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# Tarihi Kentsel Meydanların Değişimi: Beyazıt Meydanın Tarihsel Dönüşümü

Changes in Historical Urban Squares: Historical Transformation of Beyazıt Square

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#### ÖZ

Beyazıt Meydanı Roma döneminden günümüze ulaşan önemli meydanlarından biridir. Meydan, kentin tarihi ve kültürel kimliğini koruyarak kolektif belleğin oluşmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Meydan tüm kent sakinlerine açık, toplumsal etkinliklerin merkezi olan bir ünlü Meydan'dır. Tarihi Meydan'ın canlandırılması ve meydan kalitesinin iyileştirilmesi için çeşitli yarışmalar düzenlenmişse de ancak projeler ya hiç uygulanmamış ya da kısmen uygulanabilmiştir. Tasarımlar bütünüyle gerçekleşmemiştir. Günümüzde de özellikle meydanda ulaşım sorunları artırmaktadır. Tarihi meydan yoğun trafik ve hava kirliliği ile karşı karşıyadır, kültürel mirasın bir parçası olan meydanın korunması gerekmektedir. Bu makale, meydanın önemi, tarihçesi hakkında genel bilgiler vermekte meydandaki kimlikli yapıları ele almaktadır. Yine Meydan için tasarlanan yarışmalar incelenmiş, meydanın tarihsel, kültürel, işlevsel ve fiziksel değişimlerini gözlemlenmiştir. Makale Meydan'dan taşıtın uzaklaştırılması yaya odaklı yeni yöntemlerin uygulanması gerektiği savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İstanbul, tarihî meydanlar, Beyazıt Meydanı, yarışmalar, değişim

#### ABSTRACT

Beyazit Square is one of the critical squares that has survived from the Roman period to the present day. The square contributes to the formation of collective memory by preserving the historical and cultural identity of the city. The square is a famous square that is open to all city residents and is the center of social activities. Although various competitions were organized to revitalize the historical square and improve the quality of the square, the projects were either never implemented or were partially implemented. The designs were not fully realized. Today, transportation problems are increasing, especially in the square. The historical square is faced with heavy traffic and air pollution, and the square, which is a part of the cultural heritage, needs to be protected. This article provides general information about the importance and history of the square and discusses the structures with identity in the square. Again, the competitions designed for the square were examined, and the historical, cultural, functional, and physical changes of the square were observed. The article argues that new methods focused on pedestrians should be applied to remove vehicles from the square.

Keywords: Istanbul, historic squares, Beyazıt Square, competitions, transformation

Not: This article is derived from master's thesis and doctoral studies.

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#### **INTRODUCTION:**

According to (Lefebvre, 1998), the city serves as a place and time where people from different social classes and occupations can gather, and individuals and groups can come together. As city components, public squares are the stages of urban life, constantly becoming scenes of urban transformations (Mehan, 2017). In his book "The City Square," Michael Webb focuses on the necessity of squares as microcosms of urban life. Webb adds that squares have traditionally been shaped by trade and defense, political systems and cultural traditions, climate, and topography (Webb, 1990). Public squares have traditionally been the focal points of urban life and social interaction. Habermas emphasizes the significant role of public squares in enhancing the sense of belonging to the same city and forming the shared public memory of the city. These areas bear the traces of changing social, cultural, economic, and ideological structures in every era (Habermas, 1997). (Lynch, 1960) argues that urban identity consists of elements specific to the city, and public squares are one of these elements. Lynch, discussing images in urban identity, points out, for example, that St. Mark's Square is recognizable, and due to its distinctiveness, even someone who has never been to Venice could recognize St. Mark's Square from photographs nch(Lynch, 1960). The importance of squares in terms of imagery is evident. (Rapoport, 1977)public squares are spaces where people can express themselves, communicate, and fulfill their daily needs without restrictions. These open spaces are areas where people from all segments of society can equally and freely interact, allowing for the emergence of socio-cultural qualities where differences and similarities can be observed without discrimination based on religion, language, or race (Rapoport, 1977). According to Zucker (1959), a square is like a "psychological resting place" within the urban fabric. Urban squares are social functions with boundaries delimited by architectural elements, compatible parts of the urban fabric (Zucker, 1959). As these definitions indicate, squares are central points of city life where people can come together and interact, reflecting cultural and historical identity. They strengthen social interaction and support diversity.

