

# FREE MILIEUS, CREATIVE PEOPLE: AN INVESTIGATION OF CREATIVE CITY POLICY IN ISTANBUL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GOVERNMENTALITY \*

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the creative city policy for Istanbul, which has recently become a popular throughout the world. Cities are expected to be creative milieus that foster free circulation of people, ideas, and interactions for economic growth, global competitiveness, and social development. Drawing on Foucault and governmentality studies, this paper first argues that the creative city policy is a neoliberal political rationality that seeks to stimulate individuals' creative capacities through structuring urban space. Neoliberalism includes the de-governmentalization of state and the active participation of non-state actors in the governing processes. Second, using examples from street gentrification, industrial heritage re-functioning, and co-working spaces in Istanbul, this paper dissects how creativity, freedom, and economic growth intersect in urban space and how a broad coalition of political parties, state agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, small-scale cultural entrepreneurs, and creative professionals have been formed around the creative city. As a result, creative city policy is a form of governmentality that includes official documents as well as spatial strategies of a heterogeneous coalition of state and non-state actors.

**Keywords:** Creative Istanbul, Governmentality, Neoliberal political rationality, Gentrification, Co-working spaces

## *Özgür Ortamlar, Yaratıcı İnsanlar: İstanbul'da Yaratıcı Şehir Politikasının Yönetimsellik Perspektifinden İncelenmesi*

### Öz

Bu makale, son yıllarda dünya çapında popüler hale gelen yaratıcı şehir politikasını İstanbul açısından incelemektedir. Şehirlerin, ekonomik büyüme, küresel rekabet gücü ve toplumsal kalkınma için insanların, fikirlerin ve etkileşimlerin serbest dolaşımını teşvik eden yaratıcı ortamlar olması beklenir. Foucault ve yönetimsellik çalışmalarından yararlanan bu makale, ilk olarak, yaratıcı şehir politikasının, kentsel mekânı yapılandırarak bireylerin yaratıcı kapasitelerini harekete geçirmeyi amaçlayan bir neoliberal siyasal rasyonalite olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Neoliberalizm devletin yönetimsizleşmesini ve yönetim süreçlerine devlet-dışı aktörlerin aktif katılımını içerir. İkinci olarak, bu makale, İstanbul'daki sokak soylulaştırma, endüstriyel mirası yeniden-işlevlendirme ve ortak-çalışma alanlarından örnekler kullanarak, kentsel mekânda yaratıcılık, özgürlük ve ekonomik büyümenin nasıl keşiştiğini ve yaratıcı şehir etrafında siyasal partiler, devlet kurumları, yerel otoriteler, sivil toplum kuruluşları, küçük ölçekli kültür girişimcileri ve yaratıcı profesyonellerden oluşan geniş bir koalisyonun nasıl oluştuğunu incelemektedir. Sonuç olarak, yaratıcı şehir politikası, resmi politika belgelerinin yanı sıra devlet ve devlet dışı aktörlerin heterojen koalisyonunun mekânsal stratejilerini içeren bir yönetimsellik biçimidir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Yaratıcı İstanbul, Yönetimsellik, Neoliberal siyasal rasyonalite, Soylulaştırma, Ortak-çalışma alanları

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## **Free Milieus, Creative People: An Investigation of Creative City Policy in Istanbul from the Perspective of Governmentality**

### **Introduction**

International organizations and popular-academic discourse advocate the creative city as a practicable solution for urban global competitiveness, economic growth, employment, and social cohesion. National governments' urban planning strategies and political agendas integrate this new kind of governmentality. We may discuss a worldwide *creativity dispositif* (Reckwitz, 2017). A *dispositif* consists of "institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements... in short, the said as much as unsaid" (Foucault, 1977: 194). As a *fast policy* that provides technical "solutions" to social and economic issues, it becomes worldwide trend (Peck, 2007; Peck and Theodore, 2015). International conventions, reports, standards, statistics, comparative indexes, academic-popular texts, policy trips, consultations, and symposia disseminate it around the globe. It offers itself as a *global form* with proven technical solutions (Prince, 2010).

The creative city *dispositif* is a response to Istanbul's ambitions to become a global centre of attraction and acquire a competitive position in global value chains. It relates to the pursuit of a "globally decisive, high-value-added, innovative, and creative economy" by affecting creative people and investments. It is founded on the belief that cosmopolitan, tolerant, and dynamically changing cities would succeed in the global competition for creative industries. As compared to Istanbul's past claims as a global city, a bridge between continents, a financial center, a tourism destination, and a city of culture and art, the creative city has yet to become a slogan in politics, media, and academy. Since Istanbul was titled 2010 European Capital of Culture, it has become more cited, widespread, and institutionalized in national and regional development plans, urban planning strategies, state sectoral financial support programs, municipal and civil society activities, and urban transformation and revitalization projects. This paper examines creative policies and spatial strategies in Istanbul, Turkey's most densely populated city in terms of people, workforce, knowledge, capital,

consumption, investments, and infrastructure. The city is also known as a center for creative sectors in the country.<sup>1</sup> Its creative potential for global competitiveness has been recognized by international organizations (OECD, 2008; UNCTAD, 2008, 2010). UNESCO has designated Istanbul as a City of Design.<sup>2</sup>

