

# Large Scale Art Events and Their Economic Parameters in The Neoliberal Urban Context

## Neoliberal Kentte Büyük Sanat Organizasyonları ve Ekonomik Parametreleri

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### ABSTRACT

The subject of this study is defined as the evaluation of large-scale art organizations taking place in neoliberal cities. The aim of the research is to examine major art organizations held in cities in Turkey and across the world by distinguishing them from other large-scale events, and to elaborate on this issue through examples drawn from influential studies, thereby enabling a clearer and more comprehensive understanding. The study is fundamentally based on a qualitative research model and has been developed through observation, descriptive analysis, content analysis, and document analysis methods. Within this framework, the study explains how large-scale art organizations in Turkey and worldwide have been influenced by neoliberal ideologies, while also providing an evaluation of the artistic developments shaped in this context. The theoretical framework of the research is grounded in the concept of neoliberalism. Since the 1980s, neoliberal ideology has increasingly expanded its influence worldwide and is regarded as a paradigm that transforms not only economic policies but also political, cultural, and social spheres. It has been observed that neoliberalism, extending beyond its economic dimension, has profoundly affected social, spatial, and artistic structures in parallel with economic transformations, thereby shaping urbanization processes as well. In such a context, one of the most frequently preferred strategies for promoting and enhancing the attractiveness of cities has been hosting large-scale organizations, with biennials representing the artistic dimension of these initiatives. Within the scope of the research, it is understood that biennials, triennials, and other large-scale art organizations are not merely events; rather, they contribute to the globalization of cities and economic revitalization, while simultaneously serving various economic and political objectives.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism, mega events, city, art, biennial

### ÖZ

Araştırmanın konusu; neoliberal kentlerde gerçekleşen büyük sanat organizasyonlarının değerlendirilmesi olarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı; Türkiye ve dünya kentlerinde gerçekleştirilen büyük sanat organizasyonlarının diğer büyük organizasyonlardan ayrılarak değerlendirilmesi ve bu konunun gelişmesinde etkin olmuş araştırmalardan örneklerle detaylandırılması ve daha iyi anlaşılmasıdır. Araştırma, en temelde nitel bir araştırma modeli olup gözlem, betimsel, içerik ve doküman analiz yöntemleri ile oluşturulmuştur. Bu doğrultuda hazırlanan bu çalışmada Türkiye ve dünyada gerçekleştirilen büyük sanat organizasyonlarının neoliberal ideolojilerden nasıl etkilendiği açıklanırken; bu yönde gelişim gösteren sanat ile ilgili de bir değerlendirme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın kuramsal çerçevesi neoliberalizm kavramı üzerine kurulmuştur. 1980'li yıllardan itibaren dünya genelinde etkisini artıran neoliberal ideoloji, yalnızca ekonomik politikaları değil, aynı zamanda siyasal, kültürel ve toplumsal alanları da dönüştüren bir paradigma olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ekonomik boyutunu aşarak, kent ve kentleşme süreçlerini de etkisi altına alan neoliberalizmin ekonomik yapıyla paralel olarak sosyal, mekansal ve sanatsal yapıyı da derinden etkilediği görülmüştür. Böyle bir ortamda kentlerin çekiciliğini tanıtmak ve arttırmak amacıyla en çok tercih ettikleri yöntemin büyük ölçekli organizasyonlara ev sahipliği yapmak olduğu ve bienallerin de bu etkinliklerin sanat alanında olduğu görülmektedir. Araştırma kapsamında bienaller, trienaller ve diğer büyük sanat organizasyonlarının sadece etkinlik olmadığı; şehrin küreselleşmesine ve ekonomik alanda canlanmasına katkıda bulunurken çeşitli ekonomik ve siyasal amaçlara da hizmet ettiği anlaşılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Neoliberalizm, büyük organizasyonlar, kent, sanat, bienal

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## Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world shaped by global cultural circulation, the scale, scope, and significance of art organizations have undergone profound transformation. Large-scale art events are now predominantly organized in cities where cultural production, artistic infrastructure, and international visibility are highly developed. Within this context, examining such events through the conceptual framework of the neoliberal city offers an important perspective for understanding the relationship between urban transformation, cultural production, and global capitalism.

This study investigates the urban environment shaped by neoliberal ideology and examines the large-scale art organizations that emerge within this framework. The research aims to analyze both the advantages and the structural limitations that such events generate for the field of art. In establishing the methodological framework of the study, theoretical discussions and interpretations concerning neoliberalism are first addressed. The central problem of the research concerns the impact of neoliberal policies on cities and large-scale art organizations and, correspondingly, the ways in which artistic production is shaped by these transformations.

Within the neoliberal framework, the study explores how cities and large-scale cultural events influence the artistic environment and affect artists, institutions, and audiences. In discussing large-scale art organizations and their economic parameters within the neoliberal city, the infrastructural conditions, institutional networks, and economic mechanisms that sustain this environment are also examined. The research adopts a descriptive and interpretative approach based on a comprehensive review of the relevant literature.

The study consists of three main chapters. Through a critical review of the literature, it first seeks to define neoliberalism and to examine the types of large-scale events that emerge within this framework, as well as their relationship to contemporary art. The second chapter, which constitutes the conceptual foundation of the research, analyzes neoliberalism by addressing its origins, development, and reflections within the urban order. It subsequently examines the characteristics, aims, advantages, and disadvantages of large-scale events, illustrating these features with relevant examples. Within this context, biennials are discussed as a prominent form of large-scale art organization, and their functions and transformations within the neoliberal environment are analyzed. Particular attention is given to the ways in which economic dynamics influence both the structure of these events and the artistic production that emerges within them.

The final chapter presents the findings and conclusions of the research. Taken together, the three chapters form a coherent analytical framework for understanding the relationship between neoliberal urban transformation and contemporary large-scale art events.

