

Main centrality

Mixed plotted area

Mixed mass housing development

Historic area under urban renewal

Formal middle-class neighbourhood

Suburban gated community

Rich residential area

Leisure zone

Industrial zone

Military zone

Port

Airport

- 1 Commercial, touristic and cultural centre in the historical peninsula
- 2 Beyoğlu
- 3 Mecidiyeköy and Gayrettepe
- 4 Büyükdere Avenue
- 5 Maslak

Heterogeneous zone dominated by densified popular settlements, plotted neighbourhoods, manufacturing areas, pockets of mass housing and local centralities; urban redevelopment in various locations

Developed by housing cooperatives, state agencies or private developers; a wide spectrum from low-income to high-profile projects; often high-density

Old industrial and residential building stock on either side of the Golden Horn undergoing urban redevelopment and gentrification

Formally developed residential areas; predominantly apartment buildings

Low-density gated communities inhabited by affluent social groups

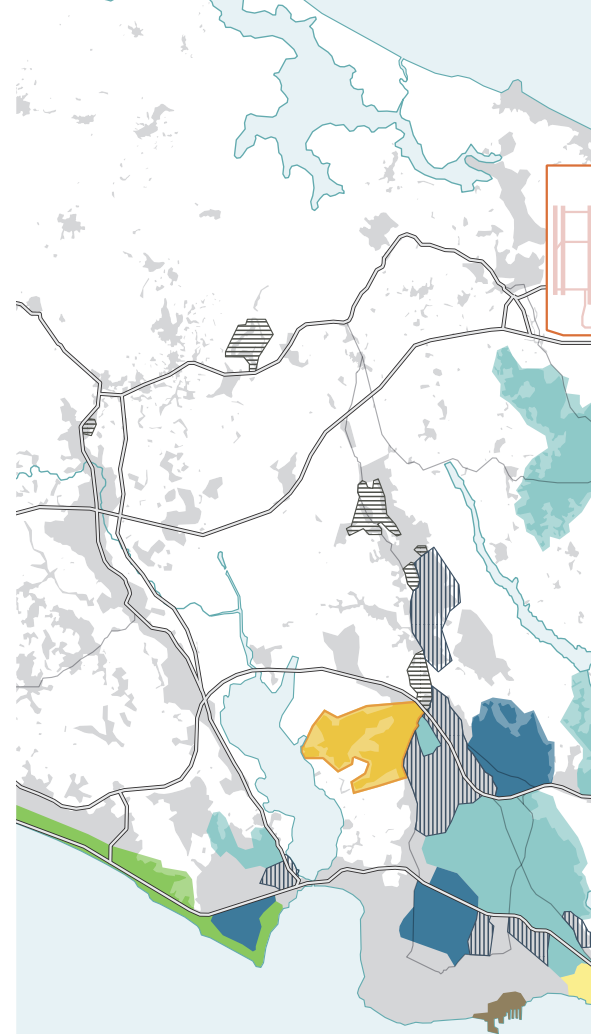
Villas, detached houses, gated communities and apartment buildings at coastal locations historically preferred by the rich

