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Investigation of the Effect of Public Space Transformations on the User's Perception of Space and its Relationship with Local Government

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Abstract

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The transformation of modern cities under the pressure of rapid urbanization and planning has made public spaces critical points of social life. When the spatial organization of cities is shaped by social and cultural contexts, it is seen that there are factors that affect individuals' perception of space and their relations with public spaces. Norberg-Schulz (1971) argues that space has not only a physical but also an emotional and cultural dimension, while Tuan (1990) emphasizes that culture, experience and environmental attitudes form perception. The aim of the study is to examine the deterioration of individuals' perception of space in the context of planning and spatial perception if the user's relationship with space and society turns into a tactical tool of planning, which is an implementing tool of the state. In this context, the study is based on two main research questions. First, how power relations and political structure affect planning processes in public spaces will be analyzed. Secondly, the change in the perception of the public as the user of the spaces that are produced or not completed on the grounds of conflict will be investigated. The Yalı Kafe project area in Atakum district of Samsun, where the transformation process is ongoing, has been selected as the sample area.

Keywords: Public Space; Public Area; Perception; Perception Of Space; City .

1. Introduction

Urban spaces are not only physical structures but also dynamic spaces where social relations, cultural identities and individual experiences are shaped. According to Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the social production of space, urban spaces are not just designed physical environments; these spaces are constantly being reshaped in line with the perceptions, experiences and interactions of the individuals living in them. Spatial perceptions are one of the main elements that determine how individuals experience their physical environment and how they attribute meanings to it. Lynch (1960) argues that individuals perceive cities through mental maps, while Gehl (2011) emphasizes how the ways in which urban spaces are used should be considered at the human scale.

Public spaces, one of the most important components of urban spaces, are an integral part of urban life as spaces where individuals come together, interact and shape collective memory. The perception and use of these spaces are influenced by multidimensional dynamics such as individuals' past experiences, cultural and social identities, their relationships with the physical environment and urban policies (Carr et al., 1992). While the continuity and accessibility of public spaces strengthen the spatial belonging of urbanites, they are also among the important factors that determine the social sustainability of urban spaces (Amen, Afara, and Nia 2023; Aziz Amen 2022; Amen and Nia 2020). However, spatial perception and usage patterns may change over time, especially in areas open to transformation such as coastal spaces. In this context, understanding how individuals' spatial perceptions and public space uses are shaped is of great importance for urban planning and spatial sustainability.

This study aims to examine the effects of spatial organization on residents' perception and use of public space in Samsun province. In particular, through the example of Yalı Kafe project area located on the coastal shore of Atakum district, the change of individuals' spatial perceptions depending on time and space will be investigated. The study aims to reveal the impact of spatial perception differences on the use of public space by analyzing the relationships that individuals establish with space. In this context, the study aims to contribute to urban planning and spatial sustainability by revealing how urban spaces in Samsun are perceived by individuals and the effects of this perception on public space use. In addition, it will evaluate how coastal spaces function for urbanites and how public space continuity can be ensured, and develop recommendations for urban planning processes.



Figure 1. Structure of the Study.

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Study

In this study, how individuals perceive public spaces, one of the main dynamics of cities, and the effects of these spatial perception differences on the location of public spaces will be examined. Public spaces have an important place in urban life as places where individuals experience, interact and perform various activities in different ways in their daily lives. How these spaces are perceived and used is directly related to individuals' spatial experiences, cultural backgrounds, environmental factors and individual expectations (Lynch, 1960; Gehl, 2011).

In this context, the main research questions of the study were determined as follows:

- How are individuals' spatial perceptions formed and which factors affect them?
- How does spatial perception guide individuals' public space use preferences?
- How is the Yalı Café project area perceived and experienced by users?
- Do spatial perceptions change over time and how are these changes reflected in the way public space is used?
- What functions do coastal spaces fulfill for urbanites and how is the continuity of public space in these areas ensured?

In the second part of the study, the conceptual and theoretical framework of public space and public space will be discussed. In this context, the concept of publicness, the definition and characteristics of public space, the functions of public space and theoretical approaches to ensuring the continuity of public space will be evaluated. In the third section, the relationship between spatial perception and the city will be discussed, and how individuals' spatial perceptions are formed and how this perception interacts with the use of public space will be analyzed. How spatial perception differs among individuals will be evaluated together with the environmental, cognitive and social factors that affect perception. Accordingly, the determining role of perception on individuals' patterns of public space use and spatial preferences will be discussed.

In the fourth section, the relationship between public space transformations and local governments will be examined, with a focus on the role of users in the transformation processes of urban spaces. In this context, the policies of local governments concerning public spaces and their impact on the continuity of these spaces will be evaluated. Additionally, the effects of the re-functionalization of public spaces on urban form and user experience will be discussed.

The fifth section will analyze the impact of public space transformations on users' spatial perceptions through the case of the Yalı Kafe project area in Atakum district, Samsun. The influence of Atakum's cosmopolitan structure—being one of the most developed districts of the city—on individuals' spatial perceptions will be assessed. The physical and social dimensions of the study area will be explored, along with how individuals use the space, the purposes of use, and the relationships they establish with it. Particular attention will be given to Yalı Kafe's connection with the coastline, its relationship with vehicular access, the opportunities it provides for social activities, and the users' sense of spatial belonging.

