

**RELEVANCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL DATA  
FOR THE CONSERVATION OF  
ISTANBUL HISTORIC PENINSULA**

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Culture Space History, International Conference,  
ODTÜ, ANKARA - 1990

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#### **RELEVANCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL DATA FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ISTANBUL HISTORIC PENINSULA**

The aim of this paper is to portray the results of a survey which was carried out during the analysis stage of the Istanbul Historic Peninsula Planning and Conservation Study (Özdeş, 1988) with the objective of providing a physical-spatial and socio-economic data base for the planning strategy. One of the major questions of the survey is to find out the inhabitants' degree of awareness of the historic value of the houses they live in as well as their attitude towards the conservation of historic houses and historic environment.

The paper is structured as follows:

In the first part, the concept of urban conservation in Turkey starting from 1960's are analyzed and the results of two researches carried out at Istanbul Technical University (Zeren 1981, 1989) were summarized. Then, the relationship between urban conservation and rapid urbanization is emphasized by explaining the processes of urbanization, coexistence of different levels of housing standards and employment structure, processes of squatter settlement formation, and deterioration and demolition of the houses at the historic core of the city.

In the second part of the paper, the case of Historic Peninsula is taken as an example of the process mentioned in the first part. Historic Peninsula is presented in relation to its' strategic location, and its' change of urban functions through history.

In the third part, the findings of the survey (Erkut, 1988) are summarized. In order to do this, firstly the objective and the method, then the sample cases are presented. Two cases from Eminönü District, namely the Quarters of Sultanahmet and Suleymaniye, and two cases from Fatih district, namely the Quarters of Kariye and Haydar are analyzed. The findings are given as percentage distributions. The absolute number of housing units that have been sampled and analyzed are 82 from Kariye, 70 from Haydar, 61 from Sultanahmet and 34 from Suleymaniye. The findings are summarized under three general headings.

- i. Findings related to the general profile of the physical environment and the residential area,
- ii. Findings related to the socio-economic level of the residents,
- iii. Findings related to the public attitude towards the conservation of historic houses and environment.

In the fourth and last part, the discussions and general conclusions of the study are presented.

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**RELEVANCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PHYSICAL DATA FOR  
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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Turkey, as a developing country, has been facing a population explosion in major urban centers starting from the 1950s. Masses of people have migrated from rural to urban areas. In addition to creating squatter settlements (informal housing) on the outskirts of the city, the migration has also become one of the reasons for deterioration and demolition of the houses at the historic core of the city.

In this paper, the case of the Istanbul Historic Peninsula will be taken as an example of this process. After a brief definition of the conservation problems of historic environment in Turkey in general, some findings related to the conservation of historic quarters of the Peninsula will be summarized. These findings, which are based on a part of the survey carried out during the analysis stage of the Istanbul Historic Peninsula Planning and Conservation Study (Ozdes, 1988) in February-July 1988, (Erkut, 1988) are concerned with the building conditions and the physical qualities of the conservation area, the socio-economic levels of the residents, and the public attitude towards the conservation of historic houses and environment.

**2. CONSERVATION PROBLEMS OF HISTORIC URBAN AREAS IN TURKEY**

The concept of urban conservation in Turkey is not as old and comprehensive as what might be observed in Europe. In the late 1960s, the planning authorities and the public were still solely interested in the conservation of monumental buildings such as mosques, palaces and castles but not in groups of houses, or quarters as a whole.

In 1965 a new law, the "Flat Ownership Law", came into force allowing for the ownership of one single unit in an apartment block. This led to the creation of a new type of enterprise on the urban housing market which began to manipulate the renewal of historic houses in the form of apartment blocks as a means to some economic ends. In addition to the legal regulations stated above, the rules predicted by the development plans, which defined a high density and floor area ratio, also led to the demolition of Traditional Turkish

Houses built on large plots and the prevalence of multi-storey housing. Other factors accelerating this process are the social change in general, the increase of urban population, the change in the family structure and, in particular the interpretation of living in a multi-storey modern apartment block as a status symbol.

The concept of urban conservation in Turkey, however, is quite recent. Since about 1973. Planning authorities have accepted the idea of historic and natural environment protection as well as the conservation of individual historic monuments. Under the influence of the trends in Europe, some related legislations, regulations and selecting criteria have been clarified. For some areas of historic value, restricting building codes have been determined, and specific conservation plans were prepared (Zeren, 1985).

