

Tree-Squares in Anatolia: What does an emergent public space mean?

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Urban places, besides their physical characteristics, are regarded as grounds where personal or collective meanings are created and accumulated. An individual can capture the meaning of a place, or create new meanings by relying on his/her own feelings and experiences. This research, by discussing the idea of togetherness of meaning and design in urban spaces, presents trees both as place making and meaning generating features, which honors the local identity of a site. Tree-squares are, therefore, the unique urban public places where this relationship is observed clearly.

The researcher's encounter with a Çınaraltı Square - a Turkish term used to define public places under massive and historical plane trees and will be referred as Tree-Square within the scope of this paper - which is marked by a plane tree that is called Musa (Moses) Plane in Antakya/Turkey has triggered an idea of questioning the urban planning and design approaches beyond the broadly accepted role of trees as natural and aesthetic beings in cities. Later on, Yalvaç Plane in Yalvaç/Isparta site, and the outstanding public place under its tremendous branches carried this wonder one step further, since this Tree-Square was not only an attractive place with a magnificent plane tree, but also the heart of the city. It was unplanned and un-envisioned by any kind of legal planning or design authority; instead, it was emerged and developed out of the cultural beliefs and traditions.

This emergent public space is a product of a long term social and historical interaction process that created the main public place of a medium-sized Turkish city, as in many Anatolian cities. It carries significant urban qualities, such as forming the heart of cities and having a visible impact on the urban macroform. Therefore, a case study research has been conducted in Yalvaç Tree-Square to gain a comprehensive grasp of the social and spatial organization of an urban place that is dominated by a historical plane tree. In this sense, the role of Yalvaç Plane in the historical and spatial development of an urban space will be evaluated by relying on socially produced meaning in the built environment

Keywords: Tree-Square; Public Space; Emergent Space; Local Identity; Meaning in Urban Design.

1 Introduction

Trees, as the first source of food, shelter and worship for man, are one of the most valuable living things on earth. From early times till today, people have always been in contact with trees, but once worshiped as gods or holy spirits, they now enrich urban exterior spaces. That is, this long-standing relationship is concealed behind the appreciation of existence of trees, and in turn the extensive use of them in the built environment. However, a child who plays around a tree, a person who planted a tree to honor the birth of his child or to provide profusion for his home are the meaningful remnants of this deeply-rooted relationship. Whether tangible or not, these facts point out a strong connection between people, trees and spaces that needs a comprehensive study covering a range of meanings of trees from physical to symbolic that may influence a person who walks by trees on streets of his/her city.

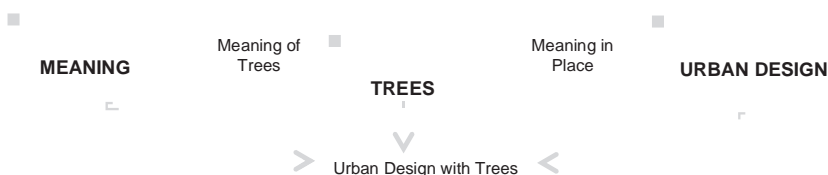


Figure 1. Connecting the Concepts: Meaning, Design and Trees

The need to understand the qualities of tree-squares in cities that contributes not only to 'emergent' place making processes but also to foster meaning in those places are the fundamental concerns within this paper. The connections between people, trees and urban public places are explored to excavate the meaning possible channels that contribute to the formation and maintenance of cultural identities on urban physical environment (Figure 1). Therefore a relevant question to ask is "*Do the emergent tree-places in Turkish cities contribute to the place making processes and meaningfulness within an urban settlement?*"

In order to construct the bridge between meaning and urban design on urban space through the evaluation of specific tree-places the first part of the paper elaborated the relationship between trees, people and places. The following part is devoted to present the richness of the meanings of tree use in urban environments especially in Anatolian region. The important point here is to see the reflections of the deep-rooted cultural and religious beliefs on the urban physical environment. The last part of this study illustrates this relationship from a closer perspective by conducting a detailed case study research on one the most well-known tree-squares in Turkey that is called Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square.

2 Trees, People and Places

"Trees are our strongest allies."
(Hageneder, 2005,6)

Urban design, as "*the study of how cities have achieved their physical form and the processes that go into renewing them*" (Cuthbert 2006, 1) is not merely interested in physical arrangements. Social aspects, symbolic values, meanings, collective memory and conflicts are also of utmost significance (Cuthbert, 2006, 1). Moreover, urban place, as the main study ground of urban design, is composed of three elements, form, activity and meaning. The formation of places is closely linked to the culture and social aspects of a society and hence people try to "match their characteristics, values, expectations, norms, behaviors" (Rapoport, 1977, 4). In this sense, urban design actions should come into the scene to provide places for people to maintain their lives and reflect their feelings. This is not an easy task, since the meaning formation requires a mutual and social interrelation between people and their environment.

