

**GAP BETWEEN PLANNING PRACTICE AND RESEARCH IN TURKEY CASE:****OLD METHODS FOR NEW ISSUES<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*To explore the relation between research and practice in planning field, we need to focus especially on how the practitioner pursuit the current academic research, we need to as is the interdisciplinarity can be realized during the planning process. Additionally, methodologies provide the most concrete link between practice and research in planning. Starting from this point, this paper focuses on how the link between research and practice is established in Turkey's planning field.*

*The data for this empirical research came from a comprehensive two-phase scientific research project. In the first phase, the focus was the private planning offices, we conducted a comprehensive survey and in-depth interviews with the owners of private offices. In the second phase we made a survey among the municipality planners, then we also made in depth interviews with them. In total, surveys are carried out with 353 planners and 25 in depth interviews are conducted.*

*Consequently, this paper argues that understanding the relationship between research and practice in the planning field, requires particular attention to predict the quality, functionality, and the communicative dimensions of the urban plan. Planning in Turkey is dominated by outdated laws, rules, and regulations rather than current research or theoretical discussion.*

**Keywords**

*Urban Planning Practice, Urban Planning Research, Research and Practice, Turkey Planning Practice, Private Planning Offices, Municipalities.*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In the international literature, one of the most important debates in planning practice is the gap between research and practice (Durning, 2004; Forsyth, 2015, 2019; Goodman et al., 2017). Our empirical research about planning in Turkey, especially regarding private planning offices and local municipalities, reveals a disconnection between research and practice. Researchers follow a protocol for an academic study, adopt systematic data collection techniques, and emphasize a gap in knowledge (Forsyth, 2015: 469) whereas investigators collect data to develop tools to solve a particular problem (Forsyth, 2015: 469). Accordingly, investigations are mostly carried out for planning processes but not the academic research.

To explore the relation between research and practice in planning field, we need to focus especially on the how the academics and practioners collaborate, how the practitioner pursuit the current academic research, whether the interdisciplinarity can be realized during the planning process. Additionally, methodologies provide the most concrete link between practice and research in planning. Hudson (2016) uses methodologies as one of the main indicators for comparing different planning approaches. This paper focuses on what the analysis, prediction and decision-making methodologies used during the planning practice and the participatory dimensions of these processes are.

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In the planning literature in Turkey, it is hard to find research focusing on the relation between research, and practice. Instead, two main subjects are often addressed about practice in Turkey. The first is the role of the political pressure on planning (Yoloğlu, 2019) while the second is the relationship with planning legislation (Duygulu, 2006; Ersoy, 2013). Few studies have focused on the planner's role in planning practice (Kubin, 1994; Penpecioglu and Taşan-Kok, 2016). Instead, critical discussions of the Turkish planning system often argue that participation is not prioritized, social policies are not included, social justice is not produced for disadvantaged people, and the political authorities allow profit-oriented practices. Meanwhile, only a very few studies consider different and innovative planning approaches or methodologies (Burak, 2020; Hülügü Kaplan Zeynep Özdemir, 2017; Ögdül et al., 2017; Yavaş, 2020).

The data for this empirical research came from a comprehensive two-phase scientific research project focusing on both municipalities and private planning offices using the qualitative and quantitative methods together to understand the planning system in Turkey. In the first phase, information on planning offices registered under the Chamber of Urban Planners in 2018 and data on Professional Auditing Practices were obtained from the Headquarters of the Chamber of Urban Planners. Based on the data of registered companies, the distribution of planning offices by location was determined. According to this data from 12 offices, among the offices that does most of the planning work are chosen and are interviewed in depth. In addition to the qualitative research, a comprehensive survey was conducted by sending a questionnaire to all 656 planning offices in Turkey, of which 119 responded. In the second phase, the planning process in the municipalities is examined and a comprehensive survey was conducted by sending a questionnaire to all the municipalities in Turkey and 234 planners from 98 different municipalities completed the questionnaire. Finally, to have a deeper understanding, 10 interviews were carried out with experienced municipality planners.

