

## URBAN POLITICS AND THE WORK AND LABOUR PROCESSES OF ARCHITECTURE: SURVEY RESEARCH WITH YOUNG ARCHITECT-WORKERS IN TURKEY

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### INTRODUCTION

There is a general tendency in architecture to insistently see the work and labour conditions of architects independently from “the production of nature as urban space” (Sert, 2020) embedded in the neoliberal capitalist economic order. However, considering the socio-ecologically crisis-prone environments in which we live, understanding the complicated relationship among nature, the urban, and society becomes more crucial than ever before (Heynen, et al., 2006; Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2008). This article aims to question the common trend that treats the production process of urban space as if it were independent of the working conditions of architects. Current architectural theory struggles to find concepts for guiding the complicated relationship of architectural process particularly working conditions of architects with urbanization of nature in the 21st century. Accordingly, as specialized citizens, architects try to rethink ecological and civic imaginaries (Karvonen, 2011) for understanding human embeddedness in space, time, nature, and place (Harvey, 1996; Gandy, 2006).

Two of the authors of this work are architects completed their undergraduate programs in Turkey in 2008 and 2009. As members of the same generation, we followed similar paths, meeting in 2016 when we worked together in the same office for a short period. It was not a coincidence that we both witnessed exploitative working conditions within the context of the increasing environments of social, economic, and ecological crisis worldwide in the 21st century as young “architect-workers” (Deamer, 2014 and 2015). We decided to focus on the exploitative conditions of architecture’s work and labour processes to open an engaging debate. Our first joint study published in 2018, based mainly on a global literature review on the issue with a glimpse of particular socio-economic and political trajectories in Turkey since the beginning of this century (Aykaç and Sert, 2018). Meanwhile, we actively participated in

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independent civil professional initiatives. Those initiatives aim to redefine and demand the work and labour rights of architects, establish solidarity networks against unemployment and exploitation, and take active roles in the urban right movements. Similar initiatives have also started to fight for labour rights due to worsening conditions for educated workers such as engineers, lawyers, and bank employees as a larger mass.

Globally, on the one hand, civil activism and a multitude of struggles addressing the precariousness of architects have emerged in the world in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. On the other hand, socio-ecologically crisis-prone types of progress, such as acceleration of excessive urbanization, intense precipitation and floods, water ecosystem damage (Sivil ve Ekolojik Haklar Derneği, 2017), loss of public spaces, and increasing respiratory and allergic diseases (Akboğa-Kale et al., 2017), have become an essential part of urban realities in the 2000s, particularly in developing countries. Unions, independent civil groups, and academia have begun discussing the work and labour conditions of architects, such as unpaid internships (D'Aprile and Deamer, 2019), short-term contracts, aggressive project schedules, long working hours, fragmentation and mechanization of labour, the loss of autonomy in the production processes of architecture, as well as architecture and ethics (Sadri, 2015). Compared to the era of 'star architects' and their iconic projects (Kaika and Thielen, 2006; Kaika, 2010; Deamer, 2013), there is limited research focused on shifting the debate towards the labour processes of these projects. Inextricable contradictions emerge today in the daily lives of young architect-workers as citizens. They may be contributing to neoliberal production through contested architectural and urban projects while they are affected by neoliberal urbanization as specialized citizens. Since the 2010s, mass protests, resistance, and criticisms have arisen against urban space production processes, deepening the crisis, the dissatisfaction, and the disregard of production processes elaborated within the international framework of architects' work and labour conditions (Sadri, 2015; Aureli, 2015; Deamer, 2015; Sargın, 2017; Onur Işıkoğlu, 2017; 2019; Aykaç and Sert, 2018; Aykaç, 2020).

There are particularities requiring a different periodization in the Turkish context, with a bold connection between architects, as labourers of late capitalism, and its urban politics. As a consequence of urban politics, we could also highlight the rise and fall of the construction sector in Turkey. In this context, we seek to unfold the underlined crisis and the relation between the labour process of architecture and urban space production through the distinctive experiences of young architect-workers in Turkey in the last decade. We particularly aim to focus on the period between 2007 and 2019 with the following question: What is the relationship between neoliberal urban politics and architects' work and labour conditions? What is the changing role of architects being among the main actors of production of urban space? How does the alteration of the urban space production processes reflect on the architect's work and labour conditions? Within these main questions, we examine the changes in exploitative work and labour conditions due to the consequences of neoliberal urbanization. This discussion leads us to designate a particular periodization for the context of Turkey, highlighting generation and gender dimensions in the work and labour conditions of architects.

### METHODOLOGY: SURVEY DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The main methodological approach of this research involved reaching young architect-workers via an online survey. In designing the survey, we considered our own personal and collaborative experiences in architectural design offices. Additionally, having a sociologist in our research group provided a proper survey design process and more productive interdisciplinary perspective. Along these lines, we specified the targeted group of “architect-workers” in this paper with the following explanation: This survey invites unemployed/employed architects who are under 40 years old, graduated as an architect from an architectural department in Turkey, and worked or currently work as an architect in an architectural design office (salaried type of employment) for at least one year between 2007 and 2019.

The period from 2007 to 2019 was chosen to capture young architect-workers under 40 years old who were faced with neoliberal urban politics and consequences like urban struggle and the socio-ecological and socio-economic crises in Turkey since the 2000s. The authority to work as an architect is obtained by the completion of a four-year undergraduate education in the departments of architecture approved by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), including some internship requirements during the education period. This authority includes the right to work at construction sites as a site manager, controller, or employee and to work in architectural design offices as an architect. It is possible to sign as the project owner while working in an architectural design office. Obtaining the authority to undertake so many responsibilities as a new graduate in Turkey is relatively easy. Graduate studies are not necessary for authority in architectural design, although the choice to continue graduate studies has become a more attractive option in light of growing unemployment (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, 2013; 2019). In order to address the target group succinctly, we defined a period of salaried work in architectural design offices of at least one year between 2007 and 2019 rather than determining a graduation date.

