

Research Article

## Abstraction and Empathy (Einfühlung) in Architecture: Rethinking Mosque Design in Sancaklar Mosque

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Sancaklar Mosque,  
Architectural Style.

**Abstract** This paper aims to explore the aesthetic theories of empathy (Einfühlung) and abstraction, focusing on their application to architectural works. Wilhelm Worringer's psychological aesthetic theories serve as the framework for this study, particularly in analyzing how artistic styles reflect the internal world of the artist. The research examines how these theories have historically explained various art styles and their relevance to different cultures and epochs. The central focus is Sancaklar Mosque, which serves as a case study to investigate how abstraction and empathy manifest in contemporary architecture. Through content analysis, the study identifies key concepts from Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy (Einfühlung)* and evaluates them from the perspective of the physical and qualitative architectural elements of the mosque. The findings aim to provide deeper insights into architectural style, particularly through the lens of psychological aesthetics. This study proposes a fresh and adaptable method for analyzing architectural works by integrating these two significant theories, illustrating their role in interpreting architectural style across different historical and cultural contexts.

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## 1. Introduction

In the study of aesthetic science, three fundamental elements become apparent: the subject (the artist), the object (the artwork), and the relationship between them. Before the 19th century, aesthetics was interpreted from an objectivist perspective, but later, under the influence of psychology, there evolved a subjectivist or psychological approach to aesthetics. One of the leading figures of this subjectivist approach is Theodor Lipps, who is regarded as the founder of modern psychological aesthetics. According to Lipps, beauty is a spiritual reality grasped by the faculties of thought and imagination (Montag, Gallinat & Heinz, 2008, pp. 1261). Lipps also explains the special feeling that the object evokes in the subject through a theory he calls "empathy" (*emfühlung*).

In German, *emfühlung* means "to feel something from within" and in the literature of art, it is defined as a feeling of pleasure. Although feelings are generally associated with the subject, the existence of the object is essential for empathy. According to Lipps, aesthetic pleasure arises when the subject lives out an experience in an object external to themselves. Lipps views this inner activity as the fundamental condition of the aesthetic process; each object takes shape as much as the subject perceives it. When this perception process is uninterrupted, the subject experiences a sense of freedom, and this freedom stems from the spiritual activity the subject experiences in the object (Jadoha, 2005, pp 151-152).

On the other hand, Wilhelm Worringer argues that Lipps' theory of empathy may be correct for certain art forms, but it falls short in explaining all forms of art. Worringer, considering the diversity of artistic styles across different cultures and historical periods, suggests that this variety cannot be explained by a single aesthetic theory (Worringer, 2017). Worringer counters Lipps' theory by pointing to abstract art forms, which he believes cannot be explained through empathy alone, and thus he develops the concept of abstraction. According to Worringer, abstraction stems from a negative relationship with the external world and inner unrest. While abstraction finds satisfaction in inorganic forms, empathy finds fulfillment in the vitality of nature and spiritual unity.

In the context of artistic traditions associated with Islamic societies, the concept of abstraction holds significant importance. These societies have developed diverse approaches to abstract art through geometry and mathematics, often striving to transcend external unrest and reflect metaphysical principles through abstract forms (Koç, 2008). However, the term "Islamic civilizations" should be used cautiously, avoiding homogenization and recognizing the multiplicity of cultural, historical, and individual factors shaping artistic production. Worringer's concept of "Islamic architecture" includes not only the earliest religious structures of Islamic history, such as the Prophet Muhammad's first mosque and the Kaaba, but also the formal religious buildings later developed by Arab societies. According to Worringer, the Kaaba, with its cubic form and clear shape, represents the ultimate form of abstraction (Worringer, 2017). Islamic architecture, deeply rooted in spiritual and cultural paradigms, manifests abstraction through intricate geometric designs, repetitive patterns, and an avoidance of representational forms. These elements are not merely aesthetic choices but represent a metaphysical dialogue, reflecting the transcendental unity of Islamic thought. For example, the design

principles of the Alhambra in Spain or the Great Mosque of Cordoba provide compelling historical contexts for understanding this tradition within the broader scope of abstraction.

Wilhelm Worringer analyzed these structures within the framework of his “abstraction and empathy” theory, emphasizing that abstraction was particularly prevalent in Islamic societies. According to Worringer, abstraction in art is an effort to transcend internal unrest by establishing a negative relationship with the external world. In Islamic architecture, this tendency is manifested through geometry and mathematical order.

Worringer described Islamic architecture as “a tangible reflection of the metaphysical understanding of Islamic societies” and analyzed these structures within the dialectic of abstraction and empathy in art history. According to him, art history is a dialectical process between abstraction and empathy, where the two tendencies complement each other. The abstraction tendency evident in Islamic art serves as a significant application of Worringer’s theory and is examined within this study. However, instead of limiting these works to the generalized term “Islamic architecture,” it is emphasized that they should be approached as a dynamic tradition reflecting the diversity of historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts.

In this study, mosques referred to as “Islamic architecture” are discussed in a broader context, later encompassing Ottoman religious structures. Worringer explains art history as a dialectical process between abstraction and empathy. According to him, the history of art is almost equivalent to the history of the universe and religion. Empathy and abstraction are not opposites but complementary creative processes. These processes are shaped by the psychological state of the artist, playing a crucial role in determining artistic styles. Figure 1 outlines the formation of these two tendencies and their interrelationship, offering a framework to evaluate the nuanced and context-specific characteristics of architectural and artistic works.

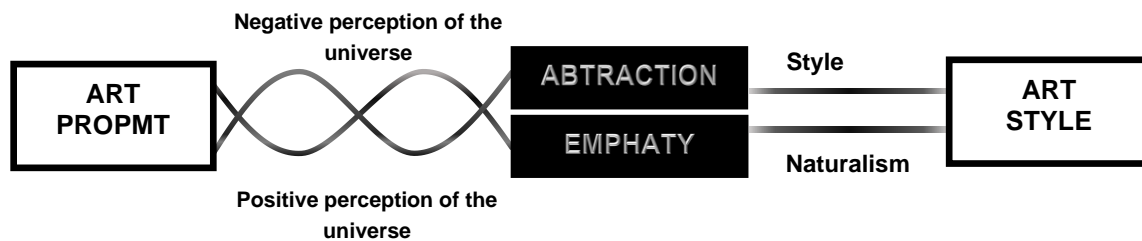


Figure 1. Abstraction and empathy process (Duman, 2021).

