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## **CULTURE AND SYMBOLISM IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN LANDSCAPES: VIENNA-ANKARA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will present an argumentation on ways of approaching to the contemporary issues of culture relevant to urban landscape research and design, and different definitions of contemporary urban landscape symbols, as tools of exposition of meanings, in cities related to changing forms of urban landscapes, and their interaction with people, from different contexts including Vienna and Ankara, which are the cities from centre and periphery of Europe and European policies. It will involve urban landscape symbol types in contemporary cities and question the modes of symbolic relationships created with codes of professional culture and urban citizens enhance the use, benefit and inclusion, while some of them diminishing, considering the different social, cultural and political groups in cities, and offer a framework of issues for cultural perspective in urban landscape design research with an attempt of producing new concept and terminologies.

### **TODAY'S URBAN LANDSCAPE AND CULTURE: THE IDEALS**

We are facing with different speed and types of configuration change of urban societies today. Globalization has brought different social scenarios for different cities. People move one location to another within displacements of connections between their cultures and environments causing various divergent reflections into different urban landscapes. Social tensions, conflicts, confusions and disorientations are the result of bringing together of huge numbers of people with totally different cultural backgrounds (Paetzold, 1997). Basically, 19th century's social tension between two basic social classes of capitalist and worker in sociology literature has evolved into more complicated social tensions among different classification of urban society based on social class, ethnic background, religion, sect, gender and many other commonalities that may cause to a determination of any identity for individuals and groups (Appadurai, 1996). This sophisticated structure of urban society has taken appearances of more sophisticated fragmentations and conflicts in urban landscapes. Homogeneous neighbourhoods of certain ethnic backgrounds or social classes, certain urban public landscapes used by certain social and cultural groups, limitation of cognition of urban spots for certain groups are a few of the results of the social conflicts, tensions, confusions and disorientations.

In relation to the phenomenon of immigration, cultural diversity, segregation or fragmentation in urban environment, particularly in European context, discourses of social sciences (Taylor et al, 1994), socio-spatial policies (EU, 1999; EC, 2004; UN, 2003), and planners (ECTP, 2003; COST ACTION 11, 2005) and landscape design theorists (Ophuis 2002) have highlighted the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in a kind of utopian idealism for the well-being of multicultural urban societies of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and urban landscape as a medium of generation of positive outcomes of multiculturalism.

All levels, from social ideals to design of urban public landscapes have been inspired from the utopian idea "...that human beings should flourish in circumstances which allow them to benefit from different cultures to be found world-wide." (Paetzold, 1997, p.25); this perspective draws an outline of a new society, which has tolerance, curiosity and the desire for enrichment, and such a public urban landscape that provides exchange and mutual enrichment, in a peaceful way.

According to planning discourses, Cost Action C 11, chapter of Human Issues, urban public landscape can function such a role for social flux if it is structured between social or cultural ghettos, while "Towards a thematic strategy on urban environment" just mentions the green spaces as an asset that should be conserved and developed for all urban citizens, and The new charter of Athens generates the concept of connectivity, which overarches the issues of social and cultural characteristics of different groups and their social and physical environment, however not in detail relating the characteristics of urban public landscapes. For Ophuis (2002), more relatively to discourse of new multicultural society, defines the society, in his perspective of contemporary urban landscape, as become from people who are in transformation to the direction of more and more individualized, selective and opportunistic in their use of urban public landscape, hungry for new stimuli and continuously searching for new experiences and new means of expressing lifestyles. This new urban public landscape involves global references, and present local historical and high cultural values in an international aesthetic framework.