Methodologically, the paper combines content analyses and observations. It firstly adheres to creative gurus' discourse and official policy documents. While these texts address issues and policies, they do not simply represent existing reality. Rather, they are intellectual technologies that render a reality for governmental interventions while also acting as a medium for trans-local policy transfer. Secondly, the paper describes specific manifestations of spatial strategies outlined in policy texts. Its categorization of creative spaces is based on urbanism and the creative city literature, web searches, and observations. The evolution of documents and spatial strategies reveals that the creative Istanbul is characterized by both continuity and change over time. The discourse brings together a wide range of actors, including international organizations, state agencies, NGOs, and political parties. Notwithstanding this convergence, there are significant disparities in these stakeholders' concerns and ambitions.

## 1. Creative Economy

Governments, companies, and public discourse welcome creativity as a universal ability that every human being possesses. For Howkins (2002: ix), who popularized the term *creative economy*, creativity is the ability to produce and say something new out of nothing, whether it works or not. It is fundamentally concerned with how we perceive and make sense of the world. We are all creative in our own unique way. Now "everyone is or should be creative" (McRobbie, 2011). Creativity has become a *moral imperative* (Osborne, 2003: 508). It has an ethos of autonomy, individuality, and self-expression. Creativity is an individual input. Self-management, self-learning, self-help, and self-empowerment are

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1 According to the 2014 report prepared by (Yaratıcı Endüstriler Konseyi Derneği [YEKON], 2014), Istanbul hosts 52.4 percent of the workforce in the creative sectors in Turkey and provides 74.5 percent of the income. According to a more recent report by (Türkiye Küçük ve Orta Ölçekli İşletmeler Serbest Meslek Mensupları ve Yöneticiler Vakfı [TOSYÖV], 2021), as of 2019, 54.65 percent of enterprises in the creative culture industry, 65.93 percent of employment and 75.31 percent of generated turnover are located in Istanbul.

2 The Creative Cities Network Program, initiated by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021) in 2004, brings together world cities in line with sustainable urban development goals. As of 2021, there are 246 cities in the network.

central concerns in the subjectification process of creative person. Each person should take care of their creativity and nurture it (Rose, 1999). The artist, who was previously regarded as exceptional figure in society, becomes a model subject with his/her unique originality and spontaneity (Raunig, 2016: 86). Hierarchical dichotomies of the disciplinary industrial capitalism, such as active-passive, culture-nature, refined culture-popular culture, mental labor-manual labor, are no longer relevant. The new mode of *distribution of the sensible* is effective, in which speech, autonomy, mental labor, refined culture, art, and educated sensibilities become an obligation for all (Lazzarato, 2017: 156).

Creativity-in-itself cannot be regarded as an economic value. It must be embodied in a tradable product. Florida (2005) establishes a direct relationship between creativity and economy. Creativity is a driving force of creative economy. It is related with culture-creative industries. Adorno and Horkheimer were the first to use the term *culture industry* critically (2010: 182-183). It ties leisure time with the principles of exchange and equivalence in the field of production. Entertainment is an extension of labor. Since the 1970s, the term has been used in the plural form of culture industries, and former negative connotations have been abandoned (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 16). The culture industries now refers to the industrial production and organizational structure of businesses that specialize in the production and marketing of cultural goods and services (Garnham, 1987: 25).

The term *creative industries* was introduced in the 1990s. The first definition and classification of the creative industries were proposed by the British Labor Party's Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS). They were defined as activities that result from personal creativity, skill and talent, and that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through the general operation of intellectual property and were classified under thirteen headings: advertising, antiques, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, film, leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio (1998). The creative industries acquired international recognition. The creative economy comprising creative persons, products, businesses, and infrastructures became the new focus. It is considered by UNCTAD (2008: 4) as a major topic for developed and developing countries, international economy and development agenda. The creative economy provides social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development, as well as income, new jobs and export earnings.<sup>3</sup>

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3 For UNCTAD, the creative industries are the broader set that includes the cultural industries. Creative industries use creativity and intellectual capital to design, manufacture and distribute goods and services. It includes knowledge-based activities

Creativity is a culturally driven way of imagining, making, and innovating on an individual and collective level (UNESCO, 2013: 39). With a healthy cultural climate, creativity flourishes. Designing places where creative people and creative entrepreneurs interact is the only way to stimulate a cultural reaction that promotes creativity. It requires public policy support and urban planning (UNCTAD, 2022: 19). Cities are considered privileged sites. They bring skilled labor, capital, and market opportunities together. Agglomeration of ideas, goods, and services fosters creativity due to the nature of spatial proximity (A. J. Scott, 1999). A clustering effect is triggered by proximity and frequency. Creative clusters are necessary for the development of urban creative economy (DCMS, 1998). Without strong clusters, cities run the risk of losing creative people and startups elsewhere (UNCTAD, 2008). Successful creative clusters encourage creative entrepreneurship by linking local and cultural forces; allow the flow of new people, ideas, and products by enabling cultural diversity, free trade, and freedom of expression. Knowledge in the creative clusters is embedded in local culture, face-to-face interactions, and networks rather than being formal and codified. Creators innovate by consuming and transforming signs - styles, looks, sounds - of local culture (O'Connor, 2004).