Squares, among the urban areas of great importance within the urban fabric, undergo change and transformation over time. They develop within the framework of different social, economic, and political factors and life norms in each period and undergo morphological change. The changing morphological structure of the urban fabric in each period reflects this transformation (Ardıçoğlu & Uslu, 2018).

Urban squares in Turkish cities are observed as small squares within neighborhoods and large squares that serve the entire city and host social events and activities. Although large mosque courtyards were accepted as squares during the Ottoman period, planned squares were not created. The construction of square fountains in the 18th century encouraged the development of squares. With the Westernization process starting with the Tanzimat, most of these areas began functioning as government squares. However, unplanned development works and vehicle-oriented practices have significantly changed the power and function of the squares (Dağlıoğlu, 2023).

The article examines the physical, functional, and cultural changes that Beyazit Square has undergone throughout history. In particular, monumental structures and structures with identities that contribute to collective memory and urban identity formation have been investigated. Transportation problems are increasing in the historical square. The square faces heavy traffic and air pollution. Transportation problems are addressed in the study. Various competitions were organized to improve the quality of the historic square, but it was observed that these projects were either partially or not implemented at all. The article also presents suggestions for the protection and sustainability of the square, which is a part of the cultural heritage.

# 1. Beyazıt Square

Beyazıt Square is located on a historical peninsula surrounded by Ordu-Yeniçeri Streets and Darülfünun Street. The entrance gate of Istanbul University is to the north, Beyazıt Mosque to the east, and Beyazıt Madrasah (Calligraphy Museum) to the west. The nearby Grand Bazaar, Second-Hand Book Bazaar, historical Simkeş Han, and Beyazıt State Library make this square necessary.

The first state of Beyazıt Square is the Forum Tauri of the ancient Roman period. It has survived until today, transforming and changing. The first state of the square is depicted together with today's Beyazıt Square, using Bauer's restitution (Figure 1), (Ersin, 2007). The arrangement of a monumental forum (Forum Tauri) in the square was made by Theodosius I. The forum was completed in 393. At that time, there were the square fountain (Nympheum), basilica, triumphal arch, column carrying the statue of the emperor, palace and statues in the square (İşözen, 1987).

The current state of the media is seen in Figure 2.

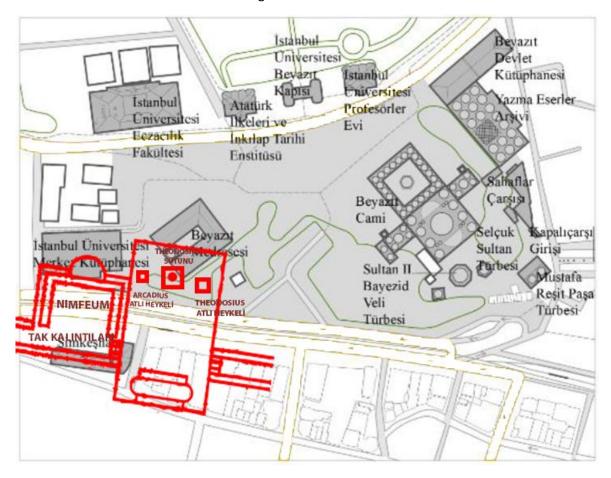


Figure 1. Current map showing the ancient Roman Forum Tauri and today's Beyazıt Square (Ateş, 2020)



Figure 1. Beyazıt Square today, (Google Maps)

Beyazıt Square has maintained its identity as a square throughout the city's different historical periods, from the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Early Republican Periods to the present day. It is an urban space that bears the traces of these periods.

A part of the historical peninsula where Beyazıt Square is located can be seen in Figure 3. The central areas of the Ottoman period were the source of essential buildings and streets. It reflects the social, economic, and cultural structure of Istanbul. Historical and commercial centers such as the Grand Bazaar can be seen. Figure 4 also shows the settlement plan of the square from that period from a different perspective.

