

The Trilogy of Power, Politics and Planning

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1. Introduction

Power and politics are deeply embedded in planning. The idea of controlling cities and nations via planning is as old as the city-states. According to Foucault (1976) every political debate in the eighteenth century onwards included discussions on urbanism, architecture and facilities of common life. Yet, it is not only through planning or infrastructure that power becomes tangible but also through a range of political techniques (Castells, 1997). Therefore, instead of speaking of the influence of power and politics in planning, it is important to refer to the mutual relationship between these three notions, thus, discuss the trilogy of power, politics and planning.

In this paper, such an approach to power, politics and planning is used in order to understand socio-spatial inequalities. Although empirical examples that assess the relationship between these notions can be found in the literature, their use in understanding of socio-spatial inequalities is not very common. Having stated the mutuality of these notions, in this paper power is also acknowledged as a plural term, and power of politics, planning and economy are taken as important determinants of socio-spatial inequalities. For instance, according to Harvey (2006) the clash of different powers, e.g. economic and political, generates uneven geographic development. In this sense, socio-spatial inequalities are explored through the relationship of these powers and the paper is grounded within the urban land rent theory, theories of uneven geographies, geometries of power as well as discussions on participatory planning and right to the city. Planning process and infrastructure development in Istanbul are used in order to explain socio-spatial inequalities.

In Istanbul, plan amendment process has become a major issue especially within the last decade. The Municipal Council of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality makes decisions on the future of the development of the city in limited time, with limited participation and regardless of the approved Urban Master Plan decisions. In this sense, the municipality (re)distributes the wealth and urban rent and yet, no regular scheme is applied for the participation of different interest groups to this process. Therefore, tension between different interest groups has climbed in recent years. For instance, professional chambers such as the chamber of urban planners and chamber of architects have sued the municipality on a number of occasions. Recently, public will to protect an urban park (Gezi Park) in its current form against government's plans of demolishing it and resurrecting old army barracks to be used as a shopping mall/hotel complex, has triggered a country-wide resistance. Government's intervention to public space at different scale and forms has become a general practice especially within the last ten years and a way to generate economic surplus. In this paper these interventions are discussed with regard to urban transformation and socio-spatial inequalities attached to this process.

The first section of this paper analyses the plan amendment process in Istanbul. Having acknowledged that the Istanbul Municipal Council approves more than a thousand plan amendments a year (personal interview, Representative of Chamber of Urban Planners 2011), the scope of this research has been limited to a defined area, that is the surroundings of the Istanbul Metro (subway). In doing so, it has been possible to assess the impacts of an important transport infrastructure in the city. In the second section of the paper, one of the emerging terms related to socio-spatial inequalities generated by transport infrastructures, the accumulation of physical capital, is examined with regard to the Istanbul Metro. This

paper uses a series of qualitative data, i.e. expert interviews, newspaper articles and adverts and analyses them with reference to political agency and structure of socio-spatial processes. This method is based on Jager's (2003) analysis of the urban land rent.

2. Conflicts: Adopting the plan or adapting it

Urban land rent theory as well as the notion of commodity, its use and exchange values, is based on a Marxist analysis of economy and economic relationships and draws mainly on Marx's explanation of the agricultural production in the third volume of the *Capital* (Marx, 1990). David Harvey has largely used Marxist land rent theory in order to explain the urban phenomena like socio-spatial inequalities in his early writings in *Social Justice and the City* (1973) as well as in his later work in order to understand the recent economic crises which he believes to have generated in urban areas due to excessive capital accumulation (Harvey, 2006; 2012; Soja, 2010). According to Harvey, use of land, the regulation on land, thus land rent, is a necessary condition for capitalism (Harvey, 1990) which has also been discussed by many others in terms of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1976; Castells, 1996; Soja, 2010).

Improvements on land such as improved infrastructure, increased accessibility and additional construction rights create urban land rent. If we need to specify the form of this rent, it can be described as Differential Rent II (DRII) (Marx, 1990). The Istanbul Metro creates DR II not only directly, based on increased property prices, diversified business sectors and increased CBD activities around the stations as discussed in a previous study (Beyazit, 2013), but also indirectly, as the Metro is used as an additional tool to increase the attractiveness of building blocks and single plots. Planning decisions given by the Istanbul Municipal Council are important determinants of this process and are evaluated in this section. Three examples of residential and commercial buildings are used to explain this process.

