

A Critical Evaluation of Planning System in Turkey: Democracy Through Decentralization ? ¹

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Introduction

The common view that sees a direct relationship between decentralization and local democracy will be questioned in this paper by using the urban planning experience of Turkey. The paper is organized in three parts; in the first part a brief summary of the arguments related to localization and democracy will be presented, second part is devoted to a short story of the relations between central and local governments in Turkey in historical perspective, and, finally, the impact of the decentralization of the urban planning functions on local democracy after 1985 will be examined.

Part 1.

In the literature on local governments and local politics a widespread consensus exists, particularly among the liberal writers, that there is a link between local government decentralization and democracy. In other words, it is assumed that decentralization brings about a democratic way of life while centralization is equated with undemocratic practices. The aim of this paper is to show that understanding the issue in this way is rather simplistic and misleading.

The dominant discourse, which underlies the significance of localization and the strengthening of local governments in the process of democratization, assumes that the transfer of power to local governments will answer the needs and demands of local people more efficiently and will increase participation in decision-making process at the local level.

The thought, which identifies localization with democracy, derives from the pluralist state theory. According to this theory, social groups are the primary social entities and the power in society is distributed non-hierarchically, e.g. almost equally among different interest groups, and the state plays the function of harmonizing, compromising, and mediating between the interests of different social groups. The pluralists sought for the maximal diffusion of power with some notion of centralized authority. In short, the state is assumed to integrate but not absorb such groups. "The function of the governing body is not to exercise unlimited power but rather to superintend and adjust the relations between groups and individuals in the interests of justice, order and liberty" (Vincent, 1987:215). The pluralists do not trust representative democracy assumed to be fully representing the interests of the public nationwide. Localization in this respect is assumed to assist people by

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sharing the political power. Therefore, the policies conducive to enhance the local governments political power are celebrated as signs of more democracy. However, as pointed out by Pickvance (1997:129) "to phrase the debate in these terms is over simple".

The idea that state is a power source in itself and this power is misused most of the time is an outcome of Weberian paradigm. This paradigm proposes a strict division between state and civil society. In this framework decentralization proposes spreading the power that is accumulated at the center. This understanding has two major problems though. First, it attributes a power, which is independent from civil society, to the state. But as it is known there is a relationship between political power and economic power however complex it might be. The second problem is the assumption that decentralized local forces would be more democratic than central forces.

It is known that local forces are outcomes of social relations, just like central forces. On local scale, there are interests that are organized in and around the state as well. Because of this fact, when power is transferred to a local level it is possible that anti-democratic structures, like those of central powers, might be created and strengthened. The values that are attributed to civil society in this respect is also problematic. The negative points attributed to state becomes positive when they are attributed to civil society and local structures. Pluralism, participation, reciprocity and democracy are expected to be driven from local structures. However, civil society is a social relation just as the state, therefore one may encounter non-democratic practices or strictly regulative structures in civil society as well. Thus there is no point in attributing a priori positive nature to them, and the transference of the power to local governments per se does not guarantee the solidity of more democratic life (Sengül, 2001b:181).

Following Duncan and Godwin (1989), the necessity of local governments should be sought in the nature of capitalist societies as creators of spatial uneven development. In parallel to this spatial differentiation, the state develops new institutions having relative autonomy visa a vis the central state. Hence, the local state becomes both an extension of and the constraint on the center. The main reason behind this contradictory position derives from the double function of the local state; acting both as a representative of the center and the local groups. Most of the time these two functions are in contradiction and this contradiction is resolved through the power relations between local and central power holders. In the second part we shall investigate these relations in the Turkish case.

Part 2.

