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## "As if architecture" in Türkiye: Reflections on the Burj al Babas project\*

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### Abstract

*This study introduces the concept of "as if architecture" to describe a prevalent approach in architecture as practiced and understood in Türkiye. It reveals "as if" circumstances in the Turkish architectural setting by focusing on the example of Burj al Babas, an unfinished residential project in Mudurnu that draws attention both in national and international media. In this context, "as if architecture" is mainly characterized as an approach where architectural content has been stripped of its ethical principles, cultural norms, competence, and commitments. It is rather supplied with superficial and merely visual interpretations. Considering its impact on the fundamental principles of the discipline and its bold representation in the Burj al Babas example, this approach deserves study in the academic sphere as well. The theoretical framework of the study is developed from the adaptation of two concepts that reveal different manifestations of "as if architecture." They are "as if personality," a personality type first identified by psychotherapist Helene Deutsch, and "acting as if," a social phenomenon that psychologist Doğan Cüceloğlu recognized in the Turkish context. Using examples from the Turkish architectural context, the study demonstrates and analyzes these two complementary modes of "as if" situations co-existing simultaneously in the Burj al Babas project. The research integrates both empirical and theoretical methods, involving a field trip to the case study for on-site examination and integrating interdisciplinary concepts to develop a theoretical framework for architecture. These concepts are subsequently correlated with additional instances to establish an "as if" scenario within Turkish architecture.*

### Keywords

*As If, Burj al Babas, Mudurnu, Turkish Architectural Criticism*

### Introduction

Within the architectural landscape of Türkiye, the existence of "as if" architecture is a significant phenomenon worthy of scholarly scrutiny. This study explores the phenomenon of "as if" architecture within the Turkish context, focusing on the Burj al Babas Project in Mudurnu. Characterized by a blend of historical styles, the project has garnered widespread attention for its unique visual qualities. However, this study goes beyond surface aesthetics to examine the deeper implications of "as if" architecture within Turkey's architectural ethos.

Within this context, "as if architecture" refers to an approach that strips architecture of its ethical underpinnings, cultural significance, and technical expertise, substituting them with superficial symbolism borrowed from external imagery. In essence, "as if architecture" denotes a state characterized by the emulation and substitution of genuine architectural principles and practices. Given its potential to influence the core principles of the discipline of architecture, this approach deserves scholarly investigation as well. By focusing on Burj al Babas as an example, this study aims to formulate this issue as "as if" in architecture and to uncover "as if" scenarios in the Turkish architectural environment.

The "as if" examination within the architectural framework draws upon two complementary sources illuminating diverse expressions of "as if architecture." The first source originates in psychology and

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pertains to the concept of the "as if personality," introduced by psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch. To better understand how the idea of "as if personality" can be adapted to the discipline of architecture in terms of "as if architecture," an analysis will be undertaken to compare the Burj al-Babas project with the traditional architecture of Mudurnu. The second reference, termed "acting as if," is introduced by Turkish psychologist Doğan Cüceloğlu as a social phenomenon aimed at understanding the underlying factors contributing to the formation of "as if personality" within Turkish architecture. Examining "as if architecture" in the context of Türkiye will be built on these two ideas: "as if personality" and "acting as if." The research demonstrates the coexistence of these two phenomena through examples from the Turkish architectural landscape, boldly illustrated by the case of Burj al Babas. Additionally, it addresses the diversity of layers causing "acting as if" in architecture, along with possible consequences.

The research methodology of this article integrates both empirical and theoretical strategies. A field trip was conducted to perform an in-depth survey of the case study within its physical context. This included on-site observations and analysis of the surrounding area. The study involved a critical discussion utilizing concepts from various disciplines to construct a theoretical framework, which was then adapted to the field of architecture. By examining common themes and patterns, the research aims to build an "as if" scenario within the architectural context of Türkiye.

### The Story of the Burj al Babas Project

Located in the Mudurnu town of Bolu city in northwest Türkiye, Burj al Babas is an unfinished housing project that draws attention both in national and international media (Figure 1). The name of the project is not Turkish but Arabic, translatable as "Babas Towers" - Burj meaning tower, and Babas is the name of a well-known spa in the region. The project included 732 similar villas with a variety of architectural styles, as well as Turkish spas, an entertainment center, and a shopping mall ("Project Catalogue," 2016). The target market for the project was wealthy tourists from Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, who were drawn to the climate, landscape, and spa towns of the region. This part of Türkiye has long been a popular destination for Gulf visitors, making it an ideal investment opportunity (Emen, 2018).