Finally, the sixth section will present a general evaluation and conclusions. Based on the study's findings, the effects of public space transformations on individuals' spatial perception will be discussed, along with policy recommendations for local governments.

1.2 Methodology of the Study

This study aims to examine the relationship between individuals' spatial perceptions, which change as a result of different life experiences and social influences, and public spaces, and the effects of these relationships on site selection. The aim of the study is to understand how individuals experience urban spaces and how these experiences shape their public space preferences. In the data collection process of the research, in-depth interviews will be conducted with 6 public participants who actively use the Yalı Kafe project area in Atakum district. These interviews will focus on the participants' perceptions of space, their use of public spaces, their sense of spatial belonging, and the reasons why these spaces are preferred. The interviews will be conducted with questions that aim to reveal the participants' site selection behaviors, their relationships with these spaces and changes over time. In addition, one urban planner and one architect from Atakum Municipality will be interviewed. The city planner will provide information about the management of public spaces, urban planning processes and strategies of local governments regarding the use of space. The architect

will share his/her perspective on spatial design and structural arrangements. Data from the municipalities will help to understand professional perspectives in the planning and development of public spaces.

The data obtained from the interviews will be evaluated through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis will reveal certain themes and patterns through the responses of the participants. In this way, it will allow us to better understand the participants' spatial perceptions, their use of public space and the emotional ties they have with the space. The data will be analyzed in terms of the participants' sense of belonging to the Yalı Café project area, their emotional attachment to the space, and the personal meaning of the time spent in this space. In addition, findings on the reasons why participants prefer this space, their sense of spatial belonging and changes over time will also be evaluated. Public space usage patterns will also play an important role in this analysis; how participants use spaces such as Yalı Café and the impact of the space on social interactions will also be taken into consideration. Changing perceptions and usage patterns over time will be explored, and how they evolve in parallel with the changes in the lives of the participants.

Interviews with experts will also be included in the analysis process. Information will be provided on the experts' perspectives on the management and planning of public spaces, how they shape the public's relationship with space, and the impact of municipal strategies on these relationships. All these data will help us understand individuals' relations with public space, the differences in their perceptions of space, and the role of municipalities in the management of these spaces. The findings will contribute to the development of recommendations for public space planning in Samsun and provide valuable information for urban planning processes.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Public Space and Public Place

2.1.1 Publicness

According to Gökgür (2017), the term *public* originates from the Latin *publicus*, which itself is derived from *pubs* (*pubis*). Conceptually, publicness refers to spaces shared by individuals and communities, as well as the practices of coexisting within these spaces (Eren, 2024).

Publicness is a foundational concept reflecting society's capacity to share common values, engage in the public sphere, and live collectively. While it is shaped by prevailing norms, rules, and values, its meaning has varied across historical, cultural, and political contexts. The notion of publicness has been widely debated in both political theory and social practice, drawing attention from numerous scholars.

Habermas (1989) conceptualizes publicness as grounded in free discussion and rational discourse, viewing it as a critical mechanism through which common interests are formed and public policies are shaped in democratic societies. In his view, the bourgeois public sphere emerged as a space where individuals could influence political and social processes through participation in public debates. However, over time, this sphere has undergone significant transformation, leading to the emergence of diverse and fragmented forms of the public sphere (Turan, 2004).

Conversely, Arendt (1958) emphasizes political action as central to publicness. She argues that the public sphere is constituted by individuals coming together to discuss shared concerns, enabling the practice of active citizenship. Unlike Habermas' emphasis on rational-critical debate, Arendt's notion is rooted in action and participation, where the public realm is actively constructed through engagement and plurality.

These differing perspectives illustrate that publicness is not a static concept; rather, it evolves in response to shifting socio-political dynamics. In light of neoliberal urban policies, technological change, and contemporary social movements, the meaning and function of publicness must be continuously re-evaluated, particularly in the context of the transformation of urban public spaces today.

2.1.1.1 The Concept of Public Space

With the establishment of Greek city-states, two different living spaces called “koine” and “oikos” emerged. While “koine” is considered to be the common space used by free citizens (profile excluding slaves, foreigners and women) and corresponds to the public sphere, “oikos” represents household life, which is considered to belong to individual individuals, and corresponds to the private sphere (Habermas, 2009). (Habermas, 2009).

The public sphere expresses centrality in the context of many models. It is also a place that is open to participation and has the value of plurality and communication. One of the main characteristics of the public sphere is that it allows individuals to participate equally. These spaces where people come together for a common purpose express togetherness. These are many different open and closed public spaces in a city; urban meeting, rally and demonstration squares, common areas surrounded by neighborhoods and historical monuments, all streets and passages open to walking, bazaars, markets and shopping centers, public sea coasts, alleyways, children's playgrounds on the street, football fields, places where culture and art shows, exhibitions and discussions are held, bookstores and reading places, foundations and similar places where social activities are held, public houses, cafes and clubs, show centers. (Özbek, 2004) Just as the issue of public space cannot be considered separately from the individual, it cannot be considered separately from the right to the city. Urban rights consist of the basic rights of people living in cities and the principles that guarantee their living standards.

