

Reading the Urban Palimpsest: Historical Time and Urban History in Architectural Education

*Urban history can provide architecture students with a means of understanding the built environment as a product of overlapping temporal, spatial, and social processes. Yet in architectural education, historical knowledge is often approached through chronological narratives rather than as an interpretive practice. This study explores how a Braudelian approach towards historical time can contribute to the reading of the urban environment within architectural education. It draws on two consecutive iterations of the AR436 Architecture and Settlement in İzmir course, a technical elective offered to third- and fourth-year architecture students at İzmir Institute of Technology during the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 academic years. Over 14 weeks, students examined İzmir as a Mediterranean port city through the concepts of *longue durée*, *conjoncture*, and *événement*, with support from lectures, fieldwork, invited talks, and visual-analytical assignments. The study analyzes students' weekly, mid-semester, and final productions as evidence of how historical knowledge is translated into architectural and urban readings. Particular attention is given to the ways students select, connect, and represent various temporal and spatial layers of the city, including cases in which the same built environment is interpreted through different historical relationships. The study argues that a common historical framework does not necessarily produce a uniform reading of the city; rather, it can enable multiple interpretations of the urban palimpsest. In this sense, urban history can function in architectural education not simply as contextual knowledge instead of as an interpretive tool through which students learn to recognize how accumulated histories remain shaping the contemporary built environment.*

Keywords: *urban history; architectural education; urban palimpsest; historical time; Fernand Braudel*

Introduction

Urban history has an important yet sometimes underused role in architectural education. Beyond providing knowledge of past buildings and urban transformations, it can help students understand the built environment as the outcome of interconnected social, economic, cultural, and spatial processes. Architectural education, however, has often approached history through chronological narratives in which periods, events, and buildings appear as successive and relatively discrete units. Such an approach provides an essential historical framework, but may limit students' ability to recognize the coexistence of different temporalities within contemporary urban environments. Learning to read these relationships is particularly significant for architecture students, for

whom the existing city constitutes both a field of historical knowledge and the context within which architectural intervention takes place.

This article approaches urban history as an interpretive practice rather than only as a body of chronological knowledge. Its conceptual framework draws on Fernand Braudel's interpretation of historical time, particularly the distinction between *longue durée*, *conjoncture*, and *événement*. By directing attention to processes unfolding at different temporal scales, Braudel's approach provides a productive framework for relating architectural objects to longer geographical, social, economic, and cultural transformations. This perspective is particularly relevant to İzmir, whose development as a Mediterranean port city has been formed by long-term interactions among geography, commerce, migration, and cultural exchange.

The concept of the urban palimpsest further connects historical time to the reading of the built environment. Rather than understanding the city as a succession of completed historical periods, the palimpsest points out the coexistence of traces, continuities, transformations, and ruptures within contemporary urban space. From an architectural education perspective, this approach can shift students' attention from identifying historical facts toward interpreting the relationships through which places acquire architectural, spatial, and cultural meaning.

The present study draws on two years of teaching experience in the Architecture and Settlement course at İzmir Institute of Technology. Building on the author's earlier study of the course and its pedagogical framework, this study focuses on students' interpretations of İzmir's built environment. Rather than evaluating the course as a pedagogical model, the study examines how students mobilize historical time to construct architectural and urban readings, and how a shared conceptual framework may yield different interpretations of places. It argues that urban history can become a productive component of architectural education when students are encouraged not merely to reconstruct what happened in the city, but to read the ways in which different histories continue to shape the spaces in which architecture is encountered and produced.

From Historical Time to Reading the Urban Palimpsest

Historically, understanding the built environment requires a conception of time that surpasses the linear succession of periods and events. Conventional architectural history commonly organizes buildings and urban transformations chronologically, establishing a sequence through which historical change can be narrated. While such chronology is necessary for locating architectural production within its historical context, it does not necessarily explain the coexistence of processes operating at different temporal scales. Fernand Braudel's approach to historical time offers a productive alternative to this linearity by distinguishing between the relatively slow transformations of the *longue durée*, medium-term conjunctures, and the shorter time of events (Braudel, 1958, 1972). Rather than treating these temporalities as successive

1 stages, Braudel understands them as overlapping dimensions of historical
2 experience.

3 This distinction is particularly relevant to the study of cities. Urban
4 environments are produced through processes that unfold at different speeds:
5 geographical conditions persist over very long periods; economic, demographic,
6 and social structures transform over decades; while political decisions, disasters,
7 planning interventions, and individual architectural projects may occur within
8 much shorter periods. These processes do not simply follow one another. They
9 intersect and become materially embedded in the same urban environment.
10 Historical time can therefore be understood not only as a framework for
11 organizing events but also as a means of interpreting how different processes
12 become spatially connected.

13 Such a multi-temporal understanding is especially productive for reading
14 İzmir. The city's historical development is closely related to its geographical
15 position within the Mediterranean and to its changing role as a port and center
16 of exchange. Tekeli (2016) argues for situating İzmir within a wider
17 Mediterranean historical narrative rather than interpreting its history exclusively
18 through a local or national framework. This approach corresponds with Braudel's
19 treatment of the Mediterranean, in which geography constitutes an active
20 historical structure through which patterns of mobility, exchange, settlement,
21 and economic interaction develop over long periods (Braudel, 1992). İzmir can
22 consequently be approached not simply as a city that has passed through
23 successive historical periods, but as a Mediterranean port whose urban
24 development has been continuously shaped by relationships extending beyond
25 its immediate geographical boundaries.

