

# ARCHITECTURAL SCIENCES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

TRACES OF THE  
HISTORY

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**An Evaluation on New Function Suggestion in  
Worship Buildings: Akşehir Armenian Church**

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## **1. Introduction**

Some historical buildings cannot maintain their original function today due to various reasons. It can be observed from the literature that there is a social benefit in preserving the life of such buildings with a new function. Giving a new function to monumental buildings has become a common practice in architectural fields, especially with rapid urbanization after the 1970s. Although this trend gained momentum in the 1970s, similar observations were made in previous years and were the subject of international meetings. In 1931, the concept of re-functioning was emphasized in Article 7 of the Carta Del Restauro, defined by ICOMOS as the Restoration Charter (Carta Del Restauro, 1931). This charter relates the concepts of re-functionalization and additional building, providing suggestions for these concepts. It stresses that in the consolidation of the monument, in case of partial or complete additions, the new elements should be kept to a minimum. These elements, desired to be simple and structural in character, should continue the existing lines of the building. To revitalize the historical value and sustain the life of the building, clear and comprehensible applications should be made, addressing the issues evaluated within the scope of this declaration. Reprogramming these buildings with a new function will ensure the transfer of natural and cultural resources to future generations. Given the importance of this application, a profound research and scientific approach are deemed necessary for the re-functionalization issue.

When examining restoration practices related to new function suggestions, it is evident that this concept should be evaluated directly within the framework of 'conservation.' The primary purpose of selecting a function in

re-functionalization is to transfer cultural heritage to the city with the given function, taking measures to sustain the life of the historical building and increase awareness of the cultural richness. These objectives align with the content of the concept of conservation.

### **1.1. New Functions and Worship Buildings**

Among monumental buildings, worship buildings hold particular importance as public spaces within cities. Many cities are shaped around and with reference to these worship buildings, which are open to the public and are known and protected by almost every urbanite. The concept of re-functionalization is especially important in terms of maintaining the relationship that such buildings establish with the city and its inhabitants. Besides their physical characteristics and the values they embody, preserving their public features while re-functionalizing them is crucial.

Abandoned worship buildings, due to reasons such as war, migration, and loss of users, hold a unique position among public worship buildings. These buildings, which have lost their users due to social transformations, might face challenges in being adopted and used by urbanites of different ethnic origins and beliefs. Church buildings are the most common monumental worship structures in Anatolian cities. In Anatolia, many worship places have been left abandoned, unused, or misused. Although converting a place of worship into a place of worship for a different faith is seen as a positive approach in theory, the results of such practices are questionable due to negative interventions during the conversion. In our country, there are very few examples of reusing worship buildings with a different function, and decision-makers often lack understanding and practical experience in this

matter. The existence of these spaces, preserved and re-functionalized as a whole with the spatial potential and historical fiction of the building and its decorative elements, is quite limited.

In addition to numerous church structures worldwide, the Ottoman Empire had a policy of tolerance towards pre-existing government and religious beliefs in conquered places. Especially in the 18th century, with the Treaty of Aynalı Kavak in 1779, a moderate approach was shown towards non-Muslim places of worship. Additionally, as a result of pressures from England and France, the Tanzimat Edicts of 1839 and the Reform Edicts of 1856 aimed to ensure equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in this regard. These practices and facilities paved the way for the construction of churches, schools, hospitals, and non-Muslim buildings in the 19th and 20th centuries, creating a new field of architecture. This situation continued until the exchange of Armenians with the Relocation and Settlement Law (Akman, 1996).

The main subject of this study is the Armenian Church in Akşehir, which is inseparable from the existing physical and historical features. To shed light on the future urban development of Akşehir, the historical buildings were analyzed in relation to the society and time they belong to. Based on the observations, it is evident that certain measures need to be taken to enable this magnificent structure to become a cultural destination and contribute to newly developing tourism routes and housing texture. One of the most important measures is the qualified restoration of the building and its adaptation to a function that serves the whole city. As part of this study, a

field study was conducted to involve citizens in the decision-making process concerning the entire city, and the results were obtained.

Within the broader framework of this study, an evaluation and research on the reuse possibilities of the Akşehir Armenian Church were conducted. The relevant building was observed before conservation practices began, and all processes were monitored during the restoration application. Considering the place of the Armenian population in Akşehir's history and their professional activities, it is evident that they made significant contributions to the architectural heritage of the city. The church, as a public building among the examples of civil architecture, aims to reintegrate itself into the city with a new function. In line with these objectives, geographical and historical definitions were made for the area where the church is located, and Akşehir's city memory and architectural development were also evaluated in the context of the building.

