

# Beyond Possibilities: Re-Reading Republican Ankara

Zelal Çınar

**Abstract**—This paper aims to expose the effects of the ideological program of Turkish Republic on city planning, through the first plan of Ankara. As the new capital, Ankara was planned to be the ‘showcase’ of modern Turkey. It was to represent all new ideologies and the country’s cultural similarities with the west. At the same time it was to underline the national identity and independence of Turkish republic. To this end, a new plan for the capital was designed by German city planner Carl Christopher Lörcher. Diametrically opposed with the existing fabric of the city, this plan was built on the basis of papers and plans, on ideological aims. On the contrary, this paper argues that the city is a machine of possibilities, rather than a clear, materialized system.

**Keywords**—Architecture, ideology, modernization, urban planning.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN 1923, just after Turkish Republic came into being, a number of reforms were established by Kemalist regime. Modernization project of the young Republic was based on cutting cultural ties with its Ottoman past and its oriental backwardness. This was done through the rejection of tradition, showing and emphasizing Republic’s commonalities with West, rather than Ottoman Empire.

The will of the new republic was transforming the nation’s culture and modernizing it. The reforms were mostly based on people’s everyday practices: new outfit, new Latin alphabets, new calendar and timing. Ankara was aimed to be a plot model of this new and modern life style and spatial form of new state model. It was the center of both government and nation. It was constructed to reflect modernity of Turkey and its cultural similarities with the west. Importantly, it was also symbolizing Kemalist regime ideologically and reinforcing the power of the government. For the republic, it was more important than the victory to construct the new capital as a modern, ideal city in such a short time. That is why the new republic had presented Ankara as its ‘miracle’.

In his illuminating book, *Ankara’nın ilk Planı: 1924- 25 Lörcher Planı*, Ali Cengizkan provides documents and a detailed analysis of Lörcher’s plan of Ankara, about which we have limited information. Although it was not fully implemented, Cengizkan points out the significance of this first plan since it shaped the following plans.<sup>1</sup> He denotes that the plan provided the spatial construction of several public

spaces at the old and newer districts of the center of Ankara [1].

The argument of this paper is drawn on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, and in particular Lefebvre’s formulations on the social production of space, everyday life and the politics of the city. Lefebvre’s conceptualization of space gives possibility to overcome ossified separations that lack the possibilities of considering in-between situations. Lefebvre offers no specific program, rules or ultimate beliefs. He offers a set of openings, an orientation rather than prescriptive course of action. Although a form of Marxism, Lefebvre’s thought is a developing process conceiving of Marxism as containing many different forms at once insufficient yet indispensable to our understanding of the world [2]. For him, Marxism is not a completed system, but a guide [3]. His dialectic therefore, is not so much composed of oppositional thesis and antithesis with resultant thesis within temporal sequencing.

## II. PLAN OF THE IDEAL

In non-Western countries, modern architecture and design has functioned as a representation of modernity without industrialism, capitalist production, and an autonomous bourgeoisie being the basis of its real material and social organization [4]. In the countries where modernization was not a result of the transformation of industrial, urban and market-oriented order, there has been striking emphasis on architecture and urbanism as a form of *visible politics* [5]. As we can see in the Turkish case, the state has been the major actor of the modernization project, mainly based on architecture and city planning.

After becoming the capital city, Ankara would be the symbol of the Turkish Republic, both as a space and way of life. New institutions, new urban design and new individuals fitting this new order should be created as soon as possible. The aim of creating a new, modern, European city also introduced the lifestyle symbols ranging from boulevards, squares, cafes, balls, to houses, clothing, etiquette rules etc. Ankara was the symbol of the new in every aspect of life.

As noted before, urban planning is an effective tool in the modern context, to shape society as well as the city. However, Lefebvre criticizes modern planning as it neglects the production of *social space*, which is produced through the interaction of his renowned trilogy: spatial practices, representation of space and representational space. Therefore it helps to produce *abstract spaces* in the cities and such spaces, and cities produced with abstraction will lack urbanity. Space, Lefebvre postulates, is an historical production, at once the medium and outcome of social being. It is not a theatre or setting but a social production, a concrete abstraction, simultaneously mental and material, work and product, such

Zelal Çınar is with the Abant İzzet Baysal University, Gölköy, Bolu 14280 Turkey (phone: 0090 374 2541000; fax: 0090 374 2534506; e-mail: zelalcinar@ibu.edu.tr).

