

The Importance of Local Organizations in Conserving Cultural and Historical Identity: The Case of Amasya-Turkey

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Abstract

Many trends have been explained through the concept of globalization in recent times. This is seen as an expansion particularly for developing countries and contains serious handicaps. The main inspiration for the idea of globalization is the control of economic resources of developing countries by global forces and the elimination of the cultural-social differences between countries. However, this evaluation does not mean that the globalization process signifies a risk for developing countries in all ways. Actually, this process provides the way for the more effective use of spatial and cultural values.

The most important parts of cultural and spatial values are the historical quarters of urban areas. Today, conservation gains a new meaning in current discussions, indicating that conservation should be perceived as conserving spatial and cultural values in terms of the development and publicizing of locality.

In this frame, the two points should be raised: efforts for the conservation of cultural and historical identity are an important opportunity for developing countries and conservation cannot be achieved without local participation.

Keywords: Amasya, globalization, locality, local organizations, urban conservation.

Introduction

The city is considered to be the symbol of natural and artificial issues peculiar to its society, changed and recreated by relationships between nature and human beings within historical process. It means that the main issues of a city's identity are its cultural life and its history (Borer, 2006). A city's identity is created by the accumulation of various cultural layers and it can be maintained and conserved through those living in the city. The participation of the public in the conservation process, as a natural result of city consciousness, forms and improves city identity at the same time. Therefore, conservation and city identity are concepts that are directly related to each other (Görer et al., 1993).

The meaning of urban conservation has been changed in the historical process. While the earlier definition of conservation was stated as the maintenance of buildings having religious, administrative and military usage in a single level, it has turned into a notion of environmental conservation affecting development of the city as a whole. More importantly, within the framework of the definitions regarding locality, conservation is positioned in the urban planning agenda as maintaining the identity based on the historical past (Antrop,2005) but interpreted in local terms, conserved places with their own specific characteristics gaining more importance; concepts such as

multiculturalism, sense of location and identity of location come to the foreground (Pınarcıoğlu, 1994; Lieber and Weisberg, 2002; Beriatos and Gospodoni, 2004).

In this framework, the main purpose of this study is to underline the importance of local organization for urban conservation. Firstly, the changing content of urban conservation are emphasized with respect to globalization. Then, the historical development of urban conservation practices is explained in Turkey. Even though the existence of economic inefficiencies, there are successfully implemented conservation practices in Turkey. Especially Amasya, there are good practices for conserving city identity. The importance of Amasya is derived from the introduction of local organizations for sustaining city identity and cultural values. Thus, the main materials of this study are explanation about local organizations in Amasya.

The New Agenda for Urban Conservation

Many changes experienced in political, economic, cultural and spatial issues have been evaluated within the context of globalization. The definition of globalization includes the approaches towards removing time and location limitations from multi-national capital movement and it is considered as a tool of an imperialist strategy (Ersoy and Keskinok, 1996).

The definition of localization within this context consists of the concepts such as sense of location, identity of location and diversity of cultures (Kalb and Land, 2000). When current trends are evaluated from this aspect, in fact, the thesis of globalization expresses localization and locality in all terms. Because economic, social and cultural values as well as the competence of countries and cities to use and develop these values determine their importance and meaning on a global level. What is important in this context for the developing countries in particular is not to give control of values and differences by global relations and to take measures aimed at using and developing these values.

Societies develop different resistances against the creation of a global culture in this frame (Smith, 2000). That can also be regarded as a reaction against the efforts to homogenize the societies (Kalb and Land, 2000). Therefore, the concept of locality and characteristics of location gain importance (Day and Murdock, 1993; Pınarcıoğlu, 1994) and expectations appear concerned with sustaining of human lives and identities for the future (Morley and Robins, 1995). What is important in the aspect of these expectations is not role that will be determined by global relations for a location or cultural accumulation but how a location or cultural accumulation emerges as a local value and how to use them in terms of identity (Massey, 1993).

Duruöz (1997) raise a similar definition on laying down the diversities and emphasize that cities can be turned into a center of investment or culture on a global level, in other words, they can be turned into differentiated places by means of economic and socio-cultural privileges of cities as well as producing plans, policies and strategies to assess them. Harvey (1989) offers a more specific definition on this subject; he defends the fact that the concept of a city identity reflects different life styles, the notion of marketing cities together with the localization process is largely related to conception of creating a city identity and conserving it.

As mentioned above, although the globalization causes imposition on the diversities, locality and identity have going on their importance. In this context, urban conservation should be evaluated as sustaining locality, cultural and historical values.

