

FROM MEMORY OF PLACE TO MEMORY PLACES – A CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION ON REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

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ABSTRACT

The subject and content of conservation extended since Venice Charter; so the set of values assigned to cultural heritage also changed. The set of values, previously assigned based on only historical and physical characteristics, are now appreciated to be socially constructed, knotted and experienced. According to contemporary value understanding, places become the subject of conservation studies not only being historically and artistically prized and authentic, but also due to symbolic and social values assigned. Especially those places on which common values are assigned by the society become integral part of urban memory in time. As collective memory find place itself on urban space and space collects and piles up memory in time, soon after the place of memory turns into a memory place. Memory places include socially constructed, experienced and knotted relations and transfer these relations to future generations.

Memory places that arouse common feelings and bring back common memories of social group are mostly being considered as common heritage and thus become the subject of conservation studies. Especially these studies stand out during the intention or act of removing such memory places – when the memory place is subjected to forgetting acts. Soon after memory places become the struggle places through which the society act together and develop strategies to safeguard its own collective memory – to be used for remembering. Within this context, it is argued that memory place turns into a double-acting place based on by whom it is managed: Subject of conservation by the society to be a means for remembering or act of scraping by the political power to be a tool for forgetting.

The main argument of the study is that urban space collects memories in time and it turns into a memory place – which should be the subject of conservation studies as they include attributed values by the society. The study argues the difficulty of protecting memory places without systematic conservation understanding. Therefore it tries to compose a relation between memory, place and conservation studies – by questioning how memory of place turns into memory places in time from the perspective of value assignment discussions. Hence, the study will first understand the formation and importance of memory places and then discuss reasons why and how memory places should be a subject of conservation studies – based on remembering and forgetting practices through well-known examples as World Trade Centre, Gezi Parkı or less-known local places as Ziyaret in Samadağ or Narlıkuyu in Mersin.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Conservation has been a phenomenon since the very beginning of humanity. Human being has constantly created his own values, and continued to keep the tracks of his past ancestors in his life in different forms for various reasons. Every value created becomes a part of the society to which it belongs and also a protective force that keeps the society together. Through this power, one can create a consciousness and, thereby, realize to where and whom he belongs to. (Şahin 2013) To keep these values that we want to protect in our lives, we need to save them first in our own personal memory.

Memory is collective and, for the formation of personal memory, it is necessary that individual accumulates memories and experiences within the society. For this reason, memory requires a social environment (Pöstecki 2012). On the other hand, not only individuals but also societies have memories, experiences and memoirs of past that they want to keep and remember - which is called as collective memory.

Memory collects, saves, recalls and sometimes erases. In this context, memory is a tool for remembering and at the same time for forgetting. Urban space creates the social environment that memory needs when it fulfils these functions. The space, itself starts to keep these tracks in its own memory. Over the time, a memory of the place develops. The place itself, which continues to be built with social networks, accumulates memories through time and turns into a memory place.

Memory places contain social experiences and events, and transfer them to the next generations. They are the places of remembering. However, these places could be used as an instrument of forgetting specific social experiences and events. These two reflexes, remembering and forgetting could also be ideological processes. In order to be the reminder of an ideology, it is necessary to make it visible over time and also on space; or on the contrary, sometimes the political power could prefer to remove or rearrange the place containing memories related with important societal events or an ideology in order to force society forget. Within this framework, remembering and forgetting emerge in fact approaches as opposed to each other.

Places contain and keep memories, and prevent them from disappearing; so that memories can be transferred to future generations as needed. Conservation has initially developed as a reflex to prevent forgetting. By conserving places, memories and objects, we prevent them from disappearing and, thereby, they can be transferred to future generations appropriately. In order to keep collective memory active, memory places should be conserved. However, there occur basic dilemmas in this conservation approach. Different than classical conservation approaches in the fields of spatial studies, a different understanding is needed to protect memory places.

The main argument of the study is that the space collects memories in time and it turns into a memory place – which should be the subject of conservation studies. The study argues the difficulty of protecting memory places without systematic conservation understanding. Therefore, the study intends to compose a relation between memory, place and conservation studies – by questioning how memory of place turns into memory places in time from the perspective of value assignment discussions. Hence, the study will first understand the formation and importance of memory place and then discuss the reasons why memory places should be a subject of conservation studies – based on remembering and forgetting practices.