Dominated by vacation homes; along the coast

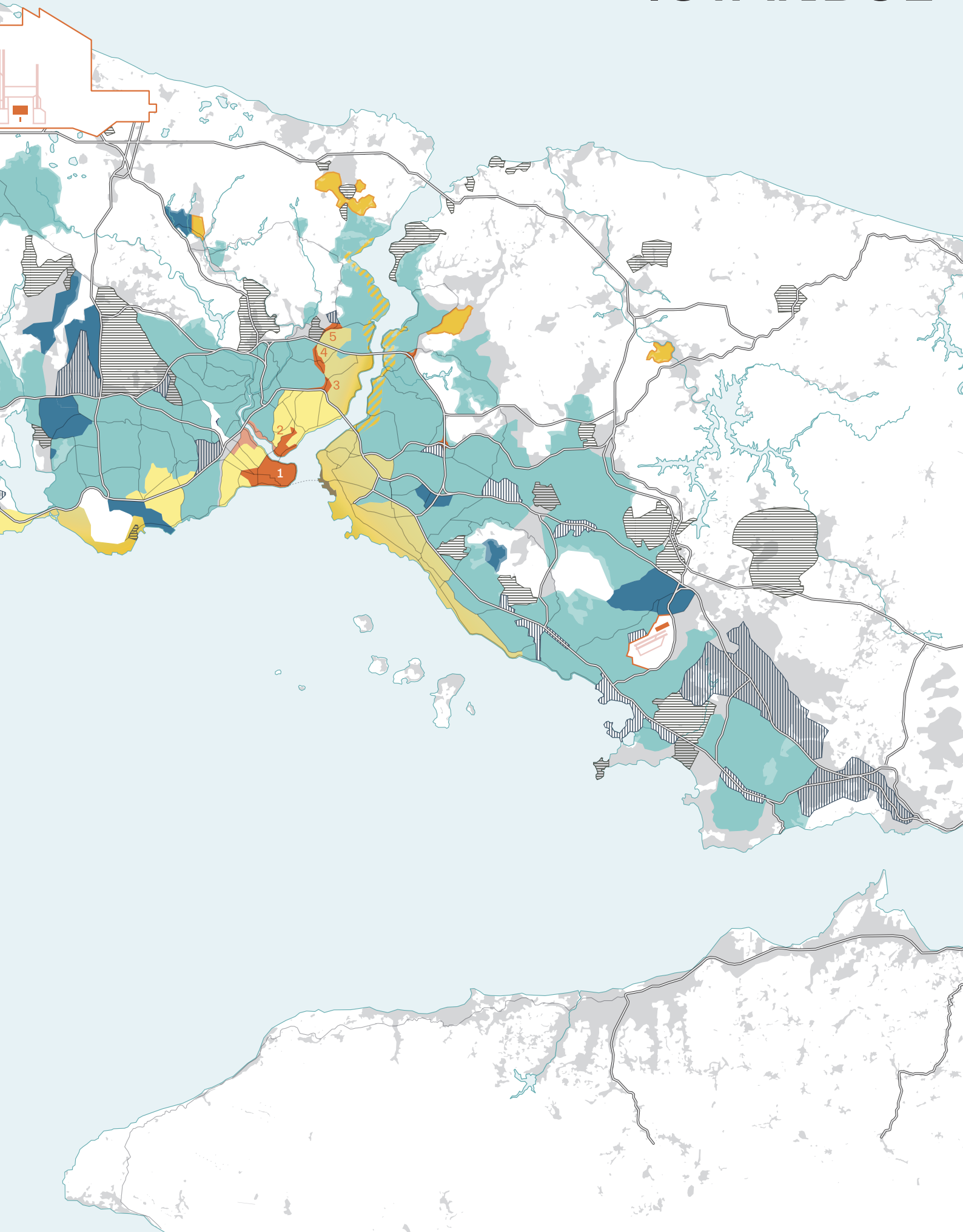
Urban footprint

Highway, main road

0 5 10 20 km



ISTANBUL



The age of grandiosity didn't last long. When Vladimir Nabokov alighted here in 1919, he found a city in ruins ... There was no physical destruction, but this place used to get the riches of all the Middle East and the Balkans, and then it all vanished, and it was reduced to poverty.

Orhan Pamuk, *Hammer*, 2014

FROM GECEKONDU TO 'CRAZY' PROJECTS

There is a substantial body of literature on the historical and social geography of Istanbul (see among others Tekeli 1992; Keyder 1999; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Esen 2011; Gül 2009; Bartu Candan and Özbay 2014). Urbanists have used a wide array of theoretical lenses to analyse the intertwined historical layers from the era of imperial cosmopolitanism to the vastly accelerated and multifaceted urbanisation of the modern period, while taking into consideration the specific conjunctures that have, at times dramatically, shifted the relative positioning of the city at regional and global scales. Following in the footsteps of this existing body of work I explain the contemporary



socio-spatial patterns of the urban region via a heuristic approach based on mapping. Therefore, the configuration map will be the main organising principle of this chapter, allowing me to delve into the past so as to excavate pivotal shifts (be they material, regulatory or political) that still have a bearing on the current situation.

The main structuring element of Istanbul's urban footprint at the macro scale is the Bosphorus strait, sharply dividing the metropolis into a 'European' and 'Anatolian' side. These geographical designations are firmly rooted in everyday usage and conceptions of the city, even though the two sides are increasingly connected thanks to the expansion of the transportation network, giving more coherence to the urban fabric. The two ring roads (corresponding to the present day D100 and E-80 highways) crossing the Bosphorus are crucial in this regard. The significant dates are the opening of the two suspension bridges spanning the Bosphorus (in 1973 and 1988, respectively). These ring roads have facilitated the expansion of the urban footprint along the east-west axis, most critically towards the ecologically significant forest areas in the north. The most recent episode in this expansionary wave has been the construction of the third ring road over a third suspension bridge, which was opened in 2016. The territorial limits of this analysis capture these subsequent waves of growth within a relatively continuous urban footprint. The northern and southern limits of the analysis are simply provided by large bodies of

water; namely, the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. The eastern and western ends include the industrial peripheries, second homes, mining zones, agricultural land and forest areas. Undoubtedly this configuration map —by its nature—is partial and cannot capture much of the 'operational landscapes' (Brenner and Schmid 2015) that extend into the hinterlands and beyond. My priority here is to depict as comprehensively as possible the urban configurations that are most relevant to Istanbul's tendencies of agglomeration (i.e. concentrated urbanisation).

It is necessary to understand the enduring centre-periphery duality that has been central to studies on the development of Istanbul. On the one hand, one may observe the central areas including the prestigious coastal neighbourhoods that make up 'old Istanbul' proper, often called the 'real Istanbul', namely the Istanbul that existed in the first half of the 20th century before the beginning of mass migration from the provinces. This Istanbul has been the subject matter of bodies of literature on collective memory, belonging, (lost) cosmopolitanism and heritage (see among others, Bartu 1999; Behar and İslam 2006; Mills 2010). This is also predominantly the Istanbul of artists, tourists and writers, as featured in the renowned works of Orhan Pamuk, for example. Separated by a transition zone of middle-class housing surrounding this core is a vast territory dominated by popular urbanisation and plotting urbanism.

The other Istanbul—much less glorified and venerated than the first—has been the subject matter of research on urban informality, poverty, marginality, clientelism, populism and social mobility (Öncü 1988; Erman 2001; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Keyder 2005). This second Istanbul is marked visually in the configuration map as a vast zone that I call a 'mixed plotted area' that has borne the brunt of explosive urban growth in the past 70 years, and which will therefore be a major focus of this text. This increasingly heterogeneous zone is dominated by densified popular settlements, plotted neighbourhoods, areas of manufacturing, pockets of mass housing and local centralities.

This dual model is necessarily reductionist and needs to be updated as urban configurations and processes continuously evolve; especially in view of recent shifts such as the continual piecemeal replacement of high-density housing stock with homes that have a better quality of construction, large-scale infrastructure projects, the emergence of gated communities and mass housing urbanisation located in the peripheries. The model has nonetheless proved to be quite resilient and retains significant explanatory power in today's Istanbul. In elaborating on the configuration map, I contextualise and complicate the evolution of this dual structure. I begin this chapter by providing a brief historical contextualisation, to the extent that it facilitates the discussion of individual urban configurations, which the bulk of the analysis will then focus on.



