



# Situating the “Cultural Reach” of Cities in a Multiscalar Field

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## Abstract

On the basis of empirical material from a city bordering Syria and Turkey, this article aims to situate the city’s emerging landscape of culture and arts in the 2000s within the dynamics of neoliberalizing city-making. It provides a political economy of the city’s “cultural reach” by connecting the dynamics of cultural production to value creating processes in and through urban regeneration to understand when, how, and which groups and sites become de- and re-valorized. It highlights the futility of nation state-city, state-civil society binaries in analysing the power geometry of multiscalar actors involved in the work, efficacy and the potency of cultural networks, institutions, and “cultural diplomacy.”

**Keywords** Multiscalar · Neoliberal city-making · Urban regeneration · Biennials · Coloniality of power

## Introduction

Starting from 1999, Mardin, a picturesque hilltop city on the Turkish-Syrian border facing the Mesopotamian plain, has increasingly become a popular backdrop for Turkish TV series and films. Between 1999 and 2017 alone, 14 Turkish TV series and at least 10 feature films were shot here, highlighting the city’s century-old yellow limestone architecture. In 2011, even a Cinema Film Office was established to promote Mardin nationally and internationally as a filming location, as well as to advocate for residents’ concerns about these filming activities.

Simultaneously, since the turn of the millennium, several Turkish and international newspapers, ranging from the *Guardian*, to *New York Times* and *Die Zeit*, as well as international radio and TV channels, such as the BBC, Al Jazeera, German, and Hungarian TV stations, have repeatedly carried features on Mardin, highlighting the city’s unique multi-faith architectural heritage and multi-lingual aura. This renewed presence of the city and its past and present, its diverse

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inhabitants (Kurdish, Arabic, Armenian, Yezidi, Turkish, Chaldean, and Syriac Christian), and heritage have extended yet further—into networks of art, museums, and cultural exchange. Starting from 2009, Mardin has increasingly become the host of international exhibitions and cultural events, including an international Biennial (Mardin Bienali).

These cultural and artistic activities and festivals have boosted the city's domestic and cross-border reach considerably. They have not only situated Mardin within multiscale artistic and cultural networks but also contributed to its tourism industry. Between 2009 and 2012, the number of total visitors to Mardin increased 44% together with an increase in the share of employment in tourism related areas (Mardin Turizm Stratejik Planı, 2014–2023, 2014).

This new presence of the city in the cultural, historical, and artistic imaginary in Turkey and beyond is especially striking in contrast to the city's decade-long conflict and poverty-ridden image that prevailed at the very end of the 1990s. Mardin was a disempowered border city (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018), which had been losing its power and wealth since the beginning of Turkish Republic. Indeed, at the turn of the millennium, it was one of the least developed cities in Turkey, marked by violence and high rates of unemployment and poverty. The Old City, despite its monumental historical buildings and/or houses, was a zone of abandonment, neglect, and decay. This was the background upon which new imaginaries and cultural work began to be projected.

The increasing international and global reach of Turkish cultural and artistic production, including TV series and films, are often seen as important instruments of Turkey's soft power (Ağırseven & Örki, 2017). The growing international sales and global viewership of Turkish TV series and film since the beginning of the 2000s, that reach over 130 countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, Balkans, and Latin America, as well as Russia, China, Japan, and Korea, amounting to about \$200 million, are taken as indicators of Turkey's increasing soft power (Hassan, 2019). Studies of soft power often approach the growing market and prominence of the popular audio-visual sector in close connection to cultural diplomacy of nation-states. These studies hail both cultural diplomacy and soft power as important persuasive vehicles of statecraft when they are deployed to advance, promote, and represent national interests (Nye, 1990). Those who adopt a critical stance in their approach to cultural diplomacy, however, seek to unlock its study from its focus on governmental processes between nation-states (Ang et al., 2015). Instead, they draw attention to the “messy landscape” of actually existing cultural diplomacy which defies state-centric analysis confined to nation-states. They call, on the one hand, for the broadening of the scope, content, and agents of cultural diplomacy, and on the other hand, for a focus on the actually existing processes generated by cultural networks, co-operations, and exchange schemes in their multi-level policy and governance mix (Ang et al., 2015; Cull & Sadlier, 2009; Paschalidis, 2009). In fact, most of these discussions are debates about scale, namely debates about the relevant socio-spatial order within which the study of cultural diplomacy is/should be embedded. A critical scrutiny of cultural diplomacy in terms of its agents, funding, and sponsors is indeed a question of scale.

