

CITY TALKS

2026

ISTANBUL METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY | IPA Istanbul Planning Agency

FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION For Freedom. Türkiye

İNSAN HAKLARI AKADEMİSİ

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the people and organizations who contributed to the realization of these events. Their selfless contributions and expertise have been of great value at every stage of our efforts to foster dialogue against polarization.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the Human Rights Academy, the Istanbul Planning Agency and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for organizing and supporting the event. We would also like to thank the members of our team who played an active role in City Talks for the work that made this event possible.

We are grateful to our esteemed speakers Prof. Dr. Bilge Doruk, Doç. Dr. İlknur Hacısoftaoğlu, Dr. Uygar Özesmi ve Dr. İrfan Emre Kovankaya'ya who shared their valuable knowledge with us throughout the events and helped us keep the dialogue process going effectively.

Finally, we sincerely thank all our participants who set aside their time for these events in the name of social cohesion and shared solutions. Without their determination to engage in dialogue, we could not have carried out this project.

INTRODUCTION

City Talks aims to play an important role in resolving social disagreements by enabling people with different views to engage in healthy dialogue in a polarized society. This event series brings together different segments of society and offers an opportunity for constructive discussions on issues that concern everyone. While the series allows participants to better understand different perspectives and to reconsider their own views, it also aims to strengthen social cohesion by building empathy between people.

My Country Talks

My Country Talks is a platform built on the method of deliberation to address the issues that divide society. Launched in Germany in 2017 by ZEIT ONLINE, this model aims to reduce polarization in society by encouraging individuals to share their different perspectives with one another. While bringing a country's citizens together for political discussions, it seeks to start constructive conversations that go beyond political disagreements through one-on-one pairings.

My City Talks, a variation of this model, is designed for a more local scale: cities, towns, municipalities or specific geographic areas. This format, which turned into neighborhood talks in Germany and later spread to the United States, was reconsidered after talks with the newspaper in question, with a view to how it could be adapted to Türkiye, and our own matching algorithm was developed. City Talks likewise aims to prevent polarization by bringing together Istanbulites with different views.

City Talks

On September 28 and October 22, 2026, the City Talks events were held in collaboration with the Istanbul Planning Agency (İPA), the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), and the Human Rights Academy (İHA), with the aim of strengthening social dialogue and addressing current urban challenges in Istanbul. The first meeting focused on sport in the city, the right to the city and accessibility, while the second explored the climate crisis and the city's food systems. By bringing together participants with different perspectives, the events aimed to encourage mutual understanding and develop shared solutions to societal challenges.

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METHODOLOGY

Before the event, participants were asked a series of questions to assess their views. Based on their responses, participants were paired with individuals whose opinions differed the most from their own. The matching process was designed to bring together people with the most contrasting perspectives, allowing each participant to engage in dialogue with someone who held significantly different views.

Following the expert presentations, participants engaged in one-on-one discussions with their assigned partners, focusing on the questions on which their opinions differed the most. These discussions provided an opportunity for participants with different viewpoints to listen to one another and consider issues from diverse perspectives. Afterwards, all participants came together in a joint session to share the outcomes of their discussions, and the event concluded with a general evaluation.



SPORT, URBAN SPACE AND ACCESSIBILITY



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OPENING SPEECHES

The event opened with a welcome speech by Elif Yıldız Kızılca from the Istanbul Planning Agency. Elif Güney Menderes from the Human Rights Academy then took the floor and explained how the City Talks format came about and why it was chosen. Menderes noted that the format builds on an initiative launched in Germany by a newspaper that brought people together to identify the issues on which they were polarized and to overcome that polarization. She said that the format, which turned into neighborhood talks in Germany and spread as far as the United States, was reconsidered after talks with the newspaper, with a view to adapting it to Türkiye, and that they developed their own algorithm. She stressed that the people participants are paired with are those from whom they differ most in their answers. Reminding participants that migration, compulsory military service, housing, natural disasters and the privatization of education had been discussed before, Menderes said that at the end of those days participants had given feedback such as “If I had seen this person’s comment on a platform, I would have reacted very harshly, but here I understood why they think this way” and that the event thus has an effect that reduces polarization. Emphasizing that reducing polarization is one of the requirements of democracy, Menderes added that the topic of sport is important with regard to the European Games to be hosted in 2027, and that climate will remain on the agenda because of COP31.



ASSOC. PROF. DR. İLKNUR HACISOFTAOĞLU'S PRESENTATION

Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlknur Hacısoftaoğlu, a sociologist from Istanbul Bilgi University, began her presentation with the question "Whose city, whose playing field?" She said she would address what the right to sport in the city means, the obstacles to this right, and the positive or negative effects of mega events such as the European Games on cities. Stressing that for sociologists, "Who do we not see?" matters more than "Who do we see in the city?", Hacısoftaoğlu asked: Who can comfortably go out for a run in Istanbul this evening? She reminded the audience that going for a run requires a home near the coast, the right running shoes and clothing, and good lighting. To draw attention to the people we cannot see in the city, she gave the following examples: When the neighborhood lights go out in Sultanbeyli, can a 14 year old girl do sport? Can a refugee child who cannot do sport because they have no license do sport? Does a person in a wheelchair have access to sport?

The right to the city and belonging

Hacısoftaoğlu said that the question of "who the city belongs to" must be considered together with a sense of belonging. Even if accessibility has been ensured and a project has been carried out, whether a person feels they belong there, and whether someone without sports shoes and clothes feels welcome in that space, was an important criterion. In the debate on the right to the city, she referred to two names: for Lefebvre, the right to the city was not merely living in the city but using and producing it; Harvey took this right further by defining it as the right to transform the city according to one's own needs. Within this framework, she raised the questions of whether people have a say in the city, whether projects are presented to them, and whether they have a chance to propose transformation: For whom is this right real, and for whom is it merely on paper?



Legal foundations of the right to sport

Noting that the right to sport can also be considered as a child's right to play, physical development and leisure, Hacısoftaoğlu asked: "Do we recognize the right to do sport in a safe space while preserving one's dignity?" She recalled that this right is guaranteed by provisions such as the UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 10 of CEDAW and Article 59 of the Constitution. Emphasizing that women's and girls' access to sport is an important right, Hacısoftaoğlu stated that success should be measured not by how many athletes are sent to the Olympics but by how many people in the city can do sport.

