



Disruptions in Greenscape Politics in Modern Turkey: A Case Study of Başkent Nation's Garden

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Abstract

Public green spaces can be regarded as an important component of an urban tissue, besides bearing ideological political connotations. The emergence of modern parks as part of public greenscape started with the 19th century Ottoman Nation's Gardens. Following the first modern parks, which started to be referred to as Nation's Gardens in the Ottoman Empire, the notion of the garden was replaced by a park during the Republican Era, which displaced the Ottoman Nation's Gardens from cityscapes. The Nation's Gardens projects, revived as an election promise in 2018 and began to be built, forming part of Turkey's green spaces in all provinces, differ from the Ottoman Nation's Gardens, to which they explicitly refer in the name. The article will discuss the changes in greenscape projects in Turkey that have been used as ideological tools and have undergone constant changes in every period and government. In line with the findings of the article, it is a fact that the users, contents, and even the locations of these green spaces have been frequently altered throughout history. The article also provides a comprehensive analysis of the Başkent Nation's Garden project, being one of the most symbolic political projects, for discussing the changing ideologies and political priorities to open up a broader discussion on the nature of Greenscape Politics in Turkey. The research aims to contribute to the discussion of the obstacles created by the design of parks and garden areas, which form an important component of cities, differing with each political approach, thereby hindering the continuity of the urban fabric. It invites a critical examination of how political influence can create fragmentation in the field of city planning, ultimately affecting the sustainability, functionality, and cultural coherence of urban spaces.

Keywords:

Greenscape, Nation's Garden, Park, Public space.

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INTRODUCTION

An analysis of parks and the changes in cities' green spaces in history would reveal the ideological positions of these collective urban landscapes, regardless of a particular geography. Many large-scale urban interventions in history have ended with creating an urban green or park. The most well-known example of such interventions is the transformation of 19th century Paris, named the greening of Paris as a political act of Haussmann (Jordan, 1995). Parks and gardens in the cityscape cannot escape serving political and ideological approaches. Since the emergence of the first modern parks of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, public green spaces, parks, and public gardens have become part of the country's political landscape in Turkey. However, from the Ottoman Empire to today, the practices of making parks and gardens and their usage by the citizens have changed radically. A prominent constant in this change is the association of these green spaces with national terminologies, where the concept of 'nation' gets to be defined and translated differently (Ercan, 2018; Şenyurt, 2018), either as millet or ulus, both of which are used to define the urban green spaces.

From this perspective, the Nation's Gardens, once the popular political project of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, were re-adopted and became the country's agenda since 2018, this time with different ideological connotations. The new Turkish presidential regime had presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018, and the new construction projects were announced as election promises. Nation's Gardens projects, essentially urban parks, were introduced as a new concept that will transform the existing landscape for the cities. As stated before, the concept is hardly novel as it was influenced by the 19th century Ottoman Empire's city park projects, which have the same name as Nation's Gardens. Naming public green spaces, the same as in the Ottoman era and as 'garden' instead of 'park', can be discussed as an ideological consequence of Ottoman revivalism.

In history, the Nation's Gardens of the Ottoman Empire faded away from the cityscapes with the emergence of the Republican parks at the beginning of the 20th century, and therefore, these new garden projects can be argued to take a stand against the greenspaces of the Republican period, namely the parks; such as Gençlik Park and Gezi Park. Therefore, it would not be wrong to assume that there are major ideological breaks in Turkey's urban history and the planning of greenscapes. This change can be traced not only from changing the name from 'garden' to 'park' and back to 'garden' again but also from the changes in the programs and activities proposed for these green spaces. Through tracing the change in the naming of the greenscape from gardens to parks and back to gardens again, the article aims to unfold the changes in the country's political and ideological approaches by comparing green projects of different periods.

This study determined three important thresholds: the nineteenth-century Ottoman Nation's Gardens, Early Republican (1923-1950) parks, and today's Nation's Gardens projects reference each other differently. It will be argued that all these resulted in the formation of different public landscapes with different users and daily practices of public space. While investigating the relations between different periods, the article will also discuss how the ideological discontinuities and ruptures between these periods are reflected in the urban fabric.

Furthermore, it will try to provide an inclusive analysis of recent Nation's Gardens projects, with a particular focus on Başkent Nation's Garden in Ankara, to argue the different and changing meanings of the concept of a nation (millet), which is common to all greenscape politics of different eras, and which is believed to affect the user profiles and the programs included in parks. This case study aims to contribute to larger urban discussions by offering insights into how the concept of nation, as embedded in the design and function of Nation's Gardens, reflects broader socio-political ideologies and influences urban development. By focusing on Başkent Nation's Garden in Ankara, the research highlights how changing interpretations of national identity shape public spaces, user demographics, and park programs, revealing a direct link between political narratives and urban planning. Based on the hypothesis that public spaces are not just physical entities but also social and cultural constructs shaped by power dynamics, the article is expected to contribute to the understanding urban development in diverse socio-political contexts, especially in case of Turkey.