Culture and cultural industries which include hosting and staging mega events (Ward, 2008; Trubina, 2012, 2014), but also international art festivals and biennials, have become part of the “Imagineering” of cities. They have acquired prominence in narratives and projects of urban renewal in cities of various scale and location. Under the neoliberal political economy, cities have become key sources of entrepreneurial strategies deployed to enhance cities competitive advantages to accumulate wealth (Harvey, 2002; Smith, 2002). Many “entrepreneurial cities” (Harvey, 1989, 2006) utilize such strategies (including cultural and artistic production) in pursuit of greater local, national, and global connectedness so as to be able to accrue capital and power. However, the success, impact, and durability of these concerted efforts, as well as the interlocking spatialities and actors of these processes of rescaling, vary. Critical studies of the politics of biennials draw our attention to the importance of connecting the processes of cultural and artistic production to the dynamics of capital accumulation, without reducing the value produced in and through biennials solely to economic capital. Instead, they relate accruing economic capital through biennials leads to the acquisition of symbolic and political capital and to the interfaces among these three kinds of capital (Sheikh, 2010; Sassatelli, 2017; Bethwaite & Kangas, 2018). Importantly, these studies underline the multiple co-implicated spatialities and scales in their analysis of the politics of such cultural events/productions, especially in relation to the challenges they pose to existing power relations (Bethwaite & Kangas, 2018). These studies have also paved the ground for scrutinizing the actors (state or civil society) and funding structures (corporate, public or private) of cultural and art productions, cultural exchange, and cooperation networks in their entanglements with national, municipal, supranational, and global institutions and actors. Such perspectives might be useful to advance debates on cultural diplomacy not only beyond the grip of “methodological nationalism” (Glick Schiller & Wimmer, 2002) but also beyond the facile binaries of state versus civil society, nation-state versus cities, and public versus private/corporate funding.

In this article, I wish to scrutinize Mardin’s “reach” in culture and arts networks in relation to the broader multiscalar dynamics of city making that have unfolded in Mardin at a particular historical conjuncture. Building upon the theoretical frame developed in *Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, displacement and Urban Regeneration* (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018), I expand the empirical material to provide a political economy of Mardin’s “cultural reach” in the 2000s. I read this emerging cultural landscape in relation to the state dynamics of urban regeneration at the turn of the millennium, as they have been situated within a multiscalar field of city-making as well as “heritage diplomacy” (see Jasper Chalcraft’s paper in this Special Issue). For this purpose, I first focus on cultural actors and institutions that have emerged in Mardin starting from the mid-2000s. Then I explore heritage-centred urban regeneration projects, their individual and institutional actors, and discourses on and in Mardin to explore how particular sites and groups of people acquired value and visibility within these processes. Finally, I focus on the importance of historical conjuncture in connecting the dynamics of cultural production to value creating processes in and through urban regeneration to understand when, how, and which groups and sites become valorized within a multiscalar field of power and institutions.

## Emerging Cultural Institutions with Multiscalar Reach

The city of Mardin, located at the crossroads of Eastern Anatolia and of Deyruzzor, Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut, Mosul, and Bagdad, was until World War 1 a powerful transit centre of trade, commerce, the arts, religious learning, and education. The early twentieth century massacres and deportations of local Armenian and Syriac Christians transformed Mardin's multi-faith and multi-ethnic population. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of Turkish Republic in 1923 and the establishment of national borders with Iraq and Syria, Mardin was reduced to being a marginalized border city between Turkey and Syria, cut off from its important regional economic, social, cultural, and religious connections. Not only was this history of persecutions inscribed into the built environment and the life of the city but so was abandonment and decay. By the 1980s it had become strongly associated with poverty, violence, terror, and out-migration. One of the important factors contributing to this association was the armed conflict between the insurgent Kurdish guerilla movement (PKK) and Turkish military forces that began in the mid-1980s.

Despite several development projects targeting the Mardin region, the city remained marked by a stagnant economy, low level of investments, and by high rates of unemployment and poverty for many decades (see Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018, for an expanded account). Until the mid-2000s, all efforts to create a territorial advantage for Mardin so as to attract capital to the city and initiate development were unsuccessful. Even an Industrial and Free Trade Zone providing profitable tax, and labour conditions for business, was unable to attract the desired investments to the city. The depopulation of Mardin province, the massive flow of forcefully dispossessed and displaced peasants (mainly Kurds) from the countryside into the city, out-migration of relatively well-to do groups from the city centre, and economic stagnation all went hand in hand (Yuksel, 2014).

The broader regional dynamics in the Middle East, especially the Gulf War and US invasion of Iraq as well as the international sanctions in their aftermath, drastically constricted Mardin's border trade-dependent economy. Their impact went beyond the economic sphere. The wars in the Middle East had an important impact on reshaping Turkey's political location (as a NATO member) regionally and globally. The southeastern NATO radar post was and is located in Mardin. Furthermore, in 1999 the European Council gave Turkey official status as a candidate member to the European Union, which in turn unleashed geopolitical dynamics with a view to reconfiguring Turkey's place vis-à-vis Europe and beyond. Thus, Turkey's location within a multiscalar field of power and institutions was changing at the turn of the millennium. All these changes had effects on this city bordering Syria and located on the only land route connecting Europe to Iraq.

