

**ARCHITECTURAL NARRATIVES AND VISITOR
EXPERIENCE: A MULTILAYERED STUDY OF THREE
ART MUSEUMS IN ISTANBUL**

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ARCHITECTURAL NARRATIVES AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE: A MULTILAYERED STUDY OF THREE ART MUSEUMS IN ISTANBUL

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*To the great women in my family; My grandmother, mother, sister and two
fantastic little nieces.*



DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that this is the true copy of my thesis, including the final revisions, approved by my thesis committee. All data and information have been obtained, produced, and presented in accordance with the rules of research ethics and principles of academic honesty. As required by these rules, to the best of my knowledge I have acknowledged ideas, thoughts, and any copyrighted material in accordance with the standard referencing rules. I certify that any part of this thesis has not been submitted for a degree or diploma in another educational institution.

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ABSTRACT

Museum architecture today emerges as an active agent embodying institutional identities and visitor experiences. This doctoral research investigates how architectural discourses of recently designed, purpose-built art museums communicate institutional identities and how visitors engage, interpret, or transform these spatial narratives. Focusing on three prominent contemporary and modern art museums in Istanbul, Istanbul Modern, Arter, and the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture, the study explores the interplay between institutional discourse, architectural representation, and visitor experience. Employing qualitative methods for institutional discourses and visitor experiences, this study reveals how architectural decisions align with and express curatorial ideologies, cultural positioning, and public engagement strategies. The comparative analysis highlights how institutions utilise architecture strategically, embedding cultural and ideological messages within their spatial designs. Findings show significant divergences and convergences among the three museums, emphasising the nuanced relationships institutions establish with their visitors through architectural narratives. This research contributes conceptually by positioning museum architecture as a discursive field where institutional strategies intersect with social interpretations, thereby extending the discussion of museum architecture beyond aesthetic concerns into broader socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Art museum architecture, institutional identity, architectural discourse, architectural representation, visitor experience

ÖZET

Günümüzde müze mimarisi, kurumsal kimlikleri ve ziyaretçi deneyimlerini barındıran aktif bir aktör olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu doktora araştırması, son yıllarda amaca özel tasarlanmış ve inşa edilmiş sanat müzelerinin mimari söylemlerinin kurumsal kimlikleri nasıl ilettiğini ve ziyaretçilerin bu mekânsal anlatılarla nasıl ilişkiye geçtiklerini, onları nasıl yorumladıklarını veya dönüştürdüklerini incelemektedir. İstanbul'da önde gelen üç çağdaş ve modern sanat müzesi olan İstanbul Modern, Arter ve İstanbul Resim ve Heykel Müzesi'ne odaklanan çalışma, kurumsal söylem, mimari temsil ve ziyaretçi deneyimi arasındaki karşılıklı etkileşimi araştırmaktadır. Kurumsal söylemler ve ziyaretçi deneyimleri için nitel yöntemler kullanan bu çalışma, mimari kararların küratöryel ideolojiler, kültürel konumlandırma ve kamusal katılım stratejileriyle nasıl uyumlandığını ve bunları nasıl ifade ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Yapılan karşılaştırmalı analiz, kurumların kültürel ve ideolojik mesajlarını mekânsal tasarımlarına stratejik olarak nasıl yerleştirdiklerini vurgulamaktadır. Bulgular, incelenen üç müze arasında önemli farklılıklar ve benzerlikler olduğunu ortaya koymakta ve kurumların mimari anlatılar aracılığıyla ziyaretçileriyle kurdukları nüanslı ilişkilere dikkat çekmektedir. Bu araştırma, müze mimarisini kurumsal stratejilerin sosyal yorumlarla kesiştiği söylemsel bir alan olarak konumlandırarak, müze mimarisi tartışmasını estetik kaygıların ötesine taşıyarak daha geniş sosyo-kültürel bağlamlara açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanat müzesi mimarisi, kurumsal kimlik, mimari söylem, mimari temsil, ziyaretçi deneyimi

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

IMPS: Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture

IMM: Istanbul Modern Museum

VKF: Vehbi Koç Foundation



1. INTRODUCTION

Since their first emergence, museums have continuously transformed by keeping up with the zeitgeist. This adventure started with the private collections of the European aristocracy in the 17th century. It evolved into public institutions in the 18th century under the influence of Enlightenment thought. It was institutionalised, especially with the birth of national museums opening to the public after the French Revolution (McClellan, 2008; Ceylanlı, 2023).

In the 19th century, museums became ideological tools as part of the construction of the nation-state. In the 20th century, they were reshaped with the concepts of art education, pedagogical function and cultural access (Barrett, 2011). With globalisation from the 1980s onwards, museums have become even more versatile institutions with cultural branding, architectural iconisation and cultural tourism policies. Today, museums are not only places that preserve and exhibit works of art; They are also spatial and discursive actors with social, cultural and economic functions (Duncan, 2005; Macdonald, 2006; McClellan, 2008; Foster, 2013).

Especially in the 21st century, museum architecture has become a way for cities to introduce themselves, a means of generating cultural capital, and a component of the tourism economy (Behner, 2003; Merrill, 2019). Today, museum buildings are not only exhibition spaces but also serve the functions of increasing brand value, gaining global visibility, and generating social belonging as “signature structures” of cities (Giebelhausen, 2006; Foster, 2013). Architecture has become a means of representation that carries the discourse of the museum, directs the visitor's experience, and embeds corporate identity in space (Rees Leahy, 2005).

Although exhibiting works of art has historically been seen as a *show of power*, today, this meaning often continues to exist implicitly, and the priority has shifted to the experience offered to the visitor. Themes such as accessibility, inclusiveness, spatial quality, and addressing the public stand out as the new *buzzwords* of contemporary museums. However, this transformation is not only physical or administrative; it can also be read through the visitor's relationship with the space.

The relationship between the museum, the architect, the curator and the visitor create a much more complex network structure than a classical client-architect relationship. In this structure, the visions of institutional actors, the assumptions of architects about the space and the experiences of visitors are in constant negotiation (Macleod, 2005; Siva & London, 2011). Therefore, museum architecture is not only a physical design; it is the physical representation of a social formation and because of that as Buren (2005) stated, when an art object enters a museum, not only does it transform the space, but also the space transforms the meaning of the art object.

In this context, the new art museums that have opened in Istanbul in recent years represent Türkiye's current transformation in the field of art. Most of these museums in Istanbul have created new museum architecture by transferring previously existing deep-rooted institutional structures to more extensive and contemporary museum standards. These new museums both contain the discursive past of the institutions and attempt to respond to the new demands of contemporary museums. However, how this transformation is grounded in the space and how visitors perceive and interpret it is still a subject that needs to be investigated.

This research examines the three nodes of relationships between institutional discourses, architectural representations and visitor experiences through examples of

Istanbul Modern, Arter and Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum, prominent contemporary art museums in Türkiye. These three nodes are not only parallel but are also considered layers that affect and shape each other. Without understanding the meaning that an institution wants to convey to a space and the message it aims to communicate to the visitor, it is impossible to evaluate whether this communication is successful. Therefore, this thesis considers architecture not only as a formal thing but also as a social act in which institutional meanings are embodied and reshaped by the visitor experience. This study aims to reveal how the discourses established by institutions through space are grounded in architectural decisions, how visitors experience these spaces, the mediating function of architecture in this process and possible points of tension.

Therefore, this study is based on literature arguing that museum architecture is not just a background but also an active agent that reflects and reproduces institutional identity. Space is also the carrier of ideological, economic and cultural discourses. However, it is emphasised that the visitor experience is not a passive acceptance of these spatial and institutional narratives. It is rather a transformative and interpretive interaction. Visitors interact with the art on display, along with every element that constitutes the physicality of the museum and thus the manifestation of the institutional discourse; through these interactions, they *agree, question, reject* even *alter* the narrative presented by the institution. *In this context, the “museum narrative” can be understood as the spatial and discursive framework constructed by the institution to convey particular values, identities, or ideologies, which are then negotiated through visitor engagement.*

This literature review is structured around three main axes to conceptualise these interactions: (1) museum architecture as a social act, (2) ideological and institutional dimensions of museum architecture, and (3) the agency of the visitor in interpreting and transforming museum narratives. These axes provide the theoretical framework for the empirical research, which constitutes the main contribution of this study. The empirical analysis critically examines how institutional narratives are embodied architecturally and how visitors experience, interpret, or negotiate these spaces. Architectural analysis was supported with thematic analysis, which was used to examine institutional discourses through official documents, interviews, and promotional materials. Moreover, grounded theory was employed to inductively analyse visitor experiences, with a focus on their spatial interactions. Together, these methods support a multi-layered investigation of how institutional meanings are spatialised and how visitors engage with these meanings within the architectural setting. In doing so, this research also aims to propose a methodological approach that integrates architectural and discursive analyses with visitor-centred inquiry, thereby contributing to the scholarly literature through its multi-perspective framework.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study examines how newly designed art museums in Istanbul communicate institutional identities through their architectural discourses and how this spatial narrative is accepted, questioned, and transformed through visitor experience. Recognising architecture as a social and ideological construct rather than a neutral container, the research explores how built form reflects and produces institutional meaning (Jones & Macleod, 2016; Macleod, 2005). That is why it follows the discourses and experiences of the actors, such as architecture, institutions, architects, museum professionals, visitors and many others. The interaction between architectural intent, institutional representation

and visitor experience is analysed in detail through the examples of Istanbul Modern, Arter and Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum. While this study is likely to attract the interest of researchers in fields such as museology and design, its findings are also expected to be of relevance to museum professionals and practising architects.

In this context, the study has two main objectives:

- a. To analyse how museum architecture functions as a tool of institutional discourse. Drawing on literature that demonstrates that architecture is a social, political and cultural act, this research discusses how design decisions such as form, circulation, and spatial symbolism represent curatorial ideologies, cultural positioning, and the museum's relationship with the public.
- b. To understand how visitors relate to institutional narratives embedded in architecture. To reveal the ways visitors accept, resist or reinterpret these narratives, with the pre-acceptance of visitors being active subjects who transform the spatial narrative through his/her own experience.

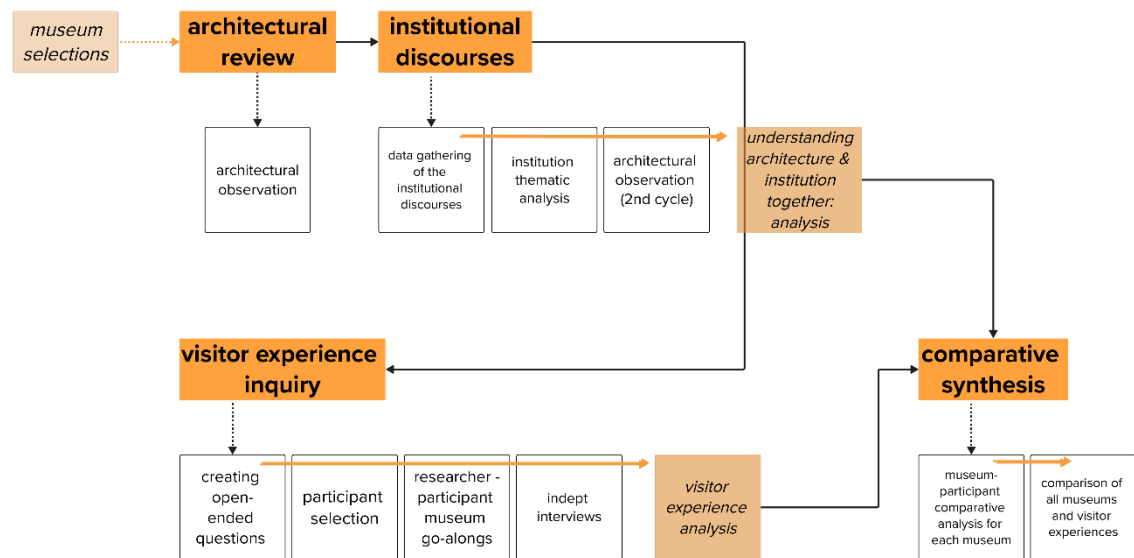
1.2 Research Approach

The study is based on diverse qualitative research approaches. Multiple research tools were used to collect data, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, architectural analysis, and scanning the discourses of institutions. Each method corresponds to a distinct analytical layer, allowing a comprehensive examination of museum spaces through their spatial configurations, institutional narratives, and visitor interactions (Figure 1.1).

The approach to architectural spaces is primarily shaped within the framework of architectural analysis. Architectural analysis is a systematic analysis method that focuses on defining a structure's physical, spatial and functional characteristics (exp. Unwin,

2014; Ching, 2014). In this context, elements such as formal arrangements, circulation structures, interior-exterior relations and material uses of museum spaces are discussed in descriptive language. At this stage, site visits to the museums and the examination of architectural plans provided valuable support for the analysis.

Figure 1.1 *Research Design Map*



In this architectural dimension, the study is informed by Attoe's (1978) concept of descriptive criticism, describing spaces as they are without applying critical judgment. It also carries this analysis to a critical depth with institutional and experiential layers. This approach is useful for maintaining a factual perspective in analysing how museums present and define their spaces, rather than imposing the subjective interpretations of the researcher. According to Attoe, descriptive criticism may include depictive, biographical, and contextual aspects. While this research primarily focuses on descriptive readings, it is also enriched by biographical and contextual dimensions, especially through institutional discourses and user experiences. Photographs and plans provided by the

architects are used to support the descriptive readings and make spatial analysis more transparent.

However, the analysis process was not limited to physical analysis only. With the inclusion of elements such as institutional discourses and user experiences, the research extends beyond architectural description. It draws on the suggestion made by Jones and MacLeod (2016) that museum architecture should be considered as a social process. They argue that museum architecture is not only a physical structure but is also constantly reproduced through social relations, institutional discourses and user practices.

They advocate that museum spaces are directly linked to the cultural and political-economic conditions in which they are shaped, and should therefore be understood as reflections of these broader contexts. In addition, evaluating architecture through its uses reveals the production of meaning through user experiences and practices rather than merely being an aesthetic thing.

In this context, the research aims to reveal the meanings that institutions attribute to architecture through their own narratives by directly finding the discourses of institutions in architecture. This reveals how architecture is shaped by different layers of meaning according to users and institutions, using a healthier and more holistic approach that reduces the risk of over-interpretation (Jones & MacLeod, 2016). By positioning architecture as a "social production process," this approach holistically evaluates the impact of visitor experiences and institutional narratives on space and expands the scope of architectural criticism beyond physical analysis to include social and cultural dimensions. Building upon this conceptual framework, the study employed analytical tools to operationalise the interpretation of institutional narratives.

The analysis of the discourses of institutions was informed on the thematic analysis method guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), which helped identify, analyse and report patterns within the institution's data. Data obtained from sources such as interviews, videos and institutional publications were coded using the Atlas.ti software. The codes were grouped according to repetitive expressions and semantic patterns and combined under main themes.

While institutional thematic discourse analysis provided a foundation for understanding organisational intentions and representations, it was equally important to explore how these narratives are received and interpreted by visitors. As part of the research process, visitors were first accompanied during museum visits to observe their immediate spatial experiences, after which semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their perceptions and interpretations in greater depth. In the analysis of visitor experiences, the grounded theory approach defined by Charmaz (2006) played an important role. It guided both the creation of questions and the analysis process, aligned with the aim of providing an insider's view of how museum spaces are perceived and used. Participant observation supported this approach, while institutional information provided preliminary insight that informed the preparation of open-ended questions. As Charmaz (2006) notes, the flexibility allows researchers to use institutions' narratives as "points of departure for developing, rather than limiting, our ideas" (p.17). In this context, grounded theory provided a useful framework for addressing research questions with institutional sensitivity and interpretive openness.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

In the selection of museums, institutions that have established their discourses and have moved to new buildings were preferred. The main reason for this preference was to

provide easier access to up-to-date and non-obsolescent data. Moreover, it was assumed that institutions that have established identities based on consistent interests and beliefs over a long period are more likely to yield clear and comparable results. Another important point is that they would incorporate contemporary museological discourse and technologies in the new architecture as they change with the requirements of that time. Since the institutional identities of such institutions are more distinct, the expectations they convey to the architect can also be expressed more clearly, and thus the architect can be consciously selected in accordance with the needs and wants of the institution. For these reasons, the number of museums within the scope of the study was naturally reduced to three museums.

The collection and analysis of data related to the institutions required a considerable time investment. The research moved on to focus on visitor experiences after this phase, with the process of recruiting participants and planning visitation and interview sessions. All these steps extended the data collection period to over a year. Therefore, it should be noted that the institutional data are limited to the period between the initial public release of information about the new museum buildings and the timeframe during which this study was conducted. This includes institutional discourses produced both prior to the official openings and throughout the data collection phase. However, since the selected museums already had institutionally established discourses, no significant changes were observed in their discourses.

Due to the variation in group sizes and availability, some museum visits could not be conducted as accompanied go-alongs. Although these participants were guided to document and recall their experiences individually, the lack of simultaneous observation

in these cases may have influenced the depth of spatial interpretation and researcher-participant interaction.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Shifting Spatial Paradigm of Museums

Modernist museum architecture was shaped by an understanding in the early 20th century that glorified the work of art and presented it with scientific objectivity and order while aiming to make architectural space invisible. As Andrew McClellan (2008) also stated, during this period, museums have to be designed from the inside out; that is, the space had to be structured according to the practice of exhibition first, and the architectural form had to be at the service of this practice. MoMA's new building on 53rd Street, which opened in 1939, is one of the most striking examples of this understanding (Figure 2.1). Designed with inspiration from department stores, this structure offered a spatial experience that centred on the work of art with its wide glass facades and small, intimate galleries (Birkett, 2012). MoMA institutionalised the white cube as the natural habitat of modern art. It separated the viewer from the context and glorified the pure form in order to make the function of the architecture a silent servant of art. It aimed to be invisible to grant absolute authority to the artwork.

This presentation form, later canonised by Alfred Barr's "Cubism and Abstract Art" (1936) exhibition at MoMA, relied on white walls, neutral lighting, and undecorated galleries to detach the artwork from any surrounding narrative. This seemingly neutral setting, however, also pushed the viewer into a passive and contemplative mode, cutting off the social and ideological layers of art (Cain, 2017). According to McClellan (2008), this architectural approach emerged as a reaction to the monumental museums of the 19th century. While architectural ornamentation, wide staircases and halls overshadowed the work in these previous museums, simplicity and functionality were at the forefront of the

modernist museum. Examples such as MoMA pioneered this transformation, which soon became the norm for art institutions worldwide.

Figure 2.1 *Museum of Modern Art – MoMA (Nye, 2009)*



Note. Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5 are used in this thesis under the Creative Commons license. Copyright remains with the original authors.

Especially, from the 1980s onwards, this “neutral” architecture began to be criticised under the influence of postmodern approaches. Jennifer Barrett (2010) discusses this process through the concept of public space and the figure of the participatory audience, emphasising that museums have become public actors that exhibit works and discuss social meanings. With this transformation, museum architecture has also changed; space is no longer a passive backdrop for works but an active interface that constructs narratives, presents identities and negotiates meaning with the visitor.

In the postmodern era, this shift in museum architecture has gained further complexity. No longer confined to aesthetic form, architecture now operates as a narrative medium that embodies institutional ideologies and visitor engagement. This new architectural approach, in which the narrative unfolds in time and space, combined with new narrative strategies including staging, cinema and technology, has transformed the museum into a multi-layered experience area (MacLeod et al., 2012).

Centre Pompidou, a pioneer of the postmodern transformation, was opened in 1977 and signified an early break from modernist paradigms (Figure 2.2). Designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, the building was envisioned as an "anti-museum". The basic design principle of the building was to move all technical infrastructure outside the building and transform the interior into a structure consisting of completely empty and uninterrupted platforms as a space to be democratic and ever-evolving. This order allowed the space to function not only as an exhibition but also as an experience area (Hamzeian, 2024). Thus, visitors had the opportunity to wander freely within the space and determine the direction of their own relationship with the exhibitions without having to follow a predefined route.

This structural choice points not only to a spatial but also to an ideological transformation. Pompidou turned the museum inside out -both literally and ideologically, redefining it as a transparent and democratic platform. The museum proposed a permeable structure where direct contact with art could be established, in contrast to the sterile and detached presentation style of modernist museums (McClellan, 2008; Foster, 2013). The exhibition layout developed by Hulten offered multiple reading paths with a "village" metaphor consisting of a chronological main axis and side roads instead of presenting the visitor with a linear narrative (Hamzeian, 2024). It dismantled the temple

and then replaced it with a ‘forum’. Pompidou opened itself to the vitality of urban life. The forum area was initially considered an open area that directly connected to the busy Piazza in front of it. However, later it turned into the full transparency of the facade and established this desired connection (Centre Pompidou, n.d.). Later, many museums all around the world used transparency to connect with urban life directly.

Figure 2.2 *Centre Pompidou (Vellut, 2014)*



The publicity concept of the Centre Pompidou was also radical. The areas that could be accessed without a ticket to enter and walk around the building made it possible for the building to interact not only with art but also with the city. The visitor ceased to be a subject who only viewed the works but became a part of the space and a partner in the narrative (Barrett, 2010). Thus, the museum gained the quality of a “space of

passage”, both physically and intellectually. Lorente (2025) combines this structural understanding with Frank Gehry's architectural approach, which he calls "gateway buildings", making the museum not only an exhibition space but also a transition point of urban movement and cultural interaction.

The architectural surface of this transformation was also discursive. The pipes protruding outwards, transparent facades and exposed circulation systems were not only functional; they were also a form of architectural expression and criticism (Foster, 2013). Such a visual strategy constitutes a direct response to the neutralising surface of the “white cube” concept. The structure was no longer just a backdrop where art was presented but also the carrier of the narrative itself.

The Pompidou example showed that the museum could not only be a representation of the past but also a stage for contemporary social relations and urban life. This transformation, unlike the museum model defined as the “exhibition complex” of the 19th century, allows space for the active movement, interaction and production of meaning of the individual within the space (Kriegel, 2006; Barrett, 2010; Macdonald, 2006). Thus, architecture was redefined not as a passive expression of institutional identity but as an active and transformative social action.

After the 1990s, museums, such as the Guggenheim Bilbao, Tate Modern and MAXXI, became not only art exhibition spaces but also urban memory, cultural identity and visual attraction points. With this transformation, narratives ceased to be fixed and chronological; they were restructured into thematic, conceptual and even controversial forms. According to Lorente (2025), this change is an indication of a structural transformation that transforms the visitor from a passive recipient to a liberated

interpreter. The postmodern museum, by opening space to multiple perspectives instead of a single truth, accepts the viewer as an active visitor who charts his own course.

One of the most striking and memorable examples in the history of museum architecture, the Guggenheim Bilbao has had an extraordinary impact since its opening, both with its architecture and its role in urban transformation (Figure 2.3). Bilbao proved that architecture could not only house the culture but generate it economically, symbolically and spatially. When it opened in 1997, only 400,000 visitors were expected per year, but in the first year, this number reached 1.3 million, bringing an estimated 219 million dollars in revenue to the region (Litt, 2019). This extraordinary success has been referred to in the literature as the “Bilbao effect” (McClellan, 2008).

Figure 2.3 *Guggenheim Bilbao (Bourgeois, 2000)*



According to Plaza (2006), the Guggenheim Bilbao was designed not only as a museum but also as a strategic lever for economic diversification and urban restructuring. The industry associated with these political events branded the Basque city, and in the

2000s, there was a boom in “iconic” museum buildings designed by ambitious architects around the world (Sirefman, 1999).

Designed by Frank Gehry, the Guggenheim Bilbao can be described as not only an art museum but also a building where architecture becomes the narrative itself. It is placed at the centre of the museum experience with its titanium cladding and amorphous shape. This is also innovative in terms of the relationship it establishes with the audience. Beyond the works of art exhibited, the building has also transformed itself into a space of experience. Guggenheim Bilbao transformed architecture into spectacle and spectacle into strategy (Wu, 2003). Lord and Blankenberg (2015) refer to such museums as “experience architecture” and emphasise that due to these buildings, the museum is remembered not only through art but also through the physical and emotional connections established with the space.

The Guggenheim Bilbao example transforms the visitor from a passive spectator to an active subject who produces meaning through multi-layered relationships with space. Architecture was no longer about exhibiting only art but also the carrier of experience, and it was a tool to exhibit the city itself. This approach is also part of the “soft power” strategies: Museums have become strategic tools not only for cultural production but also for the reconstruction of the global image of the city (Lord & Blankenberg, 2015). The Guggenheim Bilbao example is an emblematic example of this process, branding the experience of space, increasing the attractiveness of the city and integrating it into international cultural diplomacy.

Beyond the spatial experience, this structure was also a turning point in terms of cultural identity and public image production. Gehry's design became a symbol of Bilbao's rebirth after the post-industrial collapse. With the transformation of the city's

coastal area, the museum was embedded in the urban fabric as an architectural gesture and became an icon that visually transformed the Basque identity (Lorente, 2025). The structure, which invitingly fits into the urban fabric, creates a sculptural form that spreads along the city's coastline while at the same time providing a square and riverside promenade for the city's pedestrian flow. Instead of being a temple dedicated to art like MoMA, with its structure that is integrated into the life of the city, it positions itself as a public space open to everyone with its public spaces such as the museum café and bookstore, in addition to areas dedicated to art - such like the Pompidou (Sirefman, 1999; Plaza et al., 2009).

The role of architectural design was not limited to creating an aesthetically pleasing monument; it also evolved to redefine the relationship of the museum with the public space. Modern museum buildings adopted designs that integrated with their surroundings, facilitated public access, and opened up spaces for social interaction. As an example, the Tate Modern, built in 2000, reanimated industrial heritage, weaving it into the cultural fabric of the contemporary city (Figure 2.4). The museum in London was created by converting a former power station and organised the large Turbine Hall area as a public socialisation and installation space, becoming a symbol of the intersection of post-industrial transformation and public culture¹. Architects Herzog & de Meuron's approach was to keep the architectural identity of the existing building visible², to keep the new interventions as simple as possible and to integrate with the old. In this way, the building took on a dual role as a witness to the past and a carrier of contemporary art

¹ Later, Herzog & de Meuron also designed the new extension of the museum, 'The Switch House', in 2016.

² The previous power station was designed by Architect Giles Gilbert Scott, who is also the mind behind the red London telephone box (Tate, n.d.).

(Shin, 2024). Its monumental Turbine Hall became a stage for public life and collective experience, and according to the museum's website, since its opening in May 2000, it has brought 100 million pounds in economic benefits to the city, and 40 million people have visited the museum (Tate, n.d.).

Figure 2.4 *Tate Modern* (Matthews, 2003)



The former Bankside power station became not only a museum building but also a physical representation of London's rebranding and cultural revival (Liebchen, 2001). The museum's architecture, location overlooking the River Thames, and visual dialogue with St. Paul's Cathedral presented a narrative connecting the past and future. This spatial placement, like Bilbao's, activated a narrative of urban memory and transformation, placing architecture at the centre not only of the presentation of content but also of a means of producing public images (Lorente, 2025).

Spatial permeability - the physical and visual openness of a building that allows for fluid transitions between interior and exterior spaces - has also differentiated the relationship between the Tate Modern and the city. The fluidity established by the entrance ramps with the public space has carried the concept of a 'forum' from inside to the outside. Lorente (2022) emphasises that this dialogue established by critical museology with the public space enables the museum to function as a space of thought not only inside but also outside. Rather than dictate visitor path, Tate aimed to invite visitors to inhabit the museum as a citizen of the city. According to the architects, this previously central yet isolated power plant "is a large urban space, a meeting place, an independent small town; a ramp leads down to it" (Herzog & de Meuron, n.d.). In this context, Tate Modern has become not only an exhibition space but also an actor that touches the daily lives of city dwellers.

Like Guggenheim Bilbao, it is also a marvel of branding; "the dynamic combination of experience and brand became the foundation for a consumer boom in museums" (Lord & Blankeberg, 2015, p.13). In the experience economy, as Anna Klingmann (2007) defined as 'brandscape', architecture becomes the carrier of a brand, a symbolic asset in the global cultural marketplace. Buildings such as Guggenheim Bilbao and Tate Modern are designed not only as museum structures but also as marketing tools. In the first years of its opening, Tate Modern was identified with the concept of "Cool Britannia" and was associated not only with art but also with a national image and cultural dynamism - and consumption (Lord & Blankenberg, 2015). According to Kramer (2001), the packaging of museums as places that offer experiences and their presentation with a consumer logic has turned them into a 'culture mall'. Kramer's emphasis on this point relates directly to what architects have stated: visitors can enter the Great Hall or auxiliary

spaces without visiting the galleries located in peripheral locations, thus using the space as an area for experience and consumption without engaging with the art spaces. As Rees Leahy (2005, p. 113) states, "the art galleries are optional, but the shop is unavoidable."

2.2 New Museum Discourses

New museum approaches prioritise rethinking the role of museums in society and focusing on the relationship established with visitors. In her article written at the beginning of the 21st century, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) starts *Changing Values in the Art Museum* by saying, "In changing times, older art-museum values are coming under challenge, and new emphasis is being placed on museum-audience relationships" (p.9). Changes in social structures affect the museum, so much so that they "are one of the most vulnerable of institutions at this time of radical change" (p.11). The authoritative approach to addressing passive audiences has changed to active visitors with the new cultural politics and educational *approaches*. This approach opens up the museum to the *active participation* of the visitor in learning processes and the production of meaning, rather than being an institution that merely conveys information (Barrett, 2010; Walsh, 2016; Tzortzi, 2015; Dierking & Falk, 2003; Waern & Løvlie, 2022). It transforms museums not only into areas of cultural representation but also into active actors of social change and multicultural dialogue.

In particular, *inclusivity* and *social permeability* are a big part of the new museums' discourses (Sandell, 1998; Barrett, 2010; Lorente, 2022). It indicates that the museum should appeal not only to an elite segment but also to individuals of different ages, classes, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and physical capabilities. Many museums conduct visitor research in order to comprehend how to access and attend to diverse public interests and needs. The inclusive museum approach comes to life with concrete strategies

such as exhibitions carried out in collaboration with different communities, multilingual texts, physical accessibility and exhibition designs that respond to different learning styles (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Crooke, 2006). In this respect, the new museum is not only a theoretical transformation but also a restructuring process focused on social justice. Inclusivity supports the museum's educational role; they aim to be inspiring and serve their visitors while aiming to be educational.

In the current understanding of museums, the museum is increasingly being rethought as an open public space directly *connected to the urban fabric*, rather than a closed repository of objects. This transformation requires a reassessment of not only physical but also conceptual boundaries, the stretching of the museum's boundaries for *community participation, social permeability and spatial accessibility*. For example, examples such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam or the Oslo Public Library are praised as “urban living rooms” because they encourage public encounters and a sense of belonging through their architecture (Museumnext, 2021a; 2021b). Permeability is achieved through transparent façades, open squares and walkable museum spaces; this allows the museum to be experienced as a “gateway” rather than a destination (Lorente, 2025).

According to Gurian (2010), in such contexts, the form should follow function, and mixed-use spaces that support everyday interaction along with informal social practices should be created in museums. Museums that want to reach a wider audience must redefine their public role not only in terms of physical access but also at a relational level. At this point, museums are positioned as platforms for dialogue, memory, and co-production (Flynn & Barwick, 2020). Institutional power structures are questioned, and excluded voices are included in the process as co-creators of space (Museums

Association, n.d.). As the boundaries between the museum and the city dissolve, the boundaries between the audience and the institution also get thinner.

All of these approaches involving visitors have helped to bring the experience to the forefront in accordance with the zeitgeist³. Klingmann (2007) stated that the experience paradigm has affected cultural institutions after the media and commercial areas and has turned culture and education into “entertaining experiences”. Exhibitions have become interactive, gamified, and occasionally, they become something experienced by entering into their atmosphere. Lord and Blankenberg (2015) relate the deliberate enhancement of visitor experience to the broader influence of the experience economy, arguing that the branding efforts of museums are increasingly shaped by the need to intensify experiential engagement. This branding has become a tool used especially by cities or regions in need of revitalisation. Thus, “The iconic, ‘brand-name’ architecture of the new museum is often considered art in its own right” (Merrill, 2019, p. 212).

In 21st-century museums, space is no longer merely a neutral box where works of art are exhibited; it is a multi-layered platform where publicity, participation, experience, and urban memory are woven together. With the opening of buildings such as Centre Pompidou, Guggenheim Bilbao, and Tate Modern, museum architecture has ceased to be merely an aesthetic shell and has become an element that makes the visitor the subject of the space, touching the city and creating a narrative. This new understanding is constructed around discourses such as transparency (with facade arrangements with

³ According to Giedion (2008), modern architecture was not an aesthetic orientation based on individual tastes; it was born as an inevitable historical necessity in harmony with the spirit of the time - zeitgeist. In his understanding, the "zeitgeist" is the holistic expression of scientific, technological, cultural and social developments in a certain period. Architecture is a reflection of this holistic spirit.

strong interior-exterior relations as in the Pompidou example), publicity (participation with social spaces open to everyone, such as the Turbine Hall), breaking down the curatorial hierarchy and giving the visitor a role in the production of meaning, and branding (architecture becoming a cultural brand carrier, as in the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Tate Modern). Each of these museums are no longer merely the architectural representation of an art institution; they are also public stages carrying the global identity, history, and future vision of a city. Today, these discourses are not limited to these pioneering examples, but find resonance in most contemporary museum projects; The boundaries between the museum, the city and society are becoming more permeable and more open to dialogue.

2.3 Museum Architecture as a Social Act

Langdon Winner (1999), when discussing artefacts such as technologies and design, argues that those who produce them are not impartial actors, but they have agendas. Many design decisions that could appear purely technical, in fact, are saturated with power relations. That is, artefacts are not neutral but promote or suppress specific values, institutions, and social relations. Architecture, as a product of human creativity, is likewise a social condition. According to architectural historian Spiro Kostof (1995), it is a social act, and it is social both in method and purpose. Such that, to understand how, a researcher must investigate not only the physical form but “...the identity of the patrons, particulars about the motivation for the buildings commissioned, the identity and careers of the architects, the nature of the materials of construction and their provenance, matters of finance, and so on” (p. 7).

However, architecture is not a static or completed thing. As Jones and MacLeod (2016) argue, architectural meaning is not solely embedded in its design and construction

moment. It is continuously reproduced through use, appropriation and user engagement. In this sense, the built environment is shaped not only by its creators but also by its users over time. Therefore, to fully grasp the social function of architecture and what it represents, it is necessary to analyse not only the intentions behind its creation but also its experience. This requires a dual analytical perspective considering institutional authorship and user negotiation within space.

In this context, museums, especially art museums, cannot be considered mere places to exhibit art because they are in a multi-dimensional, cultural, social, and political setting. Tony Bennett (1988) uses the term exhibitionary complex for this setting. He states that art museums “through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society.” (p. 74). So those who fund museums - they could be universities, companies or the state - all have beliefs about how museums should be. Museum institutions select not only museum professionals but also designers/architects based on their identities, values, and vision. The same approach also shapes the spatial decisions they convey to them. This decision-making chain becomes part of the social dimension of museum architecture, which is inherently a physical condition. Consequently, architecture is shaped by a network of relationships with its physical and social dimensions. In turn, it becomes part of this network. It influences and is influenced by the social context (Reichmann & Müller, 2015).

2.4 Ideological and Institutional Dimensions of Museum Architecture

Silke Steets (2016) considers architecture to be a material object and argues that it is also a social phenomenon in addition to its physicality. They are human-made, but they have an autonomous life after they get out of the hands of the creator, which starts

to impact both their creator and users. This individual and collective experience holds social meanings influencing social behaviours along with social perceptions. Once built, architecture becomes a part of the social order, shaping and reflecting social dynamics. She notes, "Architecture is a congealed or sedimented form of the social. Therefore, the starting point for such analyses is always the building itself." (p.95). In this context, architecture results from social processes that have been "frozen" or materialised into something tangible. A society's values, ideologies, and power relations are embedded in the buildings and structures it creates, and these elements persist through the physical form of architecture. Architecture is a material manifestation of social dynamics, ideologies, and cultural practices. Over time, the social context that shapes a building becomes embedded in its structure, and these structures, once built, carry the historical and social weight of their creation. That is why one must begin with the building itself as the primary object of analysis (Steets, 2016). Architecture can become a lens through which one can understand the social world. The trick will be understanding "why different societies live in different realities" (p. 103). It will be the essence of the query that investigates why and how museum institutions differentiate themselves.

Moving from Steets' approach, it can be understood that museums are not natural containers that serve the works they exhibit (Lorente, 2022). Every place penetrates its meaning into the things that are accommodated inside (Soja, 1996). A museum or gallery includes a directorate, store, reception, exterior architecture, stairs, elevator, the neighbourhood, and the city in which it is located. When a visitor stands in front of an art object, it means that s/he somehow interacts with all these elements. Therefore, the idealistic concept of the white cube, ignoring all elements surrounding the object and creating a sterilised environment only for art itself, fails. Even when one disregards most

of them, doors, windows, and corridors that different people walk, pass, and open will eliminate the aimed neutral state. That is why space always defeats those who try to ignore it (Buren, 2005; Soja, 1996).

Museum architecture is a social production where institutional ideology and identity are embodied (Jones & MacLeod, 2016). In this context, architecture acts as an environment that conveys certain messages to visitors as an extension of the museum's institutional strategies. Architectural formation is designed to reflect the identity, values, and even the beliefs of the museum's sponsoring or managerial elites. Architecture is shaped in line with institutional interests and belief systems and is conveyed to visitors through discourses embedded in the space. Thus, museum architecture is not just a physical structure but a social action and carrier of ideological discourse; in this respect, it is a phenomenon intertwined with institutional identity, brand strategy, governance, and politics.

