

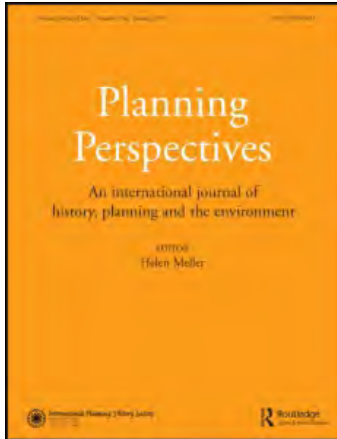
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## Politics and culture in the making of public space: Taksim Square, 1 May 1977, Istanbul

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This paper analyses how political and cultural claims over public space are symbolic of the social and historical transformation of a society at large. As an example, we aim to show that symbols, monuments and live practices of civic participation in Taksim Square, Istanbul, are integral to national and global events, and to the discourses of significance that mark particular decades. Accordingly, we discuss the changing meaning and the role of Taksim Square starting from the symbolic declaration of secularism during the first decade of the republican era, to a space of mass politics during the 1970s and finally as a spectacle of globalisation by the beginning of the twenty-first century. The May Day celebration of 1977 that ended in violence is the focal point of our analysis. We argue that this event is an expression of the mass politics of an era of urbanisation and industrialisation in a developing society during the 1970s, during which time the military often intervened. The military coup of 1980 and the global processes of liberalisation in the post-1980 era have also marked the Taksim Square. With expressions of mass politics banned, the square has become a spectacle of tourism and a locus of global culture. Henceforth, through the analysis of Taksim Square, we aim to present space as layers of articulations and fragmentation in the political culture of the nation and as instrumental in the power dynamics of the historically significant social processes and groups.

**Keywords:** civic participation; urban space; appropriation; symbolic meaning of space; violence; political culture

### Introduction

During the last century, speed of urbanisation has become the major defining element of Third-World societies, a process demanding the engagement of not only policy-makers and planners, but also of various social science disciplines. The complexity of urbanisation in the metropolitan cities of Third-World countries reflects the twentieth century's patterns of population growth, the rise of dual economies and oppressive political regimes, and the rate of migration to city centres.<sup>1</sup> The resulting inequalities of income, the segmentation of city spaces due to ineffective infrastructures and a lack of national policies to regulate their use find their parallels in unstable political regimes, and the protests of a public that utilises space in order for those protests to be heard. The city centres, squares and streets, on the one hand, have become representational symbols in the elitist discourse of nationalist and totalitarian ideas of a unified society aiming for modernisation and, on the other hand, the territories on which masses of people express their own conflicting demands.<sup>2</sup>

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Particularly during the last decade, these phenomena and the discourse on globalisation and post-modernity have influenced surveys of the nature of urban change worldwide. Contemporary approaches to the study of locality have aroused awareness of the problematic nature of ethnographic and cultural surveys that often emphasise limited, specific, ahistorical social entities defined through functions, structures and a reductive normative order.<sup>3</sup> At the other extreme, the emergence of studies on the world city or (as it is sometimes referred to) the global city reflects the macro-scale processes of information flow and capital, and defines culture as being embedded in that process, with emphasis on the present. This emphasis on globality and on the present, however, often ignores particular histories that emphasise the current form and pattern of 'embodied space', which is neither local nor global.<sup>4</sup>

One way of dealing with this dilemma is by analysing a spatial focal point in which both these extremes, global and local, collide. In particular, we point out to civic squares, as cultural artefacts within intricate power geometries, which embody, often conflicted, socio-political meanings. This act of 'concretising' the discourse on globalisation and post-modernity sheds light on the way practices of both citizens and governments are manifested in, and negotiated through, space. In other words, in the framework of this paper, urban space is seen as a strategic instrument through which participants, operating in the context of global world, choose to confront each other. These types of spaces (e.g. Tiananmen square in Beijing, Rabin square in Tel Aviv, Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Taksim Square in Istanbul, etc.) show how globalisation and post-modernity are but an added layer in the ongoing national conflict over meaning. Moreover, it is this social and historical depth that allows us to follow the changes in politics and culture in the process of cities becoming global.

This paper reflects on Istanbul and on its main city centre, Taksim Square, exploring the events of 1 May 1977, when thousands assembled to celebrate that day, by the end of which many were killed in the chaos that ensued. Embedded in the collective memory, it symbolises the pre-1980 era, i.e. prior to the adoption of an export-oriented liberal economy in February 1980, the military coup in September 1980 and post-1980, the changes in politics and culture in the process of becoming a world city. By analysing Taksim Square as a terrain of political practice,<sup>5</sup> we aim to present an example to the view that the fissures in the times and spaces of societies make diachronic historicism obsolete. We argue that 1980 is just such a fracture in Turkish history, one that has accelerated the fragmentation of space and its role as a core of civic participation.

