

THE AGORA OF İZMİR AND CULTURAL TOURISM

Eti AKYÜZ LEVİ
1395 Sokak 34/3 Alsancak – İzmir TURKEY

ejlevi@superonline.com

Dokuz Eylul University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture

KEYWORDS: Architecture, Project, Identification, Archaeology, Revitalization, Proposal, Cultural Tourism, Renovation

ABSTRACT:

The historical assets of İzmir reflecting the ancient identity of the city with a prosperous past of over 5000 years are on the verge of extinction; thus, raising our awareness as to the preservation of those still in existence has become imperative, dictating comprehensive conservation studies covering its many aspects. This paper discusses the Agora and its surroundings in the light of the complex site quality it displays, as one of the archeological focal points in active urban life.

The excavations undertaken intermittently in the past in this area bearing the marks of the Hellenistic-Roman period have assumed continuity in recent years, hence making available valuable pieces of information regarding the history of the city as well as the structure itself. Also included in this study are suggestions to re-design the area and its surroundings in terms of cultural tourism.

The study calls for the conservation of the Agora area as a historical focus of interest in daily excursions. Consequently, the following are to be considered:

- Re-designing the area around the Hatuniye Square as regards restaurants, accomodation facilities, souvenir shops,
- Improving the appearance of the side streets leading to the Agora area,
- Undertaking the restoration of the religious buildings in accordance with the re-designing of the surroundings, and connecting the pedestrian route to the Agora.

This study offers a solution which considers three main focal points, namely the Hatuniye Square, the streets in the area connecting Kadifekale, the Antique Theatre and the Agora, and the religious buildings of Kemeraltı, so as to provide for the continuity of a cross-section of the urban identity; and discusses the rehabilitation and maintenance projects for each focal point, along with their position in the whole picture.

INTRODUCTION

The historical inheritance of our city that has stood the test of time being so little as it is, the need for exceptional studies in terms of protecting and maintaining what we have today has become inevitable. Being one of the urban sites of İzmir, and located in Kemeraltı, at the historical core of town, the Agora possesses an archeological quality of a past dating back as early as the Hellenistic period, along with a proximity to other historical sights, and is therefore one of the most important elements of urban identity; the area is one that enjoys the coinciding of many identities, owing to the potential of its surroundings. It is for these characteristics that the Agora has been discussed in this paper.

The aim is to realize a program designed to revive and preserve the rich historical past of the city. The study involves generating ideas and developing suggestions regarding the conservation of the whole area. In this respect, rather than the conservation of an individual structure, a focused conservation as part of a collective project is what the studies are aimed for. As far as cultural tourism is concerned, the former identity of the city will be restored by conserving the chosen areas of focus. With tourism serving as the medium, not only the structures will be preserved in their original states, but there will also be revenues which will enable regular maintenance and repairs.

The Agora being one outstanding ancient focus in town, it is intended that the touristic potential be enhanced through those assets surrounding it. Also being studied in this paper are two other places of interest somewhat connected, Hatuniye Square

and the Synagogues District, along with the streets leading to the area. An attempt has been made as to determine, regarding the routes for culture tours, the importance of this project concentrating on the Agora, while also covering the other sub-districts nearby.

1. THE AGORA OF İZMİR

The structure bearing the characteristics of a State Agora (Texier, 1862), belonging to the Hellenistic-Roman period and located in the quarter known as Namazgah, was revealed in the course of some archeological studies in the Turkish cemetery. The excavations which started in 1927 were then continued with in the 1932 - 1941 period and later in 1944. After rather a long interval, there followed the removal of soil in the galleries in 1977, the cleaning by the Parks and Gardens Directorate of the İzmir Municipality in 1984, and excavations in the northwest corner by the Regional Restoration Office of İzmir together with the İzmir Archeology Museum in 1997 - 1998. Since 2002, İzmir Archeology Museum and the Municipality of İzmir have been undertaking in co-operation further excavations in the north and east structures of the area.



