

# Disidentification of Historical City Centers: A Comparative Study of the Old and New Settlements of Mardin, Turkey

Fatma Kürüm Varolgüneş, Fatih Canan

**Abstract**—Mardin is one of the unique cities in Turkey with its rich cultural and historical heritage. Mardin's traditional dwellings have been affected both by natural data such as climate and topography and by cultural data like lifestyle and belief. However, in the new settlements, housing is formed with modern approaches and unsuitable forms clashing with Mardin's culture and environment. While the city is expanding, traditional textures are ignored. Thus, traditional settlements are losing their identity and are vanishing because of the rapid change and transformation. The main aim of this paper is to determine the physical and social data needed to define the characteristic features of Mardin's old and new settlements. In this context, based on social and cultural data, old and new settlement formations of Mardin have been investigated from various aspects. During this research, the following methods have been utilized: observations, interviews, public surveys, literature review, as well as site examination via maps, photographs and questionnaire methodology. In conclusion, this paper focuses on how changes in the physical forms of cities affect the typology and the identity of cities, as in the case of Mardin.

**Keywords**—Urban and local identity, historical city center, traditional settlements, Mardin, Turkey.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A city's identity depends primarily on its natural environment and cultural texture. All cities have different positions and characteristics on the earth; the city identity has a heterogeneous structure. Ethnic groups, occupational groups, cultural groups and socio-economic classes in an urban area are the social components that impact city identity [1]. Most cities exist in the uncertainty of either losing their identity or failing in producing new identities. The crisis of architectural identity is a global dilemma. This crisis emerged as a result of the phenomenon of globalization [2]. This problem is experienced in every aspect including the economic, physical and cultural fields of cities. Loss of city identity gives people living there the feeling of estrangement and leads to the feeling that the individual does not belong to the city. The issue of disidentification occurs with degeneration, degradation and the loss of the unique values that provide identity, and is a significant problem for rapidly growing cities, such as cities in Turkey [1].

This study is focused on determining the data to define the

F. K. Varolgunes is with the Architectural Department, University of Bingöl, Bingöl, CO 12000 Turkey (phone: +90 5303944549; fax: +90 426-216-0033; e-mail: fakurum@gmail.com).

F. Canan is with the Architectural Department, Selcuk University, Konya, CO 42031 Turkey (e-mail: fcanan423@hotmail.com).

characteristics of Mardin's old and new settlements. For this reason, in the light of social and cultural data, old and new settlement formations of Mardin have been studied from various aspects.

The traditional dwellings began to lose their original character after the 1950s with the effect of population growth and the distorted urbanization. And while change is an indispensable process, it is necessary to provide continuity and conservation of originalities during the process of change of some values considering the dimensions, conditions and results of the change.

## II. CITY AND IDENTITY

Identity can be defined as a set of properties that help to distinguish one object from another. It can be defined as the qualities that make a place capable of being specified or singled out, which make it unique and separate [4].

For all living and non-living assets and cities as well, identity is defined as being different and unique. The identity of a city is formed over a long time period. The city is shaped with its geographical characteristics, cultural level, architectural character, tradition and customs and life style [3]. Today, urban identities are increasingly disappearing in the world and Turkey, as a result of globalization, industrialization and migration. With modernism, sustaining urban identity, especially in historical cities, has become a critical issue. The traditional architecture of Mardin has developed in this respect, and until recent years, the city had attempted to protect her own identity.

## III. THE LOCATION AND HISTORY OF MARDIN

Mardin is located in the region of Mesopotamia and Anatolia, where important civilizations of the world have emerged. Throughout its history, dating from the first centuries A.D. until the present, Mardin has housed various communities of different ethnical and religious origins [5]. An overview of the historical articles on Mardin shows the diversity of social groups and forms of religious and civic organizations within the city as well as the many communities [5]. Persians, Romans, and Byzantines have controlled the city successively until the 7<sup>th</sup> century. After these, Arabs ruled the city until the 9<sup>th</sup> century and were followed the reign of the Seljuks. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Artuqids ruled the city. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city was taken under Ottoman authority [6]. Mardin city consists of two parts – the

old and new settlements. The old settlements have important heritage. Christian elements having their own urban architectural

