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**THE CHANGING ROLE OF A HOUSING DISTRICT
INTO COMMERCIAL USE: "İST LEVENT CASE"**

Prof.Dr. Nuran Zeren Gülersoy

Serap Demir, Architect (M.A.)

Ayşe Paşalıođlu, City Planner (M.A.)

İstanbul Technical University

Faculty of Architecture

Department of Urban Planning

Tařkışla, Taksim-İstanbul TURKEY

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Nuran ZEREN GÜLERSOY, Prof. Dr Istanbul Technical University Serap DEMİR, Architect (M.A.)

Ayşe PAŞALIOĞLU, City Planner (M.A.)

Key Words

Conversion, transformation, urban growth, business orientation, decision making, economical and functional change, commercial use, prestige area.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Today's big cities are experiencing radical changes all over the world. As the evaluation of urban system continues, cities urban complexes develop in their dynamic mean. In brief, this change can be named as a kaleidoscopic transformation. Problems occurred in urban areas; growth, change, reconcentration, ageing, reconstruction, and so on interact with each other continuously. As a result of that, urban organizations change dramatically and experience continuous impacts of physical, technical, administrative, and financial innovation.

As it has been in many countries, Turkey's biggest city; Istanbul is confronted with all these problems given above. Still being the core of the country with it's of characteristic of trade, commerce and business centre, and a massive immigration from the rural area into İstanbul (which is about 400 000 person per year), planners and designers are getting more careful about the decision making process in order to cope with the needs and demands of the overgrowing city.

In İstanbul, the dynamic effects of time in the urban area is highly correlated with the changing face of the economy, and in the 1980s, this change has brought a new dimension to the urban culture of the city. The evidence of professional business environment, separated itself from the existing business area of İstanbul, and prominent headquarters have been started to appear on the north part of the city; Levent-Maslak axe, where the dominant business development area is planned in the 1990s.

The case study area, Ist Levent, situated on Şişli-Sarıyer (Maslak) road within Bosphorus region, was built in the 1950s, as a garden city, on a land of 100 hectares which had used to be the hunting path of the Ottoman Sultans in the 1900s. The project realised by Emlak Bank - state-owned bank- which aim is the construction of public housing. The area became so popular as a prestigious housing area, that has kept its reputation in the housing culture of the city until today. The area is faced with a considerable conversion movement for commercial reasons during the last two decades (Fig. 1).

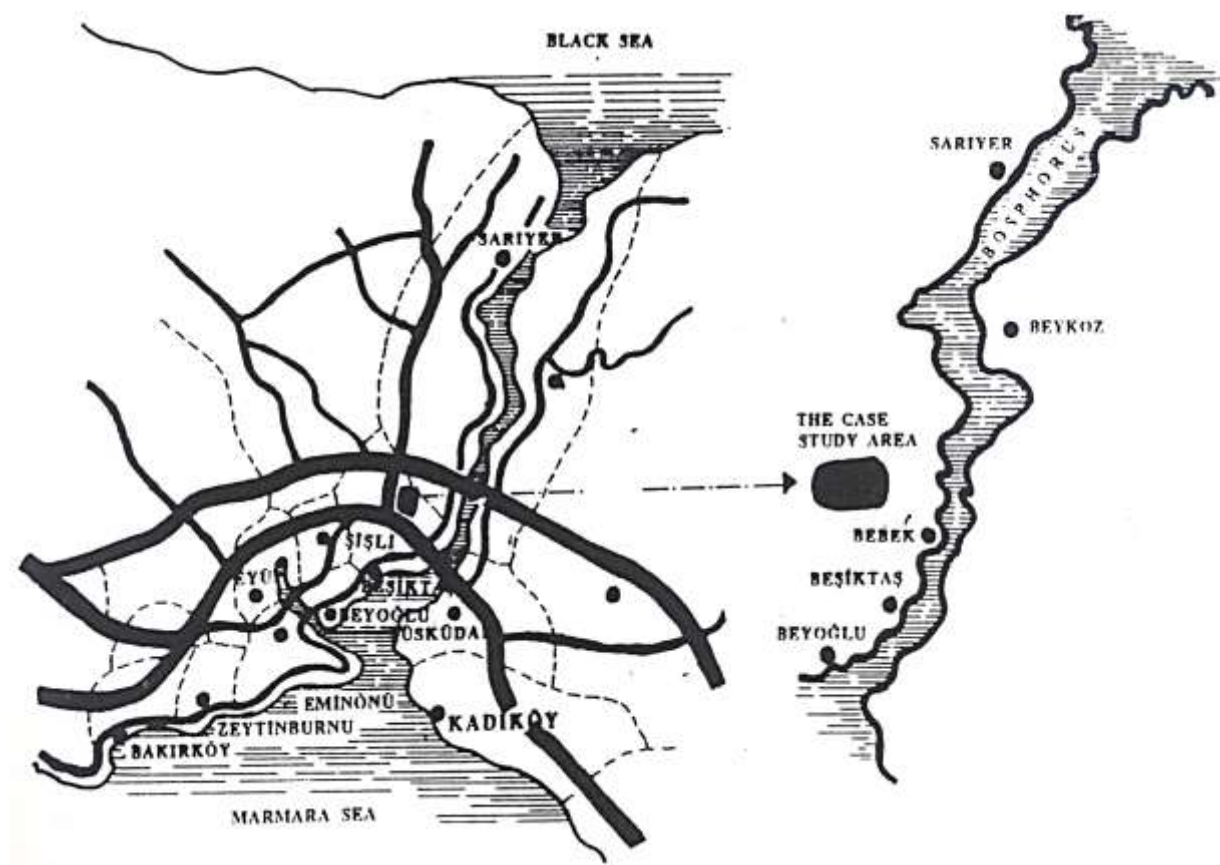


Figure 1- The Location of the Case Study Area on Istanbul Map ⁽¹⁾.

- The study is designed to give a better understanding of economical-functional change of the area, regarding the economic conditions of the country, and the requirements of the city.

2.0 THE STATE OF LEVENT IN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PLANNED DEVELOPMENT OF ISTANBUL

In order to understand the socio-economic structure and the importance of Istanbul's cultural heritage within the context of this study, a brief historical background of the city is given in this part. The second part gives the chronological order of the city master plans to show the sequence of its growth within those plans for the area which is chosen for this study. Although one might argue that, the plan does not usually reflect the vernacular growth of the city, it is, however, wise to analyse the mutual corporation between the plan and the growth.

During the 19th century and up to 1920s İstanbul was a crossing point and a channel for the flow of transport and information, being the focal point of commercial and stock exchange activities. In the late 1920s, the impacts of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the new Republic era that chose Ankara as the capital of the Turkish Republic changed the administrative feature of the city. Thus, İstanbul entered into a period of stagnation which continued until the 1930s. The city started to regain its functions as a world city after the II. World War. With the national development policy starting to take place in the 1930s, İstanbul lost its economic autonomy while the power was centralised, and the economy was governed by the State (2).

After the IInd World War İstanbul had a new role to play with the profound effects of open economic policies, liberalism and democracy, the phenomena of migration from rural to urban regions resulted in squatter housing in the 1950s. The first developments of the industry started to develop in İstanbul in addition to the commercial and financial activities. With the introduction of the planned period and particularly after the 1970s industry started to make itself felt in the economic life of İstanbul. The 1980s, with the dominance of the policies of liberalism, open economy and monetarism which widely affected the entire world, also affected the Turkish economy, and İstanbul started to become a world city in the real sense of the world.

In brief, İstanbul set up in B.C.622 has become the first metropolis of the world with 1 million population in the 11th century and has regained this function with 10 million population again in the 1990s.

The first master plan for the city had been made by Moltke at Mahmut 2nd era. During the Republic era, planning studies had been carried out by many foreign planners; H.Elgötz's plan in 1933, Prof.Henri Prost's plan in 1936, Prof.L.Piccinato's plan in 1958 accomplished for the "Cities Bank". Many plans had been then produced after this period by the İstanbul Grand Master Plan Office, and the first authorised one in 29.07.1980 at 1/50 000 scales and is called "İstanbul Metropolitan Region Master Plan" (Figure 2) (3). This plan aims to improve the importance of İstanbul at the international level, to create the functions and services required in accordance with the country's development. Conversion of the trade centres into major commercial centres within the metropolitan trade context is one of the targets aimed for business reasons.

Next studies for a recent master plan had been started in 1989 and accomplished and authorised in 1994 (Figure 3) (3). This plan aims the conservation of cultural, natural and historical identity of İstanbul. The targets of the plan can be given as follows:

- The centre of international science, technology, art, culture, education and services;
- The centre for international capital;
- Bringing the high technological transport and communication systems;
- The realisation of sustainable development.

Levent was planned as a housing area in 1946, and the first authorised plan was in 1952 at 1/2000 scale (Figure 4) (4). Further studies which had been carried out for the area can be given as follows:

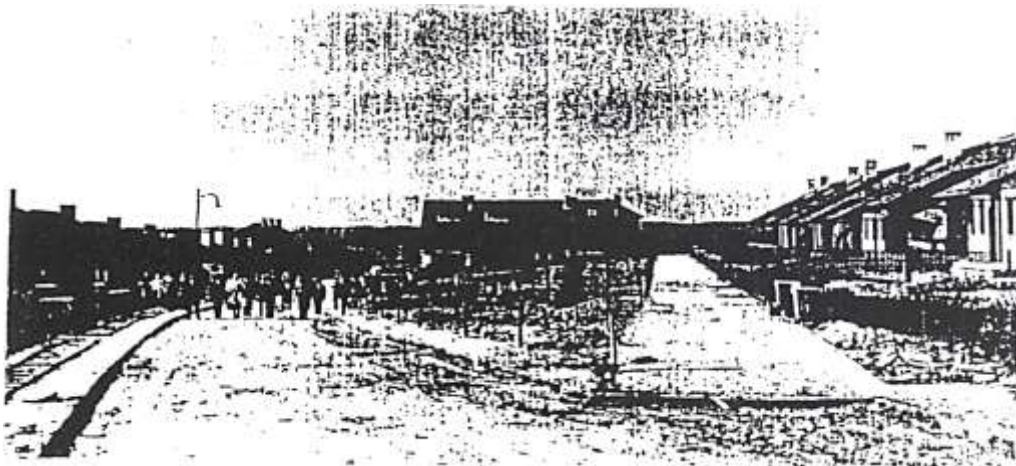
Until the 3.5.1991 plan the area was seen as a housing settlement, but with the movement of the central commercial axe from the city centre (Şişli-Gayrettepe-Mecidiyeköy-Zincirlikuyu towards Maslak) and the decreasing rent of houses for their owners, the conversion of these houses for commercial use is legalised for the first part of Levent. This part is therefore used for cafes, restaurants, bars, night clubs, banks, offices. As it is seen in the fourth part of the study, the questionnaire survey has proved the density of the change after the 1990s.

