



Examining the Spatial Impacts of Globalization on Commercial Functions: The Case of Marseille Coastline

Ticari Fonksiyonlar Üzerinde Küreselleşmenin Mekânsal Etkilerinin İncelenmesi: Marsilya Kıyı Şeridi Örneği

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Öz

Abstract

Bu çalışma, küreselleşmenin Marsilya kıyı şeridindeki ticari işlevler üzerindeki mekânsal, ekonomik, sosyo-kültürel ve dijital etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel bir vaka çalışması olarak tasarlanan araştırmada literatür taraması, ikincil veri analizi ve görsel/mekânsal inceleme yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Dönüşüm süreci, Euroméditerranée Projesi ile birlikte Vieux-Port, Les Halles de la Major, Les Terrasses du Port ve MUCEM çevresi gibi kıyı odak alanları üzerinden değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, geleneksel liman ve yerel ticaret işlevlerinin yerini turizm, hizmet, kültür ve tüketim odaklı yeni mekânsal kullanımlara bıraktığını göstermektedir. Bu yeniden yapılanma ekonomik canlılık ve küresel görünürlük sağlarken; soylulaştırma, seçkinci kamusalılık, kültürel süreklilikte zayıflama ve yerel esnaf üzerindeki baskılar gibi sosyo-kültürel gerilimler de üretmektedir. Ayrıca dijitalleşme ve çok kanallı ticaret uygulamalarının kullanıcı deneyimini dönüştürdüğü, ancak yerel işletmeler açısından yeni dijital eşitsizlik riskleri yarattığı belirlenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, kıyı alanlarındaki ticari dönüşümün yalnızca fiziksel ve ekonomik bir süreç olarak değil, kapsayıcı ve dengeli kentsel politikalarla yönetilmesi gereken çok katmanlı bir dönüşüm olarak ele alınması gerektiği vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Küreselleşme, Marsilya kıyı şeridi, Ticari mekânların dönüşümü, Kültürel miras, Sosyal eşitsizlik.

This study aims to examine the spatial, economic, socio-cultural, and digital impacts of globalization on commercial functions along the Marseille coastline. Designed as a qualitative case study, the research employs literature review, secondary data analysis, and visual/spatial investigation. The transformation process is evaluated through the Euroméditerranée Project and selected waterfront focal areas, including Vieux-Port, Les Halles de la Major, Les Terrasses du Port, and the MUCEM area. The findings indicate that traditional port and local commercial functions have gradually been replaced by tourism-, service-, culture-, and consumption-oriented spatial uses. While this restructuring has increased economic vitality and global visibility, it has also generated socio-cultural tensions such as gentrification, selective publicness, weakening cultural continuity, and pressure on local tradesmen. In addition, digitalization and omnichannel retail practices have transformed user experience while also creating new risks of digital inequality for local businesses. The study concludes that commercial transformation in waterfront areas should be addressed not merely as a physical and economic process, but as a multilayered transformation that requires inclusive and balanced urban policies.

Keywords: Globalization, Marseille coastline, Transformation of commercial spaces, Cultural heritage, Social inequality.

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Introduction

Marseille has historically been an important port city located at the intersection of European and Mediterranean trade networks. In coastal and port cities, globalization transforms not only economic structures but also the spatial organization, functions, and social meanings of commercial areas. Global capital flows, tourism-led development, cultural investments, digitalization, and changing consumption practices have refunctionalized historic waterfronts and generated new urban roles for commercial spaces (Haddad, 2021; Földi & van Weesep, 2007). While this process increases international visibility and economic attractiveness, it also creates tensions related to local identity, spatial continuity, and social balance.

The Marseille coastline, the main study area of this research, provides a particularly striking context for observing these dynamics of transformation (Figure 1). Historically shaped by port activities, fishing, small-scale commerce, and local economic interaction, this waterfront has gradually been redefined through tourism, gastronomy, leisure-oriented uses, cultural investments, and large-scale commercial interventions (Buslacchi, 2018; Duruz et al., 2023). In particular, the Euroméditerranée Project has accelerated the emergence of new commercial zones, cultural hubs, and tourist attractions while transforming the physical and economic structure of the city (Url-2; Url-3). At the same time, this process has also produced challenges such as reduced access of local residents to waterfront spaces, the weakening of traditional commercial patterns, and the erosion of cultural identity (Url-1; Gripsiou & Bergouignan, 2022). Therefore, the transformation of the Marseille coastline should be understood not only as a process of physical redevelopment but also as a broader process of social and cultural reorganization.

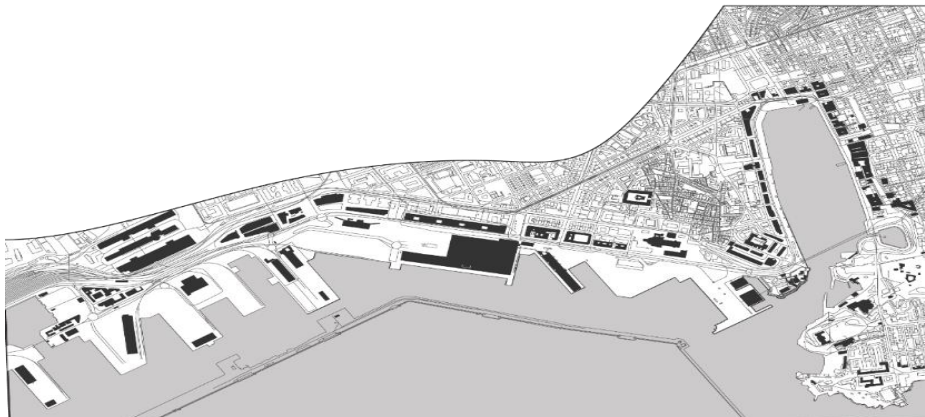


Figure 1. Study area: the Marseille coastline and the focal areas analyzed in the study.

