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Feeding Istanbul: The Melen Water Transfer Project and the Anatomy of a Silent Environmental Conflict

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ABSTRACT: Istanbul is Turkey's economic and cultural capital. With a population approaching 16 million, it uses resources, particularly water, from far beyond its borders. The city's persistent water scarcity, exacerbated by its exponential growth, has necessitated large-scale infrastructural interventions, including interbasin water transfer projects such as the Great Melen Project (GMP). This project, the nation's second largest water transfer scheme, entailed the displacement of numerous rural communities via urgent expropriation decisions by the government – a procedure designed for use only in extreme circumstances such as war or natural disasters. This study investigates the social ramifications of this project, focusing on the 2014 evacuation of Ortaköy village in the basin. Through in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders, particularly former residents, the researchers examine the project's impact on local people's lives and livelihoods. The project has been hailed as a technological and engineering marvel; however, the findings demonstrate how readily the Melen region is being sacrificed for the sake of the nation's economic growth ideals. These are embodied in an idealised 'modernisation' narrative that justifies prioritisation of the needs of Istanbul as the country's economic and cultural engine and thereby produces consent among the villagers.

KEYWORDS: Interbasin water transfers, political ecology, environmental justice, Istanbul, Great Melen Project, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

As global urban centres expand, their metabolic demands increasingly outstrip local resource capacities, necessitating large-scale infrastructural interventions such as interbasin water transfers (IBWTs). Such interventions are often championed as politically 'neutral' technocratic engineering marvels that are required to alleviate water scarcity; when viewed through the lens of political ecology, however, these megaprojects are recognised as being inherently political. As Sjömander Magnusson (2005) argues, they serve as an illustration of the 'predatory' nature of metropolitan areas. Accordingly, IBWTs frequently function as mechanisms of unequal ecological distribution, where the resource security of metropolitan cores is subsidised by the socio-environmental degradation of peripheral regions.

Turkey provides a compelling context for examining the dynamics of state-led infrastructural expansion and its socio-environmental impacts. The country's hydropolitical history has long been characterised by a centralised, top-down developmentalist paradigm (Işlar and Boda, 2014). Within this framework, water governance is heavily oriented towards supporting economic growth, often at the expense of rural sustainability. Istanbul is the nation's economic and cultural engine, with a population of around 16 million; it provides a good example of this process. The city's exponential growth, its ever-expanding infrastructural footprint, and its resulting persistent water deficits have prompted state

institutions to draw on watersheds far beyond the city's administrative borders, subordinating peripheral cities to its powerful growth imperatives.

Infrastructure to provide Istanbul with fresh water has been required since before the Byzantine period, with the Aqueduct of Valens completed in the late 4th century (Kentel, 2019). In the last decades, it has faced increasingly frequent and significant water shortages due to droughts and rapid growth of its urban population. Addressing this issue has necessitated several costly interventions. Some of these have taken the form of large-scale IBWT projects, such as the Great Melen Project[1] (GMP), which is the country's second-largest water-transfer project. Aimed at meeting Istanbul's water needs for this century and beyond, this project is designed to bring water to the city from more than 150 km away. It draws from the Melen Stream, which forms the border between the provinces of Düzce and Sakarya. This tunnel brings an estimated 2.8 million cubic metres (Mm^3) of water per day to the city (*Dünya Gazetesi*, 2012). The construction of the Melen Dam – part of the second phase of the Great Melen Project – was to be completed in 2016. In 2014, it took urgent expropriation decisions to force the evacuation of several villages that were expected to be flooded once the dam was completed. The mechanism used to make these decisions was based on a procedure that had been designed for use in extreme circumstances such as war or natural disasters (Aydın and Turhan, 2025). By 2026, 12 years after the evacuation of the villages, the dam was still not operational.