The observation of the area has also brought us the idea of asking the users of the area for business purposes; the reasons for choosing 1st Levent to set up their

business. As Istanbul's business endeavour has been mainly oriented in Taksim-Şişli-Mecidiyekoy area over the decades, there is a rapid movement of the business axe which goes towards Maslak, the north side of the city. This movement is highly appreciated by the business people, because of its updated infrastructure, the transport facilities to the major motorways which are E-5 and E-6 (TEM), the close location of the area to the city that facilitates all the services.

In other words, as it is evident in many cities in the world, Istanbul is gaining a cultural identity of a business and services-oriented since the 1980s. This movement then concluded in high-rise office buildings in the area with the authorisation given on the plans and made it accessible.

Beyond the changes on the plans, Ist Levent which situated between the existing and the new coming business zone, has, therefore, taking particular attention of the middle-size companies. .As it is seen on the evaluation of the 1/5000 scale plans of the area, Ist Levent has always remained its characteristic of houses with 2 or 3 stages of houses until 1991 between the restrictions of the Bosphorus area. This dated plan legalised the use for commercial or business purposes by the property owners, rather giving them the right to build apartments. As a consequence, the rent of these houses in the area augmented sharply, and the physical change has become apparent.



Picture 1- A view from Ist Levent in the 1950s.

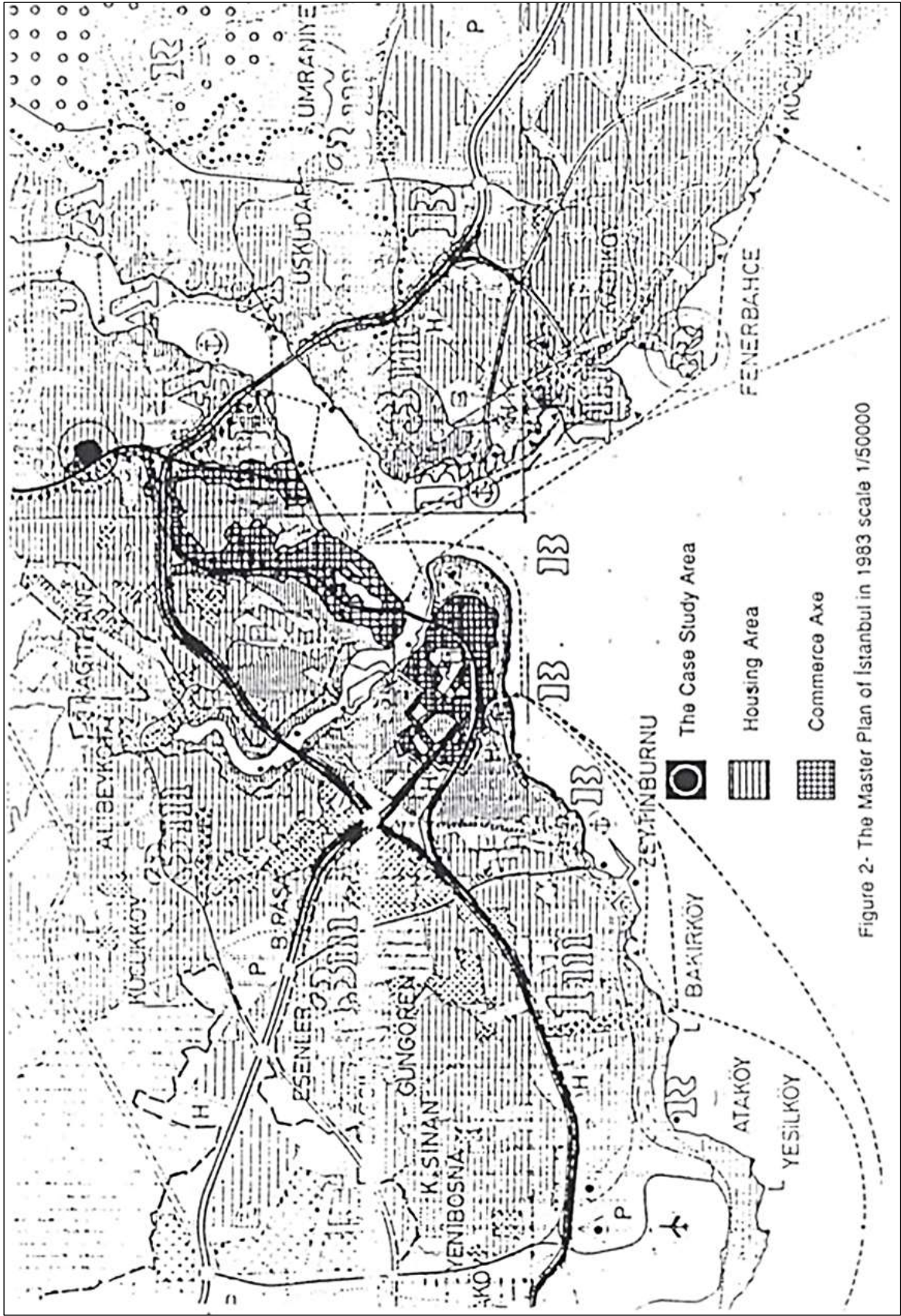
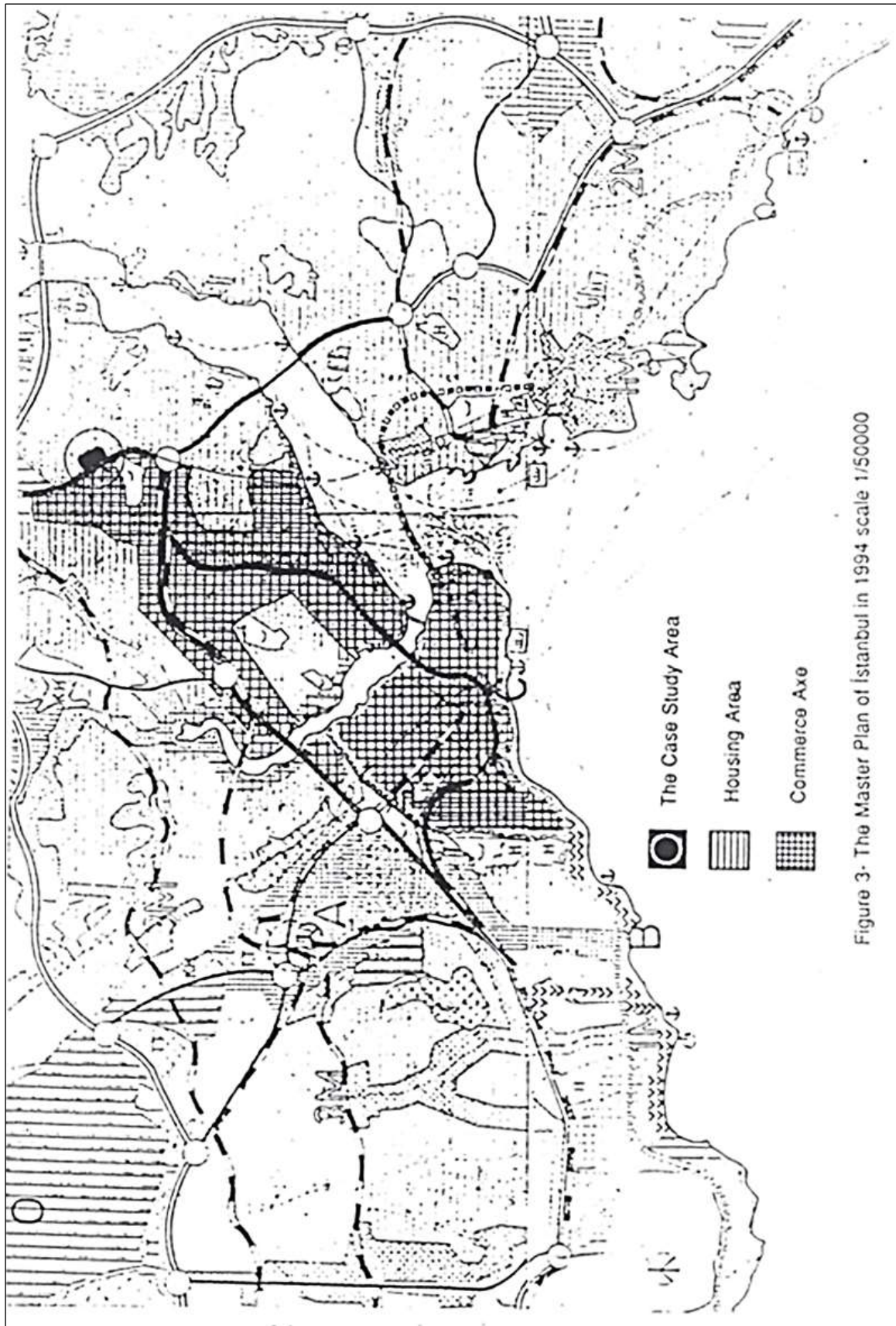


