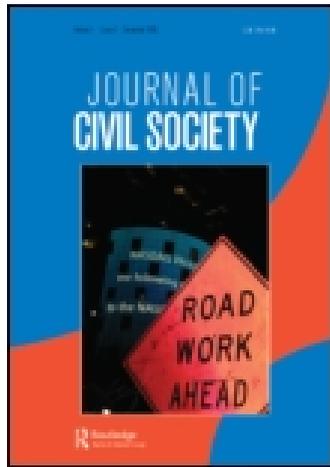


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# Civic and Political Participation of Women and Youth in Turkey: An Examination of Perspectives of Public Authorities and NGOs

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**ABSTRACT** *The aim of this article is to present a review of the discourses of public authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on civic and political participation of youth and women in Turkey. Drawing on policy documents and elite interviews, this article explores the role of civil society organizations in promoting civic and political organizations in traditionally marginal groups. The article is primarily concerned with unpacking dominant discourses, as produced by public documents and official statements by both civil society organizations and policy-makers. The analysis will produce an overview of their general discursive orientations and the related legal changes and policy implementations. The article then looks at the impact of these discursive formulations to the issue of participation. What is important to note is that action plans and strategies are not always implemented in a manner that is in keeping with the original intentions of policy-makers. The review of public and civil society documents highlights serious differences in focus and coverage between the groups. It also highlights limited engagement with the actual issues of civic and political participation. While youth participation is paid limited attention, women participation is mostly associated with political representation in national and local political bodies.*

**KEY WORDS:** civic and political participation, youth, women, Turkey

## Introduction

Civic and political participation are composed of a variety of activities in Turkey. Whereas women have traditionally been excluded to a great extent from formal and informal participation, youths have been portrayed as an ‘apolitical’ category whose political engagement can be regarded as destabilizing or ‘dangerous’.<sup>1</sup> This perspective has also been embedded in Turkish youth services and policies, which have almost exclusively been limited to sports and leisure activities. This approach has much to do with the role of

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the military in shaping the political history of the country, e.g. the 1960 Coup, followed by a Memorandum in 1971, a coup in 1980 and an intervention in 1997. Although there have been different causes for the political turmoil, these ‘interventions’ into the governance of the country have had a negative impact on individuals/citizens’ attitudes towards participation and civic engagement. In this regard, the 1980 Coup and the Constitution codified by the military junta in 1982 can be seen as critical junctures in relation to the issues addressed in this article. The of regime’s hostility against a variety of political activities culminated in the inclusion of restrictive measures in the Constitution and associated secondary legislation. As indicated by Enneli (2011, p. 264) strict antidemocratic control mechanisms established by the 1982 Constitution have shaped young people’s perceptions and (negative) attitudes towards politics and can account for widespread ‘depoliticization’ in the country. This is also true for the women, whose civic and political involvements have historically been limited due to factors such as conservative social norms and traditional roles within the family. Although there are specific amendments dealing with the general situations of youth and women in Turkey, which directly or indirectly have shaped the political participation of these groups (for a more detailed discussion see Seckinelgin, 2006, pp. 753–754), it can be argued that the civic and political participation have hardly been a prominent concern for the policy-makers. The limited number of available documents seeking to address or introduce policies for youth and women can also be seen as being indicative of the lack of wider trends and attitudes within the political structures and environment of the country.