After the opening of the Istanbul Metro in September 2000, surroundings of its stations have become attractive areas for investment. Although a number of shopping malls opened within close proximity to the Büyükdere axis regardless of the Metro connection before the Metro was built, some investments have been made considering this advantage (Figure 1). Metrocity, a shopping mall, office and residence complex comprised of three buildings with 24-26 floors, opened in 2003 at the Levent Metro station. Later on in 2005, Cevahir Shopping Mall, the biggest shopping mall in Europe and the second biggest in the world (in 2007) opened at the Şişli/Mecidiyeköy station. In 2006, Istanbul gained an extraordinary building structured like a canyon, comprised of four floors of shopping mall and separate buildings for offices and flats. Kanyon combined the features of street-shopping and shopping in a mall with its peculiar design (Kanyon AVM, 2011). All three buildings have direct access to the Metro stations and passengers can access the shopping malls without going over ground.

In a personal interview with a real estate developer (2011) it has been mentioned that investors see the metro link to the shopping malls as an advantage, likewise, customers prefer shopping malls with connection to the Metro. Therefore, it is possible to state that the Metro creates additional urban rent by offering direct access to and from the shopping malls. Recent developments such as the Diamond of Istanbul, Dubai Towers, Trump Towers, Zorlu Center and other residential and office buildings are shown in Figure 1. These projects have been subject to legal actions as a result of the ways in which they were authorised by the Municipal Council despite not being a part of the local development plans. As a result of exclusive construction rights given to these plots, values increase and the economic gain for the investors of these buildings becomes larger compared to the other investors in the area. Therefore, inequalities occur. Following paragraphs discuss the structure of the process of the generation of differential rent and agencies involved in this process.

