

Analyzing International Case Studies to Foster the Significance of a Public Square

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Abstract- The preservation and enhancement of urban green spaces have become more significant in the face of rapid urbanization and environmental challenges. This article investigates the historically distinctive and significant squares and the critical role that they play as a focal point of a city. This study also delves into design principles, and community engagement strategies that underpin the success of a square in urban context. Through a comprehensive analysis of case studies on Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, Iran; Tiananmen Square from Beijing, China; Tahrir Square from Cairo, Egypt; Red Square in Moscow, Russia; Sultanahmet Square of Istanbul, Turkey and Plaza Mayor of Madrid, Spain; this article aims to provide important perspectives for professionals and stakeholders engaged in revitalization projects. It intends to give insights in creating thriving, culturally rich public spaces that contribute to the rejuvenation of the urban fabric.

Keywords- Importance of Squares, Urban revitalization, Heritage Squares, Historical Public Squares

I. INTRODUCTION

Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody." Jane Jacobs Public square is a vibrant and most lively center of a city where community and culture came to meet. In other words, it is the heart of a city. We studied six different case studies only to affirm that the importance of a main public square remains the same even if it is run by a capitalist, communist or a religious regime. Because these squares are more than just spaces; they are where the spirit of the city is both celebrated and shaped by its people. Whether it's the bustling energy of daily commerce, the spirited debates of public discourse, or the simple tranquility of a shared public space, public squares are where the diverse strands of urban life intertwine. They would function as a communal hub, landmark, gathering point, a place to hold historical events and coronations or even sometimes demonstrations. It is a place where the city's collective soul reflects the most.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a literature-based case study approach to explore the multifaceted roles of urban public squares, focusing on six globally renowned squares namely: Naqsh-e Jahan Square of Iran, Tiananmen Square of China, Tahrir Square of Egypt, Red Square of Russia, Sultanahmet Square of Turkey, and Plaza Mayor of Spain. The methodology centers on a review of existing literature, encompassing academic journals, historical accounts, urban planning documents, and architectural analyses.

In selecting these particular squares for our study, we aimed for geographic diversity and historical significance, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of various urban, cultural, and environmental contexts. Each square was analyzed based on a set of common parameters: historical and cultural importance, design principles, community engagement strategies, and their role in urban rejuvenation. This comparative framework allowed

for a nuanced understanding of how these public spaces meet the challenges of modern urban environments while preserving their unique identities.

1. Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan, Iran

Mahboobi analyzed the integration of the bazaar with public buildings and the design combination of columned porches and monuments in large dimensions as the new innovations of Isfahan-i style during Safavid Empire time.

Naqsh-e Jahan Square is built with ornate architecture and considered as one of the most important urban development of Isfahan during the Safavid period. Barkhordar claimed that the architecture of public spaces is the identifying factor of the social identity of that civilization. They studied the effects on identity, religion, political power, system, structure and techniques of Naqsh-e Jahan and developed following tables.

Formation of Public space	Components	Sub-components	Keywords in references	Reference
Time conditions of formation (primary causes)	National identity and territorial unity (cultural heritage)	Society	Commonly used by people and government	Katev Cited in Honarfar (1984)
		Culture	Holding ritual ceremonies (Nowruz)	Kaempfer (1981) Honarfar (1984)
	Religious unity (religious beliefs)	Religion	Religious buildings around the square - holding religious ceremonies - answering religious questions	Tavernier (1957) Chardin (1956)
		Political power (governmental conditions)	Authoritative approach	Machesney (1998)
Formation causes- approaches (secondary causes)	Physical system (environmental factors)	Economy	Construction and communicating market	Godard (1996)
		Climate	Using climatic elements to provide comfort	Chardin (1956)
	Spatial structure (needs)	Forms	Extending market and surrounding the square- semi-open space- temporary elements	Kaempfer (1981) Olearius (2000) Della Valle (1991)
		Use	Attempting to establish kingship capital	Godard (1996)
	Construction system (technical procedures)	Design	Placing new structures of the city instead of the old structure	Shafaghi (2007)
		Technique	The technical power of building on a wide-scale- change in needs	Afshar Natanzi (1971)
		Materials	Change in arrays and making materials in high volume and speed	Galdieri (1983) Pirnia (2004)