The aim of this article is to present a review of the discourses of public authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on civic and political participation of youth and women in Turkey by leaning upon the policy documents reviewed and the interviews made within the scope of the PIDOP Project.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the PIDOP Project, a distinction has been made for the meanings of civic and political participation as well as participation and engagement. Barrett (2011) assumes that *participation* is an activity that is a ‘good for community’ building or has a direct impact on governance. Engagement on the other hand is seen as a psychological process relating to individuals’ opinions or values about a social issue. Adopting Verba *et al.*’s (1995, p. 37) definition of political participation whereby it is seen as an opportunity to communicate concerns and preferences to the authorities, Zani and Barrett (2012) and Pachi and Barrett (2012) describe it as an effective way for influencing governance, either directly (by affecting the making or implementation of public policy) or indirectly (by influencing the selection of individuals who make that policy). In this context, political participation can take different forms; it can adhere to conventional norms such as taking part in the electoral processes (voting, election campaigning, and running for election), or it can take on non-conventional practices (e.g. signing petitions, participating in political demonstrations, displaying a symbol or sign representing support for a political cause, membership of political campaigning organizations, writing letters to politicians and public officials, etc.). Civic participation, on the other hand, is defined as a voluntary activity focused on helping others, achieving a public good or solving a community problem (Zukin *et al.*, 2006), including work undertaken either alone or in cooperation with others in order to effect change. Ekman and Amnå (2012) developed a new typology to help clarify the difference between ‘civic engagement’ and ‘political participation’. Their typology brings together different forms, attitudes and behaviour in order to account for participation at the individual and collective level. According to Zani and Barrett (2012), the typology is important in terms of incorporating a non-participation

category which is further divided in order to account for individuals who are apolitical as opposed to antipolitical. The analysis of non-participation allows for the introduction of the concept of 'stand-by citizen' (i.e. a person who is engaged with and shows interest in politics but who does not actually participate), thus going beyond the conventional active/passive dichotomy (Zani & Barrett, 2012).

Key part of the PIDOP project was the analysis of current policies on participation. This work sought to identify and assess dominant policy discourses about civic and political participation at the European, national, and regional levels. The project focused on traditionally marginal groups (i.e. youth, women, minorities, and migrants); one of the main research questions was to compare these groups at the national level in order to establish similarities and differences in the processes leading to engagement and participation. The overall aim was to understand the relevant policy contexts. This was important so as to develop and recommend strategies and policies on the effecting groups, particularly on youth and women. The analysis of key policies provides the backdrop for understanding individual pathways to engagement. The project examined a number of policy documents and follow-up interviews were conducted with policy-makers and representatives of national NGOs working in this field.

So, this paper attempts to provide an examination of a dimension of civic and political participation in Turkey. For this particular case, the project analysed 32 documents produced between 2004 and 2011 by related public authorities and NGOs. In addition to this six follow-up interviews were conducted to gain a more detailed understanding of the peculiarities of the Turkish socio-political system, key government priorities, the emergence of counter discourses, and the role of civil society in promoting alternative forms of political participation. Identifying and examining these perspectives is necessary for contextualizing the dynamics of participation, that is to say, for taking into account the impact of civic and political environments. Simply put, this article looks at how the Turkish policy environment framed women and youth participation, as framed by the documents analysed here. The first consideration to be made relates to the overall quality of the document produced. One of the main challenges for this project was to find suitable documents that would articulate a clear youth policy in Turkey. This can be considered as an important factor showing that little attention is given to this issue, despite the large proportion of the population under the age of 25. It was assumed at the beginning that the analysis of basic discourses in policy documents would lead us to the identification of political priorities on women and youth and their impact on policy outcomes.

Given the fact that there are a variety of youth and women NGOs in Turkey having different perspectives and approaches, the documents and the interviews included in the study are not claimed to be representative. While the interviews were incorporated as supplementary materials in the study, the documents were selected as a result of a review of the official websites of youth and women organizations reached via the NGO Database of the Civil Society Development Centre.<sup>3</sup> All relevant documents released by these NGOs in their official web sites are included. The next section of this article provides a historical and conceptual overview of civic and political participation in Turkey. This framework is then applied to the analysis of civil society's documents in order to understand their perspectives on women and youth participation. Finally, the concluding section outlines the key findings and main trends shaping participation and engagement of traditionally marginal groups in contemporary Turkey.

