

Asli Kiyak Ingin

Made in Şişhane Project as an Alternative Design Practice for Safeguarding the Craft Neighbourhoods in Istanbul

Introduction

The craft neighbourhoods which have been located within the historic centre of Istanbul and have continued their existence for many years embody dynamic practices and relations that give the city its character. They have cultural, economic, social, creative and pedagogic values which still have big potentiality for a sustainable future of the city. Due to the existence of such areas, we are able to discuss design and production conditions that are specific to Istanbul. Despite their full importance and all the potentials they sustain, these districts face threats such as city policies which plan to remove small-scale production from the city centre to the periphery, economic crisis and speculated real estate prices in the last ten years. The process of urban transformation and all the new laws and plans following it accelerate these processes. Urban transformation processes threaten not only the built environment but also the social, economic, and cultural structures of the city. The vision and decisions which will utilise the potentials sustained within these districts and which will transform these potentials to become a part of the city's development dynamics are not being produced. On the contrary, this type of production faces the pressure of evacuation as it is claimed to be harmful for the city or to be incompatible with the currently proposed functions.

It is important to redefine the craft neighbourhood's essential role in its changing urban context. If this potential is valued and developed, these districts can go through an urban development process which evolves from their inner dynamics. This paper will focus on the future of craft neighbourhoods in Istanbul and discuss their potentials and threats today. It will also present the Made in Şişhane Project, which is an alternative design practice for safeguarding the craft neighbourhoods, and its motivation, questions, aims and actions. Within this article, the context that prepared the ground for the Made in Şişhane project will be conveyed on the basis of both the historic background and the characteristic features of Şişhane as a craft neighbourhood with its values, current visions and

threats. Following this, the questions that initiated the actions of the project, its purpose, its formation, and the types of activities developed and the steps made will be shared.

Şişhane District as a lighting centre of Istanbul

Şişhane is one of the craft neighbourhoods of Istanbul, and it is the almost 100-year-old lighting production and commerce centre of the city. It is a small but extremely dense district which is close to the landmark Galata Tower.

The district referred to as Galata and Pera and also including Şişhane – previously a Byzantium neighbourhood – gained its real prominence during the Genoese period and maintained this after the city fell into the hands of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of increasing diplomatic relations with the Western states, embassy buildings were built in the district, which later turned into the Ottoman state's major 'customs station' from the nineteenth century onwards, especially with the increase of the hegemonic position of the West that was going through industrialisation. This wasn't simply an entry point for the goods, but also a door for many of the 'first times' of our modern life that entered into Turkey and expanded from there (Belge 2000).

In Bankalar Street, that was one of the main axes of the district during the early twentieth century, the technology importers and technical equipment companies started gaining prominence over the banking and finance companies that were the defining elements until then. From meeting a limited number of demands from only a few companies, with the increase of demand for technology the market expanded significantly from the 1920s – its area and range increased, as a result of which the shops specialised to a lesser extent and were replaced by electricians, electronics shops and various other small-scale technology enterprises.

This process expanded to lesser known areas of the street, spilling over to Okçu Musa Street and towards Şişhane. Hence, with these transformations the street and the district started to revive from its waning fortunes after its old illustrious days (Eldem 2000).

Aside from its characteristics that result from being a historical port, commerce and finance centre, Galata also has a profound effect on the fields of electronics and lighting. The need for new technology in society made electrical and lighting shops and workshops much more important during the mid twentieth century. The district became a kind of Silicon Valley during this period. Şişhane continued to keep its place as the centre of lighting in İstanbul and even in Turkey till the beginning of 2000. The district enabled both the development of big industrial companies and the existence of small workshops. It has also continued to be the largest market of lighting.



Figure 1. The District from the Galata Tower. Photo by Galata Fotoğrafhanesi Academy of Photography

Structure of the craft neighbourhood

1. Scale

Craft-based production has a different scale and characteristics than mass production. Compared to industrial zones, craft neighbourhoods embody social, cultural and spatial relationships in addition to economic relationships. Within large scale and mass production all the operations, including storage, happen on the same premises, whereas within the districts based on craft the production process happens as an open system which works through a network of different workshops and shops in the neighbourhood. In this type of district special customised production is done, depending on needs and orders. Here is a flexible model of production that responds to different demands of

quantity and quality. This type of production would be instrumental for designers in various ways, such as flexible production which is customer oriented and project based, the possibility to produce from a prototype to big order and an interactive working environment.

