

TESEV Sustainable Development Reports

Sustainable Cities e-Participation for a Politics of Local Commons

Ulař Bayraktar



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TESEV

**Türkiye Ekonomik ve
Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı**

*Turkish Economic and
Social Studies Foundation*

Mecidiye Mahallesi, Dereboyu
Caddesi No: 41 Kat: 2-3-4 34347
Ortaköy-İstanbul
Tel: +90 212 292 89 03 PBX
Fax: +90 212 292 90 46
info@tese.org.tr
www.tese.org.tr

Authors and Contributors:

Ulaş Bayraktar

Prepared by:

İtir Akdoğan

Translation:

Bediz Yılmaz

Design and Page Layout: Myra

Design of Publication Identity: Rauf Kösemen

Page Layout: Gülderen Rençber Erbaş

Coordination: Engin Doğan

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Friedrich Naumann
STIFTUNG **FÜR DIE FREIHEIT**

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Preface

Itır Akdoğan

Sustainability and sustainable cities are on the urban agenda both conceptually and related to urban policy making since the 1970s. Is our city sustainable? If yes, where do we stand in that? If not, what shall we demand from the governors? How can we make our mind, have an opinion and share it? We, as citizens, don't always have the answers. That is because sustainable city, the concept, does not translate into concrete actions in our daily city life. One of the reasons behind this is that citizens are not always included in the discussion and policy processes of sustainability and sustainable city even though these directly touch their daily lives.

Sustainable city, is only possible when a participatory governance, technology that serve the goals of sustainability, and communities who are engaged in (sustainable) city via citizen participation come together. One concept that gathers these three key areas is e-participation, bringing together the use of new information and communication technologies in participation processes, governance, technology, and communities. This technology offers tools and functions to technically facilitate access to information, interaction, and participation; given that the political elite accept introducing a participatory governance model.

Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in partnership with the the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNF) completed the Project entitled "e-Participation for a Sustainable City", which gathered local governors and organized and unorganized civil society representatives in workshops framed around the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Sustainable Development Goals launched in 2015. Participants in these workshops discussed different concepts and planned concrete e-participation tools for a sustainable city, bringing together governance, technology, and communities. The project has been a small but effective start to put sustainable city on the local policy agenda.

We would like to thank Dr. Faik Uyanık, Communication Coordinator of the UNDP Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Assoc. Prof. Ulaş Bayraktar from Mersin University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, mayors and co-mayors of Seferihisar, Terme and Akdeniz Municipalities and their teams for their invaluable contributions in this start. This report and its policy recommendations, written at the end of the project, present an outstanding reference for broader discussions, policy, and practice of sustainable cities.

Executive Summary

The idea of sustainable development has been transformed into a concrete program under 17 headings within the United Nations Global Goals. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Index (SDG) prepared within this framework, Turkey ranks 48th among 149 countries with a score of 66.1. In the fulfillment of sustainable development goals, participatory city governments play a major role and new opportunities have emerged. Citizen participation can be achieved through a range of methods and scopes, such as information, consultation, inclusion, cooperation, and empowerment, and Internet technologies open up considerable opportunities for these, although preexisting structural and cultural problems that precede these mechanisms endure. This report argues that the participatory practices inspired by the idea of the commons could make a significant contribution to making these participatory practices more functional. Thus, we propose four main instruments that would enable a politics of the commons to take root:

1. Bringing forth city values that could be shared by all citizens, in order to enhance the bonds of belonging, and organizing activities which would foster these bonds;
2. For those who continue to express their sense of belonging to their original homelands in spite of being residents of the same city, creating public occasions that would bring people together, facilitate mutual acquaintance and develop a minimum level of mutual trust;
3. Enabling information mechanisms that would enable people to understand the necessity and importance of participation, and which would make popular monitoring possible, as well as keep administrators informed of public expectations and choices;
4. Developing practices differing from the usual hierarchical organizational types in order to facilitate and encourage the gathering of people sharing similar problems and preferences.

e-Participation for Sustainable Cities

This report comprises the issues and policy recommendations developed in discussions under the aegis of the project, “Supporting Sustainable Cities” jointly executed by the Turkey Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNF) in 2016. The theme of democratic participation for sustainable cities put forth by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals has been discussed, not only in its conceptual dimensions, but also in the context of ad hoc experiences and planned projects. Under the project, three district municipalities (Seferihisar - İzmir, Terme - Samsun, Akdeniz - Mersin) governed by three different parties (Republican People’s Party, Justice and Development Party, and People’s Democratic Party respectively), hosted trainings and workshops on issues such as sustainability, the sustainable city, and e-participation that brought together local administrations, civil society and ordinary city-dwellers.

The workshops opened with a discussion on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, i.e. the most up-to-date and comprehensive framework for sustainability policies. Following this, the focus turned to the role of cities and city administrations in the realization of these goals, as well as the necessity of implementing participatory democracy in these cities, in order that this role could be played. Tackling the issue of different participatory practices, and the flaws observed during implementation, revealed the necessity of building a new participatory democracy, termed “the politics of the commons”, so that these practices could best serve sustainable development goals. The last point of our conceptual discussions concerned the use of electronic means and instruments that would operate in the actual participatory mechanisms, and in those within the politics of the commons.

Following the theoretical discussions, the workshop participants defined the three goals that they viewed as priorities from among the global goals. The work continued in groups, and each group developed e-participation instruments, which they presented at the end.

This report summarizes the discussions and policy recommendations handled in the workshops organized on the basis of the previously mentioned concepts and themes. First, we will present the concept of sustainability, along with its relationship to participatory democracy, and then, tackle the importance of cities within this framework. Second, we will discuss different types of participatory practices, and the existing, or potential, uses of electronic instruments in relation to these practices. And finally, we will engage in a debate on our policy proposal for a politics of the commons, which is conceptualized as an opportunity to overcome the obstacles encountered in the process.

SUSTAINABILITY: THE STORY OF A CONCEPT

It is nowadays frequently stated that the scope and gravity of ecological problems have escalated and that we are on the verge of an irrevocable disaster. In response to the indecisive attitude of governments, and their failure to take definite, concrete steps towards solving these problems, international actors and non-governmental organizations have come to feel the need to become more involved in decision-making and policy-proposal processes.

The first of these steps was taken during the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, June 5-16, 1972. The final declaration of the conference proclaimed that “a point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences” and that “the capacity of the earth to produce vital renewable resources must be maintained and, wherever practicable, restored or improved”. Governments, in light of this aim, have been called upon to ensure the rational use of resources and to integrate this understanding into their development plans.

That this call to action issued in Stockholm had proved quite fruitless was accepted four years later in Vancouver, at the HABITAT I City summit. Thus, it has been observed that leaving the monopoly on decisions related to environmental problems to governments was not effective. Hence, in 1983, under the name of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), the UN General Assembly formed a special commission which would monitor the Stockholm resolutions, diagnose problems related to the environment and development, and propose solutions to these.

The commission issued a report entitled *Our Common Future* in 1987. This report is known as the Brundtland Report after the President of the Commission, Gro Harlem Brundtland. It makes a detailed assessment of the socio-ecological situation of the planet and proposes strategies to deal with the problems that came to the fore. Sustainable development, defined in the report as “the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, is the main axis of these strategies.

Another important aspect of the report for sustainability is the accent put on the responsibilities and importance of local administrations and non-governmental organizations in the defined problem areas. This comment, based on the understanding that the centralising habits and tendencies of governments weaken the efficiency of cities in their struggle with urban problems, should be read more as a technical functionality than as an argument defending participatory democracy.

We would need to wait until the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro from 3-14 June, 1992, to see any crystallization in the political role that cities and city administrations play with regard to sustainable development goals. The Final Declaration of the Summit, entitled *Agenda 21*, sets out the socio-economic and political agenda for the 21st century. The Declaration, establishes tight links between economic development, social equity and ecological conservation in 40 articles; particularly the 28th article covering the role of local administrations, i.e. the cities, in the process. This section, called the *Local Agenda 21*, sees local administrations as essential partners in the instruction, mobilization and interaction with public opinion, with regard to the advancement of sustainable development.

The role of the local scale in the framework of sustainable development goes beyond the local administrations' contribution to policies in this process on the national and international scale. In other words, beyond contributing to the policies and practices decided at higher levels of governance, cities appear as the actors that could embody the principle of sustainable development in their very existence. The concept of sustainable development is simply the expression of the criteria and experiences opening the way to this ultimate embodiment.

GLOBAL GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The idea of sustainable development was conceptualized and generalized by the HABITAT summits and documents, and this concept was updated by the United Nations in September 2015, under the title of *Global Goals for Sustainable Development*; briefly referred to as the *Global Goals*. These goals have set the framework for the struggles in problem areas such as poverty, inequality, injustice and global warming, in the years leading up to 2030, and they have, thus, taken the *Millennium Development Goals* one step further. These latter were accepted in 2000 with the aim of effecting their implementation by 2015. The 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) focusing

on “people, planet and prosperity” aim at achieving global solidarity and partnership to deal with 17 general issues, including the eradication of famine and extreme poverty, the reduction of the inequality between people, regions and countries, the fight against climate change, environmental protection, and accomplishing gender equality, economic growth, quality education and affordable energy, all by 2030. The goals are as follows:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, and at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within, and between, countries

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14: Conserve, and sustainably use, the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation, and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

These 17 Goals are more clearly formulated in 169 concrete targets and hundreds of indicators. For instance, the United Nations Statistics Division has identified 231 indicators in order to assess and compare progress towards these targets. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), an initiative formed by the United Nations, bringing together academic, business and civil society representatives in 2012, with the aim of working on concrete targets that would enhance the sustainability of societies, economies and nature, published the *SDG Index and Dashboards Report* in 2016, in which country performances were compared with regard to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs).¹

1 <http://www.sdgindex.org> (last accession: Oct. 21, 2016).

