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Urban Space-Making through Protests: The Transformation of Gezi Park into a Bricolage

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In the last decade, the world has seen a surge of protests and social movements. Also in Turkey, a group of protesters occupied the Gezi Park in 2013 against the government's plans to transform it into a commercial complex. This paper explores the protests to advance knowledge on the relationship between urban space and protests. The paper argues that first; Gezi Park reflects variegated 'rights of, in and to the city' created through 'commoning'. Second, the Park becomes a 'socio-spatial-virtual bricolage,' which contains past and present, traditional and contemporary and global and local subjects, elements and activities and different realms such as the physical and the virtual. Finally, the paper argues that the Park reflects a new political urban space and subjectivity.

Keywords: protests and urban spaces; the rights of, in and to the city; urban commoning; socio-spatial-virtual bricolage; political urban space and subjectivity; Istanbul

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Introduction

Cities all over the world have been shaken by protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street in the USA, and the Indignados in Spain, and the Arab Spring in the Middle East (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017; Sheppard et al., 2015; Tuğal, 2013; Vasudevan, 2015; Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016). Similar protests erupted in the city of Istanbul in 2013 which began with a small camp established to protect the Gezi Park from being transformed into an enclosed residential-commercial complex. The protesters used social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter to make the case public and mobilise solidarity. In a couple of days, the camp was transformed into an occupation embracing diverse people and extending towards Taksim Square, an important site laden with many political and cultural symbols. During the summer of 2013, the protests spread throughout Istanbul and performed in different public spaces in many other cities across Turkey.

The recent urban protests across the globe draw attention to the role of cities in driving social unrest, mobilising protesters and creating alternative to neoliberalism. It is argued that the constituents and design of urban space have become crucial in the evolution and expansion of these social movements (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017; Harvey, 2008; Merrifield, 2013; Sheppard et al., 2015). However, as in the words of Merrifield (2013), these 'encounters', do not emerge as a result of cities per se, but for democracy and in the context of capitalist crisis, as a result of factors beyond the limits of cities: the Occupy or Indignados were triggered by the economic crisis of 2008, while the demand for democracy and civil rights did the same during the Arab Spring. Cities have become the main sites for economic activity, politics, and education where the majority of the population live, work and consume. At the same time, cities have become sites where significant tensions become visible, be class, ethnic, religious or cultural. In addition to various economic, social or political tensions, there are also tensions emerging as a result of cities per se, such as protection of urban historical landmarks, ecology or historic built environment. So, urban space has become a contested and contesting site to bring together people with various concerns, regarding economic inequality, and social and political rights, as well as the rights of cities to be protected against further urban transformation, regarded to damage their history and heritage.

This paper argues that social movements and other forms of protests are entangled in urban spaces. By adopting a relational approach to urban space, the paper explores the relationship between urban space and protests within the case of Gezi Park. In specific, it explores how urban spaces per se can become an agent in driving people from very diverse backgrounds in coming together. The collected data from field research is diverse. It includes statistical information on the demographics of protesters, as well as qualitative data such as interviews with protesters from books, documentaries and news published in the media. An important dimension of the field research was carried out through action research methodology. The author participated in the protests inside Gezi Park until it was evicted, on a daily basis. After the protests ended, the author also interviewed several protesters to compare different views on the protests and their consequences, and participated in several academic and non-academic events about the Gezi protests.

The paper starts with a discussion of the economic, social and political atmosphere of Turkey since early 2000 until the Gezi protests. In doing this, it demonstrates how the ruling party's socio-economic and political rationale was formed around ideologies of neoliberalism and conservatism. Next, the paper discusses the ruling party's approach to urban space, as seen in the transformation of Taksim Square, a symbol of modernity and leftist political activism. In the following section, the paper focuses on the occupation of Gezi Park and describes its socio-material transformation by various subjects, elements, and activities. In the last section, the theoretical exploration of the occupation of Gezi Park uncovered different relations between the claimed 'rights' and the 'city'. These include, as developed in this paper: rights of the city; rights in the city; and rights to the city. The occupation of Gezi Park began as a result of various right(s) of the city, i.e. the rights of the city of Istanbul, such as its rights to be protected against demolition and further losing of its natural and cultural heritage. 'Rights in the city' are rights of protesters which were suppressed by the government. Their rights are claimed, experienced and expressed in the city. In this context, urban space is the stage where different identities and rights are expressed. There are also 'rights to the city', i.e. rights of having a voice in the management of the city, i.e. who owns, but more importantly who can use and benefit from urban space. The explorations of these different relations between rights and city (of, in and to the city) brought to light the logic of 'commoning' which, as demonstrated in the case of Gezi Park, revealed the urban space as something being engaged with and managed by the protesters. Last, the paper makes a two-fold argument: first, the occupied Gezi Park is a 'socio-spatial-virtual bricolage' achieved by the interaction between diverse subjects, elements, and activities and different realms such as the physical and the virtual; and second, the protests created a new urban space and subjectivity, which are political rather than revolutionary in the Marxist sense. This new urban space became the commons for the political subjectivity of diverse protesters where they could freely express their views and claims.

