

SILENT DETAILS OF URBAN IDENTITY: FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETIC ASPECTS OF URBAN FURNITURE ON GURES STREET, SIIRT

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Abstract: The development of technology, changes in living habits, and the rapid urbanization process have increased interaction between cities, leading to the formation of cities that are increasingly similar, lacking distinct identities and aesthetic appeal. In this process, urban furniture that shapes the urban space plays a crucial role in constructing both visual aesthetics and urban identity. Urban furniture not only enhances user comfort but also embodies components of identity that reflect the city's historical, cultural, and physical characteristics. This study aims to evaluate the aesthetic qualities of urban furniture on Gures Street in Siirt city centre and its relationship with urban identity. In the research, which was carried out by on-site observation, photo documentation and qualitative analysis methods; seating units, garbage bins, delimitation elements, artistic objects, tree grates, parking spaces, lighting components and water elements were examined in terms of functionality, visual harmony, maintenance status and connection with local identity. The findings show that although the furniture elements meet the needs at the functional level, they contain designs that fall short of aesthetic integrity and fail to align with the regional cultural context. This situation weakens the original identity of the street and creates discontinuity in urban perception. The study reveals that urban furniture should be reconsidered not only as physical objects but also as aesthetic elements with cultural meaning.

Keywords: Public space, Urban aesthetics, Urban identity, Urban furniture, Spatial integrity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, cities have functioned not only as living spaces but also as aesthetic structures that carry social memory (Lynch, 1960). In this context, urban furniture has evolved from being merely physical structures that meet basic needs to becoming important elements that shape urban identity and influence aesthetic perception (Morgan et al., 2000; Grabiec et al., 2022). Urban furniture refers to a set of physical elements designed to facilitate and direct

the daily lives of individuals in public open spaces of cities, while also providing spatial comfort (Akyol, 2006; Arruda et al., 2017). Consisting of components such as seating units, lighting elements, litter bins, flower boxes, directional boards and boundary elements, these structures are not only functional but also have aesthetic, cultural and symbolic meanings (Aksu, 2012; Arruda et al., 2017; Uslu and Bolukbasi, 2019; Grabiec et al., 2022). For this reason, urban furniture plays a crucial role not only in the interaction between individuals and their surroundings but also in shaping the formation of urban identity and the perceptual integrity of space (Lynch, 1960; Carmona, 2021).

When urban furniture is designed in consideration of the historical, cultural, and natural context of the environment, it also contributes to the establishment of an emotional bond between the user and the city (Bayramoglu and Ozdemir, 2012). Original urban furniture, with high aesthetic value and reflecting the local identity, strengthens the sense of place by enhancing the authenticity of the space. On the other hand, standard and unidentified furniture creates uniformity in the urban environment and weakens the sense of belonging (Relph, 1976; Mieczkowski, 1985; Rossi, 2006; Ziyadee, 2018). In this context, supporting the principal pedestrian axes, especially in city centres, with identity and meaningful furnishings serves to protect social memory and enhance urban aesthetics (Bayramoglu and Ozdemir, 2012; Yücel, 2013).

Urban identity encompasses the totality of spatial and symbolic qualities that are specific to a city, shaped by its historical accumulation, geographical structure, architectural character, cultural codes, and social memory (Lynch, 1960; Matzarakis and Mayer, 1996; Ziyadee, 2018). The original building elements, street textures, squares, and open spaces in different layers of the city serve as visual and perceptual carriers of this identity (Stathopoulos et al., 2004; Birol, 2007; Gul, 2013; Guler et al., 2016). In this context, urban furniture in public spaces should be considered not only as technical elements, but also as cultural indicators that reflect urban memory. In cities with a unique urban identity, furniture incorporates cultural references such as local materials, colors, patterns, and forms, thereby reinforcing the individual's sense of belonging and meaning (Relph, 1976; Matzarakis et al., 2007; Arruda et al., 2017).

Urban aesthetics, on the other hand, is concerned with the visual harmony, formal coherence and artistic value of a city's spatial arrangements (Wang, 2018). Aesthetic integrity is ensured not only by architectural composition but also by micro-scale design decisions such as the correct placement of urban furniture, proportionality, and harmony with the surroundings (Nikolopoulou and Steemers, 2003; Nia and Olugbenga, 2020). A lack of aesthetics, haphazardly placed or visually complex furnishings reduce the spatial quality of the city; on the other hand, original and remarkable designs that contain linguistic unity, are related to the city, increase aesthetic perception and encourage the use of public spaces (Carmona, 2021; Grabiec et al., 2022).

