# SYMBOL (IZED) TOWN SQUARES

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**Abstract**

Cities are important residential areas that offer comfortable living facilities to people. Cities with many features in the foreground are often remembered with their features. The word "symbol", which is the symbol in the sense of the word, affects the cities today and is also used in expressing the cities. The squares are among the important symbols of the cities to present the past. The squares are among the important symbols of the cities of the present day. This occurs often domestic / foreign tourists to go to, are among the places to be seen. It even has been among the most important reasons to opt for the place of the city. These areas, which we can call as the symbols that are symbolized in this process, are identified with the concept of identity of the cities. From home and abroad, İzmir Konak Square, Istanbul-Sultanahmet Square, Moscow-Red Square, Beijing-Tiananmen Square and Paris-Concorde Square are among these examples. These examples also affect the identity formation of cities. In this study symbol scope from the world and Turkey (the carcasses) town square were examined. The effects of these squares on the cities were studied in the city-identity-square triangle. It is emphasized that symbolic squares have a prescription at the primary level in terms of identity formation in the rapidly increasing deposition process and the need to preserve it.

**Keywords:** City, City İdentity, City Square, Symbolized City Square.

## INTRODUCTION

A city consists of mobile, immobile, natural and artificial components. These components all have different characteristics, which are explained with the concepts of urban identity, urban profile and urban image. When all of them come together, they form the social identity (Kaypak, 2010). According to another definition, city is a physical, spatial and social organization that comes into existence with the successive accumulation of physical, social, human and cultural components of different periods in historical continuity (Birol, 2007). Just like people have their own characteristics, identity and personality; cities also have their own identity and personality (Sağsöz et al. 1996). They also differ from each other with these various unique characteristics. The majority of settlements established in the world have a particular character that was formed within the process. That is to say, every space has a character and identity (Lynch, 1960).

Urban identity is a whole made up of components that are urban, make the city different from others, add value to and are peculiar to the city. In other words, it is the meaning expressed by that city. These elements sometimes gain importance at particular points. For instance, a city can be situated at the foot of a mountain or seaside, it can be close to or far from other cities, it can be a city of religious or historical elements, or it might be more developed compared to the developed cities in its surrounding in terms of trade and economy. All these factors contribute to the formation of unique identities of cities (Birol, 2007). That is because urban identity is considered with elements originating from natural and human-made environment. Natural and historical environmental values and economic, sociological and cultural factors constitute initial and boundary conditions for human actions and provide cities with unique characteristics. Elements of identity arising from natural environment are urban features such as topographic state, climate conditions, vegetation, general location, etc. (Önem and Kılınçaslan, 2005).

Urban identity does not only consist of physical environment, but also is a whole with natural environment of the city and all human activities in it. Society and human relations cause constant redefinition or reproduction of this identity. These concepts involve the reinterpretation of these elements from past to the present as well as the creation of entirely new elements. People create urban myths by conveying their urban experiences to each other, or through media. In monuments that have become landmarks like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, narratives and myths created in relation to this structure come into prominence more than people's experiences there and their relationships with the structure. They affect both people's perception and the development of cities (Tekeli, 1991, 82–83). These points usually known for such

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narratives transform into tourism spots. What identity brings to society and city is defined by Demir (2006) as follows;

- It differentiates the city from other cities and makes it well-known,
- Growth model develops in line with urban identity,
- Uses that will damage the existing urban identity are rejected in the first place,
- Social sensitivity increases depending on urban identity,
- Quality and suitability are taken into consideration in future investments,
- The use of urban resources is rationalized in line with urban identity.

