

More Phenomenology Less Visual: A Haptic Narrative and a Proposed Haptic 'Sensemarks' Database of Istiklal Street, Istanbul

Asiye Kartal^{1 a}¹ Architecture and Built Environment Department, University of Nottingham

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Over the years, Istanbul's urban places have changed gradually. Istanbul has gone through neoliberal goals and globalisation-based problems, and all of them improved and altered the urban faces in the city. Istiklal Street, a pedestrian way of Istanbul, has had distinctive qualifications that made it specific among the other places over the years. However, the transformation since the 1990s created dramatic physical changes in Istiklal Street. Meantime, some different variables impressed the intangible character of the area effectively besides the physical notions. Significantly, the haptic attributions of the Street have been influenced remarkably, and this motivated us to regard the haptic dimensions of the place. This research mainly asked how Istiklal Street's haptic characteristics come today. The haptic character of Istiklal Street has been issued to promote the distinctive haptic affordances of the urban places. The discussion here told us a haptic re-exploration was necessary to understand the Street's transformed sensory characteristics. The findings showed us that unique haptic characteristics of the Street are still visible. However, some new facades of the buildings have negatively influenced the authentic haptic characteristics of the Street. The study underlined that urban policies and practices need to consider the urban areas' texture, material, and graphic characteristics more efficiently and in new ways. In this paper, to make the Street's haptic intangible assessments visible and archivable, the possibility of designing a digital and online database was also discussed. The Street's haptic data would be promoted through this sustainable database. The Street's haptic dimensions would open new perspectives in design, architecture, and urban intangible heritage studies. The haptic data of Istiklal Street would provide us with significant affordances to see haptic-based conceptions of the area.

1. Phenomenology of the Haptic Modes of the Place

It is clear; an urban place is more than vision, and a phenomenological understanding needs attention to its intangible sensory dimensions beyond the visual. Haptic is the sense that is closely related to our ability to catch what our surrounding says. The haptic characteristics are the most trustful filtering and enhancing mechanism to understand the place's haptic modes. We know the discussions on the sensory properties of urban places are increasingly being considered. As the sensory experience should be understood as an embodied thinking (Pallasmaa, 2009), we may not comprehend our surroundings without sensory examinations. We know Istiklal Street has embodied highly problematic spatial situations; for years, the Street's tangible and intangible accumulations suffered. The valuable sen-

sory features related to its multicultural past, historical architectural elements, and cultural heritage components penetrated somehow. Many distinctive sensory modes have got risks losing their diversity; they started to be standardised. Nevertheless, some critical sensory elements are still distinguishable on the Street. Istiklal Street's sensory characteristics would be a multi-sensory body practice based on the perception and cognisance of the environment's sensory modes.

The haptic sensations play a vital if often overlooked, role in examining human and world interrelations. The streets are the key laboratories to search for haptic sensory experiences. Therefore, the haptic sensory experiences of the streets are crucial and worth being examined. A place is the product of complex processes; the experiential relationship between the place and user cannot be reduced to one-dimensional and visual examination. Phenomenology

^a **Asiye Nisa Kartal** is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Nottingham, Architecture and Built Environment Department. She qualified as an architect in Istanbul, Turkey. Her current research based on human and place relations. She investigates how people sense and experience urban places beyond vision. Kartal's PhD focuses on sensory perception and discusses the reflections of the physical transformations on the sensory qualities of urban places.

