

Chapter 22

Innovative Social Movements as an Urban Activism: A Turkish Perspective for an Open Public Area

Ilknur Akiner

Akdeniz University, Turkey

Sezgi Erdogan

Akdeniz University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Taksim Park İstanbul protests initially started to stop the urban development plan within the frame of pedestrianization of Taksim Square and construction of artillery barracks in Taksim Park. As a part of the project, after heavy construction equipment had entered to Taksim Park on May 27, 2013, this situation started spreading especially via social media in a short time. Thus, this situation turned into a problem for Turkey and became like a resistance movement. Historical transformation process of Taksim Park and the most prominent events of the protests are summarized before analyzing this civil disobedience in terms of the theory of NSMs. In this context, it is questioned whether the NSMs have been affected or not in cancelling the project prepared for the purpose of demolishing and rebuilding the Taksim Park having an important place in the memory of the city. The NSMs are mostly related with politics, human rights, violence against women, or religion. On the other hand, the Taksim Park events are a movement of people protecting their own architectural or urban environment.

INTRODUCTION

Etymologically, the word park is derived from the Old-French word *parc*. Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1993) describes park as a piece of ground, in or near a city or town kept for ornament, recreation, and/or environment preservation. Taksim Park is a city park located between Taksim Square and Elmadağ in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district. It is a public open area that is responsive to people's physical

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and psychological needs. In history, the area which hosted Artillery Barracks and Taksim Stadium was transferred to a city park with a modern perspective and a construction plan prepared by Henri Prost in 1940. Due to its closeness to Taksim Square which is the most important square of Istanbul, it still maintains its sense of being a city park. Taksim Park is encompassed by Tak-1 Zafer Street in the south, Asker Ocağı Street in the north, Mete Street in the east and Cumhuriyet Street in the west. The Park's main entrance is the south stairs which are located on the side of Taksim Square. Figure 1. shows satellite image of Taksim Park and its surroundings.

In fact, the process which covers Taksim Park is a period, which started with the idea of “trees should not be cut off” and turned into an action against the policies in a short term because of the disproportionate use of force (Banko and Babaoğlu, 2013: 29). Taksim Park protests became the sequence of global dimensional events which reflected rejection of a society not to turn the park at issue into a shopping

Figure 1. Taksim Park and Taksim Square in İstanbul



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