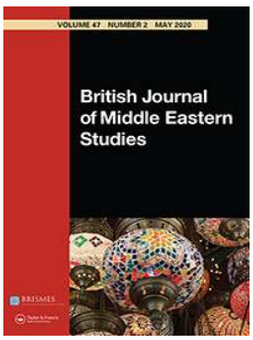

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ARTICLE

Deliberating in difficult times: lessons from public forums in Turkey in the aftermath of the Gezi protests

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the prospects of public deliberation in a semi-authoritarian political context and unfavourable political cultural setting through an in-depth analysis of three public forums taking place in the aftermath of the 2013 Gezi Protests. This analysis shows that while the gains of deliberation in terms of influencing policy decision-making are limited, significant gains can still be reached in terms of creating a more civic public and a more strongly connected civil society that keeps its linkages with social movements. The study also finds that such forums can help create dialogue among distant segments of the society even though such interactions are still rather modest. These findings have implications for public deliberation in other non-deliberative settings as they open new areas of research in terms of the prospects of such forums in increasing social capital, pluralism and civicness.

The Gezi protests that started in May 2013 at the Taksim Square in Istanbul, spread throughout Turkey. The protests first started when the government took action to cut the trees in Taksim Gezi Park in order to construct a replica of demolished Topçu Barracks from the Ottoman times as well as a new shopping mall. Gezi Park remains as one of the few public green areas and socializing places in Istanbul. As a result, environmentalist started silently protesting within the park. Brutal police intervention led to increased sympathy for and participation in the movement across the country. Protests targeted environmental degradation as well as authoritarianism and interference in lifestyles.[1] The Gezi protests lasted for about a month. But even after that, 'the spirit of Gezi' as participants and supporters like to call it, survived in a variety of organizations. Among the most significant one of these are the public forums.

This study will look at the public forums that originated with Gezi. The article provides a longue durée look whereas most of the studies on forums mostly analyzed

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[1]According to a representative survey conducted among participants during the protests, the average age of the respondents was 28 and 50.8 per cent of the protesters were female and 49.2 per cent were male, which the polling company suggests were both representative of Turkey's average age and gender distribution. The age groups of 21–25, 26–30 and 31–35 were represented at a higher rate. Moreover, one tenth of the population has a college degree while half of Gezi protesters do. About 80% of the participants were not affiliated with a party and 40% of them had participated in prior protests. 'Konda | Gezi Park Survey: Who Are They, Why Are They There and What Do They Demand?' accessed April 5, 2018, http://konda.com.tr/en/rapor/gezi-park-survey/.

Table 1. An overview of the forums.

Forum	Membership	Regularity	Key activities	Key topics of discussion	Relationship with local government	Examples of linkages with other civil society organizations
Güzelyalı	Open to public	Once a week	Events for Children, Events to Raise Environmental Awareness	Environment, Education, City Planning	Unstable relationship Some cooperation at the beginning but then municipality withdrew the support	The United June Movement, City Planners İzmir Branch, The Culture Park Platform
Foça	Open to Public	Once a week	Political Protests, Events to Raise Environmental Awareness	Environment, Education, City Planning	Close relationship Yet still has a critical stance against municipalities actions	The United June Movement, City Planners İzmir Branch, The Culture Park Platform, Environment and Culture Platform, Initiative Against Fossil Fuels
Karşıyaka	Open to Public	Once a week	Events to Raise Environmental Awareness, Political Protests	City Planning, Central and Local Governments Actions	In conflict with the municipality Criticizes other forums for their close relation with local government	City Planners İzmir Branch, The Culture Park Platform, Bridging People's Association, Karşıyaka People's Houses

the forums only during the protests. The main foci of this article are three public forums, which have been operating in Izmir since Gezi: The Foça Forum, the Güzelyalı Forum, and the Karşıyaka Forum. The study will provide an in-depth analysis of these forums to demonstrate the constraints as well as prospects of public deliberation under non-deliberative macro political settings such as the present one in Turkey. The questions this article wants to address, can be stated as follows: How does the macro political context created by the state influence the prospects of deliberative forums and their interaction with other actors within the deliberative system? More specifically, what kind of gains, if any, can be reached under semi-authoritarian settings?

As will be discussed in further detail, the Turkish case presents itself as a difficult one as far as public deliberation is concerned. The broader political and cultural setting is non-deliberative for multiple reasons. The political setting is increasingly authoritarian and the state leaves little room for societal pluralism. What is more, deep social cleavages divide the society, which suffers from low social trust and low social capital. Against this background, Gezi provides an interesting experience for a deliberative

practice under unfavourable conditions. It is the aim of this study to assess to what extend this experience is able to break the vicious cycle of low social trust, deep-seated social cleavage and low levels of civic engagement.

Studying the Gezi experience in-depth through the forums sustained after the protests will show us the gains and limits of deliberative practices under the delineated conditions. In this way, the study will also contribute to our understanding of the impact of Gezi beyond its immediate aftermath. Given the stark contrast between the practice and the context, this study will also add to the literature on the gains of studying deliberative practices at the systemic level. As the deliberative system approach, which conceptualizes deliberation as 'communicative activity that occurs in multiple, diverse yet partly overlapping spaces' [2] maintains, we need to analyse deliberative processes within their broader systemic context to 'understand how each venue is influenced by interactions across the various parts of the deliberative system as a whole'.[3]

The study will show that even though the gains of deliberation are limited in terms of influencing policy decision-making, in a context in which neither the state, nor the political culture provide opportunities for the flourishing of the civic life, public forums can contribute in creating a more civic public and a more strongly connected civil society that keeps its linkages with social movements. The study also demonstrates that such forums can help create dialogue among distant segments of the society even though such interactions are still rather modest. Iterated contact among historically distant groups in such forums has the potential to help overcome deep-seated cleavages.

In what follows, we will first provide the theoretical framework and methodological rationale of the study which will be followed by background information on the forums as well as the political setting in which these forums are embedded before turning to the discussion of findings.

Theoretical framework: a contextual and systemic look at deliberation

The deliberative democracy literature has gone in a productive direction by studying the empirical ramification of the theories on deliberative democracy. As a result, an important body of literature has been developed that tests the theoretical assumptions of models of deliberative democracy.[4] As Thompson argues, the endeavour can be taken further by systematically engaging with concerns of both theoretical and empirical nature and with better dialogue among scholars who are predominantly involved in studying either deliberative democracy philosophically or empirically.[5]

To better evaluate and further the theoretical undercurrents of deliberative democracy, finding real world cases in which deliberative processes occur is quite valuable. As Levine, Fung, and Gastil argue, 'if we want to observe how interest groups, politicians, and citizens deal with each other in public deliberations, then we need to study practices that are embedded in politics, not experiments with pre-determined topics

[2]Elstub, Ercan, and Mendonça, 'Editorial Introduction'.
[3]Mansbridge et al., 'A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy'.
[4]Didier Caluwaerts and Kris Deschouwer, 'Building Bridges across Political Divides: Experiments on Deliberative Democracy in Deeply Divided Belgium', *European Political Science Review* 6, no. 3 (August 2014): 427–50.
[5]Dennis F. Thompson, 'Deliberative Democratic Theory and Empirical Political Science', *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008): 497–520.

and controlled structures.'[6] Real world events can give us a fuller, more complex setting and a more realistic context to assess and further theories of deliberative democracy.[7] In this regard, the Gezi movement and the public forums created following the movement provide us with an invaluable opportunity.