We designed a survey comprising 23 sets of questions within 7 sections including multiple-choice, 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions. Before applying the survey, we invited five architects from different backgrounds to participate in a pilot survey and give feedback. After their active contributions, we made some alterations and finalized the survey. We disseminated it through social media channels, first opening a Twitter account with the research title to motivate participants to respond. Then we contacted the editors of two digital magazines, *Manifold* and *E-skop*, widely followed by our target group, and these platforms posted banners about the research on their websites and social media accounts (Twitter and Facebook). We also shared the survey in two different instant messaging groups run by the civil initiatives mentioned above. Those attempts helped us to reach 260 participants between November 3 and November 22, 2019. By excluding invalid responses, 238 respondents were included in the analysis.

We faced various limitations during the survey design. For example, we wanted to add more questions about family backgrounds to explore the reflections of class and more specific questions on gender-related issues, such as effects of marriage and parenthood. As another dimension of discrimination in labour relations, we could have asked about immigrants’

unregistered work conditions for non-residents Albanian, Iranian, and Syrian architects studied and worked in Turkey. However, in the scope of this online survey, we wanted to concentrate more generally on exploitative work and labour experiences. These limitations represent departure points for future research on the integrated issue of work and labour processes of architect-workers, urban politics, and the production of urban space.

## FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

### Participant Profile

To begin with, analysing the participants' overall demographic profile and information on educational background is important for us to understand whether we reached the targeted group or not. The majority (76%) of our participants are female. The youngest was born in 1997, whereas the oldest was born in 1980. The average age is 29 and more than half of the participants are between the ages of 25 and 29, with the average year of graduation being 2014 and the average age at graduation being 23.83. Only 25% of the participants graduated in/before 2012 through 2007, whereas 45% of the participants graduated in the last three years. Moreover, 75% of participants graduated in/after 2013 and the percentage of female participants among this cluster was slightly higher than the overall average (79%).

The survey participants graduated from 50 different universities, 17 of which are private. It is important to note that 80% of the participants graduated from public universities, and 34% from the top 3 public ones: Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Middle East Technical University (METU), and Yıldız Technical University (YTU). These technical universities, located in the two main metropolitan cities İstanbul and Ankara, have a significant role in establishing architectural education at an international level in Turkey.

It is not possible to argue that this participant group is representative of all architects employed in design offices in Turkey. However, we reached this group by using specific online platforms aiming to bring people together over certain issues which is of focus in this research such as work and labour conditions, urban politics, and ethics in architecture. Therefore, we think that we were able to reach the target group. It could also be argued that graduates of leading universities and younger (graduated in/after 2013) and female architects are more likely to participate in our research. The participant profile led us to consider two different groups in terms of graduation dates in the following sections: participants who graduated in/before 2012 and those who graduated in/after 2013.

### Occupational Experiences

The current employment status of participants varied as employed in an architectural design office (38%), unemployed (33%), freelancer (13%), and other (9%), such as academician, graduate student, or architect employed at a construction site. The unemployment rate among female participants (33%) was slightly higher than that of male participants (30%), who were mostly employed in architectural design offices (40%), similarly to female participants (38%). However, males (19%) worked significantly more in self-employment than their female colleagues (12%). The distribution of current working status does not display a significant difference according to the year of graduation. The unemployment rate was 31% for those who

Number of Jobs	TOTAL	Female	Male	Average Year of Graduation
One	238	181	57	2014.28
Two	165	130	35	2013.64
Three	88	68	20	2012.44
Four	41	33	8	2011.68
Five	18	15	3	2011.22

Table 1. Number of jobs worked in total by gender and average year of graduation.

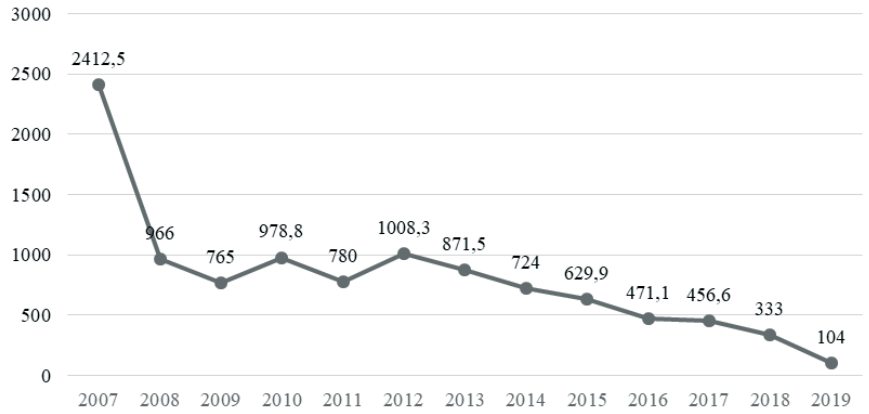


Figure 1. Average working days by starting year of a particular job.

graduated in/before 2012, whereas it was 34% for the younger cohort. However, there was a difference of 7% in unemployment rates between those who graduated from the top three public universities (27%) and others (34%).

We asked our participants to provide starting and ending dates of employment for up to the last 5 jobs and thus gathered 550 individual job entries (Table 1).

The average working days for each of these 550 jobs were then calculated according to which year they started. It thus became possible to understand the changes in duration of employment in the period since 2007. We can observe an obvious trend of decline in the average working days after 2012. Considering that only 73 of the participants mentioned just one job since graduation, this pattern cannot be explained only in reference to the time dimension (Figure 1).