However, in spite of all the efforts the desired level has not been reached, except for a few cases. In a research carried out at Istanbul Technical University in 1981, among 51 Local Authorities, various sorts of problems were identified in implementing the conservation decisions (Zeren, 1981). According to the results of this research, the main problems were absence of effective conservation decisions, contradiction between conservation decisions and planning strategies, and unqualified technical staff. Another important problem was the adverse reaction of the public to conservation mostly resulting from the insufficient financial resources. Another research carried out on the same subject in 1989 showed that, there had been little progress in the implementation of conservation decisions, and that the same problems still exist (Zeren, 1989).

In the following part of the paper, the research, whose aim is to provide a data base for the Istanbul Historic Peninsula Planning And Conservation Study will be presented.

### **3. THE ISTANBUL HISTORIC PENINSULA AS A CASE STUDY**

Situated on two continents, Istanbul lies on the Peninsula of Pashaeli in Europe and the Peninsula of Kocaeli in Asia. The strategic location of the city has caused it to be a capital over different periods. It was an administrative, commercial and cultural center in Byzantium, and it continued to be so under the Ottoman rule. Istanbul was the only city in the Ottoman Empire with a population of over a million inhabitants at the turn of the century, and most of the country's service industries and merchants specializing in foreign trade were located here. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Ankara was nominated as the new capital, however Istanbul, both as a major port and a base for Western institutions, continued to play an important role as a commercial, industrial and cultural centre. The city enjoys an architectural heritage of historic buildings and monuments assembled all throughout its rich past. In 1980 the population of Greater Istanbul was 4 741 890 inhabitants, and in 1985 it was 5 842 985 (DIE, 1985).

The Istanbul Historic Peninsula has always been the focal point of the Greater City of Istanbul. If the limited number of settlements along the Bosphorus and Galata were ignored, the city of Istanbul would consist only of the Historic Peninsula itself up to the mid-18th Century. Later, the Historic Peninsula came to be an important centre in terms of trade and administrative functions. Recently, it has turned into the center of the wholesale trade, warehouses and the small business. Today, being at the heart of the Istanbul Metropolitan Area, it is facing the problems of urban agglomeration, transportation and structural deterioration.

## 4. A SURVEY OF THE CONSERVATION AREAS IN THE ISTANBUL HISTORIC PENINSULA

### 4.1. OBJECTIVE

A Survey (Erkut.1988) was carried out during the analysis stage of the Istanbul Historic Peninsula Planning and Conservation Study (Özdes, 1988) with the objective of providing a physical and socio-economic data base for the planning strategy. It was concerned with the building condition and the physical qualities of the buildings in the conservation area, the socio-economic status of the inhabitants as well as their attitude towards the conservation of historic houses and historic environment.

### 4.2. METHOD

A questionnaire was prepared and a pilot study was carried out in order to check understandability of the questions, to provide a data-base for precoding, and to have an idea about the variability of the responses (Erkut, 1988).

Sample sizes with confidence level of 90% were found by using formulas of simple random sampling. The sampling list was prepared by using the municipal numerating lists the contents of which have been marked on a map. Then, the household units to be included in the sample were determined by using the table of random numbers. The addresses found by the procedure explained above and the spare address lists were given to the interviewers as well. Five quarters from Eminönü and five quarters from Fatih were chosen to be included in the sample. However, in this paper, only four quarters are presented and they have been studied in depth as they are considered significant in terms of conservation planning and the potential of architectural heritage.

### 4.3. PRESENTATION OF THE SAMPLE CASES



Fig 1. Location of the four cases in Istanbul Historic Peninsula

Below, four quarters of the Historic Peninsula are studied in depth from the conservation point of view. Two cases from Eminonu District, namely the Quarters of Sultanahmet and Suleymaniye, and two cases from Fatih District, namely the Quarters of Kariye and Haydar, are analyzed (see Fig1). The findings related to the physical structure of buildings are given as percentage distributions. The absolute number of cases that have been sampled and analyzed are 82 from Kariye, 70 from Haydar, 61 from Sultanahmet, and 34 from Suleymaniye.

#### The First Case - The Quarter of Kariye:

Kariye is a settlement area next to the world-famous Kariye Museum (Monastery of Chora) built in 1321 in the Byzantine Period. Some houses around the Kariye



Fig 2. Typical Timber Houses in the Kariye Quarter Restored by the Touring Automobile Association



Fig 3. Typical Timber Houses in the Istanbul Historic Peninsula

Museum have been restored by the Turkish Touring Automobile Association to provide a sample case for conservation for cultural and touristic purposes (see Fig 2). Under the influence of this positive improvement, a limited number of other houses in the vicinity have also been restored by the participation of the public.

