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Gezi Park Kampanyasi: Resurfacing an Urban Park/Istanbul/2002-2006

by

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Open spaces, like urban parks in cities are impaired between the bureaucracy of the city government and the imperatives of commercialization. They are stagnant, unable to challenge the imagination. They melt into the background of a trancelike condition we live in. Design can jolt people out of this trance to act upon their environment, when liberated from providing prescriptive solutions to conflicts between pairs no longer categorizable as opposites: city + park, culture + nature, work + leisure, private + public.

*Gezi Park Kampanyasi* is a design operation aiming to activate free spaces (or free active spaces) through a series of interventions. The interventions respond to existing formal temporal urban patterns interrupting and modifying their flows. These transient interruptions set off a chain reaction in the public realm out of which emerges an unpredictable urban space that is continuously changing.
Many thanks to all who helped and supported me...
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ONE

The objective of this project is to investigate the public realm—more specifically open free spaces—within the urban context, observe its transformation with the unstoppable spread of commercialization and propose a new model of design which has adapted itself to the ephemerality and uncertainty of contemporary urban life.

An explanation of the term free space is necessary before proceeding. The choice of the word free is related to its associations with openness and democracy, as well as its suggestion of a detachment from commercialization which has become the overpowering force behind all aspects of life. Urban parks remain one of the few typologies which offer a zone of equal use to people from all social levels. Urban parks today have the potential to be the antidote to the negative effects of alienation, namely indifference; indifference that eliminates difference from our lives.

In an effort to understand the contemporary condition, it is necessary to examine the city and nature within the city which have for too long been considered to be in a simple dialectic relationship with each other.

THE CITY

The city is a four dimensional field in which multiple systems of movement occur simultaneously. The movement of elements such as people, objects or information, constitute collection and distribution cycles, which in turn create repeating temporal patterns that relate to spatial coordinates. The physical manifestation of temporal patterns are found in formal configurations of the urban field. The operations are cycles that span the period
from the formation of an element to its disposal. This includes its use, reuse, collection from and redistribution into the city.

The facilitators of the multiple transportation networks are urban apparatuses which are nodes of activity or interaction, points of intensity on the vast urban field, and urban infrastructures which are networks connecting not only the elements to the apparatus, but also one apparatus to another. The internet is one system, the smallest element of which is information, the apparatus servers, and the infrastructure wires and cables. A city's public transportation and recycling facilities are other examples of such systems, simple in their purpose yet complex by their sheer scale. The rich density of these variables make it extremely difficult to map the contemporary city, however it provides a method to grasp the internal logic that lies beneath the chaotic, fragmented surface.

Accepting the city as an incredibly complex layering of simple systems helps us see how the city is not the opposite of wilderness, but at the very least its the man-made copy. What has changed over the years is the increasing numbers of the variables which determine the configuration of any system. Questioning the relationship between nature and culture is an ongoing discourse at the heart of which lies the redefinition of such concepts as nature and the 'artificial'. Dutch landscape architect Adriaan Geuze claims that the difference between city and nature no longer exists: “The new city is an airy metropolis with villages, urban centres, suburbs, industrial areas, ports, airports, woods, lakes, beaches, reserves and the monoculture of the high technology agricultural areas.”¹ The intertwining of technology and nature has become a sight too ordinary in the twentieth century city. Robert Smithson expresses his response to New Jersey in these words: “The highways crisscross through the towns and become man-made geological networks of concrete.”²
THE PARK

The urban park is a phenomenon of the 19th century of the times when the process of industrialization initiated the transformation of agrarian society into an industrialized one. The rapid growth of industry resulted in an unanticipated crowding and expansion of the city. In addition to the large number of workers the city attracted from the countryside, the by-product of industry, i.e. pollution, turned the peaceful, humane towns into hostile, overcrowded, polluted cities. The invention of large urban parks came about during that period as a means to counterbalance the undesired affects industrialization has taken on the urban environment. The famous parks like Parc Buttes Chaumont of Paris and Central Park of New York were all designed and executed during the 19th Century.

The word 'park' has been adapted from the French word 'parc' meaning enclosure. One of the several definitions listed in the dictionary describes a park as 'a piece of ground in or near a city or town kept for ornament and recreation'. This definition suggests the artificial recreation of the natural found in the 19th century parks. Landscape architect James Corner provides an explanation to this confusion of natural and artificial: "Although such images are not always of wholly natural features, gardens and rural fields are so easily equated with the larger natural landscape because their aesthetic, physical and temporal aspects closely resemble (and are caught within) the processes of the natural world. Thus, unlike buildings, landscape constructions tend to 'naturalize' themselves over time, masking their artifice and rendering invisible their underlying ideology." The ideologies embedded in the 19th century can be traced back to the English garden of the previous century, the harbinger of the picturesque landscape. The pre-romantic period out of which came the English garden was fascinated with nature which lay beyond the city in distant lands. The 'Western World' travelled to the south and to the east to observe the beauty of the Natural and upon their return tried to capture it in such recre-
ations as paintings and estate gardens. The legacy of the pictorial landscape carried well into the 19th century and can be observed in the urban parks of that period. The park came to be a refuge from the city.