Barriers to access

Hacısoftaoğlu listed the barriers to sport under the following headings:

• *Facilities and inequality*: She said that facilities are generally concentrated in the center and in middle-class districts, while school yards in poor neighborhoods are neglected, paved over with concrete and locked after school hours. She noted that, according to district development reports, the use of sports facilities differs between Kadıköy and Sultanbeyli. She said that in 2023 it was reported that 111,396 children took part in Spor İstanbul sports schools, and that, as one of the largest institutions where children come together in large numbers, it is critical to know who these children are and which neighborhoods they come from. She stressed that statistics are necessary to see who cannot benefit and to produce policy. However, she added that reducing sport entirely to facilities is also a problem, and that infrastructure must be provided as much as facilities.



• *Commodification:* She said that hourly pitches, facilities requiring membership, paid courses and fitness centers turn the right into a purchased service, and that all barriers to access should be removed and access should in fact be free of charge.

• *Physical access and safety:* She noted that reaching facilities involves huge flights of stairs and that there are lighting problems in the areas where they are located, which makes it especially hard for girls to go. She added that safe-accessibility problems have also been seen in Antakya and İskenderun after the earthquake.

• *Care burden and time poverty*: She said that elder care falls especially on women's shoulders and that children experience great time poverty because of the exam system.

• *Instructors:* She emphasized the need for well-trained instructors who see individuals in sports settings as rights-holding subjects and adopt an inclusive approach that strengthens their sense of belonging. She noted that all instructors at Spor İstanbul have received training in child rights and child protection. Stating that children's access to sports areas is not enough on its own and that whether they feel safe in these areas must also be assessed, she drew attention to the Sahadayız Association's report on this subject.

• *Participation in decision-making:* Repeating the question of who is consulted and who makes the decisions, Hacısoftaoğlu moved on to the steps local governments can start right away.

Seven steps local government can start tomorrow

1. **Disaggregated data:** Identifying which groups do and do not use sports areas, broken down by gender, age, disability status and neighborhood.
2. **Free and nearby access:** Opening school yards to neighborhood residents outside class hours and creating free sports areas within walking distance.
3. **Gender-responsive planning and budgeting:** Taking the needs of different social groups into account in planning and budgeting, as in the park design examples in Vienna.
4. **Universal design:** Treating accessibility not as an element added later but as a core criterion of design and planning.
5. **Inclusion and child protection training:** Expanding training on inclusion, child rights and child protection for instructors, coaches and facility staff.
6. **Continuity of training:** Ensuring that training is not limited to one-off sessions but is repeated at regular intervals and that its impact is monitored.
7. **Participatory decision-making:** Involving children, women, people with disabilities and migrants in decision-making through mechanisms such as city councils.

Designing parks together with girls

Hacısoftaoğlu gave the example of Einsiedlerpark in Vienna. She said that a space had been designed there where children can run, move their whole bodies and at the same time chat with their friends, making it attractive for girls. In the example of the breaking (dance) park in Stockholm, she said that child and youth participation is the area where we are lowest today; she related that this park has stage and performance areas and speakers where young people can play their own music, that focus group sessions were held with young girls during the design process, and that patterns that invite movement and depict dancing were used. She stated that park layouts in Türkiye mostly focus on staying still, and that park systems focused on chatting and being together with friends should be developed.



Mega events and legacy

Stressing that legacy in mega events does not come automatically and that vulnerable groups are usually those who benefit least, Hacısoftaoğlu presented examples from different cities concerning displacement and facilities left idle:

• **Rio de Janeiro:** More than 77,000 people were displaced because of mega events. In one neighborhood only 20 of 700 families resisted; some residents said, "I will not sell my home, not everyone has a price." Right after the Games, what remained were torn-out seats and dried-up grass.

• **Baku (2015 European Games):** Compensation below the real value was paid and many families were displaced; while the city was beautified, civil society was silenced, journalists and rights defenders were jailed and at least 35 people were detained.

• **London 2012 (Stratford):** Small businesses in the area left to make room for the site, displacement occurred without compulsory expropriation, and the area gentrified rapidly. Because prices rose so much, access was restricted even where spaces were open to the public; areas said to be opened for people's use were not opened.

• **Paris 2024:** Many people were displaced and 3,000 social hotels were closed, which raised the question "whose legacy is the social legacy?" On the other hand, a swimming pool was built in one of the poorest districts.

• **Barcelona:** Cited as the city that reopened to the sea; factories were cleaned up and the shores opened to the public. However, gentrification and rent increases became an issue in nearby neighborhoods. Saying "impact is not fate, it is a choice," Hacısoftaoğlu asked who makes these decisions, whether vulnerable groups are included in decision-making processes and whether the process is planned openly to the public.

• **Eskişehir**: 600 million liras were spent, but facilities were left idle and, having been built quickly, deteriorated; a new tender of 315 million liras was issued for their repair. There are places that local residents walk past but cannot enter or use.

• **Kiremitlik Tepe and Los Angeles**: It was said, "Building facilities does not expand rights; if you cannot bring the children of the neighborhood, there is no point even if you bring performance athletes." In Los Angeles, it was related that the 232.5 million spent has been used again and again and children still benefit from these spaces, and that the LA84 Foundation treats the legacy as a fund.

Seven wishes for Istanbul 2027

Reminding the audience that no new stadium will be built for the Istanbul 2027 European Games, Hacısoftaoğlu said it is not yet known whether this will be treated as a positive or a negative reference. She stressed that legacy can be measured by access, that accessibility should be permanent and that displacement should be reduced. She concluded her presentation by saying that they would measure success with the question: “In 2027, will a 14-year-old girl in Sultanbeyli be able to go out in the evening to do sport?”.

1. No one should be displaced: This includes residents, street vendors, homeless people and refugees.
2. Write the legacy in advance and with the neighborhoods: Which facility, in which neighborhood, at what price, at what hours?
3. Make child protection and safe sport the backbone: Reporting and support mechanisms should remain after the Games.
4. Make accessibility permanent: Every adjustment should remain in the city’s everyday life.
5. Gender equality: On the field, in management, in volunteering and in the media.
6. The rights of construction and service workers should be guaranteed.
7. Transparency: Budget, contracts and legacy goals are open; civil society and the city council are partners, not spectators.