The Second Case - The Quarter of Haydar: Haydar is one of the historic settlement areas on the Golden Horn. The surviving traditional buildings in this area have been subdivided and used by more than one family. In some cases one single floor is being shared by more than three families. The inhabitants of this quarter have low incomes, most of them depend on neighbouring small businesses, and form a temporary migrant population from the rural area.

The Third Case - The Quarter of Sultanahmet: Sultanahmet is a settlement area next to some important historic and archaeological spots, such as The Hagia Sophia, The Sultanahmet Mosque (The Blue Mosque) and The Hippodrome. As a result of the rapid industrialization at the turn of the century, residential buildings here were transformed into small plants and office buildings as was the case in other parts of the city. The increase in the number of office buildings, and in the volume of trade and small industry created a pressure on the traditional timber houses and led to the demolition.



Fig 4. Typical Brick Houses in the Istanbul Historic Peninsula

The Fourth Case -The Quarter of Suleymaniye:

The Suleymaniye Quarter is located in the middle of The Historic Peninsula, on one of the seven hills of Istanbul. The area is known as a distinguished residence area where the high level bureaucrats of the Ottoman Empire had

lived from 16th Century up to 19th Century. In the 1960s. The pressure of increasing business activity in this area on the residential buildings led to the demolition of traditional timber houses which were rapidly replaced by concrete blocks. In the 1950s the number of traditional timber houses typical of 19th Century Civic Architecture was 2000, whereas in the 1980's this number dropped to 525 (see Fig 3&4).

#### 4.4. FINDINGS

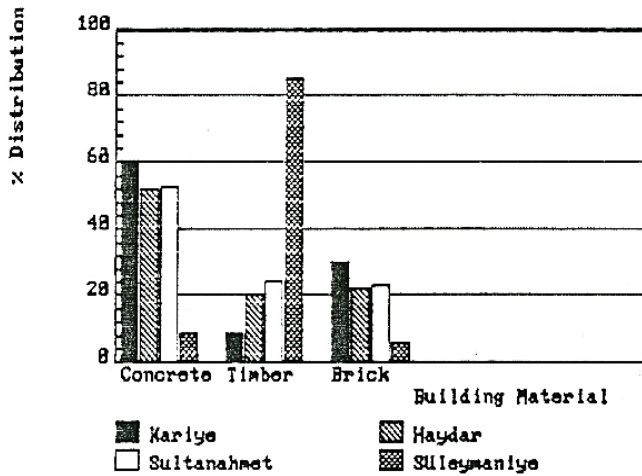
The preliminary findings can be grouped into 3 general topics. These are the findings related to;

1. profile of the physical environment
2. socio-economic status of the residents
3. Public attitude toward the conservation of historic houses and environment.

#### 4.4.1. Findings related to the general profile of the physical environment and the residential area

##### 4.4.1.1. Building Material:

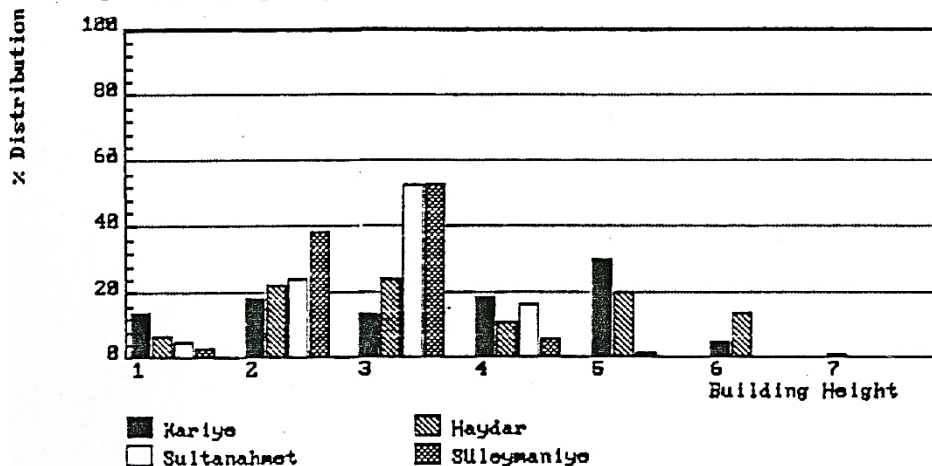
Graph 1 Building Material



As shown by the results of the four sample quarters concerning building materials, 85.4% of building materials used in the Quarter of Suleymaniye consist of timber. This is the highest percentage among the four sample quarters. In the quarter of Haydar, this is only 20%. In the quarter of Kariye, it is 8.7%, which makes up the lowest rate (see Graph 1). In the Historic Peninsula, 66% of the sampled buildings are of reinforced concrete, 15% are of timber and 18.4% are of brick.