By definition, a tree is "*a woody perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height and bearing lateral branches at some distance from the ground*" according to the Oxford dictionary. Without doubt, there is much more about the meaning and the use of trees. For instance, they have multiple benefits ranging from environmental to psychological contributions in an urban setting (Nadel *et al.* 1977; Sommer, 2003; Arnold, 1993). Thus, trees are extensively used in urban planning and design activities to satisfy various design purposes, such as enhancing urban environment, adding scale, dividing spaces; creating discrete spaces, rhythm and geometries when used properly (Arnold 1993). Besides, as representatives of nature itself trees enhance urban life by humanizing urban landscape with their visual powers, which in turn shape the human psychology positively (Nadel *et al.*, 1977). Beyond the physical and psychological

contributions, there exist a profound relationship between people and trees shaped by traditions, symbolism, religions, metaphors, psychological and social metaphors and perceptions (Sommer, 2003).

In essence, trees provide multi-dimensional benefits for human life and for cities. Therefore, this research focuses on the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, urban design, landscape architecture, ecology, theology and alike to acquire the taxonomy of meanings of trees and to solve the complicated relationships, benefits and feelings attached to them. The complexity and density of the subject is striking when different fields are studied. As the meanings of trees are examined from physical to spiritual perspectives, it gets harder to grasp and categorize the relationship and interactions between people and trees. Thus, in accordance with the findings from a comprehensive literature review, a classification for significance of trees has been formed as follows:

- Physical – Visual Benefits
- Special Benefits and Meanings for People
- Deeper Attachments

Table 1 summarizes the categories showing the importance of trees in three broad meaning levels. This classification has been developed in accordance with the environmental perception and cognition process related to grasping the sense of place. That is, the tree here may be an object at first sight, but as it gains meaning in time or in response to experiences, it may become a powerful phenomenon and may satisfy the need of meaning generation in urban places.

Table 1 Classification for Significance of Trees

	Classification of Meaning		Explanation
1st Meaning Level	Physical – Visual Benefits	Environmental	Trees' benefits for urban biodiversity and climate or trees' potential to rise real estate values etc.
2nd Meaning Level	Special Benefits & Meanings for People	Feeling Stimulator	Positive psychological and sociological effect of trees on people. Such as nurturing local identity, healing damaged self-etc.
3rd Meanings Level	Deeper Attachments	Trees in Spirituality & Cosmology	A deeper perception of trees and special ties with people. The deeply-rooted relationship between people and trees that shows itself on mythology, religion, spiritualism and depth psychology.

2.1 Physical and Visual Benefits of Trees

The studies concerning trees are generally focused on their environmental and visual benefits. Since these are easier to measure and observe, they are considered as the first level of meanings of trees in this research. Trees, at the first glance, are the beautiful features and noble representatives of nature in urban areas. They contribute to ecology by preserving biodiversity, rainwater runoff, heat balances, gas emissions and the like. These valuable attributes they construct the initial meaning association with trees. In other words, when we experience trees in

urban places, we tend to think more of their physical beauty. Their appearance can easily be an asset of aesthetics of nature. Besides, on a sunny day, we comfort ourselves along their shade, and on a rainy day we protect ourselves under their branches.

2.2 Special Meanings of Trees for People

Until recently, trees were thought as mere ornamental or cultivated additions to a cityscape. This horticultural view has been accompanied by an awareness of the contribution of trees to the psychological life in the city today (Nadel et al. 1977; Arnold, 1993; Sommer, 2003). Accordingly the second meaning level appreciates the positive effects of urban trees on human health, psychology and culture. This is because with their size, shape and other physical intrinsic characteristics trees create visual attractiveness which can easily engage our senses (Jones et al. 2002, 91). These are the sounds of their leaves, the flickering light among their branches.

Furthermore, studies on environmental psychology show stress-reducing and restorative effects of trees and landscapes on children and adults (Sommer, 2003). Also, healing effects of trees which were measured by Ulrich (1981) point out that individuals who experience urban scenes with vegetation have “*slower heartbeats, lower blood pressure, more relaxed brain waves*” than the ones who do not. In addition to visual responses, the smell and the noise of the trees and forests have healing effects on people as well (Schroeder 1990).

The resemblances between people and trees could be another reason for special ties to emerge. The humane characteristics of trees such as standing up, having arms, feet, legs are mostly associated with trunk; root and branches of trees are the first set of reasons. For instance Native Americans call trees “*our standing brothers and sisters*” (Hageneder 2005, 6).

Besides, trees protect people from sun, rain and wind, arousing a feeling of shelter or home creating profound bonds between man and trees (Schroeder 1990). When these similarities and psychological ties come together, trees are capable of reminding sociological meanings for communities. In other words, trees embody some social characteristics of people as well. For instance, when separately planted trees grow different than the ones that grow together in a forest. This is a similar situation for people who live alone or connected to a society. There is a well-known verse from the famous poet *Nazım Hikmet* that expresses the ideal life by exemplifying trees that touches upon this very context:

“Living alone and free like a tree and in brotherly love like a forest.”

2.3 Deeper Attachments between People and Trees

There are strong and deep psychological connections between people and trees that cannot be unconsciousness. The connections between primitive and modern man through meaningful remnants such as symbols and myths of the unconsciousness should not be ignored. Jung’s analytic psychology studies show the relevancy of ancient symbols -one of which is the tree- for modern man as well (Henderson cited in Jung 1964, 106).

