

## Experiencing the City with Art and Art with the City: The Case of the 17th Istanbul Biennial

Elif Eş<sup>1</sup> , Güliz Özorhon<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> M.Sc. Arch., City and Architecture Graduate Programme, Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Türkiye.

<sup>2</sup> Assoc. Prof. Dr. Faculty of Architecture and Design, Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Türkiye.

### Abstract

In this article, the contribution of art to the experience of urban public space is investigated. The focus is on the 17th Istanbul Biennial, which was held between 17 September and 20 November 2022, which spread throughout the city and thus provides a strong sample for research. The case study method was adopted in the research. Therefore, the data used in the research are the biennial venues, the relations of the artworks in these spaces with the city, the experiences of the participants, and the observations of the researchers. The findings of the research reveal that art activity can have the power to reproduce/reconstruct both the past and the future in the city with the encounters it creates on both an individual and social scale. The example of the 17th Istanbul Biennial has shown that art events have an important potential for establishing connections between the parts of the city. With these activities, it has been observed that the hidden areas, streets, and places in the city, that are hidden, unexplored, and left on the coast, that is, the hidden potentials and hidden power of the city, can be revealed.

**Keywords:** Art, Biennial, City, Mapping, Venue.

**Corresponding Author:** [elif.es@ozu.edu.tr](mailto:elif.es@ozu.edu.tr)

**Received:** 11.11.2024 - **Accepted:** 24.06.2025

**Cite:** Eş, E., & Özorhon, G. (2025). Experiencing the city with art and art with the city: The case of the 17th istanbul biennial. *DEPARCH Journal of Design Planning and Aesthetics Research*, 4(2), 181-203.  
<https://doi.org/10.63673/DepArch.2025.46>

## Kenti Sanatla ve Sanatı Kentle Deneyimlemek: 17. İstanbul Bienali Örneği

Elif Eş<sup>1</sup> , Güliz Özorhon<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Yüksek Mimar, Kent ve Mimarlık Lisansüstü Programı, Özyeğin Üniversitesi, İstanbul, Türkiye.

<sup>2</sup> Doç. Dr., Mimarlık ve Tasarım Fakültesi, Özyeğin Üniversitesi, İstanbul, Türkiye.

### Özet

Bu makalede, sanatın kentsel/kamusal alan deneyimine katkısı araştırılmıştır. 17 Eylül – 20 Kasım 2022 tarihleri arasında gerçekleştirilen ve kent geneline yayılan ve bu nedenle araştırmalar için güçlü bir örnek sunan 17. İstanbul Bienali'ne odaklanılmaktadır. Araştırmada kullanılan veriler bienal mekânları, bu mekânlarda yer alan sanat eserlerinin kentle olan ilişkileri, katılımcıların deneyimleri ve araştırmacıların gözlemleridir. Araştırmanın bulguları, sanat etkinliğinin hem bireysel hem de toplumsal ölçekte yarattığı karşılaşmalarla kentte hem geçmişi hem de geleceği yeniden üretme/ yeniden inşa etme gücüne sahip olabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. 17. İstanbul Bienali örneği, sanat etkinliklerinin kentin parçaları arasında bağlantı kurma konusunda önemli bir potansiyele sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu etkinliklerle kentte saklanan, keşfedilmeyen, kıyıda bırakılan gizli alanların, sokakların ve mekanların, yani kentin gizli potansiyellerinin ve saklı gücünün ortaya çıkarılabildiği gözlemlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sanat, Bienal, Kent, Haritalama, Mekan.

**Sorumlu Yazar:** [elif.es@ozu.edu.tr](mailto:elif.es@ozu.edu.tr)

**Alınma Tarihi:** 11.11.2024 - **Kabul Tarihi:** 24.06.2025

**Atf:** Eş, E., & Özorhon, G. (2025). Experiencing the city with art and art with the city: The case of the 17th İstanbul biennial. *DEPARCH Journal of Design Planning and Aesthetics Research*, 4(2), 181-203.  
<https://doi.org/10.63673/DepArch.2025.46>

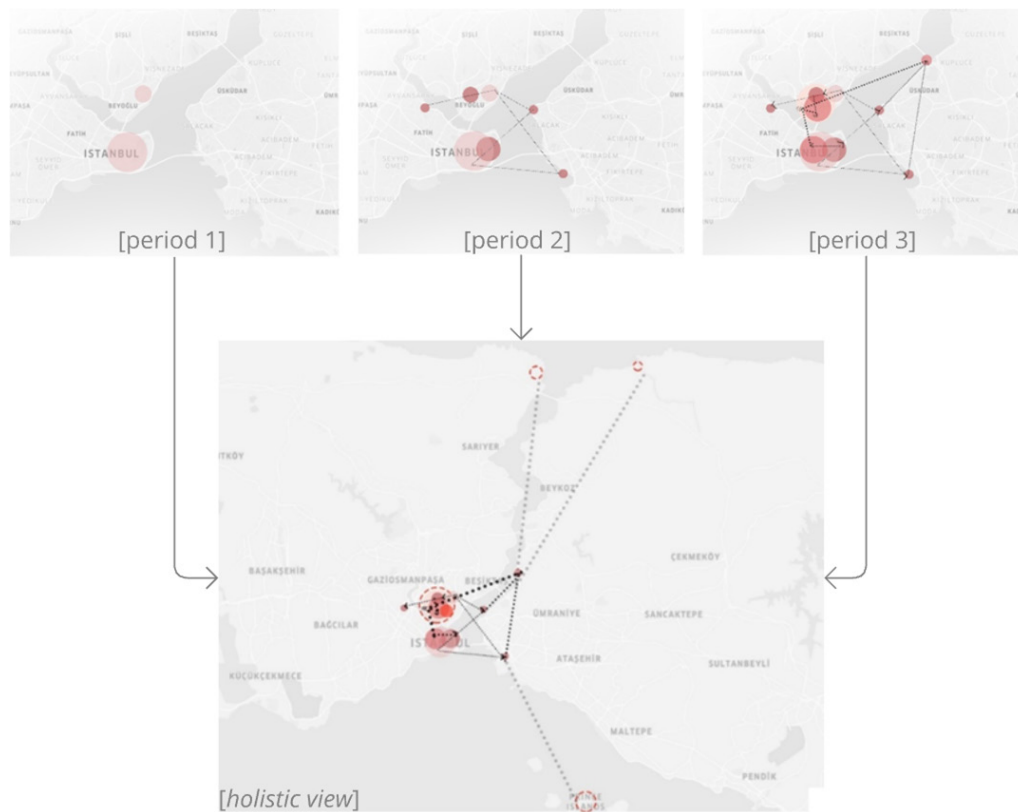
## INTRODUCTION

Urban public spaces are complex and multi-layered structures that play an important role in the establishment of the social structure, where coincidences, interactions and experiences are experienced, allow endless possibilities and conflicts, and in which every citizen can be involved. On the other hand, they are dynamic and open to innovations. The space is open to interventions and is even largely fed by these interventions. It can be said that one of the most important and powerful interventions made in public space is those made with art. Various forms of art participate in the city through public space, and this participation gives new meanings to public space, gives it a new identity, reproduces, creates and transforms 'it'. Public spaces, with their rich content and perhaps as the most important components of cities, have always been a matter of curiosity, have been structures that are thought about and tried to be understood/made sense of. According to Park (1936), public spaces are people's living spaces in their complex form. Habermas (1962) described public spaces as a place where ideas are discussed, Sennet (2010) as the soul of cities, and Arendt (1998) saw them as an encounter environment where all kinds of people could come together and emphasized their potential.

Gehl's (2019) "*Life in the city is a self-empowering process*", one of the events that triggers the chain interaction, which he expresses as "*Something happens, because something happens, because something happens*", is art. Erzen (2021) also ascribes different meanings to art in the city, associates it with belonging, inclusivity and diversity, and interprets art as a tool for urban dwellers to express themselves, as a structure that supports social networks and relationships. In this way, art diversifies the meaning of spaces by establishing a dialogue with the city, and in turn, the visibility of art in the city increases. Moreover, art creates a new urban image with its inner power, its encouragement to be participatory and its appeal to everyone.

