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# **Sustainability and communication practices in grassroots movements in Turkey following Gezi Park Protests: Cases of Dogancilar Park Forum, Macka Park Forum and Validebag Volunteers**

## **ABSTRACT**

*Recent social movements, as exemplified by the informal organizations formed during and after the Occupy Movement in the United States and Gezi Park Protests in Turkey, are characterized by distrust towards institutional political bodies and*

## **KEYWORDS**

social movements  
grassroots  
participatory media  
alternative media  
communication  
practices  
organizational  
structure  
tyranny of  
structurelessness  
iron law of oligarchy  
ICTs

*hierarchical organizations (Boler et al. 2014). Also, the debate on the relationship between social movements and digital media technologies often highlights the opportunities that these technologies provide for 'largely unfettered deliberation and coordination of action' (Castells 2012). Scholars critical towards the concept argue that horizontal grassroots organizations may suffer from problems of continuity and formation of a durable movement (Calhoun 2013). This article aims to investigate the organizational characteristics and media practices of grassroots organizations that were established or mobilized following Gezi Park Protests, a nation-level social protest in Turkey. Drawing on participant observation of three grassroots social movement organizations in Istanbul – Dogancilar Park Forum and Imrahor Garden; Macka Park Forum and Komsu Kapisi Association and Validebag Volunteers – this analysis will aim to contextualize opportunities and obstacles associated with the horizontal structures of such movements. The article will particularly focus on the strategies that these organizations utilize to maintain the sustainability of the respective movements and approaches they employ in media and communication practices at a local level.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, both social movement organizations (SMOs) and alternative/community media have been through a considerable transition due to the rapid proliferation of information and communications technologies (ICTs). While the international digital divide and unequal access to information continue to be important issues (Flanagan 2018), as ICTs become more accessible and easier to use, they can, at least potentially, help lower barriers for establishing alternative and community media. Also, scholars argue that ICTs allow informal organizations and personal networks to come to the fore and become influential actors of collective action next to larger organizations including political parties, unions and NGOs (Bimber 2000; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Günel and Karaoğlu 2015).

As various movements around the world including the Occupy Movement in the United States, Gezi Park Protests in Turkey, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, China and the Arab Spring have shown, ICTs and social media played a crucial role in the mobilization of protesters and their ability to develop alternative channels of communication (Bal and Baruh 2015; Aouragh 2012; Juris 2012; Chu 2018). In noting this potential, Castells (2012: 10) opined that ICTs offer key organizational and communication opportunities, such as 'largely unfettered deliberation and coordination of action'. Likewise, several years before the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, Juris (2005: 191) had predicted that enhanced speed with which information can be disseminated in digital networks would 'provide the technological infrastructure for the emergence of contemporary network-based social movement forms'.

On the other hand, scholars have noted that the potential of communication and mobilization presented by ICTs would not be sufficient for giving direction to policy and social change. After underlining the emancipatory potential of ICTs, Castells (2012: 10), for example, cautions that since extant institutional spaces for deliberation are dominated by 'elites and their networks', social movements need to find ways to create alternative spaces to remain visible to the public. Furthermore, Calhoun (2013) argues that there is a trade-off between clinging to informal organizational structures and

building enduring movements, which can articulate a programme and allow for sustained public debate through their media and publications. Specifically concerning Occupy Wall Street (OWS), Calhoun states that 'to resist formal structures of organization was in some ways a strength, and it was a basic sensibility for OWS. But it was a liability for building an enduring movement' (2013: 35–36). Calhoun's critique of absolute rejection towards formal structures evokes Freeman's concept of 'tyranny of structurelessness', which was also a critique of the loosely organized feminist groups of the time (Freeman [1970] 2013). With the concept of 'tyranny of structurelessness', Freeman argues that building completely informal structures will lead to anti-democratic organizations in which rules are either not clear or are only known by an inner circle. In a similar vein, Melucci states the following regarding continuity of a movement:

A social movement can survive over a period of time inasmuch as it is able to resist its own centrifugal forces and withstand the actions of its adversaries. This becomes possible only if it can develop a relatively stable organization and leadership.

(Melucci 1996: 313).

This debate on organizational structure of social movements is also reflected in different approaches to social movements, most notably between resource mobilization theory, which stresses the importance of organization in developing and managing limited resources of a SMO, and a network approach to social movements, which emphasizes the role of informal and weak ties in mass mobilization (Cammaerts 2018). Weighing in on this debate, Kavada views organizational structure from a communication perspective and, with reference to Taylor and van Every (2000), distinguishes between concepts of 'conversation', i.e. everyday interactions, and 'text', codification of such interactions in a way that creates sustainable action. Accordingly, while digital technologies enable concerned publics and activists to organize on a common ground without a conventional structure, an important question to address concerns whether digital forms of protest and collective action is located at the core of movements or mainly have an assistive role – albeit being a game changer in the field – which has more relevance for some participants who are at the periphery of such movements (2015: 873).

Indeed, in the aftermath of Gezi Park Protests in Turkey, informal organizations, named as 'park forums' and alternative/community media organizations became widespread in various districts in metropolises. Most of these organizations adhered to a model of horizontal and informal organization (Özkaynak et al. 2015; Bulut and Bal 2017). However, many of these organizations, if not all, found it difficult to maintain their activities in a unified manner and first divided into smaller factions and then became inactive. As Özkaynak et al. (2015: 105) state, 'this non-conventional arena for doing politics gradually lost its effectiveness in Turkey as the March 2014 local elections approached – people were more inclined to think and act within the existing electoral system than consider alternatives'. Therefore, while digital media and ICTs may have arguably changed the landscape of social movements, their role in sustainability of social movements and alternative/community media is a crucial area of inquiry.

In this light, this article aims to provide a summary of case studies conducted to address this question in relation to the organizational capability

and sustainability. For this purpose, we focus on two ‘park forums’ that were formed in the aftermath of the Gezi Protests in Turkey and an environmentalist organization which, while formed in late 1990s, experienced a revival following the Gezi Park Protests. For these case studies, we draw on participant observation, which took place between March 2014 and May 2017, in-depth interviews and personal conversations with activists in grassroots SMOs in Istanbul: (1) Dogancilar Park Forum and its urban vegetable garden project Imrahor Garden; (2) Macka Park Forum and *Komsu Kapisi*, an association built by the activists and (3) Validebag Volunteers. Participant observation included attending, taking field notes and conducting interviews and conversations in forums, meetings, recreational activities and protest events organized by these groups. In addition to conventional participant observation, we also utilized e-mail lists, Facebook groups, Twitter accounts, Change.org campaigns, continuous and task-based WhatsApp groups as part of our data collection efforts. We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with fifteen participants and unstructured interviews in the form of personal conversations with 48 additional participants. We use pseudonyms throughout the article when we refer to interviewees, with the exception of the president of the Validebag Volunteers Association, who is already a public figure and gave his consent for the use of his actual name. Through these three case studies, the article will aim to discuss opportunities and constraints faced by informal and horizontal structures and their impact on various community media these organizations develop and maintain.

## **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ALTERNATIVE/COMMUNITY MEDIA**

If the wealth of terminologies employed are of any indication, scholarly approaches to alternative and community media are highly heterogeneous regarding how issues like organizational structure and communication practices are studied. On the one hand, some scholars conceptualize alternative and community media in terms of their functions for various stakeholders. Examples to such conceptualizations include social movement media (Downing 2008; 2011), citizens’ media (Rodríguez 2011) and tactical media (Lester and Hutchins 2009). On the other hand, scholars also try to account for the hybrid nature of alternative/community media. For example, the concept of rhizomatic media underscores how community media should be seen as an ‘entity whose rules are constantly in motion because new elements are constantly included’ (Guedes-Bailey et al. 2008: 27). Rhizomatic media approach also ‘highlights the role of alternative media as the crossroads of organizations and movements linked with civil society’ (2008: 27) (for a detailed discussion on the definition of community media, see Voniati et al. 2018).

