

# The port of Istanbul: The space of entangled visions in the early republican era

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## Abstract

The Port of Istanbul, a key economic and spatial concern since the late 19th century, remained central to urban planning debates in the Republican era. Efforts to reorganize the port were closely tied to Istanbul's master plan and legislative regulations. While aligned with state-led modernization initiatives, the port's history reveals a complex interplay of diverse actors, urban spaces, and conflicting visions. Continuously reshaped both physically and discursively in the public sphere, it became a site of negotiation, reflecting broader urban transformations and discrepancies.

This paper examines the reproduction of the Port of Istanbul from the Early Republican period to the mid-20th century, a transformative era in urban development. Beyond physical alterations, it explores how various actors' perceptions materialized in the public sphere through archival documents, articles, reports, planning documents. By offering insights into the port's layered history, the paper highlights its multidimensional role in shaping Istanbul's modernization. Ultimately, this study reveals that the port was not merely a government-directed project but a dynamic urban arena-one that functioned as a microcosm of the city's evolving urban complexities.

## Keywords

Port of Istanbul, Public sphere, Public space, Republican era planning, Urban transformation.

## 1. Introduction

The Port of Istanbul, as a crucial economic hub, had been a subject of debate and spatial contention since the mid-19th century, remaining central to urban planning discussions in the Republican era. While modernization efforts shaped its transformation, the port was not merely a government-directed project but a contested urban space that reflected diverse visions, conflicts, and negotiations.

Following the First World War and the subsequent proclamation of the Republic, the importance of ports and railway terminals escalated, becoming crucial components for Istanbul as the city underwent significant social and economic transformations. However, unlike the standardized railroad operations, the organization of the Port of Istanbul remained complex, and the decline in port activity that started during the First World War persisted (“Çok mühim,” 1933; “Harpten evvel,” 1930). Additionally, as Istanbul transitioned from being the capital and sought a new identity during the early Republican period, there was a growing belief that the city could flourish as a leading commercial hub. Consequently, the Port of Istanbul played a significant role within the planning initiatives and debates of the Republican era (Tekeli & İlkin, 1989).

In the early 1930s, various legislative and institutional measures were implemented concerning the port. Initially, a monopoly was established for port management and logistics, followed by the nationalization of the port. The restructuring process of the port also included urban and architectural changes, occasionally aligning with efforts to formulate the master plan of Istanbul.

Efforts to modernize the port and reshape Istanbul’s urban fabric, rooted in the Tanzimat period, involved interconnected projections of urban landscapes, as well as new consensus and struggles. Rather than a top-down modernization process, these efforts reflect the agency of various actors in shaping a distinct space for modern urban activities. Far from being merely technocratic or bureaucratic measures to discipline Istanbul into becoming a “new” city shaped by transportation,

hygiene, and aesthetics, these endeavors embodied a dynamic interplay of competing interests and visions. Through these attempts, the multi-layered structures of public space were revealed, showcasing conflicts among individual or institutional participants, such as local and foreign architects, writers, journalists, administrators, representatives, bureaucrats, merchants, industrialists, and Istanbul’s residents. In this environment, complex visions of design, planning, and production, along with debates related to urban space, gained partial visibility through newspapers, periodicals, official reports, programs, and plans (Açıkgöz, 2018, pp. 2–3).

Similarly, comprehending the Port of Istanbul beyond its physical reshaping process provides insight into the multi-layered structures of this specific public space. Rather than viewing it solely as an urban space shaped by physical planning tools, it can also be critiqued as an “issue” discursively produced and reproduced in the public sphere within a unique network of relations.

Considering that this “issue” can reveal intricate motives and interwoven relationships among agents of power, authority, the built environment, and the public in the creation of this specific urban space, this study examines how the port and its reproduction became subjects of dispute and contention in public opinion. Additionally, to investigate conflicts concerning property rights and the spatial and economic activities of the Port of Istanbul, it is crucial to consider the diverse evaluations of various actors involved.

This paper investigates how the Port of Istanbul became a focal point in the public sphere through the influence of media, official reports, master plans, and legal regulations. Moreover, it traces the circulation of ideas and proposals related to the Port of Istanbul. By examining the spatial and discursive aspects of various approaches to the port, this study offers a new perspective for understanding its development. The significance of the 1950s is pivotal in this analysis, representing a turning point and historical boundary. During this period, the urban land-

scape underwent transformative shifts, marked by the post-Prost era's dynamics and the initiation of the Democratic Party's rule.

## **2. The port of Istanbul: A brief historical overview**

Examining the historical regulations of Istanbul's embankments and quays reveals a continuous institutional and spatial history of the port dating back to the late 19th century and extending into the Republican period.

In the 19th century, the embankments and quays of the Golden Horn, serving as Istanbul's harbor for centuries, became inadequate for the growing population and international maritime traffic. The need for regularizing the waterfront of Istanbul gained significance due to the city's expanding population and the increasing importance of public health and aesthetics (Çelik, 2017, p. 99). Although the concept of physical intervention was initially proposed in the document known as 1839 İlmühaberi, the existing port structures and quays continued to be used with partial renovations until the mid-19th century (Erkal, 2010).

A pivotal development for the Port of Istanbul occurred with the concessions granted to Marius Michel in 1879 and 1890. Marius Michel, a former member of the French commercial fleet, was appointed General Manager of the Lighthouses Administration in 1860. He was given the privilege to construct quays, warehouses, and office buildings for the Port of Istanbul between Sirkeci-Unkapanı and Azapkapı-Tophane waterfronts. While the first contract in 1879 was not realized, in 1890, Michel established a private company called Dersaâdet Rıhtım, Dok ve Antrepo Anonim Osmanlı Şirketi, receiving a new concession to construct and operate the port for 85 years. The company was responsible for creating sidewalks, driveways, and loading areas between the new quays and buildings, resembling the arrangements proposed in the İlmühaber (Çelik, 2017, pp. 99-101). A news report from 1890, as documented by Çelik (p. 102), also reveals that

the evaluation of the Port of Istanbul exceeded its commercial purpose as a hub, highlighting its significant link to the urban environment.