## **2. Neoliberal Urbanism or Governmentalization of Urban Space**

There is no inherent correlation between spatial agglomeration and creativity, innovation, or economic development (Amin and Thrift, 2017). Such a relationship is only practicable if the urban milieu is properly arranged. Individuals having creative abilities are urged to get involved in this arrangement (Osborne and Rose, 1999). Popular studies have highlighted the significance of creative urban milieus. Its findings and proposals operate as intellectual technologies rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of action (Miller and Rose, 1990: 7). Landry, for example, writes “A Toolbox for Urban Innovators” based on his findings on culture-led urban development and renewal projects implemented in British cities in the 1980s and 1990s. Creativity spreads among people who get together in a good milieu. A creative milieu should have both *hard* and *soft* infrastructures for the production and circulation of ideas and creativity. Hard infrastructure includes research institutes, educational institutions, cultural facilities and services such as transport, health, social facilities, as well as the public spaces of the city. “From museums to cafes,

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that profit from trade and intellectual property rights. It relates tangible products and intangible intellectual or artistic services to creative content, economic value, and market demands (2008: 13).

squares, cinemas, bars, restaurants, theaters and libraries”, these spaces allow people to feel comfortable while interacting with a socially heterogeneous milieu. They perform as venues for creative ideas and activities emerging around the city. Soft infrastructure is a system of social networks, connections and interactions that support the flow of ideas between individuals and institutions. These include face-to-face relations as well as wider communication networks made possible by information technologies (Landry, 2000: 120).

Florida brings popularity to the concept of creative city around the world with his creative class theory that nourished from the cities where high-tech industries are concentrated in North America. He argues that economic growth is regional and related with spatial agglomeration of creative people. There is a question arise from this consideration: “In a world where people are highly mobile, why do they choose some cities over others and for what reasons?”. The answer lies in the identity and lifestyle of the creative class. The creative class lifestyle indicates an innovative experience filled with more intense, high-quality, and multidimensional life story. Creative people prefer entertainment in which they are active participants rather than activities in which they are passive spectators. “What they look for... are abundant high-quality experiences, an openness to diversity of all kinds, and above all else the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people”. Any city can be creative if the right formula is adopted (Florida, 2005: 33-36).

Creative city dispositif, as developed by creative city gurus such as Landry and Florida, should be considered as a “culture-oriented governmentality of the city” (Reckwitz, 2010). It is an aspect of the *cultural turn* of contemporary capitalism, in which the boundaries between economy and culture are blurred (Thrift, 1999: 136). Symbolic forms predominate in the creation of economic value. They diffuse to all aspects of social life. Aesthetic production becomes integrated with commodity production (Jameson, 2011: 33). The world around us is more semiotic. Flexible specialization based on niche consumption hence becomes more prominent (Harvey, 1997: 318; Lash and Urry, 1994: 109).

Cities are now cultural assets for economic growth. Metropolises all over the world have been aesthetically reinventing themselves by monumental buildings, urban renewal projects, and new cultural facilities and attractive atmospheres (Zukin, 1995: 2). They are obliged to continuously improve their aesthetic value for affecting both residents and visitors and “appear as an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or to visit, to play and consume in” (Harvey, 1989: 9). The potential to sell culture helps urban governors who are facing the financial challenges brought on by deindustrialization (Amin and Thrift, 2007: 151). They are forced into zero-sum competition for public and private investments.

Restructuring the urban economy through the development of culture-creative industries is a popular way to boost global competitiveness. It promises innovation, economic growth, social inclusion, and cultural diversity, but it increases social and cultural inequality (Catungal et al., 2009; McCann, 2007; Peck, 2005). It perpetuates the neoliberal agenda that transforms cities into deterioration areas. It offers no solution to any of the entrenched problems of structural unemployment, housing inequality, working poverty, and forms of ethnic exclusion (Peck, 2007). It leads to the growth of income inequality and the expansion of low-wage service subclasses (Krätke, 2011: 185). It causes the dispossession of the urban poor through gentrification. It also implicitly contains exclusionary elements as racist and sexist. Women, minorities and households are not considered eligible for creative class interaction (Leslie and Catungal, 2012).