In this article, the contribution of art to the experience of urban public space has been investigated, and the biennial activity, where alternative states of this experience can be observed, has been determined as the research area. Biennial events differ from other art events in that they are organised on a global scale and where city-art-individual interaction is experienced, auditory arts are used as well as visual arts, and they play an educational role by organising workshops and conferences. Biennial events, which are located in different parts of the city, create different opportunities for encounters with people/citizens and offer more communication opportunities than exhibitions located at a certain point. According to Atıcı (2014), biennial events aim to give new meanings to urban public space with the artworks they contain – during the *time they are carried out* – while on the other hand, they are activities that can cause the city to experience radical transformations if they provide continuity.

Biennial exhibitions, which are defined as national or international contemporary art events held every two years, are scattered in many zones, starting from Europe. The Istanbul Biennial was first organised by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSİV, 2025). It was built in 1987 and started in the Historical Peninsula with the theme of contemporary art in traditional buildings and spread to the city periphery over time and developed by adding various spaces and opportunities to its structure. The use of venues, particularly in the Historic Peninsula and Beyoğlu areas, stands out in the biennials. Sometimes historical buildings like Hagia Sophia and the Basilica Cistern were used, and at other times, transformed spaces such as warehouses or Feshane were utilized. On occasion, the biennials were placed in streets and squares to increase their visibility in the



**Figure 1.** Mapping Istanbul Biennial's three periods.

city. The city's abandoned or forgotten spaces were revitalised, reconstructed, and brought back to life through art in the biennials. Without a fixed location, the biennials have dynamically harnessed Istanbul's potential overtime, forging stronger connections with the city and expanding their activity area from the centre to the periphery (Figure 1) (Eş & Özorhon 2022).

Curated by Ute Meta Bauer, Amar Kanwah and David Teh, the 17th Istanbul Biennial aims to be visible to people in the city by gathering around 6 sub-themes<sup>1</sup>; to create a social continuity; to connect with the locality and people; to create new city and communication channels; to examine key areas such as new dialogues and new communication channels; to make the dynamics of the city visible by addressing new situations in the city; and aimed to create new routes. In this way, the biennial invited the audience to a new discovery by looking at the city they live in with foreign eyes.

Through the example of the 17th Istanbul Biennial, this study seeks answers to the following interrelated questions: (1) How does the 'temporary' art activity affect the city? (2) What kind of traces does it leave behind? (3) How can we explain and identify these traces?

1 The 6 themes of the 17th Biennial are: 1. Sustaining News by Other Means: What are the alternative means of journalism? How can the media be revitalised? By asking such questions, it was aimed to investigate the current potentials of the media. 2. Ways of learning: In the information age, it is aimed to create knowledge and discover new ways of learning by creating different methods. 3. (An) archiving: It is aimed how past information can be disseminated organically by overlapping. 4. Basic Politics-Geopolitics: How should we organise our lives and economy to create better conditions? 5. Extrasensory Aesthetics: Artists who question "how we can perceive the world by going beyond the senses" aim to help us explore the world with the senses. 6. Distant Past- Unusually Ancient Solutions: It is discussed that solutions suitable for today's conditions should be produced with the problems from the past.

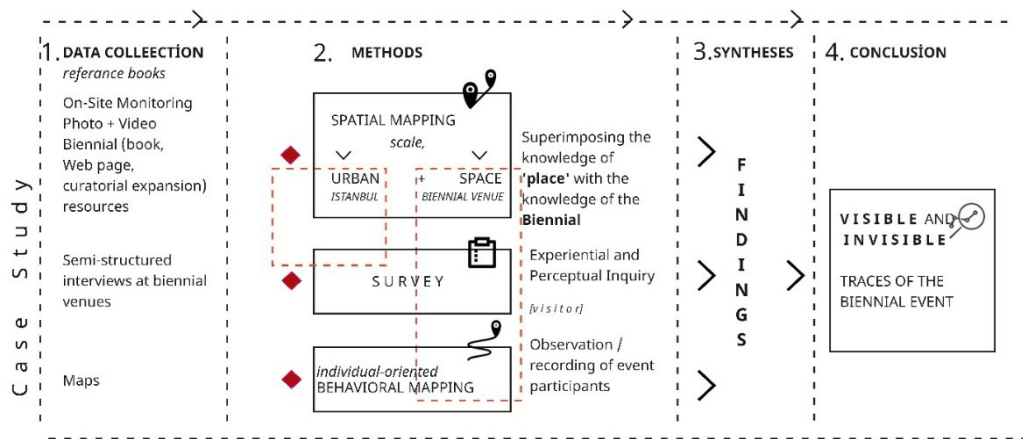


Figure 2. Method and process of the study.

## METHOD OF STUDY

The city is a multi-layered, complex, and dynamic subject. This situation requires that the research and analysis conducted on this subject be multidimensional. In order to examine the impact of art on the city as a whole with both spatial and socio-cultural effects, the fieldwork was defined with a mixed research methodology.

In the fieldwork (Figure 2), which was designed to analyse the relationship between the biennial and the city of Istanbul through the art-individual-space cycle and by associating it with spatial and socio-cultural dynamics, (a) spatial mapping, (b) questionnaire and (c) individual-oriented behavioral mapping methods were used:

a. The interaction of the 17th Istanbul Biennial with public spaces and the city and the traces of this interaction are mapped. All biennial venues in Istanbul are indicated on the map of Istanbul, thus showing the spread of biennial venues throughout the city. In addition, the relations between the venues and the biennial experience routes proposed by the biennial outside the biennial venues are articulated in this map. These routes, which are proposed by the biennial publication (sometimes the streets of a neighbourhood, sometimes a forgotten or unknown architectural work, sometimes just an experience, landscape or ...), are important because they allow the audience to have new experiences in the city or to encounter a part of the city that they have never known or have not experienced recently.

b. The survey, which was structured to evaluate the effects of the biennial on public space (spatial effects and socio-cultural effects), was conducted face-to-face with 60 people who experienced the space in the main venues of the biennial.

c. In individual-oriented behavioural mapping, the priorities in the experience of space are tried to be analysed with the unstructured observation that accompanies the studies.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Unlike other biennials, the 17th edition of the biennial was developed within the limited conditions of the pandemic period, and thus, the idea of making a difference in every field and removing borders was effective. The biennial does not have a name, because only things that have been completed and finished have names, and the importance of the process has been emphasised because





Figure 3. Venues of the 17th Istanbul Biennial.

the works in the biennial are not finished. In this context, the boundaries of the biennial were not sharply drawn, and the way to create a new interaction area was chosen by creating an in-between/ambiguous space. Within the scope of the fieldwork, the main venues of the 17th Istanbul Biennial and the surrounding neighbourhoods were examined. The 17th Biennial aimed to unite different cultural spaces and used spaces that were not very visible or idle in the city.

The exhibitions of the 17th Biennial took place in a total of 12 venues, 3 of which were the main venues (Figure 3). At the same time, since it aims to connect existing cultural venues, it has also used alternative venues such as many second-hand booksellers, bookstores, stationery, cinemas, universities, and pharmacies. This biennial aims to make the underused areas of the city visible, inviting people to explore the city: “... exhibitions, publications, talks and live events will be broadcast to Istanbul, elsewhere in Turkey, and even beyond. Instead of staging a big show, we aim to encourage space to open up, to connect existing civic and cultural exchange spaces, and to activate those that are underused or idle.” (IKSV, 2025)

The biennial has become an urban tour by being distributed over 4 zones (Figure 4) in the city. For this purpose, first, the texture of these zones and the important spatial elements in these zones are shown, and then the different components

