

**SPATIAL-MAKING OF URBAN POPULISM: THE CASE OF
POST-GEZI TAKSIM**

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By

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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

SPATIAL-MAKING OF URBAN POPULISM: THE CASE OF POST-GEZI

TAKSIM

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This thesis explores public participation in the production of space through the recent history of Taksim Square, analyzing the “Taksim Square Urban Design Competition” (2020) and the structure “Kavuşma Durağı” (2020). The thesis refers to Chantal Mouffe’s discussions on the democratic possibilities of populism (left populist strategy) and examines the role of left “urban” populism in repairing democratic values. Asking the question, “What kind of a role can space design play in contributing to democratic urban politics?” the study addresses design competitions with voting systems through discussions about public participation. Linking the recent participatory design attempts with Gezi Protests, the thesis reframes the production of “public space” through “urban populism” in the Turkish context. As examples of left urban populism, those space-making initiations mediate the repair of democracy by improving public contestation and dissensus concepts in the urban sphere and discursive space, and they provide re-politicization of governance and citizens.

Keywords: Democracy, participation, production of space, populism, people.

ÖZET

KENTSEL POPÜLİZMİN MEKÂNSAL İNŞASI: POST-GEZİ TAKSİM ÖRNEĞİ

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Bu tez, “Taksim Meydanı Kentsel Tasarım Yarışması” sürecini ve “Kavuşma Durağı” yapısını analiz ederek Taksim Meydanı'nın yakın tarihi üzerinden mekan üretiminde halk katılımının rolünü tartışır. Tez, Chantal Mouffe'un popülizmin demokratik olanakları (sol popülist strateji) hakkındaki tartışmalarına atıfta bulunur ve “kentsel” popülizmin demokratik değerleri onarmadaki rolünü inceler. Mekân tasarımı demokratik kentsel siyasete katkı sağlamada nasıl bir rol oynayabilir? sorusundan hareketle, şeffaflık ve halk katılımı tartışmaları üzerinden oylama sistemli mimari yarışmaları ele alıyor. Son zamanlardaki katılımcı tasarım girişimlerini Gezi Protestoları ile ilişkilendiren tez, Türkiye bağlamında “kentsel popülizm” üzerinden “kamusal alan” üretimini yeniden çerçevelendiriyor. Kentsel sol popülizminin örnekleri olarak bu mekan üretme açılımları kentsel ve söylemsel alanda kamusal çekişme ve fikir ayrılığı kavramlarını iyileştirerek demokrasinin onarımına aracılık ediyor ve yönetişimin ve yurttaşların yeniden siyasallaşmasını sağlıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, katılım, mekan üretimi, popülizm, halk.



To my mother

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

Neoliberal urbanization has brought various physical, social, economic, and political changes. As urban life started to work with the rhythms of competition and market activities, this cycle changed and organized how people became citizens and how they are governed. Therefore, neoliberalism is regarded not only as an idea of extensive domination of the free-market economy and privatization but also as constantly changing social life and political beings (Brown, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2009; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 1989; Harvey, 2005; Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2009). Neoliberalism gained a hegemonic position in terms of governance. This new way of governance has repressed the political and social spheres and imprisoned them in a smaller sphere of “consensus.” Consequently, the managerial governance model hindered people from performing/experiencing their active citizenship. This sort of governance trapped people in a duality: being represented or marginalized. The current circumstances regarding politics compose the problem addressed in this study.

The hegemonic position of the new managerial governance model also found its reflections in urban politics (Harvey, 1989; Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Urban politics of Turkey is a synthesis of two forces: neoliberal urbanization and the Islamist policies of AKP within the last two decades (Batuman, 2015; Karaman, 2013; Şengül, 2015). The interpenetration of the two generates a particular case, not even in perfect

agreement (Şengül, 2015, p. 2). According to Şengül, democratic dissolution in Turkey results from two authoritarian forces: conservative impositions on public life and neoliberalist tendencies in the production of the built environment. These two forces shaped and imposed particular urban politics based on Islamism and state capitalism. The soft spot of neoliberal policies is the inequalities that naturally come from competitiveness and the everlasting liberation it proposes. Inequalities again unfold in different ways. Within the last twenty years, the neoliberal policies of AKP socially created advantages for those with market power. Also, AKP's neoliberal urbanization reproduced physical disparities and divisions in the urban space since it marketizes the space and targets the privileged groups in society. As these inequalities deepened, the democratic system could not sustain itself anymore when "equality" is considered one of the main principles of a democratic regime (Canovan, 1999).

Secondly, there is an ongoing emergence of right-wing populism worldwide. This rise in right-wing populism is associated with the 2008 economic crisis, neoliberal globalization, immigrant population growth, rising nativism, xenophobia, and resentment by studies in the literature (Betz, 1993). Political parties such as Front National (FN, France), Vlaams Belang (VB, Belgium), Republikaner (REP, Germany), Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Austria), and party leaders such as Marine Le Pen (France) have been accepted as radical right populists (Mudde, 2007). Although populism is associated with emerging authoritarianism and anti-democratic policies, in this thesis, I focus on the idea that populism might indeed become a potential for the democratization of regimes and be successful at mobilizing people against a common adversary. Chantal Mouffe is among those group who thinks populism can operate as a positive method for democracy. Relying upon mostly

Chantal Mouffe's discussions, seeing architecture as an agent to rehabilitate the inequalities created by neoliberalism should help us to find more democratic possibilities in urban space.

Considering the problems generated by neoliberalism and its effects on democratic conditions, *the thesis's primary research question/problem is "What kind of a role can space design (at architectural and urban scale) play in contributing to democratic urban politics?"* Attributing some democratic qualities to architecture and space might invert the influence of neoliberal restructuring over urban space. The agency of architecture helps this democratic rehabilitation. Architecture and space usually materialize the concerns related to urban democracy very well because space is the locus where people become socialized, politicized, and encountered. For this reason, I decided to analyze Taksim Square's recent history to see the potential of architectural discipline for enhancing urban democracy in Turkey.

Taksim, as the context of this study, is quite dense with the political history of Turkey and the transformations leading to the commodification of space. Taksim Square has always been an arena for ideological confrontations and a considerable part of collective memory. Therefore, how this square transformed in time and how people inhabited the square can reveal a consistent angle to assess how public participation generates spaces and how spaces generate "political subjectivities" (Dikeç & Swyngdeuw, 2017).

In this case study, three distinct types of subheadings have been included: populist synergies in the form of resistance (Gezi), public space/design object (Kavuşma

Durağı), or plebiscite (Taksim Square Urban Design Competition). These different types of space-making activities have one common characteristic: having been constructed in a populist way. Chronologically, the Gezi Protests prepared the issue of democratic participation that we are discussing today. In an urban reality where spatial transformations are so intense, the accumulating anti-democratic grievances caused Gezi. This moment of crisis was a reflex that showed the will to develop citizenship in the direction of changing the current urban politics in Turkey. The recent Taksim Square Urban Design competition and the Kavuşma Durağı continue this political reflex to reconstruct current urban politics and criticize decision-making mechanisms. The latter two cases should be regarded as the “remaking of Taksim after its depoliticization in the value of the Gezi Protests.”

In the 2019 local elections, Turkey witnessed a significant change in the governance of metropolitan municipalities. The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), has gained the majority of votes in İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir. With the change of Municipal administration in İstanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu (new mayor) has announced their intention to design major squares (such as Taksim, Salacak, and Bakırköy) of İstanbul with architectural competitions. Architectural and urban projects have become an essential strategy for building local politics by İmamoğlu.¹ To give publicity to Taksim's competition, a platform named Kavuşma Durağı was installed. The echo of the initiations was quite thrilling for both the public and design professionals.

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-48623715>

1.1. AIM AND SCOPE OF THESIS

This thesis uses the concept of populism as a theoretical lens/tool to assess the ingenuity of architecture to transform politics and public life through how space is socially produced. Populism is usually recognized with its negative connotations. Adding to its contextual dependency, scholars argue that the theory of populism theory needs empirical investigation (Mudde, 2017). Also, populism's impact on democracy is viewed from a negative perspective. However, the primary goals of this study involve exploring potential democratic opportunities of left populism within the urban sphere and examining how space-making and design competitions contribute to democratic politics.

This study thus endeavors to reframe the discourse surrounding populism, demonstrating how it may be utilized to bring about progressive changes in the urban landscape while fostering democratic engagement and participation. It also seeks to offer a perspective on the relationship between populism, architecture, and democracy, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between politics and urban space. The following questions are designed to accomplish this:

- (a) Can architecture and urban design bear the qualities of populism?*
- (b) How does space-making contribute to the construction of left-urban populism?*
And, how do populist strategies help space-making? How can we explain their dialectical relationship?
- (c) How could space-making practices contribute to democratic urban politics in the long term?*

(d) How can we investigate “public participation” in architecture with regard to the dichotomy between democracy and populism?

1.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method is employed to investigate any shift toward democratic participation following the competition process. The paper bases its analysis on empirical data collected from news sources, interviews, and observations. The first step of the methodology includes collecting relevant data and visual, textual, and verbal documents of projects for Taksim within the last ten years. In addition, the articles and books primarily related to “populism,” the history of Taksim Square, and Gezi provided insights into the study's theoretical background.

Secondly, in-depth interviews are conducted with project owners, jury members, and key municipal actors. Respondents contributed by answering semi-structured questions.² During the interviews, I captured the conduct of decisions, organizations, and the competition process. Also, I have examined interviews already conducted in magazines. Experiences of different actors, from administration to the architects, from participants to jury members, helped me grasp the contextual timeline, effectiveness, or ineffectiveness during the process. I also learned about the existing conduct of architectural designs without competition and its deficiencies.³ After completing the

² I asked respondents various semi-structured questions: What does participation mean to you?, How competition and voting are democratic?, What is the usual practice for designing public spaces?, How threefold voting proceeds?.

³ Several interviews are conducted with the following respondents: *Ömer Yılmaz, Arman Akdoğan, Şerif Süveydan, Oktan Nalbantoğlu*. **Ömer Yılmaz**, the former director of competitions, provided information about

interviews and theoretical background of populism, I address how public participation plays a role in the production of public space in time by looking at the last ten years of Taksim. To do that, I try to detect populist themes in the cases and contextualize the case in the left populism theory of Mouffe.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The thesis comprises four chapters: (1) First chapter introduces the problem statement, thesis objectives and scope, the research questions, the research methodology (including data collection methods and data analysis methods), and the thesis structure.

(2) The second chapter introduces and discusses basic terms and definitions connected to populism and democracy, such as populism, urban populism, and left populism. Then, the chapter elaborates on existing literature about how populism and democracy establish relationships and impact each other. Finally, the chapter formulates a definition of “urban populism” based on this literature.

the formation of the competition itself and the procedures before the competition was held. He explained the formation of the jury, meetings before the competition, the idea of Kavuşma Durağı, and the very idea of a voting system. **Arman Akdoğan**, one of the founders of the IND Design Team, practices in the Netherlands and Turkey. Akdoğan took part in the design and realization of the structure called “Kavuşma Durağı.” He was also one of the jury members of the competition. He revealed the conceptual realization of the design “Kavuşma Durağı,” the legal and political obstacles to its removal, and similar design strategies they developed. **Şerif Süveydan** is an architect and intellectual thinking about architectural practice. He was part of the team “Taksim Kolektifi,” owner-team of project no 15 for the Taksim Square Urban Design Competition. Their project gains specific importance because it takes a step further by proposing a new participative design method. **Oktan Nalbantoğlu**, landscape architect and urban designer, academician and founder of ONTASARIM, provided information about their project for Taksim Square and design competitions in general.

(3) The third chapter refers to the history of Taksim Square and the Gezi Protests as a contextual background and related occurrences that had taken place in Taksim. I also explained the Akp's urban politics within the last twenty years. Mentioning Taksim's commodification process and the ideological forces that shaped it through time will be part of the third chapter. Also, Gezi is investigated as an example of a populist movement.

(4) The fourth and last chapter is an investigation of Taksim after Gezi, Kavuşma Durağı, and the Taksim Square Urban Design Competition. It introduces the whole process of competition and the significant actors in it. After so doing, It examines and makes an inductive analysis of these cases regarding their populist content and what makes them vital in building urban democracy.

The study concludes with remarks on the leftist characteristics of the case, relying on the basic themes of populism and discussions about how they will support the revitalization of urban democracy. It also offers possible research areas for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

2. POPULIST MOMENT

2.1. POPULISM

Populism has been extensively discussed both inside and outside academia in recent years. The definition of populism is quite ambiguous, and it is utilized in a broad sense in everyday politics. Besides, it has been interpreted in different ways by different theorists. In daily use, populism might refer to some sentimental and rhetorical strategies politicians deploy. It might refer to “quick” and “simplistic solutions” deployed for social problems (Mudde, 2004, p. 542). These strategies are typically appealed to when there is a self-interest of politicians, for instance, gaining the majority of the votes. Mudde (2004) describes these phenomena as “demagogy and opportunism” (p. 543). However, in academic literature, the term “populist” differs from what is referred to as “populist” in daily use. Populism etymologically derives from the “Populus” in Latin, which indicates the citizens or “the people” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 21).

The scholarly work in the literature on populism has created different taxonomic categories. What kind of an entity or phenomenon populism has not been agreed upon. Populism might be identified as “an ideology” as implied in Mudde and Kaltwasser's work, “identity politics” as in Müller's work, or “discursive strategy” as

denoted in Laclau's and Mouffe's work, or "political style" as in the work of Moffitt (Moffitt, 2016, p. 26; Mouffe, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Müller, 2016; Laclau, 2005).

In this part of the thesis, the concept of populism is scrutinized through a search for its main constitutive elements by different theorists to have some leading indicators toward an attempt at defining urban populism. However, the study will avoid detailed discussions on typological differences among various populism doctrines, whether a strategy, ideology, style, or whatnot, since the main objective of this study is not to solely comprehend the political theory of populism but instead to reveal its major constitutive elements.

2.1.1. POPULISM AND ITS MAIN CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS

The People and Elites

The first and ultimate constitutive element of populism is a social construction of "the people." While having no conventional definition, populism has been identified by many theorists as foregrounding "the people" against specific power structures in its most broad and generic sense. Canovan (1999) defines populism as "an appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of society" (p. 3). Hereupon, populists aim at mobilizing people against those power structures, which could be financially, politically, or socially formed. People are depicted as "powerless," contrary to the power block (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Populists acknowledge "the people" as the ultimate authority. Their legitimacy

rests upon addressing the people. Populists robustly pronounce that they “speak for the people...” (Canovan, 1999, p. 4). While referring to “the people,” Canovan (1999) claims that populists are inclined to be capable of “exploiting its rhetorical possibilities” by relying on the ambiguity of the term (p. 5).

Identifying specific criteria involves a process of descopeing (Laclau, 2005, p. 32). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) and Müller (2016) preclude certain concepts from populism, thereby addressing populism as definitely “anti-elitist” and “anti-pluralist.” in nature. Populists, by their nature, rest on the idea of a ‘homogeneous people’ and often reject the diversity of identities within society. On the contrary, “pluralism” recognizes the heterogeneity inherent in society (Mudde, 2004, p. 544).

Moral Division

Some scholars necessarily assert a particular divide in society while defining populism. That is the construction of two separate poles; “morally pure people” and “corrupted elites” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 5; Müller, 2016, p. 20). For Müller, populists blame others for being “morally” inferior while dignifying “the people” as “morally” superior. Müller (2016) points out populism as an “exclusionary form of identity politics” (p. 3). Therefore, populism consistently attempts to construct these “contrary” “identities” -people and elites- and impose them on society. However, Müller considers this moral differentiation as a “fictional” construction. Only a particular part of society corresponds to the “real people” in the populists’ minds, which is unrealistic (Müller, 2016, p. 21).

Claims to Representation

Müller (2016) grounds the definition of populism on evident “claims to representation” (p. 20). That means populists claim that they are the ones who are capable of representing the people (Müller, 2016). In a way, populists inherently represent/embody the “symbolic meaning” they created for the fictional idea of “people” rather than the people themselves (Müller, 2016, p. 27). They impose specific characteristics on these defined people and how they should be. This condition can only be a “metapolitical illusion” because the idea of one single and united body of people whose opinions are adequately represented by a correct voice is unfeasible (Kelsen quoted in Müller, 2016, p. 28). “The people” do not have a definite identity, which is perpetually changing. However, populists think of people as fixed, decisive beings and absolutize them (Müller, 2016, p. 72). This condition asserts the complete opposite of the formation of society, which is bonded to change and fluctuation.

General Will

For Mudde and Kaltwasser, another core element of populism is “volonte generale” (general will). Notably, their significant contribution lies in framing populism as an ideology. They point out that “thin-centered ideology” is populism’s ability to articulate and unite with distinct ideologies and create a unique genesis. Therefore, populism might appear in divergent forms and shapes, making it a somewhat inconsistent cloud of ideas and not a consistent political regime (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). In addition to that inconsistency, populism typologies vary

across different contexts. Populism is time and context-dependent; as Taggart (2004) enunciates, it “is de facto substantially contextually contingent” (p. 275). Populists have narratives of revitalizing “popular sovereignty” and the “will of the people” (Panizza, 2005, p. 5). For this, populists sometimes appeal to direct democratic procedures such as referendums (Canovan, 1999, p. 2).

Plebiscite

Populists search for the correct reflections of the “will of the people” through direct democracy methods and elections. Applying those methods, “populists see themselves as democrats” (Canovan, 1999, p. 2). Discursively and allegedly, populists are concerned about people's participation in elections and direct involvement in decision-making. For some, this can work as a democratic process. People who “do not feel represented” can have the right to speak and decide (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 18). However, there are risks to people being the “ultimate source of political power” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 10), which eventually cause authoritarian approaches to emerge.

On the other hand, a drawback of referendums is that populism often doesn't prioritize genuine public participation. To populists, referendums can be seen as a symbolic endorsement by the people for a subject matter that has already been decided. Public participation, here, only works as a legitimization tool for their action (Müller, 2016, p. 29). Therefore, whether populists genuinely are interested in the “will of the people” or not is still a relevant question.

