

Analyzing the Transformation of Urban Open Spaces

in the Historical Process with Cultural Codes: The Case of Konya Kültürpark

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Abstract

Urban spaces undergo significant physical and social transformations in response to changes in socio-cultural structures. In this process, the functions and meanings of public space are redefined. Urban open spaces, as key components of public space, provide important insights into social structure and cultural dynamics. This study examines Konya Kültürpark, located near the historical city center, through three main periods: pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican. The transformation of Kültürpark as an urban open space was analyzed through a literature review and interpreted using cultural codes. Cultural function diagrams were produced to represent spatial use, and a comparative analysis was conducted across the identified periods. The findings indicate that both the boundaries and functional structure of Kültürpark have evolved in parallel with socio-cultural changes. While some functions disappeared over time, others were transformed or sustained. The study demonstrates that urban open spaces can be interpreted as dynamic environments shaped by the interaction between spatial transformation and socio-cultural change.

Keywords: *Urban Open Space, Kültürpark, Cultural Codes, Transformation, Public Space, Historicity*

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Introduction

Cities have important roles in shaping social life. Streets, urban open spaces and squares, as components of public space, are the areas where citizens come together and express themselves (Erdönmez and Akı, 2005). Public space is a “place” where social events take place (Akyol et al., 2017). Each “place” has a unique character and “spirit of place” (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Public spaces are an important factor in the formation of a socio-cultural structure that people can easily use and relate to their environment (Akyol et al., 2017). Good planning of public spaces greatly affects the socio-cultural structure and economy of the city (Giddings et al., 2011). When well designed, urban open spaces, including parks and squares, provide social, economic and environmental value to the city and its people, determining their quality of life (Beck, 2009, 240–248). Moreover, the planning of such spaces requires an understanding of cultural context and user interaction, as highlighted in cultural planning approaches applied in urban parks, where spatial organization is shaped by social practices and cultural dynamics (Nilipour, 2023). In this context, there is a need for well-designed public spaces where the urban community can interact with each other (Mattson, 1999). Urban green areas, which function as recreational public spaces, have been developed to counterbalance rapid urbanization and to support social interaction (Tekeli, 1981). In these spaces, users actively participate through movement, interaction and everyday practices, transforming them into lived public spaces (Gehl, 1987). This transformation is closely related to how public spaces are socially used and consumed, varying across different user groups and socio-economic contexts (Rabiei et al., 2021).

Public spaces and society are transformed over time according to the cultural and social structure in which they exist. Cultural values are affected by changes in social needs and political conditions, and spaces adapt to the era they are in (Bal et al., 2022). Public spaces that have cultural value in the historical process have symbolic elements to emphasize the historicity of the space. In public spaces, a layer of information is formed by the combination of symbols, signs and traditions. While symbols express intangible assets such as ideas, feelings and memories, they are also transmitted as material features such as buildings, sculptures and monuments (Monnet, 2011). Studies on urban regeneration emphasize that collective memory plays a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of place identity while guiding spatial transformation processes (HaghighatBin et al., 2024). Furthermore, the concept of placemaking highlights that public spaces gain meaning through user participation, sense of belonging and collective experience (Meetiayagoda et al., 2023). Similarly, collective space production approaches underline that culture and space are co-produced through social practices and shared experiences, reinforcing the social role of urban spaces (Larasati et al., 2022). However, social transformations may also lead to the loss or transformation of cultural values over time, making it necessary to analyze how these values are preserved or reinterpreted within spatial processes (Bal et al., 2022). There is a direct relationship between changes in social behavior and the transformation of public spaces (Akyol et al., 2017). This study examines the transformation of urban open spaces as a component of public space through cultural codes in the historical process. The scope of the study is to identify the cultural codes of the social structure of the period in which Konya Kültürpark was located in the pre-Republican, Republican and post-Republican periods and to analyze the functional changes of the spaces in the area. The transformation of Konya Kültürpark in the historical process was investigated through a literature review. When the literature review about Konya Kültürpark is made; In the study conducted in 2002, the dates and spatial developments of the squares planned in Konya City Center were

examined and Kültürpark is one of the squares examined (Onder and Aklanoglu, 2002). A later study evaluated the reorganized Kültürpark based on quality criteria and emphasized planning processes between 1922–1954, 1955–1999 and 2000–2016 (Çalık, 2018). Another study examined Kültürpark within the framework of space-politics and analyzed its transformation after 1923 (Topçuoglu and Gürel, 2020). However, the existing literature does not address the transformation of Kültürpark through the lens of social structure and cultural change across different historical periods. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying all spatial functions throughout the historical process, determining cultural codes of space use, and developing cultural function diagrams. The transformation of the area is then analyzed comparatively through these diagrams.