Considering all these critiques, I would say that the spatial strategies of the creative city mean displacement and sacrifice for those who are not deemed creative. Yet, I disagree with Marxist political economy and neoliberal urbanism in that the creative city is essentially an outcome of neoliberal hegemony. According to Marxism, neoliberalism is a class-based ideology that overthrows the Keynesian consensus-based social order, restores capitalism, and applies the logic of capital and commodification to all social relations (Dumenil and Levy, 2004; Hall, 1990; Harvey, 2015). It is founded on the singular logic of globalization and neoliberalism, focusing on the homogenizing effects of capitalism that are claimed to account for uniform conditions in cities worldwide. Capitalism is considered to be a dominant driving-force and structural condition for the restructuring of urban space (Ong, 2007: 4; 2011: 9). Actual critical geographers suggest that neoliberalism is a highly contentious and contextual “living institutional regime” in contrast to global neoliberal hegemony that is structurally consistent and expected to produce identical effects everywhere. *Actually existing neoliberalism* contends that market-driven sociospatial transformation is an uneven, variegated, contradictory, and ongoing process rather than a fully formed policy regime, ideological apparatus, or regulatory framework (Peck et al., 2009).

I argue that creative city is a form of political rationality, drawing on governmentality studies inspired by Foucault. It is a system of norms that pervades governing practices, institutional policies, administrative interventions, and control, measurement, and evaluation techniques (Dardot and Laval, 2014: 19). Power is not a unilateral dominance over a given subject. It doesn't act directly and immediately on others. Instead, power is a kind of relationship defined by an act on the possible field of actions of others (Foucault, 1982: 220). Governmentality is “the way in which one conducts the conduct of men” (Foucault, 2008: 186). It is an ensemble of “institutions, procedures, analyses and

reflections, calculations, and tactics” that allow the exercise of a specific form of power whose main target is the population, its dominant knowledge is political economy, and its essential governing technology is apparatuses of security (Foucault, 2007: 108). In contrast to prohibit or discipline, *to govern* refers to apparatuses of security that direct the conducts of people by regulating the milieu in which they live. It requires properly governing things to a reasonable end (Foucault, 2007: 96-97). It is a calculated and rational activity (Dean, 2010: 18).

Neoliberalism does not simply mean the withdrawal of the state. It is the *de-governmentalization* of the state (Barry et al., 1996: 11). The *entrepreneurial model* becomes widespread in traditional government institutions (Burchell, 1993). The social and regulatory mechanisms of the state are undertaken by non-state actors. Direct intervention of public authorities is replaced by *governing by distance*. Auditing, accounting, and management techniques and various forms of expertise are used (Rose, 1993). But it does not mean less governing. A widespread governmentality seeks to create subjectivities that are self-initiative, risk taker and self-responsible. It is a matter of governing through freedom (Rose, 1999: 84). The government appropriates freedom as political technology. Individual subjects should be free. They must feel responsible for own choices.

In the case of the creative city, where intellectual and aesthetic innovation, interactive collaboration, and intensive communication are essential for value creation, freedom and creativity are correlated. Istanbul Regional Plan defines its vision as “Unique Istanbul; City of Innovation and Culture with Creative and Free Citizens”. The existence of urban spaces where individuals may mobilize their freedom and creative capacities for personal development and public welfare characterizes the ideal city, according to plan (İSTKA, 2014: 316). On the other hand, the lack of freedom is the primary obstacle to the city’s creative economy, as stated in Vision 2050 planning works conducted by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, headed by the opposition Republican People’s Party (İstanbul Planlama Ajansı, 2021). What kind of freedom is desired? It is not to be considered to be rights or privileges attached to a person, but rather the capability of both people and things to circulate. “Freedom is... the correlative of the deployment of apparatuses of security” (Foucault, 2007: 48-49). They form the basis of urban spatial strategies. Their efficacy is contingent on their ability to build urban milieus that encourage the free circulation of creative individuals, ideas, and interactions, as well as their actualization into economically tangible products.

### **3. Creativity-oriented Policies in Turkey**

Policies for creativity, innovation, preservation and development of culture in Turkey have long been included in national plans under the categories



of education, economy, tourism, culture-arts and urban development. While pointing out the importance of knowledge in terms of economic value and development, education policies aim to raise creative and innovative people. However, the presence of culture-creative industries in official documents is more recent. The designation of Istanbul as the 2010 European Capital of Culture is an important milestone. In the same year, a symposium on creative cities and industries was held with state officials, local municipalities, academia, trade associations, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies. The symposium was also including the *creative city guru* Charles Landry and representatives from UNCTAD and world cities. In academic studies, the current state and potencies of Istanbul's creative economy, particularly in tourism, cultural heritage, fashion design, and the film industry, have been considered in terms of spatial distribution, economic value, and employment (Alvarez and Yarcan, 2010; Durmaz et al., 2010; Enlil et al., 2011).