**Central Park**

Central Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmstead in 1858, is the focus of many studies on New York and the landscape including Rem Koolhaas’ ‘retroactive manifesto’ for New York City *Delirious New York*:

"Central Park is not only the major recreational facility of Manhattan but also the record of its progress: a taxidermic preservation of nature that exhibits forever the drama of culture outdistancing nature. Like the grid it is a colossal leap of faith; the contrast it describes between the built and the unbuilt – hardly exists at the time of its creation.

"if Central Park can be read as an operation of preservation, it is, even more, a series of manipulations and transformations performed on the nature ‘saved’ by its designers. Its lakes are artificial, its trees transplanted, its accidents engineered, its incidents supported by an invisible infrastructure that controls their assembly. A catalogue of natural elements is taken from its original context, reconstituted and compressed into a system of nature that makes the linearity of the Mall no more formal than the planned informality of the Ramble. Central Park is a synthetic Arcadian Carpet."

Central Park is a product of the transition from agrarian society to the industrial. In the first half of the 20th century modernism brought with it an altogether different ideology solving the problems of the 19th century city by merging nature and living. “They (modernists) followed Le Corbusier’s ideology that any spot on earth can be occupied. There
is no difference between inner and outer space, there is only continuous space. Nature is within the house. They created a kind of freedom and they did what they had to do: create a new kind of city.”

It was not until 1982 that the concepts behind ‘nature in the city’, which had become almost a cliche, was questioned. With the competition brief for Parc de la Villette the French government offered designers an opportunity to reflect upon and respond to the changing conditions of contemporary life in cities.

**Parc de la Villette**

In 1982 the French Ministry of Culture and the Etablissement Public du Parc de La Villette organized an international competition for an “Urban Park for the 21st Century” to occupy a 125 acre site on the northeastern edge of Paris. The site in the 19th century was the location of slaughter houses and meat markets which in the 1970’s became useless with the changes in meat production in the country. The park was to have on its grounds a Museum of Science, Technology and Industry, as well as the Grande Halle for exhibitions and the Music Center. The intention of the French Ministry of Culture was to create a cultural center as much as a recreation zone for the immediate neighbors of the park and for Parisians all around the city. The competition brief acknowledges the fact that the concept of a park can no longer be separated from that of the city. In the brief the entrants are urged to address the issue of pluralism and unity within the urban fabric by dealing with 1. urbanism, man and the city, 2. pleasure, body and mind, 3. experimentation, knowledge and action. Interestingly, the winner was Bernard Tschumi’s proposal, which in its negation of composition in architecture proposed a layering of three systems, of points (the grid of folies), lines and surfaces:

“The grid, then, presented the team with a sense of dynamic oppositions. We had to design a park: the grid was anti-nature. We had to be realists: the grid was abstract. We had to respect the local context: the grid was anti-contextual. We had to be sensitive to
site boundaries: the grid was infinite. We had to take into account political and economic
determination: the grid was determinate. We had to acknowledge garden precedents: the
grid had no origin, it opened onto an endless recession into prior images.\textsuperscript{8}

Dissociation and madness are the two key terms in Tschumi's solution to the problem.
He identifies dissociation as the prevailing social condition. Dissociation in man leads to
schizophrenia, dissociation in society leads to anarchy and 'madness'. Dissociation be-
tween program, form and social value forms the basis of his approach to designing what
he calls the 'biggest discontinuous building' in architecture. But the points of intense
activity within the grid sets up an internal logic, a new reference system within the chaos.
Over that reference system is overlaid the 'infrastructure' of line and surfaces that con-
cnnects the points to one another. The new system is as liberating as it is determinate in its
calculations.

Tschumi's design, as dated as it may seem in its psychoanalytic reasonings, nevertheless
manages to rewrite an old text and invent a new language that the Parisians were more
than happy to learn. Between then and now, as we go through another transition from
industry to information what happened to the urban landscape? Landscape architect
Adriaan Geuze argues that 'there is absolutely no need for parks anymore' that a new
kind of city has been created and it is populated with clever, able human beings.

