

RESHAPING THE URBAN MEMORY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF PTT DIRECTORATE BUILDING IN ANKARA ULUS IN THE 1970S

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the PTT Directorate Building located in the Ulus, Ankara, investigating its impact on the urban memory and experience of the main street, Atatürk Boulevard. Constructed in the late 1970s to address the growing needs of the PTT, it became a prominent modern structure in Ulus among several Republican and Post-War Era structures. It still dominates the built environment with its cubical mass and large scale. However, since its construction, it has been a controversial structure among the locals, still being discussed to this day. The structure replaced the Post Office Palace, a Republican structure constructed in 1925 on the same site and demolished in the 1970s for the new one, creating a significant transformation and change within the context and the urban memory. Thus, this paper aims to investigate why such a radical transformation occurred and how it created a change in the identity of a governmental structure by discussing the political, economic, social, and, consequently, architectural changes in relation to the developments, necessities, and motivations of the Post- War Period and onwards. Through the examination of scholarly research, documents, and interviews with the actors involved in the design and construction of the structure, the paper discusses the factors leading to its transformation, the ways of implications of modern architecture of the time, and its place in the broader discussions of preservation and conservation. Investigating the transformation will express the significance of the new Post Office building in reshaping the urban memory and its role in placing a new identity shaped with modern architecture in the collective memory.

Keywords: PTT Directorate Building, Post Office Palace, Architectural Transformation, Urban Memory, Ulus.

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YENİDEN ŞEKİLLENEN KENTSEL HAFIZA: 1970'LER ANKARA ULUS'UNDA PTT GENEL MÜDÜRLÜK BİNASININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Ankara'nın Ulus bölgesinde bulunan PTT Müdürlüğü binasına odaklanarak, Atatürk Bulvarı'nın kentsel belleği ve deneyimi üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. 1970'lerin sonlarında PTT'nin artan ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak amacıyla inşa edilen bu yapı, Ulus'ta Cumhuriyet ve Savaş Sonrası Dönem yapıları arasında öne çıkan modern bir yapı haline gelmiştir. Kübik kütlesi ve büyük ölçeği ile yapılı çevreyi günümüzde de domine etmektedir. Fakat inşa edildiği günden bu yana, yerel halk arasında tartışmalı bir yapı olmuştur ve günümüzde hâlâ konuşulmaktadır. Bu yapı, 1925 yılında aynı alanda inşa edilen ve 1970'lerde yenisinin inşası için yıkılan Cumhuriyet dönemi Postane Sarayı'nın yerini almıştır ve bu değişim, kentsel bellek ve bağlam içinde önemli bir dönüşüm ve değişim yaratmıştır. Bu nedenle, bu makale, neden böyle radikal bir dönüşüm gerçekleştiğini ve bunun nasıl önemli bir kamu yapısının kimliğini değiştirdiğini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır; bu da Savaş Sonrası Dönem ve sonrasındaki gelişmeler, gereksinimler ve motivasyonlarla ilişkili siyasi, ekonomik, sosyal ve dolayısıyla mimari değişiklikleri tartışmayı içermektedir. Bu yapının tasarım ve inşasında yer alan aktörlerle yapılan röportajlar, toplanan belgeler ve akademik araştırmaların incelenmesi aracılığıyla, dönüşümüne yol açan faktörler, dönemin modern mimarisinin üstündeki etkileri ve koruma tartışmalarındaki yeri ele alınmaktadır. Dönüşümün incelenmesi, yeni Postane binasının kentsel bellek ve deneyimi yeniden şekillendirmedeki önemini ifade edecek ve modern mimari ile şekillenen yeni bir kimliği kolektif bellekte yerleştirmesindeki rolünü vurgulayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: PTT Genel Müdürlük Binası, Postane Sarayı, Mimari Dönüşüm, Kentsel Bellek, Ulus.

Tür: Araştırma Makalesi

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1. INTRODUCTION

The General Directorate of Post and Telegraph Organization Building (the PTT Directorate Building hereafter) is a significant modern structure in the Ulus district of Ankara, standing out within the silhouette of Atatürk Boulevard (Figure 1). The structure was designed to meet PTT's growing and expanding needs and postal activities.¹ Thus, with the request of the General Directorate of PTT, it was constructed in the late 1970s and was opened to the public in 1982. Its significance is particularly derived from its site, which also housed the old post office building (the Post Office Palace hereafter), which was constructed in 1925 and demolished in the 1970s to give its place to the new one (Figure 2).

The drastic architectural transformation and changing identity of such a crucial governmental building altered the context of Ulus, reshaping the experience of the built environment and urban memory. This change reflects the broader social, economic, and political realities of post-war modernism, and its effects can be observed in the structural and spatial characteristics of the building, reshaping the experience. Therefore, through its drastic change within the historical core of Ankara, the PTT Directorate Building has become a controversial structure, particularly in discussions surrounding modernism, modern architecture, urban memory, conservation, and preservation.

The structure is located on a site directly facing Atatürk Boulevard, the main street introduced during the Early Republican Era, connecting Ulus to the vastly growing city by extending towards the south (Figure 3). As the backbone of the early formations of the Republican capital, the boulevard houses several significant structures, providing a connection between them. Therefore, the PTT Directorate



Figure 1. The PTT Directorate Building in today's Ulus. (Taken by the author, May 2023)



Figure 2. The Post Office Palace, 1925. (“Yeni Postahane,” the Postcard Collection of the Library and Archive of VEKAM, Koç University)

¹ Detailed information on the PTT Directorate Building was gathered from the interview with Cihat Uysal, the design architect of the structure, in May 2023. He is a senior architect who graduated from Istanbul Technical University in 1971. He started to work as the Assistant Manager in the ‘Architectural and Structural Department’ of PTT in the 1970s. Another interview was conducted with Seyfi Göl, the Site Manager of the construction at the time. He is a master architect who completed his master’s degree at Middle East Technical University in 1970. Now is a board member of *Peace City. World*.

Building holds a prominent place among other structures, such as the Central Bank, Ziraat Bank Museum, Yunus Emre Institute, Ulus Technical Anatolian High School, PTT Stamp Museum, İş Bank Museum, Garanti Bank, Ulus Business Center, and Anafartalar Bazaar, defining the streetscape of the boulevard with a diverse silhouette consisting of various scales, textures, and architectural features.