The concept of re-functionalization makes it easier to evaluate the existing functional potentials of buildings. By applying new functions to the buildings:

The life of the buildings is extended, and they become sustainable in urban terms. Buildings of historical value that remained idle are restored to their former glory. It contributes to the economy, as the cost is lower compared to rebuilding a structure from scratch.

The new function brings economic and cultural revitalization and contributes to the city's identity in structural and environmental terms.

It offers effective protection for spaces that have completed their functional life. Since it is approached holistically, the historical processes that form the identity of the buildings are not ignored.

## **2. Examples of Re-Use of Worship Buildings**

Instead of viewing architectural monuments as mere income-generating tools, they should be regarded as cultural products that deserve evaluation, utilization, preservation, and passing down to future generations. Addressing changing needs and wishes, as well as protecting historical and cultural heritage, are fundamental concerns in world architecture. The practice of giving monuments a new function different from their original one dates back to ancient times (Eroğlu & Yaldız, 2006).

The concept of re-functioning represents a transformative process, especially significant for registered buildings. It not only brings a building back to life but also provides society with a chance to reconnect with its own past beyond fulfilling its current needs. This interplay between re-functioning and "Public Memory" is striking (Selçuk, 2006).

After restoring and re-functionalizing the Akşehir Armenian Church, which still has not reached the end of its structural life, it will lead to both economic and social benefits on an urban scale. Future visitors will not be satisfied with merely observing the building; they will want to hear its legends, immerse themselves in the cultures of its time, and feel the essence of the place. The church structure can serve as a pivotal tool in achieving these objectives. Historic buildings offer a unique opportunity to transfer



available data in the clearest way possible in terms of character and structure.

### **2.1. Examples of Re-functionalization of Churches**


When examining examples of churches worldwide in terms of functional changes, it is evident that they generally continue to serve their original functions under the influence of Christianity, a widely practiced religious view. However, buildings that have lost their original functions and fallen into disrepair have been repurposed to serve culture and art activities, contributing to the country's economy. Additionally, in some countries like the Netherlands and the USA, churches have been transformed into residences after renovating elements with religious significance, such as doors and windows. To maintain the interior order, naos sections were considered as public focal points according to the new function. Interventions such as coating or material changes were made in interior elements like columns, steps, and stairs to reflect the new purpose of the space. Furthermore, lighting and sound systems were designed in harmony with the new function without compromising the building's structure.

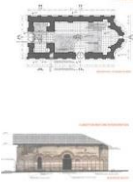

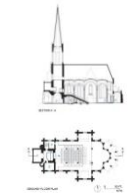
While many church buildings, holding symbolic meaning for cities and their congregations, continue to serve their worship functions with respect to their memories, considering their economic dimensions, a change of function becomes inevitable for those that would otherwise remain idle.



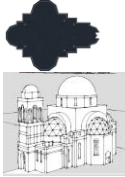
In Türkiye, re-functionalization in historical buildings was first applied in Istanbul after the Tanzimat Period, with Topkapı Palace transformed into a museum in 1924 (Uğursal, 2011). Hagia Irini Church in the courtyard of Topkapı Palace became a museum, displaying significant artifacts in 1846,


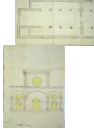

and was renamed Museum-i Hümayun (Imperial Museum) in 1869 (Aydın & Şahin, 2018). Another notable example in our country is Hagia Sophia Church, initially built as a church in 537, converted into a mosque after the conquest of Istanbul, and transformed into a museum in 1935 (Yüceer, 2016).



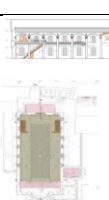
**Table 1.** Comparison of re-functionalised examples

Church	Condition of Structure	Plan Diagram-Facade Layout	Negative Change	Positive Change	Material-Technical	Function Review
CHIESA DI SAN VIDAL	-After many disasters and repairs, it is still in use today.		Exposure to many different repairs over time, -Additions to the façade from the original structure as well as the reconstruction product from the 17th century,	-There has not been any application contrary to its original state spatially. -The columns were covered with fabric and the sound system was adjusted and it was tried not to damage the structure.	-Gothic style, stone building element, -Interior design in colours and models suitable for the church	-Classical music concert hall; wide openness and acoustic function

