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Architecture and the Question of Urbanity in the Formation of the New Central Business District of Izmir

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Abstract

Large-scale urban development projects as a part of "city branding" have become a significant medium for local governments to promote their cities in order to attract investment globally. In a similar manner, at the turn of the 21st century, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality organized the "International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir," for the restructuring and re-planning of a derelict industrial zone into a new CBD (central business district). In this case, it has been almost two decades since the conclusion of the competition. This study takes the process of formation of this new CBD after the international urban design competition as a starting point and analyzes the built environment that takes shape actually. The resultant environment is documented through photographs taken between May 2018 and May 2019. Currently, the site consists of individual mixed-use blocks, each making their own statement without sufficient connection to the urban fabric of the district. The growth and construction pattern of the site shows that the possibility for the site to create an urban way of life is considerably low. This new CBD lacks spatial settings for interaction, especially compared to the activities and diversity the urban core of Izmir offers.

Keywords: *Urban way of life, large-scale urban development projects, interface between architecture and urban design*

Mimarlık Üzerinden Üretilen Kentselliğin İzmir'deki Yeni Merkezi İş Alanı Örneğindeki Yansıması

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Öz

Büyük ölçekli kentsel projeler "marka şehir" olma sürecinde yerel yönetimler için önemli bir araç haline gelmiştir. Bu projeler genel olarak yapılaşma üzerinden gayrimenkul geliştirmeye yönelik projelerdir. Yönetimler bu şekilde uluslararası yatırımcıları kendi kentlerine çekmeyi hedeflerler. Bu bağlamda, 2001 yılında İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi, terkedilmiş eski endüstri bölgesinin merkezi iş alanına dönüştürülmesini öngören "İzmir Liman Bölgesi için Kentsel Tasarım Uluslararası Fikir Yarışması'nı" açmıştır. Yarışmanın üzerinden yaklaşık 20 yıl geçmiştir. Yarışma ile üretilen fikirler imar planının oluşturulmasında önemli rol oynamıştır. Bu çalışma, kentsel tasarım yarışmasıyla başlayan bu kentsel üretim sürecinin mimari tasarım ile birlikte nasıl bir kent dokusu oluşturduğunu irdelemektedir. Mimari üzerinden üretilen kentsel doku Mayıs 2018 ve Mayıs 2019 tarihleri arasında çekilen fotoğraflarla belgelenmiştir. Kentsel alan, karma kullanımlı, kentsel doku ile yeterince bağlantı kuramayan gökdelenlerden oluşmaktadır. Alanın inşa ve gelişme süreci bu alanda kent yaşamı oluşumunun mümkün olmayacağına işaret etmektedir. Bu yeni merkezi iş alanı, ürettiği mekanlar ile kullanıcılarına İzmir kent merkezinin sunduğu çeşitlilik ve yoğunluğu sunamamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *public-private partnership projects, urban politics, urban opposition, media representations, discourse analysis*

Introduction

Large-scale urban development projects have become an important tool for local governments to attract investment as a part of the neoliberal policies at the global level. In this sense, as Mehmet Penpecioğlu argues, large-scale urban development projects have a remarkable capacity to build a neoliberal urban hegemony (2013). Usually, property-based growth strategies have become the main concern of such projects. To be able to compete in an international level, cities have to continuously rebrand themselves in order to attract investment (Lang, 2011). In a similar manner, David Harvey expresses:

- *the urban governments had to be much more innovative and entrepreneurial, willing to explore all kinds of avenues through which to alleviate their distressed conditions and thereby secure a better future for their populations (Harvey, 1989).*

In this scope, "city branding" has become a significant medium for local governments to promote their cities, via urban development and architectural design projects in order to distinguish themselves from their counterparts. Jon Lang defines "city branding" as a creation of images and positive associations about a city in a worldwide context. With reference to this issue, he states that "[cities] should be up-to-date" (Lang, 2016) in order to be part of the competition to attract investment at an international level.

At the turn of the 21st century, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality organized the "International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir," for the restructuring and re-planning of a derelict industrial zone into a new central business district. The competition site could be seen in figure 1 with reference to the study area. Even though, the municipality listed several reasons for the initiation of the competition, the most highlighted among them was the creation of a contemporary city image, which could be associated with "city branding." Another important aspect of this competition was its international nature. One of the aims of the municipality to organize the urban design competition with the support of UIA (International Union of Architects) was to make the city known at the international level prior to the production of the new central business district. The built environment of the proposed central business district rather resembles its counterparts that exist worldwide. This issue is prevalent in such examples since they are products of a

globalization process that produces contextless urban environments (Lang, 2016).

