Research Paper

Exploring Urban Resilience and Dichotomy of Transformation Projects in İstanbul:

A Comparative Study of Gasworks Museum and Galataport İstanbul

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Abstract

Urban transformation in İstanbul reflects a complex interplay between preserving cultural heritage, promoting inclusive development, and accommodating economic narrative of land rent sharing amidst rapid urbanization pressures. In recent years urban transformation projects in İstanbul increased in number with the aim of achieving a more resilient city, to combat the crises today's cities face. The rationale for the urban transformation projects varies from climate and disaster risks to regeneration of inert or unused areas. While increasing number of transformation projects present distinct approaches, they give rise to controversies on the social, economic trade-offs. This research focuses on two pivotal industrial area transformation projects: the Gasworks Museum (Müze Gazhane) and Galataport İstanbul, each representing distinct transformation models and operating paradigms in urban regeneration. These projects illustrate contrasting approaches to balancing historical preservation with modern development needs; thereby influencing urban resilience across economic, social and ecological dimensions at different levels. While the Gasworks Museum (Müze Gazhane) project exemplifies a preservation-oriented mode, rooted in adaptive reuse of industrial heritage to promote cultural continuity and community identity, Galataport İstanbul as a large-scale cruise-port transformation project epitomizes a commercial-driven approach underpinned by neoliberal policies. This study contributes to the understanding of the underlying dynamics driving transformation processes and their impacts on urban resilience, illustrated through two distinct transformation projects in İstanbul.

Keywords

Urban Resilience, Urban Transformation Projects, Industrial Heritage Preservation, Economic and Social Trade-offs, İstanbul.

1. Introduction

İstanbul, as a city under immense urbanization pressure, is experiencing a rise in urban transformation projects aimed at making it more resilient. These projects often balance the preservation of cultural heritage, inclusive development, and economic growth. However, they also reveal tensions, particularly between social, ecological, and economic trade-offs. This study investigates two such transformation projects: the Gasworks Museum and Galataport, which highlight contrasting models of development.

The Gasworks Museum exemplifies a preservation-oriented model that enhances social and ecological resilience by fostering community engagement and adaptive reuse of historical sites. It promotes cultural

continuity, social cohesion, and the development of local creative industries (Özgüner, 2021). The transformation of Gasworks Museum is paved with the activities of the civil society organization called Gazhane Environmental Volunteers. By repurposing the historic gasworks complex into a museum and cultural hub, the project not only preserves tangible and intangible urban memories but also fosters local economic activities through cultural and creative industries taking its power from the local. This model enhances social cohesion by engaging local communities in the regeneration process, thereby bolstering community resilience for its surrounding area (Leblebici, 2023). Galataport represents a commercial-driven model focused on economic revitalization through luxury tourism and mixed-use development (Çobanyımaz, 2018). It prioritizes economic growth but compromises social inclusivity and raises environmental concerns, limiting its broader resilience impact. While the project focuses on economic revitalization and job creation, debates are emerging over the impact on local businesses, displacement risks and environmental sustainability (Boz, 2018; Bilal, 2019). Galataport project's focus on luxury tourism and high-end commercial spaces and subsequent transformation of the urban fabric and socio-economic dynamics of the area, poses challenges to social inclusivity and community resilience. The transformation of the port into a large-scale infrastructure development also raised debates of preservation of coastline along with the discussions on how a newly built building complex would be incorporated to a historic urban fabric. Analyzing these projects through urban resilience framework reveals their broader implications on Istanbul's socio-economic landscape. The Gasworks Museum model demonstrates how adaptive reuse of industrial sites can foster economic diversity, preserve cultural heritage, and empower local communities, thereby enhance overall urban resilience. Conversely, Galataport model reflects the trade-offs between economic growth and social inclusiveness, underlining the need for a balanced development strategy that would mitigate negative socio-economic impacts and reduce environmental degradation.

