

Taksim Urban Design Competition

General Project Approach



Introduction

Taksim is the beating heart of Istanbul, with its arteries bringing life in and out of the square. It is a melting pot of various forms of life, ranging from tourists to local residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The square is also home to many urban animals, particularly the pigeons and sparrows. It is a continuously shifting and transforming space that has been the backdrop for various sociocultural and political upheavals, and ecological grassroots resistances.

In spite of Taksim's inherent democratic character, it has unfortunately been subjugated to multiple suppressive and opaque processes over the decades that have manipulated the essence of the square. This perpetual power struggle to define Taksim has, in turn, defined what Taksim is today: a time machine. The square's multiple layers of complexity transcends time itself. However, the public is hard to read in this narrative, and see Taksim as a space that does not only represent conflicting state ideologies of different periods.

The palimpsest of ideological layers that represent what Taksim is today, was imagined and implemented by the people in positions of power who have tried to mold Taksim to push their own vision of society. This open competition is an opportunity to call the public into the design process of this vitally important square and give the square a human touch by allowing the public to finally take part in the democratic decision making processes to implement best possible changes for the public good . It provides a democratic engagement space for citizens to leave their own history and heritage behind; for future generations to experience safe, functional, satisfying and non-discriminatory public spaces. This is possible both by creating individual memories, and by transforming Taksim from "space" into "place" through becoming a part of the democratic decision making processes within urban life.



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The Meaning of Taksim

Defining a spatial concept for Taksim requires an understanding of both its ethical dilemmas, and its sense of place. It is an atmosphere defined by multiple historical and political factors that have over time defined its spatial and collective memory.

02

A Holistic Public Space

The urban identity of Taksim needs to be enhanced by improving its active use of public space, its access to relevant functions, its connectivity to various modes of transportation, and the environmental / sustainable qualities of its green system.

03

Enhancing Spatiality

In order to increase the quality of life around Taksim, it is important to foster a socially inclusive place where all walks of life can engage in a democratic nature. This can be achieved by enhancing the square with better safety, security, architectural materials, and lighting. These issues are explained on the attached 1:1000 site plan.



A Continuously Shifting Space of Ideologies and Power

TOP-DOWN PLANNING

CONTROL

BARRACKS

URBAN RENEWAL

NATIONAL IDENTITY

SYMBOLISM

DISPLACEMENT

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

POWER PROJECTION

MEETING AREA

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

CLOSENESS

INCLUSIVE

CONTROL

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

MELTING POT

GASTRONOMY

SENSITIVITY

HISTORY AND MEMORY

MULTILAYERED

LIBRARY

NOSTALGIA

ART

CREATIVE

THEATRE

FESTIVALS

FAIRS

CENSORSHIP

EQUALITY

SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

SUPPRESSION

VIOLENCE

BIKE

CENTRAL NODE

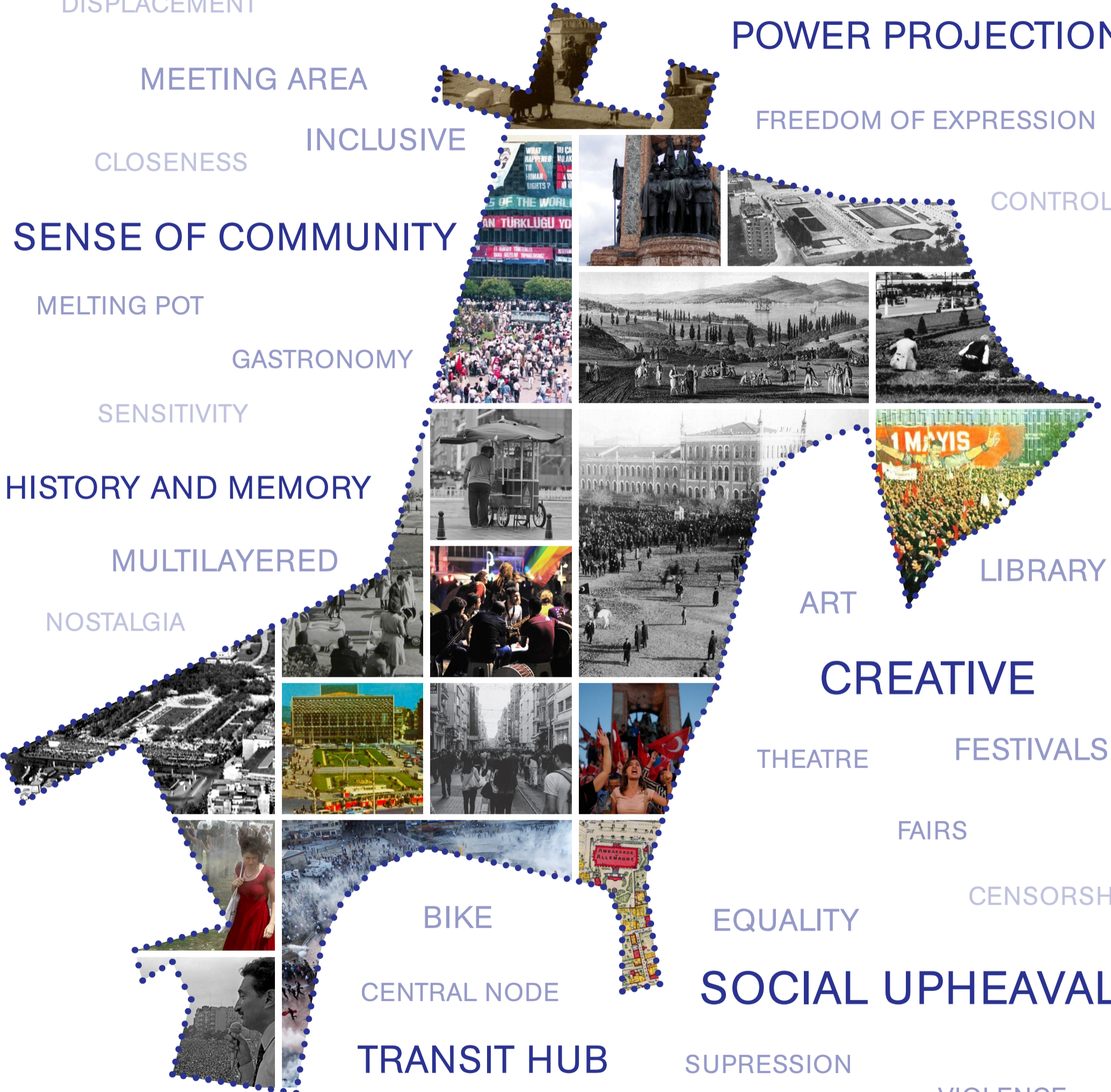
TRANSIT HUB

DOLMUS

HYPERCONNECTIVITY

METRO

01



The Meaning of Taksim

A collective and spatial memory defines the essence of Taksim, which can be characterized as a rich layering of prevailing perceptions that echo back to a time when it was not the epicenter of Istanbul. Taksim originally existed at the edge of the city as part of a peripheral settlement called Pera¹. It was the location of multiple graveyards for not only Turks (Ayas Pasha Cemetery), but minorities such as Armenians, Greeks, and other European inhabitants in the social inclusivity of a necropolis. These graveyards were used to transform the area into an active recreational green space for local inhabitants¹, laying the foundations of our public sphere interpretation of Taksim. The perception of Taksim would shift in the beginning of the 19th Century, as the Ottoman government set out to develop a modern standing army (Nizam-ı Cedid)², in addition to building massive military structures to support it. This projection of power set a precedent for Taksim to become the nation's stage where progressive changes are displayed. In 1909, these military barracks would later serve as locations for revolutionary uprisings in the struggle between absolute and constitutional monarchism².

