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## RETHINKING DISADVANTAGED GROUPS FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACE IN TAKSIM SQUARE

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## ABSTRACT

Taksim Square is a significant public space in Istanbul, Türkiye, with socio-cultural and historical importance. The square has been known as a platform for expressing political issues and socio-cultural demands. Also, it serves as a unifying hub that fosters social interaction for locals and tourists from different backgrounds. While tourists contribute to the economic activity in the areas concentrated with accommodations and shopping centres, Taksim Square holds a special place for the local community. It serves as a meeting point and holds indispensable value for various aspects of life, including business activities, museums, transportation connectivity, and the presence of nearby educational institutions. Moreover, as a prominent public space in Türkiye, Taksim Square attracts a diverse audience that includes disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, the elderly, and children. However, when considering the needs of disadvantaged groups, certain challenges become apparent. These challenges include a lack of green spaces, playgrounds, and facilities, as well as issues related to the organisation and landscape design of the area. Therefore, this research aims to revitalise Taksim Square through the implementation of urban acupuncture, proposing design solutions that cater to the diverse needs of its users. The research emphasises a comprehensive approach that prioritises the needs of disadvantaged groups and environmental considerations while fostering dynamism, security, and the creation of green spaces.

**Keywords:** urban acupuncture, Taksim Square, public space, urban design, disadvantaged groups

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Information age, the rapid transformation of the social and physical environment, and the increase in population have caused various problems in urban areas. Taksim Square is a public square located in Istanbul, Turkey. It has a long and rich history dating back to the Ottoman era and has been an important hub for transportation, trade, and political demonstrations. The square has been known as a platform for expressing political issues and socio-cultural demands. Also, the square underwent significant changes during the 20th century, with large scale urban development projects, and became a popular tourist destination in recent years.

Furthermore, as a prominent public space in Türkiye, Taksim Square draws a diverse audience, including disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, the elderly, and children. However, several challenges arise when addressing the needs of these marginalised groups. These challenges are such as a lack of green spaces, playgrounds, and facilities, as well as concerns regarding the organisation and landscape design of the area.

There are several new urban strategies that aim to create equal opportunities for citizens by fostering strong social, economic, and cultural interactions in public spaces. However, one of the most challenging aspects for many of these strategies is to design physical environments that effectively fulfil the needs and demands of marginalised groups, and thereby create inclusive public spaces. Therefore, as a solution to the challenges in urban areas at the local level, the concept of "urban acupuncture" has emerged to improve the overall quality of life with small interventions and fast implementation.

This study specifically centres around an inclusive urban acupuncture approach devised for the benefit of disadvantaged groups in Taksim Square, emphasising the significance of promoting the transformation of cities into more livable and equitable spaces. In this context, this paper has been divided into three main parts. In the first part, the concept of urban acupuncture and the conceptual framework of the study will be explained. The second part includes the research methodology; (I) problem definition, (II) definition of disadvantaged groups, (III) proposed design for Taksim Square, and (IV) project design details. Finally, the third part presents spatial and critical discussions regarding the diverse utilisation of Taksim Square.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of urban acupuncture involves making small, targeted interventions in public spaces to promote urban regeneration at a local level (Penn, 2018). This approach can be an effective and adaptable framework for urban renewal.

The phrase "Urban Acupuncture" was created by Solà-Morales when he envisioned a project for Antwerp. It is currently used all over the world, frequently with a broad definition (Shieh, 2006). The bio-urban theory of urban acupuncture integrates sociology, urban planning, and the traditional Chinese medical philosophy of acupuncture. It is a design methodology that focuses on small-scale, tactical interventions into the urban fabric with the intention of changing the larger urban organism (Laconesi & Persico, 2017).

Urban acupuncture includes small but effective suggestions rather than complex effects and aims to create a healthier space by improving the quality of life of a society. While developing the plan, the existing infrastructure of the area is used as much as possible, thus a fast and efficient process is developed. Public participation is also important in accelerating this process. An urban acupuncture based on participation and progressing with the feedback of the people becomes part of a multifunctional design with a reference to fair and comprehensive planning. In addition, a flexible plan that is sensitive to changing living conditions and physical environment is one of the basic principles.