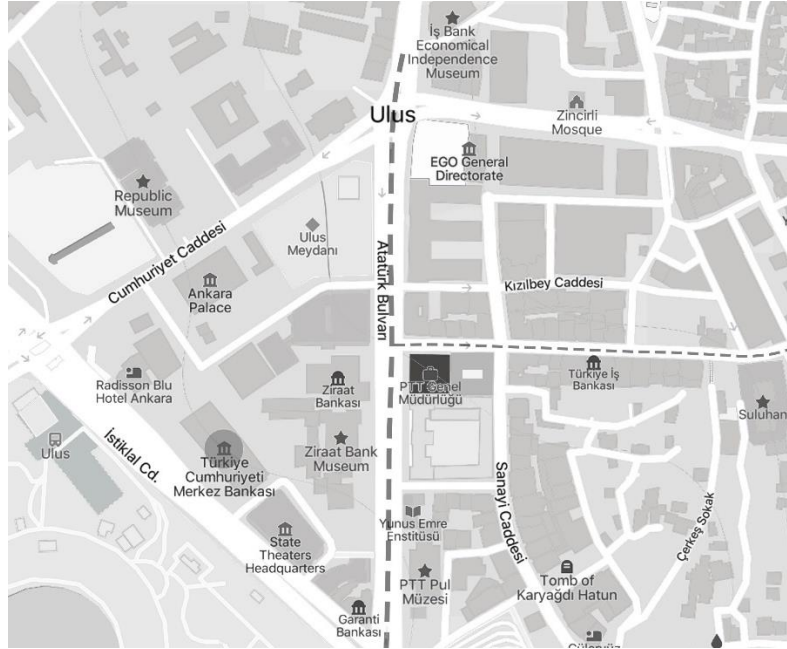


Figure 3. PTT Directorate Building and the surrounding structures.
(Map by Mapcarta, altered by the author).

In such a layered and defined context, the transformation of the post office building created a drastic change in the experience of the built environment defining the boulevard. Thus, investigating the effects of the social, economic, and political realities on its spatial, architectural, structural, and urban qualities is crucial to grasp its changing identity within its context so that the reasons behind its transformation can be examined in relation to the broader context of post-war modernism and modern architecture. Therefore, this paper focuses on the transformation of the post office directorate building of Ankara from the Post Office Palace to the PTT Directorate Building to investigate how its changing identity through its architectural and structural qualities affected the urban memory and experience of Atatürk Boulevard and Ulus.

To address how did the transformation impact the architectural identity, urban memory, and experience of Ulus and Atatürk Boulevard, within the context of modernism and modern architecture, the discussion will be supported by previous scholarly research, the documents collected from the municipality, and the interviews with the actors involved in the design and construction of the structure. It aims to explore and ultimately address “why” a transformation was necessary and “how” it changed its identity within the context of Ulus by delving into the functional, spatial, architectural, and structural qualities shaped by the period’s understanding of modernism and modern architecture.

2. POST OFFICES: A HISTORICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL INVESTIGATION

In the 1920s, new political, social, economic, and cultural changes occurred in the country with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The shift in the regime introduced new formations, ideas, and decisions, contributing to dominant transformations in the socio-political and socio-economic realms. While the transformations highly altered these realms, they also affected the physical environment of various cities countrywide. New concepts on the urban fabric, the built environment, city networks, and building types were introduced, representing the aspirations and ideas of the newly established regime within many cities (Kartal, 2019, p. 308-312).

The capital, Ankara, was the prominent city representing the regime change in its physical realm. After becoming the capital in 1923 for geopolitical, political, and strategic reasons, the city's population and boundaries expanded vastly, contributing to the significance of Ankara as the center of policies of the newly established Republic. Therefore, the new capital was envisioned as the symbol of the new regime, a strong representative of the Republic's promise of a new future different from the past, making it a model city to all other cities. (Cengizkan, 2022, p. 23). Being a significant example, it embodied the rational and secular modernization ideas in several aspects. In doing so, Ankara inspired a broader national identity rooted in the modernism that came with the Republic.

This embodiment of the new regime highly manifested itself in the urban landscape of Ankara. As the capital city, it was meant to house significant governmental institutions, each requiring its own space within the urban fabric that would flourish in capital life. Therefore, the built environment that accommodated the assembly building, ministries, government offices, schools, hospitals, etc., was designed for the growing needs of the new government and the population. Such essential institutions became the models of Republican modernization through their architectural and urban qualities, symbolizing the significant change within the new capital (Arıtan, 2008).

Among these governmental institutions, post offices also stood out with their crucial role in the urban life of the newly established Republic. As hubs of communication and material exchange, they provided a connection network between cities and countries. With the establishment of *Posta Nezareti* in 1840 as the first post organization for the public in the Ottoman Empire, the institution became a significant part of especially Istanbul, where the first post office building, *Postahane-i Amire*, was built.² As the organization flourished with the telegraph and telephone activities towards the beginning of the 20th century, the Grand Post Office in Sirkeci was constructed in 1909 to house new facilities, which still has been operating to this day (Alşan, 1990, p. 391-392). Therefore, within the old capital, the post office was already a part of urban life during the establishment of the Republic as an essential institution for communication and information exchange.

² Alşan also indicates that the first use of postal activity started for governmental communication. For further information see Alşan, R. (1990). "Cumhuriyetin Kuruluşu ve İlk Onbeş Yılında PTT İşletmesi". *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 6, pp. 391.

After establishing the capital as Ankara, new communication lines were introduced to the city, creating a network that connected the capital to the surroundings. In addition, as the city gained importance, postal activities increased because of the growing population and the governmental necessities (Yurtoğlu, 2016, p. 54). Along with other governmental institutions, the construction of a post office building became necessary in the new capital to house the increasing postal activities in people's daily lives and in formal communications. Therefore, a main post office building was constructed in the city's heart, Ulus, ensuring public access to postal services within the city center.

3. THE OLD POST OFFICE BUILDING IN ULUS, ANKARA: A SURVEY

The district of Ulus in Ankara, the city's oldest area, has a rich history flourishing with traces of its transformations throughout the centuries. It has become the center of several urban formations in Ankara, including the Republic's early years, during which it was used as the political center of the new capital after the declaration of Ankara as the capital city. Therefore, it began to develop rapidly with the construction of required institutional structures, which formed a city center highly used by politicians and citizens (Bayraktar, 2013, p. 21-23). This construction process within Ulus as the city center was planned in the Lörcher Plan between 1923 and 1928 (Figure 4). The plan's strategy was to locate the governmental institutions in the city's historical core while enabling new expansions adjacent to the center. (Çalışkan, 2009, p. 30; Cengizkan, 2004, p. 245). Therefore, Ulus became the most significant area of Republican Ankara as the core of the social, political, and economic center (Figure 5).

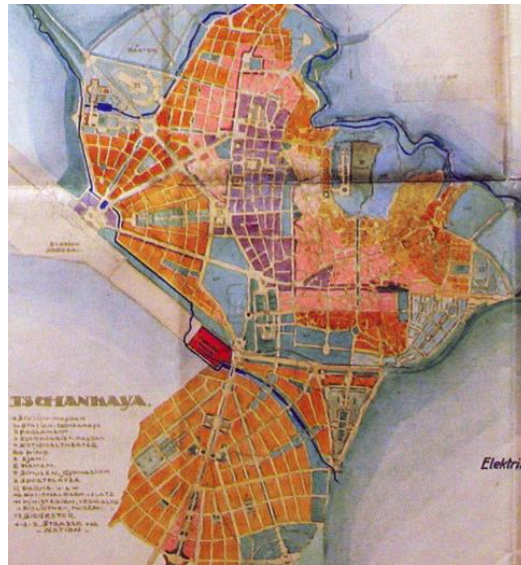


Figure 4. The general look of Lörcher Plan shows Ulus and the determined expansions. (Cengizkan, 2004, p. 245).



