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The historical development and transformation of the International Izmir Fair

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Abstract

The perspective on the Izmir Fair, possessing both national and international significance in the history of the Republic, forms the main theme of this study, dating from the present day of the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Republic. Established in 1923 during the Izmir Economic Congress, the fair gained global recognition after moving to Kültürpark. Throughout its century-long history, it endured the challenges of World War II and the Cold War, serving as a diplomatic platform. Despite hosting the International Union of Fairs (UFI), Kültürpark faced a dilemma in becoming profit-oriented, leading to a lack of clear direction. In 1990, Kültürpark was recognized as a 2nd-degree natural and historical site by the Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Regional Board but controversy arose with the Izmir Fair Kültürpark Environmental Planning and Fair Complex Architectural Project Competition, conflicting with preservation efforts. This controversy exacerbated the tension between Izmir Metropolitan Municipality and professional chambers, persisting today. This study aims to shed light on how Kültürpark, recognized for hosting significant international achievements during the Republic era and considered one of the symbols of the Republic, has deviated from its essence in contemporary times due to various urban development activities and decisions.

Keywords

Izmir Fair, Kültürpark, Urban memory, History of the Republic, Commons

Introduction

Located in the city center and assuming various roles, Kültürpark has been one of the significant public spaces in Izmir, persisting from the past to the present. In other words, Kültürpark offers participants multifaceted, layered, and communal spaces with cultural, political, entertainment, relaxation, and green space elements. With these aspects, Kültürpark has become one of the architectural-sociological images shaping urban memory. While becoming a focal point for urban dwellers, Kültürpark also creates different focal points for itself, including organizational and architectural elements (such as gates, pavilions, museums, etc.). Over the 100-year period from 1923 to the present, Kültürpark has experienced changing and evolving functions, sometimes emphasizing its role as a fairground and sometimes as a park. However, above all, its endurance for a century as a symbol of the Republic and modernity, persisting in national and international arenas, has been the most significant aspect.

The study investigates the Kültürpark's urban space, common and its place in social memory, as well as the relationship between space and memory. Located centrally in Izmir, Kültürpark took its place in the city's memory as a fair, trade, and cultural area when the Izmir International Fair, founded in the first year of the Republic, was moved to Kültürpark in 1936. The park has undergone transformations and changes over the years, shaping its present form.

The development and evolution of cities are shaped by past events, cultural activities, and social movements. In this context, urban spaces, with their history, constitute a significant element of urban memory, forming the identity of cities. Izmir, hosting many different civilizations throughout its history, is a city that encompasses cultural riches. In 1922, during our struggle for independence, a major fire

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broke out in the city of Izmir, resulting in significant damage. The belief in the future and our values brought by the Victory of Liberation (Turkish War of Independence) gave our nation the strength of revival. Immediately after our victory in the Turkish War of Independence, the Izmir Economic Congress was convened in 1923 to outline new roadmaps, a testament to this belief. The transformation of the Congress into an exhibition showcasing local products was an important first step towards the future formalization of the Izmir Fair. Starting with its inaugural and official edition in 1927, the *9 Eylül Sergisi* (September 9 Exhibition) began to represent the outward-facing aspect of Izmir and Türkiye (Turkey). Starting in the early years of the Republic, the Izmir International Fair, which moved to Kültürpark in 1936, has enriched the urban memory by hosting not only trade fairs but also trade, culture, and other social activities. As a space that bears witness to the city's history, this location is a crucial formation for understanding the city's history and carrying it into the future.

The changes the Izmir Fair has undergone have a long history of debate. Founded with an exhibition during the Izmir Economic Congress in 1923, the Izmir International Fair evolved into the September 9 Exhibition in 1927. This exhibition's participation from domestic and foreign institutions established it as a modern and international status indicator for Izmir. Despite the global economic crisis of 1929, the exhibitions continued as the September 9 Exhibition in 1933. By transitioning from an exhibition to a fair, it expanded its scope successfully during that era. Various events with fair identities increased participation, highlighting the need for a new location. A crucial turning point came with the relocation of activities to Kültürpark, a prominent public space in Konak district, which was once home to the Armenian neighborhood and St. Stepanos Church before the 1922 fire (Kültürpark, 2024). After the fire, the area lost its previous identity and developed a new one. With traditional fairs moving to Kültürpark in 1936, exhibitions replaced fairs, marking another transformative period. This shift saw a significant rise in local and foreign participants, government pavilions, and visitors, enhancing Türkiye's recognizability and position. From 1939 to 1947, the fair faced reduced participation due to World War II. During the Cold War, it became a platform showcasing global relations. These fairs, characterized by their international, national and local qualities, became multifaceted focal points. A notable aspect of the Izmir Fair was its unique position as a significant fair held sustainably every year. Serving both commercial and cultural purposes, the fair prompted new demands until the 2000s, leading to uncontrolled urbanization. The proposal to build an underground parking lot and the subsequent legal processes further marked significant changes, turning the park from a center of commercial and cultural activities into a site of tension. The perception of the Izmir Fair has changed over time due to political, social and urban transformations, yet it has grown in commercial activities. The opening of a new fairground in 2015 has reduced it to an ordinary green space. Although the Izmir Fair, established in the Republic's early years and continuing today, has lost its modernity and international qualities, its historical value should not be overlooked.

