

Tarsus historic city center, identification of problem and potentials as base for strategic guideline

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Abstract

Tarsus historic city center is a continuous settlement from the Neolithic Age to the present day. Archaeological heritage is integrated with traditional historic quarters, historic city center, Early Republican buildings and industrial heritage. Social practices, cultural production processes, legends and religious events transferred from generation to generation constitute the intangible cultural heritage elements and also the symbols of the city. In 2013, conservation area boundaries were revised and Tarsus historic city center, was declared as 3rd Grade Archaeological Site by the Regional Conservation Council. In defined context, the Conservation-Strategy Guideline was prepared with the contract signed between Mersin Metropolitan Municipality and Mersin University, Faculty of Architecture in 2022. Within the scope of document, a guideline containing urban conservation strategies for the historic city center of Tarsus has been prepared. Within the scope of this article, findings and evaluations regarding current situation based on field surveys and questionnaires that form the basis for the guideline are presented. The study aims to document the physical and socio-cultural situation of the historic center in 2022 to guide further studies concerning cultural heritage in Tarsus.

1. Introduction

There is a continuous settlement from the Neolithic Age to the present day, according to the results of archaeological research in Tarsus. Archaeological heritage within the built-up area of the city is integrated with built environment elements such as traditional housing pattern, historic city center, Early Republican Period buildings [1, 2] and industrial heritage [3]. In addition to social and cultural features located at different points within historic city center, there are also intangible heritage items those are symbols of the city [4].

In 2013, Tarsus historic city center, was declared as 3rd Grade Archaeological Site by the Adana Regional Council for the Conservation of Cultural Properties Current conservation plan was approved in 1989. Studies on revision and provision of conservation plan studies have not been finalized yet.

In defined context, the Conservation-Strategy Guideline was prepared with the contract signed between Mersin Metropolitan Municipality and Mersin

University, Faculty of Architecture in 2022. Within the scope of document, a guideline containing urban conservation strategies for the historic city center of Tarsus has been prepared. Within the scope of this article, findings and evaluations regarding the current situation based on field studies and questionnaires that form the basis for the guideline are presented, as the first phase of the project. In the second phase of the project, short-medium-long term conservation strategies and sub-project areas were developed, taking into account the problems and potentials identified specifically for the sub-regions within the project area. Implementation phase of conservation strategies and sub-project continue in line with these suggestions.

1.1. Brief history of conservation activities in Tarsus

The first conservation work for the historic city center of Tarsus was the registration of 40 buildings by the Supreme Council of Real Estate Antiquities and Monuments (GEEAYK) in 1977 [5]. During this period,

two areas of approximately 13 and 4.6 hectares within the city were designated as urban protected areas, while an area of 7.6 hectares around Gözlükule Mound and an area of 11.7 hectares around Donuktaş were designated as 1st Grade Archaeological Site.

In 1989, the Tarsus Municipality Council approved the Conservation Plan prepared by Istanbul Technical University to cover the designated conservation areas [6]. In the Master Plan, it is seen that in addition to the historic quarters, plan decisions were taken for the

archaeological sites of Donuktaş and Gözlükule Mound (Figure 1). When we examine conservation plan and its annexes, it is seen that detailed assessments and analyzes had been made at the building scale. The registered buildings and street texture were preserved. In addition, historical axes were envisaged to be preserved as pedestrian roads. However, proposed buildings or infill development predominantly altered to be transformed into 2-3-storey pattern.