As organizers of urban development in the modern sense, municipalities have a history of more than one and a half centuries in Turkey. Modernization of social life began in the Ottoman Period with the Tanzimat (Re- organization)

Proclamation in 1839. "One of the aims of the Ottoman administration in issuing this proclamation was the evasion of foreign pressures demanding the political participation of ethnic groups in the political structure of the Empire, and decentralized autonomous status to such regions. The focus was also on the strengthening of central government dominance. In other words, the attempts to institutionalize local governments were efforts towards achieving more regular and fairer taxation, better delivery of services and order and economic power, rather than the development of local democracy (Ortayli,1978: 1). Whatever the driving cause behind it, from 1855 onwards, in Ottoman cities, starting with the Capital City of İstanbul, municipal organizations bearing legal corporate status were established.

The Ottoman State have been defeated with its allies in the First World War, and forced to sign Sevres Treaty, which imposed the plan of the western imperialist powers to mutilate the Empire. Before the implementation of the Treaty, a popular resistance was built up and a nationalist liberation movement was organized under the leadership of Atatürk. A parliament was formed in 1920, in Ankara, and a new Constitution was prepared in which provincial local administrations were defined as autonomous administrative units. The 1921 Constitution, prepared under conditions of war, based local governments on an autonomous administration, unlike the 1876 Constitution.

The 1921 Constitution was democratic, in that it gave the widest autonomy to local governments. It became ineffective however, after the promulgation of the 1924 Constitution following the end of war and the foundation of the Republic.

Following the victory and the foundation of the Republic in 1923, however, the local administrative system was reorganized in concord with the French centralist system. "After the proclamation of the Republic and declaration of its new capital, priority was given to Ankara in urban development and municipality problems. A system similar to that of Istanbul was instituted in Ankara by law, in 1924. The mayor and members of the city council were to be appointed by the central government" (Ersoy, 1992: 327). (For a detailed study of the evolution of the local governments during the republican era, see Tekeli, 1978).

In short, the early Republican years witnessed the intensification of the centralized system in administration, in contrast to the liberal approach observed in the economy. This however, should be considered natural in countries where independence is new, since the power of the central state is a condition for national unity (Keleş, 1988).

In the period from the first years of the republic to the 1960's, one can observe that the mayors -especially those of big cities- were appointed by the central government and in many cases were unified in the person of the governor, whereas the municipal councils came to power by election. This fact is a supporting example for the paradigm, which argues that local governments

are social structures in which the interests of central government and local actors are represented at the same time. In other words, while mayors are representing the central government, councils are the representatives of strong local actors. Either way the local level representation of working classes is limited. If the areas that are considered as the responsibility of the local governments are taken into account these limitations are easily understood. Collective consumption goods that are important for the working classes, such as health, education and housing, are regarded as the responsibility of the central government. However, the area of responsibility of the local governments is limited to those services, which are important for local merchants or craftspeople. This explains the fact that throughout the period (and the following ones) local merchants or craftspeople are over-represented in municipal councils.

In other words, from the first days of the Republic, one can observe a structure of dual-representation that is organized within and around the state, in which two domains articulate each other. On the central level one can see a system of representation that has a corporatist nature and representing the interests of big capital, whereas on the local level the system is based on representing the small scaled and local interests of groups such as small entrepreneurs and traders. As one can see further on this structure existed without great changes until the beginning of 1980' (Sengul, 2001a: 103)

Turkey experienced a military coup in 1980, at which time constitutional and legislative changes were made in accordance with the authoritarian system. The 1982 Constitution, which is adopted during this period and still in effect, rests on the principal of totality of the central and local administrations. Article 127 states that, " Local administrative bodies are public corporate entities established to meet the common local needs of the inhabitants of provinces, municipal districts and villages, whose decision-making organs are elected by the electorate...The central administration has the power of administrative tutelage over the local governments..." In other words, autonomous local governments function according to the principle of decentralization and can make decisions and take actions independent of the central government. However, "local governments are subject to the control of the central administration exercised through the power of tutelage. This insures the indivisibility of administration and protects public interest. Tutelage is not a hierarchical form of control, it is a special kind of control exercised by central administration over the actions and decisions of local governments as to their legality" (Polatoğlu, 2000; 104-105).

