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Urbanization, urban planning and public spaces: Kadikoy and Atasehir cases from Istanbul[1]

Urbanizacja, planowanie urbanistyczne i przestrzenie publiczne: studium przypadków dzielnic Kadikoy i Atasehir w Stambule

Introduction

Within this paper, public spaces are not only taken as spaces for leisure time, but also as a space in which the 'public sphere' becomes a tangible, visible and recognizable *milieu* to reinforce an open society. Although 'public sphere' is an ambiguous term, of which there is no particularly accepted definition, it is widely accepted that a strong 'public sphere' is one of the precise indicators of an open and democratic society. Public spaces thus, are one of the essentials of the 'public sphere'. The changing nature of cities, privatization of spaces and services, and planning practices all have some significant impacts on the public character of cities. In this context, in the first part of the article, the relation between public spaces and the public sphere is discussed within the framework of a democratic and open society. In the second part, the focus is the relation between urban planning and public spaces, related with citizenship, privatization and the role of public spaces in urban life. In the third part, two cases from Istanbul will be discussed according to the related findings of a research project. The fourth and final part is the conclusion.

1.   What does public spaces has to do with public sphere?

The term 'public' is an ambiguous one, which is used in diverse perspectives in most languages, and also in Turkish. The word 'public', indicates things that are open to and involve everyone. Further, it can also be simply the opposite of

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[1] This article is drawn from a research project. It presents the one part of the theoretical framework and a case study, and does not include the full spectrum of results (Firidin Özgür, E; Sayın T; Seçer, S; Göğüş, B, 2014, The Transformation of The Use of Public Space Within Private-space-led Urbanism: Cases of Kadikoy and Atasehir Districts, Istanbul; Project no: 2013–11; Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Directorate of Scientific Research Projects, Istanbul).

public spaces', which are not accepted as public spaces since they are exclusive through design and security measures, although they do contain some facilities for public usage. Examples are shopping malls or themed parks.

So, what are the basic characteristics of a public space, or more simply, what makes an urban space public? Madanipour (1999), Varna and Tiesdell (2010), and Nemeth and Schmidt (2011) consider these questions, and have developed several models to measure the publicness of urban spaces. Ownership, management, activities and accessibility are the most common criteria in these models.

Ownership refers to the main distinction between the public and private; citizens may claim their right to use urban space if it is owned by the public. However, there are counter arguments such as that fact that public authorities may impose restrictions on the use of public spaces for the public interest, such as homeless people being marginalised from public spaces (Mitchell, 1995). The measure of management depends on the assumption that the private sector may impose distinctive restrictions, but an urban space managed by the public should be open to all citizens. This is also related to whom and which parties are involved in the process of decision-making. The diversity of activities contributes to the vividness of a place. The characteristics mentioned above should be taken into account as the criteria to measure the degree of publicness of public spaces. Accessibility is a similar challenge. On the one hand, all public spaces should be physically accessible, and on the other, public activities should be accessible to all.

Public spaces are seen as the basis of urban life. They are spaces to gather, meet, watch around, stand and use equally for all citizens, also allowing people to experience the diversity and vividness of urbanity. Hence public spaces not only make life more colourful and vivid, but also reinforce the potential for different parts of urban society to understand each other. In this regard, public spaces are gaining more importance in the age of urbanization that promotes living among like-minded people in a divided society.

2. The Relations between Urbanization, Urban Planning and Public Spaces

The shrinking role of the state in controlling a free-market to regulate redistribution of public goods, urban services and investments has changed the nature of planning. However, the public sector itself became an actor acting like a part of the private sector; accordingly urban planning became a tool for state agencies to deliver the needs of a free-market economy. This shift in the roles of public and private sectors has changed the nature of urbanisation.

Public spaces such as parks, streets, green areas, are defined places that anyone can enter freely. However, the growing role of the private sector in urban development and in the delivery of urban services may end up with the

privatization of public goods, services and spaces. A private sector investment must be profitable in a free-market economy, and hence urban services provided by, and urban spaces designed and managed by, the private sector, are for the people who can pay for them, for "good consumers". Privatized urban spaces can become places of exclusion in which certain activities (i.e. skaters or street vendors) are prohibited, designed for security and surrounded by surveillance cameras and guards. This tendency towards privatization is explored in the early works of Loukaitou-Sideris (1993) as a new phase of socio-economic relations.

