

Transforming Public Space into Authority-Controlled Space: A Case Study on the Ministries Triangle in Ankara, Türkiye

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1 Introduction

Cities consist of multiple borders, geographical, social, and political, while human-made borders define spaces and territories for safety, shelter, and function. Building on the ideas of Foucault, Benjamin, Norberg-Schulz, and Diener and Hagen, borders can be understood not simply as neutral design elements but as instruments of restriction and control. Rather than enabling openness, they often reduce permeability, limit access, and create forms of alienation, as [Colomina \(1994\)](#) and [Norberg-Schulz \(2000\)](#) emphasise, between people and space, as well as between citizens and the state. Framed within the thematic focus on accessibility, permeability, spatial functionality and its effect on socio-cultural dynamics, this research addresses how these borders operate in practice through a case study of the Ministries Triangle in Ankara, Türkiye, examining how planning decisions and interventions have transformed the area into a landscape of borders and boundaries that restrict bodily movement and limit public accessibility.

This study traces the transformation of the Ministries Triangle from the Early Republican Era in 1924 to 2025 (Figure 1). While remnants of the original planning

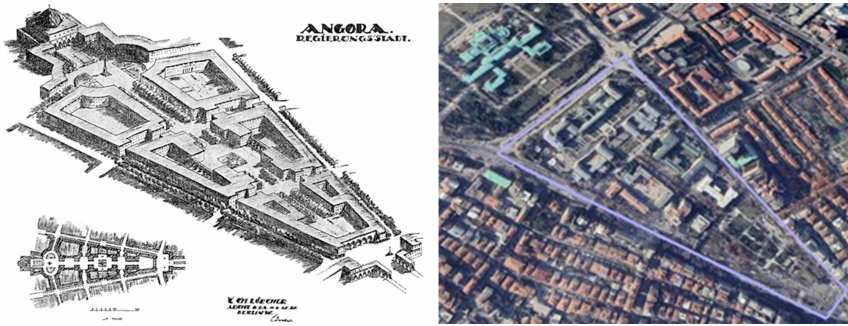


Figure 1: On the left: One of the earliest diagrams of Lörcher Plan 1924-25 Ministries Triangle (Cengizkan 2004) On the right: The satellite photo of Ministries Triangle (the purple line was added by the authors) from 2025

framework remain visible in the re-use of ministry buildings, subsequent interventions and heightened security measures have redefined spatial organisation, turning urban borders into mechanisms that regulate movement, restrict bodily access, and control permeability. Once characterised by continuous walkable public spaces formed by the ministries, their plazas, and green areas, the district has gradually lost this openness with the intrusion of streets, subway lines, and a highway, which fragmented the site and reduced accessibility. These changes illustrate how spatial organisation can both enable and constrain mobility, social interaction, and public engagement, aligning with the thematic focus on how physical structures shape accessibility and functionality. Over time, collective space has eroded, and the area has shifted into a zone of restricted access and limited permeability, functioning as a self-contained closure in line with Ching's (2007, 2012) understanding of spatial boundaries. Today, the Ministries Triangle houses key state institutions, including Güvenpark, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the General Directorate of Security Affairs, the General Commandership of Gendarmerie, and the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM).

2 Methods

The research methodology combines a literature review on the Early Republican Era of Ankara, from 1924 to 1957, with an examination of the planning approaches of Lörcher, Jansen, and Holzmeister. These readings informed the identification

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of major transformations at both the urban and architectural scales. A spatiotemporal perspective was adopted to trace development over time and to interpret changes at district and building scales.

The conceptual discourse of the norm ‘borders’ was analysed for determining the control mechanisms, spatial regulation, bodily movement, permeability, from the works of key figures like Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Alexander Diener, Joshua Hagen, Beatriz Colomina, Francis Ching, and Sigmund Freud.

The study applies a comparative analysis of development plans and archival photographs. Images were collected from institutional archives, online repositories, and community groups on social media platforms. Although many photographs lacked precise dates, cross-referencing with reliable archives enabled the construction of approximate intervals. To complement these, satellite images from Google Earth were used to document urban-scale transformations since the 2000s.

A site visit in late 2024 assessed the area using observational, ethnographic, and phenomenological approaches focused on pedestrian experience. Additional online images were limited, and privacy restrictions constrained on-site photography. Despite this, combining literature, archival sources, satellite imagery, and fieldwork offered a comprehensive understanding of the Ministries Triangle’s transformations since the Early Republican period.