## 2. “Planners Don’t Read Enough”

In the municipality, interviewees claim that they cannot have time to discuss new theories in the planning field. On the other hand, municipality planners say that they can get permission to follow academic seminars or panels.

On the contrary, our surveys conducted with private planning office planners and the municipality planners show that private office planners spare much more time to follow theoretical knowledge.

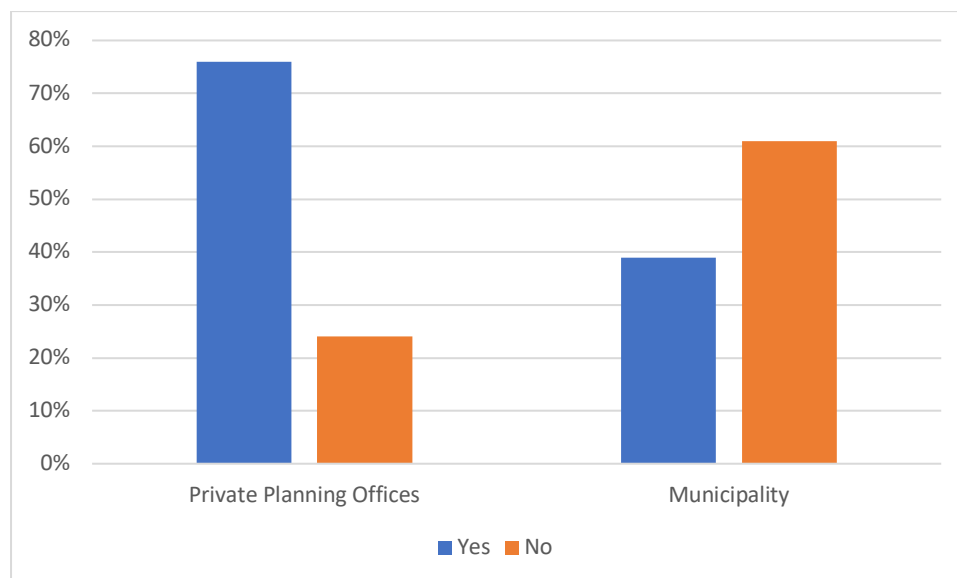


Figure 1. Pursuing the Theoretical Discussions in Planning Field (Source: Planning Process Research – Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University - 2018/2020)

Theoretical discussions in the planning fields are mostly followed from professional web portals. Planners in the private offices and municipalities cannot have time to go to the scientific meetings or to read journals and books. Professional chambers' publications also have an important impact on the intellectual development of the professionals.

**Table 1. Sources of Professional Knowledge (Source: Planning Process Research – Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University - 2018/2020)**

	Private Planning Offices	Municipalities
Scientific Meetings	9%	4%
Scientific Journals	9%	13%
Scientific Books	10%	10%
Professional Chambers Publications	23%	33%
Professional Web Portals	48%	41%

Our survey and interviews also showed that planners who ignore conceptual discussions in their work argue that academic discussions are disconnected from planning practices (Office O). On the other hand, one of our interviewees from the municipality (who previously worked in the private offices) makes a comparison and reveals that the planners in the municipality have much more opportunity to attend scientific seminars rather than their colleagues working in the private sector, but they don't prefer to go there.

*“Planners in the private planning offices work very hard, they mostly work overtime and it is obvious that they don't have time to read about the contemporary discussions about the planning field. People (planners) are working too slowly at the municipality. When we compare with the private sector planners, it is very different. The day begins at 11:00 at municipality, lunch break can extend to 2 hours and the business day finishes at 16:00.” (Interviewee AA)*

The research also shows that to read and pursue the international literature of the urban planning is not a very required specification for a planner. The interviews suggest that private planning offices tend not to prefer newly-graduated planners, office claim that the theoretical knowledge is useless for the planning practice:

*“We are having issues with young professionals graduating from universities offering a strong theoretical background.” (Office J)*