According to Keleş, the essence of urban rights is the right to live in a city that is safe, clean, where nature and resources are properly protected, healthy, abundant in employment opportunities, provides economic freedom for individuals, where housing needs are met, freedom of movement is ensured, cultural and creative activities are provided, people benefit sufficiently from sports and leisure activities, all kinds of cultures can be integrated, quality architecture and appropriate environmental conditions, all kinds of urban functions can be harmonized, and people's participation in

governance is supported (Keleş, 2015). Basic rights such as urban rights, right to housing, right to health, right to education, cultural and social rights are important for the sustainability of cities and quality of life of people. Therefore, the protection and promotion of urban rights is an issue intertwined with public space. Since issues such as the functionality and benefit of public spaces are directly related to urban rights, this issue should be among the priority tasks of city administrations.

2.1.2 Public Space

The construction process in the Yalı Kafe area has notably shaped participants' spatial perceptions and expectations. Their reflections illustrate both personal experiences and broader urban changes. Many emphasized a loss of interest in the space following the onset of construction. As one participant noted, "It used to be a place I visited with my family, but for the past 5–6 years, I haven't used it much," while another remarked, "This used to be a place where Samsun could breathe. Now it's all concrete, iron, and scaffolding," underlining the negative aesthetic and emotional impact. The area, once perceived as a relaxing public space, is now seen as visually and functionally disconnected from its original identity.

Several participants viewed the project as a top-down intervention, serving more to showcase political visibility than to meet local needs. The placement of three large buildings within a limited coastal zone significantly reduced open public space. While the architectural design includes elements referencing traditional forms, such as bay windows and wooden cladding, these were criticized as superficial, lacking cultural depth and material coherence.

The lengthy and opaque construction process also emerged as a source of frustration. Participants associated delays with administrative and legal complications, and the lack of public communication undermined trust. This disconnect was seen as diminishing the public's relationship with the space. Some feared the buildings might ultimately be repurposed for commercial or institutional uses, marginalizing their intended cultural role.

Expectations for the completed project were cautiously optimistic. Participants hoped the space would host exhibitions, performances, and inclusive activities for all age groups. Yet concerns remained about potential symbolic use and limited accessibility. One participant emphasized, "If a public, inclusive, and accessible facility is built, this area could contribute to the city's cultural life," but warned that high density and insufficient openness could hinder this potential. The loss of coastal green space was particularly noted, with suggestions that a small structure paired with a larger park would have fostered a stronger public connection.

Despite criticisms, participants expressed a desire for the project to become a peaceful, accessible, and socially engaging space. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that facilities accommodate people of all ages and needs, including those with disabilities.

In sum, the Yalı Kafe construction process has altered perceptions of a once-familiar public space. While there is hope for future cultural and social benefits, concerns regarding density, transparency, and accessibility remain central. Addressing these issues will be key to transforming Yalı Kafe into a meaningful urban space that reconnects with its community.

2.2 Perception of Space and the City

Cities are complex structures formed by human communities, and these structures directly influence how individuals relate to space. Spatial perception is a multidimensional phenomenon that not only involves how the physical environment is experienced, but also encompasses individuals' emotional and social bonds. People perceive and interpret the cities they live in through personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, social relationships, and emotional states. In this context, the effect of space on individuals is not limited to its physical characteristics; elements such as trust, sense of belonging, and identity also shape spatial perception (Tuan, 1977).

While spatial perception enables individuals to form a mental map of their surroundings, the legibility of the physical environment and the emotional associations it evokes are decisive in this process (Lynch, 1960). How a space is perceived by people depends on factors such as its accessibility, its capacity to foster social interaction, and the extent to which individuals feel safe in that space. Public spaces, in particular, are significant as areas that strengthen social bonds and enrich urban experiences. The meaning and impact of a space on individuals is shaped not only by its physical design but also by the experiences lived within it. Therefore, the design, accessibility, and experiential quality of urban spaces are among the main elements that determine the nature of the relationship individuals establish with the city.

2.2.1 Definition of the Concept of Perception

The concept of perception in Turkish derives from the root word "almak" (to take). The English equivalent "perception" originates from the Indo-European root *kap*, meaning "to grasp," and was transmitted into Latin as *capere*, also meaning "to take" (Yılmaz, 2004). Perception is the transmission of the objective world to subjective consciousness (Babacan, 2019). Thus, it is the process by which people interpret and make sense of sensory information received from their surroundings. Factors affecting perceptual differences include external stimuli—such as the position, color, sound, environmental conditions, light, temperature, and movement—and internal cognitive influences stemming from one's emotional state, past experiences, social norms, and expectations (Lam, 1977).

The perception process is complex and influenced by various factors, intersecting with multiple disciplines. Its interpretation through both the senses and intuition makes perception inherently subjective.

