

ICOA810: IMPORTANCE OF URBAN SPACES ON CREATING CULTURAL IDENTITY: DECIPHERING THE MULTI-LAYERED STRUCTURE OF ISTANBUL TAKSIM AREA

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 3: Recreating Ideas of Memory

Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 14, 2017, 11:45 – 12:00

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Meltem Vatan was born in Varna in 1978. She received her bachelor degree in architecture from Yıldız Technical University in 2002, MS degree in 2005 and PhD in 2010 at the same institution. She had worked as a Research Assistant at Yıldız Technical University for 8 years. Currently she is Vice Dean of Bahcesehir University, Faculty of Architecture and Design and teaches structures and design studio courses as Assoc. Prof. in the Department of Architecture. She has many papers on traditional construction techniques and heritage studies. She is an expert member of ICOMOS ICORP and ISCARSAH ISCs and Director of ISCARSAH Turkey.

Efsun Ekenyazıcı Güney received her undergraduate degree from Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul Turkey in 2002, followed by a MS degree in 2005 and a Ph.D. degree in 2013 in the same institution. After graduation she had professional work experience at architectural offices. During 2006-2012, she worked at Bahçeşehir University (BAU), Faculty of Architecture and Design as a research assistant. She worked as an instructor for three years and she is still an Assistant Professor since 2016 at BAU. She teaches architectural design studios and theoretical courses. Her research interests cover housing, urban renewal, identity, memory and architectural education areas.

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the dynamics of “*cultural identity*” within the extended meaning of “*urban heritage*” as an emerging phenomenon in recent decades, particularly, the increased importance of intangible values within the scope of urban heritage and its context linked to the place or community to which it belongs. In this context, the purpose of the proposed study is to explore Taksim area in Istanbul, Turkey as a place with its powerful historic link and interpretation to political powers throughout its history in order to understand the drivers of “*cultural identity*”. Taksim, with its history going back to the Ottoman Empire is a visual archive embracing the layers of social-political-spatial transformation of the city and the country, where the reconciliation of “*cultural diversity and identity*” can be seen clearly. When the regime was changed to a Republican one, the area experienced a substantial urban renewal, which was also a call for a secular social transformation of the governing power. It can be claimed that from the early years of the Ottoman Empire up to today, Taksim juxtaposes and combines spatial traces as reflections of its social-political history. In addition to the trial of deciphering multi-layered structure under strong political domination on urban space, it is important to understand the generation of “*cultural identity*” within its historic layers. Therefore, the bilateral relation between the transformation of the urban space, its character and understanding of political power and their domination on the creation of “*cultural identity*” will be considered as the backbone of this study in order to discuss

the reconciliation within its diversity. The methodology of the study is based on qualitative research approach, and it is supported by the data collected through a deep literature review, observations, and the review of community discussion forums.

Key words: *identity, Istanbul, urban space, transformation of the cities, heritage*

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of identity, which is a newly emerging research field for various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, human geography and anthropology, has been part of the agenda of planners and designers in view of the rapid change of our environment due to urbanization, globalization, and neo-liberalism processes in the last few decades. Along with this prominent transformation, which has affected the formation of urban spaces, its characteristics and identity have changed as well. Therefore, it can be claimed that preventive conservation of urban heritage as an emerging phenomenon has become one of the essential and meaningful aspects of planning and architecture nowadays.

After the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the efforts to reflect the national and modern identity of new Turkey in architectural designs, especially in urban spaces through public buildings and public spaces can be observed. This study explores the relationship between architecture and identity through a narrative of Taksim area as one of the decisive reflections of the new secular life in Turkey. The meaning of heritage in all its forms includes tangible and intangible aspects, and it is shaped by the objects, buildings, urban spaces and the influence of traditions and life style of its users, inherited from the past and consigned to posterity. In this sense, heritage plays a remarkable role in the urbanization and formation of public spaces including their activities.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the importance of urban spaces on creating cultural identity as well as political dominance in its creation in particular, and to examine identity-based conflicts as risks on the cultural heritage, focusing on deliberate and exacerbated actions of the governors to create a new identity by resetting the former one. The case study of Taksim area done by exploring its thresholds and deciphering its multi-layered structure aims to narrate the use of urban space in the creation of a cultural identity.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology of the study is based on qualitative research approach, and it is supported by data collected through a deep literature review, observations, and the review of community discussion forums. The structural frame of this study includes a review on the existing literature in order to discuss the definition of “cultural identity” and analyze its interaction with urban heritage phenomenon. The study also discusses the role of political power and effect of the governors on socio-cultural and spatial transformation of public spaces.