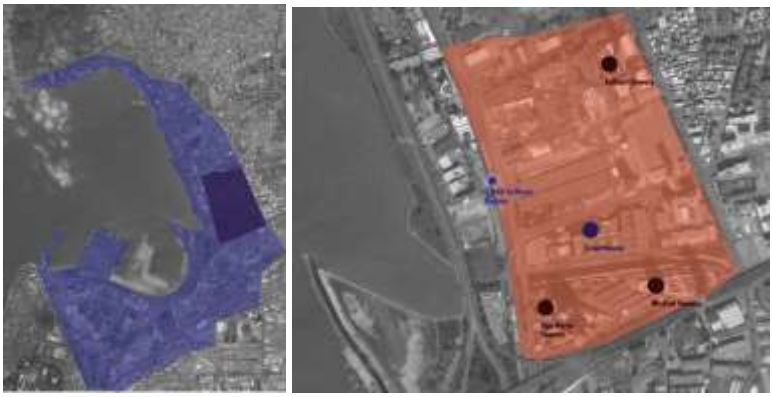


Figure 1. Perimeters of the competition site and its relationship with the study area (Source: Satellite image of the site is retrieved from Yandex Maps)

The production of such large-scale urban development projects are rather lengthy processes which are in interest of different actors both locally and worldwide. Those processes usually involve planners, architects, design professionals, politicians, landowners, investors, construction companies and local non-governmental organizations. In the case of Izmir, it has been almost two decades since the conclusion of the urban design competition to create a new central business district at Bayraklı. The present study takes the process of formation of this business district after the international urban design competition as a starting point and analyzes the built environment that takes shape actually.

The competition site and the central business district is adjacent to the one of the first settlements of Izmir, Smyrna. The excavations that had been made within this archaeological site showed that the history of the city goes far beyond 3000 BC ("Smyrna (Tepekule-Bayraklı)," n.d.). The visual relationship of the central business district and the archaeological site could be seen in figure 2. Another important adjacency of the site is its relationship with Bayraklı district, one of the most crowded areas of Izmir which had developed as a squatter settlement.



Figure 2. The visual relationship between the Smyrna Archaeological Site and the New Central Business District (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, October 2018)

After a brief content analysis of the competition documents and the development plans produced by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, the research focuses on three high-rise building groups that have started to be used within the site. The resultant environment is documented through photographs taken between May 2018 and May 2019. The present situation of the site could be seen in figure 3. Currently, the site consists of individual mixed-use blocks, each making their own statement without sufficient connection to the urban fabric of the district.



Figure 3. A View of the current situation of the site (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)

This study is based on the research made in the master's thesis, which focused on the documentation and analysis of the formation of the new central business district of Izmir.[1] The methodology of the study is explained in the second chapter. Afterwards, the process of production of the central business district is briefly introduced together with the "International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir" in the third chapter of the thesis. The documentation of the current situation of the site is introduced and evaluated in the findings chapter, and finally the documented site is discussed in the conclusion chapter.

Methodology

As previously mentioned, the findings of this study are based on the research made in the master's thesis which focused on the analysis and documentation of the formation of the new central business district of Izmir. First, a brief content analysis of the "International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir" and the development plans produced by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality is made in order to understand the context of the formation of the urban fabric of the new central business district of Izmir.

For the overall study, the evaluation of the resultant environment is mainly based on the direct observations of the authors. Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre defines direct observations as the main tool to understand and evaluate the urban space, in their book, *How to Study Public Life* (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). These observations are illustrated through five basic questions, which are; how many, who, where, what and how long (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). To begin with, the question of *how many* is concerned with the number of people who use the urban space, on the other hand, the question of *who* illustrates the variety of groups that prefer to use that particular urban space (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). The question of *where* is used determine the location of the most frequented urban spaces whereas the question of *what* depicts the type of activities that frequently occur in the urban public spaces (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). And lastly, the question of *how long* gives the observer an idea of the quality of space by particular duration of the stay of its users (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). This question also has an ability to differentiate the way the space is used either for transition

[1] *For the master's thesis, in which the findings of this study are based on, see also; Soysal, 2019.*

or for other activities that require users to spend time in one location. However, the questions that could be used by the observer is not limited to these five questions. The questions could be added and varied depending on the observed urban space. In order to evaluate the resultant urban fabric of the central business district, these questions are chosen to be the main determinants of the quality of the urban space created.