An urban acupuncture design that can adapt to the changes and developments in the area it is in, strengthens the social infrastructure of the city more firmly. Taksim Square, as one of the most attractive public centres of Istanbul, is a highly circulated area with many commercial and cultural functions. Evaluating the potential of this central location within the framework of urban acupuncture provides an opportunity to develop a local identity and create a user-oriented profile. Basic problems such as the lack of green space and pedestrian-friendly practices in the area and equipping it with environmentally friendly elements can improve the functionality of the square.

In this context, Taksim Square, a symbol of Istanbul, creates an opportunity to improve city life by applying the basic principles of acupuncture approach. The basic planning principles of urban acupuncture are based on the locally transformative power of public spaces. Basically, the urban acupuncture practice process develops in three phases: research, content observation, and action planning. However, the framework consists of four phases: defining problems, identifying disadvantaged groups, visualising solutions, introducing the finalised design (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Design Process of Urban Acupuncture in Taksim Square (Illustrated by using Miro, 2023)

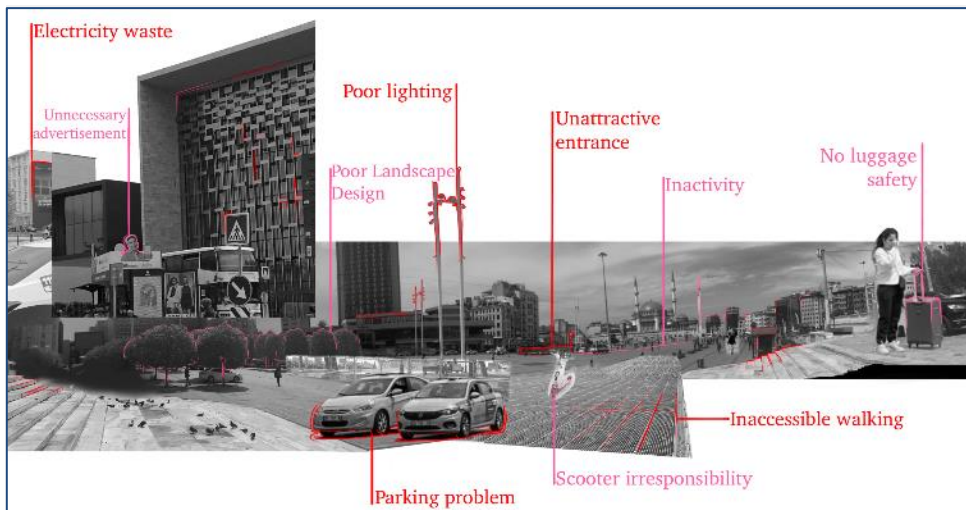
## METHOD

The present study utilises a multi-method case study approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses, to comprehensively grasp the current dynamics of the square and ascertain the needs and expectations from the user's perspective. To achieve this, several steps were undertaken. Firstly, a field trip was conducted to observe and interpret the multifaceted interactions that manifest within the physical and social conditions of the square. During this field trip, problematic areas within the public space for disadvantaged groups were documented through photo capturing techniques and quick sketches.

Secondly, quantitative indicators; building density in the square, flood percentage, the amount of sunlight received and visitor flows, were digitised to provide data-driven insights. Thirdly, a series of interviews were conducted to delve into tacit knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of the area's identity and its social values within the historical and cultural context. Based on the methodological framework of this study, four main steps were identified to guide the creation of an inclusive public space in Taksim, which are presented below.