The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum is a seminal example in museum literature on the topic of institutional power. The relationship it produces/constructs between its art, visitors, architecture, and city, as well as the Guggenheim Foundation's journey in institutionalising modern and contemporary art museums, sets an example. The importance the foundation attaches to striking and resounding architecture and their use of architecture for the institutionalisation of contemporary and modern art, while also as an advertising tool for the institution, has a side that changes the history of museology. The foundation's attitudes towards art collecting, global spreading, architectural design and ways to fund themselves created a new area for academicians and critics to analyse, especially the Bilbao Guggenheim, not only a building that houses art but also an institution along with its programme.

Guggenheim Museums' journey started with establishing the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in 1937 with the motto of "promotion and encouragement and education in art and the enlightenment of the public" (Charter of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, June 25, 1937). In light of that ambition, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum was commissioned to be designed by Frank Lloyd Wright during World War II (1943) (Figure 2.5). The design and construction phases (starting in 1953) took 16 years with delays due to causes such as the War and its economic aftermath (opened in 1959) (Quinan, 1993).

Figure 2.5 *The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Valadi, 2015)*



The war's social and psychological effects were reflected in the design with keywords such as “universal language”, “brotherhood of mankind” (Levine, 1998), “an inverted ziggurat” (Pfeiffer, 2003), “inverted Tower of Babel”, “temple in the park” (McClellan, 2008) in Wright’s words, a spiral, a rotunda where there is always a visual relationship with other visitors and the central courtyard, which brings the person to the starting point on a journey.

The controversial architecture that creates much noise is not foreign to the Guggenheim Museums. Many displeased voices were raised about how it is unsuitable for art to be presented in the unconventional habitat of the building. Critiques used extreme comments such as “the interior annihilating the paintings” or “cultural horror inflicted upon art” (McClellan, 2008, p. 86) due to its unprecedented spiral planning. Even the Guggenheim Foundation’s board could not close their ears to those comments - Wright calling the museum “Archeseum” definitely did not calm the comments down (Krens, 1993). However, Solomon Guggenheim wished for a museum with a statement, and the foundation board mainly proceeded with Wright’s decisions regarding the main scheme (ibid). However, when the museum opened in October 1959, six months after Wright’s death, April 1959, with James Johnson Sweeney’s decision, then director of the museum, visitors would see several changes made, contrasting the original decisions, such as artificial lighting, a different way of painting display, storage spaces in the sixth and seventh ramp levels, and so many others against Wright’s wishes. He “symbolically as well as literally swept the place clean” with the words of art critic Aline Saarinen (in Glueck, 1986). Even after Sweeney’s resignation in 1960, due to the fact that museums continued to grow, Wright’s original designs kept on changing (Glueck, 1991).

Nevertheless, even these alterations were not enough for the museum’s needs. When Thomas Krens replaced Thomas M. Messer, the successor of Sweeney as director, he took up an extensive restoration along with additional space in order to meet the contemporary needs of a museum. The museum closed for three years and opened its doors in 1992 with its original Wright design and an eight-story tower adjacent to it (designed by Gwathmey Siegel and Associates Architects). In addition to the new and

renovated gallery space (over 4.700 square meters), the restoration and expansion provided new office spaces (130 square meters), a restaurant and storage spaces.

Along with the expansion and renovation project of the New York Museum, the foundation continued to expand its collection, reaching branches under the directorship of Thomas Krens. The new branches can be exemplified as the Guggenheim Museum SoHo (1992 - 2001), the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1997 - present), the Deutsche Guggenheim (1997 - 2013), the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum (2003 - 2008), the Guggenheim Las Vegas (2001 - 2003), the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (established in 2007, expected to open in 2025) and the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum created a new, compelling, highly requested building type for the twenty-first century, with its effect on the people's desire to visit; therefore, it brought fame and prosperity to the city/neighbourhood in which it was established. As before with the New York Guggenheim, the foundation continues its tradition of polarising the critics with its architectural decisions. It even created a terminology of its own, the Bilbao effect, whose success has been attempted to be replicated worldwide, even though architect Gehry indicated he did not mean to change the city; he “just meant to be part of the city” (Fairs, 2021).

In the past, Bilbao was an industrial city, but it lost this feature over time. It used to be a shipbuilding town. The city's industrial power gradually faded due to political issues and devastating floods. The region was highly affected by the Basque separatist movement. Even less than one week before the museum's opening, a Basque police officer was shot dead by Eta while preventing a grenade attack on the museum (Jones, 2022). In 1983, highly damaging floods caused by the Nervion River shook the region, resulting in economic upheaval in the following years. According to insurance statistics,

economic losses from the floods are estimated at 800 M€, and 39 casualties (Ocio et. al., 2016). Towards the end of the twentieth century, Basque authorities decided to revitalise the city, turning it into a service-based economy rather than an industry-based economy. Apart from the Bilbao Guggenheim museum designed by Frank Gehry in 1997 for Bilbao City, It included a metro station designed by, again famous architecture firm, Foster and Partners (1995), a footbridge and an airport from Santiago Calatrava, Isozaki Atea Buildings designed by Arata Isozaki & Associates (2008) that faces the footbridge, an university library by Rafael Moneo (2008), the high-tech tower called Torre Iberdrola by Cesar Pelli (2011), and so many others as indicated on the website of Bilbao for Tourism which provides extensive accounts of the new Bilbao (BilbaoTurismo, n.d.). The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum was part of something bigger, but it could be considered the primary driver of them all. Now, the industry has pushed to the city's outskirts. It brought an estimated €6.5bn revenue to the country between its opening and 2022 (Jones, 2022).

The museum's Europe expansion story started in the late eighties when the Guggenheim Foundation was considering stretching its arms towards Europe under the directorship of Thomas Krens (1993). Firstly, the Austrian city of Salzburg approached the foundation. Later, the project was paused due to cost concerns of the Austrian government in 1990. In the same year as the Basque government's approach, the Bilbao Guggenheim's conversation had started. It was going to be fully funded by the government with the name and expertise of the Foundation. Again, the foundation wanted a building with similar excitement as its predecessors and, as a prerequisite, in Krens' words (1993), "a commitment to build a structure of sufficient importance and stature that it would make the new museum a significant architectural statement in its own right" (p. 35). The foundation launched a competition in 1992, resulting in Frank Gehry's

victory. A project like this needed a “landmark building” with an impact, such as the Sydney Opera House (Griffiths, 2022). Moreover, it actually became the straightforward figure of the city. The magnificent sculpture-like building is the first and most used visual to introduce the city when it is searched for Bilbao online or when checking the related travel guides. Gehry indicates that he was interested in the movement of the fish, and playing with the forms that appeal allowed him to create an architectural vocabulary (Fairs, 2021).

Chin-tao Wu (2002) explains Guggenheim’s approach using the analogy of McGuggenheim. She states that Krens’ approach is the winning of American-style capitalism and its related culture. Krens’ extreme capitalist branding approach, the aim of spreading the Guggenheim brand like a McDonald’s by opening branches (Wu, 2002) and the Basque government’s desire to stop the bleeding of the capital Bilbao combine to create this amorphous and shimmering building that resembles a work of art itself. The Guggenheim brand becomes the meaning of this museum, and as a result, the museum becomes a landmark that is to be experienced (Lord & Blankenberg, 2015). Thanks to the museum -also additions to the city’s skyline- the city is leaving the industrial dominance and entering the cultural domain (Muschamp, 1999). Instead of its turbulent political past, which is tired of the industry, as the Basque government wants, it is now remembered for culture and cutting-edge architecture. Tourism is revived, job opportunities are increased, and immigration is stopped and reversed. This became a global phenomenon, leading to the opening of contemporary art museums all over the world (Shalina, 2015).

In Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, like Bilbao, decided to use the “transformative power of culture” by creating the Saadiyat Cultural District (Saadiyat Cultural District Abu Dhabi, n.d.). This district aims to celebrate the achievements and

vision of the United Arab Emirates through museums, cultural institutions and public programs and to be the cultural centre of Abu Dhabi (ibid). In addition to the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, designed by Frank Gehry, the district includes several museums and cultural institutions, including the Louvre Abu Dhabi by Jean Nouvel, which opened in 2017, Berklee Abu Dhabi, which is affiliated with the Berklee College of Music designed by Foster + Partners, opened in 2020, New York University Campus by Rafael Vinoly, opened in 2013, Manarat Al Saadiyat opened in 2009, the upcoming Zayed National Museum, designed by Foster + Partners scheduled to open in 2025, the Abu Dhabi Natural History Museum, by Mecanoo scheduled to open in 2025 and teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi opened in April 2025, along with Abrahamic Family House by Adjaye Associates opened in 2023 (religion building complex) (Fakharany, 2024).

Designed by Frank Gehry, the museum, like the one in Bilbao, rises with the combination of iconic and differently shaped structures constructed of materials such as titanium and glass. Located at the tip of the island and with an area of 30,000 square meters, this structure, the largest of all Guggenheim museums, brings with it the view that Frank Gehry has once again created a “spectacle” and presented an example of an architectural landmark. Chloe Wyma (2015) states that the criticisms about the museum are gathered around “the Krenshian logic of aggressive building, the nouveau-mannerism of trophy architecture, and the general absorption of museums into a spectacular event economy.” Just like the one in Bilbao, the Abu Dhabi Guggenheim is also a museum project that was brought to life under the leadership of Krensh. Similar to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the main goal of these projects in Abu Dhabi is to position the city on the global cultural stage and revitalise it. Both of these capital cities aim to rebrand through culture, create globally recognised landmarks, and thus create soft power. Wyma

(2015) explains Abu Dhabi's aimed change as "remake itself from an oil fiefdom into a cosmopolitan hub – to shift away from the extraction of natural resources and towards the marketing of culture."

Abu Dhabi's drive to include international museums and world-famous architects directly results from the city's quest for economic diversification and cultural prestige. According to Wakefield (2021), Abu Dhabi has entered into franchise agreements with international museums such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi to develop cultural tourism on Saadiyat Island as part of the "Plan Abu Dhabi 2030." These museums have been strategically chosen to shape Abu Dhabi's transnational identity, strengthen its global position, and boost its tourism sector.

Elizabeth Derderian (2017), while evaluating Abu Dhabi's cultural investments, states that the concept of "tabula rasa" (blank slate) is represented in Western media as a historical and cultural void in the city. This discourse suggests that the emirate is rebuilding its identity in the cultural sphere with a culture "imported from the West". In this context, Abu Dhabi's cultural investments are a strategic move designed to increase the emirate's visibility on the global stage and create an "authentic" identity of its own.

Karen Exell (2016) describes the adoption of Western-style museums in the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Louvre and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, as a conscious and strategic choice. These museums function as symbolic instruments of global power, and franchise agreements enable rapid development by embracing rather than rejecting Western cultural authority. Exell acknowledges that imperial criticisms of global brands such as the Guggenheim may be warranted. However, she emphasises that in the Gulf context, these collaborations demonstrate the will of local actors to build global cultural power.

The main reason for the preference for established global museums such as the Guggenheim and the Louvre is their competence in providing international recognition and cultural capital. Wakefield (2021) states that such franchise institutions offer instant recognition and credibility, thus increasing Abu Dhabi's competitiveness in global cultural tourism. In addition, these museums support an image of Abu Dhabi as cosmopolitan, modern and integrated with the global context.

Powerful Western countries such as France and the USA also welcome these collaborations for economic and political reasons. According to Wakefield (2021), while the Louvre Abu Dhabi project aims to increase its influence in the region and protect its economic interests, for the Guggenheim, this initiative means increasing its global brand value and expanding its influence in the Middle East market. Therefore, Abu Dhabi's museum franchise strategy is considered a multi-layered process shaped by political, economic and cultural dynamics on both a local and global scale.

In addition, although the museum was announced in 2006, its opening date has been postponed multiple times. Initially planned to open in 2012, the museum was finally postponed to 2026 due to the economic crisis, falling oil prices, and human rights violations (Cascone, 2021). The construction process of the museum was criticised for low wages, long working hours, and difficult working conditions for migrant workers (Wyma, 2015). These criticisms led to artists boycotting the museum and postponing the opening dates (Azimi, 2016).

As a result, the Guggenheim example shows that museum architecture is not only a physical shelter but a material expression of institutional intentions, ideological stances and cultural strategies. The Guggenheim Foundation's architectural choices are an effort to create a visual impact and a strategy to strengthen the institution's discursive identity

and global position. Frank Lloyd Wright's New York Guggenheim building is an early example of this strategy: while its spiral form departed from the modernist aesthetics of the period, it institutionalised the idea that the museum offered 'an experience' not only with its works of art but also with its building. The foundation adopted this structure as a tool both to demonstrate its institutional stance and to position itself as a global player.

This institutional strategy expanded with projects such as Bilbao and Abu Dhabi under the management of Thomas Krens; With the selection of architects like Gehry, architecture has become a cultural logo. The creation of architecture itself as a work of art has created an effect that allows cities to be included in global networks; the aesthetic form of the buildings has mediated the reconstruction of the identity of cities. Thus, architecture has become not only a shelter but also the carrier of the discursive and symbolic power of the institution. As in the case of Abu Dhabi, such architectural moves are directly related to local development policies and the global circulation of cultural capital.

As MacLeod and Jones (2016) emphasise, museum architecture is not a fixed object, but a process that is constantly reproduced through social relations. While architecture constructs the ideological subjectivity of the institutional field, it also shapes legitimacy searches, capital relations, and public images. Museum buildings embody the institutional vision at every level, from the choice of architect to the choice of materials, from the spatial narrative to their location within the city. Therefore, institutions such as the Guggenheim Foundation tell "their own stories" not only through their exhibition content but also through their structures. These structures are not only architecturally striking, but also active actors representing the cultural positioning of the institution.

These architectural strategies shape not only the internal identity of the institution but also the relationship it establishes with the visitor. However, the meaning of the space is not only produced by the institution; visitors are not passive recipients of these narratives, but also interpreting, transforming, and sometimes questioning subjects. As will be discussed in the next section, how visitors receive and reinterpret architectural forms plays a central role in understanding the dynamic nature and plurality of museum narratives.

2.5 The Agency of the Visitor in Interpreting and Transforming Museum Narratives

By their very nature, museums aim for visitors to enter the museum and leave it in a different state. While this transformation is ideally expected to be positive, museums need to understand their visitors' needs and expectations and explore how to serve them best within the limits of their resources and capabilities (Falk, 2016). New visitor-focused strategies have emerged in response to shifting audience behaviours and increased competition from other leisure activities. Museum professionals now understand that identifying and addressing visitors' preferences is essential to encouraging repeat visitation (Hayde et al., 2024). Falk emphasises that museums also have their own “interests” and states that the most successful institutions are those that can bring their own interests and capacities together with those of their visitors. According to him, the museum visitor experience cannot be understood by focusing only on the museum or only on the visitor, because this experience is transient and interactive, limited in time and shaped by mutual negotiation.

Expanding on this relational understanding, Dierking and Falk (1992) explain that the museum experience constantly shifts across three different contexts. The visitor engages with the museum through their *personal context*, and at the same time, shares the

experience with others present in the space, in the *social context*. In addition, this interactive museum experience takes place within the museum's *physical context*, which is shaped by its architecture and the artworks on display. For this reason, they argue that "the total experience" must be examined, meaning that to understand the museum visit fully, it is necessary to study "the critical interactions" among these three contexts (Falk & Dierking, 1992).

This multidimensionality is illustrated through the following example: "At any given moment though, a family member could be attending to an object (physical context), watching the sun stream through a window (physical context), thinking about things that need to be done tomorrow (personal context) or joking with a family member about something that happened that morning (social context)" (Falk & Dierking, 1992, pp. 174–175). Building on this contextual understanding, scholars have moved beyond passive reception models and now recognise visitors as active meaning-makers who interpret, negotiate, and sometimes even challenge institutional narratives.

This perspective further reveals that the visitor cannot be understood as a mere recipient of information displayed in the museum; rather, they are active subjects who produce meaning, transform narratives, and at times, directly oppose them (Falk & Dierking, 2016; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Hooper-Greenhill uses hermeneutic and constructivist learning theories to understand the audience experience and argues that visitors produce different meanings in the museum in line with their cultural and historical backgrounds (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, pp. 20-27). Through the concept of "interpretive communities", she suggests that different audiences can interpret the same object differently. Likewise, Falk and Dierking's approach, the narratives established in the museum are no longer fixed. They are plural and open to negotiation, constantly reshaped

by visitors' active participation. In this form, the museum becomes an institution that narrates, listens, and transforms.

Framed by this understanding of the visitor as an active meaning-maker, recent interdisciplinary research has further deepened our understanding of visitor experiences by combining insights from museology, sociology, architecture, education, and tourism. Studies in this field reveal that museum experiences are shaped not only by the content exhibited but also by the institution's physical structure, spatial narrative and social interaction dynamics. Hayde, Weiss and Meyer (2024) emphasise that visitor research contributes not only to understanding the needs and behaviours of visitors but also to redefining the understanding of success, inclusiveness and public value of institutions. This literature shows that interaction with visitors is not only a data collection process but also a means of building more responsive, transparent and equitable museum environments.

Hayde, Weiss, and Meyer (2024) redefine the practice of visitor studies in line with the principles of “mutual benefit generation,” “contextual awareness,” “flexibility,” and “comfort” in order to support museums’ transition to a visitor-centred approach. In this context, various applications based on case studies are presented: For example, in the evaluation study conducted on the dinosaur gallery of the American Museum of Natural History, how visitors interacted with the space was analysed through different data collection tools (short surveys, group mapping activities, exit interviews). In these applications, the aim was to design data collection as not only functional but also a meaningful and participatory experience for the visitor. In addition, the study emphasises that the data collection process should allow the visitor to reflect on their own experience, so that museum professionals have the chance to evaluate “what works” through the eyes

of the visitor. The authors advocate that visitor studies become an experience themselves; this positions the visitor as an active actor shaping the experience rather than a passive source of data.

Beyond structured evaluation practices, other strands of research have begun to highlight the social and performative aspects of museum visits, drawing renewed attention to visitor agency. As an extension of the visitors' activeness, Noy (2017, p. 40) adds that "consuming the museum is a social event." This is because the spatial nature of the museum is within the public sphere, and visitors walk through the museum while observing others viewing art; they are also being observed themselves. In his study, Noy demonstrates that museum visitors are not only passive recipients but also active interpreters and discursive producers. The museum examined in his research offers visitors a space that poses political and ethical questions and encourages them to respond to these questions. This form of interaction shows that visitors are not only looking at artefacts but also at actors who participate in discourse. He analyses visitors' responses through the actor-action-motive triad, and in these responses, visitors are seen to take different moral positions. This analysis makes the visitor's agency visible at both individual and collective levels, revealing the potential to reconstruct the museum narrative.

While Noy highlights visitors' discursive and ethical positioning within museum spaces, other scholars have examined how architectural and operational features similarly mediate visitor experience and agency. For example, Li (2024) examines how cultural communication strategies are shaped in the context of visitor experiences, taking the Nan Song Deshou Palace Ruins Museum, which opened in Hangzhou, China, at the end of 2022, as an example. The research emphasises the transition of museums from their

traditional *object-centred* definitions to their *audience-centred* contemporary functions and reveals how this transformation is experienced together with architectural planning, service infrastructure and cultural narratives. Deshou Palace, as a space based on traditional Chinese garden aesthetics and Song Dynasty architecture, aims to contribute to both the construction of cultural identity and the process of visitors repositioning themselves. By offering an aesthetically and emotionally impressive environment within the framework of the experience economy theory, the museum aims to provide information to visitors and establish an emotional bond with the space.

In the study, visitors' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours regarding the space were analysed using qualitative data collection methods. It was observed that design and operational elements such as the aesthetic atmosphere of the space, lighting arrangements, wayfinding difficulties and digital guidance directly affected the visitors' perception. It also reveals in detail to what extent visitors subscribe to certain spatial and institutional orientations or how they negotiate/adapt against them. It was determined that there was a certain gap between the spatial scenario of the museum and the actual interactions of the users; especially due to complex orientation systems, limited social areas and superficial presentation of cultural narratives, visitors had difficulty in the meaning production processes. In this respect, the study constitutes an important example in terms of showing not only how experiential values are produced but also how they are left incomplete.

Extending the scope of spatial analysis beyond traditional museum settings, other studies have explored how architectural design in public institutions similarly shapes visitor interpretations and experiences. In these contexts, examining the discrepancies between institutional narratives and the actual experiences of visitors becomes a key research aim to assess how effectively such spaces communicate their intended messages.

Housley and Wahl-Jorgensen's (2008) research, which conceptualises visitor experiences through architecture, was conducted around the new Senedd building (Welsh Assembly) in Wales, which opened in 2006. The building is not a museum, but it provides important data for visitor research on the structure of visitors' visits to experience the architecture and other spectacles offered by the assembly building. It tries to understand how the space is associated with abstract concepts such as democracy, citizenship and participation through visitor experiences. In this direction, the building is not only an aesthetic and functional object, but also analysed within the framework of a visual experience practice called "democratic gaze". It compares the architectural and institutional narrative of the building with the experiences of the visitors by examining it. The authors have shown that design elements such as glass and transparency in the architecture of the building provide an opportunity for 'surveillance' towards citizens, but this monitoring practice does not always translate into active participation. In this context, the spatial relationship established through the building makes the difference between institutional intentions and public experiences visible.

The study is structured by combining ethnographic observation and open-ended interviews to understand visitors' perceptions of the space. The research is based on the discourses that emerged in the interviews around two main axes: touristic consumption and political participation. These discourses provide an analytical framework that questions whether visitors are positioned as "consumers" or "citizens." In this context, the research reveals the construction of spatial meaning by directly observing visitors' interactions with the space and accompanying their experiences. In addition, it reveals the tensions between participation and representation by showing that ideologically weighty

spaces such as democratic structures are shaped not only by institutional narratives but also by individual experiences.

A further critical perspective on the construction of visitor experience is offered by Franklin and Papastergiadis' (2017) study, which challenges conventional museum paradigms. Their study, *Engaging with the Anti-Museum*, explores visitor experiences at MONA (Museum of Old and New Art). The museum challenges the didactic, high-culture-driven visitor experience typical of classical art museums, and instead embraces a sensory, experiential, and discovery-oriented approach. They explore the possibility of a museum model that transcends the traditional "educative leisure" framework, instead engaging the body, emotion, and everyday life. In this context, how MONA develops an "anti-museum" imagination with its institutional strategies, architectural structure, and curatorial approach, as well as how this imagination resonates with visitors, is examined in detail. The museum aims to position the visitor as a subject who creates their own experience, who is surprised and open to being affected, rather than a passive viewer. This approach creates a multi-layered experience framework, especially from the exhibition layout to the architecture, from the digital guide application (O Device) to the curatorial non-intervention.

The study measures visitors' perceptions of the space through three main objectives: transforming interaction with the museum, diversifying access to art, and creating meaningful change in visitors' lives. The findings show that most visitors have experiences that align with these objectives. It provides a framework for understanding the visitor's behaviour in the space and the emotional and cognitive processes behind these behaviours. The study analyses how MONA's architectural and curatorial

construction redefines the “anticipated user” and how visitors respond to this construction.

Examining the visitor experience enables researchers (and museums) to think not only about the content or physical space of the museum, but also about how these elements are perceived, interpreted and transformed by visitors. Recent studies have shown that museum visitors are not passive spectators, but rather subjects who create meaning, interpret narratives and sometimes question them in line with their own pasts, values and expectations. Therefore, focusing on the visitor is complementary and constitutive in assessing the extent to which museums achieve their intended effects. The tensions between institutional narratives and spatial designs often become visible only through their counterparts in the visitor’s experience. In this context, understanding how visitors experience the museum on a physical, emotional, social and cognitive level is key to rethinking the museum as a more inclusive, participatory and transformative public space.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Process

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the complex relationship between art museum architecture, institutional discourse and visitor experience. This project began with recognising that museum architecture is not neutral; museums are a material expression of institutional identity, and that visitors are not passive recipients but agents who actively experience and read the museum. The investigation was initiated to understand the transition from social formations to physical representations and how the visitors perceive these representations.

The research journey included initial desk research, examination of technical data⁴ of the museums, systematic architectural observation and documentation, collection of institutional materials such as interviews and institutional publications, and visitor-centred methods of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions⁵. All of these steps contributed greatly to the understanding of the interplay between space, narrative and experience while allowing the researcher to remain open to multiple field readings.

The research process followed an iterative and flexible structure that allowed the research questions to develop in dialogue with the data in accordance with the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The study allowed themes to emerge gradually through multiphased investigation, including architectural analysis, institutional discourse thematic analysis, and participant-oriented methods such as focus groups and observation.

⁴ Examination of technical drawings and specifications provided online by the architectural firm.

⁵ For the field study, approval was received from Özyeğin University Human Research Ethics Committee with the code 2023/10/01.

3.2 Research Design

This study consists of several interconnected steps. As outlined in the Research Approach section, the research design is shaped by a combination of descriptive architectural analysis, thematic discourse analysis, and grounded theory methods to address the interplay between physical space, institutional identity, and visitor experience (Attoe, 1978; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Jones & MacLeod, 2016).

3.2.1 Selection of Museums

The study focused on long-standing art institutions that recently moved to new, purpose-built facilities with over a year of visitor engagement and interpretation. This selection ensures that these institutions have had time to establish a public reception of their architectural spaces. The rationale behind this choice is that these institutions have an established discourse that has guided their new buildings' design. The study examines how these discourses are embodied in built form by analysing museums with pre-existing institutional narratives rearticulated through architecture. These institutions have long-standing curatorial and cultural legacies. Therefore, their transition to purpose-built spaces based on these legacies marks a critical moment of spatial redefinition. Because they operate with the certainty of the present. This architectural shift allows the study to examine how institutional memory, values, and public roles are retranslated into material form.

Additionally, selecting museums that have been within the last decade allows to more up-to-date publications and institutional materials that reflect their current spatial and discursive strategies. Based on preliminary research, three museums were identified as case studies: Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (IMPS), Istanbul Modern Museum (IMM) and Arter were chosen as the research subjects. The three museums differ

in their funding structures, curatorial models, and architectural authorship: from public to private initiatives, from permanent exhibition-based to temporary programming, and from international architecture communities to local architectural firms. This diversity provides a productive ground for comparative analysis of how different types of institutions mobilise architecture as part of their institutional positioning.

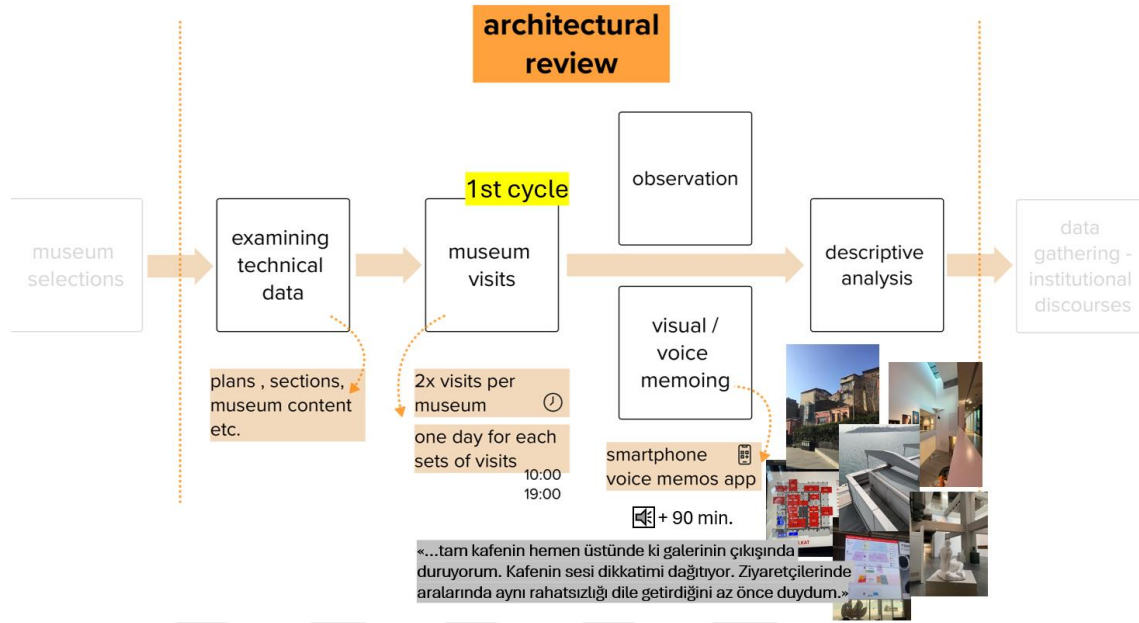
3.2.2 Phases of the Research

3.2.2.1 Architectural Review

The study's first phase involved an in-depth examination of the architecture of the selected museums. The architecture analysis is made through site visits to the museums and supplemented by the analysis of technical plans and sections shared online by the museums architects⁶ (Figure 3.1). While experiencing the museum, the use of the space by visitors and museum professionals was observed while taking voice notes. The site visits allowed descriptive analysis of the spatial organisation, materiality, circulation patterns, and the relationship between the museum and its urban surroundings, inspired by Attoe's descriptive criticism approach (1978). As discussed earlier, this approach provides grounds for an architectural reading that foregrounds spatial qualities without privileging normative judgement while also opening the analysis to biographical and contextual layers where relevant.

⁶ In addition, museums were visited to observe the visitors participating in the research.

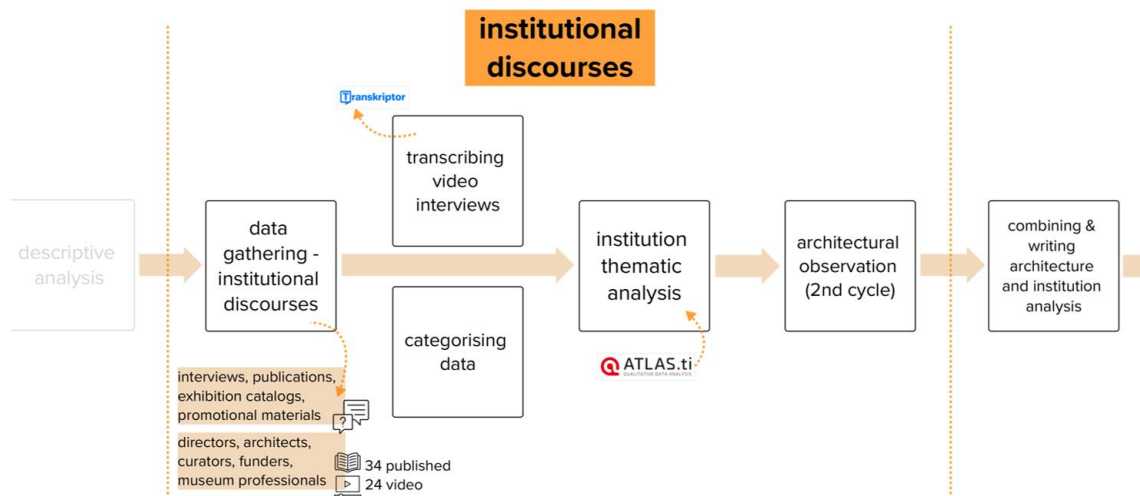
Figure 3.1 *Architectural Review Research Process*



3.2.2.2 Institutional Discourses

The first phase is followed by the second phase, data collection to capture institutional perspectives on the museums' architecture and identity (Figure 3.2). The written and video interviews given by the museums' architects, directors, and other actors (curators, funders, museum professionals), as well as institutional publications and exhibition catalogues, were analysed thematically. The thematic analysis guided the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It assisted in identifying recurring discourses surrounding each museum's architecture and institutional identity. The architectural and institutional thematic analyses were then analysed together to better understand how museums frame their architectural identities within their broader institutional narratives. As Jones and MacLeod (2016) emphasise, museum architecture is not only a physical structure. It is also a social production process. Institutional narratives, public roles, and spatial practices constantly shape it, which is why this understanding is the basis for collecting and interpreting all data.

Figure 3.2 *Institutional Discourse Research Process*



3.2.2.3 Visitor Experience Inquiry

The *third phase* of the research involved exploring the visitor experiences through participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews (Figure 3.3). In line with the approach of Atkinson and Coffey (2002), participant observation and interview methods were not treated as separate methodological stages, but as intertwined practices that mutually fed into each other in the field. Observing participants during museum visits and then participating in reflective focus group discussions allowed for associating bodily spatial behaviours with verbal interpretations. Moreover, this phase also benefited from an adapted version of the “going-along” method (Kusenbach, 2003). This method allows the researcher to accompany the participants during their visit without intervening, allowing them to interact with the space as they would naturally. This method supported a deeper understanding of how spatial meaning is constructed through bodily movement, sensory perception and dialogue and made visible the personal and emotional associations that visitors project onto the architectural space.

Focus group interviews were conducted with participants who preferred to visit in groups. As Morgan (2012) emphasises, focus groups allow participants to engage in a

dialogic process of “sharing and comparing”. Here, individuals express their own experiences while also responding, supporting, or questioning other participants’ views. This interactive quality is particularly valuable when exploring subjective experiences of space because it makes visible the multiplicity of interpretations, negotiations of meaning, and even unspoken assumptions that participants hold about cultural institutions such as museums.

Figure 3.3 *Visitor Experience Research Process*



The architectural and institutional analyses created the loose frame of the research questions and allowed a set of open-ended questions based on the insight they created. This phase was developed using a grounded theory perspective (Charmaz, 2006). The analysis in the first phase was used as *sensitising concepts*; these concepts allow researchers to begin the study with “certain research interests and a set of general concepts” (p. 16). These concepts give ideas to follow, sensitising the researcher to ask specific questions about the topic. Charmaz indicated that she uses these guiding interests to lead to concepts, and they are a start, a point of departure “to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data” (p. 17). The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to follow through with all the

valuable leads for the study. The interview is followed by qualitative coding in several cycles before the analysis.

3.2.2.4 Comparative Synthesis

The comparative analysis of visitor experiences in this research is informed by Madeline Akrich's concept of "script" (1992). Akrich emphasises that technical objects embody prescribed visions of use — designers inscribe specific roles and expected behaviours into the architecture or technology, assuming how users will act within the given frame. However, as she points out, users do not always subscribe to these prescriptions: "...they either underwrite it or try to extract themselves out of it or adjust their behaviour or the setting through some negotiations. The gap between the prescriptions and the subscriptions defines the presence or absence of a crisis, allowing the setting to be described" (Akrich & Latour, 1992, p. 261).

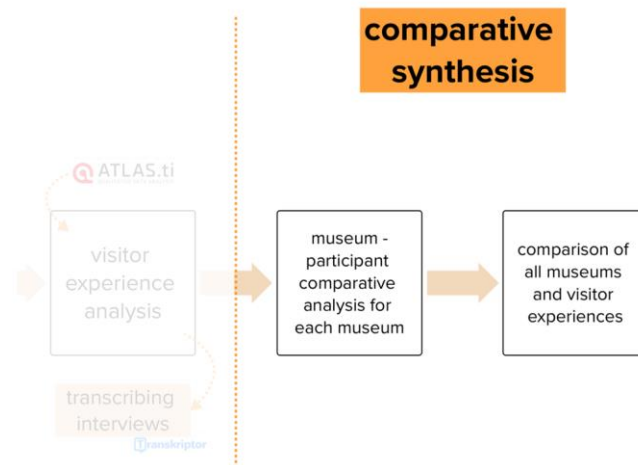
Based on this approach, museum architecture is examined not only as a spatial arrangement but also as institutional *scripts* which also project institutional assumptions about visitors' competencies, behaviours, and desires. Inspired also by Kjetil Fallan's appropriation of script analysis to design history (2008), this analysis paid particular attention to moments of negotiation, contestation, or breakdown between these projected scripts and the actual visitor practices.

Taking these approaches as reference, the participants' experiences were tabulated under the titles *accepted* or *partially accepted*, *rejected* or *partially rejected*, *missed/overlooked* (the situations that visitors overlooked or unknowingly ignored) and *conflicts* (the situations that create internal contradictions in visitor experiences). These categories were used to evaluate how visitors responded to the architectural expressions

of institutional narratives—whether they aligned with, questioned, disregarded, or experienced tension with the values and messages embedded in spatial design.

Rather than serving as a rigid categorisation, this classification functions as a methodological lens that captures the dynamic co-construction of spatial meaning between the institution and the visitor. These tables were further organised under thematic categories corresponding to each institution's key architectural narratives, providing a structured overview of how discourse and experience intersect (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 *Comparative Synthesis Research Process*



3.2.3 Data Collection

3.2.3.1 Architectural Review

Architectural observation was initially done by visiting each museum twice. These first visits were done just before interacting with the institutional discourses, thus allowing for the direct experience of the space. During the visits, voice notes were taken via mobile applications, and the architectural elements of the space were documented with photographs and videos. In these initial museum visits, a whole day, in total two separate days, was spent seeing all three museums on the same day.

After the institutional discourses were analysed using the thematic coding method, each museum was visited once more in one day. These second rounds of visits aimed to reflect on the earlier observations with the added lens of institutional narratives. Again, all three museums were visited in a day. During these visits, voice recordings and photographic documents continued to be used, serving as data and memory tools for analysis.

Photos and voice notes taken during museum visits allowed the researcher to jot down observations quickly. The content of these notes included the architectural elements encountered by the researcher throughout the process, curatorial elements, and the operational processes within the museums. Since these voice notes provided a chronological transfer of the experience, they also created a narrative sequence while analysing the architecture. In addition, these notes and photographs enabled the analysis to be deepened and detailed.

3.2.3.2 Institutional Discourses

Following the architectural analysis, materials displayed within the museum spaces that conveyed aspects of institutional identity or architectural intent were systematically recorded by taking photos and notes about where they are located and how they are presented along with its content. This process evaluated wall texts, exhibition panels, informational brochures, and any other in-situ content referring to the institution or its architecture as documentary data. This documentation guided the narrative order and helped to indicate the characteristics to which institutions attached great importance within the analysis.

