Instances of Emerging Agonistic Spatialities in the Contemporary City: The Production of Differential Geographies in the Public Space of Istanbul

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ABSTRACT--- *Today, the virtually deterritorialised digital public sphere produces recombinant effects on the increasingly fragmented physical and social urban environment. The Gezi Park Movement in Istanbul has produced an exemplary instance of resurgence of citizens in the struggle against the obliteration of participative engagement enacted by the augmented spectacle orchestrated by hegemonic economic powers. This instance has showed unprecedented collective spatial productions, liberating the potential of the pervading digital realm. This article discusses evidence found in the tensest moments of territorialisation of this situated urban movement generated by a contention on the subsistence of a key central public park – the oldest of the country. Evidence from digital media sources, supplemented by interviews with key stakeholders, is used to support a theoretical speculation on the changing role of public space in our society and the emerging paradox of centrality in the digital age. The exploration considers the movement at the wider city scale, evaluating the dialectic relations between its different parts and layers. The crucial role of new technologies in shaping spatial relations is foregrounded and evaluated as fundamental constitutive element of a hybrid public space, where differentiation is the leading force of urban transformation. Considering the complex meta-spatial dimensions of the new public realm, a new interpretations to the Lefebvrian notion of 'differential space' emerges. The 'right to the city' in the multi-layered networked habitat poses a new prominence on urban centrality that, in its reconfigured elaboration, triggers fundamental claims for the non-renounceability of genuine, reterritorialized, urban commons.*

Keywords--- Public Space, Differential space, Digital geography, Gezi Park, Istanbul

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1. INTRODUCTION

Istanbul has a long history in the production of inclusive and at the same time pluralistic, *agonistic spaces* (Mouffe, 2007, 2013) here a composite ethnical, cultural and linguistic society has developed outstanding examples of coexistence spaces replete with diversity. Openness, genuine difference, respectful tolerance and enfranchising appropriability are characteristics defining these 'differential spaces' that still persist in some public areas of the city. The differential attributes of places are not static, but tend to consolidate in particular areas where high spatial accessibility and indeterminacy are intimately combined. Typically, they are found at the centre of primary urban nodes, in conjunction with popular public amenities, such as streets and *han* markets, anglers and street vendors, pedestrian paths, open spaces with transit nodes and active *sebils*, and, in general, in most of the public spaces where tea and ayran are ambulantly served.

In the modern development of the city, traditional inclusionary places are often subject to homogenisation, commodification and gentrification processes that are buttressed by co-acting public and private interests in economic and property developments. This is also an effect of a peculiar interpretation of the *cultural turn* that, as conceptualised through paradigms of *creative* (Florida, 2004) and *eventful city* (Richards & Palmer, 2012), has included phenomena of spectacular romanticisation and staging that contribute to exclusion and marginalisation of some constitutive parts of the society (Öz & Eder, 2012). Yet, compensating for this partial loss of the multidimensional, amalgamated heaecceity supporting pluralistic public spaces, we are assisting to the recombinant effect of new high-accessibility to public sphere granted by the pervasion of digital technologies (Bohman, 2004; Castells, 2000; Diamond, 2010; Kirsch, 1995). The amplification potential offered by the digital framework to the traditional public acts and practices has importantly

modified and expanded the historical stable and formalised geography of the public dimension of the city. This potential has established a dynamic and diffusive condition that allows for the rapid emergence of powerful *counter-spaces* "capable of recapturing the unity of dissociated elements, breaking down such barriers as between public and private" (Lefebvre, 1991: 64).

Particular instances in the recent history of the city presented situations where multiple subjects, aiming to re-establish differential *agonistic* conditions of public space, re-appropriate their role in everyday civic life. In their swift embrace of the potential offered by new technologies, they redefined spatial networks, reaching the entire city and beyond. One such instance of a contested space concerns an area that has been at the centre of the local discourse on public spaces, involving all aspects of conception, perception and experience of places, and triggering an important social movement. Centre of that debate was a fundamental phase in a prominent urban renewal project aimed to repurpose Taksim Square and the surrounding public space, a major urban public square of central Istanbul for both symbolic meaning and social, institutional, cultural and commercial functions (Baykan & Hatuka, 2010). The redevelopment programme included both infrastructural and public space interventions, with extensions of pedestrian areas, development of an underground mobility system to ameliorate the vehicular network and improve the integration of a multimodal public transport node. A major element of the public space redevelopment was the transformation of a 600-tree park into a mixed use complex that included the reconstruction of the three and half hectares wide Ottoman military barracks that was demolished in 1940.[1][1] The redevelopment of the park, that constitutes the background of the phenomena discussed in this paper, was the centre of controversy, originated by an interpretation that saw it as a crucial step in the commodification process currently permeating the central public spaces of the city. It was read as the ultimate extension of the space of consumption, entertainment, and leisure that is rapidly transforming the character of the area, the centre of Beygolu district. The area, hinged on Istiklal Street – the major commercial axis of the city and characterised by a distinctive history of social, and cultural diversity – which in recent times has undergone a large number of important urban transformations, including the notorious transformation of historic Emek theatre into a shopping mall (Eder & Öz, 2015).

