

## **PUBLIC SPACE LOST IN TRANSLATION/TRANSITION: MISSING PUBLIC SQUARES OF ANKARA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Historically design, construction, emergence and socialisation of public spaces in urban areas represents a complex interplay between different actors, discourses and structures within urban planning, urban design and implementation phases. For this respect, a city is a layered and living archaeological site, in which public space is designed, realized, subjected to erosive influences and sometimes vanishes. Throughout history of cities, one can witness such trajectories for public spaces in terms of changing life styles, urban functions, tangible and intangible heritage values and assets. In order to capture a valid account of the memory of place in an urban area, such depictions are invaluable since they do not only help to get a retrospection of memory of place but also provide opportunities to foresee and design future of those places. In all nations, there are also diffusive experiences in terms of design and implementation that has been taken as a pioneer and example for other urban areas. The capital city of Ankara and its urban planning and design process after the establishment of Turkish Republic is a milestone in this regard. As a middle-sized Anatolian town, Ankara was planned in a contemporary fashion and as a symbolic example of Republican nation-state values and desired life style. Urban parks, open spaces and squares were an indispensable part of this understanding through which modern life style is experienced, witnesses and learnt. For this purpose, early planning efforts for the city of Ankara foresaw design and realization of a significant number of urban squares on main proposed boulevards such as Ataturk Boulevard. As can be observed in Ulus square of Zafer Square few of them have even been realized. Yet most of them remained in the drawing board, not implemented, filled with buildings or transformed into traffic junctures at best. The aim of this paper is to display, how the non-implementation, change of design and disappearance process of urban squares affects memory of place in the case of Ankara with respect to identification of future urban policies and design principles. For this purpose, archive data about urban planning and implementation will be used, supported by contributions of the bureaucrats and academicians working on the subject. The examples of Zafer Square and Ulus Heykel Square will be further elaborated.

**Keywords:** Missing public space, urban squares, urban planning, urban design, implementation, Ankara

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, from Arab Spring to Occupy movement, from ‘*indignados*’ to Gezi Park etc. the world has witnessed a renewed concernment, assigned to public space both as a stage and an inhibitor of social and political transformation in the form of a populism embedded in the use and exploit of urban space. Obviously, throughout history of the human civilization, the concept and phenomena of the “open space” in cities has always meant an intrinsic potential for social change and coherence simultaneously. That is why; power and legitimate authorities have always tried to get a grasp on the use, definition and exploitation of public spaces in urban areas. From Greek agora to Roman Forum and town squares of the Middle Age Europe and to the bazaars and mosques of Islamic cities, state has always tried to intervene into structural constraints that define what a public space is. This intervention transformed into institutionalized ways of planning, designing and implementing ideas about public space, as we know.

Yet, against this intervention, social meaning and de-meaning of a certain public space has rendered a distortion, transmission, diffusion and translation process in which state intervention is applied to the societal imagery of a certain public space. This translation process proves an archaeological accumulation of knowledge and physical space in the form of use and non-use of public space in cities. Planning and design ideas might float and reside on certain sections of urban areas, later to be either reinforced or fade away to picture an eclectic discontinuity or continuity in urban fabric. There can be followed in how certain ideas about public spaces can travel through historical venture, starting from technical or political concerns to be transcribed into daily lives of urban dwellers(Banerjee 2007). At the end, the fate of use and destruction of public space is legitimized or refused by the urban communities, are determined by both translation of design idea(1)s instrumentalized by political projects throughout continuous designing of public space and transition of the same public space from a uni-dimensional design space into a multi-dimensional public space.

Such transformation of public spaces can be observed in how certain instrumental spatial arrangements like public squares were planned and implemented throughout history. The aim of this paper is to show how translation of ideas from scratch to reality prescribes conditions of transition of public spaces using the case of public squares in Ankara, capital city of Turkey, to elaborate on the dialectical relationship between design and use of a public space defines design framework of a certain continuity in urban fabric.