Studies on deliberative democracy with an empirical focus have been praised for successfully combining theoretical debates of deliberative democracy with empirical evidence but they have nevertheless been criticized for focusing mostly on discrete cases of deliberation without examining their relationship to the broader system.[8] These studies have 'adopted mainly a micro approach to deliberation that isolated mini-publics and other institutions from the broader discursive environment and macro context within which they operate'.[9] As Mansbridge et al. argue, deliberative processes need to be studied within their broader systemic context in order to 'understand how each venue is influenced by interactions across the various parts of the deliberative system as a whole'.[10] To do so, it is first vital to clarify what we understand from deliberative systems. The deliberative systems approach conceptualizes deliberation as a 'communicative activity that occurs in multiple, diverse yet partly overlapping spaces, and emphasizes the need for interconnection between these spaces'.[11]

The location and scale of deliberative systems depends on the system at hand. It can include the polity at large but can also concern a set of institutions and organizations (Mansbridge et al. 2012, p.2). A deliberative system is not only judged by the deliberative capacity of its parts but by that of the whole system.[12] As Ercan and Dryzek point out, the borders of sites of public deliberation have expanded in the literature.[13] While earlier studies have either focused on formal or informal institutions more recent studies 'acknowledge that deliberation occurs in multiple and partly overlapping sites'.[14]

When viewed from the perspective described earlier, it is evident that we can get a more fully-fledged understanding of deliberative democracy if we look at it as a dynamic process that consists of a web of interrelated institutions and actors. Finding real world cases that exemplify such webs of relationship will contribute significantly to our understanding of how deliberative democracy operates and how it can be improved. Dryzek notes that the deliberative systems approach features a lot of theorizing yet 'relatively little close study of actual deliberative systems in the terms that theorists specify'.[15] Analyzing cases such as Gezi with special focus on broader deliberative network can help remedy this problem. But

[6]Peter Levine, Archon Fung, and John Gastil, 'Future Directions for Public Deliberation', *Journal of Public Deliberation* 1, no. 1 (March 25, 2005).

[7]On the importance of finding such real world experiments, see also Michael X. Delli Carpini, Fay Lomax Cook, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, 'Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation, and Citizen Engagement: A Review of the Empirical Literature', *Annual Review of Political Science* 7, no. 1 (2004): 315–44.

[8]Jane J. Mansbridge et al., 'A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy', in *Deliberative Systems : Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, ed. John R. Parkinson and Jane J. Mansbridge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–26, http://www.cambridge.org/gb/knowledge/isbn/item6796478/?site_locale=en_GB.

[9]Stephen Elstub, Selen Ercan, and Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça, 'Editorial Introduction: The Fourth Generation of Deliberative Democracy', *Critical Policy Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 139–51.

[10]See note 3.

[11]See note 2.

[12]See note 3.

[13]Selen A. Ercan and John S. Dryzek, 'The Reach of Deliberative Democracy', *Policy Studies* 36, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 241–48.

[14]Ercan and Dryzek.

[15]John S. Dryzek, 'Symposium Commentary: Reflections on the Theory of Deliberative Systems', *Critical Policy Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 209–15.

to do so, we need to clarify what is part of the deliberative system and what is not. We will also need to identify the actors and elements of a political setting that are still influential on the fate of deliberation even though they themselves are deliberately non-deliberative as the following sections will do.

In our analysis of deliberative systems, we need to distinguish what is deliberative and what is not. Deliberative practices occur in interactive settings in which not all institutions or organizations are deliberative. As Smith argues, bringing clearer boundaries to deliberative democratic systems by only including entities that can be characterized as deliberative will better sustain the analytical utility of the concept of deliberative systems.[16] This would not mean that all parts included in the system demonstrate maximum level of deliberation since the issue is a matter of degree.[17]

Yet, just because an organization, institution, or actor is not part of a deliberative system does not mean that it is isolated from that system and can be ignored in our study of deliberation. A lot of non-deliberative factors influence the quality and nature of deliberation in deliberative systems. To make sure that we incorporate such non-systemic elements in our analysis, we could consider them as contextual factors. As Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs argue, the impact of deliberation is highly context dependent and how 'contextual factors – both independently and in interaction with each other- affect the positive and negative consequences of public deliberation should be one of the primary goals of future research'.[18]

The Gezi case provides an interesting experience as it facilitates an analysis of deliberative democratic practices in a semi-authoritarian political setting. The political regime context in which the Gezi Forums operates can be classified as semi-authoritarian setting[19] as the recent literature on Turkey has called the regime hegemonic,[20] or competitive authoritarian.[21] Global indices have demonstrated this situation as well. For example, the Freedom House has classified Turkey as 'partly free' in 2017 and 'not free' in 2018[22] and the Democracy Index classifies Turkey as a 'hybrid regime'.[23]

Besides the characteristics of the current political system, the Turkish political, cultural and institutional setting also creates a rich environment for the analysis of deliberative democracy. To see how an experiment in deliberative democracy functions under such a system can broaden our understanding on deliberative democracy and it can open new areas of research in the field. The Turkish case creates a very unlikely and atypical case for deliberative practices. For most of the population, as well as for political leaders, democracy is understood as holding regular elections.[24] Turkey suffers from low social

[16]William Smith, 'The Boundaries of a Deliberative System: The Case of Disruptive Protest', *Critical Policy Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 152–70.
[17]Smith.
[18]Carpini, Cook, And Jacobs, 2004. 'Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation, and Citizen Engagement', p. 336.
[19]Murat Somer, 'Understanding Turkey's Democratic Breakdown: Old vs. New and Indigenous vs. Global Authoritarianism', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 481–503.
[20]Kursat Cinar, 'Local Determinants of an Emerging Electoral Hegemony: The Case of Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey', *Democratization* 23, no. 7 (2016): 1216–35.
[21]Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, 'Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey', *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (September 1, 2016): 1581–606.
[22]Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2017: Country Profile Turkey'., 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/turkey;;and Freedom House, 'Turkey', 2018, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/turkey.
[23]Economist Intelligence Unit, 'The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index', 2017, https://infographics.economist.com/2017/DemocracyIndex/.
[24]Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, 'Political Culture', in *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, ed. Metin Heper and Sabri Sayari (New York: Routledge, 2012), 171–80.

trust, low levels of civic engagement and low levels of social and religious tolerance. [25] Turkish civil society has been historically under the tutelage of the state due to the strong statist tradition[26] as well as the organic vision of society and republican model of citizenship.[27] What is more, Turkey suffers from high level of societal polarization which makes it hard for people from different political orientations to come together.[28] Given this background, it should come hardly as a surprise that Turkey has witnessed very few deliberative experiences throughout history.[29] In this study, we will show how forums engage with actors from local politics, social movements and civil society organizations and what kind of consequences such engagements bring. We will also discuss in what ways the political, cultural and institutional setting influences the fate of deliberative democracy. In what areas does it keep deliberative practices dormant and in what areas can deliberative practices flourish against all odds?

In addition, approaching the forums not in isolation but embedded in their context will help us understand the bigger picture. As the new turn to systems in deliberative democracy has also pointed out, studying deliberative organizations in isolation from their broader setting leaves our understanding of deliberation incomplete.[30] Yet taking all aspects of a polity as parts of a deliberative system will also result in losing analytical leverage. While looking at the broader picture in which deliberation takes place, we also need to make distinction between what is part of the deliberative system and what is not. To remedy potential problems of vagueness, we need to take a closer look at the context in which deliberative bodies operate.

In this regard, we approach the issue of deliberation in a three-tiered manner: (1) We look at the forums in which deliberation takes place, (2) we look at the interactions of public forums with other actors and organizations in the deliberative system (3) we look at the institutional, political and cultural setting in which forums operate. As a result of this, we want to understand the interaction between these three. We want to see how context influences the dynamics of the deliberative system. In doing so, we want to open a new path for research that investigates what kind of deliberative systems are created under different political and cultural settings.

As Mansbridge et al.[31] argue, we can think of deliberative systems outside democratic settings. Similarly, Dryzek[32] claims that: 'Examination of the development of [deliberative]

[25]Kalaycıoğlu, 'Political Culture'.
[26]Metin Heper, 'The Strong State as a Problem for the Consolidation of Democracy: Turkey and Germany Compared', *Comparative Political Studies* 25, no. 2 (July 1, 1992): 169–94.
[27]Fuat Keyman and Sebnem Gumuscu, 'Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation', in *Democracy, Identity, and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony through Transformation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[28]Sultan Tepe, 'The Perils of Polarization and Religious Parties: The Democratic Challenges of Political Fragmentation in Israel and Turkey', *Democratization* 20, no. 5 (August 1, 2013): 831–56.
[29]One exception is the LA21 (Local Agenda 21) which was developed under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program to foster civic participation in local governments' decision-making processes. Turkey was a one of the 23 partners. Nevertheless, in this experience deliberative practices were limited to certain purposed and constructed for limited time periods. As Doğanay notes, the LA21 practices in Turkey displayed an exclusionary attitude, which damaged the deliberative nature of these practices. Ülkü Doğanay, 'Rethinking Democratic Procedures: Democracy and Deliberative Experiences in Turkey's LA21 Process', *Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (December 2004): 728–44.
[30]Elstub, Ercan, and Mendonça, 'Editorial Introduction'; Mansbridge et al., 'A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy'.
[31]See note 3.
[32]John S. Dryzek, 'Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building', *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 11 (November 1, 2009): 1379–1402.

capacity…can apply in all kinds of political settings: under authoritarian regimes, in new and old democratic states, and in governance that eludes states.' Under undemocratic conditions, forums can play an uncertain but important role. The public sphere can in deed play a crucial role in countries where formal legislative deliberation is weak or absent.[33]

But just how deliberative systems operate within such regimes needs to be analyzed. To do that, we need to conduct an in-depth study among such groups both at the individual and the group level. What is more, we cannot just focus on single units but we need to cover the experience of as many deliberative entities as possible to reach a fuller picture of the field. This study aims to do that as it provides a multi-faceted look though in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus groups and textual analysis of forum documents.