This article explores the political ecology of such IBWTs. It uses the Great Melen Project as an instrumental case study for understanding the broader socio-environmental conflicts triggered by such megaprojects. The article examines the mechanisms through which the nation's economic growth ideals – which are embodied in the modernist narrative of 'Istanbul' – are utilised to justify the sacrifice of the Melen region. As such, the primary aim of this research is to critically examine the distributive and procedural injustices inherent in such projects. By bringing these dynamics to the fore, the study aims to highlight a rather understudied type of ecological distribution conflict – referred to as a 'silent conflict' – where all the signs suggest environmental injustices but there is no observable vocal opposition.

This study centres its analysis on the 2014 evacuation of Ortaköy village, the biggest of the 13 villages that were evacuated to make way for the Great Melen Project. It serves as an ideal site for capturing a concentrated narrative of how local livelihoods were destroyed and communities were dismantled by growth-oriented, urban-centric water governance. In the process, the study aims to advance the discourse on environmental justice and on obscuring the unequal distribution of burdens created by megaprojects.

The remainder of this article is organised into four main sections. The following section analyses how developmentalist ideologies are used to manufacture consent. This section grounds the subsequent analysis by establishing the theoretical framework; it draws upon the political ecology of water and the politics of water infrastructures. The subsequent section provides the necessary context by examining Turkey's centralised water governance landscape and the specific history of the Great Melen Project as a response to Istanbul's increasing water demand. This is followed by a section which presents the empirical core of the research. It utilises stakeholder statements to re-describe the 2014 displacement of Ortaköy residents through the specific lenses of procedural and distributive justice. The final section synthesises these findings. It discusses the role of developmentalist ideologies in manufacturing consent and offers concluding reflections on the anatomy of *silent* environmental conflicts.

[1] *Büyük Melen Projesi* in Turkish

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political ecology of water and environmental justice

Political ecology is an interdisciplinary field that critically examines how the interactions between political, economic and social factors shape environmental issues. It primarily focuses on understanding how power dynamics, governance structures and sociocultural narratives influence decisions regarding resource extraction, land use and pollution (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). According to Robbins (2012), political ecology research is structured around five dominant theses: degradation and marginalisation, conservation and control, environmental conflicts, environmental subjects and political objects, and political actors. Distinct from some allied nature-society fields, political ecology explicitly foregrounds the role of political actors and systems. It posits that large-scale environmental problems such as deforestation, resource conflicts and climate change are inextricably linked to the historical and ongoing roles of capitalism, colonialism and state policies in governing natural resources and impacting vulnerable communities (Perreault et al., 2015).

Applying this framework to hydrological systems, the political ecology of water investigates the power dynamics and socio-environmental conflicts surrounding water. It analyses how social, political and economic actors influence the allocation and control of water resources. A central argument is that the inequitable distribution of water is not a natural condition, but rather a social and political product. The inequality is often driven by multinational corporations and state actors who control water resources for capital-intensive activities such as large-scale agriculture, manufacturing or tourism, frequently at the expense of local communities' access to water (Cole, 2012). Water conflicts are thus rarely about only absolute scarcity. They tend usually to be struggles over governance, equity and justice, and their emergence is often linked to shifts in the quantity or quality of water available to powerful interests (Johnston, 2003). Community resistance is therefore directed not only at large infrastructure such as dams and water transfers; it is also aimed at industries that appropriate local water resources, such as mining and industrial agriculture (Rodríguez-Labajos and Martínez-Alier, 2015).

The political ecology framework also emphasises the critical interaction between environmental change and water governance. While climate change poses a significant threat to freshwater resources, historical analyses suggest that it is economic development that has exerted the most profound impact on water quality and availability (Johnston, 2003). Over recent decades, rapid urbanisation and industrialisation have resulted in catastrophic wetland loss and the severe pollution of a majority of the world's lakes (ibid). Infrastructural projects such as dams have potentially increased water availability for select communities in the short term; however, they have simultaneously induced substantial environmental degradation and long-term ecological challenges.