26 The nineteenth century makes these relationships particularly visible.
27 İzmir's transformation during this period was associated with expanding
28 commercial networks, new infrastructures, demographic change, and the
29 increasing integration of the port into international systems of exchange.
30 Wallerstein's world-systems perspective provides a wider framework for
31 understanding those transformations by locating port cities within
32 interconnected economic networks rather than treating their development as an
33 internally generated process (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980). Zandi-Sayek's (2012)
34 study of Ottoman İzmir similarly demonstrates how the city's transformation into
35 a cosmopolitan port involved interactions among commercial actors,
36 communities, institutions, and changing forms of urban governance. Pamuk's
37 (2015) analysis of the Ottoman economy further situates these changes within
38 broader patterns of economic transformation.

39 The relationship between these processes and the physical city has been a
40 central concern of the author's previous research. Gelişkan's (2022) doctoral
41 dissertation examined the transformation of İzmir's nineteenth-century harbor
42 zone and urban fabric through a morphological approach, emphasizing the
43 relationship among changing port functions, urban structure, and architectural
44 transformation. This research was subsequently developed through a study of
45 İzmir as a Mediterranean trade port and Ottoman city, in which the city's
46 nineteenth-century transformation was considered in relation toward broader

1 Mediterranean commercial and cultural networks (Gelişkan, 2022). These
 2 studies provide a historical and morphological basis for understanding the
 3 contemporary city as the material outcome of processes that extend beyond
 4 individual buildings or discrete historical events.

5 A Braudelian approach therefore, shifts attention from individual historical
 6 moments toward the relationships among temporal scales. The geographical
 7 structure of the port, for example, provides a long-term condition; changing
 8 commercial and demographic networks constitute medium-term processes; and
 9 particular planning decisions, architectural interventions, or destructive events
 10 may represent shorter historical moments. Yet none of these operate
 11 independently. The significance of an architectural intervention lies partly in the
 12 longer processes that made it possible and in the subsequent transformations
 13 through which it acquired new meanings and uses. Architecture thus becomes
 14 one of the material sites where different temporalities intersect.

15 This understanding also complicates the relationship between past and
 16 present. Hartog's (2000) discussion of historical temporality draws attention to
 17 the different ways societies establish relationships among past, present, and
 18 future. From this perspective, the historical environment is unable to be
 19 understood simply as a collection of remains belonging to an earlier period.
 20 Historical traces may continue to participate in contemporary spatial practices,
 21 while their meanings can be transformed by subsequent social and architectural
 22 interventions. The present city, therefore, contains not only traces of the past but
 23 active relationships with different historical moments.

24 The concept of the **urban palimpsest** provides a spatial formulation of this
 25 condition. A palimpsest suggests a surface upon which successive inscriptions
 26 are made without necessarily completely erasing previous ones. Applied to the
 27 city, the concept illuminates the accumulation, transformation, concealment,
 28 persistence, and reinterpretation of historical layers. The urban environment is
 29 consequently neither an untouched survival of the past nor a complete
 30 replacement of previous formations. It is produced through the interaction of
 31 what remains, what has been transformed, what has disappeared, and what has
 32 subsequently been inscribed upon it.

33 For İzmir, the palimpsestic condition is notably crucial. Ancient settlement
 34 and infrastructure, Ottoman commercial structures, nineteenth-century port
 35 development, the city's cosmopolitan transformation, the rupture caused by the
 36 1922 fire, Republican planning interventions, and subsequent urban
 37 development constitute individual historical processes that remain
 38 interconnected within the contemporary city. They should not be understood
 39 merely as separate chapters in a chronological history. Their relationships are
 40 also spatial and material: streets, plots, buildings, infrastructures, institutions,
 41 and urban patterns may preserve traces of earlier processes while simultaneously
 42 participating in new configurations.

43 The author's previous work on AR436 *Architecture and Settlement in*
 44 *İzmir* approached this condition pedagogically by introducing students to İzmir
 45 through Braudel's historical methodology and encouraging them to consider the
 46 city across several temporal scales (Gelişkan, 2025). The course was conceived

on the premise that historical knowledge could serve as a means of reading the existing city rather than remaining a separate body of contextual information. The present study builds upon that framework but shifts its focus. Rather than examining the course's pedagogical structure, it analyzes the **interpretive productions students generate within this framework**.

This distinction is important because an urban palimpsest is not a fixed object that can simply be revealed through historical research. It requires interpretation. Different readers may foreground different layers, establish different relationships among historical processes, or attach different meanings to the same architectural and urban conditions. Consequently, teaching students to read the city historically does not necessarily yield a single, predetermined interpretation of its built environment. On the contrary, a shared conceptual framework may provide the conditions for multiple readings to emerge.

The analytical significance of the student productions examined in this study therefore, lies precisely in this interpretive dimension. The question is not simply whether students were able to reproduce historical information about İzmir, but **how they selected, connected, represented, and spatialized historical processes in their readings of the city**. The transition from historical time to the urban palimpsest consequently establishes the conceptual basis for the analysis that follows: Braudel provides a framework for identifying the coexistence of temporal scales, while the palimpsest offers a way to examine how these temporalities become legible within the built environment. Together, they allow student work to be considered not merely as an educational output, but as a form of architectural and historical interpretation.

Visualizing Historical Layers

If the urban environment is understood as a palimpsest in which different temporalities coexist, its representation requires methods that bring these temporal and spatial relationships into view. Within the AR436 course, collage became one of the principal means through which students translated their historical readings into visual form. Rather than functioning simply as a technique for assembling images, the collage assignments provided a means of placing different historical references, architectural fragments, maps, photographs, and contemporary observations into a common visual field.

