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Reading Place in a Historical Context Through Phenomena in Architectural Competitions Edibe Begüm Özeren^{*1}, Ömer Özeren²

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Abstract

Cities are dynamic memory spaces connecting the past and the future, nourishing social memory and identity. Public spaces, as the most significant spatial components of cities, have become both physical and social heritage symbols of urban culture. This article focuses on how architectural competitions examine the geographical, historical, and cultural characteristics of places in public space design and the design decisions related to these contexts. The study investigates the concept of place in architecture through original projects developed for two architectural idea competitions. It deeply analyzes the integration of the designed space with its historical context, urban memory, and phenomenological experiences established with city dwellers. The importance of architectural place for public spaces was explored through award-winning projects. Specifically, the projects "Sazlık 2.0" and "Hazan" highlight the necessity of developing designs with a comprehensive approach that transcends physical boundaries, incorporating cultural, historical, and geographical elements. The relationship with place has been reduced to a semantic dimension through phenomenological experiences. This situation has been defined as an encounter with an abstract idea, a historical, cultural entity or settled memories in a particular place rather than a geographical location in the essence of the phenomenological experience. The findings emphasize that designs based on urban memory increase the likelihood of success, as evidenced by the award-winning projects where historical, cultural, and geographical features were prominently addressed through a direct connection with the place. In conclusion, the study advocates for rethinking public spaces situated within the historical urban memory not merely as physical entities but as components shaped by time, culture, and the environment, as demonstrated by the design alternatives developed for architectural competitions.

1. Introduction

The city, in addition to being the setting for residents' daily activities, is a dynamic structure that allows individuals to connect with the past and the future over time, fostering expectations for tomorrow. This characteristic of the city enables its physical structure to evoke and convey a sense of historical progression, while its new developments guide individuals toward the future. A city composed of such multi-layered structures generates new needs, ensuring the continuity of its vibrant nature. Among the most significant spaces within a city are its squares. Squares, in all cultures, are integral elements of urban life where people gather, meet, shop, dine, and engage with social-cultural structures and ceremonial spaces. These areas, which symbolize urban culture and grandeur from ancient civilizations to modern times, have persisted both as physical and social

legacies. In urban life, public spaces such as squares serve as places where people come together, interact, and sustain social life. These areas are not merely physical gathering points but also places where cultural interactions, social bonds, and societal values are strengthened. Urban squares reflect the spirit of a city, enhancing individuals' connections with the city [1]. Expressing the full dimensions and identity of cities is made possible through spaces open to public use. These spaces are not merely physical transition points but also multi-functional areas where social life takes shape, individuals come together to socialize, and connections with the city are strengthened [2]. Public participation in the design and planning processes of public spaces is of great importance [3]. Such participation not only enhances the physical features of these spaces but also enriches their social and cultural dimensions [4].

emphasize that this type of process significantly enhances the functionality and meaning of public spaces.

Public spaces, when coexisting with historical settings, transform into significant places reflecting urban memory. The historical environment plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of cities while also providing valuable insights into the social and cultural life of the urban context [5]. The identity of a society is in direct interaction with the identity of its built environment [6]. Although the term "historical environment" often brings to mind urban conservation areas, rural, historical, and archaeological sites are also included within this concept [7]. Emphasizes that the historical environment forms a holistic entity, comprised of elements such as structures with unique characteristics and arrangements reflecting the aesthetic and stylistic richness of these buildings. Structures within historical environments offer critical historical data, characterized by their architectural styles, spatial designs, and construction techniques, defining the local architectural identity of a region [8].

However, the city is not merely a physical structure; it is also a setting for events that remain embedded in the collective memory of societies [9]. These events influence the physical environment of the city through societal memory. Communities attribute meanings to this physicality embodied in the city, fostering a mental affinity and transforming urban spaces into not just tangible realities but also a world of imagery within societal minds [10]. Underscores the necessity of considering not only the physicality of the city but also the events engraved in memory to truly comprehend urban environments. Rossi defines this concept as "urban memory," identifying it as a fundamental element in constructing a lived environment and ensuring continuity in urban life [11]. Memory becomes tangible through space, while space is shaped by events held in memory, turning into a unique part of the city [12]. In this context, architecture aims to produce spaces through urban memory, ensuring the continuation of urban continuity[13].