Within this broader political and economic context in the mid-2000s, the landscape of culture and arts in Mardin started to change. Emergent cultural institutions began to shape the cultural landscape of the city and its national, regional, and global reach. The city started to host international cultural events and exhibitions, the most prominent of which were the International Mardin Film Festival and the International Mardin Biennial.

## International Mardin Film Festival

In 2006, the Mardin Cinema Association organized the 1st International Mardin Film Festival. Aftermath of decline and disempowerment, there were no movie theatres left in the city. During the Festival, the films were shown free of charge in open air on a terrace in the Old City. In 2007, this festival became the Sine-Mardin International Mardin Film Festival, and it continued the annual entertainment successfully in the re-opened and newly built movie theatres until today. Sine-Mardin worked in collaboration with international cultural institutions from New York to Damascus. The organization split in 2010, after which one group carried on their activities as the Mardin Cinema Association, achieving an equally impressive record of international collaborations, including French and German cultural institutions, as well as private cultural institutions from Istanbul, such as Anadolu Kultur (Halit, February 18, 2015). The initial funding for the festival came from the state: the Ministry of Culture, the Prime Ministry’s Promotion Fund, and an integrated regional development project, the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP). The founder of the Cinema Association and the Festival was then the provincial director of culture and tourism, and it was he who prepared the application for financial support to the Ministry of Culture in 2006 (Hamit, February 18, 2015).

In fact, within a period of 13 years, Mardin, a city that had no single cinema in the mid-2000s, came to accommodate two cultural institutions concentrating on film festivals with an impressive portfolio of international co-operations and reach. Importantly, these new institutions themselves contributed to the emergence of other cultural institutions and activities, such as the International Mardin Biennial, especially in their early years. Thus, when the president of the Cinema Association refers to it as “the cultural make-up artist of this city” (Halit, February 18, 2015), he highlights its true importance.

## Mardin Biennials

Since 2010, the city has hosted four International (Mardin) Biennials (2010, 2012, 2015, 2018) which have aimed explicitly at “transforming Mardin into a centre of contemporary art” and to “situate Mardin within the global contemporary art world” (Mardin Bienali – Mardin Bienali.Org, n.d.) (<http://www.mardinbienali.org/2014/eng/bienal.asp/>). The making of the 1st Mardin Biennial (2010) also goes back to 2006, when two curators, who would later become the organizers of the 1st Biennial, prepared a public space project “Buradan Çok Uzakta” (“Far away from here”) in the Ankara railway station. A successful exhibition in Mardin in 2009 *Davetinizi aldım, Teşekkürler* (“I received your invitation. Thank you very much”) by the same curators followed (Cengiz, 2017). Like all the Mardin Biennials to come, the 2009 exhibition also flagged the historical architecture and sites representing the multi-faith historical heritage of the city.

All Mardin Biennial curators had internationally acknowledged track records of exhibitions in art institutions in different parts of the world (Italy, UK, and USA) and in other international Biennials (Thessaloniki, Istanbul). The 3rd Mardin Biennial

was an exception, as it did not have individual curators, but was curated by a collective, constituted mostly of local artists, artisans, and craftsman who turned the everyday spaces of the city into Biennial's exhibition/installation sites. Though this emphasis on everyday spaces as Biennial sites, alongside the historical architectural landmarks, was already present in the 2nd Biennial in 2012, it became clearly visible in the 3rd Biennial (Zehra, May 25, 2020). The organizers explicitly decided against working with curators unfamiliar with the context and setting of Mardin. Despite of their lack of knowledge, the curators would single-handedly decide on who to exhibit, what to exhibit, and how to exhibit it. This decision came at the heels of a critique by some of the local cultural actors who opined that curators and organizers from outside were poorly embedded in the local scene (Hamit, February 18, 2015). The organizers were aware of the importance of local support and openly acknowledged that the Mardin Biennials would not have been possible without the support of local cultural institutions such as the Cinema Association. According to them, Mardin Biennial was opposed to "an autocratic and a careerist model of a biennial that worked with professional codes." Instead it was an "alternative" biennial with "organic" curators led by *samimiyet* and *dostluk*, i.e., sincerity and camaraderie, transforming the everyday spaces in Mardin into Biennial sites even without using any special installations (Zehra, June 17, 2015). Accordingly, unlike the acclaimed Istanbul Biennial (which has been taking place since 1987), and two others in Sinop and Canakkale (since 2006 and 2008 respectively), Mardin Biennial's gestation "from below" claimed distinction from all the others.

