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Contesting the Coastline: Producing Publicness in Alsancak Kordonboyu, İzmir

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Abstract

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Rights of use and ownership of urban spaces in Türkiye's neoliberal urbanization have triggered a constant negotiation of power between government, capital, and civil society since the 1980s. This study explores coastal urban space as a struggle area for economic, political, and social forces through the case of Alsancak Kordonboyu in İzmir. Critically, the Kordonboyu marks a shift from a resisted top-down highway project to a collaborative, designed reclamation of coastal publicness. By deciphering three decades of its transformation through spatial analysis, document review and interviews, the research reveals a unique trajectory of spatial production. Results demonstrate that the coastline has emerged as a contested urban space—created with the public, yet sometimes against the public—driven by grassroots mobilization and collaborative design culture. This reveals inherent contradictions within the right to the city, highlighting how collective resistance and institutional design efforts fundamentally redefine the boundaries of the public sphere.

Keywords: Right to the city; Publicness; Coastal urban space; Neoliberal urbanization; İzmir.

1. Introduction

Under neoliberal urbanization, public spaces are increasingly shaped at the intersection of political, economic, and social forces, where competing claims over access, control, and use are continuously negotiated (Aksoy & Firidin Özgür, 2020; Kohn, 2004; Madanipour, 1999; Mitchell, 2003). Market-driven approaches exert significant pressure on the production of public space, leading to the gradual erosion of genuinely public domains, the expansion of privatized environments, and the proliferation of highly controlled pseudo-public spaces (Atkinson, 2003; Madanipour, 1999; Mitchell, 2003; Aziz Amen, 2022). Within this context, public space emerges not only as a site of conflict but also as a dynamic actor who actively produces urban transformation (Aksu & Tutar, 2021; Gezer Çatalbaş & Akpınar, 2025; Tanrıverdi & Güneş, 2023).

These dynamics become particularly visible in coastal urban spaces. As the boundary between land and sea, coastlines can be understood as urban spaces where tensions between capital accumulation processes operating at multiple scales, and claims of democratic planning procedures and public interest, materialize (Davidson, 2020; Sandercock & Dovey, 2002; Aziz Amen & Ali, 2025). On the one hand, they are increasingly integrated into global circuits of capital through infrastructure investments, transportation networks, tourism development, and waterfront regeneration projects (Desfor & Laidley, 2010). This process reflects broader urban transformations characterized by increasing socio-spatial fragmentation and the weakening of public space as a central node of urban social life, as discussed by Madanipour (1999), who emphasizes the growing importance of urban design in re-establishing inclusive public spaces. Within this context, coastlines emerge as critical urban spaces where these broader structural dynamics and local public claims directly collide. On the other hand, coastlines continue to function as everyday spaces of encounter, leisure, and collective memory, where public access and lived experience remain actively reproduced. As a result, coastal urban space provides a particularly productive lens for examining how publicness is continuously produced, contested, and redefined.

Since the 1990s, Türkiye's economic liberalization and integration into global market dynamics have fundamentally transformed design and planning practices. During this period, urban planning became a spatial instrument of neoliberal urban policy and was increasingly mobilized to facilitate the commodification of space and advance urban entrepreneurialism (Eraydin & Tasan-Kok, 2013; Peck, 2005; Peck et al., 2009). In this context, urban transformation processes are strongly shaped by economic priorities and political strategies, while decision-making at the local government level plays a decisive role in determining spatial outcomes and development trajectories (Yıldız Uslu & Şanlı Katı, 2025).

Within this framework, struggles over public space can be understood through Henri Lefebvre's (1996) conception of the "right to the city," which redefines urban rights not as abstract legal principles but as concrete claims to participation, and urban life itself. For Lefebvre (1996), this right extends beyond access to the city and instead refers to the collective capacity to reshape urban space, reorganize social relations, and reclaim decision-making processes over urban development. Extending this perspective, David Harvey (2012) conceptualizes the right to the city as a collective power to transform urbanization processes, emphasizing that access to urban resources is fundamentally structured through uneven political and economic relations. From this standpoint, neoliberal urban governance constrains this transformative potential by reorienting urban space toward market logics, privileging consumption, investment, and competitiveness over collective use and democratic participation.

Within this broader context, Alsancak Kordonboyu in İzmir provides a particularly illustrative case. Located in the Konak district, the coastline has been a central component of urban life since the late Ottoman period, shaped by port activities, trade infrastructure, and a cosmopolitan urban culture (Kayın, 2023; Tanış, 2022). Frequently described as the "city's largest public stage" (Kayın 2023), Kordonboyu represents a key urban space where everyday practices, collective memory, and public life intersect. As Carr et al. (1992) suggest, such spaces function as stages of communal life where routine and symbolic practices continuously reproduce urban publicness. However, this public character has been repeatedly reshaped through successive urban interventions and planning decisions, as well as through civic, professional, and institutional forms of negotiation and resistance. In this sense, coastal publicness in Kordonboyu has been continuously reconfigured through shifting governance approaches and evolving modes of contestation.