### **Society and the politics of space**

Studies of urban form that focus exclusively on the physical environment, objectifying space within functionalist and rationalist paradigms, have often been challenged, not only with reference to epistemology but also on the grounds that urban form is itself bound by historical and social processes and by hegemonic power structures. That is, economic relations and forces of production, social, political and cultural histories and the agents of these histories have an impact on the form of space and define its meaning.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the return to spatiality and geography in social theory, as a counterpoint to the diachronic emphasis and temporality of social change, has introduced space as a constitutive element of social, political and economic histories.<sup>7</sup> As a result, there has been increased debate on the

distinctions between (universal and abstract) space and (particular and concrete) place. In fact, the mutual exclusivity of these terms is not viable, since both embody several overlapping characteristics.<sup>8</sup>

In political philosophy, what constitutes 'the public' varies significantly. On the one hand, we hear of the liberal perspective of markets and the private realm, the domains left out of the sphere of the state, and on the other hand, there is the republican and modernist perspective on institutional forms of decision-making and political systems. Whereas, social theories and anthropology have considered 'public' as the domain of people, united by sociability and a constructed normative order.<sup>9</sup> We shall not discuss how theories have evolved from debates on function, structure, ethnography, positivism and/or hermeneutics. Instead, we examine the contemporary arguments informed by earlier critiques. In our study, 'public' refers to the people present in a given space. (Being and presence in space can be further expressed analytically by deconstructing the historical, political, social and discursive embodiment of the presence of a given public in a particular place.)<sup>10</sup>

The discursive systems operate through series of meanings whereby a particular place/space becomes meaningful in symbolic, political and social terms for individuals or for social groups. Often, the discursive systems overlap when a city or urban locale is concerned. How such discourses define a pre-nationalist city, a world city, a cosmopolitan city, a city representative of a nation-state, an industrial city, an Eastern or Western city and a global city requires further elaboration of how these constructs defer to an endless series of political, social, cultural and economic processes. Furthermore, as no city can be universally defined by any one particular adjective, it cannot be reduced to a particularity, a single criterion. However, analysis of how different discourses can shape or claim public space and how alternative discourses can oppose each other for the rights over public space can be traced by deconstructing their mode of operation.

By 'mode of operation' we refer to the complex and reciprocal interactions between space and social practice, especially how they are manifested in monumental spaces, i.e. spaces that are the product of hegemonic power, demarcating dialectical relationships between space, power and society. As such, these spaces are also a social property whose symbolism and iconography are constantly defined and recreated by its users. As Henri Lefebvre argues,<sup>11</sup> social space is a social product, so that any transitions in the form of social relations must entail the production of a new space. This process of appropriation and transformation of space has become a focal issue in much of the literature on politics and space, and on how societies negotiate their identity and claim through modifying their mode of operation.<sup>12</sup> Taksim Square is just such a monument, signifying Turkey's changing socio-political modes of operation. Its historical evolution can be traced back to the seventeenth century, but during the twentieth century it has been evolved as monument, a concrete representation of the Turkish secular state. The socio-spatial traditions, which shaped and are shaping the square's appearance and meaning, illustrate the contestation over national identity and its discursive practices.

At this point, it is necessary to discuss the concept of 'square', in Turkish – *meydan*. Both terms signify an open space between structures and buildings, inside the boundaries of a city. However, *meydan* evades the rigidity and the intentionality of the plaza or square's structural form. In architecture and urban design, square is produced by the grouping of houses around an open space. Historically, this arrangement afforded a high degree of control of the inner space, as well as facilitating a ready defence against external aggression by minimising the

external surface area liable to attack. This kind of courtyard frequently came to bear symbolic value and was therefore chosen as the model for construction of numerous holy places (Agora, Forum, Mosque courtyard).<sup>13</sup> In contrast the *meydan* is not holy but rather a mundane space, a junction of axes which brings together structures and spaces that were not design *intentionally* to define one integrated spatial entity. Thus, often the scale, urban forms and style of buildings in the *meydan* do not necessarily correlate to each other. Moreover, the *meydan* as opposed to the notion of control, which is reflected in squares, is about flow of both people and space. Yet, this flexibility is also what makes the *meydan* so changeable. According to Kuban, intentional planning of *meydans* for neighbourhoods did not exist in Ottoman and Islamic cities (excluding the eighteenth century neighbourhood fountains which functionally came close to creating squares in their surroundings) where large courtyards of mosques with proximity to the market place were the gathering spaces for the masses, synonymously to Roman forums.<sup>14</sup> Although during the Abdulhamit period (1876–1909) attempts were made to generate and implement plans for squares, such as the Beyazit Meydani, by inviting a foreign planner, Antoine Bouvard, they were unrealised. Kuban argues that the *meydans* of the republican period (1923 until present) remain to be dominated by the needs of the traffic rather than as architecturally planned spaces with aesthetic concerns, albeit several attempts by city administrations to do so.<sup>15</sup>

Taksim Square itself is one such *meydan* rather than a square. We must observe this distinction in order to understand the history of this space, not as a fixed concrete form but as to how it opened itself to different forms and representations, and to people's right to be there.

