Meanings and social roles of the republic period urban parks in Ankara

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Abstract

Meanings of urban parks as open public spaces will be explored in urban readings. Social roles of parks will be discussed by using published resources and observations. The daily life in Ankara changed with the urban gardens. However, over time, they lost their characteristics because of new development. Interventions on urban structure reflect the current ideology and its physical presence. Although urban parks change physically, they still continue the task of representing ideology. In this perspective, the aim of this paper is to examine and identify the meanings of urban parks with respect to sustainability and conservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Urban gardens; ideology; sustainability; development; social

1. Introduction

Many sources claim that cities entered a rapid period of growth with the industrial revolution, as a result of which the distinction between rural and urban began to weaken. With this event, new construction, which at first began to emerge around the industrialized zone, has transformed the entire urban structure, production methods, social relationships and the ideology of the state. Also (parallel to industrial growth), in this period women entered into the

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urban life and became more visible in the public sphere, which influenced spatial arrangements and the design of public spaces. Moreover, the demands of the bourgeoisie, gaining power with the improving economy were influential in the emergence of urban parks. With the rise of the wealthy fashionable society, its growing desire to amuse itself introduced a new element into the cities of the 17th and 18th centuries. The organization of time and leisure became the main social concern. (Uludağ, 1998)

The use of urban park, a newly added element to urban life, has changed over time. The need of individuals living in industrialized cities, in the transition to this new way of life, to bond with the nature in the form of green spaces resulted in the use of public parks by the citizens. This transformation of public space from belonging mainly to the bourgeoisie into areas used by all citizens changed the definition of public space and its usage patterns. The design of landscaped spaces, that far mainly used as a tool to serve political power, after the Industrial revolution came under the influence of contemporary views of human beings and the social reality of urban life. Early pleasure gardens and the gardens of the courtly life were replaced by the public parks (1840-1900), then, parks as instrument of social reform (1900-1930), parks as active recreational facilities (1930-1965), and now open space systems serving both ecological and more passive recreational purposes (Cranz, 1989). Today, the changing concept of public park with new social, cultural, and symbolic meanings creates new relationships with the citizens and has a new mission in a modern world where the death of public space is in discussion. (Uludağ, 1998)

Since their emergence following the industrial revolution, urban parks have been places which change with the fabric of the society, and where these changes have been displayed as well as the scene of social development and interactions. The importance of urban parks as open public space becomes more obvious when we consider the city as a whole consisting of private and public space. Urban development, used as an expression of political power especially after the industrial revolution, is shaped in accordance with the current ideology, and within this changing fabric of urban environment parks are not only green areas but also places with social roles and meanings. In this study, how the meaning and usage patterns of parks have changed due to the changes in the existing ideology will be examined. The purpose of this study is to bring a new perspective to the re-reading of the urban fabric through examining the changed meanings and social roles of urban parks.

Change of public spaces including urban parks which have been constructed since the early years of Republic up to the present “Valley Projects” will be discussed with the help of published resources and observations. Also, changed scale of urban parks, their usage patterns and creation goals will be examined by showing examples.

Today, in addition being public spaces, urban parks have been changed into an investment tool based on meanings attributed to these places and the economic benefits they contribute to the neighborhood. These open green spaces, especially chosen to be a show of dominance and power of municipal governments, are being implemented in the form of the “Valley Projects”. The investments made into such projects directly affect the urban fabric, the demographic structure and the usage patterns of public space. The aim of this paper is to identify the importance of urban parks, which have become a tool for political power, for sustainable urban development and conservation of cultural heritage.