3 Results

Based on the literature review, the Ministries Triangle (MT from now on) has undergone a significant transformation on both the urban and architectural scales. While initial plans reflected a coherent design process, the current condition differs greatly due to major interventions like the alteration of Güvenpark and the construction of Eskişehir Highway, which separated the TBMM from MT and disrupted the continuous axis from park to parliament. Jansen’s garden-city principles and emphasis on walkability were progressively lost, replaced by boundaries like fences that undermine permeability. To understand these changes, the planning history of Ankara is traced from the Lörcher Plan of 1924 to the present, 2025.

In 1924, the Lörcher Plan (Figure 2) was the first to define the New City, Çankaya, designed for a population of 200,000, integrated with green areas. It introduced infrastructure for roads, electricity, water, sewage, and gas, and emphasised a walkable main axis, Zafer Avenue, with interconnected courtyards,

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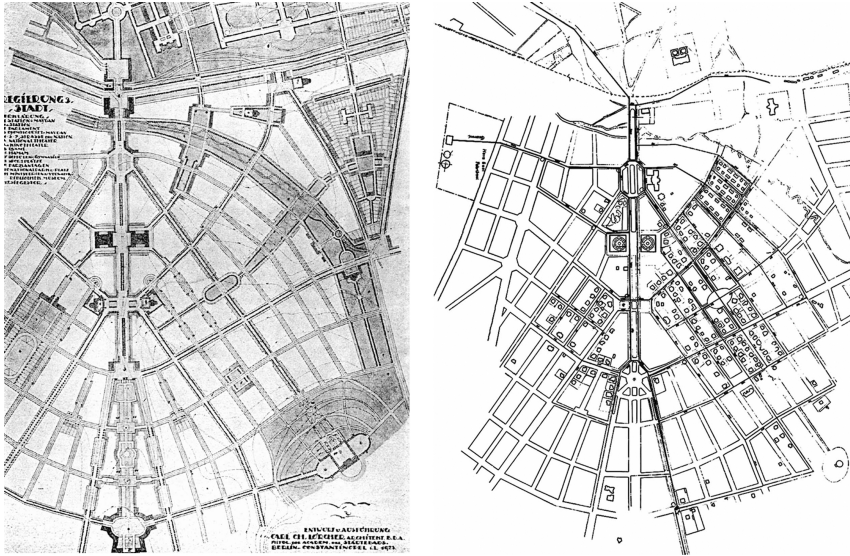


Figure 3: On the left: Lörcher Plan for the New City, 1924 (Vardar 1989). On the right: Gas infrastructure scheme, 1928 (Cengizkan 2022)

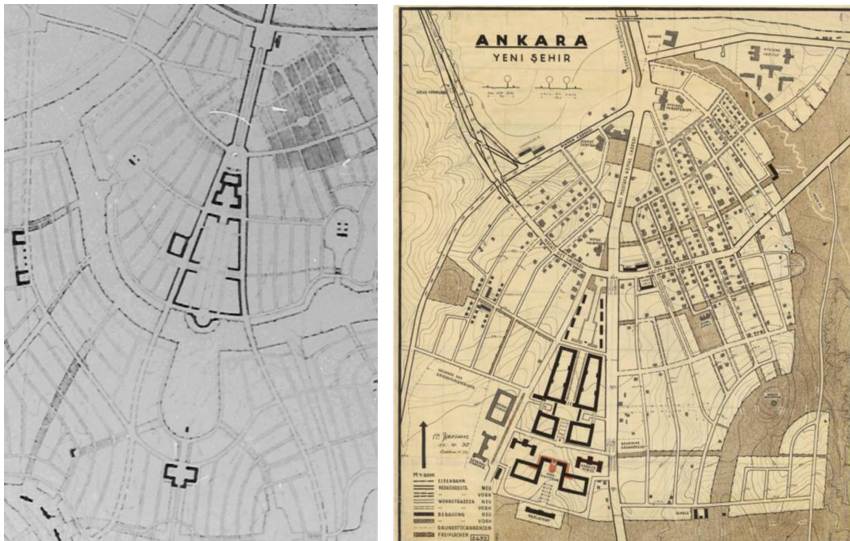


Figure 4: On the left: Jansen's competition project, 1928 (cropped by the authors to show details) (Vardar 1989) On the right: The shifted, trapezoid planning of the New City in 1930 (Baş 2018)

parliament. Later, the idea of Güvenpark was highlighted and supported by Holzmeister's idea of 'Tor Bau' (Tower Gate Building) (Figure 5), as a gateway from Güvenpark to the Ministry buildings. Jansen produced the final plan in 1935, and Güvenpark's design was finalised by French landscape architect Theo Leveau in the early 1940s (Figure 6).

