

# WORKSHOPS AS AN INFORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: KONYA ARCHITECTURE FESTIVAL EXAMPLE

## İNFORMAL ÖĞRENME ORTAMI OLARAK ATÖLYELER: KONYA MİMARLIK FESTİVALİ ÖRNEĞİ

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### ABSTRACT

Workshops have an important place in terms of being informal learning environments for architectural education. The fact that they are open-ended and that the creative environment is not limited distinguishes workshops from the rigid structure of formal education. Workshops, which are short-term and intensive training and production environments, are highly productive activities thanks to the voluntary participation of people. Cultural exchange between participants increases and a natural sharing environment is created. The resulting products are not the product of one person but of ideas shared in a natural sharing environment. Konya Architecture Festival is held every year on World Architecture Day, with various workshops and exhibitions, organized by the Konya Chamber of Architects. "Second Chance: Upcycling" workshop, one of the 15 different workshops carried out within the scope of the 2023 Konya Architecture Festival. Architecture students from different classes and universities participated in the "Second Chance: Upcycling" workshop. Within the scope of the workshop, an artwork was produced by the group using waste materials that the students had previously obtained from their environment and waste materials collected from the festival area during the workshop. Students were encouraged to "learn by doing" by applying the design and art knowledge they learned in formal education previously with waste materials within the scope of the workshop. Thus, learning in an informal environment took place in a way that supported formal learning. Participants answered the survey questions after the festival. The results show that the urban green area where the festival takes place increases the participants' motivation. In addition, it was seen in the survey results that students' awareness about upcycling increased, and a more entertaining learning environment was created compared to theoretical learning.

**Keywords:** architectural workshops; architecture festival; informal learning; upcycling.

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### ÖZ

Atölyeler, mimarlık eğitimi için informal öğrenme ortamları olmaları açısından önemli bir yere sahiptir. Açık uçlu olmaları ve yaratıcı ortamın sınırlandırılmamış olması atölyeleri örgün eğitimin katı yapısından ayırmaktadır. Kısa süreli ve yoğun eğitim ve üretim ortamları olan atölyeler, kişilerin gönüllü katılımı sayesinde son derece verimli faaliyetlerdir. Katılımcılar arasında kültürel alışveriş artar ve doğal bir paylaşım ortamı oluşur. Ortaya çıkan ürünler tek kişinin değil, doğal bir paylaşım ortamında paylaşılan fikirlerin ürünüdür. Konya Mimarlık Festivali, her yıl Dünya Mimarlık Günü'nde, Konya Mimarlar Odası tarafından düzenlenen çeşitli atölye çalışmaları ve sergilerle gerçekleştirilmektedir. Çalışma için 2023 Konya Mimarlık Festivali kapsamında gerçekleştirilen 15 farklı atölyeden biri olan "İkinci Şans: İleri Dönüşüm" atölyesi ve festival ortamının değerlendirilmesi konulu 10 soruluk bir anket uygulanmıştır. Farklı sınıflardan ve üniversitelerden mimarlık öğrencileri "İkinci Şans: İleri Dönüşüm" atölyesine katılmıştır. Atölye kapsamında öğrencilerin daha önce çevrelerinden edindikleri atık malzemeler ve atölye süresince festival alanından toplanan atık malzemeler kullanılarak grup tarafından bir sanat eseri üretilmiştir. Öğrenciler daha önce örgün eğitimde öğrendikleri tasarım ve sanat bilgilerini atölye kapsamında atık malzemelerle uygulayarak "yaparak öğrenmeye" teşvik edilmiştir. Böylece informal bir ortamda öğrenme, formal öğrenmeyi destekleyecek şekilde gerçekleşmiştir. Katılımcılar festival sonrasında anket sorularını yanıtlamışlardır. Sonuçlar, festivalin gerçekleştiği kentsel yeşil alanın katılımcıların motivasyonunu artırdığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca anket sonuçlarında öğrencilerin ileri dönüşüm konusunda farkındalıklarının arttığı ve teorik öğrenmeye kıyasla daha eğlenceli bir öğrenme ortamı oluşturulduğunu ifade etmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mimari atölyeler; mimarlık festivali; informal öğrenme; ileri dönüşüm.