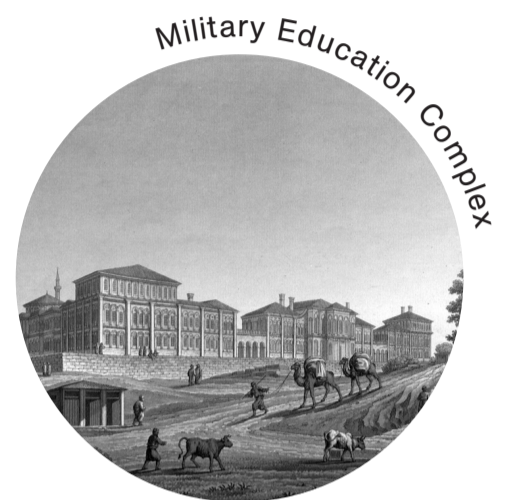
These events set in motion the politicization of Taksim, which would really begin with the designs of urbanist Henry Proust. The early Republican period government hired him to help fulfill their vision of a new center of Istanbul in Taksim³. This was a deliberate attempt to break away from the old, more specifically the historical peninsula of Fatih and its Ottoman / Byzantine symbolism³. To achieve this, Taksim was expanded as a square (to the borders we see today), the Topçu Barracks were torn down to make way for Gezi Park, and a new set of public and cultural buildings were erected around this new space. Even though some of these changes were beneficiary for the public good, such as Gezi Park radically helping and increasing women's usage of urban green spaces and Atatürk Cultural Center being the home of many important productions for the performance arts field of the country, this was also a moment when the square's destiny was singularly left to the governing bodies. Taksim square became a place for nationalistic rallies and holidays. The Republican Monument, designed by Pietro Canonica was the first "Touch of the Hand" that set into motion the set of events that would forever change Taksim into an ideological character in the national consciousness.

Even though the design would be successful in creating an axial relationship with Gezi Park and Taksim Square, the rest of the masterplan proposal would eventually be made obsolete by urbanization methods. Prevailing modernist design principles that were popular during his time were reliant on a rigid framework that did not take into account potential future pressures of urbanity. Almost a century since Proust made his plan for Taksim and Gezi Park, we know now that urban spaces should be designed towards maximum inclusivity, flexible use and readability. The design proposed here aims to define and re-create the successful aspects of the Proust plan, while changing the problematic, rigid and non-inclusive aspects of the Proust plan.

¹ Polvan, Sinan, and Yonet, Neslihan A. "Story of Taksim Square's Transformation: From Death's Stillness To Life's Hubbub", *Urban Transformation: Controversies, Contrasts and Challenges* Bahcesehir University, 2010.

² Erimtan, Can. "Turkey's Culture Wars: The Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, the Topçu Barracks & the AKM." *Istanbul Gazette* (2013): n. pag. Print.

³ Pasta, Francesco. "Construction and Destruction: Taksim Square, an Architectural Battlefield." *DOMUS*, 9 Nov. 2019, www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2019/11/09/construction-and-destruction-taksim-square-an-architectural-battlefield.html.



Observational Analysis of the Taksim Plateau and its Various Spatial Issues



Poor Pedestrian Access to the Square



No Apparent Spatial Hierarchy



Lack of Human Scale



Excessive Hardscaping



Dead End Circulation Paths



Lack of Interactive Functions

Spatial Concept

Since the creation of Taksim Square and Gezi Park, its structure would stay relatively the same. However, the ideological nature of this particular public space⁴ made it a popular place for protests and rallies, and in turn Taksim became synonymous with political violence and suppression. This toxic atmosphere of social anxiety and conflict would reach new heights in 2013, when the current national government set out to restructure Taksim in their own political image with their “Pedestrianization Project,” which aimed to not only remove Republican era symbolic structures, but also reconstruct the Topçu Barracks in its original position - on top of Gezi Park⁴.

The lack of transparency in decision making, combined with the use of urbanity to construct a political narrative, sparked massive protests that captured the public consciousness. Though these protests prevented the reconstruction of the barracks, the rest of the project moved on, resulting in Taksim becoming a unfriendly massive and chaotic void that has lost its human scale, spatial hierarchy, readability and general sense of place.

In order to reconnect Taksim to the city and its inhabitants, the square and the park must repair its contextual and social relationships. This can be achieved by generating a spatial and conceptual intervention in Taksim that creates a sense of ownership for the public, rather than the political establishment. To make this a reality, four goals must be met in the design proposal:

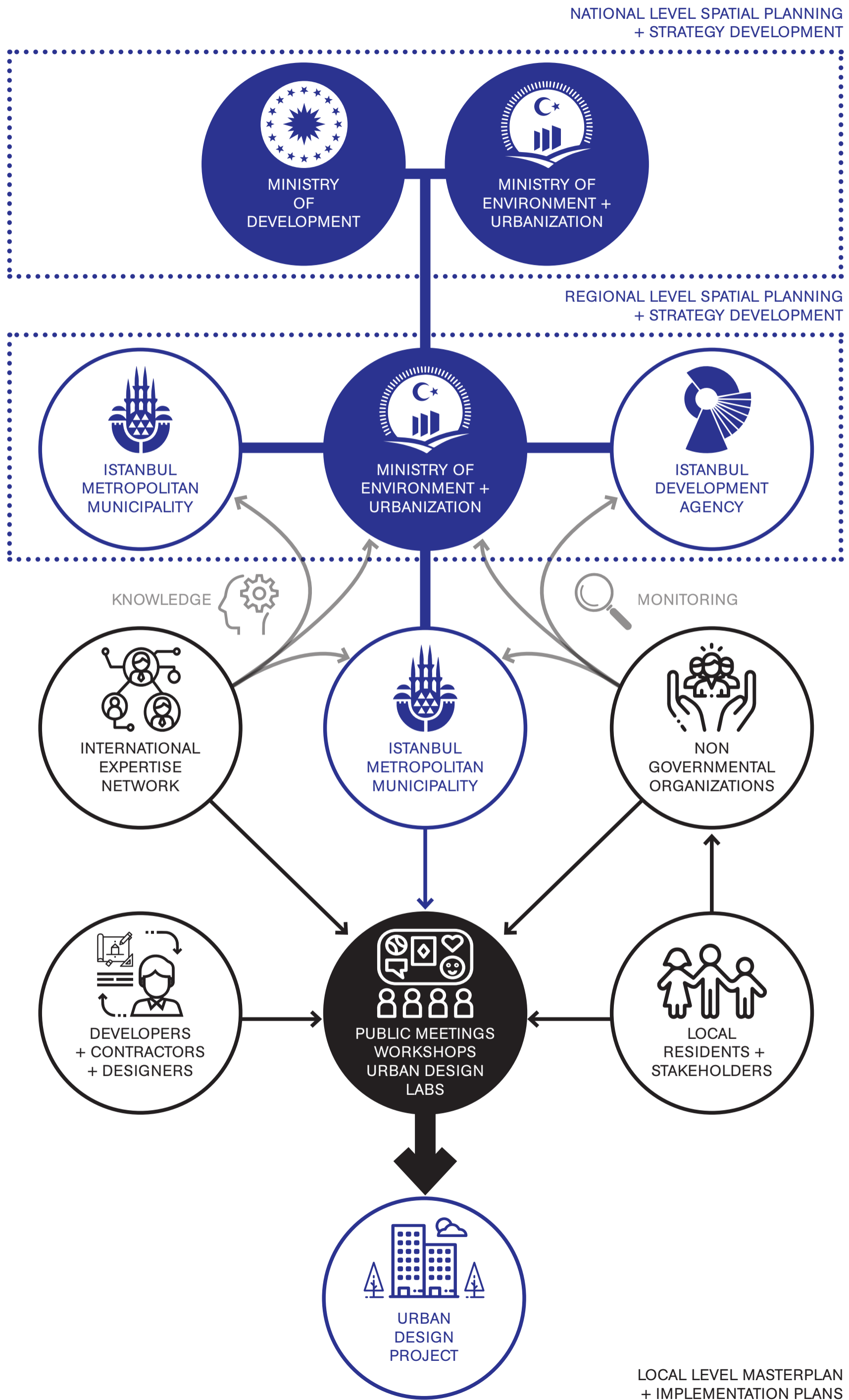
1. Reverse the inflexibility of Prost’s 1937 Master Plan by developing flexible interaction spaces that are responsive to the human scale.
2. Enrich the hierarchy of public space by implementing various semi-open spaces where inhabitants can interact with each other in various ways.
3. Transform the outdated passive character of Gezi Park into an active green space that not only provides spaces for social interaction, but is also ecologically responsible.
4. Contribute to the general readability of the space through design to make sure that the space is memorable. Not just through major landmarks, but through minor details as well.

In addition to these goals, a general increase in a sense of ownership for the public, and not the political establishment, should be one of the guiding motivators behind both current and future interventions to Taksim. This approach could potentially bring in new and more human socio-cultural functions in a flexible approach to the structuring of public space in Taksim. Achieving this will not only bring more people to Taksim, but also foster a greater sense of multiculturalism and diversity.



⁴ Gül, Murat, et al. “Istanbul’s Taksim Square And Gezi Park: The Place Of Protest And The Ideology Of Place.” *Journal Of Architecture And Urbanism*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2014, pp. 63–72., doi:10.3846/20297955.2014.902185.

Integrating Public Participation to Create Feedback Mechanisms to Urban Planning Processes in Istanbul



Urban Integrity

One of the main causes that brought Taksim to its current situation is an overall lack of urban integrity in the systematic structure of maintaining public space in Istanbul. This can be traced back to the late Republican period, when management issues began to plague the sociocultural functions that were built in Taksim⁵. Lack of oversight, combined with corruption and liberalized market policies of the mid 80's⁴, resulted in the privatization (in the form of hotels) of large sections of original park area proposed in Prost's 1937 Master Plan⁶, nearly completely cutting off Gezi Park from the rest of the green network.

This competition is a chance to implement a new development management model that will protect public space by ensuring transparency through public participation, which is severely lacking in the current planning system⁷. The current system is an overly rational top-down system where bureaucrats within the system dictate decisions to municipality planners in the later phases of project development⁸. It is not until finalized plans are released for review when local stakeholders are allowed to have a say in the design, if at all, and it is usually too late as contractors have already started the process of creating the project⁷.

To make this system more inclusive to all, and less top-heavy, public meetings and open workshops should be initiated as early as possible in the planning process, as input from landowners and local inhabitants can create a feedback mechanism for planners to improve their designs, which will in turn cause less legal bottlenecks for impending projects⁷. These feedback mechanisms need to be mediated by non government organizations such as *Taksim Platformu*, *Kentsel Strateji*, *Beyond Istanbul*, and *Kent Dedektifi*, who could be there to represent and defend the interests of local inhabitants and stakeholders. These organizations should also implement a system of monitoring these government institutions so that all planning processes continue to be transparent.

To increase public participation between the public and governmental planning bodies, it is recommended to enhance the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms with a set of tools that will create synergy between designers, planners, government officials, and a variety of other stakeholders. Firstly, to create more feedback for design processes, it is recommended to implement urban design labs that allow stakeholders to communicate to designers their perspectives, which will help provide information that previously went unnoticed. Secondly, international urbanism networks could help provide the most current expertise and strategies to governmental institutions to plan relevant projects that could potentially increase people's quality of life. Organizations that could provide such services include the *Open & Agile Smart Cities (OASC)* and the *International Urban Development Association (INTA)*, who provide regular forums where knowledge is exchanged throughout various world planning bodies.



