

Contemporary Debates and Interdisciplinary Approaches in The Social Sciences, Humanities, And Administrative Sciences

Editor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Orhan ŞANLI



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THE SOCIAL SCIENCES,
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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Orhan ŞANLI

Editor in chief: Berkan Balpetek

Cover and Page Design: Duvar Design

Printing : May-2026

Publisher Certificate No: 49837

E-ISBN: 978-625-8756-71-5

© Duvar Yayınları

853 Sokak No:13 P.10 Kemeraltı-Konak/İzmir

Tel: 0 232 484 88 68

www.duvar yayinlari.com

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Chapter 1

A Conceptual Evaluation of the Digital Communication Ecosystem in New Media

Emel KUŞKU ÖZDEMİR¹, Aysu TOKAT²

1. THE CONCEPT OF NEW MEDIA

New media is a broad communication environment operating through internet-based information technologies and encompassing numerous digital domains such as internet television, online radio broadcasting, news websites, wikis, digital film platforms, social media applications, online games, shopping websites, e-mail systems, e-books, and websites (Binark & Bek, 2007). While traditional media tools continue to maintain their importance, new media platforms are also extensively used in individuals' daily lives. With the rapid global increase in social media use, the number of new media users continues to rise steadily (Çağlak, 2020).

Today, individuals live within a popular culture environment shaped by media. Popular culture significantly influences consumption habits, lifestyles, entertainment perceptions, and patterns of thought. Media plays a guiding role in many aspects of life, ranging from nutrition and clothing to political views and everyday practices (Çağan, 2003). Therefore, media is considered an important tool both in the formation of popular culture products and in delivering them to wider audiences (Karakoç, 2014). Particularly with the development of social networks and digital platforms, the sphere of influence of popular culture has expanded even further (Bahçecioğlu, 2023).

Unlike traditional media, new media possesses an interactive structure. Whereas traditional media is largely based on one-way communication, new media actively involves users in the communication process. Users are no longer merely content consumers; they have become active participants who produce content, comment, and provide feedback. This transformation has reshaped communication processes into a more participatory structure. Furthermore, new media functions as a public sphere where individuals can share their opinions and express views regarding social issues (Kesgin, 2023).

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Alongside technological developments, the areas of new media usage continue to expand. Individuals with internet access and digital devices can rapidly access information, receive online education, and engage in economic activities through digital platforms. In particular, e-commerce, social media marketing, and online education applications constitute important areas of new media usage. Through wikis, databases, e-books, and digital journals, information circulates rapidly and users can easily access such content (Çağlak, 2020).

Nevertheless, new media also brings certain negative consequences. Intensive internet use has led to issues such as technology addiction, social media addiction, and nomophobia. Moreover, misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative content can spread rapidly in digital environments. The absence of nonverbal communication elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice in online communication may also increase misunderstandings and communication problems (Çağlak, 2020). Therefore, the conscious and controlled use of new media is of great importance.

2. TYPES OF NEW MEDIA

2.1. Blogs

A blog, also referred to as a web log, is an internet site that is updated regularly and contains commentary, event descriptions, and audiovisual materials such as graphics, photographs, and videos. Generally created by individuals, blogs provide digital platforms where users can share information, experiences, and opinions. Additionally, blogs enable interaction through readers' comments (Gedik, 2020).

Blogs are digital communication environments in which content is shared in reverse chronological order. Both content creators and readers can express their opinions and ideas on these platforms. The concept of "blog" derives from the combination of the English words "web" and "log," meaning an online diary. Individuals who create blog content are referred to as "bloggers," while the process of producing blog content is called "blogging." The digital network formed by blogs is defined as the "blogosphere." According to Akbayır (2008), blogs can be classified into four categories based on their purpose and content structure: community blogs, newspaper blogs, corporate blogs, and individual blogs. Blogs not only facilitate the sharing of personal experiences and interests but also contribute to professional knowledge sharing. With the widespread use of the internet, blogs have become a fast, low-cost, and easily accessible communication medium. Moreover, users can share content they appreciate on their own blogs, allowing content to spread rapidly online and reach wider audiences (Akbayır, 2008).

2.2. Forums

Forums are digital platforms where individuals with common interests gather to communicate and share information and experiences (Akbayır, 2008). Internet forums, also known as message boards, are digital communication environments where users engage in online discussions and form communities around specific topics. These platforms are generally organized through a tree-like structure in which topics are categorized under thematic sections and subsections. Users can initiate communication by creating a discussion topic, or “thread,” while other users can respond to these topics or existing comments, thereby creating a multilayered interaction environment. Messages shared on forums are referred to as “posts” or “postings.” Although content on many forums can be viewed publicly, users are usually required to register in order to comment or create new topics. In some forums, access to content is limited exclusively to members. Through these characteristics, forums have become important digital communication spaces where both information sharing and online communities emerge (Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012). Furthermore, one of the major advantages of internet forums is the easy access they provide to large amounts of information, their focus on specific subjects and communities, and the natural and authentic nature of user-generated content (Holtz et al., 2012).

2.3. Video Sharing and Broadcasting

Although photo sharing remains important on social media, digital video content has become increasingly widespread. Improvements in storage capacity, internet speed, and camera technologies have facilitated video content production. In particular, portable, wearable, and internet-connected camera technologies have directed users toward more dynamic and expressive video content rather than static photographs. Innovations such as motion-detecting cameras and drone technologies have also significantly transformed digital video production processes. With the increasing prevalence of video content on social media, live-streaming technologies have also become important communication tools. Live streaming is defined as the simultaneous transmission of instant video feeds to different platforms through mobile device cameras. The year 2015 is regarded as a turning point during which live-streaming technologies rapidly became widespread on social media platforms. With the emergence of applications such as Periscope, Facebook Live, Blab, and Meerkat, live-streaming features became a fundamental component of social media usage (Gretzel, 2017).

2.4. Social Media Platforms

Social networking sites are web-based services that allow users to create semi-public or public profiles, publicly display lists of connections, and navigate through these connections within the system. These platforms are generally used not for meeting new people but rather for maintaining and making visible existing social relationships. Social media platforms enable users to openly display their social networks and interact through these networks, thereby making social relationships more transparent and allowing individuals' connections to become visible. Furthermore, these platforms provide structured digital environments that help individuals define themselves and establish relationships with others through user profiles, connection lists, and navigational opportunities among these connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

- **Facebook:** Facebook is a social networking platform founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. Although initially developed to facilitate communication among Harvard University students, it eventually became one of the largest social networks globally. The company went public in 2012 and later acquired Instagram for 1 billion dollars and WhatsApp for 19 billion dollars in 2014. From a business perspective, Facebook constitutes an important platform for conducting advertising activities, generating sales opportunities, and developing marketing strategies aimed at target audiences. It also enables brands to communicate directly with users, strengthen brand reputation, and convert potential customers into loyal followers (Gedik, 2020).
- **Instagram:** Instagram is a social networking platform founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, enabling users to interact through photo- and video-based content. Shortly after its launch, Instagram experienced rapid growth and was acquired by Facebook in 2012 for 1 billion dollars. Over time, the platform gained a prominent position within the social media ecosystem due to its emphasis on visual content sharing and interaction. As of 2025, Instagram reportedly has approximately 2.4 billion monthly active users and continues to rank among the world's most popular social media platforms (DataReportal, 2025; Statista, 2025). Users aged 18–34 particularly engage intensively with features such as Reels, Stories, and Explore, generating high interaction rates. Through these features, Instagram has become an effective tool for digital marketing, audience reach, and brand awareness creation.
- **X/Twitter:** X, founded by Jack Dorsey in 2006, is a social media platform enabling users to communicate instantly through short texts

known as “tweets.” Despite being rebranded as “X” in 2023, the platform continues to maintain its global influence (DataReportal, 2025). Due to its ability to create news flows, shape agendas, and influence public opinion, X is considered one of the most influential social media platforms.

User profiles on X consist of profile photos, short biographies, and follower–following lists. Tweets are shared with timestamps and may include visuals, links, hashtags, user tags (@mentions), and location information. Users can also repost other accounts’ content, enabling posts to reach broader audiences. This feature contributes to the rapid spread of content and increased interaction on the platform (Ottoni et al., 2014).

- **TikTok:** TikTok is a social media platform particularly popular among younger generations, characterized by entertainment-oriented short video content. According to We Are Social reports, the platform’s user base is concentrated primarily between the ages of 12 and 24, and the use of certain language styles and formats in content production is considered an important factor for algorithmic visibility (Yeniceler Kortak, 2024). TikTok originated from the Musical.ly application founded in 2014. Following ByteDance’s acquisition of Musical.ly in 2017 and its merger with TikTok in 2018, the platform experienced rapid global growth (Anderson, 2020).

Through personalized content feeds, TikTok enables users to access videos aligned with their interests, thereby increasing interaction. In particular, the “For You” page presents content according to user behaviors through artificial intelligence-supported algorithms, contributing to the platform’s high usage rates (Montag et al., 2021). The platform has become an important digital space for the spread of popular trends, the discovery of new music, and the rapid circulation of short-form video content. As one of the fastest-growing social media platforms worldwide, TikTok reportedly exceeded 1.6 billion monthly active users in 2025 (DataReportal, 2025). A significant portion of its user base consists of Alpha and Generation Z users. This structure positions the platform as a space where popular culture is produced and reshaped. Furthermore, the ability of content creators to generate income through audience engagement strengthens the platform’s economic dimension (Tam, 2022).

3. DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEM IN NEW MEDIA

The ecology of new media has brought significant transformations to traditional media structures and content production processes. This transformation necessitates the reconsideration of changes in the media field through different theoretical approaches. The interaction-based structure of new media environments has led to substantial changes in individual and social communication practices, making communication processes more dynamic. Alongside technological developments, individuals have become integrated into a digital social structure shaped by new media; in this process, they have transformed from passive consumers of content into active participants who also produce content. Consequently, the new media ecology has increased users' influence over media flows and fostered a more reciprocal and multidimensional relationship between media producers and consumers within the axes of interaction and virtuality (Zinderen, 2020).

3.1. Platform Economy

Digitalization today is regarded not only as a process of technological advancement but also as a fundamental dynamic transforming economic, social, and institutional structures. With the widespread use of information and communication technologies, production, service, and communication processes have been restructured, directly affecting countries' competitiveness, economic sustainability, and innovation capacities. In particular, the development of technological infrastructure, the enhancement of qualified human resources, and the adaptation of institutional structures to digital transformation are among the determining factors of successful digitalization processes. Within this context, the digital economy emerges as a structure representing the integration of information and communication technologies with economic activities. Through the digital economy, production processes accelerate, access to services becomes easier, and innovation capacity increases. One of the most widely used concepts in today's digital economy is the platform economy. In general, a platform is defined as a structure that brings together two or more distinct types of users, enables interaction among them, and facilitates value exchange (Evans, 2017). In this context, platforms that act as intermediaries between different customer groups can be described as contemporary physical or digital meeting spaces (Rochet & Tirole, 2003).

Platform economies refer to two-sided markets in which platform firms simultaneously serve multiple user groups with differing demand structures and are characterized by indirect network effects between these groups. Examples of such markets include television channels, card payment systems, and e-

commerce websites. Through their interactive structure that connects different sides, an increase in the number of users on one side enhances the utility of the other side. This feature has made issues such as competition, pricing, data usage, and market power increasingly important. This is because platforms bring large numbers of users together within a single environment, generating strong network effects and potentially enabling them to achieve dominant positions over time. Consequently, unlike traditional markets, not only the sale of goods and services but also user data, access control, and platform governance have become key determinants of economic competition (Kar, 2022).

In addition, the digital platform economy facilitates the sharing of information, services, and resources between individuals and businesses, thereby creating a new interaction-based economic model. Through platforms, users are no longer merely consumers; they also become content producers, data providers, and active participants in economic processes. Thus, unlike traditional economic models, the digital platform economy presents a network-based, participatory, and data-driven economic structure (Veysikarani & Özel, 2025).

Due to their ability to rapidly reach large audiences through online environments, new media tools have accelerated the dissemination and popularization of cultural content. Consequently, a strong connection has emerged between new media and popular culture. Social media, as a result of this process, has become one of the primary spaces where popular culture practices are transformed and reproduced most intensively (Bahçecioglu, 2023).

The dynamic nature of popular culture, including clothing styles, music, trends, and films, is widely embraced through the high interaction opportunities provided by social media. In this regard, social media has developed a distinct communication language that contributes to the spread of popular culture in contemporary society (Akıner & Küngerü, 2015).

3.2. Algorithmic Structures

Digital media platforms today have moved beyond being mere tools for communication and access to information; they have become influential spaces where social meanings are produced, identities are shaped, and political preferences are indirectly guided. The most critical element in this transformation is the algorithms that govern the functioning of these platforms. Algorithms are not merely technical regulatory mechanisms; rather, they are structural actors that determine which information becomes visible, who gains access to which content, and consequently how public debate is shaped.

Search engines, social media feeds, and recommendation systems actively participate in processes of making information visible or invisible, thereby reproducing information hierarchies. This indicates that access to information is

not neutral but is instead structured according to specific criteria and priorities. In this way, algorithms not only regulate content flows but also constitute a field of power capable of influencing individuals' modes of thinking and political perceptions. Such filtering of information reveals a form of modern power that operates in a more invisible yet more pervasive manner. In digital systems, algorithms function as ideological filters, playing an indirect role in the production of social consent (Asta, 2026). The content encountered by users is largely determined through personalization mechanisms and engagement-based ranking systems.

This process often leads public spheres of debate to transform into “echo chambers,” where similar opinions are repeatedly reinforced. As a result of the filtered content flow provided by algorithms, individuals are frequently exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs, thereby limiting diversity within the public sphere. On the other hand, while algorithms continuously optimize content flows by analyzing users' interests and behaviors, they also entail extensive data collection processes. Every interaction is recorded as a data point, and these data are used for both economic and political purposes. Thus, digital platforms evolve into systems that are not only content providers but also structures that reproduce surveillance and data-driven power relations (Demir and Dalaylı, 2025).

Especially, video-oriented digital platforms are not merely entertainment spaces; they are digital environments that redefine user interaction and determine content visibility largely through algorithmic systems. While these platforms encourage new forms of content production, they also directly shape user behaviors. Filters, music libraries, editing tools, and interaction-oriented interfaces are among the main elements keeping users engaged on platforms for extended periods. Algorithmic recommendation systems directly influence the circulation and popularity of content (Dursun, 2026).

The organization of content flows aims to provide users with rapid and dynamic content experiences based on their interests. In this process, users' previous interactions, viewing durations, and preferences are analyzed to rank content, utilizing big data analytics and real-time data processing (Parsa & Akçora, 2021). TikTok and similar platforms aim to sustain user attention continuously through fluid content structures; algorithmic recommendations and constantly renewed content flows directly affect users' attention spans. This situation suggests that short-term and intensive content consumption may have negative effects on attention (İmren & Tekman, 2019).

TikTok's recommendation algorithm personalizes content feeds by analyzing likes, shares, and viewing behaviors, thereby increasing the time users spend on

the platform. This interaction cycle establishes a reciprocal feedback mechanism between content creators and users, contributing to the continuous updating of content strategies (Söğüt & Öngel, 2022). Consequently, the fluid content model creates a digital structure encouraging the production of short, dynamic, and attention-grabbing content (Dursun, 2026).

3.3. Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers

“Filter bubble” refers to the situation in which personalized content streams expose individuals only to information that aligns with their own interests and views, thereby limiting their access to different perspectives (Pariser, 2011). Based on this definition, filter bubbles are discussed in terms of their potential to reduce users’ exposure to alternative ideas, narrow information diversity, and gradually lead to a form of cognitive uniformity over time.

User behaviors on social networking platforms are continuously monitored and analyzed through internet algorithms. Although this situation raises concerns regarding privacy and security among users, individuals often consent to the processing of their personal data in order to benefit from the services offered by digital platforms. Algorithms analyze users’ clicking behaviors, interests, and interaction habits to create personalized content flows tailored to individuals. Through these data-driven systems, users’ ideological tendencies, consumption preferences, and digital identities can be identified.

Although personalized content presentation appears to provide a practical experience by filtering out irrelevant information within dense information flows, it also brings various social and individual problems. The constant presentation of similar opinions and perspectives reinforces users’ existing ideological viewpoints while reducing the likelihood of encountering alternative perspectives. As a result, individuals may become confined within a particular intellectual framework in digital environments, making it more difficult to evaluate the external world from a multidimensional perspective. Therefore, while algorithmic filtering systems simplify user experiences, they also create the conditions for digital communication problems such as filter bubbles and echo chambers (Ertürk, 2022).

The infinite scrolling architecture of content feeds is another significant structural feature that encourages users to spend more time on platforms by continuously and spontaneously presenting content. This structure functions as an effective mechanism for attracting and retaining user attention. Furthermore, recommendation algorithms personalize user experiences according to viewing durations, interactions, and content preferences, thereby reinforcing user habits. By analyzing user behaviors, these algorithms prioritize content likely to attract

attention. Through the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies, recommendation systems have become increasingly advanced, enabling easier access to content that may interest users through real-time data analysis. While this situation increases diversity in content consumption and fosters platform-specific habits, algorithms may also limit content diversity at times. Consequently, many systems incorporate exploration features and mechanisms that support access to different forms of content (Dursun, 2026).

Conclusion

When the literature on new media and the digital communication ecosystem is evaluated within a general framework, it becomes evident that new media is not merely a technological innovation but also a comprehensive communication environment transforming social, cultural, and economic structures. With the development of internet-based technologies, new media environments have transformed the one-way communication model of traditional media structures and paved the way for a more interactive, participatory, and multidimensional communication model.

The studies included in the literature reveal that one of the most distinctive characteristics of new media is its ability to increase user participation. The transformation of individuals from passive recipients who merely consume content into active participants who produce, share, and provide feedback has led to a structural reconfiguration of digital communication. This transformation demonstrates that the boundaries between media production and consumption processes have gradually become blurred. Particularly with the widespread use of social media platforms, users' increased visibility at both individual and societal levels has strengthened the public sphere function of new media.

The literature concerning new media types indicates that blogs, forums, video-sharing platforms, and social networks each respond to different communication needs. This diversity demonstrates that digital communication environments possess a multilayered structure and that users benefit from these platforms for various purposes. At the same time, technological developments have contributed to the increasing prominence of video-based content and short-form sharing practices.

Studies on social media platforms further demonstrate that these structures transform not only interpersonal communication but also economic and cultural production processes. Particularly with the implementation of algorithmic systems, the personalization of content flows has become one of the primary factors directly influencing user experience. While this situation facilitates access to content, it may also limit users' interaction to specific types of content.

The literature additionally identifies the impact of new media on popular culture as an important area of discussion. Digital platforms enable the rapid dissemination and reproduction of cultural content, thereby increasing the global visibility of popular culture. Although this process enhances cultural interaction, it also brings debates regarding cultural homogenization and content standardization.

Overall, the new media ecosystem emerges as one of the fundamental determinants of today's communication environment. The literature demonstrates that this structure profoundly affects both individual user experiences and broader social communication practices. At the same time, issues such as the influence of algorithmic systems, the control of information flows, digital addiction, and information pollution are likely to remain important areas of future research. Therefore, due to its continuously evolving structure, new media should be regarded as a dynamic field requiring interdisciplinary approaches.

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In the Wardrobe of Identity: A Conceptual Literature Review on the Body, Fashion Knowledge, and Everyday Archives

Mehmet Fahri FURAT¹

ABSTRACT

Drawing on an integrative conceptual review, this article examines the intersections of body, clothing, identity and information. Fashion studies have long explained clothing through class, distinction, gender performance and representation; yet the informational and archival dimensions of everyday dress have received comparatively little sustained attention. The wardrobe is reconsidered here as a micro-archival object – a site where bodily change, social aspiration, shame and personal memory are preserved in material form. The article proposes fashion information literacy as a conceptual extension of existing information literacy frameworks, understood as the capacity to seek, evaluate, interpret and apply fashion-related information in relation to one's body, social context and identity. Methodologically, the article is a conceptual framework study grounded in integrative literature review, not an empirical bibliometric analysis. Critical bibliometric sensitivity is used as a qualitative lens for examining how scholarly vocabularies render certain bodies, identities and information practices visible, searchable or marginal. Three core concepts are developed: wardrobe-as-archive, fashion information literacy and fashion information inequality. The concept of embodied information avoidance is introduced as a theoretical proposition for later empirical testing. By placing archival thinking and information literacy in dialogue with fashion and body studies, clothing is reconsidered as a record, a sign, a source of information and a site where bodies become socially visible or invisible.

Keywords: wardrobe, fashion information literacy, body literacy, personal archives, body image, information behaviour, information literacy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Clothing is among the most ordinary objects of everyday life, yet it is rarely socially neutral. It covers the body, but it also displays, classifies and interprets it. A garment may signal gender, class, profession, religious belonging or respectability, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in contradictory ways. This is why clothing has long attracted sociological and cultural analysis. Simmel's account of fashion stresses the tension between imitation and differentiation; Veblen treats visible consumption as a marker of status and social display. Bourdieu later shifts the discussion toward taste, habitus and cultural capital, showing that aesthetic preferences are socially organised rather than merely individual (Bourdieu, 1984; Simmel, 1957; Veblen, 1899/1994).

In contemporary societies, the body is also heavily mediated. It is measured, photographed, filtered, compared and circulated through digital platforms, often in ways that constrain rather than enable self-expression. The dressed body sits at the intersection of material culture, identity performance and information circulation. Someone looking for clothing is not simply choosing a product; they are navigating information about size, fit, appropriateness and social recognition. This becomes especially consequential for people whose bodies do not fit dominant norms of thinness, able-bodiedness, gender conformity or consumer affordability.

The central metaphor of this article is the wardrobe. In everyday language, a wardrobe is simply a place where clothes are stored. Conceptually, however, it can be read as a small archive of embodied life: a space that preserves garments no longer worn, clothes tied to significant events, uniforms marking institutional belonging and pieces carrying family memory or personal history. Archival theory has increasingly recognised the value of personal records and private traces. Hobbs argues that personal archives differ from organisational records precisely because they reflect intimate roles, identities and interior struggles (Hobbs, 2001). Cox similarly notes the growing significance of personal archives in contemporary society (Cox, 2008). If letters, photographs and digital files can be understood as personal archives, clothing deserves analogous attention as a form of embodied record. A garment does not simply document a moment; it stores a bodily relation to that moment: a period of mourning, a professional role, an attempt to become visible.

The claim is deliberately modest. Wardrobes are not institutional archives in any administrative sense. The question is whether archival thinking can be cautiously extended to ordinary objects whose evidential value is embodied, affective and socially situated. A wardrobe does not fulfil formal archival principles such as provenance, original order or institutional custody. Its archival value is analytical: it involves selection, retention, loss, arrangement and traces of lived experience. The strongest objection to this framing comes from the institutional archival paradigm,

which requires custodial control, provenance and preservation standards. A wardrobe fails many of these conditions; it is private, unstable, partially disordered and shaped as much by forgetting as by deliberate documentation. What the argument proposes is a separation between administrative archival status and analytical archival value, asking archival questions of everyday dress without claiming to transform the wardrobe into an institutional repository.

Fashion studies have predominantly examined dress as representation: a sign of gender, status, class or cultural identity. This is necessary but incomplete. In digital culture, fashion is also an information environment. Users search for size charts, styling advice, reviews and algorithmically suggested items. The fashion user is, at the same time, an information user. Information behaviour and information literacy therefore offer a productive vocabulary for this dimension of fashion practice. Savolainen's model of everyday life information seeking is useful because it situates information practices within everyday routines, values and ways of life (Savolainen, 1995). Lloyd's work on information literacy landscapes further reminds us that information literacy is contextual, social and embodied rather than a set of academic search skills (Lloyd, 2010). Applied to clothing, this means that interpreting fashion information is inseparable from body, social position, economic resources and cultural codes.

The relevant scholarship is scattered across several fields that rarely speak to each other. Fashion sociology discusses class, taste and distinction. Body studies examine embodiment and normativity. Fat studies criticise the marginalisation of larger bodies. Media studies analyse social media and digital comparison. Information science provides concepts such as information seeking and information literacy. Archival theory offers a language for personal records and everyday traces. A literature-based conceptual mapping is therefore necessary not as a substitute for empirical work, but as the analytical foundation on which such work can rest.

Bibliometric awareness is used here as a modest critical sensitivity rather than a framework for quantitative analysis. It directs attention to the organisation of scholarly visibility: which bodies are named, which concepts become searchable, which terms acquire citation value and which everyday experiences remain conceptually silent. This position defines the article as a conceptual framework grounded in integrative literature review methodology.

The aim is to reread the literature on fashion, body and identity through information literacy and archival thinking, developing a conceptual lens for future empirical work. Four questions guide the discussion: How can the wardrobe be conceptualised as a personal archive? How can fashion information literacy be theorised as an everyday information practice? How do digital platforms and body norms shape access to fashion information? Which bodies and identities remain

weakly visible in the literature? The contribution lies in shifting the discussion from clothing as representation toward clothing as record, information and embodied knowledge.

Table 1. Methodological Reorientation of the Review

Initial emphasis	Operational decision in this article	Methodological consequence
Publication trends, author counts and keyword frequencies	Conceptual links among body, fashion, archive and information	The review avoids numerical claims that it does not empirically produce
Visibility of themes	Critical attention to conceptual visibility and silence	Bibliometric awareness is retained as a qualitative sensitivity
Fashion and body as neighbouring literature clusters	Wardrobe-as-archive and fashion information literacy as the central conceptual link	The information and archival identity of the article becomes clearer
Network-style findings	Thematic synthesis from reviewed DergiPark literature	The design remains consistent with an integrative review

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on the reviewed literature.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Classical fashion sociology begins from the observation that fashion is social before it is aesthetic. Simmel describes fashion as a form that reconciles two opposing impulses: the desire to imitate others and the desire to differentiate oneself (Simmel, 1957). This tension remains analytically productive because clothing is still used to communicate both belonging and distinction, often in the same gesture. People dress to enter a group, but also to mark a position within it. Veblen adds the dimension of status: in his account, dress is tied to the public display of leisure and wealth (Veblen, 1899/1994). Bourdieu deepens this by showing that taste is structured by social position and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). What appears to be a personal choice is, on closer examination, shaped by class, education, income and access to legitimate taste. This is one reason the wardrobe can be approached as an archival object: it records not only possessions but also the social conditions under which certain choices became thinkable.

A second theoretical tradition treats fashion as a language. Barthes's semiotic analysis demonstrates that clothing becomes meaningful through systems of signs and descriptions (Barthes, 1983). Davis similarly argues that clothes communicate identity and social position, though they do so in unstable and context-dependent ways (Davis, 1992). This matters for the information argument because fashion information is never purely practical. A size label, brand description, influencer caption or styling category is also a sign: it tells the user what kind of body is

assumed and what kind of identity is made desirable. Users therefore need not only to locate fashion information but also to read the assumptions embedded within it.

Entwistle's concept of the dressed body is central to this framework. Her insistence that dress cannot be separated from the fleshy, lived and socially situated body (Entwistle, 2000) shifts attention from fashion as external representation to dressing as embodied practice. Clothing is not simply placed on the body; it helps the body become acceptable and recognisable within a particular social context. This perspective allows the wardrobe to be read as a record of embodied negotiations. Clothes are kept, altered or avoided because bodies change and because social expectations change. The wardrobe records the friction between the body one has, the body one remembers and the body that social norms recognise as acceptable. Wardrobe-as-archive names the material traces through which embodied experience is stored and sometimes silenced.

Goffman's dramaturgical approach to everyday life argues that social identity is performed through settings, gestures and appearances (Goffman, 1959). Clothing participates in this performance by contributing to the social definition of the situation. Butler's theory of gender performativity shows that identity is not simply expressed through appearance; it is repeatedly produced through socially recognisable acts and styles (Butler, 1990). Read together, Goffman and Butler position the wardrobe as a preparation space for identity performance: the site where individuals select the visual grammar through which they will become legible to others. Yet this selection is not free. It is constrained by gender norms, professional expectations, class codes and available fashion information. Identity performance through dress therefore depends partly on whether relevant and dignified information is accessible.

Fat studies and plus-size fashion studies challenge the assumption that all bodies have equal access to style, dignity and representation. LeBesco examines fatness as a contested cultural and political category rather than only a medical condition (LeBesco, 2004). Peters shows that access to clothing affects self-presentation, belonging and self-recognition in ways that make plus-size fashion central to fat identity formation (Peters, 2014). Clothing exclusion is not a minor consumer inconvenience; it is a form of social and symbolic exclusion. The terminology through which larger bodies are described also carries its own politics. Obesity, fat, plus-size, curve and size-inclusive do not carry the same meanings and are not interchangeable. The term fat is used here in the critical sense developed within fat studies, not as a medical label (Monaghan et al., 2013; Wann, 2009). This terminological choice reflects a substantive analytical commitment: the language used to describe bodies shapes the information that becomes available to them.

Digital platforms have transformed fashion into a dense information environment. Users encounter fashion through search engines, e-commerce filters, recommendation systems, social media images and algorithmically ordered feeds. Social media research has shown that visual platforms can affect body image and self-comparison, while body-positive content may create spaces of resistance (Cohen et al., 2019; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). For information science, the central question is not simply whether digital fashion images are positive or negative. It also concerns how information is organised, retrieved and made trustworthy. Which body types appear wearing garments? Are size charts reliable? Are disabled or older bodies represented? Such questions turn fashion visibility into an information literacy problem and extend the wardrobe-as-archive argument into digital environments, where traces of dress appear in profiles, size histories and recommendation systems.

Personal archives theory has been developed primarily through letters, diaries, photographs and digital files. Yet wardrobes also preserve traces of individual life: a wedding dress, a graduation suit, a uniform, a mourning garment or a piece inherited from a family member. These too function as records of embodied memory. Treating garments as archival objects is not a claim about their institutional status. The wardrobe has archival qualities (selection, retention, arrangement, affective value and evidential trace) without meeting the formal conditions of an institutional archive. Marshall's discussion of personal digital archiving shows that personal archiving involves recurring problems of value, accumulation and retrieval (Marshall, 2008). The wardrobe raises analogous problems. People keep too much, discard too late, preserve emotionally charged items and sometimes return to them as evidence of previous selves. This makes the wardrobe a site where memory, evidence and embodied identity are materially negotiated.

Information literacy is commonly defined through the capacity to recognise information needs, find information, evaluate sources and use information responsibly. The ACRL Framework articulates information literacy through conceptual frames including authority, creation process, value, inquiry and strategic searching (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). Although developed for higher education, these ideas transfer to everyday contexts. Fashion information literacy, as proposed here, is the ability to seek, evaluate, interpret and apply fashion-related information in relation to one's body, identity and social context. It includes reading size information critically, assessing the credibility of reviews, interpreting platform recommendations and recognising commercial persuasion. Body literacy is the wider concept: it refers to the capacity to understand the body as biological, social, material, cultural and digital simultaneously. Fashion information literacy is an applied sub-domain of body literacy, specifically the point

at which broader bodily self-knowledge meets the specific information practices required to navigate clothing-related data.

The theoretical framework is deliberately interdisciplinary, but the paradigms in play are not treated as interchangeable. Bourdieu explains how clothing choices are structured by class position and cultural capital. Barthes and Davis clarify how garments function as signs. Goffman and Butler show how identity becomes socially legible through repeated appearance and style. Entwistle provides the bridge by locating dress in embodied practice. The shared object of analysis is the dressed body as a situated practice where social structures, semiotic meanings, performative identities and information environments converge. Structural and performative accounts of identity generate an apparent tension. Bourdieu's habitus suggests that users enter fashion information environments with durably unequal resources, tastes and expectations; Butler's performativity stresses the repetition and potential revision of identity scripts through dress. Savolainen's everyday life information seeking model provides a mediating plane between these positions. Information seeking is structured by way of life and social order, yet it also allows for situated negotiation and selective interpretation (Savolainen, 1995). Agency is neither fully autonomous nor absent; it is exercised within information environments that make some clothing choices more visible and legitimate than others.

The hierarchy between body literacy and fashion information literacy can be stated plainly. Body literacy is the wider interpretive competence: knowing one's body as lived, moving, ageing, gendered, classed and culturally read. Fashion information literacy is the applied practice through which this bodily knowledge is used to interpret clothing-related data. In practice, the movement runs from bodily interpretation to information action: first understanding the body as lived and socially read, then using that understanding to search, compare and evaluate clothing information, and finally recognising when the available information environment is unequal, unreliable or exclusionary.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The classical sociological literature established the idea that fashion is a social system, not a matter of individual preference. Simmel links fashion to modernity, mobility and group dynamics; Veblen links clothing to conspicuous consumption and status display; Bourdieu links taste to social reproduction. The three accounts share the claim that clothing communicates more than individual choice. Where they diverge is in emphasis: Simmel stresses movement and change, Veblen stresses public display, and Bourdieu stresses durable class structures. This tradition supports the archival argument. A wardrobe may seem personal, but it is composed through economic capacity, class location and access to legitimate taste. Classical sociology

shows that wardrobes preserve material residues of distinction, aspiration and social belonging: the documentary traces of socially organised aesthetic choices.

Fashion and identity studies expand this classical tradition by focusing on the communicative and performative dimensions of dress. Wilson treats fashion as a modern cultural field marked by contradiction, desire and anxiety (Wilson, 1985). Crane examines clothing in relation to social agendas, gender and historical transformation (Crane, 2000). Kawamura distinguishes fashion from clothing by stressing the institutional and symbolic processes through which clothing becomes fashion (Kawamura, 2005). Within this tradition, the wardrobe is more than a storage space; it is a site of identity rehearsal. The individual asks not only 'What do I own?' but also 'Who can I become through what I wear?' This is directly relevant to body literacy and fashion information literacy: identity performance through dress depends on knowing how bodies, garments and social settings are read together, and that knowledge is unevenly distributed.

A substantial body of recent literature examines body image in relation to social media. Fardouly and Vartanian note that social media can intensify appearance comparison and body image concerns (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Tiggemann and Zaccardo's work on fitpiration imagery shows how ostensibly health-oriented visual cultures may reproduce appearance-based pressures (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Cohen and colleagues demonstrate that body-positive Instagram content can offer alternative representations, though it remains embedded in platform visibility economies (Cohen et al., 2019). The dominant methodological tendency in this area is psychological and survey-based. These methods are valuable for measuring affective outcomes, but they leave less room for examining the informational architecture of digital platforms. The analysis therefore moves beyond exposure effects toward the knowledge conditions that make certain bodies more searchable and more culturally legible than others.

Plus-size fashion and body positivity occupy an ambivalent position in the literature. They challenge narrow body ideals and create space for alternative representation, but they are also routinely absorbed into consumer markets as branding strategies. Peters's analysis demonstrates how limited garment options shape fat identity formation and self-presentation (Peters, 2014). LeBesco and Murray criticise the cultural production of fat bodies as excessive, failed or morally suspect (LeBesco, 2004; Murray, 2008). The conceptual difficulty is that inclusion can mean very different things: representational visibility, market expansion, political recognition or information access. A platform may display diverse bodies while still providing unreliable sizing information, limited fit guidance or algorithmically narrow recommendations. Fashion information inequality is the concept needed precisely at this point.

Sustainable fashion literature has grown significantly around environmental responsibility, circularity and consumer behaviour. Fletcher's work and Niinimäki and colleagues' account of fast fashion's environmental costs have been influential in positioning fashion as a systemic ecological problem (Fletcher, 2014; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Body justice, however, is largely absent from these discussions. A fashion system that reduces waste while excluding large bodies, disabled bodies or older bodies remains ethically incomplete. The connection between sustainability and the wardrobe-as-archive argument is also significant. Long-term use, repair and attachment (conditions necessary for wardrobes to function as archival objects) are possible only for bodies that have material and informational access to garments in the first place. Fast fashion poses an additional challenge. If garments are produced and discarded at high speed, their capacity to become stable records of embodied memory may appear weakened. The archival reading of the wardrobe does not collapse under this pressure, but it requires modification. In fast-fashion conditions, the wardrobe may archive instability, disposability, interrupted attachment and failed fit. It records not only continuity but also the social conditions under which continuity becomes difficult: the cycles of purchase, return, duplicate acquisition and loss of provenance that characterise accelerated consumption.

Information behaviour research offers a productive but underused perspective for fashion studies. Wilson's early frameworks situate information needs and seeking as central to user studies; Kuhlthau highlights the cognitive and affective dimensions of search processes (Kuhlthau, 1991; Wilson, 1981). Savolainen's everyday life information seeking model is particularly relevant because fashion decisions typically occur in non-academic, everyday contexts (Savolainen, 1995). Fashion information behaviour includes searching for fit, comparing images, evaluating reviews, judging the credibility of influencers and deciding whether a garment can work for a specific body. These are not peripheral activities; they are the informational practices through which clothing becomes usable. This perspective provides the information science basis for fashion information literacy as the article's central conceptual contribution.

Archival thinking brings a different sensitivity to clothing. Archives are systems of selection, memory, evidence and power, not neutral containers of the past. Derrida's archive fever and Steedman's reflections on dust both draw attention to the affective and material textures of archival work (Derrida, 1996; Steedman, 2001). Hobbs makes a similar point for personal archives by stressing the intimate character of individual records (Hobbs, 2001). The wardrobe can be read through this lens as a material system of personal evidence and embodied memory. It is not comprehensive; it is selective. It contains silences, absences and forgotten contexts. It preserves some selves and discards others, shaped by shame, aspiration, loss, care

and practical constraint. This is what distinguishes the archival reading from a merely metaphorical one: the claim is not that wardrobes resemble archives in some poetic sense, but that they perform recognisably archival functions in the domain of everyday embodied life.

Bibliometric methods are valuable for examining the structure of academic knowledge. Tools such as VOSviewer and bibliometrix are widely used for keyword co-occurrence, co-citation and thematic evolution analysis (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Donthu and colleagues describe bibliometric analysis as a rigorous method for identifying emerging research areas (Donthu et al., 2021). No completed bibliometric dataset is presented in this article. Instead, a critical bibliometric sensitivity is adopted as a qualitative stance toward scholarly visibility: asking which concepts are visible enough to be searchable, which terms organise the literature and which everyday experiences remain marginal. The object of analysis is not frequency itself, but the normative vocabulary through which the field makes some bodies knowable and leaves others conceptually silent. This is a different analytical task from quantitative science mapping, and one appropriate to the article's conceptual framework design.

Table 2. Main Literature Axes and Their Contribution to the Study

Literature axis	Main contribution	Connection to the study
Fashion sociology	Class, taste, distinction, imitation and status	Explains why the wardrobe is socially structured
Fashion semiotics	Dress as sign, language and representation	Explains how fashion information produces meaning
Body studies	Embodiment, body image and social norms	Explains why clothing must be analysed with the lived body
Fat studies and plus-size fashion	Critique of size normativity and exclusion	Supports the concept of fashion information inequality
Information behaviour	Everyday seeking, evaluation and use of information	Allows fashion to be studied as an information practice
Archival theory	Personal records, memory, selection and traces	Supports the concept of wardrobe-as-archive
Critical bibliometric sensitivity	Visibility of concepts, authors and knowledge structures	Supports critical attention to what the field makes visible or invisible

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on the reviewed literature.

4.METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research design

The article is designed as an integrative literature review based on DergiPark, Türkiye's major open-access academic journal platform. DergiPark hosts a wide range of peer-reviewed journals published by universities, scholarly associations and

academic institutions. The review is supported by thematic coding and conceptual synthesis, and focuses on how Turkish academic literature indexed in this platform discusses the intersections among fashion, clothing, body, identity, information literacy, digital visibility and archival memory. No quantitative bibliometric map is offered here – no citation counts, keyword frequency tables or network visualisations. This is a deliberate design choice, not a gap.

The methodological position is conceptual and interpretive. The reviewed publications are treated not merely as background sources but as an analytical corpus through which the conceptual vocabulary is developed. This approach is appropriate for an interdisciplinary field that is not yet institutionally consolidated under a single research label. Concepts such as wardrobe-as-archive, fashion information literacy and embodied information avoidance cannot be adequately captured through a single disciplinary database query; they require a synthetic reading of dispersed literatures across fashion studies, sociology of the body, information literacy and archival thinking.

Critical bibliometric sensitivity replaces conventional bibliometric measurement. Rather than counting words or citations to claim numerical representativeness, the analysis asks which bodies, identities and information practices become visible or remain marginal in the literature. The concern is not simply what the literature says, but which conceptual worlds it makes thinkable. The design follows the logic of integrative literature review and conceptual framework building, in which dispersed research is synthesised to generate a new analytical lens (Snyder, 2019).

The originality claimed here is conceptual. The article brings dispersed literatures into a shared analytical vocabulary, making it possible to examine dress as sign, record, embodied practice, digital information and unequal access condition. This vocabulary prepares the ground on which later empirical, bibliometric, ethnographic or platform-based research can work more precisely.

4.2. Corpus construction and DergiPark search logic

The empirical basis consists of publications identified through targeted searches in DergiPark, Türkiye's major open-access academic journal platform. DergiPark was selected because the study aims specifically to examine how the relevant conceptual intersections appear in Türkiye-based academic literature. The search process followed a purposive and thematic logic. Rather than a single search string, the corpus was built through keyword clusters designed to capture the main conceptual axes: fashion/clothing/identity; body/body image; digital visibility/social media; information literacy/information behaviour; archive/memory/everyday life; and sizing/fit/clothing data.

The searches were conducted in stages. After each round of publications was reviewed, new terms were added to address weak conceptual areas. For example, after the initial corpus showed strong coverage of body image and social media but weaker coverage of information literacy, additional searches were conducted using Turkish terms such as bilgi okuryazarlığı (information literacy), bilgi davranışı (information behaviour) and bilgiye erişim (access to information). Once the importance of sizing and fit became apparent, further targeted searches used terms such as giysi boyutlandırma (garment sizing), beden numarası (clothing size), ölçü standardizasyonu (measurement standardisation), online giyim alışverişi (online clothing shopping), saptırılmış beden (vanity sizing) and büyük beden (plus-size).

The final A-group corpus consisted of 44 publications. For transparency, the corpus covered: fashion and identity studies (Başaran, 2021; Birol & Güdekli, 2017; Ciloşoğlu & Kılınç, 2025; Çetiner, 2024; Demir Parlak, 2022; Ersoy, 2014; Göksel, 2007; İmren, 2018; Karaçizmeli et al., 2017; Özhan Koçak, 2010; Ülger, 2014; Yağlı, 2013), body theory and body image studies (Aydoğmuş Ördem, 2018; Bozkurt & Koyuncu, 2023; Bozok & Küçükdoğan, 2022; Çelik Ekmekçi, 2020; Öngören, 2015; Ulusoy, 2024), social media and digital body visibility studies (Aydoğan, 2024; Bahtiyar, 2021; Erdem & Başal Yıldız, 2019; Karabacak & Sezgin, 2016; Kaya & Dalkıç, 2020; Korkmaz, 2023; Oğuzhan, 2025; Önal, 2025; Öngören & İntizamoglu, 2025; Sejfula, 2025; Sezgin, 2024; Tayhan, 2023; Yılmaz et al., 2026), information literacy and clothing-data studies (Ağaç et al., 2018; Aygün Ocak & Çeğindir, 2019; Bayraktar, 2022; Keskin Töre & Yağmur, 2022; Kurbanoglu, 2010; Nadasbaş, 2019; Öney, 2020; Yıldız & Kişoğlu, 2011; Yılmaz & Kavak, 2024), and memory, cultural representation and fashion-industry critique studies (Aktaş et al., 2026; Başaran İnce, 2010; Varol, 2026; Yücelen, 2025).