The use of collage was particularly significant because the city's historical layers do not necessarily appear as clearly identifiable or physically continuous elements. Some remain visible in buildings and urban traces, while others survive through maps, archival representations, memories, infrastructural patterns, or changing relationships between places. Bringing such heterogeneous materials together, therefore allowed students to construct connections that could not necessarily be communicated through a linear chronological narrative.

Throughout the course, students completed a series of visual exercises. These included weekly studies as well as mid-semester and final submissions, through which their readings of İzmir progressed. The exercises did not ask

students simply to illustrate previously presented historical information. Instead, they encouraged them to select and juxtapose visual materials to establish relationships among different moments, scales, and conditions of the city.

This process can be understood as a form of **visualizing historical time**. The temporal distinctions introduced through Braudel's methodology were translated into spatial relationships within the image: long-term geographical conditions could be placed alongside changing urban structures; historical events could be related to architectural transformations; and contemporary observations could be brought into dialogue with archival material. The resulting collages consequently became interpretive constructions rather than neutral representations of the city. The importance of these visual productions also is found in their capacity to reveal differences among students' readings. Although the students worked within a shared conceptual framework and examined the same city, they did not necessarily identify the same historical relationships or assign the same significance to particular layers. Their selections, juxtapositions, omissions, scales, and visual hierarchies therefore provide a means of examining how historical knowledge is transformed into architectural interpretation.

The analysis that follows focuses on these visual productions not as illustrations of İzmir's history, but as **evidence of the students' ways of constructing historical relationships**. Particular attention is given to how the same or comparable urban environments can be reinterpreted through different combinations of historical layers. In this sense, collage operates as both a pedagogical instrument and an analytical object: it makes visible not only the layers of the city, but also the ways in which those layers are selected, connected, and given meaning by the students.

The conceptual framework introduced in the course did not remain limited to historical explanation. Through weekly visual exercises, fieldwork, presentations, and final assignments, students were asked to translate different temporalities into architectural and urban representations. The purpose of these productions was not simply to illustrate historical information, but to establish relationships between historical processes and the spatial evidence through which they could be read. In this sense, visual production became a means of historical interpretation. The students were required to move between geographical structures, social and economic transformations, and individual events, transposing these relationships into visual narratives rather than reproducing a linear chronology.

This approach develops the pedagogical framework discussed in the author's earlier study of AR436. There, the introduction of Braudel's three temporalities was intended to move students beyond an event-based understanding of history and toward an interpretation of İzmir as a Mediterranean port city shaped by processes operating at different speeds (Gelişkan, 2025). The earlier study demonstrated the value of introducing students to the relationship between geography, trade, settlement, architecture, and urban transformation. The present analysis takes the next step by examining the forms of historical interpretation that emerged in the students' visual productions. Rather than asking whether students reproduced the historical framework correctly, it asks how they

converted that framework into architectural readings. The resulting works can be grouped according to three recurring modes of visualization: temporal sequence, overlapping layers, and traces and fragments. A fourth group consists of comparative readings of contemporary architecture produced across the two academic years. These categories are not presented as mutually exclusive methodological types. Rather, they identify different ways in which students made historical time spatially and visually legible.

The City as a Temporal Sequence

The first group approaches İzmir through historical succession. In this chapter, the city is represented as a sequence in which one condition leads to another: commercial activity produces spatial transformation; political or financial changes alter the urban structure; and architectural forms emerge as consequences of these changing conditions. This mode of representation remains closest to conventional historical narration, yet the students' use of spatial and architectural evidence transforms the chronological sequence into an urban reading.

This distinction is important. Braudel did not reject chronology altogether; rather, he challenged the dominance of event history by demonstrating that historical processes operate at diverse temporal speeds (Braudel, 1992, 2004). In the course, students therefore began with a chronological awareness though were encouraged to question the assumption that history consists of a succession of isolated events. Their visualizations frequently turned chronology into a relationship between processes and spatial transformations. This transition from linear chronology toward relational historical thinking was one of the principal objectives of the visual exercises.

1 **Figure 1. Konak Pier**

The first example focuses on Konak Pier and explicitly organizes the transformation of the building through three historical periods: 1867–1935, 1935–1990s, and 1995–2002 and after. The first period identifies the building with its original function as a customs and port-related structure; the second follows its changing ownership and uses; and the third addresses its restoration, adaptive reuse, and transformation into a contemporary commercial complex.

