

# Hürriyet Square: The Story of Newness, Consumption and Transformation of an Urban Space

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## INTRODUCTION

... every time you enter the square, you find yourself caught in a dialogue... You return ... after years and you find the same dialogue still going on... population renews itself: the participants in dialogues die one by one and meanwhile those who will take their places are born, some in one role some in another.

As time passes the roles, too, are no longer exactly the same as before; certainly the action they carry forward through intrigues and surprises leads towards some final denouement, which it continues to approach even when the plot seems to thicken more and more and the obstacles increase. If you look at the square in successive moments, you hear how from act to act the dialogue changes, even if the lives of inhabitants are too short for them to realize it.<sup>1</sup>

The city is a perfect outcome of the relationship between the two realms the human world and the nature. Thus, it is shaped and reshaped by human history. In other words, city acts as a stage where different stories begin and end with the changing roles of the actors. People become a part of that stage with their cultures being developed and flourished through ages.

City is a space of change, distinction and plurality. Therefore, it is a place of appearance and mixture of the materialistic and spiritual values which evolve the utopic and/or realistic dreams of many people. In that sense, it is the cradle "of civilizations." Perhaps, from a point of view city means the square. From the fact that, every city is a "Res publica" any public object necessitates the existence of communal spaces where the citizens may gather as a corpus and produce the consciousness of being the citizens. Square as an urban space is the product of this necessity. All through the history to have a place in the square which is the heart of the public life in the city, has always been the main objective and a prestigious display of the political, economic, public and religious institutes.<sup>2</sup>

This presentation is an illustrated story of Hürriyet Square in Ankara. Hürriyet Square is not of course the most spectacular or the most beautiful square in the world. Its significance comes from its being the most prestigious square of the new capital city of the Turkish Republic thus reflecting the republican ideology and national ideals. This square has witnessed the historical development of the city in the Republican era and has gone through all the transformations and changes in the urban structure of the city. In other words, it has been physically and socially shaped with layers of meaning through years. Therefore, the story of the square is a

complex one, including the changing story of the city and the changing experiences of the citizens as well as the institutions.

As *new* means "recently come into being... never in existence or use before" as it is written in the dictionaries, this is the story of a brand new urban space in a newly established capital city. As if newness is denying the past and trying to create images of the future, then this is the story of a "tabula rasa." The story began 75 years ago at the new capital where all the built environment and urban spaces were developed in order to reflect the breaking off with the past, to eyewitness the present and to be carried into the future. Within this conceptual framework newness of the Hürriyet Square may be identified as the newness of the nation and the city life which had recently achieved or acquired a particular status in history.

Within the framework of the main arguments, to make the historical analysis of Hürriyet Square, historical documents, memories, articles from journals, essays and photographs provided the source. The changing spirit of this place with the changing social and spatial structure of the city will be illustrated in this narrative. The story begins with a historical survey of the newly developed urban environment of the capital. As a part of this urban history the changing story of the square brings out the specific aspects of societal change and structure.

## THE STORY OF THE CITY: ANKARA

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 29 October 1923, Ankara was announced as the capital city of the Turkish Republic. By that time Ankara which had been the headquarters of the nationalist army during the war of Independence, was a significant Anatolian town of some 20,000 people, with narrow, winding streets and simple mud-brick houses clustered around an impressive, ancient citadel on top of a steep hill.<sup>3</sup>

In that sense, the announcement of Ankara as the new capital was a revolutionary decision. As the capital city of the Turkish Republic, Ankara became the symbol of the Republican ideology and national ideals in the country. Thus it became the symbol of modern Turkey. This transformation from a small Anatolian town to a modern capital may be the best observed in its changing urban environment.