4.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

For the main analytical corpus, priority was given to studies that addressed at least one of the article's core axes. These included body, body image and embodied experience; fashion, dress, clothing and ready-to-wear culture; identity, representation, gender, class and social distinction; information literacy, information behaviour and information access; archive, memory, everyday life and material traces; and sizing, fit, measurement, plus-size clothing and digital clothing information.

Publications were excluded if they were purely technical textile studies, narrowly medical obesity studies, commercial marketing studies without conceptual relevance to body or information, or general cultural studies without relation to dress, body or memory. Book reviews and highly indirect texts were treated as supplementary

sources unless they made a strong conceptual contribution. Duplicate files and alternative versions of the same article were removed before final coding.

4.4. Coding procedure

The publications were read in three stages. Titles, abstracts and keywords were examined first for initial relevance. Introductions, theoretical frameworks, methodology sections and conclusions were then reviewed. Finally, each publication was coded according to thematic contribution and conceptual function. The coding scheme was built to support the findings section rather than to describe the corpus mechanically.

Table 3. Coding Framework Used in the DergiPark Corpus

Coding level	Codes	Analytical purpose	Connection to the article
Main axis codes	E1 Fashion/identity; E2 Body; E3 Digital visibility; E4 Information access; E5 Archive/memory; E6 Sizing/fit	Identifies the primary domain of each publication	Shows the interdisciplinary distribution of the corpus
Findings codes	F1–F6 covering fashion identity, body norms, digital visibility, fashion information literacy, wardrobe/archive, fashion information inequality	Organises the thematic findings	Structures Section 5
Conceptual contribution codes	GA Wardrobe-as-archive; MBO Fashion information literacy; BO Body literacy; MBE Fashion information inequality	Links each source to the article's original concepts	Connects evidence to conceptual contribution
Analytical weight	A1 Core source; A2 Bridging source; A3 Background source	Avoids treating all sources as equally central	Protects the corpus from indiscriminate expansion

Source: Author's coding scheme developed for the DergiPark-based corpus.

Table 3 documents the coding logic applied to the reviewed publications. Table 4 presents a frequency breakdown of the same process. Neither table should be read as a bibliometric map of the field: the codes overlap, a single publication may carry more than one axis designation, and the percentages say nothing about the prevalence of these themes in the broader literature. The figures are there to show, at a glance, how the forty-four publications distribute across the conceptual terrain the study is working with.

Table 4. Distribution of Main Axis Codes in the A-Group Corpus

Code	Analytical axis	Number of publications (n)	Share of 44-publication corpus
E1	Fashion / clothing / identity	23	52.3%
E2	Body / body image / self	31	70.5%
E3	Social media / digital visibility	16	36.4%
E4	Information literacy / information access	10	22.7%
E5	Archive / memory / everyday life	5	11.4%
E6	Sizing / fit / clothing data	9	20.5%

Note: Codes are non-exclusive; one publication may be assigned to more than one analytical axis. Percentages are calculated over the 44-publication A-group corpus and are used only to increase corpus transparency, not as bibliometric evidence of field-wide prevalence.

Source: Author's frequency calculation based on the coded A-group corpus.

4.5. Reliability, validity and ethical considerations

Reliability was supported through a transparent coding logic, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, duplicate removal and repeated checking of classification decisions. The use of evaluation categories before final coding helped prevent the corpus from expanding indiscriminately; analytical emphasis was placed on relevance to the research problem rather than on the mere presence of fashion- or body-related keywords.

Validity was strengthened through conceptual triangulation across several fields: sociology of fashion, body studies, social media studies, information literacy, personal archives and everyday life studies. This triangulation demonstrates that the relationship between dress and identity is representational, informational, embodied and archival – not reducible to any one of these dimensions alone.

The study does not involve human participants and therefore raises no direct participant-related ethical risks. It does deal with sensitive terminology related to fatness, plus-size bodies, body image, gender and social exclusion. Pathologising language is therefore avoided throughout. Terms such as fat body and *şişman beden* appear only in relation to critical fat studies and social experience, not as medical labels. Obesity is not used as a primary analytical category unless the cited literature itself adopts a medical framework.

5. THEMATIC FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

The coded DergiPark corpus shows that fashion and clothing in Turkish academic literature are discussed as visual, bodily, informational and social practices rather than simply aesthetic or commercial phenomena. Six major findings emerge from the analysis.

5.1. Fashion as a visual infrastructure of identity and social positioning

The first finding is that fashion functions as a visual infrastructure of identity. Several studies show that dress is one of the most immediate ways through which class, gender, profession, status and self-presentation become socially visible. Yağlı (2013) positions fashion within everyday life and ideology, arguing that clothing participates in the reconstruction of culture through routine consumption and symbolic practice. Başaran (2021) similarly treats fashion as a modern mechanism of social control, emphasising how clothing regulates bodies and social expectations.

Demir Parlak (2022) frames clothing directly as a medium of identity representation; İmren (2018) connects fashion and media to women's identity construction and ideal-body discourse; Özhan Koçak (2010) analyses the power of visibility in identity acquisition through fashion. Studies on occupational and gendered dress extend the same theme. Ciloşoğlu and Kılınç (2025) show that working women's clothing choices are connected to professional identity and social positioning. Karaçizmeli et al. (2017) demonstrate that clothing structures masculinity and workplace legitimacy in analogous ways. Birol and Güdekli (2017), through a semiotic analysis of men's fashion on Pinterest, show that digital images of male fashion carry visual codes of social meaning. These findings provide the first material foundation for the wardrobe-as-archive concept: if clothes participate in identity construction, then wardrobes preserve the material traces of changing identities.

5.2. Body norms, ideal body discourses and the need for body literacy

The body appears consistently in the corpus as a site of normativity. It is not discussed as a merely biological entity but as a socially interpreted, mediated and disciplined field. Studies on body image, body positivity, social comparison and fatness reveal how bodies are continuously measured against dominant ideals.

Öngören (2015) discusses healthy body image from a sociological perspective, connecting body image to cultural and aesthetic practices including clothing. Aydoğmuş Ördem (2018), drawing on Bryan S. Turner, situates the body within social theory and emphasises its construction through power relations. Bozkurt and Koyuncu (2023) demonstrate that identity is embodied rather than purely cognitive. Çelik Ekmekçi (2020) examines the socialised body, body politics and the clothing-identity relation through feminist criticism.

Ideal-body discourse is especially visible in studies on women, media and fashion. İmren (2018) examines how fashion and media influence women's internalisation of ideal-body narratives. Nadasbaş (2019) takes this further by showing how the ready-to-wear sector participates in the illusion of reaching the

ideal body through vanity sizing – a finding that locates body normativity not in representations alone but in measurement systems.

Body positivity studies complicate this picture. Erdem and Başal Yıldız (2019), Sezgin (2024), Sejfula (2025), Korkmaz (2023) and Önal (2025) show that body positivity challenges narrow beauty standards while remaining vulnerable to commercialisation and hostile digital commentary. Body-positive visibility does not automatically dismantle normative body regimes. The corpus therefore points toward the need for body literacy – the capacity to understand the body as biological, social, cultural and digital simultaneously – as a critical competence for navigating fashion information environments.

5.3. Digital platforms as infrastructures of body visibility and fashion knowledge

The third finding concerns digital platforms. Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest and online retail environments appear in the corpus as infrastructures that organise how bodies and fashion information become visible. Bahtiyar (2021) examines social comparison, social media attitudes and body image among university students. Aydoğan (2024) analyses the mediating role of body satisfaction in the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Kaya and Dalkıç (2020) compare body image and self-efficacy among adolescents who use and do not use Instagram. Öngören and İntizamoğlu (2025) find that social media and internet use are associated with more positive body image, complicating simple accounts of platform harm.

The body-positive literature reveals the ambivalence of digital visibility. Karabacak and Sezgin (2016) examine the Fatkini campaign as an alternative representation of women's bodies. Sezgin (2024) analyses body-positive videos on TikTok; Sejfula (2025) examines body positivity on Instagram through a meta-feminist framework, noting the tension between feminist visibility and commercial appropriation; Oğuzhan (2025) shows how digital platforms function simultaneously as spaces of aesthetic normativity and as sites of resistance.

Platforms are not neutral channels. They classify, rank, circulate and commercialise bodies through platform-specific information architectures – hashtags, engagement metrics, recommender systems and paid visibility mechanisms – which influence which body images become searchable and which garments are associated with which bodies. Algorithmic curation shapes relevance and retrievability, not only psychological exposure (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; van Dijck et al., 2018). Dominant platform categories that assume thin, young and gender-conforming bodies make other bodies harder to tag, promote and retrieve.

For this reason, the digital platform must be treated as an information infrastructure rather than merely a representational space (Bowker & Star, 1999).

5.4. Fashion information literacy: size, fit, measurement and digital clothing data

The fourth finding is the strongest contribution of the DergiPark corpus to the information and records management dimension of the study. Several publications demonstrate that clothing decisions involve complex information practices. Users must interpret size charts, measurement tables, product descriptions, garment images, model photographs, fit expectations, return policies and brand-specific sizing systems.

Kurbanoglu's (2010) conceptual analysis of information literacy provides the theoretical foundation, treating information literacy as a broad set of competencies that includes recognising information needs, finding, evaluating and using information. Yılmaz and Kavak (2024) operationalise information literacy through self-efficacy, need recognition, access, evaluation and communication. Applied to clothing, this framework shows fashion information literacy to be a distinct everyday competency, not a metaphor.

Aygün Ocak and Çeğindir (2019) show that garment sizing data in online shopping environments is frequently incomplete or inconsistent. Ağaç et al. (2018) identify problems including insufficient product information, inadequate size options, measurement inconsistencies and lack of virtual fitting tools. Yıldız and Kışoğlu (2011) show that the absence of standardised sizing in ready-to-wear clothing makes it persistently difficult for consumers to identify their appropriate size. These findings ground fashion information literacy empirically: it is a practical competence required in the routine conditions of everyday fashion consumption.

5.5. Fashion information inequality and the marginalisation of non-normative bodies

The fifth finding is that fashion information is unevenly distributed across bodies. Non-normative bodies encounter representational and informational marginalisation simultaneously – and it is the informational dimension that this article is most concerned to name.

Bozok and Küçükdoğan's (2022) feminist analysis of fat women's experiences shows how fatness is lived through looking, spatial discomfort and emotional injury. Bayraktar (2022) addresses the problem from a technical perspective, examining body measurement standardisation for plus-size women and finding that large-bodied women may require different measurement and pattern systems from those used in standard ready-to-wear production. Nadasbaş (2019) demonstrates that

vanity sizing distorts the relationship between size labels and body measurements, undermining the reliability of the most basic unit of fashion information. Yücelen (2025) adds a critical cultural dimension by examining artistic works that challenge the fashion industry's role in body-, age- and gender-based discrimination.

Fashion information inequality is not simply a matter of whether larger sizes exist on a platform. It concerns the quality, reliability, dignity and usability of information available to different bodies. A user may find a product in a larger size and still encounter meaningless fit information, absent model representation or algorithmically narrow recommendations. The concept names an information problem with the same precision that it names a market problem.

5.6. Embodied information avoidance

A further conceptual finding emerging from the corpus is the possibility of embodied information avoidance – the selective filtering of information environments perceived as incompatible with, hostile to or dismissive of one's embodied reality. The reviewed studies do not use this term; it should therefore be understood as a theoretical proposition derived from the corpus rather than a directly measured empirical finding.

If individuals repeatedly encounter fashion information that assumes a normative body, presents limited size options, uses stigmatising language or exposes them to public judgement, they may begin to avoid such environments. This filtering is not a failure of information capacity. It may function as a protective information behaviour shaped by shame, stigma and prior experience of exclusion. Social exclusion related to fatness or non-normative embodiment may consequently affect how individuals define information needs, select sources and decide whether certain information environments are usable at all.

Empirical work on this proposition could draw on user-centred methods including interviews, wardrobe-elicitation or observed online shopping sessions. The methodological point is that embodied information avoidance should be studied through the user's account of relevance, safety, distrust and failed fit – not inferred only from the presence or absence of search activity.

5.7. Wardrobe-as-archive and the archival reading of everyday dress

The sixth finding concerns the archival dimension of clothing. The DergiPark corpus does not show that wardrobes are already widely treated as archives in Turkish academic literature. This is one of the absences the study identifies. Several strands of the corpus do, however, make the concept analytically possible.

Öney's (2020) work on personal digital archives demonstrates that personal archives can include everyday materials such as photographs, sound recordings and

letters, extending archival thinking beyond institutional repositories. Başaran İnce (2010) discusses the relationship between media and social memory. Aktaş et al. (2026) analyse films as cultural memory spaces. Varol (2026) shows how fashion communication uses heritage and cultural representation to produce identity and memory. None of these studies defines the wardrobe as an archive; together, they provide the conceptual conditions for doing so.

Wardrobe-as-archive refers to the wardrobe as a space where garments preserve traces of former bodies, professional roles, gendered transitions, class aspirations, affective attachments and experiences of exclusion. The concept shifts attention from clothing as a momentary sign to clothing as a durable record – partial, selective and affectively weighted, but evidential nonetheless.

6. DISCUSSION

The DergiPark corpus confirms that fashion and dress are already taken seriously in Turkish academic literature as instruments of identity, representation, gender performance and body politics. What the corpus also reveals is that many studies stop at the level of meaning and consumption without moving toward the informational systems that make clothing decisions possible. The discussion therefore proposes a shift in analytical focus: instead of asking only what clothes mean, the question becomes how people come to know what clothes mean, how their bodies are included or excluded by fashion information systems, and how wardrobes preserve the traces of these negotiations. This shift does not reject existing fashion sociology. It extends it into information and archival studies by treating clothing not only as a sign but also as a record.

Fashion information inequality is the strongest bridge concept developed from the corpus. It connects body studies, fashion studies and information science by showing that exclusion occurs through information systems as well as through images or product offerings. Evidence from online shopping, garment sizing, plus-size measurement standardisation and vanity sizing demonstrates that fashion information is structured unevenly. Measurement tables, product images, size labels and digital shopping interfaces do not serve all bodies with equal reliability or dignity. The concept also reframes what inclusion requires. Extending a size range or using a body-positive image in a campaign is not enough. Meaningful inclusion requires reliable measurement data, respectful language, consistent sizing, accessible interfaces and substantive user guidance: in short, an informational infrastructure that treats diverse bodies as legitimate users rather than afterthoughts.

The corpus also supports the development of fashion information literacy and body literacy as linked but distinct concepts. Fashion information literacy refers to the ability to search for, evaluate, interpret and use clothing-related information in

relation to one's body and social life. Body literacy refers to the ability to understand the body as biological, social, cultural, material and digital. The relationship between the two concepts is reciprocal. Body literacy provides the interpretive ground through which users understand their embodied position in relation to social norms and information environments. Fashion information literacy provides the practical skills through which that understanding is applied to the concrete task of navigating clothing information. These concepts allow the analysis to move away from individualising language (body dissatisfaction, poor consumer choice) toward a structural account of the conditions under which clothing difficulties are produced.

Wardrobe-as-archive extends the discussion into archival thinking. Garments can be read as records of lived experience as well as visual signs or commodities. A wardrobe may document bodily change, social mobility, professional identity, gendered transitions, family history, aspiration, shame and compromise. A common objection is that wardrobes lack the formal order, provenance control and institutional custody associated with archives. This objection holds if wardrobe-as-archive is read as an administrative classification. Here, the concept is used analytically. The wardrobe is not an archive because it is complete or formally ordered; it is archive-like because it preserves traces, produces silences, retains affective evidence and organises fragments of embodied life. This brings archival thinking into everyday life in a way that has practical implications for information and records management: record value is not limited to formal documents.

The relationship between fast fashion and the wardrobe-as-archive argument deserves specific attention, since accelerated garment turnover appears to weaken the wardrobe's capacity for durable archival preservation. This challenge modifies rather than invalidates the argument. In fast-fashion conditions, the wardrobe archives instability, disposability, failed fit and the fragility of attachment. A wardrobe shaped by fast consumption may document cycles of repeated dissatisfaction rather than continuous personal history, but that documentation is itself historically significant. The archival trace does not disappear; it changes character, registering the social conditions under which continuity becomes difficult.

The proposed concept of embodied information avoidance adds a further layer to information behaviour theory. Users may avoid certain fashion information environments not because they lack information literacy but because those environments repeatedly position their bodies as unsuitable, excessive or unwelcome. This is particularly relevant for fat bodies and other non-normative bodies. If fashion information consistently fails to represent a person's body, offers unreliable size data or exposes the user to stigma, avoidance may become a protective strategy. It is an embodied response to hostile or irrelevant information environments, not an irrational one. In platform contexts, avoidance is produced both

by explicit stigma and by repeated informational failure: if search filters, size categories and recommendation systems rarely return relevant results for a user's body, the user may learn that the platform cannot be trusted. Embodied information avoidance should therefore be connected to classificatory and algorithmic processes, not only to affective experience.

The interdisciplinary contribution lies in connecting four fields that are ordinarily treated separately: fashion studies, body studies, information literacy and archival thinking. Fashion studies explain how clothing signifies identity and social position. Body studies show how bodies are normalised, disciplined and excluded. Information literacy explains how users seek, evaluate and use knowledge. Archival thinking allows garments and wardrobes to be read as records of embodied memory. Brought into dialogue, these fields make it possible to treat clothing as information, the body as an information user and the wardrobe as an everyday archive. The central contribution is showing that the conceptual materials for such a field are already present in the literature but dispersed across disciplines that have not yet found a shared vocabulary.

The corpus also reveals that some bodies and identities remain weakly visible in Türkiye-based academic literature. Women's bodies, body positivity, social media comparison and online clothing information are comparatively well represented; ageing bodies, disabled bodies, trans bodies, rural dress practices, migration-related wardrobes and non-digital fashion information practices are marginal. This unevenness is not merely accidental. It reflects the politics of academic naming, disciplinary boundaries and publication habits. Some bodies become searchable because they have already been stabilised as research categories; others remain dispersed across health, design, sociology and disability studies without entering a shared fashion-information vocabulary. Academic naming functions as a form of metadata: once a body or practice is stabilised under a recognisable term, it becomes easier to search, cite and review; when it remains unnamed or scattered across incompatible labels, it becomes methodologically harder to retrieve (Bowker & Star, 1999). The marginality of ageing, disabled, trans and rural wardrobes is therefore an information organisation problem as much as a thematic gap.

7. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations bear directly on the scope of the contribution. The corpus is based on DergiPark and reflects Turkish academic literature available through that platform, not the full international literature on fashion, body, information literacy or archival studies. This is a deliberate choice – the article examines how these conceptual intersections appear in Türkiye-based publication contexts – but it constrains the generalisability of the findings.

No quantitative bibliometric analysis is conducted. The objective is not numerical mapping but conceptual framework construction through integrative and critical reading; future research may build on this framework through bibliometric, qualitative or platform-based studies. Related to this, concepts such as embodied information avoidance and wardrobe-as-archive are proposed as theoretical constructs, not empirically measured behavioural categories. They require empirical testing through methods suited to lived experience – interviews, wardrobe-elicitation, observed online shopping sessions or ethnographic fieldwork.

Some areas are also unevenly represented in the corpus: it is stronger on women's bodies, social media, body positivity and online clothing information than on ageing bodies, disabled bodies, trans bodies or non-digital fashion information practices. This unevenness is itself a finding, not only a limitation – it demonstrates the need for further research and reflects the politics of scholarly naming discussed in Section 6.7. Finally, the terminological treatment of body, fatness, plus-size and obesity is politically and ethically sensitive. Throughout the article, these terms are handled with care, avoiding medical reductions unless the source itself adopts a clinical framework.

8. CONCLUSION

The relationship between body, clothing and identity can be productively reread through information literacy and archival thinking. The DergiPark-based corpus shows that Turkish academic literature has already established fashion as a site of class distinction, gender performance, body image and digital representation. What remains underdeveloped is the treatment of clothing as information, the body as an information user and the wardrobe as a material repository of embodied memory.

Three core concepts structure the theoretical contribution. Wardrobe-as-archive conceptualises the wardrobe as a micro-archival space in which garments preserve traces of bodily change, identity transformation, aspiration, shame and exclusion. Fashion information literacy frames searching, evaluating and interpreting clothing-related information as an everyday information practice with real competency requirements and real inequality of access. Fashion information inequality names the uneven distribution of reliable, respectful and usable fashion information across different bodies – a structural condition that cannot be resolved through representational inclusion alone.

Methodologically, the article demonstrates that an integrative literature review can function as a conceptual framework method: the contribution is not numerical bibliometric output but a critical vocabulary through which future empirical data can be read. That vocabulary prepares the ground for bibliometric mapping, platform

audits, wardrobe ethnographies and user-experience studies on fashion information practices.

The framework also has a disciplinary application within information and records management education. It could support work in courses on everyday information behaviour, critical literacies, digital information systems, personal archiving or archival theory – inviting students to examine size charts as metadata, product descriptions as information design and recommendation systems as classification environments. The aim is not to establish fashion as a professional specialisation within the field, but to show how core concerns of information and records management – access, classification, literacy, evidence and memory – operate in ordinary embodied life. Clothing sits at the intersection of body, society, memory and information. It is worn, searched, selected, measured, classified, stored, remembered and sometimes deliberately avoided. The wardrobe is more than a convenient metaphor: it is a site where everyday objects record the body's encounters with social norms, information systems and the residue of lived experience.

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Distracted Driving via Mobile Phone Use in the Digital Age: An Analysis of Traffic Safety in Türkiye

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1. Introduction

In the modern world, as communication technologies have advanced, so too have telephones begun to evolve and change. The modern phones introduced by new technologies, being small, functional and easy to use, have started to make them an integral part of life. Mobile phones have become an even more popular means of communication not only because they facilitate contact with family, friends or work-related contacts, but also because they provide a significant benefit in emergency situations. With the advent of the internet and the emergence of digital media applications, the flow of information has accelerated significantly, and these technologies have quickly placed mobile phones at the centre of daily life. The increasing use of digital platforms and their accessibility across all aspects of life has brought about both positive and negative consequences. In particular, with the rise in social media applications, the frequency of mobile phone use, or even addiction, has increased; as in other areas, this situation has become widespread among drivers on the road. This trend has begun to pose a serious threat to road safety. Using a mobile phone or consuming digital media whilst driving distracts the driver and causes accidents.

The concept of ‘Distracted Driving’ or ‘Driver Distraction’, which has been included among the causes of traffic accidents, is defined by the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) as ‘any activity that diverts attention from the task of driving and adversely affects safe driving, such as talking or texting on a mobile phone, eating or drinking, talking to passengers, interacting with audio, entertainment or navigation systems’ (NHTSA, 2025). In other words, driver distraction is conceptualized as a diversion of attention away from activities critical for safe driving toward a competing activity (Young & Regan, 2007). Traffic accidents worldwide result in very serious material and emotional consequences. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) data from 2023, 1.2 million people lose their lives and approximately 50 million are injured in accidents worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

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Table 1. Distracted-Affected (D-A) Crashes and Mobile Phone Use by Year 2019–2023

Year	Total Crashes	D-A (Number)	CrashesD-A Crashes of Total)	(%Mobile Phone (Number)	UseMobile Phone Use (% of D- A)
2019	2,740,141	423,847	15%	28,300	7%
2020	2,282,209	324,663	14%	30,000	9%
2021	2,497,869	362,405	15%	29,000	8%
2022	2,382,833	289,306	12%	26,155	9%
2023	2,442,581	324,819	13%	30,970	10%

Sources: Fars 2019–2022 final file, 2023 arf; crss 2019–2023. Date accessed: 07.01.2026

As shown in Table 1 and based on research conducted by the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), it has been observed that making phone calls whilst holding the device or texting whilst driving increases the risk of accidents. According to this study conducted in 2025, it was determined that 30,970 people were injured in traffic accidents in 2023 due to distraction caused by mobile phone use. This figure accounts for 10% of accidents resulting from inattentive driving. Furthermore, a study cited in an Anadolu Agency report from 2017 found that drivers focusing on electronic devices whilst on the road significantly increases the risk of accidents. Conducted in collaboration between the Institute for Applied Psychology and Market Research, this study involved interviews with 1,600 drivers and revealed that 60 per cent of drivers involved in accidents over the past three years were using a mobile phone at the time of the accident. This figure stood at 37 per cent among drivers who had not been involved in accidents (Anadolu Agency, 2017).

A review of the literature revealed that while a significant amount of research has been conducted internationally, there is a lack of sufficient studies in this area in Türkiye. In the vast majority of these studies, it has been established that using a mobile phone whilst driving distracts attention and increases the risk of accidents. According to the findings of McCartt et al. (2006, p.91), whilst the use of mobile phones whilst driving is prohibited in many countries worldwide, it has been noted that, as in other countries, the rate of mobile phone use whilst driving has increased in the USA. The same study explains that the use of mobile phones or similar devices whilst driving distracts the driver. According to data from a survey of 6,000 drivers in the US, it was reported that two-thirds of drivers had a mobile phone in their vehicle and half used it whilst driving (Boyle& Vanderwolf, 2005). Studies indicate that banning the use of mobile phones whilst driving in countries such as the US and the UK has yielded positive results, with mobile

phone usage rates falling by 50 per cent (Johal et al., 2005). A study conducted in Türkiye in this field, however, addressed the issue through the lens of mobile phone and social media addiction. In the study titled ‘Internet Addiction and Its Impact on Road Accidents’, the use of a mobile phone whilst driving was described as a threat to road safety (Ölmez Arıtürk & Asal, 2022, p.72). Büyükbaş et al., on the other hand, approached the subject from the perspective of ‘The Relationship Between Smartphone Addiction and Driver Behaviour’ and demonstrated a positive correlation between phone addiction and violations and negligence. According to information presented at the “Global Road Safety Ministers’ Conference” held in Moscow in 2009, factors such as speeding, failure to wear a seatbelt, mobile phone use whilst driving, and alcohol were cited as the primary causes of road traffic accidents in the coming years (WHO, 2009). In the UK, annual reports on general crime are published by the CSEW (Crime Survey for England and Wales). According to a 12-month report on traffic offences published by the Office for National Statistics as of March 2025, 4.3% of drivers are talking on a mobile phone whilst driving (Gov.uk, 2025). Research indicates that using a mobile phone or engaging with social media whilst driving is considered a significant contributing factor to road traffic accidents.

Table 2. Specific Sources of Driver Distraction

Specific Distraction	Percentage of Drivers (%)
External person, object, or event	29.4
Adjusting the radio, cassette or CD	11.4
Other occupant in the vehicle	10.9
Moving object in the vehicle	4.3
Other device/object brought into the vehicle	2.9
Adjusting vehicle or climate controls	2.8
Eating or drinking	1.7
Using or dialling a mobile phone	1.5
Smoking-related activities	0.9
Other distractions	25.6
Unknown distraction	8.6
Total	100.0

Source: <https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/17717>. Date accessed: 27.01.2026

According to an analysis based on police reports in the USA, data regarding the primary causes of driver distraction and its impact on traffic accidents between 1995 and 1999 are presented in Table 2. According to these findings, it was determined that 8% of drivers were distracted at the time of the accident. Among the identified distractions, attention directed towards people, objects or events

outside the vehicle accounted for the highest proportion (29.4%). This was followed by adjusting the radio/cassette/CD player (11.4%) and interacting with other passengers in the vehicle (10.9%). Additionally, objects moving within the vehicle () (4.3%), other devices or objects (2.9%), and adjusting vehicle or climate control settings (2.8%) were listed among the distracting factors. At lower rates, eating and/or drinking (1.7%), using a mobile phone or making a call (1.5%) and smoking-related behaviours (0.9%) were reported. Other unspecified causes accounted for 25.6%, whilst cases where the source of distraction could not be determined amounted to 8.6% (Stutts et al. 2001:11). On the other hand, an analysis of TÜİK data reveals that the vast majority of traffic accidents in Türkiye are caused by driver error (90.1%). In addition, pedestrian errors (8.2%), vehicle defects (0.8%), passenger errors (0.5%) and road defects (0.3%) play a role at lower rates (Turkish Statistical Institute [TÜİK], 2024).

Table 3. Road Accident Statistics, 2015–2024 (TÜİK)

Year	Total Number of Accidents	Number of Fatal and Injury Accidents	Number of Accidents with Property Damage	Number of Fatalities (Total)	At the Scene of the Accident	Post-Accident	Number of Injured
2015	1,313,359	183,011	1,130,348	7,530	3,831	3,699	304,421
2016	1,182,491	185,128	997,363	7,300	3,493	3,807	303,812
2017	1,202,716	182,669	1,020,047	7,427	3,534	3,893	300,383
2018	1,229,364	186,532	1,042,832	6,675	3,368	3,307	307,071
2019	1,168,144	174,896	993,248	5,473	2,524	2,949	283,234
2020	983,808	150,275	833,533	4,866	2,197	2,669	226,266
2021	1,186,353	187,963	998,390	5,362	2,421	2,941	274,615
2022	1,232,957	197,261	1,035,696	5,229	2,282	2,947	288,696
2023	1,314,136	235,071	1,079,065	6,548	2,984	3,564	350,855
2024	1,444,026	266,854	1,177,172	6,351	2,713	3,638	385,117
Total:				62,761			3,024,470

Source: <https://veriportali.tuik.gov.tr/tr/press/54056>. Date accessed: 17.02. 2026

Table 3 shows that, according to the latest 10-year data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2024), 62,761 people lost their lives whilst 3,024,470 were injured. According to the data, whilst the total number of accidents decreased significantly in 2020, it began to rise again after 2021 and reached its highest level in 2024. Similarly, the number of fatal and injury-causing accidents also fell in 2020, but showed a marked increase in subsequent years, particularly in 2023 and 2024. When considering the factors contributing to road traffic

accidents in general, it is important to emphasise that education is also a significant preventive factor. According to a study conducted by Gökdağ and Atalay in 2015, which examined the relationship between educational attainment and road traffic accidents, it was suggested that the group with the highest number of accidents consisted of primary school leavers (Gökdağ & Atalay, 2015).

In this context, the primary aim of this study is to highlight the dangers posed by mobile phone use and digital media consumption whilst driving, and to raise awareness by identifying the necessary preventive and proactive measures in this regard. To this end, a quantitative and descriptive research design was adopted, and traffic accidents occurring in Türkiye in 2025 were examined. The data were evaluated based on official traffic statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Türkiye. The findings were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, with a particular focus on accidents caused by drivers using mobile phones whilst driving. In this way, an attempt was made to demonstrate the impact of digital device usage on road safety using numerical data. The primary issue addressed in this study is that the finding frequently cited in the existing literature—that ‘mobile phone use increases the risk of accidents’—cannot be analysed with sufficient clarity in the Turkish context due to a lack of directly measurable data. For this reason, the study includes not only accidents directly linked to phone use but also indirect indicators assessed under the category of driver inattention. This approach broadens the scope of the methodology and aims to compensate for data limitations through methodological means.

2. Prevalence of Mobile Phone Use and Media Consumption in Traffic in Türkiye

With the rise in social media and digital media usage, the mobile phone has become a form of addiction and a mass communication tool that transcends spatial boundaries (Ölmez Artürk & Asal, 2022). The mobile phone is now a popular device that can be used easily anywhere and at any time. This digital transformation has introduced complex challenges for traffic safety, particularly regarding the regulation of illegal or distracting content consumption on social media platforms. The mobile phone is now a popular device that can be used easily anywhere and at any time. Mobile phone use whilst driving seriously distracts drivers (Shinar, 2007). In particular, with the development of communication technologies, behaviours such as talking on the phone, texting, watching videos or live streaming have increased, and engaging in these activities whilst driving has become a significant cause of road accidents (Caird et al., 2014). According to Strayer, when assessed from a road safety perspective, the

level of impairment caused by mobile phone use whilst driving is comparable to the level of impairment commonly observed in drink-driving (Strayer et al., 2006).

Research has shown that the distraction experienced by drivers using their phones whilst driving leads to adverse consequences. According to a study conducted by the Traffic Directorate of the General Directorate of Security (2025), it has been noted that a simple phone call made by a driver causes them to overlook potential hazards in their surroundings 20% of the time, whilst a call that requires greater mental engagement causes this to happen 29% of the time. Furthermore, the same study indicates that drivers experience distraction, which can lead to an increased risk of accidents, not only whilst dialling a number or making a call, but also whilst waiting for a call or after a call has ended. A different study cited by safety authorities also corroborates this claim. According to the results of a study involving 699 participants, the likelihood of an accident increased by 4.8 times five minutes after a call ended, and by 1.3 times within 15 minutes (General Directorate of Security [EGM], 2026).

According to the results of another study conducted by the US (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA], 2026), it was determined that texting whilst driving increases the risk of colliding with another vehicle by 23 times, whilst talking on a mobile phone held in the hand increases this risk by 4 times. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the risk posed by texting or using social media on a mobile phone is greater than that posed by talking on a mobile phone. Based on the analytical framework and sampling systems established for monitoring road safety (National Centre for Statistics and Analysis, 2025), 3,275 people lost their lives in accidents caused by mobile phone use in 2023 alone (NHTSA, 2023). A study conducted by Roadside in EU countries found that between approximately 1% and 11% of drivers use their phones whilst driving (DfT, 2015). The following data regarding certain EU countries was obtained as part of this study.

A study conducted in Austria in 2013 found that 2% of drivers were talking on the phone without a hands-free kit. In addition, 1.2% were holding the phone in their hand. It was found that van and lorry drivers were observed using handheld devices more frequently than car drivers. A study conducted in the Czech Republic in 2011 estimated that 2.7% of drivers used a mobile phone whilst driving. England and Scotland: In 2014, it was observed that 1.6% of all drivers in England and Scotland were using a handheld mobile phone whilst driving (DfT, 2015). Drivers were more frequently seen holding the phone in their hands rather than holding it to their ear. In 2014, 1.1% of drivers were observed holding their phone in their hand, whilst 0.5% were observed holding it to their

ear. The use of handheld phones is significantly higher among male drivers than female drivers; 1.7% of men and 1.3% of women were observed doing so. The overall mobile phone usage rate (1.2%) among lorry and truck drivers is lower than that of car drivers. The rate is lowest among bus, coach and minibus drivers (0.4%). Among van drivers, however, the rate is higher than that of car drivers (2.7%). A study conducted in London in 2009 showed that the overall usage rate was 2.7 per cent and that car, van and taxi drivers used hands-free devices more frequently than held phones. Usage among van drivers is almost twice that of car drivers. According to Narine et al. (2009), the rate of hands-free device usage among taxi drivers is approximately nine times higher than that of handheld phone usage. An observational study conducted in Ireland in 2013 revealed that 4% of drivers used a handheld mobile phone whilst driving. A study conducted in France in 2012 showed that 2% of car drivers used a handheld mobile phone whilst driving. A 2010 study estimated that 10% of accidents resulting in injury could be attributed to mobile phone use whilst driving. In Italy, between 2009 and 2011, the observed rate of car drivers using mobile phones whilst driving was approximately 9%. Observational studies in Spain indicate that 3% of drivers use mobile phones whilst driving (DfT, 2015).

3. Legal Regulations on Mobile Phone Use in Traffic in Türkiye

Research shows that talking on the phone or using digital media whilst driving slows the driver's reflexes and distracts their visual and mental attention. This situation significantly increases the risk of traffic accidents. Consequently, legal regulations regarding the use of mobile phones or digital media whilst driving have begun to increase worldwide. The implementation of these legal restrictions is often supported by comprehensive impact assessments that evaluate the risks to road safety (Department for Transport [DfT], 2003). In Türkiye, these strategic evaluations are coordinated at the presidential level to ensure a multi-agency approach to traffic safety (Strategic Budget Presidency [SBB], 2023). Looking at the global picture, it is evident that penalties such as fines and points deducted from driving licences are imposed for using a mobile phone whilst driving. Table 4, based on a study conducted as part of an EU project, reveals differences in regulatory approaches across the 27 EU Member States, Switzerland and Iceland (Janitzek et al. (2009). Most EU countries, with the exception of Sweden, have enacted legislation to restrict the use of mobile phones in vehicles and to ban the use of handheld phones (see Table 3). Australia and many US states also ban the use of handheld phones. Some countries, however, address mobile phone use whilst driving under broader headings such as driver distraction or careless/dangerous driving.

Table 4. Legislation on Mobile Phone Use in EU Countries

Country	Legislation requires		Hand-held phone is prohibited if		Requirement to use		Hands-free required when using		Forbidden to use			Requirements concerning	
	complete ban	use of hands-free equipment	engine is running	vehicle is moving	handset/bluetooth	additional face phone	phone function	other function	texting function	all functions that involve continuous handling	headphones	location of mounting	way of fixing
AT		X											
BE			X										
BG		X											
CY		X											
CZ		X											
DE		X											
DK		X											
EE		X											
EL		X											
ES		X				X							X
FI		X											
FR		X											
HU		X											
IE		X											
IT		X											
LT		X				X							
LU		X				X							X
LV		X											
MT		X											
NL		X											
PL		X											
PT		X											
RO		X											
SE		X											
SI		X											
SK		X				X							
UK		X											
CH		X											
IS		X											

Source: SMART 2009

Under the Turkish Highway Traffic Law (KTK), using a mobile phone, texting or watching content on a phone whilst driving in Türkiye is classified as ‘careless and disrespectful driving’ and is subject to penalties. Article 73(c) of the Highway Traffic Law defines this as: “Drivers handling and using mobile or vehicle telephones or similar communication devices whilst the vehicle is in motion” (Highways Agency [KGM], 2026). Failure to comply with this provision results in a fine of 5000 TL and 10 penalty points. The provisions of this article do not apply where mobile and vehicle telephones, as well as similar communication devices, are used by drivers via various electronic systems without being held in hand. Similar regulatory findings were reported by the European Commission (2009)

4. Efforts to Prevent Traffic Accidents Related to Mobile Phone Use in Türkiye

It is observed that a multi-faceted approach has been adopted in Türkiye to prevent traffic accidents caused by mobile phone use:

1. Legal bans and penalties are being used to deter risky behaviour.
2. Enforcement systems (police + technological radar) are used to detect violations more effectively.
3. Technological infrastructure and AI systems detect the driver’s mobile phone use and impose immediate penalties.
4. Awareness campaigns and training programmes are being used to raise public awareness.

In Türkiye, legal regulations, monitoring mechanisms and preventive

strategies aimed at reducing mobile phone use whilst driving are being implemented in a comprehensive manner. Under the Highway Traffic Act, holding a mobile phone whilst driving is prohibited, and current legislative proposals envisage increased penalties. Data from the Ministry of the Interior indicates that this offence is particularly prevalent during periods of heavy traffic and that strict enforcement and penalties are being applied. The annual increase in fines and the penalty point system strengthen deterrence, whilst AI-supported enforcement technologies enable the automatic detection of offences (EGM, 2025). Furthermore, awareness campaigns and scientific studies conducted by the General Directorate of Security (2024) demonstrate that distracted driving increases the risk of accidents, highlighting that regulations are supported by both behavioural and technological measures. These measures aim to reduce distracted driving, a major cause of accidents, and enhance road safety.

5. Research Methodology

This study was designed within a quantitative research framework and employs both descriptive and correlational analysis techniques. Instead of direct experimental data collection, secondary data analysis was preferred, and a two-stage analysis was applied:

1. Descriptive analysis: The temporal, spatial and causal distribution of traffic accidents was examined.
2. Correlation analysis: The relationships between driver error rates and total accident numbers, as well as between inattentiveness-related accidents and total accidents, were assessed.

The findings obtained from the correlation analysis were addressed within an interpretative framework due to the inability to directly measure mobile phone use. Consequently, the study asserts a relationship rather than causality. The study utilised document analysis, considered a secondary source among quantitative data collection techniques. Documents such as books, journals, images, letters, diaries, memoirs, invitations, maps, legal texts, reports, statistics, school and health records, government records, photographs and videos, etc., are treated as documents (Labuschagne, 2003). This technique is defined as the detailed examination of existing official documents, reports and numerical statistics (Wach & Ward, 2013). The method is generally divided into the following stages: accessing the document, verifying its accuracy, understanding its content, examining it, analysing it and utilising it (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this process, ensuring that the information from the obtained documents is up-to-date and verifying its accuracy will enhance the impact and significance of the study.

The data has been derived from official accident reports and statistics shared with the public by the Ministry of the Interior and the General Directorate of Security (2025a). The data covers traffic accidents occurring in 2025 and aims to examine the following figures.

- Total number of accidents
- Fatal and injury-causing accidents
- Driver fault rates
- Accidents caused by inattention (indirect indicator)

The research questions are as follows:

- What are the reasons why using a mobile phone jeopardises safe driving?
- What is the relationship between mobile phone use and road traffic accidents?
- What is the difference in risk between holding a phone and using a Bluetooth connection in the vehicle?
- Which group of drivers is at greater risk?
- How should drivers be prevented from using mobile phones whilst driving, and how can safe driving be ensured?

5.1. Research Strategy

The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate, using data on road traffic accidents occurring in Türkiye in 2025, the impact of drivers' use of mobile phones whilst driving on road safety, supported by quantitative data. Using official traffic data, an analysis is conducted of accidents caused by driver inattention, and the impact of digital device use on road safety is assessed accordingly. To carry out this assessment, official statistical data for the year 2025 were collected, and the relationship between these data was explained using correlation analysis. Furthermore, the study sought to identify areas with a high risk of accidents by accessing data from across Türkiye. Through these analyses, the impact of mobile phone use on traffic accidents was assessed; in particular, high-risk behaviour patterns were sought to be identified. This study is limited to publicly available official data. The fact that driver inattention or mobile phone use cannot always be accurately identified, and that some accidents may be under-reported, can be considered limitations of the study. The data used in the research were obtained from three main sources:

- Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) traffic accident statistics (2015–2024)
- General Directorate of Security 2025 traffic data
- Ministry of the Interior periodic traffic reports

In Türkiye, accidents attributed to mobile phone use are not directly listed as a separate category in official statistics across all datasets. Consequently, this study

analyses mobile phone use indirectly via the ‘driver inattention’ variable . This has been explicitly acknowledged as one of the study’s fundamental limitations.

