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Transformation of a Mediterranean port city into a 'city of clutter': Dualities in the urban landscape – The case of Mersin

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ABSTRACT

Since its foundation in the first half of the 19th century, Mersin has undergone transformation from a coastal village into a metropolitan area with a population of 850,000. This has been achieved through large-scale and incremental interventions into the built environment, including the construction of an international port; large-scale migration from rural areas and other cities; and urban sprawl, accompanied with the emergence of new housing forms. Conceiving Mediterranean port cities as a spatial expression of core-periphery relations and as gateways to the economic and social system of the industrial core, this study provides an account of urban change in Mersin over the last two centuries. This is accomplished through explorations into the urban development pattern at a citywide scale, and the corresponding changes to the public space system at a local scale resulting specifically from changes to Customs Square. The article illustrates that as a consequence of rapid development, especially after the mid-20th century, Mersin has transformed from a Mediterranean port city into a 'city of clutter', characterised by: dualities in the urban landscape, resulting from urban sprawl through campus-type housing environments and illegal developments; changes in the use and meaning of public spaces, such as Customs Square, a civic place of daily life, and Republican Square, for ceremonial use; and the co-existence of the urban complexity and diversity of an unplanned Mediterranean city alongside the homogeneity of a planned city.

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Introduction

Since its foundation in the first half of the 19th century until the first decades of the 20th century, Mersin was a city of modernisation on the southern Mediterranean coast of Anatolia that became a distinctive port city in the Eastern Mediterranean due to the growth of international relations with other Mediterranean port cities and the development of commercial activities. During this period, as was the case with other cities in the Mediterranean, Mersin assumed economic, cultural and spatial characteristics common to other port cities. However, from the early Republican period until today, distinctive urban transformations occurred through large-scale incremental interventions into the built environment, including the construction of an international port, rapid population growth as a result of immigration from the countryside and other cities and urban sprawl through new housing forms. These changes transformed Mersin from a coastal village comprising 'a few huts on the shore' (Beaufort, 1817) at the beginning of the 19th century into a metropolitan city with a population of

850,000, making Mersin an alluring city for urban planning research.

The transformation of Mediterranean port cities has been the subject of many studies; however, research into the socio-economic, cultural and spatial transformation of Mersin are rare (Selvi Ünlü, 2007, 2009; Selvi Ünlü and Ünlü, 2009; Toksöz, 2002, 2010; Yenişehirlioğlu, 2010). Each of these previous studies has focused upon a particular period in Mersin's development; however, to date, the development and change in the spatial organisation over the last two centuries has, on the whole, been overlooked.

This study suggests that Mersin transformed from a Mediterranean port city into a 'city of clutter' as a result of the aforementioned development, with the investigation revolving around a series of questions. Was Mersin once a typical Mediterranean port city? If Mersin did indeed experience a rupture from the characteristics of the archetype Mediterranean port city and became a 'city of clutter', why, how and in what ways did such a transformation take place? This study aims to provide an account of the distinctive characteristics of urban change in Mersin over the last two centuries through explorations of the urban development pattern on a city-wide scale, and accordingly, of the changing public space system on a local scale as a result of changes to Customs Square. Furthermore, it questions the role of planning in guiding that process, in which various motivations,

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needs and preferences of different actors were addressed, by analysing to what extent planning could help manage the urban development of the city.

The characteristics of Mediterranean port cities are discussed in the first part of the study to provide a conceptual framework, while in the second part, the urban change experienced specifically in Mersin is analysed in terms of its similarities and dissimilarities with other port cities in the region. In the concluding chapter, the research findings are briefly discussed and suggestions for further studies are proposed.

Mediterranean port city and the organisation of urban space

Throughout history, the Mediterranean world has been perceived as a vast conglomeration of tiny sub-regions and larger groups of sub-regions; however, its distinctiveness lies not only in its fragmentation but also in its connectivity. Thus, the consideration of many historical landscapes in a piecemeal fashion will remain essentially a local history (Horden & Purcell, 2000). Located in a sub-region, the port cities of the East Mediterranean are not isolated entities but rather nodal points of exchange with the rest of the world and, most importantly, among themselves. This definition allows us to speak of a common experience in urbanity (Fuhrmann & Kechriotis, 2009).

Research into the social, economic and spatial characteristics of port cities has grown over the last two decades. The modernisation approach focuses on the development of a port city as a resultant form of interregional and international relations, in which the diffusion process operates at the level of values and norms, culture, consumption patterns and politics, with little attention paid to the structuring effects of the economic relations that the port city embodies (Findlay, Paddison, & Dawson, 1990). However, Mediterranean port cities were conceived as a result of an imperialist exploitation process, serving as a conduit between their hinterland and the imperialist core. The development of capitalism and of a bourgeoisie has been correlated with the evolution of port cities, and the prosperity of a port city depends upon the momentum of bourgeoisie development. From this perspective, port cities are a spatial expression of core-periphery relations in which they serve as an essential intermediate stop from where commodities are transferred to and from the agrarian periphery and the industrial core. As such, trade was the principal mechanism for their incorporation into capitalist circuits (Keyder, Özveren, & Quataert, 1993).

In this setting, the common characteristics of Mediterranean port cities follow the archetypal image of density, urban complexity and social diversity (Munoz, 2003). Socially, the residents of Mediterranean port cities tended to feel more affinity with each other than they did with the inhabitants of non-port cities in either the Christian or Islamic worlds (Eldem, Goffman, & Masters, 1999), characterising them as locations of cultural exchange where people from different parts of the Mediterranean world met, mixed and influenced one another (Driessen, 2005). As a result, they became a 'model of conviviality' (Tabak, 2009) in which the maritime society and culture were determined by a specific, short-lived conjuncture of global economic factors, rather than by its actors (Fuhrmann & Kechriotis, 2009). The conviviality of Mediterranean port cities evokes the notion of cosmopolitanism, although an ambiguity is present that is reminiscent of a pluralist society, a dynamic contiguity of groups rather than a melting pot that functioned on the basis of the recognition of the autonomy of the different ethno-religious communities (Driessen, 2005).

