CHAPTER 4
Decline of Republican Square, Male': The Case Study
This chapter will give background information about the study area. In terms of its location, division between distinctive ranges and foundation data on how the square was transformed throughout the unique time allotment. This chapter briefly will portray an overview of history of Republican Square of Male" that examines how the square was made during a formative period and rapid change from 1800s to 2000. It will argue the transformation of Republican Square was a complex process where society shapes build environment and where changes in the built environment, in turn, influenced society (Taylor, M, 2008). It draws the Ideological, political and socio economic challenges caused changes in the distinctive public squares and urban society and how the changes, in turn, reflected in the built environment.

4.1. Republican Square, Male' City: location
Male’ is the capital city of Maldives. The city is geographically located at the southern edge of North Malé Atoll. (Fig. 15). The square forms the node in the network of places, which connect main waterfront to the inner city. Since it is the center of government and commercial activity Male become the bustling city and it supports a third of the country’s population. The entire landmass is heavily built in ad-hoc pattern and therefore it is the fourth most densely populated island in the world (The Smile of Maldives). Male’ is a historical city and was named as “King’s
Island”, it is the place “where the ancient Maldives Royal dynasties ruled and where the palace was located” (The Smile of Maldives).

Figure 15. Republican Square Location Map and Layout plan. Source Author’s construction based on Google maps.

Republican Square or JumhooreeMaidan is located on its northern side by Male’s main road BoduThakurufaamuMagu and main waterfront, this is the first impression most visitors see when arriving by speed boats because the main jetties are located here. The location has very distinguished characters, consisting commercial fringe or the downtown and Bazar area being the most happening and active area of the city. Furthermore the most important government buildings and the Islamic Centre are also located nearby with the historical Sultan Park and the National Museum is some of the other important places close to the Square.

Figure 16. Republican Square Site Context. Source: Author.
4.2. Historical Overview

Republican Square was built in 1989, and reflects the glorious side of the city’s history as it is the most emotionally and historically charged public space in Maldives (Maldives Culture). The square’s significant historic character can be portrayed by the largest flag pole in the middle of the square. The symbolism of the flag pole depicts the unity of the people and their unique identity. The Republican Square not only to give the city its largest public space but a place where people can socialize and relax, also to create an ideal location to accommodate public celebrations where the collective reality of the city is produced. Republican Square was a unique and highly valued social and cultural environment, where the cultural events and festival took place. Also it became a place where physical manifestation of democracy and political memory can be understood. However from its creation and till the date the obvious significant changes, transformation and discontinuity transformation can be seen.

![Figure 17. Republican Square, Male'. Source: Author](image)

4.3. Transformation of Republican Square and its changing roles

In the early 19th century the republic square had a strong presence it was a place where the community of Male’ can display their cultural events and identities. It was the time when the community felt great sense of community and uses the square as a mean for communication and socializing. The square was the largest public which provides extensive array of activities such as national and informal celebrations. At the time the square was crowded with local citizens even during the late evening. Since the square is surrounded by civic and state buildings, the various groups of people and workers use the space for hang out socializing and participating
in special events. The square was a space where the kids can enjoy and play, while other people tend to watch people activities and enjoying the experience of the waterfront.

4.3.1 Republican Squares as a political Space for representation

Political, social reformers and activists also shaped Republic Square in the period after 19s and particularly during the introduction of multi-party system to the country. Their reformist activities reached a peak in the beginning of 20s, after the introduction to multiparty system to the Maldives. This was the time when the square became a popular site for political demonstration and protest. As a protest site, Republican Square was a “democratic space” for public debate, protest communication and political gatherings. Consequently all these reforming activities had important implications for the city and influenced in Republican Square certain ways especially in a negative way that most of the local residents stopped using the space the way they use it before. This was the time when public the protesters tried to utilized the space for political discussions, gatherings, etc. however, the government declared a strict control in the space for such gathering and it leads to change the meaning of the square by the people of the city and their ideology towards using the space. Therefore, this rapid political and social transformation and continues variation could be a major factor that the residents of the city started to declining the square.

Figure 18. Protest gathering Republican Square, after the Coup's demonstration on Feb 7. Source: Minivan
4.3.2 The Republic Square Today!

In the case of Republican Square, the strong emphasis of the political gathering and the restriction seems to be the factor that losing its value among citizens. Another factor, which also could be a strong factor which influences the changing role of Republican Square, is the increasing of ‘control’, to avoid spontaneous gatherings of politics and protest. This control means to choreograph the space by allowing certain activities, specific groups or individuals to use the space while eliminating others (Madanipour, 2003). According to the Madanipour such kinds of legal or institutional power to control the space turn to territory which provides feelings of distinctiveness and privacy (Madanipour, 2003). Because of this strict control and political demonstrations, gradually the square became “public space” which does not welcome everyone.