**Figure 1.** Burj al Babas



**Source:** Author.

A complicated history has been involved in the construction of the project, and it continues today. Around 2011, work on the 750 decares construction site started. Local opposition to the project grew at the same time. Criticism of Mudurnu residents pointed out that the architectural language was entirely out of place and the project would destroy the landscape. The reported destruction of 6.5 decares of forest site and the dumping of excavated earth on young trees have fuelled their temper. Despite the criticisms, the mayor of Mudurnu completely supported the project. While the construction was ongoing, 350 of the villas were sold. In early 2018, the inability of the company to collect debts from its customers led to a halt in the construction of the villas. The project has reached a complete standstill with the construction of its 587 villas completed. The construction company's bankruptcy caused the project to be suspended (Emen, 2019; McKernan, 2019). Today, it is an abandoned development with an uncanny atmosphere evocative of a surreal ghost town.

The project's architectural style is interpreted as reminiscent of revivalist architecture found in French and German castles from the 17<sup>th</sup> century ("Burj al Babas", 2021). The majority of the comments in online media compare the project to a Disney castle, whose precedent is claimed to be a late 19th-century castle -Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, Germany (Thefairytaletraveler, 2015). Naci Yörük, the only architect whose name was mentioned as a consultant in the project, stated that the chateau-

style architecture of the project developed as a result of negotiations between the Arab customers and the investors. Emin Yerdelen, the owner of the investment firm, claimed that the references for the project were not taken from abroad but from two historical buildings in Istanbul, presumably in response to the criticism that the project was incompatible with the local context. The first reference is the Galata Tower, which the Genoese built in the Middle Ages, and the Maiden's Tower, which was initially a Byzantine structure and was rebuilt by the Ottoman Empire after an earthquake in the 18th century destroyed it (Gall, 2019; Emen, 2018). Due to the project's incomplete construction, the interior design has not yet been executed. Nevertheless, the project catalog preserves the fairy tale ambiance through eclectic renderings, depicting walls embellished with diverse textures and furnished with curvilinear, gold-colored furniture. The design promises a residence featuring luxurious amenities, such as bathrooms equipped with jacuzzis that offer access to healing thermal waters. ("Project Catalogue," 2016)

### ***The Global Phenomenon of Unfinished Housing Projects***

Several abandoned large-scale housing projects worldwide exist, not just Burj al Babas, which has its unique landscape of endlessly repeating Disney castles. Ambitious large-scale projects with various objectives of urban development have been envisioned globally. However, these grand projects can confront certain limitations, leading to incomplete construction or abandonment post-completion. This often results from financial problems, political barriers, or unrealistic expectations (Saif, 2023). For example, Ordos Kangbashi in China was envisioned to house a million people. Still, as of the 2000s, it became a "ghost city" as it was largely uninhabited due to unrealized expectations and lack of demand. Half of the population in Ciudad Valdez in Spain was left following the 2008 financial crisis. The Sanzhi UFO Houses in Taiwan is another abandoned housing development whose construction was stopped due to economic and construction problems. Moreover, the Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang, North Korea, was intended to be the tallest hotel in the world, but the construction remained incomplete for decades due to economic reasons (Abandoned Spaces, 2024). These abandoned sites, which are powerful symbols of the failures of speculative real estate markets, attract media and public attention due to their uncanny atmospheres.

### ***Worldwide Interest in Burj al Babas***

Today, local, national, and international media, photographers, and producers of music videos are drawn to the picturesque landscape of the abandoned settlement of Burj al Babas. The site was the background for a short film directed by conceptual designer Alexandre Humbert. He reimagined the location as "Sleeping Beauties," a theme park where visitors can pay a nominal entrance fee to take pictures of abandoned dwellings (Humbert, 2020). Moreover, Meduza shot a video clip for the song "Lose Control" in the Burj al Babas project. Since its debut on October 24, 2019, it has received more than 125 million views on YouTube (Meduza, 2019). The site, having drawn many visitors interested in exploring abandoned ruins, has undoubtedly turned into a cult attraction. As of May 2024, more than 4730 video results appear on Google searches, including many vloggers' trips to the site.