Dersaâdet Rıhtım, Dok ve Antrepo Anonim Osmanlı Şirketi completed the Galata quays in 1895 and the Sirkeci quays in 1900. The construction of customs buildings, warehouses, and administrative buildings on both coasts began but faced challenges due to conflicts between state institutions and the company, complex property relations, unexpected costs, and structural obstacles related to the geography and existing urban fabric of the waterfronts. As a result, temporary solutions were implemented for the port's operation (Erkal, 2010). The construction of quays between Unkapanı and Galata Bridge was delayed and never realized due to financial issues (Çelik, 2017, pp. 99-104).

In the late Ottoman period, Istanbul's port infrastructure was at the center of ongoing debates, shaped by the city's evolving role as an imperial capital and a commercial hub. The waterfront, particularly along the Golden Horn and the Marmara coast, functioned as both a gateway for trade and an industrial zone, yet it suffered from serious infrastructural shortcomings. The irregular growth of docks, warehouses, and industrial facilities created inefficiencies, making port operations increasingly difficult to manage. One of the main concerns was the fragmented nature of port administration. Various stakeholders, including foreign concession holders, municipal authorities, and private enterprises, had competing interests in the control and development of port facilities. While port construction efforts aimed at modernization, the prolonged delays in completing essential infrastructure and systems meant that the port had to continue operating under outdated conditions, highlighting ongoing difficulties in adapting to a modern port system. The question of where and how to restructure port facilities became a pressing issue. However, financial constraints, bureaucratic obstacles, and conflicting visions among stakeholders often hindered the realization of large-scale modernization projects (Erkal, 2010).

Against this backdrop, the construction of Haydarpaşa Port on the Anatolian side marked a significant development in Istanbul's port infrastructure. Built next to the city's terminal for the Anatolian railways, the project was initiated through a concession granted to the German company Haydarpaşa Limanı Şirketi in 1900. This new location avoided the challenges of modernizing existing quays in Üsküdar (Erkal, 2010). However, it did not emerge as a major commercial alternative, as Istanbul's primary trade and port functions remained concentrated in the city's historic commercial core.

The outbreak of the First World War further disrupted the development of port infrastructure, bringing construction efforts in the Port of Istanbul to a halt (İstanbul İktisat Komisyonu, 2006, p. 124). By the early 20th century, the port's role in urban life had become increasingly complex. It was not only a trade and transport hub but also a contested space where economic, political, and urban planning concerns intersected. As debates over port modernization remained unresolved, these infrastructural and spatial challenges persisted into the Republican era, influencing later efforts to redefine Istanbul's port system.

After the war, Istanbul underwent significant changes, losing its status as the capital along with international commercial activities, its poly-cultural structure, and half of its population. Consequently, the port became crucial for revitalizing the city's role in production and commerce. Debates about the Port of Istanbul extended beyond logistics, spatial organization, or corporate structure and the idea of relocating the port to an entirely new area was frequently debated, gaining momentum in the late 1920s, while the

Port Company resumed the construction of various structures on the Galata and Sirkeci waterfronts (İstanbul Rıhtım Şirketi'nin Galata'daki rıhtım ve antrepo, 1927).

During the Republican era, as monopolies were established to transfer commercial activities from privileged foreign capital companies to a new bourgeois class, the Port of Istanbul underwent institutional restructurings. Initially, the authority and responsibility of the Port Company were transferred to a monopoly, and in the 1930s, the port's management and operations were nationalized. However, multiple directorate changes occurred until the 1950s (Bilgili, 2016, pp. 67–68) (Figure 1).

In addition to various ministries, autonomous local groups such as bargemen, porters, and coachmen also played a role (Tekeli & İlkin, 1989). Authority conflicts and variable property rights expanded the port issue. Numerous archival documents reveal the dynamic interrelations of the actors influencing the spatial transformations of the port (İstanbul antrepolarının 2 no.lu binanın, 1926; İstanbul Galata'da bulunan eski liman dairesi, 1930; İstanbul Liman Dairesinin plan ve projeleri, 1929; İstanbul limanında yapılması düşünülen tesisat, 1936; İstanbul Limanı'nda yeni tesisler yapılması, 1935; İstanbul Rıhtım Şirketi'nin Galata'daki rıhtım ve antrepo, 1927).

In 1929, the Ford Motor Company Exports Inc. Istanbul converted the warehouses in Tophane, leased by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Industry from the Turkish Maritime Administration [Türkiye Seyr-i Sefain İdaresi], into an automotive assembly factory. Operating until 1933, the company, with "free zone" rights, docked its ships directly at the To-

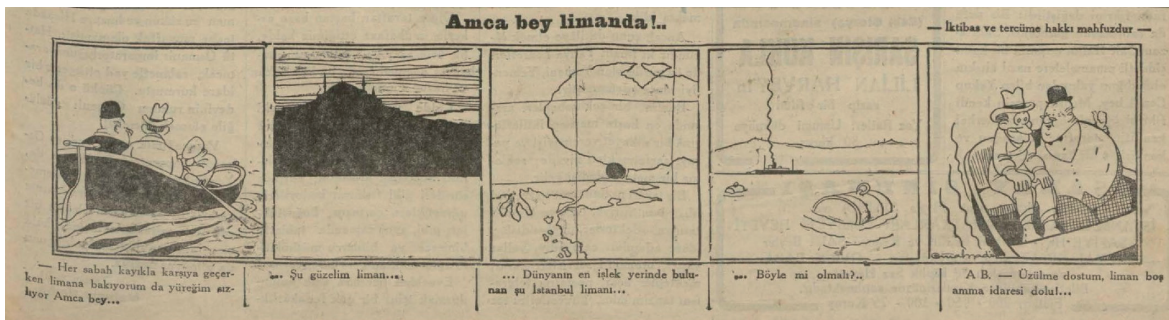


Figure 1. A cartoon critiques the frequent alterations in port management ("Amcabey Limanda," 1934).



