

CITIES IN MODERN TURKEY

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This essay offers a comparative analysis of the development process of the three largest cities in Turkey – Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir – emphasising not the differences in their urban development within a nation-state but the similarities. While the roots of this narrative go back to the ‘shy modernity’ period from the second half of the nineteenth century to the proclamation of the Republic, the focus will be on three phases of political transition in Turkey: the period of ‘radical modernity’ from 1923 to 1950; the period of ‘populist modernity’ from 1950 to 1980; and the ‘erosion of modernity’ which has occurred since the 1980s.

World War I saw the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire into nation-states. The proclamation of a Turkish Republic in 1923 involved both continuity and rupture from certain aspects of the past. The challenge was to transform a pre-industrial empire into a state that represented ‘radical modernity’ and liberated citizens from the constraints of the Ottoman Empire by placing trust in science and technology. The leaders of the Republic implemented institutional reforms that did not, however, adhere to a consistent or comprehensive political theory; instead they conceived the construction of a nation as a socio-spatial process defined by four clear strategies.

The first was the proclamation of Ankara as the capital city of a republic founded on the belief that a sense of national unity could not be developed within the cosmopolitan atmosphere of large port cities. It was hoped that an emerging middle class could establish new standards and values which would serve as an example for the whole country. In doing so, the success of Ankara as a modern capital became linked to the fate of a new political regime.

The second strategy was the construction of a railroad system to integrate the Turkish internal market.

During the period of ‘shy modernity’, railroad construction had been carried out by foreign companies charged with connecting rural areas to port cities. This opened up more land to colonial powers, however, and resulted in the disintegration of the internal market instead of its integration. The new Republic’s administration was determined to implement an integrated rail network and thus doubled its size and, more importantly, converted the existing tree-like system based on port cities to a hub-and-spoke network, with Ankara at its hub.

The third strategy was the development of a government-sponsored industrialisation programme aimed at reducing imports of foreign goods through construction of factories in small towns along the rail network. It was expected that these three strategies of ‘radical modernity’ taken together with a fourth to build public houses (*halkevleri*) in most cities across the country would penetrate all of Turkey from these focal points.

When Ankara was made the capital, Istanbul lost all administrative functions and the jobs that went with it. Although Istanbul maintained its position as Turkey’s largest city, Izmir was overtaken by Ankara, which soon became the second-largest city.

Like many developing countries, Turkey faced rapid urbanisation following World War II with Ankara and most other cities experiencing six per cent annual growth rates. During this period of ‘populist modernity’ there was also a shift to formal employment opportunities, housing, and infrastructure to accommodate the growing urban population. But provision of these elements depended on a high rate of capital accumulation which did not yet exist. Another key challenge was that the education and skills of rural migrants were insufficient to sustain them in the city. Finally, rapid population growth increased

land speculation, raising prices beyond the means of middle-income groups and expanding cities beyond their municipal boundaries. During these early years of rapid urbanisation, Turkey also moved from a single-party regime to a multi-party democracy – one in which populist tendencies increased and patron-client relations became dominant. This all coincided with an industrialisation programme that increased the demand for cheap labour in cities.

Although the urban middle classes, which included professional planners, supported implementation of the modernist legitimacy framework, in the face of rapid urbanisation, initially these groups insisted on sending migrants back to their villages. As incoming migration reached levels where such measures would be absurd, the middle class ‘imprisoned’ these new urban citizens in their minds as ‘peasants in the city’. It was expected that with time, these migrants would learn to live within the modernist legitimacy models. This expectation, however, runs contrary to premises of acculturation theory. These groups expected that in the case of two cultures coming face to face, one would be transformed into the other. Such an expectation may have removed the need to search for a new legitimisation alternative.

In order to understand Turkey’s urban development in this era, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the central government’s planning ideology was undermined by the spontaneous actions of these new migrants as well as the middle classes. Planning ideology entailed implementation of a plan prepared with scientific methods. This plan of the city’s future would be announced to society and was meant to avoid development activities presented as a *fait accompli*. This would apply at the scale of individual buildings, for example by requiring formal permits for construction and for occupancy. It also involved establishing the Ministry of Construction and Resettlement (İmar ve İskan Bakanlığı), which functioned like a ministry of urbanisation. During this period laws were passed to protect the historical urban fabric and urban planning education was institutionalised. Metropolitan planning offices were also established in each of the three cities to help them comply with a key requirement from the Provincial Bank (İller Bankası): in order to secure funding for urban infrastructure, applicants needed to provide a city plan.

