

**The Making of Consurbia: Conservation,  
Urbanization, and Socio-Environmental Change in  
Turkey's Gediz Delta**

by  
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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the processes of socio-environmental change in Turkey's Gediz Delta—an internationally protected coastal wetland, a traditionally agricultural area, and increasingly an urban development hotspot. Its theoretical insights are drawn from environmental sociology, urban political ecology as well as the studies on the neoliberalization of nature and environmental gentrification. It aims to contribute to the critical understanding of how nature is produced through historically varied and entangled socio-ecological processes. The dissertation explores how social-environmental imaginaries regarding a landscape are produced, contested, and expressed in concrete projects; how social actors interpret, navigate, and participate in socio-environmental transformations; and how conservation policies contribute to a particular form of urbanization in the urban-rural interface. Utilizing the methodological strategies of “incorporated comparison” (McMichael, 1990) and the “extended case method” (Burawoy, 1998), and based on a contextual analysis of texts, ethnographic data, and semi-structured interviews, I discuss the making of delta siconatures in relation to broader historical processes and within the context of the interplay of local and global developments since the 1860s. I particularly focus on the current conjuncture of the neoliberalization of the economy and socio-ecological relations in the post-1980 period. This conjuncture is experienced in the delta through the application of market-oriented wetland conservation policies, the mushrooming of gated communities, and the emergence of a novel peri-urbanity. I introduce and employ the concept of “consurbia” to refer to a peri-urban area which, although demonstrating a heterogenous co-existence of rural, urban, and natural ecosystems, is centred on conservation zones. Demonstrating the switch from a strict preservation model to a market-friendly one in the 2000s, I argue that conservation policies have become the dominant mode of production of space and the driver of urban developments in the delta, including luxury houses, recreational areas, and emerging socio-ecological relationships that privilege the preferences of newcomers at the expense of traditional relationships and practices. I call this process “conservation-led gentrification,” a form of environmental gentrification which describes a social and physical “upgrading” process in line with neoliberal conservation policies. My analysis demonstrates the centrality of siconature-making for capital accumulation processes and urban development models.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalization; nature conservation; urbanization; socio-environmental change; Turkey

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## List of Acronyms

AKP:	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
AOSB:	Atatürk Organize Sanayi Bölgesi (Atatürk Organized Industrial Zone)
B.C:	British Columbia
ÇEVKO:	Çevre Koruma ve Ambalaj Atıklarını Değerlendirme Vakfı (The Environmental Protection and Packaging Waste Recovery and Recycling Trust)
CHP:	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
DHKD:	Doğal Hayatı Koruma Derneği (Society for the Protection of Nature)
DP:	Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party)
DPT:	Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı (State Planning Organization)
DSİ:	Devlet Su İşleri (State Hydraulic Works)
EC:	European Community
ECM:	Extended Case Method
EIA:	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU:	European Union
ExPE:	Exurban Political Ecology
FDI:	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
IBA:	Important Bird Area
İBB:	İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality)
ICBP:	International Council for Bird Preservation, BirdLife International
ICZM:	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
ISI:	Import Substitution Industrialization
IUCN:	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWRB:	International Wildfowl Research Bureau, Wetlands International
İZKUŞ:	İzmir Kuş Cennetini Koruma ve Geliştirme Birliği (The Union for the Protection and Development of the Izmir Bird Paradise)
İzTO:	İzmir Ticaret Odası (Izmir Chamber of Commerce)

LULU:	Locally Unwanted Land Use
MGK:	Millî Güvenlik Konseyi (National Security Council)
NATO:	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEAP:	National Environmental Action Plan of Turkey
NGO:	Non-governmental Organization
OPDA:	The Ottoman Public Debt Administration
PACA:	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
Ramsar:	The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat
RSPB:	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SCF:	Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Free Republican Party)
TBMM:	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey)
TÇV:	Türkiye Çevre Vakfı (The Environmental Foundation of Turkey)
TEKEL:	State Monopolies Administration
TEMA:	Türkiye Erozyonla Mücadele Ağaçlandırma ve Doğal Varlıkları Koruma Vakfı (The Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosions and Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats)
TOKİ:	Toplu Konut İdaresi (Mass Housing Development Administration)
TTKC/TTKD:	Türkiye Tabiatını Koruma Cemiyeti/Derneği (The Turkish Association for the Conservation of Nature)
TUBITAK:	Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu (The Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey)
U.K.:	United Kingdom
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP:	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO:	United Nations World Tourism Organization
UPE:	Urban Political Ecology
USA:	United States of America
WCED:	World Commission on Environment and Development
WWF:	World Wildlife Fund / World-Wide for Nature

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

During Turkey's 2019 municipal election campaign, two major mayoral candidates for the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality frequently referred to the Gediz Delta, albeit in two completely different ways. Citing the ornithological significance of the delta and using it as evidence of Izmir's liveability, the Republican People's Party candidate (now mayor), Tunç Soyer said that "Izmir is the only city where thousands of flamingos breed. This means that we still have a clean environment. I will be the mayor of not only those who vote for me but also the flamingos" (*Sputnik News*, 2019). For former Minister of the Economy, and the Justice and Development Party candidate, Nihat Zeybekci, the delta meant something else—a potential site for infrastructural investments. His long list of campaign promises included a mega-bridge proposal. Spanning the Izmir Bay, this proposed bridge would connect the southern districts of the city to the recently completed Izmir-Istanbul highway through the Gediz Delta's shores (*Milliyet*, 2019). However, the 2019 election was not the first time that the delta was evoked within the socio-environmental imaginaries of the city and urban politics. In fact, the Gediz Delta has been imagined differently by competing social actors, and the delta landscapes have been transformed through historically varied, internally and externally entangled socio-ecological processes for the last two centuries. This dissertation examines these processes, with a particular emphasis on the post-1980 period, which have produced the contemporary social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta to understand the historical and geographical complexity of socionature-making. By socionature-making, I refer to the appropriation of nature and the reorganization of socio-environmental relations within the capitalist world-ecology (cf. Moore, 2015; more on this later).

The notion of environmental imaginaries describes the constellation of ideas that social groups develop about a given landscape by living or working in a shared place as well as how distant actors view that landscape based on the representations and the visions attached to it (Davis, 2011, p. 3; see also Peet & Watts, 1996; Nesbitt & Weiner, 2001). Environmental imaginaries stem from material and cultural practices, local, national, and international institutional environments, as well as natural properties of a landscape

(McGregor, 2004). They are manifested in concrete socio-environmental projects that transform the social and physical landscapes (cf. Yeh, 2009), attesting to the dialectical interplay of society and nature. Environmental imaginaries cannot be seen static as social structures, power relations and ecological conditions underlying them change over time in unpredictable ways. Therefore, they should be evaluated and understood within the trajectories of a given locality, world-historical context, and in relation to key conjunctural moments (Harris, 2011). The ways social actors imagine a particular natural environment is related to the socio-ecological context that they are embedded in and how they define themselves within that context (cf. Greider & Garkovich, 1994). These imaginaries say as much about the “social” as about the “natural” environment. Hence, I prefer the term *socio-environmental* imaginaries. Throughout this dissertation, I discuss how competing groups imagine the landscapes of the Gediz Delta differently and how these imaginaries are expressed through historically specific socio-environmental projects within the context of broader political-economic processes.

## 1.1. A Bird’s-Eye View on the Gediz Delta

One of the largest deltas in the country, the Gediz Delta is an extensive wetland located on the west coast, within the administrative boundaries of the Izmir province (Figure 1.1). Izmir is the third-largest urban agglomeration of Turkey, with a population of over 4 million. Adjacent to the city, the Gediz Delta covers around 40,000 hectares of land that includes lagoons, alluvium islands, reed beds, freshwater marshes, saline pools, and hilly areas as well as residential, agricultural and industrial areas. A total of 297 bird species are recorded in the delta among which the Dalmatian Pelican, the Red-breasted Goose, and the Greater Flamingo are the most well-known (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2019). In fact, the Gediz Delta is home to a tenth of the world’s Greater Flamingo population every winter (Law, 2018). The international conservation community recognizes the delta as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA).<sup>1</sup> The wetlands of the delta (approximately 15,000 hectares) are also registered as

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<sup>1</sup> For the details about these two conservation concepts see <http://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/programmes/sites-habitats-ibas-and-kbas>

“wetland of international importance” by the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

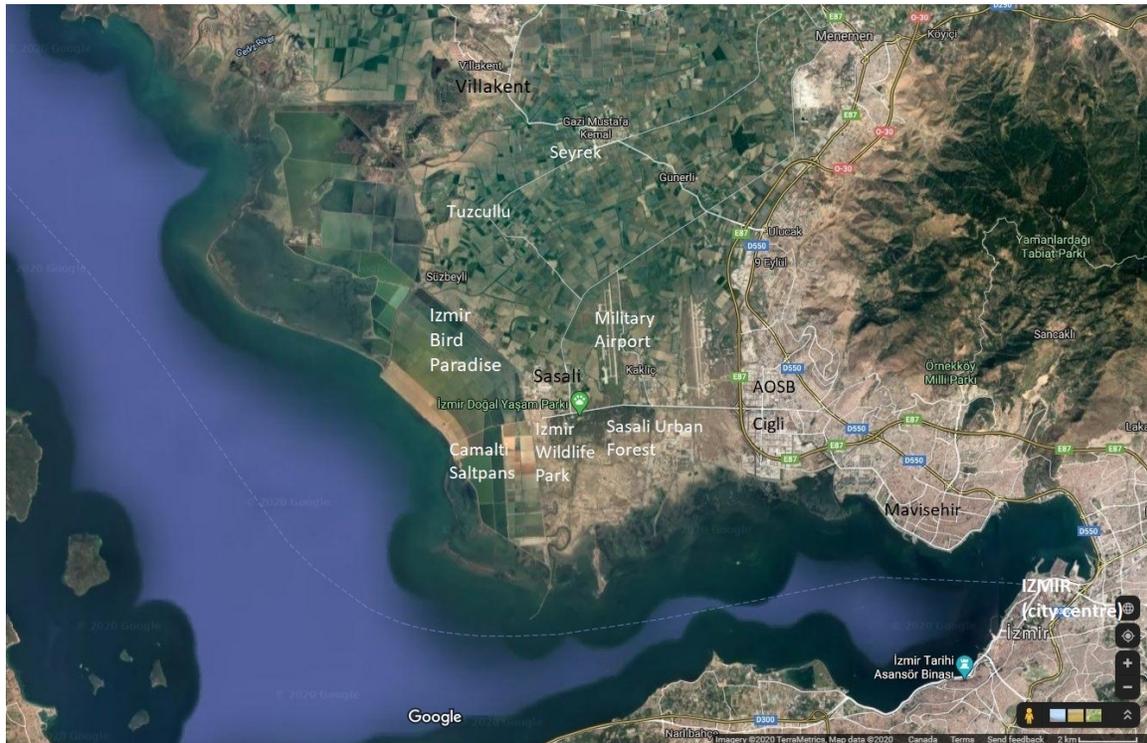


Figure 1.1. The Gediz Delta and Izmir.  
Map data: ©2020 Google, TerraMetrics. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.google.com/maps/@38.5106136,26.9062884,27094m/data=!3m1!1e3>

Located just 25 kilometres northwest of the city centre, the Gediz Delta demonstrates peri-urban characteristics. While there is no universally accepted definition of peri-urban areas, I use the concept to refer to transitional zones between the city and the countryside. Rather than being an entirely separate area, I consider peri-urban areas as an extension of the city, given that ecological, economic, and demographic processes in the city region function in an integrated way (Simon, McGregor & Thompson, 2006). These areas are characterized by the co-existence of urban and rural features, mixed land-use patterns, highly heterogeneous social compositions, and unclear institutional structures and boundaries as they often fall within multiple administrative jurisdictions, each with different financial and technical capacities and competing interests (Allen, 2003; Aguilar, 2008; Maconachie, 2007). Peri-urban areas often serve as a source of urban food supply and a place for outdoor recreational activities. They are also subject to competition for land with non-agricultural uses, mainly residential developments

underpinned by the movement of natural amenity-seeking urbanites to these areas (Chaverri, 2006, Hudalah, Winarso & Woltjer, 2016). As a result, a “heterogeneous mosaic” of natural ecosystems, agroecosystems, and urban-ecosystems co-exist in peri-urban areas (Allen, 2003). Ravetz et al. (2013, p. 13) argue that they are not simply a “zone of transition”; instead, they constitute a “new kind of multi-functional territory.” As a peri-urban area, the Gediz Delta demonstrates such multifunctionality and traverses the so-called urban-rural divide. Apart from the conservation zones and agricultural fields, there exist nine villages/neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup> and an increasing number of gated communities in the Gediz Delta. The total population of these settlements is around 20,000 today. Although agriculture, fishing and salt production still play an essential role for local livelihoods, manufacturing and service jobs are also rising thanks to the neighbouring industrial districts, the mushrooming of gated communities, and the slow but steady development of ecotourism in the delta.

The contemporary social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta are the products of historically and geographically specific processes. These processes are shaped by and in turn shape, particular socio-environmental imaginaries. The delta has been imagined differently by competing actors since the nineteenth century. These imaginaries have always been formed within the political, economic, and social contexts that the actors are embedded in and manifested through concrete socio-ecological projects (Table 1.1). The major river that was running through the delta was viewed as a threat to the city’s thriving port economy in the late nineteenth century. Responding to the political pressure from Izmir’s well-connected and internationally supported merchant groups, in 1891, the Ottoman government diverted the main riverbed to 50 kilometres north of the city. This large-scale engineering project aimed to limit the shallowing of the gulf because of the river’s sediment deposits and to maintain the productivity of the key economic sectors in the delta, namely salt extraction and agriculture. In the 1920s and the 1930s, the social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta were shaped by a significant demographic change as the delta was chosen as a settlement area for Turkish immigrants from the

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<sup>2</sup> In 2008, the Turkish Parliament passed the Law No. 5747 which extended the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities to incorporate rural subdistricts within municipal administrative structure. Villages with a population over 2000 that used to have their semi-independent municipality statuses (*belde*) were annexed to the nearest district municipalities as neighbourhoods (Republic of Turkey, 2008; Tekel, 2016). I discuss how this administrative change was experienced in the processes of conservation and urbanization in the Gediz Delta in Chapters 4 and 5.

Balkans after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The wetlands of the delta were politically constructed as “wastelands” and the cause of public health problems in this period. The young republican government started the first extensive marsh drainage projects in the delta to open new lands for agricultural production and to mitigate the growing popular unrest. During the mid-twentieth century, while the marshes continued to be drained, the delta experienced large-scale mechanization and commercialization of agriculture due to the structural changes in Turkey’s political economy. Starting from the 1970s, a gradual decline in farm jobs led many villagers to seek employment in other sectors, particularly in emerging industrial areas of Izmir.

Table 1.1. Timeline of the Making and Remaking of Delta Socionatures.

<b><i>Time Period</i></b>	<b><i>Historical Processes</i></b>	<b><i>Major Local, National, Global Actors</i></b>	<b><i>Socio-ecological Projects and the Produced Socionatures</i></b>
The 1860s – 1910s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The integration of the Ottoman Empire with the capitalist world-economy</li> <li>• The development of Izmir’s port economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ottoman government</li> <li>• Aydın Governorship</li> <li>• European consuls in Izmir</li> <li>• The Ottoman Public Debt Administration</li> <li>• Cosmopolitan merchant classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Railways</li> <li>• Re-engineered Gediz River</li> <li>• Salt extraction sites</li> </ul>
The 1920s – 1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic reconstruction</li> <li>• Demographic change</li> <li>• Nation-building policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central government</li> <li>• Menemen Anti-Malaria Unit</li> <li>• Menemen Settlement Centre</li> <li>• Turkish immigrants from the Balkans (delta villagers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New settlements</li> <li>• Draining marshes</li> <li>• Opening new agricultural areas</li> </ul>
The 1950s – 1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agriculture-led national developmentalism</li> <li>• Turkey’s repositioning in the world-system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central government</li> <li>• State Hydraulic Works (DSI)</li> <li>• The Agricultural Bank</li> <li>• Marshall Aid Provincial Distribution Committee</li> <li>• Landowners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eucalyptus plantations</li> <li>• Commercialized agricultural areas</li> <li>• NATO airbase</li> </ul>

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Historical Processes</i>	<i>Major Local, National, Global Actors</i>	<i>Socio-ecological Projects and the Produced Socionatures</i>
The 1980s – ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neoliberalization of the economy and socio-ecological relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Parks Administration</li> <li>• The Provincial Board for the Conservation of Nature and Cultural Assets</li> <li>• Izmir Metropolitan Municipality</li> <li>• Delta municipalities</li> <li>• İZKUŞ</li> <li>• National and international environmental NGOs</li> <li>• Ramsar Convention</li> <li>• Conservation scientists</li> <li>• Real estate developers</li> <li>• Amenity migrants</li> <li>• Delta communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of conservation areas</li> <li>• Izmir Bird Paradise</li> <li>• Izmir Wildlife Park</li> <li>• Sasalı Urban Forest</li> <li>• “Wetland of international importance”</li> <li>• Industrial zones</li> <li>• Urban expansion</li> <li>• Water treatment plant</li> <li>• Gated communities</li> </ul>

In the 1980s, while the city was growing towards the north where the delta is located, the Gediz Delta was reimagined as a “bird paradise,” and some parts of the delta were designated as natural preservation zones. The conservation policies of this period resulted in fencing off certain parts of the delta for scientific research, and local people lost their access to their traditional lands that had long been used for grazing, hunting, lagoon fishing, and recreational purposes. At the turn of the century, the conservation of the Gediz Delta ecosystems went through a transformation from a strict protection approach to a conservation model informed by a globally hegemonic sustainable development discourse and environmental governance framework with the involvement of national and international non-governmental organizations. At the same time, the delta has begun to appear as a “desirable” place in the socio-environmental imaginaries of urban middle-classes who were in search of a particular lifestyle. Several Izmir-based real estate companies “discovered” the delta to develop housing projects. As a result, the delta villages experienced rapid urbanization with the mushrooming of gated communities. I conceptualize all these peri-urban landscape elements of the delta, from lagoons and marshes to salt extraction sites, agricultural fields, conservation zones, parks, forested areas, and old and new settlements as socionatures.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation

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<sup>3</sup> In a recently published article, anthropologist Caterina Scaramelli (2019) discusses the social actors’ moral claims about the transformation of the Gediz Delta landscapes, particularly conservation areas, fishing lagoons, transportation projects as “infrastructural ecologies.”

demonstrates that the contemporary making and remaking of the delta siconatures take place through the dual processes of conservation and urbanization; and that these processes intersect with broader histories implicating constantly changing socio-economic, political and ecological conditions within the context of the interplay between local and global developments.

## 1.2. Conceptual Framework: The Making of Siconatures

By siconature-making, I refer to the appropriation of nature and the reorganization of socio-environmental relations within the capitalist world-ecology. Jason W. Moore argues that “capitalism is not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is a *way of organizing nature*” (2015, p. 14, emphasis in original) and offers a perspective to see capitalism as a “world-ecology, joining the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of nature in a dialectical unity” (2015, p. 15). In other words, Moore’s capitalist world-ecology perspective suggests that capitalism does not merely act on and transform nature, it “develops through nature-society relations;” to put differently, “capitalism *does not* have an ecological regime; it *is* an ecological regime” (Moore, 2011a, p. 2, emphases in original). Building on Moore’s “capitalism as a world-ecology” perspective, Parenti (2013) argues that the appropriation of nature within the processes of capital accumulation cannot be possible without the direct participation of the state. “Capital’s metabolic relationship with non-human nature,” Parenti (2013, p. 2) suggests, is “always a relationship with the state, and mediated through the state.” He argues that “managing, delivering, and producing the environment is a core and foundational feature of the modern, territorially defined, capitalist state” (ibid). Capital, in other words, requires state power to appropriate nature and reorganize socio-ecological relations.

In fact, the states have played a central role in producing mechanisms for “appropriating uncaptialized nature” within the development and expansion of capitalism, a process that

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Although her study is a significant contribution to “theorizing infrastructure and ecology as inseparable,” it does not fully address the issue the neoliberalization of nature and urbanization in the delta in relation to the broader historical processes. The present study, instead, analyzes the contemporary developments in the delta within the context of the neoliberalization of socio-ecological relationships through the application of a globally hegemonic conservation model and unfolding of a novel urbanization process, namely conservation-led gentrification.

Moore (2015) calls the “cheap nature strategy.” His historical analysis mainly focuses on the production of “cheap” food, energy, raw materials, and labour-power. The “cheap nature strategy” aims at “appropriating the biological and geological distributions of the earth in an effort to reduce the value composition of production” (Moore, 2015, p. 304). He further argues that “the appropriation of frontier land and labour” through this cheap nature strategy, “has been the indispensable condition for great waves of capital accumulation from Dutch hegemony in the seventh century to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s” (Moore, 2015, p. 305). However, according to Moore, capitalism has already exhausted this strategy as financialization and the polarization of income and wealth, as well as global climate and food crises, attest; capitalism may not survive this *manifold* crisis since there is “no place to go” now (Moore, 2014, p. 299, see also Moore 2015, 2016). Moore’s understanding of the “capitalist world-ecology” as a “patterned history of power, capital, and nature, dialectically joined” (Moore, 2015, p. 19) offers a comprehensive perspective to understand capital’s relation to nature, the modes and strategies of reorganizing socio-ecological relations, and to transcend the so-called society-nature dualism. However, what is missing in this framework is the processes that make and remake socionatures through conservation strategies in the current (neoliberal) phase of capital accumulation.

The literature on the neoliberalization of nature and conservation explores how the dominant conservation approaches today produce socionatures within a market framework and incorporate them into capital accumulation processes, a strategy Büscher and Fletcher (2015) calls “accumulation by conservation.” This literature makes important contributions to the understanding of the contemporary privatization, commercialization, and commodification of biophysical properties through mechanisms such as payments for ecosystem services, mitigation offset schemes, and carbon markets, and how power, capital, and nature are conjoined in the creation of (neoliberal) protected areas (see the discussion below). However, the role of neoliberal conservation in facilitating urban developments and conservation as an urban growth strategy has not attracted much scholarly attention. In this dissertation, I discuss the making and remaking of the Gediz Delta socionatures in relation to broader historical processes and contexts since the nineteenth century, with a particular focus on the entanglements of conservation policies and urban developments in the post-1980 period. I suggest that the transformations of the Gediz Delta landscapes through the dual processes of

conservation and urbanization within the context of broader political-economic developments offer a compelling opportunity to study the historical and geographical complexity of socationature-making.

The remaking of socationatures through the creation of protected areas for biodiversity conservation has been studied in many contexts. Land acquisitions for conservation purposes are usually conceptualized as “green grabbing,” a particular form of land grabbing processes. Green grabbing describes a process through which the access and control relations in large areas of territory are reconfigured for the benefit of extra-local actors, such as national elites, transnational corporations, big environmental NGOs, and philanthropists at the expense of local communities whose access to their traditional land and resources are limited or lost as their practices are often politically constructed as “unsustainable” (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012; Peluso & Lund, 2011; White et al., 2012, Zoomers 2010). These processes sometimes take the usual form of privatization of formerly communal lands (Holmes, 2014); in other cases, the areas involved officially remain to be public land, yet the *benefits* from natural resources are captured by more powerful outsiders, including the state (Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012; Holmes, 2012).

The literature on land grabbing often explores the dynamics of land appropriation for so-called biodiversity conservation in relation to the “agrarian question,” particularly the class-transformation processes through the commercialization of land and the weakening or disappearance of subsistence-based economies (Atasoy, 2017). Although the dynamics, processes and consequences of land acquisitions in rural contexts within their historically and geographically specific trajectories are well documented (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012; Rocheleau, 2015; Scheidel & Work, 2018; Sugden & Punch, 2014, among others), the urban connections of land grabbing for environmental ends have rarely been theorized (cf. Hettiarachchi, Morrison, & McAlpine, 2019). In her study on the process of land commodification in the commercialization of agriculture and housing in Turkey, Atasoy (2017, p. 659) suggests that an analysis of “the combined processes of transformations in land use” should go “beyond a single *sectoral* focus on either urban or agricultural development” (emphasis in original). The case of the Gediz Delta, where the traditional understandings of urbanity and rurality blend into each other and conservation policies entangle with urbanization and rural transformations, offers an opportunity to generate such a multisectoral and multidimensional analysis of socio-

environmental change. The present study suggests that the emerging entanglements of nature conservation and urbanization in peri-urban areas provide an important lens to understand the contradictions and tensions of contemporary processes of socionature-making.

The concept of socionature represents an attempt to overcome historically predominant dualistic understanding of “society” and “nature.” It is used in critical social sciences literature to argue that “‘society’ and ‘nature’ should not be analyzed in abstraction from one another but, rather, they are inseparable and always already coproductive” (Bear, 2016). Geographer Erik Swyngedouw, who developed this neologism based on his work on the hydrological landscapes, i.e., the construction of dams and water distribution systems in twentieth-century Spain and Ecuador, suggests that

contemporary scholars increasingly recognize that natural or ecological conditions and processes do not operate separately from social processes, and that the actually existing socionatural conditions are always the result of intricate transformations of pre-existing configurations that are themselves inherently natural and social (Swyngedouw, 1999, p. 445).

Recognizing the co-creation of the “social” and the “natural,” and engaging with the Gramscian idea of “conjunctural moment,”<sup>4</sup> sociologist Nancy Lee Peluso (2012, p. 81) also argues that the concept of socionature can help “examine the coalesced temporal and spatial components of a complex historical trajectory” as “these moments are products of their times and their histories, shaped both by different political-ecological contexts and by prevailing ideas and practices.” In a similar vein, offering a remedy to the “danger of losing the embodied, historically and geographically specific practices that are so central to the making of natures,” Ekers and Loftus (2013, p. 248) suggest that “it is necessary to ceaselessly historicise the processes and relations that come to bear on the production of nature.” In other words, the making of socionatures should be understood and analyzed within their historical context and geographical variegation.

I follow this approach and explore the making and remaking of the peri-urban socionatures of the Gediz Delta in relation to broader historical processes and contexts—the integration of the region with the capitalist world-economy in the nineteenth

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of “conjunctural moment” or in Gramsci’s words “the terrain of the conjunctural” describes “how different forces come together, conjuncturally, to create the new terrain, on which a different politics must form up” (Hall, 1988, p. 163).

century, the economic reconstruction, demographic change and nation-building projects of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s-30s, the agriculture-led national developmentalism and Turkey's repositioning within the world-system in the mid-twentieth century. Against this historical backdrop, I particularly focus on the current conjuncture of the neoliberalization of the economy and socio-ecological relations since the 1980s. This current conjuncture is experienced in the Gediz Delta through the application of globally hegemonic wetland conservation policies and the emergence of a novel peri-urbanity, both as a socio-spatial form and the organization of socio-ecological life. These conjunctural moments, just like the socio-natures they produce, I suggest, are shaped by a constant interplay between local and global developments. In other words, they are internally and externally entangled. They represent the "parts" that are in a dynamic and mutually conditioning relationship with a self-forming "whole" (cf. McMichael, 1990; Atasoy, 2009, 2017; see the methodology section below for a detailed discussion). The "whole" that I refer to here is the capitalist world-ecology, "a patterned history of power, capital, and nature, dialectically joined" (Moore, 2015, p. 19).

Environmental sociologists also acknowledge the inseparability of natural and social processes. Greider and Garkovich's (1994) argue that social actors "transform" the natural environments into "landscapes" through the use of symbols and attaching continually changing and competing meanings to the physical phenomena. In other words, a landscape is simultaneously a natural and a social construct that combines physical elements with a social group's self-definition, and their interpretation of the past and visions for the future. More attuned to political and economic context through which nature is made and remade, Freudenburg, Frickel, and Gramling (1995) offer the notion of "conjoint constitution" to emphasize the mutual contingency of the natural and the social. They argue that environmental conditions, elements, and processes are always defined in relation to social practices, perspectives, and technologies available to social groups; and these practices, perspectives and technologies emerge through constant interactions with the physical environment. However, the mutual contingency of the natural and the social has rarely been theorized in the context of urbanization.<sup>5</sup> Although some scholars explored the environmental impacts of urbanization and suburban sprawl

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<sup>5</sup> One significant exception is Molotch, Freudenburg and Paulsen's (2000) analysis of the urbanization trajectory of two Californian cities. They examine "how the natural environment operates as an amenity or financial resource or both" within the "cultural, political, and organizational context that interprets and shapes its meaning" (Molotch et al., 2000, pp. 807-8).

(Clement 2010; Clement & Elliott, 2012; Pattison, Habans, & Clement 2014; Rudel, 2009), the urbanization of nature through the making of socrionatures has not attracted much attention from environmental sociologists.<sup>6</sup> For instance, keywords such as “urban,” “city,” “suburban,” “peri-urban,” and “urbanization” do not appear among the popular topics in environmental sociology, according to a recent survey (Bohr & Dunlap, 2018). Similarly, the environmental sociology literature is silent about the role of conservation policies in shaping socio-environmental relations, particularly within the urbanization context. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by asking how the social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta have been produced through a series of socio-ecological projects, such as the creation of conservation zones and the emergence of gated communities, that reflect social actors’ socio-environmental imaginaries.

The inseparability of social and ecological processes lies at the centre of theoretical concerns of urban political ecology (UPE), a growing, interdisciplinary field that focuses on the production of urban socrionatures. UPE is “not so much concerned with the question of nature *IN* the city, but rather with the urbanization *OF* nature, that is, the process through which all types of nature are socially mobilized, economically incorporated (commodified), and physically metabolized/transformed in order to support the urbanization process” (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2014, pp. 462-3, emphases in original). UPE stresses the dynamic, creative, and energetic exchanges, or metabolisms, that unite humans and nature within specific historical socio-geographical conditions.

The way that urban political ecologists use the term metabolism implies that “the city is constitutively social *and* natural from the bottom to the top, and urban nature is just as political as urban society” (Wachsmuth, 2012, p. 516, emphasis in original). While metabolic interactions transform both humans and nature, humans are relatively and partially able to control and direct these exchanges through their “drives, desires, and imaginations” (Swyngedouw, 2006, pp. 24-5). In other words, the transformative exchange with biophysical dynamics of nature exists within the framework of socially

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<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, some urban sociologists recently have begun to explore the urban-nature nexus. For instance, Angelo (2019) highlights how nature emerges as a moral good in social imaginary and coins the term “urbanized nature” to describe urban “greening” forms and practices that are simultaneously a product of and a key variable in urbanization. Similarly, Loughran (2016) discusses how climate change and industrial decay, as well as growing awareness about ecological consequences of mass consumption and industrialization are shaping contemporary urban landscapes through the production of city-nature hybrids, or socrionatures.

defined regulatory conditions set by historically specific arrangements of social relations of appropriation, production, and exchange (ibid). In the case of urban metabolisms, UPE scholars argue that “the material conditions that compromise urban environments are controlled, manipulated and serve the interests of the elite at the expense of marginalized populations” (Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006, p. 6). In other words, UPE aims to uncover power relations among social groups that produce uneven urban landscapes. In fact, Swyngedouw (2006, p. 27) argues that modern urbanization is first and foremost a series of entangled and power-laden processes of the production of siconatures, including “the production of dams, the re-engineering of rivers, the management of biodiversity hotspots, the transfiguration of DNA codes, the cultivation of tomatoes (genetically modified or not) or the construction of houses.” In short, the making of siconatures involves socio-political relations, as well as ecological conditions and processes.

This dissertation explores the making of Gediz Delta siconatures in relation to broader historical processes and contexts as the products of shifting power relations among social groups and their often-competing socio-environmental imaginaries, which are expressed through particular socio-ecological projects. By doing so, I aim to contribute an ongoing discussion within the UPE literature, which revolves around the question of where (or whether) one should draw the line when examining urbanization processes. This discussion is particularly important for the purposes of this dissertation because my exploration of the emergence of a novel peri-urbanity through the application of conservation policies and the mushrooming of residential developments does not limit the urban-nature nexus within the traditional boundaries of the city.

In a rather provocative article, Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015) question the contemporary relevance of a bounded conception of the city as a privileged analytical lens—an approach they call “methodological cityism.” They suggest thinking about the political ecology of urbanization, not cities per se, that encompasses “town and country, city and wilderness,” and the global connections beyond (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2015, p. 22). Similarly, Gustafson et al. (2014) have called for a “megapolitan” political ecology, which highlights the significance of urban-hinterland connections within the flows of urban metabolisms. Offering a regional scale to understand urbanizing landscapes via socio-ecological processes, their approach emphasizes “urban-rural relations and flows, ecological change with localized impacts and regional and global connections,

urbanization through regional infrastructural networks and economic linkages, as well as regionally distinct cultural, social, and political histories” (Gustafson et al., 2014, p. 666). Correspondingly, while discussing the historically specific processes of socationature-making in the Gediz Delta, I examine how local and global developments and actors intersect and interact. The contemporary processes of urbanization of nature in the Gediz Delta demonstrate that uneven power relations that are manifested in the local environment are embedded in regional, national, and global networks.

By focusing on the transformations of peri-urban landscapes, I aim to go beyond dichotomous categories such as the urban-rural and highlight how the contemporary processes of socationature-making blur the so-called boundaries between the city and the countryside. Acknowledging the hybrid landscapes produced by contemporary uneven urbanization processes that go beyond the urban core, McKinnon et al. (2017) suggest an exurban political ecology (ExPE) framework that takes exurbs, peri-urban areas, edge cities, suburbs into consideration. Whereas UPE mainly focuses on socio-environmental issues within the boundaries of the city proper, ExPE puts the emphasis on the “environmental changes, political conflicts, and management challenges that emerge from flows of people, materials, and representations between cities and other spaces (McKinnon et al., 2017, p. 3). ExPE scholars stress the contradictory and conflictual dynamics that shape the in-between spaces, especially traditionally rural areas on the outskirts of cities that attract exurbanite amenity migrants for their perceived natural values and beauty (Cadieux & Hurley, 2011). Amenity migration, which is defined as “a broad diversity of patterns of human movement to rural places in search of particular lifestyle attributes” (Abrams, Gosnell, Gill & Klepeis, 2012, p. 270), constitutes a key dynamic in the transformation of landscapes. Amenity migrants who move from city centres to exurban, peri-urban, and rural spaces bring their socio-environmental imaginaries with them and develop new ones, which results in the “re-creation of the rural” (ibid). Exurbia is more than a geographical zone that describes emerging low-density, amenity-seeking, post-productivist residential areas around big cities; it is a space with multiple social, economic, political, and environmental interconnections and conflicts (Taylor, 2011). McKinnon et al. (2017) suggest that an integrated ExPE is useful to highlight the environmental attitudes and beliefs of both old-timers and new-comers in those spaces, the role of developers and the real estate sector as well as formal and informal regulatory and planning activities. A focus on

exurban spaces also enables scholars to incorporate nature conservation policy and practices into their analysis of residential developments in rural areas.

Whereas UPE has neglected the nature conservation both as a policy and a social movement frame, ExPE scholars explore the development of conservation spaces and the creation of a conservation landscape identity (Hurley, Maccaroni, & Williams, 2017). From this perspective, Hurley and Arı (2018) explore uneven rural landscape change in western Turkey; they argue that amenity-related residential developments in the form of second homes and conservation policies overlap. Their analysis stresses the role of cultural identities for local communities to accommodate and resist these processes (ibid). While their study focuses on “competing rural capitalisms” and reterritorialization, I am interested in how urban dynamics on the outskirts of metropolitan cities are shaped in relation to conservation policies within the context of the historical conjuncture of neoliberalization of socio-ecological relationships. My project aims to uncover how nature conservation policies and practices contribute to a particular form of urbanization as a socionature-making process in the urban-rural interface and how social actors interpret, navigate, and participate in socio-environmental transformations in peri-urban areas.

To recapitulate, this dissertation aims to provide a critical analysis of the transformation of social and physical landscapes through historically specific and geographically variegated socio-ecological projects. While focusing on the “conjoint constitution” of the social and the natural within the processes of the transformation of the natural environments into “landscapes,” and exploring urbanization as a *driver* of environmental change, environmental sociology does not pay enough attention to the urbanization of nature, and it is silent about the role of conservation policies in shaping socio-environmental relations. Urban political ecology addresses the issue of the urbanization of nature and explores the process of the production of uneven urban landscapes and power relations that shape them. However, peri-urban areas have not attracted much attention; and there remain many unanswered questions about how conservation policies shape social and physical landscapes in the urban periphery. I suggest that the processes that produce peri-urban socionatures should be explored in relation to their historical contingency and geographical specificity and within the context of the interplay between local and global developments.

To understand the historical and geographical complexity of socationature-making and uncover internally and externally entangled processes of socio-environmental change via an analysis of the production of social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta, this dissertation asks the following questions:

1. How are social-environmental imaginaries regarding a landscape produced, contested, and expressed in concrete projects, such as the creation of conservation zones, agricultural areas, and residential spaces?
2. How do social actors interpret, navigate, and participate in socio-environmental transformations in peri-urban areas?
3. How do nature conservation policies and practices contribute to a particular form of urbanization in the urban-rural interface?

To answer these questions, this dissertation also engages with conceptual developments in two interrelated domains of scholarship: the neoliberalization of nature and conservation, and environmental gentrification. The following is a discussion on these two bodies of literature that guide my research questions, where I also identify the gaps that my findings will address and propose to remedy. Table 1.2 summarizes the conceptual framework and the contributions of the present study.

Table 1.2. Conceptual Framework: Objects of Analysis, Literatures, Contributions.

<p><b>Environmental Sociology</b></p> <p><i>Objects of Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The transformation of the natural environments into "landscapes."</li> <li>• The mutual constitution of the natural and the social.</li> </ul> <p><i>The Gap</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough attention to the urbanization of nature.</li> <li>• No attention to the role of conservation policies in shaping socio-environmental relations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Present Study</b></p> <p><i>Objects of Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical and geographical complexity of socationature-making.</li> <li>• Internally and externally entangled processes of socio-environmental change.</li> </ul> <p><i>Contributions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A critical analysis of the transformation of social and physical landscapes through historically specific and geographically variegated socio-ecological projects.</li> <li>• Conservation-led gentrification as a form of environmental gentrification.</li> <li>• Consurbia as a novel form of peri-urbanity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Urban Political Ecology</b></p> <p><i>Objects of Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The urbanization of nature.</li> <li>• Power relations that shape the urban landscapes.</li> </ul> <p><i>The Gap</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough attention to peri-urban areas</li> <li>• Not enough attention to conservation policies in the production of uneven landscapes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Neoliberalization of Nature and Conservation</b></p> <p><i>Objects of Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privatization, commercialization, and commodification of environmental properties.</li> <li>• The role of conservation in the expansion of market relations.</li> <li>• Normative assumptions about human-nature relationships.</li> </ul> <p><i>The Gap</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough attention to how neoliberal conservation can go hand-in-hand with urbanization policies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental Gentrification</b></p> <p><i>Objects of Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of nature in encouraging, facilitating, and influencing gentrification processes.</li> <li>• The contentions aspects of urban greening policies.</li> <li>• The drivers of environmental gentrification.</li> </ul> <p><i>The Gap</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough attention to peri-urban greening policies.</li> <li>• No attention to how conservation policies trigger gentrification processes in the urban periphery.</li> </ul>	

### **1.2.1. Neoliberalization of Nature and Conservation**

David Harvey (2005, p. 19) describes neoliberalism as a “political project” that seeks to revitalize and expand the conditions for capital accumulation on a global scale. It is a “market form of development,” which involves a push towards marketization in the forms of deregulation and regulation, expansion of private property relations, trade and financial liberalization, shrinking of welfare systems and labour market flexibilization (Atasoy, 2014, pp. 2-3). Neoliberalism, Ward and England (2007, p. 2) suggest, has “become the ubiquitous political commonsense condition of recent years.” However, it is never a complete project or an end-state; hence, many scholars see neoliberalism as a process and prefer the term “neoliberalization” to emphasize its continually evolving practices. For instance, according to Tickell and Peck (2002, p. 383), neoliberalization processes are always “contradictory, having the capacity to bring forth countertendencies, and as existing in historically and geographically contingent forms.” Other scholars have emphasized neoliberalism’s normative framework and assumptions about the nature of human-human and human-nature relations. Gill (2012, p. 5) argues that neoliberalism as a normative project fosters and consolidates a possessively individualist, marketized “common sense” that undermines solidarity and social justice. Similarly, Adaman and Madra (2014) suggest that neoliberalization processes are predicated upon a normative assumption that sees every human decision as reducible to a mere cost-benefit analysis, which they call “economization.” Within this economization logic, all social agents are assumed to be autonomous, rational, and responsive only to economic incentives and disincentives (ibid; Atasoy, 2014). These assumptions serve to justify describing market logic as the central organizing principle of social life and reducing socio-environmental relations into an economic calculus. A closer look at neoliberalism-nature nexus reveals how these assumptions are mobilized to reorganize socio-environmental relations.

McCarthy and Prudham (2004, p. 276) suggest that neoliberalism is a “distinctively environmental project.” According to Moore, neoliberalization, as “institutional structures and policy initiatives,” is a historical mode of “organizing nature,” which has emerged from the crises of earlier organizing modes of the capitalist world-ecology (Moore, 2011b). The growing literature on the “neoliberalization of nature” explores how human interactions with the physical world are being neoliberalized through the privatization, commercialization, and commodification of environmental properties, a process which

ultimately aims to embed socio-ecological relations within the matrix of market principles (Castree, 2008a, 2008b). In their discussion on the neoliberalization of nature, Heynen and Robbins (2005) highlight the “revolutionary” changes in the law, policy and markets that “accelerate the ongoing commodification of natural things” (p. 6). Similarly, Heynen et al. (2007, p. 3) stress “the ways that attempt to ‘stretch’ and ‘deepen’ ... the reach of commodity circulation [which] rely on the re-working of environmental governance and on entrenching the commodification of nature, and vice versa.” At the heart of the neoliberal reorganization of nature lies environmental governance. Environmental governance refers to the decision-making structures that involve non-state actors such as ordinary citizens, NGOs, corporations and institutions, including global environmental conventions and treaties, and they emphasize public-private partnerships and market-based mechanisms to solve politically defined environmental problems (Himley, 2008). The neoliberalization of nature, in this sense, involves the shifting scales of institutional/regulatory arrangements and relationships within a market framework (cf. Swyngedouw, 2004). A specific and increasingly common aspect of the reorganization of socio-environmental relations through neoliberalization processes is called “neoliberal conservation.” This dissertation suggests that the making of the Gediz Delta socratures in the twenty-first century is centred on this historically specific nature conservation model.

Neoliberal conservation is defined as an “amalgamation of *ideology and techniques* informed by the premise that natures can only be ‘saved’ through their submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms” (Büscher et al., 2012, p. 4, emphases in original). In other words, it is “how nature is conserved in and through the expansion of capitalism” (ibid). The neoliberalization of conservation involves “the reregulation of nature through forms of commodification” (Igoe & Brockington, 2007, p. 432). Particularly in the Global South, this reregulation includes a new form of territorialisation through the creation of protection areas. Territorialisation through neoliberal conservation differs from the traditional understanding of the term, which refers to growing state control over formerly communal areas (cf. Vangergeest & Peluso, 1995). Neoliberal conservation areas are created by the hybrid structures, the state actors, NGOs and corporations at the expense of local people (ibid). Brockington and Duffy (2010) suggest that conservation is not only essential for the protection of biodiversity; it also enables the expansion of market relations into new areas. In this

sense, conservation practices are not necessarily contradictory to the broader neoliberal transformation of economies, nor do protected areas function as a barrier to the movement of capital. On the contrary, Holmes (2011) argues that neoliberal protected areas, as they are popularized, propagated, and in some cases managed by well-connected and networked transnational conservation elites who shape conservation discourses and practices, provide new opportunities for the capitalist expansion and the commodification of nature. In other words, protected areas have become new frontiers for neoliberal capitalism.

Grandia (2007) argues that contemporary conservation practices led by market actors and associated NGOs transcend the so-called “win-win” promises, i.e. achieving economic growth while simultaneously protecting nature. They are now claimed to be “win-win-win-win-win-win-win” solutions, as corporate investors, national economies, biodiversity, local people, western consumers, development agencies, and the conservation organizations are expecting to benefit from them (Grandia, 2007, p. 435). It is, I maintain, this “everybody wins” premise of neoliberal conservation practices that has shaped socionature-making in the Gediz Delta in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The delta has been reconstructed as a “wetland of international importance,” and the social and physical landscapes have been transformed through several socio-ecological projects, such as the production of parks, forests, and the development of an ecotourism model informed by globally hegemonic neoliberal conservation approach. In fact, ecotourism is a key mechanism through which the neoliberalization of nature unfolds based on the assumption that it benefits everyone involved as well as biodiversity and the natural habitats. As I discuss later in the dissertation, ecotourism projects have played a vital role in the neoliberalization of socio-environmental relations in the Gediz Delta and simultaneously contributed to gentrification processes.

A well-known ecotourism advocate Martha Honey (2008, p. 25) defines ecotourism as

travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveller; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and human rights.

The normative aspects of neoliberalization and how all socio-environmental relations are reduced to an economic calculus characterize most, if not all, contemporary ecotourism

models. Ecotourism is based on the premise of the inclusion of local populations in conservation efforts by offering them financial incentives and has become the most common means of local income generation in this neoliberal approach (Fletcher, 2012). It is a key element of what Honey (2008, p. 14) calls the “stakeholder theory,” which asserts that “people will protect what they receive value from.” Within a neoliberal conservation framework, ecotourism is seen as “a means of achieving economic growth, community prosperity and biodiversity conservation” (Igoe & Brockington, 2007, p. 433). However, the critics of this framework argue that ecotourism leads “biodiversity or nature to become commodities and natives to become labour” (West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006, p. 257). In that sense, ecotourism functions to spread a market fundamentalist logic, i.e. *only* the markets can provide the best and most efficient solution to all social, economic, and ecological problems, to new realms, in this case to protected areas within the context of global economic restructuring. Hence, Fletcher (2012) calls it “the master’s tool,” which is imported in local communities by extra-local elites and perpetuates the social, economic, and ecological problems that it claims to solve.

Whereas ecotourism is one of the most studied aspects of neoliberalization of nature (Bluwstein, 2017; Duffy, 2008; Münster & Münster, 2012; Ojeda, 2012; Youdelis, 2013; among others), the creation of protected areas within the neoliberal conservation model has also been explored in relation to market-oriented policy developments such as payment for ecosystem services (Corbera, 2012; McElwee, 2012; Milne & Adams, 2012), primitive accumulation (Kelly, 2011) and green grabbing (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2015; Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012), transnational philanthropy (Holmes, 2012), securitization (Massé & Lunstrum, 2016) and militarization (Marjinen & Verweijen, 2016) as well as community resistance to these neoliberal projects (Benjaminsen et al., 2013). However, how neoliberal conservation can go hand-in-hand with urbanization processes has not attracted much attention.<sup>7</sup> To bridge this gap, my project explores how the making of socionatures through several conservation policies facilitates urbanization processes in and around protected areas. I argue that the neoliberal

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<sup>7</sup> One recent exception should be noted here. Lin’s (2019) study on the ecological planning in the city of Shenzhen, China explores the “urban-growth-oriented green grabbing.” This study provides important insights to understand so-called eco-friendly urban entrepreneurialism; yet it does not address the issue of the interplay of local and global actors, such as the relationships between local governments and international conservation organizations, in the development of conservation policies. My study, in contrast, highlights the co-constitution of global and local processes and interactions that produce these policies.

conservation framework, as experimented in the Gediz Delta in the early 2000s, has produced historically specific socio-natures and contributed significantly to the emergence of a novel peri-urbanity by triggering a unique gentrification process.

I discuss the neoliberalization of the conservation of the Gediz Delta wetlands by focusing on three interrelated developments that facilitated the rescaling of institutional/regulatory arrangements and the emergence of an environmental governance structure. These developments are the designation of the delta as a Ramsar site, “a wetland of international importance” in 1998, the establishment of a union of local municipalities (İZKUŞ) that became responsible for the daily management activities, and the preparation of a wetland management plan which included several stakeholders in the conservation efforts including local communities, NGOs, and private companies. The neoliberal conservation experiment in the Gediz Delta was manifested in a series of ecotourism projects and the partnerships between local and international actors. I argue that this neoliberal model, coupled with changes in zoning regulations, has prompted the unfolding of gentrification processes in delta villages. I call these processes “conservation-led gentrification,” a distinctive and understudied form of environmental gentrification.

### **1.2.2. Environmental Gentrification**

Environmental gentrification refers to a social and physical “upgrading” process in a neighbourhood as a result of improved environmental conditions, rising property values, and accompanying socio-economic change. More specifically, it can be defined as the social and ecological transformation of formerly neglected areas through real estate investments and in-migration of wealthy residents that are facilitated by sustainability/greening discourses and plans (Pearsall, 2018). The relationship between changing environmental conditions and socio-economic dynamics in inner-city neighbourhoods was first identified by mainstream ecological economists, who discussed and coined the term, environmental gentrification as an unintentional, almost natural consequence of market mechanism (Banzhaf & McCormick, 2007; Sieg, Smith, Banzhaf, & Walsh 2004). Whereas these early studies did not focus on the contentious aspects of environmental gentrification, the work of environmental sociologists (Gould & Lewis, 2012, 2016), anthropologists (Checker, 2011, 2015) and geographers (Curran & Hamilton, 2012; Eckerd, 2011; Quastel, 2009; Pearsall, 2010) have explored the social

and political displacement/exclusion and increasing class, gender, and racial inequalities as a deliberate consequence of “urban greening policies” as well as the emerging community resistance to these processes. Below, I first discuss the main approaches in gentrification studies and then review how the natural environment as an encouraging, facilitating, influencing factor has been incorporated in the analyses of gentrification processes in urban and non-urban cases.

Insisting on the explanatory power and critical/political implication of the term gentrification, Davidson and Lees (2005) outline four defining characteristics of gentrification processes. These are 1) reinvestment of capital in formerly neglected, disinvested or even already gentrified areas; 2) social upgrading via the in-migration of high-income groups, 3) landscape change, and 4) direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups. These four characteristics capture two main theoretical explanations in gentrification studies, namely market-led (supply-side/production) gentrification explanation that sees it as an economic strategy, and gentrifier-led (demand-side/consumption) gentrification explanation which highlights the cultural dimensions of urban landscape transformation processes. The first approach, following Neil Smith’s (1979; 1987) rent gap thesis and the theory of uneven development, focuses on the cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment through which market forces exploit the difference between the “capitalized ground rent,” i.e. actual economic return gained from the use of a particular land, and the “potential ground rent,” i.e. possible financial gains if the land were put to its “highest and best use,” in an area (Lees et al., 2008, pp. 39-69). The latter approach, inspired by Ley (1994; 1996), investigates middle-class ideologies and desires to consume a particular lifestyle, accompanying the changes in occupational and industrial structures, mainly in the Global North, as the main factor that contributes to the unfolding of gentrification processes.

Nonetheless, many contemporary studies of gentrification bring the two approaches together and “consider the interplay and mutual constitution of production and consumption” (Lees et al., 2008, p. 74), demonstrating that both sides inform and shape each other. As Clark (2005, p. 261) argues, “neither side is comprehensible without the other.” Yet, there may be other mechanisms that are eventually sidelined by an integrated production-consumption framework; there may be overlooked processes through which an area becomes an ideal place for gentrifying investments and social groups as well, resulting in large-scale socio-environmental transformations and the

production of uneven landscapes. I suggest that nature conservation policy, as it is applied to preserve certain natural habitats on the outskirts of a city, is a mechanism that makes the area a frontier for real estate capital and a “desirable” place to live for urban middle-classes. In other words, the application of particular nature conservation practices can serve as a process for historically specific socionatures-making in the form of gentrification. However, this process is not fully recognizable from either market-led or gentrifier-led gentrification perspectives.

By exploring the historically specific, internally and externally entangled processes of socionature-making that have transformed the Gediz Delta landscapes, I argue that nature conservation experiments of the 2000s simultaneously create rent gaps in the area while tickling particular middle-class desires and perceptions, particularly those about “natural beauties,” “scenic landscapes,” “authentic lifestyle,” and so on. In other words, it was not necessarily a period of disinvestment and devaluation of properties in the delta that created an opportunity for real estate capital to “close” rent gaps to realize profits. It was the arrival of nature conservation policy to the delta and the designation of certain areas as conservation sites that have made the delta attractive for real estate capital. As conservation measures have gradually formed the main management framework in the delta and given it a new identity in social imaginary since the mid-1980s, it was again nature conservation policies that put the Gediz Delta in the mental maps of middle-class consumers and gentrifiers. In short, neither market actors (supply-side) nor gentrifiers (demand-side) “led” gentrification processes in the Gediz Delta; instead, both have followed conservation policies and changes in the so-called pro-conservation zoning plans. Hence my discussion is centred around the term “conservation-led gentrification” as experienced in a peri-urban area. My analysis of conservation-led gentrification in the Gediz Delta does not refute or downplay the role of the market actors’ economic strategies and the gentrifiers’ lifestyle preferences. Instead, supplementary to supply-side and demand-side explanations, conservation-led gentrification highlights how these strategies and preferences are influenced by and developed with reference to conservation policies. This dissertation thus demonstrates that a closer look at the social and environmental transformation in peri-urban areas may highlight relatively understudied aspects of contemporary gentrification processes.