## Civic and Political Participation in Turkey: A Historical and Conceptual Overview

As a country with a troubled political history, Turkey has struggled to establish a positive environment that promotes citizens' civic and political participation in general. Women and youth have been categories that also deserve special attention in that respect. Although the right to vote and be elected was granted to women in Turkey in 1934, rather early compared to many European cases, their political representation has remained highly restricted. Furthermore, despite the increasing number of women active in civic and political life, there seems to be a considerable gap between those who are actively engaging in the social, economic, and political life of the country and the majority for whom politics remains a distant reality (Çelik & Lüküslü, 2012, p. 31). In addition to this, women's participation has historically focused on issues of equality such as domestic violence, restricted participation in education, and labour force. The politicization of these issues at the hands of women's organization led to significant changes and developments in the country. As indicated by Ayata and Tütüncü (2008, p. 365), feminist movements, both by their demands and their infiltration into the political parties and other political movements, have had an important place within the political landscape in Turkey in the last couple of decades. This trend has also been accompanied by important (although limited) legal changes on key issues affecting women's social, political, and economic status. A detailed analysis of these changes highlights key differences in the way the government and civil society organizations seek to represent women's interests in the public sphere. Whereas the government's approach tends to be 'family oriented', feminist organizations tend to take a 'women-oriented' approach. In this context, the establishment of a ministry under the name of 'Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MoFSP)' in 2011 and the placement of the 'General Directorate on the Status of Women' under the roof of this ministry implies that women are mainly treated as 'family members' by public authorities. As such, issues related to women as members of households and/or mothers seem to be prioritized, which is not the same as promoting a 'women-centred' agenda.

Youth participation and engagement also deserve special attention in Turkey, as this age group makes up a large proportion of the country's population. According to 2011 data youths (i.e. individuals between 15 and 24 years of age) make up 16.8% of the total population, this corresponds to approximately 12.5 million individuals (TSI, 2012, p. 16). It is interesting to note that despite the large youth base in the country, comprehensive strategies and policies that specifically target youth participation are few and far in between. Yet there are some recent developments which have the potential to increase youth's political and civic engagement. Perhaps a turning point in Turkey's approach to youth policy was the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2011 (which used to be the General Directorate of Youth and Sports). The restructuring of youth services and policies under a government ministry, with a larger budget, should lead to the establishment of comprehensive youth policies. That said, the Ministry's focus on sports and leisure in relation to youth policies is a serious limitation in its ability to engage with youths in a meaningful and mature way. It will likely prove to be a constraining force on the establishment of a wider policy agenda seeking to address youth-related issues and problems. One of the recent projects undertaken by this Ministry is to prepare a youth policy to set out the government's strategy; this project is ongoing with little evidence of progress to date.

One of the key developments in youth policy worthy of note here is the establishment of 'youth centres', with remit for providing entry points for youth work activities, training and personal development, and planning. Clearly, the focus of many of these activities is employability and training. These activities are coordinated by the Ministry and thus contribute to the delivery of the government's policy agenda. Besides, the appropriateness of the activities to the actual needs of the young people, transparency and the level of youth participation has still been a question mark. Even though the target audience for youth centres is youth, some of these activities were designed without the participation of young people. As indicated by the geographical distribution of organizations, which receive support from the National Agency<sup>4</sup> or from the Ministry, youth services have not reached all parts of Turkey. Young people from rural areas have more obstacles to access information and opportunities. Recently, Eurodesk operating under the National Agency has started to work on youth information support in order to disseminate information about existing opportunities more effectively, especially to those who reside in disadvantaged regions of the country.

Turkey, being a part of the Convention on the Rights of the Children, has ratified several regulations to support young citizens under the age of 18. Children's courts have been developed and laws adopted in adherence to the Convention. In terms of protection, the social security department has established Child Police units to tackle issues related to children's welfare. There are several regulations in terms of protecting the rights of the children, which can be considered as positive developments. The main problem, however, remains the formal implantation of these policies. For instance, many of the judges assigned to the children's courts area are drawn from the criminal justice system. This means that the judges do not necessarily have the skills to deal with the emotional complexity of the issues coming in front of the court. The main focus seems to be on protecting society from the young people who had engaged in criminal activities. In addition to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, MoFSP is also responsible for developing and implementing policies related to disadvantaged youths. Turkey is currently increasing its investment in social services, but the quality and the relevance of the implementation are rather weak and insufficient. The approach and the capacity of the organization are not developed enough to address the needs of young people in a way to integrate such young people in to society.

