

RECONSTRUCTING THE PLACE MEMORY OF BUCA LEVANTINE SETTLEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The “Old Buca” (Izmir), a designated Urban Conservation Site, holds a significant place in history as originally it was one of the Levantine settlements of the late Ottoman Empire. Historically, Buca (Boudja) environs was a fertile area with vast vineyards, where a Greek village was once located. Then it became a summer resort of the Levantine families. Following the railway construction connecting the port of Izmir (Smyrna) to the city’s countryside in early 1860s, a rail line extension to Buca speeded up more Levantine families settling in Buca that made it into a commuter suburb (banlieue). Largely residential use of two storey houses within gardens, together with some religious facilities of a monastery, a bishop school, a nuns’ school and dormitories as well as churches, dominated the district originally. Later, the Levantine inhabitants were largely replaced by Turkish population. Although only very few Levantine families remained in Buca and some of the Levantine Mansions and religious facilities have been replaced with new uses, the neighborhood still has considerable number of Levantine heritage in good state.

There are several studies on “Old Buca” pointing out the architectural characteristics of the individual Levantine mansions, but this paper claims its significance as a historic district which derives from its spirit of place. Even today, when one steps into the Buca Historic District, it is easy to grasp a particular ambience and a significant sense of place that derives from its rich history. Although new users and some new uses had been introduced into the area throughout time, rich historic traces are still present in the urban fabric and layout of the streets, as well as in the memory of local people.

This study claims to rediscover the spirit of place and its significance as a historic district, while it anticipates to explore the discontinuities and interruptions in urban memory. This is achieved through an investigation of powerful signs (urban reminders) that are still embedded within its urban fabric, examination of city archives consisting of maps and aerial photography and pictorial resources, exploration of old street names, and locals’ memories, particularly remaining Levantines and elderly residing in the historic district over 60 years.

Keywords: Place memory, Levantine heritage, Spirit of place, Sensory memory

1. INTRODUCTION

Buca (Boudja), one of the Levantine settlements in Izmir is where the majority of the Levantine heritage still exists. I prefer to use the term *Old Buca* to define the historic fabric of original

village of Boudja. This area was designated as a Historic District in 1978, which was only 15 ha. and enlarged into 40 ha in 1986. Many layers of history and memory can be read throughout urban space of the *Old Buca*. Thus, this paper investigates the urban landscape of the *Old Buca* (Boudja) based on Hebbert's (2005) *Street as the Locus of Collective Memory*, and similarly, Mill's (2010) *Streets of Memory*, where everyday life takes place. Particularly, public grounds such as streets and open spaces in the urban memory is the subject of this research. I examined street pattern on historic maps of Buca. The earliest is Cadoux Map of 1834 (Fig. 3), and 1925 map of Buca (Fig.4), and more recent map of 1970s (Fig.9). I also interviewed a local news agent Tayfur Göçmenoğlu and examined his two published books on social life in Buca (2006; 2012), interviewed a Levantine descendant Andrew Simes, examined recollections, interviews and diaries by Levantine Heritage Foundation archives, searched through social media of Facebook closed group of Old Bucalılar and investigated related documentary movies. In this paper, I present initial insights and impressions that I gained from the study area as a result of beginning phase of an ongoing research. In the following pages, first I talk about place memory, then evolution of Boudja fabric, discontinuities and interruptions in place memory where I discuss the place memory reminders that don't exist anymore, and lastly living memories of Buca where I discuss the existing place memory reminders.