Figure 5. The Lörcher Plan with a focus on Ulus and Atatürk Boulevard.
(Cengizkan, 2004, p. 245, adapted by the author).

The new city plan created a step into a modern city shaped by republican ideas. While the social, political, economic, and urban ideas or concerns behind the plan contributed to modernization on a bigger scale, the governmental structures constructed within Ulus also reflected such ideas through their architectural, spatial, and urban qualities. Besides their physical being within the city as the representatives of the new and modern regime, they also became the backbone of daily and governmental affairs. Therefore, during this period, the social transformation was not linked to the built environment only through physical and formal entities but also through spaces and functions. While these physical and functional formations represented the Republic, they also housed significant institutions of the new system (Altan, 2005, p. 28).

One of these governmental institutions constructed in Ulus was the post office building, enabling the capital to connect to many other national and international cities. The building, also known as the Post Office Palace, was constructed in 1925, among other significant structures in Ulus.³ It was located on Atatürk Boulevard, the main circulation axis of the newly developed Republican city (Figure 6). Along with the other public buildings surrounding the boulevard, it also contributed to the experience and the silhouette of the axis through its physical and institutional being.

³ The information on its architect is diverse. Some indicate that it was Vedat Tek, who was a famous architect of the period, while some documents suggest that it was Ali Rasim Bey or the German Sodet Company.

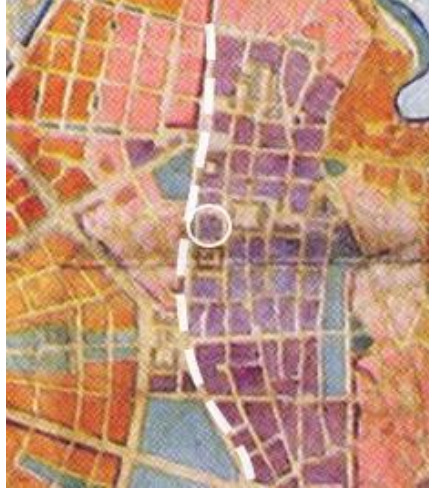


Figure 6. The site of the Post Office Palace indicated in the Lörcher Plan.
(Cengizkan, 2004, p. 245, adapted by the author).

By directly connecting to the main boulevard, the Post Office Palace became a part of the boulevard experience with its physicality and frontality. Like many structures constructed in this period, its architecture was influenced by the First National Architectural Movement, the common architectural movement of the time. This influence was exhibited especially in its formal and ornamental design, mostly seen on its exterior (Figure 7). The structure consisted of two parts with different levels, one with four stories and the other with three stories, creating an asymmetry on its façade. The main entrance was emphasized with steps in the center reaching the central part projecting outwards with two stories, and it welcomed people directly from the main street (Figure 8).



Figure 7. The Post Office Palace, 1925. ("Ankara Postanesi - Ankara Post Office", Salt Araştırma, <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/119964>)



Figure 8. The relation between the entrance of the Post Office Palace and the main street.
("Ankara / 1920'ler," Eski Türkiye Fotoğrafları Arşivi)

Furthermore, arched windows and pediment-like facade elements highly exhibit the influence of national architectural features on the design of public buildings in the capital. The projected façade was decorated with ornaments that reflected the Turkish identity, placing national identity on display to the passers-by of Atatürk Boulevard and the visitors coming to the structure for postal activities (Figure 9). Therefore, the Post Office Palace became a significant structure, with its physical entity flourishing by architectural, spatial, and ornamental features. While representing the current national architectural concepts, the construction of such a space in the city center emphasized the ongoing modernization process of the early Republican period through its physicality and functionality.



Figure 9. The exterior ornament details of the Post Office Palace.
("Ankara Postanesi - Ankara Post Office", Salt Araştırma (Salt Research),
<https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/211931>)

Its location within Ulus also increased its architectural and institutional significance. As observed from the map of 1924, a post office building constructed in 1894, indicated in the map as “*Posta ve Telgrafhane,*” already existed on the Northern side of Ulus (Figure 10) (Günel, G., Kılıcı A., 2015, p. 81). However, its use as a post office building lasted until the new Post Office Palace was opened on the southern side of the main Boulevard, known as *Bankalar Street*. The chosen site for the new post office building was crucial because it placed the institution among other significant structures, dominating the silhouette of the Eastern side of the street, such as *Maarif Vekaleti*, Lozan Hotel, Vocational High School, and Tekel Building (Figure 11). Likewise, the *Belediye Bahçesi*, Ziraat Bank, and Ottoman Bank on the western side increased public life activity while framing the boulevard.

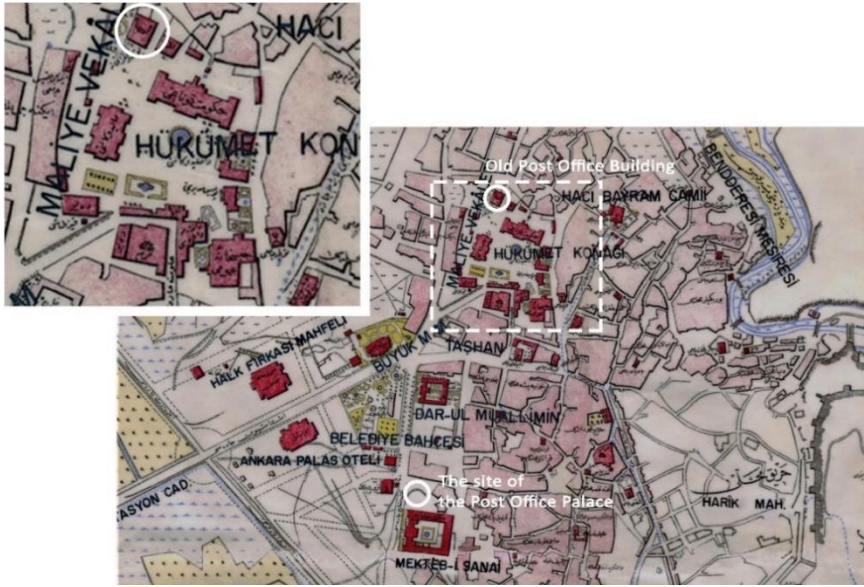


Figure 10. The old post office building in the Ankara Map of 1924.
(Günel, G., Kılıcı A., 2015, p. 80. Adapted by the author).