It is also important to note that the female participants changed their jobs slightly more often than males. The average number of job changes since graduation was 2.62 for females whereas it was 2.22 for males. According to our calculations, male participants were able to find a job 0.56 years after graduation, whereas this was 0.68 years for females.

**Exploitative Conditions: Violations of Labour Rights and Other Unethical Processes**

In the next stage, we attempt to understand exploitative conditions defined into two categories: (i) violation of labour rights (*hak gaspı*), which is the abuse of legally defined employee rights, and (ii) other processes (*hak gaspı dışındaki etik olmayan süreçler*), which are not legally defined as a problem yet still ethically questionable and are therefore more complex than the former. We defined states of exploitative conditions based on

	Female	Male	Female %	Male %
Yes	157	46	87%	81%
Yes/No	19	7	10%	12%
No	5	4	3%	7%

**Table 2.** Have you experienced violations of labour rights?

Labour Rights Violations	Yes	No	Yes %
I work overtime and do not get any extra payment or leave in return.	175	1	99%
I am paid below what I should get according to the minimum architect salary set by the Chamber of Architects.	168	4	98%
I work on public holidays and do not receive any extra payment or leave in return.	138	8	95%
My insurance should be based on full salary, but it is paid according to minimum wage.	154	11	93%
My salary is paid late.	104	9	92%
I did not receive the annual increase required.	100	11	90%
I work overtime on Sundays and do not get any extra payment or leave in return.	87	14	86%
I am expected to do jobs that are not defined in my employment contract.	91	16	85%
My insurance was not paid as soon as I started work and it was not paid for the missing months later.	86	15	82%
It has happened that my salary was not paid.	51	21	71%
My insurance is not paid; I am working without insurance.	60	27	69%
I wanted to challenge my employment contract, but before I could, I was forced to sign it.	28	26	52%
I have been asked to sign a new employment contract.	16	34	32%

**Table 3.** Which of the specified labour rights violations do you think you have experienced? (Yes % within those who responded to this question.)

our professional backgrounds and we asked participants whether they had experienced those conditions or not. We also designed open-ended questions asking for self-narratives on exploitative conditions.

In response, 85% of the participants stated that they had experienced violations of labour rights since they started working professionally. Positive replies were 6% higher among females (87%) than males (81%) and did not change according to the year of graduation (**Table 2**). In the form of yes/no questions, we directly asked whether 13 possible state of labour rights violations had been experienced or not (**Table 3**).

While 59% of the participants stated that they had to participate in unethical project processes in their professional working lives, 36% replied negatively to that question and only 5% replied "neither yes nor no". These replies did not display any significant difference according to gender or year of graduation (**Table 4**). In the form of a five-point Likert scale, we directly asked whether participants had faced 11 specific unethical processes (**Table 5**).

	Female	Male	Female %	Male %
Yes	108	32	60%	56%
Yes/No	8	4	4%	7%
No	65	21	36%	37%

Table 4. Have you experienced unethical processes?

Unethical Processes	Absolutely agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Absolutely disagree
I have to work on projects that are produced without considering harms to nature and society.	43%	16%	21%	9%	9%
I am doing tasks below my potential.	39%	28%	20%	8%	5%
I think I will be mobbed if I object to or question projects that I do not find ethically correct and that will not benefit nature and society.	39%	24%	18%	7%	12%
I do jobs that I am not professionally satisfied with.	37%	21%	28%	11%	3%
I think that if I object to or question projects that I do not find ethically correct and that will not benefit nature and society, I will not be able to advance in my job.	36%	19%	23%	9%	13%
I think I will be fired if I object to or question projects that I do not find ethically correct and that will not benefit nature and society.	35%	19%	20%	11%	15%
I unwittingly work on projects that I don't think are ethically correct.	30%	19%	19%	21%	11%
I think I was subjected to mobbing by the architect-boss.	31%	14%	20%	15%	20%
I do not feel personally responsible for the projects I have been involved in; the owner of the office is the boss, the architect, the decision maker; I just draw, I do not feel like a decision maker or the responsible person.	25%	21%	19%	15%	20%
I feel guilty if I don't work overtime.	16%	17%	21%	15%	31%
More than my architect-boss, I feel that I have to work overtime because of psychological pressure from my colleagues.	14%	13%	17%	21%	35%

Table 5. Which of these unethical processes do you think you have faced?

We asked for further statements of violations of labour rights and other unethical processes in the form of an open-ended question. Twenty-one participants described additional unethical project processes other than those provided in the survey. We selected direct quotes from the participants and categorized the responses as additional unethical processes (Table 6).

We designed more elaborative questions to understand violations of labour rights and unethical project production issues in relation to which types of offices the participants worked in. We defined three main categories: offices with large-scale urban design projects, offices producing projects for social interest, and offices producing ecologically sensitive projects (Table 7).

The findings of this section showed that unpaid overtime work and wages lower than the minimum recommended by the Chamber of Architects (*Mimarlar Odası*) were the most common violations of labour rights among the participants. The most common unethical production processes were working below one's own potential, working on architectural projects

Have you ever experienced a situation that could be considered as an unethical project production process besides those stated here?	
Further unethical processes	Direct quotes from participants
The problem of intellectual property rights.	(QA) "We saw the competition as an office [undertaking]; the boss was comfortable enough to leave and go travelling. But when we won, s/he didn't share the prize". (QB): "Although s/he made no contribution, only the name of the office chief was included in the restoration project, for which I drew everything".
Forcing the senior architect-worker to oppress the junior architect-worker.	(QC): "I am expected to apply the same pressure (overtime, aggressive attitude, etc.) given to me to the others".
Insufficient spatial and technical working environment.	(QD): "Like, the chair is uncomfortable. The inadequacy of the technological equipment used, such as using the old version of software. Smoking in a closed workplace".
The silencing of any discussion about ethical aspects of projects.	(QE): "When I question an unethical project, I see that the people I work with put pressure on me and try to persuade me".
Lack of autonomy in the making of work schedules; deadline pressures.	(QF): "While the architect-boss is making agreements, s/he agrees on unrealistic project schedules. S/he puts the entire responsibility of the project on the project coordinator. S/he does not give the necessary people/labour power to the project. In this case, overtime work becomes an obligation. Statements like "I couldn't finish the job/couldn't catch up" are interpreted as [proof of] our inadequacy".
Using the gaps in Turkish land zoning plans deliberately with the purpose of earning more profits, taking part in illegal project processes.	(QG): "I see that some applications are against the legal regulations, done illegally by obtaining permission. I do not approve. But they argue "this is the regular way it should be" and I can't resist, to not be fired from my job."