In this study, Worringer's theory of Abstraction and Empathy (Einfühlung) is discussed in the context of Islamic architecture and evaluated through the example of Sancaklar Mosque. The aim of the study is to examine how these two basic concepts in art and aesthetic theories are applied in the context of architecture and to contribute to architectural style studies.

The research will discuss the adequacy of the theory in explaining artistic tendencies across different cultural contexts, in contrast to the naturalistic style in Western art. In this regard, Sancaklar Mosque has been selected as a case study due to its unique architectural approach, which diverges from traditional mosque designs. The mosque is renowned for its minimalist aesthetic and integration with the natural landscape, reflecting a deliberate departure from ornamental and iconic elements. This makes it an ideal subject for examining how the theory

can be applied to architectural style. Furthermore, the mosque's emphasis on spirituality through simplicity aligns with the core principles of abstraction, offering a compelling contrast to more empathetic or emotionally immersive architectural styles. The choice of Sancaklar Mosque as a case study stems from its unique architectural approach, which blends modernist abstraction with Islamic principles, making it a rich example for evaluating Worringer's theory. Its minimalist aesthetic, integration with the landscape, and rejection of traditional ornamental elements offer a distinctive perspective on mosque design, reflecting a deliberate shift towards abstraction while maintaining spiritual resonance.

The theory discussed within the scope of this study is reinterpreted in the context of Islamic architecture and analyzed through the example of Sancaklar Mosque. The aim of the study is to reconsider this theory, which has made significant contributions to art history, and to create a new and developable research area regarding style studies in architecture. The method of the study was carried out by content analysis. The basic concepts in Worringer's work, *Abstraction and Empathy (Einfühlung)*, were examined through the physical and qualitative architectural elements of Sancaklar Mosque. In this context, the stylistic features of the architectural works were evaluated in terms of the theory, and how these features could be interpreted from different perspectives in the architectural sense was opened to discussion.

### 1.1. The Relationship between Abstraction, Einfühlung and Architecture

Architecture has become a discipline defined within the framework of formality and is recognized as an art form that represents the highest level of the relationship between humans and the world. Architecture serves as a means of expressing and interpreting humanity's aesthetic inclinations. In his work, *Esthetics in Architecture*, Masiero explains this by stating, "Architecture is a psychological necessity of form, positioned against nature's complex and unsettling perceptual world" (Masiero, 1999). This emphasizes architecture's role as a medium that structures the relationship between humans and their environment.

Art philosopher and theologian, Vischer posited that the element creating form on the aesthetic plane is the process of empathy or *Einfühlung*. According to Vischer, objectified images "come alive" and gain meaning through empathy (Tchikine, 2019). This perspective has laid the foundation for empirical-psychological interpretations of both art and architecture.

Fred Fiedler, reconsidering Kant's ideas, acknowledged that it is consciousness that gives shape to sensory experiences. Fiedler emphasized that the history of visual art and architecture represents the expression of styles and symbols (Fiedler, 2011). One of the most prominent figures in this field, Riegel, argued that art and architectural history are shaped through "visions" built upon the influences of various eras and styles (Riegel, 2000). Thus, the formal grammar of artistic works can be constructed in response to the cultural and historical contexts they emerge from.

Building upon these ideas, Wilhelm Worringer developed his theory by examining architectural history and seeking answers to the underlying reasons behind architectural styles and forms (Feist, 2007). Worringer's theory of abstraction and empathy not only had a profound impact on aesthetics but also significantly influenced architectural criticism and theory. His theory has

become an essential method for scientifically and critically analyzing artistic works and styles (Maskarinec, 2017).

Worringer strengthened his theory with examples from art history. First, by looking at the arts of primitive societies, he stated that these arts stemmed from a “fear of the spiritual universe” and that abstract art was born here (Worringer, 2017). Later, turning to Greek art, he suggested that structures that were distant from nature in the early periods evolved into styles that got closer to humans and nature over time. This process symbolizes a transition from abstraction to empathy. According to Worringer, geographical, intellectual, and religious conditions have deeply affected art. Periods that philosophically represented transcendence, and harsh geographical conditions paved the way for the emergence of works of art that tended to abstraction (Duman, 2021). In contrast, art periods based on empathy established a more positive relationship with nature, humans, and the environment, producing works that were close to these elements (Öhlschläger, 2020). Architecture also contributed to these artistic tendencies and produced structures that supported the theories of abstraction and empathy. Architectural structures based on abstraction theory generally stand out with minimalist and geometric forms that are far from nature, whereas structures based on empathy offer designs that emphasize the organic and intimate relationship that humans establish with their surroundings. These two opposing trends have directly influenced the shaping of architectural styles in different periods and geographies.

While structures influenced by abstraction offer a search for meaning through regular and abstract forms that question the place of humans in the world, structures on the axis of empathy aim to establish a human-centered and emotional bond in harmony with nature. The architectural traditions often associated with Islamic societies draw attention with their tendency towards abstraction; elements such as geometric ornaments, repetitive motifs, and avoidance of figurative elements highlight how abstraction has been employed in architectural practices. For instance, the Kaaba’s simple, cubic form symbolizes unity, stability, and the centrality of faith, aligning with Worringer’s idea of abstraction as a quest for transcendence and stability. However, rather than framing this abstraction solely as a metaphysical or religious phenomenon, it is essential to recognize the diverse sociocultural, historical, and material conditions that shaped these forms over time.

In this context, architectural works should not merely be seen as reflections of static cultural identities but as products of complex and dynamic historical processes. While Worringer’s theories of abstraction and empathy provide valuable tools for exploring these dynamics, the categorization into “Islamic,” “Western,” or “Modern” architecture risks oversimplifying the intricate interplay of ideas, practices, and material realities. Instead, these categories must be critically examined to avoid reinforcing binary oppositions such as East versus West or metaphysical versus rational. By engaging with the broader sociopolitical and economic conditions that shaped architectural forms, we can better understand how abstraction and empathy manifest across time and space as active, generative processes rather than as static, predetermined outcomes.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Abstraction and Empathy: Conceptual Framework and Evaluation Criteria

The study aims to reinterpret a space within the framework of abstraction and empathy theory. In this context, the concepts to be used for analyzing the space are categorized based on the two main concepts found in Worringer's work, *Abstraction and Empathy (Einfühlung)*. In line with the scope and objectives of the study, the distinction between the key concepts of abstraction and empathy theories is clearly and explicitly analyzed in Table 1. These two concepts, which form the core methodology of the research, have been explained alongside related pairs of sub-concepts derived from relevant sources. Moreover, these concepts have been further expanded throughout the study, in accordance with the significance and depth of the topic.