The Justice and Development Party: From a democratic into an authoritarian power

The economic and socio-political climate of Turkey is crucial to understanding the different driving forces which led to the occupation of Gezi Park and subsequent protests. Since 2002, the Justice and Development Party (JDP from now on) has led the country based on neoliberal economic policies, and dwelling on populist and conservative discourses to win over people (Gambetti, 2009; Eraydın & Taşan-Kök, 2014; Kuymulu, 2013; Sönmez, 2013). They came to power following short-lived, unsuccessful coalition governments. As argued by Tanülkü (2012), the JDP can be regarded as the umbrella of various right-wing voters ranging from radical Islamists to the 'nationalist-conservatives' (moderates) and the Islamic bourgeoisie. Economically, they were also supported by big business, which saw the JDP as an advantage for the creation and continuation of a neoliberal labour market, free flows of international capital and commodities. Also, their single-party rule promised stability based on a broad consensus of diverse actors. However, despite its reliance on neoliberal economic policies, supported by the private sector (both secular and Islamist) a large

segment of the urban poor backed the party since they share similar political and social rhetoric based on Islamic principles and more broadly, social conservatism. They also identified with its leader, now-president Erdoğan, who addresses them by using populist discourses. The party also gained support from the general public because of the major economic growth that engulfed the country, in addition to the different forms of social subsidies, which are reminiscent of 'sadaka', an Islamic practice that refers to a voluntary giving of charity. This practice was also popular during the Ottoman Empire, a period which the JDP admire due to its tradition and loyalty to Islam[1]. As added by Osmanağaoğlu (2013), their social policies were based on strengthening the family and the private sphere. Politically, the party seeks influence in the Middle East, similar to the Ottoman Empire's role in the region. The secular upper classes also supported the party due to their need for a populist party to keep people away from leftist political ideologies and parties. Also, the party's policies were seen as a step towards Turkey's EU membership, which could reduce the military's influence over politics and democratize Turkey.

However, things have changed since the late 2000s, when the secular bourgeoisie and the ruling elites felt threatened by the power of the Islamic bourgeoisie, claiming their share in the overall economic wealth and adopting a conservative way of life and positioning themselves against anything secular and western. Named as 'White Muslims,' the Islamic bourgeoisie created a dilemma due to the creed of an Islam which should reflect modesty while capitalism should reflect greed and consumerism. Despite its promotion of Islamic values, the ruling party was also shaken by several scandals, mainly regarding finance (tax avoidance, bribery, extensive spending). As a result, people began to reflect on the relationship between religion and morality, and capitalism and Islam, leading to the emergence of 'anti-capitalist Muslims' who adopt a more modest and devout Islamic way of life. The party also started to remove the secular symbols, modern or high art from public spaces and changed national educational curriculum into a more religious one. The broad support for the JDP eroded due to the party's exclusionary discourses and policies towards anyone who did not fit into a Sunni Muslim identity, such as people adopting a liberal way of life, religious and ethnic minority groups and the LGBT. The tensions emerging as a result of lifestyle differences (such as secularism vs Islamism) already existed before the rule of the JDP. However, the JDP used polarizing discourses and attitudes towards their opponents, leading to increasing dissent among broader sections of the society, which also reflected on urban spaces, as will be discussed in the next section.

[1]The organic relationship between right-wing politics and the urban poor goes back to the early 1950s when the founder one-party rule ended and was replaced by populist parties targeting the conservative and nationalist voters. Since then, the centre-right, and then the radical right (both nationalists and Islamists) were appraised by the urban poor, who searched a more sympathetic attitude towards their way of life (conservatism mainly relying on Islam). In addition, the right-wing political parties in Turkey were an answer to the need of the urban poor to continue their *hemşehrilik* (social ties by the place of residence) through clientelism which provided them with the survival skills in large cities. The JDP maintained this with an ever-growing provision of subsidies to the urban poor, who identified with the political leaders of the JDP, standing in contrast to urban elites ('elites' here refers to cultural elitism rather than economic class). So, the JDP's power did not only depend on broad alliance over their economic policies (neoliberalism, big business, etc.) but also the urban poor's values which were in contrast to the established urban elites. This was also explained by Yörük and Yüksel, that the urban poor were excluded and exploited, economically but more particularly socio-culturally in the face of an established secular urban culture (Yörük & Yüksel, 2014; 109).

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The transformation of Taksim Square under the JDP rule: the conflict over urban space

For near two decades, the party has also governed most of the large cities, including Istanbul, both at district and Metropolitan levels. However, they have usually been criticised by various activist groups, urban planners, architects and intellectuals because of their neoliberal policies (Bora, 2016), which were not too different from those of their predecessors. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism became the dominant rationale in urban governance. In this process, urban land was transformed into a source of profit (as a result of land rent value) which radically changed the urban landscape with the construction of various residential, commercial, and business complexes (Sönmez, 1996; Keyder, 2000). As argued by various scholars, the JDP aimed economic growth by mainly relying on construction and property markets (Eraydın & Taşan-Kök, 2014; Balaban, 2013). Some scholars also drew attention that the JDP saw urban land and property markets as a means for socio-cultural transformation based on conservative values. The party's primary rationale is to create cities reflecting Ottoman and Islamic values, particularly Sunni Islam (Eraydın & Taşan-Kök, 2014; Erensü & Karaman, 2017). They increased the number of their supporters due to direct and face-to-face services provided to urban dwellers (particularly various social services and aid to the urban poor, elderly, sick, disabled).