2. History of Parks and Gardens

Throughout history, landscaped areas (parks and gardens) have been sites where people come together for various purposes. Owing to the fact that open public spaces are places where people can come together, interact with each other, various symbolic meanings and representation tasks have been installed into urban parks and gardens. When we look at the history of parks and gardens, we see that the oldest known gardens in the Middle East civilizations emerged as areas surrounded by walls to protect them from adverse climatic conditions. These gardens were designed as a tool for individuals living in the city to connect with nature. The Egyptian enclosed garden creates a formalized and ordered simulacrum of something rare from nature—the oasis—what is excluded is the desert heat and wind. (Brook, 2008)

Mesopotamian civilization in the Middle East has a special importance in the history of gardens. It is depicted in many written sources that Hanging Gardens of Babylon with the symbolic meaning attributed to its physical structure, composed of terraces and gardens, is distinguished from other gardens in Middle Eastern civilizations. This garden is referred to as “Heaven’s Garden” in the same sources. It has its own symbolism and a special appeal as the re-creation of paradise, the Garden of Eden. (Dalley, 1993)
This approach is important to set an example for symbolic meanings of gardens apart from being land for agricultural production or simply green areas.

Throughout history, social roles and meanings of parks have changed parallel to the changes of cities, communities and current ideologies. For example, when we think of French gardens, it is not surprising that Palace Gardens immediately come to mind. These gardens, formed by geometric forms of trees, flowers and plants decorating the composition, consist of walking paths and recreation areas. Associated with the palace buildings, French gardens, with their brilliant physical structure, are the perfect reflection of French ideology and aesthetics of the period. With the French Revolution, a new era was ushered for the royal gardens. The French Revolution had opened the royal gardens of Paris. (Uludağ, 1998)

As for the British gardens, they emerged with the changes in the classical approach to nature brought about by Renaissance after the mid-17th century. Unlike the French period gardens, representing the understanding of classical thought, in the English garden, nature is preserved in its existing form with outdoor areas created to be used for recreation and navigation. Owing to these features, they are also called “picturesque gardens”.

Different from the European garden culture, in the Ottoman Empire we come across to mention of places for recreation called “mesira” areas. Nature was accepted as a reality in Turkish garden art. Therefore, the extreme formality of renaissance and baroque styles of west, the concept of axis and symmetry, did not find much place in the Ottoman garden. (Uludağ, 1998)

It can be argued that the Ottoman garden is a combination of the French and the English garden design. Inspired by French gardens, one of the most important public spaces of Ottoman period, Sadabad Garden, was constructed as the garden for Sadabad Palace. However, this park differs from its Western counterparts in the way it was being used. Although it was the first place where women were allowed to be seen in social life of traditional Ottoman society, the use of the park was exclusively restricted to a certain segment of the society. Therefore, we can only talk about very limited public use. During the Tulip Period, Sadabad and its environs developed into an attractive place of pleasure and recreation for court society. In the Sultan’s Garden grand wedding and circumcision celebrations were held, diplomats received or religious ceremonies performed (Atasoy, 2002)

Parallel to the process of modernization in Europe, in the Ottoman Empire there were some changes in everyday life, in the social structure and the use of public space. In the West, the changes in public spaces and urban parks have been shaped by new conditions developing after the industrial revolution.

3. Republic Period Central Urban Parks in Ankara

With the proclamation of the republic in Turkey, there were changes in the structure of the state and the society. After that Turkey experienced a revolution in social, political and cultural spheres which were aimed to sustain the Republican ideology and to create a modern city and a truly urban community. As it is known, Ankara was originally shaped by the “Jansen plan” which was a competition project. As part of this plan, urban development built by the state included some urban parks. It is necessary to note that up until the republican era, urban parks had never been a part of urban life. All urban parks built in this period were designed to represent and sustain the ideology of the young republic. Many sources state that, in the new capital city Ankara, there was a strong need to build residential areas and open public spaces for the civil servants to be employed in the state. In the planning period, regarding both the residential areas and the urban center, priority was given to the use of green areas for urban, social development and their sustainability. To cite an example, Atatürk Boulevard was intentionally designed to be a public space. Along the boulevard in the new city center, urban parks and cafes and patisseries with outside seating areas were designated in order to create a sense of public domain.

