This paper will concentrate on revealing the ways in which the Occupy Gezi movement transformed the young city dwellers of Istanbul from being passive citizens to active citizens. In doing so, the paper will also dwell into the impact of the social media on this process of civic transformation. *Occupy Gezi* movement bears various characteristics similar to the preceding global social movements ranging from Tahrir Square to Occupy Wall Street and *Indignados* movement in terms of the strategies and tactics employed by the young generations to challenge the growing impact of neoliberal forms of governmentality posed in the form of hegemonic organizations, charismatic leadership and consumerism. It is also similar to the others in the sense that it provided us with a *prefigurative form of politics* as it symbolized the rejection of vanguardism of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in all walks of life engineering the life-worlds of Turkish citizens with regard to his intention of raising ‘religious and conservative youth’, his call to the mothers to give at least three births, his direct intervention in the content of the Turkish soap operas, his direct order in banning alcohol on university campus, his intention of building mosques in Taksim Square and Camlica Hill, his condescending say over the lives of individuals, and his increasing authoritarian discourse, which is based Islamic references. In other words, the *Occupy Gezi* movement was partly a social upheaval against the subtle Islamization of Turkish society and politics.

**The relevance of Occupygezi Movement to citizenship**

*Occupy Gezi* is a new global social movement, which has similar characteristics to its predecessors such as Tahrir Square, Occupy Wallstreet, and European Indignado movement. Alain Badiou (2012) argued that Tahrir Square and all the activities which took place there such as fighting, barricading, camping, debating, cooking, bartering, caring for the wounded,
constituted the ‘communism of movement’ in a way that posited an alternative to the neoliberal democratic and authoritarian state. Similarly, Slavoj Zizek (2013) claimed that only these totally new political and social movements without hegemonic organizations and charismatic leaderships could create what he called the ‘magic of Tahrir’. And, Hardt and Negri (2012) also joined them in arguing that the Arab Spring, Europe’s indignado protests and Occupy Wall Street expressed the longing of the multitude for a ‘real democracy’ against corporate capitalism. Occupy Gezi movement also bears all these characteristics.

As Marina Sitrin (2012) put it in the Occupy Wallstreet Protests context, the purpose of the Gezi movement was “not to determine the path the country should take, but to create the space for a conversation in which all can participate and determine together what the future should loke like.” Rejecting all kinds of hierarchies and embracing prefigurative politics, citizens of all kinds, youngsters, socialists, Muslims, nationalists, Kemalists, Kurds, Alevi, gays/lesbians, ecologists, football fans, hackers, artists, activists, academics, anarchists, anti-war activists, women, and several others gathered in Gezi Park located in Taksim, which is loaded with left-wing working-class demonstrations in the past, to create a multiplicity of spaces such as social centres, graffiti walls, libraries, collective kitchens, music venues, conference venues, day care corners, bookfairs, barter tables, utopic streets and squares, and democratic forums, which provide room for experimentation, creativity, innovation and dissent. Hrant Dink Street, Ceylan Özkol Street, Pınar Selek Square, Mustafa Sarı Street are some of those names used by the protestors to demonstrate their solidarity with those who had been exposed to the discrimination of the state machinery either in the past or during the demonstrations. Naming the fictional streets of squares after those persons, the protestors aimed to restore the justice, which was not scured by the state. These civil utopias brought about a form of solidarity, which is cross-culture, cross-religion, cross-ethnicity, cross-class, and cross-gender.

Respecting difference was also embeded in these civil utopias where practicing muslims respected atheists, atheists respected practicing muslims, all respected homosexuals,

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1 I would like to introduce the trialectics of Edward Soja here in order for us to understand the significance of Taksim as a historically and politically loaded space leading to the emergence of massive social movement impacting the rest of the country as well as the diaspora. Trialectics is a critic of the conventional form of dialectical thought, which simply assumes that historicality is created by sociality, or in other words, societies construct history. Trialectics on the other hand, proposes that historicality is created by societies in a particular space. Hence, historicality, sociality and spatiality are the three axis which we need to consider in understanding social, economic, political, cultural and legal phenomena. See Soja (1996).
Kemalists respected the Kurdish activists, Kurds respected the Kemalists, Besiktas football fans respected Fenerbahce fans, and the elderly respected the youngsters. In the spaces of communication created by the demonstrators, citizens coming from different ideological grounds had the chance to experience a form of deliberative democracy. At Gezi Park, the protesters also displayed a good practice of responsibility and civility by cleaning up the mass they did during the demonstrations. In one of her works on the current social movements, Donatella Della Porta draws our attention to the critical trust generated by the demonstrators in such deliberative settings:

“By relating with each other, recognizing the others and being by them recognized, citizens would have the chance to understand the reasons of the others, assessing them against emerging standards of fairness. Communication not only allows for the development of better solutions, by allowing for carriers of different knowledge and expertise to interact, but it also changes the perception of one’s own preferences, making participant less concerns with individual, material interests and more with collect goods. Critical trust would develop from encounter with the other in deliberative settings” (Della Porta, 2012: 40).

Gezi movement also provided its participants with an experience of direct democracy by which the holders of different points of view interact and reciprocally transform each other views (Della Porta, 2012: 41).

As in Tahrir Square and Zucotti Park (Calhoun, 2013), the demonstrators of Gezi Park also made a point of cleaning up after collective action to demonstrate the capacity of “the people” to govern themselves. Occupy Gezi movement was also meant to be an attempt to reassemble the social, which had been polarized in different spheres of life between the so-called secularists and islamists. It was revealed that most of the demonstrators were not involved in any organized demonstration before (Konda, 2013). Gezi Park provided those youngsters who usually only communicate online with a meeting ground where they experienced communicating face to face. Against the segregation and isolation of everyday life Occupy offered participatory structures and open communication. It invited the passive citizens to experience an active sense of what James Hoslon (2008) calls ‘insurgent citizenship’ by

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2 The term “reassembling the social” is being used in the text in a similar way to the one depicted by Bruno Latour (2005).
which they could see what an inclusive and egalitarian society might look like. Gezi movement was about creating alternative pathways for political organization and communication to prefigure the real democracy and active citizenery to come. The Movement introduced millions of citizens all around the country to the experience of direct democracy. It radicalized an entire generation of previously discouraged and apathetic youth, and it built test zones for imagining and living out a post-capitalist utopia organized outside profit, competition and corporate world. The movement, or the moment, created a totally new marker of identity, which became more and more visible in the aftermath of the Occupy Gezi movement. I have heard in various places individuals introducing themselves to the others in public as “Ben Geziciyim”, which literally means “I am a Gezier”, the one who was actively involved in the movement, to express their resistant civic identity. In other words, the marker was a communicative tool underlining the active citizenship claims of those individuals exemplified by the elderly man who believed that he was supressed and belittled by the counter lady working a private bank.

As Engin F. Isin (2002: 306) put it very well, we witnessed different practices in the aftermath of the World War II that were originally deemed to be outside the political, and which assembled themselves as relatively routinized, durable and effective strategies and technologies, making, enacting, and instituting political demands and translating them into claims for citizenship rights. These practices were, at first, interpreted as social movements, then as cultural politics. Now, these practices are increasingly being perceived as insurgent citizenship practices by agents themselves as well as scholars. Thomas Janoski and Brian Gran (2002) define the active citizens as those citizens who participate in the political activities and have concern for the people in their group. The active citizens are often engaged in conflict with established élites and most often approach problems from the grassroots level. They may belong to a political party, social movement, or some other active association involved in promoting an ideology of change. They are not necessarily left or right, but tend to be in the opposition and the more radical of each political persuasion. They are often social reformers of an established party, grassroots organizers of any political position, or radical revolutionaries with an activist orientation. They believe that many things can be done altruistically for ‘the people’ or for ‘the country’. However, in dealing with the opposition, they can be somewhat ruthless (Janoski and Gran, 2002: 39-40). What is narrated here very well defines the type of citizenery experienced in Gezi movement. As John Stuart Mill ([1861] 1975: 196–7) stated in the second half of the 19th century already, active citizenship
widens individuals’ horizons and deepens their sense of how their lives are involved with others’, including the lives of people who are unknown to them. In this way participation works to overcome individualism. This is indeed what happened in the Occupy Gezi movement.