Table 1. Basic distinctions of abstraction and empathy (Duman, 2021).

ABSTRACTION	EMPHATY
Pleasure in separating objects from subjectivity	Pleasure of experiencing subjectivity in the object
Unlimited, independent, complex universe	Positive, happy, aesthetic universe perception
Awareness that the world of appearances is not real	Consciousness of objects in the visible world
The need to step outside of oneself	The need for self-activation
Abstraction from the world of objects	Living our inner world in objects
A superhuman attitude, an emphasis on	An attitude that leads people to their existence and
Emphasis on timelessness and eternity	Dependence on place and time
Human-distance structures	Human-friendly structures
The material reflects its "own" property	The material is affected by form and function

In the following section of the study, content analysis was conducted to analyze the artworks in the book, and pairs of concepts were formed based on the analyses and relevant references. These pairs are listed under the headings of abstraction and empathy in Table 2. These concepts were used in the findings section of the study to evaluate the identified spatial elements. In the findings section, the researcher has indicated which of these concept pairs is more appropriate for each spatial element.

Table 2. Sub-concepts reached by the analysis of the concepts of abstraction and empathy (*Einfühlung*) (Duman, 2021).





Concepts and Sub-Concepts in Worringer	Abstraction	Empathy
Inferences	Sub-Concepts	
Concept Pairs Inferred Based on Worringer Reading	Compulsorily	Order
	Stability	Flow
	Superconscious	Conscious
	Absence	Existence
	Eternity	Liberty
	Timelessness	The Moment
	Persuasion	Consensus
	Monumentality	Humility

In this study, architectural spatial elements identified through content analysis are listed in Table 4. These spatial elements were evaluated using references taken from the book, and directly quoted concepts were identified from the relevant sources. The sections that the spatial elements refer to were analyzed through the example of Sancaklar Mosque. Architectural elements were adapted to different sections of Sancaklar Mosque and evaluated in relation to the selected pairs of concepts.

The dual concepts encountered in the theories of abstraction and empathy can be regarded as elements that contribute to the dynamic relationships shaping Islamic art. Rather than interpreting these dualities (such as unity in multiplicity) through a purely philosophical lens, it is essential to consider the historical and social contexts that shaped the production of these artistic and architectural works. For instance, the interplay between the architectural practices of 13th-century Anatolia and the philosophical thought of the same period offers a productive framework for examining similarities and differences. Such an approach avoids a simplistic “reflection” model and instead highlights the generative or transformative relationships between artistic production and intellectual traditions.

In this study, the dualities identified within the framework of abstraction and empathy theories were determined through Worringer’s references and content analysis methodology. The sources from which these concepts were derived, and the researcher’s interpretations are detailed in Table 3 of the study. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how abstraction and empathy operate as active forces within the socio-cultural conditions of their production, rather than as static representations of metaphysical ideas.

Table 3. Determination of the elements used in architectural space analysis (Duman, 2021).

Excerpt	Space Element/ Concept
In terms of atmosphere, the Roman style also emerges as a Northern form if its ancient essential element, to which something external is added, is not to be seen. (Worringer, 2017: 105)	 <b>ATMOSPHERE</b>
The unity of the work of art is here again refined in its crystalline geometrical laws, according to which the atmosphere of the work of art is again an abstract structure. (Worringer, 2017: 92)	
Undoubtedly, individualistic northerners who have a long way to walk to reach the understanding of form... (Worringer, 2017: 39)	 <b>FORM</b>
... that is why it is beyond the absolute will of art, which can only express itself formally. (Worringer, 2017: 110)	
The alternation between light and shadow is used in later stages of art development as a means of composition in an organic sense. (Worringer, 2017: 93)	 <b>LIGHT / SHADE</b>
True, the surface undoubtedly gains vitality (with the effect of light and shadow), but this liveliness happens according to abstract rules... This kind of colorism does not appeal to our identification seventies. (Worringer, 2017: 93)	
More claims must be discovered here; For this will, we have no other handle other than a mute and inanimate material. (ibid: 116)	 <b>MATERIAL</b>
We have to deduce the will underlying it from the ability to be expressed in this material. (ibid: 116)	

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What is decisive in architecture is the dimensions, height, and width... Therefore, it is very important to determine the expressive value of the proportions. (Wölfflin, 2016: 53)

 **PROPORTIONS**

The bulkiness and rigidity of the Doric temple were broken; proportions have approached human or general organic proportions... (Worringer, 2017: 81)

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The shade serves as the compositional factor and thus this crystal completes the laws. (Worringer, 2017: 92)

 **COMPOSITION**

The change between light and shadow is used as composition in the organic sense, but in the later stages of art development. (Worringer, 2017: 93)

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In the era of Theodosius, abstract tendencies are expressed by the geometricalization of ornamentation, especially ancient plant motifs, and the weakening of the sense of form. (Worringer, 2017: 94)

 **ORNAMENT**

This style consists of the decorative schematization of the form, the approximation of the human shape to the surface ornamental character and to the architectonic commitment with it. (Worringer, 2017: 96)

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In Greek building art, too, we are confronted with a structuralist form. (Worringer, 2017: 107)

 **STRUCTURE**

In the Ionian temple and the structural development that followed, the pure skeleton, based only on the laws of matter, is brought into the friendly and joyful life of the organic. (Worringer, 2017: 107)

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...color, associations from a building's history and purpose, the oil offered by that building's substance, etc. Undoubtedly, there are many other factors. (Wölfflin, 2015: 25)

 **COLOR /  
TEXTURE**

The warm lines of wood engraving, or the cold lines of metal engraving, etc., are mentioned; this contrast also coincides with the "hard-soft" opposition of the sense of touch. (Wölfflin, 2015: 26)

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After this brief explanation and Table 1, the concept pairs defined below were reviewed and edited by the researchers.

