

Genius Loci in Adaptive Reuse: Bank Museums in Ankara

Yeniden İşlevlendirmede Genius Loci: Ankara'daki Banka Müzeleri

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ABSTRACT

Adaptive reuse, one of the architectural conservation interventions, involves the adaptation of existing buildings for new or ongoing functions while balancing their cultural significance and contemporary requirements. This strategy, consistent with sustainability goals, is not only about preserving cultural heritage but also about providing ecologic and economic interests. Apart from other forms of interventions, adaptive reuse praxis particularly emphasises the presence of the spirit of place. Therefore, beyond its sustainability intentions, the continuity of intangible elements that are an integral part of the genius loci is crucial in the case of adaptive reuse. An ancient Latin expression, “genius loci”, also known as “the spirit of place”, has become a significant factor of creativity and continuity in contemporary architecture and conservation. Based on the bond between place and people, the spirit of place is the phenomenon of the holistic perception of a place's tangible and intangible elements. Within this context, this study intends to identify the stages of perceiving genius loci in order to evaluate the success of adaptive reuse praxis. This hypothetical algorithm of sensory experience, remembrance, interpretation and narration is analysed through two case studies, such as the General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank and İşbank, both among the first public buildings built in the new capital of the Turkish Republic, Ankara.

Keywords: Architectural conservation, adaptive reuse, genius loci, spirit of place, museology.

ÖZ

Mimari koruma müdahalelerinden biri olan yeniden işlevlendirme, mevcut binaların kültürel önemleri ve çağdaş gereksinimler arasında denge kurarak yeni veya devam eden işlevler doğrultusunda uyarlanmasını kapsar. Sürdürülebilirlik hedefleriyle tutarlı olan bu strateji, yalnızca kültürel mirasın korunmasıyla değil, aynı zamanda ekolojik ve ekonomik fayda sağlamakla da ilgilidir. Diğer müdahale biçimlerinden farklı olarak, yeniden işlevlendirme pratiği özellikle yerin ruhunun varlığına vurgu yapmaktadır. Bu nedenle, sürdürülebilirlik niyetinin ötesinde, yeniden işlevlendirme durumunda yerin ruhunun ayrılmaz bir parçası olan soyut unsurların devamlılığı çok önemlidir. Eski bir Latince sözcük olan, “yerin ruhu” olarak da bilinen “genius loci”, çağdaş mimarlık ve koruma alanlarında önemli bir yaratıcılık ve süreklilik unsuru haline gelmiştir. İnsanlar ve yer arasındaki bağa dayanan genius loci, bir yerin somut ve somut olmayan unsurlarının bütünsel olarak algılanması olgusudur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, yeniden işlevlendirme pratiğinin başarısının değerlendirmek için yerin ruhu algısının aşamalarını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Duyusal deneyim, hatırlama, yorumlama ve anlatıdan oluşan bu varsayımsal algoritma, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin yeni başkenti Ankara Ulus'ta inşa edilen ilk kamu binaları arasında yer alan Ziraat Bankası Genel Müdürlüğü ve İş Bankası Genel Müdürlüğü gibi iki örnek yapı üzerinden analiz edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mimari koruma, yeniden işlevlendirme, genius loci, yerin ruhu, müzecilik.

“The past is never dead. It's not even past.”
William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951)

Introduction

Adaptive reuse, one of the architectural conservation interventions, involves the adaptation of existing buildings for new or ongoing functions while balancing their cultural significance and contemporary requirements. This strategy, consistent with sustainability goals, is not only about preserving cultural heritage but also about providing ecologic and economic interests. However, apart from other forms of interventions, adaptive reuse is particularly distinctive with the presence of soul (Scott, 2008). Therefore, beyond its sustainability intentions, the continuity of intangible elements that are an integral part of the genius loci is crucial in the case of adaptive reuse.

An ancient Latin expression, “*genius loci*”, also known as “*the spirit of place*”, has become a significant factor of creativity and continuity in contemporary architecture and conservation. Based on the bond between place and people, the spirit of place is the phenomenon of the holistic perception of a place’s tangible and intangible elements that cause different feelings of admiration, excitement, inspiration, mystery, fear, joy, etc. The spirit of place, in this context, encompasses three key elements such as cultural, socio-economic and natural, respectively: tangible and intangible attributes, experience and natural process of human-place interaction (Vecco, 2020). Although the spirit of place is the theme of a prominent conference organized by ICOMOS in 2008, named “*Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place*”, and an essential evaluation criterion as is authenticity and integrity, it lacks an explicit place in the charters of UNESCO and ICOMOS (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). In fact, the concept of the genius loci is implicit in contemporary conservation theory, starting with the foundation of ICOMOS. According to Petzet (2008), the word “*message*” in the first sentence of the Venice Charter characterizes the spirit of place: “*Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions*” (ICOMOS, 1964. p.1). According to the “*Nara Document on Authenticity*”, the spirit of place is not a criterion of its own but part of a multidimensional concept of authenticity: “*... authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors...*” (ICOMOS, 1994: Article 13). The Burra Charter also mentions that the spirit of place, along with historical, aesthetic, social and scientific values, form cultural significance (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). Yet, despite all efforts in the field of conservation to define genius loci, because of its implicit, multifaceted, and subjective nature, as Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) state, it continues to remain ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations. Therefore, it can be expressed with a phenomenological technique rather than a scientific one (Norberg-Schulz, 1979; Rifaioğlu & Şahin Güçhan, 2008).