**Table 6.** Selected quotes about further unethical processes in architectural production.

**Table 7.** Which definitions do the offices where you were subjected to exploitative conditions use to identify their projects? Participants were asked to report their experiences in the jobs (up to five) from the previous section.

Type of Office	Yes	No	Yes %
Large-Scale Urban Projects	98	140	41%
For Social Interest	89	149	37%
Ecologically Sensitive	47	191	20%

without ecological or social concerns, and lack of autonomy in the project decision-making processes. It is also significant that participants in offices involved with large-scale urban projects were more often subjected to exploitative working conditions.

### Changes in Exploitative Conditions

We designed two further questions interrelated to the previous set. We did not ask for precise dates; we simply required our participants to mention in which phases of their careers they experienced the stated situations most: early, middle, or recent phases of their careers as well as they were also able to reply "equally in all phases". The participants who graduated in/ after 2013 declared that they were more frequently subjected to exploitative

**Table 8.** In which phases of your career have you experienced violations of labour rights the most?

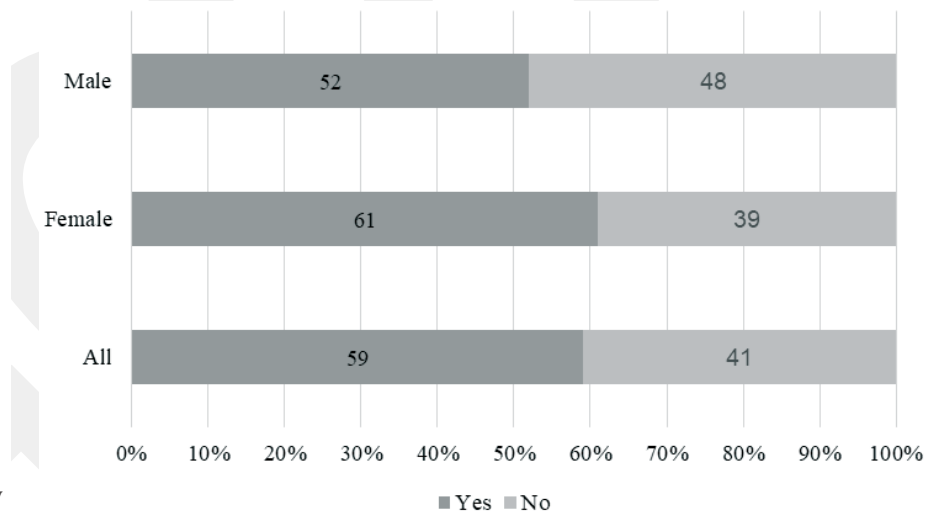
	All	≤2012	≥2013	Female	Male
<b>Equally all</b>	37%	25%	41%	37%	40%
<b>Early</b>	38%	51%	33%	39%	32%
<b>Middle</b>	9%	12%	8%	9%	7%
<b>Recent</b>	16%	12%	18%	15%	21%

**Table 9.** In which phases of your career have you been exposed to unethical project production processes the most?

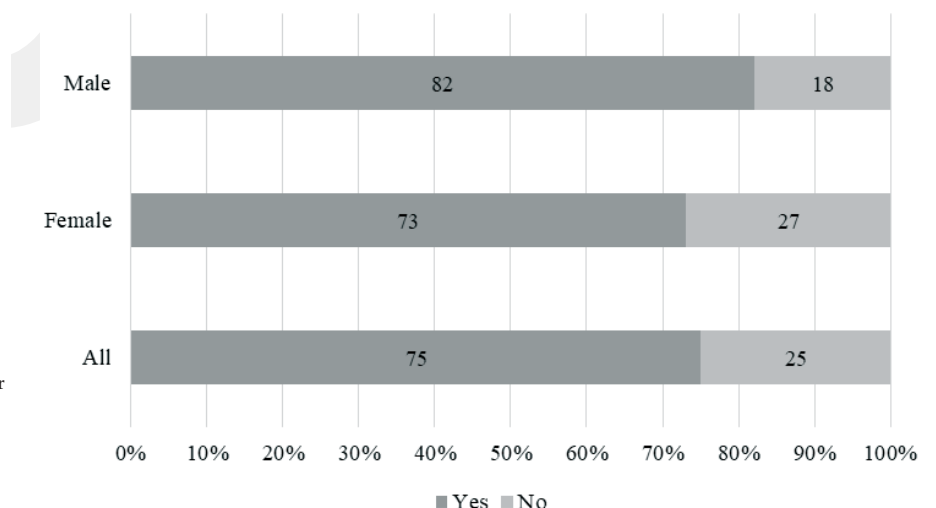
	All	≤2012	≥2013	Female	Male
<b>Equally all</b>	48%	35%	53%	50%	46%
<b>Early</b>	25%	24%	25%	24%	28%
<b>Middle</b>	13%	26%	8%	13%	10%
<b>Recent</b>	14%	15%	14%	13%	16%

conditions in all phases of their careers (violations of labour rights and unethical project production: 41% and 53%) compared to those who graduated in/before 2012 (25% and 35%). Therefore, 2013 could be accepted as a turning point in exploitative conditions in architecture (Tables 8 and 9).