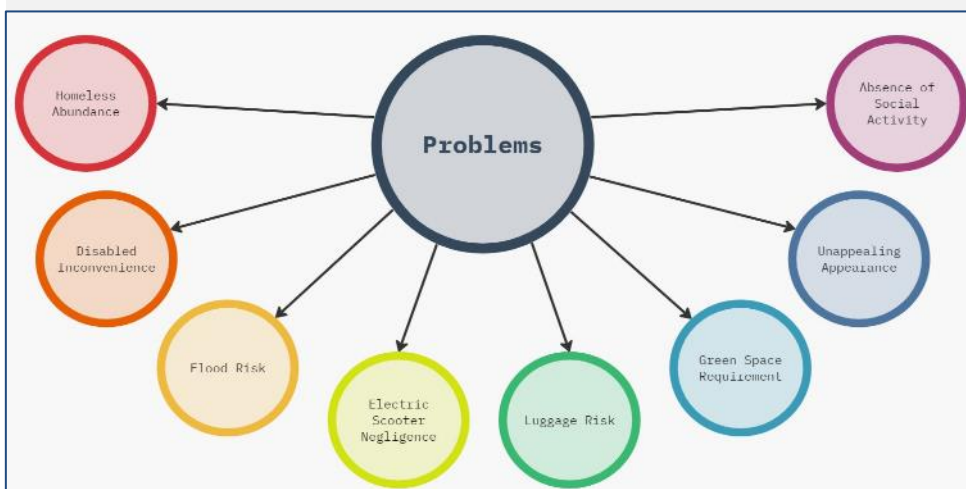
### (I) DEFINING CHALLENGES IN TAKSIM SQUARE

As one of the most renowned public spaces in Turkey, Taksim Square is distinguished by its unique characteristics deeply rooted in its historical background. However, as the square has undergone transformation over time, it now faces a multi-layer of socio-spatial challenges. Within this interconnected context, several critical issues have emerged in present times, significantly impacting the overall urban experience in Taksim Square. According to the research, eight major challenges were defined in the area (Figure 2). One of the primary concerns is the absence of aesthetically appealing elements and diverse landscaping in certain areas of the square, which diminishes the character and charm of Taksim Square, rendering it lifeless.



**Figure 2:** Problems in Taksim Square (Illustrated by using Photoshop, 2023)

In particular, the wide-empty open space at the centre of the square, coupled with the uninteresting and repetitive architectural design of the surrounding buildings, results in a monotonous and unremarkable atmosphere. This lack of originality poses a significant challenge for the square. Moreover, the absence of essential urban furniture, such as benches, public fountains, bike racks, chairs, tables, and bins, contributes to the loss of identity within the square. Additionally, the lack of proper lighting along the edges of the square and its adjoining side streets raises safety concerns. The lack of urban furniture, insufficient lighting, and security concerns have a detrimental impact on the daily experiences of both local users and visitors in the square. Additionally, as a popular tourist destination, Taksim Square faces the risk of luggage loss or theft due to the high number of visitors, particularly in crowded environments where personal items like suitcases may become targets due to a lack of attention. Furthermore, the prevalent parking problem in Taksim and its surrounding streets remains a significant issue. Limited space, high demand, traffic congestion, and challenges with regulation and occupation contribute to the persistent parking difficulties (Figure 2 and Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Main Selected Problems in the Taksim Square (Illustrated by using Miro, 2023)

## (II) RETHINKING DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN TAKSIM SQUARE






Disadvantaged groups typically refer to segments of society that face social, economic, or physical challenges, resulting in reduced access to resources, opportunities, and privileges compared to the general population such as ethnic minorities, children and youth at risk, and homeless individuals. This study defined six different disadvantaged groups in Taksim Square, which is explained below (Figure 4).

Children are very open to interaction in social activities they attend with their families, and this brings with it the desire to play. Therefore, for children's socio-cognitive development and participation in physical activities to develop effectively, it is necessary to create fun playgrounds by removing them from a monotonous area where they will get bored. To increase the child-friendliness of Taksim Square, several measures can be taken; ensuring pedestrian safety, hosting child-friendly events, improving accessibility, and installing seating areas.

Despite Taksim Square being a hub for educational institutions, it lacks facilities for students to develop their social networks and engage in leisure activities. For instance, the seating area is limited.

Moreover, the square faces restrictions, such as the absence of pedestrian-friendly spaces and insufficient urban furniture, which prevent individuals with disabilities and the elderly from freely moving, sitting, and resting. The square's design, which lacks disability-friendly features and clear guiding markers, negatively impacts the accessibility of individuals with reduced mobility.