Simpleness, Directness, and Emotional Bond

Another constitutive element is the embrace of “simpleness and directness” in communication and an emotional bond with the populist leader (Canovan, 1999, p. 5-6). As a political style, populist leaders seek direct communication to establish a strong connection with the people they define. They prefer to call out directly to the people themselves and eliminate the secondary communication channels between them and the people (Müller, 2017, p. 35). As a political mood, people and the charismatic populist leader construct some sort of emotional bond; “emotions to be focused on a charismatic leader” (Canovan, 1999, p. 6). Mouffe and Laclau bring forward the concepts of “affection” and “identification” to explain the nature of social bonding (Laclau, 2005, p. 54; Mouffe, 2018, p. 39). According to this, “a collective will cannot be constructed without some form of crystallization of common affects” (Mouffe, 2018, p. 38).

Heartland

Another central concept in populism emphasized by Taggart is “heartland,” which is “an idealized conception of the community they serve” (Taggart, 2004, p. 274). Heartland is usually associated with allusion to past and idealized life. The perception of the heartland is imagined; therefore, it is fundamentally a “construct” (Taggart, 2004, p. 274). Given this, populists evoke some idealized life and societal living that might be related to their ancestors. Then, people are inherently the “populace” of an imagined society (Taggart, 2004, p. 274).

Discourse and Performance

Populism also has a stylistic attribute (Moffitt, 2016). If populism is a performative action, leaders are “the performers.” People are the “audience,” while the media provides a ground for the performance to be played (Moffitt, 2016). Seeing populism as a performative action has some common aspects with seeing populism as a discourse because “performative folds in a number of discursive features, such as the use of language, speech, written texts” as well as it differs from other approaches by also including visual representation and also the bodily language of performers as well (Moffitt, 2016, pp. 39-40).

2.1.2. POPULISM IN RELATION TO DEMOCRACY

Similar to the ambiguous character of populism, democracy is a vague term because of its daily usage and distinctive academic interpretations. It can be broadly defined as the “rule of the majority” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 80). Democracy can have different adjectives, known as “democracy with adjectives” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 80). “Democracy refers to the combination of popular sovereignty and majority rule; nothing more, nothing less. Hence, democracy can be direct or indirect, liberal or illiberal.” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 80). All the different democracy definitions are variables of the “articulation” between the concept of liberalism and the concept of democracy (Mouffe, 2005, p. 52).

Frequently, democracy points at liberal democracy in generic use, “or at least representative or indirect democracy” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 80).

Representative democracy indicates the presence of representatives for the rule as a political system. The demands of “people” are represented by elected officials, implicating an indirect condition. In contrast, direct democracy entails the direct participation of people for the demands to be conveyed or problems to be deciphered.

While the theoretical debates on democracy are extensive, I will limit my discussion to the relationship between populism and liberal democracy. Whether populism poses threats to democracy or helps to advance it is a huge question. It depends on the articulation of populism, the type of democracy, and the context. “Populism can be seen as positive for democracy in terms of improving ‘inclusiveness’ and negative with regard to ‘public contestation’” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 206). In his book ‘Participation and Opposition,’ Dahl (1971) considers “contestations” and political “participation” as two main variables that develop further democratization. Right-wing populism assures the participation of people but decreases the possibilities of “opposition” (Dahl, 1971).

The homogenous imagination toward who composes the “people” is risky, which creates a conflict against plural democracy. Right-wing populism denies the “contestability” nature of the public (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 207). Populists are intolerant of political conflict, disagreements, and differences generated by different demands. In this sense, Müller thinks that populism in itself is “apolitical” because it denies political conflict and believes in “only one correct policy solution and only one authentic popular will” (Müller, 2016, p. 97). However, in democracies, one can know that understanding the genuine will of the people (majority) is what

democracy seeks to achieve, yet “the people do not exist except as part of an ever-receding imaginary horizon” (Panizza, 2005, p. 29). We can only converge on the idea of “people” and not fully reach the concept of people. Democracy always stays in an uncrystallized and unstable condition regarding the definition of “people” and their representation, and it is always open to auto-correction.

For Mouffe, there is an explicit tension between the liberal tradition and democratic tradition because liberalism usually refers to economic liberation and eventually causes neoliberal policies to subvert the political one. In Mouffe’s suggestion, economic liberalism is something to cope with anti-capitalist strategies, whereas political liberalism is required for a democratic system to work (Mouffe, 2018). In sum, liberal democracy is the result of an adjunction between liberal principles and democratic principles; “the liberal tradition (individual liberty and pluralism) and the democratic tradition (popular sovereignty and equality)” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 52). Therefore, Canovan (1999) considers populism as a “shadow of democracy,” which means populism inherently results from democracy (p. 10).

Some scholars posit that the problem of populism’s threat to liberal democracy is not because it violates democratic principles/rules but rather because it violates liberal principles, such as individual liberty or minority rights. However, liberal principles are essential for the continuity of democracy (Beetham, 1992, as cited in Canovan, 1999). Otherwise, democracy can devolve into an illusion of “winner-take-all” (Müller, 2016, p. 51). In comparison, democracy should guarantee that the majority does not become a tyrant over the minorities (Müller, 2016, p. 55). In an emphasized

way by the expression of Panizza (2005), the populists might promote the “spectre of a tyranny with popular support” and injures democracy (p. 18). Populist embraces a “monist conception of society” or “Manichean worldview” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde, 2004). Therefore, populism might act like a despot for the rest of society at the expense of preserving the ultimate political power of the majority. This despotism is why some scholars argue that populism is an example of an “illiberal” democracy (Canovan, 1997, p. 7). However, in another view, Müller warns that the “illiberal democracy” notion might be a problematic term because the presence of “fair” elections as a democratic practice does not guarantee the “check and balances,” working “political institutions” “rule of law” principles that are embedded in the liberal tradition (Müller, 2016, p. 50). Hence, violating the liberal doctrine implies an ‘anti-democratic’ situation. That is to say, one cannot be illiberal but democratic. Consequently, because of the exclusionist tone of populism characterized by authoritarianism, anti-pluralism, and enemy construction, scholars acutely consider populism anti-democratic (Müller, 2016).

Conversely, Müller often asks this question: Why can one not claim to be “the people”? Does this always make them populist? He answered that people could take a “revolutionary” stance in undemocratic countries. Müller’s positive idea accurately correlates with Mouffe’s suggestion to design a left populism to regain the revolutionary spirit of “people” under democratic corruptions.

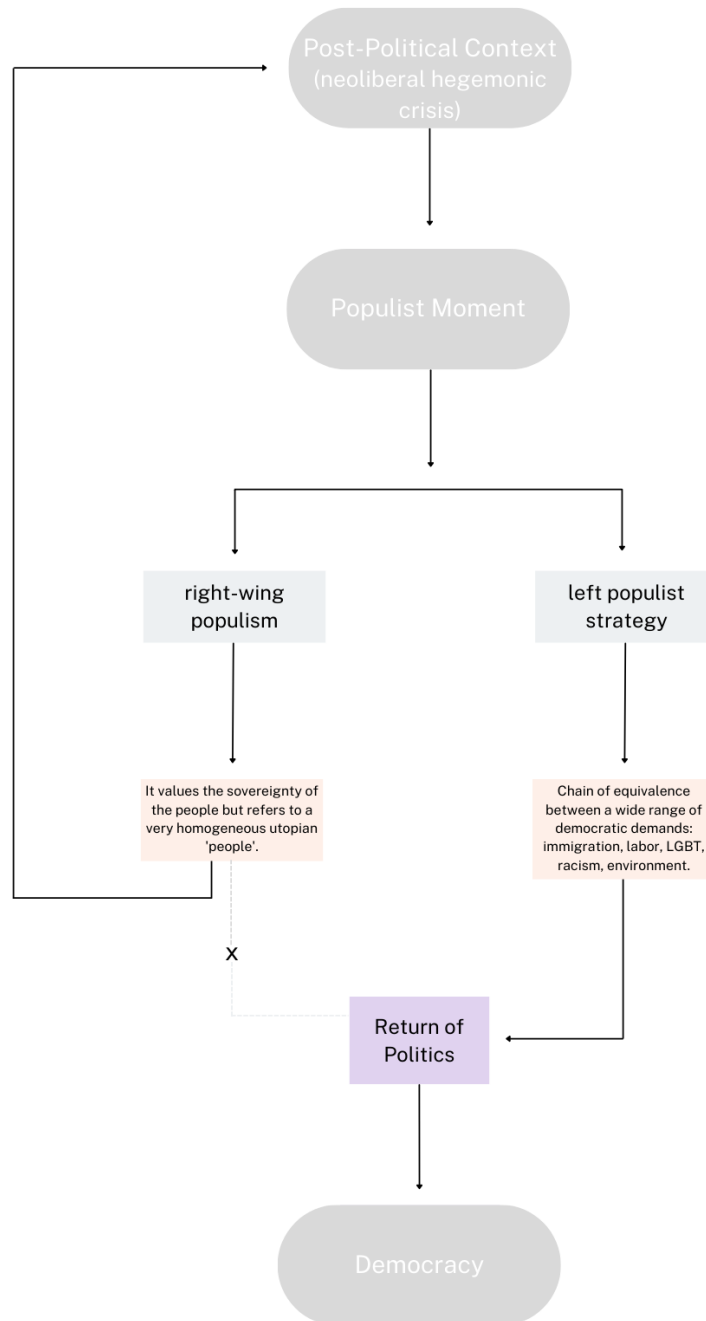


Figure 2.1. Formation of left and right populism. (source: author)

2.2. THE POPULIST MOMENT & LEFT POPULIST STRATEGY

Mouffe criticizes liberal democracy based on its contemporary problems associated with neoliberalism's dominant power over everyday life and politics. Mouffe and Laclau (1985) suggest reclaiming “radical democracy” instead of liberal democracy. They do not posit a complete disengagement with the political regime of liberal democracy; however, they suggest fixing the malfunctioning parts of liberal democracy. They offer enhancing/radicalizing “liberty” and “equality” elements. According to Mouffe (2018, p. 25), these principles are ignored and not actualized. “Radical democracy” is a proposed method by Laclau and Mouffe.

What does it mean to radicalize democracy? This is something that I need to clarify because there are many conceptions of radical democracy and serious misunderstandings have arisen with respect to the ‘radical and plural democracy’ that was defended in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Some people believed that we were calling for a total rupture with liberal democracy and for the creation of a completely new regime. In fact, what we were advocating was a ‘radicalization’ of the ethicopolitical principles of liberal-democratic regime, ‘liberty and equality for all’ (Mouffe, 2018, p. 25).

By improving these qualities of liberal democratic politics, the actions to construct a “possible new order” through radicalization is called a populist moment (Mouffe, 2018). For Mouffe, the populist moment is a strategic time when the democratic dissolution unfolds. Urban grievances create social unrest, and at this turning point, people rise as resistant collective subjects to re-form the existing order at that crossroad. This strategic moment is seen as an opportunity to build democratic values in a better way of establishment (Mouffe, 2018). This force created by “various heterogeneous demands” leads to a more extensive resistance against neoliberalism (Mouffe, 2018).

The ‘populist moment,’ therefore, is the expression of a variety of resistances to the political and economic transformations seen during the years of

neoliberal hegemony. These transformations have led to a situation that we could call ‘post-democracy’ to indicate the erosion of the two pillars of the democratic ideal: equality and popular sovereignty (Mouffe, 2018, p. 13).

Regardless of some scholars (Müller, 2016) arguably believe that the construction of a left populism will be as dangerous as right populism rising all over the world, Mouffe and Laclau (2018) construe that a “new political frontier” is required to answer the emerging new demands that cannot be sustained within usual politics such demands as “environmental struggles” or “racism.” Those different heterogeneous demands accumulate and remain unanswered, waiting for new modalities of urban politics. As a response to the populist moment, Mouffe suggests a left-populist strategy (left-wing populism), which differs from right populism in various ways.

One main characteristic of the left-populist strategy is the generation of plural democracy and politics of pluralism. This time, the subjects will not be a whole and single body, contrary to right populism. The people spectrum is expanded by this theory, including those who have no locus in existing politics and are usually perceived as radicals (Mouffe, 2018). According to leading discourses of populists, people might be inclusive or exclusionary for some groups, such as immigrants, ethnic groups, or specific nations. Under required circumstances, excluded groups might be considered potential voter groups. However, populists ultimately homogenize the group they call “the people” and externalize the rest of society under a single roof. People can be considered as either a “plurality of actors” or “an entity with one interest and identity” (de la Torre, 2019, p. 67). According to De la Torre, that perception differentiates left and right populism from each other. For example,

right populism prioritizes “ethnicity” for its exclusionary politics against minority groups (de la Torre, 2019, p. 67).

On the other hand, parties that favor left-populist thinking tend to treat society as a “plural” organism. De la Torre exemplifies Syriza, Podemos, and MAS as parties approaching people from a pluralist angle (de la Torre, 2019, p. 67). There is one inevitable result of the exclusionary and inclusive view of the left and right populists. When ethnicity couples with a “people-as-one” view, populism becomes exclusionary and anti-democratic. When it is more inclusionary, populism might become more democratic (de la Torre, 2019, p. 67). Populism’s homogenous interpretation of society or “monistic” perception of people and elites contradicts the principles of “liberal democracy” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 207). Populism is devoid of “accepting the rules of public contestation inherent to liberal democracy” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 214).

Secondly, Laclau and his companion Mouffe imagine a left-populist strategy with a demarcation of society similar to Müller, Mudde, and Kaltwasser. They build the idea of a division in the community, except that they do not base their identification on a particular moral value or moral determinants. Political relationships in populism are constructed through the logic of “antagonism.” “Antagonism is central to politics because it is through antagonism that political identities are constituted, and radical alternatives to the existing order can be imagined” (Panizza, 2005, p. 28). They approach the group of people and the opposite one in a broader base. For example, the enemy group may be denoted as a “regime.” Laclau sees populism as a

“politico-discursive practice,” and it has all been based on the creation of a “frontier” (Laclau, 2005, p. 43). Discourses generated by politicians are vital to constructing antagonist relations between those who are the real “people” and those who are not. “Naming” is a significant operation to build antagonism (Panizza, 2005). The way populists call out to their supporters and non-supporters in a hostile way works in such a process.

Populism involves the division of the social scene into two camps. This division presupposes (as we shall see in more detail below) the presence of some privileged signifiers which condense in themselves the signification of a whole antagonistic camp (the 'regime', the 'oligarchy', the 'dominant groups', and so on, for the enemy; the 'people', the 'nation', the 'silent majority', and so on, for the oppressed underdog...) (Laclau, 2005, p. 87).

Left populism also constructs a “people.” This construction is “a ‘we,’ a ‘people’ confronting a common adversary: the oligarchy” (Mouffe, 2018, p. 50). The difference is that left populism does not suggest a homogenous presence but rather brings different groups and subjects together for unity. Heterogeneous people create a collective body with distinct interests and demands. These are called “unsatisfied demands” by Mouffe. Pluralism is accepted by the left populism, contrary to populism. According to that plural view, by “chain of equivalence,” different unsatisfied demands by various groups can be equally conjoined, such as immigrants, LGBTQ groups, and others. Without prioritizing people as a “single body,” accepting plurality is a way to develop democratic politics. This chain is the way to challenge existing hegemony with a newly created hegemony: people versus oligarchy.

In the left-populist strategy, the division in the society is called “frontier” by Laclau; through this draw and construction of the “political frontier,” people convert into “popular subjects” (Laclau, 2005, p. 43). However, the construction of the frontier

achieves something interesting; it is the condition that the “equivalential chain” of demands overshadows “differential” demands (Laclau, 2005, p. 44). Populism causes the differential demands of individuals to eventually fade away and leave space for a more universalized and homogenized request to demand the same thing with others; “equivalential linkage” (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

The left populist strategy is also obliged to have “elites.” In this way of populism, “elites” refer to “neoliberal political elites” (de la Torre, 2019, p. 64). Political elites are the ones that hold the political power in hand. Proposing left populism Mouffe, the necessity of constructing a populism derives from how neoliberalism transforms the way of governance and politics (de la Torre, 2019). Neo-liberalism eventually led to the enlargement of “technocracy,” paving the way to politics becoming an “administrative enterprise” (de la Torre, 2019). The experts handle political issues with a technical approach (Mouffe, 2018). The proposal of left populism rightly developed against this “neoliberal hegemony crisis” and its way of converting subjectivities. Left populism tries to construct a “collective will” among different groups (Mouffe, 2018).

Also, left populism suggests the formation of agonistic relations instead of only antagonistic division between two groups in society: the people and the elites. That is another prominent difference between left populism and right populism: the generation of “agonistic relations” (Mouffe, 2018). Populism, in general, establishes antagonistic relationships between people and elites. However, left populism accepts the conflicts and confrontations of different groups. It allows us to construct a ground

for such contestation of people, disagreements, and disputes, contrary to the “aggregative model of democracy, which reduces the democratic process to the expression of those interests and preferences which are registered in a vote aiming at selecting leaders who will carry out the chosen policies” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, xvii).

2.2.1. WHAT IS POST-POLITICS/POST-DEMOCRACY?

The problem definition for the left populism project is the “post-politic” context. Post-politics refers to a condition where the problems are seen to be resolved only by the technical points of view of experts and through consensus. The real political quality of politics, agonism, and public debate is eliminated by neoliberal hegemony (de la Torre, 2019). By that, the people are excluded from delivering an opinion. Today, this technicality dominates the way of governance and politics. In such governance rationality, politics become “the sole interplay of state mechanisms” (Rancière, 1999, p. 102), and democracy becomes only a procedure.

The current situation can be described as ‘post-democracy’ because in recent years, as a consequence of neoliberal hegemony, the agonistic tension between the liberal and the democratic principles, which is constitutive of liberal democracy, has been eliminated. With the demise of the democratic values of equality and popular sovereignty, the agonistic spaces where different projects of society could confront each other have disappeared and citizens have been deprived of the possibility of exercising their democratic rights. To be sure, ‘democracy’ is still spoken of, but it has been reduced to its liberal component and it only signifies the presence of free elections and the defence of human rights. What has become increasingly central is economic liberalism with its defence of the free market and many aspects of political liberalism have been relegated to second place, if not simply eliminated. This is what I mean by ‘post-democracy’ (Mouffe, 2018, p. 15).