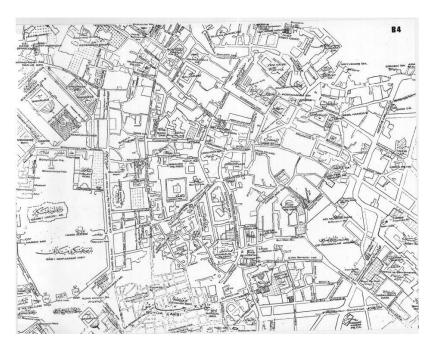


Figure 2. Beyazıt Square in the Ottoman Period, (Ayverdi, 1958)







Figure 3. Beyazit Square 1918, source: Istanbul Municipality Guide (INT-1)

Beyazit Square is one of the defining squares of Istanbul. The square in the historical peninsula hosts cultural and religious structures. It offers accommodation and shopping opportunities. Its proximity to the university gives it an advantage. For this reason, students, tourists, and people from all walks of life gather in the square. It was the city's largest Forum during the Byzantine period. It also served as the Palace Square during the Ottoman period and shaped the city's image (Bağbaşı, 2010). The square was named Republic Square in 1933 and was later changed to Freedom Square for a while. Today, it is known as Beyazit Square.

#### **Historical Process**

The completed Forum during the reign of Roman Emperor Theodosius I, including the architectural works and the description of the structures, is shown (Figure 5). This drawing shows the archaeological plan of the Forum Tauri, built during the ancient Roman period. The plan reveals the layout of the Forum and shows the surrounding structures and roads. The large rectangular area in the middle represents the main square of the Forum. The layout of the structures seen in this way indicates that the Forum Tauri was designed similarly to the Forum and Capitolium in Rome (Müller Weiner, 2016).

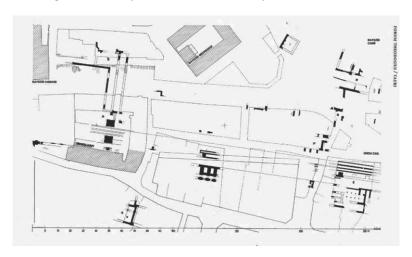


Figure 4. Forum Theodosios or Forum Tauri built in the Roman period, (Müller Weiner, 2016)

Of the forum's structures, only the Theodosius Arch has survived to the present day. The structure's ruins are in situ on the southern edge of Ordu Street. In addition, there are relief fragments of the Theodosius Column in the foundations of the Beyazıt Bath (Ersin, 2007). Equipped with numerous monuments and statues, the Tauri Forum was almost destroyed by earthquakes and fires during Byzantine (Figure 6).



Figure 5. The Theodosius Arch with its foundation walls, the arch's base, and the facade of the old courtyard of Simkeşhanı are visible, (Müller Weiner, 2016)

Again, Figure 7 shows a restitution study by Doğan Kuban of the "Forum Tauri" in Beyazıt Square. The restitution has been revived in the light of archaeological findings and historical sources. In the drawing, Kuban shows the architecture and settlement of Beyazıt Square in Istanbul during the Roman period, especially in the 4th and 5th centuries.

This area, an essential center of the Roman Empire, was called the "Forum of Theodosius" (Kuban, 2010).

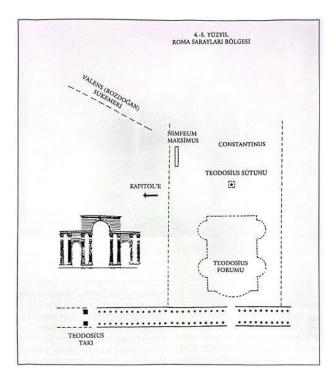


Figure 6. General plan of the Tauri or Theodosios Forum, (Kuban, 2010)

After the conquest of Istanbul, Fatih Sultan Mehmet built his palace in this square, which included a part of the Forum Tauri, in 1454. II. Beyazıt, on the other hand, expanded the area by constructing a complex (külliye) in the Forum area between 1501 and 1506 (Figure 8).