Historical centre, Eminönü, 2019

PATHWAYS OF URBANISATION

Having developed at the intersection of Asia Minor, the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean around a well-protected natural harbour, for centuries Istanbul was one of the busiest, most affluent and most populous cities in the world. It held this prominent status from the Byzantine era until the decline of the Ottoman Empire—roughly from the 5th to the 18th century. In the 19th century, under Western commercial and cultural influences the first major developments outside the walled city took shape. The city began spilling over towards the north—most notably Galata and Pera (now known as Beyoğlu) and along the shores of the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara (Tekeli 1992: 6). This period is characterised by first steps taken in the direction of industrialisation as well as the opening up of the economy to Western influences (Kuban 1996: 378, 379).

EARLY 20TH CENTURY: THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL IN DECLINE

The city experienced relative decline and stagnation during the first half of the 20th century as the country underwent immense political turmoil, including a series of wars in the Balkans and the Middle East, the First World War and the Turkish War of Independence. Istanbul was occupied by the Allies between 1918 and 1923. This period culminated in the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the founding of the Turkish Republic and the loss of Istanbul's capital city status to Ankara in 1923. The city experienced disinvestment and shrinkage during this period. Between 1897 and 1927 Istanbul's population dropped from 1.1 million to 690,000 (Tekeli 1992: 21). According to a 1924 report, in large swathes of the city 'differing degrees of neglect, desolation, and degradation could be detected even by the most casual observer in residential areas which were partly deserted' (Tekeli 1992: 26).

It was only in the late 1940s, with the beginning of large-scale industrialisation, that Istanbul entered a period of dramatic population growth, which manifested itself in waves of urban sprawl and densification. Its population increased steadily from fewer than 1.2 million in 1950 to 5.8 million in 1985 and 15.5 million in 2019 (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) 2001; Istanbul İstatistik Ofisi [Istanbul Statistics Office] 2019).

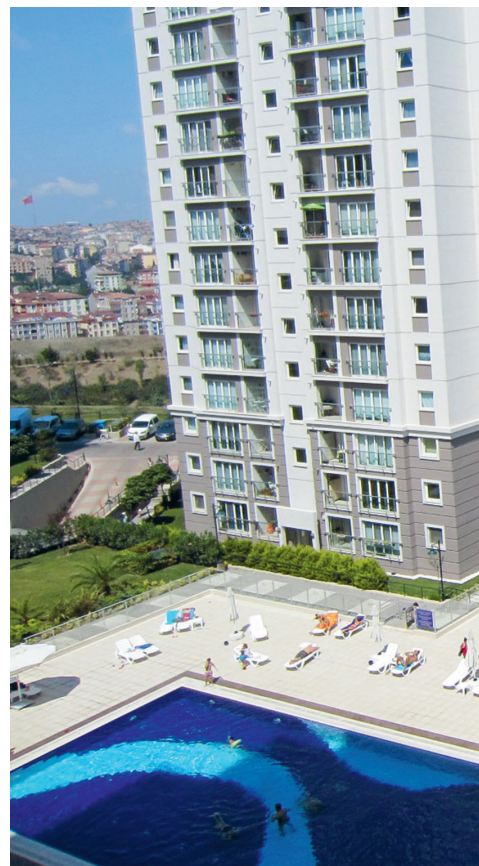
IMPORT SUBSTITUTION INDUSTRIALISATION AND RAPID URBANISATION

In the 1950s the right-wing Democrat Party administration undertook a series of large-scale public works projects. Large sections of the historic city

centre were bulldozed to make space for wide boulevards and highways (Kuban 1996: 423–434). After decades of hiatus and disrepair, Istanbul once again emerged as the most prominent economic and cultural centre in the country. The defining feature of these three decades (1950–1980) was a relatively peaceful compromise between the rapidly urbanising industrial workers and the up-and-coming national bourgeoisie under the arbitration of the state (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001). This has to be understood in the context of the import substitution industrialisation policies of the era, which were institutionalised in the 1960s (Keyder 1987), as well as the roll-out of welfare instruments such as job security, access to free or low-cost health care, education and retirement funds (Keyder 1987; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 101). Every social group benefitted from the rapid urban growth in the form of increasing land rents, which in turn provided funding for further urbanisation (Öncü 1988).

The first *gecekondu*s (namely low-cost, low-tech, largely improvised housing built mostly on publicly owned peripheral areas in close proximity to factories) were a form of popular urbanisation. They emerged in the latter half of the 1940s and increased dramatically in the following decades (Şenyapılı 1998). Subsequent administrations, often maintaining the fiction that they were fighting against *gecekondu* formations, ended up caving in to the rapidly unfolding reality on the ground. The handing out of legal title for these homes

High-rise gated community, Gaziosmanpaşa, 2013



before the elections—an inclusionary policy and ‘an integral component of the [state’s] industrialisation strategy’—became a familiar routine (Keyder 1987: 162).

GLOBALISING THE CITY

The 1980s were marked by significant changes in the urbanisation regime, in parallel with the dramatic political and economic shifts in the country as a whole, which were contemporaneous with the rise of neoliberalism across the world. The new centre-right administration encouraged entrepreneurship, deregulated the economy and opened up the country to foreign trade after three decades of statist policies based on import substitution and price controls. Under a proactive mayoral leadership, the development of Istanbul’s potential as a centre for tourist consumption and globally oriented business in the international market of cities was prioritised, whereas polluting industries were progressively removed from central locations (Keyder 2005). New industrial zones emerged in hitherto rural areas within the large Marmara region far from the metropolitan core of Istanbul (Tekeli 1998: 21). There was a visible increase in the commercial real estate stock (such as office towers, prestigious hotels and shopping malls), as well as expensive housing in prized locations such as the hills overlooking the Bosphorus.

