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# **A new approach for participative urban design: An urban design study of Cumhuriyet urban square in Yozgat Turkey**

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The concept of participation has come into prominence in urban planning and urban design since the mid- 1970's as consciousness of local identity increased. There is a significant body of research on participation related to urban design. Various participation methods, models, and processes have been proposed each based on specific experiences. This article presents a participation method and process for the urban design study of Yozgat Cumhuriyet square. This method is useful for defining a new approach in participative urban design based on intense and sincere communication between designers and users. The study was conducted entirely as an academic workshop. First, questionnaires were used to ensure participation, then it was expected that the participants, who accepted to take part in the later stages of design would directly contribute to urban design process. However, the final urban design project could not be prepared as the process failed at the stage of active participation of the citizens. Although, it failed, the process could be evaluated as a new approach/model for the participative urban design. This article explains the method and process and discusses the reasons for the failure in the case study.

**Key words:** Participation, user-designer interaction, urban design, urban square, participatory urban design.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Participation has gained importance in urban design as well as in urban planning. The increased interest of local people about their living environments and the ongoing conjuncture of the world political system make these discussions more important. Participation in urban design is based on the relations between on user and designer, but includes as well various actors such as governmental institutions, political decision makers and non-governmental organizations. However, this study refers to participation as citizen participation in urban design.

The basis of participation depends on the public actors in decision-making process in any political context. As this is vague issue, there are many debates and studies

on participation. The most important debates regard the meaning of participation in urban design as urban design could be perceived as an exclusively professional area. Consequently, another issue emerges as to how participation would take place in urban design and the role of designer and user in participatory processes. These issues have attracted the attention of many authors and professionals. For example, some researchers claim that the role of the public in public design is increasing, while others insist on the role of designer as fixed and inevitable (Sanoff, 2002, 2006; Kim, 2005; Lee, 2006; Lopez, 2009).

Participation is a process composed of various stages necessitating a definite participation rate at each stage of the process. Thus, participation in urban design could be best understood by answering the following questions: How does citizen participation take place urban design? When does citizen participation take place in urban

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design process? What kinds of actions take place in this participative process? (Lee, 2004).

Design process has a sui-generis characteristic in that it differs in various cultures and provides different results in diverse socio-economic and legal systems. As design processes could not be standardized, it is hard to speak about one universal model for participative urban design. A good and efficient model in one context may not be convenient for others. In addition, local people are the primary beneficiaries of a qualified and efficient urban design. It is claimed that, "quality urban design is founded on a sound understanding of local knowledge, values and needs" (www.mfe.govt.nz, 2009). A good, organized and efficient citizen participation in urban design or planning increases the sense of belonging to a unique locality.

There are three important factors in participative urban design; participation, urban design and public space. Participation in urban design is compulsory for an efficient and qualified urban design. In addition, urban design is closely related to public space and efforts towards qualified planning and urban design could bring about the efficient use of these spaces.

This study presents an incomplete participative design study for Yozgat Cumhuriyet Square. The main argument is how participation is handled in a public square urban design project and to investigate the issue this study employed a rather distinctive methodology for participative design. The first section of the article discusses participation in design from various viewpoints. The second section after a brief introduction on the meaning and characteristics of urban squares provides some information on Yozgat and Yozgat Cumhuriyet Square. The third section explains the theoretically and practically incomplete participatory process in designing this square. It is asserted that, with its various characteristics and methodology, the suggested process could be a model for participative urban design in localities similar to the city of Yozgat. Finally, the conclusion looks at the reasons and consequences of this unsuccessful story of participative design attempt, and the criticisms on the conditions in Turkey.