TABLE I  
COMPONENTS FORMING CITY AND ARCHITECTURE IDENTITY

Components Forming Identity	Components Forming City Identity	Components Forming Architecture Identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Transformation</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Continuity</li> <li>• Having power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical structure (natural and built environment)</li> <li>• Social, cultural, economic, political dynamics</li> <li>• Design process and Design approaches</li> <li>• Macro scale changes and developments (technology, production and consumption relations, social life norms, modes of transportation-communication, urban space organization, population, lifestyle, urban management systems, planning approaches)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographical, geological, topography and climatic factors,</li> <li>• Social and economic conditions, politic and military conditions,</li> <li>• Technical conditions,</li> <li>• Religion, philosophy and morals, science and art.</li> <li>• Design process</li> <li>• Usage process</li> </ul>



Fig. 1 The location of Mardin in Turkey



Fig. 2 Map of Mardin and its surrounding

The morphological form of the civic realm, and thus, the city texture can be largely identified with the layout of the streets. It can be ruled that the character of the streets is determined partially by the nature of Mardin as an urban stretch on the Silk Road, bringing the need for privacy from the foreign elements of passersby to its defining periphery – the buildings [5].

Mardin experienced two major waves of migration, one from the rural areas to city centers and the other to big cities from Mardin. These migrations cause distortions in the physical and cultural texture of Mardin.

#### IV. TRADITIONAL URBAN TEXTURE OF MARDIN

Mardin, due to its unique traditional stone dwellings, has a special importance in the world's literature. Her settlement texture including social and religious architectural works has the image of a medieval city. Traditional Mardin dwellings have a simple compact urban texture on a sloping topography (Figs. 3 (a) and (b)). They are located on organic textures, which are combined of straight, sloping or stairway roads. Mardin offers one of the best stone architectural samples, as a result of the combination of natural environment and human effort, and has been proposed for UNESCO World Heritage List.

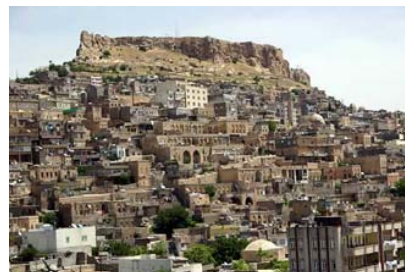


Fig. 3 (a) A view of Mardin from the south



Fig. 3 (b) View of Mardin's traditional settlements (Photographs: Canan F.)

The dwelling facades looking out over the Mesopotamian plain instead of a street, shows the richness and diversity of Mardin settlements (Fig. 4).

The city texture surrounds the south face of the castle, the entrance of which lies on the centre of gravity of the city dispersion. This axis is also the thinnest stretch of built up area of the city in the north south direction, and incorporates the commercial and industrial district running east west on the central axis. Apart from the public character of this district,



Fig. 4 View of the Mesopotamian plain from the dwellings (Photograph: Canan F.)

The city land use rarely consists of a mixed use such as residential and commercial usage together. Residential quarters extend as private zones each as a texture of high stone walls continuing along the streets, with the occasional appearance of presentable doors on the street level and a few small service windows just enough to ventilate the lower levels [5].

Atilla Yücel describes the uniqueness of the city in its poetic sense [6] as follows: Mardin is one of the most unique cities in Turkey. It is both its physical and social topography that renders its unique identity. Leaning against a steep slope of a hill, the city looks at the vast fertile Mesopotamia plain lying under it. Almost "undisturbed" with greenery, it is an excellent example of masonry that rises with terraces and at the climax of the hill, the city is crowned with a castle [7].

Every successive house built along the slope would not

the city exhibits no built-up public areas such as agoras or church fronts as in western typologies. Similarly, streets do not show any architectural traces of public life and manifest themselves as narrow service axes, organically simulating the topographical features of the ground, spatially defined by the stone periphery of the introvert domestic and communal structures [5]. The traditional urban texture of Mardin is made up of settlements around two hills. It is known that the texture of Mardin, based on the Artuqids period, is formed by courtyard terrace houses settled on a sloping terrain. Mardin City is an important historical center that has preserved her original texture until today. She reflects the original values of the traditional settlement with her streets, castles, churches, pavilions and houses (Fig. 3). Traditional houses are the main elements of the city which have been developed spontaneously and in an organic texture. With her social, economic, cultural context and climate, topography, and geological structure, Mardin dwellings show the general characteristics of traditional architecture of the south eastern Anatolia region. While the city preserves its beauty even today, the urban texture suffers deterioration due to immigration, crooked urbanization and negligence.

prevent the sight of the preceding house, so that every building benefits equally from the only view that is towards the plain [6].