Squares and streets that have different and unique features are highly important for urban identity, legibility and thus, people's choosing that space. For instance, Piazza del Campo in Siena, Piazza San Marco in Venice, Piazza del Duomo in Milano and Red Square in Moscow are identified with the identity of their cities. A crucial aspect that should be taken into account in the discussion of squares is creating a sense of place and belonging in the users of the square (Relph, 1976: 147). Every human being or society arranges the spaces and environment they live in according to their own culture and also demands that settlements in their surrounding also do the same. Some architectural works also function as tools for remembering and cherishing the memory of certain people and events (Aslanoğlu, 1995). Such reference points in cities have a significant place in the formation of urban identity. Reference points manifest themselves as towers in some cities and as squares in others. Some civilizations and societies did not show much interest in towers and chose not to build these structures. For example, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greek and Roma are among these civilisations. However, there were also societies in different periods of history that liked, appreciated and built towers (Tümer, 1999).

After all, cities are spaces that have identity and soul. People build identity by constructing houses for shelter, roads for walking and public buildings, parks, gardens, squares, fountains, etc. for sharing in their living areas. Then, dwellers start to live with the spirituality of that city. The city they provided with identity with their own hands start to give an identity to them and the city becomes their identity. Thus, people's identity identifies with the identity of the city. Then, they are called Parisian, Isfahanian, Beiruter and Istanbuller (Aktaş, 2009).

These individuals, i.e. social groups living in a city have different perceptions of the city. While the dwellers of the city and those who see the city for one day have different views about it, the combination of these perceptions creates an urban image. Urban identity is built according to the mosaic of images provided by these diverse groups. Therefore, when people talk about a city, they mean common characteristics known to everyone. Over time, this intersubjective structure gains determination and is hardly affected by personal experiences (Tekeli, 1991). Image is defined as "a mental picture of something desired, a dream, vision" (TDK, 2018a). Considered in the spatial context, it can be defined as negative or positive ideas evoked or reminded by that space.

Urban image provides information about the lifestyle in that area. Every component forming the city has a particular place in the image of the city. Urban image is sensory and intellectual traces left by urban lifestyle in people, and these traces are the most crucial step in the recognition of urban identity (Erenoğlu, 1998). *Urban image is sensory and intellectual traces that are left by urban lifestyle in individuals, and influential in the formation and recognition of urban identity*. It can be explained as the impression made by urban spaces on people through perception, as well as the meanings and symbols attached to it (Deniz, 2004). Symbol, on the other hand, refers to letters, words, plants and shapes that represent an aim or idea and have a common meaning (URL-1). Some landmark city squares and symbols they represent are given in the table (Table 1).

**Table 1. Squares and Symbols**

| Square photos | Square Symbol |
| --- | --- |
|  URL-2 | **Trafalgar Square / London**<br>Symbol of Trafalgar Battle victory |
|  URL-2 | **Hösök Tere / Budapest**<br>The symbol of the Hungarian people's respect for history and ancestry |
|  URL-2 | **Times Square / New York**<br>The Center of the Universe is the symbol of concepts such as the heart, popularity of the world. |

| | |
|---|---|
| URL-3 | **Berlin- Alexander Platz**<br>World Time and Friendship Fountain |
| URL-3 | **Berlim- Gendarmenmarkt**<br>Culture is the symbol of art |

This study presents an examination of landmark city squares. The impacts of these squares on cities are discussed in the context of city-identity-square triangle. The examples included Konak Square in Izmir and Sultanahmet Square in Istanbul from Turkey, and Red Square in Moscow, Concorde in Paris and Tiananmen Square in Beijing from the world. This analysis displayed which symbols city squares represent for the city, by drawing their plan characteristics. The examination was based on plan characteristics and city symbols (Table 2).

**FINDINGS**

Within the scope of the study, city squares as landmarks in the city-identity-square triangle and their plan characteristics were analyzed. What they symbolize for the city and their plan characteristics are given in detail in Table 2.