## **THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPATION IN URBAN DESIGN**

Although, public participation in collective decision making dates back to Plato (Sanoff, 2006), community consciousness in the 1960s led to the rise of debates on public participation in collective decision making (Sanoff, 2006). Within the theoretical discussion on participation, one of the most influential scholars of participation, Sanoff (2002) observes the basics of participation are related to participative democracy. He states that participation is not limited to voting but it should include varying activities about commitment and involvement (Sanoff, 2002). Moreover, he claims that participation in

collective decision making should not be limited to the political system but rather expand to all aspects of life. He furthers that, participation signifies collaboration of people to pursuit objectives set by themselves (Sanoff, 2002). For him, participation implies several collective works related to objectives determination and definition of ways to accomplish them (Sanoff, 1989 in Lopez, 2009). The main purposes of participation are as follows (<http://brgov.com>):

1. To involve citizens in decision making processes, planning and design, make them collaborate to find solutions to social and socio-spatial problems,
2. To unite citizens in decision making for several plans for increasing the overall quality of their living environments,
3. To promote a sense of community by bringing people together who share common problems and common goals, and
4. To increase user satisfaction through the feeling of having an influence on the decisions taken.

The ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1966 in Taylor, 2006) presents a typology of citizen involvement in decision making. It involves several stages ranging from no participation to full citizen control in particular, manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control (Taylor, 2006). Later on, Petty identified seven types of participation ranging from passive participation to self mobilization (Petty, 1995 in Byambaa, 2006). These are:

1. Passive participation; people participate by being told what is going to happen,
2. Participation in giving information; people participate by answering several questionnaires by researchers,
3. Participation in consultation; people participate by being consulted, others listen to their views,
4. Participation for material incentives,
5. Functional participation; people participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives of a project,
6. Interactive participation; people participate in joint analysis which leads to action plans and forming of new local institutions or strengthening old ones,
7. Self mobilization; people participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change the system (Petty, 1995 in Byambaa, 2006).

There has been a considerable movement towards the involvement of the public in their physical environment starting from the mid-1960s. Soon after, in the end of the 1960's, participation was first time associated with urban design (www.mfe.govt.nz, 2005). Particularly, the debates on participation in urban design started with the International Design Participation Conference held in 1972 (Lee, 2006). After that, the declaration of Architects in 1981, in Warsaw emphasized the provision of public

participation by planners and architects and defined settlements as places that should be designed with public participation ([www.mo.org.tr](http://www.mo.org.tr)).

In 1993, the "Mutual Dependence Declaration for Sustainable Future" announced in Chicago underlined the importance of and the necessity for participative design (Lee, 2006). Participation in design still gains importance with the increasing debates and studies on sustainable spatial development.

The study by Lee (2006), defines participation in three different terms: Design participation, public participation and community participation (Lee, 2006). Public participation and community participation are about strategic decision making and problem-solving while design participation is related more to the tangible aspects of spatial design. The term was first adopted in the previous mentioned design research society (DRS) conference entitled design participation in 1972 (Lee, 2006).

Design participation is simply about the interaction between designer and user (Lee, 2006). Users can provide very important and strategic data and information for the design processes. Many authors accept that users are the most important sources of knowledge that designers can utilize in any design practice ([www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz), 2005). This is more visible in spatial design as users care about their living places greatly in their social lives. For the mixed realm of the designer and the user, Lee offers various concepts as "community architecture", "participatory design", "collaborative design" and "inclusive design" as definitions and examples of design participation (Lee, 2006).

'Participation' has several dimensions that should be tackled to understand the structure and the logic of the participation. These are related to actors, objectives, benefits, tools and types of participation. Evaluation of participation in design could be possible if these dimensions of the participation are known.

While designer is the planner or the architect who is engaged in design professionally, users are all kinds of citizens who use the designed space. In addition, citizen participation could involve local politicians, business communities, citizen organizations as well as individual citizens (<http://projekter.aau.dk>). Related to user-designer interaction, Sanoff informs about the common denominator approach, which signifies the compromise done by all actors involved. ([www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz), 2005).

Participation in design has several benefits for both parties, as well as for the whole community. Firstly, for user groups, it represents an increased sense of having an influence on the decision making process and an increased awareness of the consequences (Sanoff, 1988, 2002; Kim, 2005). Moreover, participation minimizes negative activities such as vandalism and increases the sense of belonging to the area (Kim, 2005).

Secondly, for the designer it represents more relevant and up-to-date information which generates a variety of design ideas (Sanoff, 1988, 2002; Kim, 2005). Finally, for

the whole society, participation offers benefits for the community in meeting their social needs (Sanoff, 1988, 2002) and increases the effective utilization of resources (Sanoff, 1988; Kim, 2005). In addition, it is an important factor that raises urban spatial quality (Kara and Küçükerbaş, 2001). Time saving characteristics and efficiency are other benefits (Kara and Küçükerbaş, 2001). All of these benefits give the possibility to minimize costs (Kim, 2005). In sum, participatory processes may lead to positive changes and assist future urban design initiatives ([www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz), 2005).

