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### Conditions for Transitioning Toward a New Urban Politics in Türkiye via Transformative Practices of Social Cooperatives

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**Keywords:** Social cooperatives, cooperation, urban planning, transformative politics

## Introduction

In the paper, it is aimed to reveal the potential of transitioning role of social cooperatives in urban policies by analysing their cooperation with local governments in Türkiye, city of Istanbul. It will be analysed on the thematic line “from transformation to transition” by defining their transformative effects on existing “planning” practices. The research offers practical considerations for policy makers and stakeholders and insights for both academics and practitioners who involve in fostering transformative democratic practices in urban policies.

In this regard, firstly, current debates on urbanization and social cooperatives in Türkiye will be discussed. Then, two selected cases of cooperation on planning from Istanbul will be analysed. The study is held as process tracing within the in-depth interviews with key informants, document analysis and participatory observation. Participatory observation is the key aspect for the methodology since as the researcher, I have been on different parts of cooperation practices in Türkiye as a policy maker, civil servant, facilitator, consultant, analyst, and activist.

Theoretical base of the study is on criticism of existing democracy and defining cooperation as transformative strategy on urban planning. Policy advises will be driven from intersections of these pillars, considering existing practices, legal and political frameworks in Türkiye. Therefore, after presenting a theoretical framework, specific conditions about social cooperatives, administrative rule, and specific conditions about Istanbul will be conveyed. These conditions will be related with chosen cases and used methodology. The case study focuses on two social cooperatives that comes from different background and their interactions with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) and the implications for urban planning.

Türkiye is one of the countries that have been affected by market-driven construction practices of neoliberal policies. Istanbul became a financial centre with mega infrastructure investments while privatization of public services and spaces are promoted by the government. However, central government is not the only authority to approve and implement spatial plans that let commodification of cities. Planning has chosen as a field since it covers dualities related to existing democracy, leads coproduction and it is also a field that also municipalities are authorised in Türkiye.

In the local election, 2019, ruling party of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) has changed and Justice and Development Party (AKP) who has been ruling central government for 21 years, has lost the elections in Istanbul. It was a critical moment for central opposition party Republican People’s Party (CHP) to perform its public policy which is based on participation and cooperation. That is why it is aimed to have a command of the correlation

between policy and practice of IMM by focusing its interaction with two different social cooperatives with the characteristics of two different social cooperative movement in Türkiye.

One of the cooperatives is İlk Adım (First Step) Women's Cooperative which is founded by grassroots women who migrated to Istanbul without any professional skills and in low-income group. Their motivation was to create a place for their children to take early childcare education and improve their skills to participate in economic and social life. The second one is Urban.koop which is founded by professional urban planners, architects, academicians, and civil society experts. Their motivation is to do their profession without hierarchical order of public institutions and profit based private companies. These two cooperatives are also examples of two main social cooperative movement of Türkiye. The first movement is women's cooperatives movement has started at 1999, after the earthquake that has affected İzmit and its surrounding area, including İstanbul. This movement has been led by Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW) with grassroot women. The second one is new generation cooperatives movement which also led by some civil society organizations and pioneer cooperatives such as Youth Deal Cooperative and Need Map. This movement has been started from 2015, and it is mainly affected by discussions on social enterprises in Europe.

In the research, it has also revealed that beside their differences they have common specialities such as to be in search of a non-hierarchical structure, collective decision-making and addressing sharing needs. Moreover, they have similar complains about difficulties of economic sustainability, lack of regulatory frameworks, personalized relationship in public institutions and navigating in bureaucratic structures. What is critical about to choose them for the research is that both are founded in Istanbul, and they both have interactions on planning processes of IMM.

The study aims both to discover potentials of social cooperatives that can be a tool for both grassroots and professionals and bottlenecks of them to cooperate with municipalities on planning processes. Findings have used for developing practical considerations that let transitions in urban policy. These considerations are framed as conditions for transitions to find out an answer to research question which is "what are the conditions for transitioning in urban politics via transformative practices of social cooperatives in Türkiye?".

### **Criticism of existing democracy**

In the research not only, neoliberal context is accepted as the current situation but also liberal democracy itself is criticised and alternatives of it are searched by looking urban transformative practices. Focus of this criticism is unequal power relations among people and democratic institutions and marginalized people do not have power to change this balance while institutions have advantages to keep distance from them. Kristian Stokke and Olle Törnquist (2012) claims that ignoring power relations "depoliticize democracy". Chantal Mouffe's (2000) criticism on nature of modern democracy which is claimed as prevent radical democratic practices and erase the differentials and antagonism not only relations with external institutions but also inside community groups, is used as a base. Duality of conflict is important to describe "political" with reference to Chantal Mouffe (2005).

As a result, and at the same time a ground for depoliticising democracy, Robin Murray (1992) claims that liberal theory based on distinctives of "legislative x executive" and "policy x implementation". He doesn't only problematize the duality between state and citizens but also between politicians and administrators. Contribution of Jane Mansbridge (2003) is critical to the discrepancy of dividing the issues as administrative and political; she claims that "They consider 'administrative' all the issues that require only investigation and consensual decision. They consider 'political' only the issues derived from conflicting opinions or interests".

It is possible to enlarge and problematize distinctions governing practices to different spheres to think about alternatives. Mario Pianta (2001) claims that; to develop a more solid conceptualization of the alternative economy, it is appropriate to start from the "structural" distinction between different spheres of activity: the economy, politics, and civil society. Pointing out this distinction is not only critical to define an alternative economy but also to define an alternative public sphere. Nancy Fraser (1990) criticizes Habermas's public sphere theory as a bourgeois conception due to its approach to permit us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets and democratic associations. She assumes that alternative democratic models need to constructive efforts to alternative accounts for defining public sphere. Her constitutive approaches that are derived from criticism of bourgeois public sphere also points out critical theory of existing liberal democracy. She focuses on social inequality, differently empowered publics, private limits of problems and weak character of public sphere which is over against practical forces of parliamentary politics.