**LANDMARK CITY SQUARES**

• **Istanbul / Sultanahmet Square:** Located at the oldest quarter of Istanbul with its 1500 year history, Sultanahmet Square developed around the Blue Mosque. The square is a historical protected area today. It consists of four close, but separate spaces: the park with a fountain between Sultanahmet Complex, and the Hagia Sophia; old hippodrome housing the German Fountain and Obelisks; the area that is mostly occupied with ordered benches for those watching sound and light performances, and planted with *Juniperus communis* and *Taxus baccata*; and the area between the Courthouse and Firuz Aga Mosque (Gültekin 1996). It has seen different eras and been influenced by diverse cultures, is a prominent square in terms of making the history of Istanbul (Dökmeci, Dülgeroğlu Yüksel, 1996). In addition, it was built by the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus in 195-196 CE, and was used as Hippodrome in the Byzantine era (Andreasyan, 1976). Settlements concentrated around the square in the 16th century. With the construction of İbrahim Paşa Palace in early 16th century, the Hippodrome started to host great festivals and celebrations (Aslantaş, 1998). Ottoman mosques are usually surrounded with walls or do not have a facade looking at the street or a square, but the Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosque in Sultanahmet Square are different in that respect. In addition, as the square is not surrounded with buildings, it does not feel like a defined square. Buildings in this area that belong to different periods in the past add richness to the area. The gaps between them allow the rest of the city blend into this space (Dökmeci, Dülgeroğlu Yüksel, 1996). These gaps also highlight that the buildings are independent from each other (Arnheim, 1977).

• **Izmir / Konak Square:** It is not only a district or neighbourhood, but also has become the centre of the city, especially for the past two centuries. Therefore, Konak Square and its surrounding can be called the "Heart of Izmir". The most significant structure in the area forming the square and its surrounding is Izmir Governor's Official Residence. It also accommodates many places and structures that have survived to today, particularly Konak Clock Tower, City Hall, Ferry Terminal, Yalı Mosque, Ankara Palas Hotel, entrance of Anafartalar Street, Military Café, Milli Kütüphane (National Library) and Sarı Kışla (Yellow Barrack). Konak is the main entrance and exit of Kemeraltı and its surrounding, one of the most important commercial centres of Izmir. Konak Square is the starting point of all local transportation vehicles to every direction. In ancient Izmir, this area was considered as part of the "inner harbour". After the declaration of the Republic, the square was named "Atatürk Square" with the decision of Izmir City Council (URL-4).
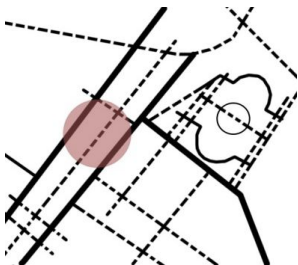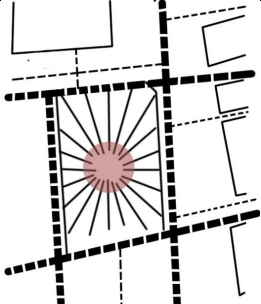
• **Moscow / Red Square:** Marking history in Moscow, Red Square has a particular place as the foundations of the city were laid here. The square also has increased significance for housing the Kremlin Palace (URL-5). Red Square has an important place in the cultural and historical past of Russia for hosting many structures that have become the symbols of both Moscow and Russia. In addition, the Kremlin and Red Square were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1990 due to their strong links with the Russian history since the 13th century (URL-6; URL-7). Other name of the square is Pozhar (fire) Square (URL-6). The construction in the square started with the Kremlin as the first building in the area. It is known that the Kremlin was the centre of the superior power of religious and non-religious life in the Grand Duchy of Moscow. At the end of the 1400s, the construction of Red Square started with the order of Ivan III, and this area housing poor peasants and criminals was cleaned (URL-6; URL-7). Lenin's Mausoleum, St Basil's
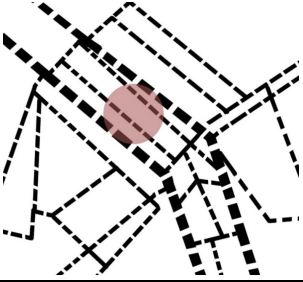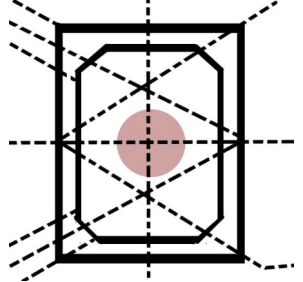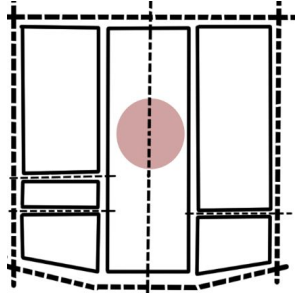
Cathedral, the State History Museum and GUM department store are situated in the square. There is a short pyramid made up of red and black granite right in front of the Kremlin walls in the middle of Red Square that is about 500 meter width (URL-8; URL-7). The Kremlin was the official residence of the Supreme power which was the centre of the earthly and spiritual life of the state in the 13th century. At the end of the 15 – 16th century, the Kremlin was one of the most important walls of Europe (URL-7). One of the most significant structures in the square is the Kremlin Palace. Having survived since 1147, this structure has become a landmark of Moscow. Throughout history, it was home to many Tsars who were coroneted here (URL-5).