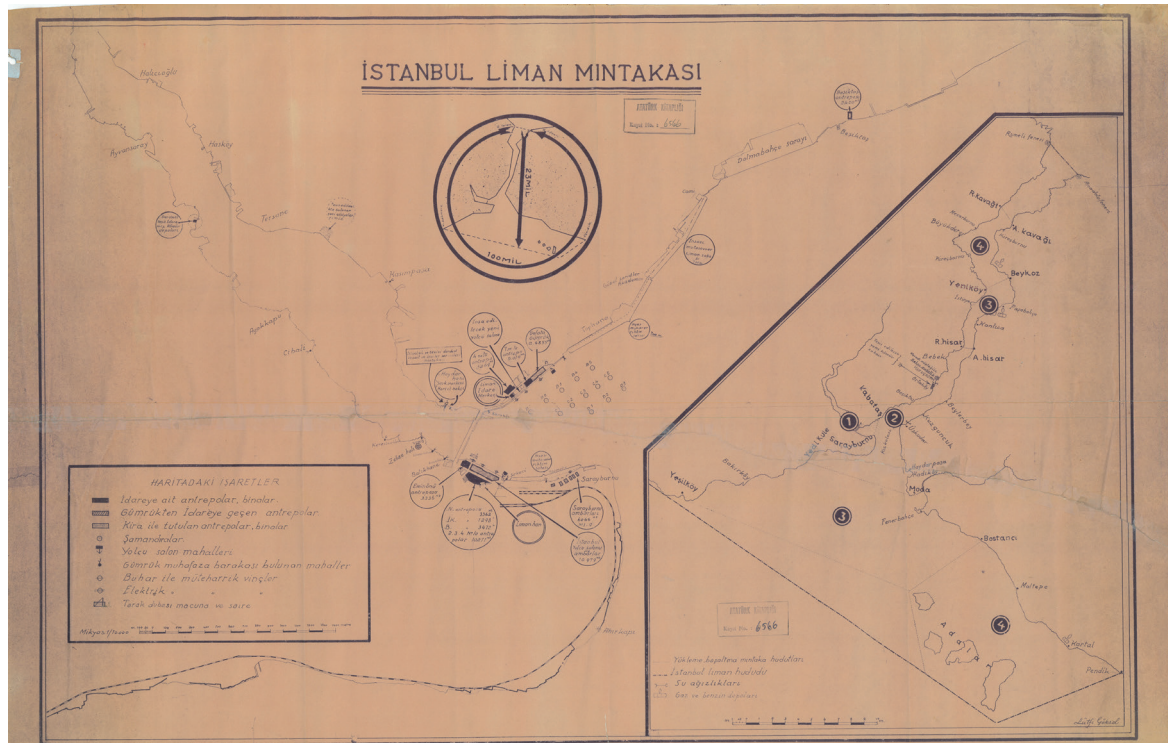


Figure 2. Map showing the different sections of the port in the 1930s (Göksel, n.d.).

phane quays, preventing potential conflicts with local actors such as the Port Company, State Ports Authority, Maritime Administration, and the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Odman, 2011).

The Port of Istanbul, planned and constructed at the end of the 19th century and still under construction in the early 20th century in a newly established regime, was an institutional and spatial structure that went through significant transformations (Erkal, 2010) (Figure 2). As a result of this anachronism, the integration of the port into modern port systems became problematic, contributing to the fact that the port remained an issue and was still debated in the public sphere in the 1950s.

### 3. Revealing the layers: The port of Istanbul in public space

The discussions surrounding the Port of Istanbul gained visibility through various public mediums. Istanbul's first urbanism and municipality journal, *İstanbul Şehremaneti Mecmuası*, played a significant role in this discourse, publishing numerous articles about the port during the 1920s (Ali Suad, 1926a, 1926b, 1927; Cemil, 1926, as cited in Çay, 2013; Emin, 1924,

as cited in Sümbül, 2011; Grosman, 1925; "İstanbul Limanı Hakkında," 1926; "İstanbul'un Umranen ve İktisaden," 1924; "Kanunlar, Nizamlar, Talimatlar," 1925; "Limanlarda Serbest Mıntıka," 1926; Mehmet Ziya, 1925; Mubahat, 1925; Muhiddin Bey, 1928; Osman Nuri, 1925, as cited in Çay, 2013; Osman Nuri & Ali Suad, 1925; Süreya, 1924). These articles not only evaluated the port as a commercial entity but also examined its role in the city's development, linking it to themes of transportation and tourism. The journal portrayed the port not merely as an isolated commercial structure but as a matter of public concern, integral to the sanitary, industrial, transportation, and aesthetic aspects of Istanbul, directly tied to planning initiatives. The articles emphasized the responsibilities of local actors, such as the municipality and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in managing the port's logistics. Additionally, they deliberated on the suitability of different city areas for various port functions, revealing conflicts among influential figures within the journal, such as Cemil Bey [Topuzlu], Emin Bey [Erkul], Ali Suad, and Osman Nuri [Ergin]. The articles, scrutinizing the Port of Istanbul through legal,

commercial, and technical lenses with reference to European examples, depicted it as a modern urban function and an aesthetic tool for the city, marking it as a consistent subject of discussion since the early years of the Republic. Similarly, other periodicals like *Liman* and *Devlet Denizyolları ve Limanları Mecmuası* published various articles, drawings, and visuals on the history of Istanbul's docks, the passenger lounge built in Galata, and different ports in Europe (Bilge, 1941; "Garp Limanları," 1928; Manyas, 1940).

Notably, the reports on the Port of Istanbul from the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a major player at the time, reflected the views of the business community. These reports, especially those from 1927 and 1928, directly addressed the port, considering it not only as an economic affair but a "scientific" issue. Prioritizing the rehabilitation of the existing port, they advocated for European experts to review port projections, aligning with perspectives presented in the *Şehremaneti Mecmuası* articles (*İstanbul Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Ticaret-i Ceriye Şubesi*, 1927; *İstanbul Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Ticaret-i Bahriye Şubesi*, 1928; *İstanbul İktisat Komisyonu*, 2006, pp. 119-120).

These concerns about port inefficiencies were also shared by Ahmet Hamdi Başar, the director of the Port Authority, who critically assessed the disorganized infrastructure, fragmented customs operations, and poor logistical planning that hindered commercial growth. While supporting modernization, he opposed the idea of relocating the port entirely, instead advocating for expanding and improving the existing facilities in Galata and Sirkeci. Furthermore, he stressed the need for centralized and strategic management, warning that without proper reforms, the port would remain an obstacle rather than a facilitator of Istanbul's economic and urban development (Başar, 1929, as cited in Erkal, 2010). These concerns were reinforced in the 1931 Laroche Report, commissioned by the Rıhtım, Dok ve Antrepo Şirketi and prepared by Charles Laroche. The report similarly highlighted the inefficiencies of the port's fragmented management and infrastructure, ad-

vocating for systematic modernization rather than relocation (Bilge, 1949, pp. 68-77).

