

A R A Ş T I R M A M A K A L E S İ / R E S E A R C H A R T I C L E

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A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO URBAN AREA:
ODUNPAZARI HISTORICAL AREA CASE, ESKİŞEHİR

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ABSTRACT

Through the use of visual symbols and design elements, architecture has many abstract meanings and integrated communicative elements. It relates to cultural systems such as shared values, scientific developments, moral codes, religions, and economic situations. Without a doubt, globalization has caused countries to resemble each other, and that makes local cultures more attractive. This has led to the tendency of local governments to create a new urban identity for economic development. This study examines the "Historic Odunpazarı Houses Conservation and Development Project" area in Odunpazarı Locale, as a place with deep indicators of different urban images. The area is built on a hillside in the South of Eskişehir, Turkey, which symbolizes the Ottoman period's urban life. The semiotic approach is used to determine connotative meanings of buildings in historical area. Results show that renovated buildings are highly connotative structures. These kinds of buildings contain more metaphors than the original ones.

Keywords: Eskişehir, Odunpazarı, visual communication, revitalizing project, semiotics**Jel Kodları:** N9, L83KENTSEL ALANA GÖSTERGEBİLİMSEL YAKLAŞIM: ESKİŞEHİR TARİHİ
ODUNPAZARI BÖLGESİ ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZ

Görsel sembollerin ve tasarım öğelerinin kullanımıyla mimari, birçok soyut anlama ve bütünlük iletişim öğelerine sahiptir ve paylaşılan değerler, bilimsel gelişmeler, ahlaki kurallar, dinler ve ekonomik durumlar gibi kültürel sistemlerle şekillenir. Şüphesiz küreselleşme ülkelerin birbirine benzemesine neden olmuş, bu da yerel kültürleri daha çekici hale getirmiştir. Bu durum yerel yönetimlerin ekonomik kalkınma için yeni bir kentsel kimlik oluşturmaya yönelmesine neden olmuştur. Bu çalışmada, Eskişehir Odunpazarı Bölgesindeki "Tarihi Odunpazarı Evleri Koruma ve Geliştirme" proje alanını, farklı kentsel imgelerin derin göstergelerini taşıyan bir yer olarak incelenmektedir. Tarihi alandaki yapıların yan anlamlarını belirlemek için göstergebilimsel yaklaşım kullanılmaktadır. Sonuçlar, yenilenen yapıların yan anlamları yüksek yapılar olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu tür yapılar orijinallerine göre daha fazla metafor içermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eskişehir, Odunpazarı, görsel iletişim, yenileme projesi, göstergebilim,**Jel Codes:** N9, L83

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INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a type of communication and it has representation and communication features. By the use of visual symbols and design elements, it provides an array of abstract and combined communicative elements that have a common feature with mass media. Different from other categories of communication, architectural communication appeal to large audiences and falls largely into a non-verbal category. According to De Fusco (2020), certain forms have communicated by showing certain architectural functions since ancient times. These built forms and their signs represent usages, symbolic purposes, and monumental functions within the cultural framework in which they exist. Moreover, unlike other mass media categories, architecture has long-lasting effects on society.

Countries' social and economic conditions are always reflected in their built environment and urban space. Construction materials, technology, and supply-demand relationships affect the communicative function of architecture. For instance, a stair denotes going up or down. While a stair makes its function possible, it also communicates the possibility of going up or down the user; in other words, it denotes it. Or, doors mean the entrance and exit. Users are expected to receive the message conveyed by the architectural form and to know how to perform the required function. This situation arises from the expectations of individuals based on the culture to which they belong.

From a social perspective, architectural structures are closely related to the formation of an environment. A social environment relates to cultural systems such as common values, scientific developments, moral codes, religions, beliefs, and economic situations. These systems are manifested themselves through physical objects besides social life and roles and institutions (Norberg-Schulz, 1966). When architecture is examined among the mass media, it is necessary to define meanings, what it conveys, and how it provides communication.