Considering these theoretical approaches, in the paper existing democracy is handled and criticized as a process of depoliticising that is blind to inequality and is driven by distinctions on policy making and implementations and based on separation spheres of activities. Therefore, developing alternative forms and creating transitions are considered as a reversal process of them.

### **Cooperation as a transformative strategy on planning**

Transformative democratic politics is defined by Kristian Stokke and Olle Törnquist (2012) not based on economic struggle but includes gradualism, state centered state-society cooperation, collective action, and democratic politics. They emphasise on key features of it as primacy of politics via popular organizations and public institutions, centrality of citizen-based democracy and coherency of political demands from below, universal, and individualistic include economic policies from above. This definition of transformative democratic politics is not only critical due to its focus on cooperation but also it has been defined as not only opposed to both mainstream liberal democracy but also strong institutions of rule of law of governance. Therefore, the theory proposes a balance between institutional and hegemonic perspectives and claims that "democracy cannot be crafted by just building institutions, relations of power have to be changed" (Stokke and Törnquist 2012). This perspective points out a strategy to create alternative paths to transitions from existing democracy. It is critical for this strategy that which actors need to be supported and how? Social cooperatives and municipalities as an apparatus for local government are chosen to be analysed to evaluate potentials of transformative politics. Moreover, practices of planning provide a fruitful ground to analyse these cooperations because it has both spatial and social dimension while it is a result of political and administrative decisions.

Social cooperatives are both economic and social organizations, so the idea of social cooperative itself is a combination of different activity spheres. Their fields of activity generally need cooperation with public institutions, so they are also part of public policy implementation even they are defined in civil society sphere. Moreover, they are non-hierarchical organizations whose members aims to change their or some other people's social and economic conditions in other words, they are caused by and at the same time points out social inequality.

Local governments give more opportunity to analyse state-society cooperation since have more close and physical relations with people who vote for them and use the services. Even though delegation of authority shows variety country to country, generally municipalities are responsible for urban planning and daily life activities in cities. Since central states are getting far away from welfare policies and do not use their resources for social and cultural

policies, local governments take much more area in that fields to meet the needs of citizens. However, defining needs, itself is a problematic issue since criticism of democracy at the same time based on criticism of there is not only one unique public as it has mentioned above. That's mean is, there is no "one" unique "public good" to define and decide accordingly. Changes in the assumption of public good, is not just driven by feminist theorists like Nancy Fraser but also by neoliberal approaches also use it. Therefore, effects of this paradigmatic change are clearly seen on urban policy especially on planning.

According to Mitchel Silver (2014) "purpose of planning is to protect the public, health, safety and welfare, to address uncertainty about the future, to analyze and prepare for emerging trends and demographic change, to plan for and sustain the environment, economy and equity". This definition puts the difficulty of the profession itself especially considering current debates on social, economic and environmental crises. Kelvin MacDonald (2014) raises these big questions to conceptualise planning in 21st century; "(1) What is the purpose of professionalism in planning? (2) Who does and should planning serve? (3) What are the ideas and ways of working?" He claims that since planners should give answer to problems and problems are getting complex, there is a need for professionalism. He adds that even though relationships between politicians and planners is always an issue, value-free advisers' myth is over now. MacDonald points out that changing the idea about there is no one public good/interest reveals activist planners who do advocacy so we are not talking about only expertise but also leadership. Bishwapriya Sanyal (2014) also claims that even though planners are questioned and criticised in last century, these questions are not finished profession needed. What MacDonald says leadership, Sanyal defines as "Idea of planning is a form of political effort to link knowledge with action". There are also other remarks which focus on "talents" especially to be aware of technological improvements and able to adapt them to profession. Peter Head (2014) mentions the importance of open data system and nested nature of big data, localism and decentralization nevertheless it needs skilled planners to operate it with ethical intensity to build trust with local community.

Moving from value-free technocratic expertise to a position that needs to be defined with values bring out another question that Mee Kam Ng (2014) asked, which side planner will stand exchange value or use value? This is a critical choice that is between two main visions of the city, has been defined by Lefebvre (1991); on the one hand, there is this search for a city as a living space and place around the use value and there is restless motion and pressure pushing the cities toward other end as a source of exchange value and relentless rent seeking activities. Need to define a value, bring us to objection of Katie Williams (2014) objection that claims, "we are not just mediators". Therefore, planners are not nor value-free experts nor facilitators. Moreover, they are also seek for creating jobs, action oriented problem solvers, creative thinkers (Silver 2014).

In order to deal with all complexity and responsibility of planning, Louis Albrechts (2012) comes up with the coproduction perspective for innovative, emancipatory and transformative planning approach since coproduction go beyond service delivery to a political strategy this need change on individual behaviours to be effective on projects and encourage transformative practices.

Since transformative democratic politics that mentioned by Kristian Stokke and Olle Törnquist (2012) need; change in power relations within community based, collective action, coproduction approach becomes a promising key concept as a bottom-up strategy. It breaks the duality between state actors and citizens and opens a new floor for planning, designing, delivering, and improving public services together. The concept of coproduction, coined by Elinor Ostrom, also states the intersection of both rights-based and need-based claims and it came to the fore for more effective and efficient ways to meet social needs and provide services of public interest. Mitlin (2008) underlines that it is different from standard participation and partnership, lobbying and protesting. Moreover, according to Boyle and

Harry (2009), it blurs the boundary between producers and consumers public and private. Albrechts (2012) combines coproduction concept with planning and claims that it leads to equal partnership instead of professionals and clients and aims at not consulting people or sit them on board but use their skills so it shifts the balance of power from professionals to individuals.