SPORT POLICIES IN THE CITY



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PROF. DR. BİLGE DORUK'S PRESENTATION

Prof. Dr. Bilge Doruk, General Manager of Spor İstanbul, approached the subject from a management-science perspective. Noting that the work presented in the previous talk would shed light on their own, Doruk spoke about the powers and responsibilities of local government.

Powers and responsibilities of the municipality

According to Doruk, under the Metropolitan Municipality Law the municipality's basic duties are: to get people to do sport, to support local amateur clubs, to support events such as the Istanbul Marathon, to support some organizations while carrying out others itself, and to host organizations held within the framework of the international Olympic games. Doruk noted that the first step of hosting comes from the Metropolitan Mayor's Office and that the process is then carried out together with the Ministry within the framework of the laws.

A changing model for mega events

Saying that a trend has emerged worldwide whereby the budgets generated by Olympic games cause serious economic harm to cities and countries, Doruk explained that after 2020 the system changed and that the chances of the city putting forward the lowest investment budget to host the Olympics have risen. As examples, Doruk stated that Los Angeles is hosting with zero investment, that in Paris 86 percent of existing facilities were used and investment costs were brought down to zero through temporary facilities, and that Paris closed the Olympics at a profit by selling 9 million tickets. Noting that Baku is not a model to follow, Doruk said that Istanbul could carry out the organization for one-fifteenth of what Baku spent.

European Games 2027

Noting that 15-16 sports facilities will be used for 26 sports at the European Games to be held in June 2027, Doruk said that new investment will be made in Istanbul for only two of the missing venues, and that the others will be set up in open areas in centers that will show the city to the world, such as Haydarpaşa and Galataport. Doruk added that successful athletes can win quotas and take part in the Games in Los Angeles. Stressing that the organization carried out with the lowest budget will leave a profit for the city, Doruk said that sport climbing areas will be set up, that the public will be contacted before some of the sports held at the Games, and that the permanence of the climbing walls will be ensured. Doruk noted that, with all its pros and cons, there is a question of whether the European Games are necessary for the country and the city, and recalled that studies conducted in Germany showed that the public did not want them; however, Doruk said that such events can be carried out properly when they are managed well.

The work of Spor İstanbul

Doruk stated that Spor İstanbul is a public affiliate company and that, at events, they operate without making a loss and without burdening the public, in a way that generates a positive return. The main information conveyed in this context was as follows:



- Spor İstanbul has 77 sports facilities, and these facilities are used about 13 million times a year.
- A facility was built inside a school sports hall in Sultangazi; 7-8 schools can use it in physical education classes. Once a suitable site is found, construction and repair support is provided; the public and students can do sport without paying a fee.
- İBB's Youth and Sports Services Department and Parks and Gardens Department make sports investments that can be made in open areas, such as basketball, skateboarding and table tennis, and Spor İstanbul works in coordination with these units. Morning exercise sessions are also held at open facilities.
- Opposite the water sports center in Florya there are basketball courts; although user numbers are not measured, they are estimated to be high.
- Within the framework of social municipalism, a 1 TL campaign is run for retirees; retirees can use pool and fitness facilities. Accordingly, Doruk stressed that sport is not only about doing sport but also about socializing and psychosocial benefit.
- Accessible structures have been built for people with disabilities and disability services are provided.
- The sports schools serve about 120,000 people. Talented children are connected with the youth academies of clubs; children are also admitted to the youth academy of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's (İBB) own sports club. It was noted that there will be students from these schools taking part in the European Games.
- To spread sports culture and introduce different sports, events such as the 48th Istanbul Marathon, the Istanbul Half Marathon, İstanbul'u Koşuyorum (I'm Running Istanbul), a cycling marathon, İstanbul'u Yüzüyorum (I'm Swimming Istanbul), oil wrestling and a nature camp are organized. İBB is a supporter of many organizations held in Istanbul.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION

After the presentations and the lunch break, participants came together with their assigned partners to discuss the statements on which they agreed least. Participants were also told that they could share their own examples. The statements discussed during the one-on-one discussions were as follows:

Least agreed-upon statements

1. Municipal sports services should not be free for everyone but charged on a sliding scale according to income.
2. Municipalities establishing name and sponsorship relationships with professional clubs is an acceptable promotional investment that adds value to the city.
3. A residency requirement should be imposed for benefiting from municipal sports services.
4. The request of neighborhood residents who complain about noise from sports fields is a sufficient reason to restrict the facilities hours of use.
5. The visibility that the Olympics and similar international organizations bring to the city justifies high public costs.

After about an hour of one-on-one discussion, participants came together with all the groups and shared the results.



DISCUSSION OUTCOMES

After the discussions, participants said that overall they had found common ground on many points. It was stated that some questions had been misunderstood and that disagreements emerged in particular on the issues of sponsorship and public damage. One participant related that they had found their partner's view more reasonable and had changed their own opinion. After the event, a comparison between Guatemala and Istanbul was also made.

Pricing and symbolic fees

Participants discussed whether municipal sports services could be free or charged on a sliding scale according to income. Assessments were made that symbolic fees such as 1 TL for women and retirees are both encouraging and that people can value a service they pay for more highly.

Sponsorship and public damage

Some participants understood the statement to mean that the club, rather than the municipality, would sponsor the other party, and the discussion moved forward once this misunderstanding was cleared up. Participants accepted that municipalities can engage in sponsorship; however, as in the case of Erzurumspor, it was recalled that if the club makes a loss this turns into damage to the public, and opinions differed on this point. It was said that cooperation with professional clubs could come back to the municipality as a risk rather than a plus, could create the perception among citizens of "where are they spending my money?" and could raise the question of what business the municipality has in this field.

