

**COMPLETE URBANIZATION IN AYVALIK AND
URBAN ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS**

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IN
ARCHITECTURE

By
Bilgesu Sever
May 2025

*To all the brave people,
who have stood unwavering in their struggle.*

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

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ABSTRACT

COMPLETE URBANIZATION IN AYVALIK AND URBAN ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

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Over the past three decades, the vast expansion of urban areas driven by neoliberal policies has drastically transformed the interactions between ‘urban society’ and ‘nature,’ intensifying existing environmental conflicts. Therefore, the restructured socio-urban environment as part of what Lefebvre described as “complete urbanization,” calls for new conceptualizations and scopes within environmental movements from a radical perspective, necessitating a re-exploration of the understanding and definition of nature. Accordingly, this study introduces the concept of *urban ecological movements*, which is defined as the forms of resistance shaped under conditions of complete urbanization and the increasing incorporation of non-urban spaces into neoliberal urban development. In order to discuss this changing relationship between urban and non-urban spaces under the conditions of complete urbanization, the study is grounded in the literature of right to the city, urban social movements, environmental movements and the framework of urban political ecology. Using a critical urban political ecology framework, it examines the interplay between neoliberal urbanization, urban nature, and socio-ecological resistance.

To conduct this research, Ayvalık, a coastal town under the governance of Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality, is scrutinized as a case study. Ayvalık is designated both as an ‘urban conservation area’ for its historic port and traditional settlement and a ‘natural and historic conservation area’ for its olive groves. Its proximity to the metropolitan areas, especially Istanbul, makes it a striking example to discuss the actors of resistance and the network generated among them. Ayvalık exemplifies a contested environment, where local resistance engages with regional, national, and even global urban and environmental issues. The specificities explored through the case allow for a grounded discussion on the neoliberal mode of urbanization and the relentless production and exploitation of urban nature, argued to be driven by social and political policies.

The scope of the research is limited to the past decade, a period that has witnessed significant impetus in ecological movements, marked by the Gezi Park Protests, opposing neoliberal urban policies pursued by power-holders. By analysing the socio-political and environmental consequences of complete urbanization in the last decade, the research highlights how conscious and organized urban ecological activism of complete urbanization actively claims the right to the city and nature as both working slogans and political ideals against neoliberal restructuring of space.

Keywords: Complete Urbanization, Urban Ecological Movements, Neoliberal Policies, Urban Political Ecology, Right To The City-Nature

ÖZET

AYVALIK'TA TAM KENTLEŞME VE KENTSEL EKOLOJİK HAREKETLER

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Son otuz yılda, neoliberal politikalar tarafından yönlendirilen kentsel alanların büyük ölçekli genişlemesi, ‘kentsel toplum’ ile ‘doğa’ arasındaki etkileşimleri köklü bir şekilde dönüştürerek mevcut çevresel çatışmaları derinleştirmiştir. Dolayısıyla, Lefebvre’in “tam kentleşme” (complete urbanization) olarak tanımladığı sürecin bir parçası olarak yeniden şekillenen sosyo-kentsel çevre, radikal bir perspektiften çevre hareketlerinin yeni kavramsallaştırmalarını ve kapsamlarını zorunlu kılmakta; doğaya dair anlayışın ve tanımın yeniden ele alınmasını gerektirmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışma, tam kentleşme koşulları altında ve kentsel olmayan alanların neoliberal kentleşme süreçlerine giderek artan şekilde dahil edilmesiyle şekillenen direniş biçimleri olarak kavramsallaştırılan *kentsel ekolojik hareketler* kavramını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, tam kentleşme koşulları altında kentsel ve kentsel olmayan mekânlar arasındaki dönüşen ilişkiyi tartışmak amacıyla, kent hakkı, kentsel toplumsal hareketler, çevre hareketleri literatürüne ve kentsel politik ekoloji çerçevesine dayanmaktadır. Eleştirel bir kentsel politik ekoloji perspektifi kullanılarak, neoliberal kentleşme, kentsel doğa ve sosyo-ekolojik direniş arasındaki etkileşim incelenmektedir.

Bu araştırma kapsamında, Balıkesir Büyükşehir Belediyesi yönetimi altında bulunan kıyı kenti Ayvalık, bir örnek alan çalışması olarak ele alınmaktadır. Ayvalık, tarihi limanı ve geleneksel yerleşimi nedeniyle ‘kentsel sit alanı,’ zeytinlikleri nedeniyle ise ‘doğal ve tarihi sit alanı’ olarak tanımlanmıştır. İstanbul başta olmak üzere metropol alanlara yakınlığı, onu direniş aktörlerini ve bunların oluşturduğu ağları tartışmak için çarpıcı bir örnek hâline getirmektedir. Ayvalık, yerel direnişin bölgesel, ulusal ve hatta küresel kentsel ve çevresel meselelerle etkileşime girdiği çekişmeli bir mekânsal yapıyı temsil etmektedir. Bu vaka üzerinden ele alınan özgül dinamikler, neoliberal kentleşme modeli ile kentsel doğanın sürekli üretimi ve sömürsünün toplumsal ve politik süreçler tarafından nasıl şekillendirildiğine dair temellendirilmiş bir tartışma sunmaktadır.

Araştırmanın kapsamı, ekolojik hareketlerin önemli bir ivme kazandığı son on yıl ile sınırlandırılmıştır. Bu dönem, özellikle Gezi Parkı Direnişi ile simgeleşen ve iktidar odaklarının neoliberal kent politikalarına karşı gelişen toplumsal mücadelelerin belirleyici olduğu bir zaman dilimini içermektedir. Çalışma, tam kentleşmenin son on yıldaki sosyo-politik ve çevresel sonuçlarını analiz ederek, tam kentleşme sürecinde bilinçli ve örgütlü kentsel ekolojik hareketlerin, neoliberal mekânsal yeniden yapılanmaya karşı kent ve doğa hakkını hem bir mücadele sloganı hem de politik bir ideal olarak nasıl sahiplendiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tam Kentleşme, Kentsel Ekolojik Hareketler, Neoliberal Politikalar, Kentsel Politik Ekoloji, Kent ve Doğa Hakkı

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKVG – Ayvalık Initiative for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage
(Ayvalık K lt r ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Giriřimi)

AKG – Altınova Conservation Initiative (Altınova Koruma Giriřimi)

AKP – Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)

AYK – Ayvalık Local Initiative (Ayvalık Yerel Hareketi)

ATP – Ayvalık Nature Platform (Ayvalık Tabiat Platformu)

BEP – Bergama Environmental Action Platform (Bergama  evre Platformu)

EB – Ecology Union (Ekoloji Birlięi)

KDA – Coastal Movements Solidarity Network (Kıyı Hareketleri Dayanıřma Aęı)

TİP – Workers' Party of Turkey (T rkiye İř i Partisi)

TMMOB – Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (T rk M hendis
ve Mimar Odaları Birlięi)

T İK – Turkish Statistical Institute

UPE – Urban Political Ecology

GDNCNP – General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

More than half a century ago, Henri Lefebvre had an assessment with the following hypothesis: “Society has been completely urbanized” and proposed a notion of ‘urban society’ that emerged as the result of the urbanization process (Lefebvre, 2003, p.1). He also had a considerably sharp argument towards the disruption in ‘well-known’ distinctions between ‘the city’ and ‘the rural’ by pointing out the emergence of the term of ‘complete urbanization.’ Since the emergence of Lefebvre’s thesis, the notion of urban served as the encompassing phenomenon beyond the ‘limits’ of the city towards the rural areas, where the borders between them sought to disappear. His ideas have pioneered new theoretical frameworks and provided an understanding of the necessity of discussing changing urbanization processes. In this sense, Lefebvre’s intention was not to label all grounds as urban; on the contrary, it lies in exposing and comprehending the socio-political, economic, and ecological conditions that are dynamically evolving through urbanization as a process without restraint. Building on Lefebvre’s conceptualizations, this study seeks to develop a new framework for understanding urban movements that resist contemporary urbanization dynamics. So, how does urban society and nature change and how does the socio-ecological relations consistently ‘reproduced’ by the immense pressure of complete urbanization and neoliberal policies are questioned to understand the effects of urbanization on nature.

“Difference arises out of struggle,” says Lefebvre (1996, p.51), while indicating the ruptures in societal patterns and orders, where fractions in the everyday use of social space manifest as differences. In this context, resistance arising out of urban life is seen as integral to the urbanization process, signifying the emergence of new urban entities and the re-development of differential spaces in which “differences come to light” (Schmid, 2014). Here, urban mobilizations, or differences as Lefebvre suggests, stem from the resistance within ‘urban society,’ tapping into the emancipatory potential inherent in urban spaces and their adeptness in (re)producing social relations (Finkelievich, 1981; Lefebvre, 1991). The potential of ‘differential urbanization’ is produced through them, which could also be seen as the promise of urban life or the right to the city (Schmid, 2014, 2018). Furthermore, urban social

movements become evident in the urban space by indicating a collective action. That collectiveness arises as a social activism resisting grievance, discontent, and oppositional stances by articulating predominantly antagonistic perspectives. As Snow et al. (2004, p.3) defined, these movements “are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action”.

The urbanization process is based on a specific set of socio-spatial relations that give rise to “an ecological transformation which requires the reproduction of those relations to sustain it” (Harvey, 1996, p.94). From an ecological perspective, the formation of the urban through such socio-environmental shifts leads to the continual generation of novel ‘urban natures’ and the emergence of new urban social and physical environmental conditions (Cronon, 1991). The physical and social environment under the constant domination of urbanization inevitably produces urban natures and new definitions of activism. Nature, in that sense, has been incorporated into the process of urbanization, and it is being urbanized both by the expansion of urban and adding itself into the social representations of urban environments by bringing out different modes of resistance. Therefore, urban nature is in a constant state of change through the capitalist mode of urbanization and the conflicting social-spatial relations. It has not only been affected by ascribed socio-political changes but also altered the social environment in which it exists and changes through reproducing social relations within the paradigm of the capitalist mode of urbanization. Thus, the emerging and constantly transforming urban era has started to be discussed as characterized by variegated social and environmental interactions; it presents the potential for significant disparities and conflicts while also simultaneously offering new opportunities for democratic engagement and reclaiming of space across all scales. The city is considered as a dynamic structure that not only contains the built environment and spaces but also has the potential to reproduce them through social relations. In this context, Lefebvre, who revolutionised our understanding of space by presenting it as an active and controversial social product rather than a passive field of human activity, is also the first one who considers space as a field of continuous political struggle and social production with the concept of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 2003). Originally developed nearly 50 years ago, the concept of the right to the city is still widely invoked today, although its contemporary interpretations differ from the meanings outlined in Lefebvre's 1968 work *Le Droit à la Ville*.

Right to the city has emanated from the liberating potential of the urban and has intricate relations with changing the urban space as desired, participating in the decision-making processes and so being a part of the social geography of the urban (Goonewardena, 2014; Arboleda, 2016a). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the concept has experienced a resurgence as a recurring theme for social movements. This resurgence has played a crucial role in shaping the understanding of these movements concerning the process of urbanization by emphasizing the significance of collective power (Harvey, 2008). Building upon the legacy of the 'right to the city,' Apostolopoulou and Adams (2019) proposed the 'right to nature' as the entitlement to influence and govern the processes through which nature-society relationships are (re)configured by urbanization and capitalism (Apostolopoulou, 2019; Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018; Armas-Díaz & Sabaté-Bel, 2022). Hence, the right to nature has been exposed as holding keen importance as a reference point for conceptualizing the capitalist exploitation process of nature, exacerbated by neoliberal urbanization (Apostolopoulou, 2023; Purcell, 2002).

In this context, over the past three decades, adopting neoliberal policies and ideas has significantly reshaped the interactions between so-called 'nature' and 'urban society'. Following the altered socio-spatial relationships led by complete urbanization, the changes turned into the intensification and evolution of already existing environmental conflicts. Furthermore, urbanized conditions of the neoliberal era have brought up new sets of changing socio-spatial relations which have particularly arisen in the form of oppositions related to environmental or urban social movements and generally, have been associated with the socio-environmental inequalities, as well as the undemocratic nature of spatial change (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). Consequently, it is posited that commencing with the ascent of neoliberalism with the vast extension of urbanization, i.e., complete urbanization, the changing human–nature and urban–non-urban interaction has necessitated a critical discussion within a socio-political discourse to understand the recent ecological exploitations and the opposing movements. These movements are argued to have acquired an urban character under the influence of complete urbanization and are conceptualized as “urban ecological movements.” In this sense, the study proposes to first identify and then discuss the urban ecological movements against the neoliberal restructuring of urban nature and urban space as socio-spatial reflections of the neoliberal urbanization dynamics.

In an era where the struggles over the city and nature have started to merge from similar departure points of urban crisis, the movements prioritizing urban ecology become prominent. It is therefore worthwhile to give greater consideration to the interdependent relationship among neoliberal conservation, infrastructure, and urbanization, as well as the dynamic co-creation of urban and non-urban/rural environments within neoliberal capitalism. This approach has the potential to uncover the connections between capitalist urbanization and the neoliberal transformation of natural and spatial domains, providing insights into the social, spatial, and environmental dimensions of urbanization that span urban and rural landscapes.

While urban social movements have been extensively explored, framing environmental movements with an explicit 'urban' perspective is unusual. Reconceptualizing urban social movements in light of emerging modes of capital accumulation in non-urban areas, integrated into the urbanization process, and the subsequent environmental capitalist exploitation holds the strong potential to expand the socio-political framework to include the right to nature. Here, examining the neoliberal urbanization process that goes beyond conventional city boundaries within the realm of complete urbanization facilitates the comprehension of the repercussions of urbanization on impacted socio-natures (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019). For this reason, it is decided to take Ayvalık, a coastal town in western Türkiye, as the case study to analyse the current socio-ecological activism happening there to see the potential of radical practices to challenge rent-seeking urban development and claim the right to the city and nature.

Since coastal towns are particularly vulnerable to capitalist environmental exploitation of 'natural areas' driven by profit motives, analysing the resistance emerging in one instance allows us to closely explore the effects of intricate socio-political variables on the urban environment. While the current urbanization theories explore the incorporation of the urban into non-urban areas through global networks and connections, extending this discourse to, coastal areas characterized by both rural and urban dynamics, offers insights into the functioning of contemporary capital and power relations within the local community.

Considering the specific dynamics of the urban ecological movements in coastal towns, this thesis argues that the shifting understanding of nature and the urban environment within the context of complete urbanization has led to a new

conceptualization of environmental movements. This shift introduces a radical practice with the potential to challenge rent-seeking urban development while asserting claims to the right to the city and nature. Building on this argument, the central research question of the thesis is: How do environmental movements evolve in response to the changing conceptualization and perception of ‘nature’ under the conditions of complete urbanization deepened by neoliberal policies? To explore this, the thesis employs an urban political ecology (UPE) perspective, which serves as the foundation for analysing the interrelations between urbanization, nature, and socio-political resistance. Within this framework, urbanization is understood as a ‘socio-natural’ process that extends beyond physical expansion, encompassing economic, social, and historical dimensions (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014). This perspective allows for a critical examination of urban ecological issues, particularly through the lens of uneven urban development. The discussion centres on how urbanization produces a ‘connected yet unevenly differentiated urban fabric’ highlighting the spatial and social inequalities that shape environmental struggles (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014, p. 11). In a word, the overall discussion includes the evolving conditions of urbanization, nature, as well as the emergence of novel forms of resistance.

1.1. AIM AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS

This thesis aims to conceptualize urban ecological movements to bring new insights into the discussion of complete urbanization, its effects on urban nature, and how it reproduces variegated, dynamic socio-environmental relations. While urban social movements have increasingly articulated their struggles over urban space in ecological terms—primarily employing the discourse of urban social movements, environmental activism, and the right to the city and nature—these movements have largely been examined within broader frameworks of urban or environmental struggles (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2014). This study, however, introduces a new perspective by specifically focusing on urban ecological movements as a distinct form of resistance shaped by the conditions of complete urbanization, particularly where urban and non-urban confront and/or intermingle. It argues that these movements emerge not merely as reactions to environmental crises but as actively engaged socio-political forces that challenge the commodification of urban nature and assert claims to both the right to the city and the right to nature. By framing urban ecological movements through the lens of urban political ecology, this research

highlights how they navigate and contest the socio-natural transformations imposed by neoliberal urbanization.

To attain this objective, the research investigates conscious and organized ecological initiatives that are integral to broader urban and environmental activism, claiming the right to the city and the right to nature as both ‘working slogans and political ideals’ (Harvey, 2008). This analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how environmental struggles are also embedded in the dynamics of urbanization and how they reshape urban-environmental relations beyond conventional activism. Against these objectives, the following research questions are formulated:

- (a) How do environmental movements evolve in response to the changing conceptualization and perception of ‘nature’ under the conditions of complete urbanization deepened by neoliberal policies?
- (b) In what ways do urban social movements in the current era of complete urbanization diverge from their precedents? How does this variation contribute to the literature of urban political ecology and urban social movements?
- (c) How do the dynamics of neoliberalization of urban space and nature relate to socio-ecological resistances within the context of complete urbanization?
- (d) Who are the actors of resistance; what are the roles of non-local, metropolitan actors? What are their motivations and impact on urban development and environmental policy?

The thesis delves into inquiries exploring the social, spatial, and environmental dimensions influenced by neoliberal urbanization. Specifically, questions (b) and (c) aim to unravel the socio-demographic characteristics of activists engaged in various urban struggles. Answering these questions requires a multidisciplinary analysis of both the spatial and social reflections of movements and their actors. Following that, Ayvalık is selected as a case study to provide a grounded example of how urban ecological movements manifest in a distinct region and space. Ayvalık, a historically and ecologically significant coastal town in western Turkey, has undergone notable environmental and spatial transformations due to its proximity to Istanbul and its integration into the broader metropolitan framework of Balıkesir. Balıkesir was declared a metropolitan municipality in 2012, a transition that restructured

administrative boundaries and governance models, directly affecting smaller coastal settlements like Ayvalık. The town's strategic location, coupled with increasing urbanization pressures, has rendered it a focal point for socio-environmental struggles against land commodification, tourism-driven urban development, and ecological degradation.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is also to understand how Ayvalık's proximity to major metropolitan centres influences social aspects of movement, including the spirit of resistance, ecological awareness, and practical knowledge inherit from past experiences. In essence, the purpose is to investigate the interaction between individuals' subjective experiences and the objective realities of the locality. The temporal scope of this study is constrained to the past decade, a period marked by noteworthy momentum in ecological activism.

The turning point that catalysed this inquiry lies in the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Türkiye, which significantly reshaped the landscape of urban and ecological resistance. While sparked by a localized struggle over a public park in Istanbul, Gezi quickly evolved into a nationwide movement that exposed the broader socio-political tensions caused by urban transformation. In Ayvalık, Gezi served as a pivotal moment that mobilized local actors, fostering a culture of collective resistance and ecological awareness. It redefined local activism by linking environmental struggles to broader urban and political processes, paving the way for more organized and sustained opposition to rent-driven urban development. For this reason, the starting point is the Gezi protests, which served as a turning point for urban social movements in Turkey, amplifying concerns about public space, ecological destruction, and authoritarian urban policies.

Additionally, the enactment of the Metropolitan Law (Law No. 6360) further reshaped governance structures, intensifying urban expansion and commodification processes. By extending the analysis to the present day, the study captures the evolving dynamics of urban ecological resistance, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the long-term implications of these transformations on Ayvalık's socio-environmental landscape.

1.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method research design is developed for this research (Figure 1.1). It draws on qualitative and interpretive-historical inquiry to investigate the dynamic social, environmental, and power relations acquired in urban ecological movements with the vast expansion of urbanization under the dominance of neoliberal urban policies. The data collection is made up of four different tools: ethnographic methods, interdisciplinary inquiries based on a theoretical framework, i.e. UPE, a case study and a literature review. Through utilizing a multidisciplinary research approach, it aims to conduct a comprehensive theoretical inquiry and socio-spatial analysis, delving into the political ecology of urban resistance. To concretize and exemplify the socio-environmental activism within the intertwined interaction of urban and non-urban contexts concerning complete urbanization, Ayvalık, a coastal town located in the Balıkesir Province in northwestern Turkey, is chosen as a case study. Ayvalık is located along the Aegean Sea and is known for its picturesque coastline, historic architecture, and olive groves. A considerably large portion of the town is designated both as an ‘urban conservation area’ for its historic port and traditional settlement and a ‘natural and historic conservation area’ for its olive groves. Therefore, exemplifies a contested terrain, where local resistance engages with regional, national, and even global urban and environmental issues. Additionally, the town's proximity to the Greek island of Lesbos (Midilli) enhances its cultural and geographic significance. More importantly, and the primary reason for this area's selection as a case study, is the ongoing environmental resistance throughout the town, which aims to oppose government-led interventions, privatization attempts, and amendments to mining and environmental protection laws and legislation.



Figure 1.1 Overview of the Research Strategy. Produced by the author

The study draws on key theoretical backgrounds to build on the already existing literature. In that sense, it draws on concepts of the ‘right to the city’, ‘urban society’ and ‘complete urbanization’ to explore the evolution of social and environmental movements regarding the changing urbanization dynamics. Nevertheless, examining the transformation of nature and its perception within the context of complete urbanization necessitates a more comprehensive theoretical approach, leading to the adoption of a UPE framework. The theoretical framework of UPE is employed to understand how socio-natural processes in both urban and non-urban areas create distinctions and connections. Apart from the theoretical inquiry, a major practical contribution of the study lies in case study and literature review. Document analysis are conducted for policy documents, municipal report, and planning regulations in order to collect relevant data and visual, textual information on changes in the legislation and its influences on urban space and urban nature in Ayvalık within the last ten years. The resistances in Ayvalık are documented and analysed to show the peculiarities of the case by addressing the already reviewed theories. In-depth interviews are conducted with the actors of resistance (activists and locals who comprise the resistance), academicians, and architects working specifically on Ayvalık and the ongoing spatial change. Respondents contributed by answering semi-structured questions.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter establishes the key research questions and objectives, defining the focus of the study. The chapter then introduces the research methodology, detailing the data collection and analysis methods used to examine urban ecological movements. This section provides a foundation for understanding the research objectives and the framework within which the study is conducted.

The second chapter presents a literature review on urban mobilizations and the conceptualization of urban ecological movements. It begins with an exploration of urban social movements, tracing their emergence and contemporary developments, with a particular focus on the concept of the right to the city. The chapter then shifts the discussion toward ecological resistance, investigating how urban political ecology reconfigures the relationship between cities and nature. Key debates on urban nature, its commodification, and the right to nature are examined. The chapter

concludes by formulating a theoretical framework for understanding urban ecological movements.

The third chapter contextualizes urban ecological movements within the framework of complete urbanization, using Ayvalık as a case study. It begins by analyzing how metropolitanization processes have extended urbanization into provincial areas, reshaping urban-rural relations. This section critically examines legislative changes, including development plans and mining regulations, and their implications for natural landscapes. The discussion then turns to the Gezi Park protest in Turkey as a pivotal moment in reimagining urban social movements. The latter part of the chapter maps spaces of activism in Ayvalık, identifying sites of resistance and protest while highlighting the diverse strategies of urban ecological movements. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the key actors of resistance, offering insight into their roles and contributions to urban-environmental struggles.

The fourth and final chapter synthesizes the findings of the research and offers concluding remarks on the implications of urban ecological movements. It discusses potential contributions to the broader literature on urban political ecology and resistance, highlighting opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 2

URBAN MOBILIZATIONS AND URBAN ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

Urban mobilizations have long been central to the contestation of social and spatial injustices produced by the dynamics of urbanization, where urban space serves both as the battleground of struggle and a resource for political mobilization (Tonkiss, 2005, p. 59). These collective actions do not merely arise from isolated local concerns but often reflect broader political, social, and ecological transformations that reshape urban life (Fainstein & Fainstein, 1985). Urban social movements, in particular, bring together diverse actors around shared concerns regarding the production, appropriation, and governance of urban space. Their strength lies in their ability to reframe everyday urban problems — ranging from access to collective services and public goods to struggles over identity, security, and environmental rights — into political questions that transcend local boundaries. These movements mobilize not only within clearly defined neighborhoods or cities, but also across scales, forging connections between local struggles and global agendas. As noted by Della Porta and Subirats (2019), this multi-scalar character allows heterogeneous groups — including activists, marginalized residents, creative professionals, and environmental organizations — to converge around urban causes, transforming the city itself into both the arena and the medium of resistance. The academic study of urban social movements gained momentum particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, when the growing discontent with post-war urban development models and capitalist urbanization processes sparked widespread protest across global cities.

2.1. EMERGENCE OF URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS STUDIES

The concept of urban social movements was first introduced by Manuel Castells in the 1970s. Castells was heavily influenced by the revolts of the 1960s and the concept mainly covered the movements oriented towards “class struggle” and “collective consumption” (Mayer, 2006, 2011). Then, it has been deeply shaped by

structuralist Marxist thought and critical urban theory and played a crucial role in analysing the relationship between social dynamics and spatial organization. Although some scholars classify urban social movements as “old” due to their focus on material demands, others view them as “new” because they transcend class-based struggles, operate beyond the realm of production, and advocate for broader participation and emerging rights (Della Porta & Subirats, 2019).

Castells’s conceptualization is shaped around three key elements: collective consumption, local government (power), and community culture–identity. In this sense, the domination of capitalism is argued to be a reason for conflict. According to him, the capitalist mode of production and collective consumption creates social division by deepening the distinction between the consumers of urban services, thereby transforming the city into a hub of conflicting social interests and values. In *The Urban Question* (1977), Castells defined urban social movements as those capable of driving structural change by linking the political and economic dimensions of class struggle. He later revised this perspective, underscoring the necessity of a more direct connection between class struggle and urban social movements. In *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), he expanded his framework, incorporating struggles over collective consumption alongside movements centred on cultural identity and political self-determination. Castells’s vision of urban social movements manifests class conflict over access to collective consumption goods and services, in which he argues that the majority of social movements within the urban fabric have arisen to enhance individuals’ access to urban resources (Castells, 1983). He further explains urban social movements as follows:

A system of practices resulting from the articulation of a conjuncture of the system of urban agents and of other social practices in such a way that its development tends objectively towards the structural transformation of the urban system or towards a substantial modification of the power relations in the class struggle, that is to say, in the last resort, in the power of the state (Castells, 1977, p.263).

In line with these arguments, Castells uses the term urban social movements to describe “urban-oriented mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings” (Castells, 1983, p.305), which play a significant role as precursors for societal transformations. Although incapable of transforming society (Castells, 1983, p.326), urban social movements, as defined here, do alter ‘urban meanings’. They challenge the societal hierarchies that structure urban life

and establish a city grounded in use values, independent local cultures, and decentralized participatory democracy (Castells, 1983, p.319, 320; Mayer, 2006).

Manuel Castells's work has shaped the perspectives of later urban scholars (e.g., Brenner et al., 2011; Hamel et al., 2000; Harvey, 2008, 2012; Mayer, 2006, 2009, 2013). His contributions have been instrumental in framing the urban realm as a key site of social struggle (Pickvance, 1985) and in outlining a new trajectory for research in the field. He (1983) is recognized for his studies on the interconnection between urban contradictions, conflicts, and the emergence of urban social movements within scholarly discourse. His work continues to be highly relevant for the contemporary research on urban social movements (Mayer, 2006) in which the theorized concepts revolve around comprehending urban dynamics and how they have evolved through politicising urban spaces, particularly through interventions in collective consumption processes to sustain the reproduction of the labour force.

According to Pickvance (2003), Castells's conceptualization of urban social movements can be understood in both a restrictive and a broader, more generic sense. In its restrictive interpretation, Castells identifies varying levels of societal action that emerge from urban contradictions, each exerting distinct influences on urban and political dynamics. At the lowest level, participation primarily affects symbolic aspects of urban life and exercises limited control over the reproduction of the urban system. Protest, positioned at an intermediate level, leads to reformist changes by modifying certain urban elements while preserving existing relational structures. At the highest level of resistance, urban social movements have the capacity to drive structural transformations, reshaping both urban elements and their interrelations (Pickvance, 2003). In contrast, the broader, generic usage of the term extends beyond these distinctions, encompassing all forms of opposition related to urban issues. This perspective underscores the importance of considering the long-term transformative potential of such actions, rather than focusing solely on their immediate effects. Given the relative rarity of movements capable of instigating significant urban change, Pickvance (2003) ultimately supports Castells' more structured framework for analysing urban social movements.

Castells's perspective, however, has also been criticised for its 'narrow' view of the city as merely a site for the everyday reproduction of labour power (Schmid, 2011). His structured political viewpoint that has prioritized emphasises on organized protests has often marginalized the "spontaneous" forms of mobilizations, actions,

and revolts (Leontidou, 1990; Schmid, 2011, p. 45). In contrast, Henri Lefebvre proposed a more open and radical understanding of the urban, rejecting a fixed theory in favor of an ongoing exploration of urbanization and social conflict (Lefebvre, 1991, 1996, 2003; Purcell, 2002). His inquiries sought to capture the spontaneous and everyday actions shaping urban life beyond formalized movements.