Research methodology and case selection

In the five years following Gezi, a rich body of literature has now been accumulated. Scholars have discussed the class base of the protests,[34] the underlying causes of the protests ranging from environmental concerns,[35] to resistance against neoliberal policies,[36] decline of public spaces as well as of individual rights.[37] They have also delved into the implications and effects of Gezi in terms of the transformation of engagement with public spaces as well as changing citizenship practices in Turkey. [38] They have noted that Gezi has opened up new political arenas as evident, for instance, in electoral performance of the HDP (Hakların Demokratik Partisi/Peoples' Democratic Party), which created a radical democratic platform and formed an alliance between parts of the Turkish Left and the Kurdish political movement as opposed to its previous mostly Kurdish voter base.[39] Scholars have also noted that, in broader sense, Gezi has created unlikely alliances that were the result of both spontaneous encounters and conscious efforts to address the reductionism that hitherto reduced everything to the binary of secularism and Islamism.[40]

Besides the world historical significance of the Gezi case, studying forums in Turkey will provide further insights in our understanding of the working of deliberative democracy based on multiple other grounds. What makes Gezi significant from a deliberative perspective is that it brought a new approach to social movements in the Turkish case and it is part

[33]Dryzek. Dryzek gives the example of the Solidarity movement in Poland in the early 1980s.
[34]See, for instance, 'Korkut Boratav, Gezi Direnişi'ni değerlendirdi: "Olgunlaşmış bir sınıfsal başkaldırı…"', *Sendika.Org* (blog), accessed March 26, 2018, http://sendika62.org/2013/06/her-yer-taksim-her-yer-direnis-bu-isci-sinifinin-tarihsel-ozlemi-olan-sinirsiz-dolaysiz-demokrasi-cagrisidir-korkut-boratav-120919/.; Cihan Tuğal, '"Resistance Everywhere": The Gezi Revolt in Global Perspective', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 49 (ed 2013): 157–72; and Erdem Yörük and Murat Yüksel, 'Class and Politics in Turkey's Gezi Protests', *New Left Review*, II, no. 89 (2014): 103–23.
[35]For example, Begüm Özkaynak et al., 'The Gezi Park Resistance from an Environmental Justice and Social Metabolism Perspective', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 99–114.
[36]Antimo L. Farro and Deniz Günce Demirhisar, 'The Gezi Park Movement: A Turkish Experience of the Twenty-First-Century Collective Movements', *International Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (April 9, 2014): 176–89.
[37]Nilüfer Göle, 'Gezi – Anatomy of a Public Square Movement', *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 3 (2013). See also Cihan Tuğal, '"Resistance Everywhere"'.
[38]İlay Romain Örs, 'Genie in the Bottle: Gezi Park, Taksim Square, and the Realignment of Democracy and Space in Turkey', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 40, no. 4–5 (May 1, 2014): 489–98, p. 491.
[39]Oğuzhan Göksel and Omer Tekdemir, 'Questioning the "immortal State": The Gezi Protests and the Short-Lived Human Security Moment in Turkey', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 0, no. 0 (26 June, 2017): 1–18.
[40]Onur Bakıner, 'Can the "Spirit of Gezi" Transform Progressive Politics in Turkey?' in *The Making of a Protest Movement in Turkey: #occupygezi* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014), 65–76, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-137-41378-9_5.

of a more global trend of horizontal, participatory social movements. Ozkaynak et al call Gezi Park forums 'the first participatory democracy experience in Turkish history', which 'served as egalitarian, self-regulatory gathering spaces'.[41] Gezi Park was turned into a communal living space in which protestors set up tents, shared their food, and installed a mobile library. Public services, such as medical ones, were provided for free by the participants. Gezi brought together people from different ideological and ideational backgrounds, including 'a variety of left-wing organizations, environmentalist, LGBT groups, feminist groups and "anti-capitalist Muslim", as well as many trade unions and professional organizations'.[42] Seeing electoral aspects of democracy as insufficient, Gezi participants formed local assemblies and showed deliberative potential in their organization and execution of decisions.[43] In cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir park assemblies were formed that 'featured rotating speakers, rather than spokespersons' and the Gezi case played an important role in fostering deliberation among groups that had hitherto been distant, even hostile to one another.[44] For instance, Gezi brought together Kurds and Turks, secularists and Islamists and people from different classes.

Given Turkeys' socio-political history, Gezi is unusual and pioneering since it opens the door for civil society-led deliberative practices that are sustained over time. Whether such an initiative is able to break the vicious cycle of low social trust, deep-seated social cleavage and low levels of civic engagement is an important question to address. The selection of Izmir as the locus for the public forums chosen will also serve us in advancing this inquiry. Izmir is historically the political stronghold for secularist voters and votes mostly in opposition to AKP, primarily for The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP). In addition to being a stronghold for the opposition,[45] Izmir is also generally known for its staunchly Kemalist secularism and nationalism. Izmir is also among the most immigration-receiving cities of Turkey, which means that local inhabitants of Izmir get to meet people from diverse backgrounds. The forums of Izmir are a good litmus test for forums created after Gezi as to understand whether the inclusive and pluralistic tone of Gezi could be maintained in such public forums.[46] What is more, studying these experiences in-depth will show us the gains and limits of deliberative practices under the delineated conditions. This article focuses on three public forums, which have been operating in Izmir since Gezi: The Foça Forum, the Güzelyalı Forum, and the Karşıyaka Forum. A general overview of these forums can be found in Table 1. These three forums were chosen for the reason that unlike other forums such as the Kadıköy Yoğurtçu Park Public Forum and the Abbasağa Park Forum (both in Istanbul), these forums survived up until now. In terms of tracing forums' dynamics, their survival and transformation process, these forums provide invaluable data.[47]

[41]Özkaynak et al., 'The Gezi Park Resistance from an Environmental Justice and Social Metabolism Perspective'.
[42]Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça and Selen A. Ercan, 'Deliberation and Protest: Strange Bedfellows? Revealing the Deliberative Potential of 2013 Protests in Turkey and Brazil', *Policy Studies* 36, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 267–82.
[43]Mendonça and Ercan.
[44]Ibid.
[45]Feryaz Ocaklı, 'Islamist Mobilisation in Secularist Strongholds: Institutional Change and Electoral Performance in Turkey', *South European Society and Politics* 22, no. 1: 61–80, p.76.
[46]With such characteristics, Gezi is often juxtaposed to the 'Republican Rallies' of 2007, which were defined by their hardline secularist, militaristic and exclusionary tone. On these rallies, see, for example, Ayla Göl, 'The Identity of Turkey: Muslim and Secular', *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (June 1, 2009): 795–811.
[47]Ozkaynak et al lament the fact that these forums, which were 'attempts to continue the unconventional politics of Gezi Park' and tried to 'create a more direct and pluralistic form of democracy', gradually lost their effectiveness as

Public park forums in Izmir demonstrate patterns of deliberative democracy. All three forums put discussion at the centre and they all emphasize respect and tolerance. In all three forums, decisions are taken as a result of deliberation of all members. In each meeting, forum members vote for a moderator who oversees the discussions. Decisions are mostly taken by consensus. On conflicting issues, they sometimes eventually opt for absolute majority vote. The forums do not have restrictive membership rules. Nevertheless, all three public forum refer to basic human rights and they adopt an anti-racist discourse. The forums give importance to publicity and transparency. All forums' meetings are open to public. The agenda and decisions are published after the forum meetings. Forum members state that they put collective interest ahead of each of their private interests and they work voluntarily.