1.3 Originality and Contribution to the Field of Heritage

The originality of the selected case study for this paper is the influence of cultural practices on urbanization, aiming to create a cultural identity. Taksim is the place where modernity and institutionalization regulated urbanization by creating traditions as anchorages and feelings of belonging to the community by collective movements. In the last few decades, this place has experienced a new assignment contrary to its significance in the modernization of Turkish Republic and has taken on a new,

more conservative cultural identity. This political change has had a direct effect on the urbanization and heritage of the place in terms of both tangible and intangible values.

Taksim area, remarkable in modernity and institutionalization of Turkish Republic, is a modern image of the city, where the mode of this perception is reflected on communal definitions based on specific, usually politically-inflected differentiations such as gender, sex, class, religion, race and ethnicity, nationality and the like, which are already within the definition of cultural identity. The significance of this area is to be subjected to the deliberate political operations in order to change the cultural identity, the so-called new religious young generation. As a result, both tangible and intangible heritage values are at risk due to identity conflicts.

2. Cultural Identity and its Interaction with the Urban Heritage Phenomenon

Identity has a significant role as an invaluable resource for cultural heritage and its protection to be consigned to posterity. Particularly, cultural identity is a central aspect of shaping communities or countries and ideologies by bringing people together. Therefore, the meaning of identity needs to be considered in all its forms – tangible and intangible – with the consideration of heritage values of places, memories and its evolving existence. Within this context, cultural heritage is examined as a living expression, where “cultural identity” constitutes one part. The change of living expressions in time is remarkable and phenomenal. Therefore, cultural heritage includes complexity and plurality in terms of commemorative practices, politics, and use of urban space and formation of identity. In this sense, cultural identity is a tool of social and political culture to remember or to forget the past and to restructure the future. Within this narrative, cultural identity is linked to the urban spaces used in creating urban heritage with the interaction of places and people belonging to a community, expressing ideologies and ideas.

In this study, cultural identity, urban heritage and identity-based conflicts are explored with the emphasis on the function of urban spaces, manifestations, monuments as anchorages of the urban heritage, formation of public places, and the effect of political influences on these actions, meaning how public spaces and urbanization can be used as a cultural identity creator and how the former one can be reset as the justification of the national existence. The use of inconsistencies and deliberations in order to create cultural identity is discussed as an interaction between cultural identity and urban heritage phenomenon. Ernest Gellner explains this as a deliberate definition of social entity and the modern nation-state, which continuously defines and redefines its cultural identity according to its prevalent requirements and needs¹. On the other hand, the concept of globalization, which is explained as the reference to the recent expansion and acceleration of flows of people, organizations, capital, images, and ideas across different parts of the world², though not directly related to the aforementioned facts, supports them. Taksim area also attracts newcomers to the city, i.e. immigrants, both from national and international levels, from the countries where armed conflict and war exist.

3. Case Study: Taksim Area, an Example of the Role of Politics on Socio – Cultural and Spatial Transformation of Public Spaces

¹Gellner, 2001

²Appadurai, 1996

Taksim area had been organized with the aim of shaping modern Turkish cultural identity, and in the recent decades, it has been subjected to political effects in opposite directions. Taksimarea (Fig.1) is considered to be the showcase of the principal transformation of the country by reflections of the political change, where a new way of living -secular life- became apparent. This area has always reflected the role of politics on socio-cultural and spatial transformation of public spaces shaping cultural identity. The events took place in this area as thresholds of formation of cultural identity based on political ideologies and they can be listed as September 6-7 1955 Istanbul riots, celebrations of May 1st Labour Day 1977 (Fig.2) and Gezi Park protests of 2013 (Fig. 3). Taksim Square, Istiklal Street, Atatürk Cultural Centre and the Republic Monument are the tangible attributes of the area as urban anchorages of its cultural identity and are linked to the events which can be explained as intangible values of the area.