Figure 2- The Master Plan of Istanbul in 1963 scale 1/50000



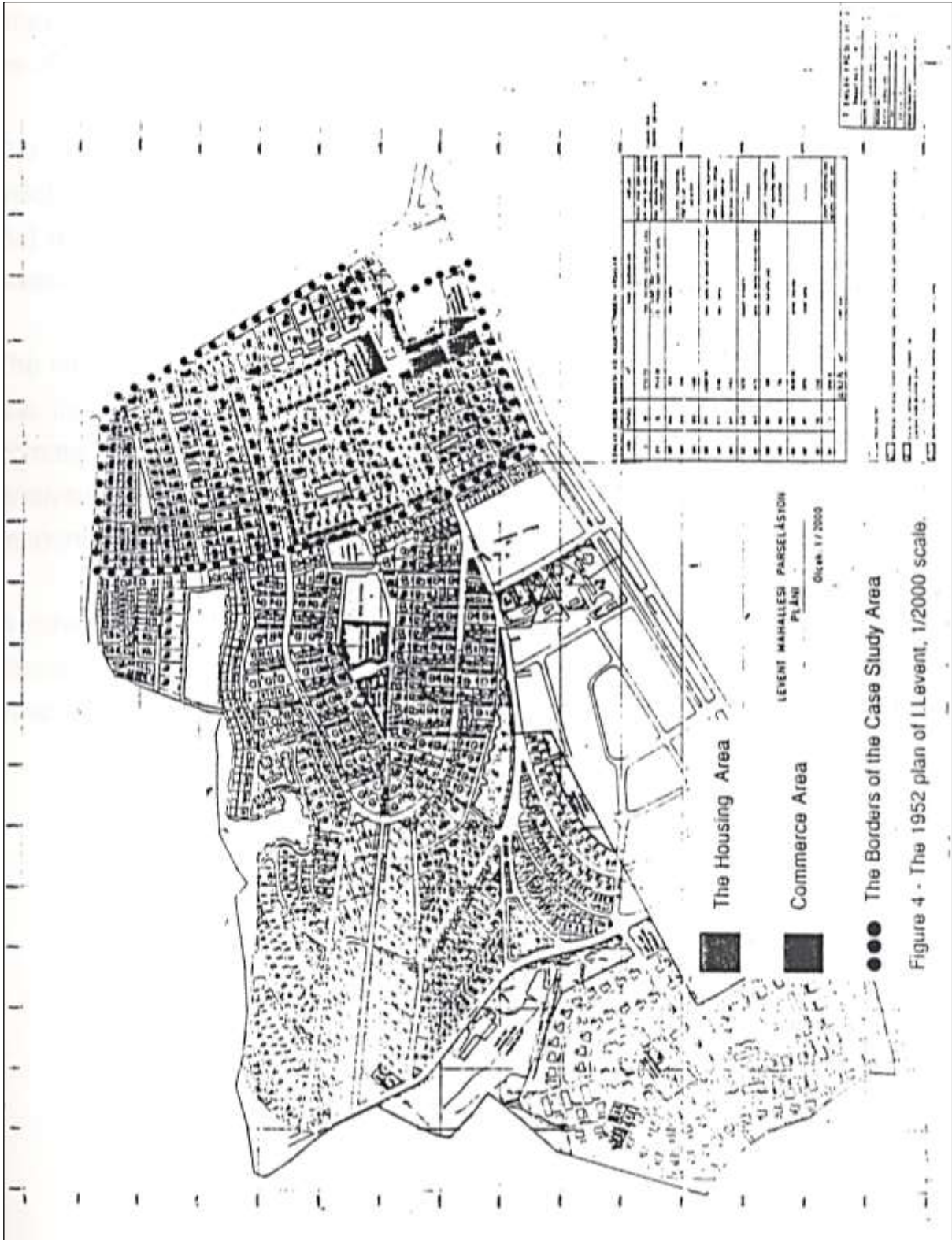


Figure 4 - The 1952 plan of I. Levent, 1/2000 scale.

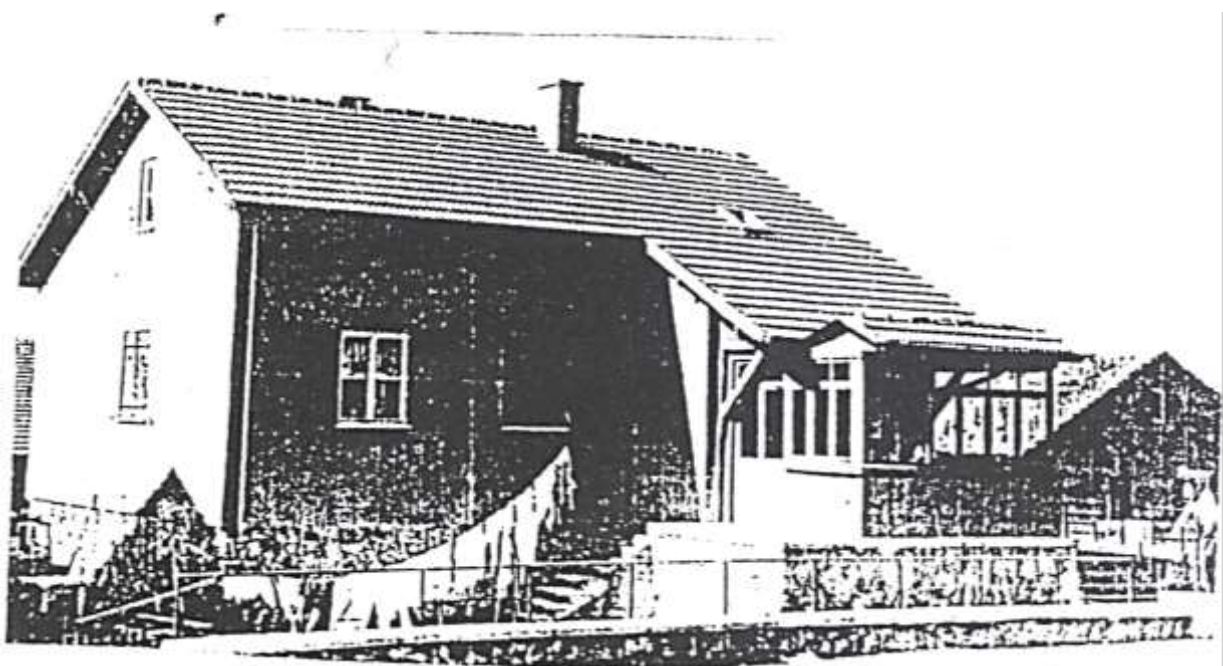
3.0 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

One of the methods followed during the study was the questionnaire survey that carried out in the case area Ist Lèvent. In order to observe and show the reasons for this functional change, a questionnaire survey is carried out through using the interview technique with the business people who work in the area.

The starting point of the analysis was to find out the number of dwellings which changed their function for commercial use. It is eventually found out that the 115 dwellings of those 315 converted into offices for such business reasons (Figure 5) (1).

The interview comprised the study of 88 converted dwellings into commercial use that has been chosen through a pre-classification of functions in 115 commercial use. Thus, the findings of the questionnaire survey are given by the analysis of 88 businesses; 48 examples are answered, 24 of them are not responded, and 11 businesses are found closed.

Another object of the questionnaire survey was to find out some clues for this drastic change in the quality of the area, and the necessity that required by inhabitants of the community.



Picture 2- The typical style of Ist Levent houses in the 1950s.