Taksim Square is located at the upper end of Istiklal Street and shows a very complex urban life. The high intensity of social interaction in its spaces is supported by its magnitude, spatial centrality, and accessibility. However, particularly important to its success is the fundamental indeterminacy of its spaces that form a unique in-between realm activated by major civic and commercial amenities: the commercial cluster on the Istiklal side, the major hospitality facilities on its north, east and south fringes, and the outstanding set of public institutions that includes the Istanbul Technical University, the Atatürk Cultural centre and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Taksim Atatürk Library. The connectivity of this key location in the historical European side of Istanbul is also exceptional and makes it a prime meeting point and preferred site for large scale social gatherings of cultural, political, even mundane, events. It is a transportation hub that has a high infrastructural provision concerning both local and regional movements of millions of urban commuters.

Taksim Square – initially as a *meydan*[2] a[2] and an urban intersection – was built in 1926 as one the first public squares with monumental and political symbolism, bringing to Istanbul the concepts of forum for democratic life that inspired the formation of piazzas in "progressive" Europe. As the seal of a foundational moment in the Country's political history, and connector to the first public park created in the Country, today it is a place embedded in the collective memory, particularly symbolising the pre-1980 era; a period prior to the adoption of an export-oriented liberal economy that preceded the events related to the military coup in September 1980 (Baykan & Hatuka, 2010, p. 50).

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[1] Authorities announced that a part of Gezi Park's garden will be protected by the construction of the barracks. Beneath the park, a parking garage will be built to help alleviate traffic:

- Taksim Square and Gezi Park construction works, Turkey | EJAtlas. (n.d.). Retrieved March 17, 2016, from https://ejatlas.org/conflict/taksim-square-and-gezi-park-construction-works-turkey
- Gezi Parkı'ndaki 'kavga'nın sebebi AVM planı. (2013, May 31). Retrieved March 17, 2016, from http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gezi-parki-ndaki-kavganin-sebebi-avm-plani-23405125

[2] In contrast to the square and plaza of the European city, which is defined spatially, politically and culturally to represent the public life of the city, *meydan* 'is mundane and accidental, a junction of axes which brings together structures and spaces that were not designed *intentionally* to define one integrated spatial entity'(Baykan & Hatuka, 2010, p. 52). It is worth noting that this infrastructural condition reflects its historical centrality in the water network, being the site of the distribution system of the northern city districts (the monumental Ottoman cistern still forming its western boundary of the square).

Taksim Square saw the start of the Gezi Park movement that, as many subsequent protests and demonstrations were founded and rooted in it, began as a limited local protest against the urban regeneration programme. It eventually incorporated key elements of a wider movement that sees the neoliberal urban development favouring gentrification, social and political stratification, polarisation, and spatial disenfranchisement and segregation of citizens (Erkip, 2000; Gunay, 2012). Due to its political ramifications and magnitude, it is argued to be a critical turning point in the history of the city, since it introduced and consolidated new practices of public life that engaged a complex set of rapidly developing socio-cultural layers (Adanali, 2013; Göle, 2013).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Considering the conceptual theories developed by Lefebvre (1991) in *The Production of Space*, this paper analyses the occupation movement as moment of production, reproduction and appropriation of a space by Istanbul citizens. Turning away from the dichotomy of domination and the dominated and its binary logic, the analysis of the production of a new urban space indicates how the crisis of a controlled (Lefebvre, 2003a) and 'over-determined' space (Sennett, 2010) of centrality can lead to the obliteration of the central while a new centrality will be reproduced by the other citizens in exceptional circumstances. . Elaborating on the concept of centrality as the key urban character, this paper unpacks and analyses interconnected urban concepts of periphery, segregation and occupation as the consequences of the crisis of urban centralities.

The process of industrialisation, urbanisation and creation of fragmented knowledge unable of grasping and reproducing a city as a whole, leads to physical, social and political domains that are also increasingly fragmented. Most notably, this fragmentation affected the core city, reflecting a universal phenomenon that is identified by Lefebvre as the 'crisis of the city' (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 100; Schmid, 2012, p. 43): A crisis that has been identified as the departure point of many social and urban movements of the late 1960s which demanded a 'different city' (Schmid, 2012). These movements, like the Gezi Park movement, shared the objective to halt the progressive 'inhospitality of our cities'[3] and its production of marginalisation and exclusion of important parts of the society from urban centres (Sennett, 2010). They demanded a new centre – a centre of material and immaterial resources – and claimed for the adoption of participative processes for the creation and production of its space. They also struggled to resist all forms of alienation of the rights to 'appropriate' existing centres, and all forms of peripheralisations in the formal processes of production of space.

Strongly tied to the concept of centrality, simultaneously in divergence with the centre, is the notion of difference that in the industrialised and neoliberal cities tend to disappear in favour of indistinctiveness (Brenner & Theodore, 2005; Elicin, 2014; Purcell, 2008). However, many metropolitan centres that alienated forms of difference with planning and social legislation, found important resistance in the implementation of phases, since difference erupted and reproduced itself within the gaps, weaknesses and internal conflicts of the system of over-determining governance and policies (Lefebvre, 1991) (Sennett, 2010). Unfolding the complex relationship between these two agonistic concepts of centrality and difference, this study discusses how, during the occupation of Gezi Park by forces aiming to preserve spaces for inclusive differentiation, complex synergies between the physical and digital realms, transformed both the lived and perceived geographies of the public space, asserting the prime cultural, social and civic role of centrality.

