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Space and Time Travelers Exploring Cultural Identity of the City

Arzu Ispalar Çahantimur and Gözde Kırılı Özer

Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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Abstract

This chapter presents the architectural graduate students' works on exploring cultural identity of a palimpsest city in Turkey, *İznik (Nicaea)*. These evaluative works, which were prepared in the context of time and space, include the interpretations of transformation of urban spaces throughout time and its effects on the identity of the city. At the end of their study, the fresh architects were conscious about the role of culture in the process of urban development. They had experienced how to investigate the ways of benefiting from city culture in favor of city identity. Putting stress on the efficient role of cultural factors composing identity of a city throughout time, the example studies and their proposals indicated in this chapter show that achieving sufficient and healthy urban environments could be possible with identifying the importance of culture and benefits of culture-led development and using it in architectural and urban design.

Keywords: space, time, culture, identity, architecture, Bursa, Turkey

1. Introduction

Why do we like one urban space and other not? Why do we feel close to the town space we reside? Why do we adversely criticize the “ungracious”? and Why do we love the “fine” we encounter in the city space?

Where do we walk, if we make the time? Perhaps, it is an architectural pattern of discussion. Where we walk, what we like, what inspires us, and what we sincerely hate as image, area, activity, or style? Where we rediscover ourselves, or we find our sources and creativity, in what setting or environment?

The included contributions' aim is to raise some questions about the signs and symbols whose presence, appearance, or disappearance delimits emotional landmarks and experiments within

the urban space. Referring to Kevin Lynch's book, "What time is this place?" [1], the works undertaken in the scope of this chapter discuss how image affects the environment, well-being, and behavior of the individual. Signs and symbols, statues and buildings—monuments—are an important part of cultural and emotional space; their appearance and disappearance often mark our present, the transition and spatial temporality, structuring the memory on the city. Many arise discussions, polemic, questions, and debates. Whether they treat victory, power, and commemoration, those are also the hypostases of emotional and urban experiment they propose to the city.

As Manuel Castells states, "space is not only expression of society, it is one of society's fundamental material dimensions that has to be discussed in terms of social relationships, because matter and consciousness are interrelated" [2]. Space and place have a crucial role in understanding the city. There is a variety of metaphors to characterize life in the city. To see social interaction as a drama unlocks a rich vein of metaphors: image, theme, plot, script, roles, back-stage, protagonist, and audience. These can all be utilized to describe and explain *social interactions*. To be more precise, these interactions are socio-spatial. They all *take place*. They occur in a spatial setting. Space is not just backdrop. Space and place are crucial to what performances are given and how they are received. We can picture the city as a variety of settings all with differences in appropriate behavior [3].

What is certain is that palimpsest cities¹ abound in urban artifacts, as Aldo Rossi [5] names them. An urban artifact can be a city itself or a building, a district, and it is hard to describe it because of its ambiguity of language and the importance of personally experiencing it. The city as a work of art is nature and culture and also imagination and collective memory. Cities can be read as multi-layered texts, a narrative of signs and symbols, which are hidden in the design of the built environment that gives expression, meaning and identity to the political, social, and cultural forces spread out throughout time [3].

In the context of these, the city is considered as a cultural phenomenon in its own right and examined both as the product of cultures and as the site for their production. The graduate course² at the architecture department, which is the subject of this chapter, approaches the city as a socio-spatial phenomenon with its temporal dimension. The discussions and evaluations are made accepting the fact that the city is a "product of time" [6], a "historical creation" [7], and the "embodiment of history" [8]. "Does the identity of a city change throughout time?" and "Are the phases of urban development influenced by different cultures?" are the research questions of the study. The graduated architects were given the following assignment.

As a space-time traveller in the city of İznik, a county in Bursa, Turkey; travel in three different unique spaces of the city each of which reflects three different time periods. Explain your impressions giving examples about;

¹The concept of palimpsest is broadly used in urban planning and heritage studies. The concept of the palimpsest explains the construction stages of the architectural monuments and the urban morphology development during the era [4].

²Mim5056 "City Culture and Architecture" is an elective graduate course at Uludağ University, Institute of Science and Technology, Program of Architecture. The works undertaken in this chapter were prepared in the scope of this course in 2015–2016 spring semester.

- Urban pattern of the city
- Unique architectural components of the city
- Natural and cultural landscape of the city

The aim was to make the fresh architects conscious about the role of culture in the process of urban development and let them to investigate the ways of benefiting from city culture in favor of city identity. They were obliged to prepare an article of about 4500–6000 words supported by photographs, drawings/sketches, and maps. In order to be able to master the case area of the course, the following section summarizes development of İznik throughout history.

2. İznik (Nicaea) as a palimpsest city in Turkey

Because of Turkey's location on important commercial routes like historical spice and silk routes and the advantage of its mild climate and rich soil, Turkey hosted many different civilizations in different times. All these civilizations made their own settlements. However, in time, because of wars and natural disasters, they were wrecked and partially disappeared and became layers that were buried underground. These buried layers of history gradually increased throughout time and turned Anatolian land into a palimpsest structure (**Figure 1**).