By examining these two transformation processes in İstanbul through the framework of urban resilience this study aims to deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics in urban transformation processes and their significant impacts on urban resilience. By examining the unique cases of Galataport and the Gasworks Museum, it sheds light on how distinct transformation and operational models influence urban resilience across economic, social, and ecological dimensions in complex, evolving urban contexts like Istanbul. This research emphasizes how adaptive reuse, commercialization, and controlled access strategies affect not only the physical landscape but also the social fabric, economic stability, and ecological sustainability of urban areas. Furthermore, it explores how resilience is created and affected by inclusivity, public accessibility, and the trade-offs between preserving heritage and fostering economic growth. The multidimensional nature of resilience within these projects offers a comprehensive approach to the study and offers insights to create resilient urban spaces that can adapt to socio-economic pressures and environmental uncertainties while maintaining the cultural and historical identity of the city.

2. Theoretical Framework: Urban Resilience and Transformation Projects

2.1. Conceptualizing Urban Resilience

Urban resilience has emerged as a vital concept in urban planning, focusing on cities' ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from various shocks and stresses, including environmental, social, and economic disruptions (Meerow et al., 2016; Adger, 2000). Rooted in both ecology and social sciences, resilience is often framed as a multifaceted capacity that allows urban systems to maintain function despite changing conditions, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability and adaptability (Ahern, 2011). This approach has gained traction as cities face increasing pressures from climate change, rapid urbanization, and socio-economic inequalities, underscoring the need for adaptive strategies that span diverse dimensions of

resilience. Pickett et al. defines resilience as "the ability of a system to adjust in the face of changing conditions, while Godschalk (2003) explains the concept of resilience as a sustainable network which consist of physical systems and human communities. In the literature mainly resilience is defined through systems or a city's own capacity to withstand any disturbances of stresses and usually hazards. Focusing on the essential functions in a city such as housing, commerce, industry governance and social interaction, Hamilton (2009) asserts a resilient city has the capacity to bounce back and maintain its essential functions despite facing. In several cases resilience to one particular hazard or a disturbance is addressed such as climate-resilience, disaster resilience, earthquake resilience etc. (Datola, 2003; Saez Ujaque, 2021; Freitag et al., 2014; Cutter et al., 2008). Meerow et al. (2015) combines all these with as systematic approach an proposes the following explanation: "Urban resilience refers to the ability of an urban system-and all its constituent socio-ecological and socio-technical networks across temporal and spatial scales-to maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems that limit current or future adaptive capacity."

2.2. Dimensions of Urban Resilience

Urban resilience is the capacity of cities and urban systems to absorb shocks, stresses or crises; quickly bouncing back and maintain its essential functions, well-being and quality of life. It is about a city's ability not only to recover from disruptions but also to adapt to changing conditions in order to sustain stability and continuity. Various studies highlight a broad spectrum of resilience dimensions, with scholars emphasizing socio-economic, infrastructural, institutional, and governance-related factors as essential components of resilient urban systems (Meerow et al., 2016; Ahern, 2011; Chelleri, 2012). For instance, socio-economic resilience focuses on the community's adaptability and economic robustness, while infrastructural resilience emphasizes the durability and flexibility of physical systems and networks. Institutional resilience looks at how policies and structures provide support to adaptation, while governance resilience underlines the role of effective, inclusive decision-making.

This study bases its analysis of urban resilience among four key dimensions: social, economic, ecological, and governance, which will be very important in understanding the resilience within Istanbul's dynamic urban landscape. These four dimensions of resilience both independently and collectively impact a city's ability to respond to contingencies, shocks, stresses or other crises.

Social Resilience: Social resilience inclues key dimensions such as inclusivity, culture, community building and a high sense of community identity. A socially resilient community can absorb, adapt, and thrive in response to disruptions due to supportive social networks and equal access to resources. While promoting equity and inclusivity, social resilience ensures all groups, especially vulnerable population, to have the oppotunity to participate in urban life and access essential urban services. Another factor that fosters social resilience is cultural and historial continuity of communities in the face of a crisis or change. Stong bonds in a community reflects its ability to mitigate, withstand and adapt to the risks. The displacement risk and loss of the urban identity and concequently loss of social resilience is closely linked with and should be considered in rapid urban transformation projects. (Kwok et al., 2018; Renchler, 2010).