The expected outcomes of the research is to contribute to various debates on the challenges posed by the design of parks and gardens, key elements of cities, as they vary according to political approaches, disrupting the continuity of the urban fabric. It aims to introduce a critical analysis of how political influence can lead to fragmentation in urban planning, ultimately impacting the sustainability, functionality, and cultural integrity of urban spaces.

METHODOLOGY

Researching greenscape politics through various greenscape projects demands a detailed analysis that goes beyond what this article can provide. Nevertheless, the article attempts to concentrate on particular politically symbolic examples to frame its discussion. Interruptions, discontinuities and disruptions in ideological discourses within this historical analysis has been a key motivation for the study. By underlying the changes in the name and concept of urban greenscape, from gardens to park and back to gardens again, the study seeks to perform a concurrent analysis of the fluctuating ideological and political interpretations of 'millet' and 'ulus' in relation to the assessment of existing urban green spaces. The main methodology of the article involves revealing the transformations of these concepts by comparing different historical periods and examining how these concepts have

evolved in response to ideological shifts and reflected to the design of urban greenscape. The determined historical breaks of the study were examined through a comparative approach between the greenscape projects developed by the ruling governments. The research benefited from various historical sources. 19th and 20th century Ottoman Empire gardens and parks were analyzed through maps, as primary and secondary sources. Especially the Directorate of State Archives Ottoman Archives (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Osmalı Arşivleri) were analyzed to reframe the terminological complexities, which resulted from Nation's Gardens Guide, reconstructing the historical narrative, about mesire, çayır, garden and park in different periods.

Today's Nation's Gardens were analyzed and mapped based on site selection, the previous functions of the sites, and the design firms involved, using publications from TOKİ, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanism and Climate Change, and occasionally municipalities, which were the primary stakeholders in the projects. Additionally, information from TOKİ Haber, the Nation's Gardens Guide, the official publication of the presidency, and various newspaper reports regarding the Nation's Gardens were compared.

THE NATION'S GARDENS (MİLLET BAHÇELERİ) AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATION (MİLLET) IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Nation's Garden is a name that is referred to many green spaces in cities today. It has been a prominent tool for reference to Ottoman idealism in contemporary political discourse. Due to both the name of today's Nation's Gardens and the references to the Ottoman Empire in official statements, the earliest examples of Nation's Gardens in the 19th century Ottoman Empire can be analyzed to understand and compare the references to certain concepts.

The first Nation's Garden of the Ottoman Empire opened after a five-year construction process in Taksim in 1869 (Çelik, 1993). The emergence of the Nation's Gardens in the Tanzimat Era (1839-1871) corresponds to the reign of Abdulaziz (1861-1876). After his reign, urban interventions and the evolution of the so-called modern green spaces continued in the Abdulhamid II Era (1876-1909), also known as the Hamidian Era. Following the Hamidian Era, in the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1920), many public green space projects started to proliferate. Although the first examples of modern parks started to emerge, mostly named as Nation's Gardens, in the last half of the 19th century, the use of public green spaces with modern practices cannot be limited to the emergence of these gardens (Ercan, 2018; Şenyurt 2018).

Traditional public green spaces in the Ottoman Empire, which were generally called mesire and çayır in earlier times, were also got to be modernized and used by people parallel to the foundation of Nation's Gardens. At the same time, the first Nation's Gardens emerged in

İstanbul and then spread to the Ottoman realm, mesire, and çayır as existing green areas that were often used in each city and province of the Ottoman Empire for the resort, promenading, picnicking, and other activities in the warm weather (Işın, 2018). However, mesire and çayır were unplanned landscapes until the 19th century, especially in İstanbul as they were the extensions of the palace gardens (Arın, 2018; Eldem, 1976; Hamadeh, 2002).

The increasing popularity of utilizing green spaces and the rise of epidemics in the 19th century led to investments in infrastructure and landscape elements in mesire and çayır. Although most of these spaces were located near water sources (Figure 1), some were also significant because of their location as part of İstanbul's water system (Mizbani, 2016). As a result, public-funded and private fountains flourished around the cities within various green spaces. Along with the architectural and infrastructural aspects, recent modern institutions have also impacted the architecture of public green spaces, leading to significant changes in mesire and çayır. The traditional practices continue to coexist with modern ones, thus turning public green spaces into encountering space (Arın, 2018).



Figure 1. Kağıthane Mesire (Frères, 1890).

With the rise in urban regulations in the second half of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the extensions of the Tanzimat reforms, codes and regulations (expropriation, building), and establishment of the municipality, modern European-style parks started to appear in the cityscape. These green spaces, which were part of the new cityscape of everyday life, different from mesire or çayır, were started to be called Nation's Gardens. Nation's Gardens were initially the new bourgeoisie spaces of the urban which often charged an entrance fee. The first examples of these gardens emerged in Pera district, where the new European population demanded a European-style garden (Demirakın, 2006; Kentel, 2018). The first Nation's Garden, Taksim Nation's Garden, was built on the existing ground of a non-Muslim cemetery (Grands Champs des Morts) in Taksim in 1869 (Çelik, 1993).

spontaneously expanding process like *mesire* and *çayır* (Demirakin, 2012; Gölönü, 2020).