5.2. Findings

The findings indicate that driver errors account for approximately 90% of traffic accidents. This proportion highlights the decisive role of behavioural factors, such as distraction, in road safety. However, as there are no direct measurements of mobile phone use in the current datasets, it should be emphasised that this relationship is assessed indirectly. In this context, given that the category of distraction is significantly associated with mobile phone use in the literature, it can be said that the findings are consistent with international studies. In particular, consistent with the study by Strayer and Johnston (2001), it is supported that distraction reduces driving performance. However, interpreting these results as establishing a direct causal relationship is methodologically limited.

Classification of traffic accidents

Table 5. *Distribution of Traffic Accidents and Outcomes by Type (Nationwide)*

Accident Type / Outcome	Urban Area	Outside Areas	Total
Total Number of Accidents	40,835	5,854	46,689
Number of Fatal Accidents	53	52	105
Number of Accidents Resulting Injuries	14,166	2,067	16,233
Number of Accidents with Prop Damage	26,616	3,735	30,351
Number of Fatalities	58	61	119
Number of Injured	18,954	4,063	23,017

Source: <https://www.trafik.gov.tr/kurumlar/trafik.gov.tr/04-Istatistik/Aylik/202502/Subat-2025.pdf>

The data in Table 5 does not include the number of traffic accidents involving only material damage where the parties involved reached an agreement and drew up a report. It includes the number of fatalities occurring at the scene of the accident. According to these figures, the vast majority of traffic accidents occur in built-up areas and predominantly result in injuries and material damage. However, although accidents outside built-up areas are fewer in number, the fact that the rates of fatal accidents and fatalities are at a similar level to those in built-up areas indicates that accidents in these areas carry a higher risk of fatality. This finding points to the need to strengthen traffic safety measures on roads outside built-up areas.

Spatial analysis (where do most accidents occur)

Table 6. Top 10 Provinces with the Highest Number of Fatal and Injury Traffic Accidents in Türkiye (2025)

İl	Ölüm-Yaralanmalı Kaza	Maddi Hasarlı Kaza	Ölü	Yaralı
İstanbul	4.740	12.135	24	5.775
Ankara	2.405	12.762	29	3.310
İzmir	2.067	4.063	18	2.622
Antalya	1.733	1.793	8	2.295
Bursa	1.313	3.161	5	1.798
Mersin	1.295	819	14	1.746
Adana	1.140	1.185	13	1.576
Hatay	1.120	525	5	1.554
Konya	1.098	1.612	16	1.612
Gaziantep	906	844	6	1.398

Source: <https://www.trafik.gov.tr/kurumlar/trafik.gov.tr/04-Istatistik/Aylik/202502/Subat-2025pdf>

Table 6 shows the 10 provinces in Türkiye with the highest number of fatal and injury-causing road traffic accidents, along with the number of fatalities and injuries resulting from these accidents. An analysis of the data reveals that fatal and injury-causing road traffic accidents in Türkiye are largely concentrated in major cities with high population density and heavy traffic volumes. Istanbul ranks first with 4,740 fatal and injury-causing accidents; the high number of accidents in this province can be attributed to its dense population, high number of vehicles and high levels of daily traffic. Similarly, Ankara (2,405) and Izmir (2,067) also feature in the top ranks, highlighting that metropolitan cities pose a higher risk in terms of road safety.

Antalya's fourth-place ranking can be explained by the province's tourism activities, seasonal population growth and high inter-city traffic density. The presence of industrial, port and migration- receiving cities such as Bursa, Mersin, Adana and Hatay within the top ten demonstrates the impact of economic activity and transit traffic on road accidents. Although Konya is Türkiye's largest province by area, its inclusion in the top ten suggests that extensive road networks and high levels of inter-city traffic increase the risk of accidents. Gaziantep's presence on the list, meanwhile, can be linked to traffic movements associated with regional trade, industry and border crossings.

According to 2025 national data from the General Directorate of Security (2025b), the total number of fatal and injury-causing accidents across all provinces was 35,899, whilst the number of accidents resulting in material damage was 61,654. Based on these accident results, the total number of fatalities is 308, and the number of injuries is 50,88 (EMG, 2025). This table, like the data in Table 3, does not include property damage traffic accidents where the parties involved reached an agreement and drew up a report. Furthermore, it includes the number of fatalities occurring at the scene of the accident as a result of the traffic accident.

Temporal analysis (change over the years)

Table 7. Traffic Accident Statistics in Türkiye (2015–2024)

Yıl	Toplam Taşıt Sayısı	Toplam Kaza Sayısı	Ölümlü ve Yaralanmalı Kaza Sayısı	Maddi Hasarlı Kaza Sayısı	Ölü Sayısı (Toplam)	Kaza Yerinde	Kaza Sonrası (1)	Yaralı Sayısı
2015	19.994.472	1.313.359	183.011	1.130.348	7.530	3.831	3.699	304.421
2016	21.090.424	1.182.491	185.128	997.363	7.300	3.493	3.807	300.812
2017	22.218.945	1.202.716	182.669	1.020.047	7.427	3.534	3.893	300.383
2018	22.865.921	1.229.364	186.532	1.042.832	6.675	3.368	3.307	307.071
2019	23.156.975	1.168.144	174.896	993.248	5.473	2.524	2.949	283.234
2020	24.144.857	983.808	150.275	833.533	4.866	2.197	2.669	226.266
2021	25.249.119	1.186.353	187.963	998.390	5.362	2.421	2.941	274.615
2022	26.482.847	1.232.957	197.261	1.035.696	5.229	2.282	2.947	288.696
2023	28.740.492	1.314.136	235.071	1.079.065	6.548	2.984	3.564	350.855
2024	31.301.389	1.444.026	266.854	1.177.172	6.351	2.713	3.638	385.117

Source: Adapted from data provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (2025).

The TÜİK data in Table 7 covers those injured in road traffic accidents and referred to healthcare facilities who died within thirty days as a result of the accident. According to these figures, the number of vehicles and the total number of road traffic accidents in Türkiye generally increased during the 2015–2024 period. In 2020, accidents, deaths and injuries decreased significantly due to COVID-19 restrictions; however, a rising trend has been observed since 2021. The number of fatal and injury-causing accidents, as well as the number of injured persons, reached their highest levels in 2024. The findings indicate that traffic accidents remain a persistent and significant road safety issue in Türkiye.

Regression analysis (causes of accidents)

Table 8. Factors Contributing to Traffic Accidents (Fatal and Injury-Involving) (Nationwide)

Fault Factors	Year 2025
Driver	38,871
Pedestrian	3,532
Passenger	218
Vehicle	320
Road	132
Total	43,073

Source: <https://www.trafik.gov.tr/kurumlar/trafik.gov.tr/04-Istatistik/Aylik/202502/Subat-2025.pdf>

An analysis of the data in Table 8 reveals that the vast majority of traffic accidents are caused by driver error. Other causes include accidents involving pedestrians, passengers, vehicles and the road itself. In 2025, 38,871 out of a total of 43,073 accidents were caused by driver errors. This clearly demonstrates that driver errors (inattention, speeding, mobile phone use, rule violations, etc.) are the most critical risk factor in terms of road safety.

Table 9. Fault Ratios in Fatal and Injury-Causing Traffic Accidents from 2015 to 2024

Year	Driver (%)	Vehicle (%)	Road (%)	Total	Human Factor (%)	Pedestrian (%)	Passenger (%)
2020	88.34	7.04	1.45	96.83		2.67	0.50
2021	87.06	8.20	1.76	97.02		2.57	0.42
2022	86.84	9.45	1.17	97.47		2.15	0.38
2023	88.90	9.02	0.62	98.55		1.12	0.33
2024	90.06	8.23	0.54	98.83		0.85	0.33

Source: <https://www.kgm.gov.tr/SiteCollectionDocuments/KGMdocuments/Trafik/Trafik-kaza-ozetbilgi.pdf> (Turkish Statistical Institute).

According to TÜİK data covering the years 2014–2024, as presented in Table 9, the human factor is the primary cause of fatal and injury-causing road traffic accidents (EGM, 2024). As data for 2025 has not yet been released, the data in Table 7 covers the period from 2014 to 2024. According to these figures, the total share attributable to the human factor has ranged between 96% and 99% in all years. This ratio indicates that traffic accidents are more of a behavioural problem than a structural issue. In 2024, the proportion of accidents caused by drivers reached its highest level at 90.06%. These figures reveal that the primary causes of traffic accidents in Türkiye are driver behaviours such as rule violations, inattention, speeding, mobile phone use, and driving under the influence of alcohol or while drowsy. Consequently, traffic safety policies

must prioritise education, enforcement and awareness campaigns aimed at changing human behaviour. Whilst improvements to technical infrastructure are important, they are not sufficient on their own. Policies targeting digital distractions for drivers, speeding offences and risk perception are of critical importance.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has examined the phenomenon of distracted driving, which has emerged as digitalisation permeates everyday life practices, within the context of the effects of mobile phone use on road safety in Türkiye. Descriptive and quantitative analyses based on official data published by the Ministry of the Interior, the General Directorate of Security and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) for the year 2025 reveal that the vast majority of traffic accidents result from driver-related errors, with distraction playing a critical role among these errors. The data obtained indicates that drivers using their phones manually whilst driving creates visual and inattentive blindness, and that this situation leads to accidents. The research findings indicate that, in Türkiye, the number of traffic accidents is particularly concentrated in major cities; however, accidents occurring outside built-up areas carry a higher risk in terms of fatality rates. Temporal analyses reveal that, whilst there was a temporary decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of traffic accidents, injuries and fatalities has resumed an upward trend in the post-2021 period, in parallel with the increase in the number of vehicles. This confirms that road safety is a structural and persistent issue. One of the most striking findings of the study is that approximately 90% of fatal and injury-causing traffic accidents are attributable to driver error. In line with national and international literature, it is evident that using a mobile phone for calls, messaging and consuming digital media whilst driving simultaneously impairs the driver's visual, cognitive and motor attention; consequently, this significantly increases the risk of an accident. The finding that interactive activities such as messaging and social media use pose a higher risk compared to holding a mobile phone to talk is supported by data from the NHTSA and EGM. However, it has been established that conversations conducted via in-car Bluetooth connections carry less risk than using a mobile phone manually. Although existing legal regulations and administrative penalties regarding mobile phone use in Türkiye indicate that the issue has been recognised, it is clear that these measures alone are insufficient when considering the scale of accidents and driver behaviour. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that legal regulations have reduced the number of accidents linked to mobile phone use. In this context, assessments conducted in the USA, Finland and the United Kingdom have found that shortly after legislation banning the use of handheld mobile phones whilst driving came into force, there was a reduction of approximately 50% in mobile phone use whilst driving (McCartt et al., 2006).

Findings derived from official data reveal that young and inexperienced drivers are

in a higher- risk group in terms of distracted driving; heavy traffic, complex road layouts and long journeys also increase this risk. According to a study on this subject, young (18–25 years), adult (26–54 years) and elderly (aged 55+) drivers were compared, revealing that young drivers (aged 18– 25) engaged in mobile phone use, texting, listening to music, and eating and drinking behaviours more frequently than older drivers (aged 26–54; 55+) (Young & Lenné, 2010). These behavioural differences in young drivers are often rooted in perceived social norms and psychological intentions, which play a crucial role in their decision to engage in risky driving actions (Elliott & Baughan, 2004). In this context, to prevent accidents caused by mobile phone use on the roads, a multi-dimensional and holistic policy approach must be implemented rather than relying solely on punitive measures. Updating driver training programmes, incorporating topics such as digital addiction and distracted driving into driving school curricula , increasing public service announcements and social awareness campaigns, and promoting in-vehicle warning and restriction technologies are among the key policies highlighted. When assessed overall, it is understood that fatal and injury-causing road traffic accidents are influenced not only by population size but also by multi-dimensional factors such as the level of urbanisation, transport infrastructure, economic activities and seasonal mobility. These findings indicate that road safety policies need to be tailored at the provincial level and that targeted preventive measures, particularly in major cities, must be increased.

Digital media presents significant opportunities in the field of road safety, whilst also posing serious risks. To enhance road safety, media platforms must act responsibly and users must be made aware of the issues. In this regard, the implementation of the following steps will make a significant contribution to reducing traffic accidents and developing the community’s road safety culture. These steps are:

- Education and Awareness: Conducting road safety campaigns more widely and effectively on digital media,
- Legal Regulations: The implementation of legal regulations that increase the responsibility of social media platforms,
- Technological Solutions: The development of AI-based content moderation systems,
- Driver Discipline: This can be described as the prohibition and monitoring of digital media use whilst driving, and ensuring that penalties are sufficiently deterrent.

In addition to implementing these measures, public service announcements and awareness campaigns designed to improve road safety can reach a much wider audience through digital media. Government bodies and civil society organisations use social media accounts to remind the public of basic traffic

rules—such as speed limits, seatbelt use and not driving under the influence—and to raise awareness. However, for these campaigns to be effective, the content must be of high visual and messaging quality, designed to suit the target audience, and published regularly. Furthermore, it is important to seek professional support to increase the visibility of campaigns within social media algorithms. In the context of raising awareness, digital media has become central to our lives in recent years and has accelerated the flow of information. Regarding road safety, the media has been used both as a tool for raising awareness and as a catalyst for the spread of certain risky behaviours. This situation necessitates a more careful examination of the media's role when assessing the causes of road accidents and methods of prevention. Although the media is a powerful actor in shaping society's perception of traffic, the nature of the content and the manner of its presentation determine whether this influence is positive or negative.

The data obtained from the study reveal that traffic accidents in Türkiye are largely caused by driver behaviour, and that distracted driving plays a critical role among these behaviours. Mobile phone use is considered one of the most significant components of this distraction, despite the limitations of the available data. However, the study's findings clearly indicate that the impact of mobile phone use on traffic accidents is interpreted through indirect indicators rather than being measured directly. This situation necessitates a careful interpretation of the study's results. Distracted driving is an increasingly significant road safety issue in Türkiye, and there is a need for stronger, data-driven and multi-methodological research in this field. In this context, distracted driving is emerging as an increasingly significant road safety issue in Türkiye, and there is a need for stronger, data-driven and multi-methodological research in this field. In this context, first and foremost, the reporting of mobile phone-related accidents as a separate category in official statistics will contribute to a more accurate measurement of the problem. Furthermore, an increase in field studies directly examining driver behaviour will enable a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of distraction. Furthermore, the wider adoption of experimental and simulation-based studies will provide an opportunity to analyse the effects of distractions during driving in controlled environments. Finally, the development of artificial intelligence-supported data collection and analysis systems will enable the acquisition of more comprehensive and real-time data on road safety, thereby making significant contributions to policy-making processes.

In conclusion, the adverse effects of digital media and mobile phone use on road safety are emerging as an increasingly significant public safety issue in Türkiye. This study highlights the decisive role of distracted driving in road accidents based on official data, thereby providing important findings for

decision-makers, practitioners and researchers. Despite the lack of data directly measuring the impact of mobile phone use on traffic accidents in Türkiye, the study offers an indirect analysis based on existing official statistics. Mobile phone use is assessed as one of the most significant components of distraction whilst driving, despite current data limitations, and supports the view—in line with the international literature—that distracted driving is a major risk factor. However, the study’s most significant methodological limitation is the lack of specific and disaggregated data on mobile phone use. This situation results in the analyses remaining at an interpretative level. In future research, the use of field studies and experimental methods aimed at measuring individual driver behaviour will contribute to a deeper understanding of the effects of mobile phone use on road traffic accidents.

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Ground-Penetrating Radar Investigations in the Roman Building Unit of the Sanctuary of Klaros

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Klaros Kutsal Alanı'nın güney kesiminde yer alan Roma Yapı Birimi'nde yürütülen jeoradar araştırmalarını ve bunların mimari yorumlamaya katkılarını ele almaktadır. Roma Yapı Birimi, kutsal alanın anıtsal çekirdeği ile dış bağlantıları arasında konumlanan, planı ve işlevi henüz bütünüyle açıklığa kavuşmamış önemli bir yapı topluluğudur. 2021 yılında yapının kuzey ve güney kesimlerinde gerçekleştirilen jeoradar taramaları, kazıyla henüz açığa çıkarılmamış duvar hatları, mekân sınırları ve olası plan devamlılıkları hakkında önemli veriler sağlamıştır. Elde edilen anomaliler, yapının yalnızca kuzeyde belgelenen bölümüyle sınırlı olmadığını; güneyde de devam eden, büyük olasılıkla simetrik planlı ve ortasında açık avlu bulunan daha kapsamlı bir mimari düzenlemeye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlar, 2023, 2024 ve 2025 yıllarında gerçekleştirilen kazılarla önemli ölçüde doğrulanmıştır. Çalışma, jeoradar yönteminin Klaros gibi kalın alüvyon dolgu altında kalan arkeolojik alanlarda gömülü mimari unsurların saptanması, kazı stratejisinin yönlendirilmesi ve yapı ölçeğinin bütüncül biçimde değerlendirilmesi açısından etkili bir araştırma aracı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Böylece Roma Yapı Birimi'nin plan şeması ve olası işlevi üzerine yapılan yorumlar daha sağlam bir analitik zemine kavuşmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Klaros, jeoradar, Roma Yapı Birimi, arkeojeofizik, mimari planlama

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) investigations conducted in the Roman Building Unit located in the southern sector of the Sanctuary of Klaros and evaluates their contribution to the architectural interpretation of the structure. The Roman Building Unit represents an important architectural complex situated between the monumental core of the sanctuary and its external connections, whose overall plan and function have not yet been fully clarified. GPR surveys carried out in the northern and southern sectors of the building in 2021 provided significant data regarding buried wall lines, room boundaries, and possible continuities in the architectural layout of areas not yet excavated. The recorded anomalies indicate that the structure was not limited to the northern section already exposed by excavation, but rather extended southward as part of a more extensive architectural arrangement, probably with a symmetrical plan and an open central courtyard. These results were substantially confirmed by excavations conducted in 2023, 2024, and 2025. The study demonstrates that GPR is an effective research tool in archaeological contexts such as Klaros, where thick alluvial deposits conceal architectural remains, by enabling the detection of buried features, the planning of excavation strategy, and the holistic assessment of the scale and organisation of the building. In this way, interpretations concerning the plan and possible function of the Roman Building Unit can be placed on a firmer analytical basis.

Keywords: Klaros, ground-penetrating radar, Roman Building Unit, archaeogeophysics, architectural layout

1. Introduction

The Sanctuary of Klaros, located within the boundaries of the Menderes district of İzmir Province, is one of the most important oracle centres of Ionia. Developed around the cult of Apollo Klarios, this sanctuary is noteworthy not only for its religious identity, but also for the settlement network to which it was connected, the movement of visitors it attracted, and the spatial transformations it underwent over time. Especially during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Klaros should be regarded as part of a broader organisation extending beyond the boundaries of the sanctuary, together with its surrounding structures, transitional zones, and patterns of use. In this respect, not only the monumental core of the site, but also the architectural units that complemented and supported it, are of particular importance for research.

The Roman Building Unit (RBU), which constitutes the subject of this study, is located to the south of the Hellenistic temenos and occupies the southern sector of the sanctuary extending toward Notion (Kolophon by the Sea). The area in which the building is located is significant in that it indicates a transitional zone between the sacred core of Klaros and its external connections. For this reason, the Roman Building Unit should be evaluated not merely as a single architectural remain, but as a building complex that must be considered in terms of its relationship to the spatial layout, patterns of use, and surrounding context of the sanctuary in the Roman Imperial period.

Research on the Roman Building Unit began in a systematic manner in 2016, following the expropriation of the parcel located to the south of the sanctuary and its incorporation into the boundaries of the archaeological site, and important data concerning the building were obtained during the subsequent excavation seasons. Work carried out during the 2025 season increased architectural observations relating to the parts of the building uncovered in the north; however, fundamental issues such as the overall plan of the building, its spatial integrity, and especially its continuation toward the south have not yet been fully clarified. This situation makes it necessary to consider the building not only through its excavated parts, but also together with the areas that have not yet been excavated.

The data obtained so far show that the Roman Building Unit was an important and well-preserved structure, built according to a coherent plan scheme and consisting of multiple spaces. However, questions still remain regarding the function of the building, its period of use, and its place within the sanctuary. In particular, the extent to which the architectural integrity has been preserved, the directions in which the building continued, and the place of the uncovered spaces within a broader arrangement can only be assessed to a limited extent on the basis of the currently available data. In addition, the fact that the groups of finds do not

always speak with the same clarity as the architectural data requires caution in interpretations concerning the function of the building. In this respect, the Roman Building Unit constitutes an important example for understanding the late spatial arrangements within the Sanctuary of Klaros. The location of the building, its plan features, and the architectural data revealed so far indicate that it was a structure associated with the southern approach to the sanctuary and should be considered within a particular circulation and use pattern. Nevertheless, any assessment of the complete plan and function of the building can only be placed on a firmer basis through new data.

This study aims to address the existing excavation data concerning the Roman Building Unit together with new findings that contribute to the understanding of its plan and architectural development. Within this framework, the architectural features of the building and the main problems relating to its function will first be evaluated, followed by the ground-penetrating radar data, which constitute the principal focus of the study. In this way, the study seeks to contribute to a holistic understanding of the Roman Building Unit through the combined evaluation of the evidence revealed by excavation and the architectural continuities still lying underground.

2. The Roman Building Unit: Architectural Characteristics and the Question of Function

The structure referred to as the Roman Building Unit extends for 50 m along an east–west axis. Its main entrance is located on the south, and five rooms open into one another. Although Room 6 has an entrance independent of the other rooms, it was constructed adjacent to the building on the west. A wall extending approximately 15 m westward from this room terminates in a seventh room. Although the boundaries of the structure have been exposed along an east–west axis, both the western and eastern freestanding walls continue southward. The western wall extends approximately 4 m to the south, while the eastern wall continues for about 9 m before entering the section. It may therefore be assumed that similar rooms also existed on the southern side, with an open courtyard at the centre.

What is striking, however, is that although the building is rather well preserved and many of its rooms have been excavated below threshold level, no contextual finds were encountered. The bricks used in the walls had collapsed and sealed the rooms up to threshold level. Nevertheless, the density of finds is very low and remains far from offering any clear indication, particularly regarding the function of the building. Apart from a small quantity of Roman-period pottery datable to the 1st–3rd centuries AD, a limited number of coins of the 5th–6th centuries AD

were recovered from the upper wall levels. The latest find from the structure is a coin of Romanos III, dated to AD 1028–1034⁴.

The transformation that took place within the sanctuary, particularly following the declaration of Christianity as the official religion, became visible by the late 5th century AD. Significant evidence has been obtained indicating that certain buildings or spaces within the sanctuary were used as brick and metal workshops. In this context, the misfired bricks and production waste found along the freestanding wall of the Roman Building Unit extending westward and in Room 7 point to the presence of a brick workshop in this area. It is therefore thought that, during the process by which the building was abandoned, part of it may have been transformed into a dumping area for the workshop. Evidence for this workshop was obtained during the 2005 excavations at Klaros. In the excavations of the Gallesion West Slope (GBY) Rock Complex, located approximately 50 m southeast of the Hellenistic Propylon, more than five hundred melted and vitrified bricks were recovered from pits cut into the bedrock⁵. An incised stamp on a *stroter*, discovered in the room containing the main entrance during the 2016 excavations, suggested that the building may have functioned as a workshop or shop belonging to an individual during its period of use⁶. However, no contextual evidence supporting such a function emerged during the subsequent excavation seasons. Given the large number of wall bricks recovered in a scattered manner from all rooms, it is also possible that this stamp was a mark belonging to the individual or workshop engaged in the production of bricks and/or roof tiles⁷. Another particularly noteworthy observation is that the wall extending along the southern line of the room, where its main entrance is located, had shifted southward, that is, toward the sea. At the same time, the collapse of the wall bricks and, in some rooms, of the lintels suggests that the building was brought to an end by an earthquake⁸. However, this still does not explain the very small amount of material found within the building. Owing to its location, the structure must have been intended for visitors approaching the sanctuary either from the south or from the sea. It is well known that fairs or markets were often established in the vicinity of sanctuaries, some of them consisting of permanent structures and

⁴ Şahin et al. 2022, 476; Şahin et al. 2019, 143. Although they are not very numerous, these coins show that there was still activity both at Klaros and in the Roman Building Unit.

⁵ Şahin et al. 2007, 600–602. The hill on which the rock complex is located extends from Klaros toward Notion. According to the excavation reports of Erol Atalay, who conducted excavations and surveys at Notion between 1985 and 1987, the area containing the Hellenistic rock tombs on the slope was later reused as a settlement area and workshop zone due to the increase in the urban population. Atalay 1987, 148. This conclusion is also consistent with the data obtained from the recent excavations at Klaros.

⁶ Şahin et al., 2018, 427.

⁷ Zunal 2023b, 93.

⁸ Zunal 2023b, 103.

others of temporary installations⁹ The Roman Building Unit may likewise have been a permanent marketplace within the sanctuary, thought to have served such a function. However, future excavations will be able to clarify this issue more clearly.

3. Ground-Penetrating Radar Investigations

Although the excavation data relating to the architecture and function of the building have produced important results, an understanding of the overall plan of the Roman Building Unit required the evaluation of the parts that had not yet been exposed. For this reason, archaeogeophysical investigations aimed at determining the scale, architectural continuity, and plan scheme of the building gained particular importance. Since the architectural remains at Klaros lie beneath an alluvial fill varying from approximately 9 m to 3 m in thickness from north to south, their large-scale exposure through excavation is quite difficult¹⁰. This situation made it necessary to investigate the plan of the structure and its buried architectural elements through non-invasive methods.

For this purpose, different archaeogeophysical methods were applied in the field. In 2017, when the structure had only been exposed to a limited extent, magnetometry and electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) were tested; although various anomalies thought to represent walls, structures, or pits were identified, these could not be confirmed by subsequent excavations. In this outcome, the thick alluvial fill at Klaros, the physical properties of the soil, and the high groundwater level of the basin were decisive factors. Thereafter, in 2021, the ground-penetrating radar method was applied in the southern and northern sectors of the structure; this article examines the contributions of that investigation to the plan and architectural interpretation of the Roman Building Unit.

3.1. Objectives and Methodology

The primary aim of the ground-penetrating radar investigations conducted in the Roman Building Unit was to determine how the architectural arrangement partially revealed by excavation in the north continued into the southern and northern sectors of the structure, to identify possible wall lines and room boundaries, and to shape the planning of subsequent excavation seasons in light of these data. This need arose from the fact that the architectural remains at Klaros

⁹ Chandezon 2000, 97. For considerations on the function of the Roman Building Unit, see Zunal 2023a, 1086.

¹⁰ The location of Klaros on the floor of the Ahmetbeyli valley, and particularly the alluvial-colluvial deposits carried by the Ahmetbeyli and KırmızıKayalar streams, gradually led to the burial of the architectural remains around the sanctuary. Evaluating the geomorphological development of the area within this framework, Kayan notes that the process of deposition points to a rapid environmental change. For the geomorphological development of the site and the alluvial deposition process, see Kayan 1995, 5–6.

are covered beneath the present ground surface by a thick alluvial fill. Such fill not only makes it difficult to trace the overall plan of the structure directly, but also necessitates the targeted and controlled planning of large-scale excavations. Within this framework, ground-penetrating radar investigations were carried out in the southern and northern sectors of the Roman Building Unit in 2021. The surveys employed the SIR-3000 ground radar system produced by GSSI, equipped with an integrated shielded antenna. This device is capable of transmitting 25,000–50,000 radar pulses into the ground per second and offers 128, 256, 512, 1024, and 2048 sampling options per scan. In the Klaros application, 1024 samples per scan were generally preferred in order to maximise resolution, while the range was set to 80 ns, thus allowing an average of 13 data points to be recorded for each nanosecond. The value used per sample was set at 16 bits; taking into account the depth of the buried structures and signal attenuation caused by different fill layers, the gain control of the device was used in automatic mode. The data obtained during the survey were recorded on a portable memory device connected to the control unit and transferred to the analysis computer after the completion of the fieldwork.

In the field application, the survey area was divided into adjacent grids in the southern and northern sectors of the structure. In the southern sector, three survey areas arranged along an east–west axis were laid out with dimensions of 10×20 m, 20×20 m, and 20×25 m, respectively. In the northern sector, again along an east–west axis, three further areas were arranged in dimensions of 15×20 m, 20×20 m, and 20×20 m. In this way, ground-penetrating radar survey was conducted over a total surface area of 2,200 m² in six separate survey areas. On the ground, the survey areas were converted into a grid system at 1 m intervals using string, and the data were collected along systematic transects within each area. A 270 MHz antenna was used in the surveys; the control unit automatically terminated data acquisition at the end of each line according to the entered grid coordinates. The corner points of each grid were georeferenced using a GPS+GLONASS receiver, making it possible to place the ground-penetrating radar data accurately within the site plan. The raw data were subsequently processed in RADAN software developed by GSSI; individual radar profiles were transformed into three-dimensional datasets, and maps allowing the horizontal distribution of the data to be traced in plan view were produced. In this way, not only the anomaly lines visible in individual sections, but also their spatial relationships, could be evaluated in a holistic manner¹¹.

¹¹ For the methodological framework of ground-penetrating radar in archaeological research, particularly in relation to the non-invasive detection of buried remains, the integrated evaluation of numerous transect data collected within a grid, and the reconstruction of three-dimensional subsurface patterns, see Conyers 2013, 24–

The success of ground-penetrating radar investigations conducted in archaeological areas depends on many environmental factors, such as the mineralogical properties of the soil and sediment, clay content, ground moisture, the depth of buried remains, surface topography, and vegetation cover. For this reason, rather than being a standard technique that can be applied under identical conditions at every site, the method should be regarded as a research tool that must be adapted to the specific conditions of the field. Nevertheless, in the case of Klaros, the measurement conditions appear to have been favourable for ground-penetrating radar investigations. The fact that the ground had received no rainfall for at least one month during the period in which the survey was carried out, and that air temperatures ranged between approximately 25 and 35 °C, contributed to keeping the moisture content of the surface and near-surface fill low; this, in turn, is likely to have had a positive effect on the penetration of the radar waves into the ground and on the readability of the signals reflected back from the buried architectural remains¹².

3.2. Results and Evaluation

The ground-penetrating radar surveys carried out in the southern and northern sectors of the Roman Building Unit in 2021 demonstrated that the structure was not limited to the portion exposed by excavation in the north, but possessed an architectural arrangement that also continued, particularly toward the south. The data revealed strong anomalies displaying alignments consistent with the wall lines known in the north and indicating the overall integrity of the building plan. In particular, the data suggesting that the line thought to correspond to the eastern boundary of the structure continued southward and then turned westward at a certain point also indicated the presence of new rooms in the southern sector.

These findings suggest that the Roman Building Unit was not merely a limited structure consisting of a single row of rooms, but rather represented a broader architectural whole with a distinct plan arrangement. According to the picture presented by the ground-penetrating radar data, the structure approaches a symmetrical plan scheme in which the spatial organisation documented in the north was repeated in the south, thus potentially creating an open courtyard between two wings. In this respect, the ground-penetrating radar results contributed not only to the identification of the architectural boundaries, but also

31; for a comparative field application involving grid blocks, parallel transects, GPS-based corner georeferencing, and the identification of buried architecture beneath alluvial cover, see Gragson et al. 2016, 1588–1593.

¹² For the classical view that ground-penetrating radar data produce more favourable results, particularly in dry soils with low conductivity, see Vickers-Dolphin 1975; for a broader discussion of the effects of different soil and moisture conditions on the success of GPR, see Conyers 2004; Conyers 2012, 34; Doolittle et al. 2007.

significantly to the understanding of the internal organisation and overall spatial arrangement of the structure.

These data are also significant for evaluations concerning the function of the building. The limited number of contextual finds in the existing excavation areas makes it difficult to define the function of the structure with certainty. Nevertheless, when considered together with the ground-penetrating radar data, the expanded plan of the structure, its successive arrangement of rooms, and its possible courtyard layout suggest that this may have been an orderly and permanent building complex serving visitors approaching the sanctuary from the south or from the sea. Even so, this interpretation can only be confirmed through the new architectural contexts and associated groups of finds that will be brought to light in future years.

3.3. Comparison of the Results with the Excavation

In order to test the results of the ground-penetrating radar investigations carried out in the southern and northern sectors of the Roman Building Unit in 2021, it was decided to conduct excavations in the southern part of the sector in 2023. In this context, a 3 × 3 m sounding was opened 18 m to the south of the wall located at the easternmost part of the structure and traceable for 14 m along a north–south axis. The geophysical data had indicated that this wall continued up to this point and then turned westward. Indeed, as a result of the excavation carried out in this area, the southern extension of the eastern wall of the structure was uncovered, and thus the architectural continuity predicted by the ground-penetrating radar data was confirmed directly by excavation for the first time.

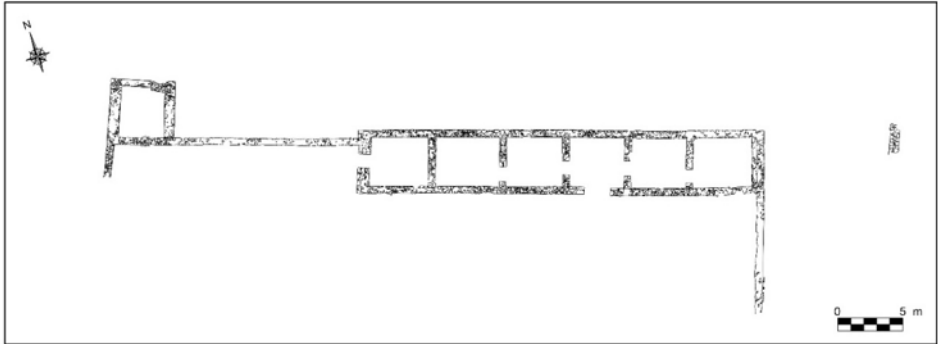
In the 2024 and 2025 excavation seasons, the section where the same wall turned westward, together with architectural traces belonging to several associated rooms, was also identified. This sounding and the subsequent trenches demonstrated that, as in the northern part of the structure, the southern part likewise consisted of rooms arranged one after another. In this way, the plan scheme proposed on the basis of the ground-penetrating radar data was substantially supported. The results obtained suggest that the Roman Building Unit was a building complex with a symmetrical plan, incorporating an open courtyard at its centre and most probably having entrances on the eastern and western sides. Nevertheless, the architectural character and internal arrangement of the structure will only be fully clarified through the excavations to be carried out in the coming years.

4. Conclusion

The ground-penetrating radar investigations conducted in the Roman Building Unit clearly demonstrated that this method is a highly functional tool in archaeological areas such as Klaros, where remains lie beneath a thick alluvial fill. Thanks to the ground-penetrating radar data, buried wall lines, room sequences, and possible plan schemes in areas not yet exposed by excavation could be anticipated in advance; in this way, the excavation programme could be directed on a more targeted, economical, and scientific basis. In particular, the fact that the excavations of 2023, 2024, and 2025 largely confirmed the ground-penetrating radar results shows that the method is not merely an auxiliary preliminary research technique, but also a reliable research tool that directly guides excavation strategy.

The data obtained demonstrate that the Roman Building Unit did not consist only of the part uncovered in the north, but rather formed a more extensive building complex, most probably symmetrical in plan, continuing toward the south with similar sequences of rooms and an open courtyard at its centre. For this reason, the ground-penetrating radar investigations contributed not only to the identification of the location of the buried architecture, but also to placing interpretations concerning the overall plan arrangement and possible function of the structure on a firmer analytical basis. Excavations to be carried out in the coming years will both reveal this plan in its entirety and make it possible to assess more clearly the manner in which the structure was used and its role within the sanctuary.

KL 20 / L1-M1 21-27 / RYB



General view of the Roman Building Unit in 2020



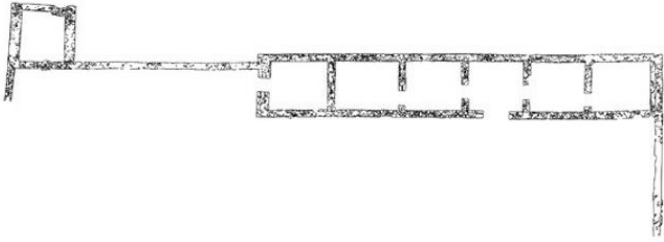
Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey Data of the Roman Buildings Unit, 2021



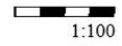
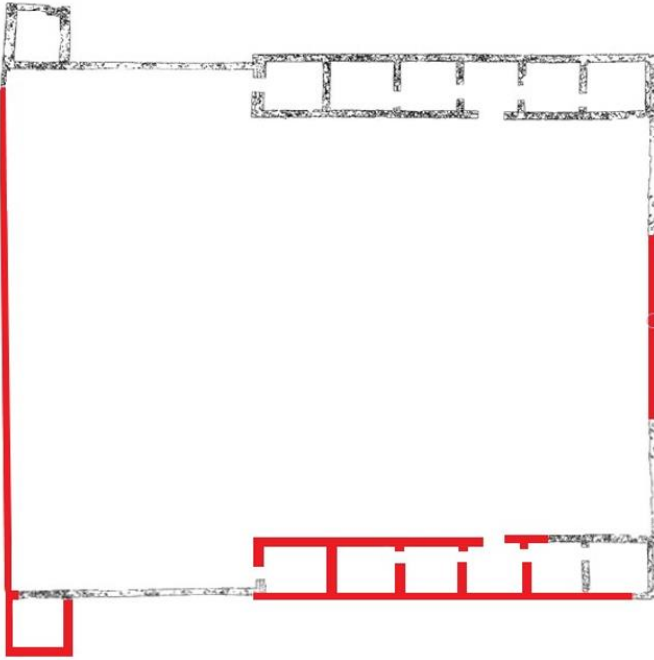
Roman Buildings Unit, 2021: Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey Data



Roman Building Unit, 2023: Discovery of the Eastern Boundary Wall of the Structure in the South



Roman Buildings Unit, 2025: Walls and Rooms in Southern Sector



Plan of the Proposed Rooms of the Roman Buildings Unit

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Chapter 5

Democratic Rule of Law and Human Rights: A Theoretical Analysis

Polat TUNÇER¹

Introduction

Democracy, the rule of law, and human rights are among the core concepts that determine the legitimacy and institutional quality of contemporary political systems. Democracy refers to the grounding of political authority in the will of the people and to citizens' participation in public decision-making processes. The rule of law provides the constitutional and institutional limits that prevent democratic power from turning into arbitrary rule. Human rights, in turn, constitute both the normative purpose and the legitimacy criterion of a democratic rule-of-law order (Dahl, 1971). Therefore, the relationship among these three concepts is not merely a theoretical issue; it also lies at the heart of the question of how state power can be limited and how the individual can be protected against arbitrary authority (Bingham, 2010).

Reducing democracy to elections alone does not reflect the normative depth reached by contemporary democratic theory. Elections are indispensable for democratic legitimacy; however, when they are not supported by pluralism, political participation, the right to opposition, freedom of expression, and the rule of law, democracy may be reduced to a merely formal mechanism (Held, 2006). For this reason, the quality of democratic systems should be assessed not only by whether political power changes hands through elections, but also by the extent to which fundamental rights and freedoms are effectively protected (Dahl, 1971).

The rule of law requires that all actions and decisions of the state be constrained by legal norms. Yet the rule of law cannot be reduced to the mere existence of laws, because laws themselves must comply with human rights, justice, legal certainty, and equality (Tamanaha, 2004). In this respect, the rule of law should be understood not only as a formal mechanism that limits state

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authority, but also as a substantive system of guarantees that protects individuals against public power (Bingham, 2010).

Human rights refer to the inalienable and non-derogable rights that individuals possess simply by virtue of being human. These rights limit the authority of the state while also imposing positive obligations on public authorities to protect and fulfil them (Donnelly, 2013). The principles of universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights demonstrate that a democratic rule-of-law order is related not only to civil and political liberties, but also to social justice and living conditions compatible with human dignity (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 1993).

This chapter examines the relationship between the democratic rule of law and human rights at the theoretical level. To this end, it first clarifies the concepts of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. It then analyses the mutual dependence among these concepts. The following section discusses how human rights are eroded under anti-democratic regimes. The chapter subsequently evaluates the protection of human rights through the distinction between the rule of law, rule by law, and the police state. The final section presents policy recommendations for strengthening the democratic rule of law as a human-rights-based institutional order.

1. Conceptual Framework: Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Human Rights

1.1. Democracy

Democracy has historically been built upon the ideas of popular participation, political equality, and the accountability of rulers. In its classical sense, democracy refers to a political order based on popular sovereignty. In the modern period, however, democracy is no longer understood merely as majority rule; it is also associated with the protection of minority rights, pluralism, free opposition, and legal guarantees (Dahl, 1971). This transformation shows that democracy is not simply a form of government that reflects the will of the majority, but a political order that secures fundamental rights and freedoms (Held, 2006).

Political equality lies at the core of democratic government. It requires that individuals not be arbitrarily excluded from political processes on the basis of race, class, gender, belief, identity, or social status. Democratic participation is therefore not limited to the right to vote. It also includes citizens' ability to participate in public debate, organise collectively, criticise those in power, and develop alternative political preferences (Dahl, 1971). In this respect,

democracy is not only an electoral mechanism, but also a broader institutional and social framework that enables citizens to act as political agents.

Contemporary democratic theory must establish a balance between majority rule and the protection of fundamental rights. Although majority will is an important source of democratic legitimacy, unlimited majority rule may threaten the rights of individuals and minorities. For this reason, pluralist democracy interprets majority decisions together with constitutional limits, judicial independence, and guarantees of fundamental rights (Held, 2006). The rule of law becomes decisive precisely at this point, because it prevents democratic authority from turning into arbitrary power.

Democracy must also be institutionalised not only at the formal level, but also at the social and cultural levels. Elections, parliaments, and political parties are indispensable components of democratic systems. However, when democratic culture is weak, these institutions may become merely formal or procedural. Democracy should therefore be understood as a way of political life in which citizens can exercise their rights, take part in public affairs, and hold political power accountable (Dahl, 1971).

1.2. The Rule of Law

The rule of law is based on the principle that all actions and decisions of the state must be bound by law and that public authority must not be exercised arbitrarily. This principle requires not only that the administration comply with legal rules, but also that legislative and executive powers be limited by constitutional principles (Bingham, 2010). The rule of law provides legal certainty for citizens by enabling them to foresee their rights and the limits within which public authorities may act (Tamanaha, 2004).

The rule of law means that all persons and institutions, including the state itself, are accountable before the law. It is concretised through principles and guarantees such as equality before the law, legal certainty, judicial independence, separation of powers, the right to a fair trial, and access to effective remedies (Council of Europe, 2016). In this sense, the rule of law is not merely a mechanism for maintaining order. It is also an institutional framework that protects individual liberty and human dignity.

The formal and substantive dimensions of the rule of law should be considered together. The formal dimension requires that public power be based on law, that legal rules be clear and foreseeable, and that administrative action be subject to judicial review. The substantive dimension requires that laws themselves be compatible with human rights, justice, and equality (Tamanaha, 2004). Thus, the mere existence of laws is not sufficient for the realisation of

the democratic rule of law; laws must also be supported by a rights-based and liberty-oriented content (Bingham, 2010).

