



The Haptic and Visual Considerations of Public Spaces: Otto Herbert Hajek's Proposal for Hergelen Square in Ankara

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the German sculptor Otto Herbert Hajek's (1927-2005) sculpture located in one of the oldest public spaces in Ankara, Hergelen Square. Today rapid urbanization shapes our cities on the basis of overly mathematized and rationalized rules. This determinist tendency suggests some geometric and formalist norms as a reference for the formation of cities. The excessive rationalism and the formalist trends draw our attentions on the appearance of the building facades, stylistic motifs and cause us to neglect that what constitutes public spaces are not the geometric order of the surrounding buildings but the longstanding established social paths. As Rykwert noted those paths are the movement of people, social routes that carries communication between different communities and give a public square social establishment (Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice*, 1982).

In this regard, this paper explores Hajek's approach in Hergelen square as an alternative model which questions the haptic qualities in the formation of public squares and cities. Hapticity emphasizes bodily movements, performances and inherited social routes rather than visual qualities of the spaces (O'Neill, 2001). Addressing Hajek's work it is argued that giving more account to the visual qualities of the public spaces i.e. stylistic appearance of the buildings or display of representational shapes or motifs may limit our communications with a city by visual level. However by revealing the inherited social paths public spaces may continue to reconstruct new social and emotional relations. Within this framework the purpose of this article is to propose some working methods which may help us to consider public spaces not much from stylistic (and technocratic) aspects but social and emotional ones. Discourse analysis is the main methodological approach in this research. At the first stage the memories of the inhabitants will be analysed in order to understand how the social paths were constructed in the square. Following that Hajek's notes, explanations, paintings and sculpture will be analysed to



reveal how the artist responded to these established pathways. The results will be evaluated at the final stage.

Keywords: public spaces, emotional experience, haptic mapping, social patterns, dwelling, sculpture.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the German sculptor Otto Herbert Hajek's (1927-2005) incompleting sculpture in one of the oldest public spaces in Ankara, named Hergelen Meydanı (Hergelen Square). Although today it stands as a heavily neglected and dismissed sculpture site, it carries some important messages about Hergelen Square in Ankara as well as public spaces in a global context. While the reductionist manner – developed by the expectations of globalization – proposes very idealistic and formalist norms, Hajek's sculpture (in Hergelen Square raises questions about the haptic qualities in the formation of the cities (Wong, 2012). The postmodernist movement strengthening stylistic and pictorial tendencies together with the domination of technocratic expectations have turned many cities into mathematized or geometrized spaces instead of lived ones (Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice*, 1982). At this point perhaps it is proper to say that the way the human being conceptualizes a city is as important as the way the city conceptualizes the existence of the human being in his/her environment. Within the current trend the human body is given a place behind a screen as a passive spectator rather than being invited to be an active participant (Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice*, 1982) (Coleman, *History Theory Design: A Pedagogy of Persuasion*, 2004). This prevailing approach introduces public spaces as display objects to consume and limits our encounters with the environment at a visual level.

This paper intends to explore Hajek's way of engaging with the square, which suggests hapticity as an alternative approach to the one neglecting the human being's emotional and social involvement with the city. Hapticity is related to bodily movement: it renders squares and public spaces as an experiential reality which prioritizes bodily contact with the environment; it acts like a stage for rituals, bodily actions and performances, which make the site open to further bodily and social dialects (Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture*, 2004). On this account, this paper elaborates on Hajek's haptic approach to Hergelen Square, which poses the challenging question as to how it would be possible to create a more responsive and associative public spaces while re-emphasizing the existing social routes at the site.



In this regard this paper first focuses on the historical background of the site. It intends to reveal how the social activities, rituals and social paths constituted the square as a public space. This part also presents how those constructed social paths were destroyed by the rapid urbanization in the course of time. For doing this the paper addresses to the memory of people who lived in the region. The second part of the article explores how Hajek responds to this deterioration by his sculpture and his challenge to revitalize those forgotten social paths. Finally the article will be concluded by some discussions and suggestions.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE

For Joseph Rykwert a square is more than a constructed city object; it is an intersection of roads, but more than that it is a carrier of communication and social relations which are rooted back in the site's past (Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, 2010). Parallel to this idea in his writings what Hajek wants to do with his artwork is to remind people of the existence of those social routes which still provide a formative ground for the construction of social relations. Hajek draws attention to the ongoing paradox that while the square has been heavily objectified by the occupation of more high-rise buildings, those inherited social intercourses and social paths never allow themselves to be erased; on the contrary, they persist through time and continually devise the re-structuring of new communities and communal dialects (Hajek O. H., 1998). From this perspective, Hajek's work is closely related to the historical background of the square. Exploring how the site developed in the course of time can, therefore, help us to have a better understanding about how Hajek considered the site. For this purpose I would first like to refer to the Turkish scholar Erdoğan's discourse about the region.

