

SEMINAR

Istanbul : 21st Century Model of the Global City?

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After our successful and productive fieldtrip to Istanbul for the MA in [Governing the Large Metropolis](#) in January 2012 (see final report now available: http://master.sciences-po.fr/sites/default/files/Istanbul_Report_2012.pdf), we are proposing a follow up advanced research project that might build on the material we have gathered and connections we have made in the Istanbul. It is apparent to us that not only is Istanbul an extraordinary and accessible case right now of one of the "new" emerging global metropolises, but also that the multiple dimensions of urban development and change to be found in the city exemplify in striking ways the agenda proposed by the "Governance" approach to the urban studies that is the signature of the Sciences Po "Cities are Back in Town" research pôle. Further, expanding our interest in Istanbul fits ideally with the move at Sciences Po to develop an on-going programme of events and activities in Turkish Studies next year, led by Riva Kastoryano at CERI.

A characteristic of the urban studies approach shared by colleagues at Sciences Po is a dissatisfaction with the dominant, critical theory led, and increasingly lazy debates on neo-liberalism / global city restructuring that now fill the mainstream urban studies journals. Where this literature engages with emergent (non-Western) global cities, it often emphasizes the rise of networks and governance failures related to obsolete governmental boundaries, and the triumph of urban sprawl, factors both suggesting that large metropolises are not really governed or governable. But what is happening in and around large metropolis such as Istanbul confounds these approaches, as it does perhaps too as regards the brace of new, fast moving mega-cities -- Sao Paolo, Beijing, Cairo, Mexico City, Shanghai, Delhi, Johannesburg, Seoul, Singapore, etc -- currently posting similarly extraordinary development and growth statistics. The fact, too, that Istanbul is, of course, the only European large metropolis on the list, underlines moreover its importance in a regional sense to Europe and its environs.

We propose a fresh look at Istanbul as a case, with the working idea that we should not just be rolling out standard neo-liberal / global city hypotheses, but rather re-thinking how and why Istanbul might be suggesting elements of a new model of the global city, relevant to understand the emergent non-Western global metropolises of the twenty first century. Several aspects of contemporary Istanbul can be suggested as key dimensions of this model.

First, there is the fact that the politics behind Istanbul's extraordinary growth and transformation (which is being repeated in many other large cities around Turkey) is not comfortably liberal or Westernising, as might be assumed. Turkey presents the striking case of a moderate Islamist regime, using democracy and

populism to its own ends along with aspects of authoritarianism, to pursue a strikingly liberal, modernising path in its effects. It is not sure that typical "dependent development" models apply, nor that Turkey needs Europe as much as vice versa. For all the potential instabilities and uncertainties with Erdoğan and the AKP's intentions, the government is emanating (non-Western oriented) confidence, seeing itself as an exemplar in the Middle East and the region.

Second, global, regional and local capital has transformed Istanbul in ways that naturally suggest Istanbul has risen into a hub position in global city networks, with many of the features corresponding to the archetypal industries and production modes of the 1990s/2000s "neo-liberal" era: polarised labour markets, dramatic growth in FIRE services, housing and construction booms, culture and tourism, de-regulated entrepreneurship, specialised manufacturing and export, aggressive regional control over energy and natural resources. Turkish business large and small have grown dramatically, extending their operations with a sometimes stunning territorial range -- which encompasses the diasporas of Europe, the old Ottoman lands, and penetrates deep into former Soviet space. But is this all just global "neo-liberalism" at work? The strongly planning oriented strategies of the government, both national and city level, suggest otherwise. With housing and construction at the heart of the boom, it is striking to see how much this is a tightly governed growth and development model, with fast track housing and construction planning (the famous TOKI central agency), massive support for banks, government involvement in all aspects of the new, often Islamic, business, and huge, visionary "neo-Ottoman" infrastructure projects spearheaded by Western trained planning experts. This is an Asian capitalism parallel and no less organised or planned than other "miracle" Asian cities that have risen to hegemonically challenge American and European global leadership.

