

Galata Bridge as a physical and social construct in the collective memory of Istanbul residents

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The city of Istanbul has a unique geographical location. The Bosphorus separates the European and Asian sides of the city, and the central parts of the European side of the city are further divided by the Golden Horn, a drowned estuary forming the northern flank of the Historic Peninsula. Here, the Greek and Roman cities of Byzantium and Constantinople flourished before the Ottoman conquest of 1453. A few decades later the idea of establishing a fixed link between the Historic Peninsula and the Galata district led to Leonardo da Vinci being asked to design a bridge. His bold design must have given the Sultan pause for thought however, and the bridge was not built.

The first three bridges to be built were the product of the rapid commercial and cultural expansion of the Galata and Pera districts, and were in use on the same site between 1845-63, 1863-75, and 1875-1912. The fourth, built by Germans, lasted 80 years until it was destroyed by a fire in one of the shops located under the roadway. During these years, this bridge had its own special place in the collective memory of locally-born Istanbulites, through various films, paintings, photographs, novels and poems. The fifth and last was completed in 1994, and has been in use since then.

Both ends of the Galata Bridge offer vistas of very important architectural monuments. Standing on one side it is possible to view historic landmarks such as Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sophia, Suleymaniye, and the old Spice Market. From the other side, the imposing Galata Tower, the Golden Horn and the first Bosphorus Bridge also stand out. This very distinctive and multi-functional crossing, 490 meters in length, is used by pedestrians, vehicles, and the city's most important tram-line, as well as supporting dozens of restaurants, and hundreds of anglers, commuters, and sightseers. It remains at the very heart of the city.

The aim of this paper is to assess the diverse roles of this iconic bridge in the lives of Istanbul residents and foreign visitors, as a continuing and developing social and physical construct, through analysis of written and visual materials, as well as from in-depth interviews with its very diverse range of users.