

MULTIPLICITY, THRESHOLDS, AND INACTIVITY. COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO ON ANKARA'S ULUS MEYDANI, TÜRKIYE

MULTIPLICIDAD, UMBRALES E INACTIVIDAD. ESTUDIO DE ARQUITECTURA COLABORATIVA EN ULUS MEYDANI, ANKARA, TURQUÍA

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Abstract

This study explores the architectural and urban design strategies for revitalizing non-formalized open spaces within the historical context of former Ottoman cities, focusing on the Ulus central neighborhood in Ankara, Türkiye. Ulus Square served as a testing ground for a collaborative studio methodology conducted with third-year students in the Department of Architecture at Bilkent University. By examining the design studio's efforts to integrate various architectural languages amidst Ankara's eclectic/historicist backdrop, this paper highlights the complexities and opportunities in transforming Ulus Square into an 'active void'. The methodology we adopted involves reimagining these open spaces through a revised understanding of spatial analysis, departing from three key principles: favoring multiplicity over uniform solutions; designing public spaces as urban thresholds; and prioritizing inactivity over complex functional programs. We observed that the *charrette* format, moving from collaborative visions to individual tasks, was ideal for incrementing students' participation compared to more rigid studio structures experimented with in previous years.

Keywords

Design studio methodology, meydan, multiplicity, inactivity, threshold

Resumen

Este estudio explora las estrategias de diseño arquitectónico y urbano para revitalizar espacios abiertos no formalizados en el contexto histórico de las antiguas ciudades otomanas, centrándose en el céntrico barrio de Ulus, en

Ankara (Turquía). La plaza Ulus sirvió de campo de pruebas para una metodología de estudio colaborativo llevada a cabo con estudiantes de tercer curso del Departamento de Arquitectura de la Universidad de Bilkent. Al examinar los esfuerzos del estudio de diseño por integrar diversos lenguajes arquitectónicos en el ecléctico e historicista telón de fondo de Ankara, este artículo pone de relieve las complejidades y oportunidades de transformar la plaza Ulus en un 'vacío activo'. La metodología que adoptamos consiste en reimaginar estos espacios abiertos a través de una comprensión revisada del análisis espacial, partiendo de tres principios clave: favorecer la multiplicidad frente a las soluciones uniformes; diseñar los espacios públicos como umbrales urbanos; y priorizar la inactividad frente a programas funcionales complejos. Observamos que el formato de *charrette*, en el que se pasaba de visiones colaborativas a tareas individuales, era ideal para incrementar la participación de los estudiantes en comparación con las estructuras de estudio más rígidas experimentadas en años anteriores.

Palabras clave

metodología del estudio de diseño arquitectónico, meydan, multiplicidad, inactividad, umbral

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to investigate design tactics for informal open spaces in former Ottoman cities, with a specific focus on one of the landmark places in Ankara, Ulus central neighborhood. The core of Ulus, the *meydan*, is a typical open space of the Ottoman city, usually not geometrically defined, but rather divided into subspaces and connected through a system of semi-private patches mediated by urban thresholds. It is a cluster of diffused fragmented spaces. Ulus Meydanı is an area with a strong representative value, ranging from its district to the national history of Türkiye. Ideally, the research will contribute to the debate on the status of public spaces in Ulus (Akkar Ercan & Oya Memlük, 2015) and Türkiye in general. This case served as a test for an architecture studio's approach to address various architectural languages, in contrast to the ambiguous eclectic/historicist approach prevalent in Türkiye (Çeler, 2019). Furthermore, Ankara's status as a metropolitan municipality with increased financial and administrative autonomy is relatively new (Çörek Öztaş, 2021); as is its role as the nation's capital (Aytekin, 2022; Tankut, 1993). This has presented the challenge of representing a new national identity in the city's primary public spaces, particularly in the central area.

The article will first introduce the case of Ulus Meydani by considering its morphological and spatial qualities. Secondly, it will analyze the problems and challenges faced by a design studio in terms of design language, figurative implications, and programmatic functioning. Finally, the results of the design studio are presented with conclusions for their possible future adoption by other architecture courses.

Architecture schools are currently rethinking their educational approaches to align with research performance frameworks focused on quantitative criteria. This has sparked debate on the role of design studios in research institutions. The volume *Against and for Method* (Silberberger, 2021) provides a comprehensive panorama of the educational practices employed in Western Europe. In this spirit, we are also seeking new methodologies to experiment with in our context (Rossi et al., 2017).

The objective of this design studio was to develop a contemporary approach that preserves the neighborhood scale while remaining true to the historical context of a capital city. In this article, we aim to discuss the aesthetic and theoretical challenges commonly faced in such spaces, describe our design studio process in relation to a specific case study in Ankara, and share these uncertainties with our peers in

architectural education. The challenges we've tackled are prevalent across several mid-sized to large cities in Eastern Europe that have fallen under the sway of the Ottoman Empire. These urban areas, which have expanded with unplanned expansions over the past two centuries, are currently confronting the realities of a globalized society and its universal tastes. Today, the tension between the universal and the unique, jeopardized by a collective craving for novelty, is more present than ever.