In a lively article on “neglected geographies of gentrification,” M. Phillips (2004) has encouraged scholars to consider how gentrified landscapes are produced in rural spaces

and even remote areas.<sup>8</sup> The main characteristics of gentrification processes in rural areas, particularly the commodification, privatization, and displacement, as well as the nuances of socio-spatial contexts, have been identified in a burgeoning literature. Whereas some studies have focused on the demand-side of these processes by highlighting the motivations of gentrifiers to move to rural areas to consume a particular lifestyle centred around the ideas such as “authentic villages,” “organic communities,” “slow-pace life,” and “aesthetic/scenic landscapes” (D. P. Smith & D. A. Phillips, 2001; Ghose, 2004; Solana-Solana, 2010); others have explored the changes in rural economies and the dynamics of disinvestment and reinvestment (Darling, 2005; M. Phillips, 2005a). One of the critical findings of rural gentrification studies is the centrality of nature to gentrification processes, which has until recently rarely been theorized in the case of inner-city neighbourhood transformations.

In almost all cases of rural gentrification, the way in which natural ecosystems and their socio-cultural representations attract capital investments and in-migration has been highlighted. M. Phillips (2005b cited in Bryson, 2013, p. 578) suggests that the relationship between nature and gentrification in rural areas is “one of the most rural, and least urban, aspects of rural gentrification.” D. P. Smith and D. A. Phillips (2001) have coined the term “greentrification” to refer to the processes of rural gentrification as a manifestation of “the demand for, and perception of, ‘green’ residential space” (p. 457). Whereas D. P. Smith and D. A. Phillips (2001) focus on the gentrifier-led (demand-side) processes, Darling (2005) takes a supply-side approach and emphasizes the “significance of material production of nature by the state management of the landscape in creating the conditions within which investment and disinvestment in the rural built environment occur in the first place” (p. 1018). She explores “a distinct spatial expression of the rent

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<sup>8</sup> Gentrification is not strictly an urban phenomenon. Although two well-known, perhaps the most cited, definitions of the concept, “the class remake of the central urban landscape” (Smith, 1996, p. 39) and “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use” (Lees et al., 2008, p. xv), put the emphasis on changes within the boundaries of the city proper, gentrification processes unfold in many unexpected areas. The remaking of social and physical landscapes of the countryside via the reinvestment of capital and the movement of exurbanites that lead to the displacement of low-income rural residents and the transformation of class structure was first observed by Parsons (1980, cited in Lees et al., 2008, p. 135) and later theorized based on its similarities with and differences from its urban counterpart by M. Phillips (2002; 2004). Although the literature on rural gentrification first emerged in the United Kingdom, documenting such cases in the English and Welsh countryside (D. P. Smith, 2002a, 2002b; M. Phillips, 1993, 2002), it has gradually extended towards other parts of the world. Yet, gentrification processes in-between spaces such as peri-urban areas have not attracted much attention.

gap (...) not typically seen in the city” (Darling, 2005, p. 1016). She coins the term “wilderness gentrification” to differentiate her case from both urban gentrification and rural gentrification (ibid). Darling (2005, p. 1030), argues that “rural spaces are not merely different from cities, but they are different from each other,” emphasizing the significance of a conservation framework in a rural setting, New York State’s Adirondack Park, that produced nature as a distinct commodity for gentrification actors.

Although Darling’s study provides valuable insights to understand the relationship between conservation spaces and gentrification, wilderness gentrification does not fully capture the gentrification processes in the Gediz Delta for three reasons. First, as the name implies, wilderness gentrification highlights the transformations in remote areas where the proximity to a city centre and urban amenities is irrelevant. However, in the case of the Gediz Delta, as a peri-urban space, the sustained urban connections are part and parcel of gentrification. Second, Darling argues that unlike urban gentrification within which residential space is produced, “what gets produced in the process of wilderness gentrification is *recreational* space” (2005, p. 1022, emphasis in original). In the Gediz Delta, as I demonstrate, it is both recreational space *and* residential space that is produced. Finally, in Darling’s case, the “potential consumers of gentrified housing (...) are visitors” (ibid), they do not live in the area the all year round, they rent a house for a limited time period, they do not invest in the area. This finding translates into an essential aspect of wilderness gentrification: “The tenants of gentrified wilderness rental housing need not *necessarily* have any greater economic means at their disposal than the local population” (ibid, emphasis in original). However, the transformation of socio-economic structure in the gentrified Gediz Delta is much more pronounced as the newcomers, whose move is permanent, are more educated and employed in well-paying professional jobs or are business-owners while the local residents have relatively modest means.

Despite these differences, it is crucially important to acknowledge one of the key findings of Darling’s study. She argues that planning regulations that limit residential developments such as the creation of a wilderness area may trigger gentrification processes by increasing the land value. As this dissertation demonstrates, conservation policies and gentrification processes can unfold simultaneously and shape one another. Engaging with Darling’s arguments to explore the relationship between wilderness and gentrification in the U.K., D. Smith, M. Phillips, and C. Kinton (2018) also find that

although some structural conditions, such as rigid planning regimes, constrain new build developments in certain places; they suggest that “some adjacent areas in close proximity to protected areas of wilderness may be more fully influenced by processes of rural gentrification” (p. 383). In short, in order to explain how the making and remaking of siconatures occur in the “neglected geographies of gentrification” (M. Phillips, 2004), I argue that it is necessary to pay closer attention to the natural environments and how they are produced, regulated, managed, and represented through conservation policies.

“The nature of gentrification” (Bryson, 2013) or the environmental dimensions of gentrification processes have recently become a research focus in urban studies as well. Several contentious aspects of “urban greening policies,” such as the social and political displacement and exclusion, increasing class and racial inequalities, as well as the loss of livelihoods and community ties, have been explored. Bryson (2013) suggests that nature has been factored in critical urban studies and gentrification research in two different ways. First, scholars have highlighted the role of nature “as a tool of social power,” i.e. how the natural environment is manipulated by “growth coalitions” (cf. Molotch, 1976; Logan & Molotch, 2007) to maintain unequal power relations in cities and financially and politically benefit from urban environmental transformations. Second, the significance of nature “as a material actor” has been, albeit to a limited extent, discussed; scholars have explored how the “natural environment provides opportunities and constraints, and how it forces humans to make choices based on its physical material” (Bryson, 2013, p. 583). These studies use the terms ecological gentrification, eco-gentrification or green gentrification to describe similar processes experienced around the world, particularly in the cities of the Global North.

Dooling (2009, p. 621) defines ecological gentrification as “the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green spaces that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population - homeless people - while espousing an environmental ethic.” Her study on the creation of new green spaces in Seattle, Washington problematizes city-wide environmental planning agendas as “tools promoting economic development for the benefit of private-property owners” at the expense of disadvantaged groups (Dooling, 2009, p. 631). Similarly, Quastel (2009), who uses the term eco-gentrification, explores how so-called environmental sustainability discourses such as “eco-density” and “smart growth,” coupled with the middle-class ideology of “green consumerism” are part and parcel of

gentrification in Vancouver, B.C. His case traces the relationships between municipal planners, real estate developers and consumers to argue that ecological urban planning practices, such as EcoDensity in Vancouver, function as state-sponsored support to developers who aim to produce gentrified urban landscapes around the idea of “livability” for wealthy (and “ecologically-conscious”) residents (Quastel, 2009). However, ecological sustainability is not the only discourse appropriated by pro-gentrification actors. Checker (2011) argues that environmental gentrification “builds on the material and discursive successes of the environmental justice movement.” Her ethnographic case study on the “green improvements” in a predominantly black neighbourhood of New York City highlights how so-called consensual, a-political, ecologically and socially sensitive planning policies ultimately serve wealthy and white populations while subordinating “equity to profit-minded development” (Checker, 2011, p. 210). Gould and Lewis (2012, p. 114) also stress the class and racial dimensions of “green gentrification,” which they describe as a process through which, “without clearly focused public policy intervention, in situ environmental improvements will tend to increase racial and class inequality and decrease environmental justice.” In short, the material and discursive aspects of socio-natures have been incorporated into gentrification research in order to reach a better understanding of how urban landscape transformations occur in the nexus of political, economic, and ecological processes.

Following these conceptual developments in urban environmental/green gentrification research, many studies have identified “environmental gentrification catalysts” (see Pearsall, 2018 for a review) such as bike infrastructure (Lubitow et al., 2016; Lugo, 2015), brownfield cleaning up initiatives (Checker, 2015; Curran & Hamilton, 2012), parks and green recreational spaces (Gould & Lewis, 2012; Littke, Locke, & Haas, 2016; Millington, 2015), waterfront redevelopments (Bunce 2009; Lim et al., 2013), and community gardening and urban farming (Braswell, 2018; McClintock, 2018; Reynolds, 2015). Combining the demand-side and supply-side explanations in gentrification research with a particular emphasis on planning policies, these studies explore the production of uneven urban green landscapes. However, the nature conservation policy and practices as a gentrification culprit are missing in this literature. Since most of the conservation spaces are located outside of the city proper, “methodological cityism” (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015), which is evident in most of urban environmental/green

gentrification research, has not allowed scholars to explore the relationship between conservation and gentrification.

One significant exception is Hudalah, Winarso, and Woltjer's (2016) study on an environmental revitalization project in a peri-urban area of Bandung City, Indonesia. They suggest that "the relationship between the inflow of capital and neighbourhood reinvestment is far more complex than a supply-demand mechanism would suggest" (Hudalah et al., 2016, p. 594). Focusing on the uncertainty of land tenure, cross-jurisdictional areas with no apparent authority and the absence of well-defined administrative structures, Hudalah et al. (2016) argue that real estate developers take advantage of the "institutional gap" in peri-urban areas. In other words, similar to the gentrification of the Gediz Delta villages, it is not the previous cycles of investment and disinvestment or lifestyle-related concerns and desires of middle classes that have "led" gentrification processes in peri-urban Bandung City. However, the gentrification of the Gediz Delta villages differs from their case in two main ways. First, Hudalah et al. (2016) demonstrate that private actors were on board with the environmental revitalization project in Bandung City; in fact, they largely influenced the local government's decision to "revitalise Punclut's ecological function" through a public-private partnership focusing on residential and agro-tourism developments. This is not the case in the Gediz Delta, where capital groups first negatively reacted to the designation of the delta as a conservation zone. Second, the revitalization project in Hudalah et al.'s (2016) case was supported by local villagers who were hoping to gain tenure for their traditional land when the local government and real-estate actors developed the project; nevertheless, the villagers were eventually "alienated by the growth coalition" (p. 603). In my case, the villagers of the Gediz Delta were against the idea of conservation in the early stages as many lost their grazing and hunting areas as well as their access to the shores, but they were gradually incorporated in the conservation process and developed certain strategies to benefit from the rebranding of the delta as a "wetland of international importance."

The Gediz Delta is a space where urban, rural, and natural ecosystems co-exist and blend into each other. In other words, gated communities, traditional villages, agricultural fields, industrial zones, and nature conservation areas collectively form the contemporary social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta. In this dissertation, I put forward that the peri-urbanization in the Gediz Delta in the twenty-first century has

taken a particular form, which I conceptualize as conservation-led gentrification. The creation of conservation spaces in the delta, particularly the neoliberal conservation experiments of the early twenty-first century, has triggered this specific peri-urbanization process. Constituting the main conceptual contribution of this dissertation, conservation-led gentrification is a form of environmental gentrification and refers to the social and physical transformations following the designation of an area as a nature conservation zone. The conservation-led gentrification that I explore in this dissertation involves specific processes of socionature-making, including the production of residential spaces in the form of gated communities on formerly undercapitalized agricultural land, the rebranding of ecological characteristics of the area to appeal a particular socio-economic group, mainly middle-class exurbanites and ecotourists, and the production of environmental amenities for recreational consumption.

Conservation-led gentrification processes contribute to the emergence of a specific type of peri-urban landscape in the Gediz Delta, which I call “consurbia.” This concept is inspired by Sandul’s (2010, p. 195) “agriburb,” which defines a suburban form “planned, developed, and promoted based on the drive for profit in emerging agricultural markets.” Similarly, Newman, Powell, and Wittman (2015) discuss the peri-urban surroundings of Vancouver, B.C, particularly the social and physical landscapes of Richmond, as an example of “agriburbia” where agriculture plays a significant role in shaping an area’s identity, form, and socio-economic relations. The notion of consurbia, by contrast, refers to a peri-urban area which, although demonstrating a heterogeneous mixture of rural, urban, and natural ecosystems, is centred around the production of *conservation* spaces. Consurbia is “planned, developed, and promoted” as a conservation space, but urban developments are also welcomed and encouraged, and agriculture continues to play an essential yet declining role for local livelihoods and identities. In other words, consurbia is a peri-urban area where urban, rural, and natural landscapes blend into each other; yet nature conservation spaces become *primus inter pares* as they play vital roles in shaping the main management activities and regulatory models, ecologies and economies, and socio-environmental relations, imaginaries, and identities. Consurbia is thus the social and spatial outcome of the dual processes of conservation and urbanization. In short, this project examines the historically specific and internally and externally entangled, socio-economic, political, and ecological processes that have

transformed the Gediz Delta socio-natures and produced the area as a conurbation in the twenty-first century.

### 1.3. Methodological Approach

Phillip McMichael's notion of "incorporated comparison" (McMichael, 1990, 2000) and Michael Burawoy's extended case method (Burawoy, 1998) and global ethnography (Burawoy et al., 2000) constitute the methodological foundation of this project. McMichael (1990, 2000) develops the method of incorporated comparison to overcome the limitations of existing comparative approaches in sociology. He argues that while identifying a particular formalism problem of the previous approaches, the "encompassing" comparative methodology of historical sociologists such as Wallerstein (1974) and Tilly (1984) "*presumes* a 'whole' that governs its 'parts'" (McMichael, 1990, p. 386, emphasis in original). As a result, their comparative approach, McMichael (1990) suggests, also relies on formal comparisons of predetermined units of analysis that are constructed as permanent categories abstracted from their historical and geographical contexts. The notion of incorporated comparison, on the other hand, suggests that neither the "whole" nor its "parts" are fixed categories. Instead, for the methodology of incorporated comparison, the "whole" is an emergent phenomenon, and "parts" are the moments in a self-forming whole. Highlighting the dynamic and mutually conditioning whole-part relationships, McMichael (1990) argues for a comparative approach which "progressively constructs the whole as a methodological procedure by giving context to historical phenomenon" (p. 386) and "in which interrelated instances are integral to, and define, the general historical process" (p. 389). In other words, "parts" do not simply represent how the "whole" is manifested differently in local contexts; instead, they are relational and constitutive elements of broader, and ever-changing, historically situated processes.

I employ the methodological strategy of incorporated comparison in the single case of the socio-environmental change in Turkey's Gediz Delta since the 1860s. I situate the transformation of the Gediz Delta socio-natures within the broader historical developments in the city, the country, and the capitalist world-economy and state system. For instance, I discuss how the delta was politically constructed as a threat to the city's growing port economy and the position of the Ottoman Empire in the capitalist

world-economy in the late nineteenth century. In the second half of the twentieth century, the delta played a major role in the Republic's "new articulation with the world-economy" through rural-agricultural development (Boratav, 2012). In this period, the mechanization and commercialization of agriculture, as well as wetland draining practices to open up new agricultural areas, shaped the making of socionatures in the delta. At the same time, as Turkey joined the "Western block" under the United States hegemony, a NATO airbase was opened in the delta, which resulted in a substantial loss of communal grazing land for delta villagers. In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century the socio-environmental change in the delta was primarily shaped by environmental policies: Since the 1980s, several overlapping conservation zones were created as the delta was reimagined as a "bird paradise," and finally in 1998, a large portion of the delta was designated as a "wetland of international importance" within the global wetland conservation framework. In the twenty-first century, I suggest, these conservation policies, accompanied by the "construction boom" that Turkey experienced, have triggered a particular peri-urbanization process as the delta villages started to attract speculative real estate investments as well as natural amenity-seeking middle-class families from other parts of the city. I discuss these critical moments of the socionature-making in the Gediz Delta as manifestations of the continually evolving interplay of local and global processes.

Similarly, while discussing the development of environmental policies in Turkey, I suggest that Turkey's considerably well-developed environmental legislation cannot be seen merely as an outcome of outside pressure from international organizations. Instead, I argue that environmental policies in Turkey have evolved through a constant interplay between domestic concerns such as "rising up to the level of contemporary civilizations"<sup>9</sup> ("*muasır medeniyetler seviyesine yükselmek*") and Europeanization,<sup>10</sup> and international developments such as the emergence of a sustainable development ideology and changes in the global wetland conservation framework. In this sense, the

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<sup>9</sup> Here I refer to Turkish political elites' orientation towards Europe after the fall of the Ottoman Empire as manifested in the Republic's official ideology and the social and economic reforms particularly in the 1930s (see Heper, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Here I refer to political elite discourses on Turkey's attempts to become a member of the European Union (see Taniyici, 2010).

methodological strategy of incorporated comparison enables me to explore the dynamic whole-part relationships and to go beyond the so-called global-local dichotomy.

Complementary to the methodology of incorporated comparison, this project also utilizes the extended case method (ECM). The ECM builds on what Burawoy (1998, p. 5) calls the reflexive model of science. Challenging the positivist separation of subject and object, reflexive science takes an ongoing dialogue between the observer and participants as a starting point and “embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself” (ibid). The purpose of the ECM is to “extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (ibid). The ECM entails the extension of the observer into the world of the participant; extending observations over time and space; extending out from micro process to macro forces, and the extension of theory (Burawoy, 1998, see also Burawoy 2000, pp. 24-28). Building on this approach, Burawoy and his colleagues argue for a global ethnography (Burawoy et al., 2000). Global ethnography suggests that global processes are not merely experienced or “received in localities, more significantly “[w]hat we understand to be ‘global’ is itself constituted within the local” (2001, p. 150). In this sense, global ethnography goes beyond being bound to a single place and time, and it is necessarily multi-sited, “even when our fields [do] not themselves stretch across the globe, and it [is] only the participants’ imaginations that [connect] them to the global” (Burawoy, 2000, p. 4).

Particularly in Chapters 4 and 5, where I discuss the evolution of conservation policy and practices in the delta and concomitant urban developments, I follow the principles of the ECM. As a reflexive method, the ECM has guided me to understand how social actors interpret, navigate, and participate in the socio-environmental changes in the Gediz Delta. Growing up in the area in the 1990s and having strong connections with several social actors helped me to *extend* myself from observer to participant. Burawoy suggests that “the reflexive perspective embraces participant as intervention precisely because it distorts and disturbs” (1998, p. 16). My own insider-outsider position in the field (see below) added a unique dimension to this intervention. I believe that most of my participants saw me as one of them as I had extensive knowledge about the region that went beyond my academic concerns, and I was attuned to cultural nuances. In one

instance, a participant introduced me to his friends at a village tea shop as “our son (*evladımız*) is doing research about us at a Canadian university.” When I spent time in villages, recreational areas, farmer’s markets, “producer’s bazaars,” and several events, I was able to “blend in” easily and created perhaps little disruption in the rhythms of everyday life. However, I acknowledge the inevitability of the effect of my presence at a coffee shop, interviewing local people or walking in a village with farmers on the phenomena being researched (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I used my extensive knowledge about the region that came from my “insider” status and my familiarity with different social actors’ competing claims to cautiously “disrupt” so-called “common sense” explanations of socio-environmental change in the area and to gain more detailed answers.

As I particularly asked questions regarding the past, present, and future of the delta, my interviews covered a large time span. For instance, many participants shared childhood memories, such as having family picnics in the delta. Others talked about their trips to France to learn how a similar delta, the Camargue, was managed; they mentioned how those trips made them feel part of a global effort -the conservation of wetlands and delta birds. My observations *extended* over time and space. While trying to understand local processes, such as the development of ecotourism in the area, I always situate them within broader contexts, such as the emergence of a globally hegemonic sustainable development discourse. In other words, my case study “extended out from micro process to macro forces” or “from the space-time rhythms of the site to the geographical and historical context of the field’ (Burawoy, 2001, p. 27). Finally, my project is guided by a desire to extend theory through refutation and reconstruction (Burawoy, 1998, p. 20). In Burawoy’s words, “rather than being ‘induced’ from the data, discovered ‘de novo’ from the ground, existing theory is extended to accommodate observed lacunae or anomalies” (2001, p. 28). In this sense, throughout the dissertation, I utilize already existing conceptual and analytical tools, yet when it is necessary, I discuss their limitations and suggest new ones, such as “conservation-led gentrification.”

## **1.4. Field Research and Data Collection**

Moving from the methodological approach to data collection techniques, first, I should elaborate on my insider-outsider position concerning this research project. I was born

and raised in the geographical area that I study, and my family still lives in a neighbourhood adjacent to the delta. Even though I moved out of our family home in 2004 and have never lived in the region again, I see myself as a “local” and maintain strong connections with local people. My interest in and familiarity with the social and environmental change in the Gediz Delta goes well beyond my academic concerns. My personal commitment to the humans, nonhuman animals, and the biophysical properties of the delta has necessarily shaped my research trajectory. In this sense, this project is an outcome of my commitment to an ecologically sound and socially just future for the delta. My already existing connections in the area enabled me to reach several social actors that were involved in the social and environmental change in the delta. For instance, I went to high school with one of my research participants; several participants, particularly long-time residents of delta villages, immediately recognized my last name and asked me about my family. As I consider myself “local,” my participants also perceived me as an “insider” which, I believe, helped me to form subject-subject relations with my participants. Yet, I was also an “outsider;” when I told my participants that I was a doctoral student at a Canadian university, many were surprised, but I never felt any suspicion about my interest in the delta due to my insider status. My outsider status was perceived as an extension of my insider status. Many local residents told me that they found it “nice” to be interviewed for research purposes by a local person and openly pleased with the fact that I was going to tell their story in Canada. However, some participants did not want to answer my questions about political relations in their village. I believe this was related to my father’s position as a city councillor in a delta municipality.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, some participants saw this as an opportunity to raise their demands from the municipality and wanted me to pass along their message to the local authorities.

The data for this project were collected in two main ways. First, I collected a wide variety of secondary and archival sources, including official reports, policy documents, laws and regulations, scientific documents, newspaper articles, newsletters, pamphlets, brochures, and press releases of governmental and non-governmental institutions. I also used several books written by European travellers and Christian missionaries who

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<sup>11</sup> My father, Mustafa Avdan, was elected to the Çiğli Municipality’s council first in 2014 and re-elected in 2019. When I recruited bureaucrat participants for this study, I avoided reaching anyone who reported to my father. Yet, I wanted him to pass along my study details and contact information to former and current elected policymakers.

visited the Gediz Delta in the late nineteenth-century. In addition to these nineteenth-century social histories of the delta, I surveyed the contemporary accounts of the socio-environmental transformation in the memoirs, non-academic studies published by local authors and newspapers. The archival and document research illustrates the environmental policy development in Turkey, the changes in wetland conservation framework as well as how different social actors have imagined the past, present, and the future of the delta as manifested in several socio-environmental projects such as the diversion of the main river bed in the late nineteenth century, the wetland drainage efforts until the late 1970s, and the designation of the delta as a conservation zone in the late twentieth century.

Secondly, the research questions were addressed through extensive fieldwork. The primary method used to collect data during the fieldwork was semi-structured and open-ended interviews. During my first research trip to the delta in 2015, which lasted for the duration of four months, I conducted semi-structured and open-ended interviews with 32 participants (policymakers, conservation bureaucrats and scientists, environmental NGO members, real estate developers and agents, amenity migrants/new-comers and long-time residents of the delta villages). My research question required me to conduct interviews with a wide range of groups as I aimed to understand how social actors produce and contest social-environmental imaginaries regarding a landscape and how they interpret, navigate and participate in socio-environmental transformations. My participants were recruited as key informants about the processes of socio-environmental change in the Gediz Delta. Key informants are traditionally selected on the basis of their position in their organizations or communities and their specific knowledge about the issues in hand as well as their reputation (Elmondord & Luloff, 2006). I interviewed two former subdistrict mayors, two former city councillors as well as two conservation scientists and two conservation bureaucrats who were directly involved in the processes of urbanization and conservation to understand their competing claims about and strategic roles in the socio-environmental transformation of delta landscapes. My NGO interviewees also provided key insights about the relationships among state actors, municipals decisionmakers, international conservation community as well as community members. To provide a full picture of socio-environmental imaginaries at work within the socio-environmental transformations and changing social relationships, I also interviewed long-time residents of the delta villages and those who recently moved

to the area, a group that can be described as amenity-migrants. Interviewees are catalogued in Table 1.3, and a more detailed list of participants is provided in Appendix A. A list of sample interview questions is included in Appendix B.

As my interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, I asked my participants already-prepared questions pertaining to major themes to be addressed, and new questions were raised based on their responses; I also left space for the articulation of individual subjectivities. Interviews typically lasted around an hour, the shortest being 15-minute long and the longest being 150-minute long. Some interview participants were recruited through my existing contacts in the delta and others by snowball sampling on the basis of the recommendation of a key informant. For the latter, I asked my personal contacts to pass along the study details and contact information to potential participants. Most interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. Some participants did not want their interview to be audio-recorded for reasons that they did not disclose. In these cases, I took handwritten notes during the interview with their permission and more comprehensive notes were written immediately following the interview. Most interviewees were assigned pseudonyms as a measure to protect their confidentiality and any direct identifiers, such as names of locations, organizations or specific events, were removed. Some interviewees are cited by their real names in the dissertation per their request and/or because their names and positions were already public knowledge. All interviews were conducted in Turkish and transcribed and translated by me.

In addition to these interviews, during the first research trip in 2015, I participated in several activities, including hiking, cycling, picnicking, and community gatherings in the delta villages, a fishing festival, and the events organized by a local municipality for the World Environment Day. I visited the delta in April 2017 and August 2018 again. During these trips, I did not conduct additional interviews, but I observed the everyday life in the delta and engaged in numerous informal conversations as I spent many hours time in delta coffee shops, newly created environmental amenities such as the Izmir Wildlife Park and the Sasalı Urban Forest, attended to “producer’s bazaars.” These informal conversations and short-term and localized observations were documented in my field notes. To protect individuals’ and third parties’ rights and privacy, no identifying information was included in the field notes, unless that information was already public. Based on the methodological foundation that I outlined above (McMichael 1990; Burawoy, 1998; Burawoy et al., 2000), I analyzed the interviews, ethnographic and

textual data by identifying major themes in light of the main theoretical framework as well as the emerging ones, situating them in broader historical and socio-economic contexts and mutually constituting whole-part relationships.

Table 1.3. Interview Participants

<b>Participant Category</b>	<b>Number of Interviewees</b>
Policymakers	4
Conservation and agriculture bureaucrats	2
Conservation scientists	2
Long-time residents	14
New-comers/Amenity migrants	3
Real estate developers and agents	3 <sup>12</sup>
Former residents	2
NGO members	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>

## 1.5. Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 details the development of environmental policies in Turkey. I trace the significant changes in the Turkish environmental framework, such as the romantic views on nature and the environment within the nationalist ideology of the 1930s, the introduction of new ideas, such as national parks, and the emergence of a conservation bureaucracy in the mid-twentieth century, the gradual institutionalization of environmental policymaking since the 1970s, and neoliberalization in the post-1980 period. The contemporary Turkish environmental legislation is a product of a constant interplay between global processes and domestic concerns. I suggest that the development of environmental policymaking in Turkey was shaped by an approach that I refer to as the “elite environmentalism.” The elite environmentalism is defined here as the environmental concerns of the people in the position of power who locate nature outside of society, yet who also believe that nature should be protected for the benefit of humans, economic or otherwise. This approach has been manifested in the Turkish

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<sup>12</sup> Two participants in this category were amenity migrants. In this sense, I interviewed 5 amenity migrants, two of which were also real estate actors.

legislation and regulatory frameworks thanks to the efforts of bureaucrats and technocrats; the environmental concerns of the local people and the marginalized and disadvantaged communities have rarely, if not never, influenced this trajectory. The elite environmentalism cannot be separated from the developmentalist approach that has guided the actions of political actors since the foundation of the Republic. By highlighting the social and political context of significant laws and regulations, Chapter 2 demonstrates that the development of environmental policies in Turkey has reflected the country's political elite's long-standing desire to "modernize" the country and achieve economic growth through participating in the capitalist world-economy. Although international "greening" organizations have played important roles in the development of the Turkish environmental framework, this dynamic cannot be seen as a one-directional influence. Instead, I argue that gradually increasing presence of Turkey in international environmental conventions, agreements, and organizations is a manifestation of a "domestic" modernization imaginary and project. This modernization imaginary and project has gone through a neoliberalization process within the changing context of the global political economy in the post-1980 period, especially in the 2000s. This chapter also demonstrates that wetlands are the last ecosystems that have come to the attention of Turkish policy actors. Wetlands had been politically constructed as "wastelands" and valueless areas that could be reclaimed from nature and been seen as threats for public health; however, since the late 1990s, they have made it to the policymaking agenda as ecologically important areas that should be revalued, revalorized, and incorporated into the economic development efforts through the application of "wise use" principle.

Chapter 3 explores the metabolic relationships, i.e. the material, dynamic, and transformative exchanges between the Gediz Delta and the metropolitan city of Izmir and beyond. Focusing on the developments between the 1860s and the 1970s, I discuss how the Gediz Delta was imagined differently by different social groups and how these imaginaries were shaped within political, economic, and social contexts that the actors were embedded in, in return how they guided several socio-environmental projects. This chapter thus situates the contemporary process of socionature-making in the Gediz Delta within the broader historical developments in Izmir, in the country, and beyond. First, I highlight Izmir's position in the world-economy as a port-city during the late nineteenth-century, then I discuss how urban landscapes and the city's hinterland were transformed by several infrastructural projects to support the development of a port

economy. Within this context, one particular project was the diversion of the Gediz River to 50 kilometres north of the city in order to protect the Gulf of Izmir from incoming sediment that was forming shoals on the coast of the Gediz Delta. In the early twentieth century, the delta's socio-natures were shaped by a significant demographic change as the delta was selected as a settlement area for Turkish immigrants from the Balkans, and the government started the first large scale marsh drainage projects to open up new lands for agricultural production. During the mid-twentieth century, the delta experienced large-scale mechanization and commercialization of agriculture due to the structural changes in Turkey's political economy. Starting from the 1960s, a gradual decline in farm jobs led many villagers to seek employment in other sectors, particularly in emerging industrial areas of Izmir. In this period, the Gediz Delta wetlands continued to disappear as wetland drainage and reclamation was one of the primary mandates of the newly established the State Hydraulic Works (DSI).

In the 1980s, the Gediz Delta was reimagined as a "bird paradise," and some parts of the delta were designated as conservation zones. Chapter 4 focuses on the development and application of national and international conservation frameworks in the delta. First, I discuss the first wave of conservation efforts in the late 1980s and the 1990s; I suggest that the conservation practices of this period were characterized by a strict protection approach that mainly operated within a national framework with little reference to international environmental agreements and with limited involvement of international actors. The proponents of this approach viewed local people as the main threat to the preservation of natural habitats and/or species. The conservation policies of the 1980s and the 1990s resulted in fencing off certain parts of the delta for scientific research and limiting the access of local people to their traditional lands that had long been used for grazing, fishing, and recreational purposes. However, at the turn of the century, the conservation of the Gediz Delta ecosystems went through a transformation from a strict protection approach to a conservation approach informed by a globally hegemonic sustainable development and environmental governance framework. This new conservation model has opened the door for the intensified involvement of international actors, private groups, local governments and communities. This shifting scales of institutional and regulatory arrangements and everyday conservation practices, as well as the ideational underpinnings of this transformation, I suggest, is a manifestation of the neoliberalization of nature and conservation. In Chapter 4, I explore

three interrelated developments (the designation of the delta as a “wetland of international importance within the Ramsar framework, the establishment of a union of local governments to manage daily conservation activities and the preparation of a wetland management plan) as the institutionalization of a neoliberal conservation and environmental governance model in the delta. Then, I discuss how the partnerships between local and international policy actors emerged, and certain conservation policies were circulated among the Mediterranean deltas thanks to these networks. This chapter concludes with a discussion of several ecotourism projects implemented in the Gediz Delta in the early 2000s. I argue that neoliberal conservation policies of this period set the socio-environmental conditions for and encouraged the gentrification of the delta villages.

I introduce the concept of “conservation-led gentrification” in Chapter 5. First, I discuss the first wave of peri-urbanization around the delta in the late twentieth century. The revised 1978 Izmir Metropolitan Master Plan aimed to direct the expansion of the city towards the north where the delta was located, and the new residential developments emerged around the delta, outside of the conservation area boundaries, in the 1990s. I suggest that although new residential developments of this period in the form of mass housing projects for low-income groups and the high-rise and villa-type gated communities for upper-middle-income groups symbolize the reinvestment of capital in a formerly neglected and disinvested area, they cannot be seen as gentrification. Nevertheless, the introduction of the neoliberal conservation model in the early 2000s, accompanied by Turkey’s “construction boom,” has triggered a novel form of gentrification within the delta villages. This model has made the area attractive for speculative real estate investments and encouraged the in-migration of urban middle classes who were in search of a particular lifestyle. I explore the emergence of a rent gap in a delta village with the changes in the so-called pro-conservation zoning plan, the mushrooming of gated communities, the transformation of social and environmental landscapes in terms of social upgrading with the in-migration of affluent exurbanites, the direct or indirect displacement of traditional villagers, the development of new socio-economic relations and interactions. The conservation-led gentrification that I describe in Chapter 5 involves a novel process of socation-making, including the production of residential spaces through the development of gated communities on formerly undercapitalized agricultural land, the re-branding of ecological characteristics of the

delta, and the production of environmental amenities for recreational consumption. In short, consurbia is the social and spatial outcome of these processes. Chapter 6 summarizes the arguments of the dissertation and concludes with a discussion on future research directions that this project implicates.

## Chapter 2.

# Elite Environmentalism: The Development of Environmental Policymaking and Wetland Policies in Turkey

Turkey's 1982 Constitution is known for its statist values and its suspicion towards the fundamental civil rights and liberties. It is a product of the military coup of 12 September 1980 and was prepared under the strict control of the military regime of the National Security Council (*Millî Güvenlik Konseyi*, MGK). Although the constitution was approved by a vast majority of the population in a referendum, its democratic legitimacy is open to question as the MGK prohibited oppositional propaganda and the citizens cast their votes under the shadow of army officers, both literally and figuratively (Insel, 2003; Özbudun, 2007). Unlike the 1961 Constitution of Turkey, the 1982 Constitution defines fundamental rights and liberties, such as freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, peaceful assembly, and association in highly restrictive terms (Özbudun, 2007, p. 179). Nevertheless, with regard to environmental protection, the 1982 Constitution provides a set of articles on the obligations of the state and the rights of citizens. For instance, Article 56 describes the right of all citizens to live in a "healthy and balanced environment" and makes the state and citizens equally responsible to "protect the health of the environment and prevent it from pollution." This article has since been used as a reference point by many environmentalist groups in their legal activism and mobilization efforts.

Turkey has a substantial body of environmental legislation; the environmental responsibilities of central and local administrative units are well-defined, and the country is a member of many international environmental conventions and agreements (Adaman & Arsel, 2005, pp. 3-4). Although, it is possible to identify some embryonic legislative and institutional developments in the mid-twentieth century, the environment as a "problem" did not make it to the policymaking agenda of the Turkish state until the 1980s. Adaman and Arsel (2005) argue that the state was able to neglect environmental issues as they had not reached the point that would jeopardize the conditions for capital accumulation, and they did not generate a reaction from the public until the 1980s. In addition to the fact that environmental degradation was relatively tolerable and did not

threaten the legitimacy of the state, there was no external (international) pressure to influence the Turkish state to develop environmental policies. As a result, environmental policies in Turkey had been limited in terms of their number and scope until the early 1980s (Adaman & Arsel 2005). However, the 1990s witnessed a significant increase in the number of environmental laws, decrees, and regulations in Turkey. In this period, the external pressure on the Turkish state also influenced policymakers to adopt several international agreements to the Turkish context.

This chapter outlines the socio-political history of environmental politics and policymaking in Turkey. It highlights the fundamental role that the state plays in “managing, delivering, and producing the environment” (Parenti, 2013, p. 2). The first part of the chapter aims to show the general environmental protection/conservation framework of Turkey and discusses how the relationships between social actors and the national and international political-economic context that have contributed to the development of this framework. Although international “greening” organizations have played significant roles in the development of environmental law and regulations in Turkey, this dynamic cannot be seen merely as a one-directional influence. Instead, I argue that the well-developed environmental legislation and the gradually increasing presence of Turkey in international environmental conventions, agreements, and organizations is an outcome of a constant interplay between a domestic modernization imaginary/project and global processes. As a domestic modernization imaginary and project, I refer to the Turkish political elite’s long-standing desire to “modernize” the country and simultaneously achieve economic growth. I use the notion of “global processes” to refer to the international political-economic developments as well as the emergence of globally hegemonic environmental approaches such as “sustainable development.” I suggest that Turkey’s modernization imaginary and project through constant interactions with global processes has shaped the emergence of its environmental policy framework. This environmental policy framework has shaped the transformation of the Gediz Delta socio-natures in the post-1980 period and largely contributed to the emergence of a novel peri-urbanity in the area by eventually initiating the conservation-led gentrification processes.

The significant moments of Turkey’s environmental policy trajectory that I discuss in this chapter are characterized by an approach that I refer to as the “elite environmentalism.” The elite environmentalism is defined here as the environmental concerns of people in

the position of power who locate nature outside of society, yet, who believe that nature should be protected for the *benefit* of humans, economic or otherwise. In this sense, the elite environmentalism is situated at the intersection of two “currents” of environmentalism that Martinez-Alier (2002) describes. These two currents are the “cult of wilderness,” which is concerned with the preservation of “pristine nature” for recreational and scientific purposes, and the “gospel of eco-efficiency,” the dominant environmentalist approach today, which focuses on “wise use of natural resources” and the incorporation of socioecological relations within the market framework as manifested in “sustainable development” and ecological modernization discourses (ibid; for a discussion on contemporary convergence between these two approaches see Anguelovski & Martinez-Alier, 2014). “Elites” of the elite environmentalism are policymakers and bureaucrats, scientists, philanthropists, global and national conservationist groups, and consumer-individuals.

The elite environmentalism, as manifested in Turkey’s environmental framework, is a paternalistic and top-down approach that long characterized the broader state-society relationships in the country. This approach has shaped the Turkish legislation and regulatory frameworks thanks to the efforts of bureaucrats and technocrats. The environmental concerns of the local people and the disadvantaged communities have rarely, if not never, influenced this trajectory. The primary motivation for the Turkish elite environmentalists has been to “modernize” the country and be accepted in the global community. This approach also reflects the other priority of Turkey’s modernization project, namely economic growth. The elite variant of environmentalism cannot be separated from the developmentalist character of Turkey’s modernization imaginary and project. Developmentalism, understood as both an “evolutionary movement bringing rising standards of living” and “a political strategy to institutionalize nationally managed economic growth” (McMichael, 1996, p. 26), has been part and parcel of Turkey’s engagement with the global political economy. Turkey’s environmental policy trajectory has developed hand-in-hand with the structural changes in the country’s political economy and its position in the capitalist world-economy and state system. Since the late twentieth century, Turkey’s environmental policy framework has gone through neoliberalization within the changing context of the global political economy.

The second part of the chapter focuses particularly on the wetland policies in Turkey since the 1930s. This part demonstrates that it is possible to follow the trajectory of

policies concerning Turkish wetlands, conservationist or otherwise, in relation to the developments at the international level. Wetlands are the last ecosystems that have come to the attention of Turkish policy actors. Wetlands had been politically constructed as “wastelands” and “valueless” areas that could be reclaimed from nature for a long time. However, since the late 1990s, they have made it to the policymaking agenda as ecologically important areas that should be re-valued and incorporated into the economic development efforts through the application of the “wise use” principle. This change in attitude towards wetlands is not unique to Turkey, yet unlike the experiences of many other countries, Turkey had never had a preservationist wetland agenda. I argue that when Turkey jumped on the bandwagon of wetland conservationism, the globally hegemonic wetland conservation regime had already evolved into a neoliberal framework thanks to the work of several organizations, particularly the Ramsar Convention.

## **2.1. The Evolution of Turkey’s Environmental Policy Framework**

### **2.1.1. Environmentalism of the Early Republican Period**

The dismantling of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War was followed by four more years of war in the geography of Turkey and the Republic was founded in 1923. Here, I use the term “early Republican period” to refer to “Single-Party State” in Turkey between 1923 and 1946, which was, first *de facto* later *de jure*, guided by Kemalist principles (republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism). Despite the possibility of over-simplification, this period can be defined as an authoritarian phase based on an effective one-party system, political, economic, cultural nationalism, and modernizing and secularizing reforms (cf. Zürcher, 2003).

Repudiating all imperial concerns and functions, the young Republic emerged as the first peripheral area to become an independent nation-state with a long history of capitalist penetration (Keyder, 1981). For the Turkish state-builders, the main concern was to reach high economic growth rates while building a strong secular-national identity at home. Both concerns were influenced by an established Kemalist desire of “rising up to the level of contemporary civilizations,” (*muasır medeniyetler seviyesine yükselmek*) as

the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk famously put it as the fundamental national goal. Atasoy (2009, p. 58) calls the socio-economic developments in this period “wholesale westernization.” To reach that goal, the young Republic focused on state-led commercialization of agriculture, industrialization, and infrastructure investments alongside with a series reforms concentrated on the secularization of state, education, and law, the replacement of religious symbols with the symbols of European civilization; and emphasizing a non-religious Turkish heritage and national pride, particularly in the 1930s. Overall, the early republican period aimed to cut off Turkish society from its Ottoman and Middle Eastern Islamic traditions and reorient it towards the West (Zürcher, 2003, p. 189). Within this period, environmentalism or environmental protection rarely crossed the minds of the Turkish state-builders.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify particular environmentalist concerns and discourses in the early republican period. The environmental concerns of the political elite in this period cannot be separated from the state’s main projects, namely establishing an idea of Turkishness and economic development in an attempt to catch up with “contemporary civilizations.” They manifested themselves in three areas concerning the natural environment. First, a few so-called environmentalist associations were formed by the urban elite; second, during the 1930 an elite ideology of “peasantism” emerged based on the idea of a romanticized countryside; and finally, two laws in the late 1930s slightly referred to the protection of the natural environment and plant species.

The first area that particular environmentalist concerns were manifested was related to urban green space and protection of iconic landscapes through state-society co-operation. Several single-issue urban beautification and preservation associations such as the Association to Conserve Trees (Gormez, 1997 cited in Adem 2005, p. 73) were formed. These associations focused on popular natural beauty spots such as Çamlıca, Uludağ and Boğaziçi (ibid). Although significantly limited in their scope and local in terms of their concerns, these associations were first environmental civil society organizations in Turkey. The first urban park of the Republic, the Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul, was also created in this period, which was followed by parks in other big cities.

Secondly, the approach that the Turkish state developed towards the environmental issues in rural areas was linked to an elite ideology of “peasantism,” pastoralism and

nation-building efforts. To what extent a peasant economy and society in Turkey predominated in the twentieth century is beyond the scope of this dissertation (see Keyder, 1983). Yet, the ruling elite of the country, at an intellectual level, embraced a “peasantist outlook,” alongside their urban-industrial ambitions, in an attempt to “sustain a huge peasant mass” (Karaömerlioğlu, 1998, p. 67). A pastoral Turk who lived in a far-away village, suffering the hardships of the natural environment, and simultaneously a naturally unique and incomparably beautiful national geography were imagined and propagated. Several state-sponsored intellectuals of the period developed a “peasantist ideology” which glorified village life and portrayed peasants as “the pure, unspoiled, noble, intelligent, flexibly thinking people who made up the roots of the Turkish nation and the motor of national development” (Karaömerlioğlu, 1998, p. 76). This ideology was instrumental in the establishment of the People’s Houses (*Halk Evleri*) in 1932 and propagated through literary works such as novels and poetry, periodical journals, daily educational activities of People’s Houses (Karaömerlioğlu, 1998, 2002).

The imagined link between the environment as countryside and national identity is by no means unique to the Turkish experience. Rennie Short (1995, p. 35) argues that “in most countries the countryside has become the embodiment of the nation, idealized as the ideal middle landscape between the rough wilderness of nature and the smooth artificiality of the town, a combination of nature and culture which best represents the nation-state.” While the protection of natural elements of this imagined geography and people did not make it to the policymaking agenda, the protection of an imagined “Turkishness” hidden in far-away villages and “helping” Turkish villagers in their struggle *against* nature through educational programs and modernization of agriculture were the main features of the peasantist, yet elite, variant environmentalism in the early republican period.

Finally, the National Assembly (TBMM) passed two laws in this period, which slightly referred to the protection of natural elements and animal species. The Hunting Law of 1937 (Republic of Turkey, 1937a) had a protectionist language which clearly defined the hunting seasons, the bird and mammal species that could not be hunted at all, and the responsibilities of the Hunting Commission (under the Ministry of Agriculture) to protect and increase the number of the endangered animals in the country. The law also stated the fee and penalties for illegal hunting. However, the state did not regulate the environment-society relations in any significant way in this period. As Murat Arsel

(2005a, p. 19) argues, economic development, as understood by the republican elite, was synonymous with heavy industrialization, which required the subjugation of nature in the name of national progress. This approach is evident in the language of the Forestry Law (Law No. 3116). Passed by the TBMM in February 1937, this law regulated several aspects of forestry, including the types of forests, the rights of people living in nearby villages, rezoning and development in forested areas. The law mainly aimed at the commercialization of forestry activities in Turkey and the only chapter dedicated to the protection of forests did only mention the rights and responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture to approve economic activities such as mining and factory production in forested areas (Republic of Turkey, 1937b). In short, the ultimate purpose of this particular law was not to protect but to commercialize the forests. To conclude, while romanticizing an imagined geography and nature, the state-builders and ideologues of the Republic did not concern themselves with the protection of the environment. This approach began to change in the second half of the 1950s.

### **2.1.2. Environmental Protection and National Developmentalism: Embryonic Institutionalization**

The discussions on the Land Distribution Law in May 1945 signifies a turning point in the Turkish political life. The law would redistribute unused state lands, lands of recently closed religious endowments, reclaimed land, and land expropriated from large landowners to farmers who had no or too little land. Although it was passed unanimously, it created heated debates in the TBMM, and it was the first occasion when its own members openly and harshly criticized the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP). Notably, the Members of Parliament who had strong connections to, or themselves were, large landowners first criticized the economic arguments of the law, claiming that the proposed land redistribution would undermine the private property rights and create a decline in agricultural production (Zürcher, 2003, p. 210). This economic argument quickly turned into a discussion on the autocratic tendencies of the government and the lack of democracy in the country.

The opposition was led by Adnan Menderes, who himself was a member of a large landowning family, and supported by many other leading figures in Turkish politics, including Celal Bayar, a former Prime Minister. This group soon resigned from or were forced to leave the CHP and formed the Democratic Party (DP) in January 1946. In May

1950, the DP would come to power by gaining 55 percent of votes in the first open and free elections in the country (Zürcher, 2003, p. 217). It was not only the end of the 27-year long single-party state in Turkey, but it also signified a power shift from industrialized urban centres, populated by educated and secular CHP supporters to underdeveloped rural towns, villages, overall agricultural and religious segments of the population. In terms of the economy, the 10-year long DP rule, which ended with the military coup of 1960, was characterized by liberal trade policies, the first wave of foreign direct investments to the Republic, a non-linear agricultural production-led growth and agricultural modernization supported by large scale American aid (Boratav, 2012). As I discuss in the next chapter, this agricultural-led growth model backed by the American aid was experienced in the Gediz Delta with the introduction of new technologies and large-scale commercialization of agriculture. In this period, the Gediz Delta emerged as an important cotton production region.

The openness of the economy also meant the openness of the country to new ideas, policies, and practices. As part of American Marshall Aid, many young Turkish bureaucrats and technocrats went to the United States to attend lectures, workshops, and short-term educational programs. It is fair to argue that the idea of environmental protection was imported to the Turkish policy-making circles as a result of these study tours. In other words, the growing relationships between Turkey and the USA resulted in the emergence of the first professional cadres of the elite environmentalism in the country. A young bureaucrat from the Directorate-General for Forestry, Zekai Bayer, who went to the USA several times between 1950 and 1952 and finished a master's degree in 1962 at Michigan State University, was instrumental in this process. He came back from his visits with the idea of creating national parks, which was unheard of in Turkey at the time (Yenilmez Arpa, 2017, p. 171). Bayer was the first member of a small group of individuals, mainly bureaucrats and scientists, in Turkey who would transfer contemporary environmental protection policy and practices to the Turkish context.

Thanks to the efforts of Bayer as a bureaucrat in the Directorate-General for Forestry, the concept of the national park was included in the new Forestry Law of 1956. Articles 4 and 25 of the Law No. 6831 defined national park and the notion of "protecting nature for leisure and recreation purposes" entered the language of a regulation for the first time in the country (Republic of Turkey, 1956). When the Ministry made the Chapter 6 of the Directorate-General for Forestry, where Bayer was serving as the director, responsible

for the designation and management of national parks in Turkey, he became the top conservation bureaucrat (Yenilmez Arpa, 2017, p. 171). Within Bayer's tenure (1958-78) in several key positions, including the General Director of the National Parks Administration, 16 areas were designated as national parks.

Bayer was also a founding member of the Turkish Association for the Conservation of Nature (*Türkiye Tabiatini Koruma Cemiyeti*, TTKC, now TTKD). Founded in 1955, the society, whose members were mostly bureaucrats and technocrats employed in several departments related to the environment and nature, became the first nationwide environmental NGO and the first non-governmental partner of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Turkey (Coskun, ND; <http://www.ttkder.org.tr/kurulus.html>). In fact, Bayer played a crucial role in developing relations between the international conservation community and the Turkish state and NGOs. He attended the 1958 Congress of the IUCN and hosted several delegations from the union in Turkey (Yenilmez Arpa, 2017, pp. 172-173). He invited international experts and technocrats to Turkey and incorporated their recommendations in the master plans of newly established national parks in the country. For instance, the Long-Term National Park Development Plan was prepared in partnership between the State Planning Agency and a group of American conservationists in 1971 (Yenilmez Arpa 2017, p. 172; Yücel & Babuş, 2005, p. 21). Bayer was also the chief organizer of the "Technical Meeting on Wetland Conservation" in 1967 in Ankara, where the first draft of an international "Wetland Convention" was circulated (ibid; Matthews, 1995, p. 15). In this sense, Turkish bureaucrats did not only follow international environmental policy developments but also actively participated in these processes. Alongside his work as a bureaucrat, Bayer published numerous articles and books on environmental protectionism in the 1960s, which became instant classics in the policy-oriented variant of Turkish environmentalism (Yenilmez Arpa, 2017).

In short, in this early period of environmental protectionism in Turkey, it was neither the influence of the social-environmental movements nor a forceful push from international "greening" organizations shaped environmentalism in Turkey. During the 1950s and 1960s, the environmental policy and practices in Turkey were direct outcomes of the efforts of one single individual, who facilitated the interplay between the domestic concerns and international developments. It is not possible to find one policy regarding the protection of nature in this period without the involvement of Zekai Bayer. He was

also instrumental in putting Turkey in the mental map of international nature conservationism and built strong ties between the Ministry of Agriculture, TTKC, and the IUCN. In the late 1970s, when the idea of protecting nature gradually became institutionalized and made it into the 1982 Constitution, Bayer continued to be a key figure in the development of Turkey's environmental protection framework.

In the 1960s, Turkey started signing and ratifying several international conservation treaties. One early example is the 1950 International Convention for the Protection of Birds, which was signed by Turkey in 1966 (Republic of Turkey, 1966). Following this, the TBMM ratified a number of environmental treaties; yet these treaties were mainly related to banning nuclear and biological weapons, not the protection of nature *per se*. However, after the early 1970s, Turkish authorities approached environmental protection as a long-term state policy (Başlar, 2001). This development was a direct manifestation of the growing ties between Turkey and European countries, which gradually replaced the USA as Turkey's most important trade partner; concurrently, the weight of the international policy circles increased in shaping policymaking in many areas, including environmental protection. Turkey had positioned itself within the Western alliance through the NATO membership since the early 1950s and became an associated member of the European Community in 1964. Although the road to the full membership proved to be longer than foreseen (Zürcher, 2003: 276), "Europeanization" significantly shaped policy language in Turkey in the subsequent years. In terms of environmental protection, perhaps the first important step was the mentioning of environmental problems in a separate section in the Third Five-Year Development Plan of 1973.

In terms of its developmentalist path, Turkey switched to a more coordinated economy model and prioritized import substitution industrialization (ISI) after the introduction of the 1961 Constitution. Korkut Boratav (2012) defines the political economy of this new period as "inward-oriented, foreign-dependent growth," which was characterized by the planned industrialization, economic protectionism, and populist redistribution policies. Within this political-economic environment, the State Planning Organization (*Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı*, DPT) emerged as an important actor with extensive power in the fields of economic, social, and cultural planning (Boratav, 2012, p. 118; Keyder 1987, p. 148; Zürcher, 2003, p. 265). One of the main tasks of the organization was to prepare five-year development plans providing binding principles on the public sector and guidance for private actors.