Residency requirement

Participants generally thought that no residency requirement should be imposed. It was recalled that the Bahçelievler Municipality introduced a residency requirement at its Olympic-size swimming pool because of the discomfort of people living nearby due to the crowding. In response, it was said that after priority is given to the municipality's own citizens, quotas could be opened, and that there is no need to require residency entirely. As with pricing, a participant who initially held the opposite view on the residency requirement found the other side's view more reasonable and changed their mind. Participants also pointed out that a registered address can be "deceptive": for example, someone living in Üsküdar may be closer to Kadıköy, and students who come from outside the city may be unable to benefit because of this requirement. It was stressed that nobody changes their place of residence on a whim, that where there is no accessibility people go elsewhere out of necessity, and that the residency requirement is therefore restrictive.

Noise and facility hours

In the example of men's use of artificial-turf pitches, most participants thought that noise is not something to complain about and that having such pitches open until late hours is not a problem; some participants expressed a different view. It was stated that this disagreement should apply to stadiums as well. It was said that, as a neighborhood resident, one does not have to put up with noise at 2-3 a.m., and that enclosed sports facilities should be preferred to open pitches in the midst of neighborhoods within the city. It was suggested that where demand is very high, suitable facility configuration and cost planning should be carried out, and that centers operating 24/7 in a central location could be set up on demand.

Olympic and mega event costs

Some participants argued that the Olympics justify high public costs, while others differed. It was stated that if large complexes that will not be used afterwards and will be left idle are involved, the high public cost ceases to be justified. The following points stood out in the discussion:

- The focus should be on the sustainability of facilities rather than on their cost.
- A commission could be set up so that even the promotional and media products used can be given to the public or recycled afterwards.
- Whether Istanbul's infrastructure, including internet infrastructure and toilets, is sufficient for the people who will come to the Games. The internet infrastructure must not collapse while the Olympics are broadcast live, whereas lasting cultural heritage can be debated; these too are costs.

- With an event program planned in advance, the effect of the resources and facilities set aside for the European Games on cultural heritage could be significant.
- Any calculation made for Istanbul should rest on transparent and measurable criteria

Safety, awareness and cultural prejudices

It was said that there is a safety problem on coastal roads and that not only personal safety but also the absence of an arbiter or point of contact on the separation of cyclists and pedestrians can be a factor in people not going there again. Giving the example of a pedestrian who stopped a cyclist on a bike path in Sarıyer saying “So I can’t walk here?”, it was stated that awareness-raising is necessary but is difficult because it concerns general awareness. It was said that there is a cultural prejudice that keeps people from coming to sports facilities, that promotional work and one-on-one communication could be considered for this, that work aimed at breaking down these prejudices could be carried out in the field of sociology, and that a comprehensive approach should be adopted instead of simple, one-by-one formulas. It was suggested that, since almost every school has a car park, one floor of it could be made suitable for sport.

CONCLUSION

The City Talks: Sport and Mobility in the City program treated sport as a right rather than merely a service and brought together people with opposing views, offering an important platform for dialogue to understand needs, demands and problems. While openly voicing their ideas in a spirit of tolerance, participants were able to question the reality behind opinions through expert presentations and data. The topics that stood out in the discussions are as follows:

The right to sport and the right to the city:

It was emphasized that being able to do sport in the city is a right and that who can do sport tells us who the city belongs to. Even where accessibility is ensured, whether a person feels they belong there and whether they have a say in the city in terms of the right to the city were considered important. It was stated that success should be measured not by the number of athletes taken to the Olympics but by how many people in the city can do sport.

Inequality in access and commodification:

It was stated that facilities are concentrated in the center and in middle-class districts, that school yards in poor neighborhoods are neglected and locked, and that sport has become a purchased service through paid courses, memberships and hourly pitches. It was emphasized that barriers such as safety, lighting, caregiving responsibilities and time poverty particularly affect women and girls. Solutions such as free or income-based sliding-scale pricing and symbolic fees were discussed; there was agreement that the residency requirement is restrictive.



Mega events and legacy:
It was emphasized that legacy does not come about automatically, that vulnerable groups face the risk of displacement, and that idle facilities do not justify high public costs. It was stated that the success of Istanbul 2027 should be measured by access, that is, by “whether a girl in Sultanbeyli can go out in the evening and do sport”. Participants drew attention to the sustainability of facilities rather than their cost, and to processes being transparent and measurable.

Public resources, sponsorship and accountability:
Concerns were raised that municipalities' sponsorship relationships with clubs could turn into a risk of public loss and could lead citizens to ask "where are they spending my money?" It was recalled that municipalities and municipal affiliate companies are subject to audit by the Court of Accounts.

Safety, belonging and participation:
Safety on coastal roads, the separation of cyclists and pedestrians, cultural prejudices, inclusion and child protection training, and the participation of girls, women, people with disabilities and migrants in decision-making processes were the headings that came to the fore.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below have been compiled from the views expressed in the presentations and discussions.

Data-Based and Inclusive Planning

Data disaggregated by gender, age, disability status and neighborhood should be collected in order to see who benefits and who does not benefit from sports facilities and courses. Planning and budgeting should be gender-responsive, and accessibility should be treated as a starting criterion.

Free, Nearby and Safe Access

School yards and suitable school spaces should be opened to the neighborhood outside class hours, and free spaces within walking distance should be made widespread. Where charging is necessary, income-based sliding-scale or symbolic fee models should be considered; quota arrangements that give priority to neighborhood residents should be preferred to a residency requirement. Problems of lighting, transport and safety on coastal roads should be resolved.

Inclusion and Child Protection Training

Inclusion and child protection training for instructors, coaches and facility staff should be renewed and monitored at regular intervals. Parks and sports spaces should be designed together with girls and young people, and spaces that support movement and conversation together should be created.