Alongside these developments that would potentially enhance youth participation in an indirect manner, there is also a recent attempt to decrease the age of candidacy in national elections to 18. At the time of writing, the debate about introducing a formal amendment to improve access to political structures and about whether it would actually increase youth political participation is still ongoing. Article 58 of the Constitution outlines very clearly the way in which the state views youths as citizens. According to this article, the future of the Republic is entrusted to this group, as opposed to other sections of society defined within the Constitution, such as women, people with disabilities, or citizens. The state's obligation is to take precautions to ensure the 'training' and 'development' of youth. However, the fundamental aim of this 'training' and 'development' is to oppose 'ideas aiming at the destruction of the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation'. Furthermore, 'precautions' are to be taken for the fundamental objective of securing the continuity and the unity of the state. Hence, the main focus of this section of Article 58 does not seek to support youths per se, but rather it outlines the extent to which state intervention in the affairs of youth can be legitimized in order to minimize the potential

'harm' that may be brought to the state by means of youth. Therefore, these 'precautions' are in favour of the state and are conceptualized in terms of the state's right to intervene and protect, rather than the rights and needs of the youth.

### **Perspectives of Public Authorities and NGOs on Women and Youth Civic and Political Participation**

#### *Women*

The examination of policy documents and interviews realized within the scope of this study implies that as a general tendency, women's participation is regarded by political authorities and by some NGOs mostly within the confines of the conventional forms of participation and especially the political representation in the parliament and local politics. In parallel with this and given the acute problems of women in Turkey such as domestic violence, poverty and limited education, the attention seems to be directed towards these issues, and civic and political participation are deemed secondary. The lack of a considerable reference to the issues related to participation in the documents produced by public authorities in relation to women in Turkey also implies this secondary character. An important exception to this can be regarded as the 2008–2013 Action Plan produced by the 'General Directorate on the Status of Women', which determines political participation as one of the priorities of the organization and emphasizes that:

Objectives of development and modernity cannot be achieved without an active participation of women in all levels of decision-making and management since in those positions of power decisions are taken that affect the whole society. More women in powerful positions mean more effective solutions for the problems and needs of female citizens. (KSGM, 2008, p. 47)

Yet, despite the institution's emphasis on active participation in all levels of decision-making, the main focus of the Action Plan in relation to participation remains within the confines of the conventional forms of political participation such as the representation of women in the national and local elections and in the top positions in the public and private sector, judiciary, academia, and trade unions (KSGM, 2008, pp. 47–51). Furthermore, the Plan does not include any reference to 'civic participation' of women. Additionally, although setting women quotas for political nominations is a strategy that is often proposed by the women NGOs in order to increase women's participation in local and general elections as nominees, it is not incorporated in the Gender Equality Action Plan, but only mentioned with an indication that there are different views on the quota practice in Turkey (KSGM, 2008, p. 52, see also KSGM, 2009, pp. 26–28). In fact, the perspectives of the public authorities on the women quotas imply that even in relation to this conventional form of participation there are no decisive agenda and related strategies. Thus, the Head of the Grand National Assembly Commission for Equal Opportunity for Women and Men indicates that the real problem in relation to the gender inequality in Turkey is insufficient implementation that has been at issue despite almost 'perfect' legal arrangements.<sup>5</sup> Restricted political participation of women is also stressed by the interviewee as one of the weakest points of the Turkish political landscape. She expresses that the existence of women in local politics was especially restricted due to the high expectations

from women who are willing to participate such as being well educated and having a decent family life. Furthermore in her account, in order to promote women's political participation, women quotas in local and national politics should only be implemented as an initial step. In the long run, she indicates, this strategy should be abandoned since women should not be regarded as being in need of such a favour.