Genius loci in museology plays a significant role in creating the interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage. Whereas conventional museology creates a separation among cultural heritage, user and place, the presence of genius loci can engage these three components together (Stefano, 2008). For museums, especially those with a specific theme and where the building itself is exhibited, the aim is to preserve, interpret and transmit the spirit of a place by sustaining its tangible and intangible elements. Genius loci influences display design, guiding curators in creating immersive experiences that connect visitors to the cultural, historical, and spatial identity and atmosphere of the place. Even in cases where the physical environment has changed or been destroyed, museums can evoke genius loci through storytelling, sensory engagement, and digital reconstruction. By integrating genius loci into museological practices, it is ensured that the essence of the place is not only documented but also meaningfully experienced by visitors.

In light of all this background, this study aims to identify the process of genius loci perception in adaptive reuse, especially for the converted buildings displayed as thematic museums, and to analyse this algorithm through case studies.

Material and Methods

The General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank and İşbank, both among the first public buildings built in the new capital of the Turkish Republic, Ankara - Ulus, have been chosen as case studies to verify the hypothesis of this research. Both were designed as bank buildings in the First National Architectural Style by an Italian architect, Giulio Mongeri, in 1926. These buildings were recently refunctioned as museums by the same curator-designer, Burçak Madran, by safeguarding their tangible and intangible remnants as a whole.

In both buildings, one can note that the act of conversion into museums through the utilization of authentic objects, furniture, clothes, tools, the building itself and the interpreted installations invokes various perceptions in each visitor, which cumulatively can be called genius loci. In such cases where the physical change is minimal, it is particularly intriguing to see the impressions shaped by an individual’s accumulated experience with the place and the influence of all tangible and intangible elements, creating a unique human-place relationship every single time. The study will systematically examine the evolving relationship between our perception and architectural interventions, providing a structured method for assessing genius loci in adaptive reuse praxis. Therefore, in this study, a hypothetical process of perceiving genius loci was presented based on the multiple meanings of the phenomenological concept of genius loci in the literature as well as personal experiences.

In this context, the study will start with a literature review on the concept of genius loci in adaptive reuse, followed by identifying the steps of perceiving the spirit of place. This hypothetical process, which unfolds in four stages—sensory experience, remembrance, interpretation, and narration—will be analysed through the aforementioned case studies.

Genius Loci in Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse is simply defined as the repurposing of a building to ensure its survival in accordance with today’s conditions. However, its implementation expands from conservation to restoration, from maintenance to transformation. Because the definition and content of adaptive reuse are not commonly agreed upon and are variably interpreted by scholars (Lanz & Pendlebury, 2022), the methodology of its theory in many publications is based on different groups of case studies, allegories, and strategies on interventions (Wong, 2017; Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019; Stone, 2020). The importance of investigating the host building beforehand is also necessarily underlined in these publications. Since the architecture is more than spatial features, the host building to be altered is also examined through its materials, style, layers of time and past habitation customs (Scott, 2008). Its capacity for a new function is driven by various characteristics, such as its physical state, its ability to carry extra load and adapt spatially, and its context and memory, in particular (Wong, 2017).

Genius loci, in other words, “*the spirit of a place*” or “*the sense of a place*” (Brook, 2000) or “*places of significance*” (Petzet, 2008), is formed by the coexistence of all its tangible elements such as sites, buildings, landscapes, objects, etc. and intangible elements such as narratives, memories, rituals, traditional knowledge, written sources, values, festivals, colours, smells, fabrics, etc. that attach place emotion, meaning, enigma and value (ICOMOS, 2008a). The “*spirit*” can be simply considered as intangible and “*place*” as tangible that both cannot be separated from each other (Petzet, 2008). According to Harney

(2017), *genius loci* refers to the knowledge, emotions, and experiences tied to the tangible and intangible elements of the cultural heritage, forming its distinctive atmosphere and character. The spirit animates both people and places by shaping the identity and defining the essence (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Thompson (2003), too, who regards character as the focus of *genius loci*, draws an analogy between human and place in this context. According to him, both the character of place and humans develop gradually, though they change cyclically in short terms.