Architectural design competitions hold a privileged position within the discipline of architecture due to their principles of evaluation and reward, which create a free and transparent environment for the development of new ideas, research, discourse, and innovations within the architectural production context (Özeren & Dinç Kalaycı, 2023) [14]. These competitions provide significant benefits and contribute to achieving high-quality architectural outcomes. Today, the International Union of Architects (UIA) describes architectural competitions as a procedure aimed at selecting solutions that lead to an appropriate built environment in architectural services [15].

Competitions, which play a critical role in the development and continuity of urban culture, have a decisive impact on these processes [16] In this context, the study aims to examine the relationship established between "place" and "citizens" in two project proposals developed for two different competitions in a historical context. The projects are analyzed in terms of their compatibility with the local context, contributions to urban memory, and interactions with city residents. These proposals were prepared by teams in which the authors were participants. Within the scope of the research, the relationship between the physical, cultural, and historical characteristics of the space and the needs and expectations of users was analyzed in relation to its reflections on the design process and the functionality of the projects. Additionally, the contributions of these projects to spatial harmony and cultural sustainability within the historical environment are evaluated. As a result, the study highlights the strengths and limitations of the projects regarding the interaction between "place" and "citizens" and provides recommendations for design approaches within historical contexts.

2. Project Proposals for Place in the Historical Context

1.Project Report / Sazlık 2.0 (Kayseri Melikgazi Municipality Meeting Point Design Competition)

Kayseri is a city of great significance in Anatolian Islamic culture. Within its boundaries, Kayseri has hosted numerous cultures and witnessed many civilizations throughout prehistory and beyond. In addition to its historical and cultural identity, Kayseri also encompasses significant geographical formations within its borders. Mount Erciyes and Sultan Marshes serve as natural gathering points in the city. A contextual analysis reveals that the design site is a strong area in terms of its historical past, geographical features, and current potentials.

Sazlık 2.0 is envisioned as a new cultural gathering center for social events, cultural life, and the overall urban experience. The primary concept is a dynamic, flexible, and open public space that accommodates all users and supports various activities. This design creates a user-centric, multifaceted urban area that highlights the region's historical identity, reflects the city's significant geographical formations, and integrates local commercial activities. It also addresses the social needs of urban life while supporting cultural activities. Sazlık 2.0 consists of three key elements developed through different stages: Permeable, dynamic, and sustainable wooden double-layered 8x8 cm columns that incorporate diverse functions without overshadowing the existing urban texture. Sales units complementing small squares within the design. Complementary social facilities catering to diverse user groups.

Within the wooden structure, a membrane cover with an autonomous steel construction can open to create sheltered spaces, ensuring the continuity of the design under various weather conditions. The doublelayered wooden structure divides the square into different areas for social and commercial purposes, creating interdependent spaces.

The cultural zone's center is marked by an amphitheater positioned in front of the historic city

walls. This placement allows the walls to transform into an open-air cinema for screenings. Additionally, the stage in front of the performance wall facilitates concerts and shows. The enclosed space beneath the amphitheater supports commercial activities, such as hosting a restaurant along the trade axis. The wooden installations interact dynamically with urban users, providing not only rest areas but also interactive spaces for engagement. Despite receiving positive feedback from the jury for its spatial organization, the project did not receive an award due to its dense layout.