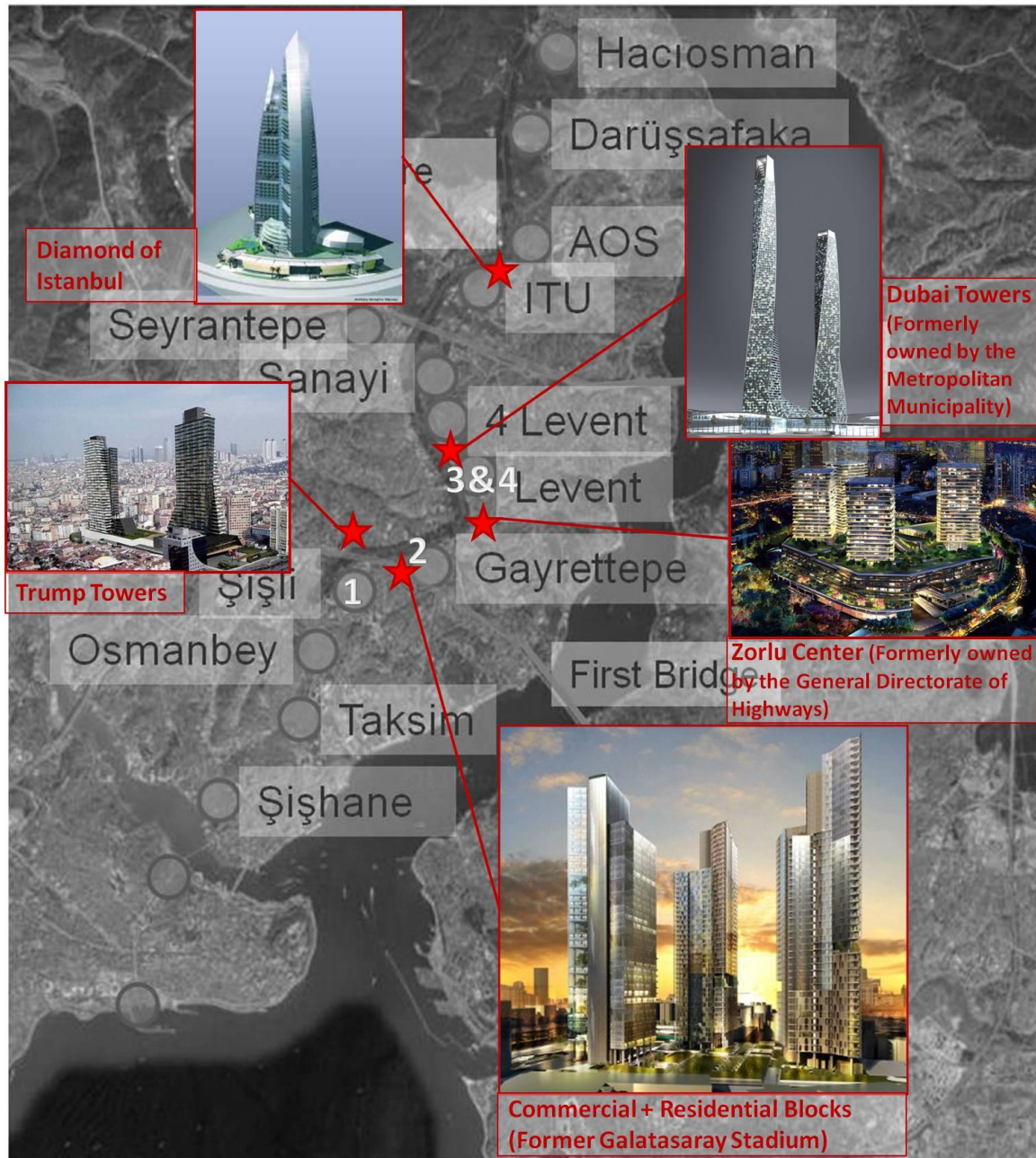


Figure 1 Stars point out the residential and commercial developments that the Chamber of Urban Planners has appealed to the Administrative Court about. Numbers mark the shopping malls/residential and office complexes that have direct connections to the Metro stations. 1: Cevahir Shopping Mall; 2: Astoria; 3: Metrocity; 4: Kanyon

Having stated the importance of the connection to the Istanbul Metro for developers, it is crucial to assess this issue from the stand point of decision-makers. Even though the planning process in Istanbul follows a formal path that consists of various stages of urban planning, the final products, i.e. the master plans, are diverted from their aims and objectives due to interventions from national and local authorities. Therefore, the knowledge produced and shared by academics, planners, decision-makers and other stake-holders in the process of preparing master plans is disregarded in order to implement new decisions via plan

amendments, changed construction rights and new urban design projects¹. This section analyses the plan amendment process in order to define the *structure* and the *actors* taking part in the generation of the differential rent based on Jager's (2003) analysis of the urban land rent.

In a personal interview with one of the members of the Municipal Assembly (also a member of the opposition party) the plan amendment process has been discussed. Based on the interview, it can be stated that this process is very straightforward and includes eight steps from the proposal to the consultation and approval of the project (Figure 2). However, when this process is evaluated in depth, it is far more complicated and involves various actors especially in cases where a decision on an individual plot may have effects at a larger scale such as in the construction of shopping malls and office buildings that affect transport, density and economic gain.