Mardin Biennial was different in another way too. While the funding of the other biennials in Turkey were a mixture of corporate and private support, with some monies coming from international cultural organizations, the first two in Mardin were predominantly state funded. Though the later Biennials enjoyed the financial support of a broad spectrum of public, private, and civil society actors, ranging from the British Council, the French and Spanish Cultural Institutes, to the Catholic Syriac Foundation, the Caledonian and Mor Benham (Syriac) Church, the very first biennial was realized with state funding alone. The strong financial and personal engagement of the provincial government and the governor played a crucial role in the making of the Mardin Biennial. Unlike mayors, governors in Turkey are appointed by the central state, and in Mardin, they played a crucial role in the cultural field.

As it was the case in the 1st Mardin International Film Festival, the funding for the 1st Mardin Biennial and its predecessor, the 2009 exhibition, also came from the already mentioned Turkish state's regional development project for the Southeastern Anatolia region. The personal connections of cultural actors with the GAP officials played an important role, GAP. Before curating the 2009 exhibition and then the first Mardin Biennale, the main initiator of the Mardin Biennials worked at the GAP administration in Ankara as Director of Media and Press Relations. It was she who persuaded the GAP directors and the governor of Mardin of the importance of contemporary art for the development of the region (Deniz, June 17, 2015). Though this strong state support and funding, behind the initial biennials was a matter of some concern for some artists in terms of artistic independence, a concern that was openly expressed at different events; nevertheless, the events acquired considerable resonance both in Turkish and in international media, cultural exchange networks, and

civil society organizations. They thus acquired remarkable multiscalar reach. They reached out to international artists and curators; their openings attracted domestic as well as international journalists, artists, city leaders, and representatives of several NGOs and international organizations; they boosted cultural tourism by attracting visitors from the nearby cities; and well-known cultural tour agencies brought visitors from Istanbul and Ankara some of which took part in the guided tours organized by the Biennial curators (Ekrem, February 22, 2015; Deniz, June 17, 2015; Zehra, May 28, 2020).

The year 2009 also marked the opening of a new city museum in Mardin with private support from an influential Istanbul-based private foundation. The Mardin City Museum, housed in a renovated historical building, which was the property of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, but was allocated to a private foundation (of Sabanci Holding) by the efforts of a former Istanbul governor who was originally from Mardin, also foregrounded the historical heritage of the city. The museum’s foundation also goes back to 2006 (Ekrem, February 22, 2015).

## A Plethora of Urban Renewal Projects

Since the beginning of the 2000s, Mardin has increasingly become the ground of a regime of accumulation achieved through intervention on urban space, particularly into the built environment within the frame of urban regeneration and renewal projects. Like in other neo-liberalizing economies and cities, urban renewal projects became the major economic, social, and political tools of urban development and politics (Davis, 2006; Harvey, 2008). Urban restructuring projects, enmeshed with participatory models, became the main ground of accumulation and urban development.

There were several projects aiming to initiate economic and social development in Mardin through heritage tourism. The preservation and the restoration of the abandoned and neglected Old City centre and historical sites of cultural/religious heritage were crucial for the targeted heritage tourism industry. This industry, entangled with the construction sector was designated as the motor of economic development through urban regeneration. These restructuring processes in Mardin went together with a revalorization process in the sense that selected sites, places, pasts and parts of the population, and practices related to them acquired economic, symbolic, and cultural capital within this form of city-making (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018).

Urban restructuring in Mardin embraced several intertwined regeneration projects. The most prominent were the Mardin Participatory Urban Rehabilitation Project (known as MardinAr), the Mardin Historical Transformation Project, and the Mardin Sustainable Tourism Project. In fact, the promotion of the city on the basis of its historical and cultural heritage and the accompanying multiple urban renovation and regeneration initiatives were closely entangled with Mardin’s nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List. This gave impetus to most of these urban renewal and regeneration initiatives. The Ministry of Culture decided to propose the city of Mardin as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001. However, according to a former mayor of Mardin, the official from the Ministry of Culture prepared Mardin’s dossier according to outdated criteria, those that were valid before 2001. As it then

became clear that the application would not be accepted as such, it was withdrawn. Despite several subsequent discussions, since then no revised dossier has been prepared (Kaya, March 2, 2015).