Before the second half of the 19th century, technological and spatial changes in construction were very slow, and this slowness contributed to the formation of harmony of architectural characteristics between the periods. The same materials were used, and similar-scale structures were constructed in a particular culture. This situation led to the formation of vernacular architecture. Today, however, the usage of the same devices, the production of the same things with new technologies, standardization, industrialization, economic growth, and globalization affect the architectural specialties of cities like other products. As Altınöz (2010) mentioned, this condition caused the extinction of the harmony of construction and architecture between periods. People have access easier and faster to information about other countries, citizens, and cultures. Gigantic structures appearing everywhere represent the complete planning of co-purpose groups comprising states. The residences and workplaces established in our cities are the monuments of our culture. However, in the homogenized global world, it is possible to see the building type resembling each other at anywhere. In the essay Adham (2008: 19) looks from a different perspective: *"Paul Virilio, for example, has declared that cities are becoming like airports. Following this thread, I would suggest that airports are looking more like shopping malls; shopping malls are becoming closer to theme parks; theme parks are looking more like resorts; and resorts are becoming the ultimate typology for cities"*.

More recently, there has been growing interest in diversity. Tourists are interested in different places with local heritages and authentic cultural experiences. Historic urban sites are one of the most important pieces of evidence of the past lifestyle. As mentioned by İpekoğlu (2006), the conservation of architectural values by evaluating their historical, environmental, visual, and aesthetic characteristics in the context of conservation and revitalization of built environment heritage is, in one respect, the preservation of culture. For this reason, local governments gave priority to the authenticity of their cities. They focus on the unique value of cities and their cultural capital. They began revitalizing their cultural heritage to reach tourist attractions for economic survival and become competitive in the international market. Authentic experiences and cultural heritages are become important and used as an income source (AlSayyad, 2001; Broudehoux 2001). For economic gain, to make the area more attractive, and to boost distinctive local features, local municipalities have towards image making. For example, Dresden was an important cultural

area in Germany and a symbol of bourgeois culture that was dominated by baroque historic towers and domes. Altmarkt Square, the historical core of the area, was chosen as a neighbourhood reconstruction area (Sigel, 2019). With the rebuilding of the Church (Church of Our Lady), the area gained its characteristic silhouette. Afterwards, block by block, the overall appearance of the area was reconstructed. Now, the buildings in the area are used as hotels, offices and housing. Altmarkt Square resembles the former form with its architectural style and land use, and at first sight, it is tough to guess the period (Danilović & Stefanović, 2020). Specht (2014) argued that many tourists can not realize the church's former destruction and rebuilding. They perceive it as an authentic historical building.



Figure 1. Poble Espanyol, Spain

Source: Author

Another example is Poble Espanyol in Spain (Figure 1). The area was constructed as an open-air architectural museum to represent the authentic architectural style of Spain for the "Barcelona International Exhibition" in 1929 (Specht, 2014). The area is enclosed within the medieval walls with a single entrance and replicas of artificial stone that symbolize authenticity in appearance. The architecture of the buildings symbolizes Extremadura, Galicia, Andalusia, Castile, Aragon and Catalonia styles (Mendelson, 2004).

This study considers the implication of revitalizing project in historical urban area. It aims to raise questions about the new buildings within the scope of revitalizing projects in Odunpazarı settlement area, Eskişehir, Turkey. The area symbolizes the urban life of Ottoman Period. Therefore, Odunpazarı should be examined not only as a place for strolling but also as an area where deep indicators of different urban images can be read. In the research, the information obtained by the observations made on the spot, and the photographs taken about the square were examined together with the literary sources acquired, and the evaluation of the area was carried out with the semiotic analysis approach in the process of making sense of the historical settlement area.

