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# URBAN IDENTITY: THE CASE OF AMASYA IN TURKEY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important components of urbanisation and metropolitanisation is migration. Every year, 20 million people in the world migrate to the cities. The world population (currently 5.3 billion) is expected to at least double in the next century. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities expects that up to 90% of this increase will take place in urban agglomerations (Ekart and Simonis, 1991). Rural immigrants create great changes in cities when there is an unprepared physical and socio-economical infrastructure. Rapid urbanisation in developing countries that do not have sufficient urban amenities, infrastructures and job opportunities causes severe problems, especially in cities, due to the population migration from rural areas.

At the end of the Second World War, cities in Turkey became subject to internal migration which, flowed predominantly to large cities, and the associated population activity: squatter housing, unauthorised settlements and an inability to urbanise. Thus traditional settlement patterns have changed considerably throughout the country.

Among the problems observable in urban settlements produced by migration and the attendant socio-cultural differentiation in the urbanisation process are the circumstances faced by the new urbanite. A critical and urgent problem is adaptation by the new urbanite individual to the new settlement forms and new urban functions.

In the historical development process, cities acquire an identity through the effects of environment. For it is an identity that derives from the environmental

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data of the various natural, social and built environments in the cities. Cities are by no means static. Change and transition are normal parts of the urban condition and urban form. However, changes should not result in the loss of an identity that took centuries to develop.

This paper intends to evaluate the elements of urban identity not in a large metropolitan city in Turkey, effected by massive pressure from internal migration, but in a middle-size city whose traditional settlement pattern has not been greatly affected by internal migration, through an investigation of those who live in the oldest part of the middle-size city.

This study was executed, taking as a hypothesis that inhabitants who have resided in the city for a long period and have begun to benefit from the opportunities and possibilities that it offers define the city using mostly positive elements. The City of Amasya, which has rich natural and man-made assets representing different periods of time, was chosen as a research area. A sample of its residents who have lived in the historical core for a long time was surveyed to find how they define the city by using positive or negative elements.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF URBAN IDENTITY

Webster's dictionary specifies that "identity is the state or character that makes it possible to distinguish an object or a creature" (Murian and Murian, 1983). The relationship between people and environment is transactional: people take something (positive or negative) from and give or do things to the environment; in this process identity is always told from the position of others. According to Lynch, "Identity is the extent to which a person can recognise or recall a place as being distinct from other places – as having a vivid, or unique, or at least a particular character of its own" (Lynch, 1981). No doubt, the circumstance of being original or of a distinctive character can be perceived in the course of relations established with other objects and creatures. Identity is always in part a kind of representation, it is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's own self (Hall, 1991a).

City forms and urban fabric are a reflection of the relations between people and place. In such interactions self can be thought of as a term that describes the individual as a total system including both conscious and unconscious perception of his past, his daily experience, behaviour and his future aspirations. Self is defined and expressed not simply by one's relationship to other people, but also by one's relationship to the various physical settings. Proshansky proposed that a person's place identity – those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex

pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goods, and behavioural tendencies and skills relevant to this environment – is influenced by an individual's unique environmental experiences as well as those experiences common to all people living in particular kinds of physical settings (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983). Self-identity is closely related to settlement identity. Interactively, city life produces an urban type of personality. In explaining an urban type of personality, Proshansky further argued that city environments share similar, generalisable characteristics that become linked to the self-identity of the inhabitants to define an urban place-identity.

The identity of the individual constitutes the identity of society. Group identity is also active in the formation of the identity of the individual (Beer, 1990). Identity in a social and cultural aspect is the coming together of the ones that make up the society in a mutual being and sharing mutual beliefs, values, feelings, goods and the like. The psychologically healthy state of a person's sense of self is not a static one; rather it is characterised by growth and change in response to a changing physical and social world. Urban identity is characterised by changes as well as constancies throughout the urban dwellers' lifetime (Ocakçi and Southworth, 1995). Urban identity is created through interaction and interrelations with the environmental elements which are natural, social and man-made. The elements of identity based on the natural environment are natural events. The elements of identity dependent on the social environment are essentially integral with the cultural structure in which they are found. The elements of identity deriving from man-made (built) environment are structures whose values are assessed through their forms, locations, and types of utilisation and meanings (Ocakçi, 1993; 1994).

