

# Diminishing Role of Urban Planner, Rising Power of Market

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**Abstract:** *As an interdisciplinary field, urban planning is affected by all economic, cultural and social trends and evolves under the effects of them. The most important trend is without any doubt globalism, which started in early 1980s and increased the idea of liberalism. In this process, traditional urban planning has lost its importance gradually and strategic planning system which is consistent with new urban trends became more popular. Strategic planning adopted a dynamic, flexible and co-operative policy. In this planning system, the urban planner has a reconciler role. Planners put together different stakeholders such as society, investors and governments and manage the relationship between these actors.*

*In the last decades, especially in developing countries such as Turkey, neo-liberal policies have a rising influence on planning system. As a consequence, society-oriented relations are replaced by market-oriented relations in planning as in many other fields. Depending on these changes, it has become more important for the planner to consider public interest as a reconciler. However, in Turkey, central government is becoming the main authority in planning and planner's role is diminishing.*

*Considering the applications in recent years, Bosphorus Bridge and Northern Marmara Highway Project is the much-debated planning decision of market-oriented planning practices. Authorities state that the goal of this project is solving the traffic problem in Istanbul. However, according to many researches from different fields including urban planning, this project does not present a long-term solution and it will even cause natural, economic, social and physical harms. Urban planners also remarked that the 1/100.000 scale Istanbul Provincial Master Plan does not recommend the Third Bosphorus Bridge. However, despite all discussion the construction of the bridge has already started.*

*This study aims to examine Third Bosphorus Bridge and Northern Marmara Highway Project as an example to assess the diminishing role of urban planners and the increasing influence of market on planning practices in Turkey.*

**Keywords:** *Urban Planning , Urban Policies, Urban Conservation*

## 1. Introduction

By the rise of globalism and neo-liberal politics in the world, society-oriented relations are replaced by market oriented relations in many areas. Architecture, engineering and planning industries are also seriously affected by these shifts in relations. When considering effects on Turkish planning system, a change in the control mechanisms of the state and a transition into market-oriented practices can be clearly seen especially since 1980s. In this period, the planning conception and the role of planner also experience a visible transformation.

The science of planning is founded at the end of the 19. century. As an interdisciplinary field, urban planning is developed and evolved toward some main conceptions and generally inspected in four time periods. In the first period, it was perceived as a science aimed at only enhancing environment. In the second period, it was accepted as a technical subject and seen as a field of profession consisting of applying the laws and executions. A perspective of calculation and control was dominant in this period. Also urban planning was identified as a

purpose instead of tool and regarded as stable process in this term. In the third period, planning was handled as a more sophisticated socio-economic subject instead of a technical subject based on enhancing the environment. During this period the rational comprehensive planning approach is adopted. This approach emphasizes that planning area to be considered as a whole with the environment. In this process, the planning profession is evolving in parallel with the nation-state concept and it was thought that the state does everything best for community. In the fourth and last period, politics are also involved to urban planning along with socio-economic components. Under the influences of globalism and neo-liberalism, traditional planning approach lost its importance and strategic planning became more popular in 1980s.

Strategic spatial planning offers a planning which cares comprehensiveness and process at the same time by point to the importance of integrated planning. According this planning approach communicative rationality is more important than instrumental rationality. In this sense, participatory democracy and transparency principle gives an important role to the planner. Besides during this period, the city has begun to be addressed in a wider framework and urban planning has been largely politicized [1].

Accepted to 21. century's planning approach, strategic planning is a road map which aims to arrive some socio-economic and spatial goals in settlements. This planning approach does not accept that planning is only issue of nation-state, it also includes the citizens, public and private corporations, and also neighborhood cities and regions. So, ensuring the highest level of participation is required in these plans. In strategic planning process, urban planners' role is bringing all the stakeholders together and managing the relationships between them. Planner is not only a technician, also an active actor who manages the process by using his technical equipment and experience in this planning system [2]. Therefore, urban planner should be a moderator and create a common vision and goals in the aspect of strategic planning consideration.

Nowadays, participatory, flexible and applicable planning concept has a new dimension by rising global relations and changes of economy politics. Also neo-liberalist economic policies affect to planning system as in the past. In a planning system, which puts economic growth before everything, creates economic policies that aims to have global enterprises and avoids the environment and social strategies. Management and planning thoughts based on priority of economic development increase the need for international capital. Thus, environmental and social planning elements remain in the background comparatively. In recent years, depending on competitiveness policies, increased foreign investment partnership and conducted in a large public space applications are examples of this issue. Especially based on real estate and construction sector investments which need to large area and capital, has risen sharply. This situation has attended some legislative regulation. Transfer of authority to central institutes and decrease of local authorities' effectiveness concerning urban planning are consequence of these legislative regulations.