The new central business district along the Mecidiyeköy-Büyükdere-Maslak axis in the north began taking shape. Popular urbanisation, a dominant process in the previous period, became marginalised as the competition to capitalise on land rents intensified across social classes, giving way to plotting urbanism (see below). As the urban agglomeration grew the peripheries became more heterogeneous, resulting in an increasingly fragmented landscape (Kurtuluş 2005). Gated communities began to proliferate; the more affluent ones equipped with shared upmarket facilities such as swimming pools, gyms and daycare centres (Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008; Kurtuluş 2011). In the periphery, these gated communities take the style of garden towns with controlled access and private surveillance. In most other cases, however, in spite of their strenuous efforts to isolate themselves from the rest of the city, these areas are generally separated from low-income neighbourhoods only by major roads or highways (Robins and Aksoy 2003). In the central locations high-rise settlements are common, particularly along main transportation arteries. These are not visible on the map due to their small footprint.

LAND-BASED GROWTH UNDER THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (AKP)

Since the early 2000s, wealth accumulation based on urbanisation has intensified under the rule of the AKP (Yeşilbağ, 2022, Bora 2016). AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998, prime minister of Turkey from 2003 to 2014 and president since 2014) gradually centralised power into his hands and took all the major decisions related to Istanbul’s infrastructure and big projects. Construction and real estate sectors have become the centrepiece of the new administration’s economic policy, as well as a major means of enrichment for a select group of contractors and businessmen, thanks to favourable public contracts that transfer most of the risk to taxpayers. The Mass Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) emerged as a dominant actor in the housing sector, launching joint ventures on publicly owned lands. The last decade, in particular, has been a period of grand projects, including a colossal new international airport as well as major investments in Istanbul’s transportation network.



PATTERNS OF URBANISATION

THE EVOLUTION OF METROPOLITAN CENTRALITIES: STRETCHING OUT NORTH

The overall spatial configuration of the centralities could be understood as a chain of clusters that has extended over the decades (Seger 2012). As a result, the structure is linear in form and reflects a gradual extension northwards from the eastern section of the historic peninsula—namely the Eminönü district and its surrounding areas. Comprising the old imperial palace, administrative quarters, the port area, monumental mosques and the immense central marketplace with covered streets (Kapalıçarşı), for centuries this traditional centre was essentially the economic, cultural and political centre of the Ottoman Empire. The historical peninsula is today the major destination for international tourism in Turkey on account of its architectural and cultural heritage. Despite the proliferation of tourism-oriented businesses, it remains a vibrant commercial, cultural and religious centre for Istanbulites as well.

In the 19th century, under Western influences, a clear differentiation came into existence between the traditional centre in the historic peninsula, dominated by Muslim merchants and shop owners, and a new centre on the other side of the Golden Horn expanding northwards along the Galata–Beyoğlu axis and dominated by foreign and non-Muslim traders and bankers. The new central district in the north hosted new types of buildings for Istanbul: banks and administrative offices that were completely detached from the sites of manufacturing, Western-style cafes, hotels, restaurants, shops, bars and theatres (Tekeli 1992: 5). The Grand Avenue of Beyoğlu (now known as İstiklal Avenue) and the residential areas surrounding became the new high-prestige zone and attracted the wealthy segments of society (Gül 2009). European-run schools and embassies were also established.

The relocation of the imperial palace from Topkapı to Dolmabahçe in 1856 accentuated this shift of the centre of gravity, encouraging the northward flight of the elites and the first wave of suburbanisation (Esen 2011; Tekeli 1992: 20). Beyoğlu region, with İstiklal Avenue as its main axis, still remains an important commercial, tourist and cultural centrality today. This area has experienced rounds of decline and resurgence over the decades. The latest round of reinvestment corresponds roughly to the 2001–2013 period, when Beyoğlu experienced a significant injection of capital in the real estate, retail and hospitality sectors under the AKP administration (Türkün 2021). A massive shopping mall and high-street chain stores

gradually squeezed out small old shops and businesses such as bookshops, small theatres and cafes catering to a culturally liberal, Westernised clientele (beyond.istanbul 2018).

With increasing rents and its changing user profile, Beyoğlu began losing its status as a space that accommodated students, artists, activists and alternative lifestyles. This process of the incorporation of differences culminated in the mass revolts of June 2013 (see Chapter 17). This momentous event was sparked by the then Prime Minister Erdoğan's plan to construct a commercial complex in the highly visible central public park, at the north end of İstiklal Avenue adjacent to Taksim Square. This move was made under the pretext of reviving an old military barracks, which had been completely demolished in 1940 and replaced by the present-day public park. The attempt was widely perceived as a literal and symbolic attack on the breathing spaces or 'life spaces' of those weary of Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian attitude and his economic policy centred on the construction sector (Erensü and Karaman 2017). The effort was also part and parcel of the goal of taming Beyoğlu to rid it of its 'unruly' and 'unsavoury' elements and render it more suitable for tourists and the consumption of goods and services (Adanalı 2011; Karaman 2013c). The project was finally abandoned in the face of immense popular resistance, yet the sterilisation, touristification and banalisation of İstiklal Avenue continues to date.

The duality of structure between the traditional Islamic centre in the historic peninsula and the European, Westernised centre of Beyoğlu persisted for decades (Seger 2012). Notable changes began to occur only in the 1970s after the first ring road and its corresponding highway network were opened in 1973. The main centrality began to expand further north. In the 1980s Osmanbey, Şişli and Nişantaşı emerged as luxurious shopping areas and the Mecidiyeköy–Büyükdere axis became a favoured location for insurance companies, banks, and the headquarters of national and multinational companies (Tekeli 1992: 84). By the 1950s and 1960s pharmaceutical, textile and automotive industries had settled along the Mecidiyeköy–Büyükdere axis, which extended to Maslak in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the largest companies in Turkey (such as Sabancı Holdings and İşbank) invested in additional land along the axis in anticipation of rising land values (Öktem 2011: 31).