One of the oldest squares of Ankara. It used to be a vast green field extending from one side to the other side of the city. We can say that it was the hippodrome of the early years of Ankara; it was surrounded by long willow trees. Its boundaries in those years started from Gazi High School (on the north) and ended at the Numune Hospital (on the south). The vast plain area between these two buildings was defined as Hergelen Square.

One of the prominent features of this square was that the oldest traditional horse game named Cirit used to be held in this place. Cirit, which is a game inherited from the prehistoric middle Asian nomadic Turkish tribes, used to take stage on this field in a rapturous atmosphere enhanced by drums and clarions.

In addition, the farewell ceremonies used to be held here for the soldiers who were joining the army. It is not me: my mother tells all these stories.



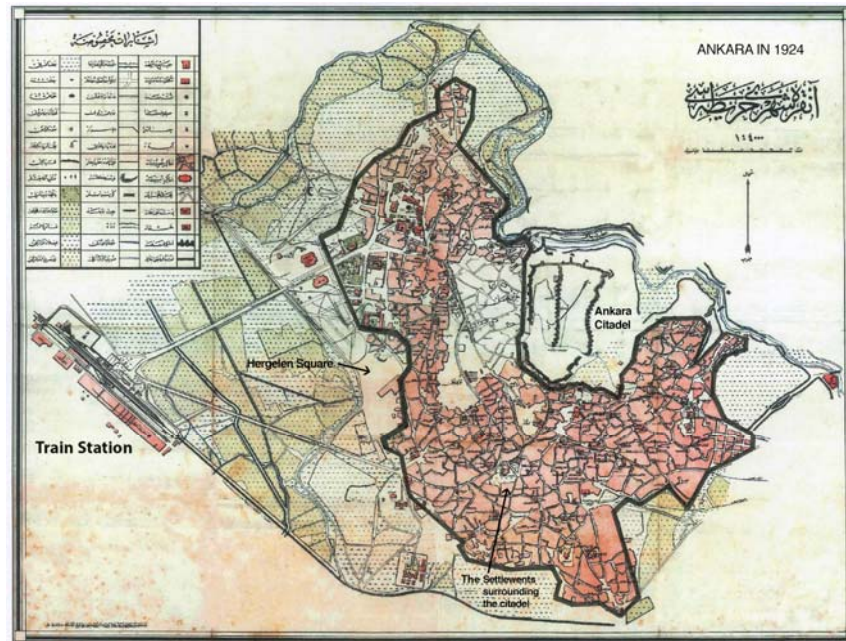
She continues: I know the years when this venue was called "hergele", not "hergelen". In those years people owned stalls for feeding their cows. These people used to wake up early, do the milking and then bring their cows to this square to entrust them to a shepherd. This shepherd collected the animals and took them to Maltepe for grazing. At night he brought them back to this field and the owners of the cows collected them from here. In Anatolia, particularly in Ankara, people used to call a herd of horses and cows "hergele". This is the story of this square.

In the course of time buildings were constructed and the square was diminished. Later on a mill was constructed here, but it didn't work; then a fire department was established here, and the name of the square was changed into "Fire Department Square (Erdoğdu, 2002, p. 161,162).

Hergelen Square as a lively urban node is located in a very historic region near Ankara castle. The history of this area goes back to the Bronze Age before 1600 BC. The importance of Ankara is related to the caravan routes to the east. The hill where the castle is located now overlooks this route, and this gives it a very strategic position that enables it to control the surrounding area (Kacar, 2010). Due to this peculiarity, the hill became the center of interest of many civilizations, and the first settlement began with the Hatti civilization when they surrounded this hill with a wall (Şenyapılı, 2013). Following that the Hittite civilization built a castle to settle their military garrison here and gave it the name "Ankuwash". In the Roman period (25 BC) the settlement was extended out of the castle and some important buildings like the Augustus Temple and the Roman bath were constructed on a nearby area. These buildings constituted focal points that led to the development of new districts around the hill. Following the Romans Ankara remained under the administration of Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman Empires, and in all these periods it continued to serve as an important trading center on the Silk Road.