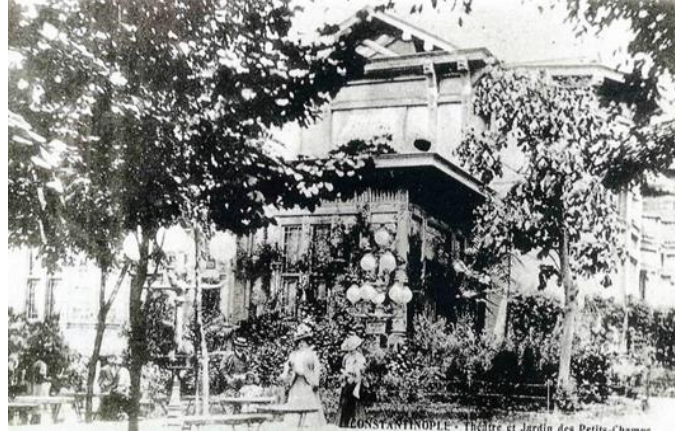


Figure 3. Tepebaşı Nation's Garden Theatre ca. 1900 (URL-1).

Even though the municipal parks were seen as public green spaces, the particular name of Nation's Gardens can be argued to be related to the fact that these gardens were not publicly owned. However, they were often leased to non-Muslim operators, and in the case of İstanbul, the tenants were usually certain non-Muslim communities ('millet' as they were called in the Ottoman era) (Ercan, 2018). While Tanzimat reforms, modernization, new institutions, and especially the municipality created new opportunities for the subjects in the city, new rising classes pleurably benefited. It seems that the emphasis on the notion of 'nation' or 'millet' in Nation's Gardens was an outcome of them belonging to certain nations in the Ottoman Empire, such as the gardens of this different millet. They refer to the plurality of nations and the emergence of modern uses of public space within the Empire. By the turn of the century, these landscapes started to be called belonging to 'millet' (nation) as a proper identification according to the Ottoman Empire's social and political structure.

Another important terminological discussion is why they preferred to be named a garden rather than a park. Even though the terms 'garden' and 'park' can refer to similar things physically, there is still a differentiation in their connotations. The 'garden' is a term that recalls for dependency of green space on an architectural edifice or an extension of a structure as seen in palatial gardens. On the other hand, the park may refer to a more independent structure that does not belong to an architectural structure as a garden does. The European counterparts were called in certain cases, such as People's Parks or public gardens. However, in the Ottoman tradition, the concept refers to the development of green space that entails extending a structure and, therefore, indicates particular users. This may be related to the historical green space practices, as discussed earlier, like *mesire* or *çayır*, which are mostly extensions of the palace gardens (Arın, 2018). Therefore, the definition of a garden has always depended on either an existing entity or a particular user, as it was in the earlier cases of Nation's Gardens. As will be discussed later, the connotations of 'millet'

and 'garden' were radically different in the late 19th century from the connotations of the same notions adopted as of today for naming the urban green areas.

The green space, being the ground for both cultural and political theatre plays and demonstrations, was common ground even in the earlier green lands of the Ottoman Empire. However, as it will be discussed, both activities were transformed radically in using and forming green space in contemporary examples of Nation's Gardens today. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, newly emerged public green spaces cannot be related to a single ideology or nation but get influenced by the multiplicity of populations and brought out novel ways of using public space. Nation's Gardens, Liberty Gardens, sometimes parks, and sports fields have always been politically charged public spaces, and their evolution, coexisting in the urban space, also created a base for the Republic of Turkey's green spaces, which prefer to use the term 'park' rather than 'garden' later in the century.

THE MODERN PARKS OF THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD AND THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE CONCEPT OF NATION (ULUS)

As discussed previously, the ideology behind Nation's Garden's emergence in the upper-class neighborhoods was also related to the changing definitions of nation and nationalism in different eras of the Ottoman Empire. After the Republican revolution, the existing modern and traditional public green spaces were subjected to radical changes, including naming from 'garden' to 'park' and from 'millet' to 'ulus'. For example, Ankara Nation's Garden, which was established at the end of the 19th century as a result of the Tanzimat reforms and the modernization of Ottoman urban spaces, started to be referred to as the city garden or municipal garden after the proclamation of the Republic (Figure 4). In the early 20th century, Ankara Nation's Garden was mostly used by statesmen and elites due to the position of the building across the garden, which was started to be constructed for the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) but later became the First National Assembly. With the construction of new and modern green spaces such as Gençlik Park, Atatürk Forest Farm, Çubuk Dam, the first Nations Garden in Ankara has rapidly lost its role as one of the leading parks of the city (Gültekin, 2013).



Figure 4. Ankara Nation's Garden (Aktürk, 2006).