The party's urban ambition can be seen in the transformation of Istanbul, the country's largest city with a rich history and heritage, and beautiful topography with several widely-debated projects, ranging from large-scale infrastructural projects to various housing, recreational, and religious complexes. An essential example is their 'Taksim Pedestrianisation Project' launched in 2011 by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality which was criticized by urban planners and protectionists because of neglecting symbolic and cultural importance of the area representing modernity, secularism and left-wing activism. The area to be transformed consists of three landmarks: Taksim Square, where the Republic Monument is located, Ataturk Cultural Centre, and Gezi Park (Figure 1).

As argued by Taşçı, Taksim Square can be regarded as one of the most important public squares of Istanbul used for recreation and political demonstrations as well as for celebrating the New Year and major sports events (Taşçı, 2014). During the Ottoman Empire, the district of Beyoğlu, where Taksim Square is located, was mainly inhabited by non-Muslim communities dealing with trade, banking and bureaucracy. The area became the symbol of the Western and non-Muslim way of life in the Empire's capital, with its churches, synagogues, high-rises, and recreational facilities such as shops, restaurants and cafes. Taksim Square became the site where Republican elites aimed at demonstrating their ideology with the symbols of secularism, and modernism (Batuman, 2015; Gülersoy, 1986; Walton, 2015). During the 1930s, prominent urban planner Henri Prost was invited to Istanbul for designing the city's master plan. The area changed as a result of several interventions including that of Prost, all of which aimed to provide the area with a secular, modern and western identity.

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Figure 1: Taksim Square, located on the European side of Istanbul, is the vacant area in the middle of the picture. Republic Monument, left, erected in 1928, is located in the round area, with Gezi Park, the green space in the upper part of the picture. On the far left, the dome of a mosque is seen, under construction since 2017. The large vacant area to the right belongs to now-demolished Ataturk Cultural Centre, closed to the public since 2008. *Source:* Google Earth.

Taksim Square also contains the Republic Monument which was erected in 1928, built by an Italian sculptor Pietro Canonica. The monument depicts the leaders of the Turkish Independence War and enlightenment such as Ataturk and their allies of the time, such as the Soviet Union. The Square has also become a symbol of left-wing activism during the 1970s due to massive demonstrations to commemorate May Day. However, it was closed off to the public by the cadre of the 1980 coup d'etat signalling an extended period of political oppression. Since the late 1970s into the present, Taksim Square also became a site of conflict between seculars and Islamists. JDP is not the first and only political party which aims at altering Taksim Square according to their ideology. As argued by Bartu, the area had already been a target of Islamists to display their power, and to complete its symbolic conquest by building a mosque in Taksim Square, which contest the secular and western identity of the area (Bartu, 2000).

Ataturk Cultural Centre is another landmark which completes the Square's identity, built in a modernist style, which became the leading centre for classical music, opera, and ballet performances as well as traditional Turkish music since the 1970s. The last landmark is Gezi Park, a small green space next to the Square, which is mainly used for recreational purposes. It contains mature trees and is one of the rare green areas in a very dense part of the city (Gül, Dee & Cünük, 2014). Gezi Park was developed by prominent architect Henri Prost and replaced the Halil Pasha Artillery Barracks, a neo-baroque building of the late Ottoman Empire. The Barracks became the symbol of an Islamic uprising in 1909 which was defeated by the secular Young Turks. After being

used for national ceremonies and sports events, the Barracks were demolished during the 1940s when Gezi Park was developed. Gezi Park was designed as a promenade reminiscent of other similar public parks in different European cities (Gülersoy, 1986).

The implementation of the 'Taksim Pedestrianisation Project' would change all these landmarks: as a result, Gezi Park would be demolished, and a replica of the Barracks would be constructed as a mixed-use and multi-purpose building, supposed to include shops, a city museum, residences and offices. The reconstruction of the Barracks would complete the symbolic conquest of the area by Islamists. The Ataturk Cultural Centre was now demolished to be replaced by a new cultural centre which would contain restaurants, cinemas, grand and small halls for art performances. The new building will carry Islamic details while there is a Mosque under construction in the Square next to the Republic Monument.

The protection of Gezi Park against its demolition and more broadly, that of Taksim and Beyoğlu, went back before the protests. The urban activists, mainly consisting of planners, architects, historians, academics and intellectuals defended this site against its demolition and transformation by organising various events to attract the attention of the public. This struggle led to the formation of the 'Taksim Solidarity,' a civil organisation comprising diverse constituents such as Chambers of Urban Planners, and Architects. While they were active before and during the protests, the occupation of the Park and subsequent protests transcended their influence and did not have a specific leader[2].