The SDG Index shows that all countries are faced with important challenges in achieving the SDGs, and Turkey ranks 48th from among 149 countries. According to this, Turkey has made significant improvements in domains such as hunger, clean water, education, energy, sustainable cities and climate change, but still has a long way to go with regard to gender equality, industry, underwater life and, particularly, in the partnership for goals.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES

The *Aalborg Charter* may be evaluated as a cornerstone in the process of shaping the concept of sustainability through UN meetings with cities and the Local Agenda 21 procedures. *The Charter of European Sustainable Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability*, known as the *Aalborg Charter* after the name of the city where the First European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns was held in 1994, represents the birth of the urban ecological sustainability initiative. The Charter, signed by more than 40 countries and 4000 local administrations, is composed of three parts: Part 1 is a consensus declaration of European sustainable cities and towns in favour of sustainability, Part 2 relates to the creation of the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign, and Part 3 is declaration of intent that local governments will seek to engage in Local Agenda 21 processes.

The sustainable cities, as defined by the Aalborg Charter, are thus cities, which, in making policy decisions, would take into account their impacts on economic, social and environmental domains, and which have already managed to go beyond a minimum distance in all three aspects. In other words, in sustainable cities the most economically advantageous option is not the cheapest, but the one which serves the city's general interests best.² But how can these general interests be taken into account?

The key point for becoming a sustainable city lies in adopting a holistic way of reasoning that would cover all domains, such as business, education, infrastructure, public services, environment and nature. The main objective is to ensure that all decisions are taken with the sum interests of all these domains having been taken into account. The main sources of information, and the instruments to be put into use, are the following:

- Inter-sectoral partnerships that would enhance sustainability
- Information-based solutions that simultaneously generate economic, social, and environmental benefits
- Citizen partnerships that would increase the value of money, procure social benefits, and support the environment
- Integrated planning and solutions in public institutions aimed at supporting 3-in-1 solutions
- Sustainable provision

The signatory cities of the Charter declare their determination to adopt the 10 commitments below through the adoption of these instruments³:

1. To affect **governance** by energising the decision-making processes through increased participatory democracy;
2. To implement effective local management cycles in harmony with the principle of **sustainability**;

² <http://www.sustainablecities.eu> (last accession: Oct. 20, 2016).

³ http://www.sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/repository/Aalborg_Commitments/Aalborg_Commitments_English.pdf (last accession: Oct. 20, 2016).

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3. To protect, preserve, and ensure equitable access to **natural common goods**;
 4. To adopt and facilitate the prudent and efficient use of resources, and to encourage sustainable consumption and production, thus adopting **responsible consumption and lifestyle choices**;
 5. to assign strategic importance to urban **planning and design** in addressing environmental, social, economic, health, and cultural issues;
 6. To recognize the interdependence of transport, health and the environment, and to be committed to the strong promotion of **sustainable mobility choices**;
 7. To protect and promote the **health and wellbeing** of our citizens and to mobilise local actions in support of this aim;
 8. To create and ensure a **vibrant and sustainable local economy** that gives access to employment without damaging the environment;
 9. To defend **social equity and justice** with the aim of securing inclusive and supportive communities;
 10. To assume our **global responsibility at the local level** for peace, justice, equity, sustainable development, and climate protection.

The Aalborg commitments have thus resolved that the cities are essential elements from the perspective of sustainability. Beyond a mere commitment to a principle, the *Aalborg Charter*, an important threshold in the determination of application methods, has been further concretised in the *Lisbon Action Plan*, constituted in October 1996. This framework, developed in a third conference held in Hannover in 2000, has been transformed into a list of commitments (the *Aalborg Commitments - Aalborg+10*) which were presented for signing at a second summit in Aalborg ten years later, in June 2004. And at the Seville Conference in 2007, more than 25 000 cities from over 40 countries have declared their adherence to these commitments.

Until now, the Aalborg Charter has been signed by the following local governments from Turkey: the metropolitan municipalities of Bursa and Diyarbakır as well as municipalities of Batman, Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Hakkâri, Mardin (Dikmen) and Siirt. The Çorum Governorship and Marmara Municipalities Union have provisionally signed the Charter.⁴ There have been no signatories from Turkey to the Aalborg Commitments declared in 2004.

Apart from these meetings and commitments under the aegis of the Aalborg Charter, the role of the cities within the framework of development, democracy and human rights were also under discussion in Europe. The *European Urban Charter* and the *European Declaration of Urban Rights*, adopted by the European Council in 1992, define the properties of an ecological, democratic and livable city in 13 themes and 68 principles.

According to these, the cities should:

1. Have **transport and mobility** opportunities that are environmentally friendly and offer alternatives to the use of private cars;
2. Adopt **nature protection** policies for energy use and management, and against pollution;
3. Protect the **physical form of cities**, conserve city centers and the creative quality of architecture, and develop open spaces by protecting them;

4 http://www.sustainablecities.eu/fileadmin/repository/Aalborg_Charter/Aalborg_Charter_signatories.pdf

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4. Pass legal, financial and economic regulations to protect the **urban architectural heritage**, and adopt a planning perspective that serves this objective;
 5. Make the necessary economic and social regulations to provide **housing** that would respect individual privacy, and be secure, safe, and accessible;
 6. Develop and make available adequate funding for **urban security and crime prevention**, including alternative forms of penalisation that rely on scientific methods and on cooperation between the security forces and people;
 7. Adopt proper, integrative, solidarity-based design principles to ensure that cities be accessible to all **disadvantaged and disabled persons**;
 8. Ensure that all urban dwellers take part in **sporting and recreational activities** in a healthy and safe way by developing their individual potential;
 9. Support mutual **cultural exchange** between different segments of the population, while encouraging occasions of solidarity and shared cultural activities by adopting pluralistic policies;
 10. Provide opportunities, particularly to migrants, to ensure that they have sufficient political, economic and physical opportunities that would enable social cohesion and **multicultural integration in towns**;
 11. Provide adequate **health** conditions and fundamental goods in a safe and healthy way;
 12. Safeguard **citizen participation, urban management and urban planning through** free and democratic representation, counseling and participation; provide adequate information in a comprehensible way and adopt an administrative concept based on planning;
 13. Have adequate infrastructure for **economic development**, be open to public-private partnerships, and develop policies that are sensitive to social development.

There is no doubt that the main question and problem is *how* these principles, to which no one would object, could be achieved. We are aware that there exists no scientific or technical answer applicable to all cities and countries. Given that the issue is clearly not a mere technical problem but is, rather, a primarily political question in essence, the necessity of dealing with it through the mechanism of democracy has appeared on the agenda.

Participation and Sustainability

16 years after the adoption of *European Urban Charter*, in 2008, the European Council decided to redefine, complete and update some of the Urban Charter's principles in light of the social, economic and cultural changes that had occurred over the course of time. Drafted in consultation with the Sustainable Development Committee, the importance for our discussion of this new framework, the *Manifesto for a New Urbanity*, is that it promotes the concept of "Right to the City" by underlining the central role of the citizens in relation to urban policies.

In light of the right to the city, the Charter emphasises that "towns and cities are responsible for building a model of urban governance which takes account of the new demands of democracy, particularly where participation is concerned". The new Charter, thus, represents the most concrete European expression related to the urban integration of the governance models put forth by the concept of sustainability. Observations such as the loss of citizen interest in elections, or in politics in general, as well as the rise of marginal ideas, might be cited as reasons underpinning the prominence of participation. Against the flaws of representative democracy and along with its practices, the Charter underlines the importance of the use of participatory democratic practices such as "citizens' assemblies, local referendums, and all forms of direct citizen participation".

This new manifesto on urbanity does not limit itself to emphasising only the principal role that the cities would play in bringing the principle of sustainability to life. After warning against the internal disputes likely to occur after the redistribution of power between central and regional governments and local authorities had been affected, with the resulting emancipation of towns and cities, the Charter asserts the necessity of preventing a situation in which "the increasing independence of towns and cities [leads] to ruthless, unregulated competition between local areas". This is especially important because, beyond a mere discussion of autonomy, it puts the accent on democratic and participatory functioning within the local administrations.

Another novelty of the Charter is the reference made to information technologies, which have the potential to facilitate participatory democratic functioning. It is believed that, thanks to these new technological media, "the interactivity and speed of information can enhance the process of democratic participation and improve dialogue between elected representatives and citizens". The improvements in the domain of technology, particularly the ease in access to the Internet, the facilitation and acceleration of data transfers, and the incredible enlargement of possible interactions have also had a deep impact on politics; in essence, a collective activity. The reference to information technologies makes the *Manifesto for a New Urbanity* a primary reference for our discussion.

Hence, the *We Are Social* platform, in its annual report comprising data on 232 countries, states that, of Turkey's population, 58 % are active users of the Internet, while 53 % are users of social media. The use of mobile phones is at 90 % and mobile social media use through mobile phones is at 45 %. In light of these figures, it may be stated that the Internet facilities are available to a high proportion of the population.⁵

5 <http://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/2016-digital-yearbook> (last accession: Oct. 22, 2016).

In the following sections, we will be tackling the repertoire of participatory practices, with the aim of analysing the concrete ways in which the participatory mechanisms, as defended by the Charter, are implemented.

PARTICIPATORY MECHANISMS

We have already stated that one way to realise the principle of sustainability, and thus, to overcome the problems that our planet currently faces, is to constitute democratic governance in cities; which would be possible mainly through developing participatory practices and mechanisms. Yet, it is not possible to envisage a single category for these. There are various mechanisms, with regards to their structures and functioning, as well as their democratic impact. In this section, we shall categorise practices that enable the kind of popular participation in urban governments that the Urban Charter-II has postulated. Moreover, we shall also discuss how the information technologies that the Charter highlights are, or can be, used for these ends.

Information

Activities of informing are first stage of participation, as well as the precondition for other participatory practices. The presentation of the subject in all its dimensions, in a way that can be publicly understood and evaluated, forms the basis of information-providing practices. It would not be entirely appropriate, at this stage, to claim that citizens enjoy a genuine opportunity for true democratic participation, as they remain essentially passive recipients of information. Yet, as we can expect that the information thus acquired will enhance interest in, and the deliberate use of, other participatory mechanisms, its importance with regards to democratic governance cannot be ignored.

