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UNDERSTANDING OF MODERN MOVEMENT IN KAYSERİ BY USING ORAL HISTORY METHODS: A CASE ON AKDAMAR APARTMENT, 1960's

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Abstract. In the recent history of the modernization of dwelling and housing culture, much attention has been given to oral history methodology. However, less research has been done on 1960's houses and very little on actual homeowners' firsthand experiences in their homes in Kayseri, Turkey. For this reason, this study attempts to use oral history as a way to critically understand how the modern home was built and how residents lived in the space in the 1960's. In this context, the Akdamar Family Apartment is assumed to provide a large corpus of data, documenting the living, subjective, social, cultural, and dialectical experiences of a modern home during the 1960's by utilizing oral history methods. To verify this hypothesis, interviews with Akdamar Family members have been utilized, and the physical space of the Akdamar house has been reconstructed and analyzed. In addition to this reconstruction, a floorplan and various photographs are used to demonstrate the actual family life lived within that space in those years. By using the data gathered from oral history methodology performed with the Akdamar Family, it is possible to examine how the family as individuals used their home during this period as well as the relationship between the space they inhabited and their domestic needs in order to understand the 1960's modern house movement. This case study has also recorded stories about various aspects of historic neighborhoods, including architectural features and the alteration of Republic-era houses in Kayseri. As a result, this paper attempts to demonstrate that the way in which oral history stories are constructed tends to destabilize the notion of 1960's architectural intention.

Keywords: Oral history, Akdamar Apartment, Modern house, Modern movement in 1960's.

Introduction

No place in the context of social change is as important as the house [1]. Likewise, the modern house is one of the main research topics of modernism. It is a fact that modern houses introduced new methods for designing, constructing, and material usage, and captured the contemporary essence of modernism. Yet, in a social and cultural context, less research has been done on the modern home compared with the physical context. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that in traditional studies, modern houses have been examined through documents like layouts, maps, reports, and so on as a method, and less research has been done on actual homeowners' firsthand experiences in their homes in Turkey.

The oral history¹ method principally relies on the memories of individuals with personal experience of historic events [2]. Since this method not only records physical but also social, spiritual, and ritual phenomena, it is essential to understanding the intangible and capturing sense of place [3]. Though it is not a fully accepted method in the discipline of architectural history, oral history and memory studies are recently emerging in the related field in Turkey [4]. Within this context, this paper attempts to *use the oral history method* as a way of critically comprehending the intentions of the homeowner, the Akdamar Family living in Kayseri, Turkey, and through their memories and experiences, understanding the 1960's modern house movement and domestic life. It is believed that by using this method with such a case study it would be possible to understand a neighborhood in the 1960's in Kayseri based on archival research, architectural documentation, and oral history stories within a cultural context. As a result, by evaluating the narration of a family member and the documents (photographs, drawings) of the Akdamar Family Apartment, this paper discusses how oral history can contribute to understanding the domestic life in the 1960's. As a conclusion, it is seen that the use of the oral history method can help to illuminate a historical period and the individual's domestic experience with the changing of space.

Modern Movement in Turkey, 1960's

During the 1950's and 1960's, Turkey was faced with significant changes regarding social, cultural, and economic aspects. After the Second World War, the changing social and political perception was reflected in Turkish cultural life. Following the integration into the international economic system, Turkey met with new building types, construction, and design methods in architecture [5]. A sizable increase in designing family apartments was witnessed during those years. Family apartments replaced modern houses and life in contrast to traditional houses and life. Batur (2004) argues that, in a modern architectural context, an apartment is totally different from a traditional house in every respect; not to remind of past, new, contemporary, and distinctive [6]. We may see it as an apartment was seen as a symbol of modern life. Moreover, as Allaback (2003) claims, if the modern house was a product of a century's change, modernism as a style burst onto the architectural scene with hardly any notice and instantly challenged the modern tradition [7].

The first apartments in Turkey, designed by Greek/Armenian architects, emerged at the end of the 19th century in Galata-Beyoğlu, Istanbul for people running the embassy, members of the foreign traders, and Levantines living in urban areas [8]. In the Early Republican Period, Ankara met with the first apartments in the second half of the 1920's [9]. Similarly, in Kayseri, the first family apartments were built in the second half of the 1930's [10]. These are Mehmet Kızıklı-Mehmet Kaşıkçı House (1935), Örnek (İspanak) Apartment (1938), and Emek Apartment (1938). In the 1950's and 1960's, the number of modern houses increased in downtown [10]. It is possible to claim that family houses of the 1950's and 1960's especially have a potential to reveal how housing designs evolved through the new construction systems/materials and plan types affected by the modern movement in Turkey. Thus, important identity changes in the streets, neighborhoods, and cities have been witnessed due to these singular family apartments. Later, through the 1944-1945 Urban Plan by Aru Oelsner, most of the old buildings were demolished, and two/three-story buildings were built in the city center. It is possible to claim that all these changes caused an evolution in the domestic culture and daily life.