Figure 1. Location of Alsancak Kordonboyu in İzmir (Base Map Source: Google Earth, 2026).

This study aims to analyze the transformation of Alsancak Kordonboyu over last three decades in terms of different understandings of publicness, and to investigate how this transformation is shaped by emerging urban dynamics. Within this framework, the study asks: How is coastal publicness along Alsancak Kordonboyu reproduced through shifting political, economic, and social relations over time?

Methodologically, the research adopts a retrospective reading of urban space, guided by the question: *What was here before?* Using a mixed-methods approach that combines archival research, on-site observation, and semi-structured interviews, the study traces the socio-spatial production of the coastline at different stages of transformation.

The originality of this study lies in its temporal and regime-based reading of coastal publicness, which traces the transformation of Alsancak Kordonboyu through four successive phases of urban intervention, each reflecting distinct governance logics and spatial priorities shaping coastal publicness over time. Rather than treating publicness as a static spatial condition, the study conceptualizes it as a historically layered and continuously reconfigured process. A further contribution is its demonstration that modes of contestation are not fixed but evolve over time, shifting from civic resistance to institutional negotiation, participatory design, and adaptive governance.

In terms of its academic contribution, the study extends debates on public space by shifting attention from static parameters used to measure publicness toward a processual understanding of how publicness is produced through changing governance rationalities. It also contributes to the literature on the "right to the city" by showing that this right is not exercised through a singular form of collective action, but is continuously redefined across different political and spatial regimes. Finally, it advances urban design scholarship by conceptualizing design not merely as a spatial practice, but as a governance mechanism through which publicness is constructed and institutionalized over time.

2. Theoretical Framework: Public Space and Publicness

This section develops the theoretical framework of the study by conceptualizing public space through “complex, unpredictable spatio-temporal processes” (Desfor & Laidley, 2010). The first part discusses the concept of the public and public space through questions of visibility, access, and claim-making. The second part examines publicness not as a fixed attribute, but as a socio-spatial process produced through institutional arrangements, design practices, and political struggles. Together, these discussions provide the theoretical basis for analyzing how coastal publicness is produced, contested, and transformed in Alsancak Kordonboyu.

2.1 Public Space as a Political Realm: Visibility, Access, and Claims

The literature widely recognizes the political and social significance of public space, emphasizing its central role in democratic life (Kohn, 2004; Madanipour, 1999; Mitchell, 2003). On the one hand, public spaces host representations of state power and authority; on the other, they provide settings for demonstrations, protests, and collective expression (Aksoy & Firidin Özgür, 2020). In this framework, Marcuse (2014) defines political public space as a fundamental arena for democratic governance, asserting that the right to “peaceable assembly” within these spaces is an indispensable prerequisite for a democratic society. Furthermore, he highlights an inherent tension in this political role, noting that while the effective use of public space often requires the disruption of official regulations, states frequently maintain a strong incentive to restrict such assemblies. As Firidin Özgür (2018) notes, state organs often restrict usage and marginalize certain groups under the guise of maintaining “public order,” which demonstrates that even under state ownership, the public character of a space is never entirely frictionless. Consequently, public space manifests not merely as a site of representation but inherently as a continuous sphere of struggle (Mitchell, 2003) where different public groups contest for their right to be visible.

The political dimension of public space is thus closely intertwined with questions of visibility and accessibility, which have been theorized from different perspectives by Arendt (1958) and Habermas (1991). Arendt (1958, p. 50) conceptualizes the public realm through appearance, “something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves”. Habermas (1991) conceptualizes accessibility and publicity as constitutive conditions of the public sphere, shifting the focus from physical limitations to the socio-political conditions of free speech and open discussion. From this procedural perspective, the public sphere does not necessitate a fixed spatial boundary; rather, it encompasses any real or virtual medium—including newspapers, digital platforms, and alternative communication channels—where a public can address a wider audience and exert influence on institutional power. From this perspective, publicness is not strictly bound to a physical site, but is produced through conditions that allow publics to emerge and address broader audiences.

However, critical urban theory challenges this normative framing by arguing that visibility and access are never neutral conditions. Mitchell (2003) conceptualizes public space not as a pre-given democratic arena, but as a site of struggle shaped through ongoing conflicts over inclusion, exclusion, and belonging. In this sense, publicness is not an inherent quality of space, but something actively produced through contested spatial practices and acts of claiming presence. From this perspective, public space should be understood not merely as a physical setting for public life because its design is a political process where visibility, access, and spatial claims are continuously negotiated.

2.2 Publicness: From Parameters to Political Process

The publicness of public space has often been conceptualized through measurable attributes. Within this perspective, publicness is understood as a relative condition shaped by the boundaries between public and private, influencing how space is accessed, managed, and used.

One of the foundational frameworks for understanding publicness was proposed by Benn and Gaus (1983), who identify three key dimensions: access, agency, and interest. According to this framework, publicness depends on the extent to which access to spaces, activities, information, and decision-making processes is open to all and oriented toward collective rather than private interests.