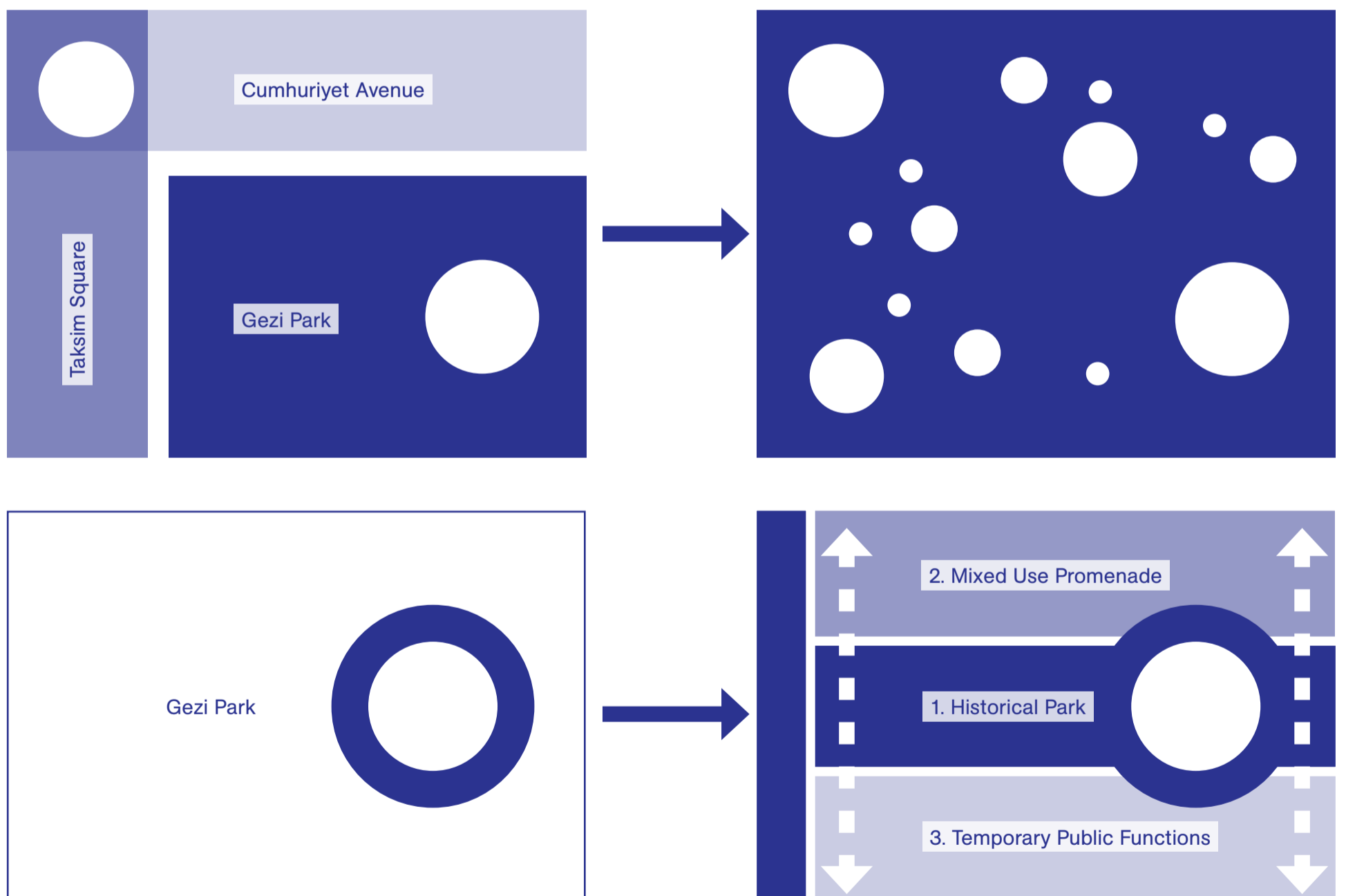
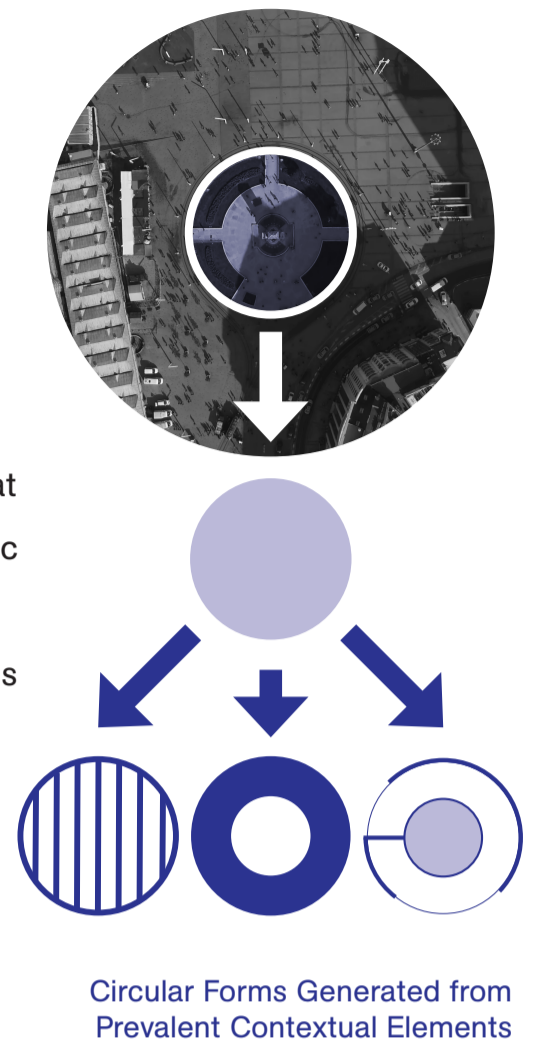
⁵ "Taksim Is a Site of Struggle for Ideological Predominance' - Turkey News." *Hürriyet Daily News*, 3 June 2013, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/taksim-is-a-site-of-struggle-for-ideological-predominance-48074.

⁷ Dede, Okan Murat. "The Analysis of Turkish Urban Planning Process Regarding Sustainable Urban Development." *Sustainable Urbanization*, 28 Sept. 2016, doi:10.5772/63271.

⁸ Gursoy, Nevra, and David J. Edelman. "Regional Development Planning in Istanbul: Recent Issues and Challenges." *Current Urban Studies*, vol. 05, no. 02, June 2017, pp. 146–163., doi:10.4236/cus.2017.52009.

A Holistic Public Place

Another major issue with Taksim is the lack of cohesion between the various spatial actors and functions that are on the site⁹. Within this public stage area exists three different characters that work in isolation from each other. These actors are: the Republic Monument, Gezi Park, and the empty plateau of Taksim Square and Cumhuriyet Avenue created by the Pedestrian Project. The reason for this broken spatial relationship is that these characters were built over time within the preexisting urban structure of Taksim⁹, creating boundaries that strictly defined pedestrian circulation flows. To repair this dysfunctional public space, a holistic concept needs to be implemented that allows for free flowing circulation paths to form, while also providing a flexible framework that is adaptable over time, depending on the future needs of Taksim. This can be achieved by using a consistent structural design element taken from a common conceptual language found on the project site, and using it as a connective tissue that ties the once isolated spatial actors together as one public space. These elements must include within them a variety of engaging functions that would take the proposed circulation paths, and use them to activate disconnected spaces like Gezi Park.



Conceptual Diagrams Explaining the Structural and Spatial Impacts Created by the Holistic Design Intervention

Generating a Holistic and Flexible Spatial Intervention that Connects All Spatial Actors with a Common Language

A. Integrating the Gezi Bridge into an Enhanced Entrance Space

One of the great misfortunes of privatization and urbanization of the green network that connected Gezi Park with Maçka and Harbiye has been reduced to an infrastructural object like the footbridge that exists now. In an effort to try and repair this relationship, a new entrance space is proposed that integrates Taksim Park with the bridge into one common design element.