Historical Transformation of Konya Kültürpark

Konya Kültürpark is located in the northwest of the historical city center of Konya and constitutes an important urban open space for public use. The area is actively used by citizens for recreation, social interaction, and cultural activities. It includes green areas, walking paths, seating areas, and significant historical elements such as the Dede Mansion and Tacülvezir Tomb. Due to its central location and accessibility, Kültürpark plays an important role in daily urban life and contributes to the socio-cultural structure of the city. The area is characterized by its multi-functional use and continuous public accessibility. Today, it functions as a multi-functional urban open space where different user groups come together.

The current condition of Kültürpark represents the latest stage of its transformation process, as illustrated in Figure 1. Based on map analyses, it is evident that the boundaries of the area have changed over time. Located within the historical city center, Kültürpark functions today as an actively used urban open space. As shown in Figure 1, the transformation of the area can be traced through three main periods: pre-Republican (1910), Republican (1972), and post-Republican (2026). These periods reflect the spatial and functional evolution of the area and provide a basis for analyzing cultural change.

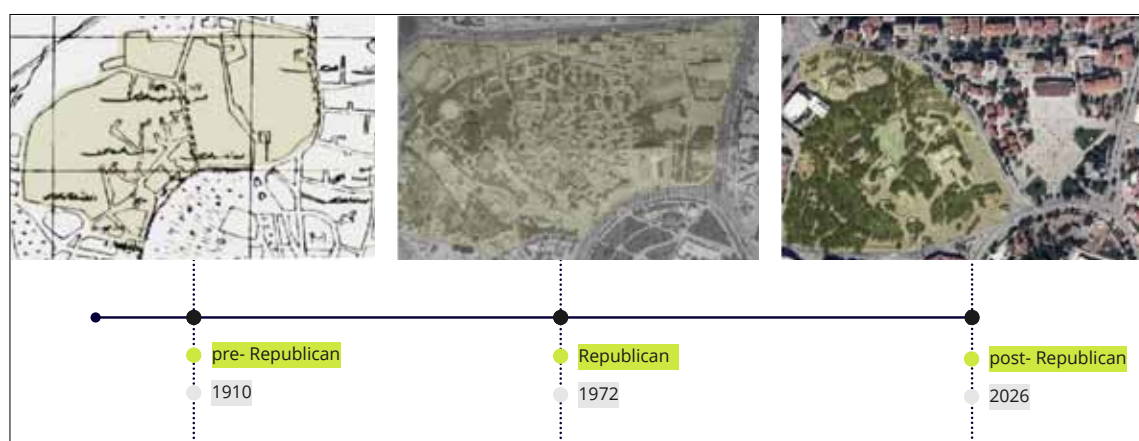


Figure 1. Historical transformation of the location of Konya Kültürpark (Karpuz archive, URL 3).

When the historical development of the area where Konya Kültürpark is located is examined, it is known that Dede Garden, one of the historical gardens of Konya, was situated in this area. Within the boundaries of Dede Garden, Tacülvezir Lodge was located, as shown in Figure 2 (Önder and Aklanoglu, 2002). The lodge was positioned to the east of the garden,

adjacent to the Tacülvezir Tomb within the present-day borders of Kültürpark. Built by Taceddin Ahmet in 1239 during the reign of Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev II, the complex included a madrasah and a zawiya. Initially used as a lodge (hankah), it was later transferred to the Mevlevi order and functioned as both a madrasah and a lodge. The structure remained in active use as a madrasah, zawiya, masjid, and lodge until the end of the Ottoman period. During the Ottoman era, the Tacülvezir madrasah and its associated foundations, including the adjacent garden, were recorded in official documents (Küçükdağ, 2020). Originally constructed as a tomb and later expanded with the addition of a madrasah, the structure began to be used as a zawiya in 1556–1557 and was completely demolished in 1896 (URL 1).



Figure 2. Tacülvezir Lodge (URL 2).

Dede Garden was used for many years as a summer garden by the Mevlevi sheikhs and served as a place where foreign guests visiting the city were hosted. In the late 19th century, a pool and a dervish lodge were constructed by Abdülvacit Çelebi, as shown in Figure 3. Individuals associated with the Mevlana Dervish Lodge organized sema performances and gatherings around this pool (Odabası, 1998).



Figure 3. In 1930 pool and lodge in the Dede Garden (URL 2).

In the area where Dede Garden was located, several important structures such as Karatay Madrasah, Ali Gav Lodge-Foundation, and Alaeddin Darüssifa were present, as shown in Figure 4. These buildings were positioned to the east of the garden, forming a spatial cluster of religious, educational, and health-related functions. The area, known as the Dervish gardens, included resting areas, a two-story lodge, a pool, and petit trees. This spatial configuration indicates that the area functioned as a semi-private space reserved for statesmen and dervishes (Topçuoglu and Gürel, 2020). This limited accessibility reflects a socio-cultural structure centered on religious institutions use, distinguishing it from later periods where public accessibility increased.