LOCATION: FEAR THE CENTER

The Studio's core problem is that of designing on the edge of the central area of Ankara, where the public open space is rather fragmented. Characterized as a clearing in the built environment, Ulus poses the problem of an open-ended urban fabric that can be either clustered, completed, or kept open. For this reason, we will be highlighting how the traditional positive/negative space analysis can be re-elaborated in order to ultimately achieve 'active voids'. Such activation entails a space that is concave, allowing the visitor to establish a dialogue with the environment and the neighborhood as a whole. The concept was developed by Carlos Martí Arís (1999, p. 60) to describe how masterfully Jorge Oteiza shaped voids in his works, "Crea un espacio cóncavo, receptivo, permitiendo al espectador penetrar en la obra y entablar un diálogo con ella¹." The activation of a void by its enclosing planes, functional program, shape, and its relationship with light transforms an urban environment into an architectural interior. Along this line, Jean Cousin noted how such activation is not only an intrinsic quality of objects (geometry and material), but also a manifestation of humans that appropriate the surrounding space through their visual field, perceiving possible uses of it (Cousin, 1980).

The design potential of voids has also been interpreted in terms of possibilities by Ignasi de Solà-Morales and charged in-between by Alison and Peter Smithson (Benedito, 2023; Resta & Dicunzo, 2023).

Therefore, the overall picture is composed of a *meydan*, a non-formalized public space, surrounded and connected with small-scale urban subspaces. On the edge,

¹ "It creates a concave, receptive space, allowing the viewer to penetrate the work and enter into a dialogue with it."

where the transition occurs, we propose experimenting with design solutions departing from three theoretical problems: blending in an eclectic setting, designing on the threshold, and staging urban lingering.

Ulus central district as a case study

The neighborhood, commonly known as Ulus, holds great importance in the urban history of the capital city and is one of its most symbolic locations (Figure 1). The area varies significantly in elevation, with a gradient of approximately 25 meters from southwest to northeast. In Ottoman times, it was a strategic and crucial focus for urban life. This area is located at the base of a hill where the Seljuk citadel is situated (Figure 2-D). It consists of two distinct districts separated by a specialized street that descends from the citadel's slope. One of them was the commercial center of the city, with traditional trade buildings and warehouses, *han* and *bedesten* (Figure 2-B). It used to be a meeting place for foreigners who traded and negotiated goods, as they used to pitch their tents in a nearby field. The area around the open informal space known as *Tahtakale* is densely populated with buildings. The other district was the religious focus of the city. Clustered around the oldest mosque of the city, *Haci Bayram*, this place served as the sacred counterpart of the *Tahtakale*, bustling with commercial activities (Figure 2-C). These areas, consisting of *Haci Bayram* and the market district, together with the citadel, form the double-centered structure of the city in Ottoman time (Ayhan Koçyiğit, 2019). Both districts were situated on the western edge of the city walls. A street divided them, ending at the Istanbul Gate. In this urban junction, social, institutional, and religious activities took place (Hmood & Dişli, 2019). *Ulus* Square formed as a large open space situated between the outer edge of the historical city and a new area to be developed (Figure 2-A). In the nineteenth century, this junction was named *Taşhan* Square after the market building that overlooked the area. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the proclamation of Ankara as the new capital city, this space turned into the core of the new urban structure devised by German urban planner Hermann Jansen in 1932 (Avcı Hosanlı & Resta, 2021). Jansen inserted, right through *Taşhan* Square, the backbone of the new plan, Atatürk Boulevard. The area acquired a new meaning as the focus where the new capital was forged and represented. At the same time, it was a statement on the ultimate attempt to re-center the nation. Due to its symbolic charge, it was later named *Ulus Meydani*, Nation Square. As Çinar (2014) pointed out, the designation of this point as the Nation Square served to create a new sense of national belonging.

Several new buildings have shaped the *Ulus Meydani*'s current design. Impressive

façades highlight the shift between the old and new areas of the city. Particularly the 1927 equestrian statue of Atatürk, elevated on a podium (Figure 2, Figure 4); two buildings occupied by financial institutions, one designed by Giulio Mongeri (*İş bankası*, 1929) and the other by Martin Elsaesser (*Sümer Bank*, 1937); one office and market complex (*İş Hanı*, 1954) that incorporates the statue within a public terrace overlooking the square (Figure 2 - building 2, Figure 3, Figure 5). All these pieces are not integrated within a clear vision of a square that should represent the country (Avcı Hosanlı & Resta, 2021; Dizdaroglu, 2022). The aim of the studio is precisely that of making the city-scale *Ulus Meydani* interact with the surrounding neighborhood, integrating eclectic superimpositions, designed threshold conditions, and an open program for public spaces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MEYDAN AS A NON-FORMALIZED PUBLIC SPACE

Meydan is the Turkish name of an open public space that cannot be associated with the typical Western type of square. It has no specific spatial focus, or at least not only one, and it functions as a multipurpose platform for temporary uses. Usually, *meydans* were unenclosed, wide areas, located at the edges of urban settlements. Maurice Cerasi has extensively investigated the implications of these original features. According to him, *meydans* “were not architecturally designed, their margins were quite casual or simply enhanced by single monuments” (Cerasi, 1985, p. 37). As AlSayyad (1987, p. 109) pointed out, “Unlike Greek or Roman cities, large open public space is seldom observed in Muslim cities. The Maidan is not equivalent to the Agora or the Forum, and it did not perform the function of providing an arena for public gathering”. Additionally, the *meydan* functioned as a flexible area close to the entrance of the city, by the gates, where to organize camps or a makeshift marketplace, as seen with Ulus.