Enhancing the space here will create a greater sense of an entrance to not only Gezi Park, but the entire Taksim plateau itself. Another factor in the spatial configuration of the entrance space involves creating expansion points for pedestrians walking up Cumhuriyet Avenue towards Harbiye, who now walk on an unfriendly sidewalk between the park's hard edge and the car tunnel.

Another motivation behind this intervention is that there is a nearly hidden metro entrance to Taksim Square. A mass transit node as busy as Taksim deserves a bit better, instead of being an under designed afterthought. Changing this entrance space will bring in a new breath of life to Taksim, and motivate pedestrians to explore the actual space, not just walk through it.

C. AKM as an Urban Toy Box

Within the newly redesigned Atatürk Cultural Center, there sits a red jewel-like performance theatre that can be observed from the outside looking through the building's massive modernist glass facade. This is an opportunity to better connect the AKM with the Taksim plateau, and the best way to interpret this is to look at the building as a toy box that has been knocked over, and its spherical objects did not just spill onto the square, but the entire urban plateau!

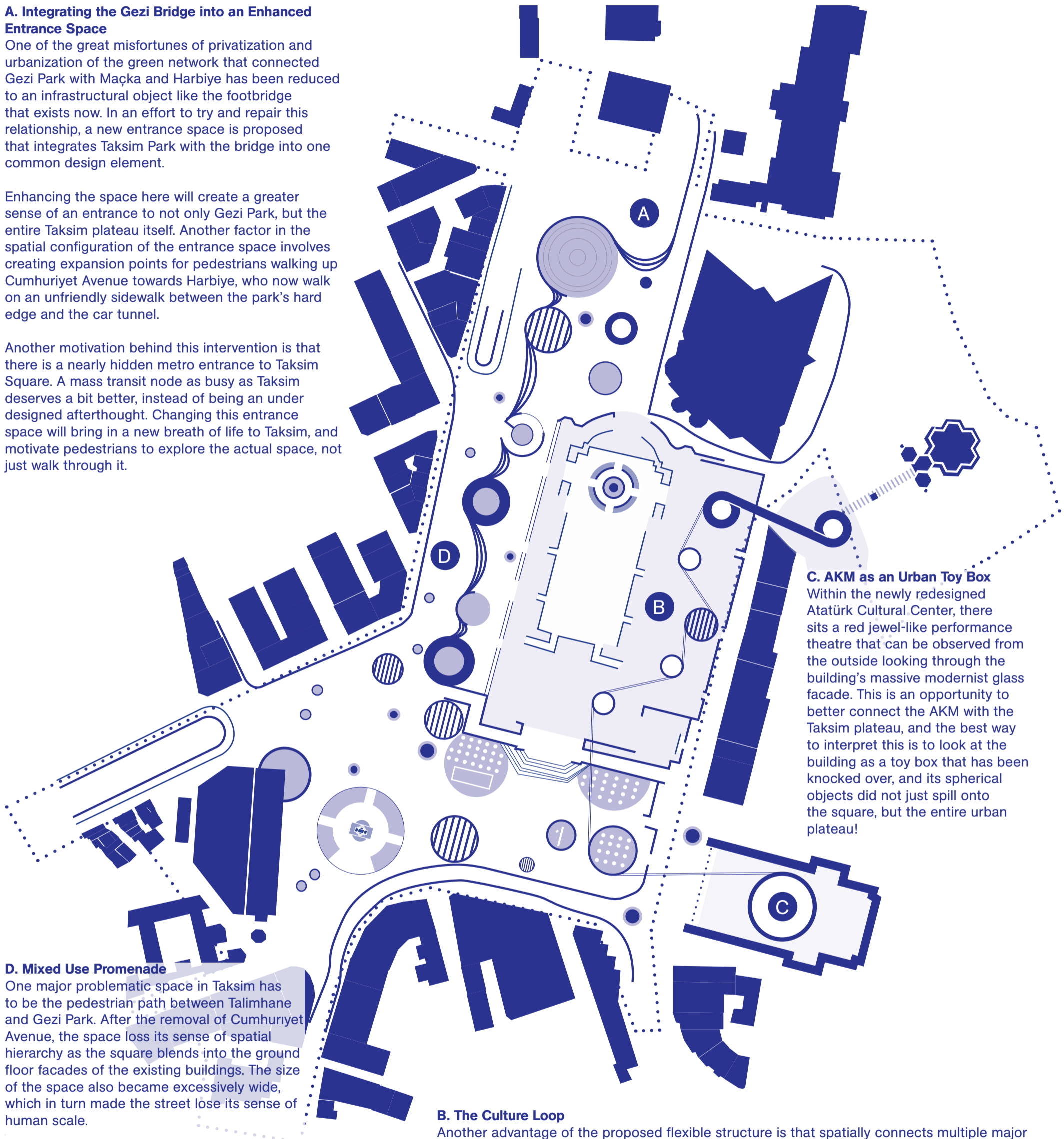
B. The Culture Loop

Another advantage of the proposed flexible structure is that spatially connects multiple major actors of Taksim into once holistic space. It also can manipulate pedestrian circulation flows to not only control the interactions between programmatic functions, but also activate them! An opportunity has arisen to connect the Atatürk Library with the AKM through Gezi Park, essentially plugging it into a circulation loop that could potentially activate the common space that will link them together. The Cultural Loop has the potential to bring Gezi Park back to life by not only making a destination point with the connective bridge to the Atatürk Library, but also providing new functions within the green space that could act as a temporary public zone that uses the structure provided by the loop to have events that keep a community strong and connected. These events could be in the form of book (Sahaf Festival) and food fairs, film and art festivals (IKSV), youth gatherings, even pop-up shops for local designers¹⁰!

D. Mixed Use Promenade

One major problematic space in Taksim has to be the pedestrian path between Talimhane and Gezi Park. After the removal of Cumhuriyet Avenue, the space loss its sense of spatial hierarchy as the square blends into the ground floor facades of the existing buildings. The size of the space also became excessively wide, which in turn made the street lose its sense of human scale.

To make this street more pedestrian friendly, a variety of programmatic elements are strung along the boundary of Gezi Park to make a street wall that faces Talimhane, while at the same time attempts to compress the space with its massing. These structures project into the streetscape, but also creates a permeable border that will influence pedestrians to interact with Gezi Park in a more active way, rather than just walking by it.



⁹ Kubat, Ayse Sema. "Evaluating the impacts of an urban design project : Multi-phase Analyses of Taksim Square and Gezi Park , Istanbul." (2015).