Latin word *genius loci*, is originating from Roman myths; however, it has evolved into a subjective and multifaceted concept mentioned in many fields such as literature, poetry, travelogues, garden and landscape design, architecture, urban planning, and conservation -notably adaptive reuse- to describe a place with its unique atmosphere and character (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). Through an extensive literature review on the interpretations of *genius loci* in these various fields, Brook (2000) points out its complex set of meanings, including character, authenticity, distinctiveness, narrative, essence, atmosphere as well as place of special beings, ecosystem, health of place, panpsychism, pantheism. This is due to the phenomenological nature of the notion (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Therefore, this study focuses on the subjective concepts relevant to adaptive reuse and conservation, such as experience, memory, meaning and narrative. If we refer to these notions as a process that we firstly perceive, secondly remember, thirdly interpret and finally narrate, then we can say that the existence of the spirit of place is explored through sensory experience, remembrance, interpretation and narrativity (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The process of perceiving *genius loci* (A. Özmen, 2025)

Sensory Experience

The first step for perceiving *genius loci* is through experiencing its atmosphere. The term “*atmosphere*” refers to the sensory features of a place that prioritizes aesthetics and function as well as the overall experience (Kepczynska-Walczak & Walczak, 2019). Norberg-Schulz (1979) and Petzet (2008) used the term atmosphere, or other words, “*aura*”, to describe the character of a place. The concept of aura reflects the expression of the artwork’s cult value through the lens of temporal and spatial perception (Benjamin, 1935; 1969). Meaning the glow or resonance of an artefact or a person; the aura is also used as a synonym for the spirit of place (Vecco, 2020). The experience of aura is characterized by the user’s sensory and emotional interaction with space and time. The sensory experiences create the first and unique impulse while allowing users to trust their senses above all (Dupré & Vrijs, 2019). Based on the fact that *genius loci* is also named as “*sense of place*” in various resources, multiple sensory experiences by sight, touch, sound, smell or (even) taste provide an immersive understanding of a place. The legibility of fragments through seeing, the echoes of spaces through hearing, the texture of the surfaces through touching and the scents of the place through smelling guide the sensory experience. Via these sensory mediators, the place can be experienced spatially and within a temporal flow. And, ultimately, the sensory experiences offer an embodied and inclusive engagement to deepen the users’ emotional ties to the place.

Remembrance

Along with sensory experience, the emotional bond to place enables remembrance through the fragments of artefacts. This occurs through a mutual process of intangible and tangible mnemonics (Stone, 2020). The history embodied in the present reminds us (Nora, 1996). Place and remembrance are linked in such a holistic way that neither can be understood in the absence of referring to the other (Malpas, 2012). The remembrance fosters a sense of identity, meaning and attachment to a place. As Cicero stated monuments are that invoke remembering (Petzet, 2008). Monuments are a permanent reminder of a particular phenomenon “*within the hierarchy of the past*”, emphasizing its historical continuity (Stone, 2020). This mnemonic message, also expressed as “*meaning*”, is variable in the course of time. Meaning indicates what place points to, shows, reminds and/or signifies to us (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). Since monuments are beyond the materialization of an idea, the meaning represented by their materials can also be shifting (Petzet, 2008). The shift in meaning is associated with the allegory of “*palimpsest*” in adaptive reuse (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). Machado was one of the first scholars to mention about palimpsest metaphor in adaptive reuse. In his pioneering text on remodelling, which signifies the alteration of the form of the existing building, he correlates it with rewriting on a palimpsest where the past is recorded as “*a ‘package of sense’ of built-up meaning to be accepted (maintained), transformed, or suppressed (refused)*” (Machado, 1976). Here, Machado emphasizes that alteration is not only a formal intervention but also creates narratives and meanings (Van Cleempoel, 2020).

Interpretation

Interpretation is a deliberate communication method that creates inclusive, relevant and meaningful experiences, enhancing understanding, expanding viewpoints, and encouraging attachment to the place (URL-1). Regarding cultural heritage, interpretation implies the range of communication methods used to express the values and meanings and is key to comprehending the broader nature of heritage (Silberman, 2013). In other words, it is any means of presenting cultural heritage values, including conservative interventions, (re)use, activities and installation of descriptive elements (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). The decision of which tangible remnants and intangible values to sustain -or to remember- as well as the methods of their conservation and presentation to the public, are integral aspects of the interpretation of cultural heritage (ICOMOS, 2008b). The term interpretation in relation to cultural heritage was first introduced by Tilden (Karadalli & Levi, 2023). Tilden (1957) defines interpretation as an educational and artistic process of holistically understanding relationships and meanings through experience, using authentic elements and informative tools. The interpretation is intended to enrich users’ experiences, enhance their appreciation and preservation of cultural heritage, inspire them through their own perceptions, and create meaningful attachments to place by encouraging exploration, participation, learning and curiosity (ICOMOS, 2008b). According to the Burra Charter, the degree of alteration of cultural heritage and its function depends on the cultural significance of the place, that is, its historic, social, aesthetic, scientific and spiritual values embodied in its setting, use, fabric, associations, records and meanings, and its proper interpretation (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). The means of interpretation of cultural heritage can take three forms: Firstly, the interpretation itself encompasses various activities aimed at deepening an understanding of all aspects of cultural heritage and raising public awareness through

installations, publications, public events, lectures, research and evaluation. Secondly, presentation, on the other hand, focuses on the structured communication of these contents through the arrangement of access, routes and interpretive tools such as displays, panels, lectures, websites, tours and multimedia screens. And, thirdly, interpretive infrastructure includes physical facilities, areas and installations—both on-site and off-site—that support interpretation and presentation, including various technologies (ICOMOS, 2008b).

