

## **Characteristics of Historic Areas and Buildings in the City of Uşak and Recommendations for a Sustainable Conservation Area Approach**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article is on creating a conservation framework for the historic areas and houses of the city of Uşak, which represents peculiar examples of vernacular architecture of the Anatolian region. The city of Uşak is an Anatolian city with a rich historical background. Even though the history of Uşak dates back to 4000 years, most architectural evidence of history have disappeared except late 19th and early 20th century houses. They stand as signifiers the historic identity of the city.

From the ancient times many different civilizations have settled and developed in Uşak in a wide variety of ways of life, concepts and forms. Uşak has always been a most important regional location between Europe and Asia. Also it has experienced migration and settlement of various cultures and civilization through time. Through the influence of climatic and physical factors of the region and the historical variety of culture, the development of the Central Anatolian house form and culture has been comparatively significant.

In Uşak, natural conditions had a direct and strong influence of the form of buildings and their construction. All factors have combined to produce a wide variety of forms and structures. Most of the traditional wooden houses are produced in the “himis” (Turkish traditional construction system which consist of wood and adobe) structural system technique.

Uşak houses have been demonstrating qualities such as continuity of architectural identity, sustaining of collective memory, sustaining building techniques. There is an urgent need to include the Uşak houses as a conservation agenda to contemporary planning and design dynamics of the city. A sustainability framework for the conservation and reuse of these homes could be a major objective, fulfilling all or most environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects. In addition to this article aims to provide solution alternatives that provide measures for the conservation (and reuse) of the historical houses in Uşak.

**KEYWORDS:** Uşak, Uşak Traditional Architecture, Uşak House, Historic Area and Buildings

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Historic towns and buildings are important elements of our cultural heritage. A mandatory condition of conservation philosophy is to conserve these cultural heritage elements and provide necessary measures and actions for their contemporary use with appropriateness.

Historic environment is defined as the milieu that possesses the historic evidence of natural and cultural values. These environments should be conceived as carrying or possessing the traces of all kind of historic events and processes. With this special character, historic environments maintain a value system and have a right to be conserved and be sustained. The value system basically is formed of four domains according to English Heritage ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk), 2014); evidential value, historical value, aesthetic value and communal value. From a sustainability perspective, the value system can be extended to environmental, economic and social (equity) value of the historic environments and its elements. Historic environments are also the places that enable the social and cultural connections. The details of social and economic life of past civilizations are carried through generation by the historic environments (Ahunbay, 2004).

This paper demonstrate the idea of the right to be conserved and sustained (based on these inherent values of the place) and the principles for how to do it, with a case study of a historic environment- the Old City of Uşak in Turkey. The urban conservation area of Uşak, with its 19th and early 20th century vernacular architectural examples will be the subject of this study.

The forces of globally occurring demographic, environmental social, cultural and technological changes usually have negative impacts on historic environments. Similar patterns of negative impacts can be found in all historic environments of Turkey, thus Uşak is another example.

The historic environments in Uşak relatively show a homogenous structure. The ratios and dimensions of buildings usually possess an unspoken building code. The lifestyle of the context at the time and construction techniques has created this so called homogenous or in other words harmony. Historic environments are also a spatial connection and reference to the growing new settlements in Uşak such that they enable the inhabitants to perceive and recognize the city as a clear image (Önal, 1999).

## 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN THE UŞAK

### 2.1 The Location

The City of Uşak is located between the Aegean Region and Central Anatolia Region, about 300 km east of İzmir and 300 km west of Ankara, Turkey. It is basically an agricultural and industrial city with five other small town within its jurisdiction. Both Uşak and its towns have historical areas in similar historical and architectural character. The City of Uşak is formed of 19 neighborhoods, some of which the conservation area under study falls into.

### 2.2 Uşak in History

The first settlements in Uşak's hinterland date back to 4000 B.C. (Tuğlacı, 1985). The Byzantium records discovered reveal that present Uşak was part of a region called "*Thema Obsikion*", by which the location of the city of *Traianopolis* and its military troops were named. The city of Traianopolis was located 10 km east of present city. (Karaman, 2001).

The city was inhabited by Phrygians circa 1200 BC, by Lydians circa 700 BC, Persians by 600 BC, Macedonians by 400 BC, the Kingdom of Pergamon by 300 BC and by Romans after 200 BC. The Turks invaded Uşak in 1076 and the city's ruling changed a few times between Selçjukids and Byzantines.