The link between alternative/community media and organizations within the sphere of civil society is especially important due to the politically polarized media environment in Turkey (Toker 2015). Scholars studying the relationship between media and democracy in Turkey suggest that the Turkish media environment resembles a ‘neoliberal media autocracy’ in which ‘profit rather than journalistic ideals’ (Akser and Baybars-Hawks 2012: 304) is considered important and ‘print and broadcast media reporters continually feel pressured toward self-censorship’ (Akser and Baybars-Hawks 2012: 309). Furthermore, ‘high media integration into party politics’ and ‘press-party

parallelism' is noted as some of the main characteristics of the Turkish media environment (Panayırçı, İşeri and Şekercioğlu 2016: 552; see also Çarkoğlu, Baruh and Yıldırım 2014). An important result of this media environment is 'uneven access to media' (Esen and Gumuscu 2016: 1587), with, for example, the ruling Justice and Development Party (Ak Parti) receiving the majority of airtime (46 per cent) and political ad space (91 per cent) in the state-run public TV broadcaster TRT during the June 2015 campaign for general elections (Esen and Gumuscu 2016: 1588–89). The media environment is not different for private media outlets and mainstream media. For instance, Ak Parti was the only political party, which was able to run political ads on ATV during the June 2015 campaign (Esen and Gumuscu 2016: 1588). Esen and Gumuscu (2016: 1590) argue that '[b]esides creating an AKP-friendly media, the government has also disciplined the mainstream media via intimidation, mass firings and imprisonment of journalists, and buying off media moguls'. Most recently, Demiroren Group, a group with significant investments in the energy sector, bought one of the largest media groups in Turkey (Dogan Media Group). This acquisition included, among others, Dogan News Agency, the flagship newspaper *Hurriyet*, CNN Turk, Kanal D (one of the largest television broadcast channels) and YAY-SAT, a media distribution company (Cumhuriyet 2018). These points suggest that alternative/community media are vital for SMOs in Turkey.

Insofar as the sustainability of community media depends on the endurance of the organization, which produces and disseminates content, this article focuses on the organizational structure of the analysed grassroots SMOs and address questions pertaining to how these SMOs and their communication practices can be situated historically. In doing so, we aim to avoid running the risk of 'losing track of the field and re-inventing the wheel', a problem which, according to Rodríguez, alternative media research is often facing (2014: 161).

### **CASE STUDIES: THREE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN ISTANBUL**

To understand the role of organizational structures on sustainability in grassroots social movements and their corresponding community media practices in the context of the social movement ecosystem in Istanbul (Turkey), we will focus on three case studies: (1) Dogancilar Park Forum and the Imrahor Garden; (2) Macka Park Forum and the Komsu Kapisı Association and (3) Validebag Volunteers. As mentioned above, the Dogancilar Park Forum and Macka Park Forum are examples of park forums that were formed in the aftermath of the Gezi Park Protests. Dogancilar and Macka Park Forums were included in this analysis as both forums showed distinctly local and grassroots characters in contrast to other larger forums in Kadikoy and Besiktas. Moreover, even though similar in size and local character, Dogancilar and Macka Park Forums had different focal points, respectively, environment and neighbourhood. The focus of the third case study, Validebag Volunteers, on the other hand, is an environmentalist organization formed in the late 1990s, with the goal of preserving Validebag Grove as a green space. As such, we selected Validebag Volunteers as a grassroots organization, which predates Gezi Park Protests and due to its endurance for two decades, as a case study that can allow us to have a broader, comparative perspective.

It is important to note that the Gezi Park Protests were not a one-dimensional social phenomenon; and thereby included participants from various

socio-economic backgrounds, motivated by numerous issues and representing diverse ideological/political groups. Protesters – or resisters as they preferred to call themselves – who were settled in Gezi Park, and their slogans, also reflected this plurality (Gürcan and Peker 2014). This diversity was also reflected in the tactics utilized during the protests, such as street art (e.g. graffiti and warning signs) and performance art (e.g. the ‘standing man’) (Taş and Taş 2014). After protesters were forced out of the Gezi Park on 15 June 2013, ‘the resistance reorganized into “park forums” in the neighborhoods of Istanbul and other cities’ (Özkaynak et al. 2015: 104). Drawing on the experience activists gained in Gezi Park, each park forum established their digital alternative/community media channels via social networking and micro-blogging platforms and internal communication practices through instant messaging applications, which were used to organize and announce events as well as to disseminate information and updates about the movement. Validebag Volunteers, which predominantly used print media as its community media for a decade, also adopted the same digital tools in this new social movement landscape.

In our analysis, we will first summarize each case separately, interpreting them in terms of their relationship to the political context and transformation of the media landscape in Turkey. Then, in the discussion section, we will engage in a comparative analysis of the three cases to identify patterns in the social movement and community media scene in Turkey. Organizational structure and communication practices will be the main dimensions of analysis and comparison. Analysing cases both separately and comparatively will allow us to draw specific conclusions regarding the current state of social movements and how their utilization of media throughout five years since the Gezi Park Protests have transformed them.

### ***Dogancilar Park Forum and Imrahor Garden***

As the apparent starting point of the Gezi Park Protests demonstrate, environmental issues were among the key concerns of protesters. As Gürcan and Peker (2014: 79) state, “[l]ong live our ecological revolution,” said some graffiti, highlighting the green tones of Gezi against authoritarian market logic’. Park forums, which were the local offshoots of the community formed within Gezi Park between 1 and 15 June 2013, also reflected this environmentalist streak. In a similar vein, Dogancilar Park Forum was established by the participants coming from the nearby neighbourhoods to the Dogancilar Park on 19 June 2013, following a social media call and a ‘standing woman’ demonstration by a Gezi Park protester (Yeşil Bülten 2014). Dogancilar Park Forum, located in the predominantly conservative Uskudar district of Istanbul, was one of the park forums in which the environmentalist outlook was relatively stronger compared to so-called more ideologically homogenous park forums such as Yögurtcu Park Forum in Kadikoy or Abbasaga Park Forum in Besiktas. It was also different from Macka Park Forum, which predominantly focused on local citizen engagement and the well-being of the neighbourhood as a community. The environmentalist aspect of Dogancilar Park Forum was evident in the formation of Imrahor Garden, an urban garden project set up on an unused piece of land which was ‘occupied’ by the forum participants to be turned into a vegetable garden. The heterogeneity of the ideological orientation of its participants resulted in considerable political conflicts within the forum from its inception.

As one of the participants of the forum reports, the early meetings and gatherings of the forum were marked by heated political debates revolving around long-standing cleavages between left-wing and right-wing political groups as well as issues related to ethnicity and religion in Turkey (Kemal, interview, July 2014). On the other hand, a high level of participation in the gatherings and the lasting impact of Gezi Park Protests in the activist core of the forum allowed the forum members to organize various activities. These included seminars by prominent figures of Gezi Park Protests, film screenings, screenings of Turkish traditional shadow theatre adapted to Gezi Park Protests theme, workshops on social media use and misinformation, forums whereby each member was allowed to convey their opinion within a given amount of time, and iftar dinners during the month of Ramadan (Figure 1). In earlier stages, the park was a natural meeting point, and the opportunity for face-to-face communication was at its peak. At the same time, from the get-go, the forum members supplemented face-to-face communication with communication via social media, mainly Twitter and a Facebook group, as well as printed materials to announce its activities.