### 3. Not Research But Investigation

Research is the obligatory phase of the urban planning process to get familiar with the planning field, to gather data necessary for the decision-making process. When we talk about the research, Forsyth (2015) sets forth 2 categories; first is the academic research, second is the investigation. Forsyth (2015) claims that the academics follow a protocol, a rigorous methodology for the academic research and this systematic data collection aims to fill any gap in knowledge. However, the investigation serves to collect data or develop tools only to solve very specific problems. Practitioners do not focus on criticising the general situation or do not carry out deep analysis about urban issues. The focus is especially on satisfying the public and the local government. On the other hand, academics focus on the details of the issues, analyse deeply, and try to make contribution to the international literature. Durning (2004)

concludes that academics and practitioners belong to two separate tribes rather than one common community, which is true for the Turkish planning community.

The main guide for urban planning analysis and research is specified in the section “Research and Analysis” in the Regulation on Making Spatial Plans. This requires an analysis of problems and needs, sectoral and thematic reports, population growth analysis, physical environment analysis and population projection.

In Turkish planning practice, urban planning research methods and decision making techniques are determined in a framework dating back to the 1970s. The analytical structure of the planning process in Turkey is often determined by the public authority, which requests the obligatory analysis in the Law No. 3194 on Land Development Planning and Control, reflecting a classical modernist planning approach. The analysis framework is defined by Provincial Bank, diversified in its research topics and details for different city sizes. With this framework, Turkey’s planning system perceive urban communities as “ideal types” categorized by their sizes.

These suggestions does not require a research, only an investigation about the main problems is sufficient to do what is necessary in terms of laws and regulations.

**Table 2. Using Methods During Planning Process (Source: Planning Process Research – Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University - 2018/2020)**

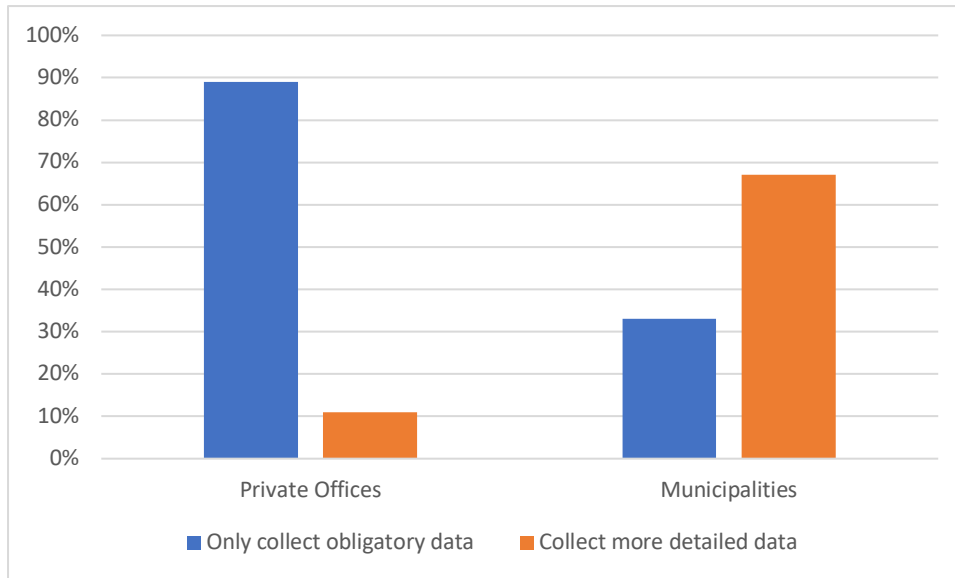
	Private Planning Offices	Municipalities
Interview with Public Institutions	25%	23%
Land Use Analysis	23%	21%
Examination of Old Plan Reports	20%	20%
Interview with Important Actors	16%	15%
Survey	11%	11%
Participative methods	6%	11%

Our survey in the private offices and municipalities shows that the rate of using techniques are very similar in both.

Despite the survey results presenting the similar rates for the private offices and municipalities, in depth interviews also demonstrate that in municipalities planners have more opportunity to deepen the investigation. Private planning offices are doing the public meetings especially for convincing potentially opponent actors.