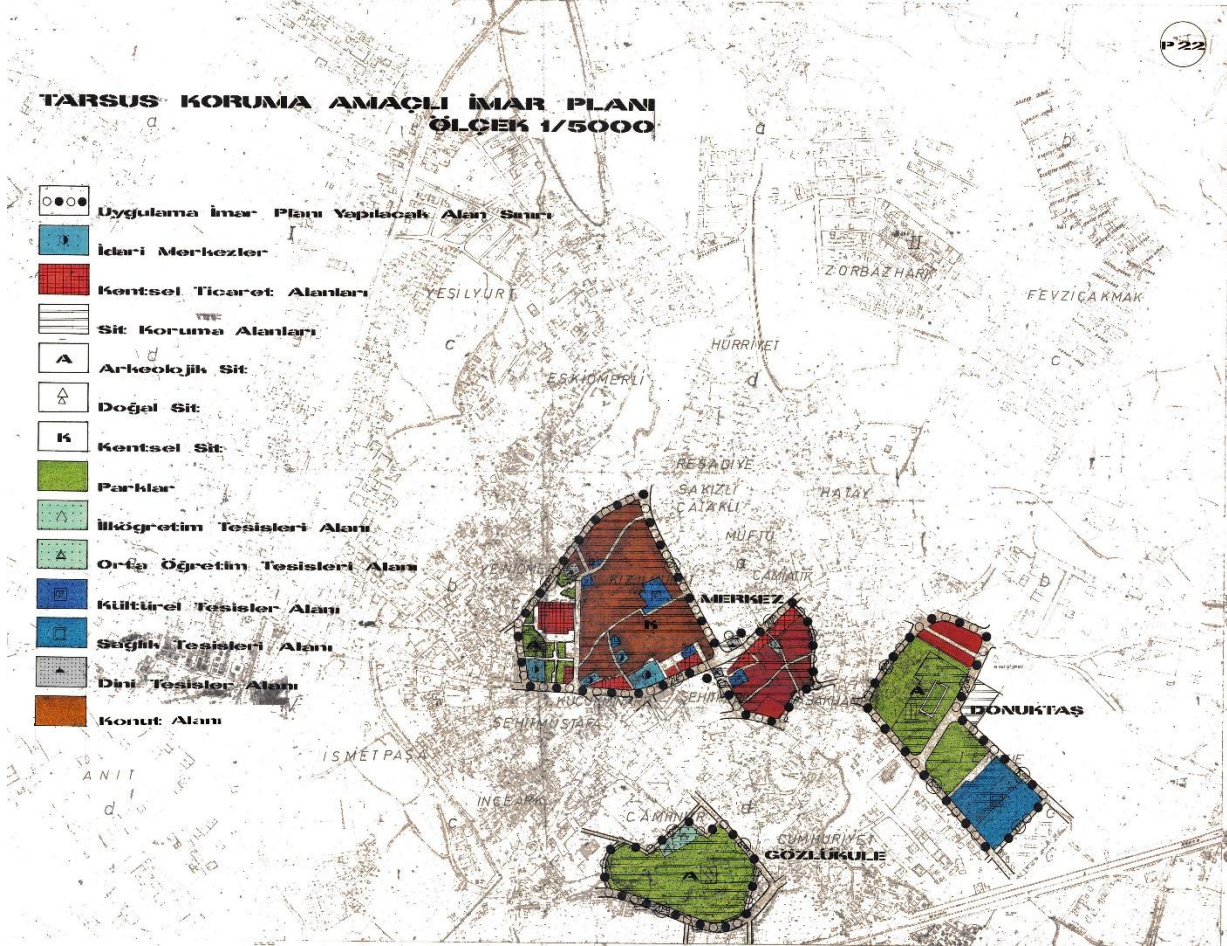


Figure 1. 1989 ITU Conservation Zoning Plan - 1/5000 (Tarsus Municipality Archive).

In the process that has continued until today, expect archaeological excavations, no site management intervention has been made in the archaeological sites despite the fact that a period of approximately 35 years has passed after the approval of the Conservation Plan. During this period, there has been development pressure outside the boundaries of conservation zones in the historic city center of Tarsus.

Development Plan approved by the Tarsus Municipality Council in 2013 enabled demolish-and-build processes in those areas. After Adana Regional Council for the Conservation of Cultural Properties declared Tarsus historic city center as 3rd Grade Archaeological Site, development plans in force in the entire city center are no longer valid. The transition period regulations in line with the decision were first approved in 2014. When we examine those regulations, it is seen that in addition to the Museum-controlled development processes, there were regulations to decrease planning rights in terms of the number of floors.

However, due to the decisions regarding the decreasing of density and number of floors, the transitional period regulations were partially canceled by the Higher Council for the Conservation of Cultural Properties. In 2015, the regulations were revised and the current ones were approved in 2018 due to the expiration of the three-year period specified in the relevant legislation. During this process, a recommendation we prepared by the Regional Conservation Council to enlarge conservation boundaries including historic fabric around Ulucami, the Historic Trade Center and Altından Geçme. According to current legislation, conservation zoning plans should be prepared within 3 years after the declaration of conservation sites, but the Conservation Plan has not been prepared since 2013.

Tarsus, as a multi-layered settlement [7] structures, sites and archaeological remains should be integrated into daily life as a historical identity. The city has been a settlement of cultural and economic importance throughout its history [8-10]. The cultural and economic

life of the city in different periods is reflected in the built environment and socio-cultural life. Within this framework, the monumental and traditional structures that have survived to the present day and those that have disappeared but whose existence is known and still in the memory of locals; industrial heritage buildings and areas; archaeological heritage above and below ground; narratives and meanings related to beliefs and legends; and the food and beverage culture blended by the citizens within this rich diversity constitute tangible and intangible heritage values of the city. The strategic guideline is prior requirement for the conservation and management of these cultural heritage values. In this context, as mentioned above, a field study and a questionnaire were conducted to form the basis of the guideline. In the next section, firstly the research methodology and then the findings will be explained.

2. Method

In the preparation of a strategy guide for the historic city center of Tarsus, in addition to the historical-spatial evaluation and literature review of the area, the current situation of the city center was determined. The field study started in mid-June 2022 and at the end of approximately one month, the observations made during the field study were organized in a table to be associated with Geographical Information Systems. Prior to the

determinations made in the field study, all of the buildings were coded by unique identification numbers. Based on these identification numbers, the buildings were examined from the street, an inventory sheet (Table 1) was filled out for each building and the building was photographed from the street from the appropriate facades. Due to the constraints of the work schedule and the project team, the identification/documentation work could only be carried out from the street/outside of the buildings. In the process of developing sub-scale project design and conservation strategies, it is recommended to carry out building-specific identification and analysis where necessary.

First, the functions of the buildings were documented in the inventory sheet. In addition to land use study, secondary data was also collected with open-ended texts in order to understand commercial and accommodation uses and possible traditional ones. In addition, data on the structural condition and construction system of the buildings were recorded. In terms of building type, not only registered buildings but also authentic buildings were identified through traces of different periods and constructions. Determinations were also made regarding the compatibility and harmony of new buildings with the historic environment in terms of massing and facade features. Findings regarding the current situation are presented in detail in the following sections.

Table 1. Inventory Sheet / Form.

| Tarsus Project Identification Sheet | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Inventory No. | Expert Name | | | Door No: | |
| Date | Neighbourhood | | | Block / Parcel | |
| Function | Residential Education Health Unit | Residen.+Comme Administrative Religious | Commercial Bank Vacant | Type Accommodation: Other: | |
| Floor | High One Floor | Floor Basement | Half-Basement | Cihannüma / Belvedere | Winter |
| Building-Street Relationship | Street-Building | St.-Buil.-Garden | St.-Gar.-Building | St.-Buil+Garden | |
| Construction System | Reinforced Concrete Stone Masonry | Steel Mas.+Timber Frame | Timber Frame | St.-Buil+Court. | |
| Structural Condition | Good | Moderate | Moderately Damaged | Heavy Damaged | Ruin |
| Building Type | Traditional New | Transition Period Mass: Compatible | Early Republic Incompatible | Modern Facade: Compatible | Incompatible |
| Spolia / Reused Material | present / absent | | | | |

In addition to the field study, a questionnaire was applied to evaluate the opinions of locals. 490 surveys were conducted in all neighborhoods in the study area; 82 Evler, Caminur, Cumhuriyet, Duatepe, Eski Ömerli, Fatih, İsmetpaşa, Kızilmurat, Reşadiye, Şehit Mustafa, Şehit Kerim, Tekke, Yeni Ömerli neighborhoods. With the survey questions, it was aimed to obtain information from the users about their personal profile, use of historical buildings, use of the historical city center, perception-consciousness level of historical texture and problems-demands.