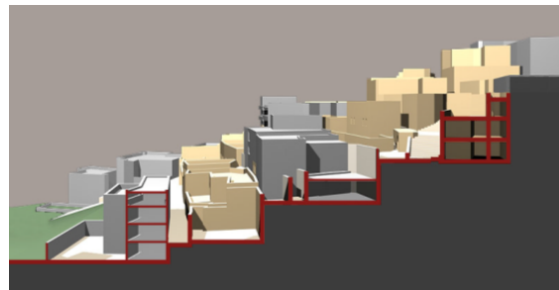


Fig. 5 (a) Cross-sections of house and city texture [6]



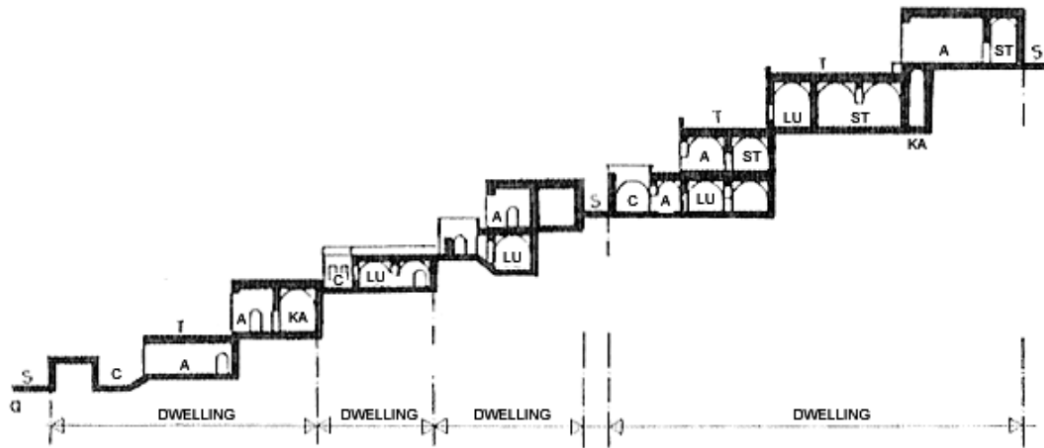


Fig. 5 (b) Cross-sections of house and city texture [4]



Fig. 6 The street patterns to the east and west of the settlement [5]



Fig. 7 (a) View of traditional Mardin streets (Photograph: Canan F.)



Fig. 7 (b) View of traditional Mardin streets

### V. TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF MARDIN

The dwellings are the basic items that make up Mardin's dense structure, which are very close to each other due to the city's narrow streets. But this closeness does not infringe in the privacy of others. The narrowness of the streets is in line with the climate of the region.



Fig. 8 Facade of Mardin PTT House

Mardin houses are composed of spaces including the living unit, archway, terrace and courtyard. The main entrance of the house is within the courtyard (Fig. 8). However, houses with crowded families may have multiple entrances. For instance, many houses have entrances to intermediate stories accessed in the east or west directions descending through the streets on the sides of the parcel. In fact, some properties also have entrances from the north [6].

Indoors, semi-open spaces and open spaces on all floors of the traditional house are included in the design with their formal and functional features. In old Mardin city, public spaces such as the bazaar and Ulu Mosque are integrated with the neighborhood, as it is in the traditional complexes. The transition, which is an important feature in the creation of contemporary urban textures, between public and private spaces was a significant known phenomenon in the planning of Ottoman complexes built hundreds of years ago. Similarly, the bazaar next to Mardin Ulu mosque, its neighborhood and the mosque entrance and its roads are integrated on four sides (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9 (a) Traditional dwellings in the historic centre of Mardin



Fig. 9 (b) Traditional dwellings in the historic centre of Mardin



Fig. 10 (a) Compact texture of the old city of Mardin (Photographs: Canan F.)



Fig. 10 (b) Traditional mosque dome (Ulu Cami) (Photograph: Canan F.)