Figure 1 Table of development of social identity during Safavid Era with the causes and conditions of making Public space in Naqsh-e Jahan Square based on historical and analytical references 1

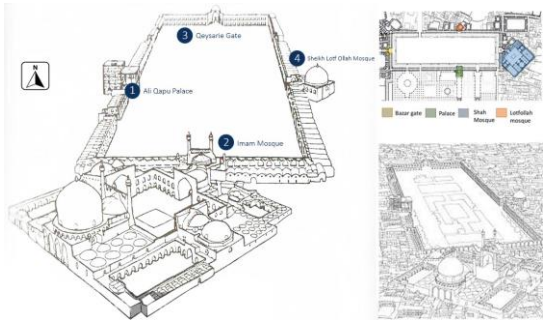


Figure 2 Naqsh-e Jahan Square (iransafar.co)

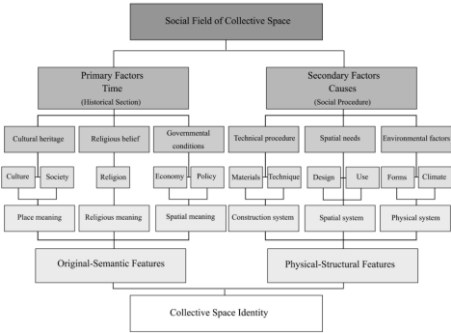


Figure 3 Formation of Public Space Identity in Naqsh-e Jahan Square during Safavid Era by Babak Barkhordar, Leila Zare, and Seyed Mostafa Mokhtabad Amrei, 'Rereading the Role of Social Identity in Building a Public Space (Case Study: Naqsh-e Jevah Square, Isfahan, as a Public Space in the Safavid Era)', Manzar Journal, 13.56 (2021), 30–41

What we have learnt after studying the case of Naqsh-e Jahan Square is that it is currently facing challenges such as surrounding infrastructure development pressures and environmental issues. The Square's revitalization had been focusing on preserving its historical integrity while enhancing green spaces. Key outcomes of that includes improved pedestrian accessibility and the incorporation of sustainable landscaping practices. The square's design successfully balanced contemporary needs with its rich cultural heritage, ensuring its continued importance as a social and cultural hub. It is clear that the commitment to the values and cultural heritage of a society will create a strong sense of belonging. It ends up producing the finest version of architecture of that civilization which then reflect the cultural, social, religious, economic and political identity of the era.

2. Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China

The protest movements which started in April and May of 1989 and ended in the most brutal crackdown of June 4, 1989 at Tiananmen Square by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was one of the most significant events for China. Skidmore argued that this remarkable event indicates the negation of the narratives such as the unique history and culture of China is not ready for democracy . Henry Kissinger's insensitive remark of "No government in the world would have tolerated having the main square of its

capital occupied for eight weeks by tens of thousands of demonstrators.” would have also supported the brutal repressions of June 4, 1989. Nonetheless, this event remained as one of the most sensitive and most extensively censored topics of modern China.

The study's outcome indicate that Tiananmen Square was and still is a major landmark of the political and cultural landscape of Beijing. The current design advancements consider and respect the square's historical significance while integrating with modern urban requirements. Economic and technological boom of Beijing suggests future possibilities for using technology to manage crowd flow and enhance visitor experience in the square.