It was the Mardin Participatory Urban Rehabilitation Project (Mardinar) which started the concerted restoration and renovation processes in the city. In 2000, Switzerland provided UNDP (\$350,000) funding for the rehabilitation of Mardin's architectural heritage. In 2001, in search of a local partner for the realization of the project, UNDP channelled the project to the Regional Development Administration of GAP, and then to Istanbul Technical University for its coordination and supervision. The Governorship and municipality were closely involved in this project of infrastructure improvement and rehabilitation of the cultural and architectural heritage of the old city—which largely meant restoring the historical buildings by removing the concrete extensions built on them. Both aims in fact echoed an earlier World Bank report highlighting the importance of the cultural and historical heritage of the city for development through the tourism industry. Most importantly, the report underlined the city's poor infrastructure and the urgent need to conserve the city's cultural and architectural heritage for there to be any prospect of developing the tourism industry and funding for it. These goals meant a strong intervention into the built environment, as is the case in many capital restructurings through urban regeneration processes elsewhere (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Funds came from different sources including global institutions. There was a consensus in both the World Bank and the European Union about providing funding for the preservation (and rehabilitation) of the urban heritage for the city's sustainable development (Kaya, March 2, 2015).

If one of the pillars of the Mardinar project's goals was urban rehabilitation, then the other was a participatory model of governance. In fact, Mardinar gave impetus to a local (urban) civil society initiative in 2001 in the city, namely to the establishment of a civic platform called Local Agenda (*Yerel Gündem*). The emergence of this civic platform was closely related to the UN-backed comprehensive plan of action (Local Agenda 21) for sustainable development, which was endorsed in the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. Advocating measures for decentralization, local autonomy, and participation, Local Agenda 21 expanded the responsibilities of municipalities and local government in urban renewal/regeneration projects. Local Agenda 21 emphasized governance based on participation and local partnerships within the framework of global partnerships against a centralized top-down decision-making process. It thus promoted a mantra of participatory policy making within which citizens, politicians, NGOs, chambers, and businessmen would work together on concrete issues related to the city.

It is noteworthy that while *Yerel Gündem*, as a civic platform, institutionalized participation, it blurred the taken for granted boundaries between state, bureaucracy, and private actors and produced a new architecture of urban governance, with reconfigured relations between the state, local actors, and transnational institutions. Thus, participatory planning became a central tool of a governmental strategy through which populations have been co-opted into a new configuration of power. In this framework, the active agency of people was called upon and the municipality encouraged the active involvement of civil, social organizations, and public institutions in urban policy making. One of the founders of *Yerel Gündem*



in Mardin captures these connections and the spirit of those days of Mardinar project very well:

Then we learned what *Yerel Gündem* is. And we decided to establish Mardin *Yerel Gündem*... at that time, we had the idea that such a project would permit not only to preserve the historical assets of Mardin and promote them to the world but also convert them into marketable commodities. But there were no institutions that would allow this to happen..., this created a spreading enthusiasm in the city: Mardin will be promoted to the world!! ...We established *Yerel Gündem* with not only support from UNDP, World Bank, and İstanbul Technical University, but also from the local governor, municipality and local actors. The output of this initiative of *Yerel Gündem* is the 2000 bed capacity in Mardin today [2015]. Then, there were no tourism facilities, companies or restaurants. But now we have them. Touristic tours started. (Kaya, March 2, 2015).

In 2006, *Yerel Gündem* became the City Council. The meetings of this civic platform also included citizens, civil society actors, local authorities from the municipality, the governor’s office, MAREV (Mardin Mutual Aid and Education Foundation), representatives of chambers, but also the representatives of UNDP, GAP, and World Bank (Kaya, March 2, 2015).

Both the infrastructure development and participatory governance schemes the Mardinar project aimed at and put in place were important for the city’s future development and access to funds. For accessing IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) funds of the European Union, a precondition was that infrastructure improvement should have been completed in the places where these funds would be spent. The establishment of the participatory model of urban governance and urban transformation was on the other hand crucial for fulfilling some of the “democratization” requirements of the EU for Turkey’s EU candidacy.

The historical transformation project, which commenced in January 2009, was a comprehensive urban restructuring and development project initiated in 2008 by the local government based on an agreement signed between Mardin governate, municipality, and Housing Development Administration (TOKİ). In addition to the improvement of its (sewage, electricity, and water) infrastructure, the historical transformation project aimed to restore the historical and cultural heritage of the Old City, which has had the status of a Historical Protection Site (SIT) for decades, rehabilitation of the main street, and a proactive strategy of urban branding. This project entailed the full or partial demolition of buildings that did not comply with the architectural heritage of the Old City and the renewal and clearing of cement or concrete from the stone walls or other parts of the houses so that the historical stone facades of the built environment could be restored. This was again a mostly state-funded restoration project. Buildings registered as cultural assets, including the public buildings owned by the state rather than the houses, were renewed. As I mention later, these properties usually belonged to the former Armenian inhabitants of the city who had been subject to deportation and persecution.