Throughout the observations, certain qualities are looked for within the site; in particular; the density, diversity, vitality, pedestrian permeability, pollution and noise, and publicness. The initial idea of these assessments stem from Jan Gehl's *Life between Buildings.* In this scope, the scale and the basic components; continuity, differentiation and interface of the built environment are important variables for the assessment of the urban spaces created by the built environment.

For the recording and documentation, the site is visited several times in a two-year period. However, only two main excursions are taken as a reference for the assessment. These excursions are made in August 2018 and May 2019. Notes and photographs that had been taken during these excursions are the main sources of documentation and evaluation of the site. In the upcoming chapter, the competition and the planning process is briefly introduced, prior to the discussion on the findings.

The Planning Process of the New Central Business District of Izmir

In order to completely grasp the issues within the site and the resultant environment, it is important to understand the process that led to the formation of the new central business district. Table 1 shows the chronology through which the central business district was planned.

Table 1. Significant Decisions Made about the New Central Business District of Izmir

Year	Significant Decisions and Developments within the Site
1989	1:25000 Masterplan for Izmir proposed site to be a CBD.
2001	"International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir" was initiated by the municipality
2003-2009	Production of 1:5000 development plans for the CBD site.
2009	The 1:5000 development plan of the site was cancelled due to the lack of geological surveys.
2010-	The plan for the area is reapproved after the completion of geological surveys. Revisions have been made since.
2011-	Constructions within the CBD site has been initiated
2012	1:25000 Masterplan for Izmir is reproduced

As it could be seen in the table 1, the repurposing of the derelict industrial zone as a central business district was initially introduced with a 1:25000 masterplan produced in 1989. However, first thoroughly attempt for the planning of the area as a new central business district was initiated with the "International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir," that was organized by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality in 2001. The brief of the competition highlighted its aim as

to obtain preliminary ideas for the development of urban space and architectural character of the Izmir Port District, to enhance the contemporary image of the city and create a new city center on the port area in the emerging international status of Izmir (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2001).

As it could be concluded from this statement, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality did not only aim to create a new image for the city, but they also had an opportunity to promote Izmir at an international level.

As previously mentioned and parallel to the promotion of the city in the international level, one of the most important features of the competition was its international nature. The competition was endorsed by the International Union of Architects (UIA). Even though the competition was international, the winning projects were mostly from Turkey. From the nine prizes that were given, only three of them were submitted by international teams. Three prizes and six honorable mentions were given to the following projects; 1st prize for the competition was given to Jochen Brandi from Germany, and the other award-winning projects included; 2nd prize: Bünyamin Derman, Dilek Topuz Derman; 3rd prize: Ertur Yener, Erdoğan Elmas, Zafer Gülçur; 1st honourable mention: Maria Aiolova, Tunch Güngör; 2nd honourable mention: Yasemin Balkan, Fırat Aykaç; 3rd honourable mention: Mehmet Kütükçüoğlu, Burcu Kütükçüoğlu, Elif Kendir, Ertuğ Uçar, Evren Aysev, Tansel Dalgalı; 4th honourable mention: Zeki Şerifoğlu, Ali Herkül Çelikkol; 5th honourable mention: Nevzat Sayın, Can Çinici; and 6th honourable mention: David Haseler Raia, Angela Rheinlaender (Özer, 2002).

The competition was an idea competition and the award-winning projects were not to be implemented as they were. However, the most influential proposal for the planning of the area was the first-prize winner Jochen Brandi's project. The site plan submitted by Brandi could be seen

in figure 4. As it could be seen in the site plan, his proposal indicated an island like system for high-rise buildings floating within green areas, rather than a street network to connect them. The lack of street network within the current site could be traced back to this proposal.