The printed publications of the institutions – especially books, catalogues, brochures and booklets containing content on the new buildings and institutional history,

vision, and mission – were obtained from their in-house libraries and official online sources. In addition, the official websites of the institutions and their architects were examined to gather publicly available textual and visual material, including project descriptions, press releases, and mission statements.

In the next stage of the process, 33 published and 23 video interviews with institutional figures, museum directors, curators and architects were scanned, and representative discourses regarding the space and the institution were collected⁷ (Figure 3.5). The interviews were evaluated as an important data source in terms of understanding how corporate identity is associated with architecture and how this relationship is conveyed to the public.

In all visits, spatial features such as circulation, material use, visibility, accessibility and scale were observed in light of both the descriptive architectural criticism approach and institutional discourses. These criteria are informed by key architectural analysis frameworks that emphasise spatial organisation, sensory perception, and user experience as central components of architectural meaning-making (Unwin, 2014; Ching, 2014). These multi-stage observations made it possible to conduct a multi-dimensional architectural reading sensitive to the space's physical and discursive layers.

⁷ Although the total number of interviews used for analysis is 56, the number of interviews scanned is higher. The reason why the interviews mentioned were not included in the thesis is that they do not provide details about the institution and architecture, but rather talk about exhibitions.

Figure 3.5 *The Sources and Owners of Institutional Discourses*

	IMPS	IMM	ARTER
Published Interviews	IRHM, n.d. (official) EAA, n.d. (architect) Erciyes, 2020 (curator/advisor) Koyuncu Bali, 2023 (curator/advisor) Yüksel, n.d. (architect) İnci, 2024 (rector)	Belcher, 2023 (architect) Eczacıbaşı, 2022 (funders- Bülent Eczacıbaşı) Eczacıbaşı, 2023 (funders - foundation) Eczacıbaşı, 2024 (funders - foundation) Emden & Yıldız, 2023 (curator) Harris, 2023 (architect) İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2022 (funders) İstanbul Modern, n.d., -a, -b, -c, -d, -e (official) İstanbul Museum of Modern Art, 2023 (architect, museum professionals, foundation director - Oya Eczacıbaşı) Merlo, 2023 (architect) Piano et al., 2021 (architect, foundation director - Oya Eczacıbaşı) XXI, 2023 (architect, foundation director - Oya Eczacıbaşı)	Altunok, 2019 (museum director) Art50, 2021 (chief curator, museum professionals) Arter, n.d., -a, -b, -c, -d (official) Balıç et al., 2021 (foundation director, funders, museum director, chief curator, museum professionals, architects, artists, etc.) Ezik, 2021 (museum professional) Fereli & Balıç, 2019 (chief curator, museum professional) Oral, 2019 (chief curator) Personal Communication with Melih Fereli, 2023 (museum director)
Video Interviews	Akbank Sanat, 2016 (architect) Akbulut, 2019 (rector) Arkitera.com, 2022 (prev. rector, architect) Demirören Haber Ajansı, 2021 (rector) Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2021 (rector) Müzecilik Meslek Kuruluşu Derneği, 2022 (museum director) RIBA Architecture, 2019 (architect) TRT 2, 2022 (architect) TRT Haber, 2021 (rector)	Akbank Sanat, 2022 (chief curator) Anadolu Agency, 2023 (chief curator) Euronews Culture, 2023 (architect) NTV Program, 2023 (architect, foundation director - Oya Eczacıbaşı) NTV, 2022 (funders- Bülent Eczacıbaşı) Oksijen TV, 2024 (foundation director - Oya Eczacıbaşı) Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2023 (architect) Showcase, 2023 (architect, foundation director - Oya Eczacıbaşı) Vatican News - English, 2020 (architect)	Arter, 2019 (museum director, chief curator, chairman of the board - Ömer Koç, foundation general manager) Grimshaw, 2021 (architect, museum director) Habertürk TV, 2019 (museum director, chief curator, museum professional) TRT 2, 2023 (architect, museum professionals) Woman TV, 2019 (curator, museum professional)
	6 written + 9 video sources 06 architect 06 rector 03 museum professionals	16 written + 9 video sources 11 architect 11 funders 04 museum professionals	11 written + 5 video sources 03 architect 02 funders 12 museum professionals

3.2.3.3 Visitor

Due to the nature of the research, the targeted individuals were those who frequently visited art museums and could visit all three museums within a short period (in a week or less) in order to have their memories of their experiences fresh. Therefore, a sample of 16 people was created using snowball sampling (Table 3.1). The volunteers who participated in the research chose to visit the museums as a group activity and suggested new participants to the researcher. This resulted in the creation of naturally formed focus groups. Therefore, three focus group interviews were conducted in total, with one single-person interview in addition.

Table 3.1 *Table of Participants*

Interview	Participant code	Gender	Age	Profession
Focus Group 1	p1	male	34	architect
	p2	female	33	architect
	p3	male	32	financier
	p4	female	33	architect
	p5	male	32	programmer
	p6	female	34	architect
	p7	male	35	engineer
Focus Group 2	p8	female	37	academician
	p9	male	37	financier
	p10	female	36	architect
	p11	male	37	engineer
	p12	female	35	engineer
	p13	male	37	financier
Focus Group 3	p14	female	37	yoga instructor
(online)	p15	male	37	lawyer
Interview (online)	p16	female	22	journalist

Two group focus group discussions were conducted in the cafes within the museums to facilitate immediate reflections on the participants after visiting all three museums in one day. During these visits, the researcher visited the museums with the participants and took field notes without interrupting their visits. The third focus group interview took place online to accommodate participants' schedules. Due to their work schedule, this group decided to divide their visitations into three days. Additionally, a fourth interview was conducted individually (online), as one participant from a scheduled two-person group was unable to attend.

The online interview groups were asked to take photographs and take short notes during the visit in order to help them remember their experiences. They were specifically asked to review these photographs and notes before the interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, which were conducted online, the participants were asked to describe their visit process in detail, including details such as how they reached the museum, where they entered, and what they did before, during and after the tour. This guidance was provided to refresh their memories of the visit and to convey their experiences more clearly.

The focus groups aimed to capture naturally forming discussions consistent with the participants' typical museum-visiting habits. Therefore, it was left entirely to the participants to decide with whom they wanted to visit, on what days they wanted to visit, and how they wanted to do it. The only restriction was that they had to do it within a week.

As an adapted version of Kusenbach's (2003) approach, participants were accompanied during their visits. Prior to the visits, participants were informed that the researcher would accompany them and that they should visit the museums as they normally would. In cases where the visit was planned as a group activity, the aim was to observe the natural flow of interaction among participants. As Kusenbach also stated, the fact that this was a group activity reduced some of the discomfort that could have been caused by being monitored and questioned by the researcher.

Based on the participants' own plans, the researcher joined them from the very beginning and encouraged them to organise the visit themselves. The two teams added the researcher to the online group messaging conversations without the researcher's request, where they planned to meet, so the conversations and planning were observed. The participants' conversations were observed and listened to. During these

conversations, questions were occasionally asked to understand certain situations better or to explore the reasons behind behaviours without heavily intervening. In particular, directing or changing the content of their conversations or behaviours was avoided, as the aim was to guide the participants minimally throughout the process.

Semi-structured interviews constituted an important part of the data collection process regarding visitor experiences. After each museum visit, participants were asked to discuss their experiences with each other while relaxing in the museum cafés. During this time, the meaning-production processes triggered by the interactions within the group were observed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the café of the last visited museum. All group discussions were recorded with a smartphone voice recording application, while individual online interviews were recorded via Zoom. The interviews proceeded in line with the main topics determined, but participants were allowed to shape the discussion according to their own experiences. This flexibility allowed participants to reveal their meaning structures within their own narratives (Charmaz, 2006).⁸

According to Charmaz, open-ended questions facilitate participants to share experiences and feelings that they rarely have the opportunity to express in daily life. In these interviews, pre-determined questions were only a guide; the researcher specifically avoided encouraging participants to respond in certain directions. In this way, the interviews remained both structurally focused and open to highlighting the participants' own priorities, remembered moments, and spatial impressions. As stated by Charmaz and Belgrave (2012), the interviews were not only considered as data collection tools but also as interactional areas where social meanings and experiences were produced together.

⁸ Check Appendix A for the question set.

Therefore, the interviews both produced data on the research questions and shed light on the processes through which visitor experiences are collectively shaped.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

Atlas.ti program was used for thematic analysis of all data collected about the museums. Atlas.ti is a qualitative data analysis software that allows for finding patterns and identifying and describing themes within the collected data. Audio files (including institutional discourses and visitor interviews) were transcribed using an online platform, Transkriptor, which allows for both automatic transcription and manual correction. These transcriptions, alongside field notes, architectural observation notes, and analytical memos written during and after the data collection process, were uploaded into Atlas.ti for systematic analysis.

The data collected from the institutions were evaluated using the thematic analysis method. In this process, the thematic analysis guide of Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in particular. Repetitive expressions in the discourses of the institutions were identified, and thematic coding of these discourses, together with their supporting sub-discourses, was done. Themes were generated through a recursive six-phase approach; (1) beginning with familiarisation with the data through reading the written or transcribed video interviews in several cycles, (2) initial coding and (3) organising the codes and developing the overarching themes, (4) reviewing themes and making sure the codes are suitable for the themes, (5) defining and naming the themes that correlate with their essence, (6) finally creating a narrative that supports the resulting thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the frequency and recurrence of certain narratives informed theme development, the thematic importance and relevance to the research question were prioritised over mere quantification (Table 4.1).

This thematic analysis informed the architectural analysis as well. While describing the space, the discourses obtained from the thematic analysis matched the architectural features and were written together. For instance, the museums' spatial organisation and material selections were described when discussing institutional strategies around openness or transparency. Then, the institutional approach on those topics was expressed through the lens of those themes.

Notably, the thematic analysis also provided the basis for the subsequent stages of the study. As noted in previous sections, the findings of this thematic analysis provided a loose framework for semi-structured interviews with visitors. In this sense, institutional themes not only guided the interview questions but also contributed to framing the analytical lens for visitor responses.

Visitor interviews were transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory-informed approach (Charmaz, 2006). Initially, first-cycle coding was conducted to summarise participants' statements using descriptive and process coding methods (Saldana, 2013). These methods helped to capture both the content of what was said and the actions or processes described by the participants. To allow concepts to emerge from the data rather than imposing pre-existing categories, initial codes were deliberately kept open and flexible.

Subsequently, codes were re-analysed across three iterative cycles. (1) In the first cycle, broad descriptive and action-oriented codes were assigned to capture immediate meanings and experiences. (2) In the second cycle, these initial codes were revisited, compared across interviews, and re-organised to identify recurring patterns and emerging conceptual groupings. (3) In the third cycle, codes were refined into categories and sub-categories that synthesised higher-level patterns across the visitor narratives.

The need for multiple iterations arose from the complex and layered nature of visitor experiences, which could not be adequately captured in a single coding cycle. Through repeated comparison and refinement, the codes were gradually consolidated into a coherent thematic structure. The process continued until no substantially new patterns emerged, indicating that thematic saturation had been reached. This approach aligns with the principles of the constant comparative method (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012), where ongoing movement between data and developing codes allows deeper patterns to surface.⁹

Finally, a comparative analysis examined discrepancies between institutional narratives and visitor experiences. This analysis aimed to reveal any gaps between how museums aimed to present themselves architecturally and how visitors actually perceive and engage with these spaces. Visitor narratives were examined in relation to institutional discourses they corresponded with — since many of the interview prompts were derived from the earlier thematic codes, this allowed for a reflective, layered analysis. Additionally, comparisons between each institution's discourses were made to reveal their distinguishing methods.

As a result, a mixed methodological strategy was applied around institutional narratives, spatial contexts and visitor subjectivities, combining elements of thematic analysis and grounded theory. This approach enabled the researcher to conduct a multi-layered analysis at both institutional and visitor levels.

⁹ Check Appendix B for the codebook.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Institutional Discourses

This section examines how institutional identity is expressed through architectural discourse with the help of thematic analysis and descriptive architectural analysis.

Institutional discourse is not merely a narrative that follows architectural or exhibition decisions; it also acts as an active tool shaping the spatial and social role of the museum. The primary sources of this discourse include statements by museum directors, architects, and curators, institutional publications, and architectural explanations. This analysis explores how institutions define themselves, prioritise values, and address the public.

4.1.1 *Appraisal of Locations*

4.1.1.1 Tophane

Approaching the building from Beşiktaş, visitors are greeted by the buildings of Mimar Sinan University, to which the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum (IMPS) is affiliated. Just beyond the university lie the complexes of Galataport Istanbul. IMPS and Istanbul Modern Museum (IMM)¹⁰ are part of the Galataport Istanbul, a mega-reconstruction project that functions as a cruise port and mixed-use facility encompassing museums, offices, hotels, and 230 shops and restaurants.

Galataport Istanbul, with an investment amount of 1.7 billion dollars, covers a 1.2 km coastline on the Bosphorus¹¹. According to its official website, Galataport aspires to welcome 25 million visitors annually, including 1.5 million cruise passengers. The

¹⁰ Both museums neighbour the Tophane Square along with the Nusretiye Mosque.

¹¹ <https://galataport.com/tr/hakkimizda/proje-hakkinda>

terminal's innovative design is noteworthy. It is situated underground and features a distinctive cover system—a global first¹². This system utilises a portion of the seaside walkway, rising at a ninety-degree angle to create a barrier, facilitating ship docking and providing visitors access to the port via an underpass.

The project area, primarily situated within the Tophane¹³ region (Figure 4.1), played multifaceted roles between the 18th and 20th centuries, serving as a military barracks, assembly factory, Karaköy Pier, and Salıpazarı Port. Positioned at the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus intersection, it hosts a rich historical and cultural heritage dating back to the Genoese era (Kara, 2022). Additionally, during the latter half of the 15th century in the Ottoman Empire, this area was a hub for the production of cannons and artillery ammunition (Fitöz, 2015). Over time, it underwent significant expansion, reclaiming land from the sea on three occasions until 1955¹⁴. Subsequently, further expansion occurred, stimulated by the needs of the Salıpazarı Port, leading to the construction of multiple warehouses to cater to Türkiye's growing trading requirements (Ardıçoğlu, 2019).

The warehouses in the port, along with the Tophane Square Arrangement Project, realised in 1958, were designed by Sedad Hakkı Eldem, one of the prominent Turkish architects of the 20th century. This project has become controversial due to the disconnection of an essential point of the city from the public. Notably, during Eldem's design phase for the Tophane Square Arrangement Project, he opposed the construction

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Tophane name is derived from the combination of two Turkish words: "top" (heavy and fire arms), and "hane" (house) and it means cannon foundry, arsenal.

¹⁴ The sea was filled by driving piles due to the narrow coastal strip for the Salıpazarı warehouses, which were decided to be built due to reasons such as the inadequacy of the Golden Horn port, the increase in the size of the ships, and the increase in the trade volume of the port (Kara, 2022).

of warehouse number 4 on the site (which would later house the Istanbul Modern Museum). Despite his objections, ministry decisions prevailed, leading to the construction of the warehouse. Consequently, with its establishment, the link between Tophane Square and Nusretiye Mosque with the sea was severed mainly (Kazaz, 2017). Later, the area was closed to the public, and the sea, the square and pedestrian communication were completely cut off.

Figure 4.1 *Tophane Region Map*



Due to factors such as the inadequacy of infrastructure for a city-centre port and the shift to containerised transportation, the Salıpaazarı warehouses and cargo port were abandoned within a mere twenty years. Subsequently, prompted by various dynamics, including its strategic location and the rise of cruise tourism, the entire Salıpaazarı dock area and the Karaköy section were allocated with the build-operate-transfer model and given to the private sector for structuring (Kazaz, 2017).

Subsequently, in 2002, the Galataport Istanbul project's announcement ignited significant controversy, which has persisted ever since. The lack of transparency surrounding the project's development process has left the public uneasy. Primary

opposition stemmed from its central location within Istanbul and the potential threat it posed to historically significant structures along the Fındıklı, Tophane, and Karaköy axis. These concerns intensified as the project kicked off, notably due to its perceived impact on altering the iconic Bosphorus view by disrupting communication between Nusretiye Mosque, Kılıç Ali Pasha Mosque, Tophane Square, and the sea, which was already problematic because of the warehouse where Istanbul Modern was located (Warehouse No. 4).

Additionally, fears of gentrification in the Tophane region, the privatisation of valuable coastal areas, and their detachment from public life were prominent points of concern. The demolition of historically significant buildings during the construction process only served to escalate tensions further (Aysel, 2022; Gürsel, 2014; Kazaz, 2017; Ortaylı, 2021; Polat, 2017; Pişkin, 2017; Tuna, 2021).

4.1.1.2 Dolapdere

Dolapdere is located in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul and has had a multi-layered historical and cultural identity for many years. The development of the district became particularly evident in the 19th century, during which time Dolapdere and its surroundings hosted a significant Greek Orthodox community (Aşık & Ahunbay, 2017). This settlement, which spread from the region known as Tatavla, made Dolapdere an important non-Muslim settlement in Istanbul.

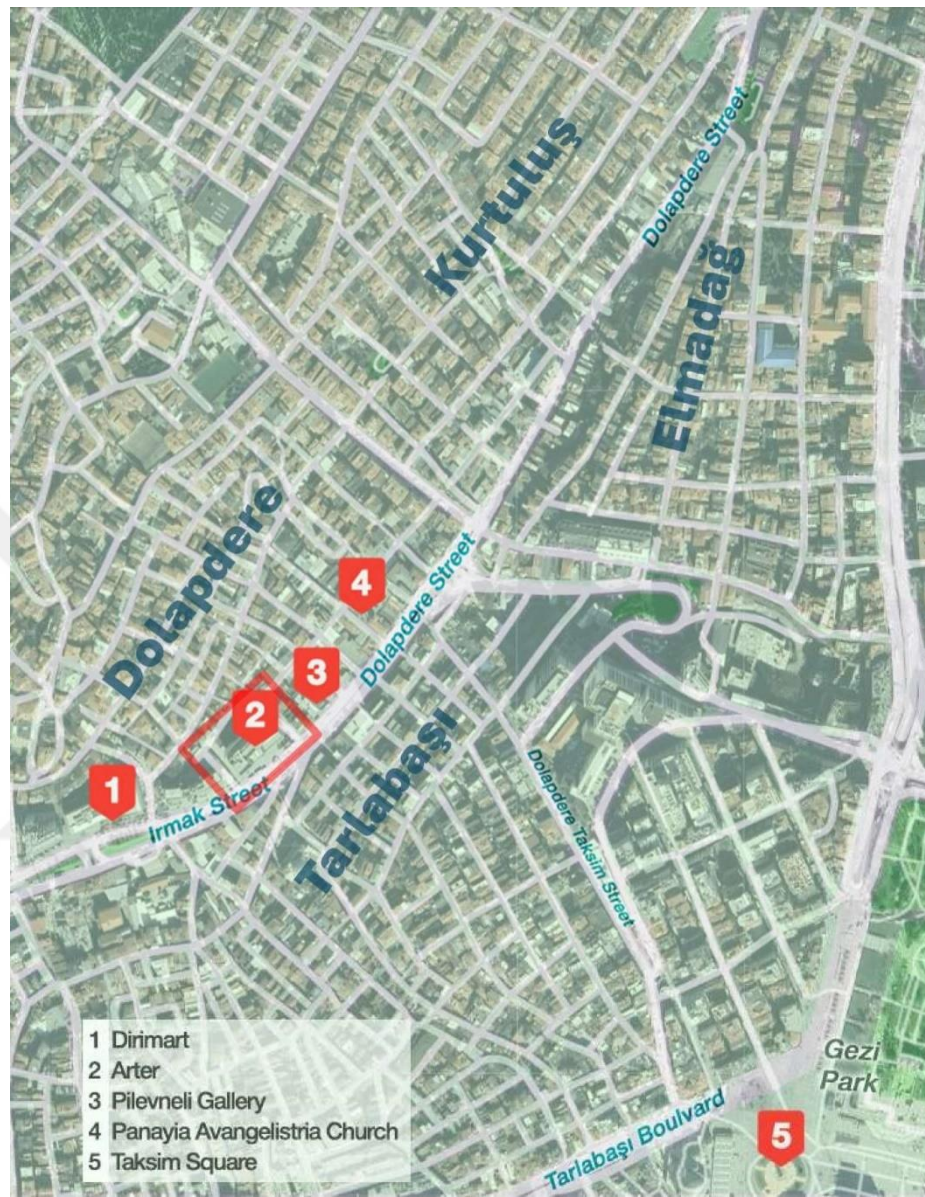
The architectural texture of the region is previously characterised by monumental buildings, especially the Evangelistria Greek Orthodox Church, and modest two-three-story residential texture; however, the great fire of 1929 destroyed most of the traditional wooden houses in the region, and they were replaced by new structures built with a more mixed structural system (Aşık & Ahunbay, 2017).

With the migration movements and political changes experienced in the post-Republican period, the socio-demographic structure of the district has transformed significantly; today, it has evolved into a heterogeneous population structure consisting of low-income groups and immigrant communities, and most of the buildings have become old and abandoned (Ergün, 2022). According to Selin Ergün's research, inadequate infrastructure, irregular construction, and abandoned areas lead to increased insecurity in the region, especially in the evening.

In addition to these general socio-spatial characteristics, the micro-geography of Dolapdere also reveals significant patterns that reinforce its socio-economic conditions. One of the main streets shaping the district's daily life and physical environment is Dolapdere Street, which slopes down and connects with Irmak Street right before reaching the Arter building (Figure 4.2).

This street also hosts factories, car mechanics, construction material stores, and many other industrial shops. The street is unsuitable for pedestrian use, either due to the operational needs of the businesses or poor urban planning. Sidewalks are either non-existent or occupied by these businesses (they are used for purposes such as unloading and loading, parking for car repair shops, or even repairing cars). Even though Dolapdere is a heavily industrialised, thickly settled, underprivileged neighbourhood, it is considerably close to the highly crowded and tourist area, Taksim, Beyoğlu.

Figure 4.2 *Dolapdere Taksim Region Map*



These spatial and functional features of Dolapdere Street also influence the character of the surrounding public spaces and local activities, including the Dolapdere flea market¹⁵, an important part of the cultural identity of the district, which is a unique example of a space that reflects the region's economic and social dynamics. It is described

¹⁵ A flea market, which also locally known as “hırsız pazarı” (thieves bazaar) set up the street continuation of the Arter’s backyards open on to, where second-hand and/or cheap products are usually sold

as a place where products collected from Istanbul's waste are sold, as mentioned by a vendor in the *Birgün* newspaper (Subaşı, 2016). As Fırat and Karacebe (2023) stated, this marketplace serves both as a source of income for socioeconomically vulnerable groups and as a mirror of spatial inequalities in Istanbul. However, Dolapdere Flea Market has also been directly affected by the region's pressures of urban transformation and gentrification. During the construction process of cultural institutions such as Arter, the stalls in the market were frequently interrupted, and it became unclear on which days they could or could not be set up (Arıcan, 2020).

Cultural investments that started in Dolapdere, especially since the 2010s, have partially begun to change the region's face. With the opening of culture and art venues such as Arter, Pilevneli Dolapdere, Dirimart and Gaia, the district has become a new focal point on the art map of Istanbul. However, rather than directly improving local people's lives, this process has heralded a new wave of gentrification due to rising property prices and living costs (Ergün, 2022).

While cultural investments and spatial improvement discourses shape the future of Dolapdere, it is also faced with the threat of marginalisation of the traditional social fabric and daily life practices. This dual structure shows that the spatial transformation of the district is not only an increase in economic value, but also a process that deepens social injustices (Ergün, 2022).

As a result, Dolapdere's historical layers, architectural heritage and urban transformation processes continue to shape the multidimensional identity of the district. The tension between the traditional building texture and new cultural investments will be an important indicator of what kind of identity Dolapdere will evolve into in the future.

4.1.2 Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture

Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (IMPS)¹⁶ is the first art museum in Türkiye, established in 1937 through a civilian artist initiative and affiliated with the Academy of Fine Arts (Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University) (Köksal, 2021). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye, allocated the Crown Prince's office in Dolmabahçe Palace as the museum's initial location (About the Museum | IRHM, n.d.). The museum resided here till 2011, and then collections were relocated to Warehouse No.5. Prior to its relocation to Tophane, the museum experienced multiple closures and reopenings¹⁷, totalling approximately 31 years of intermittent accessibility to the public. With the initiative of Mimar Sinan University, the warehouse in Tophane was allocated to the university for the museum in 2012 by the decision of the High Council of Privatisation (Arkitera.com, 2022). In December 2021, IMPS opened its doors to the public with the new building designed by Emre Arolat Architecture¹⁸.

In the founding document signed by Saffet Arıkan, the Minister of Culture, IMPS was established with the mandate "to provide an exhibition and artistic training opportunity for the art and craftsmen of our country... (IMPS) is obliged to collect all these assets and show the true existence of our country in the field of art in the best way

¹⁶ In Turkish; Istanbul Resim ve Heykel Müzesi.

¹⁷ The museum's history has been marked by several closures and re-openings. It initially closed in 1939 due to World War II and remained shut for 12 years until reopening in 1951. In 1976, it closed again due to fire hazard concerns but reopened in 1981 after a five-year closure. It closed once more in 2007 for a comprehensive restoration. During this period, the last exhibition in Dolmabahçe Palace took place in 2009 while the restoration work was ongoing, with the museum briefly opening for this event. Following a temporary exhibition at Tophane, Warehouse No.5, the museum finally reopened in its new location at the end of 2021 (About the Museum | IRHM, n.d.).

¹⁸ The semi-permeable layer above the mechanical systems on the roof, initially included in the original project, could not be completed due to a lack of financing (Arkitera.com, 2022). At the request of the new rector, Handan İnci, the Sculpture Restoration Workshop and the library on the fourth floor, which were not part of the initial plan, were added to the project. The library is not directly accessible to the public; it operates on an appointment system (İnci, 2024).

possible" (Köksal, 2021, p. 100). Here, Arıkan outlines the core principles of IMPS: collection, exhibition, and education for the Turkish public. However, the significance of the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (IMPS) transcends its status as Türkiye's inaugural institution; as Handan İnci, the current rector of Mimar Sinan University, expresses, IMPS embodies *the artistic memory of the nation* (Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2021; Demirören Haber Ajansı, 2021). Its extensive collection of over 12,000 works dating back to the 19th century serves as a repository of not only Türkiye's *artistic heritage* but also its broader *historical narrative* (Köksal, 2022). While discussing the museum's struggle for existence over the years, Ayşe Köksal (2021, p. 294) says that history has a counterpart in the present. "It is history that defines what contemporary is, gives meaning to the period we live in, and reminds us of the existence of the ancient in the face of the volatility of the moment. Therefore, history draws the boundaries of how the present will be perceived and developed..." In relation to this importance, Vasıf Kortun¹⁹, who provided consultancy for a short period during the opening of the Museum, describes the potential of IMPS as "having an inventory and history that makes it possible to delve into modern times more deeply than other institutions." (Erciyes, 2019).

4.1.2.1 Architecture

Emre Arolat, the architect behind the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture's (IMPS) transformation, emphasised the significance of the building by saying, "By being

¹⁹ Vasıf Kortun is a curator and writer working on contemporary art, art institutions and exhibition practices. He consulted the museum for approximately six months. Handan İnci explained his leaving as 'During this process (establishment of the museum), I had a very valuable advisor... We worked with Vasıf Kortun, and I really benefited from him for a while... but Vasıf Kortun's concept of a private museum and the state museum structure here were not compatible with each other. Therefore, when I could not make progress on some issues because I could not provide this flexibility unintentionally, the process ended and we parted ways.' (Demirören Haber Ajansı, 2021).

Sedad Hakkı Eldem building, by being an important interpretation of Traditional Anatolian Architecture's carcass, by being a 3-dimensional concrete grid, those buildings were a significant part of the urban memory. Indeed, their existence has been very powerful in the urban memory since the '50s." (Akbank Sanat, 2016). Additionally, Arolat recounted that they agreed on saving the *urban memory* with the University's then Rector Yalçın Karayağız, who initiated the new building's construction project. Despite suggestions from then Minister Mehmet Şimşek and privatisation board chairman Ahmet Aksu to demolish and rebuild the structure due to the onset of the Galataport process, Karayağız stated that he devotedly opposed this idea. He added that he defended the preservation of the building to all authorities, aligning himself with Arolat's stance (Arkitera.com, 2022).

Arolat characterises the project as an "adaptive reuse" project (TRT 2, 2022). Warehouse No. 5 underwent a comprehensive overhaul, with all its floors and walls stripped away to create (or leave only) a three-dimensional gridal load-bearing structure. Within this gridal framework, container galleries of varying sizes and heights were installed (hung) as exhibition spaces, paying homage to Tophane's maritime heritage (Müzecilik Meslek Kuruluşu Derneği, 2022; Arkitera.com, 2022; EAA, n.d.; Yuksel, n.d.). An additional feature of the renovation was the incorporation of a transparent glass facade, seamlessly integrated to preserve the visibility of the layers of history while creating a dynamic interplay between old (the old building's stripped structure) and new elements. This interplay is a detail that Arolat emphasised as crucial on many occasions (Arkitera.com, 2022; TRT 2, 2022). Arolat indicates that cities are enriched by the coming together of different layers. The superimposition of the richness of different cultural layers, the colourful life experiences of different social classes, and the layers that

structures have formed over time creates the aforementioned richness, according to him (RIBA Architecture, 2019). Furthermore, the extension building along the roadside, formerly occupied by the Coast Guard General Directorate, was demolished and meticulously reconstructed to match the original facade (Arkitera.com, 2022). Moreover, Arolat underlined that this building also had a place in the city's memory of Istanbulites and it was rebuilt with a similar sense of memory, such as a three-dimensional grid; they create the area's identity as an industrial and harbour region (EAA, n.d.).

IMPS's reconstructed facade (the Coast Guard General Directorate building) overlooks the Meclis-i Mebusan Street, which passes in front of the Galataport complex (Figure 4.3). The street connects Tophane to Karaköy and Beşiktaş neighbourhoods, forming one of the main arteries of Istanbul. The wide street has heavy traffic, with four lanes of cars and two lanes of trams. By leaving space for visitors to spend time in front of the building, it retreats and distances itself from the street crowds, allowing visitors and passers-by to sit on the street furniture and watch the facade of Sedat Hakkı Eldem as well as the sculptures exhibited here. There is no such retreat area between any Galataport building and the street. The Nusretiye Mosque and the Istanbul Modern behind it come into perspective when standing in this frontal area. The spacious frontal area and lay-by for public buses allow tour buses to pick up and drop off tourists here. It becomes an initial location for the tourists to start their journey in Galataport.

In front of the building, visitors face the grey-blue glass mosaic tiled facade that is nearly identical to the Eldem's original facade. The colour grey monopolises all the facades of the building during the daytime, but this situation changes at night. The double-facade containers, which stick out of the grid, change their colours to red, creating a colourful, eye-catching focal point for the Galataport. The red lights added under the

containers' perforated wall illuminate these areas and create contrast with the building's grey tones.

Figure 4.3 *IMPS Street Side View*



The building consists of 5 levels above ground, including the entrance floor. There is a Painting Workshop, Sculpture Workshop, Cafe, Conference Hall and employee offices on the ground floor. While restoration professionals restore the art pieces in the workshops, their transparent facades allow visitors to engage visually with the ongoing process. On the upper three floors, exhibition containers progress chronologically. Some of these containers are directly connected, while others operate as individual sections. They are placed in a three-dimensional grid at different lengths and sizes to capture dynamism in both the interior and the facade. Finally, the 4th floor consists of a multipurpose hall and a library, which operates by appointment.

When visitors enter the museum from the reconstructed old office building, they step into the atrium, a welcoming area, a gallery space as high as the height of the entire building (Figure 4.4). According to the architect Arolat, they left this prolonged building as an ample empty gallery space to add vertical circulation and fix the issue of the level

difference between the warehouse and the office building (Akbank Sanat, 2016). Standing and looking up in this vast space, visitors see the enormous griddle structure and observation terraces/balconies extending from the grid. The main vertical circulation (elevators and stairs) is located on the gallery space's left side. Initially, visitors to the museum are welcomed by the cloakroom and the museum ticket desk. The small diagonal museum store is located on the right side of the space and offers IMPS collection-inspired souvenirs and art publications. Main exhibitions start from the 1st floor; in order to reach there, visitors pass through the turnstiles on the ground level and reach the main vertical circulation area. As visitors circulate between levels, they proceed adjacent to the facade, rising in the building with the changing view of the Meclis-i Mebusan Street on one side, and the 3d gridal structure on the other side.

Figure 4.4 *Entrance Atrium*



The grid and (partially) containers are enclosed within a glass facade (Figure 4.5), designed to allow observers to perceive the new layers integrated into the old structure through transparency (Arkitera.com, 2022; TRT 2, 2022). According to the architect, the containers are intended to create “natural areas”, a “sterile environment” and foster “a pure relationship between the viewer and the art,” “unalloyed relationships with works” while circulation zones aim to establish “a connection with the city” via unexpected perspectives (Arkitera.com, 2022; Yüksel, n.d.; TRT 2, 2022; EAA, n.d.; About the Museum | IRHM, n.d.). The architect emphatically mentioned that *forming a dialogue with the physical environment* is foremost important so that visitors won’t be disconnected with the context (Akbank Sanat, 2016).

Figure 4.5 *View from the Tophane Square*



Visitors' perspectives continually shift as they navigate in and out of the irregularly hung exhibition spaces within the gridded structure, revealing transparent

sections overlooking Meclis-i Mebusan Street, Clock Tower Square (shared with Istanbul Modern), and neighbouring office buildings (Figure 4.5). However, some openings between the containers result in unusable spaces with less meaningful views, such as empty walls or neighbouring offices. Nevertheless, several circulation spaces and observation balconies strategically display sculptures. This curation aimed to invite visitors towards the works, uses unfrequented spaces, and allows them to see the view of the Galataport, when it's meaningful. For example, observation balconies entice visitors to explore circulation areas while enjoying views of the front facade and the street.

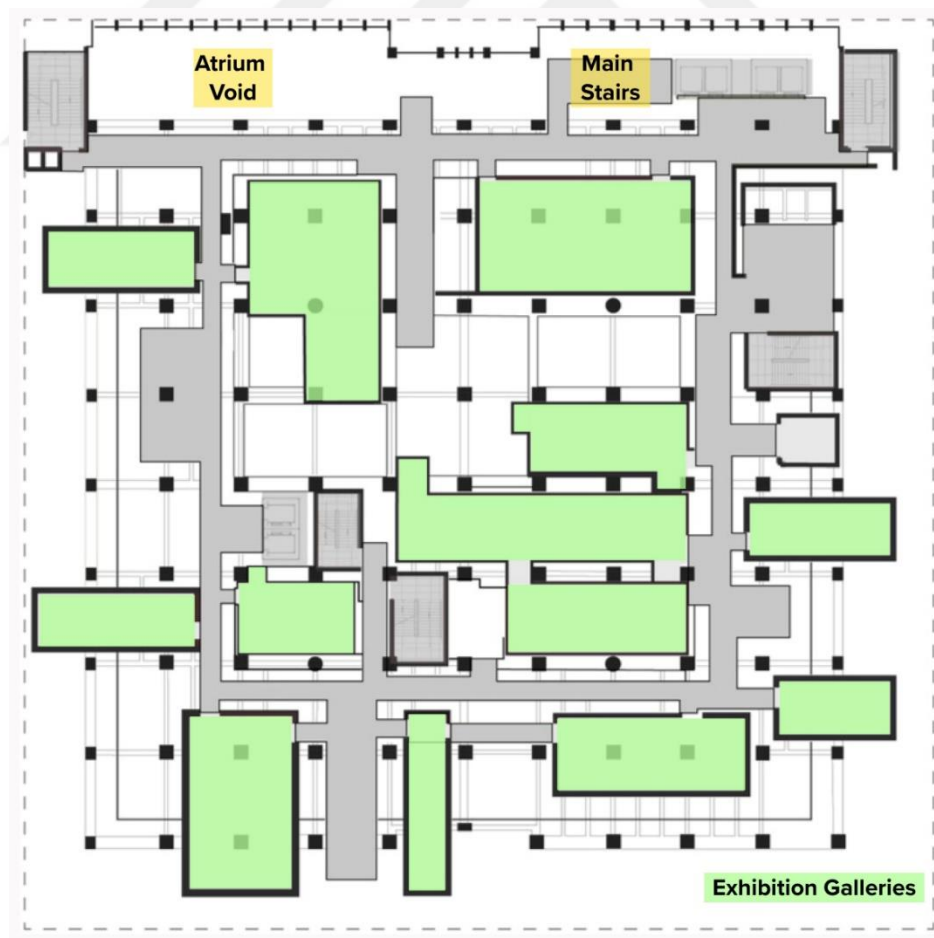
The exhibition galleries are numbered sequentially from 101-102...201-202, facilitating a chronological browsing experience for visitors. However, recognising the potential for confusion in the fragmented gallery layout, directional arrows were placed on the floor. These arrows try to guide visitors through areas where navigation might otherwise be challenging, helping them maintain spatial orientation and anticipate their museum journey more effectively, which feels disorienting from time to time.