Legacy and Guarantees Against Displacement in Mega Events

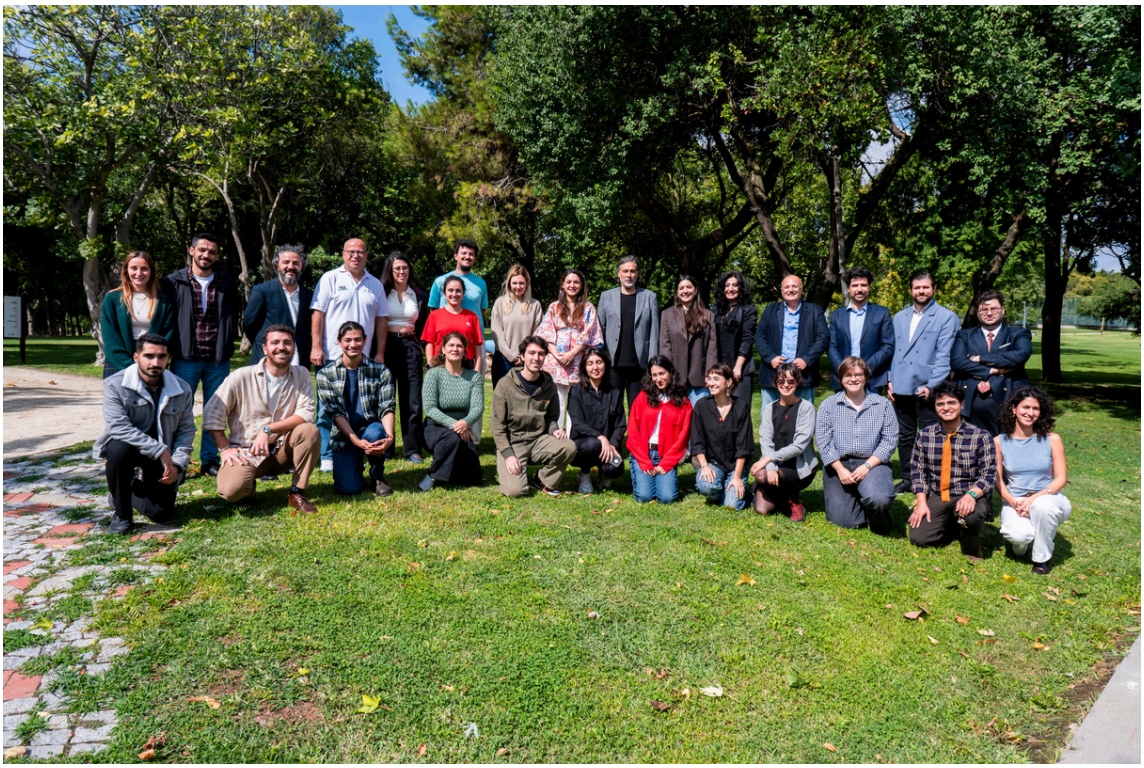
The legacy plan for the Istanbul 2027 European Games should be written in advance and together with the neighborhoods, specifying which facility will serve which neighborhood, at what price and at what hours. Displacement should not occur, accessibility should be made permanent, child protection mechanisms should continue after the Games, and the rights of construction and service workers should be guaranteed.

Transparency, Sustainability and Participation

Budgets, contracts and legacy goals should be open to the public; civil society and city councils should take part in the process as partners, not spectators. Facilities should be evaluated by their sustainability rather than their construction cost, and mechanisms should be established so that promotional products and temporary structures are given to the public or recycled after the Games.

Awareness and Cultural Prejudices

Promotion, one-on-one communication and sociological studies should be supported to overcome the cultural prejudices that keep people from coming to sports facilities. Awareness-raising activities should be carried out in shared-use areas, such as the separation of cyclists and pedestrians.



TOWARDS COP31: ISTANBUL



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OPENING SPEECHES

Kızılca noted that they were coming together with the participants for the second City Talks meeting and gave an overview of the themes of City Talks held in previous years. Yiğit Göktuğ Torun, project and communications officer at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Human Rights Academy, then introduced the two institutions, explaining that they work on issues such as human rights and the rule of law and teach courses on human rights.

Describing City Talks as a programme launched against polarization that aims to bring together people who think in opposite ways, Torun recalled that the format was first implemented in Germany by ZEIT. He stressed that people tend to drift further apart on social media and in the digital space, whereas common ground increases when they meet face to face; at such events discussions proceed more moderately and come closer to concrete outcomes. He stated that climate had been chosen as the topic of this meeting because Türkiye is hosting COP31.



THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND THE CITY



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DR. UYGAR ÖZESMİ'S PRESENTATION

In his presentation titled "The climate crisis and the city: What future awaits Istanbul? How can a consuming city become a 'prosuming' city?", Dr. Uygar Özesmi of the Prosumption Economy Association (Türetim Ekonomisi Derneği) and Good4Trust.org discussed what the climate crisis means for Istanbul and how the city could move from a consuming structure to one that both produces and consumes.

A regime of extremes

Özesmi said that we are living through "great oscillations" and drew attention to a terminological distinction in Turkish: carbon is emitted (salım), it does not oscillate (salınım), and the word "salınım" is often misused in the climate field. He said the climate is now experienced not through averages but through large fluctuations, recalling that the fill levels of Istanbul's reservoirs can change greatly within a short time and that a single flood can make a significant difference.

Stressing that today's climate is a regime of extremes, "either extremely dry or extremely wet", Özesmi explained that as averages shift, the extremes grow. He said half a degree or one degree Celsius of warming should not be underestimated: heatwaves that used to occur once in 50 years become much more frequent and intense with 1 and 2 degrees of warming. A one-degree shift in the average leads to much larger differences at the extremes; where we used to see 40 degrees, we may see 47.

The "take, use, throw away" model

According to Özesmi, Istanbul follows a model of taking from outside, using and throwing away: it takes its water from other basins, its energy through imports and its food from outside the city. Noting that a total of 570 million cubic metres of water had been transferred from other basins, he said that taking the water and ecosystem of one place and moving it elsewhere is a form of exploitation.

Turning to wastewater, Özesmi explained that water is treated using chemicals and energy and that the resulting sludge is buried, because of its heavy metals, without anyone knowing what to do with it. "We take the most useful thing in the world, which could be called gold, and turn it into toxic sludge," he said, stressing that water cannot be waste: we are water. He added that what is called food waste is in fact very valuable but has been turned into a problem.

Four pressures

Özesmi said that in the coming period the city faces four main pressures:

- H*eatwaves:* He recalled that many people died in this summer's heatwaves in Europe and that people in France took to the streets saying "You left us defenceless against the heat." Those most affected were migrant workers without cooling at home; Türkiye was lucky this year, but the same picture could emerge next year.

- W*ater scarcity and excess water:* A flood also means water scarcity; beyond the officially reported deaths, floods cause invisible deaths from infections, and these systemic effects are ignored.

