

Creative Pedagogies on Adaptive Reuse: Reimagining Istanbul SSK Zeyrek Building

Saadet K k Ayaz^a, Duygu Cankurtaran^b

^aIstanbul Beykent University, Istanbul, Turkey, saadetkok@beykent.edu.tr; ^bIstanbul Beykent University, Istanbul, Turkey, duygucankurtaran@beykent.edu.tr

Abstract

This study aims to create a critical platform for discussing the value and future of modern buildings by bringing together architectural history pedagogy and the practice of adaptive reuse. Can the ‘adaptive reuse’ approach become a tool for making historical processes visible as dynamic processes rather than static narratives? Can this approach go beyond physical functional change and feed alternative pedagogies that intervene in the writing of history? The answers to these questions have been sought within the scope of an undergraduate course in architectural history focusing on the modern and postmodern periods. The focus of the study is the ‘Social Insurance Institution Complex (SSK)’ in Zeyrek designed by Sedat Hakk  Eldem in the 1960s. This structure is selected because it is a piece of modern architectural heritage that is ‘about to be abandoned’ due to threats of demolition and privatization. As part of the course, students were asked to generate speculative ideas about the history, present, and possible future reuse scenarios of the structure. During this process, students presented their own narratives through moving representations, hand-drawn sketches, digital collages, and texts. The building was approached not only as an object to be preserved, but also as a multi-layered narrative that could be reimagined. Students were encouraged to become active agents in writing history through collective and speculative means. It was believed that, because they were free from professional conventions, students had the potential to question and reconstruct historical narratives. In conclusion, this study has transformed architectural history into a field that is being rewritten, while reuse has become a creative and pedagogical narrative of history. Student representations developed through the SSK Zeyrek example have produced alternative approaches to modern heritage while establishing interpretive and transformative connections between historical structures and the present. As a result, the student projects in question have been evaluated as pedagogical actions that experience and question the social, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of adaptive reuse.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Architectural History Course, Adaptive Reuse

Introduction

By its very nature, architectural education is positioned at the intersection of many disciplines, such as theoretical, cultural, environmental, and social fields. At the heart of this education lies a unique studio-based pedagogy that establishes and monitors the interaction between these fields. Today, this field of interaction is expanding and transforming the ways

in which students think, see, and produce. Architectural history is a field that is particularly important in helping students understand the reasoning behind historical developments and strengthen their ability to read cultural, social, and technological contexts. This study argues that architectural history requires not only the transmission of knowledge but also its re-production and interpretation. It also proposes that the concept of adaptive reuse can be used as a pedagogical and conceptual tool beyond physical interventions. In this context, this study aims to develop a critical and productive reading of history through the processes of researching, analyzing, and reimagining the SSK Zeyrek building by architecture history students. Thus, the structure in question has been placed at the center as an area where both modern architectural heritage is discussed and historical narratives are reinterpreted within the scope of the course. Although the concept of adaptive reuse, which came to the fore in architectural theory with the sustainability-focused debates of the 20th century, is generally addressed in the context of extending the life of a building and resource efficiency, this approach can often overlook the historical, conceptual, and experiential layers of the building. This shortcoming is stated in studies that approach adaptive reuse as an interpretive process. Lanz and Pendlebury (2022) highlight the term's theoretical potential which can open it up to contributions beyond pragmatic and practice-focused interventions. From this perspective, adaptive reuse can also be considered as a tool for critical thinking and can be intertwined with fields such as architectural history, cultural studies, social values, and pedagogical practices.