Being inactive carries the risk of being ignored during policy-making processes. So women's participation is important to better communicate the preferences and needs of women with public officials (Burns *et al.*, 2001, p. 6). Women's empowerment in participatory behaviour is important not only due to its impact upon policy but also for their recognition as full members of the community (Burns *et al.*, 2001, p. 6). As Tsutsui and Wotipka (2004) mention, considering all segments of society (in equal access of participatory rights and the discussed gender gap in relation to civic/political participation), there could be a transmission effect of participatory behaviour from parents to younger generations.

Alongside the dominant public perspective that is based on an identification of women participation with representation in the parliamentary and local decision-making processes, there are also NGOs sharing this common ground. In the words of an NGO representative:<sup>6</sup> 'In terms of citizenship women's rights have a crucial importance. I wonder that the women in our country are not represented in the parliament on an equal basis. I do not want to be a citizen of a country which is ruled almost only by men.'

Furthermore, two main different NGO positions can be identified in relation to the restricted participation of women in politics in Turkey. The first one identifies the issue with reference to the indifference of women against politics and the underlying reasons of widespread indifference. In parallel with this, the representative of a women's organization points out that fear is the most prominent reason behind women's restricted political engagement.<sup>7</sup> It is also expressed by the interviewee that the foundation in which she works does not prefer to be involved in politics, since its target group is mainly women who are living in poor neighbourhoods and who are mostly housewives having no chance of being active in social life. She describes the main priority of the foundation as to encourage women for gaining self-confidence and economic independence and to provide them opportunities for facilitating their involvement in social life in a more active manner, rather than being involved in political activities. Similarly, a representative from another organization emphasizes that their association is an 'apolitical' one and states that 'we do not have a political approach, in no wise. What is important for us is true implementation of policies related to women'.<sup>8</sup> The second position regards that the gender inequality in terms of political representation should not be conceived as a matter of political indifference on the part of the women. What is at issue is their political exclusion, rather than apathy (KADER, 2006, p. 19).

Furthermore, as it is also the case for both youth NGOs included in the study, there are also women's organizations that perceive political involvement as 'risky' and that mostly abstain from being associated with politics. However, in an accelerating manner in recent years, women's organizations have organized important campaigns on different issues related to women. One of the most prominent is the campaign to politicize the widespread violence against women and the murders, which have started to be widely referred to as 'women murders' and which have claimed that murders of women by men on the grounds of issues such as 'morality', 'honour', and 'jealousy' are not simply murders and they should not be handled simply as such.

### Youth

Youth is a category about which a variety of expectations have been framed in different manners in Turkey. Although the age of youth is presented differently in some research and documents in Turkey, the general view is that it is between the ages 12 and 24. According to the Turkish Civil Law (2001), 'Adulthood starts as one finishes the age of eighteen.' According to the Regulations on Youth Centres (2003), individuals should be between the ages of 12 and 24 for the membership to the youth centres, and membership registry can be made, upon request, if the age is no younger than 7 and older than 26. According to the Turkish Civil Law and the Law of Associations (after 2004) every legal and natural person having the capacity to act holds the right to become a member of and establish associations. Also, young people finishing 15 may establish children associations or become members of already established ones. This shows that there is an overlap in age ranges of childhood and youth in Turkey.

As indicated by Kurtaran *et al.* (2008, p. 7) there has been a tendency to conceptualize youth in an instrumental manner, i.e. by assigning certain goals to it as in the case of the widespread phrases such as the 'guarantee of our future'. Although there have been different sorts of such identifications depending on the historical context, the main expectations seem to be framed with reference to the conservative/progressive distinction during the last decade. The first side of the distinction was illustrated by the prime minister, who in one of his public speeches identified one of the goals of the government as 'to raise a faithful generation'.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, from an oppositional perspective a representative of an NGO, which determines its main target group as the youth, mentions that the organization wishes the young people who engage in their activities to be 'secular, inquisitorial, curious and critical individuals'.<sup>10</sup> She indicates that although the association has no specific programme or project in order to promote young people's participation and engagement, it encourages them to be sensitive in terms of different problems of the country. The main instruments she mentions are the seminars and trainings about different issues and fields that the association organizes for them. She also indicates that they discontinue a scholarship if a scholarship holder does not participate in more than half of the activities the association organizes.

