Family photos and architectural representation: Using photo-collage sketchbook to understand behaviour patterns in family apartment buildings

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Abstract

This article presents a three-step process of collecting, deconstructing and reconstructing family photos in ethnographic research investigating the sociocultural aspects of behaviour patterns in family apartment buildings. The first author conducted the study for her Ph.D. thesis in architectural design, supervised by the second and third authors. As an architect, the first author created a photo collage sketchbook, combining various representational techniques of her profession with family photographs. While observing the family apartment building and trying to understand the *"gecekondu"* where the participants lived before the family apartment building, the researcher realised that the interviews were insufficient, and this problem forced the use of a photo collage sketchbook. To synthesise ethnographic knowledge, research started with obtaining family photos. After extracting and grouping, the deconstruction process began. Deconstructed layers are then reconstructed by using various architectural representation techniques and text. This photo collage sketchbook has helped us understand various aspects of the family apartment buildings related to architecture and culture. While doing this, the sketchbook prepared with visual contents combined with short notes represents the data collecting, organising, analysing, interpretation, knowledge-making, and presentation stages. In working with a photo collage sketchbook, obtaining family photographs and overlapping the photographs and interviews' narratives appear challenging. Therefore, collective interviews have been a critical move to compare and verify the memories recalled by the participants. While interviewing, it is vital to show the photos to every participant from a particular age group because they contribute differently to the photo components because of the place experience. So, this study is not about a set of instructions or tools but experiences about the process or approach to constructing ethnographic knowledge.

Keywords: architectural research, family apartment buildings, family photos, qualitative inquiry, visual ethnography

1. Introduction

In the last decades, architects have become more familiar with ethnography than in the past and ethnographic methods are used in architectural research (Schön, 1987; Cuff, 1992; Jacobs &

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Merriman, 2011). The use of ethnographic tools in architectural research has increased as a result of the studies exploring design-making processes in architecture (Yaneva, 2009a & 2009b; Loukisass, 2012; Cayer, 2018; Gottschling, 2018; Malinin, 2018; Mommersteeg, 2018; Sharif, 2018; Smitheram & Kidd, 2018; Stender, 2018; Van der Linden, Dong & Heylighen, 2018) and architectural drawings (Ferracina, 2018). To understand and investigate the emergence and design of domestic spaces, not only architects but also researchers from a variety of fields, including anthropology and sociology, explore ways to understand the relationship between spaces and daily life practices of people (Rapoport, 1969; Rapoport, 1980; Rapoport, 1988; Lawrence, 1987; Rakoff, 1979). However, using ethnography as a methodology is still uncommon in architectural research. Therefore, there is a need to use architectural ethnography to allow the development of an intimate understanding of everyday life and space.

Images and drawings interweave the realities of space, history, and everyday life and definitions of culture, lifestyles, narratives, and identities (Pink, 2001). They also play a central role in the lives of architects and are the essential way of expressing their work. Pink (2013) stated that new knowledge-producing and presenting techniques can be developed with the involvement of the researcher's personal and professional approaches during the production of ethnographic knowledge, which contributes to the production of ethnographic meaning. Based on this, I argue that in this study, a toolkit will be created appropriate to the nature of each research and unique to it in producing ethnographic knowledge. In the emergence of this discourse, the relationship between the researcher and the researched stands at a critical point. If an architect conducts ethnographic research, one of the topics of curiosity is what kind of effect this situation has on the research process or what difference it makes. How do architects, as people who tend to think visually, follow a path when studying visual materials? How can the photographic frame, representing a frozen moment as a visual material, be transformed into a live story of space and carried beyond its boundaries? To find answers to all these questions, as architects and designers, we used a combination of visual representation techniques related to architecture and family photographs in this study. This mixed approach formed photo collage sketchbooks, allowing us to understand the field and represent what is understood visually. This paper represents our three-step approach to creating these photo collage sketchbooks developed throughout working in the field with family photos and architectural drawings.

This paper is organised into four sections. First, we briefly lay out a short literature review on visual ethnography and using family photos and sketchbooks in research. Second, we give information about our field, which is a low-rise family apartment building. Third, we focus on deconstructing and reconstructing family photos to form what we call 'an architect's photo-collage sketchbook.' We give details on the three-step approach to creating these sketchbooks. In the fourth and final section of the paper, we reflect on how this approach might extend architectural ethnography.

2. Visual Ethnography, Family Photos and Sketchbooks

Visual ethnography is defined as "*the study and use of visual media and material, but also the incorporation of a visual lens into mainstream ethnography*" (O'Reilly, 2009). O'Reilly (2009) states that visual ethnography "*opens up whole new ways of seeing the worlds we study, enabling a focus on the emotions, the sensual, the artistic, and creative elements that digital media, especially, are providing entire new ways to represent*". Since images are easier to produce, use, and even share, thanks to technology, people use them in more diverse ways, and ethnographers are creating many ways to involve visuals in their research. However, as Pink (2001) stated, the ethnographic value of any image depends on how it is used, how it is interpreted, and what meaning and information is used to invoke what.