However, urbanism does not refer to a way of life associated with residence in an urban area where relationships forged by size, density and heterogeneity replace community ties. Rather, it denotes an inter-subjective construction and representation of

the city idea – a cultural attitude toward city and urban life that introduced a distinctive model of urban growth, which led to 'spontaneous development', excluding typical land-use zoning; 'spaces of immigrants', causing illegal housing formations not only in the periphery but also in the city centre; and 'urban competition' (Leontidou, 2001). At the turn of the 19th century, port cities such as Istanbul, İzmir, Alexandria, Athens-Piraeus, Algiers, Beirut, Barcelona, Tel Aviv, Naples, Genoa and Marseilles were agglomerations where land use was intense and dense regional, national and international communication networks converged (Driessen, 2005). The popularity of the city centre and the subsequent street life is evident both in the urban landscape and in land use, with small squares interspersed throughout the urban landscape within walking distance of both central and peripheral areas, rather than the presence of large parks (Leontidou, 2001).

With the transition from a setting of urban complexity and social diversity to the logic of nation-statehood, the ethnic and religious mosaic of the era was shattered, making it difficult to sustain the distinctive characteristics of a Mediterranean port city (Tabak, 2009). During this process, especially over the last century, structural changes in the economy and the proliferation of digital technology in communication networks have generated significant impacts, such as the dispersal of population, production and consumption over space. Commercial and industrial growth have forced larger ports to develop beyond the urban centres where space was scarce (Driessen, 2005), which, in turn, has resulted in an increasing separation between the city and port, with the latter being closed to the general public (Munoz, 2003).

The problems of urban development in Mediterranean port cities after the foundation of nation states resulted from a lack of common social, economic, cultural and spatial characteristics. The incorporation of Salonica into the Greek state coincided with an active state policy to reinforce Greek sovereignty within the new territories (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, 1997), while the demise of cosmopolitan Alexandria was attributed to the rise of parochial, anti-colonial nationalism in Egypt and the emigration of Greek and Italian entrepreneurs (Starr, 2005). Likewise, in Barcelona, during a period in which a national identity was being revived, the city leaders engaged in a process of city beautification that witnessed the construction of modernist buildings alongside the recovery and promotion of medieval constructions, historic sites and arts. It was a process of urban transformation with a twofold objective that connected, in an interesting manner, the promotion of tourism with the fostering of civic pride and the Catalan national identity (Casellas, 2009). During this same period, the urban development of Athens suffered from a lack of open public spaces in its central areas, a low quality of environmental infrastructure, a dependence on private means of transport, and a significant distortion of the historical and natural topography (Chorianopoulos, Pagonis, Koukoulas, & Drymoniti, 2010).

Urban planning played an important role during the transition into nation states when European, and especially French, planner-architects were active in the Eastern Mediterranean (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, 2011). Urban plans were prepared by the Danger brothers and Michel Ecochard during the French mandate for the modernisation of parts of the city centre of Beirut, where governmental administrations needed to be built (Nasr & Verdeil, 2008). In the same period, both the Greek government and the young Turkish Republic were anxious to make a clean break with the past. The plan of Hebard, prepared after the great fire of Salonica, became a vehicle for a common and significant ideological locus by prioritising the issue of national identity (Lagopoulos, 2005); in addition, the plan of İzmir, prepared by the Danger brothers in 1924–1925 in collaboration with Henri Prost after the great fire of 1922, coincided with the foundation of the Turkish Republic, when the dialectical discourse on modernisation and the creation

of a national culture became essential (Bilsel, 1996). The plan of Barcelona produced by Jausseley paid attention to monumentality as the main characteristic and aimed at the renewal of the historic centre (Monclus, 2000).

Urban change in Mersin

Urban change in Mersin, from its foundation in the first half of the 19th century to the present day, is assessed in three basic periods. The first period refers to its time as a flourishing port city within the Eastern Mediterranean with close relations to other ports, while the second period covers the early Republican period of Turkey and the establishment of a nation state. The third period was marked by the construction of the international port in the early 1960s, which was a turning point in the urban development of Mersin. The intention of this paper is to provide insight into the process of urban change in Mersin and to question the motivations behind the enormous urban sprawl, its qualitative characteristics and the role of urban planning.

Emergence of an Eastern Mediterranean port city

Mersin is located in the Çukurova Region, known as the Cilicia Region in antiquity, which is one of the most fertile lands along the Mediterranean coast of Turkey (Fig. 1). Its foundation dates to the first half of the 19th century when it was a mere village on the shore, after which the Eastern Mediterranean emerged as an area of modernity from the 1830s onwards (Fuhrmann & Kechriotis, 2009). Throughout the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire, which was accelerated as a result of the *Tanzimat* reforms, the aim was to develop secular universal policies that would result in the strengthening of the central authority; and, uniformity and rationalisation would be achieved through the codification of laws, the establishment of equality for all citizens and the recognition of private property (Sunar, 2004). The reforms resulted in the evolution of the autarkic economy into a free market and gave rise to prosperity in port cities (Keyder et al., 1993; Sifneos, 2005). As a consequence, a new hierarchical pattern of commercial relations began to emerge in the coastal zones rather than in the relatively isolated urban centres (Costello, 1980). The economic world opened up to merchants through their utilisation of business organisations and networks that extended beyond the limits of national boundaries; the Ottoman Empire also offered merchants of different national, religious and ethnic backgrounds a measure of autonomy (Keyder,

2008) and the opportunity to dominate a sphere of business and participate in the flow of daily life (Chatziioannou, 2010). As a result, the value of trade increased nearly ninefold between 1840 and 1914, with imports only slightly exceeding exports (Keyder et al., 1993).