2.2.1.1 Factors Affecting Perception

Perception refers to the process of processing and interpreting sensory information received from the external world. However, this process is not limited to sensory stimuli; it is also influenced by cognitive, social, and environmental

factors. Accordingly, the factors affecting the perception of any type of space—open or enclosed—can be grouped into three categories: environmental qualities, the user's past experiences and individual characteristics, and the cognitive relationship between the user and the space (Acaralp, 2009).

2.2.1.1.1 Environmental Factors

Environmental factors include the external characteristics of the physical environment in the perception process. Our perception of physical space cannot be reduced to models made up of simple geometric forms and ratios; the perception of the physical environment is a far more complex process (Holl, 1994). The nature, intensity, duration, and salience of stimuli directly influence perception. Environmental attributes such as light, color, sound, smell, texture, detail, size, proportion, scale, order, and rhythm form different combinations that lead to variations in the perception of space or the physical environment (Acaralp, 2009).

2.2.1.1.2 Cognitive Factors

People's levels of perception differ and are constantly changing. Cognitive characteristics include the internal processes that shape perception. Factors such as individual experiences, interpretation capabilities, and expectations cause perceptual differences among individuals.

Perception and cognition are often confused. Perception is the process of interpreting sensory stimuli from the environment through cognitive models and information. Although perception is initiated by the senses, it is a mental process that involves interpreting or understanding stimuli, which varies from person to person—this distinguishes it from mere sensory input. In other words, perception is a constantly changing model of comprehension formed by blending data obtained through the senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) with existing mental models, experiences, expectations, and emotions (Acaralp, 2009).

2.2.1.1.3 Social Factors

According to Gezer (2008), the relationship between space and the user is shaped not only by the user's past experiences in that space but also by the social, cultural, and psychological associations that the space evokes in the user. Social factors such as cultural norms, social interactions, and peer influence determine how individuals perceive and interpret their environments. Cultural norms are the values, assumptions, and behavioral standards imposed by a society or culture, which can shape many of an individual's decisions and interpretations based on their cultural background.

Social interaction is also a key factor in spatial perception. Public spaces are urban areas where people from different cultures, backgrounds, and social classes come together, share experiences, communicate, discover their similarities and differences, learn to trust each other and coexist, and ultimately create a sense of social cohesion in public life (CABE, 2004).

2.2.2 The Concept of Spatial Perception

Since spaces are designed for people, the human being is the most fundamental element of the built environment. A person should be considered not only as a physical entity but also as a subject who interacts with their surroundings, perceives space through personal experience, and assigns meaning to it. Therefore, humans cannot be separated from space or from one another; an individual's perception of space is shaped by a combination of social interactions, cultural background, and the physical environment (Göka, 2001).

Spatial perception is defined as the process by which the human mind organizes and interprets data received from the environment (Norberg-Schulz, 1966). This process offers a basic framework for understanding how individuals perceive and respond to their surroundings. Spatial perception is commonly analyzed under two main theoretical approaches: sensory-based theories and knowledge-based theories (Lang, 1987). While sensory-based theories emphasize the direct perception of the physical environment through the five senses, knowledge-based theories highlight the role of prior experiences, cultural accumulation, and social context in shaping spatial understanding.

In daily life, individuals are constantly exposed to stimuli that activate their perceptual systems. These perceptions are among the key factors that influence individuals' movements, preferences, and orientations within space (Kürkçüoğlu & Ocağcı, 2015). In analyzing the components of sensory perception to understand how urban spaces affect user experience, it becomes evident that vision is the most dominant sense in spatial perception. According to Altan (1993), the influence of the four main senses on spatial perception is distributed as follows: 70% vision, 25% touch, and 5% hearing and smell. The sense of vision, in particular, plays a central role in determining orientation within space, perceiving boundaries, and understanding spatial hierarchy.

Research on the influence of visual perception on spatial experience reveals that users interpret their surroundings through visual cues, and spatial configurations are shaped accordingly (Gehl, 1987). Individuals assess the physical boundaries, accessibility, scale, and spatial organization of an area primarily through visual elements. However, spatial experience cannot be reduced to visual perception alone. Tactile perception determines how individuals physically interact with space, while auditory perception plays a critical role in interpreting social interactions and the ambient atmosphere. In this context, the relationship between an individual and space should be understood as a multi-layered process shaped by various components of sensory perception and personal experience.

2.3 Transformations of Public Space and Local Governance

Public spaces are areas that shape the social fabric of cities and provide a spatial connection to the identities of urban dwellers. The transformation of public spaces is not limited to physical changes; it is also a process shaped by the interaction of social, cultural, and economic dimensions (Low et al., 2005). These transformations reflect broader

processes such as urban redevelopment projects, infrastructure improvement, and cultural shifts. The refunctionalization of public spaces is often guided by social needs and requires the intervention of local governments. At the core of all such transformation processes lies not only the goal of addressing individual needs but also the broader aim of contributing to the sustainable development of cities (Carmona et al., 2010).