This profound association is explored mostly by psychology, symbolism, mythology, and studies in cosmology. Trees and man share a common fate shaped throughout the history which resulted in rich accumulation of traditions and symbolism. They are one of the particular beings that

affected the imaginative life of man considerably (Nadel *et al.* 1977, 1; Porteous, 2002, 150). Almost all people regarded trees as the representatives of some deeper virtue beyond their physical existence, which in turn resulted in strong attachments between people and trees especially in spiritual and psychological dimensions (Philpot, 2004, Nadel *et al.*, 1977). Their imposing sizes, changing colors, sounds, durability and solidity may have triggered the early people's imagination. Trees commonly were seen as an embodiment of life or a spiritual essence, the main axis of the universe, and as the center of the world connecting three realms; namely earth, heaven and hell (Philpot 2004 ; Fontana 1994). The upright position, branches reaching to the sky, changing colors through seasons and many other characteristics of trees have resulted in the experience of awe (Porteous 2002, 149; Schroeder 1992). Trees were the first temples, homes, sanctuaries for men who supplied his first food and clothing from them (Porteous 2002, 216).

This spiritual connection between people and trees can be exemplified through the history of tree worship and its contemporary traces. There are interesting norms and daily practices of modern man that carry traces from this deeply-rooted relationship. For instance, evergreens are seen as the symbols of the eternal life, while the deciduous trees represent regeneration and immortality in various regions (Fontana 1994; Schroeder, 1993). Another remarkable example is the Christmas tree. Pine trees are decorated during the Christmas time as a symbol of the continuity of life even in the cold or "lifeless" months of the year (Fontana 1994, 100). A famous turcologist Gönül Tekin (2009) states that the first traces regarding to the symbolism of a world tree and a tree god date back to the Sumerians (ca. 4500 and 4000 BC).

From the earliest periods of time till today, these powerful associations to the trees could have left marks in the psychological and spiritual perception of modern man. Jung (1964) explains this historical interconnection as the bridge between conscious expressions of rational thoughts and the primitive, colorful and pictorial world of instinct (Jung 1969, 48-49). It is clear that this third level of meaning association towards trees is the most profound and enigmatic one.

Trees in Symbolism

Trees in mythology are the symbols representing what is unexplainable for the primitive man who sought answers for what is going on around him. Therefore, these myths offered explanations by relating real life incidents to some spiritual or natural references. In this sense, trees stood for life, growth, fertility, health, regeneration, wisdom, enlightenment, wish, healing and strength almost in all ancient beliefs (Schroeder, 1992, 75; Ergun, 2004, 17).

Especially one ruling tree that stands in the middle of earth, with its roots reaching to underground, its trunk standing on the ground and branches rising to the sky has been a significant symbol for the cosmic or the "World Tree", which represented hell (roots), earth (trunk) and heaven (branches) (Ergun 2004, 17). This concept of tree of life dates back to the Neolithic times (Hageneder, 2005, 8). One of the famous examples belongs to Scandinavian mythology and called "Ash Yggdrasil". It was believed that Ash Yggdrasil's branches covered earth, and the creator made his decisions beside it (Ergun 2004, 20). There are other cosmic trees as "Hayat/Dünya Ağacı" in Turkish belief, "Irmisul" in Germany and "Haoma Tree" in Iran and many alike. These myths indicate the similarity of perceptions regardless to the geography, since there is always a colossal

tree at the center of the world, covering the three realms of the universe and ruling the life on earth. It is for sure that, symbolic values of trees go beyond the World Tree.

3 Tree-Places in Anatolia

The literature findings indicate that the earliest traces for tree cults date back to the 4th century BC to the Huns (Hunlar) in Anatolia. At the end of every summer, Huns performed a ritual around a pine tree located on a skirt of a mountain in their capital city. This can be considered as a mark showing that the majesty of an individual tree with impressive size and shape affected the lifestyle of Turkic people. Furthermore, the most common symbol of a cosmic world tree is known as Hayat Ağacı (Tree of Life) holding the three realms of the universe with its nine branches representing nine levels of sky reaching to divine and as long as this tree stays green, life on earth will continue (Ergun, 2004, 145-146). Similar to the other examples of world tree around the world, the branches of Hayat Ağacı represent birth and death. The tree of world (or life) is single, lonely, magnificent in size and shape, deciduous, life giving, old, connecting the three realms of universe and covering the whole world in all civilizations (Ergun, 2004, 193-195).

There are some specific tree symbols. The beech tree, for instance, was sacred to Shamanist Turks. Shamans' drums were believed to be made from tree of life and hence, Shamans had to be present in all sorts of rituals to make the creator hear their will. According to an Altay Legend, a pine rises at the center of the world touching to sky (to god), and it is possible to see this pine drawing on some Shaman drums. There is a well-known association of tree cult to shamanism, totemism and polytheistic religion of Turkic peoples. Sky God (Göktanrı), for instance, tree of life is a reflection of the creator on earth (Ergun 2004, 148).