<sup>1</sup> Unlike the widespread tenet that the first plan of Ankara was done by Herman Jansen, Cengizkan claims that the first one was Lörcher’s plan indeed.

that social relations have no real existence except in and through space [6]. This relationship between the social and the spatial is an interactive one, where people make places and places make people. Consequently space is not produced only by agents of the state, such as architects or other urban professionals. Lefebvrian paradigm of social space is not a product, rather it subsumes things produced, and it encompasses their relationships in their coexistence and simultaneity. There is nothing imagined, unreal or ideal about it.

The production of space, spatial context, as it is argued, is one of the basic components of Turkish modernization project. Not only the city and the public places, but also houses, the residents of people, were seen as a part of the “civilizational shift” project. With formal arrangement of appearances and behaviors, the education and transformation of people was attempted.

Etiquette rules were important components of making modern man. Etiquette was a cultural capital, which reinforced the social status of the newly emerging Turkish elite. Thus it was strongly supported by them and served as a means of cultural segregation. Then they were seen as the carriers of this new life style. How to wear, how to eat, times to sleep, wake-up, how to construct a family were all explained in details in etiquette rules. Newspapers, magazines, books published to teach them.

Modern places of the city were the schools of the new etiquette, restaurants, ballrooms, hotels, etc. As these places were not accessible to everyone, they just served to high class. Traditional workers in service sector such as tailors, shoe makers, barbers became important figures as they were partly participating socialization and everyday life of elites. Eventually two types of Ankara and two types of *Ankarans* appeared: The citizens and the local people.

In addition to this division, there were certain agglomerations according to the city of origin in north-south axis. Whereas the local people of Ankara were settled in the north, around the castle; citizens were settled in the south, namely in the new city. In my point of view, contradictory spaces and identities stand as a crucial signifier of democracy. However, in Republican Ankara, public spaces were isolated from each kind of difference and there were no mediators developed between the ruling elites and the local people.

The approach of treating subjects with contrasting dualities does not give permission for understanding transformation processes which comprehend in between situations. It can be said that this is why exclusion of localness by Republican elites to create a consistent image of civilization resulted in tension between modern and traditional. Life styles of the existing inhabitants are not taken into consideration. No solution proposed for this tension. In fact, the only aim was to create a modern physical environment, by means of architecture and planning. Social utopia of the modernist project of the Republic was to create a new modern man, create him almost out of nothing.

### III. STRATEGIES OF THE PLAN

In the light of the foregoing, the plan for Ankara should have suited the modernity project of newly established republic as well as proposing solutions for the lack of housing due to the increasing population. Hereby, Lörcher prepared two plans for Ankara. First one was the plan of the old city. Predicting 200.000 of population in the future, the plan was proposing regeneration of the area between the castle and the train station. In this plan, the old city center was left as it is. The second plan, proposed a new city, an administrative body, in the south of the old city. This new part of the city was intentionally isolated from the old one. Providing such a setting in which administrative buildings dominating the city was also defining the new city center.

In the south of the railway, an empty land was expropriated in order to develop new city of Ankara. This new district, Yenisehir, was going to be constructed for new administrators, bureaucrats, ministries and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. The expropriation resulted in rapid development around Yenisehir and the railway appeared as a border between the new and the elder city. Yenisehir would be the locus of the new declared capital city and so of the new established republic.

Lörcher designed some paths to connect the regions. These paths did not only function as connection lines, but also constructed semantic relations and urban metaphors between the focal points which are associated physically through the design. These paths were conceived to provide the radial construction originated from the Castle, which also would construct the historical meaning of the space based on the history of Ankara. For instance, beyond connecting the city to the outside, the railway was conceived to emphasize the axis on the Railway Station, the first Parliament Building, and the Castle. The Station Street was planned to be the most essential and prestigious street of the city as it welcomes the strangers to the city. The central business district would be located there; moreover the new Parliament, the new Vakıf Hotel, *Ankara Palace* and the new Garden, Garden of the Nation were decided to be constructed on this street [7].

Located at the highest hill of Ankara, the Castle was renamed as ‘the Beautiful Castle’ in the plan of Lörcher and was considered as a spatial element reminding the pre-Ottoman period of the city. Therefore, in his design, it was used as a main radial component to construct radial relationships between the focal points of the city. It was going to constitute a radial spatial pattern by connecting other focal points of the city, especially through radial green areas.

Lörcher designed a radial axis in both the new and the elder cities. The axis on the Main Railway Station, the Parliament and the Castle was the radial axis for the old city and this schema was repeated for the new city by the axis composed of the Castle, the Railway Station (Sihhiye), the squares, the Neighborhood of the Government and the Parliament. The new axis was going to be named as Nation Street and was going to be formed by the pattern of squares. These adjacently located public spaces were Millet (Ulus) Square, Sihhiye Square, Zafer Square, Cumhuriyet (Kızılay) Square [8].