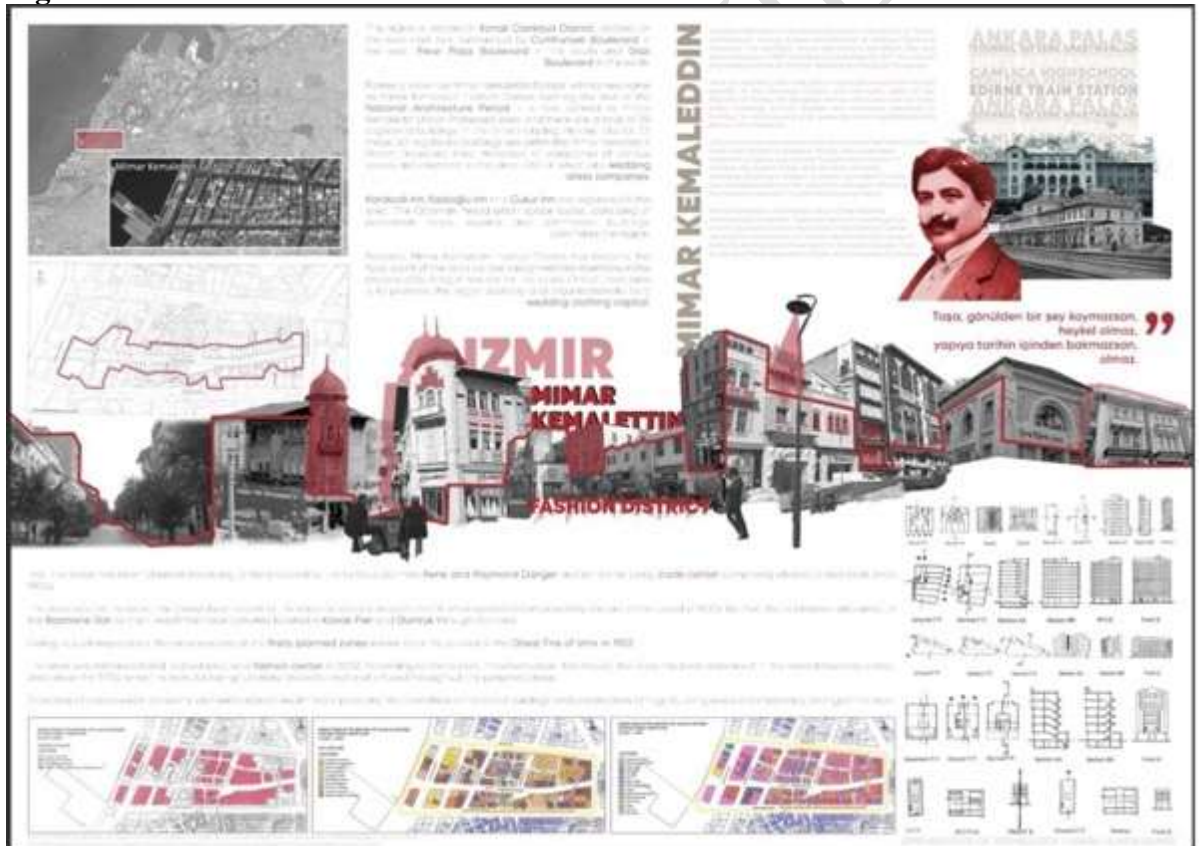
What makes this production particularly relevant to the present analysis is that the chronological sequence is not presented as a neutral succession of dates. The student also introduces Braudel's distinction between *conjecture* and *event* into the visual depiction. Broader processes such as the opening of the Ottoman economy toward Western trade and the development of foreign commercial

influence are distinguished from specific moments such as the construction of the customs building and its later transformation.

The historical sequence consequently operates at more than one scale. The building's transformation is connected to longer economic and urban processes, while particular dates identify moments at which those processes became materially visible. The second part of the analysis similarly relates modernization, post-Republican transformation, and neoliberal redevelopment to specific architectural and functional changes.

The collage can therefore be read as an attempt to translate Braudelien temporalities into a visual sequence. Rather than presenting Konak Pier as a fixed architectural object belonging to a particular historical period, the student constructs it as an entity whose meaning and function change through time. The building becomes a medium through which larger transformations in İzmir's commercial, institutional, and urban history can be observed.

Figure 2. *Mimar Kemalettin Fashion District*



The study of the Mimar Kemalettin Fashion District provides a particularly clear example of this approach (Fig. 2). Rather than treating the street as a collection of individual buildings, the student reconstructed its development through changing commercial activities, urban interventions, architectural production, and transformations of the street itself. The analysis connected the district's present identity to longer-term processes of commercial and urban change.

The poster establishes a temporal chain in which the district's earlier commercial role, the interventions associated with the early twentieth century, the development of the modern commercial center, and its contemporary identity are positioned in relation to one another. Mimar Kemalettin himself becomes part of this sequence, not merely as an architect whose buildings are cataloged, but as an actor situated within the transformation of İzmir's urban and commercial environment.

The visual structure of the work is especially important because it combines maps, historical photographs, architectural representations, street morphology, and contemporary images. The sequence is thus not only chronological but also spatial. The student's reading demonstrates how a historical transformation can be reconstructed by placing different forms of evidence into a continuous visual narrative. This interpretation corresponds with the author's research on İzmir's nineteenth-century harbor zone, where urban morphology was approached as the product of changing economic, infrastructural, and social conditions rather than as a static physical structure (Gelişkan, 2022). Similarly, Tekeli's interpretation of İzmir within a broader Mediterranean historical narrative provides a basis to understand the city's urban transformation as part of wider systems of settlement, trade and regional connectivity (Tekeli, 2016).

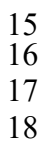
The temporal-sequence exercises therefore represent an important transitional stage in students' historical thinking. They begin with “*what happened when?*”, but the visual organization of their material gradually shifts the question toward “*what changed as a consequence?*”.

This distinction is particularly relevant in architectural education. A building can be dated, stylistically classified, and placed within a historical period without necessarily being understood as an urban product. The students' sequence-based readings begin to establish the missing connections between historical events and spatial transformation. In this sense, chronology becomes a tool rather than the final objective of interpretation. Taken together, the two examples indicate that even when students adopt a similar temporal reading, the visual form of that reading can differ considerably. The first student organizes history mainly through chronological periods and the relationship between *conjecture* and *event*, whereas the second reconstructs historical transformation through the spatial evidence of maps, buildings, plans, and urban traces. The distinction is important because it indicates that a shared historical methodology does not prescribe a single representational language.

The City as Overlapping Layers

If the temporal-sequence exercises represent historical change through succession, a second group approaches the city through simultaneity. In this part, different historical processes operating at different temporal and spatial scales are brought into the same visual field.

