Neoliberal Urbanization in the case of Istanbul: Spatial Manifestations and ways of contesting it

Onur Ekmekci

Advisors: Dr. Catharina Gabrielsson
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Preface:

The Recent protests that took place in various parts of the world, under the banner ‘Occupy Movement’, were arguably successful in terms of bringing attention to the major social, economic problems that the majority of people are facing all around the world. Perhaps following a similar fashion of the global protests that took place in Seattle, London, Genoa in 1990s, along with the globally spread anti-Iraq War demonstrations in 2003, the Occupy movement was essential to show that capitalism and neoliberal policies are under serious criticism, and their validity is being questioned. This process will perhaps not, as many argue, bring down capitalism, but it is crucial in a way to show the shortcomings and falsehood of the current system.

On the other hand, it is almost incomprehensible to think of cities and how they operate independently from the economic structure and governing policies. In that regard, along with the unprecedented levels of urbanization taking place, there is a growing inequality beginning to surround the cities, where a slogan like ‘right to the city’ becomes important than ever. As a direct result of the last three decades’ neoliberal policies, major cities all around the world are in a constant competition with each other to attract more investment, events, and ‘creative class’ to put themselves in the global cities map. Thus, in this context, cities function as a playground of neoliberalism, in which profit based policies start to dominate how the urban environment is shaped. The City then loses its availability to everyone, and becomes an elitist enclave, where there is a clear definition in regards to ‘us’ and ‘them’, or ‘the winners’ and ‘the losers’. As a direct result of the dominance of the neoliberal policies, the city also becomes increasingly de-politicized and spaces that enhance conflicts, contrasts, and politics disappear for the sake of a consensus society, which is in many ways an enemy to the real democratic system.

I see the constant questioning of viability of capitalism in the face of recent and expected financial crises (as well as riots taking place in various places), as a sign of an urgent need for evaluating the neoliberal city and how it operates.

Istanbul is, in many ways, a perfect example on displaying the neoliberal and post-political tendencies within it. From government driven, top down, controversial, gigantic infrastructural projects, to incredible numbers of shopping malls standing side by side, to the so-called social housing projects (which in many cases destroys historical, poor neighborhoods to open up space for private real estate developments), as
well as the presence of a strong tabula rasa approach rooted in municipal projects, Istanbul embodies the issues of what a neoliberal city is all about in the most extreme ways possible. As part of this thesis, the intent here is to strive to establish a comprehensive view by looking at some of the spatial implications in Istanbul.

The research questions guiding this thesis are:
– In what way do the current governance and on-going transformations of Istanbul comply with a conceptualization of “neoliberal urbanisation”?

– How do the spatial manifestations of this mode inform an understanding of neoliberal urbanisation as an abstract (generic) yet concrete ("actually existing … path-dependant, embedded etc.") phenomena?

- What are the main conflicts and problems in this process / and what are the strategies for contesting the dominance of neoliberal urbanisation in Istanbul?
Acknowledgments

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Lastly, my parents, Cengiz and Nurdan Ekmekci, deserve the biggest gratitude for this work. Their selfless, unconditional sacrifices and efforts throughout the years made this thesis a reality. I dedicate this work to them.
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Istanbul: A brief introduction to the historically ‘Wordly’ City

A recent New York Times article indicated that Istanbul, “which went from a cosmopolitan wonderland in the 19th century to, in the Nobel-winning novelist Orhan Pamuk’s words, a ‘pale, poor, second-class imitation of a Western city’ for much of the 20th, is having its moment of rebirth.”¹ Indeed, the city has been getting a lot of attention since the beginning of the 21st century, and this interest is often expressed not only in the articles of prestigious media organizations like NYT, but also through the amount of Foreign Direct Investment flowing into the city, as well as through an increasing number of high profile events that the city hosts every year. According to a survey done by Ernst&Young, Istanbul ranks as the 4th among top 10 Emerging European Cities.² The city’s rising position has recently been reinforced and increased by the 2010 European Cultural Capital title it received, which reflected its European identity.³

Considering the city has had its moments numerous times in its long past, the recent resurgence of the city should not come as a big surprise. Istanbul, as the 3rd largest metropolitan area in Europe after London and Moscow has, for the period of more than thousands of years, been one of the most prominent cities in the world. Even the name, Istanbul, based on the old Greek term, Is-tan-poli, which means ‘towards city’, symbolizes in a way the strong inherent urban qualities coming from the city’s past. The city has been the imperial capital to two great empires, Byzantine and Ottoman, for 1500 years, which gives the city its unique complexity of its historical, cultural and geographical layers.

² Ernst & Young, Reinventing European Growth: 2009 European Attractiveness Survey
During this period, the city had a quintessential regional, and global role, and has been an economic, political, cultural center at the crossroads of civilizations. However, the city’s role diminished in the beginning of the 20th century with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, which declared Ankara as its new capital. As a result of this, Istanbul lost its networks of commercial relations and thus its standing as an important port city and a vibrant center. This stagnation period lasted up until 1980s, when the city began to regain its regional role, and the last ten years generated opportunities that supported the city’s determined attempt to categorize itself as a “Global City.”

Described by many as a ‘in between’ global city, different dichotomies, such as ‘East vs. West’, ‘Europe vs. Asia’, ‘Christian vs. Muslim’, ‘Modern vs. Ancient,’ operate constantly and influence the city’s eclectic identity, and its global position. Sibel Bozdogan mentions that the city ‘resists any easy categorization into typological abstractions like European city, Islamic City, Mediterranean city or global city’. The difficulty of labeling the city shows itself in regards to its

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1. I. Toronto, “Istanbul: City of Islands”, University College of London, Development Planning Unit, Field Report 2009-2010
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2010 European Capital of Culture nomination, which on the one hand ‘acknowledges the city as a part of the European cultural heritage, but at same time questions the Europeanness of Turkey in overall’⁸. Perhaps, the kind of ‘identity crisis’ attached to Istanbul has to do with the inability of the “Euro-American centric dominant theorizations of global city regions”, used to analyze the emerging multiple forms of metropolitan modernities, like Istanbul. ⁹ It also makes it difficult to propose clear-cut urban solutions for a variety of uniquely contextualized problems the city is facing.

On the other hand, these different layers mixed with a strong history behind, puts the city in a particular position. The city’s economic influence, especially in the fields of finance, gold markets, fashion, construction, and real estate, goes beyond the confines of a national territory, and expands towards Balkans, North Africa, Central Asia, and to other rings of regional and geographic proximities all around the world. Furthermore, Istanbul’s economic activities, perhaps thanks to its

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empire past, are in that regard ‘rooted geographically and historically’. Sassen describes this unique quality Istanbul has as the city ‘reaching across the East-West and the North South axes of the world, and all their variants.’ She goes on to say that

out of these histories of intersections comes the need to develop specific capabilities for handling and enhancing network functions; it is not simply a question of location at intersections. It seems to me that developing such capabilities across diverse histories and geographies is a particularity of Istanbul’s deep history.

At the same time, it would be a misleading move to use the “Global City” discourse, in Sassen’s words, since the term has its own inherent limitations when it comes to explaining the dynamics of cities from the developing world, like Istanbul. Perhaps, the idea of “worlding” city, coined by Ananya Roy, can be a better term for theorizing the circumstances Istanbul has. Roy describes “worlding city” as a:

“milieu of intervention, a source of ambitious visions, and of speculative experiments that have different possibilities of success and failure. We hold that such experiments cannot be conceptually reduced to instantiations of universal logics of capitalism or post colonialism. They must be understood as worlding practices, those that pursue world recognition in the midst of inter-city rivalry and globalized contingency. We therefore focus on the urban as a milieu that is in constant formation, one shaped by the multitudinous ongoing activities that by wedding dream and technique, form the art of being global. Inherently unstable, inevitably subject to intense contestation, and always incomplete, worlding is the art of being global.”

10 Sarkis, Hasim, “It’s Istanbul (Not Globalization)”, The Living in the Endless City, Phaidon, 2011
11 Illustration by the author
12 Sassen, Saskia, “The immutable intersection of vast mobilities”, The Living in the Endless City, Phaidon, 2010
The last sentence especially constitutes an interesting allegory of Istanbul. Whether Istanbul should be labeled as a “working” or a “global city” is perhaps not the essential point here. The undeniable truth is that the globalization process has generated highly problematic and uneven socio-spatial dynamics within the city. The foremost problem Istanbul is facing right now is the ‘dual nature’ which the city is increasingly obtaining; a conflict is always present between ‘the spaces that are generated and part of the global dynamics’, and ‘the spaces that are not, but partly influenced by the global dynamics’\textsuperscript{14}. According to Caglar Keyder, the first one is becoming much more influential and occupying more and more space, which poses a serious threat to the city’s future. While the position the city is enjoying in the global arena, undoubtedly makes Istanbul a more attractive place to visit, and experience, for an outsider, same cannot be said about the majority of residents of Istanbul whose rights to their city is being challenged by the numerous top-down planning decisions implemented in the city continuously by the Istanbul Municipality and the national government. This brings up a crucial question; at what cost has the city become a major attraction point? Neoliberal policies of the last 20 years, which stands out as the major component of the globalization process Istanbul had, has created an environment where the informal public realm, which is ‘crucial for survival in the over-crowded, under resourced crossroads city’, is being eliminated or weakened tremendously.\textsuperscript{15} In that regard, there is a need for further research to understand the dynamics of Neoliberal Urbanism in the city. The following chapters will attempt to analyze some of the spatial effects of the Neoliberal urbanization process in Istanbul, as well as try to put a light on how the city residents are campaigning against it.

\textsuperscript{14} Keyder, Caglar, “Kuresellesen Istanbulda Ekonomi”, “Kuresellesen Istanbulda Ekonomi”, Osmanli Bankasi, 2010

\textsuperscript{15} Sennett, Richard, “Istanbul within a Europe of Cities”, The Living in the Endless City, Phaidon, 2011
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Neoliberal Urbanism: Overview

Neoliberalism:

Economic and social consequences of the collapse of Lehman Brothers and AIG in 2008 and the following financial crisis, which is considered by many as the worst the world has ever seen since the Great Depression, is manifold. Aside from the highly tangible outcomes of the crisis (such as the collapse of leading economies and giant corporations, the increase in redundancy and unemployment rates, and a growing income disparity), the most intriguing result of the ongoing economic turmoil is that many in the society now challenge or question the reign of neoliberal capitalist structure, an entity that has been taken as granted and undisputable. On a spatial level, the damages and destruction that the last three decades of ruthless neoliberal policies bought upon the cities can be seen over growing socio-spatial polarizations taking place in different scales, and various formats. Before getting into the Neoliberalism’s effects on the cities, it is conceivably imperative to briefly define what Neoliberalism is all about.

Neoliberalism, in a nutshell, can be described as economic liberalism, reinitiated in the late 1970s and early 1980s under the governments of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Deng Xiaoping. It was initiated as a response to the ‘internal crisis of Fordism’16 and Keynesianism, to promote ‘supply-side policies to revive capitalism’.17 As Neoliberalism became the dominant trajectory, it began to manifest itself first through implementing authoritarian market reforms primarily in Latin America, later in 1976 New York fiscal crisis, as well as through using ‘shock therapy’18 methods in former Soviet Union and Easter Europe countries

17 Harvey, David, A brief history of Neoliberalism, Kindle Version, accessed at amazon.com in January 10th, 2012
18 Shock therapy refers to the sudden release of price and currency controls, withdrawal of state subsidies, and immediate trade liberalization within a country, usually also including large scale privatization of previously public owned assets. It was coined by the economist Milton Friedman and which later became absorbed into the group of ideas that formed neoliberalism
after the dissolution of state socialism in 1989. Thus, one can see that the introduction of neoliberal policies also brought down the already weakened welfare states and the Keynesian policies, that were pretty much the direct outcome of Post-war era policies in Europe (and to a much less extent in the US). Thus, egalitarian values that were embedded in welfare policies earlier on started to crumble with the introduction of neoliberal policies.

In a sense, this supports the notion of David Harvey, in which he states that “main achievements of neoliberalism have been redistributive rather than generative.” Indeed, economic and social power shifts disproportionately to upper classes within the reign of neoliberal policies. According to Mike Davis among many, this ever increasing social inequality “is the very engine of the contemporary economy,” and not just an “advertent consequence.” The social and economic disparities form the necessary infrastructure required for a neoliberal city.

As the welfare state disappeared, what followed was a strong emphasis on the efficiency of private enterprise, free trade, the importance of ‘the global market place’, and the role of the private sector, rather than states, in establishing the political and economic agenda of the world. Privatization of state enterprises and public services, deregulations of financial institutions, and liberalization of capital accounts, among others, form the core of neoliberal understanding. Moreover, neoliberalism is based on following the two major ideals of the 18th century liberalism by John Locke and Adam Smith: “that the free and democratic exercise of individual self-interest led to the optimal collective social good; and the market knows best: that is, private property is the foundation of this self-interest, and free market exchange is its ideal vehicle.”

As it is mentioned earlier, one can fairly make the equation that ultimate market rule became synonymous with neoliberalism. The strong

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20 Davis, Mike and Monk, Bertrand
emphasis on market rule comes hand in hand with certain strategies according to Jamie Peck. 

Firstly, neoliberalization is usually strongly associated with targeted attacks on planning, the social state, and social collectivities. This often comes with the commercial exploitation of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, and lead to the loss of social function of cities, as well as, deepening social and economic inequalities.

In a very similar fashion, Harvey describes Neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.“ Indeed, as it is also apparent in Locke and Smith’s ideals, ‘freedom’ stands out as one of the presupposed backbones of neoliberal regime, while application of this term in individual and collective levels differ drastically. In fact, Atlas Shrugged-esque, destructive freedom on personal level, anticipates ‘a programme of the methodical destruction of collectives’, says Pierre Bourdie, in a dystopian locution(collectives in this context refers to nation state, work groups, union associations, cooperative, and even family to certain extent) . Minimizing the leverage of ‘collectives’ in this case also has very much to do with neoliberalism’s ability to ‘hijack and integrate oppositional and rebellious claims and repertoires into its regime’. Contrary to the establishment of Neoliberalization in countries like Argentina and Chile in 1970s, in a ‘swift, brutal, and sure’ way by the military coup, Neoliberalization processes after 1979 had to be accomplished by using democratic means, by creating ‘the construction of consent’.

Thus, one can say that magnitude of establishing neoliberal urbanizations evolved through time and showed major contrast between different contexts. Regardless, strengthening of the “right arm” state functions, such as discipline, control and surveillance, find an increasing

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26 Harvey, David, A brief history of Neoliberalism, Kindle Version, accessed at amazon.com in January 10th, 2012
usage under the neoliberal dogma. Despite the rise of police and military violence, one could also notice an increase in insecurity, mainly due to the direct result of the spatial segregation and social inequality caused by the whole system.

Capital centric rule stands out as one of the linked aspects as well. As it is mentioned earlier, market distribution, rather than social redistribution, dominates the neoliberalization dogma, and this in return results in rising socio spatial inequality. Thus, one can see the following patterns as part of the neoliberal procedure:

- Exclusions caused by zoning, real estate values, and privatization
- Increasing privatization of public spaces
- Public interaction based on the model of commodity and capital flows
- Increase in the value of the urban land/commodification of land/exchange value of land becoming more important than its use value
- Implementation of urban policies in favor of global capitalism
- Many states functions transforming into non-state/quasi state bodies
- Priority to growth at the expense of all other values
- The absence of democracy and social participation in decision making processes that are in the public interest. (A post-political condition)
- The dramatic increase in forced evictions
- The criminalization of social movements

Neoliberalization of Cities

“...The central place of cities in Fordist-Keynesian systems of production and reproduction defines them as key arenas (if not ‘targets’) for neoliberal rollback strategies, but their strategic significance as loci for innovation and growth, and as zones of devolved governance and local institutional experimentation, likewise positions cities in the forefront of the neoliberal roll out.”

Cities indeed play a key role in neoliberal restructuring, as they were often “starting points and fields of experimentation for neoliberal restructuring and the corresponding image production.”

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27 Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Thodore “Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the rule of Markets, July 2005
28 Kohler, Betina and Wissen, Markus, “Glocalizing Protest: Urban Conflicts and Global Social Movements”, The Urban Sociology Reader, Routledge 2011
neoliberal urban revolution is often presented as a necessity rather than a choice: in a world of limited investment and limited amounts of ‘creative people’, cities have to do whatever is within their reach to attract a fair share of investment, high tech industries and a well-educated workforce,” says Guy Baeten. In this context, cities have become “increasingly important geographical targets and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments.” As part of the neoliberal agenda, one can see the place marketing, enterprise and empowerment zones, local tax abatements, urban development corporations, public private partnerships, new forms of local boosterism, workfare policies, property redevelopment policies, business incubator projects, new strategies of social control, policing and surveillance and host of other institutional modifications constantly getting materialized in cities, as part of the neoliberal regime. Going back to, Jamie Peck, he points to several major characteristics that constitute the core of Neoliberal Urbanism. These are categorized under the headlines “Growth first”, “Financialization”, “Urban Spectacle and events”, “Entrepreneurial Governance”, “Privatism”, “Market Distributivism”, “Roll Backs”, and “Revanchism”.

