Pathways of entrepreneurial urban governance

Spatial dynamics and community politics in Istanbul's regeneration

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

6. Synthesis and conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The core argument of this dissertation is rooted in understanding entrepreneurial governance as a double-edged framework that can simultaneously facilitate both inclusion and exclusion mechanisms, particularly depending on socio-political contexts. The research focused on how the paradoxical system of urban regeneration governance in Turkey operates in the face of inherent contradictions: providing opportunities for innovation on one hand, while reinforcing structural inequalities on the other. The large-scale—commonly referred to as 'mega'—regeneration cases from Istanbul (Derbent and Fikirtepe urban transformation projects) illustrate how these contradictions manifest and how localized actors navigate governance frameworks to assert agency. Returning to the research questions, I synthesize the insights I gained step by step during my research journey to articulate their broader, universal relevance.

In this concluding section, I am bridging the specific cases and the general academic debates. To this end, I revisit the core research questions that have guided this dissertation to ensure they are fully addressed. To unify the findings, I present a general synthesis that offers broader reflections and highlight the overarching themes, contributions, and limitations of the study. Rather than sharing insights as isolated to specific cases or chapters, I aim to distill relevant universal lessons and potential applications across diverse political, economic, and cultural geographies. This also involves connecting the study's localized findings to broader theoretical advancements and contextualizing them within global discussions on urban governance, spatial dynamics, and policy networks beyond Turkey.

I focus on several fundamental questions: *How do spatial governance frameworks mediate the competing interests of stakeholders like governments, private developers, and communities? How do governance models change or adapt when adopting entrepreneurial approaches? How does localized agency (the ability of local actors to assert influence) manifest, even within authoritarian contexts?* Responses to these questions are offered in respective chapters and in this conclusion chapter I only revisit the

universal questions that emerge in relation to them. The research moves from answering localized questions to generating universal insights that can inform theoretical debates on urban governance. In addition to going back to the core arguments and focusing more on the synthesis, I also acknowledge the methodological and contextual challenges encountered during the research process.

Critically, in this synthesis section, I identify and openly discuss the research's limitations, such as the distinctive socio-political landscape of Istanbul, which might make it difficult to generalize the findings and apply them universally, or methodological constraints, such as the absence of longitudinal data or limited access to informal community networks, which may have constrained the study's scope. I should also underline the enormous diversity of urban regeneration projects with different backgrounds that accommodate equally diverse communities with different needs and different ways to deal with. However, rather than seeing these challenges as purely negative, I adopt a reflective and forward-looking perspective and situate these limitations as opportunities for future exploration. For example, to overcome the context-specific limitations mentioned earlier, the findings emphasize the need for comparative studies across different urban environments, as well as the imperative for innovative methodologies to study informal networks or conduct long-term analyses to observe governance contradictions and transformations over time.

In the pursuit of universal relevance, I examine how the findings can apply to governance practices and theories in other contexts. While contextualizing entrepreneurial urban governance, emerging patterns across case studies such as China, Spain, the Netherlands, and South Africa illustrate the global applicability of concepts such as entrepreneurial governance, state entrepreneurialism, policy networks, and community adaptability. These cross-contextual reflections demonstrate a mutual relationship, showing how Istanbul's governance dynamics are both unique and globally relevant, thus offering new perspectives and lessons in urban governance worldwide. I also challenge the assumption that governance frameworks inherently represent solely bottom-up policies that oppose any top-down, centralized, or authoritarian stance, and that they can be transferred across different contexts to function in a similar way. However, entrepreneurial governance operates as a dynamic platform that also enables an environment capable of accommodating such contradictions, depending

on how key determinants interact within local socio-political dynamics, as the dissertation evidences. It charts a path for ongoing debates and provides a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers navigating the complexities of urban development worldwide.

6.2. Reclaiming 'right to the city': How do grassroots responses navigate entrepreneurial state dynamics in urban regeneration?

The core focus of this dissertation was to examine the complex dynamics of top-down, state-led governance strategies and grassroots, community-driven responses to urban redevelopment. It addressed the conflict between governance levels: state-driven goals and the localized realities of the communities. Building on these insights, I investigated how state entrepreneurialism manifests in urban regeneration as one of the central research themes of the dissertation. More specifically, I examined how local communities react to this manifestation, negotiate with state-led governance strategies, and what these interactions reveal about spatial governance, particularly in cities with market-oriented frameworks and similar socio-political contexts.