Since the Republican regime abolished the millet system, for the sake of replacing it with the notion of 'ulus', non-Muslim population (millet) living in the Republic of Turkey started to be called 'minorities' (Barkey & Gavrilis, 2015). Meanwhile, the Ottoman greenscapes started to fade away from the landscapes by transforming into republican institutions or parks. Some of these transformations are planned to be on new grounds, where some of them transformed the existing parks of the Ottoman Empire, like İnönü Gezisi (Gezi Park) in İstanbul (Çınar, 2005). While Gezi Park contained the former Taksim Nation's Garden in its boundaries, the Gençlik Park was located just across the only Nation's Garden in Ankara (Figure 5), in Çaputçu Çayırı, which formerly was Ayyıldız sports field. Most of the Republican parks were built according to city plans and the green zone belts that are proposed or exist in the city.

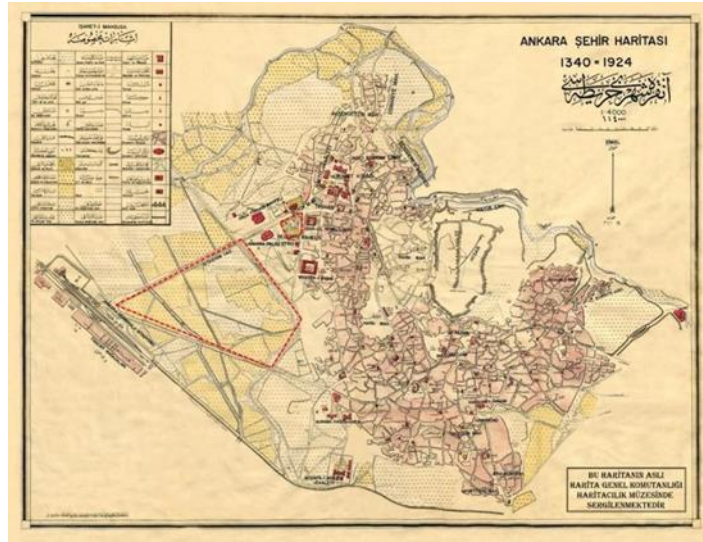


Figure 5. 1924 Ankara Plan, marked areas in the map: Ankara Nation's Garden vs Gençlik Park (URL-2)

This ideological shift in the definition of the terms can also be observed in how the urban green started to change its name from Nation's Garden to Park at the turn of the century (Cengizkan, 2018, p. 122). Compared to the Ottoman Nation's Gardens and parks, the modern urban parks of the Republic of Turkey had new programs, design attitudes, and ideological meanings. City planning required a more holistic approach to public green spaces, in contrast to the previous piecemeal approach of Ottoman municipalities in the planning of Nation's Gardens. The modern urban parks directly affected the emergence of new activities within the city, instead of replicating the existing urban programs. These new programs, such as swimming pools, pavilions with restaurants, and dance floors, also brought out new user profiles within the city. And more importantly these activities required the participation of both men and women in the experience of the green space (Bozdoğan, 2001; Gültekin, 2013; Uludağ, 1998; Yılmaz, 2020). Because Muslim women's access or how they used the mesire and çayır were regulated by the edicts and controlled by gardeners (Arın, 2018; Hamadeh, 2007) and they were banned from using the (Ottoman)

Nation's Gardens, especially where alcohol was sold (Gölönü, 2020, p. 115). Therefore, these new users of green space were nourished not by the city's cosmopolitan identity, as in the Ottoman period, but by an understanding of social cohesion independent of gender and ethnic identity. Therefore, the idea of 'millet' with all its connotations was translated to 'ulus', which envisions another idea of collectivity and new urban practices in public green space.

One of the most important projects of this era was inevitably the Gençlik Park (Figure 6), which also became a symbolic space of the Republican ideals. It was also a model for other parks in different cities. Gençlik Park was the modern urban park in the important location of the capital city where the city's newcomers in the train station saw the park first in the green belt of the Jansen Plan and the city's main axis. Modern urban parks of the Republic of Turkey had new programs, design attitudes, and ideological meanings compared to the Ottoman Nation's Gardens and parks. First of all, these new green spaces of the new regime were not named gardens. As discussed, this change is not limited to a simple name change. However, the fact that these new green spaces had an independent stance and place in the city gave these parks a role far beyond an extension of existing architectural structures such as gardens. The park as an urban entity started to be regarded at the same level as other cultural or social institutions.

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Figure 6. View of Gençlik Park in 1950s (URL-3)

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TODAY'S NATION'S GARDENS AND EARLIER EXAMPLES OF GREEN SPACE

The naming of green spaces as 'gardens' (particularly Nation's Gardens) reflects more than urban development priorities; it embodies significant political and ideological shifts in Turkey. The transformation from TOKİPARK projects, initiated by the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ) in early 2018, to Nation's Gardens by the end of the same year aligns with broader regime changes. This renaming coincided with Turkey's transition to an executive presidential system following the 2017 constitutional referendum and

the 2018 elections, which consolidated political power within the presidency (TOKİ Haber, 2018).

The introduction of Nation's Gardens serves multiple strategic purposes. First, it reinforces a nationalistic narrative by framing urban green spaces as integral to Turkey's cultural and historical identity (Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, 2020). The concept of a 'nation's garden' emphasizes the role of public spaces in fostering a collective sense of belonging. Second, it reflects symbolic policymaking, with these gardens portrayed as sites promoting social harmony, well-being, and family life. This narrative is intended to counter criticism that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) had prioritized rapid urbanization at the expense of environmental sustainability. This renaming, therefore, illustrates how public spaces are not only functional but also serve as instruments for political communication and regime legitimation.

