

# DESIGN DISCOURSE AS A TOOL OF LEGITIMATIZATION IN PRIVATIZATION OF URBAN PUBLIC LANDSCAPES<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

It is necessary to continuously re-produce factories, infrastructure systems, schools, hospitals, housing zones, malls etc., as different components of urban environment for profitability of capital accumulation in order to realize the sustainability of the capitalist system (Öngel, 2012). This re-production understanding sometimes privatizes public landscapes. This process is planned and conducted by administrations.

The privatization of urban public landscapes for these political and economic reasons also involves the intervention of governing forces directly to social lifestyles. This intervention is a way of governing forces' strengthening the perception management by changing some of the symbols in the communal memory and leaving a mark on its own way in the communal memory.

Transforming ownership quality of public landscape in this way occurs generally by changing the space management and usage styles of landscape. In these processes, one of the most effective methods in persuasion of public opposition centers and in legitimatization of the process is intervening in these spaces through design. Actually, so called 'participant' design methods like Gallup polls, public surveys, competitions, which are directed by ruling administrations, are used as legitimatization tools.

While a wide mass opposes the transformation of public landscape areas, like most of the other transformation areas, due to social, scientific and technical reasons, one of the biggest factors which has a role in strengthening this opposition is that these areas meet the needs of the society of all layers since they are public areas without being a property of a specific community. All kinds of intervention which would put these areas under the domination of specific capital powers and which would enable them to be sold without the consent of their true owners will face a strong opposition. Breaking this strong communal opposition can be achieved only if the emptied 'design' expression, which was conceptually distracted from its core, can change the perception of community of all layers slowly with some explanandum which would cover the structural and economic transformation to be done. Depending on this understanding, discussing the design peculiarities of the final products of Mosque Project Competition will take the place of the statements which will be developed about maintaining the usage of Çamlıca Hill as public landscape in the society and in architectural publications.

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape: it means a space which is the result of activity and interaction of natural and/or humane elements in character.

Another project which has become a discussion item for the public over 'design' statements is Taksim Square Urban Design and Artillery Barracks Restitution and Re-Usage Projects. While the Project, which is called 'Taksim Square Urban Design', is a transportation Project clearly searching for an answer to the needs of rubber-tyred vehicle traffic, although it was brought to the agenda under the name of pedestrianization, what is meant by the expression 'Taksim Square Urban Design and Artillery Barracks Restitution and Re-Usage Projects' is not a usual 'restitution' Project. Following the assize which claims that the construction does not have the required documents for restitution, the expression of 'Re-Usage' is actually one of the most important evidences showing that this construction will actually contain the peculiarities of the architectural imitations of the demolished building and that it will search for an answer to some functions defined as 'needs of the age'.

### **Taksim Square (Istanbul) Sample/Taksim Square Pedestrianization and Artillery Barracks Betterment Projects**

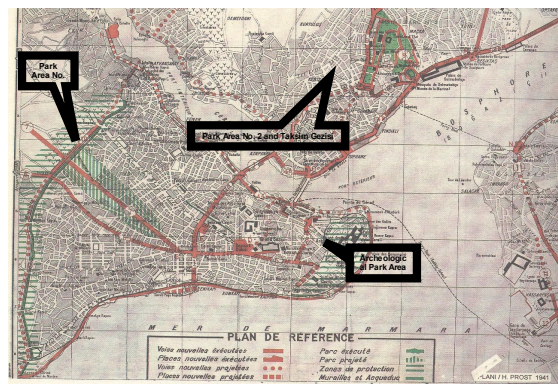


Figure 1. Istanbul General Plan-Reference Plan 1937 prepared by Prost (Özler, 2007).