The city and its region was joined to the Anatolian Selçjukid State by the first half of 13th century in the times of Alaeddin Keykubat (Tumer, 1971). Passing to Ottoman ruling in 1429, Uşak was a first a

town connected to Kütahya County. After the Turkish Republic's establishment, in 1953 Uşak became a jurisdictional county and the city of Uşak became its center.

### 2.3 Uşak Urban Conservation Area

The urban conservation area of Uşak is connected to the modern downtown of Uşak and spreads out from the center. As building types concerned, housing, commercial and religious buildings are found in the area. Many of the historical houses are currently unused and in a wreck condition. The urban conservation area consists of 79 registered buildings. In addition, there are 5 proposed buildings for historic register, and 20 monumental structure and fountains.

The north side of the area is occupied with buildings with historic register mainly. On the south of the area is mostly commercial and some buildings are in bad state. This area also sites hans, mosques and bedesten structures.



Figure 1: Uşak Urban Conservation Area Plan

### 2.4 The Architecture of the Uşak Traditional Houses

Historical Uşak houses are generally built in attached style. The street patterns are relatively narrow in the housing and commercial areas. The street are made of rubble stone. Narrow and curving streets with various building projections provide characteristic and varied street patterns.

In historical Uşak houses, the main typology is room opening to a sofa. Sofas are the main circulation space of the house and, they are also use for living and sitting area. The courtyard and gardens are perceived as an important living area as well. Usually in the courtyards, hearths, fireplaces, coking places and laundries were found. Kitchen and toilets were placed in the courtyard or in the house itself. Pitched roof with various solutions is the regular roof type with 'alaturka' roof tiles. The eaves were wood, either undecorated or decorated. They can also be made with wood base with mortar cover. Many houses had writings and decorations on their eaves. The painting with miscellaneous decorations were also seen in the interiors of some of the houses. Wood, gypsum and stone decorations were also found.

The timber construction on the projections provide an architectural character to the building pattern in the area. These structural wood projections are framed with wood elements in the facade as well. The supports for these projections can be made of wood, stone or metal.

Most common frame type in the facades for windows are door are stone projections. On some buildings have windows and doors with arched projections with keystones. The width of the windows on the upper stories are usually 60-100 cm, height 1.40-1.90, and on the lower floors the dimensions of the living area windows can be 10 cm less. The basement floors which covered the service areas usually have square shaped windows with metal frames for security.

The entrance doors are usually heightened 2-5 steps from the road surface. Stairs made up of either stone or mosaic threads and rises gave way to the entrances to the houses with arched projections and double doors. Later period historic houses may have carving and moldings on the doors and the arches.



Picture 1: Dokur House, Aybey Neighborhood, Wood Frame Construction

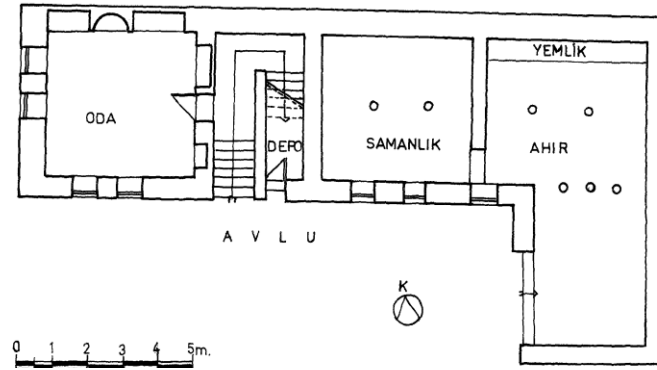


Figure . 2. Dokur House Ground Floor (Şenay, Y. Drawing)

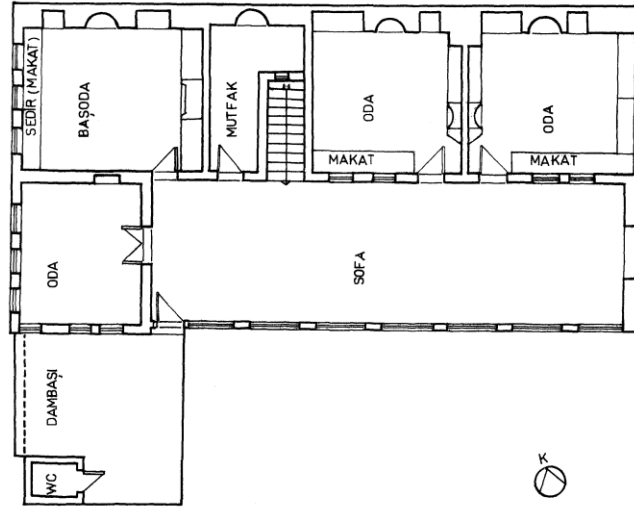


Figure 3. Dokur House Upper Floor (Şenay, Y. Drawing)



Picture 2. Timber Frame House



Picture 3. Timber Frame House after restoration.