Building on Lefebvre's notion of 'urban society' as a bureaucratic system of controlled consumption (Lefebvre, 2003), Monte-Mór (2014) argues that by the 1980s, urban social movements had extended beyond city boundaries, integrating rural and traditional populations. As a result, the distinction between "urban" and broader social movements became increasingly redundant. This perspective challenges the assumption that social movements are confined to the urban sphere, highlighting their expansion into unbounded social spaces. However, for the purposes of this study, the concept of urban movements remains central to understanding the evolving 'urban' environmental struggles within complete urbanization. Since this study primarily aims to examine the urbanization of nature and strategies for addressing urban nature within the framework of complete urbanization, the literature on urban social movements serves as a foundational basis for conceptualizing urban ecological movements. Consequently, the term urban social movements provides a grounding framework for distinguishing oppositional actions that drive structural transformations and urban social change. Thus, this study adopts the term urban movements to further explore how evolving socio-environmental dynamics within complete urbanization shape struggles over the urban and its inherently interconnected elements. Through this concept, the study engages with contemporary discussions and conceptualization efforts related to urban movements.

2.2. CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

During the 1960s and 1970s, urban movements were largely perceived as homogeneous entities (Mayer, 2006, p. 205), with neighborhood and district committees serving as their primary organizational structures (Della Porta & Subirats, 2019). Over time, however, "urban mobilizations have expanded, differentiated and fragmented in so many different ways and directions" (Mayer 2006, p. 202).

Certain movements have been categorized as NIMBY (“not in my backyard”), often characterized as localized and insular reactions driven by strong emotions and self-interest rather than broader societal concerns (Andretta et al., 2015, p. 205). Meanwhile, the other types of urban mobilization, such as squatting initiatives, have sought alternative ways of inhabiting and conceptualizing urban spaces, striving to build new social and economic models (Della Porta & Subirats, 2019). Some of these movements have actively resisted corporate-led urban development within the framework of the “urban growth machine” (Molotch & Logan, 1984), albeit from varying perspectives. As Mayer (2013) observed, later, a more significant distinction appeared in-between movements in the postindustrial neoliberal city.

While the literature calls for consistent terminology, any attempt to synthesize these movements along similar lines risks oversimplifying their complexities and failing to capture their distinct characteristics, dynamics, and significance in contemporary society (Mayer, 2006, p.203). The uneven patterns of urbanization, which make both the urbanization process and urban social movements difficult to categorize, continue to generate conflict-prone urban spaces where resistance emerges as a strategic tool for claiming the right to the city. In line with Lefebvre’s theory (2003), although urban social movements initially emerged as struggles for the right to housing and access to basic urban services—as seen in Turkey in the 1970s—under contemporary urbanization, the urban social movements have evolved beyond an individual entitlement to resources, housing, or land, becoming a collective right shared by all urban inhabitants (Harvey, 2008).

Earlier forms of urban social mobilization were often rooted in the political and spatial tensions produced by the industrial and welfare-state urban model associated with Fordism. In contrast, contemporary movements have largely emerged as a response to the restructuring of cities under neoliberalism. This shift has introduced new patterns of urban inequality and triggered mobilizations that differ significantly from earlier forms, both in their organizational practices and in their political demands (Mayer, 2011). In this sense, recent studies on urban social movements increasingly diverge from Castells’s framework, reflecting how conflicts in the neoliberal era have shifted towards demands for greater democratic participation in urban life. Contemporary struggles increasingly highlight issues of democratic participation, ecological sustainability, and spatial justice, reflecting a broader critique of neoliberal urban development rather than a reaction solely to industrial-era

urban conditions. In order to further illuminate this discussion, it is necessary to first define the term “neoliberal urbanization.”

Neoliberalization is widely recognized as an “intensely contested” process, driven by efforts to impose market-oriented regulations and sociocultural norms (Brenner & Theodore, 2005, p. 102). These efforts, however, are met with strong resistance from social groups advocating for non-market or “socialized” systems that constrain unrestricted capital accumulation (Brenner & Theodore, 2005). In the urban context, neoliberal strategies seek to reshape city landscapes through gentrification, speculative development, and the attraction of global corporate investments, often at the expense of residents’ social and political rights. As a result, neoliberal urban development disrupts multiple dimensions of social life, affecting material and spatial conditions, altering symbolic meanings of space, and intensifying struggles over sociospatial structures (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). In this context, urban social movements in the neoliberal era emerge as responses to these transformations, shaped by the very urban strategies that define contemporary urbanization dynamics.

Under the dominance of neoliberalism, the social fabric of urban life and the dynamics of urban social movements have been profoundly transformed, bringing the struggle for the ‘right to the city’ to the forefront (Mayer, 2011). The contemporary urban landscape, largely shaped by neoliberal urbanization, has redefined the socio-spatial terrain, creating both opportunities and constraints for social movements (Mayer, 2006). Today, struggles over urban life increasingly centred on issues of social exclusion and spatial segregation, both of which are reinforced by the neoliberal market system. Opposition to neoliberalism is inherently sociospatial, as space itself functions not only as an arena of contestation but also as a crucial element of political strategy (Leitner et al., 2007). More than half a century ago, Lefebvre (2003) foresaw this shift, emphasizing that urban opposition would emerge as a response to hegemonic interventions in urban space—a collective demand for renewed urban life and a rejection of efforts to dominate and re-appropriate the city. Thus, social movements emerging in the age of neoliberal urbanization has seen as able to create new opportunities for mobilisation even under restrictive conditions, as the new context have reinforced their legitimacy, strengthened their arguments, and facilitated connections across various contested spaces (Della Porta & Subirats, 2019).

Against the backdrop of neoliberal urban restructuring, where public spaces and urban commons are increasingly commodified, various forms of resistance, both individual and collective, have emerged across different territories. A unifying theme among the wave of protests between 2011 and 2013 was the demand to reclaim, reappropriate public spaces perceived as having been expropriated by neoliberal development (Della Porta and Subirats, 2019, p. 3). Public spaces such as Tahrir and al-Adawiya squares in Cairo, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Syntagma Square in Athens, Zuccotti Park in New York City, Paternoster Square in London, Plaza de Catalunya in Barcelona and Taksim Square (Gezi Park) in Istanbul emerged as ‘insurgent’ mobilizations turning public spaces into common spaces for social interaction and political activism (Della Porta & Subirats, 2019; Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019). In fact, urban mobilizations initially formed through encampments and later expanding into the broader urban fabric, grow into broader political movements. These mobilizations across different cities demonstrated that neoliberal pressures, which undermine citizens’ rights to the city, provoke what Bayat (2012, pp. 124–125) refers to as “a new logic of repossession”.

In the context of the relationship between the hegemony of neoliberal urbanization and the economic crises starting with the worldwide financial crises in 2008, Brenner et al. (2011) argue that the ongoing impacts of the global economic recession are significantly exacerbating the contradictions that urban social movements have long highlighted, thereby reinforcing their assertions about the unsustainable and destructive nature of neoliberal urbanization practices. In this sense, there was an ongoing search on how various types of cities within the global system are being restructured within increasingly unstable and financialized circuits of capital accumulation and how this crisis has either stimulated or restricted “alternative visions of urban life” that challenge capitalism as the foundational principle of political-economic and spatial organization (Brenner et al., 2011).

Capitalist cities have long functioned not only as sites of capital accumulation but also as ‘battlegrounds’ where conflicts and contradictions emerge, challenging profit-driven urbanization and the relentless commodification and re-commodification of urban space (Brenner et al., 2011; Harvey, 2009; Kipfer et al., 2008; Lefebvre, 2003). Paradoxically, rather than leading to its demise, the crises, failures, and instabilities inherent in neoliberal urbanization have fuelled its continual reinvention, as capital persistently restructures urban sociospatial configurations

through a dynamic process of “implosion-explosion” (Brenner et al., 2011; Lefebvre, 2003).

This very process has also created space for alternative visions of urban life that challenge the uneven capitalist mode of urbanization and the forces of neoliberalization. As Schmid (2011) suggests, urban crises not only expose the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism but also present opportunities to conceptualize new potential urban worlds (Harvey, 1996; Lehrer & Keil, 2007). According to Marcuse (2009), “Capitalism has always been a system with deep internal contradictions” (p.187), by becoming the common enemy for the urban inhabitants to battle against and to gather with the common cause. Marxism, in this sense, has long focused on examining crises as central to its analysis, and its findings are unlikely to be invalidated by contemporary circumstances (Marcuse, 2009). Herein, the relationship between crises and capitalism constitutes another discussion to explore, to be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters of the thesis.

In this context, Bayırbağ and Penpecioglu (2022), examines how the spatial contradictions of neoliberal capitalism give rise to urban crises. In particular, it is argued that the wave of urban uprisings following 2008 can be traced to the unsuccessful implementation of roll-out neoliberal strategies. As Harvey (2014) asserts, the root causes of urban crises lie in the intrinsic contradictions of the capitalist system and the processes of capital accumulation. Given this reality, the study of urban movements, crises, and environmental disasters are becoming increasingly crucial for understanding the social imprints of contemporary urbanization dynamics. In this sense, the age of complete urbanization, which is internalised by the exacerbation of crises and disasters, constantly changes and produces urban social movements produced by changing socio-environmental relations (Domaradzka, 2018; Donaghy, 2022).

Accordingly, even though neoliberal restructuring has significantly altered the context, leading to new conflicts and new types of urban struggle over privatization, retrenchment, and social polarization (Mayer, 2006), the former framework of urban social movements (proposed by Castells) remained vital by its identified prevailing tendencies and approaches which became key organizing principles. Mayer (2006, 2011), in this sense, has further explored new types of urban struggle that the current neoliberal practices provoked where she scrutinized the changing mottos of the movements by tracing back the different versions of various neoliberal regimes.

Mayer (2009) posits that the current conjunction including the contemporary slogan of the right to the city and contemporary urban social movements holds the potential to bring together the “claims of the deprived and disconnected” (as it is conceptualized by Marcuse, 2009) that were not realized through 1968.

The contradictory situation is that contemporary urbanization practices, while exacerbating neoliberal accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2004, 2008) and making urban life result in significant losses of civil, social, political, and economic rights (Mayer, 2009), led to the proliferation of resistance and opposition, producing new urban meanings, thereby increasing awareness through social and urban rights in the form of democratic demands. In this sense, since neoliberal policies have started to acknowledge 'civil society', particularly by focusing on socially marginalized areas and incorporating civil society stakeholders into various development and labour market policies, the political opportunity structures for urban movements have undergone a fundamental transformation (Mayer, 2006, p.205). Thus, although the neoliberal transformation of urban spaces has, in many respects, created a more challenging environment for progressive urban movements, it has also facilitated a more global expression of urban protest which has also entailed a renewed convergence of these movements under the unifying slogan of the right to the city (Mayer, 2009, 2011).

2.3. THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

The notion of ‘the right to the city’ was initially introduced by Henri Lefebvre in 1968 in his work *Le Droit à la ville* (English translation as *The right to the city* in 1996). It has later evolved into a widely recognized aspiration to ensure human rights within urban environments, encompassing theoretical discourse and practical implementation. While some academics have characterized the right to the city as asserting entitlements to fundamental urban amenities like transportation, housing, potable water, and property, alternative perspectives suggest a focus on traditional libertarian rights. This divergence in interpretation underscores the broader ideological debate surrounding urban citizenship, as some views emphasize basic services, while others highlight the right to challenge the capitalist restructuring of urban space and the urbanization process itself.

Lefebvre's understanding of the right to the city depends on the interrelation of demand, claim, cry, and a plea, especially for transformation and renewed access to centrality, encounter, and urban life (Lefebvre, 1996). The right to the city, he asserts, is "like a cry and a demand" (Lefebvre, 1996). It encompasses several key aspects: the right to inhabit the city, the right to shape urban life without being constrained by economic factors, and the right to maintain a sense of connection and belonging to urban environments (Attoh, 2011). At its core, this concept challenges the exclusionary forces of neoliberal urbanization, emphasizing that urban centrality should not be dictated solely by economic power but rather by active participation and social integration. Thus, urban inhabitants' integration and participation in urban centrality—beyond mere physical accessibility to include decision-making and power structures—becomes the primary question of the phenomenon (Lefebvre, 2003).

This engagement is not simply about presence but about actively shaping urban life, or as Merrifield (2013, p.525) puts it, the right "be in the heat of the action," ensuring the complete and inclusive use of urban spaces in connection with everyday experiences. Lefebvre's vision extends beyond nostalgia for the traditional city; rather, he calls for an urban society that reimagines spatial configurations, institutional structures, and political frameworks. He argues that urban inhabitants must reclaim control over the restructuring of social, political, and economic landscapes (Lefebvre, 1996; Madden, 2012). In this sense, the physical occupation of urban space—through both habitation and inhabitation—becomes a tangible expression of the right to the city, representing a superior form of rights that challenges the commodification of urban life.

The urban space and its relations with the capitalist mode of production was another important point of Lefebvre's conceptualization of the right to the city. The domination of capitalism in the economy and social context is reflected to have a negative impact on the production of urban space, where it manifests itself as turning it into a battleground. Urban conflicts, resistance, and mobilization among the urban inhabitants appear and affect the production of urban space; the city, as Lefebvre (1996) argues, should allow urban dwellers to be able to participate in the re-making of social and political urban life and so the city. Lefebvrian's conceptualization calls for a radical, revolutionary approach to reconfigure both the societal dynamics within capitalism and the prevailing framework of democratic urban politics and citizenship (Attoh, 2011; Purcell, 2002, 2003). It proposes granting autonomous urban

governance to urban inhabitants, yet underscoring a critical assertion in support of strong engagement in urban democracy and the transformation of urban environments.

Even though the right to the city has been seen as a core mobilizer in urban social movements and despite the strong idea behind the Lefebvrian conceptualization of the right to the city, several critics and discussions have arisen regarding the conception and use of the term. The questions that have been under discussion by the scholars are whether the right to the concept is a fundamental human right to merely a symbolic slogan; who is included in the concept; what specific right and city does it entail; does it merely refer to access to city centres or address the socio-economic needs of marginalized urban inhabitants; how can the demand be practically realized; is it about right to the city or right to urban [life] (Marcuse, 2009)?¹ Thus, it is, on the one hand, due to the radical openness the theory both grounds on and causes; on the other hand, the term itself was also found problematic concerning its direct guidance into “cities”.

Accordingly, it is observed that the term itself was also amended by Lefebvre himself through the use of other terms: “the right to centrality”, “the right to difference”, and “right to space” (Schmid, 2011, p.49). Furthermore, although the potential benefits of this openness are evident, setting an argument asserting the significance of divergent definitions and manifestations of rights presents a challenge, albeit it is a crucial attempt (Attoh, 2011). Consequently, efforts were given by scholars to ascribe further explanation and framework to already brought conceptualization; the question of the inclusivity of the rights embodied within the collectivity of the right to the city and the specific rights it involves were addressed (Attoh, 2011; Harvey, 2008). In this sense, the dynamic components and scope of the right to the city were re-evaluated and discussed thoroughly by questioning “*whose* right is it about, what *right* is it, and right to *what* city?” (Brenner et al., 2011; Harvey, 2012; Marcuse, 2009; Merrifield, 2014a).

Building on Lefebvre’s metaphor of the right to the city as a ‘cry’ and a ‘demand,’ Marcuse (2009) refines this distinction by linking the ‘cry’ to those who are alienated

¹ These questions persist, making the theory still ambiguous and open to interpretation. Nevertheless, although, it is evident that, the concept has adopted diverse interpretations and degrees of flexibility due to this radical openness, the review of these disparate approaches and the conceptual evolution provide a foundation for addressing urban ecological movements, constituting the principal objective of this thesis.

and the 'demand' to those who are excluded. He argues that the right to the city belongs not only to the 'deprived'—those directly exploited, unemployed, and impoverished—but also to the 'discontent'—those who, while not necessarily destitute, remain overlooked and subject to systemic inequalities. This dual perspective highlights a crucial convergence: the grievances of the oppressed intersect with the aspirations of the alienated, creating a shared struggle against capitalist structures. As a result, the right to the city becomes the unifying framework for resistance, giving rise to a "battle of ideology" in which capitalism is identified as the common adversary and the reconfiguration of urban space as the collective objective (Marcuse, 2009, p.191-192).

The demand for the right to the city has become a widespread slogan across Europe, North America, and Latin America because it unifies and articulates a range of issues that have intensified over years of neoliberal urban development and have been further exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis (Mayer, 2011). It is also worth noting that even though the concept of "the right to the city" has been excessively used as a slogan within urban resistance movements and beyond, its radical Lefebvrian roots, which calls for an oppositional demand rather than a juridical right, well distinguished from the depoliticized versions used widely by NGOs; which underscores the necessity for a clear and radical definition of the right to the city one more time (Mayer, 2009).

The challenge inherent in Lefebvre's proposition lies in the absence of explicit guidelines delineating how urban inhabitants can practically realize the right to the city, leaving uncertainties regarding the extent of its implementation. As a result, a critical question today is how to interpret the right to the city within contemporary urbanization dynamics and how earlier conceptualizations contribute to its actualization (Marcuse, 2009; Purcell, 2002, 2003). While the interrelationship between urbanization and capitalism has been widely discussed, the right to the city remains one of the fundamental debates shaping these discussions (Harvey, 2008, 2012). In this context, Attoh (2011) highlights Lefebvre's concept as a crucial lens for understanding urban life under capitalism, presenting it as a reimagined and revitalized framework that diverges from traditional sociological studies. This perspective underscores the right to the city not merely as a theoretical abstraction but as a transformative approach to urban living.

Moving beyond conceptual interpretations, Marcuse (2009) offers a concrete method for action, outlining three sequential steps that critical theory could adapt to implement the right to the city in contemporary urban struggles: exposing injustices, proposing alternatives, and politicizing the demands of urban inhabitants. This structured approach bridges the gap between theoretical discourse and practical application, shedding light on possible pathways for realizing the right to the city in today's world.

Harvey's formulation of the right to the city, on the other hand, depends on the arguments of urban sociologist Robert Park; he conceptualizes the right to the city as not only access to the centre but a right to "change it after our heart's desire" (Harvey, 2003). In this sense, it is seen as a liberty, a freedom, and a right to interactively participate in the production of urban space through the process of making, re-making, and re-imagining thereby changing and reinventing the city with the collective power over the process of urbanization (Harvey, 2003, 2008, 2012). Harvey summarises this point of view as follows,

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey, 2008, p.23).

This revolutionary potential of the right to the city is reflected as not a total break but a rupture that is powerful enough to turn things 'upside down'; it is the freedom to imagine a different order and resist shaping it according to the heart's desire. Within this radical way of thinking, claiming the right to the city was emphasized as a collective act for urban inhabitants rather than an individualistic right concerning access (Harvey, 2008).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the concept has experienced a resurgence as a recurring theme for social movements. It has increasingly served as a prevalent tool for urban inhabitants in mobilizing resistance against neoliberal urban policies within the rapidly growing urbanization process, emphasizing the significance of collective power (Harvey, 2008; Mayer, 2011). Within this dynamic, various contemporary urban social and environmental movements have emerged, positioning the right to the city as the central argument in their resistance against hegemonic policies and authority. As these policies reshape urban landscapes through mechanisms such as

urban renewal, the commodification of space, and the expansion of uneven urbanization, their impacts vary across different socio-spatial contexts.

This can be exemplified by the Right to City Alliance in the USA (Mayer, 2009) and the protests at Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park in 2013. Activists gathered around the cause of opposition and have brought up the demand for democracy, (social and environmental) justice for all against the neoliberal urban policies. In doing so, the concept of the right to the city offers valuable guidance and inspiration for tangible efforts aimed at transforming the contemporary city (Purcell, 2014). Hence, contemporary urban social movements have reshaped their demands following the renewed concept of right to the city, which has regained prominence during the heightened mobilizations that were emerged to claim public space expropriated by neoliberal development. Or in other words, urban social movements, renewed by the urge to change urban space in a desired way by participating in decision-making processes and being part of the social geography of the city, have embraced the concept of the right to the city as both a rallying cry and a framework for resistance (Arboleda, 2016; Attoh, 2011; Goonewardena, 2014). As a result, Lefebvre's concept, first articulated over half a century ago, has once again become central to discussions on urban mobilization.

2.4. SHIFTING THE FOCUS OF RESISTANCE TO ECOLOGY

The process of urbanization has played a central role in driving significant environmental changes, bringing ecological concerns to the forefront of the political agenda (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). In particular, over the past three decades, the adoption of neoliberal policies and ideologies within the urbanization process has resulted in a reconfiguration of the relationship between nature and society, accompanied by the emergence of new forms of injustice (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). These discussions have also inspired broader conceptualizations, such as planetary urbanization, which challenge the traditional urban-rural divide by emphasizing the global reach of urbanization processes and their ecological consequences (Brenner and Schmid, 2015).

In this context, a range of environmental movements has risen to challenge the neoliberal transformation of environmental policies, advocating for alternative approaches to urban-ecological governance. These movements, broadly defined

under the term “environmental movements” or “environmental activism,” encompass various local struggles and conflicts centered on ecological concerns within the broader discourse of development. Notably, they often transcend the conventional divide between environmental and labour agendas (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018), highlighting the interconnectedness of ecological degradation and socio-economic inequalities.

From a political perspective, environmental movements can be understood as forms of social mobilization centred on the interconnected network of socio-ecological relationships (Swyngedouw et al., 2005). This perspective highlights how struggles over the environment are inherently political, as they challenge existing power structures and demand more equitable governance of natural and urban resources. This dynamic is particularly evident in cities, where the unequal distribution of resources and decision-making power creates highly uneven urban environments (Smith, 2008; Swyngedouw et al., 2005; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). These processes of uneven geographical development can be associated with the ideologies and discourses radiating from the urban environment, that are observed at various scales, influencing the way nature transforms and urban areas develop across time (Gottlieb, 2005).

From an ecological perspective, the discussion necessitates an emphasis on ‘nature’. The concept of nature itself is not fixed or independent of human influence; rather, it is socially constructed and continuously redefined through political, economic, and cultural processes (Collard et al., 2018). This recognition has made ecological issues a key site of political contestation, as different actors seek to shape how nature is understood, managed, and integrated into urban development. As ecological concerns gain prominence in political discourse, they have increasingly become subjects of democratic debate and negotiation, reflecting broader struggles over the future of cities and their relationship with the environment (Keil, 2003).

For example, the Environmental Justice Atlas (also known as the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice) is a collaborative map of socio-environmental conflicts around the world.² As an online, interactive resource developed and maintained by a team of researchers and activists, it has already documented over four thousand cases, including struggles around nuclear energy, mining, waste and water

² The Environmental Justice Atlas website can be accessed via the following link: <https://ejatlas.org/>.

management, and biodiversity conservation, among others (Temper et al., 2018). In certain instances, these local struggles have demonstrated their capacity to directly challenge the logic of capitalism (Temper et al., 2018) in which local communities have been able to break out of their isolation and become fully-fledged political actors (Arboleda, 2016b, p. 96). In this sense, the expansion of global capitalism increases the disconnection across different geographies of injustice along commodity chains, yet simultaneously, the globalization of governance and 'environmental justice movements' is making local political ecologies more transnational and interconnected (Temper et al., 2015, p. 255).

Challenges in Environmental Movements

Recognizing the need to examine environmental movements as a form of democratic resistance against neoliberal forces, scholars have made significant contributions to this field of inquiry (Apostolopoulou, 2023; Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019; Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018; Apostolopoulou & Kotsila, 2022). Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vazquez (2019; 2018) particularly have been working on the intersection of urbanization, nature, and neoliberalism and have adopted a critical approach to the environmental contradictions of capitalism and environmental activism, to examine the specificity of environmental movements that have emerged to oppose the commodification and injustice of urban environments. The argument put forth is that the centred of resistance against the inequitable allocation of the costs and benefits of neoliberal policies emerged in various regions around the globe, thereby underscoring the growing social, environmental, and spatial injustices. Despite the evident necessity for an in-depth examination of environmental movements in order to address the ongoing ecological crises that are being experienced across the globe, there has been a notable absence of analysis concerning the interrelationship between rural and urban areas.

Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vázquez (2018) point out four significant inconsistencies that persistently hinder the progress of critical scholarship and its direct connection to radical practice, even though there has been a clear and active resistance to neoliberal capitalism in both academic and activist spheres in recent years. The first challenge contains the divergence between disparate research domains and movements about the environmental contradictions of capitalism. Different modes of socio-environmental movements considered as insufficiently interconnected, resulting in a divide between urban and rural areas, the 'city' and the 'countryside', and ultimately, between society and nature (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez,

2018). A second challenge that has been identified points out namely a notable lack of engagement between critical and radical scholars studying nature-society interactions under capitalism and environmental activists. It is therefore imperative to establish a systematic exchange of theoretical insights, practical experiences, and successful political strategies (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). This necessity is further reinforced by the observation that the voices of numerous environmental movements, in particular those connected to vulnerable communities, are frequently overlooked or merely utilized to bolster academic arguments.

The third challenge is framed around the efforts of critical scholars addressing the class dimensions of environmental degradation and the associated movements and struggles that have been noted as insufficient (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). This deficiency impedes the establishment of constructive and continuous discourse with activists, environmental movements, and particularly the labour movement regarding the consequences of economic and ecological crises and potential alternatives to the neoliberal agenda (Burkett, 1999; Harvey, 2014). The fourth and the last challenge concerns the comparative studies across various locations, countries, and continents that are notably scarce, impeding the meaningful comparison of specific, “actually existing” neoliberalizations. There is a mentioned discrepancy between political ecology studies that focus on the global North and those that concentrate on the global South. Those who focus on the global North tend to be underrepresented and emphasize urban struggles, whereas those who concentrate on the global South predominantly focus on rural issues. This limitation impedes the comprehensive comprehension of the multifaceted impacts of neoliberalism across diverse geographical and socioeconomic settings (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). The sharing of knowledge between these two areas of focus could provide a profound critique of the nature-society relationships under capitalism, directly connecting both theoretical frameworks and practical considerations.

Environmental Resistance in Turkey: From Local Resistance to Urban Movements

On the other hand, in Turkey, there has been a notable shift in the agenda of resistance, with a particular focus on ecology, as a result of grassroots mobilization. Environmental disasters and the threat of ecological exploitation have necessitated the integration of environmental concerns into the struggle for justice in the 1990s. One significant outcome of the aggressive interventions driven by the urbanization

strategies of AKP government has been the increasing politicization of environmental issues, which, until the 1990s, had primarily been a middle-class concern, largely confined to international environmental NGOs (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). Over the past decade, however, grassroots environmental movements have emerged across Turkey, with hundreds of newly formed collectives named after towns, villages, or entire valleys. These movements have taken root even in the most remote areas, where political activism had previously been minimal (Erensü & Karaman, 2017).

Environmentalism exerted a considerable influence, particularly in the case of the villagers' resistance to gold mining in Bergama, Izmir (Arsel, 2005). It has originated in the early 1990s, the movement gained significant momentum after 1997 and has maintained its presence in national public discourse ever since (Çoban, 2004). Another early and highly contested development was the 2003 policy decision to open forested areas to private sector exploitation, which marked a turning point in the struggle over Turkey's natural commons. This was soon followed by the acceleration of state-led initiatives to construct a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu, located on the Mediterranean coast. In the following years, local opposition began to organize against a wide range of environmentally destructive projects, including coal-fired power plants, gold mines, and hydroelectric power plants (HPPs). By around 2010, the anti-HPP protests had succeeded in transforming scattered local efforts into a coordinated national network of resistance (F. Turan, 2011). Although land and water grabs directly threaten agricultural communities, rural resistance cannot simply be categorized as peasant movements or environmentalism of the poor (Adaman & Arsel, 2014; Martinez-Alier, 2003). Instead, rural opposition consists of a diverse range of actors who represent the complex interconnections between urban and rural life in contemporary Turkey (Öztürk et al., 2014). This spectrum includes suburban and seasonal villagers, individuals maintaining dual residences in rural and urban areas, first-and second-generation rural-to-urban migrants who have severed ties with agricultural work yet remain connected to their hometowns, returning retirees, and traditional farming communities. This diversity has allowed rural ecological movements to mobilize effectively, build networks, and form alliances across villages, towns, and cities, preserving their rural foundations while simultaneously shaping both the urban and rural resistance (Erensü & Karaman, 2017).

In particular, in the Black Sea, Marmara, and Aegean regions, numerous local and civil initiatives are actively organized in opposition to the planned energy investments. These mobilizations have been so effective that they have led to a stay of execution (Gönenç, 2022; Kadirbeyoglu, 2005). In this context, the concept of ‘counter-hegemonic flows’ (as conceptualized by E. Turan & Aydın, 2023) has experienced a resurgence as local ecological struggles have expanded opposition to renewable energy in Turkey. Although environmentalism provided the most effective critique of neoliberal urbanization in Turkey, its influence declined significantly after the 2011 elections, as evidenced by the failure of environmental activists to get most hydroelectric power plant (HPP) projects cancelled (Batuman, 2017). However, the Gezi Park protests in 2013 marked a critical turning point, revitalizing environmental activism and broader urban struggles. As a defining moment, Gezi not only lend impetus for collective mobilization against neoliberal urbanization but also introduced a new vision of urban social movements in Turkey, bringing environmental concerns to the urban agenda (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014) by fostering new political imaginaries that connected and reinforced various grassroots and political mobilizations that had preceded it (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). While some studies have pointed to the absence of a cohesive environmental movement and limited political representation, along with the financial constraints hindering rural communities from engaging in sustained activism (Duru, 2013; Paker, 2013), the past fifteen years have nonetheless seen significant civil society efforts and government-led initiatives opposing large-scale investments at both local and national levels. I will discuss this and its further connections with the Gezi protests, as well as reflections on urban ecological movements of complete urbanization, in Chapter 3.