Whereas Ulus today is a central district in Ankara, in the eighteenth century, the *meydan* resulted from an open field that was enclosed by the third circuit of the city wall (Figure 1). The place was ideal for providing commercial activities and accommodation for foreigners (Ayhan Koçyiğit, 2019). In a city with multiple centers, it was one of the outer hubs connecting fragmented neighborhoods. In this case, Ulus served as a transition space since the beginning, marking a threshold where social and material negotiations happened. Its informality is also due to the lack of the concept of a street façade. *Kulliyes* and *konaks* buildings were usually not following the

alignments given to create a continuous urban scene, but rather positioned themselves independently from the street (Cerasi, 2005). In order to grasp an idea of the fragmentation of the area, we should consider that the residential neighborhood outside the castle was made up of around 81 scattered *mahalles* (organic residential environments) that were in themselves small communities with 25 to 35 households (Aktüre, 1989). Such fragmentation reflected a sub-level of living environments in which urban dwellers of the Ottoman cities formed decision-making communities (Demir, 2023). Moreover, in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman state attempted to resettle nomadic tribes around the city wall enclosing the residential area to create an additional buffer zone protecting the city (Aktüre, 1989, p. 73). In a way, this condition of abeyance of the urbanization process, which was mistaken for chaos by many Western travelers, was based on strict socio-economic mechanisms and generated the kind of dynamic open spaces that we associate with *meydans*. Being *mahalles* similar to independent urban villages, the *meydan* was a common ground in between those clusters.

Social and architectural aspects prevented the agglutination of Ottoman houses from being the motive for the formation of public space (Gasco & Resta, 2021). The plots and their enclosures were lined up along the street, but the position of the house within the plot was freely arranged according to the sun path, the topography, and the visual privacy of the neighbors (Cerasi, 1986). The garden area formerly used for the self-sustenance of the family was being increasingly eroded as society transitioned towards an urban lifestyle. In the late nineteenth century, as the empire declined, the population migrated and settled in vacant areas between existing buildings and in new adjacent neighborhoods, following a gridiron system.

Given the spatial qualities outlined above, how do we approach a design studio in a fragmented urban environment and resist the temptation to establish a new layout that would flatten the complexity of these spaces? A critical part of the problem is that of interpreting the margins of the public space. In a seminal essay, Evelina Calvi (1997) proposed a description of the possible features an architecture that shapes urban margins should have. In particular, she pointed out that it is essential to escape any standardized approach. And this is especially true, we maintain, in those eclectic contexts like Ulus. Moving from the main open space of the *meydan* to the subspaces at the margins, one can experience a dramatic change of scale, light condition, and materiality. A unifying, seamless architecture would inevitably contradict the visual porosity of the semi-private spaces of the city.

At the beginning of the studio, a three-pronged theoretical framework (multiplicity, threshold, inactivity) was discussed with the students by providing a collection of readings that are outlined in the following section.

Figure 1

View of Ankara, anonymous, 1700 - 1799



Source. Anonymous (1700 - 1799). View of Ankara [Painting]. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (object number SK-A-2055). www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2055.

Figure 2

Ulus Central District, figure-ground plan with contour lines



Note. Areas: A) Ulus Square, B) commercial area, C) religious area, D) citadel. Buildings: 1) Hacı Bayram Mosque, 2) İş Bank, 3) Sümer Bank, 4) Atatürk monument, 5) Ulus İş Hanı complex, 6) covered market, 7) Suluhan Çarşısı. Streets: Atatürk Blv (to the

south), Anafartalar (to the east).

Source. Graphic elaboration by the authors

THREE-STEP DESIGN METHODOLOGY

Blending in an eclectic setting

An architectural language of multiplicity (Donougho, 1987) aims at establishing a dialogue with a manifold set of references, one that blends in a setting with no intention to overwrite conflicts of forms and meanings. The language of multiplicity is a form of ‘modern mannerism’, according to Bruno Zevi (1992). It is a continuous, argumentative dialogue with historical architecture. According to Zevi, mannerism implies a creative blend of existing languages, hence a new creation. Beyond this ‘positive’ mannerism, there is only pointless eclecticism (Zevi, 1992, p. 139). The stance for a productive dialogue with diverse times and sources may adequately fit a contemporary position that does not surrender either to eclectic nor to historicist temptations. Franco Purini described this very position as “dialectic and plural modernity” (Purini, 2010, p. 40). The idea of multiplicity originates from the complex structure of the context, yet it does not seek to put together fragments of a specific period; on the contrary, multiplicity attempts to integrate elements from different periods: the new and the modern because of their essential efficiency, with the old and the traditional because of their topical essence (Daou, 2008; Kim, 2021).