The following is a socio-historical account of the evolution of the Square, its symbolic and political significance and uses. We then analyse the politics of space in the 1977 protest, the violent suppression of that protest and the effects on protests in the Square, shifting from universalist aims (of left-wing politics) to the fragmented discourses on the politics of identity.

### **Taksim Square: the historical legacy**

In general, histories are written by tracing representational signs and symbols to which are attributed significance according to different interests. Istanbul's history has been marked by changes that have not only added layers to its archaeology, but have also expanded the scope of representational forms through which the space has become meaningful.<sup>16</sup>

The Ottoman Empire was a segmented society composed of confessional groups organised around *millet*s, which faced contradictory systems and structures following the incorporation into the world system by the beginning of the nineteenth century. This reflected on space. Entrance to world finance and capital paralleled the establishment of new commercial and business centres, the emergence of a new class, and administrated by salaried bureaucrats. Buildings to accommodate the embassies of Western governments, hospitals, banks, hotels, new businesses and schools for the different religious denominations and new elite were sought for throughout the historic city – around Galata and Pera – extending to Beyoglu via the Grand Rue de Pera leading to Taksim Square (see Figure 1). These new capitalists emerged from the non-Muslim populations and from the *Levantine*s, the non-Ottoman subjects residing in Istanbul for international trade and other purposes.

Spatially speaking, Istanbul began to change rapidly. The governors and Muslim bureaucrats moved away from the old city during the nineteenth century, building new palaces and



Figure 1. Taksim Square (Cengiz Kahraman collection).

residences on the shores of the Bosphorus and in Besiktas. New land-use patterns emerged with respect to the separation of public and private spheres. New infrastructures, railway stations, ports, post offices and other public offices were built, often designed by invited foreign architects and engineers.<sup>17</sup> Thus, spatial change occurred with diversification of both residential and business districts, not only per se but also on cultural differences. In 1855, the Municipal Governance was established to coordinate change and to improve the ageing structure of the city, and in July 1857 Galata and Beyoglu were designated as the sixth division.<sup>18</sup> Between 1836 and 1837 Von Moltke created the first plan for the city. In 1848, 1864 and 1882 laws were made to implement the new plans. In 1850, neighbourhood plans were drawn up. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a ‘beautiful city’ was the planners’ intention, but neither Bouvard’s plan of 1902 nor Auric’s plans that followed were implemented.<sup>19</sup>

‘Taksim’ means ‘allocation’, and the name derives from the water distribution chamber located there. The dams, aqueducts and fountains bringing water to Istanbul are centuries old, and as the city grew new systems were added. Construction of the Taksim water system began during the reign of Mahmut I (1730–1754) and was completed during the reign of Mahmut II in 1839.<sup>20</sup> From the Taksim distribution centre, water was allocated to the different districts of the city. An artillery barracks and its courtyard originally built between 1803 and 1806 occupied a large area of the site, and rebuilt and renovated several times after damage from uprisings and fire, until it was ultimately demolished (see Figure 3, 4).<sup>21</sup> During World War I (WWI) it was abandoned, and after 1921 the courtyard became a stadium and the interior areas of the barracks were used as casinos and workshops. In 1940, the building was demolished to create an open space for a park. Apart from the barracks and the water reservoir, there were also



Figure 2. The unveiling ceremony at the monument (Cengiz Kahraman collection).

cemeteries around the open space. However, the Beyoglu district expanded and new, upscale residences were built around the space of Taksim, close to the lively Western lifestyle of Beyoglu.

After losing WWI to Entente powers, Istanbul was occupied on 16 March 1920 (occupation ended in 1922) and became peripheral in the process of nation-state building of the new Republic.<sup>22</sup> Until 1946, the single-party rule dictated how Turkey was to be spatialised.<sup>23</sup> New railroads connected the outlying localities, uniting them in ‘national space’, and cities were organised according to the social, political and cultural institutions that disseminated the new ideals of the nation. The trajectories of modernity also reflected on the changes in the physical forms of the city and in the architecture.<sup>24</sup> Expressing the aspirations of the young Republic, plans were made and implemented for Ankara, the new capital, with monumental new buildings and styles. The power of the state derived from decision-making based on the norms of modern knowledge and the centralised distribution of resources. During the 1930s, municipal laws were passed for the appropriation of land, and for their financing. Plans for large cities were mandatory, and professional architects and engineers arrogated the construction of buildings.<sup>25</sup> Inevitably, the application of these new laws was another matter, due to the government’s limited resources; and how much (or little) the new ideology was internalised by large segments of the population is debatable.