First character is “Growth first”, which indicates an aggressive pursuit of opportunities for growth and investment. Since it is believed that cities’ only way of survival is to compete with each other to attract global companies, and investors, growth, in financial and geographical terms, can be described as the key word. In that regard, Financialization of the city becomes crucial factor in establishing a system based on market speculation and debt financed development (which is in many ways the main responsible force that led to the bubble economy that caused the latest crisis in the city) for pro-business environment. Another strategy for making cities ‘competitive’ is the constant bidding by city governments for “signature events” (Olympics, conferences, cultural events, as well as landmark architecture, such Guggenheim Bilbao).

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29 Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Thodore “Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the rule of Markets, July 2005
30 Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Thodore “Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the rule of Markets, July 2005
As the city becomes the ground for business and commerce as part of the neoliberalization process, one can see the growing influence of “market distributivism”. This condition is followed by a strong neglect towards social housing, and a growing interest in market-led housing, as well as for branding techniques coupled with landmark architecture. In this context, consumerism is one of the determinant forces in shaping the urban environment. Shopping malls become the new ‘public spaces’, where the idea of having leisure time, or fun, become tangled with strong monetary terms. Meanwhile, the public spaces in more traditional understanding (streets, squares) get purified from any of their political qualities, mostly through privatization.

In the process of radically economizing and de-politicizing the social space, public expression or outcry automatically becomes restricted to the levels where it can be considered non-existent in the new post-political setting. This condition for the most part is also reinforced by the fact that governance in the city morphed to a much more technocrat and entrepreneurial nature, rather than a representative, social and political form.

Within the Entrepreneurial governance, public sector governs cities in a more businesslike manner, in which institutions of local governance operate like the private sector or are replaced by private-sector-based systems.\footnote{Swyngedouw, Erik, Moulaert, Frank and Rodriguez, Arantxa, “Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large-scale Urban Development Projects and the New Urban Policy”, Antipode, Blackwell Publishing, 2002} In this scheme, roll backs of public sectors, and socially oriented institutions play a fundamental role. The shift towards the quasi-private and highly autonomous organizations, results in the “fragmentation of agencies and the multiplicity of institutions, both formal and informal, are often portrayed as positive signs, suggesting enabling institutional thickness, a considerable degree of local embeddedness, and significant social capacity-building.” \footnote{Swyngedouw, Erik, Moulaert, Frank and Rodriguez, Arantxa, “Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large-scale Urban Development Projects and the New Urban Policy”, Antipode, Blackwell Publishing, 2002} In a fascinating way, these new fragmented and entrepreneurial regulatory configurations are perceived in a more positive way, since they
supposedly provide ‘a better and more transparent articulation between
government and civil society.’

On the other hand, since the control over the housing projects is left to
free market policies, and the private developers for the most part,
shortage of affordable social housing stands out as a threatening issue as
well. Deprived neighborhoods around central locations are replaced
with condos that would attract the ‘creative class’, and the poor is kicked
out to the peripheries of the city, where they can’t pose any serious
threat to the functioning of the economic machinery of neoliberal
governance. In this context, the deprived neighborhood is then an
experimental space and a platform to introduce the neoliberal
revanchist urban policies, where radical urban renewal projects
decreasing the social benefits for the poor can be implemented for
almost no cost, thus establishing a ‘large scale displacement of the
unwanted from the wanted places in the city.’

In that sense, one can also talk about a certain ‘tabula rasa’ approach embedded in the
neoliberal urban policies, in which urban spaces or buildings with certain
historical or sentimental values for public can very well be regarded as
entities that are easily replaceable, and disregard them without a real
consideration for urban legacy.

**Adaptive and Contradictory essence of Neoliberal Urbanism**

Neoliberalism, by many, is considered as an open ended process, thus it
is hard to put a well-defined description on it, due to its highly adaptive
nature, but its character is underlined as a set of intersection strategies of
restructuring, rather than a stable regime. Moreover, it is challenging to
think about Neoliberalism, because ‘we think within it.’ The
ideological traces of neoliberalism are most likely to be embedded in our
way of thinking.

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34 Swyngedouw, Erik, Moulaert, Frank and Rodriguez, Arantxa, “Neoliberal
Urbanization in Europe: Large-scale Urban Development Projects and the New
35 Baeten, Guy, “The Uses of Deprivation in the Neoliberal City”, *Urban Politics Now:
Re-imaging Democracy in the Neoliberal City*, NAI Publishers
36 Brenner, Neil, Peck, Jamie, and Theodore, Nik, *Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and
the rule of Markets*
37 Jamie Peck, “Austerity Urbanism” Lecture, Stockholm University, January 28th,
2012
There is also a very clear contrast between how Neoliberalism is ideally supposed to work in theoretical level, and how it in fact takes from in everyday life. The notion of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, is helpful in a way to show that neoliberal restructuring strategies never come in a pure form, and completely replace a former paradigm. Instead, they interact with the already pre-existing spaces, and institutional configurations and constellations of sociopolitical power, by sometimes taking an adaptive, highly complex, or contradictory manners. While Neoliberalism’s main goal is determined to be the creation of a utopia of free markets, without any form of state interference, “it has in practice entailed a dramatic intensification of coercive, disciplinary forms of state intervention in order to impose versions of market rule and subsequently, to manage the consequences and contradictions of such marketization initiatives.”

This complex nature of neoliberalism manifests itself in its historical evolution as well. As inequalities, socio-spatial polarization, and wealth became unevenly distributed, neoliberalism may be said to have gone through a confrontation with its own contradictions and consequences, especially starting with the early 1990s. In this context, Neoliberalism’s primary mission or target ‘was no longer to overcome the Fordist class compromise, but to manage its self-made disasters by methods such as the aggressive de-regulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of the 1980s.’

During this confrontation with its own contradictions, major shifts and transformations within the neoliberal strategies have occurred along the way. Jamie Peck calls these shifts as part of the ‘Permanent revolution in Neoliberal Practice,” in which Neoliberalism had the tendency to change:

- from privatization to public-private partnership
- from structural adjustment to good governance
- from “no such thing as society” to big society
- from dogmatic deregulation to light touch regulation

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8 Brenner, Neil, Peck, Jamie, and Theodore, Nik, Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the rule of Markets
10 Kohler, Betina and Wissen, Markus, “Glocalizing Protest: Urban Conflicts and Global Social Movements”, The Urban Sociology Reader, Routledge 2011
-from greed is good to markets with morals
- from welfare retrenchment to active social policy
- from budget cuts to management by audit
- crises as crucibles of reconstruction (New Orleans, systematic crisis of Keynesianism, conjectural crises of neoliberalism)
- From systematic policy failures to “fail forward”

One needs to emphasize the fact that these politico-ideological shifts “have emerged along a strongly path-dependent evolutionary trajectory, in which we can expect the stakes, sites, structures and subjects of contemporary neo-liberalization to be meaningfully different in, for example, Berlin, Johannesburg, Seoul, and Chicago. These localized neo-liberalization processes have each been rooted in distinctive crises of, and reactions to, their respective extant institutional orders, and they each signify unique conjectural trajectories.”

Istanbul as a Neoliberalized City?

Following the introduction of free market economy and neoliberal political economic context in Turkey in 1980s, Istanbul was given the role for being the ultimate center for ‘the articulation of national economy with global markets’, due to its unique geographical and historical location on the continental transportation routes. Fast and intense applications of Neoliberal policies, especially since 2000s, put the city within the context of the ‘global city’ discourse, and raised the quintessential question of “How to sell Istanbul?”, posed by Caglar Keyder. In the next chapter, main emphasis would be to illustrate an overview of the neoliberalization processes and how they attested themselves in the context of Istanbul.

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Neoliberal Urbanization in Istanbul:

The first chapter mainly focused on giving an overview of the Neoliberal discourse and how it is accentuated through spatial and urban manifestations in cities. Within this chapter, the intention is to apply the major aspects of Neoliberalism mentioned earlier on Istanbul and to show some of the spatial workings of Neoliberal Urbanization. Due to the limited scope of this project, it is by no means to claim that this work would encompass the full spectrum of the overly complicated, varied and complex nature of neoliberal urbanism processes in Istanbul. Instead, it is important to emphasize that the goal here is to establish a narrative of the emerging spaces of neoliberalism in Istanbul through some carefully selected socio spatial traits and unique themes.

Rise of Neoliberalism in 1980s

Foundation of the Turkish Republic goes back to 1923. From the 1920s up until 1950s, Turkey experienced an economy based mostly on a doctrine called etatism, which in many ways meant the government had the ultimate control over both economic and social policies, which meant a huge involvement of the state in industrial developments, but also led to formation of an isolated economy from the rest of the world. This structure has been challenged in different periods, especially in 1950s, under the strong government of Adnan Menderes, who promised to work towards the goal of making the country a ‘little America’, politically and economically, as him and other party members of the Democrat Party, saw themselves as ‘embodying the attributes of their imagined West, namely its superior weight in strategic, ideational and moral terms.’ Menderes period can in fact be seen as the first time in which capitalism started to be institutionalized in Turkey.

After the highly detrimental financial crisis, coupled with an increasing political unrest in the late 1970s, 1980s started with a military coup d'état,

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43 Abou-El-Fadl, Reem, *Turkey’s Accession to NATO: Building a ‘Little America’*, accessed at http://www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Paper%20RA.pdf
which sent all the major political figures to prisons. Political, economic, and social consequences of this anti-democratic move are not the subject of this thesis, but must be mentioned that the coup had long lasting effects and they stand out as a contentious topics for debate even today. In terms of its influence on Turkey and Istanbul’s introduction to neoliberal policies, one can make the assumption that it paved the way for the rule of Motherland Party (ANAP) from 1983 till 1991. But even before ANAP, introduction to neoliberal policies had already begun by Turgut Ozal and his profoundly center-right nationalist part. The austerity measures of 24 January 1981, taken by the technocrat government formed by the military, attempted to apply policies that provided structural changes to banking and the stock exchange, in taxation and the introduction of trade zones, in a push toward the convertibility of the Turkish Lira, in the privatization of public-sector enterprises, and in new regulations concerning local administrations. With the commencement of ANAP government in 1983, neoliberal policies were put into play that brought restrictions on the role government can play in the government, as well as favored private capital and enterprise, and thus Turkey left ‘a closed economic model based on heavy state intervention for an outward looking, market oriented development strategy’ in the early 1980s. The Turkish economy was transformed into a free-market one, with cutting down the public expenses, along with privatization of public institutions. In terms of economic growth, Turkey was only second to Japan in world rankings in the late 1980s. In the ANAP reign, Istanbul gained its importance once again. During the first years of the Republic in 1920s, Ankara was selected to be the capital, and almost all the governmental institutions had moved here from the old capital Istanbul. Thus, perhaps mostly due to the young Republic’s founders’ desire to distance themselves from the empire past and Islamic values, Istanbul (as the symbol of the Ottoman Empire in many ways) was for many decades purposely neglected. (Keyder 2009) Istanbul started to be seen as the major gateway to the world for Turkey. Along with ANAP ruling the country, Istanbul’s mayoral position also went to an ANAP candidate, Bedrettin Dalan. Thus, most of the 80s saw the same party ruling both the country and

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44 Kaptan, Huseyin and Enlil, Zeynep Meray, Istanbul: Global Aspirations and Socio-Spatial Restructuring in an era of New Internalism
45 Bugra, Ayse, and Adar, Sinem, ‘Social Policy Change in Countries without mature Welfare States: The Case of Turkey’, New Perspectives on Turkey, n.38, Spring 2008
Istanbul, thus benefiting the city in terms of the abundant financial resources despite the austerity measures and general decline in state subsidies. The results were megaprojects like second bridge over Bosphorus, Trans European Motorway, enlargement of Atatürk International Airport, etc. The overall goal of the Neoliberal polices was to transform the city into a ‘Global city’, and use it as a “test case for successful integration into the emerging world of global markets.”

Towards an Entrepreneurial Governance

During this period, major radical financial and administrative changes were introduced to Istanbul’s metropolitan governance. The 1984 law, which brought a two-tier system consisting of greater metropolitan municipality and the district municipalities, introduced new financial resources for the local governments, as well as brought different agencies (such as master plan bureau, or water supply authority) that were previously part of the central government, under the control of the mayor. The Mayor, Bedrettin Dalan back then, became a more powerful politician and this change led to the ‘emergence of an entrepreneurial local government acting as a market facilitator.”

Along with this redefinition of the mayoral power, many of the municipality services were also privatized during the same period. Major manifestations of the mayor’s power were the implementation of urban renewal projects, especially the ones around historic districts of Tarlabasi, and Halic (Goldenhorn). Thanks to the “Law 5366, LAW for the Protection of Deteriorated Historic and Cultural Heritage through Renewal and Re-use”, the local authorities gained power to implement renewal projects for several blocks without the consent of the property owners in the dilapidated areas in historic neighborhoods. What happened in Tarlabasi and other neighborhoods in 1980s can be compared to what happened in Bronx of New York in 1950s by Robert Moses; a similar Hausmannian fashion, with the same Tabula rasa approach towards the existing fabric formed the basis for the urban renewal projects in Istanbul’s of 80s.

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* Kaptan, Huseyin and Emil, Zeynep Merey, Istanbul: Global Aspirations and Socio-Spatial Restructuring in an era of New Internalism
* Keyder. Caglar, “Istanbul into the Twentieth Century”
* Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and KOLLUOGLU, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
Rise of AKP

When the financially chaotic 1990s came to an end, Turkey got a new, single party government in the 2003 elections, which has governed the country since then. AKP (Justice and Development Party), a centre-right, conservative party (by many described as Islamist) led by a populist and charismatic R. Tayyip Erdogan (who was the mayor of Istanbul for 8 years prior to become the prime minister), has refueled the globalization and neoliberal efforts started in 1980s in a much bigger scale this time. AKP government, by abandoning traditional populism, “started looking for new ways to market the city; their adoption of the neo-liberal discourse found a perfect fit in projects preparing the city for showcase on the global stage.” (Keyder) Accordingly, the new municipality laws of 2004 and 2005, made the mayor even more powerful, established the model of ‘powerful mayor and weak council’, especially in regards to macro-level decisions concerning the entire city.51 With these recent

51 Images were taken from Istanbul Municipality’s “Strategic Plan 2010-2014” document
laws, some of the new elements of power the Mayor had acquired have been: 52

1) broadening the physical space under the control and jurisdiction of the greater municipality

2) increasing its power and authority in development (imar), control and coordination of district municipalities

3) making it easier for greater municipalities to establish, and /or create partnerships and collaborate with private companies

4) defining new responsibilities of the municipality in dealing with “natural disasters”;

5) outlining the first legal framework for “urban transformation”, by giving municipalities the authority to designate, plan and implement “urban transformation” areas and projects.

Thus, one can argue that typologies resulted from Neoliberalisation was apparent here and there in 80s, as well as 90s, but it wasn’t widespread as it is now. This sentiment is shared by Asu Aksoy, who indicates that:

“in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the global vision achieved partial and piecemeal results. This earlier phase was distinguished by real estate developments (shopping centres, residential complexes and commercial headquarters), which did not touch most of the city, nor did they have a large impact on the daily lives of its citizens. Instead, they remained sequestered projects of the city’s globalising elite, driven mainly by the Turkish-origin conglomerate capital. Istanbul thus entered the new millennium as a dual city.”

She goes on to say that the current form of the city is much different now, and one can feel the urban change taking place all over the city: “Now every part of the city is exposed to radical change as more and more land is pulled into the market sphere, catapulting the whole of Istanbul into an irreversible process of large-scale urban development. It is an overwhelming and all-encompassing transformation owing to the alliance of national and local political will as well as economic interests, but it is also happening because of the scale and scope with which global capital has entered the city.” 53


A gradual shift from an Industrial City to a Service oriented City

By making the governing bodies of Istanbul more ‘entrepreneurial’ in structure, which is arguably one of the core characteristics of Neoliberal urban policies, AKP government had the strong desire to use Istanbul as the facilitator for bringing global capital to the country. This strategy was implemented partly by following ‘state-directed capitalism’, where one can see the hybrid corporation emerging, “backed by the state but behaving like a private-sector”\(^54\), like what is happening in China nowadays.

Thus, Istanbul, within the last decade, has changed from a mostly industrial city to a more finance and service-centered city, and in many ways trying hard to compete with other world cities for investment, especially in the FIRE sector (Edward Soja’s term for ‘Finance, Insurance, Real Estate). In the words of Cagdar Keyder, following the successful liberalization of the Turkish economy, “it was understood that the city served as the gateway to the country and perhaps to the greater region.”\(^55\) As Keyder mentions, the shift from an ‘informal, unstructured, and insufficiently institutionalized globalization (which was the case in 1980s and 90s) towards a more formal and deliberate platform,” meant inviting more agents of global networks into the city in parallel to Erdogan and his government’s desire to put the city into the world map, and in a way create a different kind of Dubai model in the region. This goal has been arguably achieved through making the city


available to foreign capital and marketable audience. Today, as a result of this development on globalization and free-market economy, the city is home to more than 19,000 foreign firms (more than half of these are headquartered in the city).  

What are the spatial manifestations of the Neoliberalisation in Istanbul?

In terms of urban fabric, one cannot escape but notice the increasing numbers of luxurious hotels, high rise office towers, as well as shopping malls, luxury residential compounds and towers, along with new leisure and culture spaces emerging in the city. Thus, in Keyder’s words, one can get the impression that Istanbul is a success story by the standards of neo-liberal globalization.