2.3.1 The Process and Dynamics of Public Space Transformation

The transformation of public spaces goes beyond spatial changes. This process encompasses a range of factors, from shifts in social structures to the influence of economic-political decisions. Studies on Urban Renewal and Public Spaces reveal how spatial restructuring alters social interactions. Zukin (1995) noted that urban transformation projects often commercialize public spaces, which may lead to social fragmentation. Furthermore, the effects of gentrification processes on public spaces demonstrate how user experiences are reshaped. In the refunctionalization and redesign of public spaces, it is not only the physical environment that is transformed, but also the cultural and social fabric. Lynch's (1960) cognitive mapping approach serves as a significant tool in understanding how individuals perceive cities. The transformation processes of public spaces also alter these perceptions, which holds critical importance in terms of social sustainability. Changes in how communities experience spaces and in their mental images of those spaces affect processes of social belonging and identity formation (Rapoport, 1977).

2.3.2 User Impact and Participatory Planning

Participatory planning plays a vital role in the redesign of public spaces. Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) identifies different levels of public involvement in planning processes, shedding light on the extent to which users are included in decision-making. Participatory planning not only aims to understand how users interact with space but also responds to their needs and expectations. In this process, incorporating the views of local residents regarding the transformation of public spaces emerges as a strategy that enhances social sustainability.

Moreover, participatory planning is closely linked to the concept of social justice. This approach seeks to create accessible and equitable spaces for all by considering the social and cultural characteristics of local communities (Fainstein, 2010). In this context, qualitative research methods such as cognitive mapping enable in-depth analysis of user experiences and the integration of these insights into planning processes.

2.3.3 Public Space Policies and Intervention Approaches of Local Governments

The management and regulation of public spaces are directly linked to the policies adopted by local governments. The influence of neoliberal policies on public spaces has transformed not only their physical but also their economic functions. Privatization and commercialization often restrict the accessibility of these spaces, making them more appealing to elite groups (Harvey, 2005). However, more participatory approaches such as community-based planning aim to provide a counterbalance to these processes.

Local governments are increasingly considering public spaces from the perspective of environmental sustainability. Studies on green public spaces have shown that such environments not only enhance interaction with nature but also play a key role in mitigating the urban heat island effect (Beatley, 2000). These types of policies are critical in ensuring both the environmental and social sustainability of public spaces.

3. INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECT OF PUBLIC SPACE TRANSFORMATIONS ON THE USER'S PERCEPTION OF SPACE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ATAKUM YALI CAFÉ EXAMPLE

3.1 About the Study Area

Atakum, a district of Samsun province (population: 1,335,716), is located along the Black Sea coast and has rapidly developed into a dynamic urban area. With its beaches, parks, and recreational spaces stretching along the coastal line, Atakum has become an attractive center for both local residents and visitors. One of the focal points in this coastal area is Yalı Kafe, which stands out as a significant public space with its sea view and large open areas, serving as a center for both leisure and social activities.

Especially during the summer months, Yalı Kafe draws a high number of visitors, functioning not only as a place for relaxation and entertainment but also as a venue for cultural events and community gatherings. Over time, the structure and functions of Yalı Kafe have undergone several transformations. These changes have directly influenced users' spatial perceptions, shaping their relationships and experiences with the space.

In the transformation process of public spaces, the role of local governments is considerable. The services provided by the municipality, improvements implemented, and innovations introduced have a direct impact on the appeal and functionality of Yalı Kafe. How the local government administratively defines and manages this space to meet social needs and expectations significantly affects both user behavior and the way the space is utilized.

Beyond being merely a physical space, Yalı Kafe has become a socio-cultural landmark in Atakum. The way it is perceived and valued by users offers insights into its importance in the collective urban experience. Hosting a variety of cultural activities, social interactions, and communal gatherings, Yalı Kafe contributes to the socio-cultural enrichment of the area, reinforcing users' emotional connection and sense of belonging to the space.

In this context, examining the impact of public space transformations on users' spatial perception and their relationship with local governments, as illustrated in the case of Yalı Kafe in Atakum, provides valuable insights into the role and significance of urban spaces in social life. This study focuses on the transformation of public spaces and the policies of local governments in shaping such spaces.



Figure 2. Former Appearance of Yalı Kafe.



Figure 3. Current Appearance of Yalı Kafe.

3.2 Spatial and Social Development of the Yalı Kafe Area

The Yalı Kafe study area, located in the Atakum district, has undergone various changes over the years. Initially designated as a "Public Institution Area (RK)" in the first zoning plans prepared for the site, the land was owned by the Bank of Provinces (İller Bankası). Over time, due to various legal and administrative processes, the area has been allocated for different uses.

Previously known as "Deniz Kafe," the Yalı Kafe area operated as a recreational venue. According to the earliest accessible zoning plans from 2012, the area was designated as a public institution area. Additionally, a municipal council decision made in 2012 stated that no structures were to be built on the site.

Plan bütününde yer alan yolun bir kısmı "sahil yolu projesi" kapsamında tamamlanmış olup, kullanıma açılmıştır. Diğer kısmının düzenleme çalışmaları sürdürülmektedir.