Due to the natural needs of the art exhibiting, galleries are illuminated with brighter and whiter light. Nevertheless, the circulation zones are left dim with warmer lighting. The change in light temperature and intensity further increases the feeling of leaving the exhibition spaces. Arolat indicates that it keeps visitors dynamic (Akbank Sanat, 2016). The visitor constantly moves from darkness to light, from light to darkness, forcing them to try to adapt to their new environment. These effects become less noticeable when visitors move to the upper floors because of the natural light from the skylight. These light intensity changes also move one's gaze to the views offered by the openings; the darkness frames the view and lets visitors move towards it. However,

because of the darkness and the contrast, this feature does not help with reading the room numbers or the arrows on the floor and supports the disorienting feeling.

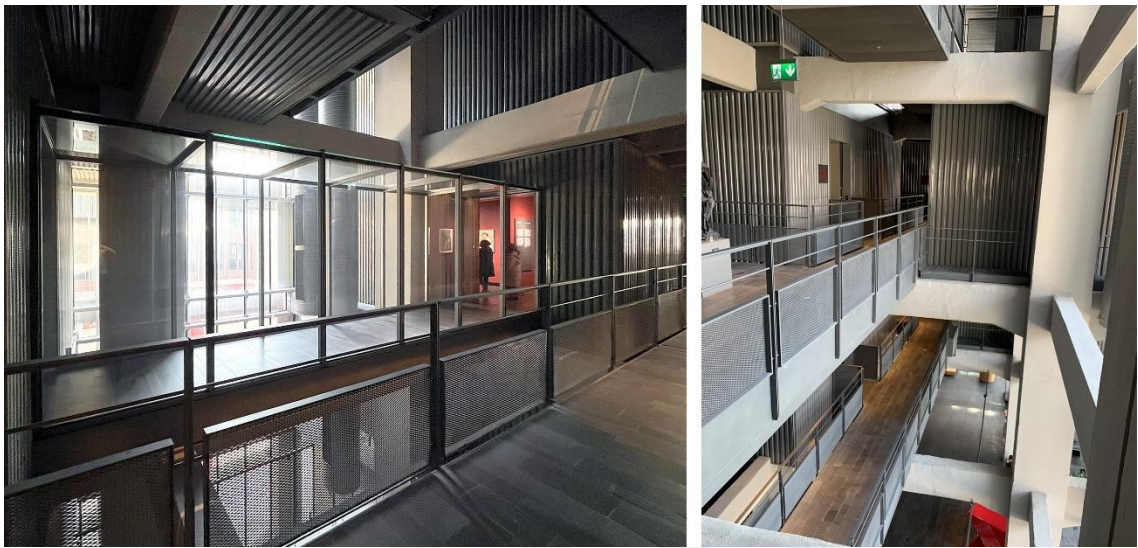
Walkways, serving as horizontal circulation bridges, connect the exhibition spaces and facilitate vertical communication with the areas outside of the container/galleries (Figure 4.6 & 4.7). This design choice encourages visitors to perceive the grid structure independently of the walls. The building functions as a single interconnected volume, meaning the gallery spaces become deeper as visitors ascend to the upper floors. However, this extensively connected space can lead to noise issues, particularly in galleries adjacent to the café during peak crowd times.

Figure 4.6 *IMPS's Second-Floor Plan*



Note. Manipulated by the author (Pintos, 2022).

Figure 4.7 *Circulation Zones*



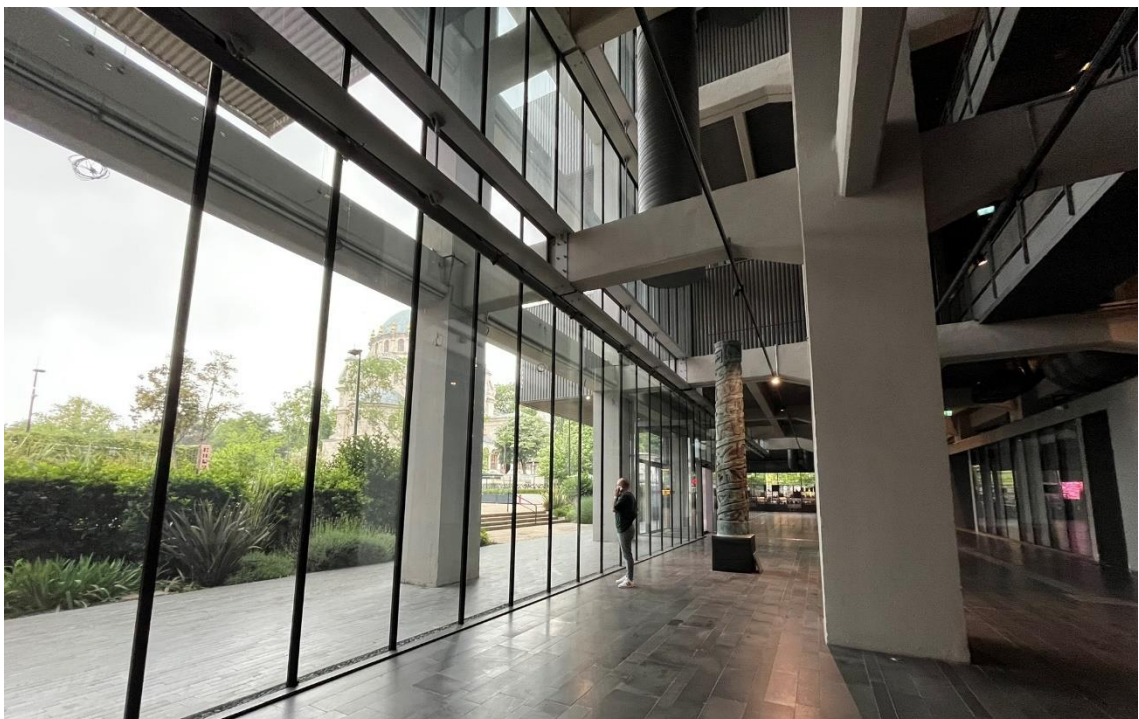
Several larger exhibition spaces exhibit vertical visual communication with one another, making the grid structure in these areas particularly evident (Figure 4.8). Notably, the sculpture gallery engages in visual dialogue with three other galleries, allowing it to be observed from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, there are exhibition spaces where the structural framework penetrates the containers. In these areas, columns are often centrally located, creating challenges for curatorial practices.

Figure 4.8 *Multi-Levelled Galleries*



Emre Arolat asserts that maximising permeability and transitivity is the foremost mission of contemporary architects (Akbank Sanat, 2016). This approach is particularly evident on the ground floor of the building. The transparency here, along with the back facade facing Galataport's interior, aims to "increase public areas and reduce restricted spaces" (Akbank Sanat, 2016). The interior functions retreat towards the middle of the structure to create an atrium for circulation, linking the front and back entrances. It creates an interior facade that houses the workshops, information office, ticket office, museum professionals' offices, and the café. The transparent outer facade enables these areas to interact with the outside environment (Figure 4.9). Emptying the narrow, long-plan old office building as a large gallery space, making the floors on the upper levels permeable by turning them into circulation bridges, all aimed to heighten this interaction (Yüksel, n.d.). As visitors walk through this promenade/atrium, they can see the upper circulation and container galleries above them, as well as the Clock Tower Square outside.

Figure 4.9 *Ground Floor*



The ground floor is designated for public use and can be accessed without the purchase of a ticket. Due to the museum's strategic location, visitors can enter the building through the Meclis-i Mebusan entrance after passing through security, traverse the ground floor promenade, gaze into the restoration workshops, reach the coffee shop, and exit to Galataport. This interior promenade features a small, diagonally designed museum shop offering reproductions of artworks, souvenirs, and books. The shop's open design, comprising only shelves and low-height displays, preserves the overall sense of transparency in this section (Figure 4.10).

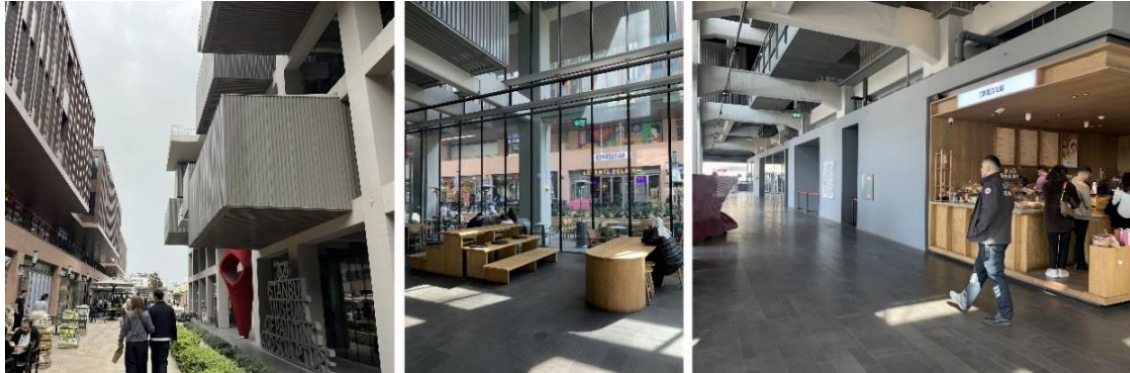
Figure 4.10 *The Top View of the Museum Shop*



The transparent facade of the museum cafe overlooks the interior of Galataport, where various cafes and restaurants are located (Figure 4.11). This design makes the cafe feel more like a part of Galataport than a part of the museum. Visitors can easily enter the cafe from Galataport, just as they would with any other cafe in the area. Adjacent to the cafe are offices with facades designed to be again permeable, ensuring they are integrated with the surrounding area. These offices include curatorial rooms, the museum director's

office, and a conference hall. This positioning adopts a more unifying and approachable attitude by bringing together museum managers and visitors.

Figure 4.11 *Café Entrance, Café's Seating Area, Café and the Ground Floor Circulation Zone (Left to Right)*



4.1.2.2 Who Talks About the Museum?

Since it is a museum affiliated with a university, which is a state institution, it is seen that the rector undertakes the promotion of the museum on behalf of the museum. Although the construction of the museum started during the term of the previous rector, as a natural consequence of being a state institution, when the rector changes, the person who undertakes the task of promoting the museum also changes. Since the museum is an institution affiliated with the university, it can be thought that it does not aim to promote or market itself like a company; however, there are various values that the museum should represent, and the institution fulfils this representation task. In addition, apart from a joint meeting with the former rector who initiated the construction of the museum, the architect also has various statements on museum architecture independently of the current rector. It is also observed that the architect aims to introduce his design to the public and make it visible by promoting it with interviews. In an interview with the former rector, he states that he is a graduate of Mimar Sinan University and that the area where the museum is

located was given to them as a project subject when he was a student. Therefore, he is familiar with this area due to his university background and research during his student years and has developed a personal bond with it during his student years. In addition, the ministry-appointed museum director, though limited, also contributed to the museum's discourse. It was observed that Vasıf Kortun, who worked as a consultant to the museum for a short period, made various statements about the museum until his resignation.

Table 4.1 *IMPS Institutional Discourse*

IMPS	
Patronship	State / University
Main Narrative	Being Türkiye's art memory
	The most important collection of Türkiye
	Protect Türkiye's art
	Being an example of a big urban transformation
Design Idea & Starting Point	Safeguarding urban memory
	Inspiration of storage mechanisms (entrepots)
	Adaptive reuse
	3D grid
City - Location	Creating a break between galleries and circulation
	Creating a relationship with the city
	Showing the area's identity
	Centre of the city
Transparency	Permeable ground floor
	Transparency - bond with the surroundings
Visitor	Meeting point
	Social permeability
(Inter)nationality	Bringing national cultural heritage to a broader audience
Safety Concerns	Protect the collection
	Structural reinforcement

4.1.3 *Istanbul Modern*

When visitors approach Galataport from the direction of Karaköy, they pass through the Kılıç Ali Paşa Hamamı and the Kılıç Ali Paşa Mosque, leaving Tophane-i Amire²⁰ behind them. Subsequently, they proceed alongside the Tophane Fountain before reaching one of the many entrances of the Galataport. After passing through security, visitors enter Tophane Square, now part of the security-restricted zone of Galataport. Tophane Square, also referred to as Galataport Clock Tower Square, is bordered by Nusretiye Mosque, Tophane Pavilion, and Tophane Fountain along Meclis-i Mebusan Street. To the northeast of the square lies the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum, while Istanbul Modern is located along the seaside. From this direction, visitors are greeted by a grandiose view that encompasses both history and, partially, the Bosphorus.

The museum's journey started in 1987 when Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı²¹ wished to establish a permanent modern art museum in Istanbul after the success of the 1st International Contemporary Art Exhibitions (later known as the Istanbul Biennial) (Istanbul Modern, n.d.-b). According to Bülent Eczacıbaşı²², the business world has a duty to contribute to societal development. His vision, combined (or possibly derived) with Dr Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı's personal interest in culture and art and his belief that

²⁰ The cannon foundry established by Sultan Mehmet II is the place where the military cannons used by the Ottoman army and navy were produced. It was transferred to Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 1992. Today, it is used as Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Tophane-i Amire Culture and Art Centre.

²¹ The founder of the Eczacıbaşı Group, Nejat Eczacıbaşı is the father-in-law of Oya Eczacıbaşı (the Chair of Board of the Istanbul Modern). Nejat Eczacıbaşı is also the founder of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSV). İKSV is a non-profit organisation that has supported arts and culture in Istanbul since 1973. It organises major festivals like the Istanbul Music, Film, Theatre, and Jazz Festivals, as well as the Istanbul Biennial. The foundation supports contemporary arts with various awards and residency programs (Istanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2022).

Eczacıbaşı Group is directly linked to the Eczacıbaşı family, one of the richest families in Türkiye. According to the Economist magazine in December 2023, the Eczacıbaşı family is ranked as the sixth richest in Türkiye (Yılmaz, 2023). Eczacıbaşı group is involved in many areas including health, construction and consumer products.

²² The chairman of the board at Eczacıbaşı Holding and husband of Oya Eczacıbaşı.

stronger ties were needed between people and art to promote social development, explains the foundation of the museum (Eczacıbaşı, 2024). According to the Eczacıbaşı Group's magazine *Yaşam/Life*, since 1942 (82 years), along with founding "Istanbul Modern, Türkiye's first modern and contemporary art and today one of the world's leading culture and art institution" they have been following Nejat Eczacıbaşı's vision (ibid). This vision began to materialise in 2003. The museum project started with the conversion of Warehouse No. 4 in Karaköy, which was initially built as a dry cargo warehouse (Istanbul Modern, n.d.-b). The building was adapted into a modern museum by Tabanlıoğlu Architects²³ and opened its doors on 11 December 2004. Istanbul Modern operated in this location for 14 years before moving to a temporary venue in Beyoğlu during the construction of its new building. The new five-story museum, designed by Renzo Piano, was completed in 2022 and reopened to the public on 4 May 2023 at its original site in Karaköy. The Eczacıbaşı group strengthens its national and international positions through art by implementing the successful formula of creating a relationship between art and corporatisation on a global scale (Köksal, 2011). This commitment is further demonstrated by the Group's role as a founding sponsor of the new building, supported by other sponsors, the Doğu Group and Bilgili Holding (Harris, 2023).

Oya Eczacıbaşı, the Chair of Istanbul Modern, explained that the decision to involve Renzo Piano in designing the new museum building was driven by the need for a world-class venue that would elevate Istanbul Modern to the level of leading modern art museums globally (Eczacıbaşı, 2024). The redevelopment of the port area where Istanbul Modern is located provided an opportunity to realise this vision. According to

²³ An architectural office established in Istanbul that has produced dozens of well-known projects in Türkiye.

Eczacıbaşı, during their first meeting in 2014, Renzo Piano who is “recognised as the world’s most accomplished museum architect”, embraced the museum's dream of creating a building that would not only attract international attention but also reflect the unique beauty of Istanbul (ibid). Eczacıbaşı explains the choice of architect as follows:

Our unanimous decision to work with Renzo Piano reflected not only his expertise in museum architecture and unique breadth of experience but also the success of the spaces he has created every museum and art institution bearing his signature has become a landmark of their home city... In buildings designed by Piano, spatial design is in perfect harmony with the works of art on display. This approach, I believe, is one of the most important reasons why visitors wish to enter a museum of modern and contemporary art. (Piano et al., 2021)

Oya Eczacıbaşı also stated that the reason for choosing Piano was that the building, which would be “located across from the Topkapı Palace,” could not have an “extravagant” architecture and needed to be a building that would highlight the art works within and would not compete with the historical peninsula (Oksijen Tv, 2024). She stated that the architect they chose by looking at museums such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Beyeler Foundation, and the Centre Georges Pompidou had created “buildings that highlight the artwork within” and that, as they wanted, he had created “a visitor-focused and artist-focused structure that holds itself back but yet very stylish.”

It is unsurprising that the directors of Istanbul Modern selected Renzo Piano, given the museum’s close relationship with the Centre Georges Pompidou, which dates back to 2007. This partnership began with an educational programme series titled ‘Genç Istanbul Modern’ (Young Istanbul Modern). The Centre Georges Pompidou, a globally renowned museum, has revolutionised museum design and operations since it was

constructed by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano. Building on this foundation, Levent Çalıkoğlu, who served as the museum's general director from 2012 to 2023, emphasised that they adopted the educational approaches of the Pompidou Centre that deviate from traditional models. This model aims to bring together individuals from various disciplines and artists to educate kids and young people.

4.1.3.1 Architecture

The Istanbul Modern Museum is elevated 65 cm above the square level with a series of steps (Figure 4.12). Renzo Piano (XXI, 2023) explains that this architectural choice was made to establish a connection between the square and the Bosphorus. The elevation brings the transparent ground floor to eye level, allowing viewers to comfortably observe both the museum's interior and the surrounding views (Piano et al., 2021). Ümit Mesci, curator at Istanbul Modern, further elaborated that maintaining this transparency at the ground level was the core concept of the building (Belcher, 2023). This approach aimed to create a seamless connection between the museum, the adjacent sea, and the park while integrating the historical architecture of the 16th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The transparent ground floor is also intended to offer unrestricted access to public spaces, including the library, café, and educational areas.

Figure 4.12 *Istanbul Modern and Topkapı Square*



Oya Eczacıbaşı highlighted that prioritising the institution's foundational mission in the new building led to allocating more space for educational initiatives, aligning with their goal of fostering artistic experiences and engagement for audiences of all ages. Additionally, the architect highlighted that the ground floor is designed as a space where people can meet and share common values, reinforcing the museum's commitment to public accessibility. This emphasis on accessibility becomes even more important considering that this area has been closed to the public for many years. Now, it offers a unique vantage point with views of the Anatolian side, the Princes' Islands, and the Historical Peninsula (Figure 4.13) (Istanbul Modern, n.d.-c).

Figure 4.13 *Istanbul Modern and Historical Peninsula View*



Oya Eczacıbaşı describes their objectives as part of the implementation of contemporary museology approaches and transformations (Piano et al., 2021). Bülent Eczacıbaşı echoes this sentiment, emphasising museums have now evolved beyond mere exhibition spaces to become dynamic environments as “centres for living” (Eczacıbaşı, 2024). According to the Chair of the Board Oya Eczacıbaşı, the museum established this

goal, with the public embracing both the museum and its auxiliary spaces as "a living space" (Piano et al., 2021).

Unlike the previous museum structure, which was housed within an opaque, windowless structure, the new building raises the main volume, rendering the ground floor both transparent and permeable, thereby facilitating communication with the exterior (Piano et al., 2021). Architect indicates that this transparency is also integral to the security of the space, as the absence of hidden corners ensures that everything is visible and open, enhancing both safety and accessibility (ibid). The architectural landscape created by circular columns and mechanical funnels aimed to further enhance the brightness and safety of the environment by softening the transition between light and shadow (Istanbul Modern, n.d.-c).

The hybrid system of concrete-encased steel wide-flange columns and beams above ground, combined with a concrete basement, not only allows the aimed transparency on the ground floor but also provides durability to excessive seismic forces without the need for a massive building core that would endanger permeability (Piano et al., 2021). Türkiye is located in a very active earthquake zone. It is a fact underscored by the major earthquakes that occurred in the Marmara region in 1999 and the earthquakes that occurred just before the museum's opening in Syria, Kahramanmaraş and Hatay, which caused thousands of lives and property losses. As a result, the structural integrity of the building became a critical concern for the architectural team and Arup, who were responsible for its engineering. Piano described the challenge by stating: "We had to make a solid building that will be there for centuries." (Belcher, 2023), one that is safe, solid, bright and flying (Eczacıbaşı, 2023; Showcase, 2023).

The architect envisioned the building as one that would "defy gravity and rise from the ground" establishing a visual and physical relationship "through its transparency between the seascape on one side and the park and the Galata district" on the other, which dates back to the Middle Ages (Eczacıbaşı, 2023). Emanuela Baglietto, the project manager of the museum design, explained that in order to enhance the transparency they carved out the main volume at the lower levels and increased to double the height on the ground floor in order even to open up more to the city and become more inviting (Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2023). This design aimed not only to reinforce the museum's connection to its surrounding environment but also to integrate public spaces such as the library, information points, educational workshops, café, and store into the transparent ground floor, further enhancing the *accessibility and openness* of the museum (Eczacıbaşı, 2023). Piano elaborates by saying, "In a complex city like this, to make a silent place where you celebrate art in an open way, *not like a place of intimidation*. Where you make culture a place open to everybody." (Euronews Culture, 2023).

A glass fence encloses the museum's open spaces, separating them from the Galataport and the surrounding area. This wall is connected to the museum's security-controlled entrance. Architect Renzo Piano (Piano et al., 2021) describes this additional barrier as a protective measure against potential explosions and terrorist attacks in Istanbul. However, this precaution necessitates that visitors pass through an additional layer of security within Galataport before entering the museum. He explains the reason for this repeated emphasis on security as follows:

I have already said that I remember the first visit to the site perfectly. I remember it because a week later there was a terrorist attack at Atatürk Airport, on June 28, 2016. It caused 45 deaths and more than 200 injured. Put yourself into the shoes

of a client who, like Bülent and Oya (Eczacıbaşı), appreciates that the building is designed to generously invite in the population, that it is an open and accessible place of culture. All the same, it needs security. (Piano et al., 2021)

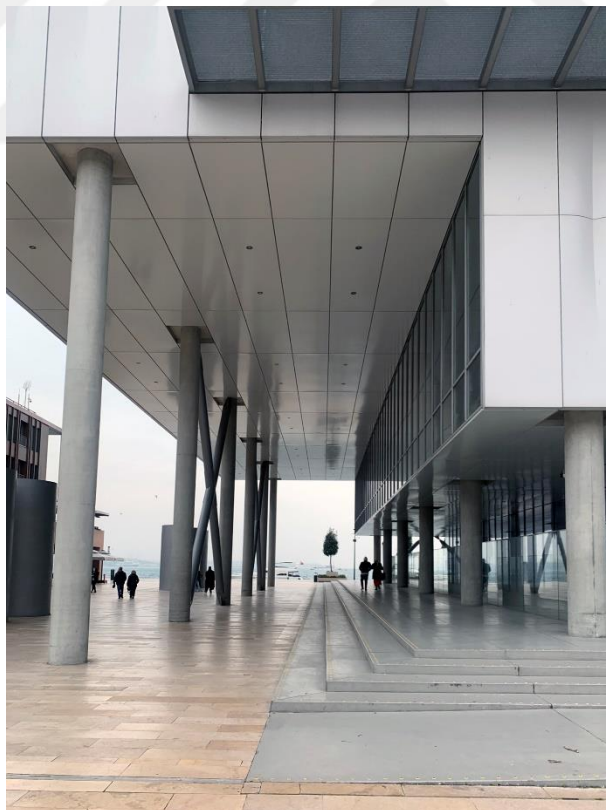
The facade is vertically divided into three parts: a transparent ground floor with visible large columns that carry the upper levels, a second level and a third level, which shields the top of the café's and workshop's outdoor area and the public area at the other side of the ground level. Piano explains the decision to create a structure that rises upwards with a transparent ground level, aiming to elevate itself from the ground and establish a connection with the Bosphorus, much like "a ship gliding along the Bosphorus" (Eczacıbaşı, 2023), or akin to "a flying vessel right on the water" (Vatican News - English, 2023). According to Piano, Istanbul is a city defined by its relationship with water, and this connection serves as the building's starting point (NTV Program, 2023).

While parts of the facade that connect with the environment are transparent, a significant portion is covered with three-dimensional metal modules. The architect described the facade as needing to be "rhythmic and metallic, like a fish leaping out of the water" (Piano et al., 2021). To achieve this dynamic effect, approximately 300 compressed concave and convex aluminium modules are integrated into the design, interacting with the changing light throughout the day and reflecting the Bosphorus (Piano et al., 2021; Emden & Yıldız, 2023; Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, 2023). Additionally, external galvanised steel staircases and walkways are integrated into the facade, serving purposes such as maintenance, fire escapes, and museum events. The choice of materials (steel, aluminium, etc.) and colours (metallic, light grey, etc.) was made to reflect the site's historical and contextual significance. It has a simple form,

creating an elegant but maintaining industrial concept (Piano et al., 2021; Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, 2023; Merlo, 2023).

Visitors walking from the Tophane Square side of the museum to the front facade can see the view of Istanbul through the large cross-braced columns, which support the third level and house ventilation shafts that emerge from the ground in groups of three (Figure 4.14). In this section, forming the museum's shorter facade, the museum staff's offices can be seen on the second floor, and below the offices, the museum shop and library can be seen through the glass facade.

Figure 4.14 *The Low Steps Surrounding the Museum, Cross-braced Columns Supporting the Third Floor and Ventilation Shafts Emerging from the Floor*



People often sit on the low steps surrounding the building, observing the surroundings and enjoying the view of the Bosphorus. However, the scene can change

dramatically due to cruise ships occasionally docking on the Bosphorus side of the museum. One day, visitors might enjoy one of the finest views of Istanbul, while the next, they may find themselves facing the facade of a massive cruise ship. During these times, a hydraulic road on the seaside is raised, creating a high wall between the museum, the cruise ship, and the Galataport (Figure 4.15). This situation affects Istanbul Modern, particularly the library, which features a fully transparent facade where visitors tend to spend extended periods.

Figure 4.15 *The Pedestrian Path in Front of the Museum: Normal and Raised States of the Dock*



The building also offers an entrance on the sea-facing facade. Adjacent to this entrance, a staircase leads to the Istanbul Modern's restaurant. This entrance allows the restaurant to operate independently after museum hours, ensuring that visitors to the restaurant do not need to pass through the museum. The entrance is accessed via metal stairs and walkways, similar to those on the Tophane Square facade.

As visitors continue along the low steps on the seaside, towards the western side of the museum, they find the café, workshops, and an outdoor event area to which both

these auxiliary spaces have direct access to. This outdoor space, sheltered by the third floor, provides a high and spacious environment, ideal for seating and displaying outdoor sculptures. From this vantage point, the museum overlooks the buildings adjacent to Galataport, blending the modern structure with its historical surroundings. Before completing the full tour of the museum's exterior and arriving at the Tophane facade entrance, visitors come across the Galataport's parking lot entrance, which does not attract attention from the museum entrance area. Istanbul Modern is directly located on top of this underground car park.

Renzo Piano acknowledged challenges such as parking beneath the building, large ships docking at the seafront, and the ramp that rises to form a wall for the ships. However, he regarded these obstacles as "providential aids" that allowed him to concentrate on other, more manageable issues. Piano also recognised the contradiction between the intended openness and security of the design. He noted that the team focused their efforts on addressing these tensions and harmonising the structure with its environment (Piano et al., 2021).

The enclosed ground floor includes security entrances and ticket desks positioned on both the square and seaside, along with a museum shop and library on the west, and a museum café and two workshop spaces (Eco Art Lab and Discovery Space) on the east side. Centrally located between the ticket desks, the staircase dominates the midsection of the entrance hall.

The relatively small library's entrance area is also dedicated to exhibition space, featuring a display titled 'Spirit of Time,' which delves into the museum's design process, its architecture, and the work of Renzo Piano's office. The library's facades are entirely transparent, creating a unique workspace that offers an immersive and uninterrupted view

of the sea and the Bosphorus, particularly when cruise ships are absent. Adjacent to the library is the museum shop, which shares a glass wall, though there is no direct passage between them. The museum shop not only offers Istanbul Modern's own merchandise and exhibition catalogues but also boasts a wide range of design products.

Designed to be accessible to the public at no cost, the auxiliary spaces on the ground floor aimed to encourage open interaction (Figure 4.16). After obtaining tickets, visitors are guided to the circulation area where elevators and stairs are situated. From here, they can descend to the basement level, designated as the mezzanine, where they may leave their belongings in the cloakroom. The mezzanine also accommodates a 156-seat auditorium (which doubles as a cinema), as well as restrooms and event rooms. The area at the base of the staircase serves as the foyer for the auditorium. However, when not utilised as a foyer, this space appears undefined in contrast to the more structured upper floors, with scattered mobile seating further contributing to this sense of ambiguity.

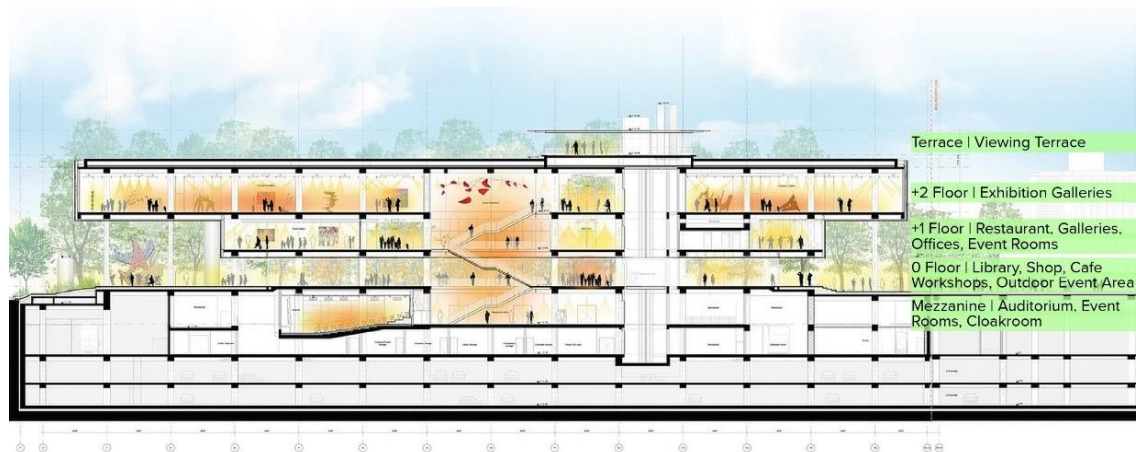
Figure 4.16 *Ground Floor Plan of Istanbul Modern*



Note. Manipulated by the author (Pintos, 2024).

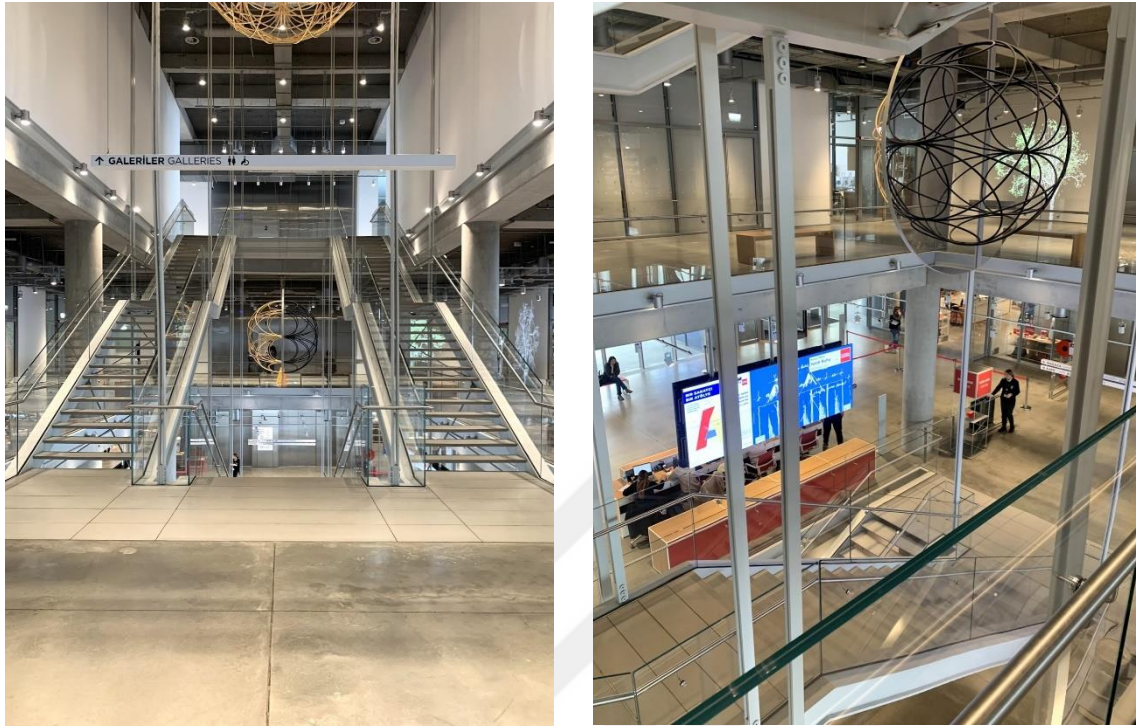
The staircase system in the middle of the museum serves as the focal point and has a three-stage configuration (Figure 4.17). First, a two-sleeved staircase connects the basement to the ground floor. Consequently, a single-sleeved staircase rises from the space between two arms, linking the ground floor to the first floor. Finally, on the first floor, a two-sleeved staircase extends upwards from both sides of this single arm. The stairwell itself makes the central part of the building, facilitating a visual connection with the lower floors. While it doesn't reveal the exhibition spaces, it allows visitors to observe the circulation throughout the building (Figure 4.18). Additionally, the clear glass railings and metal structure maintain the transparency theme of the ground floor while preserving the building's industrial character. This design diversifies circulation and becomes a visually interesting element. It also allows the artwork attached to the stairs to be viewed from different angles.

Figure 4.17 *Longitudinal Section of Istanbul Modern*



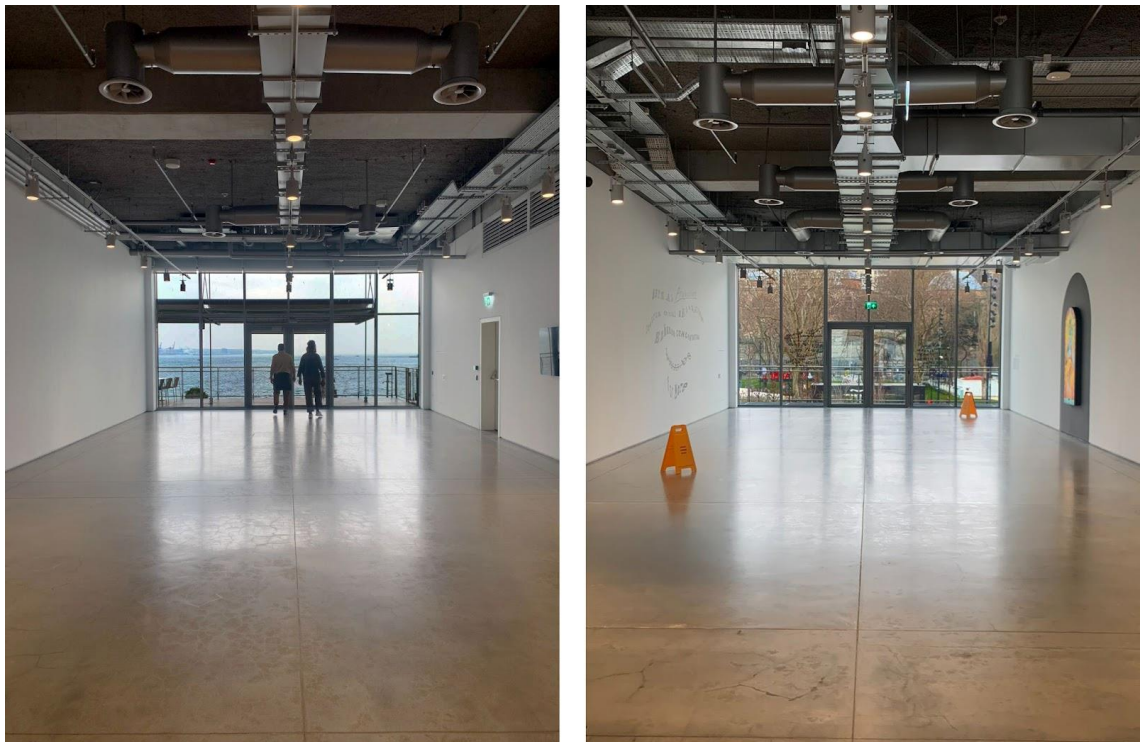
Note. Manipulated by the author (Pintos, 2024).

Figure 4.18 *Staircase Views from the First Floor*



Upon ascending the staircase from the ground floor to the first floor, visitors are greeted by two large doors leading to the photography gallery and the pop-up gallery. The landing lobby between the stairs and galleries features windows overlooking the square (also the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum) on one side and a viewing terrace facing the Bosphorus on the other, creating a space where two distinct landscapes converge (Figure 4.19). The museum’s website explains this dual view of “*park and water*”, a “*visual connection to the surroundings*” to help “*visitors orientate themselves through the building*” (Istanbul Modern, n.d.-c). This level also comprises event rooms, an education room, the STEAM studio, and staff offices. On the seaside of this floor, located on the south facade, is the Istanbul Modern restaurant, with a facade designed for transparency, allowing for an uninterrupted visual connection between the interior and the Bosphorus. The restaurant also makes use of a metal balcony structure attached to its facade, enhancing the integration of indoor and outdoor spaces.

Figure 4.19 *Views from Both Ends of the Landing Lobby*



The facades of the exhibition spaces on the first-floor feature full-length openings, creating a direct connection with the exterior environment. These openings can be covered with blackout curtains when video installations requiring darker conditions are exhibited. In addition to offering views of the sea and the square, the galleries on this side also overlook the outdoor event area, enabling sculptures displayed there to be observed from various angles.