Photography has long been used in various ways in ethnographic research. Mainly, photography shows itself in two ways: either as a methodological or as a presentation tool (Schwartz, 1989). As a methodological tool, photographs can invoke comments, memory and discussion during a semi-

structured interview (Banks, 2001) in "photo elicitation", for example. In this method, photographs can clarify vague memories by creating a "*flood of detail*" (Banks, 2001). Canal (2004) states that the photographic content and the narratives evoked by the photographs convey information that cannot be obtained through verbal communication. As a presentation tool in research, Banks (2001) underlines that photography should not be included lightly or as an afterthought and should convey narratives transparently and naturally.

There are two ways that ethnographers obtain photographs during research: The first is the creation of images by the researcher either to document or to analyse, and the second involves collecting and studying images produced or consumed by the research subjects (Banks, 2007). Byers (1966: 31) states that "*the photograph is not a message in the usual sense. It is, instead, the raw material for an infinite number of messages which each viewer can construct for himself*". Obtaining or producing the photograph is essential for a living relationship. In the phase of searching for or evaluating a photograph, ethnographic knowledge starts forming. Not only obtaining but also talking about these photographs and producing ethnographic knowledge is a process that requires attention and time. Using participants' photographs helped Pink's (2001) research go beyond the boundaries of the past narratives because talking about photographs has helped the participants construct and convey their own life and past. Similarly, Schwartz (1989) states that the dynamism and interaction between the photograph, the viewer and the photographer create photographic meaning. The meaning is not passive but an active relationship between these three components in the monitoring process.

Researching family photographs emerges as a rich field of study that combines visual sociology, visuality, family memory, culture, trauma, time, stories, narratives and testimonies (Doucet, 2018). Kuhn (2007), in his study entitled "*Photography and Cultural Memory",* mentions that family photos are like a store of memory. Examining family photographs discusses how the memories interact individually and socially and what kind of cultural memory they reveal. Kuhn (2007) expresses it: "*Work on personal and domestic photography and memory can unlock doors to understanding not only the ethnography of everyday memory talk but also the workings of cultural memory across wider social-historical spheres*." Kuhn (2007) adds that producing new knowledge is an experimental process. In producing new knowledge, the cooperation of the researcher and the researched person or community is essential.

Drawing in visual ethnography is quite common, and it offers the researcher unlimited interpretation opportunities at the points where words or writing are missing. Ingold (2011) sees drawing as a potential to use the act of observing and describing together and supports using drawing as a knowledge production practice. This practice of knowledge production offers the researcher a broad perspective in ethnographic studies examining spatial behaviour because visual representations allow capturing multiple perspectives and subjectivities. Ingold (2013) also refers to drawing as 'knowledge from the inside.' Bayre, Harper and Afonso (2016) consider this inside knowledge a bidirectional, immersive, and never-ending mental process. Here, Bayre, Harper and Afonso (2016) mentioned two directions: the outside world and the researcher's brain and hand. They added that the drawings may help make the researcher's subjectivity visible, which can contribute to the opening of new dialogues by increasing cooperation with the participants. Bonanno (2019) expresses that the visual representations in ethnography "*…enable capturing both the coexistence of multiple perspectives, bodies and subjectivities and the simultaneity of events, relations, and interactions: those lie at the very core of any ethnographic encounter and define its intersubjective nature*". Oppitz (2001) states that drawings have a conceptual abstraction ability that visually presents symbolic significance and depicts reality beyond realism.

While discussing the use of sketchbooks in design, geography, architecture, and anthropology, Kuschnir (2016) aims to evaluate ethnographers as visual thinkers and presents the benefits of using sketchbooks and drawings in ethnography. Kuschnir (2016) states that by generating closeness and empathy, openly drawing in a sketchbook in the field promotes conversations and generates collaborative research. Similarly, Ramos (2004) explains that in fieldwork research, drawing is a

documentation activity and a creative tool for interacting with people from different cultures and languages. He also states that 'a trained eye and a skilled hand' are helpful tools for documenting the material culture and everyday life. Although the use of drawings in ethnographic research has been discussed in visual ethnography, combining sketchbooks with photographs or other mixed techniques has not been explored enough. Moreover, sketchbooks are mostly a concrete output of the documentation process, not a form of constructing ethnographic knowledge. The fact that architects and/or designers think visually has led to the emergence of a sketchbook prepared with mixed techniques during the documentation of this study. With this aspect, this study presents an experimental approach that combines the stages of documentation, construction, and presentation of ethnographic knowledge.

Banks (2001) states that visual research methods should not be an end but a means to an end, a step along the way. This article explains an example of how visual research methods are used as a 'step' in understanding the field during a research study in architecture.

3. The Field: A Low-rise Family Apartment Building in Istanbul

For her Ph.D. study in architectural design, supervised by the second and the third authors, the first author investigated the sociocultural aspects of behaviour patterns in family apartment buildings in Istanbul. She had chosen the family apartment building where her husband lived before their marriage as the case study and research area.

Before writing about family apartment buildings as the research subject, making the semantic expansion of the home in Turkey would be correct. Bachelard (1996) states that the home is the first universe of the people living in it and a real cosmos. In addition, he says that the home offers us both scattered images and a holistic imaginary value. With this aspect, the concept of home can have different symbolic meanings between societies or cultures due to different life experiences. However, it is a reality that the home has the most symbolic meanings in all societies or cultural environments (İnceoğlu, 1999). İnceoğlu (1999) states that: *"Houses symbolically communicate one's contradictions with oneself, one's qualities, social status, group membership, and also establish relationships between people and encourage socialization."* The first psycho-social area surrounding a person is her/his home. Therefore, it has not only physical control but also psychological and social control over this person. Today, as a global society, even if similar lifestyles, places, or objects are seen worldwide, the meanings attributed to these places, forms, or objects can differ on a social or individual scale (İnceoğlu, 1999).

