

Production of Urban Spaces for the Creation of a 'Modern Society' In Turkey

Birge YILDIRIM OKTA, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

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Abstract

The creation of a new culture, following the proclamation of the Republic and Turkish Revolution is the embodiment of an excessive passion. In Turkey's experience, modernization (and westernization) was achieved by a plan introduced from the top. This plan was achieved by several reforms on political, legal, cultural, social, and economic policy debates for the creation of modern nation-state. This paper aims to analyze the effects of the social reforms of Turkish revolution in urban daily life of Istanbul by researching the transformation of public spaces. The change of the social life necessitates huge urban transformations which symbolize and represent Turkey's modernization in urban space - provided through figural representations by the disciplines of architecture and planning for purging the urban space from its Ottoman/Islamic past. As a part of the modernization project, public space was used to represent the drive to develop a healthy and modern society. Those who held the political power and the modernized, enlightened elite, together, they imposed on the Turkish people the selected culture and etiquette. The forced opening of public spaces actually meant their closure as a result of the state's nationalist propaganda. In the process, public spaces were purged from ethnic, religious and cultural diversities. Those who were impossible to purge were expelled from the Republic's public space. This paper researches the history and transformation of public spaces in Istanbul, Turkey for the creation of the modern, secular society.

Keywords: Urban history, Public space, Turkish society, Secular, Modernization, Westernization

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Introduction

In 19th century Istanbul was the Ottoman capital, with a chaotic population, severed infrastructure, transportation network and destructed by catastrophic fires. In the beginning of the 20th century, Ottoman Empire was suffering from economic and political crisis of First World War, which also interrupted the planning projects of the municipality (Şehremaneti). The invasion period ended with a victory by the national resistance movement lead by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who later marked a threshold in the history of the country by establishing the Republic of Turkey. After the Establishment of the Republic, the main objective was to create a modern, secular society from a religious community. Aligned with the objective of transition from a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan imperial community to a secular society secularizing reforms were introduced in the administrative, legal, and cultural fields. The modernization of Turkey under secularism aimed to transform the Ottoman society with reforms, with destruction of political figures, symbols and institutions in which religion was strictly under state control under a top-down social transformation program since Islamic institutions were seen as the reason for backwardness of the country (Gül, 2009). Although Atatürk did not point the west as the only place of civilization he emphasized that a democratic society/achieving the level of contemporary civilizations [muasır medeniyetler seviyesine ulaşmak] would only be possible by “knowledge, science and technology”.

In terms of secularization reform policies were adapted. Zürcher classifies in three groups; first is secularization of the state, education and law, second is erasure of religious symbols and their replacement by the European symbols, the secularization of the social life (Zürcher, 1993). Secularization of the state had already begun prior to the proclamation of the Republic and the caliphate system was abolished in 1924. The Islamic law based on Koran was abolished and a Swiss civil code was introduced by the government in 1926.

Additionally, education was systematized and a secular education was given by state. All religious schools, courts, were closed. In 1926 the Islamic lunar calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar. In 1928 the new Turkish alphabet was introduced with an act of the parliament. The abandonment of the Arabic script eroded and diminished the cultural interaction of new generations with the Ottoman history and culture. Another erosion was the sale of Ottoman archival documents to Bulgaria as recycled paper (Gül, 2009, 75). Hat act was adopted in 1925. *Fes* was seen as the conservatism and a European style hat was introduced by Mustafa Kemal. Following the reforms in dressing, numerals (1928), weights and measures (1931) eastern music was temporarily banned (Mardin, 1997, 210). State also supported modern Turkish art away from the prohibition in Islam on representational images and figures. Halk evleri (People's Houses) were opened as adult education centers, to promote the new Turkish culture which was formulated as a combination of vernacular and European cultures.

For the erasure of Islamic past some religious symbols were replaced by the European symbols. The reflection of this attempt in urban scape was the change in urban toponymy. The Ottoman street names were seen as unpleasant reminders of the Islamic past. Street names have the capacity for bringing hegemonic ideologies into existence (Vuolteenaho, Ainiala, 2009). For the creation of the new regime's culture

urban names were replaced by republican names such as Liberty, Republican or by the names of political actors of the regime.

The introduction of women's rights and the appearance of women in public space was the most important instrument for creating the secular society during Kemalist Regime. This was the greatest attempt for women's visibility in public space. Influencing from French revolution, Turkish revolution aimed to create its own modernity project (Akpınar, 2003). In this regard equalization of sexes were seen as a must for the creation of the democratic public space. As Atatürk stated; Republic meant democracy and recognition of women's rights was a dictate for democracy; hence women's rights will be recognized. Parallel to the reformist agenda women's legal rights such as right to choose their spouse, political equality for men and women were given to Turkish women. Additionally, role of women in Turkish society started to be discussed and the appearance of women in daily life which meant being together with men in public space or being visible in public space has become a right of women. During early republican period these rights manifested itself by posters of women in different magazines, Miss Turkey contests, opening of public beaches by the abandonment of sea baths, opening of public parks and squares and modern cubic houses for working women.