In terms of digital communication, forum members used WhatsApp in urgent situations and Google Groups for general internal communication while using Facebook and Twitter for external communication. One of the members of the forum, who is a veteran journalist and a fanzine enthusiast, printed and distributed a local newspaper titled *Bostan Gazetesi* ('Garden Newspaper'), which aimed to situate various urban garden projects including Kuzguncuk, Imrahor and Yedikule gardens within the broader ecological movement in Turkey. For example, the Garden Newspaper excerpt shown in Figure 2 covers the controversies surrounding an NGO's (Turkish Organ Transplant Foundation) application to build a hospital in one of the few remaining green areas in the Kuzguncuk neighbourhood, with a catchy pun for the headline: 'Kuzguncuk is Receiving a Cement Transplant'. The Garden Newspaper was instrumental in terms of Imrahor Garden's ability to gain recognition among various activist groups in Istanbul. This was largely due to the personal efforts of the participant who printed the newspaper. However, unlike e-mail groups, social networking sites, microblogging sites and messaging applications, the newspaper did not play a key role for facilitating communication among the participants of Dogancilar Park Forum (or between the forum and other forums).

Dogancilar Park Forum activists aimed to maintain regular meetings and a decision-making process built on consensus, following the model of horizontal organization adhered by all the park forums. However, in practice, especially after the formation of Imrahor Garden in January 2014, the decision-making process could not involve newcomers despite efforts by the activists to involve new participants such as organizing a regular forum and garden meetings mostly on weekends within the garden to ensure availability and announcement of meetings and garden activities both face-to-face and through social media. One reason for the lack of attendance was the motivation of newcomers. For these new participants, who were mostly from the local population, the main concern was the vegetable garden rather than the park forum. However, activists' deliberate resistance to codify the group's everyday actions and ideas, which cultivated an 'anything goes' attitude among participants, was another significant factor. Even when regular forums (i.e. gatherings in which every participant has a say) were organized, activists were reluctant to



## DOĞANCILAR PARKI

### ÜSKÜDAR AKŞAMLARI

#### BİR BAŞKA GÜZEL!

**29.07 PAZARTESİ**  
**LUIS MIGUEL HURTADO CORONADO İLE SÖYLEŞİ**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı. İşgal evleri ve direniş üzerine.



**30.07 SALI**  
**BÜKOOP\* SÖYLEŞİ**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı

\*Boğaziçi Mensupları Tüketim Kooperatifi



**31.07 ÇARŞAMBA**  
**FORUM**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı



**01.08 PERŞEMBE**  
**SOSYAL MEDYA KULLANIMI VE DEZENFORMASYON SUNUMU**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı. Sertaç Doğanay tarafından.



**02.08 CUMA**  
**PERSEPOLİS FİLM GÖSTERİMİ**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı



**08.07 PAZARTESİ**  
**TÜM FORUMLAR GEZİ PARKI'NDA BULUŞUYOR**  
18:30 Üsküdar İskelesinden hareketle



**09.07 SALI**  
**PARKTA İFTAR YEMEĞİ**  
(Bu hafta içi her akşam olacaktır.)



**10.07 ÇARŞAMBA**  
**'ÇAPULCU KARAGÖZ' GÖLGE OYUNU**  
22:00 Doğancılar Parkı



**11.07 PERŞEMBE**  
**METİN YEĞİN İLE SÖYLEŞİ**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı



**12.07 CUMA**  
**'EKÜMENOPOLİS' FİLM GÖSTERİMİ**  
21:30 Doğancılar Parkı (Yönetmenin katılımıyla.)



<https://twitter.com/DForumu>  
<https://www.facebook.com/UskudarDogancilarParkiForumu>  
<http://parkiarbimiz.blogspot.com>

<https://twitter.com/DForumu>  
<https://www.facebook.com/UskudarDogancilarParkiForumu>  
<http://parkiarbimiz.blogspot.com>

ÜSKÜDAR DOĞANCILAR PARKI FORUMU

Figure 1: Dogancilar Park Forum schedule of events during the summer of 2013.



# BOSTAN GAZETESİ

01.01.2015 - 00.01----

## YAŞASIN 23 YILLIK BOSTAN DİRENİŞİ

NOKTA 42/14 Haziran 1992 / Yaşam

### KUZGUNCUK'A BETON NAKLİ YAPILIYOR Boş Arazi mi Bulamamışlar!

Türkiye Organ Nakli Vakfı Kuzguncuk'un elde kalan son yeşil alanlarından birisi olan bostana hastane yapmak istiyor. Kuzguncuklular hastane yapmaya karşı. Kuzguncuklular hastane yapmaya karşı. Vakıf yöneticileri inşaatın bir-iki ay içinde başlayacağını söylüyor.

Kuzguncuk'daki bostan yıllardır çocuk sesleri ile yankılanırdı. Şimdi alanın etrafı tellerle çevrildi. Yasal olarak mümkün değil ama bostana hastane yapılacak. Çocuklar ise hastane istemiyorlar. Çünkü onlar bostan sayesinde zaten sağlıklı yaşıyorlar. Anne babalar ise hastane yapılabilecek ruteli bir biçimde yer bulduğunu bunun için yeşil bir alanın kati edilmesi gerektiğini söylüyorlar. Kuzguncuk'ta anne-babaları için hep rahattır. Ellerini çocukları bostanda oynuyordu. Ama son günlerde canları bir hayli sızdı çünkü bostanların çeviren tel örgünün üzerine asılan tabelada buraya bir hastane yapılacağı yazılmış durumda.

Bostan, Kuzguncuk, İcadıye Caddesi'nde Vakıflar'a ait 16 bin metrekarelik bir alan üzerinde yer alıyor. İki yıl önceine kadar bu alanı kiralayan bostancılar, sebze yetiştiriyorlardı. Ancak 1991 sonu Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü "birdeyere" kararını değiştirdi ve aradığı bostancıları çıkarıp araziyi 10 yıllığına, Türkiye Organ Nakli ve Yanık Tedavi Vakfına devretti. Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü de Vakıflar arasında düzenlenen kira sözleşmesi 31 Aralık 1991'de başlayıp 2002 yılında sona eriyor. Sözleşmede, bostanın aylık kirası 3 milyon lira olarak belirleniyor.

**RESMİ BAŞVURU DA YOK!** Organ Nakli Vakfı gerçi bostanı kiralamış ama henüz üzerine yapmayı planladığı bina için herhangi bir başvuruda bulunmamış. Üstidarı Belediye Başkanı Niyazi Yurtseven, "Kuzguncuk Boğaziçi öngörünüm bölgesidir, bostana hastane yapılabilmek için Boğaziçi İmar Müdürlüğü ve İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi İmar Müdürlüğü'ne başvurmuş, imar planında tadilat yapılmak gerekiyor" diyor.

Yapılacak hastane "şimdilik" yalnızca yöneticilerin kafasında. Onlar rüyalarını açık açık belirtiyor. Organ Vakfı'nın Bostancı Şenşenler'deki tesisinin müdürü olan Recep Haberal, inşaatı bir-iki ay

kadar başlayacağını belirtiyor. Buraya kurulacak hastanenin müdürlüğünü üstlenecek olan Haberal, taşınma gerçekleştirildikten sonra 44 olan diyaliz ünitesi sayısının 50'ye çıkaracağını açıklıyor.

Recep Haberal'a göre, aynı zamanda yeşeni olan Vakıf Başkanı Mehmet Haberal, buraya bir eğitim hastanesi kurmak istiyor. Ancak ilk etapta diyaliz merkezi kurmak niyetinde. Fakat, henüz başvuru yapılmadığı için belediyenin ne yolda bir karar vereceği "meçhul".