Fig.1– Location of Taksim area within Istanbul city³



Fig.2– Celebrations of May 1stLabour Day in the Taksim area (a): 1978⁴; (b): 2016⁵

³Taksim, 2017

⁴ <http://www.listemis.com/1-mayis-fotografлари/>

⁵ <http://www.diken.com.tr/istanbuldaki-1-mayis-kutlamalari-bakirkoyde-taksime-sembolik-cicek-birakilacak/>



Fig.3- TaksimIstiklal Street – Gezi Park Protests (a): 2000s⁶; (b): 2016⁷

In this study, Taksim area is explored as the place of events based on identity conflicts and the example of political power domination of using the public space to create cultural identity. The main public place of the area is Gezi Park, formerly known as İnönü Promenade, which was constructed after the demolition of the Artillery Barracks by the Republican government in the early 1940s. Taksim area was restructured as a whole with special public spaces free from the symbols of the restrictive Ottoman culture as the modern face of the republic⁸. The political change in Turkey was brought by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which took over in 2003 as the governor and still keeps its position. AKP also targets using Taksim area for its ideology and policies to create a new cultural identity; the so-called religious young generation. Taksim area has faced dramatic change in terms of urbanization based on the ideology of AKP, which completely opposes the face of modernity. Urbanization and intention of construction of new cultural identity ended up with Gezi Park protests that started in the last days of May, 2013. Kadri Gürsel⁹ explained these events as a spontaneous action by a group of well-educated urban youth seeking to protect their city and environment, but turned into a revolt that brought together almost all groups of opposition in a couple of days. The events which from time to time led to conflicts between police forces and protestors exacerbated due to ideological and political differences among citizens, and even caused discrimination. Particularly, the proposals for the reconstruction of the Artillery Barracks as a shopping mall and the removal of the Republic Monument¹⁰ from Taksim Square flamed exacerbation between governors and protestors who named themselves as defenders of the modern Republic of Turkey on the grounds that it would remove Gezi Park.

Another event that can be stated as a part of the cultural heritage of Turkey is the celebration of May 1st Labour Day, which was started in 1977. The beginning of this dates back to an armed coup which occurred in 1960 where the army took over government throughout the entire country. After this event, in 1961 the Labour Party of Turkey was established, and labour movement got stronger, which made Taksim to soon become synonymous with this movement and its socialist ideology. As a result of this movement, the 1970s faced political violence in Turkey and ended up with a bloody event on May 1st Labour Day during the celebrations in Taksim in 1977. Consequently, Taksim area, especially Taksim

⁶<http://www.teknokulis.com/galeri/teknoloji/sony-xperia-z2-ile-cekilmis-fotograflar>

⁷<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/taksimde-polis-mudahalesi-10-gozalti-40035137>

⁸Bilsel, 2010

⁹Gürsel, 2017

¹⁰Gül et al, 2014

Square, has become the main place for demonstrations and a strong psychological link between Taksim and the leftist ideology in Turkey has been established.

The oldest event in the history of Taksim area based on identity and ethnic conflict was a violent riot against the Greeks and other non-Muslim citizens on September 6-7 1955¹¹. This event resulted in the loss of life of over a dozen people and hundreds of injuries. Lots of places, such as houses, offices, churches, a synagogue, a monastery, schools, hotels and bars, were attacked¹².

4. Conclusion

Heritage as a living expression over time is remarkable and phenomenal; however, the meaning and acceptance of change is a challenge faced.

When politics is involved in the process of heritage production, which is the case in this study, depending on the communities supporting or opposing politicians, activities to protect the heritage can result in conflicts. Taksim area in Istanbul, the case study of this paper, is a significant place in terms of its importance in the history of Turkish Republic and modernization activities. Throughout its relatively short history, Taksim area has hosted noticeable events such as manifestations, protests, meetings and even conflicts. One of the main triggers of these events was cultural identity based conflicts, mostly between government and the public. Due to its political connection and being a place where governors display power, it is used as a politically designed urban area and a tool to create cultural identity. It has always been a powerful symbol of many social and ideological causes as a place used by governments to demonstrate their ideologies and policies.