says a place is multi-sensorial. For the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, our body opens a world to us to approach things and people, so our body is our anchorage in a world (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 167). Merleau-Ponty defines the role of the body as the origin of the experience of place. According to him, we comprehend the world, things, and others through our body (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 182-185). For the notion of Merleau-Ponty, the body inhabits a place (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 172-175); by occupying a place, we capture the place, which based on our bodily experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 230-233). He says, “*we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body*” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 239). As we come to the ‘haptic experience’, the matters related to the haptic sensations issued in the literature; hapticity is considered synonymous with tactile sensations. It may refer primarily to the experience of touching the body. Haptic experience, moreover, provides information about an object’s surface, its consistency, and form. Accordingly, the urban places’ tactile experience refers to the potential of bodily relations within the environment (Diaconu, 2011). Unlike other senses, haptics enables us to modify and manipulate the world around us (McLaughlin et al., 2002). We cannot change our environment through hearing, seeing, smelling, or tasting, but we can do it through haptic body movements. Haptic perception involves connections between movement and touch (Millar, 2005), and this strong interaction reveals the importance of touch for experiencing the built environment (Herssens & Heylighen, 2012). Therefore, haptic perception goes far beyond visual-spatial perception and refers to a more complicated experience; it involves integrating many senses, such as touch, positional awareness, balance, and movement (O’Neill, 2006). Touching is the only sense that deals with the three-dimensional world as we experience it (Trejo, 2011); the haptic sense incorporates pressure, temperature, pain, and kinesthetic sensations. The haptic sensation is unlike any other sensory experiences as it may have the ability to alter the environment whilst perceiving it; this is not feasible in other senses such as hearing, seeing, smelling or tasting (Herssens & Heylighen, 2008; Vasilikou, 2016). The haptic system consists of the complex intermingling of subsystems with no specific ‘sense organ’; this cooperation turns the whole body into an active organ of perception (Dischinger, 2000). Through the sense of touch, we sense the shape of an object or place and its materiality, weight, resistance, temperature, and lack of it; we may not explore a site efficiently. All the senses are said to be extensions of the haptic sensations; for example, “sight detached from touch could not have any idea of distance, outness or profundity, nor consequently of space or body” (Pallasmaa, 2005). Imagining our surroundings is not possible without ever having felt the texture. Therefore, an urban place could be decoded well by haptic sensations as subscribed (Pallasmaa, 2005, p. 143). Contrary to the hegemony of visual understanding of urban areas, haptic experiences’ importance is essential. This research’s approach flows the idea that an urban place originates from visual and non-visual sensory experiences, and they combine the sensory character and distinctiveness of the site. Although the haptic approach has been still in its infancy, it can open a wide range of intimate understandings of the place.

2. The Changing Hapticity of Istiklal Street, Istanbul that Codes the Place

Istiklal Street has been probably the most popular and exciting part of Istanbul with its shops, restaurants, bars, museums, and bookshops. The area characterised by richness and profundity in terms of its history and cultural background (Ertep, 2009). We know the future of urban space based on its self-dynamism, but the latest actions have distorted some intimate hapticity levels in the area. As we know, people experience and judge places following how they sense. There is a mutual and inseparable relationship between sensory qualities and experiencing a place because a human body is a sensory organism and draws advantage from sensory attributes in the experiencing processing of urban areas. Therefore, seeing the haptic experience’s mediations would give us a new understanding of the place’s sensory characteristics. Istiklal Street is a crucial place for urban sensations in Istanbul; thus, it is a contested concept and summons different images and connotations for different audiences. It is also a paradigmatic place to see how the links between the inhabitants and place established, shaped, and reproduced. The Street witnessed the alterations of the socio-cultural structure, economic and political movements, law regulations, innovative transportation, and communication activities in Istanbul. The process resulted in a controversial modification of the distinctive sensory characteristics of the Street.

After the 1990s, many buildings restored, moved, converted, closed, and demolished. Many of them have been significant elements in terms of the qualitative value of Istiklal Street. The concretisation of the Taksim square, and the construction of the Demirören Shopping Mall, the apparent disregard of public interest in projects such as Narmanlı Han, the clearing out of the Cercle d’Orient building and demolition of the Emek Movie Theater, the forced relocation of İnci Patisserie and Robinson Crusoe bookstore, the closure of Rebul Pharmacy along with the evacuation of century-old second-hand bookseller Librairie de Péra located in Tünel square, of Kelebek corset shop and Rumeli arcade, the closing down of the City Theater, Muammer Karaca Cultural Center, and cinemas such as Alkazar, Emek and Sinpop became the most prominent markers of the transformation taking place. It has been Istiklal Street that ended up negatively influenced by all of this. In the immediate aftermath of the Gezi Protests in 2013, the Street could not retain its liveliness, and the 2016 coup attempt decreased tourists’ flow to Istiklal Street. The policies expedited tenants’ eviction combined with regulations on outdoor tables and chairs for restaurants and cafes. They caused young and upper-middle classes hanging out in Beyoğlu to shift towards Beşiktaş and Kadıköy instead. The further desertion of places on Istiklal Street resulted in the closure of many places that had become emblematic of the neighbourhood. This process brought about the Street’s unique, hybrid constitution’s rapid disintegration. The pictures from the good days on the Street dwindled. Istiklal Street has continued to be the only address despite this destruction of its identity and accumulated sensory experiences. A large segment of the society has criticised the changes in the area, unavoidably local voices raised. Except