By the end of WWI Istanbul’s population was close to one million. After the war, the non-Muslim population left the city in large numbers. However, Istanbul’s cosmopolitan character, as the seat of the Sultanate, the Caliphate, and of the Western economic and cultural powers, was a deterrent to the new regime’s willingness to promote the city. Furthermore, there was no open space in Istanbul for representing the new democracy apart from Taksim Square, and the



Figure 3. Taksim Square with the barracks (at the left corner of the photograph). In the centre – the monument (Cengiz Kahraman collection).

new nation needed a space not previously marked by monuments of empire. Western ideas defined the cosmopolitan character of Beyoglu and Taksim. Nationalism, after all, derives from Western ideas appropriated to express an essence.<sup>26</sup> The autarchic power of the state expressed the discourses on republicanism, civic rights, progress, secularism and civilisation. Monuments to the new nation and new names for old streets and regions are paradigmatic of the objectification of these new discourses.

Taksim Square, built in 1926, was the first square with the first monument to be planned and designed in the new republic (see Figure 2, 3). The base of the monument and the landscaping around it were designed by the Italian Mongeri, and the statue of Atatürk surrounded by his friends in the War of Independence was created by Canonica, another Italian.<sup>27</sup> The Grand Rue de Pera, leading from Beyoglu to Taksim, known previously as *Cadde-i Kebir*, became *İstiklal Caddesi*, i.e. ‘Liberty Street’, while the street by the water reservoir and the barracks leading to Pangalti, which used to be ‘Barracks Street’ became *Cumhuriyet Caddesi*, the ‘Avenue of the Republic’. Perhaps renaming cannot completely erase memory, but it does impose a new language through which the new generations dictate and relearn the meaning of the space. After 80 years, the names do not bring to mind the original intention of political power, but they are witnesses to a history that is constantly being rewritten.

The monument and the Taksim Square did not mitigate the vast space in front of the barracks, but this rather loose spatial definition, together with the political symbolism – as an embodiment of universal ideas of civic rights, secularism and progress – endows the Square with its potency as a site for popular action.



City growth and development continued to affect the spatial form of the square. In 1930, when an international competition was held for land-use planning of Istanbul, the winner of the competition, H. Elgötz, proposed major re-planning of Taksim Square, but his plans were not implemented. In 1936, Henry Prost, one of the planners in the competition, was offered the task. He accepted and his plans for Beyoglu were put into operation in 1939.<sup>28</sup> Between 1939 and 1949, planning and rebuilding of Istanbul continued on modernist lines designed by professionals. Prost offered to expand the square in Taksim, defined by the Monument of the Republic and the narrow circular space surrounding it, by razing the barracks and building spectacular public buildings, such as exhibition halls and broad boulevards.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Prost designated not Taksim but the historic area of the city for public ceremonies. In his plans, Taksim was allocated to narrow definitions, functions and uses of modernity, exclusive of political representational forms aimed at masses.<sup>30</sup>

1950 marked the beginning of the post-WWII era. The multi-party regime, the liberalisation of the economy, Marshall-aid, new highways to replace railroads and the expanded population brought about the articulation of rural areas with large cities. The new party, which replaced the previous regime, pursued populist policies in culture and economy. Between 1950 and 1960 Istanbul's population nearly doubled, approaching two million. The political ideology of space did not mean to symbolise the new, modern nation, but cared about it as an economic resource for liberal interests. Land speculation increased due to large migrations into the city, and Istanbul was once more becoming the leading city for commerce and industry. Large boulevards were constructed through and across the historic area, connecting it to other parts of the city with no consideration for its historical significance. Several neighbourhoods were erased in the process. Along the new boulevards, dense construction took place without regard to style or quality.<sup>31</sup> In the early 1940s, a new park had been constructed in Taksim (based on Prost's plans), replacing the old barracks (see Figure 4). It was named for İnönü, Atatürk's second in command in the earlier regime, who became president after Atatürk's death. When the new regime came to power, a plinth for a monument to İnönü already existed. However, the new regime changed the name of the park and rejected the monument, and Taksim's image changed once again. As in the 1920s, the discourse of political power in the 1950s re-erased Taksim's representational form.<sup>32</sup> It was an open space once more, a *meydan* for the rising tide of newcomers to the city, whose aspirations differed from those of the power elite. Most notably, in the aftermath of WWII a new era of American influence in the ruling political ideology, the dictates of the liberal world that Turkey had become part of and the internationalist style of architecture reflected on the Taksim Square. The building of the Hilton Hotel at the edge of the Park, designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in collaboration with Sedat Hakki Eldem, a highly regarded Turkish architect, is very symbolic in the sense that it introduced the location to these new appropriations.<sup>33</sup>