Figure 1. Izmir Kültürpark



Source: Google Earth (02.02.2024)

Literature Review: The History of Studies on the Izmir Fair

Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the Izmir Fair was one of Turkey's most significant cultural, economic, and political events. Although the fair has lost some prominence from its peak years, it continues to exist. Literature reviews on the fair, which possesses a multi-layered and multifaceted identity, reveal numerous studies related to Kültürpark, where the fair experienced its most vibrant periods.

Kültürpark, as a significant component of Izmir's collective memory, has played an important role in urban life through various functions over different periods. Since its opening in 1936, it hosted the Izmir

International Fair, losing this function when the fair was relocated in 2015. This change marked a turning point in the identity of the park and in the collective memory of Izmir's residents. Emel Kayın (2015), in her article titled *Anımsama ve Unutmanın Temsilleri: İzmir Enternasyonal Fuarı ve Kültürpark'ın Hafıza Katmanları* emphasizes that the Izmir International Fair and Kültürpark have been significant elements of the city of Izmir in socio-economic, cultural, ideological and spatial dimensions. She also highlights that through the transformations experienced from the past to the present, the area has become a multi-layered memory space. According to Kayın (2015), Kültürpark has undergone changes in four fundamental periods throughout its historical process: from the 1940s to the 1950s, Kültürpark served as a stage for Republican modernization; from the 1950s to the 1980s, the period described as the era of worn ideals and settled habits where entertainment culture came to the forefront; from the 1980s to the 2000s, the period characterized by popular culture and consumer consumption, where the functions of Kültürpark and the fair intertwined; and from the 2000s to the present, a period of searching for representations of the past and the construction of the future following the relocation of the fair (Kayın, 2015). In this context, memory layers were examined through the representations of remembrance and forgetting, which create different identity definitions for the place. Kayın (2015) proposed a conservation framework for the memory layers of the Izmir International Fair and Kültürpark within the legacy of the Modern era. This framework aims to integrate the park, which holds an important place in the city's memory, well into urban life and to sustainably relate the memory layers with contemporary living (Pasin, Kılınç & Yılmaz, 2015).

During the establishment process of the Republic, Kültürpark, which hosted the Izmir Fair, played a significant role both spatially and ideologically in the construction of the state, in line with the economic goals of the period (Altan, 2015). Altan's study titled *Izmir Fuarı, Kültürpark ve Türkiye'nin İnşası* examines how the new urban identity, defined through the modernization and contemporary policies of the era, was represented in public spaces that encompassed exhibition, entertainment, and leisure functions. It also evaluates the shaping process of new urban life practices that occurred and were intended to occur in the newly constructed spaces (Altan, 2015). According to Altan, both the fair and the park served not only as spaces for displaying a modern and urban identity but also played an active role in continuously reproducing this identity through spatial practices in the park's cultural and entertainment structures.

Various studies have been conducted to explore how Kültürpark forms a collective ground in terms of social and individual identities and memories. Can and Drinkwater (2015) analyzed their oral history interviews with Kültürpark users through Punter's conceptual framework of activities, physical structure, and meaning that transforms space into a 'place.' The analyses revealed that activities such as dining, entertainment, concerts, strolling, and sports, as well as physical spaces like casinos, tea gardens, pavilions, theaters, and amusement parks, are key reminders in data collection, deeply intertwined with Kültürpark's history. According to Can and Drinkwater (2015), the ideological, nostalgic, and social meanings attributed to these activities and spaces play a significant role in the identity construction of ordinary urban users. In this context, it was emphasized that Kültürpark users, regardless of their ethnic, sexual, cultural, and class differences, acquire a collective Izmir identity. Values such as family, childhood, entertainment culture, and democracy are reconstructed and positively reinforced in memories as they are orally shared through the reminder activities, spaces, and their associated meanings. However, current issues such as overcrowding, insecurity, pollution, and urbanization interrupt this construction process and lead to memory distortion. This study essentially presents a cognitive memory map of Kültürpark.

After reviewing the literature, this study aims to summarize the 100-year multi-layered history of the Izmir Fair and establish a foundation for transferring this knowledge to the future. Given that collective memory is constructed through the shared experiences, testimonies, agreements, and conflicts of individuals in public spaces, future scenarios for Kültürpark cannot be considered independently of this memory (Pasin, Kılınç & Yılmaz, 2015). In this context, the study aims to provide a comprehensive account of the park's memory layers. The primary goal of the study is to offer a framework for existing research in this field and to establish a solid basis for future research. Accordingly, the historical changes of the Izmir Fair, its place in collective memory, and potential future projections will be examined in detail.

Aims and Method

The aim of this study is to examine the spatial and functional changes of the Izmir Fair, which stood out with its socio-cultural, economic, and contemporary roles during the founding period of the Republic of Türkiye, in the urban memory. The article that addresses the urban memory and commonality of Kültürpark examines its changing and transforming aspects, its functionality, and the actors responsible

for these changes. The tragic position of Kültürpark, caught between the conflicting ideas and tensions among the actors, as well as the concerns of development and profit, is questioned.

The selected period of 1923-2023 has been analyzed chronologically by identifying the transformations and turning points of the Izmir Fair in the city based on the information obtained from sources and individuals. Given that this 100-year period coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye, it is aimed to emphasize once again the importance of the Izmir Fair, which is one of the symbols of independence.

The early Republican Period witnessed the accelerated modernization efforts and initial formations shaped by state policies between 1923 and 1936. The second period (1936-1960) encompasses the processes leading to the transformation of the Izmir Fair into Kültürpark. Between 1960-2000, the study delves into the evolving functions and meanings in the context of a globalized world, capitalism, and consumer society and their impact on space and urban memory. Post-2000, attention is drawn to the changes in decisions and debates concerning the transformation of the Izmir Fair and Kültürpark into areas of rent.