Parallel to these debates, legal measures were introduced, most notably the Istanbul Port Ordinance of 1926, which sought to regulate port operations and ensure safety (*Ticaret-i Bahriye Müdüriyeti*, 1926).

In the 1930s, as urban planning efforts accelerated, discussions on the Port of Istanbul gained prominence, emphasizing its crucial role in the city's development. The enactment of the Ports Law and Municipality Code No. 1580 coincided with initiatives to establish a comprehensive master plan for Istanbul. Recognizing the port's significance in shaping the city's future, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry proposed that port and railway experts contribute to the planning process ("*İstanbul limanı*," 1937; "*Müstakbel İstanbul*," 1932; "*Şehir planı*," 1934). Ahmet Hamdi Başar, the port director, similarly argued that modernizing the port was inseparable from Istanbul's urban planning efforts, emphasizing the need for an integrated approach (Başar, 1937).

While debates on the port's significance intensified in the 1930s, discussions about its impact on Istanbul's urban development were not new. Among the prominent voices advocating for change was Cemil Topuzlu, who viewed the port's reorganization as a key factor in shaping the city's future. Serving as Istanbul's mayor in two different periods (1912-1914, 1919-1920) and later as a city council member in 1946, Topuzlu emphasized that relocating the port was essential for the city's overall planning, as he believed the entire urban structure depended on it. He argued that a modern port should integrate essential storage and commercial facilities, which were then scattered across the city's most valuable areas. To achieve a well-ordered urban layout, these functions needed to be relocated to a newly designated port district. Simply expanding and improving the existing port, he maintained, would be a wasteful and short-sighted approach; instead, he promoted a radical relocation to facilitate Istanbul's modernization. As a key figure in Is-

tanbul's urban development, Topuzlu strongly advocated for constructing a new port along the coastline between Yedikule and Yenikapı, accompanied by railway infrastructure, industrial storage facilities, and transportation networks. His vision was driven by the belief that the existing locations hindered the modernization and aesthetic transformation of the city. Although he considered alternative locations, such as Büyükçekmece Lake, he maintained that Yedikule was the most viable option in the short term (Topuzlu, 1937, pp. 3–16). Topuzlu also emphasized the importance of clearing industrial and storage areas from the Golden Horn and the historic peninsula, proposing the removal of factories, shipyards, coal depots, and customs offices from these areas and their transformation into commercial and recreational spaces (Cemil, 1926).

Urban planning experts and architects, such as Hermann Jansen, Ernst Egli, and Martin Wagner, also asserted that the port issue and city development should be addressed together. Hermann Jansen, a German urban planning professor and a candidate for the planning specialist position in Istanbul, advocated for a master plan that provided solutions not only for the city's port but also for public open spaces and transportation issues ("M. Yansen'in," 1931). Additionally, Ernst Egli, an Austrian architect and urban planner, went beyond proposing solutions for the port; he engaged his students in developing the master plan for Istanbul at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1932. He advocated for the expansion of the port to the Golden Horn by building a suspension bridge between Tünel Square and Süleymaniye ("İstanbul nasıl," 1932). Similarly, German architect and city planner Martin Wagner, associated with a project linked to the Port of Istanbul in the 1930s, emphasized that the realization of the master plan hinged upon resolving the port issue. He advocated for the construction of modern ports along the Marmara coast and around Haydarpaşa (Erkal, 2010).

In 1933, besides the enactment of the Istanbul Port Regulation, an interna-

tional competition was organized, inviting Hermann Ehlgötz, Jacques Henri Lambert, and Donat-Alfred Agache to propose plans for Istanbul's development. As they envisioned Istanbul becoming an international port city, each expert presented alternative locations for the port. Agache suggested creating five separate harbors along the Golden Horn's southern and northern banks for different activities. Lambert proposed establishing the port along the Marmara coast, between Kumkapı and Bakırköy. In contrast, Ehlgötz recommended two suitable places, Yenikapı and Haydarpaşa, due to the connection with the Anatolian railway. He also suggested that, before a final decision is made, parties "involved in economic affairs" should be involved in the study of the port's future location. Ehlgötz foresaw temporarily expanding the existing port to Sarayburnu and implementing a ferry service between Sirkeci and Haydarpaşa to address the current state of the port ("İstanbul Şehir Planı," 1935). The committee established to evaluate the port issue found Ehlgötz's proposal acceptable, aligning with previous reports and deemed feasible given the economic conditions of the time. However, Ehlgötz's plan was not implemented, leading to a continued search for a planner until the French architect-urbanist Henri Prost took on the task of crafting the master plan and program for Istanbul in 1936 (Bilsel, 2010a, p. 49).

Simultaneously, conflicts emerged among central and local authorities, as well as Türkiye's young generation of architects and foreign architects, regarding the port issue. Contrary to the ideas published in Şehremaneti Mecmuası advocating for an autonomous administration for the port, some newspaper articles suggested the government take charge of port affairs ("Asma köprü," 1930). A newspaper report from 1930 highlighted the Municipality of Istanbul's refusal to take over the port's management ("Liman komisyonu: Rıhtım," 1930). Istanbul's governor-mayor, Muhittin Üstündağ, also declared that the port issue was not solely related to urban administration but required government involvement. He emphasized that the location



of the future port, as proposed by foreign planners, required government approval (“İstanbulun imarı,” 1933). On the other hand, architect Sedat Çetintaş argued that Istanbul’s master plan and the port’s location should have been developed by a Turkish architect (Çetintaş, 1936). Similarly, architect Burhan Arif [Ongun] criticized the foreign experts’ suggestions as reflective of 19th-century “corrupted European urbanism” in an article published in *Arkitekt* (Burhan Arif, 1933a, 1933b).

The debates among central and local authorities, as well as Turkish and foreign architects, became evident, revealing diverse opinions on the administration of the port and the involvement of foreign planners. Throughout this period, the Port of Istanbul remained a central focus in public discussions, embodying a complex interplay of economic, scientific, and aesthetic considerations.

#### 4. Fragmented ideas on a complex urban space: The Prost period

Henri Prost, initially invited to the 1933 planning competition by the Municipality of Istanbul, declined the invitation as he was engaged in the Master Plan of the Paris metropolitan area. In 1934, he was invited to plan a thermal site in Yalova. Upon visiting for the Yalova project in 1935, Muhittin Üstündağ invited Prost once again to undertake the planning of Istanbul, leading to the preparation of a master plan and program in 1936 (Bilsel, 2015, p. 514).