An interviewed member of the Grand National Assembly Commission for National Education, Culture, and Sport from the main oppositional party indicates that there are no peculiar programmes or guidelines that specifically target the civic and political participation of youth in Turkey.<sup>11</sup> A representative of an organization, the aim of which is depicted as working for the active participation of youth in the youth-related decision-making and implementation processes in their own local contexts, indicates that the organization works together with public institutions on the basis of partnership rather than opposition.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, a recent study (Sener, 2012a) showed that young people associate poverty and unemployment with second-class citizenship and they also refer to cultural discrimination and negative prejudice as important impediments before one's being a full citizen. In the second phase of the same research Ataman *et al.* (2012) show that alongside nationality and rights and obligations, young people tend to refer to social inequalities and income levels in relation to citizenship. This can be revealed from the two basic contexts that young people chose to express their ideas under the headings of unemployment and discrimination. In another study, Sener (2012b) found that even the university students have limited engagement in civic activities where they also have little knowledge about the civic institutions, activities, and projects relating to youth work.

Even though Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Commission, the Revised European Charter for Youth Participation in Local and Regional Life is not being implemented well enough, nor is it a part of the agenda for the local authorities. Youth participation is not one of the key objectives for the youth policy. Furthermore, although there are some ad hoc policies especially to integrate girls into the education system, inequality between young men and women is still an important issue. To be in a rural area or in a smaller city also prevents young people to access many opportunities compared to their peers. Unfortunately, local authorities have limited vision to improve this fact. Accommodation is another important issue for young people. Many young people have to live in another city for their studies and it is not so easy for them to meet their accommodation needs as they desire. Prime Ministry Credit and Dormitories Institution has dormitories for students all around Turkey, however, their capacity is not sufficient to address all students. The regulations for the dormitories are quite strict, highly protective, and not equal at all. For instance, male students have to be in the dormitory at 10:00 pm at the latest, and female students have to be at the dormitory not later than 9:00 pm. Another important point is that these services are provided only for students but not for all young people. Besides accommodation, transportation is another important issue which plays a role in facilitating young people's involvement in the social life. Unfortunately, the subsidies for transportation are very limited. They are only valid for students within their residing town which means that the state supports only students while they are travelling to their schools. Young people who are not in the education system cannot benefit from any support for transportation. The support for young people to get together and have an associated life is very limited. The regulations are not easing the process at all and the awareness about associated life is not sufficient enough. In general, supporting measures are quite limited and not very well known. Consequently, we can say that the youth participation and civic engagement are crucial issues for the youth policy development in Turkey.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The assumption underpinning the analysis presented here is that policy discourse provides a useful indication of key priorities in relation to women and young people's political participation. The analysis reveals the different approaches adopted by policy-makers and NGOs to enhance active citizenship, civic engagement, and political participation. In this respect, this paper makes a contribution to current debates about the position of civic and political participation in Europe.

The first conclusion of this analysis is that there are different approaches to promote women's and youth's participation. This is clearly reflected in the context of the documents analysed here. The elite interviews further support this conclusion. Beginning with youth as a category, these differences stem from the debate on how to conceptualize this particular group. Most commonly, youth is defined as a period in human life, as the transition from childhood to adulthood, and is reduced to a specific age group (Oktay *et al.*, 2010). Another common approach sees youth as the 'most dynamic' stage of life; this group is also seen as the key to *guarantee of the future* and sustainable economic growth. However, even with the changes that effect whole generations, it is not possible to speak of a unitary youth independent of social status. Young people from different social strata experience important social changes in different ways. And yet, it could be

argued that in societies which undergo rapid changes, historical and social processes have a great effect on the lives of youth.

