

Project Implementation in Public Open Spaces: Saraçlar Street Urban Design Project, Edirne-Turkey



Ayşe Sirel
Istanbul Aydın University, Faculty of Architecture and Design,
Department of Architecture,
Beşyol, Florya, Istanbul, Turkey
E-mail: aysesirel@yahoo.com.tr

Abstract: Public open spaces are an integral facet of urban life and have social, physical, and symbolic dimensions. In particular, public spaces deemed to be focal points of historical cities have been adversely affected in recent years by globalization and societal transformations. Many public open spaces, including squares, avenues, and boulevards, no longer reflect the cultural identity of “place,” and have instead become faceless, generic spaces. This situation has given rise to the necessity of studies designed to improve the quality of public places in the urban environment. In this paper, usage problems associated with public open spaces in historical city centers are examined. “Public open space” and “urban interface/façade” concepts are defined and methodologically explored. In addition, the paper discusses problems observed by citizens, the characteristics of these problems, and how these problems impact the urban environment. The regulatory principles of the “Saraçlar Street Urban Design Project” in Edirne, Turkey, are presented as an example of public space planning for a historical city. The project aims to enhance the environmental quality of Saraçlar Street, which is commercially and socially the most important public space in Edirne, by transforming it into a pedestrian-only area. The study concludes with an assessment of Saraçlar Street’s problems prior to pedestrianization and its status and contributions to city life after pedestrianization.

Keywords: Public open space, interface, urban design, pedestrianization, Turkey, historic cities

Kamusal Açık Mekanda Proje Uygulaması: Saraçlar Caddesi Kentsel Tasarım Projesi, Edirne-Türkiye

Özet: Kentsel olayların süregeldiği kamusal açık mekanlar; sosyal-fiziksel-simgesel boyutlarıyla ve üstlendikleri işlevlerle ön plana çıkan kent parçalarıdır. Tüm dünyada ve ülkemizde son yıllarda yaşanan değişim ve dönüşüm sürecinde, özellikle tarihi kentlerin odak noktaları sayılan kamusal dış mekanlar olumsuz etkilenmiştir. Bazen meydan, bazen cadde veya sokak olabilen kamusal açık mekanlar o “yer”in kimliğini yansıtan anlamlı mekanlar olmaktan çıkmış, kimliksiz mekanlar haline dönüşmüştür. Bu durum, kamusal mekanlarının yeniden kente kazandırılması için, çevre kalitesini geliştirmeye yönelik (üçüncü boyutta arayüzleri de içeren) kentsel tasarım proje çalışmalarının gereğini de doğurmuştur. Bu çalışmada tarihi kent merkezlerindeki kamusal açık mekanlar ve kullanım sorunları incelenmektedir. Metodoloji olarak öncelikle “kamusal açık mekan” ve “kentsel arayüz/cephe” kavramları tanımlanmıştır. Kentte yaşayan insanlar için, çevreyi algılayabilecekleri mekanlar olma özelliği taşıyan bu alanlarda gözlenen sorunlar ortaya konmuştur. Çalışmanın örnekleme kısmında ise; kamusal alan düzenlemesinin bir örneği olarak; Edirne’de “Saraçlar Caddesi Kentsel Tasarım Projesi”nin düzenleme ilkeleri anlatılmıştır. Proje ile, Edirne’nin ticari ve sosyal açıdan en önemli kamusal açık mekanı olan Saraçlar caddesinin yaya alanına dönüştürülerek, çevre kalitesinin artırılması amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonunda Saraçlar Caddesinin; yayalaştırma öncesi sorunları ile yayalaştırma sonrası kente katkıları değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kamusal açık mekan, arayüz, kentsel tasarım, yayalaştırma, Türkiye, tarihi şehirler

1. INTRODUCTION

The personal and cultural business of individuals in "public places" within cities forms the bedrock of societal life. In urban environments, residents gather in streets, squares, or parks to converse and freely express themselves. Public open spaces serve as integrative environments where cultural mores are transferred from generation to generation and socialization is improved. However, the public spaces in today's cities are unable to satisfy the expectations of city dwellers. These open areas, which are increasingly being developed as parking lots or thoroughways for motorized vehicles, have started to lose their appeal as spaces where people can wander easily or explore the environment. Historical city centers are under particular pressure from intensive use, and problems of urban decay, aesthetic depreciation, and unwelcoming open space have become significant problems [1], giving rise to the need for a plan to revive the allure of public open spaces in cities.