2. Network

Şişhane craft neighbourhood has a strong network which has its own logic and economic, cultural, social and spatial relations. The craft-based production and the multi-actors network and its cluster system of Şişhane provide as well an eco-system of an organism of sharing. Şişhane covers all steps in the lighting business and production, with different options of material and workshop. Through the existing network in the district, a variety of workshops, materials and products are accessible within walking distance. The district which has penetrated into the city works

like a big factory which has the potential of a flexible, multi-option production. The different production phases of a product are completed by different workshops in the district where working together and cooperating is predominant. Sharing common moulds, materials and workshops in the network creates a common language style. As well as economic relations, the social and cultural relations between the workshops ensure the sustenance of this network.

The most important characteristic of the craft-based production is its survival due to this network, since it produces through this network. That is, in order to produce, it needs the other workshops, raw material and semi-product shops, and lighting shops. Each workshop positions and generates its existence through this network, its interrelations and location. The movement in the district – which is generally perceived as chaotic – is in fact a sign of an important meaningful communication and connection between the actors of the craft network. The invisible network that connects craftsmen to each other and to the city is at the heart of a production process

3. Clustering

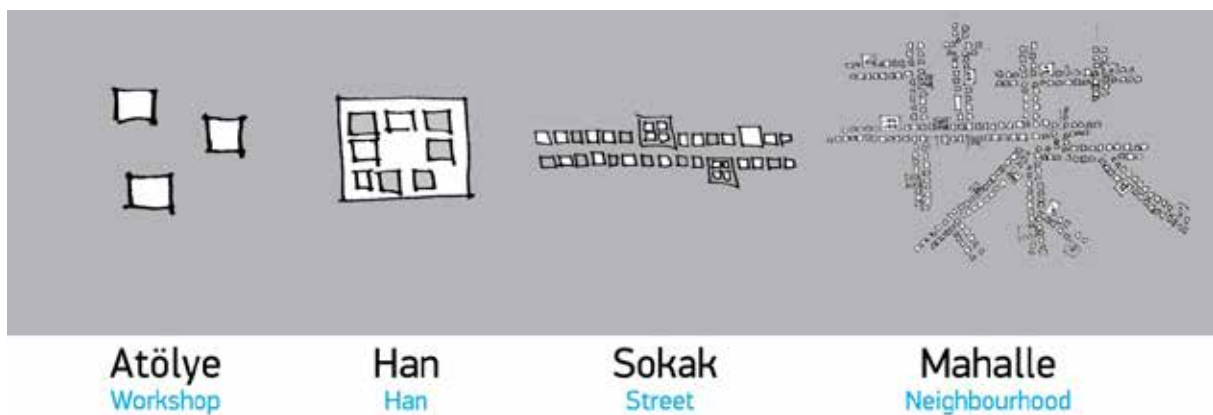


Figure 2. Elements of the craft neighbourhood. Drawing by Aslı Kiyak İngin

which relies on constant interaction between all kinds of actors. The network is also used effectively by designers, artists, architects, project developers, end-users, etc.

In Şişhane, the workshops and shops coexist differently, as horizontal and vertical clusters. Similar shops and workshops settle next to each other (Figure 2). They are competitors but also colleagues and friends of each other. On streets (horizontal clustering) and in large commercial buildings called *han* (vertical clustering) certain production and trade branches have been clustered. So a synergy that will leave a mark in the city's memory and a common market environment has been created, and this is easily accessible and readable by the users of this district.

Certain companies and stores have clustered on different streets. For example, pantographers on Yüksek Kaldırım, lathers and hardware stores on Perşembe Pazarı, music instrument producers and recording studios on Galip Dede Caddesi, decorative lighting, chandelier and lampshade producers on

Mektep Caddesi, technical lighting companies and stores on Bankalar Caddesi. In horizontal clustering, lighting stores which are located on the same street are competitors of each other but they are also co-workers. If needed, they can direct the customer to each other. In *hans* where vertical clustering has been formed, there are businesses which complete each other's function. For example, in Dörtler Han where lampshade producers and shops are located, on the entrance floor there is a tea shop and also stores which have small production corners. On upper floors, where only lampshade production workshops and wire workshops are located, there is an internal structuring and levelling.