**Figure 2.** Q1: "I have been working for more than 5 years and I think that I will be the first person to be dismissed because I have progressed in my profession and my salary is higher than the salary of new graduates, and I will be replaced by a new graduate/"inexperienced architect" with low wages" (94 responses).



**Figure 3.** Q2: "I have been working for fewer than 5 years and I think I will be dismissed more easily because there are so many new graduates who will work for low wages" (133 responses).



We also presented a general statement about the parallel relationship between precariousness and the growing number of unemployed new graduates among two groups: Q1, the participants who had worked for more than 5 years (Figure 2), and Q2, the participants who had worked for fewer than 5 years (Figure 3).

Female participants and those who graduated in/after 2013 more frequently were subjected to exploitative conditions, both violations of labour rights and other unethical project processes, equally in all stages of their professional practice compared to male participants and those who graduated in/before 2012. Thus, it seems possible to set the year of 2013 as a turning point for the rise of exploitative conditions regarding the significant change between graduation dates.

**Talking About the Crisis in the Workplace**

Participants stated that the crisis was talked about most by the architect-boss (Table 10). The responses to the question of which year the economic crisis related to the construction sector began to dominate daily or professional talks in the workplace from 2015 to 2018 (Figure 4).

We listed eight situations to understand which measures were taken subsequently to the crisis’s entry onto the agenda in the workplace, asking Which of the following steps have been taken in your office regarding the mentioned crisis? Those who responded to this question reported that “Compromising defined rights such as food allowance and regular rise in wages” and “Overtime requests” (80%) were the most common situations they faced during this period, followed by “Dismissals with compensation”, “Unpaid internships”, and “Free new graduate/

Table 10. Is the issue of economic crisis due to the construction industry on the agenda in your office? If so, for whom?

	Yes	No
Architect-boss	87%	13%
Architect-worker	75%	25%
Other office workers	56%	44%
Person/firm giving the architectural project work	62%	38%
Public institution giving the architectural project work	47%	53%

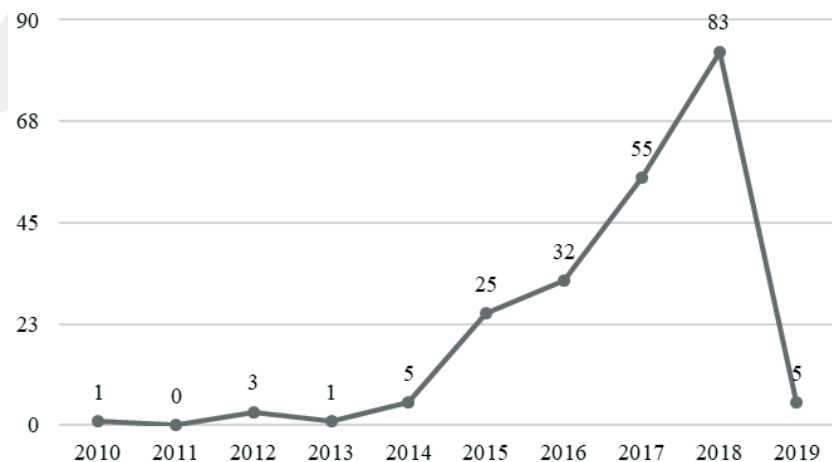


Figure 4. From which year did the economic crisis related to the construction sector enter the agenda? The survey was conducted in October 2019.

**Table 11.** Membership in the Chamber of Architects, female participants by graduation dates.

Female	Yes	No	Yes %	No %
≤2012	47	4	92%	8%
≥2013	81	48	63%	37%

**Table 12.** Membership in the Chamber of Architects, male participants by graduation dates.

Male	Yes	No	Yes %	No %
≤2012	11	0	100%	0%
≥2013	32	10	76%	24%

inexperienced architect employment" (around 70%), followed in turn by "Forced to resign" and "Salary not paid" (50%). The data do not display any differences according to gender; however, "Overtime requests" was the most common answer among those who graduated in/after 2013, whereas "Dismissals with compensation" was for those who graduated in/before 2012.

### Relationship with the Chamber of Architects of Turkey

It is important to note that 73% of the participants declared that they were members of the Chamber, with a 10% difference between female (71%) and male (81%) participants. However, the ratio of membership drastically decreased from 92% among female participants who graduated in/before 2012 to 63% among those who graduated in/after 2013 and from 100% among male participants who graduated in/before 2012 to 76% among those who graduated in/after 2013 (Tables 11) (Table 12). Thus, membership in the Chamber decreased as graduation year became more recent. Participants who graduated in/after 2013 seemed less willing to join the Chamber, especially considering that the participants who were currently members became members in the first year after graduation. Hence, the sense of belonging to one of the most important professional organizations is weaker among the new generation of architects.

Although 73% of the overall participants were members of the Chamber and 68% of them became members in the year immediately following graduation, a significant majority (92%) of participants stated that they had not received any training by the Chamber on personal rights and/or architectural ethics. Half of the participants disagreed with the statement that "such training provided by the Chamber would be beneficial in preventing violations of labour rights and unethical architectural project production processes" and only 29% of them agreed, while 21% of them were uncertain. These results displayed no significant differences according to gender, generation, or membership status. Based on our professional experience with the Chamber, we are inclined to understand this finding as a significant indicator of the communication gap between what our participants expect from the Chamber as a professional body and the Chamber's activities aim to deal with the listed problems concerning young architect workers.