The Izmir Fair constitutes a layered reading that has become one of the symbols of the Republic in the urban memory, starting with the early period of the Republic of Türkiye and continuing in some form for years with its steadfast stance. Despite facing adverse practices, demolitions, and additions, the Izmir Fair is a complex structure that ensures the continuity of collective memory. In other words, the Izmir Fair and Kültürpark are valuable Republican legacies with a 100-year steadfastness that ensures the continuity of urban memory.

Literature Review: Izmir Fair from The Republican Era to The Present

From the Izmir Economic Congress to Türkiye's First International Fair: The Interwar Izmir International Fair (1923-1936)

The year 1922 encompassed critical periods in Izmir, including discussions on the city's infrastructure and demographic structure following the Great Fire of Izmir, as well as deliberations on economic decisions amidst the ongoing struggle for independence. Preparations began for the Izmir Economic Congress, scheduled to take place from February 17 to March 4, 1923, following the victory of the Turkish War of Independence in 1922. Concurrently, an exhibition was opened to facilitate communication among Türkiye's sectoral workers and to promote local products. The Economic Congress and the exhibition were held at the Aram Hamparsumyan Stores in the Kemeraltı Yemişçiler Bazaar. The exhibition showcased local products such as cotton, oranges, olive oil, carpets, soap and fabrics (Aşkan, 2011). These initiatives constituted an important development laying the groundwork for the Izmir Fair.

Figure 2. Izmir Economic Congress at Aram Hamparsumyan Stores, Apikam Archive,



Source: Karpaz (2009).

In commemoration of Izmir's liberation and with significant contributions from the governor of the time, Kazım Dirik, the first official September 9 Exhibition, was organized in 1927. The exhibition, which included both indoor and outdoor spaces, was held at the Izmir School of Arts, known at the time as the Mithatpaşa Vocational High School (Aşkan, 2011). What distinguished the September 9 Exhibition from the exhibition at the Economic Congress was the participation of numerous foreign companies

alongside many domestic official institutions and firms (71 state institutions, 195 domestic companies and 72 foreign companies) (Çakmak, 2023). In this regard, İzmir, one of the symbolic cities of the independence struggle, became the birthplace of the İzmir International Fair, which symbolized both the transition to the republic and modernity and international status.

Figure 3. Kültürpark İzmir International Fair



Source: İzfaş (2024a).

Following the consecutive exhibitions held in 1927 and 1928, the global impact of the 1929 Great Depression also affected Türkiye. İzmir, being a port city, played a significant role in this influence. İzmir Port, one of the commercial ports with a wide hinterland, experienced a period of stagnation and as a result of this adverse effect, the September 9 Exhibition could not be held again after 1929.

By the 1930s, efforts to overcome the impact of the economic crisis were made under state-driven economic policies with the aim of achieving self-sufficiency in the country through domestic products. In line with this objective, the city of İzmir, with its experience in exhibitions, hosted an event on 9th September 1933 under the name *Dokuz Eylül Panayırı* (September 9 Fair). With the participation of foreign and predominantly local companies (23 foreign, 130 local, 9 chambers of commerce, and 11 government institutions), the event, attended by approximately two hundred and forty thousand people, transformed into a stimulating economic activity (Çakmak, 2023). The internationalization of the September 9 Fair in 1934, followed by the *Arsiulusal Panayır* (Inter-National Fair) in 1935, became a traditional fair that, with increasing interest and participation, gave rise to other needs. Alongside addressing these needs, the development of a *Kültürpark* (Culture Park), which would symbolize a modern stance, became a topic of discussion.

Establishment of Kültürpark: Attaining a Significant Fair Identity on a Global Scale (1936-1960)

Kültürpark is a collective structure that accommodates the social, cultural, health, and recreational activities of the public and domestic and foreign visitors and participants under one roof. It has transformed from traditional fairs into official event venues. Kültürpark, with its 360,000 square meters of green space and modern facilities, hosted the *Arsiulusal İzmir Fuarı* (Inter-National İzmir Fair) for the first time in 1936. Significant economic revenues were generated through the participation of both domestic and foreign exhibitors and visitors. Many state institutions such as Sümerbank, Türkiye Şeker Fabrikası (Türkiye Sugar Factory), and Devlet Demiryolları (State Railways), which had participated in previous years, also participated in this year's fair. Additionally, Kültürpark hosted over 300,000 domestic and foreign visitors in total (Çakmak, 2023). With the increasing number of participants, the İzmir fair strengthened Türkiye's national and international position. Starting from 1937, the fair began to be referred to as the *Enternasyonal İzmir Fuarı* (International İzmir Fair). In the 1938 fair, unlike previous fairs and festivals, the opportunity for the commercial sale of products was provided. In this context, not only social and cultural but also commercial revenues were opened up.

