A callous diversion from a livable stage-set; the 75-year story of a “high-market” street

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Abstract

This study probes the relative decline in the quality of commerce in Balıkesir in relation to its urban-architectonic stage. Milli Kuvvetler Street in Balıkesir, an astonishing insertion of 1916 into the organic town fabric, is examined in this paper. Its deviation from an urban space representing a new social model of Turkish Republic in the early 1920s towards a mediocre and untidy streetscape, has been of long interest particularly from the viewpoint of parallel processes of morphological and socio-economic transformation in small towns. This study aims to elucidate spatial dimensions of traditional commerce by investigating a small western Anatolian town and the evolution of its most exquisite linear space of its time and the first upper-class commercial street of Balıkesir. In a historical perspective (between 1920s and 1980s), the principles of the stage design of this social act or ritual in the city, whereby a Western European lifestyle is appropriated are examined for the purpose of discovering their relation with the ritual itself. Within the framework of morphological aspect of the townscape, urban effects of key interventions are analysed adopting methods of townscape analyses such as building heights, plot widths, sequential continuity of urban paths as well as figure-ground relationships in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the physical context in which the economic nucleus to flourish. Some results are noteworthy especially in the case of Balıkesir. It is suggested that the changes observed in the fabric of the square, building height and plot width might have negatively affected the rhythm of shopping activity. Environmental quality and appropriateness is evaluated retrospectively towards a better and vivid social life in the historic centre of the city of Balıkesir. Milli Kuvvetler Street is suggested as an urban generator to reactivate the social life in the city for a much more liveable Balıkesir.