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SEMINAR PRESENTATION
**'PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BİRGİ,
AN OLD TOWN IN WESTERN ANATOLIA'**

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SUMMARY

The Civil Conservation Initiative in Birgi

Birgi, a historic town in Western Anatolia, with a significant past as capital to the fourteenth century Aydınöđlu Beylik and a major city during the Ottoman period, has been witnessing signals of an exciting new period in terms of conservation and public participation, since the beginning of 1996. It is the first site in a series of campaigns initiated by ÇEKÜL (Foundation for the Protection and Promotion of the Environmental and Cultural Heritage), collectively called '**Greeting the 21st Century with 21 Preserved Towns**', to preserve, enhance and promote the natural, cultural and historical values that many towns in Anatolia possess.

The underlying motive of this initiative is the accumulation of concern shared among the intelligentsia in Turkey about the rapid **loss of the cultural values**, and thus the cultural identity, of the country, as a result of misguided 'modernisation' movements prevalent since the 1950s. Incoherent and discontinuous state policies, coupled with a great under-allocation of state resources for heritage conservation, has only served to worsen the situation, and ultimately push professionals and academics into seeking alternative approaches. However, the catalysing impetus can be traced back to the inscription of **Safranbolu**, another historic Anatolian town, on **UNESCO's World Heritage List** in 1994, causing hopeful repercussions among all spheres of conservation in Turkey. As one of the inspired bodies, ÇEKÜL has launched the '**21 Towns**' programme, where seven towns (including Birgi) have initially been chosen, with seven more to be added each consecutive year, to form a country-wide network of cooperation.

In each of these towns, restoration of a traditional building, aimed as a **local research centre**, has been started. Meanwhile, research studies are underway for the planning of a characteristic street, which will eventually cover the whole town. Universities are encouraged to take up selected towns in their studies and research, while seminars and workshops are organised in local settings; thus, **characteristic values of each town** are put under focus and enduring **communication networks** are established between local governments and their communities.

