Structuring and Planning Public Space based on Right to Protest: Comparing Zuccotti Park, Tahrir Square and Taksim Square

Aynaz Lotfata (Corresponding author)

Mississippi State University

United States

Tel: 1-662-694-0820   E-mail: a.lotfata@gmail.com

Research Problem: Planning based on the socio-spatial behaviors of a diversity of users from protest movements contributes to the construction of an inclusive and democratic public space.

It is a place that is organized by people based on their talents and skills in a non-violent process. In non-violent protest, people arrange space in an innovative way to express their voice, as was seen recently in Taksim Square in 2013, Tahrir Square in 2011 and Zuccotti Park in 2011. Since democracy requires physical space and particular physical arrangements, 'how do people in the protest movement reconstruct the existing physical arrangement into a democratic public space?' or 'how do people organize an unlivable place into a place of everyday protest?' as in Tahrir Square and Taksim-Gezi Park, which became arenas for the plays of actors, for the organization of workshops, and for the provision of medical needs and meals for protestors.

As democratic cultures linked to new protest movements circulate globally, I reassess the relationship that exists between the form of public space and democracy. To this end, the study shows how the protest movements in Taksim Square, Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park adopted the public space as a site for the rehearsal of a new form of public action. We are witnessing a new type of protest worldwide, from the Arab world to the Western capitals, and from Turkey to Brazil. In these contexts, people maintain their public presence and favor nonviolence invent new forms of public agency and use visual arts and performance, while also raising new issues relating to faith, the environment and capitalism (Lotfata and Lotfata, 2018).

These new protest movements are somewhat different from the organized political movements of the past, in that they lack a core ideology, and indeed defy political authoritarianism and reject neo-capitalism. They open up a new milieu, a public space for the promotion of a democratic culture, and the organization of space based on the right to protest, bringing everyday life into the realm of democracy (Lotfata, 2015). In this regard, Taksim Square, Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park movements brought focus to the public space as a site for enhancing and staging democracy through everyday practices. The study will show how public space is a vital arena of democracy that should be open to all, and should not obstructed by the state authorities or handed over to capitalist ventures. Broadly speaking, at the heart of the protest movement is the restoration of public space as an inclusive and democratic place. The democratic space is public in that it is open to all, bringing together men and women, Muslims and non-religious, Alevis and Kurds, young and old, and middle and lower classes.

Objective: The study aims to narrate and compare the social-physical structures of Tahrir Square, Taksim Square and Zuccotti Park to derive principles and patterns for the planning and structuring of a democratic place. These three contexts, as arenas of great urban protests, can be considered appropriate cases for study to investigate the inclusiveness of these public spaces. In this regard, the study will, as a primary mission, explain the spatial patterns produced as a result of people's actions in the reconstruction of a public area into a place for a diversity of users and activities, while also investigating the relationships that exist within the spatial patterns. These exposed patterns will reveal different strategies of spatial participation, while the relationship patterns will verify the involvement of different ethnicities and classes in the construction of space. The relational structuring of physical space is one of the major factors in the construction of inclusive, and so democratic, public space (Lotfata, 2013).

Additionally, the different physical attributes of the case study areas makes them more valuable for study, with the stone flooring of Tahrir Square, the green space of Taksim Square and the physical aesthetics of Zuccotti Park. Moreover, to validate the study, the selected case studies feature different levels of democracy, ranging from a place under strict authoritarian rule to a place with a higher level of liberal democracy.

Literature: Existing literature suggests that an inclusive public space is a democratic space, although it does not discuss the importance of organized space in the protest movement as a context worthy of investigation to ascertain "how a place is organized for a diversity of users and activities".

-Existing literature (e.g. Lefebvre, 1991; de Certeau, 1984; Jecobs, 1969) discusses the everyday life of the public space, along with its essential, recreational and social activities, while bypassing the arrangement of daily life according to the socio-spatial patterns used in daily protest movements.

-Existing studies into urban violence point to the sort of the physical arrangements (e.g. lighting, street furniture, accessibility) that prevent the spontaneous movement of people (Bordieau, 1991; Atkinson, 2012; Harvey, 2012 and Wacquant, 2004), but fall short of explaining the non-violent planning of the public space under the new urban protest.

- Previous studies by Don Mitchell (2003), Harvey (2012), Lotfata (2013) and Lefebvre

(1991) emphasize the right to protest in public spaces, but overlook the construction of the public space based on the socio-spatial patterns and principles used by people to express their voice in protest movements.

Method: A qualitative research approach will be undertaken to garner data and knowledge related to this project. The study necessitates the formation of a historical overview to investigate the physical changes that have occurred in Zuccotti Park, Taksim Square and Tahrir Square, particularly over the last 10 years. Moreover, the study will use photo archives to study the evolution of architectural elements, street furniture, landscape design, lighting, etc. As a further step, an overview will be provided of local government policies related to the three case study areas, while a number of newspaper archives will be accessed to provide an overview of the major political/social protests and where they occurred in New York, Istanbul and Cairo. Finally, documentary and photographic records will contribute to the compilation of maps of the three contexts to explain the use of space over the last ten years. In addition, differential maps will be prepared to show the distribution of the population in the surroundings of the case-study areas.

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