3.1 Plane Trees in Ottoman Era

The descriptions of cities made by Moltke in the first half of the 19th century prove the significance of existence of trees. Moreover, the noteworthy role of plane trees worth mentioning in detail. Plane tree is known as a symbol of the Ottoman Empire, and thus they were frequently planted in urban places. The story behind this symbolic value is a dream in which the founder of the Ottoman Empire Osman Gazi saw a plane tree covering the entire sky and ruling three continents. This dream was interpreted as the forerunner for foundation of empire. It is also believed that, after this dream a dervish named *Geyikli Baba* planted an old plane tree to present the solidity and eternity of a new empire (Ergun 2010, 231). Ünaydın (1938 cited in Çınar et al. 2004, 63-64) emphasizes the link between the plane tree and Turkish identity by saying:

“Plane is the very tree of Turks. It is beautiful, that much connectedness to the earth ...When it covers a square, it gives coolness and shade. It is also visible in our architecture. On one side of a mosque there is a plane trees symbolizing life and on the other a beech trees symbolizing death.”



Figure 2. Small Raised Square with a Plane Tree

(Source: Cerasi 1985, 45)

Furthermore, the valuable studies of Cerasi (1985) demonstrate the significance of tree and water elements for open space arrangement in Ottoman cities. He describes that in a courtyard, near a fountain or along river majestic trees were the “pivots of an urban square” defining a human intervention that generates “urbanity” which integrates culture, nature and what is built (Cerasi 1985, 43) (Figure 2).

On account of this symbolic value, plane trees were frequently used to enrich urban places, especially in social complexes during the Ottoman era. For example, in the mosque yards plane trees provided shade and a nodal point for people to gather, creating an open public place for people. Plane trees were marking the memory of a dream that came true about a great regality and at the same time they are unique collectors of people in Turkish cities although they had lost their true meanings through years (Cerasi, 1985; Lowry 2009, 97).

3.2 Trees in Turkish Culture Today

Every community carries their former beliefs as it moves to another level of religious or cultural understanding. Even not fulfilled completely, these habits and customs are imprinted on the cultural codes of the society (Ergun 2004, 391). Tree cults, in this sense, can be described as meaningful remnants of a deep rooted past. Ergun (2004) argues that, today the trees with their imposing characteristics are looked upon as the reminders of the existence of Allah while former cults are being evolved into other type of rituals and customs.

There are over one thousand tree cults all around the Anatolian region today (Ergun 2004 ; Lowry 2009, 97). The beech tree, pine, cypress, mulberry, plane trees are the frequently seen trees carrying a symbolic value in the Anatolian geography. To illustrate, beech tree stands for the kindness and wellbeing, the pine for the uniqueness and greatness of the creator, poplar tree for the independence, plane for power and regency, cypress tree for the eternity and so on (Ergun 2004, 195-234).

As some trees are symbolizing life, it was a tradition to plant trees around sanctuaries or cemeteries. Today people plant trees on the direction of tiptoes and heads of the dead in Turkey. The cypress tree is commonly seen in the graveyards (Figure 3). People believe that the souls of their loved ones reach to the skies (to heaven) and as long as the tree is green, the soul is believed

to be in peace (Ergun 2004, 234). Besides symbolizing the peaceful eternal life, cypress trees rise straightly to the sky and have gentle roots that do no harm to the graves. As the tree for death, the form of cypress trees was linked to their moral impacts by Hisar (2006 cited in Çınar et al. 2010, 64) as: *“They were always looking at the sky, as if not to see any slavishness”*. A famous Turkish poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek summarizes the perception about cypress trees by this single verse from his poem of *Canım İstanbul* as:

“Cypress, graceful cypress curtains the after-life.”

The “Dilek Ağacı-Wish Tree” is a noteworthy illustration for historical Turkish customs related to trees (Figure 4). The wish trees are quite widespread in Anatolia. People hang clothes up on some special trees wishing that their wills to be heard by the divine. The paragraph below explains these appealing characteristics of trees:

“When you get close to one single tree, you see some pale rags of every color hanging on the dry and puzzled branches of them. These are the vows of desires plucked from the cuffs of jackets and tied to those puzzled branches. They are the vows of beautiful desires that may never come true.”

(Birand, *Anadolu Manzaraları*, 1999)



Figure 3. Cemetery and Cypress Trees
(Personal Archive, 2012)



Figure 4. A Wish Tree in Cappadocia
(Oktay, 2012)

Another example is the trees which are planted next to tombs, mausoleums and mosques. It is almost impossible to think of a tomb or mosque without a tree in its close vicinity. The reason can be the meaningful remnants from the earlier rituals of associating trees with divinity and gods. Today, the trees planted near worship related places or tombs are believed to symbolize the existence of god and protect the spirits of dead ones (Figures 5-6).



Figure 5. Trabzon Square: The Mosque and Plane Tree (Gedikli, 2012)



Figure 6. Edirne: Selimiye Mosque and Plane Tree (Günay, 2007)

The symbolic value of the mulberry tree is also remarkable. It is known as the home tree and planted in front of the houses before they are built. The mulberry tree is planted to prevent bad luck, to bring happiness and luck to the home, to mark their territory and to provide shade as well. It stands for that the spirit of houses, and provides happiness and profusion (Ergun 2004, 238).