This reading aligns more closely with the notion of the urban palimpsest developed within the theoretical framework. A city does not simply replace one

14 **Figure 3.** *Konak Square*

11

12 **Figure 4.** *Tibaş Mass Housing*



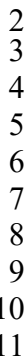
The TİBAŞ Mass Housing Site in Hatay offers a different but complementary example. Here, the student places a contemporary housing development within a much longer history of settlement, migration, urbanization, and architectural production. The poster establishes a visual continuum beginning with shelter and early settlement, moving through Yeşilova Mound, Kadifekale, and Smyrna, maritime and caravan trade, Ottoman infrastructure, the railway, the 1922 fire, migration, the declaration of the Republic, twentieth-century urbanization and postmodernism, and finally the TİBAŞ housing development. The contemporary project is therefore not presented as an isolated architectural object but as the latest visible condition within a much longer urban process.

The significance of this representation lies in the simultaneous presence of different temporal scales. The project's architectural form is interpreted through *longue durée structures*, medium-term urban transformations, and more immediate historical events. This is consistent with Braudel's insistence that historical interpretation requires the interaction of geographical structures, social and economic rhythms, and events rather than privileging any one of them (Braudel, 2004). The same methodological relationship was explicitly established in the course between geography, trade, infrastructure, architecture, and morphology.

In this case, therefore, the contemporary housing project becomes a point at which multiple histories intersect. The visual representation does not simply place the building at the “end” of a timeline; it makes the building simultaneously dependent upon and expressive of several historical layers.

The City Through Traces and Fragments

A third form of visualization emerges when students begin not from the continuity of historical layers, but from their partial survival. The past is not always preserved in a complete architectural or urban form. Some historical conditions disappear, while others survive through fragments, documents, photographs, spatial traces, or collective memory. This reading extends the palimpsest metaphor in an important way. A palimpsest is not simply a surface on which all previous layers remain visible. Some layers are obscured, erased, or only partially legible. Historical interpretation therefore, involves reconstructing relationships from incomplete evidence.



The Kültürpark study represents the trace of what is lost. Students does not approach the site only as the location of the contemporary park or the İzmir International Fair. Instead, the analysis reconstructs the urban condition that preceded it, particularly the multicultural urban fabric disrupted by the 1922 fire. The historical photographs and representations of pre-fire İzmir are situated in relation to the fire, the subsequent transformation of the area, and the establishment of Kültürpark. The visual narrative thus moves between absence and presence: the lost urban fabric is no longer available as a complete physical

1 environment, yet it remains apprehensible through historical images, spatial
2 references, and memory.

3 This is significant because the student is no longer simply **reading what**
4 **survives**. The student is reading the city through the evidence of what has
5 disappeared. The distinction between material continuity and historical memory
6 is particularly relevant to İzmir's urban history. The city's nineteenth-century
7 cosmopolitan development, for example, cannot be understood solely through
8 the buildings that survive today; it also requires attention to the communities,
9 economic networks, and urban spaces that shaped the city and were subsequently
10 transformed or erased (Bilsel, 2021; Zandi-Sayek, 2014). The Kültürpark
11 exercise makes this problem visible through architectural representation.

ONLY FOR REVIEW

ottoman bank

The Ottoman Bank was a financial institution that operated as part of the Ottoman Empire in major trade and port cities such as Izmir branches in these cities handled transactions such as financing trade, providing loans, exchanging money, and providing other financial services. The branches of the Ottoman Bank in Izmir may have contributed to the economic vitality of the region and supported the development of trade.

sea

Cumhuriyet Boulevard

Fatihpaşa Boulevard

first opening date: 1888
opening ceremony: 1890
laying the foundation: 1921
architect: Gülsü Mengin

conjunction

During the Crimean War in 1854, the Ottoman Government borrowed from abroad for the first time. Ottoman Bank (Bank-i Osmani) was established in 1868 when the state needed a bank to act as an intermediary in the payment of foreign debts. The bank, which provides financial support to the state, exports commodities and takes an active role in treasury transactions. It mainly extends branches in port cities. One of these branches is opening in Izmir, which has been an important port city throughout history.

general information

The Ottoman Bank Building is a four-story building located in Izmir and designed by Italian architect Paolo Benini. Its construction started in 1921 as a branch of the Ottoman Bank and it was opened for use on February 11, 1922. The building, which is among the examples of the First National Architecture Movement, is today used as the Osmanköy Şişli İzmir Corporate Branch Building.

1922 izmir fire

The Izmir branch of the Ottoman Bank, which was opened in 1888 and based on Second Kordon Street, became unusable in a fire that destroyed the city center on the night of September 15, 1922. The construction of the new building of the branch, which was moved to temporary locations, was decided in 1921.

land register

banking functions

Ottoman Bank was founded in Istanbul by British entrepreneurs Peter Pasquell and Stephen Skaith with the decree of Queen Victoria dated 24 May 1865. Over the years, its branch network expanded to Tripoli and Baghdad in Libya, Hama in the Hejaz and Beirut in the south of Iraq. During the expansion process, a branch of the Ottoman Bank was opened in Izmir at first known location is near the 304 zone Regional Directorate, which is currently located on Cumhuriyet Boulevard (Second Kordon).

Province: Izmir
District: Center
Sub-district: Kanak
Cadastral Plot No.: 27
Area: 951
Parcel ID:
Area: 832 m²
Function: A warehouse, an office, a detached masonry building with 4 storeys

plan design

When the plan features of the buildings of the First National Architecture period are examined, it is seen that most of them were designed in a single form, but we cannot say that this same is true for the Ottoman Bank. It is such arrangement is used in the windows and symmetrical planning approach is dominant. However, the plans were reshaped by some facade effects.