Operating under the direct tutelage of the Prime Minister and in collaboration with the local government, TOKİ was a major force of dispossession and

displacement within the urban regeneration project of Historical Transformation in Mardin. TOKİ was empowered to seize public lands, transform them into private property, enforce evictions and demolitions, and develop profit-oriented housing to be populated by those who were evicted from the houses declared to be unsafe and prone to “disaster” in the Old city. Thus, TOKİ displaced the residents of the “unsafe” and “unauthorized” houses in the Old City (including its outskirts) to its newly constructed apartments in a New City for the displaced. TOKİ was a crucial force for the financialization of housing and the commodification of stone buildings. Consequently, within the historical transformation project, the construction sector and its related sub-sectors grew, land prices increased, and building licenses in Mardin showed a significant rise in terms of both the number of buildings and the area zoned for the construction sector. The value of building licenses in 2012 was 30 times that of building licenses in 2002, whereas the area zoned for planning in 2014 was 347 times larger (Yapı Ruhsatı İstatistikleri, TUIK in Yuksel, 2014).

All these regeneration efforts aimed to return the city and its built environment to its “original” state of a century ago, which in turn was envisaged to establish the basis of heritage tourism industry. Despite this upfront discourse of “re-establishing the honour and dignity” (*iade-i itibar*) of the city, even a project representative of the governorship was very clear about what all these urban renewal projects were about.

The aim here [with these projects] is not to simply develop the cultural heritage. These are not renovation projects.... In fact, at the core of this project lies economics, which will also serve for social development (Tulin, February 23, 2015).

In sum, the sustainable social and economic developments of the city were to be achieved through the heritage tourism industry. All renewal projects, geared to this end, unleashed processes of capital accumulation, dispossession, and displacement in the city within a multiscalar field of actors.

The Sustainable Tourism Project, which was initiated in 2013 through the collaboration of Mardin municipality and governorate, like the former projects, also aimed the improvement of the city’s main street, this time by refurbishing building facades and standardizing signboards, shutters, and sunshades, but its main goal was publicizing and branding Mardin to boost the heritage tourism industry. As the infrastructure improvement of the city was mostly completed by the previous projects, IPA-EU funds now became accessible and were utilized to increase the city’s tourism capacity. The local government and particularly Mardin’s governor clearly played a crucial role in the city’s restructuring through renewal projects. It is noteworthy that it was the same governor who played a pioneering role supporting and funding the aforementioned international cultural events, including the 2009 exhibition, and the establishment of the Mardin Biennial.

## A Safe City to Invest, Funds, and Minority Rights

It was in this broader context that the cultural agents and institutions emerged, all aiming to revive the cultural sector in Mardin. They contributed to further valorization of the multi-faith and linguistic heritage, notably of some minority communities, as well as the built environment of the city. They also contributed to urban restructuring as part of the city’s social and economic development. All these cultural institutions were entangled with the processes of value generation in and through urban and capital restructuring.

Two important developments had a crucial impact on city-making processes in Mardin: the first was the official recognition in 1999 of Turkey’s candidacy to the EU and the second was the unilateral ceasefire the PKK declared again in 1999. The prospects of a safer environment for investment and business in Mardin and Turkey’s eligibility for EU accession introduced a new set of conjunctural factors that shaped not only the processes of urban regeneration in Mardin and its funding but also the city’s social and political life. These developments had a profound impact on the relationship between the city today and its past and current population, particularly its ethnic and religious minorities, which I address below.

Turkey’s candidacy and the ceasefire both meant that attracting investments and capital to the city had become a more viable opportunity than before. As a pre-accession country, Turkey became eligible for EU financial assistance through Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds which provided candidate countries assistance in their transition to membership. However, at the same time, candidacy meant carrying out a series of reforms in governance structures and rights regimes in order to qualify for the accession negotiations. This required monitoring Turkey’s progress in its “democratization,” especially in terms of the introduction and implementation of legal and political frameworks that specified the rights and obligations of governments and citizens (including religious and ethnic minorities).

It is within this broader local, regional, and global economic and political context that some of the city’s minorities acquired increasing value and presence within the cultural networks and city imaginaries. Among the city’s past and current minorities, Syriac Christians acquired particular visibility in heritage preservation discourses. In 1999–2000, specific efforts were undertaken by the Turkish state to reach out the “emigrated” Syriac Christians living in different parts of Europe. The aim was to convince them to return to their “ancestral land” with a promise and guarantee of the protection of their property and religious rights (for a history of minorities and particularly of the Syriac Christians in Mardin and in diaspora see Biner, 2007, 2010).