¹⁰ "50 Days of Festival in Beyoglu." Daily Sabah, www.dailysabah.com/arts-culture/2016/09/28/50-days-of-festival-in-beyoglu.

Functions and Access

The flexibility of the proposed holistic structure not only means that the functions within it can change over time, but can also adjust to Taksim's contextual programmatic relationships around the public space. The main contextual functions are based on access to the city, the park, and immediate cultural functions. These relationships help define programmatic zones that create an internal network that is powered by the larger city network, in turn activating multiple areas of the project, especially with problem areas like Gezi Park⁹.

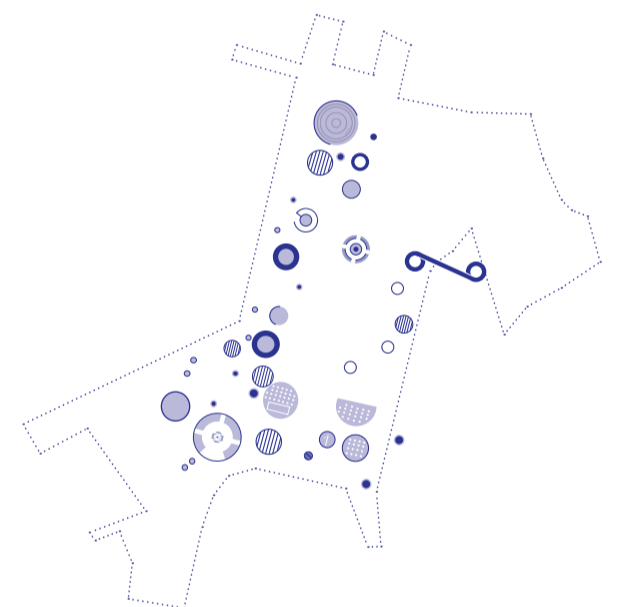
The holistic structure should allow these programmatic + contextual relationships to flourish by using the circular form of its design to promote a free flow of pedestrian circulation around them, while also fostering a human friendly scale to the public realm. The proposal implements a blend of both permanent and temporary sociocultural functions that will not only allow for flexible use over time, but will also have a set of stable functions that are necessary for successful placemaking. In addition to this, the free flow circulation of the proposal defines the size and shapes of the circular structure, establishing a sense that "form follows people."



Circular Forms are Used to Enhance Free Flow Circulation



- A. Enhanced Gezi Park Entrance
- B. Multifunctional Promenade
- C. Active Recreational Park
- D. Transit Hub Platform
- E. Cultural Square
- F. Historical Entrance



Structure of the Intervention Works Separately, but also as One



Programmatic Typologies Located within the Site are Determined on their Contextual Proximity

Enhancing Various forms of Access to Taksim within the Proposed Flexible Framework Language

1. Restoring the Structural Grid of Talimhane

An unintended consequence of making an underground bypass for Cumhuriyet Avenue was that it damaged the street grid that defines the structure of Talimhane. This traumatic act broke down the spatial relationship between Gezi Park and the neighborhood. Even though the pedestrian project increased pedestrian traffic to Taksim Square, it isolated Gezi Park even more⁹.

To repair this relationship, the street section between Talimhane and Gezi Park needs to be shortened so that the space between them can be seen as one holistic space, rather than being separated. Doing so will not only give the space a better sense of human scale, but will help activate Gezi Park with more pedestrian traffic that sees the circulation axis as one holistic space.

4. Creating Awareness + Access

A biking path connects Beyoglu with Mecediyekoy to promote non-motorized transportation, including a parking structure integrated into the proposed flexible urban structure. Ramps can also be integrated into the flexible structure, promoting the inclusivity of disabled people within the entire public space.

6. Enhancing the Dolmus System

Looking at the current functionality of the transportation network, the Dolmus seems to be undervalued as a legitimate method of getting around the city. Therefore, we propose a formal drop off/ on point of Mete Street as the minibuses on this side of Taksim travel to the East side of Istanbul, as routes traveling west already use the Tunel passage. Placing this new transportation node will also activate Gezi Park with pedestrian traffic who are transiting from different parts of the city.

5. Developing Spatial Hierarchy via the Existing Metro Entrances

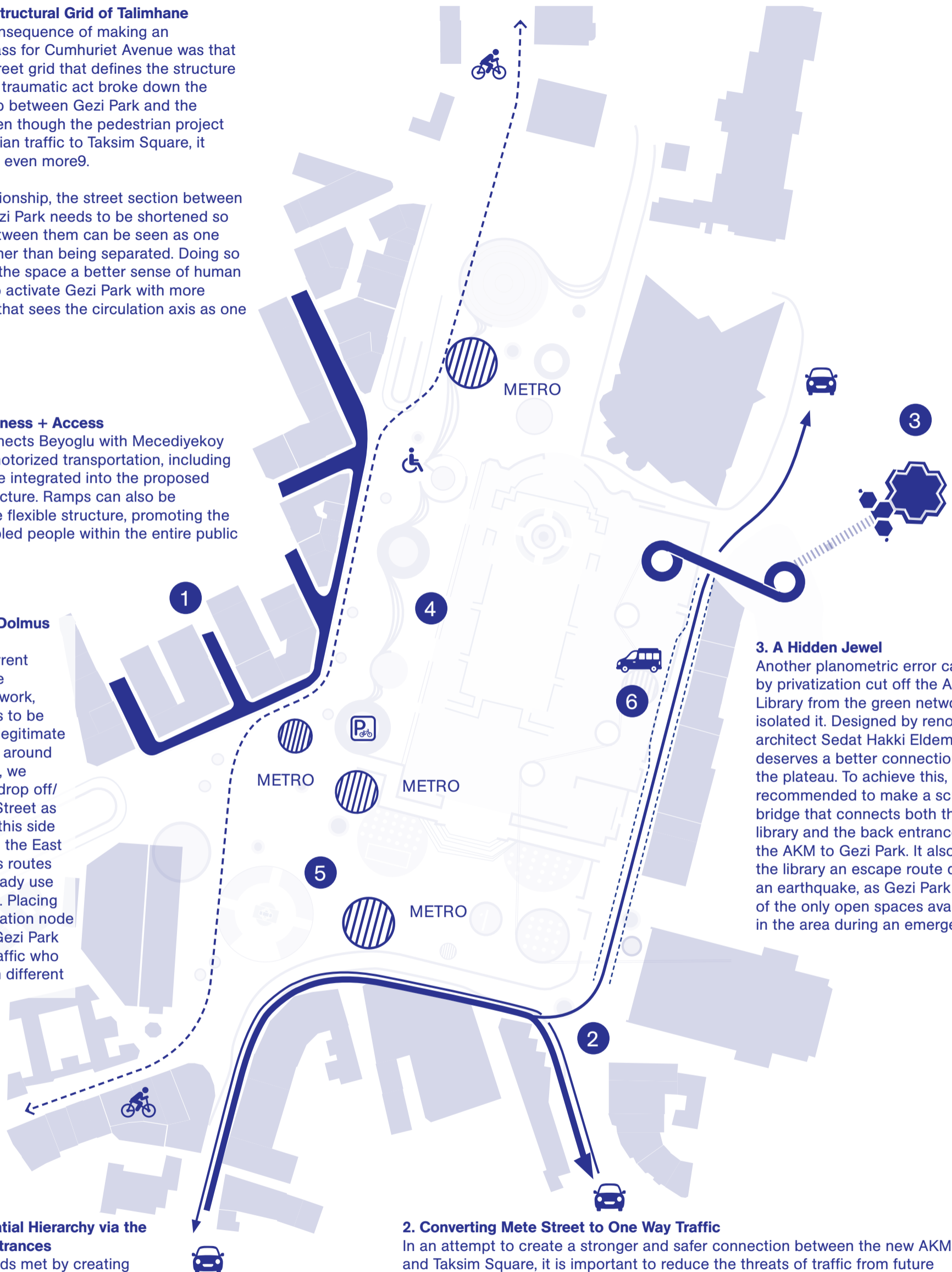
There are two needs met by creating roof structures over the entrances to the Taksim Metro Station. Not only does it provide protection to riders, but it also creates a semi-open space that allows visitors to spatially transition between the enclosed station and the openness of Taksim Square. Both integrated in the proposed flexible urban structure