It was indicated by Creighton (1994) in Sanoff (2006) that in the case of successful participation, there are some communal benefits such as improved quality of decisions, minimizing cost and delays, consensus building, increased ease of implementation, avoiding 'worst-case' confrontations, maintaining credibility and legitimacy, anticipating public concerns and attitudes and developing public expertise and creativity.

Design processes play an important role for providing these benefits for all actors. Participatory processes need resources, time, organizational efforts, effective communication and clear commitment (Lehtonen, 2007). Learning and mutual interaction of designer and user are important factors for the success of the process. There are 3 steps in general participatory process: (1) public information, (2) design workshop and (3) feedbacks (Ahn and Park, 2007). They state that in most of the public related projects such as public open spaces, public participation remains at a minimum level by holding required public announcement and public hearings. Then again, participation in design is more than public announcements and public hearings.

Sanoff (2006) listed the steps in participation for better public awareness as:

1. Establishing a policy of inclusiveness,
2. Holding open meetings,
3. Making speeches to community groups,
4. Obtaining public input,
5. Making public announcements,
6. Holding face-to-face meetings,
7. Conducting progress surveys.

These methods depend on the techniques used in participative design. The final declaration of World Urban Forum III by U.N Habitat categorizes the participation techniques in two groups: informal approaches and formal approaches. Informal approaches include street conversations, open house (presentations and/or exhibitions), and mass media, whereas formal approaches include surveys, focus groups, facilitated workshops and design charts (Taylor, 2006; Sanoff, 2006) lists participation techniques as community surveys, review boards, advisory boards, task forces, neighborhood and community meetings, public hearings, public information programs, and interactive cable television. As shown also

by Sanoff, increasing communication possibilities favor participation processes; however, face-to-face relations are still one of the most important factors for efficient participation process in design (Sanoff, 2006).

## URBAN SQUARES

As one of the most significant spaces in urban areas, urban squares continue to have an importance throughout ages. In addition to their social functions, urban squares also have a role in the evolution of urban image (Kara and Küçükerbaş, 2001).

The first urban settlements appeared some 6000 years ago. Initially, established at the crossroads of important trade routes, city squares over time acquired several other functions, such as hosting military processions and parades as an opportunity for the rulers to exercise power (<http://www.urbansquares.com>). In the contemporary world, squares are embodiments of human inheritance: cooperation, technological processes and architectural and urban planning (Kara and Küçükerbaş, 2001).

Urban squares could be defined as spaces that form focal points in the public space network, providing a forum for exchange, both social and economic, and a focus for civic pride and community expression (<http://www.healthypaces.org.au>). Urban squares around the world have common characteristics despite socio-economic and geographical differences.

The following classification was developed in order to examine the role of squares in cities and to assist the process of planning them: (1) ceremonial, (2) religion based, (3) social, (4) residential, (5) Court, (6) with park and (7) street extension (<http://www.urbansquares.com>).

Successful urban squares are designed for people to walk in, stand in, sit in, dance in and to perform in and to observe other people participating in these activities (<http://www.healthypaces.org.au>). Urban squares, if designed well are thriving spaces that invite people to linger, interact and connect. They support the popularity of activity centers providing a space for a wide range of formal and informal activities that support social and cultural life for users of the centre (<http://www.healthypaces.org.au>).

The evaluation method for the squares could be based on the factors like; sociability, uses and activities, Access and linkages, comfort, image and tourist value (<http://www.urbansquares.com>). Well-designed and well-organized urban squares have a number of benefits for the users as well as the urban setting in which they are located ranging from personal and community health to encouraging economic investment (<http://www.healthypaces.org.au>).

As a result, as one of the most important public spaces in cities, the city squares play an important role in a settlement. It is the place where several flows pass

through and is the intersection point of these flows in city life. All the related professional actors like city planners, urban designers and architects have to conserve and keep alive urban squares by considering user demands and ensuring a wide participation in planning or urban design.