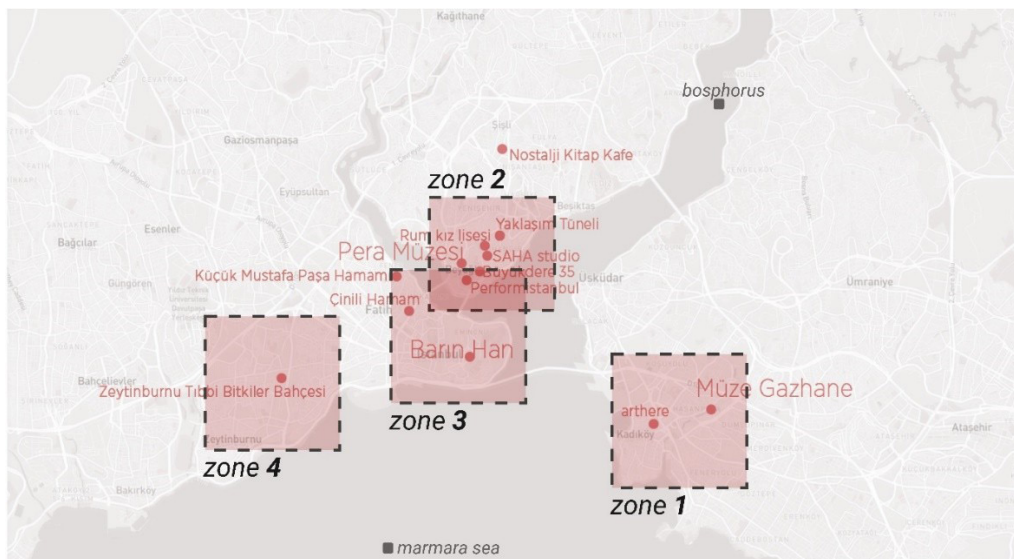
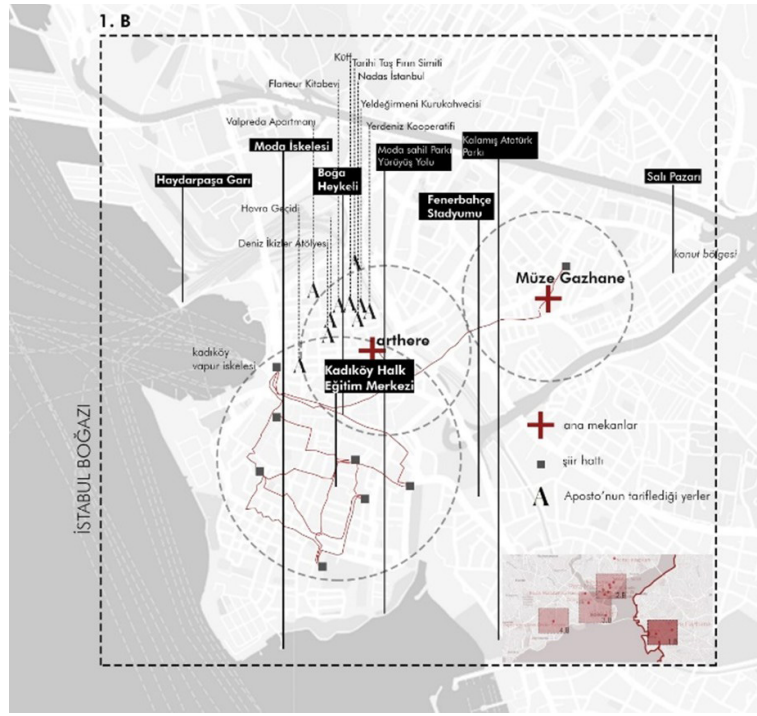


Figure 4. The Istanbul Biennial focuses on four zones.



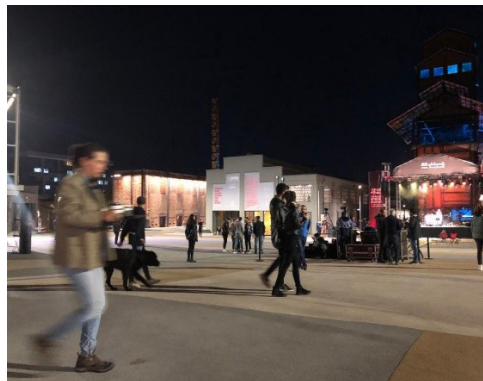
**Figure 5.** Zone1|17th Istanbul Biennial in Kadıköy.

of the 17th Istanbul Biennial (main venues, other venues of the biennial, poetry line venues and route) and the relations between these components are shown. In addition to these, parks and green areas, cultural centres, buildings, restaurants and cafes, historical ruins and artefacts and shops belonging to the zones pointed out by Aposto are indicated.

### Spatial Mapping Zone 1: Kadıköy

The biennial existed in the Kadıköy zone on the Anatolian side. Kadıköy is one of the oldest residential areas on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. Among the main focuses of Kadıköy are Haydarpaşa Train Station, Kadıköy Public Education Centre, and the Bull Statue (Figure 5).

One of the main venues of the biennial is the Museum Gazhane. The museum, which was formed by the re-functioning of the Hasanpaşa Gazhanesi, which was established at the end of the 19th century to meet the energy needs of the Anatolian side, is a dynamic space open to the public, hosting various permanent and temporary exhibitions and hosting different functions such as a library, bookstore and stage areas. Museum Gazhane was also actively used in the 17th Istanbul Biennial with its indoor and outdoor spaces in the evening (Figure 6). Another place in this zone is Arthoro, which is located in Yeldeğirmeni. Founded in 2014 by Syrian artists under the leadership of Omar Berakdar,



**Figure 6.** Use of Hasanpaşa Gazhane on different days and times during the biennial.

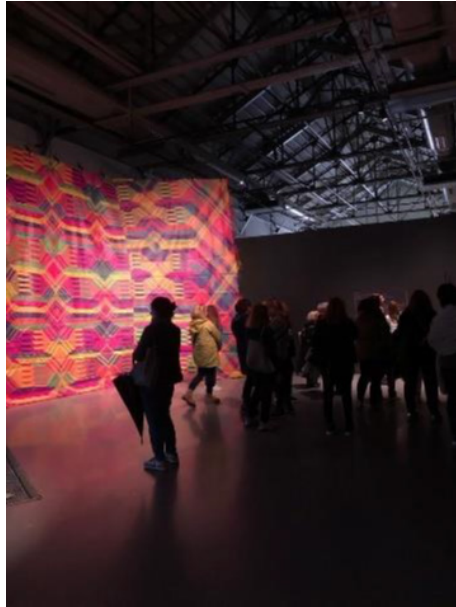


Figure 7. Harunan Motol

the art gallery continues its production with a team of eight people, with the participation of Turkish artists (Arthere, 2022). Displaced people come together here and make productions, thus offering a new environment of encounter, dialogue, and culture to the citizens of the city. The space is used not only as an exhibition space, but also as a café and workshop. There are workshops of various artists and many cafes in Yeldeğirmeni. The biennial invites you to explore the city's streets that cut off the sea and direct you towards the nearby Bahariye and Moda (Artfulliving, 2015).

Primary and secondary schools organised trips to Museum Gazhane, which is the main exhibition area in this region. During the free activity time, the children spent time under the flags of Arrahmaiani's outdoor installation, the Flag Project (Figure 6, right).

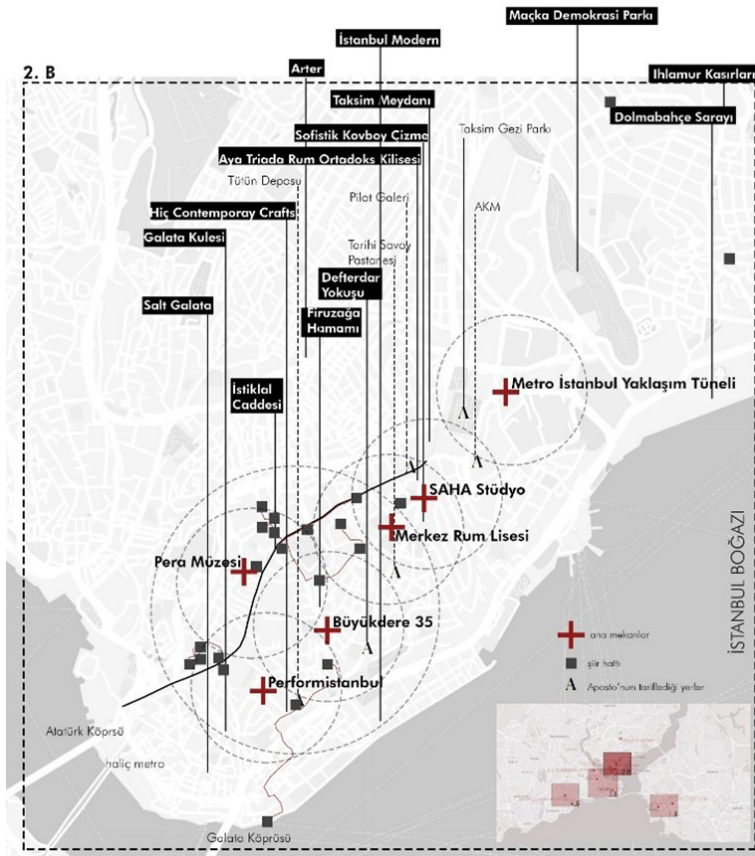
Although it is located in the exhibition area, this work, called Harunan Motol-Boat Ladder, which attracts people's attention with its 488 by 550 cm size, has come to the fore with its bright colours (Figure 7). At the same time, the fact that there are videos from the life of the people of the region on the screen next to the work and that a carpet is placed in front of the screen has enabled the visitors to spend more time here.