The exhibition "Ghost Stories: Carrier Bag Theory of Architecture," showcased at the Pavilion of Türkiye during the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia 2023, featured Burj al Babas as a prominent exhibit. Curated by architects Sevinç Bayrak and Oral Göktaş, the Turkish pavilion criticized the obsession with construction for economic aims by highlighting the prevalence of empty and abandoned buildings across the country. Drawing inspiration from Ursula Le Guin's essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," the exhibition advocated a shift in focus towards understanding the narratives of neglected structures rather than glorifying successful projects. Burj al Babas was a poignant example of such unused and abandoned developments. (Türkiye Pavillion, 2023)

As the unfinished and abandoned atmosphere of these villas is combined with the endlessly replicated image of a castle, the extraordinary feeling of a surreal, dark, even postapocalyptic world—a view to which we are not accustomed, seems to be the reason for this project's widespread interest. However, this study is not concerned with understanding the stylistic confusion of the project. Nor will it analyze the aesthetic reasons behind its arousing interest and astonishment worldwide. This place merits discussion not only for its confused visual and aesthetic qualities but also because it sheds light on a complex and deep state in architecture as it is understood and implemented in Turkey. In this study, this state will be conceptualized as 'as if' architecture, with its theoretical framework rooted in the concepts of 'as if personality' and 'acting as if,' which will be thoroughly explored in subsequent discussions.

### **"As If" Personality**

"As if personality" was initially described in psychology as a personality type by German psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch in 1942. In her seminal study published in "Some Forms of Emotional Disturbance and its Link to Schizophrenia," Deutsch describes that people with "as if personality" may appear completely normal on the outside (2007, p. 326). These people do not complain of any disorder and seem to have "normal" relationships with those around them. Closer examination reveals, however, that their relationships lack warmth, that all emotional manifestations are formal, and that any interior experience is utterly absent. Deutsch likens people with "as if personality" to performers who are "technically well trained" (Deutsch, 2007, p. 328) but cannot give the character any sense of life. She claims these people acted "as if" they had genuine emotions and interpersonal relationships. However, the "as if" person lacks an inner drive and a connection to their authentic self. Without the chance to grow a sense of self, imitation becomes the new normal. The seemingly natural way of interacting with the world is a copy of others - "as if" personality fully identifies itself with outside things. Only external sources serve as the authority for moral judgments. The absence of a warm or caring relationship on an emotional level or not having any reliable attachment figures in their life, like having distant and uninvolved parents, may weaken the vitality required to seek to live a meaningful life and cause the evolution of "as if personality" as a defense mechanism in further stages of life (Deutsch, 2007, pp.325-344).

Deutsch mentions treatment for emptiness and reaching the authentic self cannot be quickly succeeded (Deutsch, 2007, p. 344). Solomon (2004) notes that treating emptiness and reaching the authentic self is an unwarranted journey, yet awakening consciousness can reveal positive results. Although the expectation of total recovery is too optimistic, psychic gains are recognized as greater life freedoms.

### **From "As If" Personality to "As If" Architecture**

Explanation of "as if personality" provided by Deutsch lends a reassuring viewpoint to the discussion of "as if" in architecture. It is plausible to assert that an architectural work consists of distinguishing elements that contribute to its character and help define its identity, much to how a person's personality is described as the sum of her patterns of behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs. All ideas in response to the social, cultural, physical, functional, and aesthetic demands of the design context make up the whole relationship system. The architect tries to respond to the multidimensional and complex requests of the design problem through spatial design principles that make up the totality of the work. It would not be inaccurate to state that an architectural work's character or personality may be compromised by the lack of consideration put into its design or its incapacity to consider multiple factors. The sense of emptiness at the core of the self, which Deutsch recognizes in "as if personality," is not all that, unlike the absence of the system of ideas or thoughts that makes up an architectural work. Similar to how an "as if" person creates themselves through identifications from external sources, an architectural work can tend to find different identities and attach them to substitute the original sense of internal emptiness. This emptiness is masked through the identity it borrows from outside and does not belong to it. This way, it starts to "pretend" like an "as if personality."

Burj al Babas is a bold example of how the state of "as if personality" can manifest itself in the architectural environment. Additionally, it is anticipated that the "as if" condition of Burj al Babas will become more apparent after addressing how Mudurnu's traditional architecture interacts with its physical and cultural environment through its still relevant design principles.

### **Traditional Architecture of Mudurnu**

The historic town of Mudurnu is situated on the forested lower slopes of Mount Bolu. The hills, valley slopes, and Mudurnu Stream surrounding the district are the determining factors in the formation of the town's physical structure and urban texture (Figure 2). In Mudurnu Town, the natural terrain and urban fabric are dramatically reconciled by the town's linear settlement along the Mudurnu Stream (Halaç et al., 2021). The town has a rich history. It has been a shelter for countless civilizations, such as the Phrygians, Lydians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, and Ottomans. Although Mudurnu carries traces of different traditions, it preserves its character as a typical Ottoman town with a 700-year history.