The occupation of Gezi Park: A socio-spatial-virtual bricolage of diverse subjects, elements and activities

At the end of May 2013, a small group of activists, mainly consisting of environmentalists and urban protectionists camped inside Gezi Park to prevent its demolition. The tensions between protesters and the police received attention from the members of the opposition parties, mainly the PDP (Peace and Democracy Party), who used their bodies to shield the trees. Another event which drew people to the Park was the cancellation of the rally of the main opposition party, Republican People's Party which would take place on the 1st of June in Kadıköy, on the opposite side of the city. Once it was cancelled, hundreds of thousands of people went to Taksim to support the activists inside the Park. Later on, the numbers of protesters grew with the help of social media.

The protesters included people from different identities, educational background, social classes, and representing different NGOs, political parties, ranging from radical to centre-left, as well as LGBT groups, and celebrities. Anti-capitalist Muslims also joined the protesters who rejected JDP's policies based on authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Also, Çarşı Group, the unofficial fan club of Beşiktaş Soccer Team actively joined the protests, which usually come along during football games and is

[2] http://taksimdayanisma.org/

known for their leftist-anarchist slogans[3].

Initially, Gezi Park was closed off by barriers which prevented people from entering both the Park and Taksim Square. However, protesters removed them and created a vast and open space connecting the two. To protect the Park from the police, the protesters needed new boundaries, this time made by vehicles (buses, vans, and cars) confiscated from the Metropolitan Municipality, TV channels and the police. These new barriers were porous and flexible, which prevented police from entering the Park, while they allowed other protesters inside the Park. The use of such barriers demonstrates how a fixed and rigid space (Park before its occupation) became a flexible and permeable one.

The protesters appropriated the Park from one day to the next by adding a different facility. They created new spaces within the Park using tents, and mechanical apparatuses, as well as vehicles such as a public bus which became a library. The Park had a dispensary, which was followed by the establishment of various locations to distribute tea and food and a worship place for practising Muslims (Günerbüyük, 2013; 86-87). It also contained a public library, a journal, radio station, an organic vegetable garden, solar panels, and a vet clinic for injured pet and stray animals and a 'Museum of Protest' (Catterall, 2013). Most activities were done collectively: 'At all times there are diverse activities taking place: readings, gatherings, forums, concerts, Pilates and yoga sessions' (Catterall, 2013). The protesters also distributed books, medical aid and food donated by others, while collected waste collectively (Güvenç-Salgırlı, 2014; 91; Iplikçi, 2013; 168).

An informal TV channel, 'Çapul TV' (Looter TV) broadcasting from the Park, became an important medium to provide information censored by the mass media. There were stands of various political parties and NGOs which distributed their leaflets and promoted themselves to protesters. There were also symbolic streets, such as 'Hrant Dink Street' and symbolic graveyards, to commemorate the people who died during the protests or the Armenian community supposed to have a cemetery near Gezi Park, destroyed during the early decades of the Turkish Republic when the area was developed as a park. In this respect, the Park brought together the past and the future: while the memorabilia of suppressed identities of Turkey symbolised the past of Turkey which was rarely discussed freely in everyday life, the Park itself signified the ideal society of protesters (the future). Inside the Park, the trees also became part of the occupation: they were covered by banners, notes and posters to allow communication between the protesters. The protesters also brought together many elements from

[3] According to the survey conducted by the Konda Research and Consultancy between 6 and 8 June 2013 with 4411 people who actively joined the protests, the average age of the protesters inside the Park was 28, while there was a balance between women and men. The university graduates were 42, 8 % of the total number of protesters, while 12, 9 % of them were post-grads. 51, 8 % were working, and 36, 6 % were students (Konda Gezi Report, 2014). Since the protesters acted in shifts and some of them visited the Park irregularly, the number of protesters inside the Park cannot be precisely numbered. This made it difficult to conduct research based on a representative sample. However, despite this disadvantage, there are few research studies which estimated the total number of protesters in Istanbul. As an example, Yörük and Yüksel argue that approximately 16% of the population of Istanbul joined the protests, equivalent to 1, 5 million people (Yörük & Yüksel, 2014).

different cultures, histories and places. As an example, they created wishing trees, and used Guy Fawkes masks while held candlelight vigils to commemorate dead and injured protesters.

The protesters also occupied Taksim Square and used it as a space for demonstrations, as was done during the 1970s. They covered the Republic Monument with banners and posters of different political parties, NGOs and activist groups. They also occupied the Ataturk Cultural Centre and covered its surface by banners and posters of the various shades of the political opposition (from the radical left and to NGOs). Its roof was used to light fireworks (Figures 2 and 3). They also reclaimed walls and buildings and any other available location, used as tools to amplify their voices through graffiti and political slogans. After the protests, people painted several steps near Taksim with the colours of the rainbow, reminiscent of the diversity of protesters, elements and activities inside the Park.

Figure 2. Ataturk Cultural Centre, during the occupation of Taksim Square in 2013. *Source*: Wikimedia Commons.

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Figure 3. Ataturk Cultural Centre, as an empty building after the protests. *Source:* Author.

