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Transform of Traditional Urfa Houses Located in the Historical Area of the City

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Abstract

The city of Sanliurfa is located on the Syria border, in the southeast of Turkey. The traditional houses of Urfa were built with limestone found in the region, in the late of 18th century. The architecture, buildings and streets were created an urban texture that attracts attention. Due to the shift of the city center to the north and the fact the life in the modern reinforced concrete apartments in the newly urbanized areas was more comfortable, by the time, the traditional houses were abandoned one by one, and the buildings remained empty for many years. In recent years, after the discovery of neolithic settlements such as Göbeklitepe or Karahantepe occurred intense tourist visits, caused demand of hotel accommodation in the city. Today, traditional houses located in the historical area of the city are being restored and re-functionalized as boutique hotels. During this new functionalization, various reinforcements such as wet areas (bath, kitchenet), heating and lighting systems equipment, etc. were inserted to the buildings. These new functions and restorations prevent the building from being demolished and destroy, but they also bring intervention and an additional load to structure. In this study, a discussion was made about the balance of protection and use in cultural heritage by examining local examples in terms.

Keywords: Re-functioning, adaptive, re-use, traditional building, renovation, conservation, Şanlıurfa

1. Introduction

The historical center of a city is the most significant tool that transmits the city's past urban life, history, social structure, and cultural accumulation to the present day. The core of historical city centers generally consists of traditional residential structures and historical/traditional commercial centers [1]. Traditional residential structures are buildings that reflect the beliefs, traditions, customs, and lifestyles of the era in which they were constructed, using the materials available in the region and built according to the economic conditions of the time. The reasons why historical structures cannot continue to function are summarized as the loss of their original functions and the functional obsolescence of the structures [2].

Functional change is the creation of new usage opportunities, including interventions that will meet new user needs, by preserving their architectural, aesthetic, social and cultural values, instead of the original functions of historical buildings that cannot be maintained due to different reasons such as environmental factors, economic reasons, socio-cultural changes. Reutilization is considered as a necessary practice for transferring historical structures and areas to future generations, ensuring physical and cultural continuity, providing contributions to the economic and cultural environment by re-evaluating the structures and areas, and meeting the needs of the city by beautifying the existing environmental appearance [3].

While bringing contemporary comfort conditions to traditional buildings made with old technology, various equipment such as wet areas (toilets, bathrooms, kitchens), heating and lighting systems are installed in the houses. These new functions and restorations prevent the building from being demolished and disappearing, but also bring intervention and additional load to the structure. With these additions, in some cases, the original architectural features of the buildings can be significantly

altered. The quality and quantity of the interventions can cause the historical documentation value of the buildings to be lost, and as a result, traditional buildings may not be able to obtain legal protection status as cultural assets, or may be excluded from this status. Therefore, the inability to preserve the originality of traditional residential structures has become a significant problem today [4].

The work area is the city of Sanliurfa located in the southeast of Turkey and adjacent to Syria in the south. With the discovery of settlements dating back to 10,000 BC such as Göbeklitepe and Karahantepe by archaeologists in recent years, it has been seen that the region's history extends back to the Neolithic period. Sanliurfa had been under the rule of various empires such as Ebla, Akkad, Babylon, Hittites, Hurri, Mitanni, Arameans, Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans since ancient times, and had witnessed invasions by the Sassanids, Goths, and Mongols. During the Byzantine period, the city was rebuilt and constantly changed hands between the Seljuks, the Crusaders, and other Muslim states. Şanlıurfa has attracted attention with its original historical urban texture that has been preserved until today. The traditional buildings located in the historic center of the city were constructed in the late 18th century using the technique of stone masonry with limestone, which was abundant in the region. The streets, shaped in accordance with the architectural texture and climate conditions, have created a remarkable and unique urban texture.

As a result of the comfort of living in modern concrete buildings constructed with evolving technology in the north of the historic city center, traditional houses in the historic city center had been gradually abandoned one by one. The traditional houses remained empty for many years. After the Syrian War in 2013, these historic buildings became living spaces for Syrian immigrants. In recent years, the intense tourist visits due to the discovery of neolithic settlements such as Göbeklitepe and Karahan Tepe have led to an increase in demand for hotel accommodation in the city. As a result of this demand, traditional houses located in the historical area of the city have been restored and started to be re-functionalized as boutique hotel.