The Efforts towards Urban Conservation in Turkey

Turkey has extensive developed experience in the conservation of cultural heritage. The efforts towards conserving cultural heritage covers a long process from the Act for Ancient Monuments laid down in the period of Ottoman in 1869 to the Law on Protection of Cultural and

Natural Assets laid down in 2004. The development in this period of over 140 years has given Turkey legislative framework for the conservation and integrating that urban planning.

Although legislative aspects have been developed to a significant extent, the fact that the conservation process still has a centralist organization creates a serious handicap in institutional terms. The main problem is that while duty of taking decisions regarding urban conservation have been given to conservation boards under the control of central government, implementation and monitoring have been delegated to local governments/municipalities. This administrative organization brings about dispute and disharmony between the institutions, and effectiveness as well as reliability in urban conservation process cannot be ensured. Although Law number 5226 passed in 2004 granted new responsibilities to the local governments, the impact of that has not been observed.

Another critical issue in the urban conservation is the failure to support economic sources that facilitate implementing conservation decisions at a satisfactory level. This economic deficiency leads to insufficient level of local consciousness regarding to urban conservation.

Even though existence of economic inefficiencies and institutional problems, conservation practices can be achieved by initiating internal dynamics and giving priority to local actors (local administrators, organizations and people) (Tonnoen, 1995). Turkey's experience shows the necessity of local initiatives in urban conservation process. Since the 1990's common efforts have been developed by the local authorities in various cities including Safranbolu, Muğla, Çanakkale, Kütahya, Edirne and Amasya (Sözen, 1996). Especially Amasya, there are attractive efforts for emphasizing the importance of local organizations in achieving conservation practices.

Local Organizations for Conserving Cultural Identity in Amasya

Being an ancient settlement, Amasya has a rich fabric reflecting its long history. Besides the tombs of kings, monuments of Seljuk and particularly Ottoman periods, buildings representing civilian architecture have been preserved up to date. The city is located below the summit of the Harsene Mountain which was firstly settled in Bronze Age and has accumulation of 11 different civilizations so far (Hittite, Phrygians, Lydia, Persian, Pontus, Rome, Byzantine, Danishment, Seljuk, İlhanlı and Ottoman). Findings prove that settlement started earlier than B.C. 3000. There are two main reasons for Amasya to have become a continual settlement location. First the city has a natural castle which provided conditions for defense. The second reason is the city's locating at the junction of the thoroughfares (Rome and Silk Roads) linking Anatolia to the Black Sea Coast, Eastern Anatolia and Western Anatolia (Hüsameddin, 1986; Özdemir, 1996; Menç, 1997). (Figure 1)

Amasya is a city located on two hillsides on both sides of a valley with suitable settlement areas restricted to the valley basin. The gradient in these quite densely populated areas varies between 5% and 15%. On the northern and southern sides of the city the gradients rise to 30%. Steep sides restrict the development of city but these areas are used by the city dwellers as recreational areas (Haleplioğlu, 1988). Areas for development in Amasya are very limited. However, this topographical structure is a characteristic feature for the city identity (Figures 2, 3 and 4).



Figure 1. The Location of Amasya in Turkey (URL 1)