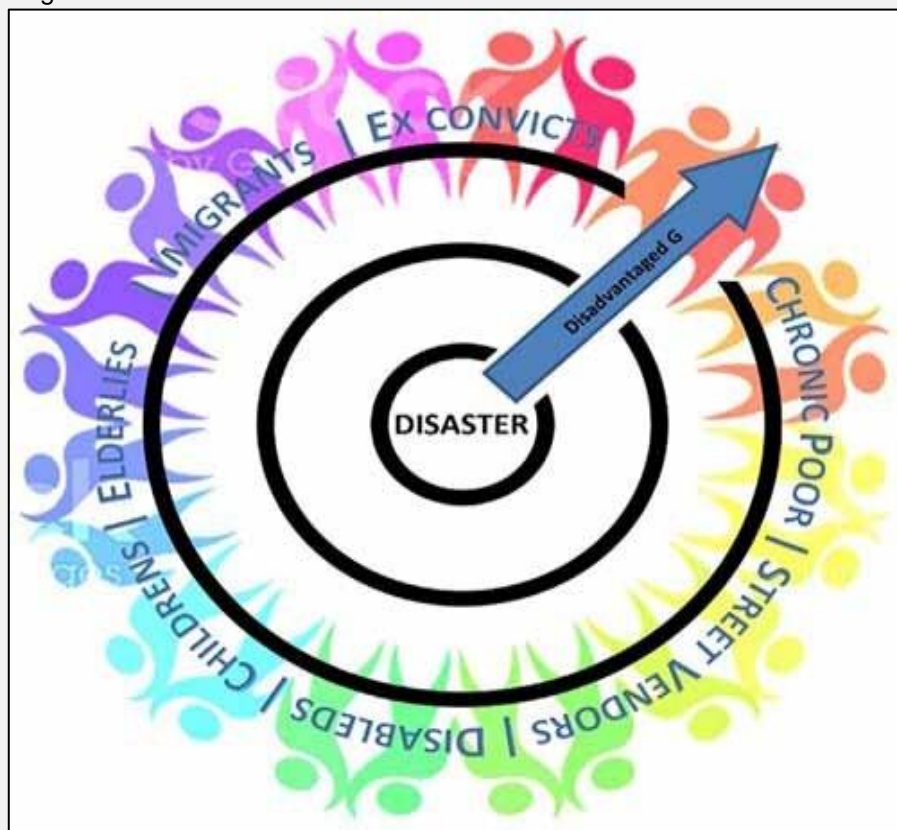
### Rethinking Disadvantages Groups for Creating Inclusive Public Space in Taksim

	<b>Children:</b> Encouraging playtime on the playground
	<b>The Elderly:</b> Increasing the rest and sitting area
	<b>The Disabled:</b> Facilitating accessibility with a ramp system
	<b>Teens:</b> The field of interaction with social facilities
	<b>The Homeless:</b> Meeting the need for shelter
	<b>Tourists:</b> Locker for the safety of suitcases

**Figure 4:** Disadvantaged Groups in Taksim Square (Illustrated by using Photoshop, 2023)

Another disadvantaged group frequently encountered in Taksim Square is the homeless population, who experience housing insecurity. Due to their current circumstances, they often lead isolated lives, disconnected from social support networks, and struggle to meet basic social needs beyond shelter.

Furthermore, the absence of adequate measures to protect personal belongings negatively impacts the safety of luggage and contributes to an increase in theft and loss incidents. Therefore, efforts should be made to address these issues and create a more inclusive and supportive environment within Taksim Square. This can include providing additional social facilities for students, improving pedestrian infrastructure, increasing seating options, enhancing disability accessibility features, and developing support systems for the homeless and tourist population to help them reintegrate into society. Figure 5 shows the disadvantaged groups and other possible populations for the design consideration.