- F*ood and hunger:* Agricultural production depends not only on water but also on temperature; where food is produced, who gains and who loses are decisive.

- *Injustice:* Noting that the richest 1 per cent of society consumes an ordinary person's annual emissions in the first 10 days of the year, Özesmi said that those responsible for the climate crisis and those who are not are affected in the same way, while the most disadvantaged groups are hit hardest.



The big impact of simple measures

Özesmi said that in the “Don’t Waste Water” (Suyu Boşa Harcama) campaign run with İBB and TEMA, people were encouraged to save water through very simple methods, achieving a 10 per cent reduction in total water use. Without these savings Istanbul could not have been supplied with water for a month; taking infection-related mortality into account, this could have caused many deaths, he said, underlining how vital collectively applied simple measures are.

Fragile Istanbul and resilient Istanbul

Özesmi described two possible Istanbuls: a fragile Istanbul that brings ever more water from ever further away, depends on more imported energy and leaves the poorest most alone; and a resilient Istanbul in which water is kept and circulated within the city, made up of mutually supportive neighbourhoods and networks that protect the most vulnerable. He recalled that Istanbul used to do this, citing the Basilica Cistern and the cisterns of old houses that stored rainwater from the roof.

Explaining that the water that goes down the drain after washing our hands is in fact valuable and that in Japan bath water is given back to the soil, Özesmi said these principles should be adapted to today’s systems: making flushing systems suitable for soapy water, separating grey water in apartment design and using it for garden irrigation.

Principles of resilience

Drawing on the ecological concept of resilience, Özesmi said that diversity is essential for a system to be resilient and that monotypic systems are fragile. He recounted how, when he went to Karacadağ to collect seeds, he learned that seeds of many different colours and shapes ensure that the one best suited to that year’s ecological conditions takes hold. The second principle is redundancy: investment should not be concentrated in a single place; as in the example of fields on the mountainside and in the middle of the plain, a reserve is needed so as not to go hungry when the plain floods. Thirdly, he stressed that locality and knowing one’s geography allow the city to stand on its own feet.

COP31 and the prosuming city

Recalling that COP31 is only a short time away, Özesmi said that the agenda is now implementation: states negotiate, cities implement. He stressed that the net-zero targets set for Istanbul (2050) and Türkiye (2053) remain hollow unless they are backed by step-by-step plans with interim targets, dates and accountable officials.



According to Özesmi, Istanbul needs to become a “prosuming” city that both produces and consumes, where, as in a forest, one actor’s waste is another’s food. Highlighting the importance of closing energy, water, food and money cycles within the city, he cited balcony solar panels in Germany, sponge-city practices, keeping rain where it falls and edible landscapes as examples. “Money is like water: if it flows away quickly it does not nourish the soil; if it circulates within the city, its value stays inside,” he said, emphasizing the importance of the local economy. He proposed seven steps for a prosuming Istanbul.

Seven Steps for a prosuming Istanbul

1. Distributed energy
2. Solar shared with the neighbor
3. Sponge and circular Istanbul
4. Cool Istanbul
5. Edible Istanbul
6. Money circulating in the neighbourhood
7. Participatory climate budget: let the neighborhood residents decide on the priority

Pointing to the importance of participation and of citizens jointly determining their own future, he said that a climate budget should also be considered in this context.

Who will pay the bill?

Özesmi set out three principles on the cost of the transformation:

1. **Not acting is far more expensive:** The cost of floods, droughts and heatwaves is already being paid.
2. **Investment is income, not expense:** Rooftop panels, water circulating within the city and local production keep money in the city.
3. **The most vulnerable first:** The transformation should start in the poorest neighbourhood.

Closing with proposed questions for the afternoon discussions, Özesmi invited participants to reflect on “What do you produce today, and what could you produce?” and “What challenges you most during a heatwave or a flood?” He ended his presentation with the words: “Either a prosuming city or a fragile city; we can produce the future together.”

FEEDING THE CITY



ISTANBUL METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY
IPA Istanbul Planning Agency
FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION For Freedom. Türkiye
İNSAN HAKLARI AKADEMİSİ

RES. ASST. DR. İRFAN EMRE KOVANKAYA'S PRESENTATION

In his presentation titled "Feeding the City: Production, Access and Sustainability", Res. Asst. Dr. İrfan Emre Kovankaya of Yıldız Technical University addressed the subject through two questions: How is Istanbul's access to food ensured, and can agriculture be used as a tool to protect Istanbul's resilience and rural areas?
Kovankaya noted that the conversation becomes harder when the subject is Istanbul, whereas these questions are easier to answer for a small place. He said that Istanbul's economy rests on services, trade and industry and that the city ranks eighth from last among provinces in agricultural production. The city creates a geographical inequality; for example, although it is said that water "has to" be taken from Düzce, other options exist.

The food chain and its vulnerabilities

According to Kovankaya, 90 per cent of Istanbul's food comes from outside the city. Provinces such as Antalya, Konya, Mersin and Manisa, where the food comes from, also rank at the top in agricultural output and exports, while Istanbul, home to one fifth of the population, is the destination for a large share of these products. Along the chain from field to table, from the producer to the wholesale market, transport, wholesalers and greengrocers, there are at least 6-7 intermediaries; since people make a living from this chain, the issue also has a political-economy dimension. He said this structure creates three vulnerabilities:

- *Climate:* Extreme weather events such as floods and droughts have begun to occur at the same time; the climate crisis is turning the Mediterranean climate towards a tropical one. A flood or drought in Antalya, which supplies food to all of Türkiye, affects the whole country, and Istanbul, dependent on a few production centres, is directly affected by this vulnerability.
- *Economy:* Economic crises and rises in oil and diesel prices are directly reflected in food prices.
- *Ecological footprint:* Food transported over long distances has a significant ecological impact on a global scale.

Food inflation and access

Kovankaya reported that the cumulative increase in food prices since 2019 has reached eightfold, rising to 20-30 times for meat, and that products such as tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, melons and watermelons have also seen serious inflation. According to OECD data, Türkiye ranks first in food inflation. Citing a survey, he said that 58 per cent of participants cannot put meat on their tables, that portions are shrinking and that people have begun collecting discarded produce from under market stalls.