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## INTRODUCTION

Workshops are informal learning environments that play an important role in architectural learning. In workshops, spontaneous, unpredictable, open-ended environments are created, unlike the static progress of formal learning. The students use their creativity freely, independent of the rigid structure of the curriculum. In addition, the environment of group work that increases mutual communication maximizes student's ability to benefit from each other. Mutual information exchange, brainstorming, and the transformation of different ideas into new ideas by conflicting or approaching each other increase the student's learning efficiency. Students, who experience group working, applying together, and learning by doing, improve their design skills by internalizing the culture of learning together. In this context, workshops are an integral part of architectural education.

Studies about workshops in architectural education are as follows: In Ciravoğlu's (2001) master's thesis, formal and informal environments in architectural education were examined and evaluations were made on workshops and studio environments. Yürekli and Yürekli's study (2004) examined various workshops as informal environments in architectural education. In Polatoğlu and Vural's study (2012), two workshops with international partners held at Yıldız Technical University were evaluated. In Karşlı and Özker's study (2014), the contribution of workshops to architectural design education was evaluated with the help of a survey. In Turgut and Cantürk's study (2015), an architectural workshop themed around the city of Istanbul was presented. Smatanova and Dubovcova's study (2016) deals with workshops held in the field of

architecture at the Slovak University of Technology. Orhan's study (2017) includes a case presentation of an architectural workshop. Paszkowski and Golebiewski's study (2020) discussed the place of international workshops in architectural design through a workshop example.

Within the scope of the study, the Konya Architecture Festival and the “Second Chance: Upcycling” workshop held at the festival were evaluated through a survey. Nine of the survey questions were formulated using a 5-point Likert scale format. The tenth question was designed as an open-ended inquiry to allow students to freely express their opinions and suggestions. By conducting a survey study, the effect of the festival environment on students’ motivation and the efficiency of the workshop were examined.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Informal Learning Environments**

People learn by being educated about the prevailing order and, indirectly or directly, the 'normal', the norms, values, measures, acceptances, and prevailing tastes of this order, and how to use these as evaluation criteria. This is the purpose of formal education. Informality, which aims to go beyond the normal, and the ordinary, offers a new environment, a new reality, outside the existing order and rules, where the accepted hierarchy is destroyed (Yürekli and Yürekli, 2004). Out-of-school learning environments are environments that allow people to benefit from different opportunities during the learning process and increase course outcomes through organized activities and trips. (Elmas et al., 2021).

Informal learning activities are carried out to strengthen the learning activities that were held at school, make them more fun, and most importantly, provide effective and permanent learning. According to the literature, it is seen that the skills intended to be acquired in schools are learned faster by children in informal environments outside of school, and informal learning environments play an important role in increasing students' academic success (Bartan et al., 2020).

## **The Role of Workshops in Architectural Education**

The common opinion of those who are involved in architectural design education is that education in architectural schools is not enough to give the perspective of architecture. The whole world is the field of observation of the architecture student. Out-of-school education means changing the order at school, providing different orders, and other environments, and a move away from formal education. The most important part of organized informal education systems is workshops (Yürekli and Yürekli, 2004).

Workshops are educational tools developed to identify and discover design problems, generate new ideas, and make decisions to solve them in a limited time. It is clear that they help students develop their design perception and skills. The independent atmosphere of the workshops creates a positive environment for students' productivity and creativity. These intense but short-term meetings support a range of activities designed to encourage learning, discussion, and feedback through interaction (Turgut and Cantürk, 2015).

