Art in Public Sphere and Sculpture Practices in Public Places in Turkey

Olcay Ataseven  Associate Professor
Suleyman Demirel University, Isparta, Turkey
olcayataseven@sdu.edu.tr

Abstract: While “public sphere” as an abstract concept is fulfilled in the process of social life, “public place” must be perceived more physically. As an art form, sculpture always affects easily its environment naturally. So, there is a strong relationship between, sculpture and public areas such as public sphere and public places. As an artistic discipline “sculpture” has gained significance after the proclamation of Turkish Republic and perpetuated its entity as a phenomenon integrating with Atatürk’s monuments. However, it could be said that the beginning stage of sculpture in Turkey had a functional purpose in a sense. For example, monuments and busts, in this period, have been considered as another way of transferring stories and heroisms to society related to the foundation of young Turkish Republic. The process extending to the present, sculpture art has moved out of its reflective feature of certain subjects and tried hard to find ways for reaching at a situation where the artist can bring up its personal approach. It is emphasized in art education. This period, when compared with the processual background of western art atmosphere, has been sufficient from the point of providing necessary accumulation for developing the tradition although it includes a short period of time in Turkey. The way to share these artistic values with more people will be possible with their accessibilities in the meaning of both physically and intellectually. With such an idea, meeting the sculpture with audience directly has brought to the agenda the opening outs that modern approaches could be internalized by more crowds of people easier. This study is going to search for the importance of sculpture in the public places in Turkey that are believed to support the accumulation of its tradition and encounter with the public sphere/place.

Keywords: art education, sculpture, public sphere, public place, outdoor sculpture, esthetic conscious.

Introduction
Sculpture can be defined as an artistic form that owns a voluminous feature, a direct connection with the environment it lives in and at the same time a place special to itself as well. Sculpture as a form of art is of a structure that affects its environment directly.

For that reason, the communication being created between sculpture and public sphere/place shows similarity with the relation between collective consciousness and public place.

With this study the definition of public sphere/place, relationship between sculpture and public sphere/place as part of art education and its improvement in Turkey will be tried to explain briefly.

Public Sphere and Sculpture/Art in Public Sphere/Place
The concept ‘public sphere’ here has been approached with the defining style of J. Habermas. So, while ‘public sphere’ is an abstract concept being realized in the social life process, ‘public place’ should be perceived as a more concrete and physical concept which prepares an environment for its formation. The concept ‘public sphere’ by J. Habermas has been defining an institution being concrete with the participation of people. However, public sphere cannot be defined as ‘crowd’ in a simple way (Habermas, 1995).

J. Habermas says that an area similar to public opinion in itself in a sense can be formed with his ‘public sphere’ concept and a piece of social life has been defined. To him, the most important quality of public sphere is that its openness to all citizens and this is created with every kind of communication where citizens create a public organ with each other (Habermas, 1995).

As for the public places, they are the areas bearing/reflecting the features of a city such as social structure, culture, identity etc. and at the same time where many activities are held, sharing are realized and that of art; consequently, of an art work has been able to become a united whole with
human being, and also the areas where society could be one inside the other with art, even if physically.

It is possible to define these places as environments formed by common habitations as well. Environment is the whole of relations formed by life itself and it constitutes a system becoming a united whole with those in it. Environment has a determined language & narration that becomes a united whole with life. And this creates effects on individuals and society. The components forming the environment and their succession in a certain order, participation into one another have been realized in a physical atmosphere and bear a different meaning for every individual. Perception of the environment shows alterations depending upon personal life of the perceiver, structuring, intellectual background, time resided in environment and prejudices regarding environment (Cubuk, 1978).