Starting from the introduction written by then Prime Minister Ferit Melen, the Third Five-Year Development Plan 1973-1978 first and foremost reflected Turkey's desire to be a full member of the European Community (EC). The Ankara Agreement of 1964 between Turkey and the EC had defined a long but somewhat concrete path to the membership and the socio-economic aims and strategies set in the Third Plan were shaped by that path. As it is seen in the case of Zekai Bayer, since the early 1950s, Turkish policymakers and bureaucrats had been closely following the latest international policy developments, attending study tours, and hosting international policy experts in Turkey. Therefore, it would be fair to assume that the bureaucrats in the DPT were well aware of ongoing discussions around the relationship between development and the environment, especially at the level of the United Nations. In fact, a Turkish delegation had participated in the Intergovernmental Conference of Experts on the Scientific Basis for Rational Use and Conservation of the Resources of the Biosphere convened in Paris by UNESCO in September 1968, where the idea of a universal declaration on environmental protection was originated. (UNESCO, 1969). Discussed and approved by the TBMM in June 1972, around the same days with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the Five-Year Development Plan devoted a section on the environmental issues. In terms of both language and the tone of the approach to the relationship between development and the environment, this section shows many similarities to the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment.

Although it was a crucial movement in the development of an international framework for the protection of nature, the Stockholm Declaration fell short of the expectations of environmentalists (Pallemerts, 1992). It stated "under-development" as the leading cause of environmental degradation and was very cautious about not offending the ambitions of developing countries towards economic growth. In fact, the first draft of the declaration, prepared by the working group had been attacked on the grounds that it would have functioned as "an instrument for purely restrictive, anti-developmental and 'conservationist' policies and that "it did not put in the forefront the basic principle that each state has inalienable sovereignty over its environment" (Sohn, 1973, p. 428). In the general debate during the conference, there was a consensus on the basic principles of the draft such as linking human rights and environmental protection; however, many speakers highlighted the issue of the needs and rights of developing countries, especially, the need and "right to develop" (Sohn, 1973, p. 430). As a result, the final

document recognized the “unique needs” of developing countries and formulated the general principles in a way that would not conflict with the sovereignty principle. More importantly, it stressed that environmental protection and economic growth and development could be reconciled through rational planning, education, and international cooperation. In this sense, economic growth-oriented nature conservation agendas had begun to emerge in the early 1970s within these discussions.

Turkey’s Third Five-Year Development Plan engaged with these discussions around development, sovereignty, and the environment and referred to the emerging international law framework (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1973, p. 866). While acknowledging that the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the 1960s had created environmental pollution and misuse of natural resources, the Plan stated that these problems could not be seen as “valid reasons to slow down the development attempts” (ibid). Although the tone of the section on the environment was defensive and prioritizing development over environmental concerns, it envisioned a holistic and coordinated planning approach for future developments in this regard. The Plan also highlighted the importance of participating in international scientific and policy-oriented discussions and adopting regulative developments in the Turkish context. However, it explicitly stated that Turkey would not accept any responsibility from the international community that could *contradict* with its goal of “development through industrialization” (ibid). In this sense, the Turkish bureaucrats were aware of the possibility of an international pressure to limit heavy industrialization on environmental grounds and wanted to stress their commitment to the country’s developmental ambitions. Regardless of this defensive approach, the section on the environment in the Plan is important in two ways: First, it shows that international developments in the field of environmental protection were being followed closely by Turkish policymakers and bureaucrats; second, it was a key moment in the emergence of environmental protection as a long-term state policy.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to cite one single significant policy initiative for the 5-year period that the Third Plan was supposed to guide the social and economic development in Turkey. In fact, the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1979-1983) states that although the previous plan had acknowledged the necessity of solving environmental problems within the framework of economic development, no environmental standards or effective institutional structures were developed within that period (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1979, p. 83). The Fourth Plan cites the emergence of public awareness as the

only achievement of the previous plan regarding environmental protection, albeit with no reference to any kind of evidence for this “emergence.” However, an important step was taken toward the institutionalization of environmentalism in 1978 as the Prime Ministry Under-secretariat for the Environment was founded. The Under-secretariat was responsible for coordinating various activities dealing with environmental problems, produce environmental regulations and advise to other state bodies. Yet again, the Under-secretariat was far from being effective as the country was going through a turmoil that led to the military coup of 12 September 1980; the environmental problems were the least of the concerns of Turkish policymakers. Commenting on this limited institutionalization of environmental protection in Turkey before the 1980s, Zülküf Aydın argues that the level of industrialization and agricultural commercialization had not created a noteworthy environmental degradation that would threaten capital accumulation in the country and that would put the legitimacy of the state in question (Aydın, 2005, pp. 63-64). Furthermore, there was no pressure from social actors in Turkey or international groups to force the state to develop a stronger environmental policy. All of these would change in the 1980s.

### **2.1.3. Environmentalism in the Early Neoliberal Period and Slowly Developing Social Resistance**

The inward-oriented accumulation strategy based on ISI policies in Turkey entered a crisis in the second half of the 1970s. The foreign-dependency of the post-1960 growth model had made the country extremely vulnerable to the global accumulation crisis of the 1970s. While the country was suffering from the lack of foreign currency, all fractions of the capitalist groups framed the crisis in terms of high wage levels, the strength of trade unions and collective bargaining rights; at the same time, the left and working-class organizations responded by radicalizing their struggle in order to defend their rights (Akça, 2014, p. 14). Within the context of the growing accumulation crisis and radicalization of class struggle, the capitalist classes, represented by the ruling centre-right Justice Party of Süleyman Demirel, reached a consensus that the adoption of IMF-guided neoliberal austerity measures was the only solution (ibid). Demirel announced his neoliberalization plan on 24 January 1980; however, he lacked the political power to apply them as the 1961 Constitution was corporatist in nature. When the military took power only eight months after the announcement of the plan, the socio-political conditions to switch the gears toward neoliberalization were finally created. The military

regime that ruled the country until 1983 largely wiped out the radical left and working-class organizations, cleared the political scene, and most importantly changed the constitution which would set the tone for a “neoliberal form of reorganizing the relations between economic, military, political, and cultural ideological processes” (Atasoy, 2009, p. 80). In short, Turkey switched from an inward-oriented substitution model to an outward-oriented export-promotion mode of accumulation through mechanisms such as liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. The processes and outcomes of environmental policymaking in Turkey also began to change in this early neoliberal period.

The generals that took power on 12 September 1980 used the constitutionally defined National Security Council (MGK) as the executive branch of the state to rule the country until 1983. With the legislative help of the Advising Assembly whose members were all appointed by the MGK, the military regime of three years created the legal conditions of socio-economic and political neoliberalization in Turkey through passing many crucial laws and regulations or amending existing ones including the Political Parties Law, the Higher Education Law, The Press Law, the Trade Law among others. It was this political structure that wrote the 1982 Constitution with its above-mentioned “environmentalist” Article 56. This period also marked the beginning of a new wave of the adoption of international environmental policy and practices into the Turkish context. The MGK ratified several international environmental agreements, including the Convention for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (Barcelona Convention, 1976) and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris Convention, 1972). In line with the elite ideology of “rising up to the level of contemporary civilizations,” the members of the MGK cited the country’s long-standing desire to be a member of the international community when they discussed these conventions.

The MGK and the National Assembly also passed a series of environmental regulations and laws, among them was the very first environmental law of the country. Consistent with the general political atmosphere of the period, there was little or no discussion about these laws and regulations in the parliament, and absolutely no public input was sought. It is no surprise that the elite environmentalism of the Turkish policymakers continued to be a guiding approach throughout the military regime. Nevertheless, it is not possible to suggest that the Turkish policymakers were influenced or forced by any

international intergovernmental or nongovernmental organization to pass these laws and regulations. In their limited discussions of the laws, regulations and agreements, the members of the MGK and the assembly rarely mentioned any direct international influence, apart from their general desire for Turkey to be a respected member of the international community. They also regularly referred to deteriorating environmental conditions in the country that was threatening life standards of citizens, “national interest,” and “inevitable necessity” to justify the new framework.

The Environmental Law came into force in 1983 provided a basis to factor in environmental issues in the country’s present and future socio-economic development. It aimed not only to prevent and eliminate environmental pollution but also to encourage “sustainable management” of natural resources (Ünalán, 2016, p. 223). The law was the first reflection of Article 56 of the 1982 Constitution in Turkish legislation. Although it was a crucial step for the gradual institutionalization of environmental policymaking, the Environmental Law did not introduce a transparent, participatory, democratic decision-making structure that involves all parties concerned (Ünalán, 2016, p. 224). During the discussion session, Zekai Bayer, former director of the National Parks Administration and Member of Parliament (1980-83), raised the issue of incorporating the elements of civil society in the processes of identifying and solving environmental problems. Bayer was also the only member that referred to the 1972 Stockholm Principles and the experiences of other countries (Republic of Turkey, 1983a). However, the role of civil society in environmental protection was not mentioned in the final version of the law. Instead, the law extended a long-standing top-down and bureaucratic/technocratic approach that had characterized the state-society relationships regarding environmental issues in Turkey.

Eventually, the country’s environmental protection framework in general, and the Environmental Law in particular, were updated within the context of the 1992 Rio Summit. Turkey participated in the 1992 Rio Summit and agreed to introduce participatory decision-making mechanisms and conflict resolution procedures in the case of environmental conflicts, although their effectiveness in solving the issues are open to debate (Ünalán, 2016). Another critical legislative development during the military regime was the Law for the Preservation of Cultural and Natural Assets in June 1983 (Republic of Turkey, 1983b). This law introduced the concept of “protected areas” (more on this in this particular law in Chapter 4). In short, the generals of the 12 September

1980 coup left a legacy of environmental protection as a core policy development field within which the paternalistic tendencies of the Turkish state crystallized in command and control structures.

Turkey returned to civilian politics in 1983 and the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) of Turgut Özal, a key figure in the development of the neoliberal 24 January Program, won the first post-coup elections. The Motherland Party used the rise of environmental concerns in the 1983 election campaign more than any other party ever, “allocating 3 percent of its manifesto emphasis on the protection of the environment” (Çarkoğlu, 2017, p. 157). The Motherland governments (1983-1991) focused on neoliberal reforms and admission into the European Economic Community. In fact, the most significant policy developments concerning environmental protection in this period were the manifestations of the latter. The wave of ratifying European environmental conventions continued under the Motherland governments as Turkey became a party in the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1984) and the Geneva Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (1990). These conventions placed the Turkish government under the obligation of protecting internationally recognized, ecologically important habitats and endangered species, especially marine turtles and monk seals. As a result, 40 new areas designated as protection zones, including four national parks and 12 “Specially Protected Areas” during this period (Yücel & Babuş, 2005, p. 22). However, the existing administrative structure, centred around the Prime Ministry Under-secretariat for the Environment, was not efficient in fulfilling these responsibilities; a ministry with larger institutional capacities was needed.

Within this context, the Ministry of the Environment was founded in 1991 by the third (and last) Motherland government. The Ministry took over the responsibilities of the under-secretariat. It was a significant change as the new ministry had a larger budget and more staff, and more importantly, it could implement and enforce policies. The wide-ranging responsibilities of the Ministry included land-use planning, protection of natural resources, plant and animal species, fighting pollution, and raising public awareness (Ünalın, 2016, p. 223). Not only the increasing ecological pressure due to the expansion of the energy, industry and tourism sectors but also international pressure necessitated a more pronounced governmental interest in environmental issues. With its participation in the 1992 Rio Summit and the endorsement of Agenda 21, Turkey had committed to a

balanced approach to economic and environmental policies and the incorporation of ecological concerns into decision-making processes. However, the integration of sustainable development principles into national legislation had to wait until the second half of the 1990s (Ünalın, 2016, p. 224). It was the Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (1996-2000) that mentioned the concept of sustainable development for the first time in a nation-wide strategic document (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1995). The Ministry and the DPT also collaborated in the preparation of the National Environmental Action Plan of Turkey (NEAP). Financially sponsored by the World Bank, the NEAP responded to “the need for a strategy” and aimed at “supplementing the existing Development Plan with concrete actions for integrating environment and development” (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1999). Although the integration process was rather slow, the Ministry of the Environment played an essential role in introducing institutional and legal changes for environmental management as well as for international engagement in environmental issues.

Thanks to the work of the Ministry of the Environment, Turkey has become a contracting party to several conventions, including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1993), the Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution (1994), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1996). More significantly, the Ministry was instrumental in aligning Turkey’s environmental policies with the EU environmental *acquis*. Since the Accession Partnership between the EU and Turkey indicated the environment one of the priority areas alongside with democratization and social inclusion for Turkey’s membership preparations, the weight of the ministry in politics gradually grew (Izci, 2005, p. 91). Although Turkey had incorporated the environmental concerns and policies of the EU into its legal structure as a non-member state at the turn of the century (Budak, 2000 cited in Izci, 2005: 92), the impact of the EU on environmental policymaking in Turkey intensified during the first years of the AKP government, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In terms of the state-society in relations in Turkey, the early neoliberal period, especially after the end of a 3-year long military rule in 1983, was characterized by a gradual development of civil society organizations. The active encouragement of entrepreneurialism and individualism was an impetus for the quantitative development of NGOs in this period (Adaman & Arsel, 2005, p. 6). The civil society sphere has expanded to new areas, including identity politics, cultural rights and freedoms, and

environmentalism as the number of NGOs in the country grew steadily. Keyman (2005, p. 44) argues that it was only in this period the idea of civil society in Turkey “gained definitional and institutional resemblance” with its European counterparts and “constituted itself both as an associational life independent of the state and a vital area for democratization.” Since the civil society organizations emerged in this period had no intention to challenge or achieve governmental power but sought to affect the decision-making process through democratic participation, the Turkish state was also more attuned to their demands. The international context was particularly in favour of the development of civil society; the advances in telecommunications and the visibility of the human rights issues to international observers also made the Turkish state more “careful” in handling civil society demands (Kadirbeyoğlu, 2005, p. 114). Moreover, the development of civil society organizations was encouraged and supported by the state as it was seen as a precondition for Turkey’s full membership in the EU. The rapid expansion of civil society organizations and the legal, political, and political frameworks created in this period, according to Aydın (2005, p. 59), were necessary “to ensure a smooth integration into the global economy.”

These new non-state actors were different from their counterparts in the 1960s and the 1970s in two major ways. First, whereas the civil society organizations of the previous period were ideologically oriented and the products of radicalized left and right polarization, the NGOs of the neoliberal period were issue-specific, such as women’s rights, animal welfare, and environmental issues and they aimed to make their voice heard by attracting public attention and sympathy from society in general (Toprak, 1996). Second, unlike the “revolutionary” and “reactionary” organizations of the 1960s and 1970s, the newly emerging issue-specific NGOs developed strong ties with international organizations and received financial, institutional, material, and moral/ideational support from them. In the case of the Turkish environmental NGOs, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the European Commission’s LIFE Third Countries Program were main sponsors of their projects (Adem, 2005, p. 80). A pivotal moment in the development of Turkish environmental NGOs was the HABITAT II Conference held in Istanbul in 1996. As Adem (2005, p. 79) states, during the conference, these burgeoning organizations found opportunities to network with other national and international groups. These exchanges between national NGOs and their international counterparts facilitated further

institutionalization and professionalization of the environmental organizations in Turkey. The conference generated a renewed interest in the discussion of citizenship and civil society concerning environmental issues. 67 participating NGOs formed the Environmental Caucus of Turkey, which became an essential platform for the transmission and accumulation of information, experience, and model among its members (ibid). Although at the turn of the century, membership of environment-related organizations was around 2 percent in Turkey (Kalaycıoğlu, 2001, p. 57), the number of NGOs has grown significantly, and they have become important players in environmental issues. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the institutionalization of a neoliberal wetland conservation model in the Gediz Delta in the early 2000s largely benefited from these nationally and internationally well-connected environmental NGOs.

In the late 1980s, the socio-environmental movements also began to emerge in Turkey. Many scholars argue that the long history of the paternalistic state-society relations created an indifference on the part of the local communities and prevented the emergence of strong grassroots movements against developmentalism and growth-oriented policies in the country (cf. Adaman & Arsel, 2005, Aydın, 2005). Starting from 1986, several mobilizations of local people in different parts of Turkey did not initially generate a critique of growth-oriented policies since they were mostly concerned with urban planning disputes such as the attempt to demolish several parks and locally unwanted land-use conflicts, including oil refineries and mining sites (Adem, 2005: 76). Yet, they contributed gradual politicization of the environmentalist movement in Turkey. The most prominent urban movements took place in Ankara and focused on the protection of two green spaces, namely Güven Park (1986) and Zafer Park (1987). Both mobilizations, powered by the left-leaning occupational groups such as the Ankara Chamber of Urban Planners, the Chamber of Architects and Engineers, were able to generate public support and the plans to demolish these parks to build a shopping mall, a parking lot, and a hotel were halted by the court (Erim, 1988). Although led by already existing chambers, these mobilizations created a legacy of “citizen initiatives” as several local actors formed the Ankara Environmental Solidarity Group, alongside similar loosely connected and informal organizations in Istanbul and Izmir. Similar urban mobilization also took place in Izmir to preserve the Gediz Delta ecosystems and wetland species in the 1980s (see Chapter 4).

Within this early neoliberal period, a group of Turkish environmentalists founded the Green Party in 1988. Influenced by green movements in European countries, the party aimed to gather eco-socialists, anarchists, and anti-militarist groups together. However, it could not go beyond being a cadre movement and was disbanded in 1994 due to legal formalities (Ünalán, 2016, p. 227; Özlüer, Turhan, & Erensü, 2016, pp. 27-28). The party was able to organize only in major cities and could not channel the growing environmental struggles in the early 1990s into a critique of the developmentalist agenda (Adem, 2005, pp. 74-75). Yet, many environmentalist local groups benefited from the experiences and legal expertise of these cadres in the 1990s.

The movements against thermal plants in Gökova (1986), Aliağa (1989-92), and Yatağan (1989-92) represent the first generation of locally unwanted land-use conflicts and the environmentalism outside the elite discourses in Turkey. Although they did not prove successful in the long run, environmental activists and local groups began to accumulate necessary skills and social movement repertoire (Tilly, 2004) to fight giant developmental projects. For instance, a group of lawyers founded the Environmental Movement Lawyers Group of the Izmir Bar in this period. This group effectively mobilized Article 56 and the Environmental Law of 1983 in courts and was able to stop these projects, albeit temporarily (Özlüer, Turhan, & Erensü 2016, pp. 20-21, Keskin & Mert, 2002).

The Bergama (Izmir) movement was conceivably the most influential of this first wave of environmental struggles in Turkey. The resistance of Bergama villagers to an international gold mining company, Eurogold (owned by a consortium of Australian, French, and Canadian shareholders), became the largest and longest-running movement in the country to date (Ünalán, 2016, p. 227). It started in the early 1990s and involved several social movement tactics, including sit-ins, unofficial referendums, blocking the machines, even blocking the Bosphorus Bridge, a symbolic location in Istanbul, 700 kilometres away from the actual resistance site to generate public attention to the issue (Arsel, 2005b). The movement reached its peak in 1997 with considerable support from the general public and continues to be on the national agenda since then. It was the first organized opposition to the ecological damage caused by a foreign resource extraction company whose activities in the country were supported by the neoliberal policies of the state. While ruling politicians publicly blamed the movement for being anti-development and for trying to slow down Turkey's economic growth, the

protestors based their arguments on their health and livelihood concerns, and eventually gained a nation-wide sympathy for their struggle (Özen, 2009). The peaceful tactics used by the movement and the positive coverage received in the media prevented the government from delegitimizing the demands of the protestors (Kadirbeyoğlu, 2005, p. 103). The foreign ownership of the company was also crucial for the protestors to articulate the struggle within a nationalist framework. This framework resonated with many people in the country who were not physically connected to Bergama. As a result, it transformed a local movement, at least discursively, into a national struggle for economic independence (Özen, 2009, p. 413). While situating itself in part in an anti-imperialist framework, the Bergama movement also had a positive impact on the transnationalization of environmental struggles in Turkey. Several transnational advocacy networks such as Minewatch in the UK, the Mineral Policy Centre in the USA, alongside with Greenpeace made effective use of information politics and expert knowledge to put pressure on the Turkish government and the governments of the countries associated with the mining company (Kadirbeyoğlu, 2005, pp. 104-105).

The most significant contribution of the Bergama case to the social movement repertoire of the future environmental struggles in Turkey was perhaps related to legal activism. During the early stages of mining activity in Bergama, the Environmental Movement Lawyers Group of the Izmir Bar filed three separate lawsuits on behalf of 652 plaintiffs from the area and demanded the cancellation of the executive order of the Ministry of the Environment granting Eurogold permit gold extraction by cyanide leaching (Arsel, 2005b, p. 269). Although the court ruled against all three cases, the legal battle continued in the Council of the State, where the plaintiffs found support for their cases on the grounds of the constitutional right for a healthy environment. Since its operation permit was cancelled by the ruling of the Council of the State, Eurogold applied to the Ministry for a renewed permit in 1998. In this process, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit ordered the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) to study the ecological and social risks of the gold mining in Bergama. The Council's 1999 report challenged the previous decision of the Council of the State by stating that the operations of Eurogold were "environmentally harmonious" and beneficial for Turkey's "national interests within the context of the concept of sustainable development" (Arsel, 2005b, pp. 270-71). In 2001, the company received a permit for trial operations but went into full operation immediately. In fact, during this legal battle of almost five years, the

company had not stopped its activities even when the Council of the State ordered the closure of the mine. The fact that the government was not effectively closing the mine despite the court decisions enabled the protestors to articulate new social demands, such as “the rule of law.” Hence, the protestors strategically linked their struggle against a company to more substantial democratization and human rights demands in society (Özen, 2009, p. 416). The environmentalist lawyers and the protesting villagers took the case to the European Human Rights Court in 2004, and the court found the Turkish government guilty on the basis that “that resumption [in 2001] had no legal basis and amounted to circumvention of a judicial decision” (Arsel, 2005b, p. 272). Although the gold mining operations continue in Bergama as of 2020 and the movement did not generate any policy outcomes, the Bergama resistance has become a reference point for the environmentalist movement in Turkey. Many local environmental resistance movements in the following years mobilized similar strategies, tactics, and human resources such as lawyers.

Perhaps the leading non-state actors that effectively shaped environmental policymaking in this period were the elite environmentalist organizations. These organizations were either established or directly supported by the private sector, especially big business groups. The Environmental Protection and Packaging Waste Recovery and Recycling Trust (ÇEVKO) is a prime example of this business-led environmentalism. During the debate sessions of the Environmental Law in the parliament, ÇEVKO’s parent organization, the Istanbul Chamber of Industrialists, had lobbied against the establishment of environmental standards (Adem, 2005, p. 79). However, since its foundation in 1991, ÇEVKO has become the major actor in supporting the collection and separation of municipal solid waste and in the generation of resources for the industry (Kalaycıoğlu & Gönel, 2005, p. 123). ÇEVKO has been instrumental in integrating daily business practices with environmentalist themes, and the development of urban policies within the framework of sustainable development.

On a national scale, the Turkish Association for the Conservation of Nature (TTKD) and the Environmental Foundation of Turkey (TÇV) were powered by technocrats in the Ministry of Forestry and the National Parks Administration and claimed to be “non-partisan.” They mobilized their connections within the state apparatus to lobby for vital legal developments such as the Environmental Law and the Law for Preservation of Cultural and Natural Assets. In 1981, the TÇV also began to publish the annual

inventories of environmental problems. These inventories have gradually become an essential document for the conservationist bureaucracy.<sup>13</sup> Another elite organization, the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosions and Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), was founded in 1992 by leading industrialists and businesspeople. Just like the TTKD and TÇV, TEMA also defined itself “outside of the political realm” to emphasize that it had no ties with any political organization and was not following any political agenda. Although led and represented by elites and endorsed by prominent politicians, TEMA became very popular in all segments of the Turkish society during the 1990s and reached a vast network of volunteers and members (Adem, 2005, p. 79). TEMA lobbied for the Law of National Reforestation and Soil Erosion Control of 1995 (Republic of Turkey, 1995). The law was the first state-led campaign (*seferberlik*) for the protection of a natural habitat in Turkey and made almost all public institutions, including but not limited to ministries, the army, police and military academies, universities, religious institutions as well as non-state organizations such as business chambers, labour unions, even sports clubs to create forests on the lands under their ownership or control. TEMA partnered with many public institutions during this campaign; for instance, it organized reforestation mobilizations with schools. TEMA was thus instrumental in incorporating ordinary citizens within elite environmentalism during the 1990s.

In short, the experiences of ÇEVKO, TTKD, TÇV, and TEMA show that in the absence of strong grassroots movements questioning the environmental cost of economic growth policies, elite environmentalists with established connections with the state and large capitalists played critical roles in the development of environmental policies in the post-1980 period in Turkey. As a result, environmentalism in Turkey in the early neoliberal period was limited to a series of policies aiming at fixing the problems of growth-oriented agenda. The loosely connected and embryonic grassroots environmental movements in the early neoliberal period were limited in their scopes and concerns. Their legal victories against the developmental projects that threatened local livelihoods and living standards could not transform into a broader and in-depth critique of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, several local struggles and citizen initiatives challenged the elite forms of environmentalism and made the environmentalism as a livelihood struggle publicly

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.cevre.org.tr/tr/kurumsal#hakkimizda>

visible. They were also significant in terms of building a social movement repertoire, international connections, and developing a dexterity to navigate legal and management structures which were gradually getting more complicated, but also open to the integration of public concerns, albeit in theory. This early neoliberal period also witnessed greater participation of Turkey in international environmental policy circles. Turkey ratified several international environmental conventions in this period. These conventions provided a base for the development of environmental policies in the country. However, as Aydın (2005) argues, environmental policymaking was much of a “public relations exercise” in this period, aiming at both re-strengthening the paternalism in state-society relations in Turkey and maintaining relations with international organizations, such as the UN, EEC/EU that explicitly embraced a sustainable development agenda. Environmental policy developments in this period were a continuation of the long-standing elite ideology of “rising up to the level of contemporary civilizations.”

#### **2.1.4. Environmental Policies in the AKP Era**

Only 15 months after its formation, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by then politically banned, former mayor of Istanbul Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won an unexpected victory in the November 2002 elections. The party whose leaders were coming from an Islamist political background gained 34.3 percent of the popular vote, and thanks to the electoral system, almost two-thirds (363/550) of the seats in the national assembly. The beginning of the AKP rule represented a significant turning point in the country’s social, political, and economic trajectory, which Atasoy (2009) describes as “Islam’s marriage with neoliberalism.” According to Ziya Öniş (2004), the extraordinary electoral success of the AKP was a result of three interrelated developments: First, the party was able to build a cross-class electoral alliance that brought both winners and losers of neoliberalization together. Second, the AKP cadres, and especially its leaders, had a strong track record at the municipal level, which translated into a unique trust-based politician-voter relationship. Finally, the failures of the established parties in achieving economic growth and solving the day-to-day problems of citizens coupled with the problem of pervasive corruption during the 1990s contributed to the emergence of the AKP as the major political actor in the country (Öniş, 2004).

Especially the political impact of two major financial crises in November 2000 and February 2001, which resulted in unprecedented urban unemployment and a record depreciation of the Turkish lira was severe (Çarkoğlu 2007). The ruling coalition of centre-left, centre-right, and nationalist parties had been following an IMF program to decrease budget deficits and reform the banking system since the early 2000s, but a series of structural adjustment policies did not stop the collapse of the Turkish economy in only one year. The coalition government invited the Vice President of the World Bank, Kemal Derviş, as the Treasury Minister to stabilize the economy in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. The so-called Derviş Program proved successful in stopping the economic meltdown thanks to the strictly implemented policies that aimed at controlling public finances, reforming the banking sector, increasing privatization revenues, curbing inflation and interest rates, enhancing competitiveness, and creating independent regulatory agencies (Kuyucu, 2017, pp. 51-52). However, the success of the program also meant the end of populist inflationary policies in Turkey and 13 years of weak coalition governments. The newly founded AKP came to power against this political and economic backdrop, as none of the coalition partners was able to enter the national assembly because of the 10 percent vote threshold. Despite its ideological and historical differences from the established parties, the AKP continued two fundamental processes: the revised IMF-WB program and the negotiations with the EU. Notably, the latter shaped the trajectory of environmental policies in the years between 2002 and 2008. However, the EU anchor gradually disappeared from Turkish politics and the leader of the AKP, Erdoğan adopted an authoritarian form of environmentalism, describing himself as the “one and only environmentalist.”

In its early years, the AKP described its ideological position as “conservative democracy” (Akdoğan, 2003) and the party leaders who had strong Islamist roots constantly tried to distance themselves from previous political Islamist parties. Indeed, the Islamist movement in Turkey had gone through a significant transformation in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Öniş, 2006). For instance, while its predecessors (the National Salvation Party, the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party) dedicated a vital role to the nation-state in terms of economic development, industrialization, and redistribution, the AKP put a strong emphasis on liberal economy and foreign direct investments; favoured privatization and committed to the provision of social services within the limits of the IMF program. In terms of nationalism, the AKP left the nativist tone of the previous Islamist

parties and adopted a highly cosmopolitan discourse, at least in its early years in power. The difference between the AKP and its predecessors was especially pronounced in the case of its foreign policy orientation. While the previous Islamist parties had a strong anti-western and anti-EU bias and favoured close relations with Muslim countries, the AKP initially presented itself as the leader of a sizeable pro-European coalition in Turkey with full commitment to EU membership (Öniş, 2006, pp. 126-7). However, this transformation of political Islam in the case of the AKP was not homogenous.

The AKP cadres selectively rejected certain aspects of political Islam and embraced a continuity with others. Çavdar (2012) defines two sets of ideological issues that show the “heterogeneous transformation of Islamism.” On the one hand, there are “resilient” issues, such as gender issues, alcohol consumption, and religious education. The discourse that AKP developed around these issues was not different from the previous Islamist parties as they were inherited as “loci of confrontation with the secular establishment” (Çavdar, 2012, p. 9). On the other hand, the “accommodating” issues such as foreign policy, centralization/decentralization, and the environment could be defined outside of the traditional political Islamist ideology in Turkey (ibid). Before the 2002 elections and in its early years in power, the AKP focused more on these “accommodating” issues and was able to create a broad coalition around its neoliberal agenda.

The issue of environmental protection has never been a political matter for Islamists in Turkey. Although several ideologues put forward an Islamist-environmentalist approach that considered the protection of the environment a “duty” for Muslims as environmental degradation was seen as “a violation of God’s order,” it has remained as a purely intellectual discussion (Çavdar, 2012, p. 4). For this small group of Islamist-environmentalists, environmental problems were consequences of modernity, western philosophy, and secular lifestyle. However, neither its predecessors nor the AKP adopted this somewhat radical discourse. On the contrary, the political program of Islamism in Turkey, *Adil Düzen* (“Just Order”) as developed by Necmettin Erbakan (the leader of the political Islamist parties between the 1970s and the late 1990s) was committed to an industrialization-led growth model as much as the secularist parties and had no reference to an Islamist approach to environmentalism. However, during the 1990s, especially in the case of municipal politics, Erbakan’s party adopted a sustainable development discourse. Nevertheless, as Barbara Pusch (2005, p. 143)

argues, the “environmental politics of Islamist parties (...) reflect a reformist approach which treats environmental problems as many other secular politicians would.” The environmentalism of the AKP was parallel to the understanding of the previous Islamist parties, which approached the environment as a secondary issue within the context of an economic development-oriented agenda. Yet, unlike the previous parties, the AKP was deeply committed to neoliberalization and EU membership. Hence, the environmental policies in the first years of the AKP era reflected the party’s adherence to neoliberal policies and were mostly shaped by the EU negotiation/accession process.

Since the second half of the 1990s, especially after the recognition of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) and Agenda 21, international engagement has become the main driving force for the development of environmental policies in Turkey. Yet, the beginning of official accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey in 2004 was a turning point as European integration has had more impact on environmental policies in the country than domestic ideas and movements as well as other international actors (Ünalán, 2016, p. 224). To achieve a full membership status, Turkey committed to aligning its institutional and legal structures with the EU environmental *acquis*. Turkey’s National Environmental Action Plan of 1999 had already made a reference to the adoption of the EU’s “environmental standards and regulations at a feasible pace” (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1999, cited in İzci, 2005, p. 92), yet the process accelerated and further institutionalized with the beginning of official negotiations. For instance, the Regional Environmental Center, sponsored mainly by the European Commission, opened its Ankara office in 2004 to assist the Ministry of the Environment to achieve “a high-level of environmental protection and compliance with the EU environmental requirements” (İzci, 2005, p. 92). Turkey became a member of the European Environmental Agency in 2003, which meant further intensification of monitoring, measuring, and quality-assuring of environmental data and information. In terms of international environmental agreements, three developments should be noted. A Ministerial Decree on the import and export of endangered species (CITES Convention) was adopted in February 2003, the European Landscape Agreement was ratified, and two laws on substances that deplete the ozone layer (Montreal Protocol) were passed in 2003. With a stronger engagement with EU environmental policy, a comprehensive transition of environmental policymaking and practice in Turkey from a centralized, top-down approach to an environmental governance model has begun. This

model was experienced in the Gediz Delta with the establishment of a union of local municipalities to undertake daily nature conservation activities and the involvement of NGOs, local communities, and private actors in conservation efforts (see Chapter 4).

EU environmental policy, overall, aims to promote sustainable development and is based on the principles of “preventive action,” “the polluter pays,” “fighting environmental damage at source,” “shared responsibility and the integration of environmental protection into other policies” (McCormick, 2001). Adopting these principles within the context of the European sustainable development agenda also means the development of new modes of environmental governance (Ünalán & Cowell, 2009). Although, as Holzinger et al. (2006) argue that there is a gap between ideas put forward by EU policymakers and their implementation in member states, the emerging environmental governance model refers to the “abolition of traditional patterns of interventionist command-and-control regulation in favour of economic instruments and ‘context-oriented’ governance” (p. 403). In other words, EU environmental policy has moved toward more flexible forms of control, a greater emphasis on economic incentives, the self-regulation of actors involved in socio-environmental processes and their outcomes, and the encouragement of public participation (Knill & Liefferink, 2007). The institutional and procedural developments in terms of environmental protection in the first five years of the AKP era demonstrated these overall tendencies towards weakening the role of central bureaucracy and strengthening the participation of local public and private actors through various incentives; however, this environmental governance approach would be dropped in the 2010s.

One of the first institutional developments regarding environmental governance in the AKP era was the merging of the Ministry of the Environment with the Ministry of Forestry in 2003 (Republic of Turkey, 2003a). Although this merger was justified in terms of a strengthened administrative capacity and praised in the Progress Report for Turkey 2004 (European Commission, 2004, p. 135) as a “positive step,” the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry had limited power and relatively low significance within governmental decision-making process (Ünalán, 2016, p 225). Indeed, the merger meant a reduction in the size of their staff and a significant decrease in budget allocations compared to the combined shares of the ministries before the merger. Furthermore, the other ministries that were crucial for environmental protection, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism were also unified (Republic of Turkey,

2003b). One of the outcomes of this merger was the dissolving of the National Committee for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Sites, which consisted of top-level bureaucrats from various ministries and was responsible for monitoring environmentally sensitive areas in the country (Çavdar, 2012, p. 10). The merging of four ministries into two resulted in further institutional fragmentation, overlaps in competencies between different offices, limited budgets, and the loss of technical expertise and capacity.

The contradictory and non-linear developments are also evident in the legal changes during the early AKP period. In September 2004, the AKP government introduced several penalties for polluting as part of major amendments to the Penal Code (Republic of Turkey, 2004). Although it was an important step forward to establish the “polluter pays principle” which the AKP emphasized in its election platform and then in the government program as an element of the adoption of the EU’s environmental *acquis*, the code regarding to the penalties for environmental damage would not be in effect until the end of 2006. Neither the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry nor any party representative made an explanation about this delay (Çavdar, 2012, p. 14). The 2006 amendments to the Environmental Law (Republic of Turkey, 2006) also introduced new concepts such as sustainable environment, biological diversity, wetland, environmental impact assessment, and strategic environmental assessment, environmental governance. These conceptual changes were also supported by principles such as sustainable development, public participation, public-private partnerships. Through these amendments, the government aimed to ensure legislative harmony between Turkey and the EU. However, the new Environmental Law also listed several activities such as oil exploration, geothermal energy production, and mining as exemptions from the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process.

EIA was one of the first environmental policies that modelled after the developments in the EU. It was first enacted in 1993, but the process was revised in 2001 to align it with the EU EIA directive. In fact, the 2002 Progress Report for Turkey’s accession acknowledged the transposition of the directive on EIA as a significant accomplishment (Izci, 2005, pp. 91-92). However, several changes in the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive in 2004 shorten the EIA process by abolishing some key elements, such as preparing reports and organizing public hearings for specific projects (Duru, 2006). These changes were cited in the AKP’s 2007 election platform as an achievement in terms of “finding a balance between industrialization and environmental

protection within the context of sustainable development” (Yıldırım & Budak, 2010, p. 180). In fact, the bylaw that regulates the EIA management revised 14 times during the AKP’s first 14 years in power and only 43 EIA cases were rejected out of a total of 56,071 (Erensü, 2017, p. 127). In short, while paying lip service to the Environmental Action Programme that guides European environmental policy through the gradual transposition of the *acquis*, the policies of the AKP government generated contradictory outcomes as economic growth and capital accumulation were prioritized.

One of the policy areas that emerged within the intersections of dual processes of Europeanization and neoliberalization in Turkey was administrative decentralization. Especially between 2002 and 2008, the AKP focused on empowering local governments in decision-making processes. In 2005, two crucial laws (the Metropolitan Municipality Law and the Municipality Law) passed by the TBMM strengthened metropolitan governments and changed the long-standing centralist orientation in Turkey’s public administration. The new laws laid “local autonomy” as the foundation of local governments and designated local administrations as “sole authorities in exercising the rights outlined by law (Kuyucu, 2017, pp. 51-52). Metropolitan municipalities were given powers and responsibilities to carry out a wide range of activities and ventures concerning the environment. These new activities included the disposal and treatment of wastewater and rainwater, the construction and operation of plants for such purposes, the collection, transportation, decomposition, recirculation, removal and storage of solid wastes, and so on. The daily management of protected natural sites was also a new function of local governments and the local organizations such as the Union for the Protection and Development of the Izmir Bird Paradise, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, was founded for this purpose. All these new responsibilities and functions required new forms of public-private partnerships, and in fact, the laws mentioned above outlined how local authorities can plan, manage, coordinate, evaluate, and supervise the entire process of public-private partnerships projects (Karayiğit, 2016). However, AKP’s decentralization agenda was strategically selective. When it comes to the commodification of nature, the AKP introduced a series of policies that re-enforce the authority of the central government over local administrations. For instance, with two sets of amendments to the Law of Promotion of Tourism in 2003 and 2006, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism designated as the sole authority for zoning and planning in

“touristic development zones” (Duru, 2006) These amendments also enabled tourism investors to use publicly owned shores and forests under the supervision of the Ministry.

The attempts to further commodify nature and socio-environmental relations also revealed the already existing tensions within the state, more specifically the tensions between the ruling conservative party and the secularist bureaucracy. During its first term in power between 2002 and 2007, the AKP had to work with then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, who was elected in 2000 thanks to the support of several political parties in Parliament. Sezer, a former chief justice of the Constitutional Court, was known as a representative of hardline secularist bureaucracy and used his presidential powers to block a number of legislative changes and the appointments of AKP nominees to key positions in the state (Jenkins, 2008). The tension between the AKP and President Sezer was also evident in the case of environmental issues. For instance, Sezer vetoed Bill Concerning Constitutional Amendments in August 2003, which proposed to privatize the operation of national parks and sell publicly owned forests that had already “lost the features of being forests” (*Hürriyet*, 2003). While the AKP was expecting to generate a revenue of 25 billion dollars from the selling of public forests, Sezer argued that the bill would have encouraged the illegal forest fires and deforestation (*TGRT Haber*, 2003). Similarly, Sezer vetoed the Amendments to the Forestry Law that proposed to exclude forests consisting of certain types of trees from the list of protected forests in the same year. When the 7-year term of Sezer ended in 2007, the AKP majority in the TBMM elected Abdullah Gül, a founder of the party and a former prime minister as president. The new president approved both bills previously vetoed by Sezer (Çavdar 2012, pp. 11-12). Yet, these bills generated a considerable public discussion about the AKP’s environmental approach and its adherence to neoliberal principles as the attempts to privatize national parks and to sell publicly owned forests criticized by numerous social groups including the Union of the Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, the Chamber of Urban Planners and opposition parties.

2007 was a turning point for the ruling party in many regards, including environmental policies and governance. As the country was already enjoying the benefits of global capital expansion between 2002 and 2007, the AKP won 46 percent of the vote in June 2007 general elections and formed another majority government. In other words, the AKP maintained its electoral appeal in the face of a severe downturn in the global economy. The election of Gül as president in the same year further consolidated the

AKP's power within the state apparatus. For the reasons that are beyond the purpose of this chapter, the EU membership target lost its central position in policymaking in Turkey as the accession talks faced a stalemate in the same period (cf. Cengiz & Hoffmann, 2014). In May 2008, the 19<sup>th</sup> stand-by agreement between Turkey and the IMF ended, and the AKP government decided not to sign a new one (Öniş, 2012). In short, when the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 hit the country, the AKP was more popular, politically stronger, economically more independent and not strained by the EU *acquis* in policymaking. While the AKP's policymaking elite framed the crisis as an "externally generated phenomenon" over which "they had very little control" (Öniş, 2012, p. 144), they also effectively switched the mode of accumulation to an "authoritarian developmentalist" variant of neoliberalism (cf. Adaman, Arsel, & Akbulut, 2017 and 2018).

This turn also meant a new wave of centralization in policymaking and implementation in Turkey. One example of this re-centralization is the Metropolitan Municipality Law of 2012, which terminated municipal statuses of 552 sub-districts (*belde*) and 16,000 villages (Akpınar & Başaran 2015). This process had started with Law. No 5747 in 2008, which extended the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities to incorporate rural subdistricts within the municipal administrative structure (Republic of Turkey, 2008). As a result of this change, the two largest villages in the Gediz Delta lost their administrative structures and became neighbourhoods of the nearest district municipalities (see Chapter 5). The new law also authorized metropolitan municipalities, mostly governed by the AKP mayors, to alter the zoning and planning regulations of the former rural areas (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 61). The elimination of provincial municipalities also meant the elimination of local organizations that had formed to manage conservation areas in their jurisdictions. The central government and its regional offices became once again the sole authority in environmental conservation and management (see Chapter 4).

According to Kuyucu (2017), the recentralization efforts of the AKP government can partly be explained by the impacts of the 2008-2009 economic downturn on the Turkish political economy. During its first term in office, the AKP benefited from an "unusually favorable global liquidity environment that enabled Turkey to attract large inflows of short-term and long-term foreign capital" (Öniş, 2012, p. 139). In this period, the government remained committed to a regulated banking system, an independent central bank that controlled inflation, and fiscal discipline. Thanks to these policies and global

capital expansion, the economy grew approximately 7 percent per annum, inflation and interest rates dropped to single digits, GDP per capita increased from US\$ 1,802 in 2002 to US\$ 10,444 in 2008, and the country began to attract US\$ 20 billion in the form of foreign direct investments annually (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 52). The economic growth experienced these early years of the AKP rule in Turkey “fuelled a real estate speculation frenzy and construction boom” (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 48; for a more detailed discussion on Turkey’s “construction boom” in the 2000s, see Chapter 5). Yet, this impressive economic performance also produced massive increases in the private sector and household debt and the current account deficit (Boratav, 2012, pp. 193-223). More importantly, this growth regime came to an end with the global economic downturn of 2008-2009. For the first time after seven years, the growth rate in 2009 was negative, and the unemployment rate reached 14 percent. To deal with the effects of economic downturn and the “new low growth equilibrium,” the AKP government recentralized the country’s economic management and its administrative systems through a series of laws. Thanks to this recentralization, the AKP has become able to undertake major public investments and to generate and appropriate urban rent more directly (Kuyucu, 2017). While the government relied more aggressively on foreign debt to finance its ambitious mega-projects, private and public investments in the construction sector became the engine of the economy (Adaman, Akbulut, Madra, & Pamuk, 2014).

Adaman et al. (2014) outline three components of this “construction-based finance-led growth regime;” each component has direct socio-ecological costs. The first component has been private and public investments in the housing sector. With the restructuring of the Turkish Mass Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), the central government has begun to play an enhanced role in housing provision (Özdemir, 2011). TOKİ has become the sole authority to undertake urban renewal projects and to open formerly underutilized areas in urban and rural settings to construction. In 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization (MoEU) replaced the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the newly founded ministry granted exclusive rights with the passing of a new law called “Law Regarding the Transformation of Areas under Risk of Disaster” (Law No. 6306) in May 2012 to initiate and supervise projects with TOKİ. While possible “natural” disasters have been used to hasten the process and to minimize opposition as a pretext in many of these projects to legitimize the government’s urban policies (Saracoglu & Demirtas-Milz, 2014), environmental issues have been completely

sidelined within the works of the ministry. Overall, construction has become a crucial sector in fuelling growth within the context of a slowing economy since 2008, as the share of the sector in the total GDP increased to 6 percent (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 63).

The second key component of the “construction-based finance-led growth regime” is investments in the energy sector (Adaman et al., 2014). Between 2008 and 2015, investments in this sector surpass US\$ 50 billion, while an average of US\$ 6 billion is poured into new energy production infrastructures per year (Erensü, 2017, p. 122). A considerable share of these new investments is dedicated to hydropower, which show an unprecedented growth trend with the involvement of new private actors. “Turkey’s hydropower renaissance,” according to Erensü (2017), is mostly based on the construction of small plants on small streams. Although they are individually small in capacity, they constitute more than half of all hydroelectric power plants in Turkey, and they have significant impacts on rural livelihoods, local economies, agricultural structures, and ecological integrity in the Turkish countryside (Erensü, 2017). As of 2016, 678 of Turkey’s 913 hydroelectric power plants have a capacity of 25 MW or smaller, which is the threshold for an obligatory EIA review. In other words, the vast majority of hydroelectric power plants in Turkey were built without being subjected to environmental assessment (Erensü, 2017, p. 129).

Finally, investments in megaprojects constitute the third key element of the AKP’s neoliberal growth agenda based on the construction sector. Three projects are worth mentioning here as they “are packaged together and are the pride of the government” in terms of economic growth (Paker, 2017, p. 105). These projects are the third bridge across the Bosphorus, a third airport in Istanbul with 150-million passenger capacity, and an opening a waterway (Canal Istanbul) parallel to the Bosphorus. While these projects are described as the manifestations of the country’s “civilization project” and the symbols of the power of the Turkish state and Istanbul as a global city by President Erdoğan and other AKP representatives, they have generated serious adverse ecological outcomes (ibid). All these projects threaten the ecological integrity of the Northern Forests, the only remaining forested area in Istanbul and one of 100 environmental hotspots in Europe that need urgent protection (Paker, 2017, p. 106). The construction of the third bridge was completed in September 2016, and an estimated 3 million trees were cut down for the project (Sol, 2015). Although the EIA reports confirmed the ecological damage that would be caused by the construction of the third airport and a local administrative court

ruled the “immediate suspension” of the project in 2014 (Atay, 2014), the construction has continued, and the inauguration of the airport took place in April 2019. The construction of the third mega-project of this “package,” Canal Istanbul, has not started yet but Erdoğan frequently stated that the waterway connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara would be built “no matter what” and “whatever they [environmentalist groups, opposition etc.] say” (Diken, 2016). The project is expected to cost approximately US\$ 20 billion (Sabah, 2018), and, according to environmentalist groups and scientists, will produce irreversible environmental damage (Sudagezer, 2018).

While the AKP has tried to deal with the effects of low economic growth since the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 through a construction-based growth regime, all three aspects of this strategy, public and private investments in housing and urban renewal projects, the construction of hydroelectric powerplants on small streams, and megaprojects, have generated social unrest and protests movements. According to many observers, the AKP government has undermined the rule of law and democratic process to bolster neoliberal transformations of socio-ecological relationships by “disregarding existing laws, environmental standards and procedures to push through investments and projects on behalf of corporations” (Paker, 2017, p. 113). Several local and national movements have emerged to challenge these projects, their arbitrariness, and their impacts on socio-ecological relationships. This new wave of socio-environmental movements, ranging from urban environmental movements such as the Gezi Protests of 2013 (Arsel, Adaman, & Akbulut, 2017; Gürcan & Peker, 2015), to the “environmentalism of the malcontent” in Gerze (Arsel, Adaman, & Akbulut, 2015) and to local struggles to defend livelihoods in the Black Sea region (Aksu, 2016, Eren & Buke, 2016; Evren, 2016) and the Northern Forests Defence in Istanbul against the megaprojects (Paker, 2017) have been the biggest challenge to the AKP government and its particular brand of authoritarian neoliberalism (Adaman et al. 2017).

The AKP government’s initial reaction to this new wave of socio-environmental movements was to openly blame the protestors for trying to prevent Turkey’s economic development. For instance, then Prime Minister Erdoğan criticized those who were protesting the construction of hydroelectric plants in the Black Sea region for being “spare-time environmentalists” who had never had any contributions to the development of Turkey (Hürriyet, 2008). This initial disdain for the socio-environmental concerns of the environmentalist groups took novel forms in the case of the more massive protests.

When the sit-in at Istanbul's Gezi Park to contest the urban development plan that would demolish the park to build a shopping mall turned into a nation-wide anti-government protest movement, Erdoğan and other AKP officials framed the events as a "conspiracy against the government" staged by "the CIA, Europeans jealous of their economic success, unspecified foreign forces in cahoots with terrorists, Twitter, 'interest rate lobby' and of course, the international Jewish conspiracy" (Gibbons, 2013). In the case of protests against megaprojects in northern Istanbul, Erdoğan once again expressed his astonishment and described the environmentalists and the opposition parties that brought their concerns to the agenda of the parliament as "useless": "They say that they will shelve Turkey's mega projects. They say that they will stop the third bridge and the third airport. What does this mean? What is the logic here? These people have never planted a tree in their life" (*Sputnik News*, 2015). On several occasions, the AKP officials, Erdoğan himself, did not hesitate to include environmentalists in their long list of the "groups against Turkey's development" (*Sözcü*, 2014; *BirGün*, 2017).

Whenever his government was challenged by the actions and arguments of environmentalist groups, Erdoğan announced himself as the "best and only environmentalist" by using slang ("*Çevrecinin daniskasıyım*" *Hürriyet*, 2008). Claiming that "no one could compete with [him] in terms of environmentalism," Erdoğan has cited the number of trees planted since the AKP came to power in 2002 (*Hürriyet*, 2013). According to Paker (2017), Erdoğan's self-proclaimed environmentalism aims to divert attention from the criticism towards AKP's mega-projects and one of the main pillars of AKP's developmentalist discourse. Perhaps speaking to the forestation efforts of the 1990s, led by elite NGOs and supported by the various state institutions, in the collective consciousness of Turkish society, Erdoğan has frequently referred to tree-planting as a "civilization project" (Ministry of Forestry and Water Works, 2016). However, environmentalist groups argue that the presentation of tree-planting as a form of environmentalism is misleading (*T24*, 2013; *Bianet*, 2018). As a well-known lawyer of the environmentalist movement, Arif Ali Cangi puts it, the ecological importance of forests is not limited to the number of trees within an area; they constitute an ecosystem with all the elements in the area. Planting trees cannot replace an already extinguished forest ecosystem (*Bianet*, 2018). Paker (2017, p. 111) argues that the Erdoğan-style cooptation of environmentalism strengthens the AKP's hegemony and "fend[s] of criticism based on ecological arguments and create[s] the perception of the government

as an actor that addresses environmental concerns.” In fact, the tree-planting strategy can produce ecologically problematic outcomes even when it is used for so-called environmentalist projects. This is also evident in the case of the Gediz Delta, where eucalyptus trees were planted to dry up the wetlands to open up residential and recreational areas in the 1970s (see Chapter 4 for a discussion on how eucalyptus plantations created a conflict among conservation scientists, and Chapter 5 how these plantations were rebranded as an “environmental amenity” for recreational consumption). On this note, I now turn to the policies related to wetland conservation in Turkey within the context of the global neoliberalization of wetland conservation.

## **2.2. Wetland Policies in Turkey**

After Russia, Turkey has the second-largest number of existing wetlands in Europe and the Middle East with a combined surface area of three million hectares (Karadeniz et al., 2009). According to the General-Directorate for Nature Conservation and National Parks, there are 135 “wetlands of international importance” in Turkey, 14 of which are designated as Ramsar sites, alongside 45 “wetlands of national importance.”<sup>14</sup> Today, Turkey has a well-developed regulative framework concerning the conservation of wetlands. Nevertheless, wetlands as ecosystems to be protected have come to the attention of policymakers as well as environmentalist groups considerably late. In fact, they had been socially and politically constructed as “wastelands” until the 1990s. Similar to the many European, North American, and Asian experiences (see Blackbourn, 2006; Giblett, 2016; Yeh, 2009), for the most of the history of the Republic, wetlands had been associated with diseases, unproductivity, and underdevelopment; hence, the primary approach had been centred on draining and reclaiming them for production and development.