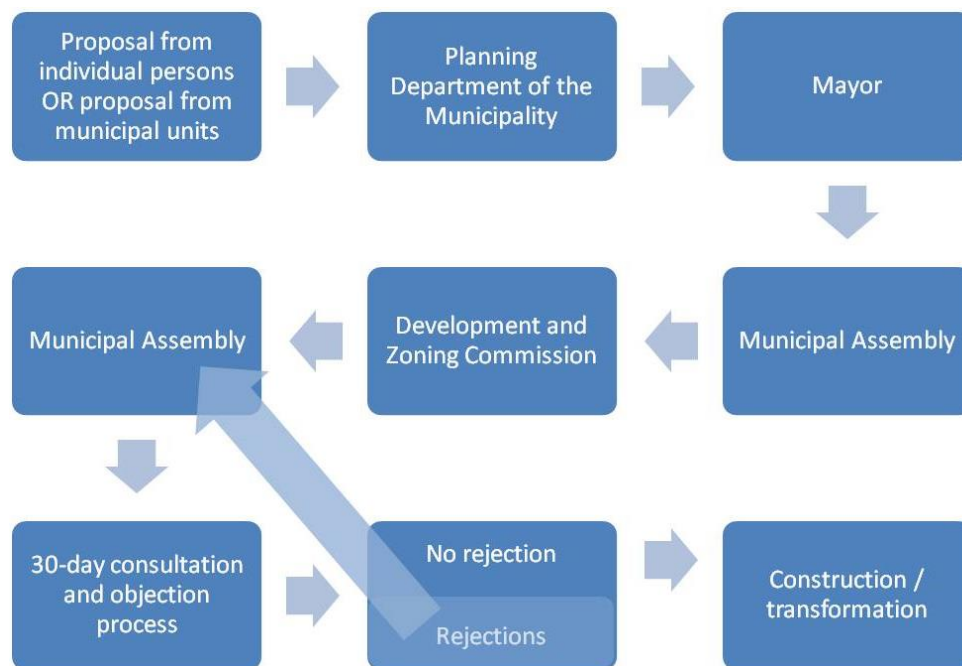


Figure 2 Plan amendment process (source: author's own elaboration)

First of all, differential rent is generated in two ways in Istanbul and is based on the changes of the ownership of the land. Figure 3 demonstrates this structure and the actors involved in various steps of this process. The figure is based on personal interviews with the representative of the Chamber of Urban Planners and one of the members of the Municipal Assembly, decisions of the Municipal Assembly, court documents, national newspapers and non-academic journals on internet.

The first mechanism operates through the declaration of the publicly owned land or partially private land as a "transfer centre" or a "tourism and commerce area/centre" by the Istanbul Municipal Assembly. Following this, the assembly decides (based on the opinion of related

¹ For instance, 2009 Master Plan of Istanbul, a comprehensive study based on four years of data collection, analysis and a wide spectrum of expertise, proposes polycentric development for Istanbul in the East-West direction. However, soon after the plan was published, three major projects were suggested by the Prime Minister himself prior to the National Elections. These projects are; Third Road Bridge over the Bosphorus at the Northern end of the city, a road tunnel connecting the city from south and a new 50m wide canal connecting south to north. First two projects have been included in the latest Transport Master Plan (2012).

municipal units) upon new construction rules on these transfer centres. According to the Istanbul Municipal Assembly's decision number 1985 on Ayazağa Transfer Centre on 16.09.2010, a "transfer centre" may include:

2. Park and ride facilities, parking space, shopping mall and/or cultural centre and/or congress centre and/or education centre and/or hospital and/or tourism centre, office, apart-hotel (residence) functions.

And the plan should be implemented according to the avant (pre) project:

3. [...] Avant project will be prepared by the coordination between the Transport Planning Department and the interest groups (for spatial use, pedestrian-private and transit vehicles connectivity, parking capacity and entrances and exits, connection to the rail system, management plan for the building, parking space and protocol for the usage of the transfer centre) and will be implemented by the approval of the Greater Municipality of Istanbul.

The council defines the tourism and commerce centre as (taken from the amended plan notes of 1/5000 Sisli District Plan decided on 07.11.2010);

3. Tourism and commerce centre may include; hotels, business centres, residences, offices, shopping malls, cinema, theatre, entertainment centre, multi-storey shops, museum, exhibition hall, cultural centre, restaurant, cafes and financial institutions.

The council also suggests for this particular place that;

11. A connection to the metro station can be made.

Second mechanism operates as follows. First, the planning conditions on a publicly owned land are changed by the Municipal Assembly to a "tourism and commerce centre" or a "transfer centre". Later on this land is sold in an auction to the highest bidder. The main difference between two processes is the transformation of the ownership of the land from private to private or from public to private. However, in both cases the construction rights are increased before privatisation (if needed) in order to increase the value of the land before transactions. Therefore, the land is sold by the municipality or by a national institution (such as the Housing Administration and the General Directorate of Highways) after a rise is given to its value by the Municipal Assembly. Despite slight differences between two mechanisms the result is the same: generating differential rent over urban land.