HAKAN SAHİN

facade design

The buildings constructed during this period shared a common feature in that their interior spaces are designed solely for function and simplicity. In way the facades are notably elaborated and vertically in the facades of tall buildings, and the monumental effect is heightened by the use of facades ornaments such as pointed arches and domes in Ottoman and Seljuk architecture.

TÜRKER LİHAZ

wet area

bank

library

turkish marriage room

octagonal corner tower

pointed arch

bursa type arc

flat arch

2

3

4

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56

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financial networks and to the transformation of İzmir into a port city. This approach closely aligns with the Ottoman Bank reading described in the author's earlier article, in which the students used archival material to examine the building as one of the financial structures through which the Ottoman Empire participated in the changing economic conditions. It also parallels the broader argument that economic networks, infrastructure, and institutional architecture need to be considered together when interpreting nineteenth-century İzmir (Pamuk, 2015; Wallerstein, 2004).

The two cases consequently establish a productive distinction:

Kültürpark reads the trace of what has been lost; Ottoman Bank reads the traces of what remains. In both cases, however, historical knowledge is produced through assembly. The student does not simply retrieve a pre-existing historical narrative. Instead, fragments of evidence are selected, juxtaposed, and interpreted in relation to one another.

Comparative Re-readings of Modern Architecture Across Two Academic Years

The fourth group shifts the analytical focus once again. Rather than asking how a particular historical layer is represented, these works allow us to examine how architectural interpretation itself changes when a contemporary building is read through the course's shared framework.

This is particularly significant because the course was taught in two consecutive academic years. The course content and assignment structure remained substantially consistent, while different students produced the visual interpretations. The comparison therefore, does not constitute a controlled pedagogical experiment; rather, it provides an opportunity to observe how a common theoretical framework can generate different architectural readings.

The four selected works comprise two readings of Balçova Cemevi and two readings of Arkas cultural buildings. Importantly, these two pairs do not operate in exactly the same manner. The Cemevi pair allows comparison of the same building, while the Arkas pair brings together two related contemporary cultural buildings through different narratives of historical continuity. This distinction is analytically useful rather than problematic.

Balçova Cemevi: From Cultural Identity to Spatial and Symbolic Reading

The two Cemevi studies demonstrate particularly clearly how the same contemporary building can become legible through different historical and architectural emphases.

1 **Figure 7.** *Balçova Cemevi exercise from 2024/2025*

2
3
4 One reading approaches Balçova Cemevi through social identity, cultural
5 representation, collective memory and public visibility. The building is
6 interpreted not simply as a religious structure but as a cultural and social
7 institution, and its relationship with the surrounding neighbourhood contributes
8 to this interpretation.

9 The other reading moves more explicitly toward spatial experience and
10 architectural symbolism. The students examine the cem hall, inner courtyard,
11 circulation, natural lighting and acoustic conditions. Specific spatial elements
12 are related to Alevi concepts and rituals. For example, the twelve roof openings
13 and the courtyard are interpreted in relation to *yol erkânı*, *meydan evi* and the
14 circular movement of *semah*.

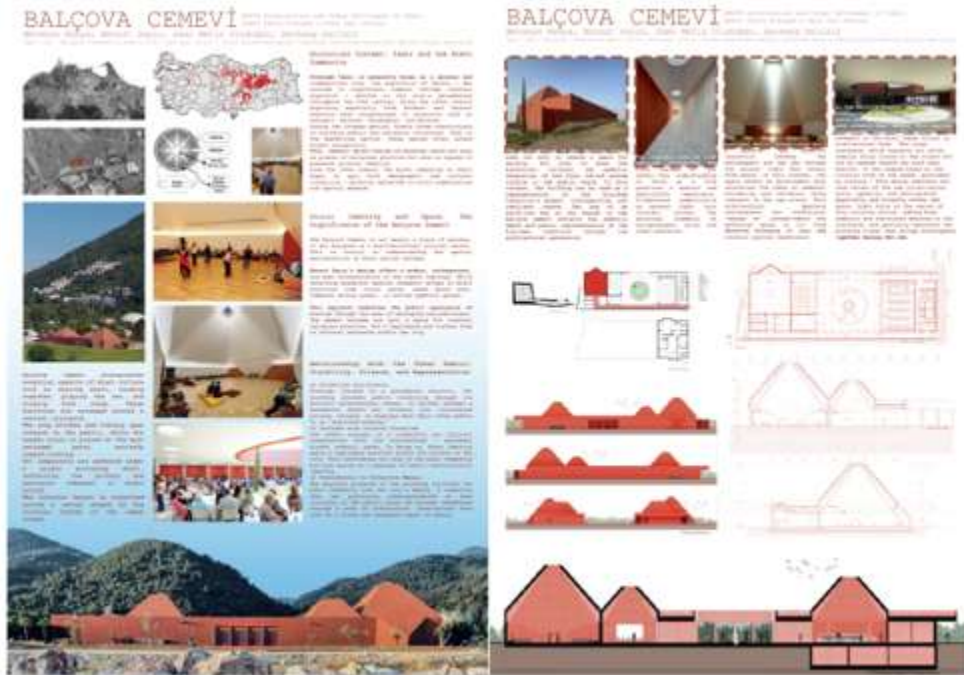
The difference between these readings does not indicate that one interpretation is more correct than the other. Instead, it demonstrates how a shared historical framework can support different forms of architectural inquiry:

social identity → cultural representation → collective memory

versus

ritual → spatial organization → light → architectural symbolism

Figure 8. *Balçova Cemevi exercise from 2025/2026*



The significance of this variation lies precisely in its interpretive character. The students are not merely applying Braudel as a fixed analytical template. They are mobilizing historical concepts to construct different relationships between architecture, culture and time.