Before 12 June 2011 General Elections, Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan introduced 'Taksim Pedestrianization Project' to the public as one of the new works of the government; this project covers the transformation of the Square, which was one of the first planned areas in the history of the Republic of Turkey, and the cultural and natural elements<sup>2</sup> which constituted it. The project covers taking pedestrian and vehicle activities underground, and the

<sup>2</sup> In the 06.01.1999 dated and 10521 issued decision of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture İstanbul Number I Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board, four elements which constitute Taksim Republic Area (Taksim Square) are Taksim Water Cistern (Su Maksemi), Atatürk Cultural Center, Republic Monument and Taksim Gezisi and it is stated that they each part should be preserved as a whole.

betterment of Artillery Barracks which was demolished in 1940 into Taksim Gezisi<sup>3</sup>.



Figure 2. People walking around the park and walking their kids (Cânâ Bilsel Archive).

Despite all kinds of legal-executive situations, judicial and scientific facts and social oppositions, the government's effort to actualize the mentioned project contains several processes;

The process officially begun with the acceptance of '1/5000 and 1/1000 scaled Reconstruction Plan for Protect Amendments of Beyoğlu County Taksim Square Pedestrianization Project' by Istanbul Metropolitan City Council's 16 September 2011 dated and 2111 issued decision, acceptance of the mentioned Amendments by the relevant Preservation Board on 4 January 2012 and starting these plan amendments on 14 February 2012.

In the plan notes of these plan amendments it is written "'Taksim Barracks" which was registered as a cultural asset that requires protection with the decision of the Istanbul Number II C. and N. H. P. Board, dated 09.02.2011 and issued 4225, will be handled as a whole together with urban design Project.' Artillery Barracks was demolished during the construction of Taksim Gezisi and due to Beyoğlu Mayorality Plan and Project Administration's 17 January 2011

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<sup>3</sup> Taksim Gezisi, which was planned to be constructed in Beyoğlu area in two-part Master Plan suggested by H. Prost, was designed as an important part of a large park area of approximately 30 hectare (Park No. 2) among Maçka, Harbiye, Taksim and Dolmabahçe. The parks, travel parks, rides, view terraces and squares as defined in Prost's reports were designed as public spaces which support a contemporary urban life. In this context, Taksim Gezisi, which was handled together with Taksim Square and completed in 1948, is the most successful design example constructed according to this understanding. On 12 November 1944 Prost wrote on the back of one of the photos he took 'The answer to the question "What is the use of the parks?"', and on the back of another it is written 'the kids and their mothers give the answer to this question.' (Cânâ Bilsel Archive).

dated petition, the Barracks was registered from I. Degree<sup>4</sup> on 9 February 2011 with the decision of the same Board and it was decided to reconstruct the Barracks. While taking the decision of reconstructing a building which was demolished 70 years ago, ignoring Taksim Gezisi, which has an important role in the lives and memories of the city dwellers, and registration decisions in that area caused a great reaction in the society.

Change in plans which enables underground tunnel that causes disidentification and de-pedestrianization of Taksim Square, and betterment of Artillery Barracks was submitted to the court under the light of scientific facts defined in the petitions of The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) Chamber of Architects, Chamber of City Planners and Chamber of Landscape Architects (TMMOB, 2013).

These chambers stated that the mentioned plan amendments were unacceptable in terms of town architecture principles and planning principals since they introduce underground passages and open green areas for construction without considering historical environment, cultural heritage, social, cultural, economic structure and physical conditions of Taksim Square, without protecting neighboring structure and street texture and performing required survey studies (TMMOB, 2013).

The process continued by changing the methods and principals related to Immovable Cultural Assets that Requires Protection, Determination and Registration of Protected Areas Excluding Natural Areas defined in the 3<sup>rd</sup> article and explained in the 6<sup>th</sup> article of the Code of Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties, dated 21.07.1983 and issued 2863, on 12 March 2012, that is one day before the termination of 30 day period during which the legal protests are permitted.

According to the mentioned modification; the provision of 'the above mentioned record is not put for the areas not signed in land registry without the inscription and limiting the places like rocks, hills, mountains and unowned nonarable places like the sources extracted from them and general waters like sea, lake, river and road, square, bridge, green area and park as defined in (c) clause of the first item of 16th article of 3402 numbered Law' is added to the Article 8-(6) sub-clause under the Regulation related to the Immovable Cultural Assets that Requires Protection and Determination and Registration of Protected Areas registry processes.