Economic Resilience: Economies that promote a diversified economy that can withstand external shocks and sustain development (and economic growth), promote innovation and collaboration and are community driven, encourage local businesses are resilient economies. Resilient urban economies provide diverse employment opportunities and support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which increase adaptability and distribute economic benefits more broadly. An economically resilient city is less dependent on a single industry or market and instead fosters sustainable economic activities that can

respond to both global economic shifts and localized disruptions. In the case of a economic shock or a crisis, diversity of economic activities play an important role to provide stability by enabling cities to recover faster.

Ecological Resilience: Ecological resilience emphasizes sustainable resource management, green infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and the protection of natural ecosystems that reduce environmental risks and maintain biodiversity. Ecological resilience enables cities to maintain ecosystem services that support urban life while also reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts (Tong, 2021). Ecologically sustainable and resilient cities support a livable environment not only for the present but also for future generations by utilizing and creating the necessary increntives for sustainable solutions such as energy efficiency, reusable energy, waste reduction, circular economy, prioritizing green infrastructure and nature based solutions.

Governance (Institutional) Resilience: Urban resilience requires effective governance through inclusive, transparent, and adaptive decision-making processes that allow the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Governance resilience sustains the need for participatory structures encouraging collaboration between government agencies, private sector actors, and community organizations to enable quicker responses to crises, equitable allocation of resources, and adaptable plans toward long-term urban needs (Kwok et al., 2018). It means that resilient governance systems will allow cities to implement adaptive strategies, make resources available more equitably, and respond inclusively to the needs of communities while reinforcing all dimensions of resilience (Pickett et al., 2013).

2.2. Urban Transformation Projects and Their Role in Urban Resilience

The rapid population growth and fast urbanization increases the pressure in urban systems leading to problems of climate change, ecological crises, the unequal distribution of resources and socio-economic disparities. While urban transformation projects carry the potential to foster urban resilience by creating just and inclusive spaces, they can also create new vulnerabilities that deepen the existing problems. These projects often involve reimagining and transforming urban areas, such as neglected waterfronts, industrial zones, and historical sites, into adaptive and multi-functional areas that are able to respond to current needs while still preserving cultural heritage.

Transformation projects can contribute to urban resilience by fostering economic diversity, enhancing public spaces, and promoting ecological sustainability, while also considering the needs of the existing community and responding to these need. Mixed-use developments, for example, provide adaptable spaces that support both economic activity and social interaction, creating vibrant, multi-functional neighborhoods that can create an boost for the local economy. Projects that incorporate nature-based solutions, green infrastructure and energy-efficient design choices support ecological resilience by mitigating environmental impacts.

The success of an urban transformation project depends on its demeanor, objectives and the tools it uses. It is also shaped by what the project prioritizes and what are the trade-offs for this prioritization. For a resilient urban area, the transformation that follows inclusive planning and governance framework, which engages communities and addresses their needs could be much more successful on the long run. When managed inclusively, transformation projects can increase social cohesion, strengthen local identity and provide resources equally for resilient urban environments while responding effectively to future uncertainties.

3. Methodology

3.1. Analytical Framework of the Study

This study provides a critical comparative analysis of two distinct urban transformation project examples in İstanbul, Müze Gazhane (Gasworks Museum) and Galataport İstanbul projects, with their contributions to the framework of urban resilience. Investigating social, economic, ecological, and governance dimensions, it explains how each approach contributes or contests the urban resilience framework. A comparative study approach is employed to reveal how differing transformation models impact these four key dimensions, providing insight into the broader implications of each project.

To investigate these dynamics, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the study, enabling a systematic exploration of the ways these transformation models interact with urban resilience:

a.) How do the Gasworks Museum and Galataport projects impact urban resilience across social, economic, ecological, and governance dimensions? This question investigates to what extent each of these initiatives integrates social inclusivity, economic viability, conservation of the environment, and effective governance. It inquiries the impact of these factors in terms of the ability of the projects to respond and mitigate urban challenges such as displacement, economic inequality, and environmental degradation.

b.) How do differing approaches to community involvement in the Gasworks Museum and Galataport projects influence their overall contribution to urban resilience? This question examines the role of community engagement in the planning and implementation of each project. By analyzing the presence or absence of local participation, this question aims to unravel the outcomes in terms of social cohesion, local identity, and the projects' alignment with the needs of local residents.