- **Paris / Concorde Square:** Measuring 8 ha in area, Place de la Concorde is the largest square in Paris. Being 80.000 square meters large, it is situated between the Champs-Elysées and the Tuileries / Louvre Gardens and presents a unique perspective of the Arch of Triumph (URL-9; URL-10). At each corner of the octagonal square is a statue representing a French city: Bordeaux, Brest, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Rouen and Strasbourg. They were installed in 1836 by Jacob Ignaz Hittorf who redesigned the Place de la Concorde between 1833 and 1846. There are two fountains in the square: a bronze fountain called 'La fontaine des Mers' and the 'Elevation of the Maritime' fountain. Both fountains were designed by Hittorf. Having witnessed the most terrible scenes at a time, the square has become the most famous tourism spot in Paris today. (URL-11; URL-9). Back in the day, some prominent persons were executed in public. A guillotine was installed at the square and people in death row were beheaded on guillotine (URL-11). During the French Revolution in 1792, the statue was replaced by another large statue, called 'Liberté' (freedom) and the square was called Place de la Révolution (URL-9).

- **Beijing / Tiananmen Square:** Tiananmen is among the largest public areas in the world. One end of the square extends to the Forbidden City. Built between 1406 and 1420, the Forbidden City covers an area of 720.000 square meters and served as the administrative centre of the Chinese dynasty with its 8707 rooms for centuries. It was included in the World Cultural Heritage List in 1987. All the structures in the area are registered as the largest collection of preserved ancient wooden structures in the world (URL-12). Tiananmen Square is the geographical centre of Beijing (URL-13; URL-14). Surrounded with huge buildings, the square seems magnificent and monumental. At the centre of the square is the Monument to the People's Heroes which were built in memory of the martyrs who dedicated their lives to the Chinese people. As the biggest monument of the Chinese history, it reaches as tall as 37.94 meters (URL-13). Tiananmen Tower in the south was built in 1417 during the reign of Ming Dynasty. The tower has five arch gateways and nine principle hall columns. With the delicately carved white marbles on its base and yellow tiles on the roof, the tower is quite resplendent. Under the tower flows the limpid Jinshui River, across which seven exquisite bridges are perched, named the Golden Water Bridges (URL-13). This widest palace complex in the world opens into Tiananmen Gate in the south. Tiananmen literally means the 'Gate of Heavenly Peace'. Unfortunately, having created such splendid numbers, China is not remembered with a concept like the 'Gate of Heavenly Peace', but with a hellish massacre (URL-12).