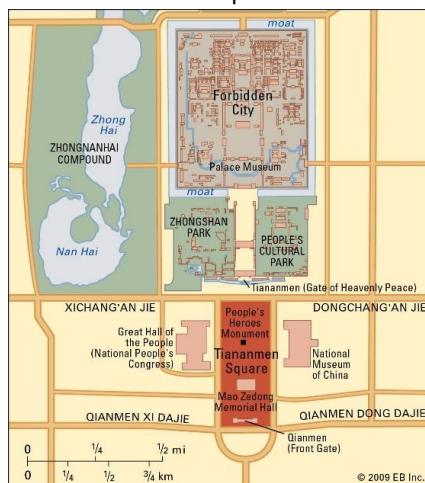


Figure 4 Tiananmen Square Plan (Britainica.com)



Figure 5 Panoramic View of Tiananmen Square from The North



Figure 6 National Flag-Raising Ceremony every morning at 6 until this day

3. Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt

The study of Tahrir Square offers valuable lessons in civic engagement, social movements, and urban planning. Goes stated in her research that the square was a medium for diverse voices and it empowered the civil society which had impacted greatly on the political forces. The key lesson from this case is the transformative power of public spaces in serving as focal points for collective action and expression of societal aspirations. The square became a symbol of resilience and unity during the Arab Spring, highlighting the importance of public spaces as platforms for democratic movements. Goes also described the square as “giving the people back the meaning of civil society – a place where people can talk, discuss and act freely”.

Abdelazim in her study of Tahrir throughout 150 years concluded reoccurring themes and uses of the square during the seven time periods. Tahrir played three consistent roles according to her deduction. First, the square always acted as a traffic circle and a main transportation hub that connected Downtown Cairo to the rest of the city districts. Second, Tahrir has been a venue for public voices and protests.

Third, and most importantly, the square has been acting as a mean for symbolism, projecting Egypt's identity throughout its modern history.



Figure 7 (Abdelazim, 2021)'s comparative pictures of the Tahrir Square from 2011 to 2021

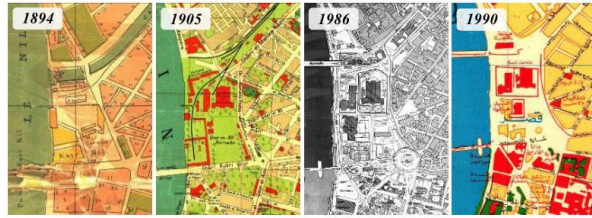


Figure 8 Urban development for Tahrir Square by USAMA NASSAR, 'Space and Politics: Changing of Social Activities in Tahrir Square, Egypt', European Conference on Social Science Research, 10.2005 (2013), 1–17.

Therefore, Tahrir Square underscores the significance of inclusive urban planning for diverse groups of people in Egypt. The Square's contemporary redesign approaches aimed to address the issues of overcrowding and limited green spaces. The project successfully created more open areas for public gatherings and introduced new elements of green infrastructure. The square's new design has not only preserved its role as a focal point for political expression but also transformed it into a more inviting space for everyday social interactions, suggesting a positive future for community engagement.

4. Red Square, Moscow, Russia

Ratković analyzed and remarked on Aleksandar Petrović's (renowned Serbian and Russian scholar) on poems about Red Square where he criticized Soviet Communist rule but depicted nostalgia and sense of belonging toward the homeland everyone from Soviet Union feels towards the Red Square. Red Square is a UNESCO Heritage Site located in the most central area of Moscow surrounded by Kremlin (Residence of the President and a prominent museum), Saint Basil's Cathedral (the most popular cultural symbols of Russia), Kazan Cathedral (the most prominent Cathedral of Moscow), Lenin's Mausoleum and State Historical Museum (the most celebrated Russian traditional architecture). The Red Square continued to be an iconic symbol for Russia and many Post-Soviet Nations. The contemporary redesign was focused on enhancing visitor experience through improved lighting, pedestrian pathways and signages. The outcomes demonstrated a harmonious blend of historical preservation and modern amenities, securing Red

Square's position as a prime cultural and tourist destination of Russia.