SAINT PARASKEVA	<p>-As a result of the architectural competition, it continues to be engraved on the city silhouette with contemporary intervention.</p>		<p>-The elevation of the building perimeter has remained high due to subsequent construction and no solution has been provided.</p>	<p>-Cephe düzenindeki özgün durum korunarak bütünlük sağlanmaya çalışılmıştır.</p>	<p>-Integrity was tried to be ensured by preserving the original situation in the facade layout.</p>	<p>- Documentary and visual exhibition hall where the historical development of the city is explained,</p>
BETHEL MISSIONARY	<p>-The church, which was renovated as a result of storm and fire, is in use in accordance with the project in 2009.</p>		<p>-The facade material was changed to brick at the end of the 1900s, so it could not preserve its originality.</p>	<p>-The original seating arrangement of the church was used in the interior. -Stained glass panels emphasising the history were preferred on the facade.</p>	<p>- Contemporary construction style with brick, steel trusses and polycarbonate stained glass panels</p>	<p>-Breathing space in a dense urban area as a city park and monumental exhibition</p>
CHRITUS CHURCH	<p>-After the 1980s, the interior space was included in the design and became a living structure.</p>		<p>-Since the interior was neglected in the 1980s design, the building has dampness from the walls.</p>	<p>- Selection of interior materials suitable for the church material, -Exposing the structural brick elements by not painting them</p>	<p>-Oak bleachers and panelling to match the Neo-Gothic style of construction</p>	<p>-Choir centre and chapel for the high school; additional function appropriate to the structural system with originality</p>

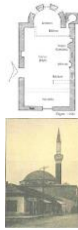
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>EBENEZER METHODIST KİLİSESİ</b></p>	<p>-It was built for the industrial population and has now been adapted for private use.</p>		<p>-It has lost its public character as it has been converted into private property.</p>	<p>-The reconstruction project was drawn and statics were provided in accordance with the original. -The building was repaired after water ingress was prevented.</p>	<p>-Gothic style elements suitable for stone building material</p>	<p>-Residence; mezzanine floor in a single space has provided a floor for the need and tourism.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>ST.STEPHANOS</b></p>	<p>-Low wear and tear due to the location away from the settlement, but also far from use</p>		<p>-No solution has been provided with urban design for its situation far from the city.</p>	<p>-The repairs it has undergone over time are recorded with inscriptions.</p>	<p>-Monastery complex with a combination of Urartan, Parthian, Greek and Roman styles</p>	<p>-Next to the church, a part of it has been adapted for the exhibition.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>AZIZ SAVIOR CHURCH</b></p>	<p>-Waiting for an appropriate response to the visual studies and the suggestion survey in 2018</p>		<p>-Will not exclusively serve religious beliefs contrary to its specific situation.</p>	<p>-User needs and opinions were determined through a questionnaire study.</p>	<p>-Early central plan and stone building material</p>	<p>- Building island as open air theatre, library, conference hall</p>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>KAPUSEN CHURCH</b></p>	<p>-A living and used building with the right function proposal</p>		<p>-Tables and bookcases were placed by ignoring the original structure in the interior.</p>	<p>-An environment of interfaith tolerance as the first educational structure,</p>	<p>-Social and architectural formation of the stone and brick period</p>	<p>-As a children's library, its place in the city memory has become strong.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>KENDIRLI</b></p>	<p>-Since it has no congregation, its functionality has been preserved with the new function.</p>		<p>-Social activity units are given to the nearby Latin School and therefore serve only cultural purposes.</p>	<p>-Different functions such as a cultural centre were tried to find a suitable function.</p>	<p>-Basilical plan with a single main space of stone and brick</p>	<p>-Witnessing the history he witnessed as the Martyrs and Veterans Association</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>AYA ISHOTYA</b></p>	<p>-It is interesting because it is the first example in terms of function in Turkey.</p>		<p>-With the cafe built in the garden, the possibility of encountering unconscious users is high.</p>	<p>-It has found the opportunity to serve the rose and related objects, which are cultural heritage like itself.</p>	<p>-Large and small limestone, coloured marble, Ottoman style</p>	<p>-A different purpose and service with the Rose Museum</p>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">ARMENIAN SIVRIHISAR</p>	<p>-Restoration was started in 2010 and it was opened for use.</p>		<p>-There is no suitable project for the building, which was originally proposed as a museum, but is intended to be used as a cultural centre.</p>	<p>-The dividing walls added to the plan scheme and the original interior have been removed.</p>	<p>-Red cut stone, three nave basilical plan scheme</p>	<p>-Cultural centre function with the idea of use suitable for wide open space</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">AYAHARALAMBOS</p>	<p>-The restoration was completed in 2012 and opened for use.</p>		<p>-It was rebuilt in the 19th century since its original state in the 18th century was demolished and there are no documents related to its first state.</p>	<p>-The vegetation on the exterior façade has been taken under control. -Excess places and additions on the roof and terrace were removed. -Interior decoration and motifs have been preserved.</p>	<p>-Three nave basilical plan scheme</p>	<p>-It has been a place used for artistic activities such as exhibitions.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">SURP VORTVOTS</p>	<p>-It has been reopened for use since 2010.</p>		<p>-The glass screen added to the entrance in the previous years was a distant approach to contemporary restoration techniques.</p>	<p>-It has survived many dangers such as earthquake, fire and destruction by preserving its structure.</p>	<p>-Stone and firebrick basilical plan</p>	<p>-As a cultural centre, it is an important example of state-community cooperation.</p>

FATIH MOSQUE

-With the last repair in 2002, it continues to be used as a mosque.