In this study, 6 traditional residential buildings that have been restored using the method of re-functionalization within the framework of the Sanliurfa Conservation Purposed Zoning Plan, located in the Sanliurfa Urban Conservation Area, have been examined. The pre- and post-restoration conditions of the buildings were examined comparatively through project plans and on-site observation, the originality and changes before and after the restoration were analyzed comparatively. Based on the data provided by the comparison method, the changes made to the houses in terms of removed and added elements have been identified, and the authenticity losses and the current comfort conditions provided have been analyzed. In conclusion, this study aimed to examine the balance between cultural heritage preservation and practical needs in the context of local examples.

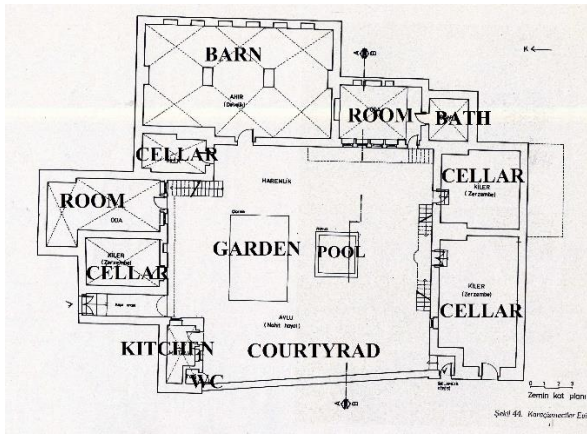
2. Architectural Features of Traditional Urfa Houses

The formation of settlements within the historic urban texture of Sanliurfa has been influenced not only by beliefs, traditions, customs, and lifestyle, but also by climate. Streets were left with a maximum width of 3-4 meters to protect from the sun, and the courtyard and garden walls facing the street were kept high to provide shade to the street at all times of the day [5]. Urfa houses are settled on a flat topography, and in terms of architectural settlement, a complex and intertwined settlement with adjacent structures can be seen. The traditional houses and streets of Urfa are mostly made of locally sourced limestone. It is a light yellow, creamy, beige colored limestone found in the vicinity of Urfa which is used in traditional Urfa Houses. This stone, which is soft and easy to shape as it allows the ornaments and decorations of the traditional Urfa architecture to come out from the quarry, then hardens as it is in contact with the air, increases strength and whitens. The historicity of Urfa has a texture created by natural stone materials [6].

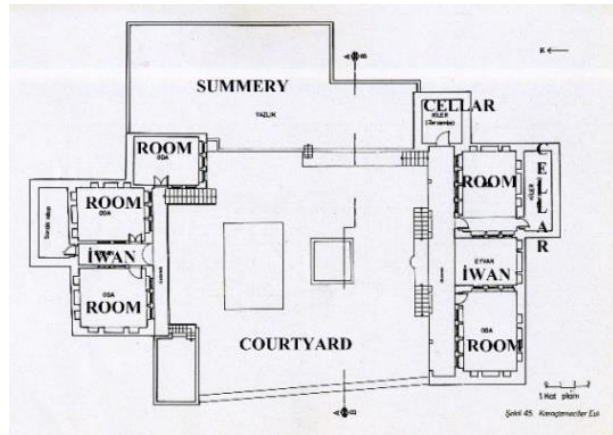
Traditional Urfa houses were shared by several generations living together (extended family). The houses were generally planned as 1.5-2 stories and functionality was given priority. In some houses, spaces planned half a floor below or above the ground level can be seen. In these houses, winter rooms and the iwan were located half a floor above the courtyard. The cellars were usually planned half a floor below the courtyard to keep the food cool [7, 8].