In light of the ongoing restructuring and urbanization of nature in the context of contemporary urbanization dynamics, it is now imperative to follow a discussion of interventions and struggles against nature. To this end, I will first begin by scrutinizing the relationship between ‘urban’ and ‘nature’ within the framework of UPE.

2.5. URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY AND NATURE

Urban political ecology (UPE) interprets the process of urbanization from a Marxist point of view and defends it as a socio-natural process in which the unjust nature of

urbanization manifests (Kaika & Swyngedouw, 2011; Swyngedouw et al., 2005; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). The framework has served multiple functions when particularly concerning its Marxist perspective: (1) it has defended against liberal, anti-urban ideologies that perpetuate false dichotomies such as town versus country, urban versus rural, and nature versus culture, which are often proposed as solutions to social issues by preserving specific types of nature or by tidying up chaotic cities with garden city planning interventions; (2) it has been instrumental in uncovering and revealing profound, structural economic and social injustices; and (3) it has provided a vocabulary for building alliances across different social and environmental issues among activists (Heynen, 2006). Swyngedouw and his colleagues (2002, p.125; 2005, p.11) have put down this field in a ten-point “manifesto”, outlining an emerging but well-defined project. The emphasis is mainly on the socio-environmental change and the tight connection between the physical environments and nature. The manifesto can be summarised as follows:

1. Social and environmental changes influence each other, shaping both physical and social landscapes through metabolic circulation.
2. Cities, infrastructure, and so produced ecosystems are not unnatural; they are historical products of socio-environmental processes without distinct boundaries.
3. Environmental changes are shaped by historical, political, and economic conditions, reflecting power relations in urban nature production.
4. Socio-environmental metabolism connects distant places and ecosystems, linking local and global processes.
5. Socio-environmental metabolism creates both benefits and harms, improving some conditions while worsening others.
6. Metabolic changes are not ‘neutral’; they favour certain groups and places while destabilizing others.
7. Control over resources and environmental conditions is shaped by power dynamics, determining inclusion and exclusion. Inspired by Lefebvre’s *right to the city*, urban political ecology argues for equitable access to metabolic processes and environmental resources.
8. Socio-environmental sustainability is inherently political, as it involves determining who benefits from or suffers due to environmental changes and how sustainability can be achieved.
9. Environmental change is deeply intertwined with social relationships and power struggles.

10. Achieving socio-ecological sustainability requires democratic control over environmental transformation, ensuring a more equitable distribution of power and a more inclusive approach to shaping nature.

On the other hand, Roger Keil (2003, p.724) has related UPE with the ‘liberation’ of societal relationships with nature in which *urban* ecological problems are mentioned deliberately for the need of socio-ecological solutions.

[T]he UPE literature is characterized by its intensely critical predisposition; critical is defined here as the linking of specific analysis of urban environmental problems to larger socio-ecological solutions. This necessitates, as a minimum, some modicum of indebtedness to radical and critical social theory. It is no coincidence then, that the emerging field of UPE has many of its multiple roots in the intellectual traditions of fundamental social critique: eco-Marxism, ecofeminism, eco-anarchism, etc. It is also, however, indebted to neo-pluralist and radical democratic politics that includes the liberation of the societal relationships with nature in the general project of the liberation of humanity.

From this perspective, 'nature' as a singular entity does not exist; instead, there is a varied and evolving assemblage of different natures that are historically, socially, and geographically produced in distinctly urbanized ways (Kaika, 2005; Smith, 2008; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2014). This is a socio-metabolic process, whereby the necessity of approaching the urban with a socio-political and ecological sensitivity gets even more crucial. Within such an understanding, Harvey (1996) insists on the argument that “it is in practice, hard to see where “society” begins and “nature” ends ... [I]n a fundamental sense, there is in the final analysis nothing unnatural about New York City.” This expresses the condition of urban harboring social and ecological processes and conceptualizes the city as a complex network of interconnected dynamics that are simultaneously human, material, natural, discursive, cultural, and organic (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003).

The UPE framework offers a comprehensive and relational framework to unravel the intertwined economic, political, social, and ecological processes that collectively shape uneven and profoundly unjust urban environments (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). The approach scrutinizes the interrelationship between the ‘ecological’ and the ‘urban’ and their formative processes, per se dealing with the production of uneven geographies (Heynen, 2017) which has been the focus of UPE for almost two decades (Connolly, 2018). Since the 1990s, UPE scholarship has focused on the ongoing socio-ecological transformations, analyzing the dialectical relationships

between inside and outside, urban core and periphery, and local and global contexts (Kaika & Swyngedouw, 2011). Adopting a critical perspective on the urban and non-urban, inside and outside, and local in relation to the global as continuous processes have been fundamental to the critical analysis of the 'urbanization of nature' thesis (Kaika, 2005) which will be discussed thoroughly in the next section.

One of the key characteristics of the UPE scholarship is its conceptualization of urban as a dynamic process of continuous socio-ecological transformation, rather than a bounded entity (Tzaninis et al., 2021). Swyngedouw and Kaika (2003) perceive the city as an ongoing, albeit contested, socio-ecological transformation that offers new possibilities for “acting on” the city. In such an approach, the conflicting dynamics within urban transformation are seen as exposing systemic gaps. This perspective critically examines urban and environmental issues in relation to the social reproduction of spaces that shape urban life. Consequently, UPE critically frames urban protest and environmental struggles to provide divergent thinking toward the reproduction of urban space through contestation against the capitalist exploitation and relentless commodification of nature (Heynen et al., 2006; Swyngedouw, 1997; Swyngedouw et al., 2005; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). The framework allows the scholars to think about the socio-environmental transformations that lead to the perpetual production of new “natures”, of new urban social and physical environmental conditions (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). Seeing the nature that is inherent to the urban crises through an urban political ecology perspective offers a relevant framework for urbanized analysis of environmental struggles.

Sequential analyses made by Nik Heynen (2014, 2016, 2017) and Collard et al. (2018) examine the multiple trajectories of UPE scholarship. Heynen categorizes UPE development into two ‘waves’ using a chronological framework. The ‘first wave’ includes seminal works like *Concrete and Clay* (Gandy, 2003), *Social Power and the Urbanization of Water* (Swyngedouw, 2004), *Nature and the City* (Desfor & Keil, 2004), *City of Flows* (Kaika, 2005), and *Lawn People* (Guthman, 2008), reaching a pivotal moment with the 2006 volume *In the Nature of Cities* edited by Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw. Despite its diverse approaches, this collection primarily draws on Swyngedouw’s concept of metabolic circulation (Swyngedouw, 2006).

The ‘second wave’ of UPE is identified as marked by emerging literature that critiques the initial UPE frameworks (Heynen, 2014, 2016, 2017). It includes studies that emphasize race (Heynen, 2016), gender, and sexuality (Heynen, 2017), and incorporate postcolonial, indigenous, feminist, and queer theoretical perspectives. While some researchers maintain a focus on metabolic circulation, others explore new directions, with a greater emphasis on everyday life and micro-political processes (Ekers & Prudham, 2018; Gandy, 2004; Kaika, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2004). On a contrary, Tzaninis et al. (2021) find the chronological framing proposed by Heynen and the separation between the earlier and the recent UPE scholarship in a linear manner ‘unhelpful’ and ‘elusive’. To acknowledge the complexity of both early and contemporary UPE scholarship as a productive dialogue among scholars, they suggest recognizing UPE's history as inherently heterodox from the outset. Denying this perspective risks oversimplifying the field's history and overlooking the intricate and critical engagement that shaped its initial debates and intellectual development (Tzaninis et al., 2021, see also Connolly, 2018).

Although the framework of UPE has been applied extensively within the field of urban studies, the approach adopted by the school at earlier times (Heynen et al. 2006; Kaika 2005; Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000; Swyngedouw 2004, 2006; Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003) has been criticized for being limited to urban agglomerations and ‘not expanding its radical political-ecological imaginary beyond it’ (Arboleda, 2016; Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015; Ibañez and Katsikis 2014; Wachsmuth 2012). The focus of UPE has continuously centered around urban areas, including both the selection of site and analytical framework, which makes its exploration merely grounded on the city, thereby the possible extension of the theory towards the non-city has argued to be remained unexplored (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014). This critique becomes particularly crucial and relevant for this study in the context of examining urban nature within the broader process of complete urbanization. As Lefebvre (2003) proposed, urban areas have been expanding beyond their traditional limits, creating an uneven urban landscape that perpetually extends into previously non-urban areas. In this context, considering and discussing Lefebvre's theory of complete urbanization alongside the critical urbanization theories it has inspired (see Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014; Brenner, 2013; Merrifield, 2013a; Monte-Mór, 2014; Schmid, 2014, 2018), in conjunction with urban political ecology, is regarded as valuable for offering an alternative perspective on the integration of nature into the realm of urban and the urbanization process that describes this integration or *extension* (Arboleda, 2016a).

The future implications of the UPE framework have also been discussed; Gandy (2022) offers a critical reconfiguration of it, highlighting potential future trajectories for the field. He underscores the necessity of investigating the dynamic spatial patterns of urbanization and the institutional frameworks influencing the development of urban theory. Within this context, while Angelo and Wachsmuth (2014) were dealing with the unexplored aspects and, correspondingly, potentials of UPE by telling the story of current urbanization dynamics and theories, they also asserted that there is a need for a return by adhering to UPE's previously adopted understandings—the desire to reinterpret urbanization through Lefebvrian roots of provocative thinking. The urbanization process, according to them, must then be understood as the “production of specific and quite heterogeneous spatio-temporal forms embedded within different kinds of social action” (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2014, p. 381). Following the same line, while Arboleda (2016a) discusses the observed expansion of urban towards the non-urban area, he also contends that UPE has the potential to deepen the planetary, ecological, and political understanding of contemporary urbanization by fulfilling its Lefebvrian promises (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014) when it is addressed in a diverse range of scales, encompassing both 'city' and 'non-city' contexts. In line with this objective, he suggests broadening UPE's concepts of the urbanization of nature to encompass the geographical impacts of expanding global metabolic flows of matter, energy, and capital that are deeply embedded into the urban reality.

Following the critiques and the suggestions made by scholars for the future studies, the thesis aims at discussing ‘urban nature’ within the contemporary dynamics of urbanization across different scales, including decentralized approaches towards the urban and nature, expanding UPE’s radical political-ecological imaginary beyond the boundaries of urban agglomeration.

2.5.1. URBAN NATURE

The term “nature” has been employed to describe both human and non-human aspects, encompassing elements of the human body as well as the broader environment (Castree, 2003). Smith (2008) defines the environment beyond human beings as “external nature,” yet, as Harvey (1974) argues, it remains inseparable from society and its modes of utilization. In this context, nature is shaped by social

processes and often takes the form of commodities (Heynen et al., 2006). Throughout this thesis, the term "urban nature" is used to cover the physical, spatial, and social traits of the environment, and to aptly emphasize its so-called “naturalness” of the urban environments within the dynamics of capital-driven urbanization in the contemporary urban era.

The definition of ‘nature’ is now intrinsically bound to the realm of urban in the age of urban society. The deepening of neoliberal policies, manifesting itself as fiscal austerity, deregulation, re-regulation, and the privatization of natural resources and public assets (Cahill, 2011; Harvey, 2011a; Peck et al., 2012) have significantly reshaped the interaction between nature and society across the globe. Activities such as fracking, mining, waste disposal, and land appropriation in rural areas, as well as diminishing public access to green spaces, gentrification, urban renewal, and large-scale infrastructure projects, illustrate how non-human environments both within and beyond conventional urban boundaries are being expropriated, privatized, commodified, altered, and degraded in the pursuit of economic recovery and growth (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019).

As contemporary urbanization evolves, new definitions emerge not only for the city and the urban but also for the concept of ‘nature.’ Shifting interpretations and conceptualizations reveal how contemporary notions of ‘nature’ take distinct forms in specific urban contexts, influence urban transformation, and manifest across various scales (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014). The central argument is that urbanization is an ongoing process of socio-ecological transformation that continually reshapes diverse urban environments, where the ‘city’ itself can be understood as the ‘urbanization of nature’ (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003).

Urbanization of Nature

Urbanization of nature can be described as the process of nature being integrated into the urban or the vast expansion of the urban engulfing and encompassing nature, leading to the transformation of nature into an entity characterized by urban attributes and thereby necessitates a rethinking of “urban nature” inextricably linked with the realm of the urban. Nevertheless, it is evident that the consideration of environmental concerns and the evolution of nature have been pivotal to urban transformation and urban politics for at least a century, if not longer (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). In his seminal book, *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams (1973) was the first to examine how rural landscapes have evolved under the dominance of urbanization,

highlighting the intrinsic connection between urbanization, environmental transformation, and the social relations embedded within these processes.

Urbanization, as a process, is driven by a distinct set of socio-spatial relationships that, as Harvey (1996, p. 94) argues, facilitate “an ecological transformation which requires the reproduction of those relations to sustain it.” This transformation is particularly evident in the accelerating urbanization of nature, where intensifying metabolic interactions between social and ecological processes continuously reshape urban environments (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). From such an ecological standpoint, the development of the urban through these socio-environmental changes results in the ongoing creation of new urban 'natures' and the re-creation of new urban social and physical environmental conditions (Cronon, 1991).

To understand the urbanization process of nature, scholars begin by exploring the historical emergence of nature/society dualism as an integral aspect of modernity's internal demand (Kaika, 2005; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). To move beyond this dualism and its inherent contradictions, a new reconceptualization is made regarding nature and the city as "hybrids," entities that are neither purely human nor purely natural (Gandy, 2022; Kaika, 2005; Swyngedouw, 1996, 2006). The analyses concerning these emphasize the dialectical relationship between the production of cities and the production of nature, suggesting they are intertwined processes within the broader "urbanization of nature" (Heynen et al., 2006; Kaika, 2005; Kaika & Swyngedouw, 2003, 2011; Swyngedouw et al., 2005). Researchers have increasingly deemed it more significant to examine the urbanization *OF* nature, rather than merely the presence of nature *IN* the city, to comprehend the contemporary dynamics of urbanization better (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2014). Here, urbanization of nature is understood “as the process through which all types of nature are socially mobilized, economically incorporated (commodified), and physically metabolized/ transformed in order to support the urbanization process” (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2014, p.459). The initially emphasized nature-society dualism has evolved into an exploration of nature-society relations globally, which have transformed constantly since the 2008 financial crisis, significantly influenced by the expansion of neoliberalism and its profound effects on the socio-economic landscape of the urban (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018).

Especially by the adoption of the complete urbanization thesis, how nature, society, and the city weld together becomes even more critical which they together have the

power to define a specific socio-environmental milieu in a profoundly heterogeneous, conflicting, and often disturbing whole (Davis, 1999; Swyngedouw, 1996). In that sense, both nature and society are perceived as fundamentally intertwined within historical and geographical production processes (refer to Castree 1995; Smith 1984, 1996, 1998a). In such a critical approach, the dialectical processes that define both the city's environment and the essence of the urban become central to the discussion. These processes are tied to the constant transformation of urban spaces and the ever-changing mosaic of environmentally and socioculturally distinct urban ecologies. This spectrum ranges from the meticulously landscaped gardens of gated communities and high-tech campuses to the ecological battlegrounds of impoverished neighborhoods. In these marginalized areas, lead-painted walls, asbestos-laden ceilings, waste dumps, and pollution-ridden landscapes continue to shape the dynamics of contemporary urbanization (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). It shows the integration of environmental ideologies, practices, and projects being essential components of the urbanization of nature. It is important to note that this constructionist perspective views urbanization as an integral aspect of producing new environments and new forms of nature and suggests how the urban process substantially implies a political-ecological process, one that shapes the production of urban natures.

The Production of Urban Nature

The nature and characteristics of physical and environmental transformations, along with the consequent conditions on the environment, are deeply intertwined with particular historical social, cultural, political, and economic contexts, as well as the institutions associated with them. The significance of the social and material creation of urban nature has already been discussed thoroughly in historical-geographical materialist and radical geographic discourse (Benton 1996; Braun and Castree 1998; Castree 1995; Castree and Braun 2001; Desfor and Keil 2004; Gandy 2002; Grundman 1991; Harvey 1996; Hughes 2000; Keil and Graham 1998; Smith 1984; Swyngedouw 1996; 2004a,b). Building on this perspective, the UPE framework adopts a historically and geographically grounded analysis of how urban natures are produced, exposing the uneven power dynamics embedded in this process and offering insights into how these power relations can be transformed (Swyngedouw et al., 2005).

In this context, the production of nature is discussed as tightly coupled with the existing social processes. Swyngedouw (1999, p. 445) suggests that “[C]ontemporary

scholars increasingly recognize that natural or ecological conditions and processes do not operate separately from social processes and that the actually existing socio-natural conditions are always the result of intricate transformations of pre-existing configurations that are themselves inherently natural and social". Thus, the construction of urban areas can be described as the result of the transformation of natural resources through socially regulated natural processes (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003).

In the notion of social production of urban nature, Lefebvre's (1976) concept of "second nature" provides a framework that is frequently overlooked in the examination of the social construction of urban environments. In his discussion of the social production of urban spaces, Lefebvre (1976, p. 15) posits that:

Nature, destroyed as such, has already had to be reconstructed at another level, the level of "second nature" i.e. the town and the urban. The town, anti-nature or non-nature and yet second nature, heralds the future world, the world of the generalized urban. Nature, as the sum of particularities which are external to each other and dispersed in space, dies. It gives way to produced space, to the urban. The urban, defined as assemblies and encounters, is therefore the simultaneity (or centrality) of all that exists socially.

Lefebvre's concept of second nature provides a compelling framework for understanding urban environments as inherently socially constructed. This perspective offers a valuable lens for grasping the complex interplay of political, economic, and social forces that continuously shape and reshape urban landscapes. Following these, it can be posited that urban spaces and nature should be discussed in relation to each other, emphasizing the assertion that the social reproduction processes of both definitions of urban, influence and transform one another. In addition to this, although the claim that all types of environments are socially constructed is well-established, there is still considerable scope for further exploration, debate, and exemplification. In his seminal work, *Uneven Development* (1984), Smith proposes:

What jars us so much about this idea of the production of nature is that it defies the conventional, sacrosanct separation of nature and society, and it does so with such abandon and without shame. We are used to conceiving of nature as external to society, pristine and pre-human, or else a grand universal in which human beings are but small and simple cogs. But ... our concepts have not caught up with our reality. It is capitalism which ardently defies the inherited separation of nature and society, and with pride rather than shame (p.7).

Despite the increasing entrenchment of global and local capitalism in all aspects of social life, there remain strong tendencies to externalize nature (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). Nevertheless, the intricate and inherently vulnerable interdependence of capital accumulation on nature persists and intensifies. At this juncture, it is possible to posit that the process of vast and uneven urbanization represents a key factor facilitating the domination of nature and the instrumentalization of the natural environment for the purpose of capital accumulation, reinforcing the argument that uneven development “is the concrete pattern and process of the production of nature under capitalism” (Harvey, 2011c, 2019; Smith, 2008). As outlined by Harvey (2006), spatial integration – defined as the connection of commodity production across various locations via exchange – is a fundamental aspect of capital accumulation and circulation. This homogenization process is achieved by minimizing physical obstacles to the movement of commodities and capital (Harvey, 2006, p. 375). From a historical-materialist perspective, this can also be understood as an assault upon nature and the labor force as a collective entity in relation to capitalist exploitation (Güngen, 2023).

In this sense, the production of urban nature manifests itself firstly within the capitalist mode of production, which ultimately leads to the expansion of the urban fabric into traditionally non-urban areas (Arboleda, 2016b) and secondly as a “destroyed” but then “reconstructed” social production which gives way to produced space, the urban (Lefebvre, 1976). The adoption of both of these understandings throughout the research was found to be of significant importance in terms of exploring both the impact of the unevenly ongoing urbanization process on nature and understanding the role that socio-spatially constructed urban nature plays in generating opposition. It is beyond doubt that these uneven and often oppressive socio-ecological processes are met with resistance and opposition. Numerous forms of socio-ecological activism and movements have emerged to contest the dominant approaches of urbanizing nature. These movements delineate strategies for transforming and democratizing the production of urban natures.

2.5.2. THE COMMODIFICATION OF URBAN NATURE

Nature enters into exchange value and commodities, to be bought and sold. This 'naturalness' which is counterfeited and traded in, is destroyed by commercialized, industrialized and institutionally organized leisure pursuits ... The urban ravages the countryside: this urbanized countryside opposes

itself to a dispossessed rurality, the extreme case of the deep misery of the inhabitant, the habitat, of to inhabit. (Lefebvre, 1996)

The commodification of urban nature is deeply rooted in the rise of capitalism. Initially, the control and distribution of natural resources were shaped by the interests of those in power and the demands of the market. Over time, this control extended to the very use of nature itself, leading to its systematic appropriation and commodification. As a result, nature, which is now hard to define alone without mentioning its urban roots, becomes solely an object of exchange, to be bought and sold. The incorporation of urban nature into the process of valorizing capital turns nature itself becoming a commodity (Kipfer et al., 2008).

Lefebvre's (1996) critique, is directed at the commercialized and industrialized leisure activities, driven by capitalist interests, which ultimately result in the destruction of 'nature' by deducing it into a commodity. He identifies the detrimental impact of urbanization on rural regions, where the expansion of urban results in the consumption and transformation of the countryside which in his definition gives rise to an 'urbanized countryside', that is starkly divergent from the impoverished and neglected rural areas, further exacerbating social and spatial inequalities.

In *Capital*, Marx's (1992) initial discussion of nature retains some abstract philosophical tone of his earlier works but also lays the groundwork for a more concrete and developed analysis of the relationship between nature and capitalism (Smith, 2008). In subsequent sections on the division of labor, manufacturing, and modern industry, Marx revisits this theme to illustrate the specific transformations of nature under the capitalist condition in which his analysis of rent provides further insights into a more concrete, materialist conception of nature. According to the Marxian conceptualization, a commodity is defined as 'an object produced for sale on the market' that contains both use and exchange value. So it is posited that commodities are not merely goods and products; they are also social assets that reflect the labour invested in their production and the social relations that govern their exchange (Burkett, 1999; Marx, 1992).

Based on the conceptions of Marx, Smith (2007, 2008) provides a detailed analysis of how nature has become a strategy for capital accumulation and how both nature and capital have been unevenly produced in an era shaped by political struggles against exploitation and oppression, particularly within the context of neoliberal

urbanization. Following the idea that dominant ideologies reproduce social relations, he argues that in the last thirty years, a new facet of capitalist nature production has profoundly reshaped the social relationship with the natural world (Smith, 2007). Here, multiple forms of strategies for capital accumulation ought to be mentioned, including privatization, alienation, individuation, abstraction, valuation, displacement, and dispossession (Castree, 2003; Harvey, 1996, 2007). Ultimately, both the production of urban nature itself and consumption of it under the capitalist form of urbanization can be described as the commodification of urban nature (Smith, 2008).

Under capitalism, the process of commodification masks the intricate socioecological relations of power, subjugation, and exploitation that sustain urbanization, shaping the city into a dynamic socio-environmental system that extends far beyond its immediate surroundings (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). The transformation of nature into a market-driven commodity not only obscures the underlying social power structures but also detaches the continuous circulation of altered and commodified natural resources from their ecological origins (Katz, 1998). As a result, the urban environment, both socially and physically, emerges through a historically and geographically situated process in which nature is continuously reshaped by urbanization.

David Harvey characterizes this phenomenon as “the wholesale commercialization of nature” in its various aspects by describing it as a renewed way of “enclosing the commons” (Harvey, 2004, p. 148) that uses environmental concerns to accelerate capitalist expansion (Castree, 2010, p. 1744; McAfee, 1999, p. 134). This approach, termed 'accumulation by dispossession', involves the acquisition of resources at little or no cost, ensuring immediate financial returns while avoiding the problems associated with over-accumulation (Harvey, 2004, 2007). Traditional examples of these methods and tools could be listed as mining, fracking, resource extraction, land appropriation, the loss of green spaces and ecosystems due to extensive infrastructure, urban redevelopment, and gentrification, thus closely connected to the mechanisms of urban production and consumption (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019; Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). Additionally, it involves the privatization of essential resources like water and energy, the commercialization of public nature assets, the intensifying commodification of protected environments, and the growing use of market-oriented tools such as ecosystem service payments and carbon offset schemes.

In the majority of cases, natural ecosystems are expropriated from local communities because economic growth and development are the sole means of counteracting economic downturn, which is a characteristic narrative of neoliberalism (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). The intensified commodification, marketization, and financialization of nature are essential components of the broader neoliberal agenda since neoliberalism replaces social calculation with private market economic measurement and insists that anything of social value must be tradable in the global market.³

On a global scale, the commodification of nature and the neoliberalisation process have intensified, particularly in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). In the context of Turkey, despite the articulation of environmentalist perspectives by Islamist intellectuals and politicians (Batuman, 2017; Ignatow, 2008), the government demonstrated a strong commitment to the neoliberalisation of nature in the 1990s. This intensification demonstrates that nature continues to be a fundamental source of wealth and plays a critical role in capital accumulation (O'Connor, 1998; Smith, 2008) in conjunction with labor power (Marx, 1992).

Although the ability to transform natural resources into tradable financial instruments is undoubtedly significant, it is also imperative to exercise caution and refrain from overstating its impact. The process of neoliberalization of nature, as evidenced by the growing commodification of natural resources, is reflected as still an ongoing process (Smith, 2007, p. 21). Despite the numerous challenges it faces, the process is far from seamless, and even with the financialization of nature being in its early stages, its scope and trajectory are already becoming evident. Nevertheless, the diverse forms of uneven urbanization and the relentless pursuit of new accumulation strategies give rise to the significant expansion of neoliberal endeavors toward the exploitation of

³ In that context, a collective research initiative has been launched to analyze capital-power relations in Turkey through data collection and mapping. It is entitled as “Networks of Dispossession” (Mülsüzleştirme Ağları) and visualizes the processes through which urban nature and common spaces are dispossessed, highlighting the stakeholder networks involved. “Mülsüzleştirme Ağları” exposes connections between 393 projects and the private companies and state institutions responsible for them. These projects range from the Third Airport, which devastates Istanbul’s Northern Forests, to urban transformation projects displacing residents of Tarlabası and Sulukule, from the Ilısu Dam, which submerges Hasankeyf, to the demolition of Emek Cinema for a shopping mall. The map also provides details such as project costs, start dates, locations, and, if applicable, work-related accidents. It illustrates the partnerships formed through the board members of the companies executing these projects. The website can be accessed via the following link: mulksuzlestirme.org

non-human nature in the post-crisis context (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018), accelerating the process of an “unequal ecological apocalypse” (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2014, p. 473). Thus, the neoliberalization of nature (Castree, 2008a, 2008b; Heynen et al., 2007) is characterized by a crisis-prone process of market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring (Peck et al., 2012).

While the instrumentalization of nature within the context of capitalist exploitation and its use as an accumulation strategy is discussed, there is also an emphasis that the commodification of nature also transforms the social relations inherent in nature (Heynen et al., 2006; Marx, 1992). The concept of capitalism can also be defined as a new system of reorganizing all relations of nature, including the 'work, reproduction, and the conditions of life' (Moore, 2016). Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vázquez (2018) seek to address the fundamental shortcomings of the critical opposition to the neoliberalization of nature and environmental policies. The scholars conclude that the various accounts of environmental conflicts discussed throughout the book demonstrate the existence of distinct yet interlinked methods through which opposition to the neoliberalization of nature can be addressed and suppressed.

This understanding provides valuable insights for grassroots and environmental movements on how to adjust their strategies and comprehend the obstacles posed by uneven power dynamics and class disparities to their efforts. The ongoing exploration of this field is coupled with an examination of the resistance from emerging environmental movements, which construct a critical discourse on neoliberalism, and their demands for a fundamentally different approach to the reproduction of nature and defend alternative futures (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018; Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). Thus, new social relations have appeared opposing politically over access, representation, and control of an increasingly commodified nature expressing the crisis-prone nature of the capitalist mode of urbanization and capitalist nature.

