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ABSTRACTS

Re-thinking
and
Re-constructing
Modern Asian Architecture

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5th INTERNATIONAL mAAN CONFERENCE

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Beşiktaş 34349 İstanbul-TR, Tel: +90.212 227 69 10 - Fax: +90.212 236 85 28

<http://www.mimarist.org>, e-mail: mimarist@mimarist.org

Contact: Chamber of Architects of Turkey İstanbul Metropolitan Branch, Yıldız Sarayı Dış Karakol Binası
Barbaros Bulvarı Beşiktaş 34349 İstanbul-TR, Tel: +90.212 227 69 10 - Fax: +90.212 236 85 28

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MURAT ÖZTİN
ARCHITECT

TIAN Yang, Tsuto SAKAMOTO The Rise of Teaching Chinese Architectural History During the Pre-Society Period	37
Kashikar VISHWANATH Modernity and Universalism: Modernity as a Timeless Tradition	39
WONG Chong Thai Bobby, TAN Zhengzhen Spatial Deceit and Durational Truth in the Works of Liang Sicheng and Tong Jun.....	41

Poster Presentations

Mohammad Abdullah AL MASUM, Shaid Sabil SHARAFUDDIN, Aksin Ahmed SIDDIQI High-Rise Apartment Development, The Expression of Modernity: Case Study of Dhaka City	43
FU Chao-Ching Socio-Political and Reformation and Architectural Transformation in Taiwan: "New" Modern Architectural Discourse in the 21 st Century in Taiwan.....	45
Türkan URAZ, Hıfsiye PULHAN, Pınar ULUÇAY A Narrative of Modern Architecture in the Eastern Corner of Mediterranean Region.....	47

Revitalization and Metamorphosis: Sustainability of Built Heritage

Paper Abstracts

Nurten AKSUGUR, Özlem OLGAC TÜRKER A Model for the Modernization of a Vernacular Settlement as a Milieu for Two Different Cultural Backgrounds Re-Learning to Live Together.....	51
Resmiye ALPAR, Emrah ASLAN, Zafer ERTÜRK Modernism And Vernacularism in Cyprus: A Typological Analysing Methodology.....	53
Can BİNAN, Banu ÇELEBİOĞLU, Nevzat İLHAN, Ebru OMAY-POLAT, Gül ÜNAL Evaluation of a Preservation and Revitalization Project: İstanbul- Karaköy Harbour Buildings; Passenger Lounge And Warehouse No:20	55
Murat ÇETİN (Do Not A)void Connecting Traditional with Modern.....	57
Kaustubh DAS Revitalization of the Esplanade, Calcutta: Reclaiming a Lost Public Realm.....	59

(DO NOT A)VOID CONNECTING TRADITIONAL WITH MODERN

Murat ÇETIN

Assist. Prof., Yeditepe University, Turkey
mcetin@yeditepe.edu.tr

The study addresses the issues of *regeneration* and *metamorphosis* by shedding light onto a recently completed, judicious architectural intervention into the neglected architectural heritage in a small Western Anatolian city. The project is based on a *VOID* connecting what exists with what disappeared long ago in a totally new combination.

The reconciliation of the "modern" with the "traditional", whereby characteristics of the existing heritage is re-abstracted, is intended in order to overcome the dichotomy of "modern versus traditional". The proposed architectural hybrid consists of *preserved* and *added* features. The design tackles the *preserved features* as the underlying grammatical structure onto which the *added features* are specifically and critically integrated.

Thus, a new paradigm, which can be called as "modern reads (or rewrites) the traditional" based on a linguistic analogy, is advocated through the construction of the first Museum of Photography of Turkey in a humble town of Western Asia. Here, the traditional grammar is exalted through not only the neutral and humble reinterpretation of a genuine architectural vocabulary, but also the culmination of *space* as the major integrating component of the overall composition. The out coming new narrative is rewritten on a common language. The sources and principals of such a formal transformation could be further evaluated is also discussed throughout the article. Along this route, reinterpretation of planimetric typology is analyzed. Furthermore, configuration of exterior space in relation to the regulating *VOID* within the building as well as the metaphorical use of photography for such a spatial configuration is explained.