##### 4.4.1.2. Building Height:

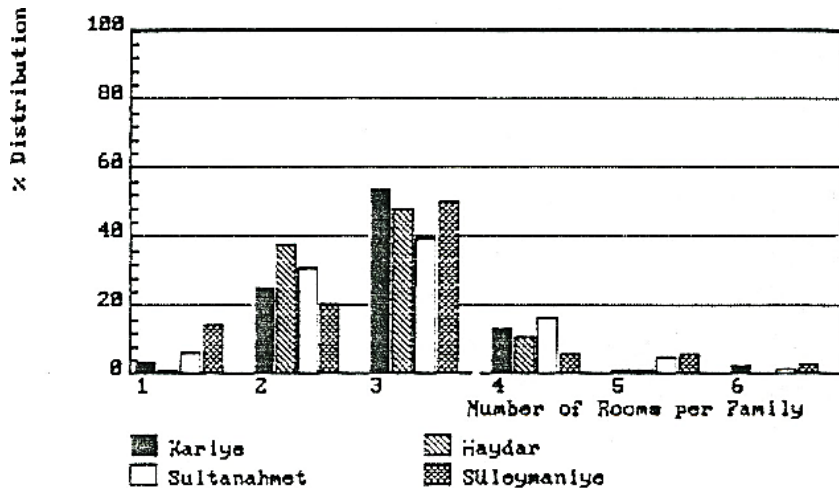
Graph 2 Building Height



Among the four cases. 5-storey buildings are mostly located in Kariye with a rate of 30.4%. In Sultanahmet, buildings are mostly 3 storied, with a rate of 52.7%. In Sultanahmet, the maximum building height is 5 storeys, whereas in Suleymaniye the maximum building height is 4 storeys. The rate of 4-storey buildings is 5.9%, i.e. low. Suleymaniye has the biggest rate of 3-storey buildings with 52.9% (see Graph 2). In new buildings, there is a positive relationship between the permitted building-height by current development plans and the demolition of traditional historic houses.

#### 4.4.1.3. Number of Rooms per Family:

Graph 3 Number of Rooms per Family

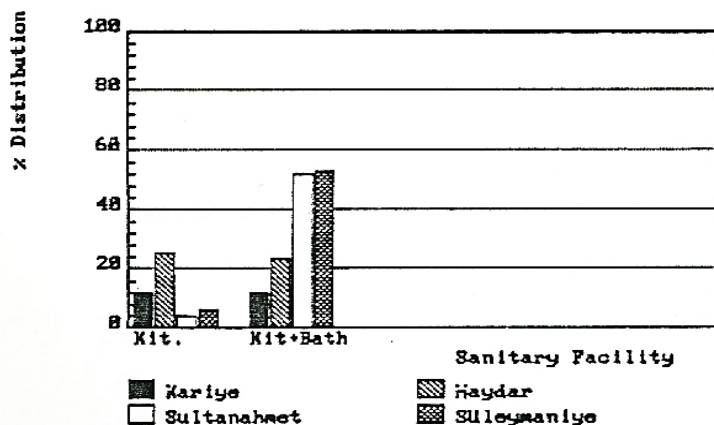


In all the four cases, the number of rooms per family is 3 on the average, including 1 living room and 2 bedrooms. This rate is 53.8% in Kariye 48% in Haydar, 39.4% in Sultanahmet and 50% in Suleymaniye.

In the Historic Peninsula, the same rate turns out to be 52.9% for the 10 cases considered. For the living units of only one room per family, the highest rate is in Suleymaniye with a ratio of 14.7%. The reason for this is that traditional historic houses are shared by more than one family. Most of the families living in one room are those who have migrated from rural areas into urban areas (see Graph 3). In the Historic Peninsula, the rate of one room units is 1.6% in Fatih District and 5.2% in Eminonu District.

#### 4.4.1.4. Units without a Separate Kitchen or Bathroom

Graph 4 Units without a Separate Kitchen or Bath



The most important indicator of comfortable living conditions in the unit is whether it has a separate kitchen and a separate bathroom. It is observed that in Suleymaniye 53% and in Sultanahmet 52% of the living units have neither a separate kitchen nor a separate bathroom (see Graph 4).