Photograph 1 – A general view of the Agora

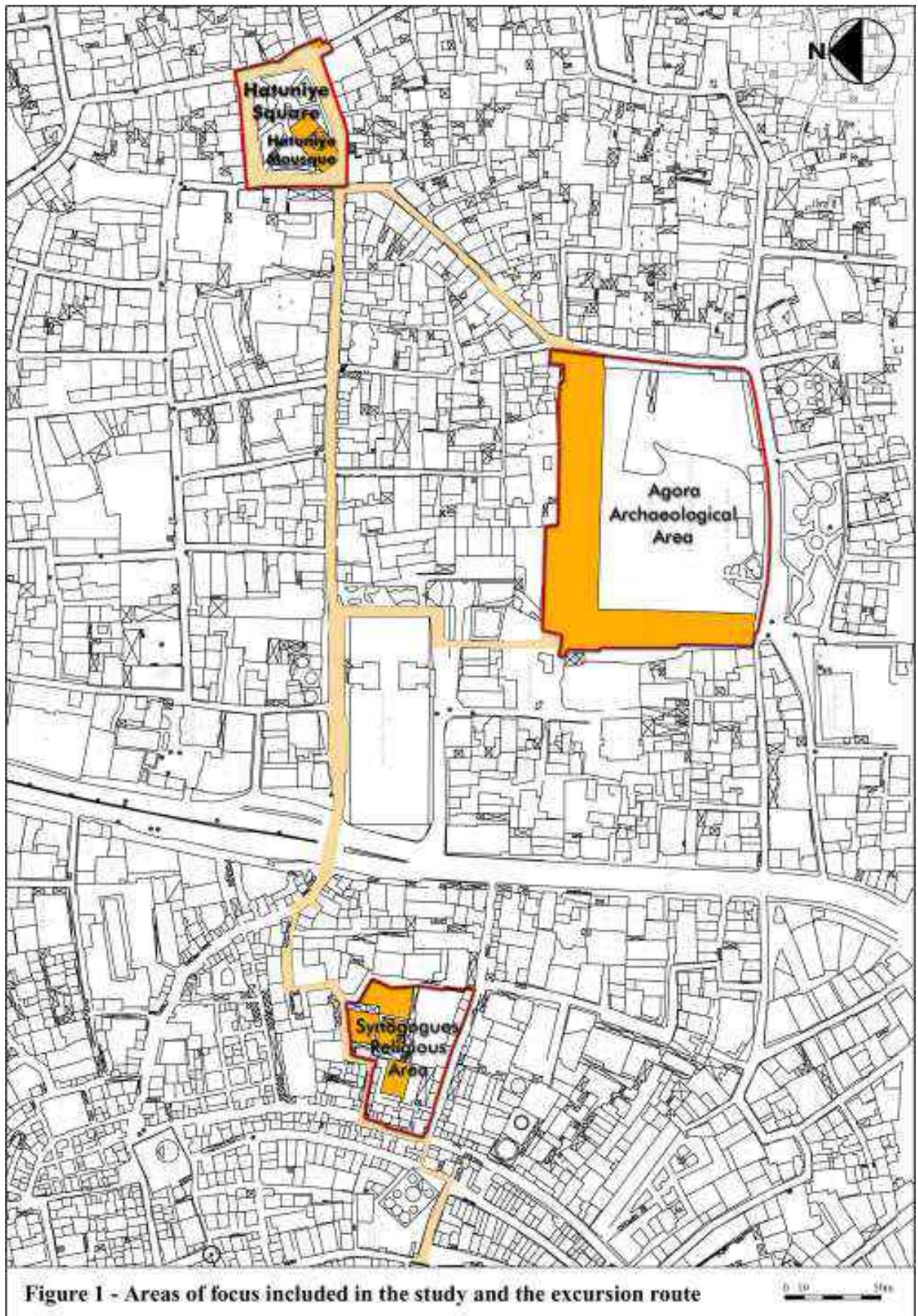


Figure 1 - Areas of focus included in the study and the excursion route



Photograph 2 – A general view of the Agora

As indicated by the findings of the excavations, the structure consisting of a basement and two floors surrounded with porticos on three sides is situated around a courtyard of 123 metres in the east-west direction having a free access, with the North Structure and the East and West Structure respectively being 29 m and 17.8 m wide. The basement, actually originating from the slope of the land, has a very interesting construction with its arches in the shape of the Christian cross. It is known that in the North Structure the shops are lined on a street and a number of 28 rooms open to a vestibule here with columns (Naumann & Kantar, 1950a). There is no reliable information as to the location and the characteristics of the South Structure.



Photograph 3 – The Basement construction of the West Structure in the Agora

The three-dimensional impact of the structure is perceived solely through the 13 columns of the West Structure and the Faustina Gate .