Boğaz daki öngörünüm alanı içinde en büyük yetidiye sahip kurum olan Boğaziçi İmar Müdürlüğü'nün imar planları hastane ruyetini suya düşürebilecek şekilde. Çünkü bu imar planında bostanın krokisine tarım alanı olarak kullanılmaktadır" notu düşülmüş. Planda küçük bir tadilat var. Bu tadilatta, arazının küçük bir bölümüne ilkokul yapılmasına izin veriliyor. Planda aynı zamanda "doğal zemin kodu ve mevcut ağaçlar korunacaktır" ibaresi bulunuyor. Üstelik, Kuzguncuk, doğal ve tarihi konumu nedeniyle SİT alanı ilan edilmiş. Bu nedenle burada bina yapmak çok kat kurallara bağlı.

### 5 MİLYONA BOSTANCIILIK

Organ Vakfı Başkanı Mehmet Haberal'a bostana bina yapmanın mümkün olmadığını hatırlattığımızda verdiği yanıt, "Biz binayı Vakıflardan kiralamak, yasalar izin verirse buraya hastane yapacağız. Eğer yasalar bina yapmamıza izin vermezse yapamayız. Yasalar bostan yapmamıza izin veriyorsa bostan yaparız, yeşil alan diyorsa yeşil alan yaparız" oldu. Yani bu durumda binaya izin vermezse, Vakıf, ayda 3 milyon lira kira vermek bostancılar yapacak. Bostan'ın tel örgü ile çevrilmesi Kuzguncuklular'ı çok kızdı. Onlar şimdiki hastane yapılıncasına için elerinden gelen yasal çabalarını sürdürüyorlar. Çevre Kanunu'nun kendilerine verdiği hakları hatırlatarak bir imza kampanyası başlatıyorlar. Bostana bina yapılmasına karşı çıkıyorlar, çünkü, 2872 sayılı Çevre Kanunu'nun 3. Maddesi "çevrenin korunması ve çevre kirliliğinin önlenmesi vatandaşların görevidir" diyor.

Kuzguncuklular, gelişmeleri bir-önce bitti olarak ritelendiriyorlar. Son 20-30 yılda İstanbul'un yeşil ve ağaçlık alanlarının beton yapılarla çevrilmesini önlemek için mücadele ediyorlar. Şimdi de bostancılar örgütleniyorlar da betonla kaplanmasına katılmamak istiyorlar. Hafta ortasında Kuzguncuk'ta ağaçlara asılmış şu notlar dikkat çekti, "Pazar günü 11.00'de bostanda buluşalım".

Pazar günü bostana gittiğimizde mahallelerin toplandığını gördük. Telin üstüne asıldan pan-

kartra "Hastane değil buraya yapılmasına karşıyız" yazıyordu. Çocuklar hazırladıkları renkli kartonlarda "Çarımız, gururumuz, her şeyimiz, bostanımız", "Bostana elele verip sahip çıkalım diyorlardı. Kuzguncuklular yıllardır çocuklarını gönül rahatlığı ile oynamaya gönderdikleri bostana bina yapılmasını istemiyorlardı. Hastane yapmak için başka yer bulunabilirdi. Aralarında bu bölgede oturan hemen her kesimden insan vardı. Su Yücel gibi ressamlar, Cengiz Bektaş gibi mimarlar, Uğur Yücel gibi sahne sanatçıları, yabancı uyrukular ve ev kadınları çocuklarını eğlence için bu tabii güzellikte sevindikleri bir şeyi korumaya çalışıyorlardı. Uğur Yücel duygularını, "Kuzguncuk Boğaz'ın en önemli yerlerinden biridir. Bu alan benim için çok büyük anlamlar taşıyor. Burada bir hastane yapılırsa insanlar sokaklarda dolaşamaz. Buraya eski den küçük Paris derlerdi. Buranın ağaçları, çiçekleri, kısaca bütün değerlerini korumak gerektir" diyerek anlatıyorlardı.

**İLLE DE İLKOKUL...** Kuzguncuklular, bostanın bir köşesine ilkokul yapılmasını istiyorlar. Alanın geri kalan kısmının ise kendilerine verilse çiçek bahçesine çevrebileceklerini söylüyorlar. Kuzguncuklular'ın bu isteklerini Prof. Dr. Mehmet Haberal'a ilettiler. Ama ona göre, bu mümkün değil. "Biz Vakıflar'la kira sözleşmesi yaptık. Vakıflar'a ayda 5 milyon ödüyoruz. Bunun eskiden mezbeliğidir. Bununla ilgili bir sözleşme yapıldı. Biz araziyi korumak için tel örgü ile çevirdik. Halk yeşil alan istiyorsa bunu belediyeden istemesi gerekir" diyor ve devam ediyor: "Hastane burada yaşayınlar içinde bir hizmettir."

Eğer bostana inşaat yapılması çocuklar sokaklarda oynamak zorunda kalacaklar. Oysa burada büyütüldüler. Günlerini burada geçiriyorlar. Zaten bostana hastane yapılmasına izin veremeycekler. Eğer makinalar gelip de bostanı kazıyorsa başlarsa, "onları yitireceğiz". Kuzguncuklular çocukları için koruyucu bulmuşlar. Bostanın etrafına tel çeken işçilerden, içeri girebilmeleri için bir kapı kurulmasını rica ediyorlar. Onlar da küçük bir giriş kurulabilir. Bostana hastane yapılırsa gelip geçen arabaların arasında oynamak zorunda kalıp, hastanelik olacaklarını bilen çocuklar, bütün olup bitenini özeti bu mektuba yazmışlardır. "Hastane istemiyoruz."

Tinaz DANİŞ - Alican DEĞER

Figure 2: Garden Newspaper, 1 January 2015.<sup>1</sup>

1. Title says 'long live 23-year garden resistance'.

formalize any of their activities and procedures, which was perceived as an antiquated feature of old left-wing political parties:

Even here, in the garden, someone said something about writing a manifesto. What are you going to do with a manifesto? What is a manifesto? We cannot get rid of these stereotypes. We need to cast off such stereotypes and find methods and instruments which will build on local dynamics and carry them one step further.

(Kemal, interview, July 2014)

When asked about what these methods and instruments might be, Kemal responds:

[...] it can be anything which will introduce the residents, who are not accustomed to emancipatory perspectives and organisations, to things outside of their worldview, which can be a movie, a book, a documentary, a trip to a different location or having visitors and conversations with people from outside their neighbourhood.

(Kemal, interview, July 2014)

Because horizontal organization allows for such creativity to flow, according to Kemal and the members sharing his views, activists should not build walls by creating formal organizations. However, building a sustainable horizontal organization, especially when it is coupled with the challenge of reconciling participants with different political leanings, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, proved difficult for the group. This was particularly so given the stark differences between the activists and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in terms of worldviews, and lifestyles.

Echoing Melucci's (1996) observation that longevity of a social movement is contingent on the extent to which they generate substantial organization and strong leadership, the experiences of the Dogancilar Park Forum and the Imrahor Garden built by its activists show that there may be a trade-off between ensuring the sustainability of the group and maintaining an informal structure. Namely, as the immediate impact of the Gezi Park Protests subsided and the summer ended, the forum started to lose its regular attendees, which was accompanied by a sense of lack of purpose felt by the activist core of the group. Around August 2013, some participants left the group due to a series of discussions and conflicts. A few participants left the forum stating that there was monopolization in the group (i.e. a core group dominating the decision-making process) thus creating a sense of insiders and outsiders. Another reason for these participants' departure was their belief that the Gezi Park Protests meant a clean break with the political currents of earlier periods including left-wing, Kemalist and pro-Kurdish approaches. The majority of participants, regardless of their political viewpoints, felt that even though the Gezi Park Protests marked the beginning of a new period in terms of political organization and communication, ideologies of earlier periods were not rendered irrelevant. As a result of these issues, departures from the forum became inevitable. Even more significantly, as they left, one of the groups departing from the forum took the Facebook Community Page of Uskudar Dogancilar Park Forum with them and as a result forced the remaining participants to form another Facebook page. While not condoning

the seizing of the original Facebook page of the forum, one of the founding activists of the forum acknowledges the existence of an inner circle, which gives some merit to the claims of monopolization, echoing Freeman's idea that unstructured organizations lead to formation of informal elites based on personal ties and friendship ([1970] 2013). However, this inner group also tried to open up and involve other participants by trying to change their means of communication with limited success:

We tried not to use the WhatsApp group because we thought we were becoming too concentrated to a small, core group. We tried to use the mail group instead but it could not replace WhatsApp [...] We were withdrawn as a group. If we could use the mail group the core group might have been larger but it wasn't suited to be used by everyone as a means of urgent communication.