Various urban design proposals have been made for Beyazıt Square over the years, including a European-style square proposed by French architect Antoine Bouvard in the 19th century. The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has tried to reshape Beyazıt Square through urban design interventions such as the Urban Design Project (Ardıçoğlu & Uslu, 2018).



Figure 7. Beyazit Square, 19th century (INT-2)

# 1.1. Identifiable Structures

The structures surrounding the square define the square itself. Schulz (1971) states that for open spaces to be defined as spaces, they need a volumetric closure, and without this closure, the space cannot be perceived (Schulz, 1971).

The identifiable structures in Beyazit Square are buildings that define the city's character, history, or significant features. These structures usually carry symbolic or historical value and are crucial tourist attractions for promoting Istanbul.

**Old Palace (Saray-ı Atik):** The first Turkish palace built by Fatih Sultan Mehmet in 1454 after the conquest of Istanbul (Islamic Encyclopedia, INT-7).

**Istanbul University:** The old palace buildings commissioned by Fatih Sultan Mehmet were redesigned in 1866 by the French architect Bourgeois as the Seraskerat Building. During the constitutional monarchy period, it was changed to the Ministry of War and remained so until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Since 1933, it has been Istanbul University. The university continues to operate as a medical and law faculty (Bağbaşı, 2010).

**Istanbul University Beyazit Gate:** The Gate is an emblem of Istanbul University (Figure 9). The twin pavilions on either side of the Gate were designed by the French architect Borgues. However, the design was not realized. It has gone down in history as the main gate of the Ministry. Engineer Bekir

Pasha also claimed to have designed the gate. The structure, consisting of three adjoining arched parts, possesses a monumental identity (İstanbul University, INT-8).

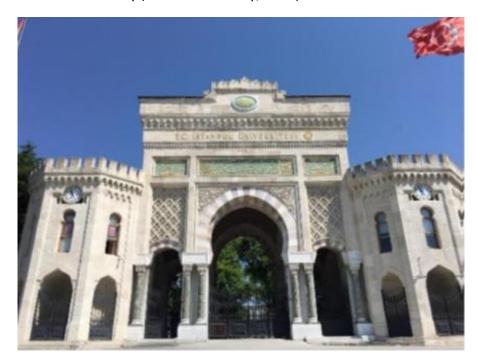


Figure 98. Beyazit Gate of Istanbul University (Ates, 2020)

**Beyazit State Library:** The Beyazit State Library, the first library established during the Ottoman period, was initially known as the Kütübhâne-i Umûmî-i Osmânî. It was opened in 1884 in the İmaret section of the Beyazit Complex (Ottoman Archives). The library was also called the Bayezid Public Library, and since 1961, it has been serving as the Beyazit State Library (Islamic Encyclopedia, İNT-7).

**Bayezid Complex**: It was built in 1505 and includes buildings such as a mosque, guesthouse, madrasa (theological school), elementary school, soup kitchen, bathhouse, caravanserai, fountain, timekeeping room, and tomb (Islamic Encyclopedia, İNT-7).

**Beyazit Mosque**: The mosque gave its name to Sultan II. He built Bayezid. This mosque, one of Istanbul's magnificent structures, was constructed in one corner of the Forum Tauri, a significant square during the Byzantine period .

**Beyazit Madrasa:** It was built by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II in Istanbul as part of the Bayezid complex in 1506-1508. It is also known among the public as the "Pool Madrasa" because of the large rectangular pool to the right of the entrance gate. The construction of the Bayezid Madrasa began after the completion of the Bayezid Mosque. The construction of the madrasa, which is a classical madrasa plan structure located northwest of the mosque and a little further away, was completed in 1507. The architect was Yusuf Bin Papas, see Figure 10 (Vikipedia, iNT-9).





Figure 10. Beyazit Madrasa (Ateş, 2020)

**Bayezid II Tomb**: The tomb was built by Yavuz Sultan Selim, son of Beyazıt II. The tomb is made of regular cut stone and has an octagonal plan. It reflects an example of Classical Ottoman Architecture. It has iron bars. The upper row of windows are in the form of pointed arches. The rectangular moldings intertwined on the tomb facades add aesthetic value to the structure (Fatih.gov,tr, iNT-10).