### VI. HISTORICAL PROCESS AND THE FORMATION OF NEW URBAN TEXTURE

Mardin is shaped within the force of changing social and economic conditions of 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the light of new values and the direction of modern urbanization. For this purpose, studies on the physical planning of the city are carried out.

The first zoning plan for Mardin dates back to the year 1952. This non-conservative plan was used until 1971 with some alterations. The second zoning plan was tendered by



İlBank in 1973. A zoning plan for protection was made by Kamutay Türkoğlu, Ahmet Uzel and friends, and was approved in 1985. In 1990, 1/25,000 and 1/5,000 scaled plans were prepared by Esat Turak for the zones in and outside the

site. Another protection zoning plan with a scale of 1/5,000 was prepared by Prof. Dr. İsmet Okyay at the end of 1990s. In 1991, Işık Nuralı and his team sustained the continuation of the study and continue to progress it today (Fig. 11).

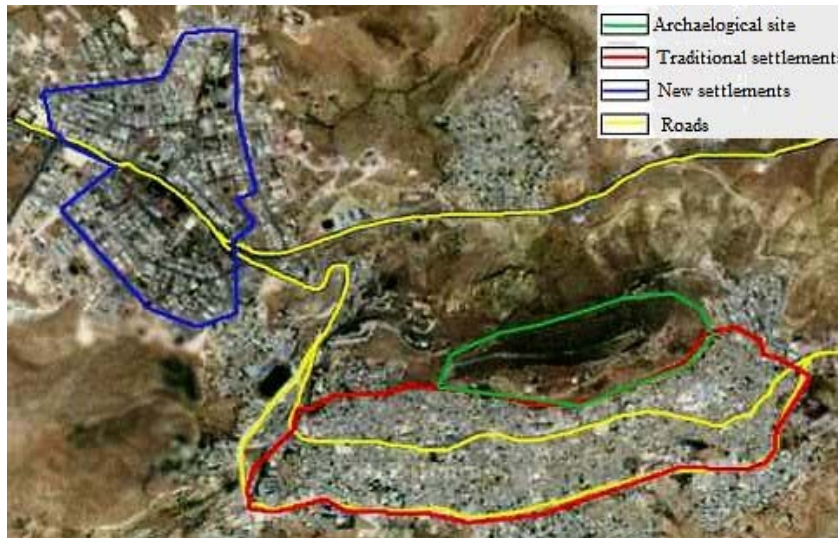


Fig. 11 Development periods of the city of Mardin [13]

Today, the city is under protection since 1979. Since then the city started growing towards the west and a new district developed; namely Yenisehir.

Transition to the Yenişehir region, which now being selected as a protected area and located within the old Mardin settlement, has occurred gradually in terms of location and time. Christian population activity has been observed in religious, educational and health issues in the region.

The first buildings outside the traditional city were built on the western side of the city after 1890. Educational buildings of the Americans have been established at this region. When Mardin was proclaimed as a province during the establishment of modern Turkish Republic, the required public buildings, such as the Governorate buildings, were built in the eastern part of the city in the areas which are comparatively flat [9].

Between 1950 and 1970, around the train station area, military and educational buildings were established. In 1970, Station neighborhood, a small industrial zone, and Enver Ensar neighborhood formed the eastern part of the city, and as a result of the migrations from rural areas, were established. After the declaration of Mardin City as a protected area, the neighborhoods of Saraçoğlu and Cumhuriyet emerged to the south-west region of the city. After 1990, the city started to develop in the Diyarbakir (north-west) direction where the topography is more appropriate [9].



Fig. 12 (a) Close relationships impairing visual privacy [8]



Fig. 12 (b) Close relationships impairing visual privacy [8]

Traditional Anatolian dwellings with courtyards are the habitat where nature-neighbourhood-community relations are the most intense, as well as having the function of providing privacy. These dwellings combine humane, humble and monumental expressions. The users of these settlements live by the consciousness of their surroundings and their existence. These traditional Anatolian houses have unfortunately left their place to high-rise buildings, which were stolid to environmental problems [10]. A new form of production emerged after the industrial revolution and the requirement of the transportation to the new accommodation and production centres having formed as a result of these changes have shaped the modern city. Today it is argued that the modern architecture has not yet matured in the way of being contemporary and it has finally produced urban environments not conceiving people and society. Many of the values that existed in traditional texture have been vanished as a reflection of this current architectural movement (Fig. 12).