Going back to the Jamie Peck’s categorization on the main characteristics of Neoliberal urbanism might be a useful strategy to help explaining what has transpired in Istanbul since the beginning of 2000s. The main aspects that are associated with Neoliberal Urbanization that Peck indicates are ‘growth first’, ‘financialization’, ‘urban spectacle and signature events’, entrepreneurial governance’, ‘privatism’, ‘market distributivism’, ‘revanchism’, and ‘symbolic development projects’.

Istanbul’s neoliberal repositioning, for the most part, comprises of all these attributes in one way or another. Next, some of the aspects mentioned above and how they perform in the context of Istanbul will be briefly looked at.

Urban Spectacle and Signature Events

City marketing and place-branding techniques are part of the toolbox of neoliberal urbanization process, since the competition in between cities revolves mainly around “(re)producing and promoting their urban

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57 Author’s note: The intention of this thesis is to show several portraits from Istanbul, and to give a snapshot of the neoliberal urbanization process happening in the city. It should be strongly emphasized that the spatial effects of Neoliberal Urbanization, without a doubt, encompasses a much wider and perhaps complex scope, than the one presented here.
heritage and symbolic assets for tourism,” 58 in order to basically bring more international capital and recognition. Bringing mega events and spectacles to the cities are done through the municipalities and states using their “urban entrepreneurship” qualities as part of the Neoliberal dogma, as Jamie Peck suggests “because signature, cultural events, prestige corporate investments, public resources, and good jobs are in such short supply, cities (perhaps the most visibly denuded victims of roll-back neoliberalism) are induced to jump on the bandwagon of urban entrepreneurialism, which they do with varying enthusiasm and effectiveness.” 59

Istanbul is no exception to this. Indeed, one can see the results of this entrepreneurial approach in the high profile international events the city has been bidding for and hosting in the last decade. Starting with the HABITAT II conference in 1996, the city had Champions League final games, Formula 1 race in 2005 (needless to mention that a new racing track had to be built for this), World Basketball Championship, as well as the various failed bids to host the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 Olympics. Interesting enough, with an incredible support coming from the national

Signature Events

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II conference in 1996, the city had Champions League final games, Formula 1 race in 2005 (needless to mention that a new racing track had to be built for this), World Basketball Championship, as well as the various failed bids to host the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 Olympics. Interesting enough, with an incredible support coming from the national

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58 Dogan, Evinc, Reimagining the City: Istanbul towards Globalization and Commodification, Pasos Vol.8(3) Special Issue, pg. 7-16, 2010
60 Illustration done by the author
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government, nowadays the city is initiating a new campaign for getting the Olympics 2020, running against cities like Tokyo, Madrid, Rome, Doha and Baku. Istanbul promises to have resources to make the event spectacular by international standards, with ‘opening and closing ceremonies happening at two continents simultaneously, for the first time in history, with more than a million spectators present’. These bold promises are crucial in a way to show how much the geographical location, along with the dynamics of a large population are being utilized as assets to promote the city’s position as an ideal candidate. Every effort is spent to bring more and more capital, as well international networks into the city, which seemed to work quite efficiently till now. Aside from the sports events, the city has begun to harbor art and cultural events within the last decade as well. Along with increasingly prestigious Istanbul Movie, Jazz Festivals and Biennial, the city became the European Capital of Culture in 2010, which brought an intense programme of events to the city, with generous funding. The content of the program was noticeable in terms of the limitation of European presence and connection, in which might indicate that the Istanbul, with this title, was trying to appeal to a larger global audience, rather than being limited to only European context. On the other hand, the preparations for large scale urban events like Olympics, usually comes in hand with the ongoing urban transformation projects, for the purpose of “cleaning up” the city, in which “gecekondu” areas and poor neighborhoods seems to be the primary targets. While the city, in a positive note, transforms into one “successful in showcasing its unrivalled cultural heritage, attracting a growing number of tourists,” partly as the result of the mega urban events, one can also see a destructive side being generated out of the urban events. Mike Davis points to the this

63 Gecekondu (plural gecekondular) is a Turkish word meaning “built overnight” a house put up quickly without proper permissions, a squatter’s house, and by extension, a shanty or shack
64 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoğlu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
factor, and it very much resonates with the case of Istanbul as well: “In the urban Third World, poor people dread high-profile international events – conferences, dignitary visits, sporting events, beauty contests, and international festivals – that prompt authorities to launch crusades to clean up the city: slum-dwellers know that they are the ‘dirt’ or ‘blight’ that their governments prefer the world not to see.” One could see this sort of “urban transformation” projects in relation to the urban spectacles, being implemented by the Istanbul Municipality, most important one being the Istanbul Olympic Stadium built for the failed 2008 Olympics Bid of the city, in 1999. During the process, many gecekondu areas were razed to open up space for the construction of the stadium complex. Nowadays, the city is financially much stronger compared to what it was a decade ago, and one can only imagine the magnitude of revanchist urban transformations will be implemented as part of the city’s new bid for the Olympics 2020. On the other hand, the term ‘urban transformation’, is not, undeniably only limited to the urban events, and spectacles.

Revanchism, Urban Renewal Projects and TOKİ (Mass Housing Agency)

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[Davis, Mike, “The Planet of the Slums”]

[Illustration done by the author]
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Since the 1980s, as the city’s exposure to private capital and investment skyrocketed, along with the tremendous increase in population numbers, the land use and building practices took a radical turn in Istanbul. Land now is being perceived as one of the crucial components for investment and development, as a result of the commodification processes that came along with the neoliberal positioning of the city. (Keyder, 2005) Speculative market is also an integral part of this newly emerged condition, and its main spatial manifestation is the real estate boom happening all around the city, even in areas where once urbanization thought to be unthinkable. During the last three decades, Istanbul has witnessed the emergence of new socio-spatial formations partitioning the city into compartments, a process that continues today. 68 Gated communities, Mass Housing projects being built around the peripheries of the city, revanchist urban renewals projects in run-down poverty stricken areas, and gecekondu zones are crucial in a way to highlight this partitioning, and the increasing gap between the rich and poor. At this point, it is imperative to give a little background on the genealogy of the word “gecekondu”, and what it came to represent. Robert Neuwirth states “For years, Turkey’s squatters built at night to take advantage of an ancient legal precept that said, essentially, that if they started construction at dusk and were moved in by sunrise without being discovered by the authorities, they gained legal standing and could not be evicted without a court fight. That’s why squatter housing in Turkey is called gecekondu, meaning ‘it happened at night’.” 69 The way gecekondu_s evolved in the last four decades seems to be a unique process, special to the context of Istanbul. Architectural qualities along with social dynamics embedded in the construction of gecekondu areas are what make this typology perhaps different than shanty town developments all around the developing world.

This sentiment is shared by Yves Cabannes, who says that “gecekondu_s are built and transformed into consolidated neighbourhoods very quickly. They do not consist of only single buildings, but of buildings verticalized over time. And this is relatively original. Another peculiarity is the lack of social housing provisions for the poor rural-to-urban migrant workers. I mean people coming from the rest of Anatolia built

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their own houses. There was relatively little support from the state or market. It was really through their own efforts”.  
Up until 2000s, the gecekondu areas were supported by the municipalities as part of the populist governance policies, and most of the early gecekondu developments from 1970s, like Sultanbeyli, now seem very much urbanized, as a result of this support. Still, many gecekondu areas nowadays continue to occupy valuable lands near financial districts and central areas of the city, which became target points for land profit as a result of the neoliberalization process of the city.

Thus, how to be efficient or make more profit from the land as a tool for capital accumulation are prioritized over the needs of the people. The working class who actually built the city as an industrial center no longer has a place in the new consumption-centered finance and service city. 
In the middle of this turmoil, the people who got most negatively affected by these processes have been the migrants, who used to have access to self-made housing, and informal settlement areas (gecekondu) in the city. They were also joined by the displaced population of inner-city squatters, targeted by the new ‘Urban Transformation’ Law - which was designed to ‘clean’ the city by razing unsightly neighborhoods in core areas. (Kevder) Historical neighborhoods, gecekondu districts are being destroyed, and people who live in these places are forced to move to the modernist high rise residential units built by TOKI, Central Government’s Mass Housing Administration, in the far peripheries of the city.

1 “Our biggest ideal was to eradicate the gecekondus that have surrounded our cities like a tumor”. 
“Now we are fulfilling this ideal, and we have to accomplish this goal all over Turkey.” R. Tayyip Erdogan/Prime Minister (2008)

70 Interview with Yves Cabannes by Imre Balanli, “Istanbul Living in Voluntary and Involuntary Exclusion”
71 Ekumenopolis, A documentary film about Istanbul
“The implementation of a neoliberal revanchist urban utopia—the city of business and commerce, of city marketing and landmark architecture, of social cut-downs and market-led housing—cannot exist without the demonization of dysfunctional neighborhoods”

says Guy Baeten in regards to the urban renewal project in cities where neoliberalization processes are underway. This is pretty much evident in the way old neighborhoods and gecekondu areas are portrayed by the municipality and the Government. “cancerous district embedded within the city,” says the Prime Minister Erdogan, about the neighborhoods of the urban poor. More specifically, Erdogan Bayraktar, who is now the minister responsible of environment and cities, once said: “Terrorist groups and people who are involved in drug and women trafficking try to obstruct urban transformation projects, by manipulating innocent people who live in gecekondu settlements. Irregular urbanization breeds terrorism.”

Moreover, nowadays potential earthquake expected for Istanbul is also being put out as another excuse for implementing the urban transformation and the public housing projects, which are propagated as ‘solution’ to this ‘irregular urbanization’ in the city. This “discourse of urgency,” is usually articulated in relation to “other disasters” that are waiting for Istanbulites such as crime, chaos in the transportation system.

The housing units are built by the Central government’s Mass Housing Administration (TOKI), first established in 1984, with the goal of handling housing issues of middle and lower income groups. Its self-defined reason for existence is to maintain “right to housing,” and this institutional role is based on an article in the Turkish Constitution, which states that “the State shall take measures to meet the needs of housing within the framework of a plan which takes into account the characteristics of cities and environmental conditions and shall support mass housing projects.”

Especially since AKP government came to power, TOKI gained insurmountable powers, including forming partnerships with private

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24 “Kentsel Donusum Gecekonduculara Takildi” , Zaman, 28 November 2007
25 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
26 www.toki.gov.tr
construction companies and involvement in the construction and selling houses for profit, being able to take over state urban land at no cost with the approval of the prime ministry and the president’s office, expropriation of urban land to construct housing projects, and developing and implementing cekondu transformation projects. As it could be easily observed, TOKI plays a crucial role in the commodification of the land and in the real estate sector, and the number of housing units it produced in the last decade (around 50000 in Istanbul alone), as a response to the housing demand, is remarkable by any standard. While TOKI does not lag behind in providing the numbers, the model it follows is far from being progressive and well-articulated. With “their depressing environments and tasteless building quality,” the high-rise mass housing of TOKI are in almost all the cases, located in isolated areas, far from central areas where the jobs are, with insufficient numbers of social facilities for the people, especially children and young ones. In an ironic way, these housing projects are also reminiscent of the modernist “towers in the park” scheme, which were used in developed world in the last several decades, and considered as a failed typology and it is common to see

\[\text{Mass housing: TOKI Empire}\]

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{77} Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{78} www.toki.gov.tr}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{79} Korkmaz, Tansel and Unlu-Yucesoy, Eda, “Living in Voluntary and Involuntary Exclusion”,}\]
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demolishment of these structures nowadays. For a city that claims to become a “global” one, it is contradictory at best, to see these old-fashioned, highly problematic mass housing schemes to pop out all over the city.

While the urban poor are forced to move to these housing units at the peripheries of the city, their old valuable lands at the inner city areas automatically become part of the real estate market and available for the “big construction companies for their fancy projects.”

This transition would have serious social consequences for the city in the next couple of decades, according to Yves Cabannes, who argues that gecekondu areas are peculiar and rich in a way to have their own social, economic solidarity network based usually on kinship, where people are able to cultivate their own food, have their own entertainment and leisure, and go to their jobs. He says “This sort of multifunctional city integrated at the neighborhood level is being disaggregated with consuming functions in malls, living functions elsewhere, and transport in between.”

TOKI’s role in the exclusionary agenda of Neoliberal policies, are bound to generate great social problems in the long run for the city. TOKI, with its huge unprecedented investment and political power, in a way,

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80 Korkmaz and Unlu Yucesoy
81 Interview with Yves Cabannes by Imre Balanli, “Istanbul Living in Voluntary and Involuntary Exclusion”
acts as the irreplaceable component in creating the highly problematic voluntary and involuntary seclusions within the city, through mass housing, private condominiums, and gated communities.

Due to TOKI’s big share in the Turkish economy, the tendency is to overlook the potentially dire consequences that the projects are expected to generate. However, Istanbul's future is heavily dependent on the path that TOKI is going to shape or will take in the next decade, and that will most likely result in the most harmful and destructive ways possible. In a perhaps dystopian way, it would not be far-fetched to imagine the whole city becoming “homogenized”, “sterile”, and an “entity without any surprise or indifference,” just like the way TOKI designs and implements.
Growth, Expansion and Post-metropolis Condition

The notion of growth features very centrally in the neoliberal discourse, not only in economic sense, but also in spatial and political terms. According to Peck, Neoliberalism “promotes and normalizes a “growth-
First” approach to urban development.”

Harvey Molotch argues in his seminal work “The City as a Growth Machine”, that “the political and economic essence of virtually any given locality, in the present American context, is growth.”. Although mentioned almost three decades ago, and in an urban context with completely different dynamics, Molotch’s portrayal of the notion ‘growth’ is pertinent for the neoliberal discourse, especially in regards to special implications it shows in Istanbul.

As a result of intensive industrialization efforts of 1950s, Turkey’s urbanization process got accelerated within the same period, and Istanbul, in an extremely unbalanced way, became attraction point once again. The rural poor from Anatolia, in the search for a more prosperity and a ‘new way of life’, poured into the city, which once called a ‘cosmopolitan enclave’, a reference to the city’s empire past of having different ethnic groups and faiths. Eventually, Istanbul’s population reached 13 million people, and the city’s land area tripled from 1,800 km2 to 5,300 km2 in a matter of fifty years. Nowadays, the city administration’s goal of limiting the population at 16 million already seems unrealistic, and without a careful control over the spreading of the city, the population, with the high %3 population increase, is expected to get to the levels of 21 million in 2023 and 49 million in 2050 (which would, at that point, account to almost half of the country’s population). That is inconceivably imbalanced situation for a country of 71 million people, not only in financial, but also in socio-political terms. Thus, Istanbul’s spreading to its surroundings in a process to become a postmetropolis is not only a problem that needs to be resolved in a city scale, but it has become a national issue as well when “the GDP of the poorest regions in Turkey is just 20 percent of that of the richest areas of the country”. As a result of this imbalance, Istanbul has become a magnet for the rural poor, as Deyan Sudjic mentions in his article (aptly titled ‘The City too big to fail’). Sudjic further adds that internal migration in Turkey has had .

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84 Panel discussion between Catharina Gabrielsson and Imre Azem, Konsthall C, Stockholm, 5th October, 2011
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As Istanbul becomes expanded, the power struggle over the city is increasingly falling to the hands of the international capital with the great support of municipality and the national government, one could see how TOKI satellite modernist towns are expanding the city’s borders, ‘creating an extensive new sprawl with the hope of continued expansion.’ In the place of the demolished neighborhoods at center of the city, there are more and more skyscrapers, highways, and shopping malls rising, in this new joint vision of TOKI, Municipalities, and private investors. According to Richard Sennett, this ‘centre-periphery distinction generates profound social dissonances’ likely to create a much more geographically undefined, divided city in the long run. Within this condition, one can also see the conceptualization of Edward Soja’s term Postmetropolis, which is characterized by a new spatiality where “what is urban is inseparable from what is non-urban, where the limits between the interior and the exterior have become blurred, where concepts such

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as "city," "suburb," "country," and "metropolitan area" are hard to separate.”

Even for someone who grew up in Istanbul, nowadays it is an extremely difficult task to locate the city, where and how it ends, and its center (or centers).

These signs of social, spatial and economic dichotomies give the conclusion that Istanbul is on its way to become a fractal city due to its constant expansion, if it isn’t already. This will only be intensified with upcoming ambitious plans to create sub centres, both on the east and west sides of the city (in fact, the one on the east side, Kartal, is masterplanned by Zaha Hadid, which is cancelled now). On the other hand, with heavy investment on infrastructure, there are plans to connect both ends of the city better as well. On top of these all, a third bridge over Bosphorus strait is proposed on the northern side of the city, where the mains forests and water reservoirs of the city are located. It is feared by almost everyone in the planning and environmental field that this bridge will not only destroy the reservoirs that feed the city, but also lead to more urban expansion on north-south axis of the city. There are already rumors of land speculations in play in regards to the areas where the bridge will pass through.

An even more highly controversial proposal came from the Prime Minster Erdogan, as part of last parliamentary elections campaign, for to build a canal parallel to Istanbul’s Bosporus. Described by many, including Erdogan himself, as the “crazy project,” it envisions a 28- to 30-mile canal connecting the Black Sea in the north to the Marmara Sea in the southwest that would supposedly create a safer alternative for heavy tanker ships than the natural Bosporus straits. The proposed canal, which would most likely rival Panama Canal, in terms of its size and expected cost, will be around 500 feet wide and 80 feet deep.