The realities, which are based on unbalanced situation, between the "designer and landscape" and "landscape and user" resulted with the still continuing inequalities in the access to different kind of services, and the characteristics of urban society, have presented different degrees and types of social and cultural exclusion, fragmentation, and tension in use of urban public landscapes. Distance from the ideal society has made the urban public landscapes

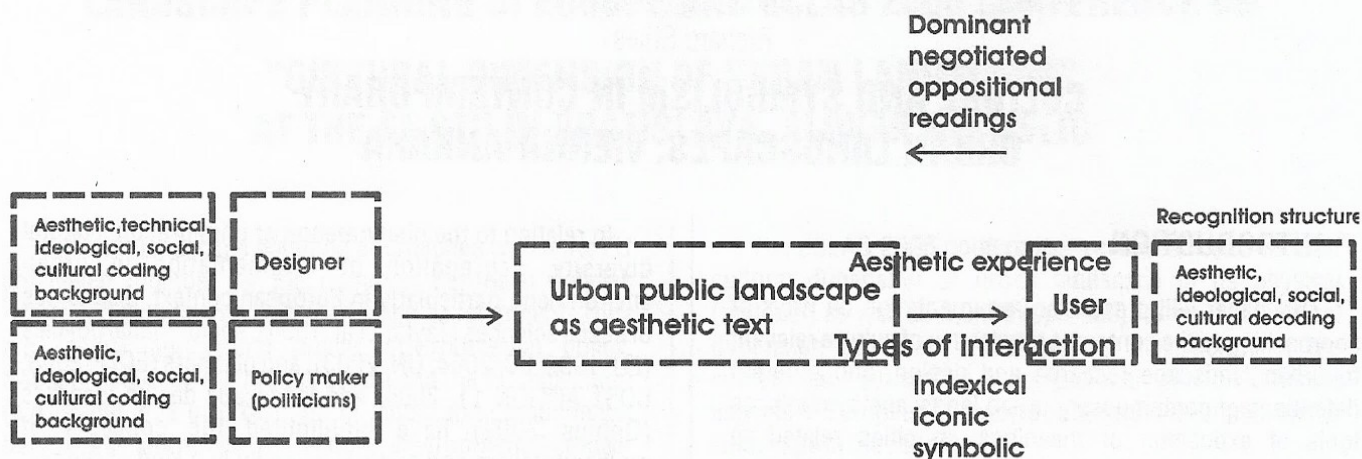


Figure 1.  
*Urban landscape as medium of communication*

such platforms for struggle for recognition for different social and cultural groups, populist approaches interpreted by political authorities.

### **CULTURE, AESTHETICS AND SYMBOLISM IN URBAN PUBLIC LANDSCAPES: VIENNA-ANKARA**

Culture, aesthetics, and symbolism in urban landscape can be conceived with the models and theories of semiotics. The communication model is a good explanation of the process of interaction between production of any object and its receptions by people (Eco, 1976). Culture in this model, is a dynamic system of shared values and symbols, which characterize a group of people, it might transform in time. This system designates the regularities in group's thinking and behaviour (Lang, 1988). Design and use of urban public landscape reflect cultures; professional cultures, political cultures, society's cultures. Culture constitutes the basics of two edges of any communicative action, an aesthetic experience, between production of any urban public landscape as an aesthetic text and structures of the reception of it (Eco, 1976). Between aesthetic text and people several types of interactions (indexical, iconic, and symbolic) occur according to the level of conventionality of the signs the text involves (Chandler, 2002). Symbolic interactions provide important types of aesthetic experiences as the most conventional structures between any object and person (Lang, 1988). With their ideological, social and cultural background people conceive objects and transform them into symbols (Chandler, 2002). Lang (1988, p.15) defines architectural symbolism as a "nonverbal mechanism that people use to communicate messages about themselves,

their backgrounds, social statuses and worldviews to others". Urban public landscape, as object, as aesthetic text, is conceived and transformed into symbols in people's minds.

In the context of multicultural structure of cities, symbols have differed from one culture to another and play role in the aesthetization of urban public landscapes, and consequently have defined the rules of social and cultural inclusion and exclusion. According to Krease (2005), the ethnic groups, which invade the neighbourhoods, change the appearances of spaces and places as well as the meanings of them. In American context, the classic urban ecologists called this process "ethnic succession" (Krease 2005). Ecological and semiotic processes function together; ethnic and other cultural groups use signs (usually symbolic ones) to create new appearances and meanings to communicate and to invade.