4. Lighting shops

Many lighting shops which are located in Şişhane have focused on different lighting types: decorative, technical, architectural, industrial, outdoors, etc. These shops vary; some of them have their own trademark and production, and some of them sell export products. In addition, there are also shops which sell semi-product lighting materials in the district. There is an organic relationship between the

lighting shops and workshops. Workshops produce for these shops and can also make changes to the product if the customers who visit these stores request it. In fact, these types of changes can often be resolved quite rapidly while having a cup of tea and a chat. This interview with a master shows their relation and the importance of it:

In Şiřhane, the customer comes and wants to buy at once the product that he sees and likes. Its height needs to be decreased or it needs to be repaired. For this kind of thing he doesn't want to come again next week to get it. He sits, drinks coffee or tea. Since the ateliers are close by, that repair is done within an hour or two and it is given to the customer. Therefore, there should be an atelier close to the store, below or above it. If the ateliers are moved out of Şiřhane, then it would also be difficult for the stores. (Kıyak İngin 2011: 24)

This organic relationship between the stores and the workshops had started decreasing at the beginning of 2000. One of the reasons was due to economic developments on a global scale; the stores had begun to increase the import of Far Eastern products instead of the local production.

5. Workshops

There are different kinds of production material-based workshops in Şiřhane and its environs. They are metal, acrylic, lampshade, wire, turner, press, wooden, montage, chandelier, glass, advertisement, pantograph, painting, etc. Workshops can also be classified as:

- Ones that started as a workshop, transformed into institutionalised companies and that have shifted their production to outside the city,
- Companies that have shops and workshops in Şiřhane,
- Workshops that are mostly producing for architects, designers, shops and other lighting companies,
- Workshops doing intermediary operations,
- Workshops that sell semi-finished products and lighting materials. (Kıyak İngin 2006)

They are mostly focused on the production process rather than product sale. They don't have their own collection, catalogue and web page because they generally produce on order and demand. They have a corner in their workshop to exhibit some past work

or a box which collects the photographs of their old work to give an idea of their craftsmanship quality and ability. They use the traditional system which relies on recommendation, guidance and the fact of being clustered in the neighbourhood instead of the contemporary marketing systems. And they mostly work with their customers, who are also their collaborators over the long term.



Figure 3. A metal and montage workshop in the neighbourhood. Photo by Arif Yaman

Workshops mostly focus on a small number of pieces and customer/user-based production. Workshops don't need a warehouse; they produce without stock, and they can supply the material from the neighbourhood when they need it. They use the simple and old techniques and machines (Figure 3). They sustain the local and traditional knowledge and knowhow of the production and craftsmanship from generation to generation. The master is also owner of the workshop, which is mostly a family business with only a few people working together. The following interview shows the family scale from the craftsman's point of view:

My mum and dad work together. Me too since my childhood ... still we are together. They stay at the other workshop in the front street. We are separate since two years but we come and go together to work. Our houses are also close to each other. My dad is mostly with the customers, he follows the work that's outside. Mostly he intervenes when we are overloaded. My mum mostly deals with accounts but when there is a mass order, if we are overloaded, she also helps bits and pieces. (Turgut)

Threats to the craft neighbourhood

The multi-layered and rich-patterned structure of the district is at the threshold of important changes and threads within the framework of current and future policies. As a result of today's changing macro-economic policies, which identify tourism and the construction sector as a preferred development and urban renewal tool, Istanbul is also being influenced by these changes.

