

# Upgrading Sarayici-Edirne: A Contextual Overview

Nevnihal Erdogan,  
Trakya University, Turkey\*

## Abstract

*Located on Turkey's western border, the city of Edirne was a historic capital city during the Ottoman Age and is today a university centre. Throughout its long history the city has ranked as one of the region's the most significant centres of commerce and education and continues to do so at the present day.*

*The International Competition-Exhibition named Ecopolises: Settlements for Sustainable Development (The House-City-Region) which was organized as part of Habitat 2 was carried out by the International Academy of Architecture (IAA) on 30<sup>th</sup> June to the Region 4 coordinator of IAA in Istanbul.*

*A proposal submitted by this researcher in conjunction with her sixth semester students towards the design of a new 12<sup>th</sup> settlement district to be located in the historical central districts of Edirne's inner city was presented to the first phase of the regional competition. The projects and surveys were prepared cooperatively by the students and myself. The proposal based on the cultural history of the Sarayici district of Edirne calls for a new 12<sup>th</sup> settlement district in which new houses and villas are to be located contiguous to a large pool. This proposal may also be implemented as a model for upgrading the derelict housing areas in the western and northern parts of the city.*

*The major issues that are blocking the development of the city have been identified as follows:*

- *The water resources of the city are becoming exhausted and the waters of the existing rivers in the city need to be controlled.*
- *The existing residential areas in the historical outer districts of the inner city and in the central districts of the inner city are becoming derelict.*

## Introduction

This paper was prepared in relation to resolutions about settlement of sustainable development in conditions of crisis over total environmental resources in Turkey, and represents also part of my research project to determine the present situation as it exists in Edirne, (Erdogan, 1995).

The aim of the research is to upgrade the derelict housing areas of the border city of Edirne. As is mentioned in the abstract, the city has been one of the most significant commercial and education centres throughout history.

The research mentioned was first presented as a project during Habitat 2, which was organized in Istanbul in 1995. In the Phase I-Regional-competition, the proposal for a new 12th settlement district was presented by this researcher in conjunction with her sixth semester students (IAA, 1996).




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\* Associate Professor, Trakya University, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Turkey.  
Email: nevtrakya@hotmail.com

## **Rationale for the project**

The administrative and geographical divisions of Turkey, its regions, districts and sub-parts are well-defined (Ianli et al, 1976). In accordance with planned development strategy, Turkey as a whole is divided into 8 main regions and 19 sub-regions of which Thrace is one of such sub-region.

Today Turkey's cities and their districts are classified as municipalities according to the size of its city centre and the size of its population. Elected mayors administer these municipalities. Settlements with a population of 5000 or more are called "Belde," these also governed by mayors; while villages, settlements with a population under 2000, are administered by local registry officials, also elected, so-called "muhtar" in Turkish.

Edirne is a city in the West Marmara region of Thrace. The greater Marmara region of Turkey includes the coastal parts of western Anatolia along the Sea of Marmara and the part of Turkey that lies on the European mainland. This area lies between the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea with the Mediterranean coastal climate prevailing over most of the area. Thrace, however, though part of the Marmara region, has a more severe climate.

The city of Edirne consists of 11 districts and 24 neighborhoods. The districts are divided into three groups. The first group comprises the historic outer districts of the city proper, (Karaaiaç, Yildirim, Yeniimaret); the second group includes the central district of the inner core (Kaleiçi, Çavuibey, Sabuni, Tailik, Kiyik, Ayiekadin) and the third group includes the new settlement districts in the city proper, (Istasyon, Hacılarevani).

The theme of the project, assigned to sixth semester students, included an investigation into the districts that make up the second group.

## **Development of the Yeniimaret Region**

The city represents the basis of sustainable development of society. As a consequence, the physical and social conditions of the central districts (2<sup>nd</sup> group) and the historical outer districts the inner city proper (1<sup>st</sup> group) were investigated within this research project. The new settlement districts of the city proper (3<sup>rd</sup> Group) lie in the east of the city, and these new settlements are moving out towards the districts involved in farming pursuits.

With regard to the surveys conducted during the research, Yeniimaret, the region in which Sarayı district is located, is geographically isolated from the central district of the city proper by the Tunca River. That river flows around the northeast part of this district with large areas lying between that part and the city centre.

During the Ottoman age the lands here consisted of green fields and resting pavilions that belonged to the local palace elite. These buildings and pavilions built for entertainment and retreat were destroyed during the later battles that were fought here. Today, traditional Turkish wrestling contests and festivals are held in this area.

According to surveys and map studies conducted as part of this research, at times during its long history the Tunca, Meriç and Arda rivers, flowing between the city centre and the historical outer districts, were used for various purposes such as irrigation, hunting, transportation etc. During the Ottoman period the river edges were fortified by steep and

high banks. Because the palaces, the kiosks and the gardens of the rich were located in this area, the Ottomans used this kind of embankment to protect the land from floods. Today, however, the riverbanks are no longer fortified, resulting in flooding and damage to the agricultural fields and housing settlements lying nearby. To forestall this kind of damage the rivers in the city (Meriç, Tunca) again need to be controlled and steps need to be taken as soon as possible to beautify and restore the areas of Sarayıçi, transforming it into a pleasant and healthy place to live. The surveys and map studies carried out in the research project have demonstrated that during the Ottoman period the banks of the Tunca, Meriç, and Arda Rivers were highly fortified and that the rivers themselves in this district, which at the time remained outside the boundaries of the city proper, were used for a variety of purposes (irrigation, hunting, and transportation). On the land side of these embankments, the elite of the time built palaces, fine homes, and gardens, especially vineyards.

