

Preface

Since ancient times, Istanbul has been one of the most important cities on the European continent. In the 20th century, urban transformation processes marked the metropolis. As a result of intense internal migration from the 1950's to the end of the 20th century, the city grew to an official population of 12 million, with inhabitants on both sides of the Bosphorus. In spite of master plans to control the city's development, the growth is spontaneous and informal. At the same time, as an industrial and service city, the metropolis is a subject of national politics and global competition. The simultaneous coexistence of these disparities has affected the development of urban space in Istanbul. Therefore, in urban space, cultural conflicts about the definition of locality and identity are manifested and materialized.

In contemporary social and cultural science, urban space is no longer conceived as an objective or static container for social practices, but as a complex analytic category. Cities as complex structures are combinations of localized places, institutions and actors, activities, imaginaries and narratives. Urban space is analyzed as a social process that is based on spatial structures and space constructing activities. Urban spaces are continuously (re)constructed in planning processes, as well as in everyday practices. In this sense, the existence of public space – where spatial structures are materialized and social interactions take place – is a central characteristic of »urbanity«. It is temporarily used for different utilizations and has differing attributions of meaning. It is thus a heterogeneous space of negotiation, materially and discursively disputed.

In the first decade of the 21st century, on the brink of entering the European Union, Istanbul is a place of exemplified urban transforma-

tion. The significance of public spaces is becoming a popular topic in research and discussion about Istanbul's development and modernization. In research projects public space is analyzed not only concerning its shape as architectural design projects but as a social and political space. The discussions reflect the effort to overcome polarizations and dichotomist attributions like the »historic« and the »contemporary« city, »tradition« and »modernity«, »periphery« and »center«, the »local« and the »global«. The outcome of new discourses arising on migration, social exclusion, or the definition of the Other, are propositions for built environments that would create the physical conditions necessary for »new public spaces« as well as »public spheres«, where different cultural groups would have access and representation.

With its layers of the past, present, and future, Istanbul is an appropriate city to study the contemporary urban condition: the constitution of public spaces and spheres. Nevertheless, while more attention has been drawn to Istanbul's metropolitan life, profound studies on the complex cultural and urban situation are still rare.

In 2006 – succeeding research projects about other metropolis and the production, perception and appropriation of urban space – our intention was to initiate an interdisciplinary discussion with theoretical approaches and case studies on Istanbul. As urban scholars – with so far limited knowledge on Istanbul – we organized the conference »Public Istanbul – Spaces and Spheres of the City« at Bauhaus University, Weimar (19th and 20th January 2007). The conference had an interdisciplinary focus, with contributors from fields of geography, ethnography, history, cultural studies, architecture, and urban planning. We invited young urban scholars and well-known experts from Turkey and Germany, encouraging a dialog between different approaches and disciplines. Finally the conference was organized along four main axes of research: »Divided Istanbul« – dealing with socio-demographic aspects in a fragmented urban space, »Experiencing Istanbul« – an ethnographic and artistic look at everyday practices, »Planning Istanbul« – concentrating on the typology of public spaces, larger city planning projects, and new forms of urbanism, and finally »Representing Istanbul« – (historical) investigations about the image of the city and its reflection in cinema and art.

This book is an outcome of the conference, a selection of the perspectives and papers, which represent interdisciplinary approaches to urban transformation and everyday life in Istanbul as a globalizing metropolis. The collection of articles includes different levels and degrees of research experience, a combination of scientific and subjective ap-

proaches, various means of data collection, methodology and analysis, and different writing genres.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first part concentrates on geographical and sociological perspectives. Aspects of urban planning are also presented, and public space is analyzed in a spatial and political sense. Istanbul's urban organization of what we call the »public sphere«, has undergone substantial change, like many other cities. Unlike other cities in Europe, however, fast growth has challenged urban planning and local politics in a yet-unknown way. The question then is what the term »public« still means in Istanbul under contemporary conditions.

The second part takes a closer look at everyday life, investigating specific sites, social interaction, and individual biographies. Focusing on the micro level of local places and everyday practices, the historic and ethnographic case studies in this part give insight to possible interpretations of public spaces as arenas for production and reproduction of the urban.

The book represents fragments of contemporary discourses on Istanbul. It is not meant to be complete; there are many topics which could not be mentioned in the span of this work as well as many more scholars, planners, and scientists working on Istanbul and public space. We understand this compilation as a first step towards further discussions and exchanges between disciplines, knowledge, and local perspectives on the multi-dimensionality of urban public spaces in Istanbul.

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