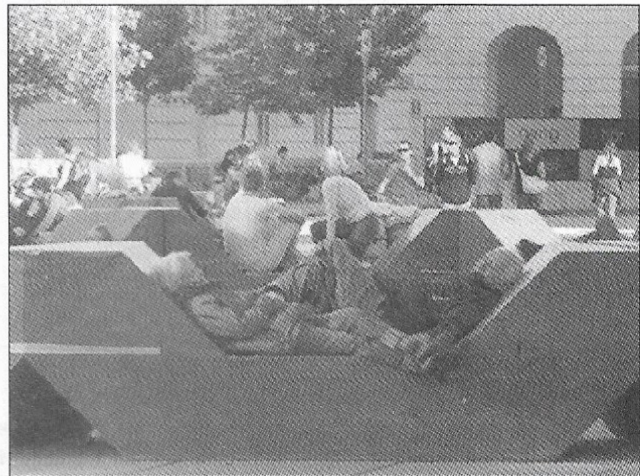
Building (shapes, patterns, motifs etc.) and spatial (volume, degree of enclosure, proportions of enclosed space, furniture types etc.) configurations, materials (visual, sonic, haptic character), the nature of illumination, pigmentation and some non-physical variables such as names given to the landscapes, events happening, people who are using, or designers or developers who are well known by the public, of any urban public landscape might carry symbolic meanings (Lang, 1988). The dominance of design professionals' culture in production of the aesthetics of urban public landscapes reflects formulations of these physical and non-physical variables usually for the ideal society, which is highly individual, looking for new stimuli, social networks and experiences and presentation of its various identities. This new society functionally fragments its urban public landscapes for experiences in nature and culture. However, social well-being is based on integration of different socio-cultural groups in sharing of these experiences, the current urban society is not only constituted from the ideal type of people and ideologies for landscape experiences differ from one culture to another.

**CASE OF VIENNA: SYMBOLS OF  
DIFFERENT CULTURAL GROUPS: LOCALS,  
TOURISTS AND IMMIGRANTS**



*Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7  
Several views from Museumsquartier in Vienna (2006).*

Users of Museumsquartier (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) in Vienna, come to this urban public landscape for visiting museums, reading, meeting and chatting with friends, listening certain kinds of music, sunbathing, or just lying on the benches. They are usually from middle class, students, housewives, parents with children, retired people and tourists; and they tend to define themselves as Viennese or tourist. Most of them state that they feel very free and comfortable in this place without any hesitation of being this public space with many strangers; they feel very familiar with people. They like the benches in the place, because the benches give them freedom of the way of engagement in the place, and content and visuality of the surrounding museums give them a kind of feeling that they are in the heart of the cultural locus of Vienna. The aesthetics, which involves permeable enclosure by museums, the huge volume of this public room, continuously changing configuration of bench groupings and ergonomics, colour and shape of benches, and human mosaic reflecting a certain lifestyle, has become symbol developing, transmitting and recording different meanings.



*Figure 8.  
Lying down in Museumsquartier, Vienna (2006).*

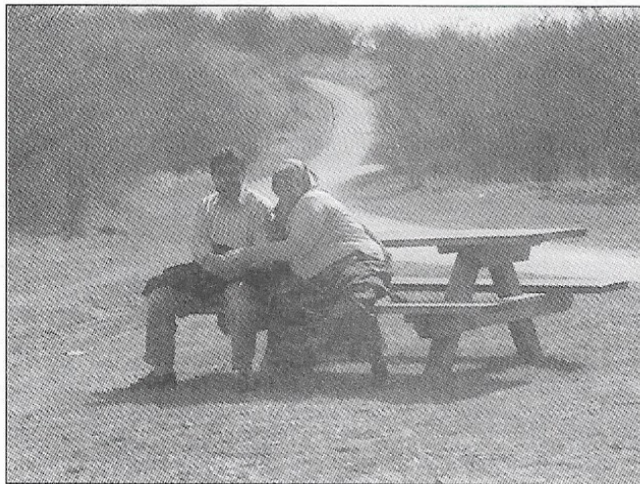


Figure 9.  
A Turkish couple in Park Wienerberg, Vienna (2006).