Both the Ottoman Nation's Gardens of the late 19th century and the parks established during the early Republican period were key urban spaces of modernization, shaping traditional daily life through new public green space practices. These spaces introduced new urban behaviors and social interactions. For example, leisure activities such as visits to cafés, cinemas, theaters, and gazino began to play a significant role, even in some of the earliest Nation's Gardens toward the end of the 19th century. However, the intention behind building Nation's Gardens projects today is rather different. First, they do not bear any role in introducing innovative urban programs or practices for different uses and users. Secondly, these projects have not resulted in a radical increase in green space in cities across the country, as they have been achieved by converting existing green spaces or areas used as sports fields.

An analysis of the Nation's Gardens and the previous uses of their locations reveals that many of the completed projects were originally public green spaces or urban parks, often transformed with minimal alterations—sometimes as little as a name change. As of 2024, the total number of Nation's Gardens projects has surpassed 500, with over 230 already completed (TOKİ Haber, 2024). However, it is almost impossible to be precise about the overall picture of this ambitious picture, as the information in different sources is inconsistent with each other, and there is no clear information on how far most projects have been completed. The article, therefore, will try to pursue a discussion based on available data on the impact of this ambitious project on green space use practices across Turkey.

The selection of sites for the Nation's Gardens appears fragmented, as many projects involve converting existing urban parks into these gardens. Additionally, TOKİ's authority to intervene in protected areas has enabled the creation of Nation's Gardens within forests, coastal zones, and other protected areas. As a result, the implementation of these projects varies significantly across locations, reflecting differing

approaches and contexts. Another criterion that is difficult to compare is the size of the projects as they vary from ten thousand square meters to five million square meters. Similarly, some projects have disproportionately high budgets, even in smaller provinces, making it challenging to assess how effectively these investments resonate with local communities. Similarly, the decision-making processes often disregard urban master plans, focusing more on the visibility and impact of the projects rather than their potential consequences for the existing urban fabric.

Looking at the distribution of Nation's Gardens projects in Turkey, although there is a noticeable concentration of projects in the municipalities of the AKP district, it is challenging to identify the factors that determine the distribution by city. The cities with the next highest number of projects can be listed as Ankara, Konya, Erzurum, Bursa, and Şanlıurfa, which display a constant change in the number of projects. Currently, İstanbul has the highest number of projects, with more than fifty, most of which have been converted from existing green spaces rather than a new attempt to form a green land (Table 1). These green spaces are mostly existing parks, sports fields, TOKİPARKs, urban forests, or military barracks. Hence, the idea of increasing green space per person is unlikely due to projects taking place in already green areas.

Table 1. Nation's Gardens in İstanbul

Name	Area	Former Function	Design Office
Atatürk Airport	2.818.979 m ²	Atatürk Airport	
Başakşehir (1st phase)	339.000 m ²		
Maslak			
Pendik	285.000 m ²	TOKİPARK Pendik	DS Mimarlık
Kayaşehir MB (1st phase)	280.000 m ²	TOKİPARK Kayaşehir	ON Tasarım
Bakırköy Baruthane	60.000 m ²	TOKİPARK Ataköy/Baruthane	
Zeytinburnu Çırpıcı	223.600 m ²	Çırpıcı Urban Park	
Hoşdere	142.000 m ²	Hoşdere Hayat Park	
Esenler		Baştapya-Topkule Kışlası	
Ümraniye Hekimbaşı	330.000 m ²	Hacegan Forest	
Zeytinburnu Beştelsiz	55.176 m ²	Former Military Housing Area	ADD Design Studio
Zeytinburnu Merkez Efendi			
Yıldız Technical University	240.310 m ²	University Campus	
Çatalca	35.431 m ²		ON Tasarım
Güngören	26.618 m ²	15 Temmuz Stadium	ON Tasarım
Beyoğlu Küçükpiyale	9.967 m ²	Parking Lot	
Beşiktaş (Rumeli Hisarı)	172.000 m ²	Military Zone	
Bayrampaşa	45.000 m ²	Pancar Motor Factory	
Çekmeköy	51.000 m ²		

Arnavutköy Bolluca	310.000 m2		
Fatih Land Walls	26.000 m2	Protection Site	ON Tasarım
Kartal Orhantepe	313.000 m2	Quarry	
Kartal Çavuşoğlu			
Silivri	35.000 m2		
Sultanbeyli	67.000 m2		ES Mimarlık
Şile			
Kağıthane Type B Mesire	60.000 m2	Mesire	
Beykoz	100.000 m2	Beykoz Çayırı	
Üsküdar Nakkaştepe	48.676 m2	Military Zone	
Ümraniye Osmangazi	160.000 m2	Osmangazi Grove	
Yamanevler	70.000 m2		
Aydos		Aydos Forest	
Güngören Güneştepe			
Yalıköy			
Ayazma (Kumbaba)	40.910 m2		
Esenler 15 Temmuz	182.556m2		
Küçükçekmece Halkalı	98.467 m2	Green Space	
Fatih	226.137 m2		
Validebağ Grove		Grade I natural site area	
Sancaktepe Samandıra			
Bağcılar Sevgi Forest	62.000 m2		
Bağcılar	57.000 m2		
Pendik Burla Biraderler Grove			
Alibeyköy			
Sultangazi Cebeci	160.000 m2		
Fazlı Hayırlıoğlu	19.000 m2		
Başakşehir Altınşehir			