In Ulus, it is unfortunate that exceptional architectural and urban elements have been encroached upon, over time, by an assortment of incoherent and mediocre constructions. This accumulation has fostered a milieu characterized by neglect and decay. Consequently, this has substantially compromised the spatial integrity of the locale, undermining its distinct urban narrative (Aksit, 2010).

The multiplicity of language proposed by the design studio is a tool to contrast the ambiguous eclectic/historicist approach that today characterizes the Anatolian metropolis (Yıldız Kuyrukçu & Ünal, 2021). Recent eclecticism presents a selective reproduction of historical architectural features that is usually limited to the façade appearance of a building and instrumental to biased political narratives (Bevan, 2022). Furthermore, it privileges a specific period that is de-contextualized to be refashioned in a generic form. Opposed to eclecticism, multiplicity functions differently; it aims to activate a system of places characterized by a rich and powerful diversity of languages,

each articulated in its own unique way. Indeed, this approach has already been experimented with in the Turkish context, such as the two design workshops organized by The Chamber of City Planners in 2015 and 2016 (Çalışkan et al., 2020).

Having introduced an unpredictable component to the formal outcome of architecture, is there any room for architects to make personal contributions? In other terms, should authorship fade as an unnecessary component of design? Here, we agree with Breitschmid and Olgiati (2019), who wrote that a piece of architecture omitting authorship is purely a technical and organizational work. But their analysis is more profound: in their understanding of the world as a non-referential realm, which should be characterized by non-referential architecture, “it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be a form-giver of a society that does not know its own form” (Breitschmid & Olgiati, 2019, p. 135). Yet author-architects are needed to design sense-making buildings. Relying on “realism without interpretation” (Breitschmid & Olgiati, 2019, p. 18), Breitschmid and Olgiati maintained that the non-referential does not represent any particular style of architecture or ideology. The problem of the author is present in our design studio discussions, but is especially relevant in many Turkish contexts under development. In those cases that resemble Ulus, the growth of the neighborhood generates an important piece of the city that is always in the making, with a latent sense of incompleteness. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, people from other parts of the country moved into residential areas and utilized unused spaces for urban development that were previously considered deadlands. The new Land Code, issued in 1858, allowed newcomers to legally own the public areas that were being privatized (Aktüre, 1989, p. 76).

Hence, the formal composition of the *meydan* and its surroundings has never consolidated as a whole, creating one unplanned ground that evolved simultaneously with the evolution of the *mahalles*. The ultimate perception that emerges is not that of an ill-defined space, nor a leftover, but rather a peculiar formation of space that favors open compositions. This manner of adjoining spaces as a system, built by juxtaposed and open criteria, together with the anti-classical rationality of the existing urban layout, and the absence of rigorous geometry, were considered by Cerasi (1986, p. 120) as the key elements to understanding the diverse spatial quality produced by the Ottoman city (Figure 3, Figure 4).

Figure 3

Ulus Central District: Covered Market (1937) and historical residential buildings (XIX century)



Source. Photo: authors, August 2019.

Figure 4

Ulus Central District: Hallaç Mahmut Mosque (XV Century)



Source. Photo: authors, August 2019.

Designing on the threshold

Once an enclosure is established, the threshold denotes the point where two urban areas meet. The thickness of the threshold may vary, ranging from a fine line to the size of a building's footprint. Also, it is important to identify the morphology of the opening that interrupts such enclosure. In his essay *Doors and Portals*, Robert Musil (2006) analyzed the complex social implications of the act of building and the process of crossing. Musil explored how the act of building, whether it be a physical structure or an abstract concept, can have a profound impact on society. Crossing thresholds is

both a literal and figurative act that can affect individuals and society as a whole. Musil highlighted the importance of understanding the psychological implications of these actions in order to create a more harmonious and just society. In contemporary urban design discourse, there is a noticeable shift towards creating open, loosely structured urban fabrics that prioritize transparency. This evolution in urban aesthetics significantly diminishes the prominence of the threshold concept, which historically demarcated distinct spatial boundaries. Robert Musil's critique further underscored this transition, positing that the threshold, once a central focus of aesthetic inquiries, has now receded in its importance.

How then should there be doors if there is no 'house'? The only original door conceived by our time is the glass revolving door of the hotel and the department store. In former times, the door, as part of the whole, represented the entire house, just as the house one owned and the house which one was having built were intended to show the social standing of its owner (Musil, 2006, p. 62).

This shift reflects a broader tendency in architecture and urban planning, where the delineation between spaces becomes less rigid. The threshold serves the purpose of control, while also initiating a series of actions that constitute a ritual. Furthermore, the door implies a sense of directionality as it serves as an entrance or exit point between domestic and exterior spaces.

