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## TO SEE OR TO PERCEIVE ARCHITECTURE?

Faruk Yalçın UĞURLU

Cankaya University, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Turkey

### ABSTRACT

*In general, environmental elements around us are perceived very instinctively. The common behavior is to look at the physical elements as objects surrounding us in order to serve us for different purposes. We have the right to destruct, change or deform them according to our short-term needs or expectations, and we usually do not force our brain to think about their reflective characteristics. Therefore, we pay no attention or choose not to care about why and how do they present their performance positively or negatively according to our feelings. Likewise, we usually have no idea about their design backgrounds, applied methodologies or existing principles. To look at them is not the only way to understand their sensitive potentials or meanings hidden underneath. In reality, there are other tools at hand to be able to have better outcomes and benefits from these organisms. By thinking and applying alternative methodologies, it can be possible to become aware of these differences.*

*Since the potential of human brain is totally affected by art and aesthetic values, improvement and transformation depends on the multidimensional perception of architecture through having a sense for details, being aware of risk limitations, and being able to manage them properly. For this purpose, education and training systems may be subject to change via reprogramming and editing. Subsequently, communication and relation structure between producers and users of architecture should be renewed scientifically. To see, perceive, sense or being aware and conscious are all different states in constructing the relations to architecture.*

*Keywords: Abstraction, Architecture, Design, Environment, Perception.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this contemporary age, although we constantly live in an architectural environment, it is surprising that most of us are not able to comment on how we look at, see or perceive architecture. Regardless of these expressions having any difference, there is very little concern on the evaluation of the architectural environment, how do we gain benefit out of it, is it good or bad, etc. Some may argue that "it can not be perceived but only lived in" and in fact most of the negativity on this subject arises not from the rightly or wrongly understood characteristics of architecture, but from the type of approach, which argues that it should only be lived in. It is a similar mentality like the one that only stares at the fading ecological balance of the nature and regrets it but that is not aware of the need to have urgent solutions. It is a critical necessity to be able to accurately perceive our environment at each content and context, through every scale and scope. Furthermore, any addition to or subtraction from it should be parallel and in accordance with its own rights, which means in a sense that architectural decisions and applications should be assimilated through extraordinary awareness. Maintaining the entire internal balance of the environment by way of feeling and





perceiving it would help us to carry on with our life within a different level of medium and standard of life that creates a multi-dimensional appreciation for the future (Da\_i, 1999).

The situation that is briefly outlined above is an issue that requires foremost attention for all individuals and societies. The reason is that all of the abstract and concrete roots of our life are directly influenced by this medium of understanding and comprehension, either positively or negatively. Therefore, we should immediately figure out ways to regain certain notions without completely losing some irreplaceable values. In particular, the artistic and aesthetic values, together with the totality of those values that are assumed to have a direct effect on the philosophical potential of human being, should be brought to fruition. The initiation of such evolution and transformation is directly related with the multi-dimensional perception of architecture, acquiring a sense for each and every detail of its peculiarities, and being aware of all the limitations of risks in managing them.

Consequently, the main aim of this study is to present a different perception methodology for architecture by creating a new state of mind that rests upon the knowledge of the **abstract**. As a designer or as an architectural product user, we should concentrate on perceiving the various parts not separately but in conjunction with the meanings or reasons that combine these parts as a wholly unified element. At this point, abstraction is in fact the search for being aware or conscious of the structure or structural meaning that encompasses the numerous diverse parts, while at the same time allows us to perceive all of the relationships, connection means and elements among the structural peculiarities of the whole system.

## 2. MAN AND ARCHITECTURE

Since the earliest periods of life, man has been struggling to control his environment. At the end of all of his efforts, we observe the gradual formation of scientific specialization and the emergence of architecture as one of its outcomes. Due to substantial population increase and as a consequence of technological improvements, we observe the proliferation of defined environments for people to live in, such as villoges or cities. Conventionally architects were supposed to be responsible of the creation of harmonious settlements for people to live in, however, because of the erroneous political, educational, and socio-economical impacts, the balanced aesthetic values of environment, which should be respected and influenced by professional processes, started to become demolished. Space has come to be modified by producers and users without any communal contact or consciousness.