## 2. DESIGN OF CITY SQUARE AS A PUBLIC SPACE AS TRANSLATION/TRANSITION

Throughout historical process, the more city squares associated with public values the more they became meaningful places for the urban space they reside in. It can be said that this publicness was not a mere abstraction but rather a structural element of the citizen’s minds that exists a visible, functional and semantic reality. While publicness of a city square increases, that square acquires an identity of “place” in which all contradictions and conflict of that urban reality became visible and any kind of interaction became legitimized(Carmona et al. 2003). In this regard, issued such as history of squares, historical progression of a square through which it transforms into a public space, criteria considered by urban planners, designers and urban administrations in shaping urban squares and how they interact with the existing uses of urban squares indicates some important resolutions for life span of a public space in urban areas.

Transformation of a city square from an idea to a socially constructed public space involves a consecutively initiated and then cyclical process of “translation/transition” process (Trancik 1986). As can be seen in any other urban space, a city square is planned and designed by an urban planner or an architect in contemporary societies with a mandate for the existing social relations and power structure. There is a continuous translation process at work in determining details of implementation under changing social, economic and political conditions. In this translation, various actors and institutions are at work, changing and adopting ideas inherent in design (Zakariya, Harun, and Mansor 2014). This translation process is a never-ending venture since the very idea of designing a prominent place is on the other hand institutionalized in design education and existential traditions of design occupations. At the end of this translation, not all public spaces and urban squares get the chance to be realized and emerge as a solid construct. Some of them might be subjected to later re-design efforts and transformed into something else, but, in the end, the city will have a designed and socially accepted city square as a public space, that will be subjected to continuous transitions from one social construction process to another, and might be cut off by other design attempts. All the research on city squares accounts for some important features of this process in which the end result is a public space. To this extent, a city square can be counted as a public space if it inherits some of the dimensionalities defined below:

- Temporal Dimension: In temporal terms, a square shall express continuity between past, now and future in terms of physical structure, functionality, seasonal and daily cycles.
- Natural Dimension: Naturally, landscape of a square is a value by itself and shall have acoustic, atmospheric, shading and reflecting, scenery, microclimate, control/intimacy and other historical continuities.
- Graphical Dimension: In graphical terms, a square shall constitute a unique language of ambient with its images, shapes, colors, signs.
- Architectural Dimension: In architectural terms, all the elements that frame the physical totality of the square (buildings, paving, monuments etc.) shall be coherent with the conceptual construct that brings together historical function of the square.
- Spatial Dimension: In spatial terms, all the urban patterns, boundaries, tracks, landmarks, nodes and other elements that defines a square shall be expressed in such a minimalist and open understanding to avoid distortion of repertoire of historical meanings.
- Psychological Dimension: In psychological terms, a square is a stage in which a set of experiences involving aesthetic, education, escape and others are derived. A balance should be regarded between these diverse experiences.
- Physiological Dimension: A square shall present a fiction with significant references to meanings that stimulates senses of sight, taste, touch, hearing and smelling.

On the other hand, within perpetuity of design and use of a public space, social regulation and arrangement of a city square denotes for some principles of consensus (Brown et al. 2005), defined throughout historical progression of the understanding of public spaces in cities:

- Universality: In terms of universality, a square is “everyone’s”. It should embrace a characteristic that is open to every age, disabled, disadvantaged sections of society and all ethnic and religious groups.
- In social process, a square has an urban atmosphere. It accommodates planned events like festivals, concerts, protests together with unplanned actions like encounters, spectating, eating and idleness or ‘flamer’.

- Cultural dimension: Each square has an intangible cultural continuity. There are specific behaviors, songs, literature and experiencing that square.
- Revitalization: A square might need revitalization in minimal doses of intervention. An effort, handling different dimensions of a square with the sensitivity of a surgeon in order to make it a richer experience and a public space is an important urban activity.
- Resilience and sustainability: Principles of resilience and sustainability is recommended to be at the hearth of design approaches. A square shall be responsive place that can answer changing conditions in responsibility, renew itself in the face of interventions and respond to different generations.
- Senses: A square is a bundle of senses. Renowned squares of the world creates a sense of ingenious and attractive place. This sense diverts ordinary flow of city through bending urges to explore and curiosity.
- Participation: Public participation is the key factor in both design and sense of belonging. Interdisciplinary approaches in determining design needs, common mind of the users in selection of design alternatives are vital in creating a sense of publicness.
- Story: As public spaces, squares have stories. These stories render squares meaningful and memorable together with the concepts they are built on. Social regulation of squares retells these stories and again.