Until that point, the influence of neoliberal structuring over the economic sphere and its effects on institutional arrangements are appraised. However, one should notice neoliberalism's impact on the political sphere. After reviewing the institutional changes and how neoliberalism organizes itself, in this part, the meaning of “the political” and in company with the sentiment of “democracy,” why it is endangered by neoliberalism, and why “the political” matters, will be covered. Also, the meaning of active citizenship and how to retrieve it through new forms of politics will be elaborated. Moreover, public space can ultimately mediate these new forms of politics to help regain “the political.”

2.2.2. NEOLIBERALISM AS THE CAUSE OF POST-POLITICS

Neoliberalism has emerged as a whole bunch of “political-economic practices” that promote the liberation of individuals and market activities in the interest of private companies and mitigate the impact of the state over market actions. This liberty from state interference does not put the state up against the market. Instead, the state’s main charge in the neoliberal era is to protect the “institutional framework” for market practices and activities to continue operating well while eventually losing its “social provision” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). The state protects legal frameworks and business precepts to maintain the “space of world economy” (Brown, 2019, p. 57).

One associated term with neoliberalism is “restructuring,” which refers to urban conditions after the 1980s. Neoliberal restructuring refers to a series of “destructions,”

“constructions,” “institutional” changes, and processes of market orientation within the realm of “political economy,” “space,” “social,” and “ideology” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Neoliberalism’s evolvement is neither too sudden nor final. Instead, there is a continuing “process of neoliberalism.” Also, neoliberalism refers to the set of context-sensitive strategies. According to the geographical context, neoliberalism and its organization differ significantly. Different contexts produce peculiar outcomes, explaining the “path-dependency” of neoliberalism (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This contingency makes neoliberalism in practice differ from the ideal or ideological one; this is why Theodore and Brenner (2002) called it “actually existing neoliberalism.” Moreover, deregulation of the state does not happen immediately. Instead, neoliberal relations are complexly constructed and interlaced by the “roll-out” and “roll-back” mechanisms, or two moments, which are “partial destruction” and “tendential creation” (Brenner et al., 2009, p. 55). That is to say, the old functioning of institutions disassembled while simultaneously new strategies and arrangements (marked-driven, competitive, and privatized) start to replace the older ones.

The main ground where this restructuring happens is in the cities and space (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Theodore & Brenner, 2002). Cities now become part of “interurban competition” to captivate capital and are the main experimentation sites for new institutional changes. They are characterized by highly entrepreneurial roles and accomplish “economic growth” through the agency of various strategies, some of which are “place-marketing, enterprise zones, local tax abatements, public-private partnerships, and new forms of local boosterism, through to workfare policies, property redevelopment schemes” and generation of “social control, policing,

surveillance” to assure a proper capitalist functioning (Theodore & Brenner, 2002, p. 368). Harvey describes this new type of governance as a transition to the scheme of “entrepreneurism” (Harvey, 1989). The concept of governance is a market-driven management model in which there are “coalitions” and partnerships with many actors. Besides the conventional state itself, those actors can participate in the management model as a business.

Not only are cities the main ground for neoliberalism and organized around and in line with the discipline of capitalist forces, but social life and way of life are organized and alternate according to neoliberal thinking, or what is called neoliberal “rationality.” As Harvey (2005) points out, “It seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (p. 3).

The process of neoliberalization has, however, entailed much ‘creative destruction,’ not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart (Harvey, 2005, p. 3).

In neoliberalism and the new governance model, we observe a deliberate denial of the “social” and “social power.” It also denies social struggles, grievances, and social turmoils. That is, the new governance model fell short of gaining political quality. This assault on “the social” is “key to generating an anti-democratic culture from below while building and legitimating anti-democratic forms of state power from above” (Brown, 2019, p. 28). For Brown, “social,” “social justice,” and “political equality” are the precondition of any democratic practice. The social is where the “common good” is aspired; various struggles and conflicts happen in the interest of wealth of “good for the whole” (Brown, 2015, p. 127).

Neoliberalism fosters such individualism and subjectivities that everyone evolves into “responsibilized individuals.” Since deregulation and fast privatizations abolished the “social state” (Brown, 2019, p. 38), people are now responsible for the services that the social state used to provide. Social is a setting where people prioritize commonwealth and the provision of basic human needs from health to housing. Not only that but everyone is treated as equal in terms of “sharing political power” through voting and sometimes through “upheaval.” In addition, “the social” favors us to generate a link beyond the “economic” based relationships, identities, and communication styles (consumer, investor roles) between people imposed or at least encouraged by neoliberalism (Brown, 2019, p. 41). Although she thinks that democracy’s promise will never be performed entirely, political equality seems to be the online way to ensure equal power dispersal and equal treatment. “Political life serves the whole, rather than an elite” (Brown, 2019, p. 25). It proposes a redistribution of the power in hands.

2.2.3. TECHNOCRACY AND LOSS OF POLITICAL

Neoliberalism commercializes “the political” just like it transforms individuals, thereby abolishing “the social” sphere. Substitution of “politics” via a particular form of “governance” curtailed the domain of “active citizenship” and how people behave as citizens (Brown, 2015, p. 210). Today, people lost their ability to think “politically” and turned into “homo oeconomicus” for Brown (2015, p. 10). Through a similar process, “political” transformed into “policing” (Swyngedouw, 2009, p. 605).

Political is a state of “fissure” in the settled organization of things for the pursuit of “equality” among citizens (Swyngedouw, 2009). This fissure results from a “lack” or “surplus” within the existing “police” order (Dikeç, as cited in Swyngedouw, 2009). It is a moment of statement for the “right to egaliberte” by those who feel secluded from “socio-political order” (Swyngedouw, 2009) and reconfigure this order. Therefore, “political” is everlastingly about disorganization and a rupture. However, neoliberal restructuring is about organization and distribution. “The overarching goal of such neoliberal urban policy experiments is to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices” (Brenner et al., 2009, p. 58).

In a way, the state has lost its capacity to encourage politicization and has turned into a “depoliticized state.” (Žižek, as cited in Swyngedouw, 2009). When “the political” shrinks, the space for maneuvering for democracy becomes narrowed. The neoliberal governance model embraces the public sphere as a set of “strategies, techniques, and procedures” that help the serviceability of things such as transactions, enterprise, or project execution. That is why neoliberal governance implies idiosyncratic “public life and politics.” Although the very fundamental nature of politics is “contestation,” the primary goal of business activity is based on “consensus” (Rancière, 2001; Žižek, 1999a; as cited in Swyngedouw, 2009). The negotiation of operations ensures the maintenance of business activity. This type of politics is grounded on “socio-scientific knowledge” (Swyngedouw, 2009). For neoliberalism, the divergent interests of different groups should not prolong a time for conflict or disagreements. Therefore, “political” is considered an adversary (Brown, 2015, p. 127).

Neoliberalism also distorts and re-organizes the meaning of democracy according to its rationale. The critical principles of democracy are rectified according to “economic” motive rather than “political.” Neoliberalism only indulges a “thin version of democracy,” which means democracy is diagnosed as a “procedural” action and released from “the political.” Despite having various actors and varied interests, there is no conflict or opposition. They start participating in “consensus-building” (Brown, 2015, p. 128). This results in a post-political situation (Mouffe, 2018; Swyngedouw, 2009). “Dissensus,” which is the main character of “political,” is supplanted by consensus and “technocratic” conduct (Swyngedouw, 2009). In a post-political world, “Inclusion inverts into the competition, equality into inequality, freedom into deregulated marketplaces, and popular sovereignty is nowhere to be found” (Brown, 2015, p. 42).

2.2.4. LEFT POPULISM AS A CORRECTOR

Mouffe does not condemn the populist mode of politics. Instead, she criticizes the way that populist relations are constructed. “The problem lies in how this 'people' is constructed” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 69). Although left populism shares some common aspects with right populism, even so, its sensitivity towards pluralism and non-authoritarianism makes it more democratic. By the given core concepts in the left populism project, this study will focus on how populism might operate as a rehabilitation tool for democracy, not as a negative concept. Left populism can create a new order to recreate the “articulation between liberalism and democracy” (Mouffe, 2018, p. 27).

The ultimate aim of the left populism is to reattain democratic principles in politics and presumably activate people's democratic participation in political problems. Besides increasing "inclusiveness" by public involvement, it also creates conditions for "public contestation" (Dahl, 1971). The tension between populism and democracy was about abolishing individual liberties and minority rights because of the extreme defense of the majority group. However, left populism tries to ensure liberties and freedom while defending the rights of majorities. However, this time, the majority groups expanded to a broader base of people groups. The people's takeover of "popular sovereignty and equality" (Mouffe, 2018) will repeatedly be a desired objective for left populism without allowing majorities to have suppressive legitimacy over the rest of the society. Under democratic tradition, political power should be distributed and shared equally among citizens.

As the left-populist strategy asserts, there are alternatives to right-wing populism regarding their attitude toward pluralism. We can analyze the structure of Rainbow Coalition as an example of the left populism movement found in Chicago. Illuzzi investigates the favorable sides of populism through a study on the Rainbow Coalition. He reasonably asks for that, "—Is it possible to form a moderate "us" without oppressing a "them"? (Illuzzi, 2020, p. 76). He gives reference to Roger Smith's theory of "peoplehood" and expresses that there might be a "moderate" coalition of groups, instead of a homogenous group of one type. And this might create still a populist movement around a common purpose and common unrest. Therefore, the issue of "peoplehood" does not have to be always something exclusive. In this case, it aims to unite different ethnic groups under the "Babylon Captivity." As a

counter group, they designated the “Daley” regime. Another case in which we can exemplify radical leftist politics is “Syriza” in Greek. Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014) made a discursive analysis of that left-populist formation after their electoral success in 2012. They found that Syriza unites people in a more “inclusionary” and “plural” way, similar to Rainbow Coalition. It also depended on an antagonistic relationship, as the second criterion of populism for authors; “us/the people against them/the establishment” (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 138). Through references to illustrations and speeches of politicians, they argued that Syriza supplies the “minimum criteria” of populism.

2.3. URBAN POPULISM

Studies related to urban politics address neighborhood movements, insurgencies, grassroots movements, mass protests, or counter-hegemonic political structures in relation to urban populism. These terms are entangled and used interchangeably. They don’t refer to urban populism in the sense that political theorists define populism. One of the earliest discussions about urban populism was made by Axworthy and Epstein in 1974. They have associated the term with the movements in Canada during the 1970s. People have been willing to take part in “city policies.” Ignorance toward the participation demands of residents led to “citizen activism” and the formation of “citizen groups” in different cities.

At the heart of urban populism is a set of clear propositions: 1. that people should have a say in decisions that affect them, and 2. that those decisions will be more closely in tune with the interests of the ordinary citizens. In other words, one basic aim underlying the activity of citizen groups is to change the way public policy was made in the belief that more involvement by citizens

will result in better policies, or at least policies closer in accord with their wishes (Axworthy & Epstein, 1974, p. 2).

Although Tore Sager (2019) does not explicitly name urban populism, he attempts to investigate the relationship between “communicative planning theories (CPT)” and “populist” theories. He also associates urban populism with bottom-up, participatory initiatives in contrast to authoritarian populism, which violates important aspects of CPT, such as public deliberation and mutual understanding. However, more involvement by citizens doesn’t make those cases urban populist examples. Neighborhood movements should not be confused with populism as a political concept.

The same confusion is valid in the Turkish context, as well. Most Turkish academicians have used urban populism to explain the transformations of squatter areas and their politics during the 1970s. They are usually defined in this way because the politics of those transformations offer provisional access to resources or rights; however, they do not necessarily introduce permanent changes. This counter-dependency continued in the 1980s, as well. Most politicians targeted electoral success(voting), especially during the neo-liberalization of Turkey in the 1980s (Erman, 2001; Güvenç & Işık, 2002; Keyder & Öncü, 1994; Sanli & Townshend, 2018). After the 1950s, with state-led industrialization, the large cities became subjected to migration from rural areas, which led to significant housing needs. However, for example, the Democrat Party has “tolerated” gecekondu because the labor of these migrants was essential and required for the new economy. They were also providing political support for themselves “with the promises of title deeds, and infrastructure and services to their settlements, made by the leader of the political party holding office” (Erman, 2001, p. 985).

For citizens, accepting housing demand on a populist ground deepened their issue. “For decades, the authorities conveniently turned a blind eye to these rapidly proliferating *gecekondu* neighborhoods” (Karaman, 2013, p. 3417). While in earlier years, *gecekondu* residents and governors bargained for title deeds, later on, they were seen as a threat to the modern image of cities. This populist attitude made people think of their problem at the surface level, not the “right to inhabit” level. Populists kept them away from thinking of their housing demands as political demands. Populism here is a momentary solution to avoid political conflicts and the pain they will create. Rancière (1999, p. 102) defines such a practice as “consensus democracy,” while Byung-Chul Han (2022) names it “palliative politics.”

Ananya Roy (2009) embraces a similar approach. Roy is an academician primarily working on urbanism and related themes of poverty and informality. She associates informality with the politicians' motivation to provide services in exchange for political gain. Ananya Roy (2009, p. 9) states that “the territorial logic of informality is linked to a politics of urban populism, one where there is dissent and mobilization but rarely structural change” In *City and Grassroots*, Castells’(1983), urban populism also refers to “political allegiance” occur between state services and housing rights of the inhabitants. He similarly relates urban populism to informal housing. Castells alludes to “urban populism, the process of establishing political legitimacy on the basis of a popular mobilization supported by and aimed at the delivery of land, housing, and public services” (Castells, 1983, p. 175).

When we come to contemporary studies, we see that urban populism term is more closely used to its political meaning. Swyngedouw (2009, p. 604) counts populism as

something that comes hand in hand with “post-political consensual police order,” which is why he calls urban populism a “symptom of the post-political condition.” Populism is not an urban solution to urban problems but a “symptom” of it. Therefore, he relates the urban populism concept to a kind of “urban policing” and governance method that misses a “political” dimension. Urban populism is lacking in creating alternative urbanities; “idiosyncrasies of different forms and expressions of urban life, silences ideological and other constitutive social differences” (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 10). In “Post-democratic Cities for Whom and for What?”, his use of the term differs from others in the sense that he relates urban populism to the political theory of populism.

Urban populism is also based on a politics of ‘the people know best’ (although the latter category remains often empty, unnamed), supported by an assumedly neutral scientific technocracy, and advocates a direct relationship between people and political participation. Populism customarily invokes the spectre of annihilating apocalyptic futures if no direct and immediate action is taken. If we refrain from acting (in a technocratic-managerial manner) now, our urban future is in grave danger (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 10).

Özkeser (2019) indicates urban populism as a form of “ultra-politics” by referring to Swyngedouw. In his master thesis, he builds his argument on Rancière’s post-political theory and analyzes the discourses of politicians over mega-projects in İstanbul. He uses the urban populism concept in the sense that there is no room for “closure of debate” in urban politics and marginalization of some groups for the sake of a unified people. This marginalization can be done physically in the urban space and through the discourses of elites. His definition contains elites as a fundamental element of populism. He also sees urban populism as an example of “arkhe-politics.” Like the division of labor in arkhe-politics, urban populism designates certain duties and roles to society. From this, the role of expertise and ordinary people is consolidated.

Through that, populist politics is constructed, which “eliminate any possibility of politics with marginalizing oppositional voices” (Özkeser, 2019, p. 99).

Swyngedouw’s and Özkeser’s urban populism commentary is a negative one. In this thesis, following Mouffe, I attempt to develop a positive interpretation of urban populism. Accordingly, although there is a vast amount of study on urban politics, policy-making, electoral politics, and related topics, none consciously defines or elaborates on the elements of “urban populism” or differentiates it from other radical urban movements. Also, within studies of political science, scholars do not elaborate on “space.” I deliberately focus my definition on populist mechanisms over “space-making.” Considering the entanglement of populism and space, it is intended to offer a new definition of left-urban populism.

Left urban populism, in this regard, means the constant promotion of agonisms and conflicts “through” and “within” space, which works as an instrument for enhancing urban democracy. Architecture becomes an agency (both physical and discursive) by increasing contestation possibilities (written by the author).

CHAPTER 3

3. GEZI AND THE RETURN OF POLITICS

3.1. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF TAKSIM SQUARE UNTIL THE GEZI PROTESTS

This chapter presents a historical overview of Taksim Square, one of Turkey's main public squares and spaces, to understand the transformations leading to the Gezi Protests, one of the crucial uprisings in Turkey's modern history. The square's physical change over time, as well as its socio-political meaning, will be explained. In the following section, I will introduce the commodification and Islamization processes that led to the Gezi Protests. Lastly, the Gezi Protests' populist nature as a positive rectifier for democracy (in terms of constructing a "people" against AKP's power elite) will be explained.

The formation of Taksim Square dates back to the 19. century. At the end of the 18. century, the existence of Maksem (water distribution chamber), Artillery Barracks, a few military buildings, and a vacant drill field were surrounding today's Taksim Square. During the 19th century, with the developing settlement, Beyoğlu, it became an undefined traffic node at the end of Grand Rue de Pera (later called İstiklal Street). Pera was mainly known for its non-Muslim population and Western urban life. During the birth of the Turkish nation-state, Taksim functioned as a stage to settle the new

modernist way of life in the 1920s. It was identified as a new square free from the Ottoman past (Zeybekoglu Sadri, 2017). Political and everyday practices were organized to consolidate the modernist ideology of the new regime of the new nation-state (Batuman, 2015).

Initially, the square was defined by the “Independence Monument” erected in front of Maksem for Taksim to be characterized by Republican ideology in 1928. Later, in the 1930s-1940s, Taksim went through a series of transformations with Henri Prost’s intention of integrative design of Istanbul. That plan led to the destruction of the Artillery Barracks. With the destruction, we see the first traces of Gezi Park in the place of the demolished barracks. Also, according to Prost's plan, Taksim was equipped with a series of cultural and entertainment facilities (including a Theater House that will, subsequently, become today's AKM, Kristal Music Hall, and Municipal Music Hall) (Almanac, 2020). In sum, initially, the public space of Taksim has been serving to solidify modernist ideas of the new Turkish state with cultural facilities and modernist city planning of Prost. However, its morphological nature has continued to change with the construction of new buildings around it. The political actors of this era were homogenous, secularist-nationalist-modernist cadres. Therefore, until the 1950s, modernist ideals of the single-party regime of Turkey dominated the spaces and activities.