Information theorists point out that the eye is able to handle an amount of almost 5 million bits of data per second, whereas the brain is able to process this data at a much slower rate. This gap results in what is referred as **selective attention** in perceiving the things around us, and naturally, the architectural environment, as well. It also leads to divergent individual or group cultural characteristics in reacting to different impulses coming from space and its various components. That is why designers should be highly conscientious in creating forms or functions, so that they hold suitable meanings to all perceivers. On the other hand, the users' conception, as the receivers of these environmental entities, is significantly affected by identification of what they want to perceive, which depends on their past experiences, culture and/or beliefs as well as their present mood or state of mind. (Güvenc, 1997) From this point of view, architectural abstractions may provide a useful support in any design process as a starting point to achieve an organization of space that is capable of stimulating positive energy. In view of that, the utilization of architectural space can be easily compared with the process of dialogue or communication because of the resemblance in the duality in between attitudes on qualitative or quantitative terms of architectural spaces.

In the daily life, people struggle about their life standards, environmental pollutions, loss of aesthetic values, etc. and they argue about the impact of visual pollutions on human and social psychology. Under the circumstances of political or economical influences breaking social interactions and bringing segregation of cultural standards, separate perception potentials emerge among different people. Moreover, as regulatory pressures start to dissolve or lose their weight on actual implementation, chaot-



ic outcomes come into view especially in cosmopolitan urban areas, which further creates a complex effect on individual conception (Chamber of Architects, 1999).

With this multiplicity of internal and external factors at hand, the relationship of man with architecture and the shaping of architectural environment should be thought and studied carefully. As all the components of life, from education, production, to recreation, together with all the major and minor activities, take part in different spatial organizations, the ability of adapting and living along with these various organizations of space, and tackling with the problems created by this physical atmosphere collectively depends on how to see, to perceive, to be aware, to be conscious or to understand these physical or psychological peculiarities of this organization deeply in detail. In order to obtain the utmost benefit from architectural products and to be using them successfully depends on having a satisfactory notion about the meanings behind the physical elements, forms, textures, colors, and structures, in part and as a whole. The complete awareness of form or mass of any architectural spatial organization is deemed to help the users in creating a proper revenue quality from architectural environments.

### 3. ARCHITECT AND ARCHITECTURE

As we search about psychological behavior of human being, we should also criticize the architects and architecture within their professional life and their education or training and application systems in total. There should also be emphasis based on **occupation interference** in perception. As architects, when we are designing space, we may find ourselves under the influence of the preconception that some factors are incontestably right for the users, which is in fact, a misleading critical impulse that comes out directly from our preconditioned state of mind as an architect (Lindersmith and Strauss, 1968).

Possibly, to avoid this defect in the ancient periods when becoming an architect had been very different as they used to be educated and trained in the company of their pioneer masters, designing and applying architecture as a complete entity. In the contemporary system, the professional practice developed to be highly fragmented with specialization at each step of the production. As a consequence, the diverse members of the architectural production team is required to have an overall consensus in understanding the different aspects of their profession and influencing the outcomes with their responsibilities in specialization. Effective and efficient harmonization in between professions is particularly important in approaching the systematic architectural problems that originate from the intrinsic deficiencies of the various social, economical, cultural, psychological settings and their numerous superimpositions.

### 4. CONSEQUENCES

Human being is usually under the direct or indirect impact of different influential factors; where on the one hand, these impacts come from internal accumulations and superimpositions, on the other hand, some of them occur due to external conditions, such as environmental impacts. Therefore, the cross-section of these two major factors comes out as the activator in the system of conception.

To give an example, man with his natural instincts, may automatically adapt to new environmental conditions positively or negatively, with respect to his comfort condition standards. However, the initiation of this interesting process depends upon the important role of the internal system structure, which perceives all of these conditions, comments and generates a feeling for them by utmost assimilations. The main sources forming this internal dynamism are considered to be genetic, socio-cultural and psychological brain productions that emerge as the aggregation of traditional accumulations.