After Prost’s commission, a program addressing the port issue was also developed, and financial resources were sought. Discussions with Port Authority’s director Raufi Manyas, former head of the Municipality’s Directory of Urban Development Ziya [Kocainan], and a delegation of port engineers resulted in the decision to align existing port plans with the city’s future master plan (“Bu sene,” 1936; “Galata rıhtımının,” 1936; “Müstakbel İstanbul,” 1936).

In 1943, Prost prepared a 10-year plan for the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul, similar to Emin Bey’s [Erkul] 10-year development pro-

gramme in the 1920s. This plan included urban developments for the next decade and addressed the port issue. Prost’s approach to the port aligned with Lambert and Ehlgötz’s ideas and Şehremaneti Mecmuası’s frequent opinions, proposing relocating the port to Yenikapı and emphasizing panoramic views of the Marmara shore. In line with the views expressed in various contemporary periodicals, Prost criticized the spread of port facilities along the Bosphorus, expressing in a 1936 note that his master plan aimed to preserve the Bosphorus’s urban fabric by locating the port and industrial zones west of Yedikule (Bilsel, 2010b, pp. 137–139).

However, the Ministry of Public Works favored Haydarpaşa for the new port’s location, sparking a dispute between Prost and the central government (Bilsel, 2010b, p. 116). A 1935 decree signed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stated that the port would remain and be developed in its current locations, Sirkeci and Galata. Ultimately, Prost proposed a plan for Galata and Sirkeci quays, which, though not approved for urbanism, proceeded with spatial arrangements like dock construction and passenger lounge in Galata (“Duyumlar,” 1936; “İstanbulun imarı,” 1938; “İstanbulun imarı meselesi,” 1938). The 1937 master plan for the European side excluded the proposed port and industrial estate between Yedikule and Bakırköy, and the 1939 master plan for the Asian side included Haydarpaşa Port. It is possible that the decision-making process was influenced by many factors, such as the insufficient bureaucratic support for the previous proposal, the financial difficulties that hinder the implementation of large-scale spatial changes, and the expectations of the municipal authorities, which emphasize the modernisation of the urban area (Bilsel, 2010a, pp. 54–55).

In a 1937 *Ulus* article, Falih Rıfkı Atay highlighted the complex nature of the port issue, noting that while Prost considered it a major concern, only the state could address this fundamental issue (“İstanbul’un yeni planı,” 1937). Prost also suggested that the issue should be examined by experts due



to the port's specialized nature. Even when the master plan was approved in 1939, it was decided to continue examining the port issue (Durhan, 2009, p. 142).

Newspaper reports and columns during the 1930s detailed the port's complexities. Discussions ranged from monopoly issues and transportation networks to the proposal for a "free zone" in the port ("Çok mühim bir," 1933; Daver, 1930a; "İstanbul limanı," 1930; "İstanbulda serbest liman," 1934; "Limanımız," 1930; Nadi, 1930f, 1930g, 1934). The media increasingly framed the port as a fundamental aspect of the master plan, linking it to Istanbul's economic development, transportation network, and even the proposal of a suspended bridge over the Golden Horn ("Asma köprü meselesi," 1930; Birson, 1936; Daver, 1930b; Etem, 1930; Haydar İbrahim, 1932; "İstanbul'un imarı meselesi," 1938; "İstanbul limanı," 1930; "Kendi Kendimizi," 1932; Tevfik, 1930). In the 1930s, Istanbul's image as a city of "commerce, industry, and tourism" persisted, echoing the discourse of the 1920s (Daver, 1930b; "İstanbul bir," 1930; Nadi, 1930b). Yunus Nadi, in *Cumhuriyet* editorials, emphasized the need to evaluate the port along with the city's economy and development, suggesting it could save Istanbul and enhance the Golden Horn's natural beauty (Nadi, 1930a, 1930b, 1930c, 1930d, 1930e, 1932a, 1932b, 1932c, 1933, 1937).

Various figures debated the port's prospective locations in public discussions (Figure 3). Egli proposed extending the port into the Golden Horn, while Emin Erkul suggested the inner parts of the Golden Horn could suffice with appropriate arrangements ("İstanbul'un imarı," 1938). Ziya Bey, Municipal Director of Civil Works, believed that the current port met existing requirements and it could eventually be relocated between Kumkapı and Yedikule or near Çekmece ("Asma köprü," 1932).

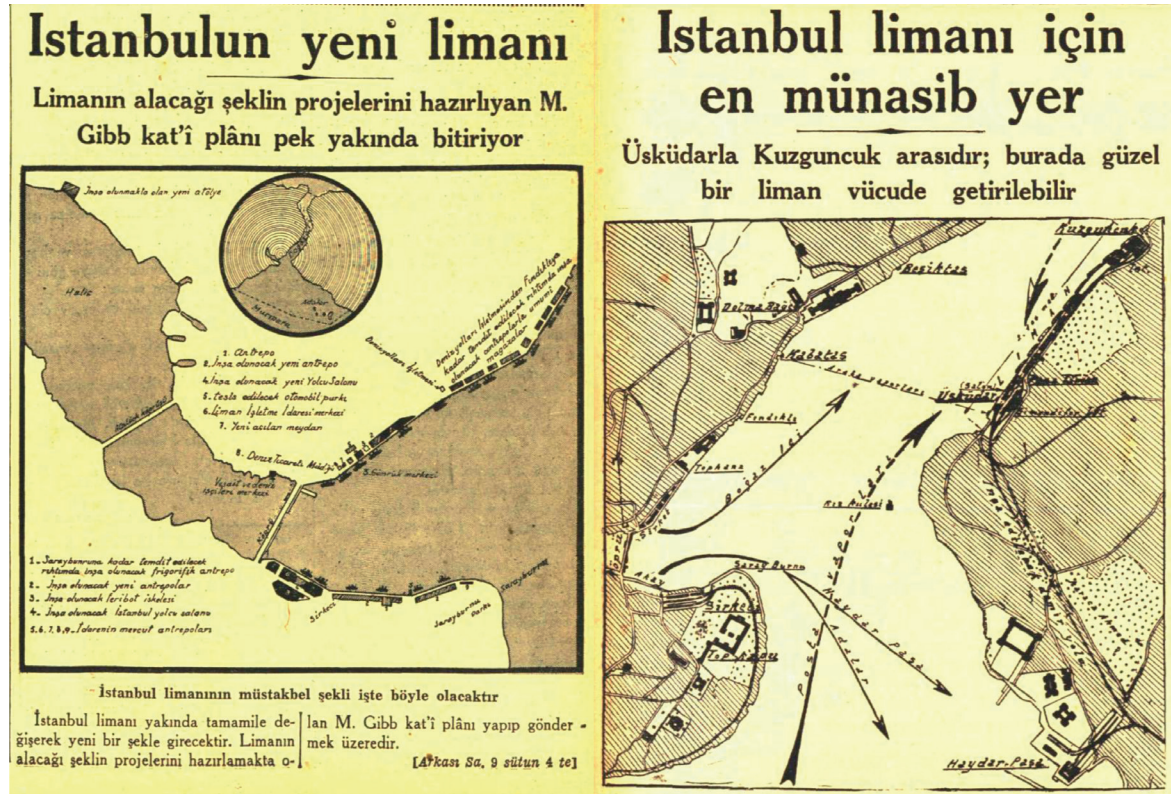
As previously mentioned, Cemil Topuzlu remained a strong advocate for Yedikule as the ideal port location, citing its spatial, economic, transportation, and security advantages. According to Topuzlu, had his proposal