By conceptualising water as a politically contested resource, the political ecology perspective offers critical insights for developing more just, equitable and sustainable management pathways (Budds, 2004). It advocates for policies that integrate ecological considerations with human needs and it calls for participatory governance approaches that centralise the knowledge and perspectives of local communities. In doing so, this framework not only exposes the root causes of water insecurity, but also facilitates the conceptualisation of alternative solutions that are founded on principles of justice and resilience (Budds, 2004; Johnston, 2003). In the 21st century, political ecology remains an indispensable analytical tool for addressing the complex challenges of global water governance.

This focus on justice aligns political ecology with the core tenets of the environmental justice movement, which critique the disproportionate burden of environmental harms that is borne by marginalised low-income and minority communities. Environmental justice is the involvement of communities in environmental policymaking and enforcement regardless of race, ethnicity, income or gender. It seeks to address the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by marginalised communities, particularly concerning pollution, hazardous waste and resource depletion. The concept

emerged during the 1980s from grassroots movements in the United States, and it has since expanded into a global framework for understanding the intersection of environmental harm and social inequality (Agyeman et al., 2016).

As mentioned above, one central tenet of environmental justice is that low-income and minority communities often bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Industrial facilities, waste dumps and polluting factories are disproportionately often located in or near neighbourhoods with lower socio-economic status; this exposes residents to higher levels of air and water pollution, toxic chemicals and other environmental hazards. These communities tend to have limited political power and are often excluded from decision-making processes that affect their environment. Environmental justice advocates argue that this is a form of systemic inequality, linking environmental harm with broader social, racial and economic injustices.

The work of Schlosberg (2007) provides a crucial theoretical framework by identifying three key dimensions of environmental justice. The first, distribution, addresses the equitable allocation of environmental benefits such as clean water and green spaces, and burdens such as pollution and waste facilities. The second, recognition, calls for the acknowledgement of, and respect for, the diverse cultural identities and social values of particular communities and recognition of their historical attachments to their environments. The third dimension, participation, emphasises the right of all communities to have meaningful involvement and influence in the political processes and decisions that affect their local environments. Together, these three dimensions offer a comprehensive analytical lens for examining the multifaceted injustices inherent in environmental conflicts, making them central to the political ecology of water.

Politics of urban water infrastructures

Material networks such as roads, pipelines and digital networks facilitate the movement of goods and information and are usually seen as neutral technical and technological artifacts; in fact, however, they are products of power relations and decision-making that are embedded within broader social, economic and political contexts (Larkin, 2013). By determining who gets to use the materials and at what cost, infrastructure becomes a means of controlling societies; it often reflects the priorities of the people and entities that hold power, rather than the needs of marginalised communities (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

Urban water distribution relies on large-scale infrastructure because it is both economically advantageous and easier to regulate (Trowsdale et al., 2020); however, the decision-making processes regarding the location and construction of dams and pipelines often exacerbate social disparities (Meehan, 2013). Distribution thus tends to favour urban centres and industrial zones, which are the primary drivers of economic growth, while rural areas with less-powerful communities face inadequate supplies (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). This resource allocation, perpetuating social and economic injustice, is a political choice that privileges selected groups and reinforces existing hierarchies of oppression (Anand, 2012).

Those who are relocated or excluded by the installation of water infrastructure frequently contest it. Such projects are usually opposed by communities that lose access to land or experience environmental deterioration, thus casting doubt on the development and progress narratives that support them. Because these conflicts expose divergent perspectives on resource usage, governance and justice, they highlight the political dimension of water infrastructure. In addition to affecting ecosystems and economies, infrastructure shapes access to water and serves as a platform for conflicts about equality, ownership and power.

In many instances, infrastructure development is also tied to urban sprawl. As cities expand, they require extensive highways, water lines and electricity grids to connect suburban developments to the urban core. While these projects enable expansion, they impose significant financial and environmental burdens. Maintaining and extending services over low-density areas is often more costly than upgrading

existing urban spaces; infrastructure thus tends to expand outward from urban hubs, placing disproportionate fiscal strain on local governments (Carruthers and Úlfarsson, 2008).