for the field of academic talks, an enormous amount of discourses in social media showed that the multi-layered socio-cultural and architectural structure of Istiklal Street has been changing controversially (Adanalı, 2011a, 2011b; Güney, 2015; Tekin & Akgün Gültekin, 2017). We know nothing more certain than change helps ensure the continued viability of every human-made and natural system. In urban environments, the changes are seen as the lifeblood of economic, social, and political systems that underpin the built fabric that accommodates and facilitates activity, but how about the Street's intimate haptic modes?

This research stressed that the experiences of people in the Street are more than visual experiences. The urban perception is not only understood through the eyes; it is experienced through all the senses of our body as we move through the place and actively interact with it (Pallasmaa, 2005). The predominant sensory informant seems like the visual modality, but this approach may threaten the multi-sensory nature of the human-places interaction. Because the eye's dominating role gradually separates us from a sense of the world, we become spectators on a just visual journey (Theart, 2010). Although visual perception is the primary way of understanding urban places' experiences, the haptic sensations influence the experience and understand authentic and intimate relationships with the Street. This Street, as a composition comprising impressions from different sensory spheres that continuously overlap and complement each other. So, it can only be perceived as a dynamic multi-dimensional holistic, multi-sensorial medium. The Street's haptic senses mediate our interactions within the urban context through the body in a multi-sensorial way (Degen, 2010). The process of sensing the place goes beyond the visual impressions. Istiklal Street's sensory dimensions comprised many multi-sensory features, but hapticity has been the most critical element to shape the area's distinctiveness. The site was filled with late Ottoman-era buildings, mainly from the 19th and early 20th centuries; the buildings have had distinctive architectural styles; therefore, the Street has a recognisable haptic characteristic.

As the haptic transformers, the area witnessed a challenging process since the 1990s that directly influenced Istiklal Street's haptic appearance and sensations. The Street's haptic characteristics are mainly structured by historically and politically significant buildings such as churches, [synagogues](#), [mosques](#), and academic institutions and consulates by various nations. In terms of the haptic experiences of people, the Street has been converted into a new shaped hub. There have been many reasons. The changes in the area forced the identical shops to leave the Street. While the most distinctive facades have gone on the Street, such as Kelebek Corset Shop and Inci Patisserie, the restored or renovated buildings' facades remarkably transformed the textures haptic characteristics of the area. Many veteran theatres turned into hotels; some important bookstores have abandoned the Street. The exterior design of the buildings followed the new functions of the buildings. Unavoidably new facades of the buildings have risked the area's haptic characteristics; as Tuan says, "touch is the sense least susceptible to deception and hence the one in which we tend to put the most trust" (Tuan, 1993, p. 45). We