Definitions of a city by certain elements within the interactive system of human environment and perception from the outside of the same elements are almost certainly expressed by different concepts. As Güvenç has shown, identity is not identical with image. The perception of the existence of an image is from the exterior, whereas identity is the definition of the creature itself. While image and identity may influence each other, they may also alter independently of each other (Güvenç, 1994).

The elements that make up the identity of a city may be positive or negative. With a decline in the positive elements designating a city, negative elements come to the fore. This is an indicator that the balance has shifted and that the elements of identity the city had acquired in the course of the historical development process have disappeared or diminished or that the negative aspects have become dominant.

Cities are areas representing a space within which change can take place and they possess a dynamic structure. Change is a process of breakdown in equilibrium or entropy in the system. This change may be in the direction of development (positive) or it may be in the direction of degeneration (negative).

On the urban level, the act of differentiation in the variables of the environment that are natural, social and built may affect identity and cause change. But this change should not mean the loss of elements of a rich identity and the variety created by different historical segments. (Suher *et al.*, 1996).

Cities and regions, spatial forms and spatial process have been directly effected and transformed by the technological impact of the Information Revolution. To understand the effects of information technology, major processes should be discussed. According to Castells there are three main processes:

1. A technological revolution, mainly based on international technologies (including genetic engineering).

2. The formation of global economy.

3. The emergence of a new form of economic production and management (Castells, 1991).

Information technologies are neither making cities disappear nor producing endless suburban sprawl. What is disappearing, however, is the particular meaning of any place (Castells, 1991). Planners and designers must seek to communicate the life, history, and meanings of places in order to understand the environment we live in and to manage it and use it more responsively (Souhtworth, 1992).

### 2.1. The elements of urban identity in Amasya

The province of Amasya covers 0,7% percent of Turkey's land with its 5,460 km². The city, in northern Anatolia, more likely shows the economic and social characteristics of middle Anatolia due to its location not adjacent to the Black Sea. The climate is generally warm but three months in winter are cold. Amasya is not located on the countrywide main transportation routes. Due to the inability to settle on the steep slopes of the hills that surround the city, Amasya has spread along the river of Yeşilirmak in the valley (Ertürk, 1996).

Table 1. Population increase in Turkey

| Year | Amasya | | Turkey |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| | population | annual increase (%) | annual increase (%) |
| 1960 | 83.360 | 1.3 | 2.8 |
| 1970 | 98.275 | 1.5 | 2.5 |
| 1980 | 113.670 | 1.3 | 2.0 |
| 1990 | 121.000 | 0.7 | 2.2 |

Source: DIE (1990).

The results of censuses at 10 years intervals reveal that the rate of annual population increase was 1.3% in 1960, and it reached the maximum point with the rate of 1.5% in Amasya (table 1). The annual rate of population increase between 1960–1980 was quite steady. Since 1980 it is observed from the table that annual increase has begun to drop. Examining the rates of population increase in Amasya and Turkey, we find that the rate of population growth in Turkey rose to almost four times the rate of Amasya in 1990.

Differences between metropolitan cities in Turkey and Amasya have been enormous. For example, when the population growth in Istanbul as the most industrialised and urbanised city in Turkey was 4.47% in the years between 1980–1990, the rate in the same period in Amasya was 0.6%. Amasya is in the group of cities which comprise the lowest 20% of Turkey in terms of population growth. However, it is in the highest 20% of Turkey in terms of population density (DIE, 1985) because of its location-having limited land in between the high mountains.