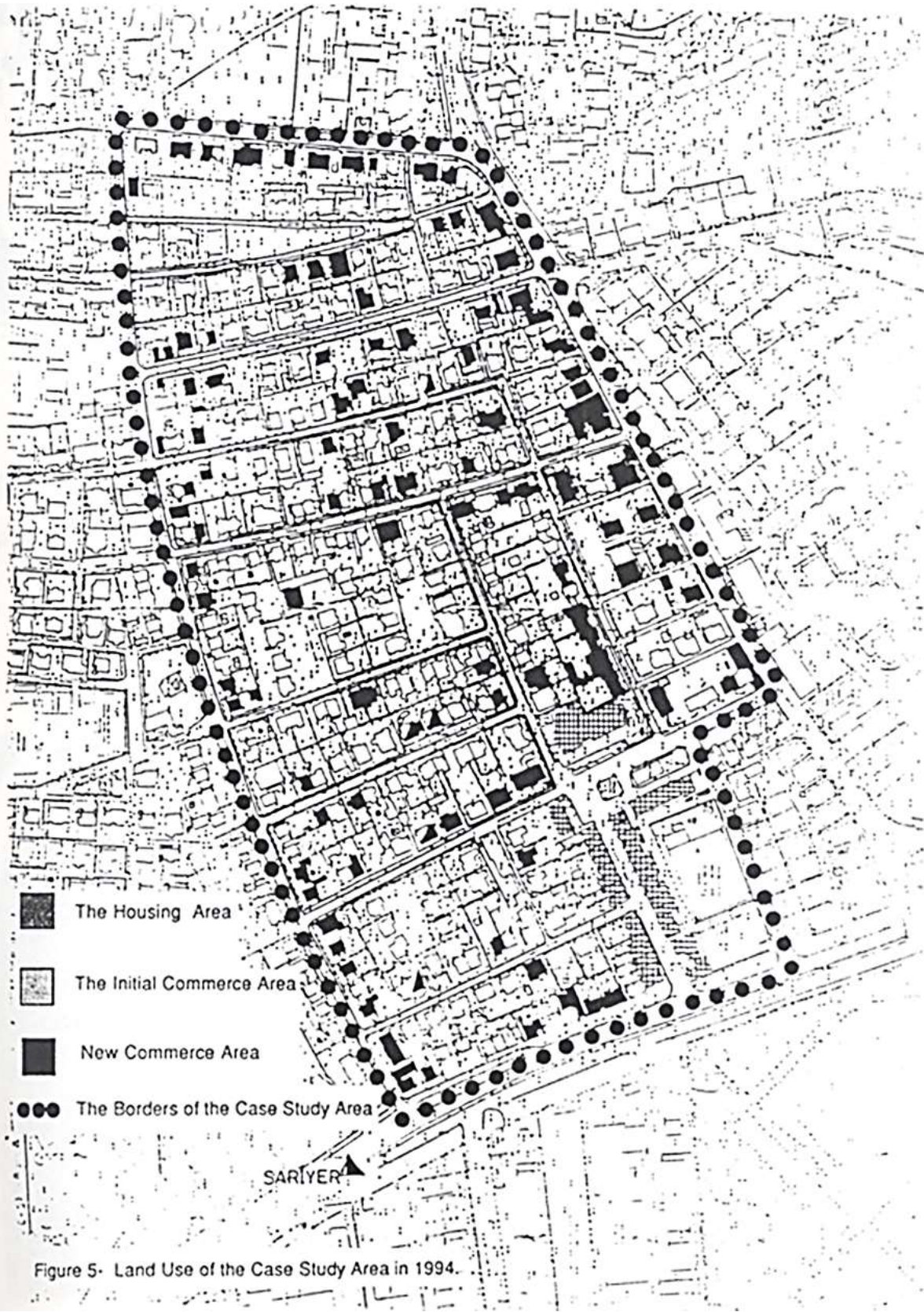
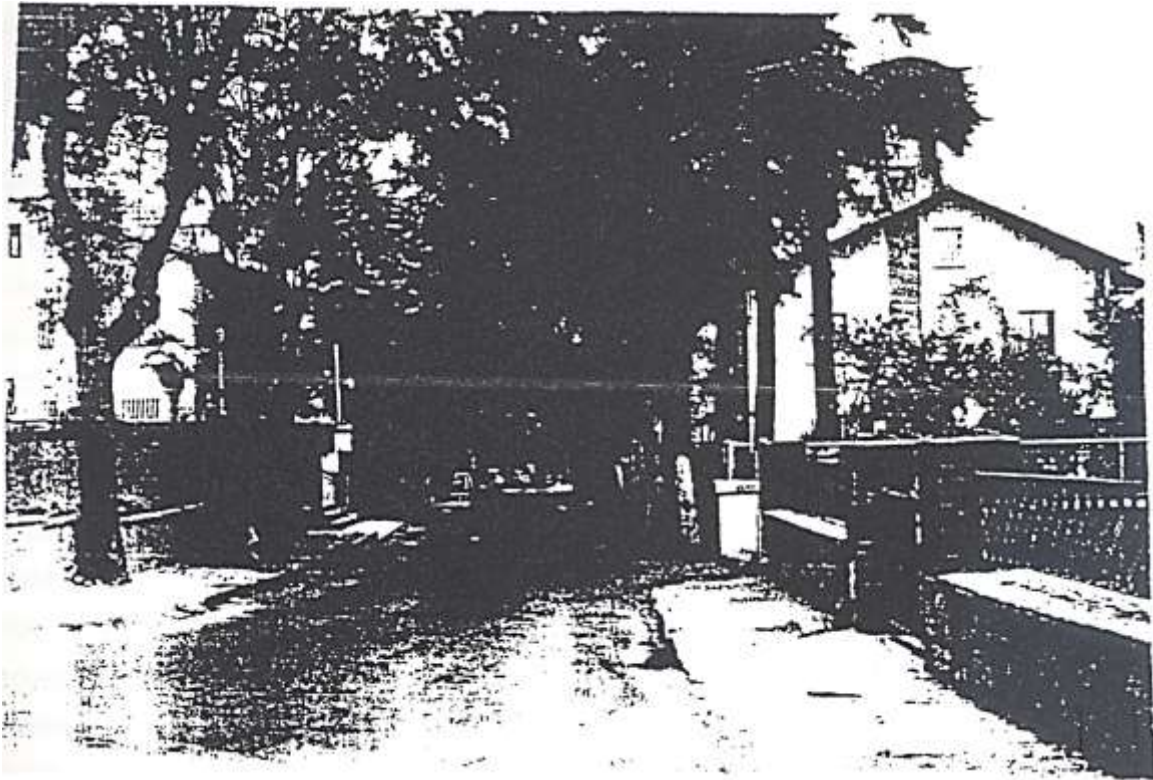
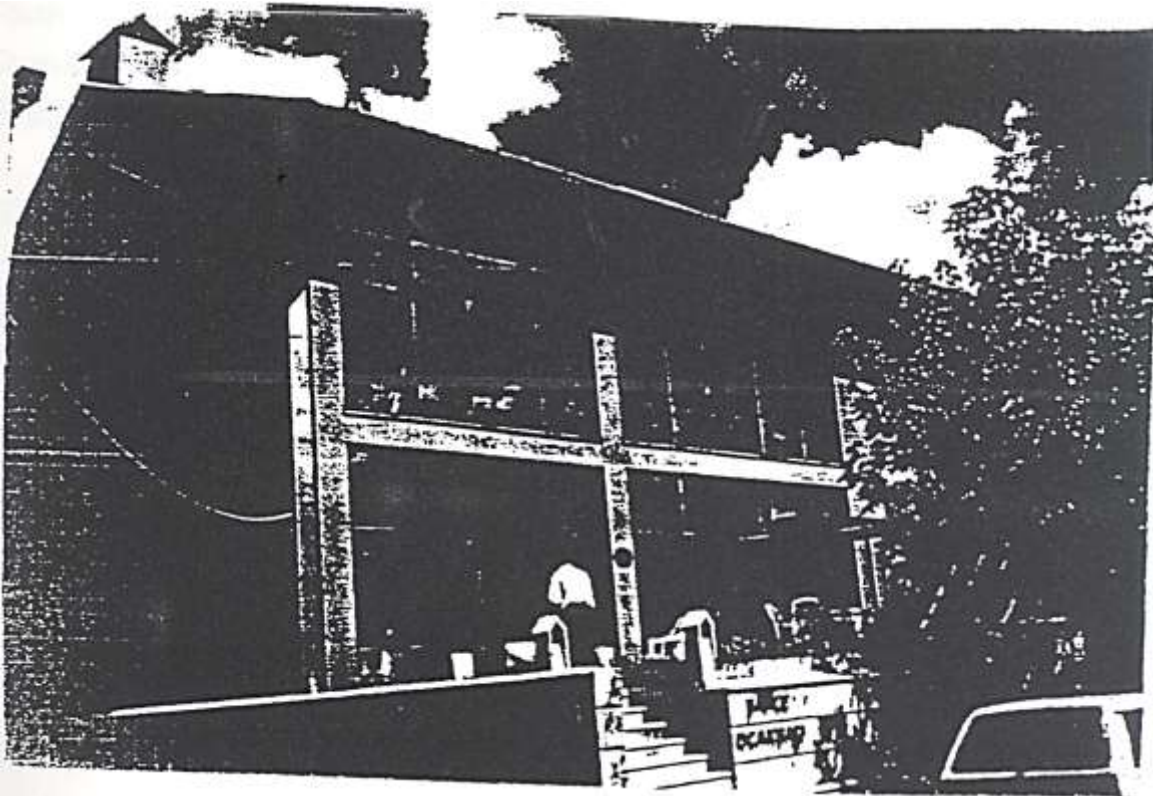


Figure 5- Land Use of the Case Study Area in 1994.



Picture 3- Present view of a road in Ist Levent



Picture 4- A view from a converted house for commercial use.

The findings and the variety of businesses in the case study area can be then given as follows:

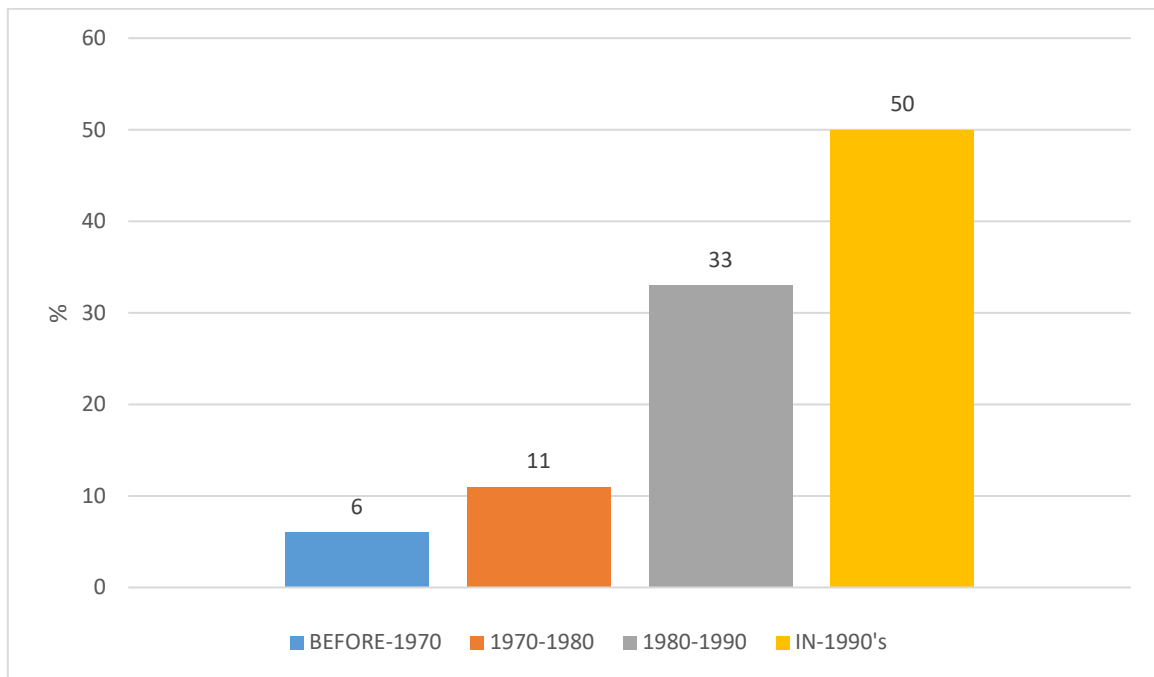
Kebap house, restaurant, pub, bar, night club.....	13
Finance, Audit,import-export,advertisement,insurance broadcasting, publishing and other companies	50
Boutique.....	3
Bank office.....	3
Travel, casting agency.....	3
Private clinic.....	3
Art gallery.....	2
Beauty and hairdressing salon.....	3
Bridge club and clubhouses.....	3
Showroom.....	5
Private nursery school, private primary school, private school.....	8
Garage.....	1
Car sale.....	4
Furniture repairer.....	2
Youth centre.....	1
Consulate.....	1
Empty places.....	10
TOTAL.....	115

The questionnaire survey explains all the reasons for this change and the characteristics of the recent users of the area with their expectations from the region. Having given the particularities of the questionnaire survey, the questions which are consisted in, were designed to search the opening date of the business in the area, the reasons to set up the business in Ist Lèvent, the likes and dislikes of the users from the area according to their precedent business area in order to understand the popularity of the area. The data taken from the study is described as follows:

- *The Ratio of Conversion* According to the survey findings, 115 of 315 houses have been converted into offices or commerce buildings. The ratio of conversion has been found at 37 per cent.

- *The Opening Date of the Business* As it is discussed in the previous parts, the dramatic change has been started in the 1990s with the execution of the new plans prepared for the area, the result of the study carried out with 48 business. The tendency of using for business purposes in the 1980s is the starting date of the phenomena.