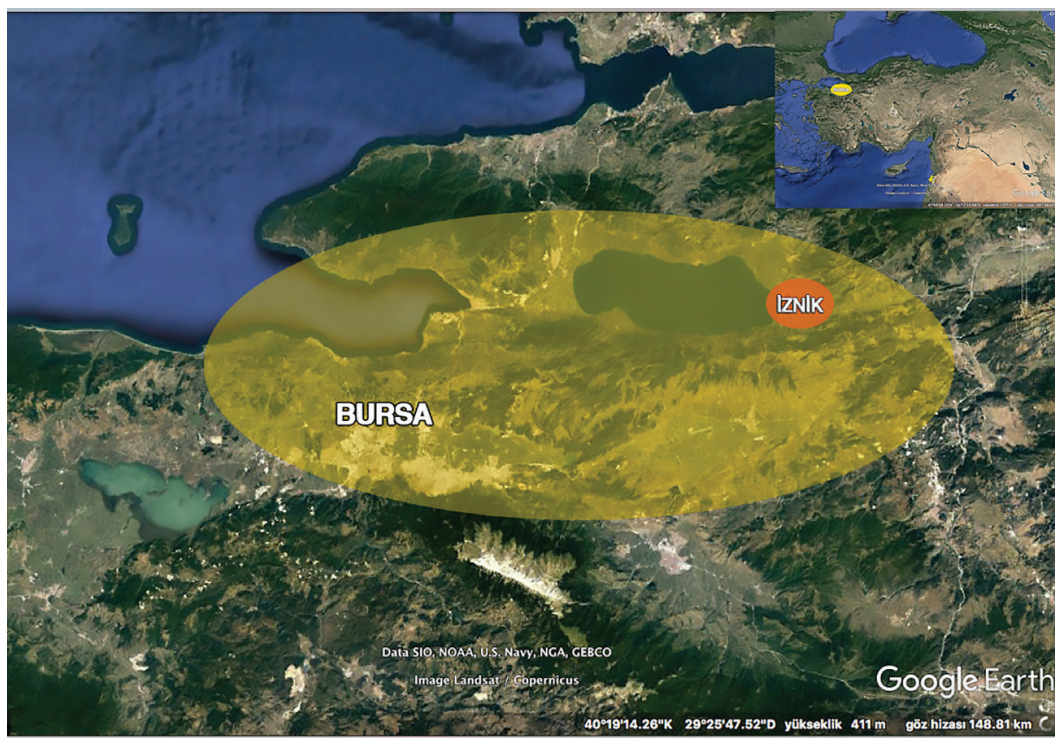


Figure 1. Location of İznik in Bursa and Turkey (adapted from Google earth in 10.10.2017).

The reasons of choosing İznik as a case field are the city's cultural, archeological, and geopolitical importance not only for Anatolian history but also for Christian theological structure and its being one of many palimpsest cities in Turkey.

According to ancient reports of famous geographer Strabon, Nicaea was founded in 316 BC by Antigonos and named after Lysimachos' (the general who took Nicaea from Antigonos) wife Nicaea [9]. During the Hellenistic period, the settlement was planned as a rectangular shaped city with four city gates (İstanbul, Lefke, Göl, and Yenişehir) and two main perpendicular axes, which can still be seen and actively used today [10]. The city had four major civilizations ruled over—Roman, Byzantine, Seljuks, and Ottoman—till it reaches to be a Turkish city. The remains dating earlier than Roman period can be seen out of the city walls but no remains left or yet found inside.

During the Byzantine period, Nicaea became an important religious center, particularly after Emperor Constantine converted the city into Christianity in 313AD. The first Christian Council called the great Council of Nicaea was held in Nicaea in 325AD with participation of more than 300 bishops coming from different regions of the Empire. The Seventh Ecumenical Council was also convened in Nicaea in 787 to deal with the iconoclastic controversy on the use of icons. This council was held in the church of Hagia Sophia, constructed by the Emperor Justinian over the ruins of the former church dating back to the fourth century [11, 12].

Anatolian Seljuks conquered Nicaea in 1081 made the city their capital and renamed it Nicaea. The Byzantines regained the city in 1097. After the Fourth Crusade captured Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1204, Nicaea became the core of the successor Byzantine Empire after emperor Theodore Laskaris founded the Empire of Nicaea there. During this period, the city became an important political and cultural center with the construction of imperial and civic buildings such as the palace of the Patriarch, the hospitals, the charity institutions, and the churches. The city walls were also expanded and reinforced with plenty of towers. The pentagonal city walls surrounding İznik are 4970 m long. The construction of the city walls started in Hellenistic period, but they took their final shape by new additions during Roman and Byzantine periods [9] (**Figure 2**).

After having been captured by the Ottoman Army in 1331, İznik became a more active city and a center of art, culture, and trade. Many famous Muslim scholars lectured in Orhan Gazi Madrasah during this period. The first Mosque, Madrasah, and İmaret (Soup Kitchen) of Ottoman period were built in İznik. In the early years of the Ottoman Empire, İznik was the second in importance only to Bursa. However, after the capture of Constantinople in 1453, it was gradually reduced to the status of a provincial town, as many residents gravitated to the new capital.

İznik revived to a certain extent in 1514, when Selim I resettled there some Persian (probably Armenian) potters and their families whom he had taken after the conquest of Tabriz. The potters set up their kilns in İznik, and for the next century, the town was famous for the superb tiles produced there to adorn the mosque complexes and palaces of the Ottoman Empire. İznik tiles, which reached the peak of their perfection in the years 1570–1620, were used to decorate virtually all of the buildings erected by the great Ottoman architect Sinan (**Figure 3**). The quality of İznik tiles declined sharply after 1620, when the local potters seem to have lost the mastery of their art, and though the kilns continued to work on into the mid-eighteenth century, their products never again came close to the perfection of the great age [13].

By that time, İznik had been reduced to the status of a mere village, whose humble houses clustered within the imposing circuit of its ancient defense walls. In 1922, it was devastated in



Figure 2. Map of İznik (adapted from Google earth in 10.10.2017).