3. Results

3.1. The Field Practice / Observations

3.1.1. Number of floors and traditional features

Traditional residential buildings in the historic city center of Tarsus have 1-3 storey. The height of monumental buildings depends on the type of building. When the study area is evaluated; 32.4% of the area is composed of single-storey; 50.9% is composed of two-

storey; 9.6% is composed of three-storey; 2.8% is composed of 4-storey; 2.3% is composed of 5-storey buildings; and 1.8% is composed of buildings above 5 floors. It is seen that single and two-storey buildings constitute the majority in the area. Buildings with 5 or more storeys are concentrated in the south east of the historical trade center and on the periphery of 3rd Grade Archaeological Site (Figure 2).

Considering that the traditional residential buildings in Tarsus have different forms according to social, economic and construction technique information, the

ground floor height, the presence of a basement floor, the presence of a *cihannüma* (belvedere) and the presence of an intermediate floor called the winter floor (*kışlık*) constitute important data in the evaluation of the floor height. 88 buildings in the project area have basement floors; 16 buildings have semi-basement floors; 6 buildings have *cihannüma*; and 35 buildings have winter floors. While the presence of winter floors is concentrated in Kızılmurat Neighborhood, a small number of *cihannüma* are located in different neighborhoods in the study area (Figure 3).

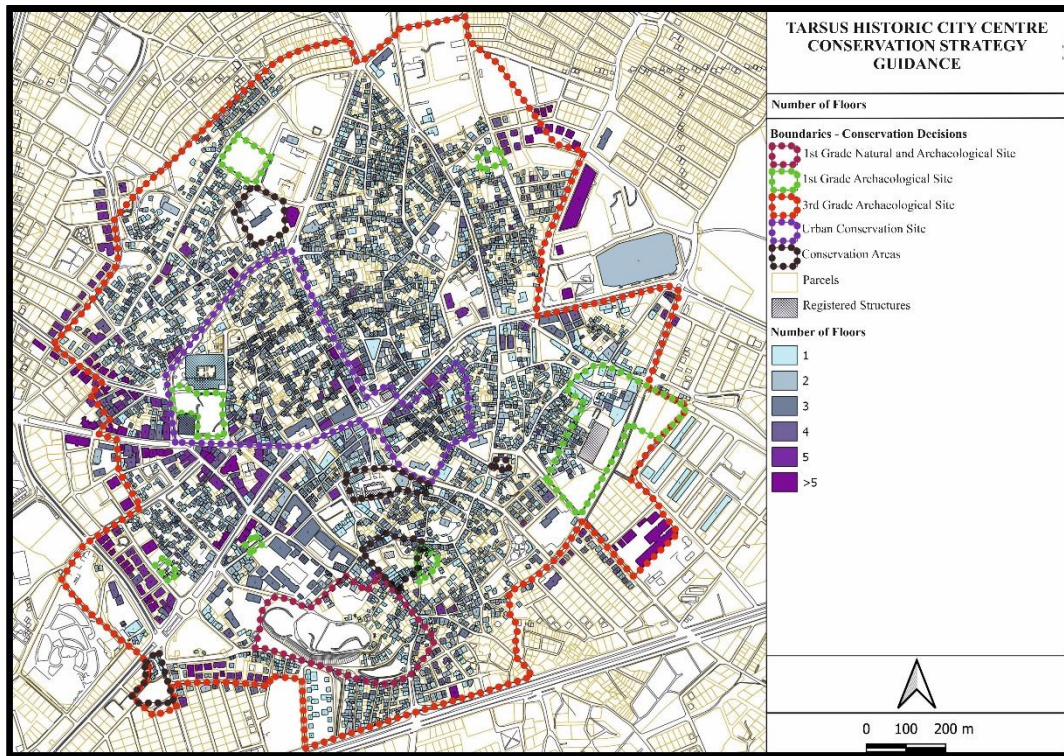


Figure 2. Number of floors.

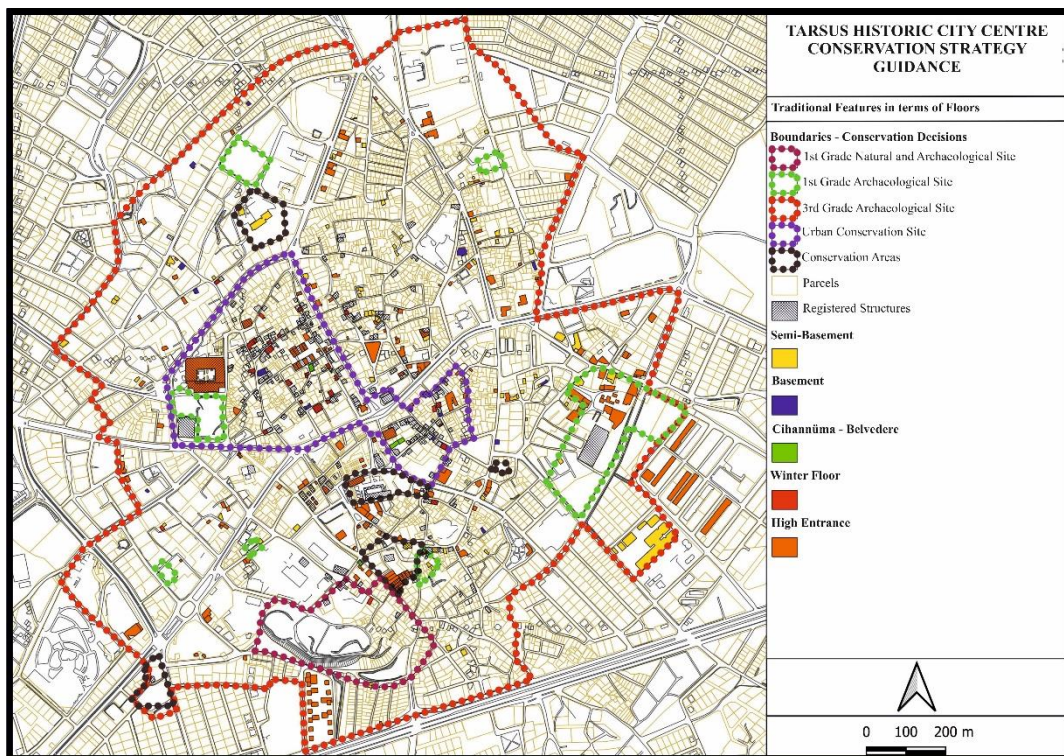


Figure 3. Traditional features in terms of floors.

