

URBAN OPEN SPACE USE IN ADDIS ABABA: THE CASE OF MESKEL SQUARE

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Användningen av de urbana friytorna i Addis Ababa: Exemplet Meskel Square

Master Thesis in the program Urban Landscape Dynamics, 30 hp
Självständigt arbete vid LTJ-fakulteten, SLU
Faculty of Landscape Planning, Horticulture and Agricultural Sciences,
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Preface

This master thesis is inspired by my experience in my two years stay in the Swedish cities, Stockholm, Malmö and Lund. When arriving in these cities, the first thing that fascinated me the most was the urban open spaces. These were public parks, cemetery parks, green ways and gray open spaces. The way they were designed, the way the people used them and the general image they give to the cities attracted my attention. I come from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia which is one of the third world countries. I am not used to seeing the direct effect of urban open spaces. My experience in Sweden led me to the thought of quality urban spaces in Addis Ababa.

I benefited a lot from my stay at SLU. The courses which I took under the program Urban Landscape Dynamics helped me in exploring more of the Swedish as well as European culture of urban planning and design. I was able to understand the idea of landscape as a major element in the construction of cities. The courses in the program explored different theories and the public dimension concerning landscape architecture and planning. In the courses, we encountered different people with vast experience in these fields. All this helped me in understanding the cultural and contextual fit of the urban open spaces in the Swedish cities. The existing local culture contributed a lot in the well functioning of these spaces. I also wanted to study what kind of urban open space design would fit in the context of Addis Ababa. I am interested in exploring different ways to create an environment friendly city. Thus, I am interested in looking at the different approaches to the subject around the world.

From these interests, I have chosen the subject for this thesis paper. I will be exploring the current trends of urban open space usage in Addis Ababa. I have the intention of continuing in this field where I would do more research and design proposals on urban open spaces. I am interested in going further in my studies to work internationally in the subject as well.

Acknowledgement

First of all I thank the Lord all mighty for all the success in my work. I would like to thank my supervisor, Gunilla Lindholm not only for her thorough criticism and comments on my work but also for guiding my work in to a more elaborate and focused goal. I would also like to thank Yidnekachew Tesmama for great discussions, ideas and criticisms. I would like to especially thank Gebremeskel Tesfai for all his supports in my work. I thank my parents, brother, sister, my colleagues and friends whom without their support, the finalization of this thesis would not have been real. Thank you.

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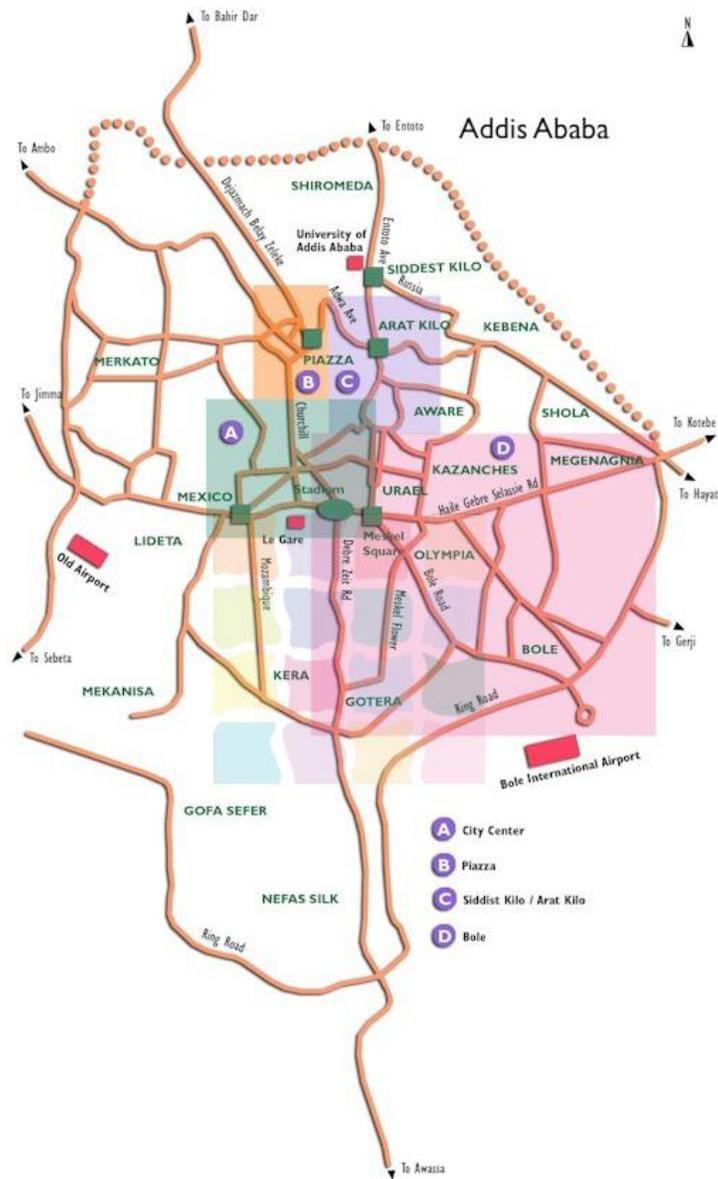


Figure 1 General map of Addis Ababa

Abstract

Urban planning and design has proven to be an important element in shaping life styles, solving problems and giving new ways of living in the urban arena. The quality of urban life is one of the big goals that the field tries to reach. Urban open spaces are known to enhance the quality of urban life. So, every city needs these spaces. The planning and design of urban open spaces have been practiced in different parts of the world in different ways. The practice and use of these spaces differed from place to place as well as from time to time. A good approach in the planning and designing of these spaces is to first study the past and current trends of urban open space usage in a place. The existing local culture acts as a guiding element to design a space suitable for the need of the locals. This paper is a study on a local culture of using urban open space. The study is about the user trend of urban open spaces in the city of Addis Ababa. The paper covers a general history and development of urban open space usage in the city. It focuses on a case area which is found in the center of the city and has a significant historical perspective as well. The development and current use of this space will indicate the direction of urban open space trends in the city. This will in turn help the future approaches in planning and design of such spaces. So, the paper includes the case area study, its data analysis, findings and finally suggestion of problems found on the case area study.

1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the world of today, urban planning and design has shifted into a new concept that incorporates the safe usage of the environment in a way that is sustainable. In urban planning and design projects around the world, the quality of urban life is given much attention than ever. It is understood that the health of a city, its economy and environment is improved more by a properly designed and implemented master plan incorporating environmental issues. One of the ways to increase the quality of urban life is the introduction of urban open spaces and green areas in cities. These include squares, green corridors, urban parks, urban zoos and street greeneries. Studies show that cities which are designed with the above elements in consideration have improved health status in the public, low stress level in the society, decrease pollution and generally enhanced quality of life.

Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia is a fast developing city. The city, being the seat for the African Union and having an international image, needs to meet international standards in many aspects. One of these aspects is its urban environment. The condensed part of the city is the major image and the overall face that characterizes the city. The quality of life inside the city is also another aspect. The increase in the

quality of its urban life can be ensured by the proper planning and design of urban open spaces and green areas in the urban system. Currently the image of the city and the quality of life inside the city face many problems. These problems are discussed in section 1.2. Understanding the current trend in the issues of urban open space is a first step in the planning and designing of efficient spaces in the future.

The aim of this paper is to formulate a research around the past and current use of urban open spaces, specifically by taking a public square in Addis Ababa as a case area for the study. Knowing the existing culture of the people in using the square will give an input for future planning and design of squares and other public spaces in the city. As Cliff (2003) warns, it is dangerous to try to transfer design concepts that worked at one time or place or one culture to a different place and culture through time.

1.2 Background/problem description

The city of Addis Ababa has a population of three million people with a growth rate of 2.9 percent per year. (CSA, 1999). One of the main problems that the city is facing today is the lack of properly planned and designed public spaces. As can be seen from the conditions of the existing open spaces in the city,

it is clear that these elements are not given the needed attention. Looking at the different master plans for the city at different periods, even though proper urban open spaces were proposed, they were not implemented. The two major problems around this issue are that there is not enough urban open space for the use of the public and the existing spaces lack proper management.

The only public spaces available are the streets, street joints, unplanned left-over spaces which are usually reserved for future building projects and few squares which are not enough for the population of the city. The low attitude towards open public space in the city, both in the public and private sector, has resulted in the diminishing of existing open spaces as well. With this, the main breathing spaces of the city are extinct. The priority given to the issues around urban open space in the city is low. This may be due to the low economic status of the country. Most part of the government budget for planning goes to the much more needed housing units in the city. But, the city also needs proper urban open spaces and green parks in the city. The administration should also pay the needed attention to the existing open spaces which are facing many problems at the moment. To name a few, most of the places are unplanned or left over spaces, there are no facilities in these spaces and since the general attitude towards them by the public is low, they are used as garbage disposal areas. The fact that little concern is given to the places and the idea of them being ownerless makes them inappropriate for many of the needed functions they could give to the public.

1.3 Objective and Question

The overall objective of this study is to understand the current trends and usage of the urban open spaces in the city and use it to figure out rational ways of designing and planning

urban open spaces in the city. Thus, it tries to answer the following questions.

1. How was the development of the urban open spaces in the city through time?
2. For what purpose is the public using these urban open spaces today?
3. What are the benefits of these spaces to the public?