The home and the items that organise it produce discourses about the people's identity, lifestyle, and behaviour. These discourses are the starting point of looking at home in the context of the culture-space-behaviour relationship. From a similar point of view, Uraz and Turgut (1997) state that the meaning of home can change and develop according to the interactional process between the people living in the home and the home. They also added that the essential components of this transactional relationship that affect the house's meaning are time, user, and space (or environment). Within this aspect, the home is in a constant transformation, and it is an organism that lives as a holistic structure within this transactional system (Yılmaz Kılıç, 2021). Regardless of the economic situation, the home contains objects or forms of use that will give clues about the people's identity, social group, and culture. Considering the squatter as the home of low-income families, we can say that it is a sheltering place shaped by the cultural core elements of the social groups migrating from the countryside to the city.

In Turkey, many people migrated to the metropolitan cities from the countryside due to industrialisation and mechanisation in agriculture that occurred after the 1950s. Migrant families often settled in squatter settlements (known as *"gecekondu"* in Turkish: a shanty, squat, or slum dwelling; 'Gece' means 'night' and 'kondu' means 'was built/was put') on the city's periphery. Arslan (1989) defines squatters as the transition place of people who migrated from rural to urban life. In time, these families established themselves in the city, and with socio-economic change, they started to live in their apartment buildings. These families, who migrated from the countryside to

the city and lived in the squatter areas, built or had their multi-story illegal apartments constructed by their means. These buildings, built without the support of a professional designer or architect, are generally used by the extended family typology as if they were a single house (Sağlamer et al., 1994). In other words, we can say that the family apartment building concept emerged due to the large family's tendency to live together in a multi-story, low-rise, urban apartment. This type of configuration caused the spatial distributions and behaviour patterns of particular actions to be privatised. Family members live with their core families in every block of this type of apartment, but the larger family uses the block's common areas. For example, rugs in the stair halls and communal cupboards are not seen in the typical multi-story apartment typology, or walking between floors in the apartment hall with house slippers is not common. In the traditional extended family typology, there is a greater tendency to keep the culture they belong to alive, and the role of elders is generally at a critical point in raising grandchildren and children (Yılmaz Kaynar, 2014). Eating, sleeping, raising children, and privacy concepts usually create different behavioural settings in these family apartment buildings. Therefore, this apartment building, perceived as a regular city dwelling or multi-story apartment, has a different meaning for those living here (İnceoğlu, 1999).

The first author's husband's parents came to Istanbul in the 1960s, settled on the city's periphery, and built their *gecekondu* (Figure 1). Patriarchal large family typology as a dynamic of rural life led them to live together in the city. The *gecekondu* they lived in was replaced by the family apartment building in the 1990s (Figure 2). The first author entered the family structure of the given case as a daughter-in-law, where she had the challenge of understanding the spatial equivalents of this 'coexistence' as a researcher and an architect.

As she started observing the field's daily routines and activity patterns, she found that the information and forms of knowledge taught in architectural schools did not fit the facts of the case study apartment building as a domestic space. This incongruent relationship often occurs through family apartment buildings in Turkey, where cultural codes of rural lifestyle shape daily life and reflect the extreme character of the domestic space formation. Observing this lifestyle's physical, cultural, and social counterparts led her to inquire as an architect with a varying concept of spatial organisation.

Figure 1 The squatter family in their street in Istanbul, with their cultural instrument "bağlama" in the early 1970s, is on the left, and they were in front of their squatter on the right
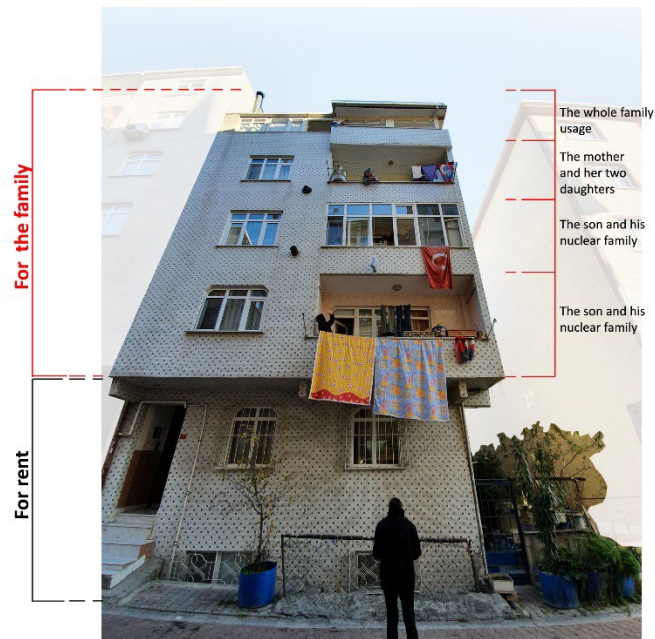
Figure 2 The low-rise family apartment building where the extended family that was transformed from the squatter family over time live together in the city and the usage diagram of it (The first author, 2020)

The starting questions of the research are how vertical and horizontal spatial relations and activity systems have changed due to coexistence and how the cultural background of a rural lifestyle may affect the emergent lifestyle in the metropolitan city area. Family apartment buildings contain intensive indicators in terms of the culture-space-behaviour relationship. To investigate these indicators, the researcher needs to spend sufficient time in the family apartment building to discover the ordinariness of daily life and learn about the cultural background.