2. PLACE MEMORY

To Halbwachs (1992), who coined the term “collective memory”, urban space is a receptacle of collective memory. Nora (1989), developed notion of 'sites of memory', and drew attentions on memory that is spatially constituted. For Nora, memory is attached to 'sites' that are concrete and physical—the burial places, cathedrals, battlefields, prisons that embody tangible notions of the past—as well as to 'sites' that are non-material—the celebrations, spectacles and rituals that provide an aura of the past. Rossi (1982) also “looked for urban memory not in buildings but in the voids between them”. He argued that a city's street plan is “a primary element”...to unlock the secrets of their planform through the technique of morphological analysis...and , investigation of a town's plan can reveal its deep structure-`the soul of the city”... “a continual exploration of collective memory embodied in the street plan”. Hebbert (2005) discusses the role of streets and urban spaces, everyday settings, as a locus of collective memory. He says that streets whose collective memory is based on shared everyday experience and maybe even the name of that street is a local invention. To Lahiri (2011), urban memory has a sensuous character, and a shared sensory memory. He “situates urban memory in the body through an exploration of sensory remembrance” and “challenge the hegemony of the visual in favour of a multi-sensory approach...sensory urban practices remain emplaced and unique to each city, providing a rich source of cultural memory”.

3. BOUDJA: THE FLOWER VILLAGE

Historically, the *Old Buca* (Boudja) environs was a fertile area of Izmir (Smyrna) with vast vineyards, where several streams ran, and natural springs existed; also known as a place of fresh air and cool weather in Izmir's very hot and humid summer season. The *Old Buca* (Boudja) together with nearby Şirinyer was called Paradisso (Paradise) due to its natural beauty, over the Green River Valley (St Anne Valley), where the road connecting Boudja to Smyrna ran through. In the Byzantine period it was an inhabited area with rural houses, known as *Konchi*. It was a farming area in Roman period; and Forbes hill (1, Fig 9) holds remains from this period. Several refugee families from the Peloponnese and from the islands,

mainly Chios, were settled in the *Old Buca* (ΜΠΟΥΤΖΑΣ in Greek) in 18th century (Smyrnelis, 2016). Buca name was first seen on the French Consulate records when it moved to the *Old Buca* in 1688 (Gökdemir 2008).



Figure 1. Boudja (h), 19th Century, towards Tıngırtepe



Figure 2. Buca environs

It became a summer retreat of the British, Italian, and French Levantines (merchants-the beneficiaries of capitulations -economic and legal concessions) who preferred living during the hot and humid summers. Railway construction to connect port of Izmir to the city's fertile countryside in early 1860s and a railway extension to Buca in 1865 speeded up more Levantines to settle in Buca. In 1891 there were 2,603 inhabitants (Beyru, 2011) and the number increased to 4,000 in 1905 (Inal 2006). It expanded largely as a result of Turkish refugees settled on the skirts of Tıngırtepe (Fig. 9) following the Balkan wars in 1912-1913. The area was named Yaylacık Neighborhood (Upper Town) taking after where they came from (Erpi,1985).



Figure 3. Buca in 1834 (Beyru 2011)



Figure 4. Buca in 1925 (Atay 1998)

In this process, two major streets of so called Old Municipality Street (Today's Erdem Street (2, Fig. 9) and Kommenler Boulevard (Today Uğur Mumcu Street) (3, Fig. 9) were developed. The former divided the settlement into two quarters: Upper Town and Lower Town. Based on the construction dates of the buildings, it can be said that the settlement emerged from the north towards the south (Bırol 2004; Erpi 1987). From the layout of the settlement the irregular (distorted grid) streets in the Upper Town changes into a more regular grid pattern in the Lower Town. Towards the south, the grid changes again into a fan like form most possibly following the old beds of the creeks coming from the hills to the north. To the south of the designated historic area, the street followed the old stream bed buried today (4, Fig.9) in which the inhabitants associate several childhood memories of swimming.