The rapid development of Mersin during the 19th century was dependent upon the flourishing international trade and commercial activity within the Eastern Mediterranean. Although Mersin comprised only 'a few huts on the shore' (Beaufort, 1817) at the beginning of the 19th century, it quickly developed relations with other port cities. In the midst of the 19th century, Barker (1853) and Risk (1853) wrote that French vessels sailing to Marseille were loaded with sesame seed and wool in Mersin, Arabian vessels transported goods to Syria and Cyprus, Greek boats came to load wheat, and British vessels transported goods to İzmir. Among the goods exported, cotton, wool, wheat, barley, wax, sesame seed and flax seed constituted the majority.

Yet, the critical turning point in Mersin's development as a port city was the American Civil War in the 1860s (Selvi Ünlü, 2009; Toksöz, 2002). Up to that point, American companies had dominated the cotton market; however, after the American Civil War, British interest in cotton brought a rapid increase in cotton production in response to world demand, and by the 1870s, the port of Mersin was surpassing all others in the region in terms of import–export rates, supported by the construction of the Mersin–Adana road in 1873 and the railway in 1886.

Consequently, a new economic space was created in and around Mersin that later became a part of the national economy (Toksöz, 2010). Trade data published in *Annuaire Oriental du Commerce* reveals that Mersin emerged as a new and dynamic commercial centre in the Eastern Mediterranean, with the number of tradesmen in the city increasing from 62 to 350 from 1891 to 1921. In a detailed analysis of the urban development of Mersin during the 19th century, Selvi Ünlü (2007) suggested that the growth of the city had been dependent upon the commercial relations across the Mediterranean region and beyond, with the French, British, German and American concerns that were taking an interest in the Cilicia region as a focal point of development.

In parallel to the prospering trade relations and the surge in commercial activity, port cities also provided an alternative location for different cultural practices and a new bourgeoisie population as a result of the new public places and buildings and a new built environment (Keyder, 2008). Mersin thus developed a cosmopolitan atmosphere due to the presence of Greek and Levantine merchants and foreign consulates, who protected the interests of



Fig. 1. Location of Mersin in the Mediterranean.



Fig. 2. Customs Square in the early 20th century. Customs House (on the left) restaurants, coffee houses and other shops made the square a gathering place for all. Source: Ali Murat Merzeci Collection.

their subjects engaged in international commercial activities, which were based on maritime trade, banking, importing, exporting and insurance. The merchants created a hierarchical priority for themselves, both in terms of relations and spatial organisation, with a preeminence of the district of merchant inns within the morphology of the city. These inns were relatively isolated commercial landscapes that would later evolve into the core central business district (Ünlü, 2012). In the meantime, Mersin also offered new cultural experiences to its citizens through the establishment of restaurants and coffee houses, which provided an atmosphere where merchants could strike deals and brokers could seek potential customers.

However, the modernisation efforts resulting from institutional reforms underwent extensions into the urban fabric in the form of new codes, such as the Street and Building Regulations and the Building Law issued in 1963 and 1882, respectively. The result was a metamorphosis of the classical Ottoman/Islamic urban image into a more cosmopolitan one (Akçura, 1982; Çelik, 1986). Solely a result of the modernisation process, the urban morphology of Mersin assumed a grid pattern rather than the instinctive growth of an Ottoman/Islamic city. Mersin expanded in a sectoral pattern rather than a concentric one, similar to Athens (Leontidou, 1990), following basic avenues such as Silifke Road to the west, Tarsus Road to the east and Gözne Road to the north. Customs Square at the very centre of the city, and a key component of the public space system, was located near the coastline, as was the case in many other port cities.¹ The square formed a gateway to the outside world through Customs Pier, which was an organic extension of the square and the main pier among the others in the city, namely Stone Pier, Municipal Pier, German Pier and Railway Pier.

Customs Square took its name from the main building on the site – Customs House – which in this period became a place of expression of the civic life of the city for its inhabitants, with daily

life centering around the square due to the presence of a mosque, cafe, monument and various types of shops (Fig. 2). It was the heart of the city, and as such, its main function was as a gathering place for people (Zucker, 1959), a microcosm of urban life where people could meet and watch the world go by (Webb, 1990) and a place for freedom of action, with people sitting or strolling next to each other regardless of mutual acquaintance (Kostof, 1992).

Customs Square had walkable connections to other public spaces, such as the Yoghurt Bazaar to the north, a traditional marketplace for the trade of agricultural and animal products, and Kışla Street to the west, a retail area where the traders were predominantly drapers and shoe sellers. Uray Street on the eastward extension developed as a business centre, mostly associated with international trade and banking, similar to Karaköy in Istanbul (Tokatlı and Boyacı, 1999), where the buildings were similar to those observed in other port cities of the Eastern Mediterranean (Yenişehirlioğlu, 2004). The relationship between Customs Square and Uray Street was strengthened with the establishment of *deko-ville*, a narrow-gauge rail system that ran along the street by which goods and chattel were carried between Customs Pier and the railway station (Fig. 3). During the French mandate, the *deko-ville* line was regulated as a tram line for transporting passengers between the station and Customs Square, entering into operation with an opening ceremony on 10 March, 1920.² In addition to the tram line, a new quay, 110 meters long and 12 meters wide, was planned in the location of Customs Pier to facilitate safer ship loading.³

To summarise, after the 1830s, while Eastern Mediterranean port cities were undergoing a modernisation process, Mersin emerged as a privatised milieu for tradesmen from different cities but was dominated by Greek and Levantine merchants engaged in maritime trade and insurance and banking activities. Well-developed maritime trade and financial institutions, including banks and insurance agencies illustrated the modernisation of commercial activities like İzmir (Syrett, 2009), while many cultural institutions began to feature in the social life of the city. Port cities like İzmir, Salonica, Alexandria and Cairo were the most important in

¹ Kostof, 1992 points out that the main squares in port towns were rarely in the inner city, but rather on the waterfront. In this way they became the main gateway to cities, as was the case of Piazza di San Marco in Venice. Historical examples of this can be found in ancient Greek cities like Miletus, where the square served as both a civic centre and a marketplace on the waterfront.

