A Challenge to Urban Planning In Turkey: a Self-Created Urban Planning Model In Turkish Cities

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The paper reviews the manner in which urban planning in Turkey has changed in response to decentralization of decision making and a rising philosophy of entrepreneurialism within the local and central authority. With the 1984 local elections, preparation and follow-up of master and implementation plans were given to local authorities in Turkey. Decentralization of decision making, in a context of entrepreneurial urban development challenged fundamentally the practice of urban planning. The transfer of planning powers to local authorities, without ensuring the legality and public interest, has resulted in the creation of a new urban planning model, which is in reality a negation of urban planning institution. The deficiency of the conventional approaches to urban planning in developing countries has widely been recognized (Rakodi, 2001). In fact, in Turkey also, almost the half of the urban space has developed out of control and this situation continue to be one of the most important dilemma for urban authorities. The empowerment of local governments without any institutional reform or improvement of urban planning thus contained an enormous risk of decentralizing these shortcomings and weaknesses as well.

The 20 years of decentralization practice has shown that such concerns were not unfounded. Actually, the decentralization of decision making had a double outcome for urban planning: On one hand, the fully empowered planning authorities i.e., municipalities have tended to see urban planning as a simple mechanism of regulating the existing structure and allocating the very limited resources, without any concern for strategic planning or for a holistic approach to urban development. On the other hand, rather than producing national rules and guidelines and developing regional policies, central government has re-introduced itself to the scene through some sporadic interferences and undermined the planning powers of local authorities thank to its exceptional means of intervention. Decentralization of decision making tended to produce a new model of urban planning, what we called a self-promoted model, in which the destiny of each land parcel is decided or even negotiated separately. A significant shift in the philosophy of planning, which legitimates to ask: What future for Turkish cities in the 21st century?
Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the post decentralization urban planning in Turkey. Particular attention is paid to the exploitation of planning procedures, tools and methods both by local and central authorities in a context of market oriented planning. In the mid 1980’s, Turkish municipalities were given considerable financial resources, certain autonomy and full planning powers comprising the preparation, approbation and follow-up of master and implementation plans. However, during the period following the decentralization, as well as local practices of urban planning, unjustified central government interferences, have raised questions about the decentralization which is widely considered as an integral component of new structures of governance.

The first section of this paper focused on the planning practice of two Turkish local authorities. The decisions of these city councils concerning urban planning constituted the basis of the analysis. Then, in the second section, central authority interferences were examined throughout a number of examples. The emphasis has been given to the repercussions of the decentralization of decision making over urban planning institution and over urban management in general.

I. Urban planning in a decentralized context

I. a. Globalisation and the new planning approach

In a new context characterized by globalisation, a radical change has occurred in the discourse of urban planning. A growing entrepreneurialism was largely orchestrated by central government initiatives (McGuirk, 1994; Stoker & Young, 1993). A market-oriented planning has been created as the emphasis has been given to promotion of local development (Fainstein, 1991; Gar-on Yeh and Wu, 1999).

The engagement with entrepreneurial styles of governance has been followed by the decentralization of responsibilities across spheres of government (Painter, 1997). The changing role and function of local government politics and the role of urban planning have been the target of several analysis (e.g. Mcguirk 2001, Brindley et al., 1996; Newman & Thornley, 1996). The challenges and opportunities posed by changing modes of governance for local government in general and for local government planning in particular have been discussed (Mcguirk, 2001).

Decentralization has been proposed as an important component of the restructuring process appealed to inform and facilitate urban policy and the regeneration of cities. Decentralist strategies were invariably advocated as ones which are necessary (but not sufficient) to legitimise preferred changes (Paddison, 1999). Many authors claim that parallel to these developments the context for urban planning is also altered (Fainstein, 1991; Mcguirk, 2001). The economic and financial interests find a legitimisation of their escalating demands in entrepreneurial governance.

Planning gains its power through its embodiment in the legislation and regulations which form part of the legal apparatus of a particular country. The nature and style of legal apparatus can vary from country to country and therefore have an effect on generating different approaches to planning. The implementation of planning occurs through the administrative system which again varies considerably across the countries (Newman & Thornley 1996).