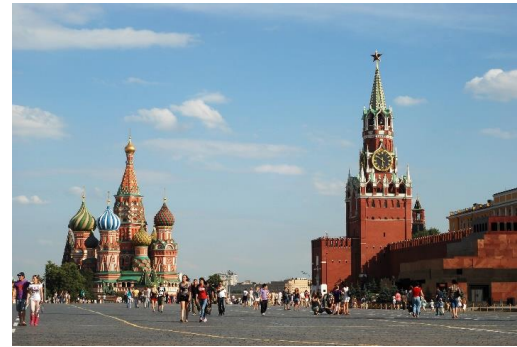


Figure 9 Red Square (historyhit.com)

5. Sultanahmet Square, Istanbul, Turkey

Taksim Square would be more fitting to state as the most happening and active square of the modern-day Istanbul due to its location, the Republic Monument as well as never ending celebrations and protests. Nevertheless, any visitors and tourists who visited Istanbul would rate Sultanahmet Square as a classic symbol and landmark of Istanbul. It is located right in the middle of Ayasofya, Blue Mosque, Basilica Cistern, Orthodox Church Hagia Irene and other historically significant buildings. During the Byzantine Empire, Hippodrome was a major social center of the capital city, Constantinople. It functioned as a circus square, the sporting zone, chariot racing as well as a horse racing square of Constantinople. The Theodosian Obelisk (originally from Temple of Amon) was erected in the square around 390 is still the major landmark of current day Sultanahmet Square.

In addressing the conservation needs of Sultanahmet Square, the study focused on balancing the heavy tourist footfall with the preservation of its historic structures. The outcomes indicated that there have been innovative approaches to pedestrian flow management and the integration of cultural activities into the square's daily life. Nevertheless, it remains the most hectic and crowded center of Istanbul. Compared to Taksim, where the local voices are more active, Sultanahmet Square is flooded with tourists every day. The square's new approaches have enhanced its role as a cultural bridge between East and West, offering

insights into sustainable tourism management in historic urban centers.

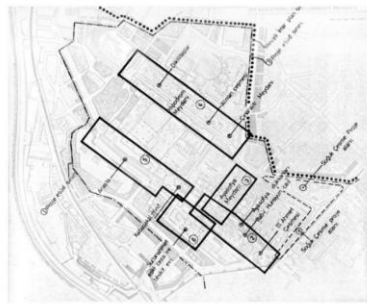


Figure 10 No.4- Sultanahmet Square (epamimarlik.com)

6. Plaza Mayor, Madrid, Spain

This grand square was planned and built as an urban centerpiece for a new capital envisioned by architect Juan de Herrera under the command of the Spanish king Philip II (ruled 1556–98). This Herrerian architecture is known for its classical lines and harmonious symmetry. It originally served as the center of commerce and municipal life. The Plaza has witnessed various historical events, from coronations to bullfights, and has evolved into a vibrant space frequented by locals and tourists. This symbolic construction of Madrid's principal public space is a focal point for the community of Madrid. It hosts various events, including traditional markets, festivals and concerts embodying the lively spirit of the city. The square's ability to adapt to the changing times while preserving its historical essence makes it a symbol of continuity and resilience.



Figure 11 Plaza Mayor, Madrid, Spain

The contemporary challenges for Plaza Mayor were to revitalize its role as a communal space while addressing urban challenges like pollution,

sustainability and space optimization. We have learnt that the implementation of eco-friendly materials and the introduction of multi-functional areas had enhanced the square greatly.

III. CONCLUSION

The case studies of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Tiananmen Square, Tahrir Square, Red Square, Sultanahmet Square, and Plaza Mayor collectively underscore the profound significance of the idea of a main public square in urban landscape. These spaces were more than just physical locations. They emerge as pivotal hubs for cultural, social, and political interactions, reflecting the historical and contemporary identity of their respective cities. We can see how the balance of preserving historical integrity, integrating modern amenities and sustainability highlights the potential of these squares to adapt and thrive amidst contemporary urban challenges. Furthermore, this study highlights the vital role of the squares which play in fostering community engagement, enhancing urban livability, and serving as catalysts for the ongoing rejuvenation of the urban fabric.

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