Figure 3. Some examples of İznik tiles.

the fighting that took place during the Turkish War of Independence, leaving its ruins as the Ottoman Empire came to an end. The town has recovered considerably since then, and the İznik Foundation has revived the lost ceramic art of the town. The workshops are turning out tiles of outstanding quality (**Figure 4**).

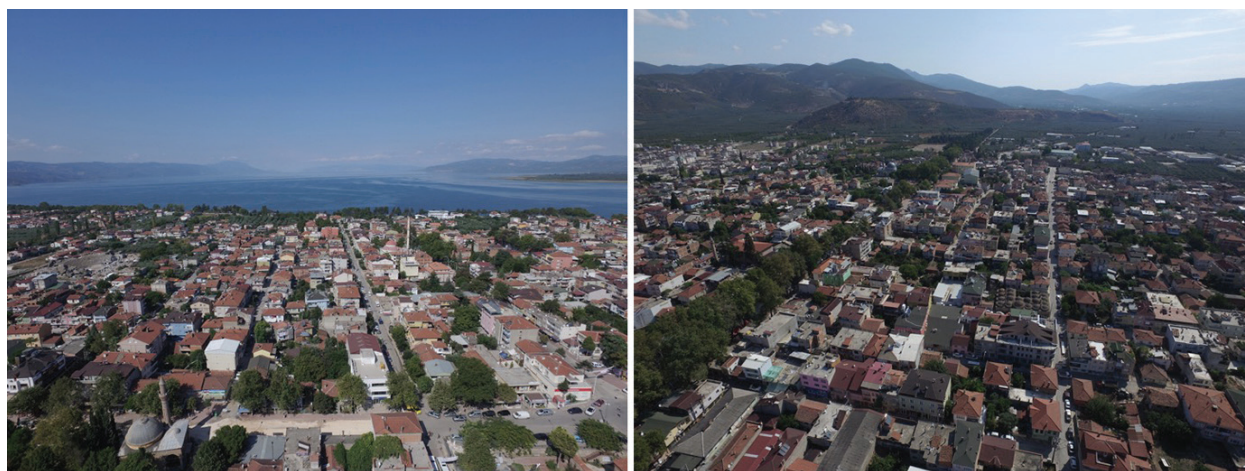


Figure 4. Some views from İznik today.

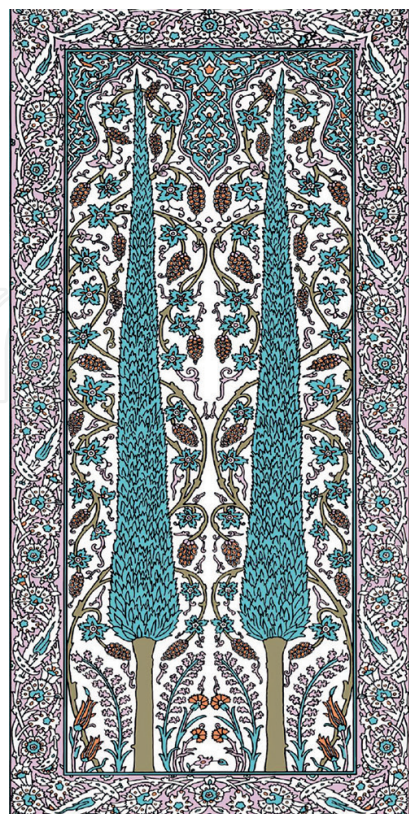
3. Space-time travelers in the city of İznik (Nicaea)

We had six space-time travelers, of which three are Erasmus exchange students coming from Romania, and the other three are Turkish graduate students. The diversity of the students was beneficial for the prosperity of the course and its outcomes at the end of the semester. Every work has been undertaken and presented individually.

Adonis Lemnaru from Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest likens the world's cultural heritage to a big puzzle in his work *"Space-Time Traveller in İznik"* (Figure 5).

He shows his consciousness about the importance of cultural heritage by indicating that, "...We must ensure the protection of every single piece today, so that future generations may have the opportunities to enjoy the puzzle". After explaining a brief history of İznik, Lemnaru begins his travel and his first visit to İznik is set in Byzantine Period (787). Pretending to be a priest, Lemnaru first of all describes the natural environment of the settlement putting stress on İznik Lake, which was called as 'Askania' in the Prehistoric age, and Samanlı and Katırlı Mountains surrounding the lake. Then, he explains the importance of the city as being one of the major religious centers in the world in Byzantine period. Being the host of the First Council in 325 and the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, İznik played an important role for formation of the Christian theological structure. The church of Hagia Sophia and the church of Dormition are the witnesses of these crucial events in the history.

Lemnaru's second visit is set in Ottoman period (sixteenth century), pretending to be a tile craftsman. He explains the development in the art of ceramic tiling in İznik. He also briefly describes the laborious process of tile making. The second emphasis of this period is the monumental buildings of Ottoman architecture, most of which are decorated with İznik tiles. Having been influenced by its story, he especially describes Imaret of Nilufer Hatun, which houses İznik Museum today. His third and the last visit is set in contemporaneity (2016) as a tourist. Description of this last visit includes his experiences and observations in İznik, beginning with an impressive sentence as: "When you see İznik for the first time you may think that 'So,



Space-time traveller in İZNIK

Stud. Arch. LEMNARU Adonis – CITY CULTURE AND ARCHITECTURE

Assoc. Prof. Arzu ÇAHANTIMUR, Ph.D. – Uludağ University

Institute of Science Program of Architecture – 2015/2016, 2nd Semester

//Set Destination: **İznik (Nicaea)**, 40°25'46.0"N 29°43'12.0"E

//Set Time: 787 / 16th century / 2016

//processing...

//calculating route...

//Enjoy your ride!

...