been implemented, Galata, which was heavily shaped by maritime trade, could have transformed into one of Istanbul's most aesthetically appealing districts ("İstanbul limanı," 1931; "İstanbul'un imarı," 1937; "Profesör Cemil," 1937). Meanwhile, Galip Alnar, the Istanbul Municipality Director of Roads and Bridges Branch, advocated for the establishment of a modern port situated between Salacak and Bostancı, underscoring the significance of strategic location and contemporary infrastructure (Alnar, 1935).

Yet, disagreements persisted. Minister of Economy Şakir Kesebir asserted that relocating the port to Yenikapı region was not an immediate priority ("Liman meselesi," 1938). Similarly, writer and journalist Abidin Daver criticized the proposition, arguing that Yenikapı's limited hinterland and the anticipated economic burden of the project made relocation unfeasible (Daver, 1935).

At the same time, Haydarpaşa remained consistently under consideration as a potential site ("İstanbul limanı: Haydarpaşada," 1935). In a similar vein, İbrahim Ayad, the former assistant chief engineer of the Municipality, identified the region between Üsküdar and Kuzguncuk as the most suitable locale for the port, citing its convenient connection with the hinterland (Ayad, 1937). In contrast, Cafer Seno, described as "a dweller and lover of Istanbul who is interested in its beauties," argued that aesthetic considerations could harmonize with economic reasons. He asserted that extending the port to Unkapanı would be both more economical and aesthetically pleasing, envisioning the transformation of the Marmara shore into "wide boulevards decorated with palm trees" (Seno, 1937).

Amid conflicting views, the uncertainty about the port's location occasionally hampered other architectural projects. For example, the plan to rebuild the courthouse, which had been destroyed by fire, in Sirkeci was criticised for fear that it would hinder the modernisation of the port ("İstanbul'un yeni," 1934). All the different perspectives and discussions are significant in demonstrating the fluidity of



**Figure 3.** Two newspaper reports on different proposals for the location of the port (Ayad, 1937; “İstanbulun yeni limanı,” 1937).

ideas about urban space and functions around various emphases.

Apart from the master plan, various committees and ministries worked on Port of Istanbul projects. In 1937, the Ministry of Economy approved several works by the Port Authority, including constructing a reinforced concrete warehouse in Mumhane, installing mechanical loading and unloading equipment, building construction and repair shops in Kasımpaşa converting the existing structures on the docks into modern warehouses, building a passenger hall, a park, and a square in front of Rıhtım Han, and completing the rehabilitation and development project of the British “Gip” company on the port (“İstanbul limanında,” 1937; “İktisad Vekili,” 1937). However, these committees faced criticism for not implementing their envisioned projects (“Liman işleri,” 1930; “Liman işlerinin,” 1932; “Liman Komisyonu,” 1930).

Throughout the 1930s, newspapers and architectural journals covered the continuing progress in the port, discussing issues such as the need for a modern passenger hall and international competitions for its design, with the impact on tourists at the centre of

the debate (“Duyumlar,” 1936; “Gala-ta rıhtımı,” 1935; “İstanbul limanının,” 1931, “İstanbul rıhtımları,” 1934; “Limanda yapılacak,” 1936; “Limanda yeni,” 1935; “Rıhtımlar çöküyor,” 1936; “Rıhtımlar için,” 1935; “Rıhtımlar için hazırlanan,” 1935; “Tahkikat başlıyor,” 1930; “Yeni rıhtımlara,” 1935; “Yeni rıhtımlara dair,” 1935; “Yeni rıhtımların,” 1935; “Yolcu salonu,” 1936).

Foreign companies and experts were involved in port-related activities, with notable individuals such as M. Mayyo, a consultant for the Ministry of Public Works, and [Max] von der Porten, the chief counsellor for the Ministry of Economy, contributing to inspections, management and construction works (“İstanbulun imarı,” 1939; “İstanbul limanı: Haydarpaşada,” 1935; “İstanbul limanı,” 1935; “Kömür deposu,” 1930; “Rıhtımlarda,” 1936; “Yeni rıhtımlar,” 1935). In 1937, a delegation visited Europe to survey ports (“Liman tetkikine,” 1937). The reports on the invitation of a “renowned European expert” for the preparation of the port plan and the cooperation with the British company “Aleksandr Gibb” and “Engineer Piver” for the modernisation of the port underline the global nature of the

port issue (“İstanbul limanının ıslahı,” 1937; “Liman üzerinde,” 1937; “Yenikapı limanı,” 1937). In addition, an article from 1931 is also noteworthy, as it highlights the economic instability that affected the issue of the port. According to the report, an Italian firm seeking to expand the port in 1931 was offered payment for the construction cost only after 1943 (“Limanımızı inşa,” 1931).

By the end of 1937, M. Gibb’s program for the port had been partly implemented, including projects at Galata port in line with Prost’s opinions (“İstanbul’un yeni limanı,” 1937; “İstanbul Limanı,” 1939). Plans were made to build coal depots and a workers’ settlement in Kuruçeşme. There were also plans to build warehouses and passenger halls along the Galata and Sirkeci waterfronts (“Limanda yapılacak,” 1938; “M. Prost’un,” 1938). However, these projects were in contradiction with Prost’s reports from mid-1938. This discrepancy suggests that the port proposal in Prost’s masterplan was not considered feasible in the short term. The approval of the master plan by the Ministry of Public Works, which excluded the port proposal, and the determination to re-evaluate the port also support this view.