During the occupation, Gezi Park and Taksim Square also became the stage for a variety of performances by dancers, actors and musicians. An example of such performance came from the 'Standing Man,' a no-name performance artist from Turkey who stood motionless in front of Ataturk Cultural Centre to protest the police violence. He became one of the symbols of the protests, whose image in front of Ataturk Cultural Centre circulated through social media. International artists also joined the protests, such as Davide Martello an Italian pianist, who performed in front of Republic Monument (Figures 4 and 5).

As the protests continued, anti-capitalist Muslims organised 'yeryüzü sofraları' (earth tables) and invited the others to break their fasts during Ramadan together, demonstrating the collective logic of the protests. People also supported the activists from their homes at night, by beating pots and pans to react against police violence and the state. Social media (Facebook and Twitter) became an essential means to communicate with the broader public and call for help. Evidence suggests that as a result of the role of the social media during the protests, the virtual and the physical realms activated each other (Chrona & Bee, 2017; Varol, Ferrara, Ogan, Menczer, & Flammini, 2014; Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016). As Pearce added, the social media and other forms of alternative media became the primary tools to get information and

communicate due to the insufficiency of the mainstream media in covering the protests as a result of the fear of censorship and oppression (Pearce, 2014). As examples, during the protests, 90% of the tweets came from Turkey and 50% from Istanbul, unlike other protests such as Egyptian uprising where only 30% of tweets came from Egypt (Barbera and Metzger, 2013). Also, between 29 May and 10 June, the number of active Twitter users in Turkey increased from 1.8 million to 9.5 million (Banko & Babaoğlu, 2013).

Figure 4. Republic Monument during the protests. *Source:* Wikimedia Commons.

The protesters also created a jargon around humour, seen when they threw tear gas cannons back at the police, made fun of political actors in social media, and created graffiti. A famous example of this humour is the word ‘çapulcu’ (looter), first used by the Prime Minister, Erdoğan, to describe the protesters. Instead, the protesters internalised and used it to explain their actions as ‘I am çapulling’ (I am looting). Daily life inside the Park continued without significant problems or disputes, even if there were people with opposing views and identities. The protesters discussed problems and survival strategies among them in the forums established inside the Park and took decisions through consensus, i.e. equal participation in the decision-making processes, as explained by Benlisoy (2013). The protesters also avoided capitalist rationale as much as they could do, and the Park was interpreted as a realm relatively autonomous from capitalism (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). Gezi Park became a democratic site in the middle of Istanbul, where protesters removed themselves from

everyday rules, pressures and any source of authority. In this aspect, Gezi Park symbolised a wish to be freed from daily routines trapped in dystopian cities, characterised by traffic congestion, increasing density, competition, and search for status (particularly relevant for the protesters coming from a middle-class/white-collar background). However, by leaving behind their ordinary life, the protesters established a sense of solidarity and community and formed a temporary utopia inside the Park. Also, in the interviews, the protesters representing different groups explained that the Park gave them a feeling of living in a fairy tale, like 'Alice in Wonderland' (Iplikçi; 2013, 92) and 'utopia' (ibid. 261). They also explained that they could establish face-to-face relationships with people they had not known before (Çelebi, 2013; Çıtak, 2013). Also, a person from the Çarşı group who joined the Park addressed the lack of noise, fight or theft, or abuse inside the Park. She added that the Park resembled her parent's youth when everyone's door was open, and people sat in the street to chat with each other (Artık Yeter: Haziran Direnişi (Enough: June Opposition), 2013).

Figure 5. Republic Monument after the protests in its original form. *Source:* Author.

Gezi Park was evicted by the police mid-June and sealed off again. Tents, banners, posters, furniture, vehicles were all cleared away, while Ataturk Cultural Centre, Republic Monument, and Gezi Park became empty with no sign of occupation.

The protests did not seem to change too much in the Turkish society: at the moment, the JDP is still the ruling party. Although the largest cities (Istanbul, Ankara) are now under the rule of the opposition since the last local elections in 2019 March, and Gezi Park was saved from being demolished, the JDP's ecological, urban, economic and social policies continue as before. Since the protests ended, there has grown a discourse of 'escapism' among the secular middle and upper classes, leading to an increase in the brain drain abroad or migration to smaller cities in Anatolia, particularly Western Anatolia characterised by a secular and liberal culture[4] . While a general mood of escapism exits, the occupation of Gezi Park also led to the emergence of new spaces and businesses alternative to neoliberal capitalism. First, although short-lived, there were held urban forums in various cities across Turkey. As argued by Benlisoy, in this respect, Gezi Park occupation and subsequent protests did not only reflect the need to protest but also search for new social relations and experiments about the future (Benlisoy, 2013, 200-201). Second, squats and guerrilla gardens emerged mainly in Istanbul but also other parts of Turkey rejecting the capitalist economy and the general neoliberalisation of daily life and values. Lastly, several alternative initiatives and businesses emerged, which adopted a non-capitalist and collectivist rationale such as 'Café Neighbour Collective' founded in Istanbul (Komşu Café Kolektif) (Tanülkü & Fisker, 2018). This café has recently been closed, but it survived a couple of years and became an important symbol of alternative business.