This small building complex consists of not only a building designed for temporary and permanent exhibitions, but also a library with its reading hall and multi-purpose reception area, as well as seminar rooms, administration

rooms, technical areas etc. These two buildings (*a reconstructed building and a restored building*) are united around a backyard allowing exterior activities. Moreover, the paper elucidates the planning and design process behind the restoration and reconstruction project, as well as the involvement of local non-governmental organizations. How it became the nucleus of a local movement of urban renewal in Balıkesir, is also discussed.

Consequently, architectural identity of the existing (and sometimes disappeared) heritage is reproduced via injection of this new hybrid into the very heart of the existing urban fabric. The design of the *VOID* intends to resolve the tensions between the contrasting features of restoration and intervention merely by understanding the conditions and fundamentals of the process of historical layering in the town.

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İletişim: Y.Doç.Dr.Yıldız SALMAN, İTÜ, Mimarlık Fakültesi, Restorasyon Anabilim Dalı, Taşkışla, Taksim, 34437 İstanbul-TR,
Tel: +90.212 293 13 00 – Faks: +90.212 251 48 95, e-posta: salman@itu.edu.tr
Contact: Assist. Prof.Yıldız SALMAN, İTU, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Restoration, Taşkışla, Taksim, 34437 Istanbul-TR,
Tel: +90.212 293 13 00 – Fax: +90.212 251 48 95, e-mail: salman@itu.edu.tr

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MURAT ÖZTİN
ARCHITECT

Rizal MUSLIMIN
Modernity in Traditional Architecture 87

Deniz GÜNER, Deniz ÖZKUT, H. Gökhan KUTLU
An Interprèteur and Mediator of 'Helical Continuity' of Peripheral Modernities in Architecture: Sedad Hakki Eldem and His Œuvre 94

Hyungmin PAI
Between The Wall and Fence: Questions of Identity and Place in The Architecture of Kim Swoo Geun and Seung H-Sang 102

Tsuto SAKAMOTO
Surface as a Locus Where the Origin Derives From: Kenzo Tange's Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere Memorial 109

Bohui LI, Qiang SHENG
Heterochrony Modernism 118

Tian YANG, Tsuto SAKAMOTO
The Missing Piece in Curricula: Teaching Chinese Architecture in Modern China 127

Kashikar VISHWANATH
Modernity and Universalism: Modernity as a Timeless Tradition 138

WONG CHONG THAI Bobby, TAN Zhengzhen
Spatial Deceit and Durational Truth in the Works of Liang Sicheng and Tong Jun 145

Poster Presentations

Fu CHAO-CHING
Socio-Political Reformation and Architectural Transformation in Taiwan "New" Modern Architectural Discourse in the Twenty-First Century in Taiwan 151

Türkan URAZ, Hıfsiye PULHAN, Pınar ULUÇAY
A Narrative of Modern Housing in the Eastern Corner of Mediterranean Region 153

Revitalization and Metamorphosis: Sustainability of Asian Built Heritage

Full Papers

Nurten AKSUGUR, Özlem Olgaç TÜRKER
A Model for the Modernization of a Vernacular Settlement as a Milieu for Two Different Cultural Backgrounds "Re-Learning To Live Together" 159

Zafer ERTURK, Resmiye ALPAR
Modernism and Vernacularism in Cyprus 167

Can BİNAN, Banu ÇELEBİOĞLU, Nevzat İLHAN, Ebru Omay-Polat, Gül ÜNAL
Evaluation of a Preservation and Revitalization Project: Istanbul Karaköy Harbour Buildings: Passenger Lounge and Warehouse No: 20 172

Murat ÇETİN
(Do Not A)Void Connecting Traditional with Modern 179

Kaustubh DAS
Revitalization of the Esplanade, Calcutta: Reclaiming a Lost Public Realm 185

Nimish PATEL, Parul ZAVERI
Heritage: An Integral Part of New Paradigms in Modern Indian Architecture: Emerging Role of the Architects for Sensitive Interventions in Historic Settlements of India 190

are deciphered and then recoded in a new format containing; new technologies, materials, forms, and meanings. What is essential in such a translation is that this void should pay homage to the former linguistic code or morphological grammar in the overall composition, that is to say, the synthesised end-product which is the transformed building itself.