know Istiklal Street has hosted many passages with various characteristics; these passages have offered different social frequencies and configurations in terms of the usage patterns; specifically, the arcades about the main Street have attracted the users of the place. The strong immediate link between the body and the built environment that the haptic sensations of the place (Vasilikou, 2016) damaged in the area. The Street's haptic characteristic has been normally compiled by the hanging stuff such as dresses, huts, and paintings to get the pedestrians' attention. However, the latest interferences have changed Istiklal's passages' authentic characteristics as they converted into the service places of shop stores and hotels. Istiklal Street afforded many local and tourists opportunities to see the street arts; the inhabitants and shop owners have been very tolerant of artists. In some case, cafes have preferred drawings as a background for their outdoor seating areas. People could share their feelings, their anger, their love and their beliefs with people through the walls' surfaces on the area. So, many graffiti works on the walls as one important part of the Street's texture. The colourful surprises of artworks and images awaited pedestrians on the old walls. They accompanied people as they walked along; this had made it hard to imagine the walls without it. However, the latest renovation process created pure surfaces without any sign of artworks. As the haptic experiences form an intimate sense that conveys messages of the built environments, the newly renovated and restored surfaces could not tell us the buildings' story. As one of the other issues on the haptic characteristics of the area, we need to mention that traffic has been taken down as a part of the region's urban renewal project at the beginning of Istiklal Street in 2013. In 2014, the iconic Taksim Square transformed into a pedestrian area, and the entire area paved by mostly concrete and granite materials. We witnessed the haptic engagements with new objects on the Street allowed us to have less emotionally resonant experiences of our environment. Also, the Street's floor renovated and revamped in 2017, but a green plastic material has been laid on the ground beneath the tram. We are aware that various properties such as "smooth or rough, firm, or soft, matt or reflective, or absorbent, etc." may provide an affordance to identify the place's haptic qualities (Thibaud, 2011). However, the new outlook of the street flooring has not received positive feedback. In the area, globalisation has negatively affected the Street's haptic features; the Street has started to serve the advertisement concepts. Nearly every corner or even on the top of stores designed as branding places such as huge billboards to attract people to shopping. Due to new regulations, nearly all the signboards of stores on the Street started to look nearly similar. All of them resulted in the situation that the local ones have left their facade coverings and signboards. While the colours, forms, and textures have started to be similar, the Street's haptic qualities damaged by the non-specific and non-identifiable features. Our haptic perceptions embrace the sensory interrelations of our eyes, ears, and limbs. It extends our embodied spatial perception, which is simultaneously conducted by our vision, hearing and touch. Therefore, haptic qualities may reflect off the Street's weight, density, temperature qualities. As the Street's haptic features altered following the renovations

and marketing actions, we see nearly all haptic components from the facades to the iconic tramway changed somehow. The planning approach is not considered the local and non-local people's preferences, the cosmopolite structure, and the intangible elements damaged with the Street's distinctive haptic composition.

3. The Losing Intimacy in the Street's Haptic Characteristics

This research followed the idea that the intimate role of the haptic sense between the user and place is an undeniable phenomenological fact that deserves to look at as much as possible. It is crucially worthwhile to see the place with a perspective that would be more phenomenology, less visual. The outputs tell us the Street's old and historical buildings have got distinctive outlook and haptic traits. The surface characteristics of the building facades on the area have been eroded and neglected. The annoying presence of the construction stuff above the buildings' faces notably expanded. This situation has related to the wrong implementations of the renovation or restoration procedures in the area. The effects of globalisation-oriented urbanisation have been dangerously visible in the Street's haptic identity. The historical buildings are the essential agents of the Street's haptic presentation. Istiklal Street's haptic features showed us our haptic bodily choices on the environment's texture, material, and graphic sides. The overall result could say the construction works visibly expanded on the area; also, several neglected and damaged pieces of buildings' facades. The lovely Street art examples have gone somehow, whereas the artworks on the walls have been a part of the pedestrian's walking tour on the Street. The outdoor advertisements and big posters started to dominate the facades' representation of the area. However, the unique haptic characteristics -which belong to the Street's old and historic buildings- are still distinguishable among other haptic elements of the Street. The unique facades and texture, material, graphic characteristics of the Street need to be considered more efficient policies and practices.