One needs to remember that most of the informal areas Istanbul has currently were developed along the areas near the Second Bridge, which was built in 1980s, and they created an immense pressure on the water and green resources of the city. Huseyin Kaptan, an influential city planner, poses the question “who will save those water basin areas?”, in regards to the potential shafts as part of the third bridge project that will

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89 http://www.atributosurbanos.es/en/terms/postmetropolis/

go through water basin areas. He adds of course one bridge isn’t enough for a metropolis of 20 million but when their entrances disrupt the water basin areas; Istanbul will be challenged by a great ecological disaster. Who will protect the people, is there anyone who can? Have we ever managed to clear these water basin areas before, or even stop the urbanization in them? We have to face the realities.”  

Projects like Third Bridge, and Canal Istanbul are successful in a sense that they highlight the unsatisfying need for the central government to expand the urbanization limits of the city, and automatically make more lands available for further development and profit, no matter what the social, political, and most importantly in this case, ecological consequences are. David Harvey mentions “Capitalism needs urbanization to absorb the surplus products it perpetually produces. In this way an inner connection emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanization. Hardly surprisingly, therefore, the logistical curves of growth of capitalist output over time are broadly paralleled by the logistical curves of urbanization of the world’s population.”

Thus, city’s population reaching to 25 million or even more in the next two decades doesn’t seem unrealistic or far-fetched at all with these

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91 Interview with Huseyin Kaptan by Imre Balanli, “Istanbul Living in Voluntary and Involuntary Exclusion”,
93 Harvey, David, “Rebel Cities: from the right to the city to Urban Revolution”, Verso, 2012

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gigantic infrastructural projects aiming to bring additional growth and urbanization to the city, at this point. Without proper attention being paid to long term planning strategies (which significantly lack in Istanbul), one could predict that projects like these, along with neoliberal land policies are more likely to prepare the city, for many call, a ‘chaos’ in the near future.

Symbolic Urban Development Projects
For many writers, like Swyngedouw, the main hallmark of the new neoliberal urban policy, is the grand projects of Urban Development Projects (UDP), or as some calls flagship, or prestige projects, that are

94 http://www.ekumenopolis.net
95 Image source: www.todayszaman.com
being implemented to “strengthening towns’ and cities’ competitive positions and put them on the map of globally competitive metropolises.” Projects like Berlin’s Potzdamer Platz, Amsterdam’s South Axis, Stockholms’ Slussen, Rotterdam’s Kop Van Zuid, New York City’s High line, or Bilbao’s Guggenheim Museum, or London’s redevelopment for the east part of the city for Olympics, can be described as the “material expression of a developmental logic that views them as major leverages for generating future growth and attracting investment capital and consumers.”

As the staunch follower of the Neoliberal urban policies, Istanbul has had its good share of Urban Development(or Transformation)Projects in the last decade. As the Canal Istanbul stands out as the most recent one (since it is described by the government as the ultimate project that would symbolize Turkey’s economic power to the world), the projects developed by world renowned architects Zaha Hadid’s project for Kartal (an industrial area on the Asian Side), and Ken Yeang’s project for the transformation of the southern part of the Kucukcekmece district on the

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97 Oudenampsen, Merijn, “Amsterdam the City as a Business”, *Urban Politics Now Reimagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*, NAI Publishers
98 Swyngedouw, Erik,”The Post-Political City”, *Urban Politics Now Reimagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*, NAI Publishers
99 Illustration done by the author, based on a diagram found in “Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large Scale Urban Development Projects and the New Urban Policy”, by Erik Swyngedouw, Erik, and Moulaert, Frank, and Rodriguez, Arantxa., *Antipode*, 2002
European side, are probably the most internationally famous ones proposed for the city to this day. Kartal project involves relocating industries to the outskirts of the city and designing a platform that would cater to the needs of service industries, along with five-star hotels targeted towards international visitors, and a marina to boost cruise tourism. As part of the Istanbul’s decentralization policies, with this project Kartal is designated to be a new sub-centre, that would generate a new central business district in the area, which is in close approximation to Sabiha Gokcen Airport, Sabanci University, and the newly emerging Pendik ‘silicon valley’. Yeang’s project follows a similar decentralization process, and proposes a touristic and recreational area, which would have a seven star hotel, an aquapark, and marina. Yeang and Hadid’s projects are not the only urban transformation projects that are on the table. Haydarpasa Redevelopment project, Galataport, expanding the financial district from Levent to up until Golden Horn, as well as revitalizing Topkapi as another financial district are among the plans envisioned for Istanbul.

On the other hand, Marmaray project, which connects the east and west ends of the city via rail network (which partially goes under water in Bosphorus), is expected to be finished in the next few years. As part of this grand project, historical district of Yenikapi (located in the old peninsula) is designated to be the main transportation hub of the city, and advertised as the new “gateway” of Istanbul to the world. The municipality organized an international design competition for the area’s transformation, and invited several starchitecture firms, such as MVRDV,
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Eisenmann Architects, Mecanoo, Hashim Sarkis, and the most prominent Turkish Architecture firms to generate proposals for the competition (while names like Rem Koolhaas and Michael Sorkin are among the jury members). Han Tumertekin, who is one of the architects selected for the competition and collaborating with Hashim Sarkis, once said that “famous architecture is being used to attract interest of the real estate developers from all around the world. It seems like there are going to be several ‘starchitect’ buildings will be present in Istanbul. On the other hand, Istanbul is probably a city that does not need these sorts of developments in any form.”

It would be interesting to see whether and how his firm’s entry would problematize the question of implementing an urban transformation project in one of the most historically, socially, and economically layered areas of the city. When one considers both Yeang and Hadid’s projects, along with the proposals for Galataport and Haydarpasa redevelopment schemes, they were controversial in a sense that they promoted the destruction of historic fabric of the city in highly problematic tabula rasa approach (especially highly criticized Hadid project), “in order to specifically cater to the interests of high-income groups, severely limiting public access to these areas.”

Thus, one can argue that projects like these ‘have become an integral part of neoliberal policies to replace more traditional redistribution driven approaches.”

According to Candan and Kolluoglu, the urban transformation projects, whether they take form in gecekondu areas, or in the derelict neighborhoods in the historical parts of the city, or under the name ‘natural disaster projects, or as it is described in this section, as the ‘prestige projects,’ share similar traits, despite their differences and case specific implications. They all end up generating similar consequences in terms of “the increase in the value of urban land, the displacement of significant numbers of people, the relocation of poverty, and dramatic changes in the urban and social landscape of the city.”

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104 Tumertekin, Han, “Ekonominin Donusturdugu Mimari”, Kuresellesen Istanbul’da Ekonomi, Osmanli Bankasi Arsiv ve Arastirma Merkezi, 2010 Translated by the author
105 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
106 Swyngedouw, Erik, “The Post-Political City”, Urban Politics Now Reimagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City, NAI Publishers
107 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
to assess that the urban renewal projects, or whatever the name, ultimately stand out as the focal driving force of neoliberal urbanization in Istanbul.

**Increasing Consumerism and Shopping Malls**

One of the most vivid and visible spatial expressions of Neoliberal Urbanization in Istanbul has to be the emergence of new consumption landscapes, and the repositioning of urban form in relation to commerce. As Istanbul became the “the capitalist capital of Turkish Republic” since the 1980s, one could see the ever growing numbers of shopping malls emerging in the city, especially since 2003. This condition mainly occurred as the Turkish retail sector ‘internationalized’ and started to receive attention from large domestic and foreign capital. Another factor for increase in the attractiveness of the retail market for large domestic and foreign companies has been the significant increases in per capita income in the country since 1980.

109 Tokatli, and Boyaci
110 Tokatli, and Boyaci
111 Illustration done by the author
As a direct result of the affluent middle class, 1980s also saw the first modern shopping mall, opening its doors. Galeria, opened in 1988 by Turgut Ozal who was inspired by a similar shopping mall he saw in Houston, Texas and recommended a similar complex being built in Istanbul, served as attraction point for people coming from all around the city. Its ‘privileged status’ as the main shopping mall in the city lasted until the mid-1990s, when rival shopping centers such Atrium, Akmerkez, Capitol, Carousel began to operate. Around the same time, hypermarkets such as German Market AG, Real Adler, Bauhaus, Carrefoure, and Ikea started to appear in the city as well. Since 2006, following the economic stability and growth of Turkish Economy, there has been an extremely powerful trend towards the development of mega shopping malls in Istanbul. The numbers of shopping malls before 2000s were limited to around 10. Between 2000 and 2008, there were 47 seven additional shopping malls were built, with a floor space exceeding two million square meters. Now, the numbers of shopping malls increased to more than 100, with a floor space of 4 million square meters. These shopping mall developments are in a way “embedded in the larger process of the increasing dominance of the finance and service sectors in Istanbul’s economy, accompanied by the skewed income distribution; the transformations in Istanbul’s urban space produce and reproduce this trend.”

For many, skyrocketed developments of the malls indicate that there is something fundamentally odd with this picture. Aka Gunduz Ozdemir, an influential figure in Turkey’s top industrial conglomerate Koc Holding, is among many who is puzzled by these recent developments. Ozdemir says

“I cannot understand the logic of the way shopping malls spring up, almost like small grocery stores. A smart businessman wouldn’t construct these developments side by side. There is entertainment, food, and everything, but trade capacity in these places is not all great. You

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112 Kaptan, Huseyin and Enil, Zeynep Merey, Istanbul: Global Aspirations and Socio-Spatial Restructuring in an era of New Internalism
113 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
114 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
Ozdemir’s words indicate the crucial problems that are associated with the growing numbers of shopping malls in Istanbul. Margaret Crawford says, in reference to the modern shopping malls in the North American context, that unlike 19th century utopians such as Fourier or Owen, who ‘sought unity through collective productive activity and social reorganization,’ and thus encouraging ‘social intercourse and foster communal emotions’, the new malls ‘stimulates consumption.’ This pretty much explains the Istanbul context as well. As the consumerist trends got amplified in the city, understanding of a ‘public space’ started to get linked to the shopping mall developments, where leisure time transformed into a commodified and consumption based entity. Where the streets of Istanbul used to be the gathering points for everyone, regardless of their income levels, one can argue that the new shopping malls are not necessarily trying to be inclusive to everyone, in fact as their own raison d’être dictates, here the essential thing is to attract the ones with financial means. This dichotomy between inclusiveness and exclusion forms one of the core elements of Neoliberal dynamics in Istanbul.

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116 Crawford, Margaret, ’The World in a Shopping Mall’, Variations on a theme Park, Hill and Wang, 1992
Conclusion:

What this chapter attempted was to draw a picture of the workings of Neoliberal Urbanization that took place in Istanbul, within the trajectory from 1980s up until now. As it could be shown from some of the implications shown above, the political, social, environmental and economic consequences of Neoliberal Urbanization are incredibly complex and happening in an extremely fast phase in the context of Istanbul, and thus neoliberalization of the city “not only has become more visible, but also deepened and more entrenched.” As the city became more prone to global capital as a natural byproduct of neoliberalization and globalization, commodification of the land in all parts of the city, along with the geographical expansion through urbanization along the north-south and east-west axis, has put the city in an entirely new position, where the capital and free market rule seems to be overarching theme present in the new urban paradigm.

As the paper tried to show so far, current circumstances where the city is becoming increasingly compartmentalized, segregated through urban renewal projects, and the wide gap between poor and rich of the city finds itself more spatial manifestations more than ever before. The revanchist policies of the increasingly entrepreneurial Istanbul

117 Images taken by the author
118 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
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Metropolitan municipality towards the poor of the city, and their relocation to the outer peripheries of the city stand out as one of those major manifestations. On the other hand, through gated communities, shopping malls, “public becomes privatized, walled or restricted for those who are members rather citizens.” 119 Gentrification also happens to be part of these processes as well, especially in the old parts of the city, where the urban transformation and renewal projects are being implemented on a daily basis. As part of the deconstruction of the city under the influence of globalization, one can also notice the hegemony of “non-places” being reinforced (following Marc Auge’s concept), through chain restaurants, chain cafes, or chain hair dressers, the spaces that “can be replicated endlessly in different spaces” which lack unique character, or history. 120 What makes Istanbul unique as a metropolitan is perhaps its particularities based on heterogenous, unpredictable, old and rooted nature of the city, which are losing ground in the process of Neoliberalization. Moreover, one should also take into consideration that despite uncanny resemblance and similarities between the Neoliberal Urban policies in Istanbul and the rest of the developing world cities, there are undoubtedly peculiar aspects that need to be mentioned in regards to the Istanbul’s case. Next chapter will look at the some of these peculiar conditions that are present in Istanbul, especially in regards to the historical conflicts that are intertwined with the neoliberal and globalization processes.

119 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
120 Candan, Ayfer Bartu, and Kolluoglu, Biray, Emerging spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul, New Perspectives on Turkey
Localizing Neoliberalism in Istanbul

From commodification of the land to the real estate boom that comes with it, to increasing numbers of Shopping malls, to revanchist urban renewal projects, Istanbul perhaps encompasses and follows similar neoliberal restructuring patterns as they occurred throughout the world. When one looks at the Neoliberal Ideology, it is assumed that it establishes itself through unchallengeable laws, regardless of the context or the specific economic and social conditions. However, as it is mentioned earlier, one of the major components of the neoliberal discourse is the notion that it is highly adaptive in its nature, and successful in integrating itself in highly varied settings. Brenner and Theodore, referring to the notion of “Actually existing Neoliberalism”, emphasize “the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring projects insofar as they have been produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles.”

I would argue that this is precisely the notion of the neoliberalization process that Istanbul has experienced in the last three decades. Path dependent and contextual peculiarities as part of the neoliberal discourse attached to the city show themselves in multiple dimensions, and these are remarkably formed by sharp cultural, political, and geographical dichotomies. “West” vs. “Non-West”, “Secular vs. Pious”, “Urbanite” vs. “Rural”, “Republican” vs. “Ottoman”, “Traditional” vs. “Modern”, “Poor” vs. “Rich”, “National” vs. “Local”, and more, acquire new

121 Brenner, Neil, Theodore, Nik, “Cities and the Geographies of Actually Existing Neoliberalism”

122 Brenner and Theodore
utilizations and get mixed within the neo-liberal discourse, while maintaining their politically contested character in Istanbul.

These contrasts are under constant exploitation by the Neo-liberal agenda in a greatly dividing way. Istanbul’s geo-political position, issues related to ethnic demographics, religious tensions, migration, the culturally peculiar understandings of consumption or cosmopolitanism, democratic traditions, and how these aspects are comprehended in the Turkish context most certainly provide plentiful distinctiveness for the neo-liberalization processes of Istanbul. It is not the intent or in the scope of this paper to examine every single idiosyncrasy that exists in the context of Istanbul’s neo-liberalization; rather to focus on the ones that are the most contextualized and local, that can help to differentiate Istanbul’s case from rest of the Neo-Liberal urbanization examples from the rest of the world.

**Neo-liberalization of Istanbul: AKP driven National project**

First and foremost, one needs to mention the greatly symbiotic relationship that subsists between the Central AKP Government and the city itself, which plays a peculiar role in the Neo-liberalization efforts. Prime Minister Erdogan has always recognized the city as the gateway ticket for Turkey, especially in regards to membership negotiations with the European Union (which were more active in the beginning of 2000s, before it faded away), and the integration with the world economy. AKP government holds the belief that Turkey’s future is absolutely dependent on Istanbul’s future, consequently, a very special treatment has been given to the city by the Central government, through making vast political, economic, and cultural resources available for the Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor. Since Istanbul is being governed by an AKP administration, what has emerged is a total accord between central and local governments - between Ankara, where the central government is seated, and Istanbul.

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123 Oktem, Binnur, “Neoliberal Kuresellesmenin Kentlerde Insası: AKP’nin Kursel Kent Soylemi ve İstanbul’un Kentsel Dönüşüm Projeleri”, translated by the author
Especially after the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality’s administrative boundaries were extended from 1.831km² to 5,342km² (makes Istanbul one of the largest municipal entities in the world), the Metropolitan Mayor’s power increased drastically. In this context, the Mayor himself stands out as one of the most popular politicians in the country, by having more popular votes behind him than any single politician. As noted earlier, Istanbul’s role in the Turkish economy is undoubtedly massive; 27 per cent of national GDP, 38 per cent of national industrial output, more than 50 per cent of national service output and 40 per cent of national tax revenues come from the functional metropolitan region. Thus, the role of the mayor in this context is hardly overestimated.

Despite the incredible levels of power and governing autonomy the Mayor has over the city, it is very clear that globalization and neoliberalization of the city is essentially an AKP project, and extends beyond borders of the city and has national dimensions. To comprehend the significance of Istanbul for AKP, one needs to look at the Prime Minister Recep T. Erdogan’s views on the city:

*Istanbul is one of the prominent cities in the world and in Turkey in terms of not just its history, tourism and culture but also its economic and commercial profile. I served as mayor in Istanbul for 4.5 years and I had a goal, an ambition in those days to turn Istanbul into a financial capital. Of course, because it was different politics ruling in the central government we couldn’t do it then. But now, we are in power in the central government, and also in Istanbul local government. We considered the pros and cons and decided to take prompt action to make Istanbul the financial centre. As we have expressed in our medium-term programme, we will accomplish this, mindful that it amounts to an important structural reform. Private sector financial institutions are already here, we are going to move public finance institutions as well as the regulatory bodies and organizations. Istanbul at this point is entering a new restructuring process.***"*

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125 http://urban-age.net/publications/surveys/istanbul/
126 IMFWorld Bank Annual Meetings, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister and the head of AK Party
While the speech mainly focuses on the desire of moving the financial institutions (most importantly the National Central Bank) to Istanbul, similar talks emphasizing the prominence of the city have been heard so often in recent times. Every major project that concerns the future of the city, ranging from the “Third Bridge”, to “Canal Istanbul”, to “Two New Cities”, to “Taksim Square Redevelopment”, are all announced and promoted by the Prime Minister, as part of his political campaigns. David Harvey’s analysis of the relationship between the decentralization and the centralized control within the cities is a relevant one in this context, which could be used to define the power structure governing Istanbul. Harvey says:

“The trajectory of developments since liberalization began in 1979 rested on the notion that decentralization is one of the best ways to exercise centralized control. The idea was to liberate regional and municipal governments, and even villages and townships, to seek their own betterment within a framework of centralized control and market coordination. Successful solutions arrived at through local initiatives then become the basis for the reformulation of central government policies.”