Today, the city’s built environment could be seen as a machine for living which effects the changes to the public spaces as well. Therefore, the activity in and around the Republican square began to decline. Towards the end of 2008, the Republican Square is no longer recognizable and started to lose its social and cultural identity and meaning with its traditional role and it became an exclusive space for occasional tourist visits and a gathering place for foreign labours. Moreover, instead of contributing to its environment and public realm, the square has begun to decline due to the negligence of its physical settings as well there were no effort of enhancing or...
revitalizing the square. It can be observed that, the loss of collective memory occurs when there is major change in physical or social environment which cause discontinuities and urban memory loss (Halbwach, 1996).

### 4.3 Research methodology

This study made use of mixed methodology in relation to the theoretical concepts of collective memory formulated through literature review to see how sense of collective memory is important in activating underutilized public squares. The methods consist of visual documentation, user survey, and interviewing community focused group.

- **Preliminary Observation / Visual Documentation**

  Preliminary Observation and Visual Documentation enables to identify the physical character of the square, activity pattern and significant changes with comparison between two formative time periods. Photographic documentation and illustration are used to gather and analysis data’s. The user survey of the research was carried out during the course of four days, both weekdays and weekends. This survey method was use to gather information about the visitors of the space, how they perceive and experience the space and what the square mean for them. The study began with the collection of information on the physical and spatial characteristics of the Republican Square including the location of the square, and the design attributes of the space. Photographs of the inside of the square and the surrounding area were also taken and used as visual documentation.

- **User Survey**

  In order to learn about the underlying reasons of underutilizing the square, a short and informal interview with the residents of Male were carried out. The participants select randomly from different areas of the city. The User survey is used to document immediate visitor’s perception, feelings and experience in the square.

- **Interview with Community Focused Group**

  The interviews with community focused group are carried out with the 209 inhabitants from the same ward where the square locates, and consists of three different age groups, which facilitate to understand the different time sequences. The comparison between different time sequences
demonstrates the transformations of the collective memory of these inhabitants. The participants were asked 3 main open-ended questions and their sub questions that led to an in-depth analysis of inhabitant’s feelings and perceptions of the Republican Square.

Question 1- Which elements were important in the Republican Square? (Physical Aspects)
- What makes these elements important?
- What are the physical (spatial) factors that made the square important or special?

Question 2- Are there any political, social, economic or perceptual reasons that belong to you? (Socio-cultural Aspects)
- What was the reason behind why were you using / not using this place?
- Do you think that square was the place of communication of the community? Why?

Question 3- What kind of emotions did this place remind you? Why? (Psychological Aspects)
- What was the meaning of Republic Square for you in general?
- When you are experiencing the square did you feel that you are belonging to this place (Republican Square)?
- Can you draw a mind map of the Square?

4.4. Research Findings
This part has presented a discussion of the experiences of the on site visitors and participants of the focus group interview, and has identified how their experiences of Republic Square linked with the theories mentioned in the literature. Based on the interview questionnaires with the community focused group and user survey, the 26 participants who participated in the onsite user survey include 19 male and 7 female and participants who responded to the questionnaire included 124 male and 85 female (see Graph1, 2).

Most of the participants were between 20 to 40 years old. About 20% of the total was between 20 and 39 years old which mostly includes local people. In terms of frequency of the visits, most of the people visited the square weekly, especially in weekend and most of them were foreign
labors. About 12% of the total visits the square monthly basis and very less percentage of people visit the square daily.

Graph1. Number of responses based on Gender

Graph2. Number of responses based on Age

In the onsite user- survey the data gathered from 26 onsite visitors / users of the Republican Square. Approximately, 24% of the respondents were female and 76% were male. The majority of respondents of 65 % were foreign labors, of those, 18 were interviewed on the weekend and most of the foreign labours were interviewed on Fridays. The survey depicts that foreign labours use the space as mean of communication and gathering while local community seldom uses the space.

Graph3. Type of Visitors

Graph4. Frequency of Visits

The participants use / visit the square for multiple purposes. Therefore, for the question of what they do in the square, multiple responses were given by the participants. The data indicates that most of the people visit the square to socialize and approximately half of them are coming with
friends. And 23% of total are visit the square with their kids and family and all of them are local residents. Other common responses include to sit and relax and to play with kids.