In this paper, usage and planning problems associated with public open spaces are explained. The study consists of two parts. In part 1, the theoretical underpinnings of "public open space" are described. In this context, the concept of an "urban interface-façade" functioning as a border element between public open space and structured areas in historical city centers is scrutinized. In part 2, the principles of the "Saraçlar Street Urban Design Project" are described as an example of public space arrangement. Location, design status, spatial functions, and existing problems with the horizontal and vertical planes (i.e., plan and façade) are identified for Saraçlar Street, which serves as a public open space in the historical city center of Edirne, Turkey. The study concludes with a comparison of the street and its contributions to the city before and after pedestrianization.

2. THE CONCEPT OF "PUBLIC OPEN SPACE"

In urban settlements, places where common or personal requirements are met as a result of collective living are called *public open spaces*. Structured and unstructured spaces are divided into public or private spaces depending on land use zoning [2]. The concept of public open space is emphasized in this study due to its relevance to the research aims.

Public space studies began in Europe in the 1960s, but even today, there remain different viewpoints on the concept and no agreed-upon precise definition. Although political scientists and architects/urban planners have different conceptions of public open space, the fundamental characteristics often overlap. Çubuk (1989) define public space as functional areas that are accessible by anyone and have symbolic meanings [3]. Rowe (1997) refers to public space as areas that can be directly accessed and which satisfy the key requirements of human socialization [4]. Keleş (2012) characterizes public places as laboratories for determining the limits of living together, moral rules, and life direction [5]. Madanipour (2013) refers to public open space as areas that have always been an integral part of the city [6].

The common point in the definitions above is that public spaces feature discourse, action, and emphasis on "sociality." The most significant feature of public space is that it is open to all citizens: indeed, it manifests the spirit of a city with its physical form and social fabric [7]. All non-private housing or business gathering areas (e.g., squares, avenues, streets, parks) may be referred to as *public*. In this paper, "public outdoor place" or "public open space" concepts are used interchangeably. Public places are essentially open spaces in which people gather to conduct all kinds of social and economic objectives [8, 9]. On a broader scale, public outdoor spaces may be seen as integrative environments where culture is transferred from generation to generation. Public space may serve as a dynamic passage area (e.g., avenue, street, waterway, channel) or statically qualified assembling area (e.g., square), depending on its spatial properties [10]. Public outdoor places are also associated with the structures encircling them.

In order to nurture collective life [11], open urban places should allow all for all kinds of social activities and at the same time should be in harmony with the topographic character of the natural environment. Conversely, structures intended to restrict public space should be expressed in such a way that establishes a collective identity. In recent decades, globalization has brought about a sea change in social, cultural, and economic processes. During this transformation, many public outdoor

spaces deemed to be focal points have been adversely affected (i.e., they have ceased to reflect the identity of “place” and no longer contribute to the lives of city dwellers). Urban planning studies for historical cities in Turkey have mostly adhered to a two-dimensional ground arrangement strategy (i.e., Urban Plan). The desired results could not be attained except in instances of improvement for "urban interfaces" that make up the collective identity of building façades, which limits public engagement with the third dimension. In the following section, the interface phenomenon, which is a spatial consideration where the physical and societal frames of city life intermingle [12], is analyzed in detail.

3. THE INTERFACE CONCEPT: A Problematic Field in the Public Spaces of Historical Cities

The interface phenomenon refers to architectural façades that limit urban open places [10]. It is a boundary element that delineates structured areas in urban outdoor places. *Interfaces* are the transition zones between "urban public outdoor places" and "architectural structure forms"; they determine how the urban fabric will be read and establish visual and functional links between private indoor places and public outdoor spaces [13]. The interface, which does not emerge uniformly in historical cities, is a physical formation shaped through local characteristics (e.g., space, architectural typology, construction materials, form, and aesthetics) and communal values.