1.4 Scope and limitations of the research

The issues around urban open spaces are very wide. There are economical, social, environmental, health and many other issues that are related to the idea of open spaces in a city. This study focuses only on the trend of the public in using urban open space. When discussing urban open space, there are different types. These could be streets, city parks, cemeteries, squares, national parks and the like. This paper is limited to the study of squares only. Thus, the study is limited to the subject of squares in the city of Addis Ababa and studies the trend of the public in using these areas. With these study subjects in mind, a case study is chosen to understand the specific issues. The case study is a public square known as Meskel Square. This is the major part of the study.

The limitations for this paper are mainly the lack of documented information on the subject of urban open space. The official bodies which are concerned with the subject are very recent and do not have any such documentation. The fact that the concern for urban open space in urban planning and design is recent has created a lack of specific official body to get information from. The time limit of the study which was 20 weeks has confined the paper to the study of only the past and existing user trends of squares.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

The Thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 – Introducing the study

This chapter gives a brief introduction to the issues of urban open space in the city of Addis Ababa. It describes the research objective, limitations, methodology and theoretical considerations for the study. It also includes a brief description of the paper.

Chapter 2 – Contextual back ground

This chapter consists in detail about the situation of urban open spaces in the history of Addis Ababa until now. It shows the development of open space in the city and describes the current situation of urban open spaces as well.

Chapter 3 – Case study

The case study consist a study of the case area “Meskel Square”. It contains the history of the square, the current uses of the square, interviews and physical analysis of the square.

Chapter 4 – Analysis and findings

This chapter presents the analysis of the different data. Findings of the study based on the case area are also included. It discusses the different findings in accordance with the objective and question of the study.

Chapter 5 – Recommendations and conclusion

This chapter contains recommendations based on the findings of the study and concludes with suggestions for issues to be considered when planning and designing future public squares in the city.

1.6 Methodological considerations

This is an exploratory study where different kinds of data are used and put together, to get a rich understanding of the existence and use of public space in Addis Ababa. Primary data would be collected through interviews of users of urban open spaces, government body concerned with the open spaces and other involved stake holders. There will also be relevant maps, direct observation of the spaces and pictures. The secondary data will be collected from other documentations, pictures, websites and books.

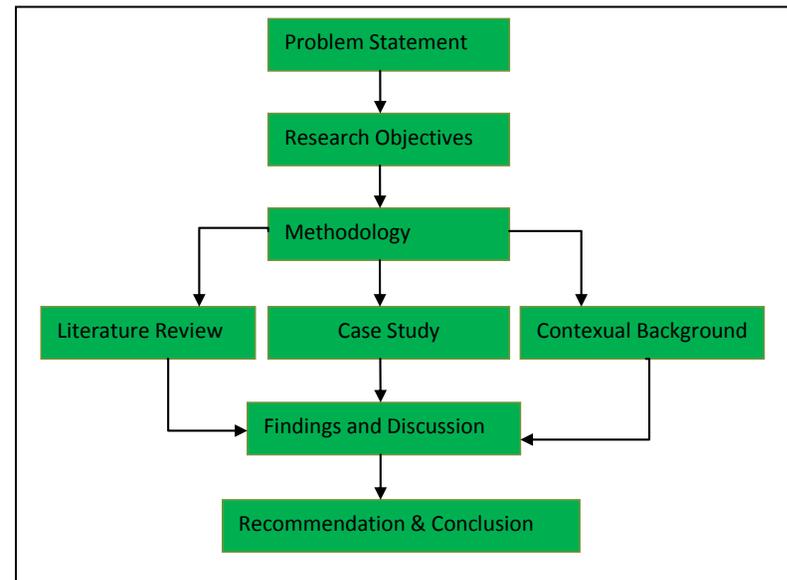


Figure 2 Study flow chart

1.7 Theoretical considerations

Before going into theories around urban open space, the definition of the term and the use of it in this paper should first be established. The definition of an open space according to Hornby (1995) is “*a large area especially of land not built on*”. With this definition, any open space in an urban area could be considered as urban open space. Open space as part of a city can be seen through different perspectives. For the purpose of this paper, this chapter is defining a specific perspective of open space. this specific perspective of urban open space is the square. I will try to discuss different ideas around the trend, utilization and design of squares and explore the different approaches to the subject. Hornby (1995) defines squares as an open area in a town, usually with four sides surrounded by buildings. “A square or plaza is both an area framed by buildings and an area designed to exhibit its buildings to the greatest advantage”. (Cliff, 2003) Both the above definitions are defining the square as an urban arena surrounded by buildings. This paper will be referring to squares in the same meaning. The following is a discussion on the use of squares as part of urban open spaces.

The use of urban open space differs in different societies in different parts of the world. Local cultures have been defining the use of these spaces in different periods. When discussing the use of urban open spaces, its historical beginnings go back to the Greek Agora and the Roman forum where these spaces were used for political, economic and cultural activities. They are still significant in history for their symbolical function concerning democracy. According to N. Naz and Z. Ashraf (2008) the blended activities of these types of spaces did not continue to the middle Ages. Giving examples from the renaissance cities, they describe the isolated use of market square, cathedral square and others which are

confined to single uses of economic, political or religious purpose. They also discuss how these spaces have changed into parking spaces in modern cities.

Starting from the year 1970, when modernism was highly challenged, as pollution and vehicular traffic dominated cities, public space and green open areas were reintroduced into the urban realm. (Gehl and Gemzoe 2000) The reintroduction of public space according to the above statement was a solution to the growing pollution rate of the environment and it was about reclaiming the city space from vehicles and motor ways. And from this point, public space has become an important element of urban life in many developed countries. Now, cities are growing into more society, pedestrian and people centered urban designs. The use of public space differed in different periods. Generally, it circulated around market place, meeting place and traffic space. (Gehl and Gemzoe 2000)

According to Gehl and Gemzoe (2000), this pattern has continued to this day. The domination of traffic in the middle of the 20th century broke this pattern of public space use, but in the current pedestrian focused urban design, public spaces act as spaces connecting different functions thus acting as meeting, market and traffic spaces.

Another perspective of the use of squares is as both multiuse and single use spaces according to the period and situation of the place. According to Cliff (2003), there were different uses in different periods. Squares were considered as market places during peace time and for other purposes during war time. They were used as Agoras and Forums in some. But, he concludes that the best kind of open spaces or squares are the ones which allow the variety of users to use the squares for variety of uses. Alternatively Cliff (2003) also sees the square as part of an urban element, its centrality. The use of a square is that it becomes central and symbolic. Its aesthetic and

architectural values signify some kind of message. And as a central element, it serves as organizing element for the urban planner and designer.

According to the two ideas of Gehl and Gemzoe (2000) and N. Naz and Z. Ashraf (2008) the current trend of urban open space is towards a multi-use space that could be used for political, economic, social and cultural uses. Cliff's idea combined here leads us to a common understanding that the multi use, flexibility in function and free accessibility of squares enhances their use as public spaces. It is also clear that the square provides not only physical use by the public but also acts as an important part of a city. It's symbolic quality and the force of organization it puts on the city form should not be put aside. The trend and use of a public square is always dependent on the culture of the local people, the economy of the country and its political structure. These three factors guide the use of a square.

In planning theories, based on the above discussion, a square should be planned and designed in a way that is flexible for many uses and users. In a new approach of planning, the above meaning of a square as an open space bounded by buildings is totally changed when we use landscape as the guiding element for urban planning and design. Landscape

urbanism could become a better approach in this context. The first models of this theory being parks make it more applicable for urban open spaces.

“Across a diverse spectrum of cultural positions landscape has emerged as the most relevant medium through which to construct a meaningful and viable public realm in North American cities.” (Waldheim, 2006)

In the above quote, Charles explains landscape to be more effective in planning approach than architecture or the traditional way of building the city. This theory introduces planning and design ideas that consider the landscape first and bring in architectural elements later.

In the next chapter, the study will try to show the case of urban open spaces in Addis Ababa. It will discuss the historical development of the spaces and also talk about the current situations of urban open spaces in the city. This is to give a general background to the subject before going to the main case study which is *“Meskel Square”*.

2 CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical development of urban open space in Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa is found in the central part of Ethiopia at an elevation of 2440m above sea level. (Encarta 2008) and its total size is estimated to be around 520km².

The history of urban open spaces in Addis Ababa would begin from the recent past. The historical aspect of the city is described in the city development plan (ORAAMP, 2009), Addis Ababa means “*new flower*” according to the native language *Amharic*. This name was given to it when it was first founded by Empress *Taitu*, wife of *Minilik II*, in 1886. Before this, the name of the area was called *Finfinne* and it was known for its fertile farm land and dense forests with streams and a sloping terrain. The landscape which attracted the Empress had a focus point at *Filwuha*, a natural spring of hot water which was used for bathing and medical purposes. As seen in fig 3, the *Entoto* Mountain, *Mt. Watchatcha*, *Mt. Furi* and *Mt. Yerer* sheltered a flat terrain in the middle. This position made it attractive for the location of the future city of Addis Ababa.



Figure 3 Topographic map for the location of Addis Ababa

The first palace was situated at mount *Entoto* since it was a strategic point to watch for anyone coming or leaving the settlement. Thus, the landscape played a big role in the founding of Addis Ababa.



Figure 4 Hot Springs of Filwoha 1900

The cities which were used as seats for previous governments had three main institutions. These were the Palace, the Market and the Church. They acted as three cores in a city. The same trend continued in Addis Ababa as well. The city grew around the Palace, the *S.t George Church* and *Arada* which was the market. These were the political, religious and commercial cores of the city respectively. And this was the beginning for the development of Addis Ababa.