2.5.3. THE RIGHT TO NATURE

Henri Lefebvre posits that alongside the "right to the city," there exists a parallel desire for nature and the enjoyment of natural spaces (1996). This aspiration frequently manifests as a tendency to seek escape from the deteriorated and alienating conditions of urban life, in which the 'naturalness' itself is described as

being “counterfeited and traded in” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 157). He had a strong emphasis on the condition of rural within the process of urbanization, showing that it has led the countryside eventually getting urbanized and losing or ‘dispossessing’ its rural essence. Consequently, a fundamental contradiction is identified: the need and right to nature appear to be in opposition to the right to the city. This inclination to leave the urban environment in pursuit of nature implies a dissatisfaction with urban existence. Nevertheless, Lefebvre argues that the right to nature is inextricably linked to the right to the city. As a matter of fact, the right to nature is derived from the fundamental aspirations of the right to the city, insofar as these entitlements correspond to the utilization and accessibility of “urban commons” without restriction or discrimination (Lefebvre, 1996). Considering that urban nature and resources constitute part of the urban commons, it can be argued that access to urban nature, the right to benefit from nature, and collective participation in the process of reproducing urban nature (Harvey, 2008) define the right to nature in its most basic form; thus, right to nature follows the ideals of the right to the city, with the demand for a democratic social environment and space.

In this context, although the right to nature is initially conceptualized based on Lefebvre's initial articulation and Harvey's expanded discussion on the right to the city (2008), the concept of the right to nature has diverged from its evolutionary trajectory in a different direction in response to the recent increase in ecological crises, economic variables, and the multifaceted dynamics of urbanization. This reflects a shift in our approach to nature as well. Lefebvre's pioneering claims concerning the preliminary framework of the right to nature, which was framed by the concern for 'participating in nature, benefiting from nature within the urban', have recently been developed in depth. Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vazquez (2018) contextualize the right to nature within the current dynamics of urbanization, uneven production of urban space and nature, particularly in the context of the domination of neoliberal capitalism. Additionally, even though the notion of the right to nature has only recently gained traction in critical scholarship, it bears upon both urban political ecology and critical urban geography and contributes to both the understanding of nature and the radical transformation of current urbanization dynamics (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019; Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). As these disciplines conceptualize the city as a product of politicized, interconnected sociospatial and socio-natural processes (Harvey, 2009; Heynen, 2014; Heynen et al., 2006), both fields recognize that urban environments are predominantly shaped and controlled to serve the interests of capitalist elites. They stress the importance of

developing political projects that are radically democratic in their approach to the production of urban spaces and socionatures (Swyngedouw, 2004).

Neoliberal austerity has significantly impacted both the physical and metabolic transformations of non-human nature, as well as the strategic use and incorporation of dominant narratives about it. This has entailed reducing public expenditure on social welfare and fostering new forms of accumulation through the enclosure and privatization of land, public spaces, and natural resources (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019). Additionally, it has resulted in various forms of material and immaterial dispossession, including the loss of housing rights, a sense of belonging, everyday security, and health. Various forms of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2008) have become the objects of opposition claiming the right to nature by the collective action induced from below, having the potential to provoke transformative change and challenge the dominance of neoliberal urbanism and the production of urban public spaces and nature that are progressively influenced by neoliberalism (Apostolopoulou & Kotsila, 2022). In the context of this, the concept of the right to nature is redefined as the right to shape and oversee the processes by which socio-natural relations are established, transformed, and disrupted through urban development and economic growth (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019; Harvey, 2008, 2012; Lefebvre, 1996).

From the perspective of urban nature, both notions, right to the city and nature, exhibit a convergence whereby they begin to resemble, encompass, and integrate. As the concept of the right to the city diverges from traditional urbanization perspectives, the right to nature can provide insights into the increasing impacts of urbanization beyond the traditional urban boundaries (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019, p. 203). Here, the right to nature not only bears the promise of producing democratic urban natures but also acting actively to reclaim control over it through the re-making of socio-spatial relations and re-appropriation of urban space (Lefebvre, 1991) or demands a radically different city and urban commons (Apostolopoulou & Kotsila, 2022).

I have previously demonstrated that right to the city embarks on a social and political action that can be formulated and re-articulated according to distinct challenges under complete urbanization (Schmid, 2014). The act of opposition is framed as revolutionary, positioning it alongside other rights guaranteed by citizenship. Because it is inherently linked to the urban realm through socio-spatial dynamics, it

emerges as a claim to a “renewed urban life” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158). Whereas, the notion of ‘the right to nature’ holds the promise of introducing a fundamentally distinct comprehension of environmental struggles (Angel & Loftus, 2019; Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). It underlines the requirement for collective endeavors in pursuit of both social and environmental justice, along with the imperative of collaboratively envisioning and constructing an alternative framework for structuring the production and reproduction of nature. Here, the discussion must be grounded on who controls the production of nature and the interests served by this production (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019, p. 205).

In this context, the environmental struggles that have emerged in the current era by adopting the right to the city and right to nature as both a working slogan and political ideal (Harvey, 2008) are sufficiently robust to challenge the prevailing neoliberal policies and urbanization dynamics. In what follows, I will present a novel conceptualization of the environmental movements in light of the evolving dynamics of urbanization and the shifting comprehension of nature within it. I will discuss the role of the environmental movements with an urban character in resisting neoliberal agendas within the context of complete urbanization.

2.6. CONCEPTUALIZING URBAN ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

At a time when environmental and urban studies had diverged, it was noteworthy that in the expanding literature on the environment and among the multitude of environmental social movements, the urban realm was frequently marginalized. Except from the works of Keil (2003), Gandy (2003), Harvey (1996), Swyngedouw (1996, 1997), Cronon (1992), and Davis (1995), there was an almost complete absence and neglect of any substantial engagement with the environmental issue in the extensive literature on studies attempting to scrutinize the city and the urban (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). While this was the case until two decades ago, there has been a notable shift in focus towards a more comprehensive exploration of the interrelations between the city and nature, namely urban environments and their surrounding natural ecosystems.

As the tangible effects of urbanization became apparent, they came to be regarded as central to significant environmental concerns, leading to the emergence of several

oppositions. Nevertheless, the research on the environmental contradictions of capitalism often remains fragmented across different issues and movements (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). For example, the impacts of infrastructure mega-projects and the operations of extractive industries, the privatization of natural resources, the commodification of nature, and environmental offsetting as part of neoliberal conservation efforts (Igoe & Brockington, 2007) do not meet in a single conceptualization. The lack of interdisciplinary dialogue between these disparate areas of study has resulted in a disconnect between urban and rural struggles. This division between urban and rural areas, as well as between ‘city’ and ‘countryside,’ ultimately results in a fragmentation of social movements with differing thematic and geographical focuses, which necessitates critical dialogue (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). In this context, the issue of complete urbanization and its relationship with the recent environmental struggles assumes even greater importance. As urbanization continues to expand globally, the traditional boundaries between urban and rural areas are becoming increasingly blurred, thereby linking diverse struggles across regions.

The urbanization process is characterized by the vast sprawl of urban agglomerations and the spread of urban networks (Schmid, 2018); in that sense, it corresponds to a multiscalar process involving the production and reproduction of the built environment, which intertwines global capital structures with everyday practices (Wachsmuth, 2014). Given that Brenner and Schmid (2014, 2015) argue by the thesis of planetary urbanization, the movements resisting gentrification in cities can be aligned with those opposing land enclosures and large-scale infrastructure projects in practically ‘remote’ areas (2015, p.178). Additionally, new types of solidarity are developing between local communities and global advocacy networks, establishing connections between ‘operational landscapes’ and large urban agglomerations. Here, Arboleda (2016b, 2016a) argues that resource extraction landscapes contribute to both the marginalization and dispossession of certain groups and simultaneously generate new centralities and opportunities for connection among communities or individuals that were previously isolated.

The metropolis, on the other hand, is undergoing a period of rapid growth and diversification, by ‘exploding’ and ‘scattering’ multitudes of urban fragments in its vicinity (Schmid, 2014). In the case of Turkey, this has an even more variegated appearance; Batuman (2022b) puts forth the argument that during the AKP's rule, an urban revolution occurred that subjected the entire geography, extending beyond

urban areas, to the logic of urbanization. To illustrate, Law No. 6360 in Turkey (I will explain the law and its effects further in Chapter 3) was given as an example which has expanded the boundaries of metropolitan areas to encompass provincial limits, thereby incorporating territories previously classified as rural into the metropolitan region. Despite not immediately undergoing a complete transformation into 'urban,' it is evident that they incorporated into and significantly influenced the urban environment.

Urbanization is a continuous process of metabolic socio-ecological change and since environmental issues became known as part of urban, environmental movements have started to be seen as predominantly urban phenomena. By referring to Gottlieb (2005) Swyngedouw & Kaika (2003, p. 567) point out that, “environmental ideologies and discourses on the environment as well as the material transformation of nature generally originate in and radiate from the urban environment.” Here, the intrinsic connection between environmental issues and environmental struggles within the urban context can be explained by two aspects: firstly, the urban’s dominant role in exerting control over and altering the environment; and secondly, the inevitable integration and incorporation of nature into the urban landscape due to the rapid expansion and extension of urbanization. Thus, in some sense, “the brutal domination of urban” has contributed to the emergence and condensation of environmental conflicts on the political agenda and imagination, claiming some kind of shaping power or influence over the process of urbanization (Batuman, 2017, p. 109; Harvey, 2012; Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). This necessitates a shared cause and the potential for broader, collective mobilization to claim the rights to the city and nature in opposition to the intensified forms of capital-driven urbanization of nature.

In light of the aforementioned necessity in urban studies and the ongoing transformation in the relationship between urban nature and emerging movements, a new conceptualization of environmental resistance is necessary to grasp how current urbanization dynamics shape nature. The conceptual framework to address the intricate interrelations between urban and natural environments (UPE), the environmental conditions shaped by urbanization (urban nature), the novel rights emerging from urbanization (right to nature), and lastly the first social opposition response to urban interventions towards nature in Turkey (Gezi Park protests) have been elucidated in comprehensive detail in the preceding chapters. In the context of evolving urbanization dynamics, it is evident that the intensification of new and

existing environmental challenges and spatial changes give rise to new social and environmental relationships.

The ecological and social concerns that were exacerbated through the uneven urbanization dynamics have resulted in the formation of new social definitions within the movements. Therefore, heightened resistance that develop against exacerbated environmental problems within the urbanized conditions should be conceptualized as urban ecological movements.⁴ The choice of the term ecological over environmental here is deliberate, as it allows for a broader and more relational understanding of the issue. While “environmental” often refers to problems and concerns framed within conservationist or managerial discourses, the term “ecological” highlights the intertwined social, spatial, and political dimensions of human-nature relationships shaped by urbanization. This framing emphasizes not only the protection of nature but also the critique of the socio-economic and political processes—such as neoliberal urbanization—that produce environmental injustices within the urban fabric.

Interpreting resistances, which reflect contemporary urbanization dynamics, offers a promising method for analyzing potential transformations in the ways of thinking about and studying the urban. In this context, the integration of nature within the fully urbanized landscape requires a critical assessment and conceptualization of environmental movements with an urban identity. Specifically, environmental struggles resisting the exploitation of urban nature, which is driven by neoliberal urbanization dynamics, should be understood as an inherent component of the urban fabric and the broader discourse on urban nature. These movements reveal various injustices and growing inequalities linked to neoliberalization and its post-democratic or authoritarian forms of urban governance, i.e. the 'undemocratic character of socio-environmental change' (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019; Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2007). They possess significant potential to construct a critical discourse against neoliberalism, ultimately striving to create and advocate alternative futures (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019).

⁴ Büşra Üner (2021), in her master’s thesis entitled “Defending Nature: A Comparative Analysis of the Cerattepe and Kirazlı Anti-Mining Environmental Movements” proposes the concept of “environmentalism of the urbanite” in a similar context. She proposes the term to define a new environmentalist group in Turkey that has relocated from urban to rural areas and has the potential to give rise to a novel form of environmentalism. She argues that their involvement in the resistance movement resulted in the failure of the movement to establish a collective identity for a sustainable environmental movement due to the presence of conflicting interests among the actors involved.

Nevertheless, certain questions remain: To what extent do resistances emerging in rural spaces—considered integral to the urban through the process of complete urbanization—truly embody the essence of the urban? Does framing these resistances as urban inadvertently support capitalist exploitation of what is labeled as nature? In this context, the argument presented is that resistance against the exploitation of nature incorporated into the urban—namely, urban ecological struggles—originates from the resistance of ‘urban society.’ This resistance draws its emancipatory potential from the urban itself and its capacity to actively reproduce social relations (Lefebvre, 1991, 1996, 2003, 2014).

Tamamlanmamış Kentsel Devrim (2022), edited by Eda Acara and Mehmet is also based on the theoretical framework, i.e. complete urbanization set forth by Henri Lefebvre (2003). By defining urban revolution as ‘uncompleted’ (tamamlanmamış), it aspires to represent the reality that the ongoing capitalist urbanization process does not occur uniformly across different geographical areas. The global expansion of urbanization indicates a particular process in that the neoliberal mode of capitalism is spread across all geographies, where the previously distinct categories of personal and real estate property are becoming intertwined. Considering the crisis-prone nature of capitalism, this situation resulted in the emergence of ‘protests and movements with an urban character’ worldwide following the 2008 financial crisis. The book, in this sense, illustrates concrete examples of this capitalist-driven uneven urban revolution by presenting environmental disasters, the accelerated incorporation of all types of natural resources into urban areas, and the responses/movements rooted in the urban realm that had developed in reaction to them.

The second chapter of the book is shaped around the discussion of ‘boundaries, cycles, and movements beyond the city’, explaining how the expansion of urban areas outside their ecological thresholds was initiated (Acara & Penpecioğlu, 2022). The article “The Urban Origins of Contemporary Ecological Contradictions in Turkey” by Acara (2022) in this section, presents a discussion of the processes through which non-urban areas are integrated into cities, with the example of Istanbul as a case study. In this context, Lefebvre's provocative assertion, "Society has completely urbanized" (2003), is borne out by the example provided. The article examines the Thrace sub-region and the Ergene Basin as growth areas for Istanbul and explores the restructured nature relations and labor processes created by capitalism within the political ecology of urbanization. In this sense, Acara (2022)

offers a framework for examining the urbanization process of a predominantly 'natural' area in conjunction with the utilization of natural resources and the resulting contradictory, unequal urban ecologies. While Acara does not present a conceptualization of urban ecological movements, she does, nevertheless, draw attention to the urban roots of ecological crises and conflict.

Such conceptualization requires a meticulous study to be carried out in order to gain a deeper understanding. The term 'urban' is not simply applied to environmental struggles in the context of urbanizing environments. Rather, the intention is to show that these movements have become increasingly urbanized as a consequence of the social and ecological transformations brought about by urbanization, and thus are characterized by urban features, necessitating a sensitivity to the political ecology of urbanization (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). Accordingly, the article by Storper and Scott (2016) emphasizes the necessity of differentiating between those aspects that are intrinsic to urban life and those that are merely located within the boundaries of the city. The paper challenges the assumption that any phenomenon occurring in a city is inherently urban; without further explanation, this assumption is argued to be susceptible to "ecological fallacy". It is therefore essential to conduct a detailed examination to ascertain which factors are genuinely urban and which are merely associated with cities, as this will help to identify the true causes of urban political, social, and ecological outcomes. Despite the prevalent tendency among those attempting to articulate the profound dichotomy between urban and rural to categorize any coastal settlement as 'rural' (Acara, 2022), such typologies are considered to exemplify the increasingly blurred boundaries between urban and non-urban settings within the context of complete urbanization theory. Such geographies, where the non-urban is included in the urban in various ways, challenge us to constantly question the accuracy of the way we think of the urban–urbanization–ecology (Batuman, 2022b), and urban ecological movements as their social reflections. This underscores the pressing need for a conceptualization of urban ecological movements by having the coastal town of Ayvalık as a case study.

CHAPTER 3

URBAN ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS OF COMPLETE URBANIZATION: THE CASE OF AYVALIK

The question that now begins to gnaw at your mind is more anguished: outside Penthesilea does an outside exist? Or, no matter how far you go from the city, will you only pass from one limbo to another, never managing to leave it? Italo Calvino ([1974] 1979: 122)

The coastal town of Ayvalık is situated in the Aegean region of Balıkesir Province, in northwestern Turkey. The town is bordered to the north by Gömeç, to the south by Dikili, and to the southeast by Bergama (Figure 3.1). Ayvalık is distinguished by its undulating topography and its status as an archipelago, comprising over twenty islands and islets (Figure 3.2). The most prominent of these is Cunda Island (also known as Alibey, Figure 3.3), which is the largest one. Due to its location within an archipelago, Ayvalık is situated on a small inland sea and is sheltered within a bay by Cunda. The broader geography of the area is marked by the Madra Mountains on the mainland. It is bordered by the Aegean Sea to the west and hills rising 100–200 meters to the east. The city, situated between these hills and the sea, has expanded over time towards the slopes and in a northern direction. The town's industrial landscape is shaped by its unique geographical location at the western edge of an inland sea formed by Central Anatolia and Lesvos (Midilli) in the northern Aegean, which stands as a remarkable testament to the region's role in olive oil production since the 19th century.

Ayvalık is designated both as an 'urban conservation area' due to its historic port and traditional settlement and a 'natural conservation area' to protect its olive groves and natural park.⁵ Various legal frameworks, including cultural heritage, forestry, and

⁵ Conservation efforts can be listed as such based on the data derived from the website of UNESCO World Heritage Center, Ayvalık's Industrial Landscape: **Urban Conservation:** Recognized as an "urban conservation area" under Decision No. A-160 (1976). **Natural Conservation:** Surrounding landscapes designated as a "natural conservation area" under Decision No. A-4000 (1978). **Legal Protection:** Governed by the **Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties Law** No. 2863 (1983, amended in 2004). **Olive Grove Protection:** Safeguarded by the **Olive-Production Improvement Law** No. 3573 (1939, amended in 1995). **Regional Planning:** Integrated into the **1/25,000 Regional Development Plan (1995)**

agricultural protection laws, regulate and safeguard the region. The olive groves, a fundamental aspect of Ayvalık's heritage, are preserved under specific agricultural policies, while additional conservation measures protect key areas such as Cunda Island, parts of the Hakkı Bey Peninsula, and 20 of the 22 islands in the region.⁶ Furthermore, portions of the landscape have been designated as a national park to ensure long-term preservation. Ayvalık Industrial Landscape is added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List in 2017 (Tentative Lists, REF. No.6243, Ayvalık Industrial Landscape). The town's well-preserved industrial sites, along with its port, traditional settlement, and the surrounding olive groves (spanning 13,200 hectares), offer a comprehensive view of the industrialization process (UNESCO World Heritage, 2017). Due to its coastal features and natural beauty and with the growing dominance of the tourism sector in the 1980s, the city began to be recognized as an attractive tourist destination.



Figure 3.1 The location of Ayvalık. Source: Google Earth.

as a special agricultural zone. **Island and Peninsula Conservation:** Alibey Island and 20 other islands, as well as areas east, south, and west of Ayvalık, are protected under **Forestry Law No. 6381 (1956)**. **National Park Status:** Parts of Alibey Island (17,950 ha) and various other islands designated under **National Parks Law No. 2873 (1983)**.

⁶ Ayvalık Islands are officially established as the Ayvalık Islands Nature Park (Ayvalık Adaları Tabiat Parkı) through a decision by the Council of Ministers (Decision No: 95/6717), published in the Official Gazette on 21 April 1995 (No. 22265). Among 22 islands that surround Ayvalık, 20 are included within the boundaries of the designated park (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2 A view of the Ayvalık Islands Nature Park, which consists of peninsulas and islands. Source: Dünya Gazetesi, 2017.



Figure 3.3 A view of Cunda.
Source: Ayvalık Municipality

The historical documentation of Ayvalık dates back to the 16th century according to the earliest available sources; per local accounts, it was founded around 1580 by the Greek community (Şahin Güçhan, 2008). Although there is a chronological gap that makes it difficult to follow the historical development, it is known from local tradition that Ayvalık gained autonomy with an imperial edict around 1789, illustrating a period characterized by a predominantly Greek population and rapid urban growth (Sağlam, 2022b). During the 19th century, while it was situated within the dominion borders of the Ottoman Empire, it flourished as one of the key port settlements along the western Anatolian coastline, owing to its olive oil-soap production and trade network (Akin Akbüber, 2015).

The city played a significant role in olive and olive oil production. It housed over a hundred olive oil presses, and there were more than thirty soap factories. In this way, Ayvalık supplied a portion of Istanbul's olive oil and soap needs. Additionally, the soap produced in the city was exported to Thrace and Macedonia, while some olive oil was sold to Russia (Yaman-Kocadağlı, 2011). This economic growth, particularly during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, led to a substantial increase in the city's wealth and population. Through the convergence of the olive oil industry's economic potential and advancements in infrastructure, it underwent a major change, evolving from a modest coastal village into a prominent 'commercial harbor city' within a century (Akbüber, 2020; Akin Akbüber, 2015; Sağlam, 2022b; Uçar, 2015).

Despite the enduring imprints of vibrant commercial activities within the port-centric urban fabric—evident in the prevalent presence of factories and shops—Ayvalık's social and spatial organization has consistently undergone transformation due to distinct social and ecological challenges (Akbüber, 2020; Sağlam, 2022b). From the earliest records of Ayvalık to the 2000s, the causes of the significant changes in population, social structure, and spatial order are attributed to the port city's geographical location and evident ecological vulnerability. Nevertheless, it is observed that the causes and consequences of these crises in contemporary urban dynamics have diverged significantly compared to those of earlier times.

In the 18th century, the majority of Ayvalık's population was Turkish. However, over time, the city developed as a settlement for migrants arriving from Greece. By the 19th century, the Greek population in Ayvalık had increased rapidly (Balcı Akova, 2011; Yaman-Kocadağlı, 2011). The rise of nationalism following the French Revolution ultimately led to uprisings among the Greek population. The first rupture in the socio-environmental history of Ayvalık was the Greek Revolution in 1821. While this period was acknowledged as profoundly 'devastating', historical documentation underlines Ayvalık's ability to prevail and even thrive in the aftermath of this adversity (Sağlam, 2022). Subsequently, an earthquake happened in 1866 and nearly half a century later, the city was once again confronted by destruction and abandonment due to the conditions of armed conflict during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923).

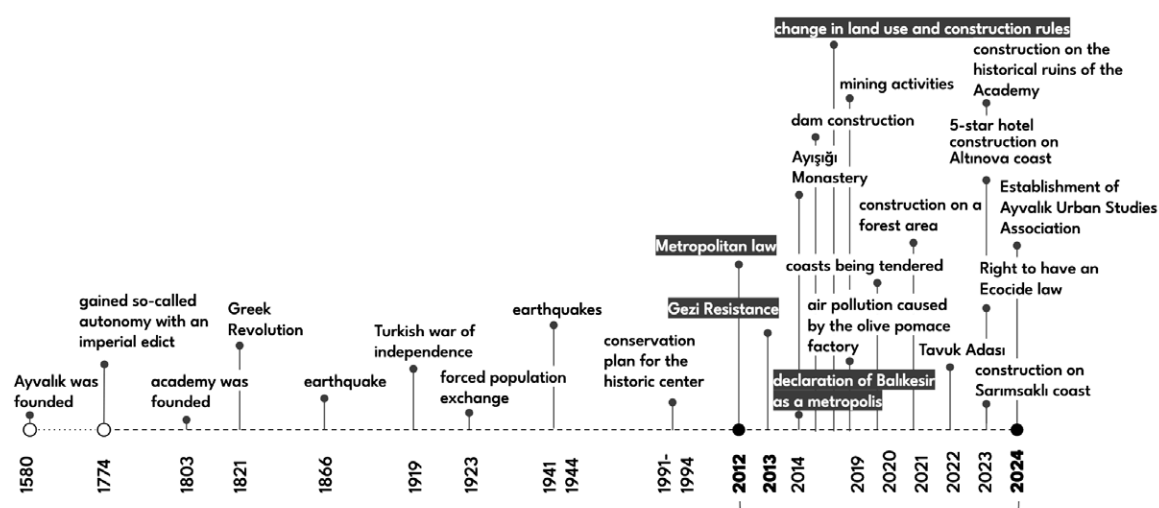


Figure 3.4 The brief history of Ayvalık. Produced by the author.

Following the forced population exchange between Turkey and Greece⁷ which resulted in 1923, in the early years of the Turkish Republic, Ayvalık underwent a drastic social transformation, marked by the permanent displacement of its original residents, who were supplanted by Turks from Lesvos, Crete, and Thrace (Turan, 2008; Anastassiadou, 2012 as cited in Sağlam, 2022). This has been noted as one of the most prominent and drastic changes, that has purely affected the social and spatial imprint and economic structure of the harbour city (Balcı Akova, 2011; Yaman-Kocadağlı, 2011). The first population census in the newly established Republic of Turkey was conducted in 1927. According to this census, Ayvalık had a total population of 16.873. The decline in Ayvalık's population from 31.894 in 1914 to 16.873 in 1927 (Table 1) was primarily due to the hardships of the war years and the drastic population exchange that took place following the War of Independence (Yaman-Kocadağlı, 2011). Lastly, in the 1940s, two additional catastrophic earthquakes hit the region, which was recorded as the last milestone until the contemporary era, in the history of Ayvalık in terms of social and environmental crises (Figure 3.4).

The uprisings that occasionally occurred in Ayvalık, a city where different religions, languages, and ethnic groups coexisted, inflicted damage on both its developing economy and the city itself. The population exchange that took place following the War of Independence brought profound transformations to Ayvalık's social and economic structure. The adaptation of the resettled population to the local social and economic conditions was initially slow, leading to a period of economic and socio-cultural stagnation in the city. However, from the 1960s onward, Ayvalık entered a new phase of development. While agriculture and agro-industries continued to play a significant role, tourism activities also began to influence the city's growth

⁷ In the 19th century, influenced by emerging independence movements, the Greek Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire revolted against Ottoman rule. This process culminated in Greece's territorial expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, reaching its peak with the Greek army's occupation of Anatolia in 1919. However, the offensive was ultimately repelled in 1922 with the Turkish victory in the Great Offensive. As a result, approximately one million Greeks migrated to Greece, while the status of those remaining was addressed during the Lausanne Conference. The population exchange between Turkey and Greece became one of the central issues of the conference and was formally settled. Treaty of Lausanne (1923) drew up the conditions for the exchange of populations. According to Article 1 of this agreement, Orthodox Greeks residing in Turkey and Muslim Turks living in Greece were subjected to compulsory migration starting from May 1, 1923. The agreement also stipulated that those who migrated could not return to their countries of origin for permanent resettlement without the approval of Turkish and Greek authorities. Under this agreement, approximately 350,000 Muslim Turks and 200,000 Christian Greeks were forcibly relocated (Blanchard, 1925; Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014).

during this period. Ayvalık experienced a rise in tourism revenue during the 1960s, benefiting from the expansion of accommodations, hotels, clubs, and beaches (Yorulmaz, 1997, p. 127). Following 1963, the government provided financial support to promote coastal tourism, and in 1969, Ayvalık was officially designated as a priority area for coastal development (Cantimur, 2011). Emerging in the 1960s and expanding rapidly after the 1980s, tourism became a key factor in Ayvalık's economic and urban development (Yaman-Kocadağlı, 2011).

Table 1: Ayvalık's Population Between 1820 and 2022			
Years	Urban Population	Rural Population	Total Population
1820	-	-	30.000
1887	-	-	19.843
1890	-	-	20.630
1900	-	-	21.600
1907	-	-	23.309
1914	-	-	31.894
1927	13.549	3.324	16.873
1935	13.088	9.451	22.539
1940	12.286	9.977	22.263
1945	13.650	11.092	24.742
1950	13.101	11.718	24.819
1955	16.754	11.807	28.561
1960	16.087	12.179	28.266
1965	16.283	13.930	30.213
1970	17.661	14.296	31.957
1975	18.041	15.063	33.104
1980	19.371	15.172	34.543
1985	21.381	17.498	38.879
1990	25.678	21.140	46.827
2000	31.968	26.752	58.738
2007	34.651	23.987	58.638
2009	35.986	27.474	62.460
2011	37.182	26.167	64.349
2013*	64.462	-	64.462

2015	67.902	-	67.902
2018	71.063	-	71.063
2022	67.995	-	74.643

Source: Prepared by the author by using data from Yaman-Kocadağlı, 2011; Yıldız and Sezgin, 2024 and Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) address-based population registration system for the years 2011-2018. *As a result of the Metropolitan Law, villages were reclassified as neighbourhoods and since 2013, rural population data has been excluded from TÜİK records.

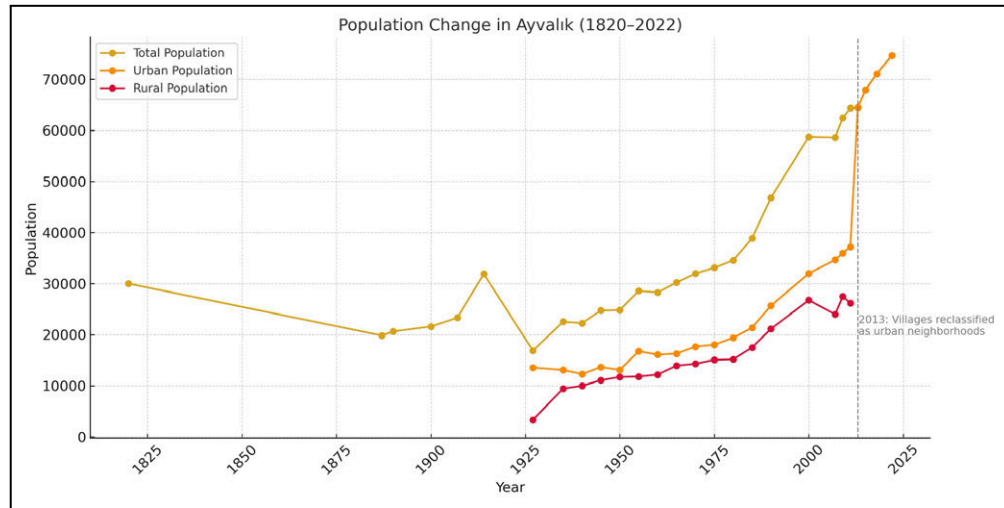


Figure 3.5 Urban, rural, and total population change in Ayvalık (1820-2022). Prepared by the author based on the data from Table 1.