In the literature, it has been noted that well-designed urban furniture fosters a sense of belonging and a 'sense of place' among city dwellers (Toy et al., 2007; Yilmaz et al., 2013; Yücel, 2006; Arruda et al., 2017; Grabiec et al., 2022). Furthermore, similar and anonymous designs can lead to a weakening of urban identity by increasing perceptions of 'loss of place' (Relph, 1976; Schulz, 1980; Nia and Olugbenga, 2020). Urban furniture in public spaces can be designed elements that reveal the character and identity of the city (Arruda et al., 2017). Especially the streets in the city centres are the places where these furnishings have the most intense contact with the city dwellers (Yucel, 2006; Bayazit and Kisakurek, 2020). Furniture that embodies an urban identity is characterized by a unique combination of city-specific elements, including

materials, forms, and historical textures (Lynch, 1960). Aesthetics is the external reflection of this character. Facilities without identity reduce the perceptual value of the space (Kır, 2009; Bayazit and Kisakurek, 2020).

The focus of this study is to evaluate the existing urban furniture in Siirt's Gures Street in terms of identity and aesthetics. Gures Street, one of the most prominent and symbolic urban axes in Siirt, is a central space for Siirt, encompassing areas of economic, social, cultural, and political activity. In this context, the aim is to evaluate the urban furniture on Gures Street in terms of both its urban aesthetic appeal and its capacity to represent the area's identity. The study is based on the idea that this pedestrian axis is not only a transportation line, but also a representational medium where urban memory is visually encoded. In this context, the study aims to evaluate the urban furniture in the study area in terms of its aesthetic appeal and suitability for enhancing Siirt's urban identity.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method and aims to analyze urban furniture in the context of aesthetic and identity values. The research process is based on observation, visual document analysis, literature review, and photo-based descriptive analysis techniques. The primary material of the study consists of original ground photographs taken on Gures Street and Siirt Gures Street in March and April 2025, as well as qualitative data obtained from field observations.

Gures Street is one of the most prominent and symbolic urban axes of Siirt. The street, which is approximately 2.236 meters long, extends from northwest to southeast, from Seyh Aziz Street to Ibrahim Hakki Street. The pedestrian section is pedestrianized and then opened to vehicular traffic, connecting to the ring road (Gunduz Gezer, 2022). The street, which was included in the zoning plan in the late 1970s, has become the focal point of Siirt's social, economic, and cultural life over time (Ozgen and Karadogan, 2009). In 2006, pedestrianization was implemented based on a project prepared by the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, and the street gained the identity of an important public space where urban interaction intensified (Gunduz Gezer, 2022). Today, Gures Street is not only the city's main pedestrian thoroughfare but also a multifaceted public space that combines various functions, including shopping, recreation, socializing, and meeting. The street not only shapes the city centre but also serves as a spatial reference that determines the direction of urban development (Derin, 2021; Demir, 2023).

The various cafes, restaurants, health and education institutions, and commercial centers located on the route bring together different socio-economic groups, thus exhibiting a multicultural urban structure (Gunduz Gezer, 2022; Tan and Bayezit, 2023). Although located in the historical core area, it has also contributed to the spatial development of the new Siirt through the modernization process. The location of Siirt University, situated near the city centre, has directly influenced the transformation of the street, resulting in the emergence of a lively and dynamic social environment where the young population is primarily concentrated. In this context, Gures Street is regarded as a strong urban image that symbolizes the transition to contemporary urban life while preserving traditional values (Figure 1).

The research design is based on a case study, with Siirt Gures Street serving as the single sample. During the field study, the urban furniture (benches, litter bins, lamp posts, boundary elements, flower boxes, and floor coverings) in the street was observed on-site, and each item

was evaluated in terms of aesthetic integrity, functionality, spatial harmony, identity reflection, and user-friendliness.

All observations were made using a semi-structured field survey form, and the visual analysis was supported by photographic documentation. The evaluation criteria were structured around the central themes defined in the national and international literature on urban furniture, including aesthetic value, representation of local identity, ergonomic functionality, ease of maintenance, and durability.