### Large-scale art events and their economic parameters in the neoliberal urban context

In the contemporary cultural landscape, neoliberalism increasingly exerts influence over the organization, circulation, and institutional structure of art. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary first to examine the emergence of neoliberalism and its impact on urban environments. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter addresses the conceptual foundations of ne-

oliberalism and its reflections on the urban order. The following sections then examine the role of large-scale art organizations within major cultural events and analyze the financialization of art within the neoliberal system.

### Neoliberalism and Its Reflections on the Urban Order

Since the 1980s, neoliberal ideology has profoundly shaped social life across economic, political, cultural, and social domains, gradually expanding its influence on a global scale. The process of globalization structured around neoliberal principles has encouraged policies aimed at reducing the role of the state while strengthening the influence of the private sector at both national and international levels. Within this framework, global cities and global capitalism have become key nodes through which neoliberal ideology operates. Urban environments therefore provide crucial sites for observing, defining, and institutionalizing the structural transformations associated with neoliberal globalization.

Neoliberalism emerged as a response to the recurring crises of capitalism. In 1947, the Mont Pelerin Society was established under the leadership of Friedrich von Hayek, bringing together influential economists and intellectuals such as Ludwig von Mises and Milton Friedman. Advocates of liberal economic thought within this circle formulated the foundations of neoliberal doctrine in opposition to theories supporting extensive state intervention, while emphasizing the free-market principles of neoclassical economics (Harvey, 2015, p. 27).

At its core, neoliberal ideology promotes a socio-economic system based on free, competitive, and largely unregulated markets, accompanied by minimal state intervention. In accordance with this framework, policies have been implemented that aim to dismantle regulatory structures, weaken institutional constraints, and expand the reach of market mechanisms. Such policies typically include the withdrawal of the state from industrial regulation, the weakening of organized labor, reductions in taxation on capital, the privatization of public goods and services, limitations on social welfare programs, integration into international financial markets, and the intensification of market competition.

The global diffusion of neoliberalism has generated profound transformations across economic systems, political institutions, and ideological structures. As Harvey notes, neoliberal policies have been adopted and adapted across diverse political contexts, from the Thatcher and Reagan administrations in the United Kingdom and the United States to post-socialist states emerging after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden and developing economies including South Africa and China (Harvey, 2006, p. 145). In this sense, neoliberalism has evolved into a dominant paradigm shaping contemporary global governance.

The influence of this paradigm extends far beyond economic policy. It has reshaped social relations, everyday practices, established habits, and modes of thinking. As the global free-market economy expanded, urban environments inevitably became one of its primary arenas of transformation.

Technological advancements, industrialization, mechanization, and developments in transportation and administrative systems have placed cities at the center of economic and social life. The Industrial Revolution fundamentally transformed production systems and economic structures, which in turn reshaped urban or-

ganization and social relations.

Within the capitalist mode of production, traditional urban structures were reconfigured in response to industrial expansion. Industrial facilities were typically located near energy sources, transportation networks, raw material supplies, and inexpensive labor. Consequently, worker settlements developed around production centers, and urbanization accelerated in direct relation to industrial capitalism.

With the emergence of neoliberalism, cities became focal points of economic restructuring and socio-political struggles over social reproduction. As Theodore, Peck, and Brenner argue, the process of neoliberalization has fundamentally transformed urban space, restructuring both its economic functions and its social organization (2012, p. 30). Within this framework, cities increasingly function as sites where capital is both reproduced and consumed.

Since the early 1980s, competition among cities has intensified as urban administrations seek to attract global capital, tourism, and investment. Branding strategies, architectural spectacles, and large-scale development projects have become central tools in this competition. Shopping malls, entertainment complexes, cultural institutions, and tourist infrastructures have proliferated in urban landscapes as cities attempt to position themselves within the global economy.

The concept of the neoliberal city refers to an urban model structured according to market-oriented principles. In this model, urban development is guided less by collective social needs than by the logic of market competition and capital accumulation. As a result, individual and corporate interests frequently take precedence over public welfare. The neoliberal city thus reflects processes such as economic deregulation, privatization of public space, and the restructuring of production and consumption patterns.

Urban space, in this context, becomes what Harvey describes as a mechanism for the “absorption of surplus capital,” transforming the city into a site of profit-oriented investment rather than a domain primarily organized around public needs (Bayat, 2016, p. 30).

As a result of neoliberal policies, the era of state-centered development gradually came to an end, leading to significant changes in regions where capital was concentrated. With the reorganization of production and the globalization of capital, the role of the state underwent a substantial transformation. Initially functioning as the main provider of urban services, the state gradually transferred many of these responsibilities to the private sector. Services in areas such as transportation, education, and healthcare increasingly began to be provided by private actors, while the state’s influence over urban planning and development diminished.

As observed in many examples worldwide, including Turkey, governments have increasingly prioritized projects implemented through public-private partnerships in determining urban policies. In Istanbul, neoliberal approaches have been shaped and developed in accordance with dominant global economic and political transformations, effectively positioning the city as a showcase for these trends in Turkey. With the process of deindustrialization, the labor structure in Istanbul has also undergone significant changes, while the real estate sector has experienced

considerable growth. Urban transformation projects have been introduced to address illegal housing structures and potential earthquake risks. Through these projects, new residential areas, skyscrapers, bridges, tunnels, canals, as well as restoration and renewal initiatives, have transformed Istanbul into a highly dynamic and rapidly developing urban center.

The increase in the number of contemporary art galleries in certain redeveloped districts of Istanbul has simultaneously turned these areas into focal points for tourism, entertainment, and the real estate sector. According to research conducted by Özkan, Galata and Cihangir are among the neighborhoods that have undergone this transformation. As Özkan explains:

The gentrification processes in Galata and Cihangir have occurred in parallel with the development of art-related enterprises in these districts. Previously inhabited mainly by low-income migrant families, these neighborhoods began to transform with the settlement of artists, young professionals, and contemporary art galleries. Today, these areas have become the focus of large institutions, and major holding companies in Turkey are increasingly investing in real estate in these neighborhoods (Özkan, 2011).