When the laws and practices that was occurred in the last five years in Turkey were studied, it will easy to see that central government became more powerful in planning and collected all authorities in its own hand. For instance, Law on Transformation of Disaster Risk Areas gives the all authority for defining "risky areas" and "risky buildings" and "renewal" or "rehabilitation" of these areas to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization. If the local municipalities would be the part of the process it is only possible when the ministry could charge them. As a result, the local municipalities knowing better the nature of settlements has lost all their authorities and widely be excluded from this process. In another words local governments were suppressed by ministry by this arrangement.

In another case, with the law, 2011 and nr 648, Councils for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets were divided into "Cultural" and "Natural" assets and became part of Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization respectively. Also, Conservation Councils transfer to Conservation Region Councils, so local authorities' competences and responsibilities were diminished and these institutions transferred to the central government by this law.

## **2. Discussion**

Considering the importance of all these developments it is possible to say that İstanbul is the central of all this discussions in Turkey. Especially in the last decades, İstanbul became more important for finance, service, logistic and tourism due to its cultural and natural values. İstanbul introducing as an innovation based technology and business center, so it became attractive enterprise area for national and international finance

cooperation, banks, commercial firms, advertising companies and real estate companies. According to İstanbul's geopolitical location it becomes the center of international transportation projects. Third Bosphorus Bridge and Northern Marmara Highway Project is held as a one of the major investments in the agenda. This investment and the process of implementation often discussed the context of integrity, participation, flexibility and practically which the main points of strategic planning are.

İstanbul is located on two continents, so it is not possible to tell bridges are not needed. But when its natural and cultural assets were considered, this decision should be made by focusing the balance between protection and usage. To analyze the change of urban and natural areas according to existing two bridges will help to predict the possible impact of the third one.

To connect two continents, the first bridge "Bosphorus Bridge" was built in 1973, the second one "Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge" was finished in 1988. The car number increased %200 in 1973, when the first bridge was built. 1970-1990 the car ownership was increased %230. The population in Asian side was increased %11 in this time period. After 1988, the car numbers that used the bridges were increased %1180, but the passenger numbers were increased only %170 [3]. It is clearly showed that only car ownerships were increased, bridges are not solution for people who travel in two continents but an opportunity for buying a new car.

In summary after 1980's car ownership fastened five times more than population. Even population increase less than car ownership it is still important population increase for İstanbul. The most critical increase was seen in Sultanbeyli, the population of İstanbul increased %23 but Sultanbeyli's population increased %2100. The second bridge developed new settlement areas. The most prominent ones are Ümraniye which's population increased 305 thousand and Gaziosmanpaşa which's population increased 360 thousands [4]. The aim of these two bridges was to find a solution of current traffic problems; however the both bridge were become short time solutions. And the problems came back even more strongly.

In 1993 the third bridge was discussed as an enterprise policy but it was hardly criticized. In 2009 1/100.000 scale İstanbul Environmental Plan, which based on a long term extensive study was prepared and this plan doesn't offer the third bridge. This cause another debate about, new big investment can be considered even decision is not included in the plan? Despite the all criticism made, third bridge become official in 8 August 2010 which draw directly on base map and called 1/25000 scale Third Bosphorus Bridge and Northern Marmara Highway Master Plan.