One should also be reminded of the fact that the kind of insurgent citizen depicted here has no similarity with the corporate citizen created by the neoliberal ideology of prudentialism, construing individuals as active subjects liable to take proper care of themselves within the framework of existing free market conditions away from the redistributive justice of the social welfare state. This is what Jonothan Xavier Inda (2006) calls the transition from welfarism to prudentialism. As a consequence of this ideological shift, social policy is now increasingly based upon the notion of stakeholdership, promoting the idea that corporate individuals can be responsibilized and empowered by social policy to become a part of the club of stakeholders (O’Malley, 2000; Gilling, 2001). The logic of stakeholdership is to pathologize and blame those who fail to become stakeholders. From the nineteenth century onwards, being a respectable working man required to be acting in a prudent way (O’Malley, 2000). Being prudent refers to joining insurance schemes, making regular payments in order to insure his/her own life, and that of his/her family members against any possible misfortune at the expense of becoming more and more self-centered (Defert, 1991). Prudence is a modern phenomenon. Prior to the sixteenth century, prudence was socially frowned upon, associated primarily with cowardliness, lowliness, frugality, selfishness, lack of honour, etc. Only from the sixteenth century onwards did prudence gradually emerge to become a sign of wisdom and was accepted as a proper moral obligation (Hacking, 2003: 25-26).

**Right to the city**

Another very important element of the Gezi movement was its premises on the right to the city and to the public space. Many citizens in Istanbul as well as in the other parts of Turkey were becoming more concerned with the decisions of the political centre in Ankara, turning their everyday life into a kind of turmoil dominated by chaos, traffic jam, pollution, crowdedness, hopelessness, anomyny and confusion. Since the late 1990s, Turkish citizens were becoming more and more critical, demanding and outspoken in parallel with the Europeanization of the civil society in Turkey. They were becoming less supportive of the military tutelage in power. As explained earlier, the Turkish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the outspoken claims of ethno-cultural and religious minorities, and the growing power of the
civil society organizations were all meant to be the signs of the Europeanization of the ways in which the public space is being constructed without being under the monopoly of the state. Especially the younger and the most educated ones were also becoming more and more concerned about the reislamization of the Turkish society along with the AKP rule in the 2000s. The state in Turkey has so far had the monopoly of shaping the public space. The campaigns of “Citizens speak Turkish!” in the 1930s and 1940s, headscarf ban of the last decades, and AKP’s insistence on the discourse underlining that “Cemevis (Alevi communion houses) are not places of warship” in the 2000s, all these are examples of the statist understanding of public space, which are recently reproduced by the AKP rule repeatedly in building shopping malls, skyscrapers, bridges, airports, and gigantic projects without consulting the inhabitants of the cities such as Istanbul and Ankara. Occupy Gezi movement is a revolt of the citizens, or the dwellers of Istanbul and of other cities, against the repressive hegemony of the state restricting the right of individual city-dwellers to the city.

Henri Lefebvre’s path-breaking notion of “the right to the city” is probably the most meaningful theoretical intervention to be used to explain what the Occupy Gezi movement refers to. Lefebvre (1996: 158) defines the city as “an oeuvre, a work in which all citizens participate”. Lefebvre does not accept the monopoly of the state in constructing the urban space. The city is a public space of interaction and exchange, and the right to the city enfranchises dwellers to participate in the use and reproduction of the urban space. The right to the city is the right to “urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of … moments and places” (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). Similarly, David Harvey (2012) defines the right to the city being “far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts’ desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights” (Harvey, 2012: 4).

What happened in Gezi Park was a revolt of the masses against the ever-lasting authority of the state in shaping the public space as well as the city. The revolt was spontaneously

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3 The AKP government has lifted the ban on headscarf for the public officers other than the police, judiciary and the army in October 2013 within the framework of democratic reforms.
organized by the youngsters of every kind, who were mobilized through the new social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The selection of the Gezi Park, which is located at the very centre of the city was also symbolically important as it was meant to be the space restored from the hands of the corporate world collaborating with the neo-liberal state. Lefebvre finds the use of the city centre by the dwellers of that city to be very important with regard to the materialization of the right to the city:

The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos for workers, immigrants, the ‘marginal’ and even for the ‘privileged’ (Lefebvre, 1996: 36).

Hence, Occupy Gezi movement has become a civil-political venue in which the youngsters of every kind have communicated with each other in a deliberative form and became active citizens in a way that has proved the merits of the ongoing Europeanization processes.