In recent years coproduction also became a strategy for tackling the privatisation of public spaces, over-use of nature, and urban renewal mega-projects which are reflections of neoliberalism on cities and rural areas. The concept mainly points out production and delivery of public services led by the community itself. It can be in the form of urban commons and cooperatives and can be in collaboration with a public institution, mainly local governments. It also reveals the diversity in the society, needs and practices.

Jenny Cameron & Deanna Grant-Smith (2005) focus on two main political approach that are change in public good (not only one public) and Institutions are not guaranty for power relations. They claim that there is a need for “safe spaces” for marginalised groups to define their needs without manipulated. But after this there is a need also “mix spaces” to shift self-interests to collective interest for planning to contribute for transformative politics. This perspective also fits with the definition of Ostrom (1996) who define “coproduction a process through which inputs used to produce a good or service is contributed by individuals who are not ‘in’ the same organization”.

Murray (1992) defines the realm of producing collective goods and services in a collective way as “productive democracy” which allows citizen involvement/control individually/collectively on service provision, citizen production with a system designed to meet wider social/environmental requirements by linking public sector workers and citizens on provision of services. Hilary Wainwright (2020) explains productive democracy as a combination of meeting needs and creating useful jobs however she warns that it shouldn't be understood to give limited money to cooperatives for their services. This warning is critical to define an alternative instead of reframing regulated capitalism.

Jane Jacobs (1961) has mentioned that; city can give everyone if it planned by everyone. This statement summarises importance of collective way of planning for both urban and democracy theories. Cooperations of local governments and social cooperatives on planning are handled as a coproduction practice that serves transformative democratic policies. Considering criticism of existing democracy that has mentioned above, these cooperations will be evaluated accordingly their capacity on create transformations on power relations, policy making and implementing processes and relationality of activity spheres.

## **Social Cooperatives in Türkiye**

Since the early 2000s, women's cooperatives have been founded in Turkey, and they have provided examples of community-based approaches to social services such as early childhood education with the participation of families and neighbourhoods (FSWW 2021a). Women's cooperatives have defined as a specific branch of cooperatives in 2013 because of advocacy activities of these cooperatives with Foundation of the Support of Women's Work (FSWW)<sup>1</sup>. However, they are not defined as “social cooperatives”. In recent years, concept of social cooperatives has taken a part on the agenda of both public institutions and civil society, due to successful experience of women's cooperatives and increasing number of studies on sustainability, fair working environment, urban social movements, and commons, all over the world. International funds and projects have also played a key role in defining social cooperatives.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information about improvement of women's cooperative movement: <https://www.kedv.org.tr/kedv-ve-kadin-kooperatifleri-hareketi>

According to the 2013 monitoring report of the General Directorate of Cooperatives of the Ministry of Customs and Trade, a technical trip to Italy was organised for the first time in 2012 and a "Field Analysis Report on Supporting Cooperatives Programme (KOOP-DES)" was prepared by adding the evaluations obtained on how public support is provided to cooperatives in Italy, social cooperatives legislation and practices. In 2018, "Social Cooperatives Promotion, Training, Development and Implementation Project" were initiated and search conferences and field visits to Italy were carried out by the Ministry of Trade (Mert Korkmaz 2022). Within the scope of the same project a "Social Cooperative Education and Promotion Train" moved to different cities of Türkiye with cooperative specialists to promote social cooperative model.

Even though women's cooperatives were the first implementations of social purposes with cooperatives, after 2018, new civil society actors of this field became so called "new generation cooperatives". Differently low-income group of women, founders of new generation cooperatives are mainly young, well-educated groups who have connection international institutions that aims at promotion of social economy. One of the pioneers of these cooperatives is Youth Deal Cooperative, that has driven a project to create network among new generation cooperatives with financial support of European Union and cooperation Haliéus, the international development cooperation organisation of Legacoop, the Italian National Association of Cooperatives and Mutuals.<sup>2</sup> Second important cooperative is "Needs Map", they have found "Excellence Platform for Social Cooperative Development"<sup>3</sup> with financial support of European Union and cooperation Confcooperative Emilia Romagna and Association of Civil Society Development Centre (STGM) that is also financed by European Union.

These projects have started 2021, during these years also KEDV has coordinated European Union projects, that aims at strength organization and advocacy capacity of women's community-based organizations that refers to women cooperatives<sup>4</sup>. At the same time ministries continue to implement some projects that focus on women cooperatives. As a result of these developments, the number of women's cooperatives, has increased quickly since the projects have mainly focused on numbers. In September 2021, the project of "Empowerment of Women through Cooperatives" started to be implemented for 30 months under the coordination of the Ministry of Family and Social Services, with the financing of the European Union. Within the scope of the project, it is planned to provide training to 3,500 women who have the potential to establish/partner in co-operatives. Since the project activities are based on generalised training and counselling programmes rather than addressing the specific problems of existing cooperatives, the number of cooperatives will probably continue to increase in the coming days.

It can be said that social cooperatives are became much more popular concept in recent years however there is a mass about definitions of organizations and their implementations. While implementation of women cooperatives is mainly fix with the World Standards of Social Cooperatives that are defined by CICOPA (2004), in Türkiye they are not defined as social cooperatives. Moreover, even though new generation cooperatives have different motivations than social cooperatives, they are pretended to be the same concepts (Akçay and Ünlüönen 2020). Another issue that is

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<sup>2</sup> <https://newgencoop.org/proje/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5a0d190a7f8347d4a19bbfc2599eaf6e/page/Anasayfa/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kedv.org.tr/toplum-temelli-yerel-kuruluslarin-katilim-ve-savunuculuk-kapasitelerini-guclendirme-projesi-raporlari>

also related with the mentioned mass is all improvements in that field are driven by project base implementations without a comprehensive public policy.