The increasing demand driven by tourism activities created an urgent need for a development plan in Ayvalık since the second half of 20th century. Consequently, a 1/1000-scale plan for Ayvalık was prepared in 1972. The 1972 Development Plan was largely implemented in a limited region, while planned developments for Cunda and Lale Islands remained unrealized due to low demand for new construction (UNESCO World Heritage, 2017). A key proposal of the plan—the relocation of olive oil factories outside the city—began to be enforced in the 1980s. During the same period, a significant portion of Ayvalık and Cunda's historic areas was designated as a Natural and Historic Conservation Area in 1976, with temporary development regulations introduced in 1978. Until 1982, the Development Plan was applied with certain revisions in areas outside the conservation boundaries (Şahin Güçhan, 1986, pp. 28–35; UNESCO World Heritage, 2017).

Following the enactment of the Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties Law (Law No. 2863) in 1983, Ayvalık came under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Bursa Regional Conservation Council. In the late 1980s, revisions were made to the boundaries and regulations of the conservation zones. Subsequently, in 1990, regional development plans were approved for areas outside the conservation boundaries, while in 1994, conservation plans for urban heritage areas were prepared and remain in effect today (Şahin Güçhan, 1986, pp. 28–35).

Between 1976 and the mid-1990s, new developments were permitted only outside the urban conservation areas, leading to the construction of summer houses and tourism-related structures with minimal building density. The relocation of polluting factories to designated industrial zones addressed some environmental concerns but rendered many industrial buildings in the city centre non-functional. However, by the 2000s, interest in preserving these structures began to grow, supported by initiatives from local businesses, the municipality, and NGOs. This momentum contributed to the establishment of a more structured approach to heritage conservation in Ayvalık (Cantimur, 2011; UNESCO World Heritage, 2017).

The social and environmental crises in Ayvalık, which I refer to as ‘ruptures,’ are characterized by drastic changes in population (Balçı Akova, 2011), socio-spatial structure (Sağlam, 2022b), and the management of urban space. In his examination of urban revolutions, David Harvey (2011c, 2012) consistently emphasizes the crises resulting from the relentless accumulation of capitalism, arguing that this accumulation in urban areas brings about both crises and resistance. The social and ecological crises in Ayvalık in this sense, have intensified since 2012 due to the prioritization of tourism and the neoliberal urbanization dynamics, including the privatization of public goods and services, which has led to a decrease in their quality (Friedmann, 2014; Harvey, 2012). Nature, in this era, is utilized as a tool or strategy to accumulate capitalism (Smith, 2007), in which these commodification attempts towards nature within the vast urbanization process have objected to severe resistance.

The evolution, deepening, and global proliferation of capitalism generates an extensive and diverse landscape of ‘urban(ized) conditions’ along with the urban revolutions, encompassing and progressively surpassing the traditionally emphasized zones of agglomeration that have been the focal point of urban research for an extended period (Brenner, 2014, p. 16). Extending the discussion of the urban beyond

the zones of agglomeration and discussing the urbanized interventions therein, where the previously non-urban areas become progressively incorporated into and operationalized by a planetary-encompassing process of neoliberal urbanization (Brenner, 2014; Brenner & Schmid, 2015), provides a foundation for problematizing the relationship between complete urbanization and various forms of urban intervention towards the nature.

The evolving challenges accompanying Ayvalık's transformation from predominantly non-urban to urban(ized) conditions provide valuable insights for contextualizing the contemporary urban character of a coastal town. As Schmid (2014, p. 80) argues “The size of a city can no longer be determined with certainty, and in any case, it has only very limited validity, as smaller cities can also achieve a high degree of urbanity.” Hence, smaller cities in comparison to metropolitan large areas also possess the potential to attain a significant level of urbanity (Schmid, 2014); the focus should be on recognizing distinct forms and expressions of the urban. The exchange and integration of mechanisms among urban settlements of different sizes highlight a crucial element of 'complete urbanization' (Batuman, 2017, p. 108). The essential aspect here lies in the process of urbanization itself—the dialectic of sociospatial implosion and explosion—which has ultimately created an urban society (Goonewardena, 2014) and revolutionized the emancipatory political possibilities within and against it (Arboleda, 2016b; Goonewardena, 2014; Lefebvre, 2003). The concurrent processes of implosion and explosion cannot be simply viewed in binary terms, where implosion signifies quantitative accumulation and explosion represents a qualitative extension of the urban condition. Instead, this is a complex, multifaceted process that goes beyond a bilateral interaction between city and countryside, involving numerous dynamics that become urbanized and subsequently transform the urban landscape into a hybrid form (Batuman, 2017).

The city of Ayvalık occupies a significant position here by being both a hinterland to the metropolis (İstanbul) and a region comprising its own hinterland. At this juncture, it is an apt point of departure for an examination of the contrasts between nature and the urban, the city and the countryside, which have been a recurring theme from the outset. Ayvalık's distinctive urbanization patterns render it a convenient case study. In comparison to larger cities, Ayvalık may be less visible or even overlooked in terms of the urbanization, yet it is potentially more severely affected by environmental and spatial challenges. This signifies the emergence of new urban entities and the redevelopment of differential spaces “in which differences come to

light” (Schmid, 2014, p. 71). In this context, Ayvalık can also be defined as “place of differences” (Schmid, 2014, 2018); not particularly because of the heterogeneity of the local population residing within it, but rather arises of the conflicts emerging between those holding the power of authority and locals. Consequently, the urbanized conditions of Ayvalık have come to delineate new forms of resistance shaped around the accumulation of urban crises and the extension or spread of the urban resistance agenda, gained during and after the Gezi Park protests.

Ayvalık presents an interesting case for examining urban ecological movements for several reasons. First, the process of tourism-driven neoliberalization, which began in the 1980s, has significantly shaped the city's development. A particularly striking moment in this trend was Ayvalık’s incorporation into the metropolitan area, marking a key shift in its urbanization trajectory. At the same time, the Gezi Park protests played a crucial role in shaping urban ecological activism in Ayvalık. This influence can be understood in two ways: first, Gezi transformed our understanding of the urban-nature relationship, sparking new perspectives on environmental struggles; second, Balıkesir’s geographical proximity to Istanbul facilitated activist networks, strengthening local mobilization efforts. In the following sections, I will explore these two dynamics in detail. I will then analyse the broader activist networks and urban ecological movements that have emerged in this context.

3.1. METROPOLITANIZATION: COMPLETE URBANIZATION ARRIVES IN AYVALIK

For the last decade, it has been observed that the urban conditions and socio-ecological challenges of Ayvalık have been shaped by four key political adjustments stemming from legislation and regulatory amendments (Figure 3.6). These developments include: (i) the designation of Balıkesir as a metropolitan city in 2014, after the enactment of metropolitan law in 2012, which altered Ayvalık’s local administrative powers; (ii) the cancellation of preservation plans for Ayvalık’s urban protected areas by the Balıkesir Conservation Board in 2018; (iii) the 2022 regulatory amendment by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, which permitted construction and prospecting activities in olive groves by modifying existing legislation; and (iv) the downgrading of first-degree natural protected areas since 2015, enabling construction. These actions exemplify how metropolitanization affected urban nature, prioritizing capital accumulation while disregarding

socio-ecological consequences. As a result, nature has been instrumentalized as a site for capitalist investment. In response, urban ecological movements, driven by resistance to these transformations, have mobilized through the conscious and coordinated efforts of metropolitan activists and local residents. A closer look at the changing dynamics between local institutions and urban movements would help understand the role of local contexts and how ‘democracy’ relates to urbanization (Della Porta & Subirats, 2019, p. 5).



Figure 3.6 Key policy shifts reshaping recent urban and natural landscape of Ayvalık. Produced by the author.

Given the deficiency of scientific studies assessing the current socio-ecological and urbanization dynamics of Ayvalık, the understanding of these aspects relies on a comprehensive review incorporating newspaper articles, the researcher's field observations, and in-depth interviews.

3.1.1. EXTENSION OF METROPOLITAN CITIES TO PROVINCIAL BORDERS

In Turkey, a long-standing governance approach driven by nationalist-conservative policies has prioritized urban expansion, leading to the growth of metropolitan areas to encompass their rural hinterlands. Particularly important here has been the 2012 Law No. 6360, popularly known as the “Metropolitan Law” (Bütünşehir Yasası). This marked a major governance reform by extending metropolitan municipalities' jurisdiction to entire provincial boundaries, erasing the legal distinction between urban and rural areas (Mengi & Özgül, 2024). The reorganization of administrative units was carried out to severely diminish rural regions (Batuman, 2017, p. 110).

Back in 2002, 65% of Turkey's population was noted as urban, with more than half residing within the boundaries of sixteen metropolitan municipalities. Early in its term, the AKP government moved to expand these metropolitan boundaries through legislation in 2004. By 2012, as a result of a series of reforms, 76% of the population

lived in areas designated as metropolitan, which encompassed 55% of the nation's land (Arikboğa, 2013; O. Zengin, 2014). At the latter end, the last regulation in 2012 redefined the metropolitan structure and villages were integrated into metropolitan districts by expanding municipal governance into peripheral areas. This does not only entail the expansion of municipal administration to the peripheries, it also changes the definition of urban with the increasing influence of the periphery in urban politics (Batuman, 2017, p. 110).

Balıkesir was among the provinces affected by these governance and policy changes. With the enactment of Law No. 6360, titled "The Establishment of Metropolitan Municipalities in Fourteen Provinces, the Formation of Twenty-Seven Districts, and Amendments to Certain Legislative Decrees," which was adopted on November 12, 2012, and published in the Official Gazette on December 6, 2012, Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality was established, and its jurisdiction was defined as the entire provincial territory (Resmî Gazete, 2012, Figure 3.7).

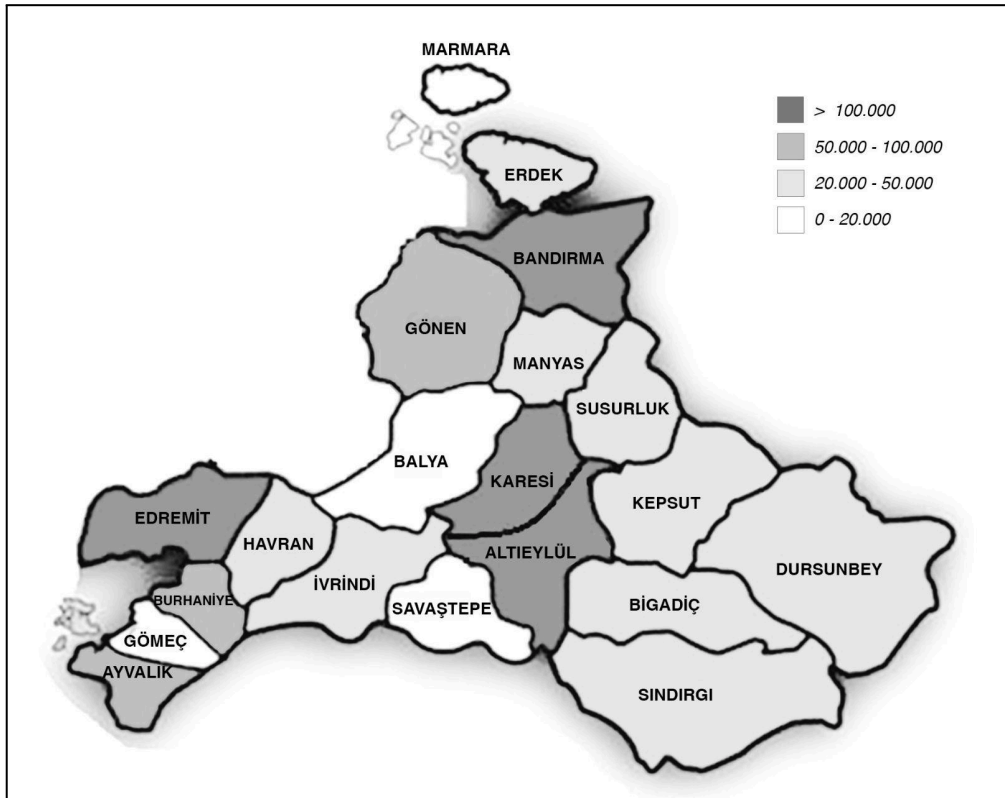


Figure 3.7 Jurisdiction of Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality. Re-produced by the author based on the information on Balıkesir Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2024.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), as of 2014, Balıkesir no longer has a statistically defined rural population due to its designation as a metropolitan municipality. In 2012, however, 61.32% of the population resided in provincial and

district centres while 38.68% lived in towns and villages (Balıkesir Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2024).

In addition to Balıkesir, in the provinces of Aydın, Denizli, Hatay, Malatya, Manisa, Kahramanmaraş, Mardin, Muğla, Ordu, Tekirdağ, Trabzon, Şanlıurfa, and Van, metropolitan municipalities were established under the same name, with their jurisdiction defined by the provincial administrative boundaries (Resmî Gazete, 2012). Consequently, the existing provincial municipalities in these areas were restructured as metropolitan municipalities. With the legislative amendment, the number of metropolitan municipalities in Turkey has reached 30.

The regulation became effective in 2014 with the local administration general elections held on March 30. Since that time, Balıkesir has been governed as a Metropolitan Municipality. In the days following the elections, public statements began appearing in the media, emphasizing plans to transform Balıkesir into an "attraction center." It was announced that numerous new projects would be introduced to achieve this goal.

These projects ranged from infrastructure developments, such as wastewater treatment facilities to reduce marine and environmental pollution, and the construction of overpasses and highways, to large-scale investments aimed at making both the city center and its districts key attraction points. These included tourism centers, ports, a regional hospital, an airport, shopping malls, and new residential developments. The Balıkesir-Çanakkale Planning Region 1/100,000 Scale Environmental Plan also provided a higher-level framework supporting these large-scale projects and investments. Additionally, the invitation and brochure for the 7th Emerging Cities Summit, held on May 6–7, 2015, described Balıkesir as the "shining star of the Marmara region," highlighting its central location at the intersection of major highways and positioning it as a prime destination for investors (Özerk, 2017). During presentations at the summit, Balıkesir's strategic location—close to major highways and metropolitan areas—was emphasized to attract investment for planned projects. Meanwhile, numerous so-called “visionary projects,” promoted under the goal of making Balıkesir a "brand city," began to receive extensive coverage in both print and digital media (Figure 3.8) (Özerk, 2017).



Figure 3.8 Some ‘mega’ projects proposed for Balıkesir after 2014 (Özerk, 2017).

The delineated concentration of production, population, and infrastructure within the metropolitan area serves as a driving force for capital accumulation and transformation of locations, regions, and landscapes across various spatial scales (Krätke, 2014; Scott & Storper, 2015; Soja, 2000). As previously discussed and presented in earlier sections, contemporary forms of urbanization are already disrupting and redefining the traditional boundaries of cities, including those of major metropolitan areas, as they alter existing regional arrangements and increasingly blur the distinction between urban and non-urban areas (Brenner, 2013b, 2014; Brenner & Schmid, 2014b, 2014a). The metropolitan law on the other hand has adopted a disruptive approach, accelerating and evolving the process and drawing its own boundaries. In this sense, legal and regulatory changes have been politically instrumentalized within the context of urban spatial reproductions to find new ways of capital accumulation.

Ayvalık was also affected by the changes in metropolitan structure. In 2012, Balıkesir was declared a metropolitan city, and Ayvalık's local administration saw changes in its authority. Similar to what has been argued with the thesis of complete urbanization, the Metropolitan law can be considered to crystallize the explosion and expansion of the urban, leading to the autonomy of small and medium-sized cities, transforming them into the ‘virtual colonies of the metropolis’ (Schmid, 2014, p.69). In this sense, Ayvalık became liable to be conceptualized as a ‘virtual colony’ of its

neighboring metropolitan cities, namely Izmir and Istanbul, considering the established trade network settled primarily on olive.

Upon examining the urbanization process following the change in administration in Ayvalık, urban projects tendered or proposed by the Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality have been brought forward. Following this decision, what is frequently emphasized is the revival of numerous proposals, which were previously planned but reportedly suppressed in the past due to strong opposition from the local municipality. In addition, one of the most significant challenges currently facing the local community is the lack of sufficient attention and support from the metropolitan municipality towards local issues. The ongoing socio-ecological issues of Ayvalık are being marginalized by the metropolitan municipality, eliciting apprehensions regarding the prevailing perception of an unattended local voice.

Following Balıkesir's declaration as a metropolitan city in 2014, Ayvalık experienced negligible advantages. The top-down management style of the metropolitan municipality was unable to adequately address the local needs. (Interview 1)

With the changes in jurisdiction, the Water and Sewerage Treatment Plants were transferred to the metropolitan municipality. In the past, we saw that these treatment plants were not being operated before the election. We organized many protests and made significant efforts to get the treatment plants running, but we couldn't achieve any results. The Metropolitan Municipality Law has also become something that exacerbates such problems and disruptions from an ecological perspective. I believe it was entirely created out of political concerns (Interview 3)

Giving the decision-making power to higher levels of governance undermines the autonomy and effectiveness of district municipalities. This shift in power diminishes the decision-making capacity and active participation of local governments, which are best suited to manage and respond to the immediate needs of their communities, such as waste collection and maintaining clean streets. Governance should be grounded in the local context, where the management of daily life is most effective, and where resources, personnel, and decisions can directly address the specific needs of the area. Centralizing authority not only disrupts the functionality of local governance but also weakens the direct connection between the government and the community it serves.

Delegating governance to a higher level inherently means bypassing the local will. It restricts decision-making capacity, reduces agency, and diminishes participation. In essence, it strips the locality of its governing power. A district municipality operates at the smallest scale—handling tasks such as

waste collection, street maintenance, and addressing community needs. Governance must be approached from within the flow of everyday life; it cannot be effectively managed from a different scale. Managing the district requires establishing a framework that aligns with its budget, personnel, and tangible presence in daily life. (Interview 2)

3.1.2. THE CHANGES IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND MINING LEGISLATION

In the wake of a concluded legal case in 2018, the Conservation Plans for the urban conservation areas of Ayvalık, Cunda and Çamlık Urban Conservation Areas were cancelled by the decision of the Balıkesir Regional Conservation Board on October 26, 2020 (Decision No. 2161) (Başakçioğlu, 2020a, 2020b; Şengörenoğlu, 2020; Yeşil Gazete, 2020). For nearly two years, there has been no legally binding Conservation-Oriented Development Plan for the designated Urban Conservation Areas in Ayvalık.

In response to this decision, political parties, non-governmental organizations, and environmental groups issued a joint statement in early December 2020. The statement noted that the annulment of the Conservation-Oriented Development Plans for Ayvalık, Alibey Island, and Çamlık Urban Conservation Areas had been decided by the Balıkesir Regional Conservation Board in a lawsuit that was individually filed and concluded in 2018, yet this ruling had not been publicly disclosed until recently (Başakçioğlu, 2020a, 2020b; Şengörenoğlu, 2020; Yeşil Gazete, 2020). It emphasized that the city was now left vulnerable to groups seeking to exploit it for financial gain, threatening to replace its unique natural landscape with excessive urban development. The justification for the annulment, which cited the absence of higher-scale plans for Ayvalık, was described as a contentious claim. The statement pointed out that Ayvalık already possessed a 1/5000 scale Master Plan, approved in 1988, as well as a 1/25000 scale Master Plan that defined the boundaries of the urban conservation area. Furthermore, the affected conservation zones included both green-characterized urban conservation areas and natural conservation sites (Başakçioğlu, 2020a; Şengörenoğlu, 2020).

Concerns regarding several risks towards urban and natural landscape due to planning decisions are reflected by the statement. According to the statement expressed by experts and activists, cancellation of conservation plans may cause risks

of unregulated construction encroaching on olive groves and protected natural areas, while increased building density could strain the city's already inadequate infrastructure, making it less liveable. Such developments threaten Ayvalık's historical and natural fabric and weakens its sustainable tourism potential and urban identity (Başakçioğlu, 2020a; Şengörenoğlu, 2020). Additionally, rising construction density may shift property ownership from local to external investors, diminishing the local economy. Large-scale projects primarily benefiting external capital could marginalize small-scale entrepreneurs and limit local participation. Finally, planning decisions that disregard Ayvalık's status as an Industrial Cultural Landscape on UNESCO's World Heritage Tentative List could jeopardize its nomination process (Başakçioğlu, 2020a; Şengörenoğlu, 2020).

The given decision strengthens the claim by the local people, activists, and scholars that current urbanization dynamics in Ayvalık prioritize market-driven socio-spatial transformations to establish the accumulation of capital despite the 'natural areas', expected to be protected—underlines the reflection of neoliberalism within the complete urbanization (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Merrifield, 2014a). The given decision can be evaluated as a concrete manifestation signaling the city's exposure to socio-ecological crises. The heightened neo-liberalization of nature is a process induced by crises and, in turn, contributes to crises (Peck et al., 2012).

Speaking on the issue, Nebahat Dinler, spokesperson for the Ayvalık Nature Platform, stated that the Balıkesir Regional Board for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, through its decisions dated September 11, 2020 (No. 2244, 2245, and 2246), had established Transitional Conservation Principles and Usage Conditions, thereby leaving all urban planning and construction regulations within Ayvalık's Urban Conservation Area entirely at the discretion of the Board. Betül Dikici, President of the Balıkesir Branch of the Chamber of Architects, underlined that Ayvalık had been left without a conservation plan for an indefinite period, making it highly susceptible to speculative development and exploitation. Providing technical details regarding the planning process, Dikici explained that in 2017, Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality tendered the preparation of 1/5000 scale Master Plans for 18 districts of Balıkesir, along with 1/5000 scale Conservation-Oriented Master Plans for the Urban Conservation Areas of Ayvalık, Havran, Sındırgı, Gömeç/Karaağaç, and Edremit/Altınoluk. However, the firms awarded these tenders had not finalized the planning process yet. Once the 1/5000 scale plans within the jurisdiction of the Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality were completed, the preparation of 1/1000 and

1/500 scale Conservation-Oriented Development Plans for the Urban Conservation Areas within the jurisdiction of the Ayvalık Municipality would commence. As a result, Ayvalık had effectively been left without legally binding Conservation-Oriented Development Plans for nearly two years (Başakçioğlu, 2020a; Şengörenoğlu, 2020).

Following a directive from the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, a subsequent legislative alteration related to mining areas transpired in 2022 (Yeşil Düşünce, 2022). This decision, made at the national level, paved the way for the degradation of especially the olive grove areas located primarily at the hinterlands of Ayvalık that played a predominant role in the formation of Ayvalık's historical urban image and economy, where the change promoted the mining activities. This change in the sites of 'operation' or 'exploitation' deepens the subaltern conditions by being deeply rewoven with the state mediation of capitalist urbanization (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014, p. 256).

3.1.3. RECLASSIFICATION OF THE NATURAL AREAS

The last alteration that is to be addressed in relation to the accumulation of socio-ecological challenges is the reclassification of the natural areas that were designated as first-grade natural conservation sites within the boundaries of Ayvalık Islands Nature Park (Başakçioğlu, 2020a; R. Doğan, 2017; Kaya, 2017, 2019). Ayvalık Islands Nature Park was established in 1995 and is managed by the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks (GDNCNP) of the Turkish Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs (Bann & Başak, 2013). Since 2015, a series of ongoing top-down alterations have led to a reduction in the conservation status of protected areas. A report prepared under the United Nations Development Programme in 2013 highlighted the absence of a management plan for the Nature Park, stating that without one, essential management activities such as monitoring were not being conducted, putting the long-term conservation of the site's marine and terrestrial natural assets at risk (Bann & Başak, 2013). More than a decade later, as of 2024, this issue still remains unresolved, and the Ayvalık Islands still have a conservation plan but no management plan (Interview 4), which increases the regions' vulnerability.

In accordance with the "Regulation Amending the Regulation on the Procedure and Principles for the Identification, Registration, and Approval of Protected Areas", published in the Official Gazette on October 27, 2017, the status of many Natural Protected Areas across Turkey are downgraded by reclassifying them as "Qualified Natural Protection Areas." The areas designated as Nature Parks in Ayvalık are being protected, including the 22 islands. However, recent changes have resulted in a significant portion of these areas being exposed to possible construction and spatial development. The names of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd degree natural protected areas (*SİT alanı*) have been altered and are now categorized as Strictly, Qualified, and Sustainable Conservation Areas (Mutlak, Nitelikli ve Sürdürülebilir Koruma Alanları). Absolute conservation is indicated by red, qualified conservation by blue, and sustainable conservation by green (R. Doğan, 2017).



Figure 3.9 A map illustrating the boundaries of Ayvalık Islands Nature Park, highlighting the islands and regions that have been downgraded over time. Produced by the author based on the information derived from GDNCNP.

On August 20, Yellice Poyraz Island, natural protected area in Ayvalık was also designated as a "Qualified Natural Protection Area" (Kaya, 2019). While debates continued in the region, on October 6, by the decision of President, Kız Island in Ayvalık was declared a "Strictly Protected Sensitive Area." As these consecutive decisions continued, the Pınar Island natural protected area was also downgraded to a "Qualified Natural Protection Area" by the Ministry's decision dated October 2, 2020,

numbered 207450. A large portion of Cunda, classified as a first-degree natural protected area, is also being divided and downgraded to a third-degree status piece by piece (Figure 3.9) (Dursun, 2017). As a result, the protection status of Yellice, Pınar, Hasır, Tavuk, Güvercin, Çiçek, and Çıplak Islands has been downgraded from 1st to 2nd degree, and a significant portion of Cunda Island, particularly the Pateriça area and its surroundings, is being targeted for urban development (Figure 3.11) (BirGün, 2017).

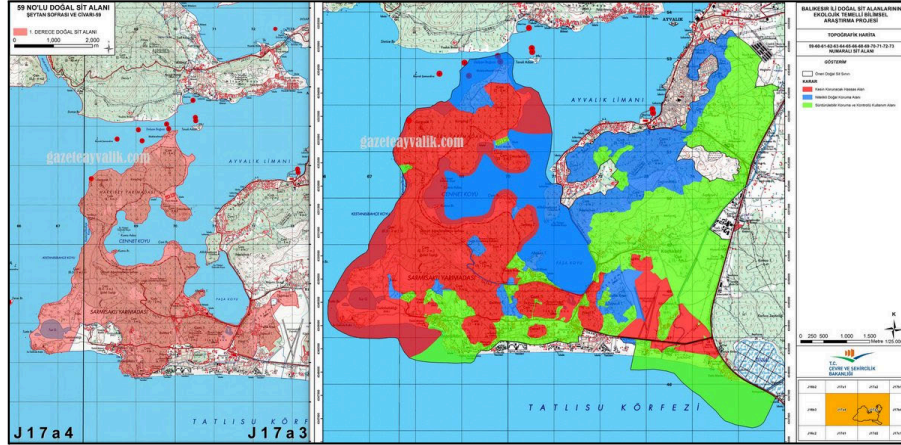


Figure 3.10 Proposed Plan for Şeytan Sofrası and its surrounding area. Retrieved from the website of Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change.

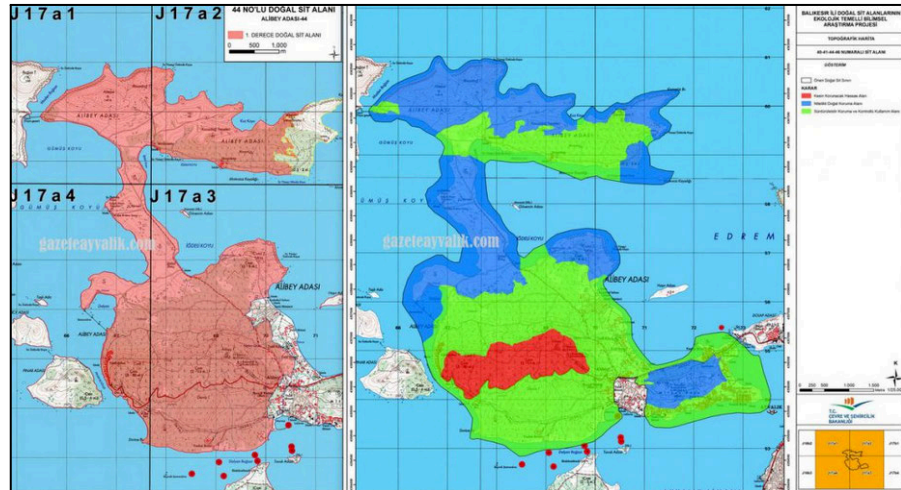


Figure 3.11 Proposed Plan for Cunda (Alibey). Retrieved from the website of Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change.