Although the literature addresses globalization, port-city restructuring, and tourism pressure, studies examining the transformation of commercial functions in coastal cities through spatial, economic, socio-cultural, and digital dimensions together remain limited (Földi & van Weesep, 2007; Guimarães, 2022). Contemporary commercial spaces can no longer be understood solely as places of shopping; they have increasingly become hybrid urban environments associated with social interaction, recreation, cultural representation, and the production of experience (Baghaee et al., 2020; Baghaee et al., 2021). In addition, digitalization and

omnichannel commerce practices are reshaping the operation of commercial spaces and user experience in coastal cities (Safeer, 2023; Rao, 2019). By integrating these dimensions within a single coastal case, this study addresses a gap in the literature, where such transformation processes are often examined separately rather than as interconnected dynamics. To do so, the research adopts a qualitative case-study approach based on literature review, secondary data analysis, and visual/spatial investigation.

This study aims to examine the spatial effects of globalization on commercial functions along the Marseille coastline and to evaluate the spatial, economic, socio-cultural, and digital dimensions of this transformation. Within this framework, the Euroméditerranée Project, Vieux-Port, Les Halles de la Major, and Les Terrasses du Port are treated as key focal areas through which different dimensions of change can be observed. Marseille has been selected as a critical case due to its historical port-city identity, its strategic position within the Mediterranean, and the visible impact of large-scale waterfront redevelopment projects on the city (Duruz et al., 2023; Grésillon & De Saussure, 2021). Accordingly, the article first presents the theoretical framework, then explains the method and analytical approach, and finally examines the multidimensional transformation of the coastline through the Marseille case.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The reorganization of commercial spaces under globalization is a multilayered process shaped by economic, social, and technological dynamics. This process affects not only the changing functions of commercial areas but also the spatial organization, user profiles, and public interaction within cities. These transformations become especially visible in coastal and port cities, where historical zones of trade are increasingly refunctionalized through tourism, culture, and new consumption patterns (Haddad, 2021; Földi & van Weesep, 2007).

Globalization and the Transformation of Urban Space

Globalization transforms urban space from a mere physical setting into a dynamic structure where economic and cultural relations are continuously reproduced. The restructuring of waterfronts represents one of the most visible spatial expressions of this transformation. Historically centered on production, storage, and local trade, these areas have gradually been redefined as multifunctional urban nodes driven by service-based, tourism-oriented, and cultural uses (Duruz et al., 2023; Buslacchi, 2018).

While the relocation of industrial activities opens former port zones to strategic investments and public-space interventions, it also makes waterfronts vulnerable to the pressures of international capital and real-estate development (Grésillon & De Saussure, 2021). This generates a tension between spatial homogenization and local distinctiveness. Modern commercial functions may strengthen international visibility, but they often lead to the retreat

of local use patterns, the erosion of historical port identities, and the hierarchical reorganization of public space (Haddad, 2021; Parvu, 2012).

Transformation of Commercial Functions and Digitalization

In contemporary cities, commercial spaces have evolved into hybrid environments associated with social interaction, recreation, and experience production (Baghaee et al., 2020). Tourism-led strategies in coastal cities increasingly replace small-scale, local commercial units with visitor-oriented retail and branded consumption environments (Guimarães, 2022).

Simultaneously, digitalization and omnichannel commerce are redefining how these spaces operate. Faced with the competitive pressure of out-of-town shopping malls and online retail, physical commercial districts are forced to develop innovative responses to maintain commercial resilience (Jones & Livingstone, 2017). Consequently, traditional commercial areas now function not simply as places for purchasing goods, but as spaces of experience, digital integration, and brand interaction (Safeer, 2023; Rao, 2019). However, both tourism-led and digital transformations raise concerns regarding social inclusiveness, spatial belonging, and the sustainability of local markets.

Method

This research is structured as a qualitative single-case study aiming to examine the multidimensional effects of globalization on commercial functions along the Marseille coastline. A qualitative case-study approach enables a detailed evaluation of transformation processes emerging within a specific urban context.

Marseille was selected as the focal case due to its historical port-city identity, its strategic Mediterranean position, and the profound spatial impact of large-scale restructuring interventions, most notably the Euroméditerranée Project (Duruz et al., 2023). The study relies on secondary data rather than direct on-site fieldwork, allowing for an integrated assessment of physical, economic, socio-cultural, and digital dimensions.

Data Sources and Analytical Approach

To evaluate the multidimensional structure of this transformation, data were compiled from four main sources. First, academic literature was used to establish the theoretical framework and conceptual background of globalization, waterfront transformation, publicness, and commercial change. Second, institutional reports, official statements, and statistical data (e.g., INSEE, 2021) were examined to identify the economic and policy-related dimensions of urban restructuring in Marseille. Third, open-source mapping platforms, satellite imagery, and institutional project documents were utilized to trace the spatial organization of the waterfront and the distribution of new commercial focal areas. Finally, historical archives and cartographic evolution maps were comparatively assessed to interpret the temporal

dimension of changes in commercial functions and the transition from port-based uses to tourism- and service-oriented redevelopment.

The collected data were analyzed through a qualitative and interpretive framework structured around four analytical axes: spatial/functional restructuring, economic transformation, socio-cultural effects, and digitalization. As shown in Table 1, each data source was matched with one or more analytical axes in order to clarify its role in the study. Academic literature primarily informed the conceptual interpretation of socio-cultural change and digitalization, while institutional reports and statistical documents supported the analysis of economic transformation. Spatial restructuring was mainly examined through maps, satellite imagery, and project documents, whereas historical archives and cartographic materials were used to identify temporal change and continuity across the waterfront. In this way, the study establishes a clear correspondence between data sources and analytical axes, enabling a cross-reading of physical, economic, social, and technological transformation processes.

Within this framework, the Euroméditerranée Project, Vieux-Port, Les Halles de la Major, Les Terrasses du Port, and the MUCEM area were treated as focal areas through which different dimensions of transformation become visible. Comparative visual and spatial analysis of these areas made it possible to trace how commercial transformation along the Marseille coastline operates simultaneously at physical, economic, socio-cultural, and digital levels.

Table 1
Data Sources and Their Correspondence to The Analytical Axes.