In recent years, art has been used in Istanbul not only as a tool of urban marketing but also as an integral element of newly designed or implemented real estate projects. In the transformation and marketing processes carried out by both state institutions and private-sector actors, culture- and art-oriented policies play an important role. Structures such as art-themed hotels, residential complexes, and fashion and design stores are increasingly promoted through contemporary art, which is employed as a factor enhancing the aesthetic value and prestige of these spaces.

For example, within the Point Hotel project in Barbaros, twenty-six contemporary artists were commissioned to produce 265 unique artworks interpreting the architectural spaces of the hotel. The curator overseeing the project, Beral Madra, argued that this initiative would not only provide the building with “the prestige of a contemporary art museum,” but would also create “significant promotional value for the country” (Artun, 2023, pp. 45–46).

Cities are also remembered and gain recognition through their cultural assets, artistic events such as film festivals, the museums they host, and their historical heritage. As Ali Artun suggests, “museums have now become architectural spectacles that brand metropolitan cities” (Artun, 2018).

In conclusion, under neoliberal policies urban space has become one of the most significant areas of investment, promoted and marketed to international audiences through tourism- and real estate-oriented projects. Within the highly competitive global environment, one of the most common strategies used by cities to enhance and advertise their attractiveness is the organization of large-scale events. As a result of the restructuring processes brought about by the neoliberal era, urban space has been continuously reshaped through diverse and large-scale projects.

In a competitive environment shaped by capital and the free-market economy, urban administrations transform cities through major urban development projects in order to attract investment. However, this process also transforms cities into commodities in which the interests of different social groups often conflict, generating new economic and social tensions. Cities

positioned at the center of international capital flows compete with one another to host major urban projects and large-scale events at both national and international levels. In order to maximize the potential benefits of this competition, they increasingly incorporate neoliberal policies into their institutional, political, and legislative frameworks.

### Major art organizations

The literature on event studies employs a variety of terms when defining and classifying large-scale organizations, including “large,” “mega,” “major,” “hallmark,” “special event,” and “flagship event” (Richards and Wilson, 2004, pp. 12–23). Because of their overlapping meanings, these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. One of the key scholars in the field of large-scale events, Ritchie, defines such organizations as events that take place within a limited time frame, occur periodically, or are organized only once during a specific period, and that aim to enhance the short- and long-term awareness, attractiveness, and profitability of a tourist destination (Ritchie, 1984, p. 3).

Based on the relevant literature, the main common characteristics of large-scale events can be summarized as follows:

- Attracting the attention of tourists and international investors,
- Supporting local development while enhancing the global prestige of a city’s cultural elements,
- Taking place within a specific time frame and sometimes recurring periodically,
- Increasing public awareness of the city and strengthening its image,
- Functioning as instruments that guide urban redevelopment and growth while benefiting from newly constructed facilities and infrastructure,
- Providing social and cultural experiences for both residents and visitors.

In addition, large-scale events generally develop around two fundamental objectives. The first is the creation of an attraction that extends beyond the boundaries of the city, and even the nation, in order to appeal to a global audience. The second is the generation of economic benefits for the host city through tourism and related activities.

As noted by Yardımcı, the intense competition among cities to organize festivals and biennials, and to host internationally recognized curators and artists, stems from the belief that such events will attract global attention and, alongside it, circulating capital to the city (Yardımcı, 2014, p. 12).

Since the 1980s, a significant increase has been observed in the number of national and international fairs, large-scale sports competitions, and periodically organized festivals and events that attract broad audiences. These events, institutionalized through international cultural exchange and supported by growing public interest, have become indispensable components of major cities and important platforms for many different artistic fields.

Organizations that bring international prestige to host cities include political summits and forums (such as the Davos Summit), major sports competitions (such as the FIFA World Cup, the

Olympic Games, and Formula 1 races), international expos and fairs (such as the Paris Book Fair), biennials and triennials (such as the Istanbul Biennial), carnivals and festivals (such as the Venice Film Festival), and cultural programs such as the European Capital of Culture initiative. Although these socio-cultural events differ significantly in their themes and formats, their shared objective can be identified as strengthening the image of cities, promoting them internationally, and positioning them within global cultural markets.

The aspiration to attain international recognition and status as a global city constitutes one of the primary motivations for hosting large-scale events. In order for such events to be defined as “major,” attracting the attention of global media networks can be considered one of the fundamental conditions of this demanding process.

This new global restructuring has intensified competition among cities. At the heart of this competition lies the desire to secure a position within the global market by attracting as many investors and visitors as possible. Cities participating in this competition seek to construct distinctive images and identity values in order to stand out internationally. In doing so, they incorporate unique cultural and spatial characteristics to develop recognizable urban brands. As Uysal argues, cities perceive major events as opportunities to create their own brand value, while existing brand value simultaneously becomes an advantage in organizing such events (Uysal, 2014, p. 165).

Consequently, the identity value acquired through such events continues to generate tourism and investment potential long after the events themselves have ended. In other words, the economic and social impacts of these events are not limited to their duration but extend into the long term. In this process, the city ceases to function merely as a location that hosts events; instead, it gradually becomes a large-scale stage shaped by and organized around these events.

When examining certain historical examples of large-scale events, it can be observed that event areas and facilities were initially designed as temporary or semi-permanent structures intended to be dismantled after the event. However, in some cases these structures were preserved and transformed into permanent spaces because visitor numbers remained high and the buildings gained symbolic value. The preservation of such structures can therefore be regarded as a contribution to cultural heritage. Examples include the Eiffel Tower, which remained as a landmark following the 1889 Paris Exposition commemorating the centenary of the French Revolution, and the New York State Pavilion constructed for the 1964 New York World’s Fair.

Large-scale events also provide significant opportunities for host cities to strengthen their technical infrastructure and implement extensive urban transformation projects. The 1972 Munich Olympic Games provide a well-known example of how event-related infrastructure can reshape urban environments.

As Chalip, Green, and Hill note, the Olympic facilities designed by Frei Otto significantly transformed the city’s landscape during the event. In the long term, infrastructure investments expanded to other areas of the city. Projects such as the construction of a ring road and the reorganization of pedestrian pathways in the city center were implemented, while the most striking example of infrastructure development was the rapid completion of a new fourteen-kilometer subway

line connecting the Olympic facilities with the rest of the city (Chalip et al., 2003, p. 228).