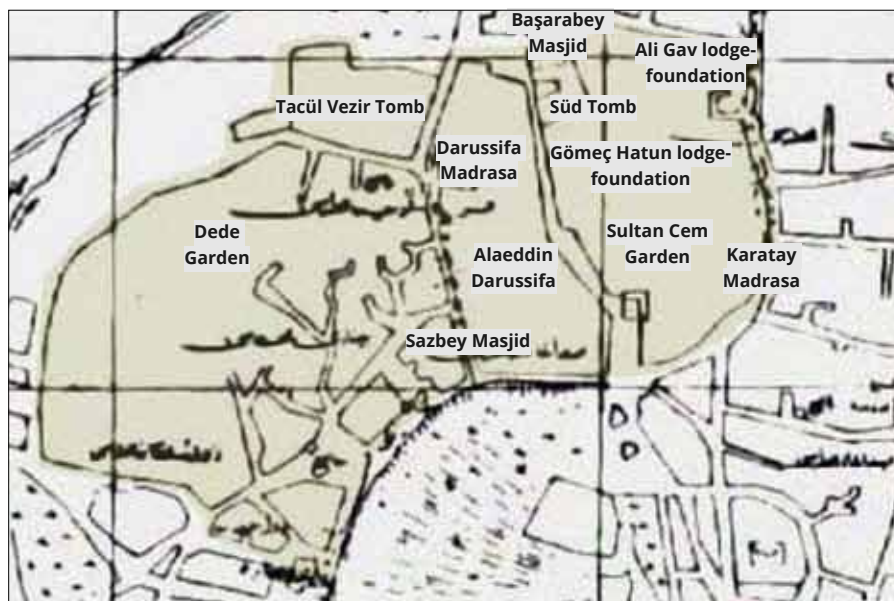


Figure 4. In 1910 Kültürpark area and important buildings (Author, based on Küçükdağ (1989, 347–359) and the Karpuz Archive).

Dede Garden was opened to public use between 1915 and 1920 by Postnisiin Abdülhalim Çelebi Efendi. Following the proclamation of the Republic, dervish lodges were closed in 1926, and the area was first transferred to the treasury and later to municipal ownership in 1931 (Sahin and Ceylan, 2013). As shown in Figure 5, the area where the pavilion and pool were located was transformed into a family casino, and its function was redefined with the addition of a dance floor (Isık, 2010). In this period, the municipality reorganized the garden, introduced new landscaping elements, and added functions such as a zoo, tennis courts, and recreational facilities (Önder and Aklanoglu, 2002). This transformation marks a significant shift from a semi-private, religiously oriented space to a publicly accessible urban open space with recreational and social functions. The diversification of uses indicates a change in socio-cultural structure, reflecting the emergence inclusive urban practices. Over time, some of these functions, such as the zoo and tennis courts, were removed, while new functions like the fairground were introduced, demonstrating the dynamic nature of the area. Today, Kültürpark continues to function as an important urban open space that

meets the recreational and social needs of the public. The surrounding urban context also played a significant role in shaping the area. Important structures such as Karatay Madrasa, the Courthouse building, and Atatürk Vocational High School for Girls contributed to the socio-cultural and spatial development of the area. Kültürpark and its surroundings are perceived as a unified urban zone, reinforcing its role as a central recreational and social space. In addition, the nearby Sazibey (Ak) Mosque, located to the northwest of Alaeddin Hill and built in 1424 during the Karamanoglu period, reflects the historical continuity of the area (URL 4).

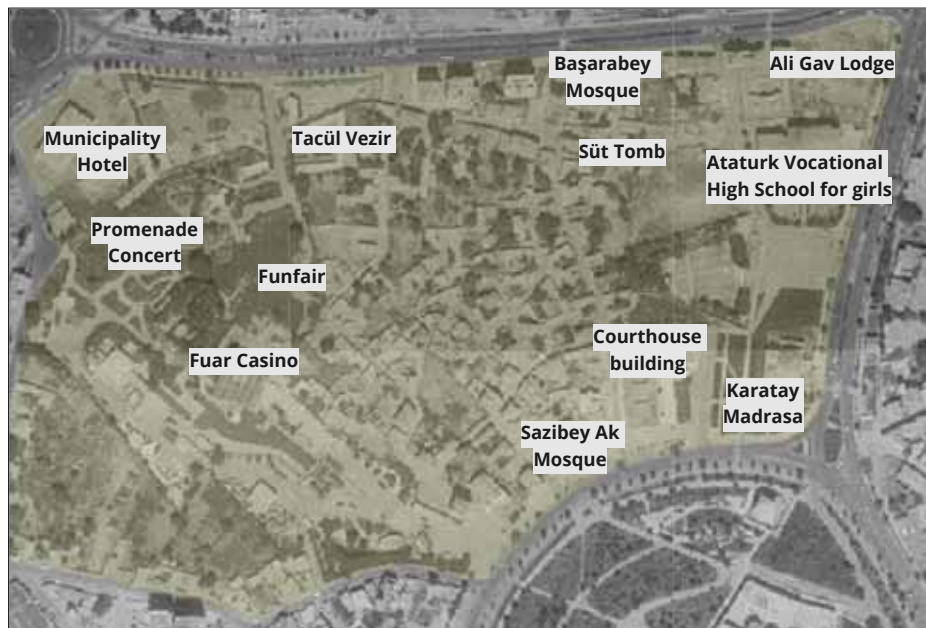


Figure 5. In 1972 area of Kültürpark and important buildings (Author, based on URL 3).