¹ Oral history, defined as “the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction.”

Akdamar Apartment

Residential buildings are striking because they show the tendency of local people to modern architecture and lifestyle [11]

From the beginning of the 1950's and 1960's in Kayseri, the traditional housing plans with multi-functional rooms have been turned into housing plans with functional geometric volumes in a modern context. One of the residential buildings in Kayseri, the Akdamar Apartment, represents the 1960's modern architectural style built in the city center. For this reason, by focusing on the families' individual experiences during their occupancy in the Akdamar Apartment, the family's domestic life and social life affected by the architecture is analyzed.

Akdamar family's domestic life

The Akdamar Apartment as a family house, located in Sahabiye Neighborhood on Boylar Street, was designed by civil engineer Kamil Kundakçiođlu in 1965, with modern planning considerations, construction materials, and systems. (See Fig.1)



Fig. 1. The views of Akdamar Apartment from Boylar Street.

For this study, an oral history interview has been actualized with Yusuf Akdamar (b.1952), the owner of the house, and information has been gathered about the changes of the apartment from the 1960's to the present. From his words; “*Mustafa, Mahmut, and Ahmet Akdamarlar decided to construct a family apartment. So they asked Kamil Kundakçiođlu to design a 3-story house. Kundakçiođlu designed the apartment on 1 March 1965 as a basement, ground floor, first and second floor. The ground floor includes a kitchen, hall, doorway, wc, bathroom, dining room, living room, guest-room. The first floor is the same as the ground floor besides two balconies. One of the balconies is connected with the dining room and living room. The other one is connected with the living room. Each floor consists of one family. For example, Mustafa Akdamarlar lived on the ground floor. Mahmut Akdamarlar lived on the first floor. Ahmet was located on the upper floor. The balcony was not designed next to the kitchen in the original layout, so a small balcony was added during the construction process. The basement floor was seen in the layout as a flat; on the other hand, it was used as a warehouse for woodshed, goods, and food storage. There had never been a major renovation on our house until 2005. We moved out in 2005. The current occupants, who run the office, made some changes by demolishing some walls in the house...*”

His explanations coincide with the plans of the house given in Figure 2. Each floor is connected with a main stairwell. When the floor plan is examined, it can be seen that the whole floor was separated into two main functions as living and sleeping area with the corridor (See Fig. 2). Yusuf Akdamar described the living area as “a front area” and sleeping area as “a back area”.

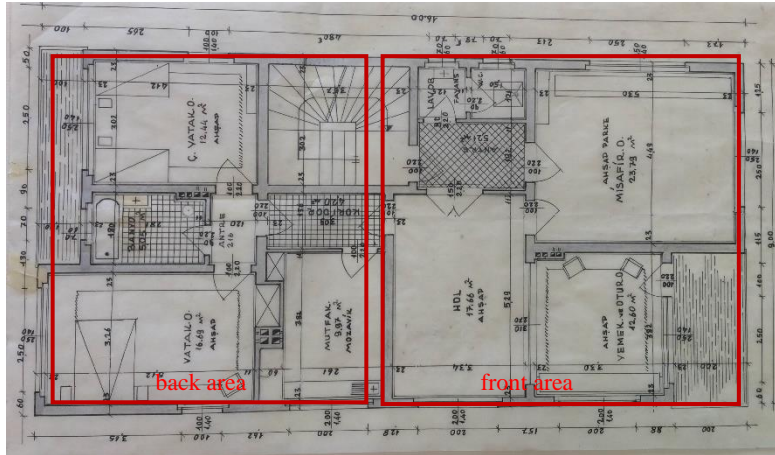


Fig. 2. First floor plan of the Akdamar Apartment. ²

Yusuf Akdamar also added that “our apartment was different from the other apartments on Boylar Street. There was a unique main entrance façade designed with different geometric shapes – triangle, square, and circular windows that allowed sunlight to penetrate into the stairs inside”. (See Fig. 4) This information can be seen in Figure 3, which shows a drawing of the original façade design and a photo from the current situation.



Fig. 3. A drawing of original West façade and a photo of current situation.