"We as landscape architects should provide them with the tools for their behavior. We
are going to give them the equipment to make a beautiful life....there is a need to provoke
people, that mankind can work creatively better than he has done."\textsuperscript{9} His optimistic views
on the human condition have played themselves out in several of West 8's designs that
enhance the quality of open urban spaces, and avoid the reductionist utilitarian policies of
city governments toward public leisure facilities.
As I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, the goal of his thesis project is to question the typology of the urban park and use design as a tool to activate interaction between people and their environment.
TWO analysis of a local situation

Istanbul

aerial photograph

Taksim Gezi Park

diagrams
The global conditions of societies and cities described in the previous chapter are more or less generalizations of similar trends that occur around the world albeit within varying time frames. Every city would offer a different story based on cultural, geographical, political differences. In order to translate concepts into design, however, the shift in scale is an important step. Narrowing the physical boundaries of the project by focusing on a specific location in fact widens the scope since the introduction of cultural and geographical parameters require a closer look at the issues in hand.

ISTANBUL

The global typology of the urban park eventually led me to a prototype located in the city of Istanbul, the largest and the most westernized city of Turkey. The most significant quality of the city is the freedom I found in its incompleteness despite its age. Cultural transitions throughout the ages have affected the city as much its geographical location between the east and the west. Having served as the capital of the Christian Byzantine Empire Istanbul was handed over to the Muslim Ottoman Empire in the 15th Century and remained the capital until the collapse of the Ottomans with World War 1. When the Republic of Turkey was founded after the War of Independence following WWI Ankara in central Anatolia was declared capital, however Istanbul continued to be the more powerful of the two owing to its importance to the economy as a port town.

The setback of the war and the transition from the monarchy to the democratic secular republic hindered the spread of industrialization which had by the beginning of the 1900's begun shaping many European and American cities. The effects of industrialization were
aerial photograph showing the area around Gezi Park
felt much later in Istanbul, mostly after the Second World War. Therefore throughout the second half of the 20th Century Istanbul has been adapting to the requirements of accommodating large fluctuations of population, growing industrial and residential neighborhoods. Until 1960’s when the big waves of emigration began Istanbul was more like a western city with a mixed population of Muslims, Christians and Jews. In the last 40 years, however, much has changed with the influx of people from rural areas, most residents of foreign origins have been displaced and Istanbul has assumed its current social landscape.

**TAKSIM GEZI PARK**

The site I have given myself the task of redesigning is that of an existing park - Taksim Gezi Park- in a central part of Istanbul. The park lies at the edge of an area which has developed in the 19th century as the center of commerce and hosted many foreigners involved in the trades. More recently many service industries have replaced the small industries, especially tourism has benefitted from the central location. Drawing many foreigners to the area tourism has unwittingly sustained the international diversity which has more or less disappeared in other parts of the city. The centrality of the location has attracted more than just tourism. Since the Republic was founded in 1923 an important monument has been erected and the largest music and performing arts center has been built along the southern periphery of the park creating large open areas within the otherwise dense urban fabric. The following photographs taken in October of 2000 show different parts of the site.

1. AKM - Ataturk Cultural Center for the Performing Arts and Music
2. Overlooking traffic that runs along the northern edge
3. the main central field of the park
4. Looking south from the park showing the make shift parking lot
5. Looking towards the southwest, view obstructed by a large McDonald's billboard.
The motivation behind redesigning a park which has been reconstructed in the last 10 years lies partly in my frustration with the design imposed on the site by the city government and partly in my excitement at the opportunities the rich texture of the site offers. The city is by no means a clean slate, therefore I began by trying to absorb through analysis the conditions in and around the park.

The following maps and diagrams document the different layers of structure and activity, and the patterns that emerge out of them:

*Infrastructure* shows the network of mobility, transportation including pedestrian vs. vehicular traffic routes, bus subway and shuttle stops.

*Natural structure* shows the boundaries of the park as well as surrounding open areas.

*Diagram of trees* locates the different types of trees in the park providing information on the evolution of the park and determining to a certain degree where activities could take place.

*Superstructure* shows the buildings around the site, emphasizing size and density. Program types are analyzed in a separate diagram.

*Activity/time* diagram maps the intensity and direction of people flows according to the time of day.
The initial analysis provided me with an understanding of the situation of the park within the larger context. Surrounded by two busy streets along its west and south periphery, the park remains detached from the intensity of activity accumulated around its edges. The change in surface level from the edges to the middle is partially accountable for this condition. However, even more importantly surface parking along the southern periphery prevents pedestrian flows to penetrate the park.