Under pressure from large business groups, in the 1980s this area was designated as the location for a prospective international business district (Öktem 2011). Since the 1990s, numerous office towers, upmarket shopping centres and residential towers have been developed. By the 2000s this new business district could be clearly distinguished from the older central areas by its 'globalised' look and glossy office towers (Öktem 2011; Seger 2012). To complement the emergence of this new centrality, various nodes along the highway network such as

Kozyatağı, Ümraniye and Kavacık have also been developed for administrative offices and firms looking for inexpensive real estate to rent (Ozus et al. 2011: 343).

FORMAL MIDDLE-CLASS NEIGHBOURHOODS

The first zone of expansion encircling the traditional centralities is dominated by middle-class housing in the form of apartment buildings.

The apartment type—which would later radically transform the face of Istanbul—had been introduced in Beyoğlu in the 1930s (Kaptan and Enlil 2009: 29). Nonetheless, vast sections of Istanbul—including the walled city—retained their low density ‘garden city’ characteristics up until the 1950s (Kuban 1996: 372). In the three decades that followed, significant densification and the construction of middle-class residential areas took place (Öncü 1988; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 102–110), together with the increasing prominence of secondary centralities such as Bakırköy, Beşiktaş and Kadıköy.

The proliferation of apartment buildings relied on *yapsatçılık*, which means ‘the practice of building and selling’. It is a unique financial model, the likes of which can be found in few other Mediterranean countries (Esen 2011; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 102–110; Tekeli 1998). The absence of a well-developed credit market, a fragmented ownership structure and small plot sizes made it difficult for big construction companies to step up as the main producers of residential urban space. Under such circumstances, *yapsatçılık* emerged as a response to housing demand and was driven by small contractors. In the standard model, the owner of the plot and the contractor come to an agreement on their share of the flats to be constructed. This is usually calculated in terms of percentages. In areas where demand is high, the share of the lot owner could be as high as 60 per cent. No monetary transaction is involved in acquiring the land for development, which significantly reduces the contractor’s initial costs, and the latter bears all the costs of construction in full (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 102–110). A typical apartment building would have five to seven storeys, each containing two to four flats. The ground floor is typically allocated to small businesses and shops.

As Işık and Pınarcıoğlu (2001: 102–110) explain, from the contractor’s point of view, the system provides many flexible possibilities for absorbing possible risks. The contractor acquires the land from the landowner at no cost and the bulk of the funding for construction is procured through pre-sale of units to third parties. The construction-related risks are shouldered by the subcontractors, who are commissioned on a task-by-task basis. As the model does not require large amounts of start-up capital, this initial stage of urbanisation was largely driven by small developers. *Yapsatçılık* mobilised the large

reserves of unskilled labour employed in the construction sector; a demand met by men migrating from rural areas to the cities.

The Condominium Law, passed in 1965, enabled people to own an individual apartment, thereby providing a legal impetus for the rapid replacement of Istanbul’s detached housing stock with apartment buildings (Öncü 1988: 49). Today, the few remaining detached houses that exist are either in serious disrepair or have been renovated for other functions.

In recent years individual buildings in many of these areas (such as Kadıköy) have been undergoing further redevelopment. To do this, property owners take advantage of recent legislation—most importantly Law no 6306 on the ‘Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk,’ which allows extra development rights to encourage the upgrading of buildings. This increases density even further.

MIXED PLOTTED AREAS

The most visible and extensive urban configuration in terms of the area on the map is shaped by what we have called ‘popular urbanisation’ and ‘plotting urbanism’ (see Chapters 12 and 13). The first historical layer of this configuration pertains to the *gecekondu* phenomenon. At later phases, unauthorised constructions on illegally subdivided agricultural lands also increased in number. All this was enabled by the steady rural–urban migration that started in earnest in the late 1940s. This usually took the form of chain migration, in which migrants maintained their ties to the countryside long after they relocated to the town (Erder 1996). The first settlers, mainly single men, were soon followed by their immediate kin (wives and children), relatives and acquaintances from the same region, and a *gecekondu* neighbourhood would incrementally emerge as migration paths connecting certain rural regions of Turkey to specific *gecekondu* neighbourhoods were established.

By 1949 there were 3,218 *gecekondus* in the Zeytinburnu-Kazlıçeşme area immediately west of the old city walls (Tekeli 1992: 39). Other first-wave *gecekondu* neighbourhoods emerged in Mecidiyeköy, between Paşabahçe and Beykoz and in many other locations within the city centre as well (Tekeli 1992). ‘The inhabitants in Zeytinburnu formed a Society for Beautification and Organisation and with the money raised, the main road was paved with stones, wells were dug, a first aid service was established. With the opening of grocery stores, coffee houses, barber shops and tailors, a proper neighbourhood was built’ (Tekeli 1992: 38). With elements of self-help housing and grassroots organisation, this initial phase was dominated by the *use value* of housing (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, 2001: 113); namely its value as a shelter and place of social reproduction.

The state reacted to this form of popular urbanisation largely by ignoring it as long as the buildings did not encroach on military lands, and they often enacted ad hoc measures to regulate it. Amenities such as paved roads, running water, sanitary infrastructure and electricity were soon provided thanks to clientelist networks. Gecekondu neighbourhoods had double legitimacy as both the habitat of the working class and as a major voting pool in elections. Laws were frequently passed to eliminate, contain or regularise gecekondu settlements. But overall, these proved to be ineffective in curbing what officials called ‘irregular urbanisation’, and in most cases ended up by providing incentives for these settlements to expand by periodically legalising unauthorised constructions—not only those built by relatively poor people, but by all sections of society.

As Istanbul grew rapidly, informal land markets burgeoned and the construction of gecekondu neighbourhoods became increasingly commodified and a source of wealth for those who had participated in the early rounds of land occupation (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Öncü 1988). Over time gecekondu were more solidly built, and tenancy rates increased. Multistorey buildings became increasingly common, especially along major streets and in desirable locations. The main turning point in the evolution of this popular urbanisation occurred in the 1980s, when the government enacted a series of amnesties for construction-related violations and laws on tenure (Tercan (2018). These populist laws were exceptional in that not only did they define a path of legalisation for existing gecekondu, but they also offered additional construction rights, thereby encouraging the densification of the neighbourhoods (Ekinci 1998).