By the 1940s, the port’s location remained undetermined, even as plans for Istanbul and Beyoğlu districts were approved by the City Council. A storage area in Yenikapı and a commercial area between Karaköy and Azapkapı were outlined in these plans (“Yeni planlar,” 1940). Prost and his team continued their work on the Galata waterfront in this period (“Liman sahasının,” 1940).

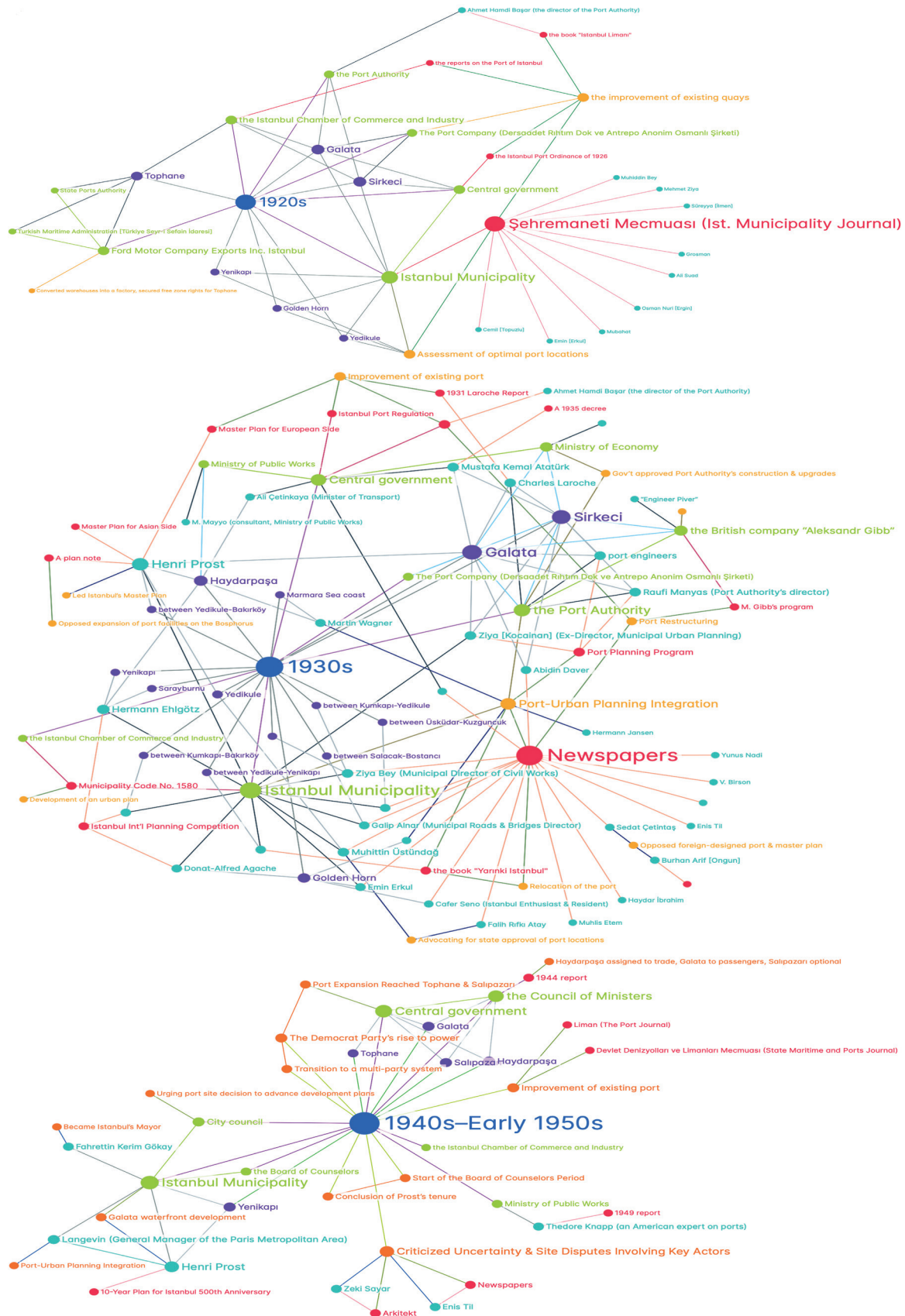
In the 1940s, however, the idea that the Anatolian side would be more suitable for the port was gaining ground. Minister of Transport Ali Çetinkaya indicated that part of the port would be built at Haydarpaşa (“İstanbul limanı kısmen,” 1939). In 1944, the Council of Ministers approved a report allocating Haydarpaşa for commerce and transportation and the existing facilities in Galata for passenger transport, extending to Salıpazarı if needed. This decision faced public opposition, prompting a reexamination of the port issue (Durhan, 2009, pp. 145–146).

Following the transition to a multi-party system in 1946, Fahrettin Kerim Gökay became mayor of Istanbul in 1949. In the meantime, newspaper reports indicated that the search for foreign experts for the port was still going on (“İstanbul limanı,” 1947). For example, a 1948 report revealed that Langevin, “General Manager of the Paris Metropolitan Area”, visited Istanbul at Prost’s invitation to assess the port’s location and designs for the metro (“İstanbul limanı,” 1948). Furthermore, according to a report from 1949, Theodore Knapp, an American expert on ports, prepared a report for the Ministry of Public Works (“İstanbul limanı,” 1949).

However, the prolonged duration of the port issue led to public criticism. For example, an article in a newspaper in 1948 referred to an article in the *İkdam* of 1910 reporting that private entrepreneurs planned to build the port between Yenikapı and Kumkapı. The journalist criticized that the port issue was still unresolved after 38 years (Til, 1948). Furthermore, the city council demanded that the government finalize the plan for the location of the port, as the lack of a decision was an obstacle to the construction of the coastal road on the Anatolian coast (“Anadolu Sahil,” 1946).