As the main category of participatory government, the most concrete and traditional practices are to be found in the category of informing. Every meeting, publication or communication addressed to the public by politicians and bureaucrats with the objective of presenting actions and projects are examples of informing.

The most important weakness of informing is that communication flows in a one-way channel from politicians/bureaucrats to citizens, and that it does not aim to convey the wishes and choices of the latter to the government. While decision-makers enjoy the opportunity to explain their decisions, plans and preferences, the audience does not have the opportunity of questioning, influencing or changing them. The electorate is informed about decisions that have already been taken, or are scheduled to be taken. In most cases, even confirmation of the information presented can be troublesome. Lacking various sources of information, citizens cannot even be sure about the validity of the information delivered.

The development and popularisation of information technologies has made the practice of informing much cheaper and quicker. Channels of communication such as websites, blogs, micro-blogs, and e-mail groups, have made it much easier for officials to inform the public about government activities and projects. Particularly, websites such as Wikipedia, which has adapted the age-old traditions of the encyclopedia to the present, have very much improved access to information via the Internet.

Websites like Wikipedia enable all people to share their information on any subject easily, rapidly and at no cost. The problem of validity, with regard to the anonymously provided information, has been dealt with at the hands of large numbers of people referencing and confirming information published online. In fact, websites like eksisozluk.com that have no ambition of providing objective information have become notable resources of information by virtue of the number of users and the density of contributions.

Moreover, traditional methods of communication used by politicians and bureaucrats have become cheaper, easier and more instantaneous thanks to new digital technologies. The Internet has freed informative activities addressing a limited audience in a specific lieu from the restrictions of time and space. Thus, it has become quite easy to follow public deliberations, such as municipal council sessions, that are formally open to the public, but very rarely attended. Like the mayor of Fatsa, Fikri Sönmez, who broadcast council meetings from municipal loudspeakers in the late 1970s, now municipalities can similarly stream them over the Internet. Quite a number of cities, such as Amasra⁶, Antalya⁷, Düzce⁸ and Burhaniye,⁹ in fact, currently broadcast their council sessions on the Internet.

The broadcast of municipal sessions is not a formal obligation, but the publicising of resolutions adopted by the council and the executive committee is. With digital technologies, access to such information is much easier. In addition to ease of access, through the use of digital media, municipal resolutions can become much more comprehensible. Thanks to graphics, drawings, maps and geographical information systems, a wider public can follow and understand municipal policies that are normally presented in a technical language. For instance, mecliste.org website aims to present the draft laws on the agenda of the Grand National Assembly in a way that everybody can understand. The objective of websites such as mulksuzlestirme.org, and megaprojeleristanbul.com, is to reveal the networks of interest in urban projects and investments, and report on their current state, in a comprehensible manner that people can follow.

With the popularisation and the greater affordability of audiovisual data communication arising from mobile Internet technologies, each mobile phone has turned into a live broadcasting tool. Consequently, even in contexts where access to traditional media, such as radio, television or newspapers, is not provided or controlled by authorities, political actors can have the opportunity to share information with the public. The Periscope application that has been recently popularised, or the live streaming programs that were widely used during the Gezi protests in 2013 can be mentioned as examples of such new opportunities. The website launched by Ruşen Çakır through Periscope broadcasts has now become a veritable media channel offering dozens of different programs¹⁰. These new digital opportunities are even more valuable to the local press, which has remained relatively ineffective as a result of financial and technical constraints, despite its importance in local politics.

Social media platforms as well as micro-blog sites that do not necessarily offer audiovisual content, enable the public to be updated on a moment-to-moment basis with regard to emerging developments. With the expansion of mobile Internet technologies, we have witnessed the emergence of citizen journalism, bringing forth the opportunity for everyone to become a journalist. In fact, the platform 140journos, launched by three university students in 2012, has become a media tool active on all major social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Whatsapp, and addressing tens of thousands of followers.

Another opportunity as valuable as immediate, real-time access is the ability to access presented information even after it has been broadcast. Whereas a live broadcast of a parliamentary session or press meeting can be watched only by those in front of their screens at the time, there is no temporal or spatial restriction on any information or explanation presented through the Internet -based visual archives, such as Youtube, personal websites and/or social media accounts.

6 <http://www.amasra.bel.tr/amasra/meclis-toplantilari-117.html>

7 <https://www.antalya.bel.tr/i/canli-yayin>

8 <http://www.duzce.bel.tr/canli-yayin.asp>

9 <http://www.burhaniye.bel.tr/haberler/haber-arsivi/302-meclis-toplantilari-canli-yayinda.html>

10 www.medyascope.tv

All these opportunities offered by digital technologies depend, of course, on the accessibility of these tools. It should be stressed that there are still millions of people without computers, and, thus, without the Internet, who therefore remain deprived of access to information-based channels.

Consultation

Consultative mechanisms go one step beyond the dissemination of information by permitting the informed public to express their opinions on the relevant subject. However, the opinions expressed have no binding influence on the eventual decision. In this sense, all information giving practices where the audience can express its opinions gain a consultative character. For example, the chance to evaluate shared information, opinions and comments transforms social media posts into a consultative practice.

Communication channels such as hot lines, e-mail accounts, request boxes, and white tables can be considered mechanisms of consultation, thanks to which citizens can express their wishes, suggestions and complaints with regards to public services. The expansion of the Internet facilities has rendered this kind of communication easier, more affordable and faster. As it has become mandatory for all corporations and public institutions to have a website and an e-mail account, it is now possible to reach them via the Internet. Of course, it should be noted that there is no obligation to respond to such queries, except for those that are transmitted to public institutions under the legal framework of the right to be informed.

Another advantage of these consultative mechanisms, facilitated by access to the Internet, is that they render possible the transmission of audiovisual content. It is now possible to provide clear and certain information on a given problem by means of tools that enable citizens to instantaneously acquire and transmit photos related to the issue concerned, along with its geographical coordinates. Lines of communication based on the WhatsApp application that has been recently popularised may be given as an example of such consultation.

The authorities do not need to wait for citizen complaints and requests in order to consult the opinion of the latter. For instance, it is now formally mandatory to hold meetings for information and consultation under the framework of procedures for environmental impact assessments. Yet again, it should be kept in mind that the opinions expressed do not have a binding character.

Meetings and activities organised by institutions with the objective of informing and consulting to the public with regard to their projects and activities are now free from temporal and spatial constraints thanks to Internet technologies. Comments on written or visually presented information can be easily expressed on web based forum pages. Moreover, citizens who are eager to be involved do not have to be present in real-time during the process. They now have the opportunity to express their opinions or react to previous comments whenever they wish on a web page introduced for this purpose.

Similarly, citizens have acquired the chance to express their opinions and criticisms of a given policy and transmit these to a large audience via Internet facilities, without requiring any initiative by the authorities. Personal, collective or thematic web pages, as well as initiatives launched on the Internet, can bring an issue forward in the public arena. [muhit.co](#) which we shall later discuss in greater detail, may be cited as an example of such initiatives, as it functions as an instrument to raise local problems for public consideration.

Traditional evaluator mechanisms such as public surveys have also become cheaper, faster and simpler thanks to new digital technologies. A user of a public service, or an inhabitant of a locality, can be invited to evaluate a general or specific issue through mobile or Internet applications. Particularly, satisfaction surveys aimed at assessing the efficacy of public services can be carried out much more easily. Another novelty that new technologies

have brought into consultative practices, is that results of such surveys can be instantaneously evaluated, as participant responses can be followed up on instantly. Consequently, general tendencies can be observed throughout the process, without the need to wait for the full participation of the entire sample.

Consultative processes enable citizens to be informed and to present their contributions, but it is not binding on authorities to take citizen input into consideration. They are free to pay attention to these views, or adapt their decisions accordingly. In fact, in most cases, such participatory practices remain of a token nature.

Inclusion

Processes of inclusion require that the inputs of participants be reflected in the eventual decisions. The most important instruments that bring about such binding contributions are elections and referendums.

It is undeniable that elections are the principal instruments of political participation. As the main dynamic of democracy remains representation, the participation of citizens in the election of representatives is crucial. Elections, traditionally carried out through ballot boxes, have become easier and faster thanks to new electronic tools. Such new opportunities either permit voting itself to be effected electronically at electoral offices, or remove spatial restrictions by means of the Internet or telephone-based voting. While countries like the USA, Britain and Sweden have introduced e-voting, Estonia has enabled its citizens to vote from their homes via the Internet, thanks to chip-equipped identity cards.

In addition to the election of representatives, referendums that give citizens the final word on specific decisions have become cheaper and easier through the development and expansion of electronic instruments. Thanks to the practicality of these new options, authorities can now leave final decisions to citizens, and thus, expand the direct inclusion of citizens in decision-making whenever desired.

It is important to keep in mind the risks that have emerged in relation to the popularisation of these new technologies. Instruments that enable remote-access and interaction increase the risk of manipulation and interventions. Viruses that affect electronic software and allow the malicious use of that program without the knowledge of its user, render possible the illegitimate and illegal use of these tools that otherwise facilitate citizen participation.

Cooperation

The democratic weakness of elections and referendums is that they restrict preferences to given options. Since options or candidates are often determined without citizen participation, even if decisions are tied to these processes, they do not constitute a genuine opportunity for citizens to directly express their opinions. Any true involvement would be made possible only through the right to participate in the determination of options and shaping of policies, projects and alternatives

Citizen participation at this preparatory phase of public policies had already been made possible through traditional instruments. Ad hoc workshops, research conferences, working groups and commissions, all help in the participatory execution of these processes. However, as we have stated above, these activities have not only suffered from temporal and spatial restrictions, but are also financially disadvantageous to organise.