3.1.2. Construction system

It is seen that the mixed construction system consisting of stone masonry and ground floor stone masonry with timber frame infill system is widely used in the traditional residential buildings in the historic quarters of Tarsus. The buildings constructed in the Republican period have a mixed construction system in which stone material and reinforced concrete beam-column system are applied together. The use of reinforced concrete system is common in multi-storey buildings built after the Republic.

In the project area, the following construction systems were found: timber frame with a rate of 2%; stone masonry with a rate of 21%; mixed system where

stone masonry and timber frame are used together with a rate of 14.8%; mixed system where stone masonry and reinforced concrete are used together with a rate of 3.1%; reinforced concrete with a rate of 56%; steel with a rate of 0.4%; prefabricated with a rate of 0.1%; and brick masonry with a rate of 0.05% (Figure 4). Although some of the buildings built in reinforced concrete system are cultural assets that need to be preserved, it can be observed that they are not in compliance with current construction legislation. In historic quarters, there are traditional construction systems. New reinforced concrete buildings are concentrated in the south-east of the historical commercial center, where high-rise buildings are observed.

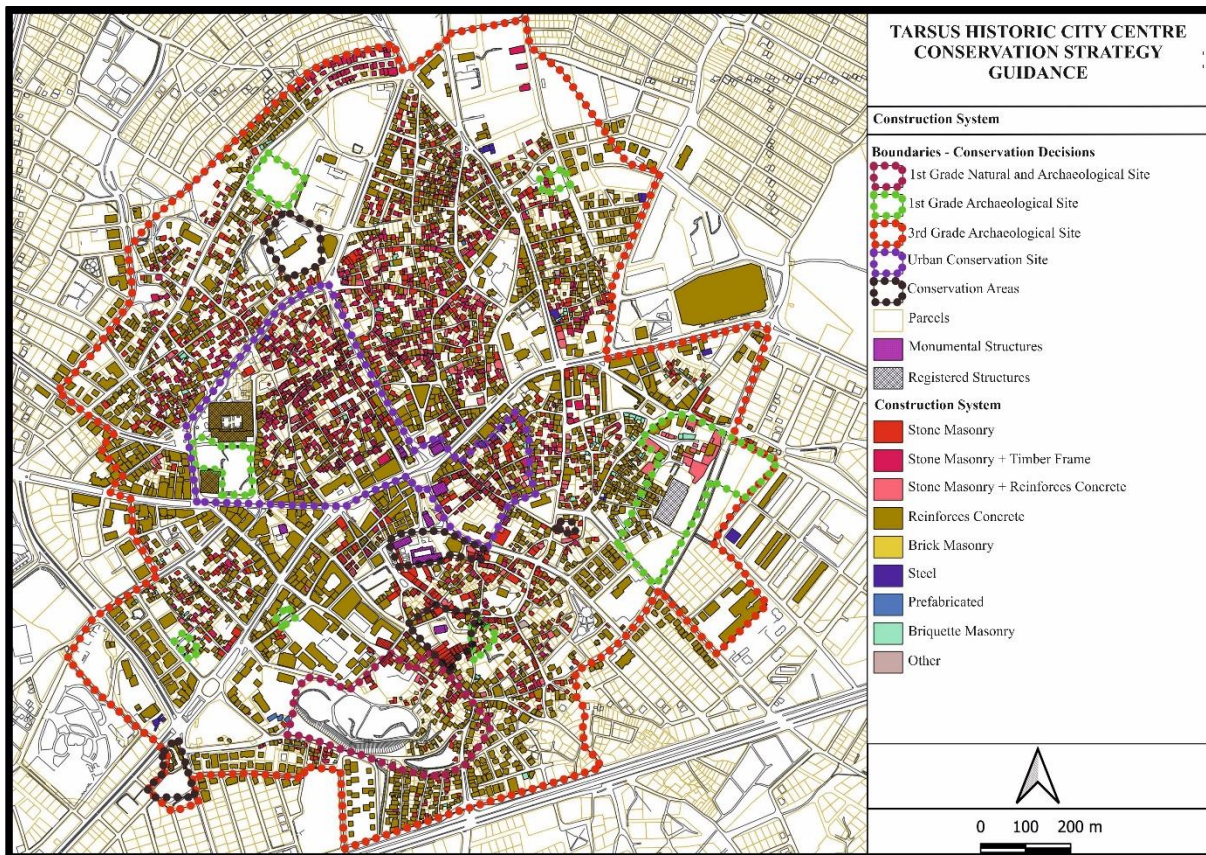


Figure 4. Construction system.

3.1.3. Building Type - Typology

Within the historic city centre of Tarsus, there are a significant number and variety of buildings that are examples of traditional architecture from the Ottoman period, monumental buildings from the pre-Ottoman period and archaeological finds, as well as a significant number and variety of buildings built after the Republic of Turkey that are cultural assets that need to be protected. As of 2021, there are 448 registered parcels within the project area, including 261 within the urban conservation area, 8 within the 1st degree archaeological conservation area, 157 within the 3rd degree archaeological conservation area and 22 within the protection areas [3]. As a result of field studies, 1438 traditional buildings, 147 buildings built after the Republic, which has traditional design and construction

principles, 48 buildings built after the Republic reflecting the design approach of the period, and 8 buildings built in modern design approach were identified (Figure 5).

Traditional buildings are also concentrated outside the boundaries of the urban conservation site. Traditional houses are located towards the northwest, east and southeast of the historic commercial center.

According to the field study, there are unique unregistered structures that should be listed by a special study. In addition to the buildings built after the Republic, where traditional design and construction principles used, there are also buildings built after the Republic reflecting its period. By the way, historic city center is a unique characteristic of ongoing multi-layeredness. Modern buildings concentrated on Atatürk Street and Hilmi Seçkin Boulevard leading to Tarsus Station from the core of administrative buildings in the

historic city center towards the west. Both of these axes were opened after the Republic.

It is seen that multi-storey and adjacent buildings are concentrated on the boulevards and streets within the project area. These buildings are largely incompatible with the historic environment in terms of mass and façade. However, while the buildings in the area where

the traditional street texture is preserved within the project area are partially incompatible with the historic environment in terms of façade features, they are compatible with the historic environment in terms of mass, more precisely, the building-parcel-street relationship and the number of floors (Figure 6).