“The more you can convince people, the more you have chance to implement your plan. That is why you need to make a participative effort.” (Office P)

The technical specification documents which state how the planning process must be ruled, especially specify the composition of the planning team and the obligatory observations like the survey, archive scanning, and gathering the public authorities’ opinions. Private planning offices must prepare an analysis report. In municipalities, planners claim that they make much more detailed analysis than the required data by the laws and regulations.



**Figure 2. Collecting Detailed Data (Source: Planning Process Research – Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University - 2018/2020)**

*“If you are making an urban plan led by the municipality, analysis is only a formality. It is only expected to make a population projection.” (Office D)*

The above statement which is made by a private planning office change in the municipality environment. In municipality, one of our interviewees claims that the planning process is only about laws and regulations:

*“We (planners) only put into practice the rules and regulations about the planning process.” (Interviewee BB)*

One of the important differences between private offices and municipalities has been related to the use of innovative methods in both analysis and decision-making processes.

Private offices complete the planning process by doing the jobs defined by the employer, which are mostly included in the technical specification documents. On the other hand, although rarely, innovative methods can be tried in municipalities, depending on the initiative of the planner responsible for that plan.

Here, it is seen that counseling received from academic staff is very effective. Municipalities can sometimes get support from academicians for the work of the plan itself, and sometimes for the research works that will form the basis for that plan. In this process, it is seen that innovative methods are tried and more dynamic plans can be made in this sense.

In the international literature, there are studies with findings that support the gap between academic knowledge and practice. Hurley and his colleagues (Hurley et al., 2016: 4) claim that professionals do not prefer academic language because it is not clear, or easily implementable.

One of our interviewees, who was one of the planners in the municipality, made an important determination in which he said that academic staff and planners working in the public sector are rivals of each other.

*“Academic staff are mostly involved in the theoretical and supervisory side of the planning work. For example, a person who criticizes a plan writes a report, acts as an expert, or becomes a consultant to the professional chamber that sues to cancel a plan that has problems. For this reason, academics are not particularly liked by private offices, and sometimes they can work with municipalities.” (Interviewee AA)*

#### 4. Citizen Participation is very Limited

None of the private office planners, nor the municipality planners marked actively communicative methods or mentioned any other consensus-building techniques. The fact that the participation processes are not operated causes the understanding of democratic planning to fall behind on the one hand, and on the other hand, brings along the inability to meet the demands and needs of the people as required, and causes the gap between research and practice in the field of planning to grow.

Regarding participation, the main problem mentioned by private office planners' interviewees was that very limited time is allocated for planning, then they only focus on land use investigation.

*"I think Turkey is not ready for a participatory decision-making process. If you try to make this happen, you will fail. Which project is done through public participation?" (Office 1)*