Data source	Main purpose in the study	Analytical axis supported
Academic literature	Establishing the theoretical and conceptual framework on globalization, waterfront transformation, publicness, and commercial change	Socio-cultural effects; Digitalization; overall conceptual framing
Institutional reports, official documents, and statistical data	Identifying restructuring policies, investment patterns, visitor-oriented development, and economic change	Economic transformation; Spatial/functional restructuring
Open-source maps, satellite imagery, and project documents	Tracing spatial organization, new commercial focal points, and waterfront redevelopment patterns	Spatial/functional restructuring; Economic transformation
Historical archives and cartographic evolution maps	Interpreting temporal continuity and change in commercial functions and waterfront uses	Spatial/functional restructuring; Socio-cultural effects; temporal dimension

Case Study: Marseille

This section examines the effects of globalization on commercial functions along the Marseille coastline. In line with the theoretical framework and analytical approach, the transformation of the waterfront is addressed through the transition from traditional port functions to global urban focal points, spatial reorganization, tourism pressure, socio-cultural change, and digitalization. The Euroméditerranée Project, Vieux-Port, Les Halles de la Major, Les Terrasses

du Port, and the MUCEM area are examined as key focal points to comprehensively discuss the physical, economic, social, and technological consequences of this commercial transformation.

Transition from Traditional Port to Global Hub

The Marseille coastline historically developed as one of the major centers of trade, transport, and economic interaction in the Mediterranean context. For many years, the port function of the city shaped not only regional economic activity, but also everyday life, social relations, and the patterns of use associated with waterfront spaces. Fishing, small-scale trade, storage, transportation, and port-related production activities long constituted the principal functions through which the Marseille coastline linked local economic structure with social life (Duruz et al., 2023; Buslacchi, 2018).

Table 2 summarizes the historical development of the Port of Marseille and the transformation of its waterfront, from antiquity to the present.

Table 2

Historical Development of The Port of Marseille and The Transformation of its Waterfront.

Period / Year	Historical Phase	Main Characteristic	Relevance to the Study
600 B.C.	Ancient Period	Foundation of the Greek colony of Massalia	Establishment of Marseille as a maritime trade center
1st century A.D.	Roman Period	Expansion of port-based trade activities	Consolidation of the port's regional commercial importance
5th–15th century	Middle Ages	Fortification of the harbour and integration into new trade routes	Strengthening of the port's strategic and economic role
16th–18th century	Early Modern Period	Emergence of a more organized harbour structure	Transition toward a modern port system
19th century	Industrial Revolution	Industrialization and expansion of port infrastructure	Intensification of production, storage, and transport functions
20th century	Modern Era	Modernization of port functions and increasing tourism-related activity	Gradual shift from traditional port uses to new urban functions
1995–present	Euroméditerranée and Global Restructuring	Large-scale redevelopment of waterfront areas; growth of tourism, services, and new commercial spaces	Transformation from traditional port functions toward a globalized waterfront economy

Within this historical trajectory, the Port of Marseille gradually evolved into a more complex urban structure extending beyond conventional port and trade functions. Changes in global trade networks, the transformation of logistics systems, and the relocation of port activities to larger-scale areas led to the redefinition of traditional functions along the coastline.

As industrial and storage activities withdrew from the urban core, waterfront areas became increasingly open to new investment and intervention decisions. These zones began to be reconsidered in terms of tourism, culture, services, and new commercial uses (Grésillon & De

Saussure, 2021). The transformation of the Marseille waterfront in 1960, 1984, and 2010 is illustrated in Figure 2.

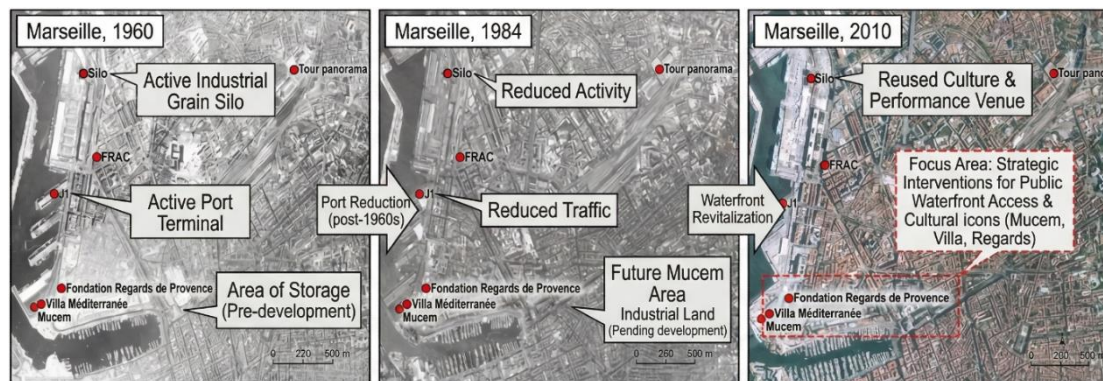


Figure 2. Analytical synthesis of the evolution of the Marseille waterfront from an industrial port structure to a cultural and public-oriented urban area: 1960, 1984, and 2010.

Figure 2 demonstrates the evolution of the Marseille waterfront from an industrial port structure toward a more publicly accessible and culture-oriented urban area.

The most visible institutional and structural phase of this transformation emerged with the launch of the Euroméditerranée Project in 1995. Euroméditerranée should be understood not merely as an urban intervention aimed at renewing the physical environment, but also as a large-scale restructuring strategy intended to reposition Marseille economically, culturally, and spatially (Grésillon & De Saussure, 2021). The spatial extent of the Euroméditerranée Project and its main intervention areas are shown in Figure 3.

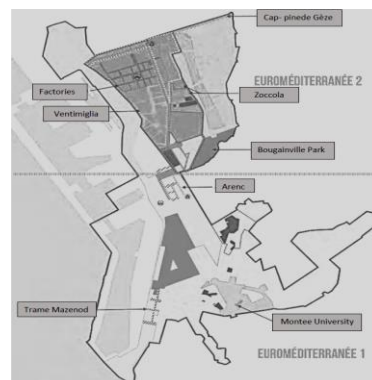


Figure 3. Spatial extent and main intervention areas of the Euroméditerranée Project in Marseille.

Euroméditerranée 1 and Euroméditerranée 2 stand out as the main development areas through which new commercial, cultural, and public focal points emerged along the waterfront.