The development of electronic tools seems to have brought about partial solutions with regards to problems of access to such participatory policy-making processes. The popularisation of the Internet and mobile technologies has enabled people to attend meetings they cannot be physically present at. Hence, it is now possible to follow

and contribute in real-time to collective undertakings, even while physically absent from the meeting location, thanks to applications such as Skype, Facetime, and Messenger. Activities of deliberation and planning have thus become accessible, even for those deprived of the chance of being physically present.

Apart from facilitating participation, electronic tools have rendered projects under consideration much more comprehensible for ordinary citizens by freeing them from technical jargon. Objects of deliberation, in the form of technical drawings or plans inaccessible to laypeople, have become much easier to interpret thanks to visual tools and simulation applications. Moreover, these tools have enabled ordinary users to easily modify and develop the existing models. Thus, policy processes subject to the technical hegemony of experts, even in cases formally carried out with the participation of citizens, have been endowed with the means to enable cooperation between experts and laypeople. It is particularly important to mention the case of *Düzce Umut Evleri*, which has carried out an experiment in design and planning exactly along the lines set out above.

Of course, policy processes are not restricted only to technical designs, but consist also of written regulations, such as laws, directives, statutes, plans and reports. New web-based facilities enable participants in such processes to work online collectively. Thanks to these new online tools, draft texts become accessible to the modification and evaluation of all related parties free from spatial and temporal restrictions. With online text processors offered usually free of charge and in a user-friendly style, any number of contributors can work collectively on a single document. Consequently, together with technical designs, legal and technical regulations are also directly opened to the simultaneous cooperation of all related actors.

Although participation is usually conceived of in relation to agenda-setting, policy design and decision making, and the implementation of decisions are also fundamental stages of policy making. The risk of a lack of identification with finalised decisions renders the supervision of policy implementation just as important as the prior phases of policy-making. Hence, it is necessary to keep in mind that citizen participation does not, in fact, end with the finalisation of policy decisions. It should be thus noted that supervision of the results of formal decisions, and the extent to which the actual impact corresponds to envisaged plans and projects, should be considered as a crucial part of citizen evaluation and participation.

Therefore, the above-mentioned tools of information and consultation may be rendered operational with regards to the implementation of policies, in order to establish online means of supervision and interaction so that citizens can oversee and participate in the post-decision phases of policy making. In this way, the whole public policy cycle can be re-designed from a participatory perspective.

Empowerment

All participatory channels and tools mentioned until now concern processes that are on the initiative of administrative authorities with an invitation to participate issued to the general public. Yet, the ultimate aim of participatory democracy is reached when citizen involvement transcends mere after-the-fact participation, and the experiment is carried out on the direct and original initiative of the citizens themselves. We can expect civil society groups and organisations to develop policies and solutions in a policy domain where they are empowered and held responsible. In other words, the public becomes directly responsible for a policy, rather than a mere external participant, and thus acquires a certain political authority.

In such experiments, all tools and opportunities may be mobilised with the aim of either organising to pave the way for such areas of civic power to emerge, or, in the wake of organising activities, opening up this area of authority to the participation and assessment of other civil society and public actors.

BOTTLENECKS OF PARTICIPATORY MECHANISMS

We can in fact note that the problems experienced with regards to the abovementioned participatory mechanisms do not only have technical and financial aspects. Even if the most ideal approach and structure is adopted, and adequate resources are allocated, a democratic functioning that serves the principle of sustainability cannot be taken for granted. In fact, Rebecca Abers (2000), who is well-known for her research on participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, describes precisely the participatory deficiencies that Sherry Arnstein (1969) had noted in her “Ladder of Participation”.

According to Abers, such mechanisms suffer from three problems. The first group consists of problems of implementation. Due to this set of problems, participatory mechanisms that are formally structured and launched, encounter resistance from diverse groups when participation goes into effect. The traditional rigidity of bureaucracies, and the pressures that militate in favour of quick decision-making, represent the first dimension of such resistance. The operation of new participatory mechanisms, or the delivery of their outputs to the system, are hindered by resistance or pressure from these traditional actors. No matter how eager and well-intentioned political actors may be, bureaucrats are not inclined to make concessions or share their own competencies with external actors. Moreover, pressure groups in political or interest-based partnerships with bureaucrats or politicians remain sceptical of any participatory process that risks threatening, or at least conflicting, with their status and interests.

The democratic operation of participatory mechanisms is not secured even if we manage to overcome such operational problems. In fact, in operation, these mechanisms may suffer from problems of internal representation. Only those with spare time, adequate experience and moral courage can make effective use of these means of participation. Participation is not easy for those who work all day long, take care of children and assume familial responsibilities out of office hours and who may be uninformed about the activities of their organisation. Even if one is present at a meeting despite all these obstacles, one may still not have the self-confidence to be active in the process, and thus, will remain as a passive spectator of better educated, wealthier, more active participants. Therefore, even if the mechanism goes into effect in practice, the equal representation and participation of attendees should not be taken for granted.

Finally, even in cases where such problems of operation and representation have been overcome, processes may still fall into the trap of secondary agendas. Politicians and bureaucrats can obstruct the real impact of such mechanisms by imposing agenda items that they see as inoffensive or not in conflict with their interests. Even resolutions on serious and important issues might be weakened in their impact. Seeing lack of tangible outcomes, participants gradually lose their motivation to take part in mechanisms which, subsequently, cease to be operational.

We can confirm the validity of Abers’s observations on the experience of Porto Alegre, in reference to the situation in Turkey, through a closer look at the city councils that first emerged as grassroots initiatives in the late 1990s, but which were, subsequently, formally declared mandatory after 2005.

Problems Experienced in Turkey’s City Councils

Local participatory practices started gaining ground following the multiplication of discussions related to civil society after the 1990s, and especially following the organisation of the HABITAT II Human Settlements Summit in Istanbul in 1996. City Councils that had been founded under the Local Agenda 21 project with the expectation of

actualising local plans and strategies for sustainable development, along with the assemblies of women, youth, the retired, and the disabled, were indicators that local politics would operate on a more participative basis. Indeed, despite financial hardships, in cities such as Bursa, İzmir and Antalya, these mechanisms undeniably reinforced the democratic nature of local politics.

However, after being declared compulsory by the 2004-2005 regulations, through which these structures were linked to a central code, their democratic capacity rapidly decreased. Subject to the Municipalities, and thus, to the Mayors, they became subordinated to the influence of these institutions or actors, and became pseudo-participatory mechanisms that supported or approved the policies of these institutions, and, as such, they lost their democratic function in local politics. It is possible to summarise the operational problems of these participatory mechanisms under a few headings.

First of all, even if we assume that all the municipalities constituted the councils solely on the basis of the legal obligation to do so, as no sanctions existing to discipline municipalities that fail to institute these councils, we can assume that many municipalities are still deprived of them, to the extent that even the General Directorate for Local Administration is said be unaware of their exact number.

The first, and probably the largest group of councils, is those which have been established only on paper. It is clear that this group of councils does not exist beyond an imaginary showpiece and lack any kind of practical functionality. There is no doubt that councils of this kind have no effect at all in terms of popular participation.

Among the councils which actually exist in practice, and have obtained a certain level of functionality, the emphasis lies on those established and functioning under the influence of the Mayor. The councils constituted on the orders of the Mayors, and acting under their direction, serve as an additional source of legitimacy for these Mayors, rather than expanding the space available to citizens for participation. There is, moreover, no obstacle preventing the Mayors from also becoming the presidents of the councils if they so wish, and, thus they can connect items from their own agenda to that of the council and gain a greater audience. Even if they do not obtain the presidency, as the general secretary is chosen from among three candidates presented by them, they will nonetheless still be able to influence the functioning of the council regardless. Thus, a policy that they would have had to defend as a politician or an administrator will gain the support of civil society and the legitimacy of a larger popular base, and, as a result, these policies can be executed in a more powerful way.

Even when the councils are established independently of the Mayor's influence, this may not be sufficient to free them from political instrumentalisation. It is not rare to observe influential actors in local politics, or those who seek to widen their influence, using city councils as a platform to raise their own public profile or to employ them as an instrument to publicise their own political projects. The mere existence of this kind of actor in the councils, running after political rent and their own political ascension, leads to disinterest from the wider public towards these structures.

In those councils which have not been instrumentalised by the Mayor or other actors, and which have been constituted by, and function solely on the basis of, the effort and participation of the local civil society, the main tendency is to develop ambitious projects with the aim of bringing solutions to the major problems of the locality. However, the idea of replacing the municipalities with councils is not particularly meaningful in terms of participatory democracy. Formations which display such tendencies, that have a more project-oriented logic rather than a commitment to representation or participation, may have to content themselves to minimal influence and remain subject to the actions of a small group. As there have been many efforts in this vein, which might be

termed “civic subcontracting”, the public perception of the councils is bound to devolve to the point that they are seen as useless.

It is also not uncommon to come across councils which act as voluntary subcontractors to provide municipal services, or which assume responsibility in areas that either do not interest the municipal authorities, or which compete with municipal governments for legitimacy. In light of the obvious corruption of the politicians, council members may be inclined to see the entire political process as totally illegitimate and, thus, to fancy themselves the virtual representatives of the people. But in so doing, they would be missing the point that, without representative mechanisms, participatory democracy would either fail to exist, or at best, would go no further than a form of elitist representation, because, all studies related to the subject show that there exist inequalities in participation based on economic class, cultural identity or gender. Thus, completely rejecting the political legitimacy of municipal governments, despite the fact that these are constituted through free and democratic elections, and attempting to usurp their representation and decision-making roles, is a risk that has been encountered in council experiments.

Lastly, another pitfall is that the councils may tend to enter into competitions of legitimacy, not with municipal governments, but with other non-governmental organisations. Some councils which have managed to function autonomously from the municipality, have difficulty keeping up the relationship with the associations, foundations or other civic organisations under their umbrella; this fact impedes their role of functioning as a true umbrella-organisation, and results in their acting as an NGO in their own right. Consequently, the city council becomes an organisation that produces policies and discourses in line with the preferences of the persons in the administration, functioning in a manner that is quite far from being representative.

