Field Report

NORMATIVE VALUES AND THEIR CULTURAL ROOTS IN THE TRADITIONAL TURKISH HOUSE

HULYA TURGUT

The great civil, architectural art that created the harmonious environment of the Turkish people of previous generations has today lost its functionality because of the lack of connection between the old and the new. The "traditional Turkish house," created by a vanished socio-cultural structure, has lost its validity, and the desire for Westernization has left Turkish architecture seeking formal copies of Western cultural products. To bring Turkish architecture out of this impasse will be possible only if an effort is made to rediscover the content of Turkish culture and express it with contemporary language. The aim of this paper is to analyze the cultural origins of the Turkish house and show its usage with contemporary design principles. It begins by defining the cultural components that directly affect the formation of the spatial setting. It then gives a brief introduction to the architecture of the traditional Turkish house. Next, it analyzes normative cultural values and their roots, using the traditional Turkish house as a case study. This is followed by a study of normative values as they form principles of spatial setting in the contemporary Turkish house. Finally, the paper builds on the findings of the case study to offer some proposals for design principles relating to the contemporary Turkish house.

Today the traditional environment which once formed the harmonious surroundings of Anatolian people is being destroyed in Turkey as a result of dramatic changes caused by industrialization and Westernization. Turkish architectural tradition, created by a socioeconomic structure which no longer exists and a building-construction technology which is being gradually abandoned, has lost its validity. Design products, including housing patterns prepared originally for
the cultural groups of Western countries, are being applied to Turkish cultural groups, whose fundamental requirements have not yet been determined. This situation is creating disharmony between space and man.

Studies have focused on the physical settings of the traditional Turkish house, and, generally, attention has also been paid to the quantitative problems of Turkish housing. Architectural investigations as part of these efforts, however, have not gone beyond maintaining the old, repeating it exactly as it was, or pulling pieces out of historical context to create a new synthesis abstracted from former content. Such content was once part of a cultural continuity developed through a historical process, by which principles of living and customary behavior made themselves evident in spatial settings. Contemporary needs in housing architecture cannot be met by imitating the forms of the past deprived of their content, or by importing new patterns that depend for their content on foreign culture.

When the problem of the contemporary Turkish house is approached from this perspective, the aim must be to discover what is right and beautiful in the traditional Turkish house, and then use this information according to a dynamic system analysis which takes man-space interactions as a base. The secret searched for thus lies in the interactions between the created environment, man, and culture — not in the static, constructive quality or physical setting of the traditional Turkish house. Both the determination of qualitative problems inherent in the contemporary Turkish house and the generation of solutions in ways that are in keeping with cultural continuity require deep examination of the subject within a historical framework. This paper explores normative values and their cultural roots in the traditional Turkish house in terms of such a historical perspective, and it examines this cultural content in respect to the contemporary Turkish house.

CULTURAL COMPONENTS AND THE FORMATION OF A SPATIAL SETTING

The formation of the relationship between man and environment over the course of time reflects social and cultural changes. Being related to the socioeconomic structure of society, cultural values contain remnants of the past, although they are also determined by contemporary technological and economic capabilities. Every notion which has a rooted past has a living style of its own. Turkish society, since ancient times, has thus developed its physical settings with its own life-styles — at the same time that it has also received diverse influences from other societies. In this context, the cultural content of the architecture of the contemporary Turkish house must be sought in the secrets of the culture-space interaction system of traditional Turkish architecture.

A great number of researchers in recent years have concentrated their study of the shaping of the environment on the role of cultural components and their roots. For example, David Saile, through anthropological, historical and archeological analyses, has paid attention to housing design, cultural values, norms and traditions. Roderick Lawrence has focused on the secrets of housing forms. And Amos Rapoport has emphasized the role of cultural values in housing design and usage in the framework of socio-cultural approaches. According to these studies, in order to create a healthy database for contemporary housing designs, analysis of traditional culture and its environment is indispensable and beneficial. This analysis, in turn, is only possible by studying the interaction between culture and spatial setting. The accompanying diagram explains this interaction theoretically (FIG. 1).