Since it has been pointed out that the perception of individuals is highly determined by the abovementioned internal processes, it should implicitly be clear that the basic task falls on the architects – as catalysts in the occurrence of all of the archi-





tectural values, along with dissemination and optimum positive utilization of the perception and the feeling by society – during the transition stage from individual to society or vice versa.

A very clear example of this new proposed process can be given as the understanding in the health system. Although the issue of health had commonly been treated through individualistic approaches earlier in the past, at present, it is understood that it is not possible to achieve positive results without having full appreciation of social health in its entirety. Taking this viewpoint into account in the methodology of design, we should realize that application and utilization of all life and production spaces, together with their environmental conditions or standards, are interrelated with each other. Similar to the art of a tailor, who utilizes his inputs to produce outfits by controlling all of the positive physical comfort conditions of human body, architectural or urban spaces should be created in accordance with multi-dimensional economical or durational conditions, as they come to have an overall importance in influencing the people forever. The reason is that dimension, in any sense, scale or stage, automatically becomes social and therefore, in this systematic process, one should not overlook that the dimensions of positive and negative impacts or their importance are directly related to the multi-factorial (socio-economic, cultural, etc.) development levels of different countries.

In this presented approach, since we concentrate on the unavoidable conjunction of individual life with the processes of social life, we see that it is also inevitable that the physical, social, psychological, economical, and cultural impacts of an architectural space on the individual or on the social structure, directly or indirectly, carry and transfer all these values among individuals and society, either positively or negatively. Therefore, the eminence of an architectural product is directly linked to the measurability of the eminence of the social life and the eminence of cultural accumulation, which are believed to have direct contributions to it. The standards that exist in a living environment at a European or a North American city and how the behavioral aspects of people, the resulting social interrelations and culture in those regions are defined correspondingly can be taken as examples. On the other hand, in the case of Turkey, as a rapidly improving country, the positive or negative impacts of environment that influence any development are directly related to the main assumptions covered in the architectural design of an environment. Against all the economical problems and shortages in the early Republican period of Turkey, it was possible to observe much more evenly distributed spaces whose elements contained superior standards and almost untouched natural balances with respect to the present. Individuals were directed towards production very positively then, whereas now, the perceived distorted urbanism and crooked natural balances, on the one side, influence the psychological structure of people negatively and on the other, cause gross losses brought by economical processes creating irrational social interrelations.

#### 5. ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION AND CULTURE

The present-day architectural education and training systems exhibit roots from the teaching and learning processes of medieval ages where students are expected to orient themselves to imitate certain previous experiences. In general they have no transfer of learning or creative applied education system that would facilitate understanding to present and discuss their personal scientific abilities to improve supply and demand mechanisms in producing and utilizing an architectural product. Besides, almost all of the architectural education programs in Turkey offer more or less the same curriculums through nearly similar content and context with identical application principles. As a consequence, inferior graduates get away by choosing to abide by the existing predetermined rules directly, creating highly negative outcomes, whereas the better ones choose to discard the basics with the over confidence that comes from their design potentials, feeling free to produce extremely different spaces which lack harmony within the total environmental unity.

At present, there are free university systems in developed countries that are designed to offer endless curriculum planning options and so they provide students the flexibility of choosing different lecture packages in order to achieve an open-minded

background for creative intellectual accumulation. Architects coming from such a stimulating configuration may indeed be able to construct proper points of contact with ordinary people who will utilize their products, which in turn is expected to lead to a number of positive upshots such as appropriate perceptions or feelings and sensing multi-dimensional potentials of the created architectural spaces that fit directly to their needs. As a result, these new architectural environments may be able to create the total aesthetic and functional spatial organisms that conform to their natural infrastructure, which are also able to adapt themselves to the ecologically proved flexibilities.