During the Gezi Park movement, the imposing growth of the digital sphere and the activity of social networks have constituted fundamental platforms to collect, share and interpret information, generating imposing virtual spaces for encounter, debate and dialogue. These platforms, through continuous engagement in the form of interaction occurring in actual places, lead to the constitution of an extraordinarily complex spatiality that embodies a core phenomenon of the contemporary transition of urban life: the contradictory and complex evolution of the dialectic between different actors and agencies involved in the conception, construction and representation of the city as a civic body. During the Gezi Park movement the locus of occupation (the park) became the fulcrum of a networked laboratory for the emergence and experimentation of new forms of 'differential' space in what has been dubbed as "senseable" city (Ratti & Townsend, 2011). It elaborated symbolic, affective and artistic dimensions often overlooked by prevailing models of urban governance. Hence the process initiated by this movement represents an exemplification of the inborn rights to *centrality* and *difference* in the development of the *integral city* claimed by Lefebvre (1991, 1996, 2003b) and argued for by other scholars like Christian Schmid (2012) Edward Soja (1996), David Harvey (2007), Manuel Castells (1983) and Mark Purcell (2002)

To unearth some complex layers of the movement and how these layers intertwined with the layers of urban fabric, this study conducted a qualitative and quantitative analysis by investigating multidimensional networks of the users in digital geographies.

Recently, many studies focusing on urban movements considered the user generated social networks as their main source of data. Twitter and other a micro-blogging services with more than half billion users have created a deterritorialised universal public sphere for digital users to mobilize, project, and enable a stronger public participation in urban movements. To study the information fabric produced by Twitter, this study analyses different datasets from

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[3] This definition was coined by the German psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich, 'referring to the barrenness that Fordist zoning of urban space and suburbanisation had brought about' (Mayer, 2010, p. 19)

dedicated servers to geographically map and interpret the dynamics of the digital geography of the movement within Istanbul and in the wider context.

Based in a reading of Lefebvre, the paper presents research developed through consideration of interviews with scholars, activists and artists who were involved in the movement, and argues for a citizenry transformation of urban space otherwise subjected to the control of investment capital. Elaborating on the theoretical framework and the data analysis, this paper depicts how a profound act of resistance that is produced in the digital and physical public spheres create a unique condition for public engagement of the different and the marginalised.

3. THE SPATIAL CONTEXT OF THE MOVEMENT

Istanbul has been historically considered a unique city. While straddling two continents, it is defined by neither and is, instead, often regarded as the place of intersection of multiple traditions, powers and ideologies; a city of co-existence and conflict. Istanbul is a city which encompasses the history of Persians, Ottomans, Greeks, Romans, Armenian, Turks, Kurds and Arabs and many others. It has been inhabited by Jews, Christians, Muslims, Sufis and the 'others'. This cosmopolitan character can be found within manifold layers of urbanity of the city including in the characteristics of the Gezi Park movement.

The coexistence of different worlds in one city accompanied with disputes, conflicts and also production of a strong civil society and a rebellious community that revolted against the establishment and the dominant power. The conflicts between opposing urban dwellers have been resolved and settled down through different means and strategies depending on the historical and political context of the time. These strategies included intentional and informal segregation of city, with the creation of elite neighbourhoods, gated communities, ethnic enclaves and disenfranchised migrant settlements, sometime associated with polarised phenomena of gentrification and community displacement (Duben, 1992). Spatial transformations aimed to modernise and regenerate the historical city, recently implemented with neo-liberal planning policies, often reflect the increasing antagonism between groups of people (Erkip, 2000). These are imposing market-driven processes that attract national and international investment capitals, making Istanbul a city in continuous redefinition of its social reality, urbanity, and morphology (Dinçer, 2011). Policies and strategies specifically aimed to governing this change started in the 1980s and often caused conflicts and opposition movements (Keyder, 2005; Kuymulu, 2013).

One of the instances that influenced the history, transformation and current affairs of the city is the contradictory relationship between the centre and periphery. Due to the historical dimensions of Istanbul that mentioned before in this paper defining the centre- and consequently the periphery- is not possible without considering manifold layers of urbanity of Istanbul and its transformation into the digital age. Analysis of the events during the Taksim Square and Gezi Park occupation provide an understanding of the emerging relations between centre and periphery that account for the agonistic agencies for peripheralisation and appropriation of the centre

Indeed, the Gezi Park occupation movement, which according to many media outlets started on 28 May with the protest of environmental activists against the bulldozers that in the first phase of the renewal programme excavated the western fringe of the park, was the catalyst of a much wider movement that had been growing and fermenting for a long time in different forms as a response to the new urban policies (Elicin, 2014). The movement was against the incepting form of urbanism, particularly addressing commodification of urban life and space and the marginalisation of citizens from the governance processes. It immediately spread across the different districts of Istanbul, causing local uprisings and conflicts, and rapidly escalated into a national urban movement with important public manifestations in different cities. On 31 May protesters were allowed to gather in the park and thus began ten days of occupation. Considering the spatial and digital dimensions of occupation, it indicates how a counteracting interaction between the citizens can materialise a very peculiar condition that introduces new possibilities to the urban life and the city as a whole.

4. THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE CRISIS OF THE CITY

[...] centralization is a constituent of urban life, that if there is not centralization, there is no longer urban life, that the destruction of the urban centers threatens the very essence of urban living. [...] There are dialectical disturbances, shifts in urban centralization; there is saturation, the self-destructive aspect of urban centralization, from which perhaps will come the need for poly-centrality, for a polycentric conception of urban space. (Lefebvre & Enders, 1976, p. 34)

This section of the study elaborates on the interpretation of the Lefebvrian notions of 'right to the city' and 'crisis of the city', considering its reception and articulation in several urban and political studies, and focusing on spatial aspects, discussing the role of 'centre' as the core of the crisis. In relation to the *right to the city* Lefebvre states:

The right to the city is like a cry and a demand. This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities. (Lefebvre 1996: 158)

And in another instance, he indicates:

The right to information, the right to use of multiple services, the right of users to make known their ideas on

the space and time of their activities in urban areas; it would also cover the right to the use of the centre. (Lefebvre 1991: 34)

These definitions are projecting the significant role of *centre* in the concept of *right to the city* considering particular aspects relevant to this study. The first proclaims its relevance. The second, warns of the perils of distracting emotional approaches and speculates on a particularly relevant topic to the Gezi urban renewal programme since it offers guidance to the interpretation of the main element in the immanent ambivalence of the narrative concerning the reinstatement of a lost key heritage urban element (the Ottoman Halil Pasha Artillery Barracks) backing the renewal programme. The third, directly addresses the question of pluralism and the problem of inclusion that informs the notion of 'differentiality," and refers to the right to communicate convictions and principles exercised in the centrally situated place using multiple mediated and unmediated forms on the various spatial and temporal scales provided by electronic media.

In the claim of it as "cry and demand", there is another important cogent element: Lefebvre rhetoric refers to the underlying condition determined by the contemporary dominance of multiple cultural and socioeconomic agencies that, with their combined effects, have progressively disembedded and endangered the heart of the city. His description of the sequential implementation of processes of homogenisation, segregation and eventually eradication (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 159) has been associated by contemporary scholars, in its exacerbated form produced by neoliberal urbanism, the mainstream urban governance (Mayer, 2009, 2010; Schmid, 2012) and crisis (Mayer, 2010: 18). This interpretation is supported by evidence from several urban redevelopment projects, where processes of urban renewal have faced organised reactions in forms of urban movements.[4] Protests, initially concerned with the idea of collective consumption, more recently have been directed toward the production of urban space, its use – rather than its exchange value –, and more importantly the direct participation in the formal phases of conception and implementation of urbanisation processes. Being argued by Lefebvre, in two short texts (1996, 2003b), Purcell (2002) and Schmid (2012, p. 46) the right to the city and the related right to centre are not referred to concrete geographical situations and specific concrete contents. However, centrality is conceived as a specific formal attribute that entails and fosters the "possibility of an encounter" (Schmid, 2012, p. 46). This considers the centre as the locus for the convergence of the multiplicity of *things* and activities, consequently being understood as eminent place of difference: The place where the different appear, meet, acknowledge and compete with the other.

Taksim Square, using the Lefebvrian approach, represents most differing place in the city of Istanbul as a place of extreme political significance. In the urban fabric of the city, indeed, it has historically accommodated difference in multifarious forms, from the most prosaic to the radical, both at the local and national level. The subitaneous collective reaction to the obliteration plan of part of this prime civic reference (the park) and the consequent normalisation of differences was possibly an unforeseeable manifestation of the discontent. This is probably because of an intimate paradoxical condition in the fundamental conception of the centrality of the park: it by no means acted as a permanent primary platform for social interaction in the political arena, yet was perceived as a place of immense geopolitical importance. Due to the weight of the latter, its impact as a central node in the perceived network of social infrastructure of the city, represented for some individuals and groups a non-renounceable post of their urban condition: a sort of civic garrison guaranteeing inclusion against marginalisation and disenfranchisement. Indeed, Taksim Square and the park, more than being centres themselves, centralises the urban. Paraphrasing Lefebvre, they centralise "creation and nothing else" (2003, p.116). Yet, in that centralising role, they have outpaced all other centres of the present and the past of Istanbul. Even though they hosted cardinal collective political events, like Labour Day celebrations, the recognition of its centrality, many of the protesters would insist, is in its intrinsic contradictory role of rejecting any form of commercial alienation: the park and the square as urban commons, as the territory of all; first and foremost the peripheralised. Accordingly, a fundamental asset in the conflict between centrality and periphery. Centrality today implies the availability of manifold possibilities and access to social resources. Conversely, peripheralisation stands for dispersion, demarcation, and exclusion from urban life. Through the process of appropriation of Gezi Park as a central public *garrison*, the periphery, the *other*, including ethnic minorities, the marginalised and excluded political groups, the socially and religiously oppressed and other underrepresented groups occupied the space, appropriated it and asserted their own political dimension. This led to the creation of a laboratory for a different use of public space as key civic urban infrastructure. This process has been reflected in both the physical space and in the digital realm. Even though the appropriation of the contested space was a short lived experience for the reintegration of the peripheralised, it allowed the concrete conversion of the paradoxical notion of *differentiating centrality*, in a productive, reproductive and appropriative process of the peripheral.