Figure 5. Cover page and the first page of Lemnaru's work.

time travel can also be made using a ferry or bus'!". And he explains İznik with the words "peace" and "tranquillity". Lemnaru's work is supported with some expressive illustrations (**Figure 6**).

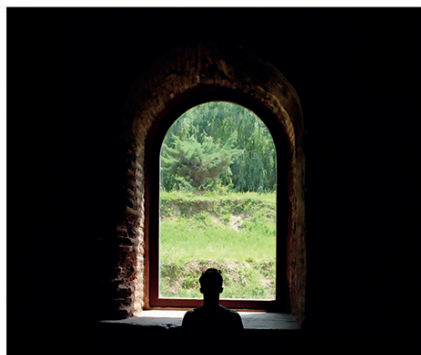
Yasmin Asan from Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest realizes that she had been mistaken for her initial impression about İznik after spending 24 hours there. She shares her experiences as a traveler in her work "*Journal of a Space-time Traveller, The City of İznik*" (**Figure 7**). Different than Lemnaru, Asan has chosen three places in İznik, which reflects different time periods of the city and explains her impressions, feelings, and opinions about these places and their components.

Her work is composed of four chapters and an epilogue together with explanatory photos. Chapter 1 includes her journey from Bursa to İznik, her first impressions about the city and a brief explanation about the location and urban layout of İznik. Chapter 2 describes her first place in İznik, Hagia Sophia—Orhan Mosque. Being at the junction of the two main perpendicular streets of the city—each two ends of the streets leading from four main gates of the ancient city walls—this monument is one of the landmarks of İznik. Asan observes the traces of history inside the mosque, which was built as a typical Byzantine church that hosted the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Christianity and used as a museum today. She explains her interpretation as: "... *It is, not only an architecture masterpiece but also a witness of the evolution,*

//Set 1st time: Byzantine Period (787)

//Status: Arrived

//Pretending to be: Priest...



Inside the Aya Sophia Church, personal photo

The shores of İznik Lake, which was called 'Askani'³ in the Prehistoric age, are covered with olive trees, fruit and vegetable gardens and vineyards. Trellises have been built on the shore so that the lake and its surrounds can be used as a natural promenade area. Samanlı Mountains are in the north and Katrlı Mountains are in the south of the lake which is a calling port for visitors throughout the year.

³ Erişir, Türkiye, TÜRKİYE DERGİ | NİSAN 2012//Set 2nd time: Ottoman period (16th century)

//Status: Arrived

//Pretending to be: Tile craftsman



A tile craftsman, painting, personal photo

Set 2nd time: Contemporaneity (2016)

Status: Arrived

Pretending to be: Tourist

'otto: When you see İznik for the first time you may think that "So, 'time travel' can also be made using a try or a bus"!

is said that İznik is an open-air museum; gates appearing every few steps, bridges, walls are the most important evidence of that.

hat it İznik? A place where people are using mostly bicycles and scooters. A place with small houses, spot with a lot of greenery. It has the atmosphere of a peaceful village.

ace. Tranquility. Old people wearing traditional hats and drinking tea. They were smiling when I ok photos and one of them said "Where are you from? I'm from Deutschland!"



Figure 6. Inside cover pages of Lemnaru's work.

the downfall and the rising of İznik. And it survived and raised from the ashes like a phoenix, proclaiming its majestic importance" (Figure 8).

Asan's second place is a public area characterized by a fifteenth century mosque, Eşrefzade Rumi Mosque, of which minaret only is dated to the fifteenth century and the remaining parts are recently built. However, centuries ago it was a part of a sacred complex including a dervish lodge and the tomb of Eşrefzade Rumi. She explains the reason of her choice as: *"The reason I wanted to discuss about this area was because in my opinion, it seemed a very festive area, with a carnival like atmosphere, and paved streets dedicated to pedestrians, trees that border the alleys and hide the sky... The community seemed very united and everybody recognized our faces- the outside-of-the community face, the tourist. And they smiled..."*. In Chapter 3, she tells the story of this mosque and explains her observations about the public life around it (Figure 9).

The third place Asan chooses is the Lake of İznik, and she begins with some lines of a poem from Nazım Hikmet Ran³:

This lake is Lake İznik

It is stagnant

It is dark

It is deep

Like a well water it is inward the mountains. She explains her preference with her sentences: *"This is the third place I chose as a time traveller. The lake area. Because it has the biggest potential*

³He is a famous Turkish poet lived between 1901 and 1963. There is a great plane tree in one of the villages of İznik in memoriam of him.

Journal* of a space-time traveler

The city of Iznik

stud.arch.Asan Yasmin

*Journal is defined here as a cognitive map (also: mental map or mental model) a type of mental representation which serves an individual to acquire, code, store, recall, and decode information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in their everyday or metaphorical spatial environment.



Figure 7. Cover page of Asan's work.

of development, and because it is the most contemporary place of all İznik, in constant change. It is alive at night, in antithesis with the rest of the city. Because the lake never sleeps". The location and natural and cultural environment of the lake including the underwater Byzantine basilica⁴ are described. The problems that threaten this cultural landscape are discussed briefly (Figure 10). She thinks that not enough attention is given to this city and concludes with her fears about the future of İznik.

Ayşenur Kılıç from Uludag University Architectural Program in Bursa titled her work as "Culture-Space and Time Interrelations in İznik" and gives the historical development of the city in detail. She also explains every monumental building of the city briefly. However, by describing the physical properties and explaining the historical development process in detail, she puts stress on three different monuments belonging to three different periods of time. These are the ancient city walls for Roman period, Hagia Sophia Church for Byzantine period, and Green Mosque for Ottoman period. Kılıç proposes some conservation strategies as a conclusion.