4. Gasworks Museum: Revitalizing Heritage for Resilient Communities

Located in İstanbul's Kadıköy district, The Gasworks Museum is an adaptive reuse project that transforms a historic industrial complex into a vibrant cultural and creative community hub. The facility was originally constructed as a gasworks facility in the late 19th century and became the main source of gas energy for the city (Bilal, 2019; Özgüner, 2021; Kıraç, 2023). In 1993 the gasworks facilities operation ceased and the facility was left to be abandoned. After decades of abandonment, the complex was in danger of deterioration, but efforts were mobilized to preserve its architectural and historical integrity, thanks to a coalition of local civil society advocates known as Gazhane Environmental Volunteers. These efforts resulted in a transformation project that emphasizes cultural preservation, community engagement, and reuse to ensure the continuity of heritage sites and strengthen local identity.

While blending heritage with modern functionality, the preservation-focused transformation of Gasworks Museum not only revitalizes the site but also reintroduces the site as a public cultural asset. Presently, the museum holds a variety of spaces for exhibitions, workshops, performances, and educational programs, inviting a diversity of visitors to discover Istanbul's industrial heritage (Figure 1). Gasworks Museum is an exemplary project that shows how heritage sites can be throughtfully adapted to meet contemporary urban needs while preserving their historical significance (Leblebici, 2023). In this project the preservation was possible through adaptive resused of cities and preserving the original architecturall elements.

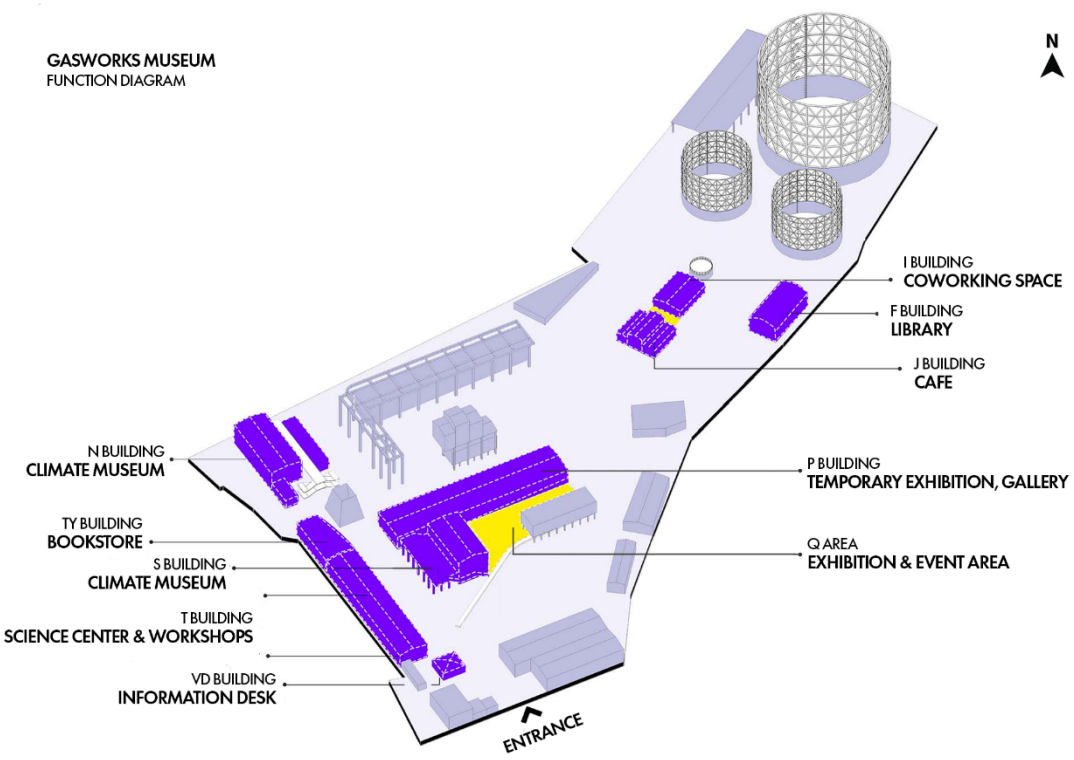

Figure 1. Plan Layout of Gasworks Museum showing museum and exhibition areas, collective working areas, galleries and recreational open areas. Source: https://www.arkitera.com/proje/muze-gazhane-muze-ve-kutuphane-binalari-yeniden-islevlendirme-ve-ic-mekan-tasarimlari/.