The second floor, similar to the first, features landing lobbies with observation terraces offering views. These landing lobbies are occasionally utilised for exhibition purposes. Directly opposite the stairs is the Temporary Exhibition Gallery, while entrances to the Permanent Exhibition Gallery are located on either side of the staircase. The exhibition spaces have been designed to be wide and high, to accommodate various types and needs of art (Figure 4.20). The second-floor galleries, significantly larger than

those on the first floor, also incorporate facade openings that establish a connection with the exterior. These openings are rhythmically repeated at intervals across the facade.

Figure 4.20 *Exhibition Galleries*



The stairs leading to the Viewing Terrace are positioned adjacent to the interior facade of the Temporary Exhibition Gallery (Figure 4.21). The gallery's exits are located on either side of the landing lobby, and one of them is located right behind the viewing terrace stairs. These stairs, misaligned from the main circulation staircase, seem simple and unremarkable given that they lead to such a grand view. The viewing terrace occupies the museum's top floor and includes a 5-cm-deep Reflection Pool (Figure 4.22). Moreover, it features a terrace bar that has not yet been opened to the public.

The central area of the terrace is designed as a roof-covered viewing pavilion, while the remaining sections are occupied by water elements. The flooring and roof of the covered terrace are clad in materials of similar hues, creating a harmonious integration with the surrounding environment as architects intended (Piano et al., 2021; Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2023; Istanbul Modern, n.d.-c; Eczacıbaşı, 2023). The grey tones of this space, reflecting the colours of the surrounding area, achieve a seamless unity with

the Bosphorus. The Reflection Pool, extending this perspective, merges with the view, with its base material and the water mimicking the colour of the Bosphorus and reflecting the sky, making it appear as an extension of the Bosphorus itself. This creates a sense of infinity, where the reflection of the ceiling and the colour of the ground contribute to completing the scene. Additionally, the pool is frequented by hundreds of seagulls, native to Istanbul's waters, whose sounds add another dimension to the atmosphere.

Figure 4.21 *Stairs Leading to the Viewing Terrace*

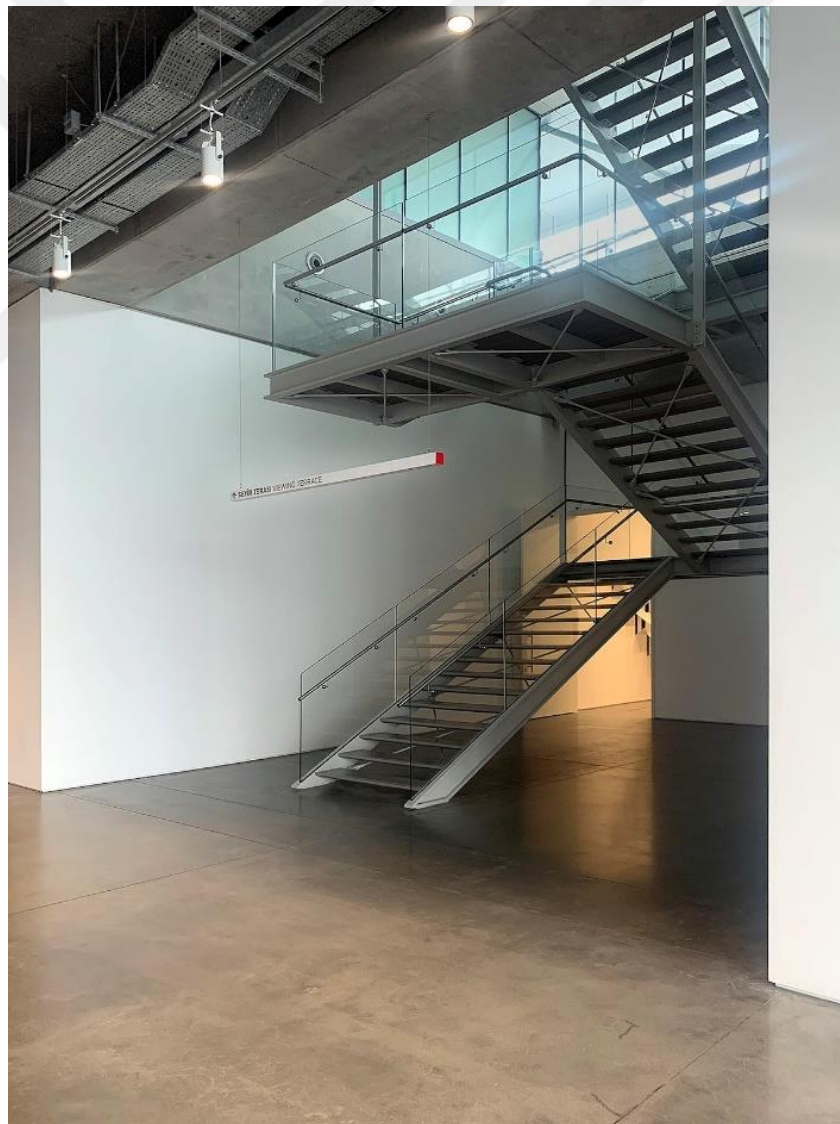


Figure 4.22 *Reflection Terrace of Istanbul Modern*



The view from this terrace feels like a liberated version of the framed vistas seen throughout the building. As visitors proceed along the terrace, they encounter small metal plaques that explain the structures visible in the landscape. The pavilion serves as an observatory with a bar where people encounter a panorama of Istanbul's most significant landmarks and views, including the Historic Peninsula, Galata Tower, Doğan Apartment, Crimea Memorial Church, Russian Consulate, and Cihangir Mosque, and so many others (Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2023).

4.1.3.2 Who Talks About the Museum?

The two main figures who convey the architecture and institutional discourse of Istanbul Modern to the public are architect Renzo Piano and Istanbul Modern Board of Directors Chair Oya Eczacıbaşı. The fact that Renzo Piano is brought to the forefront of

this discourse can be associated with the strategy of moving the museum to a more visible and respected position in the international arena. The museum aimed to position itself as a global art centre by taking advantage of Piano's global recognition for the iconic cultural structures he designed.

The statements of Renzo Piano and Oya Eczacıbaşı, especially in the press conference and promotional events held immediately after the museum's opening, received extensive coverage in the press; they were reported in detail in newspapers, magazines and Eczacıbaşı Holding's corporate publication *Yaşam/Life* magazine. Another important figure who contributed to the museum's architectural discourse is Emanuela Baglietto, who is responsible for the project and is one of the partners of the Renzo Piano Building Workshop. In addition, Eczacıbaşı Holding Chairman Bülent Eczacıbaşı and museum curators have also assumed specific roles within the architectural and institutional discourse.

Another element that strengthens the discourse on museum architecture is the comprehensive book published by the architectural office. This monograph, published by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, explains the museum's design process and spatial character in detail and includes Oya Eczacıbaşı's evaluation of the process. Similarly, the museum's publication "Constructing Architecture" and the book "Reflection of a Transformation" by Bülent Eczacıbaşı contribute to the museum discourse with rich visuals and architectural narratives. These publications highlight the museum's architectural, its relationship with Istanbul's urban fabric, and its social contribution.

Finally, it is observed that these discourses continue beyond printed publications through press conferences, national and international media interviews, and digital media. In particular, Renzo Piano's narratives frequently highlight the museum's integration

with the city, alongside the additional measures taken during the design and construction phases to address seismic risks and potential terrorist threats. These communications also underscore the museum's symbolic role as a peaceful space and as a representation of modern Türkiye on the global stage.

Table 4.2 *IMM Institutional Discourse*

IMM	
Patronship	Eczacıbaşı support
	Türkiye's first modern and contemporary art museum
Main Narrative	Duty to contribute to the development of society
	Popularise modern and contemporary art
	"Solid and flying" design
	Multiple planes
Design Idea & Starting Point	Elegant but industrial feel
	Resembling a ship sailing on the Bosphorus
	Simple form
	Bosphorus - using water and its reflectiveness
	Interaction with the urbanscape - sea & land
City - Location	A visual connection with the city
	Making the waterfront promenade accessible
	Creating a connection with the sea & the square
Transparency	Transparent ground floor
	Raised from the ground - hanging in the air – lightness
Visitor	A place where people meet
	Visitor-oriented
	Open and accessible
(Inter)nationality	International partnerships
	Piano: renowned museum architect / a world-class building
Safety Concerns	Security with brightness and transparency
	Earthquake and terrorism safety

4.1.4 Arter

Arter was established on İstiklal Street, Beyoğlu, in 2010 as an art exhibition space connected to the Vehbi Koç Foundation (referred to as "a space for art" in the museum's published book) (Baliç et al., 2021). The historical Meymaret Han²⁴ building, constructed in the 1910s, hosted Arter for nine years, from 2010 to 2019, in its 800-square-metre space, until its relocation to its current home in the Dolapdere neighbourhood. Meymaret Han, its former home, was purchased in 2003 at the request of Ömer Koç²⁵, either for the establishment of a research centre based on his historical photography collection or as a new location for the Vehbi Koç Foundation's other museum, the Sadberk Hanım Museum, which is now located in Sarıyer. Ultimately, the Foundation decided to house Arter there until its new building was completed. In 2013, Grimshaw Architects won the project competition opened by the Vehbi Koç Foundation to design Arter's new building, coinciding with the Foundation's 50th anniversary. The construction of the new building in Dolapdere began in 2015 and was completed in 2019. This interim period in İstiklal Street provided the team with a valuable testing ground, allowing them to refine their vision for the new space (ibid).

Vehbi Koç Foundation initially considered creating a campus museum complex together with Sadberk Hanım Museum²⁶ and locating them in the 'Tersane Masterplan' project in the Golden Horn region of Istanbul. The Foundation had to abandon this idea, leaving Sadberk Hanım Museum in the aforementioned project, and decided to seek a

²⁴ 'Han' means inn, hostelry in Turkish.

²⁵ Ömer Koç is the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Koç Holding and Arter.

²⁶ Named after Vehbi Koç's wife Sadberk Hanım, the museum is Türkiye's first private museum, affiliated with Koç Holding, exhibiting personal collections. It is currently located in Sarıyer.

place in the city centre (Woman TV, 2019). Subsequently, they decided on the Oto Koç²⁷ building, affiliated with Koç Holding. This industrial structure would either be strengthened or demolished. However, according to the current regulation, strengthening it would be very costly and since the total area of the existing building was limited, it would not be possible to accommodate all the functions of the desired multi-disciplinary cultural centre (personal communication, August 14, 2023). The decision was to demolish it. The Koç family donated the building to the VKF. The founding Director, Melih Fereli, said that even though the dream of a campus museum complex together with the Sadberk Hanım Museum could not be realised, both museums will be located in the same district, being relatively close, 10 minutes car drive away. Moreover, Fereli also stated that since the news of Arter's arrival, property prices in the area have increased and that the residents of the area said, “It's a good thing we didn't sell our houses and leave”. Meanwhile, new art spaces such as Dirimart, Pilevneli Gallery, and Evliyagil opened. Regardless of all these signs of gentrification, this area is yet an industrial area, with minimal to no access to public transportation in and out of the neighbourhood.

Melih Fereli explains that he prepared a 'vision document'²⁸ to be presented to Ömer Koç before the establishment of Arter with the options of establishing a film industry or a contemporary art institution. Due to his personal interest in contemporary art, Ömer Koç chose the path of contemporary art, which led to the establishment of Arter (Baliç et al., 2021). According to the museum's website (Arter, n.d.-d) since 2005, the Vehbi Koç Foundation has adopted a strategy to support contemporary art in Türkiye also

²⁷ Otokoç Koç, which was founded by Vehbi Koç in 1928 and is Koç Holding's first automotive sector investment.

²⁸ The book published by Arter (Baliç et al., 2021) is referred to as a 'report consisting of situation assessment and recommendations'.

globally in a sustainable manner and this has been carried out under the founding of Koç Holding and guided by the vision of Ömer Koç, in alignment with the strategic plan outlined in its vision document. Also, throughout Arter's website, this connection is highly visible and repeated. Statements such as this; "Founded in 2010 as a subsidiary of the VKF, Arter is a sustainable, vibrant cultural hub, offering a broad range of programmes accessible to everyone" (Arter, n.d.-c) emphasises the ambitions of both the Foundation and Koç Holding, while also revealing how the museum is meant to symbolise the corporation.

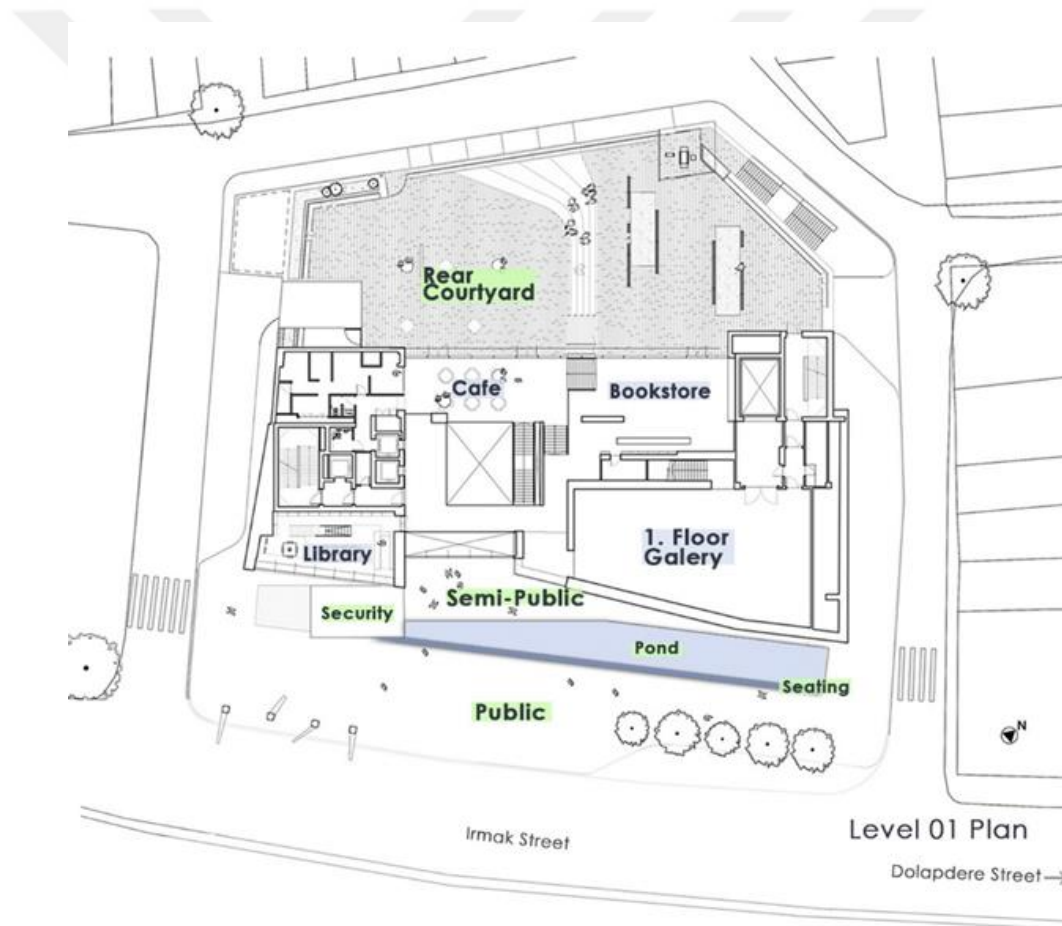
As the museum institution has stated on many occasions, Arter is desired as a cultural centre that aims to be a social meeting point, gathering people with current art productions of whole art disciplines and they aim to do it by avoiding static or permanent displays of art; continuously evolving presentation of artworks, ensuring that the museum remains responsive to contemporary artistic practices and current cultural dialogues (Ezik & Evren, 2021; Art50, 2021; Fereli & Baliç, 2019; Altunok, 2019). Possibly that's why the institution avoids calling itself a 'cultural hub' rather than a 'museum'. Moreover, Arter repeatedly indicated that it aims to create spaces that enable visitors to think and produce together with its common areas, library, affordable bookstore, learning activities and workshops. At the press conference for the museum's opening (Arter, 2019), they explained this approach by identifying people they invited to the museum not just as 'exhibition viewers' but as 'visitors', 'users', 'addressees' and 'participants'.

4.1.4.1 Architecture

While proceeding through this dense texture (and unfriendly to pedestrian usage), the front garden formed in front of the Arter building creates an important spot for this

area to stop and rest (Figure 4.23). This public square²⁹ is equipped with a shallow pool positioned to create a physical boundary between the museum entrance and the street and an extended seating element adjacent to the pool where pedestrians can sit and look around. The pool, positioned at a low elevation, provides uninterrupted communication with the transparent ground floor facade while visually drawing a minimum boundary and separating museum visitors from the street.

Figure 4.23 *First Floor Plan of Arter*



Note. Manipulated by the author (Pintos, 2020).

²⁹ The shuttles that Arter provides free of charge are also located here. They commute to nearby central points such like Taksim Square and Tepebaşı (Pera). Visitors typically sit on the seating beside the pool while waiting for the shuttles.

The transparency created on the ground floor continues with a large piece pulled inward in the middle of the façade (Figure 4.24). This feature visually connects the front square with the rear square created behind the museum. Thus, the visual relationship that begins in the front square continues to the street behind the building, which is located on different levels. Kirsten Lees, who led the project at Grimshaw Architecture, explained that their goal was to design a building deeply connected to its surroundings, encouraging engagement and movement through the space, and this design element aims to naturally draw people into and through the museum (Grimshaw, 2021).

Figure 4.24 *Arter's View from the Irmak Street*



The intended inviting effect is aimed to be further enhanced by positioning the security entrance kiosk at the end of the seating element, away from the facade (Figure

4.23). It maintains the same colour as the facade itself, and with its minimal design, it blends in with the surroundings. After passing through security, visitors are guided to the museum entrance, located behind the pool. The entrance facade is distinguished by a three-dimensional convex and concave diamond-shaped modular facade, constructed from glass fibre-reinforced concrete (GFRC) with handmade glazed surfaces that sparkle as sunlight shifts through them (Figure 4.24) (Baliç, 2021).

Melih Fereli indicated that Arter always had a design philosophy of openness and fluidity. That's why the initial design of the building in 2013 did not include a security control entrance, which aimed to allow visitors to enter the building freely (Baliç, 2021). However, following terrorist attacks in Türkiye in 2015 and security assessments conducted in 2018, this plan was abandoned, and entrances and exits to the building have been reconsidered. After extensive consultations and debates between the architectural team and museum staff, a controlled border with water elements was decided as a middle ground of all concerns (Fereli Interview, 2023). He also mentioned that consultants had suggested isolating the building with higher walls due to their perception of the neighbourhood as unsafe. In rejecting this idea, he explained that his aim was quite the opposite—to embrace the neighbourhood and design a structure that would strengthen its connections with the surrounding community. The reason for the low prices – museum tickets, the Bistro³⁰ menu, bookstore - and the 'neighbour card'³¹ is explained by this attitude (Baykal et al., 2021).

³⁰ Typically regarded as a high-end establishment, Bistro by Divan, owned by Koç Holding. However, this specific branch offers much more reasonable prices than its other locations.

³¹ This card, which is given free of charge to Arter neighbors living or working in the Yenişehir and Bülbül neighborhoods, provides many conveniences such as free exhibition entry, two free participations in 'learning programs', and discounts at bookstores and bistro (Arter, n.d.-a).

The ground floor, primarily designed to be permeable, has an entrance gallery that can be seen directly from the outside (Figure 4.25). Kirsten Lees explained that the brief that was given by the Arter was creating this place “almost like a picture window”, such like the Meymaret Han buildings entrance on Istiklal Street. She explained that the client wanted the openness of that “being able to put the artwork on display many ways drawing people in. And making sure that there was no barriers that this art and contemporary art” (TRT 2, 2023). This gallery is an exhibition area that can be visited free of charge without requiring a ticket. The entrance lobby is attached to this transparent facade, facing the main artery of Dolapdere with three-storey-high transparent glass windows. After passing through a small, single-person revolving door, visitors can see a framed view of the busy street and observe people sitting or walking through the museum's front square before reaching the ticket counter on the right.

Figure 4.25 *View of the Entrance Lobby from the First Floor*



Note. Photo by Quintin Lake (Pintos, 2020).

Upon entering, visitors are welcomed by a digital screen displaying information about current exhibitions and events. A museum attendant greets visitors and provides guidance on key areas, such as the ticket office, where exhibition and guided tour tickets, as well as audio guides, can be purchased, lockers and a membership desk on the ground level, and directions to the exhibition's starting point.

The bistro and the rear square are also visible from the entrance lobby, which is designed as a three-story-high atrium (Figure 4.26). The bistro, located one level above the entrance lobby, also has a transparent facade facing Yeni Bostan Street. The transparent facade offers a framed glimpse of the street, showcasing the everyday activities of Arter's neighbours. From hanging laundry out to dry and neighbours leaning out to chat between windows and the street, to children playing football along the narrow road, the scene reveals the rhythms of local life. The transparency also allows the neighbours to see the museums inside directly. This creates a two-way communication between the museum and the surroundings.

Figure 4.26 *View of the Bistro from the Second Floor*



Note. Photo by Quintin Lake (Pintos, 2020).

The neighbours can watch visitors resting in the rear garden/square, eating their lunches or roaming around the museum. It has also been observed that the bistro is used by museum staff for lunch or business meetings³², so the bistro becomes the meeting point. This multifunctional architectural node connects the visitors, neighbours and staff. Even though this place creates a convergence point between all the actors, the neighbours can only reach it by passing through the front security. Still, the garden creates a serene city void between the dense patterns of the Dolapdere neighbourhood.

Half a level above the bistro, the Arter bookstore (museum shop) is situated, sharing the rear transparent facade that overlooks the surrounding neighbourhood. As mentioned previously, the bookstore aims to be affordable and accessible for all. It offers Arter's publications, along with publications with an interdisciplinary selection that focuses on different branches of art at affordable prices (Arter, n.d.-b). The Arter's library and the first-floor gallery are located on the same level as the bookstore. After passing through the first-floor gallery, visitors reach the library via a bridge located just above the entrance lobby. This bridge is suspended between a three-storey void attached to the facade and one of the building's two deep atrium spaces (void gallery spaces), which connects floors +2 and -3. This two-level, relatively small library has a double-wall glass facade. The second layer on the exterior of the glass wall seamlessly extends the more transparent version of the 3d modular facade, enabling sun control and generating a dynamic interplay of light, casting varying shadows throughout the day with its movements. The opposite wall of the facade is designed to accommodate two-level high, wall-to-wall bookshelves. It is divided by a mezzanine floor, creating a usage of this

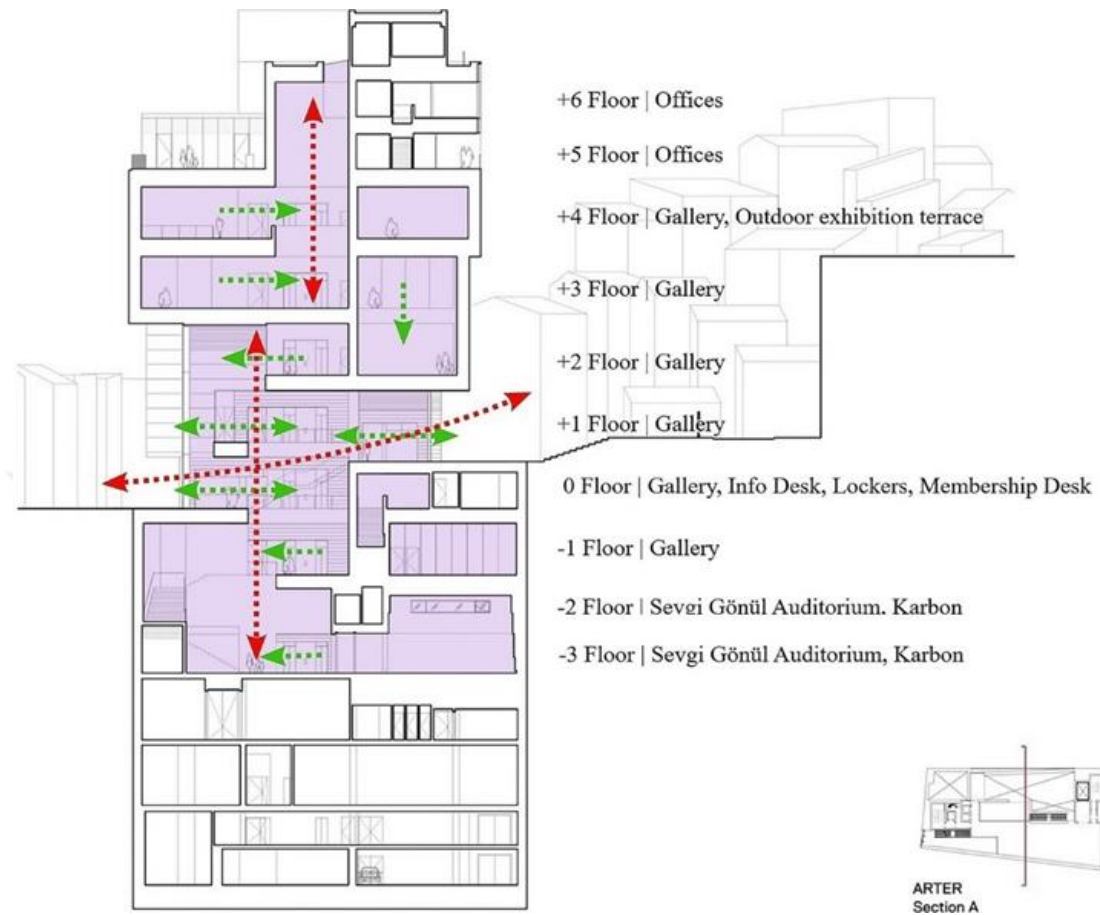
³² During site visits, it was observed that the bistro was used by museum staff for recruitment meetings and to host guests. It has also been determined that the garden is also used for museum events and parties.

narrow but tall volume. Due to a wide variety of publications and its modest size, as well as possibly free coffee and water, it creates a hospitable atmosphere for library-goers. Visitors can freely access national and international publications along with Arter's own publications (books of exhibitions), which have been produced to accompany exhibitions since 2010 (Ezik & Evren, 2021).

Arter's six galleries of considerable sizes and generous in height³³ - plus the outdoor exhibition space - are designed to be adaptable, meeting the diverse requirements of contemporary art (Figure 4.27). The 5,000 square metres of exhibition space are distributed across seven floors of the building, including levels +4, +3, +2, +1, ground, -1, and -3. What makes Arter's exhibition spaces intriguing is the ability to glimpse into other gallery areas from most gallery spaces, allowing visitors to see art and its wanderers from a different perspective. The big atriums or the openings within the spaces spark curiosity and naturally draw visitors in. At the same time, the strategically placed openings in the facade offer different perspectives of the Dolapdere neighbourhood or the lively street in front, continuously shifting the forms of visual interaction while allowing natural light to enter inside (Figure 4.28). Fereli indicated on several occasions that "Each of our floors has a relationship that will make you remember that you are in Istanbul" (Habertürk TV, 2019; Oral, 2019). The outdoor exhibition area reinforces a sense of belonging to Arter's design approach through the repetition of permeable facade elements, similar to those used in the library. This architectural continuity blends the design with views of Dolapdere, integrating the building into its surrounding urban landscape (TRT 2, 2023).

³³ The height of the gallery spaces varies between four to nine meters.

Figure 4.27 *Visual Connection Diagram*



Note. Manipulated by the author (Pintos, 2020).

The two performance halls are located on the subterranean levels; Karbon Hall and the Sevgi Gönül Auditorium are located on the minus-third floor. The Karbon Hall has a 332-visitor capacity and functions as a black box, which is a darkened, enclosed space designed for image or video projection and various types of art performances. This adaptable environment provides controlled lighting conditions, making it ideal for immersive visual and auditory experiences. The Sevgi Gönül Auditorium has a 166-visitor capacity with a flexible design of telescopic seating arrangement, allowing space to be transformed into an empty area when needed, accommodating a variety of events and configurations. While it fulfils all the functions of an auditorium, it becomes a

suitable venue for performing arts when the seating elements are lifted with the help of a telescopic system.

Figure 4.281 *Interior and Exterior Facade Openings*



Note. Photos by Quintin Lake (Pintos, 2020).

Auxiliary spaces such as the library, bistro, bookstore and rear courtyard are located closer to the entrance level. This organisation allows visitors to stop and take a break in between their tours, serving as well-placed pit stops to help prevent museum fatigue. Additionally, the strategic incorporation of openings that offer views of the surrounding neighbourhood, along with the presence of natural light, further enhances the visitor experience by providing visual and mental relief during their visit.

The building consists of two interconnected large atriums that are 17 and 25 meters tall in the centre of the building. It attracts visitors' attention and allows them to see other visitors roaming around the building or other exhibitions happening on other

levels. This feature also brings natural light into the deep basement. According to Kirsten Lees, the design aims to invite visitors down to the lower levels while minimising any sense of being underground (Grimshaw, 2021). She explained that this is why significant attention was paid to the circulation, a necessity given the substantial technical challenges involved in excavating to such a depth. Both architects and the founding director indicated on several occasions that the building's design was developed through sectional planning (Grimshaw, 2021; Fereli Interview, 2023). This method was aimed at enabling detailed consideration of the vertical flow and connection between levels, ensuring a smooth and cohesive visitor experience across different floors. In other words, this approach allows enhanced three-dimensionality, which is captured by designing the void while prioritising transparency and fluidity. Moreover Lees indicated that rather than creating a single major stair in one location, that connects sort of top to bottom, they wanted to create a journey through the building. They aimed to take the visitor gently, guiding through the building; a single circulation route takes the visitors and links every single one of the volumes (TRT 2, 2023).

Finally, it is all for the sake of fostering connectivity among all the key actors: the neighbourhood and its inhabitants, Arter's visitors, the museum's staff, the art exhibited and the architectural space (Baliç, Fereli & Evren, 2021; Grimshaw Architects, 2020). Their intention was to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, encouraging visitors to engage more fully and extend their time within this "unpretentious, environmentally friendly, human-scale building" (ibid). The design seeks to create a strong connection with the city, without overshadowing or competing with the museum's content.

The "strong synergy" and open communication between the architectural team and Arter staff were consistently emphasised, with both sides noting their active involvement throughout the project (Balic, 2021; Grimshaw, 2021; Fereli interview). In his discussions with Fereli, Sir Nicholas Grimshaw expressed his intention to design a building that would always feel unique while seamlessly incorporating art into the space (Habertürk, 2019). For Fereli, this reflected the architect's clear grasp of Arter's core principles. He often stressed that their collaboration was a unified effort, with decisions being made together at every step, functioning as a single cohesive team. Lees also indicated that the design approaches remained consistent from the beginning because both sides were on the same page the site; "context and the well thought vision of the project brief; open, welcoming place that breakdown any perceived barriers that exist in terms of cultural building... different types of spaces that are able to accommodate all forms of art... continuous, dynamic and fluid" (TRT 2, 2023).

4.1.4.2 Who Talks About the Museum?

The people shaping Arter's architectural and institutional discourses directly reflect the institution's representation strategy. The most visible figure in this discourse production is founding director Melih Fereli. He is followed by Arter's former (2009–2021) Communications Director, İlkey Baliç, the chief curator of the opening period, Emre Baykal, who became the Director after Fereli left the institution. They stand out as the people who voice the institution's vision and architectural and curatorial strategies. Additionally, team members from different fields also contribute significantly to the discourse.

The architectural team also plays an active role in the production of discourse. In the interviews where project director Kirsten Lees from Grimshaw Architects takes part,

statements supporting the institutional vision regarding the building design are frequently encountered. Since the beginning of the architectural process, the institution and the architectural team have stated that they have worked in strong cooperation and mutual understanding by making all decisions together.

Apart from all these figures, Ömer Koç—Chairman of Koç Holding’s and Arter’s Board of Directors, a key figure at the origin of Arter’s collection—has a notably limited presence in the institution’s public discourse. While his visibility remains low, his role strongly symbolises the institutional backing and foundational support behind Arter. Although this situation shows that Arter is an institution founded with the support and vision of the Koç Group, it has been preferred that the institution display an independent appearance in the discursive field. Fereli’s statement that Ömer Koç granted him complete autonomy regarding Arter supports this situation. In this respect, Arter appears as an institution shaped by its founder’s vision, yet intentionally positioned in the background of his public presence (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 *ARTER Institutional Discourse*

ARTER	
Patronship	Koç Group support
	Cultural platform - not a museum.
	“It is our duty” - slogan
Main Narrative	A sustainable art institution
	Contribute to the development/production of contemporary art
	Focus first on the artist and audience

ARTER

	Permeability - openness - fluidity - unpretentious
	Designing the void / through sections
Design Idea & Starting Point	Environmentally friendly
	Human-scaled
	Dynamism
	Design secondary to content
	Strong bond with the city
City - Location	Dialogue with Dolapdere and the city
	A building that is of its setting
Transparency	Transparent building
	Extrovert
	Artistic and social meeting point
Visitor	Invite and embrace
	Accessible for everyone/price policy
	Free exhibition and auxiliary areas
(Inter)-nationality	International partnerships
	To promote the country's art in Türkiye and abroad
	Security without hindering invitingness
Safety Concerns	Terrorism and changing risk perception - made security a legal obligation

4.2 Visitor Experiences

4.2.1 *Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture*

While sharing their experiences with the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (IMPS), each participant particularly emphasised that the museum is “an invaluable museum.” The participant P15 drew attention to the significance of experiencing a “preserved entire artistic heritage.”³⁴ Within a preserved building, and stated that the museum's educational mission is a fundamental element that distinguishes it from other museums. They also pointed out the value of witnessing the art history of this geography as someone living in Türkiye. Participant P15:

Ultimately, this is a museum that every citizen should visit, a museum that belongs to this land and this geography. Of course, it is a very important museum. It does not change. That collection remains. It's not like it will be gone by August 2025, for instance. Then, another collection will not replace it. New things may be added on top, but of course, there is a different concept in that sense compared to the other two.

Additionally, visitors who positively remarked on the large number of artworks exhibited at the same time also emphasised the museum's significance by stating: “... (the other museums) can be consumed in just an hour, but this is a place where you dedicate a whole day.” Participants also noted that IMPS felt “more like a museum” due to the sequential presentation of art movements. They indicated it facilitated a better learning process. Some expressed that the existence of a clearly defined and fluid route within the

³⁴ The participant used the word ‘külliyyat’ here. In Turkish, it refers to a series containing the complete works of an author. In this context, they are referring to a ‘complete’ collection of artworks by artists from Türkiye.

museum improved their overall experience, making their visit more accessible. Several participants felt the museum's segmented design, which divides exhibition spaces into a sequence of individual rooms, offered a "more artwork-focused" architectural experience, offering deeper engagement with the artworks. They also noted that individuals with a strong interest in art would especially enjoy spending time in this more focused setting. The participant P15 humorously described this aspect: "It was a very serious institution, you know what I mean? I mean, serious! Seriously, you stand in front of it with a sense of respect. You think, 'If this is here, there must be a reason for it.'"

However, while participants valued the structured layout for enhancing the learning experience, they also found it overly rigid, restricting their movement and sense of freedom within the space. Almost all participants stated that they found the predetermined and strictly defined circulation path, which did not allow for an alternative circulation order, to be too controlling and expressed their discomfort about this issue. Many participants who expressed similar views commented that there were no areas where they could rest on each floor, and participant P12 specifically described their frustration as follows:

But, you know, I also felt suffocated. Because there was really no place where you could take a break. Once you start, you have to finish that corridor. Otherwise, there was no option like stepping out [to take a breath, pausing for a moment, relaxing, or refreshing yourself. You actually had to complete the entire corridor, or rather the whole floor, before you could do that [rest].

This sense of restriction was not only due to the predetermined circulation route but also intensified by the spatial characteristics of the museum itself. Participants who described this spatial organisation as making them feel "*under pressure*" and "*under*

control” emphasised that being forced to move continuously in a fixed direction was exhausting and that they *did not feel free while circulating the museum*. Beyond the sheer number of artworks contributing to their *sense of fatigue*, they also pointed out that the museum’s *dark interior*³⁵ and *lack of openness* to the outside further intensified this feeling. The participant P7 specifically highlighted the use of solid, enclosed exhibition rooms - entrepots - and circulation zones in between them, stating that this design choice “*cuts off your connection with life*.” Moreover, *the dominance of grey tones* in the space (monochrome effect) and the inadequacy of the floor height in some sections were pointed out as further contributing to their discomfort. Some participants acknowledged that the building’s colour reflected its industrial past; however, they also felt that its “*excessive industrial character*” became an element that reinforced these negative emotions. In this context, certain museum areas were described as “*stuffy*”³⁶.

Despite these criticisms, some participants took a different perspective, arguing that the museum's spatial constraints served a deliberate purpose. After listing these negative feelings, three participants expressed that they thought these elements were aspects that the architect consciously exercised and that exhibiting this amount of artwork could be done only this way. Participant P15 in particular shared his experience and thoughts on this issue as follows:

I think, for all these reasons, if it were such a comfortable, relaxing place, it would actually raise more questions for me... I don’t need to feel so magnificent, so good.

I think you have to feel slightly constrained in some spaces for something

³⁵ Several participants also noted issues with the lighting of certain artworks, mentioning that while some remained in shadow, others were difficult to view due to glare.