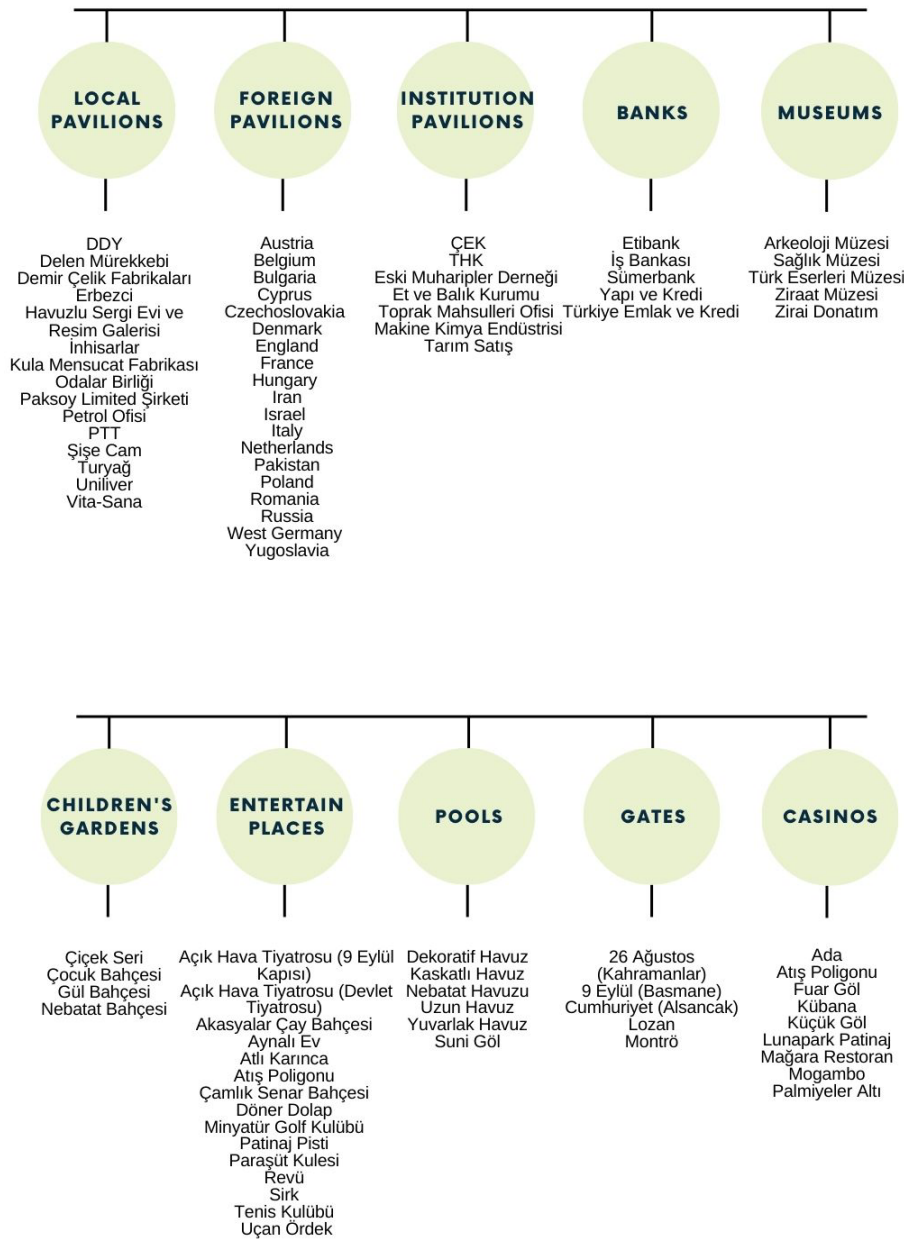
The event, which had been organized since 1927, encountered a challenging period as it continued into the ninth edition in 1939 with the onset of World War II. The fair in 1940 concluded with financial losses due to the ongoing war and reduced participation. Despite the tense environment, the International İzmir Fair maintained its functionality and continued to be organized. The fair, which was closed in 1942, reopened in 1943. Particularly during the years 1944-1946, it served a national function, while from 1947 onwards, it resumed its organization with an international character (Aşkan, 2011).

During the 1950s and 1960s, new relationships emerged under the influence of the Cold War. The İzmir Fair gained a new dimension with the display of products from the United States of America (USA), one

of the actors in the Cold War. In other words, the fair became a mediator in the economic and diplomatic relations between Türkiye and the USA. Moreover, the Izmir fair served as a platform reflecting the tensions between the USA and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), becoming a center for power displays. After 1960, the competition between the USA and the USSR shifted towards space exploration. The Izmir Fair continued to serve as a venue for power displays in this context as well. This time, the fair transformed into a space where arguments representing the space ideologies of the two powers were exhibited alongside its traditional purpose (Babaoğlu, 2023).

Kültürpark, hosting the Izmir Fair, has preserved the spatial changes in its qualitative and quantitative values in a spatial sense. Particularly, until the 1960s, it showcased its spatial transformations as demolition and construction. According to the data from 1959, it encompassed various spatial elements of many qualities (Karpas, 2009):

Figure 4. Kültürpark Izmir Fair Organization Spatial Elements, 1959



Source: Adapted from Karpas (2009).

Kültürpark not only serves as a fairground but also invites cultural, social, entertainment, and recreational activities. According to data from 1959, spatial elements and organizations are things that people of all ages want to spend their time on. With its collective structure, Kültürpark is a significant asset as a city park, embodying important values for the period. While İzmir Fair progressed between 1960-80, Kültürpark experienced a decline. The prioritization of economic values over cultural values led to negligent planning and construction in Kültürpark. Positioned in the city center and dominating an important green area, Kültürpark suffered from imbalanced destruction and construction, resulting in a loss of green space (Karpata, 2009). As a consequence of these changes and transformations, Kültürpark's directions of use as a fairground and a park have left traces in the city's memory, sometimes overshadowing each other and sometimes complementing one another (Karakuş, Akalın, 2017).