Figure 1. Location of the study area (Google Earth, 2025) and images of Gures Street (Siirt Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025)

3. RESULTS

In this section, urban furniture in Gures Street, Siirt, has been evaluated in terms of aesthetic value, functionality, and contribution to urban identity. Based on on-site observations and photographic documentation, the following elements were analyzed under separate headings: seating units, waste bins, lighting elements, flower boxes, border elements, and floor coverings.

3.1. Seating elements

Three types of seating elements were identified in the study area: under-tree seating, with and without backs, and all models are without armrests (Akyol, 2006).

In general, the seating units are simple in design. Seating units in the street are generally classic bench models with metal frames and wooden seats. In general, the materials of the seats are worn, and in some places, the backrest is broken or missing. The seating units are in completely open areas, with no shelter. Their open position in the sun and lack of shade reduce the comfort of use. The wooden parts are dilapidated and irregular in appearance. During the field study

observations, it was noted that these benches have a general shape that can be found in any city. The designs do not contain any aesthetic elements relating to urban identity, motifs, or symbols specific to Siirt. Therefore, they are weak in terms of urban identity. Aesthetically, they are compatible with the street structure and have a functional appearance (Figure 2).

In some areas, circular bench systems have been used around the tree. These models are out of scale with the tree, narrow,

and unevenly mounted. The wooden parts are of different colors, and some are missing, disrupting the visual integrity. They are of low aesthetic quality and do not contribute to the urban identity. Figure 3 illustrates various types of bolted boards, some of which are missing or damaged. This poses a risk in terms of both aesthetics and safety.

3.2. Lighting elements

The modern, slim-line lighting poles used along the street feature a minimalist design and contemporary lines. The design of the poles used on Gures Street consists of a tubular body that narrows towards one end and features visual objects on top. Although aesthetically unified, these elements are not related to traditional local architectural elements. The lighting elements in the study area do not carry symbols specific to Siirt and exhibit a thoroughly contemporary style. Although they fulfil functionality by providing appropriate light intensity, their aesthetic identity value is limited. All poles are similar in tone and are not visually incompatible with the street texture; however, they are not unique. During the field inspections, it was observed that the poles were positioned at the border of the vegetative landscape in the areas where they were located, or in some cases, they were planted solely for aesthetic purposes (Figure 4).



Figure 2. Seating elements located in the study area on Gures Street



Figure 3. Tree-surround seating elements located in the study area on Gures Street



Figure 4. Lighting elements located in the study area on Gures Street

3.3. Rubbish bins

The bins used along Gures Street are rectangular with metal frames and horizontal wooden slats. The bins placed on the street have been partially enriched visually by using wood veneer on metal. Although this design is positive in terms of providing aesthetic integrity, the selected wood patterns or colors do not contain any cultural reference specific to Siirt. Although the combination of artificial and natural materials harmonizes with the area, it does not establish a direct connection with the city's symbolic identity. These bins are suitable for the area in terms of functionality and general aesthetics, but they fall short of creating a unique urban identity (Figure 5). Additionally, it was determined that their number was insufficient, and their placement was incompatible.

3.4. Delimitation elements

There are different types and materials of delimitation elements (metal fences, parking stones, short, fixed barriers, and illuminated lights) on Gures Street. However, field observations revealed that these elements are not adequate in terms of design, placement, and maintenance. Metal fences between the planted areas and the pedestrian path serve a functional purpose in orienting the urban fabric. However, bending, paint flaking, and deformation were observed in most of the fence elements. Although they feature aesthetically repetitive motifs, they do not convey a unique local identity. The physical boundary elements, such as parking stones and short fixed barriers, used to separate pedestrian and vehicle traffic, are scattered throughout the area. Some parking stones are broken or displaced, while others have lost their function. As they are not sufficiently fixed on the surface, some situations may pose an accident risk. Illuminated delimitation elements integrated with the paving are intended to provide visual

orientation. However, some elements are broken or non-functional, while others are entirely obscured by the ground and are not visible (Figure 6).

Although the delimitation elements on Gures Street partially fulfill their basic functions, they fall short of aesthetic continuity and a holistic design approach. Although these delimitation elements are sufficient in terms of both aesthetics and functionality, they do not offer a unique identity element. The wide variety of designs along the street creates a confusion of perception and design.

