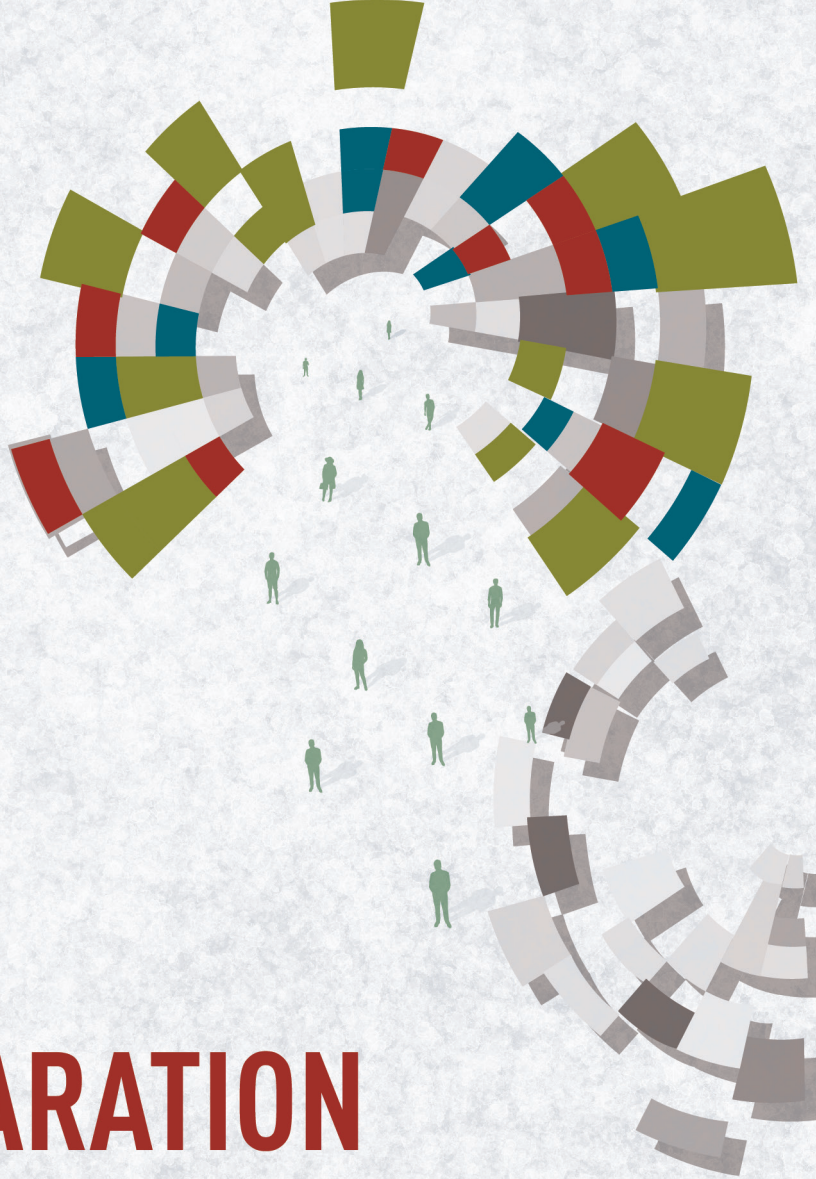


9

CONFERENCE ON URBAN STUDIES

KENT ARAŐTIRMALARI KONGRESİ



FINAL DECLARATION



Background

The 9th Conference on Urban Studies was held on November 20, 21, and 22, 2024, at TEPAV, within the scope of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit's (GIZ) 'Resilient Cities and Communities Project'. The conference, which primarily focused on enhancing the resilience of cities affected by the earthquake, served as a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration. It was organized in cooperation with the Presidential Local Government Policies Committee, Institute of Urban Studies, TEPAV, TOBB ETÜ, University of Stuttgart, Idealkent, ADAMOR, ASAM, IBC, Adıyaman Municipality, Hatay Metropolitan Municipality, and BYS Group.

This three-day event brought together over a thousand participants, including distinguished speakers, policymakers, experts, practitioners, and more than two hundred academics. Representatives from national and international organizations, central and local governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, chambers, and universities actively contributed their perspectives, experiences, and scholarly research on resilient cities and communities.