It is important to note that although the multi-faith and multi-lingual heritage of the city included the Caledonian, Christian, Kurdish, Muslim, Syriac, and Arab heritage, it was the Syriac Christian that acquired prominence in this revaluation process. The valorization of Christian minorities and particularly the Syriac Christians was also connected to the increasing radicalization of Islam in the

Middle East. Securing Christian presence in the ancestral homeland of Eastern Christianity became a heightened concern to global Christian institutions in this context. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that the valorization of minorities in Mardin and their heritage was selective.

As stated earlier, the city's border-trade-dependent economy was drastically constricted by the Iraq wars. However, these wars also produced new regional political dynamics as well as investment and trade opportunities, within which projects to attract investment and to regenerate and reposition Mardin gained ground and viability. In order to make the city business and investment friendly and to attract capital, city leaders, including the mayor's and governor's offices, together with local businessmen, coordinated their efforts to change the city's image from a violence-ridden place to one of a peaceful co-habitation of religions, languages and minorities. Closely entangled with the city leaderships' efforts to regenerate and brand the city for development, the emerging culture and arts institutions not only contributed to the revival of the cultural sector but also played an important role in the valorization of some linguistic and religious minorities, as well as the built environment, parts of the city, and the goods associated with these minorities. The valorization of a "multi-faith" heritage and the revaluing of (selected) linguistic and religious/cultural minorities were closely connected to the envisioned development through the heritage tourism industry and the accompanying urban regeneration at a particular conjuncture.

However, it is important to note that neither the strong (Christian) Armenian past of the city, nor its Kurdish fabric were part of the city's branding strategy. These minorities and their heritage were not valorized, because of the refusal of the Turkish state to recognize Armenian claims for historical justice and compensation of the losses from the 1915 genocide; or the Kurds' claims for independence and/or recognition. According to one of the founders of MARSEV (Mardin Education Foundation), the valorization of the Syriac Christians, rather than the recognition of the material and immaterial heritage of the Armenians in the city, was striking. According to him, despite the fact that the real Christian inhabitants of the city had been Armenians, not the Assyrians (Syriacs), "today the Assyrians [Syriac Christians] and their return are cherished as they are believed to create a surplus in terms of Mardin's tourism" (Ahmet, June 25, 2015). Contrary to the current narrative about the Christian Syriac heritage which increasingly became cultural, symbolic, and economic capital for the city, he continues to argue that the fundamentals of the city have been Armenian. Yesterday's big mansion houses, that are today's public buildings, originally belonged to the Armenians and were appropriated by the state during the deportation of the Armenians (Ahmet, June 25, 2015).

Syriac Christians took a central stage in the emerging cultural institutions referred to earlier. For example, the 2014 Sine-Mardin International Film Festival was dedicated to Syriac Christian films. Although Churches from different denominations, monasteries, Medressas, or old mansions hosted the Mardin Biennials, Syriac Christian churches (restored, functioning, abandoned or decaying) occupied central roles in these biennials. Thus, Syriac Christians became part of the value creation processes in Mardin in multiple ways. As a member of parliament from Mardin and the first Syriac in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, put it "people once fled and

left the land, now they are returning, and the land is regaining value...in fact Syriacs themselves became a value” (Dora, 2011).

It was within the efforts to change the war, violence, and poverty associated image of Mardin that Mardinite businessmen have deployed the so-called instruments of soft power or cultural diplomacy. Many of the TV series, films, and features about Mardin, mentioned in the beginning of this article, were commissioned by these businessmen in order to contribute to the promotion of the city nationally, regionally, and globally. According to the president of the Organized Industrial Zone, they invited journalists, covered all their costs, and asked them to write articles about Mardin. They covered the production costs of TV series to create a media presence of a particular image of the city as a peaceful co-habitation of different religions, cultures and languages. They pursued this branding for the economic development of the city (Fehmi, February 20, 2015).

With Turkey’s official candidate status to EU, Turkey’s ethnic and religious minorities attained renewed visibility. Monitoring Turkey’s observance and governance of its ethnic and religious minorities and their rights, especially of religious freedom of Christians, has been crucial for assessing Turkey’s success in deploying a series of reforms to ensure the democratization process required for the accession negotiations. The return of displaced Syriac Christians from Europe became a platform for the display of Turkey’s respect for religious minority rights and its “democratization” process. Their return and presence in the city boosted the city’s image for safety and stability. While public enactment of the first was crucial for accessing supranational funds and institutional networks of power, the second was crucial to attract capital and investment to the city.

Indeed, in the context of the assured safety for business and of stagnating European markets in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, which made the expanding Middle Eastern market, especially in war-destroyed Iraq, more attractive, the city attracted domestic and international investment. Between 2003 and 2015, the volume of exports from Mardin (mainly to Iraq) increased 150% (DIKA, 2016). The city’s share in Turkey’s exports increased tenfold. Together with the tourist-industry, the construction sector became the major driver of the local economy and real estate prices tripled (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018).