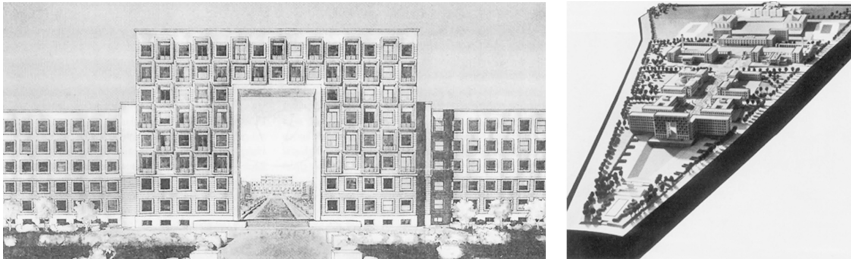


Figure 5: Holzmeister's façade proposal for Tor Bau, and drawn within the MT, both dated 1934 (Cengizkan 2010)

By the mid-twentieth century, the Yücel-Uybadin plan of 1957 (Figure 7) introduced the Eskişehir Highway directly through Vilayetler Square, eliminating the plaza and further isolating the MT. In subsequent decades, additional fences and boundaries were erected around ministries, creating internal separations that undermined the vision of continuous public space and limited pedestrian movement.

Changes in the 2000s are evident from satellite images (Figure 8), which document the transformation of small courtyards. Some were converted into green plazas, while others accommodated new construction. By 2020, several parking areas were redeveloped into landscaped zones, and restoration of ministry buildings continues into 2025.

Overall, the MT has shifted from an accessible, pedestrian-oriented public axis envisioned in the early plans into a fragmented and restricted zone shaped by highways, fences, and security measures. The progressive erosion of openness demonstrates how urban and architectural interventions can transform an area once designed as a civic core into a closed and controlled space.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The chronological timeline shows the MT's significant transformation. Taking Lörcher's plan as the basis, the most critical interventions at the urban scale were the addition of Güvenpark, Eskişehir Highway, and the subway construction

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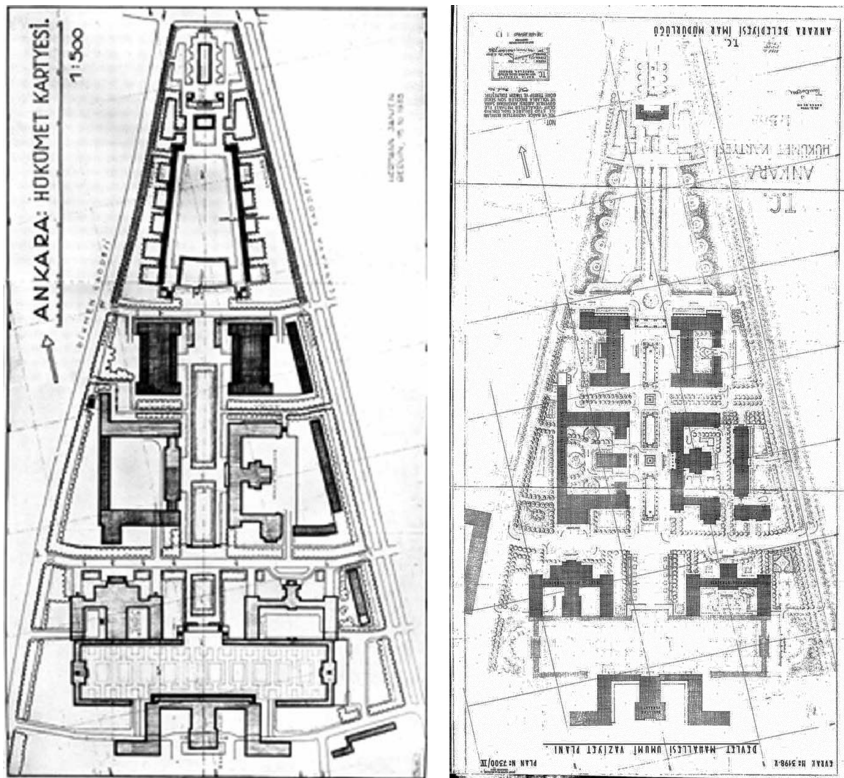


Figure 6: On the left: Jansen's 1935 plan, including Holzmeister's Güvenpark (Cengizkan 2010) On the right: Theo Leveau's 1937 plan with finalised landscape layout and Güvenpark (Cengizkan 2010)

(Figure 9). Spatial fragmentation turned pedestrian paths into closed fields, while large areas were converted into infrastructure. Added walls and checkpoints forced changes of direction; visible and invisible protocols created a hierarchical order of access. All of these reveal that the Ministries had become a mechanism of control, as Diener and Hagen (2012) emphasise, regulating the public sphere.