Mudurnu is designated a "Historic Guild Town," a distinction emblematic of its rich cultural legacy and enduring commitment to traditional artisanal practices. Characterized by a profound reverence for heritage, the town sustains deep-rooted customs and communal spirit, notably exemplified by rituals such as the Merchants' Friday Prayer and the tradition of preparing bread to honor the dead. To keep an authentic tradition alive for centuries, Mudurnu has managed to carve itself a place on the UNESCO Tentative List for World Heritage Sites (Permanent Delegation of Türkiye to UNESCO, 2015). Additionally, the town Joined the Cittaslow Network in 2018 (Olivetti, 2018; Cittaslow, 2024). The sustained tradition, the preservation of the traditional architectural fabric, and the urban texture



characteristic of an Ottoman town, alongside the restoration and reuse of several buildings as hotels, promote cultural tourism in Mudurnu. Additionally, the presence of thermal springs, forested areas, and streams provides ample opportunities for nature-based and health tourism in this settlement (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024).

**Figure 2.** View of Mudurnu Town



**Source:** (Dosseman, 2019) Retrieved April 1, 2024 from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mudurnu\\_in\\_2019\\_2834.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mudurnu_in_2019_2834.jpg) CC BY-SA 4.0

The architecture of this historic town exhibits many key design characteristics, including tectonic language, which draws its principles from structural and constructional principles, and consideration of topography, landscape, and climate as design factors that influence the spatial organization and the articulation of mass and façade. Traditional Mudurnu houses, like all other traditional settlements in Anatolia, exhibit unique features driven by climatic and topographic conditions. As their structural system, the ground floors are mostly built of adobe and stone masonry, and the upper floors are timber framing whose spaces in between are filled with adobe or stone and usually covered with timber (Koçan, 2012). (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Front Facade of a Traditional Mudurnu House



**Source:** Dosseman (2017a) Retrieved April 1, 2024 from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mudurnu\\_buildings\\_in\\_2007\\_7294.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mudurnu_buildings_in_2007_7294.jpg) CC BY-SA 4.0

The plan schemes of traditional houses were also arranged according to the characteristics of the local climate. The front facades of the buildings were designed to face the view. Due to topographical constraints, Mudurnu buildings were not created by spreading across the land but by utilizing the slope and adding more floors. In buildings that adapt to the slope with different levels, the functions of the floors change, and the primary living floor varies accordingly. (Karatop et al., 2021) As a reflection of differences in spatial arrangement, the projections on the mass can change their position and shape to the extent of the possibilities of the structural system. This attitude enables diversity and variation in the overall urban tissue through mass and façade articulations by maintaining a consistent architectural language. In other words, traditional Mudurnu architecture draws its design ideas and solutions from its own physical and cultural context, and it does not require any external concepts or answers that do not belong to it. Since it possesses intellectual integrity, it does not need to resemble anything else.

### ***Comparison Between the Traditional Architecture of Mudurnu and the Burj al Babas***

It is an entirely opposing experience to come across the Burj al Babas project after leaving the historical center of Mudurnu. Burj al Babas, located three kilometers from Mudurnu's historic center, contrasts with the surrounding landscape. The project, near a partially demolished forest, consists of identical villas, a mosque, and a large shopping center. The interwoven landscape of nature and buildings is replaced by unending rows of partially finished villas, indicating a lack of greenery (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Aerial view of the Burj al Babas Construction Site



**Source:** Google (2024).

Mudurnu's urban fabric, crafted by traditional architecture, showcases variations in height, size, construction techniques, and materials, resulting in aesthetic quality and response to diverse lifestyles (see Figure 5). On the other hand, Burj al Babas does not demonstrate any concepts that would lead to distinctiveness within the fabric it generates. The elaboration of the design problem does not take the potential interpretations of the physical context, and as a result, the same type is repeated 732 times (see Figure 6).

**Figure 5.** Urban Fabric of Mudurnu



**Source:** Dosseman (2007b) Retrieved April 1, 2024, from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mudurnu\\_in\\_2007\\_7311.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mudurnu_in_2007_7311.jpg) CC BY-SA 4.0.

**Figure 6.** View of Burj al Babas Project from the Main Road



**Source:** Author.

In Mudurnu traditional architecture, the architectural language assumes its tectonic quality from local materials' constructive and structural capacities. Formal aspects such as window sizes, cantilevers, spatial proportions, and roof geometry create their architectural language by acting within the possibilities and limits brought by the structural material (see Figure 7). In Burj al Babas, the structure is a reinforced concrete frame given a make-up of a historical building that would have been built with a masonry system like stone. The structural system is masked as the building pretends to be a historic structure or a castle, although it is not (see Figure 8).