In 2009, Kültürpark underwent another transformation and today functions as a multi-functional urban open space with various social and recreational facilities. With the introduction of the tram line, the boundaries of Kültürpark have become clearly defined, as illustrated in Figure 6. Historical elements such as the Tacülvezir Tomb, Dede Lodge, and the pool, preserved from the pre-Republican period, are located within the boundaries of the park. The area where the Dede Lodge and the pool are situated has been adapted for use as a café, reflecting the integration of historical structures into contemporary urban functions. In addition, to the east of Kültürpark, Konya City Square and the Payitaht Museum are located on the site of the former Courthouse building (Sahin and Ceylan, 2013). The transformation of Kültürpark demonstrates how urban open spaces evolve in response to changing socio-cultural needs. Over time, user demands and expectations have shifted, leading to the emergence of new functions while some traditional uses have been preserved. This process highlights the dynamic relationship between space, function, and cultural change, which constitutes the main focus of this study.



Figure 6. In 2023, the area where Kùltürpark is located and important buildings (Author, based on URL 3).

Methodology

This study aims to examine and concretely express the socio-cultural structure by analyzing the changes in landscaping and architectural arrangements of urban open spaces throughout the historical process. The use of urban open spaces during the pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods and their reflections on the socio-cultural structure were evaluated.

The methodology of the study consists of six main stages, as illustrated in Figure 7. First, the relationship between urban open space and culture was examined to establish the conceptual framework of the study. Second, the transformation periods of Konya Kùltürpark were identified as pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods. Third, the functions of the area were determined for each period through a literature review structured according to the three historical periods. For the pre-Republican period, historical sources and archival documents were used; for the Republican period, planning documents and secondary literature were examined; and for the post-Republican period, recent studies, current maps, and field-based observations were utilized. Fourth, cultural codes were identified based on these functions. Cultural codes are abstract graphical symbols that reflect cultural changes and represent behavioral patterns of societies (Uysal and Semerci, 2014). For example, the act of sitting for resting in an urban open space is represented as a cultural code. Fifth, cultural function diagrams were created based on the identified codes to visualize the use of the area. These codes were grouped under the categories of

Resting, Recreation, Entertainment, Sports, Culture and Art, Religion and Education, and Security. Finally, in the sixth stage, a comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate the transformation of Kültürpark as an urban open space throughout the historical process. Konya province, one of the oldest settlements in Anatolia, provides a significant case study for examining the relationship between space and cultural change. Kültürpark, located in the northwest of the historical city center of Konya, has undergone transformations over time, reflecting the socio-cultural evolution of society. Through the use of cultural codes and function diagrams, the transformation process of Kültürpark and its relationship with social change were systematically analyzed.

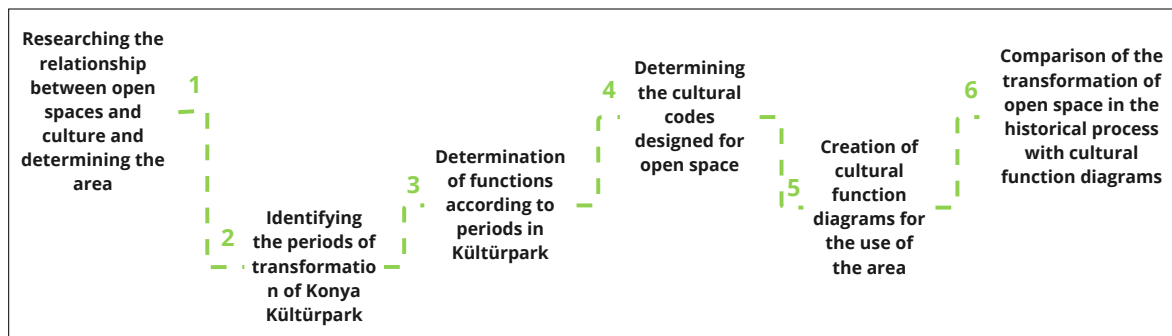


Figure 7. Method of analyzing open space with cultural codes (Author).

Analysis of Konya Kültürpark with Culturel Codes

When Konya Kültürpark is analyzed within the historical process, it is evaluated through three main periods of transformation: pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods. The cultural values of the society using the area in each period were identified through spatial functions. As illustrated in Figure 8, these functions were interpreted as cultural codes representing user behavior and socio-cultural patterns.