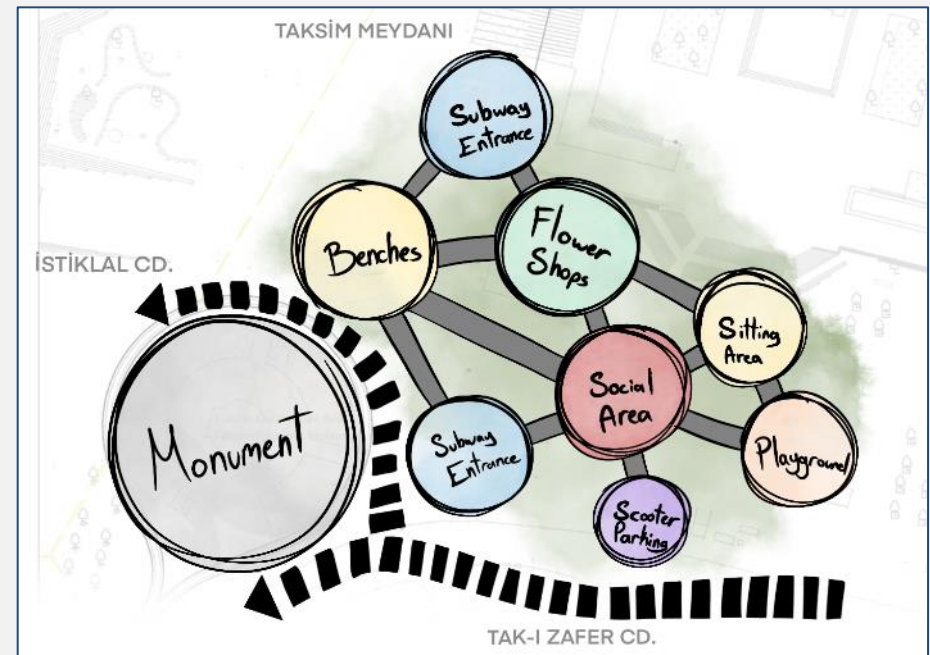


**Figure 5:** Disadvantaged Groups and Participation in Management in Disaster Prevention  
(Source: Fidan, 2021)

### (III) DESIGN PROPOSAL

The following design principles aim to transform Taksim Square into a vibrant and inclusive public space that embraces the distinct characteristics of its surroundings. These principles cater to the diverse needs of users, fostering a sense of community and prioritising aesthetics, mobility, and sustainability. In this context, to enhance the square's appeal, the use of different colours can be employed to indicate the various functions and activities within the space. This visual differentiation enables visitors to easily identify and navigate between different areas and experiences.