-It was converted into a mosque after the conquest, but remained neglected for a long time.

-It preserves its original purpose as a place of worship.

-Stone-built, partly basilical plan with a single main room

-The minaret, which was added for the mosque function, is adjacent to the building, but has an independent construction style.

In the examples analyzed in Table 1, the priority is clearly given to preserving and protecting the building. Church buildings, typically constructed with stone and brick materials in masonry style, refrain from making changes to their body walls and facade layouts unless absolutely necessary. In both Turkey and other parts of the world, churches whose congregations have dispersed for various reasons are often repurposed into museums and exhibition spaces. These buildings are well-suited for functions that require large openings in terms of plan scheme and ceiling arrangements. The economic benefits of imposing a new function on the existing structure are also considered.

In contrast to examples from around the world, Turkey has historically seen periods of an unconscious approach to ornamentation and decorations, leading to certain challenges in restoration works. Common issues during restoration include stone deterioration caused by ground and external factors, especially in buildings with structural problems. It is crucial to

maintain the traces of the original period after strengthening the structural elements, such as stone material and columns.

Considering the re-use of worship buildings, conservation practices play a vital role in protecting the buildings while providing them with a suitable function. Qualified restoration applications are essential before reusing these spaces. The functions given to these buildings are carefully chosen in alignment with their forms. Large-span buildings, except for mosques with continuous worship functions, are often re-purposed to respond to the needs of the community.

Regarding the Akşehir Armenian Church, restoration and re-functionalization would lead to economic and social benefits on an urban scale. Future visitors are not only interested in observing the building but also in experiencing the legends, cultures of the period, and the essence of the place. The church structure can serve as a powerful tool in achieving these objectives, transferring historical data effectively through its character and structure.

### **3. Akşehir History, Architectural Heritage, and Akşehir Armenian Church**

Akşehir, situated in the Konya Department of the Central Anatolia Region, has a rich cultural history dating back to the Neolithic Period (8 thousand BC). Its first known names include Thymbrion, Phomelium, or Philomelion. In local records, it was referred to as Akyanus, and later became known as "Belde-i Beyza" and "Şehr-i Beyza" due to its white houses resembling bird nests amidst lush green trees (Akşehir translates to "white city" in Turkish).

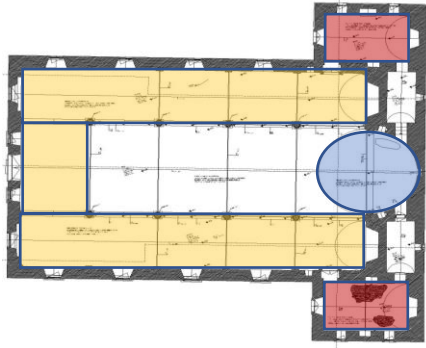


The city has been a significant trade center along trade routes during the Ottoman period (Bayar, 2013).

Akşehir boasts a diverse cultural mosaic, with surviving Seljuk and Ottoman architectural works such as the Imaret Mosque. The "Akşehir Houses," most of which are now registered and owned by Turkey, reflect true Turkish culture. The city has undertaken protection activities to preserve these architectural gems, and restoration efforts have yielded positive results. Various buildings, including archaeological sites, natural sites, mosques, masjids, baths, fountains, and administrative structures, contribute to Akşehir's rich heritage.

The history of Armenians in Akşehir traces back to Çağrı Bey, who established a settlement in the region. Anatolian Seljuk Sultan Alaaddin Keykubad appointed Alanya Bey Kir Farid as the governor of Akşehir, leading to the presence of Christians in the city descending from Kir Farid (Bayar, 2013).

Akşehir Armenian Church, located in Çimenli Neighbourhood, Değirmen Street, was constructed in the mid-19th century by the Armenian community (Alkan, Karpuz, 2012). The church features a basilical plan with three naves and is primarily built with rubble cut stone and brick, with a hipped roof covered in alaturka tiles. The east facade includes a half-dome and arched apse with an oculus and two semi-circular apscices. Wooden mezzanines can be accessed from both sides of the entrance door, leading to a baptism room on the north side and a priest's room on the south side. The priest and baptism rooms have original arched openings, and from these rooms, single-leaf doors lead to the apse along the east facade (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Plan of Akşehir Armenian Church

Within the scope of the "Nasreddin Hodja Humour Village Project" prepared in cooperation with the local administration and the Konya Plain Project Regional Development Administration of the Ministry of Development of the Republic of Turkey, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Primary School is planned to be used as the Akşehir City Museum and the church as the World Humour Masters Art House. The gathering and cultural garden of the city museum and art house is specified as the garden of the church and the school. It is envisaged to create spaces for the masters of local and world humour to work and use for meetings and presentations (PGLOBAL Küresel Danışmanlık ve Eğitim Hizmetleri A.Ş., 2016).