Ancak, mevcut durum ile imar planı ve proje arasında uyumsuzluklar bulunmaktadır. Gerek uyumsuzluğun giderilmesi gerekse mülkiyetle ilgili sorunların çözümlenmesi için nazım imar planı ve uygulama imar planı değişikliğine gidilmiştir.

Uygulama imar planı kullanım kararlarının büyük ölçüde korunduğu düzenlemede, kıyıda mülkiyet ve yapılaşmalardan kaynaklanan imar hattı uyumsuzluğunun park, otopark, rekreasyon alanları vb. kamu kullanımlarına yönelik olarak değerlendirilmesi sağlanmıştır. Ancak, Belediyemizce projelendirme çalışmalarını sürdürülen alan için;

"Planda M.K. ile işaretli kısımlar Büyükşehir Belediyesi tarafından sahil yolu projesi kapsamında hazırlanan ya da hazırlanacak olan vaziyet planına göre sadece kamu kullanımı (otopark, yeşil alan, bisiklet yolu, yaya yolu v.b.) olarak düzenlenecek olup, her hangi bir yapı yapılmayacaktır." şeklinde plan notu eklenmiştir.

20m enkesitli yol yer yer genişlemekle birlikte, 20m enkesitten sonra kalan kısımlar M.K. olarak işaretlenmiştir. Böylece kullanım kararlarında bütünlük sağlayacak projelerin yapımına olanak sağlanmıştır.

Plan da yer alan yol genişlikleri ile ilgili hatlar sahil yolu projesine göre değiştirilebilir. Hat gerisinde kalan alan içerisinde plan değişikliğine gerek olmadan yaya, bisiklet, taşıt yolu ... düzenlenebilir.



Figure 5. Zoning Plan Dated 2011.

Figure 4. Plan Explanation Report Dated 2011.

At the same time, this area was under the ownership of İller Bank. In 2014, with the change in municipal administration, there were significant shifts in the operation model of the site, leading to various debates in the public and among local authorities regarding its use.

In 2019, the area, still owned by İller Bank at the time, was leased to Atakum Municipality. However, the ownership was later transferred to the Metropolitan Municipality. Subsequently, a revision to the 1/5000 and 1/1000 scale zoning plans was prepared to designate the official institution area as a "nation's library" and "book café". Following this transfer, the land use in the zoning plan was redefined as a "Cultural Facility Area".

However, on the grounds that this decision had been violated, members of the municipal council filed a criminal complaint with the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. Upon review, the governor's office denied permission for an investigation. Numerous petitions of objection were submitted, and there were many opposing opinions regarding the development conditions of the area.

In 2021, due to the removal of the "nation's library" designation from the legislation, the plan was revised to reflect the use of the space as a book café within a cultural facility framework.

As a result of the lawsuits and subsequent amendments, the study area in question is currently subject to ongoing legal proceedings. Most recently, as per the municipal council agenda dated May 8, 2024, and in accordance with the court ruling, the 1/1000 scale zoning plan—originally approved on April 29, 2022, under decision number 219 by the Samsun Metropolitan Municipal Council—was amended and reorganized.

Today, debates and zoning changes regarding the Yalı Kafe site are still ongoing. A new zoning plan amendment has been prepared to remove the existing structure, and most recently, with the latest municipal council decision, the area has once again been re-designated as a "Cultural Facility Area." These changes have brought ongoing uncertainties and public debates about how the area will be used in the future.



Figure 6. Satellite Image from 2018.



Figure 7. Satellite Image from 2024.