This important locus becomes invisible in the mind maps of Turkish immigrants, especially who have low degree of education and income. It does not show simply their physical exclusion from an urban public landscape, but their exclusion from the struggle of cultural recognition, and (the access to the cultural capital of Vienna) the cultural landscapes of Vienna in relation to their weak integration into the Viennese society via education, public life and other channels of socialization. They read the aesthetic text of Muesumsquartier with a rejection according to their cultural structure of recognition of urban public landscapes. The urban public landscape symbols of comfort and freedom for Viennese people and tourists transform into shame, sin and discomfort in uneducated and low income Turkish immigrants' psyche. They need privacy, proximity and invisibility in quiet periphery (Figure 8) urban public landscapes of Vienna for their rehabilitation.

## CASE OF ANKARA: SYMBOLS OF DIFFERENT CULTURAL GROUPS: POLITICAL GROUPS, INCOME GROUPS, LOCALS AND MIGRANTS

Instable social, economical and political structure of Ankara presents very high percentage of migrated population after 1950s from middle and eastern Anatolia. Mostly, they illegally occupied city's state lands for dwelling. Within time small sheds transformed into big apartment neighbourhoods attracting more and more population from countryside (Şenyapılı, 2004). The main characteristics of cultural difference between different groups in the city are basically dependant on having past generations in the city, income and education levels. The class difference has become enhanced and overlapped with political perspectives, and concrete cultural and political fragmentation in the city. Mostly, while low income, and less educated countryside origins people have chose right-wing parties, whose discourses are based on religious and nationalist motifs, high income, educated groups, which are at least three generations in Ankara have chose left-wing parties, whose discourses are based on the concepts like democracy, secularism and liberalism (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, 2005).

Theodor W. Adorno identifies a profound alteration at the edge of totalitarian societies in the cultural nature of art works. For him, the difference between artistic sphere and ordinary economic and political life vanishes (Paetzold 2000). Within the social change in Ankara, and fragmentation of urban environment and municipalities basing on politics, the difference between the art of landscape design and political life has vanished. Designer's discourse, which involves professional social, technical and artistic streams, on urban public landscape has