## In Lieu of Conclusions

The historical and architectural heritage of the city and the once persecuted and undesired Syriac Christians and their past became political, cultural, and economic assets within a particular constellation of global, political, and regional dynamics, aspirations, and policies that acquired salience in Mardin within the power geometry of a specific historical conjuncture. It is the multiscalar dynamics of capital accumulation in the city which shaped the emplacement of cultural institutions and networks (and for that matter soft power and cultural diplomacy) that were closely entangled with the processes of Mardin’s valorization.

Those who understand capital to be a set of unequal social relations repeatedly underline the “coloniality of power,” i.e., the fundamental importance of the

legitimizing and naturalizing narratives of racialized, culturalized, and gendered differences for the appropriations and the dispossessive processes underlying capital accumulation (Butler, 2016; Piketty, 2014; Quijano, 2000). They rightly urge us to analyse both processes in relationship to each other. However, once these narratives of difference take the form of a positive valuation rather than dehumanization, as it is the case in multi-cultural and multi-religious narratives of diversity and community politics, the analysis often proceeds as if these valorizations were detached from the structures and processes of appropriation underlying capital accumulation. Building upon studies that approach re-valuation processes in connection to global movement of capital accumulation and its temporalities (Narotzky, 2016) thus embedded in the colonial and racial logic of capitalism, I approach the striking valorization of selected (minority) groups and their concomitant empowerment both discursively and in policies in connection to capital and urban restructuring geared to establish the competitive worth of the place (Brenner, 2004). I argue that it is important to subject both the devalorization and the valorization of selected groups to a shared analytical lens. Such a lens would review the dehumanization and demonization of groups through persecution, displacement, and dispossession, but also their re-valuation as assets of linguistic and religious diversity. However, in order to capture the coloniality of power, it is crucial above all that we analyse these processes in relation to the changing configurations—the mix and potency—of intersecting multiscalar networks of disparate power. That is to say, the power geometry of historical conjuncture is crucial in understanding the temporality of value regimes.

The revaluing processes of the historical heritage of Mardin and the Syriac Christians, as well as the cultural networks and institutions entangled with them, have been embedded into a multiscalar field of actors. In addition to state, city, and local state actors, this field has involved German, Spanish, and French national cultural institutions, but also international and supranational actors such as UNESCO, the International Biennial Association, the Roman Catholic Church, Caritas (the international federation of Catholic charitable organizations), and the Eastern Christian Church. The location, efficacy, and the reach of these cultural institutions and networks were produced and reproduced within these interlocking spatialities and actors in a multiscalar field, which escape any kind of binaries posed as city versus nation state, or state versus civil society.

In the context of the expansion of the Syrian War since 2012 and the changing power geometry (Massey, 2005) in the region, within Europe, and the EU and above all in terms of the location of the Turkish state within this multiscalar field, the cornerstones of urban regeneration as well as the minority rights and peace process agendas in Mardin have been transformed. In the context of the state violence which has taken the region into its grip since June 2015, narratives of heritage, diversity, and cultural dialogue have lost their prominence, drastically constricting investments, real estate development, and the tourism industry.

It is true that in the context of neo-liberal globalization, cities are unmooring themselves from nation-states as engines of economy, centres of trade and investment, and innovation. They have increasingly become the focus and locus of power, policy making, governance, politics, and of cultural production and cultural exchange networks. However, it would be misleading to juxtapose cities and nation state as

if they form a binary in which city power is merely replacing national power. Neither nation-states nor cities are the containers of national and urban processes respectively. A multiscalar analysis of a city urges us to take the city as an entry point and trace the connections that link that city in a relational and processual way within a multiscalar field. Here I use the “multiscalar” as a “shorthand to speak of sociospatial spheres of practice that are constituted in relation to each other and within various hierarchies of networks of power” (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018) beyond any fixed hierarchy of bounded territorial units.

The Mardin case illustrates the importance of a relational and multiscalar analysis of the processes of city-making within changing power contingencies at a particular conjuncture. The neo-liberal restructuring of the economy in Mardin has depended heavily on urban restructuring projects within which cultural institutions and actors were closely involved. This case highlights the futility of nation state-city, state-civil society binaries in analysing the actors involved in the work, efficacy, and the potency of cultural networks, institutions, and cultural diplomacy. The emergence and dynamics of cultural institutions and practices and the cultural reach of Mardin have become legible within the restructuring processes of the place within the power geometry of national, regional, local, international, and global actors and institutions within a particular historical conjuncture. In fact, in most of the cases, it was state institutions and funding that fostered, initiated, and/or coordinated the establishment of civil society organisations with participatory agendas and brought in global and/or supranational actors to carry out city regeneration and cultural reach projects.

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