The completion of the Anatolian Railway in 1892 connecting İstanbul, Ankara and Konya enhanced the economic and strategic importance of Ankara. In those years the railway station was deployed on the plateau which is on the south-west part of the town according to Ankara castle. Within this scheme Hergelen Square took its place between this station and the settlement on the outskirts of the hill and in doing so, it functioned as a kind of gate-way or gathering point orientating people to Ankara Castle. In fact it was a public space welcoming outsiders or travelers and facilitating their engagement with the active town life (Figure 1).

This social function of the square did not change even after Ankara was declared as the capital city of the new Republic of Turkey in 1923. The new government and public buildings such as Gazi High school designed by Austrian architect Ernst Egli in 1936, Numune Hospital designed by Robert Oerly in 1933, İller Bank by Seyfi Arkan in 1937, Opera Binası by Şevki Balmumcu in 1933, and Gençlik Parkı built in 1943 surrounded Hergelen Square. Arranged in that way, the message given was that the modernization of Turkey was a public revolution; it aimed at the improvement of public wealth and this was going to be accomplished by the active participation and cooperation of the existing communities (Atay, 2013). For that reason in the Jansen City Plan- which was the first planning scheme to transform Ankara into a modern capital city – the square was not considered irrelevant to the modern face of the city but was instead regarded as an important ground for restructuring new society.



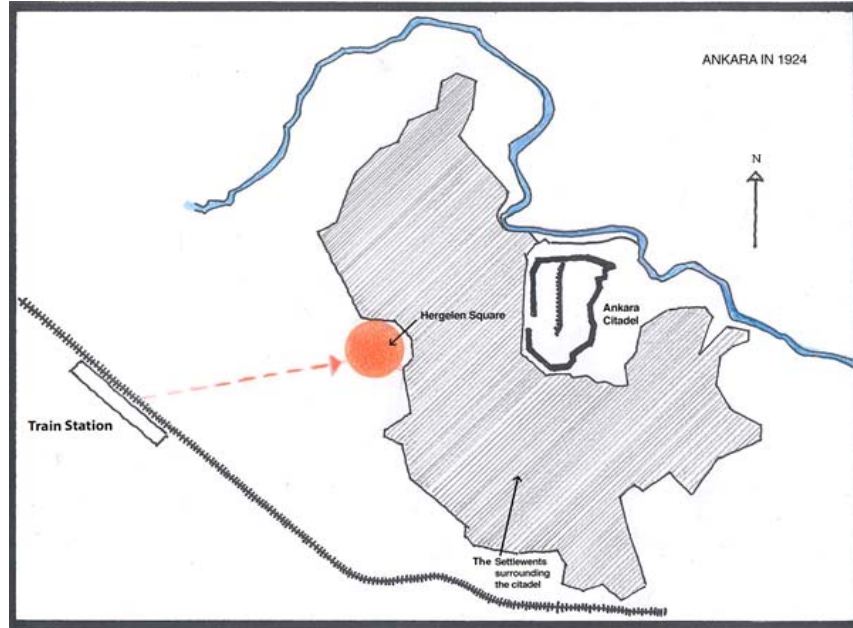


Figure 1. Development of Ankara in 1924 and Hergelen Square(Günel, Kılıcı, 2015)

However, the changes in the city plan in the 1950s neglected this public space as an idle and suburban region, which in turn prepared the ground for the development of unplanned settlements (Şenyapılı, 2013). Erdoğan's discourse criticizes this policy and underlines the fact that Hergelen Square had always contributed to cultural accumulation; it had always been more than a mere open space, it came to being as a social institution rooted back in ancient times. Accordingly, Hergelen Square was a significant gathering place where important celebrations, meetings and rituals took stage. Therefore, it was the place where the collective consciousness was structured about Ankara. However, in the second half of the 20th century the common tendency was not to derive modernity out of the existing society or social values but rather to introduce a sudden differentiation from the social intercourse that was offered by the existing built environment (Atay, 2013). As a result, this important place was heavily constructed and occupied by privatized properties. Very little space was given to social interactions, and life was squeezed among the concrete blocks. Hergelen Square, which used to be everyone's square, gradually became overly commoditized, commercialized and thus individualized (Figure 2,3).