Figure 5. Fardi Street (Erdem Street)



Figure 6. Station Street (Uğur Mumcu St)

Largely residential use of two storey houses within spacious gardens and lush greenery dominated the historic district originally. Additionally, there was a concentration of religious facilities including a Capucins (the Orient) Monastery, also known as L'Istituto Apostolico d'Oriente di Buca (Buca French Girls School) (Inal 2006) (5, Fig.9); a Catholic nuns' school, The 'Notre Dame des Anges' or 'Filles de la Charité' (1850-1936) (6, Fig.9) (Kararas, 1962); and nuns' dormitories (7, Fig.9) are mainly located in the geographical center of the designated historic district. There were three Greek Orthodox Churches (Agios Ioannis Prodromos, in the Upper Town, built in 1796; only the front door remained (8, Fig.9); Evangelismos Theotokou in the Lower town, built in 1903, only gates remain (9, Fig.9); Agios Ioannis Apokefalistheis (Beheaded) (10, Fig.9), in Üçkuyular (Tria Pigadia) Neighborhood (11, Fig.9) , built in 1865, only some parts remaining at Buca High School; and one Catholic and one Protestant Churches and three Cemeteries. Today, only two churches exist: the Roman Catholic (12, Fig.9) and Saint John the Baptist (DOM) (13, Fig.9), Lower Town, built in 1840, and Anglican, All Saints, on Erdem Street, built in 1865. There was also a Bishop guesthouse (14, Fig.9) that was annexed and used as an apartment building currently.



Figure 7. Capucins Monastery



Figure 8. Saint John the Baptist (DOM)

The Station Street (Today's Uğur Mumcu St) included the train station (15, Fig.9), the old municipality building (Farkoh Mansion) (16, Fig.9), and commercial activities. Later, the 83rd street (17, Fig.9), connecting the train station towards Üçkuyular (Tria Pigadia) Neighborhood, also constituted the commercial section of the settlement on which small shops of locally produced goods such as dairy, custom made shoes, tailor, butcher, and coffee houses are located (Yanikkahveler district) (18, Fig.9). Even an original wood run bakery and wrought iron atelier still function today in the vicinity. To the south, an open space called Pine Tree (19, Fig.9) was the place for public celebrations such as religious and official festivals. The

Aliotti Mansion had very large grounds which became a park Hasanağa Garden (20, Fig.9) today. This was where the *Old Buca* (Boudja) ended and agricultural fields started.

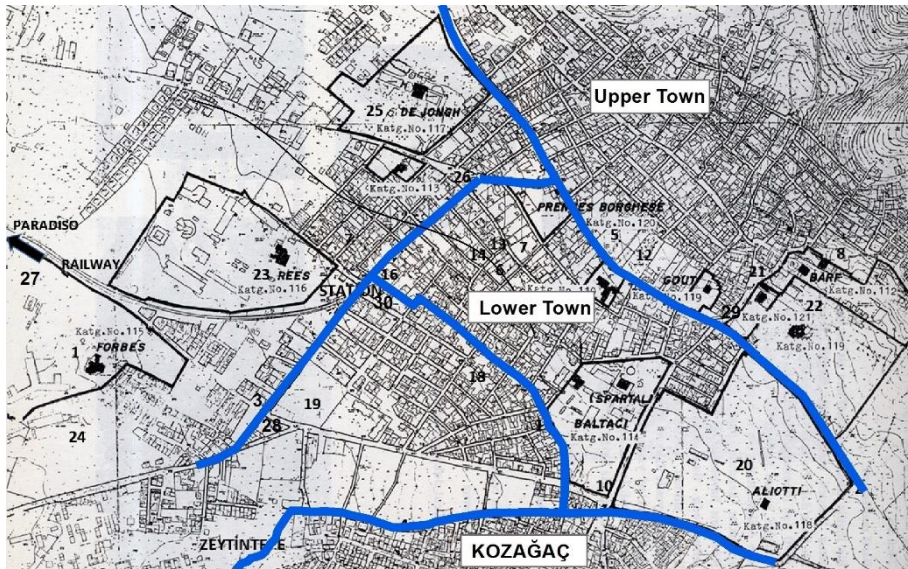


Figure 9. Buca in 1970s (Modified from Erpi, 1987, p.135)