2. MEMORY: REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Memory refers in its literal meaning to “[t]he faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information; [t]he mind regarded as a store of things remembered; or [s]omething remembered from the past” (Oxford Dictionary). In concrete meaning, memory is treated as brain’s means of storing. It is the cognitive process that allows recalling things experienced in the past or the ability to keep them to recall or remember the experiences, sensations, perceptions and conceptions (Güçlü et al. 2002).

The subject of memory, which is discussed within interdisciplinary environment, is handled in different forms. On the one hand it is the subject of research in medical sciences such as neurology, psychology and psychiatry; on the other hand it has become the focus of study for different social sciences fields such as anthropology, sociology, social sciences and communication. In this study, which approaches the memory from the perspective of urban studies, memory is handled not just as saving a moment or a memory but as the total of values that make people *human* in its entirety and the sum of social, psychological and historical experiences that create those values.

While memory performs the functions to collect, save and recall, it brings two important phenomena alongside: remembering and forgetting. Remembering and forgetting are cultural phenomena. Just as remembering and forgetting are closely related to memory, this is also a process of sorting, selecting and reproduction. (Pösteki 2012) Whether they are abstract or concrete, you preserve and protect the objects you want to remember and this serves as a measure against forgetting when you look back. Forgetting, on the other hand, is to erase the tracks from the memory – intentionally or unintentionally. When you erase tracks, you also need to remove the objects that bear those tracks.

According to Freud, memory is the practice of remembering and forgetting resulting from personal choices, so that it is individual in this context. On the other hand, there is a need for social context, social belonging and space for the formation of personal memory. Past, present, continuity, moments that are historical parts of memory can accumulate in this context. For this reason, Bergson, who has studies on memory in the early 20th century, deals with memory through perception and representation, and he argues that perception takes place under cultural and social influences. (Bergson 2007 by Çalpak 2012, İlhan, 2015) Conceptualizations on memory are not just specific to individuals. The individual is a piece of the society. Halbwachs, who made a synthesis of earlier studies on personal and societal memory, claims that memory is produced by the society and is a collective form. He states that memory is formed in accordance with social codes, although it corresponds to individual remembering. A new concept arises in this field: *collective memory*. (Halbwachs 1992 by Assmann 2015, İlhan 2015)

While personal memory focuses on the individual and develops a recall concept through memories, collective memory which is constructed within a group or society – a collective structure, will be remembered when the individual is in that collective structure again. Thus, İlhan (2015) claims that the duration of the remembering in both personal and collective memory approaches is as long as the life of the individual or collective structure. On the contrary, he states that a memory approach based on traditions creates a more permanent memory, because such approach would focus on what to remember rather than who remembers, and calls this recall action a *cultural memory* (İlhan 2015). In this approach, memory is created culturally, not individually and socially.

In Halbwachs' conceptualization, memory is socially produced and it cannot be described without considering the social and physical environment in which the individual lives.

(Halbwachs 1992) When an event or moment is saved in memory, it is coded by being associated with the place where the event occurred. Memory always holds to a place. (Assmann 2015) Individual need to recall this place to remember or the place might remind the event to individual. The place is shaped not only by physical elements, but also by the intangible features that it contains; sounds, smells, textures, colours, images. This approach has created a discussion subject for spatial studies: the relationship and interaction of the individual – or the memory, with the space, and the memory of place.

3. MEMORY AND PLACE: ACCUMULATED MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE SOCIETY ON BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Place is one of the most important elements that embody the experiences located in the memory of the societies: it stores, reproduces, re-presents and reminds. It is the knowledge of the past itself at one hand, and the place where this knowledge is stored on the other hand. Place is the storage of social and cultural memory. The past is stored in the mind by means of memory and it is unearthed by recalling. During this storage process, individual also codes place that holds the memory, so that place also becomes a part of the memory. This is not only an individual process, but societies also encode memories by places.

Place and memory relation is important for the construction of collective memory. According to Pöstecki (2012) elimination of place that serves as a basis or foothold to memory makes the personal and collective memory insecure.