Furthermore, improvements in transportation systems, communication networks, tourism infrastructure, and urban renewal projects play a crucial role in attracting international investment and stimulating economic development. Large-scale events also stimulate local economies by increasing tourist participation and generating demand across numerous service sectors, including restaurants, hotels, bars, transportation services, pharmacies, photography services, souvenir shops, nightclubs, and travel agencies.

However, the evaluation of such events must also take into account the complex and multi-layered relationships that exist within urban environments. Although large-scale events provide numerous cultural, social, political, and economic benefits, they also carry significant risks and negative consequences.

One of the most frequently discussed drawbacks is the high economic cost associated with hosting these events. Construction expenses, rising operational costs, and potential economic downturns represent major risks. In many cases, cities hosting such events have been left with substantial debts that persist for decades. Allocating a large share of public investment to these projects may delay other essential investments and generate opportunity costs, while also exacerbating social inequalities. For example, it has been reported that the government of New South Wales reduced public services in order to cover debts incurred during the construction of facilities for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (Richards, 2015).

Large-scale events may also serve as mechanisms that legitimize urban demolitions, forced displacement, and ecological destruction within the context of urban restructuring. A report by the Center on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) examining cities that hosted the Olympic Games between 1998 and 2007 revealed that more than four million people were forcibly displaced during this period (COHRE, 2007). As Harvey argues, mega-events function as mechanisms of capital accumulation through processes of displacement and dispossession. Furthermore, preparing a city to bid for the Olympic Games involves highly speculative and costly investments that carry significant risks of financial loss (Harvey, 2014, p. 32).

The increasing power of capital has deeply affected social, spatial, and artistic structures within the contemporary economic system. This raises an important question: how does the economic and political collaboration fostered by neoliberalism intersect with art institutions and large-scale cultural and artistic events?

In contemporary conditions, art is no longer confined to traditional institutional spaces such as museums, auctions, galleries, academies, and studios. Instead, it increasingly expands into global networks that include biennials, art fairs, multinational corporations, and financial markets. Within these networks, art becomes integrated into complex and open-ended systems of circulation and valuation.

Today, art fairs and auctions have become the primary arenas where art and capital intersect most intensely. Galleries and even biennials are increasingly connected to these capital-centered environments, and the circulation and valuation of artworks are often determined within these structures. As noted by Artun, the front page of the New York-based newspaper *International Art*

*Fairs* announced that “art fairs have been replaced by biennials, and biennials by new art fairs” (Artun, 2023, p. 20).

Festivals, art fairs, triennials, and similar cultural activities can all be considered within the broader category of large-scale events. Among these, biennials occupy a particularly important place, as they strongly emphasize the city as an artistic geography and construct cultural narratives based on urban identity.

Biennials provide two additional advantages for host cities that distinguish them from other types of events such as technology fairs or sports competitions. First, art possesses a prestige in the public imagination that transcends ordinary culture and entertainment, pointing toward universal values. Second, art not only reflects the benefits of globalization but also actively promotes and disseminates them (Stallabrass, 2021, pp. 49–50).

The wave of globalization in the 1990s laid the foundations for biennials to become one of the most influential platforms of contemporary art. According to research conducted by Bengisu Bayrak:

The number of biennials worldwide increased dramatically from approximately twenty in the 1990s to seventy-five in the 2000s, around one hundred in the 2010s, and currently exceeding two hundred and fifty. One of the consequences of neoliberal globalization, particularly since the early 2000s, has been the increasing articulation of art in terms of economic value. Similarly, the number of art fairs worldwide has risen from fifty-five in the early 2000s to more than two hundred and sixty today (Bayrak, 2019, p. 38).

Stallabrass explains the rapid proliferation of biennials by linking it to broader processes in the global cultural economy. According to him, the forces that have led to the construction of new museums and the expansion or reconstruction of older ones have also contributed to the spread of biennials. A biennial is now considered one of the cultural attractions that cities aspiring to global status are expected to possess, serving to attract a culturally oriented tourist class and entertain affluent residents (Stallabrass, 2021, p. 48).

For instance, Stallabrass interprets the Istanbul Biennial as part of the Turkish government’s broader effort to demonstrate alignment with the secular and neoliberal standards expected by the European Union (Stallabrass, 2016, p. 43).

Like many other large-scale events, biennials have become embedded within the dynamics of global capitalism. As a result, they often serve economic and political purposes alongside their role as platforms for contemporary art.

According to curator Vasif Kortun, biennials also generate significant financial returns for host cities such as Venice and Istanbul. These events attract audiences with high spending capacity and produce substantial economic benefits that extend far beyond the revenues generated by conference tourism (Yardimci, 2014, p. 32).

Nevertheless, the impact of these events on the dissemination of contemporary art and the increased visibility of artists should not be overlooked. On the one hand, such art organizations reinforce the neoliberal discourse of cultural diversity; on the other hand somewhat paradoxically they have contributed to the formation of a global aesthetic hegemony structured around the culture of

contemporary art.

Large-scale cultural events and artistic activities have therefore become instruments shaped by cultural, political, and economic interests. Many of these events are realized through collaborations between corporations, institutions, and cultural organizations. While such activities contribute to the economic and cultural development of cities, they also create new forms of social interaction and cultural exchange.

This raises a final question: within this system, does art play a passive role, or does it act as an active agent? In other words, does art merely become a phenomenon through which neoliberal economic and political regimes assert themselves, or does it transform into a dynamic field that reproduces and reconfigures itself through the circulation of capital?

### **Economic parameters of artistic events**

It can be argued that after the 1970s art gradually shifted away from its earlier ambition of interpreting, shaping, and transforming life, and instead became increasingly embedded within the structures of the neoliberal world. Particularly from the 1980s onward, the effects of industrialization on culture and artistic production generated new conditions under which art gained recognition, conditions that frequently produced speculation and market-driven valuation.