Figure 11. A postcard showing the east side of Atatürk Boulevard, going towards the Post Office Palace.
(Archive of fotoankara. Adapted by the author).

As the city vastly grew towards the south after the 1930s, Atatürk Boulevard remained as the main axis, connecting Ulus to the “new city” (Ünal, 2015, p. 249). However, in his Ankara plan of 1932, Jansen preserved Ulus as the business and commerce center of the city even though the formation of a new center in the south was evident (Figure 12). Therefore, the existence of the city center has continued throughout the decades by housing crucial urban functions. As a part of this daily functioning, the structure became significant. It continued its use for years by being connected to the new urban formations through its direct relationship with Atatürk Boulevard.

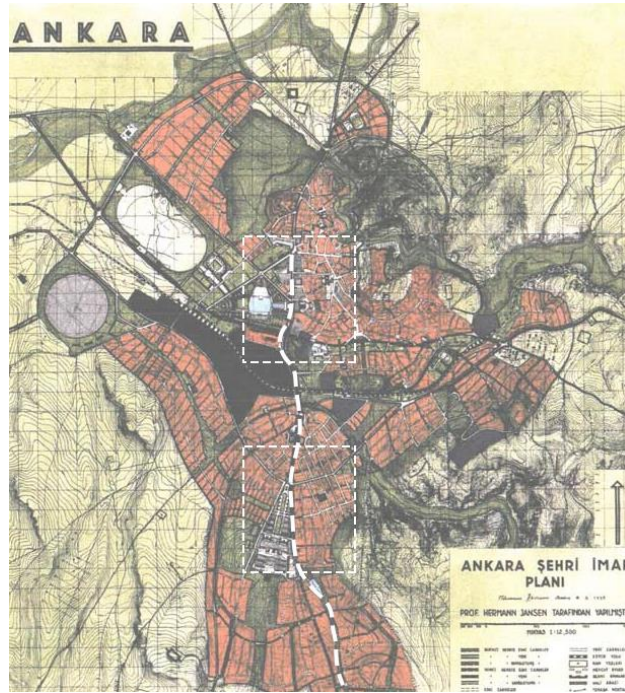


Figure 12. The extension of Atatürk Boulevard and two centers in the Jansen Plan, 1932. (Çalışkan, 2009, p.31. Adapted by the author).

The Post Office Palace remained as an important structure dominating the urban context. While it exhibited Republican modernism through its architectural features, it also served as the communication hub for decades, preserving its space in the urban fabric, as evident in the Ankara maps from different periods (Figure 13). However, as changes occurred in the social, political, and economic contexts throughout eras, the built environment was also altered parallelly. Especially with the modernization process of the Post-War Era, some structures were transformed, some were altered, and some were newly introduced according to the needs and ideologies. The Post Office Palace was one of these structures that was affected by such changes, which resulted in its demolition and transformation into a whole new structure with different architectural and spatial concerns. Therefore, to elaborate on “why?” and “how?” it was transformed, it is crucial to investigate the aspirations and needs of the era of its change.

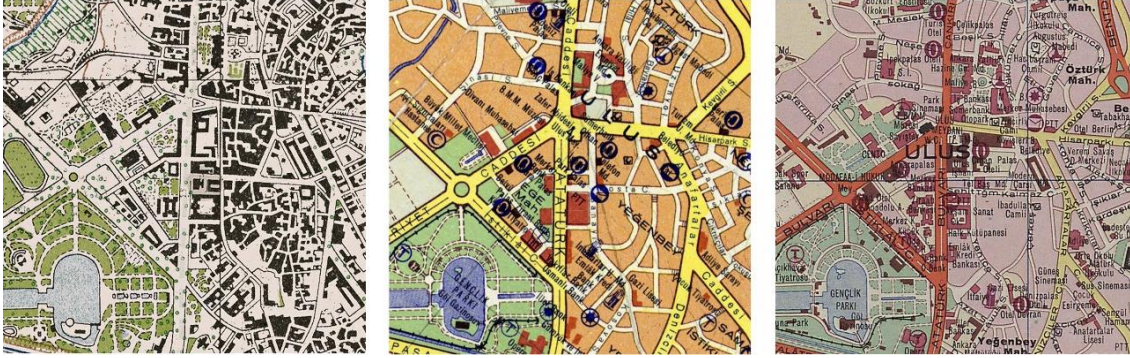


Figure 13. Ankara map of 1940, 1960, and 1967. (İnönü Encyclopedia, Harita Umum Müdürlüğü)

4. THE URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL AFTERMATH OF THE POST-WAR ERA IN ANKARA AND ULUS

After the end of World War II, political, economic, and social changes occurred worldwide, creating new perspectives on modernism in Turkey as well. Such changes also affected urban planning and architecture in a way that new architectural styles began to spread with new modernist principles and concepts, especially under the influence of the Western world (Ockman, J. 1993, p. 13).⁴ From the 1940s onwards, there was a dominant shift in the interpretation of “modernization,” shaped according to social and political shifts, population growth, and technological advancements. Therefore, many cities worldwide were energized with new architecture and urban planning approaches that focused on functionality, simplicity, and social responsibility, which formed the International Style (Adam, 2012, p. 29-33).

Turkey was also affected by the idea of modernization that spread from the Western world. Between the 1930s and 1950, the First National Architectural Movement had already given place to the Second National Architectural Movement affected by international modernism. In designs affected by the new “style,” monumentality, simplicity, symmetry, and functionality were introduced, while national elements and materials were still the focus. (Çubukçu, 2021, p. 370-373). Such design ideas can be observed in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (1938) by Clemens Holzmeister, the Ankara Opera House (1933) by Şevki Balmumcu and later altered by Paul Bonatz in the 1940s and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Building of Istanbul University (1942) by Sedat Hakkı Eldem and Emin Onat.

In the 1950s, with the rapid urbanization and industrialization, the modernization process was intensified. The large-scale urban planning projects, new building typologies, and new architectural styles emerged in accordance with the growing industry and the population growth globally. Thus, with economic and technological advancements, the dominant use of steel, glass, and concrete in the designs supported functional, simple, and proportional design (Ugah, Babalola, Ekeh, 2024, p. 7-9). For example, the Seagram

⁴ For a general overview of the context of the post-war period, see Ockman, J. (1993). “Introduction”, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (edited by Joan Ockman with the collaboration of Edward Eigen). Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, p. 13-24.

Building in New York City (1958) by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, the Unité d'Habitation in France (1952) by Le Corbusier the Jyväskylä University Building in Jyväskylä, Finland (1951) by Alvar Aalto, and the JK Building in Belo Horizonte, Brazil (1951) by Oscar Niemeyer. Each design contributed to the modernist understanding of the period through its material, geometry, and functionalist design and influenced one another across countries. Therefore, the International Style started to spread globally with economic internationalism and political interactions.