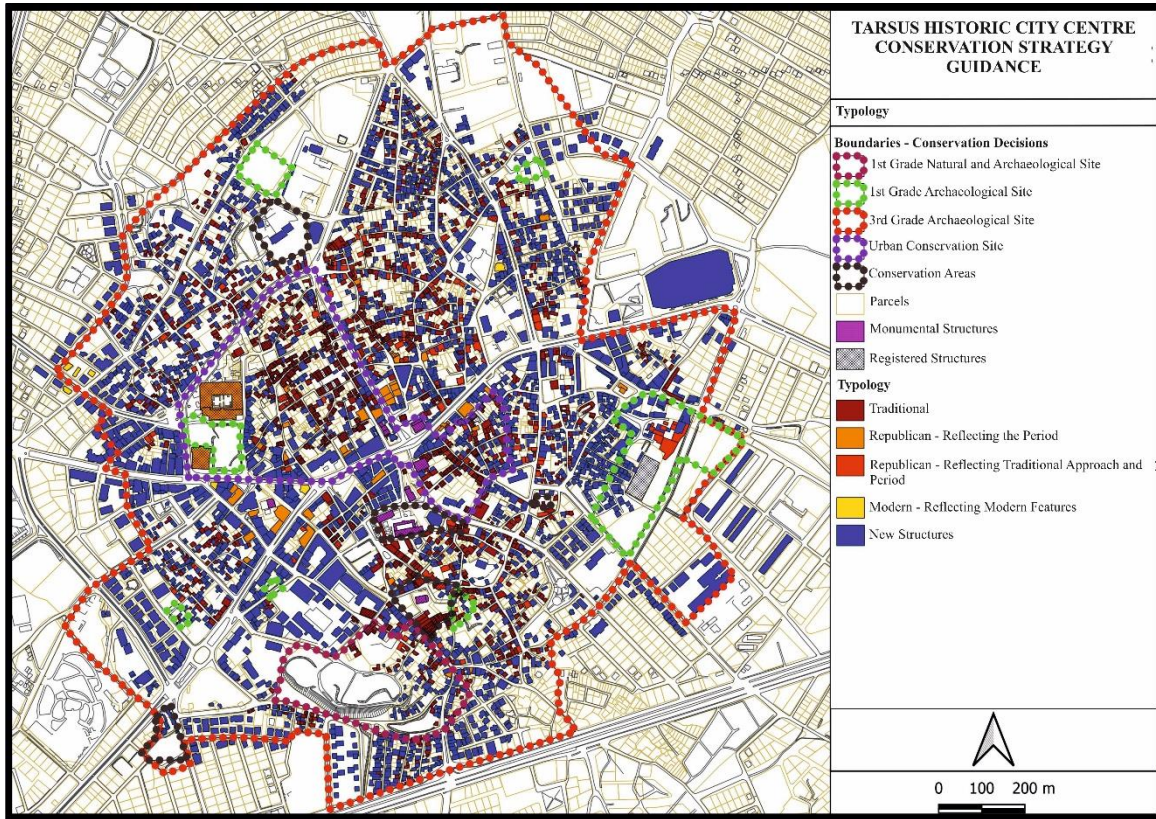


Figure 5. Building type – Typology.

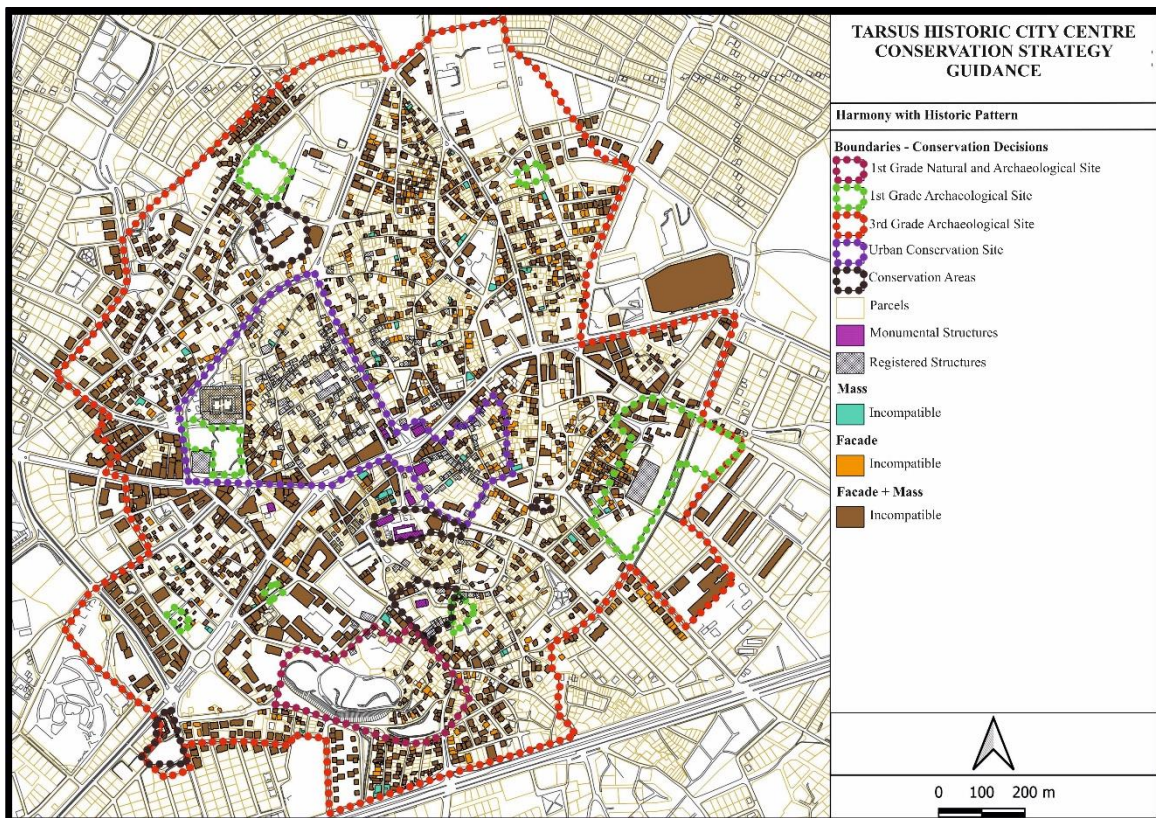


Figure 6. Harmony with historic pattern.