### Future Aspirations

The seventh and final section of the survey addresses future aspirations in terms of the profession. Faced with the statement "The architectural profession will be in a better place in five years", 79% of the participants "strongly disagreed" (60%) or "disagreed" (19%) and only 6% of them felt positive. Furthermore, 82% of the participants were considering moving

abroad, with a 7% difference between female (80%) and male (87%) participants, but the rate of negative answers sharply increased among those who had graduated in/before 2012 (32%) compared to in/after 2013 (14%). On the other hand, only 13% of participants declared that they had already started submitting job applications abroad. As for their preferences for the destination, the most popular responses were Germany (13%), the UK (9%), the USA (8%), the Netherlands (8%), and Italy (7%) among 25 different countries mentioned.

In response to the statement, "I am thinking of beginning a new profession in the next five years", 53% of the participants agreed while only 21% of them disagreed. There was not a significant difference according to gender, but there was a 10% gap between those who graduated in/before 2012 (45%) and those who did in/after 2013 (55%). Furthermore, 116 participants stated the professions that they planned to pursue in the next five years. The most frequently mentioned professions were merchant (21 participants), graphic designer (11), (industrial) product designer (8), software specialist (7), chef (6), airline pilot (6), academic (5), photographer (5), civil servant (4), farmer (4), Pilates and yoga instructor (4), and social media specialist (3).

#### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: ARCHITECTS, ARCHITECTURE, AND URBAN POLITICS IN TURKEY**

"We do not merely live in a city, we are of the city; we are not merely social, we are associated".  
(Karvonen, 2011, 189)

Young architect-workers began their work lives in the age of megaprojects, crisis environments, and urban struggle in the context of neoliberal urbanization practices as "specialized citizens" (Karvonen, 2011) subjected to exploitative labour conditions as actors of the labour force of neoliberal urban politics in Turkey. In line with the quotation above, we seek to contribute civic imaginaries by locating architect-workers as specialized citizens associated with the city's production while being dialectically affected by this process. First and foremost, this research indicates that as the architects became obliged to take part in unethical urban space production processes since 2013, their working conditions became more exploitative. Most of the participants share the feeling of being obliged to work on socially and ecologically unethical architectural and urban design projects. More than half does not think that they can even have any initiative to question processes in the workplace. Working on unethical projects becomes integrated with other types of exploitation some of which are complicated to cope with, such as working below one's own potential. Additionally, participants state that they frequently become subjected to violations of major labour rights, one of the most common of which is being obliged to work even for lower than the minimum wage set by the Chamber. This problem becomes even more complicated if a very common employer attitude demanding for unpaid overtime is considered.

In general terms, most of these exploitative conditions of work we discuss in this paper, such as low wages and the ever-narrowing conditions of the architectural profession, are not new but even mentioned in the *20th Term Study Report* published by the Chamber of Architects-Ankara Branch (TMMOB Chamber of Architects-Ankara Branch, 1975) in 1975. In 1974, similar problems in architectural education were elaborated in the *Turkey 1st Technical Staff Conference Report* (TMMOB, 1974, 190-2). However, a

new series of interdependent factors substantially changing working conditions of young architect-workers began in the 2000s in Turkey: increase in short-term and project-based employment (similar to seasonal workers), proliferation of government subsidized iconic mega-scale urban projects, market-driven degradation in ethical professional standards, disbelief and dissatisfaction underlying the ethical positioning of projects, lengthening of working hours, aggressive project schedules, and declining living standards and conditions of architects. In this context, we argue that neoliberal urban politics anticipating capital accumulation in state-led urban interventions have reproduced architects as precarious labourers of urban space production. As the AKP government came to power in 2002, one of the initial steps taken in the domain of urbanization was establishing a new legal basis for wholesale urban renewal, megaprojects, intense privatization of public assets, and the opening of conserved natural sites to the world market (Kuyucu, 2018b). This new epoch of aggressive and authoritarian restructuring of urban space production concurs with a series of abrupt rise and fall of the construction sector. Moreover, the government continuously increases quotas for architecture departments and even establishes new ones; hence, architects are reproduced as replaceable labourers, neglecting their capacity as specialized citizens. As a consequence, the young architect-workers participating in this study faced disbelief and dissatisfaction in work and labour processes; a vast majority is planning to pursue other professions and even considering leaving the country for a better life.

To elaborate on the periodization of neoliberal urban politics, 2005 is referred to as a turning point at which urban transformation projects were initiated through a new series of legislations issued in the same year (Kuyucu, 2018b, 370). Several large-scale urban renewal projects were initiated during the period between 2005 and 2012 in squatter housing districts in major cities. Although the regulations suggest that urban development projects should be open to participation by the beneficiaries and public actors, this principle was not observed in most of these projects (Kuyucu, 2018b, 369-70). The global economic crisis in 2008 did not trigger an equivalent depression in the housing sector in Turkey as it was the case in many other countries (Yeşilbağ, 2019). However, as the Turkish government began to support more aggressive and mega scale projects to keep economy running steadily (Kuyucu, 2018b) this global crisis has constituted another critical juncture in the urban policy background in the 2010s (Kuyucu, 2017). Civil opposition against these authoritarian and anti-participatory urban processes became legally more challenging after 2010 with these new regulations. In this period, a variety of civil initiatives and local organizations were founded by citizens for urban struggle following the mass occupy-style protests initiated during the Gezi Park Protests in 2013 (Alkan, 2015; Kuyucu, 2017; 2018a). Urban scholars have also widely criticized contested architectural and urban projects for causing forcible displacement of low-income urban communities, new socio-spatial tensions, threats for ecosystem health and liveable cities, and increased respiratory and allergic diseases (Kuyucu and Ünsal, 2010; Lovering and Hade, 2011; Balaban, 2012; Civil and Ecological Rights Association, 2014; Akboğa-Kale et al., 2017). Moreover, one may argue that those projects, serving as rent-generators, only pushed the economy in the short term. The boom of the economy, depending highly on the construction sector's activities, was followed by an alarming downtrend in 2013 and another serious decline emerged in 2018 (Yeşilbağ, 2019, 123).