The first author, who has a kinship relationship with the family, established a direct relationship with the field. This situation brings up the issue of positionality and reflexivity in ethnographic research. Weber (1949) states that different social positions affect not only the findings of the study but also the choice of the subject or problem to be investigated because each researcher's interests, values, cultural backgrounds, and experiences are different. Özlem (2015) states that empiricism and cultural and historical meaning effectively produce scientific knowledge in social studies. For this reason, it is critical for the researcher to constantly question and discuss the position of the researcher, who has a direct relationship with the field, in terms of producing scientific knowledge through ethnographic research.

Researchers' identity, approach to the research problem, and position(s) in the field directly affect the phases of the research. Therefore, a researcher's insider or outsider position may affect the quality and quantity of the research data (Breen, 2007). However, in qualitative research, not only does the researcher affect the researched people and the researched object, but participants also affect the researcher and the research process. Kaçar Tunç (2020) says that the perspective of the researcher and all the decisions she/he will make impact on his/her positionality. Qin (2016) defines qualitative research as a *'dialogical process'* between the researched and the researcher. This multi-factor relationship between the researcher and the researched affects the research process, so the researcher must constantly evaluate her/his position. Furthermore, researchers must consider their existence's inevitability and cultural, social, and political realities. Also, they need to think about how these realities affect the interactional relationship in the field and must control their positionality accordingly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

As an insider, the first author has a command of the field, and although this often seems like an advantage, in some cases, it might create blindness in research that seeks to explore the ordinary. Similarly, the fact that the researcher is over-experienced in the field may cause the dominance of her/his own experiences in the interpretation part (Greene, 2014). Sometimes, being an insider

might prevent the researched community from telling as a result of thinking that the researcher already knows everything (Chavez, 2008). All of these make the reflexivity of the first author critical in this study. Berger (2015) describes reflexivity as *"turning of the researcher's lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation."*. In addition, he states that reflexivity cannot be considered independent of the knowledge producer. Therefore, reflexivity is also essential for the researcher's internal control. In the context of this study, for the researcher's reflexivity, it is crucial that the first author sometimes moves away from the field, re-evaluates her position each time in the interviews, constantly evaluates the viewpoint of the researched person or community, and designs an ethnographic toolkit accordingly.

4. Developing an Architect's Photo-collage Sketchbook: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Family Photos

In 2019, as a pilot study, the first author started to observe the family members living in the family apartment building: one day on the weekdays (Thursdays) and once on the weekend (Sundays) to understand different patterns. To support the observation, she conducted semi-structured interviews.

During the observations, the production of visual material was needed:

"I wanted to have a sketch of the old gecekondu. However, my mother-in-law was not eager to draw. I think this is because she was an illiterate woman. I saw how she was anxious about holding the pen. So, I never insisted. Finally, two of my husband's sisters drew a sketch. I asked them the questions I was curious about and made them think more about their past".

(Field notes, 2019)

The first author's boundaries due to her different identities in the field, her curiosity about the space as an architect, and the family's unwritten rules push her to use various visual tools to learn more. This trial-and-error process directed the emergence of photo collage sketchbooks. Searching for a place the researcher (first author) had never been to and had not had a chance to be in was quite a challenge. She interviewed the participants to investigate how cultural codes from the past affect space and behaviour and what behavioural codes have survived or not and benefited from life narratives. The information she gathered created a pile of data in her head, but it was insufficient. Photographs of the family houses where the family lived in the past were needed to explore the roots of daily life in the current family apartment building. The researcher aimed to understand how the family uses the spaces with photographs by looking at the photos taken in the houses they lived in, how they communicate with the items and the place itself, and to discover what cultural core elements are important to their cultural background. While doing this, open-ended interviews were conducted with the researched family while obtaining the photographs. Combining the information of the places in the obtained photos like a puzzle and turning it into a movie scene constructed the ethnographic data.

The researcher could embody the information in her head when she looked at the family photos. It is not easy for a researcher to quickly access family photos, but being in close contact with the family as an insider gave the first author an advantage in accessing family photos. She gained access and made the family members happy for being interested in these photos. One of the family members said during the photo-seeking:

"While we constantly migrated from one place to another, one of our photo albums was lost during each move. How sad we were with each one of them. If it was not, there were more photos to show you. I wish they had not disappeared, too. However, thanks to you, we also remembered our memories".

(Field notes, 2020)

The family mostly has joint albums for their photographs. However, one family member said that she has a unique album apart from the family's joint albums. She showed the researcher this special album herself. When the researcher asked why, she expressed this situation as:

"We are still nomads anyway. Things are constantly going up and down from here to there, from this floor to that floor. I will not let these photos disappear."

(Field notes, 2020)

While the above quotes reveal the importance of photos for families, they show how gaining trust accelerates sharing these personal items for a researcher.