**Figure 2.** Akşehir Armenian Church (C. Bektaş archive)



**Figure 3:** The condition of the church and the registered buildings around.

**Figure 4:** Preservation status of the church and the registered buildings around.

The buildings marked in red in the first figure show the church and the buildings around it, which are registered on a single building basis (Figure 3). Considering the density of registered buildings along Değirmen Street where the church is located and the church together with its surroundings, it is understood that the conservation process will proceed easily due to its location in a historical built environment. Because in such cases, the people living there should be able to look at the issue consciously and help. When the preservation status of the church and the surrounding buildings is examined, it is understood that as a result of the street sanitisation practices, all the buildings along the streets, whether registered or not, are tried to be preserved (Figure 4). Akşehir Armenian Church, which is located in the urban protected area, is within the important region where maintenance and repair works are carried out by the Ministry of Culture, local administration and various companies through tenders. It is located in an area where there are dwellings that have undergone simple repairs, street sanitisation, where

the façade and roof can be preserved, or where arrangements are made in order not to disrupt the silhouette of the façade, considering the buildings that have disappeared over time. In this case, it has an accelerating effect on the conservation process of the church.



**Figure 5.** Full-empty analysis of the church and surrounding buildings

**Figure 6.** Functional analysis of the church and surrounding buildings

It is located in an environment with a significant occupancy rate due to the adjacent buildings on the entrance façade and other sides (Figure 5). Only the gardens of the adjacent buildings and the gaps on the side facing the Akşehir Stream behind the church stand out.

Functionally, the majority of the area is dominated by residential buildings. Apart from these, there are a few historical-religious buildings, a grocery store and a workshop. This workshop is a building where materials and equipment used for restoration works are stored and prepared. Apart from this, there is Gazi Mustafa Kemal Primary School, which is located in the same garden with the church and which suffers the fate of being idle together with it. Most of the houses are still in use in their current state. There are a few houses that have been transferred to the ownership of the municipality and are awaiting repair and are planned to serve various cultural projects.

The small grocery store located at the beginning of Değirmen Street on the side facing Çınaraltı Square has remained as a small commercial area serving the people of the neighbourhood.

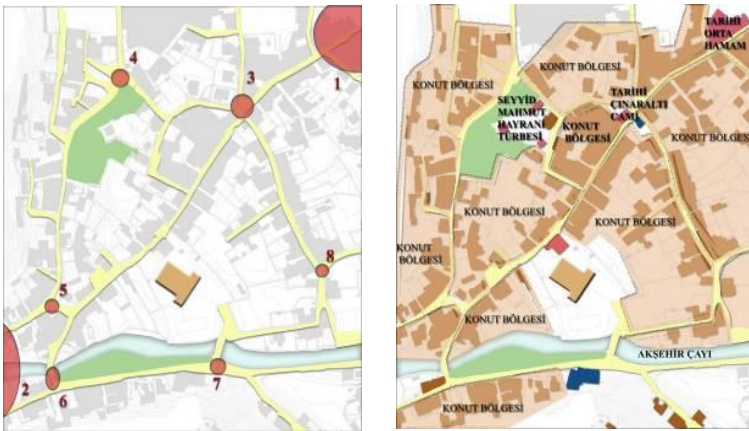


**Figure 7.** Conditions limiting the church and its surroundings  
**Figure 8.** Roads and streets in and around the church

The sign elements of the church and its surroundings were analysed according to the five main criteria identified by Kevin Lynch, who is famous for his urban studies, as roads, borders, foci, zones and landmarks. For the church, which is a landmark in itself, it was possible to analyse the other four elements.