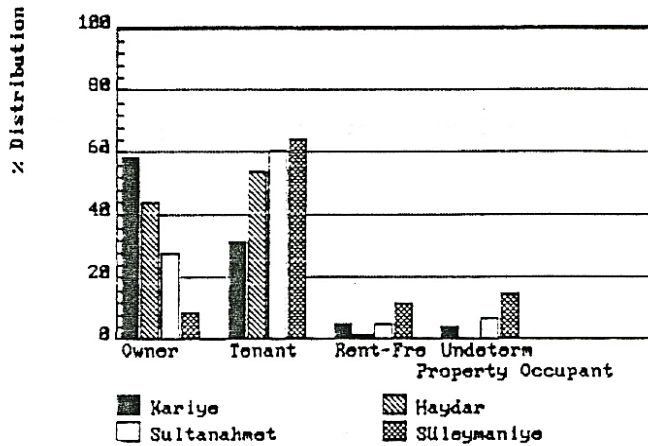
#### 4.4.2. Findings Related to the Socio-Economic Status of the Residents

##### 4.4.2.1. Tenant-Owner Ratio

As for the tenant-owner ratio in these four cases it is found out that, among the four cases, Suleymaniye has the highest rate of tenants with 64%. It is

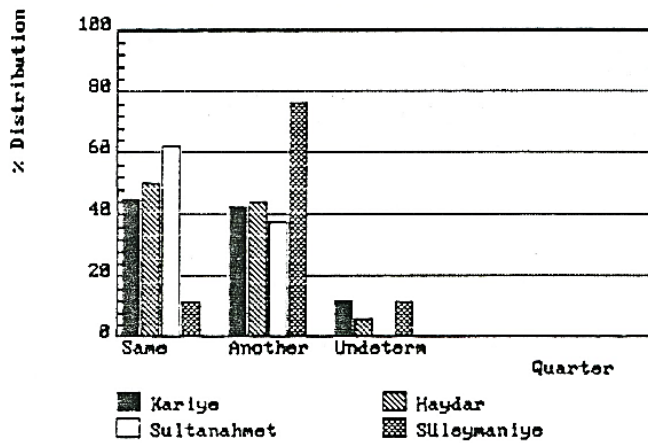


Graph 5 Property Occupant



observed that most of the timber houses in this quarter are occupied by tenants. The tenant rate is 60.6% for Sultanahmet, 54.2% for Haydar and 31.7% for Kariye. In Kariye, most of the buildings are reinforced concrete and the rate of owners is high with 58.5% (see Graph 5). As stated above, in multi-storey concrete buildings it is possible to own one single flat, which increases the rate of owners.

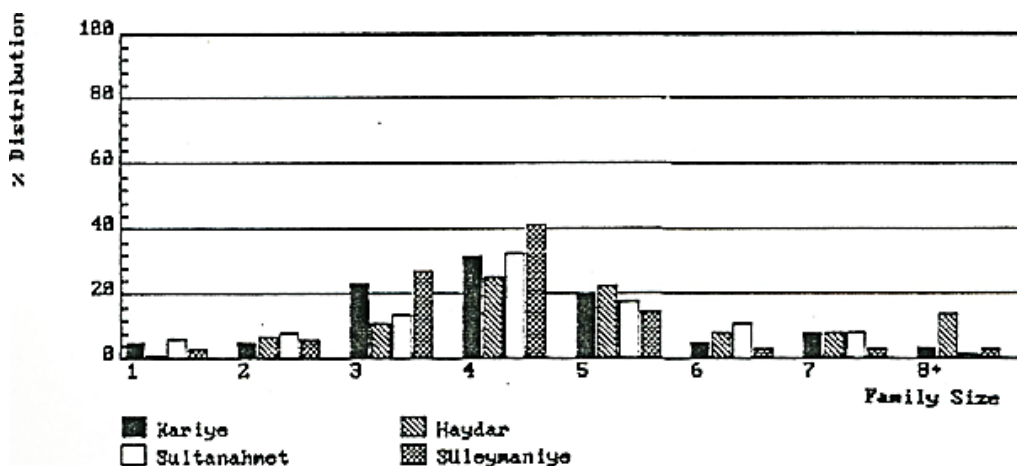
Graph 6 Owners Living/Mart-Living in sans Quarter



In order to find out whether the owners of the houses have left the quarter, it is asked whether the owners still lived in another place in the same quarter. 76.4% of the owners in Suleymaniye do not live here any more, i.e. they have left the quarter (see Graph 6).

