

The Power of Community Values in Safeguarding the Urban Heritage: The Emek Cinema in Istanbul as a Missed Opportunity

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The Emek Cinema in Beyoglu/Istanbul (Turkey) is a much-loved, Grade I listed movie theatre dating back to 1924, with neo-classical and art-deco interior features. It is a case that represents the existing tension between the economical value of heritage that's being promoted by the authorities and community values attached to the place by the people of the city. Although the project realised on the plot that once Emek Cinema stood, has not been part of an urban renewal project, it has served the regeneration process of the area, in which the locals have not been invited to participate. Despite the continuous protests during 2013 against the restoration decisions approved by the Conservation Committee, the movie theater was finally dismantled and carried to be rebuild again as a cinema, into the nextdoor building within a new context, while the building that used to house the cinema was totally demolished to make way for a shopping and entertainment complex. It is a misfortune that the process was poorly managed and insufficient planning strategies that finally led to a loss in the urban identity of Istanbul. However, it is not the only case for the new design and adaptive-reuse projects that's being proposed and realised in Beyoglu. There are also other historic buildings dating to the same era that have been or will be subject to serious transformations. The careless use of urban heritage for touristic and commercial purposes will eventually create a new environment, which will be difficult to embrace.

After Burra Charter (1988) and the dissemination of Conservation Plan (1980), heritage protection gained a new dimension. Historic environment is no longer regarded as a constraint against development, but an opportunity. Since 2000s, social values have started to be actively in use in the determination of significance of cultural heritage. With the emergence of Cultural Heritage Management in theory and in practice, it has been widely accepted, that cultural heritage needs to be managed and if managed with a thorough understanding of their significance, the outcome generates the social profile, as well as uprising the quality of the built environment. Charter of Krakow (2000) defines each community responsible for the identification as well as the management of its heritage. As what has also been identified in UNESCO's Recommendation on HUL, there is today a need to better integrate and frame urban heritage conservation strategies by considering the social, cultural and economic values of the place. The historic urban landscape approach respects the traditions and perceptions of local communities and suggests 'tools' to overcome the complexities and difficulties that may be confronted in urban historic settings like Beyoglu.

This paper will briefly introduce the recent theory for the safeguarding of urban heritage with complex problems. It will then focus on the case of Emek Cinema in Beyoglu; examine its potentials in the historic urban landscape with different values attached by the people of Istanbul and will highlight the chances that have been missed, but could have helped maintain the existing urban identity.

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