Against all these dimensions mentioned in the relevant literature, under current circumstances there is a tendency to re-regulate squares not as public squares but as commodities to be marketed within various approaches such as “city branding”, “competitive cities” based on neoliberal paradigm. As a commodified object, a squares various dimensions collapse down into a superficial understanding of it either in the form of a commercial area or a place of ceremony for the dominant hegemony in power. All these various dimensions and commodification constitute translation and transition cycle of a city square as a public space.

### **3. LOST SQUARES OF ANKARA IN TRANSLATION/TRANSITION**

City squares are perceived to be one of the significant shortcomings of the Turkish Cities. Not only the number and quality of the existing squares are problematized by both ruling power and opposition but also constitution of new and robust city squares is among prospects and projects of nearly all local governments at work. Yet, new interventions to revitalize or structure existing squares and new one occasionally result in erosion of existing public space, emphasis on transportation and car traffic regulations, public space lacking design and identity. At the end, existing squares and design of new ones are not up to expectations. Nevertheless, it can be said that, this problem of “being squareless” has historical roots which can be understand with reference to translation/transition cycle since, urban planning and urban design processes are mostly subordinated by the economic considerations aiming at maximizing land rent or political gains. In most cities, it is apparent that motivations of designing squares are intertwined with social and political repercussions of various kinds.

In fact, institutional recognition of the importance of city squares as an element of civic life has begun with the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Just after the establishment of Turkish Republic and proclamation of Ankara City as the capital city, urban development of Ankara became one of the most important endeavors of the young Republic in terms of urban planning and urban design (Tankut 1988). In addition to a western style planned urban development approach, building of parks and civic elements of urban fabric was seed as

instruments of the westernization movement of the Republican Cadre. Later on, Republican planning and urban design understanding diffused to whole other cities in Turkey. Therefore, understanding and addressing planning and design processes for city squares in Ankara might prove to verify certain translation/transition processes of city squares in Turkish cities. In this study, first of all a general account of all the proposed city squares in Ankara and their fate will be provided and based on interviews and archive study on the two of these squares namely Zafer and Ulus Heykel Square will be further elaborated on.

In the first urban development plans of Ankara, first drawn by Lörcher and then Herman Jansen, a series of squares were proposed (Cengizkan 2004). Some of those squares were lost between different planning processes, some between planning and design, some between design and implementation and some after implementation. Today, existing examples of these proposed squares are neither fully functional not treated as design challenges but focal points to be intervened for socio-political transformation. These proposed city squares and their translation/transition process could be listed below:

1. Millet (Hakimiyet-I Milliye” Square: First appeared in Lörchers plan, in front of famous Taşhan in the old city center of Ankara. Yet, just after demolition of Taşhan, this square was re-designed, changing its shape and reducing its size and later on transformed into today’s “Ulus Square”, one of the most well-known squares in Ankara, which is a perfect example for translation/transition process.
2. Government (Hükümet) Square: It was proposed for in front of Ankara Governorship and built that way. Yet, after 2000’s this square transformed into a high security government area and used as a car park for official vehicles eventually lost its square characteristic. Recently, because of renewals in the adjacent archaeological area and transfer of some of the official buildings surrounding square to a newly established state university (Ankara Social Sciences University) there might be new prospects.
3. The Square of Fire Brigade: In its proposed form, this square was in fact a series of squares involving famous Hergelen Square and Karyağdı Tomb. Only Hergelen Square left of this proposed design. In 1990’s Hergelen Square was designed as a modern square with modern monuments. Later on in 2000’s it first transformed into a car park and bazaar. Recently the whole square is transformed into a huge mosque, completely eradicating the square.
4. Gazi Square: This square was proposed in front of Gazi Primary School but it has never been realized.
5. Kale Square: This square was proposed in Hisar Boulevard axis but it has never been realized.
6. Yıldız Square: It was proposed in the junction between 19 May Sport Facilities and Atatürk Cultural Center Area. An area was reserved for square but later on, that area was added to the sports facilities.
7. Station Square: Between main station building and city a series of squares were proposed and some of them were realized. However, later on out of the ones that have been realized, all transformed into inner city roads and they disappeared.
8. Kızılay Square: A square was proposed here but later on, it was not realized. Instead, low-density housing, traffic, and co-design of car traffic with pedestrians caused this area to be later on perceived and used as a square. Currently, it is accepted as one of the most important squares of Ankara, in which all protests and celebrations took place but in reality, it is a traffic junction.