With the industrialization of image production, artists increasingly turned toward transformations in meaning and language in order to generate new visual forms. At the same time, finance has expanded far beyond the simple circulation of money or capital. Within the neoliberal order, art has thus become simultaneously associated with fashion, finance, and emerging technologies. In this context, Andy Warhol's well-known statements that "making money is art" and that "the greatest art is commerce" (Artun, 2023, p. 103) provide a significant insight into how artistic production during this period became increasingly commercialized and how the boundaries between art and economic systems gradually blurred. These expressions reflect an era in which art is no longer merely an aesthetic or expressive medium but has become directly integrated into broader economic structures.

According to Don Thompson's interpretation of Karl Marx, works of art representing the highest forms of intellectual production must be presented as objects capable of directly generating material wealth in order to possess value in the eyes of the bourgeoisie (Thompson, 2008, p. 34). Following this trajectory, the role of art has become increasingly visible and financialized, particularly after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the consolidation of capitalism as a global system, and the financial crisis of 2008. As Fredric Jameson observes, aesthetic production today is largely integrated into commodity production (Jameson, 2011, p. 33).

Slovak sociologist and cultural theorist Lev Kref has described this transformation of art as follows:

Art long ago ceased to be merely "beautiful," and it is no longer autonomous. The diversity and expansion of artistic forms and genres have exceeded all the boundaries that once gave the term "art" a clear meaning. Even the most unconventional artworks are commodities products of the culture industry. What then distinguishes a contemporary artwork from a cultural commodity? On the surface, there is no dif-

ference. Everything appears blurred, hybrid, and mixed, and there is nothing that can be definitively and unambiguously called "art" (Artun, 2009, p. 10).

Within the consumer culture shaped by the capitalist system, almost nothing remains outside the sphere of commodification. As commodities increasingly acquire cultural dimensions, art has found a broader market space, which has further accelerated its commodification and integration into capitalist economic relations.

Benjamin Buchloh has argued that art, like money, has increasingly become a commodity defined by its exchange value. As long as they remain material objects, neither money nor art can completely lose their use value. However, the examples frequently cited by critics demonstrate the instability of this relationship: during the Russian Civil War, books were printed on banknotes because money had lost its value; similarly, Marcel Duchamp provocatively suggested that a Rembrandt painting could be used as an ironing board (Stalabrass, 2016, p. 83).

Such examples illustrate the tension between symbolic meaning and exchange value in modern art.

The commodification of art also poses a significant obstacle to the autonomy of artistic production, particularly when the pursuit of profit becomes the primary objective. When profit becomes the central aim of art, it directly influences the processes through which artworks are produced and circulated. Within such a system, artists inevitably become participants in a culture of consumption. As a result, widely recognized and branded artists often produce visually striking and easily accessible works in order to attract public attention and secure financial support from wealthy investors.

Within contemporary cultural economies, artists are expected to adapt to the logic of current production systems and conform to the economic structures that govern them. As Beral Madra notes:

In such a structure, an artist can only prove themselves and sustain their existence by acquiring a share of symbolic capital and achieving economic success. Artists who cannot integrate into the system face diminishing chances of survival. Consequently, many artists are compelled to compromise with certain centers of power, establish partnerships, and market themselves (Madra, 2006).

Under these conditions, networks of cultural production increasingly position artists as agents contributing to the diffusion of neoliberal values and policies.

Today, many internationally recognized artists collaborate with major fashion and design brands. For example, fashion designer Marc Jacobs who has produced collections for the brand Louis Vuitton has collaborated with artists such as Stephen Sprouse, Takashi Murakami, and Richard Prince in the design of fashion accessories (Artun, 2023, p. 73).

These collaborations make the relationship between artists and corporations highly visible while simultaneously allowing both parties to expand their media presence and strengthen their brand identities.

For corporations, advertising campaigns remain one of the most effective tools for increasing sales and shaping public percep-

tion, and art sponsorship frequently functions as a component of these strategies. Particularly for companies operating in controversial industries such as weapons, tobacco, or alcohol, supporting the arts provides an opportunity to cultivate a more positive public image and strengthen credibility within financial and social networks.

The case of the American oil company Mobil illustrates this dynamic. Mobil has long been one of the largest corporate investors in cultural activities in the United States. At the same time, artist Hans Haacke produced a series of critical works in the mid-1970s exposing the political activities of the company. Haacke gathered documents demonstrating that Mobil had transferred significant funds to the racist regime in apartheid-era South Africa while simultaneously sponsoring cultural events worldwide. In 1981, Haacke exhibited these written and visual documents alongside Mobil's own advertisements and corporate symbols, revealing what he described as the company's contradictory identity simultaneously supporting both racism and the arts (Yılmaz, 2006, p. 232).

Yet even Haacke's works, which critically exposed the contradictions of the art market, could themselves be purchased and incorporated into private collections. In this way, critical art can be neutralized and assimilated into the very capitalist structures it seeks to challenge. Neoliberalism often operates precisely through such mechanisms, incorporating opposition into its own systems of production and circulation.

At this stage, where corporations consolidate their prestige through cultural patronage and art increasingly functions as a form of economic or symbolic capital, it becomes possible to speak not simply of art but of an art market operating within the broader neoliberal network of relations. Like any other commercial sector, art involves processes of production, distribution, marketing, and management, as well as auctions, speculation, financial instruments, and intermediaries. Art has therefore become an industry governed by its own market rules and exchange mechanisms.

Jean Baudrillard describes this transformation by suggesting that art today, like any commercial enterprise, offers career opportunities, profitable investments, and prestigious consumer objects (Baudrillard, 2018, p. 12).

Pierre Bourdieu addresses similar dynamics in his discussion of the "market for symbolic goods" in *The Rules of Art*. According to Bourdieu, the cultural field contains two opposing modes of production and circulation: one based on symbolic capital and the other based on economic capital. The former is characterized by autonomy, intellectualism, and disinterest in immediate profit, while the latter is governed by commercial logic and economic gain (Artun, 2023, p. 47).