The military intervention in 1980 prepared the ground for rise of entrepreneurial municipal model as well. The military regime held elections in 1983 with the newly established political parties in a restricted setting. Both the 1983 and 1987 elections were won by ANAP (The Motherland Party). The new administration in power announced that their philosophy of government derived from liberalization, private ownership and democratization principles, and promised substantial legal changes to this end. The local

governments were to be strengthened and centralistic tendencies would be curbed.

During ANAP government, reorganization of the greater city municipalities, privatization efforts, large scale urban infrastructural projects, renewal of town centers, slum clearance projects, introduction of new planning authorities, etc. turned the urban centers into an investment arena. The new balance of power created a new and a more complicated situation which "rather than changing the dominant forms of interest representation, dominant interest groups have been articulated with the traditional forms of representation by using new channels. That is to say, clientilism and corporatism have remained the dominant forms of interest representation while channels of representation became more diversified" (Şengül, 1993).

This new era has been propagated as one of increased power of local governments vis a vis the central government. The first concrete evidence of this assumption was the increased financial powers of the local governments. A series of new legislation were enacted for increasing municipal revenues and the 5% share allotted to municipalities from the national revenues was increased to 10.30%. As a result of this legislation, municipal incomes increased considerably in 1985. (For a detailed analysis of the financial system in Turkish local governments, see Ersoy, 1999).

Though it is a fact that the local governments enjoyed their most prosperous days during the 1980's, reasons behind this can be linked to conjectural political developments rather than increasing local power as alleged. As mentioned above, following the military coup d'état of 1980 all the political parties were abolished. A brand new political party ANAP (The Motherland Party) established by a very small group of politicians won two consequent elections. This new party had no political base either in urban or in rural areas. Therefore, with the seizure of power the vital problem for this party was to form loyal political cadres and the grass roots that would support it against the traditional parties on the national and local levels. It may be argued that empowerment of local governments financially through increase in the municipal incomes helped the Motherland Party in two ways. First, a new local capital class with close ties to the Motherland Party is created and supported through transfers from the national budgets, and secondly, the increased quality of the urban infrastructure thanks to such investments contributed to the creation of new party cadres and sympathizers in urban areas. In fact, the Motherland Party until today has been a party supported by ballots given in urban areas. This observation is important for understanding the betterment in the financing of local governments in the 1980's, before labeling it as an attempt to increase the powers of local governments as castles of local democracy.

In the final section modifications in the urban development plans will be studied to show the implausibility of the view, which equates democracy with decentralization.

Part 3.

Before studying the plan modifications and in relation with it the composition of the municipal councils, a few words should be said about the functions of the municipalities in Turkey after the 1980's. Since the development of the municipalities followed a rather different track in Turkey than the European way, even in its most effective period they have never been local beds of power providing social functions in reproduction of labor power. In fact, until the 1980's, thanks to etatist and developmentalist ideology coupled with import substitution policies, "Turkey's plans and priorities have consistently favored industrial development over urban facilities" (Danielson and Keles, 1985).

The military intervention in 1980 prepared the ground for the rise of the entrepreneurial municipal model. As mentioned above, municipalities became stronger financially and their priorities were redefined. While municipalities were withdrawn strategically and selectively from the key areas of collective consumption, "their investments shifted more and more towards infrastructure which had been neglected so long in the cities. On the other hand, especially in large cities, the local government became big business and the cities, perhaps for the first time, came to the attention of big firms and corporations" (Sengul, 1993).

In short, following the 1980's the functions of the municipalities were limited to contributing to the capital formation of the private sector only, hence labeled as one- function entities (Ayman Guler, 1992). This function is performed basically through planning decisions and infrastructure investments. In the rest of the paper we shall deal with the planning practice of the 1980's.

Some have welcomed the current Development Law enacted during ANAP administration in 1985 as a "revolution" while others argued that it was a "reaction" to the previous era, particularly in reference to its delivery of all powers related to development plans to local authorities. During the 60 years of the Republic, the superior approval of the Ministry was required for all urban development plans prepared or approved by the city councils to be effective. Furthermore, the Ministry had the capacity to make changes in plans sent for approval. Plan modifications also were to be approved by the Ministry.