Secondly, agency constitutes an important part of this process. Actors are involved at different stages in the process and make different contributions (Figure 3). While the Metropolitan Municipality, Municipal Assembly, the Mayor, Ministers of the ruling party and National government's units such as the Housing Administration (TOKI) have encouraging roles in the process in collaboration with developers and investors; professional chambers and some individuals (experts, members of the council or the opposition party) may have opposing roles. After the decision is made, individuals or professional chambers may address to the court in order to change the decisions. Administrative courts and court experts consulted by the court may or may not approve the decisions which may lead to either revisions of the decision by the Municipal Assembly or the case to be taken to a higher court, Council of State, by the Assembly.

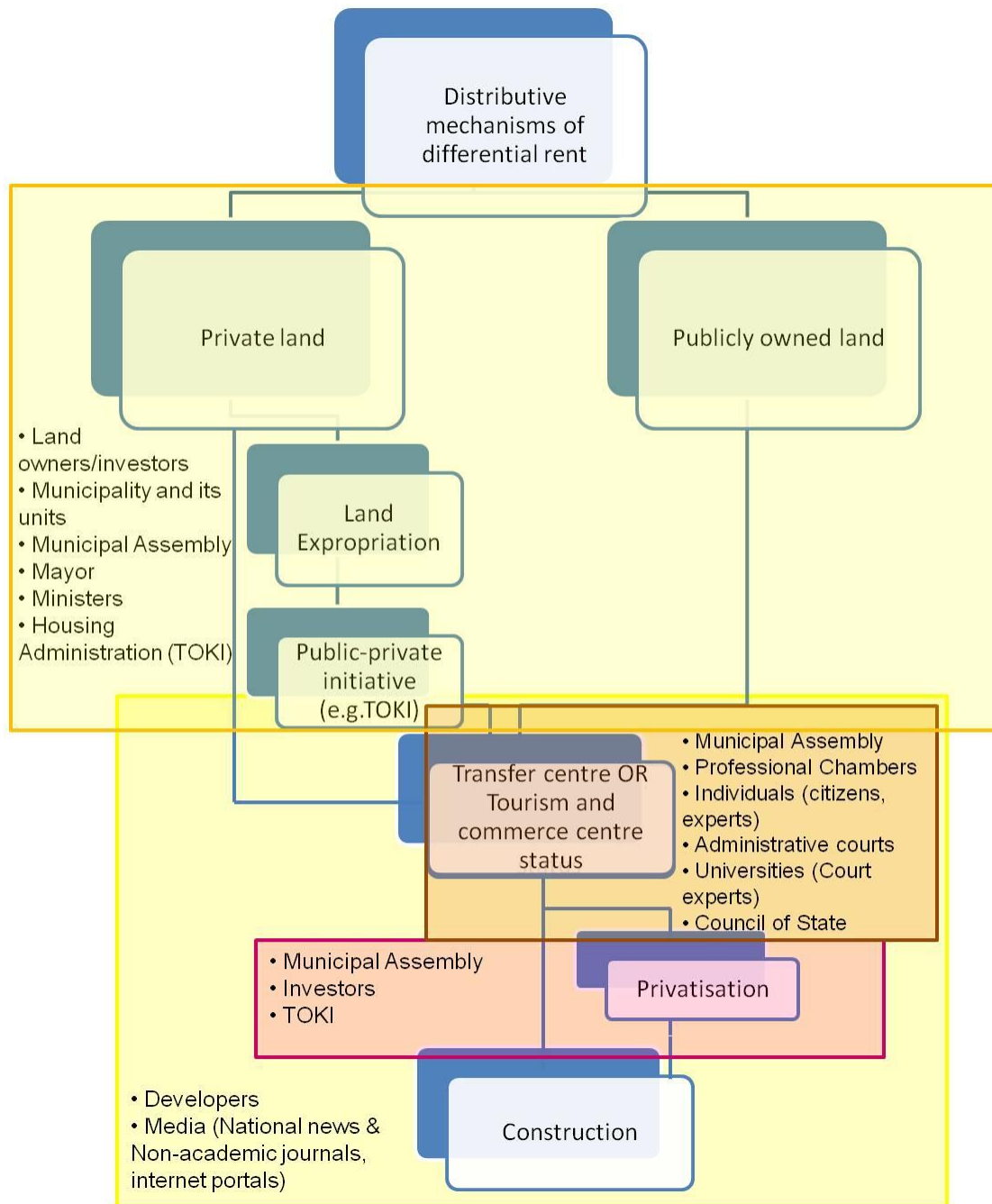


Figure 3 Distribution mechanisms of the differential rent on the Büyükdere Axis, the case of Metro (source: author’s own elaboration)

In this sense, the plan amendment process looks like it is democratically structured. However, power relationships between different actors in the process are likely to influence the decision-making process.