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<sup>4</sup> For I. Degree register the building should have original architecture, original material and original usage.



Figure 3. Last view of Taksim Square (Hürriyet Newspaper, 2013).

Despite the continuing judicial process, underground tunnel was contracted out and construction begun. Artillery Barrack Restitution Project which was prepared by architect Halil Onur with the 11.12.2012 dated and 883 issued decision, taken by Istanbul Number II Cultural Assets Protection Regional Board, was rejected due to anonymity of the year of construction, its architect, plan features and construction details, and emphasizing Taksim Gezi's quality of being a witness to history during 70 years and its essential place in the collective memories of Istanbul residents. On the other hand Prime Minister ignored the science and laws by saying 'We reject the rejection decision' and suppressed a neutral science institution by exceeding his authority (TMMOB, 2013).

In the end of all these processes, on the date of 28 February 2013 rejection of refection was accepted and High Council of Protection<sup>5</sup>, which was composed of bureaucrats, granted approval for the construction of Artillery Barracks.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Regulations Related to Objections towards Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation High Board and Protection Region Boards Works and High Council of Protection of as published in the Official Gazette, dated 12/01/2005 and issued 25698; Article 6: Protection High Board is composed of sixteen members, ten of them will be a) Undersecretary of Ministry, b) Deputy Undersecretary of Prime Ministry, c) Related Deputy Undersecretary of the Ministry, d) Cultural Assets and Museums General Directorate, e) Investments and Enterprises General Directorate, f) Related General Directorate or Deputy of the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement, g) General Directorate or Deputy of Forest, h) General Directorate or Deputy of Foundations, i) General Directorate or Deputy Nature Conservation and Natural Parks, six of them will be chosen by the Ministry from j) Protection Regional Board Chairpersons.

Not only our domestic law but also European Landscape Contract<sup>6</sup>, which was signed by our country on 20 October 2000, contains commitments which entail the protection of historical and cultural values on international level. In General Precautions part, 5<sup>th</sup> Article of the contract, each party to sign the contract guarantees to recognize landscape as an important component of people's environments, an expression of the variety of cultural and natural heritage and a foundation of their identity by law.



Figure 4. Modeling of Taksim Pedestrianization Project (IMM, 2012).

### **Privatization of Urban Public Landscapes**

With 'Taksim Pedestrianization Project' it is aimed to change both the importance over collective history and memory, and user nature of Taksim Square which is an urban cultural landscape due to its founding elements. The decision of betterment of Artillery Barracks into Taksim Gezi and its function as a shopping mall are enough to prove this understanding.

With the construction of shopping mall, ownership feature of the area to be produced will change. Park as a public area will be privatized. Privatization of the public areas has commercial goals directly. Ostracizing low-income public, thus the people who would not shop, from investment spots enable these areas to be reserved for city's privileged group and tourists with their spendable incomes (Kressel, 2009).

Companies claim that as long as anyone can enter, the areas are 'public'. According to this, shopping malls are equal to city squares in terms of public welfare. City squares, which are the centers of communal life, are replaced by shopping malls, to which transportation is possible only via private vehicles and where people attend to private consumerism in public areas; and the latter

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<sup>6</sup> European Landscape Contract was opened for signature on 20 October 2000, was signed by our country on the same date and approved by the Law dated 10 June 2003 and issued 4881, and published in the Official Gazette dated 27 July 2003 and issued.

spreads as the foundation of 're-alignment' movement in a way to enable the companies to regulate new urban borders (Kressel, 2009).

Designers developed a vocabulary of elements in order to apply company goals and attribute agendas special to public areas. For example, a popular form is 'captured' Street: a public domain street is closed and the land is left to a private manor or planner as a tool of land council for bigger buildings than the previously existing ones. These streets can stay partly 'open' depending on the limitations on actions for access hours and maintenance requirements. However, public area is minified, entrepreneurial force is intensified and it is hinted that instead of public domain street, private area is preferred—and most importantly safe (Kressel, 2009).