Narration

Both space and time, as dimensions of the narration, leave traces and influence the meaning and interpretation over generations. Space and time intertwine within the spiritual essence of cultural heritage, creating a seemingly paradoxical yet deeply tangible connection to the past. The use strongly influences this essence, and when the use persists, either in its original or adapted form, it gains a significant social dimension (Petzet, 2008). A place embodies *genius loci* when its past is legible yet organically integrated into its present, forming a coherent narrative meaningfully connecting history, current function, and potential future (Brook, 2000). Pérez-Gómez (2007) states that narrative plays a vital role in practice, as context and history are not fixed realities but need to be actively constructed. Narratives are shaped in the present through personal and cultural engagement; therefore, every narrative contains an authentic context. As Walter (2020) proposed, based on the notion of living heritage, the narrative approach in conservation stands between continuity and change, where cultural heritage remains within its context but embraces constant change. The narrative takes place in three modes: The first is intergenerational, establishing a dialogue between the past and the present; the second is communal, created by the community and its practices; and the third is ongoing, allowing future generations to build on it. Yet the narrative is always composed in such a way as to maintain a coherent whole (Walter, 2020).

Case Study I: The General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası), Ulus-Ankara

The General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası) was designed by Giulio Mongeri in 1926 and opened in 1929. Located on Atatürk Boulevard in Ulus-Ankara, it was built on the former land of Kızılcabey Foundation (Özkaya, 2011).

Architecture

The building bears the characteristics of the First National Architectural Style. Having a symmetrical plan from the central axis of the front façade facing Atatürk Boulevard, it consists of two floors above the basement and a raised ground floor, a mezzanine, and an attic. Its four corners are relatively elevated and protruded to resemble towers (Aslanoğlu, 2010). Covered with a hipped roof, the wide eaves are supported by wooden buttresses. The towers are more dominant on the front facade than on the back. Window openings shaped by pointed arches change in size in accordance with the height of each floor. Built with a reinforced concrete system, the ground floor of the building is covered with rough stones, and the upper floors are with local yellowish stones. The entrance facade of the building is more decorated than the rest. The entrance is slightly raised and protruding from the main building, forming a semi-open entrance hall and a balcony above it (Figure 2). Mongeri and two of his students, Sedad Hakkı Eldem and Arif Hikmet Koyunoğlu,

along with Turkish, Italian and Hungarian craftsmen, had worked collaboratively during the design and construction (Aslanoğlu, 2010).



Figure 2. The General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank, Ulus, Ankara (A. Özmen, 2024)



Figure 3. The Hall of Honour, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2024)

Inside, the “Hall of Honour” (Figure 3), located in the centre of the ground floor, elevates and turns into an atrium illuminated from above. The transparent roof above the hall is decorated with stained glass. The hall is surrounded by arcades with pointed arches, and behind the arcades are spaces where banking operations were once conducted. There were administrative rooms on the first floor, staff rooms on the second floor, training areas and other premises related to banking facilities on the mezzanine floor. Archives and water tanks were located in the attic, while the vaults and technical areas were in the basement (Özkaya, 2011). A three-armed main staircase at the main entrance hall and service staircases in the rear towers provide access to the upper floors. A single-armed staircase leads from the Hall of Honour directly to the vaults in the basement. All ornaments of the interior elements, furnishings as well as façades are derived from Ottoman and Seljuk decorative arts (Aslanoğlu, 2010). In 1935, Mongeri built a smaller two-storey building behind

the main building, which was used as a dining hall, charity and printing press, but it was demolished in the 1960s following the construction of new annexes, which were designed by Yılmaz Tuncer, Yılmaz Sanlı and Güner Acar through a national architectural competition. There are three buildings, one higher behind the main building and two lower to its right and left. With the construction of these buildings, a few modifications were made, including the crossing bridges (Özkaya, 2011).

Restoration, Adaptive Reuse and Museology

The building was registered in 1972 at Grade I (URL-2). In 1981, Turkey's first bank museum was established in the Hall of Honour on the ground floor behind the counters, but it was not open for free access (Madran, 2022). Although interventions have been based on contemporary requirements, comfort and use in the main building over time, no radical changes have been made (Özkaya, 2011). The first conservation project of the building was prepared between 2004-2005 and conservation works were realized between 2009-2010. The building was scientifically documented for the first time during these works, historical research, and structural system and material analyses were conducted, and a restoration project was prepared. Accordingly, it aimed to document the building and eliminate the material problems on the facades (URL-3). It underwent restoration again between 2017-2019, and in 2019 the basement and ground floor were repurposed as an institutional museum (URL-2). The upper floors still function as the General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank.