According to a report by the Human Development Foundation (2021), a specific regulation for cooperatives operating for social purposes is one of the most critical issues in Türkiye. Another report by the International Labour Organisation and the Istanbul Policy Centre (2022) focuses on the potential of women's cooperatives to create new jobs for women in social areas and highlights the threats of increasing number of cooperatives without the necessary regulations. In the booklet (2021b) prepared by the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW) for the cooperation of women's cooperatives and municipalities, it is mentioned that municipalities perceive women's cooperatives as employment strategy for women rather than a cooperation with an organised women's group. Lack of regulations and consciousness of cooperation create hierarchical personalized relations instead of institutionalised (Yalçın 2019).

Reports of projects that are driven by new generation cooperatives also mentions the need to clarification of descriptions and regulatory frameworks. (NGC 2022) Even though existing reports that based on feedback and suggestions driven by implementors and experts, mention the importance of regulatory framework especially for cooperation with local governments, there isn't any improvements about it yet. Public properties and services belong to public institutions, or they are tendered to private institutions/personalities by public institutions so there is no regulation for third sector entities in Türkiye. Therefore, social cooperatives are pretended to be as normal enterprises or associations. In other words, there is not any specific mechanism that includes tax and tender regulations to make them a preferable implementer of public services. While their popularity and number increase, claims of existing cooperatives such as to be equal partners of planning and implementing public services continue.

### **Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality**

It is important to mention about delegation of authority in public services in Türkiye to evaluate cooperation opportunities. Türkiye has a centralized regime that main public services such as health, education, security, are driven by central government. Central government has its own representatives at every local but at the same time "municipalities" have their own election and selected representatives in each city and metropolis. Recent years, municipalities became more active on social and cultural services since the central government does not provide necessary budget and facilities. Moreover, these services give publicity opportunity to local politicians. On the other hand, after 1980's municipalities have given the authority of making spatial planning of the cities. Even though central government has also right to make plan on some specific conditions, municipalities are mainly responsible for making and implementing the plans. Therefore "planning" is the most powerful instruments for municipalities not only planning activity itself an overwhelming tool for deliberation of sources and power, but also municipalities have their own authority on it.

Istanbul is one of the important metropolises in the world and most crowded city of Türkiye with its 16 million habitants. Istanbul has 39 district municipalities and Metropolitan Municipality that contains councillors who are selected from districts, but Mayor of metropolitan municipality is selected separately. Its 2023 budget has accepted 115 billion 250 million lira and about 85 thousand staff on its subsidiaries and affiliated companies. It can be said with its financial and organizational capacity, Istanbul itself like a state more than a city. Therefore, it is important that who rules Istanbul, which party will win the elections and who will be the mayor. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who is the president of Türkiye and chairman of Justice and Development Party (AKP) that rules the country for 21 years used to be Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality before he has found AKP and selected as parliament. However, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has been ruled by rightest parties from 1994



when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has chosen as mayor till 2019. In 2019, Ekrem İmamoğlu who is member of Republican People's Party has chosen. It was not a quiet election and even though it was a local election, it created an affect such as President Erdoğan has lost the election due to his effort to make their candidate win and repeat the election. Nevertheless, İmamoğlu has won the repeated elections and its reflection became as "Turkey's President Suffers Stinging Defeat in Istanbul Election Redo"<sup>5</sup>.

Istanbul is a critical city, not only because its symbolic power on politics but also its actual power on economy which attracts foreign investors and compose %30 percentage of Türkiye's economy (ICC, 2022). Planning decisions are very critical for big investments such as financial centres urban renewal projects, mega infrastructures such as airport and 3<sup>rd</sup> bridge. Therefore, change in the management of Istanbul was critical to observe conflicts of two different political approach and its reflection to city itself.

İmamoğlu puts participation and governance at the centre of his election campaigns and strategic plan after the election. Being open to collaboration with different groups and emphasis on co-governance were also antithesis of centralised regime of AKP. According to vision plan that has prepared by IMM after the election:

*"As in other cities, Istanbul cannot be planned according to the priorities of certain groups and with top-down paternalistic approaches. The opportunity to find solutions to common problems together, the intellectual richness and scientific ground needed to plan a future that provides a good life for all Istanbul residents is available in Istanbul". (IMM, 2022)*

This plan has established as "The Istanbul Vision 2050 Strategy Document", which emphasis "in the power of producing together and is shaped by a scientifically planned participation process, has been prepared with a paradigm that prioritizes the increase of the quality of life of Istanbulites and embraces positive discrimination of vulnerable groups." The document is announced also as a guide for all institutions and individuals working for Istanbul. Within the scope of this strategy there have been organized participatory meetings and established new institutions such as Istanbul Planning Agency to facilitate these participatory processes from 2019.

Since there has been a transformation about government strategy of IMM, it is assumed that analysing its consequences with both bottlenecks and opportunities in practice is valuable to improve transformative effects of these strategies.

## **Methodology**

Considering theoretical approach that is based on critics on existing democracy and puts forward cooperation as a transformative strategy for the challenges on planning that have mentioned above, a process tracing has done to analyse IMM's cooperation with two different types of social cooperatives on planning.

Two different cooperatives are selected as an example of two different social cooperative movements that has mentioned above to cover different profiles and possible cooperations. The first one is preliminary examples of women cooperatives that works on multiple activity sphere include need-assessment and mapping for their neighbourhood, "İlk Adım" that has founded in 2004, in Nurtepe Neighbourhood of Kağıthane which is one of the peripheral districts of Istanbul. The second one "Urban.koop" is a unique example of new generation ones, that serve in planning. They have founded in 2020, in Kadıköy one of the central districts of Istanbul. Kadıköy is also a centre that some of founders of the cooperative live, work and choose for socializing.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/23/world/europe/istanbul-mayor-election-erdogan.html>

Cases are selected to cover different potentials and bottlenecks in cooperation. Both cooperatives can be thought as typical example of their movements but at the same time they are the only ones that have worked on planning in İstanbul among their counterparts. Moreover, IMM is a municipality that put cooperation at the centre of its governance strategy, and it is fully responsible for planning decisions of İstanbul even though it is not fully responsible for education, health, security etc. accordingly administrative rule of Türkiye.