³⁶ Here, the “*basık*” word in Turkish is used to express that it was a dark, constrictive, negative spatial experience.

meaningful to emerge from that experience. Sometimes, feeling discomfort is important—being pushed out of your comfort zone. Maybe that’s what this place could be. If there were no exhibition there, if it were just an empty space, maybe I would say, ‘What is this? I feel so trapped. It’s too dark; it’s suffocating.’ But what’s already present in that space is the sense of education, the history that comes from so far back and is not easy at all... It guides you through that complex past. If they had instead created a space that was bright, open to the outside, where everything seemed as if it were beautiful, that would be completely unrealistic. So, in that sense, yes, for me, it was darker, maybe harder to navigate... Perhaps spatially, it was more challenging. There wasn’t a sense of openness or spaciousness. But I believe that’s exactly how it should be—how it makes you feel, its connection to history, to that entire artistic heritage³⁷, to its educational role.

While this experience of spatial congestion is felt more intensely on the museum's lower floors, the situation changes when visitors go to the upper levels. Participants remarked that these *negative aspects of the building were felt much less on the top floor*, emphasising that the natural light entering through the roof openings played a significant role in balancing this effect. It was stressed that, unlike the container structure of the museum, this area, which has a large volume and is accessed via a wide ramp leading to the lower levels, was highlighted to *enable visual communication between floors*. Similarly, the sculpture exhibition area, which has several floors high, opens into different

³⁷ Here again ‘külliyat’ word is used.

exhibition galleries and receives natural light from the roof openings, was also evaluated by the participants as “one of the most successful areas”.

While multiple participants gave reasons for suggesting that *this design approach should have been spread throughout the building*, participant P6 specifically commented on this experience as follows:

The first hall on the fourth floor, the one we entered, was, in my opinion, beautiful and spacious, and being able to see the exhibition area two floors below from there was also nice. I wish they had extended this design approach throughout the entire building and maintained this spatial concept consistently. The building would have worked very well. But unfortunately, on the other floors, it's just room after room after room... Yes, okay, the rooms guide you into a line and essentially direct your movement, but after a certain point, it becomes boring. You just keep entering one box after another, walking through enclosed spaces over and over again.

In addition to the *negative feelings expressed about the circulation*, half of the participants mentioned the unfortunate experience of missing the Osman Hamdi exhibition, which they considered the most valuable exhibition in the museum, due to the poor circulation and weak signage. These participants did not see the entrance to the Osman Hamdi exhibition, which was located right next to the previously mentioned well-lit exhibition space spread over several floors due to its enclosed entrance. As a result, participants who failed to notice the Osman Hamdi exhibition's entrance and proceeded directly to the exhibitions on the lower floors reacted with great frustration to the lack of clear wayfinding. In addition, two participants added that the museum was very quiet and

empty³⁸. However, if it was crowded, the small, compartmentalised exhibition rooms and narrow circulation spaces could become problematic in a crowded setting, making it difficult to experience the exhibitions at the same level of engagement. The participant P14 described this concern as follows:

We live in an incredibly crowded city. We can anticipate how busy museums can get, and we plan our visiting hours accordingly. But really, that place, when crowded, is not a space where those small areas can be navigated comfortably. It's detailed... and for those who work in or are genuinely interested in this field, it could be off-putting. You might not even enter a section, thinking, 'Oh, this is too crowded. Look at the queue.' And as I said, the space is already limited. We were lucky—there were very few people, and we were almost alone in those halls. But in a crowded setting, you would just feel suffocated and overwhelmed in there.

These challenges were not limited to the exhibition areas but also extended to the entrance and ground floor, where spatial inefficiencies further disrupted the visitor experience. Participants critiqued the organisation of the ground floor, stating that this area had an “undefined” and “inefficient” planning. In particular, they emphasised that the long corridor between the street and the Galataport entrance was poorly designed and left spatially dysfunctional. They also noted that having two separate entrances contributed to organisational shortcomings and that the lack of clear wayfinding negatively impacted the visitor experience. As a result of the confusion they experienced at the entrances, they also mentioned that the museum did not feel welcoming/inviting.

³⁸ While visiting the museum, the participants also talked among themselves about the fact that there were no security guards inside the museum. They realized through experience that the protection of the works in the spaces was provided by proximity sensors. The participant here supported his words by saying that it was not crowded and that "there were not even security guards".

Adding to this sense of disorder, participants criticised the security checkpoint at the Galataport entrance, where visitors were called over by security for an additional X-ray screening after entering freely from the Galataport side entrance. They described it as illogical and needed to be spatially figured out. The lack of clear spatial guidance further added to visitors' confusion about how to navigate the entrance area. The participant P12 described this experience as follows:

At the Painting and Sculpture Museum... we were already confused when entering. Should we go to the right? Should we go through security first, or should we head directly to the woman standing at the desk? Should we leave our belongings in the cloakroom? You hesitate. The security guard tells you, 'Come this way first,' and so on. There's a mess, a sense of chaos there. There's also a café, but you can't tell whether it starts from the end or the middle. You just start walking, and there's a chaotic setup there as well. But of course, the entrance space, when you really look at it, is nice—it gives a sense of scale and grandeur. Maybe the only thing that should change is its placement.

One major criticism regarding the entrance area was the placement of the Espressolab³⁹ café near the Galataport entrance. It was particularly described as "chaotic," "disorganised," and "undefined." They pointed out a disconnect between the ticketing area and the entrance and mentioned that it makes access to the museum unclear and unnecessarily complicated. It was also stressed that there should be a museum-owned café instead of a commercial chain café shop, such as Espressolab that could be integrated

³⁹ Chain coffee shop brand.

better with the museum shop. They also pointed out that the current café setup failed to function as a social gathering space, which is often expected in contemporary museums.

Beyond these spatial concerns, participants also highlighted issues related to sound insulation. Since all the interiorities of the museum, except for the container galleries, were directly connected, they reported that noise from the café travelled upstairs, negatively affecting the exhibition experience. The lack of acoustic separation between the café and the exhibition halls was seen as a significant shortcoming, as it interfered with the contemplative atmosphere typically expected in museum spaces.

Despite these criticisms about the entrance and interior spatial planning, participants also recognised certain aspects of the museum's exterior as more inviting and well-integrated with its surroundings. The open area side where this section meets the street left a more positive impression on visitors. Many acknowledged that the public space created in front of the building on the street side increased the sense of openness and contributed to the overall welcoming atmosphere. Despite this, most participants stated that they primarily used the Galataport entrance, as they were already within the Galataport complex and also due to the convenient proximity of the parking lot exit.

Beyond the open public space, certain design elements within the museum's entrance sequence were also positively received. In particular, some spatial arrangements in the corridor between the two entrances were evaluated favourably. The restoration workshops, located near the street entrance, were particularly *appreciated* for their transparent facades, allowing visitors to observe the ongoing *conservation work* inside. Participants stated that this arrangement makes the functioning of the museum and the art production process visible, thus adding a different dimension to the visitor experience.

The museum shop also faced design-related criticism. Participants emphasised that the museum store looked like an afterthought, rather than an integrated part of the museum space, and that an institution such as the Museum of Painting and Sculpture should not have a museum shop that resembles a simple booth. It was also stated that there was a lack of written materials about the exhibitions in the store. The participant P15 expressed this deficiency as follows:

...the store that I couldn't find what I was looking for in terms of books was the store of the Painting and Sculpture Museum. You would like to buy a booklet or a book about the current exhibition, while you can easily reach it...I mean, there weren't many of these things in the Painting and Sculpture Museum. I think that was a deficiency. I mean, it's like they attached it [the museum shop] to the edge of the area [entrance], like 'Let's just put it there at the edge and call it harmonised'. It was like a brush-over.

Participants found the museum's adapted grid structure, container additions and reconstructed mosaic-facade building *successful in terms of both overall appearance and design*. In particular, *the mosaic facade entrance and circulation volume* received *positive remarks* due to its being a preserved building and establishing a strong relationship with the street. As a building affiliated with Mimar Sinan University, its proximity to the university, making it easily accessible for students, and its location within Galataport, which is considered an economic attraction, were considered factors contributing to its *successful integration with its surroundings*. Participants also emphasised that being in Galataport provided a significant advantage, making the museum *easily accessible*.

When participants were asked whether the museum's architecture supported the museum's mission, some participants emphasised that the artworks were exceptional, but

that the architecture did not fully match the museum's content. However, a larger group of participants, despite their critical views of the architecture, expressed that they did not share this perspective. In particular, they highlighted that the museum's adaptation within a historic structure and its spatial design that reinforces its educational mission were key distinguishing features (Figure 4.29).

4.2.2 Istanbul Modern

When evaluating their architectural experience at Istanbul Modern Museum (IMM), the majority of participants highlighted the spaciousness and brightness of the museum. They stated that these features played a decisive role in their appreciation of the space. The museum's location—right next to the Bosphorus Sea—was emphasised as one of the most important reasons for this appreciation. Visitors based the spaciousness of the museum on two essential elements: first, the large interior volumes of the building; second, the direct visual and spatial relationship it established with the Bosphorus and Tophane Square thanks to the wide openings. It was stated that the use of natural light and this strong connection established with the exterior nurtured the experience of art gazing and positively affected spatial perception. At the same time, the spacious interior prevented the feeling of crowding even when the museum was busy.

Participants who did not appreciate the museum's architecture as much as the previous group commented that the building *lacked a distinct identity* and, aside from its sea view, which, in their opinion, was *overly dominant*, felt like “just any other building.” The participant P4 articulated this view with the following words:

A building like water. It did not leave a trace of its character on me. It really is like any other building, and the [Bosphorus] views are very dominant. There could easily be an ‘Espressolab’ anywhere here. Nothing about its gallery function

stayed with me... There was no such dominant museum function in my experience.

Another participant, P3, noted that, in his opinion, the dominance of the landscape would not be well received by art lovers. Moreover, during their visit, two participants who were familiar with Renzo Piano's work remarked that this particular building seemed like the one he had put the least effort into designing.

All participants expressed that the museum had an "*incredible view*". At the same time, the group that appreciated the architecture declared that the building established a "*good relationship*" with the city and the Bosphorus. In response to the critical participants, they argued that it was impossible to ignore such a view when it existed; in fact, they thought that this panorama, which they described as the "*best view in Istanbul*", definitely required a relationship with the sea in the building's design. They also stated that this view was already one of the reasons for visiting the museum. Participants highlighted that the view increased the feeling of spaciousness. However, this relationship is more limited within the exhibition areas and is instead more strongly felt in the landing lobbies and on the open terrace at the top floor. In addition, it was underlined that the view played an essential role in *minimising both physical and mental fatigue* during the museum visit⁴⁰. The participant P14 explains this situation as an enjoyable break;

Given its location... I think it's one of the essentials there... opening up to the outside feels good to me. Every now and then, seeing the sea through the windows, catching a glimpse of the outside. Because, I mean... in such an intensity, a person... kind of like... needs something like advertisements, like a

⁴⁰ Only two participants stated that they felt a small amount of fatigue due to the size of the museum and that they felt physically challenged in the top floor exhibition.

curtain being lifted, so that the mind can... take a short break, rest and continue from there.

A large portion of the participants voiced the museum's compatibility, not only with its view but also with the area where it is located, and that a crowded location like Galataport, where people enjoy coming, is highly suitable for such a museum. However, some participants who did not adopt the general concept of Galataport found the area and the museum "soulless" and thought that it did not adequately reflect the identity of Istanbul, stating that such a contemporary structure felt cold within a historically rich setting. The participant P3 even drew attention to this spatial incompatibility by saying, "A person who comes to Galataport has nothing to do with the Modern Museum." In contrast, another participant, P4 expressed that the shopping-oriented structure of Galataport and the numerous security checkpoints gave the museum the feeling of a shopping mall.

Many participants commented on *the excessive security measures* at the museum. The fact that after going through a security check at the entrance to Galataport, visitors had to go through a second security checkpoint when entering the museum. While the building was found inviting due to the openness of the entrance, there were also participants who *did not feel it inviting* due to the security intensity. Additionally, visitors described the presence of uniformed security personnel instead of museum staff in the exhibition areas as "excessive" and "disturbing." Some participants compared the museum to heavily secured locations such as embassies or football stadiums, while others justified these measures by suggesting that it might be "the most crowded museum." However, participant P7, who found these security measures intrusive, humorously criticised the situation, saying:

You enter a room; for example, you want to talk to the person beside you about the artwork. But there's a security guard standing at the door. So you think, never mind, I'll go somewhere else. It's as if there's a Picasso painting here. We've been to see Picasso, and security wasn't this tight even there.

In addition to criticisms regarding the security measures on the museum's ground floor, *problems with directions* were also expressed. Participants noted that first-time visitors might struggle to determine which direction to take upon entering and had to seek verbal assistance to locate the cloakroom. However, besides the navigation difficulties, visitors generally shared positive experiences regarding the ground floor. The participant P12 emphasised that the space left a strong first impression by saying, "You enter IMM, and you are impressed." In contrast, another participant appreciated the placement of the café due to its seaside view.

Participants who evaluated the *circulation* of the museum particularly appreciated the "freedom" offered by the space and expressed their *appreciation* for experiencing the "incredible view" while moving between spaces. However, some participants also *criticised the wayfinding system*. In particular, they noted that the staircase leading to the terrace did not effectively guide visitors toward "such an exceptional view." In addition, a participant, P11, who criticised the continuity of circulation between the exhibition areas said, "I think they could not fully maintain continuity here either. So, for example, you start on the right side, and then on the left side, it's like two separate worlds," he said, drawing attention to the lack of spatial integrity.

Participants *positively evaluated the auxiliary spaces* in the museum and stated that they saw these areas as meeting and socialising spaces. They noted that the stylish restaurant was worth visiting due to its unique view. The spaciousness and airiness of

these spaces were evaluated as features that increased user comfort. At the same time, it was emphasised that being in a central location like Galataport facilitated access to these auxiliary services. Some participants said they occasionally visited the museum just to use the café of IMM. The multifaceted experience offered by the museum was evaluated by some visitors beyond the traditional exhibition area. One participant, P14, expressed this situation with the following words: “So, rather than seeing it as a stand-alone exhibition space or event space, it really felt like there was another world [there]... where there were concerts, cinema, food and drink, different types of people visit...” This view shows that the museum was perceived as a multifaceted public space that appealed to various activities and user profiles beyond just an art exhibition space.

The museum store was also found interesting by the participants. In addition to supplementary books related to exhibitions, it was evaluated as a striking area due to the colourful design products that were “very appealing”. The participant P15 who stated that it had a satisfactory variety in terms of books and design products expressed this situation with the words, “In terms of books, Modern is already at the top [between the three museums in question], in terms of satisfaction, content, publications and design items, it is a very enjoyable place... I mean, you can go there just to shop...” Similarly, the museum café was appreciated for its menu that appealed to a wide range of dietary preferences. The same participant, drawing attention to the importance of variety, said;

The café is like that too. It is a nice detail to have options for people with all kinds of diets. Also, it is vegan; it makes a distinction between floury and flourless, [also] sugary and unsweetened. These are features that I personally look for in a place I go to, whether it is a museum or not...

and drew attention to the importance of this variety. However, many participants emphasised that the prices of the products in the store were extremely high. In addition, many participants commented on the high entrance fee. They emphasised that it was expensive, especially for foreign visitors. Some participants compared the ticket price of IMM to that of world-famous institutions such as the Louvre and the Vatican Museums, and they expressed that price-wise, it was on a similar level to those of these important museums. However, others compared it to the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture, declaring that the content of IMM was much more limited than that of the museum. Therefore, the entrance fee did not seem fair.

Participants emphasised that Galataport is *highly accessible* and noted that its location in the city centre facilitates access by ferry, private vehicle and other means of transportation. Moreover, they said Galataport provides a high flow of visitors due to its facilities, such as restaurants, shopping areas and indoor parking, which naturally increases the museum's visibility. Described as both a tourist and commercial centre, Galataport was seen as a cultural and economic attraction point.

Some participants stated that visitors coming to Galataport are more likely to notice and decide to visit the museum. The participant P5, who drew attention to the fact that the museum arouses an instant desire for discovery in visitors due to its easy accessibility, expressed this situation with the following words:

The feeling of 'let's go, let's tour the inside' is awakened more in Istanbul Modern [comparing the other museums in the study] ... Those who enter Galataport from one end find their route ending right in front of Istanbul Modern, which sits at the centre. Similarly, visitors entering from the Karaköy side see Istanbul Modern

right in the middle. Since it is also an inviting building, many people naturally feel inclined to go inside.

This comment shows that the physical location and architectural design of the museum increase its potential to attract visitors.

However, participants emphasised that the museum is already a *popular destination*. The participant P16 in particular declared that IMM is frequently featured as a “recommended meeting spot” on social media platforms such as TikTok. Several statements such as this show that the museum is perceived not only as an art exhibition space but also as a venue for events and experiences⁴¹. More than one participant expressed their belief that its popularity and central location contribute to the high number of visitors.

In this context, some suggested that the excessive security measures may also be related to the museum’s high number of visitors. The participant P16 stated that due to the museum's popularity, many visitors take photos with flash, which can damage the artwork, and hence, overcrowded security guards may be there to monitor the use of flash.

Participants generally described IMM as a museum of international significance, while some also considered it a source of pride. One participant, P15, stated that the museum is architecturally inspiring and an excellent gain for Türkiye. Another participant, P14, emphasised that the museum is a centre of attraction that can influence foreign visitors who have prejudices about modern art and contemporary architecture in Türkiye. “Look at what is being done here, what exhibitions are being held, which

⁴¹ Some participants viewed this phenomenon negatively, criticizing visitors who come to IMM primarily for its popularity rather than for the art.

painters and ceramic artists are coming, and a biennial is being organised,” he said, drawing attention to IMM’s function in making art production in Türkiye visible.

Additionally, some participants found Istanbul Modern more successful than the other two museums they visited within the scope of the study, particularly in terms of its spaciousness, connection with the view, location, architectural quality, and well-designed entrance floor. One participant, P9, framed, “Istanbul Modern had the best use of light and spaciousness. Architecturally, I think all the museums were quite similar in terms of interior design. However, Istanbul Modern’s location and sense of openness add a whole new dimension. Even though modern art feels somewhat uninteresting to me, seeing the same artwork at the Museum of Painting and Sculpture versus at Istanbul Modern would create a different experience.” This perspective highlights how IMM’s openness and natural light contribute to the overall visitor experience, allowing for a spaciousness that prevents feelings of crowding (Figure 4.29).

4.2.3 Arter

Participants appreciated the museum’s spatial and aesthetic qualities when asked about their overall impressions of Arter’s architectural design. Although a few noted that the simplicity of the architecture was not particularly impressive, most highlighted several aspects that contributed to their positive perception. They spotlighted aspects such as *‘good architecture’*, a *sense of ‘spaciousness’*, *‘compact size’*, *‘good flow/circulation’ between exhibitions*, *‘good visual relationship’ with the surrounding neighbourhood*, and *‘good’ visual communication within the interior*⁴².

⁴² Participants used the words ‘good’ or ‘I liked’ to express their appreciation.

The *spaciousness* is primarily associated with the bright, sizable design, which is enhanced by permeable interior and exterior facades, as well as a seamlessly flowing circulation within the interior. One participant, P11, explained that the museum still felt spacious, even in the lowest basement. He emphasised this situation to indicate the importance of this spatial quality in shaping their overall experience. During all of the interviews, other participants gave similar remarks.

The participants stated that Arter's *compact-boutique-small* size made the experience easier and more comfortable. One participant evaluated this situation as "inclusive and friendly", while another stated that being small and uncomplicated increased her sympathy for this place. Additionally, qualities attributed to the museum's 'good architecture' - the spaciousness, small scale, fluidity, and connection with the exterior - were noted as their role in *minimising museum fatigue*. Especially the participant, P4 in particular summarised their experience as:

Arter's flow from one exhibition to another is very comfortable... and especially in the middle floors, there is a huge gallery space right in the heart... seeing another place from the [interior] window, in other words, having a dynamic section, is very positive in my opinion. Looking at the irrelevant parts of the city with surprise vistas while moving from one place to another is very enjoyable. I think that [feature] enriches the experience a lot. On the other hand, while experiencing the exhibition, both volumes are quite large, and the plain white walls are connected to each other with excellent fluidity. That's why [this situation] also allows us to concentrate on the artwork. Since it is not a very big place, we can finish it in a focused manner, without getting confused and tired...'

Many participants associated Arter's *well-designed circulation* with *interior visual connections*. They explained that the seamless flow between spaces and the opportunity to see other exhibition areas and visitors within them from constantly different perspectives enriched their spatial experience and strengthened the sense of spaciousness. Describing Arter as "easy" to navigate," "a comfortable museum," with a "natural flow," participants most frequently characterised it as "fluid" and "free". The participant P16 explained that;

Wayfinding was very easy at Arter. As I said, maybe it's because it is slightly smaller than the others. We had no difficulty at all in finding our way. We could quickly reach wherever we wanted to go. Also, in terms of interior design, for example, while going up the stairs, we could already see where we had been and where we were heading. We could track where we had been, what we had seen, and where we were going.

Participants commented positively, stating that the museum's *good auxiliary spaces*, the café, bookstore and library significantly improved their exhibition experience in addition to the previously mentioned aspects. While emphasising the importance of having such spaces in museums, where visitors can sit, converse, reflect on what they have seen, and even recover from the physical fatigue of the tour, they pointed out the successful positioning of the Arter's café. One participant, P11, mentioned the advantage of the café opening onto the back courtyard. At the same time, another highlighted the striking experience of seeing the Dolapdere neighbourhood in clear view from this vantage point.

Moreover, they also appreciated knowing that Divan Bistro is not only of high quality but also specifically affordable for Arter, allowing them to enjoy a good coffee or

meal at the end of their visit. The variety of products in the bookstore, the availability of written resources related to the exhibitions, and the compact yet well-designed nature of the library were also noted as valuable features. The participant P14 explained that;

... It's not just visiting an exhibition, [museums] create a feeling of spending [more] time there, interacting there, leaving something, taking something. If there wasn't that feeling of hospitality that we love, we would go and sit somewhere else... when we went down from the top, we were going straight to the cafe. After all, you know, you walk around something like this, you get tired, then you want to have a coffee or something to eat... I think the place you end up in these places should be the café, [you should] not ask, 'I wonder where the cafe is', but say, 'Oh, I came to the cafe, let's sit down and have tea, a coffee, something'.

Participants described Arter as an *inviting space*, emphasising its strong connection to the street and inviting ground floor design. The participant P5 referred to Arter as 'the only inviting place in the area [Dolapdere],' while another noted that "Both the back entrance and the entrance we use at the front are integrated with the street... So you go through security, but it's as if you're entering [the building] directly."

They emphasised its strong connection to the street, as well as the accessibility of its library and café, which visitors can use free of charge. Additionally, they noted that the ground floor exhibition space has a transparent facade. They pointed out that while it allows passersby to view the artworks from the street, it further enhances the museum's invitingness. One of the issues the participants particularly criticised about the ground floor was that, despite having a spacious and free entrance area, visitors were allowed in through a tiny revolving door. The fact that entrance and exit were only made through

this single-person revolving door was described by some participants as ‘absurd’ and ‘unnecessary’.

During their visit, two participants mentioned in their conversation that they associated the dimensional issue of the entrance door with the *uncanny* feeling of Dolapdere. In general, many participants stated that they felt *a sense of insecurity towards the Dolapdere neighbourhood* and found its overall architectural state neglected and stagnant. They said they would not prefer to visit the area in the evening due to concerns about transportation and safety. They added that they might hesitate to invite people unfamiliar with Dolapdere to Arter. Although the neighbourhood is only about 1 km from Taksim—one of Istanbul’s busiest districts—roughly a 10–15-minute walk away, they emphasised that it felt much farther in terms of perception.

In addition to their sense of unease, almost all participants noted that Arter was not particularly easy to reach. Despite being within walking distance of Taksim, many preferred to use the shuttle service, with some expressing frustration over long waiting times. Participants also noted limited public transport options and their discomfort with being dependent on the shuttle. While walking from the metro was relatively easy, they found the uphill walk to the Metro challenging. Arter's lack of a dedicated parking area was also mentioned as an issue. This also contributed to the idea of carefully planning visits in advance, as it was ‘not a place one could easily stumble upon’.

However, nearly all participants noted that they had not experienced these feelings once inside the museum. Two participants *living close* to the museum stated that, being familiar with the area, they did not share the same concerns and *felt comfortable coming here* in their daily lives to use its social spaces. The participant P4 summarised their perspective as follows: “I don’t feel uneasy because I know this place... For someone

unfamiliar, it might be unsettling... But I think this situation clearly reflects something about the places we live in. In my opinion, this place is more successful as a space for socialising [comparing other museums].”

Some participants emphasised that Arter is very valuable because it draws people to an area they would not usually go to. While some people appreciated the *transformative power of the museum* and thought that Arter had initiated a modern process in the area, some argued that this effect had not yet been seen and that a museum of this scale alone *could not create such a transformation*. This was the issue on which participants expressed the most divergent opinions in the case of Arter.

Two participants noted that the view from *outside distracted them during their art gazing*, while all other participants *praised Arter’s relationship with the exterior due to its permeable facade*. Those who found it distracting attributed this to the street bazaar set up right next to Arter or the poor state of the neglected architecture in the surrounding area.

In contrast, other participants stated that they found these views “interesting” and “enjoyable” and that when they occasionally glanced outside during the exhibition, it created a “surprising feeling” and provided good communication between the interior and exterior. One participant, P10, in particular, described this situation with the following words: “Arter is actually a museum that tries to turn that disadvantage into an advantage for itself.”

Following this discussion, when asked about the relationship between the building’s architecture and its surrounding neighbourhood, participants were once again divided. The vast majority emphasised that the building was quite *contemporary compared to the surroundings, but that this was a positive feature*. They argued that this

contemporary approach was designed with consideration for the area and that the contrast it established with the environment was one of the museum's strengths and created the potential to attract people here.

On the other hand, some participants stated that the *placing of such a contemporary building* within an architectural texture like Dolapdere *evoked negative feelings*. One participant, P14, positioned between these two perspectives, expressed their thoughts as follows:

...the fact that something so overly modern was built in such an old place made me feel a bit conflicted... creating a place that is a bit older, how should I put it, more in line with the texture of that place is actually like... what I mean is, the buildings that are currently being built in urban transformation⁴³ are soulless... Arter is not a soulless place, but is it too overdose modern in a sense?

During the study, the increase in museum entrance fees and the closure of the top floor due to the change of exhibition caused the participants' opinions about Arter's pricing to differ. While the participants who visited before the price increase and the change of the exhibition floor stated that they found the ticket prices to be highly reasonable, the last three participants who visited the museum in the later stages of the study pointed out that they did not find it fair in terms of pricing that one floor was closed in the face of the increased prices.

Yet, the participants generally stated that the affordability of the auxiliary areas made the museum more accessible. They evaluated the reasonable pricing of Divan

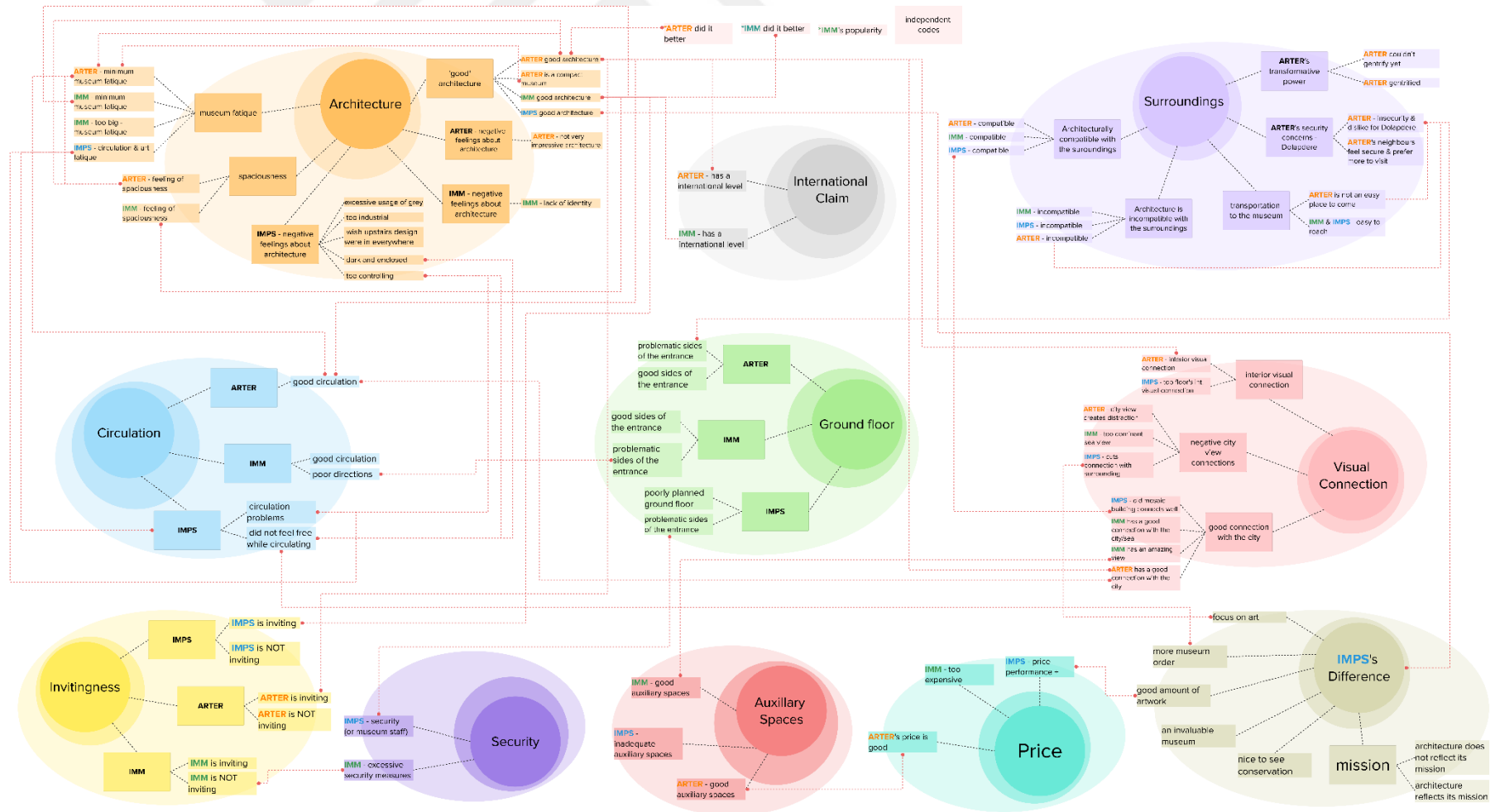
⁴³ Due to the anticipated major earthquakes in Istanbul, old building stock is being demolished, and new structures—highly uniform in design and constructed with similar materials—are being rapidly built.

Bistro, which is typically considered an expensive establishment, and the accessible pricing policy of the bookstore positively.

Participants who evaluated Arter's architecture as a world-class museum stated that the structure reached international standards in terms of both its spatial quality and contemporary museum approach. One participant, P15, even described the presence of such a museum in Istanbul as "a source of pride," while another participant, P4, emphasised, "Whenever I entered Arter's door, I always felt like I had come to a museum in Europe," stating its international atmosphere.

Additionally, some participants found Arter more successful than the other two museums they visited within the scope of the study in terms of the difference it tried to create in its environment, the various spatial forms that allowed for different exhibition styles, and the relationship it established with its surroundings. The fact that Arter's spatial possibilities allow for more flexible exhibitions was considered an essential plus by these participants (Figure 4.29).

Figure 4.29 Visitor Experience Code Diagram



4.3 Comparative Analysis

The final phase of this research consists of a comparative analysis of institutional narratives and visitor experiences. This section examines how museums shape their institutional discourses through architecture and how visitors interpret, accept or question these narratives.

In the first phase of the research, institutional discourses were thematically analysed through the statements of key institutional figures and their relation to architectural design. In this chapter each museum will be examined individually, assessing the alignment between its institutional discourse and visitor interpretations. In this framework, the interview questions posed to participants were shaped in response to themes derived from institutional discourse. As such, participant comments are contextually linked to specific institutional narratives, either as affirmations, reinterpretations, or contestations. This allows for a direct comparison between what museums intend to communicate through architecture and how these messages are received, experienced, or reframed by visitors.

As indicated previously, the comparative analysis was guided by Madeleine Akrich's (1992) concept of "script analysis," which proposes that designers inscribe expectations into objects or systems, anticipating user behaviour, yet users often negotiate or resist these expectations. Within this framework, museum architecture is understood as a set of institutional scripts, spatial and symbolic configurations that carry assumptions about visitor behaviour, competencies, and values. The analysis traces alignments or discrepancies between these prescribed intentions and actual visitor responses, including instances of affirmation, reinterpretation, disregard, or resistance.

To structure this analysis, four response categories were developed based on visitor data: (1) Accepted / Partially Accepted, where visitors aligned with institutional messages; (2) Rejected / Partially Rejected, where visitors opposed or criticised these messages; (3) Missed / Overlooked, where messages were not registered or consciously ignored; and (4) Conflicts, where internal contradictions or tensions were reported.

These comparisons help reveal perceptual discrepancies between institutional intentions and lived visitor experiences. They also explore how museum spaces serve as a means of reading social situations and mediate the relationship between institutional authority and public engagement.

To enable direct comparison, the primary thematic areas in both institutional discourse and visitor narratives were first identified. However, rather than evaluating these dimensions separately, a new set of synthesised thematic categories was created to allow for coherent cross-referencing. This step reflects the premise that visitors do not passively receive institutional messages; rather, they actively negotiate them. The comparative tables were produced based on these synthesised thematic categories in order to clarify and visualise the alignments and discrepancies identified between institutional intentions and visitor responses.

In support of this analysis, a series of connection diagrams was created to map the relationships between institutional and visitor discourses (Figure 4.30, Figure 4.31, and Figure 4.32). Additionally, comparative tables were developed to cross-reference each museum's architectural intentions with visitor responses across seven key thematic areas. These tables provide a visual overview of the alignments and discrepancies observed: blue indicates acceptance, red signifies rejection, and green reflects partial or negotiated engagement. This methodological approach offers a structured lens through which to

assess the coherence between architectural scripting and experiential narratives, ultimately providing a more nuanced understanding of how museums communicate with their publics through spatial and symbolic forms.