Although some inconsistencies emerged between the display and technical requirements, a joint effort was made to implement the main principles in the context of both conservation and museology. In this context, the museum narratives of the ground floor and basement floor differ regarding both theme and methodology. While the Hall of Honour is preserved as it was with its authentic interior elements, the functional spaces on the basement floor, except the vaults, are reorganised in accordance with the theme of the permanent exhibition (Madran, 2022).

Access to the extended basement floor is provided from the newly added entrance block in the south. From the reception area on the basement floor, the visitor is oriented to the first part of the vaults. Here the original safes and the belongings of some politicians are exhibited. The staircase next to the vaults leads to the Hall of Honour on the ground floor. In the Hall of Honour, the authentic atmosphere has been preserved thanks to the presence of furniture and decoration originally designed by Selahattin Refik Sırmalı (Bruniera, 2019). The chronological history of the bank is presented through original objects and written and visual documents at the stations placed in the arcades around the Hall of Honour (Figure 4). These stations are designed as invisibly as possible on mirror-surfaced bases in order not to disrupt the spatial integrity as well as at an appropriate height that would not disrupt the view from the Hall of Honour (Madran, 2022). On the walls and floors of the Hall, there are works of prominent Turkish painters and sculptors from Ziraat Bank's private collection, specially commissioned for the general directorate (URL-4). There is also the Homeland Fund (Memleket Sandığı) from 1863, which led to the idea of banking in Turkey. In the basement floor on the west wing, the institutional history of the bank is exhibited chronologically through written and visual information and movable cultural assets of the bank. Under the Hall of Honour, the labyrinth-shaped main vault and its entrance door are preserved as they are thanks to conservation works, and original objects and illustrations are placed to enrich its narrative. The light installation in the corridor leads to the area

of experience on the east wing. Here, the radio and cinema rooms are reconstructed as *mise-en-scène* of the 1960s and 1980s, respectively. The boiler room, highlighted by a light installation, leads the visitor to the area of institutional communication and architecture. Here, the bank's commercial posters, architectural drawings, models, and visual and written information about various bank branches in Anatolia are displayed. An activity area for children follows it. The route leads the visitor to the south wing and back to the entrance hall, where the awards are exhibited.

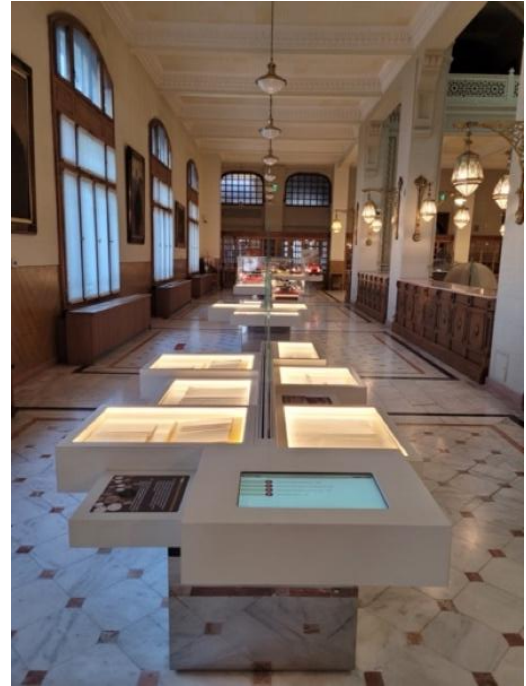


Figure 4. The display units in the arcades around the Hall of Honour, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2024)

Case Study II: The General Headquarters of İşbank (Türkiye İş Bankası), Ulus-Ankara

The General Headquarters of İşbank, designed in 1926 by Guilio Mongeri (Madran, 2022), began to be constructed in 1927 and opened in 1929 (Bruniera, 2019). Today, it is located at the intersection of Çam Street and Çankırı Street, while its front facade is oriented towards the Victory Monument at Ulus Square.

Architecture

The façade of the building, which shows the characteristics of the First National Architectural Style, has pointed arched openings decorated by pilasters. These elements emphasize the vertical effect of the facades (Akşit, 2010). On the upper floors, three rows of windows in pointed arched niches are complemented with pilasters. Supported by buttresses, the south façade has three independent balconies on the second floor, while the each of northwest and southeast façades have a long balcony on the first floor. The building ends with eaves decorated with muqarnas. While the ornaments reflect Ottoman and Seljuk architecture, the triple hierarchy over the basement covered with rough stones refers to Renaissance architecture. In addition, the glass canopy over the entrance, and the bank's institutional name and logo reflect the Art Nouveau Style (Aslanoğlu, 2010) (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The Headquarters of İşbank, Ulus, Ankara (A. Özmen, 2025)

The building, built in a reinforced concrete system, has an isosceles triangular plan with a rounded entrance corner. It consists of five floors over a basement. The southeast part of the once symmetrically planned building was expanded in 1956 and 1973 (Aslanoğlu, 2010). Apart from the raised main entrance, which is monumentalized through marble stairs accessed from the street, there are lateral entrances on the northwest and southeast facades. Inside, the oval-shaped waiting hall, which elevates over two floors starting from the ground floor, is covered with a glass dome decorated with stained glass (Figure 6). The stairs and elevators at the end of the northwest and southeast wings provide access to the upper floors. On the ground floor, cash desks surrounded the higher main waiting hall. At the rear, a lower spacious area contained workspaces where banking operations were carried out. The vault was located in the basement. On the first floor, which opens to a colonnaded gallery space, there were executive rooms and meeting rooms, while on the upper floors, there were office units for the employees.