The Foça, Güzelyalı and Karşıyaka Forums were all created during the Gezi movement and have been active since June 2013. Each weekly forum meeting includes about 15–20 participants but during important periods such as the anniversary of Gezi Park movement or during some political events (such as general elections or referenda) the number of participants increases. There are some similarities and differences among these chosen. They display similar membership profiles in terms of age range. Most of the participants in each forum are above 40, and a majority of them are retired. In all three neighbourhoods, the municipal government is ruled by the main opposition party in Turkey, CHP. The party defines itself as secular, social democratic.

Each forum meets weekly: the Foça Forum meets on Thursdays and the Karşıyaka and Güzelyalı Forums meet on Tuesdays. During summer times, the number of meetings and the number of participants fall significantly because of the holiday season but members meet even if only three people attend. In all three forums, forum participants work voluntarily, they collect money from their own pockets in order to use for their events and protests. Those who could not contribute financially did so through other means. For example, a worker at a supermarket who helps clean and arrange the meeting place and prepares the workshop material for the Güzelyalı Forum stated that he joined the forum because even though he could not help the forum financially, he wanted to volunteer for the needs of the forum.

Compared to Güzelyalı and Karşıyaka, Foça is a small seaside town. Hence, almost all of its participants are retired people. In Güzelyalı, the number of people who work as civil servants are higher than in Karşıyaka. Both Karşıyaka and Güzelyalı Forums have members with trade union background. The Karşıyaka Forum defines itself explicitly as left-wing whereas the Foça Forum defines itself as open to different political affiliations yet during the forum meetings and focus groups discussions, Foça Forum members did not reveal their political identities. Overall, the Foça Forum prefers a more moderate approach both in terms of discussion and mode of action as the discussions below will show. In the Güzelyalı Forum, members do not refer to terms that could connote any political affiliation. Instead, they prefer adjectives such as 'humanitarian' and 'human-

the March 2014 local elections approached since 'people were more inclined to think and act within the existing electoral system than consider alternatives'. Izmir forums constitute an outlier in this regard as this study will show. Özkaynak et al., 'The Gezi Park Resistance from an Environmental Justice and Social Metabolism Perspective'. In addition to the selected forums, there are six forums in Izmir: Buca Barış Mahallesi Kız Kulesi Public Forum, Konak Forum, Bornova Public Forum

Gündoğdu İskele Public Forum, Evka-1 Yedigöller Public Forum, Alsancak İskele Public Forum. http://everywheretaksim.net/tr/tag/izmir/page/8/. Accessed May 25, 1931, 2018.

oriented' for their actions, and they define public forums as 'human-oriented collectivities'. As one member puts it 'we have human-oriented concerns and we do not have any political priorities'.

For our research, we reached the forums through their Facebook pages. We sent them messages explaining our research and our desire to participate in their events. Upon this, we were invited to their events. We employed multiple research methods in order to provide a fully-fledged account of the cases at hand. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups studies as well as taking part in forum events as participant observers. We conducted two focus group studies with each forum.[48] We attended their meetings and requested forum members whom we met during these events to be interviewed and to join our focus group study. In-depth interviews were conducted and focus groups were held with members who accepted our request. Since these forums are announcing important events they organize via Facebook, we were able to follow and join such events. We also made sure to attend meetings during important time periods, such as the constitutional referendum process and the Gezi anniversary or the times in which these forums organized events or protests. To protect the anonymity of participants, we refer to them with their jobs (if mentioned), their position in the forum as well as some other distinct characteristic whenever relevant in order to separate the interviewees from each other. In total, we have conducted 45 in-depth interviews, 5 focus groups and 7 participant observations. [49]

In social movement research, in-depth interviews are useful instruments to examine the way in which participants give sense to their actions and to the micro-dynamics of commitment. As Della Porta argues, qualitative interviews are particularly useful when 'we wish to analyze the meaning individuals attribute to the external world and to their own participation in it, the construction of identity, and the development of emotions'.[50] Despite its strengths, in-depth interviews are not conducive to revealing the interaction between participants. For this reason, we complemented our interviews with focus group research. We also participated in the forums' events and discussions in order to understand the contradictions, stakes and social expectations of forum participants. While in-depth interviews helped us understand the personal perspectives of participants, focus groups provided valuable information about the interaction between the participants and participant observations filled the gaps by providing us self-experience. The forums members who were interviewed sometimes also participated in the focus groups studies, which gave us the opportunity to make comparison between their responses during face-to-face interviews and in focus groups studies since members can give different responses when they enter into interaction with other forum members.[51]

[48]The dates of the focus groups were as follows: Foça Public Forum (14 July 2016, 3 March 2017), Güzelyalı Public Forum (13 March 2017), Karşıyaka Public Forum (7 February 2016, 22 June 2017). The dates of the participant observations were as follows: Foça Public Forum (7 February 2016, 5 April 2017), Güzelyalı Public Forum (19 December 2015, 1 June 2017, 23 June 2017), Karşıyaka Public Forum (2 January 2016, 18 March 2017).

[49]The field research for this article was conducted between December 2015 and June 2017.

[50]Donatella Della Porta, 'In-Depth Interviews' in Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research (Oxford University Press, New York, 2014), 230.

[51]Ercan, Hendriks and Boswell also suggest interpretative methods for systemic deliberative approaches so as to cope with challenges that arise from tackling with different components of the system. They maintain that an interpretive approach can pave the way for the analysis of the core dynamics of deliberative systems, namely sites, agents and

Swimming against the stream: deliberation in limited settings

For an institution to count as deliberative, it needs to facilitate action that is 'reflective, respectful, and dialogic'.[52] Similarly, Mansbridge et al. identify the elements of deliberative systems as those that perform the functions of 'seeking truth, establishing mutual respect, and generating inclusive, egalitarian decision-making'.[53] Finally, Dryzek defines deliberative capacity as 'the extent to which a political system possesses structures to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential'.[54] Using these measures, the state of Turkish political authority leaves no room for deliberation and thus it is impossible to be included into a deliberative system. As opposed to parliaments and constitutional courts that suit deliberation better,[55] the executive is very powerful in the Turkish case and rule by decree is common. Even the recent constitution-making process lacked any significant deliberation. The leaders of the ruling party, AKP, and a smaller, far-right party, MHP, made arrangements behind the doors to switch the regime from parliamentarism to presidentialism and to remove all traces of checks and balances from the system. In a controversial referendum, in which the Higher Council for the Elections (YSK) accepted unstamped ballots as valid, the referendum passed with 51% of the votes.[56]

Not surprisingly, the Turkish state does not open any channels of deliberation with the forums. In fact, the state does not recognize the forums as an actor to be taken seriously. The political system is strictly majoritarian and democracy is solely viewed as elections. Gezi is constantly being discredited by the ruling party and is accused of being part of a bigger conspiracy. To this, we can also add the fact that Izmir is a city that constantly votes against the AKP. As a result, it is safe to say that there is no dialogue between these forums and the central government. When it comes to the issue of local governments, the picture becomes more complicated.

Among the three forums, their level of dialogue with the municipal governments varies. The Güzelyalı Park Forum maintained close relationship with the local government at the beginning. For example, the municipal government had allocated them the Güzelyalı Kültür Merkezi (Güzelyalı Cultural Center) every Saturday for their events such as workshops for children or music and theatre performances. However, this relationship did not last long. As the forum started objecting the city plans of the municipal government and particularly as a result of their protest to the Göztepe Stadium project, the municipality started to perceive the forum as a menace. In an in-depth interview, a forum participant summarized this situation as 'authority by nature is closed to opposition, when you voice your contradictory arguments, authority tries to bloc you'.

The Karşıyaka Public Forum presents a collective stance against the local government. During focus group meetings, the group criticized local authorities even though there are CHP supporters and even members of it in the forum. One participant for example expressed his thoughts on this matter as follows: 'as a member of Kültürpark Platform

discursive elements. Ercan, Hendriks and Boswell, 'Studying Public Deliberation after the Systemic Turn: The Crucial Role for Interpretive Research', Policy & Politics, April 1, 2017, 1–36.