He explained that the weight of supermarket chains in retail has grown, that discount chains buying directly from producers show a tendency towards monopolization and compete with neighbourhood markets, and that greengrocers are left at the bottom of this pyramid.

Civil society monitoring and food safety

Kovankaya drew attention to the role of civil society monitoring. He reported that Greenpeace had collected products from various supermarkets, tested them for pesticide residues and shared the results with the public; 3 of the 20 products tested were found to be in breach of regulations. He described how chains capable of running such operations were called on to carry out pesticide controls as well, and how a trusted chain subsequently tried to clear its name by publishing documents. He stressed that when food is left to the monopoly of a few large players, a pressure mechanism becomes necessary. At one end lies hunger, at the other the question of how healthy the food people can access is, and this is directly linked to human rights; food is a constitutional and fundamental right.

The role of local governments

Noting that he worked in the field of agriculture between 2020 and 2026, carried out studies on rural Istanbul with İPA and cooperated in preparing the Istanbul Food Strategy Document, Kovankaya said that on the market, access to food is ensured through cross-financing. A supermarket has to make a profit, whereas municipalities have no such concern and can therefore view food in terms of its use value. He cited the Halk Süt (People's Milk) and neighbourhood market initiatives carried out since 2019, practices that expanded after 2020 and the 21 City Restaurants (Kent Lokantası) as examples of access to healthy food at reasonable prices. Stressing that we live in an age of multiple crises, he said that alongside the climate crisis the political crisis also has direct repercussions on both district municipalities and İBB, especially in the field of food security.



Agriculture in Istanbul and the protection of rural areas

Addressing the idea of consuming in Istanbul what is produced in Istanbul, Kovankaya said that production in the city cannot meet consumption, but agriculture can take on a different function. Rural areas such as pastures, meadows and forests, which are not covered in concrete and let water through, absorb heavy rainfall and recharge groundwater; despite Kanal Istanbul, the city still has significant rural potential. He stressed that agriculture in Istanbul should be practised not to compete with Antalya but to protect rural areas. He noted that the city has 746,000 decares of active agricultural land and that Istanbul is among the top four provinces in water buffalo numbers.

He explained that a study carried out at İPA identified four producer profiles: traditional producers in Silivri selling to industry; people who pass land down the generations and return to places like Şile after being educated in Istanbul; white-collar investors; and those who migrated to Istanbul, could not hold on in the city and turned to farming in rural areas. Producers who own their land do not face rent pressure and can invest, and there are cooperative examples that affect the city's agricultural statistics. Urban agriculture remains a niche; debates continue over hobby gardens versus community gardens (bostan), and district municipalities such as Kadıköy also have gardens.

Explaining that İBB's support for agricultural services has increased since 2020 in items such as seedlings, fertilizer and diesel and has become institutionalized, planned and programmed, Kovankaya said that direct producer markets can be opened in places such as Büyükçekmece and Silivri. He argued that models such as the Büyükçekmece model created in peripheral districts should also be designed for central districts such as Şişli and Beşiktaş, and that local governments have important powers in this regard, although this looks difficult in the current political climate.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION

Following the presentations and the lunch break, participants gathered with their assigned partners to discuss the questions with the lowest level of consensus. They were also informed that they could share their own examples. During the paired discussions, the following statements were addressed:

Questions with the lowest consensus:

1. Is changing individual consumption habits a more effective method than major infrastructure investments in Istanbul's fight against climate change?

2. Is ensuring food security in Istanbul primarily the responsibility of the central government?

3. Should municipalities fund climate and food investments using public resources if the private sector is capable of undertaking them economically?

4. Is an increase in energy, transportation, and consumption costs acceptable for Istanbul to reach its climate targets?

5. In the fight against water scarcity, should the unit price of water increase as household and business consumption rises?

6. Should restrictions be imposed on citizens' individual consumption choices to protect Istanbul's water and food resources?

After approximately an hour of paired discussions, participants reassembled with all groups to share their findings.

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES

Participants said they had found common ground on many points and had tried to develop joint solutions where they clashed. One participant reported that they had initially disagreed on an issue but later met on common ground.

Individual consumption habits or infrastructure investment?

This was the clearest point of disagreement. One group of participants argued that no matter how many measures are taken, it all comes down to the individual. In response, it was pointed out that in a country where the gap between rich and poor keeps widening, those who can heat their homes and wear shorts in winter cannot be held to the same

responsibility as those who have to turn down the gas and wear three pairs of socks. Some pairs asked: “Which individual?” It was said that the consumption habits of an individual living in a villa and of a family of eight in a poor neighbourhood cannot be measured by the same yardstick.

Participants who prioritized infrastructure argued that investments such as the sponge-city model, grey water, rainwater harvesting and letting rainwater reach the ground are more effective than changes in individual behaviour, and that had these investments been made, the damage from the recent flood would have been far smaller. Participants on the other side pointed out that large infrastructure investments can themselves cause environmental harm, citing the impact of the Sarıyer-Zekeriyaköy connection on the northern forests and the long-term costs of large projects. It was also said that however much infrastructure is built, no results will be achieved unless energy consumption habits change. Some participants stressed that awareness must come first, and that once awareness is built, the feasibility and sustainability of infrastructure will follow; in areas such as transport, a lack of access is a failure of the state.

The role of the private sector and financing

Some participants argued that at a time when public resources are limited, the private sector has more means and reach, while others stressed that investments must be community-oriented. One pair that disagreed on whether municipalities should finance the private sector found common ground by the end of the discussion. It was said that while the private sector causes the greatest damage, it is unfair for that damage to be covered by households, and that the budget should be provided by large companies and the private sector. Whether the private sector truly brings public benefit, what pricing policy could be applied to which household, and the ethical dimensions of the issue were also discussed.

Green tax and transport incentives

One pair focused on producing solutions where they clashed and developed concrete proposals. Under a green tax, they proposed that part of the profits of industrial companies with a high carbon footprint be transferred, through taxes or sanctions, to certain institutions and civil society organizations; they stressed that citizens should not pay the price for those whose impact is far greater than their own. In transport, they proposed that unused rides on public transport passes be converted into an environmental donation or into a points system that could be used at the municipality’s own outlets.