In this interaction, as well as in the relationship between the components of culture, the definition and the classification of cultural components are important. Hence, it is important to define the concept of culture both generally and more specifically in relation to the house.

Culture, in its most expansive meaning, is everything created and produced by man. This includes material-cultural components such as production, communication, technology; and it includes nonmaterial cultural components such as mores, customs, traditions, beliefs and ideals. In attempting to shed light on the interaction between culture and housing, this paper focuses on the spiritual components of culture that establish the relation of man to his past. It is less concerned with culture's rapidly changing material-cultural components.
Culture plays a great role with respect to the formation of the environment. Altman has defined culture's role in linking man and environment by differentiating four basic characteristics of culture. First, culture is based on a set of beliefs and perceptions, values and norms, group or social behaviors, and habits. Second, culture involves the commonly shared patterns of knowing, feeling or behavior of a group (as the Christian religion is a common belief in Western cultures). Third, culture involves the transfer of these common beliefs, values and forms of behavior from one generation to another (in other words, culture preserves itself through educational and socialization processes). Finally, culture is present in the physical environment, so that houses, settlements, and all manmade environments reflect cultural values.

Similarly, Rapoport has defined culture in the general context of man-environment relations according to three integrated perspectives which delimit each other. The first implies that culture is the life-style of a typical group. The second views culture as a system of cognitive schemata, symbols and meanings formed by symbolic codes. The third posits that culture is a set of adaptation strategies related to survival within a surrounding ecology and according to available natural resources. At the same time that Rapoport divides culture into its basic components, he also explains that the relation between culture and behavior (with regard to world view, beliefs, values, images, life-styles, and action chains) is a process of going from abstract to concrete.

Rapoport stresses that two of his main three definitions of culture relate directly to the house and its environment. And he further analyzes the cultural components — values and images, religious beliefs, family structure, social organizations, social relations between individuals, and life-styles — which affect the form of housing. In this system, it is important to point out that cultural core elements define the characteristics of user groups, private life-styles, and sets of important activities.

Lawrence asserts that studies of houses and culture must take socio-political, cultural and historical perspectives into consideration. He states that cultural variables must be gathered into two groups, which are related to each other. The first group consists of latent factors formed by normative concepts and meanings. In this group, he places the ethical and aesthetic principles of an idealized world view. The variables in the second group consist of individual and group behaviors which become patterns. In sum, he defines culture in two separate ways: as normative concepts and processes related to human behavior, and as visible and invisible cultural factors. By contrast, Altman, conducts housing research from a cultural and historical perspective, and he studies housing as a reflection of the relations between culture and environment. He lists the cultural factors affecting the house as follows: world view; environmental cognition and perceptions; privacy, order and other values; and social structures and family structure.

These studies and classification systems suggest that culture is a difficult concept, and those who try to define it generally must concentrate on one of its components, its process, or its quality. Chaos and ambiguity arise when the primary component of culture under consideration is not explicitly stated. Therefore, to determine the conceptual framework of research, it is important to define those cultural components and variables that are considered here to have an effect on the formation and use of the Turkish house. This framework of analysis consists of the following components: environmental images, religious beliefs, family structure and norms and rules of kinship, and domestic life-style. These components complement each other from time to time, and are explained below.

**Environmental images**

Important images are formed by user groups in relation to house form and life-style according to world view, values and ideals. Such images simplify environmental complexity and constitute a link between the perceived and real world. Shared common values and preferences among a social group combine with individual images of the environment to create an overall attitude toward the environment. Images emerging from a society's common values must be considered in a cultural context. In societies where traditional values are not discussed, and where sanctity is important, shared environmental images are reflected in all physical settings. Thus, in European village societies, especially in the Baltic countries, the form and orientation of houses reflect the sun's movement. Images related to the cardinal points are also seen in traditional societies. For example, in Mongolian houses, which are made up of four separations, the right side of the entrance is reserved for parents and for the most important guests, while the left side is reserved for other guests.