2009 Environmental Arrangement Plan, the general policy framework for Istanbul, proposes to reorient the city's economic activity away from manufacturing and toward service, finance, and information technology, in accordance with global developments, and to encourage cultural industries like as fashion, design, film, and tourism. Istanbul's role in the global system is "to be a city of culture and tourism," and "to aspire to the management services of the global upper region and to get a bigger proportion of the upper region's economy" (İBB, 2009: 513). Specific goals include granting the city "the status of a world-class culture-oriented tourism city that is identified with its original character" and "a sustainable economy based on information and technology, with high economic competitiveness". The first strategy aims to "build new monumental and architectural works that will add meaning and value to the city," promote international cultural and artistic events and museums, gain the identity of the city that *lives 24 hours*, and build *cultural centers* where cultural industries and those working in these sectors are clustered. The second strategy is to deindustrialize urban cores and reuse them for activities connected to the knowledge economy, cultural industries, and the service sector (İBB, 2009: 525).

The Plan aims to revitalize the historical districts as cultural neighborhoods. Encouraging the settlement of small-scale culture industries and those working in these sectors in these districts is considered both in terms of cultural tourism and "making Istanbul attractive for the 'creative' sectors, which are seen as the engine of the city's economies in the future" (İBB, 2009: 466). It is stated that Istanbul has a spontaneously formed *culture triangle* covering the districts of Eminönü, Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Şişli and Kadıköy, and this is a ready-to-develop infrastructure for spatial strategy. In order to protect and nourish the productive environment, it is recommended to increase the quality of urban life

with “supporting the diversity of activities by creating more meeting places, parking lots and green areas” (İBB, 2009: 473).

National development plans include culture-creative industries as well. While culture industries are addressed in policies on culture-arts and intellectual property rights, creative industries are considered in policies on urbanization. It is stated that priority will be given to practices that support creative industries in urban revitalization projects (T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013: 128). Ministries and regional development agencies carry out strategic plans and support programs. Istanbul Development Agency (İSTKA) plays an important role in the programs to support creative industries and to attract creative people to the city by building creative ecosystem.<sup>4</sup> The main goal of the “city of innovation and culture with its creative and free people” vision is to have a creative urban economy competitive on a global scale. Istanbul should have a creative ecology that attracts qualified labour and capital. The way is to establish milieus wherein urbanites may use their freedom and creativity for both personal development and the production of social welfare (İSTKA, 2014: 316).

Although the creative city has evolved into a global form that can be transferred from one context to another, it’s actually translated into the existing institutional, social, spatial, class, and power dynamics. In Istanbul, the dynamic balance of power in both the central and municipal authorities affect the context within which creative city initiatives are adopted. The following national plan underlines the threats of standardizing mass culture and cultural hegemony established by new media under the hands of multinational companies (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, 2019: 10). Against this threat, it highlights the significance of historical, national, and cultural values, feelings of social unity and belonging, and classical arts in supporting culture industries. It promotes historical individuals and events, legendary characters, and cultural aspects through drama, movies, documentaries, series, and cartoons (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, 2019: 149-150). The new Istanbul Regional Plan (2024-2028) follows the increasing emphasis on locality and nationality. It determines that monotonous places irrespective of the culture fostered by globalization and chain brands endanger the city’s identity. It refers to the creative class thesis, which claims that members of this class seek the

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4 The agency has been conducting financial support programs for the creative industries since 2010, in line with the national development goals. These programs support initiatives and non-profit organizations. For example, among the priorities of the program announced in 2021 are increasing added value, strengthening the creative industries ecosystem and local crafts. İSTKA supports the fields of activity within the creative industries classification of UNCTAD (2020).

authentic atmosphere provided by the local culture (İSTKA, 2022b: 83). The emphasis on freedom is minimized in comparison to the previous plan, and it is solely featured in relation to the work environment and work practices.

The Opposition, which seized office with the 2019 municipal elections, prioritizes creativity in Istanbul's future vision. Istanbul needs to be creative for global competitiveness, income and employment, eliminating inequality in the international and national level, and a more just and prosperous life.<sup>5</sup> A new metropolitan plan is being developed on the basis of a new institutional structure. Istanbul Planning Agency and Vision 2050 Office collaborate with world cities that adopt creativity as the main goal in their strategic plans, such as Barcelona, New York, Johannesburg, Berlin and Sao Paulo. It is stated that the lack of a *free milieu* and *expression* in the context of the general political atmosphere and democracy is the most serious obstacle to the city's creative development, and that "freedom, pluralism, inclusiveness, and originality" are criteria for Istanbul's creative potential. Istanbul is recognized as a city of creative individuals due to its youthful and energetic population. The strategy embodies the aspirations of middle-class youth and professionals. It incorporates themes of creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, environmentalism, inclusive mobility, freedom, equality, cultural diversity, and vibrant city life. It intends to mobilize all of it in pursuit of a transformative and resilient economy. Creative and active participation of city residents and civic initiatives would contribute to constructing the creative city. It begins with metropolitan planning processes and progresses to the formation of self-governing urban citizens who are also responsible for the city's general well-being (İstanbul Planlama Ajansı, 2021, 2022).