[52]Smith, 'The Boundaries of a Deliberative System'.

[53]See note 3.

[54]Dryzek, 'Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building'.

[55]Dryzek.

[56]Alexandra Topping, 'Turkey Referendum: Erdoğan Wins Vote amid Dispute over Ballots – as It Happened', *The Guardian*, April 16, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2017/apr/16/turkey-referendum-recep-tayyip-erdogan-votes-presidential-powers.

(to be explained in the following text) and as a citizen who is living in Karşıyaka, and as a member of CHP, I can say that, CHP does bad things in terms of city planning and we try to defend our city together.' Another member of the forum also criticized the Güzelyalı and Foça forums for having close ties with the municipalities on the grounds that he believes that one needs to keep some distance with the municipal government in order to maintain a critical attitude towards the municipal government.

The Foça forum is most closely in interaction with the municipal government. The forum members prepared a forum program and they delivered it to the mayor. They told us that mayor said that, if he had gotten this program before elections, he would have implemented this program rather than their own program. Forum members brought up this anecdote to back their point that good relations with local authority are essential. As one participant put it: 'If we want to change something in our city and protect our living spaces, we should find ways to be respected by local authorities. They should accept us as a social pressure element.' With the purpose of constructing close relations with local authorities, some forum members joined the city council and they entered some assemblies such as the Tourism Assembly in order to develop a more systematic way of work.

Nevertheless, even at the Foça Forum, there are disagreements among the members on how this relationship should be. A case in point is the discussion around Donatkent, which is a beach in Foça that has been occupied by a person for private enterprise for 3 years and the local authorities have chosen to ignore this situation. The person has built a private café on this public beach. The forum has been tackling with this issue for two years without success. During a focus group meeting, the forum moderator first read the forum agenda, which included the subject of Donatkent. The moderator explained to the participants what the forum did in the course of time concerning the issue of Donatkent. He read the new petition they submitted to the officials of the municipality and asked for further suggestions regarding the next step to be taken by the forum members. There was disagreement on the issue of how to proceed. One participant suggested they should wait until they receive the municipality's response but another participant disagreed stating that 'while waiting we should go and stay on the beach some days of the week. We should not be passive if we want to gain concrete benefits at the end of day. We should create pressure over authority as public authority.' The participant who favoured waiting for the municipality's response first replied in turn by saying that if they wanted to get concrete benefits, they should refrain from being a menace in the eyes of local authority.

Overall, there was disagreement on the approach to follow. Some participants suggested meeting with the mayor and district governor and gaining their support; some of them objected to this suggestion. Those who were in favour of being active and suggest street demonstrations argued that such protests could gain media attention and could create social pressure over local authorities. These contradictory arguments did not cause conflict that disrupted the working of the forum though. While they discussed, they took the floor by asking permission from the moderator and they tried to find a middle way by referring to the goals of the forum.

While the situation might not be as grave as it is with the central government, we can still say that the local governments do not provide an important link within the deliberative system.

As far as societal actors are concerned, the Turkish case is known to demonstrate low social capital, low social trust and associational capacity.[57] From the media angle, there is also not room for deliberation as Turkey suffers from general crackdown of the media.[58] Major media outlets are owned by a handful number of conglomerates, who have close ties to the government and who receive lucrative deals from the state in return for their loyalty.[59]

In this atmosphere, the social media, some of the civil society initiatives and social movements (most of which have been further curbed as a result of the State of Emergency declared after the 2016 coup attempt) and to a certain extent, some of the local governments can be counted within the deliberative system in which the Gezi forums operate. Considering all the dynamics, we can say that Gezi forums work against the stream as the overall political and cultural setting under which they operate shows very low deliberative capacity.

As Mansbridge et al.[60] argue, the state has an important role to play for deliberative systems. Regarding liberal-democratic constitutional states, Mansbridge et al.[61] claim that such states 'create spaces of deliberation within political institutions such as legislatures and courts. They also enable deliberation within society by protecting free speech and association. They encourage deliberation by underwriting institutions in which deliberation is itself constitutive, such as universities and scientific research establishments.' Hybrid regimes[62] do not create such opportunities. When asked about their relationship with the state, and even before being asked about that, all three forums define themselves not as in deliberation with the state but as actors that try to achieve things despite the state.

Even so, the state plays an important role for the deliberative system not as a facilitator or catalyst but as an imposing actor that influences the strategies, discursive practices and actions of deliberative entities as will be discussed in detail later. As Dryzek (2009, p.1395) argues, 'state structures may have unintended and surprising consequences that can be revealed only by empirical analysis.' As a result, even though the state does not count as part of the deliberative system, it still needs to be accounted for in the analysis as an important part of the context in which the system operates. The same is true for the media as well as socio-cultural factors. In terms of such factors, we can count the deep-seated cleavages in the society, particularly between Islamist and secularists as well as between Kurdish and Turkish nationalists. To study deliberative systems in semi-authoritarian regimes can give us a lot of insight regarding the survival, flourishing or demise of such systems. It can also demonstrate in what fields such systems can make gains and in which fields they are unable to achieve anything.

[57]Kalaycıoğlu, 'Political Culture'; and Keyman and Gumuscu, 'Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation'.
[58]'Freedom of the Press 2017: Turkey Profile', 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/turkey;; and Reporters without Borders, 'Journalism Engulfed by the Purge'. 2017, https://rsf.org/en/turkey.
[59]Ali Çarkoğlu and Gözde Yavuz, 'Press–party Parallelism in Turkey: An Individual Level Interpretation', *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 613–24; and Raşit Kaya and Barış Çakmur, 'Politics and the Mass Media in Turkey', *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 521–37.
[60]See note 3.
[61]Mansbridge et al.
[62]Larry Jay Diamond, 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes', *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 21–35.

Prospects of deliberation: the civic life

As we have shown, the impact of the forums on policy decisions, both at the central government and at the municipal level, are extremely weak. Yet, as Dryzek[63] argues, deliberation has functions other than being closely tied to policy decision. In parallel with this idea, we will seek to find answers to the following questions in the section below: How do public forums affect the social and political cultural of their environment in which they operate? Are they able to contribute to the civicness and social capital of their community? Do they cause any transformation of deep-seated ideas and do they lead to encounters of different-minded people and thereby promote pluralism?

As a result of our study, we found that one of the important gains of the public forums is to enrich social capital and civic associations significantly. This is very crucial since the Turkish civil society is known for being very weak and mostly lacks autonomy from the state.[64] What is more, interpersonal trust is very low among Turkish citizens and people prefer to socialize with their families or people from the same hometown as them instead of participating in civic associations.[65] Finally, Turkish society is ridden with deep cleavages, particularly between secularism and Islamism and between Kurdish and Turkish nationalism [66] which further contributes to the polarized and parochial context, with polarization further fuelled by the ruling party and by Erdoğan, whose electoral strategy is to gather votes via consolidating his own support base.[67]

In such an atmosphere in which neither the state, nor the political culture provide opportunities for the flourishing of the civic life, public forums serve important purposes.

During an in-depth interview, one participant of the Karşıyaka Forum, who is retired and is taking care of her grandchildren, illustrated this point by saying: 'I could not imagine becoming a politically engaged person before joining the forum. Maybe I cannot participate in all events and meetings but I do my best as a 65 years old person who was not politically active in any period of her life.' The forums also foster a civic sense of belonging to the neighbourhood, promote a sense of solidarity, and educate people to behave and make decisions collectively. As a Güzelyalı Forum participant puts it, these forums are 'educative and create a sense of awareness.'