In terms of democracy... it is based on pluralism (*not on consensus*). Decisions (*proposals*) are brought to the agenda of the Council² based on Mayor’s or ruling party’s will. Council decide to say yes or no to these decisions (*mentions that the ruling party would have the majority anyway, therefore, they would have the final word*). Meanwhile, people who are opposing to the decision can present their positive or negative views. They may mention that they do not

² Municipal Assembly or City Council.

agree with the decision. If they are in the *planning* commission, they can place declaratory clause to the decision; if they are not powerful enough in the commission they can address to the council in their party groups and reason their objections.... Have they got other alternatives? Well, they can take the decision to the court, object (*further*) or address to the media. That is how the system works. [...] In any case, if the Mayor does not want *the decision to be made*, he would not send it to the Council. Even if he does send it, he would ask the ruling party to object the proposal.

Politician, 2011 interview (words in italic, my notes)

It can be understood from this statement that the Mayor and therefore, the members of the Municipal Assembly from ruling party, are the most powerful actors in the decision making process. Thus, these groups are the drivers of the agenda on plan amendments. Yet, it is arguable to what extent the members of the Municipal Assembly engage with these planning decisions. Based on an observation of the decision making process in a district municipality during the fieldwork, it is possible to state that the decisions are made in a very short time and without much discussion. The number of plan amendments in a year supports this argument as one of the interviewees mention.

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality approves about 1000 plan amendments in a year. How does the Municipal Assembly work? Members of the Assembly redistribute large (*economic*) surplus from one place to another just by raising and dropping their hands and create an enormous rent in Istanbul. This rent is never taxed in Turkey, urban rent is not taxed.

Representative of the Chamber of Urban Planners, 2011 interview (words in italic, my notes)

The above quote also suggests that as the urban rent generated through plan amendment processes is not taxed, it is not beneficial for the state, therefore, the public. Although the Municipality usually gains from the transaction of municipal land, it uses its initial gain by bringing physical infrastructure to those areas that accommodate new functions. There are cases in which the municipality negotiates with developers for new environment design or pedestrian crossings, however, it is not clear how much of developers' gain is passed on to such projects concerning public good.

Moving on with the attitudes of the actors in the plan amendment process, it is also possible to discuss that, even though ministries do not have a say in this process, they show their support to the municipalities ruled by the same party. Moreover, the Mass Housing Administration (TOKI) has the power to declare any area or a building plot as an urban transformation area and can purchase and sell land. Being a part of the national government, it has slightly more power than other investors.

Professional chambers, NGOs and individuals (citizens, academics, council members etc.) have the power to object the decisions by informing the Municipality and if they do not receive positive response they can take these decisions to Administrative Courts. However, legal cases *occasionally* result in their favour³. Moreover, they can generate public awareness via the channels of the media and try to create a greater objection to these decisions. However, the media can also be used by the municipality to legitimise their decisions. Therefore, these groups are less likely to have a significant impact on these

³ For instance, in the case of plan amendments on the plot that Zorlu Centre has been built, Chambers of Urban Planners, Architects, Civil Engineers and Cartographers-Cadastral Engineers sued the Ministry of Public Works (currently, Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning), Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Prime Minister's Office Privatisation Administration as well as Zorlu Holding based on the decision being against public good and planning principles. Even though decisions by the court were in favour of these chambers in 2008, the situation has turned in favour of investors and national and local authorities in 2009.

issues. Having said that, previous (e.g. the Park Hotel) and recent (e.g. the Transfer Centre planned in the plot abandoned by the Galatasaray Stadium, Figure 1) success stories exist.

