

The Governance of İstanbul Metropolitan Development: The Role of State and Big Firms

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1. Introduction:

As a part of an international comparative research programme on the metropolitan development, this article examines metropolitan development of Istanbul with a specific focus on the role of the neo-liberal economic and administrative policies. In this regard, this article intended to find out answers for the following research questions related to Istanbul Metropolitan Area.

Is the recent urban development neo-liberal? Does metropolitan process help us to understand relationships between state and the economy and changes affecting them?

How do changes in public/private relations affect the governance of metropolitan development? In particular, are big firms becoming “political” players? Are (coalitions of) smaller firms political players? What is the outcome of these relations?

The globalization and neo-liberalism process has put big economic actors, interest groups and transnational corporations, at the forefront of metropolitan urban development as important actors of urban change and metropolitan development (Lefevre, 2011). At the same time, central governments have been transformed, squeezed between neo-liberal globalization trends and decentralization reforms, at least in most democratic countries. By the effect of neo-liberalism and the transformation of understanding of public service delivery (new public management movement: democratization, decentralization and regionalization), urban governance is based on the explicit representation and coordination of functional interests active at the local level. There is a cooperative style of policy-making and the local authority must moderate or initiate cooperation instead of giving orders. In these new forms of urban governance, the actors in economic development and technological modernisation programmes are big firms, business associations, chambers of commerce, large local companies, banks, research institutes, universities, unions and many different forms of civil society organizations as (Cox, 1998) described some of them ‘locally dependent actors’.

This study will examine İstanbul’s metropolitan development in the light of above mentioned theoretical perspective. To do this we will analyse two main component of metropolitan development: governance and economic development in terms of public, private and third sector relations. There will be explicit case studies to underline such relations.

Recently Istanbul is performing three big projects which will help developing the economy of the Istanbul and Turkey as well; these projects are:

- The Marmaray Project (Train tunnels under the İstanbul Strait (Bosphorus).
- The North Marmara Motorway Project and 3rd Bridge on İstanbul Strait.
- 3rd Airport in İstanbul (at North-West İstanbul, on Black See side)

What is the meaning of metropolitan area and what is the metropolitan development for İstanbul? Three criteria were laid out in a methodology developed by the OECD in an attempt to provide a definition of metro-regions (OECD, 2008). These criteria were population size, density and functional labour markets. Due to the fact that it spread on a large area with a dense population, the criteria of population size and density are met by Istanbul. However there are ambiguities as to the fulfillment of the criterion.

Although the boundaries and concept of Istanbul province have been widely discussed by researchers, there is no agreed definition yet. Nonetheless, from 2005 on Istanbul Metropolitan

Municipality (IMM) has jurisdiction over the entire province. In line with this regulation, in our study we equate the entire province with Istanbul metropolitan area and contend that any socio-economic experienced in this area should be the subject matters of metropolitan development.

The reconfiguration of urban tissue through development of strategies, policies and action plans lay at the heart of metropolitan development. In this study the term metropolitan implies strategies whose goal is to shape the trajectory of development at the metropolitan level. Thus this study covers not discursive but practical aspects of transformation.