### **Taksim Square as a locus of demonstration**

Histories of space are built on moments of fracture after which neither the space nor its symbolic meaning will ever be the same. To assume that the crowds or people in a space are merely bodies of people gathered is to reify and de-historicise them through giving a static essence to their mere being. Alternatively, as discussed below, the nature of Taksim's change



Figure 4. Taksim after of the demolition of the stables and three wings of the barracks. The front wing can be seen on the right (Cengiz Kahraman collection).

follows a perspective that takes into account the changes in the nature of the public realm and how it became a public space on which new understandings of political power operated.

Political upheavals and demonstrations were familiar incidences to the rulers of the Ottoman Empire, especially in times of economic hardship and/or moves to modernise the army and the state. Masses often gathered around the familiar spaces of army barracks and mosques. The most hospitable of such spaces was the Beyazit Meydani in the historical peninsula with proximity to the market, the Beyazit Mosque and institutions of learning. This proximity was effective to both reactionary demonstrations against social change and revolutionary changes against a conservative regime. For the former, the funeral of Mareşal Fevzi Cakmak, as an opponent of the single party regime, at the Beyazit Mosque and its aftermath, and for the latter, the 1958 student and intellectuals' demonstration against the rule of the Democrat Party are offered as examples.<sup>34</sup>

After the military coup of 1960, a new constitution was adopted in 1961, which laid the foundations of the separation of powers, on the one hand, and, on the other, for the civic organisations that clamoured for economic and democratic rights, such as the labour unions and other professional organisations. The import-substitution models of economic growth encouraged the development of cities around growing industries. The new constitution weakened the power of governments, which, more often than not, were coalitions of various small parties. The unstable political governance and a deepening economic crisis of the 1970s accompanied the clash between the municipal powers, whose electorate tended to the left, and the right-wing centre that pursued patron-client relations in favour of populist support systems. City centres,

streets and public institutions, such as universities, became battlefields of different groups organised along different political lines. As the city with the largest population and number of social organisations, Istanbul was inevitably the stage for largest demonstrations.

The Turkish word corresponding to ‘demonstration’ is *gösteri*, which can also be translated as a performance on stage. Hence, political protests by crowds on city spaces were referred to as ‘protest demonstrations’, *protesto gösterileri* in Turkish, which, during the 1970s, were frequent, large and well organised. New roads and transport facilities made Taksim accessible as a focal stage where people would converge and the protest demonstrations would end with public speeches. If we accept that protest is a method of involving people in political partnerships, then we must also accept that protest has a specific *form*, negotiated both by particular groups and by a regime. Thus, understanding the spatial dynamic of protest is not just a question of control, legality or even collective behaviour. It is about reclaiming the national, local or communal space and its symbolic attributes.

From the aspect of the politics of place, celebrations on 1 May extend beyond Taksim’s geographical boundaries. Starting from the two boundaries of the city and with Taksim as the meeting point, the demonstration procession reclaimed the city as part of its universalist discourse on labour. Going back to history, mass demonstrations celebrating 1 May as Labour Day were allowed between 1910 and 1912 under Ottoman rule, and in 1921–1923 and 1976–1978 during the Republic.<sup>35</sup> In other years, although some spontaneous demonstrations occurred, the government repressed and punished them. In 1976, the 1 May demonstration was organised by the Revolutionary Confederation of the Labor Unions in the social and political climate explained above. No major incidents occurred, and in the following year the event was rescheduled, this time with broader publicity. The spatial attributes of the demonstration of 1977 as a point in the history of the square illuminate the later shifts in the square’s public life and in its fragmented domain. We demonstrate here that the assembly was a moment in time and space which encapsulated conflicting dualities: first, (prior to the violence) the success of the procession and its universal claims, and secondly, after the violence, as the onset of a fragmentation process which has influenced acts of protest in space until today.

### The 1 May 1977 demonstration

As a rule, civic squares are key spaces for placing individuals in a meaningful social hierarchy.<sup>36</sup> In these spaces, urban and architectural aesthetics are often recruited to emphasise symbolic meaning, by integrating vistas and perspectives that promulgate the power relationships implicit in the square. However, Taksim Square, with its huge concrete plateau surrounded by offices, banks, international hotels and prestige projects, like the opera house and art gallery, does not belong in this category. Taksim Square is a lived, inclusive space, a place bustling with the movement of traffic and people, locals and tourists. Its vastness and facilities allow for different practices – sitting near the monument or in a café, shopping, eating and commuting. It is a place which maintains a reciprocal *daily* relationship between its space and the crowd’s trajectories (see Figures 5 and 6). This relationship was a major concern (pragmatically and symbolically) in the configuration of the 1 May demonstration.