Figure 4.30 *Emerging Themes in IMPS's Institutional and Visitor Narratives*

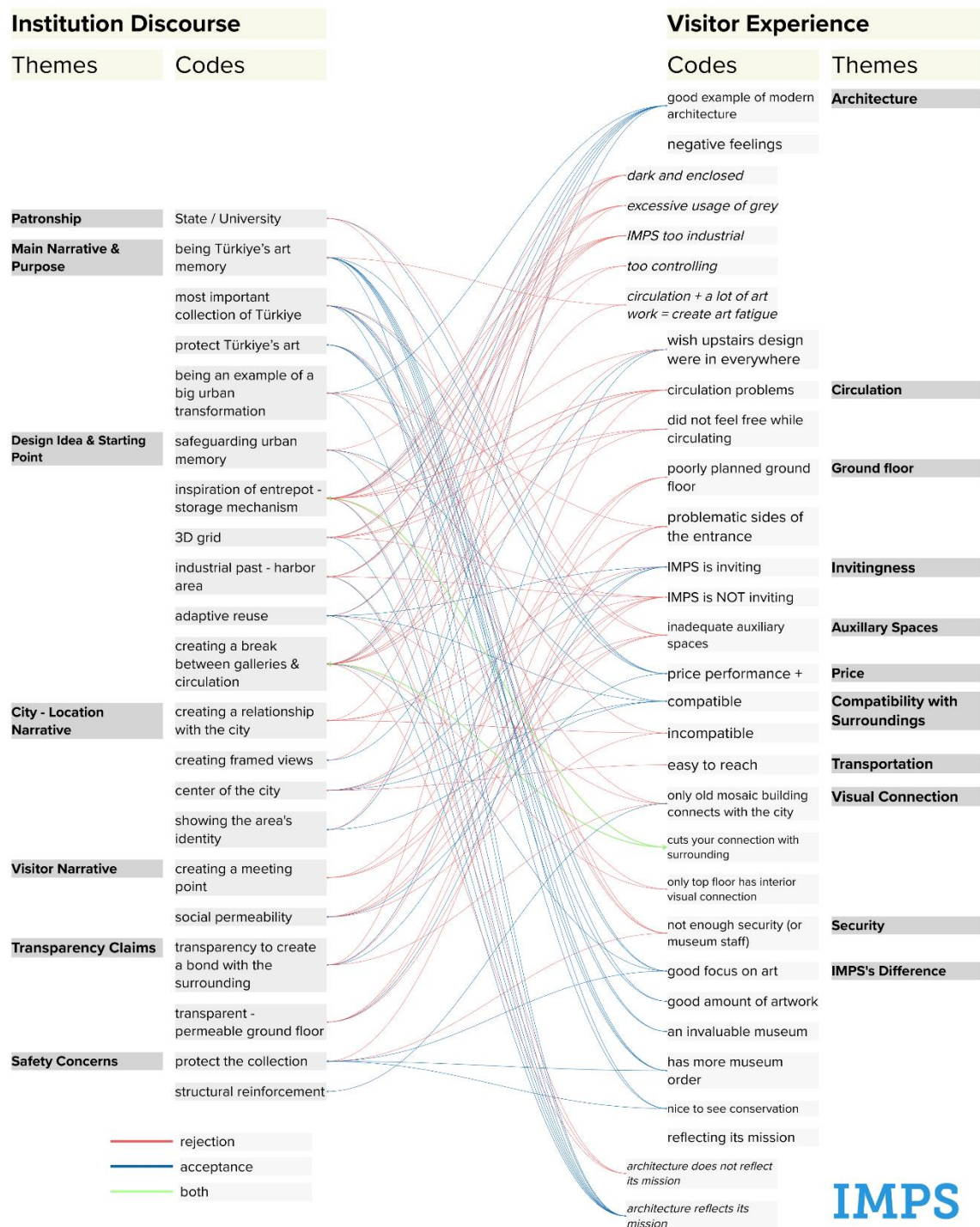


Figure 4.31 *Emerging Themes in IMM's Institutional and Visitor Narratives*

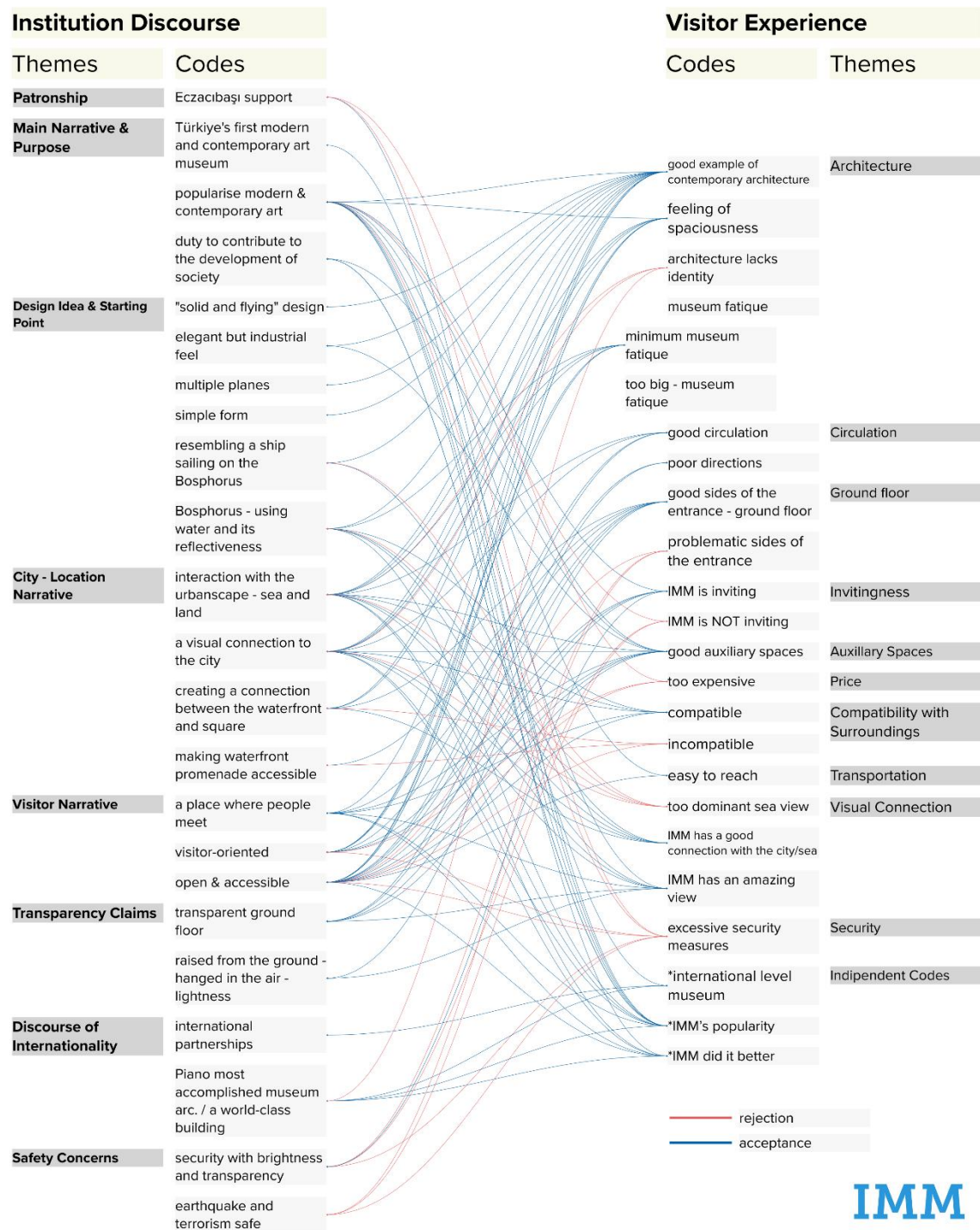
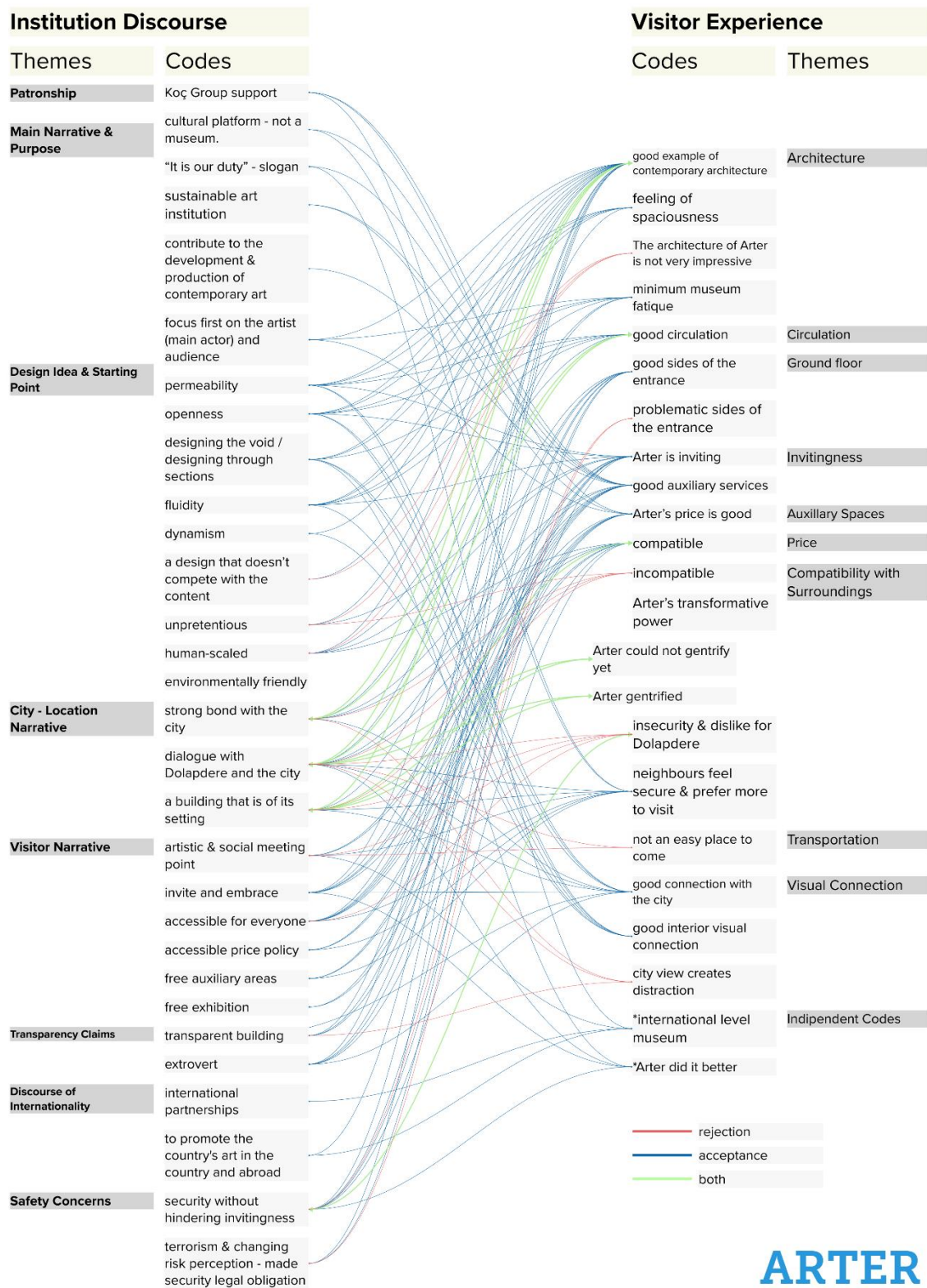


Figure 4.32 *Emerging Themes in Arter's Institutional and Visitor Narratives*



4.3.1 Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture

IMPS shapes its institutional narrative with its distinction of being Türkiye's first art museum and its founding-protective role in *Turkish artistic memory*. This institution, which stands out with its long-standing history and operation within the *university*, emphasises that it has *the most valuable art collection in Türkiye* and undertakes the duty of art historical continuity, national artistic heritage and art education by *preserving and protecting this collection*. All visitors stated that they were aware of this importance and defined the museum as *an invaluable museum*.

The participants noted that observing the historical development of Turkish art through *a large number of artworks* and within *a museum order* made the museum's *art-focused* curatorial and architectural approach highly instructive for them. They further highlighted that, alongside these previously mentioned features, the opportunity to observe the conservation workshops on the ground floor, which are accessible to visitors, enabled them to *sense the mission the museum* has undertaken directly. But, despite the museum's mission to protect the works, the inadequacy of the number of museum staff and security personnel was found surprising by the participants.

These key institutional narratives shape or direct the architectural decisions aimed at *preserving the urban memory*, such as protecting the artistic legacy. As the architect emphasises, the museum aspires to serve as *an example of the big urban transformation* in the region by *safeguarding the urban memory*. Therefore, the project adopted an *adaptive reuse* strategy, preserving the *three-dimensional grid* of the entrepot structure and reconstructing the coastal guard building as it originally stood. In order to further reinforce this approach, colours and materials in accordance with the approach and *the industrial past* were chosen; the reinforced concrete structure was left bare, and the grey

tone was preserved throughout the building. Another fundamental approach to the design is the museum architect's belief that museums should not be completely enclosed structures that cut visitors' relationship with the surroundings, but should *establish a connection with the city* in which they are located. In line with this understanding, the architect aimed to present *framed city views* from within the building. He explains that this was achieved by creating *a break between the galleries and circulation areas*. This was exercised by placing impermeable, *entrepot/storage mechanism-inspired* exhibition rooms within the grid system and the open circulation bridges connecting these spaces. The circulation zones in question were designed to be in one open space. It aimed to enable visitors to experience a clear sense of transition/stepping out as they moved from brighter galleries to the darker circulation zones. Moreover, this approach makes galleries fragmented units, within which the artworks are arranged according to a chronological narrative. The circulation bridges also assumed a guiding function for visitors to follow this chronology.

Participants appreciated the museum's design approach as an example of good architecture in terms of finding the form appealing. They stated that the enclosed fragmented container galleries supported the *focus on the works*, and the chronological order supported their learning process. Still, even though they perceived the intended *industrial aesthetic*, they found it *too excessive*. Especially due to the *excessive use of grey tones*, the museum felt *overly dark and overwhelming*. The museum's *highly controlled*, poorly lit circulation and self-contained rooms were criticised by participants for creating *a feeling of pressure and fatigue* rather than a moment of rest or openness (“creating a break”, in the architect's words). Participants explained that the circulation

zones were not allowing them to exercise their freedom of movement and were *overly dark, enclosed, and excessively controlling*.

Furthermore, the architect's intention to establish a dynamic visual dialogue with Istanbul was not fully reflected in the participants' experience. The permeable spaces that aimed to present changing perceptions of the urban context were not sufficiently felt by the visitors. Most participants stated that they struggled to perceive this intended dialogue, and the attempts to integrate city views were either ineffective or hardly noticeable during their visit. They also expressed discomfort that there were limited opportunities to pause, reflect, or engage visually with their surroundings (in the exhibition areas or even in the cafe after their visit), causing confusion and fatigue, especially when moving from brighter exhibition spaces back into darker corridors. Navigation issues further contributed to visitor frustration. Several participants failed to locate the Osman Hamdi exhibition, which they considered one of the museum's most valuable exhibitions, due to inadequate signage and unclear circulation.

The multi-story gallery at the *top level*, unlike the fragmented approach, was appreciated for its natural illumination, inter-floor connectivity, and city views. This situation *prompted interest in extending this concept*. Although participants acknowledged the positive aspects of the art-focused container galleries, the openness of the top floor, its clear relationship with the outside, visual communication, and flow between different spaces were described as offering a more comfortable and satisfying experience. Overall, it appeared that participants did not fully perceive or experience the architect's stated goal of creating a permeable and dynamic relationship with the urban context throughout most parts of the exhibition levels.

The architect emphasised the *permeability and spatial continuity of the ground floor* as critical elements in the museum's design in terms of creating a *social meeting point*. In this context, the ground floor was aimed to be an area that supports *physical and social permeability*. To achieve this, visual permeability was increased on the ground floor facade, and two different entrances were designed connecting the entrances from the street and Galataport. Participants indeed appreciated the museum's accessibility in relation to its *central location* and *affordable ticket pricing* compared to the number and significance of exhibited works. Participants also valued the preserved coastal guard building, its permeable facade, and the openness and inviting quality of the public square in front of it.

However, the participants expressed *serious problems in the spatial organisation of the ground floor*, along with *inadequate auxiliary services* (cafe, museum shop). In particular, they perceived the café on the Galataport side as a commercialised extension of Galataport, far from contributing to the social experience of the museum and not establishing an organic connection with the museum. Furthermore, the spatial confusion caused by dual entrances and inadequate signage created navigation difficulties, weakening the intended accessibility. Although the architect emphasised *transparency and social permeability* in the spatial design of the ground floor, participants stated that the architectural implementation and inadequate auxiliary services prevented them from fully experiencing the intended social interaction and permeability. Despite some positive architectural elements, there was an apparent mismatch between the architect's goals and the participants' experiences. Nevertheless, considering all these criticisms, it was also observed that the artistic and cultural mission of the museum as an institution was largely accepted and embraced by the participants (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 *IMPS Visitor Experience vs. Institutional Discourse*

Historical and Educational Mission	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Visitors strongly agreed that the IMPS was an institution of national importance and that every citizen should visit. They valued the size and significance of the collection.	
Partially Rejected	
While the structured, chronological layout of the galleries helped reinforce the educational mission, it also made the museum's layout feel too rigid. Visitors felt forced to follow a single path.	While visitors acknowledged IMPS's role in safeguarding Türkiye's artistic memory, its rigid layout and poor wayfinding design limited its effectiveness as an educational space.
Missed/ Overlooked	
The wayfinding design and inadequate signage resulted in several participants missing a vital exhibition. It disrupted rather than advanced the learning process.	
Contradictions	
Some perceived the museum's strict circulation path and enclosed rooms as creating a sense of pressure and exhaustion, making the visit feel like a task rather than an enriching experience.	
Adaptive Reuse and Urban Memory	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Visitors appreciated restoring industrial heritage. The mosaic facade and transparent workshops were positive elements linking the past and present.	IMPS's adaptive reuse approach was acknowledged as a successful conservation effort. However, the aesthetic and spatial choices made the
Partially Rejected	
Some found the industrial aesthetic overly dominant and oppressive. While the museum honoured its past as a port	

warehouse, the monochrome interior and enclosed spaces evoked discomfort rather than historical depth.	museum feel cold and isolating rather than seamlessly integrated into the urban fabric.
Missed/ Overlooked	

The intended dialogue between the museum and its urban surroundings did not fully translate for visitors. Although Arolat emphasised permeability, they did not perceive a strong connection with the city.

Circulation and Spatial Navigation

Accepted	Key Takeaway
The strict circulation route was the museum's most criticised aspect. Visitors felt discomfort at not being able to pause, rest, or explore sections freely.	
Missed/ Overlooked	The strictly structured circulation design
Wayfinding issues, especially the unnoticed Osman Hamdi exhibition, suggested that the circulation was less intuitive than intended.	backfired, making visitors feel controlled rather than guided, and reducing their ability to engage with the collection fully.
Contradictions	
While controlled circulation aimed to enhance the experience, it caused fatigue and disengagement. Some felt suffocated, especially due to the lack of rest areas and open spaces.	

Atmosphere and Sensory Experience

Partially Accepted	Key Takeaway
The intimate, compartmentalised exhibition rooms made some visitors feel the artwork was the focus, enhancing concentration and appreciation.	The intended focused atmosphere became overwhelming due to excessive enclosure, dark

Rejected

However, the darkness, heavy industrial aesthetic, and limited natural light created a sense of confinement and exhaustion. Visitors felt physically and mentally drained, struggling to stay engaged.

aesthetics, and lack of openness, making the museum physically and mentally exhausting for visitors.

Missed/ Overlooked

The upper levels, which introduced more openness and natural light, were received positively, but this approach was not consistently applied throughout the museum.

Contradictions

Although the fragmented structure was appreciated architecturally, it was stated that the spacious and visually continuous design on the upper floor was better.

Public Accessibility and Integration with Galataport

Accepted

Visitors appreciated the ticket price and the number of artworks they could experience.

Key Takeaway

Missed/ Overlooked

Many felt confused by the entrance sequence, mainly due to the dual entrance system (Gataport and street-side), which caused navigational issues and disorientation.

IMPS's integration into Galataport was strategically beneficial but also introduced commercial and navigational

Contradictions

The café was seen as a commercially driven, out-of-place addition rather than an organic part of the museum experience. Visitors wished for a museum-owned café to foster a stronger cultural identity rather than reinforce Galataport's commercialised feel.

complications, making the museum's ground floor feel less like a cultural hub.

4.3.2 Istanbul Modern

Supported by Eczacıbaşı, Istanbul Modern boasts of being *Türkiye's first modern and contemporary art museum*. They state that their main aims are to “*popularise modern & contemporary art*” and “*duty to contribute to the development of society*”. In order to realise this statement and establish “*a world-class*” museum building, they chose Renzo Piano, who they describe as *one of the most successful museum architects in the world*. Renzo Piano is an architect who has created many world-famous and popular museum architectures. Thus, choosing Piano to provide an example of a building at international standards and to support the popularity of the museum is a situation that serves the museum's interests very well.

Visitors' comments have shown that the support of Eczacıbaşı, the reputation of the museum architect, the publicity, successful auxiliary spaces, and the good location and view of the museum support *the popularity* of the museum. Although some participants stated that the popularity of the museum is not related to the interest in art, it was observed that the museum, although partially accepted by some, achieved its goal and is considered of international quality. The museum and architect stated that they aimed to design - especially the ground floor of - the building as *a visitor-oriented, open and accessible area, a place where people meet*, a public living space with *transparent facades*, a public library, a café and workshops. Most visitors found *the spaciousness and openness of the ground floor and open spaces positive*. They actively used the social areas, especially the cafes and shops, and considered the museum a real “meeting place”. While transparency is described in architecture as a symbol of both security (leaving no hidden corners) and openness, the architect emphasises that open architecture will increase security. The museum's *high level of security* has been observed to overshadow

this sense of openness and accessibility. Some visitors have found the two-stage security checkpoints and the crowded security guards inside "disturbing". The openness established by transparency conflicted with the museum's atmosphere and operational security practices, with the space being perceived as both positively "open" and negatively "overly regulated."

The museum defines itself as a structure that *integrates with the Bosphorus* and uses the visual effect of *water and reflections*. It aims to be compatible with the historical and geographical identity of Istanbul via *interacting with the sea and the Tophane Square* to create *a visual connection with the city*. It was aimed to establish the "city-space-view" triangle, especially on the terrace, landing lobbies and ground floor. The architect explains the structure with *fish and ship metaphors* in relation to the Bosphorus and the location's industrial past. The architect also states that the building, which he describes as having *a simple form*, has been raised from the ground by leaving the *ground floor transparent*, thus creating a sense of *lightness* in the structure.

All visitors found the Bosphorus view and *the relationship between the museum and the sea extremely valuable*, even describing the museum as *"the place with the best view in Istanbul"*. However, some participants argued that the *dominance of the sea view* overshadowed the building's architectural identity or the art it inhabits. They argued that the architect's focus on integrating the sea weakened the structure's character, making it feel "like any other building" (*lack of identity*). Visitors familiar with Renzo Piano's architectural reputation described the building as "one of Piano's weakest works". As a result, although the architectural perception aimed at holding architecture back from bringing art to the forefront was partially realised, due to its view, it is understood that the building did not leave a strong impression on visitors, and its view stood out.

The contrast between the building's strong visual connection and its architectural identity also influenced how visitors experienced the space. Participants stated that the museum's central staircase and flexible circulation gave them a sense of spaciousness and freedom. They also appreciated the landing lobbies and outdoor terraces, *minimising museum fatigue*. However, many participants complained about *the lack of clear wayfinding*. In particular, the insufficient emphasis on the reflection terrace staircase and the disjointed flow between the exhibition areas were among the criticised elements. Although spatial fluidity was generally considered to be achieved, it was emphasised that some deficiencies were felt in terms of direction and spatial integrity. Moreover, natural light and views have increased spatial comfort. However, some visitors, particularly those more focused on the art itself, felt distanced from the artistic narrative due to the museum's emphasis on views.

One of the museum's fundamental discourses, integration with the city and accessibility, makes it difficult to think of the museum separately from the large-scale urban transformation project, Galataport, where it is located. While the museum is physically integrated into the Galataport, it also partially distinguishes itself with elements such as glass security barriers and additional security points. On the other hand, the function of the past port and the construction of the Galataport were criticised because they severed the relationship between the city dweller and the historical Tophane Square with the sea. Based on this, the architect elevated the building with stairs and designed the ground floor to be maximally transparent as an attempt to visually and physically *reconnect the square and the waterfront*. While the museum benefits from Galataport's intense visitor traffic, it also maintains a certain distance between itself and its surroundings. Many visitors positively evaluated the advantages of the museum's central

location and found the museum easy to reach. However, some participants criticised the commercial structure of the Galataport and described the museum and its surroundings as “shopping-oriented” and “devoid of spirit.” Although the museum is frequently visited thanks to its central location, the touristic and commercialised atmosphere of Galataport has made it difficult for some visitors to feel a sense of spatial belonging.

As an internationally focused institution, IMM positions itself alongside global contemporary art museums with its pricing strategy and diversified services. Although the participants supported the museum’s claim of being international, they stated that they found the entrance fees and the prices of its store disproportionate and expensive when compared to world-famous institutions such as the Louvre and the Vatican (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 *IMM Visitor Experience vs. Institutional Discourse*

Accessibility & Public Space Narrative	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
The ground floor’s openness and brightness made auxiliary areas feel like inviting meeting spots.	The museum delivered a physically open space, yet the visitor experience of openness was dampened by visible security measures, creating a tension between intent and perception.
Rejected	
However, the heavy presence of security checkpoints at Galataport’s entrance and inside the museum was perceived as off-putting and excessive.	
Contradictions	
While the spatial openness was recognised, the operational environment (i.e., visible and numerous security guards) contradicted the intended “open & democratic” atmosphere.	

Iconic Architecture & Urban Identity	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
All praised the amazing Bosphorus view and appreciated the building’s connection with the water. Many referred to the view as “the best in Istanbul.”	While the museum’s connection to its urban and geographic context resonated with visitors, the architectural identity was seen as underwhelming by some.
Partially Rejected	
Some participants criticised the building for lacking a distinctive architectural identity, feeling that the view overpowered the architecture.	
Missed/ Overlooked	
The goal of an “iconic” design wasn’t fully recognised, even Piano’s admirers finding it weaker than his other projects.	
Connection with Galataport & Urban Context	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
The museum is in Galataport’s busy pedestrian traffic, naturally encouraging footfall.	IMM benefited from Galataport’s foot traffic, but the commercial context undermined some visitors’ sense of cultural immersion.
Partially Rejected	
Some participants criticised Galataport’s commercial atmosphere as “soulless” and detached from the cultural identity they expected from Istanbul Modern.	
Contradictions	
While the location improved accessibility and visibility, it also made IMM seem part of a commercial rather than a cultural institution.	
Spatial Fluidity & Navigation	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Visitors appreciated the sense of spatial openness, especially between landing lobbies and terraces with panoramic views.	IMM succeeded in creating open, fluid

Rejected	
Visitors reported wayfinding issues regarding the under-emphasised viewing terrace stairs and the disjointed flow between exhibition areas.	spaces, but visitors experienced practical navigational challenges that hindered a seamless journey.
Missed/ Overlooked	
Although the plan promoted fluid movement, the absence of clear navigational aids limited its full realisation.	
Sensory Experience: Light, Openness & Comfort	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Natural light and the panoramic views were praised for providing mental and physical relief during the visit.	IMM's sensory environment enhanced visitor comfort, but its heavy reliance on the external scenery diluted the sense of focused engagement with the art for some.
Partially Rejected	
Some felt the view dominated the experience, distracting from the artwork, weakening its identity as a gallery space.	
Contradictions	
While bright, open spaces were seen as comfortable and relaxing, some visitors felt the museum lacked an intense, immersive 'art-centred' atmosphere.	
Pricing and Commercial Perception	
Rejected	Key Takeaway
Many visitors criticised the high ticket and museum shop prices, comparing them unfavourably to world-famous museums like the Louvre.	IMM's global aspirations were clear, but high pricing reduced perceived value, generating critical visitor responses.
Contradictions	
IMM's international stature was recognised, but visitors questioned whether the museum's content and scale justified such pricing in the local context.	

4.3.3 Arter

Founded as an extension of the strategic vision of the Vehbi Koç Foundation (VKV) in the field of contemporary art, Arter moved from its first location in Beyoğlu in 2010 to its new building in Dolapdere in 2019. The institution's identity is nourished by the *Koç Group's sustainable cultural support approach*. Arter rejects defining itself as a museum in the traditional sense and positions itself as a broader "*cultural platform*". They explain that the reason for this is to go beyond preserving and exhibiting the past and to establish connections with art in different ways and flexibility. Moreover, as a cultural hub, they focus on social hospitality, inclusivity and interactive public engagement.

Institutional rhetoric frequently emphasises affordability, accessibility, and the museum's role as *an artistic and social meeting point*. Acting with the slogan "*It's our duty*" to support art, the institution aims to *actively contribute to the development and production of contemporary art* by adopting an approach that *prioritises the artist and the audience*. This prioritisation is also supported by *a design that does not compete with the art it inhabits*.

The architectural team and the institution aim to create an architectural space emphasising *permeability, fluidity, openness and dynamism*, especially by proceeding with the *design process through sections and voids*. The main reason is to create a visitor-friendly, *unpretentious, human-scale, inviting and embracing* building. In line with this purpose, transparent facades, wide and high atriums that provide continuous visual communication within the building, and strategically positioned auxiliary service areas were designed to create an *extroverted* building.

Participants strongly affirmed, and they praised the *fluidity* and *spaciousness* of the museum. They appreciated these design qualities, *good intuitive circulation, visual*

continuity between galleries and floors, and the surprise city views, all of which effectively *minimised museum fatigue*. Likewise, auxiliary spaces were consistently highlighted as enhancing navigation comfort and helping to prevent fatigue. Moreover, they acknowledged their role in improving comfort and sociability. The bookstore and Divan Bistro were praised for their quality, affordability, and positioning overlooking the rear courtyard. As a result, auxiliary spaces effectively achieved the goal of corporate social hospitality, increasing visitors' comfort and interaction.

Moreover, while participants appreciated the visual openness, accessibility and *inviting character* of the entry plaza and the transparent front facade, they strongly criticised the restrictive single-person revolving door entry mechanism. Although the museum initially stated that they did not even plan for a security kiosk during the early design stages, security measures became *a legal obligation due to terrorism and changing risk perceptions in the country*. As a result, the museum aimed for *security solutions that would not hinder its inviting character*. However, these institutional statements do not explain why the automatic entry doors used after the security kiosk were later replaced by single-person revolving doors shortly after the museum's opening. The revolving door, being the main entry point, was considered absurd and unnecessary by participants. This contradiction is regarded as the museum's unease and insecurity towards Dolapdere.

Even though interior fluidity was successfully realised, the narrow entry slightly damaged their perception of fluidity and openness, contradicting the museum's intentions of permeability and *ease of access*. Additionally, it was noticed that the closure (or discontinuation of use) of the rear entrance further intensified these feelings. This reveals a fundamental tension between Arter's spatial ideals and the practical security realities of its urban context.

Visual permeability, strong bond, and dialogue with Dolapdere and the city, which constitute Arter's main discourses, are due to the institution's aim of being an *inclusive building, which is of its setting*. Rather than being an isolated cultural landmark, the museum establishes connections with the community, promoting openness through transparent facades and accessible public spaces. That's why the architect planned front and rear squares to open up to the neighbourhood and created Dolapdere views from the cafe, bookstore and library. Despite security concerns, the institution avoided high walls or overly secure boundaries, choosing instead minimal visual separations such as the shallow pool separating Irmak Street from the front plaza.

Many of the participants *positively acknowledged Arter's connection with the city* and its openness and transparency, which allows visitors to observe the daily life of Dolapdere. Although a small number of participants stated that the relationship with the outside world and the “run-down” situation of Dolapdere were *distracting for the art gazing activity*, most indicated that these unexpected *visual interactions with the city enriched their experience* and reduced their museum fatigue, as mentioned previously. While describing these surprising visual connections, they especially mentioned those that improved circulation and auxiliary spaces. Some participants even stated that Arter's disadvantageous location in a neglected neighbourhood became an advantage with these interesting visual connections.

However, besides these positive comments, many visitors expressed *discomfort or insecurity about the general condition of Dolapdere*. The neighbourhood was repeatedly described as neglected, insecure, or difficult to access. A significant group of participants—especially females—stated that due to *concerns about transportation, safety, and aesthetic neglect*, they would avoid visiting the area for any purpose other than

Arter, particularly at night. A few even said they would hesitate to invite foreigners or individuals unfamiliar with the area. In contrast, some *participants who live near Dolapdere* mentioned they had a different perception; they trusted the neighbourhood and *visited the area regularly*—not just for viewing art but also for the good auxiliary services provided by Arter.

One of the main issues where the participants had different opinions was the architecture's *compatibility* with the neighbourhood's texture. Some participants found the contrast created by the modernity of the building valuable and evaluated it as an element that attracts visitors. They even stated that it was the *beginning of a positive urban regeneration*, as stated by the institution. However, the other group noted that the contemporary architecture of the museum created a negative contrast with the neighbourhood's texture, creating a sense of dissonance or detachment rather than meaningful dialogue, and it *could not create a meaningful change in the neighbourhood* positively. Ultimately, urban integration is neither wholly successful nor unsuccessful; instead, it is a complex and partially realised goal intertwined with moments of intimate connection and unresolved urban problems.

The institution's emphasis on being an inclusive and publicly accessible cultural institution has led to measures such as accessible pricing, the neighbour card, free-entry spaces (ground floor exhibitions, auxiliary areas, etc.), and clear internal wayfinding, all aiming to attract a wider demographic. Participants positively acknowledged this approach by praising the museum's internal accessibility, affordable ticket pricing, and auxiliary spaces. They also found the museum's entry plaza (excluding the entrance gate itself) and the overall building inviting and highly accessible.

While internal and financial accessibility received high remarks, several concerns were expressed regarding infrastructural and logistical challenges. Participants mentioned inadequate public transport options, limited shuttle service schedules, lack of parking facilities, and the steep or pedestrian-unfriendly walking paths, alongside a general sense of discomfort or unease related to Dolapdere itself. In short, internal openness and accessibility contrasted sharply with external accessibility challenges due to contextual limitations. It was understood that the efforts made by the institution on social integration and accessibility were not sufficiently taken into consideration by the visitors.

Arter explicitly highlights that, as an institution, they aim to *promote the country's art both domestically and internationally*. International partnerships, architectural flexibility accommodating diverse art forms, diverse programmatic offerings (exhibitions, performance halls, library), spatial aesthetics, and high-quality auxiliary services and spaces are also implemented to communicate this international stature. Participants firmly recognised that Arter is a world-class institution in terms of architectural quality, gallery flexibility, spatial aesthetics and cultural programming. Yet again, despite acknowledging all these, many visitors expressed significant hesitation or reluctance to suggest foreign guests or friends unfamiliar with Dolapdere, primarily the aforementioned reasons, socio-economic neglect, perceived insecurity and inadequate infrastructure (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 *Arter Visitor Experience vs. Institutional Discourse*

Fluidity, Navigation & Spatial Comfort	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Strong fondness for internal fluidity, intuitive circulation, comfortable scale, spaciousness, transparency, and well-placed auxiliary spaces, reducing visitor fatigue.	
Rejected	
Strong criticism of the restrictive single-person revolving door entry is perceived explicitly as a cautious reaction to Dolapdere's insecurity.	Interior fluidity was successfully realised, but it was compromised by the entry point, creating a perceptual mismatch.
Contradictions	
Interior openness and fluidity are contradicted by limiting, security-driven entry.	
Missed/ Overlooked	
Some visitors missed the architectural intent behind the entry design as a security compromise.	
Social Hospitality & Auxiliary Spaces	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Strong fondness for auxiliary spaces enhancing comfort, sociability, and visitor satisfaction. Visitors praised affordability, strategic placement, and an inviting ambience.	Auxiliary spaces effectively realised the institutional goal of social hospitality, enhancing visitor comfort and interaction.
Missed/ Overlooked	
Some partially missed the deliberate strategy behind affordable pricing (bistro/bookstore) as social outreach.	

Visual & Urban Integration with Dolapdere		
Accepted	Key Takeaway	
Most appreciated visual permeability, seeing the surrounding neighbourhood enriches the museum experience and creates dialogue.	Mixed success in urban integration; visual permeability appreciated, but socio-spatial context created tensions, limiting complete alignment with institutional intent.	
Rejected		
Strong concerns with the unsafety of Dolapdere. Few view the museum as visually disconnected and alien in its run-down context.		
Contradictions		
Opinions diverged significantly on whether Arter enhanced or disrupted the local urban context.		
Missed/ Overlooked	Despite successful internal openness and affordability, infrastructural and logistical challenges dilute the intended openness, causing a strong mismatch in accessibility.	
The museum's deliberate initiatives (neighbour card, local engagement efforts) were largely overlooked.		
Accessibility & Ease of Arrival		
Accepted		Key Takeaway
Once inside, the museum is perceived as welcoming and accessible, with affordable internal amenities.		Despite successful internal openness and affordability, infrastructural and logistical challenges dilute the intended openness, causing a strong mismatch in accessibility.
Rejected		
Criticisms: difficult physical access, reliance on shuttles, lack of parking, and perceived insecurity of Dolapdere		
Contradictions		
Internal openness contrasted sharply with external accessibility challenges.		
Missed/ Overlooked		
Visitors largely overlooked/missed the museum’s strategic efforts to improve society integration and accessibility.		

Security & Entry Experience	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Visitors appreciated the visual openness of the entry plaza and the discreet security design, which maintained the building's overall transparency and welcoming atmosphere.	
Rejected	
The single-person revolving-door entry was strongly criticised as restrictive and contrary to the museum's intended openness, while the closure of the rear entrance further reinforced this sense of limitation.	Intended openness is undermined by restrictive revolving-door entry and closed rear access, highlighting the tension between architectural ideals and security realities.
Contradictions	
Architectural openness contrasted with practical realities: restrictive front entry and sealed rear entrance.	
Missed/ Overlooked	
The security rationale behind entrance design compromises goes unnoticed and is seen merely as a design drawback.	
Museum as World-Class Space	
Accepted	Key Takeaway
Arter is firmly recognised as world-class in terms of architectural quality, gallery flexibility, spatial aesthetics, and cultural programming.	
Rejected	
Significant visitor hesitation to invite foreign guests due to Dolapdere's perceived insecurity, neglect, and infrastructural problems.	Aligns strongly with global museum standards internally, yet its location reduces visitors' "internationality" perception—a tension between institutional image and urban context.
Contradictions	
The internal museum experience is praised as a global standard, but contrasts with Dolapdere concerns.	

Missed/ Overlooked

Broader institutional strategies for community engagement and urban integration are mostly overlooked



5. DISCUSSION

IMPS is a state museum affiliated with Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, while Istanbul Modern continues its activities with the support of large private capital groups such as Eczacıbaşı and Arter Koç. The difference between these public and privately supported structures directly affects how museums position themselves in the public sphere. Institutional structures play a decisive role in many decision-making processes, such as management, curatorial staff, architect selection and target audience determination, causing each institution to express its unique identity through architecture. Nevertheless, these museums also converge in several contemporary museological approaches. This is largely because visitors across all three institutions share similar expectations, and the museums operate within the same broader cultural and temporal context. However, the way each institution frames and articulates these common approaches varies significantly due to their differing funding structures.

Istanbul Modern and Arter aim to make a difference by developing an architecture and discourse compatible with their institutional supporters' values in a cultural environment where competition is intense. This strategy provides both soft power to the institutions and enables museums to show their institutional identities (Lord & Blankenberg, 2015). On the other hand, IMPS has to strike a balance between protecting the cultural heritage and connecting with contemporary audiences. As a museum affiliated with a well-established university, IMPS emphasises its mission to preserve and exhibit Türkiye's artistic heritage.

In addition to these structural and strategic differentiations, each museum adopts a distinct model regarding who speaks for the institution, which further reveals their institutional culture. Arter exhibits a decentralised and inclusive discursive approach,

where multiple staff members across different departments—ranging from curators to operations and communications—actively participate in shaping the museum’s narrative. This discursive plurality is not only evident in interviews and public communications but is also institutionalised in Arter’s own publications, reflecting its internalised commitment to openness and shared authorship.

In contrast, IMPS reflects a more hierarchical structure in its institutional representation. The rector, as the figurehead of the affiliated university, speaks authoritatively on behalf of the museum, while the architect often articulates his vision independently, occasionally diverging from the university's overarching narrative. Notably, the project was initially shaped under a rector who had a personal connection to the site and acted almost as a commissioning figure for the transformation. However, the subsequent change in university leadership introduced a shift in narrative emphasis, suggesting a discontinuity between the institutional voice and architectural authorship. This division reveals a potential latent tension between institutional continuity and architectural intent.

Istanbul Modern, meanwhile, centralises its institutional discourse around prominent figures such as Chairperson Oya Eczacıbaşı and star architect Renzo Piano. The use of high-profile individuals not only reflects an effort to establish credibility and prestige but also supports the institution’s broader ambition for international visibility and branding.