The empirical findings explore the contradictions of entrepreneurial governance in the Turkish context: state or market priorities (growth imperatives) on the one hand, and grassroots priorities (advocacy for inclusive governance practices) on the other. The empirical analysis highlights the significant role of the social composition of the Derbent informal neighborhood (*gecekondu*), its history of solidarity and collective resistance, and the socio-political backdrop in shaping the community's responses. The state leverages specific legal tools and even institutional reconfigurations as part of its spatial restructuring strategies, as well as authoritarian interventions, to achieve economic and symbolic goals. However, local actors respond to these strategies through resistance and contestation, while also inspiring broader citizenship debates. They institutionalize their self-organization, re-politicize themselves and policy networks, and negotiate grassroots governance with innovative approaches, up-to-date agendas, and data-driven dialogue. The analysis bases its framework on the Derbent case as an example to link to universal themes in spatial governance, such as growth-oriented development models, the

'right to the city', social justice in wider sense, how governance frameworks are contested and negotiated in urban regeneration processes, and the lessons that can be applied to other contexts.

Bridging empirical evidence with conceptual insights, the Derbent case brings these broader themes together and acts as a real-world example where state entrepreneurialism plays out in practice, and critical contradictions are observed, analyzed, and synthesized. On the one hand, state-driven efforts to monetize urban spaces often clash with residents' call for responsive spatial governance, which seeks to realign priorities with community-driven actions and adaptive frameworks in a more inclusive manner. On the other hand, mechanisms of negotiation emerge, with local actors resisting state-led initiatives by leveraging their sense of belonging and identity narratives tied to their places. This resistance actively shapes governance processes, creating a dynamism between top-down strategies and grassroots activism. Beyond its context-specific examinations, the outcomes and conceptual insights of Derbent examination hold high potential of negotiated and participatory urbanism as pathways toward socio-spatial justice by advancing social equity, fairness, and representation.

However, despite its contributions, there were areas where the research was constrained or incomplete. During the fieldwork stage, I have always questioned whether the scope of participation within the community is entirely inclusive or representative, or if any local groups dominate the dialogue. Because I used snowball sampling technique, I was able to connect with those who were already engaged in in-circle local groups. Although I tried to conduct the process as iteratively as possible to minimize bias in certain findings and mitigated this potential limitation by incorporating diverse secondary sources, issues of underrepresentation and tokenism within the community might still pose a limitation or challenge to my dissertation. Another significant challenge lay in reaching central government actors and property developers. Because the empirical work of this dissertation centered on 'contested' projects, it genuinely challenged me to articulate the networks of these actors and connect with their real reflections. Even when I was able to make contact, obtaining so-called generic answers from most of these actor groups made me reflect on my role as a researcher and the need to adopt a more neutral stance to facilitate these connections and knowledge transfers. These challenges, particularly in capturing the full complexity of the case, stand as significant limitations of this research.

Acknowledging limitations, tackling core questions related to the fundamentals, and pursuing their answers through empirical case studies make several novel contributions to the field of urban governance and suggest pathways for further research. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of urban governance by (1) emphasizing its spatial layer, as well as its network and policy layers; (2) illustrating how spatial governance operates within an entrepreneurial state, how governmental institutions and non-state actors interact in this sphere, and where local agency situates itself within policy networks, particularly in socio-spatially significant yet economically transitioning contested projects. Socio-politically, it provides an interpretation that moves beyond a right-versus-left dichotomy, so it leaves this black-and-white biased division behind, taking into account the rise of post-populist authoritarian urbanisms worldwide. It offers solid input on how, even within a governing system with authoritarian tendencies, democratic channels are not entirely blocked. On the contrary, innovative methods, if they benefit from institutionalized self-organization and prioritize collective interests encompassing social and spatial justice, can create their own pathways to ensure the system still work for resistance, contestation, and negotiation. These efforts also often find external support from broader communities, such as academia, including local governments, chambers, and other stakeholders.