**Corrupt Politics and Loss of Trust**

During the *Occupy Gezi* movement, the PM Erdoğan named the protesters as ‘a bunch of scum’, “çapulcu” in Turkish, which was immediately turned into a popular symbol of societal and political resistance. The word çapulcu was later popularized through the social media, and vernacularized by several international youth groups in different languages: “we are chappuling”, “wir chappulieren” and etc. The AKP and particularly Erdoğan himself belittled a handful of environmentalist protestors who were staying in tents at Gezi Park to protest the Istanbul Greater Municipality and the AKP, who were keen on building a shopping-mall replacing the Park. Towards the morning of the 28th of May, the police forces put the tents into fire and brutally attacked the environmentalists who were accompanied by their children and spouses. The brutal act of the police immediately provoked thousands of individuals who went to the Park to express their solidarity with their environmentalist peers. These crowds were later joined by thousands of middle-class youngsters who were angry enough because of the new alcohol regulation put forward by the AKP government. Apparently, what was happening was a kind of enlarging societal and political alliance, which was later extended
even further with the inclusion of Alevi youngsters who were complaining about the naming of the third bridge connecting Europe with Asia, after one of the notorious Sultans of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century, Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, who is believed by the Alevi to have massacred thousands of Alevi on his march towards the Safavid Empire in Persia. Later, football fans of the teams, Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş, as well as the supporters of the oppositional parties such as the CHP, MHP, BDP and others, joined them enlarging the alliance. Socialist Muslims, LGBT groups, Kemalists, labour unions, and some other marginal left-wing groups came to the centre of the city to express their solidarity with the rest of the allied societal forces, and to protest the hegemonic-authoritarian rule of the AKP in general, and the PM Erdoğan in particular.

Erdoğan and his friends were literally shocked with what was going on. The revolt was spreading around the country by means of the social media as the mainstream media was almost entirely controlled and pressured by the government. The protests were immediately replicated in several other cities such as Ankara, İzmir, Hatay, Eskisehir, Antalya, Tunceli and etc. Most of the city centres in Turkey were literally occupied by the protestors, who were mainly complaining about the polarization of the society by the AKP rule on the religious-secularist faultline. One of the first things that the PM Erdoğan wanted to do was to organize a public rally in the centre of one of the big cities, Istanbul or Ankara. However, the protesters did not let him use the centre. He had to organize his rally in the outskirts of Ankara, where he collected thousands of supporters who were immediately appealed by Erdoğan’s rhetoric polarizing the society even further between Muslims and secularists.

The believers of Islam situated on the other side of the polarized social and political reality of contemporary Turkey often had a strong appeal towards the headscarf rhetoric, which helped politically mobilize the conservative masses in parallel with the government’s policies. Among many others, Erdoğan’s latest attempt to utilize the headscarf rhetoric in agitating his followers was seen during the Occupy Gezi movement in June when a young veiled woman with her child was allegedly harassed by the protestors at Kabatas, a district of Istanbul on the western shores of Bosphorus near Taksim, on 1 June 2013. The so-called physical attack has been widely reported by the media, especially those newspapers akin to the government such as Yeni Şafak, Sabah, and Haber Türk. However, security camera footage disclosed on 13 February 2014 has revealed that there was no physical attack on a woman who claimed she and her baby were attacked by up to 100 protesters in Istanbul at the height of the nationwide
Gezi demonstrations for wearing a headscarf. This was later widely discussed in the social media by many people inviting those journalists such as Balçıçek Pamir and İsmet Berkan who said in their Tweeter accounts that they had seen the footage.\(^4\)

The government forces used other similar rhetorics during the Gezi movement, and they communicated these stories to the majority of the population by means of mainstream media. One of these rhetorics was built upon once centence of ty all the PM Erdoğan, which was later repeated by all the followers of the AKP, referring to a handful of environmentalist protesters in the tents he said “We know what they are actually doing in those tents!” He simply meant that the protesters were staying mixed in those tents, and doing sex. This was something that Erdoğan repeatedly said in different platforms underlining the inapporpriateness of men and women staying in the same place with regard to Islamic way of life. Another similar rhetoric, which was formulated in order to exploit religious sentiments of devout Muslims was the gossip created by Erdoğan himself again about the protesters who were using the mosque in Dolmabahçe, nearby the Gezi park by the sea, for the mediacaial treatment of the wounded. He suddenly misinformed the public through the mainstream media again that the protesters did notty things in the mosque and they drank alcohol there disrespecting the holiness of the mosque. This rhetoric was immediately falsified by the Imam of the mosque at stake, and later the Imam was sent to exile by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) connected to the Prime Minister’s office. The protesters had only one instrument to fight against all those kinds of misinformation disseminated through the mainstream media, that was the socia media, Twitter and Facebook, communicating the movement in the country and accross the national borders to get the support of the members of the Turkish transnational social and political networks as well as some of the members international community.