The rule of law also performs a fundamental function for the sustainability of democratic systems. When judicial independence weakens, checks on the executive decline and the arbitrary use of political power may expand. This situation erodes not only the legal order but also democratic legitimacy (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018). Therefore, the rule of law is both the institutional guarantee of democracy and a necessary condition for the effective protection of human rights.

1.3. Human Rights

Human rights are universal, inalienable, and non-derogable rights that individuals possess simply because they are human. These rights aim to protect human dignity and define the normative limits of the relationship between the individual and the state (Donnelly, 2013). Human rights constrain state authority, but they also impose obligations on the state to create the legal, institutional, and social conditions necessary for individuals to enjoy their rights effectively (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

The idea of human rights developed through natural rights theory, constitutional limitations on political power, and the emergence of modern international law. The protection of the individual against the state is one of the central concerns of modern human rights thought. Yet human rights are not limited to negative liberties. Rights such as education, health, social security, and work are also integral to a life compatible with human dignity (Sen, 1999). Therefore, rather than establishing a hierarchy among rights, a more appropriate approach is to emphasise their indivisibility and interdependence (OHCHR, 1993).

Civil and political rights have particular importance for the functioning of the democratic rule of law. Freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to a fair trial, personal security, and political participation enable individuals both to be protected against the state and to participate effectively in political life (Landman, 2013). When these rights are weakened, democratic oversight mechanisms also weaken, and the limitation of public power becomes more difficult.

Economic, social, and cultural rights reveal the social justice dimension of human rights. Poverty, unequal access to education and health services, and social exclusion may limit individuals' capacity to participate in democratic life (Sen, 1999). For this reason, the democratic rule of law should not be

understood as a passive structure that merely protects individuals from state interference. It should also be seen as an active institutional order that supports the conditions necessary for a life consistent with human dignity.

One of the central issues in democratic theory is that popular sovereignty must not produce an unlimited sphere of power. Democratic legitimacy requires recognition of the political preferences of the majority. However, majority will cannot be used in a way that abolishes fundamental rights or destroys the conditions necessary for opposition. Constitutional democracy is therefore based on a balance between popular will and guarantees of fundamental rights (Held, 2006). When this balance is disrupted, elections may continue to exist, but the liberal and rights-based character of the democratic regime may weaken.

The relationship between the rule of law and human rights rests on the idea that the state must not only act according to law, but that law itself must have a rights-protective content. The clarity, generality, and foreseeability of laws are important; however, laws that conflict with human rights cannot produce a genuine rule-of-law order (Raz, 1979). The rule of law therefore includes a substantive meaning that goes beyond formal legality and protects individual freedoms (Tamanaha, 2004).

The classification of human rights into generations is useful for explaining their historical development, but it should not be interpreted as a hierarchy among rights. Civil and political rights protect individuals against the state and enable participation in political processes. Economic, social, and cultural rights support the material conditions necessary for human dignity (Marshall, 1992). These two fields of rights complement each other, since the weakening of one may also limit the effective enjoyment of the other (OHCHR, 1993).

Natural rights theory constitutes one of the philosophical foundations of modern human rights. According to this view, individuals possess certain rights not because the state grants them, but because they are human beings. The state is therefore not the source of rights, but their protector (Locke, 1988). In a democratic rule-of-law order, the task of the constitutional system is to secure these rights effectively against arbitrary power.

The distinction between negative and positive liberty also contributes to human rights theory. Negative liberty refers to protection from external interference, whereas positive liberty emphasises the conditions that enable individuals to make meaningful choices about their own lives (Berlin, 1969). The democratic rule of law should not place these two dimensions of freedom in opposition to each other. Rather, it should create institutional conditions that protect individuals from arbitrary interference while also enabling them to exercise their rights effectively.

The classification of rights in terms of legal status is also useful for understanding the democratic rule of law. Negative status rights protect individuals from state interference and secure a sphere of personal liberty. Positive status rights require the state to provide services in fields such as education, health, and social security. Active status rights, including the rights to vote, stand for election, and engage in political activity, contribute directly to democratic legitimacy. Taken together, these three categories show that the democratic rule of law involves limited government, social responsibility, and participatory politics.

The capacity of the rule of law to protect human rights is closely related to the quality of judicial review. The fact that all administrative acts and decisions are subject to judicial control prevents individuals from being left unprotected against public authority. Effective remedies, legal certainty, and judicial independence are therefore essential guarantees (Bingham, 2010). When these guarantees are weakened, the constitutional recognition of rights is not sufficient, because the real value of rights depends on their enforceability in cases of violation.

Finally, the joint analysis of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights requires an interdisciplinary perspective. From the standpoint of political science, democracy is concerned with representation, participation, and accountability. From the standpoint of law, the rule of law concerns the binding force of norms, judicial review, and rights guarantees. From the standpoint of public administration, the relationship among these concepts is reflected in transparency, merit, impartiality, and administrative accountability. Thus, the democratic rule of law is not only a matter of constitutional law, but also a central issue in the study of political institutions and public administration.

2. The Mutual Dependence between the Democratic Rule of Law and Human Rights

The relationship between the democratic rule of law and human rights is based on mutual dependence. Democracy provides the mechanisms of political participation, representation, and accountability that are necessary for the protection of human rights. The rule of law establishes the constitutional and judicial guarantees that prevent these democratic mechanisms from turning into arbitrary exercises of power. Human rights, in turn, constitute both the legitimacy criterion of democracy and the substantive content of the rule of law (Risse et al., 2013).

Democratic systems provide a favourable institutional environment for the recognition and protection of human rights. However, democracy alone does

not automatically guarantee rights. When majority will is not balanced by constitutional limits and fundamental rights guarantees, it may become a source of pressure on individual freedoms (Held, 2006). For this reason, the democratic rule of law must establish a normative balance between the right of the majority to govern and the protection of fundamental rights.

Human rights determine not only the outcomes of democratic systems, but also the conditions under which democracy can function. Without freedom of expression, free public debate is not possible. Without freedom of association, pluralist politics cannot develop. Without fair trial guarantees, legal security is weakened. Without political participation rights, democratic representation loses its substance (Landman, 2013). Human rights should therefore not be regarded as external consequences of democracy, but as internal and constitutive elements of a democratic regime.

The rule of law provides the institutional framework that makes human rights enforceable. The constitutional recognition of rights is important, but it is not sufficient unless those rights are supported by independent courts, effective remedies, and accountable public administration (Bingham, 2010). In systems where judicial independence is weakened or administrative power cannot be effectively reviewed, human rights may remain formally recognised while becoming practically insecure (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018).

The obligations of the state in the field of human rights may be understood at three basic levels: to respect, to protect, and to fulfil. The obligation to respect requires the state to refrain from directly interfering with individual rights. The obligation to protect requires public authorities to safeguard individuals against violations by third parties. The obligation to fulfil refers to the creation of the legal, institutional, and social conditions necessary for the effective enjoyment of rights (OHCHR & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

This threefold relationship shows that the democratic rule of law is not merely a constitutional model, but also a rights-based understanding of governance. Democratic legitimacy cannot be sustained within a legal order that fails to protect human rights. Likewise, the rule of law may be reduced to a merely formal legal order if it is detached from democratic participation and accountability (Tamanaha, 2004). Democracy, the rule of law, and human rights must therefore be evaluated together.

The quality of the democratic rule of law is measured not only by the existence of institutions, but also by how those institutions operate in practice. Regular elections alone cannot guarantee the democratic character of a political system. Elections must be free and fair; media and civil society must operate without undue pressure; courts must decide independently; and citizens must be

able to exercise their fundamental rights (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). For this reason, the effective protection of rights should be treated as a central criterion beyond the mere presence of formal institutions.

In a democratic rule-of-law order, the protection of fundamental rights is significant not only for individual liberty, but also for the continuity of political legitimacy. A government that violates human rights weakens its democratic legitimacy even if it has come to power through elections. Democracy is not only about the source of governing authority; it is also about the limits and manner of exercising that authority (Dahl, 1971).

In this context, human rights function as limiting principles within the democratic rule of law. The state may restrict certain rights on grounds such as public interest, security, or public order. However, such restrictions must have a legal basis, pursue a legitimate aim, and comply with the principle of proportionality (Council of Europe, 2016). The principle of proportionality demonstrates that restrictions destroying the essence of fundamental rights are incompatible with the rule of law.

The logic of mutual dependence within the democratic rule of law is concretised through institutional checks and balances. The balance among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches prevents public power from becoming concentrated in a single centre. The weakening of this balance directly affects human rights, because unchecked power is more likely to produce rights violations (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018). The separation of powers is therefore not merely a technical constitutional principle, but an institutional guarantee of human rights.

Political participation is also central to the relationship between the democratic rule of law and human rights. Citizens should not only vote periodically, but should also be able to participate in public decision-making through access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and mechanisms of oversight. Participatory democracy enables citizens to become active subjects in public affairs (Habermas, 1996). In this sense, participation strengthens both democratic legitimacy and the capacity to protect rights.

The international human rights regime provides an important framework that complements the domestic capacity of the democratic rule of law. International conventions, monitoring procedures, and judicial mechanisms make state obligations in the field of human rights more visible. These mechanisms may offer individuals an additional layer of protection, especially when domestic remedies are ineffective (Simmons, 2009). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of

international standards depends on institutional willingness and implementation capacity at the domestic level.

Mutual dependence also means that decline in one dimension may trigger deterioration in others. When democracy declines, the space for political participation narrows. When participation narrows, the ability to hold power accountable weakens. When accountability weakens, rule-of-law institutions erode. When the rule of law weakens, human rights become more fragile. Democratic backsliding should therefore not be understood merely as a matter of regime change; it is also a direct human rights problem (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

The protection of human rights within the democratic rule of law depends not only on normative principles, but also on institutional practices. Constitutional catalogues of rights may remain symbolic if they are not supported by independent courts, effective administrative review, impartial public administration, and accountable political institutions. Thus, rights protection is shaped not only by the quality of legal texts, but also by the independence and capacity of the institutions that implement them (Risse et al., 2013).

The relationship between human rights and democracy is particularly visible in the quality of the public sphere. A public sphere in which citizens can access information, criticise those in power, organise alternative views, and assemble peacefully improves the quality of democratic decision-making. Without these rights, the meaning of elections narrows, because voters need open channels of information, debate, and organisation in order to form free political preferences (Landman, 2013).

3. The Erosion of Human Rights under Anti-Democratic Regimes

Anti-democratic regimes are among the most problematic political structures in terms of the protection of human rights. In such regimes, political power becomes largely detached from the constraints imposed by popular will, the rule of law, and fundamental rights. Human rights, by their nature, constitute a normative framework that limits state authority and protects individuals against arbitrary intervention (Donnelly, 2013). For this reason, even when rights are formally recognised in legal texts under anti-democratic regimes, they often cannot be effectively protected in practice.

One of the main reasons for the weakening of human rights under authoritarian rule is the erosion of accountability mechanisms. In democratic systems, elections, parliaments, independent courts, free media, and civil society perform crucial functions in limiting political power. In anti-democratic

regimes, however, these institutions are either weakened or brought under the control of those in power (Levitsky & Way, 2010). As a result, the protection of rights becomes dependent less on legal guarantees than on the discretion of political authority.

Civil and political rights are among the rights most severely affected under anti-democratic rule. Freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and political participation make it possible to criticise those in power and develop alternative political options. For this reason, regimes with authoritarian tendencies often restrict these rights through censorship, administrative limitations, judicial harassment, or the threat of punishment (Davenport, 2007).

The impact of anti-democratic regimes on human rights is not limited to open forms of repression. Such regimes may also instrumentalise law and give legal appearance to rights violations. In what is often described as “rule by law,” law ceases to function as a guarantee protecting individuals against the state and becomes an instrument through which power controls society (Tamanaha, 2004). The problem, therefore, is not only the absence of law, but also the detachment of law from human rights and its transformation into a tool of domination (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018).

Security and public order discourses may also be used under anti-democratic regimes to legitimise restrictions on rights. Every state has an obligation to ensure public security. However, in a democratic rule-of-law order, security policies must be limited by legality, proportionality, judicial review, and respect for fundamental rights (Bingham, 2010). In anti-democratic systems, by contrast, security justifications may serve to normalise extraordinary powers and criminalise opposition (Scheppelle, 2018).

Processes of democratic backsliding are important because they show how human rights can be eroded gradually. Contemporary authoritarianism often does not emerge through open coups or explicit regime breakdowns. Rather, it may develop through processes in which elections continue to be held while judicial independence, media freedom, opposition rights, and civic space are progressively narrowed (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). This demonstrates that human rights violations may occur not only in classical dictatorships, but also in electoral yet illiberal or hybrid regimes.

The weakening of judicial independence is one of the most critical turning points for human rights in processes of anti-democratisation. Independent courts constitute the main institutional guarantee that protects individuals against the state. When the judiciary comes under the influence of the executive, processes of detention, trial, and punishment may turn into instruments of political

pressure (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018). In such circumstances, the legal order may formally continue to exist, but individuals' capacity to seek justice is seriously weakened.

Pressure on civil society and the media also contributes to the invisibility of human rights violations. Free media constitute a crucial sphere of oversight by bringing rights violations to public attention. Civil society gives voice to victims, monitors state practices, and connects domestic struggles with international human rights networks (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). When these spaces are restricted, rights violations not only increase but may also become normalised.

Economic and social rights cannot be protected independently of political rights under anti-democratic regimes. Some governments may seek to produce legitimacy through social assistance, economic development, or public service delivery. Yet the existence of social policies cannot justify the suppression of civil and political rights (Donnelly, 2013). The ability to claim rights, expose violations, and scrutinise public policies requires a free public sphere and effective legal guarantees (Sen, 1999).

Anti-democratic regimes therefore do not merely violate human rights; they also transform the meaning of rights. In such regimes, rights may cease to be universal guarantees possessed by individuals against the state and may instead be reduced to limited privileges granted by those in power. The essence of human rights, however, lies in the protection of individuals against state authority, the safeguarding of human dignity, and the limitation of political power through law.

Human rights violations under anti-democratic regimes often emerge not as isolated incidents, but as part of an institutional pattern. First, mechanisms of oversight are weakened; then, the space for opposition is narrowed; and eventually, rights violations may become an ordinary practice of government (Svolik, 2012). This process underlines the importance of early warning indicators for the protection of human rights. The weakening of judicial independence, pressure on the media, and the shrinking of civic space are among the most significant indicators of such deterioration.

The instrumentalisation of law is particularly important in authoritarianisation processes. Governments may carry out rights violations not through openly unlawful means, but through statutes, administrative decisions, and formally legal procedures. In this way, repressive practices acquire the appearance of legality and become more difficult to challenge (Scheppele, 2018). From the perspective of the democratic rule of law, therefore, it is not

enough that laws are enacted through proper procedures; they must also have a liberty-oriented and rights-based content.

The principle of equality may also be seriously eroded under anti-democratic regimes. Law may operate protectively for groups close to political power while becoming a mechanism of pressure against opponents, minorities, or critical actors. This weakens equality before the law and undermines legal certainty (Tamanaha, 2004). The universal character of human rights, however, requires that rights not be differentiated according to political loyalty, identity, or ideological position (Donnelly, 2013).

Social oversight is as important as institutional oversight for the protection of human rights. Free academia, professional organisations, human rights associations, and independent media help document violations and bring them into public debate. When these actors are weakened, rights violations not only increase, but the visibility of violations and the capacity of victims to seek remedies also decline (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

The erosion of human rights under anti-democratic regimes often occurs not through the explicit rejection of rights, but through the narrowing of their meaning. Freedom of expression may be reduced to the expression of opinions that do not disturb those in power. The right of assembly may be repeatedly postponed or restricted on security grounds. The right to a fair trial may be confined to formal procedural rules while losing its substantive guarantees. In this way, rights may appear to exist legally, while becoming ineffective in practice. This shows the need to focus not only on the textual recognition of rights, but also on the conditions of their implementation.

Another characteristic of anti-democratic regimes is their tendency to frame rights claims as political threats. When human rights advocacy, opposition activity, or public criticism is labelled as hostility toward the state, democratic oversight mechanisms are weakened. Human rights defenders and civil society actors, however, are legitimate social actors who enhance the accountability of public power in a democratic rule-of-law order (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Protecting civic space is therefore not only a matter of freedom of association, but also a central component of the broader human rights protection system.

It is also problematic to substitute economic and social rights for political freedoms in authoritarianisation processes. Public service provision, social assistance mechanisms, or economic growth narratives cannot legitimise the weakening of freedom of expression, fair trial guarantees, and political participation rights (Sen, 1999). The principle of the indivisibility of human rights requires that social rights be protected together with civil and political rights (OHCHR, 1993).

In conclusion, anti-democratic regimes erode human rights by weakening accountability, instrumentalising law, restricting civic space, and narrowing the meaning of rights. These processes show that human rights cannot be effectively protected in the absence of democratic participation, judicial independence, media freedom, and institutional checks and balances. The erosion of human rights is therefore not merely a legal problem; it is also a political and institutional problem that directly concerns the quality of the democratic rule of law.

4. Human Rights in the Distinction between the Rule of Law, Rule by Law, and the Police State

The distinction between the rule of law, rule by law, and the police state is crucial for understanding the conditions under which human rights can be effectively protected. Rule by law refers to a system in which state actions and decisions are formally based on law. However, this approach does not necessarily question whether laws are substantively just or compatible with human rights (Raz, 1979). For this reason, rule by law may ensure a certain degree of formal legality, but it does not by itself provide an effective guarantee for human rights.

In a rule-by-law system, law may be understood primarily as an instrument that gives legal form to state activity. If laws are used not to protect fundamental rights but to legitimise the preferences of political power, the result is not the rule of law but governance through law (Tamanaha, 2004). In such a context, individual rights depend less on constitutional and judicial guarantees than on the political preferences of the legislative majority or the executive.

The police state, by contrast, refers to a form of government in which broad and often arbitrary powers of intervention are exercised over individuals in the name of public order and security. In such systems, administrative action is subject to limited review, and individual freedoms are deprived of strong institutional guarantees (Hayek, 1960). The police-state logic places the state at the centre and pushes the individual into a secondary position, thereby creating serious risks for legal certainty and the protection of fundamental rights.

The rule of law offers a higher normative framework that overcomes the limitations of both rule by law and the police state. In a rule-of-law order, public power must not only be based on law; the exercise of that power must also comply with human rights, proportionality, judicial review, and legal certainty (Bingham, 2010). The rule of law therefore connects formal legality with substantive justice and functions as a political-legal ideal that protects the individual against arbitrary authority.

This distinction has direct consequences for the protection of human rights. Under rule by law, rights may be recognised in legal texts, but the broad discretion of lawmakers or the executive may facilitate their restriction. In a police state, rights may be systematically weakened in the face of security and order-based discourses. In a rule-of-law system, however, restrictions on rights are legitimate only if they comply with legality, legitimate aim, proportionality, and judicial review (Council of Europe, 2016).

In contemporary constitutional orders, the rule of law is indispensable for the protection of human rights. Judicial independence, separation of powers, effective remedies, equality before the law, and legal certainty protect the individual against public authority (Bingham, 2010). When these guarantees are weakened, the legal order may formally continue to exist, but the practical capacity to protect human rights declines.

The democratic rule of law therefore requires not only that the state act through law, but also that laws themselves be compatible with human rights. Rule by law represents formal legality; the police state represents a security-centred and arbitrary logic of intervention; the rule of law represents a rights-based understanding of limited government. Accordingly, the effective protection of human rights depends not merely on the existence of legal regulations, but on whether those regulations are supported by liberty-oriented content, independent courts, and democratic oversight (Tamanaha, 2004).

The difference between rule by law and the rule of law becomes particularly visible in times of emergency. In extraordinary circumstances, the state's responsibility to protect public order and security continues. However, this responsibility does not grant unlimited authority to suspend fundamental rights. The rule of law requires that legality, proportionality, judicial review, and the essence of rights be preserved even during periods of crisis (Bingham, 2010).

Within the logic of the police state, security may be presented as an absolute value overriding rights. In the democratic rule of law, however, security and liberty are not mutually exclusive principles; rather, they should be understood as mutually reinforcing. When security policies are not conducted within legal limits, public trust in the state weakens and political legitimacy erodes (Hayek, 1960). For this reason, security policies must be designed in accordance with human rights law.

The substantive dimension of the rule of law requires not only that laws be formally valid, but also that they protect rights. Guarantees such as the right to a fair trial, the right of defence, the right to an effective remedy, and the presumption of innocence concretise the relationship between the rule of law and human rights (Council of Europe, 2016). In a system where these

guarantees are weakened, laws may remain in force, but the legal security of the individual is seriously undermined.

The significance of this distinction lies in showing why the democratic rule of law cannot be defined merely as “government in accordance with laws.” The rule of law is a principle that limits democratic legitimacy through human rights and renders public power accountable (Tamanaha, 2004). The distinction between rule by law and the police state therefore demonstrates that the real guarantee of human rights is not formal legality, but a rights-based legal order.

The difference between rule by law and the rule of law also becomes decisive in the regime of rights limitations. A rule-by-law approach may consider the existence of a legal basis sufficient for restricting rights. The rule of law, however, also examines the aim, scope, necessity, and proportionality of the restriction. In a democratic rule-of-law order, limitations on rights must therefore be exceptional, reviewable, and designed in a way that preserves the essence of the right (Council of Europe, 2016).

The concept of the police state constitutes a particular risk for human rights because it refers to the use of broad administrative discretion on security grounds. If law-enforcement powers are not subject to effective legal review, several rights may be weakened, including personal liberty, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and the right to privacy. The rule of law does not abolish law-enforcement powers; rather, it limits them through legality, necessity, proportionality, and judicial oversight.

In this framework, the rule of law protects the individual not only against the executive but also against the possible arbitrariness of legislative majorities. Constitutional review is an important mechanism that prevents laws incompatible with fundamental rights from gaining unlimited authority within the legal order. The rule of law therefore establishes a constitutional balance between the will of the democratic majority and the inviolable core of human rights (Bingham, 2010).

Ultimately, the distinction between the rule of law, rule by law, and the police state shows that human rights require more than the formal existence of legal norms. Rights can be effectively protected only when law limits power, courts remain independent, administrative discretion is reviewable, and security policies are bound by legality and proportionality. The democratic rule of law thus represents the institutional form in which legality, liberty, accountability, and human dignity are brought together.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The relationship between the democratic rule of law and human rights constitutes a multi-layered structure that lies at the normative and institutional foundation of contemporary political systems. As this chapter has argued, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights should not be treated as independent or isolated concepts. Democracy produces political legitimacy, the rule of law prevents this legitimacy from turning into arbitrary power, and human rights provide both the normative purpose and the limiting criterion of a democratic rule-of-law order.

Reducing democracy to electoral mechanisms alone leads to an insufficient understanding of human rights protection. Elections are necessary for democratic legitimacy, but they do not by themselves guarantee a rights-based political order. Without free media, strong civil society, judicial independence, freedom of expression, and political pluralism, the democratic character of a political system becomes weakened (Dahl, 1971). For this reason, the democratic rule of law should be understood not merely as a set of formal institutions, but as a political order in which rights can be effectively exercised.

The rule of law makes it possible not only to recognise human rights, but also to implement and enforce them. The existence of laws does not by itself provide an adequate guarantee for rights. Laws must be compatible with human rights; administrative action must be subject to judicial review; and individuals must have access to effective remedies (Bingham, 2010). In this respect, the rule of law differs from both rule by law and the police state by establishing a substantive system of guarantees that protects individuals against public power.

Anti-democratic regimes demonstrate that the protection of human rights cannot be separated from democratic and legal institutional structures. In authoritarian and hybrid regimes, the erosion of rule-of-law institutions, the weakening of judicial independence, and pressure on the media and civil society directly threaten human rights (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). This shows that the democratic rule of law is not merely a theoretical ideal, but a practical mechanism for rights protection.

The first policy recommendation is to ensure the full compatibility of constitutional and legal frameworks with human rights standards. Fundamental rights and freedoms should be regulated in clear, foreseeable, and rights-protective terms. The limitation of rights should be subject to strict safeguards, including legality, legitimate aim, necessity, proportionality, and respect for the essence of the right (Council of Europe, 2016). Rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, personal liberty, the right to a fair trial, and

political participation should be regarded as minimum conditions of the democratic rule of law (Donnelly, 2013).

Second, judicial independence and impartiality should be strengthened. The appointment, promotion, evaluation, and disciplinary procedures of judges and prosecutors should be organised in a transparent, merit-based, and institutionally independent manner. Judicial independence is essential for the protection of human rights because it ensures the functioning of effective remedies against rights violations (Bingham, 2010). It also operates as an institutional check against democratic backsliding and the concentration of political power (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018).

Third, the separation of powers and mechanisms of parliamentary oversight should be reinforced. When the balance among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches is weakened, political power may become concentrated and the risk of rights violations may increase (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Oversight instruments that enhance executive accountability, transparent decision-making procedures, and effective administrative justice should therefore be preserved as essential elements of the democratic rule of law.

Fourth, civil society and media freedom should be guaranteed. Civil society organisations play a crucial role in making human rights violations visible and in compelling public authorities to act accountably (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). A free and pluralistic media environment also enables citizens to access information, scrutinise public power, and participate in democratic debate. The protection of civic space is therefore not a secondary matter, but a core condition for rights-based democratic governance (Norris, 2022).

Fifth, human rights education and democratic citizenship awareness should be strengthened. The protection of human rights depends not only on legal institutions, but also on social awareness, democratic culture, and citizens' capacity to claim their rights. Educational policies should therefore be designed in a way that enables citizens to understand their rights and responsibilities, internalise pluralism, and recognise the value of the rule of law (Council of Europe, 2020).

Sixth, public administration should be strengthened through a rights-based governance approach. The impartial, transparent, accountable, and foreseeable functioning of the administration directly affects citizens' access to rights. Reasoned administrative decisions, effective complaint and appeal mechanisms, non-discrimination in access to public services, and merit-based public personnel systems constitute the everyday institutional face of the democratic rule of law.

Seventh, human rights impact assessments should be integrated into legislative processes. Before laws are enacted, their possible effects on fundamental rights and freedoms should be systematically evaluated. Such preventive mechanisms would

make it possible to identify potential rights violations before they occur, rather than relying solely on corrective mechanisms after violations have taken place. This would strengthen the protective and preventive function of the rule of law.

Finally, alignment with international human rights mechanisms should be enhanced. The effective implementation of international conventions in domestic law strengthens national rights-protection capacity (OHCHR & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). International monitoring and review mechanisms also make state obligations in the field of human rights more visible and contribute to the consolidation of the democratic rule of law (Simmons, 2009). The sustainability of the democratic rule of law therefore depends on the joint operation of domestic institutional reforms and international human rights standards.

Overall, this chapter has shown that the relationship between the democratic rule of law and human rights is two-directional. On the one hand, human rights define the normative content of the democratic rule of law. On the other hand, the democratic rule of law provides the institutional framework necessary for the effective protection of those rights. Democracy-building, the institutionalisation of the rule of law, and the protection of human rights should therefore not be treated as separate reform areas. They should instead be understood as interdependent components of an integrated democratisation strategy.

The central conclusion of the chapter is that a rights-based understanding of the democratic rule of law cannot be established through constitutional texts alone. Constitutional guarantees become effective only when they are supported by independent courts, reviewable administration, a strong parliament, free media, active civil society, and a citizenship culture conscious of rights. When these elements operate together, human rights cease to be merely principles written in legal documents and become practical guarantees of social and political life.

In conclusion, the democratic rule of law refers to a political and legal order in which human rights are not only recognised, but also effectively protected and exercised. Its sustainability depends not merely on the formal existence of institutions, but on their operation in a liberty-oriented and rights-protective manner. When the relationship among democracy, the rule of law, and human rights is strengthened, human dignity is protected, political legitimacy is reinforced, and social peace gains a more stable institutional foundation.

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Chapter 6

Hospital Disaster Management in Türkiye: Legal Framework, Institutional Coordination, and Policy Lessons

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Introduction

Hospital disaster management in Türkiye is of strategic importance because any interruption of health services during disasters produces direct rights-based, administrative, and social consequences. Access to health care during emergencies is not merely a matter of technical capacity; it is a public responsibility linked to the right to life, the right to health, patient safety, and public security. Hospital disaster planning should therefore integrate continuity of clinical services, ethical decision-making, allocation of scarce resources, patient flow, and equity principles.

The focus of this chapter is not simply to describe the achievements or deficiencies of hospital disaster management in Türkiye. Rather, it examines the conditions under which the existing planning architecture generates effective capacity and the areas in which implementation gaps emerge. For this purpose, official legislation and institutional documents, international disaster management frameworks, and recent practical experiences are evaluated together.

Türkiye is exposed to multiple hazards because of its geological location, rapid urbanization, population density, and climate-related risks. Earthquakes, floods, landslides, forest fires, industrial accidents, CBRN events, and epidemics have transformed disaster management from a technical response field into a central issue of public administration, health policy, and societal resilience. In this context, hospitals are both critical infrastructures exposed to risk and essential service centers expected to meet society's urgent health needs during disasters (Kruk et al., 2015).

Hospital disaster management, particularly in countries with high seismic risk, cannot be reduced to building safety. Large-scale disasters may quickly

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generate mass casualties, intensive care needs, emergency surgery requirements, patient transfers, demand for medicines and blood products, psychosocial support needs, and public health surveillance. Hospitals must therefore maintain critical functions such as electricity, water, medical gases, communication, information systems, laboratory services, pharmacy services, and sterilization. The WHO hospital emergency response checklist similarly recommends that hospitals prepare through an all-hazards approach (WHO, 2011).

Türkiye's disaster management approach was long shaped around post-disaster response and recovery. In recent years, however, it has moved toward a more integrated structure centered on risk reduction, preparedness, coordination, and resilience. This transformation is consistent with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which emphasizes understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance, investing in resilience, and enhancing preparedness for effective response (UNDRR, 2015). The Türkiye Disaster Response Plan, the Türkiye Disaster Risk Reduction Plan, and Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Plans constitute key national and local instruments of this transformation (AFAD, 2022a, 2022b). Studies discussing the health and resilience dimension of Sendai also indicate that this framework strengthens a people-centered risk reduction perspective (Aitsi-Selmi et al., 2015).

The Hospital Disaster and Emergency Plan (HAP) is the most important institutional instrument for hospital-level disaster preparedness in Türkiye. It aims to ensure that hospitals plan in advance their task distribution, triage, evacuation, security, logistics, communication, patient flow, and service continuity processes. Its real value, however, lies not in its existence as a formal file, but in staff awareness, regular drills, adaptation to local risk profiles, and integration with post-disaster learning processes (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquakes made both the strengths and weaknesses of hospital disaster management in Türkiye more visible. The pandemic generated important lessons on intensive care capacity, personal protective equipment, health workforce fatigue, digital health applications, and continuity of routine services. The 2023 earthquakes, in turn, demonstrated the importance of hospital building resilience, mobile health services, regional referral chains, logistical support, workforce management, and inter-institutional coordination under disaster conditions (Tayfur et al., 2024a).

1. General Framework of Hospital Disaster Management in Türkiye

Hospital disaster management requires the simultaneous execution of clinical decision-making and administrative coordination. Patient admission,

triage, and referral decisions during disasters must be addressed together with workforce assignment, security, logistics, communication, and infrastructure continuity. For this reason, hospital disaster management is a shared responsibility not only of health professionals but also of technical services, information technologies, procurement, security, cleaning, and support units (Nekoie-Moghadam et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2014).

Another important issue in Türkiye is that hospitals differ in ownership, capacity, and service role. Training and research hospitals, city hospitals, university hospitals, district state hospitals, and private hospitals do not prepare for the same risks with identical resources. In addition to national standards, differentiated preparedness criteria should therefore be developed according to hospital type, regional role, bed capacity, and intensive care capacity (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a).

The distinctive feature of hospitals in disaster management is that demand for services does not decline during disasters; it often increases rapidly. When emergency departments, intensive care units, operating rooms, maternity services, dialysis units, and blood services are disrupted, disasters cease to be merely infrastructure problems and generate direct consequences for referral chains, public health surveillance, and public trust. Service continuity should therefore be considered the central principle of hospital disaster management (WHO, 2019).

In Türkiye, disaster risks also vary regionally. Earthquake risk is more pronounced in Marmara, the Aegean region, and Eastern Anatolia; flood and landslide risks in the Black Sea region; forest fire risks in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions; industrial accident risks in large industrial cities; and mass-casualty risks in metropolitan areas. Each hospital should therefore connect national standards with local risk profiles, transportation conditions, demographic structures, neighboring health facilities, and referral capacity (AFAD, 2025).

Hospital disaster management in Türkiye should be understood through the relationship between multiple disaster risks and the resilience of the health system. In ordinary times, hospitals are central institutions for treatment, care, and diagnostic services. During disasters, however, they acquire a strategic role in protecting community health security. A hospital's inability to function during a disaster may mean not only institutional service interruption but also loss of life, breakdown of referral chains, disruption of public health surveillance, and erosion of social trust (WHO, 2019).

Three capacities should be considered together in the general framework of hospital disaster management: structural safety, non-structural safety, and

functional continuity. Structural safety concerns the resistance of the building's load-bearing system to hazards. Non-structural safety includes the security of medical devices, shelves, installations, oxygen systems, and critical equipment. Functional continuity refers to the ability of the hospital to maintain critical services under disaster conditions. The Hospital Safety Index approach demonstrates that these three dimensions should be evaluated together (WHO & PAHO, 2015).

Hospital disaster management in Türkiye is positioned between the national disaster management system and the institutional capacity of the health sector. TAMP defines the roles and responsibilities of institutions in disaster and emergency response. TARAP establishes disaster risk reduction as a national policy objective. İRAP provides a local risk reduction instrument based on the specific risk profiles of provinces. These documents show that hospitals should be addressed not only through post-event response capacity but also through pre-disaster risk reduction and preparedness processes (AFAD, 2025).

The concept of health system resilience provides an important framework for explaining hospital disaster management. A resilient health system is not only one that continues to deliver services during crises; it also adapts to changing conditions, reduces vulnerabilities, and reorganizes itself through learning (Blanchet et al., 2017). Hospitals are the most visible institutions of this resilience because public confidence in the health system during disasters largely depends on hospitals remaining operational, receiving patients, and maintaining critical services (Kruk et al., 2015).

Hospital disaster management in Türkiye should be designed not only for sudden and destructive events such as earthquakes but also for epidemics and prolonged health crises. COVID-19 made visible the vulnerabilities of health systems in intensive care, workforce continuity, infection control, and supply chains. The increasing significance of digital health applications also shows that information systems have become critical infrastructures that must be protected during disasters (Keesara et al., 2020).

Another element of the general framework is the protection of vulnerable groups. Older persons, children, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, chronic patients, dialysis patients, migrants, and individuals dependent on regular medication face heightened risks during disasters. Hospital disaster plans should therefore be prepared not only according to average patient load but also according to the evacuation, access, medication, accompaniment, communication, and psychosocial support needs of groups with special requirements. The WHO Health EDRM framework likewise emphasizes

integrated approaches that improve health outcomes among at-risk communities (WHO, 2019).

In this context, the main question for hospital disaster management in Türkiye is the extent to which existing plans and institutions generate effective capacity in the field. The existence of plans is important; yet preparedness level, training, drills, logistics stocks, digital backup systems, inter-institutional information sharing, and post-disaster learning processes are more decisive. Systematic studies on hospital disaster preparedness show that command systems, communication, evacuation, resource management, and service continuity should be evaluated together (Nekoie-Moghadam et al., 2016).

2. Legal Framework and Institutional Structure

The legal and institutional structure of hospital disaster management in Türkiye has evolved from classical regulations focused on post-disaster assistance toward a broader architecture centered on risk reduction, preparedness, response, and service continuity. Law No. 7269 long served as the basic legal foundation for measures and assistance in settlements affected by disasters (7269 Sayılı Kanun, 1959). From the perspective of hospitals, however, modern disaster management requires not only post-disaster assistance but also the uninterrupted continuity of critical health services.

One of the most important stages of institutional transformation was the establishment of AFAD through Law No. 5902. The creation of AFAD is important because it brought together disaster and emergency responsibilities that had previously been dispersed among different institutions under a central coordination umbrella (5902 Sayılı Kanun, 2009). For hospitals, this structure indicates that health services during major disasters must be carried out in coordination with AFAD, provincial disaster and emergency directorates, the Ministry of Health, provincial health directorates, local governments, and other public institutions.

The Türkiye Disaster Response Plan is the main policy document defining the roles of institutions through service groups in disaster response. Its initial publication in 2014 and update in 2022 show that disaster response in Türkiye has been strengthened through an institutional coordination logic (AFAD, 2022a). Within this system, hospitals occupy a strategic position in terms of health services, emergency treatment, casualty transport, referral chains, psychosocial support, public health surveillance, and health logistics.

TARAP and İRAP are particularly important in the dimension of risk reduction. TARAP positions disaster management not merely as a post-event response field but as a sustainable public policy area in which risks should be

reduced before disasters occur (AFAD, 2022b). İRAP aims to identify the disaster risk profile of each province, improve cooperation among local stakeholders, and use resources more effectively (AFAD, 2025). Hospital disaster plans should therefore be aligned with these local risk reduction documents.

The most direct regulation for hospitals is the Regulation on the Implementation of Hospital Disaster and Emergency Plans. Published in the Official Gazette on March 18, 2020, the regulation establishes the basic framework for preparing, implementing, and updating disaster plans in hospitals providing inpatient treatment services (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2020b). Its coverage of public, university, municipal, and private hospitals indicates that HAP constitutes a common disaster management standard for all inpatient health institutions in Türkiye.

The HAP Preparation Guide is the practical counterpart of this legal obligation. The first version was published in 2015 and the second version entered into force in 2021, indicating that the guide has been updated through training, implementation, and drill experiences (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a). The comparative analysis by Çiçekdağı and Bozkurt shows that the 2021 guide became more comprehensive and systematic than the 2015 version (Çiçekdağı & Bozkurt, 2022).

The Regulation on Health Services in Disasters and Emergencies is another basic regulation determining how health services are organized during disasters and emergencies. It institutionalizes the framework for planning, conducting, and coordinating health services during disasters at the Ministry of Health level (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021b). This regulation indicates that hospitals must operate not only according to their internal plans but also as part of the national and provincial health disaster network.

The effectiveness of legislation depends not only on vertical distribution of responsibilities but also on horizontal coordination capacity. During disasters, hospitals must work with municipalities, law enforcement, fire departments, social service units, blood centers, pharmacies, logistics actors, and civil society organizations. Defining the roles of these actors in advance and testing them through joint drills strengthens the operational value of legislation (Tierney, 2012).

A strong feature of Türkiye's legal architecture is the existence of documents regulating disaster management at different scales. TAMP addresses national response coordination, TARAP risk reduction, İRAP local risk profiles, and HAP hospital-level preparedness and response. Yet these documents should use the same conceptual language and priority hierarchy. For example, if earthquake

risk is high in a province, this risk identified in İRAP should be translated in HAP into concrete measures such as evacuation, alternative energy, critical stocks, patient referral, and staff transportation. Without such vertical linkage, national and local plans may appear strong while implementation gaps emerge at the hospital level.

Another significant dimension of institutional structure is the inclusion of public, university, and private hospitals within the same disaster management standard. Health service delivery in Türkiye has a mixed structure, and private and university hospitals are also part of regional health capacity during disasters. HAP's coverage of all inpatient institutions is therefore appropriate. However, broad coverage also increases the need for supervision and coordination. The inclusion of private, university, and public hospitals in joint drills, referral-chain planning, and capacity-sharing systems would strengthen the field-level effect of legislation.

Data-based monitoring mechanisms are critical for the applicability of legislation. It should be regularly monitored which hospitals have updated their HAPs, when they last conducted drills, whether their critical stocks are sufficient, whether evacuation capacity has been tested, and whether staff training has been completed. These indicators are necessary not only for administrative supervision but also for realistically assessing regional disaster capacity. In this way, legislation can move beyond a static regulatory field and become a management system supported by measurable performance indicators.

The basic issue regarding the legal and institutional structure is the coordinated operation of HAP, TAMP, TARAP, and İRAP. HAP operates at the hospital scale, İRAP at the provincial scale, TAMP at the national response scale, and TARAP at the national risk reduction scale. The structure is theoretically comprehensive. Yet to produce effective results, plans must be current, measurable, auditable, and tested through drills. Disaster governance literature emphasizes the importance of network-based coordination in complex crises (Tierney, 2012). The Ministry of Health's documents and forms on health disaster plans also indicate that these plans must be supported by practical implementation documents (Sağlık Bakanlığı Acil Sağlık Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2024d).

Accordingly, while Türkiye has a strong legal infrastructure for hospital disaster management, implementation capacity must be continuously monitored. The existence of legislation does not mean that hospitals are ready for disasters. Plans must be known by staff, critical stocks must be protected, evacuation routes must function, digital infrastructure must be backed up, and information flows must be established at provincial and national levels. Instruments

assessing hospital disaster preparedness show that, in addition to plan existence, command, communication, logistics, evacuation, and human resource dimensions should also be measured (Tang et al., 2014).

Table 1. Institutional Tools of Hospital Disaster Management in Türkiye

Institutional tool	Level	Main function
TAMP	National	Disaster response coordination and allocation of duties through service groups
TARAP	National	Disaster risk reduction and national risk reduction priorities
İRAP	Provincial	Identification of local risk profiles and coordination among local stakeholders
HAP	Hospital	Hospital-level preparedness, task distribution, triage, evacuation, and service continuity
UMKE	Operational/field	Medical rescue, first response, triage, and patient guidance
SAKOM	Coordination/information	Health disaster information flow, capacity monitoring, and support for referral decisions

Note. The table was prepared based on the national and institutional documents discussed in this chapter.

3. Ministry of Health Policies and Institutional Coordination

The applicability of hospital disaster management in Türkiye largely depends on the central policy capacity of the Ministry of Health and its operational integration with provincial organization. Ministry policies address disaster management not merely as a hospital-internal preparedness process but as a multidimensional field of health governance that includes emergency health services, medical rescue, health disaster coordination, CBRN preparedness, patient referral, public health surveillance, and service continuity. This approach is consistent with the WHO Health EDRM framework (WHO, 2019).

One of the Ministry's most important policy instruments is HAP. It enables hospitals to prepare in advance for disasters and emergencies, clarify task distribution, analyze risks, and prioritize critical services. The Ministry states that the HAP Preparation Guide was prepared by drawing on national and

international disaster management experience (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a). HAP is therefore not merely a technical file; it is a policy instrument that institutionalizes risk management and service continuity at the hospital level.

UMKE represents the Ministry of Health's field-level medical response capacity during disasters and emergencies. UMKE teams play a critical role in first response, triage, medical rescue, and directing patients to appropriate health facilities along the chain from the incident site to the hospital. The existence of training, drill, and logistics headings related to UMKE under the Ministry's Disaster and Emergency Management Department demonstrates the applied preparedness dimension of this structure (Sağlık Bakanlığı Acil Sağlık Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2024c).