### **Compulsorily and Order:**

While order represents the active involvement of the subject, laws signify the participation of the external world and natural forces in the process. In this context, laws point towards abstraction. Orderly forms can manifest in architectural structures through the arrangement of columns or decorative patterns. However, this order can sometimes become more flexible, acquiring a freer character (Figure 2). As an example, Wölfflin compares the absolute and serious posture of a monumental building to the orderly but cheerful atmosphere of a country house (Wölfflin, 2015: 42, 67).



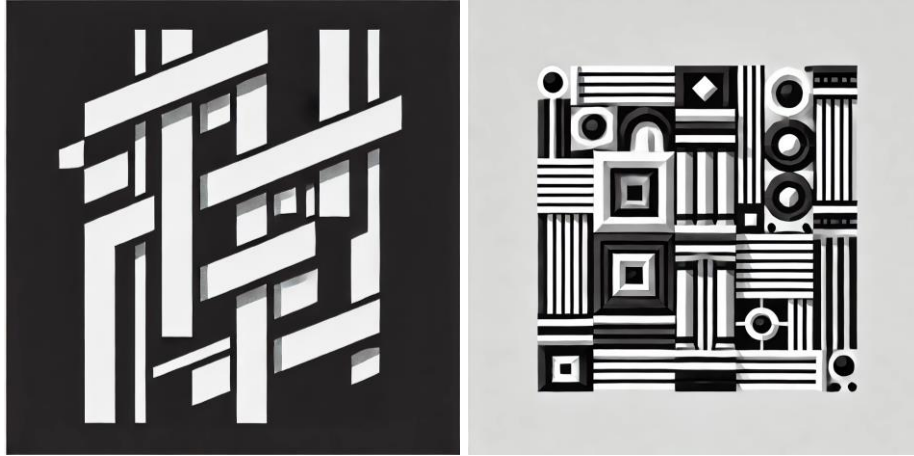


Figure 2. Abstract representations of compulsorily and order. (OpenAI, 2024)

### Stability (Stasis) and Flow:

Broad, powerful, and imposing structures reject the instinct of empathy and stand firm with their internal order. These types of structures lack elements of movement, thus creating an independent space for movement within them. In contrast, artworks that are constantly in motion and aim to actively assert their existence appeal to the satisfaction of empathy. This design approach, directed towards the instinct of empathy, influences and guides the subject, shaping the individual's relationship with the space (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Abstract representations of stability (stasis) and flow. (OpenAI, 2024)

### Subconscious and Conscious:

A subconscious approach leads to the creation of spaces in architecture without guiding elements. In such structures, the right to make conscious movements and decisions is not restricted, and thus the process of abstraction can be read more clearly. When a sense of closeness between humans and the world emerges, consciousness begins to develop. This consciousness represents a state free from insecurities in the world. The need for empathy is reflected in art as a desire for self-fulfillment, shaping human creative expression consciously (Figure 4).

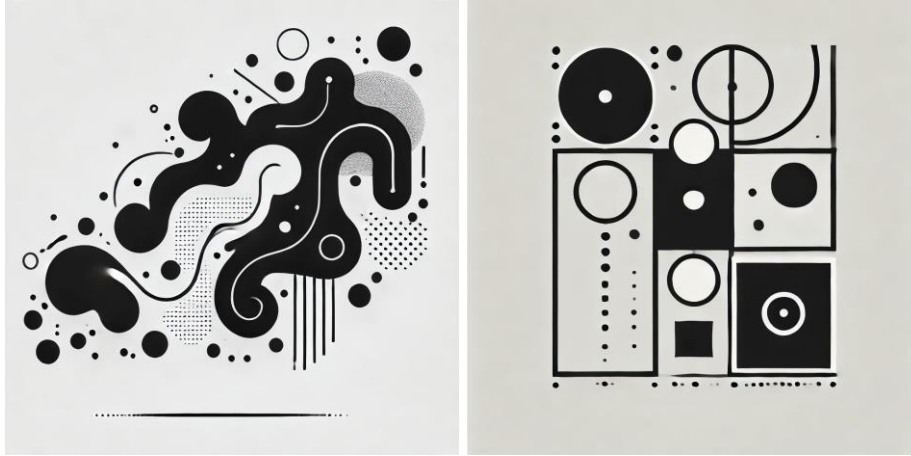


Figure 4. Abstract representations of subconscious and conscious. (OpenAI, 2024)

### Nothingness and Existence:

It can be said that products satisfying the instinct of abstraction exhibit an attitude that nullifies human existence. The feeling of existence in a space and the perception of space through an inner emotion demonstrate how this concept manifests through empathy in design. For a person who finds the opportunity to experience their own existence in a space, this structure becomes a place of being. If the atmosphere of a space allows us to transcend our individual existence and establish a meaningful relationship with the structure, enabling us to feel and experience ourselves within it, then we can speak of a product of empathy (Figure 5).

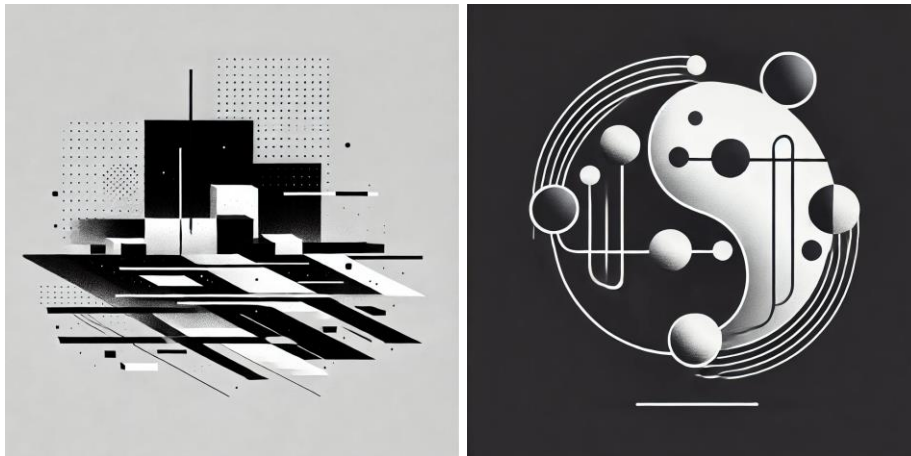


Figure 5. Abstract representations of nothingness and existence. (OpenAI, 2024)