Turkey also underwent rapid urbanization, making the 1950s a significant period for urban and architectural developments. Within this period, the infrastructure and urban planning were modernized and developed, old neighborhoods were altered for new developments, and mass housing projects were introduced. Such developments reflected the influence of the Western World on Turkey's political and economic landscape. With these influences, the modernization understanding in Turkey shifted towards the International Style, embracing functional design, clean lines, and a human-centric approach (Tapan, 1984, p. 105-108). The ability to construct more complex structures with new building technologies and materials also enabled such a shift, providing an opportunity to express the modern approach of the period in the context of Turkish cities. Such expression can be observed in the Istanbul Hilton Hotel (1955) by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill with Sedat Hakkı Eldem, and the Ankara Emek Business Center (1959) by Enver Tokay (Bozdoğan, 2015, p. 15-23).

Between 1960 and 1980, several social, political, and technological changes occurred with the growing industrial activity and changing social perspectives worldwide. Various architectural movements, such as Brutalism, Structural Expressionism, Regionalism, and Postmodernism, that reflected the changes and developments were developed, contributing to the ever-evolving understanding of modernism (Yücel, 1984, p. 127). The emphasis on materiality and technology was dominant in Brutalist architecture, also observed in the Boston City Hall (1963) by Kallmann McKinnell and Knowles, and Structural Expressionist architecture, such as the Centre Pompidou in France (1971) by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. However, the search for historical and local identity also became a design concern in Regionalist, such as the Azuma House in Japan (1976) by Tadao Ando, and Postmodernist architecture, such as the Vanna Venturi House in the USA (1964) by Robert Venturi (Erkol, 2016, p. 11-31).⁵

Such socialist and localized modernist principles also influenced the architecture in Turkey. In the 1960s, Brutalist architecture became dominant and was generally used in public structures.⁶ The architects tended to use raw concrete to emphasize the mass and solidity of the structures, as also observed in the Faculty Buildings of METU (1961) by Behruz and Altuğ Çinici and the Turkish Historical Society Building (1967) by Turgut Cansever. However, this period also housed discussions on the significance of integrating local architectural elements into modern designs to balance identity and modernity. Therefore, Turkish architects experimented with forming a unique architecture aligned with the Turkish identity and culture, such as the Social Insurance Institution Building in Istanbul (1963) by Sedat Hakkı Eldem, and the Sedat Gürel House (1971) by Sedat Gürel (Erkol, 2016, p. 75-86).

⁵ For the broader context, see Erkol, İ. (2016). *Türkiye Mimarlığı'nda Modernizmin Revizyonları (1960-1980)*. PhD Dissertation for İstanbul Technical University, Institute of Science and Technology, p. 11-31.

⁶ The same approach was evident not only in Turkey, but globally. Imani, E. & Imani, S. (2021). "Brutalism: as a preferred style for institutional buildings in modern architecture period." *E3S Web of Conferences*. 231. 04001.

Ankara became a pioneer city, housing such modernist transformations which affected the built environment and urban context during the period. Especially after the 1950s, the city continued to vastly expand towards north-south and east-west directions, as observed in the Uybadin-Yücel Development Plan 1957 (Figure 14) (Kezer, 2015, p. 45).⁷ Consequently, the city's urban planning and architectural applications were energized with new constructions for new functions and needs. Ulus, however, has preserved its significance as the historical and commercial core of the capital while undergoing changes and transformations with new commercial, institutional, and social needs. (Cengizkan, 2006, p. 30-32). Therefore, between 1950 and 1980, various modern structures were constructed among the Early Republican ones, representing the changing modernist understanding throughout the decades, such as the Ulus Business Center, the Anafartalar Bazaar, and the 100th Year Bazaar. Such additions and transformations contributed to the diversity in Ulus and added new layers created by the structures designed under the modernist principles and movements

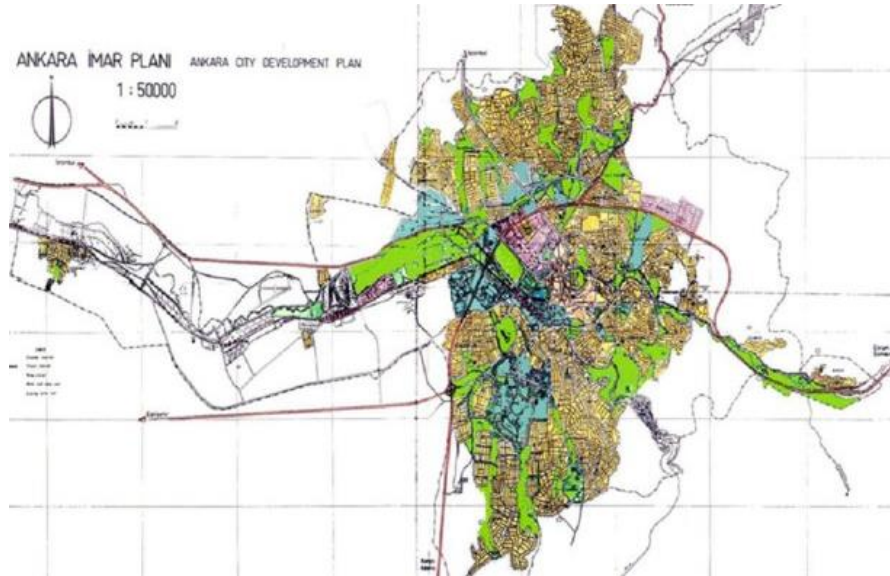


Figure 14. Uybadin-Yücel Development Plan, 1957.
(Cinar Ozdil, N. & Vejre, H. & Bilsel, C., 2019, p. 11)

The eagerness to develop and change resulted from the expanding city's growing needs. Ulus was already a part of the change by diversifying its context with various functions. For the needs of the developing city, bazaars, commercial complexes, and business centers became a part of Ulus between 1950 and 1980, alongside the banks, schools, and governmental buildings built between 1920 and 1950 (Altan, 2005, p. 29). Thus, the growing needs and motivations resulting from the population growth necessitated new architectural products serving different functions. These additions redefined the character of Ulus, making it a multifaceted context that represented the evolution of Ankara (Madran, Ergut, Özgönül, 2005, p. 51-

⁷ For the background of political and urban developments that affected such urban expansion, see Kezer, Z. (2015). "Political Capital". In *Building Modern Turkey: State, Space, and Ideology in the Early Republic*. University of Pittsburgh Press, p. 45.

52). As a part of this architectural and urban evolution, the Post Office Palace also underwent a transformation from its demolition to the construction of a whole new structure in the 1970s. This strict shift from the early 20th-century structure to the more modernized PTT Directorate Building represents the changing context in Ulus, reflecting the dynamic adaptation to the growing communication needs of the city.