Figure 2. Hergelen Square in Ulus, Ankara, in the 1930s (Şipka, 2013)



Figure 3. The current state of the site. Massive concretization of the square can be clearly seen (Demirel, 2017)



This can be considered as the problem brought about by the rapid modernization and urbanization of Turkish cities towards the late 70s and 80s (Uzun, 2005). Particularly for the past ten years the construction sector has acted as a driving power for the survival of the Turkish economy (Balaman, 2011). The fabrication of architectural practice in this way requires very rationalized, templated and dissociative planning schemes which ease mass production (Karakuş, 2017). As Joseph Rykwert points out, "*the current trend is to treat the building (particularly the administrative or speculative building) as an isolated 'architectural' object without reference to the texture of the town*" (Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, 2010). As underlined here, the main matter is the divorce between the social pattern and the physical dwelling structure. A city contains many functional units but it is, in a very basic sense, constructed on spatial relations. The relations between the spaces are derived from the relations between the people and their emotional dialect with the environment. This, at the end, constitutes a pattern of spatial relations or a texture (of town) that narrates the people's common and shared desires, rituals, expectations, activities and responses to their surroundings. Perhaps what can be understood from Rykwert's text is that having no reference to the texture of the town, a city may not be suggestive or formative but remains as a mere formed object.

Hajek's sculpture in Hergelen Square was a part of the rehabilitation project for the site and it addressed this issue that caused the deterioration of this region. By his sculpture in he asks what the referential source for the formation of squares and the public spaces could be – whether it is the movement of the people (the social paths), or the mere architectural forms and geometric patterns to a city. He underlines the problematic tendency which gives more attention to the object-like qualities of public spaces than to their spatiality.

For Hajek the city can be defined as a place of bazaar. It is a kind of common ground or a venue where the different ideas, experiences encounter each other (Hajek O. H., 1998). Here is the place to be spent time in and walk around, and it can be considered as the site where discussions, celebrations, feasts, games and dances take place. Bazaars are where people think and observe; they are the point of where human life is born. They act as a referential basis (axis) where a person begins to structure his/her own consciousness. According to him a city happens when the ideas encountering each other in a square or in public spaces become important tools which devise interaction. The city is not merely an architecturally constructed object but it is a bazaar, or it can be said to be an open venue which functions as a common ground for the sharing of different ideas, desires, dreams and feelings. Accordingly the formation of the city is not much based the mathematized or geometrized formalist norms but the re-narration of the dialect

between the sensuous body and the space. In this regard, what Hajek intended to do through his design was to reveal the experiential qualities of the square which in turn devised the social interactions and the formation of collective memories about the city. Hajek considers this as a virtue of the city which is enduring and immortal, and such qualities are hard to lose their validity even amid the current formalist and technocratic tendencies (Hajek O. H., 1998).

HOW THE CITY IS CONCEPTUALIZED IN HAJEK'S WORKS

Before going into further details about how Hajek considered Hergelen square it might be beneficial to unpack his way of understanding of city in general context. Hajek's sculptures are not independent of his paintings that reflect his ideas about a city. He composes his paintings with stripes in contrasting colors which are called by Hajek "color ways". The sharp transition from warm to cold colors or vice versa creates a sense of movement that reflects the noise of the city – this at the same time renders us the feelings of a city. According to the Italian artist Sabino Iusco, through these vivid and contrasting colors Hajek draws attention not to the dead and silent side of the cities such as huge building blocks enduring with their static impressions but rather to the vivid aspects such as the noises, slogans, goings and comings, and the movement of people, which give the city its spirit and character (Hajek O. H., 1994). For Hajek cities are always dynamic and noisy, they always contain a movement. In his paintings this dynamism is also emphasized by the diagonal forms that cross along the right-angled, stable but vividly colourful background forms (Figure 4, 5, 6).

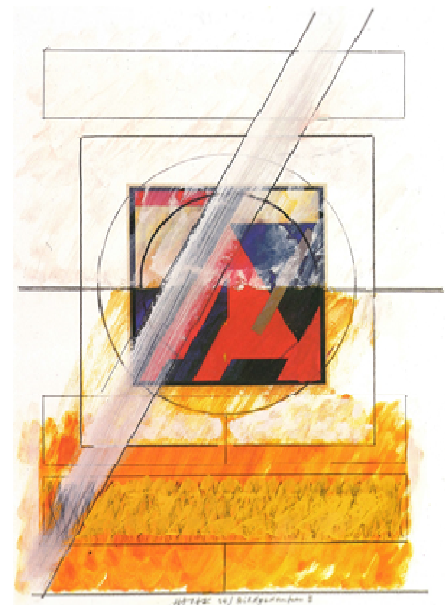




Figure 4. Hajek's paintings that show the "Color Ways" (Çimen,1994)