1. Research Study

Eskişehir is located in the northwest of Central Anatolia, Turkey. It is placed around the Porsuk River, near the thermal resources. Recently the city was almost rebuilt for domestic and foreign tourism. Many large-scale themed parks and artificial environments have proliferated to gain tourist attractions. For instance, river transportation like Venice and Fairytale Castle like Disneyland and even a beach, although Eskişehir is not a seaside city, are frequent tourist destinations today (Figure 2). Also, restoration and renovation projects are in demand for the urban strategy. Now the city attracts many domestic tourists, and this interest is increasing steadily. This situation is supported by Mike Robinson's thoughts: "*tourism has become an increasingly significant driver for cultural remaking and reinvention.*" (Adham, 2008)



Figure 2. Touristic Destinations in Eskişehir

Source: <https://www.eskisehir.bel.tr>

Eskişehir's historical heritage center, "Odunpazarı," is an urban area built on a hillside in the South of the city; it is known as the first settlement area in the city on sloping land (Figure 3). The area reflects the characteristics of the traditional Turkish neighborhood with narrow streets, houses, fountains, and small squares. It contains the traditional texture of the 19th century that settled around the Kurşunlu Complex with historical indications from the Seljuk, Ottoman, and Turkish Republic Periods (Unesco). The area has an organic plan, and the buildings are placed following this plan. It is formed by curved paths, blind streets, wood ornaments, and oriel windows, which have survived until today.

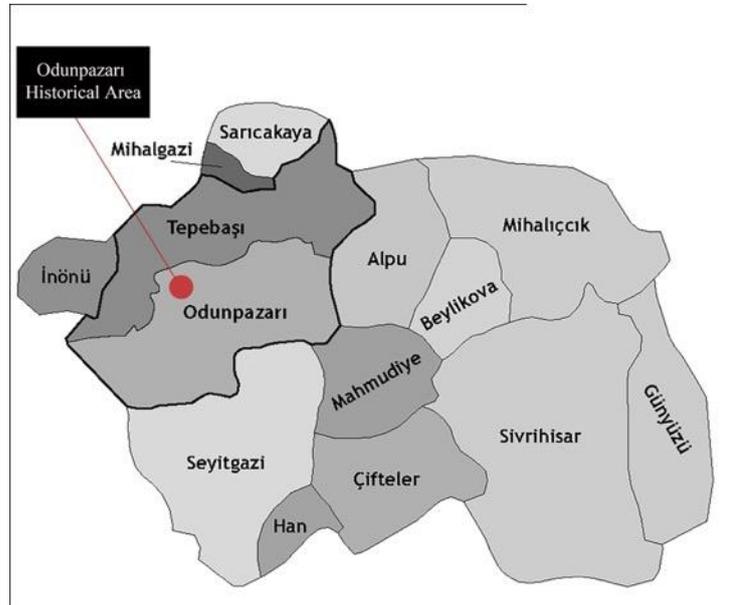


Figure 3. Map of Eskişehir Indicating The Location of Odunpazarı Historical Area

The area consists of not only individual houses or workplaces but also the harmony of buildings with each other and their environment, which has a unique appearance within the style. Historical houses' interior and exterior specialities, like structural elements, materials, and street textures, are invaluable examples of the traditional style (Unesco). The area attracts attention with their narrow streets and adjacent historical wooden houses with colourful bay windows. Although they are nested within each other, they respect each other without exceeding their intimate boundaries. They are designed extremely modestly and do not compete with each other, built with traditional Turkish house construction techniques such as adobe filling between wooden frames (Erşan & Demirarslan, 2020).



Figure 4. The Authentic Buildings in Odunpazarı

Source: Author

If a house faces the street, all its cantilevers also face the street. For the residents to see the street from their house, buildings were built facing the street rather than parallel. Visual communication with the street was established through these bay cantilevers or windows. They were used to see who was coming to the door and who was passing by. This area was the family's private place but did not interrupt communication with the street. The cantilevers of houses have been repeated according to the facade sizes (Atıcı, 2017). The entrance doors of the houses are highlighted, and the doors open to the street. Due to the topography, some houses can be entered with flat feet, and some can be reached after a few steps. In addition, the houses have double casement guillotine windows. Their forms are generally square, flat-arched square, rectangular and flat-arched. These windows were divided into sections with wooden pieces. The main floor windows generally have bars to allow households to observe the street comfortably without compromising their privacy and making it easy to place flowerpots (Atıcı, 2017). The widths of the eaves vary depending on the location of the house and in some of the eaves painted embroideries appear (Özüdoğru, 2005) (Figure 4).