The social media is a good source of communication not only within the forum but also between forums and with other civil society organizations. All forums have a Facebook account. Forums use Facebook as a way to announce events, put records of their meetings, or share photos of their events. While a Güzelyalı Forum member stated that they use the social media to ensure the transparency, publicity and inclusiveness of their forum, a Karşıyaka Forum member said that even older members of their forum started using the social media since Gezi because 'it was the only way of communication when the mass media was blind and speechless.' A Foça forum participant said that they knew that they had an important following on the social media, which became visible

[63]John S. Dryzek, 'Theory, Evidence, and the Tasks of Deliberation', in *Deliberation, Participation and Democracy*, ed. Shawn W. Rosenberg (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 237–50.
[64]Keyman and Gumuscu, 'Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation'.
Even though the global trends and the EU integration process has resulted in a livelier civil society, nevertheless the increase in quantity has not translated to a qualitative transformation of the state-civil society relations in Turkey. Keyman and Gumuscu, p.155.
[65]See note 25.
[66]Ergun Özbudun, *Party Politics & Social Cleavages in Turkey* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013).
[67]Cinar, 'Local Determinants of an Emerging Electoral Hegemony'.

with the support they received at the events they organized. Forums also use social media to attract the attention of potential participants.

The environment provides a common point for the forums and brings forums together. Pollution in an industrial district of Izmir, Aliağa, is a common concern for all forums. Forum members gather around environmental issues in Aliağa especially concerning steam power plants. In June 2014, Karşıyaka Forum members joined the Foça Forum as well as the Doğal ve Kültürel Yaşam Girisimi (Initiative for Natural and Cultural Life), City Planners İzmir Branch, Eğitimsen (a left-wing teacher's trade union) Foça Branch in a visit to Horozgediği and Kozbeyli villages and with these initiatives they talked about road maps to be pursued.

For the Karşıyaka Forum, Nergis Park (a public park on which the municipality was planning to build a car park and other buildings) is also a central theme of discussion during almost all meetings. The Karşıyaka Forum has been working on this issue since 2014 and as forum members mentioned during focus group meetings, they went to local authorities in order to voice their demands for several times. Nevertheless, they could not reach any gain from their efforts. Conducting participant observations gave us the chance to observe that forum members could not reach a consensus about the strategy they will pursue on this issue during forum meetings. Some of forum participants wanted to protest in the municipal assembly but others disagreed claiming that that was not the way to go to find a solution.

The Foça Forum has close ties with the Foça Cevre ve Kultur (Environment and Culture) Platform (Foçep), which was founded in 2009. The forum protested jointly with Foçep for environmental issues. The last protest of that nature was called 'Zeytinime Dokunma (Do not touch my Olive),' which was also joined by the Ege (Aegean) Cevre ve Kultur (Environment and Culture) Platform. They all went to the Turkish parliament and made a press release on 13 June 2017 to demand that the government stops projects of opening olive gardens to construction. The Foca Forum also participated in an initiative against fossil fuels (Fosil Yakıt Karşıtı Insiyatifi) along with 37 other organizations. They jointly organized an event called 'Kömüre Karşı Pedala Bas' (Pedal Against Coal) and a panel called 'Kömürden kurtul geleceği kurtar' (Get rid of coal, rescue your future).

In a focus group meeting with the Güzelyalı Public Forum, when asked about their relationship with other forums, one member said 'We as Izmir Public Forums can work together without any hesitation especially when it comes to the environment. Our living spaces are our priority and we want to have our voice heard in the decision-making process regarding this issue.' The formation of the Kültürpark platform is important in this regard. The same responded continued by saying 'With this purpose we joined the Kültürpark Platform and some of forum members actually led the founding of it. The Kültürpark Platform is a very important achievement for İzmir's civil society.' In the same focus group meeting with the Güzelyalı Public Forum, another participant wanted to add that 'Forums are not organizations, forums are processes where people gather and discuss. After forum discussions, common action can occur.' He maintained that they founded the Kültürpark Platform with this idea and that they discuss the future of the Kültürpark Platform in their forums.

The Kültürpark Platform shows that umbrella organizations can grow out of interactions of the deliberative forums. The Kültürpark Platform includes 25 components including political and civil organizations such as TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers

And Architects), Halkevleri (People's Houses), Mimarlar Odası (Chamber of Architects), İzmir Tabib Odası (Izmir Chamber of Doktors), Şehir Plancılar Odası (Chamber of Urban Planners), The United June Movement as well as public forums of Izmir. The platform was founded as a result of the meetings and deliberations among members of different forums in order to provide a space for organized action. On its Facebook website, [68] the platform defines its purpose as 'to invite the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality to withdraw the Kültürpark Revision Project … and to accept with common sense that it is possible to find a way that makes it possible to pass the natural, historical, cultural and social structure of Kültürpark to new generations with more sustainable practices.' The project protested by the platform will lead to the construction of skyscrapers right in the middle of Kültürpark, which is one of Izmir's most significant public spaces and has historical and natural value. In addition to tackling the specific issue of the Kültürpark, the Kültürpark Platform also mobilized during the constitutional amendment referendum of 2017 and created 'No' assemblies that campaigned against the shift to presidentialism.

Not only the Güzelyalı Forum, but also the Foça and Karşıyaka forums also show interest in Kültürpark. Foça Forum members participated in the activities of Kültürpark and put pictures of those events on their Facebook website. The Karşıyaka Forum members mentioned Kültürpark during their meetings. In a recent forum meeting, one participant took the floor and told other members about the legal process of the Kültürpark events. He asked forum members to come to a decision as the whole forum to participate in the Kültürpark activities. A consensus was reached at the end of the meeting to join the activities of Kültürpark.

Forums as springboards for further civic and political action

Forums also provide a gateway to other forms of civic and political action, which is not confined to organizations concerned primarily with environmental issues. The United June Movement (Birlesik Haziran Hareketi – BHH) is an important actor that was 'fermented' in the forums of Gezi.[69] After Gezi, members of different forums came together at different times but on 30 August 2014 forum participants met with academics, members of political parties and civil society organizations came together. After subsequent meetings in September and October, the group was founded with the name 'The United June Movement' (June being the month of Gezi).[70] The movement proposes more horizontal forms of organization and local assemblies and advocacy for issues such as environment or human rights.

For instance, many members of the Güzelyalı Forum, who are now also members of BHH's Güzelyalı assembly, have volunteered in organizations such as *Izmir'in Sandıkları* (The Ballot Boxes of Istanbul). They received education on how to become observers at ballot boxes during elections and they served as observers during the referendum. Before the referendum, at a forum meeting participants of the forum, who are also members of *Izmir'in Sandıkları*, discussed what they did as *Izmir'in Sandıkları*. The forum also served as a bridge between the Bar Association of Izmir and *Izmir'in Sandıkları*. The

[68]'Kulturpark Platformu', 2017, https://www.facebook.com/kulturparkplatformu/.
[69]Ali Daglar, 'Birleşik Haziran Hareketi Nedir', Hürriyet, accessed July 1, 2017, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/birlesik-haziran-hareketi-nedir-28195098.
[70]Daglar.

Bar Association allocated an office for *Izmir'in Sandıkları* and published 10,000 brochures detailing the proposed constitutional amendments as well as the guidebook for becoming observers during the referendum.

Not all forum members are happy with the engagement with the BHH. In the Karşıyaka Forum, for example, some participants were unhappy about other members being directly involved with the BHH on the ground that they find it 'too political.' Some members of the forum even left the forum based on this disagreement. One forum participant complained, 'the forum moves in a direction I cannot adopt day by day. Some friends try to steer the works of the forum because they are members of the BHH.'

The Karşıyaka Forum also works with the Halkların Köprüsü (Bridging Peoples) Association.[71] On 28 February 2015 Izmir forums jointly organized a solidarity concert, which was also attended by the members of the Halkların Köprüsü Association. The president of the association made a speech at that occasion.

The Foça Forum, on the other hand, has a close relationship with Foça Barış Kadınları (Peace Women). This organization defines its mission to work for justice and peace, gender equality, women's rights, provide mutual understanding among women from different cultural and political backgrounds and to prevent violence against women and children.[72] The Foça Forum provided support for the events of this organization.

The forums also want to reach broader audiences and influence public opinion via creating alternative news sources. The Foça Forum members started to issue an internet newspaper titled Siren. Foça Siren defines itself as 'an internet newspaper that is independent of state institutions and political parties, which is focused on Foça.' [73] A member defined the contributions of this periodical as 'voicing our city's problems in a more perpetual way.' Similarly, when asked about the concrete contributions of their forums during a focus group meeting, members of the Karşıyaka Forum unanimously mentioned the Kızılcık Eylem Haberleri (Kızılcık Action News), which is an internet news portal founded after Gezi by a permanent member of the Karşıyaka Forum.