## Yozgat Cumhuriyet square

Yozgat is a mid-size city located in central Anatolia with a population of approximately 85.000 by 2008. It is located on the east of Ankara, about 220 kilometers away from Ankara in road kilometers.

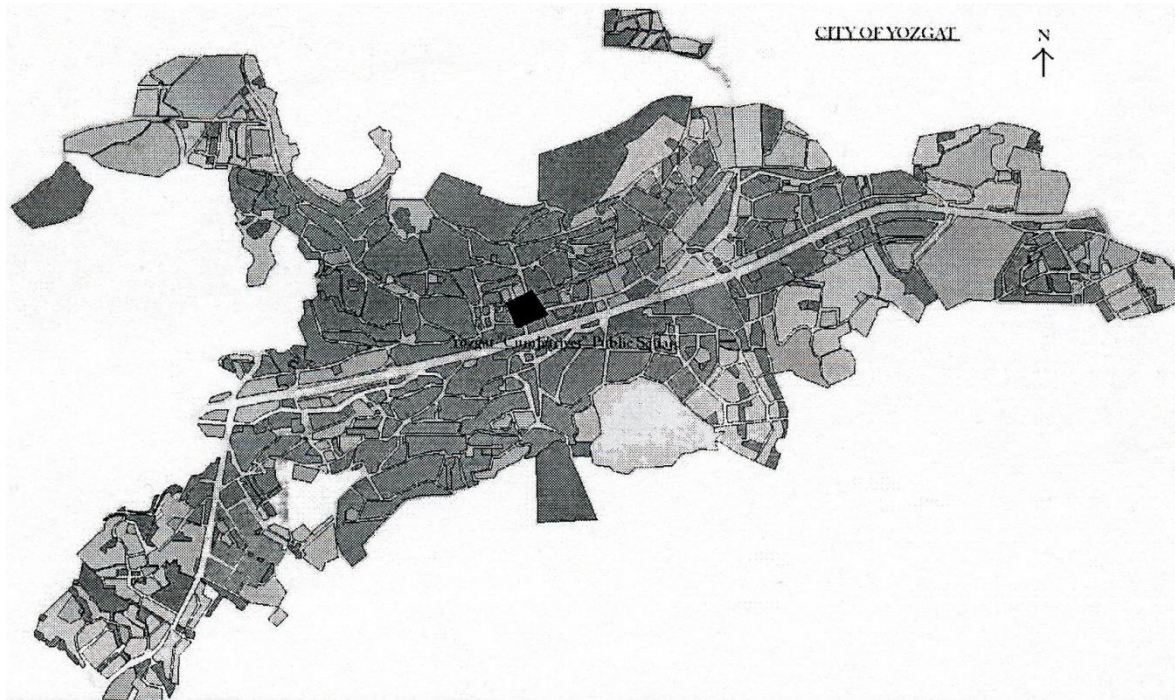
The history of Yozgat city dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Started out with 30 households, its population reached 16.000 in 1832 (Acun, 2005). The first settled area in the city was about 150 m to the south of the Cumhuriyet square. The city developed around this core in rings.

Cumhuriyet Square is located in the center of the city (Figure 1). The history of the square dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1920's, the area was vacant and used as an open area. It became the public square of the city after the establishment of the Republic (Kapusuzoğlu, 2009). It is estimated that it was formally used as a public square of the city in 1930's. The square survived to the present day without many differences in terms of its boundaries and function. The square was taken into account in environmental plans made in 1976 and in 2000, when it took its final and modern form (Figure 2).

The square consists of two main parts. One is the southern part used as ceremonial area surrounded by stairs. This part is about 3300 m<sup>2</sup>. Second part is the northern part two meters elevated from the first part. There is a tea garden, a playpen of 650 m<sup>2</sup>, a coffee house and recreational grounds. This part is about 6200 m<sup>2</sup>, the environs of the square is shown in Figure 3.

There is a governorship building on the north of the area. Roads on the west, east and the south surround the square. The southern section is adjacent to "Lise" Avenue which is the most important commercial area of the city. There is a municipality building on the northwest side of the square in addition to the commercial and some other administrative buildings surrounding the square. The square is near to the clock tower at the crossroads, which is one of the most important landmarks of the city, built in 1908.