Meanwhile, the interface phenomenon is composed of façades from a societal standpoint. That is, although transition zones may be an indication of a society’s personality, they are also the reflection of the communal differences of a city [12]. Interfaces, which have evolved through different cultural phases over the course of hundreds of years, constitute the most obvious evidence of urban evolution. The main elements that change are determined by systemic factors such as technology availability, construction materials, legal obligations, zoning laws, and aesthetic preferences.

As stated above, public outdoor spaces are integrative environments where culture passes from generation to generation. In recent years, interface characteristics that confer the unique identity of historical city centers have been supplanted by unqualified structures as a result of intensive use pressure. In fact, deterioration of public outdoor spaces may be seen in both pattern (function-interface) and structural (plan-façade) scales, which also reduces citizens’ regard for these areas as common ground.

Urban interfaces play a major role in determining the degree of negative impact suffered by public places. "Urban Plans" are an inadequate prescription to solve problems with the current planning system in Turkey. “Urban Design Project” studies, which ostensibly address the third dimension of place, were carried out in order to produce more appealing urban interfaces [14]. An initiative of the public administration, these studies aimed to improve environmental quality by combining function with aesthetics. Spatial relationships were examined with the understanding of particular systems in the regulation of interfaces, which serve as sub-elements of public space. While examining the interface layout, different techniques were used to separate façades by the components that were utilized during construction [12]. Here, it should be noted that the architectural characteristics of façades that form the interface for existing historical structures should not be thought of as badges (i.e., imitations, motif repetitions, etc.) to be attached to planned buildings [15].

The process of the aforementioned technical studies for regulation of interfaces is detailed below:

- Using photographs and drawings, a determination is made of which façades (interface) of existing structures restrict place.
- Next, textural-structural-volumetric-legal analysis studies are conducted.
- A determination of design principles is proposed. Fundamental inclinations of the design in determining formal and structural relations between historical structures are emphasized. Required protections and new buildings to be constructed on empty parcels remaining among existing structures are identified.
- Improvements for current degraded historical façades are identified.
- Finally, a design guide is prepared.

Urban design projects allow for the integration of subjective personal attitudes in plans to enhance the value of public outdoor place [16].

4. CASE STUDY: The Saraçlar Street Urban Design Project and Contributions to Urban Life

4.1 The History and Urban Development Process of Edirne

Edirne is located in the far northwestern region of Turkey. Greece and Bulgaria are located to its west (Figure 1). The city, which dates back to prehistoric times, has been the birthplace of various civilizations and has long been a community focal point for the region. The city was established in 700 B.C. by the Odrysian kingdom [17]. The city then came under control of the Romans in A.D. 46, and then fell under rule of the Byzantine Empire in A.D. 375 when the Roman Empire was partitioned. The name of the city, which had been Adrianapolis until this date, was converted into Edirne when the Ottomans conquered the city in 1362 [18].

Edirne has been a significant settlement for centuries by dint of its geopolitical location. The city has historic neighborhoods located on the western side of the Tunca River and a settlement (Castle Interior–Exterior) in the arc shaped by the Tunca River (Figure 2). Edirne's importance increased dramatically after the Turks conquered it: the city served as capital of the Ottoman Empire for about one century. The city, with its magnificent monuments and stately civil architecture, represents the height of Ottoman architecture (Figure 3).



Figure 1. The geographic location of Edirne.

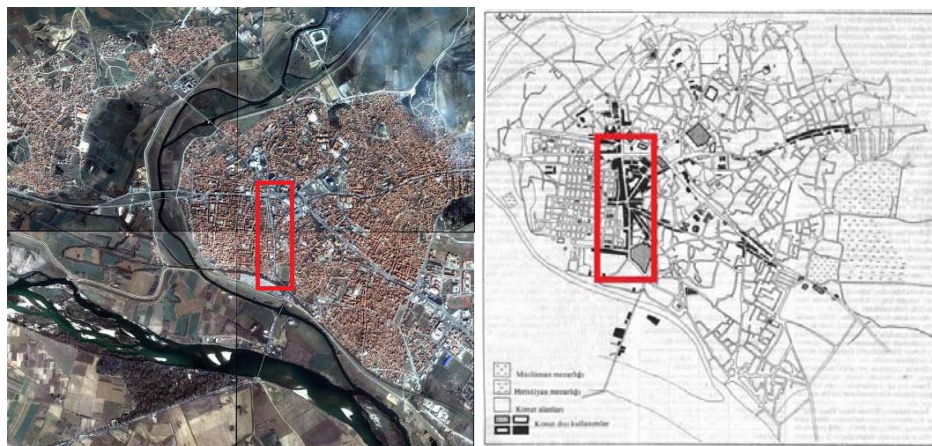


Figure 2. The historic macroform of Edirne.