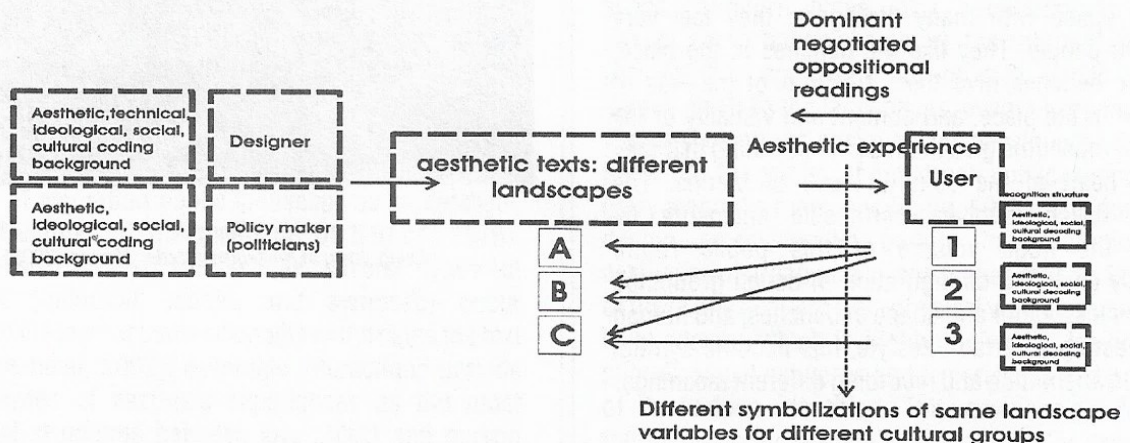
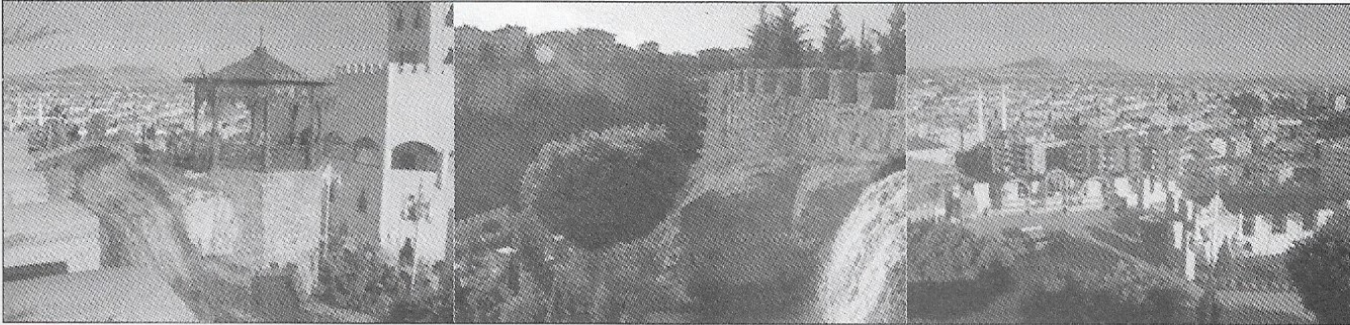


Figure 10.  
Communication between designer-policy maker  
and landscape and different social-cultural groups, users in Vienna:  
Cultural fragmentation: exclusion of Turkish immigrants from cultural urban public landscapes of Vienna



*Figures 11, 12,13. Views from Estergon Castle and its gardens (built in 2004), Keçiören, Ankara (2006).*



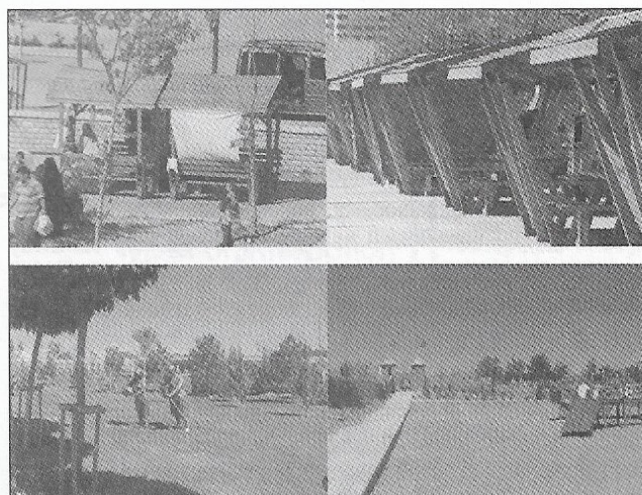
*Figures 14, 15,16. Views from Gökçek Park (2005), Keçiören District, Ankara (2006).*

disappeared, and discourse of politics, which involves the self reflection of peoples' cultural urban public landscape cognition structures, was directly reflected into the urban public landscapes of fragmented neighbourhoods.