The common tradition of planting trees in front of houses can be interpreted in terms of two aspects, the first of which is the visible impact of trees on the urban layout and the second aspect is the maintenance of a deeply-rooted relationship. In terms of the first aspect, trees planted in front of houses can be perceived as an integration of green to the urban tissue. Le Corbusier, for instance, states that “A Turk, before he builds a house, makes the garden and plant the tree, while French cut the tree to build the house.” (cited in Ergun 2004, 299) although the present situation has turned the other way around. For the second aspect, there seems to be a symbolic value of these trees for the owner of houses even if it stays hidden nowadays.



Figure 7. Mulberry Tree and a House (Personal Archive, 2012)



Figure 8. Pine Tree and a House (Günay, 2006)



Figure 9. Walnut Tree and a House (Personal Archive, 2012)

The figures 7-8-9 illustrate the house and tree relationship in Turkey. They are from various settlements from Turkey, and in each one of it, there is a different housing and tree type which makes this tradition (or ritual) significant for the urban fabric. In spite of being a spontaneous application, this sort of tree use indicates a valuable urban feature that has a word in the

organization of urban space.

4 Case Study: Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square

Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square in Yalvaç in the province of Isparta is located in the Central Anatolian region of Turkey. This tree-place serves as a public square and an 800 year-old plane tree which is called Yalvaç Plane stands in the middle. This tree is at the heart of the urban fabric forming a gathering area for the citizens and visitors of Yalvaç. Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square is a particular example which is developed spontaneously throughout the years. That is, the existence of the plane tree had affected the spatial development of the city. People have regarded trees as focal points for years, and yet the intentional design interventions enrich the site's spatial qualities as well. In this sense, this chapter presents the methodological approach to the main research question, how it is evaluated with the case research and the related findings.

The History of Tree / Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square

Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square is one of the most attractive urban areas in the city of Yalvaç. It stands out as a distinctive and lively urban area both for local people and visitors. This place is surrounded by a variety of commercial uses such as coffee houses, hairdressers and restaurants. This 800 year old-plane tree dominates this public square with its 25 meters height and 3.2 meters diameter. It embraces the whole square with its magnificent branches of 8 to 16 meters length.

The history of the site and tree is not clear in the current sources. However, an interview conducted with the mayor of Yalvaç city, Mr. Tekin Bayram, has revealed some clues regarding the historical background of the square. The mayor states that, history of the plane tree dates back to the Battle of Myriokephalon in 1176. During this war, army of the Crusades had been defeated near Yalvaç region and Turkish empery had proven its dominancy in the Anatolian region once again under the leadership of Kılıçarslan the Second. It is believed that Kılıçarslan's brother and Emir Ahmet came near to the Yalvaç city, and Yalvaç plane tree had been planted as a sign of victory at the beginning of the 13th century A.D. The Devlethan Mosque near the plane tree was built in the 14th century in the name of the brother of Kılıçarslan the Second. According to the mayor, the Seljuk Bath, mosque and plane tree all in close vicinity give clues regarding the settlement pattern in Seljuk period.



Figure 10. Çınaraltı Square in 1946
(Yalvaç Municipality Archive)



Figure 11. Çınaraltı Square in 2012
(Personal Archive)

Since this monumental plane tree has been a key feature within the urban fabric for 800 years, the spatial organization around the tree surrounding deserves a closer look. It should be noted that, there is not adequate information regarding the former situations of Çınaraltı Square. Old pictures, interviews with mayor and local people are used to conceptualize the site in pre-90s.

Based on the data collected from narrators and old pictures, the area seems to have served for gathering and functioned as a marker of the mosque. Even back then, there were tables and other sitting elements which oriented local people and visitors to gather around the plane tree (Figure 10).

The Mayor explains that before the 1990s the site was already acting as the heart of Yalvaç, together with the sitting elements and socio-cultural activities (e.g. call and response duets, festivals, a cinema called 'Çınar Sineması' etc.). Plane tree was located at a corner of a paved street and a road was passing right beside it. Older interviewees added that there was a stream on the other side of Yalvaç plane. People would drink water from a well that was fed by this stream. Briefly, Yalvaç Çınaraltı has always been the very public place that gathers people together, makes it possible to share thoughts, entertains local people, and welcomes visitors for many years. The spatial organization of the square before 1990s has been illustrated by taking the old pictures and statements of the participants into account (Figure 12).

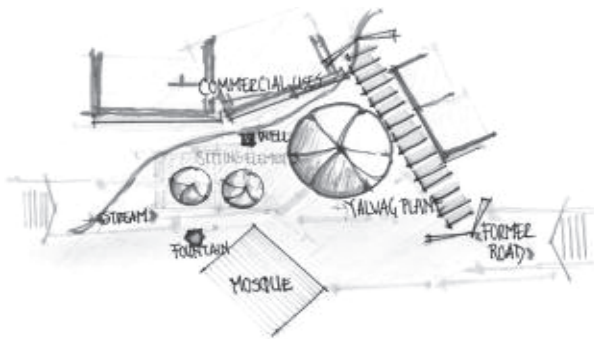


Figure 12. The Square Before the 1990s
(drawn by the author with respect to interviews and old pictures)

Today, Yalvaç Çınaraltı square dominates a significant urban area after some design arrangements held on site. There are 13 coffee shops, one hair dresser and two restaurants around the tree. Also, former road was canceled and added to the place. The surface of the square was differentiated than the surrounding area to indicate the “tree’s place”. There are two ottoman bazaars (arasta) which are ironsmith and shoemaker bazaars opening up to the square. Devlethan Mosque, the Mausoleum of Emir Ahmet can be listed as the important religious and architectural values near Çınaraltı (Figure 11).