#### **6. ARCHITECTURAL THEORY AND DESIGN EDUCATION**

Architectural theory and design education in any system or program of architectural training should contain practical application means together with certain adaptable qualities that provide flexibility for future needs and changes. In Turkey, constructing theory and supporting it with practical finding that is fed by application is difficult to achieve, especially in applied sciences. The only exception is medical practice where, even though a limited number of researches can find application in hospitals, it is possible to directly share the outcomes with other professionals in the practice. Despite its negative sides, such as certain unexpected and harmful results, it proves to be a better functioning system as it offers a milieu for the observation of actual and results, which also facilitates the scientific gaps between other countries to become smaller. However, in the architectural environment, especially in poor housing applications, it is not possible to think about the perceptual competence of people because of the lack of comprehension potential in their minds to appreciate architecture, which creates a negative reflection and related negative occurrences over professional applications. Moreover, these negativities directly influence further difficulties and deficiencies in socio-economic standards, leading to a psychologically depressed population (Teymur and Al, 1997).

#### **7. ACHIEVING IMPROVEMENT STEPS**

In order to understand and achieve improvement in the differences in thinking, looking, seeing, perceiving, being aware and being conscious in architecture, some interesting discussion topics are presented below together with notes parallel to our solutions to the problems to be able to put forward some hints for tackling with the above facts. It is aimed that the psychological progress in below subjects creates a valuable methodological approach in terms of theory-practice relationship (U\_urlu, 2000) to the aforementioned predicaments.







### 7.1 Abstract and Concrete / Art and Architecture

<p><i>"Art should not be explained but lived."</i></p>	<p>According to this understanding, if you cannot explain anything, then the ideal case of having a societal capacity or standard which can understand, perceive and feel architecture will not be able to become realized.</p>
<p><i>"Architect is the owner of the spaces he has designed, users are the guests."</i></p>	<p>This is not acceptable because in order to have maximum revenue out of architectural products, architects should illuminate the users on the various aspects of the particular design to realize one of the major goals, which is efficiency.</p>
<p><i>"Architect is a type of drama producer. Actors are the ordinary people."</i></p>	<p>More accurately, architect is supposed to be the actual motivator of these actors in order to be able to accumulate support from these ordinary people, which would help to enhance artistic strength through creating boundaries of communication with the clients, users, or the contractors for achieving better solutions, perceptions and feelings. However, the main idea is to be able to contemplate on the question of 'what do we expect from an architectural product?' Is it only a physical entity or a multi-dimensional whole?</p>

### 7.2 Sample arguments and concepts from various architects / Understandings by different viewpoints and perceptions

<p><i>"A time-adaptable space."</i></p>	<p>Why it is not practical to take the valuable ancient architecture and utilize it in the contemporary world? What are the influencing factors? Is it possible to minimize them by creating a new design method?</p>
<p><i>"One of the proofs of a successful architecture is the utilization of that building parallel to the goals of the architect."</i></p>	<p>It is argued that not only the quality of the architecture but also factors such as unconscious clients, users, contractors, or developers that lack architectural perception or feeling cause unwanted results.</p>
<p><i>"Architectural products are not produced by the artist himself. Architect composes the music which will be performed by the others."</i></p>	<p>If the professional application principles are approached seriously and if the activities and team organizations can be controlled systematically, it may be possible to automatically create different outcomes involving different perception or feeling standards.</p>
<p><i>"Architecture does not transfer any close or private message from one person to another."</i></p>	<p>It is not acceptable, as many successful architectural products search for an important message that can be transferred to the whole society in order to improve the quality of perception in spatial organizations, which adds a new design potential to the artist, as well.</p>



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<p><i>"Soft and hard form definition is a complex and relative definition."</i></p>	<p>Formal definitions cannot solely be considered as soft or hard, where there can also be specifications such as abstract or concrete, static or dynamic, etc. The meanings that we achieve from forms help us to attain efficient perceptions.</p>
<p><i>"Even the most sensitive explanation of all the façade peculiarities of an object cannot give the directly created real feeling to us."</i></p>	<p>The main question here does not depend upon the perceiver but on the designer who creates the design with certain missing points. In this case, the best approach is to choose a way of multi-sided explanation to create positive psychological reflections with maximum sensitivity and standards.</p>
<p><i>"To understand the architecture is totally different than specifying the style of a building from its appearance."</i></p>	<p>To specify the style of a building is not so important, but the crucial thing is to contribute to a minimum cultural level of each individual to feel the architecture.</p>