Deliberative democracy and social movements: Gezi as a focal point

As Della Porta argues, deliberative democracy and social movements have not been sufficiently linked in the scholarly literature and recent social movements provide an opportunity to closely inspect the relationship between these two phenomena.[74] Gezi's relationship to public forums creates an excellent opportunity in this regard as it constitutes an important centre of gravity for the forums. The Gezi movement serves as a bonding agent both for within forum action, action across forums and the broader network of civil society organizations. Gezi provides an anchoring point and is a source

[71]This association defines itself as follows: 'We are attempting to promote a safe space in order to create a public friendship between all people groups. We are striving for a society free of hate, fear, isolation, conflict, and enmity towards one another'. 'Halklarin Koprusu', accessed July 1, 2017, http://www.halklarinkoprusu.org/en/who-are-we/.

[72]Foca Siren, 'Foça Barış Kadınları'yla Kadın Cezaevi Ziyareti üzerine Konuşma', *Foça Siren*, February 6, 2017, http://focasiren.net/foca-baris-kadinlariyla-kadin-cezaevi-ziyareti-uzerine-konusma/.

[73]Foca Siren, 'Hakkimizda', *Foça Siren* (blog), March 13, 2016, http://focasiren.net/hakkimizda-3/.

[74]Donatella Della Porta, 'Communication in Movement', *Information, Communication & Society* 14, no. 6 (September 1, 2011): 800–819.

of solidarity and motivation for forum participants. Both in the in-depth interviews and in the focus group meetings, forum participants referred to Gezi quite often.

In all three forums, even without asking, forum participants refer to the Gezi movement. Forum members still gather around themes covering Gezi and they see Gezi as an opportunity to bond with other forums as well. In the Karşıyaka Forum, for example, one partisan told us that if there had been no Gezi, there would not have been these forums and the other participants of the focus group agreed. Members of all three forums, carry the pictures of those people who were killed during the Gezi protests in the public demonstrations they participate in.

In the case of the Foça Forum, one female participant told us that the forums were established during Gezi based on environmental concerns but she added that over time, these forums have transformed themselves to cover social phenomena. Another participant maintained: 'These forums were established because we lived a movement like Gezi otherwise it would not have occurred' while another one claimed that they participated in the forums since June 2013 'order to fight together against anti-democratic implementations in our country'.

When asked 'what was the reason for you to join the forum?' participants of the Güzelyalı forum told us that the Gezi Movement was the initial driving force because it revealed that many people have common concerns about political power and its actions. Although they all agree that Gezi Park Movement served as a point of departure and paved the way for public park forums, forums were able to take the struggle one step further by creating a more convenient atmosphere and a more established formation, which provides an optimal cultural and political climate.

During the fourth anniversary of Gezi, the Karşıyaka forum organized a commemorative event and invited other Izmir forums to this event. The slogan of the event was 'We remember Gezi and remind others of Gezi: from Gezi to the referendum.' The referendum here refers to the constitutional referendum that introduced a majoritarian presidential system. During this event, participants of different Izmir forums took the floor and talked about the first days of Gezi and how the movement paved the way for the forums. With regard to the forums, one participant said: 'Gezi is our mom and dad, Gezi is our turning point.' As the name of the event suggests, Gezi also provided a frame for further action.

Especially in every event which they need participation from different segments of society they refer to Gezi and its spirit of togetherness. For example, the forum published a booklet for the Izmir Book Fair, which took place in April, 2014. This booklet started with the following sentence: 'The Karşıyaka Public Forum originated from the Taksim Gezi Park Movement, which spread through out the country and this Karşıyaka Public Forum derives its legitimacy from this "Gezi Spirit".'

Gezi has also provided a repertoire of discourse and action for forum participants. In a meeting with Karşıyaka Forum participants, one participant stressed that Gezi provided an unforgettable reference point for them in terms of its modes of action, production of slogans, and practice of coordinated action. For the anniversary of Gezi, the Karşıyaka Forum prepared a manifesto in which they state that the Gezi movement created a culture of sharing, which stipulates 'There is no you and I, there is us.' Karşıyaka Forum Members refer to Gezi Park stance during Forum discussion meetings in order to legitimize their decisions. Even forum decision-making principles are justified with Gezi. The document showing Karşıyaka Forum's decision-making principles states the following:

(1) The decisions should be taken in such a manner that every member should be convinced about them. Otherwise, discussions should continue until everyone accepts the decision or another way is found.
(2) The decision-making process should be in line with the soul of June [read Gezi]
(3) It should serve the fight for democracy, freedom and labour.

There is an interaction between forums and social movements in which forums serve as potential reservoirs for social movements. In parallel, one Karşıyaka Forum member defines forums as potential cadres of new social movements. During a focus group meeting, when asked why they are still in the forum, participants of the Karşıyaka Forum almost unanimously stated that they want to be ready here when the sun that was extinguish after Gezi will want to flare up again. A member of the Karşıyaka Forum added: 'we are still here in order to be ready as a social reaction centre to orient unorganized people in a chaotic atmosphere in which social clashes would become more obvious again likely during Gezi Movement.'

The findings about Gezi support the claim in the literature that social movements and deliberative democracy should not be viewed as antithetical [75] On the contrary, social movements can create important opportunities for deliberative practices. Mendonça and Ercan[76] focus on the deliberative dimensions of protests such as Gezi in terms of their organization, their execution and achievements. This study, on the other hand, has shown that social protests can have further influences on public forums that even exceed their existence as actual protests. Furthermore, our findings also reveal that forums can also feed social movements as well as the other way around.

Social learning in public forums

In addition to contributing to the civic life and providing bridges between different civil societal actors, one praiseworthy function of deliberative democracy is social learning: 'That is, deliberation across different kinds of individuals and groups can be productive in restructuring social relationships in a more respectful direction and producing mutual understanding.' [77] Dryzek claims that deliberation 'can play an important role in healing deep divisions based on ethnic, racial, national, religious, or linguistic lines.'[78] This is a gain that cannot be overestimated, especially for cases such as Turkey, which are deeply polarized.

Forums are eager to reach new people. As a Karşıyaka Forum member stated 'we organize events to reach people and convince them to be a member of our Forum. We are aware of that if they can reach more people then they become more effective in terms of making their voice heard by local powers.' To reach people, Karşıyaka and Güzelyalı forum members, for example, went to public places such as bazaars and talked to people about daily problems such as the cost of living and purchasing power because they think that these are the most important problems for people before all other political concerns. While the groups contribute significantly to the system of civil societal actors and provide important bridges for them, there are limits to the pluralism that is fostered by the forums.

[75]Mansbridge et al., 'A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy'; Mendonça and Ercan, 'Deliberation and Protest'.
[76]Mendonça and Ercan, 'Deliberation and Protest'.
[77]Dryzek, 'Theory, Evidence, and the Tasks of Deliberation'.
[78]See note 54.

In a way, one can argue that the forums facilitate people to join the civic life but they encourage more socialization with like-minded people compared to providing bridging mechanisms to groups that are outside one's ideological leaning. As one participant of the Foça Forum stated 'I was politically involved before coming to Foça but it was due to the Forum discussions that I gained knowledge and experience about environmental issues more than I ever had. Moreover, I started to participate in demonstrations actively.' She added, 'After I had come to such a small city then I realized how important to be with others who *think along the same line with you*.' (emphasis added) As Dryzek argues, only interacting with like-minded people reduces the deliberative capacity of the forums.[79]

A Karşıyaka Forum participant for example stated that whereas at the beginning of the forum, meaning during the days of Gezi, over the course of time the movement has evolved into a more left-oriented direction because those people who lead the discussions and actions are left-oriented. 'These people constitute the majority,' she argued 'because they generally have a more politically active background and are experienced in acting in an organized manner.' She claimed that for that reason, those who did not identify with left-wing ideology felt excluded. The same participant also told us during a focus group meeting that it was hard for her to tolerate a nationalist in the forum since the forum has 'created its own deep-seated structure.' Even those participants who welcomed the opinions are not uniform on this matter though. In the same forum, one respondent said 'I felt happy to walk with a nationalist arm in arm because this shows that they started to think and question existing situation.' Sometimes, the language used showed a bias against certain groups but this did not prevent the inclusion of members from other ideological backgrounds. Two statements of a respondent from the Karşıyaka Forum during an interview illustrate this point well: 'There were even right wing people in Public Park Forum discussions.' and 'Although they are right wing they participated.'