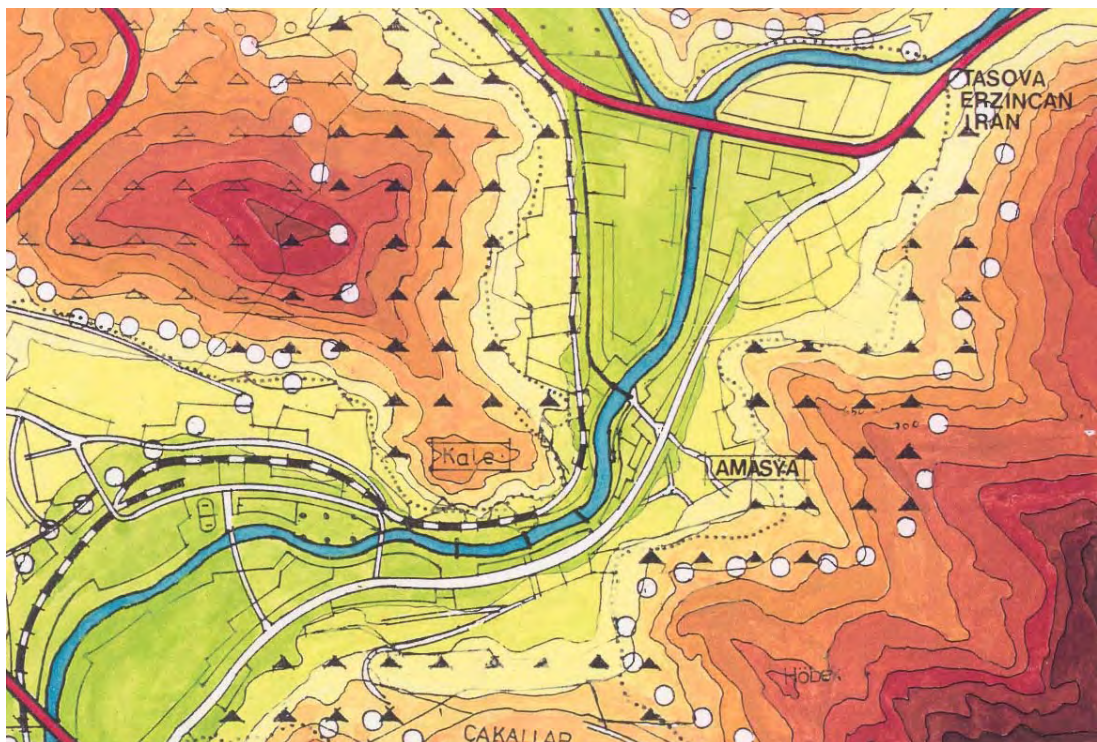


Figure 2. Topographical Structure of Amasya (Yalçın, 1997)

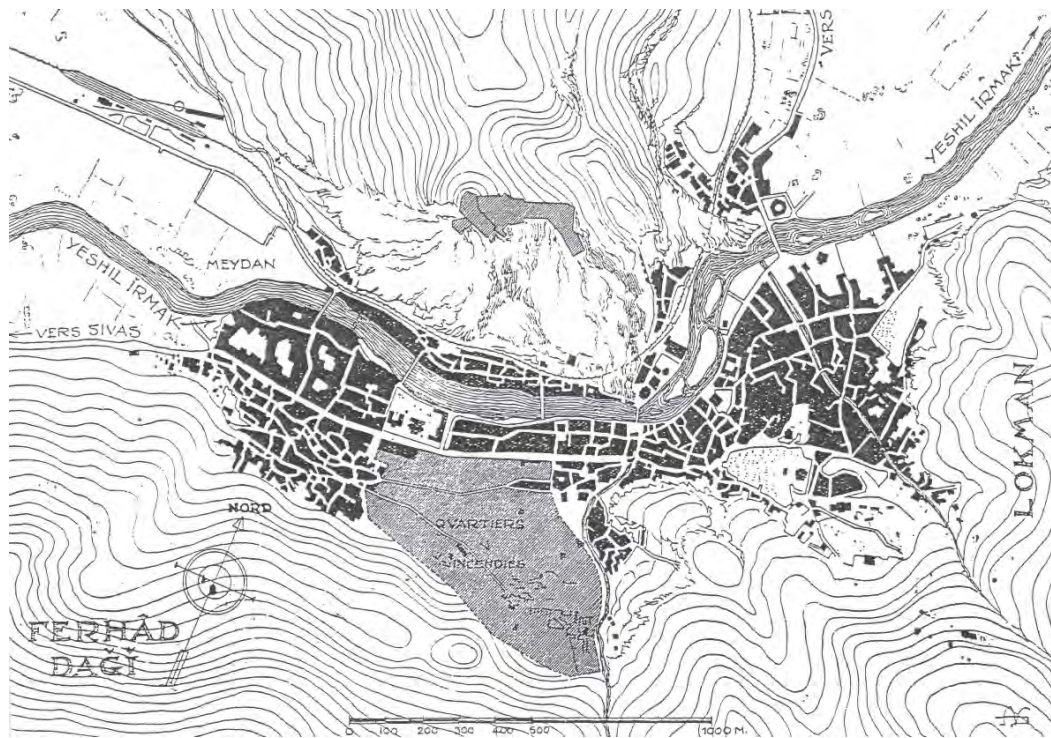


Figure 3. City Form at the beginning of 1900's (Gabriel, 1934)



Figure 4. Panoramic View of Amasya in 1934 (Photo Ozden Archive)

The conservation practices were initiated in 1979. The process, beginning with the registration of Amasya Urban Conservation Area on 22nd September 1979, was maintained with Conservation Plan on Urban Conservation Area in Amasya taken on 8th May 1981. The ongoing efforts towards conserving a traditional pattern were supported by decisions taken in September 1984 and then in May 1992 determining the stages regarding the implementation of the Conservation Plan.