The phenomenon of mutual learning between members of workshop groups has emerged as a new model of design-based, innovative, and creative education outside of formal education. It is also known that different groups working side by side contribute to this creativity (Paszkowski and Golebiewski, 2020).

## **Konya Architecture Festival 2023 and “Second Chance: Upcycling” Workshop**

Konya Architecture Festival is held every year on World Architecture Day, under the coordination of the Konya Chamber of Architects, with the participation of students, academicians, and architects. The festival includes various exhibitions, panels, presentations and workshops. One of the most interesting events of the festival is the workshops. Within the scope of the festival, 15 different workshops were held with active work for one day. These workshops are available to architecture students and architects, but the majority of participants are architecture students. The workshops created short-term environments for idea generation and implementation. A volunteer-based study was carried out, with students registering for workshops that interested them before the festival.

The area designated for workshops is Kültürpark in Konya city center. Kültürpark is a city park located within the borders of Konya Metropolitan Municipality, close to the urban historical settlement center, northwest of Alaaddin Hill, which has an important place both with its green texture and historical context, and west of Konya City Square (Figure 1). Kültürpark first served

as a meeting center in the Seljuk period in the 13th century, where people affiliated to the Mevlevi lodge organized sema performances for many years and established assemblies around it. In the Republican period, it was reorganized under the ownership of Konya Municipality and opened in 1970 to be used as a fairground on certain days of the year. The fact that it developed together with the city in the city center during the Republican period, and that it includes fair and recreation areas together (amusement park, etc.) has been effective in gaining the quality of an urban park conceptually and spatially (Çalık 2018). The fact that the place where the workshops will take place is a green urban park and its close to the historical texture of the city has brought the chance to be in a natural learning environment for architecture students (Figure 2).