The manifestation of the reforms on urban landscape was a transformation in everyday life and also in urban form of the city. Like many other revolutionary regimes in the world the Kemalist regime saw the urban landscape and architecture as visual indicators of cultural modernization (Gül, 2009). The new reformist ideology was proposed to replace the traditional urban culture with a modern European culture, and new planning schemes were put into the republican reform agenda, which meant the transformation of the urban landscape spatially, economically and socially. Focusing on Istanbul this paper will be analyzing and narrating the history and transformation of public spaces in Istanbul, for the creation of the modern, secular society under Kemalist principles, during the Republican period in which the urban landscape and public space has become a *dispositif*¹ or a tool to shape order and control revolution.

The search for the main actor for designing the secular public space

The privileged position of Istanbul in 19th century changed with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and with declaration of Ankara as the capital of the new republic. Ankara was chosen as the capital for its geopolitical position but beyond that, it was seen as the symbol of the new republic. Ankara symbolized and highlighted the change or the transformation of the country, where as Istanbul was

¹ Foucault's *dispositif* is translated to English as apparatus, which denotes 'tools and devices' to operate or control the institutionalized praxis (Ploger, 2008). Foucault defines the elements of the *dispositif* as an ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions. He states that these elements constitute a heterogeneous system of relations, which is the *dispositif*. In Foucault's discourse *dispositif* also entails for the nature of the networks or the relations between elements (Foucault, 1980, 194). Additionally Foucault claims that the term *dispositif* is a formation functioning to respond an urgent need in a historical threshold. In his words 'the apparatus (*dispositif*) has a dominant strategic function' (Foucault, 1980, 195). Parallel to Foucault, Deleuze states that 'our present day reality takes on the form of dispositions of overt and continuous control' (Deleuze, 1992, 164). The control mechanisms generate through non-visible surveillance or cognitive expressions such as norms, values, discourses, ideologies (Ploger, 2008).

associated with the past (Lewis, 2002: 261). Many scholars claims that in the beginning of the 20th century, the glorious city Istanbul was neglected for a decade (Akpınar, 2003, Keyder, 1999, Gül, 2009, Lewis, 2002, Bilsel, 2007). The reasos for this statement is firstly because of the anti-ottoman and anti-greek propaganda of state, secondly because Atatürk did not visit the city until 1927, thirdly there were no investments or public developments in the city until 1930s. (Akpınar, 2003). However, during these periods, a preparation of topographic studies, city maps were going on for the planning of the city (Güvenç, 2000).² The still period of Istanbul ended in 1932 with an urban design competition for the “civilization of Istanbul”. The following year Atatürk himself invited for an international urban design competition four European urban planners to write a report and submit their proposals on the planning of Istanbul: Alfred Agache, Henri Lambert, Hermann Ehlgözt. A subcommittee was stablished to review three proposals. Elgötz’s proposal was regarded as the most realistic for the monumental and natural heritage of the city however the proposal of Ehlgötz was never implemented. Following the urban design competition, a German urban planner, Martin Wagner was invited by the Municipality of Istanbul in 1935. He was first appointed as the consulted of Directorate of Development and two years later, he was appointed as the advisor for the Department of Public Works. His main concern was solving the transportation problem, creating financial resources and establishing a relationship between the city center and the hinterland of the city.³ Wagner’s analytic and statistical solutions and proposals which required staged, long term and detailed processes, were not implemented because they were found redundant to the government. After all proposals that was regarded as unaccepted by the government, Atatürk himself decided to invite a French urban planner, Henri Prost to develop an urban plan of the city (Figure 1). Prost had his reputation from a large number of international urban design competitions he won. His first urban design competition prize was in 1910, for the planning of Antwerp. He was graduated from L'École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. Later he won the Prix Rome in 1902 and continued his education at the French Institute at the Villa Medici in Rome between 1903-1907. His education gave him a deeper understanding in designing and planning principles while developing his interest in linking social, financial and political layers of the city. He had the chance to work with Eugène Hénard for the master planning of Paris. After his winning of the competition for planning of Antwerp, he was invited by the military governor of Morocco, Marechal Lyautey to prepare an urban plan for the cities in North Africa, including Casablanca, Fez, Rabat, Meknes, Marakesh.

² Jacques Pervititch, who was a French topographer, was commissioned in 1922 to prepare cadastral maps of Istanbul.

³ Martin Wagners report was published in the architectural journal *Arkitekt* between years 1936-1937.



Figure 1: Henri Prost

Prost's collaboration with the Turkish government started with the planning project he has finished with René Danger for İzmir, which is the third largest city in the Aegean coast of Turkey. When we analyze the early planning projects and implementations of Prost, it is possible to summarize his planning and urban design approach under three fundamental concepts; transportation, hygiene and aesthetics. Prost would use these principles for designing and planning Istanbul (Akpınar, 2010). It was the major reason why Prost was chosen as the main chief planner for changing the face of Istanbul (Bilsel, 2007). His proposals were parallel to government's overall secular, westernized, modern ideology. The gigantic Haussmannian boulevards for the transportation he designed in his early projects were seen as a symbol of modernism, the open city parks were perceived as the recreational fields where men and women could freely enjoy the public space.