Especially after the 1950s, rather than symbols and their constructions, political activities transformed the meaning of Taksim Square more than in the previous period. Social tensions continued to accelerate with the liberalization objectives of the state, rising leftist movements, civic organizational groups, and university students’

activism (Baykan & Hatuka, 2010). Different power blocks existed in public spaces and organized public protests. Therefore, demonstrations and rallies were performed parallel to the political conflicts and changing dynamics of the political history of Turkey (student demonstrations, union demonstrations, and May Day celebrations) (Baykan & Hatuka, 2010). The political actors of this period were diverse in terms of ideologies: rising Islamist groups, secularist groups, union groups, leftist students, and others. Prominent demonstrations include the Incidents of September 6th-7th, Bloody Sunday of 1969, and May Day of 1977 Protests (Almanac, 2020; Baykan & Hatuka, 2010; Batuman, 2015). Political protests were so dense and fierce that protests were getting violent responses. For example, on May Day, 1977, nearly 500,000 people were populating space in Taksim Square. Labor unions, workers, and leftist organizations gathered to celebrate May Day. They appropriated the square with marches, walks, and speeches. However, it has resulted in violence, with at least 34 deaths reported (controversial) and many injuries.¹ This incident highlights the importance of public spaces for democracy. Also, it highlights the political significance of the square.

Neoliberal economic motivations in the value of the military coup marked the 1980s. While the neoliberal era started to convert main centers in accordance with creating global cities, the 1980 military coup led to a decrease in political activities and organizations in public spaces, such as protest bans (Hatuka & Baykan, 2010). Hatuka and Baykan (2010) posit that the political rupture of 1980 led to the “fragmentation of space and its role as a core of civic participation” (p. 50). From 1979 onwards, protests and demonstrations were prohibited in Taksim until the 2000s (Batuman,

¹<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/146248-1-mayis-1977-neden-ve-nasil-kana-bulandi>

2015). This ban is an act of excluding politics from the public space. Also, with the neo-liberalization of the Turkish political economy, the global image of İstanbul became important. Commercial uses, tourism, and cultural industry dominated construction on essential lands. We observe the “emergence of skyscrapers, hotels, restaurants, and other cultural productions, such as the music industry” (Hatuka & Baykan, 2010, p. 64). Taksim also became a locus of entertainment and consumption. The construction of Süzer Plaza on the hill towards Beşiktaş is an excellent example (Almanac, 2020).

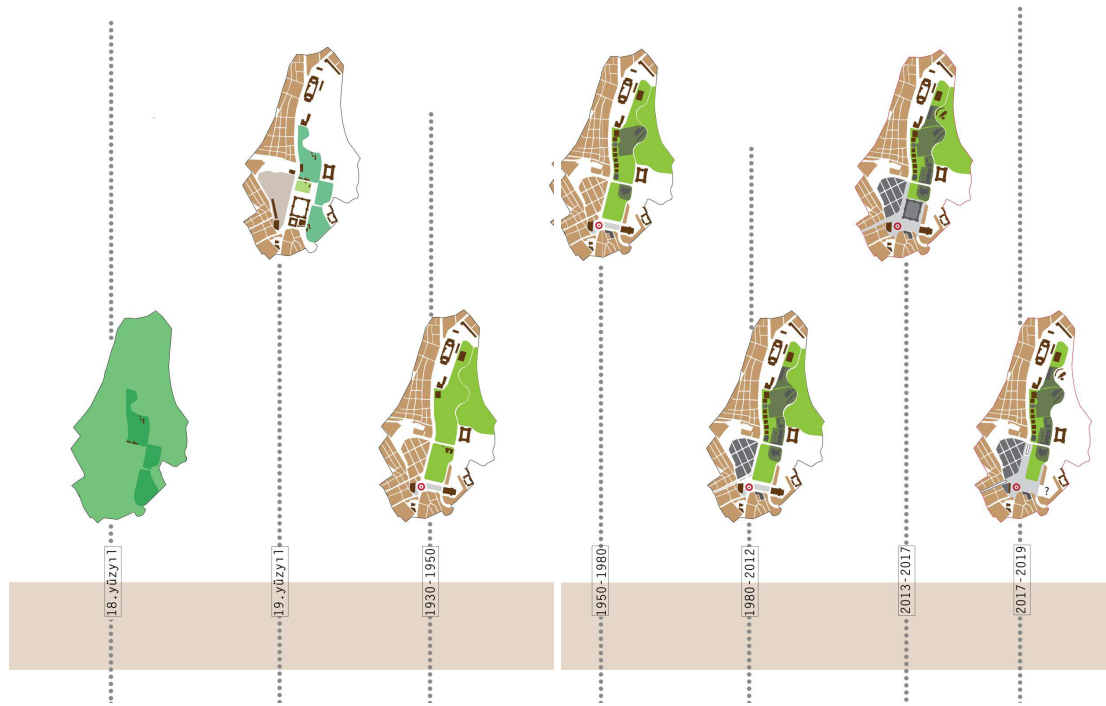


Figure 3.1. Morphological development of Taksim Square. (source: Almanac, 2020)

After this brief overview of Taksim Square between the early 1920s and 2000s, to better understand the Gezi Protests, I need to clarify the political-economic program of the 2000s in a more detailed way, which led to the total urbanization of Turkey.

3.2. THE AKP'S URBAN POLITICS AND THE GEZI PROTESTS

“...AKP's development model,..., depends on the trinity of construction, real estate, and infrastructure” (Erensü & Karaman, 2017, p. 27).

With its economic development plan and the prospect of EU membership, the AKP garnered support from the general public in the 2002 elections, in the value of the 2001 economic crisis (Sengupta, 2017; Özen, 2015). Along with liberalization in the economy, AKP also came to the forefront with the claims of democratization and modernization in socio-political terms. Islamic circles, who were seen as an underdog group and believed Kemalist elitism had disregarded their interests, regarded the AKP as a new populist party. As a result, all the processes discussed below were carried out with popular support and populist construction.

In particular, to realize a neoliberal program, AKP focused its full attention on the “urban space” and its construction. It has become a common practice for them to provide capital accumulation through the construction sector, real estate, land speculations, and large-scale projects. The construction sector gained a vital role in economic growth. This situation was so accelerated and intense that it could be said that there was a “construction boom” (Özen, 2015, p. 539). “One remarkable success of the AKP has been its ability to present its real estate and construction-led growth model as the benchmark of development (and modernity)” (Erensü & Karaman, 2017, p. 24). We can say that this created a very different urban reality. These interventions and projects took place in such a way as to affect not only the city but also the urban peripheries and rural areas. Total urbanization in the form of an “urban-rural continuum” occurred in all focus areas (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). The urban-rural

continuum is well exemplified by including rural areas into the city by changing their legal status (Batuman, 2018). In other words, there is no longer urban versus/and rural, but an all-encompassing urbanity. These urban interventions are exemplified by “a series of restructuring, regeneration, renovation, and transformation projects in urban areas as well as some housing, airport, highway, and power plant projects” (Özen, 2015, p. 539). Some authors have defined this as an urban revolution with reference to Lefebvre, explaining the urban situation arising from dense urbanization (Batuman, 2019; Bayırbağ et al., 2022). According to that, the AKP government has sparked an urban revolution where “politics is completely urbanized” (Batuman, 2019). The AKP “embraced an agenda of absolute national development whose primary mechanism was nationwide urban revolution” (Bayırbağ et al., 2022, p. 1).

Each urban intervention covered a significant amount of place in Turkish literature: UTPs, *gecekondus* (squatter houses), TOKI (Turkish Housing Development Administration) projects, infrastructural projects, renewal projects, and gentrification projects (Erman, 2016; Erensü & Karaman, 2017; Batuman, 2013; Bayırbağ et al., 2022; Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). These projects have a significant amount of “urban rent” production. “According to Lefebvre, cities were no longer merely arenas in which industrial societies produce a social surplus, but rather, social surplus was produced through urbanization” (Bayırbağ et al., 2022, p. 2). The state itself speculated on these processes or took the initiative to pave the way through laws.

In neoliberal urbanization, urban space is reproduced, commodified, and put into market circulation. These were carried out through land speculation, sometimes by stretching the laws in the desired direction (such as disaster law and zoning changes),

sometimes through dispossession, and sometimes through “directed demands”² in line with the wishes of the popular base (Acara & Penpecioglu, 2022). Rent production and distribution, as Acara and Penpecioglu (2022) argue, in the Global South and Turkey is handled very differently. Not only do state institutions realize urban projects firsthand with a top-down approach, but also people get involved in urban transformations with directed demands. Urban transformations in Turkey result from informal, conflicting, and clientelist relationships. “...the rent has been divided through various nepotistic networks/relationships, and this process has turned into a key factor enabling the grassroots mobilization of the power within the last 18 years” (Doğan as cited in Bayırbağ et al., 2022, p. 179)

In line with AKP’s development program, there was not only an economic but also a social and spatial revolution effort. In addition to a neoliberal purpose, social life began to be shaped by religious values/parameters. For instance, “alcohol consumption, sexual segregation in student houses and dormitories, and harsh measures concerning childbirth, abortion, and divorce” (Özen, 2015, p. 538). Here, we can see that both social life and urban spaces are restructured similarly. “While conservatism aggressively recodes the urban space within the framework of its own values, it declares the social segments that do not adopt this imposition as the enemy and the spaces as enemy territory” (Şengül, 2015, p. 5).

We will focus on here that urban rent production, sharing of rent, and Islamic social structure become something that feeds each other. Because a strong network formed between religious segments and those groups/institutions. A strong congregation

² The participation of the public in the speculation system, considering the financial benefits they would gain from the transformations. For instance, in the 80s, the emergence of the “yapsatçılık” model enabled gecekondu dwellers to engage in land speculation, as well.

emerged through both formal alliances (partnerships) and informal alliances: “alliances with various actors, which included big capital groups, various Islamic and conservative groups, liberal circles, and international powers (Özen, 2015, p. 537). It was precisely these alliances that provided an increasingly intertwined interdependence. While providing financial profit to these alliances, the state also brought electoral gain. “This allowed the AKP to cultivate patronage networks which, in turn, cemented its electoral success” (Bayırbağ et al., 2022, p. 3). This developmental and construction-oriented growth and speculation system made these groups economic actors. People also became “entrepreneurs” to create rent (Erensü & Karaman, 2017). In this respect, neoliberal economic policy has become an interwoven structure with Islamism. In other words, the spread of neoliberalism to such a wide popular base and getting political support is the network where Islamic and financial goals are intertwined, known as “neoliberalism’s symbiotic coupling with Islamism” (Karaman, 2013, p. 3413). This speculative production has occurred in a highly destructive and authoritarian manner due to the undemocratic nature of these processes, which are neither open to negotiation nor implemented at a reasonable pace (Şengül, 2015).

The public space was also influenced by the parameters mentioned above and was also shaped to create urban rent. By deciding how and by whom the public space will be used, public space is constructed with architectural, discursive, and symbolic strategies. As Kaya clarifies, “state has always monopolized the right to define and shape the principal components of the public space” (2017, p. 210).

3.2.1. TAKSIM SQUARE AFTER THE 2000s

3.2.1.1. PEDESTRIANIZATION PLAN

Coming back to Taksim Square, after the 2000s, new discourses started to dominate the agenda of Taksim in line with the commodification and Islamization processes mentioned above. It was related to a series of proposals depicted by Erdoğan, known as the “Taksim Pedestrianization Plan.” These projects compelled the “pedestrianization” of the square, rearranging the square by placing traffic underground. Also, the plan proposed the reconstitution of the old Artillery Barracks and the construction of a new mosque. This mosque project has been expected for quite some time, with several attempts to propose it in the past. However, it has been rejected on different occasions due to reasons such as military rule and the conservation of archaeological heritage. Additionally, the plan included the demolition of the AKM building, which was designated as a theater house in Prost’s plan and became prominent with its modernist image (Batuman, 2015; Büyüksaraç, 2005; Harmanşah, 2014). The plan for pedestrianization was accepted by the conservation board and put into effect in 2012. “Tarlabaşı Bulvarı – Cumhuriyet Caddesi” is pedestrianized by underground tunnels. This project received public backlash from residents, professional chambers, and local stakeholders. Those resistances led to the formation of an organization, “Taksim Solidarity Platform.” The pedestrianization project would result in narrower sidewalks, the destruction of trees, and reduced pedestrian accessibility to Taksim Square (Batuman, 2015). It also threatened the square’s quality by diminishing the spatial diversity of pedestrians and transportation (Batuman, 2015).

We can attribute the pedestrianization plan of Taksim Square to objectives such as economic development, construction-led growth, and surplus gain through space, which is realized not only in Taksim but all over Turkey. Like other sites in Turkey, Taksim also became the locus of transformation for urban rent creation with its market value. Also, it is within this period that the history of Taksim shows a transition from a modernist nationalist character to an Islamic identity and representation. Not only visibility of Islamist groups was increasing, but it also dominated how the public space was shaped. Specific Islamist manifestations were imagined to dominate the space, such as the building of a neo-Ottoman Mosque (Batuman, 2015). Also, we cannot ignore the desire to turn İstanbul into a globally attractive city in the eyes of the world (Zeybekoglu Sadri, 2017). Through “sterilization” and “commercialization” of the square, Taksim would become upscaled for “retail” and “tourism” activities and consumption (Erensü & Karaman, 2017, p. 27). Batuman discussed this transformation as “banal politicization” (Batuman, 2018, p. 176). Both “Islamization” and “neoliberal” forces shaping the representation of the square and interventions towards demonstrations somehow lead to the square losing its previous political identity and social character.

As already mentioned, even though the “urban space” was handled in a construction-led manner, long-term concerns about the environment, social justice, and the right to the city were neglected. These societal problems kept accumulating until the Gezi Protests (Batuman, 2018). Although there were occasionally movements against them, it was limited to activism. In terms of the conceptualization of the Urban Revolution once more, according to Batuman, there was “opposition” centered around urban issues in reaction to the AKP's politics established over the

city. In other words, “opposition” was urbanized as well. The Gezi Protests erupted due to the fusion of various “urbanized opposition” axes, claims Batuman (2018). The “revolution of the urban,” as he calls Gezi, was created when these various fractions came together. If we ask where the public space is in all of this, we can also see that the revolution of “urban” is being realized “through” the public space. Reclaiming public space can challenge and subvert power relationships and help to build new hegemonic relationships, as left populism tries to build.

3.2.1.2. GEZI PROTESTS

The reconstruction of the Artillery Barracks in the form of a mall³ on the site of Gezi Park triggered protests. It was one of Erdoğan's objectives following the pedestrianization action plan. The incident began with a small group of environmentalists defending the park. It grew into a much larger insurgent movement after the bulldozers arrived to destroy the park's trees on 30 May 2013 (Aksoy, 2017). Due to the dynamics mentioned earlier, this uprising developed against neoliberal urbanism. It is not possible to reduce it to a single cause. The urban interventions elicited negative public feedback and generated opposition, prompting a desire among citizens to influence governance. Gezi marked a transition from representative democratic processes to direct engagement motivated by popular demand. Örs (2014) describes this as the “second meaning of democracy,” entailing active citizenship and genuine involvement in determining how the public is governed. The political actors of this occupation were again quite variegated, such as secular and conservative people, workers, university students, and LGBTQ groups (Tuğal, 2015, p. 166). As a

³ The mall was supposed to be the reconstructed version of the old Artillery Barracks.

populist example, Gezi calls upon “pluralism.” By its various aspects, the occupation appeared to many researchers to be a genuine sample of the “right to city” concept (Batuman, 2015; Kuymulu, 2013). During its occupation by protestors, Gezi Park was appropriated and reproduced with different commoning activities. It became a stage for alternative spatial practices;

There was a ‘revolutionary market’, a market at which no money was needed, and a common kitchen, a library, a health centre, an organic vegetable garden, a forum area, a TV station, a radio station... free classes for children; sessions for such activities as meditation, yoga, and physical exercise; there were speeches (in the democratic spirit of free speech), talks and discussions in the people’s forum area. The emergent democratic culture made a space for sitting around, sleeping, reading, talking, singing, discussing, and just plain and simple being together (Aksoy, 2017, p. 31).



Figure 3.2. A free library established by protestors in Gezi Park. (source: <https://www.farklibirbakis.com/gezi-parkina-avm-degil-kutuphane-kuruldu/>)

These new commonalities taught what is missing in commodified and controlled public spaces. Gezi was de-commodifying space through the idealization of “use value” over “exchange value” (Kuymulu, 2013, p. 276). After the negotiations

between protestors and the AKP government about the eviction of the occupation, Erdoğan promised to abolish the plan for the Artillery Barracks.

Although Gezi is formed by opposition to various interventions, mega-scaled projects, displacements through renewal projects, and “real estate” development policies by AKP, Gezi can be related to bigger discontent beyond being a local insurgency (Erensü & Karaman, 2017; Kuymulu, 2013). Tuğal (2015) discusses the revolts happening in different countries, especially between “2009-2013,” in a broader sense, admitting Gezi’s relation to these “worldwide” outbreaks. Two reasons for these insurgencies are considered “commodification” and “authoritarianism” exercising their control over the countries. Each of them was tackling the commodification of different aspects of their lives. In the Global North, while it revolves more around precise capitalism, in Global South, the problem was mainly on “commodification of space,” such as gentrification projects and projects targeting nature.

Various researchers also investigated the potentials that Gezi exposed within the discussions on “the political.” As an outbreak, Gezi constituted an obstruction to the ordinary functioning of “politics” and created “dissensus” (Erensü & Karaman, 2017, p. 21). Erensü and Karaman build their discussion on three central facets; the first pertains to capital accumulation and generation of urban rent through space, the second is possibilities for designing radical urban politics through “disruption” in the arrangement of usual politics, and the third is beyond political activity concentrated in the space. The third facet concerns the production of space through a rupture/event in space and the overreaching power of spontaneous movements to influence present

politics (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017). The Gezi outbreak represents such a rupture that happened through intense collective experience.