The current law stipulates that urban development plans within the boundaries of municipalities and their adjacent areas be made and approved by municipalities. Plans falling out of these areas are made and approved by governorships. However, this power is not unlimited." Master" and "implementation" plans have to be in accordance with regional and environmental development plans prepared by the central government, if

any. Thus, a coordination between local and higher level plans is aimed at. It is not against the local government principle, for the central government to practice administrative tutelage in this sense (Ünal, 1990:165).

In brief, almost unlimited power of physical planning is given to local governments, and the municipal Councils are the sole authority in making decisions for planning and ratifying the prepared plans.

Although the current Development Law specifies different types of development plans at different levels and scales the most widely used ones are “master plans” and “implementation plans”. Master plans are usually drawn on 1/5000-scale maps and show general land uses, main zoning types, main transportation routes and population densities. They are used as upper scale guide or strategy plans for implementation. Applications are made according to implementations plans that are produced at 1/1000 scale and show all the details at the level of building lot.

Municipal Councils are the sole authority in taking decisions for planning and ratifying the prepared plans. There exists no technical control mechanism related to the quality of the plans prepared.

Comprehensive modifications on current plans can be made through “Revision Development Plan”s, “Partial Development Plan”s and “Additional Development Plan”s. However minor amendments at the level of lots are made through Plan Modification that is the most frequently used tool to change the plan decisions in the name of private interests and in practice through plan modifications specified individuals and sections of the local people are protected and rewarded. Urban rent is still considered to be most effective toll in the hands of municipalities as a means of distribution of wealth at the local level. Some researchers estimate the share of urban land rent in non-productive earnings to be around 75 per cent (Besiktepe, 1990). In this respect plan modifications play a significant role in measuring clienteles relations at the local level.

Modifications in development plans follow the same procedure as in the preparation and ratification of other plans; in other words, the Municipal Council has the final say in decisions. Therefore the composition of municipal councils is extremely important in this process. To study the link between the compositions of municipal councils and plan modifications we shall first investigate the rate of plan modifications before and after so-called more democratized change in the Turkish planning system following 1985. Secondly, the composition and structure of municipal councils will briefly be analyzed.

Although a limited numbers of studies are made on plan modifications they serve our purpose since there are studies made both in the pre and post 1985 era (For a detailed study of plan modifications in Turkey, see Ersoy 2000). It should be emphasized at the outset that plan modification is the most

frequently used tool to change the plan decisions in the name of private interests, and in practice through plan modifications specified individuals and sections of the local people are protected and rewarded. Urban rent is still considered to be the most effective toll in the hands of municipalities as a means of distribution of wealth at the local level.

According to Gunay (1979), 20787 plan modifications were made throughout Turkey between the years 1965 to 1978. In urban areas with more than 500,000 inhabitants, 162 plan modifications were made yearly on average between the years 1965 to 1978. Atahan reached a similar finding; in 1971 in three most populated cities of Turkey on average 141 plan modifications were made (Cited in Geray, 1972). Following these findings one can estimate that during the 1970's in Ankara the number of plan modifications per 10,000 persons was around 1.

Günay's findings show that 40 per cent of the plan changes were transformation of green areas to residential uses, i.e. from public to private uses. Less than 1 per cent of the plan modifications are made in squatter areas, which indicated that low- income people were not the active agents of the process.

A number of plan modifications increased enormously after the ratification of the current Urban Development Law in 1985 that decentralized the planning functions completely to local governments. For instance, Akyol (1995) cites about the plan modifications in a medium sized city of Trabzon. In Trabzon between 1989 and 1993, 2722 proposals for plan modifications were made to the city council of which 780 were ratified. Those changes resulted in the increment of the gross density in the city around 40 per cent. In another example, in a county of the Greater City of Istanbul named Bakirkoy, 230 proposals were made on plan modifications in one year. (Ersoy, 2000).