Figure 1. Competition 1 Project Proposal

2) Project Report / Hazan (Odak Ürgüp City Center Design Competition)

The square, located between Ürgüp's prominent urban axes, Güllüce Street and Suat Hayri Ürgüplü Avenue, connects Güllü Street to the main road. In the Conservation Master Plan, a replicable design model was developed for small squares located in different areas of the city. However, instead of applying a uniform approach, this model was shaped to integrate with the physical environment and topography of each square. The organic structure and rhythmic layout of Ürgüp's traditional fabric served as inspiration for the square's design. This traditional fabric, shaped by the use of local materials and exhibiting a respectful harmony between buildings and spaces, is contrasted by the square's flat and visually defining design elements. The square is also influenced by the surrounding transportation routes and multi-level buildings, which are natural reflections of Ürgüp's unique topography. The design aims to go beyond serving as a transitional space, transforming the area into one that fosters a sense of belonging, establishes deep connections with the city's cultural heritage, and responds to the dynamics of contemporary urban life. The primary concept of the design draws inspiration from the symbolic cloth strips tied to trees on Temenni Hill as a sign of hope, as well as from the muslin used in wine or molasses filtering-elements deeply ingrained in the city's memory. The design employs the concept of "cloth" as a medium to create a flow between contrasts. The central theme is based on the idea of focusing attention on specific elements by deliberately leaving certain areas undefined. This approach underscores the necessity for wind to animate the scene

to capture attention. The design's primary objective is to channel perceptual strength into uncovering the meaning of ambiguity, ultimately evoking a sense of forgotten or overlooked events. This design language positions the space as a functional medium, facilitating an interplay between memory and perception for its audience. The concept of ambiguity is addressed through the lens of phenomenology. Phenomena are considered as a starting point for ways of thinking that encompass everyday experiences of simple objects that can be seen. heard, smelled, touched, or intuited [17]. Within the design area, elements like light, color, texture, the sound of wind, and the space's scent were identified as core phenomena. This framework allowed the exploration of concepts such as the subject-object relationship and experiential design processes, ultimately contributing to the formation of place-based design ideas. According to [18] Holl (2000), the strong spatial connection between architectural works and their surroundings is emphasized by the alignment of architectural products with countless perspectives. Holl highlights the sensory relationship between architecture and its setting with a poetic and metaphysical perspective. Unlike other artistic disciplines, architecture's intrinsic connection to place is further manifested in the way the fixed structure of the architectural work harmonizes with its surrounding environment. The architectural elements within the design area are inspired by Ürgüp's wine cellars, creating an architectural space that reinterprets the phenomenological experience. This interpretation revisits spatial subject-object and body-space relations in their physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Beyond the functional and physical qualities of materials, the design aims to bring out the emotional depth of the materials, establishing an intense architectural experience that engages the perceiver on an emotional and sensory level. Drawing from the Anatolian tradition of tying fabric strips to trees, the design envisions a poetic space where fabric is artistically intertwined with wooden structures. The design responds to the challenges stemming from the need for tectonic phenomenological approaches, utilizing language and the sensory dimensions of materials to provide solutions.



Figure 2. Competition 2 Project Proposal

3. Analyzing Place-Based Characteristics in Projects

Both proposed projects examine the interaction with the place through different means, deeply questioning the relationship between architectural design and the unique identity of the place. Both designs aim to shape their designs based on the tangible and abstract qualities of the place. Jury reports support this premise. Although the designs' discourses related to place were appreciated by the juries, they were not awarded due to different parameters. For these projects, the concept of "place" is treated as a space that goes beyond just being a functional area, becoming an experiential space that reflects the historical, cultural, and physical character of the place.

The Sazlık 2.0 project adopts a design language built on the historical and geographical context of Kayseri. In this project, natural elements such as Sultan Sazlığı and Erciyes Mountain within the city of Kayseri were directly referenced in the design of the space. These elements were not only included visually or symbolically but were also used in the construction of a building system directly affected by the topography and climatic conditions of the place. The wooden installations used in the design present a flexible, permeable, and interactive layout. Designed on the edge of the historic city walls, the project makes efforts to integrate with the historical environment, treating the walls and their surfaces as interfaces that merge with the design, combining them with the permeable structure of the design. By reinterpreting the vacant space and integrating urban memory into the design, the project created a strong public space and made it culturally sustainable by strengthening the historical traces of the city.