Theorising the Occupation of Gezi Park: An 'Urban Commons' of Diverse Right(s) of, in and to the city

In this section, the paper approaches the Gezi Park occupation through the theory of 'right to the city' and introduces new concepts 'rights of the city' and 'rights in the city'. First, the occupation started as a result of the 'rights of the city,' i.e. the rights of Istanbul per se. Gezi Park and the surrounding area were important regarding their cultural, symbolic and ecological value for Istanbul and the collective memory of its inhabitants. The primary group of protesters inside the Park, mainly environmental and urban activists aimed at protecting it from being transformed into an exclusive mixed-use commercial complex. As expressed in the literature, the Gezi protests became the peak of the broader urban or ecological struggle against neoliberal urbanism seen in different parts of the country (Kodalak, 2013; Özkaynak, Aydın, Ertör-Akyazı & Ertör, 2015; Harmanşah, 2014). So, the primary reason behind its occupation was the 'rights of the city' (Istanbul) against its further demolition and transformation.

The primary protesters mainly were urban activists and environmentalists fighting for urban green areas and historical heritage, and at a broader context, protesters inside

[4] There is a surge in the literature on the recent brain drain in Turkey, which has increased as a result of the economic, political and psychological atmosphere of Turkey. For the information on the brain drain see 'Bu Ülkeden Gitmek' (Leaving This Country), Kazaz, G. & Mavituna, İ. H. (2018). To know more about migration from large cities to smaller towns within Turkey, a quick search on the internet provides many sources, interviews and news.

Gezi Park were regarded as middle classes. Some scholars draw attention to the relationship between the middle classes and the urban space and argue that the Gezi protests were the middle-classes' reaction to the policies by the ruling party, which destroyed secular, liberal and democratic urban space used by them (Gülhan, 2014)[5]. Citing Wacquant, Aytekin argues that Gezi protests reflect broader dissensus among the urban classes who clash over urban space. However, their clash is not for economic capital; instead, each represents a specific capital, such as the middle classes correspond to cultural capital while the state and the business to economic capital. In this framework, middle classes try to preserve their cultural capital by protecting urban spaces against the blind market forces and the authoritative dynamics of the state (Aytekin, 2017). In a parallel manner, Centner demonstrates from different countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Turkey that the urban space experiences conflict between the middle classes and other groups about the use and access to the 'right kind of city' (Centner, 2013). As Centner argues, the middle classes have 'spatial capital,' i.e. for them, a particular form of urban space is regarded as right, which should be promoted, protected and appraised by others. In this context, the urban struggle has a class aspect not concerning who is going to use, control, manage or access the urban space, but also what kind of urban space is to be used, managed, accessed, and protected (Centner, 2013). The struggle over Gezi Park could be seen within this framework: it started with the initiatives of urban elites (architects, environmentalists, planners, intellectuals) while the Taksim Solidarity played an essential role in the process. In this context, protecting the Park (and other landmarks) looks like an elitist/middle-class effort which demonstrates what is regarded to 'deserve' to be protected and saved against urban transformation.

However, even if its occupation started due to the 'right of the city,' the diversity of protesters demonstrated how the protests went beyond a simple concern for the urban ecology or heritage. Gezi Park brought together the suppressed people during the rule of the JDP (Iplikci, 2013; 392). This suppression can be read as 'increasing social and political conservatism' (Kaya, 2017) or from a psychoanalytic approach, 'father figure' symbolised by the state, the JDP and its political leaders (Soysal, 2013). Instead, inside the Park, the protesters expressed their identities and rights freely, which were suppressed by the state or more broadly, various sources of authority. The paper argues that these are the 'rights in the city', i.e. the rights of different groups and

[5] However, there are counter-arguments against this. As an example, Gürcan and Peker argue that while Gezi Park protests were regarded as middle-class protests, they also reflected the concerns of service-sector workers and the educated youth, who were threatened by the insecurities of neoliberal capitalism and transformed into precariat. They also explain that the protests went beyond Gezi Park and Istanbul and spread to other poor neighbourhoods and smaller Anatolian cities where people from the lower-income groups joined the protests (Gürcan & Peker, 2015). Yörük and Yüksel also add that this distorted view about the new-middle classes during the Gezi protests is associated with their high cultural capital and their extensive use of social media during the protests. Instead, the lower classes, despite their presence in the Park and street protests, did not receive too much attention (Yörük & Yüksel, 2014). The 'middle class' argument is a simplistic way to explain the visibility of 'good-looking' educated youth and young adults inside the Park, which can conceal the differences within the middle classes. 'Middle class' is also a concept which trivialises the class dimension, and at the same time, it seems as an apolitical concept, while it also limits the Gezi protests to the social/urban aesthetic realm. So, interpreting Gezi protests as a middle-class phenomenon is very simplistic, but it can be concluded that the protests started to protect the Park as a result of elitist/middle-class concerns for urban heritage and green areas which later extended to larger sections of the society.

individuals to express or perform their identities and interests in urban space. During the JDP rule, more and more people became concerned about their rights while urban space has become a hostile realm instead of a liberating one. Instead, Gezi Park became a free site for all people who became excluded by the JDP policies and an opportunity for them to express their identity freely. Parallel to diverse 'rights in the city,' also the protesters were diverse. Despite their ideological or cultural differences, the new commons of the park helped them politically unite against the rule of the JDP, or at least to express their views and interests freely.