## 8. CONCLUSION

Deriving from the fact that perception is highly influenced by individual interests, beliefs, attitudes, and certain other personal attributes coming from our individuality, it is concluded that perception is highly subjective and selective (Runyon, 1977). Perception is subjective in the sense that it takes place in the mind of the receiver, and it is selective because the personal capability of human being is not sufficient enough to perceive all the stimuli around us, which subconsciously leads to the selection of a number of elements to pay attention or to react.

Although the above statements provide a very concrete base for perception, when the issue is approached from the viewpoint of the whole society, especially creative designers and architects, it is easily perceived that in any of the relations between the environmental elements and human being, there is the contextual emphasis and the significant position of abstract art perception.

Alongside these ambitions, it should be pointed out that the consciousness of artistic aesthetical perception ability, that is one of the basic and important privileges of being human, cannot be considered sufficient, hence, the reflex consciousness that belong to this ability should be aimed to mature and made possible to put forward.

Parallel to this attempt, the need for the construction of a lifetime durable and sustainable education and training system is indisputable. The process for choosing, deciding, and applying study areas in the fields of basic design and design should also follow a course with creative, original, and precise roots.

In the realization of the above mentioned approaches for achieving better environments that are created by these different perceptions, feeling perspectives and standards of societies, together with duties and responsibilities is required to be shared by all the actors involved in planning and political decision-making.





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#### Communication Address

**FARUK YALÇIN UĞURLU**

Cankaya University, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture,  
Department of Interior Architecture,  
Öğretmenler Cad. No:112, 100. Yıl, 06530 Balgat/Ankara, Turkey  
Phone : + 90 312 284 4500  
Fax : + 90 312 284 8043  
E-mail : fyugurlu@cankaya.edu.tr / fylcinugurlu@hotmail.com

N. Kural , S. Özaloğlu, S. Tannöver, S. Ertez Ural,S.Yılmaz	
Akdeniz: Mekan - Beş Duyu - Bellek .....	334
R. Coşkun	
Zamanın Tik-Takları .....	341
A. Güçhan	
Sanat Üzerinden Savaş Üzerine .....	344
M. Sözen	
Sinemacı Gözüyle Kentlere ve Kentsel Mekanlara Bakmak .....	350
B. Taranç	
Kıbrıs Türk Uygarlığına Özgü Beş Sabah Feslinin Akdeniz Kültürü ve Müzik İlişkisinde Değişim Dönüşüm Bağlamında Çözümlemesi .....	357
H. Atun	
Kent Peyzajında Görsel kalite ve Gazimağusa Üzerine Bir Öneri .....	365

## CASE STUDY / ALAN ÇALIŞMALARI-ÖRNEKLER

English / İngilizce

Jorge Correia	
Processes of evolution from Mazagão to El Jadida .....	373
M. İnceoğlu, İ. Akpınar, B. Serdar Köknar	
The Making of a Public Space: Re-reading Antakya .....	381
A. Kocabay	
Globalisation, earthquake resistance, EU harmonisation and the re-conceptualisation of conservation planning in Istanbul .....	388
N. Yeşilkaya	
Transformation of Istanbul in the Early Nineteenth Century .....	396
A.D. Oktaç, M. Ulusoy	
The Transformations Created on the Natural and Architectural Places by Cultural Alterations: Konya - Meram Orchard Region Sample .....	403
M. Ünder, M. Moh'd	
A Study on the Architectural Identification of St. George of the Latins in Famagusta .....	415
B. Özad, U. Kutoğlu	
Gypsy Travellers in Gazimağusa .....	424
B. Oktay	
Tourism Impacts at the Coastal Cities: Case of Girne .....	433
A. Tannkul, C. Atakara	
Sustainable Developments for Coastal Problems in Kyrenia, Cyprus .....	441