Subsequent studies expanded this multidimensional understanding. Varna and Tiesdell (2010) conceptualize publicness through meaning, ownership, control, civility, and physical configuration, emphasizing both symbolic and material dimensions. Similarly, Nemeth and Schmidt (2011) focus on ownership, management, and use, arguing that public ownership tends to support greater social diversity compared to privately controlled spaces. Langstraat and van Melik (2013) further develop this framework through ownership, management, accessibility, and inclusiveness, highlighting both formal and experiential dimensions of publicness. More recently, Li, Dang, and Song (2022) synthesize these approaches in defining the “ideal” public space through ownership, accessibility, management, and inclusiveness.

Taken together, these studies reflect a broader tendency to understand publicness through measurable and comparable criteria. As Kohn (2004) argues, public space functions as a “cluster concept,” where multiple overlapping attributes such as ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity collectively shape publicness.

Despite their analytical value, these approaches risk reducing publicness to a static set of attributes, overlooking its dynamic and contested character. In response, critical urban theory shifts attention from measuring publicness toward understanding how it is produced.

Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes space not as a passive container, but as an active construction produced through social relations, power dynamics, and everyday practices. Within this framework, space operates dialectically as both a product and a means of production: it embodies dominant socio-political structures while simultaneously reproducing and shaping them. This perspective fundamentally shifts the analytical focus from the mere physical and material characteristics of space toward the complex socio-political processes through which space is systematically organized, regulated, and transformed.

Building on this perspective, urban design can be understood as a process through which publicness is materially negotiated. Madanipour (1996, 2006) emphasizes the interaction between process and product, arguing that urban design involves technical, social, and creative dimensions through which spatial outcomes emerge. Inam (2002) similarly

highlights the fragmented and turbulent nature of urban design processes, shaped by distributed agency, and competing interests. Carmona (2014) further conceptualizes urban design as a place-shaping continuum unfolding through design, development, use, and management across time. More recently, Madanipour (2023) introduces the concept of dynamic multiplicity, emphasizing the relational, temporal, and multi-scalar character of urban design processes.

This process-oriented perspective directly links the production of public space to Lefebvre's (1996) and Harvey's (2012) conception of the right to the city. Here, the right to the city extends beyond access to urban resources and becomes a collective right to reshape urbanization itself. Publicness, therefore, should be understood not simply through who can use urban space, but through who has the power to shape its production, transformation, and future.

These questions become particularly significant under neoliberal urbanization, where public spaces are increasingly shaped by growth-oriented development. In such contexts, public spaces may remain formally open and accessible while being increasingly structured by dominant political and economic interests. This contradiction is particularly visible in coastal urban spaces, where public access may be expanded physically while decision-making power remains institutionally concentrated.

From this perspective, this study conceptualizes publicness not as a static set of attributes, but as a socio-spatial process produced through the interaction of institutional frameworks, design practices, and forms of political contestation over time.

3. Methodological Framework: Backwards Reading Coastal Transformation

This study adopts a process-oriented methodological framework that revisits the urban transformation of Alsancak Kordonboyu backwards from the present condition. Instead of constructing a linear historical narrative moving from past to present, the research begins with the current configuration of the coastline, treating it as an outcome of the layered political, social, and design processes.

The backward reading approach is grounded in Lefebvre's (1991) conception of the production of space, which understands urban space through the interaction of political decisions, planning practices, everyday uses, and power relations. From this perspective, urban space does not simply accumulate history in a chronological sequence; rather, it embodies traces of past conflicts, negotiations, and interventions that remain embedded in its present form. Accordingly, the current coastline is approached as a socially produced spatial condition that serves as an analytical entry point for reconstructing the historical processes, actors, and struggles through which it has been continuously produced and transformed.

Alsancak Kordonboyu was selected as the case study due to its layered transformation history and strategic role in İzmir's coastal urbanization. Located along the inner bay of İzmir, within the Kültür and Alsancak neighborhoods, the coastline occupies a central position adjacent to the Port of Alsancak and the Alsancak Ferry Terminal. Structurally framed by Atatürk Avenue and surrounded by dense residential blocks, commercial units, hotels, and socio-cultural facilities, it constitutes one of the city's most active and symbolically significant public spaces. The case is particularly significant because it reveals multiple and contested phases of urban transformation. Since the 1990s, Alsancak Kordonboyu has undergone major spatial interventions. These interventions reflect shifting local government approaches toward public space and provide a critical ground for examining how coastal publicness has been politically and spatially produced.

The research design combines site observation, archival research, and semi-structured interviews within a process-oriented framework (Figure 2). However, these methods are not treated as equivalent or parallel data streams; instead, they are positioned within a sequential logic shaped by the backwards reading approach.