**Figure 7.** Wooden Construction of a Mudurnu House



**Source:** Author.

**Figure 8.** The reinforced concrete structure of a typical villa in the Burj al Babas project



**Source:** Author.

Additionally, the Burj al Babas lacks other principles examined in the Mudurnu traditional architecture, including the impact of topography and landscape in forming spatial arrangement and the interaction between mass and spatial organization (see Figure 9). The plans or spatial organization of Burj al Babas, despite the exterior image's reference to a castle or a palace, are far from expressing the atmosphere it aims to evoke. Low ceiling heights, narrow entrance characteristics, treating the living area and all other spaces as separate rooms, and layering floors repeatedly indicate a lack of spatial elaboration. The contradiction between the facade impression and the spatial arrangement is accentuated regarding the relationship between the indoors and outdoors. The terraces delineated by the mass articulations intended to evoke a castle are incompatible with the usage of the interior space, and there is no access from the living area to the garden (see Figure 10).



**Figure 9.** Plan Typologies In Traditional Mudurnu Houses

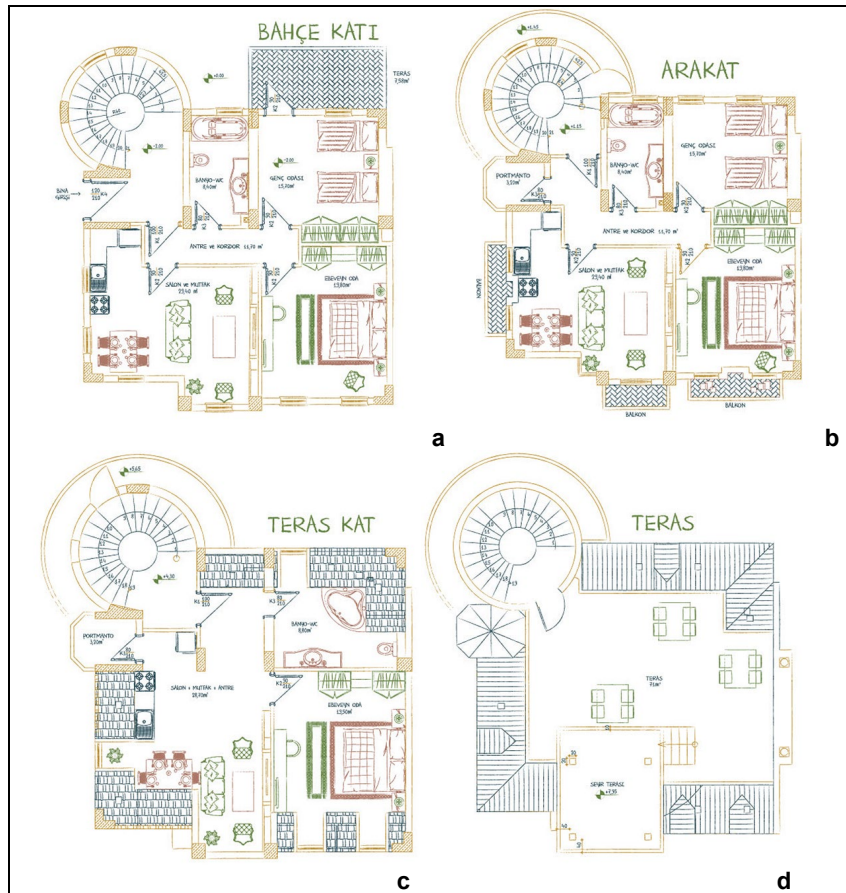
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TEK SIRA ODALI				
İKİ SIRA ODA YANYANA				
İKİ SIRA ODA + ODLAR ARASINA EYVAN, MERDİVEN, TUVALET, KİLER vb. MAHALLER GİRİŞİŞ				

**Source:** Babalı (2007, p. 66).

[The sofa, acting as both a circulation and a communal space, connects with all rooms, and its layout displays variations in response to its site, topography, and landscape.]



**Figure 10. (a, b, c, d) Floor Plans of a Typical Villa in the Burj al Babas Project**



**Source:** Floor Plans (2016). Retrieved April 1, 2024 from <https://www.burjalbabas.com/assets/images/katplani.pdf>

[All spaces, including the living space and staircase halls, are regarded as rooms and separated through corridors.]

### **Prevailing Approaches of "As If" in Türkiye**

The comparison between the "new" Burj al Babas Project and the "old" architecture of Mudurnu exemplifies the condition of "as if personality" in architecture, which points to the attitude of attaching images plagiarised from other sources to make up for the absence of essential architectural design characteristics. The Burj al Babas project exhibits the "as if" condition, which is not unusual in Turkish architecture.