Food security and the role of municipalities

The statement “Ensuring Istanbul’s food security is the responsibility of the central government; the role of municipalities should remain limited” was another topic on which

disagreements concentrated. Participants defending the role of municipalities said that the central government is not doing enough and that services such as city restaurants, nurseries and İBB dormitories are critical for protecting vulnerable groups during an economic crisis. Those with the opposing view argued that practices such as municipal restaurants have remained unchanged for many years without solving the problem, and that resources should be used for more structural solutions.

Some participants underlined that food security means not only access to food but also the provision of safe food. Recalling that nearly 600,000 commercial enterprises are affiliated with the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and that food poisoning frequently makes the news, they said that rather than limiting the role of municipalities, inspections should be increased and cooperation with the central government established. Pesticide use, groundwater pollution and the effects of the climate crisis on public health were also raised in this context; a proposal to increase employment in food engineering met the objection that it could turn into personal rather than public benefit.

Governance and education

A neighbourhood headman (muhtar) said that headmen are the ones most squeezed between central and local government, that administrations are organizations made up of individuals, and that lasting change will only be possible by instilling climate and environmental awareness from childhood. If this is embraced as a value “as important as breathing”, the issue will move beyond political debate. He said that unless the central government draws the framework, metropolitan and district municipalities cannot solve the problem alone, that such an issue cannot be left to the relationship between two mayors, and that the real debate is about who will bear the cost: “The cost we do not cover today, we will pay with our lives and our homes.”

Urban agriculture and community gardens

A participant working on urban agriculture recalled that in the 1930s Istanbul ranked 26th among 57 provinces in agricultural production, and said that by bringing community gardens to the neighbourhood scale the food needs of low-income groups could be met and production prioritizing citizens’ needs could take place in peripheral neighbourhoods. Another participant suggested that in a city where everything is covered in concrete, vertical farming could be a solution. Noting that collective gardens like the one in Kuzguncuk feed the neighbourhood, while some gardens have turned into hobby gardens, participants stressed the importance of collective production.

CONCLUSION

The City Talks: Towards COP31 – Istanbul event treated the climate crisis and the city's food not merely as technical problems but as matters of rights, justice and governance, and by bringing together people with opposing views it offered an important platform for dialogue that made common ground and points of disagreement visible. While expressing their ideas openly, participants had the opportunity to question their own views through the data presented by the experts. The topics that stood out in the discussions are:

The fragile city and the prosuming city:

It was emphasized that Istanbul's dependence on outside sources for its water, energy and food leaves the city fragile in the face of the extremes of the climate crisis, and that a model in which water, energy, food and money circulate within the city, based on diversity and redundancy, would increase resilience.

Justice and the most vulnerable:

It was stated that those least responsible for the climate crisis are hit hardest and that the transformation should start in the poorest neighbourhoods. In the discussions, the question "Which individual?" showed that individual responsibility cannot be considered independently of social inequalities.



Access to food and food security:

The fact that food largely comes from outside the city through a long chain of intermediaries, food inflation and monopolization in retail make access to food a human rights issue. Participants largely agreed that food security means not only access but also safe food, and on the importance of inspection.

Individual behaviour, infrastructure and governance:

While the relative importance of individual consumption habits and infrastructure investment was the most contested topic, participants agreed that awareness, education

and cooperation between central and local government are decisive for both approaches. The question of who will bear the cost was the common denominator of the discussions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below have been compiled from the views expressed in the presentations and discussions.

An Accountable Climate Plan with Interim Targets

Istanbul's net-zero target should be backed by a step-by-step plan with clear interim targets, dates and responsible parties; citizens' participation in decision-making should be ensured through tools such as a participatory climate budget.

Keeping Water in the City's Cycle

Sponge-city practices, rainwater harvesting, cisterns and grey-water systems should be expanded; the separation of grey water should be encouraged in new building and apartment design, and public buildings and campuses should set an example. Low-cost collective measures such as water-saving campaigns should be continued.

The Most Vulnerable First

Climate adaptation and transformation investments should start in the poor neighbourhoods most affected by heatwaves and floods; protective mechanisms should be developed for vulnerable groups such as households without cooling and migrant workers.

Access to Food and Short Supply Chains

Public food-access tools such as direct producer markets, neighbourhood markets, Halk Süt and city restaurants should be strengthened; adapting practices such as the Büyükçekmece model to central districts should be considered.

Food Safety Inspection

Inspections of pesticide residues and food safety should be increased; cooperation on inspection should be established between municipalities and the central government, and independent monitoring by civil society should be supported.

Protecting Rural Areas through Agriculture and Urban Farming

Istanbul's active agricultural land and permeable rural ground should be protected for the city's climate resilience; support for producers should continue, and collective community gardens should be expanded at the neighbourhood level.

Fair Cost Sharing

The cost of the transformation should be shared fairly through mechanisms such as a green tax that takes into account the contribution of high-impact industrial and private-sector actors; incentive systems rewarding public transport use and environmentally friendly behaviour should be considered.

Climate and Environmental Education

Climate and environmental awareness should be embedded in curricula as a core value from school age onwards.



WHO ARE WE?

Istanbul Planning Agency:

Founded in 2020 as part of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the Istanbul Planning Agency works with civil society, academia, experts, the private sector, international institutions, and Istanbulites to plan the city's future based on scientific research. İPA identifies Istanbul's current problems and develops data-driven short, medium, and long term strategies and policy recommendations to solve these issues.

Friedrich Naumann Foundation:

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom was established in 1958 and offers political education in Germany and abroad, supporting projects that promote liberal values. Since 1991, the Foundation has been actively working in Türkiye with partners from civil society, academia, business, and politics. Given Türkiye's history, culture, economy, and geographical location, it significantly cooperates with Germany, Europe, and the transatlantic region. Therefore, the Foundation supports citizens and organisations in Türkiye who share liberal ideas and aims to promote liberal values in Turkish society.

Human Rights Academy:

The Human Rights Academy was founded in 2020 to institutionalize human rights courses and form a regular structure through the cooperation of civil society and academia. A Consultative Committee composed of experts has been established. The Academy aims to fill the gaps left by undergraduate or graduate education in human rights through various activities, to advance and disseminate human rights knowledge in Turkey, and to provide human rights education to individuals working in various fields who need this training.