Here, the traditional grammar is exalted through not only the neutral and humble reinterpretation of a genuine architectural vocabulary, but also the culmination of *space* as the major integrating component of the overall composition. Therefore, space becomes a device to interpret the underlying grammatical structure as the basis of the new composition.

In fact, any architectural intervention can be considered as a linguistic activity that is expressed in a formal a grammar and vocabulary. The point, here, is that the outcoming new narrative should be rewritten on a common language. The architectural context should provide a medium in which not only the new narratives, but also what they are based on, that is to say, former stories, their texts, grammar and vocabulary can also be read. Such a void is intended as an instrument to achieve a culturally sustainable transformation.

The sources and principals of such a formal transformation can be searched within the vernacular typology of the local architecture. Following a comprehensive research through the local documents, typical features of the façade typology in Balıkesir could be obtained. The façade of the existing building was documented and restoration drawings were prepared. The reconstruction project was also prepared for the adjoining site (on which a traditional house once existed) on the basis of remaining photographs (Figure 2) and typological knowledge for the façades in the surrounding context. Moreover, if the reinterpretation of Plannimetric Typology with reference to Photography Museum & Library, is analysed, one is faced with a difficulty that there is not any document left to guide us about the spatial organisation of the former house. Therefore, plan typology of the nearby environment had been the major source of inspiration for the intended intervention. Spatial configuration is developed from the *central sofa* plan typology. Since the *sofa* was the main distributing space within the house, the new void was taken as the major space connecting all sub-spaces in different levels of the building with the exterior space (Figure 3). Furthermore, configuration of exterior space in relation to the regulating *VOID* within the building is of prime importance since the exterior symbolises the future while the façade and plannimetry is associated with the past.