In addition to trade, Levantines initiated activities such as horse races, golfing, playing tennis, bike and boat races. They established a Tennis club (later called Good Air Club) to the south of De Jongh estate (25, Fig.9). A race track, later a hipodrome, was established in Paradisso for horse races (Fig.11-12). A race was organised in honor of the Ottoman Sultan Abdullaziz in 1863, then it became an annual event. The Nine Fountains monument was erected in the Upper Town in honor of Sultan Abdullaziz. An American College was also constructed nearby in 1914 (Fig. 13). The grounds near the Roman aqueducts were also preferred for social outings due to natural beauty, the reason for to be called Paradisso/Paradise (Fig.10)



Figure 10. Excursion near aqueducts, Paradisso



Figure 11. Hipodrome, Paradisso

The majority of the Levantines left Boudja following Turkish Independence War in 1922. Following domestic migration from rural areas to cities in 1950s caused Buca to expand so that the *Old Buca* and Paradisso which are 2,5 km apart were connected. The pleasant countryside of vineyards and agricultural lands were replaced by multi-storey residential development (Erpi, 1985). Open air cinemas were established where old buildings were

cleared out. Additionally, development of Dokuz Eylul University (DEU) in Dokuzçeşmeler (21, Fig.9) to the north east of Buca Historic District in 1982 is another reason for the *Old Buca* to expand extensively.

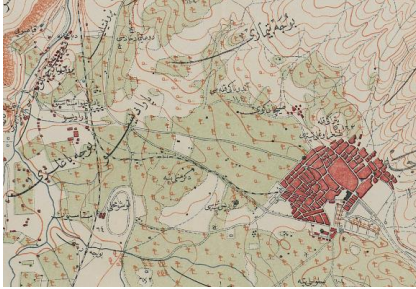


Figure 12. Location of hipodrome



Figure 13. American College in the background

4. DISCONTINUITIES AND INTERRUPTIONS IN BUCA PLACE MEMORY

Here I discuss the place memory reminders that don't exist anymore as discontinuity and interruption in Buca's place memory in two groups of tangibles and intangibles. First, I want to talk about a crucial milestone in the *Old Buca's* evolution which was the major discontinuity and interruption in its history. It is the population exchange occurred following Izmir's Independence War (1922). Once home to a population of multicultural tradesmen of Smyrna, the area was replaced by the Turkish refugees from Balkans. Thus, the most significant discontinuity occurred when the Levantines left the *Old Buca*. They were the ones who constructed this cultural landscape in accordance with their life styles, habits and rituals. Life in Buca after the 1922 population exchange has changed drastically. Newcomers only knew how to grow tobacco so they grew tobacco in Buca instead of vineyards and Tekel Tobacco Building (24, Fig.9) was constructed within the vicinity of Forbes Mansion.

4.1. Tangibles

Geographical features nearby such as streams and creeks, vineyards and trees on the streets don't exist anymore. Streams are buried under concrete/asphalt streets. Bridges were either removed as they became dysfunctional or treated as monuments as in Hasanağa Garden. Fields and hills (Tingirtepe, Zeyintepe) surrounding the *Old Buca* are covered or surrounded by multi-storey buildings.

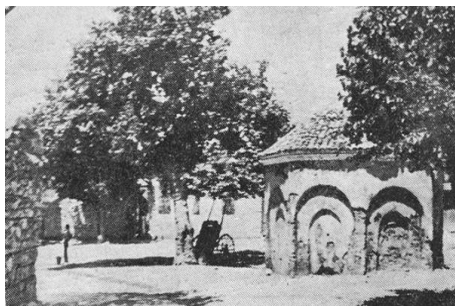


Figure 14. Nine Fountains monument



Figure 15. Nine Fountains today

Related to the built environment, there is high volume and noisy traffic on major streets surrounding the historic district, and sharp increase in building heights and masses within the historic zone due to a smaller historic district designation in 1978. The street level was risen due to new layers of pavement. Even for some historic buildings, parts of the basement windows stayed below road level, and steps had to be built around the Nine Fountains monument (21, Fig.9). Street fountains were removed, several open air cinemas (27, Fig.9) were replaced with buildings or being used for wedding ceremonies. The Train Station and railway, the main reason of Buca to become a town from a village and which was a meeting point and entertainment place (Göçmenoğlu 2006), became dysfunctional due to new metro lines. Thus, an important memory reminder has become dysfunctional and created a significant loss in place memory.