3.1. Millet Garden

Millet Garden was the first open public space of the Republican period. As the name suggests, it was meant to be the garden of the nation or the public. Inside the garden, there was a restaurant and a tea garden which were particularly used by the delegates of the parliament. “In these places dance was accompanied by soft music on special occasions in order to spread and exhibit modern life which was envisioned after the founding of the
Republic. (Dilek & Açıksöz, 1997).” Additionally inside Millet Park, there is a mention of a wood-construction cinema where plays for children were performed. Unfortunately this cinema, also called “Büyük Sinema” (Big Cinema), burned down as a result of a fire in 1928. Millet garden has significance for being the first public space where people came together for western style cultural and social activities in which public visibility was exhibited.

3.2. Zafer Square

Zafer Square was constructed to be a part of the green line which was intended to be built along the Boulevard. The park used to be composed of green areas on both sides of the boulevard and these were planned to be non-commercial public space. Since then, one side of this park has been destroyed due to the construction of an underground shopping area and a building behind it.
3.3. Kızılay Park

‘Kızılay Park’ was planned in the center of “yeni-şehir” as a part of Jansen plan. Social life of the city began to shape with the inclusion of Kızılay Park in urban life. It became a public space for the city dwellers mainly used to rest, interact and socialize especially at the end of the working day. In the 1930s the park lost some land to the Kızılay building but still continued to be a place of attraction. However, the real blow to this park came in the 1980s, when the building was knocked down and the entire area of the park was turned into a construction zone.

3.4. Güven Park

Located across from the Kızılay Park, after which the city center was named though it doesn’t exist anymore, Güven Park was designed as a part of the system of open green areas in the areas close to the ministry buildings. Owing to its central location, it was also known as Güvenlik Square. Güven Park as one of the major historic public parks that was developed to enhance the national identity and Republican ideology. (Sarıkulak, 2013) Especially Güven Monument is one of the major symbols of the newly established Republic ideology. Both with its function and its appearance, it was one of the most important places that created the collective, modern Republic identity in Ankara. (Sarıkulak, 2013) However, the park lost some of its land because of road widening construction in the 1950s and the transformation of a section of the park into a bus depot in the 1970s. All these physical changes brought to the boulevard and the park also changed the meaning of public space and its use. Nevertheless, even if the park has since then changed physically, it still continues the task of representing the ideology of the republic.
3.5. Gençlik Park

Gençlik Park, Ankara's first "urban park", has a special significance in the history of the republic for being the first city image the visitors saw upon arriving in the city by train as well as its physical structure designed as the area of modern life simulation. In fact, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that it was more than a park in the years it was constructed. In the period of urbanization, it was a breaking point for Ankara; the place where the old city ended and the new city started.

Citizens of Ankara, who had first met with open air theater in Millet Bahçesi, were further amused by another auditorium, the water sports (including a club house), a casino, an ice rink, mini train lines (made by Turkish Railways), and a multitude of recreation areas which became available in Gençlik Park. Back then Gençlik Park
served as a social school for the citizens. That is, this park was used as a tool for the realization and the sustainability of social development.

Fig. 6. photograph of Gençlik Park

3.6. Atatürk Model Farm

The farm, or AOÇ, was established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the years following the foundation of the republic, by rehabilitating the marshes and barren land on the outskirts of the city.

Following the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, efforts to develop Turkish agriculture and to put labour of Turkish farmers to good use occurred. (Köksal, 1996:10) This was done for the purposes of agriculture (vineyards, orchids, vegetable gardens, poultry and dairy farms), industry (brewery, wine, mineral water and ice cream) and commerce. (Bozdoğan, 2002:93)

In the farm, besides agricultural areas there also were open pools (originally intended to be used in agriculture), recreation areas, restaurants, tea gardens and a zoo for public use. Although a private land, AOÇ was an important public space in those years. Since then, the farm land has been diminished due to various reasons and the recreation areas have been closed to the public.