In the following days urban planning efforts began for the new capital. A restricted international competition was organized by the republican leaders. A German architect Herman Jansen as the winner of the competition was employed to prepare the urban development plan of the capital city in 1929. Jansen planned the new city at the south of Ankara without disturbing the old city and the citadel area. Batur quotes the principal decisions of this plan as follows:

The Atatürk Boulevard would be the north-south structural axis and would extend to Çankaya. The second axis would

intersect the Boulevard at right angles in Ulus, connecting to the Ystanbul road on the west, following the natural contour of the topography in the east, and then crossing the southern part of the old town. The new city was planned outside the confines of the old city around these axes. The old town was to be preserved. Its western section adjacent the new city was to be modernized. The commercial center was to remain in Ulus, but the new administrative district was to be placed in Yenisehir. The area surrounding the Atatürk Boulevard was arranged in a grid pattern for housing.<sup>4</sup>

Ankara was not only the symbol of a modern Turkish city but also, it was the symbol of the modern Turkish life style.<sup>5</sup> Falih Rıfkı Atay in one of his articles in the Ulus Collection defines Ankara as the symbol of developing Turkey.

Ankara is not only a center for us. It is a school which teaches us the ways and styles of re-building an Anatolian town. The things we have succeeded in making Ankara will be more easily realized in other Anatolian towns....Till we have experienced Ankara we have forgotten city planning and architecture. By making Ankara we have re-created the Turkish Nation's creative character...Turkish people have the right to be proud of Republican Ankara and love the city. Because, it is not a city of representation like other eastern cities, it is the original work and success of Turkish people. Ankara represents the Turkish Nation's power, will, courage and understanding of new Turkish life style.<sup>6</sup>

During its early years, the new capital was like a large construction site with new boulevards, streets, official buildings and housing units. The efforts to build the new capital were great but the financial shortages and difficult conditions of the city life can be depicted from the memories of the citizens. From Vehbi Koç's memories Ankara in 1920s was a city of shortages;

Ankara was a small dusty town having uncomfortable and uncivilized living conditions with shortages of water supply and a barren landscape as a source of infection of malaria. There was no electricity, so candles and kerosene lamps were used for illumination. Stoves, braziers or ovens were used for heating purposes. People used to sit around the stoves sharing same blankets to warm themselves. Since there was not an infrastructure for water supply in the houses people used to provide water from the fountains, to have a bath they used to go to Turkish baths in the districts and for washing clothes they used to go to riversides in the countryside. The roads inside the town were paved with rough cobble-stone but the ones leading outside the town were soil. Since, there was not any public transportation in the town, coaches were used for this purpose.<sup>7</sup>

However, *this* traditional landscape of this small town was totally replaced at the end of the 1930s Ulus dated 25.8.1937:1,4 has published the article of a Belgian journalist B. Henri Liebrecht from the newspaper 'Le Soir' on 10.10.1937, commenting about Turkey in 1937. Liebrecht defines Ankara as a modern capital in the middle of a desert.

A few minutes ago we were in the middle of a desert; as soon as we got out from the Station we found ourselves in the middle of an active and lively city with modern boulevards in contrast to the narrow, curved streets of Ystanbul...Except for the American experience which provided us with the Washington City a century before, no other nation had ever established its governmental center on a barren land by making an urban plan.<sup>8</sup>

The new city was developing despite all shortages and restrictions. Atatürk Boulevard as designated in Jansen's plan was one of

the main transportation axes connecting the old and the new city in the north-south direction. The new city was developed first on the edges of this modern boulevard. The other important axes extending between the east-west direction is Ziya Gökalp Street. Hürriyet Square (Kizilay Square) was located on the crossing of these two lines. (Fig.1) So, the story of Hürriyet Square began with the implementation of Jansen's plan in the 1930s. Development of the Atatürk Boulevard and the new city accelerated the development of one of the most significant squares in the new city.