Briefly, certain dangers in the legally-stipulated functioning of the councils may present obstacles for the democratic contributions expected from these bodies. We have to accept the need to closely monitor these experiments, which could successfully overcome these risks.

Political Culture Obstructing Participatory Administration

In the previous section, we presented different dimensions of the fact that the city councils have failed to implement participatory administrative practices, in spite of their *raison d’être* as structures to serve the goal of sustainable development. We have to accept that, behind these kinds of democratic weaknesses, there exist structural, social and cultural factors independent from these institutions.

In this context, we first have to recall the prejudices and restrictions targeting political formations following the September 12 coup. In an environment where even the word “organisation” has started to have a negative connotation, it is quite natural that citizens preferred to stay away from political collectives. Beyond the distancing of political collectives, the military regime and its veiled remnants nurtured a general mistrust, and even hostility, towards politics in general. Even citizens who came together to express their common problems and expectations, started to deny the political nature of their collective groupings. This political allergy compounded the effect of the usual formal and *de facto* restrictions and difficulties, reinforcing the permanence of the widespread clientelistic networks traditionally existent in politics. As a result, solidarity networks based upon parochial, ethnic and religious identities continued to operate as a hierarchical mechanism of participation and representation.

The consequence for political culture of these solidarity networks, which form hierarchically around a given identity, is that they adopt an exclusionary attitude towards persons and groups who do not share the same

identity. To use the terminology of American political scientist Robert Putnam (1999), these gatherings function more as a vehicle for “bonding” those alike to each other, rather than for “bridging” the gaps with the other. These cultural tendencies to foster some identities while excluding others, may be characterised as a weakening agent with regard to the democratic nature of civil society.

Although, in Turkey, civil society became rather active, especially after 1990s, and significant discussions and activities started to take place in this area, it seems that these civil formations were insufficiently strong to support the optimism likely to emerge from looking at these discussions. Maintaining the weakness of civil society, despite its apparent dynamism, was the continuing allergy to politics mentioned above. The distance that most people keep from political gatherings, and all kinds of organisations, led civil formations to be overwhelmingly composed of only certain segments of the society. All over the world, these organisations tend to have a principal membership body comprised of middle-class well-educated men, and this same factor caused the representative power of these organisations to remain low in Turkey.

When we look at the activities of civil society formations run by a relatively small section of the society, we observe a concentration on efforts to produce concrete solutions (i.e. projects) instead of efforts towards political representation and participation. This tendency is in line with the discourse of the New Right on the necessity of the state to retreat from social and economic fields, and, as a result of this tendency, civic formations started to shoulder the production of projects in service areas from which the state had withdrawn. Consequently, civil society became a realm of service provision substituting for the functions of political institutions, rather than a means of taking over the state’s representative and participatory functions.

Such an orientation towards project-making inevitably made the pursuit of funds an important occupation for civil formations. Institutions that were becoming more and more specialised had to employ full-time professionals in order to prepare technical projects in their field of proficiency and to find financial means for these projects. This professionalisation not only overshadowed the functions of citizen participation and representation, but also led to a certain degree of centralisation within the structure and functioning of these civil organisations. Moreover, the tradition of interorganisational solidarity, already very weak, became weaker because of this competition for projects.

In short, it is difficult to argue that civil society discussions which have intensified since 1990 have made a noticeable contribution in local politics. These organizations increased in number but focused on projects inclined to substitute for the functions of the state, rather than assuming functions of political participation and representation, and their impact on local democracy remained very limited.

We may also argue that professional chambers, which may be deemed to be relatively free from project-focused approaches, do not promote an understanding of democratic governance vis-a-vis public policies. It is also important to discuss the participatory practices allowed by professional chambers, the civil society qualities of which are periodically questioned, since they do not exactly comply with the principle of voluntariness within the context of local politics. Since the 1970s, professional chambers that have put social matters within their profession on their agendas alongside professional matters, may be considered the most important actors in local politics, beyond institutional areas, in light of the technical knowledge and experience they possess. Having comprehensive knowledge of the technical dimensions of issues that even municipal council members are not familiar with, these professional groups closely monitor irregularities and failures in the area of local politics and ensure that these matters are brought to the agenda.

However, the main political struggle of professional chambers are of a legal nature since the weakness of civil society, which lacks the ability or habit of engaging in collective activity for the aforementioned reasons, does not enable them to promote these agenda items collectively; professional chambers thus try to take part in local politics by filing suits in the administrative jurisdiction. This method of legal struggle, by which it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain results, has grown yet more difficult, due to recent government regulations and the results obtained remain limited. There are attempts underway to weaken the influence on local politics of these chambers, whose elections are interfered with on the one hand, and whose financial resources and auditing authorities are restricted on the other. Even if we assume for a moment that they are free from these problems, it should be kept in mind that the predominantly technocratic approach of these chambers may not always reflect social preferences and expectations. Thus, it is difficult to state that these chambers, which predominantly tend to organize campaigns on the basis of legal struggles from a technocratic rather than democratic popular perspective, make any noteworthy contribution to facilitating the participation of the people in public policy.

Participatory Democracy and the Politics of the Commons

We have stressed the importance of participatory city administrations in fulfilling the role and goals attributed to cities by the sustainable development idea, but also have underlined the fact that participatory practices suffer substantial structural, functional and cultural weaknesses in execution. These considerations should not leave the impression that we have arrived at a hasty conclusion indicating the impossibility of participatory city government, or to the absence of alternative policies.

Our argument is that identity-based, closed, hierarchical gatherings hinder the actualisation of the desired conception of participatory government, and the ability of democratic mechanisms to adhere to a democratic manner of functioning. We argue that, during public gatherings, the maintenance of such closed and hierarchical ties prevents city-dwellers from coming together on the basis of common city identity and obstructs the implementation of democratic organisation or activities.

Hence, such a political culture would identify living space, not as the shared space of cohabitants in which differences are accepted, but as a space of disputes and tensions on different levels. And this would lead the inhabitant to feel a belonging, not to the space presently occupied, but to other locations from which s/he had originally emigrated. In that sense, cohabitation of a city ceases to be a mutual co-spatiality and comes to be described on the basis of the abandoned space. This would consequently make the sense of space in the present locality, or commonality with others, difficult to sustain.

In such a shattered space where nostalgia for the previous hometown persists, any participatory mechanism is bound to be unsuccessful in bringing about the anticipated democratic contribution, because the lack of trust towards others as well as the loosely-founded ties of spatial belonging, would not permit a definition of common interest. In a psychological condition defined by survival, individuals would be oriented towards defending their own interests without concession.

Such a psychological condition might also cause serious problems in the creation of democratic political procedures in that locality, because whatever the level of participation in their formation, in a landscape where one participant may prey on another, this kind of mechanism would either become a showpiece political instrument sincerely embraced by no one, or which reproduces the existing power relations. It is very difficult to argue that through these procedures, in which political and social fault lines are deepened, and differences are experienced in a more conflictual way rather than through the discovery and development of common ground, can make any kind of contribution to democratic living. For these mechanisms to gain a meaningful participatory and representative function, it is necessary that the citizens who are supposed to make use of them develop a certain sense of common spatial belonging. This is not necessarily synonymous with similitude or uniformity. On the contrary, it points to the need for acceptance of diversity, and beyond that, the propagation of a sense of common interest.

Briefly, we see the existing political culture as an obstacle to the realisation of a participatory conception of government, to which we ascribe a key role in the name of sustainability. Our argument, according to which the

political culture may achieve a democratic quality only through the strengthening of a sense of commons, has led us to seek an alternative approach in pursuit of this aim. Before describing the politics of the commons, as we name this approach, we should first look more closely at the concept of the commons.

The Commons Movement

“Common goods” is the name given to natural or man-made assets that are the property of no individual or institution. Forests, seas, meadows, air, water, public places and parks are among those assets commonly owned by the public. And, being nobody’s property, in other words, being free in their use and consumption to all, is the reason why the ultimate disappearance of these assets is seen as an inevitable tragedy by some authors.

The concept entered into discussion with the publication of an article by Garrett Hardin in the *Science* magazine in 1986. Giving the example of a grazing pasture, Hardin argues that the utility of a herdsman adding one more animal to the herd is not in balanced proportion to its cost. Because of the fact that the meadow is a common land, the cost of overgrazing would be shared by all the herdsmen using the same field, and, for a single herdsman, the cost becomes negligible. Thus, the herdsmen would not abstain from increasing the numbers in their herds until the resources of the common land have been completely consumed and destroyed.

According to Hardin, the use of the resources of the common land is a tragedy, as is the burden on natural resources, even if we do not individually feel the cost of the waste left in natural areas or on public lands until, in the long term, it destroys the ecological equilibrium and jeopardises life in society. Hardin’s response to this question was to suggest that, either the State should regulate and control the use of such common land and resources, or that they should be privatised so that usage and consumption become subject to payment.

Although Hardin’s paper marks an important turning point in the use of the concept, Elinor Ostrom (1990) cites a number of other thinkers dealing with this question before Hardin. Aristotle, in *Politics*, mentions that the more numerous the users of a resource are, the less the attention is given to its usage. Hobbes’s condition of humanity in which a man is a wolf to his fellows might be another example. Finally Gordon states that anything collectively owned effectively belongs to nobody, and its value is not adequately acknowledged. All these approaches claim that resources subject to common property are bound to be consumed irresponsibly and that the only way to prevent this is to regulate the use of these resources at the hands of either an authoritarian state, or a profit-driven private company.

In 2009, Ostrom, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in economics, developed an approach that challenged the perspective that the allocation of public resources should be in the hands of either the state or the private sector. Ostrom’s work demonstrated that the commonly-owned public goods in every corner of the world, such as grazing lands, forests, drinking water or fishing zones, could be administered in an equitable and sustainable way (Walljasper 2015, p.39).

Ostrom (1990) demonstrates that public goods could be spared Hardin’s tragedy, as well as maintained outside the ownership of the state and the private sector, through the self-organisation of users, and a form of management relying on agreement among these users. The users would lay out the principles and rules pertaining to the utilisation of the resources in question and initiate mechanisms that would enable the functioning of the system based on these rules. Thus, they ensure the equitable and sustainable use of these resources without requiring an external authority, be it public or private.