Calling the protesters as “scum and feral”, trying to get the support of the devout Muslims by turning them into vigilantes fighting in the name of Islam\(^5\), Erdoğan was actually trying to cover up his illegitimate ways of doing politics and business as well as the rampant feral nature of capitalism, which has already turned the big cities into the endless lands of profit for


\(^5\) In the present case of vigilantism, it is arguable that wherever people live within State structures, similar questions about the (un)satisfactory provision of law and order from that source frequently arise. Taking the law into their own hands is a common response of citizens to such problems of order.
the AKP elite and its followers. David Harvey successfully turns such accusations made by Erdoğan during Gezi movement, Nicola Sarkozy during the Paris banlieue riots in 2005, and David Cameron during the 2011 London riots, to contemporary capitalism, which he believes, has become “rampantly feral”:

“But the problem is that we live in a society where capitalism itself has become rampantly feral. Feral politicians cheat on their expenses; feral bankers plunder the public purse for all it’s worth; CEOs, hedge fund operators, and private equity geniuses loot the world of wealth; telephone and credit card companies load mysterious charges on everyone’s bills; corporations and the wealthy don’t pay taxes while they feed at the trough of public finance; shopkeepers price-gouge; and, at the drop of a hat swindlers and scam artists get to practice three-card monte right up into the highest echelons of the corporate and political world (Harvey, 2012, 156).

In a similar fashion, Harvey continues to heavily criticize the growing political economy of mass dispossession in big cities through the alliance of neoliberal states and corporate capitalism. Following the Occupy Gezi Movement, towards the end of 2013 came serious allegations about the corrupt activities of some ministers and their children as well as of the Prime Minister Erdoğan and his immediate family members, known as the 17th of December Process. This was also the time when the holy alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement was terminated, leading to a continuing war of secret tape recordings allegedly revealed by the latter to put the former under pressure for making concessions in the power struggle. Then, the AKP government made a complaint to the judiciary regarding the dissemination of secret tape recordings through the social media resulting with the official ban on the social media, Twitter and Youtube. Eventually came the local elections on 30 March 2014, which was presented by the AKP political elite as well as by the oppositional parties regarding the rule of PM Erdoğan. The land-slide victory of the AKP with 45 percent vote is open to discussion. There is probably only one way to understand if the primary motive of the AKP electorate was to white-wash the PM Erdoğan and his dependants against the allegations of corruption, or to express their support to the profit-based local politics of the party: either the presidential elections in August 2014, or the general elections to be held in 2015. Probably, the reality is somewhere in between, that is to say that the attraction of the AKP for some springs from their faith-based approach towards the PM Erdoğan, perceiving him as the “last Prophet” even; and for some others what primarily matters is the profit-based local politics of
the AKP leading to the continuation of the process of capital accumulation dating back to the early days of the AKP rule.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, I believe that one of the most essential problems of contemporary Turkey is that the state has always monopolized the right to define and shape the principal components of public space. The campaigns of “Citizens speak Turkish!” in the 1930s and 1940s, the headscarf ban of the last decades, and the AKP’s insistence on the discourse underlining that “Cemevis (Alevi communion houses) are not places of worship” in the 2000s, all these are examples of the statist understanding of the public space, which have recently been repeated during the AKP rule through the building of shopping malls, skyscrapers, bridges, airports, and gigantic projects without consulting the inhabitants of big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara. In this sense, the *Occupy Gezi* movement is a revolt of the citizens, or the dwellers of Istanbul and of other cities, against the repressive hegemony of the state restricting the right of individuals to shape the public space. Historically speaking, the Occupy Gezi movement was similar to the preceding movements such as Headscarf movement, Alevi movement, Kurdish movement, which challenged the repressive hegemony of the state in monopolizing the formation of the public space. However, what made Gezi movement different from the other social movements was its capacity to reassemble the social across ethnic, religious, class, cultural, and gendered identities. Furthermore, Occupy Gezi movement was not televised, but tweeted, unlike the others. Hence, the use of the social media was very decisive in disseminating the messages of the movement across the globe.

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