Changes in morphology:

a. Changes in streetscape and network: In general traces of historic street network within the original settlement and connections to Izmir still exist. However, the street widths were enlarged on historic Erdem and Uğur Mumcu Streets that surround the historic area as well as some minor streets within the district. A dead-end street was opened up for better connection (24, Fig.4). With the addition of five-storey buildings along the widened Erdem Street the streetscape has changed drastically. Characteristic Mulberry trees have been cut off, and historic pavement of the streets were paved over by asphalt.



Figure 16. Erdem Street before



Figure 17. Erdem Street now

b. Changes in plot sizes and increased building mass: Some large plots were divided into smaller size plots in accordance with the former Conservation Plan of 1997. As a result of quite small historic zone designation in 1978, number of stories increased, larger footprints occurred by additions or reconstructions, and additional new buildings were constructed in large plots even within the historic area.

Changes in land use:

Buildings on major Erdem and Uğur Mumcu Streets have adopted educational uses, and some cafes and restaurants. Within the historic district residential buildings became student hostels due to DEU campus and a few day care centers. Public buses run on the two major streets Erdem and Uğur Mumcu of surrounding the historic zone and present a short glimpse of human scaled, green and unique environment inside. The tennis club (Good Air Club) was also replaced with a multi-storey apartment building. Multi-storey buildings or wedding saloons also replaced the open air cinemas. Out of five churches only two remain today. One church was replaced with a mosque, nuns' school was replaced by another school, and one nuns' dormitory became a house. Another characteristic in the past there were several farms with

mill towers called Koulaades surrounding the historic district. “The best known was the Koula of the English priest (27, Fig.9) –the converted windmill house of Rev. Ashe and that of Hadjiantoni”, both still exist. The Koula was once a functioning mill, then a summer house, and finally it is turned into a monument within a park design. (www.levantineheritage.com). The pine tree area, became a football field as well as a festival ground, but has become dysfunctional lately.



Figure 18. The old mill (Koula) before



Figure 19. The old mill today

The Farkoh Mansion, served as the Buca Municipality between 1925 and 2000 and now has been altered to serve as the district’s library and cultural center. The number of artisans and craftsmen and traditional small shops decreased on Uzun Street/83rd Street. Home vine making disappeared, the wine cellars at basements are used for other purposes, as well as the statue of a grape selling girl was removed. Once very popular, the open air cinemas were closed later as well.



Figure 20. Hadjiantoni Koula



Figure 21. The old Bridge in Hasanağa Garden

At the All Saints Church, another significant heritage and memory place is the ancient cemetery where many Levantine families rest for years. However, when the building was used by the Municipality as a Culture Center, part of the cemetery was turned into a parking area and basketball field. For Levantine descendants who live in Izmir or who visits this has been very saddening (Personal interview with Andrew Simes on 06.01.2017).

4.2. Intangibles

Here I discuss Nora’s (1989) non-material sites of celebration, spectacle and ritual in Boudja. Levantines used to have tea parties at home and in their gardens, played theaters (Paradisos Theater), raced horses in Hippodrome at Paradiso, played tennis at the Tennis Club to the south of De Jongh Estate (25, Fig.9), and golf on flat area near Forbes estate; and went for outings to nearby Paradiso, Kozagac, and Pinarbasi. The Tennis Club has become the Good Air Club

later in 20th cc. where weddings, and Christmas parties took place. Later occupants remember swimming in the streams, tasting the water out of natural springs, harvesting locally grown grapes and figs, signs of connecting with the material world in enjoyment and pleasure. Their nearby pleasure grounds for outings/excursions such as picnics, hidirellez (easter) included Zeytintepe, Koşu Tepesi, Kızılcıllu (Şirinyer), and Meles Stream. Buca of their childhood is remembered through an embodied sense of place. Train Station used to be a popular entertainment area (Göçmenoğlu 2006), and once very popular in 1970s, the open air cinemas were closed off later as well.