Evered (2012) argues that a “wetland as wasteland” discourse is embedded in the national mythologies of the Turkish state. For instance, the construction and designation of Ankara as a capital in the middle of Anatolia and on “reclaimed” wetlands was a symbol of a rebirth of a nation, integrated into the nationalist narratives as a story of struggle (Evered, 2012, p. 53; see also Evered, 2008). Indeed, for the young Republic,

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.turkiyesulakalanlari.com/sulak-alanlar/>

wetlands were almost synonymous with malaria; they were seen as a severe threat to public health and identified as “potential enemies of the state.” As a result, just like many states during the first half of the twentieth century, Turkey waged a public health-based war on wetlands (Evered, 2014). The Gediz Delta wetlands, as they were politically constructed as wastelands in this period, also took their fair share from these nationwide wetland drainage efforts (see Chapter 3). However, preventing diseases was not the only motivation for draining wetlands. In several cases, wetlands were drained to acquire agricultural fields and open irrigation canals; for instance, in the province of Ankara alone, over 25 thousand hectares of wetlands were drained between 1925 and 1936 for economic reasons (Evered, 2014, p. 485).

Draining wetlands to open up new agricultural fields gained momentum in the 1950s. As part of the commercialized agriculture-based growth strategy of the time, the state encouraged private actors to dry out wetlands with the Law No. 5516 enacted in 1950 which stated that those who would dry out the government-owned marsh areas by their individual or group efforts would be entitled to use such areas free of charge (Republic of Turkey, 1950). The State Hydraulic Works (DSI), the leading public organization concerning the utilization of water resources, was founded in 1953 and partially or entirely drained many wetlands in Turkey. When Turkey experienced a wave of rural-to-urban migration and rapid urbanization in the following decades as a result of mechanization in agriculture, opening spaces for urban developments became the main reason to drain wetlands. For instance, with an amendment to the Housing Law in 1970, wetlands were included in the list of the lands that could be allocated, assigned, and transferred (Karadeniz et al., 2009, p. 1110). In short, first to address diseases such as malaria, then to open up spaces for agriculture and housing, an estimated 1.3 million hectares of wetlands in Turkey, almost half of the current wetland areas, were irreversibly destroyed during the twentieth century (Özesmi & Özesmi, 2001). However, the fate of wetlands in Turkey changed when the state switched to a pro-wetland agenda with a circular signed by then Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel in January 1993. The circular stated that “necessary implementation, inspection and monitoring for protection and observation of the wetlands should be conducted meticulously” by all the “the Ministries, Governors and Municipalities” (Republic of Turkey, 1993). This circular symbolizes a critical moment for the development of wetland conservation policies in Turkey.

Only a year after Demirel's circular, Turkey became a party to the Ramsar Convention and five wetlands (Manyas Lake, Burdur Lake, Sultansazlığı Reeds, Seyfe Lake, and Göksu Delta) were designated as "wetlands of international importance (Ramsar Sites) in 1994, and four more, including the Gediz Delta, in 1998. All of these Ramsar sites had already been protected within several national frameworks. However, the diversity of these protection categories (national park, specially protected natural area, wildlife conservation area, natural site, and so on) shows the lack of an integrated and consistent conservation strategy before Turkey became a Ramsar party (Arı, 2005, p. 293). As of 2020, there are 14 Ramsar Sites in Turkey, with a surface of 184,487 hectares<sup>15</sup>. While the General-Directorate for Nature Conservation and National Parks (under the Ministry of Forestry and Water Works) is the designated Ramsar administrative authority in Turkey, WWF-Turkey is the main non-governmental partner, especially for matters relating to communication, education, participation, and awareness. To understand Turkey's current wetland conservation regime, it is imperative to discuss the evolution of the global wetland conservation framework. Thus, now I turn to the neoliberalization of wetland conservation thanks to the work of international conventions, big environmental NGOs, and research centres. Then I will discuss how the current wetland conservation regime in Turkey has been developed within this framework.

### **2.2.1. Neoliberalization of Wetland Conservation**

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, or the Ramsar Convention was created on February 2, 1971, in the city of Ramsar in Iran. It established the first globally coordinated institutional and policy framework for conservation of a threatened ecosystem, and this framework has inspired many other conservation-oriented global treaties, such as the Convention on Migratory Species (1983) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1993) in the following years (Hettiarachchi, Morrison, & McAlpine, 2015, p. 57). Although regional cooperation has been encouraged and a considerably strong emphasis has been put on national sovereignty over protected wetland areas, the Ramsar framework is "fundamentally global in outlook" (Gillespie, 2007, p. 15). A critical look at the official Ramsar documents

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ramsar.org/wetland/turkey>

(resolutions, recommendations, and handbooks) as well as how this framework has been practiced in several local contexts, including the Gediz Delta, demonstrates that the Convention has been used as an instrument to tie wetland conservation strategies to the market-oriented sustainable development discourse and practice.

The Convention was a product of a lengthy process of discussions, negotiations, and compromises (Matthews, 1993). International NGOs mainly facilitated this process. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN, now called the World Conservation Union, but keeping the same acronym) and its partner, the International Wildfowl Research Bureau (now called Wetlands International) were primarily instrumental in attracting international attention for the protection of wetlands. International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP, now called BirdLife International) and World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) were other key players in the movement towards a convention and its subsequent improvement and expansion (Matthews, 1993, p. 5). Despite several disputes between potential parties, the Convention was reached after nine years of “conferences, technical meetings and behind-the-scenes discussions” between policymakers, wetland scientists, and NGOs (Matthews, 1993, p. 6). The first draft of an international wetland protection convention was prepared by the Dutch Ministry of Culture, Education, and Social Welfare in 1966 and circulated on 12 October 1967 during a Technical Meeting on Wetland Conservation, jointly organized by the IUCN and the IWRB in Turkey (Matthews, 1993, p. 15). In other words, Turkey played an important role in the emergence of the Ramsar framework. This draft went through a series of revisions, particularly related to the obligations and sovereignty rights of contracting parties until it was finalized in 1971.

During the 1970s, the Ramsar Convention evolved as a conservation regime that pointed out the direct links between protected areas and threatened species. In fact, for many wetland conservation pioneers, especially those in high-income countries such as Britain, Switzerland, and the United States, the importance of wetlands as waterfowl habitat had provided the major motivation to develop an international framework for wetland conservation (Bowman, 2002, p. 62). It was not a coincidence that ornithological organizations had been the main vehicle for pushing governmental bodies to come together for an international conservation strategy for wetlands. The original convention was strictly protectionist and aimed to limit the human activities in waterfowl habitats, as they were seen as “altering the present ecological situation” in the Final Act of the

Convention. During the 1970s, the Bureau devoted its energy mainly to create a list of “Wetlands of International Importance” (Ramsar, 1971, Article 2). However, within the context of the emergence of the sustainable development discourse in the 1980s, the Convention evolved through a neoliberal conservation approach.

The neoliberal conservation approach is based on the argument that capitalist expansion and the protection of the environment are mutually compatible (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). While arguing that “natures can only be ‘saved’ through their submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms” (Büscher, Sullivan, Neves, Igoe & Brockington, 2012, p. 4), neoliberal conservation ideology and practice encourages the corporate sponsorship of conservation organizations, increasing role of NGOs in policymaking and the management of protected areas by private companies. By enlisting to an “ecosystem services approach” which manifested itself in the two most significant global environmental initiatives, namely the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, neoliberal conservationism frames and understands environmental problems as technical management issues (Adams, Hodge, & Sandbrook, 2014). It also puts a greater emphasis on economic growth that can be achieved by “ecologically friendly” activities such as ecotourism and holds a strong belief in conserving biodiversity through investment and consumption. Neoliberal conservation strategies aim to produce territories that are suitable for capitalist expansion by “displacing, enclosing, commodifying, and spectacularizing these into the idealized natures that are to be saved” (Büscher et al., 2012, p. 23). The neoliberalization of the Ramsar framework involves two dimensions—the development of “wise use of wetlands” concept and the adoption of an “ecosystem services approach,” which opened the door for the involvement of private actors and so-called “community participation.”

The Convention’s initial preoccupation with preserving the waterfowl habitats in their present form was dropped by the early 1980s, and the Bureau started to work on developing a definition and policy guidelines for “wise use of wetlands” (Hettiarachchi et al., 2015, p. 59). Although the concept of “wise use” was used in the original text of the Convention in 1971, it was not until the 1980 Conference of the Contracting Parties in Cagliari, Italy, that the Bureau attempted to define it. The 1980 Conference was primarily influenced by recently published the *World Conservation Strategy*, which defined conservation as “[t]he management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield

the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations” (IUCN, 1980, p. 1). This approach guided the conceptual developments in the Ramsar framework. For instance, a conference document states that “wise use of wetlands involves maintenance of their ecological character, as a basis not only for nature conservation, but for *sustainable development*” (Ramsar, 1980, emphasis added). The 1987 Meeting of the Ramsar Convention in Regina, Canada finally produced a clear definition of the concept as follows: “The wise use of wetlands is their sustainable utilization for the benefit of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem” (Ramsar, 1987). Sustainable utilization was defined as “human use of a wetland so that it may yield the greatest continuous benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations” (ibid). This definition was evidently influenced by *Our Common Future* report of UN’s World Commission of Environment and Development (1987), which popularized the concept of “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

As H. Smith (2005, p. 79) points out, the concept of “sustainable development” was more hopeful and essentially capital-oriented in comparison to its antecedents, such as the “limits to growth” discourse which was based on an apocalyptic vision of the future and proposed a complete rejection of capitalist developmentalism. The promoters of “sustainable development” were emphasizing the sustainability of economic growth, but also, probably more significantly, they were eager to recognize the “right to develop.” The idea thus allowed economic growth, albeit within the limits of “sustainability,” and it was attractive to the leaders of Global South who have been enchanted by the ideology of developmentalism for decades. The idea of wise use of wetlands functioned in the same way. Bowman (2002, p. 62) suggests that there is a strong correlation between the increasing number of developing countries in the Ramsar Convention and the rise of the “wise use” concept. The leaders of developing countries were enthusiastic about joining this growing network of wetland conservation as it was not a threat to their economic growth ambitions anymore. On the contrary, it was seen as an opportunity to take place within the “sustainable development historical bloc” (Igoe et al., 2010). Following the revised wise use definition, which put a greater emphasis on the economic values and benefits of wetlands, the number of contracting parties skyrocketed; the membership

doubled in only seven years and reached 80 in 1994. Turkey was one of those “new-comers.” During this period, the Bureau and its NGO partners such as the IUCN, the IWRB, the ICBP, and the WWF produced a series of policy development documents, such as *Additional Guidance for the Implementation of the Wise Use Concept* (Ramsar, 1993b), *Economic Valuation of Wetlands: A Guide for Policy Makers and Planners* (Barbier, Acreman & Knowler, 1997). These documents would be central reference points for the emergence of national wetland conservation frameworks in new members of the Convention, including Turkey.

In the 2000s, the wise use concept was linked to the newly emerging “ecosystem services approach.” The fundamental idea within this approach was to promote conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way and to balance compromises between human-wellbeing and ecosystem services (Finlayson et al., 2011, p. 187). The main principles of ecosystem services approach can be summarized as follows: 1) putting societal choices at the center of decision-making process, 2) decentralization of management to the lowest appropriate level, 3) understanding an ecosystem within an economic context, 4) seeking the appropriate balance between, and integration of, conservation and use of biological diversity (Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992). Büscher et al. (2012) argue that this approach aims to subject ecosystem conservation to capitalist market dynamics and to contribute to the progression of capitalist expansion and intensification in environmental conservation areas. In other words, the ecosystem services approach is inherent to neoliberal conservationism.

The Ramsar Convention’s convergence with the neoliberal conservation framework took a significant step at the 2005 Conference as the definition of “wise use of wetland” was updated as “the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the *implementation of ecosystems approaches*, within the context of sustainable development” (Ramsar, 2005, emphasis added). The implementation of ecosystem approaches presumes the inclusion of private actors in conservation efforts. At the 2008 meeting, the Convention urged contracting parties to form partnerships with private sector actors in developing and improving wetland management models, including access and benefit-sharing and corporate responsibility programmes (Ramsar, 2008a; Ramsar, 2008b). The ecosystem services approach that prioritizes the economic benefits of wetlands and the emphasized role of private sector actors in managing wetlands became even more visible in the Strategic Plan 2009-2015 of the Convention.

For instance, The Strategy 1.10 acknowledges private sector as key players and identifies “significant progress in the private sector in applying the concepts and approaches for conservation and wise use of wetlands contained in Ramsar Guidance,” “increased private sector engagement in the wise use of wetlands and in the management of Ramsar Sites,” and awareness-raising material made available to the public to enable wetland-friendly consumer choices” are defined as key result areas (Ramsar, 2010c, p. 16).

While merging ecosystem approaches and the wise use of wetlands, the Convention has also begun emphasizing the importance of community participation in the management of wetlands. Creating public awareness and educating communities about the value of wetlands and wise use principles was one of the central activities of the Convention during the 1990s. However, in the 2000s, the focus has shifted to cooperating with local communities in the management processes as the ecosystem approach encourages decentralization and inclusion of all forms of relevant information, such as indigenous, and local knowledge innovations, and practices while developing management practices (Hettiarachchi et al., 2015). Local people’s participation in the management of wetlands was one of the critical issues discussed in the 1999, 2002, 2005, and 2008 meetings of the Convention. It was Resolution VII.8 (Ramsar, 1999) which first noted that “involving local stakeholders can accelerate the move towards achieving the Ramsar goal of wise use of wetlands” and urged “the Contracting Parties to create, as appropriate, the legal and policy context to facilitate indigenous people’s and local communities’ direct involvement in national and local decision-making for the sustainable use of wetlands.” The handbook developed based on above-mentioned and other resolutions, *Participatory Skills*, listed several principles to include local and indigenous people in the participatory process, for knowledge exchange and capacity building, measuring the degree of local involvement, and testing the participatory approach and listed several case studies where these principles had been put in action (Ramsar, 2010d). However, Hettiarachchi et al. (2015, p. 59) argue that most of the participation tools recommended by the guideline are limited to basic levels of community involvement rather than full empowerment. In fact, the Ramsar principles on community participation failed to include local and indigenous people in decision-making processes in many cases (cf. Adaman, Hakyemez, & Özkaynak, 2009).

In short, the global wetland conservation framework has evolved through a neoliberal model since the 1980s. This neoliberal model emphasizes the economic “potentials” of wetlands, the role of private actors in the management of protected areas and pays lip service to community participation. I explore how this neoliberal conservation framework was adopted in the Gediz Delta and produced particular socio-natures in the 2000s in Chapter 4.

### **2.2.2. Turkey’s Neoliberal Wetland Conservation Framework**

When Turkey became a party in the Ramsar Convention in 1994, the international wetland conservation community had already left its initial strictly preservationist approach behind and embraced a market-oriented conservation framework that considered the value of wetlands concerning their economic benefits. Nevertheless, the convention has been instrumental for the emergence of an integrated wetland conservation policy in Turkey. Although it took Turkish policymakers eight years to fulfill a key Ramsar requirement, finally in January 2002, the Ministry of the Environment issued the Directive for the Protection of Wetlands (Republic of Turkey, 2002). This directive has been the most important legal document concerning the conservation of wetlands in the country. The preparation of a National Wetland Strategy is also a direct outcome of this directive, which was finalized in 2003. Both the directive and the strategy aim the protection and development of wetlands and the reclaiming of the drained ones within the Ramsar framework. They also outline the basics of cooperation and coordination between the public and private organizations and institutions. Following the Ramsar principles, the directive initiates the foundation of the National Wetlands Commission and Local Wetland Commissions where there is a designated Ramsar site. Both national and local commissions are required to include representatives from NGOs and academics alongside the conservation bureaucrats of the central government. The primary responsibility of these commissions is to advise the administrative authorities to identify and designate wetlands of international importance in the country and to prepare the management plans for the designated wetlands.

The Ministry defines the management plans as “constitutions” of wetlands.<sup>16</sup> Prepared according to a Ramsar handbook, *Managing Wetlands*, they are “developed in

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.turkiyesulakalanlari.com/mevzuat/>.

consultation with stakeholders, leading to the establishment of a cross-sectoral management committee” (Ramsar, 2010, p. 10). They outline specific site management activities and actions regarding the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland. They also delegate responsibilities to several stakeholders and describe the possible forms of cooperation between them. The first wetland management plan was prepared for the Göksu Delta in Mersin in 1999 by a partnership between the Ministry of the Environment and WWF-Turkey<sup>17</sup> (see also Karadeniz et al., 2009, pp. 1114-1115). The Göksu Delta was also the first wetland that the Tour du Valat Research Institute for the Conservation of Wetlands showed interest in Turkey. In fact, the institute conducted field research in the delta in partnership with WWF-Turkey between 1993 and 1998, the report published at the end of this project provided the basis for the preparation of a management plan (Zalidis, Tkavakoglu & Gerakis, 1999, p. 65). The plan outlined around 100 activities necessary to accomplish the Ramsar goals in the Göksu Delta and foresaw public involvement in every stage. The project was the first experiment for Turkish bureaucrats and technocrats with a wetland management plan. Even though none of the essential goals were accomplished within the timeframe projected by the plan, the process itself was seen as a valuable learning experience by all actors involved, especially in terms of cooperation between the ministry, international agencies, national NGOs and local groups (Karadeniz et al., 2009, p. 1116). Since 1999, 26 management plans have been prepared for wetlands in Turkey and 29 others are in preparation<sup>18</sup>, but only one of them, the Gediz Delta Management Plan, was implemented fully, albeit for a short period of time.

The Directive for the Protection of Wetlands has been revised several times since 2002. The first amendments were made in 2005 to align the regulations with the EU’s Birds Directive. However, not all the changes were related to the protection of migratory birds in Europe. For instance, the statement that “it is essential to reclaim the drained wetlands” in the original regulation was changed to “necessary measures that are convenient in *technical* and *economic* terms shall be taken to reclaim the drained wetlands” (Republic of Turkey, 2005; emphases added). This “convenience” factor would be used by the state to limit the reclaiming efforts. In 2010, the directive was revisited again, and new amendments further deepened the market-oriented concerns by

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.turkiyesulakalanlari.com/goksu-deltasi-mersin/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.turkiyesulakalanlari.com/mevzuat/>

narrowing the limits of buffer zones and made industrial developments in these areas possible (Republic of Turkey, 2010). The new regulations also allowed the businesses already operating in the designated wetland areas to continue their operations for two more years. More importantly, the 2010 amendments abolished the voting rights of civil society organizations in national and local wetland commissions. Although WWF-Turkey applied to the Council of State to repeal all these changes, the Council annulled only the one that was related to the buffer zones of the wetlands (WWF-Turkey, 2014). The April 2014 changes in the regulation defined two groups of wetlands in Turkey as “nationally important” and “internationally important wetlands.” This distinction made public and private development projects possible within the wetlands of local importance (*Cumhuriyet*, 2014). Following these changes, the Union of Aegean Mayoralties, which includes dozens of resort towns on the Aegean coast, sued the Ministry of Forestry for reducing the number of protected wetlands and allocating them for the use of private investors (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2014).

In short, Turkey’s experience with wetland policy since the 1930s has not been dissimilar to those of many other countries. Wetlands were seen as “wastelands” and sources of diseases and economically valueless areas until the 1990s and draining or filling them was the chief policy concern. Since the 1990s, however, Turkey switched a considerably pro-wetland agenda by following international trends in conservation policy. At the international level and national levels, Turkey has reached “particular benchmarks” concerning wetland conservation (Evered, 2012, p. 57). It is a contracting party in the Ramsar Convention, it became one of the first developing countries that developed a national wetland strategy according to the Ramsar principles, and there are management plans, either prepared or in preparation for all Ramsar sites in the country. In other words, Turkish policymakers have done their homework as active members of the international wetland conservation community. However, a closer look at policy developments and their implications in the localities offers a different narrative. Chapter 4 will examine how international and national policies have been practiced in the Gediz Delta and discuss the making of socio-natures within this neoliberal-developmental approach that prioritizes economic value over ecological and social values, which is embedded in the current conservation framework.

## 2.3. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has traced the socio-political history of Turkey's environmental conservation framework and its transformation since the 1930s. Throughout the chapter, I have highlighted the central role the state has played in "managing, delivering, and producing the environment" (Parenti, 2013, p. 2). By exploring how broader socio-political developments in the country and the articulation and re-articulation of Turkey with the capitalist world-economy, I have argued that the current environmental framework is an outcome of a constant interplay between a domestic modernization imaginary and global processes. Although this framework has gone through certain stages as a result of the ongoing interactions and intersections between local and global developments, there is a continuity in terms of the approach that has guided the development of Turkey's environmental legislation. I have referred to this approach as the "elite environmentalism." I have suggested that the elite environmentalism brings environmental concerns and economic growth ambitions together. In this sense, this variant of environmentalism, I contend, reflects the twin projects of Turkey's modernizing elite—being accepted by the global community via participating in intergovernmental policy networks and achieving economic growth through integration with the capitalist world-economy, albeit in varying ways and degrees.

The elite environmentalism was first represented by bureaucrats and technocrats, who shaped the trajectory of Turkey's environmental framework thanks to their connections with the global conservation community. These individuals introduced new ideas to the country and contributed to the institutionalization of environmental policies in the 1960s and 1970s. In this period, environmental concerns were framed within Turkey's national developmentalist agenda, as manifested in the State Planning Organization's 5-year development plans. Since the early 1980s, Turkey has adopted a neoliberal economic development model, and its environmental framework, which is mainly shaped by globally hegemonic sustainable development discourses, has also gone through a neoliberalization process. Turkey has become a contracting party to numerous international environmental agreements and, particularly under the AKP rule in the 2000s, adopted the European environmental policy framework within the context of the EU membership efforts. This has opened the door for the involvement of not only international actors but also elite-led environmental NGOs, municipalities, and private

businesses in environmental governance. Although the neoliberalization of Turkey's environmental framework involves some references to the inclusion of local populations in conservation efforts, it is ultimately a top-down, elitist approach that pays only "lip service" to community participation. Yet, socio-environmental movements that defined environmental concerns outside of elite discourses also began to emerge in this period. The impact of these movements on the trajectory of Turkey's evolving neoliberal environmental agenda has been limited; however, they have contributed to the accumulation of a social movement repertoire, especially in regard to legal activism.

In terms of the conservation of wetland habitats, Turkey became a party to the Ramsar Convention in 1994 and fully adopted the Convention's neoliberal conservation framework in the 2000s. The remaking of Gediz Delta socionatures through the implementation of conservation policies is a product of this historical trajectory. I explore how this neoliberal model has been experimented in the delta in Chapter 4. However, the socionature-making processes through conservation policies in the delta cannot be fully understood without a discussion on how contemporary Gediz Delta landscapes have been historically imagined and produced since the 1860s. Thus, the following chapter explores the making and remaking of delta socionatures over a hundred-year period, prior to its "rediscovery" as an ecologically significant habitat in the 1980s.

## Chapter 3.

### The City and Its Delta: The Making of Gediz Delta Socionatures (1860-1973)

This chapter explores the metabolic relationships, i.e. the material, dynamic, and transformative exchanges between the Gediz Delta and the metropolitan city of Izmir and beyond. Izmir is the third-largest city in Turkey after Istanbul and Ankara, with a population of approximately 4.3 million as of 2020. Located on the west coast of the country, Izmir played a crucial role in Mediterranean trade as around one-third of total Ottoman foreign trade was being realized in the Izmir Port during the peak of the integration with the capitalist world economy in the nineteenth century (Keyder, Özveren & Quataert, 1993). Although the industrialization in Izmir was limited at the beginning of the twentieth century (Kasaba, 1993, p. 405), the city has maintained its position as an important port while building a robust industrial-urban economy during the republican period with food and beverage, textile, iron and steel, chemistry, machinery, and automotive as the main sectors (Aegean Region Chamber of Industry, 2016). The city has also become a tourism destination thanks to the resort towns on the Aegean coast. The Gediz Delta is located 25 kilometres north of Izmir's downtown and extends over 40,000 hectares. I suggest that contemporary making and remaking of Gediz Delta socionatures cannot be fully comprehended without considering its metabolic relationships with the city and beyond since the late nineteenth century.

To understand these relationships, I explore how the Gediz Delta was imagined differently by competing social groups and how these imaginaries were shaped within political, economic, and social contexts that the actors were embedded in as well as how they guided several socio-environmental projects between the 1860s and the 1970s. I trace these competing socio-environmental imaginaries in the official documents, technical reports as well as the writings of European travellers and missionaries. Employing McMichael's (1990) "incorporated comparison" methodology, I explore the dynamic and mutually conditioning relationships between the *whole* (the capitalist world-ecology) and a *part* (Gediz Delta socionatures). Throughout the chapter, I emphasize how the state meditates the production of socionatures and coordinates the socio-environmental relationship in the delta while selectively tying them to capital

accumulation processes via specific projects (cf. Moore, 2011b, 2015; Parenti, 2013). In short, this chapter situates the dynamics, actors, and processes of socationature-making in the Gediz Delta within the context of broader historical developments in the city, the country, and the world-economy over a hundred-year period, prior to its “rediscovery” as an ecologically significant habitat in the 1980s.

### **3.1. The Making of a Port Economy: Izmir in the Nineteenth Century**

David Jaffee (2015, p. 784) defines the port economy as the “constellation of economic activities that revolve around the transportation, logistics, and distribution of goods moving through a maritime port.” He argues that the development of a port economy appears as an evolving urban growth strategy that brings several capital groups and public officials together to form a growth coalition. While the original urban growth machine model (Logan & Molotch 2007 [1987], Molotch, 1976) emphasizes the power and influence of land-based elites in advancing a pro-growth agenda, Jaffee (2015) highlights the role that public investments in large-scale infrastructure play in making of a port economy. “A growing and competitive port economy requires,” Jaffee (2015, p. 790) suggests, “*speculative megaprojects* that involve huge public sector investments in (...) large scale coastal and transportation infrastructure” (emphasis in original). He uses the term “speculative” to emphasize that these projects can never guarantee economic growth on their own and, more importantly, “the need for, approval of, and potential economic benefits accruing from, the necessary megaprojects, are determined by forces largely outside the control of local officials and urban elites” (ibid, p. 791). He also suggests that an analysis of a port economy should consider the insights of urban political ecology on capitalism-nature nexus since, as a growth strategy, it always requires purposeful mobilization of the discourses around natural/geographical advantages (Jaffee, 2015, p. 797). Although Jaffee develops his analysis based on the experiences of a mid-sized coastal city in Florida in the early twenty-first century, I suggest that the infrastructural developments and the urban-rural interactions in the late nineteenth century Izmir have many similarities with “the port economy as urban growth engine” he describes. Below I discuss how urban and peri-urban landscapes of Izmir were transformed by infrastructural projects to support the development of a port

economy in the city, which was mainly led by extra-local actors, such as European financiers and orchestrated by the state.

Izmir was just a small agricultural town with a population of 2,000 at the end of the sixteenth century. Under the Ottoman policy of provisionism<sup>19</sup>, most of its agricultural products, including the grains, raisins, figs, oranges, and cotton from the fertile Gediz region, were shipped to Istanbul to feed and clothe the thriving capital of the empire (Goffman, 1999, p. 87). International commerce was almost non-existent. Yet, in the nineteenth century, it became a major metropolis with a diverse population fabric of Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Turks, alongside with a highly mobile group of European merchants and the city's economic importance made it a leading port of the entire eastern Mediterranean region (Kasaba, 1993, p. 387). The city played a vital role in the integration of the empire with the capitalist world-economy in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the greatest part of Ottoman export produce reached the West and most of the European manufactured goods, and colonial exports reached the Anatolian and Iranian markets through Izmir (Frangakis-Syrett, 1998). The commercial importance of the city was not limited to its dominant position within the external trade networks; Izmir also dominated much of the internal networks of the empire's vast territory (Frangakis-Syrett, 2001, p. 24). Whereas France was the leading trading partner throughout the eighteenth century, the economic ties of Izmir with European countries were even more strengthened as Britain took the place of France since French trade declined following the 1789 Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (ibid).

In fact, the industrialization of Britain significantly affected commercial relations in western Anatolia. British merchants sought to market their finished goods in Izmir and collect agricultural products to feed their industries and increasingly urban populations at home (Goffman, 1999, p. 126). Valonia, madder roots, raisins, opium, and cotton were the principal Ottoman exports to Britain, constituting from 43 percent to 73 percent of total exports; they were mostly produced within Izmir's hinterland and were almost exclusively shipped from Izmir (Kasaba, 1988, p. 88). Thanks to a variety of internationally demanded products, Izmir never had to rely on a single commodity for its

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<sup>19</sup> Provisionism here refers to an Ottoman imperial policy which subjected the dynamics of agricultural production, craft industries, and raw material extraction in Anatolian towns to the needs of the development of the capital, Istanbul (See Faroqhi, 1984).

exports (Frangakis-Syrett, 1998, p. 153). Throughout the nineteenth century, around a quarter of all imports to the empire from European countries and around 55 percent of all exports passed through the port of Izmir (Frangakis-Syrett, 2001, p. 24). In fact, on the contrary to the general trends of the Ottoman foreign trade, the value of exports was always higher than the value of imports in Izmir (Kasaba, 1988, pp. 95-6). As a result, a substantial sum left in the area and the city became more prosperous with a growing, highly cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. The accumulation of wealth in the city contributed to the development of key urban infrastructure and services such as an extensive network of paved streets, gas lighting, streetcar line, sewage system, postal and telegraph services as well as a vibrant cultural life with multilingual newspapers, libraries, and theatres (Goffman, 1999, pp. 128-131). As the trade in the region expanded, Izmir also became a centre for services such as insurance, customs, and brokerage, but also sorting, weighing and packaging of commodities (Kasaba, 1988, p. 97). Several European banks opened branches in Izmir, and the city became another financial hub of the empire after Istanbul (Frangakis-Syrett, 1998, p. 150). In short, a *port economy proper* made Izmir the empire's most important city in the Eastern Mediterranean and stimulated the emergence of complex urban life in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The making of a port economy as a growth strategy in Izmir was mobilized by a coalition formed by European entrepreneurs and financiers seeking for infrastructural investment opportunities (mainly, railroads and ports) in the city, merchants hoping to have access to its highly fertile periphery, and Ottoman authorities who were trying to secure the city's position in the Mediterranean trade networks while generating tax revenues. Although it is not possible to find first-hand accounts of the local producers who engaged in trade relations with European merchants, several consular reports suggest that farmers also participated in the making of a port economy as they gradually switched from subsistence agriculture and producing for local markets to cash-crops in the second half of the century. In the case of the building of the quay, Izmir's inhabitants became more vocal about their concerns and demanding a more significant emphasis on the public utility aspect of such a project (Zandi-Sayek, 2000). The development of a port economy in Izmir would not have been possible without critical changes in Ottoman trade policy, urban administration system, and foreign direct investments in the city.

Institutionally, the introduction of the Free Trade Treaties of 1838-41 between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, and subsequently with other European countries, enabled the intensification of trade relations. These treaties served as the principal legal framework and were instrumental in the growth of the trade volume between European countries and the empire within the context of the expansion of the world-economy in the nineteenth century (Pamuk, 1987, pp. 18-20). They took away the power of the Ottoman government to impose restrictions on the exportation of agricultural products and raw materials; as a result, Izmir and its immediate hinterland were among the first to show rapid increases in exports (Pamuk, 1987, p. 99). Before these treaties, foreign merchants had limited access to Izmir's hinterland; however, now they were able to move goods between Ottoman provinces without restrictions. However, the lack of necessary infrastructure to transport the export materials from inner regions to port-cities and European centres was the biggest problem in the mid-nineteenth century, as observed by a railroad developer:

the extraordinary fertility and resources of Asia Minor maintain Smyrna in her position as a trading emporium, notwithstanding all the disadvantages she has had to contend with from the total absence of even the most ordinary roads, and which has from time immemorial rendered imperative the exclusive use of Camels and Mules (Macdonald Stephenson, 1859, p. 5).

In fact, in a report, Felix Wakefield, who made the first railroad survey in Western Anatolia in 1857, states that “the means of transport is the sole limit to production” (quoted in Macdonald Stephenson, 1859, p. 9).

Whereas many observers concluded that the construction of railroads connecting the interior to the port of Izmir was essential to improve the trade relations, a few voices were opposing the railroads. For instance, James Lewis Farley, the accountant-general of the Imperial Ottoman Bank, a joint venture of British and French capital groups and the Ottoman Government, warned British investors about the “policy of encouraging the formation of railways” (Farley, 1866, p. 176). Highlighting the poor conditions of roads connecting towns and villages in Izmir and its hinterland, Farley (1866, p. 177) argued that “putting railways before roads is very much like reversing the natural order of things.” However, Farley's suggestion to invest “the same amount of capital and energy” to road construction, which, he argued, “would have (...) sensibly increase [the trade of Smyrna] by an influx of produce from districts” did not make much sense to European

entrepreneurs and Ottoman authorities in the age of railroads. The making of a port economy in Izmir, in their opinion, was not possible without a well-developed railroad network in the region. Cottrell (2008, p. 86) suggests that a growth coalition was formed around what he calls the “Smyrna Plan” based on a royal decree of 11 July 1856, “which envisaged the development of a system through lines radiating from the important commercial port of Smyrna.”

In order to attract foreign direct investments to build necessary infrastructure in the country, alongside the free trade legal framework, in 1856 the Ottoman government enacted the law of expropriation for the public utility which allowed foreign railroad and harbour developer companies to acquire the right to use strips of lands via long-term contracts (Hastaoglu-Martinidis, 2010, p. 96). In fact, most of the foreign capital inflow was directed towards railroad construction. British capital had the largest share in foreign direct investment during the 1860s and 1870s and mostly concentrated on infrastructural investments in western Anatolia (Pamuk, 1987, p. 76). These investments contributed to the intensification of foreign trade in the city while transforming the urban and peri-urban landscapes of Izmir significantly. As Frangakis-Syrett (2001) argues, infrastructural projects both enabled and symbolized the commercial success of the city.

Two primary infrastructural vehicles of the intensification of trade relations between the empire and the European centres realized in Izmir were the construction of the Izmir-Aydın and Izmir-Kasaba Railways (1866) and the Quay of Izmir (1875). The first concession to build a railroad in the region was granted to four British entrepreneurs on 23 September 1856, who then transferred it to a company called “The Ottoman Railway from Smyrna to Aidin of His Imperial Majesty to Sultan” (Clarke, 1861, p. 3, hereafter the Ottoman Railway Company). The concession included the construction and operation of “the railway, wharves, piers, warehouses, custom-house and any other buildings;” it also gave the company the right to concede, purchase or lease “all lands, mines, forests, machinery” necessary for the construction (The Ottoman Railway Company, 1856, pp. 1-2). The construction of this first railway in Anatolia started in September 1857 with a big ceremony. The commencement was reported by a London magazine as follows: “It appeared as if the whole city of Smyrna was formed in an animated circle around the field where the ceremony was celebrated of this great undertaking, which will establish a new era in Turkey” (*The Illustrated London News*, 1857, p. 436). However, one observer notes that this enthusiasm did not last long because of the local people’s fluctuating

views on the construction and “wavering in [their] convictions of its own interests” and also the government’s own “financial difficulties and political complications” (Clarke, 1861, p. 5). The company faced environmental limitations such as landslides and financial problems, as well. As a result, the construction took around eight years, and the 130-kilometre long railway finally completed in July 1866 (*The Railway Engineer*, 1896, p. 310).

In the north of the city, the original concession for the construction of a railway from Izmir to Kasaba (Cassaba in English-language documents, modern-day Turgutlu) was first given to a London based Smyrna-Cassaba Railway Company (*The Railway Engineer*, 1896, p. 311). The original line started from the central station in Izmir, initially led to in a northern direction with its first station in Menemen, then the largest town in the Gediz Delta, and followed the Gediz River to Manisa and reached Kasaba. As reported by Wakefield in 1857, a railway from the city toward the north was an essential investment to transport the agricultural products of the Gediz region to the port, especially fresh fruits when they were still ripe, and ship them to European cities (quoted in Macdonald Stephenson, 1859, pp. 32-3). The Izmir-Kasaba Railway was relatively shorter, a total of 95 kilometres, than the Aydın line; also, the company did not experience any significant financial or topographical difficulties. Hence, it was completed within the proposed schedule, and the inauguration of the Izmir-Kasaba Railway took place in January 1866 (*The Railway Engineer*, 1896, p. 311).

İnal (2019, p. 899) suggests that these railways made Izmir the “first port-city with a regular train connection to its hinterland in the Ottoman Empire.” In the following years, new lines were added to the originally built railroads, and in 1912, the whole length of the railways in western Anatolia reached 1035 kilometres (ibid, p. 900). Nevertheless, the foreign companies operating these railways limited their activities with transportation only and did not become purchasing agents (Kasaba, 1988, p. 73). Furthermore, a London-based magazine for British railway investors and engineers reports that even after the 30 years of the opening of the original line of the Izmir-Kasaba Railway, camel caravans still “maintain[ed] an active competition for the traffic” (*The Railway Engineer*, 1896, p. 311). Although railways did not completely replace old methods of transportation, the foreign trade in Izmir grew exponentially once they were opened. The share of the city in Ottoman foreign trade grew from 7.5 percent in 1850 to 30 percent in 1873 (Issawi, 1980, p. 109-111). İnal (2019) also argues that the already ongoing

transformation of agriculture from subsistence farming towards the production of commercial crops such as cotton, cereals, tobacco, and so on intensified with the introduction of a relatively well-developed railway system in the region. Indeed, many farmers in the region, especially in the Gediz Delta, switched to producing cotton in the second half of the nineteenth century (U.K. Foreign Office, 1865, p. 598).

Besides the railways that connected the city to its hinterlands, the waterfront developments in Izmir also significantly contributed to the ever-expanding trade relations between the city and European centres. Until the 1870s, Izmir was a “port-city without a port,” lacking the adequate waterfront facilities to support growing commercial activities (Hastaoglou-Martinidis, 2010). As the trade activities had to take place in the deformed and disorderly old wharves, which allowed easy and continuous smuggling, for Ottoman authorities, the lack of an orderly quay was resulting in a substantial loss of tax revenue. A quay thus would significantly contribute to formally organized activities within the world-economy. For the business community, a new quay would be a fundamental addition to the existing transportation network consisting of railways (Zandi-Sayek, 2000, p. 62). As several influential merchants sent the governor a memorandum in favour of building a quay, the central government ordered local authorities to produce a report on the feasibility and the estimated cost of a quay project in 1862 (ibid). A group of British entrepreneurs, residing in Izmir, were able to get the concession from the government and formed a company called the Smyrna Quay Company in 1867.

The original 5-year project included not only the construction of a wharf at least 4 kilometres long and 18.75 metres wide along the shore, but also a tramway, sewers, and a port of anchorage. The company was also given the right to operate the port for 25 years and granted full ownership of all land reclaimed from the sea (Issawi, 1980, p. 169). They hired Dussaud Brothers, a French contracting firm with a high international reputation in this field; the Dussauds had undertaken the construction of several ports in the Mediterranean, including Marseilles, Brest, Toulon, and Trieste (Frangakis-Syrett, 2001, p. 23). Owing to the unforeseen difficulties, the Smyrna Quay Company soon became unable to make the payments to the contractor who already commenced the construction, and it was forced into liquidation and gave up the project in 1869 (Issawi, 1980, p. 169). Dussaud Brothers bought the original concessionaires' shares and took the company over with the encouragement of the French consul; as a result, what started as a British infrastructural investment in Izmir became a French enterprise

(Frangakis-Syrett, 2001, p. 28). Trying to manage the late nineteenth-century European imperialist competition and uncomfortable with the growing British dominance in the region with the construction of railway lines by British capital, this take-over was welcomed by the Ottoman government as well. In fact, when Dussaud Brothers wanted to sell the company to British financiers in the following years, the government stopped them by granting additional concessions including giving up its statutory right to 12 percent of the company's gross revenue and prolonging the original concession to 35 years (Frangakis-Syrett, 2001, pp. 32-35). The planned work was completed in August 1875.

The quay contributed not only to the commercial dynamism and growth of Izmir but also became an initial symbol of the city when the pictures of the waterfront were reprinted in European journals. Frangakis-Syrett (*ibid*) suggests that, in true nineteenth-century spirit, the quay was a tribute to engineering, private enterprise, and free trade. Several observers noted that the orderly quay, similar to the ports of Brest and Toulon in design, symbolized the city's riches and cosmopolitanism. Among them, the French geologist and traveller Louis de Launay writes in 1887: "Smyrna is a façade of European regularity tacked onto an Oriental confusion. (...) We land on a beautiful majestic quay, built by the French Company. We are still in Europe" (quoted in Zandi-Sayek, 2012, p. 115). Built by private foreign capital and supported by the Ottoman government, the railways and the quay created a *port economy proper* in Izmir. Supplementary to each other, they acted as a significant catalyst for the economic growth of the city and the gradual evolution of urban spaces while putting Izmir among the foremost port-cities in the Mediterranean. They were celebrated as great successes of nineteenth-century engineering and entrepreneurialism. What is less known, in many cases not even mentioned, is another "megaproject" that took place in the same period, which eventually secured the future of the port and the commercial function of the railways. This project was the diversion of the Gediz River to 50 kilometres north of the city in order to protect the gulf from river deposits.

### **3.2. The Nineteenth Century Socio-Environmental Imaginaries: A Fertile Delta and a Threat to the Port Economy**

Starting from the eighteenth century, countless European missionaries, geographers, travellers, and “explorers” passed through the Gediz Delta. Their travels were mostly financially supported by intellectual societies that were curious about the artistic and historical significance of the region and private companies that were seeking new markets as well as religious organizations that were interested in both Christian roots in Asia Minor and possibilities for a Christian revival there. They wrote extensively on the natural and social characteristics of the region to report back to their sponsors. In their writings, the Gediz Delta appears as a broad, fertile alluvium plain which is famous for its fresh fruit and as a recreational area for affluent urbanites.

Among them, a classics scholar Richard Chandler published the account of his tour in 1764, made at the expense of the Society of Dilettanti, a group of English noblemen who sponsored the study of ancient Greek and Roman art. Chandler’s travel notes include his detailed observations in the Gediz Delta. He mentions numerous villages in the area which, thanks to “the fertility of the soil, and the plenty of water for the uses of gardening and agriculture, with other advantages,” supplied Izmir with fruits, fish, and provisions (Chandler, 1817, p. 84). McCoan (1878, p. 703) also notes the “picturesque beauty of the scenery” and the gardens of Menemen that were renowned for their fruit. He mentions that with the opening of the railway with a station in Menemen, the area became “a favourite summer resort of the Smyrniotes” (ibid). Georg Weber, an early archaeological explorer of the Izmir region, mainly Ephesus, describes a vast delta “covered with buffaloes and wild goats,” through which “rare horsemen and rows of camels passed” (1880, p. 8). “[The delta was] almost entirely under water during winter,” Weber observes; and interestingly enough, he also highlights the similarities between the Gediz Delta and France’s Camargue (ibid), almost a hundred years before the policymakers, scientists, and environmental activists from these two Mediterranean deltas started to develop a conversation around wetland management, conservation, and development (see Chapter 4).

These travellers also point out the shoals that had been formed throughout the years by the waters of the Gediz River. Chandler (1817) is among the first to suggest that the

Gediz River had already affected significant changes on the gulf and would “gradually accomplish some signal alterations.” He argues that in the near future the sea within the gulf would have given place to a “noble plain created and watered by the Hermus [Gediz]”; then commercial activities in the port would have to be removed as “Smyrna be, if not utterly deserted, desolate and forlorn” (Chandler, 1817, pp. 88-89). Henry John Van Lennep, who was born in 1815 in Izmir to a Dutch family, educated in Amherst College and Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, served as a missionary with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Izmir (1840-1844 and 1863-69) also points out the threat that the Gediz River was posing on Izmir. In 1864, he writes about the shoals formed by the waters of the Gediz and speculates about the future of Izmir:

It is strange, however, that the Government do [*sic*] not see the necessity of guarding against the further encroachments of the river deposits; for there can be no doubt that Smyrna will ere long cease to be a sea-port town, and will, like Nice, stand upon an inland lake, whose overflow will reach the sea through a narrow canal (Van Lennep, 1870, p. 16).

The renowned French geographer of the time, Élisée Reclus (1885, p. 269) even calculates the time when the entrance to the port would have been entirely closed:

[T]he silting process is resumed at a rate that will probably reduce the whole harbour to a mean depth of about 40 feet towards the year 2,000. Then deep-sea navigation will become difficult and even impossible, unless meantime the lower Hermus be again diverted through its old bed towards Phocaea, so as to carry its alluvia westwards to the outer gulf.

He also refers to the ancient cities such as Ephesus and Miletus that had lost their advantageous commercial positions when the fluvial deposits of the Little Meander and the Great Meander, respectively, “choked” their harbours (ibid). French geographer and orientalist Vital Cuinet refers to the “very fertile alluvial deposits” of the Gediz River, extended over 20,000 hectares that stretches between Menemen and the sea (1890, p. 388). Although he celebrates the production of “many excellent fruits” in the Gediz Delta, Cuinet also mentions that the widespread floods of the river that had caused great ravages in the agricultural production (Cuinet, 1890, p. 362). Yet, the uncontrolled river was a problem not only for the local producers, but Cuinet also stresses the threat of the river to the city’s port economy. He refers to Izmir as the “second city of the Ottoman Empire and the first of Asia Minor,” but the city had “exposed to losing its rank, or maybe even disappear[ed] one day, as so many rich ancient cities (...) as a result of landings of

the Gediz” (Cuinet, 1890, p. 446). He suggests that it would have been impracticable for ships of average tonnage to enter the bay, and the deposits of the river would have completely filled the entrance and created an inner lake in a century (ibid).

It was not only these geographers that pointed out that the Gediz Delta was expanding towards the entrance of the port. Concerned with the future of commercial activities of their vessels in the Izmir Port, the British consuls and other officials also reported on the threat of the shoals formed by the river deposits. For instance, in his report to the British Secretary of the State for War, physician and zoologist George Rolleston, who was appointed at the British Civil Hospital in Izmir during Crimean War (1853-56), writes:

It is not uncommon to see steamers and other vessels stuck fast upon this shoal, which is, however, free from rock, as being in great measure the deposit of the Hermus. During our residence in Smyrna this disaster never befell an English vessel (Rolleston, 1856, p. 14).

However, according to Rolleston, the increase of the shoal was not considerable, and it might have affected only “remotely the future prospects of the port” (ibid). Almost a decade later, British Consul Cumberbatch, in his report on the trade of Izmir in 1864, mentions the narrowing entrance of the port, and the frequent incidents of vessels running on the shoals, yet he says that they “sustain no damage, as the soil is soft” (U.K. Foreign Office, 1865, p. 596). Nevertheless, while reporting on the trade in 1868, Cumberbatch alters his view as the river -naturally- changed its course in 1867. As the river came three kilometres closer to the port, it “caused a considerable amount of extra soil to descend,” and the entrance got even narrower, which would “eventually be closed” (U.K. Foreign Office, 1870). Cumberbatch includes his concerns about the government’s indifference towards this growing threat that the river was posing on the port and the agricultural production in the area in almost every annual report after this natural development. For instance, in 1873 he notes that “no attempt has yet been made to clear the mouth of the Hermus which river frequently overflows its banks and does a large amount of damage to the crops; besides, it is gradually filling up the entrance of the bay of Smyrna” (U.K. The House of Commons, 1874, p. 1008).

The Ottoman government was not completely unaware of these geological developments in the Gediz Delta. Three years after the Gediz River changed its course three kilometres towards the gulf, in 1870, the Ottoman Council of the State acknowledged the potential risks of letting the river flow in its new bed, such as the

narrowing of the entrance of the harbour, the destruction of fertile agricultural lands and salt pans. The *mazbata* (official decision) authorized the Aydın Governorship (the province of which İzmir was the capital) to appoint an engineer to study the area, produce a detailed map, and develop a project to divert the river to its former bed (Korkut, 2003, pp. 21-3). In 1871, Margossian Efendi was appointed as the chief engineer of the province. Margossian conducted a very detailed study in the Gediz Delta and submitted his report, within which he discussed several potential solutions to the problem by citing examples from similar projects carried out in other countries, to the Governor-General Sadık Pasha (Scherzer, 1873, p. 4). In his report, Margossian argued that the flooding of agricultural areas deserved less consideration, but the fact that incoming deposits filling the entrance of the bay was a severe threat. He claimed that “these sandy deposits, in about fifty years, will have finally completely obstruct the harbour. This obstruction would necessarily be the ruin of the city, which survives only by its commerce” (Scherzer, 1873, p. 234). Margossian did not think that the diversion of the river back to its former bed would be a permanent solution. Margossian believed that it was impossible to divert the river towards the north; even had it been possible, the marine current would have brought the sands back to the entrance of the port. Therefore, he proposed dredging as the only “rational solution that could be adopted” (Scherzer, 1873, p. 241). However, this was never considered as a viable option by Ottoman authorities; the governor was “contemplating conducting [the] river by a canal towards the ancient Phoccea (Foça)” (U.K. Foreign Office, 1875, p. 1803). Yet, as Governor Sadık Pasha’s term in office ended, the idea of diverting the river was also shelved. When there was a property dispute in the delta in 1875, the government stated that the river would not be diverted to its old bed based on this report (Korkut, 2003, pp. 12 and 28-9). Nevertheless, in the following years, the merchants, businesspeople, and European consuls in the city continued to raise their worries. Especially with the completion of the quay project in 1875, the trade volume in the İzmir Port continued to grow despite the overall recession in European economies (Kasaba, 1988, pp. 120-1). The merchants and the quay company were concerned about the longevity of their investments in the city. Rougon (1892, p. 445), then French Consul-General in İzmir, notes that it was the continuous pressure from the business community that forced the government to take action.

Another concern was the sustainability of salt production in the delta. The delta was one of the primary salt extraction sites in the empire since the sixteenth century; sea salt produced in saltpans built on marshes by the coast had been transported to the imperial capital under the Ottoman policy of provisionism for centuries. In the nineteenth century, when this policy was replaced by free trade, salt production in the Gediz Delta became the biggest profitable and revenue-generating business. Administered by the Foçateyn county, the Çamaltı and Adatepe saltpans were the two most productive salt extraction sites whose salt was sold almost exclusively on the international market (Erol, 2016, pp. 45-6). The saltpans were under state ownership and were rented out to contractors known as *mültezim*, who paid a fixed annual tax. When the Ottoman government declared bankruptcy in 1876 and suspended interest and amortizations payments to its foreign creditors, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA), a European controlled office within the Ottoman bureaucracy, was established to ensure credit payments and scale down the debt in 1881 (Issawi, 1980, pp. 361-2). The OPDA ceded the revenues generated by the critical elements of the Ottoman treasury, including the leading monopolies such as salt and tobacco, as well as the stamp and spirit duties, the silk tithe among others (Birdal, 2010). Hence, salt production in the delta began to be controlled by OPDA's Foçateyn branch (Erol, 2016, p. 46). The revenues collected from the salt production were ceded to this new institution, while salt became OPDA's second-largest source of revenue, after tobacco, in these early years of foreign control (Adshead, 1992, p. 275). Eventually, the OPDA appeared to be an influential actor that could put enormous pressure on the government to execute necessary public works in the delta. In other words, maintaining salt production in the delta was crucial not only for local authorities but also for the empire's foreign creditors. Yet, the occasional floods of the Gediz River in the delta were obscuring this profitable business (Korkut, 2003, p. 46). In his 1885 trade report, the British Consul-General in Izmir, Dennis states that the diversion project including the construction of canals and dykes aimed not only to protect the gulf but also "preserve the salt works on this coast of the gulf from the inundation of fresh water" (U.K. Foreign Office, 1886, pp. 20-1).

The diversion of the Gediz River was carried out by a French engineer named M. Rivet, then chief engineer of the province, and completed between 1886 and January 1891. According to a report on the irrigation works in the empire, published in a French engineering journal, the shore had advanced three kilometres between 1837 and 1885

and another 10-kilometre advancement would have meant the natural closure of the port (Godard, 1910, p. 284). Hence, by 1885, the government had no other option than executing another infrastructural project. However, whereas the railways and quay were built by foreign capital, the diversion of the Gediz River was fully funded by the imperial government (Korkut, 2003, pp. 44-5). The project consisted of one large canal of 2,000 metres in length and two others of 3,300 metres in length each. M. Rivet hired his team of workers from the villages in the delta. The project did not involve opening a completely new bed for the Gediz River; instead, an old arm directing north-westward was revived (Godard, 1910, p. 284). On the plain of Menemen, a large, 5-kilometre long earthen embankment was built. The construction of a 3,600 metres long earthen levee, followed by another 2,000 meters in stone to prevent the waters of the Gediz River from entering the salt marshes, also secured the salt production in the area (Cuinet, 1890, p. 446). According to Godard, the chief engineer of the Roads and Bridges Department of the Ottoman Government between 1909 and 1912, the project was a success; however, he notes that “unfortunately as always in Turkey, [it was not] maintained” (1910, p. 284). He also mentions that with the diversion of the river’s main bed, the remaining flow in the delta is “more than enough to ensure fruitful summer irrigations” and “the results would be very profitable” (ibid). Cuinet (1890, p. 447) suggests that the diversion of the riverbed along with “another significant improvement,” the construction of the port and docks, guaranteed the various interests of the Ottoman government, the province, European merchants, and the general public simultaneously.