SAKOM is a strategic center for health disaster coordination and information management. During disasters, knowing how many vacant beds, intensive care beds, ambulances, health workers, and critical materials are available in each hospital is necessary for patient referral and resource management. SAKOM should therefore be considered not only a communication unit but also a node that supports decision-making, capacity monitoring, and inter-institutional coordination (Sağlık Bakanlığı Acil Sağlık Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2024b).

CBRN preparedness is another dimension of Ministry policies requiring specialized expertise. In chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear events, hospitals must have capacities for decontamination, isolation, infection control, personal protective equipment, laboratory safety, and staff safety. The inclusion of CBRN arrangements in the Ministry's disaster and emergency management structure shows that disaster management is not limited to classical hazards such as earthquakes and fires (Sağlık Bakanlığı Acil Sağlık Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2024a).

The quality of institutional coordination depends on routine relations established before disasters. If units come to know each other only during a crisis, the culture of joint work remains weak. Regular provincial coordination meetings, table-top and field drills, capacity-sharing mechanisms, and data-flow systems should therefore be developed. When central guidance is combined with the local implementation capacity of provincial health directorates, information sharing, referral, and resource allocation among hospitals become faster (WHO, 2019; Sağlık Bakanlığı Acil Sağlık Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2024d).

The balance between centralized decision-making and local implementation is decisive. In major disasters, central coordination is necessary for producing standard decisions, regulating resource allocation, and mobilizing national

capacity. Yet in the first hours of a disaster, provincial health directorates, hospital managers, 112 emergency health services, UMKE teams, and local actors must make rapid decisions. Central policy documents should therefore be supported by procedures that are flexible and quickly applicable at the local level.

The relationship between UMKE and SAKOM is particularly important for integrating field response with information management. UMKE generates capacity for medical intervention, triage, and patient direction at the scene, whereas SAKOM monitors the overall system and supports decisions on referrals and resource allocation. If reliable data flow is not established between these capacities, some hospitals may face excessive patient loads while facilities with available capacity remain underused.

The success of institutional coordination is measured less by legislation and organizational charts than by implementation capacity in the field. Studies on hospital disaster preparedness in Türkiye show that although the existence of plans is important, it is not sufficient by itself. Top, Gider, and Taş argue that hospital disaster preparedness in Türkiye should be assessed in terms of plan characteristics and surge capacity (Top et al., 2010). Semerci and Şahinöz similarly show that disaster preparedness in public hospitals should be considered together with institutional characteristics (Semerci & Şahinöz, 2024).

Education and drills are indispensable elements of institutional coordination in Ministry policies. For HAP to function effectively, staff must know their duties, the crisis command structure must work, evacuation and triage processes must be tested, and joint scenarios must be implemented with 112 emergency health services and UMKE. International literature also emphasizes that planning, communication, human resources, logistics, evacuation, and training should be considered together in hospital disaster preparedness assessments (Nekoie-Moghadam et al., 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic made the Ministry's central coordination capacity visible in the context of a prolonged health crisis. Management of intensive care capacity, need for protective equipment, health workforce burden, patient referrals, and digital health applications increased the importance of centralized decision-making and data sharing. Studies evaluating Türkiye's COVID-19 experience show that health systems need flexibility and rapid adaptation capacity during epidemics (Keskinılıç et al., 2021).

The 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes demonstrated that hospital resilience should be considered together with building safety, mobile health capacity, referral chains, logistical support, workforce management, and information

flow. A study on the medical response in Hatay shows that damage to health facilities seriously complicated service delivery (Tayfur et al., 2024b). This experience confirms that hospitals should be managed not as isolated institutions but as part of a regional health service network during disasters.

4. Hospital Disaster and Emergency Plans: The Institutional Role of HAP

HAP is the basic instrument that institutionalizes hospital disaster management in Türkiye. It aims to ensure that hospitals do not merely react during disasters but analyze their risks in advance, determine tasks and responsibilities, prioritize critical services, train staff, and enable organizational learning after disasters. In this respect, HAP brings together risk management, crisis management, service continuity, and resilience capacity at the hospital level (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a).

The institutional role of HAP stems from the dual position of hospitals in disasters. Hospitals are both vulnerable structures that may be affected by disasters and critical centers expected to respond to society's most urgent health needs. Interruptions in electricity, water, oxygen, communication, or information systems may disrupt vital services such as emergency treatment, intensive care, surgery, and patient referral. HAP must therefore manage structural, non-structural, and functional vulnerabilities together (WHO & PAHO, 2015).

The legal basis of HAP was clearly established by the 2020 Regulation on the Implementation of Hospital Disaster and Emergency Plans. The regulation determines the basic obligations for preparing, implementing, and updating disaster and emergency plans in hospitals providing inpatient treatment services (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2020b). Its inclusion of all inpatient health institutions, including the public and private sectors, indicates that HAP creates a common standard for hospital disaster management in Türkiye.

The HAP Preparation Guide shows how the plan should be prepared and implemented in the field. The fact that the 2021 guide became more detailed indicates that disaster management planning is treated not as a static document but as a learning process (Çiçekdağı & Bozkurt, 2022). This development is important because disaster risks change, hospital technologies transform, and health crises are no longer limited to sudden events such as earthquakes.

The main contribution of HAP is that it links decision-making during disasters to pre-defined duties, authorities, and responsibilities rather than leaving it to personal experience. Who will decide, which services will be prioritized, which patients will be transferred, which resources will be allocated

to which units, and how external actors will be contacted should all be determined in advance. Crisis management literature emphasizes the importance of pre-established coordination mechanisms under conditions of high uncertainty (Boin et al., 2016).

HAP carries all phases of the disaster management cycle to the hospital scale. It contributes to risk identification in the mitigation phase, education and drills in the preparedness phase, triage and referral chains in the response phase, and restoration of services in the recovery phase. The WHO all-hazards approach recommends that hospitals prepare in a way that can be adapted to different disaster types (WHO, 2011). HAP should therefore not be reduced to a single disaster scenario.

HAP strengthens vertical and horizontal coordination within hospitals at the same time. Vertical coordination refers to the decision flow among the chief physician's office, crisis management team, service supervisors, and staff. Horizontal coordination refers to cooperation among the emergency department, intensive care, operating rooms, laboratories, pharmacy, technical services, security, cleaning, information technologies, and logistics units. HAP should clearly define the disaster roles of these units and the processes for communication with patients and relatives, security, information sharing, and service continuity (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a).

Scenario-based planning should be used to increase the applicability of HAP. Earthquake, fire, CBRN event, epidemic, prolonged power outage, oxygen system failure, cyberattack, or mass-casualty scenarios test different capacity areas of the hospital. These scenarios should define not only actions to be taken but also decision thresholds such as evacuation, suspension of elective services, patient referral, and critical stock alarms.

The sustainability of HAP depends on feedback mechanisms after drills and real disasters. If congestion on evacuation stairs, failures in radio communication, insufficient critical stocks, or problems in informing patient relatives are identified, these findings should be connected to plan revision, staff training, budget requests, and infrastructure investments. HAP can thus become a learning management instrument rather than a static file.

The success of HAP depends on its applicability, not merely on its preparation. The presence of a HAP file in a hospital does not mean that the hospital is disaster-ready. Staff awareness, functioning of the crisis command structure, realistic drills, tested evacuation routes, monitored logistics stocks, and pre-defined conditions for sustaining critical services are all necessary. Hospital disaster preparedness tools show that these dimensions should be measured together (Tang et al., 2014).

The human resources dimension of HAP is especially important. Health workers are not only professionals delivering services during disasters; they may also be affected by the disaster themselves. Concerns about family safety, transportation problems, long working hours, burnout, and insufficient psychosocial support may weaken hospital capacity. Disaster preparedness literature shows that education and drills improve health workers' disaster response capacity (Gebbie & Qureshi, 2002). Nursing studies also identify preparedness, experience, and training as key variables (Labrague et al., 2018).

Logistics and information management are two other areas that determine the functional value of HAP. During disasters, the need for medicines, oxygen, blood products, personal protective equipment, fuel, and sterile materials may rise while supply chains are disrupted. COVID-19 showed how shortages of ventilators and protective equipment could strain health systems (Ranney et al., 2020). Interruption of digital systems makes it difficult to monitor bed, intensive care, and referral capacity; therefore, manual backup processes should be explicitly defined within HAP.

In conclusion, HAP is at the center of institutional preparedness for hospital disasters in Türkiye. Its real effect, however, is related to implementation capacity rather than document status. Plans must be updated, internalized by staff, tested through drills, linked to national and local disaster management systems, and improved through post-disaster feedback. When these conditions are met, HAP can become a living, measurable, and learning capacity instrument at the hospital level.

5. Türkiye's Earthquake and Pandemic Experiences: Lessons for the Health System

Türkiye's recent experience offers two major sources of lessons for hospital disaster management: the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 6, 2023 Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquakes. The pandemic tested the resilience of the health system as a prolonged and widespread biological crisis. The 2023 earthquakes, by contrast, produced mass casualties in a short period, damage to health facilities, regional referral pressure, and logistical difficulties. These two experiences show that hospital disaster management must be adaptable to both sudden and prolonged crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the need for strong hospital preparedness in intensive care, isolation, infection control, and workforce continuity. During the pandemic, the postponement of routine health services, monitoring of chronic patients, management of elective procedures, and changes in health service utilization created significant problems. A study examining the impact

of COVID-19 on health care utilization in Türkiye shows that the pandemic produced important changes in access to and use of health services (Uğur et al., 2024). National guidelines used during the pandemic also aimed to regulate hospital operations together with infection control and service continuity (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2020a).

The pandemic experience also showed that digital health applications have a dual meaning for disaster management. Telehealth, remote monitoring, and digital records may support service continuity; however, these systems also create risks related to electricity, internet access, cybersecurity, and data backup. Studies indicating that COVID-19 accelerated digital transformation in health show that digital infrastructure became an indispensable part of service delivery during crises (Keesara et al., 2020). Digital resilience should therefore be an integral component of HAP.

The February 6, 2023 earthquakes demonstrated that the physical and functional resilience of hospitals should be evaluated together. In the affected provinces, health workers and their families were also affected by the disaster; transportation and shelter problems emerged; some health facilities were damaged; and regional patient load increased rapidly. Tayfur and colleagues assessed public health system resilience before and after the 2023 earthquakes through dimensions such as building stock, infrastructure, logistics, and institutional capacity (Tayfur et al., 2024a).

A study on medical response in Hatay shows that in the areas most heavily affected by the earthquakes, health service delivery was shaped not only by clinical capacity but also by damaged infrastructure, logistical support, mobile health services, and referral chains (Tayfur et al., 2024b). This finding indicates that hospital management during disasters should be considered not as the performance of a single institution but as the performance of a regional health network. The burden of hospitals that are damaged or exceed capacity must be balanced with other health facilities.

The pandemic and earthquake experiences also made the importance of flexible capacity visible. During the pandemic, it was necessary to increase intensive care beds, reorganize wards, and postpone elective services. During the earthquakes, field hospitals, mobile health units, ambulance referrals, and inter-provincial patient transfers came to the forefront. Flexible capacity does not mean only physical expansion; it also involves adapting staff to different duties and reallocating equipment.

These experiences further showed that the resilience of health workers cannot be separated from hospital resilience. During the pandemic, infection risk, long working hours, and burnout were prominent. During the earthquakes,

shelter, family safety, and transportation issues became critical. Health workers should therefore be considered not merely as personnel to be assigned, but as disaster actors who must be protected and supported.

When the pandemic and earthquake experiences are evaluated together, it becomes clear that hospital disaster management in Türkiye should be strengthened through an all-hazards approach. Earthquakes, epidemics, CBRN events, cyber disruptions, supply-chain crises, climate-related disasters, and mass migration may appear different, yet they generate similar hospital requirements: command systems, workforce continuity, patient flow, logistical support, information management, prioritization of critical services, and inter-institutional coordination (WHO, 2019).

The main lesson from these experiences is that hospital disaster management cannot be reduced to the response phase. Risk reduction, preparedness, service continuity, workforce support, data management, protection of vulnerable groups, and post-disaster learning are parts of the same system. The WHO service continuity handbook emphasizes that health facilities should plan to reduce service interruptions during public health emergencies (WHO, 2021). For Türkiye, this approach requires HAP, TAMP, TARAP, İRAP, UMKE, and SAKOM to be developed as complementary components of a learning system.

Table 2. Key Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2023 Earthquakes

Experience	Key problems	Lessons for hospital disaster management
COVID-19 pandemic	Intensive care capacity, infection control, personal protective equipment, workforce fatigue, continuity of routine services	Hospital management should be adaptable to prolonged crises and should strengthen workforce and supply-chain resilience.
February 6, 2023 earthquakes	Physical damage, regional referral pressure, mobile health services, logistical support, staff shelter and transportation	Regional health networks, functional continuity, and dynamic referral chains should be strengthened instead of relying only on single-hospital capacity.

Note. The table synthesizes the chapter discussion on pandemic and earthquake experiences.

6. Main Problems and Areas for Improvement in Hospital Disaster Management in Türkiye

The areas requiring improvement in hospital disaster management in Türkiye should not be viewed as isolated problems but as links in the same capacity chain. Although legislation, planning, and institutional instruments provide an important foundation, this foundation must be transformed into a functioning, measurable, and learning system in the field.

The first problem is that legal and planning infrastructure does not always translate into field-level implementation capacity with the same strength. HAP, TAMP, TARAP, İRAP, UMKE, and SAKOM provide an important institutional basis. Yet plans must be current, understandable, applicable, auditable, and tested through drills. Otherwise, they may become formal documents rather than instruments that facilitate decision-making during crises (Tang et al., 2014).

The second problem is that hospital resilience is often interpreted narrowly as building safety. In a country with high earthquake risk such as Türkiye, structural safety is indispensable. Yet if electricity, water, oxygen, medical gases, communication, laboratories, pharmacies, sterilization, and information systems do not function, a hospital may be physically intact but functionally inadequate. Structural, non-structural, and functional safety should therefore be evaluated together (WHO & PAHO, 2015).

The third problem is continuity of human resources. During disasters, health workers assume professional responsibilities while also being personally affected. Transportation difficulties, concerns about family safety, long working hours, shelter problems, and psychological strain may weaken service capacity. HAP should therefore explicitly define shift management, reserve staffing, staff accommodation, child and family support, psychosocial support, and worker safety (Labrague et al., 2018).

The fourth problem is the insufficient visibility of logistics and supply-chain resilience. During disasters and epidemics, demand for medicines, serum, oxygen, blood products, fuel, food, sterile materials, and personal protective equipment increases rapidly while transportation routes, warehouses, suppliers, and communication infrastructure may be damaged. Hospitals should therefore strengthen minimum self-sufficiency capacity for the first 72 hours, critical stock monitoring systems, and alternative procurement protocols (Ranney et al., 2020).

The fifth problem concerns the resilience of digital information systems. Patient records, bed and intensive care capacity, laboratory results, stock information, referral chains, and workforce planning have become increasingly

dependent on digital systems. Due to risks such as power outages, collapse of internet infrastructure, cyberattacks, and data loss, digital backup, manual recording procedures, alternative communication channels, and real-time capacity sharing should be connected to HAP (WHO, 2021).

The sixth problem is the regional referral chain and inter-institutional capacity sharing. In major disasters, some hospitals may be damaged, some may become inaccessible, and others may face patient loads far above their capacity. Disaster management should therefore be considered as the performance of a regional health service network rather than of individual hospitals. Common capacity screens, referral algorithms, ambulance management, and inter-provincial coordination protocols should be strengthened (Top et al., 2010).

The seventh problem is that vulnerable groups and new-generation health threats are not always made sufficiently visible in plans. Special evacuation, access, communication, and care scenarios should be prepared for older persons, children, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, chronic patients, dialysis patients, migrants, and individuals dependent on regular medication. Epidemics, extreme heat, floods, forest fires, CBRN events, cyber disruptions, and prolonged service interruptions should also be incorporated into plans through an all-hazards approach (UNDRR, 2015; WHO, 2019).

In conclusion, improving hospital disaster management in Türkiye depends on transforming the existing institutional architecture into an applied, measurable, and learning system. Physical resilience, human resources, logistics, digital infrastructure, regional referral, vulnerable groups, and multi-actor coordination are not separate fields; they are parts of the same service continuity chain (Kapucu & Van Wart, 2006).

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Hospital disaster management in Türkiye has developed significantly in recent years in terms of legislation, institutional structuring, planning, and coordination instruments. The architecture extending from Law No. 7269 and Law No. 5902 on AFAD to TAMP, TARAP, İRAP, HAP, UMKE, and SAKOM constitutes a comprehensive disaster management framework. The main conclusion of this chapter, however, is that the success of this architecture depends less on the number of plans and institutions than on its capacity to generate rapid decision-making, reliable information, sustainable services, effective referrals, adequate logistics, and protected human resources in the field.

This conclusion indicates that hospital disaster management should not be limited to periodic campaigns or temporary sensitivity that emerges only after

major disasters. When disaster preparedness becomes a permanent component of ordinary health management, plans become more current, staff become better prepared, inter-institutional coordination strengthens, and service continuity is better secured.

The first policy recommendation is to strengthen the link between HAP and İRAP. Each hospital plan should be prepared not only according to national templates but also in light of the province's earthquake, flood, landslide, fire, industrial accident, CBRN, epidemic, and climate-related risks. Local risk analyses should be translated into concrete hospital-level action plans (AFAD, 2025).

The second policy recommendation is to monitor the applicability of HAP through measurable indicators. The currency of the plan, staff awareness, realism of drills, functionality of evacuation routes, adequacy of critical stocks, digital backup capacity, and integration with the regional referral system should be evaluated regularly (WHO, 2011; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2021a).

The third policy recommendation is to evaluate hospital resilience through functional continuity. Building safety is indispensable; however, continuity of emergency departments, intensive care, operating rooms, dialysis, maternity services, blood services, infection control, basic laboratory services, generators, oxygen, water, communication, and medical gases should also be included in quality and audit indicators.

The fourth policy recommendation is to institutionalize more strongly the central role of health workers in disaster management. Staff training, disaster assignment, shift planning, psychosocial support, family safety, and staff accommodation should be strengthened as distinct headings within HAP.

The fifth policy recommendation is to address logistics and digital resilience together. Critical stocks should be monitored regularly, protocols should be established with alternative suppliers, continuity of oxygen and fuel should be guaranteed, digital systems should be backed up, and manual processes that can operate during power or internet outages should be defined (WHO, 2021).

The sixth policy recommendation is to make inter-institutional coordination continuous and measurable before disasters. The Ministry of Health, AFAD, provincial health directorates, municipalities, university hospitals, private hospitals, 112 emergency health services, UMKE, SAKOM, and civil society organizations should develop joint training, drill, and data-sharing mechanisms.

The seventh policy recommendation is to make vulnerable groups and new-generation health threats more visible within HAP. Special evacuation, access, communication, and care scenarios should be prepared for older persons, children, persons with disabilities, chronic patients, migrants, and individuals

dependent on regular medication. Epidemics, the climate crisis, CBRN events, cyber disruptions, and prolonged service interruptions should be incorporated into plans through an all-hazards approach (WHO, 2019).

Finally, post-disaster assessment and organizational learning should be made mandatory. After every major disaster, crisis, or drill, hospitals should report what worked well, which decisions were delayed, which services were disrupted, and which patient groups were affected more severely. When these reports are reflected in HAP updates, provincial health disaster plans, and national policy documents, disaster experiences can become institutional memory rather than temporary observations.

Overall, building disaster-resilient hospitals in Türkiye is not merely a matter of protecting health facilities. It is a responsibility to secure the right to health, public trust, public security, and health system resilience together. Hospital disaster management should therefore be treated as a permanent priority of health policy and public administration in Türkiye.

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Youth Unemployment and the NEET Problem: An Assessment of Organizational Talent Management and Workforce Strategies

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1. Introduction

Structural transformations in the global economy, digitalization, technological innovations, demographic changes, and the search for flexibility in labor markets are making the transition process from education to working life increasingly complex for young people. In this transformation process, youth unemployment and the problem of young people who are neither in education nor employment (NEET) have ceased to be a matter that can be evaluated solely within the framework of economic growth or unemployment rates; they have become a multi-dimensional structural problem of strategic importance in terms of social integration, effective use of human capital, sustainable development, and organizational competitiveness. The participation of the young population in productive economic activities is seen as a critical element for countries to transform their demographic advantages into economic value. However, the lack of experience, skill mismatch, education-employment disconnect, and gender-based inequalities that young people face when entering the labor market can lead to a significant portion of this potential remaining untapped.

Youth unemployment goes beyond delaying the start of a career; it leads to consequences such as income loss, skill erosion, social exclusion, and long-term economic vulnerability. Viewed from a broader perspective, the NEET concept includes not only unemployed youth but also those outside of education, training, and skill development processes, further highlighting the problem. On the other hand, NEET rates are considered one of the key indicators of how well young people integrate into the economic and social system. Indeed, higher NEET rates among young women highlight the impact of structural factors such as gender, care responsibilities, and inequalities of opportunity on youth policies.

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Türkiye possesses a significant demographic opportunity window compared to many developed countries in terms of its youth population, the effective utilization of this potential at the economic and organizational levels depends on the successful integration of young people into employment, education, and skill development processes. Türkiye's youth population structure has the potential to provide a significant competitive advantage with the right policies and strategic workforce planning. However, youth unemployment, high NEET rates, education-employment mismatch, and limited participation of young women in the labor market reveal that human capital is not being fully utilized. This situation necessitates the presence of both macro-social policies and small-scale organizational strategies to ensure that the advantage of a young population can be transformed into an effective asset for economic growth and sustainable development.

At this point, organizational talent management highlights the need to consider youth unemployment and the NEET problem as a strategic area shaping businesses and their future talent pools. Talent management encompasses the processes of identifying, developing, recruiting, and retaining individuals with the qualifications and skills that businesses need. Therefore, the integration of young people into the labor market in their early career stages requires a comprehensive approach to this issue. The level of alignment between the labor market expectations of young people graduating from the education system and the skills needed by organizations affects both personal employment success and the sustainable competitiveness of businesses.

This study examines the issue of youth unemployment and NEET in Türkiye within the framework of demographic structure, the education-employment relationship, gender, digital transformation, and labor market dynamics, while also aiming to evaluate it from the perspective of organizational talent management and labor market strategies. This study is based on a descriptive and comparative literature review that comprehensively examines current statistical data and theoretical sources obtained from Türkiye Statistical Institute (TUIK), Eurostat, OECD, and relevant national and international literature. Simultaneously, youth unemployment and the NEET problem are evaluated within the framework of secondary data analysis, considering their demographic, socioeconomic, and organizational dimensions.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Youth unemployment in Türkiye

Türkiye, due to its younger population structure compared to European Union countries, is in a demographic window opportunity. The high proportion of the

working-age population in the total population has presented Turkey with a strategic opportunity for many years in terms of economic growth, production capacity, and social development. This period, referred to in the literature as the "demographic opportunity window," emerges as a critical process that can accelerate economic development if the young and productive population is supported with the right education, skills, and employment policies (Mumcu & Çağlar, 2006; Yüce Dural, 2010). Türkiye's young population potential becomes remarkable, especially when compared to the aging population structure of the European Union. However, for this advantage to translate into sustainable development, it depends on the effective inclusion of the young population in the labor market (Yüce Dural & Göl, 2021).

Youth unemployment in Türkiye should not be considered solely as a problem of inability to find employment. It should be addressed as a multi-dimensional structural issue linked to the education system, skills matching, economic structure, and social policy areas. Indeed, the fact that unemployment rates among the 15–24 age group are higher than the overall unemployment rate indicates that young people face significant difficulties in the transition from education to employment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). Lack of experience, mismatch between the skills demanded by the labor market and the education system, economic fluctuations, and limited qualified job opportunities are among the factors that make it difficult for young people to enter the labor market (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). Therefore, this situation becomes particularly visible in the 20–24 age range. A significant aspect of the youth unemployment problem can also be said to be the position of young women in the labor market. The higher unemployment and NEET rates among young women compared to men highlight the reflection of gender-based structural inequalities in the youth labor market (Eurostat, 2024). Even with higher levels of education, limitations on women's participation in the workforce, care responsibilities, societal norms, and informal employment make it difficult for young women to integrate into the economic system (World Bank, 2022).

Furthermore, youth unemployment, along with economic growth, has significant and critical consequences in terms of social exclusion, income inequality, poverty risk, and brain drain. The migration of qualified young people abroad for better education and employment opportunities can lead to a loss of the country's human capital (Yüce Dural & Göl, 2021). Therefore, the problem of youth unemployment should be addressed not only from the perspective of reducing existing unemployment but also from the perspective of equipping young people with future-oriented skills, preparing them for digital

transformation processes, and directing them towards sustainable employment areas (OECD, 2023).

In conclusion, reducing youth unemployment is a strategic priority for Türkiye to transform its young population advantage into a development force. In this context, strengthening the education-employment fit, developing vocational training systems, expanding active labor market policies, increasing entrepreneurship support and organizational talent management practices are of great importance (ILO, 2022; OECD, 2023).

2.2. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Türkiye

The integration of young people into the labor market is one of the top priorities for countries in terms of sustainable development, social cohesion, and economic productivity. However, in recent years, discussions on youth unemployment have gone beyond focusing on the number and rate of unemployed young people; the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) concept, which encompasses young people who are outside of all education, employment, and skills development processes, has become a more central indicator. The NEET concept offers a more comprehensive framework than youth unemployment indicators, as it assesses the extent to which young people are involved in the education system, skills development mechanisms, and social productivity, in addition to their unemployment status (OECD, 2024). Therefore, NEET rates are now considered a critical indicator in evaluating the disengagement of young people from the economic system, the risk of social exclusion, and future human capital loss.

The NEET concept was first developed in the United Kingdom in the 1990s to define young people who are neither in education nor employment after compulsory education, and later became widely used in the social policy literature of the European Union (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Adopted by European Union institutions, Eurostat, the OECD, and the International Labour Organization (ILO), this concept has become an important tool, particularly for analyzing the vulnerabilities of young people in the transition from education to employment (OECD, 2024). According to the ILO's 2025 assessment, approximately 262 million young people worldwide, or one in four, are neither in education nor employment. This situation reveals that the NEET problem has become a structural issue on a global scale. The high NEET rates globally indicate that the human capital of young people is not being effectively utilized. World Bank data also shows that NEET rates are particularly higher in low- and middle-income countries, and that variables such as gender, income inequality, regional

development disparities, and the quality of the education system significantly affect these rates. Young women, in particular, are represented at higher rates in the NEET category due to care work, early marriage, societal norms, and structural inequalities in the labor market (World Bank, 2022).

Eurofound's foundational work on the NEET literature reveals that the NEET group does not exhibit a homogeneous structure; it consists of different subcategories such as re-enters, short-term unemployed, long-term unemployed, those unable to participate in the labor market due to illness or disability, those outside the labor force due to family and care responsibilities, discouraged youth, and other NEET groups (Eurofound, 2012). This classification shows that uniform policy interventions for NEET youth may be insufficient and that multi-layered social policy tools should be developed according to the needs of different subgroups. Eurofound's current studies on young people in the post-pandemic period show that young people are affected by labor market crises not only in terms of job loss but also in terms of financial insecurity, life satisfaction, and psychosocial well-being (Eurofound, 2021). At the same time, assessments from 2024 indicate that although a recovery in youth employment and a decline in NEET rates are observed at the EU level, the vulnerability of young people in the transition from education to employment continues, and active labor market policies such as the Youth Guarantee retain their importance (Eurofound, 2024).

From Türkiye's perspective, while the relatively high youth population presents a significant demographic opportunity, it is noteworthy that NEET rates are above the OECD and European averages. According to OECD reports on the transition from education to work, Türkiye is among the countries with higher youth NEET rates compared to many other OECD countries, and this rate is particularly pronounced among young women. Türkiye Statistical Institute (TUIK) data also reveals that young women in Türkiye are in a more vulnerable position compared to men in terms of both labor force participation and NEET indicators. This situation shows that the NEET problem in Türkiye is not only unemployment but also a structural issue related to education-employment transition mechanisms, gender roles, care responsibilities, and skills mismatch.

Economically, high NEET rates mean underutilized human capital, low productivity, dependence on social assistance, and long-term growth loss; socially, they can increase the risks of poverty, social exclusion, involvement in criminal economies, and psychosocial vulnerability (Kolev & Saget, 2005). Therefore, solving the NEET problem in Türkiye should not be limited solely to job creation policies; it should be supported by strengthening the education-employment match, skills transformation programs for young people, incentives

for women's employment, career guidance, active labor market policies, and organizational talent management strategies.

2.3. Organizational talent management and workforce strategies

Youth unemployment and the NEET problem should not only be addressed at the macro level of social policy and the labor market, but also considered as a strategic issue directly affecting organizations' future human resource planning. In the talent management literature, the concept is considered as the process of identifying critical positions for an organization to achieve its strategic goals, developing and retaining high-potential employees suitable for these positions (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, and Schuler (2017) emphasize that studies in the field of talent management have developed along two main axes: the management of high-performing and high-potential employees and the identification of strategic positions in organizations. In this context, the young workforce, especially in the early career stages, is an important resource for organizations in terms of forming their future talent pool.

While traditional human resources management focuses more on the selection, training, and compensation of current employees, strategic talent management attempts to foresee the skills and competencies that an organization will need in the future. According to Cappelli (2008), one of the fundamental problems in talent management is that organizations sometimes face a talent shortage and sometimes a talent surplus. Therefore, contemporary talent management should encompass not only recruitment and retention of employees, but also processes such as demand forecasting, internal talent development, career paths, and flexible workforce planning.

High rates of youth unemployment and NEETs represent a significant structural risk area that narrows the talent pool of organizations. Young people who have never entered the labor market or who have dropped out of education face a risk of skill loss, decreased self-confidence, and disengagement from the labor market over time. This situation increases the difficulty for businesses in finding qualified candidates and deepens the problem of skills mismatch in recruitment processes. The ILO defines skills mismatch as the difference between the skills demanded by employers and the skills possessed by individuals, emphasizing that this mismatch makes it difficult for young people to transition to employment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2025). Therefore, organizations' strategies for the young workforce should not be limited to the recruitment phase alone. University-industry collaborations, internship and on-the-job training programs, mentoring, apprenticeship models, graduate programs, digital skills training, and reskilling practices can be considered important tools

in facilitating the transition of young people to the labor market. The OECD states that vocational training and work-based learning practices can be effective in reducing youth unemployment and NEET rates; particularly in Türkiye, work experience significantly contributes to graduate employment (OECD, 2024).

The limitations on young women's participation in the labor market should also be considered from a talent management perspective. The fact that NEET rates are higher among women than men necessitates that organizations address diversity and inclusion policies not only as an ethical responsibility but also as an integral part of strategic talent management. Flexible work models, human resources practices that take caregiving responsibilities into account, early career programs for women, and mentoring mechanisms can positively influence the participation of young women in the organizational talent pool.

2.4. Structural dynamics of youth unemployment and the NEET problem

Youth unemployment and the NEET problem are too multifaceted to be explained solely by individual shortcomings or temporary economic fluctuations. The employment problems faced by young people in today's labor markets are shaped by numerous structural factors, including the alignment of the education system with labor market demands, technological transformation, gender roles, regional development disparities, and increasingly prevalent precarious forms of employment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024). Therefore, this section emphasizes the need for a holistic assessment of the structural dynamics of youth unemployment and the NEET phenomenon.

One of the key determinants of youth unemployment is the mismatch between education systems and the skills demanded by labor markets. Education-employment mismatch refers to a situation where the knowledge, skills, and competencies possessed by individuals do not match the expectations of employers (ILO, 2025). In particular, despite increasing participation rates in higher education, the skills gap faced by graduates in the labor market can increase unemployment rates among young people. The OECD (2024) emphasizes that in many countries, despite rising levels of formal education, young people struggle to transition to the labor market due to deficiencies in digital literacy, problem-solving, communication, and sectoral skills. In Türkiye, the increase in unemployment among university graduates shows that quantitative education expansion alone is insufficient; the quality of education, applied learning, and vocational guidance processes need to be strengthened. Digitalization, automation, artificial intelligence, and the platform economy are

rapidly transforming the structure of labor markets. The World Economic Forum (WEF, 2023) predicts that many traditional jobs will be transformed or disappear in the coming years; Conversely, this indicates an increased demand for a workforce with digital skills, data analytics, technology management, and adaptive learning capabilities. This transformation presents both opportunities and risks for young people. While young people with digital skills can gain an advantage in the new economy, those who fail to make the necessary transformation may be left out of the labor market. In particular, digital inequalities, differences in access to technology, and a lack of skills transformation can lead some young groups to become NEET (OECD, 2024). In countries with a high young population like Türkiye, investments in digital skills are of strategic importance not only for economic competitiveness but also for reducing youth unemployment.

Youth unemployment and NEET rates show significant differences in a gender context. Global and national data reveal that young women have higher NEET rates than men (World Bank, 2022). This indicates that women face structural barriers not only in finding employment but also in transitioning to the workforce after education. Care work responsibilities, early marriage, societal norms, sectoral segregation, and informality are the main factors limiting young women's participation in the labor market. In Türkiye, the fact that the labor force participation rates of young women lag significantly behind those of men reinforces the gender-based nature of the NEET problem. In this context, inclusive employment policies, care support, and equal opportunity mechanisms for young women are of critical importance. Youth unemployment is not homogeneously distributed across countries; it varies depending on factors such as regional development levels, sectoral structure, and economic diversity. Youth unemployment may be higher in rural areas, less industrialized regions, or areas with limited investment (OECD, 2024). In Türkiye, regional development disparities create significant differences in employment opportunities, educational possibilities, and sectoral diversity along the east-west axis. Furthermore, opportunities offered to young people differ between the service, technology, and industrial sectors. Young people in low-skill sectors face more precarious work, while skills mismatch becomes more pronounced in high-skill sectors.

In recent years, precarity in labor markets, temporary contracts, part-time work, platform economy, and freelance work have become widespread among young people. According to Standing (2011), the precariat represents a new social class characterized by unstable income, limited social security, and low predictability. Young people frequently enter the labor market in these precarious

areas; this poses risks in the long term in terms of career development, social security, and economic independence. While flexible work may offer opportunities for some young people, in most cases it creates structural vulnerability due to low wages, limited career advancement, and lack of social protection (ILO, 2022). In Türkiye, the concentration of young people in informal, temporary, or low-protection jobs brings to the forefront not only the issue of youth unemployment but also the problem of "skilled employment."

3. General Overview of the Labor Market in Türkiye

Youth unemployment and the NEET problem in Türkiye are structural phenomena that must be evaluated in conjunction with the demographic weight of the young population and their participation in the labor market. According to the Address-Based Population Registration System results, as of the end of 2025, while Türkiye's total population will be approximately 86.9 million people, the youth population in the 15-24 age group will be approximately 12.7 million people, constituting approximately 14.6% of the total population (PopulationPyramid.net, 2025). 51.2% of this young population are male and 48.8% are female. According to the United Nations' definition of youth population based on the 15-24 age group, the share of the youth population in Türkiye's total population decreased from 20.8% in 1950 to 14.9% in 2024 (Türkiye Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2025). This situation shows that while Türkiye still has a young population potential, it is entering a gradual aging process demographically. In social policies aimed at young people, target age groups can vary, such as 15–24, 18–24, or 15–29 years. This variation is considered in light of both the duration of compulsory education and the fact that the working age starts at 15. Indeed, while the ILO defines youth unemployment generally as the young population not employed in a gainful employment and actively seeking work, this age range can vary according to the institutional and legal regulations of different countries (İzgi, 2012). According to Türkiye Statistical Institute (TUIK) data, the rate of young people who are neither in education nor employment increased from 22.5% in 2023 to 22.9% in 2024. During the same period, this rate increased from 15.6% to 16.2% for young men and from 29.8% to 30.1% for young women (TUIK, 2025). These data show that in Türkiye, not only the numerical size of the young population but also the extent to which this population is included in education, employment, and labor force participation processes is critical. The fact that NEET rates are significantly higher among young women compared to men highlights the need to address youth unemployment and the NEET problem through the lenses of gender, education-employment transition, and social policy.

3.1. Demographic structure and demographic opportunity window of the young population in Türkiye

To accurately assess the structural dimensions of youth unemployment and NEET issues in Türkiye, it is first necessary to analyze the country's demographic structure, the capacity of its young population, and the opportunities offered by the working-age population.

Figure 1. Population Pyramid of Türkiye According to Age and Gender Distribution in 2025



Source: PopulationPyramid.net, 2025

Figure 1 shows Türkiye's population pyramid for 2025, revealing the country's demographic structure in terms of age and gender. The overall structure of the pyramid indicates that Türkiye still has a significant working-age population and maintains its young population potential. The population density, particularly in the 15–64 age range, suggests that Türkiye continues to have a significant demographic opportunity window in terms of economic growth, productivity, and labor supply. However, the relative narrowing observed in the lower age groups reflects a declining trend in fertility rates, while the increasing density in the upper age groups indicates that the population is gradually entering an aging

process. The higher representation of women compared to men in older age groups can be attributed to the longer average life expectancy of women. This demographic structure shows that Türkiye can maintain its advantage of a young and dynamic population in the short term; however, in the long term, aging trends may create new policy requirements in terms of the labor market, social security systems, and economic sustainability. Therefore, effectively utilizing the potential of the existing young population is of strategic importance in terms of reducing youth unemployment and NEET rates, strengthening the education-employment transition, and developing organizational talent management strategies.

3.1.1. Labor force data by gender in Türkiye

To better assess the issue of youth unemployment and NEETs in Türkiye, it is first necessary to examine the overall labor market from a gender perspective. In this context, Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of employment, unemployment, and labor force participation rates for women, men, and the general population in Türkiye during the period 2016–2025.

While a gradual improvement trend is observed in general employment and labor force participation indicators in the Türkiye labor market between 2016 and 2025, gender-based structural disparities are clearly evident. The overall employment rate increased from 50.6% in 2016 to 55% in 2025; during the same period, the unemployment rate decreased from 11.1% to 8.5%, and the labor force participation rate increased from 57% to 60.1%. These data indicate a recovery in the Türkiye labor market, particularly in the post-pandemic period. However, the decline in the overall employment rate to 47.5% and the decrease in labor force participation to 54.9% in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 clearly demonstrates the fragile effect of economic crises on the labor market.

Table 1. Labor Force Data by Gender in Türkiye (%) (2016-2025)

Years	Gender	Employment Rate %	Unemployment Rate %	Labor Force Participation Rate %
2016	Male	65,1	9,6	72
2017		65,6	9,4	72,5
2018		65,7	9,5	72,7
2019		63,1	12,4	72
2020		59,8	12,3	68,2
2021		62,8	10,7	70,3
2022		65	8,9	71,4
2023		65,7	7,7	71,2

2024	Female	66,9	7,1	72
2025		66,4	6,8	71,3
2016		28	13,7	32,5
2017		28,9	14,1	33,6
2018		29,4	13,9	34,2
2019		28,7	16,5	34,4
2020		26,3	15	30,9
2021		28	14,7	32,8
2022		30,4	13,4	35,1
2023		31,3	12,6	35,8
2024		32,5	11,8	36,8
2025		32,1	11,3	36,2
2016	Overall	50,6	11,1	57
2017		51,5	11,1	58
2018		52	11,2	58,5
2019		50,3	14	58,5
2020		47,5	13,4	54,9
2021		50,2	12,2	57,2
2022		52,9	10,7	59,2
2023		53,8	9,6	59,5
2024		55,2	8,9	60,6
2025		55	8,5	60,1

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2026). Central Distribution System (MEDAS)

When the table is analyzed by gender, it is seen that men's position in the labor market is significantly stronger than women's. While the employment rate for men remained above 60% throughout the period, it reached 66.4% in 2025. In contrast, the employment rate for women was only 32.1% in the same year. Similarly, while the labor force participation rate for men was 71.3% in 2025, it remained at 36.2% for women. This difference, almost twofold, shows that structural barriers to women's participation in the labor market in Türkiye persist. Higher levels of unemployment for women are also noticeable compared to men throughout the period. In 2025, the unemployment rate for men was 6.8%, while the unemployment rate for women was 11.3%.

The data in the table show that despite quantitative improvements in the labor market in Türkiye, gender-based inequalities remain structural. Particularly when considering the low labor force participation rates of women and the high rates of young women with negative employment obligations (NEET), it is evident that a significant portion of women remain outside the economic system. Sustainable labor market strategies in Türkiye emphasize the need for increased care policies, flexible but secure work models, education-employment transition mechanisms,

and structural reforms that strengthen gender equality, in addition to overall employment growth. Otherwise, the overall improvement in the labor market may not have a sufficient impact on sustainable development due to the limited participation of women, who constitute a significant portion of potential human capital.

3.1.2. Gender-based unemployment rates among young people

In Türkiye, for the demographic potential of the young population to be transformed into economic and social value, it is necessary to analyze the extent and conditions under which young people participate in the labor market. In this context, Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of unemployment rates among young people aged 15-19 and 20-24 in Türkiye during the 2016–2025 period, based on gender.

Table 2. Youth Unemployment Rates - Gender-Based (%) (2016-2025)

Years	Male		Female		Overall	
	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24
2016	15,7	18,3	17,2	26,8	16,2	21,5
2017	16,5	18,7	18,3	29,5	17	22,8
2018	15,7	18,8	20,6	27,3	17,1	22
2019	19,9	23,9	23,8	33,3	21,1	27,6
2020	20,2	23,9	23,5	32,6	21,1	27,1
2021	16,7	20,7	22,4	30,8	18,3	24,5
2022	13,9	17,7	20,9	26,7	15,9	21,1
2023	12,8	15,2	19,2	24,7	14,6	18,8
2024	11,7	14	18,8	23,9	13,8	17,7
2025	10,7	12,4	19,1	23,4	13,1	16,7

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2026). Central Distribution System (MEDAS)

Table 2 shows that youth unemployment rates in Türkiye between 2016 and 2025 exhibit significant differences across both age groups and genders. In terms of general trends, it is understood that youth unemployment rates in the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups increased significantly, particularly during the 2019-2020 period, before gradually declining. The overall youth unemployment rate decreased from 16.2% in 2016 to 13.1% in 2025 for the 15-19 age group, and from 21.5% to 16.7% for the 20-24 age group during the same period. This indicates a relatively improving trend in youth unemployment over the long term,

despite cyclical economic fluctuations. However, the high rates observed in both age groups, particularly in 2019 and 2020, reveal that young people are more vulnerable to economic crises and labor market contractions.

When evaluated by age groups, it is observed that the unemployment rates of young people aged 20–24 are higher throughout the period compared to the 15–19 age group. This indicates that the transition process from education to the labor market is particularly problematic in the 20–24 age range. Since the 20–24 age group mostly represents the post-secondary education, higher education, or early career transition period, the high unemployment rates in this age group can be attributed to structural problems such as education-employment mismatch, lack of experience, and difficulty finding initial employment. Therefore, youth unemployment is not only a problem of not being able to find a job; it is also an indicator directly linked to the effectiveness of school-to-work transition mechanisms.