Based on Lahiri's notion of sensory memory (2011) and sensescapes (tastescapes, smellscapes and soundscapes), there are many tastes, smells, and sounds associated with Boudja that do not exist anymore. They include: taste of grapes, figs, mulberry; sound of running water in creeks, horseshoe sounds on the streets, whistle of the steam train, church bells, later street vendors, working ironmonger and carpenter; smell of the steam train smoke, scents of trees on the streets, and harvested crops from the fields. Locally made Green Buca brand soft drink (Yeşil Buca Gazozu) disappeared.

Renaming the streets and urban districts created a significant loss of place memory. Street and district names present a version of the past in the present urban landscape. Paradiso has been changed into first Kızılcıllu and then Şirinyer. İzmir Street was changed into Menderes Street. Erdem Street was former Municipality Street, (KAIP Report, Gökdemir, Birol, Baltazzi), originally it was called Fardi Street -the main street (Kararas 1962) (<http://www.levantineheritage.com/note41.htm>), was also called Fatih Street (Göçmenoğlu, 2012). Uğur Mumcu Street was originally Kommenler (Göçmenoğlu, 2012) or the Odos Komninon, Station Street (<http://www.levantineheritage.com>), Spartalıyan Boulevard/The Boulevard, and Atadan, in order. The 83rd Street was Uzun Sokak (KAIP Report, Gökdemir, and Birol). The only street that kept its original name is Dutlu (Mulberry) Street. Today's Butchers Street (Kasaplar Sokağı) was used to be called Creek Road (Çay Sokağı) since there was a creek running down towards Heykel Square (26, Fig.9) to the channel joining Meles Stream (Göçmenoğlu 2006). Heykel, Çevik Bir (28, Fig.9) and Asparuk Squares (29, Fig.9) are more recent public areas that represent a recent layer of memory.

5. LIVING MEMORIES OF BUCA

These are the place memory reminders that still exist, in addition to the several registered historic buildings. They are memories/memory reminders that continue across years such as old tastes, friendship, playing games, shopping culture and goods and so on. A common interest across generations continue in Buca. Levantines gave importance and had initiated sports activities. Today local football Club BucaSpor and neighborhood football clubs are still essential and popular. Levantine Football team does still play football. However, the long used football field is not being used anymore. Similarly, Hippodrome and horse races still continue, even though not so significant as it was in the 19th cc.

Some preserved district names include Yaylacık Neighborhood to the north named after the village the refugees came from. The district name of Koşu, Koşu Road, and Kosu Hill takes after the horse races initiated by the Levantines; Üçkuyular (originally Tria Pigadia/Three Wells) district name; Dokuzçeşmeler (Nine fountains) district name; Vali Rahmi Bey Neighborhood name (Governor during the Levantines period). Once a characteristic, the mulberry trees on the *Old Buca's* streets continue to live on the only preserved street name Dutlu Street (30, Fig.9).

A tastescape, Çapa Restaurant, still proudly lives on the Station Street. The Pharmacy on the corner of Heykel Square stands there bearing witness to passing time. The long grown, distinctive grapes of Buca live on the logo of the local municipality, and local football club (Buca Spor), and even on the pattern of the train station courtyard mosaic. *Greenness* of Buca owes to the Levantines although at a lesser degree. Levantine Theater and football club still goes on, though not in Buca. The All Saints Church is open and welcomes anyone. Once used as a cultural center and wedding saloon it continues its relation with new users. On the contrary the DOM Church is well surveillanced and isolated.