In Turkey, this alteration has been carried out by a new urban planning act enacted in 1985 stipulating the decentralization of the decision-making in urban planning. The basis of Turkish
urban planning lies in land-use zoning and development control. The 1985 Planning Act designate'd local authorities as the empowered planning bodies. The planning Act also imposed a duty on each local authority to adopt an urban physical plan for its area. The permission of the local authority’s planning department is obligatory for any proposed development. The planning department ensures that proposals conform with the development plan and controls the scale of the development scheme by regulating plot density and building height, and also examine all aspects of the external architectural character of the scheme.

However, one should remember that, in Turkey, urbanization had not really controlled by the physical planning institution, even before the decentralization. Large Turkish cities have been exposed to a remarkably significant migration since the 1950’s, as a result of which a greater proportion of the urban macroform has been produced spontaneously. Hence, the uncontrolled and illegal forms of urban development such as spontaneous settlements (gecekondu), and illegal subdivisions of land have been a characteristic of Turkish urban centres. In the regular and planned sectors of the cities, property-based regeneration strategies dominated urban policies.

Starting from 1970’s the state has progressively abandoned regional planning. “Individual attempts by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement to prepare and implement master plans for big cities fell short of their expectations and aims. Also, as the State Planning Organization refrained from adopting a more active role in this regard” (Tekeli, 1994, 175-176). In this context, decentralization of decision making in urban planning without any central government supervision has resulted in a total deregulation. On the other hand, this lack of central government supervision has given rise to some brutal central government interventions, which will be mentioned in the second part of our paper.

Decentralization has further triggered the fracture of the two-layer urban planning system; the master plan and the implementation plan. Local authorities, as they have been given full authority at this level and any central authority supervision over planning has been imposed, the hierarchy established between master plan and implementation plan has vanished. In most cases, municipalities have simultaneously prepared and then approved the master plan and the implementation plan. The logic of the two-tier system has been broken as the only difference between them is the scale. Thus, the master plan could not provide adequate guidance for the preparation of a detailed plan and to meet the requirements of development control. The decentralization of decision-making in urban planning has radically altered the role and function of urban planning for Turkish cities. Indeed, during the period following the decentralization of decision-making, the local authorities should have to face up to increasing demands of private sector. When these demands could not have been fulfilled by existing urban plans or in case of non-compliance, plan modifications and plans prepared a posteriori to an urban plan have been employed. These kinds of interventions, which were (and should be) exceptional and secondary means of planning in reality, turned to be major planning practices. A new model of private sector-dominated urban planning, characterized by annexed and local plans and plan modifications thus emerged.

I.b. A new model of planning: exception is becoming the rule

The Urban planning Act specifies two types of intervention after the approval of an urban plan: first, modification on an exiting plans and second, plans prepared a posteriori in an urban plan. In fact, these are not independent plans but attached to an existing urban plan under the title of an annexed or local plan.
I.b.1. A posteriori plans

The exceeding use of *a posteriori* planning means, namely annexed plans and local plans deserve particular attention. According to Urban Planning Act of 1985, 3 types of plan may be prepared and approved *a posteriori* in urban plans; the revision plan, annexed plan and local plan. The revision plan is very rarely employed, and it is not supposed to disregard the general principles of the plan given that a meaningful sector or the entire plan is revised. Whereas, annexed and local plans may be prepared when the extension zones prescribed for future developments by the current plan are no longer available or are insufficient to meet an emerging need. The first of these *a posteriori* plans, i.e., annexed plan covers an adjacent zone to an existing urban plan. A local plan, on the contrary, is prepared for a zone which is outside the previously planned area and impossible to incorporate geographically and socially. In brief, annexed and local plans may be defined as “development plans prepared either for an already existing urban sub-area or for a newly developing one generally without any consideration for their impact on the totality of the urban area” (Tekeli, 1994, 269). Consequently, besides transforming the rural lands nearby the urban centres into urban land and triggering the land speculation, these plans produce an unorganised and irregular urban layout.