Gender-based analysis clearly shows that young women are in a more disadvantaged position than men in the labor market. Throughout the period, female youth unemployment rates have been higher than male rates in both the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups. This difference is particularly pronounced in the 20–24 age group. For example, in 2025, the unemployment rate for men aged 20–24 was 12.4%, while for women it was 23.4%. Similarly, in the 15–19 age group, the unemployment rate for men was 10.7%, while for women it was 19.1%. These data indicate that young women face higher barriers to entry into the labor market after education. This difference can be attributed to multifaceted factors such as gender roles, care responsibilities, sectoral disparities, lack of work experience, and structural inequalities in the labor market.

The table also reveals that despite improvements in youth female unemployment, the gender gap remains structural. While the unemployment rate for women aged 20-24 decreased from 29.5% in 2017 to 23.4% in 2025, it is still significantly higher than that for men. This demonstrates that quantitative improvement alone does not equate to an egalitarian labor market. Therefore, combating youth unemployment requires not only overall employment growth but also targeted strategies that support the participation and employment transition of young women in the workforce.

In conclusion, the table shows that youth unemployment in Türkiye has a multidimensional structure closely related to age, gender, and education-employment transition processes. The higher unemployment rates, particularly among the 20-24 age group and young women, highlight the need to address the youth unemployment problem not only through economic growth but also through skills matching, career entry mechanisms, education policies, and

inclusive labor market strategies. Within this framework, internships, on-the-job training, skills development, and early career support that facilitate the transition of young people to productive employment can play a decisive role in reducing youth unemployment in the long term.

3.1.3. Youth employment rates

To better understand the structural dimensions of youth unemployment, it is crucial to examine the unemployment landscape of the youth population based on age groups and gender. Accordingly, Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of unemployment rates for young people aged 15-19 and 20-24 in Turkey during the 2016–2025 period, broken down by gender, gender, and overall, thus highlighting the demographic differences in youth unemployment.

Table 3. Youth Unemployment Rates, Gender-Based (%) (2016-2025)

Years	Male		Female		Overall	
	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24
2016	31,3	60,9	15,6	31,5	23,6	46
2017	31,9	61,1	14,8	31,8	23,7	46,3
2018	33,4	61,4	14,2	33	24,1	47,1
2019	31	57,5	14	31,6	22,8	44,4
2020	26,2	52,2	10,5	28	18,6	40,2
2021	28,7	57,8	11,3	31,1	20,3	44,5
2022	32,2	62,5	12,4	34	22,7	48,4
2023	35,6	64	14,3	37	25,3	50,8
2024	39,2	65,9	16,2	37,7	28,1	52,2
2025	41	67	15,9	38,5	29,1	53,1

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2026). Central Distribution System (MEDAS)

Table 3 shows that youth employment rates in Türkiye between 2016 and 2025 exhibit significant differences based on age groups and gender, and are also significantly affected by seasonal economic conditions. Overall, it is understood that youth employment rates declined significantly in 2020 for both the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups, followed by a gradual recovery. The overall youth employment rate increased from 23.6% in 2016 to 29.1% in 2025 for the 15-19 age group, and from 46.0% to 53.1% for the 20-24 age group. While this table indicates an upward trend in youth participation in employment in the long term, it also reveals that youth employment is more vulnerable, particularly during periods of crisis. Indeed, the decline observed in both age groups in 2020 shows that young

people are among the groups most quickly affected by fluctuations in the labor market.

When examined by age group, it is observed that the employment rates of young people aged 20-24 are significantly higher than those of the 15-19 age group throughout the period. This is consistent with the increasing transition from education to the labor market as age increases. It is expected that employment rates would be lower in the 15-19 age group, as a significant portion of individuals remain in education. In contrast, the rates in the 20-24 age group are a more critical indicator of the level of integration of young people into the labor market after education. However, even in this age group, the employment rate remains at 53.1%, suggesting that approximately half of young people remain outside of employment and that the transition process from school to work still needs improvement.

A gender-based assessment reveals one of the most significant structural differences in youth employment. Throughout the period, employment rates for young men have remained considerably higher than those for young women. In 2025, the employment rate for men was 41% in the 15-19 age group and 67% in the 20-24 age group, while for women these rates were 15.9% and 38.5%, respectively. The difference of approximately 28.5 percentage points, particularly in the 20-24 age group, indicates that young women have a more limited access to employment after education compared to men. This suggests that multi-dimensional structural factors such as care responsibilities, societal norms, sectoral disparities, informality, and inequalities of opportunity may be influential in young women's transition to the labor market.

While there has been a noticeable increase in the employment of young women, the structural nature of the gender gap persists. For example, the employment rate for women aged 20-24 increased from 31.5% in 2016 to 38.5% in 2025. Although this increase is a positive development, when compared to the 67.0% rate for men in the same age group, it is evident that the employment capacity of young women remains significantly limited. Therefore, quantitative improvement does not mean that the structural difference between genders has disappeared.

When the table is evaluated as a whole, it is understood that while there is a long-term recovery trend in youth employment rates in Türkiye, young people have differing employment experiences, especially based on age and gender. The higher employment rates for men and the more limited rates for women indicate the need for inclusive and targeted strategies in the youth labor market. In particular, education-employment links, skills development programs, career initiation mechanisms, and sustainable work opportunities that support the

transition of young women into employment are important for balancing the youth employment structure.

3.1.4. Youth unemployment by education level (15-24)

To better understand the structural dynamics of youth unemployment, it is necessary to examine not only age and gender differences, but also labor market experiences related to education level. Accordingly, Table 4 presents a comparative analysis of unemployment rates among 15-24 year-olds in Turkey based on education level and gender during the 2016-2025 period, providing an opportunity to evaluate the effects of the education-employment relationship and skills mismatch on youth unemployment. Table 4 shows that youth unemployment rates among 15-24 year-olds in Türkiye differ significantly according to education level during the 2016-2025 period, and that the labor market transition experience becomes more complex as the education level increases. From a general trend perspective, it is understood that youth unemployment is significant not only among individuals with low education levels, but also among secondary and higher education graduates. The relatively high unemployment rates among general high school, vocational high school, and higher education graduates in many years indicate that youth unemployment in Turkey is not only a problem of access to education; This also suggests that there is a problem of education-employment mismatch and skills mismatch.

Table 4. Youth Unemployment Rates by Education Level, 15-24 (%) (2016-2025)

Years	Gender	Non-literate	Primary Education	General Secondary School / Vocational or Technical Secondary School	General High School	Vocational High School Equivalent	Higher Education
2016	Male	2,1	10,1	-	29,6	27	35,4
	Female	24,5	19,1	-	18,8	17,2	25,2
	Overall	13,4	16,5	-	22,8	21	30,8
2017	Male	7,6	14,9	-	29,2	28,4	41,2
	Female	15,3	13,7	-	21,5	18,2	25,4
	Overall	12,1	14,1	-	24,4	21,8	34,4
2018	Male	10,7	8,3	-	26,7	29,2	35,5
	Female	12,9	17,2	-	21,6	16,8	24,3
	Overall	12	14,7	-	23,5	21,3	30,6

2019	Male	21,5	22,8	-	32,5	34,5	40,1
	Female	20,5	22,5	-	26,6	23	29,8
	Overall	20,9	22,6	-	28,9	27,4	35,6
2020	Male	11	12,1	-	29,9	32,8	39,8
	Female	17,3	25,6	-	26,3	21,1	30,3
	Overall	14,3	21,6	-	27,6	25,2	35,8
2021	Male	14,5	28,9	18,5	28	28,4	37,7
	Female	23,9	18,6	17,2	20,7	18,3	26,3
	Overall	21	21,3	17,5	23,3	21,5	33,1
2022	Male	12,4	18,1	16,9	26,9	25,4	31,3
	Female	16	17,8	13,8	16,9	16,1	23,9
	Overall	14,9	17,9	14,5	20,3	19,1	28,2
2023	Male	9,2	16	14,7	24,6	24,2	28,9
	Female	7,3	16,4	12,1	16,5	13,2	19,8
	Overall	7,7	16,3	12,7	19,4	16,8	25,1
2024	Male	3,3	10,1	12,7	23,2	23,7	29,3
	Female	15,6	14,6	10,9	15,2	11,7	18,5
	Overall	13,3	13,3	11,4	18	15,5	24,9
2025	Male	18,6	17	13,8	24,8	21,8	26,9
	Female	12,5	12,2	10,3	13,6	9,3	18,4
	Overall	14,5	13,5	11,1	17,7	13,1	23,5

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2026). Central Distribution System (MEDAS)

The data presents striking findings regarding higher education graduates. In the general category, the unemployment rate among young higher education graduates decreased from 30.8% in 2016 to 23.5% in 2025. While this decrease indicates a relatively positive trend, the fact that unemployment rates among higher education graduates have remained high compared to some other educational groups for many years shows that higher education alone does not directly guarantee employment. The fact that the rates among female higher education graduates have consistently been higher than those of men for many years reveals that even with higher levels of education, young women may face additional structural barriers to entering the labor market. This situation demonstrates the need to consider graduate unemployment, skills mismatch, and gender-based disparities in the labor market together.

The unemployment rates observed between general high school graduates and vocational school graduates also offer important structural clues. While

vocational education is expected to facilitate a direct transition to the labor market, data shows that vocational school graduates can also face high unemployment rates during certain periods. This situation highlights the importance of factors such as the quality of vocational education, its alignment with sector demands, and the transfer of practical skills. Similarly, high unemployment rates among general high school graduates suggest that young people may be in a more vulnerable position when entering the labor market without sufficient skills specialization in the post-high school period.

The fact that unemployment rates have been quite high in some years among groups with low levels of education indicates that young people with limited basic education may experience greater difficulties in accessing qualified employment. However, it should also be considered that some young people with low levels of education may be employed in informal, temporary, or low-skill jobs. Therefore, not only the open unemployment rate but also the quality of employment is important.

When the gender dimension is examined, it is seen that female youth unemployment is higher than male unemployment at almost all education levels. Particularly at the high school and higher education levels, the higher rates among women suggest that women may face more obstacles than men in converting their educational investments into employment. This situation shows that even with increased education levels, gender-based labor market disparities do not completely disappear.

3.1.5. In Türkiye, young people who are neither employed nor in education or training (15-24 NEET) according to employment status

NEET rates are an important indicator for a more holistic assessment of the level of integration of young people into education, employment, and skills systems. In this context, Table 5 presents a comparative analysis of NEET rates among young people in Türkiye based on age and gender for the period 2016–2025, revealing areas of structural vulnerability.

Table 5. 15-24 NEET Rates (%) (2016-2025)

Years	Overall		Male		Female	
	15-19	15-24	15-19	15-24	15-19	15-24
2016	16,4	23,9	11,5	14,5	21,6	33,5
2017	16,8	24,2	12,0	14,6	22,0	34,0
2018	17,3	24,4	12,9	15,6	22,1	33,5

2019	18,1	26,0	14,4	18,3	22,0	34,0
2020	19,7	28,3	16,2	21,2	23,5	35,7
2021	16,9	24,8	13,1	17,5	21,0	32,4
2022	16,9	24,1	12,3	16,3	21,8	32,2
2023	16,1	22,4	12,5	15,6	19,9	29,7
2024	17,4	22,9	14,0	16,3	20,9	30,0
2025	18,5	23,2	14,3	16,3	23,1	30,7

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2026). Central Distribution System (MEDAS)

Table 5 reveals that the rates of young people who are neither in education nor employment in Türkiye show significant structural differences based on age and gender during the 2016–2025 period. Overall, the NEET rate for the 15–24 age group increased from 23.9% in 2016 to 28.3% in 2020, followed by a gradual decrease to 23.2% in 2025. This trend indicates that the risk of young people simultaneously disengaging from both the education and employment systems increased, particularly in 2020, followed by a relative recovery in subsequent years. However, the fact that the rate is still close to the 2016 level in 2025 suggests that the NEET problem is not a temporary but a structural youth issue.

When examined by age group, NEET rates are systematically higher in the 15–24 age group compared to the 15–19 age group. This indicates that young people, especially those transitioning from education to the labor market, experience greater vulnerability. Since the 15–19 age group largely participates in compulsory and secondary education, lower rates in this age group can be considered an expected result. However, the high rates in the 15–24 age group reveal that a significant portion of young people are unable to effectively participate in either employment or further education and training processes after graduation. This situation, beyond youth unemployment, may indicate the need for more effective school-to-work transition mechanisms, skills development processes, and social integration tools.

Gender-based assessment constitutes one of the most striking structural differences in the table. Throughout the period, NEET rates among young women have been significantly higher than those among men. For example, in 2025, the NEET rate for men aged 15-24 was 16.3%, while for women it was 30.7%. Similarly, although the rate for women decreased from 33.5% in 2016 to 30.7% in 2025, it remains at a high level. This indicates that young women may face

greater structural barriers to adapting to the education and employment systems compared to men. The high NEET rates among women should be evaluated in light of multifaceted factors such as care responsibilities, gender roles, early marriage, educational dropout, limited labor force participation, and inequalities of opportunity.

Although NEET rates are lower among young men compared to women, periodic increases are noteworthy. In particular, the rise in the NEET rate to 21.2% in the 15-24 age group for men in 2020 demonstrates that economic fluctuations and labor market contractions can have significant effects on young men as well. However, recovery has been faster for men; the rate decreased to 16.3% in 2025. In contrast, the decrease has been more limited for women, and the gender difference has remained structural.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the problem of youth unemployment and the issue of young people who are neither in education nor employment in Türkiye from a multidimensional perspective, considering demographic structure, the education-employment relationship, gender, structural labor force dynamics, and organizational talent management. The findings show that Türkiye's young population potential offers a significant demographic advantage; however, the transformation of this potential into economic productivity, sustainable employment, and strategic human capital capacity is limited by various structural obstacles. Although Türkiye has a younger population structure compared to many developed economies, the transformation of this advantage into a long-term development force depends on the effective inclusion of young people in education, skills development, and employment processes.

The Türkiye Statistical Institute data evaluated within the framework of the research reveals that youth unemployment and NEET rates are affected not only by economic fluctuations but also by education-employment mismatch, gender differences, regional inequalities, and structural characteristics of the labor market. Unemployment rates, particularly higher in the 20-24 age group, indicate that young people experience significant difficulties in their transition from education to working life. This suggests a correlation between the job creation capacity and the alignment of young people's skills with the expectations of the labor market. The observed differences in youth unemployment based on education level demonstrate that formal education, including higher education, alone does not guarantee employment; the quality of the education system, its mechanisms for developing practical skills, and its integration with sector demands are crucial factors.

One of the most striking findings of the study is that young women are in a more vulnerable position in the labor market. Higher unemployment and NEET rates

among women reveal that the youth issue should be evaluated not only from an age-based perspective but also from a gender perspective. The structural obstacles that young women face in the transition from education to employment can prevent a significant portion of Türkiye's existing human capital from being fully integrated into the economic system. In this context, inclusive mechanisms supporting the participation of young women in the workforce are of strategic importance not only in terms of social equality but also in terms of national labor productivity.

NEET rates point to a broader area of exclusion beyond youth unemployment. Young people with NEET status are not only unemployed; they also face a higher risk of long-term social exclusion and economic dependence due to their exclusion from education, training, and skills development processes. This situation necessitates addressing the problem of youth unemployment not only through employment policies but also through measures to prevent dropout from education, skills development programs, vocational guidance, and active labor market tools.

The organizational dimension of the study shows that youth unemployment and the NEET problem are not only a macro-social policy issue but also a strategic workforce problem that directly affects the future talent pool of organizations. In today's working life, where digitalization, automation, and skills transformation are accelerating, the sustainable competitive advantage of organizations depends not only on the management of current employees but also on supporting the young population, who will form the workforce of the future, with the right skills at an early age. In this context, organizational talent management can be strengthened through internship programs that facilitate the transition of young people to the workforce, on-the-job learning models, skill-oriented recruitment processes, career development mechanisms, and inclusive human resources strategies.

In conclusion, youth unemployment and NEET issues in Türkiye represent a strategic structural problem that transcends economic growth indicators; they are significant in terms of the quality of human capital, social cohesion, sustainable development, and organizational productivity. Effectively leveraging Türkiye's demographic opportunity window requires strengthening the transition of young people from education to employment, reducing skills mismatches, developing inclusive mechanisms to support the participation of young women in the workforce, and disseminating a strategic talent management approach at the organizational level. Therefore, addressing youth unemployment and NEET issues requires an integrated approach where public policies, education system reforms, private sector workforce strategies, and organizational talent management practices complement each other.

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A History of Theoretical Archaeology and Its Reflections in Turkish Archaeology

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INTRODUCTION

Debates surrounding archaeology have long since exceeded the discipline's dictionary definition, and contemporary discussions have increasingly converged on the question of theoretical foundations. As the field has passed through successive intellectual and political transformations, these debates have acquired new dimensions that go well beyond questions of technique or method. The transformation archaeology has undergone is not merely methodological but fundamentally epistemological: every major theoretical orientation that has emerged across the discipline's history has simultaneously challenged the conceptual framework that preceded it, while reshaping what counts as archaeological data, how archaeological data are related to evidence, and what forms of knowledge about the past are considered legitimate.

Archaeology has been shaped by a range of motivations — the search for places mentioned in sacred texts, humanity's desire to understand its origins, and the use of the past to legitimize political authority. For this reason, from its earliest manifestations the discipline has never been simply an inquiry into the past; it has also been implicated in the production of identity and representation. Understanding this dual character is essential to any serious engagement with its theoretical history.

Theory, broadly understood, refers to a systematic body of knowledge organized around causal explanation. In archaeology, however, theory functions not merely as an explanatory instrument but as an intellectual framework that governs how the past is to be read and interpreted in the first place. The theoretical development of archaeology has not followed a linear trajectory; rather, it has been shaped at each juncture by social, political, economic, and philosophical transformations. The history of the discipline is therefore also a history of struggles between competing systems of thought — struggles that have left material traces in the very way archaeological problems are formulated.

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Among the social sciences, archaeology occupies a distinctive position by virtue of its commitment to understanding past societies through their material culture. At the same time, it maintains constitutive relationships with history, anthropology, sociology, geology, biology, and philosophy, which give it a fundamentally interdisciplinary character. This interdisciplinarity is not merely a practical convenience; it reflects the irreducibly complex nature of the questions the discipline asks about human existence in time.

From the latter half of the twentieth century onward, as interdisciplinary approaches gained increasing intellectual authority, archaeology began to move beyond the foundational questions of 'what,' 'where,' and 'when' to pursue the more demanding questions of 'how' and 'why.' In doing so, archaeological data were transformed from a body of chronological findings into a domain of inquiry through which social relations, ideologies, belief systems, and patterns of human behavior could be interpreted and theorized.

The relevance of this orientation is anticipated, in a sense, by much older intellectual traditions. Plato's remarks on the cultural history of humanity in the *Protagoras* illustrate the enduring human interest in the past and in the material products of human activity (Plato, ca. 380 BCE, trans. 2010). Similarly, accounts of the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II collecting ancient artifacts may be counted among the earliest documented instances of antiquarianism and the impulse to preserve the past (Trigger, 2014). Archaeology must therefore be understood not simply as the product of modern scientific methods, but as a historically continuous expression of humanity's effort to make sense of its own past.

Though frequently associated in the popular imagination with discovery and adventure, archaeology began to constitute itself as a discipline capable of systematic knowledge production particularly from the nineteenth century onward. The theoretical approaches developed through this process have at various moments been driven by the political needs of their time, by shifts in broader scientific paradigms, or by critiques directed at prevailing intellectual authorities. The history of theoretical archaeology is accordingly not only a history of changing methods, but a history of intellectual and epistemological transformation — one that cannot be adequately understood in isolation from the social worlds in which it unfolded.

A HISTORY OF THEORETICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The search for places mentioned in scripture, curiosity about human origins, and the collecting activities of early antiquarians together constitute important components of what is now regarded as the formative phase of archaeology.

These early endeavors, however, were driven less by systematic scientific method than by elite curiosity, religious frames of reference, and the pursuit of political legitimacy. Despite their pre-scientific character, they provided the conditions under which ideas about preserving, classifying, and interpreting the material remains of the past could begin to take shape (Trigger, 2014).

The emergence of archaeology as a scientific discipline is generally associated with C.J. Thomsen's work on relative chronology, which organized artifacts according to typology, raw material, and archaeological context. Alongside this development, Paleolithic archaeology — which evolved under the influence of geology and paleontology — made significant contributions to the development of stratigraphic techniques, providing the discipline with one of its most durable methodological foundations (Renfrew & Bahn, 2017).

By the nineteenth century, growing awareness of the chronological significance of superimposed geological strata laid the theoretical groundwork for what would become known as the Three-Age System — a framework later employed by Lubbock to classify subdivisions of the Stone Age. This approach was accepted for a considerable period as the dominant framework for archaeological classification and typological analysis. In this way, archaeology began its transition from the incidental collection of objects to a discipline capable of classifying material culture according to systematic methods and situating it within a chronological context (Trigger, 2014).

Nineteenth-century archaeology was shaped in large part by systematic excavation focused on the questions of 'what,' 'where,' and 'when.' The primary objectives of archaeological research in this period were to identify cultures, construct chronological sequences, and classify groups of material culture. This approach, however, proved limited in its capacity to account for social processes — a limitation that would eventually generate significant theoretical responses.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the rise of nationalist movements across Europe began to exert pressure on both historiography and archaeology. The approach that came to be known as culture-historical archaeology aimed to identify distinct cultural regions by examining objects typologically and chronologically (Trigger, 2014). Its defining theoretical assumption was that cultural change occurred primarily through migration and diffusion rather than through independent invention — a position that allowed limited scope for the idea that human communities might arrive independently at analogous developments. The culture-historical approach accordingly tended to explain observed changes in material culture largely through reference to external influences, a tendency that would later become one of the approach's most criticized features.

The rise of culture-historical archaeology in Europe unfolded in parallel with the efforts of nation-states to derive legitimacy from the past. In Britain and France, this process was accompanied by the establishment of archaeological institutes and national museums, and archaeology became one of the principal instruments through which national identity was constructed and institutionalized.

In Germany, the work of Gustaf Kossinna gave rise to a particularly fraught synthesis of culture-historical archaeology and nationalist ideology. By interpreting prehistoric archaeology through the lens of ethnic origin and settlement history, Kossinna exercised a formative influence on German archaeology for decades (Kossinna, 1911, as cited in Trigger, 2014). This trajectory is significant precisely because it demonstrates how readily archaeological interpretation can be appropriated by ideological discourses that exceed the boundaries of scientific inquiry (Trigger, 2014).

Among the most consequential critiques of the culture-historical approach came from V. Gordon Childe, a scholar whose formation in philology did not prevent him from bringing a Marxist analytical framework to the study of production relations and cultural change. Childe sought to explain cultural transformation in terms of economic and social processes rather than migration or diffusion (Childe, 1956). In his critique of Thomsen's Three-Age System, he argued that cultures did not develop simultaneously across all regions, and that the concept of 'phase' was therefore analytically preferable to that of 'age.' Through the concepts of the 'Neolithic Revolution' and the 'Urban Revolution,' he further argued that the major transformations in human history were bound up with changes in the mode of production. Childe's contribution was pivotal in shifting archaeology from a field primarily concerned with classifying material culture toward a research practice oriented toward the interpretation of social transformation (Dyson, 1957).

NEW ORIENTATIONS AND CRITICAL APPROACHES

A survey of the development of theoretical archaeology makes it immediately apparent that the discipline has not advanced along a single linear trajectory. While certain theoretical frameworks have achieved dominance in particular periods, alternative approaches have continued to develop simultaneously in different geographical contexts and intellectual environments. This dynamic demonstrates that archaeology has been shaped not only by scientific developments but by social movements, political transformations, and philosophical debates. The history of theoretical archaeology must therefore be

understood not as a closed system progressing from a single center, but as a plural and contested intellectual field.

A significant reorientation came in the mid-twentieth century with the emergence of Processual Archaeology — associated above all with the work of Lewis Binford — which argued that archaeological explanation must be grounded in scientific method, particularly hypothetico-deductive reasoning, quantitative analysis, and the study of human-environment relationships (Binford, 1962). Processual archaeology interpreted the archaeological record as evidence of cultural adaptation and change, and contended that the discipline needed to transform itself from a descriptive enterprise into an explanatory science. This approach introduced a new analytical rigor but was also criticized, in time, for reducing the complexity of human experience to systemic and ecological variables.

The political mobilizations of the 1970s, and the feminist movements in particular, prompted a critical examination of the androcentric assumptions embedded in archaeological interpretation, giving rise to Feminist Archaeology as a distinct theoretical orientation (Conkey, 1991; Conkey & Gero, 1997). Feminist Archaeology argued that women had been rendered systematically invisible in representations of past societies, and that social roles had routinely been reconstructed in conformity with modern gender assumptions rather than archaeological evidence. Its ambitions, however, extended beyond the recovery of women's roles in the past: it subjected the very processes by which archaeological knowledge is produced to critical scrutiny, opening up questions about the assumed neutrality of archaeological data, the situated position of the interpreter, and the ideological dimensions of knowledge production.

Gender Archaeology and Feminist Archaeology have been particularly associated with debates about matriarchal social organization developed in relation to sites such as Çatalhöyük. Yet these interpretations were themselves subjected to methodological critique over time, with scholars noting that the reconstruction of past societies through the lens of contemporary political categories carries its own analytical risks. Nevertheless, feminist approaches played a formative role in the development of debates about subjectivity, identity, and representation in archaeology — debates that continue to inform the field.

The inaugural conference of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) was held in England in 1977 at the University of Southampton, and the organization was formally constituted as a national body in 1979, co-founded by Colin Renfrew and Andrew Fleming, among others (Renfrew & Bahn, 2017). TAG meetings provided a forum in which alternatives to the dominant Processual paradigm could gain visibility, and contributed to making theory a central

concern of archaeological scholarship. In this context, the Post-Processual approaches pioneered by Ian Hodder introduced symbolic and structural analysis to archaeology, bringing new interpretive possibilities to the study of the past (Hodder, 1982; 1991).

The same period also saw the growing influence of neo-Darwinian approaches that sought to establish connections between biological and cultural evolution. Drawing on concepts of adaptation, selection, and transmission, neo-Darwinian theory attempted to explain cultural change through analogy with evolutionary processes, and aimed to use the archaeological record to illuminate long-term patterns of cultural behavior (Barton & Clark, 1997).

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a range of new theoretical orientations emerged that fundamentally reconceived the relationship between material culture and human agency. Relational Archaeology, New Materialist Archaeology, and Symmetrical Archaeology were among the most prominent of these approaches. Rather than treating material culture as the passive product of human activity, they proposed that objects and materials play an active role in the constitution of social relations (Olsen et al., 2012). New Materialist Archaeology emphasizes the agency of the material world, insisting that matter is not inert but generative. Symmetrical Archaeology, meanwhile, takes a critical stance toward anthropocentric frameworks by arguing that non-human entities must be taken into account within the analysis of social relations. Together, these approaches have moved archaeology beyond a strictly human-centered explanatory model toward a broader theoretical terrain concerned with the relationships among humans, objects, environments, and material culture.

Phenomenological Archaeology represents another significant orientation that gained influence during this period. Grounded in the philosophical conviction that human beings experience the world through embodied sensory engagement, it seeks to understand the relationships that past societies maintained with space, objects, and their physical surroundings (Tilley, 1994). For Christopher Tilley, material culture is not simply a collection of objects to be interpreted; it is a domain of experiential entities that actively shape human perception and action. The form, texture, spatial positioning, and sensory qualities of objects can yield insight into the ways in which past societies apprehended their world. Phenomenological approaches have been particularly influential in landscape studies, the analysis of spatial experience, and the interpretation of ritual settings, advancing the argument that the experiential dimensions of archaeological data must be accorded analytical significance alongside its functional dimensions (Tilley, 1994).

The theoretical pluralism that has characterized archaeology from the latter half of the twentieth century onward has made it unmistakably clear that the discipline cannot be confined to a single method or a single explanatory model. Archaeology has ceased to be a field concerned solely with the material remains of past societies and has become a multidimensional intellectual domain engaged in questioning the relationships among humans, objects, environments, representations, and experience.

COLONIALISM, BORDER POLITICS, AND DECOLONIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Throughout its historical development, the discipline of archaeology has maintained deep and frequently unexamined relationships with colonial structures of power. The expansion of European powers into colonial territories encompassed not only political and economic domination but also the appropriation of those territories' material heritage; archaeological excavation and research were conducted in parallel with, and often as an instrument of, the exercise of political sovereignty. Under these conditions, the archaeological knowledge produced was not merely a body of objective findings about the past but functioned simultaneously as one of the legitimating mechanisms of the colonial order. The institutional infrastructure of colonial states — museums, universities, archaeological societies — shaped both the forms through which knowledge was produced and the channels through which it circulated (Trigger, 2014).

One of the most consequential features of colonial archaeology was its systematic relegation of local communities and their ancestors to the status of passive objects in relation to their own pasts. The subject who formulated the research questions, interpreted the data, and transmitted the findings to international scholarly audiences was, in every instance, the European researcher. Local knowledge, community memory, and culturally specific interpretations of the past were systematically disregarded or relegated to practices deemed lacking in scientific validity. This epistemic hierarchy transformed archaeological practice from a purely technical enterprise into a domain in which asymmetrical power relations were continuously reproduced.

In the second half of the twentieth century, particularly during the period in which anti-colonial movements and independence processes gained momentum, a systematic critique of these power relations began to take shape. Decolonial archaeology emerged as an intellectual and political project concerned with interrogating by whom, through what instruments, and in whose interests the past is interpreted. This approach treats the conditions under which archaeological

knowledge is produced as an analytical problem in its own right, making the researcher's positionality, institutional context, and methodological choices objects of a reflexive critique directed at the discipline itself (Smith & Wobst, 2005).

The practical dimension of the decolonial approach finds its most concrete expression in the question of incorporating indigenous and local communities into research processes. Community-based archaeology and collaborative methodologies, proceeding from the principle that the past is not the exclusive preserve of academic institutions, place the active participation of indigenous voices at the centre of research design, data interpretation, and the public communication of findings. This transformation is not merely a methodological correction; it represents a fundamentally different answer to the questions of whose past, whose identity, and whose narrative is at stake.

The institutional repercussions of these debates have grown increasingly concrete. The restitution of collections assembled during the colonial period by Western museums to their countries and communities of origin — a debate spanning a wide spectrum from the Elgin Marbles to the Benin bronzes — is being negotiated at the intersections of international law, archaeology, and political ethics. The question of to whom cultural heritage belongs makes it unmistakably clear that colonial epistemology has not remained confined to the past; it continues to inhabit the institutional structures within which archaeological practice is conducted in the present.

Considered from the perspective of Turkish archaeology, the decolonial question carries a dimension specific to the discipline's own historical formation. A significant portion of archaeological research conducted across Ottoman territories during the nineteenth century was organised by European missions and institutions. The substantial majority of artefacts recovered in the course of these activities are today dispersed across museum collections in Europe and North America. The discourse of heritage ownership that gathered force with the Republic, together with demands for international restitution, has brought this issue to the fore as a matter that is simultaneously political, deeply archaeological, and irreducibly ethical. The theoretical maturation of the discipline bears directly on its capacity to engage with these questions.

BODY, DEATH, AND BIOARCHAEOLOGY: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO HUMAN REMAINS

Human remains constitute one of the most complex and theoretically charged categories of archaeological data. A skeleton or a mummified body is simultaneously a biological object and the material residue of a subject — of a

life history, a social world, and a practice of death. This double status — as both object and trace of a subject — makes the archaeological interpretation of the human body irreducibly dependent on epistemological and ethical considerations that cannot be separated from each other. Bioarchaeology, as an interdisciplinary field that analyses human skeletal and soft tissue remains within both their biological and cultural contexts, places these tensions at the centre of its theoretical agenda (Buikstra & Beck, 2006).

The historical development of bioarchaeology has been shaped by the methodological convergence of physical anthropology and archaeology. The discipline has, however, moved well beyond the identification of biological indicators of age, sex, disease, or nutritional patterns; it has come to interrogate the relationship between these data and structures of social inequality, configurations of identity, and the organization of mortuary ritual. This transformation represents bioarchaeology's opening toward social theory — an opening that reconceives the body not as a purely biological entity but as a surface on which social relations and cultural meanings are inscribed.

Mortuary archaeology, or the archaeology of death, reads funerary practices, burial landscapes, and the treatment of the dead body as a mirror of social organization and systems of belief. Death is a universal biological fact; yet the manner in which the body is handled after death — where and how it is interred or cremated, with which objects it is deposited, and within what ritual framework the process unfolds — carries the deep imprint of cultural and social processes. The spatial organization of cemetery sites, the composition of grave goods, and the evidence of interventions upon the body count among the primary archaeological sources for reconstructing the social hierarchies, gender roles, and eschatological beliefs of past societies (Parker Pearson, 1999).

The contribution of phenomenological archaeology to this domain is particularly significant. Tilley's (1994) arguments concerning the bodily experience of space have opened new analytical possibilities for the understanding of mortuary ritual and monumental architecture. Cemeteries, tumuli, and commemorative structures are not simply locations or containers; they are spatial arrangements that organize the bodily experiences of the living, their practices of remembrance, and their relationships with ancestral figures. From this perspective, the spaces that house the dead simultaneously function as constitutive sites of social identity and collective memory.

The resonances of New Materialist and Symmetrical approaches within bioarchaeology have grown steadily more pronounced. Within the framework proposed by Olsen and his colleagues (2012), human remains are no longer confined to the status of objects awaiting analysis; they are reconceptualized as

components of complex networks among humans, material objects, and environments. In this frame, the skeleton is not only the biological record of a life history but also a participant in the ongoing relations with the material world that surrounded it — relations that did not dissolve at the moment of death.

Bioarchaeology is, at the same time, inseparable from profoundly difficult ethical questions. Who has access to human remains, under what conditions they may be examined, and where they are to be situated following research — all of these questions intersect directly with the debates of decolonial archaeology discussed above. The claims of indigenous communities over the remains of their ancestors call into question the boundaries of academic research practice and render visible the tension between scientific legitimacy and ethical responsibility. The adoption of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in the United States in 1990, and analogous legislative frameworks in Australia, demonstrates that this tension has demanded institutionalized responses in legal as well as academic registers.

From the perspective of Turkish archaeology, bioarchaeology represents a sub-field of comparatively recent emergence that is nonetheless gaining increasing institutional footing. The rich inventory of prehistoric and historical mortuary sites across Anatolia — a vast geography extending from the burial practices at Çatalhöyük to the Iron Age necropoleis of western and central Anatolia — provides an exceptionally favorable database for bioarchaeological analysis. The full realization of this potential within a theoretically informed perspective requires, however, a deepening of the dialogue with anthropology and social theory more broadly. The archaeology of the body holds the potential to constitute one of the most theoretically productive areas of development in Turkish archaeology in the period ahead.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN TURKISH ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological activity in the Ottoman period was shaped primarily by collecting practices, museum development, and the work of foreign researchers. With the establishment of the Republic, however, archaeology acquired a different significance and a different set of institutional functions. The founding of the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) was a decisive moment in this process: archaeology became one of the principal instruments through which the newly formed nation-state pursued historical legitimacy (Gölbaş, 2016). Research into the ancient civilizations of Anatolia accelerated, and the discipline was enlisted — in a manner broadly analogous to the culture-historical approach in Europe — in the production of national identity through the past. The development of archaeology in Turkey must therefore be understood not simply

as the institutionalization of a scientific discipline, but as an integral component of broader projects of modernization, nation-building, and the politics of historiography.

The 'Turkish Historical Thesis' that emerged during this period represents perhaps the most explicit instance of this orientation, seeking to consolidate historical connections between the new republic and the civilizations of Anatolia. Despite the considerable attention paid to Greek and Roman antiquity in wider scholarly discourse, an Anatolia-centered conception of history remained dominant in the Turkish context, and archaeology was deployed as a functional instrument in the cultural legitimization of the new state.

During the 1940s, scholars trained abroad and scientists who arrived from Germany established university chairs that contributed to the consolidation of archaeology as an academic discipline in Turkey. In this formative period, however, theoretical debate remained limited. Turkish archaeology developed largely within the framework of culture-historical archaeology, with chronology, typology, and the documentation of excavation data as its primary concerns. This orientation was reinforced not only by the early Republican emphasis on institutional consolidation, but also by the close relationship between archaeology and the discipline of history (Özdoğan, 2001). The dominance of a positivist philosophy of history in particular long shaped the intellectual environment within which the field developed.

The Keban Dam Rescue Excavations, carried out from the late 1960s onward, are generally regarded as a significant turning point in Turkish archaeology. Projects of this scale — in which researchers from multiple disciplines and international scholars worked in collaboration — inaugurated a new phase in the development of teamwork and the application of archaeometric methods, and significantly raised the visibility of interdisciplinary approaches (Özdoğan, 2001).

From the 1980s onward, venues such as the Excavation Results Conference (Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı), the Survey Results Conference (Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı), and the Archaeometry Results Conference (Arkeometri Sonuçları Toplantısı) contributed to the development of academic communication networks within Turkish archaeology. Nevertheless, a critical strand within the literature observes that the field has continued on the whole to develop within the gravitational field of culture-historical archaeology. Studies of the Neolithic period have frequently been framed within diffusionist models, and the limits of traditional culture-historical perspectives in confronting Anatolian data have been a recurring subject of critical reflection (Çilingiroğlu, 2015).

Research on the Bronze Ages, for its part, has tended to foreground urbanization models and settlement systems. Yet much of this work has advanced through the application of established theoretical frameworks to Anatolian data, rather than through the generation of new theoretical propositions. Observers have accordingly noted a relative divergence between the field's technical output and its engagement with broader theoretical debate.

According to Mehmet Özdoğan, the development of theory requires a corresponding development in the capacity for philosophical reflection and in the understanding of scientific methodology (Özdoğan, 2011). This orientation has been shaped in part by a historically limited engagement with theory-producing disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. Turkish archaeology has developed over many decades primarily along the axes of excavation, documentation, chronology, and material classification, while studies engaging material culture with questions of social theory, ideology, identity, representation, or subjectivity have remained comparatively rare.

In recent years, however, the visibility of theoretical debate within Turkish archaeology appears to have increased. Initiatives such as the TAG Turkey meetings have contributed to fostering discussion of the intellectual as well as the technical dimensions of the discipline, encouraging a more critical engagement with relational and symmetrical movements in contemporary thought (Çilingiroğlu, 2017). The growing theoretical discussions of recent years indicate that archaeology in Turkey holds the potential to become not only a discipline that records the past, but one that interprets it, interrogates it, and thinks it anew.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: THEORY, DISCIPLINE, AND PARALLAX

A survey of the development of theoretical archaeology makes clear that the discipline has not followed a linear course. The diversity of approaches — from culture-historical archaeology to Processual Archaeology, from Post-Processual frameworks to phenomenological and relational orientations — demonstrates that archaeology cannot be confined to a single explanatory model. Each new theoretical approach has transformed not only the manner in which the past is interpreted, but also the underlying assumptions about what archaeological data are, how they should be read, and what kinds of knowledge are accessible through them. The history of archaeology is therefore, at the same time, a history of epistemological transformations.

This observation invites a reconsideration of Childe's argument that cultural development cannot be explained in linear terms (Childe, 1956). For archaeology's own historical development equally resists linear description: it

exhibits a multilayered structure in which period-specific, intellectual, and political influences are interwoven in ways that cannot be reduced to a simple progression from less to more advanced forms of knowledge.

Throughout its development, archaeology has been shaped by social, political, and economic contexts, and has at times become one of those contexts' ideological instruments. The reinterpretation of the past during periods of intensifying nationalism in particular created conditions under which archaeological data were drawn into processes of identity construction (Özdoğan, 2001). It is therefore difficult to maintain that archaeology has ever operated as a domain fully independent of ideology. The social conditions, intellectual dispositions, and political atmosphere in which the interpreting subject is situated exert a direct and constitutive influence on the shape that archaeological interpretation takes.

The limitations of approaches that seek to explain the past exclusively through objective data are equally apparent. The experiences, belief systems, fears, rituals, conflicts, and social relations of human communities cannot be fully accounted for through numerical data or typological classification alone. A weapon recovered from a battlefield, human remains bearing the traces of trauma, or a destruction horizon are not merely material findings: they carry within them the residue of fear, violence, power, loss, and social rupture — of human experience in its full weight. Archaeological interpretation thus requires an understanding of the relationship between material culture and human experience, and this requirement is precisely what transforms archaeology from a technical specialism into a discipline that is also, irreducibly, an interpretive and intellectual practice.

In this context, the relationship between theory and discipline in archaeology exhibits a dynamic rather than a static structure. The concept of 'parallax' — used here as an original analytical metaphor — suggests itself as an illuminating frame. Just as a change in the position of observation transforms the appearance of an object, a change in theoretical approach transforms the way the past is perceived and interpreted. The past itself does not change; what changes is the gaze directed toward it.

The contrast between Processual Archaeology's focus on environmental relations and systemic processes and Post-Processual Archaeology's turn toward questions of meaning, identity, and subjectivity exemplifies this transformation (Hodder, 1991). The same body of archaeological evidence can be interpreted in fundamentally different ways depending on the theoretical framework through which it is approached. Phenomenological and relational approaches go further still, treating material culture not as the mere product of human activity but as a

constituent element of the reciprocal relationship between humans and objects (Olsen et al., 2012; Tilley, 1994). In this way, archaeology has begun to move beyond human-centered explanatory models altogether.

It may be said in this connection that archaeology possesses both a horizontal and a vertical temporality. On one axis, the discipline examines past societies within chronological continuity; on another, it attends to the relationships among different geographies, social formations, and intellectual systems. This multidimensional character makes it resistant to theoretical stabilization around any single framework.

For archaeology, then, the production of neatly bounded, universally agreed-upon, and invariant theories appears neither possible nor desirable. On the contrary, the nature of the discipline demands the continuous reproduction of theoretical debate. For archaeology is not simply a science that investigates the past; it is an intellectual field that interrogates the very conditions under which the past can be made meaningful. Theoretical debate in archaeology should therefore be understood not as an unresolved uncertainty to be finally dissolved, but as one of the fundamental dynamics that testifies to the discipline's vitality and its capacity for intellectual production. The intellectual strength of archaeology may lie not only in its capacity to uncover the past, but also in its insistence — in every era — on thinking it anew.