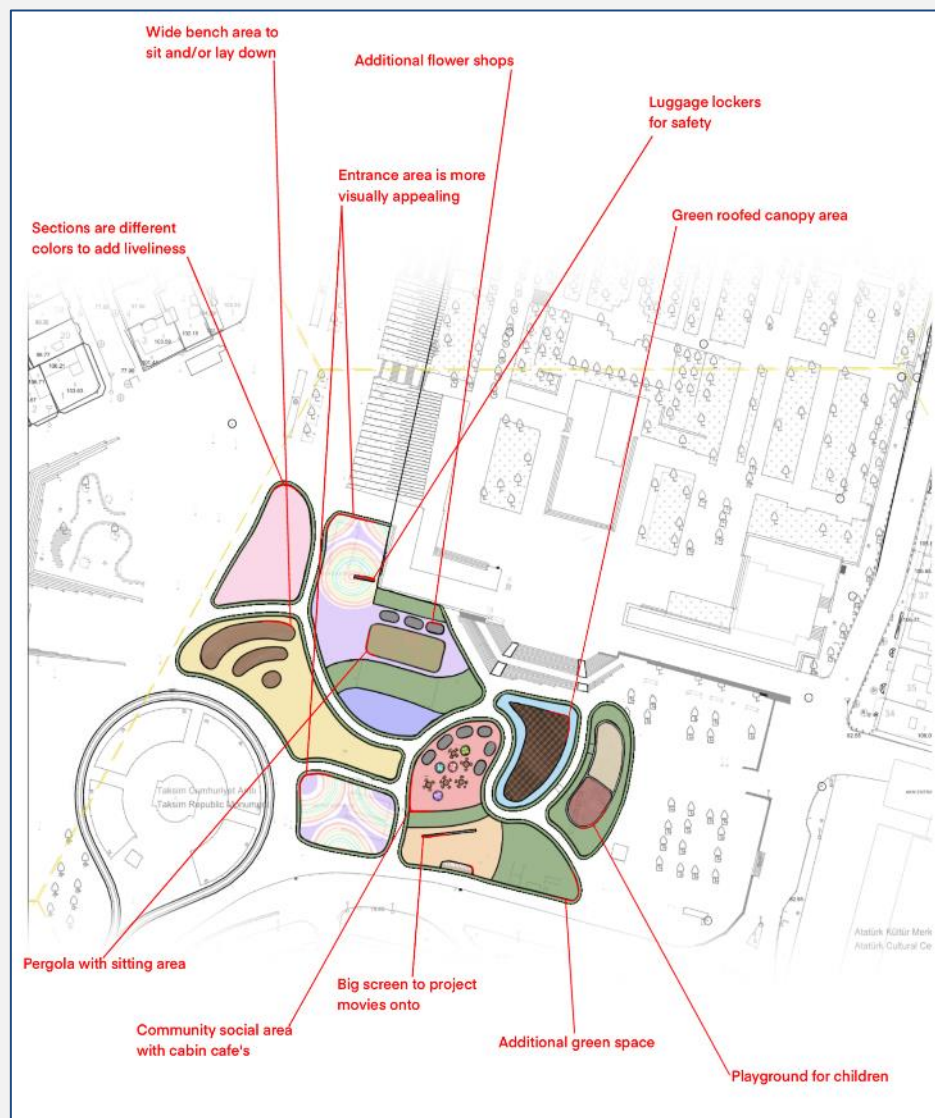
The low-cost urban acupuncture interventions such as creating coffee shops, flower stands, and increasing urban furniture create inviting spaces that encourage visitors to explore and interact with their surroundings. These elements provide opportunities for relaxation, socialisation, and a stronger sense of community, promoting increased human mobility within the area. As can be seen in Figure 6, the design aims to create a dynamic and lively ambiance that truly embodies the essence and identity of Taksim. The architecture, aesthetics, and overall design of the space are intended to reflect and celebrate its unique character.



**Figure 6:** Bubble Diagram of Proposed Taksim Square Design  
(Illustrated by using Photoshop, 2023)

Furthermore, the implementation of urban acupuncture concepts can regenerate public space. These short-term and cost-effective interventions have the potential to bring about swift changes while also fostering experimentation and community participation. Improving access to public transportation within the square is a key aspect of the design. This supports environmentally friendly and efficient transportation systems, encourages sustainable mobility options, and reduces reliance on personal vehicles. To establish a seamless connection between Taksim Square and Gezi Park, the design incorporates green lanes.

In line with the principles of sustainable urbanisation, the design introduces more green spaces within the public square (Figure 7). This approach aims to enhance air quality, provide areas for leisure and recreation, and promote the overall well-being of people and the environment. As a result, creating a more livable public realm also contributes to increased safety.