The physical environment that bundles an individual up, that is to say, his outer would has been composed of areas that affect his personal development directly, in other words, his ‘mandatory meeting places’. The individual in active life is located in these places enforecibly in long or short times. Mostly, these seem to have been comprised of lanes, streets, squares, parks and public spheres like these. Nevertheless, technological revolution renders a compulsory meeting for people in various appearances whether good or bad by means of media tools in their houses that are the most private places as well. This is another issue. Yet, the places in question that people might be obliged to be present whether they want or not, the ways that they have to be in the position of getting through can be called as ‘mandatory meeting places’, too. The areas characterized as mandatory meeting places, in fact, correspond to the concept of public place. (Ataseven, 2003, 16-21)

The disciplines that support the existence of these areas in a physical meaning need to be presented as architecture and art. While architecture undertakes the task of designing public place as ‘place’, art itself takes the function on to add semi-logical/ symbolic meaning to this place beside an identity and esthetical value. In general meaning, when places in urban scale are taken into account, the style of this art appears as sculpture again.

These art works situated in public spheres which are characterized as open area sculpture are seen to perpetuate its existence at different styles in unique structure of each period throughout history. The artist, as a result of the deep-rooted changes undergone along with the 20th century, has oriented toward studies that becoming more integrated with outer world, bringing originality to places and contributing to environments that establish a mutual relation with life.

As for sculpture’s becoming a public art object, it means that there has been a direct interaction with the viewer and it has begun to form a more direct influence into life. With respect to public art, it confronts us as an event developing along with this process. It is necessary to evaluate public art as one of the components in the formation of public sphere and development with its features providing certain awareness and public interaction and communication.

At the same time, monuments evaluated as public art, environmental installation, open area sculptures represent the art that are removed from covered-hidden exhibiting places to public areas/ places. Art created in public places that are open areas to public has reached a more significant point in the formation and development of culture through direct interaction that it sets up with every human being this way.

Public places where social interactions have been realized and artistic formations integrating with these places can be thought as the most important ones out of the factors forming public culture. Both architectural constructions and art works/sculptures taking place in public places become efficient on viewer, in short on environmental man if prepared effective and in a sensitive way.

This situation plays an important role in bringing both public sphere and public art into existence together reciprocatively. Considering this idea, it can be said that reaching up to maximum number of people and effective ones among art works are the art forms (called as open area sculpture as well) that have made accepted in public sphere itself and public places related to it.

Sculptures situated in public places or, in other words, in city places become shareholders in the formation of city’s esthetical value by creating a whole with other landscape components such as
architectural constructions and green areas forming environmental appearance. When viewed from this aspect, bearing in mind that art brings a more humanistic dimension to the environment it exists in, it is clear that it would be very lacking without including art forms of sculpture types in public sphere which should be accepted as an interaction area.

**Sculpture Practices in Public Places in Turkey**

That public places become an ideal and humanistic social living place is not only related to welfare level of a country but also art objects that bring into being and give the meaning to these places with its cultural and artistic richness as well. As for these objects, they are mostly the sculptures that give unique spirit to public places.

The art phenomenon at public sphere in Turkey has been generally perceived as monument and monumental applications in sculpture discipline. As an art discipline, “Sculpture” in Turkey has become more of an issue after the proclamation of the Republic and has continued its existence as a phenomenon being identified with the sculptures of Atatürk.

In this period, monuments and busts have been considered as another way of transferring the narrations and heroic deeds that belong to the foundation of young Turkish Republic. After all, it can be said that sculpture in Turkey has a functional aim.

As for the process extending to present day, sculpture discipline, by digressing from its feature of reflecting some certain issues, has tried to find ways in which an artist is going to be able to expose his personal approach. This period for Turkey, compared with the formation ground of western art environment, despite the fact that it includes a short time period, it has been sufficient to provide necessary accumulation for the formation of a tradition.

The way to be able to share emerging artistic values with more crowds passes from its attainability as both physically and ideationally. From such a point of view, public places that enable sculpture’s direct meeting with audience have been ideal environments for internalization of contemporary approaches by large mass. It has been benefited from monumental sculptures put up to public places for visualizing the significance of independence struggle and adopting republic ideals to public by thinking this function of art in the newly founded periods of Turkish Republic.

“In public acclaim of sculpture art in Turkey, the share for ideological need to monuments in modernization program of Republic regime has been great…. The most important figure of all these principles and values to be summarized as winning the war maintained against imperialism, providing liberation and independence and foundation of the Republic is undoubtedly Atatürk and art/sculpture image has gained a new radical meaning in Atatürk’s secular personality” (Yaman, 2002, 155).