While collecting and talking about the family photographs, the researcher felt the urgent need to sketch together with the photos. Determining the relationship between the places in the photographs, the things found there, and the people who experience those places requires a multifaceted study. Many approaches to producing scientific knowledge can be envisaged in qualitative research. The path used in this study, from getting the photos to their transformation into information, interpretation, and presentation, was also designed specifically for this study. The first author adopted an approach appropriate to the nature of her research, consisting of three steps.

4.1. Step 1: Getting, extracting, and grouping family photos

To obtain the photos, the first author identified family members with a photo archive and visited those people individually. Then, by scanning the photographs together with each person, the images were weeded out according to places. This job required time and effort, but since the researcher was also a family member, the family showed patience and faced her struggles.

Extracting was done by describing each place visible in the photographs, and family members drew sketches to define the homes they lived in the past. This process also required throwing away some photos. This subtraction was made according to whether the relationship between space and behaviour setting is observable or whether there are similar photographs from the same perspective. The photos selected were then grouped spatially according to the homes where the family moved over time.

With the space-based and chronological ordering of the photographs, the aim was to reveal the family's relocation process into the city after the migration and to present data about the places they use in the culture-space-behaviour relationship (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Weeding out and grouping the family photos collected from the family members according to the time and space-based ordering

While the researcher grouped the photographs taken in the houses where the participants moved in the city spatially and chronologically, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants who owned the photos. Afterwards, all the collected and grouped images were shown to the participants who shared the same place, and the interviews continued. It was seen that group interviews produce more information than one-on-one interviews. Photography as an object opens the door to the past, brings the participants back to their history, and creates a chained flow of information by reminding each other of their memories. In these interviews, data was obtained on where the photographs were taken and the people's actions in the photos.

Doing interviews with the participants as a group has helped the researcher check the narratives' reliability. For example, for some photos, while participants were unsure about the details in one-on-one interviews, the ambiguous information about these photographs was clarified in the group interviews.

The people who photographed or took the photo were important in group interviews because they usually started the narratives and told the story about that photo. The story of a photograph consists of the story of the person/ people, the story of the place, and the relationship between these two. Within the scope of this study, the combination of person/people and place stories has particular importance. This combination also has a dynamic character. For example, different participants looking at the same photo can talk about other photo parts. Mainly, suppose the speaking participants belong to different age groups. In that case, these narratives become more prosperous because the relationship that people of varying age groups, who are in a particular place at a specific time, establish with that place is different. The differentiation of experiences enriches the spatial narratives and transforms the frozen moment as a photograph into a multi-layered moving film. Although photos are thought of as images in which a single moment is frozen, the conversations of the people who look at the photograph bring to life the shot and take that image out of being a 'single frozen moment.' Pink (2001:74) mentions this process *"By paying attention to how people interweave such images with verbal narratives, researchers may learn about how these individuals construct their lives and histories*." This multi-layered dynamism has been exciting for the researcher and has ignited the architect's identity at this stage, where reflexivity gains importance. Audio recordings were taken while participants and the researcher discussed the photographs. It is critical for the researcher to obtain objective data, so after the interviews, she listened to the audio recordings many times and checked whether she asked a guiding question. This multi-layered dynamism is how the infrastructure of the multi-layered structure of the photo collage sketchbook was formed as a visual representation tool.

4.2. Step 2: Deconstruction of family photos

Family photographs from the first step were deconstructed to form multi-layers in the second step. In this process, it was necessary to go beyond the images. More than one photograph belongs to the same place, and they all have different meanings. Therefore, each semantic piece in the photos had to be deconstructed to interpret all the meanings in the image. The researcher started by layering components that might give her clues to socio-spatial behaviour patterns for each photograph. The details that grab the researcher's attention at first sight are processed to a transparent layer. Spatial behavioural information related to the stories about the space found in the photographs and expressed in the interviews is processed in another transparent layer. At this stage, interviews were critical to go beyond the scene that fits in a single photo frame: it is the element that animates the photographic frame, which is a frozen moment. There were other stories told, but which were related to places outside the photographic frame. These stories were represented by objects, actions or notes completed by drawing as an extension of the photo frame. Since it is space-based research, 'writing' started to fall short both in the research process and in revealing the data. The data presented by the photographs began to form some relationships within itself.