Variety of the programs, sizes, and locations resulting from Nation's Garden projects have been an important tool for refunctioning different urban entities abolished in the AKP regime. Such re-use strategies, which transform the diversity of use in the existing urban fabric, stripping away their original variety and transforming them into homogenized spaces dominated by standardized programs raises concerns about the loss of functional diversity in urban areas.

The most radical transformation among these can be regarded as the transformation of the İstanbul Atatürk Airport into a Nation's Garden in İstanbul. It is impossible to find clear information about the area, except for the images that appear differently in every source, which promote naïve arguments that 2 million 818 thousand 979 square meters of Atatürk Airport National Garden will increase the per capita green area ratio in İstanbul by 0.17 times. (URL-4). Therefore, many outcomes result from the “emergence of new modes of intervention” (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). For example, the Atatürk Airport Nation's

Garden project contains different paradigms in that it is the largest Nation's Garden, while the Başkent Nation's Garden exists in a Republican space and as part of a large real estate project (Merkez Ankara). The demolition of existing and mostly historic stadium structures within the city and their transformation into parks, on the other hand, have been another way of constructing these Nation's Gardens in many cities. Stadiums in the city centers being rendered dysfunctional by the construction of new stadiums in the peripheries, especially since 2015. In almost 20 cities, including Malatya, Sakarya, Bursa, Eskişehir (Figure 7), Adana, Samsun, Sivas, Trabzon, Diyarbakır, Batman, Ankara, Konya, Giresun, Kocaeli, Ordu, Antalya, İzmir, Çorum, Muş and Karaman Nation's Gardens projects were achieved through the demolition of the existing stadiums in the city centers (TOKİ Haber, 2018).



Figure 7. Google Earth views showing the transformation of Eskişehir Stadium into a Nation's Garden from 2018, 2022 and 2024 (URL-5)

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How the level of public use of stadiums changes with transforming these spaces into gardens is an issue that needs to be discussed in future research. This is because stadium buildings are already valuable public spaces, both in terms of their use and their location within the city. Looking at the displacement of existing sporting activity and what kind of activities were replaced for the sake of developing public gardens is an important aspect for public space debates. Because as will be discussed the proposed public use offered by the Nation's Gardens may not always be as inclusive as proposed.

When we look at the effects of these projects across the country, whether these Nation's Gardens have succeeded in increasing the use of public space or remain only as a greenwashing of historical texture throughout the city is an issue that needs to be discussed and examined in more detail. Therefore, in terms of public equality, inclusiveness and diversity, these projects seem to fail in providing a sustainable approach but are utilized to be ideological tools for promoting political inclinations. As can be observed in the transformation of the Atatürk Airport Nation's Garden project, how it has evolved into a more concretized space, losing its characteristics as a greenspace can easily be observed from the serial images. (Figure 8) In this case, greenwashing has worked in reverse, and it would not be wrong to say that the urban fabric, which is challenging to transform into a park, has fallen far short of the intended project. As a result, it remains an incomplete project area, serving as little more than a meaningless void within the city.

Figure 8. Google Earth views of Atatürk Airport showing the transformation of the site from 2018, 2022 and 2024 (URL-6)



Another example, Başkent Nation's Garden, which is located in Ankara, is among the ideologically prominent examples of Nation's Garden projects not only due to its scale but also to its strategic location, neighboring the Gençlik Park, one of the prominent ideological green spaces of the Republican Period. While a detailed comparison of these reuse-oriented projects is beyond the scope of this article, the architectural approaches generally adopted will be examined specifically through the case of the Başkent Nation's Garden. However, based on the table provided and the reuse strategies outlined, it appears that these projects typically fail to incorporate a design approach that acknowledges their urban context and previous programs. This oversight not only undermines the unique characteristics of the sites but also risks creating uniform spaces that lack a genuine connection to their surroundings. As a result, the potential benefits of adaptive reuse—such as preserving cultural heritage and enhancing community identity—may be lost, leading to developments that do not contribute meaningfully to the urban history and memory.