While high-income groups preferred the houses in Odunpazarı at the beginning of the 20th century, the preferences of high-income groups changed towards these new areas with the spread of apartment-type residential areas near the train station and Porsuk River.



Figure 5. Street view of Odunpazarı Area After The Restoration Projects

Source: The author

Due to these specialties and their social, cultural, and traditional values, Odunpazarı Historical Site was registered as a "World Heritage" and "Historical and Urban Conversation Site" tentative list of UNESCO as a global authority in heritage matters. The conservation projects in the area protect the cultural heritage and led to economic development in the area. Owing to the renovated buildings and promotional activities, large numbers of local and foreign tourists visit the area every day (Odunpazarı Belediyesi) (Figure 5).

2. Methodology: Semiotic Approach

Semiotics, in general, is a way of interpreting any object or situation that refers to the science of signs and signification (Ezzaher, 2010). The Pioneer of this theory, Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), focused on linguistic signs, he defined a sign as being composed of a 'signifier' and a 'signified' (Figure 6). Contemporary scholars tend to examine the "signifier" as "the form that the sign takes" and the "signified" as the concept to which it refers (Chandler, 2007: 14).

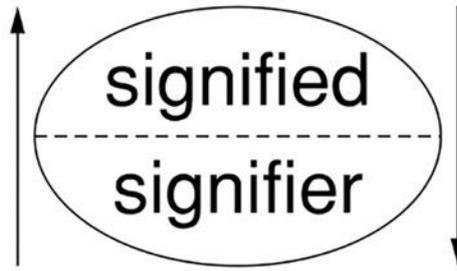


Figure 6. Saussure's Model of the Sign

Source: Sausure, 1959: 114

According to Gottdiener and Lagopoulos (1986), urban semiotics examines the city as a text in which spatial patterns and structures generate meaning. Users of the area assign meaning to urban subjects through "signs" and "symbols". Signs are the physical representation of reality and meanings embedded within that sign are called a code. As Roland Barthes (1986: 41) mentioned "as soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself." According to Barthes (cited in Leach, 1997), "The city is a discourse and this discourse is a language". Umberto Eco (1981: 24) points out that, besides architectural structures' denotative functions, their connotative function, in other words, their social and cultural meanings are very important. While "denotation" is the meaning ascribed to a sign, "connotation" refers to the spatial meanings that acquire through usage (Danesi, 2013). In architecture, the denotative role is functional usage, and the connotative role relates to more comprehensive social uses. While the perception of physical and functional aspects of the space is effective for denotation, the messages presented by the space from the perspective of connotation are included in the social memory. In other respects, when a built form denotes its function, it can also connote a specific ideology of this function. For instance, while a magnificent door connotes authority and prestige, people from another culture might perceive it differently.

The visual characteristics of the historical sites are mostly based on signification rather than their function. Vernacular architecture signifies available resources and environmental conditions of their periods. The building materials are primarily local in origin and generally constrained by the cultural context within which it is built. For that reason, buildings are liable to be consistent with cultural values, often reflecting their dwellers' status in the community and the society in which they are constructed.

Cultural data that conveys the function carries by showing certain formal features. Over time signified things can change, but signs remain. Historical buildings' signified roles give kinds of evidence about a particular state of the distribution of the meaning. According to Eco's (1976) semiotic approach, the architectural indicator includes a display showing the function that the signer makes possible in practice. But they may have lost their function in time. Throughout history, built environments have undergone many different changes. Built forms may lose their primary meanings and keep secondary meanings. In another instance, they may lose both primary

and secondary meanings. For example, pyramids are no longer the house of the Pharaohs' bodies after death and, are also no longer associated with human destiny and life after death. They symbolize the heritage of Egypt to tourists (Moustafa,1988: 49).

The reimagined architectural form may be filled with meaningless burdens. Objects that carry such a load have little meaning compared to the load they carry. To fulfil this lack of meaning, we equip them with fake things. As Eco mentioned, with its vitality, history swallows everything, empties, and refills forms; it takes its original representations of a form and enriches it with new ones (Eco 2019: 43).

In this study, a reimagined urban area is analyzed through the relationship established between architecture and semiotics. The historical urban area renovation project is examined through the terms signifier and signified while focusing on the design concepts. The case was examined based on photographs and personal observations conducted by the author in 2022.