It is interesting for us that one of the first examples given by the author of this kind of system is the organisation of the fishermen in Alanya, Turkey. During the 1970s, around 100 fishermen suffering from the results of uncontrolled fishing, an issue which had not only provoked serious conflicts among themselves but had also excessively raised production costs, found a solution through adopting a regulation coordinated and supervised by a cooperative they were members of. According to this agreement, every year in September, a list of all fishermen, whether members of the cooperative or not, would be prepared. Subsequently, the net-fishing zones that fishermen from Alanya could use between September and May would be defined. These zones would be distributed to the fishermen by lot. From September to January, each fisherman would move to the neighbouring zone to the East, and after January they would move to the West (Berkes, cited in Olstrom 1990: 18-20).

Conceptualised on the basis of natural common resources and concretised by a model of administration from Turkey, the importance of the principle of the commons with regard to participatory politics is that it has the potential to lay the groundwork for cohesion that overcomes the closed solidarity networks that hinder the above-mentioned democratic formations. We claim that reclaiming the city as a collective value will enable residents to come together on democratic platforms in pursuit of common purposes, and we label such efforts to that end “the politics of the commons”.

The Politics of the Commons

We argue that the emergence of a city as a common good, through the development of a sense of belonging to the space actually inhabited rather than the resident’s place of origin, would enable the residents of a city, who hold different identities, to come together. Accordingly, they would acquire the capacity for collective action required for the democratic operation of participatory mechanisms. The new medium of democratic politics would thus be gatherings constituted on the basis of the space actually inhabited, and with fellow residents, rather than networks of solidarity based on specific identities.

On the other hand, it should not be supposed that the sense of commons would be inculcated by imposing the idea that the “homeland” is the space actually inhabited by residents; this cannot be an issue of persuasion but of perception, it cannot be invented, but only discovered. Richard Sennett (1999: 174) cites an apt phrase from Hickersingill the geographer: “Columbus to whose happy search the West Indies first discovered itself”. Columbus did not discover the continent; on the contrary, the foreign land had itself discovered by him. In the same vein, we also need the feeling of the commons that we deem indispensable to a participatory approach to government able to serve the principles of sustainable participation, to be discovered by the people. Hence, the politics of the commons delineates the process of facilitating this discovery.

The politics of the commons represents the effort of seeking to ensure that the dwellers of a city build a bond with the place as well as with their fellow citizens, that they follow the city’s agenda, and that they have the capacity to come together around common activities. This procedure can be conceptualised around four main principles:

1. Sense of Belonging to the city
2. Trust in fellow residents
3. Knowledge of the city
4. Capacity for organisation

Our main argument is that we need a politics of local commons in order to solve structural and cultural flaws in the functioning of participatory mechanisms (i.e. in order to bring sustainable city principle to life), and to do so, we have to work within the framework of the abovementioned four principles.

It should not be assumed that we claim the necessity of first constructing the politics of the commons, upon which participatory democracy would merely follow. These two processes are not exclusive to each other, nor must they be implemented in a sequential order. The politics of the commons can, itself, be structured as a participatory democratic procedure. Hence, each step towards the four principles that we have enumerated as the basis of the politics of the commons, has to be implemented as a participatory activity. The main difference would be that the participatory practice of the politics of the commons would not take place in settings such as councils, assemblies, and platforms which employ the participatory label in their titles, but are relatively functionless in essence, but rather in daily life itself. In so doing, participatory politics would make use of numerous practices and electronic instruments.

PARTICIPATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, COMMONALITY FOR PARTICIPATION

We can now begin discussing, in more concrete terms, the politics of the commons that, we argue, has the potential to operationalize participatory mechanisms that will, in turn, contribute to the actualisation of the principle of sustainability. In the context of the discussion to be developed in reference to the abovementioned four principles, we will first state the importance of each principle before giving specific examples of practices that serve this end. While carrying out this discussion, we shall particularly refer to the current, or planned, activities of our project's city partners.

Sense of Belonging

The principle of sustainability involves a sense of ownership and protection. Efforts can only be made to conserve a given value for the future if it is actually considered to be valuable in the first place. In order to sustain the natural and cultural wealth of cities, it is necessary first to become aware of these values, and then, to subsequently embrace them. Strengthening the sense of belonging to the place of residence would serve first the discovery, and subsequently, the protection of these values.

It should be noted that any strengthening of the sense of belonging cannot be achieved by simple persuasion. The didactic discourse, according to which people should disaffiliate from their place of origin and identify themselves with where they reside, does not actually work. On the contrary, the feeling of belonging to one's place of origin is seen as such a fundamental constituent of the subjective identity, that an incitement to reject one's birthplace is likely to reinforce the motivation to cling to, and protect this identity. What is required is a sense of belonging that would not aim at substituting for the original parochial identity. The Citizen Assembly of Mezitli in Mersin, for instance, attempted to highlight this complementary sense of belonging with the campaign "Mezitli, my rising hometown". The Council, taking the inspiration from astrology of a "rising sign", attempted to encourage the city's residents to identify with the city as a kind of add-on identity that did not require them to reject their original parochial and regional identities. By not ignoring or deprecating residents' feelings of belonging to their original cities and towns, the council was attempting to highlight that need not be a competitive relationship between the localities of birth and residence.

It would not have been possible to foster in residents the sense that the place they inhabited was their “rising hometown” merely through persuasion and suggestion, even if this was the basis of the campaign. In order to share a sense of belonging to a locality it is necessary to discover its beauties and values. The first step towards a politics of commonality would thus be publicising a place to its residents. Yet, tourists may acquire more information about a place than those who spend all their life there because information on that place is often more in demand by tourists than by its own residents.

Most of us, for example, do not know certain facts about our residential spaces, such as the origins of the names of our neighborhoods, streets, or bus stops, who constructed the villa right next door, or who had lived there, what had stood in a given space before a commercial center was there, the age of a plane-tree in the garden of a school, or which well-known personalities had lived right in this neighborhood. Yet, the information and communication technologies previously discussed in this paper have made the production and distribution of such information much cheaper and easier. Grand publishing houses or huge volumes are no longer necessary for preparing an encyclopedia. A WIKI page makes it possible to collectively, and very practically, generate and publicise information on a locality. This information does not have to be scientifically generated, as what is at stake is not the history of a city, but its identity. Even hearsay, that is to say, the memory of oral history, may serve this end.

It may be argued that the communication channels designed to convey citizen problems and complaints to the administration presents a potential that could be mobilised to strengthen the sense of belonging. Documenting and sharing beauties and original values, as much as problems, with the general public might become a resource for generating a sense of belonging, both for the documenter and those watching. Particularly, thanks to the popularity of social media, such messages can very quickly reach a large audience. For example, highly popular users of applications such as Instagram, may be professionally incorporated for the promotion of cities¹¹. City-dwellers can be encouraged to use this tool to fortify their own sense of belonging to their city of residence.

For example, the Municipality of Terme, one of the project cities, incorporates the Amazons, ancient women warriors who once resided in the region, as a promotional draw card for the city, and carries out various activities in connection with this. If these efforts go beyond touristic promotion and evolve into a sense of common heritage, it may contribute to the strengthening of a sense of belonging to the city.

Similarly, in line with the 11th Global Goal, “Sustainable Cities and Settlements”, one of the working groups in Seferihisar, another project city, aimed combating the present unplanned, aesthetically unappealing model of urbanisation, in order to oppose the urbanisation process impairing character of the city. They have sought to sustain the city’s natural character and visual beauty in the face of unplanned urbanisation and construction. To this end, they planned to employ social media and e-surveys in order to identify problems. They sought to seek solutions to the problems thus identified in deliberation with experts.

This highly reasonable activity may be combined with a perspective aimed at strengthening the sense of belonging to the city. The natural character of the city that is to be protected can be elaborated on from a historical perspective beyond its symbolic and aesthetic value. Knowledge about how that character had been formed, and what had taken place in that locality, can be gathered and promoted. Accordingly, they could manage to protect, not only traditional, aesthetically-pleasing architecture, but also a history, a specificity, that can help in valorising the relationship between residents and their place of residence.

11 ‘Fenomenlerin gözünden’ İzmir, <https://www.izmir.bel.tr/HaberArsivi/14722/ara/tr> (last accession: Oct. 23, 2016).

In Akdeniz, another project city, the third group working on a project of “Sustainable Tourism” under the framework of the Global Goal “Decent Employment and Economic Growth” aimed at the identification, promotion and marketing of local products of different cultures resident in the city. What this project promises can go beyond opportunities of employment and income for households, since it may become a precious activity for revealing and distinguishing local values, thanks to the promotion of local cultural products. If this group, which plans to carry out announcements and surveys through electronic means, achieves its goal, it will manage to promote local original products to city dwellers, as well as others and thus emphasize urban values that can serve as a basis for a sense of belonging.

Trust in Fellow Residents

A sense of belonging to a city would, alone, not be sufficient to enable city-dwellers to participate in the government of that city. Making participatory democracy functional is only possible if participants in ad hoc mechanisms and activities have a minimum level of interpersonal confidence in each other. Otherwise, city-dwellers cannot assemble and cooperate, since a climate of deliberation that would let them collaborate cannot be established due to the prejudices and doubts they have with regard to one another.

In his book “The Conscience of the Eye”, Richard Sennett argues that cities have imprisoned individuals in private spheres and de-socialised them, and that society has consequently become fragmented. The locality resided in is no longer a place shared with other fellow residents where differences are welcomed, but has been identified with confrontation and conflicts on different levels. Hence, as noted above, the sense of place-based solidarity is no longer associated with the locality resided in, but rather identified with the original, abandoned place of residence.