The identified cultural codes were grouped under five main categories: resting, entertainment, sports–culture and arts, religion and education, and security. Resting includes functions such as food and beverage areas, seating on benches, sitting in green areas, water elements, and accommodation-related uses. Entertainment is represented by music and fun activities, children’s playgrounds, and zoo functions. The sports–culture and arts category includes activities such as tennis, walking, exhibitions, and theater. Religion and education cover functions such as places of worship, educational spaces, and tombs and lodges. Security includes basic service-related function safety elements. These cultural codes vary across different historical periods, reflecting changes in social structure, user needs, and spatial organization. The analysis demonstrates that the transformation of Kültürpark can be understood not only through physical changes but also through shifts in cultural values and patterns of use.

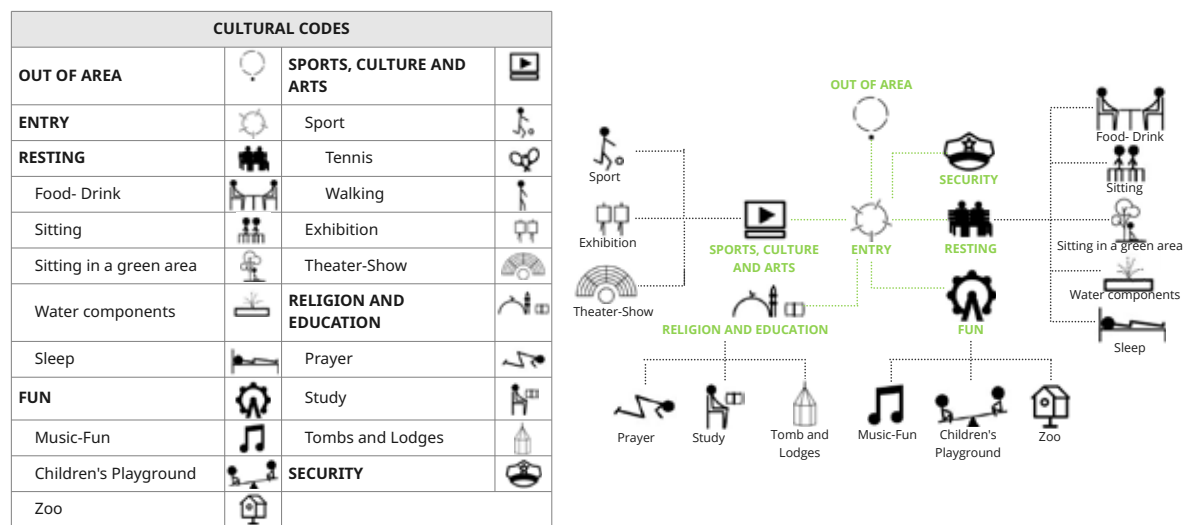


Figure 8. Cultural Codes and Cultural Function Diagrams (Author, based on Uysal and Semerci, 2014).

The cultural function diagram of the pre-Republican period is presented in Figure 9. During this period, the area was used exclusively by statesmen and dervishes, indicating a limited and controlled accessibility. This restricted use reflects a socio-cultural structure in which spatial functions were defined by specific social groups. The area was predominantly characterized by religious and educational functions, along with limited cultural and resting activities. Religious functions are represented by structures such as Tacülvezir Tomb, Süd Tomb, Basarabey Masjid, Sazbey Masjid, Ali Gav Lodge-Foundation, Gömeç Hatun Lodge-Foundation and which served as places of worship. Educational functions were provided by institutions such as Alaaddin Darüssifa, Darüssifa Madrasah, and Karatay Madrasah. In addition, the presence of resting such as Pelit Trees, Gülbahçe, Sultan Cem Garden, Dervish Lodge-garden and water elements indicates supporting functions within the spatial organization. Although there was no distinct cultural code of entertainment during the pre-Republican period, the performance of sema can be considered a cultural and spiritual activity rather than a form of entertainment. This highlights the dominance of religious and educational functions in shaping the cultural structure of the area during this period.

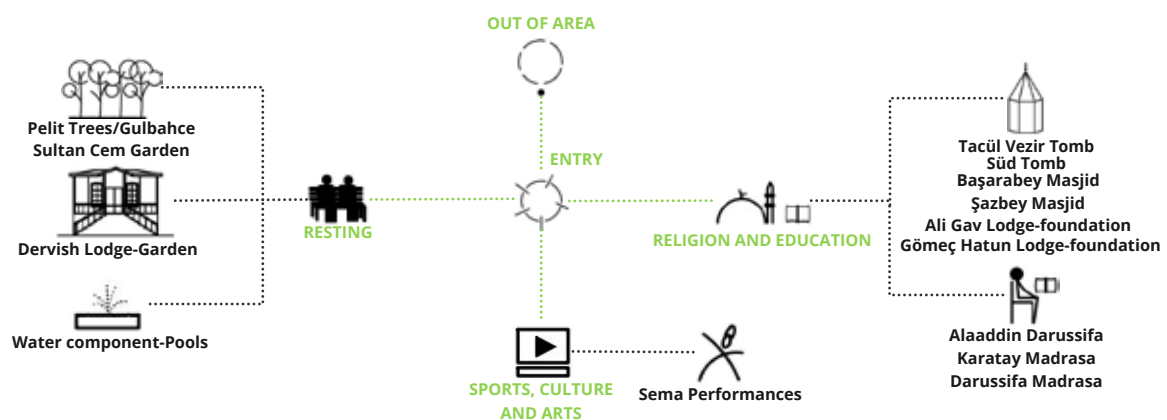


Figure 9. Cultural Function Diagram of the Pre-Republican Period (Author).