4.4.2.2. Family Size

Graph 7 Family Size

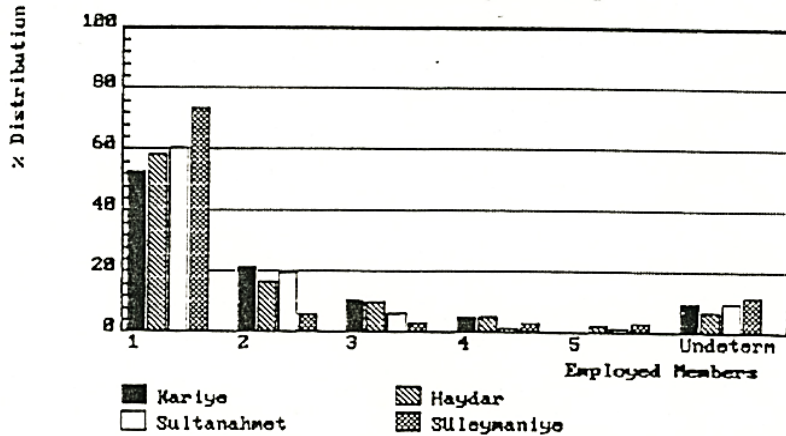


Considering the family size, research carried out in the whole area showed that most families have four or five members. The rate of four or five member families is 55.8% in Suleymaniye, 50.7% in Sultanahmet, 58.5% in Haydar and 52.1% in Kariye. This rate is 49.6% for the Historic Peninsula. For families larger than five members, Haydar has the highest rate of 31.2%, Sultanahmet

of 21.1%, Kariye of 16.2%, and Suleymaniye of 8.7%. This rate is 15.1% for the Historic Peninsula. The rate of those living alone, i.e. of the single occupant is 6.5% in Sultanahmet, 4.8% in Kariye, 2.9% in Suleymaniye, and 1.4% in Haydar (see Graph 7).

#### 4.4.2.3. Number of Employed Members per Family

Graph 8 Number Of Employed Members per Family

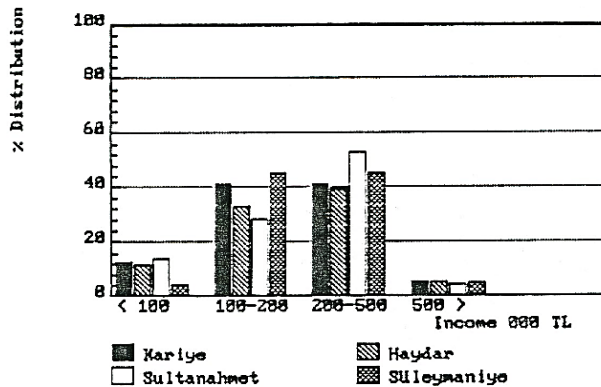


In most of the cases, number of employed members remains as one. This rate is 74% for Suleymaniye, 61% for Sultanahmet, 58.5% for Haydar, 52.7% for Kariye, and it is 58.6% for the Historic Peninsula. In 44.3% of the cases Kariye has more than one employed member in the family

(see Graph 8). For the Historic Peninsula this rate is 37.6%. Due to this fact, the income level has been drawn upward because there is accumulation of incomes.

#### 4.4.2.4. Income Level

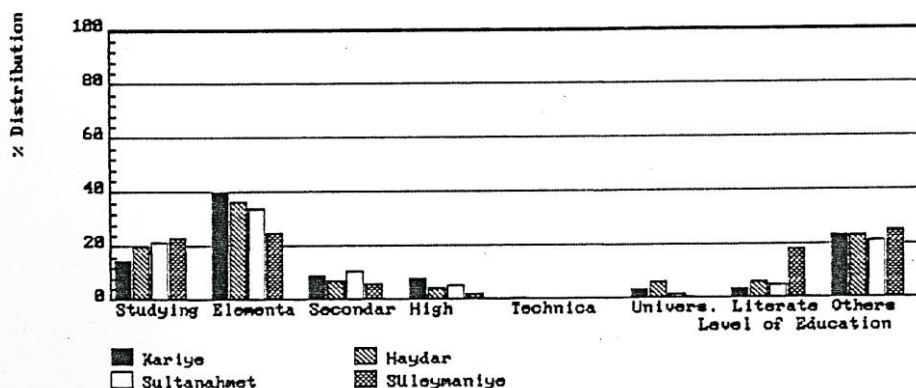
Graph 9 Income Level



Concerning the data of income levels, most families were found to have low incomes. The cases with the lowest income levels are 14.2% in Sultanahmet, 12.5% in Kariye, 11.7% in Haydar, and 4.5% in Suleymaniye (see Graph 9).