Figure 3. Saraçlar Street and its environs.

Edirne underwent many zoning transformations from the Republican era to the present. These numerous zoning plans did not allow for a holistic plan to control and protect the historical core of the city and its immediate surroundings. In other words, conservation remained at the scale of individual structures, not the entire urban fabric. Historical, cultural, and aesthetic properties could not be revealed completely for some time, which is a travesty considering Edirne is Turkey's gateway to Europe. "Spatial transformation" projects, which are increasingly being supported, have begun to

contribute to the socioeconomic development of the city by re-purposing its many historical places. One project, the "Saraçlar Street Pedestrian Zone Project", an endeavor carried out by the Trakya University Revolving Fund at the request of Edirne Municipality [19], is described below.

4.2 Saraçlar Street's Position in the City

Saraçlar Street parallels the east walls of Edirne Castle, which is practically indistinguishable today. The street is approximately 700 meters long and is the most important public open space from social and commercial viewpoints. Many commercial structures possess invaluable cultural/historical assets that survive to the present day on the street (Figure 3–5).

This route through Edirne, which has been a significant thoroughway since the Byzantine era, gained more importance after being conquered by the Ottomans. Saraçlar Street is connected to New Palace through Hükümet and Karanfiloğlu Streets toward the north and to Karaağaç through Tunca and Meriç bridges toward the south. The importance of Saraçlar Street is further increased due to its link with Istanbul Road in the east, and roads opening outside of the walls coming from Kaleiçi in the west. The entire region, which was previously situated next to Saraçhane Bridge, was renamed "Yeni Saraçhane" in the late sixteenth century and features the Saraçlar Bazaar [20]. Alipaşa Covered Bazaar, which extends parallel to the street along its northern side, is a major support for commercial activity in the area (Figure 5).



Figure 4. The general appearance of Saraçlar Street in the early twentieth century.



Figure 5. Saraçlar Street and Alipaşa Bazaar (prior to pedestrianization).

4.3 The Problems of Saraçlar Street Prior to Urban Design

- a) Structural problems
 - Violations of building heights designated by the zoning plan (Figure 6)
 - Alterations made to unique façades (Figure 7)
 - Frequent changes made to the initial zoning plan
 - Problems matching color, material, and dimensional complexity



Figure 6. Examples of building height violations along Saraçlar Street.



Figure 7. Façade changes along Saraçlar Street.

b) Problems related to urban fabric

- Some new structures clash with the historical silhouette of existing civil architectural structures (Figure 8)
- Visual pollution caused by advertising billboards (Figure 9)
- Visual pollution created by elements not compatible with historical structures (e.g., air conditioners, sun blinds, antennae)
- Asphalt paving on the street



Figure 8. New architectural formations along Saraçlar Street.



Figure 9. Visual pollution along Saraçlar Street.

c) Problems associated with transportation

- Intense vehicle traffic on the street restricts pedestrian movement and daily life (Figure 10)
- Vehicles parked on sides of the street create blockages and impair pedestrian movement (Figure 11)
- Pedestrian safety problems

d) Legal problems

- There is an inventory of "immovable cultural assets" located on Saraçlar Street
- Absence of a "development plan" prepared specifically for conservation of structures on Saraçlar Street.



Figure 10. Heavy motor vehicle traffic along Saraçlar Street



Figure 11. Parking problems along Saraçlar Street.