### Infinity and Freedom:

Human limitation, the structured nature of the universe, and the boundlessness of nature stimulate the instinct of abstraction in the artist. The creative spirit, forming its own universe within necessary boundaries, begins to desire infinity within those limits. The concept of "infinity within limitation" can be associated with the abstract stylistic choices of human-made works. This harmonious relationship between the universe and humanity liberates art; in this sense, art is subject to no constraints. In structures designed without necessity and restrictive boundaries, forms evolve freely, and plans can easily take the desired shape. Thus, freedom

in art and architecture is evident both in the design and in the experience of the space (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Abstract representations of infinity and freedom. (OpenAI, 2024)

### **Timelessness and the Moment:**

Abstract style is created independently of temporal constraints and aims to offer a creation that transcends time. This style distances itself from being tied to a specific moment and place, extending time and space into infinity. Masters of abstract art focus beyond the world, creating timeless works. In contrast, the need for empathy derives pleasure from the relationship with nature, which is bound to time and place. In this context, the reflection of the moment in art can be expressed through the design of space with light in architecture. The materials and technology of the period in which the structure was built determine the era to which the building belongs (Figure 7). This interest becomes more apparent in artistic works shaped by the emotion of empathy.

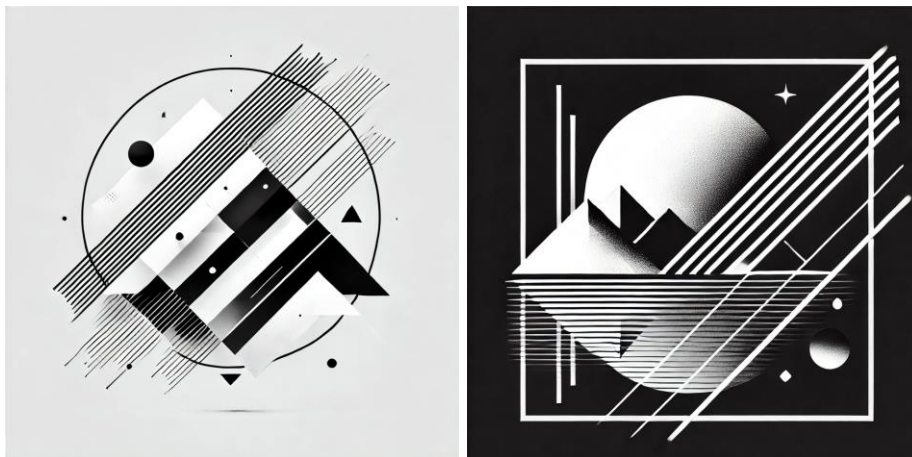


Figure 7. Abstract representations of infinity and freedom. (OpenAI, 2024)

### **Persuasion and Compromise:**

Abstract art involves an effort to persuade, as it seeks to separate humanity from time and uncertainty. Abstract works of art, independent of time and place, must convince others of their existence and beauty. The instinct of empathy, on the other hand, establishes a seamless

compromise with the surroundings. Unlike abstraction, it does not engage in a struggle; rather, there is a sense of yielding and reconciliation in the achieved form (Figure 8). This establishes a direct and peaceful relationship, strengthening the bond between humans and their environment.



Figure 8. Abstract representations of infinity and freedom. (OpenAI, 2024)

### **Monumentality and Modesty:**

The system based on the laws of abstraction reveals the grandeur and monumental nature of abstract style. Such structures represent a sense of sublimity with their height and law of inexpressive matter, standing independently with a distant stance and aiming for immortality. The grandeur of these structures' stems from the rule-bound nature of abstraction, intending to transcend time and achieve permanence.

Conversely, harmony established through empathy offers a naturalistic approach, bringing the structure closer to a more human dimension (Figure 9). The feelings of life that emerge without any obstacles cause the expression of the work to be modest. Works of art based on empathy offer a simpler and more natural beauty, providing a closer and more intimate experience for the viewer.



Figure 9. Abstract representations of monumentality and modesty. (OpenAI, 2024)

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Analysis of Sancaklar Mosque within the Scope of the Theory

Sancaklar Mosque, which has garnered attention by winning numerous awards, is in the Büyükçekmece district of Istanbul. Designed by Emre Arolat, the mosque, of which construction began in 2013, is situated on a sloped terrain. Thanks to its design, which integrates with the topography, Sancaklar Mosque has a capacity of 650 people. In addition to the prayer area, the mosque also includes a library and a socializing space. Its striking minaret, location, and architecture are designed to harmonize with the surrounding environment (Figure 10). The mosque spans an area of 700 square meters and is built into the ground in a pentagonal-shaped terrain (Figure 11). It features two separate entrances: one leading to the general area and the other to the women's prayer section.



Figure 10. Sancaklar Mosque Stairs (Duman, 2021).

The design process of Sancaklar Mosque was undergoing with an understanding independent of traditional discussion grounds regarding the question of “How should a contemporary and modern mosque be?” (Aynalı, 2011). However, this independence does not mean being completely isolated from the surrounding context. By focusing on the essence of the place of worship, the architect not only distanced himself from form-based discussions, but also took a critical distance from conventional representations in modern mosque architecture. In this context, Sancaklar Mosque is an architectural production that questions the representations and meanings that mosque architectures produced not only in Türkiye but also abroad are based on. In this project, Arolat pointed out the meaninglessness of colonizing the time-space relationship and explored alternative ways of designing a place of worship today. With this approach, Sancaklar Mosque offers a critical perspective by establishing a dialogue with the surrounding social and cultural context.



The mosque's minimalist design, its harmony with the natural environment, and its aesthetics that distance themselves from traditional forms position it as a form of opposition to the surrounding context. In this respect, the building has become not only a functional place of worship, but also an object of discussion that brings a new interpretation to modern mosque architecture.