(Sinem, interview, November 2014).

Nevertheless, the most determined members of the forum continued to meet in indoors throughout the winter in local coffee shops. In the meantime, following a general trend in post-Gezi Park forums, the group tried to keep in touch with other park forums via *Forumlararasi Koordinasyon Toplantilari* ('inter-forums coordination meetings'). Also, group members used their existing networks and established new ones within the social movement ecosystem of Uskudar and Istanbul. This expansion of social networks was critical for finding ideas that could serve as a 'purpose' for the forum in the post-Gezi Protests environment.

For example, in Kuzguncuk, another neighbourhood of Uskudar (which was the focus of the article excerpt shown in Figure 2), a social campaign to protect a green space called Kuzguncuk Bostani (Kuzguncuk Garden) – a green space, which residents use as a vegetable garden – had been ongoing for a couple of decades, since the 1990s. This social campaign was the initiative of the Kuzguncuklular Dernegi (Kuzguncuk Residents Association) (Özer 2014). As Kuzguncuk is close to Dogancilar District, Dogancilar Park Forum activists were in touch with the Kuzguncuk Residents Association, and they participated in the demonstrations of Kuzguncuk residents against various logging activities by the local municipality in the Kuzguncuk Garden. There was even a journalist among the ranks of Dogancilar Park Forum, who covered the Kuzguncuk Garden in a news story in 1992. Eventually, Dogancilar Park Forum activists were inspired by the idea of an urban garden to rekindle the 'Gezi Spirit' in their district.

Dogancilar Park Forum members decided to establish an urban garden in December 2013. Part of the space chosen for this purpose was already being used as a vegetable garden by a few residents independently from the park forum. The space chosen to turn into an urban garden was the property of The Directorate General of Foundations while the land tenure belonged to the local municipality. After submitting a petition to the authorities, forum activists learned that the land was under consideration for the reconstruction of a historical mansion called *Ayşe Hatun Kosku* while the exact date for the reconstruction was not yet determined. Drawing on this opportunity, forum activists made their first move to establish an urban garden by cleaning up the land on January 2014.

As the Imrahor Urban Garden Project continued to be the main focus of the Dogancilar Park Forum members and activities revolving around the



2. *Muhtars* are elected officials in neighbourhoods and villages in Turkey. *Muhtars* are elected on an individual basis and political parties cannot directly participate and cannot stand candidates in *Muhtar* elections.

garden were attracting attention from the neighbourhood, there was no apparent conflict within the group. The group organized events every Sunday with the participation of residents in the neighbourhood and announced these activities through their online media channels and leaflets. Public attention to the Imrahor Garden was at its peak when Riot Control Vehicles appeared on site against a tent pitched by the forum members on a gathering for planting on Sunday to protect their food and equipment against the rain on 16 March 2014. As the police force appeared on site, forum members announced the situation through their communication channels and the confrontation resolved without violence as the number of participants increased with the announcement and forum members managed to explain that the tent would not be permanent.

On the other hand, the political conflict within the group escalated with the coming of 30 March 2014 Turkish local elections. Two instances of conflict – revolving around party affiliations and ideology – occurred among forum members. The conflicts quickly turned into accusations over who made the greatest effort at the Imrahor Garden and Dogancilar Park Forum. On 21 March 2014, a discussion over a Facebook post made by a forum member who manages the communication channels of the group created tension. The issue was the spelling of the Spring Festival. In the Facebook post, both ‘Nevruz’ and ‘Newroz’ were written; however, some sympathizers of the Pro-Kurdish Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) (Peoples’ Democratic Party) reacted to the post by saying that the festival must be spelt only as ‘Newroz’. In the second instance of tension, on 1 April 2014, an e-mail calling for solidarity with the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) (Republican People’s Party) – the main opposition party with a secular, social democratic and Turkish nationalist leaning – for voting security created a reaction from the supporters of HDP in the group. Supporters of the HDP within the organization argued that the e-mail group was established only for the forum and its activities. The tension led to further divisions in the group and subsequently some of the founding activists of the forum stopped attending gatherings and activities.

The political conflicts and divisions within the Dogancilar Park Forum led to the disintegration of the forum as a local movement and left the Imrahor Garden as a space solely for gardening by some residents, who have never been active members of the forum while it was intended to be a local reflection of what Gezi Park Protests represented. The attempts to revive the forum in the summers of 2015 and 2016 were not successful even though the garden’s existence continued with the efforts of some non-activist residents. In time, the vacuum created by the lack of a grassroots SMO and the lack of supervision by the local municipality resulted in the use of the space in ways that caused disturbances in the neighbourhood (e.g. loud noise, drinking, drug use and dealing). Eventually, the local authority – the *muhtar*<sup>2</sup> – in the neighbourhood who wanted both to bring the disturbances to an end and preserve Imrahor Garden as a green space, applied to the Uskudar Municipality. After a series of official correspondences with both the municipality and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, she learned that the historical mansion that was under consideration for reconstruction was not located on the field of Imrahor Garden. Imrahor Garden officially became an urban garden on 1 October 2017, under supervision of the Uskudar Municipality (Türkmen 2017). The activists’ vision was realized albeit in a way that was surprising both for the activists and the local authorities.

### ***Macka Park Forum and Komsu Kapisi Association***

Macka Park Forum, also formed after the Gezi Park Protests in 2013, is an important case because it has been one of the most enduring park forums. The forum also created a grassroots association, Komsu Kapisi Association (*Komsu Kapisi Dernegi*), which continues its activities to this day. Komsu Kapisi Association was established as a local hub for citizen engagement and educational activities for residents through workshops, seminars and discussion sessions (discussed in further detail below). Just like in the Imrahor Garden, these activities played a crucial role in the sustainability of the forum; however, unlike the previous forum we summarized, the Macka Park Forum developed a formal set of rules accompanying a formal organizational structure. This formal organizational structure is not merely the outcome of the formation of the Komsu Kapisi Association as a legal entity. In fact, the association borrowed its structure from the forum. Pelin, a forum activist and later a member of the association, states the following about their priorities as a forum:

We consider continuity and stability very important for our forum, as well as our code of conduct. We are a forum which contemplates on forum procedures and routines. We discussed how to conduct a forum for months since the forum's inception in the Macka Park. Also, I think we are the only forum which wrote a code of conduct document.

(Pelin, interview, March 2015)

Macka Park Forum's code of conduct is a detailed document which establishes the forum's motivation, purpose, operation, decision-making, coordination of activities, frequency and duration of meetings, communication practices and communication spaces. The code of conduct indicates Macka Park Forum aims to establish an emancipatory and democratic platform based on participation, solidarity, unity, productivity, sharing and respect for differences. On this basis, Macka Park Forum aims to provide a platform for debate and discussion; for activities to break the daily routine of its members and generate active participation in neighbourhoods, parks and streets; and for social, scientific and artistic events for the development of its members and their social environment.