**Religious beliefs**

Ethnographic and historical research has determined that religious beliefs relate to human behavior and spatial form both in traditional and contemporary societies. However, the religious qualities of the house have lost importance in societies where religious rituals are carried out systematically and regularly in spaces outside the house (as in churches,
verbally from one generation to the next, they determine customs as social behavioral models which give sense and examples of customs. Kizil, who emphasizes the importance of clothing habits, marriage and funeral ceremonies are defined as unwritten, anonymous rules.9 Eating habits, of a society. According to this view, customs can also be considered without cognitive interpretation can thus be considered continuity from one psychological state to another and determine interpersonal status and power relations.10 By contrast, ritual and moral norms are not considered prescriptive, but only descriptive, rules. Children’s respect for their parents, which is a principle in various societies, can thus be considered a ritual and moral norm. The third type of normative cultural component introduced above are a society’s idealistic rules about objects and human beings that are not related directly to behavior.

Customs consist of cultural elements such as social experiences, doctrines, views, beliefs, attitudes, etc. Transmitted verbally from one generation to the next, they determine behavioral patterns by creating normative pressures on members of a society. According to this view, customs can also be defined as unwritten, anonymous rules.9 Eating habits, clothing habits, marriage and funeral ceremonies are examples of customs. Kizil, who emphasizes the importance of customs in the spatial design of house interiors, defines customs as social behavioral models which give sense and integrity to individual behavior in the face of new psychological situations. Customs thus provide continuity from one psychological state to another and determine interpersonal relations. By contrast, ritual and moral norms are not considered prescriptive, but only descriptive, rules. Children’s respect for their parents, which is a principle in various societies, can thus be considered a ritual and moral norm. The third type of normative cultural component introduced above are a society’s idealistic rules about objects and human beings that are not related directly to behavior.

Normative cultural components, or normative values, as explained above, determine relations between culture, behavior and space in different ways. For example, such normative values may define suitable and expected behavior at certain times and in certain settings; they may define the spatial and temporal use of the house; and they may define settings and types of objects.

The transformation of cultural components into normative values occurs over a long period. It is therefore important to study the historical evolution of such norms, going back to their origins and cultural roots. The direct effect of cultural norms on behavior and space may usually be seen in traditional cultures and settings. Similarly, the socio-cultural values of contemporary Turkish society can also be found to contain such cultural remnants of the past. For example, the shaping of the Turkish house, especially its rooms, is strictly tied to the characteristics of social structure. Historical analysis makes it possible to see how the Anatolian-Turkish house was formed as a result of a synthesis of different cultural components. In particular, the nomadic life of Middle Asia, its religious beliefs, and the Islamic world view combined to create the Anatolian synthesis, which preceded the arrival of the Turks. And this cultural synthesis, in the form of norms of behavior and spatial setting, has been reflected in the spatial characteristics of the traditional Turkish house and room.

Before progressing to an analysis of the roots of the normative values which affect the formation of space in the Turkish house, it is beneficial to introduce the basic elements of that house. This is followed by a brief description of the historical evolution of the settlement where the field study was carried out.

TRADITIONAL TURKISH HOUSING ARCHITECTURE

The basic units of traditional Turkish residential architecture are “Turkish rooms” in microscale, “Turkish houses” in mezzoscale, and “Turkish streets and districts” in macroscale.
At the mezzo scale, the traditional Turkish house displays a form and plan suitable for the traditional Turkish family’s living culture and customs. It has satisfied the requirements of the Turkish people for centuries. The most interesting and permanent feature observed in the traditional Turkish house is the existence of a common spatial setting. While regional differences may arise through the impact of climatic effects and the local availability of construction materials, this spatial setting in traditional Turkish houses does not change. The most widely accepted taxonomy of the Turkish house depends on plan types and the location of sofa, defined as common areas between room groups. Generally, plan types may be grouped into four categories according to the order in which they evolved: plans without a sofa, plans with external an sofa, plans with an internal sofa, and plans with a central sofa (FIG. 2). The main differences between the types emerge according to differences in the shapes and dimension of sofas.

