

ARCH 411 | Conservation of Historical Environments

2024-2025 Fall Term | Lecture Report

Instructor | Ph. D. Ayşe Henry

Report 01 | Guest Lectures Response Paper

Sevgi Melisa Karaca | 22003303

Where Tradition Shapes Tomorrow

Selected Lectures

“Navigating New Narratives: Integrating Architectural Conservation Methodologies in Contemporary Design” by Melis Sözen

“Conservation of Modern Residential Heritage: Developing Principles and Guidelines for Merbank Houses in Keçiören, Ankara” by Melis Sözen

Summary of the Lectures

Melis Sözen’s two lectures offered a comprehensive exploration of architectural conservation, focusing on both the preservation of historic urban environments and the challenges involved in conserving modern residential heritage. Together, they provided valuable insights into the principles, methods, and approaches necessary for successful conservation efforts, particularly within the Turkish context.

Navigating New Narratives: Integrating Conservation with Contemporary Design

The first lecture addressed the core stages of the conservation process while emphasizing the integration of conservation methodologies with contemporary architectural design. Sözen outlined four fundamental phases:

1. **Understanding the Space:** This initial phase involves uncovering the historical context to grasp the value and meaning embedded within the space. Understanding the layers of history is crucial for informed decision-making.
2. **Analysis:** Detailed evaluation of both the physical characteristics and the contextual relationships of the site or structure. This phase helps identify key elements worth preserving or adapting.

3. **Principles and Possible Recommendations:** Sözen stressed the importance of balancing conservation with innovation. She discussed emerging principles that encourage respectful adaptation and creative integration rather than rigid preservation.
4. **Monitoring:** Conservation is a continuous process. Methods must be applied dynamically, with ongoing assessment to ensure both protection and functionality over time.

Several case studies were presented, including the Yapı Kredi Culture and Arts Center, the Post Office Multi-Purpose Urban Center, and the Hasanpaşa Gasworks in Istanbul. These projects demonstrated how heritage protection can be effectively combined with contemporary needs, serving as exemplary models of adaptive reuse and sustainable conservation.

Conservation of Merbank Houses: Challenges in Modern Residential Heritage

The second lecture focused on the Merbank Houses in Keçiören, Ankara—an important example of Ankara's modernization in the 1950s. Designed by Sedat Çağlar in 1957, this housing complex featured various typologies and integrated public facilities. However, over time, much of its public areas were demolished and housing units underwent significant alterations.

Sözen critically examined the protection policies (or lack thereof) governing modern residential heritage in Turkey, highlighting several key issues:

- The absence of comprehensive and binding policies dedicated to the protection of modern housing heritage.

- The pressing need for residential buildings to be adaptable to rapidly changing user needs and lifestyles.
- The risk of modern housing losing their unique architectural identities due to neglect or insensitive interventions.

The Merbank Houses serve as a microcosm of broader challenges faced not only in Turkey but globally, where modern housing heritage often remains undervalued and inadequately protected. The deterioration of public spaces and fragmented management have significantly undermined the original character of the complex.

Personal Reflection and Critical Analysis

Both lectures illuminated the multifaceted and complex nature of architectural conservation. I was particularly struck by the nuanced relationship between preserving historical authenticity and addressing contemporary social needs. The first lecture's emphasis on integrating conservation with innovative design expanded my understanding of how adaptive reuse can revitalize heritage sites without compromising their significance.

The Merbank Houses case study revealed the unique challenges posed by modern residential heritage. Unlike monumental public buildings, residential complexes often struggle for recognition and protection. This raises critical questions about how heritage value is defined and who decides what deserves preservation. The lack of comprehensive policies and active management plans leads to gradual erosion of cultural and social values embedded in these housing projects.

This situation underscores the importance of developing inclusive conservation strategies that incorporate stakeholder participation, including local communities, residents, experts, and

policymakers. Such cooperation is vital for crafting dynamic, realistic, and sustainable protection frameworks that address both physical structures and their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Additionally, the discussion helped me appreciate the importance of ongoing monitoring and flexibility in conservation processes. Heritage preservation cannot be static but must evolve alongside changing societal needs and urban dynamics.

Conclusion

Melis Sözen's presentations provided me with a profound and holistic understanding of architectural conservation, especially within the Turkish context. They highlighted the intricate challenges of balancing preservation with innovation and adapting to evolving user needs, particularly in the realm of modern residential heritage.

Moving forward, these insights will significantly inform my approach to future design and conservation projects. Developing comprehensive, context-sensitive strategies that engage diverse stakeholders and embrace adaptability will be essential. I am inspired to pursue conservation practices that not only protect physical heritage but also honor and sustain the social and cultural narratives that give places their meaning.