A proper analysis of the act of crossing thresholds is pivotal in delineating the methodology to navigate the intricate spatial configurations surrounding the *meydan*. Dimensions and rhythm of the space significantly affects the permeability of a boundary. The project presented for *Revista de Arquitectura* aims to establish a distinct boundary while simultaneously developing a new central area through a connected network of squares and courtyards. Additionally, the project will incorporate new connections, such as urban galleries, arcades, and pedestrian pathways, that are seamlessly integrated within the boundary. This approach not only revitalizes the spatial dynamics, but also fosters a symbiotic relationship between the historical and contemporary urban fabric.

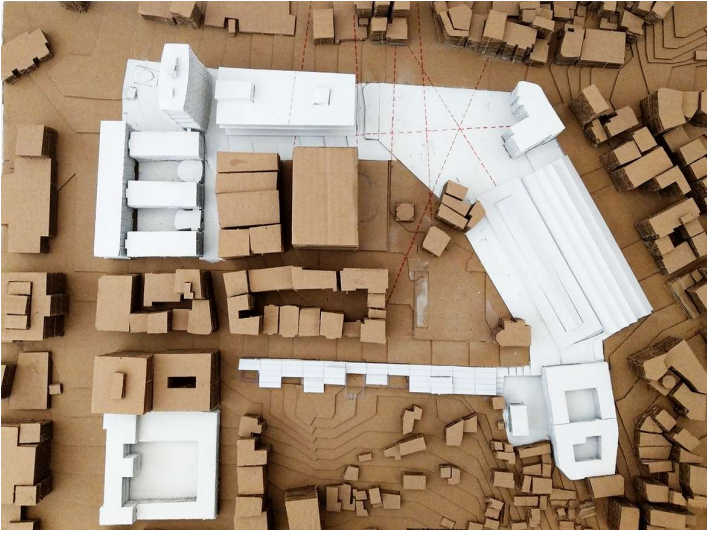
It becomes evident that the delineation between interior and exterior spaces can transcend traditional notions of privacy and public access. The concept, as articulated

by Herman Hertzberger (1991) in his influential work *Lessons for Students in Architecture*, emphasizes the importance of the threshold—not merely as a physical boundary, but as a dynamic space that facilitates interactions emblematic of hospitality (Resta & Dicuonzo, 2023). Hertzberger posited that the act of concretizing the threshold serves a dual purpose: it not only establishes a welcoming ambience for both arrivals and departures, but also symbolizes the architectural manifestation of hospitality. According to Hertzberger, the threshold should be envisioned as an architectural element that fosters social connectivity, akin to how thick walls ensure privacy. Such spaces, which can be physically represented through entrances, porches, and various in-between areas, are not merely transitional zones. Instead, they are vital in providing accommodation between adjacent realms, offering a tangible space where the private and the public can coalesce, negotiate, and interact (Del Río, 2022).

Hertzberger's insights invite architects and designers to rethink the function and potential of in-between spaces. By emphasizing the threshold's capacity to accommodate and facilitate social interactions, he encourages a broader interpretation of architectural elements as vehicles for community and connection. The metaphorical door, to which Hertzberger alludes, thus becomes a foundational concept in creating spaces that are inherently sociable and welcoming. Through this lens, architecture transcends its traditional boundaries, offering new possibilities for enhancing human connections within built environments. The Ulus covered market is only one such example. In early studio models, areas highlighted these realms in Ulus that were later connected through design (Figure 5). The Ulus İş Hanı building, the tall business complex located in the upper-left corner of Figure 5, is the pivotal mass from where the meandering intervention area unfolds. Its construction in 1955 was a symbolic shift towards a new idea of modernity, but also changed the perception of the square, overshadowing the other structures and the monuments (Çınar, 2014).

Figure 5

Arch 301, fall term: Ulus Central District, study model.



Note. In white is the intervention zone, while red lines trace the alignments of the existing urban fabric.

Source. Photo: authors, August 2019.

Staging urban lingering

A third theoretical problem that characterized the framework of the studio is that of the functional program. Matthew Carmona (2010) has reviewed and unpacked the contemporary debate around over-managed and under-managed public spaces. It is a common belief that the more functions one can accommodate with designed features in a public space, the livelier an environment will result. But in specific cases, we maintain, this approach leads to overdesign and, again, presents the issue of formalizing a space that has always been informal. If we were to landscape Ulus with more trees, benches, statues, and gazebos, then we would restrict all the possibilities of usage to a small range of configurations. In other terms, the sense of the *meydan* is more likely to be enhanced by the redesign of its margins rather than a make-up of the open space. This also guided the formation of the intervention area, decided in the first stage of the studio in accordance with the students, as an enveloping figure.

Against the initial deterministic impulse, the idea was to keep the *meydan* program as open as possible, allowing for recreational activities not tied to a specific function. The commercial nature of the *meydan*, which previously existed in and around the area, is now being complemented. Workshops extend their displays on the street; salespersons invite passers-by to appreciate their products; food carts roam the neighborhood. The whole district is known to have a diffused presence of small shops

and even a non-written, informal, zoning of shops that sell the same category of products on specific streets (Karakuş & Urak, 2021).