The cultural function diagram of the Republican period is presented in Figure 10. During this period, the area was opened to the use of the entire public, marking a transition toward a publicly accessible urban open space. As the boundaries of the green area known as

Kültürpark began to take shape, the area became accessible from multiple entry points. A significant transformation occurred in the functional structure of the area. The Dede Mansion and its garden, which were actively used for resting in the previous period, were transformed into an entertainment function as a fair casino. The addition of a funfair, children's playgrounds, and a bird zoo increased the number of entertainment spaces actively used by the public. At the same time, new functions related to sports, culture, and arts were introduced, including exhibition areas, promenade concert spaces, and tennis courts. Compared to the previous period, it was determined that entertainment and sports functions increased significantly in the historical city center. In terms of resting functions, landscape components, the Municipality Hotel, and water elements were present. Within the religion and education category, structures such as Tacülvezir Tomb, Süt Tomb, Basarabey Mosque, and Sazibey (Ak) Mosque continued to exist, while the Gömeç Hatun Lodge-Foundation no longer appeared in this period. The Ali Gav Lodge-Foundation was transformed functionally into the Mahmudiye Madrasah and continued to serve within the education category. Alaaddin Darüssifa and Darüssifa Madrasah were not present in this period, while Karatay Madrasah was repurposed as a museum. In addition, Atatürk Vocational High School for Girls emerged as a new educational structure. Within the security category, the Courthouse building was identified.

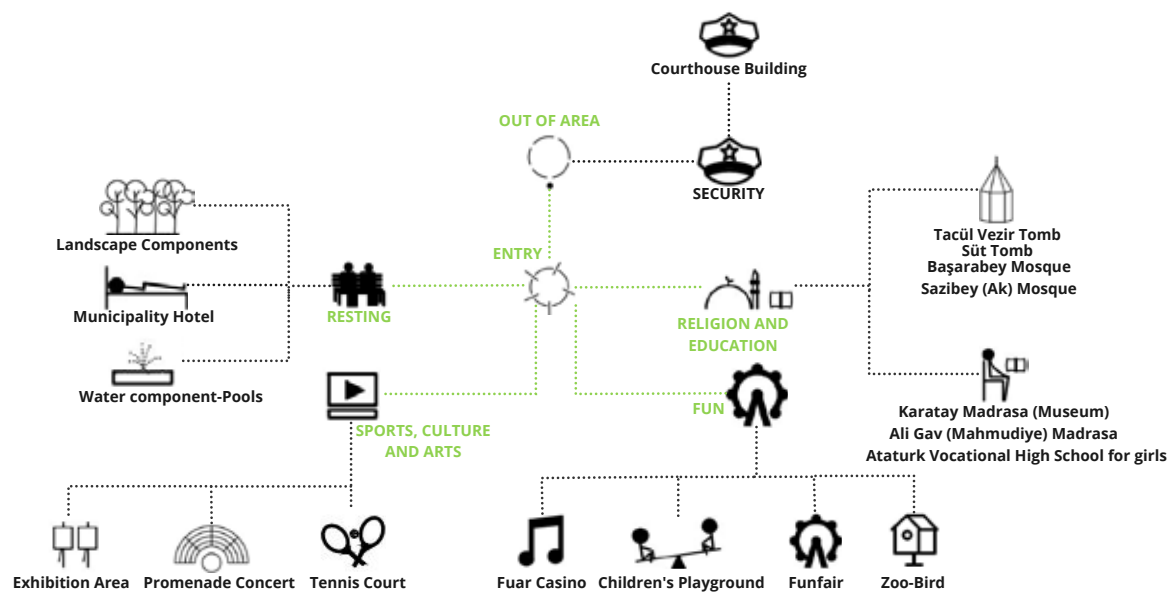


Figure 10. Cultural Function Diagram of the Republican Period (Author).