Adaptive Reuse as Pedagogical and Speculative Tool in History Teaching

Learning in architecture education involves a transformative process shaped by relational, experiential, creative, and critical processes. Pedagogical transformation is related with transforming students from passive recipients of knowledge into active producers. Underlying this pedagogical change, the concept of adaptive reuse as part of architecture education has been emerging as a theoretical and pedagogical framework and as a process both interdisciplinary and multi-layered. In recent years, various studio and laboratory-based studies addressing the concept of adaptive reuse have also shown that the concept points to a transformative pedagogical process in design and learning. To refer a few among those, Clarke, Zijlstra and de Jonge's (2019) notion of learning through understanding and interpretation, Graf's (2019) statement of knowledge in action and De Chiffre's et al. (2025) emergent notion of adaptive reuse as a new mode of learning point to a similar idea: a strong rationale for integrating adaptive reuse also into architectural history courses. Supported by Hein and van Dooren's (2020) statement of history as a timeless toolbox, this rationale becomes relevant because working with historical buildings allows students to establish the relationship between the past and the present not only at the level of knowledge, but also with social and critical awareness. When engaging with architectural heritage, students explore the possibilities of the past; in a sense, they can think with history rather than merely learn it, and they can produce alongside it. The expansion in perspective on the concept of adaptive reuse has led to the idea that it could transform the pedagogy of architectural history into a critical and experiential learning space, not limited solely to studio-based production processes. Hein and van Dooren's (2020) emphasis on enabling students to read and experiment a design situation within its broader historical and socio-cultural context implies the transformation of architectural history from a

static field of knowledge into an experimental tool for thinking. The proposed integration aims to encourage students to view history courses as a dynamic resource that informs design processes. These various pedagogical and theoretical approaches demonstrate that adaptive reuse is deeply connected to the concepts of time, continuity, and transformation, both as an educational practice and as a way of thinking. In the context of architectural history education, working with what exists requires the ability to read and interpret the continuously reconstructed relationship between past, present, and future. Therefore, in order to explain the potential of the pedagogical process carried out within the scope of this study, the concepts of virtuality, duration, becoming, and multiplicity will be discussed, drawing on the conceptualizations of Deleuze (1994) and Grosz (2004). As shown in fig.1, the pedagogy of architectural history has been examined in conjunction with the concept of adaptive reuse, viewed through the lens of Deleuze and Grosz’s conceptualizations. Within this framework, students were expected to develop alternative historical narratives based on SSK Zeyrek building.

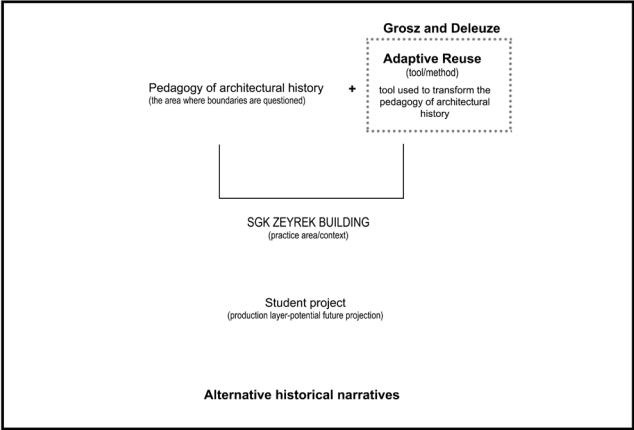


Fig. 1. Adaptive Reuse Pedagogy Diagram (Kok Ayaz and Cankurtaran, 2025)

Multiplicity of Time: Architectural History as Becoming

Time is a multi-layered structure where the past, present, and future intertwine. The past exists as an inexhaustible field of potential that enables the transformation of the present and future through critique (Grosz 2004). This approach transforms history into an active, transformative, and creative practice (Grosz 2004). Grosz (2001) states that space must always contain at least two times: the time of emergence of space and the time of history. The time of emergence of space refers to the moment of the space’s initial formation, that is, the creative process that is not yet represented but potentially exists. The time of history is the historicized, formed state of this process. Architectural history is positioned precisely at the intersection of these two times; each space carries both its moment of emergence and its historical continuity at the same time. Deleuze’s concepts of “becoming” and “process” are central to this rethinking. No being is fixed; everything is in the process of becoming something else. Process, even broader than the concept than becoming, is