Photograph 4 – Faustina Gate

Excavations in the Agora are presently continuing and the findings lead to a great deal of information regarding the history of Izmir. The area being one of the most important antique remains discovered in the city, a list of possible works to be carried out is as follows:

- Exterminating by regular use of pesticides the plants giving harm to the structure,
- Revealing every part of the structure by means of a comprehensive research,
- Due to the fact that the 13 columns in the West Structure fail to reflect the real height of the Agora, initializing a new formation based on the restitution so that a three dimensional sense will be achieved and the edge of the top cover will be partially included,
- Following a comprehensive act of nationalization to the south of the structure, determining the location of the South Structure based on information to be derived from the ancient road systems, and undertaking a testing excavation in the area,
- Enabling viewers to visualize the structure in its original scale by having a small scale model on display,
- Taking precautions as to the conservation of insitu works revealed during the excavations (such as the conservation of mosaic wall tiles),
- The anastylosis of the structure at the end of an organized, long-term excavation,
- Re-designing the area as an open air museum to host cultural activities harmless to the structure,
- Excavating the underground road connections in the Agora, Theatre and Kadifekale area.

In addition to the above suggestions regarding the Agora, this paper also includes certain concentrated studies on its surroundings.

1.1 Access To The Agora

It is recommended that the Anafartalar Street and the side streets numbered 920, 943 and 816 providing access to the Agora from the İkiçeşmelik Street be renovated and new floor covering be installed, while also tending to the green factor, water element and building façades. The routes mentioned within the scope of the study have been included with their present states as well as those being suggested.

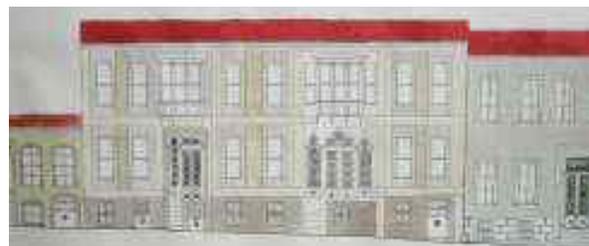


Figure 2 – Facade from the 943rd street



Photograph 5 – View from the 943rd street

Upon examining the routes in question, one does not find them to be well-maintained streets leading to a most outstanding historical focus of attention, and therefore are in urgent need to be remedied in terms of landscaping and façade renovations. Concerning the historical buildings, those elements disturbing the originality of the façades should be removed. Another matter pertaining to tokens of urban life such as lampposts and signboards needs to be looked into. In this respect, a most appropriate solution would be to install the cables underground, and to introduce an inspection on the size and characteristics of publicity tools such as signs. Where the interiors are concerned, contemporary standards of comfort should be conformed with. It is also suggested that these buildings - the whole Hatuniye Square for instance - be equipped with a secondary function to serve cultural tourism, such as using these for accommodation facilities, restaurants or cafés.

1.2 Hatuniye Square

Should the gate on the Anafartalar Street, which was recently opened but is not currently available due to excavations in progress, be used for access to the Agora, one finds the Hatuniye Square located at a further point of the road. The square accommodates two significant monumental buildings, Hatuniye Mosque and Dönertaş Public Fountain, and in addition to the shrine in the vicinity, which is an effective attraction for faith tourism, the square also possesses two remarkable attributes; it displays the 19th-20th century fabric of houses and is located in the proximity of the Agora.



Photograph 6 –Access to the Agora from the Anafartalar Street

Hatuniye Mosque is located in the square bearing the same name, at the intersection point of Çelebizade Street, that is, the side street numbered 943, and Anafartalar Street. It was in the year 1640 (in 1056 according to the Muslim calendar) that Tayyibe Hatun had the mosque built; however, its originality has somewhat suffered from the repairs and additions made later. The top cover in the main building is in the form of a large dome, whereas in the additional building it consists of a smaller dome and two diagonal vaults.

Dönertaş Public Fountain is one of the most attractive and best-maintained public fountains in town, and is located at the corner of Anafartalar and the 945th. It is supposed that Osmanzade Seyyid Ismail Rahmi Efendi had it built in 1814 (Aktepe, 1976). The public fountain has a rectangular plan with a dome on top covered with roof tiles in the Ottoman style. The name 'Dönertaş' ('Rotatingstone' in English) comes from the once rotating round marble column adjoining the structure.



Photograph 7 – Hatuniye Square –The Dönertaş Public Fountain

When the fabric of historical houses in the square is studied, prominent are those consisting of a basement and two floors bearing details such as a oriel window, corner treatments, floor and eave elements, doors and windows with decorative railings. A few examples of original houses are; on the Anafartalar Street side, the building located on the plot of land numbered 120, currently used as a guesthouse, the shop and the house located on the plots numbered 21 and 22, and on the 943rd Street side, the building on the plot numbered 71, and finally on the 1300th Street side those on the plots 1, 4, and 17 (Akyüz Levi, 2000).