5. OCCUPATION AND EMERGENCE OF DIFFERENTIAL SPACES

Considering the creation of inclusionary conditions for the appearance of diversity in a pluralistic society (the fundamental claim of the notion of *differential space*), this reading aims to evaluate whether during the Gezi Park (Figure

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[4] For instance the movements of 1960s are mainly urban mobilisation of citizens around the issues of housing, rental markets, and anti-gentrification issues. (Mayer, 2010, p. 18)

1) occupation there was a temporarily creation of a peculiar kind of alliance between different parties that relied on the geography of "otherness" generated with the intense rationality activated through electronic communication. It seeks to elaborate a framework to detect and interpret spatial evidence of the supposed manifestation of perseverance of an *agonistic space* supported by digital means in the most central urban public realm of the largest European city. This framework is intended to entangle the complex condition of hegemonic struggle between different parties emerging in public while they reciprocally grant legitimacy to the diversity of their multiple and conflicting desires in competition for recognition. The central element of this interpretation, the notion of *differential space*, elaborates upon the proposition made by Lefebvre in the Production of Space (1991) and Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. 3 (2008). Particularly effective, is the identification of two distinct but interconnected 'differentiating' types: the *induced*, or *minimal*, and the *produced*, or *maximal*. According to (Kipfer, 2008, pp. 201-202) *minimal difference* is found in *alienated particularity* that constitute discretely defined 'formal identities'. In cities like Istanbul these formal identities are represented by 'parcelized social spaces' of difference. They often result from either imposed, induced or voluntary forms of spatial segregation, such as ethnic enclaves, informal settlements or gated communities. On the contrary, *maximal difference* is produced by passionate, creative, affective and fully lived forms of autonomy that emerge in conditions of openness and revolt against any attempt of homogenisation and engineering of everyday life. The Gezi Park occupation is a distinctive instance, where both forms of maximal and minimal difference were produced simultaneously in a political struggle. This condition is however not unique as demonstrated by similarities with other historical movements that (in)formed our modern cities, such as the Paris revolts in 1968 (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, & Schmid, 2008, p. 292).
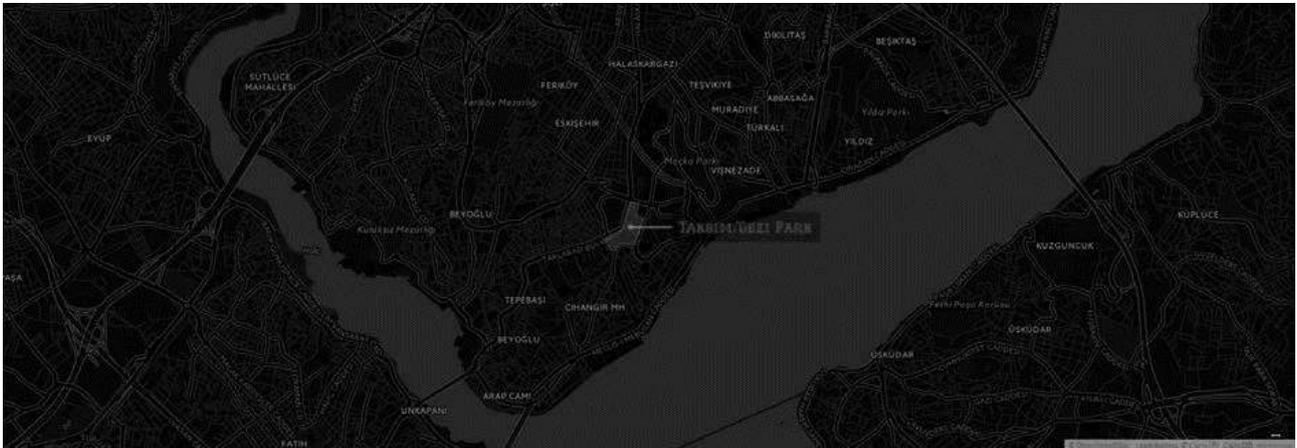
Figure 1, the location of Taksim Square and Gezi Park within the Central Istanbul – Made by Authors, using © OpenStreetMap contributors © CartoDB

 Reflecting on the relationship between the differences in the unifying urban, Schmid (2012, p. 48) argue that:
The specific quality of urban spaces arises from the simultaneous presences of very different worlds and value systems, of ethnic, cultural and social groups, activities and knowledge.

Urban space creates the possibility of bringing together these different elements and making them productive.