Being located in the city centre, Şiřhane faces threats such as city policies which plan to remove small-scale production from the city centre. The decentralisation of production, though partial, has become the current agenda due to the Master Development Plan to protect the Historic Peninsula, scaled 1/5000, dated 2005. Şiřhane and its surrounding area has been also designated as 'Trade-Service-Tourism' areas according to the Beyođlu Development Plan, scaled 1/1000, which was approved at the end of 2010. The decision states that the production operations which have increased in the area over the last years damage the historic texture of the area, so the decentralisation of production has been decided upon. Over the past ten years, by various institutions like the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and local administrations, during meetings with craftsmen and representatives of NGOs it has been stated in many ways that the workshops should be removed from their current locations. An interview with a master shows us the situation:

Last year, the mayor called all ateliers and shop owners. He said that if he becomes mayor for another term, all will be hotels and pensions here. There isn't anybody or any institution to protect the manufacturers. Where would a manufacturer go? (Kiyak İngin 2011: 29)

Another threat is the gentrification process which increases day by day in the region. The district has become fashionable in the last few years. As a consequence, real estate prices have increased dramatically. Most of the workshops and shops around the Galata Tower have had to leave their location. It becomes difficult for the workshops to survive by themselves when they leave their district, network and market. An interview with a master shows us this process:

Serdar'ı Ekrem Street was full of chandelier manufacturers. Now fashion designers have come. The chandelier companies that are left there also need to move out; they can't survive on their own. (Kiyak İngin 2011: 29)

Another threat that has affected the district is the expansion of goods from the Far East. The shifting of world production to the Far East and the consequent threats of cheap goods and production has put pressure on the technical lighting manufacturers since the end of the 1990s and on the decorative lighting sector since the 2000s. Thus, this situation has paved the way for the closure of many workshops and forced shop-owning workshops to import and sell Far Eastern goods. On this subject, neither the state nor the professional organisations for the local economy and industry have had a significant policy.

The master/apprentice system has almost disappeared. It also creates a big threat for transforming the knowledge and sustaining the craft network for the future. The following interview excerpt shows the importance of this system.

In the past, when Şiřhane was mentioned chandelier makers came to mind, here it was like a school. Apprentices working for each master were like their master's students ...

Many of our masters disappeared and raising new masters will take a long time. Nobody comes through the door and tells me to teach his child anymore. Why doesn't he? Because there is no future, it is not clear whether he would be able to make a living. There is no patience as it used to exist in the past, whereas we've always been patient. (Kiyak İngin 2011: 21)

Potentials of the craft neighbourhood

The potentials of the small-scale production areas are not utilised sufficiently and as of yet these areas have not been able to become a part of or a subject of the visions related either with the city or with design, industry, tourism and the academy. The craft neighbourhoods have cultural, economic, creative, social and pedagogic value which have to be sustained and safeguarded for the next generations.

First of all, one of the important values of the craft neighbourhood is a cultural one. The craft network is a part of the intangible cultural heritage. The craft system based on manual labour, transferred from generation to generation through the relationship of master and apprentice, should be preserved in accordance with the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage to which Turkey became a party state in 2006. Decisions such as 'to enable the traditional productions to compete, to increase their value; to enliven the traditional

production as an abstract heritage in the Historic Peninsula; to regenerate the master and apprentice system in fields of traditional production' have been taken in the Management Plan of Istanbul Historic Peninsula (2011). There are knowhow, stories and relations which the craftsman has and transfers to the next generation by the master/apprentice system. The following interviews show the meaning of intangible heritage by the local craftsman:

... When I decided to open up a shop I wanted to be on my master's street, by his side just to learn some new things from him. He used to do some work for the Masis Company. Three to four years ago I found an ash-tray he made. I use it from time to time when I am in high spirits. I worked with the artisan Onnik for seven years without realising how the time passed ... (Aharon) [Figure 4]



Figure 4. Ash-tray of Master Artin. Photo by Asli Kiyak İngin

... Producing chandeliers is a work that requires effort and patience and one must take pleasure in doing it. There are times when I come across a chandelier that I made thirty years ago. They come saying, 'I brought this for repair; its lamp socket is not working.' At that moment, I say, 'I have done such valuable work, they used it for thirty years and now they have come to me again' ...

With years of experience, you learn certain practices. Even before the client tells me, I know all the details of the work and I do it. (Kiyak İngin 2011: 23)

The second important value is the creative one. The craftsmen lose their power because of Far Eastern goods and current city policies, but collaboration with designers can provide them with a new vision and work field. Also, it is not that easy for designers to find a place in the market with their own products and labels. Such districts can create an opportunity for them. The district provides designers with the opportunity of producing and selling their own products and creating their own labels.