### **Ideological Representations and Historical References**

The "as if personality" notion in architecture often manifests primarily through historical references in Türkiye. These historical references mainly suggest visual imitations of Ottoman and Seljuk architecture and have evolved into a typical architectural style in various projects, from public buildings to big-scale housing projects. The ideological and political attitudes of the past two decades have contributed substantially to developing this strategy. An urban revolution, as noted by Batuman (2018, p. 4), has been underway in Türkiye under the current government, which has been in power since 2002, transforming all political forces into urban forms and leading to efforts to establish an "Ottoman-Seljuk" architectural style as a symbol of the "new Islamist national identity." (2018, pp. 157-162).

This new architectural language in those buildings demands attention for its unrestrained eclecticism. Domes, arches, eaves, projections, ornamental patterns, oriels, pediments, and portals can be used without any particular order. Regardless of their contextual, functional, structural, and constructional rationales, these historical references are primarily employed as adhesive elements on facades. By altering the scale, proportions, structural and constructional principles, the architectural features of the two- or three-story traditional Beypazarı houses are transferred to an 11000 m2 reinforced concrete building with five floors at the town hall of Beypazarı, Ankara (see Figure 11). In the mass housing constructed by TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of the Republic of Türkiye) in Mudurnu-

located between the historic town center and the Burj al Babas project, architectural features like projections, pediments, and timber braces are applied as decorative elements on façade repetitively regardless of their formal and constructional principles (see Figure 12).

**Figure 11.** Beypazarı Town Hall, Türkiye



**Source:** Author.

**Figure 12.** A Typical TOKİ Housing Block in Mudurnu, Türkiye



**Source:** Author.

The effort of the governing party to convey its "Islamist and national ideology" (Batuman, 2018) through architecture is being discussed in academic and professional circles. In addition to their historicist standpoint, those criticisms mention issues like their efforts to demolish significant modern architectural landmarks and replace them with mosques; legal and undemocratic urban interventions; and the problematic built environments brought on by the Housing Development Administrative (TOKİ) (Baki, 2020; Bayırbağ, et al., 2022; Batuman, 2018; Bilgi, 2017; Çavuşoğlu et al., 2014; Ghulyan, 2019; Karatepe, 2020; Orhan, 2016; Sargın, 2020; Tansel, 2019).

Most of these discussions, which link their architectural critique to the current government's politics, generally overlook the point that it is not only their organizations and municipalities that utilize architecture as an ideological tool and restrict it to historical references. The condition exemplified by Burj al Babas and other Turkish cases demonstrates that it is not solely contingent on the attitudes of the ruling party, and even other secular and social-democratic political entities share a similar mindset regarding architecture. Mudurnu mayor as a CHP (The Republican People's Party) member, declares his unquestioning support for the Burj al Babas project and his commitment to completing it despite the claims that it will damage the physical and historical environment of Mudurnu (Emen, 2018). Additionally, the Town Hall of Marmara Ereğlisi is a blend of classical architectural elements with a Western civilization-inspired past (Figure 13). The mayor from CHP praises the building despite media scrutiny ("Marmara Ereğlisi," 2018). Similarly, the mayor of Kuşadası from the same political party promotes the new Town Hall building, which has distorted and anonymized historical references (Okayer, 2021) ("Chp Chairman," 2022) (see Figure 14). It is conceivable to assert that authorities or administrators who subscribe to competing political ideologies frequently use architecture to spread their political statements using varying historical references.

**Figure 13.** Marmara Ereğlisi Town Hall, Türkiye



**Source:** Marmara Ereğlisi (2018). Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/marmara-ereglisi-belediyesinden-yeni-binayla-ilgili-aciklama?page=1>

**Figure 14.** Kuşadası Town Hall, Türkiye



**Source:** CHP Chairman (2022). Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://thegeeeye.com/chp-chairman-kemal-kilicdaroglu-opens-kusadasi-municipality-new-service-complex/>

### The Modernization Paradox

It may be time to revisit Kenneth Frampton's seminal work "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism" at this stage, given that the problem definition acquired from Ricoeur still applies to the Turkish setting. Paul Ricoeur identified the path to modernization as a significant issue facing developing countries in 1961 (Frampton, 1983, p. 148). A challenging procedure is needed to attempt to participate in global development without breaking the ties to the culture and the traditions that underpin their national identity. Because participating in scientific, technical, and political rationality is required to try to be a part of modern civilization, doing so may also require giving up old customs and traditions. For this reason, it is paradoxical to be modern while seeking to conserve the past culture, and Ricoeur is sure that not every culture can endure and manage the "shock of modern society." (Frampton, 1983, p. 148) Türkiye undoubtedly struggles to achieve cross-fertilization. Ricoeur proposed creating a hybrid "world culture" that integrates local culture and universal civilization. It is challenging to assert that this cross-fertilization, achieved through a thorough investigation of tradition and a reinterpretation of regional culture to incorporate the cultural, scientific, and technological influences of external sources, was established as a mindset in Türkiye.