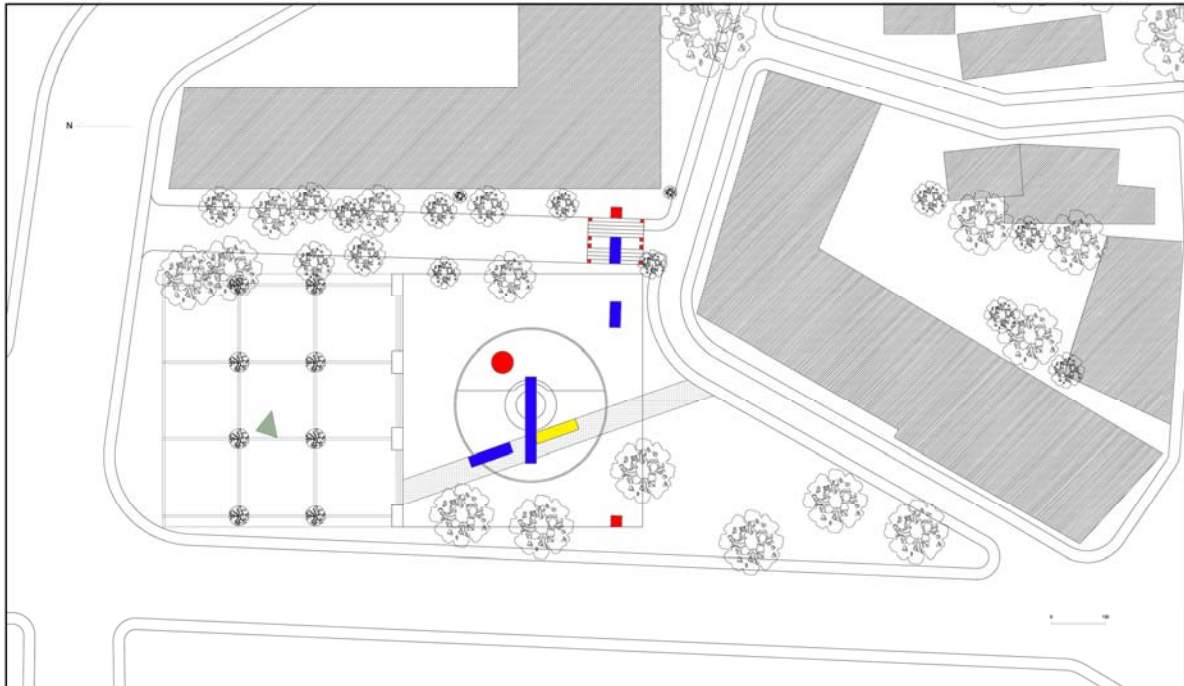


Figure 5. Plan of Hajek's sculpture work on Hergelen Square. The green triangular shows the point of view where the photograph below was taken (Şekerci, 2017)



Figure6.Hajek's sculpture work on Hergelen Square (Çimen,1994)

In many cases we are pre-conditioned by the images of the cities and in many cases most of the world's cities are presented to us with their prominent displaying symbols. This is one major criticism depicted in Hajek's paintings. Very similar to what Goston Bachelard pointed out, for Hajek cities should not be confined within these overly commercialized symbolic details. The picture squeness of a city produced in any form is only for capturing immediate attention, and later on they gradually lose their power in our memories. However, what permanently remains in our minds is what we have emotionally experienced in a city through movement of our sensuous body or in other words what alerts us about the city (Bachelard, 1994). These are the collection of feelings that constructed a memory of the city and therefore a city can not be reduced into iconic images which in many cases attributed to the photographic- like appearances of the particular buildings.

With these "color ways" Hajek inquires into what would be the core element primarily initiating the formation of cities (Hajek O. H., 1994). Would this be the site or ground, or would it be the buildings or the built environment Like architectural theorists Aldo van Eyck (1968), Joseph Rykwert (1982) and David Leatherbarrow (2004) he criticizes the strong demarcation between the site and the building – and the street and the building

as well. In doing so he draws attention to the problematic tendencies in urbanization, which introduce the city as first constructing buildings and then locating streets among these building blocks as a service way. Hajek states that the site (or street) should not be taken as a separated notion, and as Aldo van Eyck notes, a house is the extension of a street and a street is the extension of a house (Smithson, 1968). Hayek gives primary account to the site: paved ground or paved space for the formation of a city. Accordingly, paved space encourages participation: It offers participatory qualities and invites participatory activities at the first instance, and later on this prepares the ground for the construction of a city. In this sense, the noise in Hajek's painting is the noise of the inhabitants, which reminds us that the city is a participation before becoming anything else (Hajek O. H., 1998). It is not the organization of self-contained spaces isolated from the site, and it is not for creating atomized communities.