9. Sıhhiye Square: First proposed as a hexagonal square surrounded by public institutions, train station and road traffic. Later on, it was fully transformed into a transit road in which pedestrian access is nearly impossible.
10. Zafer Square: It was proposed and then realized on Atatürk Boulevard between Kızılay and Sıhhiye Squares. In 1980's, beneath one part of the square an underground shopping area was built making half of the square obsolete. The other side is used as car park and a small green area.
11. Lozan Square: This square was proposed and realized between Sakarya and Mithatpaşa Squares. In 2000's because of arrangements made for road traffic, it lost its function as a square.
12. Tandoğan Square: It was proposed and built as a rectangular square insulated from road traffic. In 1990's a subway station was built on it with some greenery rendering it useless and leaving a traffic junction instead of a square.
13. Cebeci Square: It was proposed and designed just behind historical Mamak Conservatoire but it was never realized.
14. Sakarya Square: After pedestrainization made in 1970's an empty area emerged in junction of pedestrian streets that has been used as a congregation area for celebrations and political protests.

As can be seen, several of these city squares have been proposed, planned, designed and realized in Ankara. In terms of translation and transition to a new use, these squares can be briefly summarized in the table below:

**Table 1.** A brief account of the translation/transition of City Squares in Ankara

Square	What is lost in translation	What is lost in transition and remaining value
Millet Square	Initial design arrangement	Defining building lost. A real existing city square under threat of historical renovation in close area
Government Square	Function as a square	Function as square is lost. Physical shape and surrounding buildings are in place. A new function to be incorporated.
Square of Fire Brigade	Series of squares	Square itself is lost. Stories of historical Hergelen Square remains.
Gazi Square	Design	
Kale Square	Design	
Yıldız Square	Design	The reserved area is lost.
Station Square	Design	Squares are lost. No remaining
Kızılay Square	Design	Physical space is lost. However, socially defined square and function remains.
Sıhhiye Square	Design	Square is lost. Few empty spaces and greenery remains
Zafer Square	Function	Function is lost. Physical space remains
Lozan Square	Design	Square is lost. Few empty spaces remains
Tandoğan Square	Design, function	Square is lost. Few empty spaces and greenery remains
Cebeci Square	Design	
Sakarya Square	Pedestrian Area Function	A natural spontaneous square. A sense and identity of square remains

Recently, two remaining city squares of Ankara, namely Ulus and Zafer squares are under two types of proposed re-arrangements. The Metropolitan Municipality of Ankara is pursuing a Historical Renovation Project for Ulus Region and municipality's project involves demolishing all buildings surrounding Ulus Square and enlarging it into a massive open area. Clearly, this will change plan, design and all features

of the square. On the other hand, in Zafer Square there are two simultaneous cases at hand. On one side, official buildings surrounding one part of the square left the area and there are proposals for redevelopment of the area. On the other hand, the Metropolitan Municipality of Ankara changed urban development plan and proposed a regional park for the other part of the Zafer Square. Yet, regional park decision was cancelled because of a court decision opened by the chamber of architects. As a result, it can be said that translation/transition process is going on with different motives.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Modernist tradition of city planning and design brought about a repertoire of public spaces including city squares, involving many traits. In an intricate historical process intertwining changes in planning and design of a city square and changes in use and social reconstruction of that city square, a continuous translation/transition cycle redefines city squares' intrinsic values and sometime causing them to completely lost under the hegemony of neoliberal urban policies. Ankara is a vivid example of this transformation in which only a few of the proposed squares are left and they are under threat of losing their character. A few strategies and policies might be recommended to avoid this:

- A master plan of city squares that take existing and proposed squares in an integrated understanding.
- Determining reserve areas for potential new city squares and their urban design projects obtained through competitions.
- Re-pedestrianization of squares that formerly transformed into traffic junctures.
- Preservation and conservation of intangible heritage of the squares by doing local oral history studies.
- An integrated approach to plan and design city center functions and use of art with squares.
- An awareness raising campaign for use and heritage of squares.

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