

Narrating Atatürk Cultural Center as a Place of Memory and a Space of Politics

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Abstract : This paper aims to narrate the story of Atatürk Cultural Center in Taksim Square, which was demolished in 2018 and discuss its architectonic as a social place of memory and its existence and demolishment as the space of politics. The paper uses narrative discourse analysis to research Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM) as a place of memory and space of politics from the establishment of the Turkish Republic (1923) until today. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, one of the most important implementations in Taksim Square, reflecting the internationalist style, was the construction of the Opera Building in Prost Plan. The first design of the opera building belonged to Aguste Perret, which could not be implemented due to economic hardship during World War II. Later the project was designed by architects Feridun Kıp and Rüknettin Güney in 1946 but could not be completed due to the 1960 military coup. Later the project was shifted to another architect Hayati Tabanhoglu, with a change in its function as a cultural center. Eventually, the construction of the building was completed in 1969 in a completely different design. AKM became a symbol of republican modernism not only with its modern architectural style but also with its function as the first opera building of the Republic, reflecting the western, modern cultural heritage by professional groups, artists, and the intelligentsia. In 2005, Istanbul's council for the protection of cultural heritage decided to list AKM as a grade 1 cultural heritage, ending a period of controversy which saw calls for the demolition of the center as it was claimed, it ended its useful lifespan. In 2008 the building was announced to be closed for repairs and restoration. Over the following years, the building was demolished piece by piece silently while the Taksim mosque has been built just in front of Atatürk Cultural Center. Belonging to the early republican period AKM was a representation of the cultural production of modern society for the emergence and westward looking, secular public space in Turkey. Its erasure from the Taksim scene under the rule of the conservative government, Justice, and Development Party, and the construction of the Taksim mosque in front of AKM's parcel is also representational. The question of governing the city through space has always been an important aspect for governments, those holding political power since cities are the chaotic environments that are seen as a threat for the governments, carrying the tensions of the proletariat or the contradictory groups. The story of AKM as a dispositive or a regulatory apparatus demonstrates how space itself is becoming a political medium, to transform the socio-political condition. The paper narrates the existence and demolishment of the Atatürk Cultural Center by discussing the constructed and demolished building as a place of memory and space of politics.

Keywords : space of politics, place of memory, Atatürk Cultural Center, Taksim square, collective memory

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