**Table 2. City squares and plan characters**

| Square Plan Character | |
| --- | --- |
| **Sultanahmet Square** | Square Photos |
|  | <br>URL-15,16,17 |
| | **Square m²:** 13.000 m2 |
| | **Location:** Historical Peninsula / Istanbul- TURKEY |
| | **Symbol for the city:** Hippodrome, The birth of the demolition, Sultanahmet, monuments |
| | **Year of construction:** 1854 |
| **Izmir Konak Square** | Square Photos |
|  | <br>URL-18,19,20 |
| | **Square m²:** 6100 m2 |
| | **Location:** Konak, Izmir, TURKEY |
| | **Symbol for the city:** Historical background |
| | **Year of construction:** 1800 years |

| Moscow Red Square | Square Photos |
|---|---|
|  |  |
| | URL-21,22,23 |
| | **Square m²:** 73.000 m² |
| | **Location:** North of the Moscow River,, Moscow, RUSIA |
| | **Symbol for the city:** Communism, fire, tarihe testimony |
| | **Year of construction:** 1400 years |
| **Paris Concorde Square** | Square Photos |
|  |  |
| | URL-24,25,26 |
| | **Square m²:** 80.000 m² |
| | **Location:** Paris, FRANCE |
| | **Symbol for the city:** Freedom / Light |
| | **Year of construction:** 1748 |
| **Tiananmen Square** | Square Photos |
|  |  |
| | URL-27,28 |
| | **Square m²:** 440.000 m² |
| | **Location:** Beijing, CHINA |
| | **Symbol for the city:** Heavenly Gate, National Gate |
| | **Year of construction:** 1417 |

## 4. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

This study discussed the meanings that city squares add to cities and the symbols they represent. When we looked at the examples from both Turkey and the world, we saw that each square has their own identity and history. Leaving a good or bad mark in history, these squares have become the biggest tourism and identity points today. There are many subjects and aspects to discuss within the context of the contribution of city squares to cities. This study examined the symbols of city squares and their contribution to the city with these symbols.

The main element that makes a city a city and shows its characteristics is city squares. In fact, the first thing that comes to mind for some cities can be the squares in these cities. For example: Red Square in Moscow, Times Square in New York, St. Peter's Square in Rome and Taksim Square in Istanbul (Yeşil, Akköse 2018). There are certain aspects that can be said for all the cities established from past to the present. The most important of these is the fact that cities undergo changes and transformations all the time, and they also affect and transform individuals with all social, economic and cultural systems they have during this process of change / transformation (Erdönmez, Çelik 2017). In their study, Erin et al. (2017) state that squares have become unique symbols, a representation or focal point after a situation/event, and demonstrations or social movements on these structures further strengthen this aspect (Erin, et al. 2017). In addition, the sense of belonging to a 'place' is among the primary needs of people, and having this feeling depends on the symbolic and identity features of that place and the spatial characteristics it has created (Kart Aktaş, Çınar 2018). For instance, while Trafalgar Square is the largest square in London, it is the symbolic meaning gained with experiences that attracts tourists and is imprinted on memories. There are many similar examples both in Turkey and in the world. Another example is Heroes' Square (Hősök Tere) in Budapest. The experiences of Hungarian heroes who lived throughout the history became the symbols of the square. All these events led to the formation of a symbolic square which was also the centre of major political events. On the other hand, Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin has become a landmark for being the centre of Culture-Art, and Times Square in New York has become a landmark as the place of entertainment and

dynamism. These symbolic concepts have transformed squares into unforgettable, memorable spaces. To sum up, the contributions of city squares and their symbolic meaning to cities can be given as follows:

- They help future generations to connect with the past,
- They create an alternative urban memory,
- They carry the traces of the city in the past to the future,
- They contribute to tourism by attracting local/foreign tourists,
- They reproduce the spatial practices of the present day,
- They make the city a focal point,

In conclusion, with the symbols they represent, city squares deeply influence the process that people remember these cities. That the symbol of a square makes significant contributions to the city in this process and particularly in terms of being remembered is supported by many studies. In addition to their being focal points of cities, the history and experiences of these squares are among the most important aspects that can be conveyed to future generations and tourists.

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