The development of urban open space of the city at that time took the same development trend as the city. It grew at three different cores. The functions of the spaces differed accordingly as well. A big open space was situated at the *Arada* market core of the city (fig 5). This was known as a large open market and was used for market purpose mainly. Other than that, the market place was known as the only public space. This was because the rest of the land was divided between the church and government officials and each land except the market had an owner. Since the market place belonged to all, many public activities took place on it. The

religious center at the *St. George church* had its own open space outside the church where the people and worshipers gathered. One of the main events on this space was the religious ceremony of “*Meskel*”, a religious festival celebrating the founding of the true cross. This is seen on fig 6 and the picture shows the large number of people celebrating the festival in an open space surrounded by buildings. The *Arada* market and the church were beside each other and the open spaces overlapped. So, the open space was used for different purposes. Another open space was at *Janmeda*, seen on fig 7. This was a place close to the palace. It was a wide space used for the purpose of horse riding and other games which were practiced by royal families as well. The other significant purpose of the space was the celebration of the famous religious festival of “*Timket*”. This festival celebrated the baptism of Jesus Christ.



Figure 5 Saturday market at Arada 1920



Figure 6 celebration of Meskel St. George square 1930



Figure 7 Horse Racing at Janmeda

The settlement of the people was around the residences of high government officials. Top officials settled on high places and around them their troops and families. And around the whole settlement was always the open landscape and through it routes connecting the different settlements. A single settlement area was known as *Sefer*, fig 8. This settlement morphology guided the urban form of Addis Ababa

for years to come. Since this was the first period of the city and since settlements had just started, most of the natural areas around the city were untouched. Open green spaces were available between the settlements. These areas served the locals for their day to day activities.



Figure 8 One of the first settlements

The first urban plan emerged during the brief period of occupation by Fascist Italy from 1936-1941. At this period, a segregation of the local people from the Europeans was reflected in the planning. The *Addis Ketema* meaning new city was developed for the indigenous people and the market was moved from *Arada* to this new area. The market place was known as *Merkato*. The market oriented public space was thus altered. The new change introduced buildings arranged in gridiron form. During the period of the Italian occupation two plans were prepared for the city. One by Le Corbusier and another by Guidi and Valle. Le Corbusier's proposal did not take into account the topography of the city. His proposal was suited more to a flat terrain. But, the consideration of public space and green areas were noticed for the first time in his plan since his conceptual sketch was influenced by his idea of a radiant city concept of 1930-1933. The conceptual plan for

Addis Ababa by Le Corbusier was not accepted. The accepted proposal by Guidi and Valle had two main commercial and political axis parallel to each other. The gridiron plan for *Addis Ketema* and the two axes were other strong elements of Addis Ababa city plan until today. Their proposal dealt with the idea of *landscapism*: the monumental axes of the colonial city in a well designed landscape. Public spaces were considered in the segregated parts of native and European parts of the city. But, rivers and other natural features of the city were used more for the segregation of the European city from the native city rather than for environmental or aesthetic purposes.

In 1946, a major step for the development of Addis Ababa took place. The organization for African Unity established its headquarters in Addis Ababa. This led Emperor *Haile Sellassie* to invite Sir Patrick Abercrombie, the famous planner of Greater London to prepare a master plan for Addis Ababa. Abercrombie's concept was to develop the city around existing neighborhood units and each neighborhood unit were surrounded by green parkways to make them well defined and to provide them with immediate access to green areas. A vehicular decentralization idea using ring roads intended to divert the traffic away from the centre. His ideas introduced new type of environmental consideration in the planning of the city. The previous proposals all focused on creating a monumental city. Abercrombie's idea changed this feature. Even though his proposal was left at a general guideline level, three years later, his proposal was used as a base for a new master plan which had a larger projection for population growth by a British consultant team called Bolton Hennessy and Partners. In 1965, the master plan was replaced by another one which had the concept of comparing the city with a human form and putting *Arada* as the head so that it was the core of the city. During this period, the main public spaces of the city were still the open space at *St. George church* and *Janmeda*. The monarchial government used these spaces for political as well as religious purposes. The placement of UN head quarters in the city also helped in creating a new center south of the

palace. This center consisted of UN headquarter, hotels and a new open space for public activities.

In 1974, there was a change in the political system of the country from Monarchy to the military dictatorship by the *Derge* regime. The growth of the city was halted at this time. The major reasons for this were political unrest and insecurity of urban life due to political conflicts. A plan was prepared by a Hungarian planning professor by the name C.K. Polonyi in this period. Polonyi designed the revolution square and it was one of the most significant planning steps contributed from that period. This square had a political purpose behind its construction. It was used as a public gathering and as a forum where the communist leaders addressed the public and also had their military parades. This was a major step in the planning of the city and the introduction of open space as part of the urban design. The plan was implemented immediately and the square was named "*Abyot Adebabay*" meaning Revolutionary Square. This square was also used to celebrate the finding of the true cross-*Meskel*. This urban open space was the first open space in the city to be designed in the modern style and was used for other purposes as well. This is a square that has acted as the only open public space till today. This square is used as the main case area for the purpose of this paper and will be discussed more in chapter four.

The 1986 master plan which was intended to serve for a period of twenty years was prepared by the Addis Ababa Master Plan project office established through Italo-Ethiopian cooperation. The basic concept of this plan was to develop a balanced urban system and to integrate the city with its surrounding regions and to provide modern metropolitan features. Decentralization of city services guided many of the features. In an attempt to have functional integration, the city was planned with a focus on the zoning of activities. Green spaces and public open areas were proposed in this master plan. In this plan, the city green system was to have three levels. The

local green network where open areas are connected to service centers, district green network with parks and street sides, and city wide green areas which included functional green areas reserved for recreational activities like festivals, zoos, horse race tracks, golf fields, wood lands or forests etc... The proposal also included the development of green ways along river sides that run through the city. But, the delay for its approval which took 8 years caused unplanned urban sprawl, fragmentation of services and public areas and unplanned development that affected the intended structure and urban form of the city.

Generally, the development of open spaces in Addis Ababa started from the natural landscape which was used during the different periods of the monarchy for purposes like market area, festival area and political activities. As planning was introduced to the city, these places were more planned and were divided in to functions accordingly. As the city grew wider southwards and as foreign planners came in with different ideas, there were local green areas, district and city level green areas. Integrated with these were also open spaces. These spaces were used in different ways according to their locations and context.

Currently, the city has developed around the 2003 revised master plan by the Office for the Revision of Master Plan in Addis Ababa. This master plan focuses on reorganization of the 1986 master plan with detailed studies. In this plan, there was one city center and three sub centers. The main centre located around the *National Theatre* and *Legehar*(Railway Station) area and connects it with three nodal areas: *Merkato*, *Piassa* and *Aratkilo*. Urban open spaces are proposed to be located at these centers. There are also open and green spaces proposed at other parts of the city. Public parks, zoological parks and open areas were proposed at different parts. But, due to lack of proper implementation of the plan, most of these proposed areas were taken by other functions. So, currently the two main urban open spaces in the city at the

district level other than parks and zoos are *Janmeda* which was there starting from the 19th century and *Meskel Square* which was previously known as the revolutionary square. Fig 9, 10& 11 show the development of open spaces along with the development of the city consequently.