Figure 5. İzmir Fair 1969 (APIKAM Archive)



Source: Karpata (2009).

The Gradual Loss of Fair Identity between 1960-2000

Gaining significant attention and evolving into a prominent event nationwide, the İzmir International Fair continued its development similarly during the 1960s. On May 27, 1960, a military revolution, the first in Turkish history, took place. Approximately three months after the revolution, the İzmir Fair reopened with international status (Demokrat İzmir Newspaper, 21.08.1960; Karpata, 2009).

In the 33rd İzmir Fair held in 1964, the miniature train began to circulate within the KültürPark for the first time. The Democratic İzmir Newspaper, published in the same year (20.08.1964), emphasized that the miniature train was the most captivating feature at the fair (Karpata, 2009).

Beginning in the 1950s, fair cabarets, which gained significant popularity, continued to exist as one of the peaks and references of Türkiye's entertainment scene until the era of multi-channel televisions. Fuar Göl Gazinosu, Mogambo Gazinosu and Manolya Bahçesi, named by Zeki Müren, were among the most significant cabarets. Renowned artists such as Safiye Ayla, Zeki Müren, Bülent Ersoy, Gönül Yazar, Sezen Aksu, Tanju Okan, and many others became synonymous with the İzmir Fair during that period. Even today, musical activities during fair days are predominantly carried out through open-air concerts (Arkitera, 2024a).

In his article published in 1968, journalist Sadun Tanju likened the İzmir Fair to a globally respected *public school* through educational exhibitions held periodically (Yeni Asır Newspaper, 21.08.1968; Karpata, 2009). Despite making progress in fair development between 1960 and 1980, the Kültürpark deviated from its initial goal of being a public school. Efforts to enhance exhibition areas within the Kültürpark during this period led to the loss of its function, resulting in unregulated and unplanned construction (Karpata, 2009).

In 1968, the Kültürpark hosted the Congress of the International Union of Fairs (UFI). This development, which contributed to the international recognition of the fair, facilitated participation not only from American and European countries but also from Asian and African countries (Kaya, 2016).

In 1973, the 1/25000 scale İzmir Metropolitan Master Plan, prepared by the Nazım Plan Office, was revised in 1978. According to the plan, KültürPark was designated as an urban green area and a

fairground and a decision was made to relocate it to an approximately 4220-hectare area in the northwest of the city (Karaçorlu, 1995).

During the 45th UFI Congress held in 1978, the then mayor of İzmir, İhsan Alyanak, proposed the celebration of 1981 as the *Year of Atatürk* in all world fairs. Considered an honorable matter for Türkiye through ongoing efforts, this proposal was accepted. Consequently, the 50th İzmir International Fair, which was held in 1981, was opened under the name *Atatürk Fair* (Kaya, 2016).

Until the year 1990, the fair organized by the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality was transferred to İZFAŞ (İzmir Fair Services Culture and Art Affairs Inc.), established in partnership with the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye, Aegean Region Chamber of Industry, Aegean Exporters' Association, İzmir Chamber of Commerce and İzmir Commodity Exchange. In their public announcement during the establishment of İZFAŞ, they stated their aim to elevate İzmir fairs to a competitive level with international fairs (Kaya, 2016).

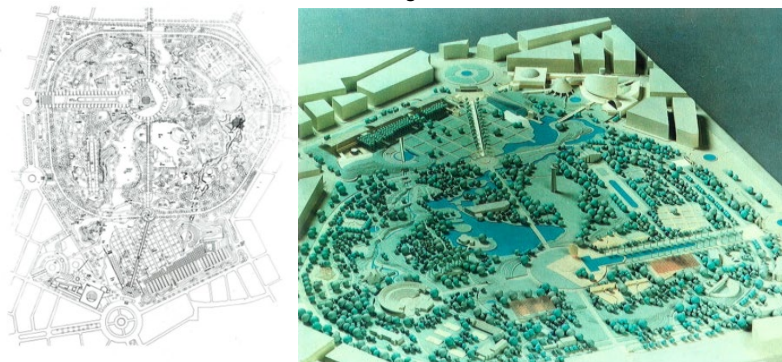
Due to both its historical significance and natural wealth, Kültürpark was registered within the framework of the Cultural and Natural Assets Protection Law in the 1990s. It was officially designated as a 2nd-degree natural protected area and a historical site by the 1st Regional Board for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets in İzmir (Alpaslan, 2017).

On February 16, 1990, the specifications for the İzmir Fair Kültürpark Environmental Arrangement and Fair Complex Architectural Project Competition were published in the Official Gazette. According to the specifications, the old power plant garage area was included in the Kültürpark area, and an approximate area of 105,000m² was designated for the construction and planning of specialized fairs, commodity exchanges, securities exchanges, hotels, conference centers, open exhibition areas, an 800-vehicle parking lot and revenue-generating facilities (Karaçorlu, 1995). An article in the Planning Magazine in 1995 criticized the absence of urban and regional planners and landscape architects in the competition team during the preparation of the competition specifications. It emphasized that this situation was attributed to the political circles of the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality viewing the Kültürpark area as an urban rent zone. These factors led to the content of the competition not considering the city residents and social life.

There was a controversial development in the results of the competition. The project by Şükrü Kocagöz, Merih Karaaslan and Şükrü Günday won the first prize. The victory of Şükrü Kocagöz, who was a member of the board of directors of the İzmir branch of the Chamber of Architects, against the decisions of the Chamber resulted in changes in the board and related decisions after the competition (Karaçorlu, 1995).