With the Euroméditerranée process, large-scale investments, new commercial zones, cultural facilities, and tourism-oriented development decisions accelerated along the Marseille coastline. Institutional data indicate an increase in the volume of investment directed toward waterfront areas and a strengthening of commercial activity in this process (INSEE, 2021; Uri-

2; Url-3). At the same time, however, this transformation did not produce only economic revitalization and international visibility; it also generated a tense restructuring between the historical port identity of Marseille and new global forms of consumption and representation. For this reason, the transition observed along the Marseille coastline should be interpreted as a multilayered transformation process moving from traditional port functions toward a global urban focal point.

In this respect, the case of Marseille demonstrates how a historical port infrastructure and local commercial texture were rescaled over time and brought into closer relation with global urban dynamics. The before-and-after macro-level spatial restructuring of the Marseille Port Area, showing the shift from logistics-oriented functions to a mixed-use maritime and commercial zone, is illustrated in Figure 4.

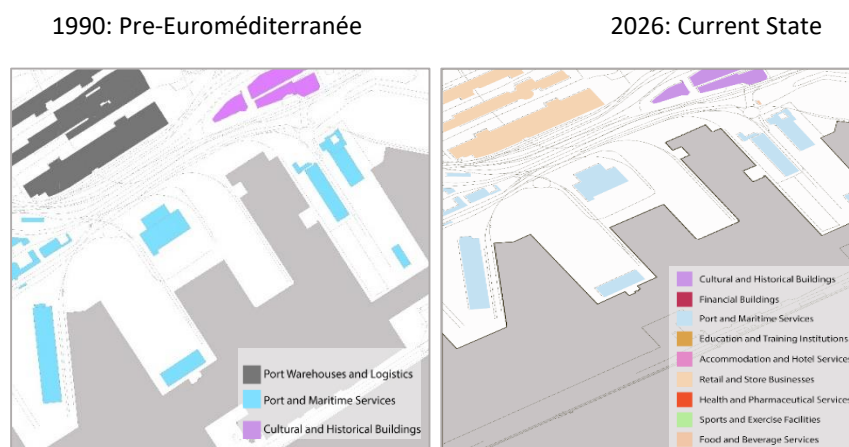


Figure 4. *Before-and-after macro-level spatial restructuring of the Marseille Port Area from logistics-oriented functions to a mixed-use maritime and commercial zone.*

Spatial Reorganization and the Impact of Tourism

One of the most visible dimensions of transformation along the Marseille coastline is the spatial reorganization of waterfront areas and the acceleration of this process through tourism-oriented uses. Over time, traditional port functions, local trade, and everyday patterns of use have given way to a new spatial order that is more visible, more consumption-oriented, and more closely aligned with visitor mobility. This transformation has altered not only the physical form of the waterfront, but also its logic of use and user profile. In this respect, Vieux-Port, Les Halles de la Major, and Les Terrasses du Port stand out as key focal areas through which this process of reorganization can be observed at different scales.

Although Vieux-Port remains one of the strongest carriers of the historical port memory of Marseille, it is now increasingly associated with tourism, food and beverage activities, visitor-oriented circulation, and representational forms of public use. The transformation of the historical port environment from traditional functions to a tourism-oriented waterfront is comparatively illustrated in Figure 5. This figure demonstrates that Vieux-Port was not only renewed as a physical environment, but also reconfigured around open public space, marina use, pedestrian circulation, and visitor experience. While this has increased the area's visibility

and attractiveness within the city, it has also contributed to the retreat of everyday local uses and to the reorganization of its commercial structure in closer alignment with visitor expectations.



Figure 5. *Before-and-after transformation of Vieux-Port from a traditional port environment to a tourism-oriented waterfront.*

The area around Les Halles de la Major, by contrast, represents a clear example of new functional diversification and experience-oriented urban use along the waterfront. The distribution of commercial, cultural, and public uses in this area is presented in Figure 6. Figure 6 shows that gastronomy, retail, cultural activity, and public circulation are organized together along the waterfront, indicating that commercial spaces are no longer limited to places of shopping, but have increasingly become multifunctional environments associated with leisure, social interaction, and the production of experience. While this reorganization makes the waterfront more vibrant and attractive, it also reveals that spatial functions are being structured according to an increasingly visitor-oriented logic.

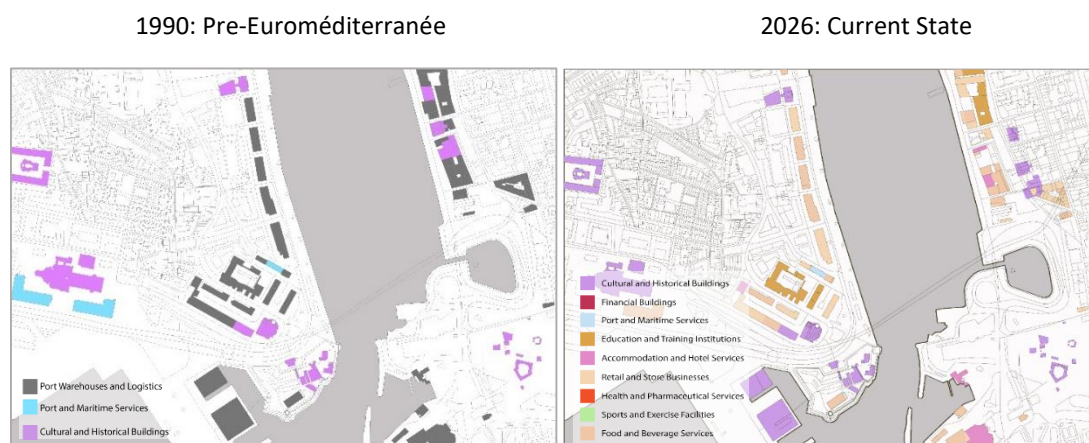


Figure 6. *Before-and-after spatial distribution showing the transformation of Les Halles de la Major from traditional port uses to mixed commercial, cultural, and public functions.*

Les Terrasses du Port represents one of the most visible examples of large-scale, institutionalized, and branded commercial development along the waterfront. The distribution of commercial, cultural, and public uses surrounding this area is shown in Figure

7. Figure 7 demonstrates how shopping, food and beverage activities, leisure, and high-representation spatial arrangements are intertwined along the coastline. In this respect, Les Terrasses du Port clearly illustrates how globalization transforms commercial environments in coastal cities into larger-scale, highly visible spaces aligned with international patterns of consumption. At the same time, however, the expansion of such large-scale commercial focal points may lead to the homogenization of commercial diversity in certain forms and to the retreat of local commercial texture along the waterfront.