² Center des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, Cilicie (inventaries 3 et 4).

³ Center des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, Cilicie (inventaries 3 et 4).

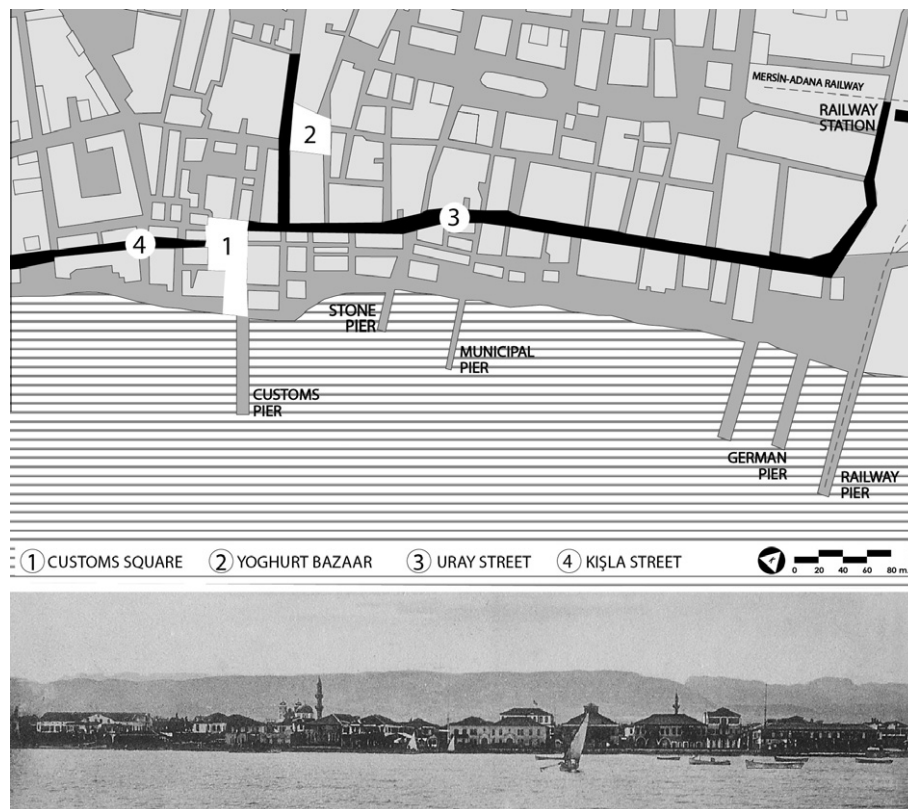


Fig. 3. Public spaces within the spatial organisation of Mersin (map is drawn after 1910 city map) and the panorama of the city in the early-20th century. Sources: National Archives of the Prime Ministry (personal archive of Ali Murat Merzeci).

the region (Eldem, 1999); however, the rapid development of Mersin from 'a few huts on the shore' into a substantial port city secured a place for the city in the network of secondary cities, including Antalya, Alexandretta and Acre.

What differentiated Mersin from other port cities in this period was its development from almost nothing. It appeared in the region as a 'city of modernisation', with the impacts clearly visible in the shaping of the urban form. Banks, hotels and insurance agencies began to open shop in purpose-built buildings in the city centre, and the passenger *dekoville* between Customs Pier and the railway station further reinforced Uray Street as a backbone of the city and Customs Square as a key part of the public space system. By the turn of the century, the notable tradesmen, especially non-Muslims and Levantines, had begun to create a bourgeoisie quarter known as *Çamlıbel* on the western extension of the city, as had been the case in Athens (Leontidou, 1990), while new cultural institutions were appearing as an indication of a new lifestyle (Tekeli, 1998).

The spatial organisation in Mersin was the result of unplanned development, as in most Mediterranean port cities (Leontidou, 1990), with Customs Square situated at the very centre; however, despite the lack of planning, the public spaces spontaneously grew into a well-organised system of interconnected squares and narrow streets and an interrelated pattern of buildings and circulation routes. It is remarkable that the infrastructure investments, planned and realised particularly during the French mandate, reinforced the importance of Customs Square within the public space system as a frame for human activity (Zucker, 1959).

The Early Republican city

Developments throughout the 19th century brought forth Mersin as a cosmopolitan port city in the Eastern Mediterranean with strong ties to the West. In the wake of the transformation

of the Ottoman Empire into the Republic of Turkey during the 1920s, which resulted in a change in the demographic and social pattern of the city (especially because of the population exchange between Turkey and Greece), Mersin was faced with a decline in its Europeanised foreign minority communities, similar to that facing Alexandria in the mid-20th century (Starr, 2005). The multi-cultural structure of the commercial pattern was modified into a more monolithic one after most of the Greek and Levantine merchants were replaced by the emerging bourgeoisie of the young Turkish Republic in line with nationalist policies. This change resulted in the beginning of the rapid demise of cultural mixing in Mediterranean port cities. Mersin became thoroughly Turkish, just like Trieste became Italian, Salonica became Greek, Tangiers became Moroccan and Alexandria became Egyptian (Driessen, 2005).