I.b.2. Plan modifications

Another frequent planning practice is plan modification. Urban planning Act stipulates that amendments concerning site, size or density of public facilities and roads should not spoil the general directions of spatial growth for the territory prescribed by the plan. In addition, when a public facility is removed, replaced by another one or reduced in size, the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement or related public authority should be consulted and an equivalent site should be allocated. When a plan modification produce a rise in urban density then, the social and technical urban infrastructure should be reinforced in order to recover the newly emerging demand. It is also interesting to note that no distinction has been made between master plan and implementation plan concerning the modification procedures. But these rules have been barely respected by planning authorities as the different case studies demonstrated. Two reasons behind this attitude have been perceived: firstly, no supervision has been set up over the decisions of local authorities concerning urban planning, secondly, local authorities had tendency to consider their planning powers as an exclusive and unquestionable right. For example, in a period of 2,5 years, the municipal council of a medium size city (Canakkale) realized 187 plan modifications. Similarly, another medium size municipality (Silivri) approved 347 plan modifications in 5,5 years.

A content analyse of plan modifications has been furnished quite valuable information. In fact, four major modification types have been distinguished: modifications related to plot ratio/site coverage; land use modifications, modifications to legalize, and finally modifications related to the rules of construction.

The first type of modifications, i.e., increasing the plot ratio, site coverage, and height limits of buildings resulted in a direct increase in urban density which deteriorated in return, the service provision level and quality of urban life. Besides, one should remember that although some of the other kind of modifications (such as modifying rules of construction and forms of buildings: detached, semi-detached etc.), did not aim to directly increase the maximum lot coverage index, they also produced the same results.

The second type of modifications referred to the amendments which had changed the land use. This type of modifications has radically altered the projection of urban plans. Two different tendencies have been distinguished in consideration of the owner of the modification demand.
In fact, public authorities demanded for a land use change in order to assign a new public facility or to cancel an existing public facility with the aim of making space for an emerging one. Decidedly, land use change was very frequently practiced to place a new public facility. Nevertheless, in such cases, a public facility has been furnished to the detriment of another such as omitting a recreation ground in order to make place for a high school. Whereas, most of the modification demands brought by the citizens have been private interest oriented such as transformation of habitat in commerce or vice versa. They have also appealed for transformation of public use into private use, such as the conversion of public utility to habitat or commerce.

The third type of modifications comprised the modifications which aimed to legalize existing buildings stocks, constructed without building permission. That kind of modifications is also significant to illustrate the incapability of public authorities to prevent irregular and illegal urban development. In fact, a plan has been amended in compliance with the illegal constructions, i.e., site coverage index, maximum height of buildings, land use or rules of construction have been modified according to the existing building. In a sense, the irregularity became the rule. However, it was interesting to note that both public authorities and citizens undoubtedly consented to this solution.

The last type of modifications concerned the rules of construction. Usually, when the plan prescriptions and regulations limited the right to construct, in other words, the conditions imposed by the urban plans and regulations could not have been fulfilled (because of the smallness of a land parcel etc.) the urban plan has been modified in order to assure the constructibility of the land.

Another crucial aspect of plan modifications was related to their dimension. In fact, a considerable part of plan modifications have been prepared and approved for a unique land parcel/building lot. It is quite difficult to justify a plan modification realized at a unique parcel/building level. Not only it harmed the integrity of urban plan but also the legitimacy of planning institution.

While the essential procedures and means designed by the planning institution are totally and deliberately neglected, annexed and local plans as well as plan modifications became the major instruments of the new model. From the judicial point of view, this is just a mechanism of legalization, producing a plus value recovered by the landowner on the land market. In contrast to the traditional urban planning, it is nearly always possible to negotiate the destination of each land parcel or each property at any moment of time. Therefore, urban planning becomes negotiable which seems to fit the logic of urban governance but certainly not that of urban planning.

II. post-decentralization period Central authority interventions

Decentralization of decision making in urban planning corresponds to a period where Turkey pursue a market-oriented and outward-looking growth strategy. The policy-makers of the post-1980 period introduce a policy framework encouraging the liberalization. However, despite the changes in legal and organizational structures the impact of decentralization on the representation of citizen groups at local government level however, was and is not a concern. In fact, the decentralization of decision making makes urban land more available for big construction companies (Erkip, 2000).

The new distribution of power has triggered confrontations between central and local governments. Such crisis has further provoked a number of central government interferences
compromising severely the structure of local governance and decentralization. They were based
upon two legal sources: The first was the authority granted to Ministry of Reconstruction and
Resettlement by the article 9 of Urban Planning Act. In fact, according to this article, the
Ministry can prepare or commission plans without requiring the approval of area municipalities.