HERGELEN SQUARE IN THE EYES OF HAJEK

It is possible to see all these ideas of Hajek on his sculpture at Hergelen Square. Approaching the site, a long white yellow cylinder is located in a horizontal position accentuating the axis which crosses along the site diagonally. This diagonal position has not been determined arbitrarily. It responds to the direction of the movement that comes from the Park street. In fact this was the long established pathway connecting the historic Karyađdı tomb and the square before it was converted into a street. Although this pathway is not clearly seen because of the higher blocks constructed behind, Hajek wants to give a hint that makes its existence felt (Figure 7).

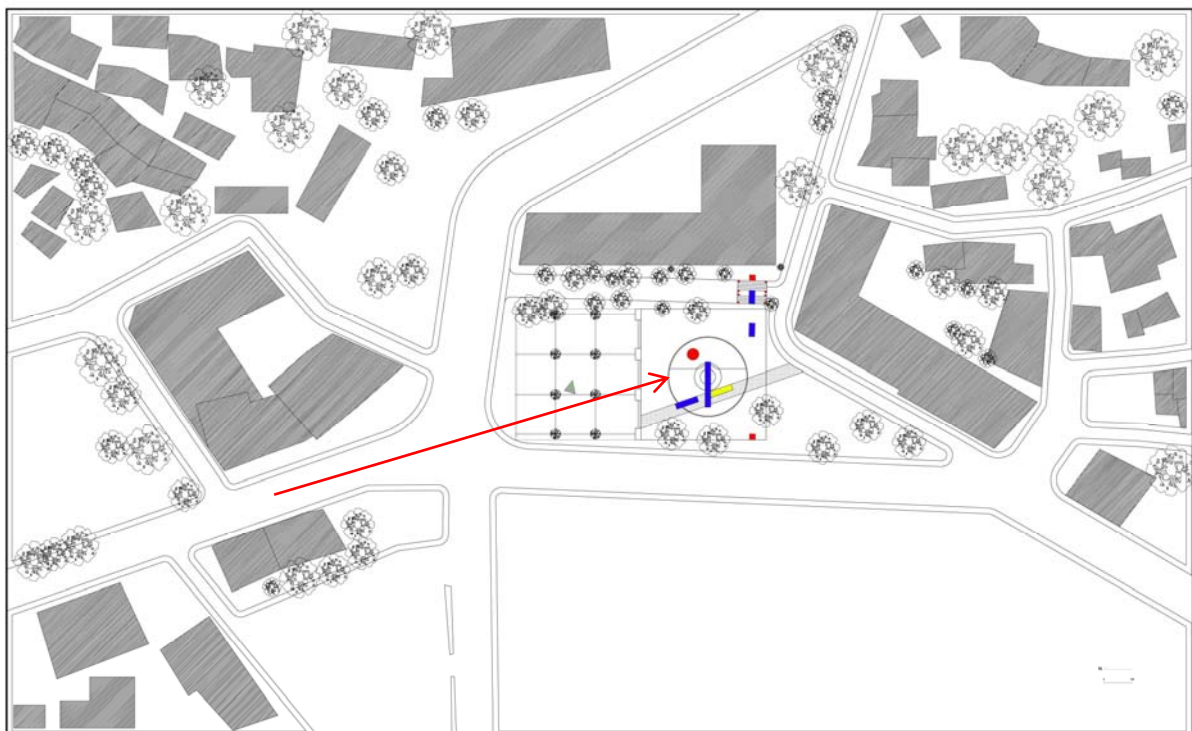




Figure 7. The Picture shows how Hajek's sculpture addresses to the social path which was inherited from the past (Demirel,2017)