5. THE PTT DIRECTORATE BUILDING: IN NEED OF A NEW POST OFFICE BUILDING IN ANKARA ULUS IN THE 1970s

In a defined and layered context, the transformations and changes are often driven by various necessities, especially in response to the social, political, and economic realities and developments. Ankara was also affected by such changes in its spatial and functional context. As the first core of the city, “political and social developments determined Ulus as the area of struggle for new ideologies” (Akdoğan, 2018, p. 389). Therefore, structures built between 1950 and 1980, such as Modern Bazaar erected in the 1950s and Anafartalar Bazaar, 100th Year Bazaar, and Ulus Business Center in the 1960s, transformed Ulus into a more commercial center “in spite of beginning to lose its political and cultural center features” (Kisaer, 2019, p. 66).

As commercial and social activities thrived during this period, postal activities also began to evolve. Besides the post and telegraph, the telephone centrals started to participate in communication activities in the 1920s, and they also had a space in the Post Office Palace. However, with the increasing spread of telephone services along with post and telegraph, it failed to accommodate necessary centrals enough for the needs of the growing city (Yurtoğlu, 2016, p. 71-76). Thus, the PTT directorate of the time requested a post office building that met the growing necessities. As a result, constructing a new structure became crucial to develop and modernize the Post Office Palace which would house more functional features and people. Therefore, with the approval of the government, the design process of a new structure started, including the architects and engineers of the governmental team, marking the starting point of the transformation.⁸

Within this need for transformation, a new structure was designed and erected on the exact site of the Post Office Palace, redefining the silhouette and experience of Ulus and Atatürk Boulevard (Figure 15). The new post office, known as the PTT Directorate Building, was designed by architect Cihat Uysal in 1974, who, at the time, was the Assistant Manager in ‘The Architectural and Structural Department’ of PTT. During its construction process, the project was continued by contractor Ali Rıza Gençer and master architect Seyfi Göl as the site manager until its completion in 1978.⁹ The post office, which was opened to the public in 1982, energized the boulevard and *Posta* Street, while providing a new scenery with its architectural design among the Republican edifices and other structures built after the 1950s (Figure 16).

⁸ The starting point of the construction was mentioned by the site manager of the construction, Seyfi Göl.

⁹ The information on the dates and actors was gathered from the interview with Cahit Uysal and Seyfi Göl and from the documents in the archive of the Ankara Municipality.

Since 1982, it is still operating as the main post office building of PTT, functioning as a significant governmental institution. Even though the institution has preserved its prominent place in the governmental and functional context of Ulus and Ankara to this day, its complete transformation from the Post Office Palace to a whole new structure with new formal, spatial, architectural, and structural details created an identity shift. Therefore, to interpret the need for a transformation, it is crucial to examine the functional, architectural, and structural qualities of the new structure in relation to the context of the period.



Figure 15. PTT Directorate Building. (Cihat Uysal, the 2010s)



Figure 16. PTT Directorate Building in the context of today's Ulus.
(Google Earth footage, adapted by the author)

The main design concern behind the new structure was having a new post office building that could house growing postal, telegraph, and telephone activities. Therefore, designing proper spaces for the service of such activities and extra office spaces for the PTT officers became crucial. The Post Office Palace failed to

accommodate such needs because it consisted of four and three stories in its two parts. Thus, the new structure was designed to include 14 stories with approximately 1700 square meters of space (Figure 17). The ground and mezzanine stories were designed for postal activities, and as observed from the plans, they consisted of necessary spaces housing both the public and the officers. The upper stories included office spaces so that the new structure could properly accommodate the requested number of PTT officers.

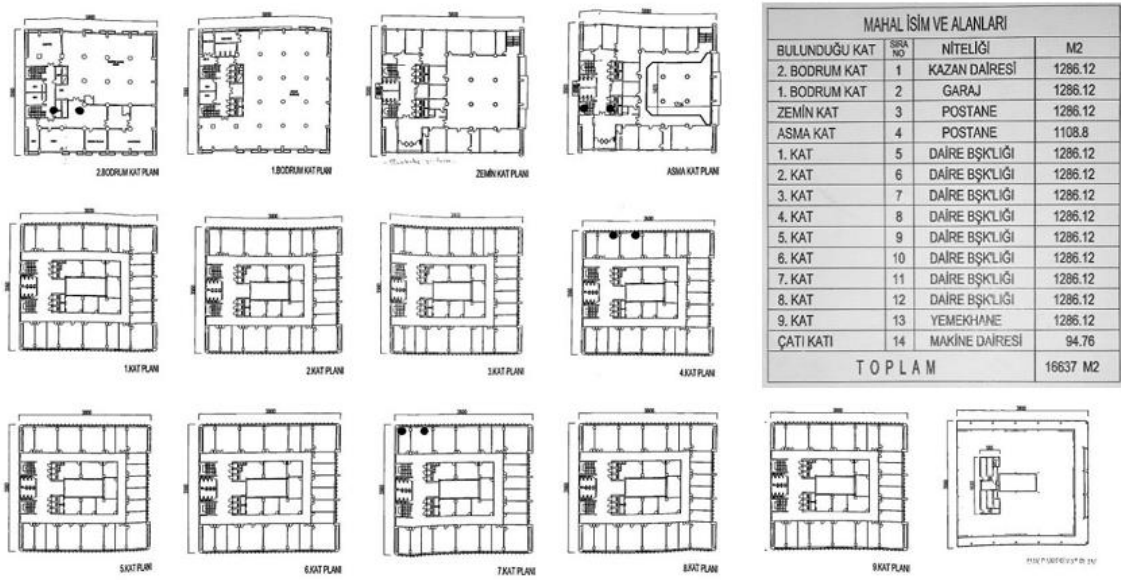


Figure 17. Plan drawings and the list showing the square meters of each story.

(The drawings of Nihan Onay, the alteration project in the 2010s, the Archive of Ankara Municipality)

Besides improving the spaces for postal activities, there was a need for a larger and more functional telephone central for PTT. Uysal emphasizes that this was a key design concern, making the uppermost story of the structure designed to accommodate a telephone central with a height of 5 meters. This significant design idea enabled the modern telephone equipment to fit in the space.¹⁰ Therefore, such considerations on the design indicate modern concerns about functionality. As the structure was transformed with functional motivations, the physicality also reflected the modern context of the period through its architectural and structural design.

Most of the structures constructed in the 1960s and the 1970s showcase the architectural concepts of modern architecture of the time, emerging alongside the developments and explorations that happened with the economic and social transformations while continuing what was explored in the 1950s. (Batur, 2005, p. 45-46). As a significant modern structure in the context of Ulus, the PTT Directorate Building reflected the precedent architectural traditions. It also embodied the architectural and structural features of the modern architecture of the period.¹¹ This can be interpreted through its formal and spatial qualities.

¹⁰ Also indicated by the architect of the structure.

¹¹ Seyfi Göl's statement when talking about its architectural features.