When we look at the roads and their names seen in and around the church, all of them have taken their shape and name from the meaning they have been attributed over time. Değirmen Street, which is the most important and provides access to the church, is an important passage on the route from the city square to the urban forest. Apart from this, Boğaz Street, which is located on the back facade of the church, is in a situation where the church can be seen even though it is lower due to the elevation difference. The

Bogaz Street, which runs parallel to the road formed by the Akşehir Stream, reaches from the Nasreddin Hodja Tomb to the Tekke Village and the Urban Forest (Figure 7) There are three issues that limit this church in Akşehir. The first of these is the important historical streets mentioned above. Değirmen Street in the northwest and Taşoluk Street in the northeast. However, the existence of Tuna Street extending from Taşoluk Street to the church cannot be ignored. The second boundary element is the elevation difference on the rear façade. It will also be possible to take the Akşehir Stream as the third element here. These boundary tools, which play an active role in access to the church and at the same time in determining its borders, are situations that develop spontaneously over time through natural means. In this respect, they do not constitute any obstacle in terms of using the data of the area (Figure 8).



**Figure 9.** The church and the surrounding areas  
**Figure 10.** Focal points in and around the church

The striking situation in the area where focal points are determined is that most of the focal points are squares formed by street intersections. Focal

point number 1 represents Akşehir City Square, which is slightly outside the area. No. 2 is the Tekke Village and the Urban Forest. The square where the historical Çınaraltı Mosque is located is 3, the intersection of Hacı Hamza Street-Yokuşbaşı Street-Turbe Street in front of Seyyid Mahmut Hayrani Tomb is 4, Yokuşbaşı Street-Değirmen Street-Kenar Street intersection is 5, Water Depot Street-Taş Street-Boğaz Street is 7, Taşoluk Street-Taş Street-Baloğlu Mescidi Street intersection is 8. Apart from this, the focus numbered 6 stands out in the part that partially leaves the historical environment and returns to the promenade area (Figure 9).

The church in the residential area has remained as a public space in this area together with Gazi Mustafa Kemal Primary School. As a green area, the garden of Seyyid Mahmut Hayrani Tomb and a small park built on the edge of Akşehir Stream at the back are visible. Apart from this, the gardens of the residences, although they are green areas to a significant extent, are far from being public. The church and its immediate surroundings have the potential to be a cultural and historical area as an inner garden. It will also be useful for Gazi Primary School located in its garden in terms of providing the necessary perception process (Figure 10).

### **3.1. New Function Suggestions for the Church**

The majority of the participants would like to see the church as a museum and exhibition area, preserved as it is. In addition, it is possible to say that there are also participants who want to see it as a library, cultural centre, theatre centre. The meaning attributed to the church is more orientated towards the functions where the user density will be high in accordance with the benefits of the form. In this respect, the Priest's Room and Baptism Room on the side facades are imagined to be service areas serving this main space.

In functions where acoustics come to the forefront, such as concert halls, it is at the forefront that this option should be evaluated for conscious organisations. Otherwise, no matter how functional it has become, this important structure will be consumed unconsciously. Those who think that Akşehir cannot participate in culture-art tourism at a sufficient level except for the festival times envisage a function in this direction. However, those who think that its function cannot be continued while preserving its original structure think of it more as a monumental exhibition and a 'Monumental Exhibition' where various activities are held in its garden. As a result of the meaning attributed by the form to the function, it is revealed with the proposed functions that this building with its large opening and majestic vaults is a suitable place for visual and auditory arts. Another function that draws attention here is the library. Although this function seems to be appropriate in terms of form and spatial benefits, there is a prevailing opinion that it will be difficult for children and young people in terms of transportation and location. In this case, we come across once again that the



space cannot be considered independent of its location. As mentioned before during a film shot in the church, the church, which has a favourable acoustic condition, is considered to be more suitable for functioning as a place serving visual arts.

### **3.2. Evaluation of New Function Suggestions**

In the results based on the survey data, certain functions were obtained in line with user opinions. The most prominent of these functions is "Museum / Exhibition Hall" and the least suggested function is "Library". Within the framework of these six proposed functions, some evaluations were made on the originality value of the building, its plan scheme, façade layout and its effect on the city. The evaluations were made by taking into consideration some criteria such as the variety of users, the frequency of use of the space, the transportation status according to its location, and the structure of being considered independent from its original function.

In all of these functions, a new function suggestion could be brought without any change in the façade layout. In this way, the window layout, size and forms; the location and form of the entrance door; the stone body walls with joints and brick jambs can be made interesting for the new function (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Analysis of new function suggestions for Akşehir Armenian Church