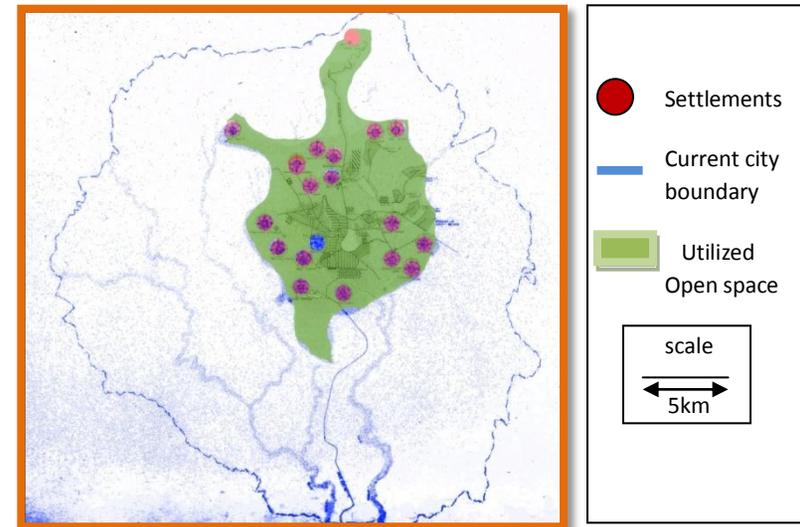


Figure 9 Map showing the first settlements of Addis Ababa

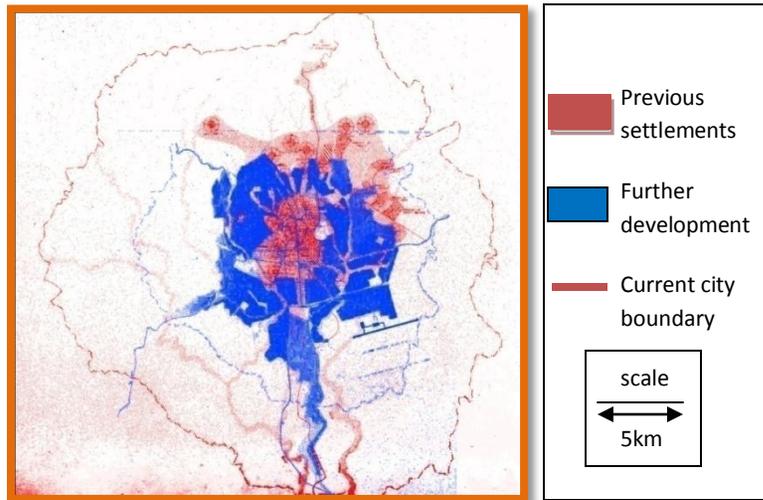


Figure 10 Map showing the development of the city

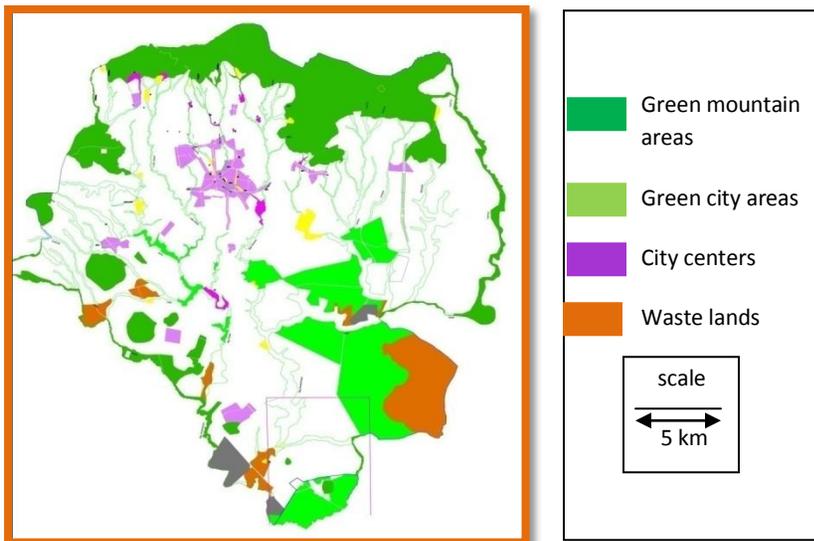


Figure 11 Map showing the current open and green space of the city

2.2 CURRENT PUBLIC SPACE IN ADDIS ABABA

Today, Addis Ababa has not yet met the standards which give it the image of an international city. The quality of urban life is not being considered in many aspects. The urban planning and design aspect has not yet given the needed priority to urban open space. The new office for greening and beautification of the city is very recent and does not have much of the plans and strategies lined out yet. But, green areas, parks and urban open spaces are managed under this office. According to the master plan these spaces are categorized in to local, district and city level open spaces. Following I will briefly discuss the current situation of each type of space.

At the local or small neighborhood level, there are many open and green areas which are used for festivals, children playgrounds and other social activities. These places are not yet designed or planned. Some of them are left out spaces between residential houses and the ones which are distinguished as urban open spaces are not managed well. Most of these places are being either sold for private investors or used as housing plots for real estates and condominiums. The exemplary areas chosen in fig 12, 13, 14 & 15 show a local open space being used by children playing on it as well as investors who are producing hollow concrete blocks. The area is in conflict between the two uses. It used to accommodate more people, but because of the HCB production taking place, it has now become a smaller place and with this trend the space could disappear in the future. These kind of open spaces are left over spaces which the local people use until they are put to a “better” use. The functions that these spaces give are usually related to recreational activities. Most of their users are in the age of 5-20. They use it for the function of playing football. They also give the function of an open area for public gathering such as religious festivals, community occasions and meetings.



Figure 12 Local open space with kids playing



Figure 14 children playing along HCB construction



Figure 13 HCB construction on local open space



Figure 15 Fenced Local open space near major street

The district level green areas include street sides, parks, plazas and most of the open spaces found in the center of the city. The district level open spaces are officially designated as plazas, squares, streets and parks. Currently, there are seventeen parks in the city which have their own reserved space and are considered as main places for recreation. The city parks are mainly used for weddings, graduation and other community activities. On other days, they are used by the local people for the purpose of relaxing areas, reading areas and meeting places. The management of these places looks relatively good. They are not properly managed when it comes to the use of the spaces. It is not allowed to use drugs and other kinds of addictive relaxation types in the parks. But, people use the parks for different purposes that are not legal. This has kept the use of many of the parks to a limited number of people. Other types of services given by the parks are cafeteria and restaurant services. These are popular places of recreation in the city. The streets are used for different purposes as well. They are used as meeting places, market places and circulation. There are properly designed streets for these purposes as well as inconvenient ones.



Figure 16 Biheretsige public park



Figure 17 Zoo in the public park



Figure 18 Vegetation in Public Park



Figure 19 Users resting and reading in Public park



Figure 21 Streets are more vehicular with small Pedestrian Street



Figure 20 Wide street with empty side walk

At the wide city level, there are forest areas which are usually on mountains and are being preserved and forestation activities are being taken seriously. These areas are well managed in the sense of preservation of trees and forestation. But, people do not use these areas since they are not easily accessible and do not have the necessary facilities to be used as recreational areas.



Figure 22 Entoto city forest areas



Figure 24 Forest area on *Yeka* Mountain



Figure 23 Entoto city forest area



Figure 25 Forest area on *Yeka* Mountain

These three types of spaces are managed by different government bodies. The city is divided into ten sub-cities. Each local, district and city level open and green spaces is managed by the local administrator depending to which sub-city they belong. Another managing body is the City Beautification and Greening bureau which is concerned with all the three and this body is directly responsible for their

cleanliness and greening. Since this office is very recent, there is not much done under it. The city municipality is responsible in coordinating the different management bodies. The use of these spaces is usually controlled by the managing bodies, especially the sub-cities. They are responsible for the proper use of the public spaces.

3 CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

As discussed in chapter one, the case area chosen for this study is *Meskel Square*. This area has been chosen because of its unique characters listed below.

- It is the first urban open space to be designed for the purpose.
- It is the only place recognized by the city administration as plaza.
- It is found in the center of the city and is easily accessible from any part of the city.
- It is the largest amphitheatre in the city.
- It is considered as the only open gathering place when the city hosts international events.

The square is bordered by a 50m wide vehicle street on the northern side, two museums on the eastern side, and an exhibition center on its southern side and a high school on its south western side. This place has a total area of 47790 m². It has a total height of 6.7 meters from its northern to southern edge. The municipality is currently planning to build three more such spaces in three other parts of the city.

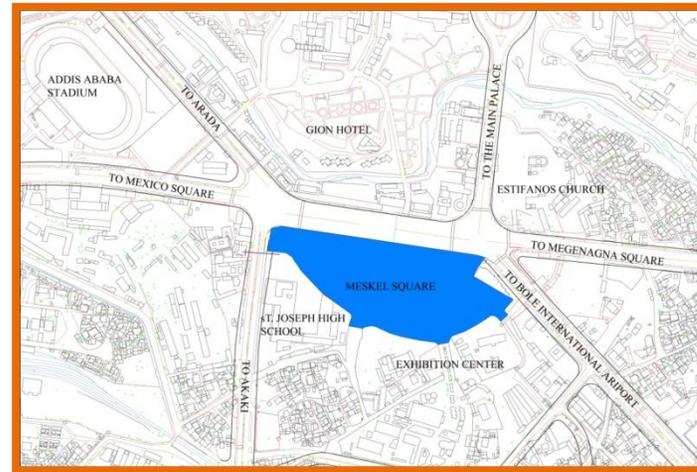


Figure 26 Map showing *Meskel Square* and its surrounding

I will discuss the study of the square in three sections. The first section shows the development of the square through time. This section will discuss the creation of the square and the different phases it has gone through until today related with the functions it has been used for. The second section discusses the current situation and uses of the square. In this section, there are two parts. The first part is concerned with the occasional functions of the square and the second part is concerned with the day to day function of the square. The overall function of the square is discussed, interviews of the users giving first hand information on the user trend of the

square is also included. The third section covers the physical analysis of the square in relation to the use of it by the public.

3.1 Development of the square

The site of the current location of the square was given to *Ras Biru*, a royal person related to emperor Minilik II when the city was founded. As every other royal person, *Ras Biru* also lived at a higher level near this location. (Giorghis and Gerard, 2007) The place was owned by him. Thus, even at that time, the landscape had a potential to be changed in to the current shape of the square, a square with the shape of an amphitheatre. The base for the foundation of the square was the construction of the *Estifanos Church* in 1958. This church was built by Emperor *Haileselesie*. The previous church which was used by the Emperor was the *St. George church*. After the construction of the *Estifanos church*, in combination with the UN head quarters and the *Gion* international hotel, the place was a promising new center for the city. This led to finding a place near *Estifanos church* for the celebration of the “*Meskel*” festival. (Addis Zemen, 1961) and starting from 1961, “*Meskel*” was celebrated in this space.

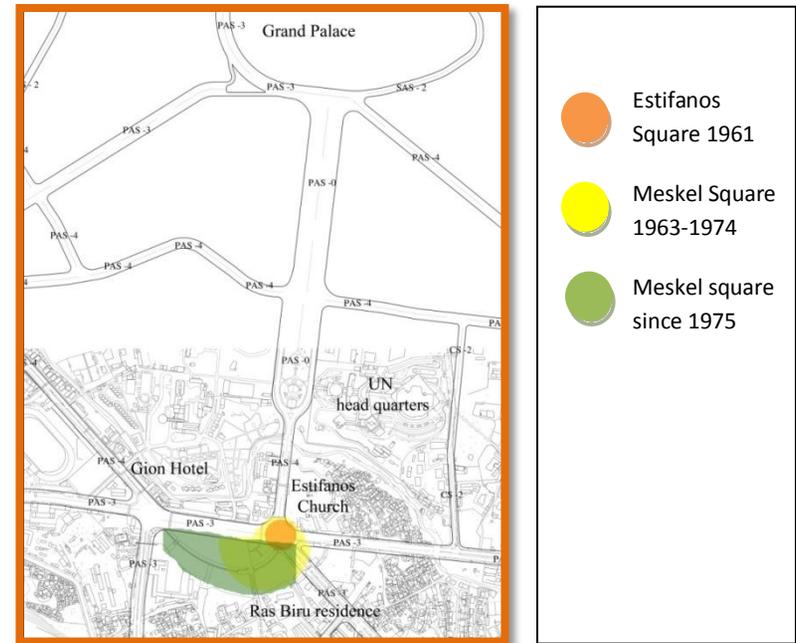


Figure 27 Map showing the development of the Square.