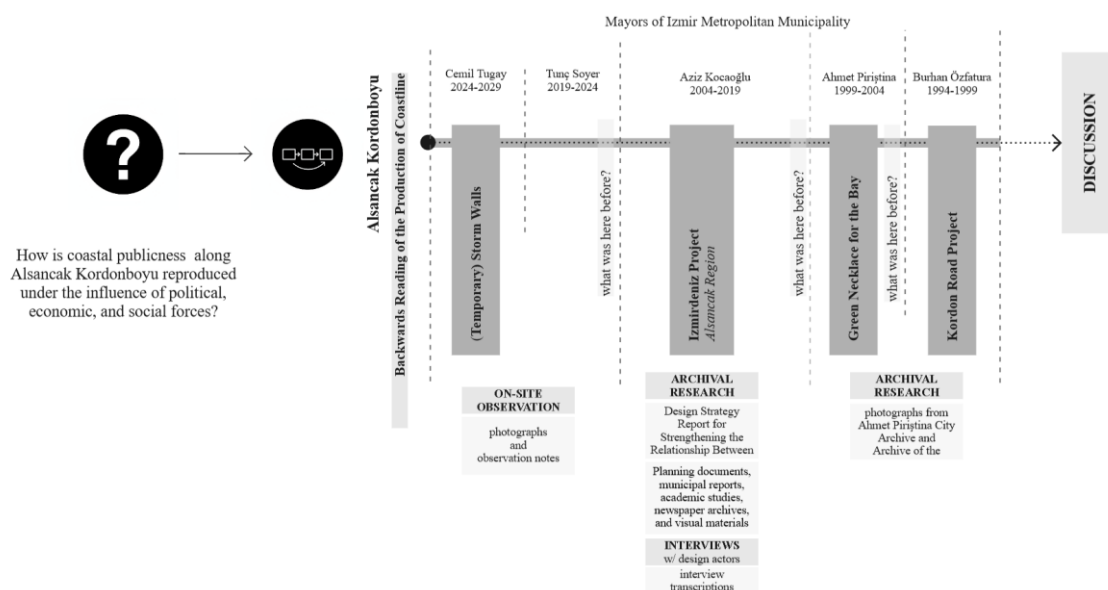


Figure 2. Methodological Framework of the Study (Developed by the Authors).

The research process was initially triggered by site-based observations conducted in Alsancak Kordonboyu between September and November 2025. These observations focused on everyday spatial practices such as walking, sitting, cycling, and informal gatherings, as well as the spatial effects of temporary infrastructural interventions along the

coastline. Rather than functioning solely as descriptive fieldwork, these observations generated a critical analytical question that structured the entire research design: *What was there before?*

This question became the starting point for the subsequent phases of the study. In this sense, site observation operates as an epistemological entry point rather than a final stage of empirical verification, directing attention toward the historical and political processes that produced the observed spatial condition.

Following this, archival research was conducted in order to reconstruct the successive phases of transformation shaping the coastline. Planning documents, municipal reports, academic studies, newspaper archives, and visual materials were examined to identify key moments of rupture, contested projects, and shifts in coastal governance. Particular attention was given to four major interventions and debates that have significantly influenced the production of the coastal space: the Temporary Storm Walls, the Kordon Road Project, the Green Necklace for the Bay initiative, and the İzmirdeniz Project. These cases were analyzed as critical moments through which changing approaches to coastal design can be traced.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with design actors involved in Alsancak Region in the İzmirdeniz Project (Table 1), which represents one of the first large-scale coastal transformation initiatives in İzmir to be developed through a collaborative and participatory design process. The interviews aimed to explore how different design professionals experienced and interpreted this process, and how the project contributed to the redefinition of publicness along the Alsancak coastline.

By combining chronological reconstruction with a backwards reading perspective, the study examines not only the physical transformation of Alsancak Kordonboyu but also the political, institutional, and design processes through which coastal publicness has been continuously reproduced.

Table 1. Information about Interviews.

Interviewees	Profession	Date of Interview
Interviewee A	Architect	14.11.2024
Interviewee B	Architect	10.03.2025
Interviewee C	Urban Planner	13.03.2024

4. Contesting Publicness along Alsancak Kordonboyu

Building on the backwards reading methodology, this section reconstructs the transformation of Alsancak Kordonboyu through a sequence of key moments that have significantly shaped the production of coastal publicness. The analysis moves between present spatial conditions and past interventions in order to trace how public space has been continuously produced, contested, and redefined through shifting political, institutional, and social relations.

The selection of analytical moments is based on their critical role in reshaping coastal publicness through the changing priorities of local governments. These include the Temporary Storm Walls, the Kordon Road Project, the Green Necklace for the Bay initiative, and the İzmirdeniz Project. Together, these moments represent distinct yet interconnected phases of coastal transformation, each reflecting changing understandings of public space, urban development, and the right to the city.

Across these cases, the analysis demonstrates that coastal publicness in Alsancak Kordonboyu is not a stable condition, but a historically contingent outcome produced through negotiations between planning rationalities, civic resistance, and design-led interventions. In this sense, public space emerges not only through everyday use and accessibility, but also through conflicts over and spatial rights that have unfolded over time.