Designed by Arolat in line with the principle of “the essence of the place of worship”, Sancaklar Mosque is clearly distinguished from other mosques in terms of both its interior and exterior structure. Located in a rural and peaceful environment, in an area where gated community-type residences are located, the mosque stands out with its remarkable architecture. This structure, which was awarded the world championship in the religious buildings category at the World Architecture Festival held in Singapore in 2013 (Source), was selected as a sample in the study. The mosque constitutes an ideal example for our research due to its unique understanding of space and atmosphere. The conformity of the structure to the theories of abstraction and empathy is also discussed, especially in the context of the psychology of religious structure and style.

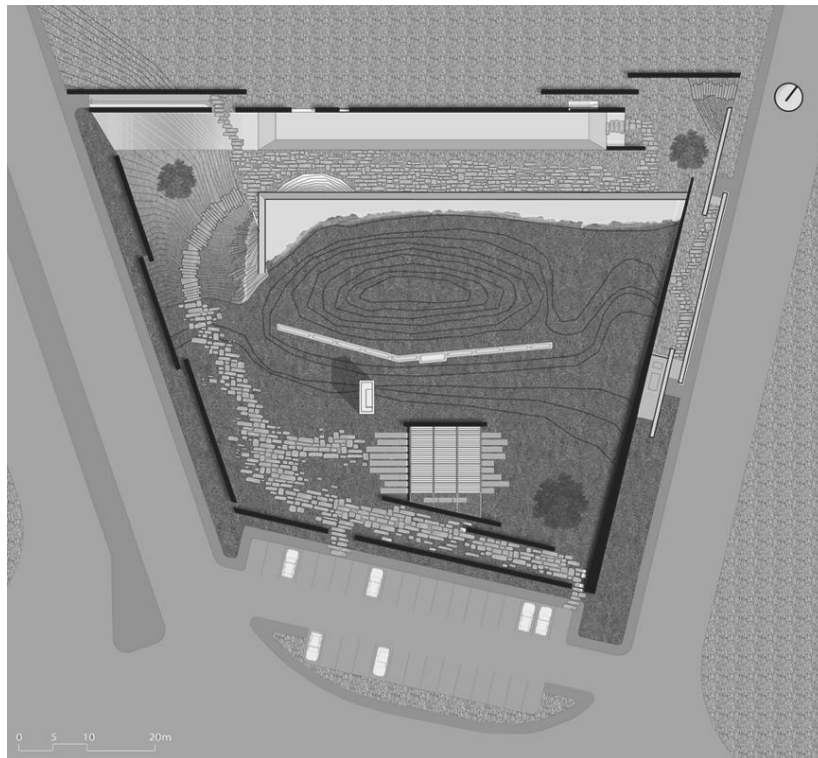


Figure 11. The site plan of Sancaklar Mosque (Duman, 2021).

Sancaklar Mosque, which is examined in the light of current discussions, ideological approaches, and critical perspectives, is addressed with its psychological aspects within the framework of Worringer's abstraction and empathy theories. In this article, the mosque is evaluated in terms of these two concepts and the results are summarized under the following headings. While preparing the tables, a method based on Worringer's methodology was used, and subjective and hypothetical evaluations of the theory were included.

### 3.2. Sancaklar Mosque through Worringer's Criteria

#### 3.2.1. A Perspective on Compulsorily and Order

Compulsorily in design refers to the creation of necessary and absolute spaces, while in regular elements, these rules tend to be applied more flexibly. The atmosphere of Sancaklar Mosque evokes a sense of orderliness, as it is designed for worship, gathering, and sharing. This sense of order is reflected in the monochromatic effect created by the materials and the structured arrangement of light beams within the space. In this context, according to Worringer's theory, it is possible to argue that the mosque exhibits a tendency toward empathy (*Einfühlung*), as its design fosters a deeper connection with its users.

Sancaklar Mosque, in terms of its form, does not represent any strict necessity; rather than adhering to a rigid structure, it has been shaped by adapting to the topography it occupies. The form of the building is uniquely crafted to suit its specific location, blending harmoniously with its surroundings (Figure 12). The elements of the mosque are designed with organic, regular proportions, and the materials used were selected to align with the texture of the region. The stone utilized here does not dominate its environment, as seen in traditional mosque structures, but instead adapts to it. In this context, the form of Sancaklar Mosque can be understood as an expression of the principle of order.



Figure 12. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing compulsorily and order (Duman, 2021).

#### 3.2.2. A Perspective on Stability and Flow

From the moment we enter the part of Sancaklar Mosque that separates it from the outside world with a low wall, we find ourselves immersed in a sense of flow. This feeling of flow continues seamlessly within the prayer space as well. The mosque almost seems to say, "Come and pray," and in this respect, it offers an experience of empathy (*Einfühlung*). Although there may be a sense of enclosure and inwardness when looking at the site plan, the overall integrity of the structure and its components exhibit a dynamic fluidity.

The changing effects of light and shadow throughout the day transform the building into a space where time flows, and these effects become key elements that contribute to the mosque's empathetic atmosphere. The use of color and texture in the structure achieves a harmonious flow with nature and within itself. The effects of color and texture, both inside and outside the building, are part of this flow. These elements do not contrast with their surroundings; instead, they move in harmony with them (Figure 13).

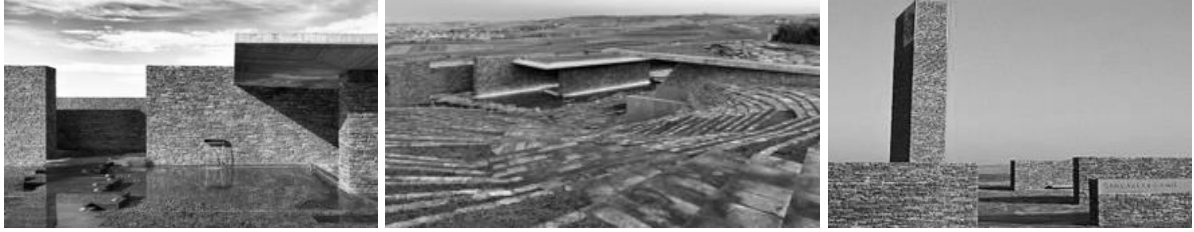


Figure 13. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing stability and flow (Duman, 2021).