The square bears various meanings for the city of Yozgat. The square is an important place for formal ceremonies as well as festivals. It is the area for elderly people to spend time with friends. From the bus stop adjacent to the square, the inner city buses reach every district of Yozgat. With its unique characteristics, the square plays an important role for the social life of the city. It is located at a focal point in the city where



**Figure 1.** Location of Cumhuriyet square in city of Yozgat (Yozgat Municipality).



**Figure 2.** A photograph of Cumhuriyet square in Yozgat-2007 (Yozgat Municipality, city photographs archive 2010).

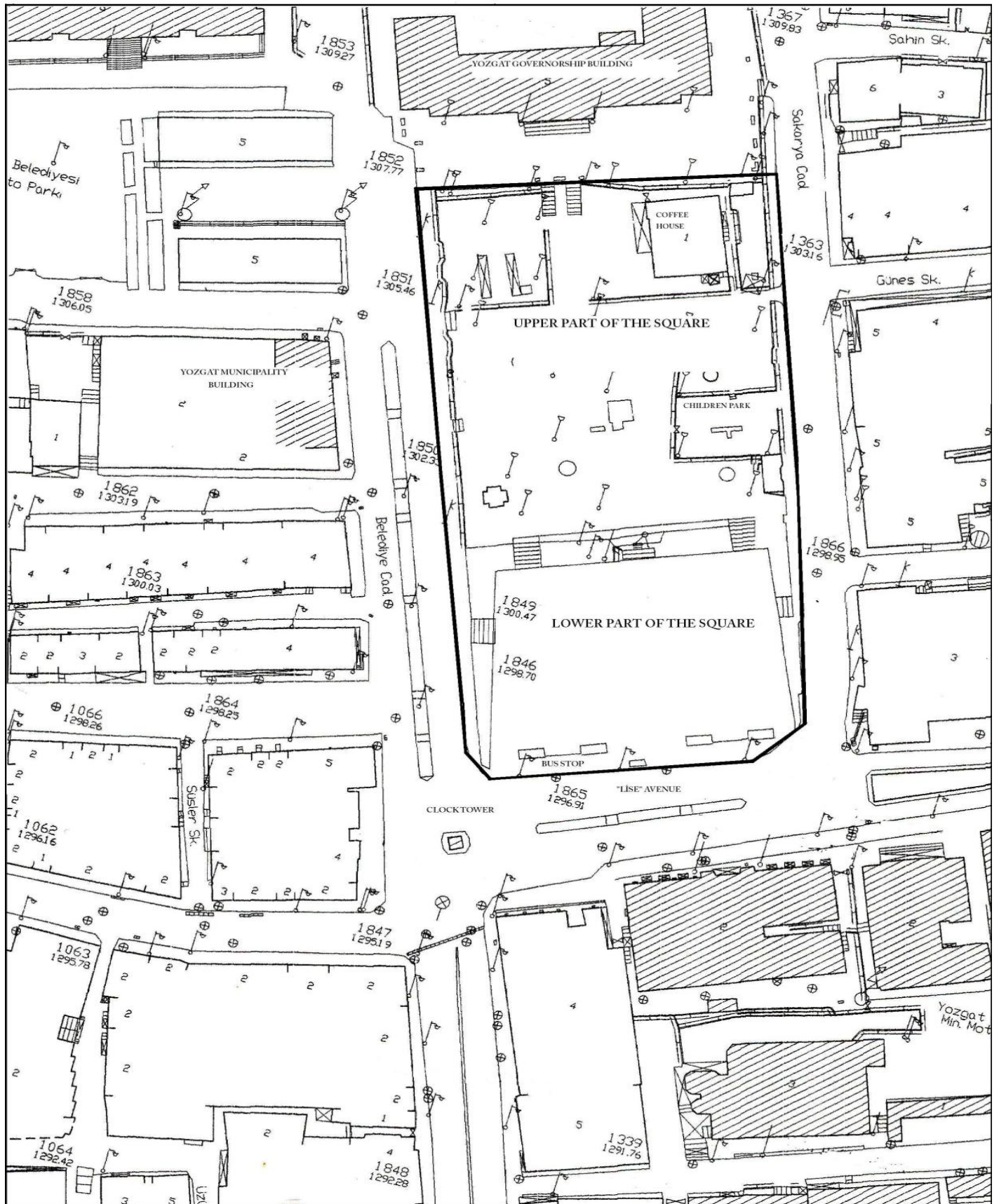


Figure 3. Current map of Yozgat Cumhuriyet square and its environs (Yozgat Municipality map archive).