The trajectory Harvey describes has happened and continues to be effective in Istanbul; however what makes Mayor Kadir Topbas’s vision of a globalizing Istanbul more decisive and more absolute is the scale and magnitude of the massive support receives from the central government in Ankara. What distinguishes the present-day scope and scale of urban transformation from the previous regimes of liberalization and opening of Istanbul to the global economy is arguably the relationship between the local and national that provides this massive support.

Therefore, it is fairs to conclude that while the emphasis on local governance and localities are heavily active in neoliberal discourse, contradictorily, central government’s power is increasing. TOKI (the Housing Administration Agency of Turkey) stands out as the most crucial manifestation of this intricate process, and the most important


128 Harvey, David, Rebel Cities: From Right to the City to Urban Revolution,
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state institution in implementing the neoliberal land policies within the city.\textsuperscript{129} TOKI not only acts as the absolute planning authority in the urban regeneration projects and the lands owned by the state, but also became the most important actor in the real estate market, and manages the market and collaborate with private sector. Thus, one can mention that neoliberal urbanization in Istanbul is realized hand in hand in by the State and market forces.\textsuperscript{130} In this process, urbanization has “gained much more top-down characteristic in the last decade”, as a result of the state putting in legitimate power and force to implement the urban agenda.\textsuperscript{131}

To conclude, Ayse Oncu’s words are worth mentioning in summarizing the peculiar relationship between the central government and the local municipality in Istanbul:

“Over the past two decades, the idea of a ‘global’ Istanbul has become the site and symbol of Turkey’s aspirations in the twenty-first century. Future visions of the city and of the nation have become inextricably bound up in public, popular and scholarly discourses.”\textsuperscript{132}

Aside from this dichotomy between the government and the Istanbul Municipality as part of the neoliberal discourse; it is perhaps essential to get a view of the existing social protection mechanisms in action, especially the peculiarities of the notion of welfare state in the Turkish context, in order to grasp the socio-political climate that neoliberalism encountered in the first place.

As Harvey indicates, the impact of neo-liberalization on a given context is contingent upon the existing frameworks of welfare and social security systems in place. For example, strong welfare traditions, coupled with


\textsuperscript{130} Turkmen, Hade, “Debates in right to the city in Istanbul”, paper presented at the International RC21 Conference 2011, Session: 18. Social Justice and the Right to the City

\textsuperscript{131} Turkmen, Hade

\textsuperscript{132} Oncu, Ayse, “The Politics of Istanbul’s Ottoman heritage in the Era of Globalism: Refraction through the Prism of a Theme Park”
good balance of class forces (like powerful union organizations), along with a healthy establishment of democratic institutions in the case of Sweden, make it possible to hold neo-liberalization in check.  

Whereas in Turkey, the welfare state can be described to have an underdeveloped nature, and historically defined as an “inegalitarian, corporatist social security system which linked benefits to employment status, and excluded the rural and urban informal sector workers”. In this context, a great role was given to the “family” in a highly conservative way, in which the term invokes not only the nuclear unit, but mainly a three-generational extended family. This was portrayed as the foundation of the nation’s genuine cultural values. Moreover, “the family rhetoric”, as it set the agenda for AKP government’s conservative approach, was put forward as the best agent to alleviate "social burdens" on the state. While “the strength of the Turkish family” is being propagated as the ultimate solution to all social, economic and political problems present in Turkey, its decline is mainly attributed to the influences of “the West”. Berna Yazici sees a profound contradiction in this:

“In the Turkish context, neo-liberalism's contradiction emerges in the simultaneous deployment of neoliberal welfare policies with a conservative political discourse about the family that denounces neoliberalism’s ideological center, "the West."

Thus, one can argue that the notion of “family” is being used as a political tool by the AKP government, which forms a strong “discursive justification for concrete material re-arrangements in the welfare system,” and simultaneously playing a critical role “in the state's restructuring within a global context.” By prioritizing family or community based welfare, AKP “aptly valorizes Muslim moral idioms or

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133 Harvey, David, “A brief history of Neoliberalism”, Amazon Kindle Edition
134 Bugra, Ayse and Adar, Sinem, ”Social Policy Change in countries without mature welfare states: The case of Turkey”, New Perspectives on Turkey, n.38, Spring 2008
136 Yazici, Berna
137 Yazici, Berna
egalitarianism to ameliorate the escalating uneven distribution of wealth and resources.138

While the emphasis on family and traditional values are promoted on a national scale, informal mechanisms of social protection, such as agricultural support policies or informal access to urban land without proper building permits (as in the case of Gecekondu), and kinship-based solidarity networks, are being eradicated within the process of neoliberalization.139 The loss of these informal and local security nets in a creatively destructive way is a crucial point in the Neo-liberalization discourse of Istanbul, because it determines to what extent the city could get influenced by the forces of Neo-liberalization, and to what extent the city could resist to the same forces. Deterioration of these networks would, without doubt, not only enlarge the domain of Neoliberal policies in the city, but also set up the effectiveness of the potential contestation mechanisms towards Neo-liberalism, which will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

Istanbul: A meeting point between Neo-liberalism and Neo-Ottomanism

Growing uncertainties and ambivalences about Turkey’s role in the global arena and its future in Europe have been accompanied by a paradigmatic shift towards Ottoman history as the political site of reworkings of national memory. Istanbul, as the prominent symbol and bearer of Ottoman Legacy, has become a major point of reference in the emergent power struggles.140

Istanbul lost its Islamic capital position after the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923. Ankara became the new capital, and Istanbul, as the ultimate symbol of the Ottoman past, began to experience a period of negligence by the protagonists of the new Republic. The main reason for this shift was to make a clear separation between the collapsed empire and its cultural, political ideologies, and the newly founded Republic’s ideals. “Modernization” of the society had to start

139 Bugra, Ayse and Adar, Sinem
140 Oncu, Ayse, “The Politics of Istanbul’s Ottoman heritage in the Era of Globalism: Refraction through the Prism of a Theme Park"
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somewhere, and Istanbul was the perfect place to manifest the strong dislike and tabula rasa approach of the government in Ankara, towards the old empire’s capital.

The evolution of Istanbul from a neglected, forgotten city, to an important, worldly city under the influence of neo-liberal policies since 1980s, as described earlier, was an important process in the city’s history. A political development taking place in parallel to the city’s neoliberalization has been the current resurgence of interest in Istanbul’s Ottoman past. One needs to mention that this interest is not only limited to Istanbul and it shows itself in a variety of scales. Neo-Ottoman tendencies of the AKP are foremost defined by the “willingness to come to terms with Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic Heritage at home and abroad”. Ramifications of this attitude are influential, especially in the realm of foreign policy. According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Foreign Minister of Turkey, who is the mastermind of the Neo-Ottomanist approach dominant nowadays in the foreign policy, argues that Turkey should not only play a regional role in the Balkans or Middle East (thanks to assumed cultural links to these regions, generated by shared history), but should aim to play a leading role in a larger geography with several regions. This new approach should commensurate Turkey’s historic and geographic depth which is amplified by its Ottoman legacy. In what is described as “Ottoman geopolitics”, Davutoğlu argues, that “Turkey is the natural heir to the Ottoman Empire that once unified the Muslim world and therefore has the potential to become a “Muslim super power”

In this Neo-Ottoman context, Istanbul, as the former Ottoman Capital, plays a central political and economic role in the Turkish Republic. Thus, the city’s empirical past, including the ancient monuments and heritage sites, has been used as a part of the marketing efforts to enhance and promote the city’s image to global audiences. Ayse Oncu explains the correlation between the Neo-Ottoman inclinations and neoliberalization of the city as the result of the fact that the large metropolises like Istanbul, present their ‘cultural heritage’ as a marketable

141 Oncu, Ayse
143 Grigoriadis, Ioannis N., “The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy”, 2010
144 W.Walker, Joshua, “Architect of Power"
commodity. She further makes a theoretical connection to Allen Scott’s notion of ‘culture generating capabilities of cities’, and the commodification of ‘history’ for display and consumption. On the other hand, she argues, the interest in the Ottoman past is not only about the marketing purposes:

Many of the ancient monuments and heritage sites that symbolize the unique attractions of Istanbul in transnational markets refer back to layers of contested memories, dislocations and serial destructions that have been a part of nation-making. The designation of particular sites in the material fabric of the city (and not others) as ‘historical treasures’ has been accompanied by intense political debate, calling forth competing interpretations of different epochs in the city’s history. More broadly, the mobilizations of Istanbul’s imperial legacy to articulate future aspirations for a ‘global’ future have challenged modernist imagination of the Republican past.

Thus, Neo-Ottoman tendencies present in the city tend to challenge the official historiography set up by Republican period, especially when they meet with the effects of neo-liberalization discourse. This calls forth new interpretations of its imperial legacy, and these are manifested spatially, as Oncu argues. There are some peculiar examples to this manifestation; most striking ones being Miniaturk, Panorama 1453, and the increasing numbers of new high-end residential developments all over the city, that use Ottoman style facadist architectural typologies.

Among these spatial expressions, Miniaturk is a miniature park situated at the north-eastern shore of Golden Horn. The park covers an area of 60,000 m2, and with the model area of 15,000 m2, it is the largest miniature park in the world. The park consists of 105 models done in 1/25th scale, 45 of which are from Istanbul, 45 from Anatolia, and 15 from the Ottoman territories that today lie outside of Turkey’s borders.

145 Oncu, Ayse
146 http://www.miniaturk.com.tr
Additional space was reserved for future models, allowing the park to “grow, model in a sense a planned urbanization”. The models for the park were chosen for “their significance in the city’s and Turkey’s collective memory”. Moreover, the park was divided into three sections; Istanbul, Anatolia and the former Ottoman Territories, and the idea is supposedly to include “every civilization that ruled in and around Anatolia and left their marks”, which covers a History of 3000 years, from Antiquity to Byzantium, from Seljuks to the Ottomans and into the present.

A park of this magnitude could demonstrate the multicultural dimensions of the Turkish history and support the current government’s statements on multiculturalism. But if one looks closely to the structure of the park, it is fairly easy to notice that the Ottoman lands are given primary emphasis.

“In representing cultural wealth, the park does not single out the Islamic Ottoman Past, but it still privileges Istanbul over Ankara, the capital built to showcase nation-building in the early Republican era. Thus while it incorporates sites from Anatolia in line with Republican history writing, it constrains those from Republican history.

Thus, an argument can be made that Miniaturk is one of the emerging politically charged sites in Istanbul, that challenges (and to a certain extent rejects) Ataturk’s Republican Nationalism, through projecting a “contemporary Turkish national identity”, in which a highly romanticized and idealized Ottoman identity stands at the center.

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148 Images taken by the author
149 http://www.miniaturk.com.tr
150 Tureli, Ipek, “Modeling Citizenship in Turkey’s Miniature Park”
151 http://www.miniaturk.com.tr
152 Tureli, Ipek
However, this new identity also comes with a level of shyness, or hesitation in regards to claiming ownership to the city.

At this point, it is particularly crucial to mention the significance of the conquest of Constantinople (1453) by the Ottoman Turks, within the discourse of Islamist’s perspective on Istanbul. This notion of ‘conquest’ has often been used as the essential symbol of the Islamic claims to the city, especially with the rise of political Islam in Istanbul politics since the 1990s. For a long time, Republican ideology has acted reluctant, as following the official nationalist history, to recognize the accomplishments of the Ottoman period. In this context, the Republic has attempted to establish itself as a “secular, West-oriented nation-state, in historic opposition to the old, Islamic, Eastern, Ottoman Empire”. Thus, conquest-commemoration was downplayed to avoid upsetting European countries who used to be Ottoman rivals.

Ayse Oncu argues that the metaphor of ‘conquest’ has lost its relevance nowadays, in part because “the Islamic movement itself has been transformed into a neo-liberal, religious-nationalist establishment.” While it is certainly true that the “conquest” does not form the core of the Islamists’ political convictions anymore, the term itself has been transformed into a more sellable spatial entity. Throughout the 1990s, reenactment of the conquest was a common celebration method, which was promoted and organized by the Welfare Party (a more openly Islamic and Nationalistic predecessor to AKP). Nowadays, the symbolism attached to the conquest, as part of the Neo-Ottomania, finds expression in the carefully constructed urban spaces, like Miniaturk. However, the most controversial example is arguably the “Panorama 1453 Historical Museum,” which was opened in 2009 and mainly financed by the Istanbul Metropolitan City Council. The museum depicts the conquest of Istanbul, with a main panoramic picture in diameter of 38 meters surrounding an area of 2.350 square meters, with three-dimensional human figures and machines taking part in the whole surreal atmosphere. Official website of the museum describes the experience as:

“This is Topkapı, the place where the fiercest battle of the Constantinople siege took place, where the unscalable walls were overcome, where the day that the blessed soldiers had awaited occurred…This is the door that opened onto the conquest of Constantinople…Here you will witness the conquest of Constantinople

154 Oncu, Ayse, “The Politics of Istanbul’s Ottoman heritage in the Era of Globalism: Refraction through the Prism of a Theme Park”
once again and experience the moment when the soldiers entered the city, almost exactly as it happened. You will witness the explosion of the cannonballs, cast by the Hungarian cannon expert Urban, and see them flung at the walls of Constantinople. The battle cry of Sultan Mehmed II's soldiers and the sound of the marches played by the Janissary band will accompany you."

Miniaturk tries to depict a “misleading picture of societal harmony”\(^\text{155}\), or the so-called Ottoman Cosmopolitanism, by supposedly including architectural showcases from all the civilizations that passed through Anatolia in the past (with Ottoman period being the dominant one). At the same time, the park carries it out with the intention of representing the “changing notions of citizenship and national identity in a globalizing city”, in an arguably less edgy manner.

The Panorama Museum, however, does not have the same concern of painting a similar positive and globally oriented message as Miniaturk. On the contrary, even the existence of the museum, where the promotion of historical triumphalism, revanchism, along with the strong vilification and “us versus them” thematic, seem to indicate that the Museum reflects the dilatational divergence between Turkey and Europe. While Miniaturk is trying to establish itself as a tourist destination within the city’s global position (and arguably on a successful level), perhaps Panorama 1453 underscores the Islamic side of the city by utilizing the rhetoric of Islam vs. Christianity.

Regardless, both Miniaturk and Panorama 1453 have been used as active agents to market the city. Especially in regards to Miniaturk, Ipej Tureli says:

\(^{155}\) www.panoramikmuze.com

\(^{156}\) Images from Panorama museum, taken by the author.
… all projects involving prime sites offered to global capital or leisure environments such as Miniaturk are characteristics of globalization. Both are domestic translations of global types, both entail the rerouting of public sources into private or privatized services; and both are designed to demonstrate Turkey’s competitiveness in the global marketplace.

While the idealization of the Neo-Ottoman values in public sphere is blatantly apparent as seen in these two prominent cases, public at large nowadays seems to be occupied with the redevelopment project of the Turkish Republic’s most iconic symbol in Istanbul’s cityscape, the Taksim Square (or “Taksim Meydani” in Turkish). This controversial new project, which is highly criticized by a large part of the society for various reasons, including staunch supporters of AKP reign, exemplifies the different aspects of Neoliberal tendencies embedded within the mindset and policies of the Turkish ruling elite. These tendencies include, but are not limited to, strong top-down governance reinforced by a Tabula Rasa approach and the desire to create post-political, controlled, and commoditized spaces. The Taksim Square project is also essential to this discussion in the sense that it is able to show the socio-historical conflicts, problematic of “right to the city” and globalization concerns inherent in the city.

**Redevelopment of Taksim Square:**

Taksim Square (Taksim Meydani), is considered arguably as the heart of Istanbul. For many tourists coming to Istanbul for the first time, Taksim square stands out as one of the first spots they experience in the city. Located on the European side, the square is surrounded by hotels, shops, as well as central metro station and bus lines that are essential to the city’s public transportation system. Considering the size of Istanbul, one striking thing is the lack of squares (in the European sense of the word) within the city. Recently, one of the most prominent journalists in Turkey called Taksim Square ‘the square-less city’s last square’, perhaps a bit exaggerated but overall a fair description for it. On the other hand, Taksim Square, especially since the foundation of Republic in 1923,

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stands out as one of the most politically and socially charged spaces in Istanbul.