In the site all the angular directions are attributed to the main routes which have naturally been formed by the movement of people. Hajek's concern is not the roads constructed for the motor vehicles but rather the circulation of people and the pathways that they take while approaching the square (Hajek O. H., 1998). Squares are not spare spaces enclosed and surrounded by buildings, or they are not open areas in which all the attention is given to the outer appearances of the building facades. As argued above, such an approach converts public squares into an object-like entity. It is not the constructed architectural objects but more primarily the natural pathways and the movement of the people that lead to the formation of a square. As Joseph Rykwert suggests, the movement of people carries social intercourse; in Hajek's term it is the encountering of different ideas, desires, dreams, expectations etc. that prepares the ground for the development of squares (Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice*, 1982). For that reason, although Hajek uses some architectural forms, they do not persist in their object-like presence, and they are not architecturally dominant on the site. They are lightened, simplified and they open the way to pre-existing pathways. In short they are



not intended to be beautifully seen objects but are intended, rather, to remind people of the endurance of these inherited social intercourses that structure our identity (Figure 7).

Hajek's endeavour for revealing the pre-existing pathways can be seen in the other part of his sculpture. For example a red cylinder, just seen at the back, juts out from the ground and extends towards the sky. Its straight posture is made more discernible by the other column in a diagonal position and a conic concrete object just located underneath. The straightness is attributed to Ankara castle, which acts like a marking point or a guidepost which in old times helped people to find their way to the city.

The other column in a diagonal position draws attention to the vast open area just in front of the square where Gençlik Parkı (Youth Park) exists. Its diagonal posture creates a sense of movement which addresses the topographical character of the site. Here the Ankara castle is located on one of the highest hills of the city, and its hillside gradually goes down and meets a large valley where Hergelen Square starts. Along with this the life cycle is well aligned with the natural topography of the site. People set up their way from their dwellings on the top of the hill to their workshops on the valley. This is very similar to the old life in Ankara when people used to come down to Hergelen Square for their social and commercial activities (Şenyapılı, 2013). In that regard the memories of the Turkish Journalist Falih Rıfkı Atay can give us some ideas how the region was in 1920s:

"In the course of time the all Christian families gained the control on the business. They constructed hotels, restaurants, palaces on the skirt of the Ankara hill which overlooks the train station.... When we arrived in Ankara, we got off the train and walked across the vast dusty plateau to reach Ankara." (Atay, 2008, p.408)

As we understood from Atay's discourse the commercial places in those years clustered on the slope of the Ankara hill that looks towards the train station. This indicates the hillside that we today call it Hergelen Square. Before Ankara was declared as a capital city in 1923 Hergelen square was an important point that grounds for the human circulation or the movement between the train station and the hillside. At this point the diagonal position of the column is not just a coincidental figure, it evokes the sense of this movement and the social path which occurred from the top of Ankara castle down to the train station via Hergelen square (Figure 8).