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A COMPARATIVE READING ON BAŞKENT NATION'S GARDEN FOR TRACING DISRUPTIONS IN GREENSCAPE POLITICS

The purpose of examining Başkent Nation's Garden, which was determined as Nation's Gardens in 2018, is mostly related to the selection of the site as it is located on the former hippodrome area, known as AKM Area neighboring the Gençlik Park. The former Minister Kurum for example, mentioned that Başkent Nation's Garden would be "the new Gençlik Park" (TOKİ Haber, 2021). The history of the site reaches back to the Jansen Plans of Ankara. Jansen determined the area as part of the green belt and sports area and the hippodrome was designed by Italian architect Paolo Vietti Violi in 1936. A vast marshy land that was improved and was made a hippodrome ground with human force in the middle of the economic crises of the 1930s has been an ideological open urban space with its modern buildings, tribunes, and racing ground (Özdemir, 2004). However, after the Uybadin Plan of the 1950s, the disconnection of the site from the sports and green line was started, and the spatial connection of the sports complexes and the

Gençlik Park, which was on the green belt and integrity of Jansen Plans was never restored. Also, turning this area into a green space is not a new phenomenon. Park projects have been on the agenda in this area since the 1970s. Mayor Vedat Dalokay (1973-1977), whose administration was considered a social municipalism, proposed an urban park in Hippodrome as an election promise for Ankara as the Hippodrome field, which had limited use because of the horse races (Ayanoğlu, 2020; Öztan, 1974). Not applying park projects in the area and suspending the horse races in the 1970s, the Hippodrome area turned into an "urban void" and a prize-winning project of architects Filiz and Çoskun Erkal, the Atatürk Cultural Center, was built in 1987 in the area (Saner, 2014). Since the 1970s, urban park proposals have been discussed for the land; however, no proposal has been implemented until the Nation's Garden project in 2018 (Ayanoğlu, 2020; Saner, 2014). While the Başkent Nation's Garden (Figure 9) serves as a significant case for examining the Nation's Gardens projects, it also embodies distinct paradigms that set it apart from many other examples. Notably, it plays a crucial role as a landscape within the larger Merkez Ankara real estate development project.



Figure 9. View from Başkent Nation's Garden (URL-7).

The site, promised during the election, was awarded to Yapı-Yapı Construction. Unlike the Hippodrome project of the 1930s and the AKM building of the 1980s, which resulted from national architectural competitions, the Nation's Garden was not subjected to such a process. Consequently, the Ankara Branch of the Chamber of Architects filed a lawsuit against the project due to its non-participatory approach and disregard for heritage conservation. Despite a court ruling that canceled the project plans, the Nation's Garden was opened on October 28, 2021, before the decision was finalized (URL-8). There are various reasons why professionals and some people oppose the project. Primarily, the site embodies Republican heritage and serves as an ideological project that directly addresses the Republic and its architectural values. However, remnants of the Republican Hippodrome, including the stands and modern structures like the AKM building, were not incorporated into the garden's design. Instead, these elements remain disconnected

and isolated from the proposed experiences and activities within the park. Being one of the largest Nation's Garden examples with approximately 633000 m², the only two programs declared in the website for the area are mescit space (mosque) (Figures 10-11) & kiraathane (coffeehouse). Of course, there are other activities within the site as library, teahouse, and conference hall, but the website gives priority to the promotion of the two functions above other amenities. However, most of the mentioned programs have not been completed at the garden's opening in October 2021 and not even today (Figure 12).

Figure 10. Başkent Nation's Garden Mosque in December 2021 (Author)



Figure 11. Religious Affairs' Youth Center in Başkent Nation's Garden in January 2023 (Author)

Figure 12. One of the entrances from Hippodrome Street and the construction site of Health Center's transformation into museum in October, 2023 (Author).



It is claimed that more than eighty percent of the park is green space, but the design of the underground parking lot actually limits the distribution of green areas and the potential growth of trees in the area. There is a contradiction between the public claims that argue the amount of green space of the garden and how it is applied in reality. For example, according to a statement from the Chamber of City Planners, the mosque in the master plan was also considered a green space (Aran, 2022). Therefore, the claim that more than eighty percent of the park consists of green space is controversial, as is the claim that the roofs of Kiraathane (Altın Mekan) and Café Park İnci, covered with both natural and artificial turf, were declared as green roofs. Most of the shade areas in Başkent Nation's Garden, which users can use especially in hot weather and sunny hours, consist of pre-established trees from the Hippodrome area. It is evident that the new architectural or landscape elements tend to offer little more than symbolic associations, lacking in functional diversity or spatial richness. Especially the underground parking lot, which transformed the area into a large construction site as stated before, inhibited the processes of soil, green, and water cycles (Figures 13-14).



Figure 13. General view of Başkent Nation's Garden, from Altın Mekan, in the shadow of large-scale real estate project Merkez Ankara and "biological pond" built on a concrete foundation in January 2023 (Author).



Figure 14. General view of Başkent Nation's Garden, large hardscape areas dominating the greenscape of the park in January, 2023 (Author).