Figure 4. The site plan submitted by Jochen Brandi (Source: Ege Mimarlık 41, no.1, 2002)

One of the most influential aspect of Brandi's proposal was his approach to the height of the built environment within the central business district. According to his proposal, shoreline would be

dominated by high-rise buildings. The report of the jury also mentioned that the height of the built environment proposed for the site was parallel to the growth that the municipality expected for the site (1. Ödül Jochen Brandi Almanya, 2002). The resemblance between the height that Brandi proposed, and the municipality proposed could easily be traced when figure 5 and 6 is compared.



Figure 5. Brandi's proposal for the silhouette (Ege Mimarlık 41, no.1, 2002)



Figure 6. An anticipated silhouette of the shoreline produced by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (Source: Izmir Metropolitan Municipality's Archive)

Even though Brandi had several other ideas about how the site would work together with the existing urban fabric and within itself, his ideas about the height of the built environment and the density was the most influential aspects for the development plan produced by the municipality.

As it could be seen in table 1, the length of the production process for the development plan for the site was rather long. The planning process was interrupted by lawsuits. The process was also affected by the changing economic tendencies. When the decision-making process for the site is analyzed in-depth, it is evident that the real estate and the financial sectors are more influential decision-makers compared to design professionals such as architects and planners.

Another important issue about the development plan is about its limited capacity to generate urban fabric, since it is mainly concerned with the distribution of the construction rights. In this sense, the development plan produced in 2003 tried to overcome this incapacity with the plan notes concerning the formation of neighborhoods within the site. Unfortunately, the final development plan produced in 2011 did not include any of this information that the 2003 development plan offered. Development plans produced in 2003 and 2011 could be seen in figure 7.



Figure 7. 1:5000 Development plan produced by municipality in 2003 and 2011 respectively (Source: Izmir Metropolitan Municipality's Archive)

Even though the "International Urban Design Idea Competition for the Port District of Izmir" initiated the planning processes for the area, the ideas produced through the competition was taken out of their context in the production of the development plans. This loss of ideas, as previously mentioned, was also due to the two-dimensional nature of the development plans. As Jan Gehl underlines; "[c]oncepts like floor area/site ratio and building density say nothing conclusive about whether human activities are adequately concentrated" (Gehl, 2011). The development plans are inadequate in determining the three-dimensional nature of the urban fabric. This inadequateness could also be seen in the resultant built

environment of the new central business district of Izmir. Since the development plan is incapable of regulating the lived-spaces, the individual buildings are the only determinant that shapes the urban fabric in the case of Izmir. In the following chapter, the urban fabric's relationship with the built environment will be discussed with reference to the documented spaces within the new central business district.

Findings

The human experience created through in-between spaces of public and private realms is what makes urban design significant (Sternberg, 2007). In this sense, when studying the public spaces, direct observations of these in-between spaces could be considered as one of the main tools of evaluation (Gehl and Svarre, 2013). Since this part of the chapter focuses on the resultant environment within the site, it consists of the authors' own observations during her site visits. The comments and criticism about produced environments is aided with the photographs taken from the site. The main focus of the analysis is the relationship of three different high-rise building groups that have been recently started to be used with the overall site. The locations of these three different high-rise building groups could be seen in figure 8. These high-rise buildings include Folkart Towers (2014), Mistral Towers (2015) and Ege Perla Towers (2017). The courthouse is an important attraction point within the site and similarly, Salhane Station of IZBAN railway line is an important transportation node. The site is visited during the lunch hours both on August 27th, 2018 and May 10th, 2019. In both of these site visits, the starting point is chosen as IZBAN Salhane Station. The routes used during the documentation process could also be seen in figure 8.