Due to the events that have happened in Taksim area during its history and the fact that the area itself has been used as a tool of politics, the profile of its users has always changed. With the modernization of Republic of Turkey, the area became the reflection of the Western culture and the focal living area for the minorities; however, after the bloody events, this population rapidly decreased, and its western face began to turn into a conservative profile.

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¹¹Kuyucu, 2017

¹²Korkut, 2017

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List of Figures

Fig.1- Location of Taksim area within Istanbul city

Fig.2– Celebrations of May 1stLabour Day in the Taksim area (a): 1978; (b): 2016

Fig.3- Taksimİstiklal Street – Gezi Park Protests (a): 2000s; (b): 2016

ICOA810: IMPORTANCE DE L'ESPACE URBAIN DANS LA CREATION DE L'IDENTITE CULTURELLE: DECHIFFRER LES DIFFERENTES STRATES DE LA PLACE TAKSIM A ISTANBUL

Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

Session 3: Recréer des idées de mémoire

Lieu: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 14 Décembre, 2017, 11:45 – 12:00

Auteur: Meltem Vatan, Efsun Ekenyazıcı Güney

Meltem Vatan est née en 1978 à Varna. Elle est diplômée en architecture et possède un Master et un Phd de l'université technique de Yildiz d'Istanbul. Elle est membre d'ICOMOS Turquie, ICORP et ISCARSAH ISCs et également vice-présidente de ICORP Turquie. Actuellement elle travaille à l'université de Bahcesehir, faculté d'architecture et de design, en tant que professeure associée. Elle est également l'un des vices-doyens de cette université.

Résumé: Cette étude a pour objectif de faire des recherches sur les dynamiques d'identité culturelles à travers la signification de patrimoine urbain comme phénomène émergent de ces dernières décennies. Elle s'attache notamment à la croissance des valeurs immatérielles à travers la portée du patrimoine urbain et son contexte liés aux lieux et communautés auxquelles ils appartiennent.

Dans ce contexte, l'objectif de l'étude est d'étudier la zone de Taksim à Istanbul, en Turquie comme une place qui possède un lien historique très fort au pouvoir politique à travers l'histoire afin de comprendre les moteurs de l'identité culturelle. Taksim, avec son histoire qui remonte à l'empire Ottoman, est une archive vivante comportant les couches de la transformation d'un espace politico-social de la ville et du pays où l'identité et la diversité culturelles peuvent être vues comme évidentes. La place Taksim a été considérée comme l'espace public le plus visible et le plus symbolique de la diversité des groupes ethniques sous le régime de l'Empire Ottoman. Lorsque le régime est devenu républicain, la place a connu un renouvellement urbain qui était également une réponse aux transformations séculaires du pouvoir en place. Il peut être prétendu que depuis les premières années de l'Empire Ottoman jusqu'à aujourd'hui, Taksim juxtapose et combine les traces de son histoire politique et sociale. Par ailleurs, en ce qui concerne l'essai de compréhension des strates sous une forte domination politique, il est important de comprendre « *l'identité culturelle* » à travers les différentes couches historiques. En conséquence, les relations bilatérales entre la transformation de l'espace public, son caractère dans la compréhension du pouvoir politique et leur domination dans la création d'une identité culturelle seront considérées comme la colonne vertébrale de cette étude dans le but de traiter de réconciliation dans la diversité.

La méthodologie de cette étude est basée sur la recherche et alimentée par une collecte de données issue d'analyses bibliographiques approfondies, observations, analyses de groupes de discussion.

Le cadre de cette étude inclut:

L'analyse de documentation dans l'objectif de traiter de la définition d'une identité culturelle, analyser son interaction avec le phénomène de patrimoine urbain

L'analyse du rôle du pouvoir politique et des effets des gouvernements sur la transformation culturelle et sociale des espaces publics.

Mots clés: *identité – réconciliation – approche basée sur le droit*