The second referred to laws and regulations concerning the planning and management of
special zones. The most important of these laws is the Tourism Act which empowers the Ministry
of Tourism to prepare and approve physical plans for the “centres of tourism” declared by the
Council of Ministers (Tourism Act, n° 2634, 12 mars 1982; regulation about the preparation and
approbation of urban plans in centres of tourism, O.G. n° 17941 of 27 January 1983). Similarly, a
number of the laws and regulations concerning special zones such as the environment, national
parks or social housing empowered different agencies of the central government as planning
authorities.

Urban pressure groups such as big construction companies have also played a crucial role in
such cases. Actually, when local authorities have rejected the demands of these economic and
financial interest groups, they have put on pressure over central government in order to
convince it to intervene. Several special zones have been created, simply to acquire a legal
ground for central authority intervention. In this section, we will examine briefly some of these
revealing examples of central authority interventions.

II. a. Central authority interventions based on article 9

Third Bridge in Istanbul

Since 1997, a “third bridge” project on the Bosphorus situated between Vanikoy and
Arnavutkoy has been put on the agenda of successive central governments. In 1999, the
Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement with Ministry of Transports pushed quite strongly
for the third bridge project despite the opposition of the Greater Istanbul Municipality.
Objections and disputes have been raised also in the seaside neighbourhood of Arnavutkoy
since construction of the third bridge on the Bosphorus was proposed there.

The main argument of the opponents of the third bridge was that the urban transport
master plan for Istanbul prepared by the General Directorate of Railways Harbours and Airports,
attached to ministry of Transport had previously prescribed an underwater tube crossing to
allow rapid transit to carry as many as 100,000 passengers an hour. It would have eliminated
nearly as many private vehicles from making the crossing by bridge. In fact, according to
statistics, there are some 10 million trips taken in Istanbul every day, but only about 10 percent
of these are between Europe and Asia and vice versa. Nevertheless, the Higher Planning Council
(Yüksek Planlama Kurulu) has declared that the priority has been given to tube project instead
of third bridge on Bosphorus.

Finally, in February 2003, the government has announced that the third bridge project had
been suspended. In June 2003, State Planning Organisation affirmed that the construction of a
third bridge could only be considered if the project coordination has been given to the Greater
Istanbul Municipality.
II.b. Central authority interventions based on the Tourism Act

II.b.1. Park Hotel

The Park Hotel Affaire is the first and the most recognized conflict clashing central government and a local authority following the decentralization of decision-making in urban planning. The Council of Greater Istanbul Municipality has decided for the demolition of an ancient Hotel of Istanbul located at Taksim, in order to reconstruct a new one in mars 1984. In July 1984, the land parcel where the Hotel is located has been declared “centre of tourism”. However, the new hotel project has provoked a great debate whose major protagonists were the Greater Istanbul Municipality, the Ministry of Tourism and a citizen group constituted in the neighbourhood, i.e., Ayazpasa Citizen Initiative. Two different master plan modifications and detailed layout plans have been prepared and approved with different plot ratios and building heights by both the Ministry of Tourism and the Greater Istanbul Municipality although planning powers of the latter had already been retrieved with the declaration of centre of tourism. On the other hand, Ayazpasa Citizen Initiative has opposed on the legal grounds to the project approved by Ministry of Tourism which allowed a building height of 86 meters. However, the Greater Istanbul Municipality, which had initially approved a layout plan with a building height of 119 meters, has changed its position after the local elections held in mars 1989. The newly elected social democrat administration has not only abandoned the project but also supported the citizen initiative against the Ministry of Tourism.

The conflict has finally been resolved by the Council of State. Ayazpasa Citizen Initiative, which had taken the Ministry of Tourism to court about the Park Hotel has gained the cause in 1993. The Park hotel, construction of which had been completed meantime, has been demolished in 1984. The rests of this building are still in place like a monument of bad urban governance.

II.b.2. Kusadasi

Declaration of “centre of tourism” the entire city of Kusadasi in September 1989 has effectively been the most flagrant example of central government intervention. So, the planning powers of the city administration were directly undermined through the establishment of centre of tourism. The Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement and the Ministry of Tourism, have undertaken the urban planning task of the city until the cancel of Kusadasi tourism centre in October 1993.