**Şimkeşhane/Şimkeş Han**: It was built (Figure 11) in the area where the Triumphal Arch, located within the boundaries of the Forum Tauri, stands. In a historical bazaar and inn complex where trade and craftsmanship once thrived, intricate silver threads and wires called "Simkeş" were produced, and the shops sold the products. This structure, which has a historical texture, has changed over time. In the 1970s, the southern side was restored and now serves as a public library (Bağbaşı, 2010).



Figure 11. Simkeşhane/Şimkeş Han (Ateş, 2020, 2022)

**Secondhand Booksellers Market (Sahaflar Çarşısı):** Beyazıt Mosque and Beyazıt State Library are located in the Bazaar. At one time, engravers and seal makers worked here. Therefore, the bazaar is also called the Engravers' Bazaar.

The symbol values of the square include the Beyazit (Fire) Tower.

**Beyazit Tower:** The tower, whose plan and appearance can be seen in Figure 12, was first built in 1749 in Beyazit, Istanbul, as a wooden structure to watch over fires. It is an 85-meter-high tower. Later, the

height of the tower was increased to 118 meters. It has three sections: watch, signal and flag floors (Vikipedia, INT-9).

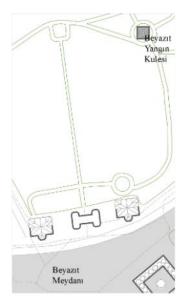




Figure 92. Location and view of Beyazit Fire Tower (Ates, 2020)

### 1.2. Green Areas

The green areas in the square offer urban dwellers opportunities for relaxation and socialization. From a recreational perspective, these green spaces provide suitable environments for activities such as walking, resting, and children's playgrounds. Various events are organized in these areas, including concerts, outdoor theaters, festivals, and other social activities.

In 1957, it was decided to remove the elliptical fountain pool in the square and replace it with a green area (Figure 13). Today, the elliptical pool has been removed, and the green area has been relatively increased (Figure 14).



Figure 10. The fountain pool condition of the square, 1930s (INT-3)

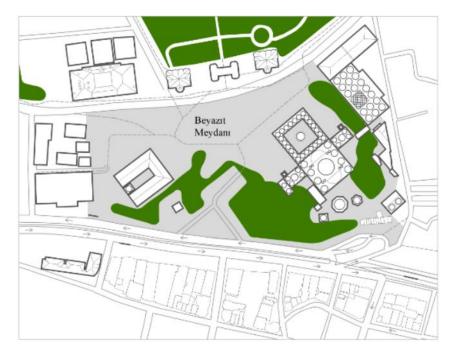


Figure 11. Beyazit Square and green areas today, sketches:

# 1.3. Road Conditions

To the south of the square, Ordu Avenue continues towards Sultanahmet via Yeniçeriler Avenue, while to the north, Darülfünun Avenue shapes the square beneath the university's entrance gate.

The widespread use of automobiles, which became prevalent rapidly after the Industrial Revolution, has also impacted this historic square, as it has many other squares.

Sennett (2002), states that in modern planning, the intersections where the road systems developed due to automobile use in cities have intersected have turned into squares. Squares are characterized as intersections (Sennett, 2002) (Figure 15). This situation causes heavy vehicle traffic and chaos in the square, traffic congestion, and an increase in accidents.



Figure 125. Entrance of automobiles to the square (INT-4)





Heavy vehicle traffic is seen around the square (Figure 16). It negatively affects the square's functionality and aesthetics. Air pollution caused by exhaust fumes harms human health. Vehicle traffic and constant honking of horns increase the noise level in the square. Heavy vehicle traffic endangers pedestrian safety around the square and creates difficulty crossing for pedestrians. A view from the heavy traffic (Figure 17).