2. Converting Mete Street to One Way Traffic

In an attempt to create a stronger and safer connection between the new AKM and Taksim Square, it is important to reduce the threats of traffic from future pedestrians crossing the street between the two spaces. In order to achieve this, it is recommended that Mete Street be reduced to a single lane, and converted into a one way street towards Taskisla Street. The reasoning behind this is so vehicles driving up from Inonu Street do not needlessly create traffic at the current intersection. This is because, according to the vehicle count provided by the competition organizers, Mete Street has one of the lowest traffic volumes in Taksim.

3. A Hidden Jewel

Another planometric error caused by privatization cut off the Ataturk Library from the green network and isolated it. Designed by renowned architect Sedat Hakki Eldem, it deserves a better connection to the plateau. To achieve this, it is recommended to make a sculptural bridge that connects both the library and the back entrance of the AKM to Gezi Park. It also gives the library an escape route during an earthquake, as Gezi Park is one of the only open spaces available in the area during an emergency.

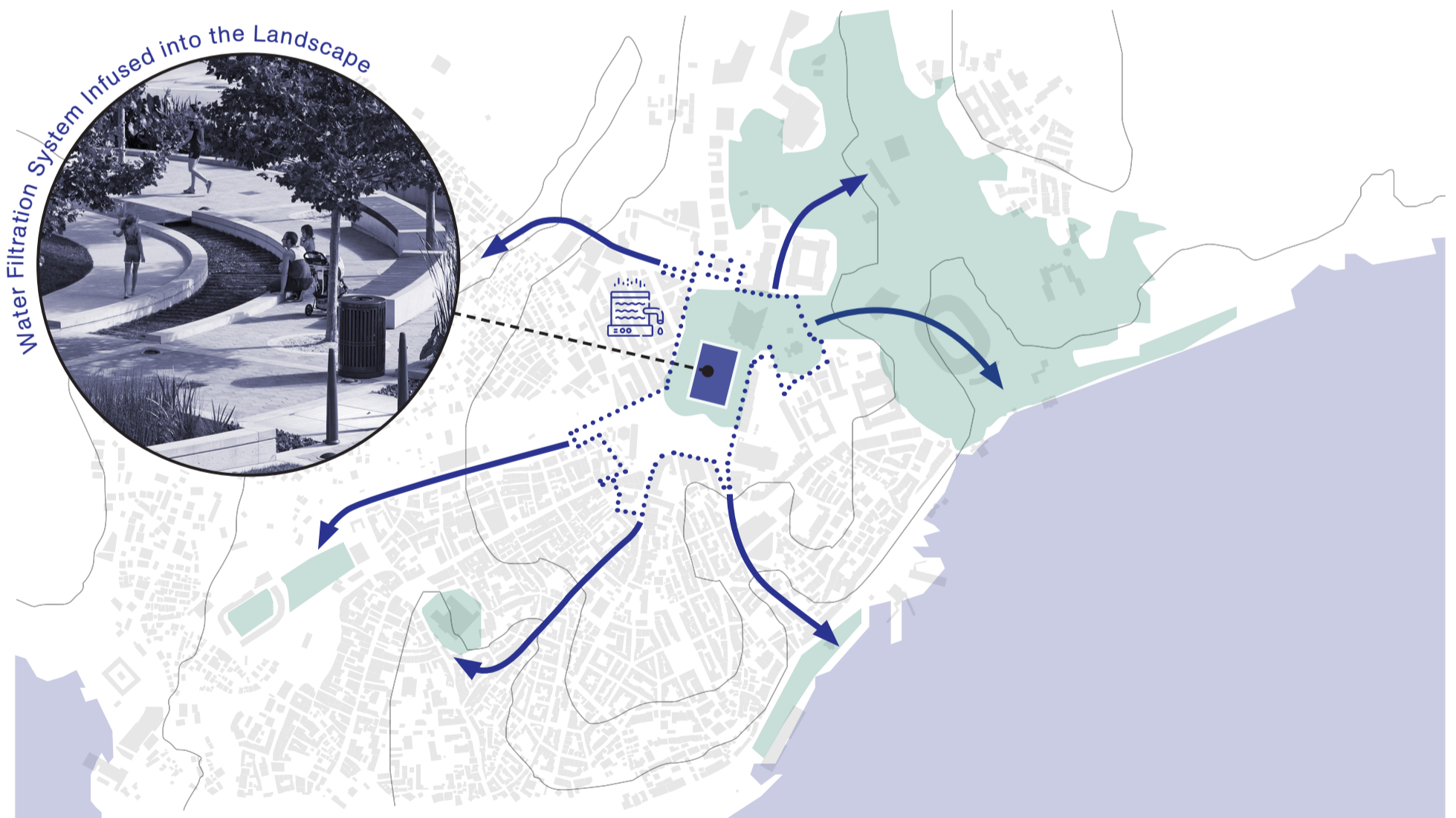
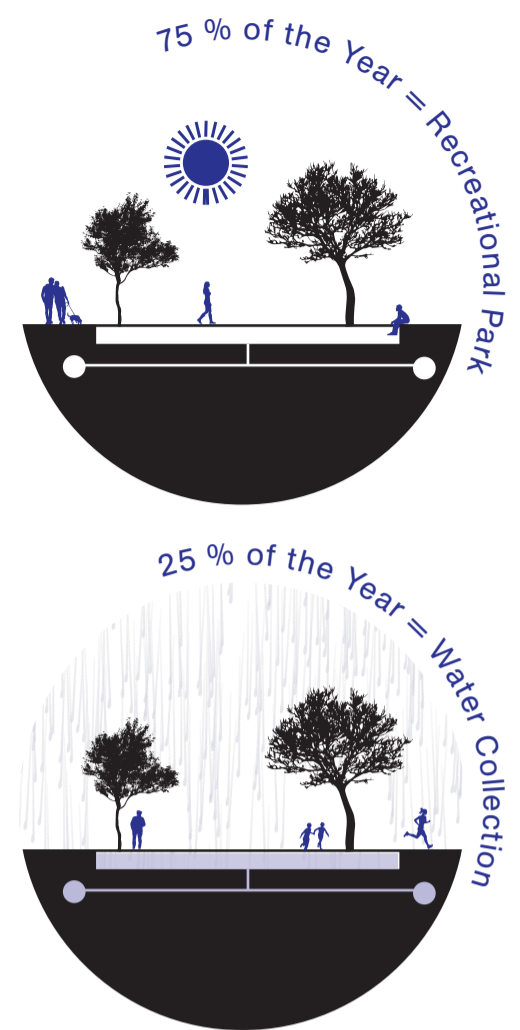