In the photos, many layers were formed chronologically: *'the gecekondu'* during the first period of migration to the city, the temporary home during the construction of the apartment, and the floors of the family apartment building as an organism that develops from the bottom up after the transition to the apartment. The houses the family lived in the city from the first migration to the present day can be expressed as chronological displacement. During these displacements, the behavioural patterns that survived or ended due to the cultural background were investigated. The photographs were also deconstructed according to this chronological displacement (Figure 4).
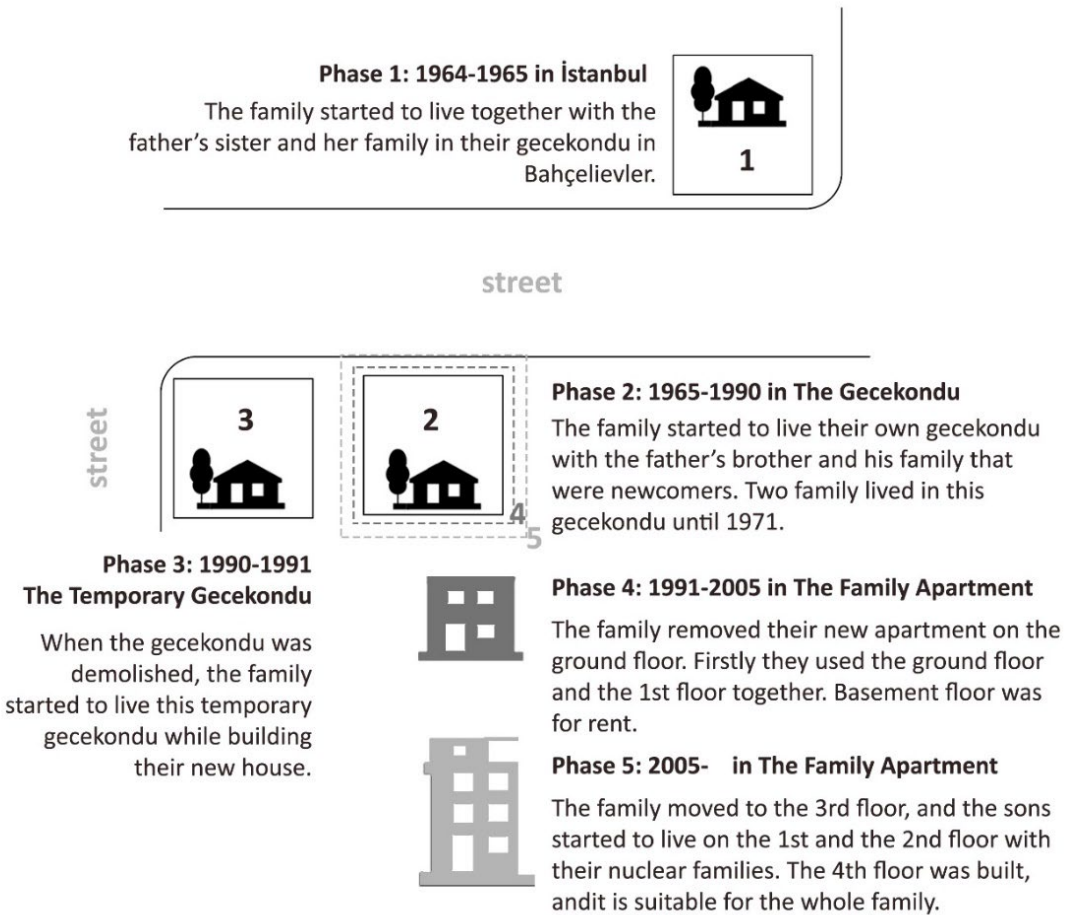

Figure 4 Historical displacements of the family in Istanbul

The photos taken in the same place sometimes formed a whole and almost created a 360-degree panorama of that space. These spaces were represented with small plan sketches supported by perspective drawings, detailed object drawings, or drawings describing actions (Figure 5).

The data that came out with photos, short chats, and interviews constituted a story in the end. The researcher tried to visualise this story in the photo collage sketchbook. This sketchbook consists of photographs, drawings, collage layers, and short notes but does not contain a single production technique; as the researcher's vision improved and parts of the story were completed, the sketchbook evolved its approach.
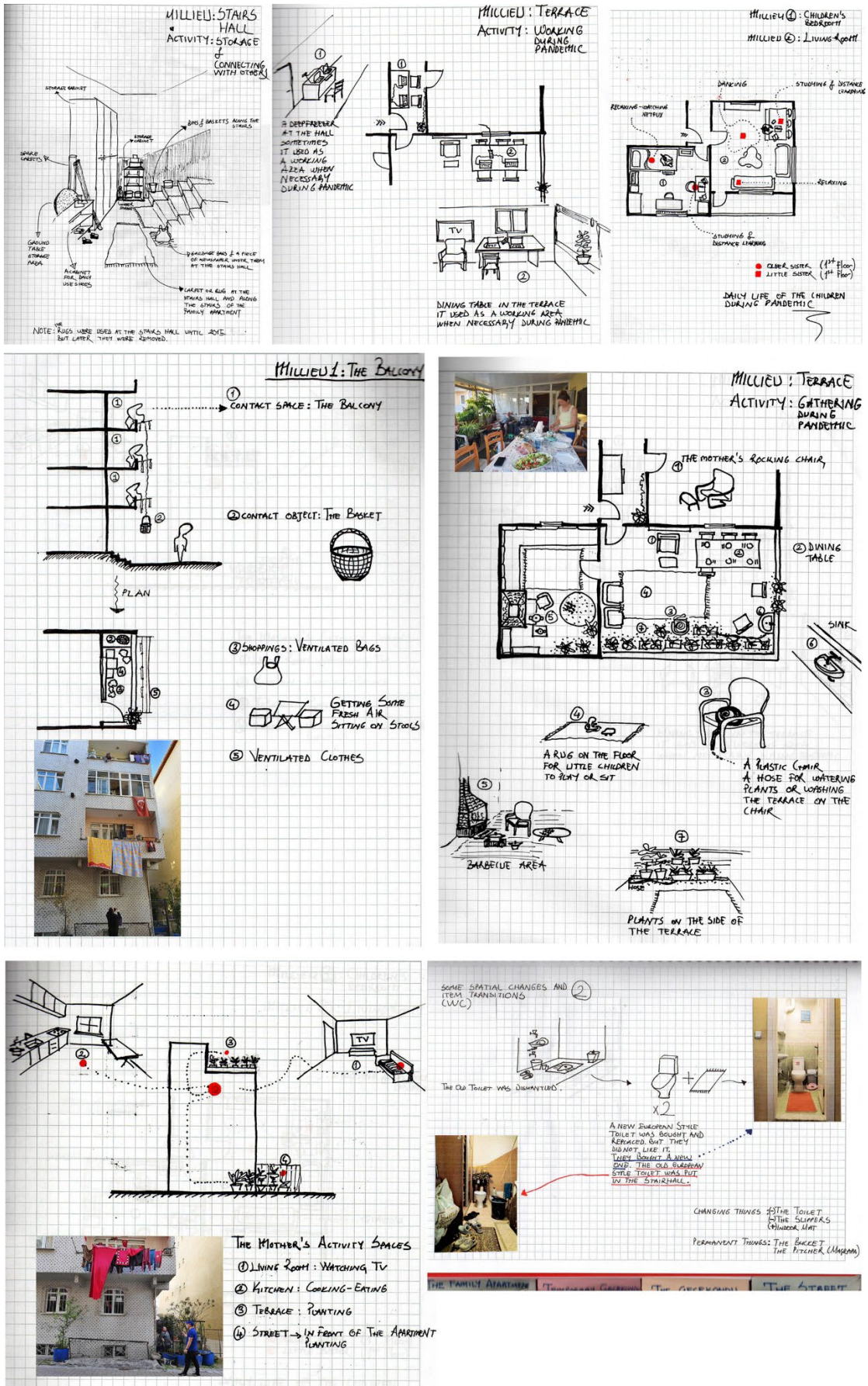
Figure 5 Observation sketch examples contain small plan sketches, perspective drawings, detailed object drawings or drawings describing actions, and photos. (The first author, 2020)