The plans and reports of Prost for Istanbul were harmonious with secular and modernizing policies of the state. In his designs he basically broke the traditional pattern of Ottoman culture and consistently changing it into a modern lifestyle. This gave way to a new period in transformation of Istanbul and Prost's collaboration with the government and the municipality, which started in 1936, extended fourteen years.

Les Espaces Libres or public spaces of Prost

In his plan Prost benefited from previous reports of Martin Wagner, Alfred Agache, Henri Lambert, Hermann Ehlgözt. They all defined the urban problems of the city as the inefficient transportation network, maritime and harbor stations and also location of the developing heavy industry zone (Bilsel, 2004). Prost prepared his master plan in between years 1936-1937 for an area of 6000 ha, a development plan of 3000ha and detailed urban design proposals for an area 650 ha (Akpınar, 2003, 66). These plans included conservation of monuments, planning an efficient vehicle and pedestrian street network, development, improvement of un-hygienic timber

buildings, zoning plan for creating hygienic conditions, creating recreational fields for public, developing urban characteristics by aestheticizing different neighborhoods while preserving the silhouette of the city (Bilsel, 2010b). This paper will focus on public spaces or as Prost calls “Les espaces libres” of Prost’s planning approach (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The Prost Plan, 1941.

“Les espaces libres” were used in the reports of Prost’s both as public spaces such as recreational field, parks, esplanades, squares, children playgrounds and also it signified the public sphere (Bilsel, 2010a). The project of Prost was not only a zoning city plan but also a social transformation projects in which the city or public spaces were the indicators of the liberal movement of Turkish Revolution. Espaces libres were the manifestations of transition from an Ottoman era, which was based on separation of men and women towards a secular society. Secularity not only meant the separation of religion from administrative or legislative institutions but also its erasure from urban scape. In this context urban spaces of Prost or espaces libres were the representative fragments the democratic reforms of Turkish Nation State. Espaces libres were a declaration of a better life for all citizens of the republic, signifying a radical change where all men and women would be equal in public space.

In this regard Prost designed eighteen parks in Istanbul, transforming fire areas or cemeteries into green belts. He also converts private Ottoman groves into public parks, as *the lungs of the city*, such as Hidiv İsmail Pasha Grove, Suphi Pasha Grove, Yıldız Grove, Hidiv Abbas Pasha Grove. Prost gave importance to public squares and

he opened or enlarged eighteen squares, which he called *the regions that the city breath*.⁴

Among all park number 2 starting from Maçka Valley, connecting with Taksim Garden and Inonu Esplanade, facing Taksim Square was one of the major arrangements in Beyoğlu region. The esplanade was defined as Boulogne Woods of İstanbul. Now called Gezi Park, Inonu Esplanade was designed as a starting spot of the second park, which was thought to be the lungs⁵ of the planned residential area. Park number 1 was another important arrangement which was stated to be the Archeological Park in the historic peninsula, the area between Hagia Sophia, Topkapı Palace and Sultanahmet Mosque.

Additionally, Prost plan include sport areas, youth gardens, botanical gardens and public beaches. Prost created a network for connecting the espaces libres he created. His network comprised mostly of Haussmanian boulevards which had an ideological role in urban scape. The wide boulevards, together with espaces libres formed the new secular nation states representational medium. The new open public spaces were a didactic propaganda of the new daily life and a new public sphere. The representational public spaces of Prost were also social educators of the citizens.

Conclusion

As a part of the modernization project, public space was used to represent the drive to develop a healthy and modern society. Public space was created together with its user's manual, prescribing how to use the public space, who could and who couldn't use it. The "freedom" provided by the secular life was embroidered with new restrictions. Modernization meant westernization. Those who held the political power and the modernized, enlightened elite, together, they imposed on the Turkish people the selected culture and etiquette. Westernization was not a wholesale but a selective approach which accepted only a limited version of the West, thus defining a limited modernization for the Turks. The forced opening of public spaces actually meant their closure as a result of the state's nationalist propaganda.

With the widespread discourse of modernism, the past seemed to be an impediment history which has to be transcended and the cities, societies transformed towards nation building for an ideal, better future. The imposition of nationalism as a top down role of the state for the process of identity construction creates an imaginary history while erasing the shared memory of the past from the urban and socio spatial landscape.

⁴ According to Prost plan Taksim, Eminönü, eyazıt, Sirkeci, Aksaray, Sutanahmet, Unkapanı, Şişhane, Galatsaray, Dolmabahçe, Kabataş, Barbaros, Harbiye, Maçka, Şişli, Üsküdar, Kadıköy, Büyükkada squares were opened between years 1938-1948.

⁵ Prost., H., "Les Transformations d'İstanbul,(vol.VIII) ,Pera-Galata, 3.

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Contact email: birgeyildirim@gmail.com