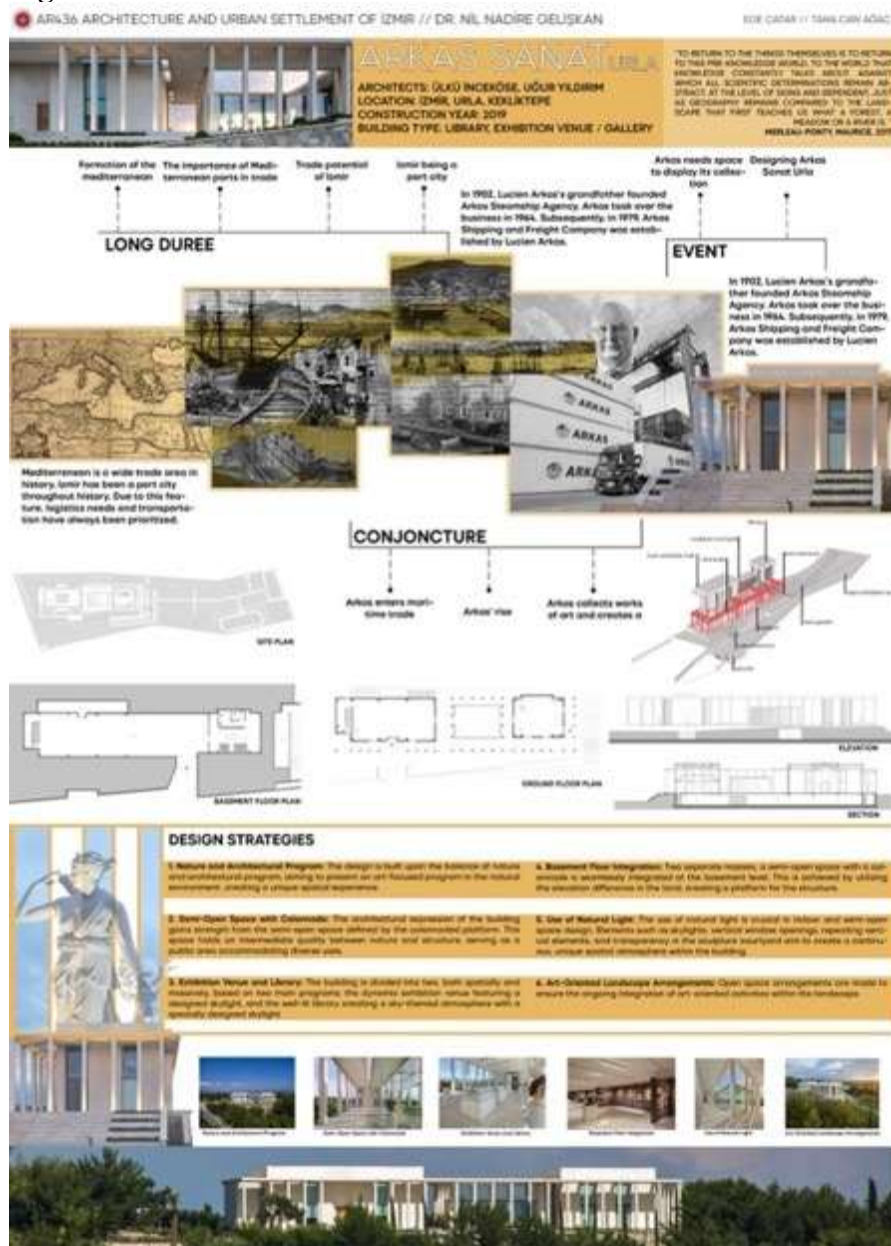
Arkas Art: From Commercial and Cultural Continuity to Contemporary Architectural Expression

The Arkas examples demonstrate a related but different form of variation. Rather than the same building being interpreted twice, two contemporary cultural buildings associated with the Arkas institution are read through different narratives of İzmir's historical continuity.

In the Arkas Art Alaçatı reading, the contemporary cultural building is situated within the Mediterranean and Levantine history of İzmir. The student's narrative connects the Arkas family's historical position within commercial and cultural networks to the contemporary cultural institution. Architectural elements such as the courtyard, stone walls and controlled natural light are then related to the local architectural context. The building consequently becomes an expression of cultural and historical continuity.

1 **Figure 9. Arkas Art Alaçatı**

The Arkas Sanat Urla reading places greater emphasis on İzmir's identity as a Mediterranean port city and on the long-term relationship between maritime trade, commercial networks and the Arkas family's economic history. The student explicitly organizes the narrative through Braudel's *longue durée*, *conjoncture* and *event*, moving from the historical significance of Mediterranean ports and trade to the family's commercial development and finally to the contemporary cultural building. The architectural analysis then turns to landscape, transparency, colonnades, natural light and spatial organization.

1 **Figure 10. Arkas Sanat Urla**

2 The difference can therefore be formulated as follows:

3
4 Arkas Art Alaçatı reads contemporary architecture through cultural and
5 historical continuity, whereas Arkas Sanat Urla reads it through the
6 transformation of a maritime-commercial legacy into contemporary cultural
7 production.

8 This is consistent with the broader observation from the earlier course study
9 that students could use Braudel's framework to connect the long and medium-
10 term history of İzmir with the architectural characteristics of a contemporary
11 cultural building.
12

Taken together, the four works demonstrate an important feature of the pedagogical experiment. The theoretical framework did not produce a single standardized method of interpretation. Instead, it provided students with a shared historical vocabulary through which they could construct different architectural arguments.