From the point of individual and collective approaches in memory studies and the need to define memory over space, Aldo Rossi (1999), based on the Halbwachs's studies on memory, describes the collective memory as an association of each value related to space. The collective memory is exactly the city itself. (Rossi 1999) Every piece of the city - Rossi defines it as a *locus* - forms a part of the memory of the city. As an architect, Rossi's conceptualization of memory is more spatial than previous studies on memory. The place has a memory and this memory belongs to the whole society. The social relations created on the space become part of the memory of the place, and they are articulated in history to shape the space and reproduce it again and again.

Norberg-Schultz argues that the space is a living organism, that it has a substance and, as time passes and the network of social relations deepens, *genius loci* develops, that is, the soul of space. In this approach, space has absorbed the memory stored in it and made such memory an integral part of itself. Experience and memoirs have stuck to the place and we have become unable to think of the space independently of them. (Norberg-Schultz 1979) The memory that the space contains is so permeated into it that the space is now perceived as a *memory place*.

Nora (2006), another important name working on the relation between memory and place, also notes that remembering and forgetting functions of the memory are directly related to daily practices and the place. Accordingly, the concept of *lieux memoire*, i.e. memory places, developed by him emphasizes that space accommodates many experiences and the importance and means of public spaces in recalling action. (Nora 2006)

Public spaces are an important link between past, present and tomorrow and have an active role in the formation of urban memory (Çalalak 2012). It is not surprising that public spaces assume such a role. Indeed, public spaces are places where urban life flows and experiences are accumulated, and they reflect it with all their complexities (Madanipour 2010). These public spaces turn into memory places as the network of social relations grows in size, and they become socialized instead of being the element of individual memory.

4. FORGETTING THROUGH SPACE: RELATION BETWEEN POLITICAL POWER AND SPACE

A memory place holds experience, memorials, and common experiences that are to be remembered by some or most part of the society. These places gain this meaning in history, that is to say, the space turns into a memory place through a process that develops spontaneously. They cannot be created artificially, and again, they cannot be reproduced in another area. When we deal with it in this respect, they are specific and context-dependent - *authentic*.

In everyday life, memory places are not very noticeable and they hardly draw attention in everyday routines. They continue to accumulate experiences and memories in a way that is quiet and not very visible. On the important days as anniversaries, commemorations, celebrations or memorials, memory places rise to prominence and, upon completion of this intensive use process, they continue to be a part of daily life and daily routine.

Memory places become main actors exactly at the moments when they are used by the political power for the act of forgetting. While the memory place as a means of remembering is a social use and can be dealt with concepts such as collectivism, partnership and sharing; politics, power and pressure come into question when it is used as a tool of making forget by the authority or in the name of an ideology. These spaces, which are adopted by the society and accumulate memories, become a field of struggle when the political power desires to erase certain experiences or to inject some artificial experiences. Concepts such as pressure, conflict, ideology, authority and repression come to the forefront in this process.

On the basis of Assmann's *Cultural Memory* (2015) study where space is considered as storage container of memory, Asiliskender suggests that spaces are objects that are shaped by the information stored in the memory. Spaces are special elements on which collective memory of society is encoded. According to this, every value that is to be destroyed in cultural and social definitions can be realized by isolating or removing it from the life in the space. (Asiliskender 2006)

In Dovey's study, space is defined as an area of action in which those who hold power use to prove their strength and to teach the rules that they establish. Space is shaped according to the aims of power as well as by the needs of the individual. Space is a tool for erasing collective memory, and power can use space as a means to erase memory that it does not own or that it does not endorse. Power can use the space to hold the society together while it is also possible to remove unfavourable memories and experiences, which are not preferred to be inherited, from the memory of society by eliminating the space. (Dovey 1999)

When political power and space relations are considered, memory places are used as a tool for re-remembering the city while they are related also – and mostly, to forgetting and making forget (Graham 2002). Today, memory places are used as means of "making the old forgotten through a new fiction" (Uzer 2009) rather than a tool for remembering. Memory places are seen as an important commodity to create economies within the contemporary neoliberal politics or to create a new memory in certain regions - such as *Sulukule*, which was not in good condition physically, but knotted by the culture of Romany people in İstanbul and their memories, now all their tracks are erased by urban renewal plans (Çetken 2013).