4.1 Research Design

Several academic fields come into the picture while constructing the theoretical framework, although the point of departure for this research has mostly been on the studies of urban design.

Relying on the findings of this variety, literature review has clarified the diversity and

complexity of the subject of meaning, elaborated social, spatial, cultural and psychological contexts related to the relationship between meaning, trees and urban places. During this, four hypotheses have been constructed to investigate through this case study in accordance with the main concerns of the research which are:

-The relationships between people and trees have direct or indirect impacts on the location and spatial organization of a tree-place.

-Tree-places act as semi-public or public places that offer various activity choices and motives.

-Tree-places carry the characteristics for its users to associate meanings and to develop a place identity, place attachment and the notion of sense of place.

-There exist a profound relationship between people and trees that is shaped throughout history and experiences.

Four sub-questions about how trees affect people and places in urban areas are formulated accordingly. They are to analyze the role of trees in an urban place in three ways: meaning, activity and form -the three essential components of urban place-. These questions intend to have a grasp of how trees define urban **activities** and spatial **forms** and in what ways trees add **meaning** to places and in turn to people. Table 2 shows the sub-questions, related research approach, data collection techniques and data analysis:

Table 2. Research Design

Sub-questions	Type of Research	Data Collection	Data Analysis
What are spatial qualities of Çınaraltı Square within the urban fabric of Yalvaç?	Exploratory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations • Municipal Archives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawings
What do the users of the Çınaraltı Square do with respect to the presence of the plane tree?	Exploratory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Ended Questionnaire • Municipal Archives • Observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content Analysis • Direct Quotations • Mapping/Drawings
What do the users of square perceive about the contribution of plane to the formation of meaning in place?	Exploratory	Open Questionnaire Ended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classifications by using Quotations
What are the constituents of meanings that people assign to trees of common urban places?	Exploratory	Open Questionnaire Ended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content Analysis • Direct Quotations

Respondents

The case study aimed to integrate respondents from different age groups, genders and occupations to the research process to minimize biases that could have caused by the dominance of a specific group. Hence, the respondents contributed to the research carried out in the Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square represent the inhabitants of Yalvaç city from different age groups, occupations and genders. The method of random sampling was applied in choosing the respondents. Twenty-two participants were asked about their perception of the plane tree, the meanings they attached to it, and their activities in the tree-place (Table 3). So as to provide gender equality in the case study

research, the very vicinity of Çınaraltı Square was chosen to speak with local women, as they barely use the square itself.

Table 3. Concepts and Related Interview Questions

Sections	Questions	
INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS	1. 2. 3. 4.	What are the main reasons for you to come to Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square? Can you please describe this place? What do you feel when you come here? What do you see around you that triggers these emotions?
ACTIVITY	5.	How do you use this square? How often? Which characteristics of the square determine how you use it?
MEANING of TREE AND THE PLACE	6. 7.	What feelings does this plane tree evoke in you? How would you describe the plane tree with your own words?
	8. 9.	What does this plane tree mean to you? What would happen if the plane tree were not be here? What kind of a place would this square be? How would you feel?
	10.	Do you have any special memories about the plane tree on the Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square?

4.2 Form

The Yalvaç Plane dominates a substantial place within the urban fabric of Yalvaç. Even the best pictures from the site may not explain well enough the impressiveness of the tree and the place under its tremendous branches. The plane tree shows itself in the middle of the urban macroform and main transportation lines of the city of Yalvaç even from the satellite images. The tree says: "I'm here." Although one is walking towards the plane tree with an awareness of its majesty, the first meeting is still highly impressive. The width of the square is narrower than the foliage of the tree. The branches hang over the roofs of surrounding buildings. There are so many people taking advantage of the shade of the tree, sitting in the cool area during a hot summer day. At the opposite of the square stands a face-stone coated Seljuk mosque and a fountain (şadırvan) next to it, both completing the definition of a square of Turkish settlements; a fountain, a mosque and a plane tree (Figure 13).

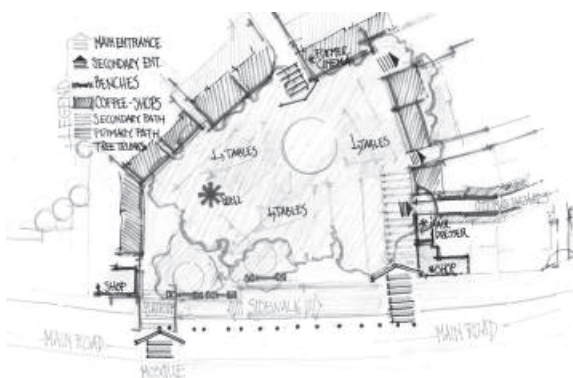


Figure 13. The Spatial Story of the Çınaraltı Square (Personal Drawing)

4.3 Activity

There are 13 coffee shops, a hairdresser, two restaurants and a former cinema (now vacant) within the square, which serve to local people and provide a meeting place. During the field research, there were a lot of people present in the case area. However, the local women do not seem to frequently use the Çınaraltı Square as far as my personal observations and some respondents' declarations are concerned. Only some high-educated female visitors were spending time in the site. There were some local women, as well, who came together with their families, but preferring to sit at the very edge of the site.