2.1 Functional Units that Form Traditional Urfa Houses

The functional units that shape traditional Urfa houses are the courtyard, iwan, rooms, and service areas such as "tandırılık" (kitchen), "develik" (stable), "zerzembe" (cellar), and "hela" (toilet) (Fig. 1).



a. Groundfloor plan



b. 1st floor plan

Fig. 1: Plan of Karacizmeliler House (Hanehan Boutique Hotel) (prepared based on the plan obtained from SKVKK archive)

2.1.1 Courtyard:

In the region dominated by hot climate, houses are shaped around a courtyard (Fig. 2). The size and shape of the courtyards, which are actively used for seven to eight months of the year, are defined according to the size and shape of the parcel and houses. The courtyard floor is covered with cut stone with dimensions of 40x50 cm. Usually, there is a small garden in the courtyard where a pool, a well, and various fruit trees such as pomegranate and fig trees grow. In some buildings, there are two separate courtyards, one for women's quarters and one for men's quarters.



a. Before restoration



b. After restoration

Fig. 2: One of the courtyards in Vilayetler House Hotels

2.1.2 Iwan:

One of the most important factors shaping traditional architecture is the climate. The hot and dry climate of the Urfa region has also shaped the traditional housing form. The iwan is a semi-open space created by the hot climate (Fig. 3). The space, which is rectangular in plan, is usually designed with rooms on both sides. Corner iwans are also found in some buildings. The iwans on the ground floor are built a few steps higher than the courtyard level. In the iwans built on the ground floor, the windows of the rooms on both sides of the iwan can face the iwan and their doors open to the courtyard. On the upper floor, the windows as well as the doors of the iwans can be opened towards the iwan (Fig. 4-c). There are also examples where the doors do not open to the iwans. Upper floor iwans that face the street have windows on the sides and back. The surface of the iwans facing the courtyard is arched (Fig. 9). In addition, there are late period iwan types divided by one or two columns in front of them (Fig. 9-e).

According to their orientation, there are two types of iwans: summer and winter. Winter iwans are oriented towards the south to benefit from sunlight, while summer ones are positioned towards the north. Traditional Urfa houses have one or more iwans. The roofs of the iwans are usually vaulted, but it is also possible to find ones with timber beams, flat ceilings, or lattice ceilings (Fig. 14).



a. Before restoration



b. After restoration

Fig. 3: An example from the iwans in Vilayetler Evi Hotels

2.1.3 Rooms:

Rooms where activities such as sitting, working, eating, and sleeping take place are built with square or rectangular plans (Fig. 4). At the entrance of the rooms, there is a "gedemeç" area where shoes are taken off, which is 20-25 cm lower than the floor level and 100-110 cm wide, sometimes extending along the room facade and sometimes made as a square.

The niches located on one or several walls of the rooms with high ceilings add liveliness to the room (Fig. 4). Additionally, there are cabinets and built-in niches called "camhane" in the rooms (Fig. 4 a-b).

The floors of the rooms are paved with smooth cut stone. The uppercovering of the rooms on the groundfloor is generally a diagonal vault, and there is less use of timber beams as the uppercovering on the groundfloor. On the upperfloors, timber beams are mostly used as the uppercovering. In front of the rooms on the upper floor, a walking platform carried by stone consoles, which is open at the top and provides access to the rooms, has been built (Fig 9a-b-f).



a. Nahrin Otel/ Before restoration



b. Tessera Hotel/ Before restoration



c. Hanehan Boutique Otel/ Before restoration

Fig. 4: Examples of rooms found in traditional Urfa houses

2.1.4 'Tandırılık' (Kitchen):

The tandırılık (kitchen), located in the harem section of the house, opens directly onto the courtyard. It is the area where daily and seasonal meals are prepared. It contains a stove for cooking food (Fig. 5) and niches for placing food containers. It is covered with a cross-vault. The wall facing the courtyard is constructed with hollow spaces to allow for air circulation.

2.1.5 'Zerzembe' (Cellars):

This is the most significant service area of the house. This space, where winter foods are stored, is designed below the ground level to keep it cool (Fig. 6). It is generally rectangular and covered with a crossvault.

2.1.6 'Develik' (Stable):

These are the areas where animals are kept and are located near the entrance on the ground floor (Fig. 7). They are generally rectangular in shape and covered with a crossvault.