Within the scope of the renovation the Hatuniye Square is recommended to go through as a currently active historical area and tourist attraction accommodating many unique elements where Izmir's urban identity is concerned, it is also suggested that the historical fabric of the buildings surrounding the square be refined, and the square itself be re-designed by working on the floor covering of the streets leading to it, while maintaining a unity with the other attractions in terms of plants and other elements. For the renovation to be carried out on the façade, it will be most suitable to detect those elements and alterations which have destroyed the original look and remove them, to apply maintenance and re-organization; and functionwise, it will be best to allocate the appropriate units for public use. It is suggested that these buildings be employed as restaurants, cafés, accommodation facilities and souvenir shops.



Figure 3 – Hatuniye Square the façade of the 1300th street

As for re-designing the square, it will be preferable to formulate a plan comprizing the improvement of the service facilities of the mosque, the burial or transfer of the transformer in the square, along with the visual and functional association of the park area with the surrounding texture and architectural works. One recommendation is to preserve the trees in the square as they are, in addition to those to be planted anew. There will be sales units, public seating, a sandwich stand, pieces of urban furniture and light fixtures. Through the realization of the project, the square will become a focus for daily cultural excursions.

1.3 Organizing The Religious Focus

Regarding the organization of the religious focus, a suggestion has been offered as to the improvement of the synagogue buildings situated in Havra Street and its surroundings symbolizing a cross section of the cultural mosaic of İzmir, as well as Kedoşe Synagogue and the area in the middle of Algazi, Sinyora and Hevra synagogues located in the sector numbered 204. Consequently, the importance of the square in terms of urban identity, faith tourism and the global Jewish identity will be emphasized.

The recommendations are:

1. Improvements related with Hevra Synagogue
2. Improvements related with Kedoşe Synagogue
3. Re-designing the courtyard
4. Re-designing the building façades in the streets surrounding the sector

The sector numbered 204, which is bordered with Havra Street in the south and the side street numbered 927 in the north and east, and where the synagogues in question are located, has a concentrated religious function. The two synagogues in the square, Sinyora and Algazi, are still functioning, whereas the other two are in ruins.

Sinyora Synagogue, which Donna Gracia Mendes, the symbol of the 16th century Sephardic Jews, ordered to be built in the same century; was later repaired in 1841 and recently went under restoration (Galante, 1960). The Algazi family had Algazi Synagogue built in the 18th century, in the year 1724 to be specific. Both synagogues have rectangular plans with their tevahs in the middle. Hevra Synagogue was built in the 17th century, and repaired twice in 1838 and 1971. It was heavily damaged by the flood a few years ago and the roof was swept away during a storm. Recently the synagogue fell in completely and is utterly ruined. The building has a central plan and the tevah is situated in the middle. Kedoşe (Forasteros) Synagogue is a structure of which some of the exterior walls are still erect, but the roof has totally disappeared. The synagogue has been attached a number of walls in various directions.

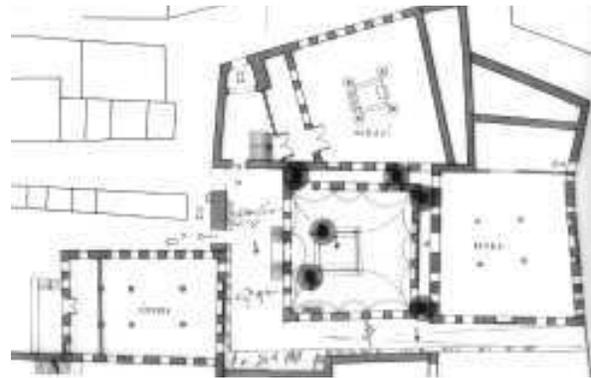


Figure 4 – Kedoşe Synagogue and the suggestion to renovate the courtyard



Photograph 8 - Kedoşe Synagogue and the suggestion to renovate the courtyard

Within the scope of the Kedoşe Synagogue renovation, where the building is to be turned into a half-open structure, re-designing the floor covering and the greens is being considered as well as the liberation and conservation of the walls. It is therefore suggested that the additional walls and separations be picked out, the original entrance which is presently closed be re-opened, the plasterwork, stone and tile surfaces of the walls be cleaned, the finishing of the wall tops be done and saddle coping be applied to prevent them from eroding, windows be re-opened in the walls where they used to be, the missing parts of

the iron railings of the windows be replaced, and finally a solution concerning the entrance and stairs be introduced.