The cubic form of the structure housed each function in a single mass. Uysal mentions that he aimed to highlight the governmental aspect by designing a “rationalist, plain, and simple” structure (Figure 18). This idea was common in the 1950s, where “a practical, problem-solving, productive, and rational architecture was adopted through the gathering of functions within a prism” (Vanlı, 2006, p. 209).

Although the structure was constructed in the 1970s, the precedent modernism concepts and architectural education in the 1960s affected the architect's perspective, resulting in the continuation of the architectural traditions of the early decades. The offices, postal activity areas, and telephone central were gathered in a single cubic mass, with a larger space for the main postal area on the ground and mezzanine floors without any extrusion or addition to the mass (Figure 19). Moreover, the organization of spaces and the circulation areas provided an efficient user experience, highlighting the significance of functionality with a human-centered approach.



Figure 18. The mass of the PTT Directorate Building. (Cihat Uysal, 2010s)



Figure 19. The main postal space. (The Archive of Ankara Municipality, 2012)

The structural and material qualities of the PTT Directorate Building also express the modern architecture of its period. Like several structures built after the end of the 1950s in Ankara, it had exposed concrete façades, showing a brutalist identity (Figure 20).¹² The same material was also used in the framework, supported with flat slabs and a bored pile foundation, making it secure for earthquakes according to the policies.¹³ Moreover, on the facades, a steel cage-like system was used for the windows, representing the developments in the building materials and construction methods (Figure 21). Such an opening design was also a result of the influence from the architectural examples of the period on how the windows were arranged in a proportional and simple manner integrated with the use of steel.

¹² Such examples can be listed as Kızılay Emek Business Center (1959-65), Turkish Grain Board Building (1964-65), Turkish Historical Society Building (1967, the faculty buildings of METU, (1960-71), Turkish İş Bank General Headquarters Building (1978), etc.

¹³ Uysal (2023); Uysal, C. 2007. “Bir Zamanlar Beton.” Yapı Dünyası Dergisi, sayı: 140.

The PTT Directorate Building stood out in the context with its architectural and structural peculiarities when compared to the old structure. Besides its simplistic, rationalist, and human-centered design that reflected the modern architectural principles, its brutalist identity expressed the technological advancements and abilities of the period. Therefore, the transformation introduced a completely new structure in the same context that represented the new modernist understandings, making the urban experience change and, consequently, alter the urban memory.



Figure 20. The front façade and the material detail.
(The Archive of Ankara Municipality, 2012)



Figure 21. The side façade and window system. (AA, 1980s)

6. THE EFFECT OF ARCHITECTURAL TRANSFORMATION ON THE URBAN MEMORY OF A GOVERNMENT BUILDING IN ULUS

The modern concepts and materials, enabled by the developments of the period, affected the new design for the post office building, creating a radical change in the context through its architecture in the 1970s. Therefore, the transformation not only remained on the building scale but also affected the urban context and experience. Since the Post Office Palace had been a part of Ulus and Atatürk Boulevard for nearly 50 years, it became a prominent edifice contributing to the boulevard experience and urban memory along with other significant structures.

“Urban memory can be regarded as an expression of collective memory that has been shaped within a particular space as time goes by” (Ringas, Christopoulou, Stefanidaki, 2011, p. 325). Therefore, it creates a link between the past and the present of the built environment experience and significantly shapes the cultural heritage. This link is nourished by the daily activities, sights, and interactions of the human experience with the place, strengthening the collective memory (Nora, 1989, p. 8). Thus, between the time the Post Office Palace was erected and demolished, it became a part of the collective urban memory

of Ulus and Ankara by contributing to the built environment experience of those who have used the post office daily, who often have been on the boulevard, or even who have encountered the structure once. Urban memory is also highly linked to identity, both being affected by spatial realms (Kolsal, Güven Ulusoy, 2023, p. 114). As the built environment contributes to the urban memory, it also shapes the area's urban identity. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, many Republican structures were constructed, each defining the streetscape of Atatürk Boulevard (Figure 22). As one walked up or down the boulevard, the built environment affected the experience through the architectural and ornamental details, greeting the passers-by with national elements. This experience boosted the Republican spirit and strengthened the collective identity. Therefore, each structure preserved its space within the urban memory and urban identity of Ulus and Ankara.



Figure 22. A gaze towards Ulus in the 1940s.

(Yavuz İşçen, Ankara Kent Yazıları: Ankara'nın yok edilen kentsel kimliği üzerine iç geçirmeler
<https://yavuziscen.blogspot.com/p/eski-ankara-fotograflar-5.html>)

The structures built between the 1950s and the 1980s created a new experience of the boulevard with new scales and textures. Thus, the urban memory was energized with new edifices representing the political, economic, and social changes of the period through their formal and architectural qualities (Figure 23). As one walked along the boulevard, they viewed the elements of the Republican structures, they looked up to see the multi-story high Post-War structures, and they became close to exposed materials and textures. Therefore, the experience was altered with new additions among the old ones, creating a diversified context in Ulus and Atatürk Boulevard.



Figure 23. A gaze towards Ulus in the 1970s.
 ("Opera Meydanı - Opera Square", CE-KA Postcards, Salt Research,
<https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/119968>)

Within this context, the PTT Directorate Building also provided a new scale different than the Post Office Palace (Figure 24). The drastic height change significantly affected the silhouette and the experience of the Atatürk Boulevard since the structure directly rose on the main circulation axis. The height difference enabled the structure to be visible from the south and the north of the boulevard, placing it in the newly shaped urban memory of the users who have been to the boulevard frequently or occasionally (Figure 25). Moreover, its height also introduced a new scale that started to become familiar in Ulus' new and diverse context, which encouraged people to look up and have a sense of the scale. This spatial recognition strengthened the place of the PTT Directorate Building in the collective urban memory.



Figure 24. The changing height of the post office buildings.
 (Ulus in 1930s, Eski Türkiye Fotoğrafları Arşivi; Ulus in 1990s, Antoloji Ankara)



Figure 25. Ulus in the 1980s.
(Antoloji Ankara, 2022, İzzet Gönenç)

Its entrance, which directly faced the boulevard, also altered the urban experience and memory. Even though its elements and decorations changed throughout the years, it became a part of everyday life, directly providing a flow of interaction between the governmental structure and the boulevard (Figure 26). Therefore, such an entrance opening to the boulevard reinforced daily encounters that occurred by entering, exiting, or passing by, each making the structure a significant part of the urban life and energizing the boulevard and *Posta* Street. Thus, it becomes not just a governmental institution but a structure that contributes to the vibrancy of the boulevard, preserving an enduring place in the urban memory.