## Zone 2: Beyoğlu

Another zone of the biennial is Beyoğlu, where many exhibition venues and various cultural and artistic events take place. The 17th Biennial directs its participants to go to the places of Beyoğlu that are not visited frequently or never and aims to create new routes. İstiklal Street, Galata Tower, Taksim, Atatürk Monument can be counted among the important elements that determine the identity/character of Beyoğlu and take place in its social memory (Figure 8).

One of the biennial venues in Beyoğlu is the Approach Tunnel. The Approach Tunnel is a tunnel under the Gezi Park in Taksim and used for the construction of the Taksim stop of the Yenikapı-Haciosman metro. Within the scope of the biennial, artist Carlos Casas presents a visual and new experience to the participants with a sound installation (in a kind of dark environment with only red and blue light). After this experience, the biennial – *through İKSV's website and guidebook* – describes a route for the participants to relax and have a pleasant time in Gezi Park, where they can slow down at one of the city's intense notes and listen to/experience the sound of the city.





**Figure 8.** Zone2 | 17th Istanbul Biennial in Beyoğlu.

The other biennial venue can be reached from Gezi Park towards Siraselviler. This is SAHA Studio, which was established in 2019 to support those who produce in the field of visual arts. Within the scope of the biennial, the venue is open to visitors on certain days (Wednesday and Saturday) for 'SAHA Studio Talks'. It is a new dialogue space where artists can talk about their work. In accordance with the theme of the biennial, it has been tried to offer a new perspective to people by revealing the formation processes/emergence adventure of the artists' works. Çelenk Bafra, the director of SAHA Studio, mentions that they have transformed this place by stating that this place is Alt Kemancı, where live music is made, which has been in the memory of those who lived in the 90s, and states that this place is not an exhibition area, but a production-oriented cultural space where artists can work together (Özbek, 2020).

Another venue located in the Beyoğlu zone, Pera Museum, which also hosted the 14th, 15th, and 16th biennials. Pera Museum hosts permanent and temporary exhibitions and various art events. Within the scope of the biennial, the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors of the museum were used. Here, in addition to the exhibitions, learning and film programmes and events were organised, and a multi-format presentation was made. The museum, which has been collaborating with the biennial since 2015, is located on Beyoğlu Meşrutiyet Street, which is full of historical layers in Istanbul. A historical continuity has been achieved by continuing this with the works exhibited inside. In the Pera Museum, there are works that try to break down the usual historical narratives and examine the relationships between individual and collective memory<sup>2</sup>.

2 eg. Mapping Transformation by Lamia Joreige and Sim Chi Yin's We Will Understand One Day/ Interventions. Both artists made a new reading of history by examining important historical events layer by layer and combining them with their personal accounts, that is, their letters, photographs and diaries.

One of the biennial venues in this zone, which has not been used in previous biennials, is the Central Greek Girls' High School. Although it was established for poor girls to study, the school was closed in 1999 because it did not have enough students and remained idle for 23 years. Within the scope of the biennial, only the first floor of the building, which was considered safe, was used. It is possible to see the materials of that period in the building, which reflects the traces of the past to the present. Within the scope of the biennial, Marco Scotini and Can Altay's project titled Disobedience Archive [Course Finished] took place in the building. The works were placed on the screens during the school, and it was aimed for the visitors to fully experience the space. As much as the visitors were interested in the works, they also spent time swinging on the swing or sitting on the bench in the schoolyard and examined the school structure as if it were a work.

Istiklal Street and Siraselviler Street, which are the two busy axes of Beyoğlu, are among the places that can be seen on the way to this place. After experiencing the event here, the biennial participants can explore the streets leading down to Tophane and proceed to other biennial venues.

At this point, the participants of the biennial were welcomed by Büyükdere 35 – *another biennial venue*. The venue, where various symposiums and workshops are held, was established in 2017. Due to its location, it is located on Boğazkesen Slope, which is one of the liveliest axes of Beyoğlu with a unique city view. This place, which has included everyone passing by in the biennial with its complete transparency façade, is a place where people can sit and rest. In this space, the works are placed on the tables and walls where food is eaten, and they unintentionally attract people's attention by turning the objects into works of art. Performistanbul, the last biennial venue in Beyoğlu, was established in 2016 with the aim of bringing visibility to this performance space by gathering performance artists in one place. Performistanbul appears in the old building among the narrow streets of Galata. On this platform, which is the first established in our country in the field of performance, art-oriented research is carried out where live art formations can be watched and archived.

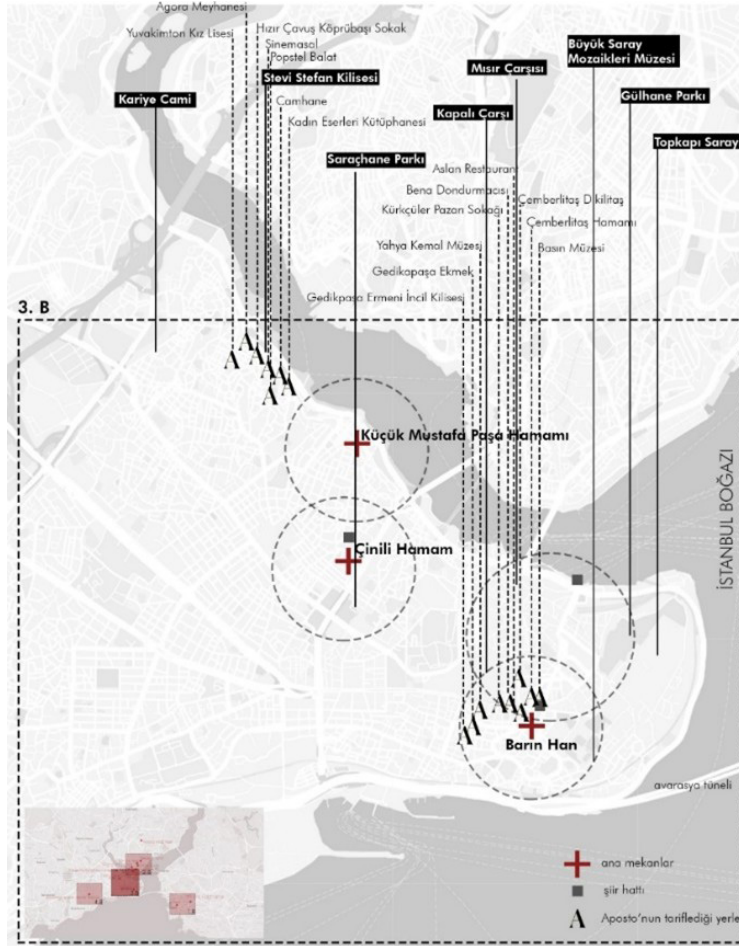
### Zone 3: Fatih

The 3rd edition of the 17th Istanbul Biennial took place. The zone is Fatih. Fatih, one of the oldest districts of Istanbul, has gained a place in the collective memory with places such as the Spice Bazaar, Gülhane Park, and Istanbul University (Figure 9). One of the main venues of the biennial, Barın Han, is located here. Barın Han is a 5-storey building located in Çemberlitaş, which is the workshop of Emin Bar, an important name in calligraphy and binding art in Turkey. Since 2019, Barın Han has become a gathering space where artists meet and organise exhibitions. The collective production spirit of space is also reflected in the works here.