3.5. Floor coverings

In floor coverings, a monotonous and straightforward pattern understanding in grey tones has been adopted. This situation does not create visual saturation for users, resulting in an impression of a lack of diversity in urban aesthetics. Although the current use of floor coverings on Gures Street shows partial success in terms of functionality, it has deficiencies in terms of aesthetics, integrity, and reflection of identity. Although the choice of color and texture creates a neutral and simple urban appearance, it is limited in its ability to reflect the local identity. A holistic design relationship has not been established between floor coverings and urban furniture in terms of color, texture, material, and form. For example, benches and waste bins are typically made of dark brown wood and grey metal; however, the aesthetic relationship between these elements and the ground is relatively weak. The lack of harmony between the ground design and urban furniture weakens the spatial integrity of the street and negatively affects the user experience (Figure 7).

3.6. Artistic objects

The clock tower was included as an artistic object, and two clock towers of the same model were identified in the study area. Although the clock tower located on Gures Street attracts attention with its modern and simple design, it is evaluated as an urban object that fails to integrate with the city's identity and establish an aesthetic and functional connection with its surroundings. Although this clock, which forms a dominant vertical element in the space with its steel structure and height, is functional in terms of orientation and time tracking, it lacks an identity value because it does not incorporate motifs, materials, or narratives that reflect the local culture. Visual and spatial harmony could not be established with the electricity panel, benches, and pavement arrangements around the clock; this situation indicates that the elements were placed in a detached and unplanned manner. Considering that symbolic objects in public spaces should be integrated with the environment not only physically but also semantically and contextually, the clock tower example emphasizes the importance of coordinating aesthetics, function, and identity in urban design (Figure 8).

3.7. Water elements

The ornamental fountains and the dry pool area on Gures Street show both functional and aesthetic inadequacies. Most of the fountains are out of use, the water flow has been cut off, and some of them are physically damaged. Although these fountains, designed in the Ottoman style, attempt to reflect the aesthetic understanding of the past with their ornamental details, decorative elements have been obscured due to a lack of maintenance. Rusting, breakage, and contamination have been observed on metal and stone surfaces. This situation both negatively affects the user experience and causes loss of urban aesthetic value (Figure 9).

In addition, the dry pool, also known as the fountain pool, located on the street, is only open during the summer months and cannot contribute to the spatial composition of the street due to its non-functionality at other times and its grey concrete coating, which falls short of visual integrity. This area, which lacks a connection to its surroundings, is perceived as empty and idle ground, drawing attention to its design and functional deficiencies. It is essential to redesign such areas in a manner that not only adds aesthetic value but also has the potential for social use (Figure 10).

3.8. Under-tree gratings and guards

In theory, the cast metal tree gratings used on Gures Street are intended to provide both protection and aesthetic contribution. However, field observations show that these elements have largely lost their function. Due to the deterioration of the soil structure, the uncontrolled growth of weeds, and a lack of maintenance, the gratings present an aesthetically unpleasant, disorganized, and neglected appearance. It has been determined that some of the grates are almost entirely covered with soil, while in others, the gaps between the grates remain dysfunctional. No design elements or motifs reflecting the city's identity were observed in the designs (Figure 11).



Figure 5. Waste bins and their general locations in the study area on Gures Street