The Hazan project aims to develop a phenomenological language for the place by focusing on the unique historical fabric, topography, and cultural identity of the city of Ürgüp. This project presents Ürgüp's natural landscape and traditional urban fabric together and shows respect for the city's history through the use of materials and spatial organization, while examining the relationship between place and space on a phenomenological level. The treatment of the place in this project bridges the past and the present and uses architectural design not just as a physical intervention, but as a tool to transmit the cultural memory of the place. It offers an interactive, dynamic space for the city's inhabitants. Referring to historical structures like Ürgüp's wine cellars, it reinterprets the traces of the past in the space through memory. The historical layers of the place materialized in the design through figurative strategies the that aim to engage user phenomenologically. The main idea of the design, which draws from the concept of "cloth," reinterprets the abstract concept of hope by solidifying it and feeding off the past.

4. Common Context: Relationship with Place and Phenomenological Experience

Phenomenology is referred to as the study of phenomena. It is a philosophical movement developed in the 19th century by its precursor Edmund Husserl. Husserl introduced phenomenology as a means to return to concrete experiences and give philosophy a new beginning. Phenomenology is less of a movement and more of a method based on description. Similar to general philosophical movements, phenomenology addresses the subject-object relationship. It opposes positivism and empiricism by viewing objects through the subject's relationships, perceptions, and experiences with the external world as "things." In phenomenology, the study of "essences" is prevalent. It focuses on perceiving and describing essences. According to the phenomenological approach, reality is the sum of experiences guided by consciousness. The phenomenological approach aims to understand how and through which processes these experiences occur or are formed, leading to unique methodological inferences (Öktem, 2005) [19]. In its most comprehensive form, phenomenology refers to the entirety of an experience specific to a single person (Giorgi, 1997, p.236) [20].

Phenomenology concerns the definitions. experiences, and meanings of things, as they are experienced in the place, body, time, and human interactions. It addresses the phenomena of lived things how these phenomena are perceived. and Phenomenology is seen as a method for the analysis of phenomena, a conscious knowledge analysis of how the experiences of objects and events are revealed. It is the "lived meaning," the expression of a situation experienced by a person through various perspectives [21].

In architecture, phenomenology is a study of experience. The phenomenological perspective, which focuses on conscious experience from the subject's point of view, is mainly applied in architectural practice. Architectural phenomenology encompasses architectural emotions and personal experiences in the realm of consciousness. It focuses on the subjective experience of space, without considering the physical proportions and dimensions of the building. In architectural phenomenology, the experience itself is more crucial than a foundational understanding of factual knowledge. Phenomenological architecture emerges from the subject's perspective, searching for shared knowledge that shapes our relationships and ideas with the surrounding world. From this perspective, the essence of architecture lies in creating a strong link between the functional process of life and all aspects of emotional and intellectual behaviors. From а phenomenological standpoint, it is possible to develop methods that help comprehend subjective meanings and knowledge derived through intuition [22].

Phenomenological approaches are methods that seek to idealize the connection between object and subject. This method aims to capture the spirit of the place in the architectural design process. The data of the

place, such as its social, historical, and cultural features, landform, surrounding texture, geographical attributes, and vegetation—both physical and abstract—form the components of a phenomenological approach. These data can be used to determine the best architectural design tectonics. Both projects examined in this paper approach the relationship with the place in depth while utilizing a phenomenological approach in different contexts. In the Sazlık 2.0 project, the space adopts a flexible structure directly interacting while with environmental conditions, whereas in the Hazan project, the focus is on the cultural and sensory dimensions of the place within a historical context. In both projects, they aim not only to integrate the place's cultural memory and aesthetic values but also to create a sensory interaction, going beyond the physical boundaries of the place. By involving the senses, a semantic connection is established, pointing to the phenomena. The phenomenon in the Sazlık 2.0 project is tactile visuality, while in the Hazan project, the phenomenon is the breeze. In these investigations regarding place, how environmental, cultural, and historical contexts have been effectively utilized in the projects has become a key element of the design. The place is not only considered as a space but as a physical and sensory component of time, culture, and environment. In this context, both projects succeed in developing a more meaningful design language by reducing the relationship with the place to emotional and sensory depths.