3. Analysis

This study examines the building area, which is the “Historic Odunpazarı Houses Conservation and Development Project” scope. The implementation of this project phase was started in 2001. New buildings were built in this area apart from the restoration of registered buildings (Hepgüzel 2011). These buildings were designed for public activities, such as museums, painting houses, carpet-rug-cloth weaving workshops, tea, coffee house, chess, and hobby space.

Within this project, the social and cultural development of the area was aimed. In this context, imitations of traditional buildings were built in a specific part of the Odunpazarı settlement area. The map of the study area is shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Map of the Study Area

Source: The author

The study starts by explaining the semiotic theory that is related to visual representations. These representations are the form of visual communication that involve a collection of signs. As Eco (1976) mentioned, all signs engage in semiotics. Actually, many Odunpazarı houses have bay windows made of mud brick, which are original examples of Turkish civil architecture. The houses carry traces of the Ottoman Empire period and differ from today's houses with their tradition. Visual communication with streets is established in these bay windows or overhangs. People are able to see passersby and visitors (Atıcı, 2017). The brown-framed, white-walled, indigo, or tile-red houses lined up in narrow streets contain important features of Ottoman-era urban architecture. The lower floors of the houses were designed in accordance with the lifestyle and economic activity of the period, typically having a kitchen, barn, laundry, or warehouse. The upper floors are generally used as living spaces.

Usually, historic buildings represent the memories and existence of people who lived there before. They carry the trace of time; they wear off and become dirty. According to Alois Riegel (2015), monuments should demonstrate their age, and addition or subtraction should not be made in

anything that time diminishes. In Western Countries, *patine* is essential to gain artistic enhancement to construction. This condition can be given as proof of their historicity that gives meaning to the area. However, obsolescence can damage buildings, which may result in the need for restoration. Many restored buildings in Turkey look so clean, perfect, and brand-new that the historicity of buildings is not clearly apparent; they become timeless constructions. This condition is also seen in "Odunpazarı houses" case. With these colorful paintings and varnished, and immaculate timeless buildings, the area may look like a theme park. To attract tourists, trinket-like buildings are used in historical concepts. In this inauthentic and artificial site, tourists can feel themselves as a part of this theme.



Figure 8. New Buildings in the Area

Source: The author (above), <https://www.eskisehir.bel.tr> (below)

Boniface & Fowler (2003) mentioned that new and different versions could be created in urban areas when authentic heritage does not exist. In this area, different versions of the buildings were constructed to revive the heritage of the city. Although the authentic building materials of the historical houses were wood and adobe, in this project, some of the new buildings were constructed with reinforced concrete. While describing the sign, Saussure mentioned, "It evokes that thing, even though it is not that thing." It can be said that, even though some of the buildings within the scope of the projects were newly constructed, they evoke the history of the area. This situation makes them an indicator. They symbolize Eskişehir; it is everywhere in the country where Eskişehir is to be stated as an image.

In addition, these newly constructed buildings are larger than the original ones, which makes them remarkable, like a showcase. They seem more impressive and striking than the original traditional buildings. However, this situation induces confusion between the new and authentic ones, and most people cannot realize the difference. So, people may experience different "dreamlands". Regarding this issue, Baudrillard's simulacra concept can be referred. According to Baudrillard, "*Simulation is no longer.. a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality...*" (Baudrillard, 2010: 1). Because they show the Ottoman period lifestyle by the particular codes and sub-codes, these buildings are the centre of attention.