 This particular quality of urbanity has been realised and practiced during the course of the occupation movement to a level that a new mode of spatial practice has been introduced to the citizens. This led to the production of more permanent differential spaces and 'autonomous zones' (Bey, 2003) (Figure 2).
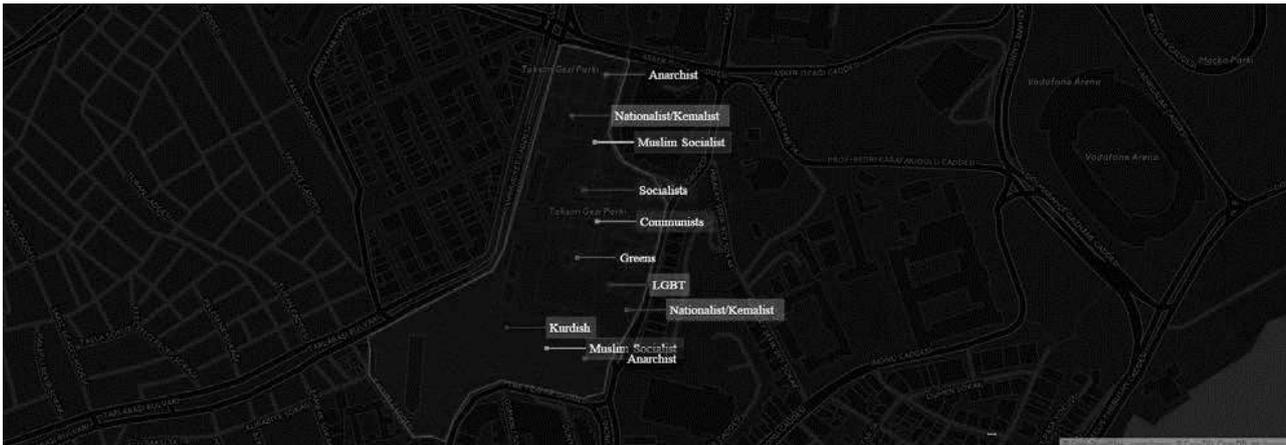
Figure 2, Occupation map of Gezi Park– Made by Authors, using © OpenStreetMap contributors © CartoDB

During the movement, the most marginalised groups of citizens were united in a peculiar way. 'The young hipsters' of Beyoglu were sharing the park with scarcely conciliable groups, such as the Anarchists and Islamist Socialists and LGBT community members. They organised their own 'streets' within the park, they shared the library, community garden, and kitchen, held voting polls for the management and cleaning of the site, secured the occupation camp (according to some interviewees the period of occupation of Gezi was the safest time and the park was the safest space that they experienced in Istanbul particularly since the police were not allowed into the site). The urban spaces and the moments produced by the 'others', represented and acknowledged their presence which, according to many, changed their perceptions about each other and created a dialogue between the different opposition groups and also between the homogenised society and the 'others' of the urban space.

> *[The city] requires another centre, a periphery, an elsewhere. An other place. This movement, produced by the urban, in turn produces the urban. Creation comes to halt to create again.* (Lefebvre 2003: 118)

An in-depth analysis of the occupation process indicates that a new pattern of co-existence occurred within the park that acknowledged the 'differences' that had never had a chance to be presented officially in a public sphere or any other urban spaces of Istanbul. In Gezi Park, groups with opposing ideologies resided next to each other which reflects an important urban phenomenon of Istanbul. Drawing on dialectic analysis of Lefebvre, Schmid (2012, p. 56) argues that the contradiction between centre and periphery is transformed to 'the antagonism between productive and non-productive ways consuming space, between capitalist "consumers" and collective "users"'. This transformation had a strong presence in a very conflicting manner in the process of the occupation. It is found that not the dichotomy of power and resistance, but the agonistic conflict played the greatest role in unifying all actors. Sharing resources and rejecting any measure of commodification was at the base of the counter-programme of civic re-foundation and, as claimed by many parties in the interviews, resulted in an effective and empowering implementation of a fully networked *differential space*.

6. SPACE, NEW CENTRALITY AND DIFFERENCE

The technological framework has been widely recognised as a fundamental driver of socio-spatial changes both at structural and every-day life levels (Lefebvre (1991). Technology has been increasingly influential in society, not simply in the rapid increase of our productive capacities and acceleration of the turnover time of capital investment, but also in the production of a space that is always re-casted to accommodate the dynamic geographies of production, exchange, and consumption. Technological advances, in a relentless "cumulative process" Kirsch (1995) supported the peculiar form of amalgamated production of space that emerged during the Gezi Park occupation. The intense use of digital social media produced an unprecedented condition that integrated and expanded the physical and social geography of that discrete urban space. Indeed, more than offering effective communication platforms to people in the park for sharing information and organising actions, it massively expanded what Purcell (2002) defined as 'right to participation.' Its power has not only been recognised by media, with the naming of the occupation as a Twitter revolution, but significantly by multiple blocks of access to social media and YouTube during key political conjunctures. However, at the time of the movement, Twitter and other digital networks produced a powerful participative platform both in locally and remotely democratising the movement to people of any nationality, political intentions and orientations. Gezi became the centre of digital fora and ultimately a global phenomenon for civic engagement that, in contrast to the preceding cases of mass involvement, activated an integrated multimodal communication network, both active locally and remotely, with millions virtually accessing Twitter (the main service to share information locally); Facebook (providing news and updates), Flickr and Tumblr (photographs); and YouTube (videos).

The analysis of the digital space, and particularly of its Twitter component, leads to two arguments: one is that during the movement whenever the urban fabric couldn't accommodate the encounter of the differences or simply the city was incapable of producing 'appropriate' space for public engagement, then the new centres were produced in the

digital sphere. However the counterargument is that to the different situation of digital users and active participants of the movement, the inaccessibility of digital technologies for the marginalised, and the technical obstacles, there is not clear evidence that the new public centres of digital sphere are the result of a weak or inappropriate space. Considering the interviews and the field work, it can be concluded that neither of these two arguments can precisely articulate the dynamics of the crisis and the production of the space. Though, it can be argued that the new digital centres are tightly interconnected to the appropriated centrality and feed different layers of urbanity to produce a new space for and of the city.