Future research could advance discussions on the authoritarian tendencies that are becoming more and more pronounced, making it all the more important to identify and understand these practices without any biased assumption. As neoliberalization exacerbates its impacts on even daily life and in everyday urban politics, it becomes more urgent to explore mechanisms to resist, mitigate, or transform these frameworks, including potential 'way-outs' of such crises. In this manner, taking intensifying process of entrepreneurialization into account, further exploration of trade-offs is crucial. Developing governance models that prioritize inclusivity and ensure the 'right to the city' becomes actionable and institutionalized merit further investigation. This also includes examining the role of institutionalized self-organization as a re-politicizing catalyst, particularly in how grassroots initiatives challenge dominant neoliberal paradigms. Additionally, this involves exploring entrepreneurialization through self-organization, where residents transform into entrepreneurial citizens and negotiate with policy-making networks for 'the right to the city'.

6.3. What happens when market-driven imperatives overshadow the 'right to the city'? Negotiating authoritarian entrepreneurialism through post-populist adaptations

What happens when market-driven priorities dominate decision-making and overshadow principles like fairness, inclusivity, and community participation? And more critically, where do community members adopting market-like strategies stand in this narrative? To understand another core question of this dissertation, I sought to understand how governance frameworks are negotiated in urban regeneration where urban residents follow different pathways compared to the Derbent case. Although the empirical examinations are within the same country, even in the same city context, the narrative in Fikirtepe shifted dramatically depending on how spatial dynamics and community politics interact with the fusion of entrepreneurial and authoritarian traits. What I found was that all sides of the actor spectrum, including the central government (Emlak Konut and TOKİ) and community actors, turned into quasi-developers, as their roles became deeply intertwined with profit-driven motives. As a result of the government's inactive role as a moderator and its partnership with financial interests, urban residents were placed in direct confrontation with market actors. Consequently, community members adopted specific strategies to navigate the governance system. In this context, balancing the complexities of this landscape evolved into a real challenge for them.

As the findings suggest, entrepreneurial governance frameworks are not static but rather adaptive and subject to contestation. This means that while they are shaped by state or market objectives, they also allow room for negotiation and resistance from local communities, even in constrained environments. These frameworks facilitate environments where entrepreneurial entities—including property developers, self-organized bodies, individual citizens, or marginalized community actors—can engage in the processes if they adopt entrepreneurial strategies. Empirical examination demonstrates how entrepreneurial citizenship can diverge into different pathways if the 'right to the city' is not a priority, if market-driven imperatives overshadow public interest, and if planning principles reflect to neoliberal political agendas rather than common good. In such cases, communities may adopt more individualistic and opportunistic approaches, as evidenced in this dissertation. As earlier question

elaborated, entrepreneurialization can occur through institutionalizing self-organization. Another way to enroll in this entrepreneurial landscape is to mimic property development actors, as the empirical findings show. However, when urban residents imitate property developers solely with material-gain-driven adaptations, without collective actions to safeguard a jointly agreed common interest, it comes with significant consequences. This choice leads to citizens becoming market actors themselves, disrupting the public balance that should benefit everyone. This disruption, in turn, brings even greater bottlenecks and crises—not only for citizens but also for the state and the private sector.

How governance frameworks are negotiated through entrepreneurial strategies are not unique to one context but reflects broader patterns observed globally. For example, in urban regeneration projects in the Netherlands, local actors navigate the complexities of multi-actor governance frameworks, leveraging contractual flexibility and hybrid governance arrangements to adapt to state-imposed constraints while seeking to secure socio-economic and relational benefits (Taşan-Kok, 2010; van den Hurk & Taşan-Kok, 2020; Taşan-Kok et al., 2021). What stands out here is that the hybrid governance arrangements adopted in the Dutch context are not solely entrepreneurial; rather, these arrangements combine both public and private sector participation and are not exclusively market dominated. However, these adaptations also highlight systemic challenges, such as power imbalances, fragmented collaboration and informalities, as exercised in the Chinese context (Wu, 2018). Depending on governance frameworks—whether they reflect purely, or predominantly market-dominated systems or neoliberal models seen elsewhere—China's governance combines strong state control in planning with market-based strategies. These challenges exacerbate inequalities and limit inclusive outcomes. For example, specific institutional mechanisms, such as the 2/3 majority rule implemented in Fikirtepe's decision-making processes, perpetuate power disparities while marginalizing vulnerable stakeholders, such as tenants or non-compliant property owners who do not comply with majority decisions.