There is a vast opportunity of materials, production forms and workshops in the area. Within this field, it is possible to produce a limited number of different and qualified products in a short time and within walking distance. Within such areas of the city, many creative products come alive through dialogue and interaction between designer and producer. Togetherness of craft and design processes has ad hoc, non-hierarchical, flexible, interactive and unmediated characteristics. In this model, a production process becomes a production route or journey which is special, unique and directed by the designer in the neighbourhood. Face-to-face design practice allows for personal expression at various stages of production. The craftsmen who produce in the district, using their traditional skills and machines, can adapt to new demands and techniques, and supply customised and unique objects.

The craftsmen are easy to have a dialogue with – they are open to communication, flexible and practical. Such dialogue and an open working environment amongst the designers, customers and craftsman is something very hard to find in large-scale industries. The craftsman is not only someone who executes but is an active contributor to the product's design. Design and production processes work together and a product is shaped by a designer's idea and sketches and a craftsman's ability and knowhow [Figure 5]. There is an unsigned agreement between the designer and the craftsman:



Figure 5. A common work between designer and craftsman, More than Design Workshop. Photo by Asli Kiyak İngin

For the past five years, I don't do mass production for the market. I work with architects on per-project basis. They see the meticulousness and cleanness of the work, they appreciate this. The biggest desire of an artisan is to receive appreciation for his work ...

When a designer comes to us, we start to work together. He/she can see everything we do from the beginning of the production till the end of it and even intervene in it. (Kıyak İngin 2011: 25)

The craft network is also knitted with the local community and everyday life practices in Şişhane. A third value is the socio-economic one. Workshops, taken on their own, correspond to a very small scale operation. However, due to their co-existence and their functioning together while relating to a common production network, they are also representatives on a large and regional scale as well. Workshops generally occupy very small places and are integrated into the existing buildings in Şişhane. They can survive with a small amount of production, but they can also deal with a big order by sharing the production with the other workshops. This potential is expressed by a local craftsman during an interview:

... In general, lighting is an item which is left to the end. It always has an urgency and tightness. According to the workload, you can also call in the other relatives. Or among the shopkeeper friends, you can receive help by passing work to each other. When you receive a mass order, you can also have them do some amount of the work. (Turgut)

Another value of the craft neighbourhood is its ability to be a method for pedagogy. A craft neighbourhood which is in the city centre and close to several educational intuitions has an opportunity for design and related education systems where there is a lack of experience of material, making and creating in its field. The last value is creating the unique experience in the urban context. It could have an essential role for an alternative vision of tourism which is not consumption oriented and which could be a creative and productive one.

Made in Şişhane Project

1. Motivations, aims, questions

At a time when both city policies and design practices are changing rapidly to accommodate new global orders, it is important to understand

the intimate relationship between craft, culture, economic activity and urban development, and to redefine its essential role in its new context. At this point, Made in Şişhane Project is developed with the motivation of urgent need for a new argument and vision that are based on bottom-up approaches for the future of the craft neighbourhood instead of the top-down process.

Made in Sishane is an activist project which has organised creative actions-events in order to contribute to the sustainability of these craft neighbourhoods since 2006. There is a need for creating bottom-up approaches and listening to the local. The project focuses on the Sishane-Galata craft neighbourhood and enriches the craft networks with the participation of designers, artists, architects and academia.

Made in Sishane project first of all aims to get a better understanding of the networks in Şişhane and make the craft network more visible and reveal its local knowledge and creative potential. The project also tries to change the production image from copy and mass production to a creative and flexible one. It hopes to create an awareness of the importance and new roles of the craft neighbourhoods for the future. Secondly, it enriches the production networks with the participation of designers, artists and architects and also agents of tourism, culture and education. Creative people become mediators to evaluate the possibilities for sustainable future developments and give testament to its intangible heritage.

Made in Şişhane Project asks: How can design have a positive role in the sustainable development of a craft neighbourhood? What kind of potentiality do these neighbourhoods have for the designers? Is it possible to establish any dialogue between the field of tourism, culture and education with craft neighbourhood?