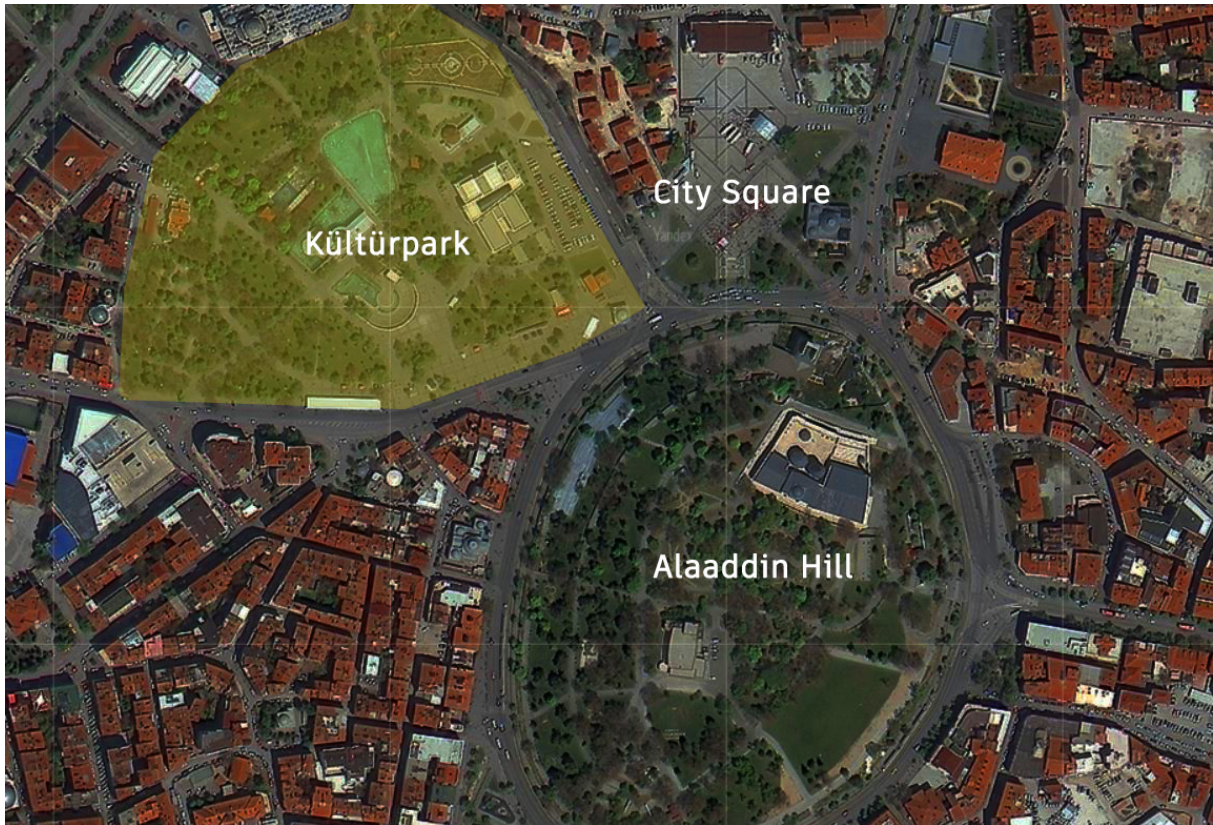


Figure 1. Location of Kültürpark (Url-1)



*Figure 2. Workshop space Kültürpark (Url-2)*

Upcycling refers to the reshaping of an old, waste, or useless object in order to make it usable. Many materials, such as broken, worn-out items and unusable clothes, can be used for upcycling. In a sense, this can be seen as giving the product a second chance and allowing it to continue its life in a different form. In this context, the “Second Chance: Upcycling” workshop, held within the scope of the festival, emerged. In the workshop, students were given information about upcycling, and a creative discussion environment was created on the subject (Figures 3). Afterward, a pre-determined art product was reproduced within the scope of the workshop with the waste materials that the students had previously collected from their environment and the waste materials collected from the festival area. In this context, cardboard pieces, old material catalogs, plastic bottle caps, spilled tree barks, discarded festival posters were cut in small sizes and glued to the relevant areas to create a visual texture effect in the study. In this context, no new materials were used for the study, all the elements that formed the design were obtained from waste materials that have completed their existing functions.



*Figure 3.* Images from the workshop environment

In the production of the artwork, the design was carried out in line with the elements and principles learned in the Basic Design course, which is a course taught in the first year of the architecture school. Thus, the lesson learned in theory was reinforced practically in an informal environment with the theme of upcycling. The final product is shown in Figure 4.





*Figure 4.* The final product (artwork)

### **Method of the Study**

Within the scope of the study, a ten-question survey was administered to ten volunteer students who participated in the Second Chance: Upcycling workshop. The survey questions were designed to evaluate the Konya Architecture Festival and the "Second Chance: Upcycling" workshop. Nine of the survey questions were constructed using a 5-point Likert scale format. This scaling technique was developed by Rensis Likert. Likert established "bipolar answering/five-point evaluation" categories in his scaling methodology. These bipolar pentadic response categories and their corresponding scores are as follows:

- Strongly Approve (5/1)
- Approve (4/2)
- Undecided (3/3)
- Disapprove (2/4)
- Strongly Disapprove (1/5)

One of the characteristics of the Likert scale is its ability to provide reliable results through straightforward methods. Another strength of Likert scaling is that each proposition in the scale contributes to the manifestation of the intrinsic characteristic being measured, while simultaneously allowing for the calculation of a total score for said characteristic. Consequently, Likert-type scaling offers a distinct advantage in terms of providing information to the researcher (Bayat, 2014).

Nine of the survey questions were formulated using a 5-point Likert scale format. The tenth question was designed as an open-ended inquiry to allow students to freely express their opinions and suggestions.