In his article, Şengül (2015) associates the crisis that caused the Gezi outbreak with the exploitation of space increasingly to provide “capital accumulation” and increasing “authoritarianism.” The interpenetration of the two generates a particular case for him, not even in perfect agreement (Şengül, 2015, p. 2). He attributes the dissolution of democracy in Turkey to two authoritarian tendencies: the primary factor being neoliberal tendencies and the second factor being Islamist tendencies. Şengül draws attention to the usual mistake of discussing neoliberal structuring only on economic grounds. Neoliberalism also transforms politics; “...commodification processes also have transformative effects on political structures” (Şengül, 2015, p. 2). Şengül argues that the commodification of space prioritizes “speed.” The surplus value is increased, and the pace of restructuring increases. That eliminates some important footsteps and legal procedures of democracies (Şengül, 2015, p. 3). This demonstrates that the political sphere has been excluded from Turkey and Taksim Square due to the nature of consensual governance.

Coming back to plans for the design of the square, the pedestrianization plan could only be partially finalized (Acar et al., 2023). However, in 2014, some designers were invited to tender, and ON Tasarım, in cooperation with TUMAŞ A.Ş., designed the recent version of Taksim Square in 2015.

3.2.2. THE POPULIST NATURE OF GEZI

Gezi, as a political awakening and a square movement, brings back the excluded political aspect, the “return of politics.” Not only did the physical side of protest achieve that, but also voicing grievances in a public space achieved the return of politics. We can describe Gezi as a “populist moment” with an accumulation of “unsatisfied demands.” It is possible to read Gezi as left populism establishment against the right populism AKP carries, or we can see it as a “bottom-up” populist movement against the top-down AKP populism, as Şengül claims:

The demand for the protection of Gezi Park, which the government attempted to suppress through violence, assumed the role of representing the diverse and heterogeneous masses’ various discontent and demands towards the government. On the one hand, it served as a divisive factor between the government and the people. On the other hand, it functioned as a binding force bringing together heterogeneous masses (Şengül, 2015, p. 11).

Many scholars argue that the Gezi protest is not only about the integrity of the park and its transformation into a shopping center, creating a commercialized space, but also the outbreak was connected to the accumulating anti-democratic processes. Accordingly, the protest dealt with the spatial privileges offered to the consumption of the elite, the privileged political power, and the disappearance of the social sphere under the pressure of the economic sphere. According to these academics, Gezi has become an “empty signifier” or “void to be filled” with reference to Laclau’s populist theory in this respect (Batuman, 2018; Gambetti, 2014; Özen, 2015; Şengül, 2015). Different “unsatisfied demands” of society come together around the “park.” Unresolved demands form a “chain of equivalence.” This chain breaks the hierarchy between demands and combines them under a single demand name. Everyone recognizes and accepts each other’s demands, according to the left populism theory. When the “particularistic demand” of one is neutralized and homogenized, each demand gets closer to the equivalence level. Therefore, they are emptied while a “new

floating signifier” starts to represent all of them. Therefore, the new thing may signify different meanings to different individuals. ”Floating signifier”⁴ is an essential constituent of populism. Empty signifiers are reproduced over and over by “discourses.” Right across the frontier, there is also an enemy figure. The “frontier” generates “antagonistic” relations among opponent groups. However, one criticism is valid for antagonistic construction. Touching upon populist theory, Gezi Protest has been studied concerning its ability to construct a “populist” resistance. For Şengül, it was a “bottom-up” and inclusionary populist action against the very exclusionary and authoritarian populism AKP constructed. [Although it started as promises about “widening publics” and more liberal promises (Özel, 2014, p. 12; Batuman, 2018, p. 145)]. He believes that, with this insurgent action, the older populism is destroyed, and a new one is constructed. By doing so, new populists (protesters) prompt AKP into “new elites” status (İğsız, 2014, p. 39; Şengül, 2015). The second force that shaped public space was related to the Islamization process. This formation is done by arranging everyday practices and “spatial representations.” For example, the idea of building a Taksim mosque since the 1950s or demonstrations for the conquest of Istanbul day (Batuman, 2015; Büyüksaraç, 2005; Çınar, 2001; Şengül, 2015).

To summarize, the commodification project that rapidly transforms urban space while suspending democratic and legal processes reinforces the government's authoritarian tendencies, while the Islamization project that targets everyday life and public space also strengthens totalitarian tendencies (Şengül, 2015, p. 6).

Gezi Protest’s populist character can be analyzed from various aspects. First, because it was a “floating signifier,” the insurgency allowed people to turn their particular demands into greater demand. It was an exercise for forming a “chain of equivalence”

⁴ There is indeed conceptual confusion regarding the usage of the terms “empty signifier” and “floating signifier” in the literature, as they are sometimes used interchangeably. In this thesis, however, both “empty signifier” and “floating signifier” will be used to refer to the same concept.

that left populism advocated. Secondly, Gezi has unfolded a “representation crisis.” Before Gezi, advocates of AKP were considered a majority, and the others were considered as minority. The protest revealed that “the others” were also bigger and heterogeneous (Batuman, 2018, p. 195). Finally, the protest also promoted the “political subjectivation” of people by using their right to speak and manifesting demands for “democracy and participation” (Batuman, 2018, p. 190). It revealed that representative democracy is a flawed system, which should be reinforced by other political activities, such as protests and campaigns (Moffitt, 2016).

Özen (2015) defines the case of Gezi in terms of populist content as “grassroots populism.” With reference to Laclau, she brings up the concept of “particular demand”: “The government’s ruthless repression of the specific demand for the protection of the Gezi Park triggered the formation of a spontaneous equivalence between this particular demand and various frustrated social demands” (Özen, 2015, p. 547). Populism heals democracy in the sense that it exposes the nonworking parts of the existing system and reminds people of the accountability of policies (Moffitt, 2016). Gezi increased the democratic participation of people and gave them a chance to express their social demands.

The case of Gezi Park involved almost all the components of grassroots populism: a broad social discontent with the hegemonic behaviour of the AKP; the formation of an equivalential link between a plurality of frustrated social demands; the constitution of ‘the people’ as a political subject against the ‘other’ – that is, the power that is unresponsive to the demands, interests, and aspirations of the people; and the incipient transformation of Gezi into an empty signifier representing the people (Özen, 2015, p. 547).

However, it was ultimately not entirely successful because equivalential linkage cannot be achieved due to the lack of political representation after the protest, the

particular interests of each group are not lost, and lastly, the government stigmatizes the group, and its power is broken. Gezi, as a populist movement, also faded over time as it could not convert into a permanent organization. So, it is a type of populism that has limits (Özen, 2015). Since populism produces two enemy blocks, one “enemy” and one “people” group, the enemy group here is the government. According to the protesters, the government constitutes the neoliberal hegemony they oppose (Özen, 2015). Here, the park is an element that unites all social frustrations around it, “signifying much more than merely protecting a park” (Özen, 2015, p. 543).

In the following chapter, I discuss the 2019 election results as a continuation of the populist moment defined by Gezi. It is essential to understand “populist moment” as a process instead of one occasion.

CHAPTER 4

4. RE-DESIGNING TAKSIM

4.1. RETHINKING TAKSIM AFTER GEZI

4.1.1. NEW MUNICIPALISM MOVEMENT AS A SIMILAR EXAMPLE

Looking at what Gezi Protests taught us as an example of left populist strategy, is it possible to create a counter-politics to the urban politics of AKP? The election outcomes in Istanbul (2019) mark a crucial turning point for a change in local politics. Initiations of new municipal administration can remind us of another case, the “new municipality movement” from the 1970s, in terms of constructing counter-politics over an urban grievance. In this regard, it is essential to draw attention to the article by Batuman, “*A Socialist Municipalism Model: “New Municipalism Movement” 1973–1977.*” According to Batuman, the slum problem in Turkey was handled populistically in the 1960s as a matter of bargaining between the slum dwellers and the administration, with various promises of legal status. It was also based on the political “patronage” relationship between municipalities and dwellers. After the 1971 memorandum, the shantytowns were under the threat of destruction by the military regime. Following this, the leftist party CHP won some municipal elections in those

cities and constructed its urban politics over the housing issue. This led to the emergence of slum movements and the transformation of the slum issue into a radical movement. In other words, the residents of the slums were also articulated to the “leftist” ideology in reaction to the demolitions (Batuman, 2010).

During that period, when the central and local administrations were from different political parties, the local administrations (of CHP) could not get financial support for municipal services; therefore, it became increasingly politicized and established a new urban policy that supported social demands. In the meantime, it is being discussed that local governments should become autonomous from the center. Those CHP Municipalities also established a union among themselves. They focused primarily on the slum problem. Especially Erol Köse¹ and Vedat Dalokay² bring the housing issue to the agenda. These municipalities have carried out some expropriations and tried to keep the rent of small enterprises under control. A group of urbanization experts (technocrats) was established, the roots of social problems were investigated, and socialist policies were produced. As a result of this reformist municipal movement or model, Batuman has the following inferences: (1) the politicization of people living in slums, the recognition of the “worker group” as an actor in urban politics, and the formation of social awareness about urban demands, (2) fair distribution of rent, (3) providing control on production and consumption (Batuman, 2010).

Could this form of municipalism as a hegemonic municipal movement serve as an inspiration for IBB's urban politics in a similar fashion? How can IBB realize such

¹ İzmit Mayor

² Ankara Mayor

urban politics? Considering the aftermath of the Gezi Protests, what impact did it have on urban politics? According to Aksoy (2017), the most important outcome of the Gezi is that they try to restore the broken relationship between politics and the city, revitalizing the city's political role. Secondly, it can organize different groups around a common thing, turn them into political actors, and offer alternative lifestyles to the neoliberal consensus (Aksoy, 2017).

Ultimately, land speculations, urban rent production, and construction-oriented development did not change (Şengül, 2015, p. 16). Projects such as Kanal Istanbul, Millet Bahçeleri, and Istanbul Airport remained on the agenda. Also, Gezi, as a populist movement, could not articulate into any existing party politics or a new political party (Bakiner, 2014). Moreover, politics became increasingly urbanized after Gezi and began to affect the following years. From this point of view, opening discussion for the competition and Taksim Square as a public space has a social quality, just like the municipal trials in the 1970s or Gezi. This is done through a populist urban policy, as I will discuss in detail.

4.2. “İSTANBUL MEYDANLARINA KAVUŞUYOR” CAMPAIGN

Turkey's local elections in 2019 marked a crucial turning point in the country's political landscape. The change in municipal administration reflects a continuity of the left-populist movement, Gezi. According to our conceptual framework, Gezi resulted from a “populist moment” defined by accumulated grievances and discontent towards the existing political order. The reason for focusing on these elections in this research is the “participatory” initiatives for urban space production by these

municipalities. Kavuşma Durağı and Taksim Urban Design Competition are essential examples of these initiatives. Similar populist initiatives took place in Ankara. A public survey was conducted to decide whether to demolish or preserve the “100. Yıl Çarşısı” is one such example (Acar, 2022). As discussed below, these initiatives should be evaluated as a political strategy with “populist rhetoric.” In this chapter, the study will examine how these cases serve the positive interpretation of populism. To do so, I will utilize the criteria from the literature review section based on populism theories and analyze them through Mouffe's left populism theory.

On February 12, 2020, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the new mayor of Istanbul, declared the initiation of design competitions within the scope of the “Reclaiming Istanbul’s Squares”³ Campaign for squares in Istanbul, beginning with Taksim, Bakırköy, Üsküdar-Salacak-Harem Waterfront, and Kadıköy. İmamoğlu stated:

Squares are areas where democracy has flourished...Instead of a project development process confined to a limited number of participants and a limited schedule, we will realize a long-term and participatory public sphere governance model through workshops, exhibitions, surveys, and ateliers (İBBTV, 2020).

The campaign began with an unusual installation in Taksim Square. The competition announcement required a venue for hosting a series of exhibitions, meetings, and activities. The intention was to enhance the competition's visibility by utilizing such a venue. Therefore, within the scope of the Taksim Square Urban Design competition, a temporary structure would be installed in Taksim (February 16, 2020). The first step to providing public involvement and visibility throughout the competition was to propose an open platform, Kavuşma Durağı.

³ “İstanbul Meydanlarına Kavuşuyor” Kampanyası

4.2.1. “KAVUŞMA DURAĞI” INSTALLATION

“Kavuşma Durağı” was a steel structure with wooden amphitheaters looking reciprocal to host open public forums about competitions and small activities (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).⁴ This platform was initially an activity platform where citizens could actively participate in decision-making processes related to the urban design competition. Also, by engaging in civic activities, citizens strengthened their sense of civic engagement and “active citizenship.” As I will discuss in detail below, public space, participation, and democracy concepts are materialized in this small structure. The starting point that requires the design of such a structure is as follows:

There is the same question on everyone’s mind as to whether we can make the urban planning process more democratic, electoral, and transparent. [...] We thought we could create a platform to talk about the city, invite some sociologists into this exhibition space, and hold a public competition, not just for Taksim but for many squares (with issues), giving them an identity and debate over them (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).

Ömer Yılmaz (İPA⁵ Competitions Coordinator) is one of the actors involved in this production process of Kavuşma Durağı. When Mahir Polat, the head of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Cultural Heritage Department, expressed his intention to create an open platform for the competition. Yılmaz states that the project began with the question, “We need something for Taksim urgently. What can we do?” and admits that he did not consider proposing a competition as a solution. Yılmaz contacted Arman Akdoğan, whom he had previously met at the “ITU Faculty of Management” architectural competition. Arman Akdoğan and his team developed Kavuşma Durağı structure’s proposal within a short time (15 days). We can relate this rapid

⁴ Interview conducted by author.

⁵ Istanbul Planning Agency (İstanbul Planlama Ajansı)

transformation urgency in Taksim to its historical context, spatial challenges, and political significance, as Ömer Yılmaz explains:

There were the Gezi protests, and Taksim Square has been a place of great concern. There was a central government that desired to build a [artillery] barracks, let's envision the climate. Perhaps, after 30 years, there has been a change in the municipality's administration, which has been governed by the same political party. Everyone is working to prevent anything from being done in Taksim. Ultimately, from the other side's perspective, what they have done is also natural. Is it necessary to do something in Taksim? It has been recently renovated, but it is not in good condition. Considering that it is one of Turkey's most significant squares, it is far from being in good shape. In this situation, a competition will be launched, and it is necessary to promote it. There may be different figures within the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) for this. Still, the person I directly interacted with was Mahir (currently the deputy secretary-general). We worked on developing it together (Yılmaz, personal communication, April 7, 2022).⁶

This political significance of the square has also shaped the conceptual design of Kavuşma Durağı. The formal expression of the structure is designed according to this underlying input. The architect of the installation mentioned the conceptual approach employed during its design:

We have previously designed a project in Albania, 'Twister Pavilion,' where we tested this seating configuration. People were playing Twister in the center while the others were watching them. In this case, the seating plan is divided into two sections, suitable for addressing social and political divisions on a unified platform (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).



Figure 4.1. Twister Pavilion in Albania by IND [Inter.National.Design]. (source: <https://www.internationaldesign.nl/Korca-Twister-Pavilion>)

⁶ Interview conducted by author.

The position of the structure on the square was also deliberately designed to have vistas towards İstiklal Street and Gezi Park. Entrance points are carefully decided according to people's circulation:

We have put considerable effort into positioning Kavuşma Durağı on Taksim. Since we are designing such an exhibition and seating arrangement, we have carefully considered the angles, perspectives, and what you will see when you reach the top. On one side, it celebrates the [Gezi] Park; on the other, it highlights İstiklal Street. Also, when you exit the metro, you encounter something like this. We have architecturally worked on the entrances and exits (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).



Figure 4.2. Position of Kavuşma Durağı on the Taksim Square (source: <https://www.arkitera.com/proje/kavusma-duragi/>) (Photographer: Yasin Akgül)

4.2.1.1. “KAVUŞMA”: REFERENCE TO GEZİ

To better understand the structure, it is necessary to address its name. The name of the Kavuşma Durağı comes from the Turkish verb ‘*kavuşmak*,’ meaning the reunion of what has remained separate (TDK Sözlükleri, n.d.). It references the Gezi Protests that have occurred on the same spot as Kavuşma Durağı. The political nature of Kavuşma Durağı and its relation to Gezi was apparent since the beginning of the design phase.

Since Taksim Square is a protected area, the design or placement of a design on the square requires permission from the “Istanbul Number 2 Regional Board for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage.” The temporary nature of Kavuşma Durağı was a question in mind. However, the question was more about the political tension between IBB and the central government. Although the design team started the manufacturing process by relying on the temporary character of the structure after consulting the city council, the regional conservation board’s permission issue was going to erupt after eight days.

There was a debate over whether to obtain permission before the construction [of Kavuşma Durağı]. We can ask the city council, which gives approval at the municipality level. However, the conservation board will not grant us permission because it is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tourism, which is politically controlled. Nothing is done without consulting Ankara. This is another factor in the failure to implement the design competitions. No conservation board is willing to give approval for Kadıköy, Bakırköy, or Taksim because they do not want to cooperate with İmamoğlu (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).

Still, the structure will accomplish many things in its short lifespan. Initially, Kavuşma Durağı occupies the square spatially by being positioned next to the existing Cumhurbaşkanlığı Digital Exhibition Tent. Symbolically, it begins to coexist alongside the tent, gaining presence. The rise of the amphitheaters on both sides makes the structure perceptible. While the upper steps/stairs serve as a seating and activity platform, the space underneath the steps is an exhibition space. The “Taksim: The Heart of Istanbul” exhibition was displayed between 17-23 February 2020 (Yılmaz, 2020). Different collective memories were depicted in the exhibition underneath the structure (“Taksim: The Heart of Istanbul”), showing the story of Taksim. In this exhibition, radical events related to Taksim were presented, such as 1 May photos, old AKM photos, and Pride photos. This exhibition shows the inclusivity of the IBB administration’s approach to minority rights and its political stance.

Kavuşma Durağı is undoubtedly a political design object. After all, every design is inherently political. The fact that Taksim Square has been a natural gathering place for May Day celebrations, the Gezi Resistance, the demolition and reconstruction debate of AKM (Ataturk Cultural Center), the ongoing controversy surrounding Taksim Mosque, and the current ban on any kind of demonstration in the square further highlights the political stance of the Kavuşma Durağı (Yırtıcı, 2020a).