4.1 Temporary Storm Walls: Ecological Intervention or Spatial Barrier?

Recent climatic risks, particularly increasing flooding and storm surges along the Alsancak coastline, have led the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality to introduce a coastal intervention strategy known as the Kordon Emergency Action Package (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2024). Implemented along approximately 1,700 meters between Alsancak Port and Cumhuriyet Square, this intervention consists of modular and temporary structural elements designed to mitigate flood risk. Among these, the most visible component is a temporary storm wall constructed along coast (Figure 3).

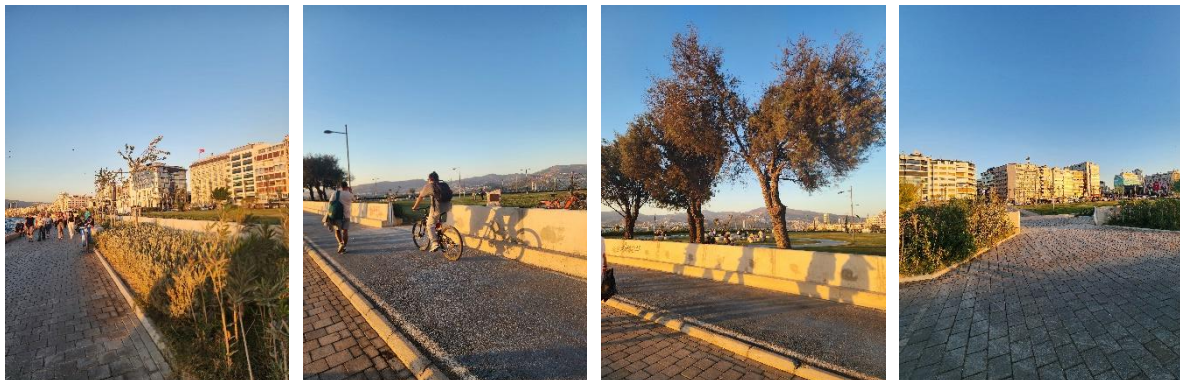


Figure 3. Photos of Temporary Storm Wall (Taken by the Authors).

The intervention of storm wall is not merely a technical response to ecological risk, but signals a restructuring of how the coastline is understood and represented. While formal drawings and cross-sectional representations predominantly

emphasize the terrestrial dimension of the city, the sea is increasingly reduced to a linear boundary condition (Figure 4). This representational shift reflects a broader conceptual transformation in which the sea is no longer treated as an active spatial element, but as a managed backdrop to the urban landscape. In this sense, the storm wall not only responds to ecological risk; it actively participates in redefining the coastline through a land-centric logic of control and containment. Framed as an emergency response to increasing coastal flooding risks, the storm wall has been subject to critique regarding both its governance process and spatial implications. The TMMOB Chamber of City Planners İzmir Branch emphasized the limited transparency of the decision-making process and the lack of public communication regarding its technical and spatial rationale (Ege'de Sonsöz, 2024). From this perspective, as the Chamber underlined, Kordonboyu requires a more accountable approach to intervention. Therefore, the temporary storm wall becomes both a flood-control infrastructure and a spatial structure that potentially reconfigures accessibility and the long-established relationship between the city and the sea.

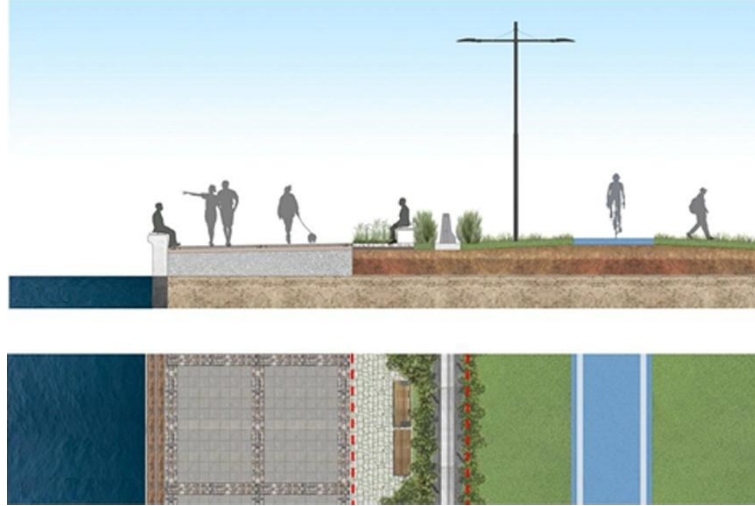


Figure 4. Diagrammatic Section of The Temporary Storm Wall Along the Coastline (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2024).

These institutional debates are further amplified through media representations. Local and national press framed the intervention through narratives such as “A barrier has been erected on the Kordon in İzmir!” (9 Eylül, 2024) and “Now a wall on top of the landfill!” (Manisa Kulis Haber, 2024). These discursive frameworks not only define an infrastructure but also actively reconstruct it as a rupture in the coastal imagery. The repeated emphasis on “wall” and “barrier” produces a dominant narrative of separation, replacing the historically permeable relationship between city and sea with an image of closure and restriction. In this sense, discourse becomes an active component in the production of spatial meaning.