5. Award-Winning Projects

When examining the award-winning projects in both competitions, it is apparent that there are similarities between the project proposals and the context of "place." In the awarded projects, aspects such as identity, history, culture, and geographical features are reflected in the designs. When designing within historical boundaries, structures that engage in direct interaction with the city and emotionally connect with people are prominent. The designs that create a historical city square while simultaneously establishing a connection with the urban population have been successful. These designs were created with a design practice that exists in harmony with the historical environment.



Figure 3. Kayseri Melikgazi Municipality Meeting Point Idea Competition Competition Proposal Award Group [23]

In the Ürgüp competition, while developing public space designs for a city with a historical geography, as in the other competition, the awarded groups emphasized geographical, cultural, and historical features when establishing a relationship with "place." Designs that were inspired by the trace of a dried-up stream that once existed in the past, and that drew from the city's history and culture, such as grape vineyards and carpet weaving, and reinterpreted them, were included in the award-winning group.



Figure 4. Odak Ürgüp City Center Idea Competition Proposal Award Group [24]

When examining the awarded groups in both competitions, it is evident that designs directly related to the place existing in the urban memory were successful. It appears that designs that establish a direct connection with history, culture, and geography stood out in the competitions. In this context, it can be said that the chances of success increase when architectural competition designs are developed with a direct relationship to urban memory.

6. Conclusion

The city is not only a physical structure but a dynamic space where historical, cultural, and social meanings intertwine. Public spaces, especially urban squares, play an important role in this regard. These spaces are the essence of the city, reflecting urban memory through elements shaped by societal interaction and cultural identity over time. Urban squares go beyond being mere physical meeting points; they are strategic spaces that nourish the development of cultural and social values and unite the community. In architecture, place is more than a fundamental component; it carries profound meanings about cities, nature, and humanity. Therefore, in the proposed designs and award-winning projects analyzed in this research, it is understood how the interaction of spaces with their environmental conditions and historical-cultural contexts has been deeply examined and integrated into the designs. The Sazlık 2.0 and Hazan projects offer designs that not only move beyond seeing place as a physical ground but also study the emotional and perceptual connections that users form with the space, strengthening these bonds. Similarly, awarded designs in the competition focus on the importance and necessity of creating a direct

relationship with urban dwellers, shaped by the cultural, historical, and geographical memory of the place. Designs that establish a relationship with users are emphasized, particularly regarding the exploration of experiences rather than images through a phenomenological perspective. The designs that aim to create a meaningful link between place and the urban dweller, beyond just establishing a sensory interaction with urban memory, observe how a shared identity is built in this context. It has been seen that the direct connection with "place" is a determining factor for success in architectural competitions. Designs that engage directly with urban memory and reflect this process in their projects fulfill a significant parameter in architectural design quality.

In conclusion, it is understood that in architectural projects, not only the physicality of "place" but also the historical, cultural, and social meanings accumulated over time in that space should be considered. Designs shaped by the physical layers, cultural history, and environmental conditions of the place reshape the experiential, social, and environmental functionality of space in the future of cities. Such an approach adds deeper meaning to projects and strengthens the connection with the city. In this context, the characteristics of existing settlements, structures with social significance, and cultural heritage can be combined with new designs to create a sustainable environment. Particularly, the reflection of the local population's connection with the past and cultural values in the design will strengthen the identity of the space and ensure its passage into the future. Geographical factors should influence spatial settlement relations and contribute to the creation of a design language compatible with the environment. Thus, the design process can be shaped in a context that both preserves the historical heritage and meets current needs and user profiles. By considering user experiences, space, place, time, phenomenological and tectonic approaches in architectural designs, uniqueness can be achieved.

Author contributions

Edibe Begüm Özeren: Conceptualization, Discussions, Conclusion Writing-Reviewing and Editing Ömer Özeren: Conceptualization, Writing-Reviewing, Conclusion and Editing.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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