This is particularly evident when the Cemevi and Arkas studies are considered together. In the former, variation occurs around a common architectural object; in the latter, variation occurs between related contemporary cultural buildings. In both cases, however, students move beyond identifying historical dates and begin to establish relationships between architecture, identity, institution, cultural continuity, spatial experience and historical time. The earlier study of the course suggested that students adopted a more layered historical understanding through visual production, fieldwork and discussion (Gelişkan, 2025). The comparative evidence examined here adds a further dimension to that finding: layered historical thinking does not necessarily result in uniform interpretations. On the contrary, the same conceptual framework can increase the range of possible architectural readings.

From Visualizing History to Interpreting Architecture

The four modes identified above can therefore be understood as progressively expanding forms of historical interpretation.

Temporal sequence makes transformation visible through succession.

Overlapping layers make different temporalities visible through simultaneity.

Traces and fragments make historical absence and partial survival visible through evidence.

Comparative re-readings make the interpretive potential of the framework itself visible by demonstrating that the same historical vocabulary can produce different architectural understandings.

This progression is important for architectural education because it shifts the role of urban history from background knowledge to an active mode of architectural inquiry. The student's task is no longer simply to establish when a building was constructed or to identify its stylistic period. Instead, historical information becomes a means of asking how architecture is situated within geography, economy, social transformation, memory and cultural continuity.

The resulting visual productions consequently occupy an intermediate position between architectural representation and historical research. They are not historical scholarship in the conventional sense, nor are they simply graphic exercises. Their value lies in the act of selecting, arranging and relating evidence. Through this process, students become interpreters of the built environment rather than passive recipients of architectural history.

This observation is consistent with the pedagogical conclusions of the earlier study, which identified visual methods, fieldwork, and local history as

productive means of developing students' engagement with urban heritage. More specifically, it suggests that visual production can function as a form of historical reasoning: the collage, diagram or poster does not merely communicate an interpretation that has already been completed; its construction is part of the interpretive process itself.

In this sense, the student's encounter with İzmir becomes a movement from history as chronology to history as spatial interpretation. Braudel's temporal framework provides the conceptual basis for this movement, while the urban palimpsest provides its spatial counterpart. Together, they allow architecture students to encounter the city not as a sequence of disconnected historical periods, but as a continuously transformed field in which different histories remain present, overlap, disappear, and become legible through traces.

Conclusion

This study has examined how urban history can serve as an active mode of architectural interpretation rather than merely a chronological body of background knowledge. Building on the author's earlier pedagogical study of AR436 *Architecture and Settlement in İzmir*, the present research shifts the focus from the structure of the course itself to the visual and architectural readings produced by students over two consecutive academic years. The analysis suggests that introducing Braudelian historical time and the concept of the urban palimpsest enabled students to approach İzmir not as a sequence of completed historical periods but as a continuously transforming environment in which different temporalities, traces, and meanings remain connected.

The significance of this approach lies partly in the specific character of İzmir. As a Mediterranean port city, İzmir has been shaped by long-term geographical conditions, commercial networks, migration, cultural exchange, political transformations, and architectural interventions. These processes do not simply follow one another; they overlap, persist, disappear, and re-emerge in different forms. Braudel's distinction between *longue durée*, *conjoncture*, and *événement* offered students a vocabulary through which these different temporal scales could be brought into relation.

The analysis of student productions further demonstrates that this historical framework did not result in a single method of representation. Instead, four modes of reading emerged. Temporal sequence enabled students to reconstruct urban transformation through succession. Overlapping layers allowed different historical processes to be understood simultaneously within the same urban field. Traces and fragments directed attention to the partial survival of the past, including both what remains materially and what survives through memory and documentary evidence. Finally, the comparative readings of contemporary architecture demonstrated that a shared historical framework can generate different interpretations of the same building or related architectural contexts. These categories suggest that visual production can function not simply as a

1 means of communicating historical knowledge, but as a form of historical
2 reasoning.

3 This finding is particularly relevant to architectural education. The existing
4 city is simultaneously the object of historical study and the context in which
5 future architectural interventions will take place. Learning to recognize the
6 temporal and spatial relationships embedded in that city can therefore contribute
7 directly to architectural judgment. The student works examined here show that
8 buildings can be interpreted through economic histories, cultural identities,
9 institutional transformations, collective memories, architectural details, and
10 urban morphology rather than through stylistic classification alone. In this sense,
11 local urban history becomes closely connected to the act of architectural reading.

12 The two-year comparison is also important. The consistency of the course
13 framework, alongside variation in student interpretations, demonstrates that a
14 shared theoretical structure need not produce uniform results. On the contrary, it
15 can provide a common ground from which different architectural questions can
16 emerge. This is particularly visible in the paired readings of Balçova Cemevi and
17 the Arkas cultural buildings, where different emphases—identity, ritual, spatial
18 experience, cultural continuity, commercial history, and architectural
19 expression—produce distinct interpretations of contemporary architecture.

20 The study therefore, does not propose Braudel's methodology as a universal
21 pedagogical model. Rather, it demonstrates its potential as a productive
22 framework for architectural students working with historically layered urban
23 environments. The principal contribution of the course experience is the shift
24 from *learning about urban history to learning how to read through history*. As
25 the students' visual productions demonstrate, interpreting the built environment
26 as an urban palimpsest encourages them to recognize that architecture is never
27 encountered outside time. It is embedded within accumulated structures,
28 transformations, memories, and absences.

29 Ultimately, the value of this approach lies in positioning students not as
30 passive recipients of urban history, but as *active interpreters of the historic built*
31 *environment*. For architectural education, this shift offers a stronger connection
32 between historical knowledge and contemporary design practice: to intervene in
33 the city responsibly requires first understanding the multiple histories through
34 which its present form has been produced.

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