Participatory observations are critical because as researcher I used to take part in collaboration strategies of IMM and women cooperative movement both professionally and voluntarily in recent years. My interior position as a researcher brings out advantages and disadvantages. Advantages are being aware of the limitations and potentials that come from regulations, familiar with key informants, experienced on different sides of the cooperation processes, like deputy mayor, consultant, coordinator, activist, and having education on urban planning. On the other hand, being insider always needs to pay attention more to be critical about observations and put a distance to recent memories to make an overall consideration. In my situation, when I decided to handle this issue, I had been living in Italy for one year, so I was not literally insider anymore. Moreover, physical, and temporal distances make me feel ready to convey my observations by combining with other key informants and existing reports.

I have made 3 in-depth interviews online during September and October 2023. I have talked one of the founders of each cooperative and one urban planner who is also specialist about participatory planning and used to be senior manager on planning department of IMM. These informants are chosen since they had different observations due to their different positions and even, they all related with planning, they haven't collaborated for any project inside IMM. Since this research is not to understand widespread impact of cooperations or to offer a regulatory framework, quality of information and narrowing the subject were prioritized while selecting informants. Therefore, informants are chosen not only to convey their processes but also make them to be real contributor of the research. That's why even though they are coming from different backgrounds all of them are positioned as "key informant" and mainly direct quotations are chosen from their assessment. All the interviews have been done via zoom, the names of the organisations interviewed in the paper has been used with the consent of the interviewees, but the names of the interviewees were anonymised.

Table 1. Key Informants

interviewee	role	date	place
#KI1	Founding of İlk Adım Women's Cooperative, activist in women's cooperative movement	17.08.2023	online
#KI2	Founding member of Urban.koop, architect	22.08.2023	online
#KI3	Coordinator in IMM (2019-2022), urban planner	07.09.2023	online

It is aimed to learn common things in different contexts of cooperation to identify relations, possible alliances and principles and needed supplementary mechanisms to increase effectiveness of these cooperations to create transitions.

## Being a social cooperative

Even though İlk Adım and Urban.koop have different backgrounds and story, they have some common approaches that make them act as a social cooperative. To analyse these common points that also describe being an alternative economic and social organization, their foundation story and reasons that make them cooperative will be cited.

As it has mentioned İlk Adım -that means “first step”- consists of low-income women who live in a neighbourhood that is at periphery of Istanbul and formed by migration.

*“We came here from the countryside and faced the difficulties and economic problems of the city. We all have a lot of children, but we don't have the opportunity to work nor to improve ourselves. Based on this, we were able to come together in our neighbourhood.” (#K11)*

İl Adım not only consists of women who came from rural areas of Türkiye but also the ones that came from Syria during last years. On the other hand, Urban.koop consists of individual consultants.

*“We are a team with experience in working with the public, especially with municipalities and NGOs. Our team includes academics, NGOs and municipality employees working in the urban field.” (#K12)*

Although they have different backgrounds and stories, they have some similarities what make them come together in a cooperative structure. The first thing is that they come together as a group of people who define some similar needs. For the Urban.koop this need is an institutional structure for the young professionals who know each other from working life, who have already an informal network. This need defined as *“to be in a community and at the same time create a space for creative production”*. (#K12) Based on the idea that traditional public institutions do not give enough place to creativity while freelance working creates precarity.

*“It is very difficult to protect one's original ideas, to work independently from traditional institutions and to ensure fair living standards. We wanted to create a space where young experts who have knowledge, experience and experience but do not have strong institutional organisations can both express themselves individually and be in a collective production. We think this is important for our generation”*. (#K12)

Therefore, they aimed at creating an umbrella for the ones who feel similarly about their professional life. This aim includes both economically and socially being satisfied since they seek for self-realization while using their professional knowledge. Another important point about their attempt is to be open to newcomers and pay regard to their networks. This is critical because professional life for planners is based on networks and “star” names who have strong relations especially with public authorities. Therefore, aiming to open to floor newcomers especially ones that do not live in Istanbul means also to create an area for variety and new opportunities for both professionals and contractors.

İlk Adım defines their basic need that brings them together as need for nursery for their children. For the women who should take care for their children, since it is impossible to be a part of economic and social life without eligible nursery services. Even though there are some private ones, for the low-income groups it is impossible to pay their prices. However, their aim was not only to consist of women who have children but also the ones that do not have any skill or opportunity to be a part of economic life and generally spend their time at home. *“Our aim was to empower women who were not well off, to strengthen them economically and learn together how to live in a democratic environment.” (#K11)*

Another thing which is similarly Urban.koop, İlk Adım also aims to create an area not only for a specific group on the contrary they want all women from the neighbourhood reach them easily and feel free to join them.

*"I can easily say that this is a place for women, and most of them know this. Whenever they want, they can open the door and come in; they can be involved in whatever their problems, whatever they want, whatever they want to work on. This is very valuable for us. Because as women we cannot enter everywhere and cannot ask everything from everyone."* (#K11)

This approach also includes to strengthen their capacity and by giving voice about so called private issues of women in a public way. Aim of to reach others who have similar conditions and establish equal relations is also related why they are a social cooperative instead a company or any other organization. Interviewee from İlk Adım, explain it as *"The cooperative is easily accessible and embracing, everything is done in a collective way, there is no hierarchical structure. Here, cooperative empowers women, women do what they want, no one employs anyone"*. (#K11) Similarly, interviewee from Urban.koop also emphasis on "non-hierarchical" being of the cooperative and why they need it; *"Our professional and political attitudes were in favour of horizontal relations, so we all came together to develop a way of doing business outside of the hierarchical relations witnessed elsewhere"*. (#K12) Both have mentioned that their decision-making mechanisms are not hierarchical, and they work in a collective way by sharing tasks.

