

A Critical evaluation of the latest regional planning efforts in Turkey

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There are a series of problems and issues planners face that are best dealt with at a regional scale such as air quality, water quality, habitat protection, transportation planning, urban sprawl (land use and growth management), economic development and social equity (Wheeler, 2000). However, regional planning is easier said than done. Planning usually occurs within administrative boundaries but economic development and environmental systems transcend these. Most of the time political boundaries do not reflect an economically, ecologically and socially functional region (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001). When the region is ill-defined planning may not achieve its goals. Planning powers and authority are usually fragmented among competing local governments and agencies with different missions.

The new millennium saw the first systematic regional planning efforts in Turkey to guide development. While there have been regional plans since 1960s these have been ad hoc, on a needs basis. The purpose of the earlier plans was to bring some order into the development taking place outside municipal boundaries due to the rapid population growth. However, these plans were not well defined by law at the time resulting in unceasing arguments over the function, content, scale, quality, legal basis of the plans as well as the responsibility and authority to make them (Tekinbaş, 2001).

By mid-2000s a series of new regulations (Environmental Law 2003, Metropolitan Municipality Law 2004, Provincial Special Administration Law 2005) prompted preparation of regional plans for most of the country. Compliance with the European Union Accession Partnership document resulted in the establishment of regional development agencies (Law Regarding the Establishment and the Duties of Development Agencies 2006) which added an additional layer of complexity to

Turkey's regional planning system and in some places this resulted in three parallel regional plans being prepared for the same geography. While some of these plans were supposed to be nested in a hierarchical order in some cases the lower order plan was prepared first. Plan boundaries and responsible agencies were controversial and many of the resulting plans were cancelled after court cases and laws governing these plans were amended. This paper intends to review the history of regional planning in Turkey and then critically examine the latest systematic regional planning efforts against best practice regional planning to identify problems and areas of improvement through the case study of regional plans of Izmir, the province containing the third most populous city in Turkey.

Preliminary work suggests problems with the hierarchical structure of the plans, designation of plan/regional boundaries and fragmentation of authority. Public Works Law of Turkey set up a hierarchy of plans and required lower level plans to be consistent with higher level plans "if they exist". In practice, there was no requirement to make regional plans and this caused a break in the hierarchical chain early on. In addition, there have been long standing confusion over who has the authority to make the sub-regional plans (Metropolitan Area Plans and Master Plans) due to the Law not specifying the responsible organizations for the master plans (Silahtar, 2001). Planning boundaries of the new regional plans have also been controversial. It was bad enough that the Master Plans were based on administrative provincial boundaries, but the designation of the boundaries of Metropolitan Area Plans were even worse and was more severely criticized. The Metropolitan Municipality Law has been mockingly called the "Compass Law" as the rule used for expansion of metropolitan boundaries for which the plans would be made involved taking the provincial government office as the centre of the town and drawing a circle with a certain radius whose length was based on population. Obviously, such a geometrical criterion has nothing to do with what constitutes a socio-economically functional region. Fragmentation of authority when it comes to regional planning is both horizontal and vertical. Horizontally the authority is shared between municipal and non-municipal areas (municipal vs. provincial administrations headed by elected vs. appointed officials respectively), between neighboring municipalities, and between neighboring provinces. At the national level

horizontal fragmentation is between competing ministries. Vertical fragmentation is between the central government and local governments. This involves the master plans prepared by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and Provincial Administrations as well as the development plans prepared by the municipalities. Furthermore there are a number of organizations with authority to make plans of regional significance such as the authority to designate Organized Industrial Parks by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the authority of designating and planning Tourism Zones by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the Cabinet. This means other organizations making regional plans covering these areas have no authority within these designated zones and centrally made spatial planning decisions such as Organized Industrial Parks, Tourism Zones etc. may also create a conflict with local development plans.

Resources

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