the movement of being taking shape within the continuous flow of time. Both concepts remove architectural history from being a complete and fixed field and reposition it as a dynamic form of thinking that transforms with time. History is a creative process that carries the virtual potentials of the past into the present. Virtuality is the realm of possibilities that have not yet been realized but have the potential to be realized. In this sense, the “virtual” is the productive layer of reality. The past is considered an energy source that can be reshaped in the present. This approach makes it possible to understand history as a continuously rewritten process. “Multiplicity” expresses that being or time is not composed of a singular essence, but of the continuity of interlinked differences. For Deleuze and Grosz, multiplicity is a network of relationships that is constantly being reshaped. This concept also liberates architectural history from a singular narrative, making it possible to rethink it as a dynamic field where different times, spatial experiences, and potentials intertwine. While virtuality carries possibilities open to the future, multiplicity makes it possible for these possibilities to develop in multiple directions simultaneously. Traditional historical narratives often construct architecture as a series of completed works; buildings are classified according to specific periods, styles, and functions. However, Deleuze and Grosz’s understanding of time allows us to go beyond this static framework. A structure is neither merely a trace of the past nor an object of the present; it is a state of becoming, open to the future, containing the virtual potentials of the past. Every architectural space is as much a carrier of its unfulfilled potential as it is of its historical layers. Therefore, architectural history can be thought of not only as a documentation of the past, but as a field where the virtual possibilities of the past are reactivated in each new interpretation. The concept of “virtual,” used by Deleuze and later by Grosz, is a productive tool for questioning the forms of representation related to architectural history in this sense. The history of a building or a city is not frozen information in drawings, archives, or texts; beyond these, it is a dynamic network where different times touch each other. In this context, every historical writing does not repeat the past in the same way; it reproduces the past in different forms. According to Deleuze, no repetition is the same; “repetition is not generality” (p.19). In this framework, reuse is not the preservation or restoration of the SSK building selected for this study. In the sense conceptualized by Deleuze, this is a repetition that passes through difference. Reuse is not the re-presentation of a past form, but the actualization of that form’s virtual potentials (its unrealized possibilities).

Research and Experimental Learning Process: SSK Zeyrek Complex

This study is based on a three-week experimental learning process centred on the Social Security Institution (SSK) Complex located in the dense historical fabric of Zeyrek district of Istanbul. Designed in 1960’s by architect Sedat Hakkı Eldem, this building is a prime example of an attempt to combine modern architecture with the spatial and formal principles of the ‘Turkish house’ typology with its reinforced concrete structural system, horizontal volumes, wide eaves, and courtyard layout as seen in fig.2. Having largely fallen into disuse over time due to lack of maintenance, the complex now occupies a critical position in terms of both modern architectural heritage and conservation debates.

Selecting SSK building as a field of study, the course focuses on the question, ‘How can architectural history be rewritten through adaptive reuse?’ This architectural history course adopts a research-based, experiential, and production-oriented approach. Students



Fig. 2. SSK Zeyrek Building, Istanbul (Bozdoğan, Özkan and Yenal, 1987)

researched the structure's past, current and possible future layers, rethinking their relationship with the space at every stage. Process started researching the historical context using archives, journals, theses, social media sources, and oral history methods. Later students focused on the building's transformation over time, producing drawings, collages, diagrams, and alternative maps. This process aimed to expand historical narratives through spatial intuition, exploration and critical reinterpretation. Last phase involved producing possible scenarios for the building, from the past to the future, through speculative narratives, video and digital productions. The work was completed with a portfolio and a reflection paper. Focus was on the learning process rather than the outcome.

Analysis of Pedagogical Outcomes Through a Theoretical Lens

The student's productions were grouped and analyzed according to theoretical frame and to the conceptual themes that emerged during the process.