Our participants consider the year of 2018 as a turning point in the employment structure in the sector and the “economic regression” became an issue in their daily conversations at the workplace. Statistical data supports this finding; according to data of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, published in *Turkey's Labor Research Report* in 2019, after Spain and Greece Turkey was the country with the third highest unemployment rate in 2019, and the construction sector was one of the sectors most affected by the economic crisis (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, 2019, 55). Turkey has the longest weekly working hours of OECD countries after Colombia, and the working hours in a week in Turkey are well above the OECD and European Union averages (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, 2019, 223).

Although neoliberal urban politics had stretched architecture to exploitative conditions before the spoken economic crisis in 2018, the gradual rise of unemployment has constituted another dimension. The rising unemployment rates has deepened the exploitative conditions and precariousness of those who graduated in/after 2013. Indeed, the year of 2013 defines a particular climax regarding general work and labour processes in Turkey. According to the 2013 *DISK-AR Unemployment Data Assessment Preliminary Report*, there was a 40% increase in precarious employment in 2013 compared to 2008 (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, 2013). The emphasis on precarity in the report indicates that 2013 marked a peak. Accordingly, those who graduated in/after 2013 felt much more insecure than those who graduated in/before 2012. Therefore, we may claim that there are two generations of architect-workers under 40 years of age in Turkey. Indeed, an unexpectedly and spontaneously emerged social movement initiated with the protests to preserve the Gezi Park against unethical and neo-liberal urban production processes also marked the year of 2013 as a turning point for Turkey (Şengül, 2015).

The politics of architectural education have deepened the multifaceted crisis of architecture. Together with the expanding construction sector, the number of architecture departments and total architecture student quotas also increased, reaching a peak in 2009 (**Figure 5**) (**Figure 6**) (Onur-Işıkoğlu, 2019; TMMOB, 2018). Correspondingly, the number of graduates as easily replaceable labour in the construction sector has significantly increased. The number of new graduates from architecture departments in 2013 was 192% higher compared to the number of new graduates in 2019. In 2019, approximately 6500 architects graduated. However, 25.3% of all student quotas in architecture departments remained empty in the same year (YÖK Atlas, 2020; YÖK Higher Education Information System, 2020). Therefore, some of the departments may face closure in the following years.

Within these trajectories, the participants constituted two different groups not only in terms of graduation dates but also in terms of gender. Similar to newer graduates, female participants were more precarious than men; they were subjected to exploitative conditions at every stage of their professional experience. The dimension of gender in the exploitative conditions in architectural production may not be surprising considering that the sector is being male-dominated (International Labour Organization, 2019). On the other hand, it is striking that for all participants in our sampling, regardless of generation and gender, the university from which they graduated, have similar levels of vulnerability to exploitative working conditions which we

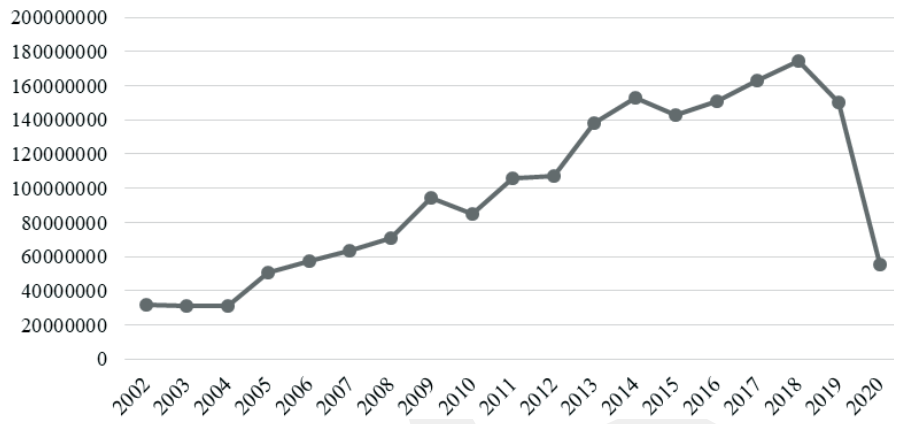


Figure 5. Building permits for total floor area (m<sup>2</sup>), 2002-2019 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020).

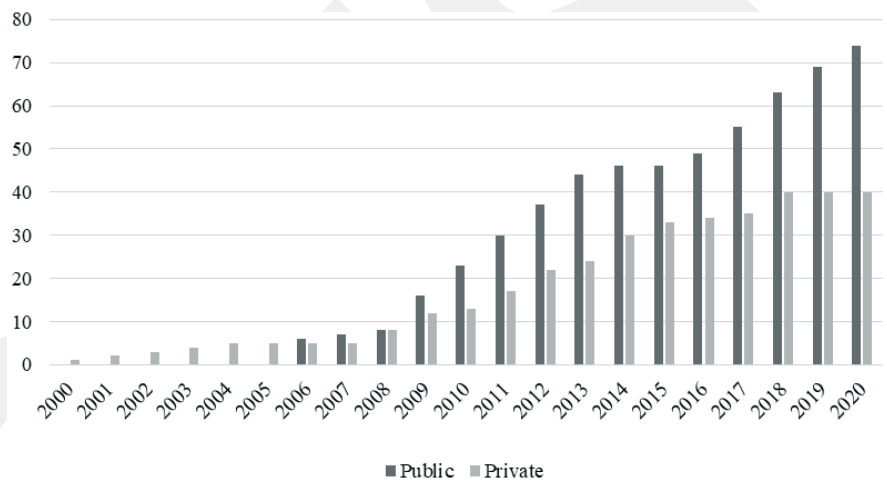


Figure 6. Number of new architecture departments by year of foundation, 2000-2020 (YÖK Higher Education Information System).

believe is an important indicator of increasing precariousness for the young architecture workers in Turkey.