Function Name	Effect on originality value	Impact on the plan diagram	Effect on facade layout	Impact on the city	Negative effect of function
LIBRARY	<p>*It will continue to be a cultural and public space.</p> <p>*It will preserve its silence in its original structure.</p>	<p>*Main area seating units and bookcases should be added.</p>	<p>*The front can be maintained in its current state without any changes.</p>	<p>*An easy-to-reach working place will be provided for children and young people living in the neighbourhood.</p>	<p>*It may be a risky function in terms of the functionality of the building according to the user diversity and the reading rate of the city.</p>
CONCERT HALL	<p>*The public status of the building will continue.</p> <p>*Interior acoustics will come to the fore.</p>	<p>*Elements may need to be added for the sound system.</p> <p>*It may be necessary to cover the columns as in the examples.</p>	<p>*Can be converted to the proposed function without changing the facade layout.</p>	<p>*As the acoustics of the place becomes interesting for those who are curious about the acoustics of the place, the rate of concerts will increase and it will be a living city element.</p>	<p>*The high density of users may be risky due to its location on the fault line and also due to vibrations.</p>
CULTURE CENTRE	<p>*It appears as a structure whose publicity continues.</p> <p>*Cultural and artistic activities will be possible.</p>	<p>*Sitting units, heating system and meeting areas will be needed.</p>	<p>*There is no need to make changes to the front.</p>	<p>*Users of all ages are likely to come for various activities.</p>	<p>*The seismicity hazard of the building may increase due to the intensive user factor.</p>
THEATRE CENTRE	<p>*As in the concert hall function, publicity and acoustics will be emphasised.</p>	<p>*Sound, light and heating system should be added and seating units should be adjusted.</p>	<p>*The facade layout may not change as it contains the visuality required for the function.</p>	<p>*It achieves user diversity.</p> <p>*It is interesting for those who want to see the acoustics.</p>	<p>*Since the possibility of unconscious users will increase, the situation of unconscious consumption of the structure may increase.</p>
MONUMENTAL EXHIBITION	<p>*Silence and visuality come to the fore.</p>	<p>*It does not need to undergo any changes.</p>	<p>*no changes are required.</p>	<p>*It will be effective for the ethnic group who are interested in the traces of the past and who lived in this neighbourhood in the past.</p>	<p>*Since it will remain only as a monitored structure, the functionality aspect may remain in the background.</p>

MUSEUM/ EXHIBITION HALL	*Publicity will continue.	*Service areas and light system should be added.	*There may be no need for changes in the front.	*It can join the circulation of other museums in the city.	*Considering the museums and exhibition areas in the city, a situation of loss of publicity may occur within the housing texture.
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In the building protected as a cultural asset, publicity can be prioritised in most of the functions. Because worship buildings are the first functional buildings where publicity comes to the fore. In addition, when evaluated as an interior space, the acoustically favourable condition of the church will facilitate the new functions to be given. Even if it does not require a change in the plan scheme, functions such as cultural centre, library, theatre centre will require seating units and cabinets to be placed in the interior. These elements and also sound, light and heating systems for all functions should be added without damaging the building. Apart from this, when the "Monumental Exhibition", which is another remarkable suggestion, is considered in the re-functioning application, it is seen that it has disadvantages in terms of functionality. Because, as can be understood from the section where the advantages of imposing new functions on the existing shell are mentioned, cultural assets should be put into use without energy and labour consumption. However, in such a case, the possibility that the first building we encounter will not be able to get rid of the idle situation it has been in for years will increase. Because for a function like this, which has no functionality, the worship structure, which is a cultural heritage from the past to the present, will remain only as a spectacle object instead of being reused.

### **3.3. Swot Analysis on New Function Suggestions**

Since it is an important method to give a new function in terms of conservation and to continue the use of the building, the good and bad aspects of the current function to be given and the opportunities and threats it will create were evaluated. As seen in the swot analysis table obtained as a result of the evaluations, evaluations were made about the proposed functions in line with the survey data. The sustainability of the socio-cultural benefits that will be provided to the environment in the church, which will also become a commercial building by giving a new function, is also necessary. It should be able to continue its contribution to the socio-cultural values formed in the historical process despite all the negativities of the function. In the swot analysis method, the opportunities and threats of the research for re-functionalisation were revealed. The demographic characteristics of the participants, the current location of the building, and the benefits of the space scheme enabled both qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

According to the Swot analysis data, when the church is re-functionalised in Akşehir, which hosts a few buildings from Armenian architecture that have survived to the present day, it will be seen as a reference to other Armenian buildings in the city. In addition, this place, where 17th-18th century Ottoman tolerance and intercultural interaction formed by social richness, can be made interesting with the new function to be given to the people who lived in the city and had to leave with the exchanges. The

situations that emerged around all these data are grouped in the table below according to functions (Table 3).

As can be understood from the comparative analyses, various functions have been proposed that could contribute to the promotion and touristic value of the city. Ensuring sustainability in re-functioning is also crucial in this regard. One way to achieve sustainability is by transferring the spatial elements to future generations with minimal changes. Adding modern equipment such as sound, light, heating systems, and seating arrangements could potentially damage the building's form and authenticity. Additionally, when different user groups start using the building, there is a risk of causing damage to its original condition due to unconscious consumption. For example, if the building is re-purposed as a Theatre Centre to cater to users of all ages, it would require service areas to accommodate the diverse public.