In addition, the zone where the Han is located is a place where printing houses were opened with the arrival of the newspaper in the Ottoman Empire in the 1800s, and therefore it became a frequent destination for important intellectuals of the period and cultural production took place (Yalvaç, 2019). With the presence of cultural venues such as the Press Museum, the 17th Istanbul Biennial started before it arrived.

The biennial, which stretches from Fatih to Zeyrek, also used the Tiled Bath built by Mimar Sinan, which has been under restoration for 12 years, as a venue. The bath is planned to host two functions in 2023: a museum and a bath. Visitors to the biennial had the opportunity to see and experience this place before it was

**Figure 9.** Zone3 | 17th Istanbul Biennial in Fatih.



used as a bathhouse. The sound installation in the space seems to showcase the architectural features/structure of the bathhouse. Because people continued to take photographs despite the fact that it was an invisible work, that is, only an auditory work (Figure 10).

The last biennial venue in Fatih was the Küçük Mustafa Pasha Bath, built in 1477, located across the Golden Horn. The hammam, which has not been used since the mid-90s, was first used in the 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015). For the participants who progressed to this space, the biennial offered a new discovery/experience opportunity.

#### **Zone 4: Zeytinburnu**

Zeytinburnu is adjacent to the Marmara Sea in the south, Fatih in the east, and Eyüp Sultan in the northeast. With the lodges opened by clerics such as Merkez Efendi and Seyit Nizam, small settlements were formed in the zone, and then their living spaces expanded with the increase in migration to the city (Akansu & Kivılcım Çorakbaşı, 2022).

This is the last area where the 17th Istanbul Biennial touched the city. Opened in 2005, the Zeytinburnu Medicinal Plants Garden (Figure 11) spread over 14 acres and contains more than 700 species of medicinal plants.

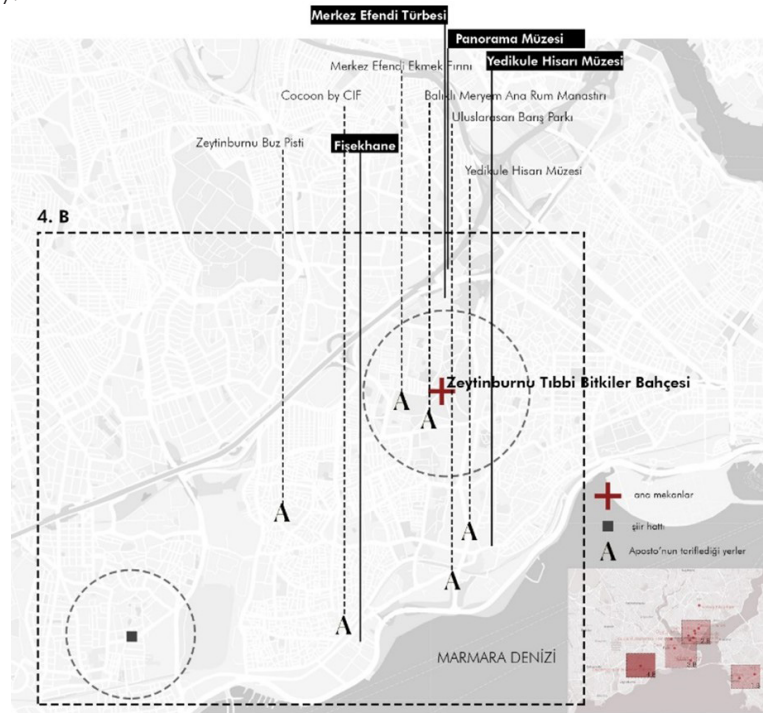
In addition to these, in order to make art accessible to everyone, special tours were organised for refugees at the Pera Museum and special tours for people with babies and children were organised at Gazhane. In addition, in order to offer a complete city experience, tours were organised in the evening hours under the name of 'A Night at the Biennial' on long Fridays at the Pera Museum.



**Figure 10.** People taking pictures at the Tiled Bath.

Another important component of the 17th Istanbul biennial is the Poetry Line project, supervised by Süreyya Evren<sup>3</sup>. During 2021, the invited poets conveyed the events in the world through their own eyes into their poems. The main venue of the Poetry Line project, which is added to the exhibition spaces of the biennial, is the Nostalgia Book & Cafe in Kurtuluş. Various conversations were held here, either physically or online. In addition, the poems were placed in second-hand bookstores, cafes, pharmacies, ferry ports, and movie theaters (Figure 12), so that this exhibition was presented to all the citizens who were in these places and passed through them, beyond the biennial audience. Poetry posters were hung in these different places and tried to infiltrate daily life while walking, sitting and talking. During the biennial, various events accompanying the biennial

3 It consists of poems written by 15 poets (Mehmet Said Aydın, Donat Bayer, Zeliha B. Cenkcı, Sevinç Çalhanoğlu, Cevat Çapan, Ersun Çıplak, Devrim Dirlikyapan, Haydar Ergülen, Mehmet Erte, Cem Kurtuluş, Bejan Matur, Mustafa Erdem Özler, Gonca Özmen, Anita Sezgener and Neşe Yashin) throughout 2021 and the collected poems of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Nazım Hikmet and the exhibition of these poems in the city.



**Figure 11.** Zone4 | 17th Istanbul Biennial in Zeytinburnu



**Figure 12.** Examples of the places where the poetry line is located / Collage.



were organised by different institutions. Events using various galleries, exhibition spaces, historical mansions and religious buildings also appear in public spaces.

In addition to all these temporary touches, the biennial is the 15th. Since its publication, it has also left a permanent work/mark in the city. The permanent work left behind by the 17th Biennial is Ayşe Erkmen's work "Golden Horn in the Golden Horn". Inspired by the dynamic and layered life of the Golden Horn, Erkmen places the work on the coastline between Balat Hospital and the ferry port in Fatih and tries to make urban spaces visible as a part of daily life by being noticed from ships and shipyards passing through the sea. With the bright and reflective material, he uses, he reflects the changing situations of the city (dualities such as day-evening, active-calm) to people and shares these dynamics with people passing by, sitting and passing by the sea.

### Survey Findings

The survey, which was designed to examine the experiences of the participants in the biennial venues and in the city, was<sup>4</sup> conducted with a total of 60 people (76% female and 24% male) randomly selected in each venue. The questionnaire is planned in 4 parts. In the 1st section, there are the demographic characteristics of the visitors participating in the survey; in the 2nd section, there are questions about the interaction of art, city, and individual; in the 3rd section, there are questions about the biennial; and in the 4th section, there are questions related to the places/places where the survey was conducted. The survey findings showed:

- The biennial was attended by participants from 19 different districts of Istanbul. The majority of the participants reside in Kadıköy and Fatih, Gaziosmanpaşa and Şişli. Accordingly, the biennial was able to reach the citizens living in different parts of the city.
- Participants found that the potential of art to create changes in the city was strong. *The majority of the participants (35) strongly agree with the judgment "A work of art alters the space in which it is located" and 21 of the respondents answered as "I agree", and it was seen that the majority of the survey participants thought that the work of art differentiated the space in which it was located.*

4 The survey was conducted on Thursday, November 4 in the Kadıköy region (Museum Gazhane and Arthere), on Wednesday, November 9 in the Beyoğlu region (Pera Museum, SAHA Studio, Private Greek School, Büyükdere 35 and Performistanbul) and on Saturday, November 12 in Fatih and Zeytinburnu regions (Barın Han, Çinili Hamam, Küçük Mustafa Pasha Bath and Zeytinburnu Medicinal Plants Garden).



- Participants were asked to give an example of artworks in their immediate surroundings exhibited in a public space. 34 people answered this question. According to their answers, the zones that the participants associate with a work of art are Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Fatih and Kadıköy. From the answers given to this question, it is understood that the art exhibited in the public space is mainly associated with sculptures.