⁴It is probably built in the fourth century and collapsed during an earthquake in 740.

INTERIOR of Hagia Sophia Orhan Mosque (Ayasofya Mosque)

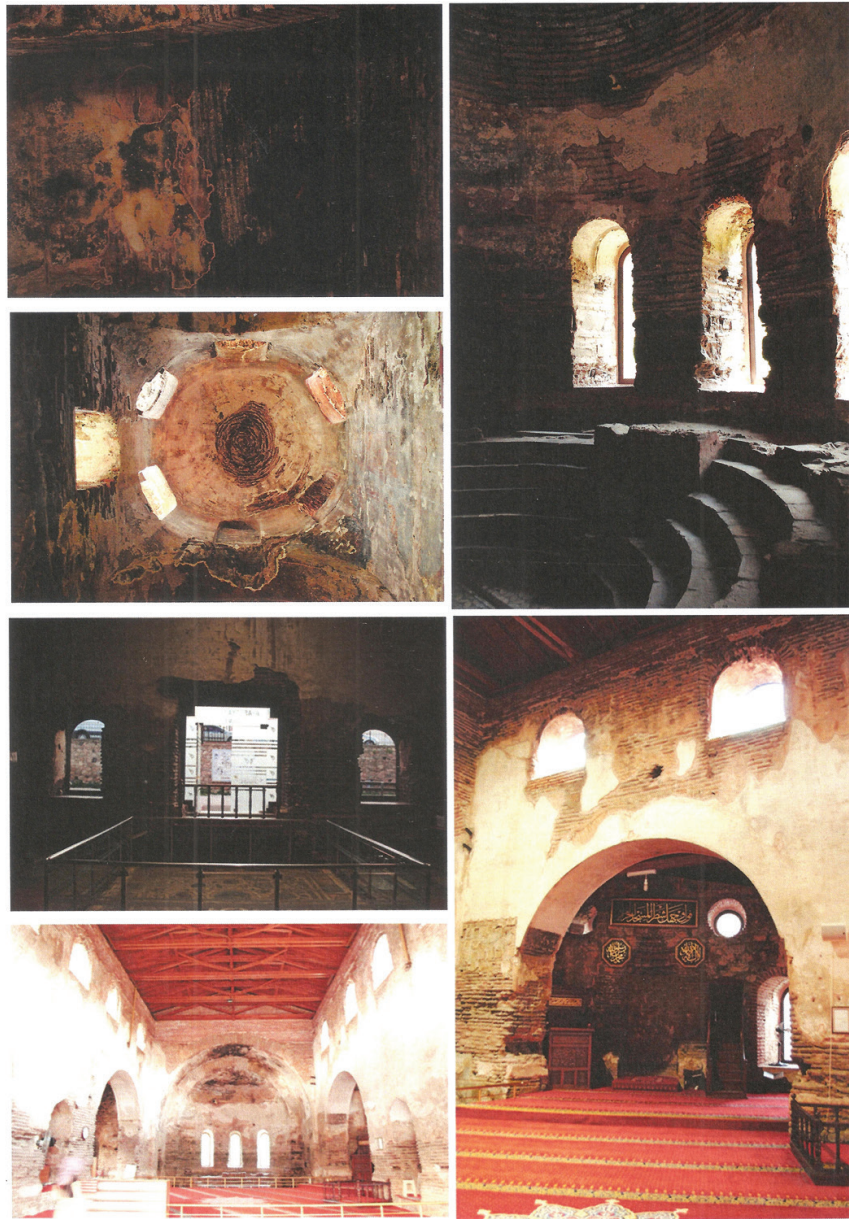


Figure 8. Some views of Hagia Sophia—Orhan Mosque from Asan’s work.

Pınar Tuğcu from Uludag University Architectural Program in Bursa discusses the interrelations of city and culture concepts in her work titled as *“Time and Space in İznik”*. She evaluates Rapoport’s ideas⁵ about the role of culture in environment and Lynch’s work⁶ on city and time. Then, she investigates time and space interrelations in İznik. She begins with analyzing her own cognitive map of İznik that she drew after her first visit (**Figure 11**).

⁵Amos Rapoport is a professor of architecture, who has been dealing with environment and behavior studies since 1960s. Rapoport [14, 15] are used in her study.

⁶Kevin Lynch was a professor of city planning who dealt with personal images of change and time in cities. Lynch [1] is used in her study.

Esrefzâde Rumi Mosque (15th century)