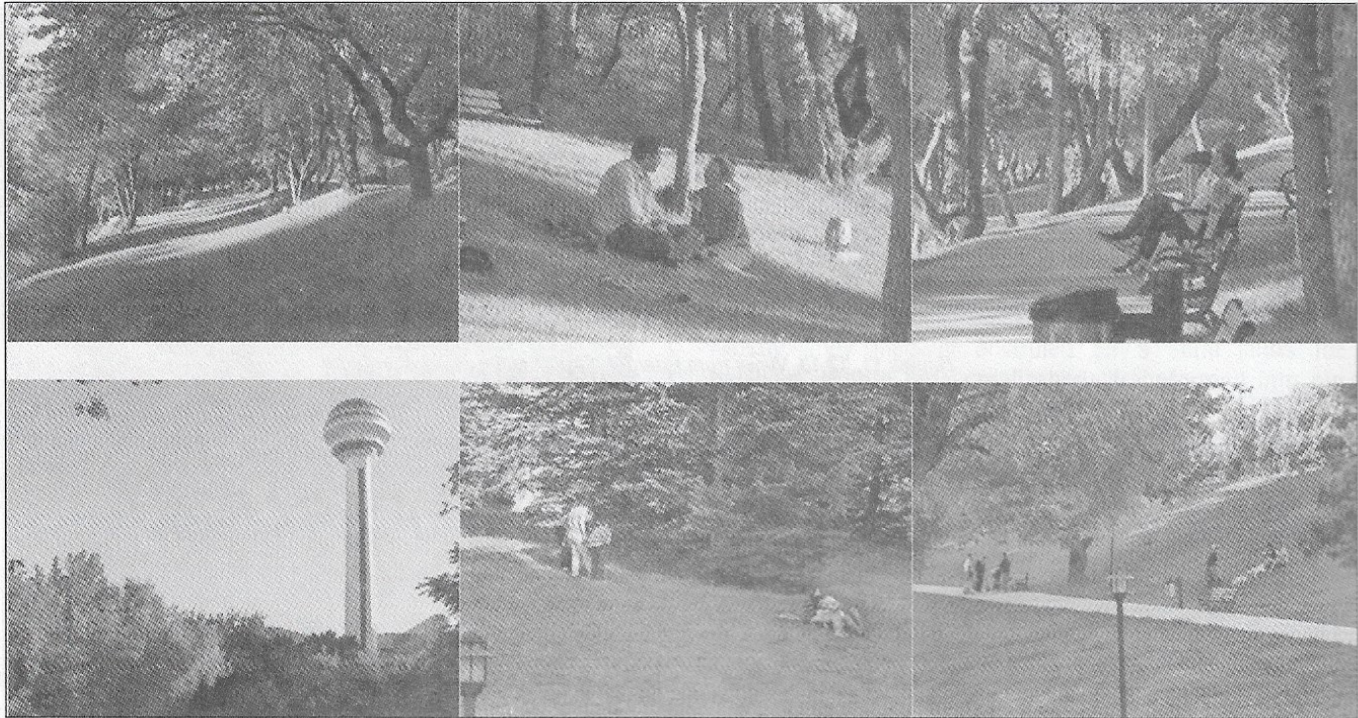
In Keçiören District (Figures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) and Eryaman District (Figures 17, 18, 19, 20), in which usually low education and income groups dwell, new spatial configurations, furniture, directionality into visual elements (to mosques) have constituted new aesthetics, which is the total reflection of neighbourhoods' peoples' cultural recognition structure, aesthetic and behavioural codes, and their ideological symbolism for urban public landscapes. Estergon Castle is an imitation of a Turkish castle constructed in 1200s at southern Anatolia. It recalls the past aesthetics, behavioural and visual motifs to another location for a public urban landscape. Peoples' unfamiliarity with the rules of urban public life has transformed the meaning of urban public landscape. The landscape is fragmented into privacies, and covered with hard surfaces for social control. With tangible elements, symbols (peasants statues for instance) the landscape builds a direct empathy with its users. Fragmented private spaces, large hard surfaces, and decreased opacity of vegetation function as symbols of safety, comfort, familiarity and freedom for the users of these urban public landscapes.

By contrast, the urban public landscapes of Çankaya District, in which higher income and education level groups dwell, have present contrast aesthetics according to districts' cultural structure of recognition. The opacity

increases with the natural elements as a symbol of confidence of social security, and freedom for different kind of behaviours in an urban public landscape. Existence and free use of large grass surfaces shows a freedom in relations in public, and increase the possibilities of integration and common enjoy of nature between people of the district. Visual configuration of the parks orients people other city images (Atakule, Father (Atatürk) tower) other than mosques. The urban public landscapes of Çankaya present a kind of neutrality at one hand with the use of natural landscape elements rather than historical religious and nationalist motifs, at another it is actually symbolizing another ideology of living.