Though being at the very center of an extensive city, another element that participates in the experience of Ulus, as in many open spaces of the Ottoman city, is the contact with nature. Open space “does not have form because it is nature, and because the entire city reminds us of a notion of open space which has a structural sense in its manner of being situated in nature” (Cerasi, 1985, p. 41). It is natural in the sense that the irregular urban fabric and its episodic compositions are arranged according to the geographical features (Kostof, 1993). What emerges from our analysis is that open space is always combined with elements of the natural environment (trees, fountains, vistas) and conveys a vision of the world that is both materialist and spiritual. In this framework, we view the busy and crowded Ulus Square as an opportunity to introduce lingering and contemplation as primary programmatic principles, escaping the performance evaluations that are widely published in academic literature. Spaces for contemplation retain a dialectic relation with the environment that is rare today, within a built environment that is pushed towards homologation (Carmona, 2010, 2015). Location is still a distinctive feature and should thus become the way out of standardization; it reactivates the pleasure of being away, displaced, and inactive. In this regard, Byung-Chul Han maintained that the current atomization of time is accompanied by an atomized identity. Namely, “one only has oneself, the little I. It is as though one is radically diminishing, spatially and temporally, globally, co-existentially” (Han, 2009, p. 7). Atomization destroys the experience of continuity, and community in the broader sense. A possible escape from the *impasse* of atomization could be what Han described as the revitalization of the *vita contemplativa*, relearning the art of lingering in wide open spaces. This is the research endpoint where the Korean-German philosopher places the contemporary performative paradigm at the core of societal burnout (Han, 2010).

The absence of performance, inactivity, is rarely discussed in terms of design, as it is a non-function, but its democratization is one of those aspects that would make public spaces just as part of leisure activities. Thus, small and large projects that provide spots for contemplation, passive inertia, break the relationship between humans and their expected performance, hence widening the spectrum of possibilities in the public domain. In Han’s terms, any *animal laborans* should be provided with an opportunity for contemplative rest. Spaces where to stop, stay, inhabit the void, and experience the absence of any imposed behavior. A new category of spaces that MacLeod and Ward

(2002) defined as marginal interstices. They insinuate the homogenous, controlled, official territory of the contemporary city, and stage in every respect another side of the urban experience. An area of indeterminacy of places and informality of spatial practices that contribute to the development of alternative modalities of making the public.

RESULTS: THE ANATOMY OF A COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

The structure of the design studio

The studio is based on a three-stage design strategy. In the first stage, the entire class collaborated to establish a framework for the project. In the second stage, smaller groups focused on specific areas of the project. Finally, individual students worked on single buildings to complete their assigned sub-tasks (Figure 6). This transition implied both a multiple-scale and a multiple-objective design process. Each stage developed a concept on a given scale: general site plan at 1/1000; focus area at 1/500, individual project of a single building at 1/100 and 1/50. Each participant had a specific set of objectives and was asked to address the three theoretical problems mentioned above. Additionally, some sub-areas required participants to consider historical architecture typologies such as the *han* and the *arasta*. Meanwhile, others had to strategize new ways of working and living in historical environments, and others had to integrate co-working solutions with the commercial nature of the district (Figure 7).

Figure 6

Arch 301, fall term: Students working in Studio



Source. Photo: authors, August 2019

Figure 7

Arch 301, fall term: Focus Area Development, Site Plan (Department of Architecture, Bilkent University)



Note. Brown, a volumetric configuration of the project areas re-designed by the students. In dark grey, the pre-existing landmarks of Ulus “activated” in the project. In light.

Source. Drawing: Students of Arch 301, fall term, Department of Architecture, Bilkent University, August 2019

Initially, students developed a common programmatic framework during an intense short-time design session (*charrette*). The *charrette*², as a product of the collaboration between students and the instructor (15+1), provided a general layout to investigate and interpret the site. The charrette turned out to be a consistent cornerstone of the methodology, at least for three reasons. First, in terms of the design process, it helped and supported students to establish a deep connection with the site right from the beginning. Second, it motivated them to propose ideas, to participate in an active way in the discussion, and encouraged their self-confidence to advance personal interpretations. Third, as an outcome, it provided a preliminary re-interpretation of the site. The aim of the charrette was to lay out a diagram with general guidelines to coordinate all further developments of the design proposals in smaller groups of two

² The design *charrette* is a collaborative design workshop that typically lasts up to three or four days. In this instance, the workshop was organized for a full day once a week. The experiment took place within the time frame usually allotted to individual design studios (one semester), in the third year of a four-year undergraduate program.

to three students. The charrette also defined a shared vision of the system of margins integrated with *Ulus Meydani* consisting of the following actions:

1. Assign a finite configuration to the edges with a study on urban façades, in order to combine the new with adjacent historical areas. Yet, this boundary needed to be porous and allow a smooth transition with a system of thresholds (passages, arcades, porticos, patios, courtyards). Eventually, this system of thresholds arranged an array of secondary alleyways to reinforce the connection with the square.
2. Manage the fragmentation of the central open space with a system of enclosed sub-spaces (courtyards, gardens, *avlus*) to support the multi-centered nature of the Ottoman city. Breaking down the diagram in discrete actions facilitates the protection of the material heritage of the place and adapts to the peculiarities of an eclectic environment. Specifically, the *Hallaç Mahmut* mosque and the *Suluhan* (Figure 2, Figure 7) of the Classical Ottoman period, three residential buildings of the late Ottoman period, and the covered market designed by Robert Oerley in the early Republican period (Figure 2, Figure 6). The residual vacant space that originated from the Ottoman informal public space, *Tahtakale*, is today used as a parking lot as well as a makeshift market.

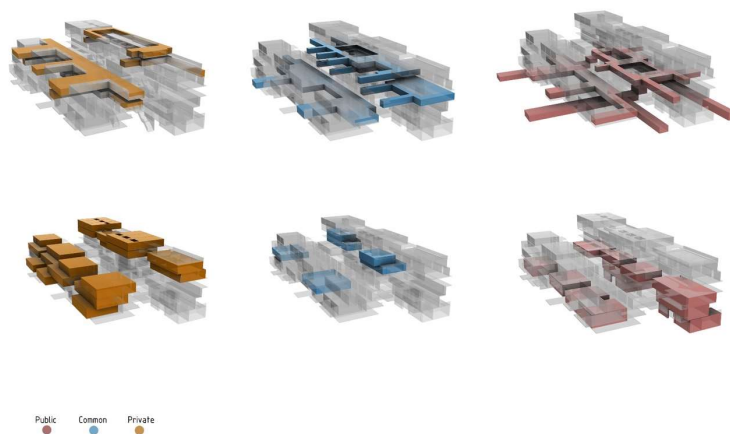
On the background of the general site plan suggested by the charrette, small groups of students have been assigned a focus area to be developed. In this second phase, students progressed with the formal layout and, at the same time, defined a program of functions. A typological study of trade buildings such as *the han*, the *arasta* (a linear market composed of adjacent longitudinal galleries), and the covered market, served as a theoretical starting point to develop a new spatial strategy. Students re-organized such interconnected spaces, the environmental background of the *meydan*, as urban interiors (Figure 8, Figure 10). The portico type also favored a similar additive process. These spatial configurations allow flexible occupancy of the built environment with different possible functions (workshops, shops, offices, exhibition galleries) though overlapping the diffused commercial nature of the site. Moreover, this strategy integrated diverse residential accommodations, with a focus on new modes of coexistence of living and working spaces. Enclosed spaces were considered catalysts for urban lingering, with different degrees of transparency. Contemplation was finally enhanced by screening noise pollution in isolated spots.

During the last phase, the groups were split up to work on individual assignments in which they formulated specific project briefs. Building on the overall plan for the focus area that had been established earlier, each student came up with a unique proposal aimed at achieving two main objectives. One was to establish an active dialogue with the eclectic context, blending with the urban forming process. This implied the expression of forms in terms of façades and composition. It was asked not to rewrite the urban text nor to dominate what already exists in quantitative terms.

The second objective contemplated the design of a porous ground floor where the public and the private permeate each other. *Ulus Meydani* had to be reconnected with the complex network of sub-spaces (Figure 9).

Figure 8

Arch 301, fall term: Building Development



Note. First row: spatial articulation of open and semi-open spaces. Second row: strategy of distribution of functions within the hybrid co-housing project.

Source. Drawing: Students of Arch 301, fall term, Department of Architecture, Bilkent University, August 2019

Figure 9

Arch 301, fall term: Building Development

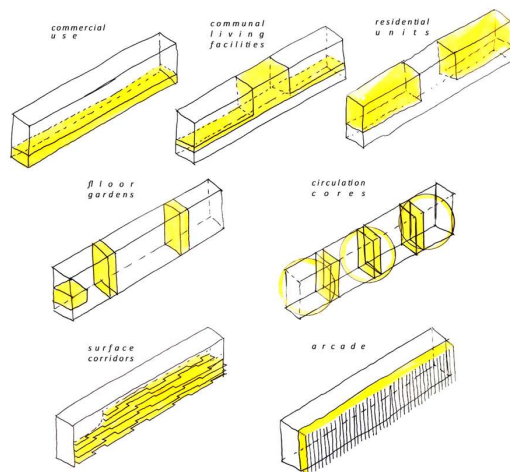


Note. On the left: square elevation, street elevation, side elevation. On the right: Axonometric studies of the double skin façade.

Source. Drawing: Students of Arch 301, fall term, Department of Architecture, Bilkent University, August 2019

Figure 10

Arch 301, fall term: Building Development, Diagrams of spatial articulation



Source. Drawing: Students of Arch 301, fall term, Department of Architecture, Bilkent University, August 2019.