Figure 28 The celebration of Meskel at Estifanos Square 1962



Figure 29 Celebration of Meskel at Meskel Square 1963

The square slowly started to get wider when the population using the space started to grow. The hilly part was used for people to stand on watching the celebrations on the lower level. In 1963, the *Estifanos* square named after the church was changed in to *Meskel Square* after the festival of *Meskel*. (Addis Zemen, 1963) The square continued hosting religious and political festivals. In 1974 the transition of government from monarchy to military governance brought a major change on the square as well. The new government wanted to destroy everything about the monarchy; it started changing names of streets and squares. Because of this, *Meskel Square* was changed to “*Abiyot*” Revolutionary Square. (Addis Zemen , 1974) Subsequently the government also prepared a master plan for the city. This was commissioned to C.K Polonyi, a Hungarian planning professor. Polonyi designed the square in to its current form of an amphitheatre for the purpose of political, military parades and religious ceremonies. In 1975, the Revolutionary Square was inaugurated for the first time to celebrate the September 12 festival of the *Derg* Revolutionary day. (Addis Zemen 1975) At this time, the square was made wider to hold much more people. The people stood on steps and at the end of the steps, there were arranged stone seats for government officials. The wide open space or the stage for the amphitheatre was used for military and civilian parades. In the ensuing years, the place was used for different official and non official purposes. The government officials’ sitting area was changed to a newly built sitting platform in front of the square across the street where the higher officials faced the crowd directly. The military always organized military parades before going to wars. There were pictures of *Mengistu Hailemariam* along with Lenin and Marx on the big wall at the top of the square. The place acted as a big symbol for the communist government. Some say that it had the same function as the red square in Moscow. This could be right since the two

governments were allayed at the time. The square was maintained and the stairs were improved in the coming years.

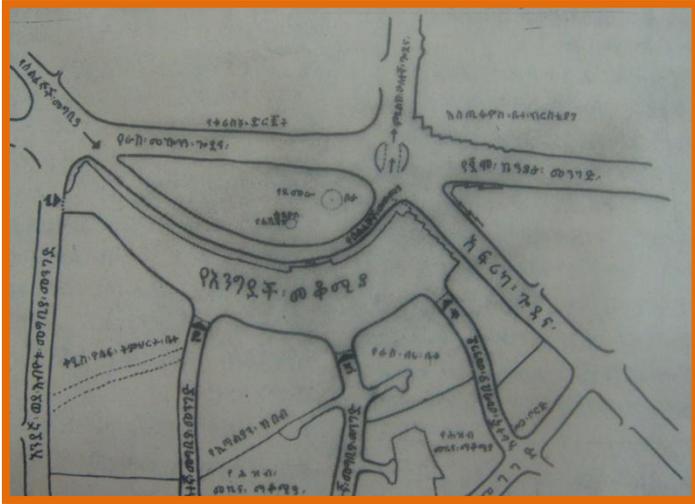


Figure 30 A map of the square from the local newspaper guiding users for the day of the Square inauguration



Figure 31 Mengistu Hailemariam giving speech at the square 1975



Figure 32 Religious leaders at the square standing at their preserved places 1975



Figure 33 People celebrating Revolution day 1975

In 1992 the Derg Military regime came to an end and EPRDF took power. With this development, the square got its name back and it was again named Meskel Square. At this time, the city had grown wider and there were smaller centers at different parts of the city. The new government recognized the use of this space as a public place and main center of the city. Starting from this transitional period, the square hosted political, cultural and religious ceremonies. On other days of the year, when there are no public holidays, the square gave use for the public as a gathering place, youth center, exercise and recreational space.

3.2 Meskel Square Today

3.2.1 Occasional Functions of the Square



Figure 34 Meskel Square

Today, the square is used by the inhabitants of the city throughout the year for different purposes. As the main objective of this study, I tried to study the main functions of this space. The different functions could be categorized in to religious, political, cultural and day to day activity. The first function which is the religious function takes an important place in the usage of the square. Complying with the fact that the square was first founded for the purpose of the religious ceremony of “*Meskel*” festival and it got its name from the festival, the “*Meskel*” festival is one of the main highlights of the square every year on September 27th. The square at this time is filled with people celebrating the festival. As seen on fig 37, a structure is built from dry wood and is burnt for the ceremony. Priests sing and show religious songs and dances on the ceremony. This is done on the lower flat level of the square

while the people watch from the amphitheatre steps. Many tourists from all over the world come to see this festival every year. The national TV and Radio recognize this place as the main event area even though there are smaller places where the same ceremony takes place at the same time. People find this place easily accessible since it is in the center of the city. Other religious activities could take place on the square. But, these are done with special request and permission from the city administration office.



Figure 35 The celebration of Meskel festival



Figure 36 The celebration of Meskel festival

The second type of function is the political ceremonies and occasions that are hosted on the square. The yearly political festival on the square is the May 28 celebration of the ruling party signifying the day the current took power. There are also other political festivals which are mainly the gathering of people called by government officials. As has been done in previous periods, the government uses this place as a communication place with the people. Other major gatherings are during election periods. The square is used by the government as well as opposition parties during this time to pass their message to their supporters. Thus, the square has now become a symbol of democracy which is the goal of the ruling party. Other uses by government bodies of the square are done by public schools, health bureau and different bodies concerned with different aspects of social functions. Since the place is free to anyone and because of its centrality, many people use the place. Thus it has become an attractive place for the governmental bodies whenever they want to communicate with the public.



Figure 37 Election 2005 political campaign at Meskel Square.

The third function is the cultural ceremonies and occasions. These functions include concerts, exhibitions and other gatherings. There are also sport occasions, like car races and athletics. Of these, the famous one is the Great Run of Ethiopia which is prepared by *Haile Gebreselasie* every year. In this race, famous athletes from around the world take part. The inhabitants of Addis Ababa as well as from other cities join the race. The starting and finishing place is *Meskel Square*. Other smaller races are also hosted at different periods by other organizations.



Figure 38 Ethiopian Great Run at the square



Figure 39 Ethiopian Great Run at the square

3.2.2 Day to day functions of the Square

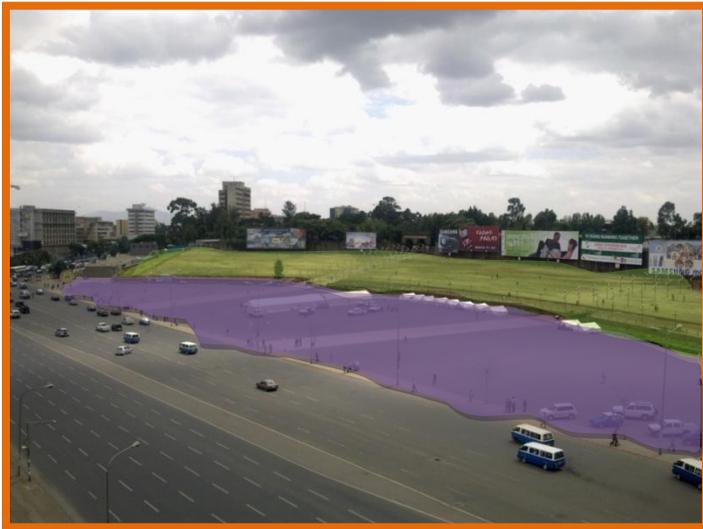


Figure 40 Elements of the Square

People use the square for different purposes. In order to understand the use and function of the square, I interviewed the users randomly categorized into three functions. The first function is the sport activity on the space. The second function is the recreational purpose of the square. The third function is trade.

Sport activity(function 1)

Many people come here for exercises. There are those who exercise as part of professional training and there are those who exercise for recreational and health reasons. The age group ranges from 10 to 50. The types of exercises differ accordingly. The ones who practice running use the upper part

of the square which is the set of steps. They use the number of steps for estimating the distance they run. For most of them the advantage of this place is that it is challenging for the purpose of the exercise. There are also those who do gymnastics on the steps. They use the ground level as well. People use the fixtures like the light post for exercising purpose (fig 43). Football is another type of exercise practiced on the ground level. This ground level of the square is seen divided into different groups for different types of games.

In the study, I have tried to understand why they choose this place for exercising, how they use it and what they like about the place. Nine people were interviewed under the sport category or **function 1**. They were chosen randomly at different times of the day. The following table is a brief summary of the questionnaires which the users have answered for the above enquires.