Moving to the micro scale, the main features of rooms in the Turkish house are those internal units which meet the requirements of certain activities. The family that the traditional Turkish house accommodated was a patriarchal, extended family, and each room within the house served the spatial needs of one nuclear family. The rooms are thus arranged and equipped for all family activities: sitting, sleeping, eating and bathing (FIG. 3).

The most important feature of the rooms in traditional Turkish houses is that they are multipurpose, meeting the requirements of permanent use. But within the room, there are three different zones. The first is the service zone, where the portable elements of the interior setting (such as pillows, beds, mattresses) are stored, and in which the gusulhane (a bathing niche for ritual washing) is located. The second zone is the central area of the room, which is left vacant for multipurpose uses. The third zone is the sedir (a sitting platform), which occupies two or three sides of the room, especially in front of the windows, and which is kept apart from the cupboards.

At the third level of characteristic residential patterning, the macro scale, traditional Turkish towns exhibit a homogeneous form, in which social classes live together in harmony without class differentiation. In both physical and social respects, the basic element of the Turkish town is the mahalle (district). When the constructive order is studied on such a district level, it can be seen that street patterns are formed by separate and adjacent houses, and that within such an organic structure and hierarchy, the cul-de-sac, street, road and square carry people successively from the private, to the semi-private, semi-public, and public spheres of life (FIG. 4).

CASE STUDY: NORMATIVE-CULTURAL VALUES AND THE ANALYSIS OF THEIR ORIGINS IN THE TRADITIONAL TURKISH HOUSES OF MALATYA

The Malatya region, in which the field study for this paper was done, has an ancient history of settlement, containing many houses formed through historical processes. Human communities have been reported in Malatya since prehistoric times. Assyrians, Hittites, Hellenes, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, Ottomans and Turks have all been the dominant peoples of Eski Malatya (Old Malatya), and its dwellings comprise a rich heritage of these cultures. Malatya is also one of the rare towns in Turkey which has been able to
protect its properties and characteristic values. The original construction dates of houses considered in this case study come from the years after 1839, from the second half of the nineteenth century, and from the beginning of the twentieth century. The upstairs room is considered the basic spatial element of the study.

Kuban explains there is a mixed belt between the coastal regions and the inner regions of Anatolia where house architecture is most representative of Turkish housing culture (fig. 5). The traditional Turkish houses of Malatya are representative of the traditional Turkish house as defined by Kuban because of their construction techniques and plan typology. The field study analyzed 41 examples of houses in Malatya, considering both appearance and interaction between space and normative cultural components, using both ethnographic and historical methods. Because it is no longer possible to observe the life-styles which determined the culture-behavior-space relation in the traditional houses, techniques of gathering archival data, behavioral plan analyses, and content analyses were used. The determined norms are studied below in relation to their origins.

The first group of norms defining the concept of the traditional Turkish house as it is present in Malatya dates to the nomadic period. According to this view, certain characteristics of the central Asian life-style eventually became social beliefs and traditions that blended into a new socio-cultural synthesis when the Turks settled in Anatolia. It was ultimately the difficult survival conditions on the Asian steppes which caused the Turks to permanently change their place of settlement. This relocation to Anatolia resulted in the emergence of concepts such as “space independent from the land” and “abstract environment.” With the separation of living space from nature, the concept which became “introversion,” or “being closed against the external world,” appeared as the main concept of the “central/common space” in and around the Turkish house (fig. 6). This had been the main characteristic of the Central Asian life-style together with the concept of the extended family.