Today this area is not maintained and the gardens and vineyards, other green areas, and housing settlements are suffering from this neglect. It is therefore necessary for the waters of the rivers that flow through the city of Edirne - the Meriç and the Tunca) to be regulated, transforming this area of Sarayıçi into something we might call the "City Summit," in other words a district that is both beautiful and amenable to healthy and pleasant living. This needs to be done to reverse the processes prevailing so far that have led to destruction of the irreplaceable resource, a total pollution and damage to the environment.

### **Historical Background of Edirne: Demographical and Sociological Aspects**

The Ottomans passed through the Dardanelles into Gallipoli in Thrace and soon arrived in Edirne, which they established as their capital city, replacing the earlier capital at Bursa. Up until 1890 Edirne was a cosmopolitan city, home to many religious and ethnic groups, including Turks, Greeks and Gypsies. 1890 saw the start of the disastrous military conflict in the region and between the years spanning 1890-1920 Edirne was exposed to various military campaigns and occupations during wars such as the Turco-Russian, Balkan and World War I (1914-1918). The wars and occupations were accompanied during and after the hostilities by massive population migrations resulting in significant changes in the physical and demographics of the city and a major change in its ethnic make-up.

In the 1891 census, the city's population was reported as 53,348. In 1899, the population had grown to 56, 813, but in a historical reference book published in France, the real figure was speculated to be 180,000. Prior to the Balkan War (1914), the city's population was reported as 80,000. Of these, 47,280 inhabitants were Muslims; 19,608 inhabitants were Greek; 14,469 inhabitants were Jewish; 4000 inhabitants were Armenian, and 2329 inhabitants were Bulgarians. In a way, it is believed that the population of Edirne did not exceed 5,000 in 1920. The present population of Edirne is about 102,345 growing annually at about 5 % (SSI, 1990).

During the Ottoman period, the various ethnic and religious groups tended to live in segregated neighbourhoods, these quarters bearing the names of the ethnic groups who inhabited them: the Greek quarter, Gypsy quarter and Muslim (Turk) quarters, etc.

In that respect, the historical social structure of the region resembles that of an ancient settlement structure. This social concept led to segregation patterns that continued until the

formation of the Turkish Republic. This kind of arrangement developed because, under the Ottomans, the various religious groups each had their own semi-autonomous administration and justice systems. Despite this development, religious or linguistic differences cannot be claimed to be handicaps for social integration, as proven by France and the USA. If language difference is ignored, this segregation may not be considered the cause of the formation but a result of the same. In that case, it is possible to assert that diverse population integration is a matter of culture, (Erdogan, 1992a).

Then, the question arises of why the cultures are not parallel. It may be that the Ottoman State never had a real reason for encouraging the integration of the various populations that made up its empire.

When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, its national aim was based on the principle of "Turkishness." Many of the minority populations were granted certain "minority rights" by virtue of the Lausanne Treaty, preferring this system as it allowed them to retain their social and religious properties. The gypsy population of Edirne was not considered a minority *per se*, though the identity of "Moslem Gypsy" continued until its official disuse in 1957. (1).

### **An Overview Proposal for Historical Outer Districts of Edirne**

Since the water resources are rapidly being exhausted, the existing rivers need to be controlled to prevent flooding. My students and I worked on a proposal for the establishment of a new residential area to be built in the district. That site plan is modeled on the historic Sarayıçi and includes a large green area in which villas are located around a big pool. The two and three-story villas closely resemble historic houses still standing in the core city (see the core city photographs). We considered this a working solution for upgrading the environment and the derelict houses in the downgrading urban areas. This sample proposal may also be implemented in other districts in the city, for instance Yeniimaret-one of the historical outer districts of Edirne (2).

Another example is from Yeniimaret, another neighborhood investigated by this writer and one of the historical outlying regions of Edirne. For the past thirty years this neighbourhood has been a destination point for migrants from Edirne's surrounding villages and other districts.

Consequently, we can state that the new 12<sup>th</sup> district proposal that includes a project of villas situated around a big pool, resembling the traditional usage pattern in the Sarayıçi district of Edirne, may be effective for upgrading the downgrading urban areas in the northern and western parts of the city. Therefore, the aim of this project is to present the new 12<sup>th</sup> district proposal as a model for upgrading the other downgrading settlements in the inner city.

### **Notes**

(1). Resource: Provincial Administration of Edirne (Valilik)

(2). Yeniimaret is a settlement area that is situated opposite the 12th district proposed in this paper. Yeniimaret was investigated by this author with a survey that involved 57 families. It was identified that 212 inhabitants had migrated from the villages and the districts of Edirne during the past thirty years, (Erdogan, 1994).

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