The importance of Amasya from the perspective of this study is the introduction of local organizations to realize decisions on conservation focusing on technical and legal aspects of the process. It is worth examining the role assumed by these local organizations which has resulted in Amasya having become an important settlement with its conserved features over the last ten years.

The first example of local organization is the project for the conservation of the Riverside Houses (YABEP) supported by the Chamber of Architects. The buildings representing the architectural style of Ancient Turkish Houses were built in the last period of Ottoman. Although modern architecture has taken precedence after the second half of the 19th century, there are still some examples of Amasya Houses, which have survived to nowadays. The best examples are Riverside Houses, where the traditional pattern is at most intensive level in the city.

YABEP is a conservation process in which official and civil organizations of the city have come together and joined their technical and professional experience for this project. The catchword of the project was *to live the history by feeling it*. The governor and mayor in that period were the forerunners of the project initiated in 1994. Architect Ali Kemal Yalçın, who had an important role in achieving the project, indicates the main objectives and goals of the project as follows:

- To conserve Yeşilirmak and Riverside Houses as the crucial parts of city identity,
- To meet the demand for new housing by using available old buildings renovating them to modern living standards instead of city enlargement,
- To achieve continuity between new development area and the traditional pattern of city,
- To take over the history of the city enhancing the visual effects of castles, city walls, bridges, tombs, monuments and houses that have witnessed thousands of years of the city's past.

YABEP, which aims to preserve traditional urban fabric from spatial perspective, is based on a comprehensive field study directed at the findings of social characteristics. The main aim is to understand the social and economic features about the people living in the district and, in this way, to develop policies that will ensure participation of the people in the implementation process of project.

When objectives and strategies of the project are examined, it is seen that two new approaches, indicated during the practices of urban conservation, direct the beginning and also development of the project. Firstly, YABEP has used the notion of *integrated conservation* which emphasizes the buildings with historical and cultural values and rendering these buildings conserve themselves via a change of using as required. Secondly, the concept of *sustainable conservation* was adopted, to meet the need of new housing by using available housing stock have been emphasized within the framework of the objectives and strategies of the project (Meşhur, 1999).



Figure 5. The Main Components of Urban Identity; Topography, River, Riverside Houses and Pontus (King) Cemeteries (Personal Archive, 1998)



Figure 6. Riverside Houses (Personal Archive, 2006)



Figure 7. Riverside Houses and Alcak Bridge (Roman Era) (Personal Arhive, 2006)

The other local organization, which is very important for the conservation of historical and cultural fabric, is the Foundation for the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Assets (AKTAV) in Amasya. The purpose of the Foundation, established in 1996, is specified under the Foundation's establishment deed;

To conserve, restore the historical and cultural buildings in Amasya, make them known to the public, ensure that they could be made use of in terms of culture and tourism and to conserve these buildings so as to make certain that they are passed on to the next generations as a cultural heritage.

On further reading of the establishment deed, it becomes evident that the Foundation is not merely a local organization but it also aims to resolve financial difficulties encountered during conservation and to ensure a widespread participation from the public. The Foundation could provide the resources and financing on a local basis without using the resources allocated for conservation by the central government. The most evident feature of financing on local basis is YABEP which was achieved using the revenue from the Foundation's own sources. Another significant feature of the Foundation is its wide membership coming for example, the governor, presidents of professional chambers and various professionals (dentist, journalist, photographer etc.) and artisans. This explicitly indicates that the methods utilized in the conservation practices for historical and cultural values in Amasya are participated by a large number of people (Meşhur, 1999).

Conclusion

Most of the time urban development is evaluated as the development of industrial and global opportunities and this evaluation has paved the way for various negative aspects including corruption and even the destruction of cultural and traditional urban pattern. It is important to

remember that it is not only the industrial and employment opportunities of a city but also, the social, cultural and spatial values owned by that city. In this context, urban conservation should be evaluated within the framework of a localization which emerged in opposition to the idea of globalization defended by developed countries and which has indeed been shaped within the melting pot of expansionism. So, for developing countries, it is important to bring to the agenda different characteristics and values particular to cities and to conserve them.

In countries like Turkey, where the urbanization process is not complete yet, and which copes with other problems arising from urbanization, the resources allocated for urban conservation are not sufficient and conservation can only be achieved by limited funding granted by the central government. Therefore, local organizations should be developed, to encourage conservation and create a positive and credible image in the sense of the local people, especially those living within historical quarter of settlements. The common feature of successful conservation efforts in Turkey is that the local organizations have been initiated without the need for centrally made decisions. In this study, as shown in the local organizations in Amasya, the concept of the conservation of historical environment is a *local* problem which should be handled via local dynamics.

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