Last, Gezi Park also demonstrated the 'right to the city,' a concept which explains various conflicts in different cities across the world, against neoliberal urban transformation (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2005; 2008; Smith, 2002). In the context of neoliberal urbanism, cities experience continuous transformation, through the construction of various residential, business and retail complexes leading to the generation of massive profits as a result of urban land rent (Smith, 2002; Harvey, 2008). For Harvey, 'the right to the city' is not only about the access to the urban space; instead, it is about having greater control over the production and utilisation of the capitalist surplus (Harvey, 2008). As discussed by various scholars, the 'right to the city' is not singular; instead, there are different 'rights to the city' claimed by different groups of people (Vasudevan, 2015). There are the rights to housing, transportation, natural resources and the rights to fight against new forms of urban revanchism. More concrete examples are the struggles over the use of and access to urban spaces leading to the emergence of squatting, urban gardening, and other subsequent socio-political transformations. The 'right(s) to the city' is about the conflict between the use and the exchange value of urban space. While the capital wants to increase the exchange value of urban space, activists and protesters want to extend its use-value by the creation of squats and guerrilla gardens (Vasudevan, 2015).

The conflict between the ownership, usership and access to urban space was disentangled through 'commoning' inside Gezi Park by protesters. Before its occupation, Gezi Park was a public space however solely managed by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. When the protesters occupied, they gradually took over its management, transforming it into an 'urban commons', singling out the state and any other public agency (Huron, 2017). The 'urban commons' demonstrates that the primary conflict does not emerge from the status of ownership of the urban land (whether it is public or private). Instead, Huron argues that conflicts can also emerge between public spaces organised and managed by the state and the urban commons, organised and managed by people. Huron (2017) maintains that all public spaces should be converted into commons to be used and accessed by people (Huron, 2017). Rather than owning but using, this suggests that accessing and taking an active role in the decision on the future of urban land is crucial (Huron, 2017). To what extent Huron's view on urban commons can be generalised to different other public spaces, in Turkey and elsewhere, is certainly a question that needs further exploration.

Spatially, the paper argues that Gezi Park became a 'cultural bricolage' where past and present, global and local, and contemporary and traditional subjects, elements and activities came together, from Guy Fawkes masks to graffiti, from candlelight vigils to

wish trees, from art performances to 'earth tables,' and 'Museum of Protest.' The Park integrated urban space and protesters who wanted to raise their voices about various rights by forming a non-hierarchical and plural opposition. One by one, the Park, trees, vehicles, Taksim Square, Republic Monument, Ataturk Cultural Centre, and then the streets, walls, steps, became parts of the protesters, reflecting their opinions, and feelings while their bodies (sounds, dresses, hair), as well as their 'things,' such as books, food, drinks, furniture, banners, etc., became mediums to express their identities. Last, Gezi Park was also co-produced by different realms: the physical (urban space, and protesters) and the virtual (Twitter, Facebook, and other forms of social media). Protesters communicated via social media channels, which completed their physical lives and helped them in case of emergencies or dangers. The Park became a flexible realm changing its shape, borders, and contents from one day to the next. In the end, it became more than a mere physical realm; instead, it became a 'socio-spatial-virtual bricolage' extending the boundaries of the physicality of urban space to embrace the virtual realm.

The Gezi Park occupation also signalled a new urban space and subjectivity. Its occupation demonstrates how urban space has become a site to make politics, demonstrate political conflict and claim a social change. In this context, Gezi Park became a political space which went beyond the limits of conventional politics (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017). Taksim Square and other parts of Istanbul re-charged its political meaning, which was latent and suppressed since the 1980 coup d'etat signalling the advent of neoliberalism. This politicisation of urban space went parallel to the politicisation of people (or subjects), who became political as a result of protesting against the government or more generally, any form of authority represented by the JDP. The emergence of political urban space and subjectivity demonstrates the difference between 'political' and 'politics' (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017). As noted by Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 'urban politics' refers to making politics within the framework of the state and government, while 'political' means making politics beyond these limits. They argue that recent global protests or occupations reflect a 'political subjectivation' which is a metaphorical subject formed by people from diverse backgrounds who come together to create 'the people' (as a political category) transcending the limits of particular social positionalities and identities (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017: 10). 'Political' does not refer to radicalism in conventional Marxist sense aiming at tearing down the status quo through radical activism under the guidance of a vanguard party or leader. For Dikeç and Swyngedouw, to become radical, the political interruption or insurgency should be enacted through a slow process of politicisation to claim equality or open up the possibility of the new (ibid. 8). In this context, the paper argues that Gezi Park created a 'political subjectivity' which became more than the sum of protesters, and was not limited to conventional politics, nor was it revolutionary in a traditional sense. Instead, it used art and humour to reflect their ideas and fight against the state and the police (and any other symbols of political and religious authority). The paper argues that this subjectivity was acting collectively not for their rights but a multitude of rights (the rights of, in and to the city) which belong to all protesters and the city of Istanbul.