Picture 4. Timber Frame Houses



Picture 5. Timber Frame House at Karaağaç street

## 2.5 Construction Techniques

Most of the houses in the conservation are from the 19th century. The ethnic background of users and builders have been an influence on the architectural character of the houses. Together with that the Middle Anatolia and Aegean Region socio-cultural relationships and other regional characteristics such as climate and building material resources had been a major part in the shaping of the architectural character of these buildings.

Uşak historic buildings have peculiar characteristics with construction techniques and materials, plan types, entrances, window types, shutter types, stone projections, balcony metal works, projections, projection supports and decorative elements. Elaborated by these elements, there are two basic building types in the Uşak conservation area. The first construction typology is masonry construction type, made of stone, brick or adobe. Generally they are one storied house with cut stone basement floors in all building material types.



Picture 6. Masonry House in Ünalán Neighborhood.



Picture 7. Masonry House in Ünalán Neighborhood.



Picture. 8. Single storey adobe house

The second construction typology is timber frame houses. In this typology ground floors are stone construction with second floor wood frame with earth fillings. Stone walls are about 50-60 cm thick and second floor is about 20-30 cm thick with mortar surfaces.



Picture 9. Işık Neighborhood, Timber Frame Construction



Picture 10. Ali Osman Tosun Timber Frame Construction.

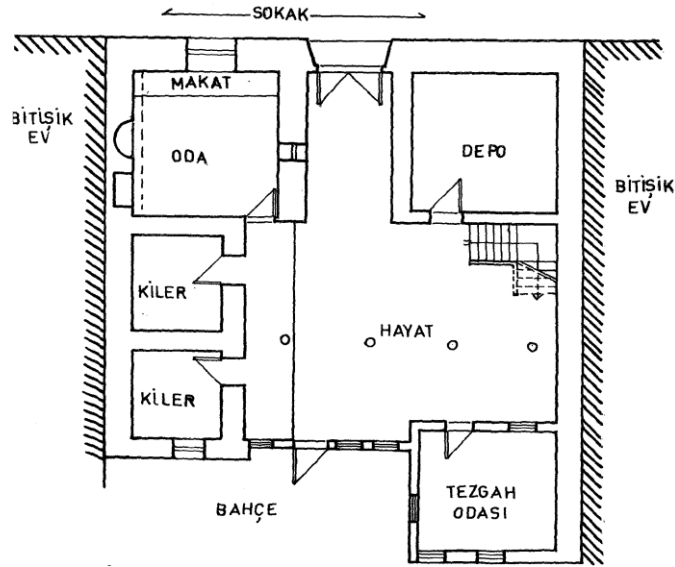


Figure 4. Ali Osman Tosun ground floor plan (Şenay, Y. Drawing)

### 3 OBSERVATION ON THE CONSERVATION MEASURES IN THE UŞAK CONSERVATION AREA

Most of the houses in the conservation area are made of stone or wood construction. There are concrete examples as well. Most buildings are privately owned and most of these houses are fragmented in ownership. Most of the bad conditioned ones are house structures. Most of the conservation area buildings need repair. The south side where the property values are higher commercial buildings are more frequent. The demand for higher property valuation has eliminated the house-garden pattern in the area. Presently, this house-garden typology has been subdivided into smaller parcels and gained a commercial character.

The urban conservation area covers six streets. These streets with their original characters must be preserved. All the streets must be closed to traffic except the periphery roads used for houses and commercials.



Some buildings have been taken out form the historic register due to alterations. In order to prevent this situation other historic buildings under threat must be included in a conservation program as soon as possible. Annexation of some of the buildings can be a solution in order to apply restoration projects.