- Participants mostly associated the impact of the artwork on the public sphere with the headings of 'quality' and 'attractiveness/focal point'. In addition, they stated that the works of art were the focal point in the city and therefore they had a place in the memories. In addition, the participants explained the contribution of the artwork in the public space to the city by "creating a different perspective and vision", "keeping history alive and researching", "experience", "landmark", "active participation", "creating a dynamic space", "works of art affecting perception and increasing the experience of space and finding direction", "public space gives a more effective and permanent message when works of art are integrated with the space". They have been expressed with evaluations such as. Attention was drawn to the importance of space and history, and it was emphasised that art creates a participatory environment.

- According to 54 of the participants, biennials have influenced urban space.

- When questioned about the potential of biennials to leave permanent traces in their temporariness, 48 out of 60 people answered positively and explained their reasons as follows: "It increased consciousness and created awareness, left new memories", "It made the invisible visible and created emotion", "It added aesthetic value to the city", "Its spaces add meaning", "It gave different views", "It added knowledge and experience", "It strengthened the bond with the city", "It appeals to everyone and people are curious wakes up, it can take you out of the routine", "It increases accessibility and recognition of the city".

- Those who responded negatively stated that: "It is exhibited in a limited time, it hosts temporary works", "Places that are not suitable for the target audience are preferred", "It is difficult to reach the venues", "It does not attract attention because it is far from reality".

Positive responses are related to the invisible, that is, socio-cultural characteristics of the biennial; Negative responses are related to visible/physical, that is, spatial qualities such as transportation and preference for unsuitable spaces.



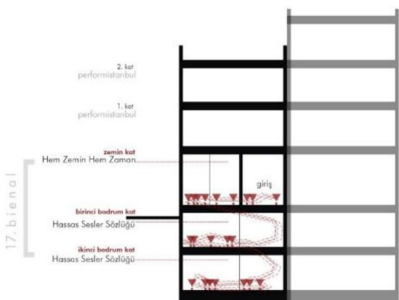
- Most of the participants said, "I visited the immediate surroundings while coming to the exhibition area", "I discovered new places in the city and spent time in the city (streets and neighbourhoods) while coming to examine the exhibition". Thus, it can be said that the biennial interacts with the city/urbanite. Thanks to the biennial, different parts of the city were discovered, and people – consciously or not – reached the city with the biennial and the city with the biennial. The participants stated that the places they visited during the biennial were Beyoğlu, Cihangir, Kadıköy, AKM, Zeyrek, Taksim, Beşiktaş, Fatih-Çemberlitaş Beyazıt, Grand Bazaar, Balat, Unkapanı, Galataport, Climate Museum/Gazhane. In addition, he stated that they also visited the streets, galleries, cafes, shops and bookstores. With the distribution of the biennial from the exhibited venues to the city, the diameter of interaction has increased. It can be said that the zonal maps hung by Aposto-Soli in the biennial venues also contributed to this event.

- Participants almost certainly agree that the biennial offers the opportunity to experience spaces that we have not been able to enter before.

- Participants found it positive that the biennials were held in different venues and agreed with the idea that this situation creates the opportunity to encounter different people.

Table 1. Behavioral mapping and observations of biennial venue.s

	MAP	OBSERVATION
MUSEUM GAZHANE		<p>Sitting in a café, chatting with people</p> <p>School trips</p> <p>Spending time outdoors</p> <p>Participation in Gazhane's own events (concerts, etc.)</p> <p>Public space performances (Bread and Puppet Theatre)</p> <p>Experience/use of public space works by children</p> <p>People who come to the library</p> <p>A shortcut to the neighbourhood</p>
ARTHERE		<p>Entrance that integrates with the street</p> <p>Since there is a low ceiling, you can watch the work by sitting / bending over</p> <p>Open plan, mastery of all works</p>
PERA MUSEUM		<p>He created new publicity by making his own exhibition free of charge during the biennial</p> <p>Vertical circulation/segmented navigation</p> <p>Experiencing work, becoming a participant</p> <p>Performance shows and film programmes</p>
GREEK SCHOOL		<p>Reflections of old-school function appear</p> <p>The entire building is not in use</p> <p>Spending time in the garden, on the swing</p> <p>Photograph</p> <p>Inspecting the space</p>
APPROACH TUNNEL		<p>People travel in groups</p> <p>It's dark inside and it's very loud</p> <p>Exploration of surrounding spaces, cityscape</p>

SAHA STUDIO		It does not have an intelligible entrance on the street Open only on Wednesdays and Saturdays between 12.00-19.00 It has a library, people study and read books Seating areas for video work are abundantly arranged
BUYUKDERE 35		It attracts people to the venue with its glass façade and invites people to the biennial by appearing from the street An area where people can relax with the café concept
PERFORMISTANBUL		Seating areas for watching videos (benches and cushions)
BARIN INN		

TILED BATH		<p>People sitting down to watch the works (cushions, benches and navel stone)</p>
MEDICINAL PLANTS GARDEN		<p>Hiking area People who spend time in hammocks People reading books on benches Playground for children</p>

- It was determined that the participants did not know the function of the space they wandered and experienced before the biennial. Thus, the biennial took place in places that people had not experienced or visited before, allowing people to discover new places.

## BEHAVIORAL MAPPING

In this section, the focus is on the experience of the space by the visitors/citizens, and the behaviors of the people in the art space are examined through individual-oriented behavioral mapping (Table 1).

In this mapping, it was tried to analyse the physical activities of people in places with unstructured observations. In this method, everyone in the space that the observer sees is a participant. The observer, on the other hand, conveys his impressions like a third eye looking from the outside. The dots on the map are the areas where people gather, sit, rest and examine the works individually or in groups. Dashed lines, on the other hand, refer to the routes/circulations of people in space.

When Table 1 is examined,

- It is observed that some spaces function as a public living space for users regardless of the content of the biennial. For example, in areas such as the Gazhane Museum, the Medicinal Plants Garden and the Barın Han, people sit, chat, read books or spend time with their children. Such behaviours reveal that the spaces of the biennial are not only exhibition spaces, but also living spaces that support daily life.
- It is seen that some venues involve visitors in the process not only as spectators, but also as active participants. While the screen printing and binding workshops held in Barın Han bring the visitors to the position of producers; Performance shows and film programmes held at venues such as Performistanbul and Pera Museum draw users directly into the art experience. These interactions show that the biennial transforms its relationship with the audience from passivity into an active experience.
- It is understood that some spaces lead visitors to a spatial awareness and exploration that goes beyond the content of the biennial. Places such as the

Küçük Mustafa Pasha Bath, the Greek School and the Approach Tunnel attract attention with their physical and historical features, encouraging visitors to discover the place itself. In this context, the biennial's potential to establish a relationship with urban memory and cultural heritage also emerges.

These evaluations show that the biennial establishes the art-space-interaction triangle in different ways and that the selected spaces are determined not only by their physical suitability, but also by their public potential and invitingness. Visitors have taken on multi-layered roles not only as art audiences, but also as users, discoverers and producers of the space.