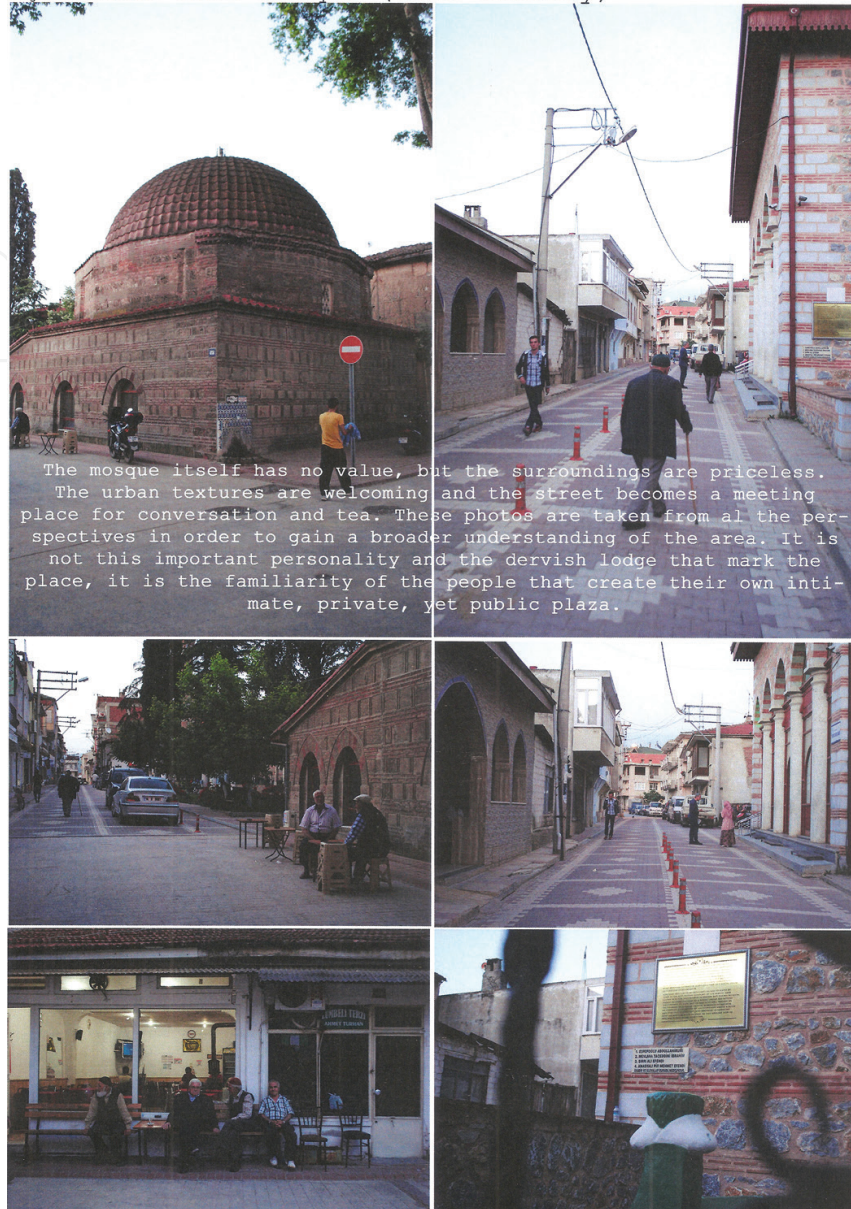


Figure 9. Some views of Esrefzade mosque from Asan's work.

As Kılıç does, Tuğcu also chooses different monuments reflecting three different periods of time. The ancient Roman Theater is the one from Roman period, and Green Mosque and Imaret of Nilüfer Hatun are from Ottoman period. Different than Kılıç, Tuğcu evaluates the city walls not as being a Roman monument but instead as the main element of city image from past to today. According to Tuğcu, the city walls had witnessed all of the civilizations in İznik throughout history without losing their importance. She examines the important buildings and public places of the city in relation with four main gates of the surrounding walls of the city and describes the walls, the water channels around the walls, and the gates in detail (**Figure 12**). She thinks that the most important and meaningful built elements of the city reflecting its palimpsest structure are these walls and gates.