The general plan of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers’ Unions (DISK)<sup>37</sup> was to approach Taksim from two points in the city, gathering in Besiktas and moving via the

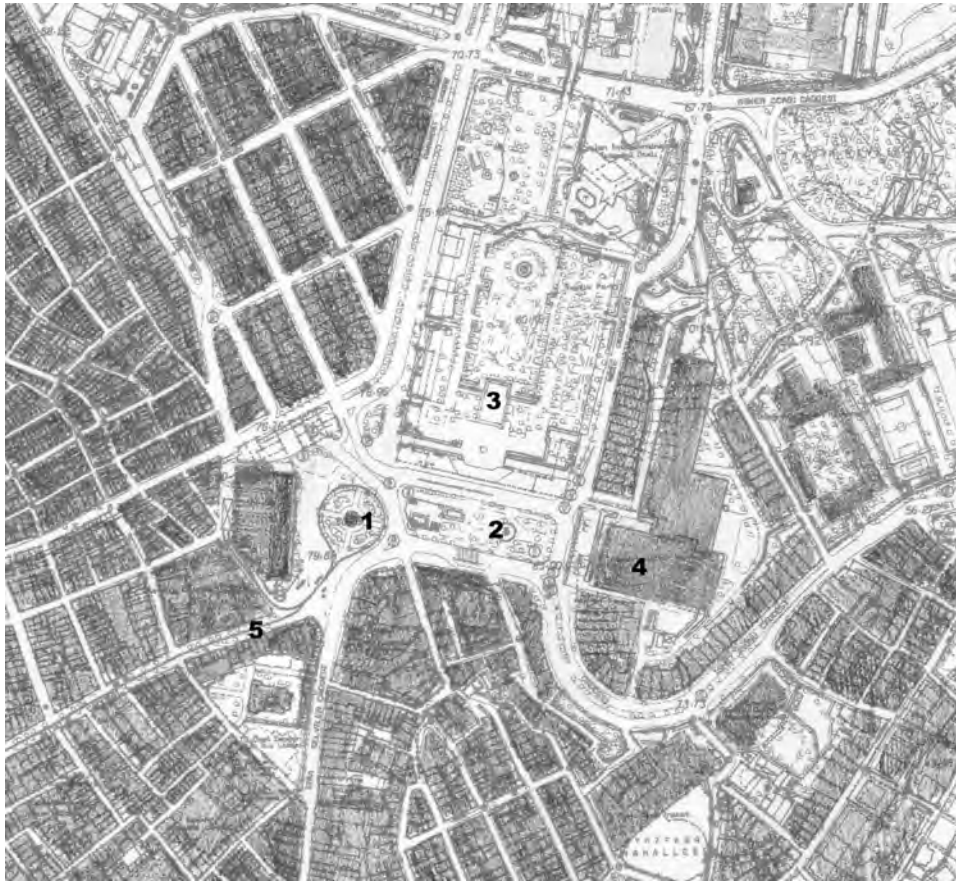


Figure 5. Plan of the Square, 2006: 1. Monument of the Republic; 2. Taksim; 3. İnönü Park 4. Atatürk Cultural Center; and 5. İstiklal Caddesi.

Barbaros Boulevard and gathering in Saraçhane Square moving across the Golden Horn, eventually meeting in Taksim Square's large central location. The accessibility by public transport to the points of origin increased the event's visibility and impact (see Figure 7).<sup>38</sup> The meeting was also a focal event at the national level, with participants coming not only from Istanbul and the Marmara region where industry is dense, but also from across the country. The crowd (according to some estimates composed of 4,00,000 people) was heterogeneous, and included, apart from DISK members, unions from the TURKIS Confederation, members of the independent unions, teachers' associations, technical personnel, architecture and engineering associations, authors, artists, lawyers, doctors, youth groups and women's associations.

Planned as a dynamic performance, the demonstration was citywide, creating a unique overlap of urban settings and cultural codes of collective behaviour in a state-citizenship context. The entire city played a role, as is often the case with demonstrations or parades, with Taksim Square as a key reference point. At 9:00 am, the crowds began to gather at the two



Figure 6. Taksim, 2006. (Photo: Tali Hatuka)

starting points, with their own flags and *pankarts* (placards). Celebrations began, accompanied with music and dancing. At 1:00 pm, in organised processions, the crowds marched along prescribed routes. National and international marching songs were sung in unison. All along the route, young actors gave street performances. Economic and democratic rights were demanded, political slogans were shouted and there was a feeling of festivity (see Figure 8).

In the Square, a stage with microphones, flags and posters had been set up, located at the entrance to the park, thus creating a focal point in the vast space. At 3:00 pm the President of DISK, Kemal Turkler, was to deliver his speech on the significance of the day, and on the demands of the workers for economic and democratic rights.