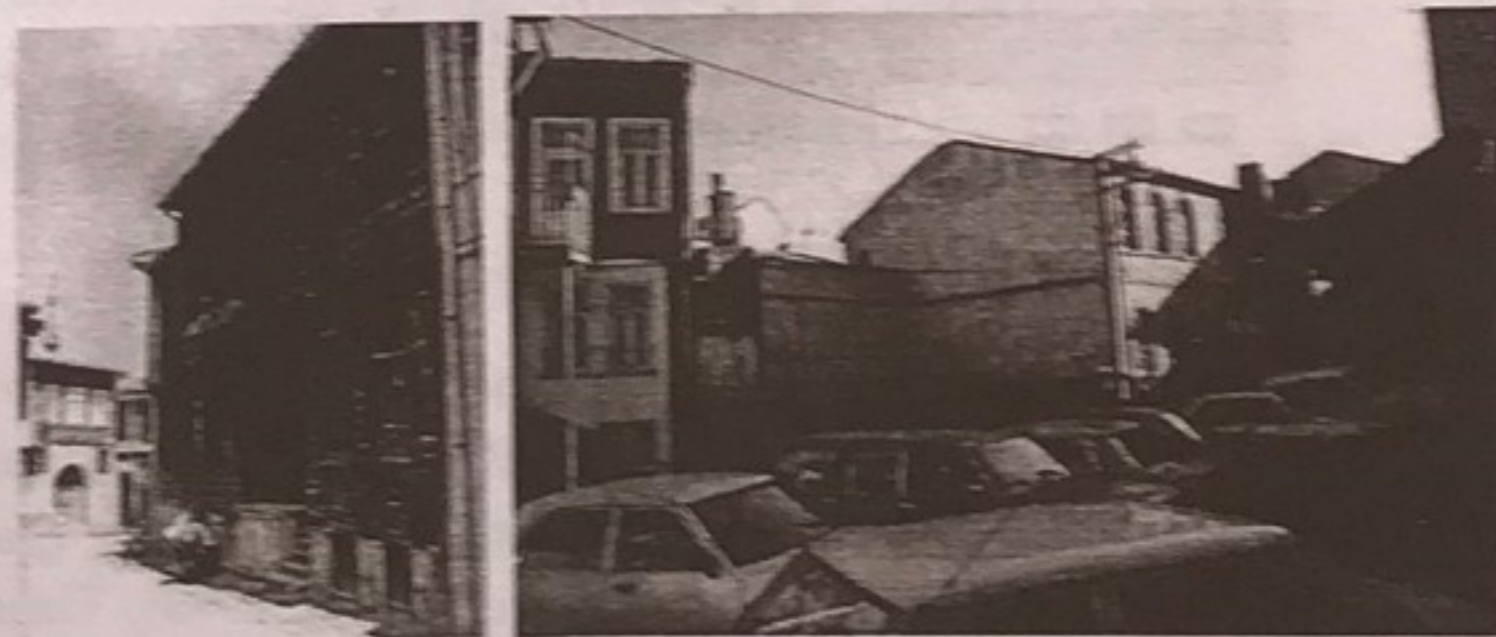


Figure 2. Remaining photograph displaying the view of the building once existed on the neighbouring lot.

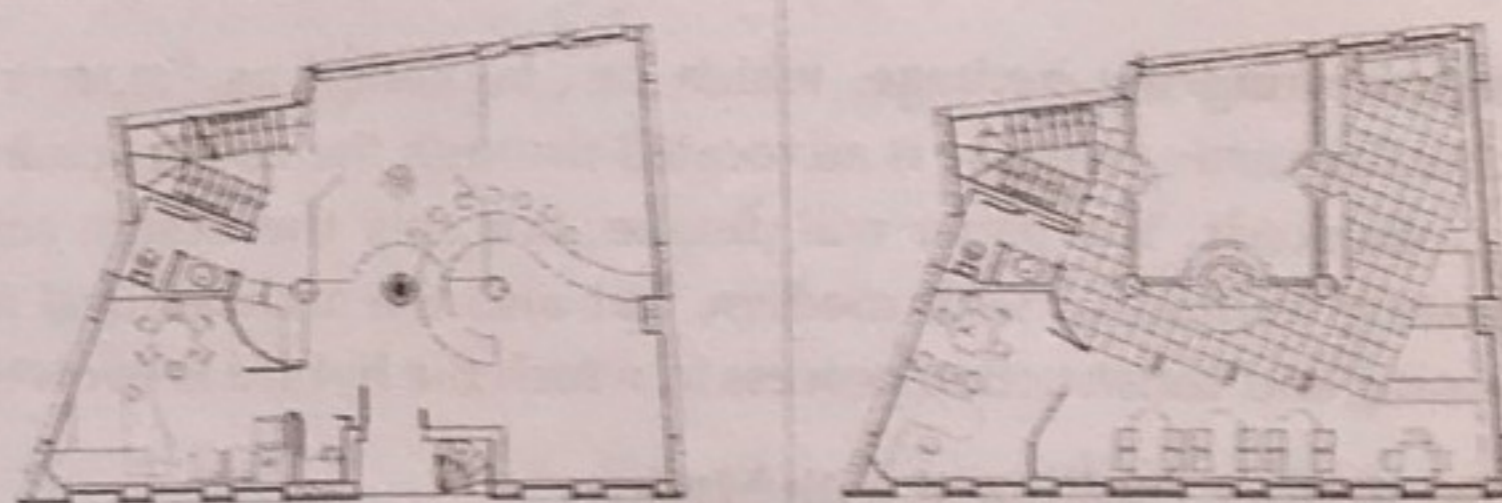


Figure 3. Plan organisation developed from the central sofa typology.