Figure 6. The main waiting hall, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)

Conservation, Adaptive Reuse and Museology

As the third headquarters building of İşbank, founded in 1924, this building has architectural and social value. It is a landmark, identified with the establishment of the Republic, and has an important place in collective memory. It is also significant for the Turkish Republic's economic and political history. Until 1976, the building was used as the general headquarters and, up until recently, as a bank branch and bank training centre. With the decision of the bank's board of directors taken in 2018 (Madran, 2022), the building was converted into the "Türkiye İşbank Economic Independence Museum" in 2019. The museum exhibits the bank's and the country's economic history with documents and memorabilia (URL-5).

The basement floor is organized as the permanent exhibition of the vault, the ground, the first and second floors as permanent exhibition spaces, the third floor as an art gallery, the fourth floor as a library and the fifth floor as an event space. While the building was transformed into a museum, the authentic architectural elements of the building were respected. It was decided to preserve and display the interior elements and ornaments of the building, as well as all the surviving components of the building, while the places that were no longer authentic were remodelled with a contemporary design. The originally plainer design of the upper floors made it possible to plan the exhibition spaces diversely and thematically (Madran, 2022).

The original elevator next to the stairs leading down to the vault is preserved but not open to use. The safes inside the vault and its original entrance door are kept. A photograph of bank employees from the 1930s was placed on the wall next to the entrance (Buyurgan & Karaaziz Şener, 2023), thus reinforcing the perception and memory of the place through a visual connection with the past. In order to provide information about the variety of objects that were once in the safes, a few samples are placed in the transparent boxes protruding from some of the safes. The vault is rearranged with original tables and photographs from the former years. All these installations support the narrativity of the building.

The visiting route of the museum is similar to that of the banking operations. The main entrance door opens inside the two-storey high main hall, as in the original plan. In fact, the 1940s appearance of this ovoid hall, which has undergone functional changes over the years, has been revived with its original furniture by means of photographs and drawings (Madran, 2022). Designed by Selahattin Refik Sırmalı (Akşit, 2010), the original wooden furniture in the main hall, such as cash desks and seating units, is now displayed in its initial location. Objects associated with the space, which are parts of the bank's movable cultural assets, are placed on the furniture. Where banking operations are carried out at the right and left of the main hall, the atmosphere of the former period is kept alive thanks to the replacement of original objects, documents, and photographs on the wooden furniture (Buyurgan & Karaaziz Şener, 2023).

In the spacious area behind the main hall, which was formed as a result of a later extension, the installation of lightweight display boxes narrates the economic history of the Turkish Republic chronologically and thematically (Figure 7). Each box, consisting of open, closed and semi-open surfaces, conveys information about its own theme to the visitors with information boards, photographs, videos, written and visual documents and objects. In terms of museology, a different approach than the main hall is applied in this part because it is not original according to the initial plan (Madran, 2022). Buyurgan and Karaaziz Şener

(2023) assess this installation as an intermediary area as being a transition zone from a banking function to a museum function. Nevertheless, due to its introverted form, this space prevents us from establishing a relationship with the original building. However, its reversible and lightweight structure is noteworthy.



Figure 7. The display boxes behind the main waiting hall, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)

The executive rooms and the Blue Hall on the first floor are displayed with authentic interior elements and furniture preserved in situ. The large meeting room with its foyer, kept as it was decorated in 1956, still hosts meetings of the bank's board of directors on special occasions. In other rooms on this floor, all the general directorate buildings used since the establishment of İşbank, are presented through information boards, photographs, models and visual and written documents.

On the second floor, the bank's century-old institutional history is presented, and on the upper floors, there are various types of exhibition spaces, event spaces and a library. From the second floor onwards, the building is like a neutral background for the exhibitions. For these parts of the museum, while the display is carried out in a way that does not harm the building, its original state is not legible due to the new atmosphere created by the display units.

The architectural elements on the basement, first and second floors, such as ornaments on walls, balustrades, columns, stained glass dome, doors, windows as well as wall coverings and floorings, survive as they are to the present day. These areas, where material authenticity is preserved in every scale, are refunctioned to be displayed through conservation works. In addition, the preservation of the original furniture in situ has been decisive for the concept and arrangement of the exhibition. This causes the reuse to be fragmented in terms of museology.

The former atmosphere is kept alive on the façade of the building, in its relationship with the city and on the entrance, basement and first floors. On the upper floors, based on the spatial potential of the building, the exhibition itself is prominent. From a museological point of view, it is suggested that the building converted to a museum has difficulties in the narration and visit flow, and for this reason, markings and directions need to be more visible. The guided tours are also recommended (Buyurgan & Karaaziz Şener, 2023).