Any participatory mechanism launched in such a fragmented and alienated context would be far from bringing about the expected democratic impact, because interpersonal mistrust hinders the formulation of common interests. Those for whom the priority is not living but surviving, would struggle uncompromisingly to defend their own interests. It is clear that such contexts are conducive only to the deepening of political and social cleavages, accentuation of differences, and heating up of conflicts, rather than the discovery and development of common grounds, or to a democratic government.

The promotion in status of a mere collection of co-habitants of a city to a kind of “city fellowship” is made possible through the promotion of a conceptual shift from the first person singular to first person plural; that is to say, the expansion and deepening of one’s relationship with his/her environment. In becoming a new ‘we’, and thus achieving a public communality, urban public spaces would become the essential locations, because they are the places where city-dwellers meet, and get to know each other, and where differences are exhibited, distinguished and acknowledged.

We have already noted that solidarity networks founded along specific identities assemble and socialise individuals with similar, close cultural backgrounds. The expansion of such socialisation processes leads to the weakening of the relationships and levels of trust among city-dwellers from different cultural backgrounds. Everybody spending their time in the company of others from their own culture kills the ‘stranger’ and emphasises the ‘other’. Yet, the attribution of the adjective ‘stranger’ applies to those about whom we have not yet made any judgement, and thus, incites us to know more about them. The feeling of familiarity and of interpersonal competition encouraged by networks of solidarity based on specific identities transforms an individual merely deemed ‘not one of us’ from a ‘stranger’ who incites curiosity and interest, into a threatening ‘other’ with probably different, and thus competing, identities and values. Each and every individual belonging to a specific group feels

immediately able to know immediately everybody else, to distinguish who is a friend and who is an enemy, thanks to their attributed identities, because codification and categorisation through these identities render any information on their own personality irrelevant, as their group identity has already revealed what ought to be thought about them.

Yet, democratic politics can be achieved only if diverse groups can come together and manage to develop collective approaches and practices. It should be particularly emphasised that this relationship does not need to be a one of affection. In order to be able to cooperate, what is needed is mutual trust rather than interpersonal love. And mutual confidence can develop through encounters and spending time together; thus, through getting to know each other.

This is exactly the primary function of urban public spaces: To enable city-dwellers to meet with, and get to know other residents with whom they share their place of abode, without necessarily being acquainted with them. These spaces of encounters and familiarisation would first weaken mutual prejudices, and then, probably permit the flourishing of a sense of trust.

Streets, parks, sporting and social spaces, and even, increasingly, commercial centers, may be noted as the settings for such daily encounters. The dynamics of urban development, condemned to construction and commotion, not only narrow these public spaces but also restrict the leisure time of city-dwellers. It becomes difficult for inhabitants of not only the same city, but even the same neighborhood or apartment to become better acquainted. Individuals with fewer opportunities to encounter others accordingly lose their trust in others, and thus, the capacity for collective action within the democratic participatory mechanisms under discussion.

Therefore, a fundamental component of rendering participatory democracy functional is to gather city-dwellers in common, public spaces. It is true that public parks and gardens are overvalued by the contemporary dominant model of municipalism. Yet, these places do not actually aim at gathering people or rendering them more public-spirited. In these gardens and landscapes, highlighted by aesthetic qualities, designs that enable diverse encounters are rarely adopted. City squares, for example, are designed mainly for formal ceremonies and adorned with spectacular statues, or urban furniture, and appear as expanded ferroconcrete or granitoid spaces. Even playgrounds do not envisage collective children's games, but offer equipment for individual amusement, such as swings and slides.

There is an ongoing debate concerning whether social media, very much popularised with the expansion of the Internet use, can be considered as part of the public sphere. At first sight, a certain public quality may be accorded to it as it enables people to communicate without temporal or spatial constraints. However, there are at least two reasons to be cautious, as these media may not be very reliable with regard to the democratic participation that represents the main axis of our discussion.

First of all, there have been increasingly observations recording the ways in which social media create a mirror effect, consolidating similar identities between people rather than exposing them to diversity. The Internet users seem to group around commonalities and exchange messages on social media with people similar to them, rather than embracing the difference of others. The acceptance I receive when those similar to me embrace the messages I send them may have the effect of intensifying my own beliefs, and giving me cause to exclude those who think differently. Hence, the gap between different groups widens, and the chances of collective action among them diminish. Moreover, it is well known that social media is not safe from the language of hatred; worse than that, the option of anonymity on the Internet seems to encourage the vulgarisation of language. Loci of encounter in public

space are thus transformed into battlefields where existing identities and opinions become more rigid and solidified.

Secondly, the freedom of virtual public spaces from temporal and spatial constraints enables people to socialise with others with whom they do not share a common environment. Even if this may appear to be an opportunity to acknowledge differences, the fact that they do not share a physical space disables cooperation and offers no opportunity to take part collectively in participatory mechanisms in their cities of residence. Opportunities for socialising free of spatial constraints do not, therefore, seem to support any eventual communalisation of cities.

In short, the public nature of social media facilitated by the Internet must evolve into opportunities for physical encounters and expand into urban public spaces. For this reason, such physical spaces for encounters and getting to know others deserve special attention in order that participatory mechanisms may become fully functional.

In fact, one of the groups in Akdeniz developed such a project under the framework of the 17th goal “Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”. They have proposed the opening of the Internet cafes and parks that will address those, especially children and youth, who do not have the economic means to access computers and the Internet. The aim of this project is not limited to the formation and socialisation of these target groups. These cafes and parks will be designed in such a way that these groups will be able to spend time together and carry out other activities, and thus, transform these venues into lively and functional public spaces. And this seems to represent a tool that will serve exactly the feeling of commonality that we have sought to emphasize.

Informed Communities

Even though the role and importance of a free press on the national scale have been intensely debated with regards to democracy, it is true that the local press does not appear much in these discussions. Yet, if we are to be able to talk of citizen representation and participation, it is essential that they be informed about policies. Mainstream media corporations cannot carry out such a function of information-dissemination in cities; hence the importance of local press emerges.

Local press corporations, local newspapers, radios and television channels, that require significant investments in infrastructure and operations, cannot be freed from the pressures exerted by capitalists and political elites in their localities. Hence, the local press has difficulty in pursuing independent publication and broadcasting, and thus serving the democratisation of local politics. Due to the prevalence of this impression, and to the problems of dissemination, city-dwellers do not seem to be interested in the local press and relationships of dependence become accordingly more inevitable.

The restricted dissemination of information in cities where local press remains weak appears as one of the main obstacles to collective civic action. In such circumstances, not only do citizens possess insufficient information concerning the policies pursued by governments, but also the latter remain indifferent to the problems, demands and preferences of citizens. This is why it seems necessary to launch alternative mechanisms of information dissemination and news gathering so that the politics of the commons can flourish.

The traditional and electronic mechanisms of information that we have mentioned while discussing different forms of participation, thus also acquire meaning with regards to the politics of the commons. As information dissemination is not only a simple, passive mechanism of participation, but also a means of facilitating more developed and functional participatory venues, the task of creating new channels of information merits serious

effort. If information can be provided more easily, cheaply and quickly, city residents may develop closer bonds with their place of residence, as we have mentioned while discussing the sense of belonging. Likewise, they can be better informed about developments that would eventually affect them and can better comprehend the need to mobilise against these developments.

The websites of municipalities may be the first example of informational tools of in localities. According to a result published by the General Directorate of Local Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, and based on the results of a survey carried out in 2011 in which 2066 municipalities had participated (90% of all), 76% of the municipalities had an institutional website. Nevertheless, the report also states that websites provide information and promotional material while often lacking interactive services. Another conclusion of the survey is that websites do not offer much information with regards to finances, policy outcomes, citizen satisfaction, or other services offered in the cities (MİGM, 2011: 48).

These observations can easily be confirmed by a cursory examination of these sites. Moreover, what the report labels as information giving, actually corresponds to instruments of public relations promoting municipal activities. Nor is this all; the information offered on websites resembles an individual activity report of the mayor rather than an institutional report on the municipality.

Not all cities are satisfied with such websites with regards to digitally presented information. Information screens introduced by one of the project cities, the Municipality of Seferihisar, can be mentioned as an example of effective channels of information. Through these screens, accessible via kiosks located in various corners of the city, as well as via a mobile application, citizens can send direct messages to the mayor, examine current and completed municipal projects, and convey their wishes, complaints, requests and demands for information. In addition to technical services, such as queries on the real market values of properties, or payment of taxes, decisions of the municipal council can be accessed on these screens. Not only city residents, but also visitors can make use of these screens, as the city's historical and touristic sights are presented with visuals as well as address directions on maps.

One of the working groups in Seferihisar focusing on the 7th Global Goal "Sustainable Energy" considered these screens as one of their implementation tools. The group, aiming at increasing the weight of renewable energy in overall energy resources, planned to mold public opinion on the impact of fossil fuels and promises of renewable energy through these screens, in addition to other mobile applications, social media channels, and contact offices.

Another project developed in Seferihisar concerned a new producers' market in the city. The working group focusing on the 12th goal "Sustainable Consumption and Production", proposed conducting an electronic poll in order to learn citizen preferences with regard to the location of the second producers' market which is on the municipal agenda. After determining the location and launching its construction, the group planned to continue making use of the Internet tools in order to keep the interest in the market alive from the beginning.

Working groups in another project city, Terme, emphasized the importance of information-giving with regards to encouraging citizens to participate in policy-making. One of the working groups planned activities with the objective of developing agro-industries under the framework of the 9th Global Goal, "Sustainable Industrialisation, Innovation and Infrastructure." To this end, they proposed the use of electronic tools such as digital newsletters and social media channels, as well as websites, in order to identify the expectations and demands of both citizens and investors with regard to the industries to be developed. Moreover, these tools will also be mobilised to provide information on this sector of investment and employment that offers new and attractive opportunities in infrastructure and incentives.

