

Preserving Istanbul's Hukukcular Site: A Modern Heritage Landmark

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Received: December 8, 2024; Accepted: December 22, 2024; Published: December 23, 2024

Abstract

This paper examines Istanbul's Hukukcular Site as a paradigm of modernist architecture, exploring its design principles, construction methodology, and significance in architectural history. By synthesizing historical and technical insights, the study highlights the building's spiritual and functional aspects, situating it within the broader context of modernity approaches by innovative contributions to Turkish architecture.

Keywords: modern heritage, Istanbul hukukcular site, landmark, modern buildings

1. Introduction

In a city celebrated for its historical landmarks, Istanbul's modern architectural gems remain overlooked and vulnerable. Although their numbers are small, lack of preservation of modern architecture heritage buildings of this city is an important issue. While different perspectives are put forward for this, it is emphasized that the period buildings do not have heritage value. However, in Turkey, the acceptance/non-acceptance of modern architectural works as heritage is still the scene of long debates. This paper examines the architectural and historical significance of the Hukukcular Site, evaluates the challenges it faces, and proposes actionable preservation strategies.

Although housing production remained in the background after the Republic was declared, initiatives for housing construction began to be made in the 1930s with the preparation of zoning plans. These initiatives aimed to produce worker and peasant housing. II. When World War II started, policies slowed down, but after the war, industrialization accelerated and meeting the housing demand of the working class became one of the problems of the state. Residential buildings were produced for factories in regions such as Kayseri, Ereğli, Nazilli and Izmit. Apart from the working class, practices were also made for civil servants and military members.

By the rapid increase in population, the single housing scale is abandoned and the production of multi-storey typologies that will meet the housing needs is started. In order to meet the increasing housing need in cities, the possibility for more than one person to have rights on a parcel was opened in 1954. As a result of the institutionalization of condominium ownership, formations such as Housing Cooperatives and Contracting for Flats have emerged. One of the important examples of the projects of this period is the Hukukcular Sitesi.

The building is important because it is facing demolition. The imminent risk of demolition underscores the building's urgent need for preservation.

2. Istanbul Hukukcular Site

The site is located in Büyükdere boulevard in Şişli region of Istanbul in the corner of İ.E.T.T garage (Figure 1). In addition to being one of the first examples of housing cooperatives, Hukukcular Site stands out with its structure that brings together residential functions, social facilities and commercial areas in a single block. The building located in Şişli is seen as a part of the rationalism offamous architects Haluk Baysal and Melih Birsal. Architects interpret Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation structure and create a design that prioritizes individuality (Kaya, 2022).

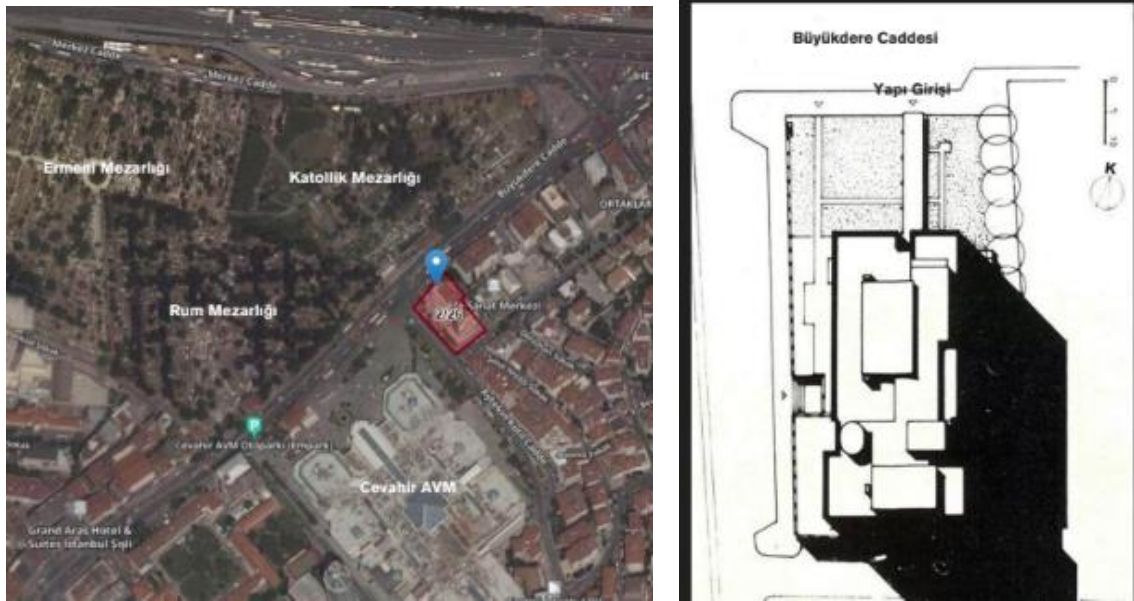


Figure 1. The location of Istanbul Hukukcular site (google earth), the site plan of building

Although the project of the building, one of the first multi-storey apartment buildings in Turkey, discussed in 1958, its construction delayed due to the coup and the construction completed in 1967. The land is located in a dense residential area near Mecidiyeköy, Istanbul. The complex, with a surface area of 2,860 m², has a prismatic mass with a front facade of 43 m, a side facade of 72 m and a rear facade of 35 m. The 7-meter elevation difference between the front and rear facades was considered as a design solution for commercial units. In addition, it is the first building in Turkey to gather site life in a single mass, with the social facilities and technical service units located inside the building (Figure 2&3).

The structure, built of reinforced concrete, reflects the construction techniques and materials of its period. While the height of the block provides a wide field of view to the city, the western and southern facades overlook the sea. Sea view facades are defined as independent blocks. Duplex and half-duplex flats are accessed from the main staircase landings. The internal circulation problem was solved with minimal space loss and a free plan was left.