## ■ CONTENTS / İÇİNDEKİLER

PREFACE / ÖNSÖZ .....	xii
MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING RECTOR OF EMU / DAÜ REKTÖRÜ'NÜN SUNUŞU .....	xiv
MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR OF GAZİMAĞUSA / GAZİMAĞUSA BELEDİYE BAŞKANI'NİN SUNUŞU .....	xvii
KEYNOTE (SPEAKERS) / DAVETLİ KONUŞMACILAR	

Henry Sanoff Participation in Community Planning .....	3
Attilio Petruccioli Mediterranean Typological Processes .....	15
Beral Madra Enlargement of EU Cultural Policy as Seen From East of EU .....	21
Hilmar Von Lojewski Berlin-Planning the Federal Capital Approaches Towards Unification of a European City .....	25

## THEORY / KURAM

English / İngilizce

A. Çetin, I. Öztürk, F. Adgüzel Restoration of Traditional Arts Existing in the Architectural Areas .....	33
M. Yılmaz Momentum, Metamorphosis And Cultural Continuity In The City Centers .....	42
D. Aydın, D. D. Gürçan The Change Of Surface In Dwellings as Border Element In The Process of Urbanization, Applications-Theories .....	51
M. Stanton, M. Eiletz, S. Wall Waterfront Development in the Mediterranean .....	61

Turkish / Türkçe

K. Cihangir Çamur 20.Yüzyıldan 21.Yüzyıla Geçiş Sürecinde Kamusal Alan ve Kamu Yararı Kavramları: Hayek, Friedmann, Buchanan'a Göre Kentsel Mekandaki Dönüşümün Çözümü ve Kent Planlama Bağlantıları .....	69
--	----



I. Ergin, M.B. Sileydin, D. Çukur, M. Efe Hedeflenen Kentsel Dönüşüm Sürecinde Planlamanın Sosyal - Ekonomik Ve Ekolojik İçerikle Yeniden Tanımlanması	77
C. Elker Kent Merkezlerinin Dönüşümünde Kullanılabilecek Yöntemler	86
H.P. Kiper Küreselleşme Çağında Kentlerin Tarihsel-Kültürel Kimliklerinin Korunması Sorunu	95
H. İ. Düzenli, E. Aydın Akdeniz'de Mimarlık Teorisi Ve Pratik:Akdeniz Ve İslam Medeniyetleri Bağlamında Turgut Cansever'in Akdeniz Projeleri	102
İ.Yurdakul Akdeniz'de Düşünsel Açılımlar	114
H. Erhan Bir Fidan, Bir Orman, Bir Orman, Bir Vatan	126

## APPROACH / YAKLAŞIM

English / İngilizce

J. Schmidt A History of a Mediterranean Example in Dutch Town Planning	133
M. Gibson, A. Kocabaş Improving Prospects for the Regeneration of Deprived Neighbourhoods in Turkey	137
C. İnceruh An Approach to Rediscover the Typology and Morphology of Urban Space Elementary Objects	146
F. Y. Uğurlu To See Or To Perceive The Architecture?	159
Y. D. Yüksel The State Of Art In Research On Housing	167
E. Günce Sideways and Bikeways	173
M. Walsh Saint Peter and Paul Church (Sinan Pasha Mosque), Famagusta: A Forgotten Gothic Moment in Northern Cyprus	181
B. Madran Museums As Milieu of Affirming Mediterranean Social Identities And Museum Effect In Social Dynamics of Med-Coast Cities	191
N. Yıldırım Cyprus within the Vision of Dante	199



A. Dener Popular Culture, Art, City: Sensitivity, Naivete, Resistance and Reaction	206
H. Akdeniz, H.I. Aydınli The Usage Of Geographical Information Systems In The Urban Planning Process	212
H. Z. Alibaba, U. Atkol Sustainable Approaches on the Application of Plumbing Systems in the Rapid Development of Gazimagusa Buildings	219
M. Ozdeniz, P. Hancer Suitable Roof Construction for Warm Climates-Gazimagusa Case	230
M. Dinsev, M. Moh'd Optimal Building Structural System Selections for Famagusta	238