Process and Becoming

When examining the students' productions, building was represented as an entity constantly redefined within the multi-layered flow of time. The intertwined use of old photographs, drawings, current observations, and projections about the future on the same ground shows that they interpreted structure as a living organism that gains new meaning in each period, along the axis of continuity and change. Rather than reading the traces of time as a unidirectional narrative, the students have made the building's potential for continuity and transformation visible by layering different periods. Thus, SSK Zeyrek has moved beyond being a fixed historical object; its memory, present, and possible futures have been considered as an active component of a process of becoming.

Virtuality and Multiplicity

It has been observed that the students' representations of process and formation reveal the

virtualities of building's potentials, representing their multiplicity in relation to the future. The possible identities of the SSK — museum, workshop, library, café, archive, or collective cultural space — were not reduced to a single scenario. By making the plurality of the building's potential identities visible, the students demonstrated that the space cannot be confined to a single historical narrative. This approach enabled creative openings in historical knowledge by posing to the student not only the question 'what was the building?', but also 'what could it have been?' and 'what could it be?'. Thus, virtual (not yet realised, but capable of realisation) architectural possibilities were transformed into an actual field of research through representation and narrative. The building has been experienced in multiple forms of existence through alternative stories and spatial constructions.

Emerging Multiplicity as Representational Tools

The diversity observed in the students' representational preferences has provided concrete evidence for the idea that architectural history cannot be grasped through a single narrative or a single tool. This broad spectrum of expression, ranging from collages to emotional maps, from sketches to monologue videos and narrated dialogues, has demonstrated that history is not merely a textual or technical production; it is also a field of thought that can become plural through sensory, intuitive and narrative layers. The students did not merely describe the current state of the space; they talked to it, listened to it, and paid attention to its memory, its emotions, and its silence. This approach demonstrates that representational tools go beyond the transmission of information, becoming creative acts that invent new meanings, reveal potentials, and build imagination-based bridges between the past and the future.

Knowledge Interpretation Relations

When examining the students' production and approaches throughout the process, the theoretical framework's insights manifested themselves in the synthesis of knowledge and interpretation. Here, a similarity to Grosz's (2001) outsider perspective can also be noted. Second-year students, still positioned outside the boundaries of professional discipline, presented a perspective that questioned, interpreted, and even reimagined architectural history knowledge. This synthesis of knowledge and interpretation has seen in their projects and reflection texts. One student wrote 'Architecture is not only what we find in archives, but what we imagine from them,' while another wrote, 'A building isn't just structure, façade, or plan; what makes it architecture is the time, memory, and users that inhabit it.' or "Architecture is not just what is written in plans, it is what we dare to imagine from them." The historical data manifested itself as a creation of meaning shaped by their interpretations, intuitions, and emotions.

Emerging Variety in Adaptive Reuse Scenarios within the Pedagogical Approach

Students revealed the building's potential for transformation through reuse scenarios such as a library, literature museum, social center, and architecture studio, proposing interventions or new functions for the building and its surroundings. Grosz's concept of the virtual past was particularly evident in the reuse scenarios. The proposed theoretical speculations also support affect and transformation as legitimate forms of learning. Students defined things that could not be realised in Eldem's vision — market, clinic, coffeehouse, and offices —

as not lost but in a passive state. This idea is also tangible in the students' project texts. One student wrote, "It wasn't just a scenario; it became a personal architectural stance, transforming without erasing the past." Another student declared, referring to the building's unfortunate history, "I wasn't destroyed, I changed." It can be considered that the concepts of emergence and virtuality have been transformed into concrete design attitudes. When students viewed the process of conservation and reuse as reviving unrealised potentials, they were able to imagine new futures for the building without severing it from its history.

Outcomes of Adaptive Reuse as a Pedagogical Method

One of the reasons this entire pedagogical process is significant is that it was tested within a history course rather than a studio course. The process is experimental, like studio productions, but unlike what is often seen in history classes, the students' voices accompanied the process. The production tools used in studio courses, namely drawings, collages, timelines, and action gifs, functioned here as tools that transformed historical research into architectural thinking. Parallel to adaptive reuse's expanded definition mentioned in the theoretical discussion part, they attempted to think with the building itself rather than about the building. Reflection papers show that students internalized adaptive reuse notion in the dialogue between time, memory, and imagination. Hand drawings and collages visualized the concept of process, while speculative narratives embodied the building's potential for transformation.