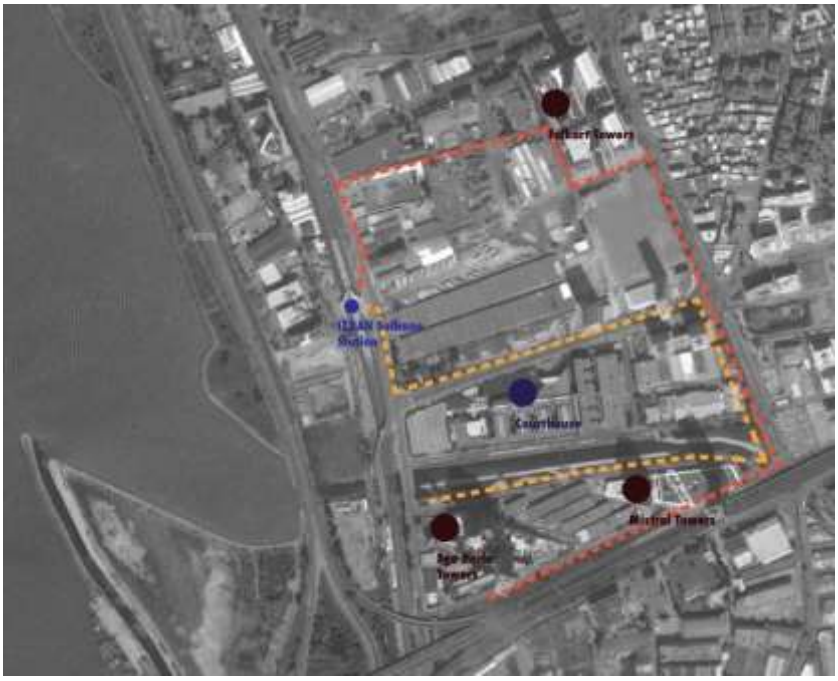


Figure 8. Routes used during the documentation (Source: Satellite image of the site is retrieved from Yandex Maps)

In the following part, the intermediary spaces that have been documented are categorized in terms of their density; diversity; vitality; pedestrian permeability; pollution and noise; and finally, through publicness they offer. The photographs taken from the site is categorized in table 2. This is done with reference to scale and basic components of the resultant built environment; and through continuity, differentiation and interface they offer.

Table 2. Documented Spaces Categorized According to Important Issues within the Site.

Important Issues within the Site	Documented Spaces	Significance of the Documented Spaces
Density		Manas Boulevard (Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)
Diversity	 	Routes along the important transportation nodes within the site (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)
Vitality	 	A small shed on the route to the Courthouse (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019) Empty retail stores underneath high-rise buildings (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019) Semi-open spaces of Mistral Towers (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, August 2018 and May 2019 respectively)









The entrances of Ege Perla buildings (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)

Pedestrian Permeability





The edge of Ege Perla building along the linear park (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)





The edge of Mistral Towers along the linear park (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)

Pollution and Noise	   	The Railway and highway that blocks the relationship of the site with the sea (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019) The relationship between the highway and the built environment (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Arhcive, August 2018)
Publicness	 	The inner garden of Ege Perla blocks (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, August 2018) The courtyard of Folkart Towers (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive May 2019)

One of the densest parts of the site is where the courthouse is located. Since it has to be used by the whole city, it is close to the important transportation nodes of the site. And thus, due to its functional requirements it is also one of the most diverse parts of the site. In a similar manner, the other side of the Manas Boulevard is also denser compared to the other parts of the central business district. This contrast could be seen in the density part of the table 2. Mobility within the site is usually achieved through wide paved automobile roads. This lack of density and intimacy in terms of pedestrian networks does not allow any sufficient and meaningful public and social interaction within the streets of the district.

The built environment of the central business district is one of the obstacles that undermines the capacity of the site to generate diversity. To begin with, the high-rise buildings within the site are mainly luxury housing projects. In addition to this issue, they consist of introverted inner spaces that do not allow interaction possibilities with the exterior urban environment. As previously mentioned, diversity is generated in the denser parts of the site which courthouse and the student neighborhood are located. Transportation nodes also aid to the diversity within the site. Some of these nodes could be seen in the diversity part of the table 2.

As it is stated previously, the street network within the site is inefficient and do not aid any meaningful social interaction. In addition to this problem, the high-rise buildings within the site are the repetition of the same kind of architectural typology and experiences, and thus connection between these blocks are unnecessary. Compared to the built environment of the overall site, the small shed on the route to the courthouse is potentially more vital. This contrast could be seen in the vitality part of the table 2.

Additionally, the linear park that is located between the courthouse and high-rise buildings is usually deserted. Pedestrians only frequent this area where the pedestrian bridge connects courthouse with the park. It is only used as a transition space and the other parts of the park is not usually frequented by pedestrians as it is expected to.