² Original drawings of the projects have been provided by the designer Kamil Kundakçioğlu



Fig. 4. Photos of stair hall.

With its 144 square meters (9x16m) area in each floor, it is one of the biggest apartments on Boylar Street. Total height of the apartment is 11 m built with reinforced concrete. As seen at the section drawing, the flat roof was also new in those years (See Fig. 5). The apartment's heating system was provided by stove, and a radiator was added in the 2000's. Tiles and mosaics as finishing materials were used in wet spaces like bathrooms, toilets, and kitchens, while wood parquet on the floor was proposed in the main rooms like the dining room, living room and guest room. While describing their home, he continues, "*Our guest room was a room with luxurious services such as a sofa set that was not used much. It was only open for celebrations and special guests*". Despite the fact that this family apartment's plan is different from the traditional houses in Kayseri, the guest room is simply connected with the entry hall and living room and does not let guests enter the main living room. It means that the traditional privacy concept still continued in the plan level in those years.

Interestingly, while a bathtub has been seen in the plan, it was not installed during the construction. Yusuf Akdamar talks about this issue, "*...there was a copper boiler/thermosiphon and a marble basin (kurna) in the bathroom*". So, it is understood that the use of the bathtub is still not widespread in those years.



Fig. 5. South façade and section drawing of the Apartment.



Fig. 6. Views of the Akdamar Apartment.

As a general review, the apartment differs from the traditional house in the plans, building material, and construction technology. It also reflects the geometric system of modern architecture. (See Fig.6)

Family's social life in Sahabiye Neighborhood

During the interview with Yusuf Akdamar, it was also possible for us to understand the social life in Sahabiye Neighborhood in the 1960's. He gave us some important clues about the social life of his home and the neighborhood in relation to entertainment, weddings, and other social activities in the 1960s, which can be listed as follows:

- *“When our family apartment was built, there were houses of Büyüknalbants, Özkökler and Mermerler Family Houses opposite the street. These houses were built in the 1950's. However, in 1960 there was an increase in the number of family apartments in the street. Dr. Ekrem Çetiner's home was next to our house. In the same year, in 1965, we built our house”.*
- *“There would be help for weddings and important days. Our neighborhood relations were very good”.*
- *“In order to have fun in the Sahabiye, we went to the family hours/matinee in Tan Cinema at 7:00 in the evening. We would prefer Çiçek Cinema as a summer cinema. Young people went to cinemas and teagardens too”.*

He emphasizes that socialization of the 1960's period is mainly based on actions such as bilateral dialogue and helping, by describing some activities such as visiting close relatives and neighbors and going to cinema and theatre. In addition, Yusuf Akdamar tells that sitting in the Sahabiye was prestigious in that era: He emphasizes that his house is close to the city center and that he has famous educated and merchant neighborhoods next to his apartment.

Conclusion

Akdamar Apartment is one of the typical family apartments in Kayseri built in the 1960's. By using the *oral history method* as a way to comprehend the daily life of the Akdamar Family, this paper aimed to understand the 1960's modern house movement and domestic life in Kayseri. It is assumed that, Yusuf Akdamar, one of the Akdamar family members, exemplifies the experiences in the new family apartment buildings in the 1960's, which were different from traditional ones.

The paper is about the value of using oral history to add to our understanding of architecture and its impacts and on the importance of a historical area in a city as well. We are reading about the

oral history and how it relays more than just an accounting of history but also the personal and social aspects.

As a general perspective, Akdamar Apartment differs from the traditional house in the geometric plans, building materials -glass, concrete, metal etc.-, and construction technology. It also reflects the geometric system of rational architecture during the 1960's.

Yusuf Akdamar also gave some information about the social experiences in the Sahabiye neighborhood. At the end of the meeting with Mr. Akdamar, an opportunity was obtained to compare what domestic life was like and how architectural spaces were designed in that era.

When other family apartments like this apartment are analyzed, detailed information about the place and the importance of the physical and social experiences of Kayseri in the modernization process can be reached. In this context, the current urban transformation project can play a role in preserving the disappearing Sahabiye Neighborhood as an example of modernization: "the first modern neighborhood" in Kayseri, Turkey.

Historic buildings often decay to the point of demolition nowadays. So, a historic building like Akdamar Apartment in Sahabiye is vital for the success of Sahabiye historic district's preservation. In short, it is really important to save 1960's modern buildings and old neighborhoods for our modern history. If we are not to be successful to save our modern architectural history, the character of the city is going to be destroying. We do see the point that we are trying to make about losing historical areas in a city is a loss of the character of the city.

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