To recapitulate, the diversion of the Gediz River northwards had three goals: to protect the entrance of the port from the river deposits, to ensure the longevity of the salt production in the area, and to prevent the fertile agricultural lands of the delta from flooding. Contemporary Gediz Delta socio-natures, including extensive marshes on the coast, functioning saltpans, vast agricultural areas, and no major river running through them, are co-products of ecological processes and the empire’s most significant engineering project. This river engineering project, alongside the railways and the quay, constituted an essential infrastructural support facility of the port economy in the late nineteenth-century Izmir.

### **3.3. The Delta's Early Twentieth Century: Demographic Change, Drainage Campaigns, and Political Unrest**

At the turn of the century, the villages of the delta, Günerli, Kaklıç, Kesik, Maltepe, Sasalı, Seyrek, Süzbeyli, Tuzçullu, and Ulucak were within the administrative territory of the Menemen township. Menemen was governed by the Saruhan (Manisa) province until 1855; then, the town was included within the boundaries of Izmir because the city served as the primary marketplace for the farmers of Menemen (Doğer, 1998, p. 96). The Republic inherited this administrative structure in 1923. The economic structure did not change meaningfully, either. As Emrence (2003) suggests, cities and large towns of the young Republic, similar to their roles in the empire, continued to be centres of trade with their hinterlands. Izmir and its delta were not exceptions. The delta continued to be an important area for salt business for international markets and agricultural production, mainly for the local market and, to some degree, to export.

The modernized salt business was taken over from the OPDA and began to be administered by the State Monopolies Administration (TEKEL, founded in 1925) as the only export-oriented salt production area of the young Republic. In terms of the production method and labour relations in the salt pans and the export regions of the Çamaltı salt, this take-over did not result in any drastic changes (Yurtoğlu, 2018). Under the administrative control of the OPDA, salt business had expanded continuously. The administration had invested in modern infrastructure and developed new international connections; at the end of the century, salt from the delta was exported as far as India, Sri Lanka, and Japan (Erol, 2016, pp. 46-47). Especially, Sir Adam Block, the president of the OPDA between 1902 and 1923, played a crucial role in the modernization and growth of the salt production in the delta (Adshead, 1992, pp. 269-280). As of 1908, almost half of the administration's salt revenues were coming from the Gediz Delta, and salt replaced tobacco as the primary source of the income for the OPDA (Adshead, 1992, pp. 274-5).

In this process, the Çamaltı salt pans attracted more and more labourers from neighbouring villages in the delta (Erol, 2016, p. 47). Although the local salt artisans in the delta continued to be the most prominent labour source in the Çamaltı Salt pans in the first decade of the OPDA control, their hereditary guilds were expropriated, and the salt artisans were replaced by salaried staff in 1909-10 (Adshead, 1992, pp. 269). As the

administration invested in electric pumps to replace the old windmills and Decauville rail lines and elevation machines, the need for human-power was significantly reduced, and the unskilled workers lost their jobs (Erol, 2016, p. 57). My interviews with the old-timers in the delta suggest that many of these workers remained in the delta and worked in the saltpans and cotton fields when seasonal labour needed (Osman, July 15, 2015; Okan, July 15, 2015). In other words, the growth and eventual mechanization of the salt production produced not only economic but also demographic outcomes in the delta. Erol (2016, p. 62) also argues that “the OPDA’s investments and management expanded the salt business and established the infrastructure and know-how for the same business in the future.” In fact, when the young Republic finally took full control of the Çamaltı Saltpans in 1927, it was the largest and most productive sea salt production site in the country (Yurtoğlu, 2018).

Although the Republic directly inherited the administrative and economic structure in the Gediz Delta, the social and economic life in the delta in the 1920s was not merely *business as usual*. Some key developments in this period significantly altered the socio-ecological relations in the delta. First, the delta also emerged as a key settlement area for Balkan immigrants in Turkey during the 1910s and 1920s. Second, as the delta lacked a primary running water source since the diversion project of 1886-91, the villages faced a chronic problem of insufficient water for agricultural and household use. Third, the increasing population prompted the need for new agricultural areas. In this context, wetland drainage and reclamation appeared to be a viable policy option for the authorities. These developments shaped the socio-ecological dynamics in the delta and the remaking of sociocultures for the following decades.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a significant demographic change in the delta. Although the booming salt business was a vital pull factor in the early 1900s, the contemporary demographic structure was shaped mainly by the Turkish War of Independence and two big immigration waves to western Turkey from the Balkans. At the turn of the century, the population of the largest town in the delta, Menemen, was 20,945. The majority of this population were Muslim (15,523), while Christians (Greek Orthodox, Armenian Gregorian, Bulgarian Orthodox) and non-Ottoman citizens consisted of a quarter of the total population (Doğer, 1998, p. 361). The first immigration wave to the delta occurred when the empire lost most of its remaining territories in Europe during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). Thousands of Muslims immigrated to

Anatolia, and Izmir received the highest number of immigrants (over 100.000). Some of them settled in the delta, where the unused land was available for agriculture. The delta gradually became demographically more homogenous as the weight of the Muslim population increased, reaching 82 percent in Menemen in 1917 (Serçe, 1998, p. 7). Gonca (2005, p. 105) also reports that many Greeks left their homes in the villages and moved first to Izmir and then migrated to Greece during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923). It is not possible to find out how many non-Muslims were killed and forcefully deported in the delta during the same period. Nevertheless, when the war ended, and the Republic was founded in 1923, only 444 non-Muslims were living in Menemen. In the villages of the Gediz Delta, the total population was around 2,500, and all the residents were Muslims (Serçe, 2001, pp. 33-34).

The second wave of immigration to the delta occurred in 1923-5, again from the Balkans, after the "Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations" was signed by Turkey and Greece. It was the first compulsory transfer of a large number of people between two nation-states in order to solve their perceived minority problem, and as a result, a minimum of 1.3 million Greeks were expelled from Turkey, and some 500,000 Muslims (mostly from Greece, but also from other Balkan countries) were sent to Turkey (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006, p. 116). Izmir, including Menemen, was one of the primary settlement regions for these Muslim immigrants. The villages of the delta, as they were "emptied" from their non-Muslim populations, were used to accommodate the incoming Muslims. During this process, the population in the villages doubled as some villages received more immigrants than their existing population (Gonca, 2005, pp. 107-8). Most old-timers in the delta today are grandchildren of these Balkan immigrants (Özcan, June 18, 2015; Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015; Osman, July 15, 2015; Okan, July 15, 2015). The 1923 immigrants were settled in the delta by the Menemen Settlement Centre, which was also responsible for distributing land to new-comers. Gonca (2005, pp. 112-3) cites that 1,396 immigrant households received a total of 7,542 hectares agricultural fields, 622 hectares vineyards, 26 hectares orchards, 1035 olive trees as well as houses and shops in Menemen. My interviews with old-timers in the villages also suggest that land ownership in the delta does not go far before 1923, as the biggest and oldest landowners in the delta received their land in this process.

Although the diversion project of 1886-91 prevented the mouths of the Gediz Delta extending southwards and eventually blocking the entrance of the Izmir Port, it also created a chronic water problem in the delta. As the population of the delta doubled in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the remaining water resources of the delta were not enough for growing agricultural and household demand. The Municipality of Menemen developed a project with a German engineering company in 1928 to solve this problem. The project would be partially financed by the contributions, up to 2 percent of the annual agricultural revenues, of the local farmers (Gonca, 2005, p. 56). Local people, mostly the Muslim immigrants from Greece, were hired to work in the construction. A network of pipelines, with 57 fountains around the town and villages, that carried water from the Yamanlar Mountains to the delta was completed in 1930 by the Izmir Governorship and extended towards the saltpans by the newly established TEKEL which had recently taken the control of the Çamaltı Saltworks from the OPDA (Gonca, 2005, p. 57). In short, the empire's most significant engineering project of the late nineteenth century triggered the need for another infrastructural development in the delta, which required the mobilization of public and private resources as well as foreign expertise and local labour.

Another important development that significantly changed the delta ecologies in the same period was the first large-scale wetland drainage efforts. These efforts combined multiple concerns in a socio-ecological agenda, which was primarily informed by a political legitimacy crisis of the young Republic. This political legitimacy crisis was a product of growing economic problems and public health issues as well as the demands for a more open political system. First, there was an economic concern. Starting from the 1930s, the population growth in the delta, thanks to the immigration from the Balkans, prompted the need for new agricultural fields. Similar to the European, North American, and Asian experiences (see Blackbourn, 2006; Giblett, 2016; Yeh, 2009), the wetlands in Turkey were also politically constructed as "wastelands" within the nation-building process. Evered (2012, p. 53) argues that "a 'wetland as wasteland' discourse is (...) embedded in the mythologies of the formative Turkish nation-state." Draining wetlands was a symbol of building a nation by challenging the limits that nature imposed. For authorities, transforming these "wastelands" into productive agricultural fields was a viable option not only to increase the farmers' income and the agricultural tax revenues of the Republic but also to show the capabilities of the state to tame nature in the name

of the nation. Second, the land distribution in the delta after the 1923 Turco-Greek Population Exchange was not a smooth and fair process; it created feelings of injustice and arbitrariness among new-comers. In several cases, it was reported that some local authorities transferred the deeds of the fields and buildings abandoned by the Greek population to themselves or, at best, they carried out the distribution process without clear criteria (Gonca, 2005, pp. 113-6). These injustices had to be addressed by producing new agricultural lands in order to maintain the loyalty of the immigrants to the Republic.

There was also a concern over public health. The wetlands of the delta were seen not only as wastelands but also as a severe threat to public health as they were viewed as the home (*yuva*) to malaria by the authorities. The central government had already passed a legislation called the Anti-Malaria Campaign Law (Law No. 839) to combat malaria through several strategies, including drying up uncultivated marshes and swamps in 1926 (Evered & Evered, 2011, pp. 479-480; Tuğluoğlu, 2008). The anti-malaria mobilization campaign started in the rural areas of Ankara, the capital of the Republic, and gradually expanded to other areas, resulting in the elimination of some 25,000 hectares of wetlands throughout the country between 1925 and 1936 (ibid, see also Evered, 2014). The local units, composed of health professionals, engineers, as well as farmers, were formed to combat malaria through drying up the marshes and swamps throughout the country (Tuğluoğlu, 2008). The Menemen Anti-Malaria Unit was opened in 1930 amid a malaria epidemic in the Gediz Delta. It had already affected over 5,000 people in Menemen only, and several deaths had been reported. The public authorities and the health professionals were protested several times during their regular visits to the villages (Gonca, 2005, p. 143). The government had to do something more than sending the doctors over to decrease the intensity of the public unrest. Align with the early twentieth-century conceptions of marshes and swamps as malaria-generating areas, wetland drainage became to be the only proactive solution available. It was believed to be effective not only to combat malaria but also to mobilize local people in a state-led project within the context of the young Republic's nation-building project. In short, wetland drainage and reclamation in the delta was not merely an economic initiative; it also combined the land distribution and public health concerns into its socio-ecological agenda. However, what tied all these issues together was a political legitimacy crisis that the Republic faced in the early 1930s.

A severe political challenge that the CHP, the newly established Turkey's ruling party, faced in western Anatolia was the foundation of the liberal Free Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, SCF) in 1930. As the agricultural commodity prices declined sharply during the Great Depression, the export-oriented agricultural development strategy ceased to function, resulting in foreign exchange shortages and trade deficits (Boratav, 2012, p. 63). The government response in the form of increased taxes and deflationary policies created further rural deprivation in the hinterlands of the leading export outlets such as Izmir (Emrence, 2003, p. 68). As the land tax and livestock tax became significant burdens for small agricultural producers, and the recently created credit mechanisms, such as the foundation of the Agricultural Bank and the local agricultural cooperatives, were far from being satisfactory, a widespread backlash against the state bureaucracy and the CHP provincial organization emerged (Emrence, 2000, pp. 33-34; Esen, 2014, p. 610). The SCF was initially an *ersatz* party: The formation of the new party was a "loyal opposition movement experiment" initiated by President Atatürk, led by the former Prime Minister Fethi Okyar, in order to contain the growing elite and popular unrest (Weiker, 1973). However, the SCF's program, which was announced on 12 August 1930, symbolized a direct challenge to the ruling party. The program criticized high taxes and state monopolies, blamed the government for spending too much on infrastructure investments, and proposed more and low-interest credit for farmers. Emrence (2000, p. 37) argues that thanks to this program, mass support from the commercialized regions, such as Izmir's hinterland, began to surge, rapidly transforming the party into a grassroots movement.

According to Emrence (2000, p. 39), the new party attracted supporters from not only the "commercialized villages, towns and 'suburban' areas who were struggling to survive the depression with no government help" but also from the educated elite (the doctors, pharmacists, lawyers) who were concerned about the narrow political boundaries of the ruling CHP as well as recent the Balkan immigrants who dissatisfied with the way the government handled their settlement and land distribution. The rapid organization of the party in the Gediz Delta attests to this observation. When the SCF's local branch was opened, several hundreds of people joined the party in Menemen and the villages of the delta (Gonca, 2005, p. 67). The party leader Fethi Okyar visited Menemen in September 1930 as part of his western Anatolia campaign, just before the municipal elections. He was presented with gifts, and a card reading, "[T]he population of Menemen are

experiencing difficult times, and we are here to show this, but the military forces are trying to make us disperse” (Emrence, 2000, p. 41). In short, Atatürk’s “loyal opposition experiment” turned into a major contender in less than two months. The 1930 municipal elections were held for 502 posts; the SCF was able to run candidates for posts in 37 of total 67 provinces and won 42 posts, of which two were big cities (Emrence, 2000, pp. 43-44). Although the CHP maintained its dominance in Izmir, the SCF won Menemen alongside thirteen rural or peri-urban municipalities in the province (Ertem, 2010; Emrence, 2000, p. 44).

The results were a considerable success for the SCF as well as a concerning signal of growing popular unrest in the commercialized regions, particularly in western Anatolia. The CHP authorities and the pro-government newspapers had already begun to allege that the SCF was the party of “communists, non-Muslims, and low-class people” who united around an anti-republic agenda during the campaign period; and after the election, associating the party with a counterrevolutionary plot supported by internal and external enemies of the Republic reached its peak (Emrence, 2000: 45-47). The SCF leaders, many deeply loyal to Atatürk, could not resist the pressure they were receiving from the ruling party in which they once played essential roles. Although they never accepted the accusations regarding the party’s “anti-republican agenda,” they chose to “voluntarily” dissolve the party (Weiker, 1973, pp. 135-6). When the party was closed, the Council of State annulled the election results in 42 municipalities where the SCF won, and the government party appointed the new mayors. The short-lived SCF experience sent a strong signal to the republican elite who could not ignore the acute problems that the villagers of the commercialized urban periphery were facing any longer.

I suggest that wetland drainage efforts of the 1930s in the Gediz Delta was influenced and shaped by this awareness on the part of the republican elite at the nexus of demographic change, land distribution issues, declining agricultural livelihoods, public health threats, and political contention. According to Gonca’s report based on local newspapers, over 500 people joined the wetland drainage mobilization in the delta (2005, p. 143), and some 5000 hectares of wetlands were drained through the construction channels that direct wetland waters to the Gediz River (Gonca, 2005, p. 179). The villagers were motivated by several incentives to participate in the campaign, including official recognition and monetary rewards (Evered & Evered, 2011, p. 480), as

well as the right to use the reclaimed wetland areas (Gonca, 2005, p. 179). While malaria epidemic was taken under control thanks to these efforts and the increased public health services in the region, the wetland drainage campaign of the early 1930s constituted the second-largest state-led mobilization of technology, expertise, human labour, and capital that significantly altered the delta socio-natures after the river diversion project of 1886-91.

### **3.4. Remaking the Delta Socionatures through Mechanized and Commercialized Agriculture**

Starting from the late 1940s, the Turkish economy went through a significant transformation from the “reconstruction within the free market” conditions of the 1920s and the protectionist-industrialization model of the 1930s towards, what Boratav (2012), calls “a new articulation with the world-economy” through rural-agricultural development. The main characteristics of this new period of developmentalism were free trade, export-oriented agriculture, mining, infrastructural investments and construction (Boratav, 2012, p. 94). This economic shift began while the CHP was still in power and shaped mainly by post-war American foreign policy, as manifested in the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid programme.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Atasoy (1999, p. 216) argues that “as far as the changes from a statist, autarkist economy and national industrialization to a market-oriented, rural-agricultural development project are concerned, the crucial turning point was (...) the decisions made by the RPP [CHP] governments between 1947 and 1950.” The reorganization of the world-economy under the U.S. hegemony was centred around dismantling “the étatist, protectionist industrial structure in favor of encouraging foreign capital, specializing in the export of agricultural commodities and importing manufacturers” (Pamuk, 1981, p. 27). An export-oriented economy with a rural focus

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<sup>20</sup> Although Turkey did not participate in the Second World War, as the Cold War geopolitics divided the world into two military camps, Turkey’s strategic location between the Balkans and the Middle East as well as “its importance as a defensive shield against Soviet military expansion in the region” (Atasoy, 2005, p. 62) shaped Turkey’s positioning in the post-war world order. The US-Turkish Aid Agreement was signed on 12 July 1947, “that same day President İnönü endorsed the opposition Democratic Party” (ibid), signalling Turkey’s commitment to organizing a liberal political regime.

was necessary to participate in the post-war world-economy reorganized around the U.S. hegemony and to be included in the Marshall Aid programme.

Turkey's repositioning within the "Free World" also required a transition to a multi-party electoral system. The formation of the populist Democrat Party in 1946 was a manifestation of this requirement as well as the growing rural discontent. Against the CHP's bureaucratic-statist-urban-secular basis, the new party positioned itself as the political representative of the maturing bourgeoisie, large landowners as well as the small farmers, poor villagers and the culturally excluded religious groups. These groups unified around the DP's anti-statist, populist, and free-market agenda that was calling for the transfer of state economic enterprises to private capital and reliance on agriculture (Pamuk, 1981, p. 27). Hence the transformation of the economy gained a significant momentum with the DP's electoral victory in 1950. Keyder argues that the DP's accession to power "constituted a fundamental break in Turkish history:" "For the first time a popular electorate expressed its political choice and voted against a statist tradition several centuries old" (Keyder, 1987, p. 124). The growing agricultural output doubled in the first three years of the DP in the office as a result of the new government's favourable attitude toward farmers and the mechanization of agriculture (Aktan, 1957). Pamuk (2007, p. 13) also highlights that "a large part of these increases were [sic] due to the expansion in cultivated area, which was supported by two complementary government policies." First, communal postures and other state-owned lands were distributed to farmers with little or no land; secondly, Marshall Aid funds were used to import agricultural machinery in an attempt to increase productivity.

In fact, more than half of the Marshall Aid funds dedicated to agriculture were spent on importing tractors, which were initially allocated to the Provincial Distribution Committees and sold to the farmers by these committees (Özer, 2014, pp. 433-4). The DP also extended state subsidies and cheap credits to the farmers. As Aktan (1957) argues, more government expenditures were made towards the improvement of the farmer's lot than previously. Almost all farmers who bought these tractors financed their purchases through government credits (Atasoy, 1999, p. 218). As a result, the number of operating tractors rose from 1,000 in 1946 to 43,000 in 1955, and the total cultivated area increased by 50 percent in the same period (Keyder, 1987, p. 130). As part of this opening up new agricultural lands policy, the government passed the Law of Drained Wetlands and Reclamation in 1950 (Law No. 5516). This law outlined the farmers' right

to drain a wetland and how the reclaimed wetlands would be distributed to those who participated in the draining process. The establishment of the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works (*Devlet Su İşleri*, DSI) in 1954 was crucially important in the case of modernization of irrigation systems in the country as well as opening up new agricultural areas through draining wetlands. Thanks to Law. No. 5516 and the DSI, a total of 93,582 hectares of wetlands were drained entirely in Turkey between 1950 and 1970 (Gürer & Yıldız, 2008, p. 336).

All these developments, i.e. the mechanization and further commercialization of agriculture and draining of wetlands to open new areas for cultivation, shaped the socio-ecological relations in the Gediz Delta in the middle of the twentieth century as well. A modern irrigation system was introduced in the villages at the end of the 1940s (Glesinger, 1960; Busch et al., 1979) as well as the mechanization replaced traditional methods of farming throughout the 1950s, especially after the introduction of tractors and tractor-drawn equipment through the Marshall Aid (Fettig et al., 1973). Cotton farming became the dominant agricultural activity in the villages; for instance, 90 percent of the cropland in Ulucak was dedicated to cotton, putting other farm products, including once important fresh vegetables to a supplementary position (Fettig et al., 1973, p. 12). Whereas the governmental loans, supervised by the Agricultural Bank and distributed by several cooperatives in the delta at a considerably low-interest rate, continued to be an essential source for commercial farmers, the cotton merchants also became a key financial actor as they provided more loans per hectare, albeit at a higher interest rate (Fettig et al., 1973, p. 13). The availability of these loans contributed to the further commercialization of cotton production and significant increases in net farm incomes (Fettig et al., 1973, p. 15). Busch et al. (1979) identify three groups of landowners in the delta during the mid-twentieth century. First, the largest group was small landowners who lived in the delta, near their fields; second, landowners residing in Menemen who hired farm managers to cultivate their land or arranged to sharecrop with the villagers; and finally, the owners of larger holdings who lived in the urban centre (Busch et al., 1979, p. 13). It was this third group which was the primary local agent of the mechanization and further commercialization of agriculture in the delta thanks to their urban connections and to access to information and financial resources (ibid).

The mechanization of agriculture decreased the need for human labour; hence, many villagers began to seek employment in non-farm activities. Thanks to the proximity of the

villages to urban centres and a new wave of industrialization in the 1960s, some could find jobs in newly opened factories in Menemen. The opening of a NATO airbase<sup>21</sup> in the delta also provided substantial income for the villagers (Fettig et al., 1973, p. 12). Especially the women from the villagers were hired as nannies, caretakers, cooks, and servers by American military personnel (Özcan, June 21, 2015). In the same period, in response to the gradual decline of farming jobs, some villagers turned towards fishing as a source of living. A small fishing community emerged in the lagoons of the delta (Kırdeniz, Homa, Çilazmak, Ragıppaşa) which were partially separated from the sea by narrow stripes of land. These fishermen used traditional techniques such as barrier traps, gill net, trammel net with reed and fyke nets in the shoals (Özden, Saka, Firat, & Süzer, 2015, p. 426) and sold their catch daily or weekly in local markets (Özcan, June 21, 2015; Rifat, July 4, 2015). This community gradually grew in the 1980s and formed the Sasalı and Adjacent Villages Fisheries Cooperative in 1991 with around 300 members.

Livestock raising was another additional source of income for the villagers; many sold milk and meat from cows, sheep, and water-buffalo in local markets (Fettig, 1965). The government-owned lands of the delta were traditionally used by communities, yet the mid-twentieth century witnessed a sharp decline in the availability of land for grazing as the government designated a large area for the construction of a NATO airbase (Osman, July 15, 2015; Okan, July 15, 2015). This resulted in a new wave of draining wetlands to open up new areas for livestock grazing as well as agriculture. The wetland drainage and reclamation approach of the 1960s was different from that of the 1930s in several ways. First, whereas a public health discourse, i.e. anti-malaria campaign, was the central theme in the 1930s, this new wave was characterized by a developmentalist discourse and an emphasis on rural incomes. Second, the local participant was absent or significantly limited in the 1960s as the DSI, with its scientists and full-time employers, was in charge. Finally, planting eucalyptus trees was chosen as the principal method to dry up the wetlands during this new wave. This method had been used to diminish

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<sup>21</sup> Turkey was admitted into the NATO in 1952 after sending troops to Korea. Leffler (1985, p. 825) argues that Turkey's changing position from being "an object of assistance" within the context of the Marshall Plan to a "formal ally" with the NATO membership was not "because of the expectation of any imminent Soviet attack on Turkey but because of Turkey's potential utility in waging war, protecting air bases, and safeguarding Middle Eastern oil resources." A bilateral treaty signed between Turkey and the US, which led to the construction of the Çiğli Air Base in the Gediz Delta for fifteen Jupiter missiles in 1958 (Gönlübol, 1975, p. 42).

mosquito habitats in different parts of the country (mainly in the Çukurova region in southeast Turkey) in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century (Özcan, Akpınar, & Cıtlı, 2017). Nevertheless, the first eucalyptus trees in the delta were planted by the DSI in the 1970s. Although the effectiveness of this method is not clear, eucalyptus trees altered the delta ecology and have gradually become a visible socionature in the delta landscape.<sup>22</sup> These plantations also generated conflicts between environmentalists, scientists, and bureaucrats in the 2010s. Whereas the policymakers reframed these plantations as “urban forests” within the process of peri-urbanization in the delta, some scientists argued that they were threatening the integrity of the wetland ecology (see Chapters 4 and 5).

### **3.5. Concluding Remarks**

To understand the contemporary socio-environmental change in the Gediz Delta, it is imperative to delve into the histories of how the delta socionatures have been made and remade over a hundred-year period. In this chapter, I discussed how the Gediz Delta was imagined differently by different social groups, how these imaginaries were shaped within political, economic, and social contexts and, in return, produced several socio-ecological projects. In other words, I situated the processes of socionature-making in the Gediz Delta within the broader historical developments in Izmir, in the country, and beyond. First, I highlighted Izmir’s position in the world-economy as a port-city during the late nineteenth-century. I examined how urban landscapes and the city’s hinterland were transformed by several infrastructural projects, such as the construction of railways and waterfront developments to support Izmir’s thriving port economy within the context of the late nineteenth century capitalist expansion and European imperialist competition. The state-orchestrated socio-environmental projects of this period also included the diversion of the Gediz River northwards, which eventually created a delta landscape without a major river. This river engineering project, I suggest, is an early testament of how local and global processes entangle, and domestic and international actors interact in the making of delta socionatures.

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<sup>22</sup> For a study on the eucalyptus-water nexus from a political ecology perspective, see Hohenthal, Räsänen, & Minoia, 2018.

In the early twentieth century, the making of the delta siconatures was shaped within the context of a significant demographic change. The delta was selected as a settlement area for Turkish/Muslim immigrants from the Balkans, and the government started the first large scale marsh drainage projects to open up new lands for agricultural production. The political construction of wetlands as wastelands and public health discourses set the tone for this first wave of wetland drainage campaigns. The wetland drainage efforts of this period can also be read as a political project. They were informed by the political elite's legitimacy concerns. The central government aimed to mobilize disappointed local people, i.e., recent immigrants who were leaning towards an emerging political opposition, around a state-led "mastery over nature" project (cf. Evered, 2012). The delta siconatures went through another transformation according to the broader structural changes in Turkey's political economy and its position within the world-economy and state system during the mid-twentieth century. The Gediz Delta became mainly a cotton production area thanks to the availability of modern inputs and technical knowledge as well as a political environment that favoured export-oriented agriculture and increased credit mechanisms for the farmers. The delta wetlands continued to disappear in this period, mainly through the reforestation projects in the form of eucalyptus plantations. When a new metabolic relationship between the delta and the city of Izmir emerged in the 1980s via the application of nature conservation statuses and gradual peri-urbanization, the delta entered the social imaginary as an ecologically important habitat. In the next chapter, I explore the conservation policies as they have unfolded since the 1980s and discuss how they have evolved from a strictly preservationist approach to a neoliberal model while drastically changing socio-ecological relations and siconatures in the Gediz Delta.

## Chapter 4.

### **Conserving the Gediz Delta: From a “Bird Paradise” to a “Wetland of International Importance”**

This chapter explores how several nature conservation models and policies have been implemented and contributed to the emergence of a conservation-centred peri-urbanity in the Gediz Delta during the post-1980 period. These policies have produced a brand new socionature in the delta: Nature conservation zones. The chapter demonstrates that the conservation efforts in the delta evolved from a strictly preservationist model in the 1980s to a neoliberal conservation model in the twenty-first century. Informed by an “expert-based” approach (Berkes, 2004), the strictly preservationist environmental policies of the 1980s were symbolized in the delta wetlands’ rebranding as a “bird paradise” and resulted in fencing off certain parts of the delta for scientific research and habitat conservation. Because of this preservation without people or “people-free parks” (Adams & Hutton, 2007) approach, delta communities’ access to their traditional lands that had long been used for livestock grazing, lagoon fishing, and recreational purposes was limited. However, at the turn of the century, the conservation of the Gediz Delta ecosystems has gone through a transformation from a strict protection model to a conservation approach informed by a globally hegemonic sustainable development and environmental governance framework. A new demarcation, “wetland of international importance,” has emerged as the conceptual symbol of this new approach. The model of the 2000s entails the simultaneous globalization and localization of conservation efforts through the involvement of international actors as well as the inclusion of local governments (municipalities) and delta communities in decision-making and application processes, albeit in varying degrees. This rescaling of institutional/regulatory arrangements and conservation practices demonstrates that global and local developments are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are dual processes that continually shape each other within the context of the existing and emerging entanglements of local and global actors.

In the first section below, I discuss the application of a series of national preservation statuses in the Gediz Delta, highlighting the tensions they generated among scientists, environmentalists, local communities, and governmental organizations in the late

twentieth century. I also demonstrate the gradually emerging ties between local and international conservation actors in this period. Then, I move to the institutionalization of a neoliberal conservation and environmental governance model in the delta in the twenty-first century through an analysis of three interrelated developments that tied mutually constituting global and local processes together—the designation of the delta as a “wetland of international importance” within the Ramsar framework, the establishment of a union of local governments to manage daily conservation activities and the preparation of a wetland management plan. I discuss how the partnerships between local and international policy actors were sustained and explore how certain conservation policies were circulated among the Mediterranean deltas thanks to the networks of conservationist groups. This chapter concludes with a discussion of several ecotourism projects implemented in the Gediz Delta in the early 2000s. I argue that neoliberal conservation policies of this period and the socio-natures that they produced have set the socio-environmental conditions for the gentrification of the delta villages.

#### **4.1. “Expert-Based” and “People-Free” Preservationism**

The early 1980s was a time within which the Turkish parliament passed a series of laws that together formed the very first nature preservation framework in the country (see Chapter 2). This legislation emerged mainly as a result of Turkey’s increasing participation in the international conservation community by ratifying several conventions and agreements such as the 1972 Paris Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and (ratified in 1982) and the 1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ratified in 1984). The basis of the Turkish nature preservation framework included Law on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets (No. 2863), Environmental Law (No. 2872), National Parks Law (No. 2873) alongside the 1982 Constitution with its Article 56 which describes the right of all citizens to live in a “healthy and balanced environment” and defines the state and citizens equally responsible to “protect the health of the environment and to prevent it from pollution.”

Perhaps the most important and effective protection status that was developed during the 1980s was the “protection site” (*sit alanı*). This demarcation was first introduced by the Law of Old Monuments (Republic of Turkey, 1973a) to define mainly human-built

structures such as religious buildings, bridges, private buildings, and so on. Nevertheless, Law No. 2863 in 1983 replaced the concept of “old monuments” with “cultural and natural assets,” further specified the concept of “protection site.” Natural areas protected under this law were known as “*doğal sit*” (natural site) whereas areas protected for their archeological values were defined as “*arkeolojik sit*” (archeological site) Three degrees or statuses of protection were created through the related by-laws: Whereas a “protection site of first-degree” status referred to the close monitoring and banning of all forms of development and allowed only scientific activities in a designated area, second- and third-degree protected areas could be developed for commercial purposes as long as an approval was received from the Provincial Board for the Protection of Nature and Cultural Assets (*Il Koruma Kurulu*). In short, the preservation framework of the 1980s and its pivotal concept, “natural protection site of first-degree of importance” (*birinci derece doğal sit alanı*), adopted a “people-free parks” approach (Schwartzman, Moreira & Nepstad, 2000). During the 1980s and the 1990s, this was the dominant approach for the delta’s conservation, although its effectiveness in preserving the delta ecosystem and endangering species is questionable. Enforced by the Provincial Board for the Protection of Nature and Cultural Assets and the central government’s National Parks Division, this approach was supported mainly by the scientific community and a group of environmental activists. As I demonstrate below, it was an “expert-based” approach that privileged the concerns of conservation scientists at the expense of local populations.

Thanks to the work of a small group of scientists and environmental activists, the Gediz Delta was rediscovered as a “bird paradise” in the early 1980s. This group of environmentalists used certain strategies such as mobilizing their connections in the national media, petitioning, and protesting to activate the central government’s growing nature conservation capacities. As a result, newly emerging nature preservation statuses in Turkey’s environmental legislation were applied to the Gediz Delta landscapes, creating a series of overlapping preservation zones in the 1980s. I suggest that the conservation policies of this period in the Gediz Delta were characterized by a strict protection approach that operated mainly within a national framework with little reference to international agreements. However, Turkish environmentalist groups occasionally sought support from international conservation organizations to strengthen their

arguments, which led to the emergence of a local-international conservationist alliance starting from the late 1980s.

The proponents of this early nature preservation approach in the delta viewed local people as the main threat to the healthy functioning of delta habitats and/or species aimed to ban any human activity within the delineated boundaries of the protected area. Downplaying the cultural and economic roles that the delta socio-natures had always played for local communities, this group highlighted the ornithological significance of the Gediz Delta. The delta was first recorded as a key waterbird breeding area in the nineteenth century by Guido von Gonzenbach (1859), the Swiss Consul General in Izmir and an amateur ornithologist. Published in a leading ornithology journal of the time, this article reached almost a mythological status for the environmentalist groups and became a key reference point within the “people-free” environmental imaginary of conservation scientists (cf. Öge, 2005). Although the area was occasionally visited by small groups of bird watchers during the twentieth century, the marshes of the delta were mainly a duck hunting area for local populations.

In 1980, for the first time, recreational and subsistence hunting in the delta was regulated according to the Hunting Tourism By-Laws (Republic of Turkey, 1973b). This first official recognition of the delta followed by a series of protection statuses applied to the delta as a result of a growing body of national nature preservation legislation. In 1982, the area that covers the Çamaltı salt pans, lagoons, marshes, and reeds of the Gediz Delta, as well as Üçtepeliler, was designated as “waterbirds protection and breeding site” within the framework of the 1950 International Convention for the Protection of Birds which was ratified by Turkey in 1966. This designation banned any kind of hunting activity in the delta during the breeding season. This initial protection status was strengthened with a new status, “wildlife protection site” in 1984 (Özbek Sönmez & Onmuş, 2006, p. 42). The Izmir Provincial Conservation Board designated the same wildlife protection site as “natural protection site of second-degree” and the Üçtepeliler area where the ancient city of Leucæ was found as “archeological protection site of first-degree” in 1985; following year the natural protection status was elevated to the first-degree as well. In this process, the protected part of the delta, now reaching 8,000 hectares of coastal land, was named as the “Izmir Çamaltı Bird Paradise” and started to serve as a fenced park, emptied from local people. The term “bird paradise” is shared by all protected wetlands in Turkey; as Scaramelli (2018, p. 415) suggests, it

reflects the “mid-20<sup>th</sup> century notions linking the value of wetlands to the provision of habitats for waterbirds.” In fact, in these early years of the application of conservation policies in the delta, more specifically before the delta was designated as a “wetland of international importance” and included in the Ramsar list in 1998, the waterbirds became the main, if not the only, reference point for the conservation efforts.

As a result of this new protection status, a protocol among public institutions, including the General Directorate for Forestry, Provincial Tourism Directorate, Menemen District Governorship, and the Çamaltı Saltworks Management which was occupying the almost entire protected area, was signed to coordinate the day-to-day protection activities in the delta in 1986 (*Cumhuriyet*, 1986). The Izmir Bird Paradise was fenced off to stop illegal hunting and fishing in the area, as well as livestock grazing. Salt, on the other, continued to be produced in the Çamaltı saltpans, although the management was held responsible for maintaining freshwater circulation in reeds that was necessary to protect waterbirds breeding sites (*ibid*). Two universities of Izmir were also authorized to establish research facilities in the delta—Dokuz Eylül University for fisheries research in the lagoons and Ege University for ornithological studies. In other words, the enclosed area continued to be state-owned land; however, the villagers lost their grazing areas and access to the lagoons where they were fishing for decades. In short, a substantial part of the delta became no longer available to local communities.

Dr. Mehmet Sıkı, whose Ph.D. research about waterbirds of the Gediz Delta and personal commitment to the protection of the area was instrumental in this process, defines himself as a “preservationist” (*korumacı*). He believes that human activity in the delta, especially within the waterbirds breeding sites, should be minimized. Starting from the 1980s, he has been the most well-known, but also perhaps the most “disliked” public figure who is involved in the conservation of the delta. I interviewed him in his university office, which was decorated with several miniatures of the delta’s iconic birds. He told me that the villagers saw him as an “enemy:”

I am a scientist; my job is to do research and provide the authorities with data. Of course, I worked so hard for the designation of the Bird Paradise as a natural protection site; I wrote petitions, I talked to the journalists, I took pictures and send them to newspapers. I went to the court several times when the [Çamaltı Saltworks] management did not open water circulation holes. But it was the Provincial Board that designated the protection area. The villagers hated me for this. Because I was seen in the

area every day. I've experienced only hostility and hatred. Those hunters who guided me in the area when I first started my research [in 1981] later hated me. I did not put the fences up; the management did. But I received threats. The hunters continued to kill birds, and not just for subsistence, they killed them, pulled their wings off and put them on my way just to say 'See *Hoca* [teacher] you cannot stop us'" (Mehmet Sıkı, July 1, 2015).

Some villagers described Dr. Sıkı to me as being "insensitive to any other concerns that people may have" (Ali, June 18, 2015). In fact, he advocated for a conservation model that excluded local people in every possible way, including limiting daily and informal interactions between villagers and conservationists. He campaigned against the conservation officers' place of residence, for instance. He argued that as the officers lived in the delta, they eventually developed "friendly relationships" with the villagers; and because of these "close ties" they developed, they were not able to enforce preservation measures they were responsible for (Mehmet Sıkı, July 1, 2015). As this argument demonstrates, Sıkı was a representative of a conservation vision that was informed solely by "scientific" concerns and left no room to local participation by principle.

While his fierce insistence on fencing the area created tension between him and the villagers, the public authorities who were responsible for to day-to-day management of the protected area did not fully embrace his vision of conservation, either. In the absence of a well-organized environmental movement in the late 1980s, Dr. Sıkı explained to me that, he developed some form of legal activism based on individual petitions, and effectively mobilized local and national journalists to put pressure on the conservation managers (Mehmet Sıkı, July 1, 2015). For instance, he wrote countless petitions to the management of the Çamaltı Saltworks as well as the Provincial Protection Board about the delay in the opening of freshwater circulation holes between saltpans. These holes, in his view, were essential to maintain waterbirds breeding sites in the reeds; yet the management insisted on drying up those up to increase salt production. When he could not receive a response from the authorities, only six months after the above-mentioned protocol signed between several public institutions, he contacted the local office of the national *Cumhuriyet*. The newspaper published a series of articles about the increasing desertification in the delta due to the activities of the management (*Cumhuriyet*, 1987a; 1987b).

While the management did not respond to Sıkı's petitions and ignored the news articles, a small group of environmentalists organized the first public demonstration in the delta. Protesting the saltworks management, they demanded the authorities fulfill their conservation responsibility (Otan, 1987). The protected areas of the delta initially became one of the main concerns of the newly founded Green Party of Turkey. For instance, the members put a symbolic "observation tent" in the Bird Paradise to hold the management accountable and tried to open water circulation holes themselves, albeit illegally (*Cumhuriyet*, 1988a). The party continued its protest in downtown Izmir; they organized a one-day bird paradise festival and exhibited photographs that showed the ecological changes in the delta. They also collected over 5,000 signatures from Izmirites for their petition that demanded to hand over the management of the protected areas from the saltworks administration to professional conservationists (*Cumhuriyet*, 1988b). In other words, the designation of the area as a "protection site" created the first real conflict between production and conservation in the delta. This was largely because of the fact that the administration of the largest industry in the delta, paradoxically, was designated as the principal conservation agent.

Meanwhile, the conservation problems increased public awareness about the ecological significance of the delta. Sıkı suggests that many Izmirites first learned about the "bird paradise" from the news articles published in this process and events organized by environmentalists. In 1994, a group of local bird watchers founded the Izmir Bird Paradise Observation Society, which defined its mandate as to "watch/observe" not only the birds of the delta but also the public authorities who were responsible for protecting the delta. Dr. Sıkı, a founding member of the society, stated to the press that "Our society will not be a quiet group. On the contrary, we will watch the good and bad developments and make our voice heard by the authorities. Every single member is a *soldier* of the Izmir Bird Paradise" (*Cumhuriyet Bilim ve Teknoloji*, 1994, emphasis added). In other words, it was not necessarily the work of the conservation officials; instead, the protests against them popularized the delta as a "bird paradise" and introduced it to the Izmirites' socio-environmental imaginary as an ecologically significant habitat.

As the saltworks management continued to ignore these protests, Sıkı and other environmentalists invited two international NGOs to the delta. In 1987, the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP, today BirdLife International) and the International

Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB, today Wetlands International) included the delta in their annual pelican counting project in the Mediterranean (Balbay, 1987). This project was the first scientific involvement of the international conservation community in the delta, as the local conservationists hoped that the attention of these groups would have strengthened their arguments. The IWRB published its report in the following year and suggested that salt production and illegal hunting were the two main threats to the waterbirds of the delta and demanded a stronger conservation framework, including the employment of professional conservationists, limiting productive activities and fishing in the protected areas (Balbay, 1988). Local environmentalists also approached the United Nations Environmental Programme in 1989 to establish an observation station in the delta and increase international participation in the conservation of the Bird Paradise (*Cumhuriyet*, 1989). The involvement of the international actors accelerated as the Society for the Protection of Natural Life, the one of the largest national environmental NGOs and the local partner of the WWF, the ICBP, and the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, started to develop projects concerning the delta (Kara, 1990a). Nevertheless, these projects remained limited in scope and scientific in nature, concerning mainly the bird counting in the delta and did not facilitate any significant change in the management of the Izmir Bird Paradise. It was not until the early 2000s the international wetland conservation framework became the central reference point for the conservation of the Gediz Delta.

Nevertheless, with the involvement of international actors in the conservation of the delta, a new concept -ecotourism- entered the lexicon of local environmentalists. A group of representatives from the ICBP visited the delta in 1990 and highlighted the importance of the site for the protection of the endangered Dalmatian Pelican. They suggested that the delta had the potential to be a hotspot for international bird watchers while providing a significant tourism income for locals (Kara, 1990b). The Environmental Foundation of Turkey, in a partnership with the Provincial Tourism Directorate, organized a photography competition and invited national and international wildlife photojournalists to the delta (*Cumhuriyet*, 1991a). The following year, the Turkish Radio and Television and BBC made a short documentary to increase public awareness about this “natural treasure” (*Cumhuriyet*, 1991b). Although the ecotourism talk had started in the early

1990s, the question of how to involve local communities in conservation efforts did not cross the minds of policymakers in this period.

Yet, the concept of ecotourism was found attractive by private companies. The first company that developed an interest in the area was McDonald's, which donated a share of its revenue generated during the 1991 Izmir International Fair to the conservation efforts (*Cumhuriyet* 1991c). Perhaps the most significant public-private partnership during the 1990s was the "Rama freshwater" project, developed by the Izmir Governorship, the DSI, and Unilever, a multinational consumer goods company. The project, named after a popular product of the company, was developed amidst a water crisis in the delta, which was threatening the waterbird habitats, especially the reed-beds, according to environmental activists and ornithologists (*Cumhuriyet*, 1991d; *Cumhuriyet*, 1991e). It aimed to canalize groundwater from the village of Süzbeyli to the protected area to preserve and restore the breeding sites (de Voogt et al., 2000). The inauguration of the project was merged with an event called "Ecotourism: Our Bird Paradises," organized by the Ministry of Tourism (*Cumhuriyet*, 1993). The company effectively used the project in its public relations, including releasing short video clips about the delta, decorating its brands and marketing stations with the symbols of the Bird Paradise, organizing tours to the protected site. The project was awarded a Gold Medal in the category of the environment by the International Public Relations Association in 1995 (Canpolat, 2011, p. 231). On the first anniversary of the Rama project, the conservation officials and the public relations director of Unilever jointly reported that the project significantly contributed to the preservation of waterbird habitats and biodiversity in the delta (Abacıoğlu, 1994). This type of public-private partnerships, which centred on public relations and ecotourism concerns, would increase in the 2000s with the introduction of the "wise use of wetlands" concept as part of the Ramsar framework.

Before the designation of the delta as a "wetland of international importance" or a Ramsar site in 1998, the publication of a book titled *Important Bird Areas of Turkey* (Magnin & Yarar, 1997) was a turning point for the conservation of the delta. The book was published by the Society for the Protection of Nature, Turkey (DHKD) with the assistance of the RSPB, BirdLife International and Vogelbescherming, a leading nature conservation organization from the Netherlands, and sponsored by Turkish Garanti Bank. The book was a part of the ICBP and IWRB project "Important Bird Areas in

Europe.” These leading organizations developed the concept of “important bird area” (IBA) and published the “first comprehensive listing of priority sites for bird conservation across Europe in a standardised manner” (Magnin & Yarar, 1997, p. 7). Out of 2,444 listed sites, 79 IBAs lie within Turkey, including the Gediz Delta. The Turkish “IBA project” undertaken by the DHKD started in 1990 and aimed to “promote the conservation of Turkish IBAs through public awareness, undertaking advocacy and campaigning activities, lobbying for the designation of protected areas, monitoring developments at the IBAs, and identifying new sites” (Magnin & Yarar, 1997, p. 8). The book is the first publication that uses the name Gediz Delta to identify the area, instead of the Izmir Bird Paradise. It thus represents a shift in the conservation approach from species conservation to habitat conservation in accordance with changes global wetland conservation framework, i.e. the Ramsar Convention, that I discussed in Chapter 2. Also, whereas the existing protected areas covered 8,000 hectares of the delta, the book describes a vast coastal wetland of 20,400 hectares as an important bird area (Magnin & Yarar, 1997, pp. 768-70). This new approach was popularized by a series of newspaper and journal articles by Güven Eken, who would soon become a leading conservationist in the delta. Eken proposed a comprehensive preservation approach that was informed by the global wetland conservation framework and the establishment of a single administrative committee that would merge diverse responsibilities of several conservation branches of the central and local governments (Eken, 1997). The way the Gediz Delta described in the above-mentioned project and Eken’s articles became the central reference point during the Ramsar process and the emergence of a new conservation approach in the delta.

## **4.2. Neoliberal Conservation and Environmental Governance in the Delta**

At the turn of the century, the conservation of the Gediz Delta ecosystems went through a transformation from a strictly protected, “expert-based,” “people-free park” approach to a conservation approach informed by a globally hegemonic sustainable development and environmental governance framework. This new conservation model has opened the door for the involvement of international actors, private groups, local governments and communities. In other words, the policymaking and implementation processes witnessed an upwards shift with the direct adoption of a conservation model produced in

multiple elsewheres and simultaneously downwards as the central government transferred its authority over a conservation area to local municipalities. Furthermore, local communities began to be seen as a key stakeholder in conservation efforts for the first time. In other words, this shift involves the simultaneous globalization and localization of conservation in the Gediz Delta and demonstrates that global and local processes are co-constitutive.

This new conservation approach, which is sometimes referred to as “community-based conservation,” aims to integrate nature conservation with economic development (Brockington, 2004) within the “normative context of sustainable development.” The “normative context of sustainable development,” or what some call the sustainable development ideology (cf. Summerville, Adkins, & Kendall, 2008) was first articulated by the World Commission on Environment and Development’s (1987) report *Our Common Future*; it was subsequently popularized by the United Nations Environment Program and several other international institutions, including conventions like the Ramsar. It rests on the assumption that “an environmentally sound and socially meaningful form of development” is possible, yet development is “taken to be synonymous with growth in material consumption” (Lélé, 1991: 607-9). Although it was not mentioned in the WCED’s original list of the “critical objectives for environment and development policies that follow from the concept of sustainable development” (WCED, 1987: 49), “making development more participatory” has been added as a critical operational goal by most organizations and agencies actively promoting the assumptions and objectives of this ideology in the following years (Lélé, 1991, pp. 607-9). “Making development more participatory” constitutes a key ideational underpinning of community-based approaches in the case of biodiversity and habitat conservation.

As a manifestation of a broader sustainable development ideology, the proponents of this new “community-based conservation” approach see inclusionary and collaborative environmental governance as the most appropriate and effective management model—a model which is mainly based on public-private and multistakeholder partnerships in conservation efforts (Apostolopoulou & Pantis, 2010). Environmental governance, as a subset of the broader “governance turn” in policymaking (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006), is a central element of this new approach. Biermann et al. (2009, p. 3) define environmental governance as

the interrelated and increasingly integrated system of formal and informal rules, rule-making systems, and actor-networks at all levels of human society (from local to global) that are set up to steer societies toward preventing, mitigating, and adapting to global and local environmental change and, in particular, earth system transformation, within the normative context of sustainable development.

In short, environmental governance presumes that sharing of managerial power and responsibilities through an expanded role for non-state actors and partnerships between them and governmental organizations is the key to the success of conservation efforts.

Unlike the previous strictly protected, expert-based, people-free parks approach, community-based conservation is based on the idea that local communities may be the most appropriate managers of an ecologically significant area as they usually depend on the preservation of that habitat for their cultural and economic survival (Leach, Mearns, & Scoones, 1999; E. A. Smith, 2000, see also Adams & Hutton, 2007 for a review). Therefore, community-based conservation is based on opening the decision-making processes and on-site management of protected areas to local communities, at least in theory. This idea of the significance of local involvement also assumes that creating a stake for local communities, i.e. financial incentives, is crucial for the success of this conservation approach (Berkes, 2004, pp. 626-7). In this sense, motivating local communities to participate in conservation efforts through financial incentives attests to the economization logic of neoliberalism (Adaman & Madra, 2014; Atasoy, 2014). These financial incentives usually take the form of ecotourism, which necessarily involves the transformation of productive, such as agricultural and extractive, landscapes to recreational landscapes through the development of touristic amenities and services as well as residential areas. Ecotourism can be seen as a fundamental aspect of the “neoliberalization of nature,” a term that I use to refer to the processes through which human-nature relationships are redefined and reorganized within a market framework.

A specific and increasingly common aspect of the commodification of nature under neoliberalism is called “neoliberal conservation.” Neoliberal conservation is defined as an “amalgamation of *ideology and techniques* informed by the premise that natures can only be ‘saved’ through their submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms” (Büscher et al., 2012, p. 4 emphases in original). Brockington and Duffy (2010) suggest that conservation is not only essential for the protection of biodiversity; it also enables the expansion of market relations into new areas. Conservation practices

are not necessarily contradictory to the broader neoliberal transformation of economies; neither do protected areas function as a barrier to the movement of capital. It has been this neoliberal conservation approach that has largely shaped the Gediz Delta sociocultures in the first decades of the twenty-first century. In other words, the rescaling of institutional/regulatory arrangements through the involvement of international conventions, private actors, local and international NGOs, local municipalities and communities has generated certain neoliberal practices that redefine human-nature relationships within a market framework, including ecotourism and simultaneously housing developments.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss three interrelated developments that have facilitated the simultaneous globalization and localization of conservation efforts and created the institutional context of the neoliberal conservation and environmental governance in the Gediz Delta: The designation of the delta as a Ramsar site (“wetland of international importance”) in 1998, the establishment of the Union for the Protection and Development of the Izmir Bird Paradise (İZKUŞ) in 2003 and finally, the preparation of a wetland ecosystem management plan for the delta in 2007. These three interrelated developments have, I suggest, set the conditions for the conservation-led gentrification in the Gediz Delta. In other words, the adaptation of globally hegemonic wetland conservation policies, the involvement of international conservationist groups as well as local municipalities, NGOs and communities in the conservation of the delta wetlands contributed to the social, economic, and ecological context of the making of consurbia.

#### **4.2.1. Reimagining the Delta as a “Wetland of International Importance”**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, environmental policies in Turkey have evolved in relation to Turkish policy elites’ long-time desire to participate in the international community. At the turn of the century, Turkey had a substantial body of environmental legislation and was a member of several international conventions and agreements (cf. Adaman & Arsel, 2005). Among these is the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, which was ratified by the TBMM in 1994 and initially, five wetlands in the country were registered with the Ramsar. The Gediz Delta was designated as a wetland of international importance and included in Turkey’s Ramsar list in April 1998 amidst the discussions around building a port in the area.

Certain capital groups in the city, organized mainly by the Izmir Chamber of Commerce (IzTO), were putting pressure on the central government to build a port in the area (*Cumhuriyet*, 1998; Ahmet, May 26, 2015; Elif, June 23, 2015; Mehmet Sıki, July 1, 2015;). The IzTO was arguing that the Izmir Port located in Alsancak had already reached its capacity, and a new port at the entrance of the Izmir Bay would contribute to maintaining growing trade volumes in the city. In fact, a new port had been on the agenda of the city's trade groups since the 1970s. Thanks to their efforts, a proposal for an industrial port in the Çamaltı area of the delta was even included in the 1973 Izmir Metropolitan Master Plan (Kaya, 2002, p. 163; see Chapter 5). However, the project was never realized as, starting from the early 1980s, several parts of the delta have begun to be protected by the application of a series of conservation statuses, such as "waterbirds protection and breeding site," "wildlife protection site," and "natural protection site of first degree of importance." In the late 1990s, the IzTO increased its pressure on the government to decrease the protection status of the delta from the first-degree to third-degree, which would have allowed commercial developments in the area (*Cumhuriyet*, 1997, p. 16). As the port talk was revived, environmentalist groups began to further mobilize their international ties and connections within the government to enhance the already existing conservation framework with an international status (*Hürriyet*, 1998).