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Conclusion

By analysing the Gezi Park occupation, the paper aimed at exploring two things: first, at a broader level, why and how the relationship between urban space and protests is established and sustained and how urban space can become an agent in generating protests and bringing together people from diverse backgrounds. Gezi Park was an exceptional space due to its importance for the people of Istanbul, which was laden with historical and political meanings. These meanings helped to bring people together and to communicate their different rights of, in and to the city. The paper argues that the occupation began as a result of the 'rights of the city' which are the rights of Istanbul to stand against any further damage to its ecological, natural, social and cultural resources. As the occupation developed, diverse protesters also claimed their diverse 'rights in the city' inside Gezi Park which became a commons to perform their diverging rights, and to protest the government's social conservatism and pressure on civil liberties. The protesters also revealed their 'rights to the city' in terms of participation in decisions concerning the future of their cities and access to the city's urban spaces and resources. The occupation of the Park came as a response to both top-down state authority and the neoliberal economic development that transformed Istanbul into a segregated, polarized and privatized city. Unpacking the 'rights of the city,' 'rights in the city' and 'rights to the city' that have inspired the occupation of the park revealed how the urban space of Gezi Park became a socio-politically, spatially and psychologically inclusive site. Second, at a micro-level, by demonstrating the socio-spatial transformation of Gezi Park, the paper argues that Gezi Park became an 'urban commons' reclaimed through collectively and equally expressed rights (Huron, 2017; Vasudevan, 2015). Performing these different rights in the park has transformed it into a 'socio-spatial-virtual bricolage', which consists of protesters, elements, and activities from the past and present, global and local, and the physical and the virtual. Gezi Park became a site where the suppressed people and practices of the JDP rule in Turkey could express their rights without any fear.

The Gezi protests also demonstrated the reasons why people from such diverse backgrounds could come together: It was the importance of Gezi Park, which attracted and pushed them to protest. The relationship between the urban space and protests was apparent: as also noted in the literature, it was the conflict between the exchange and use value of urban land (Vasudevan, 2015) or between the economic and cultural capital (Aytekin, 2017; Centner, 2013) which brought together the radical urban actors (leftists, activists) and the middle classes who were regarded to have an interest in urban aesthetics and culture rather than economics (and class politics), which also make them to be regarded as 'apolitical'. Instead, the middle classes, as the rest of the protesters became 'political subjects' inside the Park and beyond and even for a short time, they came together with more radical activists for the future of Gezi Park and broader urban and ecological problems.

While Gezi protests sought the protection of an essential urban landmark, located in a politically-loaded area, it was also inspired by surge of social movements that waved the globe since the global market crisis of 2008, e.g. the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the Indignados in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street in the USA (Tuğal, 2013;

Vatikiotis & Yörük, 2016). In this sense, the Gezi protests embrace similarities and differences to other social movements. While the Arab Spring erupted against social and economic inequalities and political suppression, the Gezi protests revealed a relatively similar concern however sparked by neoliberal economic forces and growing public calls for secularism. The Gezi protests were also similar to Occupy or Indignados movement, pioneered by the educated urban middle classes, youth and the precariat, as they became more concerned about increasing economic inequalities. In this context, the Gezi protests are not site-specific. They reflected the contemporary collective concerns of a global community regarding social and political rights, as well as economic inequalities, although they started to protect an important urban historical and cultural landmark.

Gezi was an example of reclaiming urban space through occupation and transforming it into commons where alternative relationships and spatialities became possible. The Gezi protests were important due to the nature of simultaneous events: the importance of urban space in generating protests, a broad coalition of protesters who would not usually come together, the cooperation between the physicality of urban space and the virtual realm, and the emergence of alternative lifestyles. Politically, Gezi protests transcended the limits of identity and ideology and reflected the ideals of an inclusive public realm which was seen in the mixed nature of the park and street protests: while the majority of protesters consisted of environmentalists, urban youth, women, secular middle classes, nationalists and leftists from different standpoints, there were other groups with various concerns. What helped them perform their diverse rights and form political and collective subjectivity is the use of fun and humour as a tool of resistance.

However, the paper does not romanticise or idealise the occupation of Gezi Park and subsequent protests. Instead, as the post-Gezi period demonstrated, these kinds of protests could lead to further pressure or increasing censorship of social and political opponents. At the macro level, nothing seemed to have changed in Turkey, while general psychology of escapism has grown among the middle classes. The paper argues that the success of the occupation of the Gezi Park is what happened during the process of reclaiming the Park, in terms of commoning and symbolic and physical resistance and subsequent events of protests and political transformation on small scales. Gezi protests were a turning point for Turkey and an important phenomenon in itself regarding the role of urban space in bringing diverse protesters together in a country without a rich history of protest. It suggests rethinking the relationship between urban space and protests to explain better how urban space can act as an agent in generating protest, leading to a new and political urban space and subjectivity (even if temporary). Further comparative analysis at the national, regional and global scales should thus be conducted to understand the (emancipatory) actions of protests and counter-actions of authorities of power.

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