The procession took longer than expected to reach the Square. Meanwhile, in the Square, the sound system was belting out marching music and folk songs. Sitki Coskun, DISK's organiser and office manager stage-managed the event. In between the musical items, he read poems of Nazim Hikmet (a left-wing poet who died in exile), amid the excited cheering of the participants. The President's speech was scheduled for 3 o'clock, but due to the delayed arrival of the marchers, it began at about 5:00 pm, and even then, the Tarlabası branch of the procession had not yet reached Taksim.

To understand what happened next, it is necessary to understand the 'order' of the procession, how it gave a new meaning to the place and to the participating people. Thus, by 'order' two interrelated systems are evoked, that of the assembly and the order of the space. The order



Figure 7. Map of the procession route. On the morning of the meeting, the workers and other participants, under their own banners, flags and *pankarts*, met at two key points. Those who met in Beşiktaş were to march by way of Dolmabahçe, through the street of Gumussuyu, ending in Taksim; and the others were to arrive via the Unkapanı Bridge, from the direction of Tepebasi and Tarlabasi. (Drawing: Tali Hatuka)

of the assembly and its ritual components (marching, gathering, singing, etc.), the dress mode and scheduling (timing and length of the event) represented how the participants saw themselves, on the one hand, as supporters of a universal discourse of the left, and on the other, as a community of different fragments of the society and the working classes. It was an orderly



Figure 8. Image from the procession (Cengiz Kahraman collection).

celebration on a national scale. The order of the procession was both a mechanism for constructing meaning and a device for negotiating between the state and its citizens.

The discursive order of the assembly took into account the order of the city – the topography, boundaries, traffic movement and buildings (governmental, religious, residential, etc.). Naturally, the routes were temporarily adapted to the order of the assembly, with barriers, blocked routes and adjusted traffic rules to regulate the crowd's movement. Order was also maintained externally (by the police) and internally (by DISK), as a precaution to avert any violence that might have occurred. Thus, in addition to the police force, there were around 20,000 workers from factories and DISK members to maintain security. They were identifiable by their red aprons. They did not carry guns, but only the poles supporting their banners. Their responsibilities were to maintain order, to prevent possible infiltration of unknown people from outside and to prevent any assault from outside. The significance of order, both for the assembly (maintained by DISK and the state) and the space (of the city and the square), was of special importance not only as a device of control, but also for creating new meanings for those who gathered. These overlaps of order, in assembly and in space and the sheer scale of the happening endowed the procession with enormous significance, and appropriated and altered the Square's meaning for good.

However, the extent of the violence that followed marked the enduring meaning of the event for the future to come. As Mehmet Karaca describes it:

Although I can't say the precise time, President Kemal Turkler's speech ended at around 6 o'clock. It ended with an invitation to a one-minute silence in respect for the memory of those who had lost their lives in the struggle for the cause of workers' rights. In that moving moment of respect, in that huge, totally packed space in the Taksim Square, total silence reigned. The sound of a gunshot, coming from somewhere around the entrance to Taksim from the Tarlabasi direction broke that silence. Then everything started, with that first shot.<sup>39</sup>

The first gun shot was followed by others and by the arrival of armoured police vehicles, approaching from Siraselviler and Istiklal Boulevards, and advancing towards the crowds in the Square, firing sound-bombs with high-pitched sirens. The bombs and the continuous sirens of the armoured vehicles created a mass panic with the result of several people being trampled by the crowd and others falling under police vehicles (see Figure 9). There were 34 deaths and an uncounted number of injured.

The celebrating event ended in tragedy, and caused restrictions on mass protests to follow. Thereby, the monumental nature of this particular point in time-space in the collective memory of Turkish citizens increased: a monument which is neither an object nor an aggregation of diverse objects but a social space, defined by what happened there, and consequently by what did not and may not happen there (prescribed/proscribed, scene/obscene).<sup>40</sup> No matter how temporary the appropriation was, or how permanently its traces were eradicated, the very fact of the existence of the demonstration on 1 May 1977, with the memories and associations it evokes, has permanently changed the face of Taksim Square.



Figure 9. Panic after the shooting and the bloody end of the meeting (Cengiz Kahraman collection).