Figure 5. Media Representations of The Temporary Storm Wall: “A barrier has been erected on the Kordon in İzmir!” (9 Eylül, 2024) (left) and “Now a wall on top of the landfill!” (Manisa Kulis Haber, 2024) (right).

Field observations complicate this narrative of rupture. The physical presence of the wall does not eliminate coastal use, but instead produces a reconfiguration of spatial practices along the coastline. Users are observed to cluster in inland green areas, often oriented away from the sea, while others continue to engage with the seafront through walking, fishing, and informal gathering. This suggests that the intervention does not simply restrict access, but redistributes it, producing differentiated spatial conditions along the same coastline. Publicness, in this sense, is not removed but restructured through new spatial separations and continuities.

From this perspective, the storm wall operates not as a neutral ecological infrastructure but as an active actor in the production of coastal public space. By redefining the relationship between risk, visibility, and access, the intervention reorganizes the conditions under which coastal publicness is experienced. In Lefebvre’s (1991) terms, space is continuously produced through social and political relations; similarly, Harvey’s (2012) notion of the right to the city is

challenged here as infrastructural decisions remain largely concentrated within institutional actors rather than being collectively negotiated.

Accordingly, the storm wall should be understood as an ecological intervention that produces barrier effects through its spatial character. It marks a critical moment in the ongoing redefinition of coastal publicness in Alsancak Kordonboyu, where the relationship between sea and city is simultaneously managed, reimagined, and contested.

4.2 Alsancak Region in the İzmirdeniz Project: Towards a Collaborative Design Culture

Developed under the leadership of the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, the İzmirdeniz Project emerged as a large-scale coastal design initiative aimed at strengthening the relationship between the city, its citizens, and the sea. More than one hundred designers, mostly from İzmir, from different disciplines collaborated in design teams. The project area encompasses approximately 40 km of coastline along İzmir Bay, stretching between Mavişehir and İnciraltı, and is structured into five sub-regions (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2012a):

- Region 1: Karşıyaka (Mavişehir–Alaybey Shipyard)
- Region 2: Bayraklı (Turan–Alsancak Port)
- Region 3: Alsancak-Konak (Alsancak Port–Konak Köprüsü Junction)
- Region 4: Güzelyalı (Konak Köprüsü Junction–İnciraltı Urban Forest)
- Region 5: İzmir Bay

The intellectual background of the project was established through participatory platforms such as the İzmir Culture Workshop (2009) and the İzmir Design Forum (2012b). These platforms brought together academics, designers, and practitioners from different disciplines to formulate a shared vision of İzmir as a “City of Design and Innovation” in the Mediterranean region (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2009, 2012b). Within this vision, design was positioned not merely as a professional activity concerned with physical form, but as a broader cultural and governance tool capable of shaping urban life. Consequently, coastal publicness was increasingly defined through continuity, accessibility, and interaction with the sea, placing design at the center of public space production.

This vision is further articulated in the “Design Strategy Report for Strengthening the Relationship of İzmir Residents with the Sea.” The report frames coastal public space through citizens’ right to access, use, and interact with the sea, while identifying the uninterrupted continuity of the coastline as a fundamental condition of public life. In this respect, the project can be interpreted as an alternative approach to public space production that responds to the increasing privatization, fragmentation, and selective accessibility associated with neoliberal urbanization.



Figure 6. Master Plan of Alsancak Region in the İzmirdeniz Project (ddrlp, n.d.).

Within the project, design proposals for Alsancak Kordonboyu were developed around the concept of a “hybrid landscape matrix” (Ertas, 2013). Rather than prescribing a fixed program, the proposal envisioned the coastline as a flexible spatial infrastructure capable of accommodating multiple forms of use through variations in topography, shading, vegetation, and seating configurations (Interviewee A, 2025). Publicness, therefore, was not conceived as a static condition attached to a specific physical form, but as an evolving relationship between users, activities, and the coastal environment.

Beyond physical interventions, the project also sought to embed design within everyday urban life. As Interviewee B emphasized, the proposal included a design-oriented programme of recurring events intended to create frequent encounters between citizens and design. Through exhibitions, temporary installations, workshops, and cultural activities, the project aimed to make design visible and accessible in everyday life. In this sense, design was understood not only as a means of producing space, but also as a cultural practice through which citizens could actively engage with the city and its coastline. The production of publicness was therefore linked not only to spatial accessibility but also to the cultivation of a broader public design culture.

Despite its conceptual ambition, many of these proposals were only partially realized due to institutional, financial, administrative, and legal constraints encountered during the implementation phase (Interviewee C, 2024). This highlights an important dimension of coastal publicness: public space is not produced solely through design visions or participatory

aspirations, but also through the limits of the local authority. Accordingly, the Alsancak region of the İzmirdeniz Project positioned design itself as a mechanism for producing public space. Yet it also reveals that publicness remains contingent upon the ability of institutional actors to translate collaborative visions into material and spatial realities.