3.1.4. Structural condition

According to the visual surveys, 2.2% of the buildings in the area were determined as ruins, 2.7% as heavily damaged, 23.5% as damaged, 50.2% as in fair condition and 19.1% as in good condition. The percentage of buildings identified as heavily damaged and damaged according to the deterioration of the construction system and materials, and the percentage of buildings identified as ruins according to the state of collapse is 28.4%. The fact that 50.2% of the remaining buildings are in moderate condition indicates that physical deterioration in the building stock is intensive throughout the area. The number of damaged buildings is also high within the urban conservation site. In the area between 2722 Street and Turkmenistan Street and 3410 Street, the density of damaged buildings increases. Buildings in good condition are concentrated in the south-east of the historic commercial center and on the periphery of the Grade 3 Archaeological Site.

3.1.5. Land-use

Within the 3rd degree archaeological area designated as the project area, it has been observed that the vast

majority of the buildings (approx. 61%) are used as residential buildings. There are also buildings used as Commercial + Residential. Commercial activities in the area are mostly concentrated on Atatürk Street and İsmet İnönü Boulevard to the west of the traditional historic commercial center (Figure 7). Among the commercial functions, food and beverage uses and accommodation areas that may preserve the vitality of the city center are also located on the main street axes starting from the traditional - historic trade center towards the west.

One of the important issues in terms of land use is that more than 5% of the buildings in the project area are vacant. These buildings mainly cover the traditional housing texture in Kızılmurat Neighborhood, the areas east of Ali Menteşoğlu Boulevard, Şehitkerim Neighborhood and the areas to the south. In Kızılmurat Neighborhood, especially the buildings in the areas north of the District Governorship are not occupied. Similarly, there are vacant buildings in the residential areas north of Siptili Bazaar. There are idle buildings in Şehitkerim Neighborhood and especially in the south of Ulucami. In this context, it is revealed that the buildings in the area, which are listed, cannot be actively utilized due to financial and/or management issues.

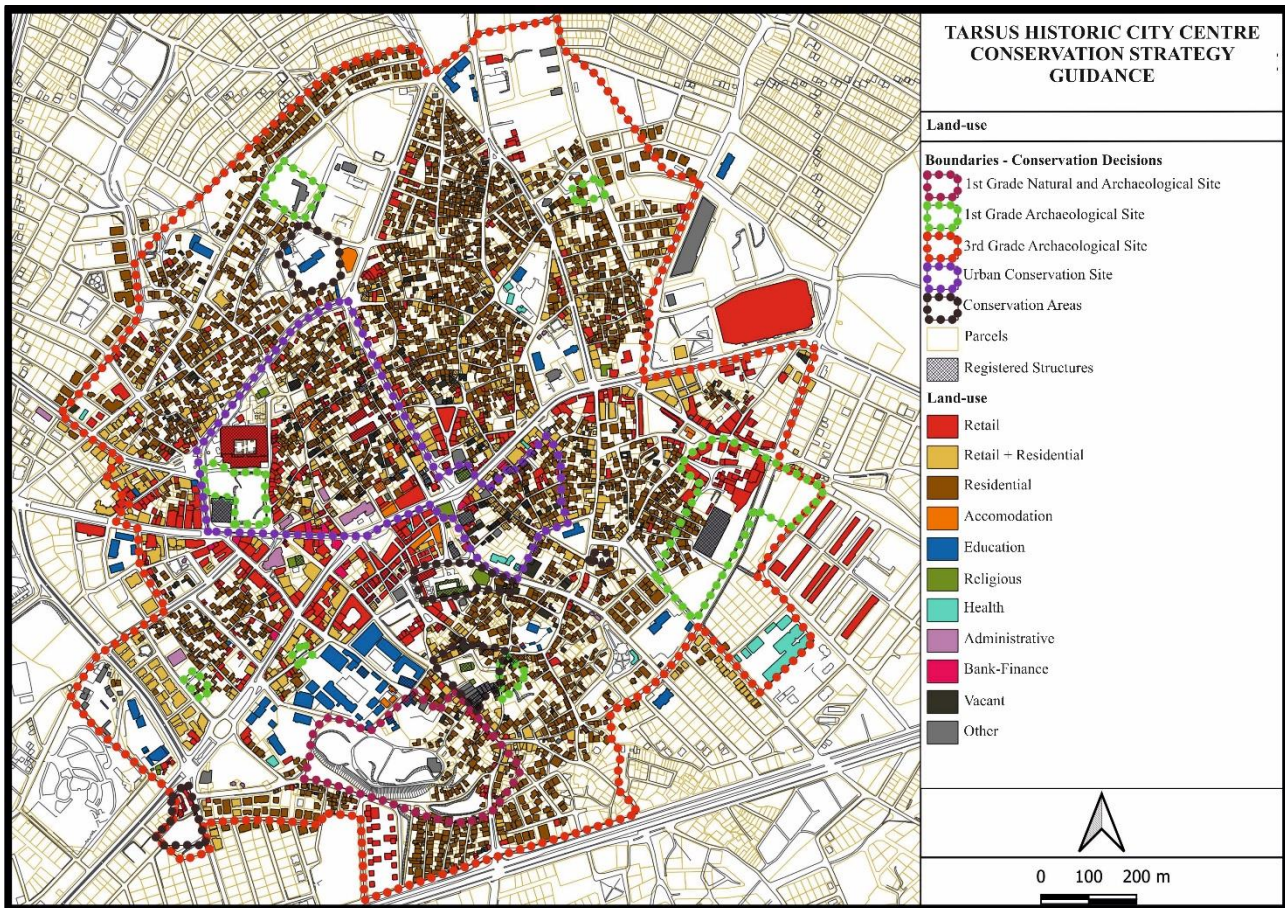


Figure 7. Land-use.