In terms of decision-making, Macka Park Forum embraces a consensus model, which is also detailed in the code of conduct that explains concepts like blocking a decision, standing aside and reservation. A forum also elects an internal coordination team, which is responsible for the implementation of the decisions reached by the forum. The coordination team can meet independently from the forum; however, these meetings must be announced to the forum through internal communication channels and the meetings are open to all forum members.

In accordance with the idea that formal organization may lead to suppression of radical action and democratic organization, consensus decision-making, as in the other grassroots SMOs we analyse in this paper, is selected to minimize the risk of the so-called iron law of oligarchy (Clemens and Minkoff 2004). However, Macka Park Forum is unique in its rigorous and systematic approach to decision-making, which not only attempts to prevent monopolization of leadership, but also actively tries to guarantee the implementation of decisions reached by the group.



After it was formed in June 2013, a majority of the Macka Park Forum activists decided to establish an association after considerable debates on the pitfalls of bureaucratization, which may come with the establishment of a formal association. In the first place, the idea of association stemmed from a concern over the sustainability of forum's activities. As the starting point of park forums was to be based in a local park, the question of what to do and where to meet when the winter comes was of utmost importance for the continuity of the forum's activities. Later on, activists wanted to form a relationship between the forum and the association based on mutual support. The forum was supposed to function as a platform for discussion and advisory body to the association, and the association was going to be instrumental in implementation of activities.

In practice, however, not all forum activists were convinced by the idea of an association. Indeed, some activists even left the group in response to the decision to create an association. Conversely, not all stakeholders who were interested in the activities of the association, particularly the residents of the neighbourhood, participated in the forum activities. Eventually, rather than acting as an advisory body to the association, the forum continued to be a platform for debate and radical action and the association managed to establish itself as a local hub for civic engagement projects, educational activities for the residents and seminars, which welcome speakers on various topics including technology, journalism, arts and sports. The association was named 'Komsu Kapisi' (which can roughly be translated as 'Neighbour's Door'). On its charter, Komsu Kapisi's decision-making procedure includes a qualified-majority rule of 75 per cent, which was also one of its differences with the Macka Park Forum that uses consensus for decision-making.

Macka Park Forum preferred social media as its main source of communication. Forum activists used Telegram – to which they switched from WhatsApp due to security concerns – and Google Groups for internal communication. Also, the forum utilized a Facebook group and Twitter to communicate their activities to the broader network of social movements and to the public. Komsu Kapisi uses a Facebook Community Page, Twitter and the association website. In addition to their use of social media, both the Macka Park Forum and Komsu Kapisi Association developed cooperation with media start-ups and citizen journalism platforms, specifically with '140journos' (a news start-up rooted in citizen journalism) and 'dokuz8haber' (a citizen journalism platform). This was not only for the purposes of getting their voices out via these platforms but also for promoting various activities.

One such activity was a series of talks entitled 'Informatics Workshops'. The main purpose of these workshops was to inform residents on digital literacy and computer skills. Some of the sessions of the Informatics Workshops was a direct result of the cooperation with 140journos and dokuz8haber. One of the key topics covered in the workshops was citizen journalism, for which the Macka Park Forum and Komsu Kapisi Association collaborated with 140journos (Figure 3). The collaboration with 140journos is important also in terms of the communication practices of the Macka Park Forum and Komsu Kapisi Association. Following Guedes-Bailey et al. (2008), who underline 'potentiality of alternative media to establish [...] rhizomatic networks that move beyond the local', in this case between a local association and an entrepreneurial citizen journalism start-up, this point shows the heterogeneous forms that alternative/community media may take.




 teknolojiyi  
doğru ve verimli  
kullanmak için

**BİLİŞİM  
ATÖLYELERİ**

**Vatandaş Gazeteciliği**

Yer: Komşu Kapısı Maçka Dayanışma Derneği  
 Hüsrev Gerede Cad. Ömer Rüştü Paşa Sokak 19D  
 Teşvikiye / Şişli  
 Zaman: 3 Mart Salı 20:30-22:30  
 Katılım Payı: 10 TL / Kişi  
 Not: Katılım payını zaman / emek ile verebilirsiniz

**BİLGİ / REZERVASYON İÇİN:**  
**(212) 259 01 06 / mackaforumu@gmail.com**

Figure 3: Informatics workshops on citizen journalism by Macka Park Forum, Komsu Kapisi Association and 140journos.

Macka Park Forum continued to meet regularly throughout the summer of 2015. The last gatherings of the group as a forum occurred in the summer of 2016. After that, the group came together only in response to urgent issues such as the closure of Macka Democracy Park's south entrance for a highway tunnel project (Çapa 2017). This point shows that the forum, as a reminiscent of Gezi Park Protests, continued to emerge during times of political crisis with specific local significance, as online communication channels enabled the community to be mobilized (then to be dissolved when the circumstances requiring its mobilization disappear). Komsu Kapisi Association, on the other hand, continues its activities regularly as it is not tied to any particular political agenda even though it involves political events such as talks and debate sessions with journalists and scholars.

### **Validebag Volunteers**

Validebag Grove is located in Uskudar, Istanbul on 354.076 square meters of land. It is considered the second largest green space located in the Anatolian side of Istanbul and it has been declared a natural and historical protected area in 1999 as a result of the Validebag Volunteers' efforts and application to the Cultural and Natural Assets Protection Board. Along with other green spaces in Istanbul, Validebag Grove is threatened by mega-projects, accumulation of waste through a stream, which is polluted due to various construction projects nearby its land, and neglect (Papadopoulos and Duru 2017).

Even though Validebag Volunteers received media attention with their activities and demonstrations after Gezi Park Protests, the movement, which aims to preserve Validebag Grove as an urban green space, dates back to the late 1990s.

Validebag Volunteers movement is the descendant of Altunizade Citizen Initiative (Altunizade Yurttas Inisiyatifi), a grassroots organization in 1996–97 in the Altunizade neighbourhood, whose purpose was to enable citizen engagement in urban planning in the district. Drawing on this heritage, Validebag Volunteers, named the Validebag Initiative at the time, started their activities in 1998. They describe themselves as a neighbourhood initiative formed by ordinary people from the surrounding neighbourhoods of Validebag Grove. Their stated aim is to preserve Validebag Grove from projects which allegedly try to commercialize the grove by opening cafes and renting space for weddings and other events. The group's main slogan is *koruyu koru* ('protect the grove'), which involves a wordplay on the word 'grove' in Turkish. After a series of debates on formalization and institutionalization, the group formed a formal association in 2001 under the name of 'Validebag Basin Urban Culture and Solidarity Association'. As the name Validebag Volunteers caught on, the association changed its name to 'Validebag Volunteers Association'. Validebag Volunteers state that they are not a 'political' organization but rather an ecological and environmentalist movement. This is a strict rule for the volunteers as members believe that overt involvement in party politics and ideological debates weaken grassroots SMOs and NGOs.

Beginning with the decision to form an association, Validebag Volunteers experienced various organizational conflicts, which revolve around questions (and accusations) related to monopolization over decision-making by various factions within the group. Arif Belgin, president of the Validebag Volunteers Association, states the following regarding the debates over establishing an association:

When the association was established, some of our friends objected. They had many reasons and they were right. We never had a hierarchy in our group and they objected to the idea of association to preserve this. After all, an association needs to have a president and a board of directors. They said that this can create a power struggle within us. We found a solution to this problem. We said: The association cannot make a decision in the name of Validebag Volunteers and it exists only for official correspondence, filing suit and raising money; it is the Validebag Volunteers who will steer both the movement and the association.