Privatized streets of Potsdamer Square in Berlin, as a result of urban renewal Project which was applied by companies, can be given as an example for 'captured' Street.

### **Potsdamer Square (Berlin) Example**

From 1961 when the Berlin Wall begun to be built, until 1989 when it was demolished, Berlin Wall divided not only the city but also Potsdamer Square. In the Square, which was filled with ruins after the destruction, with the influence of Berlin Senate (Şişman, 2009), an urban renewal Project under the title of 'Potsdamer Square Project', covering the selling and planning the field, began to be carried out.

This renewal Project was actualized by opening an urban design competition and towards private sector. By taking the concept of urban design competition as basis, public domains were transferred to private companies; the project's expenses were financed by these companies.

Announcement of this Project of which first stage covers 62.000 square meters was done by Daimler Benz Firm. *In 1991, the Senate sold another 31.000 square meters area North of the Daimler premises to the Sony Corporation. Finally, in 1992 a company called A+T bought the remaining 12.000 square meters South of the Daimler site (Frank, 2003).*

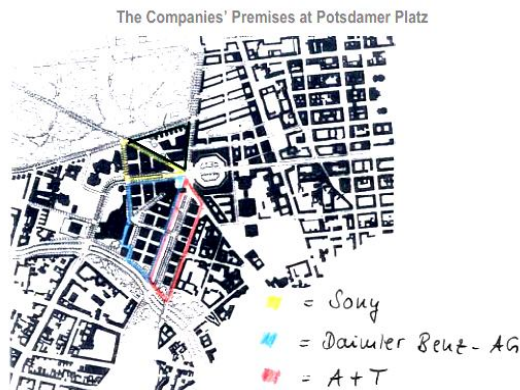


Figure 5. The Companies' premises at Potsdamer Platz (Frank, 2003).

On the one hand the mentioned companies play a role in transforming the public areas as they have a say in the decision making process on which historical constructions should be protected, on the other hand they built the constructions of their own companies in the areas which passed to their possession, and the streets inside these areas enter the domain of the companies.



Figure 6. Private Companies' buildings and streets (Frank, 2003).

This Project was tried to be justified with statements like it would provide multi-functional urban space with twenty-four hours alive multi-purpose usage facilities, shopping units, cultural structures like theater and movie theater for 3500, restaurants, cafes, housing zones for upper and middle class, etc. (Şişman, 2009).

### Conclusion

Taksim, which contains several layers of history, is a cultural landscape with its square and the elements that are effective in its foundation (Taksim Gezisi, Atatürk Cultural Center, etc.). However when the existing and planned Beyoğlu projects are considered, 'The restoration of AKM' is done by a private company yet even the Project owner cannot enter the building during construction, 'Demirören Shopping Mall' which maintains its existing unauthorized in İstiklal Street, banishing the residents in Tarlabası due to 'Tarlabası Urban Renewal Project' and other plans and projects, it is seen that Beyoğlu becomes a center for projects which unites profit based policies like pieces of a puzzle. It is clearly understood through ornamented visuals and design statements prepared for the public.

While 'Taksim Square Urban Design and Artillery Barracks Restitution and Re-Usage Projects' is presented to the public in a positive way through specific 'design' statements, it actually turns one of the most important square in Turkey, Taksim Square, which has an important place in the city-dwellers' memories and which cannot be owned by a specific person/institution due to its public domain identity, into an emptiness which would make it impossible to maintain its function as a square in usual way. Moreover the barracks, which will be built here under the title of 'betterment' or 'restitution', creates suspicion that the privatization activities in Potsdamer Square will occur here in the future by opening the park which was designed together with the square.

On the other hand, the only reason behind the renewal Project is not economic, but among important reasons of the tendency towards changing this



landscape there are changing public domain user type and accustoms, justifying the action by 'private security' which will emerge in this area in case of privatization of the ideological intervention to the square, and search of the dominant ideology a place for itself in communal memory and city identity.

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