The cultural function diagram of the post-Republican period is presented in Figure 11. During this period, the area remains open to public use and is accessible from multiple entry points. The current use of Kültürpark is reflected in the cultural function diagram, indicating a well-defined and actively used urban open space. When evaluated within the historical process, it is observed that fun functions have decreased compared to the Republican period, while the overall structure shows a partial return to the functional characteristics of the pre-Republican period, particularly in terms of religion and education. At the same time, the area maintains a diverse range of functions including sports, culture, arts, entertainment, and social use. Within the resting category, the area that previously functioned as Dede Garden in the pre-Republican period and as a fair casino during the Republican period has been transformed into a café centered around the Dede Mansion and its garden, serving as a resting space. In addition, multiple cafés have been introduced

across the area. Landscape elements supporting passive use, such as seating areas within green spaces, have been developed, and the area around the Tacülvezir Tomb has been reorganized as the Gülbahçe Monument area. In terms of sports functions, tennis courts have been removed, and instead, walking and cycling paths have been introduced. The area also includes exhibition spaces and an amphitheater, strengthening its cultural and artistic functions. Within the religion and education category, the Municipality Hotel area from the Republican period has been transformed with the construction of Hacıveyszade Mosque. Sazibey (Ak) Mosque and Tacülvezir Tomb continue to function in this period, while a library has been added as a new educational facility. In the security category, a police station is present, and within the entertainment category, children's playgrounds continue to serve the public. As indicated in Figure 11, the areas marked in red fall outside the boundaries of Kültürpark but remain actively used today. These include, within the religion and education category, Ali Gav (Mahmudiye) Madrasah, Konya Atatürk Anatolian High School, Ferhuniye Başarabey Mosque, and Süt Tomb; and within the sports, culture, and arts category, Konya City Square, the Payitaht Museum, historical Konya houses (used as museums or cafés), and Karatay Madrasah (museum).

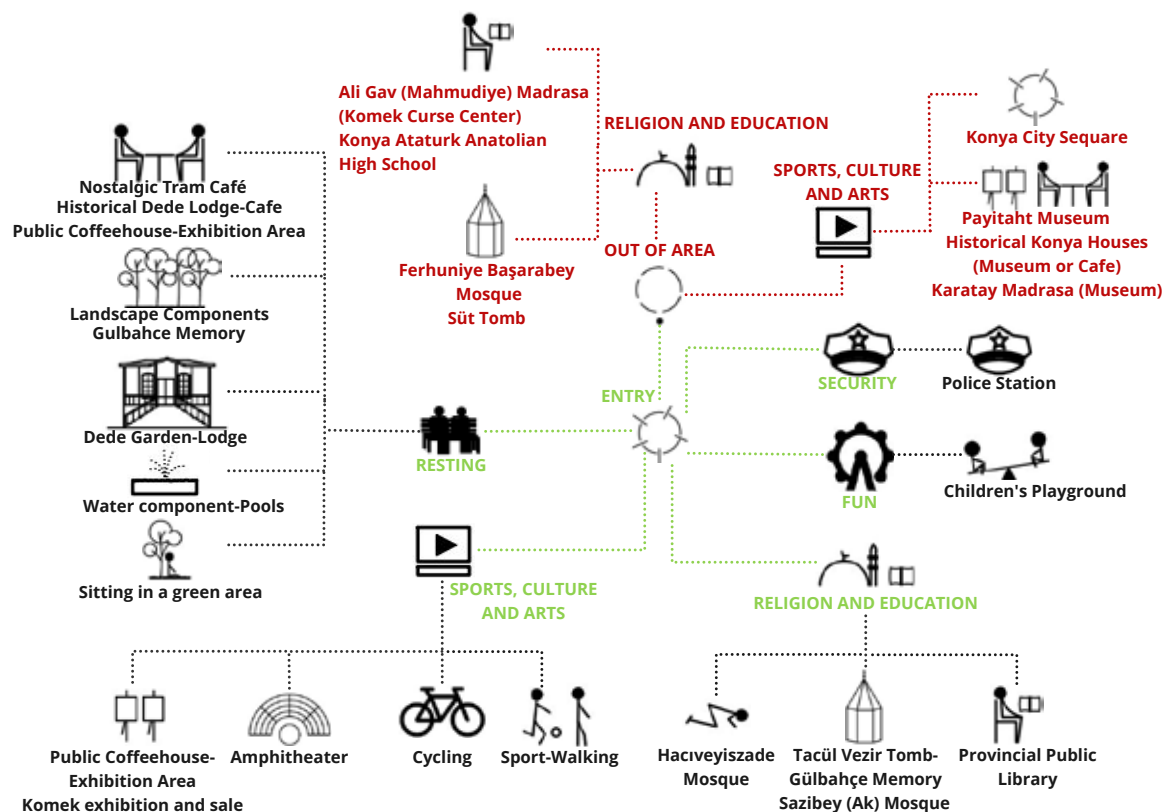


Figure 11. Cultural Function Diagram of the post-Republican Period. The red text refers to areas located outside the boundaries of Kültürpark. (Author).