It is stated that most of the areas where the conservation status has been downgraded are within the Ayvalık Nature Park, and there is an undisclosed report that is being published in separate sections. According to Dinler, the president of Ayvalık Nature Platform, this situation is explained as follows:

There is a report about the nature park on Ayvalık Island. The decisions are being announced in fragments. Instead of evaluating it as a whole, decisions

are being announced on an individual basis. The Maden Islands were announced last year. This year, the ministry announced that Poyraz Island would be downgraded from a second-degree natural protected area. Çıplak Island, Güvercin Island, Tavuk Island, and Pınar Island are among those islands that are intended to be downgraded from first-degree to second. These are, of course, large islands. They are also close to the mainland. We believe that there is an intention to open them for construction and use. We have stated that downgrading their status is not appropriate. However, in the decisions that have been made, you see that the status of one has been downgraded, while another has not. However, the situation of the islands is currently progressing in parallel with the ministry's recommendation. Kız Island was already a protected island, and a decision was made in that direction. However, what concerns us is that the status of Yellice and Poyraz Island was downgraded. There was also a proposal to downgrade Pınar Island, and a decision was made in that direction. We believe that more decisions will follow. All these decisions should be announced together. Despite having submitted a petition on three occasions, however, we have been unable to obtain that report. These decisions are being made on the basis of that report, which has not been disclosed to the public. We have been requesting its disclosure to the public since 2016 (Başakçioğlu, 2020a).

The latest news about the downgrading of a protected area was in February 2023. On February 9, 2023, the General Directorate for the Protection of Natural Assets downgraded the status of Güvercin Monastery Island and the Sefa Çamlık area, both located within the boundaries of Ayvalık and previously designated as a first-degree natural protected area (Figure 3.10) (Akdemir, 2023b). These areas, which were announced as officially registered by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change,⁸ have had their status downgraded from 'Strictly Protected Sensitive Areas' (first-degree natural protected area) to the second-degree natural protected area and reclassified as 'Qualified Natural Protection Areas' (Çevre Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, 2021).

The names of the ministries themselves reflect this duality. We are talking about a ministry where three terms that negatively impact each other—environment, urbanization, and climate change—are placed side by side. How can a ministry that is constantly involved in construction and zoning protect the environment or find solutions to climate change? Or take the Ministry of Culture and Tourism—will a ministry that promotes tourism at the expense of culture be the one to protect Ayvalık? In essence, while we are examining the Metropolitan Law from the perspective of scale, the ministries themselves are already conflicting. (Interview 2)

Regarding the reclassification of the natural areas, concerns have been raised that this downgrading could lead to an increase in construction, mining activities, and the

⁸ With the Decree of Law No. 648, enacted on August 17, 2011, cultural and natural assets were separated, assigning the authority over cultural assets to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, while the responsibility for natural assets was transferred to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change.

development of geothermal plants in areas outside the strictly protected sensitive zones, thereby provoking the possibility of even further, uneven urbanization of nature, as we also interpret from the words of the president of Ayvalık Nature (Tabiat) Platform:

With the decision to lower the conservation status, there's a risk of significant urban expansion, and any construction may lead to additional harm to the natural environment. (Interview 1)

3.1.4. NEOLIBERAL URBANIZATION OF NATURE IN AYVALIK

These four different shifts that are embedded with political motivations are listed to show the indicators of metropolitanization and how complete urbanization have arrived in Ayvalık through different modes of reshaping urban space and nature. Whether through appropriation or degradation, and whether under protection or without, nature remains central to capitalist strategies, which seek to integrate it into the circuits of capital accumulation, often without regard for the resulting socio-ecological consequences (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). In this sense, employing a historically and geographically grounded approach to the study of urban nature production allows for a critical understanding of the unequal power relations shaping these processes, which also guides the potential transformation of these power relations (Swyngedouw et al., 2006). In the case of Ayvalık, the changes in authority and legislation embark on the socio-ecological exploitations, which have also manifested themselves through several cases within the contemporary capitalist form of urbanization patterns embedded in the urban realm.

2013 | Ayvalık Nature Parks' new revision plan has been put on the agenda.

2013 | The risk of establishing a wind power plant in a nature park has been revealed.

2014 | A report about the contaminated water connected to the Bilfer mining facility appeared in the press.

2014 | Balıkesir became a metropolitan city, and Ayvalık's local administration saw changes in its authority.

2014 | Emergence of illicit structures in the Ayıştığı monastery acquired by the Sabancı family; converted into a mansion instead of a museum, in violation of the project guidelines.

2015–2023 | Reclassification for the areas designated as 1st Grade Natural Conservation Sites.

2016 | For the sake of the gold-silver mining project, the local community of Tıfıllar village is being dispossessed.

2017 | A new mining project to extract iron ore from the sea has been announced.

2019 | The air pollution caused by the Doğu Pirina factory was an object of protest.

- 2020** | Local Community and Resistance Organizations opposing the construction of Karakoç Dam
- 2020** | The signature campaign and protest initiated against the privatization of the coasts.
- 2020** | The UTТА company, which won the tender for the Ayvalık 1/5000 Zoning Plan, presented a renewed proposal for the new urban plan.
- 2021** | Waste storage area belonging to Bilfer mining facility collapsed. The waste from the Plant once again flowed into the stream that feeds the Madra Dam. A protest was staged at the mining site.
- 2022** | A new regulation to have adjustments to the current mining regulations was promulgated by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. With that latest change, olive grove areas can be utilized for mining activities.
- 2022** | A struggle took place considering the construction on Tavuk Island within the boundaries of Ayvalık Islands Nature Park.
- 2022** | Development of 5-story blocks located 10 meters from the coastline at the shoreline of Altınova.
- 2022** | Press statement on 'The shores belong to the public.'
- 2023** | Signatures were gathered, and actions were taken to prevent the urbanization and cutting of trees in forested areas.
- 2023** | The campaign titled 'Citizens Enact the Ecocide Law' has commenced.
- 2023** | An ongoing struggle against the construction-pouring concrete onto the shoreline-in Sarımsaklı beach.
- 2023** | Concrete was poured over the historical remnants of Ayvalık Academy to build a new police station building, protests were initiated against it.

Table 2. A timeline of the recent developments in Ayvalık. Produced by the author.

In this context, it can be argued based on documented evidence that (Figure 3.4 and Table 2), despite Ayvalık having confronted various instances of social and environmental disruption in the past, including earthquakes, the Greek Revolution, and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey, it has never experienced such heightened socio-ecological degradation as it currently faces in the present neoliberal era. The AKP government has demonstrated a distinctly exploitative approach toward nature (Çoban, 2019). Since 2002, the government has worked hand in hand with capital, depleting both human and non-human aspects of nature to sustain and expand a capitalist accumulation regime. However, the environmental destruction caused by the AKP government is not a new phenomenon in Turkey. This phenomenon is not limited to the advanced economies of the West but is even more pronounced in emerging centres of capitalist expansion, such as China, Turkey, and India. The restructuring of urban and natural environments plays a pivotal role in the accumulation and circulation of capital in the contemporary era (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). As history has shown, wherever capitalism exists, environmental degradation inevitably follows (Çoban, 2019). Nevertheless, Ayvalık endeavours to resist and

firmly preserve its pre-established urban and ecological identity which is characterized by designated urban and natural conservation areas, alongside first-degree protected islands and nature parks. Despite efforts to preserve Ayvalık's established urban and ecological identity, current urbanization trends are largely shaped by ongoing changes in governance, planning, and legislation. The dissolution of district municipalities, modifications to urban plans, and shifting regulations have created conditions that enable capitalist-driven environmental exploitation, exerting a dominant influence over the region's development.

Recent developments, especially over the past five years, serve as indicators of the impact of neoliberal urbanization in Ayvalık; every part of the city bears the results of various exploitations (Interview 3)

Additionally, as cities increasingly become arenas for financial speculation, urban spaces have emerged as primary sites of contestation, where struggles focus on preserving and shaping the fundamental conditions of human life—including public spaces, neighborhoods, and natural landscapes (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). In this context, within the framework of consciousness towards the democratic 'rights'—the right to the city and nature, as the activists have frequently stated—the accumulation of socio-ecological challenges in Ayvalık has originated urban ecological movements. Furthermore, resistance in these areas acquire a potentially radical and transformative nature, as it directly challenges the urban and environmental transformations that have become central to capital circulation in the neoliberal era (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). In order to grasp the specificities of urban ecological movements, Gezi Park Protests emerged in Istanbul serves as a precedent and shows how ecological movements opposing neoliberal urban policies have gained significant impetus that has eventually changed the conceptualization of urban nature.

3.2. A NEW VISION OF URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN TURKEY: GEZI PARK PROTESTS

Between 2011 and 2013, a global wave of urban insurgencies emerged, marked by large-scale occupations of common spaces in direct confrontation with the government. These collective acts of resistance challenged existing power structures, driven by aspirations for democracy and equality. The resistances were embodied in entirely dispersed points, including Tahrir Square, Assaha-al-Khadra, Syntagma Square, Zuccotti Park, Paternoster Square, Puerta del Sol, Rothschild Boulevard, and

Plaza de la Catalunya, while the Gezi Park resistance erupted in Istanbul's Taksim Square, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the spirit of resistance through global networks, even though they were spatially spread (Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2014).

The protests and uprisings in Istanbul were initially sparked by a small, peaceful "occupy-style" resistance against the planned demolition of Gezi Park, a historically significant urban commons (Kuymulu, 2013), then turned into a countrywide civil revolt (Yörük, 2014). Gezi Park was set to be replaced by another shopping mall; just before midnight on 27 May 2013, bulldozers entered the park without warning and, as later revealed, without legal authorization to remove the trees. In response, activists quickly mobilized through Twitter and Facebook, calling on more people to join them to stop the destruction; their efforts succeeded (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). For the next three days, those camping in the park remained focused on preventing a public space from being sacrificed for private commercial interests. In its early stages, the resistance was a direct response to an urban development model that prioritized capitalist gains over the rights and well-being of Istanbul's residents (Kuymulu, 2013).

After three days and nights of resistance, activists were suddenly awakened at dawn on May 30 by an operation known as "Operation Dawn" by the Istanbul police. The raid involved tear gas, water cannons, and the burning of protesters' tents and personal belongings. This event was a turning point in the protests (Kuymulu, 2013). Initially focused on protecting Gezi Park from bulldozers, protesters were forced to retreat and regroup in Taksim Square, where their actions quickly turned into something 'sudden and puzzling', 'abrupt and spontaneous' for all (Gürçan & Peker, 2014; Karakayali & Yaka, 2014; Yörük, 2014). Within hours, tens of thousands had gathered, not only in Taksim but also in other public spaces across Istanbul. As solidarity protests spread to cities nationwide, what began as a localized resistance transformed into widespread urban uprisings across Turkey. With the movement expanding beyond Gezi Park, its central political focus shifted from the right to the city to broader demands for civil rights and collective freedoms, challenging the AKP government's neoliberal authoritarianism (Kuymulu, 2013). The impact of the Gezi protests extended well beyond its time, with the so-called 'Gezi spirit' continuing to inspire opposition movements and shape Turkey's cultural landscape and political discourse (Erensü & Karaman, 2017, p. 2).

Here, it is worth to highlight once again that ‘Gezi’ is considered a mass urban social movement through which urban dwellers demanded and struggled to claim not an individual but a collective right to the city (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). A new urban awareness of neoliberal urban policy, that the ruling party has been pursuing for many years, has emerged. The overall opposition against state intervention can be described as the embodiment of “democracy, revolution, freedom, being-in-common, equality, solidarity, and emancipation” (Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019, p. 377). According to Karaliotas & Swyngedouw (2019), these embodied values reflect the politicized, ‘political’ space in which, concerning what they argue, “emerges through the act of political subjectivization”; it is the “embodied decision to act, to interrupt, to stage” (Rancière, 2004).

In this context, politics is intricately linked to the creation of spaces within existing orders, transforming them into environments where injustices can be confronted, and equality can be exemplified (Dikeç, 2005). This is a way of ‘commoning’ where heterogeneous bodies become constituted as a single unity called ‘the people’ to defend equality (Rancière, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2014). Karakayalı and Yaka (2014) define this “new virtual political subjectivity” with the concept of “recomposition” which emphasizes a collectivity established “becoming” evolved from “identity”. So, for instance, “in the intermixing of bodies, signs, objects, voices, stories, and emotions, Gezi solidarity renewed existing ties and spawned new intimacies and affections, giving its participants a ‘belonging in becoming’” (A. Zengin, 2013). Despite the activists’ varied concerns, “diverse actors shared and reproduced public space through their existence in it” (Batuman, 2017, p. 134). In this sense, activists’ backgrounds became singular, making them known only as ‘environmentalists’. It can also be conceptualized as acting in common, looking after the rights of those “who do not count, who are surplus to the police” (Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019, p. 378). It brings out a new horizontal model of organization that questions the vertical and hierarchical organization of the neoliberal and conservative social imaginary (Türkmen, 2014, p.16). Hence, political subjectivation has invigorated an opportunity to imagine, practice, and universalize a new socio-political spatialization (Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019), which thereby allows us to define the Gezi Park protests as the hallmark of a new era in Turkey in terms of urban social movements, the practice of resistance, and urban democracy.

In addition to representing the spatial manifestation of the struggle against environmental interventions, the Gezi protests were also interpreted as the outcome

of an accumulated societal reaction to state-led urban policies over time (Batuman, 2017). Batuman argues that the different lines of opposition to the urbanization trend determined by the policies pioneered by the AKP government that have been in power for more than two decades have either been largely erased or found new channels in urban politics through the Gezi protests (Batuman, 2017, p. 110). Although the labour movement weakened due to job insecurity and declining unionization—despite reaching a peak with the TEKEL protests—it transferred its repertoire of actions to urban struggles, as seen during Gezi. Meanwhile, opposition to urban transformation, which began as a fight for housing rights, expanded in both scope and participants, becoming even more prominent (Batuman, 2019). Gezi has given rise to new forms of urban opposition and political conceptualization, centered upon the notion of urban, as it has constituted an unassailable source of inspiration (Batuman, 2022a). The opposition to urban megaprojects, urban renewal, and the labor movement has been defined by many different agendas, including those of nationalist, secularist, and environmentalist groups, where these agendas have been expressed in a variety of ways, with the opposition to the Gezi protests representing a convergence of these different modes of opposition.

The 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul can be characterized as a turning point in the evolution of urban social movements in Turkey as well in terms of the lines of opposition shifting towards environmental concerns and especially the state policies about the ‘urban’ ecology (Erensü & Karaman, 2017; Karakayali & Yaka, 2014; Özkaynak et al., 2015). The resistance was primarily driven by two issues; the transformation of urban space and ecological destruction. Many were surprised that the defence of a public park—initially seen as an effort to ‘save a few trees’ within a larger urban renewal project—could ignite a movement that evolved into Turkey’s first and only spontaneous rebellion, emerging without prior organization (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). The protests demonstrate the radical and oppositional nature of urban and ecological issues, as well as their capacity to mobilize the masses (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). Millions of individuals, irrespective of their background, were mobilized into action to defend and demand for their collective right to the city and to ensure their participation in the decision-making process against the AKP’s urban transformation agenda and its neoliberal interventions in public (green) spaces (Erensü & Karaman, 2017; Kuymulu, 2013; Tuğal, 2013). In this context, the Gezi protests are noted as one of the turning points of the opposition to hegemony shaped through environmental actions, which are entirely different from the rural resistances we have witnessed so far in terms of environmental actions. The environmental

oppositional landscape of Turkey, initially shaped by anti-nuclear and anti-hydropower struggles (as already pointed out in 2.2. Shifting the Focus of Resistance to Ecology), merged with resistance against large-scale urban projects after the Gezi Resistance, inspiring urban ecological movements (Batuman, 2019; Erensü & Karaman, 2017).

Even though the nationwide Gezi Park protests have been likened by others to the Occupy! or Arab Spring movements, particularly in terms of their social and political implications (Erensü, 2013), conversely, the protests represented the culmination of a decade of socio-ecological unrest related to the plunder of urban and non-urban ecosystems (Özkaynak et al., 2015). The protests can be considered one of the most powerful collective attempts to challenge the neoliberalisation of nature and environmental policies. This has led to a range of opposition, including the Yoğurtçu Women's Forum, which opposes the government's dispossession policies, and the nature-society conflicts that neoliberal policies and ideologies are generating (Yoğurtçu Kadın Forumu, 2023). Thus, in many ways, Gezi not only expanded the scope of political activism but also reshaped urban discourse by bringing attention to the interconnectedness of different spaces.

Following the Gezi protests, the perception of politics and its connection to the urban realm underwent a fundamental transformation. Through its various manifestations and spatial articulations, the movement highlighted the need to rethink urbanization beyond the traditional physical and conceptual boundaries of the city. Batuman, referring to Lefebvre's thesis on complete urbanization, defines Gezi as the hallmark of "the complete urbanization of politics" and emphasizes that the Gezi Park resistance is a concrete manifestation of this phenomenon by being "a predicament of the urban revolution," the comprehensive thrust of urbanization under the AKP government (Batuman, 2017, pp. 108–109, 2019). The protests demonstrated that the urban revolution driven by new Islamism was not solely a top-down initiative controlled by the government; it also resulted in the urbanization of resistance against it. It is a new public sphere in which the urbanites construct a new definition of democracy, urbanity, and citizenship (Doğan, 2014) in the most creative forms of plunging into the squares in the politicized camping area formed by tents which are the most known and accessible mediation of the political scene. Therefore, it is possible to characterize Gezi as the "revolution of the urban" (Batuman, 2017, p. 146) and to assert that the protests, which spread nationwide and had international resonances, have brought about the "comprehensive urbanization of politics"

(Batuman, 2017, p. 142). This perspective also aligns with recent scholarly discussions on planetary urbanization, emphasizing the necessity of understanding urban processes at a broader scale (Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Merrifield, 2014b). As urban space and nature are increasingly reshaped to serve the needs of capital accumulation under contemporary capitalism, the Gezi protests revealed that struggles over urban and environmental issues can take on a transformative and radical dimension, as they confront the core dynamics of the capitalist system itself (Karakayali & Yaka, 2014). A convergence began to emerge between different forms of resistance opposing the neoliberal commodification of both urban environments and natural resources (Batuman, 2017). “Gezi enabled novel political imaginaries by articulating the urban, the rural and nature.” (Erensü and Karaman, 2017, p. 15).

Gezi has fostered new political imaginaries that connected and reinforced various grassroots and political mobilizations that had preceded it. By transcending specific locations, the movement continued to politicize space, leading to the emergence of new forms of activism across different regions (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). “Gezi particularly echoed in locations that were hurt by the AKP’s spatial interventions” (Erensü & Karaman, 2017, p. 14). Three months after the Gezi occupation, students from the Middle East Technical University (METU) and residents of the adjacent Yüzüncü Yıl and Çiğdem neighborhoods in Ankara came together to oppose the construction of a highway that would cut through their community and threaten thousands of trees. In Istanbul, historic urban market gardens (bostans) that were at risk due to urban renewal projects gained public attention for the first time, largely due to the efforts of local activists.

A similar mobilization took place in Diyarbakır, where the ancient Hevsel Gardens were protected through a three-week occupation in March 2014, establishing an unprecedented link between Istanbul and Turkey’s Kurdish region. Additionally, the practice of reclaiming and repurposing abandoned buildings for public use began to emerge in various neighborhoods across Istanbul and Ankara. The influence of Gezi extended even further, connecting environmental struggles in Arhavi, Artvin, and Amasya with urban resistance movements in Tuzluca and Okmeydanı. As Badiou (2012) argues, Gezi’s impact was not confined to its original location; instead, it spread and evolved, uniting diverse struggles across Turkey. Or in other words, as defined by Erensü and Karaman (2017, p.14) “what emerged at the site of Gezi delocalized and then re-localized in other sites, connecting all these sites”.

Urban ecological movements emerging in Ayvalık illustrates how ‘Gezi spirit’ continuing to inspire opposition movements and how it has affected the notion of urban nature and government-led interventions towards ecology. Gezi served as a catalyst for local resistance, transforming the perception of what was possible. A broader understanding of urban political ecology is established, where ecological issues are deeply intertwined with power relations and governance.

Right before Gezi, we were fighting to stop the construction of a wind power plant in the Nature Park. It felt like we were up against a massive ministry while we were just a handful of people... But Gezi showed us that the impossible could actually happen. During those days, the squares of Ayvalık were packed with people. (Interview 1)

Resistance mechanisms shaped by a particular context don’t always work the same way everywhere. Ayvalık’s unique geography, for instance, requires its own distinct approaches. But still, it is possible to say, “This was my strategy in Gezi, so I should take a similar approach here as well.” (Interview 2)

The city is a space of struggle, and so is ecology. Unfortunately, I believe that in order to live peacefully, we must first fight for it. ... After Gezi, many organizations realized that nothing would be the same again and that they needed to reorganize themselves accordingly and establish a line of struggle. It became clear to us what kind of attacks could come from the government and what they might do in the future. The Gezi resistance marked the beginning of a new era, both for the government and for the organizations engaged in the struggle. (Interview 3)

Gezi was more than a temporary protest; it was a transformative moment that redefined local activism in Ayvalık. It fostered a strong belief in collective action, positioned ecological struggles within the larger framework of urban resistance, and contributed to the development of more structured and sustained efforts against government-led urbanization projects. For these reasons, the research timeframe is limited to post-2013 (post-Gezi), marking the enduring impact of Gezi on Ayvalık’s ecological movements.

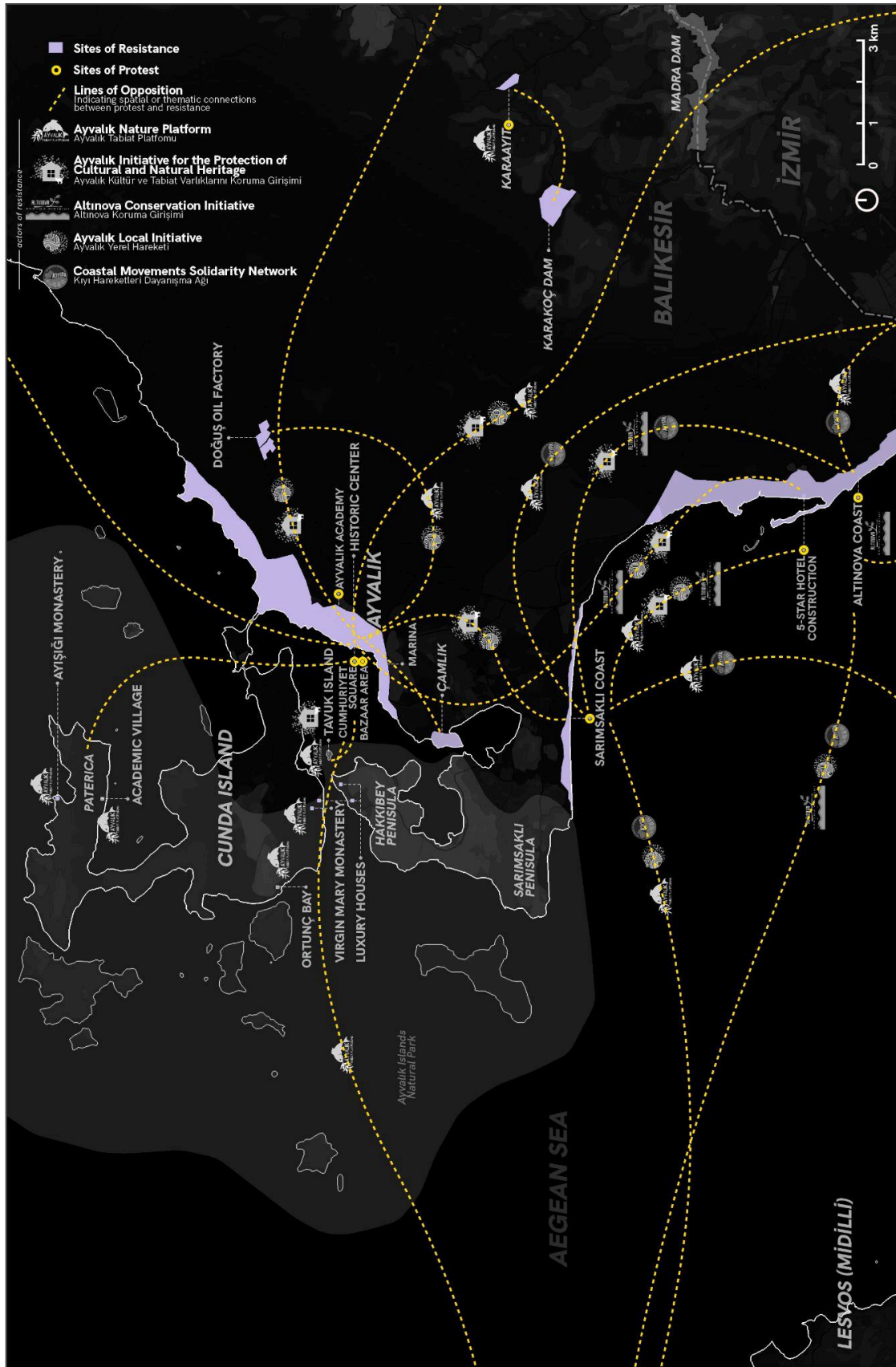


Figure 3.12 Map showing oppositional landscapes. Produced by the author.

3.3. SITES OF RESISTANCE AND PROTEST: MAPPING OPPOSITIONAL LANDSCAPE

A considerable number of areas in Ayvalık, particularly those located in the coastal region, have been experiencing a process of spatial and ecological degradation as a result of urban interventions, which are primarily driven by profit-oriented projects. These environmental issues have become focal points of resistance for volunteers, residents, and civil initiatives, leading to the recreation of both urban space and nature, as well as the adoption of new social practices. In this context, spaces shaped by the intersection of environmental degradation and collective opposition begin to constitute what can be described as oppositional landscapes—geographies marked by contestation, grassroots activism, and alternative imaginaries of urban-nature relations. Mapping as a method of analysis has been used to investigate these practices, primarily to reveal the spatial aspects of urban ecological movements (Figure 3.12).

3.3.1. SITES OF RESISTANCE: URBAN INTERFERENCE TOWARDS NATURE

The interaction between urban spaces and natural environments has become increasingly complex, particularly in contemporary capitalist relations. In cities like Ayvalık, where commercial activities and tourism largely depend on natural resources and a capital-oriented approach to urbanization is prevalent, the city, and nature are simultaneously contradictory and mutually reinforcing. The expansion of the urban, in this sense, can also be associated with the exploitation of natural resources, significantly altering the relationship between cities and the environment. It is driven by economic imperatives, where both nature and urban are reconstructed by the forces of capital. This process of reconstruction was argued to be defined as urban interference towards nature, in which the transformation of nature into urbanized environments reflects broader trends in neoliberal development. In this section of the study, I will exemplify nature that has been intensely subjected to urban interventions driven by dominant urban and environmental policies. In this context, the focus is on how urban space and nature are reconfigured through interventions and counter-struggles, and how urban nature is transformed into a space of urban ecological resistance.

In the 21st century, nature and the city not only encompass and contain each other but also change scale and dimensions... This period has seen extensive interferences, with underground resources and the surface being utilized and even exploited under human dominion. From animals to other components of nature, power has been harnessed to carry out these transformations, making the city, nature, and the environment deeply intertwined... From this perspective, viewing nature or the environment as a tool for urbanization—or, to speak from a more political standpoint, as a means for capital accumulation—and linking the continuity of the system with the persistence of neoliberal capitalist production relations, and considering it within the context of economic progress, explains everything that is happening today in Ayvalık, including all interventions and crises related to the environment. (Interview 2)

Theme of Resistance / Ongoing Opposition	Construction in a protected nature park	Interference in protected area	Coastal exploitation	Privatization	Mining	Pollution
Construction on the traces of Historic Ayvalık Academy		X				
Construction of Pateriça Academic Village within natural protected area	X	X		X		
Privatization process of Virgin Mary Monastery	X	X		X		
Luxury Housing within the borders of natural protected area	X	X		X		
Protests Against a Master Plan for Tavuk Island	X	X		X		
Resistance against Privatization process of Ayışığı Monastery	X	X		X		
Resistance against the construction of Ortunç Hotel on a bay within the protected natural area	X	X		X		
The campaign of #DoNotTouchMyOlives	X	X		X		
Interventions on Sarımsaklı Coast	X	X	X	X		
Ongoing Construction on Marina	X	X	X	X		
Protest of "The Shores Belong to the People"	X	X	X	X		
Protest of "We are All On The Coast"	X	X	X	X		
Campaign against the privatization of coastal areas	X	X	X	X		
Protests against the construction of Altınova Hotel disregarding the coastline law			X	X		
Protests against Doğuş Pirina Factory				X		X
Protests against Karaayıt Mining				X	X	X
Protests against Altınova Iron Ore Mining			X	X	X	

Table 3. Categorization of urban ecological movements in terms of their themes of resistance.