One of the well-known examples of privately owned but publicly accessible spaces is in Manhattan, New York, which is planned through bonus spaces. Nemeth (2009: 2482), examines this publicly accessible space and argues "Perhaps most importantly, the bonus space model is problematic when viewed through a lens of citizenship and representation" and concludes, with referring to Valentine (1996) that "Citizenship and representation are directly related to visibility and to making physical appearances in publicly accessible space, so space cannot be called truly public if its 'maintenance requires the marginalization or exclusion' of a particular constituency". There are similar works on public spaces in European cities, regarding the changing nature of urbanization and privatization of public spaces. Langstraat and Van Melik (2013) compare Dutch and British cases in terms of the involvement of the private sector to the production of public spaces. Their findings reveal that "There seems to be a bigger reluctance from the part of Dutch local governments to involve private parties in public space than in Britain. Perhaps this could be explained by differences in welfare state regimes, with governments playing a more central part in urban planning in social-democratic Holland than in liberal Britain (2013: 447)" These cases are of interest as they show that the involvement of public parties in the delivery of public spaces makes spaces more public, and that there may be further a strong relation between the government and urban policies on public spaces and services.

Even though there are several discussion on publicness of urban spaces today, the conceptual references of egalitarian public spaces, such as being open to all, allowing freedom of speech and demonstration of human rights has not changed. This shows the strength of public spaces in the social life of cities. There are examples proving that reinforcing public spaces of cities in relation with public facilities has a direct influence on the social cohesion of citizens. One of the examples is the city of Bogota that returned civic pride to citizens and invigorated social cohesion as a consequence of considering public spaces as a fundamental part of public policies (Berney, 2010).

3.   Two cases from Istanbul: Kadıköy and Ataşehir districts

Research conducted in two different districts of Istanbul using the above framework indicates some relevant results (Firidin Özgür, et al., 2014).

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The main objective of the research was to understand the possible discrepancies between two unlike districts representing the core and the close periphery of the Istanbul metropolitan area (Map 1). The field research was based on questionnaires (300 for both areas in total) with users, interviews with inhabitans (9 for both areas in total) and interviews with the officials from both municipalities. Although, the research covered wider respects, the results regarding above framework is discussed below with the following three headlines: open society and democracy, privatization of public spaces, and use of public spaces. Both areas are owned and under the management of local authorities as public bodies. Hence, the discussion of privatization is not valid for either area.

Map 1, 2. Location of Kadıköy and Ataşehir in Istanbul (1), and in the Asian part of the city (2)

Source: Istanbul Grater Municipality, Istanbul Metropolitan Area Plan Report, 2009 (1); produced by googlearth map (2)

Kadıköy is a central district in the Asian side that developed mostly in the last 150 years. It was built-up in a street-block system and is a vital place. Bahariye Street and Mehmet Ayvalıtaş Square at the end of the street were chosen for the research area (Photographs 1 and 2). Ataşehir represents the new fashioned outer district of Istanbul. The west part of Ataşehir was developed as an allocation of gated communities and shopping malls, next to highways, and built-up mostly in the last decade. Cumhuriyet Park and Square were chosen for research in west Ataşehir (Photographs 3 and 4).

The field research was conducted on three different levels: questionnaires with users, as well as reviews with residents and also with officials from both municipalities. The main characteristics and observations on the usage of both areas were considered.

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Figure 1, 2. Bahariye Street and Mehmet Ayvalıtaş Square

Source: Ebru Firidin Özgür

Figure 3,4. Ataşehir and Cumhuriyet Park and Square

Source: Barış Göğüş

3.1. Findings regarding an open society and democracy

The results were similar for both places on this issue. According to the questionnaires, users were in one hundred percent agreement that public spaces were places for demonstrations and protests, and these kinds of democratic actions should not be restricted. Residents also totally agreed that public spaces were places for people to make themselves visible by demonstrating and protesting in a democratic society. Officials from both municipalities stated that they did not have any restrictions on public spaces, and the right to demonstrate was fundamental for a democratic society, provided protesters did not vandalize the environment. Users declared that everyone could use public spaces, and these should be open to all, under all circumstances. Similarly, both the municipal officers argued that they considered all parts of society especially the elderly, children and handicapped people as the users of the public spaces they designed and managed. But, interestingly, the officer from Ataşehir Municipality said that they considered west Ataşehir as a prestige area since gated communities developed for upper-middle class residents were located there, and for that reason, they paid special attention to using more attractive designs in the public spaces there. Additionally, he expressed that

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they found ordinary designs sufficient for the poorer neighbourhoods within the municipal boundaries.

3.2. Findings regarding privatization of public space and presudo-public spaces

A common idea against privatization was shared by the officers of both municipalities. They had a common vision on the issue reflecting strong opposition to privatization of public spaces. They defended the idea that public spaces should be owned and managed by public bodies, especially by local municipalities. An officer from Ataşehir Municipality specified that they did not even want cafes run by the private sector in the parks. The officer from Kadıköy Municipality explained that they imposed restrictions on private sector advertisements on tents or parasols used in the public space, since these kinds of commercials dominated the whole space. Users too, were also mostly against the privatization of public spaces. Of interest, it emerged that users of Kadıköy were more open to the idea of privately maintained public spaces than the users of Ataşehir. Answers to the question as to "who should do the maintenance of public spaces?" were the private sector at 17% among the users of Kadıköy, while it was only 5% at Ataşehir. This may indicate that the users of Ataşehir were more aware of the results of privatization of management given that they used and lived in a district dominated by private management and restricted access given the proliferation of gated communities and shopping malls. Regarding this result, reviewees living in gated communities at Ataşehir saw the responsibilities of municipalities rather related with public works on infrastructure, transportation, the road network and automobile traffic. Lastly, people living in and using Kadıköy, reflected that they did not use shopping centres, unlike those subjects living in Ataşehir where shopping centres were the first places to go to in their leisure times.