The survey questions are as follows:

1. Participating in the Architecture Festival increased my motivation for my professional education.
2. The fact that the space where the festival took place was a semi-open public space instead of an indoor place had a positive impact on the workshop process.
3. The location of the festival within the urban green area had a positive effect on my motivation during the workshop.
4. Other workshops and exhibitions I observed at the Architecture Festival enriched my architectural perspective.
5. Participating in the Architecture Festival increased my motivation to attend other workshops later.
6. I would like to participate in architecture festivals again in the coming years.
7. During the workshop, the culture of learning together was emphasized.
8. Learning through workshops is more fun compared to theoretical learning.
9. The “Second Chance: Upcycling” workshop has strengthened my awareness about upcycling.
10. What are your thoughts and suggestions about the workshop?

## **FINDINGS**

The findings are presented in Table 1. The figures in the table represent the number of respondents and their respective response categories. Two questions received the highest scores: numbers 6 and 9. In these questions, all respondents selected "strongly approve". In Q6, they expressed a strong willingness to participate in architecture festivals in future years. In Q9,

participants strongly affirmed that the "Second Chance: Upcycling" workshop increased their awareness of upcycling.

Q4, Q5, and Q8 received the second-highest number of points. Here, the participants strongly agreed that having the opportunity to observe other workshops in addition to the one they participated in improved their architectural perspectives. According to the findings from Q5, the students' motivation to participate in subsequent workshops also increased. Q8 confirmed that learning through workshops is more engaging compared to theoretical learning.

Q1, 3, and 7 had identical scores, comprising "strongly approve" and "approve" responses. Q1 indicated that the workshop increased students' motivation towards their professional education. Q7 demonstrated that a culture of collaborative learning was fostered during the workshop. In Q3, students reported being positively influenced by the festival's location in a green urban area.

Finally, in Q2, the students confirmed that conducting the festival in a semi-open space rather than an indoor environment had a positive impact on the workshop process. This emphasized that in informal learning environments, not only deviating from the strict curriculum but also spatial differentiation significantly affects learning and motivation.

Table 1  
*Festival and workshop evaluation survey results (figures represents the number of people)*

	<i>Strongly Approve</i>	<i>Approve</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disapprove</i>	<i>Strongly Disapprove</i>
Q1	8	2	0	0	0
Q2	7	3	0	0	0
Q3	8	2	0	0	0
Q4	9	1	0	0	0
Q5	9	1	0	0	0
Q6	10	0	0	0	0
Q7	8	2	0	0	0
Q8	9	1	0	0	0
Q9	10	0	0	0	0

The tenth question was designed as an open-ended question. Two people left this question unanswered. The other eight answers to the open-ended question are as follows:

“After this workshop, the definition of garbage changed completely for me. I learned that any material that loses its function can be found in better places than where it is.”

“An efficient and motivational workshop was conducted.”

“I would like it to be arranged so that we have time to attend other workshops and learn more.”

“More events like this can be done.”

“Collective work helped me make the workshop process more fun and productive.”

“If the workshop days are extended to a few days rather than one day, more products can be produced.”

“It was a very fun work, there was confusion just because we were short on time and we were short-handed, but in the end, it was a great work.”

“We had a good time with my professors and fellow participants and got an idea about future transformation projects.”

### CONCLUSION

The research yielded significant findings. Primarily, workshops demonstrated positive effects on students as an informal learning environment in architecture. Notably, workshop events, which allow students to think more freely by transcending the constraints of the rigid curriculum, have enhanced students' motivation towards their professional education. In the context of the Konya Architecture Festival, the proximity of multiple workshops in the festival area enabled students to observe and analyze other workshops intermittently, thereby fostering the development of their architectural perspective. Another salient finding is that the organization of the festival in an urban green area and the implementation of workshops in semi-open spaces augmented the motivation of architecture students by reinforcing their connection with the natural and built environment. In conclusion, the quality of the workshop venue also influences learning motivation. This suggests that not only the learning style but also the learning environment impacts students' productivity.

In future research, analogous workshop activities could be conducted in diverse environments, and their effects on students could be analyzed comparatively.

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