Other elements of memory reminders include the historic mark on the store shutter, Rodos mosaics on floors, figures on the iron works of garden gates or front doors, iron doorknockers, a metal garden door (117 Street, No:8) with a fire insurance plaque of the London & Lancashire Company and so on. Because the streams are buried, bridges act as urban reminders of place memory like the one in Hasanağa Garden.



Figure 21. Train station mosaics



Figure 22. Fire insurance plaque on a door

6. CONCLUSION: *Presence of the past*

Historic urban areas are living evidence of the past that constructed them. The history of a town is written in its fabric, which is the result of an accumulation of building or rebuilding. This paper has presented initial findings of the many layers of memory that have been embedded into urban spaces and sensescapes of the *Old Buca*. Although several historic buildings still exist there are some discontinuities and interruptions in the memory of the *Old Buca*. Major changes in (physical or) social environment can cause urban discontinuities and urban memory loss. The most significant discontinuity occurred when the Levantines left the *Old Buca*. They were the ones who constructed this cultural landscape in accordance with their way of life and rituals. However, they vanished. Following the population exchange after the Turkish Independence War, newcomers moved into the buildings that Greek population left behind. Thus “a new history” started to be written and “new memories” were constructed by the newcomers. First Greek refugees from the islands, levantines, Turkish refugees from Balkans, and later domestic refugees had settled in the *Old Buca*. Thus, there is no shared memory of the past which would work as a bonding element to create a cohesive group identity in place. However, what is common among the different occupants is that they all are immigrants. Other significant loss in place memory include lost community places including the dysfunctional train station, Good Air Club, no church congregation at DOM, and disappearance of a later use of open air cinemas.

Even though original settlers, the Levantines left, a sense of place can still be experienced in Buca today. Contemporary occupants embrace and are proud of the *Old Buca* since it is a unique place. I believe this is partly achieved by publicly used Levantine heritage (schools, parks) that still lives on. Particularly schools in Buca have played a significant role in creating awareness of place history across generations/inhabitants. Some of the state owned Levantine heritage that are used for educational purposes include Buca High School (Baltazzi Mansion), DEU Education School (Rees Mansion), Umurbey Elementary School, College of Health (De Jongh Mansion). Therefore new generations have the opportunity to learn, experience, and grow an interest towards local history. Schools are significant for people and school environments are never forgotten. This means recent occupiers of the *Old Buca* have created a new/contemporary collective memory that is shared and has a unifying character among several generations. Another publicly used Levantine heritage is Aliotti property that has become a public park called Hasanağa Garden, named after the Turkish landholder who purchased the Aliotti estate and later donated it to the municipality. Instead of calling it a park it is called garden as if it still belongs to a Buca family. There is a sense of ‘pride of place’: “We are from Buca” (“Biz Bucalıyız”) as it is written on the walls of the streets. Particularly, a sense of a small town where everybody knows the other (particularly Yaylacık, Yanıkkahveler, and Zeytintepe neighborhoods) still exist.

Some suggestions to reconstruct the place memory in Buca include renaming the streets of Buca with original ones. Street names such as the Old Municipality Street and the Station Street should be kept as a memory reminder to pass on to the new occupants of residents or visitors. The Pine tree area should be rearranged for public gatherings and celebrations. Another suggestion is to place plaques on buildings, squares, streets and parks to give information of history as they are the memory reminders. For example Hasanağa Garden can have a plaque declaring it was originally Aliotti property. The train station needs to be reused. The 5.18 train to Buca lives in the title of a book by Göçmenoğlu, and a local cafe as well. However, the train station, railway, and particularly inhabitants of Buca are waiting for the next train to arrive. In spite of some major losses, all mentioned existing place memory elements contribute the *Old Buca* so that it is a lively and thriving neighborhood with small town feeling even today.

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