#### 4. Creative Strategies in Istanbul

In this section, creative city policy is discussed in term of spatial strategies such as retail gentrification and street revitalization, re-functioning of industrial heritage buildings and co-working spaces. While such spatial strategies are governmental technologies in official policy documents, they are not restricted to central planning and incorporate many spatial practices of non-state actors. NGOs are one of the most influential non-state actors that enable creative city policy to reach global effect. They play a key role in the production of information, policymaking and mobility, and financial supports and investments of public authorities by building networks among international organizations, governments, municipalities, universities, media, and corporations. In Turkey,

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5 These highlights are included in the closing speech of Istanbul Tourism Workshop by Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu (İstanbul Planlama Ajansı, 2020).

after Istanbul became the European Capital of Culture, NGOs such as Creative Industries of Turkey (YEKON) and The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) Turkey Creative Industries Assembly (TÜRKEM) were established, led by professional associations and sector representatives.<sup>6</sup>

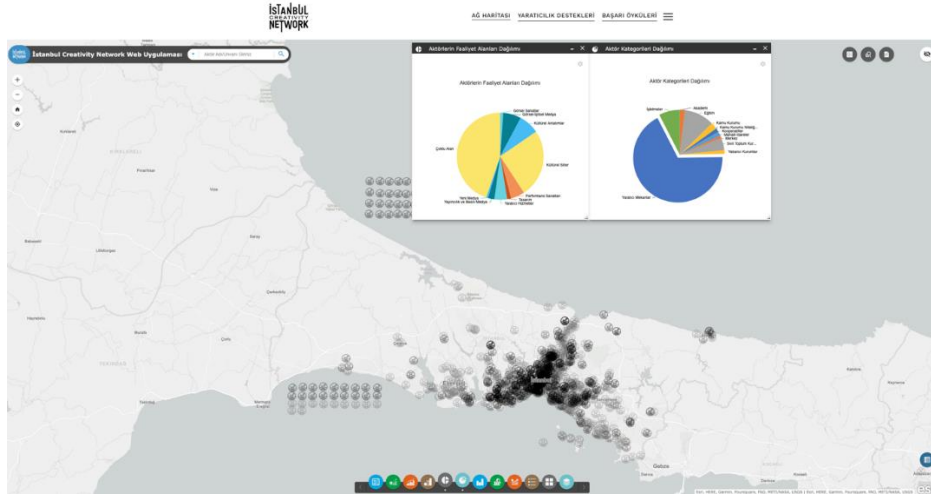
The British Council, as in many countries, carries out activities for the development of the creative economy in Turkey, through joint projects with public institutions, universities, and private initiatives. It also publishes the reports and utilize training programs and events to bring together creative individuals. The *Istanbul Creative Platforms Network Map*, prepared in cooperation with the British Council Turkey and creative platform Atölye in 2017, maps design spaces, incubation centers, co-working spaces, research centers and virtual platforms operating within creative industries in terms of both their spatial distribution and clustering and their fields of activity. In this map, it is seen that certain districts of Istanbul such as Beyoğlu, Kadıköy and Beşiktaş stand out with their creative platforms (Ayaz, 2017).

Creative city dispositif does not build a milieu from nothing. It operates in an already inhabited milieu with people and things, and it needs knowledge and expertise to translate reality into a form that can be thought about and manipulated. But there is not enough data on the current state of the creative economy in Istanbul. Plans highlight the significance of developing national statistics on the creative industries and labor, performing mapping studies, and improving impact analysis on government subsidies (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, 2019: 150). İSTKA developed and released the *Istanbul Creativity Network*, a web-based network map of Istanbul's creative ecosystem. Based on GIS infrastructure, it maps the actors of the creative economy according to their categories, sectors, spatial distribution, projects, and funding.

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6 In accordance with the provisions of the Law No. 5846 on Intellectual and Artistic Works and the Regulation on Professional Associations in the Field of Copyrights, 27 professional associations in various fields and 1 federation operate in Turkey with permission of Ministry of Culture and Tourism. These associations are legal entities subject to private law (Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2022).