4. Garden city concept – District parks

In the years following the foundation of the republic, garden city concept was used in planning residential areas for middle-income users who were employed by state institutions. In this period; the following residential detached homes with gardens were built:

- Bahçeli Homes
- Mebus Homes
- İsrail Homes
- G.O.P Homes
However, some parts of these residential areas have been preserved even to this day. Moreover, in the city center, urban gardens were also designed in accordance with the same concept as a requirement of sustainable urban development and modernity. Ankara entered a rapid period of growth in 1950s, which led to a rapid increase in its urban population. Parallel to these changes in the demographic structure, multi-storey residential blocks started to pop up in the urban fabric. District parks were constructed to meet the need for recreational areas and use of green space in the crowded residential areas.

Some of these parks are:

- Botanik Park
- Seğmenler Park
- Kuğulu Park
- Altınpark

4.1. Botanik Park

Botanik Park is one of the oldest parks of Ankara. In addition to being one of the rare green places where you can bond with nature, it is also a place of attraction owing to its intensive green fabric, a greenhouse for rare flowers, walking trails, resting areas and non-commercial structure in the city center. While inside the park, one can easily forget that he/she is surrounded by a large city. However, because of the fact that it is situated on an incline at the higher end of the city, this park never gets the kind of usage it deserves.

4.2. Seğmenler Park

Seğmenler Park is much more frequently used especially by the young people because of its close proximity to the main arteries of the city and the easy access to it. Although at times it resembles a university campus with all young people lounging around, it is possible to see people of all ages and from different walks of life eating, drinking, walking their dogs, lying on the grass in groups and giving mini concerts. Seğmenler Park has not only contributed to social life of the city but also to the residential areas surrounding it. It is no secret that the value of real estate in the area has skyrocketed since its construction.

4.3. Kuğulu Park

It is located at the beginning point of the Tunalı Hilmi Street on which cafes, patisseries, shops are arranged next to each other in the very busy and highly fashionable Kavakdere district. Therefore, there is intense pedestrian use in the street and also in the park. It also owes its popularity to the easy access and its natural structure including the famous swans where the name comes. As a result, this park is a place of refuge for the citizens in all seasons.

In the premises, there is a pond on which the swans live, children’s play areas, a restaurant/cafe and an open square used for concerts time to time. These features make Kuğulu Park a city icon for modern Ankara. It has an important place in everyday life and in memories. Though it used to spread over a much larger area in 1970s, since then it has lost a significant amount of land to road and building construction. Attempts to reduce the park area continues even today, but is hampered by the intense reaction from the people.

4.4. Altınpark

Different from other district parks, Altınpark is located in the north part of the city. It was constructed on an area which was originally planned as a golf club in the early years of republic. There is a science center, a cultural center, a sports center, a kindergarten and several cafes in the park. The size and the variety of its social facilities, make this place more than a park. Altınpark too has caused an increase in the property values in the area.

In conclusion, we can say that even though usage patterns and user profiles differ, the aforementioned district parks have contributed the value increase for residential areas.
5. Open green areas in Ankara today

Today green area projects are being implemented as valley projects. Valley projects are developed as solutions to shantytowns which have become an eyesore in the unplanned green areas.

Some of these are:

- Dikmen Valley
- Portakal Çiçeği Valley
- Öveçler Valley
- İmrahor Valley

5.1. Dikmen Valley

Dikmen Valley project is the first phase of the urban renewal project consisting of five stages. The urban transformation project carried out by the municipality has two purposes. The first is to prevent the slums spreading over the city’s natural areas and add these as open public spaces to urban life. It can be said that Dikmen Valley project is successful in this regard.

Recreation areas and natural structure of the valley, cleared from slum buildings, are attracting users and are being used extensively. The second aim of the urban renewal project is to obtain economic benefit from these areas with the increase in property value.

At this point, there is a new meaning for public space with the changing ideology.

Fig. 7. photograph of Dikmen Valley

5.2. Portakal Çiçeği Valley

Portakal Çiçeği Valley was also created by clearing slum buildings from the valley. In this valley, economic benefit from the project became more of a priority rather than the public use of the area and its contribution to urban life. High-priced residential towers and office buildings in the valley give the impression that the area has been
reserved to be used by a particular segment of society. In that respect, the valley is being used more like the gardens of luxury residential buildings instead of public space. Even if use of right was granted to the rightful owners, as a result of the changed meaning of the valley, most of them have either sold or rented out their houses, and moved to places out of the city.