4.3 Vision of “Green Necklace”: Greening the Coastline

Following the 1999 local elections, Ahmet Piriştina developed a comprehensive approach to İzmir’s coastal areas, framing its development not merely as a physical transformation but as a broader reconfiguration of the city–sea relationship. During this period, the local government combined infrastructural investments with environmental improvements, prioritizing the re-establishment of the disrupted connection between the coastline and urban residents (Topal, 2022). Within this framework, the ecological and symbolic revitalization of İzmir Bay—previously excluded from everyday urban life due to pollution, odor, and infrastructural deficiencies—became a central component of the intervention agenda. The Grand Canal Project constituted the infrastructural backbone of this process. Beyond its technical function, it enabled the environmental recovery of the bay through wastewater treatment systems, pumping stations, and collection networks (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2003). This intervention altered the environmental conditions of the bay and reintroduced the coastline into everyday urban routines, re-situating it within the lived experience of the city.

Within this context, the “Green Necklace for the Bay” vision reframed coastal space as a continuous public landscape extending across İzmir Bay (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2003). Along Alsancak Kordonboyu and other coastal segments, reclaimed areas were redesigned through pedestrian paths, squares, and green surfaces, establishing a continuous spatial band along the coast (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2003). Between 1999 and 2004, similar interventions were extended to İnciraltı, Sahilevleri, Güzelbahçe, and Bostanlı, reinforcing a continuous spatial logic of the coastline (Kayın, 2023).

From a spatial perspective, this vision significantly expanded public access to the coastline and encouraged a wider range of everyday practices. Walking, resting, sports, and informal social activities increasingly occupied the reclaimed coastal areas, transforming the coastline into a more continuous and accessible public space. In this sense, the vision contributed to the production of publicness by extending opportunities for access, visibility, and everyday encounter along the coast. Within this context, publicness was increasingly articulated through municipal visions of coastal improvement and collective urban benefit. Greening thus functioned as both a spatial strategy and a political framing through which the coastline was reimagined as a public space. Expanded access to the coastline became closely intertwined with institutional narratives of collective benefit, shaping both the production and the experience of publicness.

4.4 The Kordon Road Project: Civic Mobilization and Resistance

The Kordon Yolu Project, proposed in the 1990s for Alsancak Kordonboyu, stands out as an intervention through which the meaning of coastal publicness became intensely contested. Initially proposed within the framework of the 1955 İzmir Master Plan, the project envisioned the coastline as a multi-lane vehicular corridor between Cumhuriyet Square and Alsancak Port (Güner, 2005), reflecting a planning logic that prioritized infrastructural circulation over public coastal access. This early spatial imagination laid the groundwork for later interventions that would fundamentally reshape the relationship between the city and its coastline.

As land reclamation progressed rapidly, the coastline was transformed into a construction zone dominated by fill materials, structural foundations, and unfinished infrastructural elements. This process was widely perceived not only as a physical transformation but also as a rupture in the collective urban memory and everyday practices historically associated with the waterfront (Yılmaz, 2018).

In response, professional chambers, local initiatives, and civil actors mobilized through legal and public channels, framing the project as a violation of public interest and urban heritage. Although court rulings and conservation decisions eventually halted the project, major structural components had already been constructed, leaving unfinished viaduct remains as material traces of this conflict (Topal, 2000). These material remnants are significant not only as traces of an abandoned project but also as evidence of how contested planning processes become inscribed in urban space. In this sense, the coastline itself becomes a site where political struggle is spatially embedded, and where opposition plays an active role in shaping the material conditions of public space.

From this perspective, the Kordon Road Project reveals that the publicness of Alsancak Kordonboyu was contested outcome produced through socio-spatial struggle. The cancellation of the project can be read through Lefebvre’s (1996) notion of the “right to the city,” not only as a claim to access urban space, but as a claim to participate in its decision-making. Accordingly, Kordonboyu illustrates that public space is continuously constituted through negotiations and conflicts between the state, capital, and civil society.

5. Discussion

This study examines the transformation of coastal public spaces along Alsancak Kordonboyu through a comparative reading of successive urban interventions that have shaped coastal publicness over time. As summarized in Table 2, each intervention period reflects a distinct logic of spatial production, a specific definition of publicness, and corresponding modes of contestation. Rather than treating publicness as a fixed spatial attribute, the analysis demonstrates that it is continuously reconfigured through shifting institutional priorities, governance rationalities, and forms of civic engagement.

Taken together, the four phases reveal that coastal publicness in Alsancak Kordonboyu is produced through distinct but historically layered regimes of urban governance. These can be understood as shifting from infrastructure-led development, to ecological improvement, to design-oriented collaboration, and finally to climate-driven adaptation. Each regime produces its own spatial logic of publicness, while simultaneously redefining the relationship between the city, its citizens and the coastline.

Table 2. Reproduction of Coastal Publicness in Alsancak Kordonboyu.