The main approach of the team consisting of Merih Karaaslan, Mürşit Günday, and Şükrü Kocagöz in the competition was the purification of Kültürpark from arabesque entertainment venues and fair cabarets. Instead, these areas were proposed to be transformed into semi-open spaces for leisure and sports activities, contributing to cultural life when not in use during fairs. Additionally, the integration of Kültürpark with nature was aimed at adding geographical elements such as meadows, rivers, lakes, and mountains to the park, which was initially a flat area. The team indicated that they based these decisions on the concept of Olmsted's *general environmental park* that went beyond the understanding of English and French gardens, as seen in the Central Park competition in 1853. According to this perspective, the infinite diversity of nature should be reflected in designs. In the context of Kültürpark, they aimed to synthesize this approach with the concept of geometry and geography contrast, striving to design clear, memorable perspectives (Öztan, 1993).

Figure 6. The İzmir Kültürpark project was designed by the team of Merih Karaaslan, Mürşit Günday and Şükrü Kocagöz



Source: Öztan (1993).

After the developments in the Chamber of Architects, a lawsuit to suspend the execution was filed on 10.04.1990 at the Izmir Administrative Court on behalf of the relevant chambers of TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) (Karaçorlu, 1995). During that period, different perspectives emerged on this issue. The Chamber of Architects, considering Kültürpark as the city's largest and most well-organized green area, argued that removing the functions and structures causing noise and environmental pollution, occupying green areas, and renovating the recreational, sports areas, and landscaping of Kültürpark was the correct decision. However, the municipality emphasized that the competition aimed to develop the vacant area adjacent to Kültürpark to the requirements. It was stated that this development should integrate with the existing area, and uses related to entertainment, sports, art, and culture should continue while preserving the main characteristics. Despite the decision of Izmir 1st Regional Board for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets on 1.2.1990, which declared the competition, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality and Konak Municipality proceeded with the competition, and it was noted that this irregular procedure could harm the competitors (Karpas, 2009). However, later on, the 1st Cultural and Natural Assets Protection Board, on 19.04.1990, accepted the approval of the competition under certain conditions with its decision numbered 1851. This decision stated that, besides preserving the natural structure of Kültürpark, it could be opened to public use, taking into account the public interest, and the protection boards should also approve the conditions for this use. Following this decision, the Board filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Culture (Karaçorlu, 1995).

During this tense period, the lawsuits filed against the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality Presidency and the Ministry of Culture were rejected. The competition was postponed for an indefinite period but was reopened after the decision was made.

The years 1980-1990 were highlighted on the official page of Kültürpark, emphasizing that Kültürpark had lost its former significance in the field of trade fairs and many specialized fairs similar to the Izmir Fair had been opened worldwide.

The technological advancements and globalization of the 1980s and 1990s reshaped the global understanding of trade fairs. General trade fairs and cabaret entertainments entered a period of decline. Initially, there was a transition from international fairs where countries participated to fairs representing companies; then, the era of specialized fairs began. From the Izmir International Fair (IIF), numerous specialized fairs that gained global recognition were born. The boundaries of the fair industry had now surpassed Kültürpark (Kültürpark İzmir, 2024).

As of 1997, the cultural and artistic aspects of the Izmir Fair were emphasized alongside its commercial aspect. In line with this, cabaret activities within Kültürpark were discontinued (Karpas, 2009).

The Transformation of Kültürpark into a Speculative Area Until Today

With the changing approach to trade fairs in the 2000s, the need for exhibition halls arose to maintain the tradition of Izmir fairs in Kültürpark. Until the new fairground planned in Gazimir came into operation, temporary exhibition halls and hangars were erected using detachable elements (Alpaslan, 2017). These temporary structures continue to exist to this day.

In 2006, with the Strategic Planning Project, the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality Council decided to construct an underground parking lot with a capacity of 590 vehicles in Kültürpark. Despite objections, warnings, and concerns raised by professional chambers, civil society organizations, and city residents based on scientific, technical, ecological, and social reasons, the construction of the underground parking lot in Kültürpark commenced. Legal experts argued that the underground parking lot would not be a solution to the parking problem in Izmir; instead, they emphasized the need to address traffic issues first. A lawsuit was filed to cancel the urban planning amendment that paved the way for the construction of the underground parking lot and to suspend its implementation. The Izmir 1st Administrative Court initially ruled to suspend the implementation, thereby annulling the plan that foresaw the construction of the parking lot. After the case, the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality announced its intention to appeal the decision and expressed its commitment to legal struggle (Arkitera, 2024b). In 2008, following the acceptance of the appeal by the Council of State, the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality announced its goal to deliver the parking lot for the 2009 fair. The 594-vehicle capacity underground parking lot, covering an area of 16,000 m² and completed in time for the 2009 fair, was landscaped as a green area. This arrangement was argued to fulfill Kültürpark's parking needs while enhancing the greenery (Karpas, 2009).