As a result, there was significant densification of the urban fabric from the mid-1980s onwards. At this stage popular urbanisation—a process distinguished by the grassroots organisation of the acquisition of land and the construction of shelters for their direct use—became a marginal phenomenon. Here the very same mechanism of *yapsatçılık* discussed above—which transformed formal housing areas in the period 1950–1980—came into play, this time transforming old gecekondu neighbourhoods—which were typically in the style of garden towns—into dense urban neighbourhoods (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Esen 2011). We propose the notion of ‘plotting urbanism’ to characterise this highly commercialised process of densification (see Chapter 13). The early generation of squatters gained financially from this process. New arrivals, on the other hand, had to participate in the system mostly as tenants. Moreover, their prospects of wealth accumulation by making use of informal property markets were significantly curtailed in the 1990s as popular urbanisation ceased to be a viable option (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001).

By the early 2000s this configuration had already become heterogenous, with local centralities, elements of plotting urbanism, some vestiges of popular urbanisation, the very rare newly constructed gecekondu neighbourhoods and apartment buildings of various heights on illegally subdivided agricultural land. The latter (Yonder 1987) often displayed aspects both of popular urbanisation and plotting urbanism, depending on the varying degrees of legality and rentability of the dwellings and the resources of the residents.

Since the mid-2000s, the AKP administration has been pushing for an urban renewal programme with the goal of upgrading substandard informal housing stock and preparing Istanbul for the next expected earthquake (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010; Lovering and Türkmen 2011; Karaman 2013a; Türkün 2014; Soytemel 2017). Despite a few controversial



Mixed plotted area. Mustafa Kemal neighbourhood, 2012
also called 1 Mayıs (May Day) neighbourhood, 2012

Mass housing urbanisation. Bezirganbahçe, 2008



cases—particularly in low density areas, which ironically pose no major risk in terms of earthquake readiness—the urban renewal policy has had a limited result. This failure could be attributed to shortcomings in the institutional structure and in the legal framework of this policy, as well as to the social movements that were able to launch effective challenges to it (Kuyucu 2020). In the meantime, just as in the formally developed apartment building stock, many of these plotted areas have been undergoing redevelopment at the level of individual buildings in recent years. Plotting continues today, but to a much lesser extent than in the 1980s and 1990s.

MASS HOUSING URBANISATION

For decades, particularly from the early 1950s until the late 1990s, the housing needs of most new Istanbulites were met largely via popular urbanisation and plotting urbanism. Until the mid-1960s, in rare instances when public agencies were directly involved in housing provision via direct subsidies, these ended up ‘catering mainly to upper and middle level bureaucrats of state enterprises, state owned banks, etc.’ (Öncü 1988: 49). Prominent examples of this kind of development are the low-density suburban housing in Merkez Bankası Evleri, Etiler, Gayrettepe, Levent and Atakoy (Öncü 1988). Today these areas are considered prime real estate and are inhabited by affluent groups.

State-administered mass housing schemes that actually target low-income groups have been a recent occurrence in Turkish cities and became prominent only in the 2000s. In 1984 the Mass Housing Law was passed, prescribing the establish-

ment of a state-administered mass housing fund and an organisation to oversee it, which is known today as TOKİ. Up until the early 2000s TOKİ’s main role was limited to giving credit to housing associations (Altınok 2012). Between 1984 and 2002 it offered credit support to construct around a million housing units, while its direct involvement in housing production remained low. Only 43,145 housing units were built on its own land (Çetin 2002: 172).

Most of this support, however, benefited middle-class families who had regular incomes and were able to furnish significant sums as down payment (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 133–135; Sarica 2012: 19). It therefore remained out of reach for the low-income groups for whom popular urbanisation and housing in plotted areas remained a more realistic option. Some of the mass housing clusters visible on the map, where housing associations have had a significant impact, are Beylikdüzü on the European side and Kurtköy on the Asian side (Narin 2010). These are today major peripheral agglomerations of middle-income housing.

In the 1990s, municipalities controlled by the conservative Islamic Welfare Party (the antecedent of the ruling AKP) implemented mass housing policies on municipal lands based on long-term payment plans (Çavuşoğlu 2011). The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) did this through its mass housing firm KIPTAŞ. During his term as the mayor of Istanbul (1994–1998), Erdoğan initiated a large mass housing project called Başak Konutları, catering specifically to his conservative constituency. Today it is a major population centre. Upon the electoral success of the AKP in 2002, the KIPTAŞ model was expanded to the whole of Turkey by increasing TOKİ’s activities (Uşaklıgil 2014).

Subsequently, the AKP administration further expanded TOKİ’s sphere of activities and authority (Altınok 2012: 124–126; Turk and Korthals Altes 2010), allowing the latter to undertake for-profit projects, to found private companies or own shares in them and to implement urban renewal projects. TOKİ was also granted authority to make master plans in constructing its housing projects. It has as a consequence emerged as a major player in the AKP-led construction boom, accounting for 9.1 per cent of the housing sector in Turkey and the construction of more than 500 thousand housing units between 2002 and 2012 (Konutder 2013).

TOKİ’s primary asset is the publicly owned land to which it has priority access. Istanbul has comprised an important part of TOKİ’s portfolio. Prime land in profitable locations is typically used for what TOKİ calls revenue-generating projects catering to upper-middle class groups. It claims to use the revenue generated via luxury projects to fund social housing projects. The term ‘social housing’, however, is misleading, as it has nothing to do with the European type of municipal rental housing, but is ownership based (similar to the



Singaporean model) (Karaman 2013a). Those meeting the eligibility criteria—which include not already owning a house—participate in a lottery. The fortunate winners then effectively buy into a state-facilitated mortgage scheme and are required to pay for the cost of their houses in instalments over a period of 8 to 20 years (TOKI 2010).