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Chapter 9

Performative Femininity and The Exiled Female Self in Anita Brookner's *Hotel Du Lac*

Şefika TURAN*

Abstract

Since classical times, women have been forced to live within a patriarchal world in which they are supposed to learn and show obedience to the traditionally constructed norms and rules determined by patriarchal ideology. If they attempt to raise their voice and refuse to follow the rules by taking control of their own life, they are suppressed and exiled from the society. In *Hotel Du Lac*, Anita Brookner creates such a woman who is banished to an isolated hotel room to recover, reflecting on her mistake since she objects to patriarchal norms. This paper aims to show how patriarchal norms are seen as a safe resort and internalized by some women while they are opposed to by others. Analysing the patriarchal forces and their destructive effects on women's identity, it will depict the representation of female characters as commodities from the perspective of male authority. Finally, the failed sisterhood among the women in *Hotel Du Lac* will be discussed in this paper.

Key Words: feminist literary criticism, *Hotel du Lac*, patriarchal oppression, female identity, isolation.

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ANITA BROOKNER'IN HOTEL DU LAC ROMANINDA PERFORMATİF KADINLIK VE SÜRGÜN EDİLMİŞ KADIN KİMLİĞİ

Özet

Klasik dönemlerden bu yana kadınlar, ataerkil ideolojinin belirlediği geleneksel normlar ve kuralları öğrenip, itaat etmeleri beklenen bir ataerkil düzen içinde yaşamaya zorlanmıştır. Seslerini yükseltmeye ve kendi hayatlarının kontrolünü ele alarak kurallara uymayı reddetmeye kalkıştırlarsa, bastırılır ve toplumdan sürgün edilirler. *Hotel du Lac* adlı romanda Anita Brookner, ataerkil normlara karşı çıkması nedeniyle hatası üzerine düşünmesi ve “iyileşmesi” amacıyla izole bir otele sürgün edilen böyle bir kadın karakter yaratır. Bu çalışma, ataerkil normların nasıl bazı kadınlar tarafından güvenli bir sığınak olarak görülüp içselleştirilmesini, diğer kadınlar tarafından ise reddedilmesini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Ataerkil güçlerin ve bu güçlerin kadın kimliği üzerindeki yıkıcı etkilerinin analiz edilmesiyle, *Hotel du Lac*'teki kadın karakterlerin erkek egemen bakış açısı doğrultusunda birer meta olarak nasıl temsil edildiği ele alınacaktır. Son olarak, romanda kadınlar arasındaki başarısız kız kardeşlik ilişkileri tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: feminist edebiyat eleştirisi, *Hotel du Lac*, ataerkil baskı, kadın kimliği, izolasyon.

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Anita Brookner'in *Hotel du Lac* (1984) adlı romanını feminist edebiyat eleştirisi çerçevesinde inceleyerek, ataerkil ideolojinin kadın kimliğini nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve bu ideolojiden sapma gösteren kadınların toplumsal ve psikolojik anlamda nasıl "sürgün" edildiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Romanın merkezinde yer alan Edith Hope karakteri, evlilik, itaat ve "makbul kadınlık" gibi toplumsal beklentilere uyum sağlamadığı için toplum tarafından dışlanan ve izole edilen bir kadın figürü olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, kadın kimliğinin sabit bir öz olmaktan ziyade, ataerkil normlar tarafından sürekli olarak yeniden üretilen ve denetlenen performatif bir yapı olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Araştırma, feminist kuramın temel yaklaşımlarından hareketle kadınların tarihsel olarak erkek egemen söylemler içinde nasıl bastırıldığını ve "öteki" konumuna itildiğini tartışır. Simone de Beauvoir'ın kadının toplumsal olarak inşa edilen bir kimlik olduğu yönündeki görüşleri, Judith Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyetin performatif niteliğine dair yaklaşımı ve Luce Irigaray ile Hélène Cixous'nun kadın sesinin ataerkil dil içinde bastırılmasına yönelik eleştirileri, çalışmanın kuramsal temelini oluşturmaktadır. Bu teorik çerçeve, *Hotel du Lac*'te kadın karakterlerin kendilerini ifade etme biçimlerini, erkek otoritesine karşı konumlanışlarını ve birbirleriyle kurdukları ilişkileri çözümlemek için kullanılmıştır.

Çalışma nitel bir araştırma olarak tasarlanmış ve metin çözümlemesine dayalı eleştirel bir yöntem benimsenmiştir. Roman, yakın okuma tekniğiyle analiz edilmiş; karakterlerin söylemleri, anlatıcının bakış açısı, mekân kullanımı ve sembolik unsurlar feminist bir perspektifle değerlendirilmiştir. Özellikle otel mekânı, kadınların toplumsal hayattan dışlanmasını ve disipline edilmesini temsil eden bir "sürgün alanı" olarak ele alınmıştır. Göl, sessizlik ve grilik imgeleri ise kadınların bastırılmış duygularını ve içsel yalnızlıklarını yansıtan sembolik araçlar olarak yorumlanmıştır.

Analiz sonucunda, Edith Hope'un sürgününün yalnızca fiziksel bir uzaklaştırma değil, aynı zamanda ataerkil düzenin kadın kimliğini "ıslah etmeye" yönelik bir stratejisi olduğu görülmektedir. Edith'in evlilik kurumunu reddetmesi ve bağımsız bir kadın kimliği inşa etmeye çalışması, toplum tarafından bir tehdit olarak algılanmakta; bu nedenle karakter, izole bir alana kapatılarak görünmezleştirilmektedir. Roman, kadınların erkekler tarafından metalaştırılmasını ve evlilik yoluyla "değer" kazanan varlıklar hâline indirgenmesini açık bir biçimde ortaya koymaktadır.

Bununla birlikte çalışma, romandaki kadın karakterler arasında güçlü bir dayanışmanın kurulamadığını da göstermektedir. Kadınlar, ataerkil düzenin

baskısına birlikte karşı çıkmak yerine, çoğu zaman bu düzenin devamını sağlayan aktörler hâline gelirler. Bu durum, romanda “başarısız kız kardeşlik” olarak adlandırılabilir bir yapının ortaya çıkmasına yol açar. Kadınların birbirlerini yargılaması ve disipline etmeye çalışması, ataerkil ideolojinin içselleştirildiğini ve yeniden üretildiğini gözler önüne sermektedir.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, *Hotel du Lac*’in ataerkil toplum yapısını eleştiren güçlü bir feminist anlatı sunduğunu savunmaktadır. Roman, kadın kimliğinin bastırılması, sürgün edilmesi ve metalaştırılması süreçlerini görünür kılarken, aynı zamanda kadınların bu düzene karşı geliştirdikleri sınırlı direniş biçimlerini de yansıtmaktadır. Edith Hope’un nihai farkındalığı, ataerkil normlara tam anlamıyla teslim olmadan, bu normların yapaylığını ve baskıcı doğasını tanıyan bir bilinçlenme sürecini temsil eder. Bu yönüyle çalışma, feminist edebiyat eleştirisi alanına, kadın kimliği, sürgün ve patriyarkal söylem arasındaki ilişkiyi derinlemesine irdeleyen özgün bir katkı sunmaktadır.

Introduction

Throughout human history, the voice of women is excluded from literature, philosophy, economics and history because of the general inferior status of women in patriarchal society. Women are just assigned traditional gender roles to become ideal servants for the patriarchal system. The purpose of this system is to create "*patriarchal women who have internalized the rules and values of patriarchy*" (Tyson, 2006, p.85). Helene Cixous argues a set of binary oppositions which place female on the negative or inactive side so woman represents "*the passive, concave, the supporting, and the containing, part of a conceptual system*" that wholly privileges the male. Cixous goes on asserting that women are "*the non-social, non-political, non-human*" in men's eyes, therefore they have been suppressed to guarantee that the masculine system works properly (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 66). Women are represented as other, and they are reduced entirely to the position of other. In parallel with Cixous' ideas, Irigaray also highlights how women have frequently been reduced to becoming "*other*" in the society where social norms and standards are defined by men. She also argues that the role of women is usually relegated to reflecting men's accomplishments, ideals and values (Irigaray, 1985).

The women are often described as weak, emotional, obedient, caring and sensitive. This description of women gives rise to the belief that women are constantly in need of male protection, guidance and control. Therefore, they are expected to show obedience and surrender to their husbands and fathers. The gender roles attributed to women by patriarchy have been used successfully to justify the inferior position of women and to exclude them from equal access to many fields such as "*politics, academia, literature, economics*" and so on (Tyson, 2006, p. 85). Thus, patriarchy has defined and limited women's decisions, activities and opportunities. Moreover, the inferior position of women is also supported by many religious doctrines that point out to the creation of Eve as an extension of Adam's rib. These religious theories uphold the idea that women are inferior because of the way they were created; that is, as an extension of men. Making Eve the scapegoat for Adam's fall and their departure from the Garden of Eden serves to further legitimize the notion that women are irrational. Women were therefore viewed as cursed and forced to submit to their husbands and give birth in agony. Obviously patriarchal mentality is supported by religious teachings which emphasize women's silence and obedience as highly crucial qualities.

Feminists have observed that the inferior position of women has been used by men to justify and keep the "*male monopoly*" in many fields of social life (Tyson, 2006, p. 86). They have also observed that men declare themselves as

the only social power, preventing the access of women to educational and occupational areas to have economic and social power. Irigaray says that “*The feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects*” (Irigaray, 86, p. 1977). With this statement she argues that women’s roles and identities are constructed within systems created and controlled by men, and this situation has reinforced their marginalization in society. Men have caused women to be and feel powerless. This inferior position of women has been produced through a social and cultural programming, so it is not related to creation and inborn qualities. As Judith Butler states “*gender is the cultural interpretation of sex, so it is culturally constructed*” (Butler, 1990, p. 9). For Simone de Beauvoir “*one becomes a woman but always under a cultural compulsion to become one*” (Butler, 1990, p. 10). Women are so effectively programmed that they are not aware of their oppression by the traditional gender roles imposed on them by patriarchal society. Tyson states that patriarchal ideology offers two identities for a woman. “*If she accepts her traditional gender roles and obeys the patriarchal rules, she is a good girl; if she doesn’t, she is a bad girl*” (Tyson, 2006, p. 89). It is clear that women are forced to make a decision to be either “an angel” or “a devil” within the construction of patriarchy. The female characters in *Hotel Du Lac* are also forced to make this decision by the patriarchal order. While some female characters adapt to the rules of this authority, internalizing the convention, Edith Hope starts recognizing this patriarchal programming and decides to resist it instead of accepting and resorting to “safe” patriarchal conventions. She undergoes a process of self-discovery and during her journey toward herself, she suffers from identity crisis, loneliness and isolation.

Female Identity as the Oppressed, Silenced and Otherized

Different feminist theories have shared the belief that women have been oppressed and otherized by patriarchy as well as literary and social structures throughout centuries. Feminists aim to analyse patriarchal forces and their destructive effects on women’s identity, self confidence and assertiveness. Helene Cixous explains the otherized position of women in the society by using the terms of “*Jews*” and “*Niggers*” (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 13). She portrays the oppressed condition of women in the literary structure, stating: “*There is something of a foreignness, a feeling of not being accepted or of being unacceptable, which is particularly insistent when as a woman you suddenly get into that strange country of writing where most inhabitants are men and where the fate of women is still not settled*” (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 12). She states that women are double exiles in the world of writing, first because of their sex and

then because they attempt to enter into the world of writing that is possessed by men for a long time. In her two articles “The Newly Born Woman” and “The Laugh of Medusa”, Cixous reveals the difficulties that women face with, and she also unveils how these difficulties keep the women away from their own femininity. She invites women to “*write themselves*”, stating that: “*To write - the act that will realize the uncensored relationship of women to her sexuality, to her woman being giving her back access to her own forces; that will return her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her vast bodily territories kept under seal;.....write yourself: your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out.*” (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 35). She emphasizes that woman’s body, sexuality, pleasures as well as her speech and breath are censored by patriarchy for a very long time, therefore writing is the only way for all women to liberate themselves from this social censorship and inhibitions by reuniting their own uninhibited bodies and bodily dynamics. However, the language does not belong to women. Sontag describes the language as “*the most impure, the most contaminated and the most exhausted of all the materials out of which art is made*” (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 102). Since language has been predominantly influenced by male viewpoints, Irigaray advocates for a fundamental rethinking about the structure of the language. She contends that it must be changed to create a room for a non-subordinate feminine discourse. (Irigaray, 1977).

Virginia Woolf, the pioneer of early 20th century feminism, in her work *A Room of One’s Own* portrays how the speech of women is silenced in literature and how women are represented from the male perspective with their constructed gender roles. Both Virginia Woolf and Luce Irigaray deal with “*the slippage between real and metaphoric murder*”. Woolf refers to the mutilation and murder of women by describing the cultural murder of women’s minds and souls. She reminds us of the overwhelming power of patriarchy. In her depiction, the woman dies both literally and metaphorically. When we look what Irigaray has said about the “*slippage between the murder of self and soul*”, we can see that women are left to “*polemicize and settle their accounts privately*” because women are deprived of rites and social institutions (Walker, 1988, p. 43-44). This murder is one of the consequences of this lack of (social, institutional, symbolic) repression. Irigaray makes us aware of the fact that men’s leaving the crime to women themselves is the most silent aspect of these murders. Men reject the symbolic representation of women or their voice within patriarchal society. They create a state among women in which murder may be the only possible act of revenge. Furthermore, in literature women are

represented either as a perfect reflection of men's desires or they are seen as devils threatening the men's authority.

Simone de Beauvoir argues that women are associated with the terms as "*immanence, en-soi, facticity, object, inessential, subordinate, demands of a situation and Other*" because of the male dominance which has reigned throughout history (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 148). From the beginning, the role of "Other" is offered to women, they are encouraged and conditioned to see themselves as inferior objects and others, moreover they are expected to renounce their freedom and transcendence. To obey the rules of the tradition is easier, what is harder is taking the escape routes, releasing from the oppression, tradition and the constructed roles of patriarchy toward freedom. She strongly advises women to be aware of the temptations of conveniences, privileges or securities offered by the male dominance as well as encouraging them to reject and resist against the limitations to gain their liberty.

"Systematic silencing" of women in the discourse of Western philosophy is investigated by Luce Irigaray and Michele Le Doeuff. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray exposes the exclusion of women from the production of philosophy. She argues that philosophy exiles women to the status of Other partially. According to Le Doeuff, the voices of women inside philosophy have been the voices of "*faithful disciples*" or "*dutiful daughters*" who knew their sacred duty as keepers of the father's or lover's wisdom (Walker, 1988, p. 10-11). If women speak in the domain of philosophy, either they may never be heard or they serve for the benefit of patriarchy.

In summary, feminist thinkers like Cixous, Woolf, Irigaray, de Beauvoir, and Le Doeuff collectively reveal how patriarchal systems systematically oppress, silence, and marginalize women. They emphasize that women must reclaim their identities and voices, especially via writing and rethinking language, in order to fight against the social forces that have traditionally characterized them as the "Other". These theorists advocate for women's freedom and the reconstruction of spaces where women can express their complete uncensored selves freely.

Exiled Women in *Hotel Du Lac*

Hotel Du Lac is the story of women who are exiled from the mainstream of society and suffer from different kinds of loneliness. The fact that they all stay at a quiet hotel at the end of the season depicts that they are in one way and another out of society. First and foremost, the protagonist of the novel Edith Hope is a lonely, unmarried, middle-aged, intellectual woman who writes romantic fictions under a pseudonym "Vanessa Wilde". Writing romance is

more associated with women, so she could write romantic fictions by using her name, but she prefers writing under the name of Vanesse Wilde, hiding her character. Her writing romantic fictions under a pseudonym indicates that she does not want to be named as a romantic fiction writer, rather she wants to show herself as a woman who is against the convention of society. However, by writing romantic fictions she meets the expectation of the society in which a woman's writing romance is suitable, and she also attempts to establish a discourse among women. Furthermore, her books function as a kind of connection between her romantic self, her identity and her role as a woman in society. She finds her own self in the fictional world she creates while she feels like a marginalized one in society. Her identity is torn between her autonomous self she wants to establish in society, and the socially imposed one. One part of herself forcibly obeys the patriarchal norms while her other part rejects them. Throughout the novel, her state of being in-between is clearly observed through her attitudes and behaviours. For instance, in a society which forces women to suppress their sexual desires, Edith keeps an illicit affair with a married man called David Simmonds. Besides, she does not participate in her own wedding, letting Geoffrey Long down. Her marriage to him would be a socially accepted one, yet changing her mind at the last minute, she consciously refuses to have a so-called social status gained by marriage since she does not want to suppress her desires for David, whom she is passionately in love with. Because of her radical decision, she is humiliated and advised by her friends to disappear. Her friend Penelope sends her to a hotel in Switzerland to be "a woman" and reflect on her "mistakes". However, Edith does not object to her immediate sending to a hotel as she has consciously challenged the societal marriage norms. She submissively obeys what she is supposed to do since she gets scared and confused. Her passivity about the decision of her friends also depicts her state of being in-between.

In an isolated hotel room, she starts questioning her own attitudes and behaviours since her autonomous self is seen as a threat by her friends and society. Her self-questioning because of the situation in which she is forced, is reflected in the book as follows;

For I am not to be allowed my lapse as if I were an artless girl, she thought; and why should I be? I am a serious woman..... I am a householder, a ratepayer, a good plain cook, and a deliverer of typescripts well before the deadline; I sign anything that is put in front of me; I never telephone my publisher; and I make no claims for my particular sort of writing, although I understand that it is doing quite

well. I have held this rather dim and trusting personality together for a considerable length of time, and although I have certainly bored others I was not to be allowed to bore myself. My profile was deemed to be low and it was agreed by those who thought they knew me that it should stay that way (Brookner, 2012, p. 2).

Obviously, her spiritual paralysis and her isolation, because of the turning events of her life, force her to reflect on her roles cast for her by the society and her own wishes and desires. Her spiritual paralysis is also reflected through the nature which is vividly described by Brookner at the very beginning of the novel in this way; *“From the window all that could be seen was a receding area of grey. It was to be supposed that beyond the grey garden, which seemed to sprout nothing but the stiffish leaves of some unfamiliar plant, lay the vast grey lake.....”* (Brookner, 2012, p. 1). Nature, which is usually identified with greenness, freshness, fertility and peace, is a grey one in the novel, representing the distressed situation of Edith. The grey garden, grey lake and the whole greyness of nature can also be associated with her state of being in-between as she feels trapped in a society whose norms she does not want to comply with. Furthermore, the location of the hotel on the side of the lake is perfect but it is not highly preferred because of its limited facilities and simplicity. With its location and the limited convenience, the hotel is also isolated like the female characters in the novel. *“The Hotel Du Lac took a quiet pride, and sometimes it was very quiet indeed, in its isolation from the herd”* (Brookner, 2012, p. 6). The isolated location of the Hotel Du Lac and its prevalent dead silence reflects the isolation of its hosts and when the greyness of nature merges with the solitariness of the hotel and with its dead silence, it turns into an apparent representation of the spiritual paralysis and symbolic murder of Edith Hope and other females at the hotel by the patriarchal society.

Edith’s friends have internalized the patriarchal rules and conventions of the society in such a way that they do not give any chance to Edith to explain what she wants and how she wants to live. They believe that they all have to obey the conventions and live according to them since they are under the effect of *“mauvaise foi”* (simply bad faith) which is a concept used by Simone de Beauvoir, and Sartre to describe the condition in which human beings adopt false values and disown their innate freedom because of the pressure from social forces (Wilcox et al, 1990, p.148). Obviously, these women adopt the false patriarchal values, refusing to acknowledge their own freedom and what is worse, they force Edith to adopt the same values since they regard her challenge to this patriarchal order as a threat that has to be eliminated. In her article

“Difficult Joys” Cixous states that “*women have enemies within the world of women and that they often are themselves their own enemies*” (Wilcox et al, 1990, p. 23). As Cixous remarks the enemy of a woman is again a woman. This enmity is clearly observed in *Hotel Du Lac*. Penelope Milne is the one who shapes the destiny of Edith Hope, seeing her as a threat to the patriarchal order. Rather than establishing a real sisterhood with her against the patriarchal ideology, Penelope sees Edith as an enemy or a devil who lacks the virtues of a woman to be a perfect fit for the society. When we look at the etymological root of Penelope’s name, we can analyse the role of Penelope in Edith’s life better. Deriving from the Greek *péné*, meaning “*thread of a bobbin*”, the name of Penelope means “*weaver*” (Online Etymology Dictionary). In Greek mythology, Penelope is the wife of Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey*. She is known for her faithfulness to her husband. During Odysseus’ long absence, she delays her suitors by pretending to weave a garment. Just like Penelope who weaves garments in *Odyssey*, Penelope in *Hotel Du Lac* weaves the destiny of Edith Hope by sending her in exile to be a faithful disciple of patriarchal ideology.

At the hotel, Edith observes people from different social classes and describes both their attitudes and appearances in detail. She is especially fascinated by Iris Pusey and her daughter Jennifer. Iris Pusey, seventy-nine year old wealthy widow, is a dominant character in the novel. She controls everyone around her, especially her daughter Jennifer. She is keen on luxury goods and loves spending her time shopping. She is an extroverted person, but she is extremely self-centred. She only talks about herself and her lavish lifestyle as she loves being the centre of attention. Her daughter Jennifer is as charming as her mother with her clothing and expensive jewellery. These mother-daughter represent the women who are forced to be beautiful and glamorous all the time to please men’s desires and fantasy. That’s why Mrs. Pusey and her daughter spend most of their time keeping up with fashion and beauty trends. Despite looking as a healthy relationship at first sight, Jennifer’s devotion of her whole life to her mother actually contradicts with her being as a sexually provocative woman. Mrs. Pusey’s extreme fondness for her daughter creates a sharp contrast with Edith’s mother Rosa’s negligence for Edith.

Edith is not only charmed by Mrs. Pusey and Jennifer’s richness and glamour but also by their intimate and affectionate mother-daughter relationship which triggers the revival of her childhood memories. She recalls that as a child, she was not loved and appreciated enough by her own mother, Rosa who was disappointed and bored upon losing her former beautiful and flirtatious presence after her marriage. By obeying the marriage norms of patriarchal ideology, Rosa renounces her freedom, and her own autonomous self which not only makes her

a victim of patriarchy, but she causes her daughter, Edith to fall a prey to this hypocritical system as well.

Her strange mother, Rosa, that harsh disappointed woman, that former beauty who raged so unsuccessfully against her fate, deliberately, willfully letting herself go, slatternly and scornful, mocking her pale silent daughter who slipped so modestly in and out of her aromatic bedroom, bringing the cups of coffee which her mother deliberately spilled. And shouting, 'Too weak! Too weak! All of you, too weak!' Sighing for Vienna, which had known her young and brilliant, and not fat and slovenly, as she was now (Brookner, 2012, p. 24).

Obviously, Edith suffers from the loss of a loving mother figure in her life since she was brought up at the hands of a negligent and ill-natured woman who was obsessed only with her youth desires, leaving her daughter in deep emotional deprivation. According to Irigaray, “*the relationship between mother/daughter, daughter/mother constitutes an extremely explosive kernel in our societies. To think it, to change it, amounts to undermining the patriarchal order*” (Whitford: 1991, p. 77). Irigaray exposes the potential power of mother-daughter bond to challenge patriarchal systems, but Edith’s mother is too blinded to realize the power between herself and her daughter; thus, causing her to grow up as an unconfident, emotionally unsatisfied and vulnerable woman. One of Edith’s most apparent characteristics is her being diffident. As she has lost her confidence in the idea that her wishes and desires will be fulfilled in life, she has difficulty in asserting herself, which makes her vulnerable to other people’s directions and controls. Edith lets other people shape her fate, actions and decisions. Her diffident personality trait absolutely originates in her emotionally deprived childhood. Since her mother did not give the necessary emotional support to young Edith, acting cruelly toward her, she had to learn how to suppress her own desires and needs, thinking that they would never be met. Her suppressed unfulfilled desires find a way to come out and affect her behaviors since powerful desires like security, comfort and love cannot disappear completely in a person. Paralyzed by her childhood deprivation, Edith longs for love and needs to satisfy her intense domestic feelings with a marriage which offers her a real attachment to a man both physically and emotionally. Moreover, in her romantic fictions, Edith both expresses and fulfils her desire for love without needing censorship writing under a pseudonym.

A young lady called Monica, the wife of a noble Englishman, is another exiled woman at Hotel Du Lac. Since she is not able to meet the expectations of

her husband who wants her to produce an heir, she is dispatched to this hotel to sort out her eating disorder which adversely affects her productive functions. Her husband thinks that her staying alone at this hotel is going to help her to become stronger and fertile enough to give birth to an heir for him. As the patriarchal order forces every woman to give birth to keep the continuity of the society, her husband neither asks Monica's idea nor questions whether she is ready for taking the responsibility of a baby. He simply views her as an object to be used for the production of a male heir to keep his reputation. Just like Edith, she is forcibly packed to this hotel to be "a woman" in order to meet the expectation of her husband whom she hates and to fix her infertility. She develops a temporary friendship with Edith, sharing her feelings and anxieties. She openly states "*It is so nice to have someone to talk to*" (Brookner, 2012, p. 36) as she feels desperate because of being condemned to exile and loneliness.

Poor old trout.....She lives for that son. She'd do anything for him. And he comes to see her once a month, takes her out in the car, brings her back, and forgets her.... He considers her manners too rustic for her to be allowed to live under the same roof as that frightful wife of his who, incidentally, started life as a hairdresser before snaffling her first husband. This one's her second. Mme de Bonneuil had a beautiful house near the French border: it's quite a good family, incidentally. Naturally, the daughter-in-law wanted the house to herself. So the old girl had to go (Brookner, 2012, p. 37).

Seeming at first as a gross bourgeoisie, Madame de Bonneuil turns out to be another exiled woman who has been driven out of her own mansion by her son and her haughty wife. Apparently, this elderly aristocrat is also forcibly dispatched to Hotel Du Lac and condemned to live in isolation just like Monica and Edith. Moreover, her deafness makes her solitariness worse.

All these women sent to Hotel Du Lac against their will are thought to be unfit for the society. Although they are all condemned to live in isolation, they fail to establish any kind of relationship with each other. However, Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of developing a sisterhood to break the isolation imposed on women by patriarchal order in her seminal work the *Second Sex*. She also calls for mutual support among women to fight against patriarchal power. She argues that only if women act in solidarity, they can overcome their individual isolation and recognize themselves as a group with a common purpose. Sisterhood is essential for collective resistance against patriarchy. The women in *Hotel Du Lac* sadly cannot form such a solidarity. Thus, Edith has

started to question her existence among these women since she does not want to be one of them. As an intellectual and logical woman, she criticizes and humiliates them, finding their conversation, mostly about fashion, shopping, and parties, so dull and simple. *“But women, women, only women, and I do so love the conversation of men. Oh David, David, she thought”* (Brookner, 2012, p. 9). She wishes to be talking with men and particularly longs for David’s conversation. Edith consciously isolates herself from the women at Hotel Du Lac as she is aware that they are all representations of the hypocritical system. These females make Edith realize that she will be either cute by covering her feelings or be an outcast, excluding herself from the society.

At this point, it is highly important to note that the novel not only portrays women’s physical or social exile but also emphasizes their psychological alienation from themselves. Edith, Monica, Madame de Bonneuil even Jennifer seem to be trapped in identities that were culturally imposed on them rather than the ones they constructed themselves. Their psychological situation reflects what Judith Butler refers to as the unavoidable gender performativity in which women constantly play roles that are socially rewarding but personally devastating. Thus, Hotel du Lac becomes a transitional place where patriarchal norms are briefly suspended, enabling the female characters to confront different aspects of themselves that had been concealed for a long a time behind submission, obligations or romantic idealism. Nevertheless, this transition does not guarantee a complete transformation for all; rather it reveals the profound gap between who they really are and who they are supposed to be. Besides, the seasonal emptiness and the stillness of the hotel highlight the emptiness of the roles these women are expected to act out, revealing that the exile is not just a retribution but also enlightenment. Brookner subtly questions if women need to be in exile to reflect on their own existence or the genuine liberty is a radical rejection to return to the world that exiled them in the very beginning.

As the only man at Hotel Du Lac, Mr. Neville becomes the centre of attention for women with his good looking, gentleness and richness. Recently left by his wife, Neville enjoys his life, believing that a person should not be attached to anyone emotionally. For him, selfishness is the best way, but Edith prefers a genuine attachment, companionship and a routine life. He tells Edith that what she needs is a social position gained through marriage. Later, Mr. Neville proposes Edith, stating *“I am proposing a partnership of the most enlightened kind. A partnership based on esteem, if you like..... If you wish to take a lover, that is your concern, so long as you arrange it in a civilized manner”* (Brookner, 2012, p. 94). His proposal clearly depicts the corrupted nature of marriage institution which is established on the interests of the

partners rather than on genuine feelings and attachment. Edith will get a beautiful home, nice clothes and much freedom to do whatever she wishes, and Neville will have an intelligent and trustworthy companion to show off people in public. He sees Edith like an object, a commodity to be used for building up his lost reputation as a betrayed man in society. He forces Edith into this hypocritical society by threatening her with loneliness, boredom and triviality in case of not conforming to its rules. Upon realizing that Mr. Neville is going to use her to cover his illicit affairs which only bring her humiliation, she decides to return. Edith is quite aware of the fact that she will go on living with that hypocrisy prevailing in the society since there is no cure for this patriarchal order, but she will live through her own way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, throughout the centuries, women are suppressed, silenced and excluded from many aspects of life, being seen as inferior creatures by the patriarchal society. They are typically seen as objects to be used or as sexual possessions to be abused by the male authority. Being a remarkable novel of its time, *Hotel Du Lac* portrays the pathetic situations of cast off or exiled women from the hypocritical system dominated by the patriarchal norms and rules. Since they are seen as a threat in this order, they are doomed to be isolated from society to be cured until they can learn to act incompatible with the patriarchal norms set for them. Some females accept these norms without questioning, but Edith, undergoing a process of self-discovery, recognizes the hypocrisy and the patriarchal programming in society, stating that she will “*never learn the rules of correct behaviour..., those rules that girls are supposed to learn at their mother’s knee*” (Brookner, 2012, p. 84). The novel provides us with valuable understanding about the murder of women’s minds and souls under the overwhelming power of patriarchy, portraying how their voice is silenced within this order. After analysing the reasons of other females’ isolation, Edith becomes sure that there is no way out from the traps of patriarchal ideology as long as women are not in solidarity against their patriarchal murderers.

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Ukrainian as a Language-Culture under Threat: Digital Documentation, Translation and Textual Memory in Documenting Ukraine

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Abstract

The vulnerability of a language cannot be measured only by speaker numbers, legal status or institutional recognition. A language may remain widely used and still become fragile when the textual, cultural and interpretive conditions that sustain it are placed under pressure. This study examines Ukrainian as a language-culture under threat through a corpus of thirty publicly accessible digital texts selected from the Documenting Ukraine section of the Institute for Human Sciences website (<https://www.iwm.at/documenting-ukraine>). The corpus is treated as a curated digital textual environment in which documentation, testimony, translation, cultural memory, authorship and future archiving intersect. The analysis combines thematic coding, philological close reading and discourse analysis. It shows that Ukrainian textual memory in the corpus is organised through five interrelated patterns: documentation and future archive as textual operations; translation, bilingualism and untranslatability; testimony as textualised experience; heritage, place and cultural continuity; and epistemic agency and future interpretability. The study argues that the future of a threatened language-culture depends not only on whether texts survive, but on whether the conditions that make those texts interpretable are preserved.

Keywords: Ukrainian language; language-culture; digital documentation; textual memory; translation; testimony; cultural heritage; Documenting Ukraine; IWM

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Introduction

The vulnerability of a language is not always measured by the number of its speakers. A language may remain widely used and institutionally recognised, yet still become vulnerable when the cultural, textual and interpretive environments that sustain it are placed under pressure. Schools may be interrupted, literary production displaced, archives destabilised, and ordinary forms of cultural transmission pushed into new media, new geographies and new languages. In such cases, the question is not simply whether a language survives, but whether the cultural meanings carried by that language remain narratable, translatable, preservable and intelligible for future readers.

Ukrainian after 2022 is a particularly significant case for examining this problem. The full-scale Russian invasion intensified already existing debates around language, identity, bilingualism and cultural memory. Ukrainian had long occupied a complex position shaped by imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet histories, as well as by the asymmetric relationship between Ukrainian and Russian in public life, education, publishing and cultural authority (Bilaniuk, 2005; Kulyk, 2024). After 2022, however, language became more than a matter of policy or communicative preference. It became a field in which belonging, historical experience, cultural continuity and symbolic distance from Russian imperial frameworks were negotiated with renewed urgency (Kulyk, 2024; Racek et al., 2024).

Yet the Ukrainian case cannot be reduced to a simple narrative of linguistic replacement or national consolidation. Ukrainian textual culture has always involved multilingual histories, regional variation, translation, self-translation, bilingual biographies and contested cultural hierarchies. Russian, Ukrainian, mixed linguistic forms and international languages coexist within a field marked by unequal political and symbolic weight. For this reason, the problem addressed here is not Ukrainian language in isolation, but Ukrainian as a language-culture: a cultural-linguistic formation in which words, genres, memory, place, literature, testimony and intellectual production are interdependent.

The term language-culture is used here to indicate that language does not function merely as a neutral medium of communication. It carries memories of place, forms of address, literary traditions, embodied experience, historical references and culturally dense meanings that cannot always be translated by lexical equivalence. A threatened language-culture is therefore not only endangered when its use is suppressed. It is also threatened when the conditions that make its texts interpretable are weakened. This includes the loss of local contexts, the displacement of speakers, the interruption of institutions, the

fragility of digital records and the need to make local experience comprehensible to external audiences.

Digital documentation has become one of the main environments in which these pressures are registered. The contemporary Ukrainian textual field includes institutional statements, project descriptions, interviews, literary reflections, translated discussions, photographic essays, oral testimony, digital exhibitions and public intellectual commentary. Such materials do not merely report events. They transform experience into textual form. They produce categories, preserve voices, frame memories, mark places and prepare materials for future interpretation. In this sense, digital texts are not secondary traces of cultural life; they are among the forms through which a language-culture under pressure attempts to remain legible.

The empirical basis of the study is a corpus of thirty publicly accessible texts selected from the Documenting Ukraine section of the Institute for Human Sciences website. The project is suitable for this analysis because it explicitly brings together documentation, testimony, intellectual reflection, artistic interpretation and future archiving. Its programmatic description defines its purpose as contributing to a record of the Russo-Ukrainian War, capturing human experience and making that experience accessible and comprehensible to a broader world. It also states that supported projects are conceived and carried out by Ukrainians, and that the materials produced through them form part of Ukraine's intellectual heritage (IWM, n.d.-a). These elements make the corpus relevant not only as documentation of war, but as a curated digital textual environment in which language, memory, authorship and cultural mediation intersect.

The corpus was constructed through keyword-guided purposive sampling. The selection was based on terms derived from the project's programmatic vocabulary: record, documentation, factual record, future archive, human experience, testimony, interpretation, preservation, Ukrainian intellectual work, heritage, translation, displacement and language mediation. Texts were included when they made visible at least one of the following dimensions: textualised experience, translation or multilingual mediation, cultural memory, Ukrainian intellectual production, or digital preparation for future interpretation. This selection logic allows the corpus to be read not as a comprehensive representation of Ukrainian experience, but as a focused body of materials through which the textual mechanisms of cultural continuity can be examined.

The central research question is: how does a curated digital corpus represent and preserve Ukrainian as a language-culture under threat through documentation, translation, testimony and textual memory? This question shifts

attention away from general statements about war, identity or national culture and toward the specific forms through which language and memory are made durable. It asks how experience becomes a record, how testimony becomes textual memory, how translation mediates cultural specificity, how authorship sustains epistemic agency, and how digital documentation prepares materials for future reading.

Methodologically, the study combines thematic coding, philological close reading and discourse analysis. Thematic coding identifies the dominant categories through which the corpus organises language-culture vulnerability: record-making, testimony, translation, archive, heritage, displacement and intellectual agency. Philological close reading attends to language-focused passages where form, genre and cultural specificity shape interpretation. Discourse analysis examines how the corpus frames Ukrainian experience for local and international audiences. The aim is not to quantify Ukrainian cultural experience, but to understand how selected digital texts organise the relation between language, memory and future interpretability.

The argument developed here is that the corpus presents Ukrainian not only as a language used in wartime, but as a language-culture whose continuity depends on textual mediation. Its vulnerability appears in the interruption of institutions, the loss of home, the pressure of translation, the instability of archives and the unequal weight of multilingual histories. Its continuity appears in testimony, literary expression, intellectual authorship, digital documentation and the effort to make local meanings accessible without dissolving their cultural specificity. The study therefore treats digital textual heritage as one of the sites where a threatened language-culture is not simply preserved, but actively interpreted and prepared for future readers.

1. Conceptual Background

1.1. Language-culture and vulnerability

The notion of language-culture allows the analysis to move beyond a purely linguistic definition of vulnerability. Ukrainian is not examined only as a system of grammar or as a state language, but as a medium through which memory, genre, place, literary expression and intellectual authorship become culturally transmissible. This perspective is especially relevant in contexts where language remains publicly visible while the institutions and interpretive environments that sustain it are destabilised.

Earlier work on Ukrainian language politics shows that Ukrainian-Russian relations have long been shaped by asymmetry, symbolic competition and contested cultural authority (Bilaniuk, 2005; Kulyk, 2024). More recent research

demonstrates that the full-scale invasion accelerated shifts in language attitudes and digital language practices, increasing the symbolic value of Ukrainian and altering the relation between language, identity and public self-description (Kulyk, 2024; Racek et al., 2024).

Recent empirical studies make this tension methodologically concrete. Racek et al. (2024) analyse more than 4.4 million geo-tagged tweets from over 62,000 users and show a post-invasion shift toward Ukrainian in digital public space. Warditz and Meir (2024), by contrast, examine Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism among war-affected migrants and refugees in Austria and Germany and show that the heightened symbolic value of Ukrainian may coexist with Russian in family, migrant and pragmatic repertoires. Read together, these studies suggest that post-2022 Ukrainian should be approached through both macro-level language shift and the persistence of bilingual complexity. Snyder's framing of the war as colonial further strengthens this point by linking Ukrainian cultural survival to the right to narrate history from a Ukrainian position rather than through imperial categories (Snyder, 2022a).

This interpretation is consistent with wider sociolinguistic approaches to mobility and repertoire. Blommaert (2010) shifts attention from fixed languages to mobile linguistic resources circulating through unequal social conditions, while Garcia and Li Wei (2014) conceptualise bilingual practice as dynamic meaning-making rather than simple alternation between bounded linguistic systems. These perspectives support the treatment of translation-related and multilingual materials as part of Ukrainian cultural continuity, not as deviations from it. They also clarify why computational evidence of language shift must be complemented by philological close reading of culturally dense words, testimony, genre and translation.

Recent Ukrainian-language scholarship adds a lexical and platform-sensitive dimension to this argument. Bilovska (2026) treats the Ukrainian "word of the year" as a condensed marker of public experience, arguing that it helps "not only to record linguistic innovations, but also to understand key social trends" (p. 262; translation mine). This supports the present study's claim that linguistic change is also a cultural-memory process. Harbar, Vasylenko, and Skliarenko (2025) extend the same problem into digital environments, where communication becomes "fragmentary, visually oriented, multichannel" (p. 263; translation mine). Their argument clarifies why the corpus should be read not only as a set of texts, but as a digitally mediated field in which language, identity and cultural visibility are reorganised.

1.2. Textual memory and digital mediation

Memory requires textual forms. Testimonies, interviews, literary reflections, photographs with captions, project descriptions and digital exhibitions do not merely transmit content; they organise experience into genres that can be preserved and re-read. Erll's (2011) concept of travelling memory is useful here because it treats memory as mobile across media, languages and geographies rather than territorially fixed. In this perspective, digital fragments, translated testimonies and literary reflections are not passive traces; they are vehicles through which Ukrainian memory becomes movable, legible and available beyond its immediate context.

Digital mediation adds a further layer to this process. Digital texts are accessible and fragile at the same time. Their meaning depends not only on their survival as files or webpages, but on metadata, authorship, source boundaries, language information, translation context and conditions of use. Recent reflections on wartime documentation in Ukraine describe documentation as a form of translation between bearers of experience and those who seek to understand it, while also warning against extractive models in which sources are collected locally but interpreted elsewhere (Dovzhyk et al., 2025). The interpretability of digital materials is therefore a linguistic, archival and cultural question.

Ukrainian scholarship on wartime documentation also strengthens the archival dimension of the framework. Denysiuk (2025) conceptualises wartime archiving and documentation as a "communicative strategy that goes beyond the purely fixation function" (p. 59), linking cultural memory, identity, information security and symbolic resistance. Otrishchenko's edited volume on wartime interviewing similarly presents documentation as both a "methodological guide" and a "space of frankness and vulnerability" (Otrishchenko, 2024, p. 4; translation mine). Its foreword further shifts attention from documents as finished objects to the processes that make sources, archives and future interpretation possible. These studies therefore justify reading *Documenting Ukraine* as part of a broader Ukrainian documentary field in which language, testimony and archival practice are inseparable.

1.3. Translation and multilingual complexity

Translation is treated here not as a supplementary theme, but as one of the main sites where the cultural density of Ukrainian becomes visible. The corpus includes a language-focused subset concerned with Ukrainian-Russian contact, bilingual authorship, mixed forms such as surzhyk, and problems of untranslatability. Surzhyk is understood here, following Bilaniuk (2004) and

Hentschel (2024), as a socially marked continuum of mixed Ukrainian-Russian speech forms rather than as a single fixed variety or a defective form of Ukrainian. These materials show that Ukrainian textual memory is not produced in a linguistically closed field. It emerges within multilingual histories in which languages carry unequal cultural, political and symbolic weight.

Untranslatability is particularly important because it marks the limits of lexical equivalence. Certain words, genres or experiences may be translated grammatically while remaining culturally difficult to transfer. In such cases, translation becomes a philological problem: it reveals the historical, affective and literary conditions through which meaning becomes recognisable.

2. Data Source and Corpus Design

2.1. Data source

The empirical material consists of thirty publicly accessible texts selected from the Documenting Ukraine section of the Institute for Human Sciences website. The source was chosen because it offers a concentrated digital environment in which documentation, testimony, translation, intellectual reflection, artistic interpretation and future archiving are brought together around Ukrainian experience after 2022. Its programmatic description defines the project as an attempt to contribute to a record of the Russo-Ukrainian War, capture the human experience of that war, and make it accessible and comprehensible to a broader world (IWM, n.d.-a). Later program materials also show that the initiative developed from an emergency response into a broad grant-based and archival framework supporting Ukrainian cultural and intellectual work (IWM, 2026).

The institutional setting also matters. The IWM was founded in 1982 as a meeting place for dissenting thinkers from Eastern Europe and scholars from the West (IWM, n.d.-c). Documenting Ukraine is part of the IWM's Ukraine and the World program headed by Timothy Snyder (IWM, n.d.-a). This context clarifies why the corpus can be read within wider debates on Ukrainian authorship, historical narration, documentary truth and future interpretability.