5.3. Öveçler Valley

Öveçler Valley, a public space dominated by sports facilities, was built in the same region as the Dikmen Valley. However, this project hasn’t been as successful as Dikmen Valley Project in terms of the use of public space and landscape design. Both the lack of social facilities and usage patterns of individuals negatively affect the urban quality of the area. Thus, Öveçler Valley is mainly used as a district park. Despite some of the negative characteristics of Öveçler Valley, sales of homes overlooking the valley constitute an important data for the real estate sector.

Figure 8. Photograph of Öveçler Valley

5.4. İmrahor Valley

İmrahor Valley is one of the most important parts of Ankara green belt system. An urban renewal project (including Lake Eymir), which would alter not only the urban structure but also the ecological characteristics of the entire area has been planned but not implemented yet. Aforementioned plan, covering an area of 650 acres, paves the way for economically beneficial structural development along the green areas and the axis of the canal by designating commercial, residential and hotel/tourism areas. (Şengül, 2015) However, one of the major motivations, which drive the new urban landscape, is the fact that investors and developers have realised the economic benefits which public spaces contribute to their investments. (Ercan, 2007)

Planned investment is said to be much higher than the needs of Ankara. Besides the lack of sizeable urban style green space and parks, the destruction of the green belt surrounding the city and the environmental damage and destruction are becoming the most prominent issues. (Şengül, 2015)

With a similar approach, arrangements made around Lake Mogan have led to the loss of both the publicness and the natural properties of this natural area. Today lake shore, was used as a public beach in in the 1970s, is turned into a commercial picnic area which is constructed by municipal governments. In addition it can be said that usage patterns of the area are far away from the public sense.
6. Conclusion

Existing ideology in Turkey has undergone some changes over time. With the changing of the existing ideology, the urban parks which were built to design a modern urban life have become highly commercialized and vehicles to obtain economic benefits in the form of higher property value from residential and commercial structures built in these areas. Thus, they are no longer simply public spaces.

Although these profit oriented investments are expected to contribute to the sustainable modernization, most often they have resulted in changes in social habits and the use of public space. Owing to their social, economic, political, and ideological meanings, public spaces are convenient tools for urban renewal strategies. Consequently, concern for economic benefit together with urban renewal projects has destroyed district parks, homes with gardens and urban parks. Since public spaces are now seen by municipal governments as vehicles for large investment symbolizing their effectiveness and political power while obtaining economic benefits, the scale of green areas has grown bigger. Nowadays, green area designs implemented as valley projects do not necessarily integrate into the urban fabric, but instead create their own centers. This fabric brings out the social division and reduction of interaction inside the city. These reductions in interactions within the public domain disrupt cultural sustainability and development.

Whereas urban parks built in the early period of the republic and especially the AOÇ were designed as places fully integrated into the urban fabric, where people from all walks of life can use freely, encounter others (perhaps those who are not like them), learn from each other and develop, the parks built under the current ideology aren’t. In this perspective, the conservation of residential areas and urban parks which are the heritage of the Republican period is absolutely necessary for a sustainable urban and cultural development.

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Appendix A.

A.1. Figure 1: [Millet Bahçesi]. Retrieved July 29, 2015 from https://www.facebook.com/groups/EskiAnkaraFotograflari/


A.5. Figure 5: [İstasyon Meydanı]. Retrieved August 11.08.15 from http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ankara/26556178.asp


A.7. Figure 7: Taken by author


A.10. Figure 9(b): [Mogan Piknik Alanı]. Retrieved July 29, 2015 from https://tr.foursquare.com/v/mogan-piknik-alani%C4%B1/516167d2e4b08465ec56b5f1?openPhotoId=55981028498e8515ff0fc303

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