4.4 Design Principles for Saraçlar Street

The Saraçlar Street Urban Design Project is composed of two basic fields of study that complement each other [19]. These are;

Pedestrianization and pedestrian area arrangement

Contemporary urbanism and city planning science advocate for the conservation and planning of city centers. In general, these areas are the focal point of a city's social, economic, and cultural activities, and there is a constant quest to improve existing structures as well as create new opportunities for

sustainable urban development. Today, the worldwide trend is toward freeing city centers from vehicle traffic and creating more open space. In Europe, pedestrianization is already well underway to rescue historical city centers from the impacts of motor vehicle traffic. Municipalities in Turkey have only just started to follow this approach. For Edirne, street closures would allow pedestrian access to cultural events and amenities; this approach has become an obligation in order for the historical city center to maintain its vitality. Planning concepts for pedestrianization included (Figure 12):

- Streets paralleling Saraçlar Street, which will be closed to motor vehicle traffic, have been designated as transportation conduits
- Bicycle paths and bicycle parking spaces will line the street
- The continuity of pedestrian circulation will be ensured by interrelating passages, courtyards, and covered bazaars
- Trees on the street will be conserved and additional new green areas will be created
- Recreation areas and outdoor cafes will be erected within walking distance of green areas.

Façade rehabilitation (regulation of interfaces)

Significant architectural differences existed between the interfaces of the two wings (two sides of the road) bounding the section of Saraçlar Street that was to be pedestrianized. This condition substantially affected the spatial function of Saraçlar Street. For example, buildings with three or less stories (many of which had immovable cultural assets) had narrow façades with a width varying between 3 to 6 meters at the western wing, adjacent to Alipaşa Bazaar. On the eastern wing, other than the partially conserved regions, 4 to 5 story buildings with wide façades dominated, resulting from an arrangement for increasing the width of the street in the 1970s (Figure 13). The most important spatial problem of Saraçlar Street was façades that dominated the street in general and created a lack of harmony with opposing façades.



Figure 12. Saraçlar Street pedestrian area arrangement.

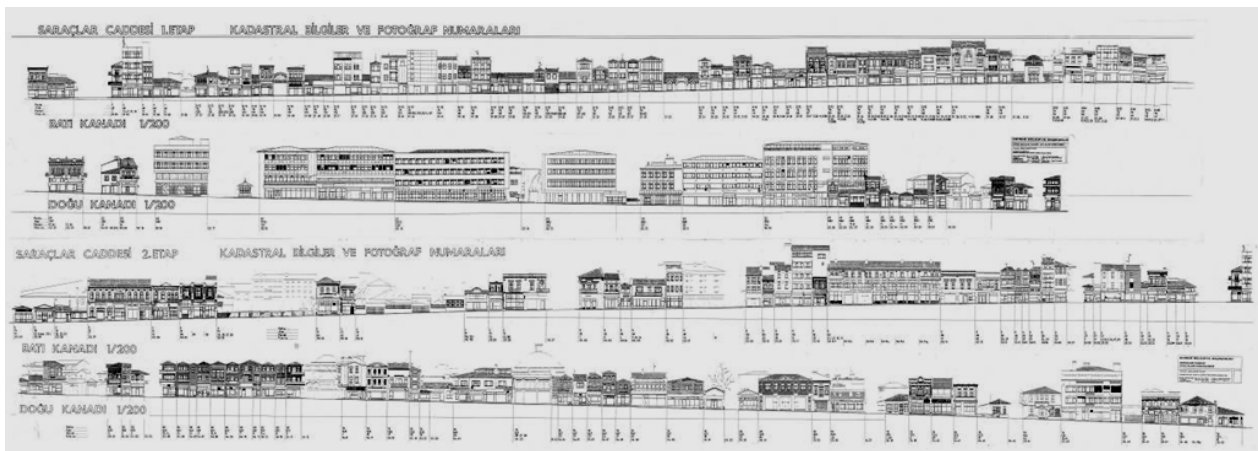


Figure 13. Saraçlar Street's interfaces (silhouette).