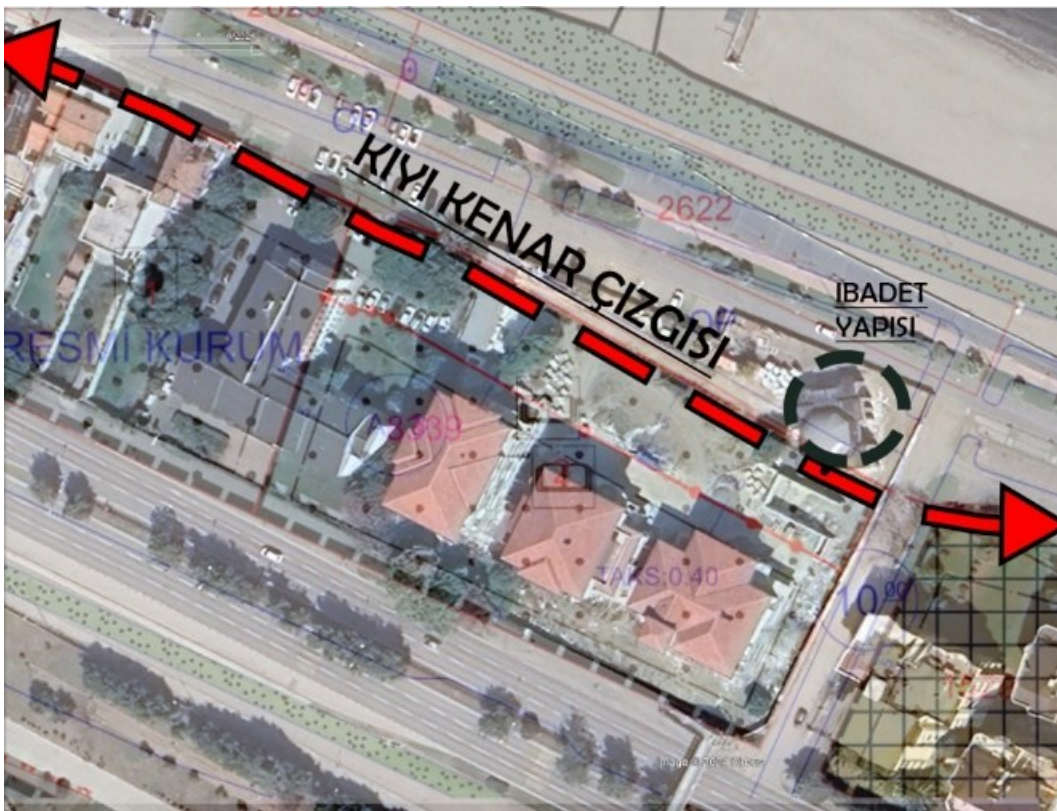


Figure 8. Relationship of the 2024 Satellite Image with the Coastal Boundary and Religious Structure.

3.3 Methodology of the Study

This research was conducted using the in-depth interview method, one of the qualitative research techniques. In-depth interviews are a semi-structured and flexible data collection technique used to reveal individuals' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes in a more detailed and comprehensive manner regarding a specific topic. The purpose of this method is to access participants' spatial experiences and the cognitive processes behind these experiences through their everyday life practices. Therefore, it offers a perspective not only to understand *what* is done, but also *why* and *how* it is done.

Within the scope of the study, the Yalı Kafe project area located in the Atakum district of Samsun, which is undergoing a transformation process, was examined. In this context, two main participant groups were determined for the fieldwork: experts and users. Within the expert group, interviews were conducted with a city planner and an architect working at the Atakum Municipality. These interviews aimed to understand the strategic decisions of local governments in public space planning processes, the policies related to the transformation of the space, and the approaches adopted during the implementation phase.

The second participant group consisted of in-depth interviews with six individuals from the public who actively use the area around Yalı Kafe. These interviews aimed to reveal users' personal experiences of the space, their spatial perceptions, the emotional and functional bonds they establish with the area, and how these perceptions have changed

over time. The interviews were structured with open-ended questions, encouraging participants to freely express their own narratives. In this way, it was possible to reach subjective experiences, layers of meaning, and individual differences that are difficult to capture through quantitative methods.

The collected data were evaluated using the thematic analysis method. This process was structured through coding the data obtained from the interviews, forming meaningful themes and sub-themes, and interpreting the findings within specific conceptual frameworks. Through thematic analysis, the participants' thoughts regarding concepts such as spatial perception, sense of belonging, continuity, accessibility, and transformation were systematically classified and evaluated. As a result, this method offered a multi-layered analysis of the effects of spatial transformations on individual perceptions and contributed to a deeper understanding of the social functions of public spaces, the construction of spatial belonging, and the variability in spatial use.

3.3.1 In-Depth Interview Analysis Method

In-depth interviews, conducted through structured or semi-structured questions, provide a broad perspective on the research topic. This method offers flexibility for participants to freely express their thoughts, allowing for the emergence of unanticipated but contextually important themes (Patton, 2002). It is especially suitable for revealing the relationships individuals establish with space and the meanings they attribute to these relationships in the context of urban planning, spatial practices, and social belonging.

The data obtained from interviews can be analyzed using qualitative approaches such as thematic analysis, content analysis, or narrative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "the process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within a data set." This type of analysis is particularly effective for making visible the patterns through which participants experience space. When supported by visual methods such as cognitive mapping, in-depth interviews allow for the analysis not only of participants' verbal expressions but also of their spatial orientations and behavioral patterns within the urban environment (Giesecking, 2013). Such combined methods are useful for examining how complex concepts like social sustainability materialize in urban space.

In conclusion, the in-depth interview method is a powerful tool for producing understanding based on qualitative data and for incorporating the participant perspective into the research. Especially in the context of urban studies, in-depth interviews play a crucial role in understanding local people's spatial perception, their relationship with urban policies, and the dynamics of the social fabric.

3.3.2 In-Depth Interview Analysis Process

In this research, the in-depth interview method was used to collect data in line with the study's objectives. The interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data on individuals' spatial perceptions, the relationships they have established with urban spaces in accordance with the principles of social sustainability, and the transformation process of the Yalı Kafe project area from the past to the present. A total of 15 individuals were interviewed during the research process. However, based on the quality, consistency, and analytical objectives of the study, 6 of these interviews were evaluated as meaningful, comprehensive, and interpretable, providing valuable content. These 6 interviews formed the core of the qualitative data set for the study.

In preparing the interview questions, an extensive literature review on the topic was conducted, and various academic sources were utilized. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questions, the first draft of the interview form was presented to 3 academics specialized in urban planning, sociology, and environmental psychology, as well as to 3 local government representatives with practical experience in the field. Based on the feedback from the experts, the scope of the questions, their clarity of language, and their alignment with the research objectives were assessed, and necessary adjustments were made according to the suggestions. This process increased the validity and reliability of the interview form, leading to the final version.