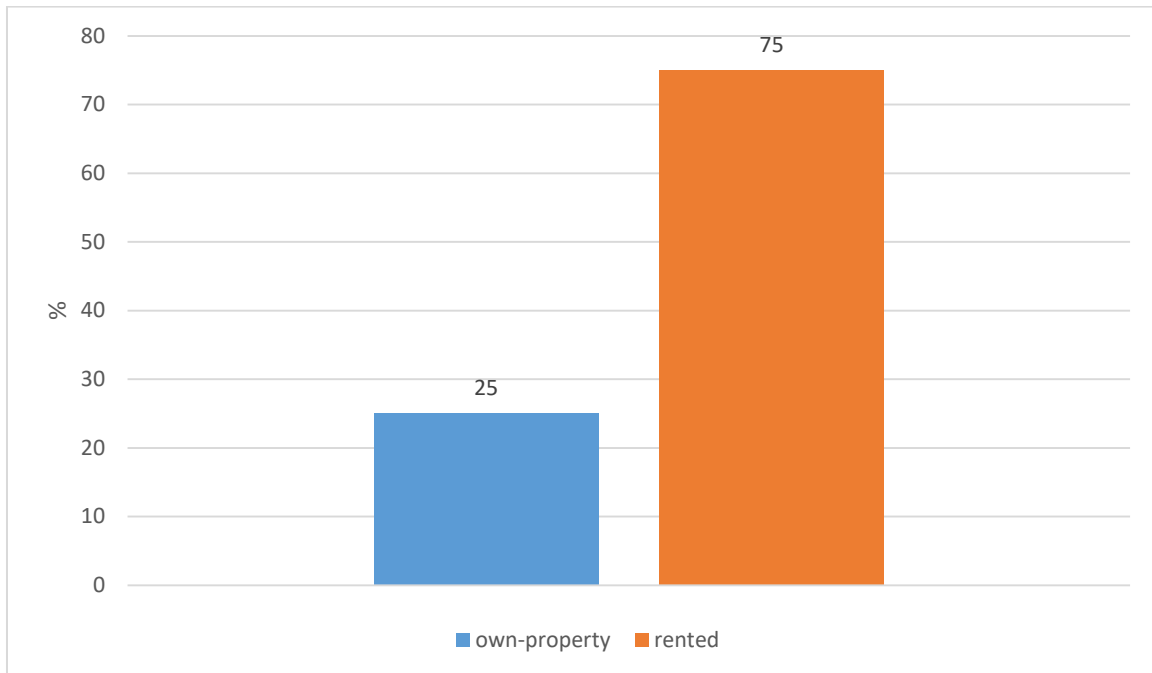
Opening Date of Business



Graph 1- Opening Date of Business in Ist Levent.

- *The Statement of Property* The ratio of owning the property by the business users is 25%. 75% of the 48 answered example rents the building; this used to be reasonable for them but no longer after the fluctuations in the foreign currencies in Turkey.

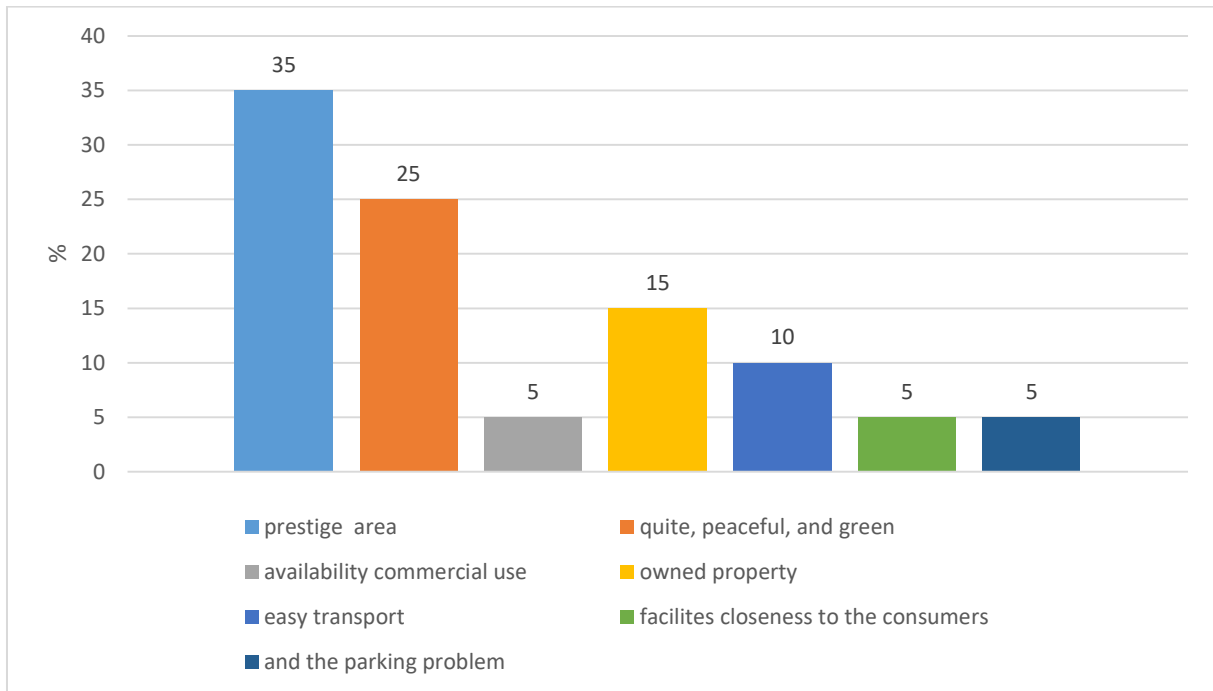
Building Property



Graph 2- Building Property in Ist Levent.-1994

- *The Reasons for Choosing the Area* According to the Purvey the main reasons in choosing I.Levent for business purposes is that it is :
 - a highly prestigious area since it first established;
 - high quality of the natural environment;
 - low traffic density;
 - the low density of housing;
 - quietness for a desirable working environment;
 - owned property;
 - easy transport facilities;
 - availability commercial use;
 - closeness to the consumers and the staff;
 - no parking problem.

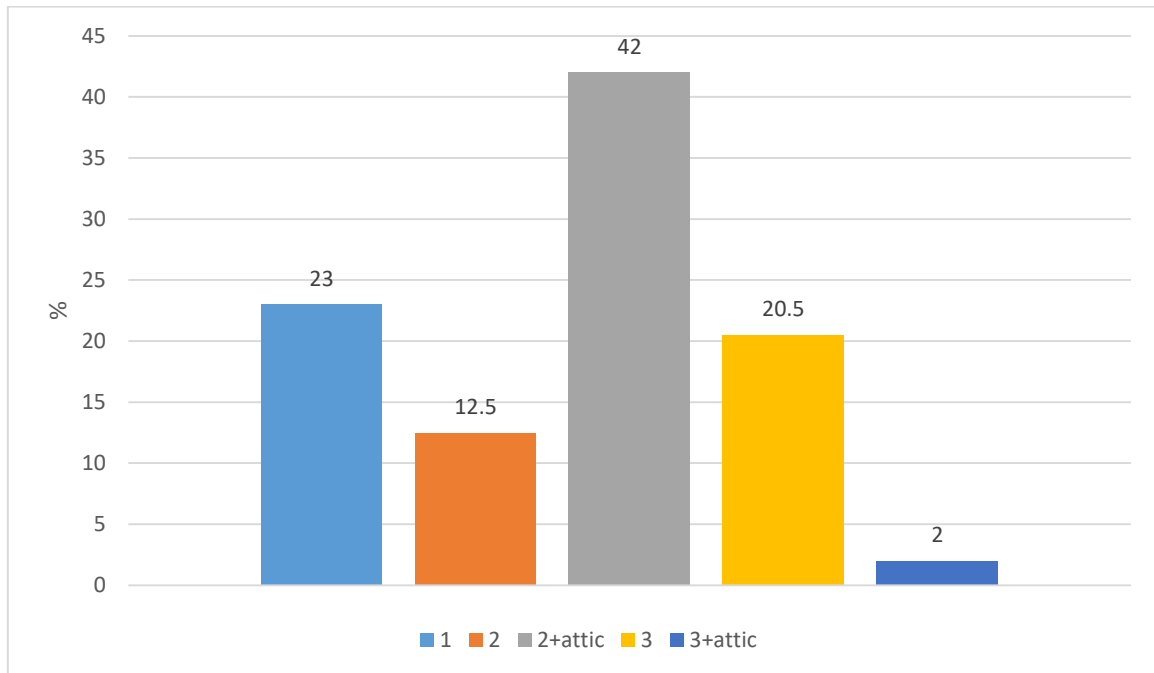
The Reasons for Choosing the Area



Graph3- The Reasons for Choosing the Area for Commercial Use, 1994

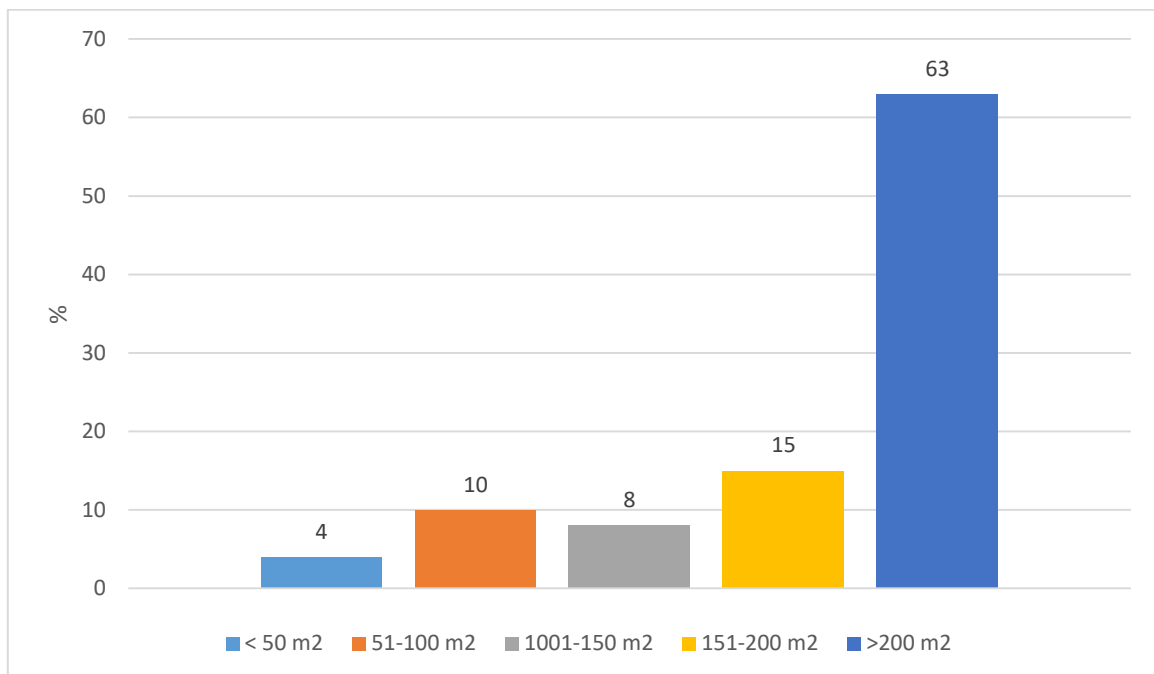
- *The Physical Conditions of the Converted Buildings* The questionnaire survey also aimed to find out the physical conditions of such converted buildings. These are given as follows:
- *The Number of Floors and The Dimensions of the Building* This has been a criterion for choosing the case study area for a comfortable working space and the feasibility of running costs compared to bills paid in a high rise office building by the businessmen.