Figure 41 People exercising on the steps

Name	age	occupation	Domicile	Frequency days/week (time of day)	Advantage of the square	Need and improvement on
Seada (f)	18	student	3km away	1/week (evening)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide space with freedom of usage • Convenient for the purpose • The steps used for measuring distance by runners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict with other users • Not properly managed
Yidnekachew (m)	19	student	1km away	4/week (morning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people of the same activity • Good for the purpose • Near by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict with other users
Sisay (m)	47	coaching	<1km away	7/week mor & eve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • available space • No other choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hard surface • unsafe for children
Biniam (m)	14	student	1km away	2/week morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • available space • No other choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hard surface • not safe • thorny plants
Bruk (m)	19	Techondo	5km away	1/week morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good for the purpose • challenging design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conflict with other users • needs maintenance
Lemmi (m)	23	Athlet	5km away	1/week morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stairs good for gymnastic • people using the square for the same purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not managed well • conflicts with other users
Yemisrach (f)	17	student	3km away	3/week mor& eve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different activities • convenient for the purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not clean • not wide enough • unemployment problems
Getenet(m)	18	student	1km away	3/week evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good scenery • everyone else exercises • easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conflict with other users • not well managed
Yibeltal(f)	21		<1km away	4/week evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many people with different activities • convenient for the purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conflict with other users • no sport facilities

Table 1 Interview summary concerning function 1 on Meskel Square

Table 1 shows the comment of the people interviewed for the study who come to the square to exercise. Most of these people are in the ages between 15 and 25. They come from different parts of the city near and far. The users who exercise as professionals come here ones or twice a week. They usually come in weekends. These types of users have other places for similar activities. The users who come to the space daily are the ones who live nearby. The reasons the square is chosen by these users are:

- The steps of the square are convenient for runners
- The space is wide which allows the freedom of activities
- There are other people on the square for the same activity
- The square is in the center of the city which makes it accessible from many parts of the city.
- Other open spaces are being taken away for constructions; hence the square is the only choice most people have.

The negative aspect of the square as the interviewees described is the low maintenance of the square. It is not clean and the steps need maintenance as well. The other negative aspect most of them see is the conflict with other users. They are in conflict with people who come to sit on the steps, people biking on the ground level and unemployed people who are seen as security risk on the square. A negative element for the users of the ground level is the hard surface of the square and the wide vehicular street beside it.



Figure 42 People playing football at the square



Figure 43 Runners on the steps of the square



Figure 44 Football on the lower flat level of the square

Relaxing activities (function 2)

The second category consists of people using the place for relaxation, meeting people and watching the activities on the place. People come in the morning, at noon and in the evening for this purpose. In the morning, there are more of exercising people. In the afternoon, the square is almost empty except for few homeless people sitting and sleeping on the square (fig 47). At this time, the only shade on the square is from the big posters on top of the steps (fig 48). In the evening many people come to the square for the purpose of relaxation.



Figure 45 Homeless people sleeping on the square



Figure 46 People sitting under the posters in the afternoon

Five people were interviewed under this category. They were chosen randomly at different times of the day.

Name	Age	Occupation	Domicile	Frequency days/week (time of day)	Advantage of the square	Needs and improvement on
Berhanu(m)	31	private	3km away	1/6 mon evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interesting scenery Easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not maintained well not clean no facilities
Gedion(m)	22	private	3km away	4/week evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> freedom of use good scenery variety activities Convenient for the purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not maintained not clean
Aman(m)	50	private	3km away	5/week anytime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fresh air good scenery relaxing atmosphere Convenient for the purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not well managed historical value not recognized
Abel(m)	25	private	7km away	3/month evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> scenery amphitheatre Variety experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low security not clean unemployment problems
Unknown(m)	38	Private	<1 km away	3/week depends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> centre to the city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not clean

Table 2 Interview summary concerning function 2 on Meskel Square

People who come here to relax take almost half of the number of people coming here. Their interview shows that most of them are in the ages between 20 to 50 years. They also come from different parts of the city. But most of them work or live nearby. They choose this place for:

- Its physical attractiveness.
- Its quality as a quite area in the center of the city,
- Its good scenery,
- The different activities on the square.
- It is easily accessed from different parts of the city

For most of the users, the main problem of the area is that it is not clean. They suggest that the government should do something about the homeless people as well since they make

them feel insecure. Most of them also suggest that the place needs constant maintenance. Other than this, they don't have conflict with other users since it is other activities that attract most of them to the place.



Figure 47 view from the square



Figure 48 view from the square

Trade activities (function 3)

The third category is trade. There are people who use the space for trading. As informed by the administration of the sub-city, no kind of trade is allowed on the space. So, all the trade activities on the space are illegal. But, there are different types of trade activities on the area. Most of these activities take place on the ground level of the square. The usual types of trade are cobbling, selling of small scale goods, bicycle renting and mobile snacks. These activities use the square the whole day. The number of people using the place for trade is relatively less than the rest of the users.

Four people from different kinds of trade were interviewed for the purpose. The following table is a summary of their answers.

name	age	occupation	Domicile	Frequency days/week (time of day)	Advantage of the square	Needs and improvement on
Amanuel(m)	23	Cobbler and small scale biz	5 km away	7/week whole day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • freedom in usage • many people • no other shops around here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very sunny • not allowed to put shades
Unknown(f)	35	Small scale biz	1 km away	do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many people • no one driving us away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no shades allowed • too much unemployment
Yidnekachew(m)	19	Motor cycle renting	1 km away	4/week morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • major place for income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we are not allowed to work here • conflict with police • conflict with other users because of motor danger
Unknown(f)	27	Mobile tea and coffee	<1 km away	3/week afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No other like function around • Good for business • Easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not allowed to work here

Table 3 Interview summary concerning function 3 on Meskel Square



Figure 49 People selling snacks from cars at the square



Figure 50 Bicycle and motor cycle renting at the square

In the trade function, the age group differs from 19-35. The users come from different parts of the city, near and far. Most

of them use the square for a larger part of a week. The reasons they choose this place for trading are:

- Not much shops around the square. So, many people buy goods from them.
- The place is relatively free from legal authorities than other places.
- The square is easily accessible

The problem they are facing is the fact that they are not allowed to work here. Since they are very small in scale, they are not registered as tax payers. Most of them cannot fulfill the criteria to be legal. Another inconvenience for the small scale business owners is the harsh sun. They have to wait for customers the whole day. The unemployed people on the square also cause security problems for these users.



Figure 51 Small scale businesses at the square



Figure 52 Small scale businesses at the square

Other than the three types of functions in the square, there are also service giving functions. These are divided in to public and private service giving functions. The public service giving functions are public transport services which are found on the edge of the square along the street side. This place is heavily crowded in the morning and evening when people go to and come from work relatively. There are other temporary service giving bodies for the public like free HIV testing centers and education centers. These are not functions which are always seen on the square. The private service giving agencies are the private transport services like small taxis, cross country buses like *Selam* bus and Sky bus. These cross country buses use the square as a starting station for travelers to other parts of the country. It is also a destination place for travelers who are coming to the city using these buses. The arrival of the buses is usually in the late afternoon when the place is active.



Figure 53 Travelers waiting with their luggage at the square



Figure 54 Travelers leaving the square

Another popular element of the square is the Sonic Screen (fig 57) which is situated at the eastern end of the square on the ground level. The screen shows different commercials the whole day. Sometimes the government uses it to transmit messages to the public. The area is crowded

whenever there are football games being transmitted live. Many people enjoy coming here to watch the games on the big screen even though they can see the games at home or can watch it in bars and restaurants. During big games like the African or world cup, the vehicle street is also crowded people flowing over on to the street. The screen is managed by a private owner.



Figure 55 People watching live game on the big Sonic screen.

The square renders an important service to the users of the exhibition center as well. The exhibition center hosts different activities on occasions. There are trade fairs, music concerts, and construction exhibitions etc... which are held annually in the center. These activities inside the exhibition center attract many of the city people. The people coming here experience *Meskel Square* as well. There is a main entrance to the exhibition center through the square (fig 58). Many people park their cars on the square and use the main passage way as entrance. The activity on the square at this time gets more crowded.



Figure 56 People entering the exhibition center with cars parked on the square.

3.3 Physical investigation of the square

Meskel Square, as noted above is a unique square in many aspects for the city of Addis Ababa. The design of the square has an interesting architectural aspect in the city. One of the boundaries being the old residence of *Ras Biru's* relates it with history. Its steps are giving wide usage in the city giving the public a place to sit in the middle of a dense city. Its general openness compared with other parts of the city makes it a breathing space for Addis Ababa residents. The square is looked after by the city administration office. The physical condition of the square shows the low concern given to it by the responsible authorities. The steps which contribute to the major physical character of the square are not managed well. Many users complain that they are not suitable for running or sitting anymore. The lights which were mounted in 2007, for the Ethiopian Millennium, do not work anymore. Most of

the light fixtures are broken. The green area in between the steps and the ground level is used as a garbage area by the users. The ground level has been under continuous maintenance.

Another factor that disturbs the use of the square is its neatness. The place is not cleaned well and garbage is seen everywhere on the square. Homeless people are other elements of the square that are noticed widely. These people make the square less secure but on the other hand give it purpose when no one is using it. There is one toilet and shower facility at one corner of the square but still, there are many people using the corner of the walls for sanitation purpose. These have made the place dangerous for the general health of the public using the square. Another significant element of the square is the line of commercial signs on the wall. These are huge commercials that are posted by government as well as private bodies. They are very significant to the physical character of the square.