The conference resulted in several tangible outputs, including a compendium of academic abstracts and a specialized guide for municipalities. The forthcoming guide emphasizes good governance and the critical role of Urban Information Systems in local administrations, offering practical knowledge tailored for implementation. These resources aim to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, enhancing local governments' capacity in urban planning, management, and service delivery.

The conference provided a multifaceted platform for discussing the theoretical and practical approaches required for resilient urban reconstruction in the face of complex and multidimensional urban crises. Discussions underscored the urgent necessity of rethinking urban approaches within a broader framework of resilience, particularly in the aftermath of the February 6th earthquakes. This declaration synthesizes the key discussions and conclusions reached during the conference, serving as a roadmap for reimagining urban strategies to build resilient and inclusive urban futures.

RETHINKING 'RESILIENT CITIES AND COMMUNITIES'

The February 2023 earthquakes, which profoundly impacted Türkiye, revealed the systemic human-induced deficiencies that transformed a natural event into a social, economic, and ecological tragedy. The scale of destruction and loss of life highlighted the need to critically examine the underlying structures contributing to such vulnerabilities.

Against this backdrop, the 9th Conference on Urban Studies, organized under the theme 'Resilient Cities and Communities' approached resilience not merely as a reactive concept to crises but as a transformative perspective that seeks to address root causes and confront systemic challenges. The earthquake was framed as a case study of broader crises, encouraging reflections on the historical, economic, and social dimensions of human-nature-space relationships.

Rather than limiting discussions to mitigating the post-event impacts of crises, the conference examined the political, economic, and social systems that contribute to the emergence of such crises. This declaration invites a rethinking of resilience through a connected approach that encompasses broader spatial and temporal contexts, aiming to uncover and address the roots of these issues.

By examining localized events like earthquakes as reflections of deeper, global, and structural problems, the conference emphasized that resolving these systemic challenges would enable cities and communities to better withstand future adversities. In this sense, the process of rebuilding cities and communities should not merely aim at recovery but be embraced as an opportunity to transform economic, ecological, and social systems, paving the way for a more resilient and equitable future.

Examining Problems and Their Roots

Over the past century, *the growth-oriented approach* of the dominant political economy has shaped all forms of relationships among humans, nature, and space. This accumulation-based and expansionist understanding of economic growth, under the promise of increasing 'social welfare' has instrumentalized nature and space, leading society to face multiple and interwoven crises.

The spatial and ecological imbalances caused by growth-driven economic models are fundamental triggers of these crises. While prioritizing economic development, this structure systematically exacerbates the consumption of natural resources, socio-spatial inequalities, inequities, and ecological destruction. Consequently, the costs proposed as short-term solutions often return as heavier burdens on societies and individuals in the long run. When

we consider the pursuit of *unlimited growth* as the root cause of current crises, several interconnected dynamics emerge:

■ ***The perpetual expansion of urban boundaries:*** In a framework where economic growth is directly proportional to urban growth, cities expand without limits, consuming fertile agricultural lands, forests, pastures, and wetlands indiscriminately to produce excessively built environments. On one hand, this obliterates natural resources; on the other, these resources are often commodified to supply of urban services. Urban sprawl, which threatens ecological existence, also engulfs and urbanizes rural settlements, disrupting the human-nature relationship and eliminating the production relations necessary for their coexistence.

■ ***The growth of social metabolism:*** The historical association of development and welfare with the magnitude of collective and individual consumption has led to an expansion of social metabolism. In recent decades, a new value system centered on individual consumption has driven an exponential increase in human activities to meet ever-growing needs, independent of population growth. This has intensified energy and raw material flows. All these factors contribute to social metabolism's expansion, which, in securing capital accumulation, accelerates the depletion of natural resources in increasingly shorter timeframes.

■ ***The limitless growth of surplus value:*** The production of surplus value, tied to the accumulation process, grows indefinitely through the relentless commodification of resources. This not only results in the commodification of all value systems but also deepens inequalities in the distribution of expanding surplus value. The exploitation of labour and nature within this accumulation process, coupled with increasingly individualized living costs and rising authoritarian measures to control these adverse dynamics, has brought multiple crises to the fore. These crises—whether economic, political, ecological, or spatial—are interconnected in complex ways. Ultimately, their relationship to distribution processes triggers social conflicts in varying forms and contexts, which inevitably become intrinsic aspects of urban processes.