It has a 180-meter square base area, accommodating 220 people for a concert. However, architecturally, its design with white lightweight steel facades makes it nearly invisible. It does have a permeability for vision contrary to permanent robust structures such as the Taksim Mosque near it. Therefore, metaphorically, mosque construction reflects permanent authority and dominance. In contrast, “Kavuşma Durağı” reflects temporality, flexibility, and “invisibility” of power over the public square and commonalities. Various movements, such as Archigram and Situationist International, experimented with this type of urban temporality. For example, we observe such spontaneity in Constant Nieuwenhuys’s utopian project, New Babylon. In his article “New Babylon: The Antinomies of Utopia,” Heynen (1996) introduces the Unitary Urbanism movement by Situationists as a response to the static contemporary modernist approach to urbanism. Situationists (e.g., Constant Nieuwenhuys and Guy Debord) deny the “utilitarian logic of consumer and capitalist society” and try to give freedom to people through more experimental and flexible spaces, which may challenge dominant powers over the public space.

Moreover, in another provocative movement, Archigram considered mobility to provide users freedom and create an alternative to top-down urbanism (Pinder, 2017). For them, everybody can be part of shaping their environments and their cities. Similarly, in “Kavuşma Durağı,” everybody had a voice to shape their environment. “Kavuşma Durağı” is an example of an experimental, transparent, and

participation-oriented pavilion. It is temporal, transparent, portable, and not fixed in a particular place.



Figure 4.3. ‘Taksim: The Heart of Istanbul’ Exhibition under Kavuşma Durağı. (source: <https://www.arkitera.com/proje/kavusma-duragi/>)

Therefore, Kavuşma Durağı signifies a reunion of those who claimed the space in the Gezi Protests, as the structure's name, “Kavuşma,” gives a clue about it. They revolve around the similar concepts of “being against top-down approaches” and having the “right to the city.” Now, “Kavuşma Durağı” can be considered another silent appropriation of the space, seven years after the Gezi Protests, with a modern design and activity allocation.

4.2.1.2. CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI DIGITAL EXHIBITION TENT

As mentioned, before the Kavuşma Durağı was installed, an exhibition tent was already present in the square: “Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı Dijital Gösterim

Çadırı.” A tent of temporary nature, just like Kavuşma Durağı. It does not contain any design input from a spatial perspective. However, this tent stands out as a political object (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022). The tent had been in the square long before the installation of Kavuşma Durağı, and it remained there for an extended period. The relevant authority, the conservation board, took no action regarding the tent. When the decision for Kavuşma Durağı’s removal was announced, it was also removed. However, the decision to remove Kavuşma Durağı was not executed previously for the tent, underscoring the political significance of the tent as an object.



Figure 4.4. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Digital Exhibition Tent. (source: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2020/02/21/kavusma-duragi-her-tasarim-nesnesi-politiktirkavusma-duragi-her-tasarim-politiktir>)

The controversy surrounding Kavuşma Durağı and the Cumhurbaşkanlığı Digital Exhibition Tent is reminiscent of the dispute between Gezi Park and Artillery Barracks. Kavuşma Durağı is successfully “tactical” in the sense that the discussions surrounding its presence have not only brought attention to the issue but also resulted in the removal of the controversial exhibition tent. The temporary nature of “Kavuşma

Durağı” has again raised questions about the political power dynamics in Taksim Square. It is the “disguise” form of what has been contested in the Gezi protest. Since then, no protest has been permitted in Taksim Square. Hence, “Kavuşma Durağı” is tactically a protest by nature and serves as a way to voice dissent. The removal of it also highlights its role in political expression.

4.2.1.3. KAVUŞMA DURAĞI AS A GENERATOR OF “MOMENTS” AND “ENCOUNTERS”

Merrifield uses the concept of encounter to explain the urban experience of establishing new connections with other “things.” According to Merrifield, encounters generated the “urban.” Conversely, urban is what makes encounters happen. As I will discuss below, Kavuşma Durağı shall be understood as a site for possible encounters, and through encounters, the urban space of Taksim is recreated.

...combination of elements that over time and through space became ready and ripe to encounter one another, elements such as market expansion and penetration, market crises, technological change, demographic growth, political and social struggle, violence and disorder, all culminating at a particular point to create something quantitatively and qualitatively new and different (Merrifield, 2012, p. 272).

The deliberate arrangement of the amphitheaters and planned occasions such as open forums, exhibitions, or concerts stimulates unexpected "encounters" among people, encouraging them to engage in dialogue. Kavuşma Durağı’s plan and spatial scenario are determined to allow “interaction.” “Kavuşma Durağı” promotes confrontations and an unexpected explosion of energies and ideas. Therefore, it is an experimental tool of encounter. Both planned activities and the spatial curiosity of the structure contribute to this.

We design landscapes with traditional instincts and teachings, but there is clearly an interaction going on here. [...] It's an unconventional seating arrangement, albeit with half of it being a familiar one we are accustomed to. It's not a new invention [see concert halls and the like]. It brought a bit of innovation when we integrated the exhibition underneath (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).



Figure 4.5. A concert taking place on Kavuşma Durağı. (source: <https://yapidergisi.com/kavusma-duragi/>)

The usual amphitheater arrangement creates one active body on stage while creating passive subjects on the audience's part. However, here, the reciprocal seating arrangement of Kavuşma Durağı was putting people on both sides into active subjects. The steps facing each other seem designed deliberately to foster physical and visual "encounters." In this design scenario, people must see, hear, and physically perceive others. People have to listen to each other's demands for the Taksim Square Competition and exchange ideas, which is the symbolic meaning of the steps.

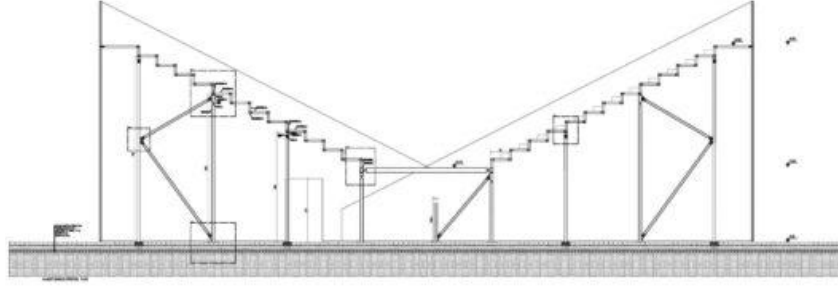


Figure 4.6. Section of Kavuşma Durağı. (source: <https://www.arkitera.com/proje/kavusma-duragi/>)

Encounters did not only happen in physical spaces. Instead, encounters transcend actual public space and transform into a totality of “online and offline encounters,” “physical and abstract discourses,” which collide and create an extremely varied, heterogenic, and rich existence (Merrifield, 2013, p. 59). We can also observe the overlap of “online and offline” encounters in Kavuşma Durağı’s short lifetime. People started to post tweets about “Durak” on Twitter and social media. Everyone can voice their opinions about Taksim, Istanbul, and “Durak” while also responding to those of others. Many hashtags related to its existence in Taksim have been created, such as #istanbulmeydanlarinakavusuyor and #KavuşmaDurağı.

Also, the structure’s temporary nature undermines modern urbanism’s rational and functional spatial logic. Instead, through its flexibility, transience, and experimental nature, it criticizes the economic and power structures that control public spaces.

In contemporary cities that are increasingly planned, designed, regulated and policed, these possibilities of spontaneity and of being in space are in danger of being lost. They are replaced with increasingly banal and sterile urban spaces, produced, shaped and regulated to eliminate difference and secure an orderly space for the market, for commodification and for profit (Zieleniec, 2018, p. 9).

Kavuşma Durağı criticizes the controlled and regulated public spaces through its spontaneous nature. I theorize the ephemeral character of Kavuşma durağı with

Lefebvre's festival concept (1991a). By relating to the traditional feasts, Lefebvre thinks feasts help individuals transcend expected habits, needs, and desires while also helping to construct new relations among people. The festival notion implies a creative state of collective mind where everyone can freely create and imagine. People can invert existing social ties and build new ones through disorderly activities. Kavuşma Durağı brought this disorder to Taksim Square and represented a similar change in everyday life and roused encounters, heterogeneities, and clashes. It signified a rupture in everyday life, bringing the "festival" notion to Taksim Square since it has been an idle space lately. "For Lefebvre, the urban is not simply a product of processes of industrial production and capital accumulation, but is 'more or less the oeuvre of its citizens' – a work of art constantly being remade" (Butler, 2012, p. 143). To resist the usual "cyclical forms of repetition" of everyday life, there should be some ruptures (Butler, 2012, p. 34). Promoting the participation of citizens and the creation of encounters in Kavuşma Durağı encourages instinctive behaviors and leads to the "festival" notion of Lefebvre. Planned or spontaneous activities on structure, such as concerts, might be examples of festival concept. Even someone passing by the structure could become a part of the spatiality present here. Those activities help to reproduce the social meaning of public space physically and spatially.

Butler interprets "everyday" as the repetitive rhythm of life under the pressure of capitalist rationality (Butler, 2012, p. 23). However, Lefebvre introduces "moments" as a contrasting experience, that stage of existence free from the monotonous precession that everyday life constrains people. Moments create ruptures in time and the "quotidian" conduct of everyday experience. Because of that rupture, "the theory

of moments itself plays an important role in highlighting the politically radical potential that lies within the everyday” (Butler, 2012, p. 29). Kavuşma Durağı becomes a platform for potential moments at the square. It provides a new, intriguing spatiality to the experience of the Taksim Square.

The other goal of the structure’s installation was to create a venue for public voting for competitions, an example of the direct democratic method. Panels, discussions, and open forums occurred in “Kavuşma Durağı” related to competitions. If it has not been removed, it might also host the voting. During Kavuşma Durağı’s lifetime, on 16 February-23 February, several collective activities were held on the structure; the juries of competitions gathered and met with citizens of Istanbul. On February 19, 2020, a public meeting (forum) was organized to debate the competition as a way of basically hearing out people’s voices. People, juries, urban designers, and architects had a chance to collectively discuss society’s needs and will over Taksim (İstanbul Kent Konseyi, 2020).⁷



Figure 4.7. The open forum organized on Kavuşma Durağı. (source: <https://twitter.com/istkentkonseyi/status/1230156427186102278>)

⁷ Even the children are included as actors in the “İstanbul Meydanlarına Kavuşuyor” campaign and participated in a design atelier on February 26, 2020. (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXYxn2NeutQ&t=13s>)

“Kavuşma Durağı” implies the convergence of different people, social groups, and ideologies. The identity of people gathered in the structure is diverse, creating a basis for people to bring their “heterogeneous demands.” According to Mouffe, politics is seen as an arena of contestation. Mouffe argues that left populism adopts and encourages contestation in politics. Agonistic public struggles are considered a positive thing. Therefore, Mouffe’s idea of “radical” democracy is energized in “Kavuşma Durağı.” This structure’s design reflects a leftist populist strategy by allowing antagonisms and agonism, uniting diverse groups of people, and allowing the exchange of demands to achieve democratic politics.

According to Dikeç and Sywngedouw (2017), radical urban politics can generate “political subjectivation” by breaking the cycle of today’s political passivization through its disruptive quality. Urban revolts, insurgencies, as well as non-traditional urban experiences can be considered part of radical urban politics. These movements readjust space and everyday life outside the usual configuration/order of functions and distributions that conventional politics established (Dikeç & Sywngedouw, 2017, p. 9). By readjusting what is already instituted, insurgencies stimulate the construction of people as “constituents” instead of “constituted power” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 208; Dikeç & Sywngedeuw, 2017, p. 14). People become active constituents of space and transform it. Similarly, the sudden and quick presence of Kavuşma Durağı disrupted the usual spatial experience of citizens and politicized them. In this sense, it potentially provided emancipation for making space and people. Insurgent movements create spaces through protests, acts, and gatherings. Dikeç and Sywngedouw (2017) call these spaces transformed by insurgent practices “evental spaces.” “Evental spaces relay an intense sense of becoming. They are animated by an

intensification of time, experience, and encounter...” (Dikeç and Sywngedouw, 2017, p. 9) Kavuşma Durağı also became active terrain of acting and practicing. Kavuşma Durağı is reproduced by intense collective experience. Therefore, it could be regarded as an evental space, looking at its potential for politicization. Not only itself it also transforms and reproduces Taksim Square and politicizes it.

Occupation of place and the ephemeral production of a new spatiality can only be short-lived and transient. The ultimate aim, of course, is a return to the ordinariness of everyday life, but one in which the initial intensity becomes transfigured in new ways of feeling, saying, and doing. In other words, the explosion of the moment enacted in place needs to spatialize, that is, become embodied and practiced within the times and spaces of everyday life (Dikeç and Sywngedouw, 2017, p. 10).

4.2.1.4. KAVUŞMA DURAĞI AS A MEANS OF “COMMONING”

As pioneers of commons theory, De Angelis and Stavrides (2010) interpret “commons” as any form of shared resources, such as water resources, access to welfare services, or urban spaces. For them, the “commons” definition includes the “pool of resources and the set of communities” and “the social process that creates and reproduces the commons” (De Angelis & Stavrides, 2010, p. 2). Accordingly, the social production of urban space is an act of commoning. “Commons” challenges capitalist production of space and commodifications, enclosure threats by it. Coming back to Taksim, Kavuşma Durağı is a site of potential commoning. Taksim Square has ceased to be a living square; it has become a void to pass through. The collective activities/experiences in “Kavuşma Durağı,” such as concerts and forums, aim to restore the functioning of the square for urbanites. Also, knowledge becomes shared common in Kavuşma Durağı. For example, meetings on the Kavuşma Durağı should

be viewed as a form of commoning practice. These are not just activities to spend time but collective moments for rebuilding urban commons.

In addition to space-commoning on Kavuşma Durağı, commoning practices develop a broader understanding of “city” as commons. People negotiate about the city they want to live in. For “Kavuşma Durağı” and its users, the city became a “collective product of its citizens.” Notwithstanding the power of capital, the structure reminds the “right to the city,” in which citizens claim the “commons” as theirs, not only of capitalist powers (Lefebvre, 1968). Furthermore, being free from commercial substances helped establish a lived space (Lefebvre, 1991b). Rather than being market subjects or leaving their consumer identities, individuals try to restore the “social” one. The space is non-commodified and produced/reappropriated collectively.

In sum, both encounters and commoning concepts reveal collective experiences’ transformative power and their role in shaping urban space. Therefore, Kavuşma Durağı should be evaluated as an example of a public space to inhabit political practices for “re-politicization.” The politicization happens within and through public space. Public space provides this terrain for “encounter” and dissensus, conflict, and dissent... However, as I will discuss below, encounters are sometimes inhibited because of their transformative power (Merrifield, 2012). The first inhibition is observed in a police intervention for an event organized on the structure. The event was a forum concert by the “Either Canal or Istanbul” Platform.⁸ The group is not

⁸ ‘Ya Kanal Ya İstanbul’ is a platform that stand against mega-project proposal by the government and fights for ecological integrity of the city.

allowed to speak on “Kavuşma Durağı,” and it is immediately closed with “crime scene tapes” (Duvarenglish, 2020). Ultimately, the removal should be read as another enclosure against collective gatherings.



Figure 4.8. Ya Kanal Ya İstanbul Platform in front of Kavuşma Durağı. (source:<https://www.duvarenglish.com/domestic/2020/02/24/kanal-istanbul-forum-banned-in-taksim>)

4.2.1.5. REMOVAL DECISION BY CONSERVATION BOARD

As previously mentioned, the structure's lifetime was relatively short. Eight days after Kavuşma Durağı was installed, the “İstanbul Number 2 Regional Board for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage” announced a removal decision for “Kavuşma Durağı.” together with the “Cumhurbaşkanlığı Digital Exhibition Tent.” The board stated there would be an official complaint if not removed (Cumhuriyet, 2020). This action reveals the symbolic meaning of those small structures for municipal and governmental bodies. “There is no other country where so much effort is spent to remove an installation, resulting in the inability to hold exhibitions, and where the space has become so politically charged” (Akdoğan, personal communication, April

15, 2022). This decision was controversial and political for two reasons: the structure's temporary character and the presence of "Cumhurbaşkanlığı Digital Exhibition Tent" a long time before "Kavuşma Durağı."

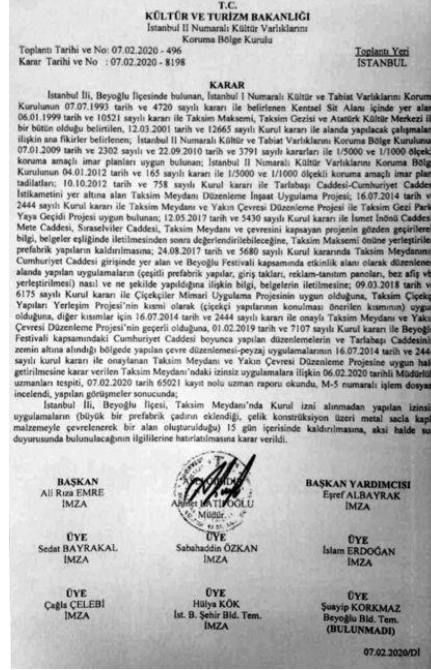


Figure 4.9. Removal decision by conservation board. (source: <https://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/murat-bardakci/2586303-koruma-kurulu-imamogluna-taksim-projesini-durdurmasi-icin-iki-hafta-sure-verdi-proje-devam-ederse-suc-duyurusunda-bulunulacak>)

4.2.2. “TAKSİM SQUARE URBAN DESIGN COMPETITION”

In this chapter, two phenomena will be discussed. One discussion is built upon the democratic legitimacy of architectural competitions in a broader sense. How do they contribute to populist rhetoric in politics and architectural practice regarding the technocracy concept? The second discussion built upon competitions with the voting system and its effectiveness in terms of public participation. Later on, we will delve into urban design competition process concerning Taksim Square, offering insights into its current phase.

4.2.2.1. DESIGN COMPETITIONS IN GENERAL

In Turkey, design competitions are organized in accordance with the regulations outlined in the “bylaw of competitions.” Çimen (2010) recognizes urban design competitions as a discursive process of different phases and actors (promoting bodies, chambers, jury committees, rapporteurs, competitors, and the public). According to Çimen (2010), written documents, colloquiums, design concepts, and jury critiques should be understood as knowledge productions and discursive formations. Although power instrumentalizes competitions, competitions may also transform discourses within the field.