During the early Republican period, interventions into the built environment were systematised in line with modernisation efforts. Urban planning emerged as an important tool for the young republic to create a physical identity and a network design and urban image that would support the modern society that the Republic aimed to achieve (Bilsel, 1996). In a similar fashion, Mediterranean port cities sought to rearrange their urban space through urban planning under the influence of nationalist policies. Although the urban plans of many port cities were drawn on Beaux Arts urban layouts, mostly by French architects and planners, Hermann Jansen, charged by Mithat Toroğlu, the mayor of Mersin in the 1930s, prepared an urban plan in 1938 where the basic principles were based on Howard's Garden City and the artistic planning of Camillo Sitte.⁴ The principles

⁴ Hermann Jansen, the German architect-planner, won the planning competition for Ankara, the capital of the young Republic, and prepared an urban plan that was issued in 1932. After his consultancy during the implementation process, he produced urban plans for many cities in Turkey, one of which was Mersin. In all plans, he adopted the principles of Howard's garden city and Camillo Sitte.



Fig. 4. Jansen Plan for Mersin, issued in 1938. Source: Architekturmuseum, Technische Universität Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 23454.

of the former were dominant in the proposed development of housing environments, and those of the latter were adopted for the historic city centre (Fig. 4).

In contrast to the French tradition, in which the power of the political structure was emphasised through axial development and formal geometry, Jansen preferred a more modest organisation of urban space. Within the whole structure, he sited industrial installations, warehouses and a new port on the eastern extension, while on the opposite side he proposed a new housing area as an addition to *Çamlıbel*. To the north, a new neighbourhood was envisaged for the working class, and, at the centre the existing urban fabric was preserved and given the name 'Old City'.

By adopting the artistic principles of Camillo Sitte for the old city, Jansen aimed at emphasising the value of public space, as had been the case in his earlier works. The urban structure and the relations between different parts of the city were sustained through the designation of an interrelated public space system via pedestrian routes, public parks and strip-like green corridors. The entire public space system was linked to the old city, and at the very centre, following the principles of Sitte and translation in Collins (1986), Jansen designated Customs Square as a vital and functional area for community life, while also extolling the harmony that existed between the square and its surrounding buildings.

What Jansen envisaged was the incorporation of People's House (*Halkevi*) and Republican Square into the public space system on the western extension as a part of the administrative centre, which together were a spatial repercussion of the nationalist and populist policies of the young republic (Figs. 5 and 6). The purpose of the establishment of People's House was to bridge the gap between

the intelligentsia and general public by teaching national culture, the rudiments of civilisation and the national secular ideas of the Republican regime (Karpas, 1963).⁵

The early Republican period witnessed the transformation of the old empire into a nation state, during which the cosmopolitan social structure changed significantly due to the replacement of Levantine merchants with the emerging Turkish bourgeoisie, which made Mersin a larger part of the new republic. Urban development was anticipated to be controlled through urban planning, which was also a tool for the spatialisation of national policies in almost all Mediterranean port cities, but in contrast to many other port cities, the Jansen plan protected the distinctive characteristics of the city by following the principles of the garden city and Sitte. Customs Square was still at the very centre of the public space system; however, with the addition of People's House and Republican Square into the system as a spatial repercussion of nationalist policies, a dual structure emerged in which Customs Square became a key factor in daily life, while Republican Square became an official and ceremonial site of the Republic.

The 'city of clutter'

Because of the liberal economic policies of the new government, which gave priority to the modernisation of agriculture during the

⁵ As Karpas (1963) points out, the intention in establishing People's House was to familiarise the masses with the ideas of the Republic, with the old ruling classes described as a cosmopolitan group that were separated from real Turks by their culture and interests. Accordingly, these institutions must be viewed as a social reaction of the lower class intelligentsia to the Ottoman order, as well as the instruments through which the new group established its own power.

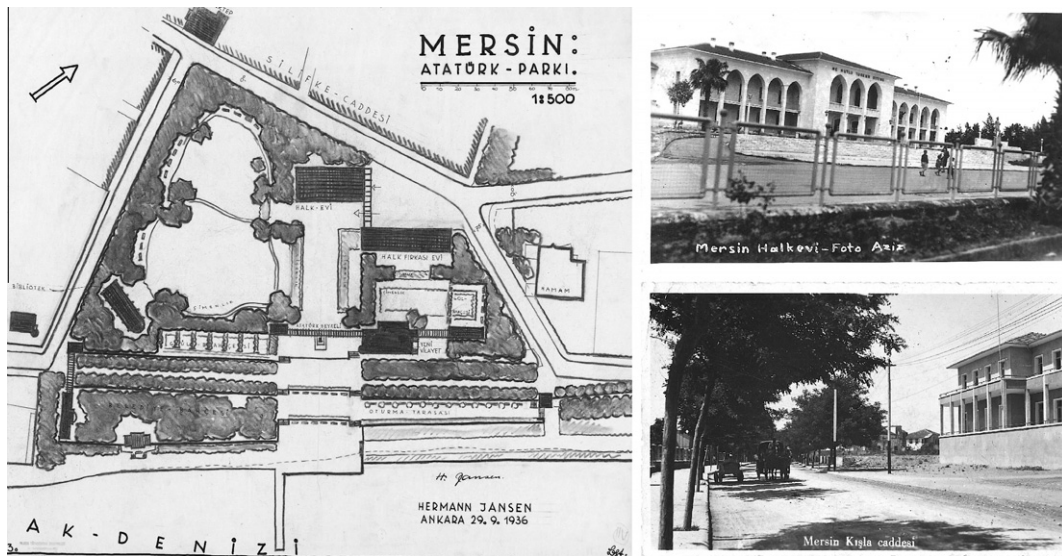


Fig. 5. The project for the administrative centre of Mersin, prepared by Hermann Jansen in 1939; People's House [top right]; and the Governor's Mansion, built in the 1940s. Sources: Architekturmuseum, Technische Universität Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 23452 (personal archive of Ali Murat Merzeci).