Firstly, the respondents tend to explain their activities on the site firstly stating by the activity types (62.2%) as meeting, chatting, spending time and so on, then with the motives (30.4%) that make them prefer to conduct that activity in this place as the existence of friends, relatives, coffee shops; and finally by mentioning about their frequency of visits (7.4%). Furthermore, there arise three noteworthy activities going on in the tree-place, namely: local bazaar, festivals and funerals.

4.4 The Meaning of Tree-Place

To be able to grasp the significance of Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square, the interview findings are grouped under six content groups -*aesthetics, spatial, historical, sensuous dimensions, nature and belonging*-. They specify that people express themselves mostly by stating a **sensation** (peace, comfort, calmness, serenity, relief, etc.), a notion of belonging (feeling like home, belonging here, etc.), a **spatial** assessment (centrality, meeting point, intersection, etc.), a **natural** characteristic (green, climatic comfort, natural, etc.), a **historical** association (history, past, old, etc.) and an **aesthetic** relation (beautiful, interesting, etc.).

Table 4. Content Groups Related to the Meaning Attribute of the Tree-place

	Content Groups	Phrases from Respondents
1	Aesthetics	"This is a beautiful place."
2	Spatial	"Here is the center of Yalvaç. You can see/find everyone here."
3	Historical	"This place tells the history."
4	Sensuous Dimension	"I find peace here. You get rid of all the sadness and concerns."
5	Nature	"Here is green and natural."
6	Belonging	"You feel like you are home."

Among the content groups provided in Table 4, the sense-related statements hold the highest ratio of 63%. That is, people tend to describe the significance of the tree-place via their emotions. The notion of belonging follows it with a ratio of 10%. While the space-related explanations hold a ratio of 8,5% among the respondents, nature-related ones are 7,5%. The least mentions are historical (5,7%) and aesthetic (4,9%) characteristics of the tree-place (Table 5) . Briefly, the users of Çınaraltı plane have strong sentimental bounds towards the area as they mostly express themselves using the words such as 'peaceful', 'comfortable', 'calm' 'happy'. Another significant point is that the respondents emphasize their feelings of safety and belonging frequently. Existence of familiar faces and the long stability of the site seem to make Yalvaç people feel themselves connected to the place. Çınaraltı Square, therefore, is a meaningful site for its users which contains prospering natural, historical and aesthetic characteristics.

Sense of place

Yalvaç inhabitants seem to have developed deeper attachments with the Çınaraltı Square that go beyond what place means solely in physical terms. Within this perspective, it is necessary to mention the notion of sense of place that is an attachment to the spirit of place which is aroused by the meanings that evoke in people's mind about a place.

Local people start talking about the functional or spatial characteristics of the place; but after a while, they tend to express their feelings towards the tree's place. It is clear from the interviews that the Çınaraltı place has produced and is still producing profound meanings for local people which in turn make them attached, remember the 'past' and associate 'profound' feelings towards it.

*"This plane is the soul of Yalvaç, the soul of a city. Also, in here all the city is represented."
(Mayor of Yalvaç)*

Table 5. Frequency of Mentions of the Perceived Contents Related to Meaning of Tree-Place

Content Groups		Contents	Frequency of Mentions	Total Freq. of Mentions	Ratio %
1	Sensuous Dimension	Comfort	12	67	63%
		Coolness	9		
		Crowd	8		
		Peace	7		
		Familiar faces	6		
		Calmness	4		
		Getting rid of stress	3		
		Reminds past	3		
		Serene	3		
		Safe	2		
		Relief	1		
		Proud	1		
Happy	1				
2	Belonging	Familiar faces	6	11	10,4%
		Hometown	2		
		Everyone is connected	2		
		Belongs to Yalvaç	1		

Content Groups		Contents	Frequency of Mentions	Total Freq. of Mentions	Ratio %
3	Spatial	Centre / central	5	9	8,5%
		Square of Yalvaç	1		
		Being close to public buildings	1		
		Quite big	1		
		Interaction point	1		
4	Nature	Being green and natural	4	8	7,5%
		Coolness	2		
		A beautiful nature	2		
5	Historical	Represents history	3	6	5,7%
		Old place	1		
		Has a spirit	1		
		Different history	1		
6	Aesthetics	Beautiful	3	5	4,9%
		Different	1		
		Interesting	1		
Total				106	100%

Place attachment

Familial, social, political, economic linkages and religious, moral, mythological dimensions are the concepts that explain the attachment to a place (Low 1992, 170). In other words, people, for any of these reasons may feel themselves attached to a place. It, naturally, depends on individual or cultural experiences and memories about a place (Tuan 2001).

Eight participants out of twenty-two state that they visit the Çınaraltı Square 'regularly' or 'in every occasion'. This physical attachment has been supported by the narrator's statements on their common past and profound connections with the place.