Despite this theoretical distinction, contemporary art markets increasingly blur the boundaries between these two spheres. As Dave Beech notes, artworks differ from ordinary commodities because they do not necessarily satisfy pre-existing needs; they are unique objects whose production and circulation often follow unconventional economic rules. Moreover, artworks may be experienced without being purchased (Stallabrass, 2021, p. 89).

Nevertheless, in today's art market the autonomy described by Bourdieu has largely weakened. The boundaries between art and economic value have become increasingly indistinct, and artistic

value has become closely intertwined with financial value. A widely accepted view within contemporary cultural economies is that any object that can be successfully marketed and sold as art may ultimately be recognized as art.

As a result, symbolic value is now often determined less by the artistic qualities of a work than by its brand value and market position. Within a postmodern context where culture and economics are deeply intertwined, financial systems permeating nearly every aspect of social and political life have absorbed even the most radical forms of artistic opposition. Rather than resisting the logic of capital, art has frequently adapted to it. As Artun argues, "money, which has become the language of reason, ultimately conquered imagination and desire; in this process, aesthetic modernism and the avant-garde were eliminated, and art lost much of its autonomy" (Artun, 2023, p. 146).

The capitalist capital directing this art market possesses the power to determine which artists become visible, where artworks are exhibited, and the prices at which they are sold. Through these mechanisms, capital not only shapes artistic trends but also influences public perception by situating artworks within particular social and cultural events.

Historically, state support for the arts was justified through the idea that culture represented a shared national heritage. Today, however, many of these responsibilities have shifted toward private corporations. Companies that sponsor exhibitions, provide awards, establish collections, and finance cultural institutions simultaneously generate ideological influence and economic value. As Marina Gržinić notes, biennials represent a direct intervention of private capital and economic interests into the cultural field under the banner of contemporary art (Gržinić, 2008, p. 35).

The enormous sums paid by wealthy collectors for contemporary artworks also contribute to this dynamic. Owning artworks by artists such as Jasper Johns or Andy Warhol confers prestige and social distinction. The perception of art as an exclusive world associated with elite circles further serves corporate interests, providing continuous media visibility and reinforcing the symbolic capital associated with cultural prestige.

However, as the relationship between art and corporate power becomes increasingly transparent, art may gradually lose the prestige derived from its perceived autonomy. Instead, it risks becoming part of a promotional system driven by celebrity culture and media spectacle.

A well-known slogan of the Philip Morris corporation once proclaimed: "It takes art to make a company great." According to Rectanus, corporate engagement with the arts provides companies with an image of creativity, legitimizes their role as patrons or collectors, and integrates them into the cultural communities addressed by art (Stallabrass, 2021, p. 128).

If art contributes to corporate image-building and profit generation in this way, there arises a significant risk: if the economic motives underlying these relationships become too visible, art may lose the very autonomy that enables it to perform this cultural function.

As both corporations and governments increasingly turn to art as a strategic instrument, the role of art as a complementary component of neoliberal economic structures becomes more apparent. Corporations use art to cultivate brand loyalty at a level that

traditional advertising cannot achieve, while governments may employ cultural initiatives to mitigate the social tensions produced by free-market economies.

As Julian Stallabrass argues, the most highly valued contemporary art often serves the interests of the neoliberal economy by promoting cultural hybridization, weakening local solidarities, and facilitating the expansion of global markets (Stallabrass, 2016, p. 165).

The exhibition of diverse cultural materials in large museums and the transformation of urban spaces into venues for festivals and biennials can therefore be understood as products of neoliberal cultural institutions. At the same time, corporations sponsor these institutions while presenting their involvement as an expression of universal cultural values.

Through large-scale exhibitions and international events, companies cultivate the perception that contemporary art events are generously supported cultural spectacles. In reality, these initiatives frequently reflect the expansionist cultural logic of multinational corporations. In particular, recurring events such as biennials ensure continuous sponsorship from major corporate actors. Once sponsorship becomes institutionalized, the prestige associated with art becomes closely linked to the sponsor's corporate identity, reinforced through the repeated display of logos and visual symbols in promotional materials.

For example, Stallabrass describes the sponsorship structure of the first Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, held in 1999, as an alliance between private companies, academic institutions, public cultural agencies, and international organizations such as the Goethe Institute. Each of these actors pursued distinct objectives, ranging from brand recognition and cultural promotion to urban regeneration and institutional prestige (Stallabrass, 2021, p. 45).

Similar dynamics can be observed in Turkey. Large-scale cultural events frequently rely on sponsorship from major corporations. For instance, the extensive promotional campaign for the Picasso exhibition organized by the Sabancı Group during 2005–2006 not only enhanced the company's reputation domestically and internationally but also projected its corporate identity to the public through a spectacular cultural event.

The dependence of contemporary art on corporate sponsorship illustrates how artistic production has increasingly diverged from its earlier ideals of autonomy. Art is now often positioned under the patronage of corporations and the guidance of state institutions, functioning as a disseminator of neoliberal values and becoming closely associated with the worlds of luxury, wealth, celebrity, fashion, and spectacle.

As Stallabrass notes, just as a Picasso painting displayed in a private residence may enhance the prestige of a wealthy collector, art performs a similar function for cities competing within the global market for investment and recognition (Stallabrass, 2021, p. 49).

This situation reveals a fundamental contradiction: mainstream fine art, once considered a relatively protected sphere, increasingly participates in promoting the very capitalist structures that threaten its autonomy. The modernization of the art market under neoliberal conditions further intensifies this contradiction.

## Conclusion

Since the 1980s, neoliberal ideology has profoundly influenced social life across economic, political, cultural, and social domains, progressively expanding its impact on a global scale. The global expansion of the free-market economy has inevitably reshaped urban space, transforming cities into key sites for the circulation, reproduction, and consumption of capital. Within this framework, urban environments have increasingly been reconfigured in accordance with the logic of neoliberal globalization.