In 2015, with the completion of the new fairground in Gazimir, the exhibition function of Kültürpark was relocated to the new area. This development turned Kültürpark's transformation into a subject of debate (Alpaslan, 2017). Concurrent with the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality's introduction of the new

fairground, on May 21, 2014, a meeting titled *Common Wisdom Tours* was organized at the Historical Gas Factory. The purpose was to present projects and discuss the future of Kültürpark with the participation of academics, chamber presidents, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and business figures. The agenda of the meeting highlighted the separation of Kültürpark and the fairground, emphasized as the testament of the park's founder, Behçet Uz, and the winning project in the architectural design competition concluded in 1990 by the team of Merih Karaaslan, Mürşit Günday, and Şükrü Kocagöz. In the project, it was decided to build a convention center in Kültürpark and increase the green area by 70%. The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) İzmir Provincial Coordination Board conveyed their views during a press conference held on September 10, 2014. They emphasized the need to preserve Kültürpark as a green area against new construction after the relocation of the fairground. They advocated for maintaining the existing functions of Kültürpark, including the fair, park, sports, culture, art, and entertainment, and suggested that the areas of the demolished fair structures should be used as green spaces (Pasin et al., 2016).

In September 2017, the Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board decided that a *Conservation-Oriented Zoning Plan* was necessary for Kültürpark, rendering the Kültürpark Revision Project, which the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality had been developing since 2014, unfeasible. In May 2018, the Kültürpark Platform organized a workshop where ideas such as removing the park's *fair* function and transforming it into a green space were discussed. However, the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality Council's decision in August 2018 to allocate the İZFAŞ building to İzmir Tınaztepe University was met with significant opposition, particularly from the Kültürpark Platform. After the 2019 local elections, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Tunç Soyer annulled the İZFAŞ allocation protocol, signaling a positive step towards a participatory governance model, but this process was soon disrupted by new conflicts. In 2021, Soyer acknowledged the ongoing disputes over Kültürpark's future, and in 2022, the Conservation-Oriented Zoning Plan for Kültürpark was approved. However, attempts to establish a collective management approach have failed, and the struggles over Kültürpark continue (Aydiner & Penpecioglu, 2023).

Figure 7. İzmir Fair Plan, May 12, 2023



Source: İzfaş (2024b).

The Transformation and Commonality of the İzmir International Fair in the Context of Urban Memory

This section emphasizes the role of Kültürpark in the transformation of urban memory, focusing on its communal nature, which has been at the center of various actors and discussions due to its functions as a fairground and park.

The term *memory* is defined by the Turkish Language Association (TDK) as the conscious ability to keep experiences, learned subjects, and their relationship with the past in the mind: consciousness, repository, mind, and memory (TDK, 2024). In the context of this study, the emphasized expression *experiences* become significant when considering the conscious experience of existing and still-present urban spaces. Halbwachs stated that individual experiences, when combined with human interactions,

form collective memory within society, emphasizing that individual experiences within this interaction create social memory (Halbwachs, 2018). Time and space have been determining factors in a memory attempted to be remembered both individually and collectively. Discussing the role of spatial images in collective memory, Halbwachs (2018) highlighted that the connection between people and places would change with human movements, and consequently, the nature of collective memory would change, and physical spaces could no longer remain the same. In this approach, places shaped by individual or social movements contribute to the formation of collective memories, thus enabling the creation of urban memory. Therefore, cities are places where events occurring over time are reflected, expressing various aspects through individual narratives and memories (Ringas, Christopoulou & Stefanidakis, 2011). In addition, memory is a synthesized reality emerging from the patterns of emotions, ideas, experiences, and actions within the virtual universe of the human mind (Thompson & Madigan, 2005). In this context, every experience and event provides an individual with a new opportunity for interpretation (Casey, 2000). This dynamic state becomes particularly significant when considering the collective aspect of the commons that intersect with the city and society.

The term *müşterek* according to the Turkish Language Association (TDK), generally conveys meanings such as *common* or *shared*—used collectively (TMMOB, 2024). When considered in the context of the city, commons can also refer to shared and historically rich elements within urban memory. Ostrom emphasizes the incomplete yet evolving nature of the concept of the commons, highlighting its collective character, which includes both natural and artificial elements under changing conditions. However, this collective stance often leads to situations fraught with dilemmas and tragedies, reflecting the complexities of being common (Ostrom, 1990). On the other hand, according to Harvey (2013), common spaces establish social and physical relations that are open to external influences. They offer collectivity on the condition of being accessible to all social groups without pursuing commercial interests. In this sense, the commons, with its political, capital and capitalist dimensions—whether abstract or concrete—necessitates the production of relationships within both sociological and urban contexts. The tensions and struggles between forces give rise to new forms of commonality. Additionally, the privatization of spaces, the closure of public spaces, the destruction of these spaces, and their sociocultural consumption inflict deep wounds on urban memory.

The transformation and changes in this common space from 1923 to the present must be discussed, including the roles of various actors. The ongoing debates around Kültürpark's fair and İpark dichotomy have led to the emergence of new definitions of commonality driven by actors pursuing different goals and actions. Particularly, developments in Kültürpark since 2014 have brought about significant tensions. One of the factors complicating the achievement of commonality through effective management is the presence of numerous influential actors with differing objectives. Some of these actors emphasize the fair aspect of Kültürpark, while others focus on its park attributes. The İzmir Metropolitan Municipality (İzBB), responsible for authority and management, has experienced these tragic dilemmas (Aydiner & Penpecioglu, 2023).

In terms of urban commons, Kültürpark's primary actor is the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality (İzBB), followed by professional chambers, civil society organizations, the Kültürpark Platform, and commercial and local capital-focused entrepreneurs. In 2014, the İzmir Chamber of Commerce (İZTO, 2014) proposed the Kültürpark Revision Project, which met with significant opposition. İZTO, an actor advocating for the continuation of the fair function, sought to facilitate zoning and commercial functions under the theme of a congress and cultural center. On the other hand, this proposal faced strong reactions from opposing viewpoints.