What makes Taksim Square relevant in the context of neoliberal urbanization discussions over Istanbul is the recent plans proposed by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, which aims to transfer the current car traffic in the square underground, by opening up giant tunnels beneath it. A major component of the plan also includes the demolition of Gezi Parkı (which is one of the rare green spaces around central part of the city) next to the square, to open up a space for reconstruction of an old military building from Ottoman era (which was demolished around 1940s). This renevoated military house is planned to be a ‘cultural center’, while opponents of the project argue that the building will become nothing but a shopping mall.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Images on left showing the current state of the square and taken by the author. Image on the bottom right is from the famous 1st May, 1977 events that took place in the square, source: btasahnesi.net

Erik Swyngedouw and Frank Moulaert apply a valuable categorization to measure the effects of the Large Scale Urban Projects in Europe within the context of Neo-Liberal Urbanism, such as the one concerning Taksim. They evaluate each project by the following criteria:

- Territorial Fragmentation
- Exceptionality Measures/Accountability
- Inclusion of Neighborhood Population in Decision Making
- Institutional Complexity
- Social Returns

Although many of the case studies they selected, such as Kop Van Zuid in Rotterdam, are larger in comparison to Taksim Square, evaluating redevelopment plans for Taksim Square within these categories would be a good methodology to understand what is indeed happening within the project from different perspectives.

3D Images showing the proposal of the Municipality, central building with the courtyard is the reconstruction of "Topçu Kislasi", which was demolished in 1920s. Image source: www.ibb.gov.tr
Exceptionality Measures/Accountability

“Exceptionality” measures include, but are not limited to, the “freezing of conventional planning tools, bypassing statutory regulations and institutional bodies, the creation of project agencies with special or exceptional powers of intervention and decision-making, and/or a change in national or regional regulations”\textsuperscript{163}. From time to time, national governments can take the role of being the main developers, setting aside both local authorities and constituencies.\textsuperscript{164}

The last general election in Turkey took place in the summer of 2011, and from an urban studies perspective, what made this one more peculiar than the previous elections was the presence of the so-called ‘visionary’ infrastructure and planning projects” that the AKP promised during the election campaign. As noted earlier, Projects like Canal Istanbul, Two new cities next to Istanbul, and Third Bridge over Bosporus were presented as grand projects that would complement the centennial celebration of the Turkish Republic in 2023. Taksim Square redevelopment, although not in the same scale as afore mentioned projects, was also presented by the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as one of the promises his party has in agenda for Istanbul. In regards to Taksim project, Erdogan said:

\textit{We will take the vehicle traffic along the boulevards of Republic and Tarlabasi underground. We also take the traffic in front of the AKM(Ataturk Culture Center) and the areas around the Republic Monument. Thus, pedestrians get the full control over the whole Taksim Square.”} \textsuperscript{165} Recep Tayyip Erdogan

During the 2011 election campaign, the details of the project presented were limited, but at the beginning of 2012, what was planned for Taksim became much clearer through public presentations done by the mayor’s office.

From the start until now, exceptional measures have been employed to a great extent within the Taksim project. It is also clear that conventional planning tools were abandoned. The way the project is presented so far

\textsuperscript{163} Swyngedouw, Erik, and Moulaert, Frank, and Rodriguez, Arantxa
\textsuperscript{164} Swyngedouw, Erik, and Moulaert, Frank, and Rodriguez, Arantxa
fails to display any rigorous analysis about the site, such as its social, historical significance, and the potential outcomes that the proposal can materialize once the project is implemented. Moreover, the project was approved by important institutional bodies and regulatory agencies in complete secrecy and speed, which brings issues about transparency and accountability to the public. On top of this, despite the fact that the project is being developed and financed by the Municipality, the national government seems to be the driving force behind close doors, and they haven’t hesitated to use the project for political aims (as part of their election campaign), which exemplifies the unique collaboration between the central government and the municipality, as noted earlier. If the national government desires to implement a project, it can be done without any substantial opposition. Andrew Finkel calls the redevelopment of Taksim Square yet another example of a grand project “produced, not for the city residents, but despite them”. This definition plainly sums up the project.

**Territorial Fragmentation**

The recent project involves two controversial components within it. The First one is to move the traffic under the square, for the intention of

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10. Illustration showing the major landmarks around the Taksim Square, done by the author.
transforming the area into a car-free zone. This will be established through construction of enormous ramps, each 10 meters deep, and 100 meters long, leading to underground tunnels directing traffic under Taksim Square. The ramps will be located at seven points; at Gumussuyu, Siraselviler, Mete, Tarlabasi, and Cumhuriyet boulevards, and one must mention that each of these boulevards has a unique and lively street life embedded to it. Aside from the ramps, there will be high concrete walls erected next to the ramps, and the existing sidewalks will be turned into service roads, limiting the pedestrian access to the square. According to Dogan Hasol, who calls the project a major mistake, 'this will create almost like molehills in the square and it will damage the surrounding fabric, along with the boulevards that connect to the square.' In regards to the project’s benefits for easing the transportation and congestion, Prof.Dr. Haluk Gercek says,

"Taksim is in fact a junction and it is accessed by connection roads. There is not a major traffic problem within the square, but at the entrance and exit points to it and the connecting roads get congested from time to time. With the traffic going underground, congestion will not only continue to be present at the connecting roads, but also show itself in underground".

In fact, while urban planners all around the world try to implement urban design strategies that try to enhance the co-existence of infrastructural elements and pedestrians, instead of creating distinct separation(or barriers) between them, the Taksim project reminds us of the days of Modernist visions of 1950s and 60s. Furthermore, as Prof. Gercek mentions, the tunnel entrances will create serious obstacles for pedestrian traffic, and from an urban design perspective, they may very well be described as ‘very bad, ugly and extremely wrong’.

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168 Gercek, Haluk

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destroying sidewalks and century old trees on the connection streets, reaching to Taksim by walking will become almost impossible.\footnote{170}

Despite the claims by the Municipality, the current project will most likely decrease the presence of people, by damaging the existing access points to the square. The proposed underground roads, parking areas, and bus stops will also create unsafe and undesirable spaces for people. Onur Sagkan makes an interesting analogy between the Taksim Square and Fritz Lang’s ‘Metropolis’.\footnote{171} He says that pedestrianized square in the size of 98000 sq meter, disconnected with the traffic and transfer points underneath it, will most likely to generate a clear-cut dichotomy between the life under and above ground, similar to the kind of environment portrayed in Metropolis.


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Inclusion of Neighborhood Population in Decision Making

In the last few years, Istanbul Municipality has chosen to ask Istanbulites for their opinions on certain matters, especially in regards to aesthetic ones. Firstly, people in Istanbul were asked to pick a design for new 'vapur' (unique ferries that run over Bosphorus, connecting the Asian and European sides of the city), through the municipality’s websites. Similar approach was chosen for design of new public buses, and trams as well as color choices for certain public transportation vehicles. This so-called public participation and transparency gives a wrong impression which suggests that the people of Istanbul have a say in regards to how their city is being run. Unfortunately, public participation as a notion is taken lightly by the Municipality, and it is only remembered when it comes to minor or mostly aesthetic issues in the city. On the other hand, major issues that need to have a real public discussion, like urban renewal projects, or the so-called Social housing schemes, or grand

172 Illustration on the top showing how the streets connecting to the Taksim square will be changed with ramps and tunnels as part of the redevelopment projects
Source: www.taksimplatformu.org
Questions below posed by the Taksim Platform, in regards to the inclusion of Neighborhood population in decision making process.
infrastructure projects, are constantly being implemented on a totally top-down approach, and without people’s opinions being heard.

The project in regards to Taksim follows a similar strategy as well. As discussed earlier, the project was first mentioned by the Prime Minister before the elections. Following that, the Istanbul Greater Metropolitan Parliament approved the plans by vote. This was followed by Istanbul No.2 Regional Agency for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Sites passing the bill, in an unseen speed for a “reconstruction project”. What is so ‘fascinating’ about this very crucial project is the fact that none of the city residents, civic organizations, or universities have been informed or consulted about the project’s details, since it was developed in total secrecy before presentation. The Taksim project follows the common strategy implemented on Urban Development Projects (UDP), in which “a veil of secrecy preempts criticism and discussion, and highly selective leaking of information is justified on the grounds of commercial confidentiality and technical impartiality”.

In regards to this lack of transparency in planning, Gila Benmayor (in her aptly titled article “Istanbulites want transparency”, asks an important question: “Who was consulted for an “urban intervention” like this for the most important part of the city?” For instance, commercial and economic ramifications of a project like this would be tremendous on small shop owners around the square. However, according to the president of Beyoglu Shop Owners Association, they were not even asked for their opinions on the project.

Head of the planning department of Mimar Sinan University, Prof. Dr. Gulsen Ozaydin suggests that “It is imperative that at the beginning of every urban project, a platform for discussion and dissent, along with a holistic approach, opportunities to bring different elements and agents into the process, need to be established”.

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173 Swyngedouw, Erik, and Moulaert, Frank, and Rodriguez, Arantxa
175 Taksim Dayanısması (Taksim Solidarity) Meeting, Karaköy Istanbul, February 14th, 2012
176 Ozaydin, Gulsen, “Taksim, dalış tüneleriyle parçalanmış ve insansızlaştırılmış bir meydana dönüşecek”, accessed at
To complement Ozaydin’s suggestion, the following excerpt from the Taksim Platform’s signature petition, a grassroots movement formed to contest against the Municipality’s project, calls for more participatory, inclusive process for Taksim Square:

*We want transparency and the opportunity for input in the redesign of Taksim Square. Urban development plans should take into consideration those residing in nearby neighborhoods as well as those who work in and visit the area. Transportation projects should not be planned by decree from above, nor in isolation from their environment and residents. The latest holistic approaches need to be taken into consideration during the design of transportation systems, viewing them as part of the overall urban fabric.*

*As the highest-profile and most symbolic square in Turkey, Taksim Square means many things to people of many different walks of life. Democratic participation in deciding how to design and use this public space is just as important as it is in rewriting the Constitution.*

*The days of reckless urban development and planning without public consultation are long over. It’s time to do things differently. Let’s start with Taksim Square. Let’s join together and make this an example of how city officials can successfully work in conjunction with civic groups and citizens for a better designed city space for everyone.*

*We call upon the city officials of Istanbul to serve their constituents in a transparent and democratic way.*

**Neo-Ottomanism vs. the Turkish Republic in Taksim**

The Taksim Square Redevelopment project is not only consisting of making the square car free and take the traffic sub-ground. In fact, perhaps the most controversial aspect of the project happens to be the reconstruction of the “Taksim Topcu Kislasi” (Taksim Artillery Barracks) and its courtyard, which was built between 1803 and 1806. At that time, its construction meant the removal of the century old Catholic


177 www.taksimplatformu.org
and Protestant graves in the Grand cemetery, and upon the completion, the new building had become the most prominent structure around Taksim area. According to Polvan and Yonet, the presence of a large scale military establishment in this area points to the fact that Taksim and its surroundings were considered beyond city's limits at that time. Considering the Taksim's central position in present day Istanbul, it is startling to see how the centrality of the city has changed through centuries.

At this point, it is perhaps crucial to mention the monument which is an inseparable part of the square. With the construction of the Taksim Monument, Taksim not only gained its city square status in 1926, but also became the symbol of a new era, and of the New Republic. The Monument of the Republic (Cumhuriyet Aniti) is the work of Italian sculptor Pietro Canonica, and celebrates the formation of the Republic, the main figures of the Independence War and the first parliament of the Republic are depicted, including Kemal Ataturk, Ismet Inonu, Fevzi Cakmak, along with the two Russian figures (a tribute to Vladimir Lenin, who sent military aid to Turks during the Turkish War of Independence in 1920). One side of the monument displays Ataturk and his comrades dressed in military costumes, whereas on the other side, they are dressed in modern, European clothing (thus, the monument shows both the Ataturk’s role as the commander in chief of the military, and his role as a statesman).

Around the same time, in 1920s, the barracks lost their functionality, and they were evacuated. The courtyard became the first football stadium in Istanbul, hosting important soccer games. During the reign of Ismet Inonu, the second president of the Republic, the city growth and planning under the influence of modernist approaches continued with

\[178 \text{Image on the left shows how Topcu Kislası looked around 1910s, and the one on the right shows how it will look after the reconstruction project. Source: www.ibb.gov.tr} \]
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speed. An international competition was held for the land-use planning of the city. The plans of Henri Proust (one of the participants in the competition) were put into action around 1939, which involved a re-organization of the Taksim Square in a modernist style. One aspect of the Prost’s plans, which were influential in wide scope, was to expand the square, and this meant the demolishment of the “Topcu Kislasi”. The 26000 square meters of land it occupied was later transformed into today’s Taksim Gezi Park, otherwise known as “Inonu Promenade.”

Within the current proposal by the Municipality, “Topcu Kislasi” will be replicated in its former spot, where the Gezi Park is located now. While the Taksim redevelopment project has been criticized greatly, the reconstruction of this building has possibly received most of the disapproval. When asked about the reasons behind the decision of bringing back the demolished structure, Mayor Kadir Topbas answered back with a question in return:

“It is necessary to ask why Taksim Kislasi was demolished in the first place! Unfortunately, in the post-war era, many historically important buildings were flattened with bulldozers, and TaksimKislasi was one of them. Bringing back this important building to life should be praised,

180 Images are taken by the author. The one on the left shows the Monument of Republic, while the one on the right shows the Gezi Park, which would be demolished with the reconstruction of Topcu Kislasi.
Moreover, in regards to the function of the new building, Topbas says that the reconstructed building will become a culture house, which will have cafe shops on the ground floor, and art galleries. He emphasizes that “there will not be any shopping mall” in the building, responding to the critiques of the project. Indeed, uncertainty surrounding the building’s new function makes many in Istanbul wonder whether the project is in fact part of the Municipality’s ‘gentrification’ strategies that have been going on especially around the Beyoglu district in the last decade. The claim that the new building would house a Cultural center does not sound convincing, when one considers the fact that historically important cultural centers at or around Taksim, such as Emek Sinemasi (Emek Theater), National Theatre Taksim Stage, or AKM (Ataturk Cultural Center), are all closed down.

While the municipality and Mayor Topbas have been trying aggressively to ease criticisms, one question still remains unanswered; “why are we reconstructing a building that was demolished long time ago?”

One also needs to emphasize the fact that today many buildings left from the Ottoman period in Istanbul are derelict, abandoned, run-down and in most cases ruined. The so-called historic preservation projects also tend to ignore having accurate constructions processes, like one can see in the reconstruction of Maiden’s Tower or The Byzantine city walls, among other numerous examples. Thus, while AKP government and the Municipality try to give the impression that they care about historical architecture; their record tells a different story in a highly contradictory manner.

On the other hand, the reconstruction of Topcu Kislasi project in many aspects constitutes an uncanny resemblance to the controversial Stadtschloss in Berlin. Stadtschloss was Berlin’s 17th century royal palace that was heavily damaged during allied bombings, and demolished by GDR, despite the protests by the West German opposition. At the same spot, GDR constructed Palast der Republik, the main parliament

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182 Ozdemir, Cuneyt, “Taksim’deki Cinayeti kor balikci bile gormuyor”, Radikal Newspaper, February 5th, 2012
building in 1970s. After the reunification in 1990, Palast der Republik was demolished to clear space for the re-construction of Stadtshcloss on its old site, despite the protests this time by the former East Berliners. 

Both projects, in a sense, exemplify how to rewrite history through architectural and urban design projects. Bringing back a building from an Ottoman era basically attempts to restore an imperial image, while aiming to erase the less glamorous days of Republican period. Moreover, this action is being implemented at the most emblematic spot of the Republican period, and with the building’s massive scale, there is no doubt it will overshadow the Monument of the Republic as well.

However it is important to note that that the political claims and conflicts over Taksim Square did not start with this recent project. “The prominent opening salvo in this debate”, between the Republic and the Islamists, was the controversy over whether to build a mosque in the square in mid 1990s, a plan proposed by R.Tayyip Erdogan who was the mayor of Istanbul at the time. Another controversy took place in 2007 in regards to AKM (Ataturk Cultural Center), one of the most iconic modernist buildings of the Republican era, built in 1960s. AKM is seen by many Islamists as an icon of Secularism and conveyed a sense of secularist threat for them, while “professional groups, artists, and the intelligentsia in the left claimed it not only physically, but also as an icon

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181 Ansari, Iman, “Transcendental Historiography and Architecture’s Process of National Selection”

184 Images are taken by the author. The one on the left shows AKM(Ataturk Cultural Center), facing the square and has been closed for few years. The image on right is a wall mural, depicting the conquest of Istanbul, and is located at the main entrance of Taksim Subway entrance.
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of republican modernism, as cultural heritage.” \(^{185}\) The decision was made by the municipality and the parliament to demolish it to build “a bigger and better” buildings in its place. After a brief renovation process, several lawsuits and disagreements between different constituencies brought the project to a halt. As a result, AKM today stands out in the middle of the square like a ghost building, with its doors closed to the public, with no plans on the horizon for it.

Thus, it must be clear now that Taksim Square Redevelopment project cannot be perceived as a stand-alone incident; rather it is the last chapter of a long lasting ideological warfare between the Republican and the Neo-Ottoman ideals.