The next set of diagrams go one step further and examine the structural systems identified in the first set programmatically. In an effort to categorize social activities, certain distinctions are made, such as that between perpetual and sporadic intensities, indoor and outdoor locations, so that conclusions can be drawn which will affect the proposed intervention. In defining an activity three properties should be taken into consideration:

1. space - location  2. time - duration and time of day  3. quality - work or leisure.

Based on geographical conditions in relation to the social attributes in and adjacent to the site seven zones are identified which as part of a larger whole, i.e. the park and the square, work together, yet require individual treatment. Each zone is roughly demarcated in the last diagram. The design proposal which follows addresses the unique aspects of the zones by responding to specific conditions that are found in each one.
24/7 indoor activity
9-5 indoor business activity
daily indoor leisure activity
mobile merchants

...
THREE proposal

Gezi Park Kampanyasi

five year plan

calendar
drawings
collages
logistics

"New public spaces will manipulate the user in such a way that he will become aware, on the spot, of his behaviour and no longer be able to fall back on mechanical, pre-programmed actions."

Adriaan Geuze of West 8 Landscape Architecture
GEZI PARK KAMPANYASI

The word 'kampanya' in Turkish translates into English as 'campaign' with a slight difference in meaning partly owing to the political associations of the English word. 'Operation', on the other hand describes the proposal more accurately, implying a system which enables the execution of a design on the given site. Operation also suggests a collective involved in the process of inventing, funding, executing and maintaining. The operation capitalizes on the importance of a continuous process in which optimizing the contribution of available resources - financially, ideologically, creatively and geographically - is the guiding principle.

Gezi Park Kampanyasi proposes a systems by which design becomes a pure process, implemented over time. The goal is to intervene in the daily routines of life as a way of urging people to respond to their environment. When the environment is active so is the collective imagination. The Kampanya is a framework for a series of urban installations to be carried out, which vary in duration from permanent to several weeks. As opposed to conventional design procedures it embraces uncertainty and change; it allows for a park to emerge out of fleeting situations. The identity of the park establishes itself in the public consciousness through impressions of sensations rather than through monumentality or other formal means.

FIVE YEAR PLAN

The initial five year projection for the park includes proposals for five interventions on the site. The interventions are born out of a desire to solve the existing problems of the park as well as to create situations which will drastically alter the perception of the environment. Five years is a period long enough to allow certain long-term projects to be carried out, yet short enough to avoid master planning. Each project corresponds to one
strategy. Subtraction, negotiation, inversion are examples of these strategies employed in formulating a response to formal and temporal patterns. When laid out on a five year calendar the five proposals for five different areas of the park give an idea as to what form the overall site will take at any given time. Simultaneous occurrences of situations and events create juxtapositions which are unpredictable and most importantly never the same.

The plan of the site at the beginning of the first five years is shown below. The two formal patterns imposed on the site, one through ideology, the other through the necessities of urban life are obvious in the drawing. The small black rectangles indicate parked cars. The gray areas indicate a symmetrical pattern imposed on the site disregarding all other possibilities.

01.02
The four scenarios below are mapped along two axes: 

y: financial-political  
x: geographical-social  

Scenario 1  
underground park(ing)  
site: under main field of the park, between surface level and subway level  
duration: permanent  

Scenario 3  
quicksand  
site: western edge of the park  
duration: 3 months over the summer

Scenario 2  
perennial island  
site: the large traffic island at the south periphery of the park  
duration: several years based on the life span

Scenario 4  
summer stage  
site: the south edge of the park overlooking perennial island and the performing arts center  
duration: several weeks in July during Istanbul Music Festival
park-ing
formal patterns; transfer

to accommodate the large number of private cars, the edges of the park have been converted into an informal parking lot, while the center remains empty restrained by another formal order inscribed upon its surface.

the park-ing project transfers patterns in order to liberate spaces from inhibiting striations.
**where**

- middle field of the park parking lot - the site of parking garage

**when**

- construction of the parking garage will begin in the winter of year 02
- middle field of the park will serve as a temporary parking lot to free the edges
- during the festival season the middle field will be a venue for outdoor concerts and shows

**how**

construction of a parking garage is an initiative of the municipality of Istanbul private corporations benefiting from the project will share the financial burden
5 x 5

between March and November five festivals take place in Istanbul. Istanbul Foundation for Arts and Culture organizes the events which are sponsored by major corporations and public funds.