3.2. Questionnaire

Within the scope of Tarsus Historic City Center Conservation Strategy Guide, a questionnaire was applied to evaluate the opinions of the locals about the area. Of the 490 people who participated in the

questionnaire, 40% were women and 60% were men. 32% of the participants were between the ages of 18-34, 45.3% were between 35-59 and 19.4% were 60 years and older. Of the respondents, 3% were literate, 26% were primary school graduates, 15% were middle school graduates, 33% were high school graduates, 6% were

associate degree graduates, 14% were university graduates and 2% were master's degree graduates. Of the respondents, 33.1% were artisans, 10.2% were retired, 10.2% were students, 9.4% were housewives and 3.3% were teachers. They are followed by farmers, workers, etc. There is 1.4% unemployed in the study area.

When we examine the income status in the historic city center, it is seen that the majority of the users have incomes below the minimum wage both in the historic trade center and in the traditional quarters. The survey questions consisted of open and closed-ended questions. According to the answers of closed-ended questions, descriptive, cross and frequency tables were prepared in SPSS program and graphs were prepared with MS Excel software. Closed-ended survey questions were evaluated in the order of "agree", "partially agree", "disagree" and "no opinion". The answers to open-ended questions were analyzed with qualitative techniques (discourse analysis). The survey aimed to measure the user profile, the perception and knowledge of locals about the use of the area and the historical texture, their awareness of the area, the priority area they identified and the priority action they expect for the area.

3.2.1. Use of historic entities

In order to measure the use of historic buildings in the area, the participants were asked the following questions: "Do you own a property that is a listed structure?" and "Are you a tenant in a building that is listed structure?" 2.4% (12 people) of the users stated that they have a house and 0.4% (2 people) a workplace; 0.2% (1 person) at home and 0.8% (4 people) as tenants. Of these users, 6% were very satisfied, 9% were satisfied and 3% were not satisfied with the historic building they own. As deficiencies and problems, the users stated that the plaster of the building is falling off, the building is worn out, the roof is leaking and that they cannot easily perform maintenance and repair in the face of these deficiencies. For the problems and deficiencies, the users stated that maintenance and repair of gardens and open spaces, reinforcement of balconies, roof repairs, and strengthening of buildings are necessary.

3.2.2. Use of historic city center

The question "How often do you come to Tarsus Historic City Center?" was asked to the users regarding the use of the area. Of the respondents, 27.3% stated that they use the area 1-2 times a month, 22.4% every weekday, 10.6% 1-2 times a week, 7.8% 3-4 times a week, 7.3% every day and 5.3% every weekend. The fact that about one third of the users come 1-2 times a month shows that shopping is done from the city center on a monthly basis, and that about one third come every weekday (22.4%) and every day (7.3%) shows that the area is a historical business area. On the other hand, weekend use is low at 5.3%.

The other question asked about the use of Tarsus Historic City Center is about how much time they spend in the area. In response to the question "How long do you spend when you visit?", 35.9% of the users stated that

they spend 1-2 hours, 19% less than 1 hour, 13.7% 3-4 hours, and 9.4% 2-3 hours. Approximately 42% of the participants use the area for sightseeing and visiting, 21% use the area because their workplaces are located in the Historic City Center, 16% of the users come for individual needs, 5% for eating and drinking, and 4.3% for shopping for groceries. When this situation is evaluated, it is seen that more than half of the users use the area for sightseeing, walking around and eating and drinking.

Approximately 36% of the users come to the Historic City Center by bus or minibus, 31.6% on foot, and about a quarter (24.5%) by private car. This is followed by bicycles (3.7%) and motorcycles (3%). In this area, access by public transportation and on foot is quite popular in the Historic City Center. Bicycle use and access is low.

3.2.3. Perception of historic environment

In order to evaluate the perceptions of the historic environment of Tarsus Historic City Center, questions related to the historical fabric were asked. In this context, participants were asked whether "historic structures are sufficiently conserved in Tarsus". Approximately 60% of the users stated that they are not conserved, 19% stated that they are conserved and 19% stated that they are partially conserved. Another question asked in relation to the subject is related to "what kind of attitude should be taken towards historic entities". In response to this question, the majority of the users (93.5%) stated that all of the historic buildings should be conserved, 5% stated that there is no need to conserve all of them and that it is sufficient to conserve enough to set an example.

In order to evaluate the participants' views on the area and what the Historic City Center means to them, the question "What importance and meaning do historic buildings and areas carry for you?" was asked. 37% of the users stated that it reflects the past and culture of the society and are important documents in this respect. Approximately 37% of the users stated that they are important and meaningful because they are touristic places, approximately 10% because they provide job opportunities and economic gains, 9% because they help us understand the lifestyles and technologies of ancient people, 3% because they provide visual richness to cities, approximately 3% because they are the heritage left to us by our ancestors and 1% because they create visual materials to teach children about the past.

In relation to the area, participants were asked the question "What are the most important historic entities and sites in Tarsus?". According to the users, Cleopatra's Gate (28%), Eshabı Kehf Cave (18%), St. Paul's Well (16%), Makam Mosque, St. Paul's Church, Roman Road, Donuktaş Temple, Great Mosque, Historic Tarsus Houses, Gözlükule Mound, Kırkkaşık Bedesteni, Gözlükule Mound and Historic Tarsus Houses are the most important historical buildings and sites (Figure 8).

Another question asked to the participants is where there is a structure or place that can be used to describe Tarsus and be a symbol of Tarsus. In this context, approximately 34% of the users stated that Eshabı Kehf Cave and 28% of the users stated that Cleopatra's Gate

describes Tarsus very well and can be a symbol of Tarsus. In addition, Tarsus Waterfall, Şahmeran, Tarsus houses, Yarenlik, and St. Paul's Well were also mentioned as places that could be symbols of Tarsus. Another question asked to the users is where improvements should be

made in Tarsus Historic City Center. In this context, 17% of the users suggest that the Ancient Roman Road, 16% suggest the Historic Tarsus houses, and 9% suggest Cleopatra's Gate.