The foundation of the city dates back to 3,000 BC. The Hattions, Lydyians, Persians, Romans, Seljuks and Ottoman Empire have all left traces. Examples of the elements of urban identity, based on natural, social and built environment, reflecting the different civilisations that passed through the city, are still visible in Amasya (figure 1–4).
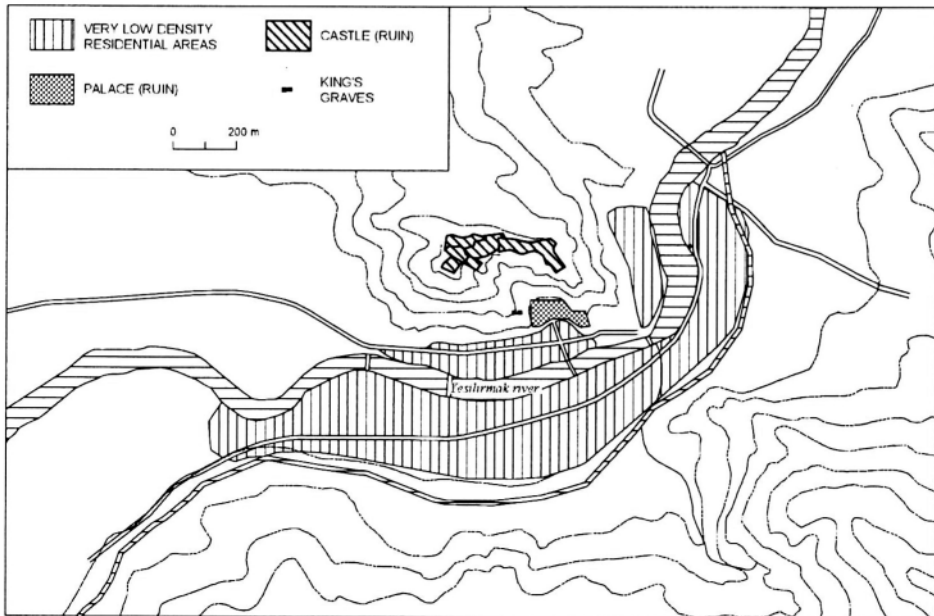


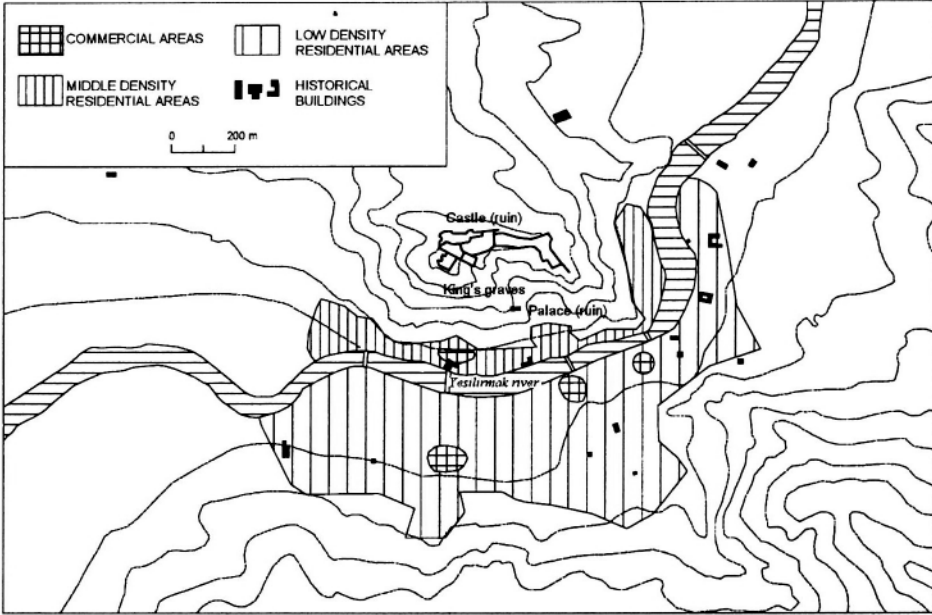Fig. 1. Amasya (Amnesia) in Roman times
Source: Kuzucular (1994)

Fig. 2. Amasya in Saljuk times
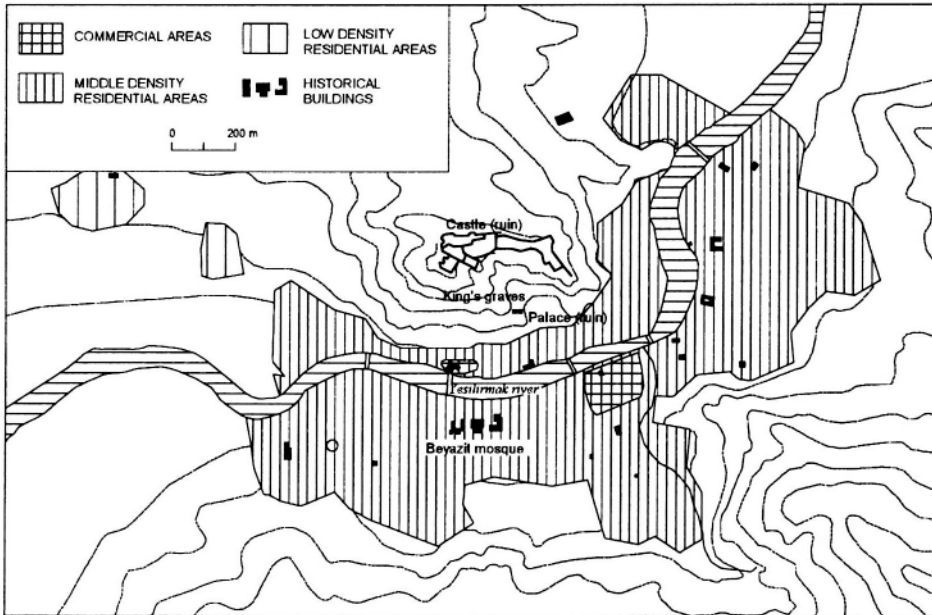Source: Kuzucular (1994)