## HOLISTIC EVALUATION

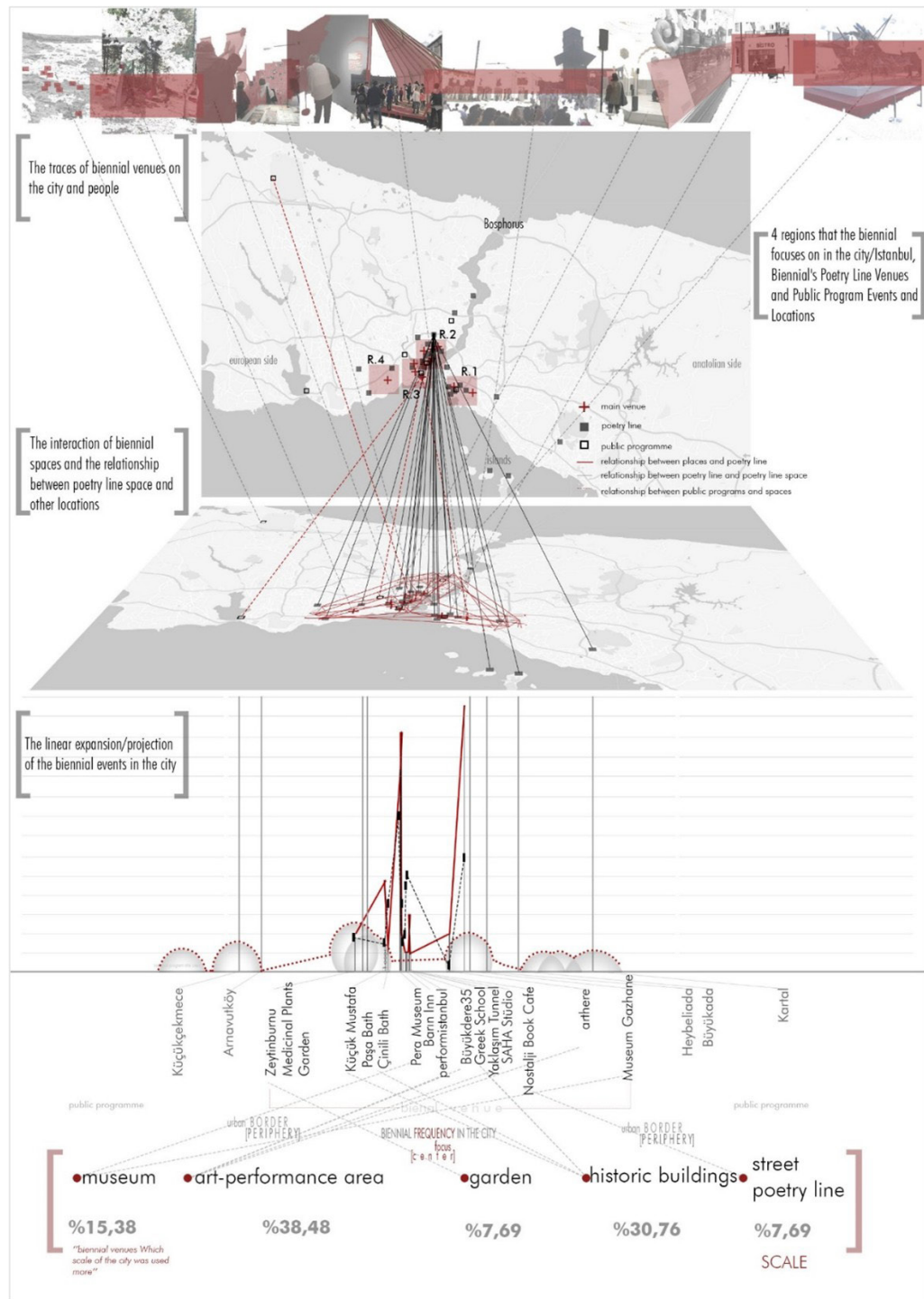
*The biennial has made visible the invisible in the city.* In other words, through biennials, the places that the city/citizens do not normally go to, cannot go to or are not frequented by have been transformed into exhibition spaces, and these places have participated in urban life. This approach of the biennial; It can be exemplified by transforming the Central Greek High School, which has been closed for years, the Tiled Bath, the Approach Tunnel and the Zeytinburnu Medicinal Plants Garden into exhibition spaces.

When asked where they would like the biennial to be held in Istanbul, the survey participants mostly indicated places close to this environment for the biennials that have centred on Beyoğlu since it was held. *Thus, it is possible to say that the biennial points to a certain zone in memory.* When it comes to activities that spread throughout the city, it can be said that it is as important to establish a relationship with the city centre as it is to spread out to the city or to reach the peripheries.

*It can be said that the biennial brought the urban landscape to the fore* and mediated the discovery of the lesser-known and unfrequented parts of the city by the citizens. The biennial webpage, the biennial book and a map produced by Aposto were hung on the doors of the biennial venues; and even through İKSV and the biennial social media accounts, the citizens were encouraged to visit the exhibition venues as well as the immediate surroundings of these venues *and the zone, and the experience expanded from the biennial venues to the city.* After visiting the exhibition spaces in the biennial booklet, the participants were directed to explore the streets and neighbourhoods in the vicinity. Thus, it can be said that the city – Istanbul – has evolved into an exhibition or an exhibition city. This is in a two-way relationship, each of which affects the other; *Art has improved the visibility of the city, and on the other hand, the visibility of the city has increased through the experience of art.*

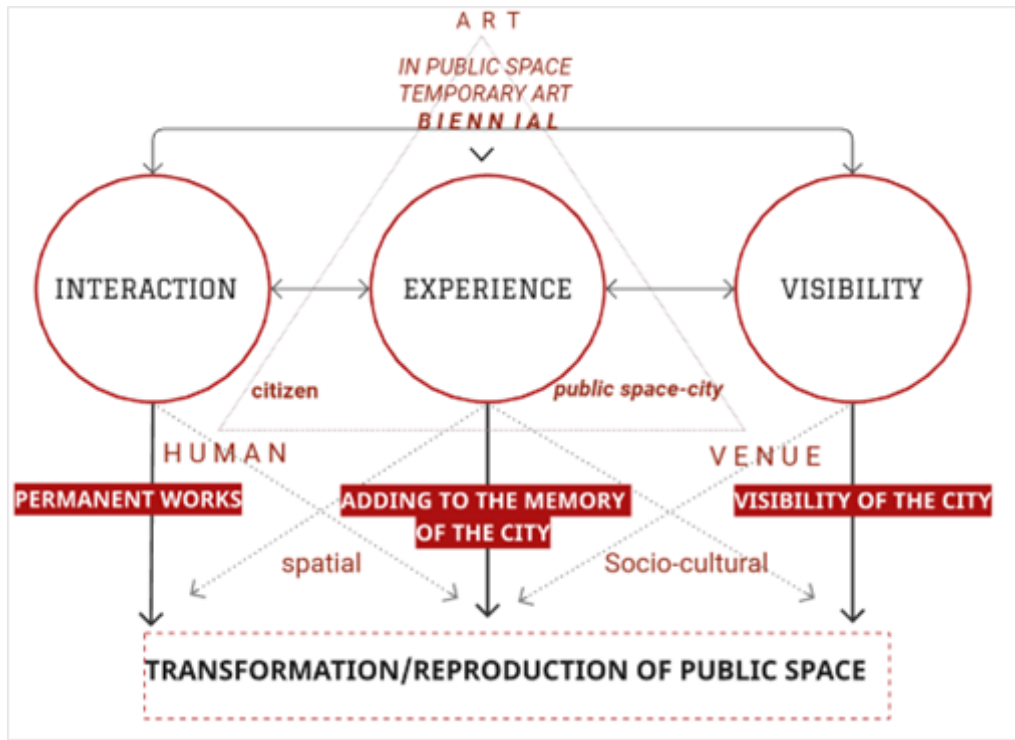
The 17th biennial, which was placed in 12 separate venues in Istanbul, took on a new organic form and created new dialogues/interactions in an almost natural way, creating various encounters in daily life. In doing so, as was often the case in the first biennials, it sought to revitalise the historical districts of the city and drew *an alternative road map where the participants could be rediscovered.* The biennial has been strongly positioned in 4 different areas in the city centre and has started to establish a relationship with the periphery through the different components of the biennial. Nilüfer Doğruel (2022) states that *"art should reach the zones where people live, not in a place where they go; In this way, art begins to be an end rather than a tool and begins to create chance encounters in the daily life of society."* With a similar approach in the 17th biennial, art tried to be included in the daily flow from the city centre to the streets, bookstores, galleries or cafes, and spread to the city limits and rural areas by creating alternative opportunities.





**Figure 13.** A superpose narrative of the interaction of the 17th Biennial with City-Istanbul.

On the other hand, the spread of the biennial to the city is not limited to the main exhibition venues. Therefore, a review focusing only on these places will be incomplete. Within the scope of the biennial, it is also necessary to mention the poetry line and itinerant activities that spread throughout the city, sometimes extending to the countryside of the city (e.g., components of the public learning programme). In this context, in Figure 13, Public Programme Activities, the points where the Poetry Line is distributed throughout the city, zones, neighbourhoods and streets were also included in the mapping, and a superposed diagram was produced both to make these components visible separately and to show their internal relations. Here, the relations established/knitted with the biennial (in other words, alternative experience routes) can be seen between the zones, places and zones where the biennial activities take place and are concentrated



**Figure 14.** Three headings are associated with the concepts of interaction, experience and visibility.

in the city. In the upper part of this superpose diagram, which contains much urban data related to the biennial, the traces/images left by the biennial in the city are shown through a collage created with visuals from the event venues. Within the scope of this study, the interaction of the biennial with the space and the city was investigated with a survey based on the opinions of the visitors and individual-orientated behavioural mapping, and it was understood that the 17th Istanbul Biennial left traces on the visitors. *The biennial experience has been reshaped from the perspective of each person and has contributed to the reproduction of the city and space with the interaction it creates.* As a result, based on the example of the 17th Istanbul Biennial, the *traces/patterns/states of temporary art in the public sphere* are categorised under three headings, and these three headings are associated with the concepts of interaction, experience and visibility (Figure 14).