Turkish / Türkçe

T. G. Köksal, H.H. Kargın Akdeniz'de Suyla Gelen Kültürün ve Mimarinin İzleri	248
N. Görer Geçmişten Günümüze Su Temini: Yağmur Suyu Hasadı ve Sarıçılar	256
D. Demirarslan, O. S. Aytöre Akdeniz ve Ege'de Kent Kültürünün Oluşumu Açısından Kıyı Kalelerinin Önemi	264
E. Kasapoğlu Akdeniz Kültürünün Akdeniz Kentine Yansımaları	273
F. Gezici, A.G. Yazgan, E. Alkay Kıyı Alanlarında Turizm Gelişimi ve Dönüşüm Etkileşimi: Bodrum Yarımadası Örneği	280
Ö. Algan Türkiye'nin Kuzey- Güney Mimarisi ve Yaşam Tarzı	294
L. Varlık Şentürk Toplumsal Değişimlerin Sanata Yansıması	298
M. Nalçakan, Ö. Kandemir Kalıcı Banş Ortamı Arayışında Toplulararası İletişim Aracı Olarak "Muze"	303
D. Göçer, K. Göçer 23 Nisan Sonrası Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın Mekansal Örgütlenmesine İlişkin Bir Model Çalışması	309
A. Yıldırım Kıbrıs'ın Solan Rengi, Cengar Gerçeği ve Tüklenen Verdigris	316
F. E. Ardaman, A. Kuruç, N. Deniz Kentin Renkleri - Renklerin Kenti	321
S. Özgencil Yıldırım Akdeniz İmgesi	329





M. Fesli , Nil Paşaoğulları Strategies to Enhance the Qualities of Two Traditional Quarters in Kyrenia -Liman arkası, Türk Mahallesi- for Tourists Attraction .....	449
M. Şahin An Island Caught Between: Gökçeada / İmroz .....	454
S. Şabır, E. Şener The Importance of Urban Furniture in Urban Spaces .....	463

Turkish / Türkçe

R. Taranç Akdeniz Kültürünün Özgün Coğrafyasında Sinematografik Değişim ve Dönüşüm Serüveni .....	470
Z. Ç. Özkan Akdeniz Ülkeleri Filmlerinde Mimari Yapı-İnsan İlişkisi .....	476
Z. H. Tokay Doğu Akdeniz Havzası ve Çukurova'da, Tarih Öncesi Çağlardan Günümüze Bir Mimari Gelenek: Dal Örgü Ahşap Yapı Tekniği, "Huş" Evi .....	484
Z. Öngül, A. Tozan Kıbrıs'ta Antik Kıyı Kentleri Soli ve Salamis'ten Günümüz Mağusa Kentine Referanslar ve Eleştiriler .....	494
S.G. Bilisel, E. Polat Doğu Akdeniz'de İki Tarihsel Liman Kenti İskenderun ve Gazimağusa: Değişim / Dönüşüm Süreçlerine Birlikte Bakış .....	502
T. Gazloğlu Surlar İçı Lefkoşa Türk Kesimi Tarihi Kent Kimliği ve Koruma-Yeniden Canlandırma Çabaları .....	513
H. Alkan Bala Kentsel Gelişim ve Dönüşümün Estetik Düşünceler ile Konya Örneğinde Değerlendirilmesi .....	523
N. Tosun Soyel 9. yy Tepebaşı'nda Kentsel Dönüşüm .....	533
H. Kaplan, N. Bayraktar, A. Tekel, Ö. Yalçiner Kıyı Yerleşmelerinin Dönüşümünde Koruma-Kullanma Dengesi Sorunlarına Bir Örnek: Çeşme-Dalyan Yerleşimi .....	544
S. Altun A. Uçar Antalya'daki Turizm Yapılarında Kullanılan Tarihsel Öğelerin Görsel Anlam Olarak Değişimi .....	553
O. Kuntay, Y. Gülbay, Ö. Acar Proje Kültürü ve Proje Yönetimi .....	560
AUTHOR INDEX / YAZAR İNDEKSİ .....	565