A controversial part of TOKI's projects has been its urban renewal ('gecekondu transformation') projects. In its standard urban renewal model (Palancioglu and Cete 2014: 132), property owners with varying degrees of security of tenure within an urban renewal zone are offered mortgage plans to pay for the difference between the new houses to be built and the expropriation value of their shortly-to-be-demolished unit. In effect, urban renewal is therefore tantamount to the dispossession and displacement of tenants and those with insufficient means to participate in the payment plan. For those who are able to participate—through a mixture of being subjected to coercion and giving their voluntary consent—it functions as a disciplinary tool, both in terms of adjusting their finances to a rigid payment scheme and to the new living environment (Karaman 2013a, 2014).

The predominant housing types by KİPTAŞ and TOKI are towers in open landscapes. The surfaces in between are allocated for car parks, playgrounds and green spaces. The overall result is a densely built-up and repetitive environment with a lack of well-defined streets and open spaces. This is in dramatic contrast with the less well regulated and sparsely populated gecekondu neighbourhoods, as discussed earlier. Examples of these towers can be found in TOKI's Bezirganbahçe housing complex, a resettlement site for the Ayazma renewal project in the borough of Küçükçekmece. Besides their difficulties in meeting their monthly payment schedules, the downsides mentioned by relocated ex-gecekondu residents include the poor quality of construction, dense living conditions, restrictions on use of common areas and open spaces, diminished contact with neighbours, increasing anonymity and a perceived lack of security (Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu 2008; Uzunçarşılıoğlu Baysal 2010).

HISTORIC AREAS UNDER URBAN RENEWAL

In central zones largely along the Golden Horn, parts of Beyoğlu and the ancient city walls, the old building stock, partly dating back to the late 19th century, has been undergoing significant redevelopment and upgrading. A diverse range of processes can be observed, such as state-led urban renewal, gentrification (Behar and İslam 2006), the incorporation of differences and some new developments in areas that previously had industrial and port-related functions. Until the 1980s the Golden Horn was a major industrial zone. Most of

these industries were relocated in the 1980s and 1990s to make space for public parks, but there are still some remaining vestiges of this type of use that are being transformed. Two prominent projects are the Haliç Congress Centre and the renovation of the Silahtarğa Power Plant. A vast mixed development project called Tersane Istanbul that incorporates some of this industrial heritage was being implemented at the time of writing.

On the southern side of the Golden Horn, the historic Fener and Balat neighbourhoods have been renovated using funds from the EU (Akkar Ercan 2011). Besides this, there have been two very controversial cases of state-led renewal in Sulukule and Tarlabası. Both neighbourhoods, which are located on the edge of the central areas, had fallen into disrepair and experienced a major economic downturn. The local municipalities launched top-down renewal schemes invoking the recently passed urban renewal law, in the name of revitalising these neighbourhoods and preserving their cultural heritage.

Sulukule—a neighbourhood on the western edge of the historic peninsula—has been home to a Roma community for decades. Tiny, family-run music clubs known as entertainment houses used to be a significant source of revenue for Sulukule and gave it its distinct identity in the popular perception. With the closure of these clubs by the authorities in the 1990s on the grounds that they were hosting illegal activities, the neighbourhood's decline accelerated. In 2005, in a joint agreement between the local municipality, the IBB and TOKI, Sulukule was declared an urban renewal zone. In the following few years the entire neighbourhood was demolished except for a few classified historic houses—and reconstructed at a higher density.



To participate in the renewal scheme imposed on them, registered homeowners were required to pay the difference between the estimated value of their existing property and the price that they would get in the new development in instalments of up to 15 years. In the face of this unforeseen financial burden, many of the property owners chose to sell their homes to third parties. The tenants were offered resettlement options in a remote TOKI development on the western periphery of Istanbul. The end result of the whole operation was the displacement of most of the original residents (for details on the Sulukule case see Karaman 2014; Karaman and Islam 2012; Uysal 2012).

Positioned just to the north of Istiklal Avenue, Tarlabası's fate has been closely tied to the fortunes of this main avenue. The neighbourhood took

its current shape in the early 20th century, with a distinctive vernacular style consisting of five-storey brick houses. Predominantly inhabited by middle-class non-Muslims, Tarlabası went through a period of decline following the founding of the republic. The economic downturn combined with policies that directly targeted minorities resulted in the dispossession and displacement of its original inhabitants. Starting from the 1950s, the new owners partitioned the flats and rented them out to newcomers. Thus, Tarlabası became one of the first points of entry and a stepping stone for rural migrants to Istanbul (Türkün and Sarioğlu 2014). As their situation improved, they would move to more spacious housing often via popular urbanisation.

In the 1990s however, Tarlabası reached rock bottom. This was primarily due to the decline of Beyoğlu discussed above and decreasing opportunities for upward mobility via popular urbanisation. Tarlabası became a dead end for migrants who came mainly from the eastern provinces. Another factor of this decline was the opening up of a major thoroughfare that significantly reduced Tarlabası's connection to Istiklal Avenue. Against this backdrop, Tarlabası was declared an urban renewal area in 2006. The first stage of the project began in 2007. Unlike Sulukule, instead of TOKI, a private developer (Gap İnşaat) was put in charge following a successful bid. The developer was authorised to increase the density in the area and was entitled to own 58 per cent of the built-up area. This left the property owners with much smaller floor areas than before. The project resulted in a thorough displacement of tenants who made up the majority of residents (for details on the Tarlabası case see Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010; Türkün and Sarioğlu 2014).

Urban renewal. Sulukule, 2012



'CRAZY' PROJECTS

The post 2002 era—particularly the last decade—is characterised by an intensification of the urbanisation-based accumulation strategy based on rent extraction and construction under the rule of the AKP. A major facet of this has been large infrastructural projects linked to transportation.