- *Permanent Works:* At the end of the biennial events, they leave permanent works behind in the city, thus changing and transforming the public space and the city.
- *Adding to the Memory of the City:* Biennial events are added to the memory of the place and articulated to the memories with the experience of space in perception, thoughts and mind, thus transforming the public space and the city in the relationality of identity and memory.
- *Visibility of the City:* Biennial events-17. *In its edition, it creates a new/alternative urban tour with its use of the unprominent/invisible parts of the city, its spread to its streets, cafes, and its extension to the peripheries and the countryside.* This situation not only increases the visibility of art but also increases the visibility of the city and shows its potential.

A comprehensive review of the 17th Istanbul Biennial was conducted simultaneously with the event. This study reflects a layered comprehension/interpretation process that is nourished by the research undertaken to examine the dynamics of the city and public space and the interaction of art, and the observations made by the researchers during the biennial event and enriched with the determinations made through mapping and surveying. Alexander

(1965) states that cities are not formed as a whole by parts but are due to the lack of connections between these parts. With this research, it is shown that art ethics have the potential to create connections between urban parts.

## CONCLUSION

As seen in the example of the 17th Istanbul Biennial, temporary public art events not only increase the visibility of art but also contribute to the transformation of public space by creating new forms of engagement with the city. The experience, interaction and visibility provided by such events increase the quality of urban life and strengthen the dialogue that art establishes with the city. Therefore, temporary art events such as biennials are important tools that reveal the transformative potential of urban space.

The dialogue that the biennial establishes with people is as important as the places in which it takes place in the city. For this reason, this dialogue has been tried to be brought to the fore with survey work and observations. However, it is clear that the people who interact with the biennial event are not just people who come to the biennial.

For this reason, in future studies, surveys or interviews can be carried out with local people (tradesmen, neighbourhood residents, etc.) in order to understand the effects of the biennial as a temporary art event. In this way, the interaction can be examined in a multidimensional way in a broader perspective. On the other hand, in order to examine the change/transformation created by temporary art events or biennials in the city, the research universe can be deepened by expanding the research universe temporally before, during and after the event. Similar methodologies can be applied to biennials or art festivals in different cities, revealing universal and site-specific dynamics through comparative analysis. New theoretical frameworks can be developed by considering the relationship between public spaces at different scales of the city (centre, periphery, rural, etc.) with art, from the perspectives of cultural planning, art policies and spatial justice.

Art activities in public spaces participate in the natural flow of life, offer different perspectives to individuals and affect their perception of the world. On top of that, they participate in the city and urban space, creating and/or transforming the meaning of place. They offer important opportunities such as nurturing the city in terms of quality of life and revitalising life, and they take a place in the identity/memory of the place by being articulated to the collective memory. In other words, the event in question has the power to reproduce/reconstruct both the past and the future in the city with the encounters it creates on both an individual and social scale, albeit temporarily, as in the case of the biennial. As a result, the possibilities offered by temporary art events to urban life are not limited to an aesthetic experience; they have transformative effects at social, spatial and cultural levels. In this respect, this study provides both a theoretical basis and a methodological example for future research that will examine the relationship between art, city and public space.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This article is produced from the thesis titled "Traces of Public Space-Art Interaction in the Transformation of the City: The Case of the 17th Istanbul Biennial", which was conducted by Elif Eş at Ozyeğin University, Institute of Natural and Applied Sciences, City and Architecture Master's Program, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Güliz Özorhon.

**Conflict of Interest:**

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

**Authors' Contribution**

The authors contributed equally to the study.

**Financial Disclosure:**

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Ethics Committee Approval:**

This study was ethically approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Özyeğin University, with the decision dated 02 November 2022 and approval number 2022/15/04.

**Legal Public/Private Permissions:**

In this research, the necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant participants (individuals, institutions and organizations) during the survey, in-depth interview, focus group interview, observation or experiment.

**REFERENCES**

Akansu, D., & Kivılcım Çorakbaşı, F. (2022). İstanbul Zeytinburnu Merkez Efendi Mahallesi'nin Kentsel Dönüşümü ve Dönüşümün Merkez Efendi Mezarlığı Kültürel Miras Değerlerine Etkisi. *bab Journal of Architecture and Design*, 3(2), 209-230. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2552757>.

Alexander, C. (1977). *A pattern language town, buildings, construction*. Oxford University Press.

Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition*. The University of Chicago Press.

Arthere. (2022). Retrieved Kasım 13, 2022, from <https://www.arthereistanbul.com/home>

Artfulliving. (2015, September 3). Suriyeli sanatçıların mekânı: Arthere İstanbul. *Artful Living*. <https://www.artfulliving.com.tr/sanat/suriyeli-sanatcilarin-mekni-arthere-istanbul-i-3693>

Atıcı, M. (2014). The construction of public realm in contemporary art: Reading on international İstanbul biennial (Tez No. 356005) [Msc thesis, İstanbul Technical University]. YÖK Ulusal Tez Merkezi.

Doğruel, N. (2022). *Maruf 21 rapor: Yeniden düşün, birlikte hareket et*. Marmara Belediyeler Birliği. <https://www.marmara.gov.tr/uploads/maruf21-raporu.pdf>

Erzen, J. (2021). *Kent yaşamı*. İdeal Kent Yayınları.

Eş, E., & Özorhon, G. (2022). The role of art in the construction of public space: İstanbul biennials from 1987 to 2019. In A. Osman, J. Nagle, & S. Tripathi (Eds.), *The urban ecologies of divided cities* (pp. 213–216). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27308-7\\_39](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27308-7_39)

Gehl, J. (2019). *İnsan için kentler* (E. Erten, Çev.). Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Habermas, J. (1962). *Kamusal alanın yapısal dönüşümü: burjuva toplumunun bir kategorisi üzerine araştırmalar*. İletişim Yayıncılık.

İKSV. (2025, May 28). Kûratoryal metin. İstanbul Bienali. <https://bienal.iksv.org/tr/17-istanbul-bienali/kuratoryal-metin>

Özbek, A. (2020, Şubat 19). Eski Kemancı Bardan Saha Stüdyo'ya Bir Üretim Mekanı. Retrieved from bianet: <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/yasam/220264-eski-kemanci-bar-dan-saha-studio-ya-bir-uretim-mekani>

Park, R. E. (1936). *Human ecology*. The Urban Sociology Reader.

Sennet, R. (2010). *Kamusal insanın çöküşü*. Ayrıntı Yayınları.

Yalvaç, M. (2019). Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e tarihi kentsel çevrede mekanlar üzerinden bir semt okuması: Cağaloğlu Semti örneği. [Master's thesis, İstanbul Üniversitesi].

## BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHORS

**Elif Eş**, received her bachelor's degree in architecture, İstanbul Gedik University in 2019. In October 2020, she started her master's program in Urban and Architecture at Özyeğin University. In 2022, she presented his first international paper focusing on these issues. At the same time, she worked as an exhibition guide at the 17th İstanbul Biennial, which is the field of study of her thesis. She completed her master's thesis under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Güliz Özorhon as the first thesis of the program in 2022. Since 2023, he has been working as an architect in restoration projects.

**Güliz Özorhon**, completed her undergraduate education at Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture in 2000, and completed her master's degree at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Building Physics, Materials Program in 2003. She completed his doctorate education at Yıldız Technical University Architectural Design Program between 2003-2009. She started to work as a Research Assistant in 2000 and worked as an Assistant Professor at Maltepe University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture between 2009-2012. She has been presented at national and international symposiums and congresses, published in various journals and has received awards in national architectural project competitions.