Conclusion

“There is a shift from the model of the ‘polis’ founded on a centre, that is, a public centre, or ‘agora’, to a new metropolitan spatialisation that is certainly invested in a process of ‘de-politicization’. “ \(^{186}\)

The shift Agamben calls attention to is one of the most direct, and politically influential consequences of the last three decades of Neo-Liberal regime. Erik Swyngedouw describes this new governance regime as an entity that is essentially “policing, controlling, and accentuating the imperatives of a globally connected, neo-liberalised market economy for which there is ostensibly no alternative, while intensifying biopolitical control and surveillance”. \(^{187}\)

The most essential function of the Taksim Square historically has been the fact that the square has served as perhaps a “terrain of political practice”, \(^{188}\) where public political encounters, democratic negotiations,

\(^{185}\) Baykan, Aysegul, and Hatuka, Tali, ”Politics and culture in the making of public space: Taksim Square, 1 May 1977 Istanbul”, Planning Perspective Vol.25 No.1 January 2010, pg.49-68

\(^{186}\) Agamben, Giorgio, ”Metropolis”, accessed at http://dystopolitik.blogspot.se/2010/01/what-is-metropolis.html

\(^{187}\) Baykan, Aysegul, and Hatuka, Tali, ”Politics and culture in the making of Public space: Taksim Square, 1 May 1977 Istanbul, Planning Perspectives Vol.25, January 2010, 49-68
and political dissent has taken place, thus serving as a functional space for spontaneity and flexibility. In this regard, Baykan and Hatuka makes an important between square and the concept meydan (Turkish translation for Square). In comparison to square, which is bounded with formal spatial definitions and urban restrictions, they define meydan as:

*As a particular spatial typology, this form of open space does not imply a lack of spatial form definition but rather a juxtaposition of multiple forms and activities, which at times overlap, at times conflict and at times are loosely defined – a juxtaposition that makes the meydan a place where citizens negotiate the transformation of symbols, structures and boundaries. As opposed to other types of spaces, bounded with formal spatial definitions and urban restrictions, the meydan as particular typology generates participatory actions and becomes a mediator space between citizens and regime. In a city of meydans, Taksim is certainly key meydan of national significance.*

After the most recent May 1st celebrations that took place in the square confirmed this meydan characteristic in such a way that Taksim Square is arguably the only space in Istanbul where the political expression, or outcry, finds itself a platform, without being restricted or controlled. The recent proposal stands out as a serious threat to this quality, in which Taksim Meydani will most likely to become a square that would resemble any other square that can be found in all around the world, by gaining rigidity and intentionality.

Mayor Topbas envisions the square as a place where there are no cars, people sitting around the numerous café shops (including ones at the ground floor of the new Topcu Kislasi), and having their cappuccinos. Perhaps, it is crucial to remind the Mayor that Taksim Square is not, and should not be, a space controlled by commercial activities, with diminished human presence, and with no political character.

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The answer to what Taksim Square would become after this project lies
next to the square, in famous Beyoglu Istiklal Avenue. A similar
approach of pedestrianization was implemented in Beyoglu Istiklal
Avenue in 1980s, and in the following three decades, as part of the
gentrification and neoliberalization processes, the square arguably lost its
diverse and unique character. Yasar Adnan Adanali describes the
current form of the avenue as:

the street that has come to function as a disciplined
consumption center hastily loses its diversity and originality,
the number of chain stores owned by multinational firms and
big national brands rapidly increase. Stores that could be
found in any shopping mall in Istanbul are now present on the
street and are increasing in number. Along with the process of
the shopping mall-ization of the street itself, shopping malls,
which can be described as contradictory to the “spirit” of this
space have opened, and there are plans for more. While these
new consumer spaces lead to the closing down or changing of
hands of the street’s long standing enterprises one by one,
Istiklal Street is becoming similar to any main street that could
be found in any other city of the world.191

Thus, the transformation of the Istiklal Avenue constitutes a warning
sign for the Taksim Square. the square should certainly not be allowed
to become another playground for Neo-liberalism, under the disguise
of Neo Ottoman idealization. City planning of a metropolitan like
Istanbul must include participants from all parts of the society, including

190 Images are taken by the author. The one on the left shows the historical Emek
Theatre, now a ruin, and a victim of the gentrification processes happened in
Istiklal Avenue. The one on the right shows the newly built Demirenen Shopping
Mall, just next to the theatre.
191 Adnan Adanali, “De-spatialized Space as Neoliberal Utopia: Gentrified Istiklal
Street and Commercialized Urban Spaces”, accessed at:
urban designers, sociologists, as well as civil activist groups. So far, the Taksim project under Mayor Topbas’s authority has failed to demonstrate a grand plan in which societal consensus could be reached. In this case we’re left with a question in our minds as to how the people of Istanbul can raise their voices against projects of this kind? As David Harvey asks:

*Is there an urban alternative and, if so, from where it might come?*

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Harvey, David, “Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution”, Amazon Kindle Edition
Towards a Post-Neoliberal Condition: Resistance and Contesting Neoliberalism in Istanbul

Cities contain some of the more audacious examples of neoliberal governance, but at the same time they are also among the principal sites and stakes for the generation of oppositional movements and alternative social visions. Cities may count as bastions of the market order, but they also define many of its most vulnerable flanks.193

Cities have indeed become central to the reproduction, mutation of and extension of neoliberalism. They are more and more the “strategic targets and proving grounds for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations and political projects.”194 At the same time, as the quote above states, they happen to be the places where contesting neoliberalism may take place. As Harvey asks “how else and where else can we come together to articulate our collective cries and demands?”195, referring to the crucial positioning of cities in urban movements. And that is exactly what people did in 2011; they came together and tried to raise their voice to construct “new forms of solidarism, between as well as within the cities”, which constitutes one of the keys to the transcendence of neoliberalism.196

People participated in the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS) in Zuccotti Park in New York, Tahrir Square, the streets of Athens and London, Madrid, to show their frustrations with the whole capitalist system of perpetual accumulation, along with its associated structures of exploitative class and state power. All these resisting movements clearly had different orientations, actors and characteristics, as well as various

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195 Harvey, David, “Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban evolution”, Amazon Kindle Edition, 2012
196 Leitner, Helga and Peck, Jamie, and S.Sheppard, Eric
goals or expectations. Some of the movements challenged the forms, goals and effects of corporate urban development in cities (like commercialization of public space, policing of urban space, or the entrepreneurial ways in which cities market themselves in global competition). Others battled against the neoliberalization of social and labor market policies, dismantling of the welfare state, and for social and environmental justice. As an example, while the Occupy Movement targeted mainly the hegemony of the Wall Street and the social and economic inequalities caused by the flawed economic structure and power relations in the American society, target points and goals for the protesters in Tahrir Square were oriented towards a different direction.

However, perhaps one commonality that lies beneath the reasons for these various urban resistance movements is the belief that current capitalist system and its projection as a neoliberal design for the city is fundamentally flawed. For David Harvey, what he calls ‘capitalist urbanization’ has been nothing but a ‘disaster for environment, social coherence.’ Some, like Australian environmentalist Paul Gilding, goes even further to call the current protests as the beginning of a process called “The Great Disruption.” According to Gilding, capital system is at the end of its ecological and financial limits in its current growth obsessed nature, and further adds “I look at the world as an integrated system, so I don’t see these protests, or the debt crisis, or inequality, or the economy, or the climate going weird, in isolation — I see our system in the painful process of breaking down.”

Despite this bleak picture, as Harvey acknowledges as well, there is a growing consensus among people all around the world that neoliberal city is not without an alternative. The notion that “capitalism is the only way for progress and survival” was used as propaganda by the neoliberal agenda for a long time, but this rhetoric is not as strong and convincing as it used to be. In this context, resistance movements gain extra significance, regardless of their influence or organizational power, for challenging this status quo. As OWS displayed very strongly, even

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powerless ‘can make history without taking power.’

Margit Mayer points to the fact that that the neoliberalization of the city has in many ways created a more hostile environment for progressive urban movements. On the other hand, she argues:

> it has also allowed for a more global articulation of urban protest, and
> it has spawned renewed convergence of some of these strands under the
> umbrella of the right to the city slogan.

As the urban movements against neoliberalism increasingly gain momentum in cities, the crucial point becomes the need to establish a ‘democratic confrontation that can grasp the contradictions inherent in any society.’

As Mayer points, “Right to the City” (RttC) is a unifying slogan that can help to achieve this goal. “Right to the City”, which was first introduced by French Urban Philosopher Henri Lefebvre in 1968, has been revisited by urban scholars, urban movements and some institutions both as a mean for contesting neoliberal urbanization and an opportunity to participate in current policy making process.

It not only means, as Lefebvre remarks, the right to the urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, but also the right to inhabit, use value free from exchange value, the right for appropriation way beyond ownership, the right to housing in opposition to the right to ownership.

Harvey refers to the term as:

> far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that
> the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after
> our hearts’ desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual
> right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a
> collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make

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201 Carbonell, Adria, “Towards a Political Urbanism”, Mono Magazine #15 Post-Ideological Urbanism, 2011


and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of human rights.

The emphasis on the use of “Right to the City” as a slogan for collective action, rather than an individual, resonates strongly with the European and American contexts, as it could be seen in the case of Occupy movement. Moreover, the subjects and repertoires of urban movements that use the “Right to the City” slogan are diverse according to the cities, political atmosphere, and practices and responses of local and central governments.204

In the context of Istanbul, the term has more of a vague and less prominent role in the urban movements discourse. Middle class activists, professionals, students, academics and political groups in Istanbul have tried to raise the slogan in urban struggle and make it a part of urban movements’ agenda, by organizing meetings to discuss the ways to make the slogan as an umbrella slogan to unify various struggle for collective action. However, despite these efforts, the term fails to comprehend and capture the city as a whole. According to Hade Turkmen, there is a gap between theory and practice in RttC struggle in Istanbul, and the main reason for this gap is different characteristics of current urban movements taking place in local scales. She says:

Although RttC defenders and activists suggests that this is a struggle to appropriate the city, since the core of urban uprising in Istanbul is against the urban regeneration projects and their consequences such as demolition and eviction, envisioning the ‘future city’ is not the very beginning of the discussions. This may be a long term target but needs the contribution of various groups which are politically mobilized and comprehend the city as a whole. 205

Thus, one can say that for the most part, the RttC in Turkish context seems to be connected to the resistance movements against the urban regeneration projects and evictions of inhabitants. In many of these cases, short term results, such as property ownership, construction opportunities or bargaining on the deals, seem to be the overriding

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outcome, rather than aiming for long term goals that would affect larger segments and collective rights in the city.\textsuperscript{206}

Regardless, the notion of urban movements in Istanbul is historically strongly associated with the urban regeneration projects, which generated intense discussions, impacts, and consequences in the cityscape. It must be noted that the last decade especially witnessed growing numbers of groups and alliances dealing with broader, sometimes extremely specific and various, urban projects. As there have been efforts to alter neighborhoods and find a new identity for the city, urban regeneration projects have pretty much determined the overall agenda of the urban movement in Istanbul.

As it could be seen from the way \textit{RttC} is understood, Neoliberalism in Istanbul, as following the forms of ‘actually existing neoliberalisms’, has been experimented, modified, implemented and most importantly contested in locally specific and uneven ways.\textsuperscript{207} In other words, since urban environment, political, social and economic structures, relations, actors and agents differ from one geographical context to another, the struggle for the right to the city emerges in different forms in Istanbul. As in many other cities around the world, contestations display contrasting layouts among various groups and geographies in the city, while coexisting with emergent neoliberalism. Thus, in order to understand the correlation between the workings of neoliberalism and contestation of it in Istanbul, one needs to look beyond neoliberalism, “to the social and projects that coevolve with it” to see the importance of alternative imaginaries and varied practices.\textsuperscript{208}

The cases selected for this chapter reflect the different aspects of urban movements and resistances currently happening in Istanbul. Some of these cases emerged as direct responses to the Taksim Redevelopment project, while others deal with other urban transformation schemes in the city. An example for civic organizations is shown through “Taksim Platform” which aims to create a strong resistance movement among the public against the Taksim Redevelopment project. How architecture

\textsuperscript{206} Turkmen, Hade
\textsuperscript{208} Leitner, Helga and Peck, Jamie, and S.Sheppard, Eric, “Squaring up to Neoliberalism”, \textit{Contesting Neoliberalism}, the Guilford Press, 2006
students are actively working to establish a common ground for contesting neoliberalism is exemplified with “Herkes icin Mimarlik” (which can be translated as “Architecture for Everyone”). While “Starbucks Occupation at Bogazici University” was selected to demonstrate the occupation as contesting method, the movie “Ekumenopolis” aims to show how an artistic documentary project can be a highly effective method for resisting the workings of neoliberalism by raising awareness among a large audience. On the other hand, “the Kitchen project” is chosen to show that a more permanent and spatial platform for contesting is indeed possible. What these cases have in common is the fact that they not only raise awareness about the urban transformation in Istanbul to a broader audience in most peculiar formats, but also put forward messages that concern the city as a whole. Last but not least, the chapter points out briefly about the role architects and planners can play in the contesting processes.

Civic Platforms and Protests (Taksim Platformu)

Last three decades of Neoliberal ideology resulted in global conjunction in which politics has been officially excluded from the urban establishment, to be replaced in return by fiction of a rationalistic agreement and consensus. While former divisions like left and right disappearing increasingly, “the economy itself (the logic of the market and competition) has been elevated to the rank for the hegemonic ideology.” In response to these circumstances, Ulrich Beck calls for the need of reinventing politics and coins the term “sub-politics.” Chantal Mouffe describes Beck’s term as:

_the central idea is that in a risk society one should not look for the political in the traditional arenas such as parliament, political parties and trade unions and that it is necessary to stop the equation between politics and state or between politics and political system._

As part of the sub-politics, Mouffe denotes that series of grass root resistance movements have emerged which are no longer linked to classes or to political parties. “Their demands concern issues which...
cannot be expressed through traditional political ideologies and they are not addressed to the political system: they take place in variety of sub-systems” she adds. Thanks to these sub-systems, having a voice and a share in the arrangement of society becomes unstrained.

The way in which current civic platforms organized in Istanbul, especially as a response to Taksim Square Redevelopment project, constitutes a good example for a sub-political entity. The Taksim Platform212 is a citizens’ initiative that raises objections to the current state of the project, arguing that the project should have gone through more transparent consulting, regulation and supervision phases.213 The platform is consisting of people coming from a wide spectrum of fields, including concerned citizens, urban planners, architects, lawyers, academics, NGOs, political party representatives, artists and more. The square, according to the platform, is “a bustling hub of activity, with majestic Gezi Park providing some natural solace.” Their main argument is that the new proposal would eliminate most of the greenery (Gezi Park), and cut off the square from the rest of the city. In order to prevent this from happening, the platform members gather together every Monday to discuss new methods and ways to spread more information about the project as well as prevent the project from being implemented. These meetings, attended between 50 to 100 people, provide a political platform for people to put their ideas forward and create a political synergy, which is an extremely curial factor in contesting the project.

Nonetheless there are some issues associated with these organized meetings. One is that certain extreme left wing movements, as well as

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212 Word “Platform” in Turkish used to express the alliances of different groups on a specific topic.
more mainstream political parties try to use these meeting for their own benefits and propagandas. A primary example of this took place during one of the first meetings when a representative from the Republican Party (CHP), the main opposition party in Turkey, announced that her party is willing to give their full support to the platform, despite the ironic fact that members from the same party voted yes for the Taksim Project in the City Council just a month earlier. Although majority of the people attending and supporting the organization ideologically relate to the left, they avoid having any party affiliation, in order to reach a broader group of people from different political views. Another visible issue is establishing a common message that would somehow satisfy every single civic organization participating in the platform. From time to time, it is clearly visible to see how conflict of interests can play an obstructive role in the progression of these meeting and lead to heated arguments. However, nowadays the platform has a relatively strong voice despite these initial inner quarrels, and it has gained a larger audience in time.

What differentiates the Taksim Platform from other numerous civic movements that took place in the city is the fact that the platform is structured as a constructive opposition movement. It is not only about obstructing or preventing the project. Platform members are working with a group of 150 professors from three different universities around the city to come up with alternate plans for making simple adjustments and improvements in Taksim Square. The slogan of the platform reinforces the idea that they want to improve the reconstruction plans, not simply cancel them: “A better project... A better Taksim... A better future.”

“Herkes icin Mimarlik” (Architecture for all)

One of the main criticisms towards architecture education all around the world is the lack of integration of the social, political and economic issues present in the society, within the academic curriculums. Studio projects, even the ones that deal with problematic contexts and issues, fail to provide crucial site inventories and analyses in holistic approaches. Moreover, participatory design processes that would involve parties from different fields are ignored to a large extent. Also, architecture education, in most part, has been following the modernist tradition that
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perceives architect as an individualistic, with highly independent-mind character, that is not in the possession of collective, participatory mindset (Ayn Rand’s protagonist Howard Roark is still a relevant example to this tradition). Thankfully, this condition started to be challenged in recent times; however one needs to note that the traditional approach, which is usually more concerned with forms, shapes and aesthetic problems, is still arguably the prevalent one. While it is extremely crucial to contest neoliberalism through civic protests, there are clearly other methods as well. Raising awareness about the negative aspects of neoliberal urbanization among the university students stands out as one.

This general overview of the architecture education is also reflected in the Turkish architecture schools as well. However, there are some independent student-led organizations increasingly appearing in Istanbul, that attempt to establish a more holistic, overarching approach in urban issues. “Herkes icin Mimarlik” (“Architecture for All”), is one of these newly emerged organizations. They define themselves as “a non-profit and independent architecture organization based in Istanbul” and their primary goal is “to offer architectural solutions to social problems which are faced in Turkey and beyond and promoting participatory design process in architecture education.” The organization strives to attract the involvement of architecture students, but they also try to establish a diverse platform, where everyone, regardless of their background, is invited to propose inputs. By providing a much needed platform for architecture students to collaborate with experts (and non-experts) from other fields, the aim here is to transform the understanding and the practice of the field into a “socially constructed entity.”