The Number of Floors



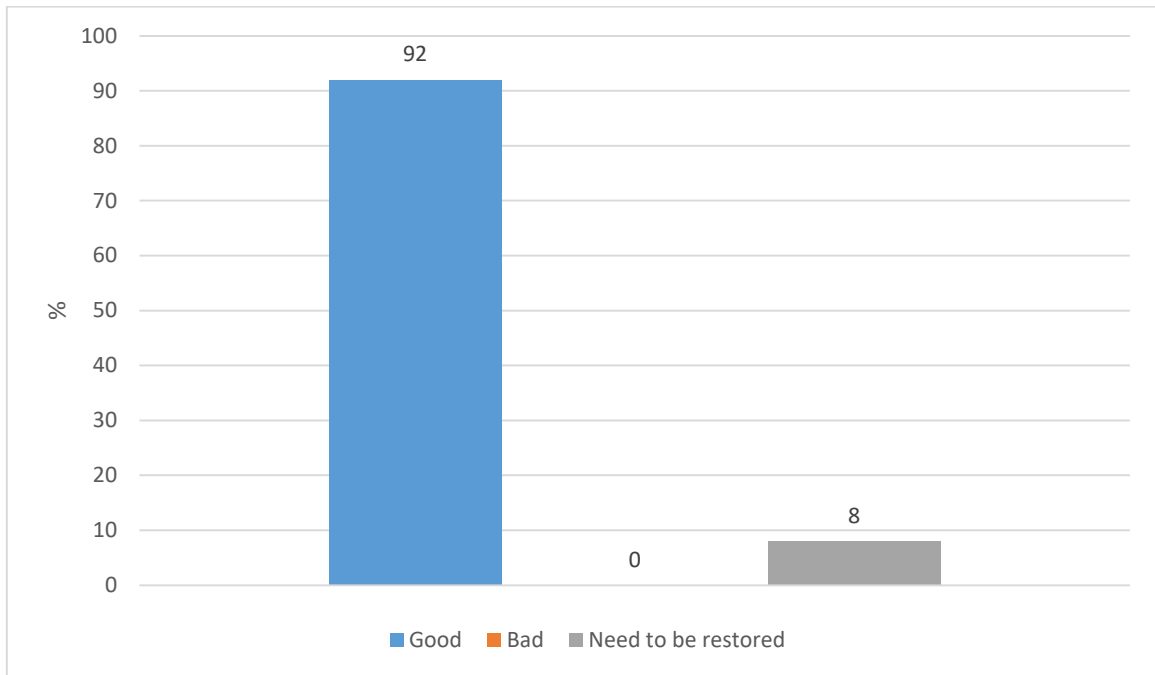
Graph4- The Number of Floors Used in Converted Buildings, 1994

The Dimensions of Buildings



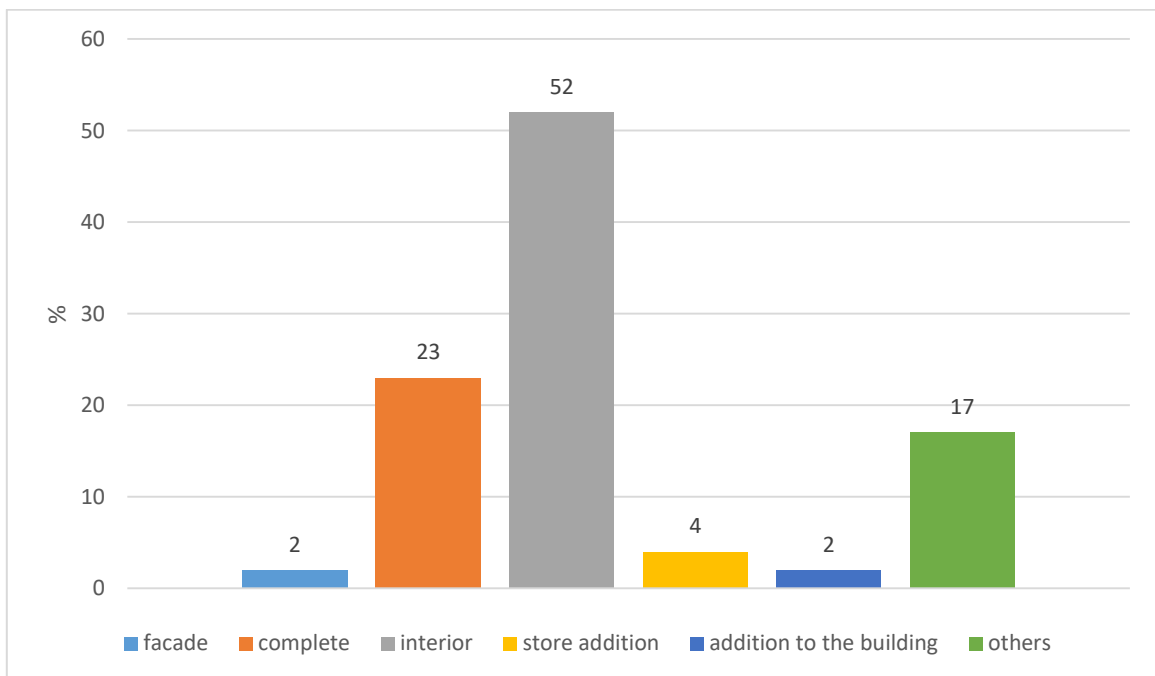
Graph 5- The Dimensions of Converted Buildings. 1994