On World Wetlands Day in 1997, the Minister of the Environment Ziyaettin Tokar publicly announced that the Ministry was working on the designation of the delta as a Ramsar site to provide a stronger conservation framework (*Cumhuriyet*, 1997, p. 18). As I noted above, the publication of several articles by Güven Eken, a leading conservationist in the country, and the enhanced interest of the international wetland conservation community in the delta such as the joint projects of the RSPB, BirdLife International, and DHKD in the same period, strengthened the arguments of the conservationist bureaucracy. The Ministry of Environment's Wetland Section published a booklet titled *The Gediz Delta (Izmir Bird Paradise)*, which was a prime example of how the Ministry embraced the Ramsar approach. This booklet represents a critical moment in switching from species conservation to habitat conservation. In other words, following the publication of this booklet, the conservation of the Gediz Delta evolved from an approach centred around the delta's iconic waterbirds towards defining and conserving the delta as a "wetland of international importance." The booklet defines the Gediz Delta as "an open-air museum with its rich and different habitats" (Ministry of Environment, 1998, p. 9) and highlights its

ecological functions, ornithological importance as well as economic and cultural values of the delta. The booklet adopted the delta boundaries described by non-governmental conservationist groups (Magnin & Yazar, 1997). The text of this booklet was also submitted to the Ramsar as part of the application for the inclusion of the Gediz Delta in the list of “wetlands of international importance.”

The Gediz Delta was designated as a Ramsar site on 15 April 1998 (Republic of Turkey, 1998). Many environmentalists see the inclusion of the Gediz Delta in Turkey’s Ramsar list as the country’s sixth wetland in that category as a victory for the conservationist movement (Şevket, July 5, 2015). It is important to note that the Ramsar designation did not terminate the already existing conservation statuses in the delta. Instead, it aimed to provide a more extensive and stronger framework backed by international actors. Nevertheless, the demands of certain capitalist groups to transform the shore of the delta to an international trade hub did not come to an end with this development. For instance, the largest business group in the city, Arkas Holding, proposed to build a container port just 3.5 kilometres from the shore of the delta and applied to the Ministry of the Environment for a permit (*Yeni Asir*, 2004). Citing the internationally protected status in its statement, the Ministry rejected the project and reassured the environmentalist groups about the commitments of the Ministry (*Radikal* 2004). Nevertheless, the designation of the area as a Ramsar site was not merely a reference point; it was a critical moment for the neoliberalization of the conservation of the Gediz Delta in the form of the emergence of new institutions, conservation practices, and local-national-international connections. While this new status did not make the trade-oriented capital groups happy, some others, particularly real estate developers, would gradually take advantage of this process in their attempts to gentrify the peri-urban Izmir (see Chapter 5).

The inclusion of the delta in the Ramsar list did not initially change everyday life and land-use patterns in the delta. Most farmers, who were already aware of the existing model, did not even hear anything about this new status until the İZKUŞ took over the everyday management activities in the later years (Salih, July 13, 2015). Unlike the conservation model of the 1980s, as manifested in the delta’s “natural protection site of first-degree” status, the Ramsar designation was not based on the fencing off parts of the delta. The local residents had already lost access to certain areas as a result of conservation developments in the late 1980s; however, the Ramsar did not add any new

“people-free” zones. The expropriation of private lands for conservation purposes did not occur either. Large landowners that I interviewed stated that the only time the [municipal] government bought land in the delta was for the construction of the wastewater treatment plant in 1993 (Osman, July 15, 2015). Since the Ramsar Convention did not have punitive sanctions, the already established “nature protection site” status continued to be the central reference point in legal battles as well.

Nevertheless, the Ramsar protection was mentioned in several cases, and international recognition strengthened the arguments of conservation NGOs and bureaucracies. For instance, the Izmir Provincial Board for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets stopped the construction of fisherman’s cabins and housing projects in the protected areas by citing the delta’s national and international protection statuses in 1999 (*Cumhuriyet*, 1999, p. 20). In the same year, the protection status of the delta was elevated from the second-degree, which allowed some economic activities in the protected parts, to the first-degree as a result of growing pressure from scientists like Dr. Sıki and national and international environmental organizations. In our interview, Dr. Sıki, who wrote the scientific report that became the basis of the Board’s new decision, told me that several developmental proposals such as a harbour and a shipyard in the delta alarmed himself and other conservationists. The Board referred to the inclusion of the delta in the Ramsar list and emphasized its new status as a “wetland of international importance” in its decision. In the national report presented to the 1999 Conference of the Contracting Parties, the Turkish Ministry of the Environment stated that “the planned international harbour and dockyard were assessed and construction of them was cancelled” (Ramsar, 1999). At the turn of the century, not only the Ramsar Convention but also two other international environmental agreements in which Turkey was a signatory became vital reference points for the conservation of the Gediz Delta. The delta was included in the list of “Areas of Special Conservation Interest” within the framework of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats in 2000. In 2002, the Protocol concerning Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas of the Barcelona Convention entered into force in Turkey and the neighbouring town of Foça was designated as a “specially protected area” to conserve the habitats of the critically endangered Mediterranean Monk Seals.

In short, in the first few years following the designation of the delta as a Ramsar site, social actors gradually familiarized themselves with the international wetland

conservation framework and adopted a new approach. The designation of the delta as “wetland of international importance” also resulted in the establishment of the Union for Protection and Development of the Izmir Bird Paradise (İZKUŞ) in 2003 as a manifestation of the Ramsar approach. The establishment of the İZKUŞ was significant for the implementation of international wetland conservation strategies in the delta as it would be instrumental for the adopting conservation methods and ideas from multiple elsewheres and building new international ties while increasing the community involvement.

#### **4.2.2. Authorizing the Local Governments to Manage Conservation Activities**

The establishment of the İZKUŞ was a direct outcome of a series of regulatory changes in Turkey’s wetland conservation framework. As a Ramsar requirement, the Ministry of Environment issued the Directive for the Protection of Wetlands in 2002, and the National Wetland Strategy was finalized in 2003 (Karadeniz et al., 2009, p. 1114). The strategy aimed for the protection and improvement of wetlands and the reclaiming of the drained ones within the Ramsar framework. It also outlined the basis of cooperation and coordination between the public and private institutions, opening the door for local participation in conservation efforts. The directive initiated the foundation of the National Wetland Commission and Local Wetland Commissions for each Ramsar site. Following these regulatory developments, the İZKUŞ was established with the involvement of the Izmir Governorship, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality and district and subdistrict (*belde*) municipalities in and around delta (Çiğli, Foça, Karşıyaka, Menemen, Sasalı and Seyrek) in 2003. Several environmental NGOs, university representatives, and local communities were also included as key stakeholders in the İZKUŞ.

In August 2008, the İZKUŞ signed a protocol with the Ministry’s National Parks division and took over the authority to carry out everyday management activities in the delta. This was a novel development in the conservation history of Turkey and the beginning of a short-lived conservation management experiment, namely the environmental governance of the delta. The Gediz Delta became the first protected area where the responsibilities and duties of a central governmental office were handed over to a local organization. For the first time, elected representatives, as well as civil society organizations, gained authority over a conservation zone (Ahmet, May 26, 2015).

However, some scientists, mainly the privileged actors of the preservation approach of the 1980s-90s, were skeptical about having a union of local municipalities as the primary conservation agent in the delta.

The experts of the previous “expert-based” and “people-free” preservationism had developed a skill set that proved to be successful in mobilizing existing regulatory framework and in challenging the conservation failures of public institutions and possible threats from private actors. These experts who had also built strong ties with some actors within the conservation bureaucracy as well as local and national media felt alienated in this process and believed that local governments would inevitably prioritize economic gain, i.e. allowing residential and commercial developments in the area, over the protection of habitats (Mehmet Sıkı, July 1, 2015). They became the harsh critics of certain activities of the İZKUŞ and used newspapers to put pressure on the union. For instance, the existence of wild horses in the protected area emerged as a conflict between the İZKUŞ and Dr. Sıkı, who argued that those horses were “alien species” to the delta and that they were threatening the waterbird habitats (*Posta*, 2013). The İZKUŞ scientists, in collaboration with local and international NGOs, conducted a study and concluded that horses had already become an essential part of the wetland ecosystem without posing a danger to the vegetation (Ahmet, May 26, 2015). Another conflict between the İZKUŞ and the privileged experts of the previous approach was centred around the eucalyptus trees in the delta. Although Dr. Sıkı petitioned the Provincial Board of the General Directorate for the Protection of Nature and National Parks to cut the trees as they were allegedly sucking up the already limited freshwater sources, the Board stood by the İZKUŞ’s side. The union argued that eucalyptus trees, although planted some 30 years ago to dry up the wetlands, were now indispensable parts of the ecosystem and the landscape integrity of the delta (Ahmet, May 26, 2015; Mehmet Sıkı, July 1, 2015). As a result of these conflicts, Dr. Sıkı was completely alienated from the İZKUŞ. The union stopped inviting him to the meetings; his application to be a non-voting member was denied. In short, the authorization of a union of local municipalities to manage the conservation activities in the delta was not a smooth, conflict-free process. Moreover, this experiment proved to be short-lived as the protocol was terminated by the Ministry in May 2017 with the argument that the union was “not fulfilling its conservation duties properly and not taking necessary actions in the delta” (*Hürriyet*, 2017). Although Dr. Sıkı petitioned the Ministry and its provincial offices about

these “not fulfilled conservation duties,” it is not clear how big of a role these petitions played in the Ministry’s decision. As of June 2017, the General Directorate for the Protection of Nature and National Parks became the sole conservation authority in the delta once again.

Nevertheless, during these nine years that it oversaw the management of the Gediz, the İZKUŞ played significant roles in the establishment of a new conservation approach in the delta. The union consisted of the mayors of member municipalities and the three city councillors from each district. Each member municipality was also required to donate 0.5 percent of its annual budget to the İZKUŞ; as a result, as of 2015, the union had an annual budget of 2.4 million liras (approximately 600.000 CAD). The İZKUŞ’s primary responsibilities were to maintain conservation activities in the delta, to coordinate the activities to detect and solve environmental problems, and to raise awareness about the social and ecological importance of the delta by organizing lectures, tours, exhibitions and other events. Approximately 30 people, including a director, a forestry engineer, a biologist, an architect, a veterinary surgeon as well as drivers, security guards, and cleaners were on the union’s payroll as of 2015 (İZKUŞ, 2015). The union also managed a visitor centre in the entrance of the protected area where the lectures and film screening were held. The centre also had a cafeteria and a store where the souvenirs were sold to visitors (Figures 4.1. and 4.2.). The İZKUŞ put several signs up in the delta to inform the visitors and local people (Figure 4.3.). It organized annual caricature and wildlife photography contests and exhibitions (Figure 4.4.).



Figure 4.1. The Gediz Delta Visitor Centre.  
Source: Author.



Figure 4.2. The Gediz Delta Store.  
Source: Author.



Figure 4.3. The Gediz Delta information signs.  
Source: Author.



Figure 4.4. 7<sup>th</sup> Izmir Bird Paradise National Caricature Contest Exhibition. Aziz Kocaoglu (right), the Mayor of the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, 11 June 2015. Source: Author.

In terms of conservation activities, the İZKUŞ coordinated bird counting and other scientific studies about the fauna and flora of the delta, including monitoring the water levels, mammals and reptilians in the area. In addition to the restoration of damaged bird

nests and rehabilitation of injured animals, the İZKUŞ also financed the construction of the “world’s largest artificial flamingo island,” covering an area of 6,440 square meters where over 7,000 pairs of flamingos nest each year (*Daily Sabah*, 2016). To undertake these conservation activities, the İZKUŞ partnered with local universities as well as an international institution, the Tour du Valat, a research centre for the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands based in France’s Camargue Delta. I will discuss this partnership, which included direct scientific assistance in conducting research, as well as site visits, knowledge transfer, and joined events, later in the chapter as a concrete example of the dual processes of globalization and localization of the conservation of the Gediz Delta.

As noted above, the establishment of the İZKUŞ was a critical development for the institutionalization of a new conservation approach in the delta. Whereas the previous conservation approach privileged expert authority and the preservation of the delta for scientific purposes, the İZKUŞ played essential roles in changing this approach towards a so-called participatory and inclusive conservation one. For instance, it facilitated the involvement of village communities, who hitherto felt disenfranchised and alienated in the conservation efforts. The election of Nurgül Uçar, then mayor of Seyrek, as the President of the İZKUŞ in 2006, was a key moment for the inclusion of local communities. Uçar describes this process as follows:

Yes, there were environmentalists, conservationists who had worked for the protection of the delta previously, but none of them were local. They did not know the locals, they did not know the importance of agriculture for the locals, they knew the area, but their perspective was foreign to the delta and its people. All they offered were fences. So, the villagers felt alienated in return; they couldn’t feel any ownership. When I got involved, the way villagers viewed conservation changed. They said, “she is one of us, someone we know, someone we can trust in charge, our daughter is leading now.” This is how people started to get involved and wanted to participate in the conservation of the delta (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015).

Uçar told me that they adopted a conservation principle based on a Turkish proverb: “Everyone shall get their fair share” (*Herkes nasibini alacak*). She emphasized that the villagers had not seen the Izmir Bird Paradise as a “paradise” at all: “Before the İZKUŞ, they wanted to protect the delta from the villagers. How can you put a gate here? Kick out the farmer, kick out the fisher, kick out the kids, women, people. This approach is unacceptable” (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). She claimed that because of this, once

dominant, strictly preservationist approach, the villagers had developed a negative attitude towards conservationism; they “even hated the idea of protection.” Hence, one of the first tasks of the İZKUŞ was to “make peace with local people.” The union organized film screenings, site tours, lectures, and exhibitions in local coffee shops in an attempt to “put flamingos into people’s mind” (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). A documentary film, *Wings of the Delta (Deltanın Kanatları)*, according to Uçar, was particularly powerful to make people see the delta from a different perspective. She suggested that it was after seeing this documentary, the villagers began to realize the importance of conservation: “My driver started to talk about our birds. Kids started to draw pictures of flamingos and brought them to me. A hunter came to my office and put his rifle on my desk: He said, ‘That’s it, I cannot hunt one more bird anymore’” (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). Parts of the delta have always been used for recreational purposes, such as picnics, hiking, sunbathing and so on by local people for decades; yet through this process, she believes, local people have learned more about the ecological significance of the area as well as bird watching as a recreational and touristic activity.

The new conservation approach offered the villagers a new income source: ecotourism. The activities of the İZKUŞ to raise awareness for the conservation of the delta was centred not only on the ecological importance of the wetland but also on the money-making opportunities it presented. The so-called central principle, “everyone shall get their fair share,” echoes Ramsar’s notion of “wise use” (see Chapter 2). The Convention defines “wise use of wetlands” as “the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development” and acknowledges that “whilst some wetland development is inevitable and ... many developments have important benefits to society, developments can be facilitated in sustainable ways by approaches elaborated under the Convention” (Ramsar, 2010a, p. 16). The convention ties poverty eradication in wetland areas with the wise use principle and cites ecotourism activities in designated Ramsar sites, in collaboration with relevant institutions, as an opportunity to reduce poverty; yet it also acknowledges “the possible negative impacts of such tourism on wetland integrity and on local cultures” (Ramsar, 2010a, p.39). Ecotourism has been a central element in the work of the İZKUŞ and the projects developed in partnerships with private organizations and NGOs. It has been cited numerous times through the Gediz Delta Wetland Management Plan. I discuss how ecotourism has brought several social actors together

and has been considered as a “win-win” strategy in detail later in the chapter as a manifestation of the neoliberal conservation in the delta.

### **4.2.3. The Wetland Management Plan: A Multistakeholder Approach**

The third development that has facilitated the simultaneous globalization and localization of the conservation efforts in the delta is the preparation of a wetland management plan. The process started in July 2003 when the Ministry of Environment and the Izmir Governorship signed a protocol. This protocol set forth a management plan which would be prepared based on the Ramsar principles as summarized in the Convention’s “New guidelines for management planning for Ramsar sites and other wetlands” (Ramsar, 2002). In fact, the management plan echoes the Ramsar’s environmental governance framework which is based on the inclusion of all stakeholders in conservation efforts: “In order to find a balance between conservation and development, it is imperative to include local residents, non-governmental organizations, local governments, occupational groups such as cooperatives as well as public institutions. ... The action plans should be realistic and feasible” (Ministry of the Environment and Forestry, 2007). The first plan, covering a period of 5 years, was finalized in 2006 and approved by the Ministry in 2007. Just like the İZKUŞ being the first local union of several local governments, provincial institutions and NGOs for the conservation of an internationally protected natural area, The Gediz Delta Wetland Management Plan (Ministry of the Environment and Forestry, 2007) is also the first document in this nature.

Alongside a representative from the İZKUŞ, bureaucrats from the Provincial Environmental Directorate and the General Directorate for the Protection of Nature and National Parks, and two NGO representatives participated in the management plan preparation process. The plan compiles research on the delta’s hydrology, geology, geomorphology, ornithology, fauna and flora as well as land-use patterns in the delta. The plan also includes the interviews with key stakeholders in the delta such as municipalities, fishing cooperatives, hunting/gaming associations, elected representatives of the villagers (*muhtars*), the management of the Çamaltı Saltworks, the Atatürk Organized Industrial Zone, the Izmir Chamber of Commerce, and universities. Based on these interviews, the plan puts forward a long list of problems that the delta is facing such as limited and declining freshwater resources, the limited budget for and the

lack of coordination among conservation institutions, increasing pollution levels, rezoning of agricultural lands, illegal grazing and hunting, the lack of economic opportunities for local people and so on. It also identifies the key stakeholders to address each listed problem. Then, the plan defines a general target as the “preservation of the ecological functioning, diversity, and the landscape integrity of the Gediz Delta Wetland ecosystem while channelling the economic benefits to local people in order to elevate their welfare level” (Ministry of the Environment and Forestry, 2007, p. 330). Here, consistent with the sustainable development ideology in general, and Ramsar’s “wise use principle” in particular, the management plan aims to reconcile conservation and economic development in the area. This “general target” is accompanied by 14 specific “output targets,” each addresses an identified problem, main responsible actor to reach that target, financial resources available, and a clear timeline for the execution of the activities related to that target.

Although wetland management plans were developed for other Ramsar sites in Turkey within the same process, what was particularly unique about the Gediz Delta Wetland Management Plan was that the key stakeholders signed off for several “output targets” and made a commitment for the following five years. The plan would be revisited in 2012 and updated, based on the outcomes, for another five years. The revised plan was prepared in 2014, with a two-year delay. It was significantly shorter than the original plan and included only five strategic targets for the next five-year period. Most importantly, there was no civil society involvement in the preparation of the revised plan. An NGO member told me that central bureaucracy came to see the civil society organizations as “troublemakers” because they “would not allow them to violate general principles of the [management] plan” (Elif, June 23, 2015). Another participant who worked for the İZKUŞ also noted that the exclusion of NGOs from the revision process of the plan was the “end of a very promising start” (Ahmet, May 26, 2015). As Ernoul and Wardell-Johnson (2013) also note, the environmental governance model in the Gediz Delta gradually evolved back to a centralist model within which local actors lost their positions.

A socio-economic structure report (Özbek Sönmez & Onmuş, 2006) that delineates the demographic structure, as well as social and economic activities in the delta, was also prepared as an accompanying document to the Gediz Delta Wetland Management Plan. This report aimed to guide the social aspects of the management plan and the future activities of the İZKUŞ. Although it was conducted in the early years of the globalization

and localization of conservation in the delta as well as unfolding gentrification processes, this study is the only quantitative analysis of the delta's socio-economic structure to date. The report outlines that agriculture, particularly the production of cash crops such as corn, cotton, and wheat, is the main economic activity in the delta. While 37.4 percent of the working population is employed in agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy production, and fishing also constitute essential elements of the delta livelihoods. Yet, thanks to the proximity to the urban centre and industrial zones, 22 percent of the residents are employed in services, while 15 percent have manufacturing jobs (Özbek Sönmez & Onmuş, 2006, p. 54). Other than the main demographic and economic indicators, the report also summarizes the problems that the delta residents face. For instance, the loss of productive agricultural land due to urbanization and industrialization, as well as the limited grazing areas in the delta because of conservation, are cited as the main concerns of the farmers (ibid, pp. 94 and 112-114). Although the report dedicates a relatively limited space for how the residents perceive the conservation efforts in the delta, it states that 76 percent of the participants want to see a management plan that would include the concerns and expectations of the local people (ibid, p. 130). Finally, this report also symbolizes an important step for the involvement of the international actors in the conservation and management of the delta as it was produced in partnership with an international wetland research centre. On that note, now I turn to the partnerships between the Gediz Delta and other Ramsar sites, particularly France's Camargue Delta, to demonstrate how the above-mentioned developments have increased the presence of the international actors in the delta.

### **4.3. “Flamingos have brought us together:” Learning from Other Deltas**

The designation of the Gediz Delta as a Ramsar site, the establishment of a union of local governments to manage everyday conservation activities, and the preparation of a wetland management plan based on environmental governance principles opened the door for the direct involvement of international actors in the conservation of the delta. These international actors, particularly environmental NGOs, research centres, and municipal decisionmakers in other deltas, were instrumental in switching from an expert-based, people-free preservation approach to a community-based, environmental governance conservation model. In other words, the arrival of globally hegemonic

wetland conservation policy ideas and practices in the delta was an outcome of the partnerships between local policy actors such as municipalities and environmentalist groups, and international players. McCann (2011, p. 114) argues that local policy actors, including policy professionals and consultants, and civil society groups utilize their “extralocal connections – ranging from official intergovernmental alliances to individual relationships with colleagues elsewhere – to learn about policy models and physically bring experts to the city to inform locals about cutting-edge policies.” As I show below, several environmentalist groups in the Gediz Delta mobilized their existing international connections and formed new ones to put the delta on the map of the global wetland conservation network. They partnered with the “global policy consultocracy” who play significant roles in the circulation of globally hegemonic policy ideas and knowledge (ibid), hosted them in the delta, introduced them to policy officials, and literally and figuratively translated these global policy ideas to the local context.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the involvement of the international actors in the conservation of the Gediz Delta wetlands goes back to the late 1980s. Global conservation actors such as the ICBP (now BirdLife International), the IWRB (now Wetlands International) included the delta in their annual bird count projects, published reports about the ecological status of the delta and provided scientific support for local environmentalist groups. However, their involvement, as it was limited in scope and scientific in nature, did not facilitate any significant change in the management of the Gediz Delta. However, after the turn of the century, particularly following the designation of the delta as a “wetland of international importance” and the establishment of the İZKUŞ, these international actors and their local partners found and created opportunities to participate in the conservation efforts directly. Perhaps the most involved international wetland conservation actor has been the Tour du Valat, a “private research institute with the legal status of a non-profit foundation that works in the public interest”<sup>23</sup> located in France’s Camargue, also known as Rhône, Delta. Since 2002, for the policy actors in the Gediz Delta, the Tour du Valat has acted as an “informational infrastructure” (McCann, 2011, p. 114) that interprets, frames, packages, and represents information about wetland conservation policy practices. In short, the establishment of a

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<sup>23</sup> <https://tourduvalat.org/en/fondation-tour-du-valat/history-and-values/>

neoliberal conservation model in the Gediz Delta would not have been possible without the involvement of this research institution.

The Tour du Valat was founded in 1954 by Luc Hoffmann, a well-known ornithologist and philanthropist who achieved a “celebrity conservationist” (Brockington, 2008) status as the co-founder and first director of the WWF-International. The institute housed the IWRB in its early years and organized several international meetings for the protection of waterfowl during the 1960s. These efforts and Hoffmann’s “essential diplomatic role” in bringing many lawmakers together around the world resulted in the signing of the Ramsar Convention in 1971. In the 1980s, the institute gradually enlarged its focus from the protection of waterfowl to the conservation and management of “wetlands of international importance” and played critical roles in the development of a Ramsar conservation framework including the concept of “wise use principle” and the “integrated coastal zone management.” The Tour du Valat, in partnership with the IWRB, started the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) in 1991 to develop conservation principles “to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of Mediterranean Wetlands.” This initiative joined the Ramsar Convention in 2002 as a “regional intergovernmental network operating within the framework of the Ramsar Convention and also involving other key actors, dedicated to promote and support multi-stakeholders policies and actions on the ground for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of Mediterranean wetlands.”<sup>24</sup> The Convention recognized the MedWet as a “model for regional collaboration on wetlands” (Papayannis, 2002, p. 32). Within this process, the Tour du Valat’s concerns began to go beyond wetland habitat conservation and included “socioeconomic questions” as well (see Chapter 2 for a discussion on the changes in the global wetland conservation framework).

The institute, now recognizing the economic and cultural significance of wetlands for local communities, has begun to provide “support for making public policies and monitoring their implementation locally, nationally, and internationally” in order to reconcile “human activities and the conservation of wetland natural heritage”<sup>25</sup> The Tour du Valat is arguably the single most influential private research institute today that produces scientific data and policy guidelines for the local and national wetland

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<sup>24</sup> <http://medwet.org>

<sup>25</sup> <https://tourduvalat.org/en/fondation-tour-du-valat/history-and-values/>.

conservation and management actors in most of the Mediterranean region, considered as the 27 contracting parties<sup>26</sup> of the Ramsar Convention. In Turkey, Tour du Valat's main local partner is the Nature Foundation (*Doğa Derneği*), yet the institute has also partnered with local municipalities, universities and the National Parks Division of the central government. The institute has been involved in several projects in the Gediz Delta, including providing expert support for the preparation of the wetland management plan, organizing study tours to the Camargue Delta for Turkish policy actors, and developing an integrated management model. This involvement has been instrumental in the evolution of a new conservation regime in the Gediz Delta.

When I asked my policy actor participants about why the Gediz Delta has become the first wetland where a union of local municipalities could be formed, and a management plan with clearly defined responsibilities of multiple stakeholders was prepared for the first time, they all stressed the importance of these international ties. For instance, the first elected president of the İZKUŞ, Nurgül Uçar, told me that “There was an accumulated interest in the area, international groups were coming here for annual bird counts, and they had publications about the importance of [the] Gediz [Delta]. Their interest changed the perspective of the [national] bureaucrats (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). NGO members that I interviewed also pointed out how the international interest in the delta facilitated a unity among local and national actors: “[Bureaucrats] take you more seriously when you show them international publications. (...) Most municipality actors (*belediyeciler*) learned about the importance of the delta from those publications” (Şevket, July 5, 2015).

In fact, the first attempts to prepare a wetland management plan for Turkish wetlands had failed because of the absence of a formal union among local and national policy actors as well as civil society groups and their international partners in the 1990s. For instance, a wetland management plan initiative had been formed in the Göksu Delta in Mersin province; although the project was supported by several international conservation groups including the Tour du Valat, it could not be finalized, and the conservation goals could not be realized in the absence of local participation (Karadeniz

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<sup>26</sup> These 27 Ramsar signatories in the Mediterranean basin are Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, and Palestine.

et al., 2009, pp. 1115-6). The local steering committee, Arı (2001, p. 197) argues, dispersed as “they could not settle disputes among different stakeholders.” He also discusses how conservation bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Environment were suspicious about the involvement of local actors in the preparation of a management plan for the Lake Uluabat wetlands (Arı 2001, p. 199). The formation of a union of local municipalities was the key to the successful finalization of a management plan for the Gediz Delta. In other words, the İZKUŞ was able to effectively direct the international interest and accumulated scientific and policy knowledge into a management plan. Unlike other experiences, the Gediz Delta Wetland Management Plan and accompanying the socio-economic structure report (Sönmez & Onmuş, 2006) were direct outcomes of cooperation between local municipalities, national conservation bureaucracies, local NGOs and international conservation actors. The Tour du Valat experts particularly helped the local actors to facilitate discussions among multiple stakeholders and to find a “balance” between multiple, and often contradicting, expectations from the new conservation regime (Ahmet, May 26, 2015).

Another critical role played by the Tour du Valat was the organization of two study tours to the Camargue Delta for Turkish policy actors. The wetlands in the Camargue and the Gediz Delta have similar habitats, species, human impacts and so-called threats such as urbanization, pollution, and erosion. In terms of socio-economic activities and administrative structures, they resemble each other; for instance, agriculture, livestock breeding, salt production are vital sectors in both deltas, and multiple governmental bodies collaborate, albeit in varying degrees, in the day-to-day management and conservation issues (Ernoul & Wardell-Johnson, 2013, pp. 232-3). Within this context, the Tour du Valat and their Turkish NGO partners pushed for an increased partnership between two deltas and study tours emerged as crucial mechanisms to bring policy actors together.

Study tours can be defined as “short visits in which a delegation of people travels to another place to experience something with potential to improve their organization or places of origin” (Montero, 2017, p. 336). These tours are significantly instrumental in adopting new policy models as well as strengthening the arguments of local policy actors in justifying their agendas. Montero (2017) argues that they are “powerful learning mechanisms,” but equally importantly, they “expand and strengthen local coalitions through the creation of trust and the mobilization of public opinion” (p. 339). Turkish

policy actors went to the Camargue to learn about the wetland conservation model developed there, which was based on a so-called balance between ecological integrity and economic benefits. The first study tour took place in June 2008 with the participation of the members of the İZKUŞ, including two subdistrict mayors and councillors from member municipalities, scientists, and NGO members. The second tour was in 2011; however, it was attended by only one scientist from the İZKUŞ, the members of the organizing NGO and the representatives of the central government. An NGO member who attended to both study tours told me that the second one could not generate any enthusiasm in the absence of local participation. In fact, it became a critical moment that showed the increasing re-centralization of conservation efforts in the Gediz Delta (Elif, June 23, 2015). Yet, the first study tour resulted in improved confidence in the ecological and economic “potential” of the delta and strengthened ties among local policymakers, and between them and international actors.

During their 5-day visit in 2008, the Turkish delegation met the municipal decisionmakers of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA), tourism officials, and the managers of the Tour du Valat. The tour was framed as a component of 14 action targets of the management plan, and two participant NGOs were designated as principal undertakers of this particular target, namely “local, national, international promotion of the delta.” The Turkish co-organizer of the tour quotes Nurgül Uçar in its final report:

It seems, at first, surprising to see a place very similar to Gediz in a different country, but actually, it is not. It is clear that nature has no boundaries, unlike countries. The historical connections between Izmir and Marseille have been maintained by migratory flamingos today. [Flamingos] have brought us together and I am sure that they will continue to do so (Doğa Derneği, 2009, p. 17).

In my conversation with her, Uçar used the same analogy: “Flamingos do not care about the boundaries; there is no visa requirement for them; you cannot make them wait at the gate. We saw the same flamingos [from the Gediz] in the Camargue. We followed them to learn from the Camargue. They changed us personally; they changed our policies too” (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). One of the critical outcomes of this study tour for Turkish policymakers was the strengthened confidence and trust among each other. One NGO member who was instrumental in the organization of the tour told me that

It made them feel like part of a larger network, made them see themselves as ‘Europeans.’ They realized that the Gediz was not that far away from

Europe. I heard them saying things like ‘we live in a small village, but we have the same nature as the French. If they can do it, we can do the same thing.’ Seeing a completely different way of doing conservation, the participation of local communities, ecotourism and so on changed how they viewed their home delta drastically (Elif, June 23, 2015).

Similarly, another participant of the tour, the former mayor of Sasalı also mentioned how Turkish policymakers felt closer to each other after the tour:

Of course, we had known each other for years; we were colleagues, working together, attending meetings together. But the visit made us feel more connected; we realized that we should have collaborated more. There was so much to gain; there was a model to follow. Yes, we made connections with the French and more importantly, we got connected to each other (Veli Kasap, June 4, 2015).

In short, Turkish policy actors developed stronger relations not only with their French counterparts but, more significantly, among each other as a result of this trip. They were convinced that the “Camargue model” was the way to go, and they needed to work together to “reach their level” (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). In this sense, developing environmentalist concerns as part of the long-standing modernist ideology of “rising up to the level of contemporary civilizations” in Turkey (see Chapter 2) was evident in policymakers’ experience of the Camargue Delta. They believed that by adopting this model, which prioritizes the ecological maintenance of the wetland without compromising local livelihoods and perhaps through generating even more incomes, the conservation in the Gediz Delta would finally include local communities and the delta would emerge as an ecotourism destination (Lütfü Dağtaş, June 26, 2015). The following year, the İZKUŞ was invited to Camargue’s Sixth Annual Festival as the “honorary guest.” A delegation of 40 policy actors saw an “ecotourism best practice” during this festival:

We were very impressed. I said that yes, this is something we need, we should have something like this in our village. ... I saw how excited local people were; because they make money you know, people come to the festival, go to farms in the delta, eat there, spend money, buy crafts from local women. I said we should do this, and we can do it. But we first need to develop a culture of collaboration, volunteerism is necessary (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015).

As I discuss in the next section, several ecotourism projects were developed in the Gediz Delta following the “Camargue model” in the 2000s; however, they could not generate the outcomes that the enthusiastic ecotourism advocates wished for.

In terms of policy development and adoption, another critical involvement of the Tour du Valat was the “Integrated Management in the Gediz Delta, Turkey” project. This project, which aims to “set up an adaptive and sustainable management system for the Gediz Delta in Turkey, with the possibility of carrying out restoration activities to compensate for the consequences of global changes,” has started in 2009. The primary financial support came from the PACA, and the Turkish partners of the project are İZKUŞ, the Izmir Governorship, Sasalı and Seyrek municipalities, Ege University, and the National Parks Division<sup>27</sup>. This project was developed as part of a new protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), which was added to the Barcelona Convention in 2009 “to address the complex political dimensions related to coastal zones” (Ernoul & Wardell-Johnson, 2015, p. 97). ICZM is defined as

a dynamic process for the sustainable management and use of coastal zones, taking into account at the same time the fragility of coastal systems and landscapes, the diversity of activities and uses, their interactions, the maritime orientation of certain activities and uses and their impact on both the marine and land parts (Barcelona Convention, 2009).

The ICZM protocol sets governance objectives and emphasizes collaborative approaches with a specific emphasis on the role of local people in coastal management (Ernoul & Wardell-Johnson, 2013, p. 231). Tour du Valat’s Gediz project aimed to analyze the feasibility of an integrated management approach in the Gediz Delta with the involvement of local populations. To achieve this project goal, Tour du Valat researchers carried out several activities “to raise local awareness about the biodiversity issues affecting the delta” and organized “participative seminars” through which the “grassroots initiatives and motivated local experts” could develop a dialogue (Tour du Valat, 2015a). In 2015 alone, the Tour du Valat organized nine field missions to Izmir involving four experts from the centre. Apart from raising awareness related activities, several scientific studies concerning the evolution of land cover and the monitoring of the delta species were conducted in partnership with a local university (Tour du Valat, 2015b, p. 34).

Although Turkey has been a signatory of the Barcelona Convention since 1976 and ratified the convention protocols in the following years, two protocols were not signed; the ICZM protocol is one of them. Nevertheless, motivated by the success of and the enthusiasm that emerged after the 2008 study tour, the “global consultocracy” based at

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<sup>27</sup> <https://tourduvalat.org/en/actions/gestion-integree-delta-gediz/>

the Tour du Valat believed that the protocol was going to enter into force in Turkey soon. Even in the absence of official recognition of the ICZM protocol, Tour du Valat experts hoped to shape the preparation of the revised management plan for the next five years based on the ICZM principles. Hence, a second tour was organized in 2011, only a year before the management plan was supposed to be revised. The Tour du Valat describes this study tour as follows:

This mission aimed to get decision-makers involved in the preparation of the 2012 management plan and to share experiences and put in place a participative work programme. On this occasion, the partners met several stakeholders such as the Camargue Regional Natural Park and the PACA region (elected representatives, international affairs officials, and Biodiversity direction) to exchange information about how they work, and to build new partnerships. The Tour du Valat provided technical and methodological support and advice for the drafting of the five-year management plan from 2012-2017 for the Gediz Delta. (...) The priorities listed include the integrated management of water resources, eco-tourism, and the restoration of habitats that have disappeared or are currently disappearing (Tour du Valat, 2012).

However, as the Turkish government annulled the municipal status of subdistricts in 2009, Sasalı and Seyrek became the neighbourhoods of Çiğli and Menemen municipalities, respectively. At the same time, the Turkish NGO could not convince the metropolitan policymakers to visit the Camargue one more time (Elif, June 23, 2015). As a result, the driving force behind the İZKUŞ -delta municipalities- was absent on the second tour. Only a few bureaucrats from the central government's National Parks Division half-heartedly attended the tour alongside the Vice Governor of Izmir. A Turkish NGO member describes the tour as follows: "It was a total failure. The National Parks representatives were suspicious of the purpose of the tour from the very beginning. The Vice Governor simply did not care. He was hesitant to make any comments, let alone make promises. Nobody even asked a question after the presentation" (Elif, June 23, 2015). This tour made it clear that the environmental governance experiment in the Gediz Delta was coming to an end.

Although the second study tour was a failure according to some participants, the "Integrated Management in the Gediz Delta, Turkey" is still an ongoing project of the Tour du Valat as of 2019. In their newsletter, Tour du Valat researchers argue that

[T]he Gediz Delta project has demonstrated the interest and usefulness of an example of effective close cooperation in a context of multi-cultural

cooperation between the Tour du Valat and other stakeholders in the Mediterranean Basin, where the activities already conducted have provided numerous mutual benefits. Capitalising on this experience, the Tour du Valat intends to develop other pilot sites to contribute to the conservation and/or rehabilitation of Mediterranean wetlands (Tour du Valat, 2015a).

Yet, since the closure of subdistrict municipalities in 2009 and the termination of the management protocol between the İZKUŞ and the Ministry of Forestry and Waterworks in May 2017, which was the official end of the environmental governance model in the Gediz Delta, the project has become a “one-sided endeavour” which is “going nowhere” according to one Turkish scientist who has collaborated with the Tour du Valat since 2007 (Ahmet, May 26, 2015). However, the researchers from the Tour du Valat, in collaboration with their Turkish NGO partners, conducted several studies in the delta as part of this project. These studies also show that growing support for a centralist approach for the conservation of the Gediz Delta wetlands was evident among the policymakers as well as the community members. Comparing the environmental discourses and local people’s perceptions in the conservation in the two deltas, Ernoul and Wardell-Johnson (2015, p. 106) conclude that “the participants in the Rhone Delta prioritized responsibilities for the local population directed through active conservation responses, whereas the participants in the Gediz Delta prioritized responsibilities for governing bodies directed through behavioural responses.” In other words, the long-standing state-centred orientation of nature conservationism in Turkey has not changed significantly despite the efforts of local and international NGOs. However, during the short-lived environmental governance experience in the Gediz Delta, the Tour du Valat played essential roles such as organizing study tours, providing policy actors with key policy ideas, and strengthening the arguments of their Turkish NGO partners with scientific data and discourses. However, as the experiment came to an end in 2017, the involvement of the Tour du Valat was relegated to a symbolic status at best, although the centre continues to work with its Turkish NGO partners.

#### **4.4. Neoliberal Conservation at Work: Ecotourism**

When I asked my participants about how they imagined the future of the Gediz Delta, one keyword appeared again and again in their responses: Ecotourism. The idea of ecotourism seems to have reached a hegemonic status in the delta and shapes the

socio-environmental imaginaries of not only policymakers but also local communities. This hegemonic status, I argue, is a product of the sustained efforts of conservation NGOs, both local and international, and the İZKUŞ. This reflects what Fletcher (2012, p. 302) calls the “growing global endorsement of ecotourism as a universal ‘panacea’ for both conservation and development concerns.” In this section, I explore three completed and one *stillborn* ecotourism projects and activities developed in the delta between 2002 and 2009 and discuss how they fit into a neoliberal conservation framework. I suggest that these ecotourism projects frame local people first and foremost as economic agents and assume that their involvement in conservation efforts requires some sort of financial return. This section demonstrates that even though these projects were not successful in elevating ecotourism to a major economic activity status, which allegedly would provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for delta communities, they contributed to the discursive construction of the Gediz Delta as a “natural treasure” in the public imaginary and an amenity migration destination for urban middle-classes. As a result, they played a role in the remaking of delta socionatures through gentrification and the emergence of a particular peri-urbanity.

Ecotourism represents a critical mechanism in the transition from expert-based preservationism to a community-based conservation model. This new model is centred on the promise of the inclusion of local populations in conservation efforts by offering them financial incentives. It is the most common means of local income generation in this neoliberal approach (Fletcher, 2012) and is a critical element of what Honey (2008, p. 14) calls the “stakeholder theory,” which asserts that “people will protect what they receive value from.” Within a neoliberal conservation framework, ecotourism is seen as “a means of achieving economic growth, community prosperity and biodiversity conservation” (Igoe & Brockington, 2007, p. 433). However, the critics of this framework argue that ecotourism leads “biodiversity or nature to become commodities and natives to become labour” (West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006, p. 257). In that sense, ecotourism functions to spread a market logic, i.e. a “fundamentalist” belief (cf. Block & Somers, 2014) that only the markets can provide the best and most efficient solution to all social, economic, and ecological problems, to new realms within the context of global economic restructuring. Hence, Fletcher (2012) calls it the “master’s tool,” which is imported in local communities by extra-local elites and perpetuates the social, economic, and ecological problems that it claims to solve.

By the global sustainability elite, on the other hand, ecotourism is considered as a “useful tool” within broader strategies towards “sustainable tourism” (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p. 12). Sustainable tourism has entered the agenda of global conservation groups at the Rio Summit in 1992 for the first time, and it involves three main principles: the protection of the environment and biodiversity; respecting host communities, their cultural heritage, and values; and finally, ensuring “viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation” (ibid, p. 11). Citing these principles of sustainable tourism, a Ramsar pamphlet, published with the financial support of the Danone/Evian Fund for Water, suggests that they are “entirely compatible with the Ramsar Convention’s ‘wise use’ principle for wetland management” (Ramsar, 2012). Hence, it is not a surprise that all the supporters of the Ramsar framework, such as policymakers, scientists, and environmental activists that I interviewed enthusiastically advocated for the development of ecotourism in the Gediz Delta.

The delta’s ecotourism “potential” is frequently noted by several stakeholders in the 2007 wetland management plan. The elected officials such as mayors and village leaders (*muhtar*) mention that they would like to see the delta as a tourist destination (Ministry of the Environment and Forestry, 2007, pp. 288 and 298-9). More interestingly, the Izmir Chamber of Commerce (IzTO), an organization which has been known for their anti-conservation stance for decades, seems to change its position during the management plan process. In the plan, the IzTO acknowledges that the delta is an “important tourism investment site,” yet, the chamber also insists that an “environmentally conscious port project” that “follows conservation guidelines” should not be dismissed by other stakeholders (ibid, p. 291). IzTO’s new approach, i.e. revising its environmental vision for the delta by incorporating a conservationist language, demonstrates that ecotourism was already a hegemonic model for the future of the delta by 2007. In fact, ecotourism strategies have been developed by several actors, both local and international, since the designation of the delta as a Ramsar site.

To promote conservation via ecotourism in the delta, a local environmental NGO developed a project, funded by the Nando Peretti Foundation and BirdLife International, in 2003. As part of this first ecotourism project, the NGO organized meetings with private sector actors, opened information booths in the shopping malls to reach out to wealthy

residents of the area, and organized several birding trips to the delta (EgeDoğa, 2004). The final report of the project notes that the informational meetings with the private sector actors “did not emphasize the problems of the delta;” instead, they focused on the ornithological significance of the southern Gediz Delta and “the economic contributions of wetlands” (ibid, p. 7). This project particularly targeted at generating interest among the wealthy residents of Mavişehir neighbourhood adjacent to the Ramsar site. The report cites this neighbourhood as the “most important local community” even though it is located outside of the Ramsar boundaries, and the residents cannot be seen indigenous to the delta.

Mavişehir neighbourhood was built in the 1990s as a gated community with luxury amenities for affluent urbanites (see Chapter 5). Compared to the delta communities whose livelihoods and cultural identities heavily depend on delta ecologies, the “importance” Mavişehir community can only be attributed to the economic, cultural, and social capital that these residents possess. In fact, when the NGO and its partners developed literature about the ecologies and economies of the delta, they put a particular emphasis on the south-eastern, i.e. more urbanized, parts of the area. For instance, a brochure about a small fishing community located in Mavişehir was produced with no reference to the larger and older fishing communities within the delta. Similarly, the project’s final report does not mention any collaboration with local populations or any reach-out activities in the delta villages. During one of my visits to the area in 2015, I attended a fishing festival organized by another environmental NGO in Mavişehir. When I talked to NGO members and environmental activists during the event, they all mentioned that it was a “perfect” location to reach out to the “general public” as it was a popular place for Mavişehir residents to take a walk. As Igoe and Brockington (2007) argue, ecotourism promises to promote environmental consciousness for western (in my case, urbanized and affluent) consumers by “encouraging them to fall in love with the environment through direct connections to it” (p. 434). Similarly, this project aimed to generate awareness about the ecological significance of the delta among urbanites to strengthen conservationist arguments in public discussions and to develop a socio-environmental imaginary of the delta as an ecotourism and bird watching destination for affluent groups.

Another activity as part of this project was the visits of two Tour du Valat experts and the International Education Manager of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Birds

(RSPB) to the delta. The RSPB representative met the Vice Governor of Izmir and the members of the İZKUŞ and provided recommendations for the improvement of the activities of the existing visitor centre in the delta (EgeDoğa, 2004, p. 13). This visit also signifies the beginning of a more specific project. The Turkish NGO partnered with the RSPB to produce a “publicity and visitor strategy for the Gediz Delta” in 2005. Supported by the İZKUŞ, this second ecotourism project was instrumental in the preparation of information boards, signs, maps, and brochures for visitors. Based on the recommendations of the RSPB experts, the project produced a series ecotourism activities targeting three distinct groups such as guided tours and lectures for decisionmakers; “adventure hikes,” storytelling, bird watching activities for general public, particularly for children and families; and more specialized events for professional groups such as businesspeople, birdwatchers, and scientists (Arik et al., 2005). Almost all the official brochures printed and distributed by the İZKUŞ between 2006 and 2016, and most of the boards and signs that can be seen in the area today are the products of this project (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). The project team also proposed two walking routes for visitors in the delta and recommended an international festival, photography tours, short videos, and bird statues around the city to increase the publicity of the delta.



Figure 4.5. An information board about a delta bird species, dalmatian pelican.  
Source: Author.



Figure 4.6. An information board about the conservation statuses and borders of the delta.  
Source: Author.

Overall, the second project's final report frames the delta as a "natural treasure" that can serve the urban populations as a recreational and educational site, and it has been a critical document to plan the future publicity activities of the İZKUŞ. The project refers to the "economic potential" of the development of ecotourism in the delta in several cases, but it does not include any specific income-generating activities for local communities. Yet, it is suggested that, in a "trickle-down" fashion, the increased number of visitors in the delta would benefit local communities economically as tourists would shop at local stores. The 2005 project, as a product of a partnership between local and international environmental NGOs and a local governmental agency, echoes globally hegemonic ecotourism arguments (Ojeda, 2008) and the socio-economic assumptions of what Honey (2008) calls, "stakeholder theory." The proponents of ecotourism through the activities proposed in this project claim that biodiversity conservation, community prosperity and economic growth can be achieved simultaneously without compromising the priorities of any stakeholders. They suggest that all actors gain: Habitats and birds survive through conservation, urban families enjoy the great outdoors, and local communities make money. Nevertheless, the project does not mention how local people see and feel about the proposed transformation of the traditionally productivist landscapes to recreational landscapes for the pleasure of tourists. It is assumed that since the project promises some sort of income generation through increased tourist activity in the delta, the villagers would happily participate in this conservation model.

The most inclusive ecotourism project developed in the delta was Doğa's "A Sustainable Tourism Plan for the Gediz Delta" project in 2007-8. It was the most "inclusive" one because, unlike the previous ecotourism projects which aimed to attract wealthy urbanites to the delta, this project was concerned with producing ecotourism avenues in the villages with the involvement of local populations. Doğa, a recognized NGO stakeholder in the Gediz Delta Management Plan, collaborated with Seyrek and Sasalı municipalities to develop a "sustainable tourism plan" for the delta villages with the financial support received from national and European development agencies (Doğa Derneği, 2009, p. 6). In fact, it was the first public-private partnership project developed in the delta within the context of the 2007 management plan. The NGO hired a tourism consultant and organized numerous meetings with a wide variety of actors in the delta and the broader city, such as private schools in the area, industrial and trade groups, the representatives of the tourism sector, local people and municipalities. An NGO member

who played an active role in the development and execution of this project told me that it was through these meetings, several influential actors were convinced that ecotourism would benefit everyone involved without compromising the broader goal of conserving the delta wetlands and species (Elif, June 23, 2015). In other words, one of the intended outcomes of the project was to elevate ecotourism to a major economic activity status in the delta.

To incorporate local people into this desired ecotourism model, the NGO started with the restoration of the buildings, including community centres, coffee shops, and some houses in the entrance of Sasalı.<sup>28</sup> It was believed that the restoration of the buildings would not only generate sympathy for the project but also attract ecotourists to the village. The assumption was that ecotourists such as families from other parts of the city, birdwatchers, cyclists would spend more time and leave tourist monies in the village if they found it inviting. To this end, NGO members and environmentalist volunteers painted the façade of these buildings in order to create a more “aesthetically pleasing” village impression. This activity aptly publicized as “the colours of the Gediz Delta are coming to life in Sasalı.” It also aimed to “improve the relationship between people and the delta;” hence, “the blue of the Aegean Sea, the white of salt, and the yellow of corn are selected” (Doğa Derneği, 2009, p. 9) to paint the buildings. An NGO member told me that this restoration activity was a turning point for how locals viewed the conservationist groups:

They understood that there was something in conservation for them too. We had always been successful in lobbying, legal activism, mobilizing the media etc. But we were desperately in need of local support. That was our primary goal in [developing] this project. We wanted to connect with the locals. We painted their houses, the tables at the coffee shop. (...) In the end, we were dancing at a wedding in the village. We became very close” (Elif, June 23, 2015).

In fact, this activity was still fondly remembered by the villagers that I talked after eight years. In other words, after decades of conflict between the environmentalists, particularly the representatives of an expert-based conservation approach, and the local populations, a conservationist group was finally welcomed in the village.

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that similar agro- and ecotourism projects were developed throughout Turkey in the 2000s (Akpınar, Talay, Ceylan, Gündüz, 2005; Açıksöz, Görmüş, & Karadeniz, 2010).

Another aspect of this project which intended to encourage the local people to participate in and support the ecotourism agenda was the handicraft courses offered by the NGO. The project report describes these courses as “inspired by the delta’s nature” and aimed to “create employment and income opportunities particularly for local women” as well as help them socialize and build confidence (Doğa Derneği, 2009, pp. 9-11). To this end, 70 women from Seyrek and Sasalı villages took hairdressing, jewelry making, ceramics, wood painting, fabric dyeing classes for a period of eight months and received a ministry approved certificate for their training at the end. The NGO also offered free childcare services during the classes to increase the number of participants. Some participants, with the logistic support of the NGO, started to open booths to sell their handicrafts to the visitors at the village square. The director of the project also mentioned that this project was the first one, which offered an income opportunity to the local women and particularly included a gender aspect in the project design. Ecotourism’s so-called empowering dimensions for women, particularly in assuming new roles outside of the household and engaging in income-generating activities, have been noted in several studies (Scheyvens, 2000; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Trans & Walter, 2014). Yet, as I discuss in the next chapter, handicraft bazaars do not change power relations in the village much. On the contrary, with the arrival of amenity migrants and their involvement in the development of ecotourism in the delta, this type of tourism-related events and activities reproduce the existing social and economic divisions among villagers and new-comers.

These two aspects of the 2007-8 project, i.e. the restoration of village buildings and handicraft classes for local women, alongside the field trips for travel agents and tourist guides organized by the NGO to increase the public visibility of the delta’s “ecotourism potential” attracted media attention as well (*Cihan News Agency*, 2007a; 2007b). This increased publicity of the delta encouraged some for-profit companies to partner up with environmentalist NGOs to develop new ecotourism projects. For instance, right after the 2007-8 project was completed, Ben and Jerry’s, a popular ice cream company, approached Doğa and stated their “keen interest” in the activities of the NGO in the delta (Elif, June 23, 2015). Doğa and the company, with the endorsement of the İZKUŞ, developed a “social responsibility project” that aimed to increase further the public awareness regarding the ecological significance of the delta wetlands and generate ecotourism incomes for local people (Özkan, 2009a, 2009b). The presidents of the

İZKUŞ and Doğa, as well as the branding director of Ben and Jerry's, officially started the project with a press conference at İZKUŞ's visitor centre in January 2009. It was planned to be a two-year project funded by a not-specified percentage of the revenues generated from the company's "fair trade" products (Ihlas News Agency, 2009). However, the project ended before it actually began at the promotion stage. Following the press conference, Ben and Jerry's publicized its partnership with the conservationists in the Gediz Delta through newspapers and advertisement boards throughout the city. When it was time to unfold the project activities on the ground, the company informed the NGO that there was no money left in the budget to undertake Doğa's conservation and ecotourism plans in the delta (Elif, June 23, 2015). Hence, I call this project a *stillborn*: an ecotourism project that only served the marketing purposes of a for-profit company, with no single conservation-related activity being realized.