Başkent Nation's Garden facilities can hardly be considered as providing novel ways of using the urban public space compared to former examples either in 19th century Nation's Gardens or 20th century Republican parks with modern and relatively secular images. Due to the deliberate avoidance of any connection to the area's history or its current surroundings, the project prioritizes religious references and practices at every stage. As a result, rather than serving as a public space integrated into the urban fabric, it becomes an introverted space that is isolated from the city and disconnected from its context. Referencing the comparison of the concepts of garden and park mentioned at the beginning of the article, it is clear that the newly constructed buildings within Başkent Nation's Garden do not transcend the notion of being mere gardens. Unlike Gençlik Park, which embodies an autonomous, independent, and public accessibility, Başkent Nation's Garden displays a more introverted architectural fabric that evolves as an extension of the buildings rather than as a vibrant public space (Halecki, et. al., 2023). In light of these considerations, it is fair to say that the project represents a more introverted and unsustainable architectural approach, particularly regarding pedestrian accessibility, and is distant from contemporary urban planning practices (Oliynyk, et. al., 2023). The garden fails to engage with its urban context, lacking any meaningful relationship with the surrounding area, including significant urban parks like Gençlik Park. Instead, it remains merely a garden, disconnected from its environment due to its incomplete structures, symbolic elements, and the programs it encompasses. Therefore, it differs greatly from Gençlik Park across Başkent Nation's Garden. Today, the two green spaces that are the products of two radically different ideologies stand next to one another without any relation. It is as if they are unaware of each other's existence. In a recent lawsuit opened by the

Chamber of Architects, the judiciary suspended the execution of the second plan for constructing a Nation's Garden in the Atatürk Cultural Center area. The project was accused of desecration of history but also of contradicting planning decisions taken at different scales, and many data, including the percentages of hard surface and green spaces do not apply to how they are proposed in the implementation plans (URL-9).

To sum up, although the conditions of the Başkent Nation's Garden are not characteristic of each Nation's Garden project, most of the projects share certain common approaches to the design of the public green space. One of these commonalities is the unfinished look of the projects, and this feature can be seen in most of these examples, where the concern for making an opening takes precedence over the implementation of the design. Only 189 of the nearly 500 projects have been completed; the others are either under construction or not yet started (TOKİ Haber, 2023). Another aspect is that they mostly convert existing park spaces or sports fields within the city, and therefore, they do not increase the green area within the city but transform the already existing green area and often with the building of mosques and other structures in these spaces the percentage of green areas even decrease from the previous conditions. While the concept of a park is an urban element that establishes a relationship with the city, the ideology behind these projects, which recall the concept of a garden, transform the definition of public space as an extension of architectural elements such as mosques, coffeehouses, etc. instead of defining a green space as an independent element within the city.

CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

Emerging modern green spaces, namely Nation's Gardens in the 19th century Ottoman Empire that were not preserved in the Republican cityscapes, were subjected to today's neoliberal Islamist urban projects. Three different periods, the late 19th century Ottoman Empire, the Early Republican Period and AKP rule have produced not only their own ideologies about the green spaces within the city. However, as the article discussed in detail the content and placement of these areas within the city markedly differ from past approaches. And this shift often results in the dilution of the concepts they reference, causing a disconnection from their historical origins and often resulting in anachronisms. Additionally, the article examined the strong association between the concepts of 'millet' and 'ulus', which are revisited and highlighted in each era, with urban green spaces. It explores how these two closely related concepts are fragmented and positioned at opposing ends of the ideological spectrum within the discourse surrounding urban green spaces. The ways in which green spaces are utilized, driven by evolving ideologies, are primarily determined by the programs introduced in these areas. As the research findings indicate that contemporary public gardens are characterized more by a range of symbolic and political programmatic elements than by diverse uses of green space. As in most

recent examples of Nation's Gardens, instead of a programmatic diversity, most of the greenscape is organized around two major functions, mosques and coffeehouses (kırathane). However, these almost stereotype programs for green spaces, which lack contextual relevance, are largely disconnected from Ottoman references and impose limited use of open spaces. This approach, which evaluates urban green space only on a m² basis, does not aim for diversity in the design and use of these urban green spaces.

As a result, Nation's gardens today, which draw little reference from Ottoman heritage, are unable to establish meaningful, well-defined, and engaging spaces in their approach to green areas, often resulting in undefined and uninviting environments. The tendency of each ideological approach to disregard the values of preceding periods is a significant factor impacting the integrity of the urban fabric. The most obvious example of this approach can be seen in the case study of Başkent Nation's Garden, as discussed in detail in the article.

According to findings of the research, it becomes obvious that Başkent Nation's Garden, fail to go beyond creating an ambiguous area within the city due to the programs included in the park, limited use of open space and its indifference towards the existing historical urban fabric that surround it. As of June 2023, the new target for Nation's gardens has been updated to 100 million square meters (TOKİ Haber, 2023). Since regime's primarily produce urban green spaces that set the stage for their ideologies, the sustainability of parks in the modern sense and their preservation as heritage have no chance to be realized. Constantly changing green spaces have turned into the practice of producing incomplete gardens in the country for over a century. Unfortunately, today, the idea of creating green spaces in the urban fabric is mostly tied to numbers and figures rather than being urban entities developed in respect to its context and urban setting. The ambiguity they create in the urban landscape is not limited to their locations or how they relate to their environment and the city's history. This ambiguity can even be observed in the names, symbolic concepts they refer to as well as their contents, as they are trying to establish a non-existent relationship with the past.

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