Figure 1: A screenshot from the Istanbul Creativity Network's website



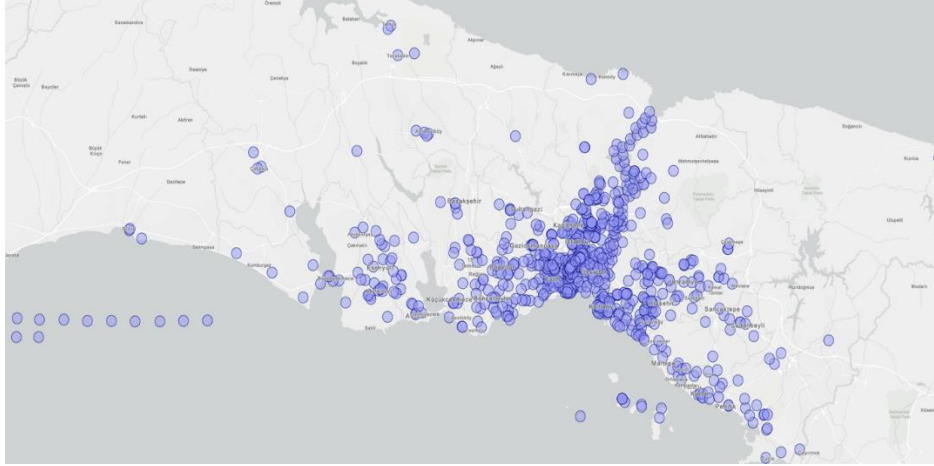
Source: <https://creativity.istanbul/istanbul-yaraticilik-agi>.

Some districts are popular among the creative class due to their vibrant street life, which includes cafés, restaurants, art galleries, cultural centers, theaters, and nightlife. They are also historical core of the city. By the 1990s they were subject to revival and gentrification with the return of intellectuals and artists (Ergun, 2004; İnce, 2006; Uzun, 2003). After artists and intellectuals, gentrification turned into projects carried out in cooperation with municipalities and NGOs. An example is the neighborhood renewal and revitalization project initiated in 2010 in cooperation with Kadıköy Municipality and ÇEKÜL Foundation in the Yel Değirmeni district of Kadıköy. The project is considered a challenge to top-down gentrification and an emancipatory practice for urban design that encourages locals' active participation (Arısoy, 2014; Turan, 2018).

The gentrification of the old neighborhoods is related to the cultural capital, taste and aesthetic dispositions of the new middle-classes (Bridge, 2007; Ley, 1994; Zukin, 1982). The new middle-class habitus looks for distinctive tastes and styles. These are embodied in gentrified places. The projects to restructure the milieu for creative individuals results in the exclusion of the so-called uncreative. Street revitalization leads the displacement of traditional neighborhood inhabitants and the artisans and shops that satisfy their daily needs, and their replacement with "hipster" small businesses that specialize in the production and presentation of symbolic goods and services (M. Scott, 2017). Grocery stores, greengrocers, butchers and corner cafes are replaced by delis, bistros, restaurants, third-wave coffee shops and boutiques. A *classed geography of consumption* emerges from the gentrification of retail businesses. The streets

are no longer areas of economic and social reproduction, but rather venues for the new middle classes to display themselves (Hubbard, 2017: 39).

**Figure 2:** Spatial agglomeration of creative spaces



Source: <https://creativity.istanbul/istanbul-yaraticilik-agi>.

Another spatial strategy for the creative city is “conservation of industrial buildings with usable value, transforming them into education and cultural industries by changing their functions” and “using industrial heritage buildings for cultural purposes” (İBB, 2009: 621, 644). There are many examples of industrial heritage in Istanbul that were built before and after the 19th century. They lost their original function and became abandoned (Köksal and Ahunbay, 2006). Re-functioning projects are projected with the cooperation of the state, municipality, private sector, culture and art foundations, artists, intellectuals, architects and planners. Factories, warehouses, power plants, shipyards, infrastructure facilities are re-used as university campuses, museums, exhibition and fair areas, culture, art, science, research and incubation centers, film and TV series plateaus.<sup>7</sup> Culture-led re-functioning and adaptive re-use of industrial

7 The exemplary applications of this process, which started in the 1990s, include the Rahmi M. Koç Museum in Hasköy Shipyard as an industry museum and exhibition space, Istanbul Modern in the Karaköy harbor warehouse, which was established by İKSV as a contemporary art museum, Silahtarağa Power Plant and Cibali Tobacco Factory converted into university campus, Beykoz Shoe Factory which serves the creative sectors as a film plateau. Apart from these, there are Mecidiyeköy Liquor

heritage is seen favorably for preserving and maintaining these landmarks while also contributing to the social, physical, and economic well-being of their surroundings and the image of city (Gunay and Dokmeci, 2012; Ozden, 2012). These initiatives are not carried out in a smoothly where all parties are on the identical path. There are various interests and power dynamics among municipalities and central government from different parties, mayors and entrepreneurs, local residents and project owners (Bezmez, 2008). It is politically controversial which historical layer of the city represents the desired authentic identity. The period, symbolic value, historical function, architectural style, and builder's identity all influence whether cultural heritages are prioritized for restoration, reconstruction, or re-functioning, abandoned to their destiny, or demolished. Buildings that highlight the city's Ottoman and Islamic pasts take precedence over Byzantine and Republic. On the other hand, the industrial heritage status of many old factories in highly profitable locations that have not been fully exploited was revised, clearing the way for luxury real estate projects in public-private partnerships (Kuyucu and Ünsal, 2010).

