

MICRO-NETWORKS OF ISTANBUL'S STREETS

Led by Phu Hoang

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Istanbul, Turkey



The “Micro-Networks of Istanbul’s Streets” workshop will research and reveal the urban identity of Tophane, a dynamic neighborhood in Istanbul that includes the GSAPP’s Studio-X facility. The neighborhood—home to Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Roma and Muslim immigrants—has historically had a multiethnic composition. Embedded within this multicultural mix are street-based micro-scale economic networks essential to Tophane’s everyday life. These networks exist beneath the surface but are integral to the neighborhood’s everyday life and identity, from corner shops (bakkal) that sell goods to residents using buckets lowered from above to semiclandestine urban recycling networks to the extensive community of food cart hawkers. With support from Studio-X Istanbul, the workshop will ask students to conduct “live research” of the micro-scale urban networks in Tophane through video interviews, research diagrams, and design drawings. Their research will generate proposals for design interventions in the micro-networks, which will be similarly small-scale and will imagine possible futures as Tophane transforms with the rest of the city. Both the research and design proposals will be exhibited in Studio-X Istanbul and will become part of a workshop publication.

Tophane is one of the last neighborhoods in the Beyoglu district to undergo the government's program of "urban renewal." This program, which is essentially state-mandated gentrification, has transformed many of the historic and diverse neighborhoods of Istanbul in an effort to make the city more "global." The embedded micro-networks that the workshop will research are not entirely unique to Tophane—but they have mostly disappeared from the neighborhoods of Tarlabasi, Karakoy and Galata. Tophane is unique in that its process of "urban renewal" is not wholly driven from top-down state forces and is funded by a mix of state, cultural, NGO, and private investors. As such, Tophane represents an alternative future for the overall development of Istanbul, in which local residents and their micro-networks in the street have the opportunity to transform along with their neighborhood.

The "Micro-Networks of Istanbul's Streets" workshop will be a combination of "live research" conducted in the streets of Tophane, walking tours with local experts, and presentations with several local institutions. Studio-X Istanbul will serve as the workshop's studio space, guest presentation area, and exhibition space. Selva Gurdogan, the Director of Studio-X Istanbul, will also provide local insight and research instruction for the workshop. Concurrent events at Studio-X Istanbul, such as Mabel Wilson and Kadambari Baxi's "Who Builds Istanbul?" workshop, will offer students additional insight. Local cultural institutions will also be involved—specifically, the contemporary arts center SALT and the NGO art space DEPO. Local architects and urban researchers will participate in discussions of the workshop's design research. Finally, "experts" in the street, like the neighborhood representatives (muhtar), coffeehouse owners (kahvehane), and even the local baker, will be interviewed to learn about their respective micro-networks. By focusing on the micro-networks of Tophane, the workshop will highlight the importance of engaging diverse local communities as many global cities undergo massive "urban renewal."

The workshop will be conducted in collaboration with:

Selva Gurdogan, Director, Studio-X Istanbul
Pelin Tan, Professor, Mardin Artuklu University
Meric Oner, Curator, SALT Institute
Asli Cetinkaya, Curator, DEPO
Alexis Sanal, Architect, SanalArc
Yasar Adanali, Urban Researcher

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