The economic, political, social, and spatial relationships shaped by prevailing growth-oriented approaches have triggered multi-dimensional crises with profound consequences. When examined in detail, these crises manifest in several interconnected forms:

■ ***Climate crisis:*** Climate change, with its high potential to alter the composition of all human systems, generates new crises by causing natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and wildfires. These events lead to unpredictable socio-economic and socio-spatial consequences. Additionally, phenomena such as food shortages, water scarcity, and energy

crises exacerbate the depletion of productive resources, disrupt social divisions of labour, and deepen contentious issues like unemployment and migration.

■ **Ecological crisis:** Closely linked to climate change, the ecological crisis arises from the commodification of nature and its incorporation into market mechanisms, alongside the destructive effects of urban sprawl. These processes disrupt ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and destabilize the interdependent relationship between nature and labour. The unequal access to nature's benefits results in new arenas of conflict, undermining the prospect of fair and sustainable coexistence.

■ **Economic crisis:** Growth-oriented economic models prioritize private property and remunerate individuals for their labour, creating exchange markets under 'normal conditions'. However, the inherent fragility of this system renders it highly vulnerable to disruptions or threats. These vulnerabilities make the economy susceptible to systematic and recurrent crises, exposing its unsustainable foundation.

■ **Democracy crisis:** To surpass the limits of growth, mechanisms of deregulation, non-supervision, and appropriation—often framed as exceptions—are employed. These mechanisms are frequently executed by the state through community or class-based preferences. This process entails a continuous erosion of institutional and legal frameworks, creating loopholes for privileges and exacerbating inequalities. The resulting social unrest and insecurities necessitate increasingly authoritarian governance forms to suppress dissent. Consequently, democracy once considered a safeguard for social consensus and collective reasoning, erodes under the strain of these dynamics.

■ **Blackswan events:** Crises stemming from events like earthquakes, pandemics, or wars often escalate into disasters when systems are unprepared. Growth-oriented frameworks diminish human systems' capacity to mitigate risks, transforming them into reservoirs of vulnerabilities that amplify potential hazards.

Although these crises affect all settlement systems cumulatively, their most profound impact and central locus of emergence are cities. The problematic relationship between cities and rural systems exacerbates these crises. Therefore, it is reasonable to define these interconnected phenomena as urban and social crises. In this context, building the resilience of cities and societies requires critically re-examining the political, economic, social, ecological, and spatial structures embraced thus far. Developing a conceptual framework for addressing these challenges is of paramount importance in the current era.

Rethinking Resilience

This declaration advocates for the necessity of a structural paradigm shift, aiming to provide insights into a new perspective on urban and social domains. Within this framework, the concept of resilience will be critically examined, along with its current definitions and the possibilities—or limitations—it presents. Proposals will be developed from a critical standpoint to address these issues.

■ In line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, the concept of resilience, as instrumentalized in international texts, is typically defined as the ability of systems to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in the face of disasters, allowing them to return to a state of equilibrium. In other words, resilience is conceptualized as the capacity of a system to either prevent disruption in the face of challenges or to recover swiftly and restore its original state after experiencing such disruptions.

This definition presupposes the perfection of existing economic, political, spatial, and social practices, suggesting that any problematic aspects of their interrelations should be resolved to sustain the system as it stands. However, the growth-oriented paradigm that defines these structures and the relationship among their components inherently generates crises that necessitate their resilience.

■ The disaster-centered approach to resilience emphasizes a reactive stance to crises, largely overlooking the importance of proactive measures that aim to prevent the emergence of disasters.

■ Moreover, this approach focuses on preserving the current system, operating with a forward-looking prediction of future risks, while neglecting the fact that the crises experienced today stem from risks inherited from the past.

■ Consequently, the discourse on resilience assumes that the concept can be implemented through universal practices. However, such discussions fail to account for the unique conditions of both the individual components of the system and the internal dynamics that govern their relationships.

Rethinking resilience further...

■ ***Shifting to a paradigm of degrowth by legitimizing and integrating it with a resilience-based framework:*** Recognizing the limits of growth, this approach necessitates the controlled use and regeneration of natural resources while fostering new socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-spatial practices and behavioural patterns. Transitioning from economic

determinism to ecological determinism, resilience could serve as both a means and an end in facilitating such a transformative process.