Third, as with Indian and Chinese cities, the growth and development drive is founded in spectacular demographics, with a huge youth population surplus hitched to astonishing rural to urban migration, atop of a twentieth century population growth for a city unmatched anywhere on the planet. As with other Asian cities, Istanbul and Turkey is rapidly becoming a receiving state of migration, as a hub of Balkan, Middle Eastern, African and Caucasian migrations. Post Second World War Western immigration and labour market models clearly need to be left behind. While the population boom suggests venerable modernist paradigms, it is mixed with features of stratification (massive new, secessionary middle classes, both secular and Islamic, living in the new parts of the city), exclusion and the simultaneous production of dense packed inner city, secondary underclass/worker populations (principally Kurdish), that also builds on Turkish nationalist and population formation in its logic. This is an urbanization/growth model that has no precedent in Western societies, albeit with strange echoes of industrialising cities of the nineteenth century.

Fourthly, we are also interested in culture and economic development, another signal feature of the "neo-liberal" global age, in which Istanbul is clearly a part and extension, in terms of its surplus of knowledge workers, creative dynamics, spectacular localised gentrification and real tensions between (conservative)

government and (radical, secular) civil society. However, again, a closer look suggests the need to break with a patronising, touristic fascination with a non-Western city coming to resemble European or North American cities, and rather take seriously the idea that Istanbul, after Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai or Rio may become an urban pole of global culture that transcends and decentres the typical ways in which modernising high and popular culture outside the West has always been a colonial operation. In the light of evidence about Istanbul's top down cultural policies and bottom up street level cultural production, we may have thus to revise ethnocentric accounts of the symbolic economy based on global capitals, such as Paris, London or New York.

Obviously, existing projects such as LSE's Urban Age (<http://lsecities.net/ua/conferences/2009-istanbul/>) & Istanbul City Portrait (at the IUAV in Venice: <http://istanbulcityportrait.wordpress.com/>) have amassed descriptive work and started to map out these trends, albeit still largely within the neo-liberal / global cities optic.

And the OECD territorial report on Istanbul adds terrific data and information: www.oecd.org/gov/oecdterritorialreviewsistanbulturkey.htm. Stressing the governance angle at Sciences Po gives our project a political economy edge (articulating *Urban Sociology* and *Political Science*), that seems particularly important right now given both the huge ambitions of the current regime and the frisson of anxiety currently being caused by the most recent political trends in Erdoğan's government.

We are not the first to suggest that Istanbul is a central global case, or even that a set of fully theorised studies on Istanbul might begin to constitute an emergent "Istanbul school" in urban studies. What we hope to point to is the possibility that a concerted, integrated reflection on the Istanbul case might genuinely provide a set of propositions about the new (non-Western) emergent global cities/metropolises. That is, identifying features of these cities which specify how and why they are not merely lagged versions of past paradigmatic models, which each had their "global" moment, such as Paris, London, New York, London, Chicago, Los Angeles, Shanghai, etc, but are rather features which durably reflect the moment (the early decades of the twentieth century) when these cities are becoming an important unit in the global urban system and global/regional economy. Our question is whether the features identified in current day and future Istanbul may provide us with the analytical key to the broader picture. Methodologically, taking Istanbul as the paradigmatic case, is of course to parallel what was done (self-consciously) with the invention of the LA School, and our conference should thus also bear some reflection on the issue of how single case study material may (or may not) be generalised and propose itself as an analytical or historical model.

Our proposal for the conference is to use it as the first stage of a process towards a book which might present and assess Istanbul's claims to be a model city of the 21st Century. Our idea is to discuss with a number of key experts on Istanbul to present to us their amassed data and visions of the city, in the light of the broader question, of whether what is being witnessed in Istanbul can be

generalised as an urban dynamic archetypal of other new global metropolises outside the Western world?