3.3. Findings regarding the use of public spaces

Results of questionnaires show that Bahariye Street and Mehmet Ayvalıtaş Square at Kadıköy were places for people to spend their time regularly. Users spent long hours at these places (60% of the users spent 3 hours and more). On the contrary, 54% of users of Cumhuriyet Park and Square at Ataşehir spent half an hour at most. Everyday users of the places at Kadıköy were 30% while it was only 13% at Ataşehir. These results show that Bahariye Street and Mehmet Ayvalıtaş Square were places that created regular users on a daily basis, but Cumhuriyet Park and Square in between gated communities did not appear as the spaces used in the same way. Accordingly, users of Ataşehir complained that there was nothing much to do, the place was noisy and the automobile traffic had a disturbing effect, while users of Kadıköy complained of the noise, there were not enough places to sit and the automobile traffic had a disturbing effect.

Another aspect of built environment is related with human relations. At Kadıköy, people were keen to generate good relations with the people and shopkeepers who lived in the same neighbourhood. This was mainly the result of the built environment of Kadıköy that encouraged people to use the streets since residents could find what they needed within walking distance. Residents of Kadıköy used places in the immediate environment to go shopping, go outside to have some fresh air, or to walk around, and even to watch a movie or a theatre since it was enough to take one step on the street. Direct relations between private and public spaces in a mixed use neighbourhood reinforce social interaction. On the contrary, residents living in gated communities at Ataşehir declared that they did not even know their neighbours.

Conclusions

Although it is not possible to discuss public spaces in all its dimensions, this paper aimed to discuss the relationship between public spaces and the 'public sphere' in an open and democratic society, through examining the character of public spaces and their use with two examples from Istanbul. The contemporary societies in which we live still consist of a ruling class and a ruled class. One of the ways to raise the voice and being visible for ruled classes is to use the means of 'public sphere', and public spaces are essential for being visible. However, public spaces have further roles in urban life as places for interaction and socialization, to have some fresh air, and to see different people. These are the places we share with others and take a common responsibility for the whole society.

The issue of privatization of public spaces is problematic: in a segregated and divided society citizens from different classes do not share the same places in cities, since privately managed spaces are organized for the capacity of paying consumers. This turns citizens into customers, which undermines the rule of equality of citizens in a democratic society. From another perspective, if a society is ruled by democratic governance, urban policies are developed in an open and participative process, which in turn affects the policies towards the management of public spaces of cities.

Today, cities are developing as a constellation of private spaces and services which was once delivered by the public. This is a process related to the strengths of the private and weaknesses of the public sectors. As long as public bodies and agencies are strong enough to regulate the private sector on behalf of public policies, this will have a direct and positive impact on public spaces of cities and uses of them. As cases from different countries show, the control of the public sector over the private sector on behalf of publicness is essential to delivering public spaces and services.

Specifically, in Istanbul, gated communities, shopping malls and office and residential towers become the only way to develop the metropolitan area under the pressure of real estate developers as a strong actor of the private sec-

tor. However, the city of Istanbul still has core districts that encourage a good relationship between the places and neighbours as was shown in the two cases above.

The municipalities that were reviewed are still reflecting on the idea of public space as a core of urban life. The results of this research also show that people, users, residents and officials have some preconceived ideas with regards to public spaces and public life of the cities. Yet, these clichés also may come from the belief in democracy. These consequences give some evidences that there is a connection between the perception of public spaces and beliefs of the idea of democracy. This assumption opens a door to thinking that urban planning and urban policies reinforcing the publicness of public spaces may support the democratic processes of society: more research is required on these diverse aspects.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje kwestie przestrzeni publicznych jako czegoś więcej, niż tylko przestrzeni czasu wolnego. Przestrzenie publiczne urastają bowiem do rangi wrażliwych, widocznych i rozpoznawalnych poziomów wzmacniania społeczeństwa otwartego. W drugiej części artykułu opisano związki między pomiędzy planowaniem urbanistycznym i przestrzeniami publicznymi, w relacji do prywatyzacji, obywatelstwa i życia miejskiego. W części trzeciej natomiast artykuł podejmuje studia przypadków dwóch dzielnic Stambułu (Kadikoy, Atasehir), w relacji do wyników projektu badawczego.

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