#### 4.4.2.5. Level of Education

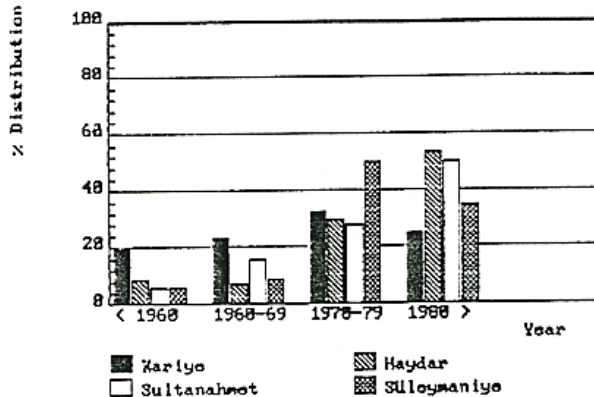
Graph 10 Level of Education



Concerning the figures for the levels of education only a small number of family members are university graduates. The rate of university graduates is 1.5% in Sultanahmet, 1.1% in Haydar and 0,8% in Kariye. As for Suleymaniye, there are no university graduates among the sampled population. Most family members have had only elementary school education (see Graph 10).

#### 4.4.2.6. Length of Stay in the Quarter

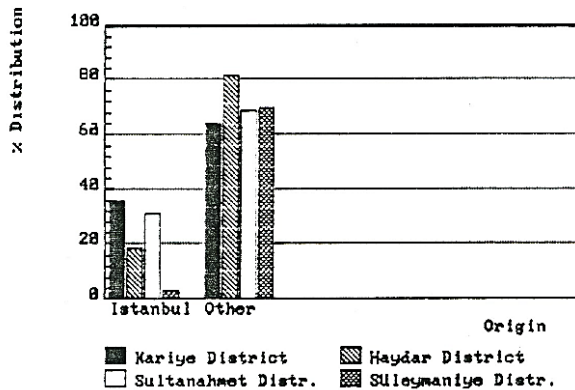
Graph 11 Length of Stay in the Quarter



It has been found out that most of the inhabitants came to their respective quarters after the 1970s. The rate of those who came after these years is 85.2% for Suleymaniye, 83.5% for Haydar, 78 % for Sultanahmet and 57.6% for Kariye (see Graph 11).

#### 4.4.2.7. Origin of the Family

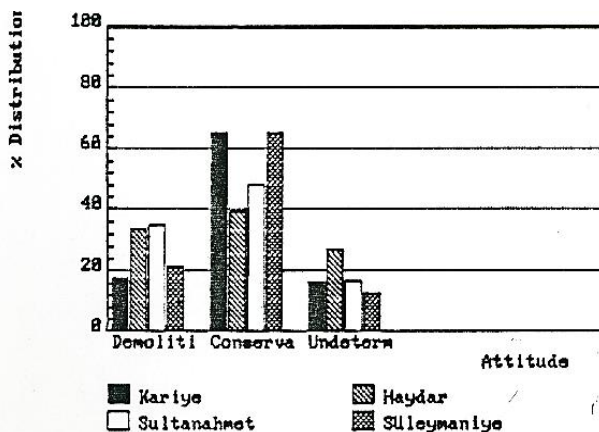
Graph 12 Origin of the Family



In Suleymaniye, only one family is originally from Istanbul, the rate being 3.1%, and 96.9% have migrated into Istanbul from other provinces. In Haydar only 18.3% and in Sultanahmet only 31% are from Istanbul. Kariye has the highest percentage, i.e. 35.9% of the families originate from Istanbul, and 64.1% have migrated from other provinces (see Graph 12).

#### 4.4.3. Findings Related to the Public Attitude Towards the Conservation of Historic Houses and Environment

Graph 13 Attitude Towards Historic Buildings



In order to find out the attitude of the inhabitants in the quarters towards the conservation of their historic houses two questions were asked. The answers to the first question, "Is it better to demolish historic buildings to build multi-storey apartment blocks?" reveal that some inhabitants (18% in Kariye, 35% in Sultanahmet, 33.8% in Haydar and 21.9% in Suleymaniye) believe that traditional houses should be demolished (see Graph 13).

It seems that the building owners are not interested in the cultural or artistic value of their houses. Under the economic pressure, the owners tend to leave their historic houses and are often forced to abandon them to deteriorate or to pull them down illegally in case the buildings are classified and listed for conservation. The rate of people wanting to keep the old buildings is 65.5% in Kariye, 39.4% in Haydar, 48.3% in Sultanahmet and 65.6% in Suleymaniye. Most of these are tenants, and the reason for their preference for keeping these buildings is the low rates of rent, not consciousness of their historical or cultural value. Some other inhabitants are quite undetermined related with the subject.