In Turkey, Istanbul has developed in close alignment with these dominant international economic and political transformations, effectively functioning as a national showcase of neoliberal urban policies. As a consequence, urban space has become one of the most significant areas of investment under neoliberal governance, promoted and marketed internationally through tourism- and real-estate-oriented development strategies. Within this competitive environment, large-scale events and artistic activities have emerged as central instruments through which cities attempt to enhance their global visibility and attractiveness.

The findings of this research indicate that major events and cultural activities have increasingly become strategic tools through which cities seek to position themselves within the global marketplace by attracting investors, tourists, and international attention. While these events contribute to the globalization of cities and stimulate economic activity, they also play a significant role in the transformation and restructuring of urban space under neoliberal conditions. In addition to reshaping urban infrastructures through large-scale redevelopment projects, major events also contribute to the symbolic reconfiguration of the city's image and identity.

The analysis conducted in this study, supported by global examples, demonstrates that the primary motivation behind the organization of large-scale events lies in their perceived economic potential. In the short term, these events are expected to generate tourism revenue; in the long term, they are intended to enhance the international image and symbolic capital of the host city. However, given the complex and multilayered nature of urban environments, the outcomes of such events are not uniform. Although major events can produce cultural, social, political, and economic benefits, they may also generate significant tensions and inequalities within urban contexts.

The influence of neoliberalism on large-scale art organizations can be observed most clearly in two interrelated dimensions. The first concerns the institutionalization of art, particularly the increasingly close relationship between art and market mechanisms. Within institutional frameworks shaped by neoliberal cultural policies, artworks are frequently evaluated according to their market value while simultaneously serving broader political, cultural, or economic agendas. The second dimension involves the instrumentalization of art, whereby artistic production is mobilized not primarily for its aesthetic, expressive, or critical capacities but rather as a tool for advancing political, economic, ideological, or social interests.

Biennials represent one of the most visible forms of these processes. As large-scale cultural events that most clearly demonstrate the city's existence as an artistic geography, biennials both utilize and transform urban space as part of their cultural infrastructure. Within the scope of this research, biennials, trien-

nials, and other major art events cannot be understood merely as cultural activities. While contributing to the globalization of cities and stimulating local economies, they also serve broader economic and political purposes within the neoliberal cultural economy.

Operating beyond both national borders and urban spaces alongside the mobility of global capital, these events increasingly attract the attention of multinational corporations. Consequently, many major cultural organizations are now realized through collaborations between corporations, public institutions, and cultural organizations. Given the substantial financial costs involved in organizing such events, corporate sponsorship has become an essential component of their realization. However, the expectations of global companies sponsoring these events are rarely limited to immediate financial returns. Rather, sponsorship functions primarily as a strategy for strengthening corporate prestige, expanding symbolic influence, and consolidating a presence within the cultural and social landscape of the host city.

Although criticisms suggesting that sponsorship practices in major art organizations contribute to the popularization and superficialization of art are not unfounded, it is equally important to acknowledge that within the contemporary capitalist system the survival of many large-scale cultural institutions would be extremely difficult without such financial support. Under these conditions, where corporate prestige is reinforced and art increasingly functions as a form of economic and symbolic capital, it becomes possible to speak less of art as an autonomous field and more of an art market operating within neoliberal networks of power and capital.

Within this network of relations, artists themselves often become integrated into the mechanisms through which neoliberal cultural policies are reproduced and disseminated. As a result, contemporary artistic production is increasingly entangled with economic interests, institutional structures, and global cultural markets, positioning art not only as a cultural practice but also as a strategic component of neoliberal urban and economic development.

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## Yapılandırılmış Özet

Bu çalışma, neoliberal kentlerde gerçekleştirilen büyük sanat organizasyonlarının kent mekânları, ekonomik yapılar ve kültürel kimlik üzerindeki etkilerini bütüncül bir biçimde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. 1980'lerden itibaren dünya genelinde etkisini artıran neoliberal ideoloji, ekonomik, siyasal, kültürel ve sosyal alanlarda köklü dönüşümlere yol açmıştır. Bu ideoloji, serbest piyasa ekonomisinin öncelikli hale gelmesi, devlet müdahalesinin sınırlandırılması ve küresel sermayenin güçlendirilmesi üzerinden kentlerin yapısını ve işlevini yeniden şekillendirmiştir. Neoliberal politikaların kent yaşamına etkileri incelendiğinde, şehirler sermayenin üretildiği, dolaşıma girdiği ve tüketildiği merkezler olarak konumlanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, büyük sanat organizasyonları yalnızca kültürel etkinlikler değil, kentlerin uluslararası görünürlüğünü artıran, ekonomik canlılık yaratan ve kültürel sermaye üretimini güçlendiren stratejik araçlar hâline gelmiştir.

Araştırmanın temel amacı, Türkiye ve dünya kentlerinde düzenlenen büyük sanat organizasyonlarının diğer büyük ölçekli etkinliklerden ayırt edilerek incelenmesi ve neoliberal politikaların bu organizasyonlar üzerindeki etkilerinin ortaya konulmasıdır. Bu çerçevede, bienaller, trienaller ve diğer büyük sanat organizasyonları, kentin küresel pazarlarda rekabet edebilirliğini artıran, kültürel ve ekonomik değer üreten mekanizmalar olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmada nitel bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş, doküman incelemesi ve içerik analizi yöntemleri ile hem Türkiye'de hem de uluslararası düzeyde gerçekleştirilen büyük sanat organizasyonlarının işleyişi, kent ekonomisi ve kültürel üretim üzerindeki etkileri detaylı biçimde analiz edilmiştir.

Neoliberalizm, bu çalışmanın kuramsal temelini oluşturmaktadır. Neoliberal ideoloji, yalnızca ekonomik alanla sınırlı kalmayıp, toplumsal ve kültürel alanlarda da kapsamlı dönüşümlere yol açmıştır. Devletin ekonomik müdahalesinin azalması, özel sektörün ve uluslararası sermayenin güçlenmesi, kentlerin mekansal ve sosyal yapısında yeni dengelerin oluşmasına neden olmuştur. Küreselleşmenin hızlanmasıyla kentler arasında rekabet artmış ve yerel yönetimler, uluslararası görünürlük kazanmak ve ekonomik fayda sağlamak amacıyla farklı stratejiler geliştirmiştir. Bu stratejilerden biri, büyük ölçekli organizasyonlara ev sahipliği yapmaktır. Spor etkinlikleri, kültürel festivaller, fuarlar ve büyük sanat organizasyonları, kentlerin marka değerini artırmak, ekonomik canlılığı sağlamak ve kültürel kimliklerini güçlendirmek için kullanılan başlıca araçlar arasında yer almaktadır.