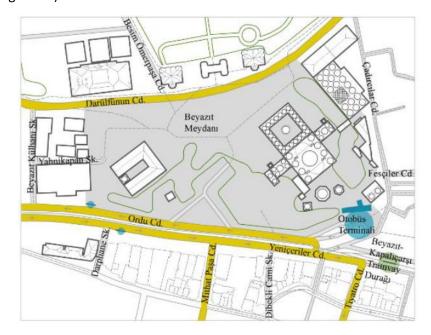


Figure 13. Current vehicle road chaos and surrounding roads of the square (Ateş, 2020)



Figure 14. A view of Beyazit Square congested with traffic (Ateş, 2020)

# 2. Competitions

One of the arrangements regarding the arrangement of Beyazit Square is the French designer Antonie Bouvard. In Antoine Bouvard's design proposal, the square was enlarged and envisaged as a European square in a style not in the Ottoman tradition (Hasol, 2014). This proposal, which Bouvard developed without seeing the city and without considering any topographic, geographical, cultural, or historical criteria, was not accepted. Bouvard's proposal greatly expanded the square to the sides, and historical

structures were demolished. Apart from the Beyazıt Madrasah, a section of the Grand Bazaar was also planned to be demolished for the expanded square to the sides.

Asım Kömürcüoğlu designed the square during the time of Mayor Ali Haydar Yuluğ between 1923 and 1924. An elliptical pool was planned in the middle, and a traffic road was designed around the pool where trams could turn (Bağbaşı, 2010). In the Republic's early years, the large and small buildings surrounding the madrasah and historical monuments were removed. A planning competition was held in 1933. German city planner Herman Elgötz won the competition. He was one of those who argued that there should be space in Beyazıt Square. In the report he presented in the competition, he aimed to open up the surroundings of the historical buildings to the east and west of the square. After Elgötz, Henri Prost was again used for city planning. He also suggested creating more space around the monuments (Bilsel, 2011). In the 1950s, German planner Högg was brought to the Istanbul Municipality planning consultancy. In 1959, Hans Högg was one of the designers of the square. Högg suggested building the square on two floors (Bayrak, 2014) (Figure 18).

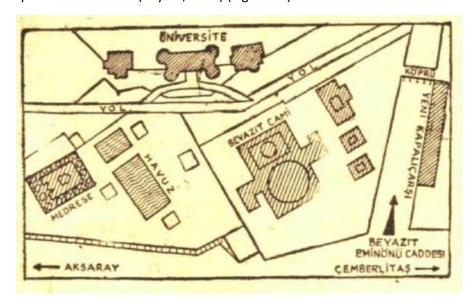


Figure 15. The project proposed by Hans Högg for Beyazıt Square (May 22, 1959 Cumhuriyet )

In In 1956-1957, works were started under the name of Istanbul's development, and road widening was applied to find a solution to traffic congestion. However, the facades that added value to the square were destroyed. For this purpose, in 1957-1958, the shops around the mosque and on the northern side of Ordu Street were expropriated and demolished with the arrangement works (Bağbaşı, 2010).

Turkish architects later organized studies on the square arrangements through competitions. In 1957, Sedad Hakkı Eldem proposed his project to re-establish the relationship between the mosque and the madrasah and minimize the traffic in the square (Figure 19).



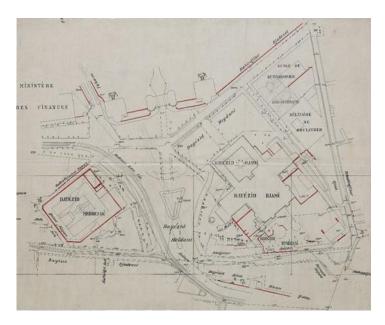


Figure 19. Eldem's Square arrangement in 1957 (Salt Research Sedad Hakkı Eldem Archive INT-5)

Subsequent In 1960, Cansever's project (Figure 20), which solved the traffic problem and provided square life, came first. The project was successful due to the evaluation of the historical environment, the creation of volumes suitable for human measurements, and the good response to the possibilities of applicability.