Pedestrian permeability could be considered as one of the most problematic issues of the site. The site is isolated from the other parts of the city due to its location in the middle of the important transportation arteries such as Ankara highway, Altınyol highway and the railway. The railway and Altınyol highway blocks the site's connection with the shoreline, and Ankara highway blocks its connection with the Alsancak and port district. These interruptions could be seen in the pedestrian permeability part of the table 2. There is only one pedestrian bridge that connects the site with the seaside, however, this pedestrian bridge is relatively far from the central business district. Another pedestrian bridge near the central business district is planned to be built, yet such a solution is only temporary, and do not solve the problem with the visual connection.

The high-rise buildings' connection with the street network is also problematic. The large-scale building plots in the site could be seen in the development plan in figure 7. Their size is an important contributor to the lack of pedestrian permeability of the site. When looked at the individual high-rise buildings, this problem could further be observed. To begin with, Ege Perla's ground floor is completely closed, even though it is claimed to be designed as a pedestrian path to connect two different streets. As it could be seen in the fourth part of the table 2, two street entrances of the buildings have a security control, and the perimeters of the blocks are completely closed to the exterior urban environment. The façade of the building blocks the visual connection with the street. On the other hand, the inner garden of Folkart Towers has more potential as a transition space compared to this pathway. However, the entrances of this blocks are also automobile oriented and do not connect with the street network efficiently. In contrast with these two high-rise blocks Mistral Towers' edge is more permeable. Unfortunately, it is important to state that these spaces are private property, and their position as semi-public spaces are rather ambiguous.

Compared to the high-rise buildings' connection with the street network, the courthouse has more efficient connections. The pedestrian bridge that connects the courthouse to the linear park is frequented by pedestrian. However, this park is only used in certain periods of time, and usually deserted in the day.

The railway and the highways which are located at the edges of the site are the main sources of pollution and noise within the site. Therefore, the pedestrian activity along these edges are limited compared to other parts of the site. These edges could be seen in pollution and noise part of the table 2.

Since there are no meaningful connections between dominant high-rise buildings that attract pedestrians, public life is rather limited within the central business district. Even though the high-rise buildings within the site have their own distinct layer, i.e. the building bases on the street level, which presuppose interaction within their limits, they are still introverted spaces that belong to private enterprises. Such introverted spaces result in the abandonment of street as public spaces of social interaction, by threatening its vitality. The lack of attractive links between the scattered high-rise buildings is therefore the main contributor of this issue. Introverted spaces of these high-rise buildings could be seen in the

publicness part of the table 2. This introverted nature is also due to the fact that the users of such buildings can reach to any service they want without any need to get out of the boundaries of these private spheres. Because of this nature, each building block is competing with each other instead of complementing one another to endorse social activities at the street level.

Discussion and Conclusion

At this stage, the site has not been constructed entirely yet. However, the nature of the architectural projects implemented within the site tends to reflect a rather fragmented character, incapable of forming an urban fabric. The problem here is that those individual buildings are mostly indifferent to their immediate surroundings and at the street level in particular. As Jan Gehl underlines, in order to generate and support life between buildings, the design of the edges of the buildings play an important role to support publicness within the urban fabric (2011). In this sense, small-scale interventions along these edges are significant in terms of the formation of public spaces. However, within the site, social interactions are only expected to happen within high-end malls that are planned at the base of high-rise buildings. In such context, it is important to highlight that the semi-public spaces, such as plazas underneath high-rise buildings, are controversial in terms of their position as public spaces. Karl Kropf underlines that their publicness is ambiguous since they are still private property (2014). Unfortunately, in the case of the new central business district of Izmir, architecture is the only determinant in the formation of public spaces or rather in the lack of them.



Figure 9. The current situation of the central business district (Source: Zeynep Soysal's Archive, May 2019)

The residences and the office buildings within the site are mainly intended for the high-income groups which reinforces the social segregation and isolation in the area. This lack of distinct urban way of life is due to the repetition of sterile environments, in this case, the repetition of the same architectural typology which includes a semi-public layer on its ground floor. Such a configuration isolates its users from the external urban fabric. Considering this configuration within the site, the urban design ended up just being a checkmark in the building program that did not have any influence on the production of the urban fabric. The growth and construction pattern of the site shows that the possibility for the site to create an urban way of life is considerably low. The street is an indispensable setting for social interaction and urban life in the city. However, this new central business district lacks such a spatial setting for interaction, especially compared to the activities and diversity that the urban core of Izmir offers.

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