As I draw attention with both the empirical results and the examination of governing patterns, entrepreneurial governance can adapt to and function in various political contexts, regardless of the nature of the political system. For instance, in the Turkish context, entrepreneurial governance

reveals different manifestations of 'entrepreneurial citizenship': in one case, the re-politicization of policy networks through institutionalized self-organization, even within authoritarian contexts; in another, navigating profit and politics through post-politics adaptations, as market actors do. In regimes like China, the contradictions arising from the combination of centralized planning and market instruments create room for informalities to develop their agencies and their own spaces. In hybrid contexts like the Netherlands, while leveraging flexibilities arising from the entrepreneurial framework, there is also an inquiry into balancing the public and private sectors, addressing economic dynamism and social justice. These comparative insights underscore that entrepreneurial governance is adaptable to various political and institutional settings. However, this adaptability also highlights the framework's limitations in addressing equity and inclusion. In other words, the findings advocate for hybrid models that prioritize collaboration and address systemic inequalities.

Additionally, the research identifies regulatory ambiguities and policy gaps as key challenges inherent in the project's protracted evolution, such as unclear legal frameworks and plan-notes based implementations, as seen in Fikirtepe. These challenges have been created by both the overregulated yet flexible urban planning trajectory of 'mega' regeneration practices, particularly in Istanbul, and their speculative nature. These issues create both internal and external ambiguities. Internally, they exacerbate tensions among stakeholders, such as disagreements over land use or governance responsibilities. Externally, the urban project's legal and institutional frameworks complicate its understanding and make the generalizability of the findings difficult, although such ambiguities are not unique to this particular context.

Inquiring this question brings novel insights to urban governance scholarship. The empirical elaboration of the concept of 'entrepreneurial citizenship' significantly contributes as a key theoretical tool for understanding community adaptability and negotiated governance dominated by market logics. Additionally, this dissertation opens a window to explore informal networks and actors, such as opportunistic brokers, moving the research beyond examining formal mechanisms. In doing so, it also draws attention to less-visible dynamics that might more frequently occur in such flexible and adaptable frameworks. And practically, it

offers policy recommendations to improve governance models, such as institutionalizing community engagement to ensure that marginalized stakeholders have a consistent voice in governance processes, preventing exclusion and tokenism; dialogue mechanisms for joint activities and mediation processes, and implementing adaptive policy cycles to respond dynamically to evolving challenges.

Looking ahead, I see several pathways emerging for future research. Investigating the scalability of entrepreneurial citizenship in varying urban governance contexts could help to clarify its applicability and limitations. In light of the increasing authoritarian turn worldwide, conducting longitudinal studies to examine the socio-economic impacts of the fusion of authoritarian and entrepreneurial traits would also enrich the field. More specifically, such studies could measure communities' ability to adapt and ensure fair and equitable access to urban spaces and resources. Finally, developing frameworks to compare urban regeneration practices globally would deepen the understanding of spatial governance and provide actionable insights for navigating the complexities of market-driven urban transformation in an inclusive and equitable manner.

6.4. Harnessing entrepreneurial governance frameworks to balance growth imperatives with equity and justice

As concluding remarks, I want to draw attention to entrepreneurial governance's transformative capacity by identifying conditions under which its potential can be harnessed to balance market imperatives with social goals. I evaluate entrepreneurial governance's ability to function effectively even within contradictory structures and constrained environments, such as centralized systems while making room for decentralized approaches, as one of its most compelling potentials. That's why it stands crucial to learn how to turn this process into the advantage of wider urban society. Some cases offer greater inclusivity through hybrid governance models, such as Preston's (UK) cooperative governance initiatives (Thompson, 2023). While this potential better integrates these seemingly opposing approaches, informing hybrid governance models will particularly ensure more robust community engagement and promote urban democracy. Additionally, while participatory mechanisms strengthen the legitimacy

of governance with community voices, they also build resilience. As Kaika (2017) argues, true resilience is beyond technical fixes, indicators, or managerial approaches, and it emerges when communities are given a voice, agency, and tools to question and challenge inequitable systems.