One of the most clear reflections of the neoliberal urbanization of nature in Ayvalık is the brutal influence and control by the government and capital holders over the environment. In order to understand the various forms and expressions of urban interference towards nature, these instances of "influence and control" were subjected to analysis and classified into six distinct categories, which are (i) construction in a protected nature park, (ii) interference in a protected area, (iii) coastal exploitation, (iv) privatization, (v) mining, and (vi) pollution (Table 3). Accordingly, it has been observed that the capitalist production of nature mainly arises as the privatization of common goods and natural resources, which gets increasingly disruptive for the daily

use of the public space by neoliberal domination. Each group is scrutinized on its own to delve into the specificity of Ayvalık in discussing urban nature and urban ecological movements.

i. Construction in a Protected Nature Park

The interferences that emerged within the drawn boundaries of the Ayvalık Islands Nature Park were classified under the heading of “Construction in a protected nature park.” Given that the legal protection status of a nature park is higher than that of the natural protected area⁹, it can be inferred that substantial interventions undertaken or planned for these regions not only cause negative effects on the natural environment but also contradict pertinent legislation. Additionally, the structures, which bear the names of the country's high-income families, serve to exemplify how nature can be commodified under the leadership of individual desires and demands (Figure 3.13).

One of the areas most profoundly affected by the privatization process in Ayvalık is Pateriça, located in the northern part of Cunda. This area comprises two settlements, commonly referred to as the First Village and the Second Village. The Second Village was purchased by the Sabancı family and repurposed as part of the "Academic Village" initiative. However, despite the project's completion in 2012, its current status remains uncertain.

At the northernmost tip of the Pateriça Peninsula, where a steep hill meets the sea, stands the Ayışığı Monastery, a historical structure believed to date back to the eighteenth century or earlier. The restoration of Ayışığı Monastery was framed around the concept of a "Museum Structure," intended to highlight its architectural features. Officially, restorations within a National Park or protected area are permitted only if the building serves as a museum. However, rather than fulfilling this intended public function, the monastery now serves as a private residence for the Sabancı family. The monastery and its surrounding area are designated as a first-degree protected natural site and hold the status of a Nature Park. Despite these protections, the Sabancı family, who also acquired the monastery, purchased another plot on the Hakkıbey Peninsula containing a small ruin. Although construction was legally prohibited due to the site's protected status, they proceeded to build a substantial structure on the land.

⁹ For further information regarding the regulation on the procedures and principles regarding the identification, registration, and approval of protected area refer to <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr> and <https://tvk.csb.gov.tr/sss/dogal-sit>.



Figure 3.13 Views of the private properties on the protected natural park. Google Earth

A similar case can be observed with the Virgin Mary Monastery, which was acquired in 1992 by the Komili family, along with the surrounding olive groves. Following its restoration, the monastery was converted into private property, restricting public access and instead serving as a private residence. The presence of additional private residences within the Nature Park, many featuring exclusive piers extending into the sea, further illustrates how ongoing interventions in Ayvalık are deeply intertwined with capital interests.

When I think about what is happening around me, what the big company owners and wealthy names are doing here, it is certainly not independent of capital. Ayvalık is a special place. At least for a while, it's a place they can enjoy. But once it's ruined, they'll abandon this place too, just like Bodrum. (Interview, 3)

ii. Interference in a Protected Area

The natural, cultural, and built environments of Ayvalık are protected not only by the designation of a natural park, but also by the establishment of urban, and archaeological protected areas.¹⁰ Consequently, urban and coastal encroachment within the protected areas is subject to a different category, including the construction of private property in natural parks, and protected areas. To illustrate, the status of Sarımsaklı Beach has been subject to continuous alteration, particularly in the wake of legislative amendments numbered 1424441 and 4546443 in 2021 and 2022, respectively, and the decision numbered 7516 published in the Official Gazette in 2023. The most recent decision has designated the area as a "sustainable protection and controlled utilization area." This legal status has consequently left the Sarımsaklı region vulnerable to development, as it permits low-density activities, tourism, and settlements. Despite the region's ecological diversity and its status as a Blue Flag beach, which makes it worthy of protection, tourism and profit-driven construction have commenced on and around the beach.

The marina project, on the other hand, was carried out by Koç Group. It was achieved through amendments to the Coastal Law Regulation and so through an increase in the maximum allowable floor area ratio within the Ayvalık urban protected area. In addition to the visible concrete structures that have been built along the coastline in the region, a housing unit has also been constructed directly on the seashore (Figure 3.14). Coastal areas, which have become a stage for capital holders to display their power, are being legitimized through a series of amendments to coastal regulations and laws, thereby being incorporated into the image of the city. In this context, both the marina project and the construction on the coast of Sarımsaklı exemplify a range of ecological resistance themes, including privatization, coastal degradation, and intervention in protected areas.

In his article "The \$1 Million Tragedy and the Marina Wars of Capital", Özgür (2024) also points out the symbolic appearance of a marina as the showcase of capital, by mentioning that yacht marinas are excellent mirrors for observing competition among capitalists and the role of politics, since they address entirely the wealthy and symbols of high-ranking financial power. Their size and luxury are directly proportional to affluence.

¹⁰ See Conservation Board Decisions: <https://korumakurullari.ktb.gov.tr/TR-294254/balikesir.html/>



Figure 3.14 Marina started to be constructed along the coastline. Source: ATP.

iii. Coastal Exploitation

In the wake of the 2014 local elections, a substantial part of the coastal area in Sarımsaklı Beach was leased to the Metropolitan Municipality with the intention, as expressed by the municipality, of capitalizing on and incorporating it into the market to promote Ayvalık as a global brand and boost tourism (Durgun, 2023). The initial proposal according to this intention was unveiled in 2015, however, postponed due to strong oppositions from the community of Ayvalık. Nevertheless, as of 2021, Sarımsaklı coast has been reclassified from a 'public beach' to a 'sustainable protection and controlled utilization area', rendering the existing plan ineffective. Based on this, the construction on the beach has started following the proposed design (Figure 3.15). The natural environment was attempted to be instrumentalized as an accumulation strategy. It is defined as an urbanized intervention that has led the way for the further construction of Sarımsaklı and the marketing of Ayvalık under the name of tourism (Figure 3.16). As discussed earlier, alterations in the conservation status of areas in Ayvalık, influenced by top-down decisions, are dominant factors shaping the condition of 'natural' spaces within the current neoliberal urbanization dynamics.

This change in Sarımsaklı coast has paved the way for construction under the label of 'Recreation Area,' marking the final step of a long-planned project. Despite claims by authorities that the ongoing construction on Sarımsaklı beach is situated in a degraded sandy area, this assertion does not align with the actual circumstances. Since the enactment of the Metropolitan law, as discussed in the previous sections, district governance has also been marginalized in addressing this dimension of the socio-environmental crisis.



Figure 3.15 Excavator traces on sand, Sarımsaklı. Photographs are taken by the author in January 2024.

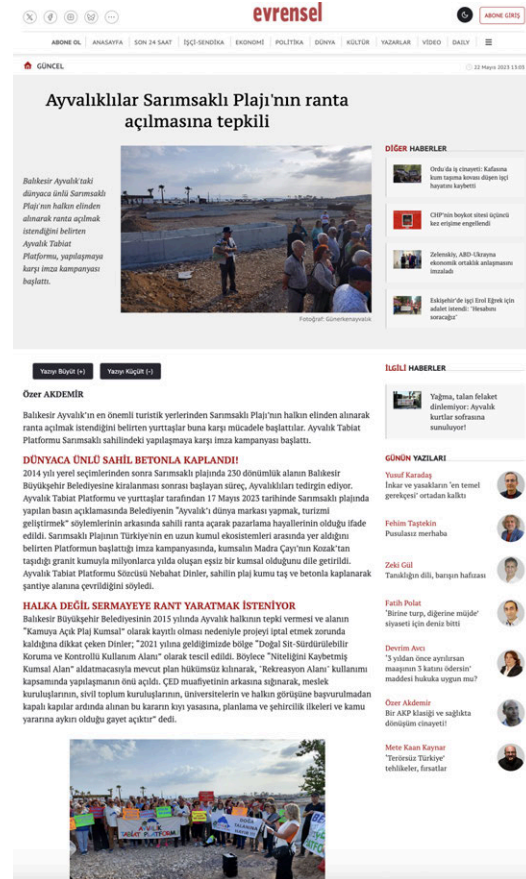


Figure 3.16 News reports highlighting criticism of coastal exploitation and urban development on Sarımsaklı Beach, Ayvalık. (Durgun, 2023; Akdemir, 2023)

In addition to this, despite repeated claims by Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality that the process was conducted with public participation through field research in 2022, the project has encountered significant opposition from both the local populace and resistance groups; the criticisms mainly pointing out the deviations from coastal law, planning and urbanization principles, and public interest. Representatives from

the Ayvalık Nature Platform contend that the project, executed not for the public but rather in opposition to the public, aims to create new areas for capitalist exploitation (Durgun, 2023). Resistance groups argue that in this project, as in many urban projects, public decision-making, influence, and participation are not prioritized.

iv. Privatization

It was observed that the capitalist production of urban nature in Ayvalık is largely the result of the privatization of common goods and natural resources. This process has the effect of disrupting the daily use of public space, a consequence of neoliberal domination. In this sense, to illustrate the cases of privatization, two different instances – the constructions on Tavuk Island and Altınova coast will be scrutinized which explicitly depicts the role of capital in the commodification of urban nature.

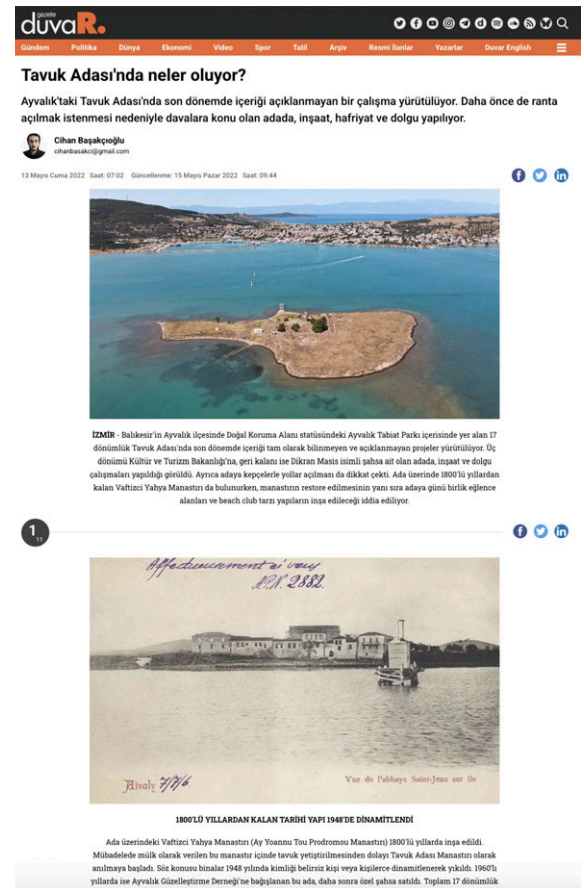
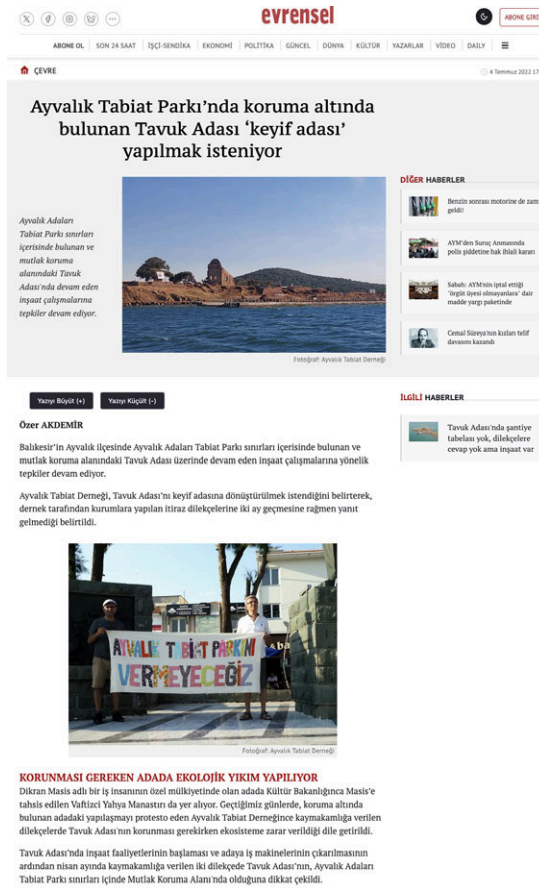


Figure 3.17 News reports on the encroachment and privatization attempts on Tavuk island, addressing both ecological concerns and the demolition of historical heritage (Akdemir, 2022; Başakçioğlu, 2022)

Tavuk Island, located 700 meters from Cunda Island, is designated as a natural protected-qualified protection area, and it is within the boundaries of the Ayvalık Islands Nature Park (Council of Ministers, 21.05.1995/22265; Ministry of

Environment and Urbanization, 02.08.2021/1424349). The site comprises the registered, historic Agios Ioannis Prodromos Monastery (ÇKTVKBK, 17.11.2005/1556). In 2012, under the direction of the Balıkesir National Forces Museum Directorate, an excavation, and cleaning were carried out at the monastery to reveal the remains of the foundation and ruined structures (Jale, 2013, p.29). During this period, a project was prepared with the aim of restoration, but rejected by the Balıkesir Regional Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, and it was not implemented (Sağlam, 2022, p. 27; see Nevzat Sayın Architecture, 2013). However, in 2022, an image of another project (Figure 3.18) appeared in the media which is quite similar to the previous one in nature (Kasap, 2022); shortly thereafter, the initiation of physical work on the island and the installation of a construction sign confirmed that the current project had been approved and put into action. It was observed that construction and fill work were being carried out on the island (Sağlam, 2022a).



Figure 3.18 Design proposal for Tavuk Island (Şahin, 2023)

A big portion of the area is privately owned by a capital owner. The reconstruction of the monastery's pier by removing soil from the center of the island with heavy machinery and creating a sea fill is, as seen in recent aerial photographs, destroying the island's natural topography, vegetation, shoreline, and seabed (Figure 3.17). All of these activities violate both the Long-Term Development Plan and the principles of being natural protected areas (Sağlam, 2022a).

Another example showing the urban interference towards nature from the perspective of privatization is the construction of a residential block on the coastline of Altınova. Despite the construction ban imposed by the Ayvalık Municipality, a five-story

residential building—even though the project was originally approved as a hotel, was constructed. The structure extends as close as 10 to 15 meters from the sea, and it is approximately 20 meters high (Yılmaz, 2022). The residents of Altınova and activists strongly opposed the construction. Members of the initiative shared the following information regarding the project: "As residents of this area, we are facing significant challenges. Initially planned as five separate blocks, the project later emerged as a single massive concrete structure, severely impacting the local ecosystem and air quality" (Durgun, 2024).

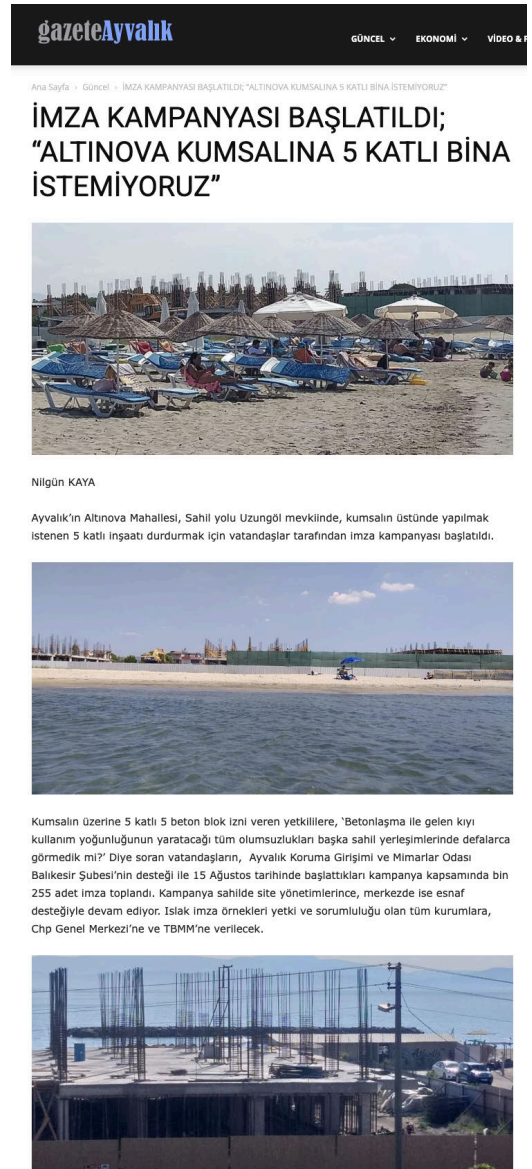
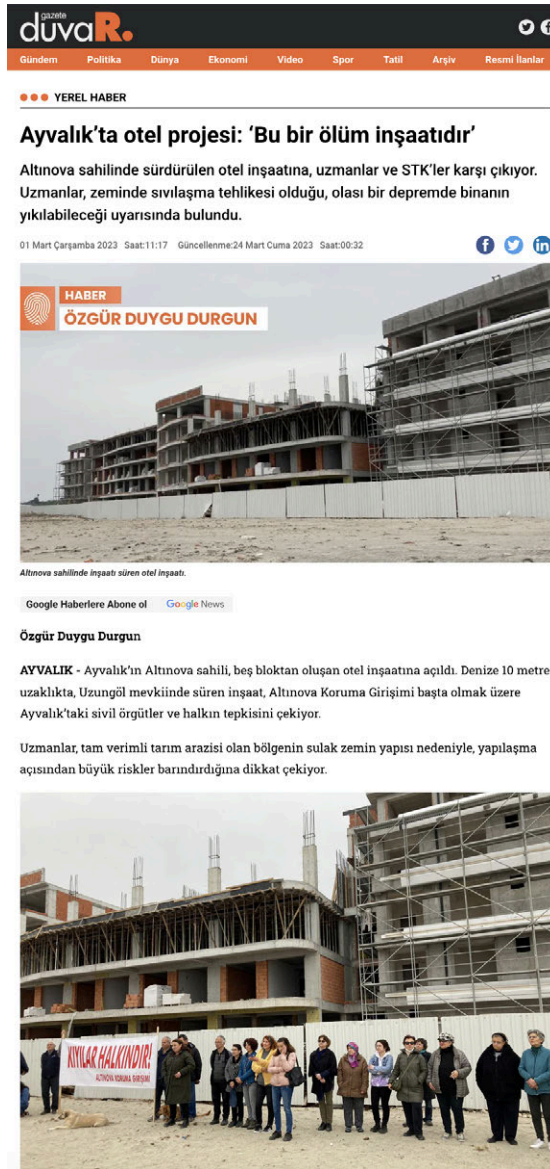


Figure 3.19 News articles highlighting public opposition and warnings against the hotel construction project on Altınova beach, Ayvalık (Durgun, 2023; Kaya, 2023)

The initiative further highlighted that the risk of coastal erosion in Altınova has been overlooked. Additionally, the Environmental Impact Assessment process was entirely

bypassed, as the construction permit was issued by the Ayvalık Municipality for a 94-room hotel, allowing the project to proceed without the necessary environmental evaluation. Balconies on the seaward side of the building are now being expanded, and private entryways leading directly from the structure to the beach are constructed (Figure 3.19). This raises concerns that the area is being transformed into a private beach for the facility. The initiative warned that the construction disrupts the region's natural air corridors, while well water in the area has already started to show signs of contamination. Characterizing the project as a "series of legal and environmental violations," activists emphasized that it not only violates the Coastal Law but is also on the verge of encroaching upon public beach areas.

v. Mining

While urban ecological struggles in Ayvalık predominantly concentrated along the coastline, numerous resistances have emerged in the hinterland areas as well, particularly against the exploitation of nature driven by activities such as mining and dam construction. Strategic initiatives are primarily devised for coastal regions, with resistance actors explicitly addressing the 'unregulated degradation' of these areas in their discourse of protest. However, while environmental destruction in the hinterland is not as explicitly addressed, capitalist exploitation in these areas remains significant. Despite their interconnectedness within the broader process of urbanization, resistance movements in coastal and hinterland areas differ in terms of their actors, motivations, and goals, highlighting distinct concerns related to socio-environmental justice.



Figure 3.20 Satellite image showing Karaayrt mining facilities. Google Earth.

The mining area in Ayvalık is known as ‘Bilfer Madencilik;’ it is in the privately-owned operational landscape, which “both result from and facilitate the dynamics of urban agglomeration” (Arboleda, 2016, p. 99; also see Brenner, 2014; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014). It is located near the village of Karaayıt in the hinterland of Ayvalık district (Figure 3.20). Since the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources considers the company's operations as vested rights and resists the annulment, the mining license for the quarry that was acquired in the 1950s remains in force even though the assigned site and the functions listed had changed over time (Ekoloji Birliği, 2021; Yeşil Gazete, 2021). Consequently, on one hand, the open-pit segment of the mine, encroaching upon the grazing land of Karaayıt Village, has operated for an extended period, and it is exempt from Environmental Impact Assessment reports. On the other hand, the recurrent collapses in the mine's waste storage area (it collapsed twice in 2019 and once in 2021) result in severe environmental ramifications from heavy metal contamination and raise particular concern due to the proximity to the Madra Dam and the village of Karaayıt (Akdemir, 2023a). The alarming arsenic levels detected in the drinking water of settlements, including Karaayıt Village and five adjacent villages, underscore the severity of the situation (Gazete Duvar, 2021). Nevertheless, the collapse of the mine's waste storage areas, instead of rendering the mine defunct, has provoked attempts to explore alternative ways for expanding its activities. Thus, the nature that has urbanized through illicit means has been used as a tool to accumulate capital over the years, depicting the unevenness of urbanization.



Figure 3.21 A photograph taken after the mine's waste storage collapsed in December 2021 (Politeknik, 2021)

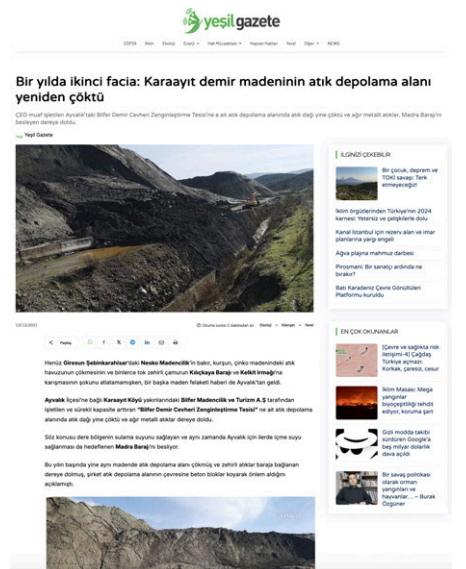


Figure 3.22 News articles highlighting the ecological concerns related to mining facilities (Akdemir, 2021, 2023; Bahtiyar, 2019; Yeşil Gazete, 2021).

As Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago (2014, p. 237) specifies while evaluating the role of extended urbanization concerning the ‘operational landscapes of capitalism’, neo-liberalized urbanization constitutes new urban territories of capitalism, or the capitalist mode of territorialization. In that sense, one of the reflections of neoliberal urbanization is given as ‘the material dimensions of privatization processes’ embracing a large variety of the plundering of natural resources and the global commons through ‘appropriating and instrumentalizing’ them where the urban fabric is currently expanding, thickening and rescaling (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014, p. 255). That interwoven relationship between overgrowth and undergrowth, or in other

words how nature has been exploited and provided overgrowth of capital, is necessary to conceptualize contemporary urbanization and its advanced development (Merrifield, 2014c).

In light of the mine's extended functionality through unauthorized means, this socio-ecological crisis is characterized as an 'organized crime committed against society and nature by political will and capital' (Politeknik, 2021). Activists stated that environmental impact reports deviate from their intended purpose, transforming into arguments of plunder that align with the goals of capitalism (Başakçioğlu, 2021). In this sense, the local community has experienced vulnerability due to the operationalized landscape located in proximity to residential areas (Figure 3.21), losing both their pastures where they grazed their animals, and the surrounding water sources were also negatively affected by the collapse of the mine waste storage areas (Figure 3.22). Indeed, although the local people continue to inhabit the same location in terms of spatial means, the tangible manifestation of capitalist accumulation, particularly through dispossession, is clear in terms of socio-environmental injustice. As Arboleda (2016b, p. 102) expresses by giving reference to Fuentes (2012), "the underground is owned by the state, regardless of any property rights over the surface"; the government has the authority to expropriate privately owned lands. Accordingly, the question of whose nature is urbanized or is urbanizing together with whose right is demanded must be at the heart of any radical political endeavor (Heynen et al., 2005; Marcuse, 2012).

Final Words on Urban Interference Towards Nature

While this study focuses on urban interventions in nature as exemplified by Ayvalık, it is clear that Ayvalık and its resistance groups are not solely addressing matters of local concern. While locally relevant issues do play a role in the spatialization and politicization of resistance, it would be misleading to expect environmental issues to remain confined to the local level in the dynamics of a globalized world. A variety of campaigns have been conducted in Ayvalık with the objective of raising awareness and garnering support for environmental disasters that have captured the nation's attention in recent years.¹¹ Additionally, the campaigns have sought to prevent

¹¹ Recent examples include: a) The Akbelen Forest resistance (2023), a widely publicized local struggle against deforestation caused by coal mining expansion in the Muğla province, which sparked nationwide environmental solidarity. b) The February 6th, 2023 earthquake, which caused widespread destruction and loss of life in Turkey's southeastern region, drawing attention to the intersection of urban planning, disaster management, and ecological vulnerability. c) The Erzincan İliç gold mine disaster (2024), where a cyanide-contaminated

amendments to laws and regulations that accelerate and exacerbate the urbanization of nature. They have also advocated for the enforcement of existing coastal and environmental regulations. The ecological-global connections forged by these campaigns by bringing direct bodily engagement in Ayvalık, addressing different geographies and themes, serve to elevate Ayvalık from its previous position at the periphery of urbanization to a central position within the context of global production relations.

This issue [Environmental concerns in Ayvalık] is not merely a matter of local or national concern; rather, it is an international and universal phenomenon. We are witnessing the emergence of a global production relationship that has global ramifications, as evidenced by its manifestation in Turkey, from the Marmara Region to the country's coastal areas, and from there to Ayvalık. Furthermore, within the Ayvalık group, the concerns of other locations are also being discussed and shared from time to time. (Interview, 2)

In the context of urbanization, which involves a complex process of creating and sustaining the built environment where global capital structures and daily activities are interconnected (Wachsmuth, 2014), these operational environments of resource extraction not only contribute to marginalization and dispossession but also establish new centralities and occasions for interaction among communities or individuals that were previously isolated (Arboleda, 2016b). Within the context of extended urbanization, the urbanized interventions that exacerbate the socio-environmental injustices uncover the unevenness of complete urbanization. Hence, adopting an ex-centric position regarding the urban, as the current urban political ecology perspective suggests, presents an opportunity to delineate the effects of diverse relationships and interactions between centralities and peripheries; it reveals the intricate interaction involving interconnected yet conflicting processes characterized by the uneven progression of capitalism and various distinct social and political determinants (Schmid, 2018).

While Lefebvre (1991) calls attention to the essence of the urban, likening it to an expansive and diverse whirlpool replete with the ambivalence of a space brimming with opportunities, playfulness, and liberating potential, yet deliberately underlines the intricate intimacy with the areas of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization. The urban, thus, appears to embody the prospect of emancipation and freedom, adeptly wielding the tools of repression and domination (Sassen et al., 1999).

landslide at a gold mining site caused severe environmental pollution and raised public opposition over mining safety regulations and ecological risks across Turkey.

Similarly, the escalating environmental conflicts in the neoliberal era, underscore significant deficiencies in current policies from the standpoint of social-environmental justice (Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vazquez, 2018), highlighting, perhaps more prominently than in previous instances, capitalism's inherent inadequacy in devising a constructive approach to the governance of the biophysical realm (Harvey, 2011b). Discussing these forms of conflict from the local perspective and within the context of local issues and areas of intervention fosters further discussions for urbanization and environmental movements.

Being local, being in the local context, means experiencing the local issues more intensely, and becoming more familiar with the actors, decision-makers, dissenters, and conflicts related to that place. The city and urbanization are not only places where contradictions and conflicts exist, but also where they are produced. This is inevitable, as different interests come into conflict, and the outcomes are shaped according to whose interests prevail. (Interview, 2)

Even though the potential of the right to nature to present a fundamentally distinct perspective on environmental struggles remains evident through accentuating the requirement for collective efforts toward social and environmental justice, the actualization of its emancipatory potential is increasingly challenging due to the socio-political dynamics inherited from neoliberal urbanization.

3.3.2. SITES OF PROTEST

Sites of protest are the spatial manifestations of public opposition. They vary according to the methods and ways that collective forms of practice operate. The social practices that have emerged in response to ongoing spatial and environmental interferences in Ayvalık manifest in the form of petition campaigns, press statements, and organizing demonstrations; the sites hosting these movements show the differentiated modes of urbanization by looking at the emerging social practices. The resistances that we would like to specifically mention in this section are the 'Beach Towel Revolt' that took place in Sarımsaklı beach and the coastal resistances mobilized with the frame of "We are all on the coast," reclaiming the coastal areas by demanding the right to the city and nature (Figure 3.23).