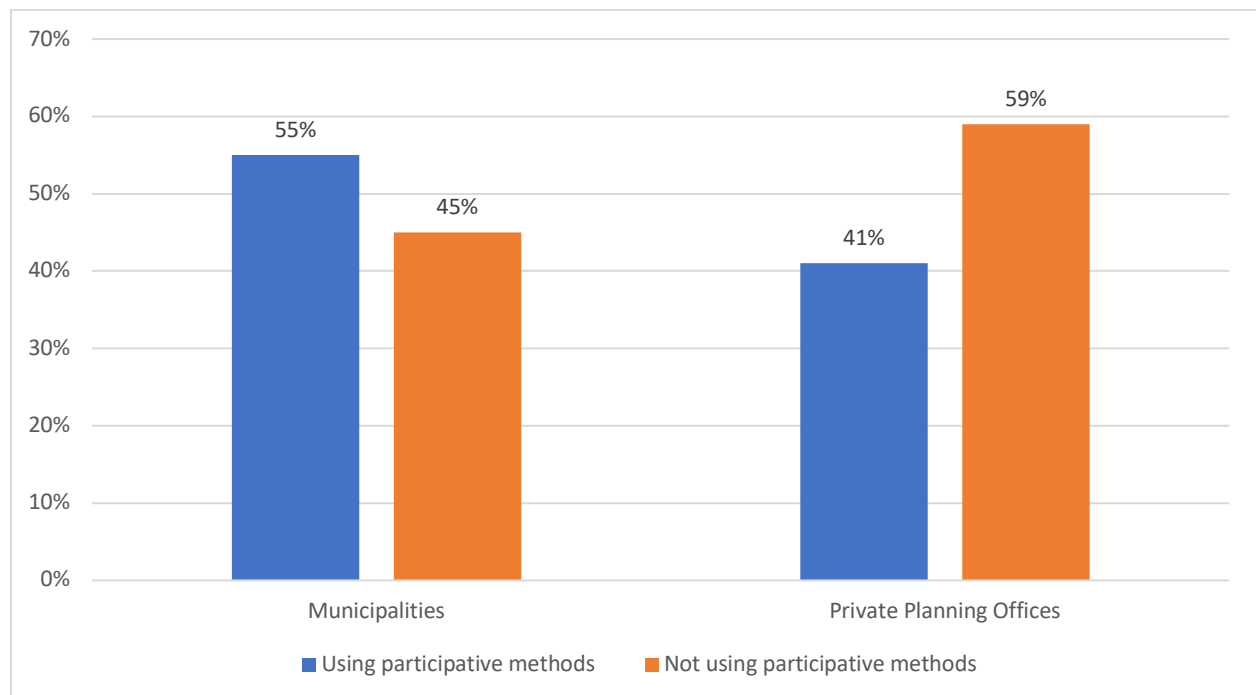


Figure 3. Use of Participative Methods (Source: Planning Process Research – Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University - 2018/2020)

In both municipalities and private planning offices, participative methods are rarely used. Even the half of the survey participants affirm that they use participative methods, in-depth interviews show that planners contact citizens usually one time in the whole planning process. Private planning offices affirm that they spend very little time at the planning field.

JOB DESCRIPTION	TIME
Research / Analysis Report	45 Days
1/1000 Implementary Development Plan + Report	100 - 110 Days
1/5000 Master Land-Use Plan + Report	100 - 180 Days

Table 3. Example Timetable in a Technical Specification Document of a Planning Job.

As the El-Kohlei said urban planning practice became now a kind of consensus-building technic itself (El-Kholei, 2020) in the world wide. In Turkey case, only one and short field trip can be sufficient for the planners. The fieldwork done in these short periods surely affects the number of actors with whom a relationship is established. Participation can not be done properly, the consensus-building technics are not in use.

## 5. Decision-Making Process Builds Upon the Important Actors' Demands

The decision-making process in planning should mostly be based on the findings obtained as a result of analysis and synthesis reports. However, in practice, it is seen that the decision-making process is actually shaped by the demands or needs of important actors rather than these findings. A planner from the municipality states:

*"Analysis, synthesis, citizen meetings, etc. are important in plan making processes. However, meetings with other public institutions, etc., and opinions from institutions and organizations have a much more important place in the basic decisions taken regarding the plans." (Interviewee BB)*