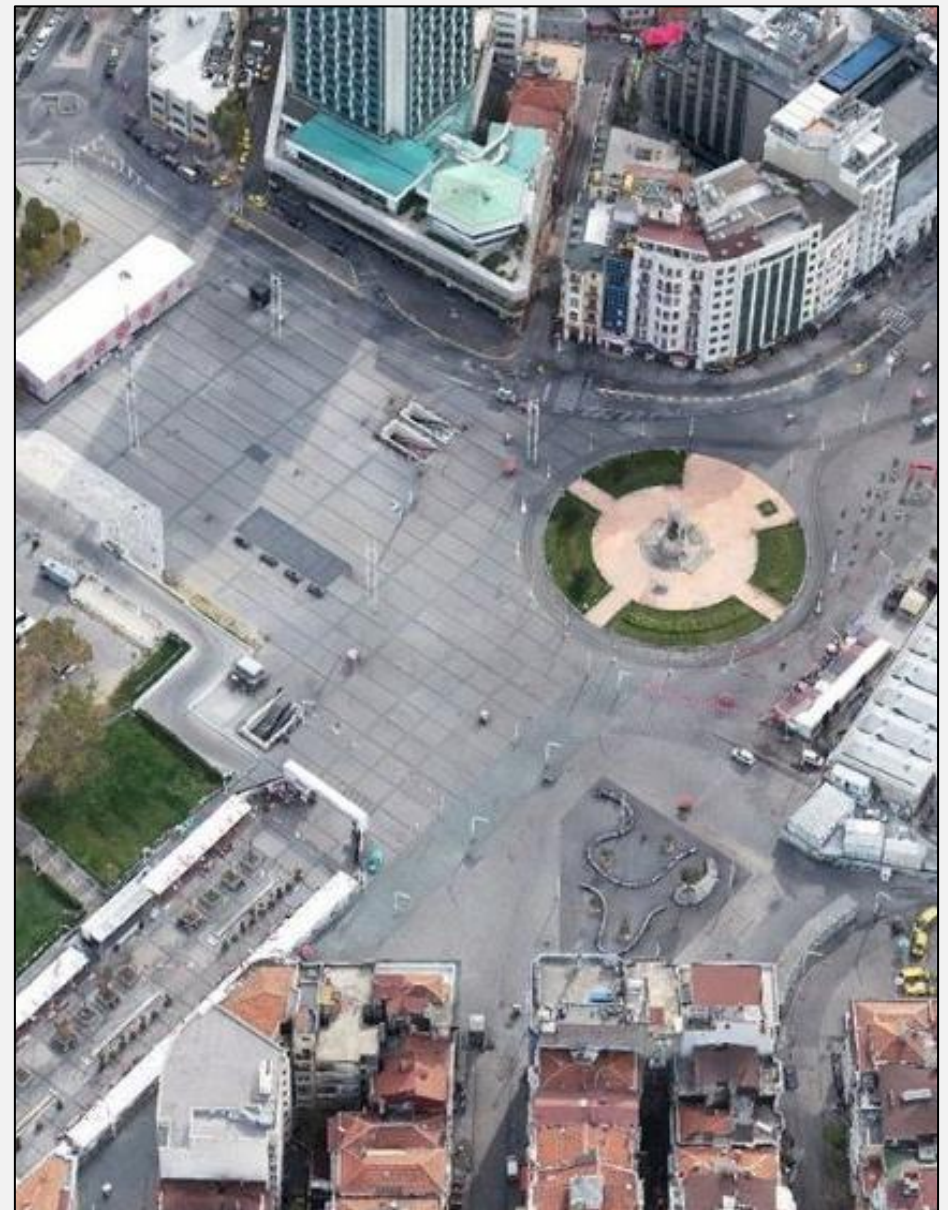


**Figure 7:** Plan of The Urban Acupuncture Design in Taksim Square  
(Illustrated by using Photoshop, 2023)

By combining each proposal, a comprehensive plan has been developed for the design of Taksim Square. As illustrated in Figure 7, the final design incorporates several key urban acupuncture interventions: (1) Sections created with individual colours to indicate space management. Wide organic shaped sitting area for the users. (2) An appealing entrance with a floor mural drawn to attract visitors. (3) Additional flower shops due to the lack of it in the area. (4) Luggage lockers for the safety of tourists' belongings. (5) Organic shaped bench area for the comfort of the elderly and the homeless. (6) Canopy area with a plant-based roof to add into the greenery. (7) Additional ramps on the side of the stairs for the disabled. (8) Sitting area with a pergola in front of the flower shops to admire the surroundings. (9) Main social section with a variety of small cafes and sitting places. (10) Additional big screen and sound system for visitors to project movies onto. (11) A playground for children enjoyment. (12) And finally, many green sections and bands to improve the air and flood problems. With these solutions combined, the existing environment of Taksim Square (Figure 8) can be turned into a more user-friendly area by demonstrating the principles of urban acupuncture.

#### (IV) DESIGN IDEAS

With these urban acupuncture design proposals, Taksim Square would be changed into a friendly, open space that encourages comfort, visual appeal, and social interaction. These architectural projects anticipate a regenerated Taksim Square that satisfies the requirements and preferences of its varied community. They range from the creation of designated areas for pedestrians to socialize to enhancing infrastructure and facilities. Taksim Square will certainly develop into a lively and welcoming area for all with the incorporation of cutting-edge elements including covered places, flora, better lighting, and storage facilities.