Answers to the other question "Are there any buildings worth conserving around here?" show that some inhabitants (62.2% in Kariye, 29.6% in Haydar, 48.6% in Sultanahmet, and 75% in Suleymaniye) agree that in their respective quarters there exist some historic buildings to be conserved. However, they also believe that the type of building to be conserved should have certain monumental characteristics, i.e. it should be a mosque, a palace or a castle, not just a traditional house. Only in Kariye the houses that have been restored by the Turkish Touring Automobile Association are evaluated as worthy of conservation as the Kariye Museum. Thus, it can be observed that having successful examples of conservation in the quarter may help to orient the public towards being more conscious for conservation.

According to the residents of historical buildings, the main problems seem to be related to the maintenance difficulties and old sanitary facilities. Another difficulty is to have to share the house with other families. Originally, such houses were built for one family only, so the common spaces in such houses like bathrooms and toilets have to be shared by the members of more than one family. Users also complain about the cost of maintenance and repair, about the difficulties of cleaning, and also about the trouble they are having with insects and rodents.

One other factor contributing to the tendency of demolishing historical buildings is the sense of respectability gained by living in a modern apartment flat.

One interesting finding is that most of the residents of concrete buildings seem to prefer living in a historical timber building, and do not approve of demolition; on the contrary, most residents in the timber houses (owners, not tenants) say they would like to live in a flat in a multi-storey apartment block.

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Man affects and shapes the environment in which he lives, and he also wants to participate in the planning decisions concerning his own area. The data used in determining the planning strategy should not only include knowledge about land use pattern, physical structures of buildings and the socioeconomic status of inhabitants, but also the expectations and awareness of each user - tenant or owner - for their environment. One of the important tasks of local governments and planners is to take into account and to channel these expectations, demands and ideas.

The results of the study indicate that indeterminacy is the general, dominant attitude towards the proper application of the conservation decisions which lead to lack of consciousness in the maintenance and repair of privately owned historic buildings. Whereas, when the decisions for developing the area have been declared to the public and the tendencies have been determined as was the

case in Kariye, then a proper and necessary atmosphere is provided for the act of conservation as well as a consciousness in all the inhabitants of the area.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a certain relationship between the length of life spent in that area and the attitude towards the conservation of historic houses. In the area studied, it is observed that most of the historic houses have been sub-divided and occupied by migrants from rural areas, and that they are all in a state of dilapidation as is the case in Suleymaniye. Due to the lack of urban utilities and the deterioration of buildings. The Quarter has lost its previous characteristics thus becoming an area inhabited by a lower-class urban population. People settled in these quarters act as hosts for their relatives and friends who are in the process of migration.

According to another finding, the residents of timber houses prefer to live in concrete buildings; on the contrary, the residents of concrete buildings prefer to live in timber houses; and most residents do not approve of the demolition of timber houses. Those who have changed their timber houses into concrete blocks express their regrets for having done so, as is the case in Kariye. And those who do not approve of demolition claim that, in addition to being historically valuable, timber houses are healthier to live in and more attractive in appearance than concrete buildings. The residents' comments on concrete buildings are: insufficient neighbourhood relations; an over-crowded environment; disagreement between flat owners; and lack of gardens and/or green areas.

Most of the residents who are for the demolition of historic houses claim that these houses are old fashioned, in a state of dilapidation and too expensive to maintain; they also believe that the quarter would be much cleaner and tidier after their demolition.

Most of the owners would rather demolish and transform their properties into multi-storey buildings, as this would be much profitable. However, tenants do not agree with the demolition, fearing that they would have to move out and that they would not be able to find a similar house with as low a rent as they are paying.

Regarding the conservation of historic environment, one important factor contributing to the success or failure of the implementation of conservation decisions is that both the people living in the area and the general public including the politicians, the administrators and the planners should see conservation as necessary. In Turkey only a small number of people react positively to the decisions about the conservation of housing environments. Most people react negatively or adopt an indifferent attitude.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Under the economic pressure mostly created by wrong development planning strategies and local administrative policies, historic buildings tend to be demolished and replaced by new multi-storey buildings to be rented or to be sold.

It can be concluded that on the macro level, some sort of education is necessary to raise the consciousness of people in general towards conserving historic houses, and that such consciousness is a function of socio-economic prosperity. In other words, when the socio-economic level goes up, when some sort of financial aid is provided, people will be encouraged to restore such houses and choose to live in them.

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