The assailants who claimed the lives of 34 people and hundreds of casualties were not (and still haven't been) identified. Yet, this fact did not deter equally large crowds from showing up again in 1978, propelled by a rising anxiety in the face of, what they saw as, the growing menace of fascism and the desire for democracy.<sup>41</sup> However, in the following year, in 1979, a massive May Day demonstration was prevented by imposing a curfew on the city and stationing a regiment of soldiers in the Square. This political show of force 'was intended to threaten and challenge not only the working class but all progressive forces. Conversely, it has helped to convince the general public of the existence of such a danger'.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

As stated earlier, there are fractures in times and spaces of societies that resist a historicist speculation of linearity in history's move forward, as in debates over a contradiction between desires for 'tradition' and 'progressive' change. After the turmoil of 1970s, 1980 started with such a fracture in Turkish history. In February of that year, liberal economic policies were implemented in place of import-substitution models of economic growth, and policies towards an export-oriented market economy were put in effect in the face of economic depression and political upheaval. On 12 September, a military coup took place, abolishing political parties and social organisations, and banning public gatherings on spaces that even remotely implied political aims. In 1981, a new constitution was written under the watchful gaze of the military with restrictions on political democracy, easing the transition to liberal economy. This constitution has been modified several times although residues remain. The process of liberalisation has reflected on the space of Istanbul in tandem with increased global interaction, the emergence of skyscrapers, hotels, restaurants and other cultural productions, such as the music industry. Space has become fragmented for different purposes, historic areas are reified, often for the tourist industry, historic public buildings are liberalised and permits are given for new functions that privatise them.<sup>43</sup> Traditional trade and production units are increasingly relegated to the edges of the city. City centres such as Taksim Square and its environs are the new spectacles of the entertainment industry.

Today, mass protests in Taksim Square are not allowed. Any day, in their place, it is possible to witness several spontaneous gatherings for a spectrum of social causes and/or protests. Lacking in political discourse based on universal claims (such as the unity of working classes of the world, etc.), and with the rise of fragmented discourses on identity politics, the discursive nature of the space is deeply fragmented. People for their own particular reasons appropriate this space and render alternative significations that are meaningful only in fragmentary terms. Apart from legal restrictions on mass demonstrations in Taksim, the government does not engage in an overriding discourse that defines the space per se either. The municipality, with the intention of making Taksim a global public space, encourages events such as concerts, new year celebrations and similar gatherings. Crowds even attend the small-scale protests along İstiklal Caddesi, which have become integral to the spectacle that is the Taksim Square.

However, although articulated in new ways, the relationship between spaces, crowds and discourse remains. Public life makes space meaningful for its own end, which is at one level always political. Space, both concrete and metaphorical, is the grounds on which politics becomes real. If landscape is ideology,<sup>44</sup> then each explication of a struggled-over landscape

adds to the meanings of both the landscape and the political practices. The significant ideological landscapes in Istanbul are the *meydans*. As a particular spatial typology, this form of open space does not imply a lack of spatial form definition but rather a juxtaposition of multiple forms and activities, which at times overlap, at times conflict and at times are loosely defined – a juxtaposition that makes the *meydan* a place where citizens negotiate the transformation of symbols, structures and boundaries. As opposed to other types of spaces, bounded with formal spatial definitions and urban restrictions, the *meydan* as particular typology generates participatory actions and becomes a mediator space between citizens and regime. In a city of *meydans*, Taksim is certainly key *meydan* of national significance. According to Yael Navaro-Yashin, since 1990s Taksim has become a locus where the state and the public have both become symbolic acts and subsumed into public life, whereby, here, both the domains of power and resistance produce and recast the political.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, 2007 and 2008 have witnessed an increased political debate on the opposing claims over Taksim Square. As an example, against the decision to demolish it to build ‘bigger and better’ buildings in its place by the municipality and the parliament, the modernist architecture of the Ataturk Cultural Center built in 1960s (opening in 1969 with a performance of the opera AIDA) has been claimed, not only physically but also as an icon of republican modernism, as cultural heritage by professional groups, artists and the intelligentsia. In addition, on 1 May 2007, Taksim Square witnessed the clash of police with protesters who were marking the 30th anniversary of the deadly rally of 1977. Police sprayed tear gas, used water cannon and clubbed demonstrators, and some 600 people were arrested. Again, in 2008 the two other *meydans* offered for parade were refused and police stopped the marchers before they moved to Taksim by using force. The rallies of 2007 and 2008 have embodied the conflict over the legitimacy of strategies for asserting rights and challenges of mediating claims. These and other ongoing clashes over the Taksim Square affirm that the Square is a space-time monument, with socio-political connotations that are still highly contested.

In conclusion, the Taksim Square’s contested history suggests multiple issues and problems. Some of these are related to the square’s physical and contextual transformation: the destruction of its traditional framing, the construction of new architectural components and its relationship to Istanbul’s changing landscape. Other issues concern the square’s role as a primary site of public activity and political expression. By combining these issues within this study, we aimed to shed light on the relationship between built space and civic participation it inspires. Henceforth, this study attempts to highlight the historical and theoretical understanding of the (amplified role of) built space as a mediator between institutional power and everyday life of a city in general, and of Istanbul in particular, in the process of becoming global.

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