Some other recommendations for the purpose of creating a symbolic focus are; to position a marble table in order to reflect the quality of a centre for positive participation, to install over the table an arbor or “sukot” as in Jewish culture in the form of a pergola, and to have on the surrounding walls an exhibit on display expressing the Jewish identity, historical and cultural inheritance by means of verbal and visual elements.

When the area is accessed from the İkiçeşmelik Street, one recognizes the necessity to re-design the floor coverings of the roads, as well as the greens and the water element. As for the renovation of the building façades in the street, it is required that the tile covered walls, etc. be picked out, and objects such as signs and billboards be re-designed.

2. EXAMINING THE AREAS OF FOCUS IN TERMS OF CULTURAL TOURISM

Following is the recommended route for daily excursions:

1. Bayraklı (Ancient Smyrna) – Tepekule
2. Kadifekale (Pagos) – A panoramic perception of the city and a visit to the castle
3. Antique Theatre – Viewing the remains
4. Hatuniye Square – Sightseeing activities in the historical structures and experiencing the atmosphere
5. The Agora – Viewing the remains
6. Religious Focus – Visiting the synagogue buildings and viewing the exhibitions, etc. held in Kedoşe Synagogue and the Peace Courtyard
7. Religious Focus – Visiting the selected mosques (Kestanepazarı Mosque, Başdurak Mosque and Kemeraltı Mosque in Anafartalar Street, and Yalı Mosque in the Konak Square)

In terms of presenting and emphasizing the historical inheritance of the city by means of daily excursions, after seeing the Bayraklı Settlement (Ancient Smyrna), a witness to the foundation of the city and the Prehistoric, Aeolic and Ionic periods as we know it; Kadifekale crowning the city of Izmir, the Antique Theatre and the Hatuniye Square will be visited. The next part of the tour will be on foot. Following a stroll in the square and in the Agora, the archeological centre, the groups will arrive via İkiçeşmelik Street at the synagogues and mosques, the religious attractions of the tour, which will be finalized in the Konak Square.

Since the mosques included in this study still serve their religious purpose and some of them have been restored only recently, this paper does not offer any suggestions regarding these buildings. Yet the roads that are part of the route need to be considered in terms of their floor covering and landscaping elements.

CONCLUSION

Aiming at the conservation of the historical riches of İzmir and passing them on to the next generations, the collective evaluation of historical assets selected will bridge the past and the future, while enabling viewers to visit different periods in time and to experience shortly the life back then. Kadifekale, bearing the traces of several periods from the Hellenistic to the Ottoman, the Agora and the Theatre from the Hellenistic-Roman periods, monuments and fabric of houses descending from the last centuries, and religious buildings dating back as early as the 16th century are bound to incorporate the past into the future.

REFERENCES

- Aktepe, M., 1976a. İzmir Suları, Çeşme ve Sebilleri ile Şadırvanları Hakkında Bir Araştırma, *Tarih Dergisi*, (30), pp.135-200.
- Akyüz Levi, E., 2000a. İzmir Hatuniye Meydanı Renovasyon Çalışması. *İzmir Kent Kültürü Dergisi*, (2), pp.180-186.
- Akyüz, E.,1985. *İzmir: Kentin Tarihsel Çevre Araştırması ve Koruma-Restorasyon Önerileri*. İzmir.
- Duyuran, R. , 1945a. İzmir’de Namazgah’ta 1944 Yılında Yapılan Kazıya Ait Kısa Rapor. *Belleten*, (IX), pp. 405-409.
- Naumann, R. & Kantar, S. , 1950a. Die Agora von Smyrna. *İstanbul Forschungen*, (17), pp. 69-114.
- Texier, C., 1862. *Asie Mineure*, Paris.
- The General Directorate of Foundation, Monument Card, Dossier Number 350101/17.
- Galante, A., 1960. *Histoire des Juifs de Turquie*. İstanbul.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Nur Kocasoy, Aylin Ertem, Bahar Sintaç and İlkay Baldağ for his contribution to the architectural survey activities of the street façades surrounding the Hatuniye Square, and to master’s degree students Gökçe D. Şenol, Burcu Karakış and Işıl Pekmezci for their contribution to those on the access route to the Agora.