(Arif Belgin, interview, May 2017)

Indeed, meetings of Validebag Volunteers are open not only to members of the association but to everyone who wants to contribute to the movement to preserve the grove. However, the dual organizational structure of the volunteers consisting of an open, horizontal SMO along with an association conceived in purely instrumental terms created confusion, especially among the new members. As the association is conceived as an instrumental body, it does not aim to grow and recruit new members while Validebag Volunteers in a broader sense aims to expand as a group. This duality creates a static and monopolized scenery on the side of the association even though the idea has been to prevent potential power struggles to occur over the leadership of the association. Still, volunteers' adherence to consensus and persuasion

as a mode of decision-making underlines the participatory nature of their organization.

Validebag Volunteers, including the former Altunizade Citizen Initiative, have been aware of the importance of building a community media for a SMO. In 1997, at the time of the Altunizade Citizen Initiative, they published *Altunizade Postasi* ('Altunizade Post'), a local newsletter distributed free of charge by the volunteers to apartments and local shops in the surrounding neighbourhoods. In the early 2000s, the group changed the publication's name to *Validebag Postasi* ('Validebag Post'), and the publication continued at intervals until 2011. Some covers and pages of *Validebag Postasi* can be seen in Figures 4 and 5.

In the *Validebag Postasi*, Validebag Volunteers announce their activities such as forums, panels, press statements, garbage collecting events, neighbourhood festivals and demonstrations; write articles on the current state and legal aspects of their struggle; document the activities of authorities and corporations and the physical damage given to the land and to the trees; and share the opinions of specialists and local authorities on the state of the Validebag Grove (Figure 4). The outlook of Validebag Volunteers, which prioritize grassroots democracy and open discussion is also evident in their activities announced through *Validebag Postasi* as seen in Figure 5.

Six volunteers worked on the *Validebag Postasi*. Even though it was intended to be a monthly publication, it could only be published at irregular intervals, particularly when the agenda of volunteers required the newsletter to inform the public, announce an event or document a negative occurrence in the grove.

Validebag Volunteers were able to publish and distribute *Validebag Postasi* regularly on a monthly basis in 2005 as they received funds from a European Union project titled 'Increasing Environmental Awareness'. Due to the rules of the project, they were unable to transfer funds to the association; however, after consulting with EU officials, volunteers who got paid through the project decided to donate these wages to the association, which, in turn, used these donations to finance its legal expenses and the expenses associated with sustaining community media. While the EU project funds were beneficial for Validebag Volunteers and *Validebag Postasi* in terms of sustainability, president of the association Arif Belgin observes that despite the transparency of all the transactions, these EU funds became a source of criticism against Validebag Volunteers and especially the administration of the association. Criticism stemmed from two sources: first, EU funding is perceived negatively among some of the Turkish left-wing political groups, especially among various anti-imperialist and Kemalist strands; and second, any funding outside of the group's own volunteers was received critically by the group members due to fear of mismanagement of received funds. Arif Belgin also states that 'now when I think of it, of course this is my opinion, we could have done without the funds if we worked harder and collected more donations, it wasn't worth all the harsh criticisms we faced for all these years' (interview, April 2018).

Volunteers ended production of *Validebag Postasi* around 2011. Two factors stand out as the primary reasons for this decision to cease the publication. First, volunteers state that even though the existence of the association and the support from the public had been instrumental in the long-term sustainability of the newsletter, the voluntary labour required to prepare and distribute the paper and the financial assets required to publish the newsletter were becoming increasingly scarce. Second, the group felt that the proliferation of





**VALİDEBAĞ POSTASI**  
SAYI:15 ÜCRETSİZDİR NİSAN 2005

ACİBADEM, ALTUNIZADE, BARBAROS, KOŞUYOLU MAHALLELERİ HABER BÜLTENİ

**SİT KARARINI DELMEK VE VALİDEBAĞ KORULUĞUNU TAHRİP ETMEKTEN VAZGEÇMEDİLER VALİDEBAĞ KORULUĞUNU SONUNA KADAR SAVUNMAKTAN VAZGEÇMEYECEĞİZ**

**NEREDEN NEREYE**

Herhabe Değeri dört büyüme kaybettik. Çoğunun abisi, Turan abii, Metek abii ve Niyazi abii. Biz onları Validebağ mücadelesinde tanışık. Bizim hep güc verirdiler. Sizleri hep güzellikler ve sevgi ve saygı ile hatırlayacağız. Emindeyiz yapacağımız güzel şeyler onları yataksız yerde huzur içinde olmasını sağlayacaktır.

Bu sayımızı hazırlarken sırasında Validebağ Koruluğuna yapılan saldırı nedeniyle bölgenin izizi çıkarmak zorunda kaldık. Altunizade Kültür Merkezi'nde 22 Nisan 2005 Cuma Akşamı Saat 19.00'daki Validebağ'ın geleceğini konuşacağız "KARARA KATILMA ZAMANI" formuna tüm konuşmalarını konusmacı olarak bekliyoruz.

7 Nisan 2005 Perşembe günü arkadaşlarımız Validebağ Koruluğuna elektrik direkleri ve bir takım yüksek gerilim kablolarının taşınmadığını tespit ettikler. 8 Nisan Cuma günü telefon trafiğini işleterek gene ne yapmak istiyorlar diye araştırmaya başladık. 10 Nisan Pazar günü ne yapmak istedikleri anlaşıldı. Dozer Validebağ Koruluğuna çirkinde yaklaşık 60 cm genişliğinde ve 110 cm derinliğinde bir çukur açarak ilerlemeye başladı. Dozerle pazar günü müdahaleler sonuç vermedi ilerleme devam etti.

Devamı 3. sayıdadır

*baştarafı 1. sayıdadır*  
nerek para kazanacak projeler üzerinde yoğunlaşmaya başlamışlar. Buldukları çözüm ise yıl para getirici için kir



*baştarafı 1. sayıdadır*  
nerek para kazanacak projeler üzerinde yoğunlaşmaya başlamışlar. Buldukları çözüm ise yıl para getirici için kir

*Dozerle yapıları çalışmalarda bütün ağaçları yarıyorlar*

Müdürlüğüne 2883 Sayılı Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kanunu'nu ihlal ettiklerini bildiren bir dilekçe verdi. İstanbul Cumhuriyet Savcılığı'na başvurarak suçluların cezalandırmasını istedi. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı'na bağlı İstanbul 8 Nolu Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu'na başvurarak aldıkları İdarece SİT kararına sahip olmaları, yerinde inceleme yaparlar onlara da savcılığa suç duyurusunda bulunmaları talep edildi. Dergimiz yayına hazırladığı sırada Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı'na bağlı İstanbul Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kuruluna görüşme sağlanmaya çalışılan Validebağ Gönüllüleri hukuk-

*Yapıkları çevre düzenlemesinde Adile Sultan Kasrı 40-50 cm kadar toprak altında kalmıştır.*

diğerlerine yönelmek çımsız.

**HUKUKU NASIL ASACAKLAR**  
Herkesin bildiği gibi Validebağ Koruluğu ve Adile Sultan Kasrı İdarece SİT Alanı, Koruma Kurulu böyle bir faaliyete izin vermez. Bu projeler için Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı'na bağlı İstanbul Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kurulu'na başvurmuşlar. Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı'na bağlı bu kurulların Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı'na bağlı Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kurullarından kurtulmak için oluşturulduğunu basından okumuştuk. Buradaki esas amaç, İdarece SİT alanı ile aynı yerleri kültürel varlıklar ve tabiat varlıklarını diye ayırarak yasanan



*Daha paralı kesim için havuzbaşı diğünü mahkûmlar arkasını dönmek. Validebağ Koruluğunda da aynı şey yapıyorlar.*

**YANLIŞ HESAP BAĞDATTAN DÖNER**  
1997 yılında Validebağ Koruluğundaki tarihi yapılar İdarece SİT alanı ilan edildi. Validebağ Gönüllüleri, muhtarlarımız ve Mimarlar Odası'nın 1999'daki başvurusu üzerine Validebağ Korusu, faunası ve florası ile İdarece SİT Alanı ilan edildi. Yeni Validebağ Korusu ve Adile Sultan Kasrı ayrılmaz bir bütündür, biri olmadan diğerinin anlamı yoktur. Siz hiç araziye olmayan bitişik nizam kasrı gördünüz mü?