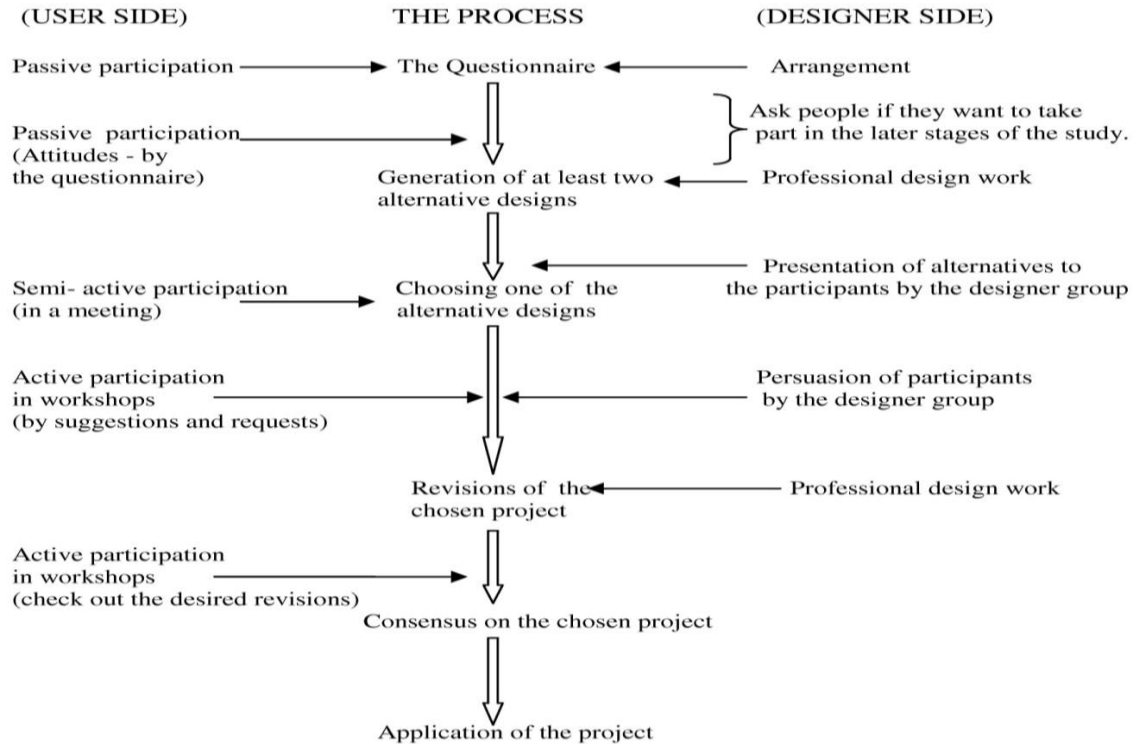


Figure 4. A Model for participation in Urban design.

everyone has to pass once a day, as there are administrative and commercial buildings around the square. The main inner city bus stop near the square makes it also the focal point of transportation in the city.

#### PARTICIPATIVE DESIGN PROCESS OF YOZGAT CUMHURİYET SQUARE

Although, the redesigning of Yozgat Cumhuriyet square is not officially on the agenda, several institutions such as universities and non-governmental organizations sometimes bring forward the necessity to redesign the square. The case study in this section is an academic workshop and could be considered a new participative design approach or a model for participation in urban design. Owing to some reasons, this process failed. The case was chosen to identify the direct effects of users on design and their effects on the power of changing the overall design. On the other hand, methodology used in participatory study could be regarded as original. The principle is not making the public design the square directly but orienting the designers/professionals by the public through explaining their expectations and observing all types of transformations within the project itself. Designers are the professionals such as planners or architects and users are the citizens who use the square in their daily lives.