Figure 2. The J Building, the café and the shared recreational open area, Gasworks Museum. Source: Authors Archive.

Figure 3. Stages and Library, Gasworks Museum. Source: Authors Archive.

4.1. Impacts on Urban Resilience

Social Resilience: The Gasworks Museum enhances social resilience by creating inclusive spaces for public gatherings, cultural events and educational activities. This focus on community, fosters a strong sense of place and belonging, promoting social cohesion and inclusivity while celebrating Istanbul's industrial heritage. Through active community engagement and the development of a variety of social programs, the museum strengthens social ties and promotes local identity, creating a strong foundation for community building.

- **Economic Resilience**: The transformation of the Gasworks into a cultural hub has generated opportunities in the creative and cultural industries. Thus it reinforces the opportunities to attract tourists, foster local job creation, and support small businesses. By strengthening the cultural economy of the region, the museum promotes diversity and stability in terms of economy, and strengthens the region's resilience to economic and financial crises and shocks.
- **Ecological Resilience**: The project enhances ecological resilience by repurposing a former industrial site, minimizing the environmental impact of new building, and integrating sustainable practices such as green landscaping and energy-efficient technology. These attributes foster an environmentally sustainable urban environment that enhances biodiversity, alleviates urban heat, and offers green public spaces, benefiting both humanity and the ecosystem.
- **Governance Resilience**: Through a collaborative approach involving civil socity, local governments and private stakeholders, the Gasworks Museum is a striking example of governance resilience. The active involvement of the Gazhane Environmental Volunteers and other community organizations secure local interests and enhances the public embrace of the cultural site. The participatory governance model ensures transparency, adaptability, and accountability, and in doing so, strengthens the sustainability of the museum and provides a model for future heritage ventures to replicate.

By working together with local government, commercial stakeholders, and civil society, the Gasworks Museum is a remarkable example of governance resilience. The project represents local interests and enhances public ownership of the cultural site thanks to the proactive involvement of the Gazhane Environmental Volunteers and other community organizations. The museum's sustainability is enhanced by this participatory governance model, which also offers a repeatable governance framework for upcoming heritage initiatives by encouraging accountability, flexibility, and transparency.

5. Galataport İstanbul: Navigating Neoliberalism in Urban Renewal

Galataport İstanbul, situated on the Bosporus waterfront, represents a landmark urban renewal project launched in 2013 and finished in 2023 in the historic Salı Pazarı area, Karaköy near İstanbul Bosphorus. Designed to revitalize a previously underutilized industrial waterfront, Galataport spans over 1.2 kilometers and incorporates mixed-use spaces, including a cruise port, retail, dining, cultural centers, offices, and residential units (Figure 4) (Bilal, 2019; Boz, 2018; Çobanyılmaz, 2018). During this transformation, the Karaköy Passenger Hall, an architectural competition project from the 1930s designed by Rebii Gorbon in the modernist style, was demolished, sacrificing a historical piece of Istanbul's modern architectural heritage. This large-scale project, orchestrated mainly by private investment, embodies a neoliberal approach to urban renewal, emphasizing privatized, consumer-driven spaces.

A defining feature of the project is its controlled access, particularly prioritizing the needs of high-income consumers and international cruise ship tourists (Erbil, 2024). The design ensures regulated entry to key areas, maximizing economic gains from transient high-income groups while limiting easy public access. Although the project provides renewed public spaces, these are largely structured to promote consumption, prioritizing retail and leisure activities over community needs. The fencing around Galataport also spatially segregates it from the adjacent historic fabric, creating a perceptible divide that disrupts continuity with surrounding neighborhoods and further reinforces economic exclusivity. Consequently, while the project brings economic vitality, it raises concerns regarding social inclusivity and the displacement of local, lower-income populations, reflecting the broader tensions in Istanbul's neoliberal urban strategies (Kara, 2022).