Street revitalization projects are designed for creative individuals to collect lived experience, which is the raw material for creativity. Re-functioning projects aim to develop *third places* and *creative clusters*. Co-working spaces (CWS), on the other hand, arise as a *grassroot movement* to satisfy the practical and emotional needs of freelancers, at least in the beginning. They provide an open-plan workplace environment for “working alone together” and “collaborative activities” for a fee (Spinuzzi, 2012). Individuals may act autonomously while still feeling a part of a larger community. These places are innovative social-material infrastructures that organize and facilitate socially meaningful encounters for freelancers (Merkel, 2019). CWS correspond to increasingly fragmented and individualized work practices in the creative economy with the ethos of being creative. The individual is responsible for conducting his/her daily activities, time, and work routine. CWS, with their physical configurations and promises of freedom, comfort, flexibility, connectivity, and interaction, translate precarious creative labor into self-precarization. These places are technologies for both individualization and totalization.

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Factory, Bomonti Brewery and Zeytinburnu Fişekhane Factory, which have been renovated and preserved to be used as culture, art and entertainment centers within the scope of real estate projects such as luxury residences, shopping centers and hotels. More recent examples include Nevmekan, where Üsküdar Municipality converted the tram depot in Bağlarbaşı into a museum and book-coffee shop, and gasworks in Kadıköy Hasanağa converted into multi-purpose culture, art, education and recreation center consisting of a museum, theatre, exhibition and co-working spaces, restaurant, café.

CWS are becoming more common in Istanbul. These are established within creative platforms, which are private initiatives, and provide membership-based services. Among the prominent membership-based co-working spaces in Istanbul are Workinton with its nine branches and Kolektif House with its seven branches, Workhaus in Maslak, and Habita Coworking in 4. Levent. Apart from these, there are Atölye İstanbul at the Bomonti Brewery, which define itself as a strategic design studio, academy and creative platform, and Impact Hub in 4 Levent, which is based in Austria and operates in more than 100 centers in more than 60 countries in the world and defines itself as a “social impact-oriented global movement”. In addition, SALT Galata in the historical Ottoman Bank building in Karaköy, which was restored by Garanti Bank, is used by researchers and students as a multi-purpose cultural space consisting of a library, auditorium, exhibition space, workshop areas, museum, cafe and restaurant (Öztürk and Koramaz, 2018; Parlak and Baycan, 2020). Aside from such membership-based places, creative classes favor international coffee brands’ stores throughout Istanbul or specially designed third-wave coffeeshops in districts with lively streets and entertainment sectors (Tunç and Kayıhan, 2018).

İSTKA recognizes the significance of such spontaneously emerging collectives, CWS, and initiatives in contributing to the formation of creative communities. They are spatial meeting points that foster productive encounters between creative individuals. But still, many struggle with a lack of physical space and an inability to connect with the larger creative ecosystem (İSTKA, 2022a: 115). What kind of connectivity is desired? The boundary with the outside world has been considered a necessary condition for the existence of a creative community. It is essential for both the formation of trustworthy interactions among community members and the filtration and translation of external forces into supportive inputs (İSTKA, 2022b: 270). Coexistence and connectivity must be maintained in specific settings and channels for creative capacities to emerge in their purest form without friction. As a result, physical and discursive boundaries are quite visible in CWS, whether they are membership-based private initiatives or municipally constituted cultural facilities.

## Conclusion

The city is “a factory for the production of the common... resides in languages, images, knowledges, affects, codes, habits, and practices” (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 250). The common is always pregnant with new trends and capacities. The creative city strives to foster these tendencies and capacities for economic growth and competitiveness. It performs through integrating freedom and creativity, and by designing a milieu conducive to creative and free interactions. As a result, the creative city is neither a technical panacea, as



promised in policy papers, nor a class strategy in which creativity, one of the most fundamental human qualities, is simply appropriated by capital's logic, but rather the production of entrepreneurial subjectivities in search of self-actualization, made responsible for their choices and fortunes.

In the case of Istanbul, the creative city brings together different political parties, professional organizations, non-governmental and volunteer-based communities, small businesses and new middle-classes. All the actors unite in one vision. Istanbul should have an urban economy focused on creativity and innovation, and qualified, highly educated people and enterprises. The way is to mobilize all urban life for economic growth, entrepreneurship and competitiveness. It especially requires the active participation of people whose creative capacities are targeted. They are subjectified as socially engaged urban citizens who care for themselves as well as the general well-being of the city. It makes creative city policy a pervasive governmentality, from macro policies and plans to small businesses, professionals, and freelancer activities. Yet, creativity oriented urban planning is selective in terms of both its subjects and stakeholders. It highlights the dynamism, youth, and ambitions of middle-class youth and professionals. For those, it means governing through freedom, while for others, it means managing inequities.

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