Being a social cooperative has also advantages that comes from its unique statue due to its bilateral structure. Interviewee from Urban.koop defined it as being in the middle on a line with one end pointing to the civil society and the other to the private sector. Since there is not yet any regulations about social enterprises, being social cooperative is the only way to be an organization that is based on equitable and fair income distribution and profit distribution instead of capital accumulation through profit. Another option is to be a women's cooperative which has same statue with social cooperatives. That's why Urban.koop mentioned that even they think that being a social enterprise is much more suitable for them, since there in not any regulations they founded a social cooperative.

When it has asked them to define advantages of being a social cooperative their common point became its possibility to be partner for NGO's and public institutions like associations. Even though being a social cooperative has some tax advantages, related regulations are mentioned are not enough and there is not regulated subventions and technical support.

*"There are not enough accountants and lawyers specialised in cooperatives in Turkey. In fact, I can say that we know more than the people who should be experts in this field."* (#K12)

Due to lack of technical and financial supports, another common thing about these two cooperatives that they have been supported by pioneer civil organizations in that field. As it has mentioned above, there are two main social cooperative movements in Türkiye, and they are led by some civil organizations. It is also possible to see these organizations effect on expressions of cooperatives while they are talking about their foundation story. Interviewee from Urban.koop mentioned support of Youth Deal Cooperative during their foundation process and also emphasised the solidarity among new generation cooperatives. On the other hand, İlk Adım defined role of Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW) not only for supportive but also as a key component that also organize and motivate them to be a cooperative.

*"I came to Istanbul in 1991. In 2001, I met the FSWW, and I participated in their early child-care educations and leadership training programmes. During these trainings we thought that we could open a kindergarten in our neighbourhood and families could pay according to their income. We told this idea to FSWW and they suggested us to be a cooperative. Afterwards,*

*we received trainings for the establishment of a cooperative. In 2004, we found our cooperative. FSWW also support us to pay the establishment costs after our foundation we repaid it. In other words, it was like a micro-credit.” (#K11)*

It seems obvious that different profiles need different supportive mechanisms, while Urban.koop needs to learn about legislative and financial processes, İlk Adım firstly has needed to be encouraged to be a cooperative. What they need also changes while they are continuing their activities.

Urban.koop consists of professionals, they have capacity to produce high value-added works. However, founders of Urban.koop also do different jobs beside cooperative. The interviewee has also mentioned that they have an aim to support some public projects in the future if they can be able to increase their income. On the other hand, it is more difficult to manage sustainability of their economy for İlk Adım. They also pay regular salary for their trainer and administrative staff for the nursery but members of the cooperative earn money only with handcraft works that they have produced, without a regular health insurance. Another reason that effects economic sustainability of İlk Adım is that their aim is to provide affordable nursery services so they do not define a price which can cover their expenses.

*“At least 30-35 children benefit from our centre every month. The families who bring their children to us are already low-income. We charge the families according to their situation; we do not charge any fee for 5-6 children. Children are given breakfast, lunch and afternoon meal, we prepare them in our own kitchen. We also have a mum for cleaning the place. Families are only asked for money for the teacher’s salary and the children’s expenses.” (#K11)*

This situation shows that İlk Adım provides a public service without having enough public support, these services continue because of women’s persistence and determination. Due to lack of subsidies, being a partner for the projects became very important financial tool for both. However, for İlk Adım, projects are also critical to pay salary of staffs and to collaborate with municipalities. Since there are not any specific regulations for municipalities to collaborate with social cooperatives, being able to an official partner to projects makes ease legislative processes.

Consequently, although they consist of different backgrounds, both found a cooperative because of need to work in a non-hierarchical ambient to care and empower their counterparts, both are helped by some other civil organizations and are in solidarity with them. Moreover, both complain about lack of regulations and institutional supports. While one of them (Urban.koop) wants to be treated as social enterprise, the other (İlk Adım) want to be treated as a social cooperative within regulative frameworks for cooperations with public institutions, like European examples.

*“In Europe, local governments can pay salaries to women who do civil society work. For 13 years we have been trying to do something on our own. We are in constant dialogue with the Ministry, and we say: ‘Forget about us, pay the salary of the teacher and the rent of the place at least.’” (#K11)*

### **Cooperation with municipalities**

Since there is not any specific regulation to cooperate with municipalities, social cooperatives are pretended to be associations or private companies. Therefore, while Urban.koop which is more similar to enterprises attends to tenders, İlk Adım does some project-based protocols like other associations. Both for tenders and protocols it can be said that initiatives of decision-makers are critical because it depends on what they prioritize to write tender calls

and protocols. Not having a specific regulation, make personal relations become more critical as it mentioned before.

*“The biggest obstacle is the legislation, since the legislation does not define how these relations should be, they are always personal. We should carry out these processes with our recognised rights, not for personal gain. At first, we made a protocol for 2 years about the place where we use, then they said that you can continue to use the place, there is no need to renew the protocol. But this situation makes us uneasy, if a mayor who does not want us is elected in the future, he may remove us from here.” (#K11)*

Interviewee emphasised the mayor because administration of municipalities in Türkiye is based on a kind of “presidency” system that mayors have strong authority on decision making. This system also makes personal relations important. Scale also becomes critical since it is important to be in communication with the mayor. *“It can be easier to work with small municipalities, and if the mayor interiorizes the project, things progress faster.” (#K12)*

Another barrier that has defined by interviewees that municipalities are seen as powerful political actors and they do not want to share their power with civil organizations, they do not enough practice and capacity to deal with these organizations. Although they want it, they do not show enough effort to lead administrative part.