Apart from these three completed and one stillborn ecotourism projects, the İZKUŞ, particularly during the presidency of Nurgül Uçar, sought the ways to put the delta on the maps of birdwatching tourism. Perhaps the most frequently appeared idea was to create an ornithological research centre in one of the villages and turn some villages homes into tourist accommodations. Former mayors of both Sasalı and Seyrek described this idea to me as their "dream project." My environmentalist participants also mentioned how "exciting" that idea was. Doğa and the İZKUŞ even worked on a project plan that would include a Tour du Valat-like centre in 2005; however, the NGO stepped down from the project when they realized there was no budget available (Elif, June 23, 2015). Similarly, organizing an annual delta festival with rotating themes such as traditional fishing, salt production, and wetland birds, to attract national and international tourists to the delta was another unrealized idea.

The projects I discussed above generated minimal success in elevating ecotourism to an important economic sector status in the delta. Yet, ecotourism is still an attractive idea and continues to influence the socio-environmental imaginaries of all major actors in the delta. Some villagers told me that they would like to see *boutique* hotels in their village that "would create employment for local people" (Ali, June 18, 2015). Former municipal decisionmakers still talk about an international festival (Veli Kasap, June 4, 2015; Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015); it even appeared in the platforms of mayoral candidates for Çiğli during the 2019 local elections (*Izmir Gündemi*, 2019). All amenity migrant/new-comer

participants also told me that they would like to see Sasalı become an ecotourism destination. They also mentioned that they had not been aware of the area until the mid-2000s, even though they had grown up in Izmir. Although the delta can hardly be considered as an ecotourism hotspot today, the sustained efforts of the İZKUŞ and partnering NGOs during the 2002-2008 period have popularized the delta among urban communities through the construction of the delta as a “natural treasure” in public imaginary. The delta frequently appeared in local and national newspapers and travel magazines as a touristic site for those who would like to take a break for the city’s chaos (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2007; *Milliyet*, 2008) and was included in the city’s official tourist guides. I do not suggest that these projects singlehandedly transformed the delta into what I define as consurbia. I argue that these projects contributed to the making of consurbia as they created a “positive” image of conservation for local communities and made extra-local affluent groups aware of a conservation space only half an hour away from the city centre. Some of those who learned about the natural amenities that the delta had to offer chose to buy land and/or houses in the delta later in the 2000s. As a result, these projects, whether intendedly or unintendedly, contributed to the framing of the delta as an amenity migration destination.

What is left unmentioned in this ecotourism talk is the loss of traditional recreational activities in the delta. The hegemonic ecotourism discourse is centred around the experience and expectations of a distant tourist. It is based on the view of the local environment, species, and scenery as commodities for the tourist consumption and local people as servers for those who are willing to leave some tourist monies in the area (West et al., 2006; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). The neoliberal ecotourism model that was popularized in the delta, through realized or unrealized projects, aimed to serve the recreational needs of extra-local groups and promised some financial returns for delta populations. Yet, the Gediz Delta has always been a recreational area for local people. My local participants who grew up in the delta told me that they learned how to swim in the lagoons of the delta; they fished with their friends; they rode their bikes through the old river-bed; they remembered having picnics with their families and watching flamingos and other delta birds from a distance, long before the arrival of neoliberal conservation policy and practices (Buket, June 16, 2015; Özcan, June 21, 2015; Semra Aksu, July 2, 2015; Osman, July 15, 2015; Okan, July 15, 2015; Sedat, July 15, 2015). Today, local people have no access to the lagoons as they are used for research purposes by a local

university; recreational fishing is not allowed, and only a limited number of certified fishers have access to the shores; biking and picnicking are regulated within designated areas. In short, using the delta for recreational purposes is not a recent phenomenon; however, the ecotourism model of the early 2000s prioritizes the needs and expectations of visitors, and more recently, the socio-environmental imaginaries of exurbanites, over the traditional recreational activities of local people.

## 4.5. Concluding Remarks

Blurring the so-called urban-rural divide, peri-urban areas demonstrate a heterogeneous mixture of urban, rural, and natural landscapes. They are hybrid spaces, characterized by the co-existence of often competing social groups, socio-economic activities, administrative structures, ecological relationships, and land-use patterns. Nevertheless, within this heterogeneity, one particular sociomorphology and the socio-ecological relations that produce it may shape the making and remaking of the other sociomorphologies and landscapes that together constitute the peri-urbanity in that area. For instance, farming sociomorphologies appear as the defining feature of Richmond's landscape, on the periphery of Vancouver, BC, creating a peri-urbanity that Newman et al. (2015) call "agriburbia." In many East Asian cases, particularly on the outskirts of Chinese cities, emerging peri-urban landscapes are characterized by the rise of industrial landscapes (Webster, 2002). Informal settlements have been the main feature of the peri-urbanization in the cities of the Global South such as Bahir Dar, Ethiopia (Adam, 2014), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (Kombe, 2005), in Lima, Peru (Allen, 2014, pp. 525-6) among others. In post-socialist Bulgaria, Hirt (2007) suggests, peri-urban growth has been driven by the housing developments for affluent groups. In this chapter, I have presented a different story, suggesting that the main characteristic of contemporary peri-urban landscapes of the Gediz Delta is the conservation spaces, alongside the residential and industrial developments while agriculture continues to be an important socio-economic activity (see next chapter). In other words, the creation of conservation zones has become a crucial mechanism of "appropriating uncaptured nature" (Moore, 2015) in the Gediz Delta.

The conservation spaces in the Gediz Delta were first produced during the 1980s within the context of the then-dominant strictly preservationist model. Thanks to the efforts of a

group of conservation scientists, the delta was discovered as a “bird paradise,” and some parts of the delta, mainly breeding sites of delta waterbirds were fenced off for scientific research and habitat preservation purposes. I have argued that this process alienated local communities who lost their traditional grazing, fishing, and recreational areas to conservation. However, since they did not particularly redefine socio-ecological relations within a market framework, the nature preservation efforts of this early period cannot be seen necessarily as a manifestation of neoliberal conservation. However, in the twenty-first century, the conservation of the Gediz Delta ecosystems has evolved through a neoliberal conservation model, based on the assumption that nature conservation can, and should, be achieved by and through the production of socionatures as commodities. The delta socionatures had been produced within the context of broader political-economic developments since the integration of the region with the capitalist world-economy in the late nineteenth century (see Chapter 3). Yet, the rearticulation of socio-ecological relations through market-oriented nature conservation to make and remake delta socionatures is a novel approach in the twenty-first century.

Starting from the designation of the delta as a “wetland of international importance” and the concomitant developments such as the establishment of an environmental governance structure constituted by local municipalities, local and international environmental NGOs, private actors, and delta communities, the delta landscapes were reconstructed as ecologically *but also* economically valuable socionatures. This neoliberal model, which was shaped by the globally dominant wetland conservation framework of the Ramsar Convention, introduced a new set of socio-ecological relationships, practices, and imaginaries to the delta. As the value of the delta socionatures was redefined in relation to money-making opportunities they presented, local people were assumed to be economically rational actors, motivated primarily by financial incentives such as ecotourist monies. With its normative assumptions about socio-ecological relationships and the local-international partnerships it was based on, the short-lived environmental governance experience in the Gediz Delta, produced several ecotourism projects in the early 2000s. I have suggested that although these projects failed to elevate ecotourism as a significant economic activity status in the delta, they largely contributed to the reconstruction of a socio-environmental imaginary within which the Gediz Delta emerged a “desirable” place to live for natural amenity-seeking urban middle-classes. The institutionalization of a neoliberal conservation model in the

twenty-first century has become a driver of residential developments and facilitated the making of the Gediz Delta as consurbia, a peri-urban form within which conservation policies become the dominant mode of production of space. The next chapter deals with this process and discusses the making and remaking of the socionatures at the intersection of conservation and urbanization.

## Chapter 5.

### Peri-Urbanization in the Gediz Delta: Where Nature Conservation Meets Gentrification

The previous chapter examined the “rediscovery” of the Gediz Delta in the post-1980 period as an ecologically significant habitat to be protected. I discussed how the changing conservation regimes have produced particular socio-natures in the delta. Today, conservation spaces constitute a crucial element of the Gediz Delta landscapes. Nevertheless, the making and remaking of the delta socio-natures in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is not limited to the implementation of nature conservation models and policies. Conservation policies of this period have been a central driving force behind the peri-urbanization in the delta. Peri-urbanization, as defined by Webster (2002, p. 5), is “a process in which rural areas located on the outskirts of established cities become more urban in character, in physical, economic, and social terms, often in piecemeal fashion.” In other words, it is “a specific form of urbanization characterized by rapid and fragmented growth” (Kontgis et al., 2014, p. 377). Blurring the so-called divide between the city and the countryside, peri-urban areas are characterized by co-existence of urban and rural features, mixed land-use patterns, highly diverse social compositions, and unclear instructional structures and boundaries (Maconachie, 2007) or what Allen (2003) calls a “heterogeneous mosaic” of natural ecosystems, agroecosystems, and urban ecosystems. Peri-urban areas are not simply a “zone of transition,” rather, they constitute a “new kind of multi-functional territory” (Ravetz et al., 2013, p. 13). These areas are “in continuous flux and transition” (ibid., p. 14), meaning that their heterogeneity, ambiguity, dynamism, and rapid changes that they experience are their key features.

In administrative terms, peri-urban areas fall within multiple jurisdictions, each with different financial and technical capacities, and they usually experience progressive incorporation of small towns and villages into larger and complex metropolitan municipal systems (Aguilar, 2008, p. 133). When it was first mentioned in an urban planning document, the Izmir Master Plan, in 1973, the Gediz Delta had nine villages (Günerli, Kaklıç, Kesik, Maltepe, Sasalı, Seyrek, Süzbeyli, Tuzçullu, and Ulucak), all included within the administrative boundaries of the Menemen Municipality, and had a population

of approximately 17,000. A year after the plan was approved, Sasalı was separated from Menemen and included, as a subdistrict, within in the Karşıyaka Municipality; in 1985 Kaklıç experienced the same process. As the 1984 Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 3030 established a two-tier municipal system in large cities such as Izmir, an upper-level metropolitan municipality also became an actor in the delta (Gül, 2016, pp. 340-1). When the Çiğli district, formerly a subdistrict of Karşıyaka, gained its own municipal city status in 1992, both Sasalı and Kaklıç were included in its boundaries. In the same year, Seyrek became a subdistrict with its own municipality within Menemen. As a result, at the turn of the century, subdistrict municipalities (Sasalı and Seyrek), district municipalities (Çiğli, Menemen, Foça, and Karşıyaka) and the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality were key administrative players in the delta.

As I noted in the previous chapter, since some parts of the delta were designated as nature conservation zones in the 1980s, several agents of the central government have emerged as influential actors in the everyday management of the delta. Among these were the Provincial Environment and Forestry Directorate, the General Directorate for Nature Conservation and Natural Parks, and the State Hydraulic Works. This network of local, provincial, and national actors has become more complicated when the Gediz Delta was included in Turkey's "wetlands of international importance" list in 1998. The designation of the delta as a Ramsar Site led to the establishment of the Union for the Protection and Development of the Izmir Bird Paradise (İZKUŞ), whose members were the provincial governorship, and the district and subdistrict municipalities in 2003. Yet, by Law No. 5747 on the Establishment of Districts within the Borders of Metropolitan Municipalities, some subdistrict municipalities of large cities were shut down and annexed to the nearest district municipality as neighbourhoods in 2008 (Republic of Turkey, 2008; Tekel, 2016). As a result, the communities of Sasalı and Seyrek lost their representation in the İZKUŞ. The İZKUŞ itself lost its authority over the management of conservation zones as the protocol between the union and the Ministry of Forestry and Waterworks was terminated in 2017. Nevertheless, the İZKUŞ played an essential role in the remaking of delta socionatures and peri-urbanization through nature conservation during this short-lived experience of environmental governance in the Gediz Delta.

Webster (2002) identifies four drivers of peri-urbanization, particularly in developing countries. These are the rise of manufacturing sector thanks to foreign direct investments; large scale public infrastructural investments such as the construction of

ports, highways and railroads; availability of relatively cheap labour; and residential developments as “middle- and upper-middle-class groups may purchase and live in residences in peri-urban areas even though they do not work in the area” (Webster, 2002, p. 11). Indeed, early discussions around peri-urbanization processes were centred on the “heterogeneous and fast-changing socio-economic makeup” in peri-urban areas where “subsistence farmers, informal settlers, industrial entrepreneurs, and urban middle-class commuters often coexist in the same territory, but with different and competing interests” (Allen, 2014, p. 523). Furthermore, Allen (ibid) argues that peri-urban areas are also seen as the “backyard of the city” by urban policymakers as unwanted land-use activities, such as landfills, bus depots, water treatment plants, are often located in these areas. The first wave of peri-urbanization in the Gediz Delta in the 1980s and 1990s was, in fact, characterized by the establishment of industrial zones and urban infrastructural facilities as well as the rise of housing developments for both low-income families and urban middle-classes.

Whereas the fragmented but progressive expansion of built environments is a significant factor in the transformation of contemporary peri-urban landscapes, in many cases, this process is accompanied by emerging urban sustainability discourses. Allen (2014, p. 523) argues that “nowadays, debates over what and how peri-urban areas should be are not merely formulated in relation to their social and economic functions but increasingly also in the light of their environmental values.” In fact, there is a growing literature on the ecological importance of peri-urban areas, particularly in terms of the roles they play in mediating climate change (Lwasa et al., 2014; Padgham et al., 2015) and providing ecosystem services (Lee et al., 2015; Harman & Choy, 2011; Vejre et al., 2010). As the environmental values of peri-urban areas have become more recognizable, the question of how to regulate these ecosystems entered the policy agendas of conservation actors. Several models and tools have been developed to conserve peri-urban habitats and biodiversity (Snep et al., 2006; Lantz et al., 2013; Owino et al., 2012). As a result, environmental policies and sustainability discourses have become an essential aspect of contemporary peri-urbanization processes. The environmental governance experience and the remaking of socionatures through nature conservation policies in the Gediz Delta between 2003 and 2017 correspond to this aspect of current transformations of peri-urban landscapes.

Within this context, Allen (2014, p. 525) suggests, the “greening of gated communities,” i.e., the emergence of residential enclaves for natural amenity-seeking middle-classes in peri-urban areas, becomes one of the key devices that is “widely adopted and/or increasingly regarded as apt to regulate the social metabolism of nature in the peri-urban context.” The peri-urbanization of the Gediz Delta since the designation of the area as a “wetland of international importance” and the application of a neoliberal conservation model has triggered the emergence of such “green gated communities” in the area. I suggest that the peri-urbanization in the Gediz Delta in the 2000s has taken a particular form, which is conceptualized here as “conservation-led gentrification.” Conservation-led gentrification is a type of environmental gentrification—the social and ecological transformation of formerly neglected areas through real-estate investments and in-migration of wealthy residents that are facilitated by urban sustainability/greening discourses and plans (Pearsall, 2018). Many studies have identified “environmental gentrification catalysts” (see Pearsall, 2018 for a review) such as bike infrastructure (Lubitow et al., 2016; Lugo, 2015), brownfield cleaning up initiatives (Checker, 2015; Curran & Hamilton, 2012), parks and green recreational spaces (Gould & Lewis, 2012, 2016; Littke, Locke, and Haas, 2016; Millington, 2015), waterfront redevelopments (Bunce 2009; Lim et al., 2013), and community gardening and urban farming (Braswell, 2018; McClintock, 2018; Reynolds, 2015). However, nature conservation policy and practices as a gentrification culprit is mostly overlooked by critical gentrification scholars. Since nature conservation spaces are generally located outside of the *city proper*, the “cityist” methodology (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015) has not allowed urban political ecology scholars to explore how nature conservation meets gentrification. The analysis in this chapter aims to bridge this gap.

Conservation-led gentrification also offers a supplementary approach to the dominant approaches in gentrification research, namely market-led (supply-side/production) explanations, which see gentrification as an economic strategy, and gentrifier-led (demand-side/consumption) explanations which highlight the cultural dimensions of social and physical landscape transformations. The first approach, following Neil Smith’s (1979, 1987) rent gap thesis and the theory of uneven development, focuses on the cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment through which market actors, particularly developers, exploit the difference between the “capitalized ground rent,” i.e. actual economic return gained from the use of land, and the “potential ground rent,” i.e.

possible financial gains if the land were put to its “highest and best use” in an area (Lees et al. 2008: 39-69). The latter approach, inspired by Ley (1994, 1996), investigates middle-class ideologies and desires to consume a certain lifestyle, accompanying the broader changes in post-industrial economies as the main factor that contributes to the unfolding of gentrification processes. Many contemporary studies, including the environmental gentrification studies that I noted above, bring these two approaches together and “consider the interplay and mutual constitution of production and consumption” (Lees et al., 2008, p. 74). Nevertheless, there may be other mechanisms that are eventually sidelined by an integrated production-consumption framework. I suggest that nature conservation policies, as they are applied to preserve natural habitats on the outskirts of a city, is such a mechanism that contributes to the making of an area a frontier for gentrification. Yet, it is not fully recognizable from either market-led or gentrifier-led gentrification explanations. Whereas peri-urban areas have long been neglected in the “geographies of gentrification” (Lees, 2000, 2012), this chapter demonstrates that a closer look at socionature-making processes through conservation and urban developments highlights relatively understudied aspects of contemporary gentrification processes. I situate how nature conservation meets gentrification in the Gediz Delta within the broader context of Turkey’s foreign capital fuelled and state-orchestrated “construction boom” and the financialization of the housing market in the 2000s and show its differences from the general trends.

By exploring the processes of socionature-making in the twenty-first century Gediz Delta, particularly the emergence of gated communities on formerly agricultural lands and the production of environmental amenities such as parks and forests, I argue that nature conservation policies, with accompanying changes in zoning plans, simultaneously create rent gaps in the area while tickling middle-class desires and perceptions, especially those about “natural beauties,” “scenic landscapes,” “authentic lifestyle” and so on. In other words, it was not necessarily a period of disinvestment and devaluation of properties in the delta that created an opportunity for real estate capital to “close” rent gaps to realize profits. It was the arrival of nature conservation policy to the delta and the designation of certain areas as conservation zones that have made the area attractive for developers. As conservation measures have gradually formed the main management framework and given the delta a new identity in social imaginary since the 1980s, it was again nature conservation policies that put the Gediz Delta in the

mental maps of middle-class gentrifiers as a desirable place to live. To recapitulate, neither market actors (supply-side) nor gentrifiers (demand-side) “led” gentrification processes in the Gediz Delta; instead, both have followed and been shaped by conservation policies. Nonetheless, my analysis of conservation-led gentrification in the Gediz Delta does not refute or downplay the role of developers’ economic strategies and the lifestyle preferences of gentrifiers. Instead, as a supplementary approach, conservation-led gentrification highlights how these strategies and preferences have been influenced by and developed with reference to conservation policies.

The existing literature that focuses on the intersection of conservation policies and housing developments in peri-urban areas highlights the role of emerging growth coalitions of local governments and developers in the unfolding of conservation policies. For instance, Hudalah et al. (2016) focus on how real estate actors take advantage of the institutional ambiguity in peri-urban Bandung City, Indonesia, to push forward a particular socio-environmental agenda. Similar to the gentrification of the Gediz Delta villages, the authors argue that it is not the previous cycles of investment and disinvestment or lifestyle-related concerns and desires of middle classes that have “led” gentrification processes in peri-urban Bandung City (*ibid*). Yet, the case of conservation-led gentrification in the Gediz Delta differs from their case in several ways. First, Hudalah et al. (2016) demonstrate that private actors were on board with the environmental revitalization project in Bandung City from the very start; in fact, they largely influenced the local government’s decision to “revitalise Punclut’s ecological function” through a public-private partnership focusing on residential and agro-tourism developments. This is not the case in the Gediz Delta, where capital groups first negatively reacted to the designation of the delta as a conservation zone (see Chapter 4). Second, the revitalization project in Hudalah et al.’s case (2016) was supported by local villagers who were hoping to gain tenure for their traditional land when the local government and real-estate actors developed the project; nevertheless, the villagers were eventually “alienated by the growth coalition” (p. 603). In my case, the villagers of the Gediz Delta were against the idea of conservation in the early stages as many lost their grazing and hunting areas as well as their access to the shores, but they gradually became “involved” in the conservation process and developed several strategies to benefit from the reconceptualization of the delta as a “wetland of international importance.” Furthermore, the conservation-led gentrification of the Gediz Delta is not

limited to residential developments; it also includes the rebranding of ecological elements of the delta and incorporating them into city-marketing strategies as well as the production of new socionatures in the form of environmental amenities for recreational consumption.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines the early wave of peri-urbanization in the delta during the 1980s and 1990s. This period was characterized by the inclusion of the delta in metropolitan master plans as the expansion of the city was directed towards the north. The delta was envisioned as an area suitable for industrial zones, landfills, and housing developments to absorb the growing population of the city. Housing cooperatives, supported by newly emerging governmental funding channels, played a key role in the peri-urbanization of the delta in this period. Furthermore, as the delta entered the socio-environmental imaginary of affluent Izmirites with the creation of preservation zones, gated communities began to emerge in adjacent areas, outside the conservation boundaries. I discuss how the first experimentations with the “greening of gated communities” (Allen, 2014, p. 525) set the tone for the gentrification processes in the 2000s.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the gentrification processes in one particular delta village, Sasalı. Unlike the housing projects of the 1990s, which were built on formerly unused, municipality-owned lands by housing cooperatives, the gated communities in the 2000s emerged at the heart of the villages and developed mainly by private companies. Although other villages in the delta also went through some degree of urbanization during the 2000s, Sasalı has experienced a pronounced gentrification, shaped by conservation discourse and practices, especially in terms of the transformation of social and environmental landscapes, social upgrading with the immigration of affluent exurbanites, the direct or indirect displacement of villagers, and the loss of traditional livelihoods. The village had a population of 3,564 in 2000 and demonstrated traditional rural characteristics: Most people were employed in agricultural and extractive sectors with low unemployment rate and educational levels (Özbek Sönmez & Onmuş, 2007). The entire village had a “natural protected site of first-degree of importance” status, which strictly limited any new residential developments in the area. Yet, a new zoning plan, ironically called the “zoning plan for (nature) conservation” (*koruma amaçlı imar planı*) prepared by the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality in 2001, effectively turned the village into a speculative real estate haven. The gated communities

in the village emerged as the productive agricultural spaces were converted to residential spaces. The mushrooming of gated communities in the village accompanied by the remaking of delta socio-natures for recreational consumption, such as the production of a “wildlife park” and an “urban forest.” Within this process, the social-economic relations and ecologies in the village have significantly changed.

## **5.1. First Wave of Peri-Urbanization (the 1980s-1990s)**

The Izmir Metropolitan Master Plan of 1973 was a turning point for the peri-urbanization in the Gediz Delta and surrounding areas. It was the first time that a major urban planning document included the delta. The 1973 Plan proposed two industrial zones in the metropolitan region, one of which was the Çiğli-Menemen district to the north, and new residential areas were planned around these industrial zones (Arkon, 2009, pp. 85-6). Concerning the delta, the 1973 Plan also included a proposal for afforestation and recreational areas, an international fair site near the Çamaltı saltpans, and a new industrial port. Nevertheless, the fair and port proposals were dropped as the plan was revised in 1978 (Kaya, 2002, pp. 163-5). With the 1989 revisions, proposed recreational areas were rezoned for residential developments and a wastewater treatment plant (Kaya, 2002, p. 175). By an amendment to the Housing Law in 1970, wetlands had already been included in the lands which could be allocated, assigned, and transferred (Karadeniz et al., 2009, p. 1110). Therefore, the DSI was authorized to drain wetlands not only to open up new agricultural areas but also to create land for housing developments. In short, the delta was envisioned mainly as an industrial zone with the concomitant housing developments in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In this process, the delta experienced an intense peri-urbanization as the land-use patterns have become more heterogeneous with the co-existence of agricultural, industrial, residential areas as well as, starting from 1982, nature conservation zones.

The Metropolitan Municipality Law No. 3030 of 1984 outlined a decentralized and more independent local government approach and delineated municipal duties such as making investment plans and programmes for the city, implementing master zoning plans, executing water, public transportation, and sewage services and coordinating affairs between district and subdistrict (*belde*) municipalities (Özcan, 2000, p. 219). The Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) was established in the same year, and its

administrative boundaries included the settlements in the Gediz Delta. In other words, the IBB became able to plan and control, in coordination with district and subdistrict municipalities, the urban developments in the region. However, most of these infrastructural investments can be understood as “locally unwanted land uses” (LULU). LULUs refer to facilities whose sitting is undesired and resisted by local communities because of the perceived health, safety or environmental risks associated with them (Mason, 2006, pp. 284-5). Some examples are hazardous waste repositories, landfills, prisons, water treatment centres, and power plants. LULUs are frequently concentrated in low socio-economic status areas and minority neighbourhoods (Cutter, 1995). In the case of the Gediz Delta, a LULU conflict over sitting of the solid waste landfill in the Harmandalı area took place during the early stages of peri-urbanization.

The Harmandalı landfill site, covering 90 hectares, was designed and constructed in 1992 as the country’s first municipal sanitary landfill to serve the entire metropolitan area for the next 15 years. Harmandalı, which became a subdistrict municipality in 1992, is adjacent to the delta, with minimal agricultural land. Animal husbandry had been the main economic activity in the village until the late 1980s. The landfill site was previously owned by the Turkish Treasury and used by the villagers of Harmandalı as an animal dung drying field. It was transferred to the Metropolitan Municipality at almost no cost, and some privately-owned adjacent areas were expropriated (Buekens, 1999, p. 32). Although the public resistance was non-existent during the site selection process, starting from the late 1990s and especially after the construction of mass housing projects and villa-type luxury housing developments in the surrounding areas, the new residents of the delta began to raise their concerns regarding to environmental and public health risks of the landfill, including a risk of explosion. They gradually organized a protest movement, albeit with no success (Kaya & Erol, 2016). Local feelings of injustice, as manifested in phrases such as “the garbage dumb of Izmir” (Semra Aksu, July 2, 2015) and the references to occasional bad smells in the area, frequently came up in my interviews. Almost all residents that I interviewed, including local policymakers, mentioned a perceived “mistreatment of the local people” by higher authorities, especially by the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality.

Nonetheless, the critical urban development in and around the Gediz Delta was the mushrooming of housing projects during the 1990s. As the Turkish economy entered a neoliberalization period following the 1980 military coup, a new set of institutions and

regulations emerged that aim to restructure the economy. In terms of housing and construction sector, which would be a central aspect of neoliberal development model in the following years, one of the principal agents of this new period was TOKİ (*Toplu Konut İdaresi*, Mass Housing Development Administration), established in 1984, following the amendments to the Mass Housing Law, to meet housing needs of ever-growing cities in the post-1980 period mainly through transferring public land to private developers. Between 1984 and 2002, TOKİ acted as a facilitator and mainly subsidized small players in the housing sector. However, TOKİ was restructured by the AKP government in 2003 and became the most prominent developer and land broker as well as the most significant housing finance agency in the country (more on this in the next section).

TOKİ, alongside the Real Estate and Credit Bank of Turkey (*Emlak Bankası*), emerged as the main governmental institutions that provided subsidized loans for residential developments in the 1980s and 1990s (Bedirhanoğlu et al., 2013). One of the primary beneficiaries of these new funding channels in this period was housing cooperatives. For instance, between 1984 and 2005, TOKİ financed 1,051,000 dwelling units, 944,000 of them were cooperative houses (Bedirhanoğlu et al., 2013, p. 309). Housing cooperatives in Turkey emerged in the 1950s as a means for middle-income families to reach homeownership. Yet, their role in housing provision started to accelerate with the establishment of the above-mentioned government funding channels in the 1980s. Buğra (1998, p. 308) cites that “of the total number of housing cooperatives founded between 1941 and 1991 (approximately 28,307), 79% originate from the post-1980 period.” In fact, while these cooperatives supplied 8.7 percent of total units in 1980, their share in total housing supply increased to 25.2 percent in 1990 (Özdemir, 2011, p. 1103). Housing cooperatives played an essential role in the suburbanization and peri-urbanization of Turkish cities in this period. The emergence of housing projects in and around the Gediz Delta during the 1990s is directly related to this growing presence of housing cooperatives in the Turkish construction sector. Two types of cooperative housing in the delta began to arise in this period: Mass housing developments for low- and middle-income families, and high-rise condominiums and gated communities with villa-type detached homes in a garden for upper-middle-income families.

First, mainly to absorb a new wave of migration to Izmir from the eastern provinces of Turkey in the post-1980 period, a series of mass housing projects emerged in the

surrounding area. Izmir, as one of the most prosperous cities of the country with industrial employment opportunities as well as a large informal sector, had received thousands of internal migrants from less-developed parts of the country since the 1950s. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the main push factor for migration was the mechanization of agriculture and the increasing rural unemployment in Izmir's hinterland. Izmir, especially the districts around the delta, also received migrants from eastern provinces following two big earthquakes in the late 1960s. During this period, squatter houses (*gecekondus*) have been built at the city peripheries, as the population of Izmir grew from approximately 360,000 in 1950 to over 1 million in 1980 (Sönmez, 2007, p. 327).

In the post-1980 period, this migration trend changed, and Izmir received thousands of migrants from the eastern and south-eastern regions of the country. As the armed conflict between the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkish state forces escalated, the forced migration from the eastern provinces became the main factor of rural-to-urban mobility; around 1.2 million Kurdish people were forced to migrate from their hometowns during the 1980s, and nearly half of them moved to the western cities of Turkey, including Izmir (Saraçoğlu, 2010, p. 240). The post-1980 migrants first settled in squatter neighbourhoods in the inner areas of the city; however, many of them moved to the neighbourhoods of Çiğli and Menemen districts, particularly Asarlık, Harmandalı, Koyundere, and Ulukent (formerly Ulucak), surrounding the delta, as the emerging housing cooperatives built thousands of units in the area during the 1990s. In 1992, these settlements became subdistrict municipalities as a result of this growth. Two industrial developments in the delta went hand-in-hand with the mushrooming of housing projects. First, the Maltepe Leather Industries Zone, with an employment capacity over 2,000, was established in 1988 on a 164-hectare land between the Seyrek village and the Gediz River. Secondly, in 1990, the Atatürk Organized Industrial Zone (AOSB) was opened on a total area of 700 hectares in the Çiğli district. The AOSB, where approximately 37,000 people are employed currently, has gradually become the largest industrial zone in the region. Thanks to these dual processes of industrial and housing developments, the population of these neighbourhoods grew significantly between 1980 and 2000. For instance, the population of Ulukent doubled from 5,977 to 11,526; and Asarlık's population grew 9-fold and reached 18,045 in 2000 (Kaygalak, 2006, p. 83).

The second type of housing developments in and around the delta during the same period was the emergence of high-rise and villa-type gated communities for upper-middle-income groups. As the delta gained a new status as a “natural treasure” in social imaginary, state-backed housing cooperatives chose the area to build luxury homes for the affluent segments of the Izmir population. The first example of high-rise gated communities in Izmir was the suburban Mavişehir neighbourhood. Mavişehir’s current population is approximately 14,000, and it is located on the northern coast of Izmir and borders the Gediz Delta on the north-west. This upper-middle-class neighbourhood, protected by security cameras, guards and gateways, includes high-density housing blocks and a large shopping mall and other urban amenities such as sports centres, playgrounds, and green areas all constructed in the mid-1990s by the cooperatives founded by the Real Estate and Credit Bank of Turkey (Kaba, 2018). The Mavişehir housing blocks were named after the waterbirds of the delta, such as Flamingo Block and Albatross Block. Several signs and boards were put up around the neighbourhood that informed the residents about the conservation statuses and ecological importance of the Gediz Delta. A former resident of Mavişehir, currently living in a gated community in Sasalı, told me that she moved to the area for the “prestige and reputation of the neighbourhood;” she believed that what made neighbourhood unique was first and foremost related to its location because “you can literally watch flamingos from your balcony” (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). The images of the birds were also used in the marketing materials, as the neighbourhood was presented as a “desirable” place for environmentally conscious affluent residents who would have access to urban amenities such as gyms and shopping malls, as well as natural amenities such as protected areas and species. In other words, the delta’s new position in the socio-environmental imaginary as a “bird paradise” was effectively blended with Mavişehir’s suburban characteristics.

While high-rise gated communities such as Mavişehir emerged in the surrounding areas, villa-type detached homes in a garden were built within the delta during the same period. Moving to a detached home in the peripheries of the city has become a class signifier for Turkish upper-middle classes since the late 1980s. Gated communities with villa-type detached homes in a garden first emerged in Istanbul, as residents who “describe themselves as urban, modern, western and secular, and express a strong aversion to urban life in Istanbul, which they found alienating, chaotic, crowded and polluted with an

unpleasant socio-cultural heterogeneity and lacking infrastructure” sought “amenities and services they deem[ed] necessary for ‘civilised’ urban living with a community that share[ed] similar social and cultural capital and aspire[d] to the same lifestyles” (Geniş, 2007, p. 773). Such housing developments guided by middle-class desires, such as “escap[ing] from pollution, street life and social heterogeneity, as well as an emphasis on family intimacy and rule-bound society and order” led to a wave of suburbanization in Ankara during the 1990s (Ayata, 2002). In Izmir, especially after the construction of new transportation networks that connected the downtown core to summer resorts such as Çeşme and Foça, gated communities began to emerge around the expressways (Datta & Yücel Young, 2007).

As the city population increased significantly during the 1980s and 1990s due to immigration particularly from the eastern provinces of the country, long-time affluent Izmirites began to look for the ways to move to the outskirts of the city where they could live within a homogenous, i.e. secular, educated, wealthy, community without sacrificing their urban ties thanks to the new transportation networks. Datta and Yücel Young (2007, p. 43) suggest that “high-end suburban gated developments incorporating luxury houses with gardens in Izmir are visible markers of what it means to be upper middle-class in Turkey.” Focusing on such luxury housing developments in the town of Urla, located 38 kilometres west of Izmir, Datta and Yücel Young (2007) discuss how these new-comers distinguish themselves from the “uncultured town,” i.e. local people and the “polluted city.” Although in the 2000s, a new middle-class sensibility centred around living in a village and building “meaningful relationships with the locals” (Ayşe, June 15, 2015) emerged, the first upper-middle class housing projects with detached homes in a garden were not different than those arose in the other peripheral areas of the city in terms of their isolation from the neighbouring town and villages.

The first upper-middle class housing project in the Gediz Delta was Villakent within the administrative boundaries of the Seyrek Municipality, about five kilometres north-west of the village. As the village became a subdistrict municipality in 1992, the first task for the new mayor and the council was to prepare a zoning plan. Then mayor of Seyrek, Nurgül Uçar, a former journalist who was well-known in the community thanks to her articles about the fisheries of the delta in the late 1980s, explained to me that her vision for the subdistrict had three pillars; these were organic agriculture, ecotourism, and higher education. Whereas she focused on making Seyrek an ecotourism and college town in

the early 2000s by leading the İZKUŞ and facilitating the opening of private high schools and a private university in the delta, Uçar and her team were preoccupied with preparing a zoning plan during her first term in office (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015). She told me that they “discovered” an “empty” public land during the zoning process:

5000-dönüm [500 hectares] of empty land! What should we do with it? If we leave it empty, unused, this is how *gecekondus* emerge; some people will come and build their homes there. First, I wanted to donate the land to the Technology Institute. They were looking for a location for the university at the time. But they decided to build the school in Urla. Fine, what is our second option? Ege-Koop approached us. They presented a proposal: A neighbourhood for hundreds of people, living very close to the village, they will buy their milk, tomatoes, bread from our local people. In return, they will offer free classes to our children in our community centre. Because, you know, teachers will move here, retirees, educated people. And we will be a big community, villagers and new-comers, they will be our people too. That was an ambitious plan because I am an ambitious person. That was our vision, and no surprise, this is precisely what have happened. Villakent was a turning point for us; it showed what kind of a city we wanted to have” (Nurgül Uçar, June 26, 2015).

Ege-Koop, established in 1983, is a housing cooperative and one of the major players in the housing sector in the delta. It was also directly involved in the zoning plan preparation process in Seyrek by providing technical assistance to the newly established municipality, which lacked the technical staff to undertake this task (Sarioglu, 2005, p. 65). The Seyrek municipal council approved the Villakent project in June 1993, and Ege-Koop built a satellite neighbourhood in the following decade. The neighbourhood was advertised as a “place in the arms of nature” to the affluent residents of Izmir and other big cities. The first families, mostly former residents of Karşıyaka, moved to this gated community in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, despite Mayor Uçar’s “ambitious plans,” only a small group of families chose to live in this gated community all year long; the population in 2007 was below 300.

Although the developers and the mayor herself tried to present the neighbourhood as an integral part of Seyrek, the interactions between the villagers and new-comers remained limited. Overall, Villakent has been perceived as a luxurious residential enclave. Nevertheless, the construction of Villakent, as Uçar suggests, was a turning point for the delta. It was the first villa-type gated community in the delta and has become a model for future gated community projects. In the 2000s, when private companies began to buy land to build luxury homes within the delta, they referred to Villakent in two ways. First, it

was a reference point to describe the delta as an up-and-coming area for the wealthy urbanites; secondly, they pointed out the “shortcomings” of Villakent as an isolated place, offering no real contact with local people (Tarık, June 23, 2015). The notion of “authentic village life,” on the other hand, would be an essential aspect of conservation-led gentrification in the 2000s.

## **5.2. “Who doesn’t want to be neighbours to flamingos?” Gentrifying a Delta Village**

To put the housing developments within the delta villages during the early 2000s in the context, it is necessary to explain Turkey’s ruling party, AKP’s “construction-led accumulation strategy” (Yeşilbağ, 2019). As I noted in Chapter 2, Erdoğan’s AKP came to power in 2002, following an economic crisis that had severe consequences including the collapse of the banking sector, the historical increase in the unemployment rate, widespread bankruptcies, and the marginalization of major political parties (Atasoy, 2007; Öniş, 2009). The AKP government fiercely continued to implement the neoliberal structural adjustment programme of the IMF and World Bank, which had been approved by the previous coalition government in the wake of the crisis. As many scholars demonstrate, the “global economic environment of growth and abundance of liquidity” offered the Turkish economy “the possibility of quick recovery via foreign capital inflows” (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 48). In fact, the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) that Turkey received rose from 1 billion USD in 2002 to 22 billion in 2007. As a result, the Turkish economy grew significantly, averaging a noteworthy 7.2 percent annual growth rate (Boratav, 2012, p. 207). The boom in the construction and housing sectors was an essential element of this growth. As Yeşilbağ (2019, p. 10) argues, the AKP deliberately promoted these sectors and adopted a “construction-led accumulation strategy” that “implemented through a comprehensive set of legislative and regulatory changes spanning a wide spectrum ranging from housing finance and mass housing to urban planning, land development, and public procurement, which completely restructured the built environment production scene.”

Rapid economic recovery “fuelled a real estate speculation frenzy and construction boom” (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 48). Balaban (2012, p. 29) cites that the average annual growth rate of GDP share of construction was 11.6 percent for the period of 2001-2007, and the

share of construction in total GDP peaked at 6.5 percent in 2007. FDIs played a vital role in this “construction boom” as the total FDIs in construction and housing sectors jumped to approximately 1 billion USD in 2008 from 6 million USD in 2004, and FDIs in the form of real estate purchase reached 2.94 billion USD in 2008 (Balaban, 2012, p. 30). The increase in the number of dwelling unit permits issued also attests to this growth, which rose from 160 thousand to over 600 thousand between 2002 and 2006 before experiencing a slow decline during the global financial crisis of 2008.<sup>29</sup>

The central government orchestrated the development of this construction boom by undertaking necessary legislative and regulatory steps, which in turn made the public sector a key player in the production of the built environment and encouraged private actors to initiate urban redevelopment projects (Balaban, 2012). In terms of legal arrangements, the AKP government passed 78 laws and 10 by-laws related to the production of built environment between 2002 and 2007, majority of which dealt with the deregulation of housing sector and the commodification of urban and rural lands for housing developments (Balaban, 2012, p. 30; see also Atasoy, 2017; Çavuşoğlu & Strutz, 2014). The legislative changes to support construction and real estate sectors aimed the reallocation of public lands and properties for private investments, relaxing of legal regulations and restrictions on conservation zones to promote private developments, promotion of particular profit-oriented mega-projects, “fast-track planning by suspending or relaxing certain rules and principles of urban development legislation,” “delegation of authority (power) to prepare land-use plans for privatized (sold) public properties,” “relaxing of land selection process for built investments,” and “relaxing of legal regulations and restrictions in legislation on conservation of cultural heritage and natural environment,” among others (for a full list of legislative changes in this period, see Balaban, 2012, p. 31).

One critical development was the reworking of the country’s mass housing agency, TOKİ. With a new legal status, TOKİ was directly linked to the Office of the Prime Minister, its activities were excluded from the general budget, and its contracts gained exemption from the Public Procurement Law, which made it hardly a “public institution” (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 56); in this vein, some scholars prefer the term “superinstitution” to

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<sup>29</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute. Retrieved from [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PrelstatistikTablo.do?istab\\_id=1558](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PrelstatistikTablo.do?istab_id=1558)

describe TOKİ (Yeşilbağ, 2019). Furthermore, it was given authority to develop urban regeneration projects with local governments and “all immovable assets and duties of the former Land Office were transferred to TOKİ, which added 64.5 million square metres of public lands to its portfolio” (Özdemir, 2011, p. 1106; see also Atasoy, 2017, p. 671). As I noted earlier, TOKİ had been established in the 1980s to support small players in the housing sector, mainly cooperatives; yet with these new legal developments, TOKİ’s role was transformed from being a “credit-dispensing mechanism” to the “most powerful contractor and land broker in the country” (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 56). TOKİ projects amounted to 24.7 percent of total housing construction in 2004, attesting to a considerable increase from the previous period, which was only 0.6 percent (Bartu Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2008, p. 17). TOKİ built close to 350,000 housing units by 2008 and most of its projects in this period was concerned with developing low/middle-income housing and relocating displaced communities as a result of urban regeneration projects to newly-elected apartment blocks on the outskirts of cities, mainly in Istanbul, (see Bartu Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2008 for one of the most cited examples). The activities of TOKİ also “inspired local governments and private developers to open peripheral lands to urban development” (Balaban, 2012, p. 33). In other words, TOKİ did not wipe out the small or medium-sized players in the sector; it encouraged them and facilitated their activities.

Apart from restructuring TOKİ, legal developments in this period also included the introduction of the country’s first comprehensive mortgage law in 2007. Known as the “Housing Finance Law” became the “legal basis of securitization and secondary markets, leading to a massive expansion of the mortgage markets” (Yeşilbağ, 2019, p. 10). Whereas low- and middle-income families were provided low-interest-rate mortgages to obtain houses in TOKİ projects (Atasoy, 2017, p. 671), the new law enabled commercial banks to offer long-term high-interest housing credits to more affluent segments of society. Aslan and Dinçer’s (2018) study on the structure of mortgage loans in Turkey shows that only upper-middle-income households were able to obtain mortgages through commercial banks because of a high loan-to-value ratio, which was set at 75 percent by the law in 2007. They also calculate that the average annual interest rate peaked at 22.69 percent in November 2008; although the average interest rate showed a gradual decline in the 2010s, it is still one of the highest in the world (Aslan & Dinçer, 2018, p. 148; see also Erol, 2019, p. 733). Although this newly

established mortgage system was out of the reach of the large segments of society, the total amount of mortgages obtained by individual households jumped to TL140 billion in 2010, accounting to 5 percent of GDP (Yeşilbağ, 2019, p. 16); this figure was only 0.08 percent before 2002 (Kuyucu, 2017, p. 57). Erol also shows that not only households but also construction and real estate companies became heavily indebted in the same period, whose “foreign debt continuously increased from US \$7.2 billion in 2002 to US \$55.9 billion by the end of 2017, which is 7.8 times the 2002 debt level” (2019, p. 732). In short, the Turkish housing sector has gone through intense financialization in the post-2001 crisis period as both producers and consumers began to borrow huge sums of money from domestic and foreign financial institutions.

The housing developments in the Gediz Delta in this period should be seen as a part of these broader processes of commodification of land and financialization of housing which constituted the construction-centred, foreign capital fueled growth model. The mushrooming of gated communities in delta villages took place within the context of the “good business climate” (Balaban, 2012, p. 34) in construction and real estate sectors and was financed by newly emerging credit mechanisms. However, the process in the delta also demonstrates some differences from the general trends of the construction boom of the 2000s. For instance, TOKİ did not play a direct role as a developer in the emergence of gated communities in the delta as they all were built by local private companies which bought formerly agricultural lands in the villages or entered “lands-for-villa exchange deals” with landowning families (for the details of this latter model, see Atasoy, 2017). More importantly, the neoliberal conservation policy and discourses that I outlined in the previous chapter played a fundamental role in the growth of urban developments in the delta. My analysis shows that the delta’s status as a “wetland of international importance” has shaped the socio-environmental imaginaries of all social actors that participate in the making of consurbia, including policymakers, environmentalists, developers, new-comers, and long-time residents. These imaginaries were expressed in the remaking of delta siconatures such as the transformation of agricultural lands into luxury houses, the production of recreational facilities and parks, and the rebranding of delta ecosystems.

In what follows, I focus on the experiences one particular delta village to discuss how conservation policies and urban developments entangle in the remaking of delta siconatures and reorganizing socio-environmental relationships. One of the major

villages and subdistrict municipalities in the delta, Sasalı, has gone through intense urbanization with the emergence of gated communities on formerly agricultural lands during the 2000s. At the turn of the century, the entire village had a “natural protected site of first-degree of importance” status, which strictly limited any residential developments. However, a new zoning plan, called the “zoning plan for (nature) conservation” (*“koruma amaçlı imar planı”*) prepared by the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality in 2001, essentially turned the village into a real estate haven. The mushrooming of gated communities in the village accompanied by the remaking of delta sociocultures for recreational consumption, such as the production of a “wildlife park” and an “urban forest” within the village boundaries. As a result, the social-economic relations and ecologies within the village have significantly changed. I define this process as “conservation-led gentrification.” It was a series of conservation policies and changes in zoning plans created a rent gap in the village and made it attractive for real estate investments; conservation policies also enabled the natural amenity-seeking urbanites to reimagine the village as a refuge from the “chaotic lifestyle” of the city.

### **5.2.1. The Emerging Rent Gap and the Arrival of Amenity Migrants**

The so-called pro-conservation zoning plan was approved by the Provincial Board for the Protection of Natural and Cultural Assets, and the protection status of 550-hectare village land was decreased from the first- to the third-degree in July 2001. This new status, unlike the strict protectionism of the former, permitted residential developments in the area as long as “they consider[ed] a balance between nature protection and development, and maintain[ed] the ecological characteristics of the area” (Izmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2012, p. 120). In practice, this plan meant the commercialization of village lands as low-density residential projects that involved two- or three-storey luxury houses in a garden would be approved by the subdistrict municipality. Whereas some parts of the village were opened to development, the remaining 3,800 hectares in the village and the designated Ramsar site were still under protection. In other words, this new plan created two types of land in the village; one was “untouchable” for conservation purposes, and the other was ready for so-called ecologically conscious development. In other words, since most parts of the village were still under protection, there was an actual limit to residential developments. This limit, in return, made the area that was zoned for development even more valuable. It also contributed to the

attractiveness of the village, because this limit enabled the real estate actors to market the soon-to-be-built luxury houses as “unique opportunities” to those who wanted to live “in the midst of nature” (Tarık, June 23, 2015) without being concerned about unfettered development.

The plan effectively transformed some formerly productive agricultural lands into undercapitalized sites for real estate investment, and Sasalı began to resemble a massive construction site in the following few years. Akyol Altun (2012) suggests that, by the turn of the century, the most profitable lands in western Izmir were already exhausted by developers, and the real estate capital was seeking new investment opportunities in the northern parts of the city where Sasalı, as an “escape island,” was located (p. 6). Following the approval of the “zoning plan for conservation,” to take advantage of the emerging rent gap in Sasalı, several Izmir-based real estate companies started to purchase land from the villagers. Some landowners sold their land to developers at prices previously unheard of in the area (Süreyya, July 23, 2015). Only a few entered a “land-for-villa exchange deal” (Atasoy, 2017) with developers to gain a house in the gated community once the project completed. Those who sold their land to real estate companies were mostly encouraged to do so by the younger family members who were disenchanted by traditional village life and “craving an urban lifestyle” (Buket, June 16, 2015). As a result, several village families moved to more central parts of Izmir in search of urban amenities and Sasalı, once a prosperous agricultural village, experienced a population decrease for the first time in modern history. The number of people living in the village dropped from 3,564 in 2000 to 2,328 in 2007. However, this downward population trend was soon reversed with the arrival of natural amenity-seeking exurbanites.

Until a provincial court terminated the new zoning plan in 2008 on environmental grounds, local private real estate companies built over 600 villa-type, 4 to 7-bedroom houses in Sasalı (Tarık, June 23, 2015). Residential areas grew from 78.5 hectares in 2002 to 128.62 hectares in 2008, accounting for a 60 percent increase in a short period of six years (Ernoul et al. 2012, p. 113). Following these residential developments, the population of the village increased from 2,328 in 2007 to 3,275 in 2012. As of 2018, the population of Sasalı was 3,736<sup>30</sup>, and the entire population

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<sup>30</sup> Turkish Statistical institute. Retrieved from: <https://biruni.tuik.gov.tr/>

increase is attributed to the in-migration of exurbanites to the gated communities in the village. All these new houses were built in 15 gated enclaves; a new residential zone, popularly called *sitelер* (plural form of *site*, a Turkish term refers to a gated community) emerged adjacent to the traditional village and within the administrative boundaries of the subdistrict municipality.<sup>31</sup> Based on my observations in the village and interviews with the participants, not a single traditional village house was purchased by exurbanites in this period. There are two main reasons for this. First, because of the protection status of the village, major constructions on the village houses would have required the Natural Protection Board's approval, which was a lengthy process that upper-middle-class gentrifiers and developers were not willing to go through. Secondly, even though they were searching for a non-urban lifestyle in the village, these amenity-seeking exurbanites chose to live in the familiar comfort of a gated community and among people that they had known from the city. As a result, the gentrification in Sasalı did not unfold as the physical renovations of existing buildings, but as the revalorization of undercapitalized, formerly agrarian land through new residential developments.

Around 1,500 people live in Sasalı's gated communities as of 2018.<sup>32</sup> In terms of their socio-economic position, the new-comers are mostly university-educated and have professional jobs or businesses. Using a marketing term, one of my exurbanite participants described his neighbours as "people in the AB segment" (Barış, June 23, 2015), which refers to upper economic status individuals who have disposable income. A quick survey of the housing prices in Sasalı's gated communities also testifies the affluence of the new-comers: An average 5-bedroom house is around 2 million liras (approximately 500,000 CAD) as of 2018, whereas an average traditional village house costs around 150,000 liras. Most of these affluent new-comers moved to the village from the other parts of Izmir, attracted by environmental amenities that the area had to offer.

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<sup>31</sup> After the termination of the "pro-conservation zoning plan" in 2008, the construction of new buildings in the village became illegal; yet already built villas continued to be bought and sold. IBB's new zoning plan was not approved by the Provincial Conservation Board until 2017 (Garip, 2017). Following the approval of the new plan, the district municipality started to issue permits and new constructions started in 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Because the gated communities do not constitute a separate administrative unit in Sasalı, it is not possible to find out the exact number of residents. This approximate number is based on my conversation with a former *muhtar* (elected village leader) of Sasalı.

Air quality, proximity to nature and recreational areas, open spaces, scenic beauties, a more authentic and peaceful lifestyle were frequently mentioned in my interviews. They saw the village as a “refuge from chaotic urban life” (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). Some told me that they wanted their young children to grow up in a “safe and natural environment” (Süreyya, July 23, 2015). A real estate agent, who was also an amenity migrant living in one of the gated communities, particularly emphasized this aspect:

Most people here are young families, between the ages of 35 and 45, with young children. Because people now want their children to socialize close to nature, they don't want that apartment lifestyle. Because [urban] streets are not safe anymore. I have 9-year old son, he plays with his friends all day in the *site* [gated community]. We don't worry about him at all. We maintain a traditional neighbourhood vibe here. We know everybody, we get together, have dinner together. We say 'hi' to each other. You cannot have these in an apartment building. You don't even know who lives upstairs (Tarık, June 23, 2015).

Another exurbanite in the village told me that having young children motivated him and his partner to move to Sasalı as well; yet because of the “lack of cafes, restaurants” in the area, he was not sure how long they could stay: “when they [the children] turn 15-16, it will be hard to keep them here. The *site* [gated community] life will not be enough for them” (Barış, June 23, 2015). This concern came up in other interviews too. Because of the limited public transportation services in the area, the parents needed to drive their teenagers everywhere, particularly to school and shopping malls. One participant told me that some of his neighbours had to move back to the city “because they were sick of being chauffeurs to their kids” (Tarık, June 23, 2015).