Güvenpark, once a key recreational space, gradually lost its function with the addition of bus stops and subway infrastructure. Today, it is used mainly by older people and families with children around the Güven Anıtı. Its relation to the ministries also shifted, as fences interrupted continuity and turned the adjacent street into a service and vending area (Figure 10). The MT embodies a spatial order where the body encounters power. Following Foucault (1977), the body is not merely biological but a carrier of power relations shaped by spatial arrangements. High walls and barriers protect authority while restricting access,



Figure 7: New City in Yücel-Uybadin 1957 Plan (Baş 2018)

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Figure 8: Aerial photos of the MT (2005–2025, at five-year intervals) were highlighted by the authors to illustrate transformations

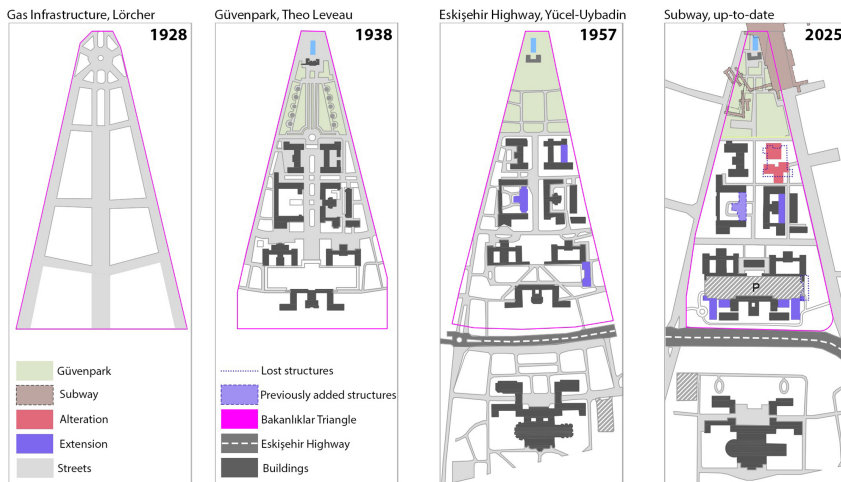


Figure 9: The first author reproduced the plans from Lörcher, Leveau, and Yücel-Uybadin, adding highlights to show transformations from 1928 to 2025. The TBMM complex was excluded from the comparative diagram as it is absent in the original Lörcher and Leveau plans.

echoing fortifications and gated communities. Framed as safety, these boundaries raise the question: safety from whom, intruders or the public itself? As Benjamin (2002), Colomina (1994), and Norberg-Schulz (2000) highlight, designated spaces can alienate, and in the MT, a space meant for the public instead enforces strict limits, distancing citizens from the state it represents.



Figure 10: The street between Güvenpark and Ministries, 2024 – all photos are from the first authors' archive, except for the bottom left, dated 2018 (Çiçek Bahçesi 2018)

State spaces regulate movement through predetermined standards, and in the Ministries Triangle, public access is now almost entirely restricted, contradicting the initial design intent. The pedestrian axis had already been disrupted in earlier phases, and subsequent expansions of the MIA complex from 1957 to 2025 further intensified this fragmentation, with its courtyard alternating between parking and landscaped space, reinforcing enclosure and limiting permeability.

The former Prime Ministry, extended in the 1970s, now belongs to the Ministry of Justice, while the old Supreme Court was repurposed for public use. The Ministry of Education, added in the 1960s, is more publicly accessible but architecturally inconsistent with Holzmeister's ensemble. In contrast, the Ministry of Justice, built in the 1930s, is surrounded by fences and guards, creating an atmosphere of exclusion. Here, walls function not only as spatial dividers but

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also as mechanisms of social separation. Turnstiles and entrance checks delay, scrutinise, or deny access, while excessive security transforms the MT into what Norberg-Schulz (1965) terms a closed organism, unsettling even passers-by. This aligns with Freud's (1919) notion of the 'uncanny,' where familiar spaces become strange under extreme control. Ultimately, the so-called entrances operate less as spatial thresholds than as political mechanisms of recognition.

Permeability in the MT is now tightly controlled. Closed streets, redirected pedestrian paths, and restricted entrances confine movement to predetermined routes, preventing full access. While the area was originally designed in the Early Republican period, 1920s-50s, to facilitate public engagement with the state, it now, in 2025, distances citizens from authority. Approaching the buildings is possible, yet walls and invisible protocols keep bodies at the boundary. This encounter is both physical and psychological, as waiting at checkpoints and constant monitoring turn the body into a participant in a choreography of power.

While borders are typically established to define spaces, ensure safety, and organise functions, shifts in authority and political dynamics can repurpose these mechanisms to restrict access and regulate movement, shaping both social interaction and the urban experience. The MT exemplifies how planning decisions and interventions transformed originally functional boundaries into instruments that limit bodily mobility, reduce permeability, and alter connectivity. These changes demonstrate how spatial structuring influences accessibility, functionality, and the broader dynamics of land use and public engagement.

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