To further harness the transformative potential of entrepreneurial governance, I identified multiple pathways for further research. First of all, it is possible to incorporate **conflict resolution mechanisms** into governance frameworks, particularly within **policy networks.** These mechanisms are methods or strategies designed to address disputes in among different parties (stakeholders). The goal is to resolve differing or conflicting priorities within collaborative systems where various actors, such as governmental institutions and non-state actors, work together on policymaking and its implementation (Selg et al., 2024). I interpret these mechanisms—including dialogue, mediation, and resource-sharing—as essential to managing complicated and multi-layered actor spheres in governance frameworks, as emphasized by Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) as well. Such systematizations are also necessary also to bridge the gap between profit-driven and community-centered goals through open communication, bringing in neutral parties to solve negotiation conflicts, and allocating benefits or responsibilities to balance interests.

Secondly, the importance of **iterative and adaptive policy cycles** in governance frameworks are important to understand. Governance, as a continuous process, inevitably accommodates challenges and failures. However, such an approach, iterative governance cycles, has a high-level ability to benefit from failures and turn them opportunities for learning and innovation, as emphasized by Bacchi and Goodwin (2016). Instead of seeing failures as obstacles, they can be viewed as valuable experiences and inputs for learning, showing what works and what doesn't for future policy implementations. This has quite practical benefits, such as keeping governance responsive and relevant to evolving needs and circumstances. It also creates opportunities to incorporate effective feedback—for example, public protests (which might also serve as **critical junctures**—moments of institutional or policy change)—and provides the flexibility to step back, respond dynamically to changing societal needs, and build iterative policies accordingly. Relevantly, **re-framing governance as iterative and dialogical**, designed as **positive-sum games** (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016)—or win-win scenarios, in other words—can also help governance

frameworks bridge the gap between state-led economic priorities and community engagement, and **address environmental and social justice** to ensure long-term sustainability.

Speaking of failures, another critical component to managing governance challenges is **recovery mechanisms in policy networks,** as highlighted by Sørensen and Torfing (2007). Governance failures may arise when policy networks face a lack of trust, competing interests, or power imbalances, which prevent them from achieving their goals. To address deadlocks, as Sørensen and Torfing (2007) emphasize, rebuilding trust and renegotiating goals are key to keeping the network functional. At this point, my dissertation contributes by adding value regarding the positive potential of informal actors to help reconnect overlooked stakeholders and marginalized groups to formal governance processes.

Although I do not directly focus on market dynamics and particularly property development actors, one of important outcomes from my synthesis, as well as many recent relevant works, demonstrates that is that urban planning must take more seriously the **integration of market dynamics into urban planning processes.** To ensure that economic growth contributes to more equitable outcomes, urban planning must proactively engage with these dynamics rather than ignoring or opposing them. What is needed at this point is the ability to see and interpret the narrative beyond black-and-white assumptions and to ensure that regulatory tools, such as inclusionary zoning, affordable housing quotas, etc., effectively align market interests with societal goals. Post-political thinkers argue that this entire learning process operates against the public interest and can transform into a weapon in the hands of market actors. While much of the scholarly literature critiques the market, there is a notable lack of studies on how citizens and the public sector exhibit market behavior, and understanding this process is crucial. However, these efforts, and understanding it, do not, of course, imply endorsing it or legitimizing it.

Finally, **recognizing the roles of social and economic entrepreneurs** in governance systems can bridge the divide between market-driven growth and community well-being. While social entrepreneurs address governing challenges by prioritizing equity-focused solutions (Scaffidi et al., 2025), economic entrepreneurs, although primarily aiming for profit, can be

aligned with societal goals through regulatory tools. Acknowledging the distinction between these actors would enable governance systems to effectively leverage their roles and integrate their efforts in urban regeneration, ultimately achieving sustainable development overall. Examples from Shenzhen (Teo, 2023) and Cape Town (Nkula-Wenz, 2019) also illustrate how similar tactics can work in practice.

By addressing these priorities, entrepreneurial governance can move beyond its primary focus on economic imperatives to become a transformative tool supporting inclusive, democratic, and just urban development. Transcending both its general and context-specific limitations can re-situate the framework as a platform where urban democracy and social and environmental justice are achieved and advanced. Incorporating tools like conflict resolution, adaptive policies, and community-driven mechanisms will strengthen its transformative capacity while providing action-based pathways and practical guidance for policymakers.

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