To sum up, Ankara was planned as an exercise of young Republic's authority. Parallel to state's will to break its ties with past, main strategy in urban planning was isolating the new city from the old city. Then the opportunities of traditional and local life to survive were weakened. The state used its authority to promote modern life and Ankara's pre-Ottoman period. The reason behind that was the belief that this period of the city was referring to country's commonalities with West.

Another strategy was to plan the city in a hierarchical order, reflecting the regime's governing structure. This order was in a contrast with the Ankara's existing structure. The objective here was constructing the capital as the center of government rather than the center of trade and bazaars, as it was in Ottoman Empire.

These strategies left no space for surprises, different patterns in urban scene. Lörcher's Ankara was designed to represent something other than itself; the power of republic and the idea of modernization. Inevitably, a struggle between the state authority and daily practices of people has emerged.

Urban practice, in Lefebvre's terms is the *blind field* for technocrats. He discusses technocrats cannot grasp the urban practice thus they substitute its *representations of space* for urban practice. Moreover, they do not know where these representations come from or what they imply. They figure in the relationships of production as organizers and administrators. They are not decision makers. Rather than controlling the space, they obey and implement. In his argument, Lefebvre criticizes this very passivity of the technocrats.

It appears that fully controlled cities may be the subject of dystopia. Of course urbanity stipulates certain kind of rationality and formality especially in comparison to rural life. However, the pure authoritarian power of rationality, in Lefebvre's words planning rationality, transforms cities into a material tool to organize production, control the daily life of the producers and the consumption of the product [9].

Parallel to Lefebvre's thinking, this paper proposes that space is not a physical container of things. It involves social and political relations. Producing urban space necessarily involves constructing the rhythms of everyday life and reproducing the social relations that frame it. The intention of the Republic was re-organizing the daily life of Ankara from top to bottom, so that it becomes a system. Yet Lefebvre claims that everyday life cannot be organized totally because it is not a system in itself; yet it is hidden under any system. For him, that is the reason why everyday life is directly related with urban life.

Furthermore, Lefebvre claims that a new society, a new life can only be defined concretely on the level of everyday life. Everyday relations between men, lived experience, change more slowly than the structure of the state, in a different way, at a different rate. He argues, even if changes are done instantaneously, as it is in the Republican project, daily life has a conservative structure and a tendency not to have a rupture from its essential elements. Daily life does not suddenly changes; thus it makes the transformation process

gradual. As Lefebvre explores, it is one of the fields where we find a continuity of cultural properties of the society and its daily life patterns which makes the transformation process gradual [10].

#### IV. OLD CITY

New lands were made available to construction to prevent speculation in the old city; however this land policy just shifted the location of speculation. Especially with the opening of the Atatürk Boulevard, there started a huge land speculation in the empty agricultural lands of the new city. Land speculation appeared as the main way to become rich easily therefore people invested their money on empty lands. Consequently, many deputies and ministers as well as the old families of Ankara, became owners of land in the new city.

On the other hand, lower income groups of Ankara clustered around the old city. It was clearly stated that the main concern of Lörcher's plan was the construction of the new city, district created for the *citizens* of the Republic. In an exclusionary manner, the relationship with the old city was proposed only by Atatürk Boulevard, the main axis and promenade of Ankara. All main institutions of the young Republic were along this boulevard. All other arrangement within the old part was left to the time.

Existing shanty houses of Ankara were included within the border of plan, but in fact they were assumed to be non-existent. Parallel to this attitude, for the Turkish elites, any social reality not in accordance with their total project, any practice not comply with desired Western standards were ignored and denied. Inevitably local people living in the shanty houses were left to informal practices to exist in the city space; and this approach contributed to emergence of impermeable boundaries in the city.

While the new spaces of the city was under the control of ruling elites, other's spaces emerged by informal tactics within the clusters of the old city. Urbanity defined by the Republic was reshaped in those spaces, by informal practices. Here, it will be illuminating to elaborate Lefebvre's conception of *differential space*, which is the space of other's. Lefebvre defines it as the space that retains particularities, which are experienced through the filter of homogenous space. He continues: '*A selection is made. The particularities that are incompletely homogenized survive, are reestablished with a different meaning*' [11].

In differential space, the global does not abolish the local; different spaces are interconnected and old spaces are preserved in new ones [12]. This space, which Lefebvre suggests is a more mixed, interpenetrative space where differences are respected rather than buried under a homogeneity. It is thus the spatial concomitant of the total revolution and total man, not a universal entity but as the space of differences.