Conclusions

This experimental study resulted in a history course that began to function like a design laboratory, where knowledge production and the act of making were inseparable. As a result of the students' studio-like yet theoretically grounded production, the reuse of a building became related to the reuse of knowledge, to inhabit the past as an open field of possibilities. The concept of adaptive reuse, here, functions not as a physical intervention method but as a conceptual, pedagogical, and speculative tool. It has revealed that the writing of history is not a static repertoire of preserved monuments, but rather a constantly evolving, reconstituted, and reinterpreted process. The pedagogical experience conducted around SSK Zeyrek building has enabled students to develop their skills in interpreting, transforming, and multiplying data from the past. Thus, the structure has become a conceptual space where memory and imagination work together. The collages, sketches, videos, monologues, diagrams, and speculative scenarios produced by the students show that architectural history is understood as a plural, fragile, and open-ended process rather than a singular, linear narrative. The theoretical framework used in this process — concepts of becoming, duration, multiplicity, and virtuality borrowed from Deleuze and Grosz — guided students' ways of reinterpreting time, memory, and space, and shifted the pedagogy of history towards an interdisciplinary approach. The pedagogical approach framed by the theoretical perspective has structured not only the theoretical framework of the study, but also how students experience educational practice and how they position themselves. The most visible manifestations of its effects appear in the students' reflection texts. References to interpretation, imagination, and speculative thinking in the texts, as opposed to factual information, show that the theoretical context can be experienced by students. This could open the door to questioning broader themes than traditionally allowed in architectural

history courses. The theoretical context used in the study points to a transferable pedagogical attitude and field of experimentation that can be extended to different cases and experiences. This attitude is thought to enable the testing of various research methods, such as different case studies, re-scanning archives, and narrative and visual fabulation, in other courses as well.

The findings reveal that the potential of architectural history courses emerges not only from teaching the past, but from enabling the practice of thinking, discussing, and creating with the past. The students' work demonstrates that a building's future is closely linked to the sensitivity, critical awareness, and creative imagination developed regarding its past. In this sense, adaptive reuse emerges as a pedagogical strategy that transforms not only buildings but also ways of thinking. The process presented here is not an end result but rather a starting point for rethinking architectural history courses as a productive, experimental, and pluralistic field. The aim is to develop the study in different learning environments and with interdisciplinary models.

Bibliography

- Bozdogan, Sibel, Süha Özkan, and Engin Yenil. *Sedad Eldem: Architect in Turkey*. Singapore: Concept Media, 1987.
- Clarke, Nicholas, Hielkje Zijlstra, and Wessel De Jonge. "Education for Adaptive Reuse – the TU Delft Heritage and Architecture Experience". *Docomomo Journal* 61, 67-75, 2019.
- De Chiffre, Livia, Artem Kitaev, Eva Mair, Katharina Paschburg, and Katherina Putzer, eds. *Reuse in Teaching: The Future of the Architectural Design Studio*. Zürich: Triest Verlag, 2025.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Graf, Franz. "Teaching the Laboratory of the Techniques and Preservation of Modern Architecture (TSAM) at the École Polytechnique Fédéral De Lausanne". *Docomomo Journal* 61, 61-66, 2019.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *The nick of time: Politics, evolution, and the untimely*. Allen & Unwin, 2004.
- Hein, Carola, and Els van Dooren. "Teaching History for Design at TU Delft." *International Journal of Technology and Design Education* 30, 849–865, 2020.
- Lanz, Francesca, and John Pendlebury. "Adaptive Reuse: A Critical Review." *The Journal of Architecture* 27 (2–3), 441–462, 2022.