Efforts to reduce the effectiveness of memory places with symbolic meaning as a means of politics and ideology have been continuing. Apart from existing cultural assets, it is remarkable that efforts have been made to create new symbolic and perhaps artificial spaces to erase the predecessors and to shift the perception in memory in order to increase competitiveness in

marketing the city. (Uzer, 2009) Power and ideology continues to intervene in memory places, which are maintained by hand or with the support of political power.

5. MEMORY PLACES AND CONSERVATION PRACTICES: HUMAN'S NEEDS AND CONSCIOUSNESS FOR PROTECTION AS A SOCIAL BEING

The physical removal of the memory places – as the storage of the collective memory, will also affect its place and being in the personal and social memory. It is necessary to protect the memory places in order to prevent them from being used as a means of conscious or unconscious process of causing to forget.

Conservation – as an act of preserving, protecting intangible things and tangible objects and save them for future generations, is an instinctive reflex indeed. The space connects the past and the future through the experiences and the memories it contains, and the meanings ascribed to it. These meanings, which are embodied within the space, continue to be transferred to next generations expanding with new additions and definitions. The continuity of the space is directly proportional to the meanings ascribed to the place and the continuity of the values contained within the space. The maintenance and ensuring of the continuity of remembering bring about the need of preserving and protecting the space that contains memories – memory places.

The need to protect, which emerged as an instinctive reflex, has been ongoing since the existence of mankind. This intrinsic conservation mentality that we pursue in order to strengthen our ties with the past has settled on scientific basis quite recently. The beginning of the contemporary concept of conservation of the built environment can be dated to a much closer time, the Venice Charter adopted by ICOMOS in 1964.

By adoption of the Venice Charter, cultural assets subject to protection have begun to be regarded as cultural heritage – *common heritage of all humanity*. Heritage is the traces of the past connected to today, and is closely related to social, political and cultural contexts. Heritage is concerned with the entirety of meanings that add value to past, rather than being physical remains bearing traces of the past (Graham 2002, so that it includes memories that are attached to the object to be conserved. In this context, heritage is our personal or social memory. Cultural heritage items are the physical structures - memory spaces which accommodate the cultural memory.

Although emphasis was placed on heritage perception, the conservation approach of the 1970's ascribed a meaning to the space for the scientific and aesthetic values it contained; thus, the need for protecting built environment was based on scientific values. Conservation of a building or a group of buildings was related to its physical structure and integrity. The human factor, the production of space in social terms and interaction with the space were the aspects ignored in the field of conservation – albeit, these elements are the elements that make sense of space and form the spirit of space exactly (Jiven and Larkham 2003). In this sense, memory of the place, i.e. the meanings it contains beyond the physical character and integrity and its process of social formation, has become an important matter of discussion in conservation approach.

In the context of these discussions, set of values and the way we approach conservation and object to be protected have expanded and diversified considerably since the Venice Charter. Conservation approach, at first focusing mainly on the physical well-being of historical buildings, has developed over the years through meetings, documents and researches organized and directed by international institutions (Ahunbay 1999). It was accepted that conservation is not purely a physical phenomenon, and that the need for conservation cannot

be explained only by the scientific, aesthetic and architectural values. Cultural assets contain different values that are attached by the society, and these values are also very important and considerable for conservation approach. It is agreed that there are ascribed values attributed by individuals and society, as well as the intrinsic values arising from the physical and historical integrity of the space such as scientific, aesthetic, artistic, historical and architectural values – all of which are reflecting collective memory of societies. This understanding which became widespread after the 2000's brought along a new sense and set of values – conservation and representation of the history of a nation, community or a minority in a way so as to set an example for the next generations and to leave a mark for posterity (Gürler and Özer 2013).

Approaching from this perspective, memory places should become items of cultural heritage and conservation discussions in the context of changing value sets. Memory places are important public spaces in terms of memories and past experiences they hold. Collective memory of the society is stored within these places, and they should be preserved for remembering and recalling memories. Removal of the memory places is an action that will also damage the collective memory. Whether conscious or unconscious, removal of memory places from the urban context will have the meaning of removal of some parts of the urban memory. The conservation of memory places is important in terms of preserving accumulated memories, recalling them when necessary, increasing urban identity and ensuring cultural continuity.