Figure 6. Types of boundary elements located in the study area on Gures Street



Figure 7. Paving materials used in the study area on Gures Street



Figure 8. Clocks (art objects) in the Gures Street research area

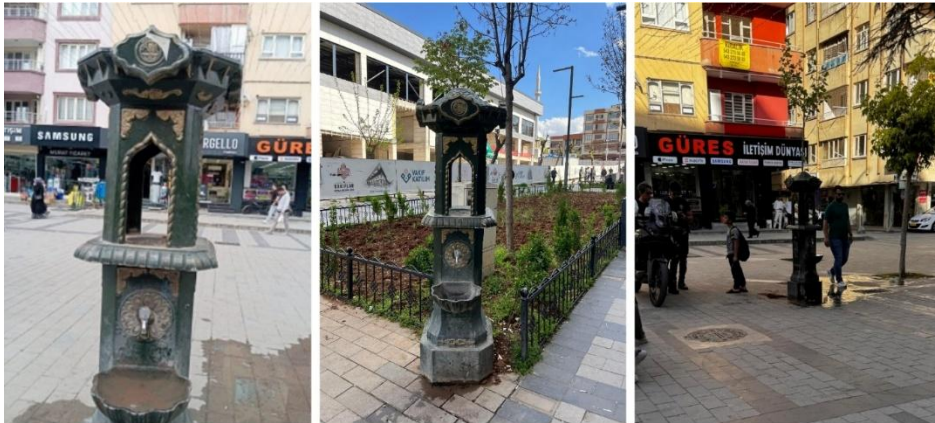


Figure 9. Fountain elements in the Gures Street research area



Figure 10. Dry pool located in the research area of Gures Street



Figure 11. Under-tree grid elements in the Gures Street research area

3.9. Bicycle parking elements

Although the bicycle parking areas on Gures Street are placed to fulfil specific functions as urban furniture, they display a very inadequate stance in terms of identity and aesthetics. Although the bicycle parks in the visuals evoke industrial, simple, and universal designs in terms of form, they do not incorporate an original design approach that integrates with Siirt's urban identity. No relation is established with the local texture, cultural symbols, or aesthetic references of the region; therefore, these elements are perceived as functional objects brought from outside, rather than site-specific.

From an aesthetic point of view, the intensive use of metal materials, rusting, paint flaking, and deformations on the surfaces indicate that these elements are far from visually intact and poorly maintained. It is observed that some bicycle parks are not integrated with the ground, cannot establish a visual connection with landscaping, and therefore create an adverse visual effect in space. At the same time, the fact that some elements are bent or broken leaves a negative impression both in terms of safety and aesthetics (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Bicycle parking elements in the research area of Gures Street

The evaluation of urban furniture in terms of aesthetics and identity is given in Table 1. In general, the furniture arrangements on the street face a problem of standardization that overlooks the cultural context (Table 1).

Although the urban furniture on Siirt Gures Street generally meets the functional requirements, it shows significant deficiencies in terms of aesthetic continuity and integration with the urban identity. Basic elements, such as seating units, waste bins, boundary elements, and lighting units, are placed with a modern yet anonymous design approach; however, integrity with the local texture could not be established. Although there is symbolic potential in artistic objects such as water elements and clocks, this potential cannot be adequately reflected in the design

integrity. Floor coverings are inadequate both aesthetically and technically, creating a floor perception that falls short of visual harmony with the furniture. Auxiliary units, such as bicycle parking areas, tree grates, and boundary elements, are often deformed, poorly maintained, and lack visual continuity.

Table 1. Evaluation of Siirt Gures Street urban furniture in terms of aesthetics and identity

Type of Urban Furniture	Aesthetic Evaluation	Relation to Urban Identity
Seating Units	Functional and straightforward, a lack of shade, modern yet ordinary	No emphasis on local identity, anonymous design
Lighting Elements	Modern design, uneven light distribution, functional	No local motifs, follow a general modern pattern
Waste Bins	Wooden cladding adds aesthetic value, but placement is inconsistent	Does not reflect urban identity
Boundary Elements (Fences, Borders)	Functional but aesthetically weak	Fails to provide unity with urban identity
Pavement Materials	The ordinary appearance, lack of originality, visible cracks, and uneven surfaces are apparent.	No representation of local symbols or textures
Artistic Objects (Clock Tower)	Modern aesthetics, not integrated with surroundings, and the symbolic potential is not utilized.	Provides aesthetic value but lacks a symbolic connection to identity
Water Features (Decorative Fountains)	Ottoman-style motifs are present, but there is a lack of maintenance and functionality.	Symbolic links exist, but aesthetic issues reduce their identity value.
Tree Grates	Partially aesthetic, but neglected and covered with soil	Weak visual identity, insufficient uniqueness
Bicycle Parking Elements	Functional but lacking visual coherence, signs of damage	Weak identity relationship, design disconnected from local context

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Urban furniture, which directly impacts the user experience of public open spaces, is evaluated not only in terms of functionality but also with respect to its aesthetic value and contribution to urban identity (Carmona, 2021). It strengthens the visual identity and aesthetic quality of the city (Grabiec et al., 2022). Properly designed furniture enhances the attractiveness of urban areas and contributes positively to the city's image (Yücel, 2006; Yilmaz et al., 2013; Radwan and Morsy, 2016). However, analyses conducted in this study reveal that the furniture elements on Siirt Gures Street primarily serve functional purposes but are insufficient in establishing a connection with aesthetic continuity and local identity.