Building's Physical Condition

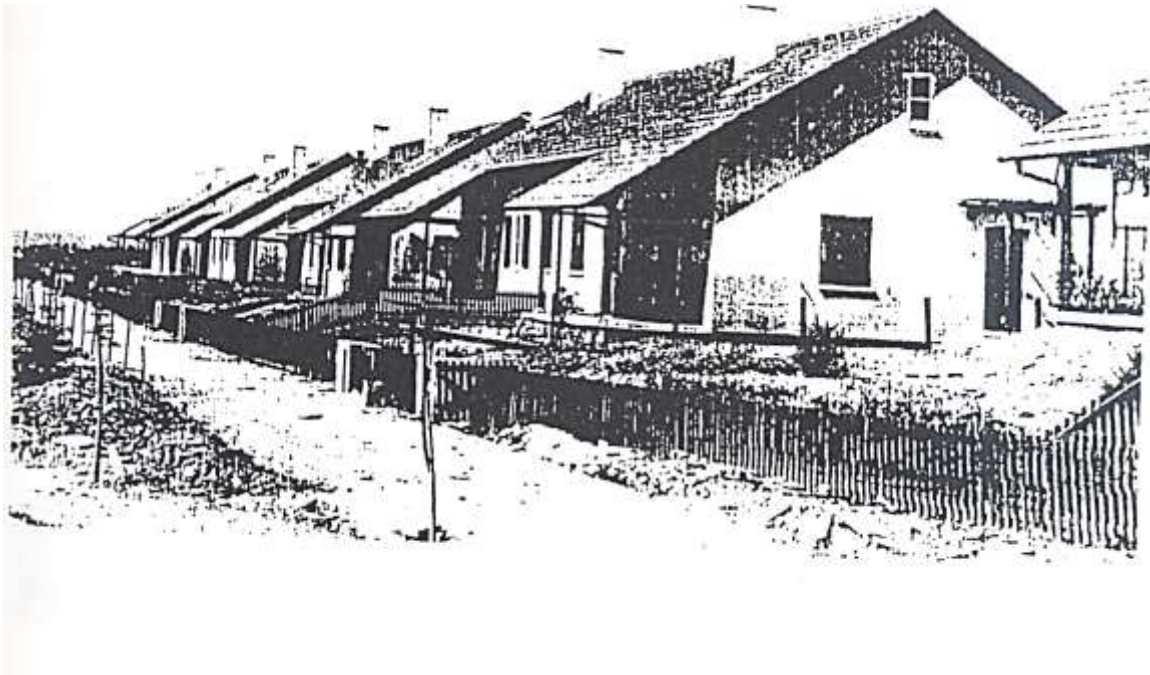


Graph 6- The Physical Conditions of Converted Buildings in Ist Levent. 1994

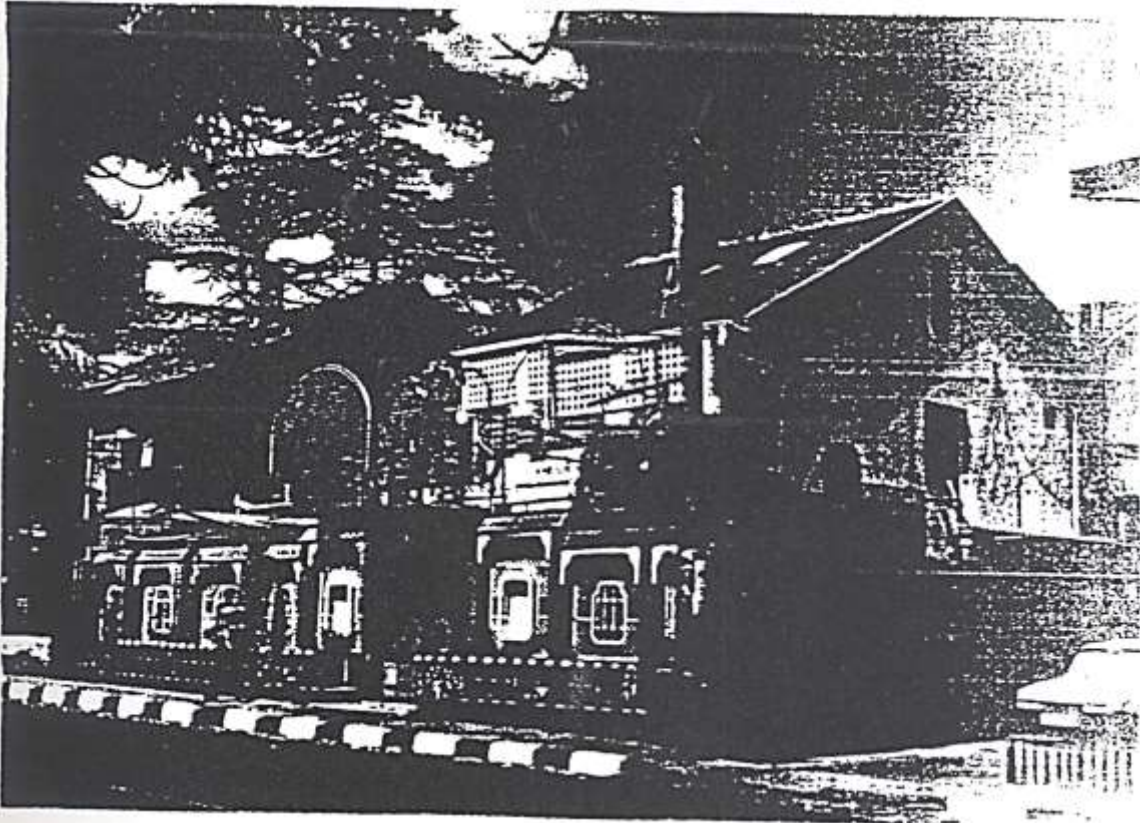
Restoration Work



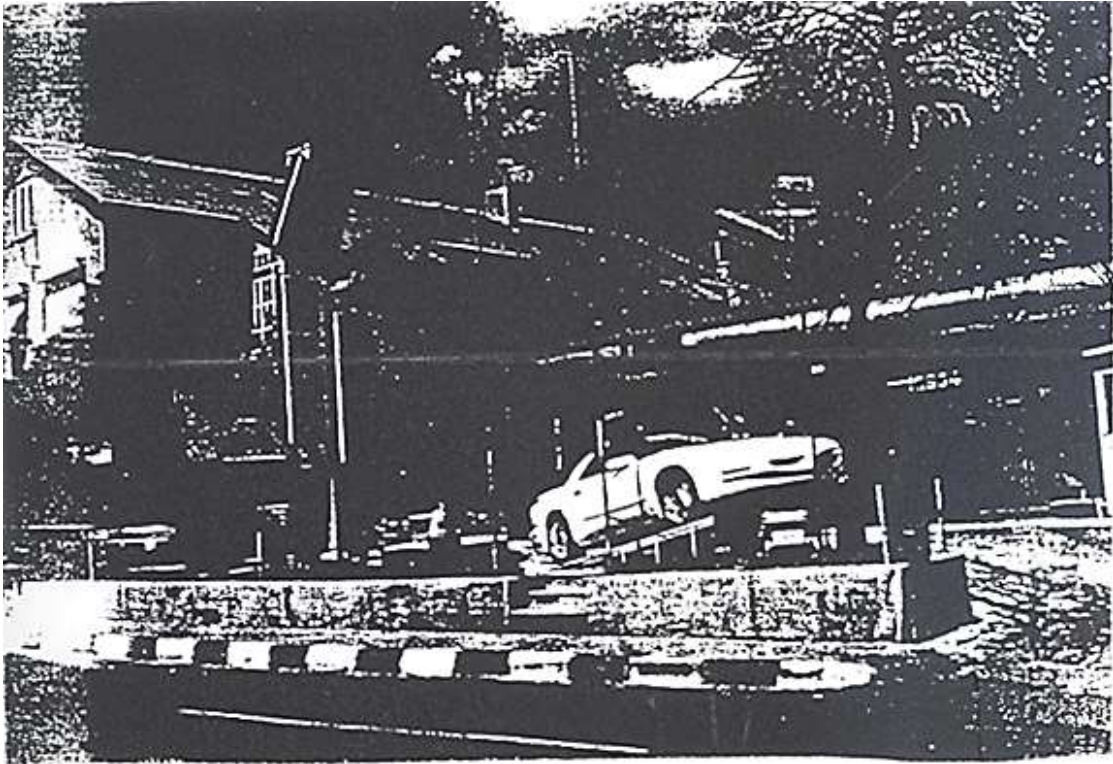
Graph 7- The Restoration Work Applied to the Buildings in Ist Levent Area



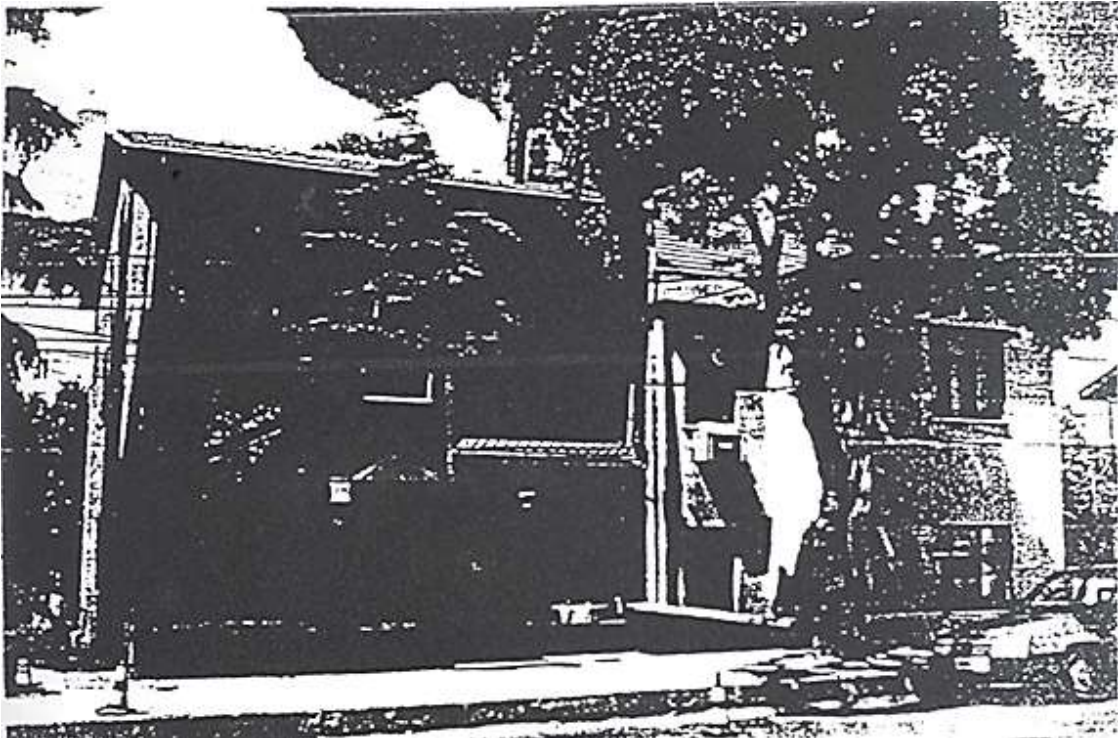
Picture 5- Previous view of a road in Ist Levent in the 1950s.



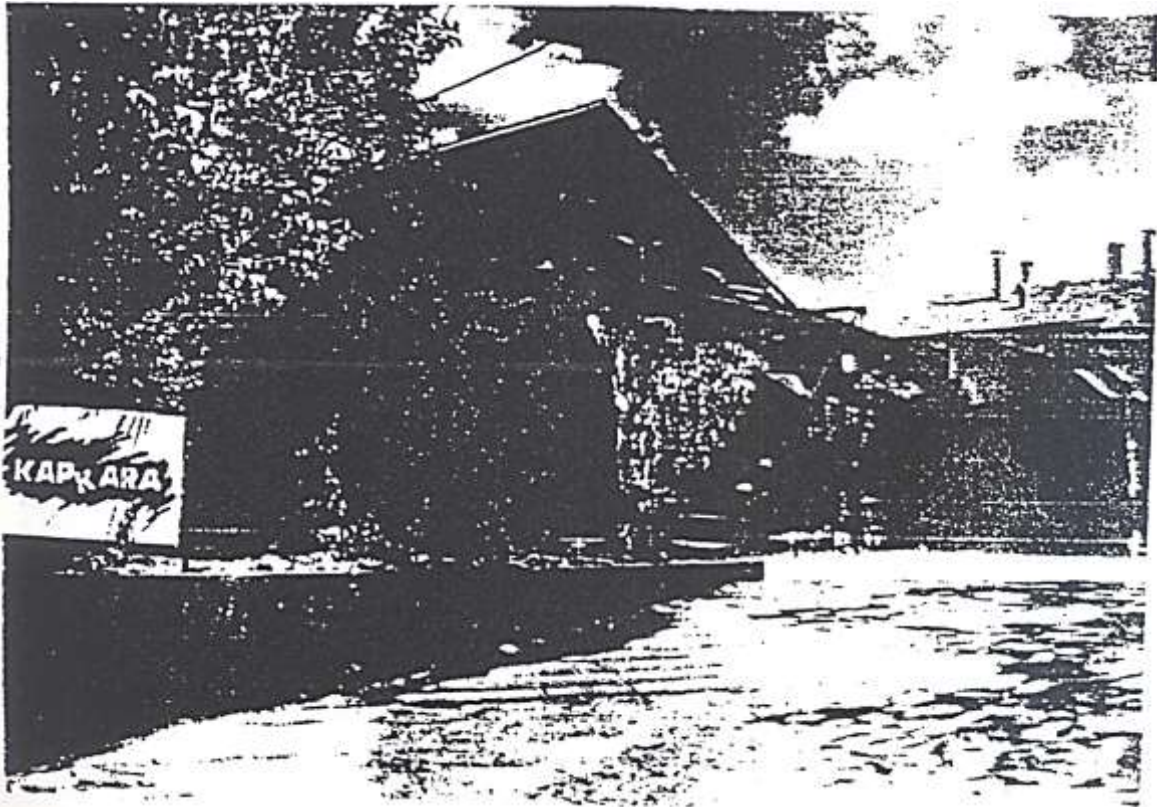
Picture 6- Present view from the commercial axe in Ist Levent