The Made in Şişhane project is developed for showing the importance of the regional scale and whole network and revealing and emphasising a common and valuable identity which come from making and craft ability. The project focuses not only on the product but also on the processes and routes in the urban context, the stories behind the product, the relations between the craft and design actors and the local knowledge of the neighbourhood. And it focuses on the common benefits and support of the whole network instead

of any one specific workshop. Since 2006, the project has been organising various events in order to

- Make visible the existing relations between design and craft,
- Support the sustainability of this system,
- Support the whole system instead of one workshop,
- Change the negative image of the district with copy and mass production,
- Promote craft-based production,
- Search for creative and sustainable transformation ways for the craft tradition,
- Knit together more relations between the craft network and other actors from the fields of design, tourism, education and culture.

2. Actions of the Project

Made in Şişhane Project organises a series of actions which focus on a bottom-up effect and support local actors to reach their aims, showing an alternative vision and creating a sustainable future for craft neighbourhoods. First of all, the project creates and reveals the local knowledge of the craft

neighbourhood through preparing papers, organising workshops and exhibitions, conducting interviews and analysis, giving courses, and publishing a book on Made in Sishane, with small-scale production and design, and realised in a participatory way, taking the contribution of different actors, making photograph archives and documentary films, sharing and collaborating with similar districts.

Secondly, the project tries to change the existing perception of the craft neighbourhoods and make the network and existing relations between designers and craftsmen visible. For this reason the first event, which was a design exhibition and panel discussion, was realised during the Istanbul Design Week in 2006. Big trucks in the park next to the old Galata Bridge were used as an exhibition place. The aim of the first action was not only to exhibit the products but also the product routes which show the network in the district and also to emphasise the existing relations between designer and craft neighbourhood [Figure 5a-b], working with the designers, artists and architects who are still working with the Şişhane craft network. After conducting interviews with the designers, big maps which show the process of the production routes in the district were created and used behind each product which has different routes and connections in the district.