*Figures 17, 18, 19,20. Views from Göksu Park (2004), Eryaman District, Ankara (2006).*



Figures 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26. Views from Botanik and Segmenler Parks (built in 1980s), Çankaya (2006)

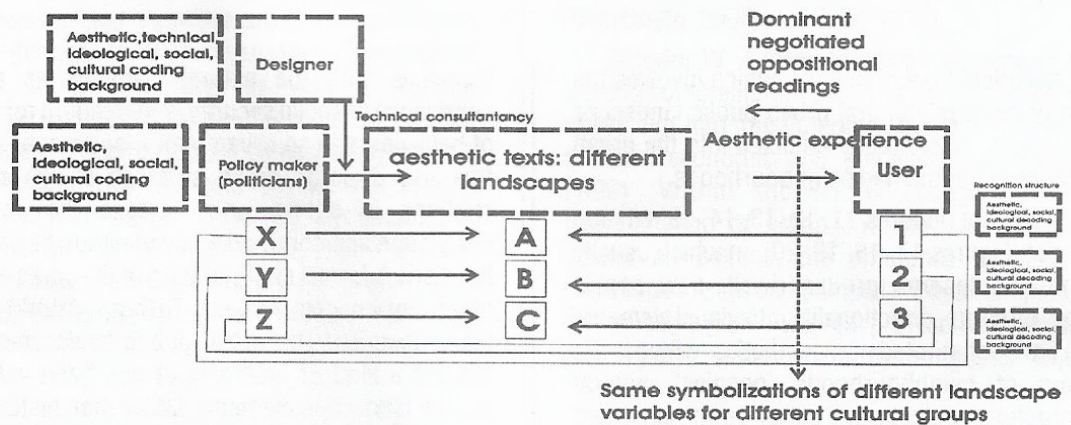


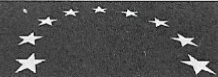
Figure 27. Communication between designer-policy maker and landscape and user in Ankara: Cultural fragmentation: Fragmentation of all urban public landscapes according to different politicized aesthetics, fragmentation of urban society

## CONCLUSIONS: “SYMBOL MANAGEMENT IN URBAN LANDSCAPE”?

The existence of the characters in the definitions of ideal multicultural urban society and its integrated, healthy public life for social-well being seems still very far away from the general and marginal cases of Vienna and Ankara. In Vienna, between the designer and policy maker a balance can be seen in the reflection of the professional values and ideals to the urban landscapes in certain extent, however cultural groups have been fragmented based on their ability to access cultural capital to conceive the urban cultural landscapes. In Ankara case, social and cultural fragmentation is increasing concretizing its politicized aesthetics in urban public landscapes, which might orient

the urban societies into tensions, conflicts and misunderstandings. Certain landscapes have transformed into certain people’s identities, people have started to identify themselves over the urban public landscapes, which they choose.

However, the unpredictability of the future phases of the communicative system, which displays the several interactions between production of urban public landscapes and their uses has still keeps itself unexposed in these two examples. These two fragmented situation might be just the beginning of the engagement of different cultural groups, which are socially disadvantaged. The next step might involve negotiations in various cultural groups for using different types of urban public landscapes, another is consciousness about urban public landscapes and looking for new stimuli and structuring pressure on



politicians to produce high quality landscapes rather than populist approaches, then professional codings might appear in the process as the influential factor. But, it might also continue negatively.