■ ***Rather than envisioning resilience solely as a forward-looking endeavour, addressing the past, present, and future simultaneously:*** This entails examining the risks, vulnerabilities, and underlying causes rooted in historical and current contexts that necessitate resilience. Such an approach redefines resilience not as a distant target to be achieved, but as an ongoing process that identifies precise issues and generates innovative, context-sensitive solutions.

■ ***Instead of adhering to a generalized notion of resilience, adopting a contextual approach:*** For resilience to transcend discourse and manifest as practical implementation, it must be rooted in the specific conditions of a given locality. Rejecting a universalized perspective that perpetuates the sustainability of all structural flaws within the current system, this approach emphasizes building processes that are responsive to the unique attributes of a place while acknowledging its interconnectedness.

■ ***Shifting from a fragmented perspective of resilience to interconnectedness:*** Resilience must be conceived as a relationship between parts and the whole, integrating individual subsystems and contexts into a cohesive framework that reflects their mutual interdependence.

■ ***A transformative approach rather than the disaster-centric understanding of resilience:*** Resilience should not be confined to a reflexive stance against crises in economic, political, social, or natural systems that escalate into disasters. Instead, when envisioned as a process, resilience should embody a proactive outlook that enhances the quality of life and well-being, eliminates injustices, and prioritizes medium- and long-term solutions. Such a perspective focuses on preventive measures, transforming systems not through reactionary fixes but by addressing root causes and fostering systemic change.

This reimagined approach to resilience challenges the status quo, advocating for a paradigm that is transformative, context-dependent, and integrative, ultimately fostering systems that are not only adaptive but also equitable and sustainable.

Rethinking the City and Community

Building on the notion that cities produce society and society produces cities, urban resilience is intrinsically linked to social resilience. Addressing the challenges inherent in urbanization is synonymous with overcoming issues that affect social resilience. In reconsidering the city and society, several fundamental areas must be addressed:

■ ***The urban-rural dialectic:*** The prevailing approach to urbanization views the city and the rural landscape—representing nature—as opposites, effectively dismantling both urban and social resilience. The growth-driven model of urbanization continually absorbs rural areas, expanding urban space while eliminating the rural production that supports it. Understanding that both urban and rural dynamics are rooted in their distinct production relationships, it is essential to recognize and nurture the interconnected relationship between the city and the countryside.

■ ***The production of the built environment in the context of the part-whole relationship:*** The current model of urban development treats the built environment as a tool for capital accumulation, approaching urbanization in a fragmented, microeconomic manner rather than a holistic perspective. Beyond the social injustices arising from the distribution of generated profits, the organization of physical space under this model facilitates the transformation of climate change and unexpected natural events into disasters. Simply securing the structural integrity of individual buildings cannot create a resilient city. Cities encompass a comprehensive system formed through the spatial organization of various land uses, and the system and its components must ensure economic, social, and physical accessibility. A resilient city requires the gradual integration of these elements, balancing them to create a cohesive, sustainable system.

Such an approach demands a long-term, controlled, and consistent process design, as opposed to rapid, fluctuating, and contradictory interventions. Additionally, urbanization should not be viewed merely as the physical production of the environment driven by economic motives, but as a process where social and ecological structures are equally integral.

■ ***Prioritizing use value in urban service supply:*** Collective consumption services, such as housing, education, health, transportation, and infrastructure, are essential for the reproduction of labour and society. However, the market-driven, individualized costs of services fail to provide the social resilience needed in times of crisis. While urban services may be perceived as purely technical processes, their outcomes play a significant role in addressing social issues and organizing everyday life.

Therefore, to build a resilient society that promotes social justice, it is vital to prioritize the use value of urban services. Securing urban rights and improving the quality of urban life should involve a needs-based approach to service delivery, ensuring that these services meet the collective needs of society and contribute to social equity and resilience.

■ ***Prioritizing labour and vulnerable groups in the axis of social justice:***

The externalized costs of commodified natural resources, labour, and services, through market-driven systems, do not vanish; instead, they are redistributed from the powerful to the vulnerable. In the long term, these costs negatively impact the quality of life and resilience of individuals and society. The key question here is: who is exporting these costs, who is forced to bear them, and how can individuals and communities manage these burdens over different time periods? This is also a moral dilemma.