Table 1 shows the semiotic interpretation of the newly built structures in the Odunpazarı area, which are used as a museum, a hotel, and touristic handicraft workshops. The number of floors, window shapes, façade elements represent characteristics of typical Odunpazarı houses. These two-story, colourful buildings with rectangular windows separated by wooden pieces, consoles and eaves can be interpreted as signs. On the other hand, when the connotations of the indicator are evaluated, it can be reached that these new buildings symbolically represent the city's historical identity. They show the traditional architectural feature of the Ottoman period and the

physical appearance of historic buildings. At the same time, as seen in the photograph (Figure 8), with architectural lighting and the inscription of "Metropolitan Municipality Odunpazarı Houses" these buildings serve as a showcase.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of New Buildings In Odunpazarı Area

Sign	Museum
	Boutique hotel
	Touristic handcraft workshops
	The letter of "Büyükşehir Belediyesi Odunpazarı Evleri"
Signifier	2 - 3 stories high colorful buildings with Courtyards, rectangular windows, cantilevers, eaves and grates
Signified	The physical appearance of the city's oldest residential district
	The city's historic identity
	The traditional architectural feature of the Ottoman period
	A Showcase of the touristic historical district.
	Vitrine of traditional modest buildings

One of the buildings in this area is the Glass Art Museum, which was opened in 2007 (Figure 9). In 2012, Eskişehir City Memorial Museum was also established in the same building. This yellow colour building, whose primary function is a museum, is two-story with a courtyard, rectangular windows divided by wooden parts, a cantilever, an eave, and a grate. All these signs make us to perceive the building as historical. Apart from its function as a museum, the building shows the physical appearance of Odunpazarı houses, the city's historical identity, and the traditional architectural feature of the Ottoman period.



Figure 9. The Museum of Glass Art

Source: The author

While the denotation is the Museum, Boutique Hotel, and Touristic Handcraft Workshops with a bay window, the connotation is the history of Eskişehir, which it symbolizes. However, bay windows exist to refer to their function in history.

CONCLUSION

Mass culture generalizes needs and forms of behavior to the population, makes them as uniform as possible, simplifies any concentration in itself, and turns it into an object of consumption; it reduces all dimensions of time to the present. In this way, traditional textures deteriorate in cities with regional planning and new housing types. As Adorno (2011) claims, today's global culture makes everything look alike. Due to new technologies and globalization, countries are gradually resembling each other. Such a situation makes local cultures attractive to tourists from developed

countries. This interest has become an income source for third-world countries. To regain historical features, create and present a new urban identity, and use history as an income source, governments give priority to revitalizing projects. These projects can be seen in many cities in Turkey, and Odunpazarı Houses revitalizing projects in Eskişehir are also one of them. As a result of the projects, actual and simulation constructions intermingle into this distinctive historical site.

Apart from the mass communication channels such as cinema, radio, television, and newspaper, architecture should not be neglected. In our daily life, we are surrounded by symbols. Any built structure symbolizes aspects of the cultural objects essential to a form of life. They are representations of abstract signs and characteristic features.

In this study, the semiotic approach was used as a method. Semiology offers a theoretical basis for architectural structure and allows people to understand and interpret the built environment. The study examines the denotations and connotations of the buildings in Odunpazarı Historic Site in the city of Eskişehir. Although the buildings are newly built, it can be said that due to their structural features, they successfully reflect the city's historical identity, especially the area. The buildings are more striking due to their size and act as a signboard. This situation is of great importance in promoting the historical area for tourism. On the other hand, the Glass Museum and City Memory Museum Building in Odunpazarı historical site is an architectural symbol that contains some elements of architectural style blend of Ottoman life culture. Signs such as having different wall colors, window shapes, and eaves allow us to perceive the building as historical. According to Eco (2019: 29), an architect can do things that give the impression of windows but actually do not function as windows, they are perceived as windows in terms of communication. Similarly, in the research area, the function of the oriel windows changed; it does not allow householders to observe the street. They now only signify Ottoman architectural style different from their actual function. It can be said that the area turned into a symbol of climatic, behavioural, social, and economic aspects of historical life. They carry symbolic connotations.

In conclusion, it can be said that a building might not say much except for 'building' but a building with a specific material, colour, or shape can communicate and give information. Renovated or reimagined buildings are highly connotative structures in historical areas. These kinds of buildings contain more metaphors than the original ones. Their semiotics is rich in connotations. Also, not the few historic buildings that create the atmosphere of the old city, all the buildings carry specific meanings and form the unique feature of that culture. In Odunpazarı houses, ambiguous meanings have finally transcended all possible functional considerations, and the buildings have become the symbol of the city. Like other examples, the area is one of the most significant attraction points, with crowds of visitors taking photos of architectural styles. Authenticity does not seem to be an issue anymore; some tourists might not be aware of whether the buildings' are newly built or not and might perceive them as authentic.