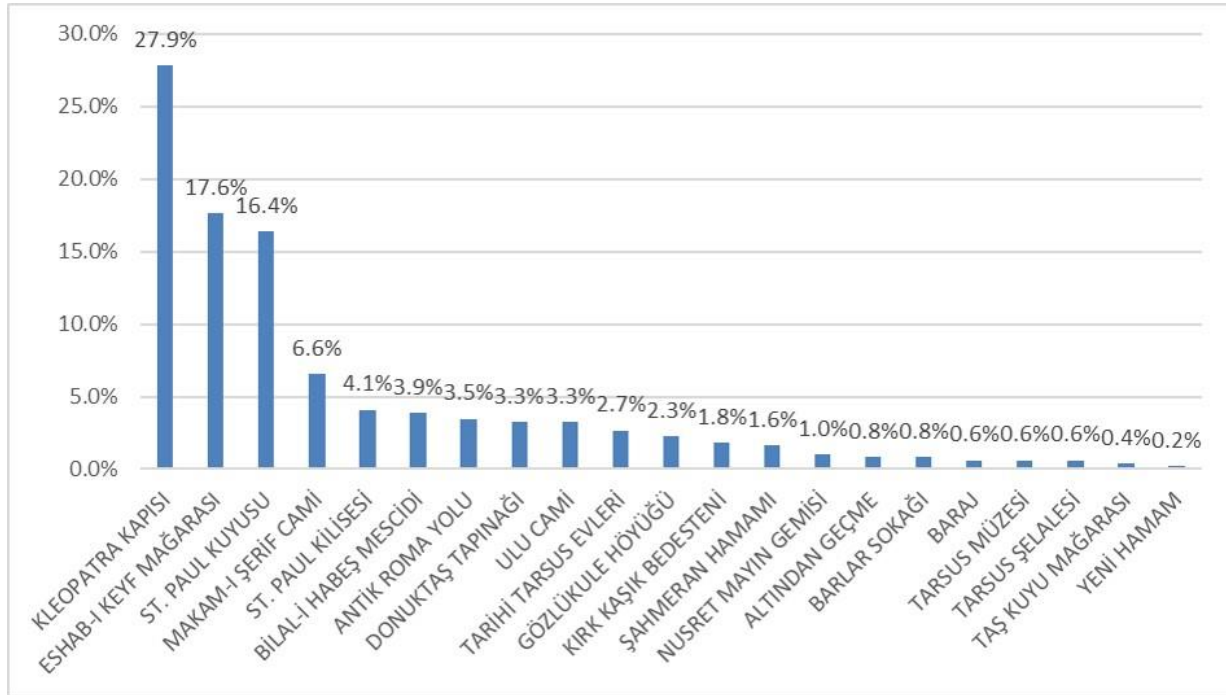


Figure 8. Perception of historic environment.

4. Discussion

In order to assess the adequacy of open space uses, walkability, safety and accessibility in Tarsus Historic City Center, closed-ended questions were asked on a graded scale (agree-somewhat agree-disagree-no opinion).

With this evaluation, about half of the users stated that the open spaces and parks in the area are sufficient, benches and resting areas are sufficient, but the arrangements such as ramps and special flooring for disadvantaged groups are insufficient and they cannot walk comfortably in the area. They stated that there are not enough cultural and artistic activities in the area and that the variety of uses and activities in this area is not sufficient. They stated that the density of vehicle traffic in the area is a deterrent factor for pedestrians to use the city center. It was also stated that there is not enough parking space in the area.

The majority of the users stated that there is a lot of noise caused by traffic. Approximately half of the users stated that the lighting of the area at night is good, but the area is not safe at night; open shops and residential areas to be located in the area can provide security to a certain extent.

Tarsus Historic City Center has largely survived its unique characteristics. Within the urban pattern of the Ottoman period, there are archaeological sites belonging to the historical periods of the city, monumental buildings of the Principalities period and qualified buildings built after the Republic. In addition, industrial buildings mostly based on cotton production, constitute the industrial heritage of the city. With these qualities,

the city is a multi-layered city that hosts buildings, areas and sociocultural aspects belonging to the cultures it has hosted throughout its history. Although residential buildings have started to be abandoned and adapted to new functions in recent years, most of the monumental buildings and residences continue their original functions in the city as a whole.

However, there is significant physical deterioration especially in residential buildings. Some of the qualified buildings built during the Republican period have been demolished and destroyed, and the buildings that have survived to the present day continue to be damaged due to interventions that disrupt the original structure.

5. Conclusion

Tarsus is a legendary city that has many priorities and importance in all religions. It also has intangible heritage values with these features and the fact that it still contains behavioral patterns and information belonging to its cultural past. In this framework, it is important to protect all tangible and intangible values with a holistic approach.

The basic assumption in contemporary conservation approaches is to conserve cultural assets in their original form and function. The fact that the historic city center, which has multicultural and multi-layered cultural values, is still included in the daily life of the inhabitants of Tarsus, as seen in the survey results, supports the approach of preserving the area with its original use.

Tarsus is an important destination due to its historical and cultural values. In recent years, with the establishment and opening of hotels in the historic fabric,

the city is becoming a tourism area with accommodation rather than a day visit. There is a potential for an increase in tourism demand for the city. On the other hand, as identified in questionnaire evaluations, the citizens still use historic area in their daily life and want to continue their cultural way of life while demanding the arrangements required by contemporary life.

Within this framework, the basic approach of the conservation strategy of Tarsus Historic City Center is determined to conserve and sustain the historic buildings and areas with their original use, the primary target group is determined as the residents in Tarsus and the type of tourism is decided to be a controlled cultural tourism, in a way to provide visitors to experience cultural daily life of the city.

For the buildings that have lost their original function, functions that will provide social and economic benefits to the citizens and support the buildings to remain in the daily life of the city have been proposed. Within the scope of the project, alternative sightseeing routes have been determined and presentation proposals have been developed for heritage buildings and sites, taking into account tourism use and visitor demands. Within the framework of guidance map created within the scope of this strategy document, conservation projects continue to be designed.

The experiences to be gained after the implementation of the stated conservation approach, which is based on the sustaining the continuity of original use with local residents, will set an example for similar multi-cultural and multi-layered areas.

Acknowledgement

This article presents basic information and field studies regarding the research project titled as "Tarsus Historic City Center Conservation Strategy Document - Guideline" prepared with the contract signed between Mersin Metropolitan Municipality and Mersin University.

Author contributions

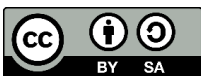
Züleyha Sara Belge: Conceptualization, Methodology, Field study, Discussions, Writing-Reviewing and Editing
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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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