Overall participants agree that the square needs to revitalize and they find openness and nature are what they most like about the square. The local residents among the survey participants, like to spend less 2 hours with complains of minimal seating and lack of amenities. However most of the foreigners tend to spend more than 4 hours at the square.
As predicted a huge percentage of people believed that the square needs to be improved and overwhelming, all of the local residents who participate in the survey want old the fountain to maintain to be part of the square. The data indicates that most of the responders felt that there should be diverse of activates that attracts people to the square. Therefore, 67% of total responders rate Average to the overall comfort with the square.

**Republican Square - Transformation of collective memory through time sequence**

Based on the preliminary observation, information obtained from inhabitants, users/visitors survey and relevant authorities, the transformation of Republican square with the changing ideology towards public spaces in Male’, can be identified in two formative period of time. The study examines how the Republican Square was made during the time sequence from 1990 to 2000 and from 2001 to till the date. It will trace the transformation of collective memory by examining the square in terms of its activity patterns, physical setting and psychological factors within the two time period. Furthermore, examining some memorable movements and the impact changing of social, political, economic ideology in urban public realm to investigate how these changes affected the inhabitants’ collective memory.

*Figure 23. Republican Square physical character and Activities during the first time period (1990-2000). Source: Author*
Impact of Physical Setting on Collective Memory

The research indicates the important elements and physical or spatial factors that the participants mentioned. According to them, the physical setting around the square was largely influenced by the civic building, the sea front, and location between 2 major roads which provides a connection space to the many public buildings and the parking spaces. Due to this, the square was a very happening place during the first time period. Furthermore, it is obvious that the participants only experience these places not only individually, but as a group or collectively which the quality of such places/features will lead to a clear understanding of the space. The graph 4 indicate the physical spatial factors which respondents find is most important and how many time they mentioned about these factors. From the memories of respondents, the National Flag as the most important element that made the square more important and memorable (see Graph 3). They strongly believe that the national flag is a symbol of unity, freedom and identity, has continued to symbolize the binding force of the community, even though some respondents declined the square long time ago.
The participants did not trace much changes of the physical setting of the square during these two time periods, because the places they mentioned the elements they have identified are still functioning as the way they were before. However some respondents find that the square has lost its pedestrian aspects of two access roads due to the expansion of main jetty within the bazar area. It became evident that even this minor transformation of the square effects to the collective memory of inhabitant which in turn alters their perception of the space.

Impact of Socio Cultural Activities
The participants of the focus group agreed that the square was largely influenced by cultural activities, special day celebration and commemorative events during the first period. Majority of respondents find the “Square was a place for Socio-cultural activities” and therefore, it acts as a platform or meeting place and common ground for community interaction for all the inhabitants. Furthermore, most of the participants find the square was a meaningful place during the first time frame, where they memorize their special gatherings and performed ceremonial celebrations. However, almost all the participant agreed that socio-cultural environment of the square has started to change after 2005 with the beginning of the political activities in the country which leads to disappear the socio cultural activities they used to participate and experience.

It is clear that data indicates that 46% of participant have involved in political gathering, protest and demonstrating which recently happened in the square. About 11% of total responds recalled the socio-cultural activities that they participate and happened to experience in the square long
time ago. For this reason, large percentage of people find, and the square’s function as a community meeting place has not been recognized in the second time period. Therefore, most of the participant’s agreed that they don’t have any interest to use or visit and spend their time there as they were previously did and some did not certain about whether they liked or not.

Impact Psychological factors

During the first time period the square’s functional and social role had a great influence on shaping people’s behavior and their life style. The participants emphasize the square as a mean of interaction, mediation, symbolic identity and the place gives different feeling which they just like to be there. Some older respondents find that it was the space where they normally hangout after the work or may be late afternoon. They remember it as a feeling of togetherness, which is unfortunately not felt now. According to the memories of participants, it is astonishing that almost 55% of people are not sure about the emotions which are attached to them when reminding the square.
According to them the square has lost its meaning and declined during the second time period. Some participants mentioned the strict control over the square by the government due to the political demonstrations has led to the deterioration with the lack of activities and maintenance. Therefore, they find that the interaction between certain elements and activities they were attached before started to distract and people gradually started to find alternatives as a replacement. However some respondents still memorize their happy moments they have experienced in the square collectively as well individually. In the perceptions of the participants, overall respondents experience negative feeling about the square and they don’t feel that they belong the place anymore, although they use or visit the square occasionally. For this reason although most of the participants are able to draw mind map of the square, however some of them did not identified some important elements and could not portray a clear picture of the square.

Graph 17. Frequency of mention graph for Emotions and Experience in the Square

Graph 18. Frequency of mention graph for Sense of Belonging