CONCLUSIONS

Departing from three theoretical problems (eclecticism, threshold, and lingering), we experimented with design solutions through empirical observations and cyclically implementing improved articulations. We were attentive in consolidating these epistemic positions and translating them into “propositional knowledge” as suggested in the aforementioned book *Against and for Methods* (Silberberger, 2021, p. 6). The design studio suggested the following methodological findings:

1. We observed that the charrette format, moving from collaborative visions to individual tasks, was ideal for incrementing students’ participation compared to more rigid studio structures experimented with in previous years. In particular, the possibility of reviewing the general scenario every time localized solutions required adjustments gave the masterplan an unexpected vitality.
2. Because the design process was structured in three successive stages, with different levels of individual accountability, we recorded a higher attendance rate, compared to the two previous semesters, during the mid-term period after the studio kick-off and before the final stage that leads to the final exam.
3. A major complication involved the advice given to desist from the easiest formulations. Namely, the domination of the context imposing *à la mode* forms, the formation of a dispersed urban fabric, and the superimposition of a rigid functional program on the *meydan*. The proposition to re-elaborate historical precedents (han, arasta, covered market) allowed a crucial step of abstraction of architectural spatialities.
4. The spatial characteristics of the *meydan* have effectively created an open public environment that can accommodate the contemporary need for an inclusive and dynamic public space. The design process utilized this model as a foundation, leading to the development of a set of strategies for the organizing of the proposed spaces: promoting informal use, establishing distinct boundaries, creating intimate small-scale areas, and balancing open, unstructured layouts with strict, defined geometries.
5. The collective formulation of the intervention area was crucial. Given the theoretical framework (eclecticism, threshold, and lingering) and a general indication of the district, the masterplan phase functioned as a productive work of form-finding of the intervention site, which is usually a priori assigned.

These findings aim to contribute to the academic debate on public spaces in Türkiye and to practical design strategies for dealing with complex urban fabrics. The intervention's core is not focused on the public square but rather on its margins. Figure 2 shows how Ulus is a threshold across history and built environments. Students' projects are extensively permeated with public spaces, as historical typologies are, strategized at all scales (Figure 8, Figure 10). The idea to set a whole collaborative masterplan, made of individual contributions to simulate an additive urban process, helped them manage the aspect of multiplicity without the need to "adjust" the context in one shot. In this regard, the use of a double skin facade system helped them find the right balance of co-existence with others (Figure 9). It was not a matter of dominating Ulus, but of grafting the new by reading essential characteristics of the existing: fenestration, materiality, light and shadow, scale, geometry, and so on.

Inactivity was finally introduced with the goal of enhancing spaces for contemplation and physiological pauses in a busy district. Pocket spaces, niches, colonnades, and loggias are some of the features implemented. Facilities and services are integrated into the block typology or located near the residential units, along with small productive spaces. The concept of hybrid and flexible spaces encompasses the occurrence and overlapping of various activities, contrasting permanent configurations with temporary setups.

Our experiment has some limitations that are being addressed in our ongoing activity: several iterations can suggest a better picture of the results; an interview with the students can incorporate a phase of self-assessment of the studio; a structural participatory dimension could complement the analysis of the site; formats of shared decision making tend to favor individuals with strong personalities.

The issues we have addressed are common to many medium and large cities in Eastern Europe that, at some point between the fourteenth and the eighteenth century, were subject to the influence of the Ottoman Empire. Those built environments that grew with unregulated additions in the last two centuries are now facing a globalized society with globalized aesthetics. The dialectic between the generic and the site-specific, threatened by a shared desire for newness, has never been more relevant than today. Peculiarities, differences, and oddities should not be eradicated. Instead, we must understand the challenges posed by non-standardized spaces today. Focusing on histories and neighborhoods is then one of the keys to intertwining such specificity with

contemporary design.

The dynamic and complex nature of contemporary cities demands new tools that can map and remap urban spaces with greater sensitivity to their inherent contradictions. First, they would enable the exploration of concepts such as multiplicity, which recognizes the layered and interconnected nature of urban parts. Urban spaces are not monolithic; they are composed of a multitude of narratives, functions, and physical forms that coexist and sometimes conflict. Second, the notion of threshold in urban design refers to the transitional spaces that mediate between different uses, forms, or social groups. These are often overlooked in conventional planning processes, yet they play a crucial role in how urban spaces are experienced and navigated. Third, the concept of inactivity, or intentionally designed spaces for rest and contemplation within the urban matrix, challenges the prevailing emphasis on efficiency and constant activity. By remapping urban areas to identify opportunities for inactivity, designers can contribute to the creation of cities that better cater to the psychological and physiological needs of their inhabitants, promoting well-being and quality of life.

It is essential to integrate these concepts into the curriculum through hands-on, collaborative projects.

An intensive charrette, as mentioned, could serve as the ideal educational environment for this endeavor. Charettes are intensive, collaborative sessions where students, educators, and sometimes community members come together to explore design solutions for a specific project. By focusing on non-geometrical and non-standardized open spaces, such charrettes would push students to apply new mapping tools in real-world scenarios, making contexts count more.

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