*“There should be toolkits on how units can work and cooperate with each other, institutional transformation should be forced, this issue is underestimated, and resources and power are not allocated to it. In fact, since there is a hierarchical structure, it is not difficult to transform this when there is a request from above. This requires a corporate leadership.” (#K13)*

### **Effects on planning**

It is mentioned that these two cooperatives have also another common point to want to have an effect urban plans. It is obvious that Urban.koop is mainly has founded to make or counselling urban plans and polices. However, İlk Adım’s story is different, comes from being a grassroot organization in their neighbourhood and their need-based practices. Interviewee from İlk Adım, explained why they wanted to be an actor on planning of their neighbourhood:

*“Our neighbourhood is a slum area, we noticed that there was a very rapid change here. Suddenly, huge buildings started to rise around us, and it is called urban renewal. But the tenants, neighbours and owners became unhappy with the result. Prices start to increase in the neighbourhood. We wanted to talk with the municipality to understand what was going on. Thus, how we started to work for the resilience of our neighbourhood.” (#K11)*

What they did for their neighbourhood mainly define the needs which are mainly well known by women instead of politician or decision makers who are mainly consists of man. Therefore their starting point is to define their needs and solutions. On the other hand, Urban.koop has an aim to increase quality of plans. As it has mentioned above, cities have much more complex problems and there need to be multiple solutions and planners are waited to have multiple tasks also. However, who will be these planners and where they will work? Will they work for public or private sector? It is obvious that private sector is seeking for profit, but at the same time it gives opportunity to be more creative and forces for being aware of benefits of technology. Urban.koop offers a third alternative as a social cooperative that works on planning. Since they have experience on working with municipalities, they claim that people cannot reveal their own talents and capacities there, that’s why they do not wanted to continue as employee in these municipalities. *“Municipalities should strengthen the development of civil society instead of hiring people in this field. You can be more flexible and creative in your own field in civil society, but not in the municipality.” (#K12)*

It can be said that there are two main approaches that comes from different social cooperatives for urban planning, the first one is to improve “identifying the needs and solutions” with a bottom-up strategies, the second one is to improve “quality” with creating a more flexible and open planning process for the planners. These two approaches do not regret each other on the contrary they have potentials to work together and create solutions to the existing challenges of planning.

### **Participation to cooperation example of Istanbul**

Administrative and political team of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) has changed after the 2019 elections and new elected Mayor, put participation concept at the centre. Therefore, a lot of civil organizations that have never had any relationship with the municipality, have change to associate. Interviewee who is charged as a specialist for participatory planning unit of IMM, emphasised that both establishing an intention to participation and breaking the institutional resistance to it over time were important achievements. Interviewee also mentioned that providing “transparency” was important, and with the efforts of new administration, data has become more available and open.

It has asked to the cooperatives if what has changed for them after the local election in Istanbul and how did they get into contact with the new administration. İlk Adım claims that they don't used to have any relation with IMM before the election. Then they have visited by the municipality to analyse their work model and have been called for meetings during the processes of preparing local equality action plan of the municipality. It is critical that due to participation meeting during the preparation processes of the plan, IMM added “improving working models with women's cooperative and making cooperation on social services”. (IMM 2021) It has also added to create mechanisms for grassroot women to participate planning processes and resilience projects. Therefore, IMM for the first time put women's cooperative and to do cooperation with them on its strategy documents.

For the Urban.koop it is impossible to make a comparison since they have founded in 2020, after the election. However, they claim that a lot of colleagues of them started to work as employee or consultant in IMM after the election so the municipality itself became more accessible for them. Another reason that makes municipality more accessible especially for planners is the new institutions like “Istanbul Planning Agency” and a new coordinatorship for participation in Planning Office, have been established to institutionalize participatory processes. Moreover, “city council” has been also found for the first time as an institutional mechanism for participation. This council consists of civil organizations in Istanbul. Interviewee from Urban.koop has claimed that they have invited for participatory planning meetings both from City Council and planning agency of IMM.

It seems that new administration IMM has achieved to start participatory processes and created needed strategies and institutions to do it. However, the important part for the study is that how they affect implementations. Interviewee from the municipality ascertained that these participatory practices were not able to go beyond. *“There were developments at the stages of getting ideas and understanding the demands, but the organisation was closed to cooperation, and the part of ‘doing it together’, sharing and delegating management could not be reached.” #K13*

This critical determination overlaps with the findings of participatory observations. At the same time, it is also aimed to understand the experiences of cooperatives. Urban.koop has prepared a project for IMM since they attended a tender and got it. It is asked to them what happened after they delivered the project<sup>6</sup> and do they know anything about its

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<sup>6</sup>For the further information about the project: “Balıkçıköy Conservation Urban Design Guide, prepared by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and BİMTAŞ, aims to set out design decisions and principles for the

implementation processes. Interviewee claimed that they have no information about it yet however he also pointed out that *“there are many organisations within IMM doing similar work at the same time, and hundreds of people working for each of these organisations from outside”*. So, trying to do some projects with plenty of organizations creates a mass that makes it difficult to monitoring the processes but at the same time increases the feeling of inefficiency, wasted effort and sources. According to interviewee from IMM, the main reason that create this mass is lack of coordination inside the municipality.