II.b.3. Gökkaifes

The most recent urban conflict involving different central and local public authorities as well as citizens has been occurred concerning the construction of a skyscraper known as Gökkaifes (meaning iron cage in Turkish) on a plot, located on a green piece of land on the way from Dolmabahce to Taksim, in Istanbul. A modification of the master plan was necessary in order to realize the project, as the site has been located on a green area. According to the Act of Metropolitan Municipalities, implementation plans are prepared and conducted by second tier municipalities whereas master plan should be prepared and approved by metropolitan city. But, neither Greater Istanbul Municipality, nor the second tier municipality concerned which was
Beyoglu District municipality in this case, did not accepted the plan modification demand of the constructor; Suzer group, which was among the *nouveaux riches* of the late President Turgut Ozal period.

Declined by the local authorities, the Suzer group has changed its tactic and putted pressure on the central government. In fact the pressure of Suzer group on the central government has paid and the land parcel where the hotel was located has been declared centre of tourism by the Council of Ministers. It is interesting to note that the central authority did not hesitate to intervene at the land parcel level neither, which raises questions about the legitimacy of its action.

Following the declaration of centre de tourism, a 1/5000 scale master plan modification was prepared and approved by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement while a 1/1000 scale implementation plan was prepared and approved by the Ministry of Tourism, without consent of related municipalities. However, the Greater Istanbul Municipality has submitted the case to the Council of State. Another interesting central government operation has been realized during the process; the plot of land where Gökkaifes is located was taken out of the jurisdiction of Beyoglu District Municipality and given to Sisli District Municipality.

The Gökkaifes construction has been completed despite the opposition. Besides the Greater Istanbul, more than 30 ONG had cooperated to stop the project. While the construction of Gökkaifes had been stopped many times during the proceedings on the grounds that it would destroy Istanbul’s architectural integrity, the Council of State has finally rejected the appeal of Greater Istanbul Municipality and Gökkaifes turned out to be another symbol of urban conflict.

The decentralization of decision making has paradoxically triggered the undermining of planning powers of municipalities through the central government interferences. However, it is obvious that the marginalisation of planning functions and the diminution of the role of urban planning is desired both by local and central authorities.

**Conclusion**

A review of the recent transformation of planning in Turkey focused on two basic key issues: On one hand, the decentralization of decision making and deepening entrepreneurialism in *urban governance changed the philosophy of urban planning*. A major alteration in the role of urban planning occurred favouring facilitative and punctual planning instead of holistic approach. On the other hand, *central government urban initiatives further undermined* urban planning and urban governance practices.

The decentralization of decision making in urban planning in Turkey produced an absence of planning hierarchy and an evolution of the ancient planning tradition towards a new model created by altered governance structures and approaches. Urban planning has been reduced to a simple mechanism of fulfilling individual demands in a context of entrepreneurial urban governance. It tended to become what Mcguirk has called “a depoliticised form of development planning which is locked into a pro-growth agenda” (Mcguirk, 2001). Social cultural and environmental objectives became secondary for national as well as local governments, preoccupied by global competition, growth and entrepreneurialism (Imrie & Thomas, 1995; Stewart, 1994; Peck, 1995).

In fact, the conventional urban planning system in Turkey had already important problems to control urban development. The inadequate development control has led to the diminishing effectiveness of urban planning. The volume of illegal development exceeded that of legal development. The decentralization of urban planning without creating new tools or innovative
techniques resulted in a complete chaos. Absence of a strong system of checks and balances exposed city governments to excessive interference by state administration. In fact, unjustified and illegitimate central authority interventions furnished a false argument to local authorities. They considered antidemocratic any interference of central government and tended to reject any control over their actions. For the same reasons the municipalities tended to act independently and to make little effort to collaborate with the state.
References


Policy and Politics, 22, 266-277


A study about the decisions of city councils concerning urban planning has revealed that, during a period of 26 months, 24 annexed and local plans have been approved in a middle size Turkish city, (tesev. http://www.tesev.org.tr/projeler/kamu_belediye_metin_teblig7.php)


Ibid