Conducting these grand building works has always been a major policy of previous right-wing administrations. In the 1950s under the Democrat Party, a series of extensive public works were undertaken. Large-scale demolitions were carried out in the historic city centre to make space for wide boulevards and highways so as to adapt Istanbul's archaic transportation system to automobile-based transportation (Kuban, 1996: 423–434). Other major public works in subsequent decades were the construction of the first and second trans-Bosphorus bridges (in 1973 and 1988) with corresponding ring roads. These highways have had major consequences in terms of the overall form of the urban region.

Istiklal Avenue. Beyoğlu, 2023



The AKP era has witnessed the visible proliferation and scaling up of such interventions. There are now three new routes across the Bosphorus, including a highway tunnel (the Eurasia Tunnel) that was opened in 2016 and a railway tunnel (Marmaray) that was opened in 2013 for public transport within the city and in 2019 for freight traffic. Finally, the third suspension bridge in the north opened in 2016 with its ring road cutting through the northern forest areas and linking up with another mega project, the new Istanbul Airport. A vast terrain (76.5 km²) by the European Black Sea coast was reserved for the new airport and its auxiliary functions (for more information on these projects see Karabey et al. n.d.). Like the Eurasia Tunnel and the third bridge projects the funding model is that of build-operate-transfer. Meanwhile, all the operations of the old Istanbul airport were formally transferred to the new airport in 2019. When it is fully completed it is expected to be the biggest airport in the world. The future of the site of the old airport is not clear.

The Istanbul Canal project, promoted as ‘crazy’ by President Erdoğan, is the latest in this series of grand projects. Even though it was not even at the bidding stage at the time of writing it is worth mentioning, as its scale and ambition have already sparked intense land speculation in peri-urban zones close to the new airport, as well as heated debates over its speculative character and the impact it will have on the environment. The project proposes an alternative waterway to the Bosphorus, which is expected to ease international maritime traffic in the strait and create a new axis of urban growth. Even though it is still too early to tell how these recent and planned interventions in Istanbul’s immediate hinterlands may affect its overall model of urbanisation, they are likely to encourage further sprawl.

These large-scale projects have been vital to the discursive arsenal underpinning the neo-Ottomanist authoritarian regime that Erdoğan has been consolidating since he came to power. In this regard they serve a twofold purpose. Firstly, thanks to the lucrative contracts that transfer most of the risk to the public domain, a business class that is totally dependent on state contracts and loyal to Erdoğan has been created. Secondly, these projects are discursively deployed in the international arena as highly prestigious and tangible accomplishments, serving to underpin the fantasy that we are witnessing a ‘new Turkey’ that is reclaiming its long lost commanding position on the world stage, to the imagined dismay of its envious foes both inside and outside the country (Kursunlugil 2019).

CONCLUSION

Istanbul has experienced explosive growth since the 1950s. Consequently, its traditional monocentric structure has evolved to comprise a hierarchy of centralities that have been formed in relation to the expanding highway network. Some studies have suggested it is transitioning to a polycentric urban model, as is consistent with the experience of many other rapidly growing urban regions (Dökmeci and Berköz 1994; Ozus et al. 2011). Despite some tendencies towards polycentricity, however, the main string of centralities on the European side stretching from the historic peninsula all the way to Maslak in the north is clearly dominant at the metropolitan scale. Thus, within the continuum of monocentric to polycentric forms (taken as ideal types), Istanbul still appears closer to a monocentric model.

The duality between the formal and the informal city has been a recurrent theme in studies of Istanbul. Even though it is much less relevant in the current context, some of its manifestations are traceable in the present configurations. This duality has historically corresponded to a centre-periphery duality, between the historic core of the city and the formally developed areas versus the semi-peripheral zones titled mixed plotted areas. The latter is the most visible element in the overall configuration of the city and is the key to the main arc of Istanbul’s story of massive urban growth. This vast belt has been shaped mainly by three processes or historical layers. The first is the layer of popular urbanisation, which refers to the working-class grassroots urbanisation from the late 1940s onwards, namely the emergence of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods in close proximity to manufacturing industries.

The second is that of plotting urbanism; namely the highly commercialised densification and expansion of these predominantly residential areas. Plotting has been a step in the direction towards the formalisation of the housing stock and consolidation of the urban fabric. At the same time, it has been a means of capital accumulation via the acquisition of land-based rents. The last layer is state-led urban renewal, which has aimed at the complete regularisation and formalisation of these areas with the official goal of rendering them resistant to an imminent earthquake. While large-scale urban renewal schemes have largely been a failure and have had limited transformative results on the ground, piecemeal, building-by-building redevelopment of the housing stock has been having a more visible impact.

Besides plotting and redevelopment of the housing stock, peripheral growth dynamics have also challenged the dual city model. Since the 1980s gated communities, master planned mass housing projects and new industrial zones have

contributed to an increasingly segregated and heterogeneous pattern of urbanisation (Kurtuluş 2005). Over the last decade in particular there have been substantial state-led investments into large-scale infrastructural projects (such as the third ring road and the new international airport in the north), which encourage further growth towards the northern hinterlands. Like its right-wing predecessors, the AKP administration, which has been in power since 2002, has given construction and real estate a pivotal role in its economic policy, but at a significantly bigger scale than they attempted. Under an increasingly centralised and clientelist regime, a few large developers have benefited immensely from public-private partnerships in which the public ends up bearing most of the risks. In this context, infrastructural interventions, such as highways, airports, tunnels and bridges, have dramatically reshaped the urban-rural interface of Istanbul (see Erensü and Karaman 2017).

Decades-long processes of reconfiguring centralities, the densification of the urban fabric and its extension into the urban-rural interface have been marked by the shortcomings and selective interventions of successive administrations. The result is a dynamic composition of multilayered and increasingly heterogeneous urban configurations in this territory.