## THE STORY OF HÜRRIYET SQUARE

Development of Hürriyet Square which means the 'square of liberty' was not only a physical change in the city but also a social one. Although squares are traditional public spaces and characteristic figures in the urban history of European cities, they did not commonly exist in the Ottoman urban culture. Before the 19th century, the only public spaces of the traditional Ottoman society devised for the gathering of crowds can be cited as the courtyards of the mosques, mesira fields, fountains, and market places.<sup>9</sup>

Introducing the concept of square was a new attempt in the urban milieu but also, it was a new attempt in experiencing a different sociability for the development of a new public culture in modern Turkey. As Zukin says: "Creating a public culture involves both shaping public space for social interaction and constructing a visual representation of the city."<sup>10</sup>

While new social experiences and a new public culture were developing in the city, the new urban artifacts began to shape the physical characteristics of the square. In the first years, a park was laid out at the corner of Hürriyet Square on the barren site of the new town with a small pool and a statue in the middle of the pool. The park was known as "Havuzbasi." (Pool side) (Fig.2). With its landscape design and location, it was one of the most beautiful, well maintained and densely used parks of the capital city.

There are several news published in the journals with the photographs mentioning the park and the "evening concerts" performed by the band of Ankara Municipality. In those days 'Havuzbasi' was the end point of the promenade on the Atatürk Boulevard which would be the most popular recreation center towards the end of 30s. Particularly, the part of the Atatürk Boulevard at Yenisehir flanked



Fig. 1 Rapid development of the New Town and Hürriyet Square in 1928.



Fig. 2 "Havuzbasi" Pool side - Kizilay (1930).

with cafes and with parks, was the locale of the new public spaces of the Republican bourgeoisie.<sup>11</sup> The wide sidewalks on both sides of the boulevard leading to Hürriyet Square were decorated with chestnut trees. Even in hot summer days shadows of trees was used to provide a comfortable environment for recreational activities.

In 1929 the administrative office of the General Directorate of Kizilay (Red Crescent) had moved to its new building which was constructed at the prestigious corner of Hürriyet Square. Kizilay Building has initiated a significant change in the history of the square. The park in front of the building which used to be known as 'Havuzbasi' (Pool side) was renamed and began to be called as Kizilay Parky. Moreover, the General Directorate of Kizilay Building has given its name not only to the park adjacent to the building but also to the square itself. (Fig.3)

So, Hürriyet Square began to be called as Kizilay Square instead of Havuzbasi unofficially. It is obvious that the name Hürriyet Square has never been used and never been shared by the citizens. Hence, in the memories of the citizens and in the social life 'Hürriyet Square' has never been existed. So, today it is known and called as Kizilay Square and the district was called as Kizilay instead of Yenisehir (New Town).

Another significant urban artifact in the square was the establishment of Güven Park at the opposite corner of Kizilay Park. Güven Park was designed by the German architect Holzmeister, between the years 1932-1936.<sup>12</sup> (Fig.4). The park has become a significant landmark with its huge monument of security in front of the rectangular pool.

In fact Kizilay and Güven parks initiated a great change in the urban milieu. They were significant urban artifacts for the development of the new public culture and new social experience in the modern capital. In 1940s the square was the most significant ceremonial square of the newly established bureaucratic city. Also, the Atatürk Boulevard with a wide refuge in the middle decorated with fruit trees and without any traffic load was very impressive. In that sense, the Kizilay Square and the boulevard were perfect reflections of the modern image of the new capital.

The built environment accurately reflects the economic, technological and social characteristics of a country. Urban texture is affected by changes in the family structure, governmental system, economic policies and even by the international relations of the country.<sup>13</sup> In Turkey the period of the 1950s was a period of major transformation to a multi-party system and thus important changes took place in Turkish politics and social life. The rapid increase in population and migration from provinces to the capital were very far from Jansen's projections in 1930s. As a result of these demographic changes a competition for a new development plan was arranged. In 1955 the development plan prepared by R. Uybadin and N. Yücel won the competition. In 1957 implementation of the new urban plan was initiated. Parallel to these changes Hürriyet Square witnessed the changing built environment on the Atatürk Boulevard and Ziya Gökalp Street.

