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## ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

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Urban mega projects have become ubiquitous throughout the world, where the concept itself is manifesting as a “new political and physical animal”. In Turkey, they have become part of the daily life since 2011, when Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of time, announced his *Kanal İstanbul* project by saying: “Turkey deserves to see 2023 with such a big, crazy and great project. Today, we are rolling up our sleeves for one of the world's greatest projects, which cannot even be compared with the Panama Canal, Suez Canal or Corinth Canal”. Since then, we have been witnessing urban transformation by mega infrastructure projects along with social and political transformation of the country via economic policies that aim to keep the construction sector alive; which in turn, have strongly contributed to the emergence of a government-affiliated conservative bourgeoisie during the AKP era. The main question of this dissertation is how a technical object (i.e. urban mega project) serves as a new form of “technology of government” which transforms not only the geographical landscape but also extends strongly to reshaping the political, economic as well social landscapes. In this respect, we consider two mega infrastructure projects for our dissertation; namely, the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge (the Third Bridge over Bosphorus) and the Istanbul Grand Airport (the Third Airport in Istanbul).

The literature on infrastructure analysis regarding the Turkish case has generally adopted a limited focus on infrastructure, considering it either as a purely technical object or focusing solely on its success/failure with respect to economic and engineering criteria. Our dissertation, aims to contribute on the literature in this field by utilizing an alternative approach that considers the government’s extensive use of state-led urban mega project investments in order to re-create and distribute the land rent, to boost the economy, to preside over both the political discourse and developmentalist narrative, and finally, to reform the socio-spatial relations and collective memory. We conceptualise infrastructure within the wider assemblages of capital and power, where it has the capacity to be a transformative mechanism not only on land but also on socio- economic and political power structures. Thus, we mobilise assemblage thinking to discuss all aspects of urban mega projects thoroughly; namely, the actors involved in and influenced by these mega projects, and the symbols and ideas that come into existence around them.

The main argument of this dissertation is that large-scale infrastructure investment provides the Turkish government with strategic and tactical tools, policies, moments, and spaces through which to intervene in the economy and to try legitimising hegemonic discourse, while at the same time, transforming the country and society profoundly and irreversibly by the “concrete”. Part 1 elaborates on infrastructure’s capacity to transform through the mobilisation of various mechanisms such as law amendments, expropriation of natural resources, public contracts for urban infrastructure development, and public–private partnerships in the construction sector. Part 2 examines the embeddedness between the government and the business and shows how the AKP has re-invented mega infrastructure projects to provide the necessary support structure for the emergence and the sustainability a new conservative bourgeoisie that is closely affiliated with the government. Finally, Part 3 explores the common background of urban mega-projects’ key actors

(both political and economic ones) through an analysis of *waqfs* in Turkey. While being the focal point for the “growing aspirations and visions” of Istanbul, urban mega projects also constitute the centre of a reinvented *milli kimlik* (national identity). This re-invented identity is reincarnated in the Ottoman, Islamic, and Turkish origins and has been framed through symbols, rituals and representations based on the glorification of the Ottoman past, while ignoring multicultural and multi-ethnic components. Indeed, we find that whilst the construction-based “gift economy” reshaped during the AKP era enables some social groups to be embedded into the political and economic system, it creates exclusion for the dissident groups.

**Keywords:** Urban megaprojects, infrastructure, construction, assemblage, embeddedness, waqfs (religious endowments), İstanbul, AKP, contemporary Turkey