215 Images source: logo for “did anyone ask you for Taksim Project?”
216 Image showing architecture students brainstorming for alternatives for Taksim Square source: herkesicinmimarlik.org
217 http://herkesicinmimarlik.org
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The organization started to gain more recognition after the announcement of Taksim Redevelopment project. In the first public campaign titled “Sana Soran oldu mu?” (“Did anyone ask you?”), they tried to bring attention, as Taksim Platform did, to the fact that no one in the city was asked for their opinion on the project that takes place in the most important square of the city. People, especially young design students, were asked to come up not only with ideas reflecting their future visions for the square, but also with the ones that would reflect their understanding of the square- what has come to mean for them. Critiquing the current proposal and proposing new methods of transparency and participation in urban governance through creative works were also asked from the students. The results were staggering in a way which show the level of diversity in the perceptions that people have in regards to the square. This diversity alone should be a clear sign as to how misinformed the Municipality’s vision is.

Aside from this competition, Herkes icin Mimarlik has been organizing picnics every Sunday since the Taksim Project was announced. There have been 5 of these events so far and numbers of participants are increasing with each event (last one gathered more than 500 people in the park.) Main target of these events is to emphasize the park’s unutilized potential for usage and its importance for the city. Events are advertised with the reminders “don’t forget to bring your foods, drinks, football and ropes!”, and accompanied by variety of events, such as dance shows, juggleur performances, artistic interventions, and even a swap event by an artist collective. In fact, each event is scheduled to have variety of activities, from different groups, thus the park itself became a platform for performing arts. The biggest accomplishment these events and Herkes icin Mimarlik generated is a new identity for the park, in which people who haven’t been aware of this place began to use it continuously and claimed ownership by actually just being there. One can even say that the park became a really important public venue.

“Ekumenopolis: A City without Limits”

In the last few years, Istanbul’s neo-liberalization process, mainly the TOKI projects, increasing numbers of shopping malls, and urban transformation projects, have gained a wider coverage within the media. Media activism, blogs, digital communication and cultural artistic events
have begun to deal with the vital issues the city has been going through. These activities are vital in creating another public sphere that can fight against main populist discourses of TOKİ and the urban transformation projects done by municipalities. Documentary practice was also put into use for making a portrayal of Istanbul’s urbanization problems, with a project called “Ekumenopolis: A city without limits.” One critique described the movies as:

İmre Azem’s debut film is not only a remarkable cinematic effort but it is also one of the most socially and politically pertinent works of our times. It clearly shows us that the city of İstanbul, much like other mega cities in developing nations, is a ticking time bomb placed in a concrete jungle. Many authorities -- especially the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ) and friends -- will not be happy with Azem’s work, for his thesis, supported by dozens of experts, shows us that what we have been witnessing as İstanbul’s “urban regeneration” is nothing more than the city and its people’s death sentence.  

Ekumenopolis is a documentary movie about Istanbul, questioning not only the neoliberal transformation the city has gone through, but also the dynamics behind it as well. The documentary’s approach to Istanbul is a holistic one in a sense that the director Azem speak with wide range of people, including experts, academics, writers, investors, city-dwellers, and community leaders. The movie follows the story of Kasim Aydin, whose struggle to find a permanent home for his family, after having lost his

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219 Image: Ekumenopolis movie logo
220 Image: Screen shot showing Kasim Aydin, in front of the TOKİ projects.
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geccekondu home to demolition by TOKI three years earlier. The picture the movie depicts is a highly dystopian and scary one. It portrays the processes of commodification of the land, destructive urban transformation and revanchist projects, that basically exclude people like Aydin and send them to TOKI projects at the periphery. The movie also revolves around the potential negative outcomes of the 3rd Bridge on Bosphorus would bring to the city, through giving illustrations, animated maps, graphics and impressive aerial views of the city. Overall message of the movie is clear:

_Ecological limits have been surpassed. Economic limits have been surpassed. Population limits have been surpassed. Social cohesion has been lost. Here is the picture of neoliberal urbanism: Ecumenopolis._

What makes a project like Ekumenopolis essential in contesting neoliberalism is the method it uses. A complex issues like neoliberal city, gentrification, urban transformation projects are described in the most comprehensible and easily understandable way that even people, who do not have extensive knowledge of the urban problems Istanbul is facing, can relate to the issues the movie is describing without confusion.

One person who was interviewed indicated that after watching the movie she gained a totally new perspective and understanding on the urban transformation projects and geccekondu evictions happening in the city. While she acknowledges the fact that the movie made her feel pessimistic about the future of the city, she also indicated that she wants to take more active part in the protests of the urban transformation projects.

The documentary was screened in educational institutions, in solidarity networks and had a relatively limited audience until recently. The campaign to collect money from public to finance the costs of putting in movie theaters in Istanbul was successful, and as of now (May 14th, 2012), the documentary is playing in two theaters. The reaction has been great so far, not only in terms of the ticket numbers it sold, but also apparent from the intensive media coverage the movie got in the last few weeks. Film’s informal premier was taken place as part of the Gezi Park

Festivities of ‘Herkes icin Mimarlik’, which exemplifies a strong solidarity between two different, but related, urban movements.

Ackbar Abbas says in regards to the movies’ role in revealing hidden narratives present in cities:

> *the practices of cinema constitute a kind of empirical evidence for an understanding of urban space but also that such evidence is not necessarily evident and only emerges through a visual-spatial critique.*

“Ekumenopolis: A city without Limits” not only achieves this ‘visual-spatial critique’, but also pushes its audience to question the transformations happening in their city. This awareness it generates alone is extremely valuable in the discourse of contesting neoliberalism within the city.

**Occupation of Bogazici Starbucks:**

The rise of Starbucks in Istanbul pretty much coincides with the establishment of global positioning of the city. Seattle Café giant has entered Turkish market in 2003, and since then, opened more than 100 stores in Istanbul alone. On a nice Saturday afternoon, one can see the Starbucks stores all over the city being crowded with young people sipping their lattes.

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223 Image: Starbucks occupation, source: starbuckssenligi.blogspot.com

224 Image: Starbucks occupation, movie showing, source: starbuckssenligi.blogspot.com
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Perhaps following the trends in global cities like London or New York, it is fairly easy to observe that the Starbucks became much more of ‘Forth place’, in Richard Florida’s term, a place which ‘aspires to be our home away from home, our next door neighbor, and even a remote office,’ in the context of Istanbul. If one can talk about a kind of ‘creative class’ emerging in Istanbul, growing numbers of Starbucks could be considered as a strong indicator of this trend (notion of creative class is strongly attached to the operational structure of neoliberal policies in cities).

Turks seem to follow the notion that Starbucks is not just about the coffee, but about buying a certain branded lifestyle, a ‘personal portal to sophistication, happiness, or whatever else you are missing in your life that five dollars cup of coffee can give you.’

Moreover, from a cities perspective, if the density of Starbucks, or some call “Latte Index”, is considered ‘a measure of urban success’, then Istanbul is surely a achievement story.

However, not everyone is happy about the rising numbers of Starbucks in Istanbul. A recent protest at Bogazici University, one of the most prominent and respected higher education institutions in Turkey, was perhaps the first and definitely the most publicized occupation movement that took place in the recent history of the city. The occupation started in December 6th, 2011 and lasted until the end of February. It started out with a demand for “affordable and healthy food in the campus” after the closing of the only student canteen where a variety of relatively inexpensive food had been available. University’s decision to close down the old canteen and rent the space to Starbucks was implemented without consulting the students or the workers of the school. In order to raise their voice against the University administration, a campaign was initiated by students in opposition to the opening of Starbucks, which lasted for 5 weeks. In the same five weeks students regularly cooked their own soup in order to protest against the campus canteen and cafeterias which didn’t meet the economic and nutritious standards adequate to student life. As the students’ attempt to express themselves and protest this situation gained no attention from the University Rectorate, the students decided to opt for “taking back what already belongs to them.”

On December 6th, the occupation began at the new Starbucks café at Bogazici University. As part of this

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occupation, student demanded the immediate abolishment of the rental contract and within the same space, opening of a student canteen with fair prices and nutritious food. They also wanted this canteen to be a food cooperative organized by students, in cooperation with local farmers, in a non-profit fashion.

Despite their demands to be rejected at the end, the occupiers managed to shed a light to one of the controversial issues present in our times, not only in the Turkish context, but in other context as well: the commercialization and gentrification of public universities, which is what the occupiers were protesting against in a broader sense. According to the protesters, the Starbucks “represents a final and very symbolic step within this neoliberal restructuring.”

On the other hand, despite the threats coming from the University, the Occupation managed to also create a ‘commune’, where students studied, cooked, read poetry and watched movies together. There were occasionally open lectures organized by the academics that came to show solidarity.

“We have not only taken control of this commercial space, but also opened its doors to anyone who desires to contemplate, produce, and share.”

There were also regular assemblies to experiment with participatory democracy in a micro scale, in order to create a political arena for students from different political backgrounds to share what is common to all. Thus, a “consensus emerges urbanistically”, along with the demonstrators finding unity in this community.

Kim Dovey describes organization control of space (in this case by a University) as “form of coercion”, in which “Coercion consists in transforming private, communal, group or cultural space into

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228 starbuckssenligi.blogspot.com
organizational spaces in which people perform actions directed towards the fulfillment of another’s plan, or refrain from performing actions subversive of the realization of another’s plan. Perhaps, the biggest achievement of the occupiers in Bogazici University was to challenge this ‘coercion’, imposed by the capitalist and neoliberal agents, and turn what may be called a public space into a ‘commune’.

“The Kitchen Project”

Contestation methods shown so far utilize spatial qualities in temporal ways, and in some cases, without having one (ex. Ekumenopolis). Perhaps one of the problems surrounding the urban movements striving to achieve urban alternatives to neoliberal urbanization is the lack of permanent grounds and spaces that can be used as meeting points and platforms for the activists.

“The Kitchen Project” is one of the peculiar community based projects in Istanbul, that tries to provide a permanent spatial solution for this problem. It is a project by an Istanbul based, a horizontally organized,

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activist network The Migrant Solidarity Network (MSN), which has been active since September 2009. The network considers itself as part of the transnational and internationalist movement of “no border” and defends that everyone has the right to unconditional freedom of movement and the right to dwell wherever they choose. Moreover, the network sees rights to residence, work, health and education as the most basic ones that everyone should be entitled to, regardless of where they come from or they are “documented”. Thus, one can fairly make the conclusion that the network’s goals are strongly aligned with the other urban movements that take “right to the city” as their motto.

In this context, “the kitchen project” is proposed as a space for the close interaction of the members of the initiative with the migrant groups present in Istanbul. Chosen location for the project is Tarlabasi, an area close to Taksim Square, where the population is consisted of Romans, internally displaced Kurds, refugees from Iraq, and undocumented African migrants. The area is also included in the so-called “Urban Transformation Project”, along with fifty other neighborhoods throughout the city.

The space is planned to have the typology of a kitchen, where the migrants and local activists will come together for cooking and eating food. The project, according to the organizers:

will serve not only to grow stronger ties between activist groups and the migrants themselves, but also to provide a platform for developing grassroots resistance to displacement. Some of the neighborhoods where the gentrification project is introduced, showed solidarity, organized local protests and resisted neoliberal urban policies, whereas the others, lacking a platform for self—organization, were swept away. Learning from these experiences of grassroots resistance in the other neighborhoods, the kitchen project, intends to open a space of solidarity where different groups can build alliance against the deleterious effects of the gentrification projects.

On the “The Kitchen Project”, is voluntary based and independent organization, and it was initiated with the funds coming from XMINY, a Dutch activist support network. After the initial phase, the kitchen

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231 http://www.facebook.com/GocmenDayanismaAgi/posts/359842187364042
232 http://valreep.wordpress.com
would need support, including monetary and food donations etc., to sustain itself in the long run.

Regardless how it turns out eventually, the project, with its social and inclusive role, is an example worth mentioning in the overall struggle and contestation against the neo-liberalization of Istanbul, since it goes against the individualistic, profit based, commercial and segregating land-use strategies of neoliberal urbanism. The project not only opens up an alternative platform and a counter-public space, but also provides a good example of a “soft form” of activism that creates collectivities on the micro or neighborhood level.  

Architects and Planners’ role: (800)

Lefebvre argues that the city needs to be understood as an ‘ouvre’, where all its citizens can participate in the public sphere and generate a city that is ‘where difference lives and were the struggle over with one another over the shape of the city, the terms of access to the public realm, and even rights of citizenship constantly have to be renegotiated.’ In other words, defeating neo-liberalism also results in contesting the kind of post-political, post-democratic society we are living in. According to Mouffe, there is a need for ‘common symbolic space’, which is entirely based on conflicts, contradictions, as well on struggle, debate and dissonance in the public sphere. Perhaps, this can be defined as the ultimate design task for the architects and planners, and this is where how they can play a role in the discourse of contesting neoliberalism.

Obviously, architects cannot organize elections, or act as a politician within its confinement; however, architecture can be political in many ways, since its tasks revolve around the spatial organizations of ‘being together or apart’, as well bringing new understandings to outside/inside relationship within the city, which are very socially charged and political attributes at the real sense. Perhaps the main task of the architects and

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233 Tan, Pelin, “Populism as a conflict of Values”, Noordkaap Times, September 2011


235 Fezer, Jesko, “Design for a Post-Neoliberal City”, e-flux Journal #17, June-August 2010
urban planners should be to be involved in generating a civic city, where neo-liberal type of individualism is exposed and an emphasis is given towards the collective networks in micro-scale, by empowering local populations and informal cultures. It is also essential to redefine what a site means, and start thinking it as a ‘relational construct’, in which the real value of it acquired through interactions and exchange. It is crucial to manipulate and negotiate existing conditions in a given site, rather than bringing finance driven, top down approaches, where architects and planners are only tools.

In fact, one can argue the current architect is very much stripped of his/her socially innovative role, and to a large extent driven by financial aspects. As Teddy Cruz, a Guatemalan architect who works mostly on border conditions between US and Mexico, indicates that there is a need for architects to reinvent their role in order to survive in the post-bubble economy. Cruz says,

*the task of architectural practice should not only be to make visible the long-ignored socio-political and economic territorial histories of injustice within our ideologically polarized world but also to generate new forms of sociability and activism.*

While sharing the belief that terms such as “the social, the economical and the political” need to be redefined, he further suggests that, aside from being designers of form, architects and planners can also be the designers of “political process, economic pro-forma, and collaboration across institutions and jurisdictions.” In order to minimize the effects of neoliberal urbanism, it is crucial that architects gain a multi-lateral, holistic approach.

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In the context of Istanbul, this holistic approach is needed more than ever, for the practicing architects and planners. There is good amount of pressure coming from the dominating government institutions, and TOKI for the most part restricts “the influence of communities and non-governmental organizations in the process of shaping the city.”

In that regard, perhaps the most essential role an architect can play is to provide coordination between local, international and non-governmental institutions, as well as between academics and communities, that has the potential and means of contributing to urban transformation processes. Most crucially, the practitioner can also strive for establishing channels to raise awareness and consciousness about the outcomes and negative impacts of ongoing urban transformation projects in the city, and perhaps to generate new alternatives for communities, that contest the effects of transformations. These contributions might not be in big scales and influential in city scale, but nonetheless they would definitely have ripple effect in regards to having positive changes within the city.

Final words:

One of the planning experts interviewed in the Ekumenopolis, points out that the urban transformations Istanbul is experiencing in a very near future will most likely to result in a city wide “chaos.” Istanbul’s urban transformation problems, as this thesis attempted to show through different angles and case studies, stand out as serious threats for the city and its residents’ future tremendously. From government driven, top down, controversial, gigantic infrastructural projects, to incredible numbers of shopping malls standing side by side, to the so-called social housing projects (which destroys historical, poor neighborhoods to open up space for private real estate developments), as well as the presence of a strong tabula rasa approach rooted in municipal projects, Istanbul embodies the issues of what a neoliberal city is all about in the most extreme ways possible. In almost all cases, one can feel the strong government influence in all projects happening Istanbul. TOKI, and its peculiar ways in approaching urban planning and the city, is entirely problematic. The so-called Social housing blocks by TOKI, which are reminiscent of the failed modernist housing visions of 1960s, are preparing the ground for future ghettos of Istanbul, since the social and

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economic ramifications of these projects are not taken into serious consideration. Signs are everywhere that the city is becoming much more fragmented, and already surpassed its ecological, economic limits.

In this context, there is an urgent need to look at this transformation the city is going through from a closer range. It is no doubt a Turkish version of “right to the city” needs to emerge right away, which could inform the large population of the city about what actually is happening to their city. Although the grass root organizations that Istanbul has seen so far haven’t been extremely influential in pushing the Municipality to revise its plans, it is without a doubt that such campaigns will gain more momentum as people of Istanbul start to see the consequences of neoliberalization process with their own eyes. We are witnessing social unrests all over the World against the imbalances and inequalities between different segments in the society, and it would be wrong to assume that the Turkish public will be immune to these current news. It is for this reason that both the Turkish government and Istanbul Municipality need to understand the dynamics of the city and try integrate different perspectives from different segments of the society into their city plans before the city with 15 million people turn into an “ekumenopolis” on its own…