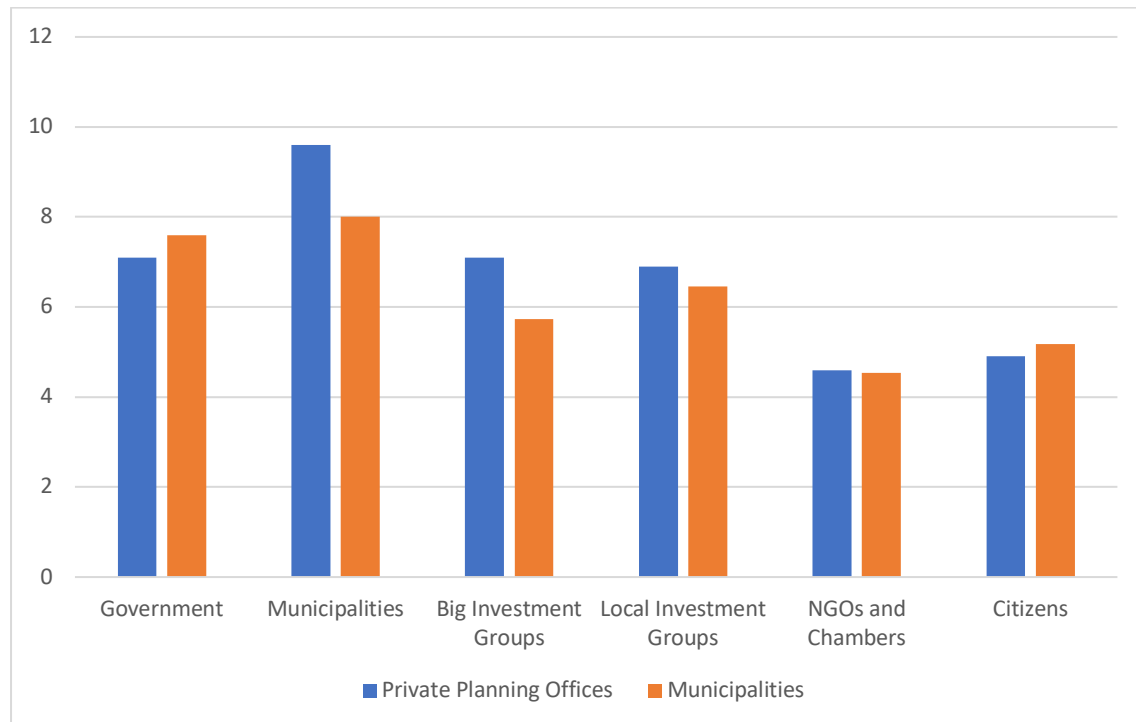


Figure 4. Important Actors During Decision-Making Process (Source: Planning Process Research – Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University - 2018/2020)

With that, when asked which actors were the most effective in the planning process, the participants gave each actor a score out of 10. As a result, it was seen that both the planners working in the municipality and the planners working in the private office gave similar scores to all actors. NGOs and urban residents are chosen as the least effective actors by both municipality and private office planners.

Palermo and Ponzini (2010) argue that different themes and scales are needed to produce good projects by encouraging a multi-method analysis and decision-making process that is still relevant today. In Turkey planning practice, we do not find a comprehensive methodology to reach the decision-making stage.

## 6. Interdisciplinary Cooperation is Poor

However, the gap between theory and practice is not simply because there is no relationship between academic work and practice of planning. Urban studies which cover interdisciplinary researchers must be the main field nurturing the planning practice. Despite this, our research reveals that it is almost impossible for Turkey to see people from different disciplines and to come across joint studies in planning practice. Except for the special plans that are only required by the regulations, experts from different disciplines are almost not included in any planning work. Although very rarely some urban experts are included in planning studies, this remains a very limited consultancy service. Pinson (2004) claims that urban planning is multidisciplinary, integrating professionals, educators, and researchers specialized in a wide range of fields. This multi-disciplinarity is necessary to establish a strong link between research and practice.

A study conducted in Australia and Germany concludes that more time is needed for multidisciplinary work to take place, which is why it is difficult. (Taylor and Hurley, 2016)

Within the Turkish planning ecosystem, a very specific guide specifies how project owners are determined and these are only people who are graduated from urban and regional planning departments.

*“Today, the primary factor affecting the planning process is legal issues. For example, we cannot easily include a sociologist in a planning process. We are doing this job to make money; to include someone who is not a planner complicates our job. (Office L)*

Private sector planners claim that the planning practice must be done very quickly, because time is very limited in their project contracts. Including someone from a different discipline is undesirable as it prolongs the work. On the other hand, the fact that each new expert has a separate cost is the main reason for not being able to do an interdisciplinary work, especially for private offices.

*“The majority of the planning work is done by planners, so that they have a comprehensive knowledge of the issues. It is better for the teams to consist only of planners.” (Office I)*

They underline that the planners know and understand better about the work to be done. On the other hand, it is stated that the planning work mostly consists of bringing the laws into effect, and therefore it is easier to work with people who are familiar with laws and regulations. On the other hand, the planners in the municipality stated that working with different disciplines is not difficult or costly, on the contrary, it makes things easier in a way.