Unlike the homogenizing and exclusionary character of the Republican project, Lefebvre grasps the complexity of the urban, and emphasizes not only the role of the state, but also that of individual experience; not only the role of technocrats, but also that of citizens. For him, the right to the city is something that should be open to all people, of whatever age, gender, class, ethnicity or sexuality. Indeed, one of the central



aims of urban life should be not only to tolerate but also to celebrate and encourage differences, creating a multitude of experiences, qualities and spaces.

#### V. NEW CITY

Having an essential role in the spatial organization of the modernization project, Ankara was conceived to symbolize values of the new nation state and on the other hand to propose a new life style [13]. Particularly the new district of Ankara was aimed to be a plot model of this new life style and spatial form of new state model. It was constructed to reflect modernity of Turkey and its cultural similarities with the west.

Accordingly, Lörcher used concepts of square and open spaces in the public space organization of the new city, since these concepts were argued to be critical for the human health and wellbeing. He proposed low-density and low-storied development with paths, wide roads and adjacent green areas in his new city plan.

Starting from Ulus, Nation Street was going to form a radial trace between Sıhhiye and Kızılay and would end at the Kızılay Square, within the neighborhood of government. This neighborhood, beginning from Güvenpark, was comprising the buildings of ministries and ending with the Parliament building. As mentioned before, the radial axis coming from the Beautiful Castle was the main component of this spatial construction.

Atatürk Boulevard constituted the main north-south axis of the plan, which would not only connect the new city centre with the old one, but also would join the nodes such as *Orduevi*, *Halkevi*, *Sergievi*. Ulus, the elder city centre, was another node, which was in a tension with Yenışehir. The plan also proposed a sequence of squares along this Boulevard; Sıhhiye Square, Zafer Square and Kızılay Square. Güvenpark was located at the end of Atatürk Boulevard.

Kızılay Square was planned to be both the symbol of the new republic and the public space of the bourgeoisie. Through this space, the new public sphere would be created and the spatial experience was going to be experienced. Designed at the intersection of two main streets, Kızılay Square would promise a new kind of public life and experience with spatial elements such as Havuzbaşı[14].

Zafer Square was an essential component of Kızılay Square. In Lörcher Plan, Zafer Square was defined with buildings of cinema and theatre on its sides. The statue which named the square, Zafer Monument turns its back to the old city and welcomes the inhabitants of the new city. Therefore Cengizkan, names it as *negative gate* [15].

Here it is crucial to note that Yenışehir was not intended to be the centre of the city. Rather protecting the *central role* of the Castle; Yenışehir with Zafer and Kızılay Square, Havuzbaşı and the new parliament was proposed to be the locus and symbol of the new life style of the new, modern Republic. It was, in very deed planned to be the house of modern bourgeoisie identity and Havuzbaşı was going to refer to the saloon of this confidential public sphere [16]. This space became a recreational public area where new bourgeoisie

come together to listen to the classical music concerts and walk around.

As it was discussed before, modern planning neglects the production of social space; therefore, it helps to produce *abstract spaces* in the cities. Lefebvre claims that every society, and hence every mode of production, produces its own space [17]. Thus natural space (a pre-existent natural phenomenon over which activities range, a space of pre-history) gives way first to absolute space (fragments of natural space rendered sacred, the space of rites, death and the space of slavery) [18], then historical space (the early towns of the West, the space of feudalism) [19], and finally abstract space (space as commodity, at once concrete and abstract, the space of capitalism) [20]. Each space contains both traces of its predecessors and the seeds of the next, creating a complex historical geography of different social spaces.

Most important for the twentieth century was abstract space, where space as treated as an abstract commodity, a medium of exchange tending to absorb use. It is also homogenous and universally applicable to any function and consequently infinitely fragmented into units of equal kinds. Abstract space, more than any prior space depends on consensus for its continual reproduction [21]. Socially, this is the space of the new city, abstraction and passive users, instruction and message, where statements take precedence over bodily action. As in the case of Ankara, such spaces and cities produced with abstraction will lack urbanity.

Despite the Republic's will to westernize, knowledge about west was superficial and incomplete. Hence, everyday life had to be reshaped by etiquette rules, in a mechanistic way, to fill in the void beneath the intellectual level of modernization. Outfit of people, decorations of houses, table manners, entertainment rules changed, but mentality did not changed simultaneously.

The Republican modernization project aimed a total transformation to western ideals through a radical break with the past and western oriented endeavor. It could be said that the radical nature of this endeavor derives from its attempt to intervene both the public and private spheres. Not only the city and the public places, but also houses, the residents were seen part of the project. Furthermore, a special attention was paid to houses since they were considered as complementary parts of new way of life.