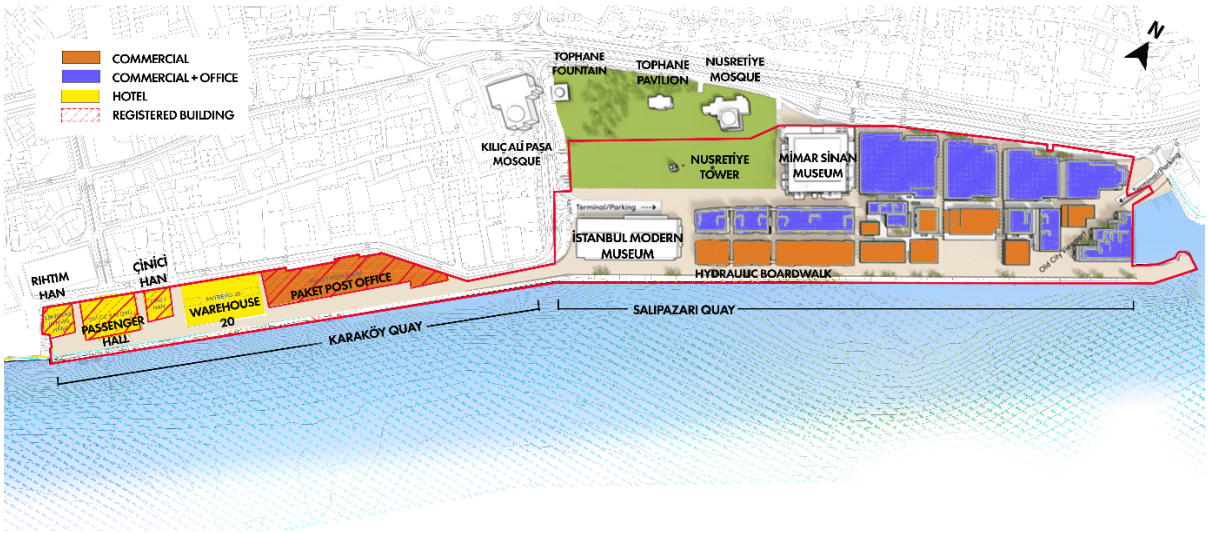

Figure 4. Galataport İstanbul Transformation Plan (Site Plan shows the locations and functions of the structures planned within the scope of the project in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report) Source: http://arkita.com/haber/galataportun-master-planini-dror-ve-gensler-tasarliyor/

Figure 5. Galataport İstanbul, coast view when a cruise ship docked. Source: Authors Archive.

Figure 6. Aerial View of Galataport İstanbul. Source: https://www.instagram.com/galataportistanbul/

5.1. Impacts on Urban Resilience

Social Resilience: Galataport development, with its high-end tourism and high-class commercial spaces, has produced an environment that appeals predominantly to high-spending visitors and tourists, possibly at the expense of local populations' interests. The restricted access and high-end orientation of the development have restricted accessible and affordable public spaces, raising concerns regarding social inclusivity and community resilience. The exclusion of lower-income residents from this redeveloped waterfront reduces opportunities for social interaction and weakens the sense of community that supports social resilience. Furthermore, insufficiency of affordable cultural and recreational amenities may weaken the cultural ties between the local comminities and the urban space.

Economic Resilience: The Galataport İstanbul transformation project aims to enhance Istanbul's economy by attracting international tourists and creating employment opportunities in hospitality, retail, and associated sectors. This surge in economic activity bolsters local enterprises serving affluent tourists, although the advantages may be inequitably allocated, resulting in a disparity between beneficiaries of the luxury-driven economy and those marginalized by it. Existing social and economic gaps in the region can become amplified through such a high-end economy model, constraining overall economic resilience in the community at a larger level.