The present architectural pattern in the Uşak conservation area reflects the traditional Anatolian lifestyle especially with its neighborhood culture and relationships. The public spaces in the conservation area must be rearranged according to this factor. Facade repair and reconstruction are need in most conservation area buildings. 23 buildings are restored ad put into use. There are seven religious buildings, three hans, one bedesten, two arastas, one library and one fountain in the area. The street pattern, facade characteristics, common space and aesthetic features of the conservation area must be addressed in the conservation program. The historic area can house cultural activity centers such as library, community center, museum, neighborhood education center integrated with the conservation area.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

##### **Recommendation for a successful conservation area initiative:**

It has been argued in this paper that the conservation area in Uşak possessed certain evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values. This value system makes a conservation approach a valid agenda for the area. Current approaches of policy making, planning and design circles also expects it to be a sustainable one.

Sustainability is a criticism and also a vision of the past, present and future trends of growth of populations, pollution and waste, diminishing of natural resources and increase in social and health problems and imbalances and many other problems of humankind-environment interaction. Beside the problems of perceiving and solving the unsustainable behavior of the society in general, even attempts for defining the sustainability concept have become a discussion because of the complex and paradoxical set of issues. One of the most used and accepted definition emerged from the UN Report, *Our Common Future*: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This definition occupyes a belief that communities can achieve *vibrant economic development, environmental protection and desired quality of life* for all its citizens ideally at the same moment of time. Campbell (1996) conceptualizes sustainability in three ‘E’s. *Environment, economy and equity* have been referred as ‘there E’s’ of sustainable development. These three concepts have been represented with models presented in the *Sustainability Triangle*.

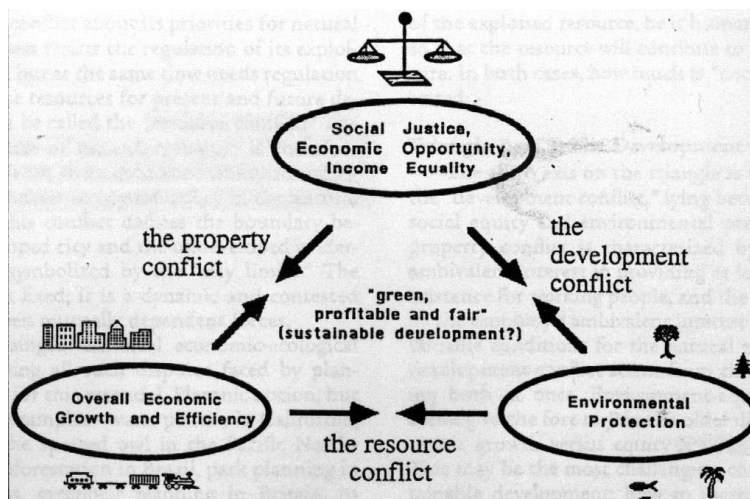


Figure 5.Sustainability Triangle (Campbell 1996)

This model of explanation is a valid one to be discussed in a conservation problem because it puts into the center the idea of conflicts and conflict resolution approaches. Uşak Conservation area sustainability framework also needs to have a conflict resolution approach. One of the key approaches to conflict resolution for conservation approaches is to develop principles to act upon. The English Heritage conservation principles provides a model approach which goes parallel to Campbell's Sustainable Triangle. These principles are as follows:

**Principle 1: The historic environment is a shared resource:** A record of human activity our historic environments have been shaped by people responding to the surroundings they inherit, and embodies the aspirations, skills and investment of successive generations.

**Principle 2: Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment:** Equal opportunity must be provided to everyone to pass and share knowledge of the value and vision of places and things.

**Principle 3: Understanding the significance of places is vital:** Distinctive identity, significance of places building and objects and the value generation must be respected and protected.

**Principle 4: Significant places should be managed to sustain their values:** Change in the historic environment is inevitable, but any intervention in the conservation areas must be approached in a collective and sustainable approach.

**Principle 5: Decisions about change must be reasonable, transparent and consistent:** Decisions about change in the historic environment demand the application of expertise, experience and judgment, in a consistent, transparent process guided by public policy. Public participation and sharing of information is vital.

**Principle 6: Documenting and learning from decisions is essential:** Conservation is a continuous effort. Sustainability is a long term goal. For all these goals continuous and healthy recording of all efforts and measures must be recorded and shared.

The above principle can be a guidance for Uşak Conservation Area plan or any other conservation plan. A principle based approach will certainly create a more systemic a long term effect on the policy making, plan making and physical intervention of the conservation areas. The principles can be used in many forms and formats from plan and design preparation to evaluation and monitoring in the policy and implementation domains of conservation approaches.

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