Figure 57 Broken and useless light fixtures



Figure 58 Unmaintained steps of the square

4 CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 ANALYSIS

4.1.1 Historical analysis

The historical development of public spaces in the city of Addis Ababa as seen from the brief history depended on the political situation of the country at that time. The monarchical government used these spaces giving them distinct functions. The major religion at that time which was the Ethiopian Orthodox religion, guided the general culture. So, the open spaces which were known largely were the ones used for recreation by royal families and the ones used for religious ceremonies. The history shows that the change in government brought with it a change in the use of the open spaces. The communist government which ruled the country after the monarchical government used the open spaces for the display of its political ideologies. These spaces had restrictions on their uses as well. The next government which had capitalist ideas also brought different kind of usage to the public spaces. Together with the political ideas, the restrictions on the usage of urban open spaces were loosened. The historical development of *Meskel Square* also shows this pattern. It has been used for many activities through time. But, there were dominant functions in the period of each government. It represented a religious festival during the monarchical period, it represented a political idea during the communist period and currently, under the capitalist idea, it is representing

democracy. This shows that the trend of urban open spaces will be guided by the type of governance of the country in the future as well.

The amount of urban open spaces in the city has been changing through time. The number has been decreasing as new governments came in power with the ideas of developing the city. Whenever there is a large development, the number of open spaces decreased. This shows that the issue of urban open spaces does not have a place in the developments. This is implied in the master plan of the city as well. While most of the proposals in the master plan have been implemented, the urban open spaces and green areas are left out. The main reason for this is the low economy of the country. Most of the budget goes to housing projects. This shows a serious threat in the future development of urban open spaces in the city.

4.1.2 Current Trend analysis

The current trend of open spaces in the city is concerned with the multi-purpose use of the spaces. Since the open spaces are divided into local, district and city level open space, a small difference in the use of these spaces is noticed. The spaces at the local level could be divided into two. The first ones are the left over spaces among residential area. These spaces are not recognized as public spaces by the municipality. So, they wait to be sold to investors. The second ones are the designed open spaces. They are not designed in detail, but they are legally

known as open spaces by the municipality. The main problem seen in these spaces is their neatness. They are not designed properly. So, these problems limit the use of the spaces.

The district level open spaces are usually parks. They are used for weddings at occasions and mostly are used by unemployed people for the purpose of “*Chat*” chewing and the like. The location of the parks and the low maintenance has resulted in fewer people using them. The other types of district level open spaces are plazas. But there is only one plaza which is *Meskel square*.

The trend in the general urban open space in the city implies the need for attention of these spaces. If the current trend continues:-

- There will be lesser urban open spaces in the city.
- The users of these spaces will be forced to look for other types of recreation areas or recreation types.
- The city will face problems by the lack of green and open spaces.

Analysis of Meskel square

The case area, *Meskel Square*, is a multiuse space. It serves for many purposes which the other types of urban open spaces lack. The history of the space shows the same trend of multi-usage since its first use. In time it has been modified to adopt more functions. Today, the square is used for the yearly activities mentioned in chapter 3. The celebration of Meskel festival is a significant part of the square. This festival attracts more tourists to the square every year. New activities are coming to the space as well. This shows a trend for the future that the space has a potential to attract more activities. The number of people using space in their day to day activities has

also increased. The study on the square shows these activities and the major functions discussed in chapter 3 are sport activities, relaxing activities and trade activities. These activities are categorized as function 1, 2 & 3 relatively. Function 1 users are high in number and need the space very much. They come from different parts of the city to exercise. Their interviews show that they want the place for sport activities only. The other users are disturbances for them. They utilize the whole space of the square in accordance with the different sport types they practice. Function 2 users are also high in number. They don't have problem with the other users of the square. They want the activities on the square. The only conflict they have is with the unemployed people. Function 3 users need the other users. The higher the number of users on the square, the more income they gate. So, the conflict that the users in function 1 have shows a need for alternative spaces. The decrease in number of these users could alleviate this problem. The interviews collected from the three function types imply the following about the square:-

- The square is a multiuse square.
- The wide space has given freedom of use.
- The elements of the square are unique in attracting more users.
- It has a design that attracts users of different activities. But it is not designed for multiple uses.
- The square needs proper management

The above points lead to the conclusion that the square needs proper attention from the municipality as the users are increasing in number.

The above points analyze the past and current trend of *Meskel square* and show what to expect in the future. The current trends are not promising for a better future in the issue. Other than the three functions discussed above, there are occasional gatherings for concerts, football games on the big sonic screen and small trade fares on the square.

The general analysis of the square implies the following points.

- The low number in urban open space in the city has caused the congestion of *Meskel square*.
- The general attitude of the public towards the proper usage of urban open spaces is low.
- Trade is a big activity in such spaces and needs attention from the responsible authorities.
- The trend of the people in using urban open spaces depends on their economic status as well.
- The public needs to be educated on the use and function of public spaces in the city.
- The following are the functions which most of the urban open spaces lack:
 - ✚ Space for children's playground
 - ✚ Space for adult entertainment
 - ✚ Open space for variety of uses
 - ✚ Variety of services like bars and restaurants
 - ✚ Proper management of small scale traders.
 - ✚ Proper management and maintenance on the spaces

4.1.3 Planning and design

The planning and design of *Meskel Square* indicates a modern approach. The first time the square was used, it was guided by other functions. *Estifanos* church beside it needed a place to celebrate the *Meskel* festival. This led to the adaptation

of the place as public space. The landscape played an important role in the construction and later development of the square. *C.K.Polonyi* (Hungarian designer) followed the existing landscape when proposing an amphitheatre at the square and using it as the main design theme of the square. Further, there have been small modifications to the square whenever there were special occasions.

4.2 FINDINGS

In chapter one, there were three research questions put forward to be answered by this study.

- 1- How was the development of the open spaces through time?
- 2- For what purpose is the public using these urban open spaces today?
- 3- What are the benefits of these spaces to the public?

In this section, I will try to summarize the answers to the above research questions. The answers are organized in two sections. The first section explains the answers in particular relation to the case study and the second section is concerned with the general urban open space in the city. Both sections are in a numbered bulleted form with each number representing the relative question number of the objectives mentioned above.

4.2.1 Case study Findings

- 1- The development of *Meskel* Square since its beginning was dominated by a higher institution. It was not just a space of the people. But, it was a place of the dominating religion in the country. It represented a big institution in the city of

Addis Ababa. The celebration of *Meskel* Festival in this space starting from the 1960s gave it a symbolical significance for the city. The next government which was the socialist *Derg* regime used the square to reflect its political philosophies. It was designed and built in a new way following the existing landscape features. So, the square continued with its symbolic value but for a different theme. During the period of the socialist government, the square was known as Revolutionary Square and it was famous for military parades and political events. The religious identity of the square was now dominated by a new political identity. The next government was a capitalist government. So, during this period, the old name was restored to the square with more activities, with the religious festival being dominant. The Historical development of the square shows a certain trend. This trend in the usage of the square is that the identity of the country was reflected on the square. The different governments guided the use of the square according to their ideologies.

2- *Meskel* Square is currently being used for many purposes. As the Ministry of Culture and Tourism office designates, the square is a cultural square. It has political, cultural and religious purposes. With these purposes as dominant features, the square hosts many other occasional and day to day activities. The general functions of the square are:

- Political
 - ✚ Government held public gatherings
 - ✚ Gatherings during election periods
 - ✚ Gatherings during different political holidays
 - ✚ Posters with messages from the government
 - ✚ Different activities by smaller branches of the government

- Cultural
 - ✚ Starting and finishing point of different sport competitions
 - ✚ Display area of the different cultures in the country
 - ✚ Place for exhibitions of different kinds
- Religious
 - ✚ Celebration of *Meskel* Festival
- Day to day
 - ✚ Sports
 - ✚ Trade
 - ✚ Recreation
 - ✚ Public transport station
 - ✚ Public gathering to watch games on the big Sonic Screen

3- *Meskel Square* is a very important place for the inhabitant of the city. It benefits most parts of the public. It provides the following functions:

- A central place for the city
- A recreational area for the inhabitants
- A retreat area for users whose previous spaces have been taken away.
- A display space for any cultural or political exhibition
- A place to celebrate different religious, cultural and political holidays
- A breathing space in the congested area of the city.

This square, along with its uniqueness is recognized by many of its users as important elements in their day to day activity. They say that there is no other such space in the city. The feature development of the square and others like it is the desire of most of the users.

4.2.2 General Findings

- 1- The general development of open space in the city showed dependency on the different governments ruling the country. In this context, it is hard to say that there was development in urban open spaces. The original landscape of the Addis Ababa had a potential that could have created efficient open and green urban spaces. But, there was not much given to the subject. Unless it suited a political idea, much attention was not given to urban open spaces. This development pattern has a big impact on today's situation of urban open space in the city.
- 2- The urban open spaces are used by the people according to their culture. The local open spaces are used for playgrounds, religious ceremonies and sometimes public gatherings of political purposes. They are also used for special occasions like setting up areas of funeral ceremonies. The district level open spaces are used for relaxation, sport activities and trade activities. The city level open spaces are not used by the public as needed. As the main case study of this paper, I will be discussing the user trend of open spaces in the city from the perspective of *Meskel Square*.

Most people in the city use cafeterias, bars, restaurants, theatre and cinemas for recreation. All the functions which are being used by the public widely need to be paid for. There is a lack of free spaces for recreation. The open spaces in the city provide this type of places. And the lack of such kind of open spaces in the city of Addis Ababa has made the few open spaces to be over crowded with too many activities. Open spaces in the city are used as places for sitting alone, mind clearing areas, places for meeting

and enjoyment with friends. Many people use the areas for this type of function.

Another use of public spaces in the city is for sport activities. Athletics is a popular sport in the Ethiopia. There are many sport clubs and individuals practicing the sport. Public spaces, highways, mountains and other challenging areas are chosen by the athletes. The urban open spaces provide a convenient environment for sport activities as well. In these areas there is no one to bother the athletes with requisites for payment. It is always free and available to everyone. The athletics types differ according to the users. But, still many people come here to exercise.