2.1.7 'Hela' (Toilet):

In somehouses, they are located in the courtyard, while in others they are located in the space between the outdoor and the innerdoor called "doorway". The "hela" that opens to the courtyard can be located under the stairs, in one corner of the courtyard, or on a wall of the courtyard (Fig. 8).



Fig. 5: Hasbahan Hotel/ Before restoration



Fig. 6: Nahrin Hotel/ Before restoration



Fig. 7: Nahrin Hotel/ Before restoration



Fig. 8: Hanehan Boutique Otel

3. Re-functioning of Traditional Houses

Historical buildings are documents and symbols reflecting the urban and architectural style of the period in which they were built, as well as the economic, social, and cultural accumulations of societies. Each building contains significant cultural values as it embodies the socio-economic, architectural, technical, and cultural way of life of the society in which it was created, forming an significant source of information on cultural values. For the same reasons, each building carries documentary, symbolic, and historical values within itself.

Over time, changes in people's way of life and evolving needs have made it difficult for traditional housing structures to meet the demands of modern living. The majority of traditional housing structures located in historic city centers have lost their users. Traditional structures that have lost their users are doomed to destruction over time due to neglect and abandonment. To prevent the destruction of these structures and ensure their sustainability by reintegrating the minto society, one of the primary practices carried out is the refunctioning of these structures. Re-functionization is a preservation method developed to transfer abandoned or original structures that cannot continue their original function to future generations by enabling their use with a new function. With re-functionization, traditional structures are preserved and reused by giving them functions such as hotels, cafes, restaurants, associations, museums, and so on.

4. Examples of Traditional Şanlıurfa Houses in the Historic City Center Re-functioned as Boutique Hotels

In recent years, the increase in the number of tourists has created a need for accommodation in the city of Şanlıurfa. In order to utilize the abandoned and deteriorated housing stock in the historical center of the city, with the support policies of the Ministry of Culture, traditional houses in the historical city center have been converted into boutique hotels. According to the data obtained from SKVKBK, the number of structures converted from traditional houses to boutique hotels for this purpose is 47, of which 24 are currently in use. As part of the study, six of these buildings were examined on site: Tessera Hotel, Hanehan Boutique Hotel, Hasbahan Guest House, Nahrin Hotel, Muzepotamia Guest House, and Vilayetler HouseHotel(Fig. 9).



a. Tessera Hotel



b. Hanehan Boutique Otel



c. Hasbahen Guest House



d. Nahrin Hotel



e. Muzepotamia Guest House



f. Vilayetler House Hotel

Fig. 9: The boutique hotels that were examined

5. Changes in Traditional Residential Buildings Re-functioned as Boutique Hotels in Sanliurfa

Over time, buildings can lose their original functions or their existing functions can become outdated due to changes in lifestyle and needs. However, the physical characteristics of buildings can have a longer lifespan than their original functions. Therefore, it becomes necessary to give appropriate functions to buildings according to the conditions of their time. Since re-functioned buildings can extend their physical life as tangible symbols of cultural and spiritual values, and the reasons that require their re-functioning are directly related to the current values of the building and can be approached with different typologies. Buildings may need to be renovated due to historical and/or cultural, economic, and environmental reasons [8].

Buildings constructed through human knowledge accumulation exist on earth and continue their own lives. Spaces and equipment added to the buildings according to their new functions will become a part of the new life of the building. Thus, the existence of the building will change and continue. During this transformation, new spaces required for the new function will be added to the building. Additionally, technical and technological equipment necessary to provide security and comfort for modern life are also added to the building. The registered historical buildings in Sanliurfa have been refunctioned as boutique hotels, and according to relevant laws and regulations, additions that will not disrupt the plan arrangement, can be dismantled, and will not create changes in the facade are made. However, it has been found that in some cases, excessive additions have been made. These include additions such as wet area additions, technical equipment (electricity, water, ventilation, internet, security cameras, water tank, TV antenna, etc.), closure of open elements such as iwans with wooden frames, covering of the terrace and/or courtyard, conversion of windows and/or niches into doors, and conversion of niches into windows.

The interventions made on the 6 structures selected and examined in the working area during the re-functionization process are given below.