The theoretical design study of the Yozgat urban

square consists of four main stages:

- (1) Gathering information on peoples' perceptions and judgments on the current situation of the square by questionnaires. Moreover, those who want to take duty on the later stages of the project are determined in this stage,
- (2) Generation of at least two alternative urban design projects of the square by designers depending on their design capabilities, and in line with the views gathered by the questionnaires,
- (3) Presentation of these alternatives to the participants and ask them to chose one of the alternatives,
- (4) With common agreement on the chosen project, the designer re-evaluates the chosen project according to the suggestions of the participants. The designer should persuade participants about the decisions that are not applicable in the project. An important issue is to achieve the "least common denominator" between the designer and the participants. Once reconciliation is achieved on the final stage of the project, then the application of the architectural details in the project suggested by the participants becomes the responsibility of the designer. In the final production stage, as a consensus is achieved, there would be no obstructions for the application of the project coming from the public.

The Figure 4 demonstrates this process. The statements on the left refer to the role of users, while the statements

On the right indicate the role of the designer or the designer groups in the process (Figure 4).

### **The questionnaire (passive citizen participation)**

The questionnaire is the first part of the study related to passive citizen participation in urban design. This stage consists of learning about the attitudes, habits and perceptions of participants about the square. In addition, this is the stage when people were asked whether they wanted to take part in the later stages of the participative practice. The questionnaire was conducted from morning to evening between Thursday and Sunday (from October, 13 to October, 16) in 2011. The questionnaire consisted of 39 questions and was applied with 186 participants who accepted to participate out of randomly selected 689 people. This means only 27% of the randomly selected people in the square eventually accepted to fill in the questionnaire.

The issues addressed by the questionnaire were as follows:

- (i) User profile and information related to use of the square as; time of use, usage hours and frequency and aim of use,
- (ii) satisfaction level related to the characteristics of the square such as pavement, urban furniture, vegetation, art elements, lighting, etc.,
- (iii) Accessibility issues such as the arrival direction, vehicle access in the area, evaluation of accessibility of every part of the square etc.,
- (iv) Views about buildings surrounding the square,
- (v) Views on the image of the area in the whole cityscape,
- (vi) Problems of the square.

It is possible to generalize the results of the questionnaire. The majority of the participants are highly educated and they seem to be conscious about their localities, whereas the rate of people who agreed to take part in the design workshop was only 6%. Most of the participants of the questionnaire have inhabited Yozgat for more than five years. The square is used by most of the people for daily activities. Especially, the primary users of the square are retired people and students. In addition, the square seems to be a place for killing time for the elder and people are not regularly employed. Besides, the inhabitants from the neighboring residential areas bring their children to the playground within the square. It is used most frequently in spring and summer and during the day in the afternoons and later on.

Ease of pedestrian accessibility to the square is one of the most important characteristics of it. Although it is a focal point in the city, few people think that it is a visual image element of Yozgat. All participants pointed out several problems in the square. Participants agreed on

problems such as the lack of cultural and art facilities in the square, lack of vegetation, security and lightning problems during the night, lack of urban furniture, inefficient urban furniture and accessories, low quality of pavement material that makes it hard to walk, lack of shelters in the ceremonial area, etc.

### **The unsuccessful participation process**

The participative urban design project was explained briefly to all participants who were then asked whether they wanted to take part in the later stages of the study while the questionnaire was given to participants. Age, sex or educational factors were not taken into account. Telephone numbers were taken with the consensus of those who accepted to participate and the whole process was explained. The number of participants who accepted was eleven, that is, they comprise only 6% of the total number of participants. These people were either students or highly educated people with respect to the rest of the group. The profile of these participants is as follows: out of seven males, four has a university degree and one graduated from high school, whereas three of them are current university students. One of them is a teacher, one is an instructor at the university, one is an engineer with a private office and one is a salesman. Among four females, one is a university graduate and is a clerk and the rest of them are university students.

Up to this point, the process could be considered satisfactory. Afterwards, eight of eleven people who previously accepted to take part in the participative design, stated that they could not take part in the later stages of the study and declared several excuses. For this reason, participative urban design workshop of the square was cancelled.