The other main function of the square is trade. As open spaces should be places for different kinds of people, most of them needing services in the areas they spend their time. Trades of different kinds come to these spaces to fulfill the needs of the people. At some places, there are legal trades run by taxpaying citizens. But, most of them are illegal traders who are hiding from the presence of the police. But still, since they provide the needs of the users and people use their services. The types of trades differ. There are small scale trades who sale items like, fast foods, chewing gums, cigarettes and the like. There are cobblers and there are also different kinds of trades like bicycle and motor cycle renting. The trade types are common in most parts of the city and the open spaces are just seen as other parts of the city where there are more people with much need for the services.

The public spaces (squares) in this case are also used for political and religious gatherings. About 95% of the population follows religions of different types. This has led for religious activities to take a large share of the public

activity. Open spaces are also used for religious activities. Political gatherings at the squares take place during annual political holidays, election periods and demonstrations in different occasions.

Other functions are available from the open spaces. One of the significant functions is to the homeless people. There are many homeless people using the urban open spaces which are not fenced for dwelling. This function is given by the square at night time usually. But, there are homeless who sleep at these spaces even during the day time. Homeless people choose these areas since they are free and not managed. The lack of housing and the large number of homeless people in the city has also encouraged this activity. Other functions like car parking, small fares and small gatherings are also given by the open spaces.

- 3- Urban open spaces are much needed city elements in Addis Ababa. There are many users of the open spaces. People need playgrounds, exercise areas, market areas which are free to everyone and for many other functions. But, there are not that many open spaces in the city in all three levels. So, the existing open spaces are used much by the public. These open spaces have provided the people spaces with freedom of use and free areas for relaxation as well. The inhabitants of the city need more spaces where they could relax other than bars and cafeterias. Many people have child hood memories when they used to have large green areas where they spent most of their time. Now, most of these areas have become parts of a big city and are taken over by buildings and roads. With the increase in population, the decrease in urban open spaces

has become challenging for people looking for a good recreational area.

According to the users of the *Meskel square*, the diminishing of most of the urban open spaces, has led for the congestion of the available spaces. These other spaces, especially *Meskel Square*, are areas that serve different types of users. The public benefits a lot from this space. But, the trouble is the congestion and there are often conflicts between the different users of the square. The benefit of the people from the urban open spaces is not that a significant elements in the planning of the city. Even though the master plan emphasizes on the creation of quality urban open spaces, the implementation of this part has been slow. The public needs more from these open spaces so that the benefits could be higher. With the current problems in these urban open spaces, most people do not even consider it their rights to have open spaces around.

The urban open spaces also give benefit to the general structure of the city. They add to the aesthetics of the city, they are good organizing elements in urban designs and they benefit the general health of the city inhabitants.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Recommendations

As discussed in the previous chapters, *Meskel Square* is a historically significant place in Addis Ababa. It is a space that accommodates a large number of the city's residents and is a relatively good place for variety of activities. The variety of activities at the square makes it unique. This character also makes it interesting and it is also why people choose the space. Another character of the square which attracts people is its central location. People from all over the city can access it easily. The design, size and some of the elements on the square like the big sonic screen make the place unique as well. The square has also a legitimacy that is granted by its history and preserved for the character it gives to the city. The above are the reasons why the place is chosen for many activities starting from top governmental functions to individual functions.

But, there are problems on the square concerning the trends in urban open space use in the city of Addis Ababa as a whole. The problems are mainly of planning, design, management and users of the space. There could be different approaches to these problems. I will present some of my recommendations in two sections. The first section will discuss the case of *Meskel*

Square and the second section will discuss the general urban open space in the city.

5.1.1 Recommendation for Meskel Square

The management of the square is not given much attention. The square is not cleaned properly; homeless people are not taken care of, elements of the square like the steps and light fixtures are not maintained well and there is no improvement on the square since the beginning. The use of the square by different users for different activities has also caused a problem in space usage. Since the square was designed only for the purpose of an amphitheatre, it cannot allow many activities to take place harmoniously. There are illegal trades, car parking takes up space from the soccer players, bicycle riders are dangers for other users, runners want an open field with no one sitting on their track fields and many more other problems discussed in previous chapters are found on the square. Keeping the positive qualities of the square, I suggest the following approaches to solve the existing problems.

- Other urban open spaces should be designed in the city so that the congestion on *Meskel Square* with many functions could decrease.

- Proper management technique with adequate budget should be allocated for the upkeep and improvement of the square.
- Users should learn how to use the square in a responsible way.
- Modification of the square with proper background research should be done. This modification should ensure:
 - ✚ Proper space for trade
 - ✚ Proper facilities to the users of the square (facilities like toilets)
 - ✚ Appropriation of the space with Furnitures and shaded areas to accommodate users.
 - ✚ Design ideas that would incorporate environmental as well as cultural values together.

5.1.2 General Recommendation

The first problem which is of Planning and design is dealt at the government level. As discussed above, the master plan of the city has already incorporated properly planned open spaces throughout the city. The incorporation of urban open spaces at the master plan level was given thought starting from the first master plan in the late 1940s. But, the problem has been in the implementation of the master plan. Due to many problems, specifically due to the less priority given to urban open spaces, the master plan proposals were left at paper level. The practical implementation has been very little. The design of urban open spaces in the city is another issue that should be given much thought. Every design should be based on a proper research on what is needed and the user trend should be studied as well. Properly designed open spaces are not affordable by most of the users.

So, in order to solve this problem, I suggest the following steps be taken.

- 1- More research should be done on urban open spaces and their benefits in all aspects. They should be studied in relation to the public health, economy and environment. This will help in enhancing the priority level of urban open spaces and the government will give the needed attention along with the other priorities. If this is done, there could be more open spaces in the city which would be sufficient for all users. This will help reduce the conflict between the different types of users who try to use one space for different purposes.
- 2- The master plan should incorporate existing open spaces of the public. These are spaces that are not given legitimacy but are giving use for the local people. These kinds of spaces have value for the locals and the master plan can help in preserving the spaces.
- 3- There should be public participation in the preparation and revision of the master plan. This would give access to local level problems and situations around the urban open spaces at different levels.
- 4- General education should be given for the public on the issues and benefits of urban open spaces. This would help the inhabitants of the city to understand more about their environment and would help them while using these spaces.
- 5- In designing particular spaces, the background of the users in relation to open spaces should be studied. The places should also be studied and the design should be in accordance with these studies. This would ensure a design that is contextually appropriate.

The second main problem is of management of existing urban open spaces. These spaces are found at the local, district and city level. One of the problems is that the existing spaces are not given the right legitimacy for urban open spaces. So, they are in danger of being taken up for some other use. The other problem is that the ones which are given legitimacy are not managed well. They are not clean; they do not have the proper facilities and infrastructures to be used for the needed function. The needed maintenance for the spaces is not available. There are also problems caused by the users themselves. These problems are usually the miss use of the spaces and the lack of respect for the other users. I suggest that these problems could be solved by:-

- 1- Training sufficient man power to manage urban open spaces at all three levels.
- 2- Allocation of proper budget by the government for the management and maintenance of the spaces.
- 3- Education of the public to take care of urban open spaces and to use the spaces in a proper manner.

5.2 Conclusion

The issue of urban open space in urban planning and design is a contemporary issue. Urban open spaces are very important elements in a city. Their benefits have many dimensions: economic, social, political and many more. Preserving and maintaining open spaces in urban environments is considered a

crucial aspect of fulfilling environmental quality goals and attaining a livable city. (Schopfer E, Lang S and Blaschke T, 2004) A city like Addis Ababa which is an important city in the continent needs to have proper urban open spaces which enhance the quality of its city life. It needs places that boost its aesthetics. The urban open spaces in European cities which have been inspirations for this thesis paper benefit their cities in many ways. But one cannot bring these open space designs directly to Addis Ababa. We need an open space designed for the culture and context of Addis Ababa itself. To achieve this, the first step should be the understanding of the trend of open space usage in Addis Ababa. The objective of this paper has thus been to understand the past and current trends of urban open spaces in the city.

The study made in this paper covered the historical aspect of open spaces in the city. Their current situation is also discussed. The case study which was Meskel Square was used as a major study area of the paper. From this case study, the basic trends in the usage of urban open spaces in the city were understood. The overall study leads to the understanding that there is a low attitude towards the subject in general. Even though there are urban open spaces being utilized in the city, they are not given the attention they deserve. On the other side, the need for such kind of spaces by the inhabitants of the city is very high. So, there is a need for change in the way these spaces are perceived. As the only feasible urban open space in the city, Meskel square has showed most of the basic relations that a public space in Addis Ababa could have with the people living in the city. The political situation, the economy, the social status of the users and the local culture of the people are all connected to the use of urban open spaces. This paper has

studied the different functions that these spaces are being utilized for by the public. It has also established what the public needs from these kinds of spaces. I have recommended some steps in solving the problems. But, the subject needs more research and study from different angles. We need more professionals in the urban planning and design field studying urban open spaces. With this, there could be many solutions to the problems at hand.

With the above suggestion and the recommendations in the paper, we could achieve the goal of having a capital city that fulfills the standard of an international city. The city will be more beautiful, the society will be healthier and the inhabitants would have beautiful green spaces in their city where they could go to any time and enjoy fresh air. Breathing spaces all over the city would ensure the needed quality of life in the city of Addis Ababa and finally the city would live up to its name.

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