In that sense, the metaphorical use of photography in this spatial configuration constitutes the main theme of the overall architectural intervention. The traditional and the modern features are integrated through the building content. In other words, the concept of photography became the starting point for designing how new will be added into the old. The working principal of a "camera" is taken as the major criteria for organising space (void). As known, beams of light reflected from the image are flown through a prism, that is to say the object lenses of the camera. Here, the beams are deflected and converted in order to project the image onto the chemical surface of the film so that the chemical reaction of the light with the film could fix the view of the object. Similarly, the design of the building takes the core space (void) of the building as the lenses of a camera, which process the light coming from the exterior courtyard through the two-storey-high glass opening and project this light onto the layer associated with the past, that is the historical (reconstructed) façade (Figure 4). Hence, the light of the future is intended to be superimposed onto the traditional building component.

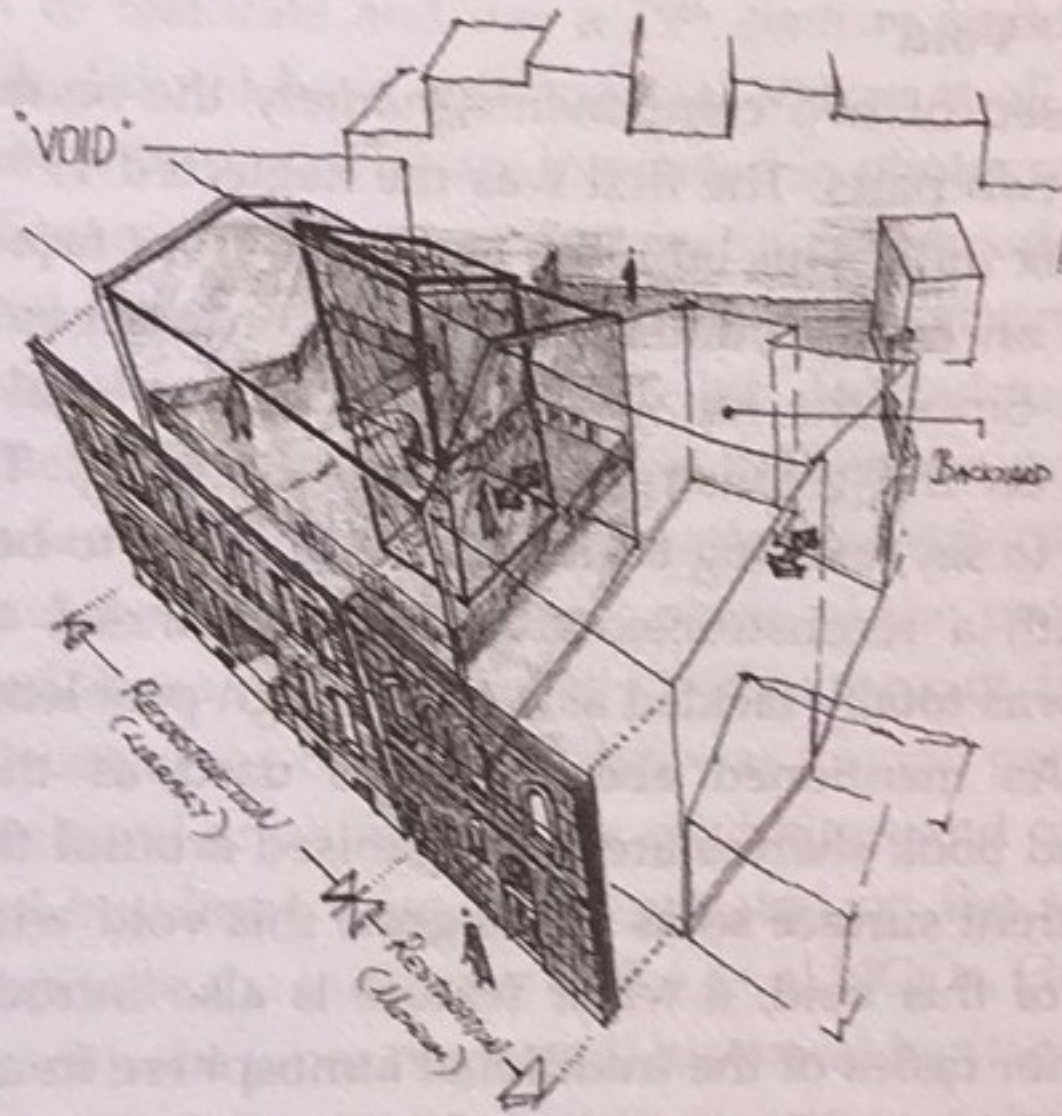


Figure 4. Spatial configuration

To sum up, the restoration and reconstruction project for Photography Museum & Library attempts to address the issues of *regeneration* and *metamorphosis* by a judicious architectural intervention into the neglected architectural heritage. As mentioned at the very beginning, the project is based on a *VOID* connecting what exists with what disappeared long ago in a totally new combination. Hence, the reconciliation of the "modern" with the "traditional", whereby characteristics of the existing heritage is re-abstracted, is intended in order to overcome the dichotomy of "modern versus traditional". The proposed architectural hybrid consists of *preserved* and *added* features. Preserved features are; the remaining building (which is suggested as the museum part) and the façade of the reconstructed library building. The added features, on the other hand, include; a new building behind the reconstructed façade, a new central space and a common backyard, that is revitalised as the exterior space for outdoor activities related to the local association of photography (BASAF) (Figure 5). The design tackles the *preserved* features as the underlying grammatical structure onto which the *added* features are specifically and critically integrated.