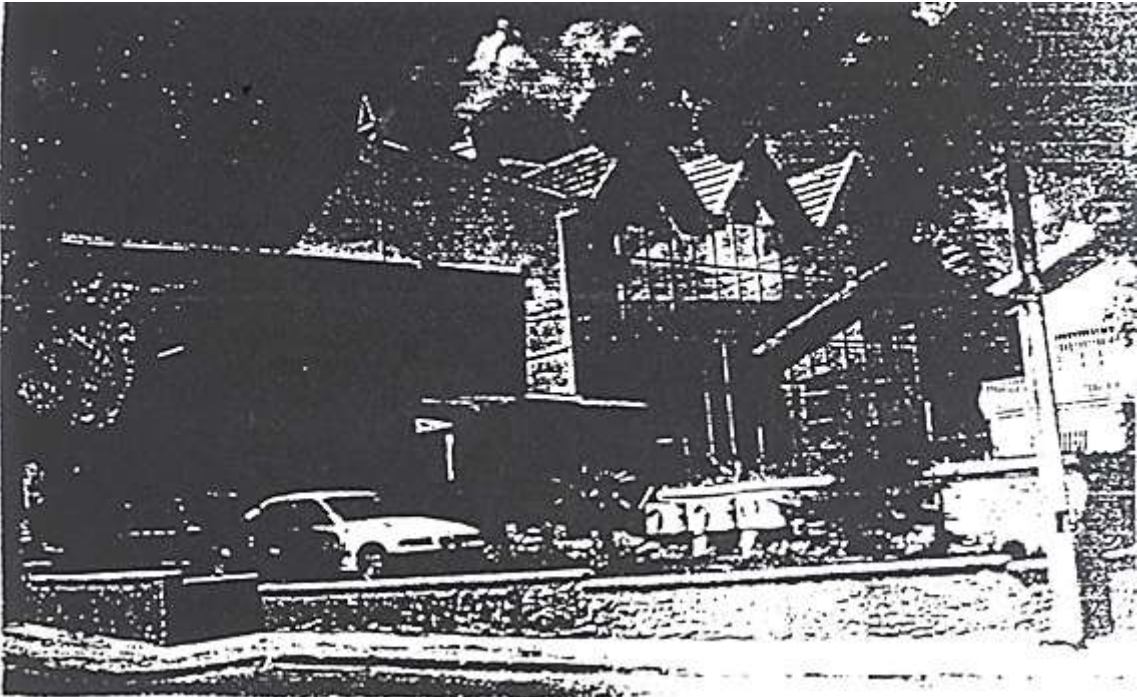
Picture 7- A converted house for commercial use



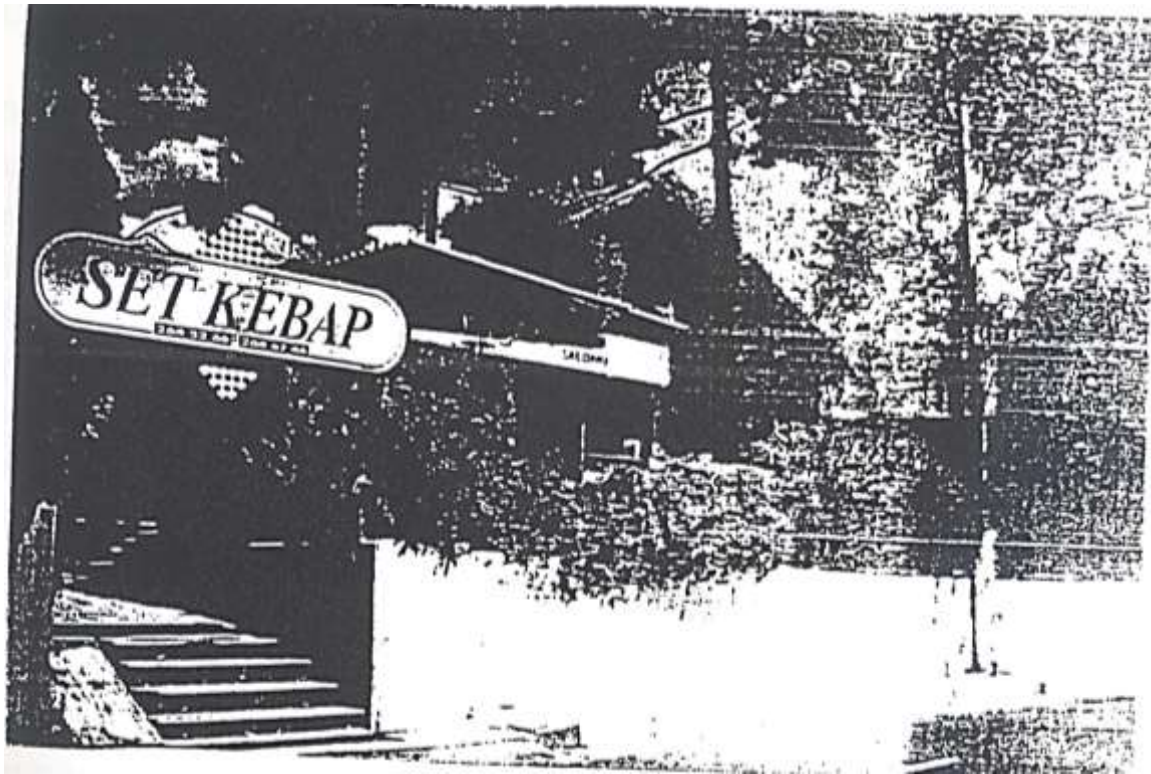
Picture 8- Present view from the commercial axe in Ist Levent.



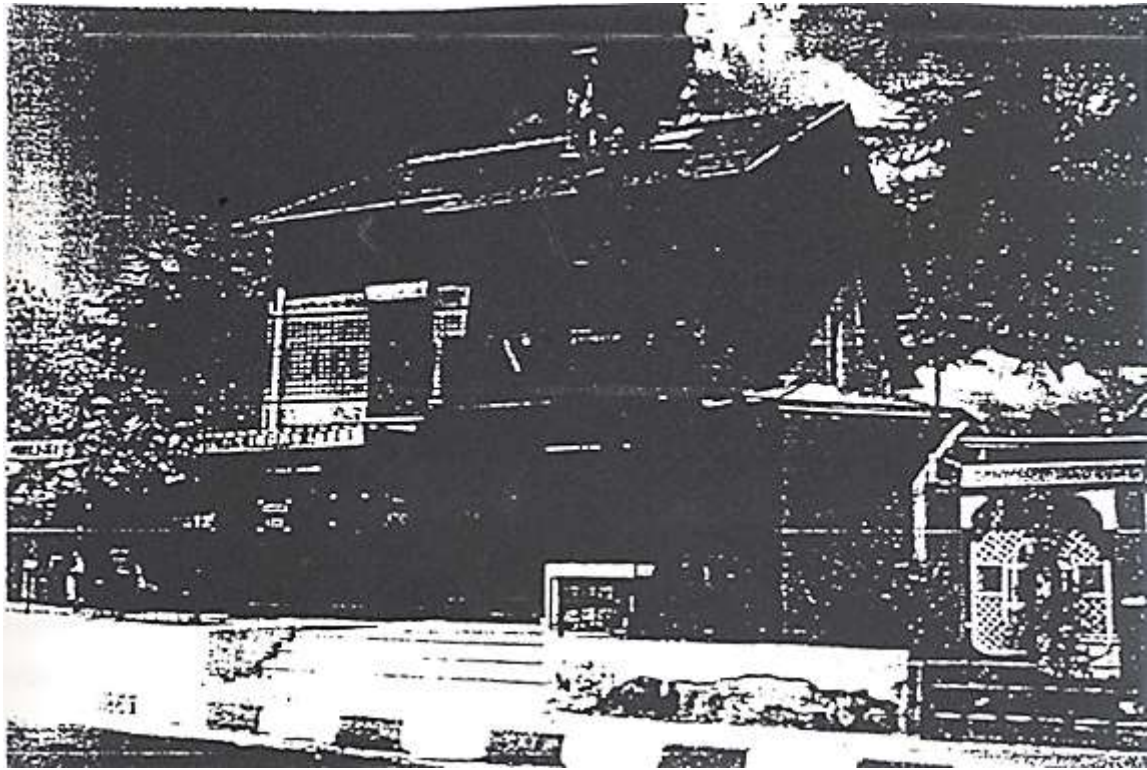
Picture 9- A view from a night club.



Picture 10- Headquarter of a broadcasting company.



Picture 11- A view from a kebab house.



Picture 12- A converted house into a garden furniture shop

4.0 CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Today's urban areas are faced with obsolescence at any level of urban functions that closely affect each other in many ways. This phenomenon occurs as an inevitable change particularly in countries like Turkey. This study is designed to give an updated data that could be used by the planners and designers in any area that are faced with this kind of change. The context of the study reveals the modern problems of housing and the needs for work environment referring to the legal procedures, and the present economic conditions that govern the urban life and culture in İstanbul. The pressure toward deterioration is demanding more responsibility from the planners in terms of the decision-making process in such historical and cultural city. Therefore modern planning should work by all the bodies of positive science to take immediate actions on such growing problems and because time is the most vital component of the design process, adequate forecasts of the growth and change should be pre-determined.

Some businesses such as advertising companies, import-export companies, that do not need the direct interruption of the city, and dependent in their operations, prefer working in low-density housing settlements, rather working in high-rise offices which neglects the human dimension of the working environment. In addition to this, businesses like nursery schools, creches, and primary schools that intensively need to have playgrounds, green and safe open spaces come to this area still full of natural characteristics. Another reason for the choice of the area, and perhaps the most prominent one is that its reputation and prestigious identity that attracts a wide variety of business functions to itself. Being the crossing point, in between the existing business centre of the city and the new development area, is another reason for this change. Therefore some functions may continue to stay, and some might move out. The proportion of these diversified functions will then have vital importance in terms of keeping the housing function of the area. In other terms, the adverse conditions created by the business environment would cause the inhabitants to leave the area.

Even a perfectly planned neighbourhood is faced with the intensive economic demand of the owners. Beyond that, the most vital reason in a functional change of an area is that the lacking restrictions that could easily be changed by the finance sectors.

Therefore, if the urban life and the historical culture of Istanbul are considered to be emphasised, plans should be done without political doubts, and produce policies that cover the existing demands of the city.

5.0 REFERENCES

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- (2) KILINÇASLAN, Dr.İsmet: Istanbul Kentleşme Sürecinde Ekonomik ve Mekânsal Yapı, 1979 İstanbul, pp. 192-201.
- (3) The Documentation of the Metropolitan Municipality of İstanbul.
- (4) Emlak Bank Documentation
- (5) The Land Use Plan of the Ist Levent, produced by the Analysis of the Case Study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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