Phase / Intervention	Driving Logic	Definition of Publicness	Spatial Outcome	Constraints	Modes of Contestation
Kordon Road Project	Infrastructure-led transformation, transportation, mobility,	Publicness subordinated to mobility and state-led development	Land reclamation, road infrastructure, interruption of sea-city continuity	Centralized decision-making	Civic mobilization, legal action, professional opposition, and media critique
Green Necklace Vision	Ecological recovery and public-oriented urban improvement	Publicness as open access, recreation, and collective urban use	Green public spaces, pedestrian continuity, sea-city reintegration	Institutionally framed design decisions	Indirect contestation through the political legacy of earlier civic resistance
İzmirdeniz Project	Design-led urban regeneration and collaborative design culture	Publicness as continuity, accessibility, and diversified use, and participation to design process	Strengthened sea-city interaction, and diversified use	Participation framed institutionally; implementation concentrated in local and central government	Negotiation between institutional actors
Temporary Storm Walls	Climate adaptation, risk management, ecological protection	Publicness redefined through sustainability and resistance	Physical threshold, altered sea-city interaction, restructured user practices	Technical and top-down implementation	Professional critique, media contestation, everyday spatial adaptation

More importantly, the findings indicate that what changes over time is not only the definition of public space, but also the dominant mode through which it is contested. The Kordon Road Project represents a period in which publicness was actively defended through civic resistance and legal struggle. The Green Necklace vision marks a transformation of the coast into an urban public space, reclaiming it for public use. The İzmirdeniz Project introduces a more participatory approach, in which publicness is shaped through collaborative design processes but remains institutionally structured. Finally, the Temporary Storm Wall reflects a climate adaptation approach in which publicness is redefined through resilience measures and spatial control.

In this sense, the case of Alsancak Kordonboyu demonstrates that publicness is not only produced through competing spatial interventions, but also through shifting modes of contestation that move from resistance, to negotiation, to participation, and to adaptation. This trajectory suggests that the “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008) is not exercised through a single form of collective action, but is continuously reconfigured as the conditions of urban governance and spatial production change.

Accordingly, coastal publicness should be understood not as a stable condition or normative ideal, but as a dynamic and historically layered set of production regimes through which spatial rights are constantly renegotiated.

6. Conclusion

Addressing the question of how coastal publicness is reshaped through political, economic, and social forces, the analysis traced four successive phases of intervention—the Kordon Road Project, the Green Necklace vision, the İzmirdeniz Project, and the Temporary Storm Wall. Together, these phases reveal that publicness cannot be understood as a fixed spatial condition, but rather as a dynamic socio-spatial process that is repeatedly redefined through changing governance approaches, planning priorities, and forms of public engagement.

The findings demonstrate that each intervention period produced a distinct understanding of publicness. While the Kordon Road Project subordinated publicness to mobility and infrastructure development, the Green Necklace vision emphasized ecological recovery and public accessibility. The İzmirdeniz Project reframed coastal publicness through collaborative design culture, continuity, and interaction with the sea, whereas the Temporary Storm Wall introduced a new understanding centered on climate adaptation, resilience, and risk management. These shifting approaches illustrate that the meaning of publicness is not stable over time, but continuously reconstructed through changing institutional rationalities and spatial strategies.

The study further shows that transformations in the definition of publicness are accompanied by transformations in the ways it is contested. Civic resistance and legal mobilization were central to the opposition against the Kordon Road Project; the Green Necklace vision institutionalized earlier demands for public access to the coastline; the İzmirdeniz Project introduced collaborative and design-oriented forms of participation; and the Temporary Storm Wall generated new debates concerning use of coastal urban space. Accordingly, the case demonstrates that the right to the city is not exercised through a single form of collective action, but is continuously reconfigured as urban governance regimes evolve.

Conceptually, the study contributes to debates on public space by proposing a temporal and regime-based reading of coastal publicness. Rather than evaluating publicness through static parameters, the findings highlight how publicness is produced through evolving modes of contestation. In doing so, the study extends discussions on the right to the city by demonstrating that claims to urban space are expressed through different political and institutional forms across time. It also contributes to urban design scholarship by showing that design operates not only as a practice of spatial form-making, but also as a governance mechanism through which publicness is articulated, negotiated, and institutionalized.

The case of Alsancak Kordonboyu contributes to broader debates on coastal transformation by revealing a trajectory that differs from privatization, real-estate-led regeneration, and entrepreneurial urban development. Instead, revisiting Kordonboyu demonstrates a more complex and contested process in which civic mobilization, ecological improvement, collaborative design initiatives, and climate adaptation measures have each played a role in shaping coastal publicness. This suggests the need for comparative research examining how different socio-political contexts influence the production of publicness along coastlines, particularly across Mediterranean cities where coastal spaces continue to occupy a central place in urban life.

Ultimately, coastal publicness emerges not as a completed condition, but as an unfinished and contested urban process—produced through the interaction of institutions, professionals, and citizens, and continuously renegotiated through changing urban priorities and forms of collective action.

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The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This research received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Graduate School, İzmir Institute of Technology (Approval No: E-68485977-050.01.04-2300068821, Date: 30 November 2023). All participants provided informed consent prior to taking part in the research.

CRedit Author Statement

All authors contributed equally to this work. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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