Büyük sanat organizasyonları, kentlere sağladığı katkılar bakımından çok boyutludur. Ekonomik açıdan, turizm gelirlerini artırmakta, uluslararası yatırımcıların ilgisini çekmekte ve kentsel altyapı yatırımlarını teşvik etmektedir. Kültürel açıdan ise, kentlerin kültürel yaşamını canlandırmakta, toplumsal etkileşimi artırmakta ve farklı sosyal gruplar arasında etkileşim imkanı yaratmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bienaller ve trienaller, yalnızca sanatsal üretim platformları olmakla kalmayıp, kentlerin küresel ekonomik ve kültürel sistemle entegrasyonunu sağlayan araçlar olarak işlev görmektedir. Ancak bu organizasyonların olumsuz etkileri de göz ardı edilemez. Yüksek maliyetler, sosyal eşitsizliklerin derinleşmesi, düşük gelirli bölgelerde yerinden edilmeler ve çevresel etkiler, büyük sanat organizasyonlarının kentlerde yarattığı potansiyel sorunlar arasında yer almaktadır. Bu nedenle, organizasyonların faydaları ile olumsuz etkilerinin dengeli bir şekilde değerlendirilmesi, araştırmanın önemli bir boyutunu oluşturmaktadır.

Neoliberal politikaların sanat alanına etkisi ele alındığında, sanat giderek piyasa odaklı bir yapıya dönüşmektedir. Sanat üretimi ve dolaşımı, uluslararası ekonomik sistemle entegre olmuş, bienaller, sanat fuarları, müzayedeler ve özel galeriler aracılığıyla hız kazanmıştır. Bu süreçte, sanatın estetik ve kültürel değerinin yanı sıra ekonomik değeri de ön plana çıkmıştır. Bu durum, sanatın hem özerkliği hem de piyasa ilişkileri açısından tartışmalı bir alan yaratmaktadır.

Sanatın neoliberal kentlerdeki dönüşümü iki temel süreçle öne çıkmaktadır: kurumsallaşma ve araçsallaşma. Kurumsallaşma sürecinde sanat, galeriler, müzeler, bienaller ve sponsorluk mekanizmaları aracılığıyla piyasa ilişkilerine entegre olmaktadır. Araçsallaşma sürecinde ise sanat, ekonomik ve politik hedeflere hizmet eden bir araç hâline gelmektedir. Büyük sanat organizasyonları, kentlerin uluslararası pazarlanmasında ve marka değerlerinin artırılmasında kritik bir rol üstlenmektedir. Bu süreç, sanatın özerkliğini sınırlayan faktörleri görünür kılarken, ekonomik ve sponsorluk ilişkilerinin sanat üretimini şekillendirdiğini açıkça ortaya koymaktadır.

Neoliberal kentlerdeki bienaller, çağdaş sanatın geniş kitlelere ulaşmasını sağlamak ve küresel sermayenin kültürel alana müdahalesini görünür kılmaktadır. Bu etkinlikler aracılığıyla kentler, uluslararası sanat çevrelerinin ilgisini çekmekte, kültürel turizm açısından önemli kazanımlar elde etmekte ve kentlerin marka değerini artırmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, sponsorluk ilişkileri ve ekonomik beklentiler doğrultusunda şekillenen bu organizasyonlar, sanatın özerkliği üzerine tartışmaları da beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu durum, neoliberal kentlerde sanatın hem kültürel hem ekonomik olarak yeniden tanımlandığını göstermektedir.

Büyük sanat organizasyonlarının şehirlerin mekansal yapısına etkisi de göz ardı edilemez. Bu organizasyonlar, kent içindeki belirli alanların dönüşümünü tetiklemekte, altyapı yatırımlarını teşvik etmekte ve kentsel yenilenme süreçlerini hızlandırmaktadır. Örneğin, müze, galeri ve sergi alanlarının oluşturulması, tarihi bölgelerin restorasyonu ve kültürel tesislerin inşası, hem turizmi hem de yerel ekonomiyi canlandıran önemli araçlardır. Bununla birlikte, bu süreçler düşük gelirli topluluklar üzerinde olumsuz etkiler yaratabilmekte, mekansal adaletsizlikleri artırabilmektedir. Dolayısıyla, büyük sanat organizasyonlarının ekonomik ve kültürel faydaları ile sosyal maliyetleri arasındaki denge dikkatle incelenmelidir.

Sonuç olarak, neoliberal kentlerde gerçekleştirilen büyük sanat organizasyonları, yalnızca kültürel etkinlikler değil, aynı zamanda ekonomik, siyasal ve mekansal dönüşüm araçları olarak değerlendirilmelidir. Bu organizasyonlar, kentlerin küresel rekabet gücünü artırmakta, kentsel mekanın yeniden yapılandırılmasına katkı sağlamakta ve sanatın piyasa ilişkileri içerisinde yeniden tanımlanmasına aracılık etmektedir. Araştırma bulguları, bu organizasyonların kentlerin küreselleşmesine ve ekonomik gelişimine önemli katkılar sunduğunu; aynı zamanda sanatın giderek metalaştığını ve neoliberal sistemin bir parçası haline geldiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sanatın özerkliği ile piyasa ilişkileri arasındaki gerilim, günümüz sanat dünyasında temel tartışma alanlarından biri olarak önemini korumaktadır. Bu bağlamda, büyük sanat organizasyonlarının toplumsal, kültürel ve ekonomik etkilerinin bütüncül bir şekilde değerlendirilmesi, kent planlaması, kültürel politikalar ve sanat yönetimi alanları için önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.