In terms of stability and flow, the results of the empathy instinct in the structure are clearly visible. This building, which “lives” like a living organism, creates a sense of direction by extending beyond its boundaries, affirming how the concept of empathy is embodied in the structure. Continuity and fluidity can be observed in the elements of the building. Unlike a static, inexpressive structure, movement and dynamic energy prevail in all architectural elements.

### 3.2.3. A Perspective on Superconscious and Conscious

Sancaklar Mosque has been shaped by an interpretation of Islamic consciousness, which encompasses a perspective on the interconnectedness of the world, nature, and living beings. This consciousness is rooted in principles that emphasize harmony, balance, and a deep awareness of the divine presence in all aspects of existence. In this context, Islamic consciousness encourages a relationship with the universe that is both respectful and reflective, prioritizing unity and coexistence over domination. The building’s integration with the topography, its nuanced use of light and shadow, and the deliberate design of directional elements all reflect this holistic worldview. These design choices highlight the mosque’s empathetic connection with the natural environment, suggesting a tendency toward harmony with its surroundings. The carefully planned entrances, exits, and directional cues further emphasize this empathetic approach, aligning the architectural form with the principles of coexistence and balance central to the Islamic worldview (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing superconscious and conscious (Duman, 2021).



On the other hand, considering its functional essence as an Islamic place of worship, the mosque does not restrict individuals' rights to act and make decisions consciously, providing a free environment in this regard. Therefore, Sancaklar Mosque can also be viewed as a product of the abstraction process when evaluated within the concepts of superconscious and conscious. A conscious design approach creates spaces in architecture that are shaped by guiding elements. This mosque, directed by the elements of light, shadow, and circulation, stands out as a product of empathy, but it also functions as a space for worship created through the process of abstraction. In conclusion, Sancaklar Mosque has adopted a distinct and unique design process.

### 3.2.4. A Perspective on Absence and Existence

When evaluated through the lenses of absence and existence, the design of Sancaklar Mosque appears to engage with both abstraction and empathy processes simultaneously. Rather than attributing this duality solely to a fixed structure of Islamic thought, it is more productive to approach these elements as dynamic and context-dependent relationships. The pairing of abstraction and empathy in the mosque's design reflects a nuanced interplay rather than a predefined synthesis. For instance, the sense of emptiness in the space evokes an abstract expression of "absence," allowing for a transcendental experience, while the mosque's originality and physical presence point towards "existence" as a lived, human-centered reality.

The duality described here -absence/existence, abstraction/empathy- should not be reduced to an essentialist interpretation of Islamic thought. Instead, these concepts can be understood as part of a broader theoretical framework that examines how architectural spaces negotiate opposing forces and meanings. By situating the mosque within this relational and context-specific framework, we can explore how its design navigates and redefines these tensions without assuming a singular or universal structure of thought. This perspective allows the mosque to be evaluated as a unique architectural response to both historical and contemporary conditions, enriching the theoretical discussion of abstraction and empathy (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing absence and existence (Duman, 2021).

### 3.2.5. A Perspective on Infinity and Liberty

Despite being a design shaped by certain limitations and available resources, Sancaklar Mosque creates a sense of infinity within itself. This perception seeks an infinity hidden within its boundaries. Through a design approach that is not bound by rigid forms or obligations, the forms, atmosphere, and composition have been created with liberty. When evaluated through the lens of Islam's dual structure, the mosque's design does not conform to any predefined category, instead establishing its own unique space (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing infinity and liberty (Duman,2021).

### 3.2.6. A Perspective on Timelessness and Moment

From the perspective of timelessness and the moment, Sancaklar Mosque can be understood as engaging with these concepts in a relational rather than absolute sense. While the abstract style of the structure evokes a sense of “essence” and offers a space that transcends specific historical moments, it remains inherently tied to the temporal and spatial realities of its creation. Every human-made structure is intrinsically connected to the time and place in which it is conceived, and the mosque is no exception. The duality of timelessness and the moment, therefore, does not imply an inherent contradiction but rather highlights how the building negotiates these two dimensions (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing timelessness and moment (Duman, 2021).

Through its design, the mosque invites users to reflect on the universal and the immediate simultaneously. The abstract form suggests an enduring relevance across different times, while the experiential aspects, such as the play of light, shadow, and spatial orientation, ground the mosque firmly in the present. This synthesis does not negate the temporal and spatial realities of the mosque’s creation but rather emphasizes how abstraction and empathy can coexist as interdependent phenomena within the same architectural work.

### 3.2.7. A Perspective on Persuasion and Consensus

Sancaklar Mosque is designed as a space for rest and gathering, creating an atmosphere that goes beyond mere functionality. It is also perceived as a peaceful retreat, a hill to lean on for serenity, or a stop to gaze upon the surroundings. The persuasion the structure establishes with the topography gives the mosque a sense of being deeply rooted and permanent, as if it has always been there. The mosque achieves a seamless consensus with the earth, effortlessly integrating with nature. Within the structure, and through the materials used, a peaceful relationship with the natural world is established, creating an atmosphere that aligns with the Islamic values of peace and tranquility (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Photos of Sancaklar Mosque representing persuasion and consensus (Duman, 2021).

### 3.2.8. A Perspective on Monumentality and Humility

Sancaklar Mosque, among structures built with empathy, possesses a design that evokes a sense of closeness and humility. Free from exaggeration, not boastful, and presenting what exists as it is, the mosque offers a space that embodies the concept of empathy. This design approach provides a humble experience for the individual, representing a profound reflection of the empathy concept in architecture through its monumentality and simplicity (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Photos of the Sancaklar Mosque representing monumentality and humility (Duman, 2021).

## 4. Conclusion

Thoughts, ideologies, worldviews, and psychological conditions shaped by the passage of time undoubtedly influence architectural designs. However, framing this relationship as a rigidly deterministic causality—where architectural styles and forms are mere reflections of these elements—risks oversimplifying the complex interplay of factors involved in the creation of architectural objects. Worringer's assertion that "What forms an artistic style is closely related to the religious/worldview and psychology of the time" should be approached critically. While intellectual and psychological conditions contribute to shaping architectural forms, they do not act as sole determinants. The production of architecture involves a multifaceted process where material constraints, individual creativity, socio-political dynamics, and unintended outcomes play equally significant roles.