*"I see old people, young people, and close friends all together here. There are grandfathers and grandsons sitting together. Sometimes you can see three generations side by side."
(Housewife, F)*

Place Identity:

The concept of place identity is the unique and continuous characteristic of places, which differentiate them from other places. Another issue about the place identity is that it is based on individual experiences. Some of the respondents indicated that the place make them feel they are from Yalvaç, while some others specifically stated the place-related information such as the uniqueness of the Çınaraltı Square.

*"(When I come here) I feel like I'm from Yalvaç. This square is the most important place of Yalvaç. I feel happy and proud here."
(Retired, M)*

*"It's a feeling of belonging to a stable area for years now, the symbol of Yalvaç."
(Retired, M)*

5 Concluding Remarks

The theoretical discussions for bridging the meaning and urban design with the help of trees have been illustrated with a real life context. Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square sets a successful example for its values in contexts of space and meaning. This tree-place is an outcome of long historical processes. Once there was only the plane and earlier people of Yalvaç must have seen it substantial and acted accordingly to the tree and the place around it. These initial and spontaneous acts have merged with the purposeful design actions on the site today. That is, 800 year old existence of a being has been favored by its users throughout the years, and in turn the plane tree carried the spirit of its history, meaning and value till today, and it is quite sure that this will last as far as the tree lives.

What has been inferred from this case study shows the validity of the hypotheses produced for a tree-place scenario, that is holding the meaning of the place and the tree together, influenced urban design actions and was influenced by them. This case study research has presented four hypotheses and related four sub-questions. These concerns have been enlightened throughout this case research and can briefly be analyzed respectively:

(1) **The relationships between people and trees have direct or indirect impacts on the location and spatial organization of a tree-place.** There is a strong interrelation between the location of the place and the urban macroform. The 800 years of existence of tree seems to shape the design interventions and people's acts towards the site. Consequently, Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square can be seen as a node, a spinal element, a natural landmark and a public square

(2) **Tree-places act as semi-public or public places that offer various activity choices and motives.** The variables and the prominent content units that are validating the public characteristics of the site are:

- **Activity Types:** Meeting, Chatting, Spending Time, Drinking Tea-Coffee, Coming Together etc.
- **Motives for Visits:** Existence of Friends, Relatives, The Tree and its Benefits etc.
- **Frequency of Visits:** Every Possible Occasion, Regularly etc.

(3) **Tree-places carry the characteristics for its users to associate meanings and to develop a place identity, place attachment and the notion of sense of place.** The respondents indicated their feelings towards the Çınaraltı Square fostered a new framework for the matter. In this respect, the main content groups have been developed as below all referring the richness of the responses to the related question. The users of the square have multi-level meanings for the place. Furthermore, most of the statements were about the sensuous meanings of tree-place such as its being comfortable, peaceful, and crowded and so on. This group of meanings was categorized as:

- **Sensuous Dimension** (comfort, peace, coolness, serenity, happiness etc.)
- **Belonging** (hometown, familiar faces etc.)
- **Spatial** (central, close vicinity square etc.)
- **Nature** (green, beautiful nature etc.)

- **Historical** (old, spirit, representative etc.)
- **Aesthetics** (beautiful, different, interesting)

Moreover, other variables (place identity-attachment and sense of place) inferred from the literature research also supported this hypothesis. Respondents consistently expressed their feelings of attachment, belonging to the place, as well as the uniqueness, identity and symbolic value of Yalvaç Çınaraltı Square. All of which emphasize the validity of measurers of **meaning in place** for the case of Yalvaç Çınaraltı.

(4) **There exists a profound relationship between people and trees that is shaped throughout history and experiences.** To unveil the meaning patterns and profound connection between people and trees was a fundamental aim of this research. It was of utmost importance to understand the meaning of the plane tree for its users by considering the fuzziness of the distinctions between the meaning of tree-place and the plane tree. Specific questions were designed in this respect. The findings of the content analysis supported the meaning variables derived from the literature research. That is, the respondents express the meaning levels in accordance with the main components introduced during the third chapter. Starting from the highest ratio of mentions to the lowest, these statements are:

Yalvaç Plane as:

- **A Symbol** (symbol of city, or as a symbol carrying humane characteristics such as being lonely, protective, embracing)
- **A Utility** (a beneficial object providing shade, Coolness; attracting clients)
- **A Sensorial Object** (a reminder of the past, evoking the feelings of sadness and peace)
- **A Design Element** (unique, irreplaceable, central)
- **A Bridge to self** (immortality of people)

The main hypothesis of this research has stated that the trees mean more to people and places than it is visible today and this makes trees valuable urban features for spatial planners to help them generate meaning or create discrete places in urban areas. This hypothesis has been supported by the findings of the literature survey as well as the case study research. The investigation of tree-places has demonstrated the power and impact of trees on urban places and provided a framework for further design applications with trees. The problem of placelessness and loss of distinctiveness can successfully be solved through this awareness by enhancing existing tree-places or creating new examples. The concluding question in this context is how to relate these findings to the fields of urban planning and design. Below are presented the inferences design guidelines prepared in accordance with the literature survey and case study research. They are presented to create a framework for design actions through which designers can care more about the deliberate use of trees in cities.

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