In this section, the expressions that each museum frequently uses to describe itself have been identified and classified under common themes. It has been observed that institutions use these themes to make their values and priorities visible and establish relationships with their target audiences.

Institutional discourses were analysed through thematic analysis, resulting in the identification of seven main themes: *Main Narrative*, *Design Idea & Starting Point*, *City-Location Narrative*, *Visitor Orientation*, *Transparency*, *(Inter)national Positioning*, and *Safety Concerns*. These themes reflect the fundamental areas where institutions articulate their identity and spatial strategies through discourse.

The theme of *Main Narrative* defines how institutions associate and represent themselves, as well as how they shape their architectural spaces accordingly. *Design Idea and Starting Point* emerged as a second core area, revealing how institutions translated their main narratives into architectural concepts. *City-Location Narrative* addresses how institutions relate their architectural identity to their immediate urban surroundings, particularly to Istanbul and their specific neighbourhoods. *Visitor* orientation focuses on how institutions positioned visitors within their discourses, particularly in terms of accessibility, social permeability, and creating welcoming spaces. *(Inter)national* positioning examined how institutions located themselves on both national and international cultural landscapes, such as through partnerships or positioning themselves as representatives of contemporary Turkish art. *Safety Concerns*, became a distinct theme, reflecting the compulsory prioritisation of security measures across public spaces in Türkiye, shaped by earthquake risks and changing political conditions. This theme highlights how each institution integrated structural and visitor safety within their architectural strategies.

Finally, *Transparency*, while initially considered a potential sub-theme under *City-Location* or *Visitor Orientation*, was elevated to the status of a main theme because transparency was not only about urban connection or visitor accessibility. It represented a larger institutional ambition towards openness, permeability, and the negotiation

between interior and exterior, becoming a foundational discourse shaping both spatial and social practices.

Thus, the themes were not only defined by the frequency of codes but also by the structural role they played in shaping institutional identity and architectural presence. Codes provided depth within these themes but were ultimately organised to reflect the holistic strategies museums adopted in constructing their spatial, social, and symbolic positioning.

Before presenting the comparative Table 5.1, it is important to note that the themes capture both discursive patterns and their architectural-material manifestations, revealing the close interrelation between narrative construction and spatial design across the three museums.

Table 5.1 *Table of Institutional Discourses*

	IMPS	IMM	ARTER
	State / University	Eczacıbaşı support	Koç Group support
Main Narrative	Being Türkiye's art memory	Türkiye's first modern and contemporary art museum	Cultural platform - not a museum. "It is our duty" - slogan
	The most important collection of Türkiye	Duty to contribute to the development of society	A sustainable art institution
	Protect Türkiye's art	Popularise modern and contemporary art	Contribute to the development/production of contemporary art
	Being an example of a big urban transformation		Focus first on the artist and audience

	IMPS	IMM	ARTER
Design Idea & Starting Point	Safeguarding urban memory	"Solid and flying" design	Permeability - openness - fluidity - unpretentious
	Inspiration of storage mechanisms (entrepots)	Multiple planes Elegant but industrial feel	Designing the void / through sections
	Adaptive reuse	Resembling a ship sailing on the Bosphorus	Environmentally friendly
	3D grid	Simple form	Human-scaled
	Creating a break between galleries and circulation	Bosphorus - using water and its reflectiveness	Dynamism Design secondary to content
City - Location	Creating a relationship with the city	Interaction with the urbanscape - sea & land A visual connection with the city	Strong bond with the city Dialogue with Dolapdere and the city
	Showing the area's identity	Making the waterfront promenade accessible	A building that is of its setting
	Centre of the city	Creating a connection with the sea & the square	
	Creating framed views		
	Permeable ground floor	Transparent ground floor Raised from the ground - hanging in the air – lightness	Transparent building Extrovert
Transparency	Transparency - bond with the surroundings		

	IMPS	IMM	ARTER
Visitor			Artistic and social meeting point
	Meeting point	A place where people meet	Invite and embrace
	Social permeability	Visitor-oriented Open and accessible	Accessible for everyone/price policy Free exhibition and auxiliary areas
(Inter) nationality	Bringing national cultural heritage to a broader audience	International partnerships Piano: renowned museum architect / a world-class building	International partnerships To promote the country's art in Türkiye and abroad
Safety Concerns	Protect the collection	Security with brightness and transparency	Security without hindering invitingness
	Structural reinforcement	Earthquake and terrorism safety	Terrorism and changing risk perception - made security a legal obligation

5.1 Main Narrative and Purpose

IMPS defines itself as an institution that preserves Türkiye's artistic memory. It underscores that it has a historical responsibility because it houses one of the country's most established art collections. Its discourse emphasises transforming a historically significant structure into a contemporary museum, with a clear focus on continuity and preservation.

Istanbul Modern defines itself as Türkiye's first museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art. Its institutional goal is to bring these branches of art together with wider

social segments and thus contribute to social development through art. This approach aims for art to become a part of everyday life, reach a wider audience and popularise.

Arter's approach is distinctly different. Instead of adopting the identity of a "museum," it defines itself as a "cultural platform" (Baliç, Fereli & Evren, 2021). This terminology reflects a more adaptive and inclusive institutional model that centres both the artist and the visitor, emphasising collaboration, sustainability, and innovation.

Although all three institutions aim to contribute to the cultural field, the ways they do this differ. While IMPS is based on the national art heritage, Istanbul Modern focuses on popularising art and its educational role. Arter stands out as a flexible and inclusive structure that supports innovative production.

The fundamental aims that all three museums put forward in their institutional discourses are expressed not only through written documents and press releases, but also through architectural forms and spatial arrangements. This situation reveals that museum architecture is not only a physical shelter, but also a material reflection of institutional identities and ideological stances (Jones & MacLeod, 2016; Steets, 2016). In this context, architecture becomes a tool through which the institution tells its "Own story."

IMPS's commitment to preservation is spatially reinforced by its historically rooted structure; Istanbul Modern's engagement with the public is reflected in its transparent, open design; and Arter's cultural platform-based identity aligns with its flexible spatial arrangements and dialogic approach to audience interaction. These spatial strategies, as Langdon Winner (1999) notes, design decisions go beyond being technical choices and become ideological tools that support certain values and visions.

As seen in new museum approaches (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Barrett, 2010), museums are no longer institutions that merely exhibit works; they have become spaces

where social meanings are negotiated and institutional narratives are reproduced together with the visitor.

This is particularly evident in Istanbul Modern's emphasis on inclusion and experience, and in Arter's creator-focused mission. As Falk (2016) highlights, meaningful institutional narratives emerge where institutional priorities and visitor interests align. Considering that visitors broadly accepted and engaged with the core narratives of each institution, it can be inferred that this alignment was achieved through both discourse and design.

Visitors generally accepted the main narratives proposed by each institution in broad terms and were able to identify and engage with these narratives through the spatial and institutional cues offered by the museums. IMPS's emphasis on continuity was acknowledged as a core mission. Istanbul Modern's effort to reach wider audiences through a more accessible form of engagement was positively received. Likewise, Arter's narrative was effectively communicated, with visitors noting its openness and visitor-centred practices. It was evident that participants were able to compare these key themes across all three museums.

5.2 Design Ideas & Starting Points

IMPS has adopted a design approach that preserves the historical texture of the building by focusing on the port area's place in urban memory and its industrial past. In this context, the three-dimensional grid system reflecting the functional character of the building, which was used as a warehouse in the past, has been preserved. While separating the exhibition areas from the circulation areas, the architect defines this grid system as layers of the past and aims for spatial continuity by placing new additions on this structural order. Thus, IMPS seeks to establish a bridge between the past and the present

in a way that is suitable for both the artistic heritage it carries and the urban context in which it is located. Like Tate Modern's conversion of an industrial power plant into a cultural landmark, IMPS's architectural intervention reflects the shift towards reusing industrial heritage as a site of meaningful cultural engagement (Shin, 2024)

The design of Istanbul Modern is shaped by the visual and spatial relationship it establishes with the Bosphorus. The simple and, at the same time, industrial aesthetics of the building are designed to evoke a ship floating on the Bosphorus. The columned structure on the ground floor aims to strengthen the contact with the sea, together with the area defined by the museum as the "column landscape". In this way, the building seeks a harmonious integrity with the coastline and establishes a relationship with its location's natural and urban dynamics.

On the other hand, Arter bases its design on the principles of permeability, fluidity and openness. The structure is defined by voids, sections and openness that blur the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces. The design takes shape with an architectural understanding that respects the human scale and nature while being unpretentious. It aims to present a space that does not overshadow art but coexists with it. This approach aspires to highlight the direct overlap with Arter's institutional identity that centres on the artist and the viewer.

IMM's and Arter's spatial strategy aligns with new museology discourses that promote participatory, dialogical, and inclusive museum environments (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Barrett, 2010). By prioritising permeability and social interaction, openness and undetermined flows enable visitor agency and narrative co-creation (Hamzeian, 2024; Lorente, 2025).

In summary, while IMPS establishes a connection with the past by re-functioning a historical structure, Istanbul Modern redefines the relationship between the sea and the city with its architecture. Arter, on the other hand, offers a platform that supports art production and experience with a flexible and inclusive design. These three spatial strategies exemplify the shift away from the modernist ideal of the “neutral container” toward a museum architecture that expresses institutional narratives, engages urban contexts, and contributes to the production of meaning (McClellan, 2008; Jones & MacLeod, 2016).

Visitors generally recognised the core design intentions articulated by each institution; however, their spatial experiences revealed certain tensions. IMPS’s adaptive reuse approach was acknowledged as a valuable effort in preserving the building’s historical character. Nevertheless, the aesthetic and spatial interventions were perceived by most as disorienting, overly controlled, and at times even cold, failing to integrate into the urban context despite their architectural narrative. In the case of Istanbul Modern, the visual and spatial engagement with the Bosphorus was mainly appreciated and considered as an element that supports the art gazing activity. Still, several visitors felt this connection was overly spotlighted, occasionally to the disadvantage of their engagement with the artworks. Arter’s architectural design was generally well received; its openness, fluidity, and sensitivity to the human scale were seen as aligning with its institutional identity. Nevertheless, the socio-spatial conditions of its immediate surroundings, largely beyond the institution’s control, generated a tension. While the interior design successfully embodies institutional values, infrastructural limitations in the surrounding urban fabric were seen to constrain the full expression of these ideals.

5.3 City-Location Narratives

IMPS defines its location in the centre of Istanbul as a connection point. The area where the museum is located, the Tophane area, attracts attention with its historical and cultural past; therefore, the institution emphasises the continuity of its location in urban memory. The architectural design aims to remind visitors of the historical texture of the city through the visual relationship they establish with the surrounding landscapes as they walk around the space.

Istanbul Modern utilises its location on the Bosphorus, which faces the Golden Horn, to interact with the sea, the city and public spaces. With that, the museum aims to re-establish the relationship between the previously disconnected coastline and Tophane Square. This integration also coincides with the museum's design themes of openness, permeability and interaction with its surroundings.

On the other hand, Arter develops a more local and community-oriented narrative by being located in a region such as Dolapdere, which is undergoing a socio-cultural transformation process. The museum aims to establish a strong bond with its environment and positions itself not as a structure isolated from its context or dominant, but as a natural extension of the neighbourhood in which it is located. The principles of human scale, permeability and unpretentiousness adopted in the architectural design are the spatial reflection of this local adaptation effort.

In general, all three museums establish different relationships with their locations. While IMPS focuses on the memory associated with the historical centre, Istanbul Modern reconstructs the interaction between the coast and the city through its design, and Arter seeks to establish an inclusive and strong connection with the local context. While each contributes to the architectural and institutional narratives of Istanbul in different

ways, they all share the claim of enriching the city's cultural landscape. All three museums' design choices, which favour openness and permeability, align with contemporary museological approaches that position the museum as a public stage actively engaging with urban life (Lorente, 2025; Barrett, 2010). This approach resonates with the transparent and democratic architecture pioneered by the Pompidou, which aimed to blur the boundaries between inside and outside (Foster, 2013). In particular, Arter's aim of local integration corresponds with the concept of the museum as an "urban living room," which prioritises social permeability and community engagement (Museumnext, 2021b).

Visitors generally appreciated IMPS's reference to the historical memory of Tophane and its symbolic presence in the city; however, in the interior, they did not have the same idea. The spatial connection with Galataport was perceived as weak, and interior areas facing the main street were criticised for lacking organisational clarity. Similarly, circulation within the exhibition spaces was described as disconnected from the urban context. In contrast, Istanbul Modern's integration with the Bosphorus and Tophane Square was positively received, with visitors valuing the openness of auxiliary areas and the visual-spatial relationship with the coastline. Arter's effort to engage with the Dolapdere neighbourhood was also recognised and aligned with its inclusive institutional narrative. Yet, concerns about safety in the surrounding area were noted as factors that disrupted this intended continuity. Although all three museums claim a strong engagement with their respective urban contexts, their success in realising this ambition varies across different spatial and experiential dimensions.

5.4 Visitor Narratives

As a state museum with public responsibility and cultural preservation at the forefront, IMPS highlights social permeability in its discourse. The museum defines itself as an inclusive meeting place where different social segments can come together.

On the other hand, Istanbul Modern adopts a more explicitly visitor-focused approach. It aims to provide a user-friendly environment through transparency and direct relations with the urbanscape to increase physical and symbolic accessibility - popularisation of art. One of the main priorities in the museum's institutional mission is to bring art to the masses and make it a part of urban life.

Arter approaches its perspective towards visitors with a broader inclusiveness. Beyond physical accessibility, it also prioritises economic access, aiming to reach more diverse audiences with free exhibition spaces and low-cost services. The institution conceives of itself not only as an art venue but also as an inclusive cultural platform where different segments of society come together and meet.

All three institutions develop discourses that centre on the visitor; however, they follow different paths to achieve their goals of accessibility and participation. While IMPS focuses on cultural continuity, Istanbul Modern prioritises openness that integrates with the city. On the other hand, Arter establishes a structure that is open to dialogue by considering inclusiveness at both physical and socio-economic levels. These different orientations shape the ways in which each institution establishes relations with the visitor in a way that is compatible with their architectural preferences and institutional identities.

The institutional efforts to position the museum as a “meeting place” resonate with contemporary museological discourses advocating active participation, dialogue, and meaning co-creation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Barrett, 2010). While IMPS's narrative

emphasises social permeability, it reflects these values, and spatial complexity and insufficient auxiliary areas seem to hinder its ability to function as an effective meeting place. Istanbul Modern's transparent architecture and connection to urban life embody a user-friendly experience, but high ticket prices and security barriers dilute this intended accessibility. Arter, in contrast, fulfils its inclusivity goals through fluid architectural design and affordable or free auxiliary services; however, its location in a socio-spatially fragile context reduces the perceived accessibility from the visitor's perspective. These differentiated levels of accessibility and spatial engagement reflect broader shifts in contemporary museum practices, a social interface that connects people, space, and culture through physical, symbolic, and economic permeability (Lorente, 2025; Gurian, 2010; Sandell, 1998; Crooke, 2006).

5.5 Transparency

One of the critical themes that IMPS, Istanbul Modern and Arter share in their discourses towards visitors is transparency. All three museums aim to encourage public participation and increase interaction with the city through the physical and visual relationship that the building establishes with its surroundings. Transparent surfaces, especially those used on ground floors or facades, are desired to provide permeability between the interior and exterior, underscoring that the institutional structure is not a closed but an accessible space. In this context, transparency is an architectural strategy and a symbolic gesture of institutional openness. Today's museum architecture adopts transparency as a way to invite public interaction and frame the institution as part of the urban and social fabric rather than separate from it (Barrett, 2010).

However, the theme of transparency is handled differently by each institution. IMPS uses transparency more to establish contact with the historical and cultural context.

The relationship between the building and its surroundings stands out as part of the effort to make the continuity of the past visible.

In Istanbul Modern, transparency is considered together with architectural lightness and openness. This approach, which represents physical and symbolic openness, is an extension of the dynamic and fluid relationship established with the Bosphorus. Thus, the building is defined as a cultural institution open to both the city and the audience.

Arter, on the other hand, addresses the concept of transparency through visual permeability and the principle of institutional inclusiveness. With its inviting and outgoing architecture, it uses transparency to express interaction and accessibility with its neighbourhood.

In conclusion, all three institutions embrace the concept of transparency; however, the ways they integrate this concept into their architectural and institutional discourses differ. Each aims to strengthen their relationship with the public by developing an understanding of transparency that suits their vision. However, visitor experiences revealed differing outcomes: the transparency strategy at IMPS was either not accepted or not fully perceived by visitors; although Istanbul Modern's transparent and open design was acknowledged and appreciated, the double-layered security was seen to contradict its symbolic openness. Arter's approach was widely praised for its permeability and inclusive spatiality, though some participants expressed discomfort with the surrounding visual landscape of Dolapdere. Nevertheless, its permeable design was found to be conceptually intriguing. As discussed in the literature, these variations echo the tensions between symbolic transparency and its embodiment in everyday practice; while

architecture may express openness, true permeability relies on consistent institutional strategies (Foster, 2013; Barrett, 2010).

5.6 (Inter)nationality

Although IMPS does not produce a discourse that directly focuses on the issue of internationalisation, it states in various statements that it aims to appeal to both local and foreign visitors. This approach coincides with the museum's goal of bringing national cultural heritage to a broader audience as an institution representing Türkiye's artistic memory.

On the other hand, Istanbul Modern tries to construct its international identity more clearly. In this context, the choice of an architect such as Renzo Piano, who is known on a global scale, reflects the museum's desire to position itself as a prestigious cultural institution on a worldwide scale. This goal is supported not only by architecture but also by international collaborations and projects.

Arter, on the other hand, combines being visible on a global scale with the vision of carrying local art to international platforms. Although it develops international partnerships, it uses these relationships directly to promote and support contemporary art production in Türkiye. In this respect, it follows a strategy to strike a balance between global interaction and national representation.

The internationalisation orientations of these three institutions are based on different priorities: While IMPS adopts a local-universal openness based more on national heritage, Istanbul Modern develops a vision that directly targets international prestige. Arter prioritises the intention of making domestic production visible in a global context. These approaches also differentiate the meaning institutions give to the international arena in their identity construction.

From a design perspective, all three museums are generally perceived by visitors as world-class institutions. However, in the case of IMPS, some participants felt that this sense was partially diminished due to organisational and spatial limitations previously mentioned. Similarly, although Arter's architecture and institutional vision reflect international standards, the neglected and unsafe atmosphere of the Dolapdere neighbourhood was seen by some visitors as undermining the feeling of being in a world-class cultural institution.

5.7 Safety Concerns

The fact that Istanbul is located in an earthquake-prone region has led all three museums we have examined to prioritise security in their designs. While each institution has taken steps to ensure structural security, they have sought ways to integrate this with their own institutional identity and architectural understanding.

IMPS particularly emphasises structural reinforcements for earthquake resistance. In addition, since it attaches great importance to the protection of the collection, more technical measures, such as secure storage areas, come to the fore. The institution's approach is based on both the strength of the building and the security of the content.

Istanbul Modern addresses the issue of security not only in terms of structural strength but also in a manner compatible with the general principles of design. While architectural transparency and openness principles are maintained, preventive measures against terrorist threats and disaster risks are also structured holistically. This situation can be associated with the museum's opening, which coincided with some terrorist attacks and earthquakes in Türkiye, since the institution particularly emphasised the need for security during this period.

Arter, on the other hand, addresses the concept of security with more invisible but functional solutions. In response to the general perception of risk created by terrorist attacks, it designs a security system that fulfils legal obligations but does not overshadow the inviting architectural approach. It is mentioned on many occasions that Arter's priority on security is not to undermine the principle of spatial inclusiveness.

As a result, while all three institutions take security seriously, their priorities on this issue differ: IMPS focuses on preserving the collection and urban heritage; Istanbul Modern tries to blend security with openness and publicity; Arter integrates security measures in a user-friendly manner, far from visibility. Each aims to strive to balance security and accessibility in its context.

Visitor experiences echoed these distinctions. At IMPS, the absence of clear direction at entrance points and the low presence of security personnel across floors created a sense of unease, which some interpreted as institutional oversight. At Istanbul Modern, the presence of two layers of entry controls—one operated by Galataport and another by the museum itself—combined with the frequent visibility of security staff rather than museum professionals, led to discomfort and diminished the sense of openness. At Arter, the visually unobtrusive entrance and ease of access were generally appreciated. However, the narrow revolving door at the main entry, which created a sensation of spatial restriction, was noted as unsettling by some visitors and was perceived as conflicting with the museum's otherwise inclusive and open spatial agenda, especially considering its attempt to build connections with the surrounding Dolapdere neighbourhood.

6. CONCLUSION

Set within the rapidly transforming urban and cultural landscape of Istanbul, this study explored how architectural spaces of newly relocated contemporary art museums in Istanbul communicate institutional identities through architecture and how these spaces are experienced and interpreted by visitors. It utilised several stages to capture this relationship: architectural review with site visits and descriptive analysis, analysis of institutional discourses through thematic analysis, visitor experience inquiry with participant observation and semi-structured interviews and finally comparative synthesis to understand how architectural intent, institutional narratives, and visitor interpretations align—or diverge—in practice.

Through these steps of investigating İstanbul Modern, Arter, and the İstanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture, the research has addressed two fundamental questions: (1) How do these museums embody institutional discourses through their architectural spaces? (2) How do visitors engage with and reinterpret these institutional narratives embedded in architecture?

Building on these questions, the study examined how architectural strategies that aim to reflect institutional identities through spatial design have occasionally encountered various tensions and criticisms. As priorly put forth in the literature review, visitors, however, have not been passively exposed to these strategies; on the contrary, they have sometimes adopted, reinterpreted or rejected institutional narratives through their physical and spatial interactions with museum spaces. This study contributes to the museum studies literature by offering an analytical framework that not only recognises the agency of visitors but also integrates their spatial experiences into a holistic evaluation of institutional effectiveness. Such an inclusive and multilayered feedback mechanism

remains limited in the field, despite increasing attention to visitor-centred approaches. In this respect, Istanbul presents a particularly relevant context: as a city of intense cultural layering and ongoing transformation, it poses both a challenge and an opportunity for museums aiming to construct and communicate institutional identities. Architecture matters here not only as a medium of institutional expression but also as a key interface through which publics negotiate meaning. This intersection of space, narrative, and experience renders the Istanbul case both analytically rich and practically urgent.

These interplays between space, narrative, and experience become even more tangible when individually examining the three case museums. Results revealed that IMPS succeeds in projecting a strong narrative of historical continuity. It prioritises heritage conservation and art preservation through structured and protective spatial strategies. However, it faces challenges related to spatial clarity and visitor circulation. While visitors valued the sense of historical continuity, they also criticised the restrictive layout and the lack of auxiliary spaces that could better support the art-viewing experience.

In contrast to IMPS's emphasis on historical continuity, Istanbul Modern focuses on both global and local visibility through spatial openness, transparency, and iconic architecture. The museum's spaciousness and its visual connection to the city are widely appreciated; however, visitor accounts also pointed to certain contradictions in practice. These include perceptions of distance or exclusion that complicate the museum's inclusive architectural message.

On the other hand, Arter negotiates between openness and exclusivity by offering a flexible architectural environment that supports diverse forms of engagement. The museum presents architectural dynamism in alignment with its experimental institutional

discourse, yet it struggles to integrate fully into its immediate urban context. As a result, while visitors recognised the openness to a range of experiences, they also expressed occasional distrust or unease related to the surrounding environment.

Although none of the museums achieved complete coherence across architectural, institutional, and experiential layers, they each offer valuable insights into how institutional messages are materialised, interpreted, and at times resisted.

Taken together, these case studies underline a broader insight: the main takeaway is that the meaning of a museum space is co-produced and continually negotiated through the interplay of architectural design, institutional discourse, and visitor engagement. Meaning is not fixed at the moment the institution inscribes it; instead, it emerges through the ongoing interaction between what is intended and how it is experienced.

More specifically, this study enriches museum studies literature by emphasising the active role of architectural space as both a mediator and a physical framework that hosts and grounds institutional discourse and visitor experience. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining multiple qualitative approaches to generate a nuanced understanding of the interplay between spatial intent and lived experience.

As a result, it proposes a multi-layered framework for analysing modern and contemporary art museums. This framework sequentially investigates architectural narrative, institutional discourse, visitor experience, and their comparative synthesis. By juxtaposing these layers, the study functions not only as a descriptive analysis but also as a reflective feedback mechanism for institutions and museum professionals.

This research identifies concrete areas for institutional reconsideration for the museums under investigation. As one of its main contributions to the field, it not only analyses the current situation but also offers guiding suggestions for museum institutions

based on the identified deficiencies and tensions. In the case of IMPS, this historical grounding is reinforced through its adaptive reuse of a heritage building and its emphasis on art preservation. Visitors responded positively to this sense of tradition and institutional legacy. However, several spatial challenges were observed that risk undermining the museum's experiential and communicative potential. Internal circulation is often experienced as disjointed or restrictive, which interrupts the continuity of the visit and detracts from focused engagement with the artworks. Auxiliary spaces such as rest areas, orientation points, and wayfinding tools are either insufficient or poorly integrated, contributing to spatial fatigue and disorientation.

In light of these findings, several concrete interventions are recommended: improving daylight access where possible and supplementing with well-designed artificial lighting to support a more intuitive and uplifting circulation flow; enhancing wayfinding systems at key transitional zones; and creating more rest-friendly zones where visitors can pause, observe, and reflect. Additionally, spatial and institutional coherence could be strengthened by integrating the existing café, which is currently perceived as externally operated, more meaningfully into the museum's identity. The museum shop, which remains modest given the institution's scale and importance, could be expanded and repositioned to better align with the overall visitor circulation, potentially in closer proximity to the café area. Finally, the on-site library should be made more accessible, welcoming, and user-friendly to fully realise its potential as an intellectual extension of the museum experience.

A similar yet contextually distinct tension emerges in the case of Istanbul Modern. While the museum is widely praised for its spatial openness, transparency, and prominent architectural language, these strengths are occasionally undermined by institutional

choices related to pricing and security. Visitors noted that ticket costs and commercial elements such as the museum shop created a sense of exclusion, especially when contrasted with the building's open and democratic visual language. Additionally, multiple layers of security were interpreted not as protective but as distancing, detracting from the sense of accessibility that the architecture intends to convey. These findings suggest that architectural openness alone is insufficient; it must be supported by institutional practices that align with the inclusive message the design aims to communicate. Furthermore, the interior spatial organisation requires careful attention, particularly wayfinding at key transition points such as the reflection terrace. Improved signage and circulation aids could help reinforce the museum's promise of openness by enabling visitors to navigate the space more intuitively and comfortably.

Arter presents another case where the difficulty lies in external contextual integration rather than internal coherence. The museum must move beyond the promise of spatial openness and invest more deliberately in fostering local integration and enhancing the perception of safety. While the museum's architectural strategy successfully creates an interior environment that feels open, dynamic, and secure, this effect remains largely confined within the building's boundaries. Visitor accounts reveal that although they felt welcomed inside, their perception of the surrounding Dolapdere neighbourhood mainly remained unchanged, marked by ambivalence or distrust. This suggests that the architectural intervention did not generate the intended shift in how the broader context is perceived, and in some cases, even reinforced a sense of detachment between the institution and its immediate environment. Consequently, the museum's interior openness risks being perceived as self-contained, rather than as part of a socially integrated urban presence. To its credit, the museum has already initiated certain outreach

and community programmes to foster local engagement. However, these efforts have yet to significantly shift visitor perceptions, indicating that more structured and deeply rooted interventions are needed. To close this gap, Arter is encouraged to engage more with the local community through participatory design processes and create shared, inclusive spaces that embody its institutional ideals beyond its physical envelope.

This study argues that modern and contemporary art museums are inherently dynamic institutions that must remain in continuous dialogue with the present. As such, they cannot rely solely on architectural intention or institutional narrative; meaning is co-produced and constantly reshaped through the lived experiences of visitors. This research supports the evolving nature by offering an adaptable and self-reflective framework that responds to the shifting conditions of art, space, and audience.

This institutional perspective also resonates on a broader scale. Beyond the institutional scale, this framework also provides valuable insight for the city of Istanbul itself. As a site of ongoing cultural transformation, Istanbul's museums, both existing and future museums, can benefit from a framework that draws on shared urban themes and visitor experiences. The layered method proposed here serves not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a guiding lens for more grounded and responsive spatial decisions. Ultimately, museums are always in a transient process: they must revisit themselves, learn through use, and transform through co-reproduction. This work aims to spark such critical reflection and provide a roadmap for progressive, future-oriented museum practices.

For museum professionals, curators, and architects, the study underscores the importance of aligning spatial decisions with institutional vision while remaining compatible with visitors' lived realities and perceptions. A visitor-centred approach is increasingly prioritised in contemporary museology, but this study demonstrates that such

approaches must not come at the expense of institutional clarity. Rather, the most meaningful experiences emerge when institutional intentions, architectural expression, and visitor interpretation are all acknowledged as equally influential and mutually shaping.

Future research may expand upon the findings of this study by investigating longitudinal changes in visitor perceptions, examining the impact of socio-political dynamics on museum architecture, and conducting cross-cultural comparisons to explore how museum-space interactions vary across different contexts. In all cases, what remains essential is an attentiveness to the museum as a layered space—one that is never complete, always in flux, and shaped through ongoing negotiation between design, discourse, and experience.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

List of Questions	Supporting topics
What were your overall impressions of the museum's architectural design?	likes/dislikes, things that remain in mind
How would you evaluate the museum's relationship with the neighbourhood in which it is located?	Outdoor vs. indoor
Can you describe your experience of reaching the museum's location?	
How would you assess the museum's location overall?	security, centrality, crowded
What was your experience of the museum's entry process?	security, control, signage, guidance
To what extent did you feel welcomed and comfortable in this museum? Can you describe your experience in terms of hospitality?	ground floor, exhibition spaces, social areas
How did you experience the entrances or ground floors of the museums? What was your first impression? (Alternative: How did the spatial organization of the entrance/ground floors (transparency, openness, circulation) reflect in your experience?)	accessibility, security, sociability, interactions with the environment
How would you evaluate these three museums as meeting or gathering points? To what extent do you think they serve that function?	to socialise, to spend time with relatives
What was your experience with the social areas in the museums (such as the library, café, restaurant, or educational spaces)?	
How financially accessible did you find the museum's entrance fee and general costs (café, bookstore, events, etc.)?	
How did you experience the exhibition spaces? In your opinion, how did the spatial design relate to the artworks?	space design, lighting, information, and transition between exhibitions

List of Questions	Supporting topics
How did you experience the interior circulation in the three museums?	orientation, atmosphere
Do you think this museum can be considered an international-level art institution? In what ways does it stand out or fall short?	spatial design, technological infrastructure, visitor comfort and safety
If you are aware of the institution the museum is affiliated with, how did that knowledge affect your perception of the museum?	
During your museum visits, what physical or mental challenges did you experience? In which museum was this most intense, and why?	
If these issues have not been discussed, then ask.	
What do you think about Istanbul Modern's relationship with the sea? How did this affect your experience of the museum?	
What are your thoughts on IMPS's relationship with the city? How did this shape your experience of the museum?	
How would you describe Arter's interaction with its immediate surroundings (buildings, street life, social context)? What kind of presence does the museum have in that environment?	
What was your experience like when moving between floors in Arter? Did the transitions feel logical and fluid to you?	
In your opinion, how does the architecture of the IMPS reflect its mission to bear witness to the history of modern art in Türkiye and to communicate it to the public?	
Do you remember the former building that once stood where this current museum building is now? If so, what kind of difference or continuity do you see between the former and current buildings?	traces from its past: ship containers, grid structure, facade building

APPENDIX B. CODEBOOK OF PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Code	Grounded Density		Groups
● Architecture	126	0	
● 'Good' architecture	31	1	
● ARTER good architecture	14	6	ARTER
● IMM good architecture	14	6	IMM
● IMPS good architecture	6	0	IMPS
● Negative impressions about architecture	9	2	
● ARTER - not very impressive architecture	4	0	ARTER
● IMM - lack of identity	5	0	IMM
● Museum fatigue	24	1	
● ARTER - minimum museum fatigue	5	3	ARTER
● IMM - minimum museum fatigue	5	1	IMM
● IMM - too big - museum fatigue	2	1	IMM
● IMPS - circulation & art fatigue	12	2	IMPS
● Spaciousness	21	1	
● ARTER - feeling of spaciousness	9	2	ARTER
● IMM - feeling of spaciousness	13	1	IMM
● ARTER is a compact museum	9	2	ARTER
● IMPS - negative feelings about architecture	34	3	IMPS
● Dark and enclosed	24	4	IMPS
● Excessive usage of grey	8	3	IMPS
● Too industrial	5	0	IMPS
● Too controlling	8	4	IMPS

Code	Grounded Density		Groups
● IMPS - wish the design of the upstairs were everywhere	5	3	IMPS
● Auxiliary Spaces	50	0	
● ARTER - good auxiliary spaces	21	0	ARTER
● IMM - good auxiliary spaces	22	1	IMM
● IMPS - inadequate auxiliary spaces	18	0	IMPS
● Circulation	55	0	
● ARTER - good circulation	14	3	ARTER
● IMM - circulation	18	0	IMM
● Good circulation	10	1	IMM
● Poor directions	8	1	IMM
● IMPS - circulation	24	2	IMPS
● Circulation problems	21	0	IMPS
● Did not feel free while circulating	4	2	IMPS
● Ground floor	35	0	
● ARTER - ground floor	14	0	ARTER
● Good sides of the entrance	9	0	ARTER
● Problematic sides of the entrance	5	1	ARTER
● IMM - ground floor	7	0	IMM
● Good sides of the entrance	4	0	IMM
● Problematic sides of the entrance	3	1	IMM
● IMPS - ground floor	18	0	IMPS
● Poorly planned ground floor	14	0	IMPS
● Problematic sides of the entrance	6	1	IMPS
● International Claim	7	0	

Code	Grounded Density		Groups
• ARTER - international level	5	0	ARTER
• IMM - international level	5	0	IMM
• Invitingness	15	0	
• ARTER is inviting	7	0	ARTER
• ARTER is NOT inviting	1	0	ARTER
• IMM is inviting	5	1	IMM
• IMM is NOT inviting	2	1	IMM
• IMPS is inviting	1	0	ARTER
• IMPS is NOT inviting	4	0	IMPS
• Price	15	0	
• ARTER's price is good	4	0	ARTER
• IMM - too expensive	7	0	IMM
• IMPS - price performance +	5	1	IMPS
• Security	14	0	
• IMM - excessive security measures	11	1	IMM
• IMPS - security (or museum staff)	3	1	IMPS
• Surroundings	79	0	
• Compatible with the surroundings	9	0	
• ARTER - compatible with surroundings	6	0	ARTER
• IMM - compatible with surroundings	3	0	IMPS
• IMPS - compatible with surroundings	4	1	IMPS
• Incompatible with the surroundings	14	0	
• ARTER - incompatible	5	1	ARTER
• IMM - incompatible	8	0	IMM

Code	Grounded Density		Groups
● IMPS - incompatible	3	0	IMPS
● Transportation to the museum	21	0	
● ARTER is not an easy place to come	10	1	ARTER
● IMM & IMPS - easy to reach	14	0	IMPS/ IMM
● ARTER - insecurity & dislike for Dolapdere	20	1	ARTER
● ARTER - Neighbours feel secure / visit more	5	0	ARTER
● ARTER's Transformative Power	13	0	ARTER
● Arter could not gentrify yet	6	0	ARTER
● Arter gentrified	7	0	ARTER
● Visual Connection	53	0	
● Forcing the city view	7	0	
● ARTER - city view creates a distraction	2	0	ARTER
● IMM - too dominant sea view	5	0	IMM
● Good connection with the city	21	0	
● ARTER - good connection with the city	8	1	ARTER
● IMM - good connection with the city/sea	12	0	IMM
● IMPS - old mosaic building connects well	3	1	IMPS
● IMM has an amazing view	16	1	IMM
● IMPS - cuts connection with the surroundings	5	1	IMPS
● Interior visual connection	7	0	
● ARTER - interior visual connection	5	2	ARTER
● IMPS – only the top floor has an interior visual connection	3	0	IMPS
● IMPS's Difference	46	0	
● Focus on art	12	1	IMPS

Code	Grounded Density		Groups
● Good amount of artwork	4	0	IMPS
● IMPS is an invaluable museum	6	1	IMPS
● IMPS has more of a museum order	12	2	IMPS
● Nice to see conservation	4	0	IMPS
● Mission	11	0	IMPS
● Architecture does not reflect its mission	5	0	IMPS
● Architecture reflects its mission	7	0	IMPS
● *ARTER did it better	5	1	ARTER
● *IMM's popularity	6	0	IMM
● *IMM did it better	11	1	IMM

APPENDIX C. CURRICULUM VITAE

Name-Surname: Ezgi Çiçek

Education:

PhD: Özyeğin University, Design, Technology and Society, 2025

MSc: Roma La Sapienza University, Product Design, 2016

Bachelor: Bahçeşehir University, Interior Architecture and Environmental Design, 2013

Work Experience:

Research Assistant: Özyeğin University, Faculty of Architecture and Design, Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design, 2017-2025.

Erasmus+ KA220-HED – Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education, *Immersive Design and New Digital Competences for the Rehabilitation and Valorization of the Built Heritage* (ID4Ex) (European Union Funded Project), Researcher, 2021–2023.

Scientific Publications:

Verdiani, G., Arslan, P. & Çiçek, E., (2019). Urban Transformation and Evolution of the Beyoğlu Waterfront in Istanbul, *Proceedings of the VII Conference- ReUSO Matera Patrimonio in Divenire*.

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