Ulusoy (1999) conducted a more comprehensive study on plan modifications in Ankara. According to her findings between the years 1986-1998, the Ankara Metropolitan Council ratified 1152 different types of development plans, which included only the changes made at the level of master plans. Seventy percent of them were plan modifications. During the twelve year period three different political parties or coalitions headed by them were in power in the Ankara Municipal Council, namely center right liberal Motherland Party, center left Social Democrat Party and radical religious Welfare Party. The plan modifications consisted of 52 percent, 65 percent and 80 percent of the plans ratified respectively. Ten percent of all the modifications were related to the increment of the density, one third of the changes related to the alteration in the use of social infrastructures to other uses. In fact, 40 percent of the all changes were transformations of the green areas to other and mostly private uses.

Findings in this paper, which are based on the data compiled by the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, for three consecutive years, namely 1990, 1991 and 1992, demonstrates that within the border of the metropolitan area 668,

795 and 770 revision plans were ratified, respectively, which means approximately 2,3 plan revisions per 10,000 inhabitants. As mentioned above, revision plans imply comprehensive modifications on development plans, therefore one can safely argue that the number of plan modifications are much higher than the number of revisions. For the Ankara case, therefore, the rate of plan modifications increased several times after the transfer of planning power to the local government. Although no such data exists for the second half of the 1990s it is known that with the transfer of mayorship to a radical Islamic party the number of plan modifications increased rapidly.

Although current regulations set limits to modify plans by putting various pre-conditions, a lack of central or local control mechanism, except than judicial ones, making them obsolete in practice. It depends totally on the Municipal Council to accept or reject a modification proposal made by individuals. When considering the amount of extra rent property owners get thanks to plan modifications, the composition of the Councils and the clientelistic relations between the voters and the political parties becomes crucial. Hence the composition of the Council of Municipalities is very important to grasp this process.

A comprehensive study conducted on the structure of municipal councils of cities over 50.000 inhabitants indicates that petty tradesmen and industrialist and tradesmen consisted 50 percent of the council members while wage earners made only 16 percent of them. Professionals such as engineers, developers, consultants and real estate dealers who are directly related with urban growth make 22 percent of the Council members (Citci, 1989). Professions of the mayors follow the same trend. 35 percent of the mayors elected between the years 1989 to 1994 were petty tradesmen, while workers and bureaucrats made only 16.5 percent (Ozhan, 1995). This composition of municipal councils gives clear hints as to which sections of the local people will be effective and for the benefit of whom. It is obvious that working classes of localities will be out of this process of rent sharing.

Concluding Remarks

Until the 1980's, Turkey experienced a municipal model highly depended on the center, which was quite understandable for the establishment and the further strengthening of the newly emerged nation state. Therefore, in spite of the 'Law on Municipalities' of 1930, which defined a broad range of duties for municipalities, the effect of local governments on the urban areas has been limited to garbage collection, provision of public transportation, maintenance of roads or tasks that are similar in nature. Apart from the strengthening of the national unity the main reason for this structural limitation was the allocation of resources to industrialization rather than urban investments. In other words, while the capital accumulation processes largely determined resource allocation on a nation-wide basis, state intervention to the reproduction of labor remained limited and mostly left on the local level.

The military intervention of 1980 changed this structure rather drastically by preparing the ground for the rise of an entrepreneurial municipal model. Increased financial resources of the local governments are used to foster the needs of the local, national, and in some cases international capital. As long as the presently structured social, economic and political relations persist, decentralization of some powers to local units will help little to promote the development of local democracy. The Turkish urban planning experience in this respect is an example. The transfer of planning powers almost unconditionally to local units -as shown above in the case of plan modifications- resulted in the empowerment of the local rent seeking power groups rather than the working sections of the local people and the improvement in local democracy which necessitates comprehensive changes in almost all spheres of life rather than limited amendments in legal codes.

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