The main objective of interface arrangement for structures bounding Saraçlar Street was to eliminate visual pollution and to reclaim lost cultural assets. To achieve this goal, the following strategy was proposed:

- *Determine the current situation:* the façade silhouette of all structures restricting both sides of Saraçlar Street was prepared at a scale of 1/100. Additionally, photographs, maps, and perspective drawings with regard to various eras were compiled into an album.
- *Perform textural, structural, volumetric, and legal analyses:* features such as horizontal and vertical traces, proportion, contrast, layout, occupancy, and material and color of each façade were revealed. Restitution for the interface on both sides of Saraçlar Street was determined by consulting the album (particularly photographs from previous eras). Similarities and differences in building elements and interventions enacted up to the present day based on urban fabric and structures were identified. As a result of the aforementioned documentation study, it was determined that many structures with immovable cultural assets had been demolished or renewed their façades so as to become unrecognizable.
- *Determine the directive design principles:* in light of the studies described above and information and documents examined, structures and parcels facing the street were classified in the following manner:
 - Structures possessing immovable cultural asset qualifications
 - Structures erected after demolition that had sufficient identifying information (e.g., photograph, building survey) regarding their façades
 - New structures and empty parcels without information in respect to their history.

The main tendencies of the "Urban Design Project" were emphasized for these three categories. Accordingly, for extant degraded historical façades it was proposed:

- To remove structural changes contrary to unique architectural elements on building façades
- To remove elements that exceeded the floor height stipulated or which were constructed in violation of the zoning plan and without license
- To remove elements like eaves, sun shades, chimneys, etc., added to façades
- To remove devices like air conditioners, antennae, etc., added to façades or to relocate them as to be invisible
- To bring advertising billboards in compliance with the "Edirne Municipality Advertising, Publicity and Promotion Regulation"
- To perform necessary repairs on structures with aesthetic problems (e.g., plaster shedding, joinery deterioration, color conflicts).

Preparation of design guide

An "Urban Design Guide" containing details regarding the decisions and standards regarding Saraçlar Street and the "Edirne Pedestrian Zones Regulation" has been published. The guide specifies usage fundamentals for Saraçlar Street and other pedestrian areas in light of the aforementioned studies. The goal in producing the guide is to ensure implementation by Edirne Municipality, so as to ensure uniform rules are enacted for historical areas.

5. CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

Public open spaces have social, physical, and symbolic dimensions. These outdoor places often serve as the focal points of historical cities, but they have ceased to be meaningful places to city dwellers due to the rapid urban changes of recent years. In many cases, public spaces have turned into faceless areas that are seldom or never used, which diminishes society and limits the social outlets of city dwellers. This situation has catalyzed a new urban planning agenda that attempts to sustain historical and cultural value through conservation. Urban design project studies that combine function with aesthetics have been launched to improve environmental quality.

Pedestrianization functions, built with the correct dynamics, are of vital importance to preserving for historical city centers that teem with commercial activities. Pedestrianized zones enhance the quality of life for citizens (by generating solutions with respect to pedestrian and vehicle traffic) as well as the entire city; when implemented correctly, pedestrian-only zones can be a very effective tool for urban planners.

Saraçlar Street, the sampling area of this study, is the center of commercial and social life in Edirne, Turkey. The street experiences intense motor vehicle traffic, giving rise to many concerns about pedestrian safety. When social, cultural, communal, and commercial activities were taken into consideration, it was obvious that human beings were the driving force of activity along the length of the street. Assuming accessibility to events and amenities is a fundamental human right, it was the obligation of city government to conserve and maintain the vitality of the city center. Accordingly, an Urban Design Project dedicated to the pedestrianization of Saraçlar Street was prepared by Edirne Municipality in 2003. The project, which provides for "city dwellers' rights" prescribed by a "European Urban Charter" and the preservation of historical and cultural assets, was conducted with the assistance of the Trakya University Revolving Fund. Saraçlar Street was pedestrianized in 2008 in accord with the principles of the Urban Design Project. After pedestrianization, city dwellers reported experiencing diminished environmental pollution and noise as well as more events ensuring the development of social, cultural, and communal relations. Moreover, property values grew and the region became more of a nexus for economic activity in the region (Figure 14).