Fig. 3. Amasya in Ottoman times
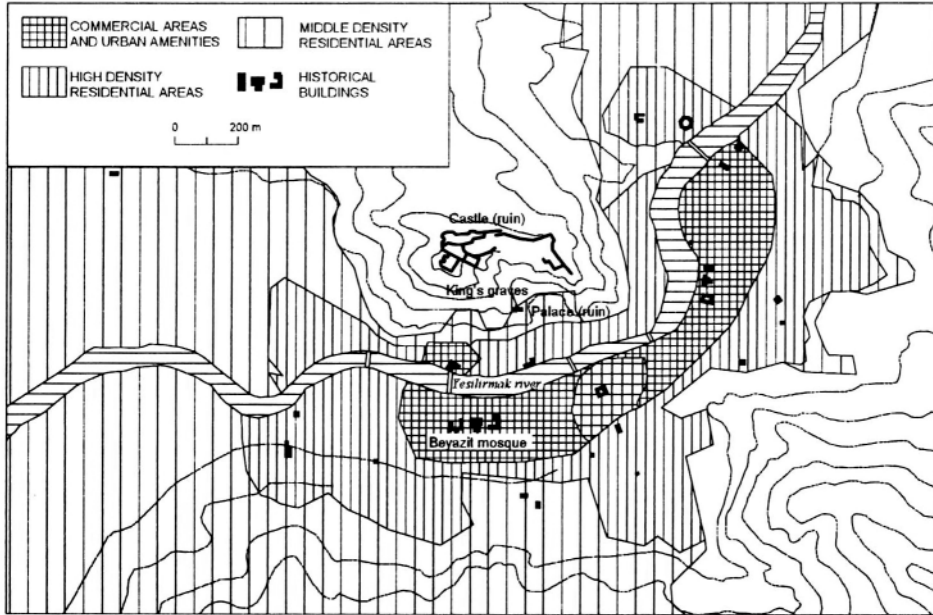Source: Kuzucular (1994)

Fig. 4. Amasya in present times
Source: Kuzucular (1994)

Natural disasters have affected the city's spatial development. A major fire in 1915 destroyed most of the settlement in the southern part of the hill except stone buildings. The major earthquake caused damage and the Savadiye river flood in 1948 destroyed a quarter of the city.

Amasya provides examples of traditional urbanism and architecture, particularly from the Ottoman period, even though threatened on a daily basis by modern building that ignores existing qualities of site, climate, urban scale, architectural character, history and cultural appropriateness. Study of Amasya reveals inherent urban structures and principles related to place and culture. Like many traditional environments, Amasya is fragile in the face of contemporary development (Bechhoefer, 1992).

The survey was conducted in the oldest part of Amasya that contained 13 quarters, 5,720 households and 20,290 people, within the size of a 132.2 ha area.

The average family size was 4.3 in the analysed area. The survey covered 5% of the 5,720 households. All of the analysed data was gathered in face-to-face oral interviews. The direct survey was conducted with the father, the head of the household. After the selection of 13 quarters, that is the historical core itself, according to the purposes of the research, we decided to use stratified sample in order to ensure an adequate representation of the groups of interest. In each quarter, street corresponding to strata representing the upper, middle and lower

socio-economic sections of the area were chosen. A systematic random sampling has been than used to select the household to be part of the sample. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: (1) Identity of the interviewee, which provided information about the social characteristics of the resident. Questions were closed-ended in this part. (2) Elements of urban identity, which were defined by interviewees. Questions were open ended. Residents were asked to describe the most important element of Amasya's identity that could have been positive or negative.

In the first part of the questionnaire six questions were asked in order to determine the identity of the interviewee (table 2).