*“Cooperation between units is never easy. Relations with other units are established at the level of requesting opinions, and the institutional functioning considers this sufficient. We have held meetings and pushed the process by forcing this, but these are always done on personal initiative.”* (#K13)

Interviewee from İlk Adım has also mentioned the obstacles that when it comes to do something together. *“We did a lot of meeting with the Metropolitan Municipality, but we did not get any results.”* (#K11) Beside general participatory meetings, İlk Adım, made a meeting with deputy general secretary of IMM and social policy departments on 12 May 2022 and they present their action plan for their neighbourhood. This plan had been prepared by the local and refugee women with the coordination of İlk Adım and FSWW and with collaboration of UN Women. At this meeting<sup>7</sup> İlk Adım suggested to take an active role strengthening communication and networks between the neighbourhood and the municipality and proposed some specific projects to make the neighbourhood economically empowered, safer and more resilient by increasing spatial quality and solidarity in cooperation with IMM. The Municipality has accepted some of these projects, such as to support İlk Adım early-child care programs instead of opening new kindergarten to the neighbourhood, to found an urban orchard for women to produce healthy food in an economic way, create new public spaces for women and children to socialise etc. However shortly after the meeting, deputy general secretary was dismissed, and a new deputy was appointed. Then, all the process has been stopped, new deputy came with new agendas and relations.

It has been asked to interviewee from İlk Adım, if the processes continued or stopped, she said that no body called them again after the meeting. Affects of changes in the municipalities can be drastic for the ongoing works and cooperation projects can be the ones that mostly are affected from them since mainly personal interests of managers are critical for them. Interviewee from municipality also mentioned that *“The processes are carried out through personal relationships rather than an institutional, therefore, in cases such as the dismiss of a person, change of duty, closure of a unit or change in the way of working, the work carried out is interrupted and returned to the beginning”*. (#K13) Conveyed experience that comes from participatory observation and statements of the interviewee show that institutionalizing participatory process needs more than open new institutions. On the country new ones even can create a mass during operation processes.

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preservation of the urban identity of the area in parallel with the conservation zoning plan being prepared for Balıkçıköy, one of the important urban protected areas on the Anatolian side of Istanbul.”

<https://urbankoop.org/>

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<sup>7</sup> I was one of the organisers of these meeting since I was responsible as social policy coordinator of the municipality but before I had worked as project coordinator for KEDV and I used to be consultant for İlk Adım while they were preparing their neighbourhood action plan. Information about meeting has conveyed from personal notes. For the further information about the project: FSWW | Resilient Neighbourhood Programme Gaziantep & Istanbul Kağıthane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q04J7hc7-HY&t=16s>

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## Conditions for transitions

It is obvious that participatory practices do not easily evolve cooperation and without cooperation it is hard to talk about transformative practices. It is also asked what make cooperation difficult to implement even it is declared as a wish by Mayor and is written all strategy documents. Interviewee from municipality made a comprehensive analysis about it:

*“Cooperation brings a new norm, changes the existing ongoing, turns all known rules upside down and change power relations. It is not known how to cope with it, change in the balance of power is not desired and this is feared. One reason for this fear is distrust. People and civil society are not trusted by bureaucrats. It is assumed that they will only act in their own interests without a broad perspective. There are also anxieties such as to lose power, falling into the situation of having done something wrong, having to act in harmony with the senior manager he/she works with, to secure himself/herself against possible changes in managers, to be prepared to be held accountable.” (#K13)*

Similarly, these defined anxieties there are also anxieties of civil organizations due to their experience. As it has mentioned above, they know that everything can change if a manager changes so all their efforts and motivations can go to waste, or their projects can disappear in the winding corridors of bureaucracy. Therefore, it is important to accept that any change is not easy especially changes in behaviour but at the same time it is a must for transitions.

To sum up experiences that has driven from the case and consider them together theoretical approach based on prioritize cooperation as a transformative strategy to create transitions on existing democratic managements, 4 main suggestions are improved as conditions. These conditions are proposed for open a floor to social cooperatives to create transitions in cities with their transformative practices:

The first one is “diversity-oriented regulatory frameworks”; legislation for cooperation of social cooperatives with municipalities is critical to institutionalized relations instead of leaving it to initiative of decision makers and to prevent hesitation of bureaucrats. However, these regulations should cover different profiles, needs, variety of practices and localities. In other words, it should be clear for each side but at the same time consist of flexibility in implementation. Moreover, it should aim to empower citizens instead of existing public authorities, challenge existing power relations and consider authenticity of civil organizations.

The second is to “strengthening democratic capacity”; to be transformative there is a need for progressive approach to create alternative. This approach is based on actor’s capacity to act horizontally, keep solidarity among themselves, be aware of distractions of neoliberal mechanisms. Therefore, actor’s democratic capacity needs to be improved. This development can only be possible by creating spaces to experience it and also by seriously considering capacity building programmes and toolkits instead of preparing it just for putting into reports of projects to get funds.

The third one is to “make cooperation mainstream” in urban politics; this covers to enlarge dimension of cooperations both in the number of actors and subject. If we think about the cases that has conveyed; we can imagine not only one social cooperative and municipality cooperation, but also these two different social cooperatives can collaborate each other and this can make them more effective on their ongoing projects with the municipality. Moreover, the cases and theoretical explanations show that urban planning has too much dimension. Planning brings spatial and social dimension together so cooperations on that field also should be considered multi-dimensional. Thinking on that way can create a bridge among grassroots and professionals but at the same time reveal connections between planning and politics.

The fourth and the complementary one is “political collective leadership in administration”; this need reveals due to existing separations between “political” and “administrative”. The case shows that even though political leader -the mayor- claims that they want to change the existing rule and even they change organization and bring out new institutions, they have blockages in implementation. Dealing with these blockages needs a different kind of political leadership that do not just consist of discourses to effect electorates but also take the municipality itself as a starting point of transformations and lead administrative team in a collective way. If the officers inside do not learn how to cooperate, trust and solidate, it is impossible to wait them to show these approaches to civil organizations. In other words, political leaders should consider that they cannot separate their political projects from their administrative success.

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