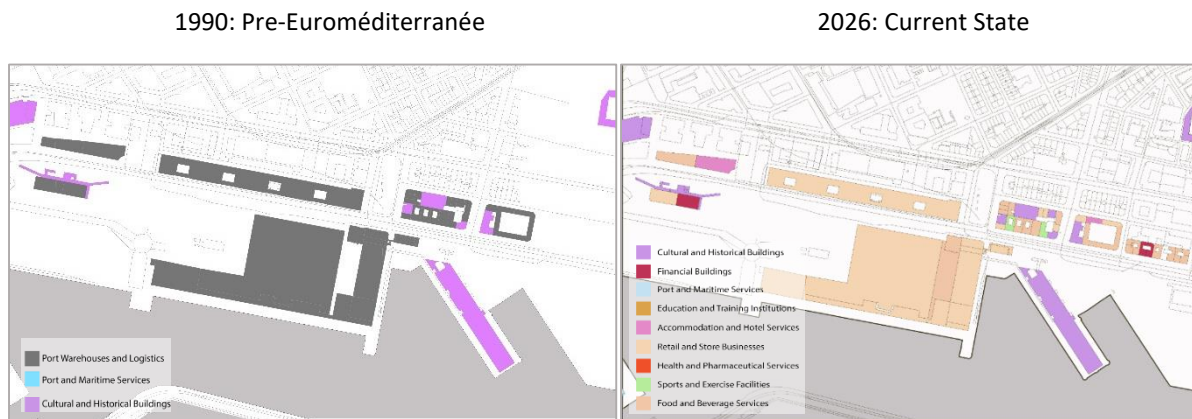


Figure 7. *Before-and-after spatial distribution showing the transformation of Les Terrasses du Port from an enclosed industrial port area into a large-scale commercial and leisure destination.*

Taken together, these focal areas show that spatial reorganization along the Marseille coastline does not produce a uniform form of transformation; however, it consistently reinforces new patterns of use centered on tourism, services, consumption, and representation. As the visibility of traditional port-related and local commercial functions declines, waterfront areas are increasingly defined by their capacity to attract visitors, generate experience, and construct urban image. For this reason, the case of Marseille demonstrates that spatial reorganization in coastal cities cannot be understood merely as a process of physical renewal; rather, it should be interpreted as a multilayered transformation that redefines commercial priorities, patterns of use, and the nature of public space.

Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Gentrification

The commercial and spatial transformation along the Marseille coastline has not been limited to the reorganization of economic functions; it has also had a decisive impact on public life, user profiles, and the social meaning of waterfront areas. The reconfiguration of these areas through new tourism-, culture-, and consumption-oriented uses has increased their visibility within the city, while simultaneously transforming the everyday relationship that local users maintain with them. In this respect, public space has gradually moved away from being a common area used equally by all and has increasingly been redefined through particular consumption practices, visitor mobility, and representational forms of use (Buslacchi, 2018; Parvu, 2012).

One of the most striking consequences of this transformation concerns the social inclusiveness of waterfront areas. While the increase in commercial and touristic focal points has made the coastline more economically vibrant and visible, it may also limit the place of lower-income user groups, traditional local businesses, and everyday public-use patterns within this new order. This creates the risk that waterfront areas become more selective spaces addressing particular user profiles and forms of consumption (Gripsiou & Bergouignan, 2022). As a result, public life may shift away from being an open and plural field of interaction toward a structure in which consumption-related modes of use become more dominant. This socio-spatial shift is reflected in the changing role of Vieux-Port, which has gradually evolved from a locally embedded waterfront environment into a more visitor-oriented social and cultural hub, as illustrated in Figure 8.

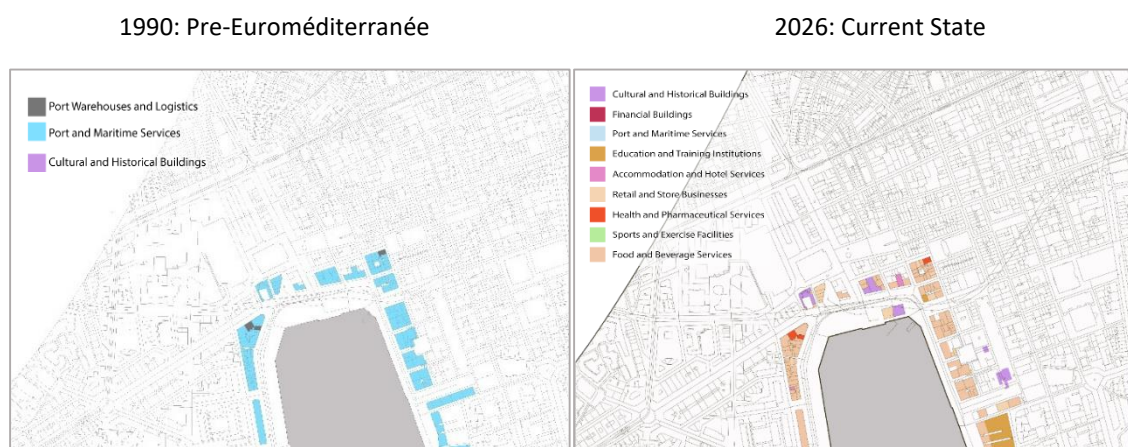


Figure 8. *Before-and-after socio-spatial transformation of Vieux-Port into a visitor-oriented social and cultural hub.*

At the same time, cultural structures and public focal points attempt to establish a different kind of social and symbolic balance within this new order. The spatial distribution of cultural, commercial, and public uses around the MUCEM area is presented in Figure 9.