25 moveable platforms are arranged for specific events
where

the festival stage is installed in the space freed from car at the main entrance of the park

when

- on site preparations begin in March, video screen and platforms are installed in place during various events the stage is rearranged by festival crews

how

IFCA - İstanbul Foundation for the Arts and Culture organizes the events and funding for the festivals. The introduction of an additional outdoor venue is funded by one of the major festival sponsors after approval by the IFCA
monumental turn
patterns of history; negotiation

the negotiation strategy mediates between the history and the daily life of the contemporary city by mobilizing the quadrants to accommodate circulation patterns on ordinary days, and processions on national holidays.

national holidays
other days

winter resistant violets bloom for six months

over the summer begonias replace the violets
where

the monument is at the southwest side of the park

when

\[02\ 03\ 04\ 05\ 06\]

on-site construction is scheduled to begin in december

deadline: April, the month of the first national celebration of the year

how

the public’s interaction with the city’s history determine the nature of this intervention.
it originates and grows along the cultural-geographical axis and is funded by public funds
quicksand
un-natural patterns; diversion

the existing linear pattern of the sycamore trees creates promenades on the east edge of the park pulling people to the cafe at the northeast corner

quicksand diverts people, slows them down, holds them in.

The tulip bulbs need to be planted by December. Flowers in full bloom in May. The bulbs are collected and the groundcovers are planted.
where

the open piece of land between the rows of trees on the eastern edge of the park is the site of quicksand

when

02 03 04 05 06

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

- on site preparation begins in late spring
- sand will be brought to site
- late summer the sand will removed

how

local construction companies will be contracted for transporation of the sand to the site.
20,000 tulips
patterns of circulation; inversion

the geometrical inscription on the traffic island consists of
a series of circles on the east-west axis with small patches
of grass.
Inverting the relationship between paved area to planted,
the circular openings become loci of activity within a dense
field. Tulips, a symbol of the city, when in full bloom creates
a sensory stimulus. Throughout the year the landscape
changes as the procedure of planting is carried out.

winter spring summer fall

the tulip bulbs need to be planted by december
flowers in full bloom in may
the bulbs are collected and the ground covers are planted
where

the island to the south of the park is surrounded by roads with heavy traffic

when

construction begins on site: preparation of flower beds
planting is executed in phases across to site; completion no later than december
flowers bloom in may

how

the project is a response to the conditions of the site and the existing surface
the city parks department is responsible for the supply and maintenance of the plants.
construction costs are covered by the municipality of Istanbul.
LOGISTICS

The successful implementation of Gezi Park Kampanyasi requires the participation of different groups of authorities, each of whom will have varying degrees of involvement in the planning and execution of the installations. The factors that come into play can be classified into four groups tied together by the design team. The role of the designers is not limited to the creative design process but also involves mediation, planning and management. The designer plans and guides the project, negotiates between the parties vital to the operation. The designer is an interface that facilitates communication regarding all aspects of the project.

Public Sector

The Municipality of the city of Istanbul is the main governing body in charge of the planning and maintainence of public spaces. The Parks and Gardens Department within the municipality oversees the planning and development of public parks. The city is divided up into districts which each have their own separate governing bodies, smaller municipalities that report to the main bureau. The site of the park is within the control zone of the Municipality of Beyoglu. The seperate political entities involved in the process, therefore, are:

- The Municipality of Istanbul
- The Parks and Gardens Department
- The Municipality of Beyoglu

The public sector is not limited to the political decision makers. The state-funded Performing Arts Center and Istanbul Foundation for the Arts is involved in the organization of cultural events.
Private Sector

The area the park is situated is a site of major service industries, most prominently tourism. The park is bound on all sides by international hotel chains, who will undoubtedly benefit from the added attraction of a lively social space. Hotels, sponsoring and promoting events for their guests as well as the general public, include - but not limited to: The Marmara, Intercontinental Ceylan, Hyatt-Regency, The Hilton.

The user

The participation of the general public in the project is twofold.

At the level of decision-making: Artists, community interest groups as well as other social, cultural groups will participate in scheduled events.

On a broader level the proposed interventions are of a nature which require very active participation of the public. The reactions and actions the public express in using or refusing to use the created environments is a vital aspect of the design process. The designers cannot operate in a vacuum, their moves are guided by the public as much as the public is led by the designers.

The site

The site of the project is an existing park in Istanbul - Taksim Gezi Parki - and adjacent public spaces along the south periphery of the park, including the area around the monument - Cumhuriyet Abidesi- and the area around the performing arts center - Ataturk Kultur Merkezi. The geographical conditions of the site not only determine the application of a design, but also in many cases initiate the design process since many urban patterns are embedded in the geography.

The diagrams below represent along two axes the distribution of involvement per project as well as indicate the source that initiated the scenarios. The geographical-cultural axis refers to the users and the site. The political-financial axis refers to the city government and private businesses.
the design team
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