Although the Istanbul Metro is not directly related to the decision making process in terms of plan amendments, it has an important part in the decision itself and a crucial role in the construction process. According to Municipal Assembly's description of Transfer Centres and Tourism/Commercial Centres discussed above, direct connections to the Metro can be made from the plots that are given such status. Yet, many new developments that offer mixed uses with shopping malls, office buildings and residential areas mentioned earlier, have benefited from the existence of the Metro stations in the area by gaining excessive construction rights compared to the neighbouring plots. As it is discussed in the next section in the case of the Zorlu Holding, even the developments with no direct access to the Metro are seeking to establish these links. In this sense, the Istanbul Metro can be described as an important spatio-political tool in the generation of differential rent in Istanbul.

3. Distribution of capital

Based on the discussions in the previous section and in a previous work (Beyazit, 2013), it is possible to comment on the Istanbul Metro's impacts on the accumulation of capital. Changing planning and construction rights encourage connection to the Metro stations from tourism and commerce centres. Even though changes in building allowance and planning rules cannot be attributed solely to the Metro, the ways in which the Metro is used in Municipal Council's decisions point out to the importance of connection between the Metro and such functions.

Rights for higher densities are supplied under Transfer Centre status. What is done through these rights for high density?: Only allowing a connection to the Metro.

Especially, these rail systems (*Istanbul Metro, Kadikoy-Kartal Metro, Marmaray*) will create further consequences in Istanbul, maybe we will see that all shopping malls will move to the surroundings of these (*rail*) stations.

Representative of the Chamber of Urban Planners, 2011 interview (words in italic, my notes)

Spatial inequalities arise as the Büyükdere Avenue and its surroundings become favourable investment areas as a result of combination of local and national politics and the existence of the Metro. The Istanbul Metro, with the help of a series of planning amendments, has fostered the functional changes in the area and has influenced the land prices.

You can see plan amendments in every station, the public buildings are sold at very high prices. Metro has affected and is affecting the functional space. There is no empty lot for sale in the area; the building density is very high; road traffic is tangled but the Metro has not reached its capacity yet.

Representative of the Chamber of Urban Planners, 2011 interview (words in italic, my notes)

As a consequence of high values captured through new connections made with the Metro stations, and yet the existence of limited empty lots in the area, new connections emerge between the Metro and Tourism/Commerce Centres even in cases where the plot is not within close proximity to the Metro stations. These situations occur as since investors consider such connection as an advantage (real estate developer, 2011 interview). For instance, based on an agreement between Zorlu Holding⁴ and the Mayor of Istanbul, a

⁴ Zorlu Group purchased the land of the Directorate of Highways after the plans for this plot were changed to include tourism and commercial function. Zorlu Centre is being built on this plot.

pedestrian underground crossing between the Gayrettepe Metro station and the BRT stop in Zincirlikuyu is being built by the investors of Zorlu Centre (Figure 1). The 717m long pedestrian tunnel with moving walkways will not only connect these two stations with each other but also provide seamless transfer between these transport systems and the Zorlu Centre where shopping malls, office buildings and residences can be found. Even though such agreements are made between municipalities and developers in order to capture the 'public good' in exchange for exclusive construction rights given to the developers, private gain becomes more important than the public good as seen in this example since the pedestrian tunnel will also connect these transport modes with the Zorlu Centre. More importantly, since it is the local authority agreeing for such a connection to be made between a private investment and two major transport links, it is possible to state that the Municipality and the Municipal Assembly act as contractors.

In terms of transport and urban planning, the role of Transfer Centres in transport network requires greater attention. In 2009, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality had sixty-nine Transfer Centres planned for the entire city (IBB, 2009) and fifty-nine of these were included in 2011 Transport Master Plan (IBB, 2011). The location and number of these centres bring up questions on whether they are actually needed and if so, whether the construction rights given to these areas will shift the demand in the transport system. More importantly, the question of whether these centres are planned in order to facilitate the transport network still remains as discussions with experts demonstrate.

In a modern city, you cannot have transfer centres everywhere. Here (*in Istanbul*), since transfer centre means giving exclusive construction rights, it is a preferred function over shopping malls. In terms of function, transfer centre status is preferred because it brings mixed-uses. For instance, there are 5-6 transfer centres only in Mecidiyeköy. [...] In a way, it is a nice thing (*idea*) as it creates a public function with public uses in the ground floor and (*private*) ownership (*through construction rights*) in the upper floors, but this situation is gone out of control.