Table 2. Characteristics of the surveyed group

| Age | < 25 | 26–35 | 36–45 | 46–55 | 56–65 | > 65 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0% | 21.3% | 32.5% | 16.2% | 18.7% | 11.3% | 100% |
| Educa-tional level | Primary School | Junior High School | | High School | University | | Total |
| | 65.0% | 7.5% | | 20% | 7.5% | | 100% |
| Profe-ssion | Farmer | Labourer | Office Worker | Self-employed | | Retired | Total |
| | 2.5% | 12.5% | 17.5% | 43.8% | | 23.7% | 100% |
| Length of resi-dence | Born in Amasya | > 10 years | | 11–20 years | | > 21 years | Total |
| | 88.8% | 4.0% | | 1% | | 6.2% | 100% |

Interviewees were mostly middle-aged (36–55). There were no heads-of--household under the age of 25.

Most interviewees in the study area (65%) had primary school education, and 20% of interviewees had high school education, constituing the second largest group.

Interviewees were mostly self-employed (shop owners) in the study area (43.8%).

A substantial percentage (23.7%) were retired. Office workers and labourers took the third and the fourth place, with the proportion of 17.5% and 12.5% respectively.

The highest proportion of interviewees (88.8%) who lived in the analysed area were born there. It is significant that the great majority of interviewees have been living in Amasya for a very long period of time. This ratio also shows the continuation of city life. Interviewees certainly belong to the city and know it very well.

In the second part of the questionnaire, it was attempted to determine the elements of urban identity in Amasya. Residents of the thirteen quarters were asked to describe the city using just one element that could have been natural, social or man-made.

The most important element of identity in Amasya, defined by interviewees with the highest ratio (51.3%) was the King's Graves that were built in Roman times, located on the rocky slope of the mountain.

Sultan Beyazit Mosque took the second place with the proportion of 17.6% of the residents of the analysed area. This waterfront mosque was built by Ottoman Sultan Beyazid II.

The third place was taken by Apple and Gumbo that hold an important place in the city economy with the proportion of 10.7%. Countrywide famous apple and gumbo, produced in Amasya, were chosen by interviewees as the elements of urban identity.

The river (Yeşilirmak), which has had a defining role in Amasya's city macroform, by dividing it in two, was seen as both a positive and negative element of the city's identity. The river was seen as a predominantly positive element, taking fourth place (7.5%) due to the fact that the city has settled along its banks through the valley. Also, no doubt, because it adds interest to the scenery, and brings a natural element into the city environment, offering a distraction from the man-made urban fabric. The river was defined as a negative element (7,1%) by interviewees because of its pollution (table 3).

Table 3. The most important elements of identity in Amasya (in %)

| King's Graves | Sultan Beyazid Mosque | Apple and Gumbo | The River (Yeşilirmak) | Pollution of the River | Others | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 51.3 | 17.6 | 10.7 | 7.5 | 7.1 | 5.8 | 100 |

## 3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The most discussed problem in developing countries is rapid urbanisation and its effects on the natural, social and man-made environments.

Elements of urban identity that form the connection between the past and the future, and also between urban generations, play a major role in the sense of continuity and belonging to inhabitants. Self identity is reinforced by a strong identity of place and time.

Planning has a very fundamental educational role to play, and the process of defining urban identity can be a key element in that process. Planning should build on the existing physical and human resources. This is especially true in situations where traditional urban patterns and the elements of urban identity face the 'contemporary' development like Amasya. Amasya has not been under

massive pressures from rapid population growth and internal migration flow, compared with the average rate of population increase in Turkey.

In this research it was attempted to examine how residents who live in the oldest core define the city. A survey was conducted in the study area. Identification of the elements of urban identity defined by the interviewees was mostly made up of positive elements (87.1%). This shows that the positive aspects were strong and the sense of belonging has grown through staying in the city for long periods.

In the historical development process, cities acquire an identity through the effects of the environments and their interaction. This identity in Amasya, particularly, presents a multi-dimensional, original and special circumstance. For it is an identity that derives from a plurality of cultures and the richness of the natural, social and built environments in the city.

Preservation and strengthening of the positive elements of urban identity should be undertaken, so that the negative elements may not become permanent elements of identity. We must assume the obligation of preserving the positive elements of urban identity through urban planning. Only then may we succeed in transmitting these positive elements of urban identity without loss to future generations.

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