The Democrat Party’s rise to power in 1950 was the start of a new era for the Port of Istanbul. The new government considered the port a neglected issue vital for economic development, significantly increasing budget allocations supported by international loans. Consequently, the expansion of the port in Haydarpaşa and Galata quays to Tophane and Salıpazarı accelerated (Yurtoğlu, 2019). However, challenges persisted, with Prost’s plans for the Galata port largely unrealized, and overcrowded warehouses in Eminönü, Galata, and Tophane posing issues (Bazoğlu, 1950, 1951). In a 1952 *Arkitekt* article, Zeki Sayar criticized the ongoing uncertainties about the Port of Istanbul, emphasizing the need for a resolution and the potential hindrance of alternative locations and various actors, such as the Ministry of Public Works, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and City Council commissions





**Figure 4.** The network of actors, institutions, proposed locations, and regulations that shaped discussions on the Port of Istanbul from the 1920s to the early 1950s, highlighting the diverse roles of state and municipal authorities, experts, media, and commercial stakeholders in its planning and development (Visualizations generated by the authors with Graph Commons).



(Sayar, 1952). Despite the efforts, the port's unresolved problems and delays persisted into the early 1950s, marking a continuation of the conflicts from the early years of the Republic.

### 5. Conclusion

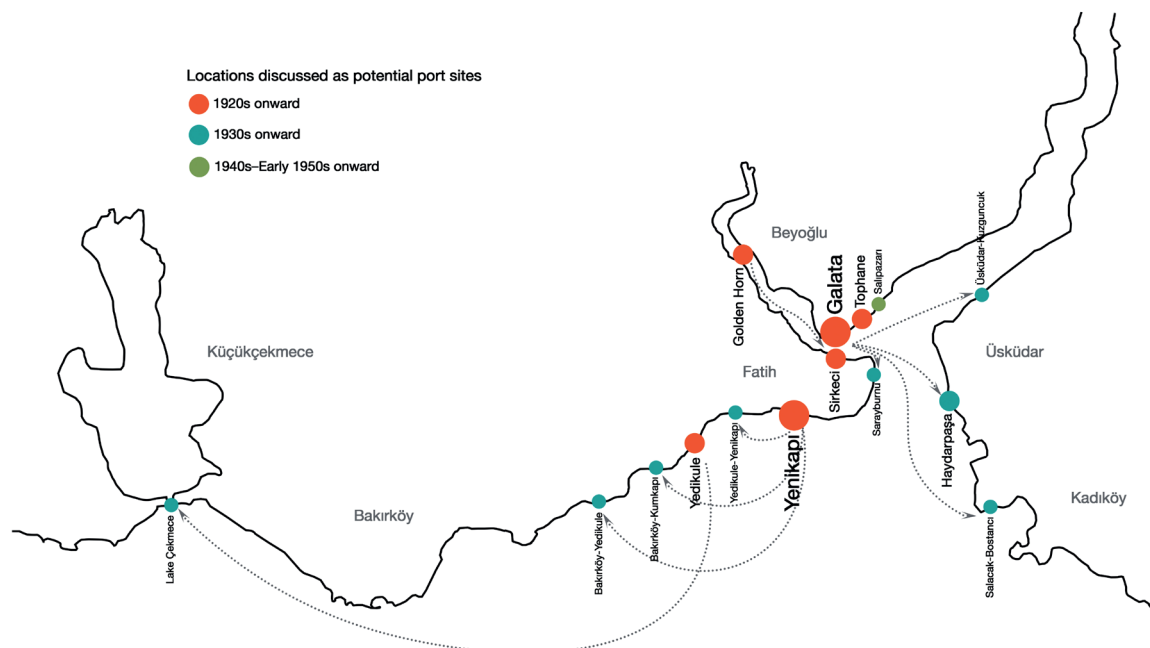
The Port of Istanbul has long been a focal point in urban planning debates, particularly since the late 1920s, as discussions on new functions, spatial structures, and potential locations intensified. Despite the central government's aspirations to systematically plan the city during the early Republican years, uncertainties in conceptual frameworks, methodology, and implementation persisted. These uncertainties stemmed from ideas rooted in the Tanzimat period, when the belief in an ideal form of urban knowledge, the authority of foreign expertise, and the ambition to discipline the city through planning shaped decision-making processes (Akyürek, 2011, pp. 208–209). Such tendencies continued into the early Republican era.

Efforts to regulate and reshape the city through laws, master plans, and projections were not linear or uniform; rather, they unfolded as a multi-layer-

ered process shaped by shifting political, economic, and institutional conditions. While the central authority played a crucial role, local actors actively negotiated, contested, and influenced urban decisions (Figure 4). In this context, the institutional and spatial transformations of the Port of Istanbul mirrored the broader dynamics of Republican-era urban planning (Figure 5).

As a critical hub for national and regional economic development, the port underwent transformations shaped by both state interventions and local agency. However, the interplay between international, national, and local actors—coupled with fluctuating economic and social conditions—turned the port into a persistent site of contention. These complexities, reflected in public debates and urban policies, made the port a source of dissatisfaction and negotiation from the late 19th century to the present day.

The Port of Istanbul functioned as a stratified urban space, where successive conflicts and historical layers shaped its spatial trajectory. Although physical changes progressed slowly, economic and operational challenges, tensions among stakeholders, and efforts to integrate the port with the city



**Figure 5.** Spatial and temporal evolution of port proposals across decades. Each proposed site is color-coded by the decade it first appears in public and planning discourse, while symbol sizes represent the duration of its visibility. The pattern highlights a gradual shift from the historical core toward peripheral zones, reflecting Istanbul's urban expansion (Visualization created by the authors).

continued to spark debate. Attempts to modernize the port during and after the Prost period frequently encountered obstacles, resulting in de facto and fragmented solutions rather than a comprehensive transformation.

Like Istanbul's broader urban planning processes, efforts to adapt the existing port to new conditions faced economic, physical, and institutional barriers, as well as resistance from various actors. While port trade primarily revolved around technical and commercial concerns, the Port of Istanbul also became entangled with the visual and ideological aspirations of the modern city imagined by the Republican regime. Although it was never fully transformed into a state-led modernization project, it was often positioned as a tool for urban modernization, particularly in trade, transportation, and tourism.

Marked by continuous yet incomplete institutional and spatial interventions, the Port of Istanbul exemplifies the contradictions and negotiations embedded in Istanbul's urban planning history. Its complex and dynamic network of relations—combined with its persistent status as an “unorganized” space despite repeated efforts to impose order—positions the port as a microcosm of the city's evolving planning strategies and struggles.

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