*Unpredictability of the evolution phases of communication process, which displays the interaction between the production and use of urban public landscapes*

**HYPOTHESIS 1**

- Engagement of different cultural groups to public landscape via direct empathy
- Development of new consciousness for new experiences
- Generation of cultural diversity in different kinds of landscapes
- Development of public consciousness demanding for high quality aesthetics in landscape rather than populist, political design approaches
- Pressure by public on politicians
- Increase in professional influence on designing urban public landscapes according to professional cultural, aesthetics, ideological, technical and aesthetic codes

**HYPOTHESIS 2**

- Engagement of different cultural groups to public landscape via direct empathy
- Concreting certain aesthetics of certain ideologies into certain landscapes and neighbourhoods
- Total fragmentation of urban public landscapes according to ideologies of landscapes and lifestyles
- Rejection of new experiences and stimuli in landscapes
- Total hegemony of politics and cultural recognition struggles of different groups fragmented in certain neighbourhoods, ghettos
- A role for the professionals, designers only as technical consultant in the production of urban public landscapes

The communicative process between design of urban public landscapes and their use by people expose different dimensions of landscape design, which are peoples' cultural aesthetic, ideological and behavioural codes, landscape recognition structures. Inclusiveness of any urban public landscape depends on not only its physical design, but also design of social interventions, which are the both sides of the communication process. This analysis suggests the need for a new research and working framework called "symbolism management in urban landscape" in this context. Thus, it might create

negotiations in peoples' recognition structures opening them for different experiences in urban public landscapes, organized by design professionals based on professional ethics that will call for a different, creative social, technical and artistic codings for more creative multicultural urban society, which shares the urban public landscape as a platform for communication and common recreation for its social well-being.

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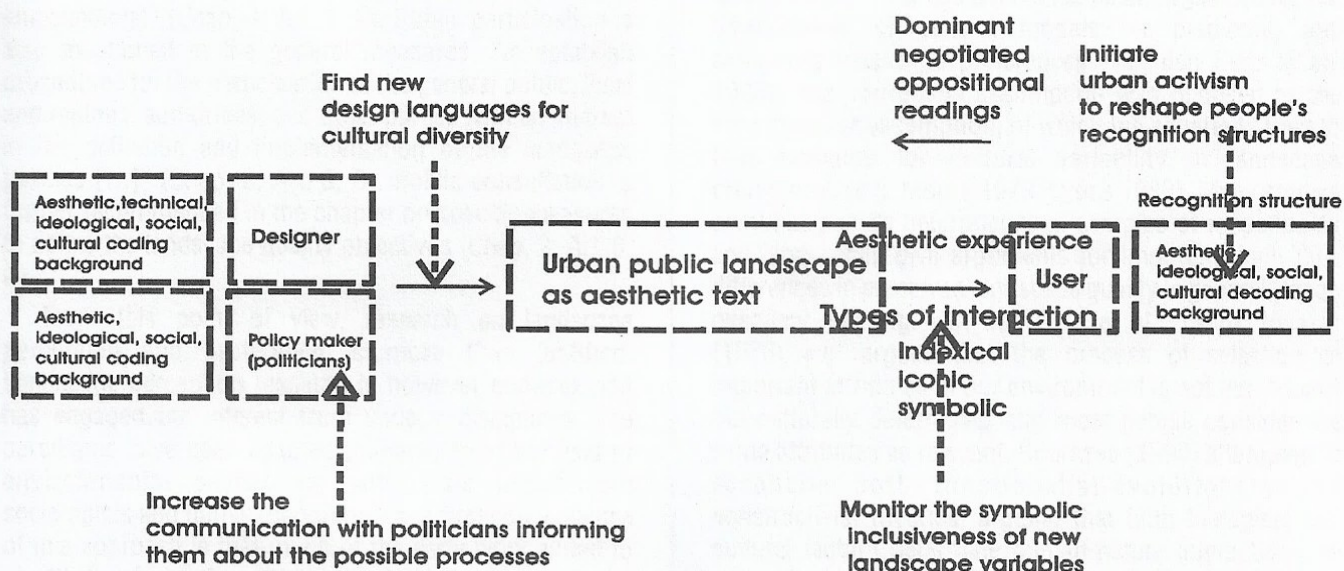


Figure 28. Management of symbolism in urban landscapes



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