There is a general recognition of design competitions with a high level of democracy. The competitions are already characterized as democratic processes because projects within the jury group go through a series of interrogations and filters. In fact, with the collision and conflict of many ideas in competitions, the possibility of regaining the “contestation” feature of politics arises. However, it only happens within the domain of design professionals. Competitions are enounced as a mechanism to challenge established tender methods based on the “*lowest price*” (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022). From that perspective, the competitions could be accepted as political borders trying to be established against the architectural discipline that occurs with oligarchic dynamics. Regular competitions are set against the political elites and the financial elites. Design competitions provide “socio-economic mobility” for many young designers and design offices. Also, all actors in competitions find “publicity” as the symbolic value of competitions (Çimen, 2010, p. 45). “Competitions serve as a means of distributing employment fairly and

providing job opportunities for many architects” (Akdoğan, personal communication, April 15, 2022).

Also, they are utilized for acquiring quality work for public spaces. Competitors come up with many authentic concepts, design ideas, and representations. The critical thinking throughout the design, evaluation, and colloquium enhances profession, theory, know-how, and intellectual accumulation (Çimen, 2010, p. 45).

When competitions are examined as a process, they rarely result in unfavorable outcomes as long as they are conducted following legislation. Although the results are always open to criticism, the competition method has never lost its sanctity (Hakan Evkaya, 2021).

On the other hand, based on Şerif Süveydan’s idea, asking about architectural competitions’ elitist content is critical if we take competition not for granted (Süveydan, personal communication, April 27, 2022).⁹ The contestation and exchange happen among jurors. It cannot be transferred to society. People are omitted from the “politics” of competitions. Design competitions are shortfalls of public involvement and political conflict. There, I argue that competitions need some form of populism to challenge the present power relations in architectural contracting. What power relationships constitute architectural practice? Are architectural problems left to the technical expertise of architects or the legitimacy of administrations?

While planning and urban design competitions legitimize the decisions shaped by the framework of power, they also enable the physical visibility of these decisions. To understand how planning and urban design competitions have historically been associated with concepts of power and legitimacy, examining how the city as a public realm, along with its public spaces, is shaped and influenced through various methods is inevitable. These political relationships, which represent the visible aspect of the forms of political representation, internal organizations, and capital accumulation processes of the existing local administrations, highlight competitions as a mechanism for establishing a different legitimacy in shaping public realms beyond the scale of a single structure in the city (Şahin, S. Z., 2014).

⁹ Interview conducted by author.

Furthermore, the low implementation rates of competitions are frequently subject to debate (Aykutlar & Kutucu, 2014; Şahin, S. Z., 2014).

4.2.2.2. COMPETITIONS WITH VOTING

The articulation of voting to competition is an exciting phenomenon. Instead of a mere election process, the competitions should have been designed to allow the possibilities of “agonistic” relations. Then, could competitions be organized in other ways? With voting? Şerif Süveydan (as a part of the winning team ‘Taksim Collective’) expresses the need for a change in the hierarchical decision-making mechanism:

It is no longer valid that ‘We consulted the Prost (of the 1930s), who advised us to design that way. Time has changed, and we must shift toward more horizontal decision-making methods (Süveydan, personal communication, April 27, 2022).

In current circumstances, it is unrealistic to assume that decisions concerning the cities should solely rely on a ‘scientific’ team of ‘experts.’ [...] We believe that establishing the Taksim Collective as part of the project process will provide an experimental platform for participatory planning, ranging from event organizations to local design contributions (Taksim Kolektifi, n.d.).

The voting system is designed to challenge the elitism and intellectual elitism in architecture. In other words, the elite here can be the architects themselves. There is a shift towards conceptions of expertise and technocracy here. In other words, although competitions may seem like democratic processes, we can argue that architects can almost turn into technocrats when they assume an excessively dominant role. Then, the design competitions could transform into something anti-democratic. Although it is based on positive acceptance in the Turkish architectural discourse, perhaps the regular competitions can be a kind of technocratic populism, yet in a negative sense. They become less connected to political content and urban politics.

There is tension between technocracy and populism in design competitions with voting. While the municipal body represents the people's will, jurors represent technical knowledge. This tension has led to confusion about selections and, finally, the non-implementation of many projects. For example, Ömer Yılmaz shares his memories about a past competition:

Ankara Büyükşehir Belediye Hizmet Binası Competition. Melih Gökçek was the mayor at that time, during his early times. The jury was selecting a project. Melih Gökçek said, 'If you choose this one, I won't implement it. Choose the second one.' The jury's selection conflicted with Melih Gökçek's selection. I believe the actions of the jury were also wrong. Instead of clashing, there should have been a compromise between them. By compromise, I mean not stepping back but negotiating. The jury didn't select it, and the project was not implemented afterward (Yılmaz, personal communication, April 7, 2022).

When the public vote is articulated into the competition, the technocracy-populism tension becomes much more complex.

We can express concerns about an institution/municipality that doesn't determine its votes until the last moment (even though it appears to hold a decisive power of $\frac{1}{3}$) as if it can make decisions without the influence of public voting (Bal, 2021).

Instead of making a binary distinction between technocracy and populism, political scientists like Moffitt suggest placing political actors and behaviors on a spectrum (Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti, 2015). The competition with voting can be located closer to the populist end of the spectrum compared to competition without a public vote. Yet, it is still produced with a technocratic logic. They share one common thing: "For neither technocrats nor populists is there any need for democratic debate. In a sense, both are curiously apolitical" (Müller, 2016, p. 97). While technocrats advocate for the expertise, and populists for the voice of the people, both may overlook the complexities that democratic processes should entail.

4.2.2.3. “TAKSIM SQUARE URBAN DESIGN COMPETITION” PROCESS

The competition was a two-stage, international urban design competition. The competition process is conducted in English. Out of 146 participants, 20 proceeded to the second stage. Among the three projects selected by the jury, online public voting took place. The team of Project Number 15 became the winner of the public vote.

Ömer Yılmaz was the coordinator of the competitions that were held in Beylikdüzü (Beylikdüzü Yaşam Vadisi Competition (2016), Beylikdüzü Belediyesi Cemevi ve Kültür Merkezi Competition (2015)). During those years, İmamoğlu was Beylikdüzü district's mayor. In fact, İmamoğlu was already active in terms of competitions during his mayoral period (Yeşil İstanbul, 2022). Thus, he was invited to coordinate the Taksim Square Urban Design competition. At the beginning of the idea formation process, just before the competition, a series of meetings were held. The meeting sessions were held by various actors' presence, architects, city council, juries, and people in the municipality. “When I read the specifications, I noticed that social scientists have also been very influential in the preparation process of the competition” (Gürsel, 2020). Those meetings helped the formation of a decent “specification.” Yılmaz (personal communication, April 7, 2022) evaluates competition processes as a “sequence of negotiations.”

The specific execution of the competition was also controversial throughout the competition. For the first time, this type of voting system was tested out at the “İzmit Fethiye Caddesi Redevelopment Competition.” The triple voting system is based on eliminating “power concentration”; the basic idea, as it should be in pluralism, is to

try to incorporate as many groups of people as possible to share power among stakeholders. According to this triplet voting method, the jury has one-third of the decision, the administration team (municipality) has one-third, and the people (citizens of Istanbul) have one-third (Yılmaz, personal communication, April 7, 2022). It is differentiated from referendum-type direct methods by distributing the decision-making among three power blocks, obstructing one group's unbalanced power. The triplet system prohibits one group from becoming an unconditional source of common will so that authoritarianism could not possibly emerge. The competition method suggests a dispersed power structure, challenging juries' and administrations' authority and power. Voting even further decentralizes the power relationships of competition and creates possibilities for a more egalitarian system. The usual competition process, where juries are selected by elected administrations, and the administration is chosen by people during political elections, is a representative democratic method. People do not become an active collective body. However, in our case, people have been actively involved in open forums, online meetings, and voting.

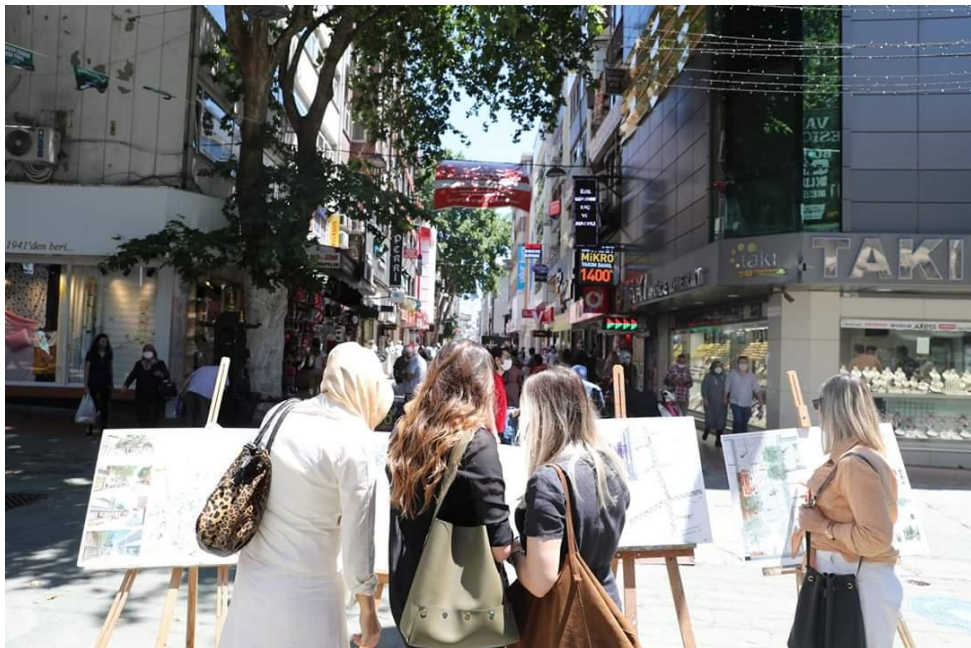
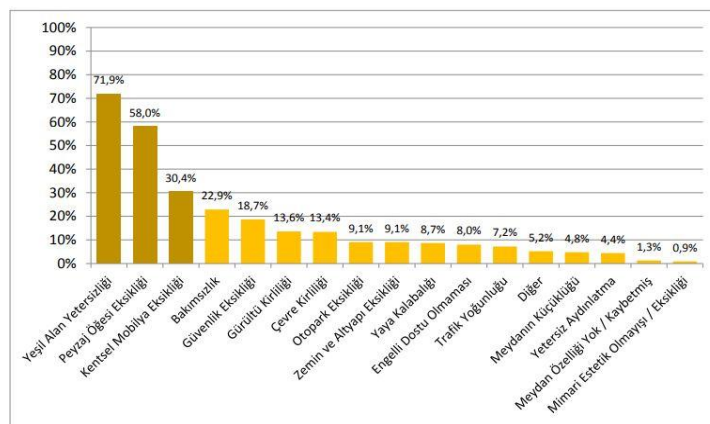


Figure 4.10. Public voting for Fethiye Caddesi Redevelopment Competition. (source: <https://twitter.com/fatmakaplan/status/1278039972868653058>)

Competitions with voting increase the level of contestation and dissensus. They not only construct a frontier against political and financial elites but also against the architects' intellectual elitism. For it to be populist, the concept of “people” must be pinpointed. The actors involved in the Taksim Square Urban Design competition process (whether deemed sufficient or not) include

- a meeting with culture and arts figures (October 31, 2019),
- a visit to the Chamber of Architects,
- a meeting with the City Council, and
- an open forum at Kavuşma Durağı (Yılmaz, 2020).

They planned to organize further events to give publicity to the competition, such as the Taksim Symposium. However, that was not possible because of the outburst of the pandemic. After all, colloquia and online publications of projects have brought competition publicity. Also, there were two inputs of the competition: the online survey conducted prior to the submission deadline and the student idea competition (İstanbul Planlama Ajansı, 2020; Arkitera, 2020). The survey queried the prevailing grievances and demanded uses for Taksim Square. In addition, the Istanbul City Council was established to enhance the role of local governance.



Şekil2. Meydanın En Önemli Sorunları

Figure 4.11. Results of the online survey before the competition. (source: https://konkur.istanbul/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/taksim_anketrapor.pdf)

The competition received many criticisms regarding whether democratic participation was sufficient. Some experts criticized the implementation of the participation model, while others claimed that involving the public was a highly risky decision. For example, one of the interviewees, Oktan Nalbantoğlu, believes that disrespect is shown to professionals and a crime is committed regarding “space” through voting. Nalbantoğlu makes an analogy to a doctor consulting the public for surgery (Nalbantoğlu, personal communication, May 11, 2023).¹⁰ Similarly, Celalettin Can saw this model as a highly reductionist approach and doubted that public voting was a reliable measure (Kıvılcım, 2020a).

Regarding the competition's results, although it seems like a good idea from the viewpoint of democratic participation, I believe leaving the final decision to the public on a subject matter that requires a lot of expertise has serious risks (Avunduk, 2020).

The subject is a matter of serious expertise; public voting often does not produce accurate results for such matters (Hasol, 2020).

In addition, during the competition process, the Chamber of Architects released a statement expressing that they [Chamber of Architects] were not involved in the process and that it was handled hastily (MO İstanbul, 2020). However, it should be noted that the Chamber of Architects had already been consulted before the competition, and the Chamber of Architects had appointed Ayşe Zeynep Ahunbay (Yılmaz, personal communication, April 7, 2022). However, Ahunbay finds the involvement of TMMOB not enough:

However, when I joined the jury around mid-February 2020, the competition specifications were mostly written and finalized. If the specifications had been discussed better, perhaps we would not have received projects that were insensitive to Taksim's history and its status as a protected site, such as those that disregard the stairs of Gezi Park and build a pool on top or altogether remove the stairs (Kıvılcım, 2020b).

¹⁰ Interview conducted by author.



Figure 4.12. Statement by Chamber of Architects. (source: <https://www.yarismo.org/haber.php?id=47&baslik=taksim-meydani-yarisma-surecine-ve-sonrasina-iliskin-zorunlu-aciklama>)

The participants may have been motivated by a populist reflex while designing. As a result of the survey conducted before the competition, the public's desire for green space was highlighted (Konkur İstanbul, 2020). Winning projects stand out with highly parallel design answers.

But in a context where the destruction of natural areas frequently occurs, and the Gezi Resistance started against the trees being cut down, the competition participants focused on influencing the public in a populist way rather than developing a vision for the future (Yırtıcı, 2021).

Numerous critiques exist regarding examples of participatory design, much like in this competition. “Populism avoids or attacks architectural theory in order to give simplistic answers to questions that in actuality can be responded to only through serious investigation” (Tsiambaos, 2019, p. 3). So, can participatory design be seen as a disguised form of populism? An example that can be given to this simplistic approach is: “Just do whatever has the most trees, and let's get it done. We are tired of concrete” (Üresin, U.G., 2020). Although some architects criticize the pace of the competition and its execution, its reflexive pace might work as a quick mobilizing force and call for a rapid change to the current crisis. Therefore, one critical aspect of

the Taksim Square Urban Design Competition is the expanded agonism in the social and political sphere that cultivates greater political debate. The left-populist project requires space for conflicting discussions and ideas to spread out.

The Taksim Square Urban Design Competition is valuable because it triggers a vibrant process of criticism and discussion, intensively addressing the contemporary interpretation of urban space and the public sphere. Despite being dismissed by a group of professionals, it holds value due to its ability to involve the public in this pursuit through presentations and introductions conducted during the voting period (Çalışkan, 2021).

In the competition process, instead of enabling the public to participate passively by voting only, several opportunities were created where they could have a voice. Public contestation was made through open forums and online colloquia. They are encouraged to challenge the existing political “consensus.” Many “discussion” opportunities were created, especially in the colloquium and the Twitter environment.

A detailed discourse analysis on Twitter and social media data can be found in Acar, Demet, and Kaynar’s (2023) article. This study shows people’s engagement with the competition in a quantitative way. Based on the Twitter commentaries, the tables show some peak points during some critical moments of the competition process (e.g., first stage result announcement date). Also, discussions have revolved around different concepts, such as political praise, spatial comments, and democracy/participation. These solid data show that the competition has created a considerable public debate. Even criticisms of the competition are constructive, fostering opportunities for new ideas and solutions to surface.