We observe that costs related to ecological and labour processes, including accessibility to urban services, have become individualized and intertwined with all urban processes. Demographic differentiations based on age, gender, disability, socio-economic classes, and identities such as ethnicity, religion, and gender already describe disadvantaged groups. When these disadvantages intersect, the level of accessibility to the city and its opportunities decreases, leading to a deterioration in the psycho-social well-being of individuals unable to bear the increasing costs, and consequently, a weakening of social resilience. Particularly in extraordinary situations, these unequal conditions become more pronounced, making these groups even more vulnerable.

In this context, the policies designed to promote resilience, based on social justice, should focus on maximizing social benefit by prioritizing labour and vulnerable groups. Instead of serving market interests, labour, and vulnerable groups must be prioritized, ensuring that increasing costs are absorbed by individuals and redistributed in a fair manner.

■ ***Communizing the urban and governance:*** It is crucial that the process of formulating urban policies and defining socio-spatial interventions involves not just central and local governments, but also civil society, professional organizations, and the communities directly affected by these processes. The current urban governance model, which has already involved coordination gaps between central and local governments, uses other representative groups as consent mechanisms and mere instruments to legitimize any kind of urban intervention. Urbanization practices that cannot be generated through common sense and shared wisdom, when combined with fragmented interventions and extraordinary measures, bring about many vulnerabilities, both in terms of the physical environment and the ability to meet social needs.

To ensure urban and social resilience, it is necessary to enable individuals to become active agents of the city and decision-making processes and to organize solidarity networks that begin from daily life and become institutionalized. This will make it easier to identify the real needs and priorities of the community, with individuals developing a sense of responsibility and belonging toward the city. Additionally, by fostering a culture of solidarity that transcends individual competition and focuses on social benefit, self-regulation mechanisms and the ethics of social governance can be strengthened.

Tools for Resilient Cities and Communities

When thinking about resilient cities and communities in the context of a paradigm shift, the following tools can be used to achieve this goal:

■ **Technical and social knowledge:** Scientific reasoning should be a foundational axis in constructing resilient cities and communities. It is essential to prioritize not only technical knowledge, but also social knowledge related to the community's everyday life practices, and cultural and social fabrics. Acquiring and synthesizing this knowledge and integrating it into decision-making processes will provide a comprehensive and context-specific approach.

■ **Planning:** Planning involves approaching urban processes at different scales, progressively and holistically, utilizing knowledge of the past and present while shaping the future as a system of interrelated parts. By using scientific and social knowledge, planning aims to establish a balanced relationship between nature, humans, and the economy. It is a vital tool in building resilient cities and communities. Planning should address socio-economic inequalities, socio-spatial injustices, and ecological damage while proposing innovative approaches to minimize these issues. The development of planning models that define resilience strategies, spatial decisions, and implementation tools is crucial.

■ **Data technologies and data governance:** To ensure the usability of technical and social knowledge in planning processes, it is necessary to gather accurate and up-to-date data. With developing technologies, urban information systems that manage and govern data production processes are emerging as significant tools. These systems enable the creation of comprehensive information by utilizing various types of data from complex urban and social systems.

 **Participation:** Using participation as a tool to create common sense and shared wisdom and generate solutions that address real needs is crucial for resilient cities and communities. Developing mechanisms that facilitate participation will ensure that decisions made through the reconciliation of differences are accepted on a broad scale, ensuring their applicability.

In conclusion, this manifesto encourages approaches that view social and urban resilience not just as a goal but as an ongoing process that fosters transformation. It aims to plant the seeds for transformation through a critical evaluation of urban and social processes. In the reconstruction of resilient cities and communities, it is essential to transform the interaction processes between nature and humanity, humans and space, and humans with each other, alongside all production relations. Starting the transformative impact in the midst of multiple crises and fostering hope emerges as a prerequisite for resilience at both individual and social levels.



T.C. CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI
YEREL YÖNETİM POLİTİKALARI KURULU



Implemented by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

KENT
ARAŞTIRMALARI
ENSTİTÜSÜ



INSTITUTE
OF URBAN
STUDIES



tepav