Evaluation

The conversion of both buildings into thematic museums, supported by contemporary museology means, facilitates the perception of genius loci. Today, museology embraces an approach that establishes a symbiotic relationship with its host structure, centres on the visitor and is enriched by experience-oriented, digital, and interactive technologies. In this context, four different display methods have been employed in both museums. The first method includes traditional display tools such as visual and written information boards, showcases, panels, boxes, models, lighting, and colouring. The second method involves digital and interactive display tools, including projections, touch screens, audio guides, mobile applications and QR codes. The third one focuses on participatory display tools such as experience rooms, visitor participation boards and activity areas for both children and general use. Finally, within the scope of this study, the fourth method considers the building itself and its spatial components as display units that materialize genius loci.

Sensory experience

These display tools create the multisensory experience of both buildings in their present state. The visual experience is enriched not only by the perception of the building as a whole and in fragments but also by the presence of movable cultural assets from the banks' collections or representative display objects (Figure 8). Projections, digital screens and light effects enhance visual perception, while sound effects, audio guides and narratives, and music complement the auditory experience (Figure 9). Although limited in number, the opportunity to touch original furniture and/or architectural elements adds to the immersive experience. Additionally, the distinct scent of the historic buildings enhances the atmosphere, engaging the sense of smell (Table 1).



Figure 8. The visual experience: The display of Homeland Fund, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2024)



Figure 9. The auditory experience, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)

Remembrance

Remembrance is described as the transition of our sensory experiences into an emotional engagement. This sensitive bond has deeply affected not only the building's visitors but also those responsible for its restoration. The sense of remembrance can be followed by these words of architect Aylin Polat, the restoration site supervisor of Ziraat Bank: *"As I was walking around, I saw that a wall was cracked. ... I put my hand in the hole (of the crack), trying to feel its extent and size. ... It was going upwards but standing there immediately below and there was a dusty bottle. ... It was a very emotional time: Reaching it or grasping it there. It was like shaking hands with the person who left it there."* (Ziraat Bank, n.d.). The imagery of the past created by the memory is also reactivated in the visitors' minds. Accordingly, everything we perceive through our senses becomes part of a pattern of remembrance. In particular, the presence of original architectural elements, such as the walls, ceilings, flooring, doors, windows, ornaments, furniture and vaults, facilitates the act of remembering. In this context, the integration of these authentic architectural elements with historic photographs, movable cultural assets and new display units creates a palimpsest, where the building's former and recent layers coexist (Figure 10, 11) (Table 1).



Figure 10. The act of remembrance through original interior elements and historic photographs of the former atmosphere, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)



Figure 11. The act of remembrance through original interior elements integrated with representative objects and historic photographs, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)

Interpretation

The contemporary layer of palimpsest that forms the pattern of remembrance is defined as interpretation. This layer not only transmits the traces of the past into the present and the future but also adds its own contributions to ensure continuity. Interpretation tools give meaning to the whole pattern formed through sensory experience and remembrance. As an integral component in shaping and completing the narrative within the context of genius loci, interpretation is emphasized in both buildings through elements such as multimedia screens and informational panels enriched with visual and written documents, models and representative objects. Both museums feature a designated visiting route that ensures the coherence of the narrative. While the route in the Ziraat Bank Museum offers a more seamless flow, the one in the İşbank Museum is fragmented, though internally consistent (Figure 12). In the Ziraat Bank Museum, an entrance mass has been added to differentiate the museum function from the building's administrative function and enhance the user experience. Functioning like a semi-open ramp and integrating with the basement level, this entrance mass is part of the interpretive infrastructure (Figure 13) (Table 1).



Figure 12. The interpretation of century-old institutional history, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)



Figure 13. The newly added entrance block, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)

Narration

The narration is formed by the links established between experienced, remembered and interpreted elements. In both buildings, a similar storytelling approach is structured for the vaults. The existing vaults have been preserved, and their intended functions are demonstrated through objects once they were keeping. Additionally, historical documents, photographs, and artefacts reinforce both the remembrance process and the whole narrative. These installations predominantly reflect an intergenerational narrative approach. At the Ziraat Bank Museum, time and space are represented through a "time passage" that begins where the chronological exhibition ends (Figure 14). This corridor guides visitors toward memory rooms, including a radio room and a cinema room, designed to evoke nostalgia for a specific period (Figure 15). The contents shown in these rooms are replayed to transport visitors back in time. Here, the narrative is materialized through non-original elements that reinforce the existing fragments of the building. While this raises questions regarding authenticity, it nonetheless contributes to the continuity of the narrative. Meanwhile, in the boiler room of 1929, an installation created with red coloured lights conveys information about the invisible technology of that time, integrating an existing fragment into the storyline (Figure 16). The narrative can be simply summarized in the following words of Architect Aylin Polat, the restoration site supervisor of Ziraat Bank: "What was Mongeri thinking? What would he choose when he decided materials for floor covering? What colour would he choose? What should radiator grille guards be? Should they reflect the colour of the walls? There are so many stories underlying them... There is a story as well that was written 90 years ago. We rewrote another story 90 years later, leaving things there." (Ziraat Bank, n.d.). At the İşbank Museum, the narrative on the first two floors is closely linked to the authentic architectural elements of the building (Figure 17). However, while internally cohesive, the exhibition on the second floor works as an independent display. The fact that this exhibition establishes little to no morphological connection with the building's architectural elements weakens the whole narrative and creates a disconnection in perceiving genius loci. However, its reversibility suggests that the display maintains an ongoing narrative approach, allowing new layers to be added in the future. In fact, this year, the existing exhibition on the second floor has been completely updated in this sense (Figure 18). The