In this process, the approach of the photo collage sketchbook, the production techniques, and the collage materials have evolved. Hence, this paper describes an approach, rather than a method, to use family photography and architectural representation techniques for gathering and representing data.

4.3. Step 3: Reconstructing the deconstructed layers: synthesis of the ethnographic data

At this stage, the photo collage sketchbook, which emerged as a chronological displacement album, took the researcher to a place she had never been. The photographs, enriched with drawings, collages, and short notes, went beyond their frames and brought to life the space with daily life inside (Figure 6-7).

Figure 6 Collage examples with family photos, sketches, and text from the Sketchbook. They also contain transparent layers to deconstruct the spatial and cultural components of the images. (The first author, 2020)

Firstly, the researcher sought the spatial and cultural equivalents of the layers separated from each photo frame. Each spatial and cultural layer in the photographs was transferred and marked on transparent layers. These layers may appear as how people use the space or the object, the alternative relationship models with the outer space, and different meanings attributed to the place or the object. In addition, these layers show certain common features as the number of photographs increases over time. These features appear as a visual code, and each piece of content in the photo collage sketchbook has ceased to be an object that made contact with the researcher. Instead, each layer communicating with the researcher and the researched community has become a building block to construct holistically ethnographic knowledge. The production of ethnographic knowledge has been tried to be represented through photographs. However, the resulting picture

is no longer just a photographic frame. The researcher's interviews and short conversations with the participants, combined with the participants' drawings, the researcher's sketches, and notes, thickened with transparent layers, turned into a collage that transcends borders.

Figure 7 Mixed technic sketches for understanding the experiences before the family apartment building life. (The first author, 2020)

Banks (2007) defines the terms figure/ground as things that appear significant and those that seem incidental. In light of the narratives and visuals in this third stage, the ground in some family photographs was transformed into a figure; in others, the background was wholly erased or sometimes transformed.

The photo collage sketchbook, which acts as a visual living organism within the framework of the culture-space-behaviour relationship, has built its production approach and the ethnographic meaning it wants to reach and convey.

At the end of this stage, the researcher met the participants again and gave them a presentation of the photo collage sketchbook. Because each participant had many fragmented and scattered photographs, seeing them chronologically within the framework of a particular story gave them emotional moments. One of the participants said, *"As if my life has become a movie and I am sitting and watching it"* during the sketchbook examination. It reveals the importance of the story for them.

The big picture built with each piece of photography is the story itself. The participants stated their positive feelings about the photo collage sketchbook made with their photographs, and the researcher made a presentation to them with the sketchbook. Photographs were part of them and a familiar object. They indicated they were tense, thinking that only a long paper would be the result, and stated that they were relieved that the researcher told their story visually.

5. Conclusion

This study presents photo collage sketchbooks that emerged while doing ethnographic research to examine the relationship between culture and the spatial configurations of family apartment buildings in Turkey. The three-step process presented in this paper constitutes only a specific part of the main research. Photo collage sketchbooks helped the researcher create a visual story of the field while conveying the relationship between the places where the participants lived in the past and their cultural behaviours.