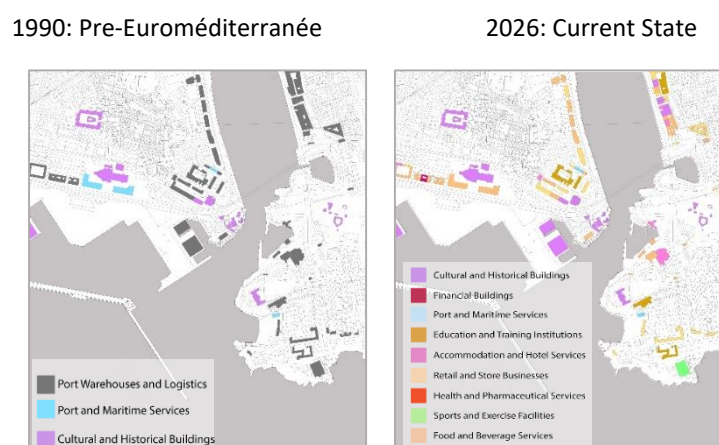


Figure 9. *Before-and-after spatial transformation of the J4/MUCEM waterfront area from an industrial port and hangar zone into a cultural, commercial, and public hub.*

Figure 9 shows that this area is not merely the surroundings of a cultural building; rather, it has become a new waterfront node structured through the interaction of public circulation, cultural representation, and commercial activity. In this respect, MUCEM demonstrates that transformation along the coastline is not limited to commercialization alone, but also proceeds through the production of cultural visibility and public representation.

Nevertheless, the presence of cultural focal points does not entirely eliminate the socio-cultural tensions experienced along the waterfront. Although historical port identity, architectural memory, and urban image are re-represented within new investments, such representation may weaken the functional presence of the past in everyday life and result in a more superficial and symbolic production of identity (Parvu, 2012; Buslacchi, 2018). For this reason, the socio-cultural transformation of the Marseille coastline should be evaluated not only through changes in the physical environment or commercial functions, but also in terms of the quality of public life, social access, selective publicness, and cultural continuity.,

Digitalization in Commercial Spaces

The commercial transformation along the Marseille coastline has not been limited to physical restructuring, tourism pressure, and functional change; with digitalization, the logic of use and user experience of commercial spaces have also been reshaped. Today, commercial structures located along the waterfront operate not only as places of sale and service provision, but also as experience-oriented and interactive environments in which online and offline consumption practices converge. This is particularly evident in new-generation commercial focal areas, where physical space is increasingly organized in an integrated way through digitally supported services, branded experiences, and user-oriented forms of consumption (Saefer, 2023).

The impact of digitalization on commercial spaces along the waterfront can first be observed in changing patterns of use. Visitors and users now relate to commercial environments not only when they are physically present in them, but also through mobile applications, digital guidance systems, online access opportunities, and omnichannel consumption practices. This transforms commercial areas along the coastline into more fluid, accessible, and experience-oriented environments, while also reshaping user expectations in terms of speed, diversity, personalization, and visual attractiveness (Jones & Livingstone, 2017; Rao, 2019).

Large-scale and branded commercial developments, in particular, incorporate the opportunities offered by digitalization in more visible ways. Waterfront focal areas that combine shopping, gastronomy, and leisure are no longer merely physical spaces of consumption; they have become hybrid structures operating through social media visibility, brand representation, online-offline integration, and the production of experience. While this increases the economic value and international attractiveness of waterfront areas, it also transforms the public perception of commercial environments (Lee, 2021).

At the same time, the process of digitalization should also be evaluated critically in terms of the social consequences of commercial transformation along the waterfront. Modes of use based on digital tools and new consumption experiences may enrich user experience; however, they may also generate new inequalities among groups that differ in terms of access, technological competence, and consumption capacity (Safeer, 2023). For this reason, digitalization along the Marseille coastline should be analyzed not only as a matter of technological innovation or commercial development, but also as an important dimension of the transformation of spatial use, social access, and public experience.

Analytical Synthesis of the Marseille Case

The transformation of the Marseille coastline is shaped by the interaction of several processes, including the shift from traditional port functions to global urban focal points, tourism pressure, the reorganization of commercial spaces, socio-cultural tensions, and digitalization. In this respect, the case shows that waterfront change cannot be understood solely through physical renewal or economic growth. Rather, globalization reshapes commercial functions together with public life, cultural identity, user experience, and spatial belonging. These interrelated dynamics are summarized in Figure 10.

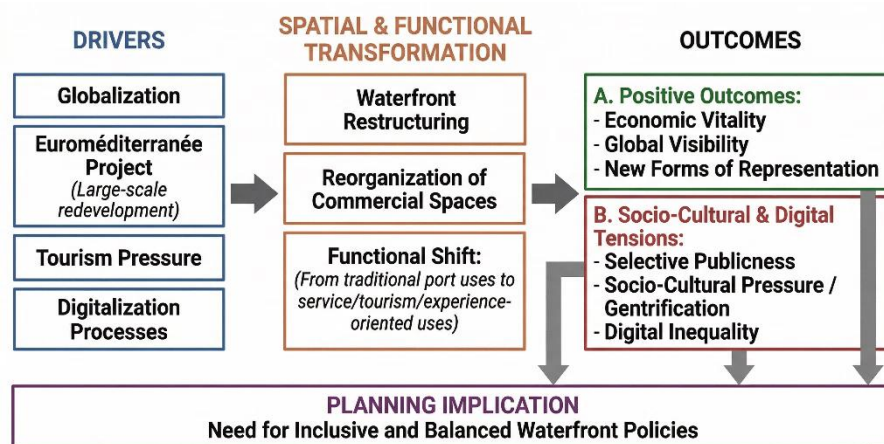


Figure 10. Analytical synthesis of the multidimensional transformation of the Marseille coastline under globalization.

Figure 10 illustrates that waterfront transformation in Marseille develops through interconnected dynamics. The decline of historical port functions and large-scale restructuring interventions has encouraged new tourism- and consumption-oriented commercial spaces, while also generating socio-cultural pressure, selective publicness, and digital inequality. At the same time, cultural institutions, public focal points, and digitally supported service models reveal that this process produces not only displacement and loss, but also new forms of representation, visibility, and urban experience.

Overall, the Marseille case suggests that globalization-driven coastal transformation should be approached through an integrated perspective that considers commercial development,

social access, cultural continuity, public quality, and digital inclusiveness together. This synthesis provides the basis for the findings and discussion presented in the following section.