So, a radical change in the urban life style with the new building programmes occurred. In 1960's the physical characteristics of the square changed with the building of Turkey's first skyscraper which was designed as a commercial office space as Emek Building (1959-1964). The impressive scale of this building has added a striking new image to the cities skyline. After 1960s commercial activities began to spread on the edges of the Atatürk Boulevard and replaced the residential activities in this formerly housing environment. In the following years, Kizilay became an alternative commercial center to the central business district at Ulus region in the old city. The Kizilay park has become a small garden after the enlargement of the Atatürk Boulevard and Ziya Gökalp Street as a result of an irresistible traffic load in the city. The wide refuge decorating the boulevard with trees was destroyed.

In 1970s the Kizilay park which had already lost its physical characteristics as a park was totally replaced. Only a small garden remained in front of the Kizilay Building with a canteen and a

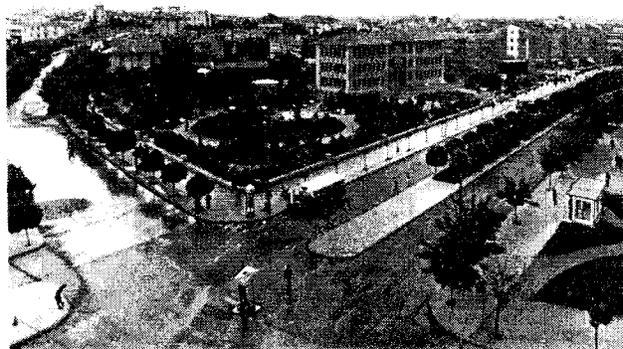


Fig. 3. The General Directorate of Kizilay (Red Crescent) Building and Hürriyet Square in 1930s.



Fig. 4. Kizilay and Güven Parks at Hürriyet Square in 1937.



Fig. 5. The Hürriyet Square in 1970s.

circular flower bed inside. In the following years, the Municipality initiated new arrangements at the square in order to solve the heavy traffic problem in the city center. (Fig.5)

In 1979 the Kizilay Building was demolished to be replaced with a modern building and the association moved to Karanfil Street temporarily. Although the Ministry of Culture has objected to this decision permission was given with the aim of renewing the urban environment; the square and the city (decision no: A-1607/79). Nevertheless, for years with a series of obstructions the site has remained empty and in ruins surrounded by billboards. During that time the site has been used as a car park area and an exhibition place



Fig. 6. The site of the demolished building of Kizilay surrounded by billboards in 1980s.



Fig. 7. The Hürriyet Square in 1999.



Fig. 8. An aerial view of the Hürriyet Square in 1990s.

of postcards for the new year and vacations. (Fig.6)

An architectural competition was organized to obtain a new project for the General Directorate Building of Kizilay at Hürriyet Square. The new project was accepted to meet the requirements of Kizilay's social facilities and also to be used for commercial purposes for the benefit of Kizilay (Red Crescent) Society, since the district has become the main commercial center of the city. The building was expected to make a contribution to the economic, social and cultural life in the city and also it was expected to be the symbol of Kizilay which has given its name to the square. In other words, it had to be monumental and symbolic, but respectful to the urban environment of the square.

The result of the competition was announced on 21st July, 1980. The project was accepted to be implemented immediately. However, the construction began in mid 90s and today, the building is still under construction. The new building with its bulk is a reminder of the story of the vanished Kizilay park and Havuzbasi. However, it reminds us the story that both "Havuzbasi" and "Kizilay Park" are already vanished. Today, despite the chaos and traffic junction at the site Kizilay Square (Hürriyet Square) is still the most popular ceremonial public outdoor space which acts as a stage for all kinds of meetings, ceremonies and celebrations. Even all national celebrations like the celebrations of the 75th year of Turkish Republic were realized at the square (Fig.7) So, Hürriyet Square is standing still despite the changing roles in the city. (Fig.8)

#### THE STORY DOESN'T END...

As a physical artifact, the contemporary city typically has many layers. It forms a palimpsest, a composite landscape made up of different built forms superimposed upon each other with the passing of time....What has gone before is important precisely because it is the locus of collective memory, of political identity, and of powerful symbolic meanings. It also constitutes a bundle of material resources containing both possibilities and barriers in the built environment for creative social change. There is rarely now a tabula rasa upon which new urban forms can be freely constructed.<sup>14</sup>

It is obvious that every civilization, culture and community puts its own stamp of importance on places within its domain. The nature and character of that stamp arises from the way people experience their world.<sup>15</sup> The cityscape took shape with the official ideology in the initial years of the capital city. The Hürriyet Square of the capital city was established with this identity. In that sense, it reflected the ideals of the Turkish Republic and national ideology. However, with the changing social and spatial structure of the city this identity has changed.