#### VII. EVALUATION OF NEW MARDIN CITY TEXTURE

The new Mardin settlement is planned on an area not showing large scaled altitude differences and could be accepted as flat. The grid-shaped urban planning template, in which the traffic routes are the determining factor, reveals the islands and parcels where the new Mardin residential settlements will be located.



Fig. 13 (a) Traditional Mardin urban texture



Fig. 13 (b) New Mardin urban texture Mardin (Photograph: Canan F.)

The urban texture formed up by parcels and island having similar dimensions and rectangular forms is monotone. The

discrete flat blocks in the building islands have the same width and height; this brings monotony on the one hand and non-recognition on the other. Except for the superficial differences on the facades of the buildings; the apartments, their islands and streets are a repetition of each other (Fig. 12).

It can be concluded that the new settlement does not have a sustainable urban design and sustaining dwellings according to criteria such as harmony with the climate and topography, orientation, access to natural resources for each dwelling, energy conservation and long-term benefits expected from the investment. On the contrary, according to the same criteria, the traditional Mardin settlement has existed with a sustainable urban design and dwelling design for centuries.



Fig. 14 (a) Mardin's traditional compact texture [11]

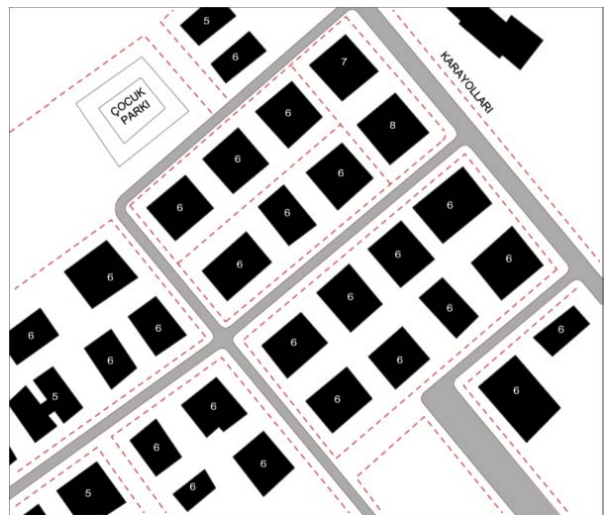


Fig. 14 (b) Mardin's new texture [11]

#### VIII. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The organic texture that can be observed in traditional settlements has been formed within the spatial requirements of the users and has been shaped spontaneously as a result of the

consideration of principles such as the dwellings being in harmony with the climate and topography, and the right of access to natural resources (Fig. 14).

The free formation, which appeared in the organic structure of traditional urban textures, has prevented uniformity and given an identity to the texture. In the formation of Mardin's traditional urban settlement, two basic data have been decisive, they are, the hot-dry climate it occupies and the very sloping terrain on which it is settled. It can be stated that the participation of the scenery to these two basic data has determined largely the design of the dwellings being formed both in the form of single structure and texture. However, in new settlements described within the same legislation and related regulations and which are applied in the same pattern at all regions of the country without discrimination and aroused as a product of the zoning plans, mostly user participation, cultural structure, climatic conditions, topography, sustainability and etc. design variables are not considered. For this reason, these types of settlements do not include traces of locality and no local identity is perceived. Thus, the uniformity caused by the new settlement texture having mnemonic and linear consistency, and which is created independently from local data, brings along an idyllic environment. In these settlements, it has been observed that design principles indicating efficient consumption of natural resources are not considered in the long run. In the design of a residential or residential group, the use and lifestyles of the end-dwellers are is of the utmost importance during the planning and designing phases of housing zones.

The success of dwelling design means in the right place, at the right time, the right organization for the right person [12]. In this sense, in order to create environments for a certain cultural group, it is necessary to use the previous customs that are adapted to the characteristics of socio-cultural environment (lifestyle and basic needs, religious beliefs and confidentiality, economy), natural environment characteristics (climate, topography) and include locality specific building materials and construction techniques.

The main goal of future designs should be transferring the extensions of images of usual environments to new circles. In this direction, urban residential projects ignoring natural and socio-cultural factors should be abolished and cities having cultural accumulation should not be unidentified.

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