The first serious impact of rapid urbanisation was a shortage of housing, and two types of spontaneous solutions were developed to overcome this problem. Government regulations did not offer the multitudes that had left rural areas the chance to sustain their lives, and soon the cities were encircled by the informal *gecekondu* settlements. Recognising the need for new housing, the populist democratic regime was tolerant of this phenomenon, especially when compared to dictatorships. It is for this reason that the *gecekondu* neighbourhoods of Turkey have always been superior in quality and appearance to their Latin-American counterparts.

In order to reconcile this informality with the planning regulations born from the modernist legitimacy framework, the government passed a series of amnesty laws which retroactively legitimised some of the illegal *gecekondu* settlements. Yet the building of new *gecekondus* continued. In time, they would become partially integrated with the formal housing market until finally it became impossible for new migrants to build *gecekondus*. This was because land was controlled by radical political groups which provided *gecekondus* in exchange for political loyalty.

The second response to provide spontaneous housing entailed a ‘build-and-sell’ (*yapsatçı*) strategy. It was developed by the middle classes who also faced a housing shortage when rapidly rising land prices eliminated the practice of registering a single building on a single parcel of land in a single name. The ‘build-and-sell’ solution enabled the middle classes to share the cost of a single parcel of land through fragmentation of ownership. It grew out of a process by which small-scale developers would acquire land from landowners in exchange for a selected number of apartment units in the multistory housing to be built on the land. The units remaining after the allocation to landowners were put on the market; not surprisingly, values were the highest in older parts of the city. This led to the formation of residential areas with inadequate infrastructure and densities far higher than those foreseen in plans. As it was easier to present this spontaneous development as congruent with modernist legitimacy models compared to *gecekondus*, the government put forward a law allowing for the registration of a building in more than one name, including rules organising the management of apartment buildings. With new development plans

increasing the number of stories in the three big cities, building densities were increased, so 'build-and-sell' housing seemingly remained consonant with modernist legitimacy models.

Another spontaneous development was the *dolmuş*. Municipalities were unable to expand public transport to meet this increased demand and the *dolmuş* – a privately operated shared taxi service provided by small-scale entrepreneurs whereby old taxis were modified to accommodate more passengers – filled the gap. Since the *dolmuş* fares were shared, they were affordable to middle- and low-income riders. As local administrations could not hinder development of the *dolmuş* since the supply of public transport was inadequate, instead they organised the *dolmuş* system along particular lines in the city.

Such emergent solutions resulted in the three largest cities displaying similar growth patterns: expansion of the city along intercity motorways, high-density inner-city development, and growth of the central business district toward high-income neighbourhoods. In this model of growth, provision of social services in the high-density city centre remained inadequate, green areas were overtaken by development, traffic congestion increased, and cities began losing their identities as the historical urban fabric was replaced by 'build-and-sell' apartment blocks. *Gecekondu* settlements were also encircling these cities. The populations of the three big cities increased greatly, making Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir metropolitan cities. But cities that grow in this way do not possess the structural characteristics of metropolises of industrial economies; it is perhaps thus more appropriate to call them overgrown industrial cities.

Confronted with this situation, attempts to sustain the modernist legitimisation framework could have included new planning approaches since planning was considered a legitimate political solution at the time. Implementation of partial development plans by local actors, however, challenged this framework. Large-scale developers with significant capital had also not yet appeared. Instead, development of large sites was carried out by a myriad of small-scale projects. These were undertaken by private real estate interests functioning as a *fait accompli* mechanism undermining urban development plans. The small-

scale capital owners who took part in these partial development plans often made use of political channels within the context of populism while powerful political actors seeking prestige through large scale projects also undermined urban planning.

In executing these 'development operations', priority was given to solving everyday problems of the people even if it meant sidestepping planning oversight or the rule of law. These large-scale development operations occurred only in Istanbul – for example the Bosphorus Bridge and beltway project in 1967-73 by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel – but they could not be sustained for long periods of time, and were typically abandoned within four or five years given growing resistance within professional circles.