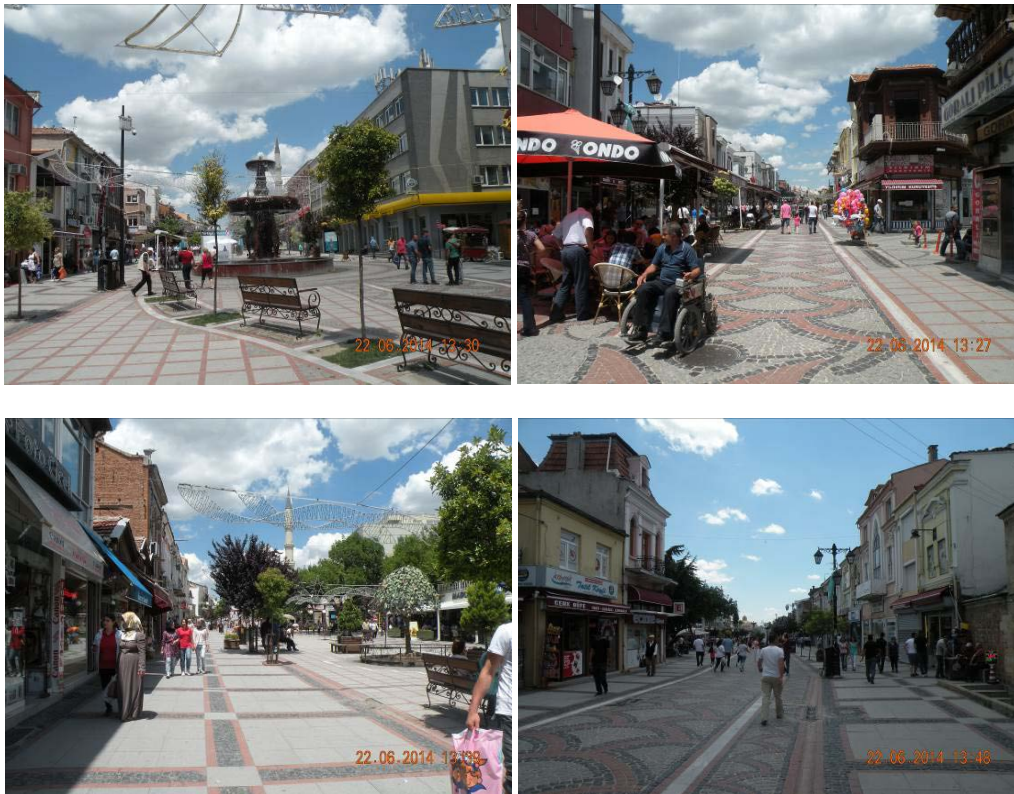


Figure 14. Saraçlar Street after pedestrianization.

A questionnaire measuring the satisfaction with the transformation of the area into a pedestrian area was distributed to people using the street and shop owners. The study was conducted with two groups consisting of 50 pedestrians and 50 shop owners selected randomly. Results showed that 100% of shop owners were satisfied after pedestrianization, and 92% of users/pedestrians were satisfied [21]. Based on the findings, it was concluded that Saraçlar Street acted as a place for “socializing, sharing, recreation, wandering, shopping, and walking,” and that the pedestrianization project was in compliance with these objectives.

Overall, the project was deemed a success, but there were some negative observations associated with the project going beyond its stated scope. These issues included:

- Implementation regarding the interface improvement (rehabilitation) within the scope of the Urban Design Project.
- Decorative items selected by the municipal administration performing the implementation, not those proposed by the plan, were used (seating, lighting elements, pools, etc.).

- Commercial enterprises were permitted to settle on the street haphazardly rather than in locations that were identified in the project plan.
- Cyclists riding in an uncontrolled manner pose a danger to pedestrians because the bicycle path and bicycle parking elements proposed in the project were not implemented.

The completion of interface rehabilitation work and correction of other deficiencies in accordance with the Urban Design Project and design guide will further enrich the public spaces of Edirne city.

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Image sources:

Figure 13: Ayşe Sirel (2014); other figures: Saraçlar Street Pedestrianization Urban Design Project, Ümit Sirel (2003).

AYŞE SİREL; B. Arch, M.Sc., PhD.,

Received her B. Arch (1980) from Mimar Sinan University, Faculty of Architecture, and M.Sc. in City Planning from Yıldız University (1982). She earned her Ph.D. degree in City and Regional Planning from Mimar Sinan University (1993), Istanbul, Turkey. Dr. Sirel worked as a Research Assistant at the City and Regional Planning Department (Mimar Sinan University/1983-1993) and as Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture (Trakya University/1994-2008). Currently, she works as an Assistant Professor at Istanbul Aydın University (2007-2014). Her major research interests include urban design and architectural design.