Results and Discussions

This section discusses the transformation of the Marseille coastline in relation to the theoretical framework and the analytical axes defined in the methodology. Taken together, the historical transition, spatial reorganization, tourism pressure, socio-cultural change, and digitalization examined in the case study show that commercial transformation along the waterfront cannot be understood solely in terms of economic growth or physical renewal. Instead, it reflects the interaction between economic revitalization, global visibility, social inclusiveness, cultural continuity, public quality, and digital access.

Economic Revitalization and Global Visibility

One of the most visible outcomes of the transformation along the Marseille coastline is the increase in economic vitality and the growing international visibility of waterfront areas. Through the Euroméditerranée process, large-scale investments, new commercial focal points, cultural facilities, and visitor-oriented public-space interventions have made the waterfront more competitive and attractive (INSEE, 2021; Url-2; Url-3). In this context, waterfront areas are no longer defined primarily by local economic functions, but increasingly by tourism, services, and experience-oriented consumption.

The reorganization of commercial spaces has also reshaped their social and cultural roles. New-generation commercial focal areas function not only as places of shopping, but also as public-commercial environments associated with leisure, social encounter, and cultural representation (Baghaee et al., 2020; Guimarães, 2022). While this shift contributes to economic revitalization, it also redefines urban life through new logics of consumption and experience.

Socio-Cultural Costs and Selective Publicness

Alongside these economic gains, transformation along the Marseille coastline has generated significant socio-cultural costs. The reorganization of waterfront areas around tourism, consumption, and representation has altered patterns of public-space use, shifting the relationship between local users and the coastline toward a more selective and visitor-oriented spatial order (Buslacchi, 2018; Parvu, 2012). These changes may produce exclusionary effects, particularly for lower-income groups and traditional local businesses (Gripsiou & Bergouignan, 2022).

The weakening of historical fish markets, small-scale commercial units, and artisan spaces in the face of international brands and consumption-oriented redevelopment also signals a rupture in cultural continuity. In this respect, transformation should be understood not only

as renewal, but also as a reconfiguration of publicness and local belonging, in which cultural identity is increasingly reproduced at a representational level (Parvu, 2012).

Digitalization, Access, and New Inequalities

Another important dimension of transformation along the Marseille coastline is digitalization. The integration of online and offline consumption practices has turned commercial areas into hybrid spaces that generate visibility, user interaction, and experience alongside physical retail activity (Safeer, 2023). This development increases the attractiveness of waterfront commercial areas while also reshaping user expectations in terms of speed, diversity, personalization, and accessibility.

However, digitalization should not be framed only in terms of innovation and efficiency. Although digitally supported services can improve access for some groups, they may also deepen inequalities among users differentiated by access to digital infrastructure, technological competence, and consumption capacity (Safeer, 2023; Rao, 2019). Digitalization therefore operates as a dual process that enhances commercial resilience while simultaneously producing new forms of selectivity along the waterfront.

Overall Evaluation and Contribution to the Literature

The Marseille case demonstrates that globalization transforms commercial functions in coastal cities through interconnected spatial, economic, socio-cultural, and technological processes. As summarized in Table 3, this transformation creates both opportunities—such as urban modernization, economic revitalization, and global visibility—and profound challenges regarding socio-spatial inequality, cultural continuity, and digital disparity.

Table 3

Summary Matrix of The Multidimensional Transformation of The Marseille Coastline

DIMENSION	PAST	PROCESS	CURRENT STATUS / EVIDENCE				
SPATIAL & FUNCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION	Traditional port functions & maritime logistics	In the late 20th century: Increasing tourism, Euroméditerranée Project (1995) → Waterfront restructuring & modernization	Mixed-use urban nodes, open public spaces, and tourism-oriented waterfronts (e.g., Vieux-Port)				
ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION	Local tradesmen, small businesses & historical fish markets	Global Capital & Tourism Pressure → Emergence of branded retail and gastronomy hubs	Massive tourist influx and global visibility (e.g., Les Terrasses du Port: 5 million visitors/year)				
SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION	Accessible waterfront public life & local cultural exchange	Gentrification & Selective Publicness → Re-branding through large-scale cultural investments (e.g., MUCEM)	Rising socio-spatial inequalities (e.g., +35% increase in housing prices, 40% relocation of low-income groups)				
TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION	Physical retail and traditional payment systems	Digitalization & Omnichannel Strategies → Integration of e-commerce and Augmented Reality (AR) applications	Enhanced commercial resilience but growing risk of digital inequality for local businesses				
CHALLENGES AND SOLUTION SUGGESTIONS							
<table border="1"> <tr> <td> Environmental and Urban Sustainability - Efforts to reduce carbon footprint - Buildings with green building certificates - Modernization of historic sites (e.g., Les Halles de la Major) - Euroméditerranée's environmentally friendly approaches </td><td> Balancing Cultural and Economic Sustainability - Projects that create space for local products - Modernisation of traditional fish markets </td><td> Social Justice & Integration of Low-Income Communities - Housing subsidies and affordable housing policies - Incentivising local businesses </td><td> Inclusive Approaches at Local & International Level - Channelling tourism revenues to local development - Digital solutions focused on social equality and access </td></tr> </table>				Environmental and Urban Sustainability - Efforts to reduce carbon footprint - Buildings with green building certificates - Modernization of historic sites (e.g., Les Halles de la Major) - Euroméditerranée's environmentally friendly approaches	Balancing Cultural and Economic Sustainability - Projects that create space for local products - Modernisation of traditional fish markets	Social Justice & Integration of Low-Income Communities - Housing subsidies and affordable housing policies - Incentivising local businesses	Inclusive Approaches at Local & International Level - Channelling tourism revenues to local development - Digital solutions focused on social equality and access
Environmental and Urban Sustainability - Efforts to reduce carbon footprint - Buildings with green building certificates - Modernization of historic sites (e.g., Les Halles de la Major) - Euroméditerranée's environmentally friendly approaches	Balancing Cultural and Economic Sustainability - Projects that create space for local products - Modernisation of traditional fish markets	Social Justice & Integration of Low-Income Communities - Housing subsidies and affordable housing policies - Incentivising local businesses	Inclusive Approaches at Local & International Level - Channelling tourism revenues to local development - Digital solutions focused on social equality and access				

Table 3 highlights not only how these spatial, economic, socio-cultural, and technological pressures interact and reinforce one another, but also outlines specific solution suggestions to address them. By structuring these responses around environmental sustainability, cultural and economic balance, social justice, and digital inclusiveness, the study contributes to the literature by examining these intertwined dynamics within a single coastal case. It moves beyond treating globalization, waterfront restructuring, and commercial change as separate processes, offering instead a holistic and policy-oriented perspective.