While constructing a conservation understanding for memory places, it is important not to overlook the special situation regarding the intrinsic values. These places, which Nora (2006) conceptualized as *lieux*, do not have to be monumental structures, historical sites of the city, but a part of the city where the collective memory is stored - so that it does not have to correspond to a physical space, even a street name can play a role in keeping the collective memory alive (Bayhan 2013). A public space, structure, street, as well as a person, a memory or a document can be treated as a *lieux de memoire*. A historical structure or area does not have to be a memory space, or vice versa, each memory place may not have a historical value. (Hartmuth 2010) On the other hand, artistic or aesthetic values may not be very prominent. In order to become a *lieux de memoire*, it has to gain significance in the collective memory of the society and values ascribed by the society must come to the forefront – such as Ground Zero on the place of World Trade Centre, even though it may be considered as a *memoriam*.

The historicity of memory place is important in terms of the richness of the memories and of the social networks established, but this historicity does not have to go too old. Space may become a memory place by accumulating memories in more recent times. Taksim Square and Gezi Parkı, Kızılay Square and Güvenpark, where important political and social events took place, may be considered as the most familiar and most featured areas to be covered in memory places. Similarly, places like Yassıada, Sinop Prison, Ankara Mamak Prison and Sivas Madımak Hotel, where the grievous events of the recent history took place, are the memory places where the memories stored in the collective memory overlaps and coalesce with the space. There is no need for the memory places to be at worldwide or national scale, or to have political meanings; they may be more local and more related with daily life and routines. Ziyaret in Samandağ, Antakya or Narlıkuyu – a fishing settlement on a small bay in Mersin, could be considered as local memory places.

6. CONCLUSION: MEMORY PLACES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The study argues that memory places should be considered within the context of cultural heritage studies. Conservation approach argues that it is not enough to make an assessment based only on scientific basis, but it is necessary to determine the values attributed by individuals and the society to the cultural heritage, and to carry out an assessment in the context of these set of values. Memory, especially collective memory, is very important as they include attributed values inside. The failure to fully understand these attributed values, ignorance of such values or deliberate implementation of practices towards eliminations would create interruptions in collective memory and, thereby, would also impair the sense of belonging. Yet, current conservation practices have not developed a specific handling for the protection of memory places.

Despite deficiencies in the protection of memory places within the current conservation practices, the meaning and the experiences attributed to the place and the memory of the place should be protected in order to ensure social and cultural continuity. In this context, memory places could be addressed within the context of cultural heritage, based on set of values attributed to the cultural heritage: a stadium located within the urban memory, a square where important events have taken place, a small bay where pleasant memories were enjoyed or a prison where deep sorrows are experienced. We need to flex our conservation understanding by deepening and widening our approaches towards the places and structures, and to review our attitudes towards memory places through new frames and definitions.

The study suggests that memory places could be subjected to conservation studies that are worthy of protection within the framework of a new sense of value; yet, there are three basic dilemmas in this conservation understanding.

The fact that the memory stored within the space is to be influenced by social changes, and in the historical process, the memory places may actually lose their meanings – the values they contain. Vice versa, we are currently evaluating our attitude towards places that have not developed into memory places yet, but have potential for such transformation. This is the first dilemma that we face in terms of relations between memory places and conservation.

The second dilemma is about value sets. The society is not a homogenous, but unified entity composed of different social groups, and not even one individual is same with another in within smaller groups. In some cases conflicting values might be assigned to a place. Memories embodied within the place might be refused by another social group. The heterogeneous characteristics of the society and also of memory places could be the second dilemma in constructing a conservation approach for memory places – whose values would be underlined and whose values would be underestimated.

The third dilemma in the memory place and conservation approach is whether it is necessary to add new public spaces to the city through spatial planning and urban design activities by hoping that they might transformation into urban memory places. This insertion process may actually cause memory shift, while at the same time, may cause the formation of artificial memory places. However, when compared to the first dilemma, this situation is less problematic. Although it would take time for the newly-created public spaces to accumulate memories and to establish a place in urban memory, such public spaces are needed in order to recall today's memories in the future.

Spatial planning and urban design have the power to influence the society and to keep the cultural values alive or to change those values either in minimum terms or at maximum - till destruction. Being aware of this power, spatial planners and designers should carefully handle

the issue through a perception focusing on the values ascribed by individuals and the society. But this would not be enough. Not only developing a careful handling, spatial planners and designers should also resist, in case of necessity and as much as possible, against any political and ideological manipulations.

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