Beginning in 1980, a new and open development policy oriented towards exports would define the Turkish economy. As state entrepreneurship waned, priority was given to the private sector. This transformation brought about a radical change in how Turkey established relations with the rest of the world. About ten years later, the disintegration of the socialist block and the end of the Cold War also provided important opportunities for Turkey to open its economy. Most important of all was the worldwide transformation following the economic crisis of 1970. This transition from industrialisation to a knowledge-based economy – from the Fordist type of production organisation to a more flexible type and from the world of nation-states to a globalised world – constituted the main dimensions of this transformation from modernism to postmodernism.

Istanbul began to regain functions it had lost in the 1920s after the Soviet and Turkish revolutions. These transformations would give Istanbul the status of a global city alongside the megacities of the world, although at the time urban planning circles in Turkey preferred to apply the concept of 'world city'.

After 1980, the processes determining the structure and expansion of Turkish cities also underwent an important change: instead of growing through the addition of individual buildings and decisions by individuals or small-scale developers, cities were being transformed by the actions of large organisations and powerful actors. Cities could now grow by the addition of large built-up areas through institutional ar-

rangements and new building-supply methods. The most important of these was a mass housing model derived from the 'build-and-sell' method. Mass building was not reserved for residential development but was applied to business needs as well. This included industrial zones and sites for warehouses, wholesale trade centres, transport services, specialised production and free trade zones. In each, small-scale developers or even individuals were organised into cooperatives or other institutional bodies to realise such large-scale operations.

The creation of new self-contained business centres with all the necessary facilities and infrastructure undermined the role of the historical central business districts. The most prominent example was seen in Istanbul, where the old city centres of Eminönü and Beyoğlu could not meet the new control and management requirements. In constructing the new central business district of skyscrapers located along the Mecidiyeköy and Maslak axes at the western ridges of the Bosphorus, access was provided to high-income residential areas in the North thanks to Istanbul's new found capacity to mobilise large amounts of capital.

During this period of growth, Turkey's three main cities did not rely exclusively on a pattern of expansion to new areas; important transformations were also taking place in the old urban zones. Three key factors determined this transformation. The first was the new development dynamics that transformed Istanbul and, to a lesser extent, Ankara and Izmir, from overgrown industrial cities to city-regions. This transformation prompted important functional changes in the city centres. For example, although Eminönü, the city's oldest centre of business, lost several of its production and service functions, it gained important touristic and cultural roles. A similar process has taken place in Beyoğlu.

A second change took place in the provision of transport infrastructure whereby all three cities borrowed large amounts of capital to realise public transportation projects. This led to gentrification of some neighbourhoods near the city centre, as in the cases of Cihangir and Kuzguncuk. The third factor was environmental and attempted to address the risks from earthquakes. For example, recently there has been increased pressure to upgrade the poor construction of older gecekondu and other substandard buildings.

But what to make of the modernist legitimacy in these cities? As their development extends further into the periphery and central districts continue to be transformed, unauthorised construction is no longer specific only to gecekondu housing. Informal construction is increasing, even in the wealthier parts of Istanbul. Thus instead of gecekondu settlements becoming more in tune with the framework of modernist legitimacy models, the reverse is happening.

This is a natural consequence of a growth trajectory which adds large built-up areas en masse to a city's existing fabric. Although it is possible to control and plan for a city's future expansion, the best way of doing so is through incremental growth. In Turkey, development is controlled by powerful actors who do not mind paying the high costs involved. Thus a fait accompli occurs the moment a large parcel of land is bought.

Developed democracies have realised that it is no longer possible to control urban development using modernist plans representing a city frozen in time; instead strategic plans prepared through public participation and a deliberative, democratic process direct a city's growth. Implementation of plans in Turkey, however, should not be confused with the transparent processes of developed democracies. In Turkey, a mayor's use of authority is not always transparent. Meanwhile, the demands on behalf of civic groups for increased municipal authority in the name of national decentralisation and participatory democracy have at times exacerbated this misuse of discretionary powers. This is because Turkey's city administrations have not been completely democratised yet, and strong municipal authority has created, in most cases, local fiefdoms rather than widespread civic engagement.

Like the lifespan of a human being, this urban narrative covers 80 years of development of Turkey's three largest cities – it is a story of modernisation, democratisation, and urbanisation that has taken place in a far shorter time and with a less efficient form of capital accumulation than one finds in other European cities.

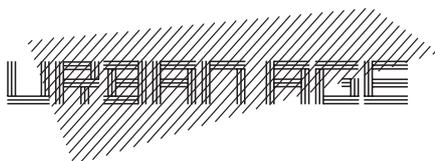
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