Figure 5. Backyard connecting the museum and library

3. Architectural Features of the "Void"

The building brief was composed of two components; namely the *museum* and the *library*. The physical context was also comprised of two parts; The first was the neglected 19th century building with a wooden skeleton frame structure and mix infill. This building has also a front façade made of cut stone. The second component of the context was an empty building lot which once accommodated a building with wooden structure and wooden façade. Since, the lot was maintaining its legal status as a listed building, the intervention should be based on the reconstruction of the building. Thus, the building program was distributed respectively, that is to say, existing building was planned to be restored as the museum while the contemporary addition with a reconstructed façade was planned to be the Library. Although the building is a reconstruction, it was totally tackled as a new design problem apart from its façade which was rebuilt as it originally was. As mentioned above, *sofa* is used as the major element of the spatial configuration. Reading halls and book shelves are organized around this central void. The periphery of this void designed as a transparent surface so as to integrate this void with the backyard lying just behind the void itself. At the bottom of this void, a water feature is also introduced not only to accentuate the centrality, but also to recall minor tastes of the traditional atmosphere in a contemporary setting (Figure 6). This small building complex consists of not only a building designed for temporary and permanent exhibitions, but also a library with its reading hall and multi-purpose reception area, as well as seminar rooms, administration rooms, technical areas etc. These two buildings (*a reconstructed building and a restored building*) are united around a backyard allowing exterior activities. This backyard was also supported with a café. In sum, the design of this couple of buildings is mainly based on the configuration of a primary VOID in order to connect what currently exists with what disappeared long ago in a totally new combination (Figure 7). Thus, the main space, in other words, *the void* becomes the lens of a camera which projects the light coming from the courtyard onto the historical surface, in other words, *the reconstructed facade*, between which guests, in other word, the photographers move creating new *layers of art* connecting *tradition with modern*.