This is a complete disappointment for the scholars who organized the urban design research and workshop project. The participation rate of the questionnaire in the square, only 27% is overwhelming combined with the overall rate of 6% who accepted to participate in following stages of the study. Overall, as these people could not participate eventually in the second stage of the participative design, the whole process ended.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

There are various types and ongoing processes of participation in planning and urban design. It would be wrong to claim that there is only one accurate way to ensure public participation in planning or urban design, as there is no method or a model of participation applicable in every locality or society. This difficulty is due to first the complicated characteristics of both urban design and participation, and second, the distinct characteristics of different societies. Participation is not



only a technical concept, but one that is closely related to the culture of societies and should be tackled within the cultural, social, economic and traditional values of societies.

Citizen participation in urban design could be divided into passive and active participation where active stands for intense communication with designers. Ensuring direct citizen participation is a hard and complex process. Within this context, this study attempted to apply a model in Yozgat Turkey. The results were discouraging as active participation could not be realized after obtaining passive participation by the questionnaire.

The aim of the study was to test a new participatory design approach or model in design of the public square in a mid-size Turkish city. One of the most important expectations was that everyone would have a consensus on the end product of the urban design process. This situation best represents the "lowest common denominator" approach (www.mfe.govt.nz, 2005). On the one hand, evidently, it is not possible to ask participants to design by themselves. On the other hand, there should be no tyranny of the designer at any point of the desired design process. Although, citizen participation goes on from the very beginning until the end product, the designer is the one to lead the whole design process.

Providing users with full information about the process and evaluate and implement their expectations from the project could be considered the best way to integrate them with the design process, which was also the intention of the urban design workshop of Cumhuriyet Square in Yozgat. User-designer relations should be intense through the process. Communication between the user and the designer is the strategic factor. The whole process depends on the skills of designers and the attitudes of local users regarding what they want to see in the project. This condition could be achieved only through good and efficient communication.

The application of such a participative design approach/model in a public square urban design in Yozgat was not successful. There are various reasons for this unsuccessful participation in urban design, such as the socio-cultural factors and organizational issues.

The socio-cultural reasons are strictly related to the social, economic and cultural characteristics of Yozgat. Although, its population is over 80.000, the society in Yozgat could be mentioned as insecure. This could be the reason why only 27% of the citizens accepted to participate in the questionnaire and 6% of this group accepted to participate in the later stages of the project, and eventually, the study failed in the stage of active participation. It is hard to talk about a "culture of participation" in decision making, planning or urban design in Yozgat. However, it should not be conceived as if people in Yozgat have little interest in the places they live in, rather it seems that they have other primary problems to deal with. Moreover, this is a macro problem of Turkish society as a whole, as most of the citizens tend

to indifferent about their democratic and socio-economic rights and there is a lack of social and public consciousness possibly due to high cost of living or fear from the authority. All of these raise important sociological questions for further research on the Turkish society.

The second reason of the failure is the pitfall of the organizational issues. In the model, the public authorities, policy makers and local politicians were not included in the process. Especially in such conditions explained previously, the existence of an authority could instead be an incentive factor for the participation of citizens in such an urban design project.

Besides the reasons for the failure of the design process, there are also other problems about the Turkish legal system related to the actual application of participatory planning or urban design. It is not possible to apply this process formally as the Turkish planning system, along with the Turkish planning traditions and laws do not allow yet such a participatory process. Even the concept urban design is not clearly defined in the Law of Construction and Land Development accepted in 1985. The planning system in Turkey takes into account urban squares within master plans prepared for the cities by planners. Then, these master plans announced on the municipality boards and their implementation takes place after the approval by the municipal council.

Ensuring participatory processes in planning or urban design seems to be the primary duty of local authorities, as they are possibly the best promoters between the user and the designer in participatory planning and urban design processes. Moreover, the necessary legal arrangements should be done to obtain a legal basis for participatory planning or urban design in developing countries like Turkey.

The most important limitation is the socio-cultural one for participation in decision making, planning or urban design in Turkey. The first condition for citizen participation is willingness of local people to participate in such projects or activities. This is highly related to the participation culture of the society and this culture depends on a series of multifaceted factors. This is a rather complex issue that again necessitates macro analyses. However, public authorities could overcome the legal and organizational limitations by making the necessary legal arrangements and regulation on participation issues.

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