Old buildings witness cities' cultural history and help give people a sense of place and connection to the past. In this article, by examining the particular case of Odunpazarı houses area, symbolic interventions were demonstrated. The spatial interventions have the capacity to carry new meanings of place. Symbols play an active role in conveying particular images of the urban area. Renovated buildings are highly connotative structures. They have a solid inspirational capacity to reimagination the area to tourist attraction. As De Fusco (2020: 113) mentioned, the "architectural everyday language" of these structures includes all the symbols, meanings, and causality attributed to them in the imagination of the people, as well as social and economic factors. This situation should be decisive for the restructuring and preservation of old cities.

As for the final word, it would be interesting to reach the experiments of local users' and tourists' interpretations. These interpretations should be taken into consideration for the conservation of the historical spirit of the urban area.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

**KENTSEL ALANA GÖSTERGEBİLİMSEL YAKLAŞIM: ESKİŞEHİR TARİHİ
ODUNPAZARI BÖLGESİ ÖRNEĞİ**

Kitle iletişim aracı olarak mimari incelenirken, taşıdığı anlamlara, neleri ilettiğine ve iletişimi sağlama biçimine ulaşmak büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bilimsel gelişmeler, ortak değerler, ahlaki kurallar, dinler, inançlar, ekonomik durumlar gibi kültürel sistemler mimar yapı aracılığıyla kendini göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada Eskişehir Odunpazarı yerleşim bölgesinde canlandırma projeleri kapsamındaki yapılar göstergebilimsel analiz yaklaşımıyla incelenmiştir. Göstergebilim genel olarak işaret ve anlam bilimine gönderme yapan herhangi bir nesneyi veya durumu yorumlamanın bir yoludur. Bu teorinin öncüsü Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), dilsel göstergelere odaklanarak, göstergeyi "gösteren" ve "gösterilen" den oluşan sistem olarak tanımlamaktadır. Çağdaş akademisyenler "gösteren"i "gösterenin aldığı biçim", "gösterileni" ise onun gönderme yaptığı kavram olarak inceleme eğilimindedirler (Chandler, 2007: 14). Göstergebilim, mimari yapı için teorik bir temel sunar ve insanların yapılı çevreyi anlamalarına ve yorumlamalarına olanak tanır.

Tarihi mekanların görsel özellikleri çoğunlukla işlevlerinden çok anlamlandırmaya dayanmaktadır. Yerel mimari, dönemlerinin mevcut kaynaklarını ve çevresel koşullarını ifade eder. Yapı malzemeleri öncelikle yerel kökenlidir ve genellikle inşa edildiği kültürel bağlamla sınırlıdır. Bu nedenle binalar, çoğunlukla içinde yaşayanların inşa edildikleri toplumdaki statülerini yansıtan kültürel değerlerle tutarlı olma eğilimindedirler. Bu çalışmada Eskişehir'in tarihi miras merkezi "Odunpazarı" bölgesindeki "Tarihi Odunpazarı Evleri Koruma ve Geliştirme Projesi" kapsamındaki yapı alanı göstergebilimsel analiz yaklaşımıyla incelenmektedir. Uygulamasına 2001 yılında başlanan proje kapsamında tescilli binaların restorasyonunun yanı sıra yeni binalar da inşa edilmiştir (Hepgüzül 2011). Bu binalar müze, halı-kilim-kumaş dokuma atölyeleri, çay, kahvehane, satranç, hobi alanı gibi kamusal faaliyetler için tasarlanmıştır. Bölge, Selçuklu ve Osmanlı Dönemine ait tarihi izler barındırarak, dar sokakları, evleri, çeşmeleri ve küçük meydanlarıyla geleneksel Türk mahallesinin özelliklerini simgelemektedir. Bu nedenle Odunpazarı sadece bir gezinti mekanı olarak değil, farklı kentsel görüntülerin derin göstergelerinin okunabileceği bir alan olarak da ele alınmalıdır. Bu alanda şehrin mirasını canlandırmak amacıyla binaların farklı versiyonları inşa edilirken, tarihi evlerin özgün yapı malzemesi ahşap ve kerpiç yerine betonarme de kullanılmıştır. Saussure'un "o şey olmasa da o şeyi çağrıştırarak iletişim kurmak" şeklinde tanımladığı gösterge kavramında olduğu gibi bu yapılar da her ne kadar yeni de yapılmış olsa Eskişehir'in tarihini simgeleyen bir gösterge halini aldığı sonucuna ulaşılabilir.