Ecological Resilience: Galaport being one od the large-scale infrastructure development along İstanbul's historic waterfront raises concerns about ecological sustainability and potential threats for the preservation of natural coastal ecosystem. While the project claims to integrate sustainable solutions and practices, the long term impact of a large scale coastal project and cruise traffic in the coastal areas raises questions on preservation of biodiversity, water quality, mucilage and other disturbances to the ecology. Overall ecological resilience entails a balanced urban development with a minimum impact over environment degradation and a maximization of renewable use of resources with adequate regulations.

Governance Resilience: In Galataport, the top-down model, which prioritizes private investment and large commercial interests, has generated little public consultation, which may make it less attuned to local needs and less sustainable in the long term with community support. Governance resilience values participatory, inclusive decision-making processes that adapt to emerging challenges. Galataport has also been embroiled in many controversies with civil society organizations and professional chambers (Çobanyılmaz, 2018). In order to foster governance and institutional resilience the future adjustments in Galataport project should include a highly collaborative governance model that creates the opportunity for citizen involvement and consider community needs and expectations.

6. Comparative Discussion of Findings

Gasworks Museum prioritizes heritage preservation, community engagement, and sustainability, offering a model of transformation that supports social cohesion and ecological balance. Galataport, on the other hand, emphasizes economic growth through luxury tourism and commercial development, yet it brings challenges related to social inclusivity and environmental impact. This comparison highlights the contrasting approaches and their broader implications for urban resilience in İstanbul.

6.1. Diverging Approaches to Urban Resilience

The Gasworks Museum exemplifies a preservation-oriented model that enhances social and ecological resilience by fostering community engagement and adaptive reuse of historical sites. It promotes cultural continuity, social cohesion, and the development of local creative industries.

In contrast, Galataport represents a commercial-driven model focused on economic revitalization through luxury tourism and mixed-use development. This approach prioritizes economic growth but compromises social inclusivity and raises environmental concerns, limiting its broader resilience impact.

6.2. Community Involvement versus Market-Driven Development

The Gasworks Museum's transformation was rooted in civil society involvement, particularly through local groups like the Gazhane Environmental Volunteers. The participatory process rooted in Gasworks Museum strengthens community belonging and acceptance of the project. This is apparent in the locals using this space frequently marking the museum complex area as a meeting and socializing point.

On contrary Galataport transformation comes from a top-down development in which neoliberal policies and market forces play pivotal roles. This led to social displacement and reduced public access to coastal areas, weakening the social resilience of local communities.

6.3. Trade-offs in Economic and Ecological Resilience

Galataport has generated economic growth and provided employment through the establishment of luxury commercial spaces and tourism; nevertheless, it has also prompted concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of this model due to its effects on the local economy and ecology.

The Gasworks Museum fosters local economic initiatives via cultural programs and the creative economy, while enhancing ecological resilience by converting an industrial site into a sustainable cultural center (cultural hub).

These findings emphasize the necessity of integrating social, economic, and ecological factors in urban transformation initiatives to bolster urban resilience across several dimensions.

7. Conclusion

The Gasworks Museum and Galataport projects represent the complex urban landscape of İstanbul, where swift developmental demands contrast with the imperative to save cultural heritage and promote social inclusion. Although both projects are crucial in influencing İstanbul's spatial and socio-economic environments, they exemplify two divergent agendas and trade-offs in urban development initiatives. This study enhances the discourse on urban resilience by highlighting the integral understanding of social, economic, and ecological objectives, as well as community engagement in the planning process. It underscores the need of acknowledging the risks linked to prioritizing economic growth over diversity and sustainability. These insights provide essential direction for urban designers, policymakers, and communities aiming for resilient cities.

For future studies, key opportunities can be sought after to enhance resilience in large scale transformation projects like Galataport İstanbul. Addressing social inequalities, instead of prioritizing commercializing the area in the sake of economic profit would offer a one step forward for social resilience. This would be further enforced if more community involvement in planning enables future projects to reflect more accurately the needs and values of the community. The balance between long-term economic growth and sustainability involves reducing environmental harm and enhancing ecological health. This study underlines that urban resilience is multidimensional, with social, economic, and ecological priorities to be carefully balanced. The comparative analysis of Gasworks Musem and Glataport reveal important insights about urban transformation trade-offs, suggesting that transformation projects must prioritize inclusivity, cultural preservation and environmental sustainability ro truly foster resilience.

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