Beyond Marseille itself, the findings provide a comparative framework for understanding similar transformation pressures in other coastal cities. They underline that integrating multidimensional solutions—ranging from green urbanism and local market preservation to affordable housing and digital equity—is a central issue in the inclusive planning and design of contemporary waterfront areas.

Conclusion

This study examined how globalization reshapes commercial functions along the Marseille coastline across spatial, economic, socio-cultural, and digital dimensions. Focusing on key waterfront areas like Euroméditerranée and Vieux-Port, the analysis revealed that as traditional maritime activities decline, the waterfront is increasingly reorganized around tourism, services, and experience-oriented consumption. This shift generates international visibility but fundamentally alters the commercial structure and social logic of these spaces.

Rather than a simple redevelopment success story, this transformation is a complex process with uneven outcomes. While the renewed waterfront is globally attractive, it weakens traditional commercial patterns, increases the selectivity of public spaces, and creates new inequalities linked to digital access and consumption capacity. Thus, waterfront commercialization affects not just physical and economic structures, but also accessibility, inclusiveness, and cultural continuity.

Consequently, commercial transformation in coastal cities must be approached as a multidimensional planning issue that balances competitiveness with public use and local identity. To address these multifaceted challenges, specific policy solutions—as summarized in the analytical matrix (Table 3)—must be integrated into urban strategies. First, environmental and urban sustainability can be supported through green building certificates and the modernization of historic sites, as seen in the Euroméditerranée project. Second, balancing cultural and economic sustainability requires creating dedicated spaces for local products and modernizing traditional functions, such as historical fish markets, rather than displacing them. Third, ensuring social justice requires active interventions, such as housing subsidies and targeted incentives for local businesses. Finally, fostering inclusive approaches necessitates channeling tourism revenues back into local development and implementing digital solutions explicitly focused on social equality and Access.

Marseille therefore serves as a crucial reference point for understanding similar pressures in other coastal cities shaped by tourism and large-scale redevelopment. While limited by its qualitative single-case approach, future research could expand this framework through comparative studies, user-based fieldwork, and quantitative investigations of long-term socio-spatial change.

Nevertheless, this article contributes to the literature by providing an integrated perspective on how economic, social, cultural, and digital dimensions intertwine within waterfront commercial transformations.

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Internet Resources

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- Url-2: <https://marseille.cbre.fr/reussir-votre-implantation/euromediterranee> (Retrieved on December 4, 2024).
- Url-3: <https://www.euromediterranee.fr> (Retrieved on December 26, 2024).
- Url-4: <https://www.euromonitor.com/marseille-in-france/report> (Retrieved on November 26, 2024).
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- Url-6: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).
- Url-7: <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr> (Retrieved on November 26, 2024).
- Url-8: <https://micheldesvignepaysagiste.com> (Retrieved on December 26, 2024).

Visual Resources

- Figure 1. Study area: the Marseille coastline and the focal areas analyzed in the study. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on the CAD city map of Marseille downloaded from Cadmapper. Access link: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).
- Figure 2. Analytical synthesis of the evolution of the Marseille waterfront from an industrial port structure to a cultural and public-oriented urban area: 1960, 1984, and 2010. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on cartographic materials obtained from Geoconfluences. Access link: <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr> (Retrieved on November 26, 2024).
- Figure 3. Spatial extent and main intervention areas of the Euroméditerranée Project in Marseille. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on cartographic and visual materials obtained from Euroméditerranée. Access link: <https://www.euromediterranee.fr> (Retrieved on December 26, 2024).
- Figure 4. Before-and-after macro-level spatial restructuring of the Marseille Port Area from logistics-oriented functions to a mixed-use maritime and commercial zone. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on the CAD city map of Marseille downloaded from Cadmapper. Access link: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).
- Figure 5. Before-and-after transformation of Vieux-Port from a traditional port environment to a tourism-oriented waterfront. Visual materials obtained from Michel Desvigne Paysagiste. Access link: <https://micheldesvignepaysagiste.com> (Retrieved on December 26, 2024).
- Figure 6. Before-and-after spatial distribution showing the transformation of Les Halles de la Major from traditional port uses to mixed commercial, cultural, and public functions. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on the CAD city map of Marseille downloaded from Cadmapper. Access link: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).
- Figure 7. Before-and-after spatial distribution showing the transformation of Les Terrasses du Port from an enclosed industrial port area into a large-scale commercial and leisure destination. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on the CAD city map of Marseille downloaded from Cadmapper. Access link: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).
- Figure 8. Before-and-after socio-spatial transformation of Vieux-Port into a visitor-oriented social and cultural hub. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey,

January 2025), based on the CAD city map of Marseille downloaded from Cadmapper. Access link: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).

Figure 9. Before-and-after spatial transformation of the J4/MUCEM waterfront area from an industrial port and hangar zone into a cultural, commercial, and public hub. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025), based on the CAD city map of Marseille downloaded from Cadmapper. Access link: <https://cadmapper.com> (Retrieved in January 2025).

Figure 10. Analytical synthesis of the multidimensional transformation of the Marseille coastline under globalization. Created by author (İlayda Kılıç, Trakya University, Department of Architecture, Edirne, Turkey, January 2025).

Beyan ve Açıklamalar

Etik Beyanı

Çalışmada kullanılan veriler için etik kurul izni gerekmemektedir.

Yazar Katkıları

- **İlayda Kılıç:** Çalışmanın kavramsal çerçevesinin oluşturulması, literatür taraması, veri toplama, analiz, bulguların yorumlanması ve makalenin yazım aşamalarında katkı sağlamıştır.
 - **Gencay Çubuk:** Çalışmanın yöntem tasarımı, araştırma sürecinin denetimi (süpervizyon), bulguların doğrulanması ve makalenin eleştirel bir şekilde incelenerek son halinin düzenlenmesi aşamalarında katkı sağlamıştır.
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Yazarlar tarafından herhangi bir çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