In line with the scholarly efforts to find new ways to re-evaluate design theory and practices, without separating the social from the natural in Turkey, with this research we can underline the link between the mode of projects in design offices and the violation of labour rights. Participants stated that large-scale urban transformation projects and megaprojects were the most common types of project production processes in which they faced unethical projects and exploitation. Participants working in offices focused on socially and ecologically just projects constituted a smaller proportion than those working for large-scale and mega projects. Although the number of offices that defined their work as ecologically sensitive was the smallest compared to the other two categories, they still reflect hope for an ethical process that includes both the project and process of labour for architect-workers.

In his book, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Guy Standing argues that there is also an “energy building around the precariat” which has a potential to transform this new situation for the white-collar workers (2014, vii); which is also discussed in the context of urban-planners in Turkey (Penpecioglu and Taşan-Kok, 2016). In this regard, another hope identified in this study is that the young architect-workers in Turkey have also strengthened their search for professional solidarity in the last two decades

especially since the Gezi Protests in 2013. For instance, the establishment of alternative organizations independent from the Chamber such as *Ücretli ve İşsiz Mimarlar Forumu* (Employed and Unemployed Architects' Forum) and *Mimarlıkta Dayanışmacı Taban Hareketi* (Grassroot Solidarity Movement in Architecture), established in 2017 and 2018 respectively, is the most obvious indicator of this search by young architect-workers in Turkey.

To conclude, the COVID-19 pandemic has unexpectedly created very new situations for all domains of human life since March 2020. It has been interpreted as a rupture in the transformation of labour relations (International Labour Organization, 2020). It is too early to speculate how the profession of architecture will be influenced by this period especially in terms of main focuses of this research. The threshold represented by the COVID-19 pandemic will be the central focus of our next research related to the labour processes of architecture and urban space production processes.

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**Anahtar Sözcükler:** İş ve emek; mimarlar; neoliberal kentleşme; kentsel politikalar; mimar-işçi.

## **KENTSEL POLİTİKALAR VE MİMARLIKTA İŞ VE EMEK SÜREÇLERİ: TÜRKİYE'DE GENÇ MİMAR-İŞÇİLERLE BİR ANKET ARAŞTIRMASI**

Mimari üretimin aktörleri arasında mimar-işçiler, neoliberal kentleşme ve bunun sosyokolojik sonuçlarıyla giderek daha fazla yüzleşirken, bununla birlikte sömürücü iş ve emek koşullarına da maruz kalıyorlar. Bu makalede, 40 yaşının altındaki genç mimar-işçilerle yapılan çevrimiçi bir anket çalışmasına dayanarak, neoliberal kentsel politikalar ve mekansal üretim ile mimarların iş ve emek koşulları arasında doğrudan bir bağlantı olduğunu tartışıyoruz. Anket bulguları, devlet kanallı katılımcılık düşünülmezsizin gerçekleşen agresif kentsel müdahalelerle sermaye birikimini öngören neoliberal kentsel politikaların, Türkiye'nin son on yılında mimarları güvencesiz ve yeri kolayca doldurulabilir işçilere dönüştürdüğünü ortaya koyuyor. Yüksek öğretimdeki politikalar, öğrenci kontenjanlarının artırılması ve inşaat sektöründeki beklenmedik dalgalanmalar bu sömürüye artan bir kırılma olarak ekleniyor. Daha spesifik olarak, katılımcılarımız bir dönüm noktası olarak 2013 yılına referansla iki kuşak oluşturdular. Kadın katılımcılar ile 2013 yılı ve sonrasında mezun olanlar, erkek katılımcılar ile 2012 ve öncesinde mezun olanlara göre daha güvencesizken, üniversite geçmişi (hangi üniversiteden mezun olunduğu) mimar-işçiler için bir ayrıcalık oluşturmuyor. Sonuç olarak, katılımcılar işlerinde güvensizlik ve tatminsizlik yaşadıklarını vurguluyorlar. Katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğuyorsa yurtdışında başka bir meslek edinmeyi planlıyor. Bu makale ile ortaya koyduğumuz perspektifin küresel salgın sonrası dönemde, emeğin ve kentsel mekânın birbiriyle ilişkili bir biçimde derinleşen krizine karşı mimarlıkta etik üretim süreçlerini sürdürmek konusunda mimarların kolektif seslerini güçlendirmesini umuyoruz.

## **URBAN POLITICS AND THE WORK AND LABOUR PROCESSES OF ARCHITECTURE: SURVEY RESEARCH WITH YOUNG ARCHITECT-WORKERS IN TURKEY**

Among the actors of architectural production, architect-workers are increasingly facing neoliberal urbanization and its socio-ecological consequences, and they are also exposed to exploitative work and labour conditions. In this article, we argue about a direct relation between neoliberal urban politics, production of urban space, and architects' work and labour conditions based on an online survey with a group of young architect-workers under 40 years of age. The survey findings reveal that neoliberal urban politics anticipating capital accumulation in state-led, anti-participatory, and aggressive urban interventions have transformed architects as precarious and replaceable workers in the last decade in Turkey. Policies in higher education, increase in student quotas and the unexpected fluctuations in the construction sector accelerate this process through which the precariousness for architects has sharply deepened.

More specifically, our participants spontaneously form two generations, in reference to the year of 2013 as a turning point, and female participants and those who graduated in/after 2013 were more precarious than male participants and those who graduated in/before 2012, whereas university background provided no privilege. Consequently, participants stressed disbelief and dissatisfaction in their work; a vast majority planned to pursue another profession abroad. We hope that our research will contribute to architects' collective efforts in pursuing ethical urban space production processes in the post-pandemic era.

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