Although the apartment types are different from each other, the main principle in their design is the same: each apartment has three bedrooms and two wet areas. In addition, fixed furniture applied together with the structure in each flat provides unity in the entire design, achieving both functionality and aesthetics.



Figure 2. The entrance of site when ist was built (salt archieve, website 1) today (the author archive, 2024)



Figure 3. The facade of site when it was built (website 1.) and today (the author archive, 2024)

Social and complementary amenities include a bicycle park, a site manager's residence and storage areas on the first and third basement floors. Commercial spaces are located on the ground floor and adjacent mezzanine, along with the first, second and third floors. Technical units consist of the auxiliary gallery on the terrace, boiler room, water and fuel tank and shelter area on the third basement floor. The purpose of planning such a system in a single residential complex was to meet every need of the residents of the complex.

There are 12 monoplexes of 117 square meters in Hukukçular Sitesi, 30 duplexes of 147 square meters and 24 semi-duplexes of 151 square meters. In the block, where there are 6 galleries as well as 3 typologies, the monoplexes are entered from the gallery level, while the other residences are accessed from the internal stair landing. Although typology solutions vary, each flat has 3 bedrooms and 2 wet areas. Also -3 to all apartments. While a storage area is defined in the basement, a parking area is also reserved for strollers and bicycles. Meeting and entertainment halls, a youth club, a pool, and open and closed terrace areas are planned to meet the needs of 66 flats (Figure 4&5). (Kaya, 2022)

In this block, where future needs are considered instead of limiting the users to single-type spaces, the architects make a synthesis by interpreting Le Corbuser's early architectural style. Although it is claimed by some that this building is a copy of the Unité d'abitation, the fact that there are 3 different typologies in the building and the users are given the right to choose shows that the Hukukçular Sitesi is inspired by this project, but the production is made with the interpretation of the architects.



Figure 4. The plans and section of B and C type (Canoğlu Kocaman, 2019).



Figure 5. The staircase from inside of building (Canoğlu Kocaman, 2019).

The deterioration caused by the change in function was not limited to the commercial use of the flats; As mentioned in the previous section, when the project was designed and implemented, the spaces on the ground floor, which were used as social areas, were rented to provide commercial income. With this approach; On the commercial floors, the passage approach designed by the designers was eliminated and access to the commercial units was designed to be from the outside. The building entrance is limited by an entrance cover and the garden use of the building is left to commercial areas. The commercial units on the northern façade serve independently of the building by separating the use of the front garden with the mass. Since it is a branch of a branded company in the food and beverage industry, the concept design of the brand shows itself in interior applications. Another commercial unit located on the ground floor; It is operated by a store serving kitchen products. The casino, one of the social areas of the building, is also used for commercial purposes by the same store. Volume enlargement initiatives affecting the façade layout have triggered material changes in the interior. One of the other commercial areas on the basement floor is used as a textile store and the other is used as a toy store. Therefore, commercial areas have brought about changes regarding their functions (Canoğlu Kocaman, 2019).

Unite d'habitation, which means 'Housing Unit' in Turkish, is one of the most famous and important mass housing projects in the world. The project is in Marseille II. It was built for French citizens who became homeless as a result of World War II. Le Corbusier wanted to change the perception of collective living in his project. Instead of just giving people a 'shelter', he tried to design a vertical garden where the people living here would live, play and come together. For this purpose, the long and wide roof of this large building was opened to the use of those living here.

The gardens, kindergarten, gym and pool on the rooftop have turned the roof into a recreation area. There are also small shops, a small infirmary and a hotel inside the building. By following such a design philosophy, Le Corbusier planned to establish a separate city structure and a common sense of life within the huge structure he created.

Melih Birsnel explains the situation in an interview in *Yapı* journal as follows: "Although our office is the author of the project, unfortunately many similar ones have been made. However, I have not come across a project study that develops this concept in Turkey. The only feature of this is that the main system is Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* building in Marseille. But there is still a difference between that and this. The main difference stems from this; In Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation*, all apartments are semi-duplex. In other words, it is a plan solution that covers the entire building. We have half-duplex, duplex and simplex. This cut is original, Haluk must be given credit. Haluk worked hard on this issue."

3. Conclusion and Evaluation

In this study, the Istanbul Hukukçular site, one of the rare examples of late modern architectural heritage in Turkey, was examined. Firstly, attention was drawn to its architectural originality and it was emphasized that they are structures worth preserving in our urban and modern architectural memory. For this purpose, the structures were designed in terms of the load-bearing system.

The Istanbul Hukukçular Sitesi structure, which has a unique modern architectural language, includes modern approaches such as its relationship with the historical and cultural context, its facades using exposed concrete and prefabricated cage systems, and being the first large-scale cooperative in Turkey.

However, today, since many modern architectural products have lost their original architecture and are under threat, it is recommended that the carrier system of the Istanbul Hukukçular site API be strengthened and continued to operate. Although it is legally registered, the building is important because it is facing demolition. It is thought

that increasing the number of studies and documentation methods aimed at the preservation of these recent structures from the Republican Era will be effective in this sense.

The recommendations for Hukukçular Site building are;

Legal: Advocate for heritage designation and stronger protection laws.

Technical: A good phased restoration plan, prioritizing structural integrity must be planned.

Educational: Workshops or public campaigns to raise awareness about modern heritage should be started.

Financial: Some funding models, such as public-private partnerships or grants from international preservation bodies can be suggested.

As a result preserving the Hukukçular Site is not merely about saving a building but about safeguarding a piece of Turkey's modern history for future generations.

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