⁹ Kubat, Ayse Sema. "Evaluating the impacts of an urban design project : Multi-phase Analyses of Taksim Square and Gezi Park , Istanbul." (2015).

Green + Blue Network

Ever since privatized urbanization developments cut off Gezi Park from the green system, the overall network now exists as a fragmented structure. In order to reconnect them back together, we must look back to the past to the project area's namesake: Maksem¹. Taksim is also known for being the location of a reservoir for Istanbul's water supply, as its strategic position on the top of a hill made it an ideal place for water distribution, as gravity would allow water flow down to the surrounding neighborhoods¹. Gezi Park can reclaim this function in some capacity, but it should implement a more passive and environmentally sustainable approach that uses natural filtration systems infused into the landscape. This can be achieved by using the park as a water square, which has the potential to capture a significant amount of rainwater that can be used to maintain and hydrate many vegetative spaces within the green network.

Keeping the green network open as possible is also a matter of safety, because Istanbul is in an earthquake zone, and in times of emergency, need to use these open spaces as evacuation corridors in dense urban areas that can be deeply damaged. The project site is one of the very few large scale open spaces in the city, and has been assigned as an gathering area within Istanbul's emergency. Therefore, it is important as designers to make sure there is access to clean drinking water in case of such an event, as it could potentially be a life saving decision for many people who rely on this space for these types of situations.



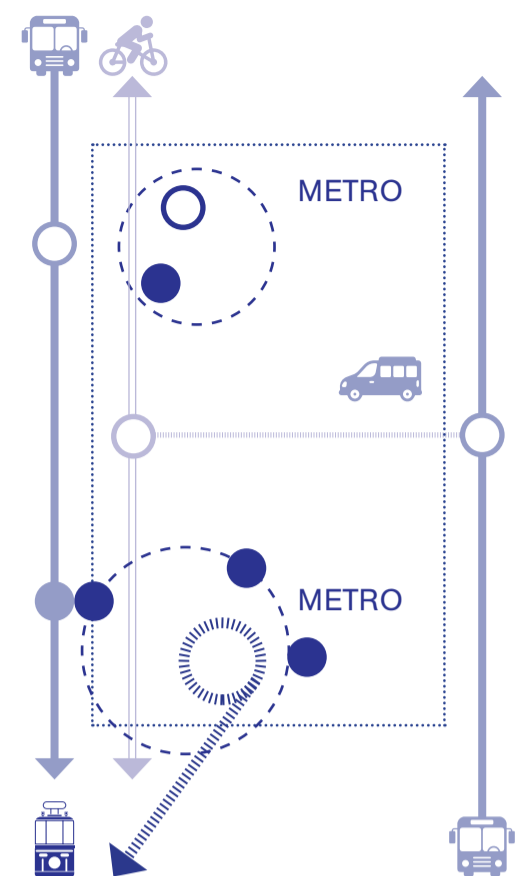
Reconnecting the Green / Blue Network by Implementing a Rainwater Collection and Filtration System as a Water Square

¹⁰ Hennig, Maik. "Sustainable Urban Mobility: The Example of Istanbul." Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2011, [f-origin.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/423/files/2013/03/2011-08-CS03_Istanbul_dtp300.pdf](https://www.giz.de/DE/pressroom/2013/03/2011-08-CS03_Istanbul_dtp300.pdf).

Diversifying Transport

Another strategic advantage of Taksim's geographical location is its hyperconnectivity with transportation. In spite of this, there is a lack of non-motorized transportation access in the area. This is because Istanbul is not a friendly biking city, due to its many hills and lack of space on car dominated roads¹⁰. Biking is also seen as more of a leisurely activity done on weekends along the waterfront of the Bosphorus, and is not taken seriously as a legitimate form of daily transportation¹⁰. There is a clear need to not only create space for biking lanes, but there also needs to be a proactive campaign to change the public's views about cycling. To combat these issues, a prominent, but relatively flat circulation artery¹⁰ should be used as a pilot project to influence ridership and change the public's opinion about biking. This route should connect Mecediyekoy and Beyoglu, with Taksim being the location of bike parking as a midway point along the biking path.

Another advantage is Taksim's position as a transit hub in the informal network of the Dolmus system. It is a socially inclusive and budget friendly way to move around the city, especially in short to medium distances. In this flexible system of transportation, there are no set times or stops, and the service level is not as comfortable as more orthodox forms of public transportation, but the volume of use and the amount of mini buses in the system makes it a quick and efficient way to get to other transit hubs.



Existing and New Proposals for Transport Nodes on the Site



Creating a Bike Path to Increase Non-Motorized Transport in Istanbul while Enhancing Efficiency of the Dolmus System

¹¹ Gürdoğan, Selva, et al. Istanbul Bike Map, Superpool, 2017, www.superpool.org/work/istanbul-bike-map.

Team Organization

The proposed team structure involves a core design team who will be in consultation and collaboration with experts in fields that will allow the design intervention to acknowledge the complex layers that will be explored throughout the development and design process of the proposed intervention. This ensures a multidisciplinary approach to the development of the project based on collective intelligence.

The participants may utilize aspects and narratives of identity as holistic communication tools. Accordingly, they may develop design proposals or discuss the premises of the kinds of design they would like to see with the core design team to express their approach to the complementary aspects of urban identity. The design process has to involve the collaboration of multiple NGOs and individuals which have been voicing their concerns about the future of the square publicly for over a decade. These NGOs should involve ecologically-oriented, disability-oriented, children's rights-oriented initiatives along with groups that work on the histories and rights of minorities and marginalized groups.