Kenneth Frampton's concept of critical referencing distinguishes it from unskilled copying, and it focuses on underlying values and principles (1983, p. 149). Imitation is the quickest and most straightforward approach to establishing identity as a marketable component, enhancing product value (Güzer, 2007). Architectural elements from the past have established identities, making the general public easily accept and consume historical imitations (Özaslan et al., 2011). Frampton's theory is supported by the Ottoman style's popularity in Türkiye, which is prevalent in public buildings, hotels, office buildings, and housing projects.

### Compulsion of Developers

In the context of Turkish architecture, "as if personality" refers to more than just historical and traditional imitation. It can also be seen in the modern-looking new building types that globalization has brought about. Many office buildings, shopping centers, and housing projects, despite being marketed as "contemporary" and "modern," fail to achieve public space or three-dimensional spatial relationships,

as their main aim is to provide the most marketable area possible. They try to compensate for the absence of spatial qualities and tectonic expression with two-dimensional surface qualities, such as combinations of sun breaks, curtain facades, and false skins composed of light concrete (Çetin, 2020).

### **"Acting As If"**

Doğan Cüceloğlu's description of "acting as if" is highly useful in comprehending the context that lays the groundwork for "as if" architecture in Türkiye. Turkish psychologist Cüceloğlu describes the phenomenon of "acting as if" in his book "Mış Gibi Yaşamlar" (2005), which translates as "Pretend Lives." He notes that this assumption of duties occurs on various scales, ranging from personal relationships to the functioning of the legal system in Türkiye. Like Helene Deutsch, Cüceloğlu describes the "as if" condition as an inauthentic state, a falsity, a copy, not having the sense of being genuine, different from what it claims to be. In a discipline, "acting as if" is described as fulfilling a task not as it should be done but doing it without attention and knowledge. Cüceloğlu mentions that every job, discipline, and study should reveal a consciousness of implementation in its environment. This consciousness includes "intention," "knowledge," "skill," and "responsibility" to sustain it. If one of these conditions is missing, the performance attains an "as if" quality. As the "as if" actions increase, it transforms into a society of people living pretend lives. Cüceloğlu mentions the "as if societies" full of people with suppressed personalities who fear authority and respect only the stronger ones. Those people are obedient without questioning and indifferent to learning. They memorize, accept without question, and lead their lives according to what others say (Cüceloğlu, 2005, pp. 26-31).

The topic of "acting as if," which may be debated for every discipline and method of operation, is regularly experienced at all levels within the Turkish architectural environment. The architectural environment in Türkiye is subject to criticism and discussion on various fronts, including education, professional practice, professional ethics, and legal rights. In education, it is discussed that the number of schools has increased continuously over the years, but there are no qualified instructors and spatial conditions to meet this need (Tuna, 2016). The number of business environments does not keep pace with the growth in the number of architects. As a result, finding jobs for young architects becomes more complex every day (Korkmaz, 2019). However, the quality of the professional practice environment is also a crucial source of dispute. In constantly transforming contexts where urban policies are not implemented, they have to work within limits determined by the zoning regulations. Contradictions abound, including the tolerance of zoning violations and the acquisition of additional zoning rights by occupying public space. Regarding the relationship of buildings with their environments, urban identity, and public interest, architects, planners, and designers face significant ethical concerns. In a 2014 statement, the "Turkish Association of Architects in Private Practice" claimed that the current state of the architectural profession is experiencing the most problematic period in the history of the Republic in terms of ethical problems and professional identity (Serbest Mimarlar Dernekleri, 2014).

Discussing the "as if" situation in architecture is a multi-dimensional subject. As architecture is a discipline that is closely related to many other fields and decision-makers, it is directly affected by all kinds of "as if" situations occurring in society. Not only must architects maintain integrity with the factors of intention, knowledge, skill, and responsibility, but authorities, employers, and other disciplines working with architecture should also satisfy these conditions. This issue is more understandable as we focus on the example of Burj al Babas. The project is a consequence of a series of lacking values, such as consideration of nature and history, respect for skills and expertise, a work ethic that prioritizes the welfare of society over personal interests, and finally, the intellectual background for correct architecture and urbanism. The architect of Burj al Babas appears to have had minimal influence on design choices; instead, he seems to act more as a supplier of the employer's desired image.