**Figure 8:** The Overview of the Taksim Square  
(Source: Politeknik, 2020)



**Figure 9:** Outdoor social area concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: Project for Public Spaces, 2022)

**Make Taksim Square a designated area that promotes social interaction and draws crowds:** This area could have cafes and tables, creating a comfortable space for people to congregate, unwind, and enjoy their time. Taksim Square can develop into a thriving centre for neighbourhood interaction by including social aspects (Figure 9).



**Figure 11:** Gazebo concept for Taksim Square (Source: YardCraft)

**To shield pedestrians from the rain and to provide relief from the summer's heat, place shading structures like pergolas or canopies all around Taksim Square:** To add to the nice and refreshing ambiance, add more green areas and plantings. The square's pedestrians will benefit from these improvements in terms of comfort and enjoyment (Figure 11).



**Figure 10:** Subway entrance concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: Minn T. Nguyen, 2023)

**Improve the metro entrance's usability and aesthetic appeal in Taksim Square:** The entrance can be developed into a desirable landmark by adding eye-catching design elements, such as contemporary materials and architectural features. This change would not only improve the square's general aesthetic but also the commuters' experience using the metro (Figure 10).



**Figure 12:** Playground concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: Oakville News, 2020)

**Bring in green areas with playgrounds for kids and pedestrians in Taksim Square:** By including recreational areas like playgrounds and open areas, the square will become more family-friendly and appealing to a wider variety of visitors. By giving pedestrians chances to engage in leisure activities, the square will become more family-friendly (Figure 12).



**Figure 13:** Lights concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: Christmas Lights Etc., 2022)

**Installing lights strategically all throughout the area will help to address the issue of inadequate lighting in Taksim Square:** Lighting fixtures that are strategically positioned and well-made will increase pedestrian visibility, increase safety, and create a more appealing environment, particularly at night (Figure 13).



**Figure 15:** Scooter Parking concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: Transport Nottingham, 2022)

**Create designated scooter parking facilities, like the BinBin, which are currently unavailable in Taksim Square:** It promotes the use of environmentally friendly modes of transportation and enhances convenience and accessibility for scooter users in the region by offering designated parking places (Figure 15).



**Figure 14:** Luggage Lockers concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: KL Sentral, 2019)

**To meet the needs of passengers, construct safe luggage storage areas at Taksim Square:** For travelers to temporarily keep their bags while they explore the region or wait for transit, these lockers or designated places will offer a secure and practical location. This service will improve the square's functionality and the overall tourist experience (Figure 14).



**Figure 16;** Bench concept for Taksim Square  
(Source: Botton Gardiner, 2013)

**Install benches throughout Taksim Square so that there are comfortable places for people to sit:** These benches can be positioned strategically in areas with great views or near socialising areas to entice visitors to unwind, rest, and socialise. The square will become more welcoming and inclusive as a result (Figure 16).

## CONCLUSION

Taksim Square is known as one of the most popular and socio-culturally important public spaces of Istanbul. It is a platform where political and socio-cultural demands are expressed. It also serves as a connecting hub for locals and tourists from different backgrounds. However, it faces some challenges that will limit its inclusive potential and dampen its appeal to the various user profiles. In order to address the identified problem areas and improve the functionality of the square, ten comprehensive interventions were presented in this research under the concept of "urban acupuncture", accompanied by various methodologies. This study, which combines quantitative and qualitative data, shows how to prioritise green space while maintaining a flexible, considerate, and all-encompassing approach to the needs of disadvantaged groups.

The proposed urban acupuncture design ideas for Taksim Square aim to create a more vibrant, welcoming, and open public space. This approach infuses dynamism into the social and artistic character of the square, leveraging the transformative and developmental capacity of the public sphere. The design effectively addresses the identified issues, offering a proper social space and an active green area where people can freely roam. The result is an inclusive public space that welcomes a wide range of user groups, improves the overall appearance of the square, and ensures a safe environment. This urban acupuncture project can successfully revitalise Taksim Square, making it a more inviting and enjoyable destination for everyone.

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