As discussed earlier, the production of differential spaces neither occurs in the traditional process of negotiation between the stakeholders involved in the process of urbanisation nor in the mere binary form of two urban concepts of centre and periphery. As the illustration of the tweets (Figure 3) in the digital sphere depicts, there is a networked and complex form of interaction between the urban inhabitants, forming multidimensional and polycentric geography of public spaces within the digital sphere.

This complex layer of parallel geography, rather than substituting, negating or contrasting the process of production of differential spaces within the physical urban fabric, appropriate a new spatiality of difference, by combining the physical geography of the resistance with the nourishing space of digital communication and interaction (Figures 3 and 4).
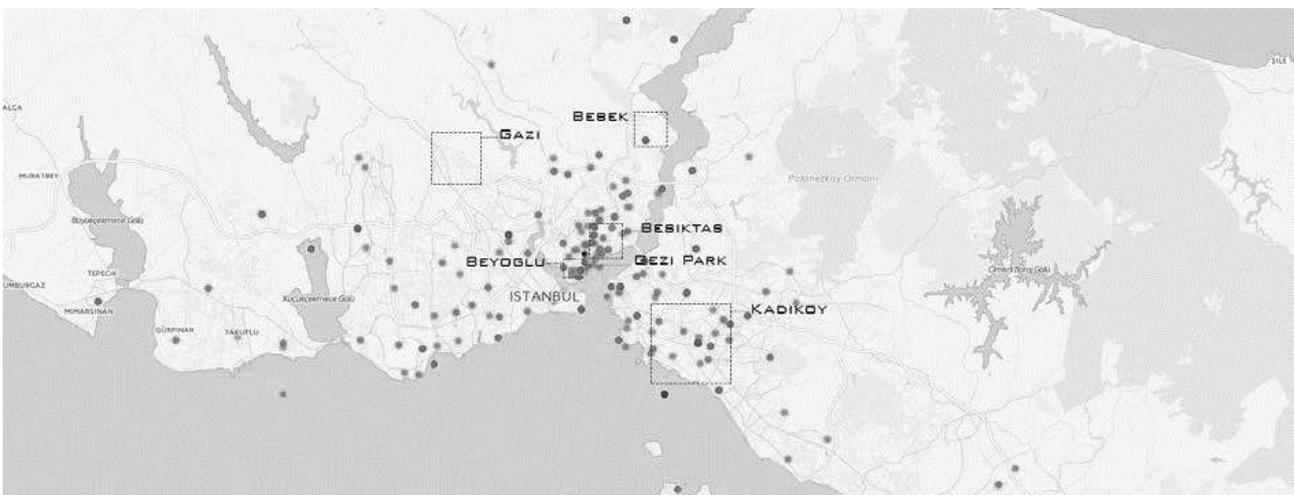

Figure 3, Digital spatiality of Tweets during the Gezi Park movement- The Data mining code includes all the geotagged tweets mentioning pro-Gezi hashtags– Made by Authors, using © OpenStreetMap contributors © CartoDB
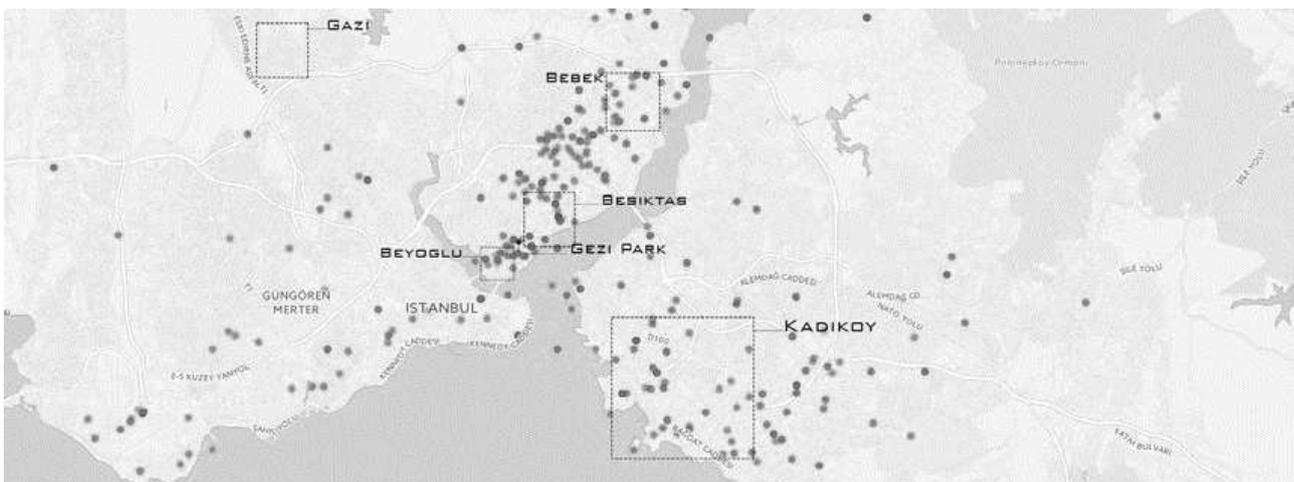