### **Impacts of "Acting as If" on Nature and the Ecosystem**

Regrettably, the consequences of "acting as if" scenarios can profoundly impact nature and the ecosystem. This was tragically demonstrated by the earthquake that struck the southeastern region of Turkey in February 2023, claiming the lives of 53,537 people. During this earthquake, 39,441 buildings collapsed, and 271,892 buildings became unusable (TMMOB, 2024). Notably, not only did older buildings succumb, but also many new buildings marketed as "luxury" and sold at high prices collapsed. It is an undeniable truth that the loss of such a significant number of lives stemmed from negligence across various stages of the building production process over the years, including development, design, project planning, construction, inspection, and usage.

Recent large-scale investment decisions, such as the construction of the third bridge and new airport in Istanbul, the opening of gold and other similar mines in forested areas, and the construction of hydroelectric power plants, were made without conducting adequate research into environmental and



ecological values, microclimatic conditions, and geological conditions. Coasts, forests, pastures, and plateaus were allocated to energy monopolies, mining companies, tourism investors, and construction companies. The construction industry devours the mountains, stones, and nature with marble quarries, brick factories, iron mining, and cement production to provide the building material (Balaban, 2012; Baysal, 2017; Elicin, 2014; Elvan, 2014; Erdoğan, 2007; Özsoy et al., 2015; Pata, 2018; Tayanç, 1999; Tonyaloglu et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2023).

In Türkiye, institutional responsibilities and legislative requirements have not been reorganized to conform to international policy and the goal of pre-disaster risk reduction. Investment and settlement decisions can still be seen in disaster-prone areas, fault zones, liquefaction and landslide-prone areas, stream beds, alluvial grounds, and valuable agricultural fields. Considering the adverse effects of swift urban population expansion, along with the growing global threats (natural disasters, global warming, economic downturn, etc.), it is evident that the existing research and policies need to be updated and expanded upon (Arşel, 2012; Balamir, 2002, 2019, 2020; Balaban, 2019; Çoban, 2019; Ş. Balaban, 2019; Özveren et al., 2012; Tatoğlu et al., 2015).

### Concluding Remarks

The Burj al Babas project, central to this study, is examined as an extreme case illustrating the "as if" scenario within the Turkish architectural context. It highlights deficiencies in the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and responsibilities inherent to the discipline of architecture and an absence of identity through an approach that diminishes it to non-authentic pasted images. This "as if" phenomenon, as discussed, warrants serious scholarly attention due to its profound impact not only on our mindsets and ways of life but also on ecology and all living beings.

In Türkiye, like in many other fields, discussing an "as if" situation in a sterile environment is not an option. It makes sense to discuss it thoroughly with all the institutions, disciplines, and cultures it interacts with. From the most potent mechanism to the individual human scale, multiple agents and players are involved in determining the quality of even a single architectural artifact. The government is undoubtedly the leading actor in these systems that control spatial development, acting through legal and political frameworks, urbanization, and transportation programs. The "Ministry of Environment and Urbanization" and the "Housing Development Administration" are two significant government organizations that specify the framework for implementation and spatial development. Local governments are the next effective and potent actors on the local level, especially urban municipalities with supreme power. The principal players authorized and in charge of carrying out urban development, encompassing both mechanisms of urban expansion and urban renewal, are metropolitan municipalities. Additionally, the housing market and the construction industry are effective in the process. The setting is standardized by technical advancements and is changed by the market's transformational economic force. Urban designers, architects, public institutions, and educators also effectively shape the environment. The condition of our built environment is also the result of citizens' demands for ever-newer homes, their preference for them over older ones, their dependence on cars, and their failure to demand or fight for fundamental urban rights.

Navigating the complexities of the "as if" situation within architecture necessitates a multifaceted and thorough approach, acknowledging the inherent challenges and potential limitations. Nevertheless, this study advocates that the initial steps toward resolution involve fostering awareness and engaging in critical thinking through constructive confrontation. It is paramount that architecture is considered within the context of its educational and practical environments, along with its relationships with all influencing disciplines and thought systems. Social and environmental responsibilities should be prioritized, and the discipline should be discussed within a vibrant critical-thinking environment. Moreover, fostering a culture of resistance and activism is crucial in challenging the proliferation of "as if" architecture and preserving the integrity of the discipline.

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The author has not declared competing interests for this research.

#### Data Availability

Data available on request from the authors: Photographs taken by the author are available upon request: [Figure 1, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 11, Figure 12]

Data available in a public repository: In this study, several images have been used from various sources. The sources of these images are acknowledged in the captions or credits accompanying each respective figure. All efforts have been made to comply with copyright and usage permissions. For more information regarding the availability and usage permissions of specific images, please refer to the individual figure captions or contact the respective sources directly.

#### Peer-review Status

The research has been double-blind peer-reviewed.