“Reconstruction of Anatolia physically after the war of Independence and increasing the activities of public works are one of the leading programs. Squares and parks planned by European experts in a city mentality have begun to be envisaged as significant meeting and gathering places of public life and this contemporary city life understanding has also begun to be considered important. Another feature distinguishing Republic cities from Ottoman ones has been monumental sculpture applications realized in these areas determined. Republic architecture and art envisaged and utilized as an ideological tool by the government has taken on a task to demonstrate state/regime and has designed and realized a new public sphere different from the one of Ottoman Empire (Yaman, 2011, 71).

For that reason, public buildings, schools, social areas, Republic squares designed in the mentality of new city created have been thought with the sculptures of Atatürk (Figure 1,2,3,4).

“The new city centers established, as different from the central configuration focused around the commercial settlement of the Ottoman have been transformed into the indicator of Turkish, nation state mentality, modernity and secularism. The sculptures of Atatürk usually focus on the center of this new function of the city or take place in the areas such as square, street, park, museum, etc. where the public is thought to come together” (Yaman, 2011, 71).

However, some crucial advances for the development of villages and peasants culturally in particular have been made along with this period. In this context, the transformation of village has been targeted,
such that with the modernization project of villages the problems of transportation, economy, health, cleanliness, water, agriculture, afforestation, education and librarianship have been designed blow-by-blow from houses to squares… In such a village where Turkish culture can clearly be seen; along with radio, travelling cinema, theater, a stage to be used for propagandas, newspaper, rooms for reading books and coffeehouses, “A Ghazi Sculpture” in the village square to be characterized as ‘the honor of the village’ and designed as public sphere that is going to introduce the liberator who founded the Republic should have been situated in there as well. This resolution has been stated with the words “A square is the honor and meeting place of the village. A pool is for a peasant who works in the vineyard and field all day in the full glare of the sun refreshing after hearing the splash of the water by looking at it towards evening and feeling relieved of his heart. The flower garden to include the pool and sculpture is for the relief of heart again. As for the Ghazi sculpture, it is going to introduce the children of today and tomorrow the liberator of the country and the founder of the Republic. A person who does not know how to have fun & live and cannot distinguish the benefactor and evildoer has nothing to do for himself too. Turkish peasant does not forget the one who makes charity. Ghazi sculpture is a sign of the liberation of the country and moving forward day by day and a source of speed to give power to hearts in succeeding any new and useful business to be done” (Yaman, 2011, 72).

Conclusion

Yet, unfortunately, this project beginning with village institutes could not have been long-termed and has not been able to reach its goal exactly. Sculpture art in Turkey has been a branch of art that enlivens only in city’s public squares. Art of sculpture made its presence felt with monuments built after the Republic era had begun independent of the traditional art inherited from the Ottoman era. However, this began to change when the first generation of Turkish artists tended to turn from figurative description to an abstract-constructive approach. (Figure 5,6)

Therefore, it was seen that sculpture in Turkish culture was going towards alternative movements shaped as mass-space and form art. In the following stage, Turkish sculpture acquired a character of its own with new depictions and expressions in which arrangements were of importance, original interpretations and new materials were experienced and it continues to make progress. Therewithal, at the present time in Turkey’s contemporary art, there are many artists who produce art works, which integrates the memory of the place in public spheres, in line with modern trends. (Figure 7,8)
Figure 3. “Republic Monument in Taksim”, 1928, Pietro Canonica, Istanbul-Turkey.

Figure 4. “Monument of National Rise”, 1964, Hüseyin Gezer, Antalya-Turkey.

Figure 5. “The Monument of Hitit Sun”, 1978, Nusret Suman, Sıhhiye-Ankara-Turkey.

Figure 6. “Mediterranean”, 1980, Ilhan Koman, Istanbul-Turkey.
Figure 7. “Being & Lifetime”, 2003, Marble, 450x200x250cm, Olcay Ataseven, Suleyman Demirel University Hospital, Isparta-Turkey.

Figure 8. “Perching”, 2007, Olcay Ataseven, Marble, 180x150x200cm, Suleyman Demirel University- East Campus, Isparta-Turkey.

Bibliography