Figure 26. The entrance of the PTT Directorate Building throughout different years.
(The Archive of Ankara Municipality, 2012)

While each structure, both “old” and “new,” contributed to the urban memory uniquely, the drastic transformation of the Post Office Palace into the PTT Directorate Building became controversial. The locals criticized the transformation of the old post office building as the “loss” of a significant structure that was contributing to the collective memory.¹⁴ Many people have criticized the command to demolish and not to preserve and conserve the Post Office Palace. Therefore, the transformation also contributes to the discussions on the preservation and conservation practices of the period.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the preservation practice was limited to the moveable artifacts from previous ages, generally associated with the museum practice. Even though immovable properties started to become a concern in the mid-twentieth century, preservation and conservation were not fully embraced until the 1960s (Elmas, 2005, p. 74-75). From the late 1960s onwards, with the inclusion of developed conservation practices in the laws after the effects of the Venice Charter, the concepts of conservation and preservation started to be more dominant (Dinler, 2022, p. 382).

However, in practice, the identification and documentation of “monumental structures” occurred after the 1970s when such structures were not considered individually but with the built environment and the surroundings, shaping a new understanding of conservation and cultural heritage (Kejanlı, T., Akın, C. T., Yılmaz, A., 2007, p. 186). Especially towards the beginning of the 2000s, the practice was strengthened with more detailed and considerate discussions and laws, creating the foundation of the prominent conservation law No. 5226, “the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Property,” in 2004 (Kejanlı, T., Akın, C. T., Yılmaz, A., 2007, p. 194). Therefore, considering the context, the concern about the conservation of Republican structures and the consideration of their relationship with the built environment were not dominant issues of the period, as Uysal also emphasizes.

Such a lack of focus on preservation and conservation practices also affected the built environment of Ankara. Although such practices were envisioned for the historic city center with the development of the “new city” towards the south after the Jansen Plan, a conscious policy that include methods to preserve and revive, such as planning and providing financial means for restoration and protection, were not properly implemented. Since the practices were not fully embraced until the 1970s, the historic urban fabric of Ulus was left to its own fate (Bademli, 1985, p. 11-16). The situation was the same for the Post Office Palace. The developing and growing needs dominated the wish to preserve a structure that was no longer efficient for the needs of the PTT.

The transformation of the Post Office Palace into the PTT Directorate Building seems radical when considered on a building scale. However, the perspective can be reinterpreted when one considers the ongoing transformations and additions that diversified the context of Ulus after the 1950s and, specifically, in the 1970s. After all, in a time where innovation and change were inevitable with new developments, “a transformation was necessary for the needs of the PTT to be covered, and that was provided with the new structure still functioning to this day” (Uysal, 2023, interview) (Figure 27).

¹⁴ Research conducted on the internet, social media, and through informal interviews, many people who have seen both structures criticize the new building.



Figure 27. The current view of the PTT Directorate Building in today's Ulus.
(Taken by the author, May 2023)

7. CONCLUSION

As a 50-year-old edifice, the PTT Directorate Building stands out in the historic center of Ankara, Ulus, presenting a controversial case of an architectural transformation within a layered and strong urban context. Since it directly interacted with Atatürk Boulevard, it became a significant structure affecting the experience of the main street connecting Ulus to the city. Therefore, its transformation from the Post Office Palace in the 1970s drastically changed the built environment and one's urban memory and experience. The changing identity of the structure due to the transformation was affected by the social, political, and economic changes and, consequently, the concepts of the modern architecture of the period.

The demolition of the Post Office Palace and the construction of the PTT Directorate Building have sparked questions on "why" and "how" it occurred. In this paper, such questions are analyzed through the governmental significance of PTT and the Post Office Palace, as well as the changing context between the early Republican Era and the period after the Post-War Era. From the 1940s to 1980, the modern architecture constantly evolved with the increasing urbanization, industrialization, and growing technological advancements occurred around the world. Various modernism principles, such as functionality and simplicity, shaped by the social, political, and technological realms affected the architecture and urban planning in a way that structures designed with new modernist movements under the influence of emerging approaches energized the cityscapes of several cities.

The modern architecture in Turkey was also affected by the evolving modernism understanding and newly emerged principles. Thus, it was highly influenced by the Western World and its architecture, shaping a Post-War modernism context within cities through the implication of modernist principles and the exploration of new materials on the designs. However, the period also reflects a dynamic interaction between international influences and local identity where a search for a national identity integrated with modern ideas became a significant issue. Especially Ankara housed such modern designs with its rapid

urbanization and development, being energized with governmental structures, educational complexes, housings, and public spaces embodying the modernist principles and technologies, such as the influence of the International Style and the Brutalism. Therefore, the capital symbolized the country's eagerness to modernize and Westernize through the architecture and urban planning developed by new modernist approaches.

The analysis of the modernization process of the period and the investigation of the architectural context are crucial because the reasons, motivations, and processes of the transformation of such a significant governmental structure within the historic center can be understood through the growing necessities of the new period by the changing political, economic, and social spheres. The analyses emphasize that such changes also affected the ideas of modernism and modern architecture, which also manifested themselves in the functional, spatial, architectural, and structural qualities of the new PTT Directorate Building.

The Post Office Palace was a modern building in its context, considering the modernism brought about by the Republican period. It had represented the great change in the regime and the modern ideologies in the city's core through its national architecture for nearly 50 years. However, in a context constantly evolving with the new modernist ideas created by the developments and explorations of the Post-War Era, the structure also surrounded the change. The growing necessities of PTT were now housed by the PTT Directorate Building, which also represented the modernist concepts of its period through its human-centered spatial organization, functional offerings, plain cubic mass, and brutalist expressions. Therefore, despite the radical transformation, the significant government structure represented modernism in both cases and placed it in the urban memory of the city's people.

The study also enriches the discussions on urban memory by providing a perspective on how the architectural transformation of a significant governmental structure within a layered historical context impacts urban memory and identity. By examining the transformation of the Post Office Palace into the PTT Directorate Building, the study demonstrates how such changes influence the urban memory of those who interacted with the structure, whether daily or even briefly, creating a complex, layered memory that reflects the evolving identity. This is significantly valid for the context of Ulus because of the complex urban fabric consisting of structures from various eras. Therefore, the study highlights how the modernist transformation reshaped the urban experience and memory, providing valuable insights into how architectural shifts can leave lasting imprints on urban memory.

Undoubtedly, the identity of the government structure in the built environment changed with the construction of the PTT Directorate Building, impacting the urban memory, silhouette and the experience of Atatürk Boulevard through its scale, texture, and architecture (Figure 28). However, as the old one was lost, a new one representing the modern architecture of the era was gained. This new structure added a new identity and introduced a significant layer to the context of Ulus and Ankara, diversifying the experience and urban memory that has been persisting for 50 years and many years to come. Therefore, "even though modern architectural production largely destroyed the one that came before it, we must argue that this heritage, which has become a part of our past, should live in our cities as a historical layer that provides a foundation for our social and spatial experiences" (Altan, 2017).



Figure 28. The PTT Directorate Building from the Atatürk Boulevard.
(Ahmet Soyak, 2013)

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