Similar to the Garden City ideal of the West, model of gardened houses was proposed in the new city of Ankara. Those villa type houses would later turn to be the symbols of the site. Yenışehir would be a specific scene for a different kind of socialization. Balls and parties were organized in villa type houses. Batuman argues participation of employees of foreign embassies and bureaucrats in higher statues implied a new kind of public sphere occurrence [22]. Balls had been used as ideological tools for cultural and social transformations. As government employees' acquaintance to Western culture expected to be the base of Turkish Bourgeoisie, this site was to be the base for bourgeois life style. Both peasants and merchants were excluded from this life style. This was an attempt to formulate a new life style in

the capital city. In order to be a part of this new society, a group of local merchants had developed relations with the government supplying capital accumulation.

In this period, newspapers and magazines began to publish the examples of modern house plans to guide people. Also there were examples of garden arrangements to create a beautiful and modern environment. Houses in Yenışehir, depicted with playgrounds, tennis courts and common gardens. Statues had also begun to be used in garden decoration. Parallel to tendencies in the city planning, they were suggested as necessities of the modern urbanism.

It was this kind of a descriptive approach Lefebvre had in his mind, when he tries to elaborate the destructive effects of *habitat* on the concept of *habiting*. In his dialectic, while *habitat* is imposed from above as the application of homogeneous global and quantitative space, *habiting* is a qualitative space based on lived-experience. *Habitat*, limits the human being to a handful of basic acts such as eating, sleeping and reproducing. *Habiting*, on the other hand, is in proximity to the unknown and the misunderstood in the everyday [23]. *Habitat* also separates inhabitants from each other, preventing them from encountering each other in the street. In short, *habitat* prevents *habiting*, which is when inhabitants come to understand the conditions of their existence.

Moreover, Lefebvre claims that a new cultural project should encompass democracy, sociability, adaptations of time and space and the body, life beyond the commodity and the slow transformation of everyday life [24]. Human activity must therefore be directed at new forms of content, seeking not just to symbolize but transform life as a kind of generalized artistic practice [25]. In Turkish modernization project, social relations were ignored and people rendered as passive entities. Architecture and urban planning was used as a means to transform the society and assumed if the city changes, the society will change, too. It was supposed that the behavior of individuals could be made through that new space, to fit the requirements of newly created circumstances. This kind of approach, in Lefebvre's words, reduces space simply to a *container* waiting to be filled by the *content* [26].

## VI. CONCLUSION

Lörcher's plan of Ankara was not fully implemented, yet it laid the foundation of the spatial organization of the city. This paper claims that the foremost failure of the plan was its denial of existing social and urban conditions. Though dealing with the whole city, the planning approach in this period was not sensitive to the existing spatial pattern. In an exclusionary manner, the main success was expected from the construction of the new city and the development of the old city was left to time. By doing that, the old city was discarded and eventually became the place of the *other*.

Cengizkan asserts that proposing development solely in the new city was due to physical reasons rather than ideological ones [27]. He supports his argument with proposing some implementation difficulties. First of all, constructing in the old city was physically impractical. Secondly, the parcels in the area were too small. Lastly, the land ownership issues of the

area were excessively complex. As a result, construction in the old city would be the waste of time and money.

This paper argues rather, proposing neither construction nor conservation to the old city is an ideological decision which led to destructive socio-spatial results. The old city was neglected for the sake of the new one and ignored in the spatial organization of the city. Furthermore, it was intentionally isolated from the new city and no mediations proposed between them. The two parts of the city had some metaphoric and semantic connections, but they had no physical connections. Thus a formal arrangement, made in the name of modernity failed not only because of this spatial tension between the old and new, but also between people of Ankara: citizens and local inhabitants. Homogenizing process of the Republic polarized those two kinds of Ankarans and eliminated the difference from the public spaces of the city.

If we recall Lefebvre: '*Architecture too easily becomes a moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles and straightness in general, combining a figurative appeal to nature with the worst kind of abstraction* [28].' Such architectural space ignores the space of the body, reduces experience to intellect and renders users passive [29]. Republican Ankara was built on the basis of papers and plans, on ideological aims. The intention was to make everything clear and intelligible, in a materialized system. Thus the text of the new part of Ankara was totally legible, as impoverished as it was clear. Diametrically opposed with the existing fabric of the city, there was no room for surprises or possibilities. From modern Ankara, which should have been the home of all that is possible, they have vanished without a trace. The last statement in that context is that the city always has the potential to be truly new and stimulating; a catalyst to all kinds of thoughts and purposes. This is why it is a *machine of possibilities* [30].

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