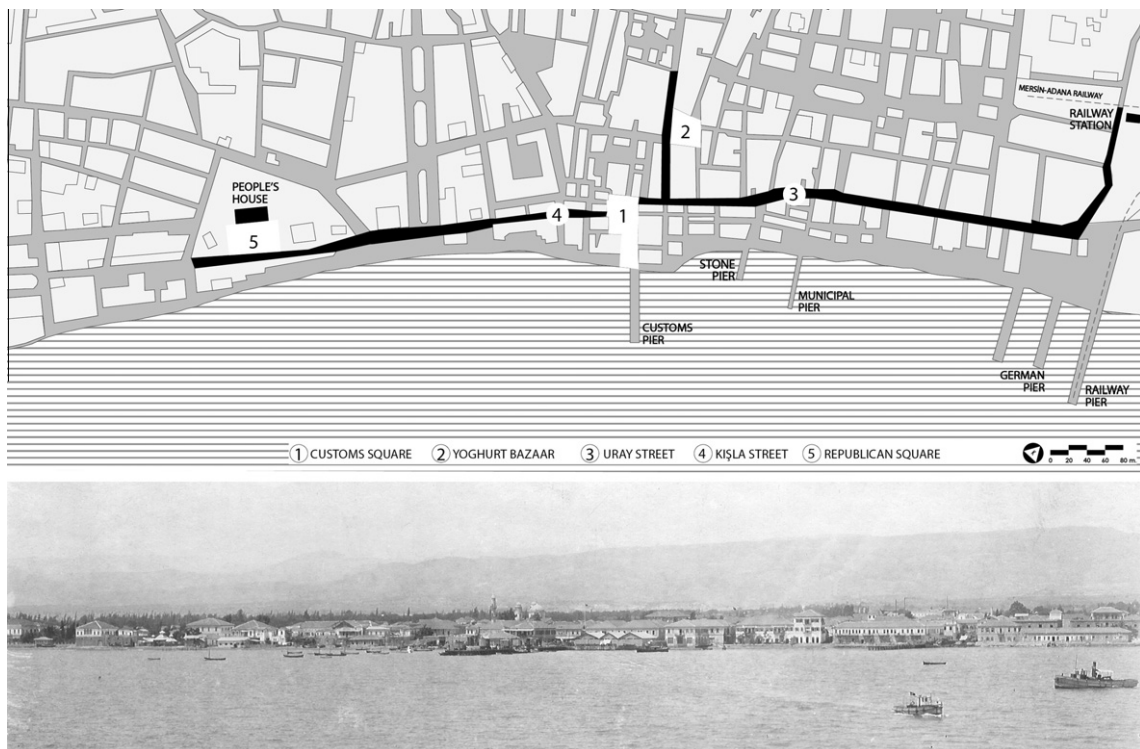


Fig. 6. Public spaces within the spatial organisation of Mersin (map is drawn after 1910 city map) and the panorama of the city in the mid-20th century. Sources: National Archives of Prime Ministry (personal archive).

1950s, cities throughout the whole country faced an inflow of people from the rural areas as a result of redundancy. As a consequence, the population of Mersin, which had remained almost constant during the early Republican period at approximately 27,000, witnessed a rapid increase, as was the case with many cities in the Mediterranean region (Catalan, Sauri, & Serra, 2008) after the 1950s. The city's population reached 48,000 in 1950 and proceeded to grow to 152,000 in 1980 and to 850,000 in 2010. Apart from the changing economic policies at a macroscale, large-scale

investments in Mersin, such as the construction of the international port in the early 1960s, also triggered immigration from the countryside and other cities due to the new labour market and job opportunities.

The construction of the port on the eastern extension affected the spatial organisation of the entire city because it required the reclaiming of land from the sea and the demolition of existing piers, including Customs Pier. Customs House was also demolished because the square had lost its function as a gateway to the outside



Fig. 7. Customs Square in the 1970s (top left); the 'platform' in front of the square and the international port in the background (top right); and the panorama of the city in the 1970s. *Source:* personal archive.

world. The reclaimed land became the site of a 'platform' that skirted the old coastline in an east–west direction and extended 100 meters into the sea, breaking the connection between Customs Square and the seafront and thus causing a subversion of the organic relationship between the sea and the square.

Customs Square still maintained its status as a central location in the city; however, as a result of the demolitions, it appeared more as a place that remained after planning and was visually unattractive and awkward and functionally useless (Tibbalds, 2001). The area became dominated by parking, road infrastructure and a poor sense of place (Carmona, De Magalhaes, & Hammond, 2008) and developed as a public transportation hub in the city for public buses during the 1960s (Fig. 7). The design project to rejuvenate the square and to re-establish a coherent link between the square and the sea (Vanli, 1976) could not solve the problem, and because of problems with the implementation process, the rejuvenation was confined to the construction of several buildings, leading to a further break in the relationship between the square and the sea. The failure of the project turned Customs Square into an isolated space within the setting of the city, becoming a place to be moved through rather than a place to be (Carmona et al., 2008). As a result, Republican Square became a more prominent space, largely because of its role as a link between the city centre and Çamlıbel.

The interventions in Customs Square arose only one year after a new urban plan was drawn up and issued in 1963 by the 'Provinces Bank', a branch of the central planning authority in the Turkish planning system. The plan was to regulate the urban sprawl by taking the illegal developments that had appeared outside of the municipal boundaries under strict control and protecting the fertile agricultural land from development pressures (Akçura, 1982).

The Provinces Bank plan served as a tool for exposing the static understanding embedded within the Turkish planning system, by which the built environment is (re)produced through the designation of blocks and the production of plots to ensure an equitable distribution of development rights on private properties. The shaping of the built environment was reduced to the piecemeal production of identical plots of similar size and shape and freestanding buildings as a settled typology.⁶ This process ensured similar urban tissues across the city, by which the city as a whole would emerge as a collocation of identical plots and a clutter of buildings. As a result, because of its static stance, the Provinces Bank plan would be unable to cope with changing problems associated with a dynamic society, including the control of illegal developments, opening the way for the transformation of Mersin into a 'city of clutter'.