5.1. Interventions Made to the Courtyard Unit

In the transformation of traditional buildings into boutique hotels, it has been observed that in some buildings, the courtyard, which is the main element shaping the residences, is partially or completely covered (Fig. 10). Cameras, modems, and other devices have been added to the courtyards (Fig. 11), and in some buildings, fans have been added to the courtyard facade to provide coolness in the summer (Fig. 12).



Fig. 10: Nahrin Hotel



Fig. 11: Ve Hotels



Fig. 12: Hasbahan Guest House&Boutique Otel

It has been observed that the pool, flowerbed, and well in the courtyards are generally preserved during the conversion of traditional buildings into boutique hotels. However, there are also examples where the flowerbeds in the courtyard have been removed or reduced in size.

5.2. Interventions Made to the Iwan Unit

In some buildings where traditional houses are converted into boutique hotels, the iwan, a semi-open space created by hot climate conditions, has been completely enclosed. In some buildings, the back wall of the iwan has been brought forward to create a wet area for the rooms (Fig.). In the building formerly known as the Karacizmeliler House and now operated as the Hanehan Boutique Hotel, the decorations on the ceiling of the eyvan have not been restored to their original state due to reasons such as a shortage of skilled craftsmen (Fig. 13). In some buildings, a fan has been added to the eyvan ceiling to provide coolness in the summer (Fig. 14).



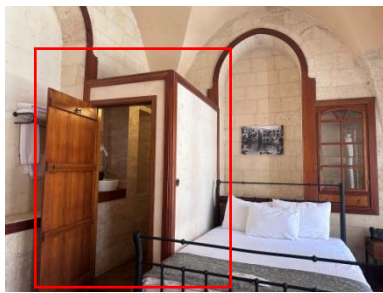
Fig. 13: Before and after restoration



Fig. 14: Hanehan Boutique Otel

5.3. Interventions in Rooms

During the conversion of traditional buildings into boutique hotels, the biggest change seen in the rooms is the addition of wet areas in line with modern living conditions. Wet areas, which should be made of removable materials, have been added to some rooms in a corner of the room (Fig. 15). In some rooms, they have been extended from the floor to the ceiling on one side of the room (Fig. 16). In some rooms, they have been designed along the facade, but the walls have been raised to a certain height and covered (Fig. 17). In some rooms around the iwan, wet areas have been added by pulling the back wall of the iwan forward (Fig. 18).



a. Ve Hotels



b. Ve Hotels



c. Müzepotamia Guest House



d. Nahrin Hotel



e. Tessera Hotel



f. Hasbahhan Guest House & Boutique Otel

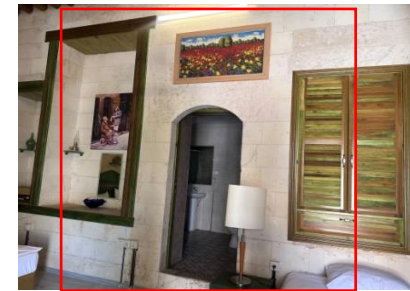
Fig. 15: Added wet areas in room corners



a. Nahrin Hotel

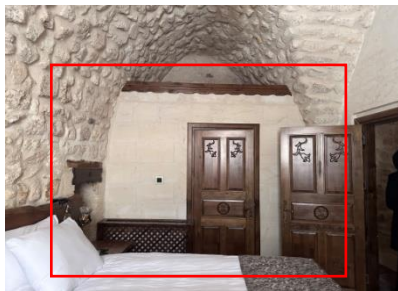


b. Tessera Hotel



c. Hanehan Boutique Otel

Fig. 16: Examples where wet areas are added along the room facade and the walls are raised up to the ceiling



a. Tessera Hotel



b. Tessera Hotel



c. Nahrin Hotel

Fig. 17: Examples of wet areas added along the room facade and with walls raised to a certain height include



a. Müzepotamia Guest House



b. The bathroom entrance facing the iwan and the extended iwan in the room /Nahrin Hotel