In Turkey, there are three types of legal regulations concerning the rights of youth. First, there are laws that are directly about young people, such as Article 59 of the Constitution. The second type consists of laws that do not target youth directly, but nevertheless concern sections of society that are predominantly young. A good example of this kind of regulation is the Disciplinary Code of the Higher Education Credit and Dormitories Institution (Yurt-Kur). The code concerns students, but since the overwhelming majority of university students in Turkey are young people, the main addressee of the law is actually youth. The third type consists of legal regulations that target youths as part of a separate issue, such as employment. Taking the needs of youth in Turkey as the point of departure, the regulations that fall under these three categories need to be revised, improved in content, and in some cases annulled or fully rewritten. Otherwise the gap between increasingly differentiating needs and available services will continue to widen. A regulation that may bridge this gap between young people's needs and the capacities of different institutions that provide services to youth could be a general youth legislation designed as the point of reference for all other laws and regulations that include provisions on youth. Specifying the fundamental duties and responsibilities of the state towards youth in this manner will not only define the rights of youth clearly, but also bring about the extension of these rights into all areas of social life to the benefit of young people. Such a fundamental law could potentially act as a model for future legal regulations developed in favour of other sections of society with different needs. Research (Sherrod, 2007; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1997) indicates that young people associate poverty and unemployment with second-class citizenship and they also refer to cultural discrimination and negative prejudice as important impediments before one's being a full citizen. Furthermore, they claim that they do not have enough information about their rights and obligations as citizens. In general, the perception of participants is firstly related to the duties to be fulfilled as a citizen such as paying taxes and doing military service.

There is not a well-developed mechanism for assessing the needs of young people. The needs are defined quite centrally in line with the general policy approaches not necessarily supported by scientific research and evidence. An evidence-based approach has not developed at all; as a result it is difficult to measure the impact brought about by policy changes. Statistical studies remain quite limited and tangential to the policy process. Only data for youth employment/unemployment rates is constantly collected, however, the studies even for employment fail to address deeper structural issues in relation to youths' fundamental needs.

The youth participation approach should be examined in two dimensions. The first dimension is about the level of youth participation within policy-making processes, which is absent. There is no system for allowing young people to express their ideas and perceptions about the policies targeting them. The second dimension about the policies is how much they reinforce or promote youth participation. Unfortunately, youth-related policies do not aim at developing and promoting youth participation. According to the figures of the Department of Associations, in 2010 there were about 581 youth NGOs in Turkey out of about 89,000 in total. Considering the fact that almost 40% of the population is under 30, this figure represents an important issue. Current policies and regulations do not ease or facilitate the process for youth participation through associated life and NGOs.

In relation to women's participation the dominant perspective of public bodies, as reflected in the documents examined here, can be defined as a narrow approach to 'women's empowerment in participatory behaviour' that is mainly 'representation-centred'. NGO approaches tend to focus on two key issues: (1) restricted participation of women in politics and perceived indifference towards politics and (2) representation and the 'political exclusion of women' from formal structures. It is also important to take into account the intersection of the categories of youth and women, which constitutes the sub-category of young women whose civic and political participation might be regarded as being considerably restricted. In an illustrative study on 'house girls',<sup>13</sup> young women fitting into this category are seen to have limited participation in political, economic, and public life due to the traditional gender roles and family structure (Çelik & Lüküslü, 2012, p. 28).

Finally, existing literature on political participation in Turkey coming from the field of political science has mostly focused on the relation between political participation and electoral behaviour, electoral volatility and democratic consolidation (see, for instance, Kalaycioglu & Turan, 1981; Ozbudun, 1976). There are studies examining the dynamics of civic and/or political participation behaviour of particular groups (see, for instance, Enneli, 2011; Lüküslü, 2008), but the perspectives of public authorities and NGOs is a clear gap in the current literature.