Konya Kültürpark was analyzed within the historical process, and cultural codes were identified. As shown in Figure 12, the transformation of Kültürpark was comparatively analyzed through cultural codes across three main periods: pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods. The analysis reveals that the functions within the area have either changed or transformed over time. In the pre-Republican period, the area was used exclusively by statesmen and dervishes, whereas in the following periods, the opening of

the area to the public led to a diversification of users. While similar cultural codes related to entertainment can be observed in the pre-Republican and post-Republican periods, the Republican period stands out with the transformation of Dede Mansion and its garden into a fairground functioning as an entertainment space. During this period, entertainment-related cultural codes became more dominant, and the area was widely used by the public, particularly during weekends and summer months. In terms of sports, culture, and arts functions, sema performances in the pre-Republican period were replaced by amphitheater-based activities in later periods. Today, the amphitheater hosts concerts and various cultural events. Tennis courts constructed during the Republican period were removed in the post-Republican period, and hard-surfaced areas are now used for activities such as cycling, skating, and skateboarding, reflecting contemporary urban practices. Regarding religion and education functions, the area, which originally included madrasahs, lodges, and spaces for dervish gatherings in the pre-Republican period, lost these functions during the Republican period. However, in the post-Republican period, the educational function was reintroduced through the construction of a library, indicating a partial revival of cultural codes. Overall, the transformation of Kültürpark demonstrates how urban open spaces evolve through the interaction between spatial change and socio-cultural dynamics.

Periods-User/Function	CULTURAL CODES					
	pre- Republican		Republican		post- Republican	
	Dervishes and Statesmen		Public		Public	
Resting	Dervish Lodge-Garden		Landscape Components		Historical Dede Lodge-Cafe	
	Pelit Trees/Gulbahce		Water component-Pools		Landscape Components/Gulbahce Memory	
	Sultan Cem Garden		Courthouse Building		Konya City Square	
	Pool		X		Water component-Pools	
	X		X		Sitting in a green area	
	X		Municipality Hotel		Haciveyizade Mosque	
	X		X		Nostalgic Tram Café	
Fun	X		Fuar Casino		X	
	X		Children's Playground		X	
	X		Funfair		Children's Playground	
	X		Zoo		X	
Sports, Culture and Arts	Sema Performances		Tennis Court		Public Coffeehouse-Exhibition Area	
	X		Promanat Concert		Amphitheater	
	X		Exhibition Area		Sport-Walking-Cycling	
	X		X		Historical Konya Houses (Museum or Cafe)	
	X		X		Komek exhibition and sale	
Religion and Education	Tacül Vezir Tomb, Süd Tomb		Tacül Vezir Tomb, Süd Tomb		Tacül Vezir Tomb-Gülbahçe Memory, Süd Tomb	
	Başarabey Masjid		Başarabey Mosque		Ferhuniye Başarabey Mosque	
	Sazbey Masjid		Sazibey (Ak) Mosque		Sazibey (Ak) Mosque	
	Alaaddin Darussifa, Darussifa Madrasa		X		X	
	Ali Gav Lodge- Foundation		Ali Gav (Mahmudiye) Madrasa		Ali Gav (Mahmudiye) Madrasa (Komek Curse Center)	
	Karatay Madrasa		Karatay Madrasa (Museum)		Karatay Madrasa (Museum)	
	Gömeç Hatun Lodge- Foundation		X		Payitaht Museum	
	X		X		Haciveyizade Mosque	
	X		Ataturk Vocational High School for girls		Konya Ataturk Anatolian High School	
	X		X		Provincial Public Library	
Security	X		Courthouse Building		X	
	X		X		Police Station	

Figure 12. Cultural Codes in the Historical Process (Author).

Conclusion

This study examined the transformation of Konya Kültürpark through cultural codes in order to analyze the socio-cultural structure of the area within a historical framework. By evaluating the spatial and functional changes across the pre-Republican, Republican, and post-Republican periods, the study demonstrated that urban open spaces provide a significant basis for interpreting socio-cultural dynamics. The findings reveal that Kültürpark has undergone a clear transformation from a restricted and functionally limited space to a publicly accessible and multi-functional urban open space. While the pre-Republican period was characterized by religious and educational functions used by a limited group, the Republican period introduced new recreational and entertainment functions, reflecting broader public engagement. In the post-Republican period, the area evolved into a complex urban open space where historical elements coexist with contemporary uses. Despite functional changes, certain cultural elements such as the Dede Mansion, its garden, the pool, and Tacülvezir Tomb, Sazibey (Ak) Mosque have been preserved, maintaining the continuity of cultural identity. The comparative analysis of cultural codes indicates that while some functions disappeared or transformed, others were sustained or reinterpreted over time. In particular, the similarities between the pre-Republican and post-Republican periods suggest a partial re-emergence of certain cultural patterns, while the Republican period stands out as a phase of significant functional diversification.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates that the use of cultural codes and graphical representations provides an effective tool for analyzing the relationship between spatial transformation and socio-cultural change. This approach enables the interpretation of urban open spaces not only as physical entities but also as dynamic socio-cultural systems.

In this context, the study contributes to the literature by offering a novel perspective on the analysis of urban open spaces through cultural codes. Furthermore, understanding the transformation of user activities in such spaces is essential for developing sustainable and livable urban environments. The findings of this study provide a basis for future planning and design decisions by highlighting the importance of integrating historical continuity with contemporary urban needs.

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