Also in Terme, the group working on the 11th Global Goal, “Sustainable Cities and Settlements” put forward the idea of launching participatory mechanisms associated with the planning processes in these cities. On their project, in addition to an interactive platform of entitled the “Mobile Solutions Center”, electronic tools appear as essential instruments enabling all groups, particularly disadvantaged individuals, to get involved in the process. Thanks to these communication channels, the problems and expectations of city-dwellers, with regard to their living space and daily lives, can be learned first-hand. Terme can thus become a city of sustainable living space thanks to a planning process founded on the expert evaluation of information gathered at the grassroots, and thus, responds both to scientific principles as well as the everyday expectations of city-dwellers.

Organised Communities

While discussing the cultural obstacles to the functioning of participation, we had already noted how the military coup of 1980 had hindered the emergence of social organisations, and how even the word ‘organisation’ [örgüt in Turkish] had been stigmatised. Yet, even if in cities where relationships of city solidarity and interpersonal trust are developed among residents who possess adequate information and the will to act, a functional participatory democracy cannot be steadily established without them first acquiring an organisational capacity. Experiments launched with an ambiguous set of competencies and responsibilities, and without plans for cooperation and activity, are condemned to fail, as everybody will try to do everything enthusiastically at the beginning, whereas, in the end, nobody will remain except a handful of volunteers who will subsequently be forced to assume all tasks. A collective initiative thus becomes a process carried out quixotically by a few heroic figures.

It is important to underline that what is meant by “organisation” is not merely the foundation of a formal structure. It is evident that even non-governmental organisations with formal institutional bodies may not be safe from processes of non-democratic decision-making and/or activities. It is not particularly rare to come across presidents of associations who criticise a mayor’s anti-democratic style of government, while reproducing the same mentality within their organisations. In a civil realm where decisions are made by a restricted group of members, organisational activities are identified with personalities who are personally associated with achievements and exempted from the responsibility for failures; and where interpersonal, as well as interorganisational, competition is exorbitant, there is a very small chance of democratic, egalitarian or accountable functioning in civil organisations themselves. It is almost impossible to expect that these experiences may contribute to sustainable development.

New communication technologies may bring about meaningful opportunities in the present context where organisational culture is weak and anti-democratic structures and functioning are omnipresent within existing formal gatherings. For instance İlhan Tekeli (2016:43) states that emerging electronic tools and opportunities pave the way to new communities: “With the developing IT technologies such as the significant expansion of the Internet, we have started discussing the emergence of post-human communities. This new kind of socialisation has engendered a new type of interpersonal relationship. When elaborating the urban communities of the present, it is necessary to take these opportunities into consideration.”

The emergence of the new communities that Tekeli mentions has enabled those who share common interests and demands to encounter one another and assemble free from spatial and temporal constraints, and to acquire the ability of systemic cooperation, thanks to the development of digital technologies. Assemblies of citizens no longer necessarily require formal organisational models, such as associations or foundations that necessitate the physical gathering of members. Those who do not know each other, or who have even never met personally, can, henceforth, undertake collective initiatives in pursuit of shared objectives.

The experiment in collective living occurring during the Gezi Protests of 2013, may provide an example of the new organisational model based on electronic technologies. Albeit relatively short-lived, the experience revealed the immense potential of such gatherings. From the kitchen to the infirmary, from the library to the garden, and to its television workshop, Gezi hosted collective initiatives launched and operated by people who did not necessarily know each other, but could communicate, meet and organise through new communication technologies. We have also witnessed a similar development of social mobilisations all around the Globe, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy movements.

Initiatives such as İhtiyaç Haritası (Map of Necessities) or Bir Silgi, Bir Kalem (An Eraser, A Pencil) can be mentioned as examples of more durable experiences. The main objective of the Map of Necessities is formulated as “the systematic identification of what is needed at the city or neighborhood level, through the active participation of citizens, the geographical mapping of these necessities and the enabling of procurement of these necessities by relevant institutions/corporations or private entities.” It was launched by a performing artist, Mert Fırat, in 2015 with the idea of using a website to gather people in need with volunteers eager to help, which eventually attracted a great deal of public interest.

Launched by two young friends in 2011, birsilgibirkalem.org operates with a similar objective of meeting the unmet needs of educational institutions. Since its foundation, it has raised a fund worth 1,2 million Turkish liras, and involves approximately 100 thousand students.

The collective experiments undertaken through the medium of the Internet are not limited only to aid campaigns and fundraising activities. The website gidatopluluklari.org, for instance, was launched with the objective of facilitating access to healthy and fairly-produced and traded food by establishing consumer cooperatives that support community-based agriculture. The website serves as a platform that gathers people with such concerns and enables them to build up their own communities. Similarly, emeksensin.com provides a virtual venue particularly to women who wish to commercialize their handicrafts but lack the adequate know-how and opportunity to do so.

Apart from such social initiatives, more politically oriented organisations have employed similar methods. For example, the initiative Oy ve Ötesi [Vote and Beyond] was launched by a group of friends with the objective of ensuring transparency during elections. During the local elections of 2014, 30 thousand volunteers were present at ballot boxes, as electoral observers, through this network. The number of volunteers exceeded 50 thousand in the following elections; in the last elections they had observers in 46 city-centers and 173 districts covering 74% of an overall 174.400 ballot-boxes.

The website muhit.co can be referred as a more recent, city-scale project. People are able to raise a problem or propose a solution in their locality by presenting it on the website. Those who share or approve the post express their support. It is expected that decision makers or executives will notice highly supported ideas and reconsider their planned, or ongoing, projects in light of the propositions made. Hence, people who do not know each other personally, manage to undertake a collective initiative within the framework of common issues and problems. While authorities are informed easily and quickly about urban problems, citizens are informed about the problems of others and enabled to gather around common problems.

Different experiments and projects undertaken through organisation were raised in project cities. For example, the Municipality of Seferihisar has encouraged voluntary initiatives by city-dwellers through *Halk Kart (Seferi Kart)*. They call for the voluntary support of city residents for certain urban tasks. Participants in such voluntary activities are encouraged to continue by earning points through these Halk Karts.

In Terme, the group working under the framework of the 8th Global Goal “Decent Work for all and Sustainable Economic Growth” has decided to launch an organisation that will assemble all related industries with regards to the improvement of the agricultural capacity of the city. The platform, which will consist of the district directorate of agriculture, professional chambers, commodity exchange, business organisations, NGOs and individual agriculturalists, as well as youth and women, will serve as a venue of discussion and research on what is to be done in the field of agriculture. Whenever the physical gathering of these partners is not possible, tools and opportunities based on the Internet technologies will be mobilised. Thanks to this new collective platform, Terme is expected to become a city cultivating new, high-quality agricultural products, improving its productive capacity, raising employment and accelerating economic growth.

One of the working groups in the Municipality of Akdeniz focusing on the same Global Goal, has planned to launch an Internet based project that aims at the promotion and commercialisation of local cultural products. The site, which may be considered a virtual cooperative, will help those residents able to offer handicrafts or food products from the diverse cultures of the city. Instead of promoting individual endeavors, the municipality offers its technical assistance so that producers can be collectively organised to promote and sell their products. The project, which resembles [seferipazari.com](#) in the Municipality of Seferihisar, or [emeksensin.com](#) which we have mentioned previously, may be noted as an organisation that presents the potential for gathering small producers and protecting local cultural values.

General Evaluation and Policy Recommendations

The quest for a new mentality as a response to the undeniably critical and tragic consequences of ecological problems for the climate and natural life, has led to the adoption of the principle of sustainability. It has emerged as a sine qua non of a planning approach that develops economic and developmental policies in view of the needs of future generations. However, the formal commitments of authorities, which have remained mere ink on paper, have revealed the need to expand the struggle to reach out to all social groups. Hence, cities and city governors emerge as important actors in the quest for sustainability. Moreover, the participation of city residents has been also highlighted as a requirement as the downscaling of political power does not necessarily mean that the political elite at the city level would act differently with respect to their national counterparts. In order to secure their commitment to the principle of sustainability in all urban decision-making and policy-implementation processes, the involvement of civil society is indispensable.

The operation of participatory mechanisms that can be mobilised for different ends and scopes of information, consultation, inclusion, cooperation and empowerment, has been facilitated thanks to the greater affordability and popularisation of electronic tools, and particularly, of Internet based applications. However even these new instruments have not brought about the expected outcomes of participatory practices, as their democratic impact depends on the scope and cooperative capacity of their attendants. Having emerged and developed as a strategy of survival and adaptation, informal solidarity networks, particularly those associated with migrant places of origin, have undermined the cooperative capacity of citizens whose specific ethnic, religious or geographical identities have remained accentuated. In such segregated societies, it is hardly possible that participatory mechanisms will function peacefully, or democratically, or bring about meaningful outcomes.

As a response to this problem faced by participatory mechanisms, we recommend a policy entitled the “politics of the commons”. We argue that transcending these closed groupings can be rendered possible only by developing an urban politics of the commons.

We propose four principal tools to enable such a politics of the commons to flourish:

1. Activities of promotion and popularisation of values that can be shared by all city residents that aim at enhancing the sense of belonging to the place of residence, thanks to the production and diffusion of contemporary and popular knowledge of the locality through web pages, campaigns on social media, social activities etc.;
2. Creating public opportunities for encounters, mutual acquaintance and, eventually, trust among residents of the same city who maintain their sense of belonging to their original hometowns, by means of social urban design (parks, squares, recreational and sports fields) and social activities (neighborhood festivals, collective celebrations, cultural events) that would facilitate encounters and meetings of residents;

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3. Introduction of informative mechanisms (city portals, effective social media networks, information screens, mobile applications) that would reveal the necessity and meaning of participation, so that, on the one hand, the public can supervise planned, and/or, implemented policies, and, on the other hand, city governors can familiarise themselves with public expectations and preferences;
 4. Development of practices (encouraging groups of sports, arts and hobbies), as well as gathering target groups, that enable the gathering of those who share similar problems and preferences beyond traditional hierarchical organisations.

The leitmotif of the report is thus a politics of the commons that is to be nourished along the lines of concepts, such as; the sense of belonging, trust, information and organisation. These are the main instruments for a participatory democracy that would eventually enable the realisation of the principle of sustainability.

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