The most recent protest in Ayvalık concerns the privatization of the coasts and demanding the implication of existing coastal laws; it has spatialized in various points locally and nationally encompassing the other coastal towns, i.e. Bodrum,

Datça, Çeşme, Fethiye, Burgazada, Daylan, etc. The struggle has evolved into an urban ecological movement because of the reason for it and the connections established among the national sites of resistance. The interconnectedness of sites of protest emphasizes the powerful potential of environmental issues to resonate with one another, making it easier to achieve collective unity in the resistance. In this regard, while Sarımsaklı Beach stands as a protest site that overlaps directly with the object of contention, other instances in Ayvalık illustrate how spatial strategies of resistance can also unfold in more symbolically charged or centrally located public spaces.



Figure 3.23 Campaign of We are all on the Coast, “Hepimiz Kıyıda’yız”. Source: ATP

Over the past decade, various forms of resistance have emerged in Ayvalık, addressing a wide range of environmental and urban issues. While the thematic scope of these struggles is diverse, the spatialization of protest actions can generally be

grouped under two main categories. In some cases, the protests take place directly at the sites under threat, spatially overlapping with the object of resistance. In other instances, protests are relocated to symbolically significant or more accessible locations, thereby gaining visibility and facilitating broader participation. For example, in response to construction projects along the coasts of Altınova and Sarımsaklı, resistance materialized on-site through bodily participation, where protesters occupied the threatened spaces. In contrast, protests against the zoning of olive groves were organized in Cumhuriyet Square, and signature campaigns against forest developments took place in Armutçuk Market Area. These examples reveal how certain protest sites become extensions or reflections of broader struggles, even when they are not physically situated at the epicenter of the contested spaces.



Figure 3.24 Everyday spaces of resistance in Ayvalık (Photographs are taken from Kaya, 2023; Anka Haber; Google Earth).

Cumhuriyet Square stands out as a key location for protest in Ayvalık. Located in the heart of the historic town center, the square is a functional space for making collective demands visible due to its centrality, accessibility, and symbolic value. Over the years, it has hosted May Day celebrations, festivals, women's rights movements, labor strikes, and collective demonstrations aligned with broader organizational networks—such as environmental protests not tied to a single site, like the coastal movements. The Armutçuk Market Area, on the other hand, is situated close to the square, and another noteworthy protest site. Particularly on market days,

it becomes a strategic space for mobilizing public support through signature campaigns and outreach. These everyday spaces gain political significance as they are integrated into ecological resistance movements. Given that environmental struggles are often perceived as more accessible forms of activism, the transformation of familiar, daily-life spaces into sites of protest reinforces their participatory and inclusive character.

On the other hand, the ongoing construction on Sarımsaklı Beach and the restriction of public access have manifested in a form of protest rarely encountered in an 'urban' context, as part of broader urban and environmental activism by the local people and resistance groups. In response to the call by the AKVG and ATP under the 'Beaches Belong to the People' movement, residents of Ayvalık mobilized in streets, squares, and beaches symbolically using 'beach towels' to claim the right to the city and reappropriate the contested urban space through bodily engagement.¹² Soon after the actions and press statements of activists from the ATP, environmental volunteers, and the AKVG began to be organized at Sarımsaklı Beach, the area was transformed from a site of daily life into a space for activism (Figure 3.25). These individuals, institutions, and initiatives, characterized by their opposition, played a crucial role in the spatial transformation of the beach by organizing activities that intertwined with the ordinary flow of daily life at the beach—events that would otherwise be considered unusual and extraordinary at any other beach.



Figure 3.25 A photograph taken during an urban ecological movement happening in Sarımsaklı. Source: ATP

¹² Originating as a reaction to beach leasing and the failure to provide free beach access to the public beyond leased areas, the 'Towel Movement' originated in Greece, later gaining momentum on the coasts of Spain and Turkey.

Through their practices, Sarımsaklı Beach has been transformed and differentiated, becoming a place where political activism has become an ordinary part of everyday life. This illustrates how the daily routine in a space where urban and non-urban intersect is momentarily disrupted by the dynamics of differential urbanization, transforming the beach into both a site of protest and a site of resistance (Dinçer, 2016). Therefore, while Sarımsaklı Beach is ecologically significant due to its endemic plant diversity and holds importance as a popular tourism and holiday destination, it can be said that the activism on the beach has further emphasized its distinctiveness distinguishing it from other beaches.

What sets Sarımsaklı Beach apart is the intertwining of daily life with political activities in a space where the effects of environmental destruction and neoliberal urban and environmental policies are most clearly observed. Notably, the Beach Towel Revolt transformed the most common activity on the beach—sunbathing—into an expression of protest, making protest a natural part of life at the beach. This convergence and integration mean that the beach is seen as more than just a site for demonstrations; it allows the potential for individuals from the flow of everyday life at the beach to participate in the resistance. Thus, resistance becomes a practice that can be experienced within daily life, even at the beach, allowing anyone to become an actor in collective activism. Here, the ease and perceived 'safety' of participating in resistance efforts with an environmental aspect, compared to other types, undoubtedly has a significant impact.

I find the ecological struggle to be somewhat successful because it is one of the forms of activism that people find most comfortable and easy to participate in. They start out with a love for nature and animals, and it doesn't necessarily require a serious political consciousness at first. That political awareness develops throughout the process. (Interview 3)

These actions occur as practices that do not interrupt the ongoing daily life at the beach, but rather integrate into it. Political activities and sunbathing, along with swimming, occur in the same space, becoming intertwined. Yet, the protest was not limited to a certain site; with resonance on social media among locals of Ayvalık, it also evolved into action to protect public areas under the Coastal Law. These protests highlighted the socio-ecological exploitation occurring in an area previously designated as a 'Public Open Beach,' now reclassified as a 'Recreation Area.' Hence, the ongoing socio-environmental exploitation and urban ecological movements in the

Sarımsaklı coast exemplify the urbanized interventions during the period of neoliberal urbanization.

3.4. ACTORS OF RESISTANCE

The urban ecological movements in Ayvalık are sustained by a diverse coalition of civil society organizations, associations, and community initiatives actively engaged in resistance against environmental degradation and unregulated urban development (Figure 3.26). Among these, the Ayvalık Initiative for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage (Ayvalık Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Girişimi–AKVG), Ayvalık Nature Platform (Ayvalık Tabiat Platformu–ATP), Altınova Conservation Initiative (Altınova Koruma Girişimi–AKG), and Ayvalık Local Initiative (Ayvalık Yerel Hareketi–AYK) stand out as the most prominent civil structures, each playing a distinct yet interconnected role in the struggle.

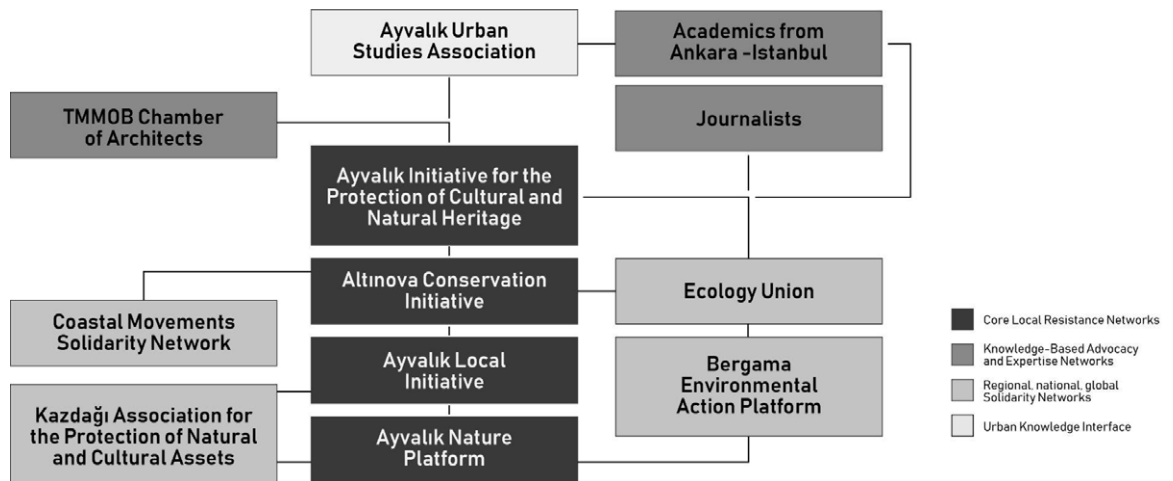


Figure 3.26 Diagram illustrating the network among the actors of resistance. Produced by the author.

The ATP and AKG are at the forefront of ecology-based resistance, focusing on the protection of Ayvalık’s natural environment, coastal ecosystems, and biodiversity. These organizations conduct scientific research, monitor environmental threats, and engage in advocacy efforts to challenge unsustainable development projects. ATP, in particular, has been instrumental in raising public awareness and mobilizing grassroots support for ecological preservation, while AKG concentrates on the conservation of Altınova’s fragile coastal landscape, resisting illegal construction and environmentally harmful policies.

Founded in 2009 as a response to the proposed revision of the Ayvalık Islands Nature Park's conservation status, ATP initially operated under the name "Platform for the Protection of Ayvalık Islands Nature Park." Its early mission was to oppose the impending revision plan that threatened the ecological balance of the islands. Over time, however, ATP redefined its identity, adopting its current name and expanding its scope of resistance. Rather than limiting itself to designated conservation zones, the platform restructured its agenda to contest any spatial intervention that prioritized capital accumulation over ecological integrity and began organizing around a broader ecological critique, mobilizing against all forms of environmental degradation occurring under the guise of "development."

By 2012, as ecological destruction intensified across different regions in Turkey, Ayvalık too began to face similar pressures. Following this, ATP responded to project applications for wind energy installations within the legally protected zones of the nature park, initiating a renewed cycle of resistance. In 2013, when a new revision plan resembling that of 2009 was drafted for the park, ATP launched a large-scale campaign opposing the plan. Shortly afterward, between late 2013 and early 2014, the platform also began to challenge the operations of Bilfer Mining Company due to its detrimental environmental impacts. At the time, ATP was the only actor of resistance which organized to resist the mine's expansion and the resulting ecological degradation in Karaayıt village.

The mine's effects—ranging from the occupation of pastures and contamination of local ecosystems to the repeated collapse of solid waste storage areas—transformed into a highly visible and politicized environmental crisis. Throughout this process, ATP's resistance exemplified a model of ecological activism rooted in long-term commitment, local knowledge, and grassroots mobilization, showing how a localized initiative can scale its agenda in response to expanding threats. In the current era, the organization holds its prominence by demonstrating the broadest act of resistance encompassing Cunda, Sarımsaklı, Altınova and Karaayıt. Their work extends beyond direct action, as they also collaborate with legal experts and policymakers to push for regulatory measures that prioritize ecological integrity.

In contrast, the AKVG directs its efforts toward safeguarding Ayvalık's urban and historical identity, recognizing the deep interconnection between cultural heritage and ecological sustainability. This commitment has taken concrete form with the establishment of the Ayvalık Urban Studies Institute, which serves as a platform for

interdisciplinary research and policy discussions. Bringing together academics and urban scholars, the institute facilitates studies on Ayvalık's spatial, architectural, and social history, producing knowledge that informs both activism and urban governance. Through these efforts, AKVG not only works to preserve the city's historical fabric but also strengthens its role as a living archive of collective memory.

The AYK plays a crucial role in localizing the movement, ensuring that the resistance garners active support from Ayvalık's residents. By fostering dialogue between community members and activist groups, AYK bridges the gap between organized advocacy and grassroots participation, reinforcing the legitimacy of the struggle. This localization is vital in sustaining long-term opposition, as it allows residents to see themselves as direct stakeholders in decisions that shape their urban and environmental future.

Beyond these core organizations, the Bergama Environmental Action Platform (Bergama Çevre Platformu–BEP) and Ecology Union (Ekoloji Birliği–EB) contribute by ensuring that the resistance initiated in other parts of Turkey resonates in Ayvalık. Their involvement highlights how ecological struggles are interconnected, demonstrating that Ayvalık's fight is part of a broader movement against environmental injustice. By sharing resources, knowledge, and strategies, BEP and EB amplify local resistance efforts, reinforcing the importance of solidarity in environmental advocacy.

Additionally, the Coastal Movements Solidarity Network (Kıyı Hareketleri Dayanışma Ağı–KDA) plays a critical role in connecting different coastal cities engaged in similar struggles, facilitating the expansion of Ayvalık's resistance from a local to a national scale. By fostering collaborations among movements from different geographies, KDA enables knowledge exchange and strengthens collective action against the systemic threats faced by coastal environments. Through this network, localized struggles gain broader visibility, allowing activists to learn from each other's experiences and develop strategies that account for diverse spatial and socio-political contexts.

While the core of the movement consists of local activists and organizations, external support from experts, academics, and professionals also plays a significant role. Scholars and researchers from Istanbul and Ankara actively contribute by providing their expertise in urban studies, environmental policy, and legal frameworks. Their

involvement enhances the movement's analytical depth, ensuring that opposition efforts are grounded in well-researched arguments. Additionally, members of the TMMOB Chamber of Architects and the TİP Balıkesir Branch, while not actively participating in protests, offer crucial support through their professional knowledge, assisting in legal battles, urban planning assessments, and petition campaigns.

Through this multi-layered network of local, regional, and national actors, the resistance in Ayvalık is both deeply rooted in the local community and connected to broader movements advocating for environmental and urban justice. This interplay between grassroots activism, academic engagement, and institutional support strengthens the movement's impact, positioning Ayvalık as a key site in the ongoing struggle for ecological and cultural preservation. In addition to the participation of locals in these groups, academics and experts from Istanbul and Ankara, so the metropolitan actors also actively contribute to the opposition. Their expertise is consulted at critical points, offering guidance, knowledge, and experience for the organization of actions.

We draw upon the strategies, knowledge, expertise, and collaborative support from the surrounding metropolitan cities for our environmental initiatives, especially seeking expert counsel when necessary. (Interview 1)

In this context, the collaboration between metropolitan and local actors in the resistance is noteworthy. However, it would be a mistake to define the 'local' solely as those who reside in Ayvalık. The group that identifies local issues and seeks solutions can be considered part of the local community involved in the urban ecological struggles in Ayvalık.

It is possible to describe as 'local' those who spend their daily lives in a place and thus interact with it. In this sense, being local does not necessarily mean being from that place, of course. You may have been there for 40 or 50 years, living there, but have never cared about any of the issues there; you've lived your daily life as you pleased and never engaged in any social issues beyond the basic rights generally offered to citizens, such as voting. You may have never participated in any community meetings, never interacted with anyone to develop an opinion about the place, and perhaps you've only spoken about it to yourself at home or elsewhere. But if you haven't done so with the intent of creating social change, trying new approaches, forming new ideas, or developing new tactics, then simply being from there or living there won't have much transformative value or contribution... Those who live their daily lives in Ayvalık certainly encounter problems related to Ayvalık more frequently. If they engage with these issues when they arise, if they intervene and take part in efforts to change things, then, in my definition, this corresponds to what can be called 'locality.' (Interview 2)

In this context, the actors who do not spend their daily lives in Ayvalık and are not directly confronted with local issues, but contribute from Istanbul and Ankara, are considered metropolitan actors of the resistance. Particularly, the actors from Istanbul, with the experience they gained from the Gezi Protests, are now bringing their perspectives on finding solutions to ongoing environmental issues and their political implications.

The relationship that metropolitan actors establish with Ayvalık is multidimensional and, in fact, independent of space when considering current global connections. In the context of networks formed through urbanization, Istanbul and Ayvalık are connected not only by trade networks but also by interaction networks. The environmental issues in Ayvalık concern not just that region but also surrounding provinces and, on a global scale, the entire planet. With this understanding, the metropolitan actors contributing to the resistance groups are 'organic parts' of the movement.

When considering actors like myself, I am not part of this daily context. I live in Istanbul. I was born and raised in Istanbul. I love Istanbul. I care about Istanbul, and I know that Istanbul is almost an unofficial capital and a city where tremendous global dynamics are at play. I see the international and broader connections and impacts of what happens here. What happens in Istanbul also affects Ayvalık. When I say I am an organic part of the movements here, this is what I mean. (Interview 2)

As revealed in the interviews, there is a sense of common interest, unity, and solidarity that arises from being together in a shared space and holding a collective identity as environmental activists in spaces of resistance. They are consciously aware of both rights; and envision accessing inclusive spaces by opposing the capitalist exploitation process of nature exacerbated by neoliberal urbanization (Purcell, 2002). The discourses of resistance, therefore, refer to the right to nature, as both a mobilizing slogan and a political idea (Harvey, 2008). They aim to counteract the persistent exploitation of both human and non-human elements of urban nature, as well as urban space, by certain capitalist interests through the intention of proposing alternatives to address inequality and reimagine the concept of the commons (Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vazquez, 2018; Apostolopoulou and Kotsila, 2022; Apostolopoulou, 2022; 2023).

All these dynamics unfold within the domains of power, where social actors endeavour to defend, claim or even shape their respective environments amid class, ethnic, racialized, and/or gender conflicts and power struggles (Davis, 1996). Hence,

in response to the relentless neoliberal exploitation of nature, new sets of socio-spatial relations have been produced in the form of urban ecological movements that have arisen in opposition to socio-spatial and socio-environmental inequalities, as well as the undemocratic nature of spatial change (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). The urban ecological movements in Ayvalık are a part of the dynamics in the urbanization process also through the deliberate resistance exhibited by the actors of resistance embodying a metropolitan identity.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This thesis has proposed that the shifting understanding of nature and the urban environment within the context of complete urbanization has led to a new conceptualization of environmental movements. This shift introduces a radical practice with the potential to challenge rent-seeking urban development while expressing claims to the right to the city and nature. In order to describe ecological struggles against urbanized interventions under conditions of complete urbanization, a new concept—urban ecological movements—has been introduced. By situating these movements within the framework of urban political ecology, this research has revealed how environmental mobilizations evolve in response to the changing conceptualization and perception of ‘nature’ under neoliberal urbanization. In doing so, it has examined the socio-spatial reflections of unequal urbanization dynamics, focusing on urban interventions in nature and the resulting forms of oppositional landscapes in Ayvalık.

Building on this argument, this thesis contributes to the broader literature on urban political ecology and resistance by demonstrating how environmental struggles are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of urbanization. The conceptualization of urban ecological movements expands existing discussions on environmental activism by emphasizing their embeddedness within urban processes. These movements do not merely oppose environmental degradation; they also articulate a broader critique of neoliberal urbanism and its socio-spatial inequalities. By focusing on Ayvalık as a case study, the research highlights the mechanisms through which environmental movements emerge, evolve, and reconfigure socio-spatial relations in response to state-driven spatial transformations. Through this analysis, the study positions urban ecological movements as both a theoretical category and a political phenomenon that reshapes the contested terrain of urbanization.

Lefebvre’s vision of the urban marked a radical shift in perspective, moving from analyzing the city as a static form to examining urbanization as a dynamic process. The assertion of ‘complete urbanization’ and ‘urban society’—which argues that the urbanization process has come to define the entire landscape (Lefebvre, 2003)—has

revitalized critical discussions on urbanization, the reconfiguration of urban and non-urban relations, and the transformation of environmental struggles. Within these dialectics, contemporary urbanization is increasingly recognized as an era characterized by entangled social and environmental interactions, which simultaneously impose new constraints on and create new opportunities for spatial appropriation, democratic engagement, and resistance (Purcell, 2002). As neoliberal urbanization intensifies socio-ecological inequalities, the need for radical urban imaginaries becomes even more urgent. The findings of this study demonstrate that contemporary urban ecological movements not only contest state-led spatial transformations but also articulate alternative visions for democratic, sustainable, and socially just urban environments. In this sense, the notion of the ‘right to nature’ functions as both a theoretical lens and a mobilizing force, shaping the demands of movements and reinforcing their claims for participatory decision-making and the reclaiming of urban nature.

The analysis of Ayvalık’s socio-spatial development over the past decade reveals how urban ecological struggles have been shaped by four key political and regulatory changes: (i) the designation of Balıkesir as a metropolitan city in 2014, following the enactment of metropolitan law in 2012, which altered Ayvalık’s local administrative powers; (ii) the cancellation of preservation plans for Ayvalık’s urban protected areas by the Balıkesir Conservation Board in 2018; (iii) the 2022 regulatory amendment by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, which permitted construction and prospecting activities in olive groves; and (iv) the downgrading of first-degree natural protected areas since 2015, facilitating urban expansion. These developments are not only crucial to see the impact of the governmental institutions and policies on urban space and nature, but they also illustrate the increasingly intertwined relationship between urban and nature, metropolitan and local, capital accumulation and socio-ecological crises.

By situating Ayvalık’s ecological struggles within the framework of urban political ecology, this study demonstrates that environmental conflicts are deeply embedded in broader urbanization processes. Rather than isolated incidents, these struggles reflect structural contradictions inherent in neoliberal urbanism. The findings underscore how nature is instrumentalized for capital accumulation, yet simultaneously becomes a focal point for resistance against spatial injustices. In response, actors of urban ecological movements, motivated by resistance to these changes, have united, fuelled by the conscious and organized efforts of metropolitan activists and local residents.

These urban ecological movements, challenging the undemocratic nature of spatial changes, generate new socio-spatial relations. These social formations, which are integral to the process of urbanization, highlight the significance of the concepts of the right to the city and the right to nature – which have emerged as both a slogan and a political ideal – in resisting capitalist-driven urbanization, or in other words, in building resilient cities and societies that can promote democracy. Hence, when considered in the context of market-driven and unequally developed urbanization processes, environmental struggles with the urban identity have the greater potential to give rise to alternative political ecologies that challenge not only the neoliberal environmental agenda but also the reproduction of spatial and environmental means of production. The findings reveal that in addition to the emancipatory potential of the urban, the unequal urbanization process serves to exacerbate environmental injustice. Consequently, ecological struggles that acquire urban identity achieve significant gains in demanding democratic rights against urban and environmental injustices.

The conceptualization of urban ecological movements proposed in this study highlights not only the spatial embeddedness of environmental resistance but also invites further reflection on their impacts, limitations, and transformative potential. While these movements are grounded in specific local contexts, they articulate broader political imaginaries that extend beyond conventional environmental concerns. However, their effectiveness is often constrained by institutional resistance, fragmented networks, and the challenges of sustaining grassroots mobilization, particularly under restrictive political environments. Despite these limitations, their significance lies in their ability to cultivate radical urban imaginaries—visions of democratic, participatory, and ecologically conscious urban futures. These imaginaries challenge the dominant logic of urban development not only by contesting spatial transformations but also by reshaping the symbolic and material relationship between society and nature.

The contingent nature of these movements is particularly evident in the enduring influence of the 2013 Gezi Uprising, which demonstrated how ecological concerns can serve as a catalyst for broader socio-political mobilization. According to findings, Gezi continues to inform the tactical strategies, collective sensibilities, and political expressions of contemporary urban ecological struggles, including those observed in Ayvalık. Rather than forming cohesive or uniform movements, these struggles reflect the fragmented yet persistent possibilities of collective action within

an era marked by socio-ecological crisis. Ultimately, urban ecological movements embody both acts of resistance and the capacity to imagine and enact alternative spatial practices, urban futures, and political ecologies.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

Given that this thesis primarily aims to conceptualize urban ecological struggles, the study is subject to certain limitations regarding the timeframe, context, and points of resistance it examines. The term urban ecological struggles, exemplified through Ayvalık as a case study, is considered valid within the framework of the thesis of complete urbanization and the observation that urbanization processes have permeated all geographies. However, this concept is not confined to Ayvalık and can be applied to other contexts and historical periods.

The field study, which explores the coexistence of urban and non-urban dynamics, was selected as a representative case within the broader, complex processes of urbanization, wherein the urban expands, disperses, and integrates the non-urban. Nevertheless, due to the diverse and uneven trajectories of urbanization, certain forms of resistance and opposition may fall outside this conceptual framework. As scholarly perspectives on urbanization and the socio-natural relations it entails continue to evolve, urban ecological struggles must be analysed within the broader literature on urban and environmental movements.

In Turkey, environmental struggles have intensified over the past decade, and reassessing these movements through an urban lens provides valuable insights into the socio-spatial and political consequences of urbanization. However, considering the defined scope of this study, economic and ecological aspects—while highly significant—were excluded from the analysis.

One of the primary data collection methods employed in this research is semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted exclusively with experts and representatives of environmental protection organizations to examine the nature, causes, successes, and experiences of environmental struggles. Consequently, the number of interviewees and their social backgrounds were deliberately limited to align with the study's focus. Notably, interviews were not conducted with local communities directly affected by the spatial and environmental transformations observed during the research. For future studies, expanding the scope of interviews to include local residents would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences and localized impacts of these struggles.

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APPENDIX
LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interview ID	Interviewee	Duration
Interview 1	A representative of ATP; a teacher	1 hour
Interview 2	Group member of AKVG; an academic	1 hour
Interview 3	TİP Balıkesir Provincial Administration Ecology Officer, an activist	30 minutes
Interview 4	A representative of the Turkish Nature Association in Ayvalık; group member of AKG	40 minutes
Interview 5	Group member of AKVG; An academic working on Ayvalık	45 minutes
Interview 6	A representative of AKVG	30 minutes

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you define the concepts of urban, nature, and environment? As a representative of your organization, how would you describe its approach or stance on environmental matters?
2. Who are the actors in this struggle? Which groups constitute the resistance? Who provides support outside the local community?
3. How would you describe the fundamental discourses and demands of this resistance?
4. How would you describe your main motivation for engaging in/supporting these environmental struggles?
5. Do you think there have been any changes in your resistance agenda or methods after the 2013 Gezi Park protests? If so, what do you think has changed?
6. How would you assess the solidarity networks your movement has built with various local struggles that have arisen in Turkey? Can you discuss your shared demands with other environmental struggles with which you collaborate?
7. It is clear that the primary motivation behind the resistance in Ayvalık is the desire to oppose the exploitation of the environment. Please describe the principal factors that contribute to the exploitation of natural and urban environment in Ayvalık.
8. How do you interpret the relationship between Balıkesir becoming a metropolitan municipality as a result of Law No. 6360 (which expanded the boundaries of metropolitan cities to provincial borders in Turkey) and the reasons you previously outlined in response to the preceding question?
9. How would you list the criteria for the success of an environmental challenge? Do you perceive the movement as having sufficient strength to resist spatial/environmental exploitations?
10. What insights have been gained from the resistance movements in Ayvalık? How can these lessons be effectively transferred to future resistance efforts?
11. Do you believe that the resistance movement in Ayvalık has either inspired or has the potential to inspire other resistance groups?
12. Could you talk about your general thoughts about the situation of the environmental movements in Turkey?

Turkish version

1. Kent, doğa ve çevre kavramlarını nasıl tanımlıyorsunuz? (Görüşülen kişi bir sivil toplum temsilcisi ise) Bağlı olduğunuz topluluğun/kuruluşun çevresel sorunlara karşı tutumu nedir?
2. Bu mücadelenin aktörleri kimlerdir? Direnişi oluşturan gruplar kimlerden oluşuyor? Yerelin dışında kimler destek sağlıyor?
3. Bu direnişin temel söylemlerini ve taleplerini nasıl tanımlarsınız?
4. Sizin bu çevresel mücadelelere katılma/destek verme konusundaki ana motivasyonunuzu nasıl tanımlarsınız?
5. 2013 Gezi Parkı protestolarından sonra direniş gündeminizde veya yöntemlerinizde herhangi bir değişiklik olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? Eğer öyleyse, neyin değiştiğini düşünüyorsunuz?
6. Destek verdiğiniz hareketin Türkiye’de ortaya çıkan çeşitli yerel mücadelelerle kurduğu dayanışma ağlarını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz? İş birliği yaptığınız diğer çevresel mücadelelerle ortak taleplerinizden bahsedebilir misiniz?
7. Ayvalık’taki direnişin ardındaki temel motivasyonun çevrenin sömürülmesine karşı çıkma arzusu olduğu açıktır. Bu durumda sizce Ayvalık’taki doğal ve kentsel çevrenin sömürülmesine veya yağmalanmasına katkıda bulunan başlıca faktörler nelerdir; bu sömürünün nedenleri nelerdir?
8. Türkiye’de büyükşehirleri il sınırlarına genişleten 6360 Sayılı Yasa sonucu Balıkesir’in büyükşehir oluşunun bu saydığımız nedenlerle kurduğu ilişkiyi nasıl yorumlarsınız?
9. Bir çevresel mücadelenin başarısını belirleyen kriterleri nasıl sıralarsınız? Hareketin mekansal/çevresel sömürülere karşı direnme gücünü yeterli buluyor musunuz?
10. Ayvalık’taki direniş hareketlerinden hangi bilgiler elde edildi? Bu dersler gelecekteki direniş çabalarına nasıl etkili bir şekilde aktarılabilir?
11. Ayvalık’taki direniş hareketinin diğer direniş gruplarını ilham verdiğini veya verme potansiyeline sahip olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?
12. Türkiye’deki çevresel hareketlerin durumu hakkında genel düşüncelerinizi paylaşabilir misiniz?