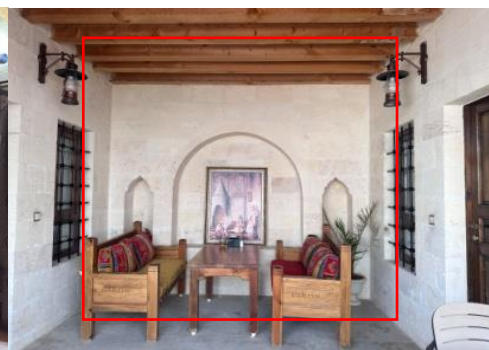


Fig. 18: The wet areas added to the back wall of the iwan

It has been observed that in the examined examples, the wet volumes are added to conform to current conditions in terms of materials, usage, etc., but they are incompatible with the traditional texture (Fig. 19).



a. Ve Hotels



b. Tessera Hotel



c. Nahrin Hotel

Fig. 19: Examples from the wet areas added to the rooms

It has been observed that air conditioning units have been added to most of the rooms (Fig. 20). In addition, interventions such as converting niches and/or windows into doors/niches into windows have been detected in the rooms.



a. Hasbahan Guest House & Butik Otel



b. Müzepotamia Guest House



c. Tessera Hotel

Fig. 20: Air conditioners added inside the rooms

The examined examples show that the door handles, called "gedemeç" in Turkish, at the entrances of the rooms have generally been preserved.

5.4. Interventions Made to Other Units (Kitchen, Cellar, Stable, Toilet)

Tandırılık (kitchen) spaces are mostly used as kitchens again (Fig. 21a). There have also been cases where they are used as hotel rooms. The spaces like the cellar, stable with a rectangular plan and usually covered with a cradle vault located half a floor below ground level are used for the boutique hotel's breakfast room needs. There are also instances where hotels have converted the upper part of their terrace and/or courtyard into a covered space to serve as a breakfast room for their guests (Fig. 21b). The original restrooms in the building are generally preserved due to their functional use (Fig. 21c).



a. Karacizmeliler Boutique kitchen before restoration



b. Hasbahan Guest House & Boutique Otel



c. Restroom kept in the place

Fig. 21: Interventions Made to Other Units

6. Results and Recommendations

Changing lifestyles, socio-cultural and economic structures over time also lead to changes in the space due to emerging new functional needs. The refunctioning of a valuable building involves the physical preservation and reutilization of the building's physical assets, which have become unusable with their current functions, and their reintroduction to human use. Refunctioning a valuable building not only allows for functional utilization of the building with various adaptations for contemporary use, but also makes the building habitable, preserves its spiritual values, and transfers them to future generations [9].

Especially in cities with high tourism potential, there is a tendency to convert traditional houses into boutique hotels to meet the accommodation needs of tourists. These restored buildings, designed to cater to tourists, also serve as cafes/restaurants for the local community in addition to their function as boutique hotels.

It is known that functional change has been going on since the earliest ages of history. The continuity of maintenance and repair of buildings has ensured their long life. Considering the previous conditions of buildings that have faced destruction and threat of disappearance, the practice of refunctioning has provided the opportunity to preserve the buildings. However, there are also negative aspects of refunctioning. In refunctioning, wet areas, electricity, water and heating systems, as well as infrastructure such as internet, phone, airconditioning, etc. are needed to provide today's comfort conditions and meet new functional and spatial needs. In order to achieve these goals, some applications may cause a slight damage to the authenticity of the building. Therefore, it should be considered that every intervention for a functional change may harm the authenticity value of the structure to some extent. In this case, it is essential to observe the balance between conservation and utilization of the structure.

The cultural and social benefits of the new function cannot be underestimated. In addition, it can be said that reusing a building that is in disuse provides economic benefits when taking into account its contribution to the national economy, land prices in the city center, the cost of constructing a new building, and energy savings.

In terms of sustainability, reuse also contributes to environmental values. In Sanliurfa, the existing building stock waste is valued instead of constructing new buildings to meet the accommodation needs.

The function selection is crucial in reusing buildings. Before assigning a new function to a historic building, a usage that is in line with the qualities of the building and does not disrupt the original perception of the building should be planned based on appropriate criteria.

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