Figure 6. View of the central space from the entrance

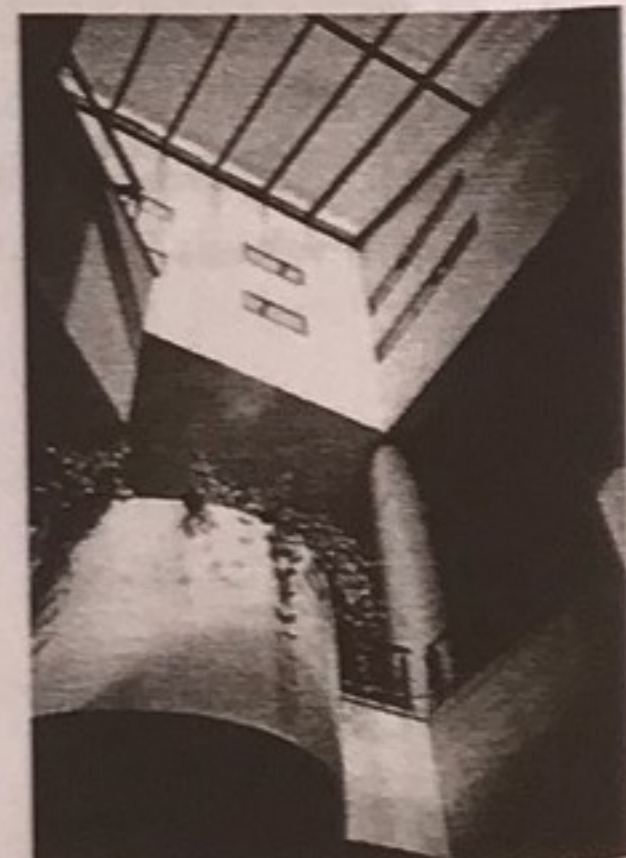


Figure 7. The central void

4. A Meticulous Process of Realisation

The Museum & Library of Photography became the nucleus of a local movement of urban renewal in Balıkesir through the planning and design process behind the restoration and reconstruction project, as well as the involvement of local non-governmental organisations. The process has started with the allocation of special funds to local administrations by the central government for restoration of local historical heritage in 2000. The bureaucrats of the municipality determined a set of buildings and contacted the local university. They were advised to tackle the issue at a broader scale and develop a regeneration model for a street or a district with the coordination of a larger section of the local society including local NGOs and various other parties. Although this initial was met with a great enthusiasm, the local authorities were unable to organise such a larger scale project. After a year of negotiations, a totally different and small initiative emerged and applied to local authorities to take one of the dilapidated buildings in Balıkesir on the condition of restoring it. The initiative was started by the local Association of Photography (BASAF). Finally, they managed to take the permission to restore and use a 19th century building which was once used as a dormitory. The association, which did not have any financial source at all, developed various contacts and activities to attract the people and institution, who are interested in photography, in order to find finance for the restoration of the building. Several businessman and institutions made donations to contribute to the construction. Moreover, at the final stages of the project they started a campaign to finance the construction. Along this route, the mayor, who owned the next building lot, decided to donate the lot on the condition that the building (once existed there) would be reconstructed. Then the project was expanded to design a building complex including a museum and a library and workshop. Afterwards, the project was promoted in various sections of the press and media. After the first phase of the project and the construction of the additional building was completed, it made great publicity within the city. It also made an important impact in the nearby environment. The front of the building which was a small parking lot was converted to a tiny square, in which various public cultural activities, such as exhibitions and concerts, are organised (Figure 8). Furthermore, few more historical buildings were also restored on the same street. Thus, the very first suggestion was realised on its own with the initiatives of the local NGOs. Hence, the current socio-economic activity of the town was meeting with the (once neglected) historical heritage of the town. Socio-cultural and economic dimensions of the intervention into the historical setting seem to manifest themselves in the configuration of spatial program around the central void. Therefore, one can assert that a void is essential in integration various dimensions of traditional with modern.



Figure 8. Frontyard of the building was converted to a public square.

5. Conclusion

The paper raises the issue of space as the major regulating force in the conservation of and intervention into historical contexts ranging from to larger scales. It also contributes to the literature by unveiling the theoretical background of a small scale application in a small town of Western Asia. It might be assumed that any architectural hybrid, injected into an ongoing metamorphosis, would consist of *preserved* and *added* features. Museum and Library of Photography in Balıkesir, as a design which attempt to integrate the traditional with the modern components of this hybrid, tackles the *preserved features* as the underlying grammatical structure onto which the *added features* are judiciously and critically integrated. Thus, the VOID appears also as a translator which transfers or interprets the traditional language onto the contemporary text. Therefore, the building represents a new paradigm for regenerating the heritage, which can be called as "modern reads (or rewrites) the traditional" based on such a linguistic analogy. Consequently, architectural

identity of the existing (and sometimes disappeared) heritage is reproduced via injection of this new hybrid into the very heart of the existing urban fabric. The design of the VOID intends to resolve the tensions between the contrasting features of restoration and intervention merely by understanding the conditions and fundamentals of the process of historical layering in the town.

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