

From Quartier Incendie to Museums Quarter: Effects of Musealisation on Sultanahmet Neighbourhood in İstanbul's Historic Peninsula

Substantial structural changes in global economies caused an urban decline in historic centres and their regeneration appeared as a major debate from the 1960s. By the effect of homogenisation process introduced by globalization, culture becomes the major concept to be promoted in order to reveal specificity. Thus, culture-led urban regeneration strategies started to be seen as a major tool for the conservation of historic urban environments especially by promoting cultural tourism. Accordingly, the museum concept has also expanded from the boundaries of buildings to historic urban areas leading to extensive transformations. Although musealisation is multi-faceted even within the bounds of a single building; when it expands from borders of a historic building to the rest of the city, this process becomes much more complicated since historic urban areas are living mechanisms formed as a complex set of relations. Considering Turkey as a context, Sultanahmet neighbourhood has been subjected to various conservation and planning projects mainly aiming musealisation from the 19th century onwards. Starting from the 1980s, the area has become the foremost tourist destination and conservation decisions have been directed towards cultural consumption. Recent discussions related to the conversion of Sultanahmet neighbourhood to a museums quarter both in İstanbul Historic Peninsula Management Plan and Imperial Walls Strategic Plan raise further concerns on built heritage and its historical, social, and cultural associations. Considering musealisation as a two-fold process including both signification and eradication; the paper discusses the effects of musealisation in Sultanahmet neighbourhood and aims to open a debate on the alternative visions for the area's future.