Figure 4, Digital spatiality of Tweets during the Gezi Park movement- The Data mining code includes all the geotagged tweets mentioning all-Gezi hashtags– Made by Authors, using © OpenStreetMap contributors © CartoDB

Although the use of digital technologies in urban movements and practices has been discussed in numerous studies in recent years, (Aurigi, 2005; Coyne, 2010; Houghton, 2010; Howard, Agarwal, & Hussain, 2011; Howard & Hussain, 2011) it must be noted that in the Gezi Park movement, the digital spheres, and particularly Twitter, were intensively active, measured both quantitatively (e.g. the total number of tweets in Turkey on 31 May surpassed 15 million, 50% higher than the average) and qualitatively (e.g. the amount of prosaic content significantly dropped).

Contesting and occupying the digital space due to its limitlessness and pervasiveness seems to be extremely effective. As depicted in figure 3 and figure 4, the geography of the digital sphere can be seen as compensatory agency to urban segregation in the dichotomous centre periphery. The paradoxical condition of the centre and the struggle to reclaim it in the digital sphere seems more challenging and problematic. The contested centre, geographically situated at the centre of the digital activities, is directly (but maybe not truly) socialised throughout the city.

The chaotic and agonistic sphere, rapidly changing in the non-hierarchical structure of the digital environment provided the *other* and the *different* permanent access to the production of space of Istanbul, overcoming displacement, cultural conflicts, and social barriers. Moreover, digital technologies have acknowledged and reflected their presence not only within the city of Istanbul but also on the international *plane of immanence* that this movement created. Ultimately, they have produced the novel possibility of a new hyper-networked, polycentric pluralistic city.

7. THE LEGACY OF THE MOVEMENT

To unfold the dialectic relationship between centrality and periphery, as a critical aspect of the differentiation process in contemporary urbanism, the case of the Gezi Park movement offered an ideal case study. It provided evidence to shed light on emerging dynamics in the production of differential spaces in the public realm. Even though it has been formally active for a very short time and in a limited space, it allowed the public realm hosting moments of extreme performativity in the collective discourse on function and meaning of public space in the city. The engagement that emerged during the occupation and developed through multiple spatial and temporal ramifications has resulted in an exceptionally high and long lasting presence in the public sphere at all local and international levels. For its peculiar combination of mediated and unmediated phenomena, it provided invaluable material for this study on the evolution of public spatialities in the contemporary city, allowing for the emergence of amalgamated realities.

It is understood that we are experiencing a rapid development of forms of co-existence of cultural, political and social differences on one hand, and representation of these differences in the networks of relationality of everyday life of citizens on the other. The important contribution of spatial factors in their digitally extended geographies is commonly overlooked, since within the urbanism disciplines it is conceived as derivative from traditional formal processes of negotiation between predetermined previously defined stakeholders - public authorities, private business organisations, community groups and citizens. This paper discussed the found key indications for the development of further research on the increasing role of the digital environment in the collective elaboration of the public dimension and on its non-renounceable place rootedness. Drawing upon studies on the active role of space within systems of relations responsible for the production of pluralistic and inclusive society, the paper speculated on the role of the contribution of this movement at the intersection of physical and digital geographies of the public realm during a moment of crisis in a major urban transformation programme that included typical phenomena of commodification. This analysis of what happened during the Gezi Park movement primarily considers the *right to the city* as the *right to the difference* as effective dispositive to unpack its spatial attributes and describe its intimate paradoxical condition. It identifies the productive agency of this contradiction, discussing patterns of use, conception and description of spaces produced during that period by people that identify themselves with the city and its institutions.

To gauge the quality of the constitution and use of that plural space, this study mapped the distinctive geography that emerged, considered the involvement of participants both on and off site, and examined the very tense and polarised urban conversation that emanated in response to the urban renewal programme. The collation of data on the continuously evolving physical and digital geographies of the square explored its spatial framework, in terms of the quality and intensity of its use and its description both through textual and photographic means. This analysis provides empirical material to validate the anticipated interpretation of the emergence of a new form of pluralistic 'spaces of appearance' that contributes to unify and defragment society, and share visions, practices and tools for the improvement of the collective realm of the city. Key to this hypothesised process is widespread citizens' participation with the full deployment of communicative potential of digital infrastructures, services, and devices in an intimate synergy between the digital public sphere and public realm. This was the condition framing the Gezi Park movement, where the new differential space was not only limited to its perimeter and immediate surroundings (which critics, such as Badiou (2012), considered as an immediate riot occurred only within its locality and among the ones who live in and around the site), but occupied much more than the locality of the contested site. The Gezi movement expanded its spatialities on a complex time-space axis. The movement widened its occupation to important areas of distant districts of the city and beyond, merging digital physical urban life of citizens, hence becoming urban, national and then international. It also had a permanent influence on various agencies and practices of the city, which are still active and vital centres of urban life today. Ultimately, one of the most relevant effects of the wide and amalgamated geographies that emerged with this movement is its impact on the urban life of global Istanbul, producing and reproducing spaces, and celebrating the spirit of urban life and diversity.

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