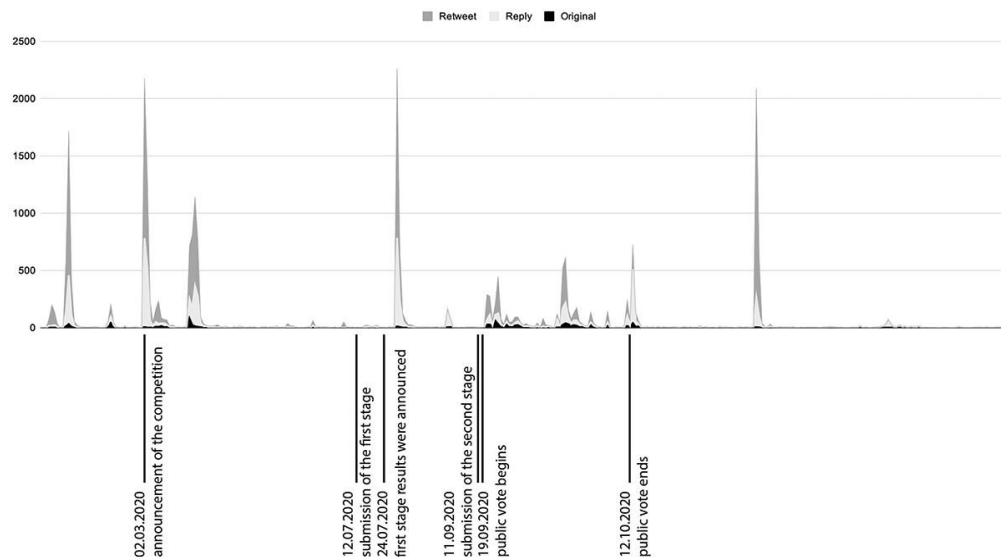


Figure 4.13. Table showing the frequency of tweets. (source: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2023.2182767>)

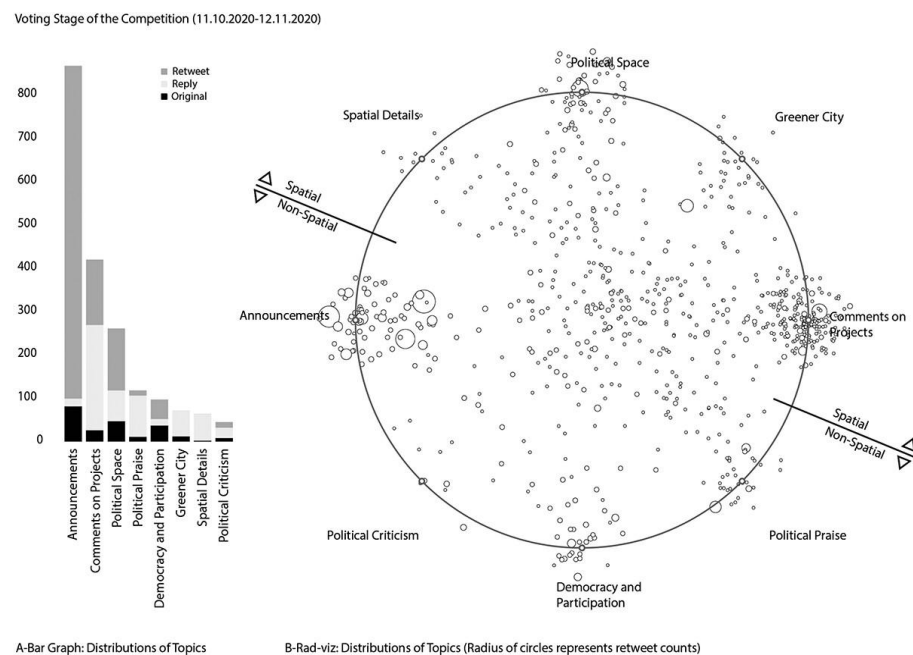


Figure 4.14. Table showing the content of tweets during the voting stage. (source: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2023.2182767>)

While trying to establish an antagonistic relationship with neoliberalism in these strategies, a politically agonistic discussion environment was produced between different public groups and people. Creating conflict and debate instead of consensus

is one of the steps to getting rid of post-politics and becoming politicized. The “political” is included again. While taking an antagonistic stance towards neoliberalism, this strategy is also anti-elitist, aiming to counteract the power dynamics created by neoliberal hegemony.

The voting system as a referendum is developed to democratize competition processes further. Using a voting method for the Taksim Urban Design Competition, such as a referendum, is a prototype. It is an early attempt to establish democratic politics over urban space. Speaking of general will at the competition, we can discuss two problems: First, the possibility of the public making emotional choices. For this reason, Suha Özkan emphasizes that the needs of the people should be determined instead of their tastes (Yapı Dergisi, 2021). Secondly, the turnout (participation rate in voting) is quantitatively low (Bal, 2021). Plebiscites are parts of democratic systems; however, the participation rate is quite important.

The whole process of competition has transgressed into the everyday life of people through symbolic appeals, discourses, slogans, propaganda, advertisements, and negotiation possibilities. “Istanbul is yours” or “Taksim is yours” become the slogans of the competition and examples of the language used in the performance. This way, the competition process can be considered a performative action. The rhetoric produced to introduce the competitions, primarily through the Twitter platform, composes the discursive part of the approach. Also, people are physically, mentally, and socially contained for the performance as the performers through their ideas, tweets, and, ultimately, votes.



Figure 4.15. Visuals used during the competition: ‘Taksim is yours, Decision is yours.’ (source: <https://konkur.istanbul/kararsenin/>)



Figure 4.16. Visuals of public surveys: ‘Tell me your opinion.’ (source: <https://twitter.com/ipaistanbul/status/1255769222443122688>)

This illustration contains discursive references to “people” that can be evaluated as populist rhetoric (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). It points out people as a source of legitimacy. There have been some slogans related to the competitions, such as “Tell me your opinion,” “Be part of the city,” “Taksim is yours!” and “Istanbul is yours!” which could create populist appeals between people and the city. People are welcomed to this intellectual criticism atmosphere physically and digitally. So there is a construction of people discursively. However, this constructed people is not just referring to the “real people” with exclusionary language but constructing a more egalitarian peoplehood. These competitions and urban project goals are also done to create a counter-hegemony that challenges the existing power structures.

4.2.2.4. CURRENT PHASE OF THE PROJECT

As a result of public voting, the “Taksim Collective” team won first place in the competition (Taksim Kolektifi, n.d.). The project stands out with its planning proposal that further enhances public participation. Going beyond voting, it elevates the competition to a higher level by involving the public in the future uses of the square. When the competition was finalized, the project was reported to the regional conservation board. However, Gezi Park underwent a change of ownership (BBC, 2021). “On March 12, 2021, when the ownership of Gezi Park was transferred from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) to the Sultan Beyazıt Hanı Veli Hazretleri Foundation, the process came to a standstill” (Güvemli, 2022). Due to this change of ownership, the conservation board did not examine the previously submitted project. In response, the Gezi Park section was removed from the project and returned to the conservation board by IBB. Between the conservation board and IBB administration, this ownership problem is still not resolved. What is intriguing is that if the competition is opened, knowing that it will not be applied anyhow, the competition may already be a tool that aims to create this political antagonism.

	SEHİR PLANLAMA MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ	Hakkımızda Çalışmalar Arşiv Dahil Ol Etkinlik Takvimi Duyurular İletişim	
PROJENİN GENEL ÖZELLİKLERİ			
PROJENİN TAM ADI	Taksim Meydanı Kentsel Tasarım ve Etkinlik Alanı Proje Yarışması		
PROJE YÜRÜ	Kentsel Tasarım Projesi		
PROJE BİLGİLERİ	Jüri Değerlendirmesi, Halk Oylaması ve Başkanlığımız Onayıyla Seçilen “Taksim Kentsel Tasarım Yarışma Projesi” nin Kuruma Kurul Gündemine Alınarak Tetkik ve Onayı Talep Edilmiştir		
DAİRE BAŞKANLIĞI	Kültür Varlıkları Dairesi Başkanlığı		
İLGİLİ MÜDÜRLÜK	Kültür Varlıkları Projeler Müdürlüğü		
İLGİLİ KURUMLAR	İstanbul 2 Numaralı Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu Müdürlüğü		
PROJE AŞAMASI	Kurul Süreci Devam Ediyor		

Figure 4.17. Current Phase of Project: ‘The board process is ongoing.’ (source: <https://sehirplanlama.ibb.istanbul/ibb-taksim-meydani-kentsel-tasarim-etkinlik-alani-proje-yarismasi/>)

Antagonism is a way to identify oppositional states between two elements. So, is there an “othering” here? What they place as an oppositional one. Antagonism/competition has been created against the AKP, like IBB vs. AKP. People and AKP are drawn as oppositional blocs toward each other. An example of how this frontier might be drawn: “Istanbul is one of the provinces the government is focusing on in its effort to label the CHP-run municipalities as ‘failed’” (Birgun.net, 2021).

The competition process can progress in two different directions. First, the conservation board does not allow the square to be touched. This is something we already assume. Since İmamoğlu was elected as the mayor, the AKP government has been trying to limit the works of the municipality. The planned project can easily be turned into the politics of “we want to serve, but they do not allow us (Yırtıcı, 2020b).

4.3. “KAVUŞMA DURAĞI” AND “TAKSİM SQUARE URBAN DESIGN COMPETITION” AS EXAMPLES OF LEFT POPULISM

Taksim Square Urban Design Competition process and prior structure “Kavuşma Durağı” are genuine examples of left populism that is tried to be constructed in the place of right populism of AKP due to the following main features/concepts of competition and Kavuşma Durağı:

- floating signifying
- construction of people/popular identity
- political frontier
- counter-hegemony
- political subjectivation and re-politicization of governance

Is competition a floating signifier?

Opening a competition may serve as an empty signifier for the politics of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB). There are accumulated social grievances regarding the use, design, and control of public spaces in Taksim and throughout the city. Therefore, the competition may be an "imagery" that corresponds to a greater demand than having designed squares. It turns into something that condenses other democratic demands. In other words, a particular demand takes the place of a larger whole. They allow for a broad coalition and provide a sense of shared purpose. For example, architects demand a fairer distribution of work for design, people demand livable city squares, and so on. Concepts discussed in competition demonstrate the different demands of people. Those demands gather around competition as a "floating signifier" in which all of these different democratic demands are attached to each other. Thus, a new "popular identity" is constructed through equivalence between those demands ("chain of equivalence"). While the competition serves a more practical purpose in this construction, Kavuşma Durağı takes on a symbolic task.

Construction of People

The term "populism" opens up unlimited possibilities for defining and recognizing the "people." Who is contained within the "people" definition and who is precluded may significantly change. İmamoğlu uses this discourse: "We don't have a mentality of 'I did it, it's final.' We will redesign Taksim with the competition method. We will also ask the public about these projects with democratic participation" (Cumhuriyet, 2019). The "people" here is Istanbulites, forming İmamoğlu's rhetoric's nodal point (focal signifier):

When we say ‘Istanbul is yours,’¹¹ we speak to 16 million, ‘Let’s decide the future of Istanbul together.’ That’s the spirit of our approach. Let’s decide together because we trust you so much. Perhaps some people find it virtuous to manage processes by relying on a handful of people. On the contrary, we know that making decisions with this city’s inhabitants will protect us, the city, and nature (İBBTV, 2020).

Here, the discourse revolves around “the people” (Istanbulites). Therefore, seeing people as authority becomes coherent with the populist content of competitions. While multiple identities and groups were together in Gezi, it is possible to talk about “Istanbulites” in İmamoğlu’s narrative today. Although the popular identity is singular here, “Istanbulites” refers to a heterogeneous plurality, not a homogeneous whole. In terms of that heterogeneity, the left populism of İBB differs from the right-wing populism of AKP’s homogeneous people construction.

Political Frontier

Populists not only react against power structures but constitute mobilizations specifically against “elitist values” (Canovan, 1999, p. 2). Therefore, the types of populism should be articulated around what they oppose. Against whom İBB’s populism constructs its borders is an essential question. On the opposite side of the antagonism here, in the position of established elites, is the AKP’s space production process. The competition is against the oligarchic formation (institutional and cultural) in space production.

Moreover, it tries to counter them by creating a new hegemony, as Laclau and Mouffe put it. We can see the execution of the competition as a set of “political strategies” against the “market dominance” and neoliberal rationale adopted by the AKP in space

¹¹ One of the frequently used slogans of competition process.

production. While the populism established by the AKP does not exclude neoliberalism, the populism found by the IBB here is distant from neoliberalism and is even pointed at it. According to the theory of Laclau and Mouffe, besides equivalential logic, there is also a “logic of difference” to be established with the opposite bloc. The “logic of difference” is set up against neoliberalism here.

Given the story of its construction and dismantling, Kavuşma Durağı constructs a political frontier, as Laclau conceptualizes it. According to Laclau, one side of the political “frontier” is the construction of “people.” It is an active construction of “people.” Besides the construction of “people,” the other side of the frontier compels a certain presence. In this case, the contrary group refers to the “neoliberal hegemony.” Space here plays a founding role in drawing the frontier, both physically and discursively. The use value of “space” is activated while challenging the exchange value, thereby diluting neoliberal hegemony over urban space.

Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

According to Laclau and Mouffe, populism is ultimately the practice of building hegemony. Over time, the AKP's urban populism has become more authoritarian and illiberal. The aim is to reverse this populism of AKP and create a new left populism. So, how is that hegemony created? For that, a new narrative resonates with social grievances and plural demands. While a new hegemony is being created, the components that make up the old political power must be broken up and replaced with new ones. As it is already discussed in the previous chapter, AKP's hegemony is urbanized to a large extent. The components of older hegemony include the following grievances:

- Non-transparent public tender systems,
- accountability,
- distant expertise from the public,
- coming together around identities rather than demands,
- and the increasing role of central power in the cities while reducing the impact of local administrations (İBB.İstanbul, 2020).

The populism of competition relied on Gezi as a social movement, and it turned from the populist movement on the street to something more institutional and turned into the urban politics of the İBB. As Moffitt argues, İmamoğlu may have used the competition process as a mediatic performance to create a narration, a political story. There is peoplehood discourse in the language, on the banners, and in the creation of slogans. Besides, he uses the space as a performance stage. Because space is a part of everyday life, a performance that addresses space/place quickly becomes a familiar narrative. İmamoğlu's award ceremony speech can be given as an example: "For the first time, I am enjoying the use of the word 'we.' Yes; we did it, we do it, we will continue to do it. because within that "us," all Istanbul residents are included" (Fıstık, 2021). By framing -us and them- in political space, they make a clear distinction from the status quo regime and create a narrative that challenges the political power. In addition, it blames the system and the elites for issues such as lack of transparency and criticizes the prevailing political order. These criticisms develop the dissensual way of doing politics and break the consensual approach criticized in neoliberalism.

Politicizing Space and Political Subjectivation

How can this type of competition contribute to that post-political condition? As a political solution, competition points to the people and the sovereignty of the people. In other words, the issue or social problems are formulated politically. By voicing their social demands and complaints about space (Taksim), they are actually “politicizing” space. This keeps accountability and transparency issues in politics on the agenda and brings a re-politicization. The people also politicize themselves by acting as actors in the political arena of competition. Laclau explains the formation of that collective politicization as follows:

These connections required more than just a tactical alliance. They necessitated a transformation of political consciousness, whereby those who joined a movement would realize that their own demands could not be met without taking into account the demands of other groups. [...] The formation of this collective will is what Gramsci referred to as hegemony (Kalpler, Zihinler ve Demokrasi, 1998).

Competition creates this tangible mobilizing force. An object is being created so that people can actively take action against established elites. There is an active agency to use and transform the public space. In addition to the public sphere, efforts are being made to alter the institutional sphere.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis's problem definition states that there is no space for collective being or shared decision-making when "the urban" is organized according to a neoliberal rationale. That annihilates the possibility of social or political equality, thereby injuring democracy (Brown, 2015, p. 64). Since social life operates according to the logic of the market, the public space, the locus where people can be social and political and claim rights for inequalities, liberties, and political power, is also shaped according to this logic. Therefore, neoliberal hegemony produces a post-politic context where consensus is dignified against dissensus.

Deepening inequalities under neoliberal hegemony and accumulating public grievances over time give rise to what Mouffe describes as a populist moment. Populist moment signals a turning point in the social sphere. At this point, various populism might be constructed. However, Mouffe suggests the construction of left populism after the populist moment, as she considers left populism superior to right populism, which she associates with anti-democratic policies. Left populism reunites different social demands in an equivalence chain for collective combat.

In this thesis, Gezi is considered a populist moment where urban grievances burst out. As a continuation, IBB municipality's 2019 elections and design initiations shall be

understood as urban populism examples. Space or the practices to shape spaces work as a collective struggle to cope with the post-politic situation. The urban politics of IBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality) are built upon two political approaches: one is to implement a left-populist strategy for urban governance. This involves reconstructing urban politics based on ‘demands’ rather than identity politics. The effectiveness of local administration increases, urban residents become politicized, and urban problems are addressed politically. Competitions serve as agencies that facilitate this politicization. The second approach is the creation of convergences of ideas and people through the process of dissensus-building. This includes the space-making of Taksim Square through practices on Kavuşma Durağı and the discursive space-making in the competition process. For IBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality), architectural competitions and the production of spaces have become essential agencies while constructing its urban populism. The competition also works as a strategy to increase public contestation. It defeats the post-political condition by increasing the possibilities of political conflict through space-making. The specific urban populism in these initiations is constructed by space-making acts/discourses.

In this context, urban populism is deliberately constructed as a tactic against neoliberal urbanization. It takes the neoliberal urbanization of the past 20 years as its opposition. It elevates the concept of ‘the people,’ constructing a new identity around it. While positioning the actors of neoliberal urbanization as elites, it seeks to reveal the will of the people and increase political participation through various methods such as referenda. In doing so, it attempts to dismantle the blocks of the older policies of AKP and change the usual practices of the older block. From this perspective, it can be seen as a radical urban movement.

Through left-populist urban acts, citizens adopt and reinforce political practices to think politically again and dispose of the “homo oeconomicus” feature of the neoliberal era. People need public spaces to inhabit these practices for “re-politicization.” Public space provides this terrain for encounters, dissensus, conflict, and dissent. The repeated inclusion of dissensus into our lives is necessary for the return of politics. Encounter mediates to help this political subjectivation.

Despite criticisms, this form of competition is essential in generating new discussions and serving as a new model. Conflicts are strongly encouraged, and productive disagreements are appreciated during competition. Forums, awaited symposiums, meetings with the city council, discussions held within the jury, and discussions on Twitter are essential dissensus spaces here. They provide an opportunity for creating alternative views and generating discussions/ideas from a dissenting perspective in the political system. Liberal democracy seeks to protect consensus while eliminating differences. Radical democracy recognizes that conflict is vital for democratic governance. In terms of challenging traditional urban politics, the competition process radicalized the principles of liberal democracy. In the left populism of IBB, plural democracy is also realized through the development of new democratic practices that subvert the power of traditional/established political practices. Plural democracy is more responsive to the demands and ambitions of excluded groups regardless of their ideologies or class, which helps to build an egalitarian society. Through encouragement towards the involvement of people, people had the right to speak and behave as responsible political bodies. This is not specific to the mere square competition itself. Still, it has become an experiment of democratic urban practices in the public sphere in general. In other words, democratic urban politics.

Research findings demonstrate that the competition process has generated a significant debate among the public. Architecture becomes the “medium” for expressions, interconnections, political demands, and spatial claims. We observed quite an intriguing paradigmatic shift in the articulation of the political participation of citizens in design competitions. Taksim once again became a means for creating political discourses through space.

Subsequent studies can examine how competitions of this nature can be enhanced. Alternatively, they may concentrate solely on the adverse/negative aspects of populism and its negative impact on democracy. Another avenue of research could delve into the relationship between technocracy and populism through a direct analysis of designs. It may also involve observing how the design outcomes of these competitions have been influenced by this process.

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