**Table 3.** Akşehir Armenian Church new function suggestions SWOT analysis

Function Name	Good aspects	Bad Aspects	Opportunities	Threats
LIBRARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*The silent structure will be preserved.</li> <li>*The Baptism and Priest room can be used as a service space and storage room without the need for an extension.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Seating unit and bookcases can reduce the perception of the main space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It is a sharing space for women and children living in the neighbourhood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*There is a possibility of being exposed to unconscious consumption.</li> <li>*Its structure far from the centre may continue its idle state.</li> </ul>
CONCERT HALL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It is more likely to perceive the main plan scheme in the interior.</li> <li>*It can become public again.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Sound and light system can damage the interior elements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Acoustics, one of the elements of form, comes to the fore.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Sound and vibration may damage the structural structure.</li> <li>*The wear and tear rate may be high since intensive use will be seen.</li> </ul>
CULTURE CENTRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Past public status can be maintained.</li> <li>*The plan scheme may not be changed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*The sound, light and heating system may damage the interior elements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*The cultural status of the place of worship will continue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It is a function independent from its environment and can be detached from the environment.</li> </ul>
THEATRE CENTRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It is a function where publicity and acoustics are at the forefront.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Seating units can divide the main space.</li> <li>*The need for a service space arises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It can be a place where users of all ages can experience.</li> <li>*The state of being cultural will continue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*The possibility of encountering unconscious users will increase.</li> </ul>
MONUMENTAL EXHIBITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It will not require any intervention to the original structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*There will be very few users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It is possible to transfer the traces of the period to the present day without changing them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It is likely to remain idle.</li> </ul>
MUSEUM/ EXHIBITION HALL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*The exhibition status of the original structure is utilised.</li> <li>*Publicity continues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Additions can be made in the interior space due to the need for a service area.</li> <li>*The light system may damage the structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*The possibility of being placed in the city memory together with other museums in the city is high.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*It may encounter with unconscious users.</li> <li>*Being far from the centre may reduce visitation.</li> </ul>

The SWOT analysis revealed that the main threats are related to user density and the equipment required for the interior space. However, the main opportunity of re-functioning is the creation of a shared space where historical traces can be exhibited, and the interplay between form and function can be observed.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study aimed to holistically evaluate the Armenian Church in Akşehir concerning the function to be given after restoration, considering the historical and cultural context, the relationship between the environment and people, and the function suggestions that align with the traditional texture of the city. Restoration practices for Armenian Churches often focus on individual buildings independently of their surroundings. However, it was concluded during the study that the church in Akşehir is not just a standalone structure but an essential urban reference point that has shaped the city's identity over time. Despite technical challenges due to the building's location on a fault line, efforts have been made to preserve this cultural asset and bring it back to life with necessary measures and reinforcements.

The research included a questionnaire study involving various social groups to gather function suggestions for the building. The majority of Akşehir's citizens expressed their desire for the church to function as an exhibition hall and museum, considering its historical significance. The SWOT analysis highlighted that re-functioning the historical building as an exhibition and museum space would be a qualified and original use and

would be highly valued by the public. However, the risk of natural disasters in crowded settings should be taken into account.

The reuse of the Akşehir Armenian Church, once an important building for the city, will allow future generations to experience a history-conscious urban environment with unbroken ties to the past. The majestic form of the church, visible from various perspectives in Akşehir, makes it an integral part of the city's residential area. Restoring its cultural significance and incorporating it into daily life will promote cultural interaction. Even with a change in function, the building is expected to maintain its public nature as a worship structure, recalling its historical purpose and the social dynamics of its era.

Considering the historical significance of Akşehir, which once stood on the historical Silk Road and the King's Road, it has the potential to become a stopover for tourism groups traveling from Konya to Pamukkale today. As an immovable cultural asset within Akşehir's historical fabric, the church's sustainability is crucial for contributing to cultural heritage. Preserving its monumental structure while adapting it to meet the needs of the modern world is vital. The church's integration into the urban space fosters a sense of local identity and promotes a connection to cultural history.

Overall, the re-functionalisation of the Akşehir Armenian Church, considering its comprehensive relationship with the surrounding city, can serve as a model for similar restoration projects in the future. The study emphasizes that the church is not just a standalone monument but an integral part of the city's fabric. Sensitivity to the city's cultural heritage is essential to ensure the preservation of this historical asset and set a precedent for its



future use. Worship buildings, as monumental structures, play a significant role in shaping the visibility of a city and reflecting the socio-cultural characteristics of the era in which they were built.

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