In the following years the way the citizens experience the square over a long time has changed the dialectic between the social practice and the place itself. The sense of place and its symbolic meaning have thus changed. Now, it has a different appearance and an unpredictable future.

However, from the layers of meaning in the development stages of the square we can read the social and physical signs and codes of urban milieu and understand the transformations in the social and urban structure, the relations of power and ideology as written into urban landscapes. In that sense, the square acts as a stage showing the changing images and changing structure. In its early years it was the symbol of modernization for the new capital city. Later it became the expression of new images and a new urban culture. Today, it is still the most popular stage for public gatherings despite its invasion by an increasing traffic load. It is clear that, meanings are not attributed to urban designs by designers but by the social dynamics and transformations in a city.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, "Cities and the Dead I" (London: Picador Press, 1983), pp. 64-65.
- <sup>2</sup> Mehmet Ali Kiliçbay, *Sehirler ve Kentler* (Ystanbul:Gece Yayinlari, 1993), p. 29 (Translated by N. Çağlar)
- <sup>3</sup> Yildirim Yavuz and Suha Özkan, "Finding a National Idiom: The First National Style," *Modern Turkish Architecture*, Holod, R., and Evin, A., (Eds.) (The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 51.
- <sup>4</sup> Afife Batur, "To Be Modern: Search for a Republican Architecture" *Modern Turkish Architecture*, Holod, R., and Evin, A., (Eds.) (The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 72.
- <sup>5</sup> Zeynep Uludag, "The Social Construction of Meaning in Landscape Architecture: A Case Study of Gençlik Parki in Ankara," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis in Architecture, Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 1998, p.106.
- <sup>6</sup> Faliş Rifki Atay, "Ankara'mizin Yıldönümü," *Ulus*, 12.11.1935:1. (Translated by Z. Uludag).
- <sup>7</sup> Koç, V., 1920 quoted in M. Özel, (Ed.). *Ankara*, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Güzel Sanatlar Genel Müdürlüğü, 1992) p.108 (Translated by Z. Uludag and P. Çağçi)
- <sup>8</sup> B. H. Liebrecht, "1937 Türkiye'si," *Ulus*, 25.8.1937, pp. 1-4. (Translated by Z. Uludag)
- <sup>9</sup> Zeynep Uludag, "The Social Construction of Meaning in Landscape Architecture: A Case Study of Gençlik Parki in Ankara," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis in Architecture, Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 1998, p. 83.
- <sup>10</sup> Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc. 1997), p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> Zeynep Uludag, "The Social Construction of Meaning in Landscape Architecture: A Case Study of Gençlik Parki in Ankara," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis in Architecture, Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 1998, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>12</sup> Nur Çağlar, "1923-1943 Dönemi Ankara Kenti Açık ve Yeşil Alanları ve Bugünkü Durumları Üzerine Bir Arastırma" unpublished Master's Thesis in Landscape Architecture, Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Peyzaj Mimarlığı Anabilim Dalı, 1986, p. 188.
- <sup>13</sup> Mete Tapan, "International Style: Liberalism in Architecture," *Modern Turkish Architecture*, Holod, R., and Evin, A., (Eds.) (The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 105.
- <sup>14</sup> David Harvey, "On Architects, Bees, and Possible Urban Worlds," *Anywise*, Davidson C.C. (Ed.), (London: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 220.

- <sup>15</sup> Norman Crowe, *Nature and the Idea of a Man-made World* (London: The MIT Press, 1995), p.74.

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