The interviews were recorded, and the verbal data was transcribed and included in the analysis process. This approach allowed for a deeper and multidimensional examination of the participants' individual experiences and spatial perceptions. The interview form used in this research is presented in Appendix 1.

3.4 Findings

The construction process in the Yalı Kafe area has significantly influenced participants' spatial perceptions and expectations. Their statements reflect both individual experiences and broader societal changes. Many noted a stark contrast between past uses of the area—such as spending time with family or friends—and their reduced interest after the onset of construction. One participant said, "It used to be a place I visited many times with my family, but for the past 5-6 years, I haven't used it much," highlighting how perceptions have shifted. Another added, "This used to be a place where Samsun could breathe, now it's all concrete, iron, and scaffolding. It bothers my eyes," expressing dissatisfaction with the aesthetic transformation. These comments suggest that the former Yalı Kafe offered a more intimate, relaxing environment, which has been lost due to the changes.

Some participants described the project as an imposed urban intervention, highlighting how its location on a central artery made it a showcase for political prestige. Limited space in the city center resulted in three closely placed buildings, restricting public open areas. Though the architecture included cultural references (e.g., bay windows, wooden finishes), these were seen as superficial, lacking integration in design and materials. Consequently, cultural heritage was only symbolically represented.

Participants also addressed the prolonged and opaque construction process. Delays were attributed to legal and political issues, and the lack of transparency caused public disengagement. One participant remarked, "Since the process wasn't transparent, people felt excluded," underscoring a loss of trust. Others suggested the project reflected the mayor's

ambitions more than community needs. Concerns were raised that the buildings might later be repurposed for commercial or institutional use, diminishing their social value.

The project's potential impact on cultural and social life also drew mixed reactions. Some hoped the space would host exhibitions, concerts, and children's activities, making it a vibrant cultural hub. However, others worried the transformation might remain symbolic. One participant warned that if the facility is not truly accessible and inclusive, it could become socially isolated. The loss of green and public space was a major concern—participants emphasized the need for more parks and open areas to reconnect the coast with the community.

Despite concerns, many expressed cautious hope. One participant said, "Just a peaceful, clean area where we can sit and watch the sea will be enough," reflecting a desire for a simple, inclusive space. Accessibility, especially for disabled individuals, was highlighted as essential. Participants emphasized that the design must prioritize social integration and public use.

In conclusion, the Yalı Kafe construction process has transformed the public's perception of the area. What was once a shared, intimate space is now viewed as less accessible and overly constructed. While there are hopes for the project's social and cultural contribution, concerns about density, transparency, and accessibility remain. If designed with the public in mind, the space could still become a valuable social and cultural asset for the city.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The construction process of Yalı Kafe illustrates the social impacts of urban transformation and public projects. Participant responses reveal the significance of public participation and the social function of urban spaces. A key issue was the lack of community involvement—many participants noted that their views were disregarded and that local authorities failed to communicate transparently. The exclusion of Atakum Municipality staff further emphasized the project's distance from participatory governance principles.

Several participants expressed that Yalı Kafe previously served as a social hub, but the construction process weakened their connection to the space. Complaints about the dominance of concrete and the loss of aesthetic and emotional ties reflect how the project disrupted the space's former identity. The new structure's incompatibility with the urban landscape raises questions about restoring public attachment and urban coherence.

Uncertainty and the prolonged timeline further eroded trust. A lack of transparency and insufficient public updates contributed to disappointment and emotional disengagement. These factors negatively impacted social dynamics and weakened the community fabric.

Despite criticisms, participants remain hopeful. Many expect Yalı Kafe to become a vibrant, functional cultural venue—provided that the space offers programs aligned with public needs, such as exhibitions, music, and children's activities. However, creating societal value depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on inclusive, responsive content. In conclusion, the Yalı Kafe case underlines that cultural projects must go beyond construction. Success relies on meaningful public participation, transparency, and socially responsive planning. If managed accordingly, Yalı Kafe holds potential to become a central social and cultural asset for Samsun.

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Appendix 1 – Questions for Public Participants:

1. How have the changes during the construction phase of the Yalı Café area influenced your perception of the space?
2. How did you use this area in the past? Has your interest in the area changed since the construction began?
3. What are your thoughts on the future use of Yalı Café as a cultural facility?
4. During the construction process, did you experience any challenges or satisfactions related to this space?
5. What are your expectations regarding the completed form of Yalı Café? In what ways do you hope to benefit from this space?

Questions for Experts:

1. How would you evaluate the current state of Yalı Café during its construction phase in comparison to other cultural facility projects in the city?
2. What are your thoughts on whether public opinion was considered during the construction process of Yalı Café?
3. How do you foresee the planned use of Yalı Café as a cultural facility affecting the local community's perception of the space?
4. How has the prolonged construction process altered public expectations, and how is this process being managed?
5. Upon its completion, how do you assess the potential impact of Yalı Café on social and cultural life?