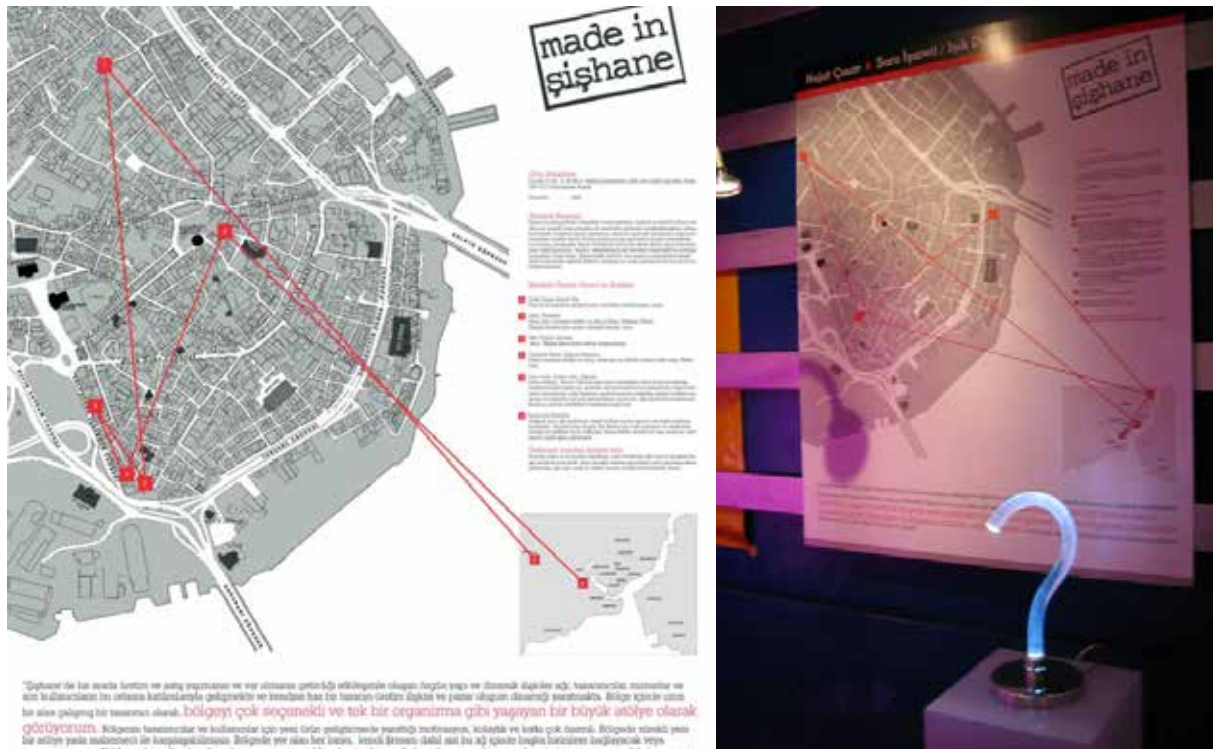


Figure 6a-b. Map of the product routes in the neighbourhood. First exhibition which took place during the Design Biennial.

The third action was to enlarge the possibilities of the neighbourhood and network. After the first exhibition event, the project continued to think about and test the idea of the project and made several small workshops with the business and design sector and academy. During this process one more question was added to the manifesto: Could we develop a new tourism which is creative and productive instead of the current consumption-oriented one?

Collaborating with the Dutch artist Teike Asselbergs and sponsored by the Consulate-General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a second main action was organised, Dutch Design Made in Şişhane, in 2009. Dutch designers who didn't know the district and Turkish language were invited to work with the craftsman in Şişhane. They were introduced to the project and craft network and then started to work with the workshops and develop a design idea and finalised it as a product in a few days. Afterward, final products and a documentary film were exhibited in the Dutch Chapel [Figure 7a-b]. Additionally, the Dutch trade minister visited some workshops and shops in the neighbourhood. This visit created an important representation and recognition of the craft neighbourhood by an upper administrative level.



Figure 7a-b. Introduction of the Dutch designers to the Şişhane Craft Network and exhibition of Dutch Design Made in Şişhane.

The next main action of the project was to continue to enlarge the network with a larger participation of designers and students. As a part of the 1st Istanbul Design Biennial, Made in Şişhane Project collaborated with Design Quartier Ehrenfeld and organised a workshop named More Than Design with almost thirty Turkish-German students and six professional German designers. They made up six teams to work in the field for creating design solutions/objects for six locations. The products designed together and produced specifically for the selected locations in the district were exhibited in the same venues with videos, stickers and information describing the process (2012)[Figure 8a-b]. In this event it was argued that the design and production process produced a new experience of togetherness. And craft and design relations were made visible by using the exact locations and micro-applications. It created new relations between other actors and craft networks in the neighbourhoods.



Figure 8a-b. More than Design Workshop, the process and result from one of the teams. Photo from Made in Şişhane Archive

Made in Şişhane also exhibited its manifesto of crafting neighbourhood and unmediated design with the participation an Indian group, URBZ, in an exhibition during the First Istanbul Design Biennial. It showed the invisible role of craftsmen and their importance for the city and design field. The stories of the craftsmen and their relations with the designer and their neighbourhood were supported by some objects, semi-finished products, photos, posters and video interviews in the installation.

Last but not least, the craft neighbourhood and knowhow of the workshops have been matched with design education. Several workshops have been realized for a part of the education system. One of them is The Material Diary, which was the studio project for the second year design students at Istanbul Bilgi University in 2013. The students became apprentices and worked in the workshops as a part of the studio. Being in relation with the craft process, they observed and understand it from inside and represented their experience within different mediums (2013) [Figure 9a-b]. By this action, the design education system has tried to be part of the craft network with its unique knowhow and experience. Students became a part of the real and everyday life of the craft and design process.



Figure 9a-b. Design Studio, 'The Material Diary'. Photo by Gizem Alemdar from the blog

Made in Şişhane Project has realised and still continues to create actions to foster a bottom-up approach and it tries to intervene in the existing transformation process. The project believes in the importance of participation at the local level and creating micro-acts as part of urban development. All its actions are realised creatively and an emphasis is placed on learning from the experience. The project opens a discussion about safeguarding the craft neighbourhood and what methods can be used, and it also searches for new design approaches which are related to the development of the craft neighbourhood and its processes.

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