In the earlier nomadic life, tents had been arranged side by side as living units. In the Turkish house the normative reflection of “common space” is the gathering of rooms around the sofa. This relation is also reflected in the formation of a central area and its use at room scale (fig. 7). An examination of the gathering of spaces in the Anatolian black tent and the interior of the traditional Turkish house shows other similarities between the living units (fig. 8). In addition to the pattern of room arrangement, the movable carpets, kilims, and mats that are used as ground covers, and the bed, chest and sadir that are used as interior space elements give the appearance of norms
that also originated from the nomadic way of life. And the use of the same tent for different activities during different times of the day may be described as "flexibility." The independent-space concept also survived the passage from nomadic life to settled life; with the separation of the living floor from the ground floor, the rooms which became general living units came to be arranged on the upper floor (FIG. 9).

Norms originating from nomadism also affected the street patterns of Turkish towns. The relation between house, courtyard, cul-de-sac, street and square is a reflection of a spatial concept gathered around a social center at the scale of the city. When seen in terms of "introversion," a significant relationship is apparent between the cul-de-sac/square pattern and that of the sofa and its surrounding rooms.

The second area in which the norms of the traditional Turkish house originated is middle-Asian beliefs and the Islamic world view. In particular, the Turkish house appears as a spiritual and material enclosure against the external world in a way common to Shamanistic, Buddhist, and Manistic beliefs. But, after the adoption of Islam, Turks also began to shift to a more settled living style in Anatolia. Thus, middle-Asian beliefs united with the Islamic world view to bring about a new lifestyle. The search for spiritual satisfaction and inner life, present both in middle-Asian beliefs and Islamic mysticism, can be summed up as "introversion" and "restricted solutions in external relations" (FIG. 10). This introverted life-style is not only the result of trying to hide house life from the outside and women from foreigners. It is also the result of the effort of the Turkish people to reach inward toward the abstract environment which they created from their own beliefs.

The third area from which norms of the traditional Turkish house have been derived was the Anatolian house tradition before the arrival of the Turks. The Turks adapted an existing institutionalized settlement order to the rules of Islam and to Turkish customs and traditions, forming a synthesis in housing patterns. For example, the norm of "repeated living unit," which can be observed extensively in the Hilani houses of Eastern Anatolia, forms the content of the traditional Turkish house setting (FIG. 11).

On the other hand, the "living unit" observable in the Hittite and Aramaic house and its repetition exhibits itself in the traditional Turkish house as a nuclear living unit. The accompanying drawing shows the similarity between the late Hittite/Aramaic house, with its repeated living unit made up of a small room and a large room, and the traditional Turkish house with its multifunctional main living space and a second small room used for storage (FIG. 12).

The analysis above shows how norms influencing the Turkish house produced traditional spatial setting principles over time. The resultant principles of spatial setting are as follows: independent space, abstract environment, introversion/enclosure to outside, central/common space, repeated nuclear unit, and movable living arrangements.

THE STUDY OF THE NORMATIVE VALUES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CONTEMPORARY TURKISH HOUSE

It is next necessary to examine the effects of these traditional principles of spatial setting on such characteristic architec-
tural determinants such as "width of space," "length of space," "solid/void ratio," "internal design of housing," "repeatable living unit," and "space hierarchy." The aim is to put these principles forward in an explicit way and discuss their potential validity as elements of contemporary house architecture. The following pairings of text and drawings study the interactions between normative cultural elements and space in the traditional Turkish house. They also examine features of the traditional environmental setting of the Turkish house which came into being over time and explores their validity for Turkish house architecture today.15

Normative values of central/common space, abstract environment, introversion and the width of space (FIG. 13). In a traditional Turkish house, "introversion" and "abstract environment" norms (originated from middle-Asian beliefs) and the "central/common space" norm (which comes from the nomadic life-style) form the concept of central area, and consequently determine the width of space. This interaction keeps its validity in the cultural content of today's Turkish house. In recent studies carried out on living spaces, it has been observed that around a central space, action areas are placed in a pattern which is introverted and abstracted from outside surroundings.