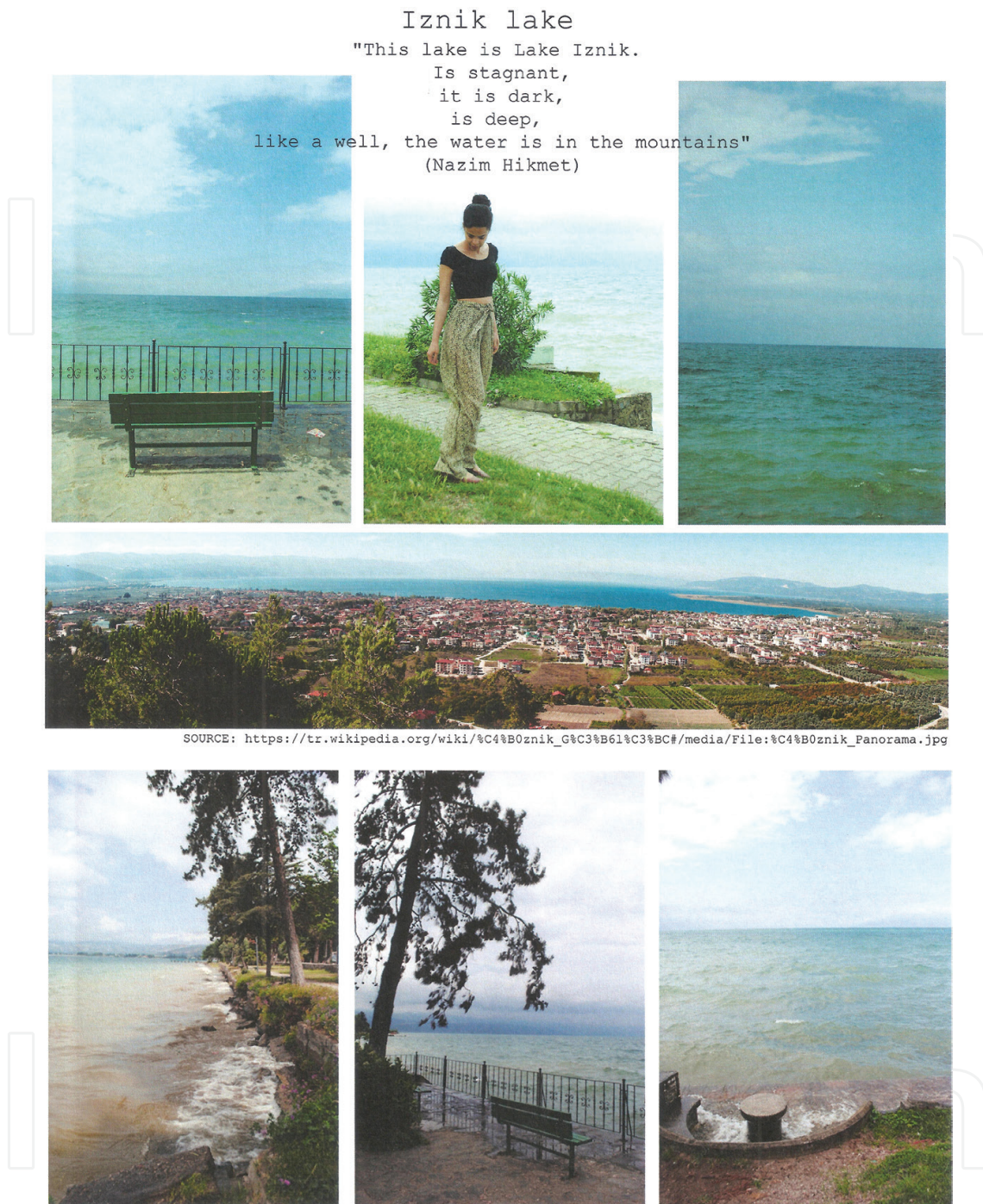


Figure 10. Some views of İznik Lake from Asan's work.

Viorel Cosmin Popescu from Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest is related especially with the urban layout of the city in his work titled as *"Time Traveller in the City of İznik"*. He analyzes the social and economic factors affecting urban development of the city. He uses his observations and archival analysis together in order to understand historical background from the interrelations of city network and the buildings. He especially deals with structural systems and materials of the buildings including houses in order to