**YENİDEN HÜCEDELE GÜNLERİ**  
Validebağ Koruluğunda olan biteni fotoğrafı kayıt altına alan Validebağ Gönüllüleri, İstanbul li Milli Eğitim

*Her yer inşaat, her yer mezbelelik*  
suz olan bu kararın yürütülmesi durdurulmalı iptali için Bölge İdare Mahkemesi'ne başvuruya hazırlanıyor. Validebağ Gönüllüleri bildiri ve gelişmeleri ve eide ettiği sonuçları 22 Şubat 2014 Cumartesi Günü Hüzrevi önünde yapacağı basın açıklaması ile kamuoyuna duyuracağını açıkladı





*Validebağ Korusu müteahhillerin malzeme deposu gibi*

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Figure 4: Samples from Validebag Postasi.<sup>3</sup>

3. On the left, the headline says 'they did not give up on breaking the protection decision and harming the grove, we will not give up on defending the grove to the end'. On the right, instances of harm to the land and trees are documented.

digital media rendered the newsletter obsolete. In other words, volunteers decided to allocate the scarce voluntary labour and limited financial resources to the relatively much easier digital alternatives, which offer novel (and more effective) ways of engagement with their audience, compared to a printed publication.

Digital communication practices of Validebag Volunteers consist of using WhatsApp and Google Groups for internal communication; a Facebook group for both internal and external communication, a Facebook Community Page and a Twitter profile for external communication. Validebag Volunteers have two WhatsApp groups. The first one is titled 'Validebag News' and it is used for issues directly about the Validebag Grove and urgent matters. The second group titled 'Validebag Conversation' is for daily conversations about issues beyond Validebag Grove. These issues include political or personal issues and announcements. Validebag Conversation WhatsApp groups function as a social network for Validebag Volunteers to share personal or political opinions, jokes, Internet memes, photos of Validebag and other green and urban spaces, urgent calls, which are not related to Validebag (e.g. health-related urgencies). In this sense, the use of WhatsApp evokes the concept of 'mass self-communication' (Castells 2009).

Neither digital communication practices nor the participatory and consensus-based decision-making is without contention though, and internal conflicts are a common occurrence for Validebag Volunteers. They have an uneasy relationship with another group called Validebag Defense, which was established by some of the Validebag Volunteers in October 2014 when





Figure 5: Samples from Validebag Postasi posters.<sup>4</sup>

Uskudar Municipality wanted to build a mosque right outside the border of Validebag Grove. Since the events were taking place outside of the grove, another SMO, Validebag Defense (Validebag Savunması) was founded as a means to create an umbrella organization, which can involve both the residents of the neighbourhood and the people who came to Validebag with mainly political motivations. Towards the end of 2015, there was a process to unite the Validebag Volunteers and Validebag Defense under the name of volunteers. Even though groups agreed on a text of principles, demonstrating a willingness to codify their actions as SMOs, sharing of digital media channel passwords created a barrier in this unification. In a way that underscores the symbolic importance of control over communication channels for the identity of SMOs, volunteers were reluctant to share their media channels, to which they give great importance as the voice of their organizations.

## DISCUSSION

The case studies discussed in this article offer important insights regarding the sustainability of grassroots SMOs and their community media. First, as digital media are increasingly displacing earlier forms of media due to their relative ease of use and accessibility, utilizing digital community media for both internal and external communication needs has become vital for grassroots SMOs. As far as the cases analysed in this paper are concerned, grassroots social movements tend to prefer instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram for internal communication, and social network sites and micro-blogging platforms for external communication. While the distinction between

4. On the left, the headline says 'who says what' and announces a panel in which Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Uskudar Municipality, Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education, Chamber of Architects Istanbul Branch, scientists and Validebag Volunteers are participants. On the right, time and location for a press statement is announced and the text says: 'No to outdoor wedding venues! We want Validebag and the storks back!'.

internal and external communication continues to be relevant for social movements, ICTs make the distinction between them more permeable, making external and internal communication interdependent. For example, in addition to serving daily operational purposes (e.g. organizing an event), instant messaging apps are highly instrumental for grassroots social movements because they facilitate an uninterrupted flow of communication, which creates a forum-like online experience where each participant can express their opinion and listen to others. Even though different groups in instant messaging applications exist independently from each other, people who are participants of different groups act as nodes bridging these separate groups, playing a crucial role in the dissemination of information across different stakeholders.

Second, we observed that in all three social movement organizations, which differ from each other in terms of their overall purpose, collective identities are closely linked to their community media. Indeed, access to media platforms plays a symbolic role as a marker of control and power within the forums and for delineation of insiders and outsiders. For example, in Dogancilar Park Forum, a discussion over monopolization resulted in some former members of the forum to seize control of the Facebook page by changing its password in an attempt to lay claims to the identity of the group as well as its audience. This move forced remaining activists to form a new Facebook group and (try to) convince both the broader network of activist groups as well as their audience on their authenticity. In Validebag Volunteers, similarly, an attempt to unify volunteers with Validebag Defense members failed as the groups could not trust each other enough to share the passwords of their social media presence, which (for them) was an indication that they were not ready to come together under one collective identity. Only in the case of Macka Park Forum and Komsu Kapisi Association, which were inclined to 'codify' (Kavada 2015) their interactions to a greater extent than the other groups in this study, there was no significant conflict over their means of communication. Relatedly, groups' readiness or reluctance to codify, or turning everyday practices into more or less fixed behavioural patterns, has an impact on SMOs in a way that shapes the way in which common identity and common practices are formed. As the case of Dogancilar Park Forum suggests, lack of codification does not necessarily translate into sustained horizontal organizations. Experience of Macka Park Forum, on the other hand, demonstrates that working on texts, codes and common meanings in a collective and collaborative way may be fruitful for a horizontal organization as well when members have the motivation, time and energy to ensure that every participant is on board. Even though Macka Park Forum is not active anymore, their offshoot Komsu Kapisi Association continues its activities since its inception. Still, as the unification experience of Validebag Volunteers with the Validebag Defense implies, codification of actions is not a panacea especially when the necessary motivation and trust is not in place.

Third, the case studies indicate that organizational structure and implementation of decision-making principles are vital for the sustainability of grassroots SMOs and their community media engagements. This is primarily because financial resources are limited, and activities require considerable time from volunteers. As such, the SMOs we analysed had to maintain a delicate balance between visibility and allocating resources for other needs, as the case of *Validebag Postasi* demonstrated clearly. Also, use patterns of different communication tools, such as WhatsApp, change in accordance with organizational structure. While in the case of Validebag Volunteers, it serves

to keep participants together and up-to-date about other members and the general state of the movement through daily communication, in the case of Dogancilar Park Forum, it can lead to withdrawal to a narrower inner circle within the group.

Finally, concerning institutionalization of SMOs, previous research has suggested that formalization and bureaucratization may impede a social movement's capacity to engage in radical action and may lead to oligarchical structures as suggested by the concept of the 'iron law of oligarchy' (Clemens and Minkoff 2004). While not negating this line of research, our findings underline that a certain degree of formalization, particularly when devised to offset the aforementioned negative aspects via a consensus-based, participatory and transparent decision-making process, generates more sustainable structures for grassroots social movement organizations.

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