



## **Influence of International Planning Ideas on Istanbul's Urban Fabric**

**Hatice AYATAÇ**, Assistant Professor  
Istanbul Technical University, Turkey  
ayatachatice@gmail.com

Diffusion is the process by which economical, political, and cultural experiences are shared amongst countries. The international diffusion of planning ideas is defined as borrowing and imposition at national and local levels. Diffusion studies have become a major conceptual tool in assessing the impact of planning on urbanization in the twentieth century. Generally defined as "the sharing of experiences," discussions of diffusion focus in town planning have been promoted by planning historian Stephen Ward.

Studies of diffusion in planning focus on three fundamental questions: how the diffusion mechanism develops (key personalities influencing this development, reformists or professional milieus, intergovernmental actions, and so on); which ideas and practices influence this process; and what the fundamental social, economical, political, and cultural ramifications during the diffusion process are. What the available scholarship suggests is that diffusion needs to be assessed as a highly variable, rather than a single, uniform, process. While there may be similarities in planning experiences between places, the outcomes and resulting products differ. Changes and transformations in developing cities and countries are specifically compared.

As a developing country, Turkey has been subjected to many influences from without, as well as exercising its own influence on Europe, America, and the Orient. The Ottoman Empire was a major influence on the European, Asian, and North African territories under its sovereignty. This identity was clearly stamped on architecture and public works in these places. The period of decline, where the Empire lagged behind Western development, however, saw a reversal of influences. Valuable works exist on these events in the history of Turkish planning. The main focus of these works is the planning experiences related to becoming more modern, westernized, and up to date. The most recent discourses concentrate on the European Union and the harmonization process.

The most significant arena of this process took place in Istanbul. The processes that developed under the "Westernized, Modern, and Contemporary Turkey" definitions actually describe imitation and borrowing. A more selective approach dominated until the 1950s, and the contribution of foreign experts and planners was more definitive. Starting with specifically the second half of the 1950s, modeling and exact implementations became the order of the day. The planning executions that focused on Istanbul during this time have been criticized for the harm they have wreaked upon the topographical, spatial, and cultural aspects despite their ostensible objective of beautifying Istanbul. In addition, a holistic planning culture failed to take hold. All planning projects concentrated on selected areas of the city. The preference for the views of foreign planners over those of local planners and architects was taken to be a prestigious choice. It is possible to interpret this situation as a direct result of the imposition on space of values admired by politicians. Conspicuous here are internal imposition as well as external model borrowing. The European Union accession process aims to harmonize all countries, which, in turn, brings the country into an external imposition process.

In this context, the purpose of this paper is to scrutinize the validity of the typology of the International diffusion of planning ideas process through the development of planning in Turkey as revealed through the case study of Istanbul. It aims to analyze the effects on the urban space of this process and its manifestation on the basis of implementations done in Istanbul. Leading international and local publications have been examined as well as the development plans and reports published by the State Planning Institute (SPI).

**KEY WORDS:** Diffusion, urban planning, Istanbul, Turkey.