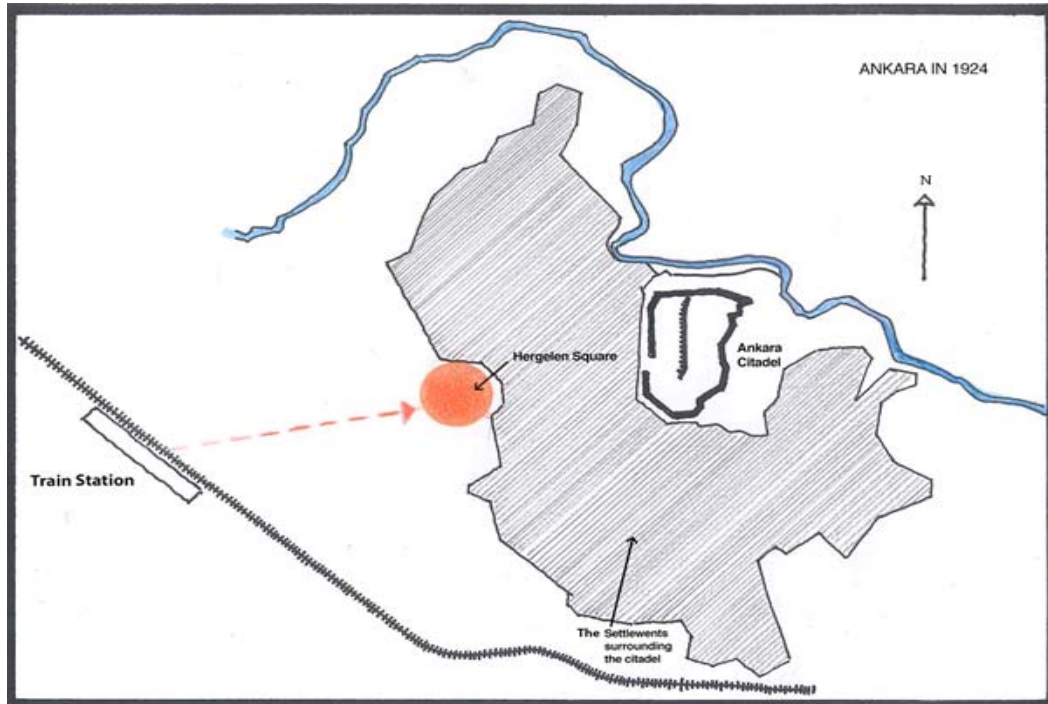


Figure 8. The diagonal column addresses to the pathway which grounds the movement from Ankara Citadel to the train station, and vice versa (Demirel,2017)

For Hajek a square in a city has no rigidly defined boundaries or edges; it has a continual and durational aspect; it comes into being as the continuation of social paths, roads and social intercourses. In doing so a square continuously re-structures its boundaries not so much physically but mentally; it introduces its boundaries when a person (inhabitant) begins to engage with this aspect of the city emotionally and socially (Hajek O. H., 1998). In that regard if the artwork is about a city, it should not remain on the canvas; it should move to the site and open itself to social involvements and aimed to reveal (Hajek O. H., 1998). Any composition depicted on a piece of paper or a canvas is inevitably framed or presented within certain boundaries. The frame of the painting tells that



whatever happens has a certain beginning and a certain end. It is like a frame of a photograph which takes its composition from its incomplete and continual timeline and converts it into a completed representation whose existence is always bound to a particular moment of time.

This is a challenge for Hajek and in this regard he freed his works from a frame and moved them into the squares in order to reveal those not seen but sensed boundaries of the city and the square. Again Hajek underlines that the construction of a city, or a square is not so much confining a particular area by constructing physical boundaries; in fact, the city should be taken as a matter of the structure of these sensed boundaries which are the moment of a city inviting social and emotional participations and engagements. Along with this idea both the city and art meet on a common ground on which they are perceived as continuing processes of completion, and they complete themselves with the recurring activities, rituals, social and emotional involvements (Hajek O. H., 1998). The engagement of art and the city in this way can make it renewable as well as persisting through time. On that account, the important thing for Hajek is not the existence of his art object but the existence of the pathways, topographic qualities or any detail that leads to social happenings.

CONCLUSION

In many aspects Hajek's art work in Hergelen Square exemplifies a model that addresses some important issues about modern urban planning. First of all, nowadays the design of squares or public spaces is so often limited to the sole decision of architects, engineers, urban planners and designers. In the current practice it is not the long-established social intercourses, but the object-like qualities such as geometric forms, shapes, motifs that constitute the basis for the formation of public squares. Even how the square looks geometrically or as a geometric motif on a map or plan view is more determining than how it offers emotional and social experiences, which make it haptical. As Hajek has exemplified through Hergelen Square, a public space is charged with fairy tales, stories, common and shared expectations, dreams; it comes to being as a result of recurring human situations. It is a formation of topoi that holds emotional and social contacts. In doing so it preserves in itself social and emotional encounters that have not yet been revealed.

Public spaces cannot be reduced to pre-determined standardized technical norms which do not serve to social expectations but only ease the construction processes. In the end, the created final product becomes a being removed from the ongoing pattern of life. However, when approached from an artistic point of view, every item seems to have an



impact on the experiencer (Elbaş, Elibol, 2017). What makes any place public is based on its capability of offering participatory qualities; therefore, constructing a public square could be considered as the re-construction of these qualities and as a challenge primarily for revealing the enduring social and emotional patterns holding the community together. In this regard, Hajek's sculpture re-questions our new understanding of the city: according to this understanding cities are constructed on the demarcation of communities but not on negotiations. As seen in Hergelen Square, this makes a site not for actions, ongoing social happenings and performances but rather brings it to account as a mere display object which limits the city to visual contact only. As Walter Benjamin argues, this is architecture for photography or incidental distraction but not for haptic encounters (Benjamin, 1999). In this regard Hajek's work in Hergelen square perhaps reminds us of what the origin of Turkish architecture suggests: cities should be regarded in a topographical sense. Topographic approach addresses not so much the objectivity but the spatiality of a site; it comes into meaning as an extension, not as a demarcation. In that sense, it suggests the negotiation of outside and inside and thus of existing and new societies.

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