As the Provinces Bank plan and those that were put forward in the following decades could not cope with the illegal housing formations on the outskirts of the city, a belt-like development pattern spontaneously emerged in the northern and eastern parts of the city and intensified after the 1980s as a result of migration from the countryside and other cities in Anatolia.

At the turn of 20th century, a new morphological type of housing unit appeared within the urban sprawl into the peripheral areas as an alternative to the identical pattern of static urbanism. These units were 'campus-type' formations, as defined by Scheer (2010), that sprung up spontaneously with no regard for a strategic plan. The emergent residential areas on vacant land became attractive not only for residence but also for the middle-class

⁶ For a detailed discussion on static understanding within the Turkish planning system and its effect on shaping of urban built environment, please look at Ünlü (2011).

lifestyle. The areas contained a limited number of shops and other amenities and were considered safe and controlled as a result of gated and introverted designs. Their proliferation engendered a high dependency on private transport, reliance on property markets and a lack of planning, similar to what followed in Barcelona (Catalan et al., 2008).

This form of urban sprawl mirrored many other Mediterranean cities in terms of low-density housing, which arose especially along the edges of motorways and orbital ring roads. However, although the Anglo-Saxon suburbanisation model of low density detached or semi-detached housing was observed in other Mediterranean cities (Munoz, 2003), the Mersin model was based on high-rise buildings (Fig. 8).

The new housing formations evoked on one hand a decline of public space through the neglect of streets, squares and market places and the creation of semi-public/semi-private areas within the campus-type housing units, while, on the other hand, encouraging a lack of social diversity, as the inhabitants were on the whole from the same social class of the urban population, thus reversing one of the most prominent characteristics of the Mediterranean port city. This process, the commodification of residential spaces, according to Munoz (2003), was the result of the move away from the qualities that had made Mediterranean port cities a 'model of conviviality' (Tabak, 2009).

During rapid development in Mersin after the mid-20th century, Customs Square lost its conviviality and became a 'lost space' (Trancik, 1986) and a 'mere void' (Zucker, 1959) due to a lack of social diversity and its changed functionality. Its relative isolation from the urban fabric and unable to positively contribute to its surroundings and users because of its weak connections to the public space system, as compared with its connections in

the early 20th century, led, in turn, to the rare use of Customs Square. Although a limited number of coffee houses are present in the area, the main generator of social interaction is the Grand Mosque and Bazaar, sited after the design project of the late 1970s, especially during Friday noon prayers. Consequently, the area today is more often called the Grand Mosque and Bazaar rather than Customs Square, meaning that it has lost its historical name (Fig. 9).

Rapid development in Mersin after the mid-20th century resulted in the city losing many of the qualities that defined it as a Mediterranean port city, such as urban complexity, social diversity and an archetypal image of density (Munoz, 2003). This development was a result of widespread immigration from rural areas, large-scale investments in the city, a decline in the number of public spaces through transformation or isolation, and a high dependency on private transport. However, what would most differentiate Mersin from the archetypal Mediterranean port city and transform it into a 'city of clutter' were: dualities in the urban landscape as a result of urban sprawl through campus-type housing environments and illegal developments; public spaces, such as Customs Square, a civic place of daily life, and Republican Square, for ceremonial use; and the co-existence of the urban complexity and diversity of an unplanned Mediterranean city alongside the homogeneity of a planned city.

Conclusion

Identifying Mediterranean port cities as a spatial expression of core-periphery relations in which they appeared as gateways to the economic and social system of industrial core (Keyder et al., 1993; Fuhrmann & Kechriotis, 2009), this study aimed to describe

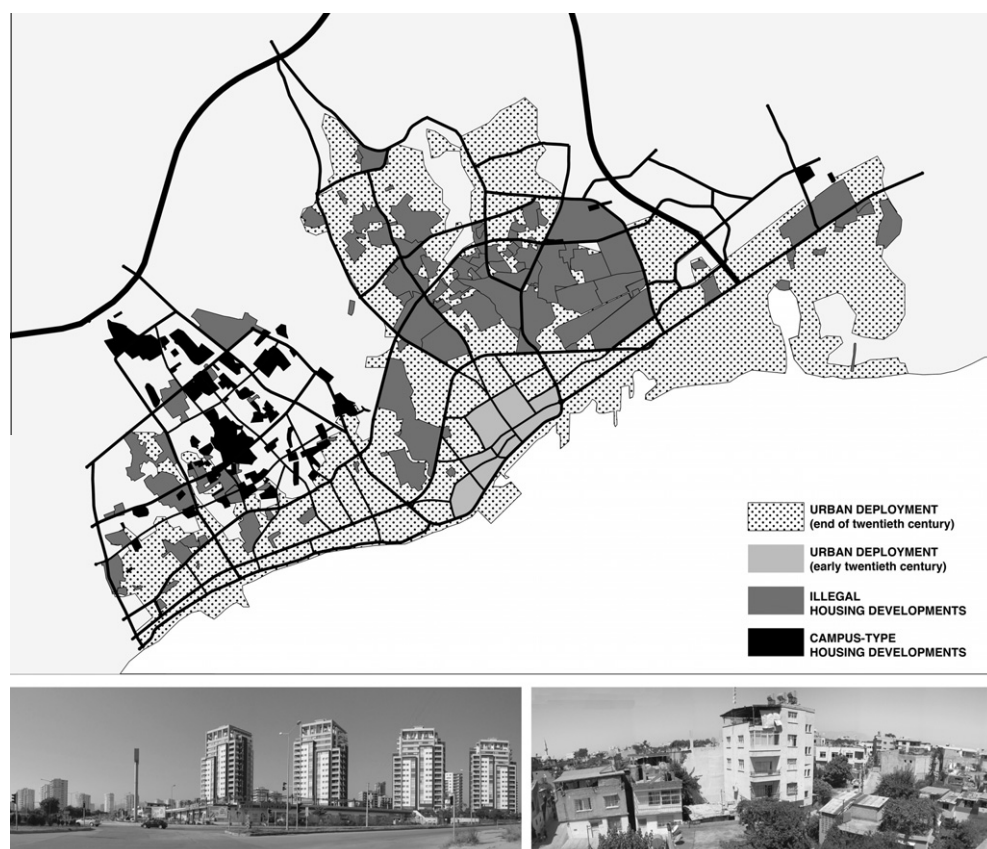


Fig. 8. Campus-type and illegal housing developments within the context of Mersin's urban sprawl.