Odunpazarı bölgesinde müze, otel ve turistik el sanatları atölyesi olarak kullanılan yeni inşa edilen yapılar kat sayısı, pencere biçimleri ve cephe elemanları ile tipik Odunpazarı evlerinin özelliklerini yansıtmaktadır. Ahşap parçalar, konsollar ve saçaklarla ayrılmış dikdörtgen pencereli, iki katlı, rengarenk bu binalar bir vitrin olarak yorumlanabilir. Öte yandan göstergenin yan anlamları değerlendirildiğinde bu yeni yapıların simgesel olarak kentin tarihi kimliğini temsil ettiği sonucuna ulaşılabilmektedir. Aynı zamanda kullanılan mimari aydınlatmalar ve "Büyükşehir Belediyesi Odunpazarı Evleri" yazısı yapıların bölgenin vitrini olarak görev üstlenmesine neden olmaktadır. Yapılar müze işlevinin yanı sıra Odunpazarı evlerinin fiziki görünümünü, kentin tarihi kimliğini ve Osmanlı döneminin geleneksel mimari özelliğini ve Eskişehir'in tarihini yansıtmaktadır. Eco'ya (2019: 29) göre bir mimar, pencere izlenimi veren ancak aslında pencere işlevi görmeyen şeyler yapabilir, bunlar iletişim açısından pencere olarak algılanır. Odunpazarı evleri gerçek işlevinden farklı anlamlar taşır. Bölgedeki yaşamın iklimsel, davranışsal, sosyal ve ekonomik yönlerinin sembolüdürler. Sembolik çağrışımlar taşırlar.

Sonuç olarak, binalar her ne kadar yeni yapılmış olsa da yapısal özellikleri nedeniyle başta bölge olmak üzere şehrin tarihi kimliğini başarılı bir şekilde yansıttıkları söylenebilir. Bir binanın 'bina' dışında pek bir şey ifade etmeyebileceği ancak belirli bir malzemesi, rengi veya şekli olan bir binanın iletişim kurabileceği ve bilgi verebileceği sonucuna ulaşılabilir. Yenilenen veya yeniden tasarlanan binalar, tarihi alanlarda oldukça çağrışım yapan yapılardır. Bu tür yapılar orijinallerinden daha fazla metafor içerir, göstergebilimsel çağrışımlar açısından zengindir. Ayrıca şehrin atmosferini oluşturan birkaç tarihi bina değil, tüm yapılar kendine has anlamlar taşıması ve o kültürün eşsiz özelliğini oluşturmasıdır. Odunpazarı evlerinde muğlak anlamlar, işlevsel kaygıların ötesine geçmiş, yapılar kentin simgesi haline gelmiştir.

Tarihi yapılar şehirlerin kültürel tarihine tanıklık eder ve insanlara bir yer duygusu ve geçmişle bağlantı kurmalarına yardımcı olur. Bölgeyi turistik cazibe merkezi olarak yeniden hayal etme konusunda sağlam bir ilham verici kapasiteye sahipler. Bu yapıların "mimari gündelik dili", sosyal ve ekonomik faktörlerin yanı sıra, insanların hayal gücünde onlara atfedilen tüm sembollerini, anlamları ve nedenselliği içerir. Bu durum tarihi bölgelerin yeniden yapılandırılması ve korunması açısından belirleyici olmalıdır. Daha sonraki çalışmalarda yerel kullanıcıların ve turistlerin yorumlarına ulaşması, kentsel alanın tarihi ruhunun korunması açısından faydalı olacaktır.

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