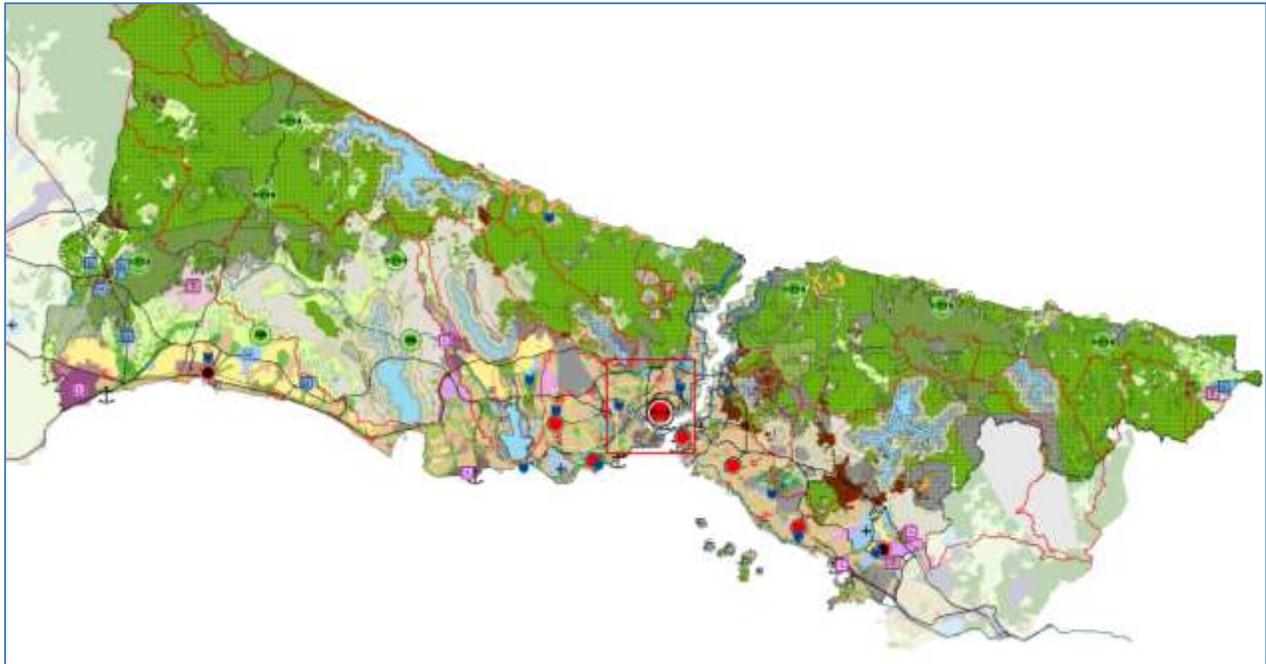


Fig. 1: 1/100.000 scale İstanbul Environmental Plan, 2009 [5].



Fig. 2: 1/25000 scale İstanbul Northern Marmara Highway Master Plan, 2010 [6].

To understand the criticisms about the third bridge, the natural assets of İstanbul should be studied. In İstanbul Metropolitan Area there are seven catchment basin. They are located on the north of İstanbul and should be protected from every threaten caused by urban growth. They should be regarded as limits that shape urban macroform [7]. The forests on north and cultivated areas on north and north west are the other areas they should be protected and should be the limits of urban area. By considering these edges, İstanbul should be growing on east west line, not on north south line.

This project has 2x4 lanes, 2 high-speed railway line capacities, 1.4 km in length bridge and total length of project is 114 km [8]. For this project and the roads, 1416 ha on European side, 1126 ha on Asian side, totally 2542 ha forest line has allocated [9]. %34 of private forest lands, %46 of forest lands, %38 of 2B lands and %43 of cultivated areas will be damaged. And the projections reveals that İstanbul's population will increase seven millions and so the population will be over than the city can handle.

The third bridge project was presented as a solution for the problem caused by transit pass. But the studies revealed that transit passes caused only %2-3 of the traffic. Traffic problem mainly caused by private cars. The only solution to reduce private car using is enterprise for public transportation and rail system. The enterprises in metropolitan cities for rail system are, London %72, Paris %87, Moskva %77, New York %77, Tokyo %96 [10] but it is only %10 in İstanbul [11].



Fig. 3: Northern Marmara Highway Project Construction Area (Şentürk, 2014).

As it is seen The Third Bridge Project threatens İstanbul in many ways. This kind of project should have certainly an environmental impact assessment (EIA), but in this case the project was absolved from this process. The given reason is that the project was discussed as a public investment before 1997. Despite of the objections and protests of the academics and professional chambers, the project was started by avoiding plan decisions.



Fig. 4: Northern Marmara Highway Project Construction Area [12].

### 3. Conclusion

Consequently, the main purpose of urban planning is looking out for common good not for certain people or groups. Also the role of urban planners is providing both technical and politic coordination in planning process. In order to accomplish aim and targets of this planning process instead of focusing on short term applications,

long term benefits should be set as priority. In the aspect of today's world planning approach, relationship between recent and foreseen issues should be identified properly. In addition that, parameters and conditions those determine strategies should be specified correctly [13].

Planner was educated to keep the balance between economical growth and protection of natural sources, social justice in the context of sustainability. In this sense planner should be an active actor in planning process. However the recent laws throw the planners out of the process and central government policies avoiding not only planners also planning too, by practices that are not in plans.

The Third Bridge Project was protested by academicians and planners because it will damage natural sources, cause new problems in urban area. But despite of these objections the project has started. In this era, the planner's critic role which is very important for sustainable development was avoided in Turkey such as in this case. By the way planning is losing its importance too at the same time.

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