Fig. 9. Customs Square at the present day. Source: personal archive.

the distinctive characteristics of the urban change in Mersin over the last two centuries through explorations into the urban development pattern at a city-wide scale and into the corresponding change to the public space system at a local scale, resulting specifically from changes to Customs Square. The study revealed that a series of dualities emerged in the urban landscape over the past two centuries since its foundation in the first decades of the 19th century.

The first duality refers to the change in the socio-cultural pattern. Founded at the beginning of the 19th century, Mersin developed rapidly as a result of the flourishing international trade and commercial activity in the region. During this period, Greek and Levantine merchants were engaged in international commercial activities based on maritime trade, banking, importing, exporting and insurance, which enabled the development of a port city bourgeoisie. These merchants facilitated the formation of a district of merchant inns as a commercial landscape that would later evolve into the core central business district while also contributing to the creation of a bourgeoisie quarter, namely Çamlıbel. In this context, similar to many other Mediterranean port cities, Mersin was a 'model of conviviality' (Tabak, 2009) as a site of cultural exchange where people from different parts of the Mediterranean world met, mixed and influenced one another (Driessen, 2005). However, *conviviality* turned into *inertia* and a lack of social diversity after many of the Greek and Levantine merchants were replaced by the emerging bourgeoisie of the young Turkish Republic as a result of nationalist policies.

The second duality is embedded in the changes in the use of public space and occurred in conjunction with the lack of social diversity and the retreat from *conviviality*. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Customs Square and Customs Pier, located at the very heart of the city, were at the core of the social diversity of the city, where people were able to sit or stroll regardless of mutual acquaintance (Kostof, 1992) and experience a microcosm of urban life, where people could meet and watch the world go by (Webb, 1990). By the early Republican period, Republican Square had been designated as a ceremonial area with an organic connection to People's House on the western extension of the city, where it became a link between the city centre and Çamlıbel. As a result of the construction of the new international port, the loss of Custom Pier's functionality and interventions through design projects, Customs Square became isolated within the urban fabric as a

place to be moved through rather than a place to be (Carmona et al., 2008). The dualities in the formation of public space exist, on the one hand, between the *liveliness* of Customs Square and its *dullness* during its evolution, and, on the other hand, the representation of Customs Square as a *civic place* and the *official space* of ceremonial Republican Square.

The third duality can be perceived in the differences in the form of urban sprawl during the spontaneous peripheral development. Campus-type housing environments introduced safe and gated communities for the middle class; however, these communities resulted in a decline of public space through their transformation into isolated communities with a high dependency on private transport. Illegal developments emerged because of widespread immigration from rural areas because of macro-scale economic policies and large-scale investments that engendered new labour markets and job opportunities in the city. The lack of harmony between these formations gave rise to an incoherent urban pattern, turning Mersin into a 'city of clutter'.

The role of planning was significant during these formations. It is apparent that Mersin took on distinctive characteristics during the unplanned development that occurred throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in the form of urban complexity, social diversity and the archetypal image of density (Munoz, 2003), as was the case in other Mediterranean port cities. However, despite the intentions of the Jansen plan to protect these qualities, during the planned development, these characteristics were relinquished through urban plans because of the static understanding that was solely intended to ensure an equitable distribution of development rights on private properties, regardless of the distinctive characteristics of the city. In fact, many other Mediterranean cities suffered from the large-scale development that undermined their characteristics and resulted in homogenised urban environments, in terms of not only identical housing environments but also a lack of social diversity. As a result of the massive development of the periphery of the city, the middle classes began to retreat from the city centre and seclude themselves within the safe environments of gated communities. The city centre could no longer function as the magnet (Leontidou, 1990) it had been in the times of the traditional Mediterranean port city. A low level of urban complexity, a lack of urban diversity (Munoz, 2003) and the poor use of public space began to characterise the emergent urban pattern.

Along this path, Customs Square is relatively isolated from the urban fabric and unable to contribute positively to its surroundings and users. However, it would be incorrect to believe that formulas from the past would ensure the creation of successful public spaces. Attempts to produce and shape public spaces should concentrate on evoking their attractiveness and conviviality through highlighting their uniqueness and differences. At the same time, the resurgence of public space must be observed as an integral part of any urban planning and urban regeneration program, with public spaces conceived as a whole in relation to the urban fabric. However, it is apparent that the static understanding of urban planning cannot cope with the dynamic nature of the Mediterranean city, which has necessitated a redefinition of urban planning to include place-sensitive strategies and principles. Priority should be given to rethinking the attributes of the traditional Mediterranean port city and to evoking urban complexity and social diversity through diverse and coherent urban environments.

In conclusion, the rapid development of Mersin from 'a few huts on the shore' to a metropolitan centre over the two centuries since its establishment has deprived the city of the qualities it possessed during the 19th century that differentiated it from other port cities and has transformed it into a 'city of clutter'. This study has aimed at providing a broad overview of this transformation; however, the emergent new housing types, the incremental interventions into urban plans, and the changing socio-cultural and economic structure are open to further and more detailed and elaborative research related to urban morphology, urban and planning history, and urban design.

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