intangible aspects of banking—such as working conditions, organization structure, relationships between employees, and atmosphere—are strongly embedded in the narratives of both buildings, highlighting the presence of a communal narrative approach (Table 1).

PROCESS OF GENIUS LOCI	ZİRAAT BANK	İŞBANK
Sensory experience	To see: building as a whole and in fragments	
	To see: movable cultural assets from the banks' collections and representative display objects	
	To see: display tools, projections, digital screens and light effects	
	To hear: sound effects, audio guides and narratives, and music installations	
	To touch: original furniture and architectural elements	
Remembrance	To smell: distinct scent of the historic buildings	
	Presence of original architectural elements, such as the walls, ceilings, flooring, doors, windows, ornaments, furniture and vaults	
Interpretation	Historic photographs, documents and movable cultural assets	
	Multimedia screens, informational panels, visual and written documents, models and representative objects	
	Designated visiting route	
Narration	Addition of an entrance block for museum function	
	Intergenerational narrative: existing vaults and demonstration of their initial functions through historical documents, photographs and artefacts	
	Communal narrative: intangible aspects of banking, such as working conditions, organization structure, relationships between employees and atmosphere	
	Ongoing narrative: reversible exhibition about the chronological history of the banks	
	Display of the authentic architectural elements and furniture	
	Installation of time passage	Installation of lightweight display boxes about the economic history of the Turkish Republic
	Recreated memory rooms, including a radio room and a cinema room	
Authentic boiler room of 1929 with a light installation		

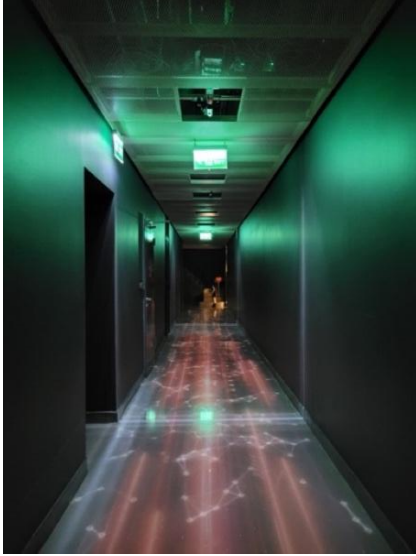


Figure 14. The time passage, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)



Figure 15. The memory room: The radio room, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)



Figure 16. The first boiler room of 1929, Ziraat Bank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)



Figure 17. The intergenerational and communal narratives through building and its authentic elements, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)



Figure 18. The reversible display units for ongoing narratives, İşbank Museum (A. Özmen, 2025)

Conclusion

This study focuses on subjective concepts of genius loci in adaptive reuse and conservation. In accordance with the method followed, it was investigated if the perception of historic places attaches importance to the tangible-intangible integrity, which is called genius loci, occurs in a process consisting of four steps respectively: sensory experience, remembrance, interpretation and narration.

These four steps are analysed through the cases of the General Headquarters of Ziraat Bank and İşbank. Located in a multi-layered part of the city, not only the historic buildings themselves but also the tools, scents, furnishings, clothes, and habits of the former employees associated with its former function contribute to genius loci. Especially in monumental buildings whose physical characteristics do not radically change over time, the accumulation of experience of the place along with the presence of tangible and intangible reminders, create a different human-place relationship every single time. For this reason, the synthesis that emerges from combining the physical attributes of places with the intangible aspects, that are an integral part of place, can offer a

new perspective on evaluating the success of the adaptive reuse praxis.

This research contributes to the emerging discourse on genius loci in adaptive reuse by offering a structured framework for evaluating how the spirit of place is perceived and maintained in the buildings converted into thematic museums. The proposed four-stage model deepens the understanding of how sensory experience, memory, interpretation, and narration influence spatial perception, broadening the theoretical foundation for future research on human-place relationships in conservation and adaptive reuse contexts. From a practical point of view, this study provides insights for architects, conservationists, and museum curators involved in adapting historic buildings. The findings can guide all stakeholders in the decision-making processes of adaptive reuse projects by emphasizing the need to preserve not only tangible attributes but also intangible dimensions while designing for new purposes. Stakeholders can apply this framework to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions and create spaces that sustain a meaningful connection between users and place, as well as between past, present and future.

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