Interviews with the participants were insufficient to fully understand a place the researcher had never been before, and this problem forced the use of photo collage sketchbooks. While creating these sketchbooks, the photographs obtained from the participants were grouped chronologically and spatially. One-on-one interviews were held with the participants during this process. At this stage, some photos acted as a trigger for the participants to remember the past. Photographs were used as visual representations during the data collection phase, but simultaneously, the participants tried to convey information through drawings. In addition, the data was enriched by the drawings in the field and supplemented with short notes. Therefore, the photo collage sketchbooks were created with a mixed technique. The use of photo collage notebooks in this research is a trigger that transfers the story, a tool to manage the visual data analysis process, and a tool to transform the data into an analysable, understandable, and transferable form. The photo collage sketchbook was deconstructed, but then a new ethnographic knowledge was built with all the deconstructed building blocks.

During the research process, family photographs served as objects that embodied the data obtained by the researcher in the pre-interviews and observations. For example, while living in the squatter, the lack of water infrastructure made water valuable. For this reason, spare water bins were seen all over their homes in the photographs. After the family moved to their apartment, they had a water infrastructure in their house, with no frequent water cuts. Nevertheless, it was seen in the observations and family photos that there were still water-filled bins in all the rooms of their houses. How the absence affects the storage habits has emerged by considering the photographs and observation data together. The spatial equivalents of this behaviour in the family apartment building have been discussed by trying to make a sociocultural expansion with open-ended interviews. The researcher's tendency to think visually as an architect constructed this approach while observing the cultural expansion of the behavioural patterns in the family apartment building. For this reason, the photographs were enriched with drawings and short notes, and the behavioural patterns were first deconstructed and transformed into layers and became analysable. Later, they were brought together again and tried to be associated with their spatial counterparts.

Ethnographers' own experiences consider observable, recordable, and translatable realities and the intangible and sensory nature of human experience and knowledge, objects, and images (Pink, 2001). While trying to understand the space in the culture-space-behaviour triangle, looking at the photograph and listening to the life narratives of the participants made an essential contribution to the research.

In the context of this study, some limitations were encountered while conducting visual ethnographic research. First, it is not easy to access the photographs of the participants while conducting the research. As mentioned in the previous sections, family photos are private, and it is difficult for the participant to share them with someone they do not know. Being an insider, of course, provides an advantage in gaining that trust. While obtaining the photographs, one-on-one interviews with the owners of the photos were one of the primary sources of information. However, to increase the reliability of the data, collective interviews were conducted in the second stage. Collective interviews have been a critical move to compare and verify the memories recalled by the participants. In addition, joint interviews created a chain of memory storms among the participants, revealing more data. While interviewing, it is vital to show the photos to every participant from a

particular age group because they contribute differently to the photo components because of the place experience.

Kuschnir (2016) expresses that hand drawing and using a sketchbook in ethnographic research humanise the researcher in the eyes of the participant. In addition to the fact that the researcher was a family member, drawing something instead of writing via a computer or a sketchbook beside the participants reduced the tension of the interview. Going beyond words or writing, collages as a new expression technique facilitated access to sensitive sensory areas for the participants and contributed to collective knowledge production. Photo-collage sketchbooks were used to overcome difficulties encountered during data collection due to the ambiguous role of the researcher.

Berger (1972) mentions that we always look at an alive and active relationship between people and objects. It is not an isolated thing. Completing existing photographs with drawings and trying to combine the invisible parts of the space made it easier to see the interactions between people, space, and objects. The aim is to expand the physical boundaries of the place visible in the photographs, read them in the context of culture-space-behaviour, and imagine daily life. While doing this, being there as an architect has some advantages. Being accustomed to working with visuals and drawings made it easier to reveal the data. Thinking with lines and supporting them with texts has created a coding language. Unlike the photo transcription method, widely used as a visual ethnographic research method, the synthesis of ethnographic knowledge is also expressed visually. The data gained from the moment the researcher met the family and the information obtained from the photos and life narratives quickly became inter-related. As a diachronic flashlight, photo collage sketchbooks shed light on the narratives while revealing how this story has developed and evolved through time.

Banks (2001) expresses visual images' complex and problematic nature and underlines that they are an omnipresent aspect of almost all human social relations. It is possible to say that visual images are a complex but indispensable aspect of architecture and design. Collier and Collier (1986) state that technical skills alone do not enable the collection of readable data and underline the difficulty of observing meaningfully. Although the researcher's familiarity with using visual images as an architect helped her in this study, it was initially difficult for her to find an architecturally correct representation technique in the sketchbooks. Over time, this problem has been solved using a mixed technique appropriate to the nature of the research, not from an architectural point of view.

The production technique of the collage sketchbook is entirely dependent on the researcher and the researched subject. This study used photographs, drawings of the participants and researcher, short notes and transparent layers while deconstructing the visual items. The technique used while creating these collages can evolve according to the time the researcher spends in the field and the quantity and quality of the text and visual documents obtained. For example, while the deconstruction of the family photos was done by dividing them into layers in the early stages of the study, the researcher encountered similar layers in the photographs over time, and her brain doing this automatically changed the collage sketchbook's production technique. Powell (2015) mentions that the researcher's personal experiences come into play when analysing, interpreting, or presenting a space. She adds that, as an insider, looking at a photo and understanding what is behind it, discovering the contradictions, and learning what to look for to see what is behind the present moment is essential. With a similar approach, Berger (2005:71) states: *"The drawing of a tree does not show a tree but a tree-being-looked-at."* So, this study is not about a set of instructions or tools but experiences about the process or approach to constructing ethnographic knowledge.

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