This source is not treated as a neutral repository of information. It is a curated digital textual environment. Its relevance lies in the fact that the materials do not only document events; they also organise language, memory, authorship and cultural interpretation into forms prepared for public circulation. Recent symposium materials around *The Most Documented War* similarly frame wartime documentation through questions of preservation, access, safety, storytelling and justice, which confirms that the issue is not only whether documents exist, but how they are curated, activated and made interpretable (IWM, 2025c). The

selected texts therefore make it possible to examine how Ukrainian appears as a language-culture under pressure: not simply as a language of communication, but as a medium through which experience is narrated, translated, archived and made available for future interpretation.

2.2. Corpus construction

The corpus consists of thirty texts selected through keyword-guided purposive sampling. The keywords were derived from the programmatic vocabulary of the source itself and from the conceptual concerns of the study. The selection focused on texts that explicitly or implicitly addressed at least one of the following dimensions: record-making, human experience, testimony, interpretation, archive, preservation, Ukrainian authorship, cultural heritage, translation, broader accessibility, displacement or language mediation.

The corpus includes different text types: programmatic pages, blog essays, news items, grantee profiles, event descriptions, interviews and publication-related texts. This variation is important because the study is concerned with textual mediation rather than with a single genre. Programmatic texts define institutional aims; interviews and profiles foreground authorship and experience; translation-related texts expose philological tensions; testimony-oriented materials show how lived experience becomes narratable; cultural and literary materials reveal the role of memory, place and expressive form.

The selection was guided by relevance to the research question rather than by frequency alone. A text was included when it contributed analytically to the study of Ukrainian as a language-culture under threat. Texts that contained relevant search terms but did not engage with Ukrainian language, cultural memory, documentation, displacement or textual mediation were not included in the main corpus. This distinction was necessary because words such as "record", "testimony" or "human experience" may occur in unrelated institutional contexts. The final corpus therefore reflects conceptual relevance rather than mechanical keyword retrieval.

2.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Texts were included in the corpus when they met three conditions. First, they had to be publicly accessible through the selected digital environment. Second, they had to contain sufficient textual content for analysis, rather than functioning only as visual or navigational material. Third, they had to contribute to at least one of the analytical categories listed above.

Texts were excluded from the main corpus when their relevance was only lexical or incidental. For example, a text mentioning "human experience" without

any connection to Ukrainian language, cultural memory, displacement or documentation was not considered suitable. Similarly, general institutional pages, unrelated fellowship descriptions or materials whose connection to the research question was indirect were left outside the corpus. This screening reduced the risk of building the analysis around accidental keyword matches.

The study also avoided private, closed-group or non-public materials. Since the corpus includes war-related and displacement-related texts, ethical caution was necessary. Public availability was not treated as automatic ethical clearance. Materials involving personal experience were used only when they were already presented within a public institutional context. The analysis therefore focuses on textual form, framing and mediation rather than on extracting private trauma.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study uses a qualitative, corpus-based case study design. The aim is not to measure the frequency of linguistic or cultural themes in a statistically representative population, but to examine how a selected body of digital texts organises the relation between language, memory, testimony, translation and cultural continuity. The corpus is therefore treated as an interpretive field rather than as a quantitative dataset.

A qualitative design is appropriate because the research problem concerns meaning, mediation and textual form. The central question is how Ukrainian is represented as a language-culture under pressure, and how digital texts transform lived experience into forms that can be recorded, translated, preserved and interpreted. Such questions require attention to genre, vocabulary, framing, authorship, translation and context. Quantitative description may support the analysis at the level of code distribution, but it cannot replace close textual interpretation.

The study combines three analytical procedures: thematic coding, philological close reading and discourse analysis. These procedures are used together because the corpus contains different types of texts: programmatic statements, interviews, grantee profiles, event descriptions, literary reflections, testimony-oriented materials and translation-related discussions. A single method would not be sufficient to account for this variety. Thematic coding identifies the recurring categories through which the corpus is organised; philological close reading examines language-focused passages where form and cultural specificity shape interpretation; discourse analysis considers how the materials frame Ukrainian language-culture for future readers and broader publics.

3.2. Analytical procedure

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, each text was catalogued according to basic metadata: title, date, text type, source location, dominant theme, language-related relevance and relation to the research question. This stage established the boundaries of the corpus and made it possible to distinguish analytically relevant materials from texts that were only incidentally connected to the search terms.

Second, the texts were coded according to a predefined analytical framework. The codes were derived from the programmatic vocabulary of the source and from the conceptual focus of the study. Terms such as record, human experience, factual record, oral testimony, intellectual reflection, artistic interpretation, archive, broader world and Ukrainian intellectual work provided the initial basis for the coding scheme. These terms were not used mechanically. They were interpreted as indicators of broader textual processes: record-making, testimony, translation, cultural mediation, authorship, preservation and future interpretability.

Third, selected texts were subjected to philological close reading. In this stage, passages were selected when linguistic form directly shaped interpretation: for example, when translation decisions, mixed language practices, poetic formulations or culturally specific expressions affected the meaning of the text. Close reading was used to identify how linguistic choices shape the cultural meaning of the texts and how translation mediates between local experience and wider accessibility.

Fourth, the coded findings were interpreted through discourse analysis. This stage examined how the corpus constructs the relationship between experience and record, testimony and memory, authorship and intellectual heritage, translation and global comprehensibility, archive and future use. The purpose was not to summarise individual texts, but to identify the textual mechanisms through which a threatened language-culture is made legible.

Table 1. Coding Framework and Analytical Functions

Code category	Analytical focus	Function in the analysis
Record and documentation	record, documentation, factual record, future archive	Identifies how experience is prepared as future-readable textual material.
Human experience	personal story, affective or embodied account	Shows how lived experience is framed as culturally meaningful.
Testimony	oral testimony, interview, witness account, first-person narrative	Examines how experience becomes narratable and shareable.
Reflection and interpretation	intellectual reflection, artistic interpretation, cultural explanation	Captures the movement from documentation to meaning-making.
Archive and preservation	archive, preservation, access, metadata, collection	Connects digital documentation to future use and interpretability.
Ukrainian authorship	local epistemic agency, intellectual production	Examines how Ukrainian actors produce and frame knowledge about their own experience.
Cultural memory	heritage, memory, literature, art, place, cultural continuity	Identifies the relation between language, place and memory transmission.
Translation and accessibility	translation, broader world, international comprehensibility	Analyses how Ukrainian experience is mediated across languages and audiences.
Displacement and rupture	refugeehood, loss of home, occupied territory, interrupted institutions	Shows how social and institutional disruption affects language-culture continuity.
Multilingual complexity	Ukrainian-Russian contact, mixed forms, language hierarchy and untranslatability	Examines the linguistic tensions within which Ukrainian textual memory is produced.

3.3. Philological close reading

Philological close reading was used to examine selected passages where linguistic form is central to meaning. Particular attention was given to translation-related and multilingual materials, especially where language choice shaped cultural memory or audience. These materials are important because they show that linguistic choice is not merely a technical feature of communication. It determines how a text enters cultural memory, how it becomes available to

different audiences, and how it carries the historical weight of Ukrainian experience.

Close reading also allowed attention to genre. The corpus includes testimonies, interviews, cultural essays, profiles, public-facing project descriptions and literary reflections. Each genre shapes experience differently. A testimony organises memory through a speaker and an event; an interview foregrounds voice and interpretation; a project profile frames experience through institutional mediation; a literary reflection condenses memory through metaphor and form. These differences matter because language-culture is preserved not only through content, but also through the genres that make content transmissible.

3.4. Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis was used to examine how the corpus frames Ukrainian language-culture under conditions of threat. The analysis focused on recurring relations: experience becoming record, testimony becoming memory, translation becoming mediation, authorship becoming epistemic agency, and archive becoming a promise of future readability.

This stage was especially important for avoiding a merely thematic reading. The aim was not to say that the texts "mention" memory, translation or displacement. The aim was to examine how these concepts function within the corpus. Record-making, for instance, is not treated as a neutral act of documentation. It is analysed as a process through which fragile experience is transformed into material that can be preserved and interpreted. Similarly, translation is not treated as simple linguistic transfer, but as a site where cultural specificity, historical asymmetry and international accessibility are negotiated.

3.5. Treatment of translation and multilingualism

Because the corpus includes materials concerned with language mediation and international accessibility, translation was treated as both an object of analysis and a methodological issue. The analysis did not assume that meanings can move transparently from one language to another. Instead, it treated translation as a form of cultural mediation that may reveal tensions between local specificity and broader comprehensibility.

Where texts discussed untranslatability, linguistic choice or bilingual authorship, these passages were read as evidence of the cultural density of language. The question was not only what is translated, but what becomes difficult to translate, what is lost or reframed in translation, and how translation affects the position of a text within Ukrainian cultural memory.

3.6. Validity and analytical control

Analytical validity was supported through three forms of control. First, the corpus was bounded by a clear source and a defined selection framework. This prevented the analysis from becoming a broad commentary on Ukrainian digital culture in general. Second, the coding categories were derived from the source's own programmatic vocabulary and from the research question, rather than imposed retrospectively after reading the texts. Third, the findings were developed at the level of recurring textual mechanisms rather than isolated examples.

The study does not claim statistical representativeness. Its validity depends on interpretive coherence, transparent selection, and the correspondence between the coding categories and the textual evidence. The corpus is used to identify how one curated digital environment makes Ukrainian language-culture visible through record-making, testimony, translation, authorship, memory and preservation.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The corpus consists of publicly accessible texts. Nevertheless, public availability does not remove ethical responsibility, especially when the materials concern war, displacement, occupied territories, personal loss or embodied experience. The analysis therefore avoids treating personal testimony as raw emotional evidence. Individual stories are considered only in relation to their public textual framing and analytical function.

No private social media content, closed-group material or unpublished testimony was included. Texts involving vulnerable experience were read with attention to genre, mediation and public context. The analysis does not seek to extract trauma, but to understand how experience is textualised, framed and prepared for future interpretation.

3.8. Methodological limitations

The corpus is selective and institutionally mediated. It does not represent the whole of Ukrainian linguistic, literary, diasporic or wartime experience. It privileges texts that have already entered a public digital environment and have been framed for broader accessibility. This limitation is significant, but it is also part of the analytical value of the study. The corpus allows observation of how Ukrainian experience is curated, titled, translated, categorised and made available to future readers.

A further limitation concerns language. The corpus includes language-focused materials, but the analysis is not a full sociolinguistic survey of Ukrainian

language use. It is a textual study of how language-culture is represented and mediated in a selected digital corpus. The findings should therefore be read as interpretive conclusions about this corpus, not as generalisable claims about all Ukrainian language practices.

4. Findings: Analytical Patterns in the Corpus

4.1. Documentation and future archive as textual operations

The first dominant pattern concerns the transformation of documentation into a textual operation. In the corpus, record-making is not presented as the simple accumulation of information. It functions as a process through which unstable experience is selected, framed, named and prepared for future interpretation. The repeated vocabulary of record, factual record, oral testimony, intellectual reflection, artistic interpretation and transdisciplinary archive indicates that documentation is understood as a structured passage from event to text, and from text to future archive. The programmatic materials are especially clear in this respect: the project is defined through the creation of a record, the capture of human experience and the future housing of materials in a complex, transdisciplinary archive (IWM, n.d.-a).

This pattern matters because it shifts the analytical focus from preservation as storage to preservation as textual preparation. A record becomes meaningful only when it remains connected to context, authorship, genre, language and conditions of access. The website launch materials reinforce this logic by presenting the project not only as a platform for collecting materials, but as a structure through which those materials are gathered, organised and prepared for wider use (IWM, 2022b).

The corpus therefore treats the future archive not as a distant institutional endpoint, but as an organising principle already active in the present. Texts are written, selected and presented with an implied future reader in mind. This future reader may be scholarly, cultural, archival or international. What matters analytically is that the materials are not merely responding to immediate disruption; they are also being shaped as documents that can carry meaning beyond their original moment. In this sense, documentation operates as one of the primary mechanisms through which a threatened language-culture attempts to secure future readability.

4.2. Translation, bilingualism and untranslatability

The second pattern concerns translation as a site of linguistic and cultural negotiation. The translation-related materials show that language is not treated as a transparent instrument for transferring information. It is a medium in which

memory, power, cultural hierarchy and historical experience are condensed. The *Building Bridges* text explicitly frames translation as a way of thinking across languages, cultures and experiences, while also foregrounding linguistic untranslatability and communicative hierarchies (IWM, 2025a).

The same problem is developed in *Translating the Human Experience*, where language contact, self-translation and the difficulty of communicating wartime experience are placed at the centre of discussion (IWM, 2025b). These materials prevent the corpus from being read through a simplified monolingual framework. Ukrainian textual memory appears within a multilingual field shaped by Ukrainian, Russian, mixed speech forms and international languages.

The analytical significance of untranslatability lies in the fact that it reveals the cultural density of language. Some meanings cannot be transferred through lexical equivalence alone because they depend on shared history, social experience, literary memory and affective resonance. Untranslatability therefore does not indicate failure; it marks the point at which language discloses its cultural embeddedness. In this corpus, translation is not only a means of reaching a broader world. It is also a philological problem that exposes what is at stake when a language-culture is mediated beyond its immediate context.

Bilingualism is equally significant. The corpus does not present Ukrainian culture as linguistically closed. Discussions of Ukrainian-Russian self-translation and language choice show that Ukrainian textual culture includes complex biographies, uneven language hierarchies and historically burdened linguistic relations. The Kulyk interview strengthens this perspective by situating post-2022 shifts in language attitudes within longer debates on identity and bilingualism (Shynkarenko & Kulyk, 2023). The question is therefore not whether Ukrainian can be isolated from other languages, but how Ukrainian cultural meaning is sustained in a multilingual field where languages do not carry equal symbolic weight.

4.3. Testimony as textualised experience

The third pattern concerns testimony as the textualisation of lived experience. In the corpus, testimony is not merely evidence of events and not merely an emotional supplement to documentation. It is a textual form through which experience is organised, narrated and made shareable. Testimony gives disruption a speaker, a temporal structure, a narrative frame and an implied audience. It converts experience into a form that can circulate beyond the immediate situation in which it was lived.

This function is visible in education-related materials, where student and teacher experiences are collected to preserve the human dimension of institutional

disruption. Education in the Shelter does not simply describe damaged schools or interrupted education; it frames testimony as a way of preventing experience from becoming an abstract statistic (IWM, 2022a). The Yelizaveta Smith profile offers a different form of textualised experience, linking disability, sensory perception, displacement from Kharkiv to Germany and the attempt to understand two radically different worlds through filmic narration (IWM, n.d.-b).

These materials show that testimony is one of the ways in which a language-culture preserves the human scale of historical disruption. It allows the corpus to hold together personal experience and cultural memory without collapsing one into the other. The methodological implication is important: testimony should not be read only for what happened, but also for how experience is made narratable. The form, framing, voice and conditions of public presentation are part of the meaning.

At the same time, the testimony-oriented materials require ethical restraint. Their value does not lie in the dramatic extraction of suffering. Their significance lies in showing how lived experience becomes textual memory under conditions of pressure. The analytical task is therefore to understand testimony as a mediated form: one that carries experience, but also reshapes it through genre, language, selection and public address.

4.4. Heritage, place and cultural continuity

The fourth pattern concerns the relation between heritage, place and cultural continuity. The corpus repeatedly links language to memory-bearing forms: literature, poetry, photography, art, home, city, landscape and intellectual heritage. Ukrainian appears not only as a language of communication, but as a cultural medium through which places are remembered, losses are named and continuity is imagined.

The Iya Kiva interview is especially important for this pattern. Poetry is described as a way of speaking about home, memory, history, loss and the wounded body of Ukrainian reality (IWM, 2024b). The point is not simply that poetry "responds" to war. Rather, poetry becomes a form through which a language-culture gives shape to rupture. It offers a mode of cultural interpretation that cannot be reduced to factual description.

The *13 Stories of War* materials extend the same pattern through visual and textual testimony. The photographic essays are framed not only as images, but as historical documents, visual evidence and personal accounts that preserve the memory of war through artistic form (IWM, 2024a). This combination of image and text shows that cultural memory is not preserved through language alone, but

through intermedial forms in which words, images and narrative frames support one another.

Place is also central to cultural continuity. References to Kharkiv, Mariupol, Donetsk, Crimea, occupied territories, destroyed institutions and lost homes do not function merely as geographical markers. They anchor memory in specific locations and show how language-culture is tied to spatial experience. When place is lost, occupied, damaged or displaced, the language that carries memories of that place also enters a condition of pressure. The corpus therefore suggests that cultural continuity depends on the preservation not only of texts, but also of the place-based meanings embedded in those texts.

4.5. Epistemic agency and future interpretability

The fifth pattern concerns epistemic agency. The corpus repeatedly foregrounds Ukrainian authorship, intellectual work and local knowledge production. This is not a secondary ethical detail. It is one of the central conditions through which a threatened language-culture remains capable of interpreting itself. The programmatic materials state that the supported projects are conceived, developed and carried out by Ukrainians, and that the resulting materials form part of Ukraine's intellectual heritage (IWM, n.d.-a). The *Why Documenting Ukraine?* text develops this further by insisting that Ukrainians have the right to tell their story and are best equipped to do so (Younger, 2022). This logic also corresponds to recent reflections on documentation as self-reflection from within the historical process, rather than as an extractive practice in which sources are gathered locally and interpreted elsewhere (Dovzhyk et al., 2025).

This emphasis matters because a language-culture is not sustained only by being documented. It is sustained when its own writers, translators, artists, scholars, archivists and witnesses continue to name, interpret and transmit its meanings. The corpus does not present Ukrainian intellectual work as an external commentary on events. It presents it as one of the mechanisms through which experience becomes culturally intelligible.

Future interpretability depends on this agency. If texts are detached from their authorship, local categories, linguistic specificity or cultural context, they may remain accessible but become weakly interpretable. The corpus therefore suggests that preservation must include more than storage and access. It must preserve the conditions under which future readers can understand who produced the text, from what position, in which language, for which audience and within which cultural field.

This pattern brings together the other four. Documentation prepares materials for future reading; translation mediates them across audiences; testimony gives experience textual form; heritage and place situate that experience culturally; epistemic agency ensures that the meanings are not only assigned from outside. The corpus thus reveals a broader process: Ukrainian as a language-culture under pressure is made future-readable through the combined work of record-making, linguistic mediation, testimony, cultural memory and local intellectual authorship.

The coding profile provides a descriptive overview of how the thirty-text corpus is distributed across the main analytical categories. The purpose is not statistical generalisation, but clarification of the relative analytical weight of the categories. Each category was coded on a three-point scale: 0 = absent, 1 = present but secondary, and 2 = central to the text.

Table 2: Aggregate Coding Profile of the Thirty-Text Corpus

Coding category	Absent n (%)	Secondary n (%)	Central n (%)	Present total n (%)
Record and documentation	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)
Human experience	0 (0.0%)	6 (20.0%)	24 (80.0%)	30 (100.0%)
Testimony and witness account	2 (6.7%)	12 (40.0%)	16 (53.3%)	28 (93.3%)
Reflection and interpretation	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	30 (100.0%)	30 (100.0%)
Archive and preservation	5 (16.7%)	11 (36.7%)	14 (46.7%)	25 (83.3%)
Ukrainian authorship and epistemic agency	0 (0.0%)	19 (63.3%)	11 (36.7%)	30 (100.0%)
Cultural memory and heritage	5 (16.7%)	13 (43.3%)	12 (40.0%)	25 (83.3%)
Translation and international accessibility	4 (13.3%)	9 (30.0%)	17 (56.7%)	26 (86.7%)
Displacement and institutional rupture	4 (13.3%)	15 (50.0%)	11 (36.7%)	26 (86.7%)
Multilingual complexity	10 (33.3%)	15 (50.0%)	5 (16.7%)	20 (66.7%)

Source: Created by the author from the coded corpus.

The high scores for record and interpretation reflect the logic of corpus construction: the texts were selected because they show how experience, memory and cultural work are transformed into public textual material. The lower centrality score for multilingual complexity should not be interpreted as marginality; language-focused materials are fewer, but they provide the main philological basis of the analysis.

Taken together, the aggregate profile indicates that the corpus is structured by four interrelated movements: experience is converted into record; record is extended through testimony and interpretation; interpretation is mediated through

translation, authorship and cultural memory; and digital documentation prepares these materials for future access and possible archival use.

5. Discussion

The corpus makes it possible to approach Ukrainian not merely as a language used under wartime conditions, but as a language-culture whose textual forms are being reorganised under pressure. The significance of this distinction is methodological. A language-culture is not reducible to grammar, vocabulary, speaker numbers or official status. It includes the genres through which a community narrates experience, the memories attached to places and words, the literary and intellectual traditions that shape expression, and the conditions under which texts can circulate beyond their original context. The materials examined here show that the pressure on Ukrainian is therefore not only communicative. It is also textual, interpretive and cultural.

The selected corpus repeatedly positions documentation as a passage from immediate experience to future readability. Expressions such as record, factual record, testimony, intellectual reflection, artistic interpretation and archive do not simply describe institutional aims. They define a process through which events are transformed into textual and cultural material. The relevance of this process lies in the fact that experience under conditions of disruption is often fragmentary, unstable and locally embedded. For such experience to become culturally transmissible, it must be narrated, framed, translated, preserved and made available for later interpretation. The corpus thus reveals documentation not as a neutral act of storage, but as a form of textual mediation.

This point is especially important for the study of threatened language-cultures. A threatened language-culture does not disappear only when its speakers disappear or when its public use is legally restricted. It may also become vulnerable when the textual environments that sustain it are weakened: schools are interrupted, cultural events are displaced, literary production is reorganised, archives are damaged, public memory is fragmented, and translation becomes necessary for international visibility. The education-related materials, for example, show that institutional disruption is also a linguistic and cultural problem. When teaching, learning and academic communication are displaced into shelters, online environments or occupied territories, language is affected not only as a tool of instruction but as a medium of continuity.

The findings also suggest that translation is one of the central sites where the vulnerability and resilience of Ukrainian become visible. The materials on translation and multilingual mediation show that translation is not simply a technical bridge between languages. It is a scene of negotiation in which

meanings, histories and cultural hierarchies are exposed. The language-focused materials prevent a simplified monolingual reading of Ukrainian textual culture. Ukrainian cultural memory is not sustained by linguistic isolation. It is sustained through decisions about what language a text is written in, what language it is translated into, which version becomes authoritative, and how a text enters the cultural field.

The problem of untranslatability sharpens this argument. Some words and experiences cannot be transferred by lexical equivalence alone. They depend on historical density, social experience, literary memory and affective resonance. For this reason, untranslatability should not be understood as failure. It is evidence that language carries more than semantic content. It carries cultural situatedness. In the corpus, translation therefore becomes a philological problem in the strongest sense: it requires attention to form, history, context, genre and the limits of equivalence.

The testimony-oriented materials raise a related problem. Testimony is often discussed either as evidence or as personal expression. The corpus suggests that it should also be treated as a textual form. Testimony gives experience a structure, a speaker position, a temporal order and an implied audience. In this sense, it is one of the ways in which lived disruption becomes culturally communicable. The significance of testimony lies not only in what it reports, but in how it converts the private, embodied or local experience of war, displacement and loss into a form that can be received by others.

Digital documentation adds another layer to this problem. The materials examined here show that digital preservation is not equivalent to cultural preservation unless the conditions of interpretation are also maintained. A digital text may remain accessible as a file or webpage while losing part of its meaning if its context, authorship, genre, language conditions or institutional framing are unclear. The future archive described in the programmatic materials is therefore not simply a repository. It is an interpretive promise: a claim that the collected materials will be preserved in ways that allow future readers to understand their documentary, cultural and intellectual significance. This is also why recent discussions of enacting archives are relevant: preservation, access and safety are inseparable from the ways archived materials later support storytelling, justice and public understanding (IWM, 2025c).

The emphasis on Ukrainian authorship and intellectual production is central to this argument. The programmatic materials insist that supported projects are conceived and carried out by Ukrainians and that the resulting materials form part of Ukraine's intellectual heritage. This is not merely an ethical declaration. It affects the structure of knowledge itself. A threatened language-culture is not

adequately preserved when it is only observed, collected or described from outside. It is sustained when its own intellectual actors continue to produce categories, narratives, interpretations and textual forms through which their experience becomes legible.

The selected materials also reveal the importance of audience. References to the broader world, accessibility and comprehensibility indicate that Ukrainian textual memory is not being produced only for internal use. It is also being mediated for international readers, institutions and future publics. This global orientation creates both possibilities and risks. It enables wider recognition, but it also requires translation, simplification and framing. The danger is that cultural specificity may be flattened in the effort to become comprehensible. The value of the corpus lies in showing this tension rather than resolving it.

The broader significance of the analysis lies in its treatment of threat. Threat is not understood only as destruction, censorship or displacement, although these remain crucial conditions. Threat also refers to the weakening of interpretive continuity: the possibility that future readers may encounter texts without the language, context, memory or cultural knowledge needed to understand them. The corpus responds to this problem by producing forms of textual continuity. It records, translates, frames, interprets and archives. Its importance lies in this movement from vulnerability to future readability.

Conclusion

The analysis of the selected corpus shows that the vulnerability of Ukrainian cannot be understood only through language policy, speaker numbers or institutional status. In the materials examined here, Ukrainian appears as part of a wider language-culture ecology: it carries memory, place, literary expression, testimony, intellectual authorship and cultural continuity.

The materials reveal a repeated movement from lived experience to textual form. Terms such as record, factual record, testimony, archive, intellectual reflection and artistic interpretation mark the stages through which experience is transformed into future-readable cultural material. The significance of this process lies not simply in documentation, but in the conversion of dispersed and fragile experience into forms that can be preserved, interpreted and circulated.

Translation and untranslatability are central to this argument. The materials on translation, bilingual writing and mixed language practices show that language choice determines how a text enters cultural memory, which audience it can reach and what forms of historical experience it is able to carry. Ukrainian is therefore not only a medium through which experience is communicated; it is one of the conditions through which experience becomes culturally recognisable.

Testimony is another central mechanism. It appears not only as evidence of events, but as a textual form through which individual experience becomes communicable. Personal stories, embodied accounts, displacement, interrupted education, occupied places and cultural loss all show how experience is reorganised through narrative.

The central argument that emerges is that the future of a threatened language-culture depends not only on whether texts survive, but on whether they remain interpretable. Ukrainian, as represented in this corpus, survives through words, translations, testimonies, genres, memories, authorship and digital traces. Its vulnerability is textual as much as political, cultural as much as linguistic, and interpretive as much as archival.

The analysis also shows why digital documentation should not be understood as simple storage. The selected corpus points to a more complex process: digital environments gather texts, but they also shape how those texts are framed, named, accessed and prepared for future interpretation. A digital record becomes culturally meaningful only when it preserves context, language, authorship, genre and conditions of use. Without these elements, preservation risks producing searchable but weakly interpretable material.

A further conclusion concerns intellectual agency. The emphasis on Ukrainian authorship, local knowledge production and intellectual ownership is not a secondary ethical detail. It is central to the preservation of a threatened language-culture. A culture is not sustained only when it is documented by others; it is sustained when its own writers, scholars, artists, translators, archivists and witnesses continue to name and interpret their world.

The corpus is valuable not because it represents Ukrainian experience comprehensively, but because it shows what a bounded, institutionally mediated body of public digital texts can do as a layer of cultural preservation. The fact that these materials have been selected, edited, translated, framed and made publicly accessible is precisely what makes them analytically revealing: it brings into view the conditions under which Ukrainian language-culture becomes future-readable. Context, authorship, genre, language, translation history and ethical access are not background features; they are what preservation depends on. Textual survival alone is not enough. For a language-culture under pressure, preservation has meaning only when the interpretive conditions that allow those texts to be understood are also kept intact.

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Chapter 11

Digital Transformations are Wicked Problems: A Practical Approach

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Introduction

Digital Transformation (DT) is not merely an important tool organization can use to survive in the continuously changing business environment but also a requirement into which many voluntarily or involuntarily, are pressed to adopt. This pressure may be coming from external forces such as regulatory bodies, competition, customer or external stakeholder demands or internal need to keep up with or stay ahead of the market, increase the processes efficiency or developing new business models etc. While DT may look like a clean-cut process in a cursory look, it is a complex and highly involved process that gets managers and others frustrated. Since the business environment, organizational processes and digital transformation itself are complex domains, it is important to understand what digital transformation entails in order to navigate this complexity and ensure that it addresses the right issues.

We claim that problems managers attempt to solve with DT and most DT processes themselves are wicked problems thus should be treated accordingly. Wicked problems require a careful problem setting before initiating problem solution. Managers who approach digital transformation using a problem setting perspective instead of problem-solving perspective can deal with difficulties arising in the transformation more productively.

The Context of Digital Transformation

While the early-stage Digital Transformation was concerned with automation of internal processes, it has mainly been identified as the adoption of emerging digital technologies such as social media, mobile platforms, and analytics to advance institutions by improving customer experience, streamlining operations, or developing new business models (Horlacher and Hess 2016). But the nature of DT evolved over time. Between 2017 to early

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2020 DT shifted from early-stage technologies to more complex, emerging technologies such as blockchain and AI (Möller 2023), big data and analytics, blockchain, cloud computing and services, internet of things (IoT) (Baker 2014).

Today DT Digital transformation has become a crucial driver of business development, reshaping industries and redefining how companies operate (Initiative 2017; Olorunyomi et al. 2024). While there is an increase in publications on digital technologies and what DT entails in terms of meaning, scope and extent of its effects, practitioners and scholars are still having difficulty in mapping what DT entails. DT technologies such as e-commerce, CRM, and enhanced communication tools allowed companies to expand their market reach and gain a competitive advantage at the end of the 20th century. In the 21st century, it has become essential for the survival of companies. Companies that approach DT as simply purchasing new technology, hiring new IT staff or new digital officers cannot ensure a successful DT (Ebert and Duarte 2018). DT involves more complex dynamics and challenges than that.

DT encompasses not only technological aspects but also process, management, and human-related issues (Olorunyomi et al. 2024). It also includes challenges such as adaptation, implementation and integration of new technologies, data security, infrastructure, managing human resources and finances (Abdallah et al. 2021; Mahmood and Khan 1970; Metzler and Muntermann 2020). In DT, technology level problems are more linear, in other words, less complex, while human-level problems are more complex. For example, the uncertainty in the organizational context and vague directives that at a cursory look seems clear, can undermine the entire DT efforts and lead to ineffectiveness in organizations (Verina and Titko 2019). Within this complexity we observe that many DT attempts fall short of the premise of DT and organizations as well as practitioners get stuck.

Some main challenges in digital transformation processes encompass the development of digital skills, the adoption of new technologies, the implementation of change management practices, and the execution of innovation initiatives (Schneider and Kokshagina 2021). Considering all the complexity around and related to DT we believe it would be proper to claim that most digital transformation initiatives are wicked problems. While part of the wickedness comes from the technical content of DT, it has a lot to do with the context which is the human aspect of organizations.

Human organizations have evolved around dilemmas, paradoxes and contradictions (Jonassen et al. 2006). They contain contradictory yet interrelated elements that seem logical when examined in isolation but counteract when they

appear simultaneously. An example is the tension between the necessities of social organization and member self-interest (Hargrave and Van de Ven 2017). Another example is the paradox of learning, that is the tension between stability and predictability on the one hand and generativity and adaptability on the other (Wagner 1982) organizations need to keep doing what they have been doing in order to ensure proficiency and efficiency but innovate and change in order to ensure competitiveness and survivability. As human organizations embody contradictions, difficult workplace problems are ill-structured and complex because they possess conflicting goals, multiple solution methods, non-engineering success standards, non-engineering constraints, and unanticipated problems (Derindere and Gülseçen 2022). The knowledge in organizations is distributed through different departments and individuals (Smith and Lewis 2011). Organizations are collaborative activity systems in which actors have different perspectives regarding the problems and problems can be represented in many ways (Tsoukas 1996) one of which is as wicked problems.

Wicked Problems and Dealing with Wicked Problems

The concept of wicked problems refers to issues with particular characteristics (Rittel and Webber 1973):

- Wicked problems have no definitive formulation.
- They have no determinable stopping rule, that is, there is no mechanism for deciding whether to continue or stop the solution effort based on the current position or past events.
- Their solutions are not true-or-false but better or worse.
- Each wicked problem is essentially unique.
- The problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem or set of problems.
- The problem can be represented in multiple ways. The way the problem is explained determines the nature of problem's resolution.
- The solvers are liable for the consequences of the actions they generate.
- The problem is not understood until after a solution is formulated (Conklin 2003)

A wicked problem is difficult or impossible to solve for several reasons. Incomplete or contradictory knowledge, multiple stakeholders with different opinions and agendas, the cost of solving all the relevant issues and interconnectedness of the issues (Kolko 2012). In wicked problems -which can be called “messes” (Ackoff 1981)- “every problem interacts with other

problems and is therefore part of a set of interrelated problems, a system of problems...”

Conceptualizing DT as wicked problem enables researchers and practitioners to better appreciate the complexity of the organizations and ecosystems within which it happens and adopts techniques and approaches that go beyond purely technical and engineering solutions.

From Technical Problem Solving to Reflective Problem Setting

DT spans both the technical and social domains of the organizations. Approaching DT or any change problem with a technical mindset brings about some deeper issues that are difficult for many managers and engineers to deal with (Argyris 2010; Derindere and Gülseçen 2022). By technical mindset, we mean regarding DT as a definitive issue with well-defined borders and processes working towards a clear end-in-view. Managers and engineers who adopt a technical mindset tend to believe that effective implementation of DT largely consists in deploying the right tools as means to achieve given and clearly defined ends. This belief assumes that the organization is or will be dedicated to implementing the engineered solution, especially if it can be shown that it solves the problems at hand. This assumption is valid as long as the problem develops in a closed system, the parameters are known, change process does not question or intervene into the underlying values and assumptions (Argyris 2010).

Another issue with technical mindset is that the engineers are held responsible for producing and advocating sound concepts and principles (Argyris 1989). So, they understandably focus on their technical discipline in order to achieve the intended results. Such a technical focus increasingly distances them from the uncertain and messy context within which the problems are set and ends are decided. This distancing, in turn, may also become a defense against management and other organizational actors. It may become a defense against management because even if the implementation of technical ideas is successful, the more technical solutions fail to provide the intended outcomes the more the engineers need to defend their solutions. It may also become a defense against other organizational actors, as engineers may feel compelled to persuade them that the implemented solutions will address problems that were defined neither by the engineers themselves nor by the organizational users.

When dealing with wicked problems, professionals need to construct the problems from the materials of problematic situations which are confusing, puzzling, and mostly uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a

problem, they must do a certain kind of work. They must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense. The process of problem setting is a necessary condition for technical problem solving. But problem setting process itself is not a technical problem. “Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them” (Schön 1983, p. 52). Practitioners can and do resolve conflicting role frames through a kind of inquiry which is outside the model of technical rationality. Such an inquiry goes beyond a focus on the technical aspects of digital transformation and incorporates the social dimensions of the issue into the developed solution. In the following section we will illustrate how this can be applied in research that aims to produce knowledge that is helpful to practitioners.

Action Research Component

The process we use in researching into wicked problems is Action Research. Action Research is a participatory, democratic process that “seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, p. 1). During our research we used two concepts to help top management to better understand the context and processes around their transformation attempts.

Critical Reflection: Critically reflecting on practice is a process of critically examining personal thoughts and actions (Somerville and Keeling 2004). It is thinking through your practice issues, problems or dilemmas that do not have an obvious solution. It includes questioning the assumptions that form the bases of personal values and beliefs and critiquing other’s and one’s own work. Critical reflection is a thinking skill that accepts uncertainty and acknowledges dilemmas (Sparks-Langer and Colto 1991) that exist in the practice context. Dewey (1933, 1939), asserts that the capacity to reflect is initiated only after recognition of a problem or dilemma *and* the acceptance of uncertainty.

Reflective practice is important because without it, practitioners are “trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions and expectations” (Larrivee 2000). Developing self-reflection enables practitioners to become more cognizant of the interdependence between their responses to the issues and the responses of others to their own. It is being able to hear the “talk-back” of the situation-problem (Schön 1983).

Theories of Action: Argyris and Schön (1974) introduced the concept of “theories of action” to conceptualize professional knowledge:

(Theories of action) exist in people's minds and are used to explain or predict the behavior of others as well as for guiding one's own behavior.

Theories of action are causal propositions consist of three components:

1. a particular set of conditions (the perceived situation),
2. behaviors employed to achieve,
3. the intended goals.

Argyris and Schön (1974) used this construct to enable professionals reflect upon how they handled important issues, how to improve their performance and produce knowledge that others can learn from. Theories of action can be made explicit by asking people three simple questions (Friedman 2009):

1. How do you perceive the situation in which you have to act?
2. What are the goals you want to achieve?
3. What are the action strategies you use to achieve these goals?

Example Case

We conducted an action research study with a company experiencing difficulties in its digital transformation process (Ünal, 2026 [baskıda]). The following provides an overview of the DT project. The company initiated a digital transformation project with the aim of digitalizing manual operations, improving efficiency, and enhancing its processes. As part of this initiative, the digital transformation needs of all departments were identified, and a project manager with relevant expertise was appointed to oversee the project. Given the extensive scope of the task list, the project concerned multiple units across the organization. The project manager was expected to monitor the tasks throughout the project and, at regular intervals, provide deadlines indicating when these tasks would be completed. Some of the project tasks were carried out in collaboration with internal stakeholders, while others involved external stakeholders. Within the company, some teams operated according to agile methods, whereas others followed a hierarchical structure. The software development teams responsible for implementing the tasks within the digital transformation project worked in an agile manner. However, while carrying out these transformation-related tasks, these teams were also required to address other urgent organizational priorities, such as legal obligations and requests from senior management. This situation made it difficult for the software teams to provide the project manager with a reliable schedule for task completion. The continual insertion of new tasks into the work queue created uncertainty and complicated efforts to establish a clear timeline for the digital transformation project. Nevertheless, the project sponsor expected the project manager to present a schedule indicating when the tasks would be completed. This was the

overall picture of the company's digital transformation project. In our interview with the project manager, they stated, in their own words, that they felt "stuck" in the project.

The challenging nature of digital transformation stems from the fact that the problems encountered in the process are not merely technical in nature. In the overall picture described above, no issue that could be characterized as purely technical was evident. For this reason, in our action research, we addressed the project manager's predicament through the action research method.

At the beginning of our interview, the project manager explained that although they were leading a digital transformation project, they felt unsuccessful in this effort. The project manager was experienced in digital transformation and software projects and had received graduate-level education in DT. They had previously managed numerous projects successfully. Likewise, both the teams and the company were highly competent; indeed, the company was a well-qualified firm that provided technology consulting to other organizations. In short, neither the project manager, nor the technical teams, nor the company lacked competence or technical capability.

Despite this, the digital transformation project had reached an impasse, and the project manager was struggling to cope with the situation.

Inquiry into Digital Transformation

In this case, which we examined through the action research method, we approached the difficulty faced by the project manager not as a technical issue but as a complex problem. In doing so, we focused on two aspects of the problem system and posed two fundamental questions:

The two aspects we examined were the external domain—namely, the broader system within which the problem was unfolding—and the internal domains of the actors involved. The external domain consisted of the organization, the actors within it, the relationships among them, and the systems of meaning embedded in that organizational context. The internal domain, by contrast, concerned how the actors perceived all of these elements and how such perceptions shaped their thinking, feelings, and actions. The two questions we posed were: "Why is this a problem?" and "What sustains the system in this problematic state?"

The picture that emerged through the research, co-produced together with the participants, brought them to a turning point that made it possible to try something different in response to the impasse they had been experiencing. This turning point was, paradoxically, the recognition of "the project as a project."

According to this picture, what was taking place in the DT process, together with the broader context of the intervention, indicated that the work was not being approached as a project characterized by uncertainty and requiring action in response to that uncertainty; rather, it was being treated more like a task list. Once the work was framed as a task list with all resources in place, requirements clearly defined, and risks eliminated, what remained was seemingly “nothing more than scheduling the tasks.” However, critical reflection revealed that this was not the case at all.

Prior to the intervention, the project manager had been internalizing a systemic impasse—one that was in fact the cumulative outcome of the organization’s overall way of handling work—as a personal burden. This, in turn, prevented them from discussing the difficulties being experienced with the relevant stakeholders. Through the picture that emerged and the participatory development of an alternative way of thinking and acting, a form of action that had previously not been possible for the project manager became possible. They were then able to engage with the project sponsor regarding the newly developed understanding of the process and explain why providing a timeline was so difficult. Before our research, however, the project manager had not felt able to initiate such a conversation with the project sponsor.

What drove the DT process into an impasse, and rendered the project manager unable to take the action necessary to move the project forward, was the tendency to approach the process from the perspective that it was a technical problem. However, digital transformation processes involve not only technical challenges but, more importantly, human and organizational difficulties. This overall picture points to two important conclusions. First, the problems encountered in digital transformation are not primarily technical problems but rather complex or wicked problems. Second, treating these problems as if they were merely technical issues makes their resolution nearly impossible. In this context, the action research we conducted enabled the project manager to approach the issue differently and to engage in a conversation with the project sponsor. In doing so, they were able to explain both the difficulty of providing a timeline and the fact that the work in question was not, in a strict sense, a project in the conventional technical meaning. As a result, the desired outcomes were achieved and the project was successfully concluded.

Conclusion

DT by and large, is triggering and feeding the evolution of organizations as well as society. Advances in digital technology and data utilization drastically change aspects of society including private lives, public administration,

industrial structure, and employment; it has become essential for the survival of companies and businesses. Companies that approach DT as simply purchasing new technology, hiring new IT staff or new digital officers cannot ensure a successful DT. As it was stressed in this paper, DT involves more complex dynamics and challenges than this approach. It encompasses not only technological aspects but also process, management, and human-related issues. In DT, technology level problems are more linear, in other words, less complex, while human-level problems are more complex.

Nowhere in the DT literature are engineers or practitioners advised not to engage with management in order to better understand the underlying issues and the values they are trying to satisfy. In practice, however, they are often reluctant to raise issues that go beyond the predefined problem boundaries. One reason for this is that they don't have skills that help them deal with difficult interpersonal issues effectively, as well as limited information flow and knowledge sharing can prevent the teams from fully leveraging their collective expertise and insights.

In our research, we have developed theoretic and practical methods that practitioners can use to effectively deal with the mentioned type of difficulties. In the participative research workshops, participants learned to notice and productively raise the conflicting conditions of problem setting and problem solving. Using participative approaches, they were able to navigate the complex, dynamic, uncertain world of organizations for effective problem setting. By setting the right problems they could better utilize and implement their technical problem-solving skills and if there is a skill gap become aware of it and deal effectively. Through several workshops conducted together with professionals, we were able to help them become aware of and learn the mindset and skills they needed to set problems participatively and effectively.

Here we suggest that, when professionals go beyond technical problem solving and engage with other organizational actors, especially with upper levels of management in a process of participative problem setting, they may enable conditions to DT success. We strongly believe it is the researcher's duty to develop theories, constructs, tools and skills to help professionals.

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