This approach also raises questions about the extent to which these so-called "worldviews" or "psychological conditions" truly encompass the thinking of individual architects or the cultural context of a specific project. For instance, can the design choices of Emre Arolat in Sancaklar Mosque be reduced to a single philosophical or ideological framework? As someone familiar with Arolat's work, it is unlikely that his design was entirely dictated by the overarching thought systems suggested here. Instead, Sancaklar Mosque exemplifies how contemporary architects negotiate between historical references, functional requirements, personal creative

vision, and the evolving discourse of modern architecture. By acknowledging the multiplicity of factors at play, we can move beyond deterministic explanations and toward a more nuanced understanding of architectural production.

Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy (Einfühlung)* theory, based on his analysis of art history, has made significant contributions to the understanding of stylistic psychology. The fundamental reason this theory has gained prominence in art history is that it does not approach artistic creations from a one-dimensional perspective and incorporates the "other art impulse" (Giedion, 1941). The theory's objective is to examine the psychological underpinnings that influence the art of a nation or an era. Within the scope of this study, the results of this theory, as they are accepted in the field of art, have been criticized.

To investigate the rich and profound aspects of Islamic art, mosques, as prime examples of Islamic architecture, were chosen for this study. The theory posits that art, religion, and worldview are different expressions of the same psychological forces, suggesting two distinct inclinations (Duman, 2021). Burckhardt (1976) argues that societies with a transcendental worldview tend to produce abstract works of art. Islamic art can be seen as a complex interplay of abstraction and empathy, shaped by the diverse cultural, social, and psychological conditions of its time.

When it comes to mosque design, the traditional mosque typology in Türkiye, often perceived as a formal burden, frequently comes to mind. However, this perception stems from a tendency to view the past as a singular and unified whole, a perspective that has shaped modern thinking over the last two centuries. In reality, mosques do not have fixed and immutable forms. On the contrary, throughout history, mosques have diversified under the influence of different cultures and periods, adopting various approaches that reflect the unique conditions of their time (Necipoğlu, 1995).

Rather than seeing traditional molds as static and monolithic, it is essential to recognize them as dynamic responses to the psychology, worldview, materials, and technologies of their era. These elements reinforced their meaning through repetition, but they also evolved over time. With the advancement of knowledge and technology, architectural approaches have the potential to transcend mere imitation, though this is not always achieved. Thus, the idea that mosques should adhere to a single, unchanging style and form must be critically questioned (Khan, 1990).

The dynamics of Islam, which inherently embrace adaptability and reinterpretation, indicate that structures and designs should have freedom. At the same time, these structures should not be understood purely as products of abstraction. Like all works of art, mosques are shaped by the complex psychological, ideological, and cultural influences of their time. While this theory, which suggests that artistic styles emerge from perceptions of the world and the psychology of the era, offers valuable insights, it also underscores the importance of viewing Islamic art as a fluid and evolving tradition shaped by both historical continuity and innovative movements (Said, 1978).

Based on this analysis and the examples examined, it becomes evident that Sancaklar Mosque represents a unique reinterpretation of traditional mosque architecture, blending

minimalist abstraction with a sense of spiritual connection. The findings highlight how the mosque balances the principles of abstraction and empathy, creating a space that transcends conventional architectural expressions. The minimalist design, integration with the natural landscape, and deliberate use of light and materials contribute to its abstract qualities, while its human-centric spatial arrangement and emphasis on emotional experience reflect empathetic tendencies. This duality underscores the adaptability of Islamic architecture in addressing contemporary needs while staying rooted in spiritual and cultural traditions. Ultimately, the analysis reveals that Sancaklar Mosque is not only a work of architecture but also a meaningful dialogue between tradition and modernity, abstraction and empathy, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding evolving artistic impulses in Islamic architecture. This analysis highlights the mosque's dual role as both a spiritual sanctuary and a critical architectural statement, challenging conventional typologies. By bridging abstraction and empathy, Sancaklar Mosque exemplifies how Islamic architecture can evolve to address contemporary needs while remaining deeply connected to its historical and cultural roots. The study demonstrates that architecture, as a living tradition, continues to navigate the delicate balance between innovation and tradition.

The traditional mosque typology has been questioned and reinterpreted, resulting in a style that leans more toward empathy. However, the transcendental thought central to Islam has not disappeared, and in this sense, the artistic impulse created through abstraction is also present in the structure. The mosque has been analyzed as an abstract work within the article, with an emphasis on its evolutionary process and the clear selection of its form and essence. When considering the use of light, metaphors, materials, and the relationship with the topography, it can also be evaluated under the concept of empathy (Frampton, 2001). The presence of both concepts allows the conclusion that the structure forms its own artistic impulse as a reactive expression (Duman, 2021).

While the style of Sancaklar Mosque does not replace the traditional mosque typology in Türkiye, it introduces alternative ways of thinking and perceiving, challenging conventional understandings. In this context, the question of how the building aligns with the “spirit of the time” or the “psychology of the present” becomes critical. If the emphasis is on a broader conception of “time,” encompassing cultural, social, and technological processes over a longer period, it is essential to explore how these dynamics have shaped the building. Architecture is not merely a product of a specific moment but a process that blends inherited traditions from the past with the needs of the present and aspirations for the future. From this perspective, the abstract and minimalist design of Sancaklar Mosque provides an experience that integrates the continuity of Islamic architectural traditions with the influences of modern technologies and aesthetic sensibilities.

However, if the focus is solely on the “present moment,” critical and, at times, contentious relationship of the mosque with contemporary architectural expectations in Türkiye must also be addressed. The building deliberately distances itself from traditional forms, presenting not just an innovation but also engaging in a complex dialogue between past, present, and future. This dialogue positions the mosque both as part of historical continuity and as a critical response to current social dynamics. Thus, Sancaklar Mosque transcends the confines of a

single moment, embodying a broader temporal and cultural perspective that reflects the evolving nature of architectural and societal transformations.

### ***Declaration of Ethical Standards***

The article complies with national and international research and publication ethics.

Ethics Committee Approval was not required for the study.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

There was no conflict of interest between the authors during the research process.

### ***Authors' Contributions***

The author contributed alone to the article and takes full responsibility for the content and any modifications made during this process.

### ***Declarations***

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According to the originality report obtained from the Turnitin software, this article's similarity rate is 5%.

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