Normative values of introversion/enclosure against the external world and the length of space (FIG. 14). The concept of privacy present in the Islamic world view and in middle-Asian beliefs (creating the development of an introverted living style) has determined the length of space in the traditional Turkish house. In today's Turkish house, the concept of privacy, while having partially changed its meaning, continues to have an impact on the formation of space. Specifically, the overall pattern of the environmental setting, comprising two different zones of space (introversion and limited openness to the outside), still has validity.

Normative values of abstract environment, introversion and enclosure to the outside and the solid-void ratio (FIG. 15). In the traditional Turkish house the norms of "abstract environment" (originating from the nomadic life-style) and of "introversion" (inherited from middle-Asian beliefs) form the behavior of privacy and so affect the "solid-void ratio" and window dimensions. In today’s Turkish house the behavior of privacy and the norms of abstract environment and introversion continue to be among the determinants of the solid-void ratio.

Normative values of movable living arrangements and the internal house design (FIG. 16). In the traditional Turkish house, the norm of "movable living arrangement" (inherited from the nomadic life-style) determines internal order. In contemporary Turkish house design this feature also contains a cultural content. The present shift to multipurpose use allows a movable life order and adjustable arrangements of personal-social space.
Normative values of the repeated/nuclear unit, independent space and the condensed-repeatable unit (fig. 17). In the traditional Turkish house space is formed according to the norms of the "repeated living unit" (inherited from the Anatolian housing tradition) and the "nuclear unit" (inherited from the nomadic life-style), integrated with the concept of independence. Today, especially in small houses, the idea of the nuclear unit, integrated with the principle of mass production's modular coordination and standardization, utilizes the same content.

Normative values of independent space, abstract environment, introversion and space hierarchy (fig. 18). In traditional Turkish architecture, the nomadic life-style, middle-Asian beliefs, and norms of "independent space," "abstract environment," and "introversion" (inherited from the Islamic world view) have combined to create a certain space hierarchy. This space hierarchy functions on all scales, and is evident in such features of Turkish towns as the cul-de-sac, street and square. Today this principle matches with the suggestions of environmental order, generated by research carried out on environmental psychology in Western societies.

CONCLUSION

The origin and effect of those normative values which form the cultural content of the Turkish house and which have become principles of space arrangement are summed up in the accompanying chart (fig. 19). In particular, the analysis in this paper has shown how normative cultural components (which materialize as independent space, abstract environment, introversion-enclosure to the outside, central/common space, repeated nuclear unit, and movable living arrangement) resulted from the past of Turkish society and may continue to form the cultural content of the contemporary Turkish house. Within this context it is possible to draw the following four conclusions.

The secret of the success of traditional environments must not be sought in old styles refined from their content. They...
must be sought in the principles which constitute the basis for human-environment interaction, in the normative values that form these principles, and in their cultural roots.

The normative values which determined the harmonious life-styles of the past must also be taken into consideration through analytical study, with their realization forming the content of the contemporary house, and their utilization converted into design principles.

Today the solution to the architectural and urban chaos in Turkey lies not in copying Western cultural patterns, but in making a dynamic analysis using the dimensions of culture, space, and time and providing for a continuity of cultural content.

In solving today's basic architectural problems, such as spatial disharmony, estrangement, degeneration, cultural disintegration, and identity crisis, the above approach presents a concrete and modest proposal.

REFERENCE NOTES


5. Lawrence, Housing, Dwellings and Homes, 1987.

6. Altman and Chemers, Culture and Environment.


15. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see H. Turgut and S. Mert Unugur, "The House from Tradition to the Future" (competition entry) (Ankara: Publication of Cultural Ministry, 1992).