As many scholars point out, gated communities on the outskirts of cities represent hope for security and a sense of community for those who are dissatisfied with urban life (Grant, 2005). Sasalı has emerged as such a refuge from the “chaotic lifestyle” of İzmir for young, natural amenity-seeking families. One participant described her life in a gated community in Sasalı as “being in your summer house all year round” (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). Nevertheless, complementary to this “refuge” status, an equally important pull factor of Sasalı is its proximity to the city centre. All my amenity migrant participants told me that they maintained their urban connections. Most of them commuted to their work in İzmir every day: “You cannot find another place like Sasalı in the entire İzmir. You're right in the middle of nature. You live in a village; it is quiet, no high-rises, no chaos. But when I jump into my car, I am in my office only in 20 minutes” (Barış, June 23, 2015).

These new residential areas in Sasalı thus demonstrate the characteristics of exurbia, an “urban-connected rural living, where some residents choose to live as close to nature and as far away from the city as they can, despite the connection in their daily lives to economic and social spheres in city and suburban centres” (Taylor & Hurley, 2016, p. 4). Although I refer to the amenity migrants of Sasalı as exurbanites because they moved away from the city centre yet stayed economically and culturally connected to it, I prefer the term consurbia to describe the emerging urban-rural-natural hybrids in the Gediz Delta. I suggest that the term consurbia captures the conservation-influenced characteristics of residential developments in the urban-rural fringe. In other words, consurbia refers to the mixture of urban, rural, and natural ecosystems, yet conservation policies shape all elements of this mixture as well as the socio-environmental imaginaries of new-comers.

The exurbanites of Sasalı that I interviewed were aware of the “wetland of international importance” status of the delta wetlands under the Ramsar Convention. They were highly supportive of conservation policies and activities of the İZKUŞ and environmental NGOs in the Gediz Delta. When I asked them whether they would describe themselves as an environmentalist, most of them hesitated to identify with an environmentalist movement; however, they mentioned that they were interested in environmental issues:

As a young journalist back in the 1990s, I covered many stories about environmental issues (...) The environment has become a central issue in Turkish politics. Especially young people are very conscious, very aware. Of course, local and national politicians should respond to their environmental concerns. Everybody should care about the environment. We live in a very rich area. It is beautiful, it is unique. This biodiversity should be protected (Barış, June 23, 2015).

They believed that the protected status of the area needed to be maintained. As I mentioned earlier, even when gated communities began to emerge, there was an effective limitation to residential developments in the delta due to conservation policies. Some villagers, real estate actors, and policymakers referred to this limitation as “unjust.” The villagers whose land fell under the conservation zone complained about not being able to benefit from the “development of Sasalı” as their land would not attract any investments (Sedat, July 15, 2015). My exurbanite participants, on the other hand, were pro-conservation and against further residential developments in the village. Some scholars describe this attitude as the “last settler’s syndrome,” referring to the desire of

new-comers to see the area to remain as it was on their arrival (Groothuis, 2010). In fact, when I asked them about the zoning “injustices” that some villagers and policymakers mentioned, they stated that they would not like to Sasalı turn into a completely urbanized area:

Sasalı should develop, we need more cafes, restaurants, places for youngsters. There are empty buildings in the village for these. But the residential developments should be limited. This area is valuable because it is protected because there is still wildlife here. That’s exactly why I moved here from the city. Can you imagine what would have happened if they allow more houses here or high-rise apartment buildings? (Ayşe, June 15, 2015).

To recapitulate, it was the nature conservation policies and the image of the delta these policies created for the general public that made the area attractive for amenity-seeking exurbanites. They moved to the delta not only because it was outside of, yet close to, the city, but more importantly, it was a conservation zone. As a consurbia, it had urban, rural, and natural amenities to offer. The conservation status of the delta also made it predictable; because of the limitation on the development, they believed that the area would never become like the city they tried to leave behind. They believed that they could maintain their urban-connected “natural lifestyle” in consurbia for a long time without worrying about unrestricted growth.

One key aspect of the conservation-led gentrification of Sasalı is the rebranding ecological properties and species as natural amenities for the recreational consumption of urbanites by NGOs, real estate actors as well as municipal decisionmakers. The ecotourism and ecological awareness projects of the early 2000s that I discussed in Chapter 4 have contributed to this rebranding and the emergence of a new socio-environmental imaginary. They have created a public awareness regarding the ecological significance of the delta wetlands, but they also increased the recreational, and eventually residential, value of the delta. Commenting on these projects, then president of the İZKUŞ said to a newspaper: “We plan to expand accommodation in the region. Then the area will be a lovely haven for those who wish to escape from urban life” (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2007). In fact, one of my amenity migrant participants, who described herself as an “animal lover,” told me that she had become aware of the delta for the first time thanks to one of the events organized by an NGO in Mavişehir, her former neighbourhood. When she learned about the residential developments in the

area later on, she decided to purchase a house in Sasalı: “I wanted to live closer to the natural life. Who doesn’t want to be neighbours to flamingos?” (Ayşe, June 15, 2015).

The former mayor of Sasalı also mentioned how natural properties of the village and its proximity to protected areas were the most critical pull factors:

Zoning has always been a problem here. When the zoning plan for conservation was approved, it changed slightly. Sasalı experienced more development than ever before. But it is limited development. Zoning created an unjust situation. This guy sells his land for 50,000; the other cannot find a buyer for 50. Why? Because his parcel is not zoned [for development]. That was the situation. But what can we do? How can we bring people here? We have agriculture; we have fresh vegetables and fruits. We have nature; we have unique birds; you cannot see anywhere else. And we are still so close to the city. We should emphasize that. In every available platform, as the mayor, I tried to explain this potential of Sasalı. People want to escape from the city, you know? Here is Sasalı, come here, your children can grow up here in our clean environment. You take your family to nature walks. When you have guests over, you do not need to take them anywhere else. We have large open spaces to relax on weekends and holidays. Sasalı has everything. The development benefits everyone. That guy who cannot sell his land [because of conservation], he benefits too. Development creates employment, new opportunities for everyone (Veli Kasap, June 4, 2015).

NGO members who were active in the area also told me that the mayor fully supported their projects in the village. For instance, an environmentalist who participated in several projects in the delta says:

The Sasalı Municipality suddenly became the richest one in the delta, with all those developments. Whenever we knocked on his door for a project, like ecotourism, bird counts, educational camps, he was like, ‘I don’t know anything about these things [conservation], my daughter, you do it. How much money do you need, do you need space, do you need a car?’ Perhaps he was right, he did not know much about conservation, but he knew whatever we did, we made Sasalı visible (Elif, June 23, 2015).

With the closure of some subdistrict municipalities in 2009, Sasalı became a neighbourhood of Çiğli. Since then, the ecological characteristics and species of the delta have been the central elements of the municipality’s city-marketing strategy. In an attempt to change the district’s public image, which had long been associated with certain environmental ills such as landfills, bus depots, and industrially polluted rivers, the municipality started to rebrand the district by making its natural amenities “visible and memorable” and creating a city identity revolving around the delta’s “wetland of

international importance” and “important bird area” statuses (Semra Aksu, July 2, 2015). These rebranding efforts included centring the flamingos on the visual representations of the district (Figure 5.1) and putting environmental information signs and banners along the main roads. City councillors and the mayor began to take more active roles in the İZKUŞ, and the city organized World Environment Day events every year at the entrance of the Izmir Bird Paradise. My environmental activist participants noted their suspicion about these newly emerged environmental sensibilities of the Çiğli Municipality and told me that the policymakers of Çiğli were the least ecologically concerned ones:

I am sure you have seen the statements of [the former mayor]. He kept saying that there was nothing ecologically important in the delta. He even had a press conference in the delta, right in front of a high-rise construction that we were able to stop with a court decision. “There are no birds, no animals, no dogs here.’ His words. For Çiğli, the delta has always been an undeveloped area, where they could not issue any construction permits. (...) Now, the new mayor being the vice-president of the İZKUŞ... It means nothing. If he could, he would open the entire area [under his jurisdiction] to investments. He is himself a developer, you know (Şevket, July 5, 2015).



Figure 5.1. A recently developed logo for Çiğli depicting a stylized flamingo figure. Source: Author.

Regardless of how genuine the environmentalism of the Çiğli policymakers was, these efforts have changed the public image of the district. It is impossible to drive through Çiğli today without encountering some reminder, like a flamingo statue or an informational board, that you are in or very close to a nature conservation area. In 2019, the newly elected municipal government organized a symposium titled “An Ecologically Sustainable City and a Just Life,” signifying that the current policymakers are determined to make their city associated with its nature in the public imaginary (Barut, 2019). My informal conversations with the residents of the district and Izmir in general also suggest that Çiğli has become synonymous with the delta and its bird species.

The ecological characteristics and species of the delta, particularly iconic wetland birds, immediately entered the lexicon of real estate actors as well. Developers named the gated communities after the ecological characteristics of the delta such as Bird Paradise Homes, Flamingo Homes, and Natural Life Homes to appeal to lifestyle choices of natural amenity-seeking families. A real estate agent, a self-identified “Sasalı expert,” shared a PowerPoint presentation that he used to introduce the village to potential clients with me. The presentation opens up with two slides titled “our neighbours” and depicts the pictures of popular animals in the wildlife park such as elephants and giraffes as well as flamingos (Figure 5.2). Alongside the “bird paradise” identity of the delta, the two other produced socionatures in the delta that made Sasalı attractive for real estate investments and the in-migration of exurbanites are the Izmir Wildlife Park and the Sasalı Urban Forest. These two environmental amenities contributed to the revitalized landscape of the delta and helped real estate agents in marketing the village as an amenity migration destination significantly.



Figure 5.2. A real estate agent’s Sasalı presentation.  
 Right: Our Neighbours Wildlife Park. Left: Our Neighbours Bird Paradise.

### 5.2.2. Producing Environmental Amenities for Recreational Consumption

In 2008, the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality opened the Izmir Wildlife Park in Sasalı after a two-year construction period. Described as the municipality’s “prestige project,” this park sits on 42.5-hectare land and home to over 1500 animals (Izmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2017). Tekeli (2018, p. 51) suggests that by replacing the former zoo in the city’s central park, the wildlife park represents a new approach that focuses on keeping animals in their “natural environment” instead of cages. Some environmentalists are not

convinced; they are concerned about the treatment of animals and see the park as a “fancy zoo.” One participant described it as the “least natural thing in the delta” (Şevket, July 5, 2015). The discussions around how this “new approach” reproduces the ideologies on animal captivity and nature-society dualisms are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet, the Izmir Wildlife Park has significantly contributed to the changing public image of Sasalı. The park attracts millions of local and international tourists every year (*Hürriyet*, 2018). It is now a key element in official tourist guides of the city and frequently included in the “things-to-do” lists of popular travel websites.

Whereas environmentalists were critical of this *foreign* addition to the delta ecologies, all my participants who lived in the area cited the wildlife park as a positive development for Sasalı. Amenity migrants believed that the park increased the “value of the village” and made many people aware of it. One participant told me that she was struggling to describe where she lived to her friends who were not familiar with the area: “People did not know anything about Sasalı. I don’t remember how many times I had to take my phone out and show them the village on the map. Now, I say ‘do you know where the wildlife park is, yes, that’s where I live’” (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). Real estate actors also mentioned that the number of people who contacted them to purchase or rent a house in the gated communities had increased significantly since 2008:

I have several stories. One family, for example, came to my office on their way back from the wildlife park and asked about the available houses to rent. They were not sure if they could adapt to life here easily; so, they chose to rent first. (...) More than half of my clients moved here as renters, but in a year of so many decided to buy a house. Some sold their summer houses; because you don’t really need a summer house when you live here (Tarık, June 23, 2015).

My villager participants told me that Sasalı became more popular after the opening of the park: “People bring their children to the park, then say ‘let’s check this village out too.’ They stop by for lunch or tea, coffee on their way back. It has increased the business in the village, for sure” (Ali, June 18, 2015). A 15-km bike route starting from the affluent Bostanlı neighbourhood of Karşıyaka ends at the gate of the wildlife park. In 2014, the municipality also introduced a bike-sharing service in the city and two stations were opened in Sasalı: one in the wildlife park, the other across the Bird Paradise visitor centre (Figure 5.3). This bike infrastructure also increased the number of visitors in the area and contributed to the popularity of the village. During my regular visits, I observed families and cycling groups in the village; my informal conversations with them

suggested that weekend trips to the Bird Paradise and the Wildlife Park, usually accompanied by a lunch break in Sasalı, have become popular recreational activities for many urbanites.



Figure 5.3. İzmir Metropolitan Municipality's bike-sharing station at the entrance of the Bird Paradise.

Source: Author.

The second produced socionature as an environmental amenity is the Sasalı Urban Forest, opened in 2009 (Figure 5.4). Unlike the İzmir Wildlife Park, this “forest” was not wholly *foreign* to the area as the metropolitan municipality reworked an existing eucalyptus plantation adjacent to the park. This plantation had been created in the late 1970s by the State Hydraulic Works in an attempt to drain the wetlands and to open up new lands for recreational development. Ninety-seven thousand new trees were planted in addition to the existing ones, and an 8-km trekking route, as well as basketball and volleyball courts, were built (*KentYasam*, 2009). In the opening ceremony, the mayor of İzmir said, “We are trying to make this place a centre of attraction in İzmir and the Aegean region” (Cihan News Agency, 2009). My observations in the area suggest that whereas the Wildlife Park attracts people from other parts of the city, the “urban forest” serves mainly local populations, particularly the exurbanites of gated communities. My exurbanite participants mentioned that they enjoyed jogging in the forest and playing sports at the courts; some of them organized community events such as picnics.



Figure 5.4. Sasalı Urban Forest information sign.  
Source: Author.

However, a dire consequence of the creation of this urban forest was the loss of already minimal communal grazing land for the villagers. Many villagers told me that there was not enough land to graze their animals in the village and surrounding areas anymore: “First the Bird Paradise came. They put fences up [in the late 1980s]. Then the municipality built the water treatment facility. Now the wildlife park and the forest... The park has tall walls with cameras and everything. The forest has fences around it; there is a small gate with security guards” (Sedat, July 15, 2015). Yet, some villagers cut the fences and let their animals inside the forest. I observed that cows were feeding on the grass with no shepherd on site (Figure 5.5). Some amenity migrants complained that security guards ignored these animals:

There are free animals there. What is it called? An urban forest, not a pasture, right? Those animals should be taken out; there are wild horses too. I don't want my children to be around free animals. I try to understand the villagers too, they need a grazing area, but I don't think it is safe for children (Tarık, June 23, 2015).

Some others, on the other hand, said that they particularly liked being around animals. The following quote suggests that there are disagreements among amenity migrants as well: "This is a village; you live in a natural area. People should accept that first. There will be animals; there will be a smell, there will be noise. You cannot pick and choose. Maybe they should move back to the city" (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). In short, the produced environmental amenities in Sasalı, mainly the urban forest, benefited some while putting the others in a disadvantaged position. The diverse views on and competing uses of the Sasalı Urban Forest are only one example of the conflictual relationships that emerged in the village with the in-migration of exurbanites. On this note, now I turn how the conservation-led gentrification in Sasalı has produced new social and economic relationships between the new-comers and the long-time residents. While these processes resulted in the loss of traditional livelihoods for some villagers, others found new ways to benefit from the gentrification in Sasalı.



Figure 5.5. Illegal grazing in the Sasalı Urban Forest.  
Source: Author.

### 5.2.3. New Socio-Environmental Relationships in a Gentrified Village

There seem to be two Sasalı today: the gated communities of the amenity migrants and the traditional village. Yet, unlike the gated communities that emerged around the delta during the 1990s, the exurbanites of Sasalı's new developments and long-time residents of the village are not entirely isolated from one another. The in-migration of exurbanites has produced not only two forms of settlements in Sasalı but also new socio-economic relationships and interactions. The only locals who left the village following the development of gated communities were the landowning families. These already well-off landowners, as I mentioned before, encouraged by their young children who wanted to live in more urbanized areas (Buket, June 16, 2015; Sedat, July 15). The demographic change in Sasalı resembles what Phillips (1993, p. 124) suggests regarding to rural gentrification: “[r]ather than seeing rural social change in terms of a middle class replacing a working class [...] in many instances it is probably more valid to talk in terms of one middle-class fraction replacing another.” The renters and agricultural workers, on the other hand, stayed and sought new opportunities in and around the village. Some had to quit agriculture altogether and had to find employment in other sectors; others continued to work in smaller fields in other parts of the delta

In terms of employment, the residential developments meant the loss of traditional livelihoods for some villagers as the gated communities were built on formerly productive lands following the 2001 changes in zoning plan. As the agricultural employment opportunities in Sasalı have decreased, traditional villagers need to seek employment in other areas. Some farmers have become factory workers in a neighbouring industrial zone; others continue to farm in the village, albeit in much smaller lots. Since cotton production, which Sasalı was once famous for, is not profitable on a small scale, some of these villagers needed to change their agricultural practices. A villager who rents a field from a large landowner describes the changing employment structure and farming practices in Sasalı as follows:

The *Organize* [referring to the Atatürk Organized Industrial Zone] has become a saviour for many. I have many friends working there now, especially young people, in factories. I don't want to work at a factory. I like working in an open space; I like agriculture. I was a bus driver for a while when I was younger, but I didn't like that either. I need to work in a field (...) I had a larger plot, but it was sold [to a developer]. This [his current rented

land] is much smaller but that's fine; I've switched to vegetables. It is just my son and me working here now. (Salih, July 13, 2015).

Another villager who did not feel a strong connection to agricultural work said: "I work at a factory now. I don't miss agriculture. Why should I? But during the [harvest] season, when there is the need, I find jobs in other villages" (Deniz, July 13, 2015). My observations in the village also suggest that many villagers commute to other parts of the delta for work now. Although some farmers are able to maintain their agricultural livelihoods, they lost the ability to work in their own village as 550 hectares of the formerly productive agricultural land was sold to the developers.

While some agricultural land was lost to residential developments, new opportunities arose for the villagers as well. These new opportunities were mostly related to the urban demands of new-comers. For instance, a small group of young male farmers are employed by the exurbanites as landscapers and security guards in gated communities. Exurbanites particularly commented on the employment opportunities that they created for the locals: "Our gardener is from the village. We hired a security company, but I know there are villager security guards in other *sitelers*. Almost all families have cleaning ladies; they are from the village too" (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). This notion of "cleaning ladies from the village" frequently came up in my interviews with the amenity migrants. The former mayor also cited this as a "big contribution of the *sitelers* to the village economy:" "Between 50 and 100 women work in those homes now. Perhaps they earn money for the first time; they contribute to their household economies. You see, the development benefits everyone" (Veli Kasap, June 4, 2015). In short, gentrifiers and policymakers view these emerging jobs as a positive development for the villagers.

Although I was not able to reach any of those "cleaning ladies from the village," my conversations with their bosses revealed some information regarding their employment. In almost all cases, these villager women are hired informally through personal connections, and they are responsible mainly for daily chores, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and/or elderly. As they work informally, they are not eligible for any form of social security through their employment and they can be let go easily. The "employment opportunities" and "economic contributions" that are frequently cited by some participants, perhaps unsurprisingly, tend to be precarious, temporary, and unauthorized. Some participants also mentioned that some amenity migrant families preferred hiring foreign domestic workers, particularly women from post-socialist

countries (see Akalın, 2007, for a discussion on foreign caregivers at upper-middle-class Turkish households). Yet, the majority of female domestic workers in Sasalı's gated communities are traditional villagers: "I don't understand why some hire Moldovans or Azeris. I don't see the point. Our own women are hardworking; they know our traditions; they are helpful. We give them jobs; otherwise, they will sit at home all day and watch TV" (Ayşe, June 15, 2015). More research is needed to understand better the relations among local and foreign domestic workers and their bosses as well as the work conditions in gentrified Sasalı. Nevertheless, it is clear that both policymakers and exurbanites are eager to highlight to "economic opportunities" that gated communities create in the village; yet these opportunities are shaped within the already existing inequalities.

Another outcome of the gentrification in Sasalı is the introduction of new skills and forms of capital to the village with the arrival of amenity migrants. One manifestation of the organizational skills and social-political capital of amenity migrants is the Sasalı Social Solidarity and Development Association. Led by a group of amenity migrant women living in gated communities, this association was founded in 2016 and has been organizing several activities in the village such as summer classes for children, film screenings, festivals, and occasional public lectures (Sipahi, 2016). One of the main activities of the association that brings exurbanites and some village women together on a regular basis is the Sasalı Producers Bazaar (*Sasalı Üretici Pazarı*). Supported by the metropolitan and district municipalities, the bazaar opens three days a week during the summer months and every Sunday in the fall at the village square where the village women sell their handicrafts and traditional food (Figure 5.6). Most of their customers are ecotourists who are on their way to (or back from) the Bird Paradise or the Wildlife Park. During my trips to the delta in 2017 and 2018, I regularly visited this bazaar and talked to the organizers and vendors. My observations suggest that there is a clear division of labour among women involved; while all the vendors are traditional village women, the organizational and leadership roles are delegated to the affluent exurbanites. For instance, to secure a market space from the municipality and obtain the necessary licences to sell food products, the exurbanites have mobilized their connections in the city hall. The decoration and organization of stalls are decided by them too. Many participants see this bazaar as an example of the "social and economic empowerment of local women," yet the division of labour between the exurbanites and

traditional villagers in the organization of the bazaar suggests that there is a limit for this empowerment.



Figure 5.6. Sasalı Producers Bazaar.  
Source: Author.

Although the activities of the association mentioned above, mainly the “producers bazaar,” bring the new-comers and old-timers together, the gates of the new residential developments in Sasalı are seldom open to the villagers. Other than the above-mentioned “cleaning ladies from the village” and a limited number of young men who work as security guards or landscapers, a few farmers have access to gated communities. I met one of them at a farmer’s market in Çiğli; we drove back to his field located right in between the traditional village and gated communities. This proud farmer, who insists on farming despite the fact that his landowner sold a large part of the field to a developer as I quoted above, let me take a photo of him to include here (Figure 5.7). He says:

I regularly go to the *sitelere*, once a week. They buy tomatoes, eggplants, green peppers whatever I have in my truck that day. They are friendly people. They want to buy local produce. Other days, I have a stand in the village square. Some come there too. All have my phone number. They call and ask if I have this or that. If I do, I deliver as well. They are loyal customers; they don’t get their vegetables from a grocery store. (...) I have good relations with all of them (Salih, July 13, 2015).



Figure 5.7. A farmer in Sasalı.

Source: Author.

Whereas the farmer quoted above describes mainly a positive relationship with the newcomers, a younger farmer, who also delivers fresh produce to gated communities, draws a different picture and notes some kind of mutual resentment between him and some of his customers:

They call me and put an order. I say, “okay, I’ll be there tomorrow.” They say, “never mind, I cannot wait.” I am busy, you know. I cannot be readily available whenever they need something. I am not working for them. (...) When I deliver, they ask questions, like “is that from your garden, is that organic?” Of course, they are from the garden! There are others; they don’t make eye contact. They get their vegetables, don’t talk to you at all, and watch you until you leave the site. I never feel comfortable there, but they are customers, you know, we don’t need to love each other (Can, July 13, 2015).

When I asked about their relationships with farmers, my amenity migrant participants also mentioned this “delivery service.” Not only farmers but convenience stores in the village also deliver to the gated communities:

When we first move there, there was only one *bakkal* [small convenience store], not many options. We had to go to the mall, even for the simplest things. Now there are two large markets. They carry almost everything we need, and they deliver too. It is pretty slow but Sasalı is developing. We

buy our meat from a local butcher. I am sure you've seen it. It is right in the village square, very clean, very nice people. We try to support local businesses as much as we can (Barış, June 23).

This notion of “supporting local businesses” emerged in my interviews frequently. Many exurbanites describe their relationships with the villagers as a form of support: They hire women from the village as domestic workers and young men as security guards or landscapers; they buy their produce from local farmers, and they shop at local stores. Overall, amenity migrants think that they contribute to the village economy significantly. Since the arrival of amenity migrants, Sasalı's small business landscape has changed with the opening of new businesses, such as coffee shops, grocery stores, breakfast and fish restaurants, and trendy bakeries appealing to the consumption preferences of exurbanites. Nevertheless, many of them find these developments limited and wish to see more urban services in the village. My villager participants, on the other hand, mentioned about the emergence of the two groups of consumers in Sasalı. A participant who refers to the tourists and amenity migrants as “strangers” points out the changing small business landscape in Sasalı:

There are our *kahves* [coffee shops] and the restaurants for *yabancılar* (strangers). Here [at a traditional village coffeeshop] you pay 50 *kurus*, there you pay 3 liras for tea. But they go there. No local would pay 3 liras for tea. It is ridiculous (Kaya, July 4, 2015).

A local fisherman says:

There were no restaurants here before. This is a village; we don't eat out here. Now we have fish restaurants. If you go there in the evening, you see, they are full. People from the *sitel* and from all over Izmir go to those restaurants. I am not saying that it is a bad thing; people make money. I sell my catch to those restaurants. But they are not for locals, that's what I am saying (Rasim, July 4, 2015).

In short, my interviews with the villagers do not suggest an anti-development sentiment exists in Sasalı. There is no active resistance to gentrification in Sasalı, either. Although some participants note personal tensions between them and the amenity migrants, most villagers see the residential developments in Sasalı and concomitant changes in the socio-economic landscape inevitable and try to adapt to the new conditions in the village. Opening small businesses that appeal to exurbanite consumption needs and employing new business practices such as delivery service seem to be two main

strategies that the villagers use to “benefit” from the growth that Sasalı has been experiencing since the early 2000s.

### 5.3. Concluding Remarks

The growth of Turkish cities, particularly their expansion towards peripheral areas in recent years, has been explored by many critical studies. These studies, most of which focus on the experience of Istanbul as the largest city of the country, highlight the role of megaprojects and state-led mass housing projects as the dominant mode of production of space and a driver of land speculation in urban peripheries (Baysal, 2017; Dogan & Stupar, 2017; Paker, 2017). The infrastructural megaprojects such as the construction of new airports, bridges, highways, even a proposed but not-yet realized artificial waterway connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara have been an essential part of Turkey’s neoliberal growth agenda. These projects have increased the land value on the outskirts of Istanbul, attracted investments and became “tools for the state to actively build hegemony” (Paker, 2017, p. 105). The devastating ecological impacts of these projects have also been discussed both by the general public and in academic literature (Cengiz, Atmış, & Görmüş, 2019). In short, the strategy of facilitating economic growth via the construction of megaprojects and mass housing developments in ecologically sensitive areas has been a vital element of Turkey’s ruling party, the AKP’s neoliberal urban agenda in the 2010s.

A similar megaproject that would bundle the government’s neoliberal agenda, hegemony building concerns, and urban growth model together, and would cause biodiversity and habitat loss according to many environmentalists was proposed for the peri-urban Izmir as well. A mega-bridge that would connect the southern districts of the city to the recently completed Izmir-Istanbul highway through the Gediz Delta’s shores was first unveiled in the 2011 general elections and became a central part of the AKP candidate’s platform during the 2014 municipal elections (*Milliyet*, 2014). Although AKP’s strategy to win an election in Izmir with infrastructural investment promises failed as the party lost the election by a significant margin,<sup>33</sup> the project continued to be on the central

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<sup>33</sup> Izmir is the one of the few cities where the AKP has never been able to gain the majority of votes in any local or general elections since 2002.

government's agenda. The Ministry of the Environment and Urbanization announced the details of the project, including the supporting environmental impact assessment (EIA) report in 2015 (Gürsel, 2015). Thanks to the efforts of the environmentalist NGOs and individuals, a local administrative court stated that the EIA report had not provided enough scientific evidence and halted the project in December 2018 (Ud, 2018). Irrespective of this development, which had been announced as a "victory for flamingos" by national and international conservationist groups (Doğa Derneği, 2018; Law, 2019), the mega-bridge project appeared again in the list of the AKP candidate's campaign promises during the March 2019 municipal elections. The AKP lost this recent election by even a larger margin. I do not suggest that the AKP's electoral failures in Izmir are due merely to its insistence on megaprojects; nevertheless, it is clear that the strategy of facilitating economic growth via megaprojects on the outskirts of metropolitan cities have proved unsuccessful several times in the case of Izmir. Either voters or civil society initiatives' legal activism stopped the ruling party from applying the same urban growth model to Izmir. Yet, AKP's neoliberal environmental policies, produced within the context of the decentralization and Europeanization efforts of the early 2000s as well as the "construction boom" that the country experienced in the same period, provided an equally "successful" mechanism for the urban expansion. Izmir has continued to grow through its peripheries through different processes. The urban developments in the Gediz Delta that I discussed in this chapter offers a distinct model of peri-urbanization in Turkey.

The peri-urbanization in the Gediz Delta started in the early 1980s as the area was included in the metropolitan master plans for the first time. Since the growth of the city was directed towards the north, industrial zones, mass housing projects, as well as luxury housing developments, began to appear in the adjacent areas. In the same period, nature conservation zones were also created in the delta. As a result, at the turn of the century, the delta's rural characteristics ceased to be the dominant feature of the area and a heterogeneous mixture of agricultural, industrial, residential, and conservation landscapes emerged. In the twenty-first century, following the simultaneous globalization and localization of conservation efforts in the delta, the peri-urbanization and the remaking of the Gediz Delta socio-natures took a particular form, which I have conceptualized here as "conservation-led gentrification." By highlighting how neoliberal conservation policies of the 2000s coupled with the changes in zoning plans and the

general “construction boom,” I suggested that the Gediz Delta became a gentrification hotspot. Whereas the luxury housing developments of the 1990s took place on unused municipality-owned lands outside of traditional villages, in the 2000s, the gated communities emerged on formerly productive agricultural lands and attracted natural amenity-seeking urban middle-classes to the area while forcing the traditional villagers to change their socio-economic practices. By focusing on the experiences of a delta village, I have demonstrated that conservation policies have given the village a new identity, shaped the socio-environmental imaginaries of the new-comers as well as the old-timers, and altered the social and physical make-up of the village significantly. Thus, I describe the twenty-first century social and physical landscapes of the Gediz Delta as consurbia, a peri-urban form within which conservation policies become the dominant mode of production of space and the driver of urban developments, including gated communities, recreational areas, and emerging socio-environmental relationships that privilege the lifestyle preferences of exurbanites.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

It is almost customary today in urban studies to cite the fact that we live on an “urban planet” as more than half of the world population now lives in urban areas (*UN News*, 2014). Yet, as Keil and Lynch (2019) rightfully observe, “most of us live, work and play in environments that would not usually be recognized as the traditional city. Instead, we find ourselves at the edge of town.” There is a burgeoning literature on “the building and rebuilding of urban peripheries” (Keil, Güney, & Üçoğlu, 2019); however, how urban developments and conservation policies meet at “the edge of the town” is largely missing in this literature (see Keil & Macdonald, 2016, for an exception). This literature particularly focuses on the emergence of “massive suburbia” through large-scale housing projects and infrastructural developments. Within this literature, the political ecology of urbanization on the outskirts of the Turkish cities is usually discussed in regard to the ecological destructions that those housing and infrastructural developments create (cf. Üçoğlu, 2019). My project explored what is happening “*beyond suburbia*” (Allen, 2017) within the context of the heterogeneous co-existence of urban, rural, and natural ecosystems, where urbanization processes enmesh with rural dynamics and conservation activities, together constituting multifunctional peri-urban landscapes. This dissertation examined the processes of socio-environmental change in Turkey’s Gediz Delta -an internationally protected coastal wetland, a traditionally agricultural area, and increasingly an urban development hotspot- based on the theoretical insights from environmental sociology and urban political ecology, as well as the critical studies on the neoliberalization of nature and environmental gentrification.

Consuburbia, as I discussed in this dissertation to describe the contemporary landscapes of the Gediz Delta, is a peri-urban form within which conservation policies become the dominant mode of production of space and the driver of urban developments, including gated communities, recreational areas, and emerging socio-environmental relationships that privilege the lifestyle preferences of exurbanites at the expense of traditional socio-economic practices and relations. I have discussed the contemporary entanglements of conservation policies and urban developments in the delta within the context of the “patterned history of power, capital, and nature, dialectically joined” (Moore, 2015, p. 19).

Jason W. Moore argues that capitalism, first and foremost, is a “*way of organizing nature*” (2015, p. 14). While emphasizing the role of “appropriating uncaptialized nature” in the development and expansion of capitalism, Moore’s historical analysis mainly focuses on the production of “cheap” food, energy, raw materials, and labour-power. However, how socionatures are made within and through contemporary conservation models in the current phase of capital accumulation is missing in this framework. The literature on the neoliberalization of nature and conservation, on the other hand, explores the ways within which the dominant conservation models, designed and promoted by a global conservation elite, produce socionatures within a market framework and incorporate them into capital accumulation processes. Büscher and Fletcher (2015) call this strategy “accumulation by conservation.” This literature makes essential contributions to the understanding of the contemporary privatization, commercialization, and commodification of biophysical properties through mechanisms such as ecotourism, payments for ecosystem services, mitigation offset schemes, and carbon markets; and how power, capital, and nature are conjoined in the creation of (neoliberal) protected areas. Yet, the role of neoliberal conservation in facilitating urban developments and conservation as an urban growth strategy have not attracted much scholarly attention. My project’s main theoretical contribution lies here in analyzing the neoliberal wetland conservation model implemented in the Gediz Delta in the 2000s as a peri-urbanization catalyst within the context of the capitalist reorganization of socio-ecological relations through the appropriation of nature for profit.

My critical analysis of the transformation of social and physical landscapes demonstrates that socionatures are produced via the changing socio-environmental imaginaries of competing groups and historically specific socio-ecological projects within the context of broader political-economic processes. The delta socionatures are made and remade through entangled local and international processes as the ecologies and economies of the delta have been incorporated in capital accumulation strategies in different ways since the late nineteenth century. The processes that I have explored in this dissertation are the capitalist expansion in the nineteenth century; Turkey’s economic reconstruction, demographic change and nation-building policies in the early twentieth century; the agriculture-led national development model of the 1950s; the country’s repositioning in the world state-system, the gradual industrialization; the neoliberalization of the economy and environmental policies since the 1980s; and finally the construction-based

growth model in the twenty-first century. Following the methodological strategies of “incorporated comparison” (McMichael, 1990), ECM (Burawoy, 1998) and global ethnography (Burawoy et al., 2000), I have demonstrated the mutual conditioning of the global and the local. Throughout this study, I have explored how the delta siconatures are produced within the context of the changing dynamics and structures of the “capitalist world-ecology” (Moore, 2015) and stressed the central role of the state in “managing, delivering, and producing the environment” (Parenti, 2013, p. 2) via historically specific ways.

I have contended that the contemporary making and remaking of the Gediz Delta siconatures, including the protected areas, recreational amenities, gated communities, agricultural areas, and urban infrastructural facilities, take place through the intertwined processes of neoliberal nature conservation and urban developments. Nature conservation policies implemented in the delta in the 2000s did not necessarily slow down or limit urban expansion towards ecologically sensitive areas; instead, they facilitated a particular form of peri-urbanization. I have also claimed that these processes intersect with broader histories implicating constantly changing socio-economic, political, and ecological conditions and the interplay between local and global developments. In this regard, I aimed to show, and make sense of, the historical and geographical complexity and specificity of siconature-making. I suggested that the emerging entanglements of nature conservation and urbanization in peri-urban areas provide a critical lens to understand the contradictions and tensions of contemporary processes of siconature-making.

In Chapter 1, I outlined my central objective in conducting this study, my theoretical position, and the conceptual discussions I engaged with as well as the methodological foundation that guided my project. To understand the complex historical trajectory of siconature-making processes (cf. Ekers & Loftus, 2013; Peluso, 2012) through nature conservation and urbanization in the Gediz Delta, I first explored a) the development of environmental policies since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, and b) the metabolic relationships between the delta and the metropolitan centre, Izmir, that it is attached to for over a hundred-year period. In Chapter 2, I have argued that the environmental policy framework that shaped the remaking of the Gediz Delta siconatures in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been evolved through a constant interplay between a domestic modernization imaginary and global political-economic processes. I

suggested that this framework has gone through certain stages as a result of the ongoing interactions and intersections between local and global developments and influenced mainly by the country's modernizing elite's twin goals of participating in intergovernmental networks and achieving economic growth through further integration with the capitalist world-economy. I called the approach that guided Turkey's environmental policy trajectory the "elite environmentalism."

The elite environmentalism is a top-down, paternalistic approach to the protection of the natural environment, which is mainly influenced by first romantic/nationalist and then developmentalist orientations, and it has always reflected the broader political-economic contexts. This approach was institutionalized and gradually integrated into Turkey's national developmentalist agenda in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to the work of a small group of bureaucrats. Since the early 1980s, Turkey has adopted a neoliberal economic development model, and the environmental framework has also experienced a steady neoliberalization with the context of globally hegemonic sustainable development ideology. This process further intensified in the early 2000s as the country adopted the EU's environmental policy framework, which opened the door for the involvement of not only international policy actors but also elite-led environmental NGOs, local governments and private businesses while paying lip service to community participation. The wetland conservation policies that have shaped the remaking of the Gediz Delta landscapes in the 2000s is a product of this trajectory. In this regard, I discussed how Turkish policymakers "discovered" long-neglected wetlands as ecologically *and also* economically significant ecosystems which should be revalued within a market-oriented framework in the 2000s, based on a neoliberal conservation approach produced and promoted by the Ramsar Convention and its international NGO partners.

To understand the contemporary remaking of the delta socionatures and socio-environmental change through the entangled processes of conservation and urbanization, I have suggested, it is necessary to delve into the histories of the metabolic relationships between the delta and Izmir, how the delta has been imagined and how the environmental imaginaries of often competing social groups have produced several socio-ecological projects since the 1860s. Thus, in Chapter 3, I discussed the role of the rise of Izmir in the late nineteenth century as a major port city in the eastern Mediterranean, the growth of export-oriented economic activities, and the infrastructural developments such as the construction of railroads and a river engineering project in the

transformation of the delta landscapes. I also explored how the delta experienced a significant demographic change in the early twentieth century, which triggered the first wave of wetland drainage projects. Finally, Chapter 3 demonstrated how the delta emerged a major cotton production area for international markets thanks to the political environment that favoured export-oriented agriculture as well as the availability of modern inputs and technical knowledge in the second half of the twentieth century. In short, I have discussed how the delta socionatures, including agricultural fields, salt production areas, drained wetlands, built environments, and eucalyptus plantations were produced within the context of the changing political-economic dynamics, implicating how local and global processes intertwined, and local and extra-local actors competed or cooperated in the transformation of the landscapes.

It was this delta landscape, constituted by a heterogeneous mixture of historically produced socionatures that was “reimagined” and “rediscovered” as an ecologically significant area to be protected in the 1980s. In Chapter 4, I have shown how the delta was reimagined first as a “bird paradise” and then as a “wetland of international importance” and discussed the continuities and changes within the evolution of conservation models in the Gediz Delta. I have explored how this new socio-environmental imaginary was manifested in the creation of nature conservation zones. I suggested that the early conservation efforts in the delta were influenced by the elite environmentalism of the scientists and technocrats. In this process, local communities and their socio-economic activities were framed as “threats” to the healthy functioning of wetland habitats. As a result, local people lost their access to their traditional lands that had long been used for grazing, fishing, and recreational purposes when waterbird breeding zones were designated as natural protected areas. While alienating local communities, the strictly preservationist and expert-based nature conservation approach of the 1980s facilitated the emergence of public awareness among urban populations of Izmir about the ecological significance of the delta. The conservation efforts in this period also generated an international interest as the national environmentalist groups encouraged the involvement of the “transnational conservation elite” (Holmes, 2011) in the protection of the delta birds. I have argued that even though it resulted in some degree of dispossession, this early conservation model was not based on the rearticulating socio-ecological relationship within a market-oriented framework. Yet, with the involvement of national and international NGOs, the “economic potential” of the delta

gradually became an important reference point for conservation efforts. Within this context, the delta was designated as a “wetland of international importance” in 1998, and a neoliberal conservation model, authored by the Ramsar Convention and its NGO partners, became the dominant mode of conserving the delta wetlands.

This new model was based on the assumption that nature conservation could only be achieved through the production of delta socionatures as commodities; hence the value of the delta was redefined in relation to the money-making opportunities it presented. The neoliberal conservation model was institutionalized by the establishment of an environmental governance structure in the delta, which opened the door for the involvement of local and international NGOs, delta municipalities, private businesses, and delta communities in the management of conservation activities. Although the delta socionatures had been made and remade within the context of broader political-economic processes since the nineteenth century, the rearticulation of socio-ecological relations through a market-oriented nature conservation framework was a novel development. In the early 2000s, this neoliberal model emerged within the context of the dual processes of globalization and localization. In other words, the policymaking and implementation processes witnessed an upwards shift with the direct adoption of a conservation model produced by global actors in multiple elsewheres and simultaneously a downwards shift as the central government transferred its authority over a conservation area to local municipalities. Moreover, local communities who were once seen as “threats” to the delta ecosystems, were redefined as economically rational actors who could be encouraged to participate in conservation through financial incentives in the form of ecotourism incomes. I analyzed the ecotourism projects developed by local environmental NGOs, with the support of their international partners and delta municipalities. My analysis suggested that while not being able to elevate ecotourism to a major economic activity status in the delta, these projects contributed to the ongoing construction of the delta as a “desirable” place to live for natural amenity-seeking urban middle-classes. I have argued that the neoliberal conservation model of the early twenty-first century became the dominant reference point for the production of space in the delta and enabled the unfolding of a unique peri-urbanization process, which I call “conservation-led gentrification.”

Chapter 5 delved into the processes through which the Gediz Delta experienced a gradually intensified peri-urbanization since the late 1980s and explored the changing

dynamics of this process. The rise of urban developments, in the form of industrial zones, mass and luxury housing developments in the adjacent areas, had started in the late twentieth century as the growth of Izmir was directed towards the north of the city. Within this process, the delta's rural characteristics ceased to be the dominant feature of the area. In the 2000s, as the conservation of the delta evolved through a neoliberal framework, the delta villages became a gentrification hotspot within the context of Turkey's state-orchestrated and foreign capital fuelled "construction boom." The delta's conservation statuses and its increasing national and international reputation as a "natural treasure" made it attractive for developers and natural amenity-seeking urbanites. A so-called "zoning plan for (nature) conservation" enabled mostly Izmir-based real estate companies to purchase agricultural lands and convert them into villa-type housing developments. Whereas the gated communities of the 1990s were constructed in adjacent areas, isolated from the traditional villages, the luxury homes in the twenty-first century transformed not only the physical but also social landscapes of the villages. These new developments were marketed mainly to young urban families who were in search of a particular lifestyle imagined around the ideas such as proximity to nature, "scenic beauties," and "rural authenticity." I have argued that the neoliberal nature conservation policies of the early 2000s simultaneously created rent gaps in the delta villages while appealing to middle-class desires and perceptions. Thus, I put forward the concept of "conservation-led gentrification" as a supplementary explanation to the existing perspectives, namely market-led and gentrifier-led gentrification.

Conservation-led gentrification is a form of environmental gentrification and describes the transformations of social and physical landscapes of a peri-urban space following the protected area designation. My project uncovers what comes *first*, what arrives before the emergence of a rent gap and the arrival of gentrifiers. I have suggested that neither market actors (supply-side) nor gentrifiers (demand-side) "led" gentrification processes in the Gediz Delta; instead, both have followed and been influenced by conservation policies. In this sense, conservation-led gentrification implies a social and physical "upgrading" process that cannot be fully captured within a straightforward supply-demand framework. Without downplaying the economic strategies of market actors or the lifestyle preferences of gentrifiers, I have stressed how these strategies and preferences are shaped by conservation policies and discourses. Focusing on the experience of a delta village whose population doubled with the arrival of exurbanites in

the 2000s, I suggested that gentrification processes that were facilitated by the protected area designation were supported by the production of new socionatures in the form of environmental amenities for recreational consumption and the blending of natural characteristics of delta in city marketing strategies. During this process, particularly as the gated communities mushroomed in the area, the delta villagers had to change their economic activities; some left agriculture altogether, others altered their practices to appeal to the consumption preferences of exurbanites. I have demonstrated that the changing demographic structure of the village reproduces the already existing inequalities and creates some interpersonal tensions between the new-comers and old-timers. Nevertheless, the emerging issues identified by the traditional villagers are not expressed within a broader critique of the neoliberalization of nature, nor do they turn into an anti-gentrification movement. My project did not only show how nature conservation policies shape to a particular form of urbanization in the urban-rural interface but also explored how social actors interpret, navigate, and participate in socio-environmental transformations in peri-urban areas.

The remaking of peri-urban socionatures through conservation-led gentrification has some similarities with but also differs from other forms of environmental gentrification that take place in urban and non-urban contexts. Environmental gentrification in the *city proper* is usually facilitated by the “eco-friendly” renovation of existing buildings such as brownfield redevelopment as well as the creation of additional green spaces in the form of parks, urban gardens and farms. Similar to conservation-led gentrification, these developments are influenced by certain sustainability and liveability discourses promoted by developers and city managers, and they appeal to middle-class perceptions of nature. However, nature conservation policies and the production of protected areas do not play a significant role in unfolding gentrification processes in urban areas. Thus, many scholars discuss urban environmental gentrification by focusing on the emerging growth coalitions among city governments, developers, and middle-class residents; the question of national and international conservation actors and neoliberal conservation models is mostly irrelevant.

In terms of non-urban environmental gentrification, many scholars have highlighted how middle-class perceptions of the natural environment and rurality such as “beautiful scenery,” “green fields,” “proximity to nature,” “natural life/wilderness,” “a refuge from chaotic urban life” and “authentic communities” transform social and physical landscapes

in rural areas. Such ideas can be identified within the process of conservation-led gentrification in peri-urban areas as well. In some cases, conservation policies *do* play a direct role in the creation of a rent gap and attracting affluent residents to non-urban areas. For instance, Darling (2005) coins the term “wilderness gentrification” to emphasize the significance of a conservation framework in triggering gentrification. However, in wilderness gentrification cases, the social and physical transformations take place in remote areas where the proximity to a city centre and urban amenities is irrelevant. In contrast, sustained urban connections are part and parcel of peri-urban gentrification. Moreover, Darling suggests that “what gets produced in the process of wilderness gentrification is *recreational space*” (2005, p. 1022, emphasis in original). Conservation-led gentrification in a peri-urban area, as I demonstrated in the case of the Gediz Delta, involves not only the production of recreational conservation spaces but also residential spaces. In short, like natural ecosystems, agroecosystems, and urban-ecosystems blend into each other in peri-urban areas, peri-urban gentrification also demonstrates a mixture of urban, rural, and wilderness gentrification characteristics.

The environmental governance model that facilitated the conservation-led gentrification in the Gediz Delta collapsed in 2017 when the Turkish government re-centralized the everyday management of the wetland ecosystems. The delta municipalities and the communities they represent, as well as the local and international environmental NGOs, have lost their influence over the conservation of the delta. How this development will shape the trajectory of peri-urbanization through conservation is yet to be seen. Apart from this, my study implicates several directions for future research. First of all, as this dissertation suggests, peri-urban areas provide a critical lens to understand the contradictions and tensions of contemporary processes of socionature-making. To grasp a better understanding of the “urban century” (Heynen, 2014), it is imperative to pay closer attention to the dynamics of peri-urbanization. The contemporary entanglement of nature conservation and urban developments that I explored in the case of the peri-urban Izmir is only one aspect of this global process. Critical scholars should pay attention to many other contentious processes socionature-making in peri-urban areas.

Second, the conservation-led gentrification process that I described in the case of a social and physical transformation of a delta village has not generated an anti-gentrification or anti-development reaction. There could be other cases of peri-urban gentrification where long-time residents are seeking ways to resist, not just

accommodate and adapt to, the changing socio-environmental conditions. Future research could benefit from the insights of this study while focusing on how emerging conflicts might turn into socio-environmental movements. Thirdly, my analysis of the circulation of wetland conservation policies among Mediterranean deltas thanks to the work of a networked conservation elite implies that nonhuman entities, in my case flamingos, play an important role in bringing policy actors together. The agency of nonhuman animals in policy mobilities is yet to be critically explored.

Finally, there is a growing interest among conservationists related to urbanized areas (see Kowarik, 2011). They highlight the ecological significance of the cities, and as Richard Conniff (2018) observes, “protecting biodiversity has in recent years become much less about securing new protected areas in pristine habitat and more about making room for wildlife on the margins of our own urbanized existence” for many conservationists. Limiting or even stopping urbanization is “not only impossible but also missing the point,” according to Rob McDonald (2016) of Nature’s Conservancy. Whereas conservationists are looking for the ways to establish a *balance* between conservation and urbanization, it is the responsibility of critical social scientists, I believe, to articulate that the capitalist production and appropriation of nature, and more specifically, the current neoliberalization of socio-ecological relations constitute possibly the biggest obstacle to overcome if such a balance is desired.

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## Appendix A: List of Participants

1. Ahmet (30s, male, conservationist, public employee), May 26, 2015.
2. Ibrahim (50s, male, fisher), May 31, 2015.
3. Cevdet (40s, male, fisher), May 31, 2015.
4. Melih (40s, male, fisher), May 31, 2015.
5. Veli Kasap (50s, male, former mayor of Sasalı, member of İZKUŞ), June 4, 2015.
6. Murat (50s, male, conservation bureaucrat), June 5, 2015.
7. Ayşe (50s, female, amenity migrant/new-comer, retired professional), June 15, 2015.
8. Buket (20s, female, long-time delta resident, unemployed), June 16, 2015.
9. Ali (50s, male, long-time delta resident, retired TEKEL worker), June 18, 2015.
10. Görkem (30s, male, agriculture bureaucrat), June 18, 2015.
11. Özcan (60s, male, former delta resident, retired TEKEL worker), June 21, 2015.
12. Barış (40s, male, amenity migrant/new-comer, journalist), June 23, 2015.
13. Tarik (40s, male, amenity migrant/new-comer, real estate agent), June 23, 2015.
14. Elif (30s, female, environmentalist, NGO member), June 23, 2015.
15. Nurgül Uçar (50s, female, former mayor of Seyrek and president of İZKUŞ), June 26, 2015.
16. Lütfü Dağtaş (50s, male, former Çiğli city councillor and member of İZKUŞ), June 26, 2015.
17. Cengiz (50s, male, real estate developer), June 27, 2015.
18. Mehmet Sıkı (60s, male, ornithologist/conservationist, professor), July 1, 2015
19. Semra Aksu (50s, female, long-time delta resident, former Çiğli city councillor), July 2, 2015.
20. Ekrem, (50s, male, amenity migrant/new-comer, medical doctor), July 2, 2015.

21. Rifat (50s, male, long-time delta resident, fisher), July 4, 2015.
22. Rasim, (50s, male, long-time delta resident, fisher), July 4, 2015.
23. Haluk (40s, male, long-time delta resident, fisher), July 4, 2015.
24. Şevket (30s, male, environmentalist, NGO member), July 5, 2015.
25. Salih (40s, male, farmer, long-time delta resident), July 13, 2015.
26. Can (20s, male, farmer, long-time delta resident), July 13, 2015.
27. Deniz (20s, male, former farmer, currently factory worker, long-time delta resident), July 13, 2015.
28. Kaya (20s, male, former farmer, currently factory worker, long-time delta resident), July 13, 2015.
29. Osman (80s, male, landowner, long-time delta resident), July 15, 2015.
30. Okan (80s, male, landowner, long-time delta resident), July 15, 2015.
31. Sedat (50s, male, farmer, long-time delta resident), July 15, 2015.
32. Süreyya (40s, male, real estate developer, amenity migrant/new-comer), July 23, 2015.

## Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

1. What is the importance of the Gediz Delta, for you?
2. What do you think about the roles that the Gediz Delta plays for the social, cultural, economic development of the city?
3. How often do you spend time in the delta? For what purposes do you go there?
4. When you talk about your city with a non-local, do you mention the delta; if yes, how?
5. Can you describe your role or your organization's role in the protection and development of the delta?
6. I understand [YOUR ORGANIZATION] is about [INSERT PRINCIPAL/MISSION STATEMENT]. What do you see as your main goals and challenges?
7. What are the main problems that the delta is facing?
8. How would you characterize your main concerns about the present and future of the delta?
9. What do you think were the mistakes in the past regarding the protection and development of the delta?
10. How would you describe the contemporary efforts for the protection and development of the delta?
11. What do you see as the future for the delta?
12. What should be done to protect the ecological integrity of the delta?
13. What should be done to realize the economic potential of the delta?
14. Do you see the ecological importance and the economic potential as irreconcilable? If no, why; if yes, why?
15. Do you think that the residents of the city use the delta to its fullest capacity?
16. How long have you lived in your village/neighborhood?
17. Why did you move here?

18. In the last decades, have there been any significant changes in your community and the surrounding area?
19. How often do you visit the Izmir Bird Paradise or the Wildlife Park? What do you think about these places?
20. How did you become involved in the protection of the delta, and why? Why is it worth it?
21. What groups in the city do you work closely with? And which do you identify with?
22. What would the Gediz Delta be like in 2030 if you were in charge? (In terms of urbanization, ecological integrity, economy, social structure...)