One can argue that the divides at the macro (country) level continue to prevent people from coming together at the micro (neighbourhood) level. One Karşıyaka Forum participant stated 'After all that long time it is impossible to be arm in arm with a Nationalist again, because the camps have more become evident than ever before.' Another reason why the diversity of forums is limited can be attributed to the prejudice of certain groups toward these forums. As one member of the Foça Forum put it: 'We know the importance of being with people with diverse opinions for the improvement of democraticy but a person from MHP does not want to be with me. Or a person who supports AKP does not join us by saying that we are against government and AKP.'

Ryfe[80] points at a dual-threat for forums: 'On the one hand, because deliberative groups are easy to exit, those that stress action will tend to become cognitively homogeneous as those who think differently from the growing group consensus exit…On the other hand, groups that seek to preserve deliberative talk will either avoid "political" issues altogether or choose issues that allow a limited range of disagreement.[81]' Both points stated above are supported by the case of public forums in Izmir as will be shown below.

[79]See note 55.
[80]David M. Ryfe, 'Does Deliberative Democracy Work?' *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (2005): 49–71.
[81]Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

In most cases, the inclusion of different groups comes at the expense of leaving political affiliations outside the door. The Güzelyalı Forum defines the rules of conduct as follows: 'Anyone who wants to participate in the forum activities should accept that no political sign (neither party logo nor political slogan) can be used on the forum's Facebook page and/or during forum activities and discussions.' Güzelyalı Forum participants mention that their door is open to everyone and they acknowledge that they all have political preferences yet they state that if people want to participate in the forum they need to leave their political and/or religious identities outside. One respondent explains, 'We invited Ihsan Eliaçık[82] to participate in the forum discussions but we requested that he and people around him leave their religious identities outside.'

The reason why forum members want to leave political identities outside the forum is because they believe that revealing political identities and affiliations can cause conflict and the dissolution of the group. One of the respondents argued 'if everyone displays his/her political identity then this will put differences in centre rather than similarities and commonalities.' While forum participants praise in-group diversity and attribute importance to different opinions in terms of maintaining a democratic and lively deliberation process, they are also afraid of seeing the reflections of deep clashes existing in the society in their forum if they highlight differences rather than similarities. One respondent, for instance, hid his political affiliation to avoid factions in the group.

Even at the Foça Forum, which claims to be more lenient toward people expressing their political identities, members claim that other members, even if they have certain political identities, should leave them outside the door when they participate in the forum discussions. Mostly valance issues are tackled in the forums as far as the profile of the participants are concerned. As one participant put it 'We do not put in table conflicting issues in fact. We discuss about issues, which have more potential to reach a consensus. Some issues are less controversial such as "need for fresh and clear air" and fight against air pollution. We decided not to hold any political party banner or shout slogans of political parties during environmental protests.' One member explained their stance towards political signs with an anecdote 'There was a June Movement event but it was broken because during election period, political preferences become more dominant and disengagements become indispensable. For instance, one of our friends had a different approach to Kurdish issue. Because of this different approach, he left the group.'

The incidence of people leaving forums when decisions are not in line with their opinions is something that the Karşıyaka Forum encountered and this attests that there are limits to the pluralism provided by the forums. One of the members of the forum, for instance, was critical of some aspects of the forum on the grounds that the membership of the forum is very homogenous and that the forum has a tendency to create a uniform community." During a focus group meeting, participants also mentioned that they do not have very severe debates because forum participants think alike on many issues.

Even so, there are important encounters that result in significant gains. One Karşıyaka Forum member, for example, said 'I learned that political activities need effort and patience. I learned to be tolerant toward people from other societal segments such as liberals and nationalists.' Another participant similarly mentioned that he learned to be

[82]Eliaçık is the leader of the Anti-capitalist Muslims group.

more tolerant toward other opinions and that he learned to listen. Yet another one claimed that her perspective against the East (read Kurdish) problem had changed.

When asked whether they witnessed any transformation in their opinions as a result of their forum participation Güzelyalı Public Forum participants (both in personal interviews and in focus group meetings) stated that they did not personally witness such a transformation. The participants also said that they were mostly already like-minded people so there were no such transformations. In the Foça forum, one participant said that her consciousness of environmental issues was raised and a Karşıyaka forum participant mentioned that she became a more politically engaged person as a result of forum participation but she did not mention a more radical transformation that cuts across ideological or cultural divides. The only exception, shown in all three forums was their exposure to participants of a group called Anti-capitalist Muslims. Meeting with this group, which is unique in terms of synthesizing a religious and critical, revolutionary ideology, is stated by some forum participants as an important gain for them. While limited, such an encounter between secular and religious groups should be considered as an important step towards pluralism and mutual understanding.

Conclusion

How do public forums affect the social and political cultural of their environment in which they operate? Are they able to contribute to the civicness and social capital of their community even under semi-authoritarian settings? Do they cause any transformation of deep-seated ideas and do they lead to encounters of different-minded people and thereby promote pluralism? These were some of the questions this article has tackled with. The answer to these questions is a modest yes. In an atmosphere in which neither the state, nor the political culture provide opportunities for the flourishing of the civic life, public forums serve important purposes. While the gains of deliberation in terms of influencing policy decision-making are limited, significant gains can still be reached in terms of creating a more civic public and a more strongly connected civil society that keeps its linkages with social movements. The study also finds that such forums can help create dialogue among distant segments of the society even though such interactions are still rather modest. Iterated contact among historically distant groups in such forums has the potential to help overcome deep-seated cleavages.

An important take away from this study is the need to study social movements and deliberative practices in conjunction as social movements can trigger sustained collective action and can provide commemorative vantage points for deliberative forum participants. Admittedly limited, living in the body of public forums, the spirit of Gezi has been able to sustain a deliberative culture to a considerable degree resulting in more civic engagement and cohabitation.

The effects of the new practices at Gezi at the level of national politics are less explicit. It is possible to say that some opposition parties, especially CHP and HDP have tried to incorporate some of the bottom-up and interactive deliberative practices inspired by Gezi. They tried to fine-tune their language to appeal further to the participants and supporters of the Gezi movement and the political culture it represents. The HDP has created an election campaign specifically targeting Gezi participants, using icons, slogans and songs similar to the ones used in Gezi. Gezi has also facilitated the

rapprochement between segments of the Turkish Left and Kurdish politics.[83] Young groups of CHP supporters developed the 'Occupy CHP' initiative 'launching passive resistance activities within CHP buildings,'[84] an act that was welcomed by the CHP administration yet such horizontal practices were never formalized by the CHP.[85]

Even in non-deliberative political settings such as the semi-authoritarian and low social capital setting in the Turkish case, public forums can become significant actors within a deliberative system, consisting of a web of multiple public forums, civil society organizations, social movements and alternative news sources. Within such deliberative systems, they have the potential to increase the civic mindedness of citizens, and promote collective action and interconnection between societal actors. They can also provide platforms in which people from different backgrounds can come together and foster a mutual understanding of one another, despite deep-seated differences. We have seen that some of these gains have been limited in the Turkish case but further research, especially comparative research, can show what mechanisms or strategies can be developed so as to further such gains. After Gezi, the authoritarian turn of the Turkish case has been in full swing. The state of emergency declared after the July 15th coup attempt, which is still in place, has left almost no room for civil society action. It remains to be seen whether such detrimental conditions, coupled with the rise of more horizontal experiences with democracy around the world[86] may trigger further deliberative practices on the ground or whether these conditions will make it impossible for such practices to exist.

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[83]Göksel and Tekdemir, 'Questioning the "immortal State."'.
[84]Göksel and Tekdemir, p. 9.
[85]Jonas Bergan Draege, Daniela Chironi, and Donatella della Porta, 'Social Movements within Organisations: Occupy Parties in Italy and Turkey', *South European Society and Politics* 22, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 139–56, p.147.
[86]See, for example, Archon Fung et al., 'Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance', in *In Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance, Eds. Archon Fung and Erik Olin*, 2003, 3–42.