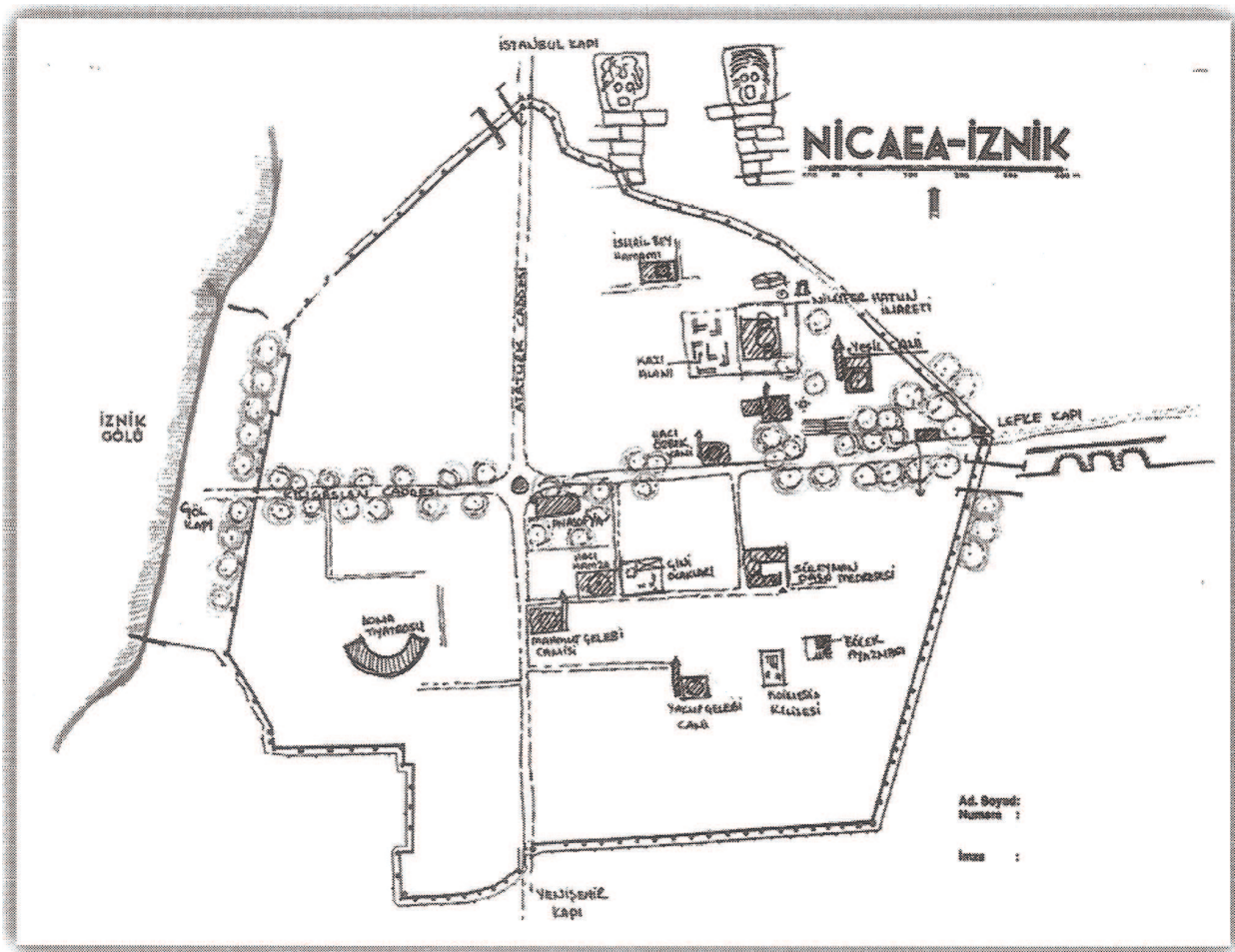


Figure 11. Tuğcu's cognitive map of İznik. İznik Gölü: İznik Lake, Göl Kapı: Göl Gate, Kılıçarslan Caddesi: Kılıçarslan Street, Atatürk Caddesi: Atatürk Street, İstanbul Kapı: İstanbul Gate, İsmail Bey Hamamı: İsmail Bey Bath, Kazı Alanı: Excavation Site, Nilüfer Hatun İmareti: Nilüfer Hatun İmareti (an inn for pilgrims), Yeşil Camii: Yeşil Mosque, Hacı Özbek Camii: Hacı Özbek Mosque, Lefke Kapı: Lefke Gate, Süleyman Paşa Medresesi: Süleyman Paşa Madrasah (an institution of higher education), Böcek Ayazması: Böcek Holy Spring, Kolmesis Kilisesi: Kolmesis Church, Yakup Çelebi Camii: Yakup Çelebi Mosque, Mahmut Çelebi Camii: Mahmut Çelebi Mosque, Hacı Hamza Camii: Hacı Hamza Mosque, Çini Ocakları: Ceramic Tile Ovens, Ayasofya : Hagia Sophia, Yenişehir Kapı: Yenişehir Gate, Roma Tiyatrosu: Rome Theatre.

determine the periods to which they belong. He thinks that when investigating any problem of a city's identity, all the related historical facts should be seen as parts making up the whole. He concludes with his sentences: "...To be able to define the identity of such an historical city, which combines positive and negative factors within itself, it would be necessary to find out its specific past and connect this with the present".

Tuğba Hümeýra Bilir from Uludag University Architectural Program in Bursa investigates the reflection of culture on the space in her work titled as "Impact of Culture on Space (İznik)". She explains the interactions between city and cultural processes and the role of time throughout the process using the related literature. Then, she gives brief information nearly about all of the monumental buildings. However, in the following parts of her study, she puts stress on the natural environment and especially the great plane trees identifying the main two axes—thus urban layout—of the city and their effect on her emotions about the city (Figure 13).



Figure 12. Some views of the gates and water channels of İznik from Tuğcu's work.

The common agreement of the young architects was that the city is more than just a physical entity, more than a place where people live and work. The aim of the assignment by letting them to be space-time travelers in İznik was to improve their imagination and make them to develop their own metaphors. However, only two of the students could use their imagination. Lemnaru and Asan were successful in presenting their 24-hour experience including their feelings and dreams about İznik.

Although the theoretical perspectives in environment-behavior research were discussed as a considerable part of the course throughout the semester, there were no obligations about the methodologies of the work. The only must was to spend a day in İznik. However, the final products were evaluated by means of proper preference of research methods, quality of the literary expressions, and presentation type.

At this point, Lemnaru and Asan used a phenomenological approach⁷ in their works. They were especially interested with why places are important for people and they searched for it via examining human actions, meanings, situations, and events in İznik. Kılıc and Tuğcu's works were descriptive. They made physical and archival analysis in order to describe the existing urban layout and its elements together with the probable reasons of the urban development process. Popescu and Bilir's works were composed mostly of a descriptive approach; however, they also included their emotions and subjective evaluations about İznik. Popescu was interested in the social and cultural life in the city. He described his observations about local people's way of life and urban livelihood and argued about the relations between urban pattern and socio-cultural variables. And his feelings let him to think about the previous lives that took place in the city. Thus, it can be said that Popescu and Bilir made use of both phenomenological and descriptive methods. All of the students used some of the major qualitative methods for environment and behavior research. These are observation of environment and people, interviews, mapping, photography, and drawing and interpreting historical documents.

⁷Phenomenology is the interpretive study of human experience. The aim is to examine and clarify human situations, events, meanings, and experiences "as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (von Eckartsberg, p. 3; from Seamon [16]).



Figure 13. A view from the perpendicular axis with the plane trees.

4. Conclusion

The way an urban space speaks about itself can be varied, but it always has an age of consecration, of architectural and artistic value, easy to detect. It gives clues to the visitors as well as to the residents about the historical, social, and cultural identity of the city. This identity is more or less subject to changes, but, in a succession of fundamentals of representation, it has defined a spirit of the place and predestination, a certain authenticity which history has managed to shape differently depending on the particular direct reaction to these. What the city expects from itself is seen in the image it offers, indicating to the residents the level of recognition they might expect as townspeople.

If we repeat our introductory questions as: *why do we like one urban space and other not? Why do we feel close to the town space we reside?* The discussion and interrogations can be multiple and diverse if we were to question the validity of the enunciated message, location, scale, and function. In a city where history wrote not only facts, great buildings, and spaces, but also essential traumas, their energy can be certainly converted into a positive message for the benefit of remembrance/memory, identity, sincerity, and meaning.

In a particular and characteristic way, İznik (Nicaea) talks about its history through architectural and urban space; through centrality, traffic axes and its specific landscape. A certain

cultural continuity is visible in the image of places, and this continuity plays a central role in the everyday life of İznik.

So as to conclude, it should be pointed out that to study the role of culture in environment and behavior interactions, one should understand the environment, including its physical and socio-cultural properties. Tracing the physical environment together with observing the social and cultural environment in a harmonious way would be a useful tool to investigate the role of culture in achieving a sufficient and healthy urban development process that provides people and communities a strong sense of identity.

This study has addressed two different issues, which are discussed in the context of environment-behavior interaction system that constitutes the great part of urban life. One is the space-time interaction affecting the culture and identity of a city and shapes everyday life. The other is the evaluations and interpretations of young architects on transformation of urban spaces throughout time and its effects on the identity of a city. As being architects, their understanding and interpretations about culture of a city are so critical because the basic aim of architecture as a discipline is to achieve sufficient and healthy urban environments for people, and this could be possible with identifying the importance of culture and benefits of culture-led development and using it in architectural and urban design.

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