The analysis presented here suggests a need to increase the visibility in key policy areas in relationship to the political and civic participation of youth and women. The policies on women's participation focused on gender discrimination and equal opportunities. These discourses, therefore, have a significant impact on individuals' access to rights and potentially on the way they see themselves as members of a political community. The findings of the PIDOP project have important implications for policy-makers and civil society actors.<sup>14</sup> Among them, the need for the policy-makers' consideration of the fact that policies are influencing the ways in which citizens interact with both state and non-state actors is an essential one. On the other hand, it is essential to take into account that gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, and age interact with one another in citizens' identifications and behaviours in the policy discourse. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the lack of measures to evaluate the participation levels of women and young people is important to develop better understanding and the recognition of these groups. Consequently, follow-up studies are needed to develop working plans.

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## Notes

1. During the review process of this paper, a civil movement had begun in Turkey. The occupation of Taksim Gezi Park in İstanbul began on 28 May 2013. Following the police raid in the park area on 30 May, the occupation continued, and thousands of people gathered to resist the government's plans (to build a shopping centre and destroy the green area). It soon became one of the largest mobilizations for years, with various different participants (from radical activists to NGOs, etc.), resembling the world-wide Occupy movement. On 31 May, street clashes started from 5:00 am in İstanbul. The resistance grew wider, while the police fired an incredible amount of tear gas bombs. An environmental protest in İstanbul which then became an anti-government move is still continuing throughout the country.
2. Although the research realized by the Ankara team within the scope of the PIDOP Project encompassed two additional groups, i.e. Roma people and the Turkish Resettlers from Bulgaria under the category of minority/immigrant, they are not included in this article for three reasons. First is the fact that there are no public and NGO documents that are directly related to the civic and political participations of these groups. Second, the dynamics of immigration as well as the characteristics of immigrant populations imply important differences compared to the European cases which are included in the project. And finally, there is an ambiguity concerning the term 'minority' in Turkey. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the only protection for minorities has been that set out in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. In the Treaty only the non-Muslim population (Armenians, Jews, and Christians with Greek origin) were defined as minority (Minority Rights Group International, 2007). There is also no legislative framework for other ethnic or religious groups in Turkey, either directly through laws granting minority rights or indirectly through an anti-discrimination law (Minority Rights Group International, 2007).
3. For the mentioned database see <http://www.stgm.org.tr/en/stoveritabani>.
4. Like its European counterparts, the Turkish National Agency is an organization responsible for organizing and coordinating the EU-based education and youth programmes in Turkey.
5. Interview made by the authors on 7 April 2010.
6. Interview made by the authors with the Head of Modern Women and Youth Foundation on 3 May 2010.
7. Interview made by the authors with the Head of Modern Women and Youth Foundation on 3 May 2010.
8. Interview made by the authors with the Head of Association of Business and Professional Women on 10 April 2010.
9. See the related news: 'We will raise a faithful generation.' Available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/19825231.asp>, February 2, 2012 (accessed on 18 September 2012).
10. Interview made by the authors with a representative of Association for Support of Modern Life on 5 May 2010.
11. Interview made by the authors on 7 April 2010.
12. Interview made by the authors with a representative of Youth Association for Habitat (Youth for Habitat) on 4 April 2010.
13. The 'house girl' (*Ev kızı* in Turkish) refers to the young woman who is neither part of the formal education system nor the labour market (Çelik & Lüküslü, 2012, p. 29). This category is characterized with those who 'do not get married immediately after leaving school (as it was the case traditionally) and do not get the "status" of a married woman and house wife' (Çelik & Lüküslü, 2012, p. 29).
14. A detailed report of the policy recommendations of the PIDOP Project can be found at the links below: <http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop/documents/PIDOP%20Policy%20Recommendations.pdf>, <http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop/documents/Briefings/PIDOP%20Policy%20Briefing%20Paper%20No.%201.pdf>.

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