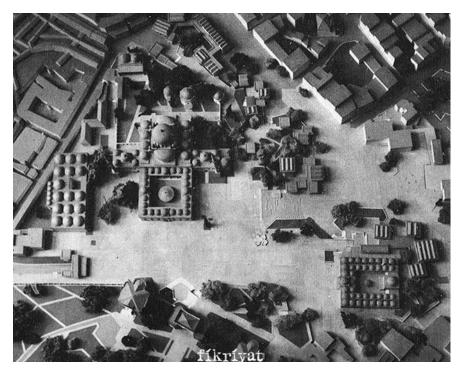


Figure 16. Turgut Cansever's Proposal for Beyazıt Square Arrangement (Arkitera INT-6)

Despite winning first place in the competition, Eldem's and Cansever's projects for Beyazıt Square were not implemented. However, the Square has gone down as a public space where significant architects have produced their ideas in Turkish architectural history. Therefore, Beyazıt Square stands out as a heritage of history and culture where local and international architects can generously present their ideas (Bayrak, 2014). Competitions for redesigning Beyazıt Square, one of Istanbul's historical squares, are essential for understanding how public spaces in the city are shaped and how urban life is affected. These competitions have included many objectives, such as preserving historical and cultural heritage,

improving the aesthetics and functionality of the environment, and solving traffic problems. However, these projects have either not been implemented at all or have been partially implemented. Necessary steps have been missing in preserving and improving the historic city square. The traffic problem has increased significantly since then and continues to worsen.

#### **RESULTS:**

In Beyazit Square, the facades that added value to the Square were destroyed due to road widenings and the shops on the side of the road were expropriated and demolished.

Since it is located in the city center, the Square faces heavy traffic and air pollution. Vehicle traffic damages historical structures and atmospheric pollution wears out monumental historical structures.

Tourism and visitor density: The famous historical square is generally a touristic attraction. This situation causes a high visitor density and, accordingly, environmental pollution and the erosion of historical structures.

Infrastructure and Maintenance Problems: The lack of sufficient maintenance in the square, deficiencies in garbage collection and other basic services cause environmental pollution.

The Square, which is a part of the Cultural Heritage, needs to be protected. However, lack of maintenance threatens the cultural heritage.

The Square is used for commercial activities and this causes the square to deviate from its main purpose and ceases to be a social and cultural tool for the city dwellers.

Historical City Squares are expected to be a gathering and meeting point for pedestrians. In the square where pedestrian-vehicle interaction is high; It has been determined that pedestrians cannot move comfortably within the area, vehicle-pedestrian chaos occurs, traffic congestion occurs and pedestrians have difficulty accessing from one place to another. Physical wear and tear is observed in structures and building groups that have not yet lost their original character. Again, various additions that wear out the original character have been identified.

# **CONCLUSION:**

According to Fauole (1995), a square is an empty space defined by a designed environment. In order for a place to be considered a square, pedestrianization must first be carried out (Fauole, 1995). Therefore, the Square needs to be pedestrianized rapidly and vehicle traffic needs to be reduced.

Traffic, congestion, noise and service difficulties create difficulties in the operation and use of the square. Pedestrianization policies should be implemented to a large extent within the center.

Pollution, transportation problems, accessibility, structural problems, infrastructure problems and traffic problems in the square can negatively affect the identity of the city (Tuncer, 2022).

Various measures can be taken to reduce or eliminate the negativities in the square. These may include measures such as providing safer passages for pedestrians, regulating traffic management, moving the public transportation system that divides the square underground, and encouraging alternative transportation methods. In addition, protecting and increasing the green areas around the square can also have a positive effect, because these areas both reduce air pollution and provide an aesthetic environment.



In urban design studies carried out at the historical city center scale, one of the most important factors that guide the designer is the city identity. Analyzing all aspects of such areas and determining the city identity elements will contribute to the correct perception of the city identity (Günaydın, 2019).

Competitions can be organized with a holistic approach to make design decisions for the square. Considering the awareness of protection in the arrangement of the square and transformation projects will lead to important steps to be taken towards the protection of both the historical heritage of the square and Istanbul and the development of urban life.

Functional historical structures should be preserved, and these structures that maintain their original character should be protected with effective intervention measures.

The Historical City Center should be a lively and prestigious tourism, accommodation, recreation, entertainment and trade center. Traditional trade areas formed in historical development, historical structures and building groups, textures, the built environment that gives a unique character to the city and the center, landscape and urban symbols should be meticulously protected and revitalized.

City squares should be designed in terms of environmental sustainability and integrated with sustainability principles in urban planning processes. It is thought that this study will create awareness about the sustainability goals of city squares.

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