Balancing aesthetics and functionality in urban furniture design is crucial for both user experience and the attractiveness of public spaces. Yet, the seating units, lighting elements, and garbage bins on Gures Street are designed in simple, anonymous, and repetitive forms; they are arranged in a way that compromises visual integrity and do not incorporate local materials or motifs. This situation weakens the aesthetic identity of the public space, making it difficult for users to develop a sense of belonging (Stathopoulos et al., 2004; Catalyurekoglu and Altiparmakogullari, 2023). Arruda et al. (2017) emphasize that the design of urban furniture

involves “material shaping” that represents the city’s identity. However, no motifs or symbols specific to Siirt are observed on the benches, lighting, or garbage bins along Gures Street.

Tan and Bayezit’s (2023) study on Siirt Gures Street examine the street’s relationship with urban identity in the context of socio-spatial transformation and public representation. Their study highlights the significance of Gures Street as an axis that shapes urban memory during modernization. However, it pays limited attention to micro-scale design components such as urban furniture. In this article, the role of urban identity is analyzed through the functional and symbolic values of urban furniture, particularly in relation to aesthetic and visual continuity. The macro-scale spatial interpretations presented by Tan and Bayezit (2023) align with the micro-scale aesthetic evaluations of this study, demonstrating that urban identity should be approached holistically, encompassing both physical settlement and equipment elements.

The integration of urban furniture with local identity is essential for ensuring cultural continuity. Nevertheless, symbolic elements with strong potential (such as the clock tower and ornamental fountain on Gures Street) remain disconnected from the urban fabric due to design incompatibility, lack of maintenance, and spatial discontinuity. Contemporary studies underline that symbolic components significantly contribute to spatial identity through visual perception, memory, and meaning-making processes (Toy et al., 2007; Arruda et al., 2017; Bolkaner et al., 2019; Grabiec et al., 2022).

The urban furniture on Gures Street lacks symbolic character and instead reflects globalized design templates, a condition that corresponds to Relph’s concept of placelessness (1976). As a result, the furniture could be found anywhere, without establishing meaningful connections with the place. Kevin Lynch (1960), in his theory of city imageability, argued that urban spaces become “legible” only when designed with consistent and locally specific elements. Although the furniture on Gures Street demonstrates a coherent visual language in terms of design, it lacks the local identity elements necessary for fostering a stronger sense of place (Dogan, 2024).

According to the literature, achieving legibility and a sense of place requires aligning design components with local cultural values (Lynch, 1960; Carmona, 2021). However, findings from this study indicate that while the urban furniture along Gures Street adopts a modern aesthetic, it falls short in reflecting local cultural identity. Trash bins, benches, lighting elements, and pavement materials exhibit standardized modern designs but fail to convey the historical or cultural characteristics of Siirt.

The analysis of urban furniture in terms of aesthetics and identity along Gures Street in Siirt has revealed that, although the existing elements follow functional and widely accepted modern design styles, they lack symbols that reflect the unique identity of Siirt. While the urban furniture generally exhibits contemporary lines, it fails to integrate with the local context, cultural traces, or symbolic meanings. Additionally, several components in active use, such as fountains, bicycle racks, boundary elements, trash bins, and seating units, suffer from serious maintenance issues and physical deterioration, which negatively impact both the user experience and spatial aesthetics. This study recommends incorporating elements that emphasize Siirt’s urban identity into future design processes.

Accordingly, the following suggestions are proposed:

- design approach aligned with the city's identity should be prioritized, and original furniture inspired by local culture and geography should be developed. A
- o ensure visual continuity, urban furniture should be coordinated with paving materials and green space arrangements. T
- urniture elements that are physically damaged, broken, or no longer functional should be rehabilitated or replaced with new ones. F
- ll types of urban furniture (including lighting units, seating areas, bicycle racks, and artistic objects) should be re-evaluated to enhance user comfort. A
- nclusive and accessible designs should be adopted to accommodate the diverse needs of various user groups, including children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. I
- raditional elements such as water features should be reinterpreted through contemporary design approaches to support cultural continuity. T

In conclusion, urban public spaces like Gures Street can serve as carriers of identity only through design decisions that reflect and strengthen that identity. Ensuring that urban furniture is not only functional but also compatible with the city in aesthetic, cultural, and symbolic terms will enhance urban livability and increase user satisfaction.

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