Exploring Istiklal Street through the haptic experiences has been a way of attending to distinctive sensory features of a place and making an explicit connection with it, communicating with the area in which we live. The Street's hapticity- that we perceive- has spread information about our surroundings back to us. We have known this Street through our haptic perception; our senses have played an essential part in this process. Istiklal Street's urban environment shaped by many elements influencing each other is a heterogeneous system characterised by a mix of multi-sensory features. Hence, a haptic sensation is a perceptive apparatus naturally intertwined with the surroundings (Signorelli, 2015). We continually expose ourselves to the imposition of haptic sensory-scapes that are intertwined and perceived simultaneously; that is why the changing intimate role of hapticity in the area creates many debates.

4. The Proposed Haptic 'Sensemarks' Database of Istiklal Street and its Possible Contributions

Here, we offered to develop a future proposal to turn Is-

tiklal Street's haptic findings into a more sustainable version. This database would be open to the contributions of the users of the Street. The Street's users may upload their individual identified haptic Street's Sensemarks to this database after visiting the area. They may share their haptic sensory experiences on the Street, which they would have previously recorded using technological recording devices. This digital and online database would be a sustainable, sensory qualities archive of Istiklal Street. So, Istiklal Street's haptic sensory experiences would be converted into a 'Sensemarks' archive. Istiklal Street's present and future haptic Sensemarks would be reachable, transferable, and sustainable through the Street's haptic sensory database.

We are aware that the non-visual-centric information about the users' sensory qualities would help overcome the lack of understanding about how people experience the places. The information -which would be gained through the proposed database- would mainly contribute to the knowledge of human and place interactions. We know all the outputs on 'how people sense and experience the place with their haptic sensory qualities' would be worthy in urban design studies, arts, architecture. This database would have a sensory perspective to discover the Street's haptic Sensemarks, so creating attention to Street's environments' haptic features would be possible. The design approaches of the Street's environments would be enriched. The database may create new motivation points on the decision-making processes of the Street. Accordingly, the new urban guidelines would be possible about the haptic sensory features of the Street. In the future, the policies may be improved through the achieved information on the Street's haptic environment.

The database's reflections may also affect the architects, designers, or policymakers; they may benefit from this data on the Street's haptic sensory features. The urban places' haptic features' data would be productive to comprehend new design probabilities, principles, or conceptions. The detections would contribute to the knowledge of architecture, design, sensory urbanism, and heritage studies.

5. As a Conclusion

We know how 'how people sense and experience the urban places' is crucial for urban ethnography, urban anthropology, and urban sociology besides urban studies and architecture disciplines. The haptic sides of the urban area have a crucial position in examining human and world interrelations. In our everyday life, different sensory compositions are integral parts of our environments. Therefore, employing a haptic based approach to study the urban environments we interact with (Pallasmaa, 2005) would be necessary and worthy. Istiklal Street is an important place for Istanbul's history, tangible and intangible heritage, cultural memory, social and community life. Istiklal Street's matters touch the fields of architecture, urban sensory studies, and intangible heritage studies.

The haptic experience should be understood as an embodied thinking (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 107). We may not imagine our surroundings without ever having felt the texture of wood, the temperature of steel, the sharpness of a corner, the verticality of a wall, or without ever having

moved on a ramp (Herssens & Heylighen, 2008). Istiklal Street's haptic characteristics could be read as an extension of our multi-sensory body practices that filter and enhance the environment's haptic modes. We know the area has embodied highly problematic spatial situations. For years, the haptic accumulations of the Street suffered. The valuable haptic features -that link the area to its multicultural past, historic architectural and cultural heritage elements -penetrated in some ways. Many haptic modes have got risks losing their diversity; they started to be homogenised. However, the essential haptic elements are still distinguishable on the Street. Therefore, it may be integrated carefully with the further design applications; the policies and practices may consider the Street's texture, material, and graphic characteristics in more efficient ways. This kind of narratives would create a short - circuit between our perception of vision and sense of touch to support the haptic modes and probabilities on the Street.

The proposed database about Istiklal Street would be worthwhile in terms of many points. Firstly, this database would make public the users' haptic experiences of the Street. The sustainable and archivable data on the Street's haptic features would create new points on the place's haptic characteristics. The new discussion would be possible in architecture, urban design, and intangible heritage about the urban places' haptic sensory experiences' data.

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