*“During a planning process (in municipality) where I was the leading planner, I decided to make a comprehensive social research so I could do it easily. I made a cooperation with social services department and they made the process very easy. In the private planning offices this kind of research costs too much.” (Interviewee BB)*

The most important reason for the above view is that public institutions already employ people from different fields of expertise and it may be easier to attract these people into a planning study. Another advantage of municipalities and other public institutions is that if the staff focuses on urban studies, since they are employed for a long time rather than a short time, they can gain experience in the practice of this subject for many years. For example, a sociologist can learn this and act faster if he/she mostly takes part in urban planning processes in the municipality where he/she works for a long time.

In metropolitan municipalities, especially in Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, it has been observed that experts such as sociologists, landscape architects and survey engineers are employed in the planning units and they are actively involved in the planning processes.



The lack of the new methods and tools are also associated with the non-interdisciplinary environment, because it is mostly the interdisciplinary atmosphere which encourages discovery of new methods and tools (Diller et al., 2018).

## 7. Conclusion

The research basically tried to reveal the gap between practice and research by addressing the municipalities (public sector) and planning offices (private sector) that carry out planning practice. The research, which looks at the factors that created this gap, reached results in the light of extensive surveys and in-depth interviews with planners working in both municipalities and private offices. First of all, in the field of planning, without distinguishing between municipalities or private offices, several basic reasons are perceived for the disconnection between research and planning practice.

First and foremost, there is a feature of professional habits in Turkish planning practice that does not go beyond laws and regulations. No innovative approach, research method or theoretical discussion that is not written in the regulation or required by law can find a place in the planning practice process. One of the main reasons for this is that planning is treated only as a legal issue. The most frequently mentioned issue by the planners regarding the necessity of participation was to prevent the filing a suit for annulment of the plan and to prevent objections to the plan, which again creates an image consisting of a planning practice carried out only in compliance with the laws and regulations.

Secondly, academic knowledge and practice in the field of planning are progressing disconnectedly. This disconnectedness is primarily due to market pressure on both speed and the need to do cheap work. The necessity of doing business quickly and cheaply prevents planners from reading and following theoretical and methodological innovative approaches. On the other hand, the fact that the above-mentioned planning is considered a legal issue creates a kind of competitive relationship between academics and planners working in practice. Practitioners often do not want academics to get involved, as academics object to the plans and publicly share their criticisms. On the other hand, planners in the market working especially in the private sector, underline that they do this job "to make money", so they do not have the opportunity to act independently from market mechanisms. On the other hand, academics cannot respond to the speed, simplicity and the obligation of doing cheap work that the market needs by working more freely, experimentally and in detail. These differences cause the two groups to become increasingly disconnected from each other.

Partnerships that cannot be established with academics cannot be established with other disciplines for similar reasons. Planning practice that cannot be fed from different disciplines, especially urban studies, cannot develop new tools and techniques for research, so the analysis framework established in the 1970s is still valid in planning studies.

Finally, the planning practice, which cannot include innovative techniques for research methods and approaches, has become unable to adequately apply participatory planning processes. When asked to list the participatory methods they used, planners only reveal surveys, public briefing about the plan, and interviews with key actors. The fact that participation is a longer, compelling and expensive process also limits its entry into the Turkish planning system.

In addition to all these, it is seen that the planning is mostly outsourced to private offices by municipalities, and the planning work is mostly done by private offices. Municipalities, in fact, can make plans with more innovative research approaches due to the diversity of their personnel, having more time to plan, and being in contact with local actors. The bidding of plans entails a faster, more superficial research process and an implementation process that is more focused on persuading key actors.

In order to improve the future planning practice, there is a need for a new legislation in which more in-depth research is obligatory and the accession process is imperative, to create the opportunity for all this discussion to enter the planning laws and regulations in Turkey. Planning field in Turkey can only make a claim in the process of creating the cities of the future by creating a new environment in which theory, research and planning and implementation processes are discussed within itself.

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