The Kültürpark Platform is a civil society organization opposing the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality's policies and advocating for Kültürpark to maintain its status as an urban park. The Platform aims to keep Kültürpark free from commercial interests and commodification (Aydiner & Penpecioglu, 2023). The Turkish Union of Engineers and Architects Chambers (TMMOB) İzmir Provincial Coordination Board (İKK) has supported this perspective, highlighting the need to prevent further zoning. It has been reported that events held in Kültürpark have led to ecological damage (URL-8).

The multifaceted debates surrounding Kültürpark have unfortunately led to uncertainties about the park's future. Indeterminate management decisions and pressures from various actors have left unanswered the critical question of whether Kültürpark should remain a park or function as a fairground. Actions that consider the interests of urban memory would be far more valuable and meaningful for İzmir and Turkey as a whole. Implementing policies and urban approaches that preserve and strengthen the layered historical and cultural structure of the commons, as well as their ecological, public, and aesthetic aspects, would resolve the ambiguities regarding Kültürpark's future.

Planning must include clear and inclusive definitions, as each functional and spatial modification to Kültürpark could potentially cause new disruptions to its layered urban memory. Even if each intervention does not cause harm, actions driven by commercial interests may lead to frightening and tragic consequences. Therefore, the future of Kültürpark should be prioritized over the interests of individual actors.

Discussion and Conclusion

Parks play a significant role in shaping the social, historical, and cultural fabric of cities, occupying an important place in urban memory. These spaces serve as venues where various cultural events are organized, green and recreational areas are provided, and historical heritage is preserved. Parks can be evaluated from various perspectives. In terms of preserving historical and cultural heritage, they serve as reminders of the city's past through the museums, monuments, pavilions, fairgrounds and exhibition areas they contain, thereby keeping the urban memory alive. Furthermore, in the context of social interaction and cultural activities, parks offer common environments where different socio-cultural groups and people of different age groups can engage in shared experiences. They also serve as platforms for events such as concerts, festivals, and international fairs. In addition, parks support people's connection with nature and contribute to their mental well-being, thus enhancing the quality of urban life. In terms of identity and character formation, parks not only become part of historical and sociocultural identity but also transform into symbols of the city through their spatial qualities. In addition to all these components, Izmir Kültürpark's status as one of the symbols of our national independence struggle has made it even more valuable for both Izmir and Türkiye. Therefore, the planning, design, and management of cultural parks are of great importance in preserving and strengthening urban memory and identity. Hence, further research and strategies are needed to better understand and evaluate the role of cultural parks in the development of cities and the enhancement of quality of life.

Kültürpark can be assessed from various perspectives. Firstly, it is a project. It stands as a representation of the Republic and modernity, enduring until the present day. Secondly, it is the focal point of the city. With its existence and content, it provides urban dwellers with multiple focal points. Thirdly, it is the city's park. With its extensive green areas, it offers the urban population a space for relaxation and recreation. Fourthly, it is a public school. Although this aspect of the park has receded into the background today, Kültürpark played a role in providing cultural and social education to the public during the Early Republican Period. Fifthly, it is the memory and image of the city.

In addition to its layered structure within the city, Kültürpark, with its own layers, occupies a significant place in collective memory. Since the declaration of the Republic, it has been an important common asset for both the city and the country. The fairs and cultural events that started in 1936 transformed Kültürpark functionally through new construction and demolitions. At times, the fair and cultural aspects of Kültürpark have dominated, while at other times, the entertainment and park aspects have remained more subdued. Changes in urban planning pose a threatening position to the longstanding urban memory. Situated in the Konak district, the city center, Kültürpark enhances its own and its surroundings' real estate value due to its central location in the transportation network, proximity to the Aegean Sea and surrounding districts, and the residential areas along its perimeter. Therefore, it is vulnerable to threats such as the increase in construction (hotels, shopping malls, etc.) alongside the reduction of green spaces. Since each alteration to the park would essentially impact the urban memory, the necessity of each step must be thoroughly debated. Therefore, Kültürpark plays a crucial role in urban management.

The most significant obstacles facing Kültürpark include unclear management decisions, conflicting interests, and pressure from various stakeholders. The concerns of modernism and capitalism, driven by the pursuit of profit, are reflected in urban policies. At Kültürpark, competing views on whether it should primarily serve as a *park* or a *fairground* have led to conflicts, complicating the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality's (İzBB) management and planning efforts. This issue has become even more pronounced since 2014. Once a symbol of independence and international stature, Kültürpark has become the focal point of functional concerns.

By learning from these concerns and debates, Kültürpark could evolve into a model for improving and structuring urban memory through new spatial and management plans. Revitalizing Kültürpark with contemporary technologies for interactive engagement could produce new syntheses and interpretations for urban memory and the city's residents.

Despite the various tensions and conflicts surrounding it, Kültürpark can contribute to urban memory through new proposals within the field of digital humanities. In the realm of digital humanities, collective urban memory can be archived, and new memories can be added to provide up-to-date archives for

both the city's residents and researchers. By incorporating interactive access routes, a bridge can be established between past and future generations while also strengthening the sense of belonging.

Through collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, a digital museum or platform could be developed to capture and archive the experiences and memories of the city's residents. This initiative could create a collective urban memory repository, preserving and enhancing the shared historical and cultural narratives of the community.

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