Representative of the Chamber of Urban Planners, 2011 interview (words in italic, my notes)

The above discussions suggest that the Istanbul Metro is a fixed capital (Harvey, 2005) that produces other fixed capitals such as shopping malls, residences, offices and transfer centres. Yet, such development generates in certain parts of the city and not distributed to the wider community, therefore, creates uneven spatial development. Changing regulations and plan amendments also have crucial role in this process and the role of politicians is very distinctive.

4. Concluding remarks

One can discuss that the ideal planning that advocates comprehensiveness and egalitarianism has lost its powerful image even as early as 1960s when criticisms towards it started to emerge (e.g. Jacobs, 1961). As cities maintain their power in the political arena and their importance continue to increase, urban planning has changed its focus from comprehensive and strategic plans to partial projects in practice (Graham and Marvin, 2001). This transformation can, to a certain degree, be explained through changes in world economy and the deconstruction of the idea of state and entanglement of cities autonomously to the global economy and therefore, through the clash of political and economic powers. In this debate, the plan amendment process in Istanbul demonstrates crucial points on the consequences of drifting away from comprehensive approaches to planning.

First of all, following an approach based on the analysis of structure and agency of various political processes, this paper has shown that the plan amendment process is not

straight forward but rather very complicated. This complexity generates as a result of many actors participating the process one way or another at different levels, in different time periods and changing the course of events. Therefore, such process can be regarded as a multi-dimensional political platform and can be evaluated within the debates of power geometries where some actors are more powerful than others. Some actors, especially from the members of the ruling party in the Municipal Council, get more say in this process and they use plans as a direct (and a powerful) tool to apply their decisions. Others, on the other hand, are restricted mainly by the law and lack the ability to manoeuvre. Therefore, it is possible to suggest the existence of the hegemony of the most powerful actors over less powerful ones in terms of urban planning in Istanbul.

Second, one of the main consequences of partial planning is the accumulation of physical capital in certain areas and the lack of distributive mechanisms concerning the economic and social benefits obtained from new projects. Exclusive construction rights given to certain plots add economic value to the land and differentiate them from nearby areas. The owner of the land or the new buyer/developer gains extra land rent which is not taxed and therefore, the public do not gain from it. Moreover, additional projects offered by the developers to the municipality, such as the pedestrian tunnel constructed by the Zorlu Company bring more private gain than public gain as they propose connections between public transport and their shopping/residence/office units. Therefore, through the analysis of the plan amendment process it is possible to comment on the uneven geographic development in urban areas.

Third, even though the Istanbul Metro is not the main concern of plan amendments, the ways in which it is used by the Municipal Council makes it significant to the process in two ways. First, the Istanbul Metro creates the conditions for an area to become a Transfer Centre and helps the area gain additional construction rights. Second, it increases the value of the property which is constructed with a direct access to one of its stations. As a result of the Municipal Council's decisions, differential rent is generated in the city over the existence of the Istanbul Metro and distributed unevenly to certain groups in the society, allotting spaces based on which company or companies provide the highest tender. Furthermore, the access to the Metro stations is important for investors as it makes the investment in these areas (e.g. shopping mall) preferable for customers. The Istanbul Metro, therefore, facilitates the circulation of capital as well as the accumulation of it in certain areas. The use of the Istanbul Metro as a case study has demonstrated the importance of fixed investments such as transport investment in creating accumulation of capital and therefore, contributing to the generation of uneven geographies.

Despite the growing trend on focusing on partial projects in urban planning, this paper has demonstrated that in order to overcome socio-spatial inequalities and establish democratic decision making mechanisms, comprehensive approach to planning is crucial. Yet, this approach, as we know of it in the planning discipline, should be reformulated with the aim of inclusiveness, participation and "just" distribution of benefits. It should propose a democratic structure that is not based on pluralism but based on consensus. Recent events in Istanbul have provided important lessons for the transformation of urban planning discipline. The protests against the demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul have been followed-up a country-wide unrest due to the excessive force used by the police and lack of anticipation by the government. More recently, park/neighbourhood forums have demonstrated how the public and different actors can come together, share their opinions and decide on various actions concerning public good and common interests. Such examples may shed light to the ways in which urban planners may overcome the conflicts and clashes between the notions of power, politics and planning in transforming cities.

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