Such large-scale projects are often classified as megaprojects, that is, complex transformational initiatives that cost upwards of US$1 billion and impact millions of people (Flyvbjerg, 2014). For governments, these projects are essential for territorial control, serving as a visible demonstration of a state's capacity to manage natural resources (Sayan et al., 2024); however, they can also function as instruments of dominance. In disputed regions, controlling water flow allows upstream users to suppress downstream opposition (ibid). The location of pipelines or dams can affect the power dynamics in the area because upstream users can control or limit the amount of water that reaches downstream populations, potentially intensifying conflicts.

According to Larkin (2013), infrastructure technologies are not neutral, but rather form the basis of discussions about citizenship and social order. Technologies and infrastructure thus constitute the strategy of governance. In addition to promoting economic growth, infrastructure expenditures also serve as a means for the state to demonstrate its power to its citizens (Szabó and Jelinek, 2023). Briefly, infrastructure around a basic resource such as water shapes complex relationships such as citizenship, social justice and state administration. When the social effects of these systems are considered along with their technical aspects, it is possible to see that infrastructure policies are a tool of power and control mechanisms (ibid).

WATER POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IN TURKEY

In Turkey, the formalisation of environmental policy gained momentum from the early 1980s. This was a period marked by accelerating industrialisation and economic liberalisation and by growing public awareness around environmental issues. The enactment of the Environmental Law No. 2872 in 1983 established a legal foundation for environmental protection, explicitly aiming to align it with the nation's economic and social development objectives. A significant body of scholarly work, however, agrees that environmental governance in Turkey is characterised by a highly centralised and top-down structure in which the state has consistently prioritised a developmentalist agenda whereby rapid economic growth has often taken precedence over environmental health and social equity (Harris and Işlar, 2014; Adaman et al., 2016).

The Yusufeli Dam Project is a prime example of how the state, through its discourse of development, can manipulate public opinion and create consent for such projects, often at the expense of local communities. As Evren (2016) notes, the AKP government's 2010 decision to acquire the project from private companies and nationalise it was a strategic move aimed at consolidating its power and ensuring that the benefits of the project accrued to the supporters of the Party. The power dynamics at play in the Yusufeli Dam Project are also highlighted in the expectations of local communities regarding employment and compensatory expropriation payments. The 2009 AKP electoral win in the district led villagers to expect more favourable treatment and more attention to their concerns from the state than from international consortiums. The desire for certainty and control, however, also played a role in villagers' decisions to sell their properties. Many were tired of the uncertainty surrounding the project and saw selling their land as a way to secure a more stable future.

An approach that favours a centralised model is institutionalised through key state bodies and is mirrored in the actual nature of water resource governance. While the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change holds primary responsibility for environmental governance, the Directorate General of State Hydraulic Works (DSİ), currently under the Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry (a fundamentally technocratic institution) is particularly influential in shaping water governance (Kibaroğlu et al., 2012; Conker, 2018; Kibaroğlu, 2020). As the principal agency for water resource management, the DSİ's activities include constructing dams for hydroelectric power, irrigation and urban water supply. These are emblematic of the state's focus on large-scale infrastructure as the primary

engine of development (Conker, 2018). While regulatory tools such as environmental impact assessments (EIAs) exist, they are often implemented within this overarching developmentalist paradigm (Adaman et al., 2016).

In this setup, major state institutions dominate the planning and management phases, while local stakeholders such as farmers and members of Water User Associations are typically relegated to the role of end-users, affording them minimal influence over strategic decision-making (Kibaroğlu, 2022). This power imbalance is most evident in the state's pursuit of megaprojects, from the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) to interbasin water transfers such as the Great Melen Project. These initiatives are designed to support urban expansion and industrial growth, reflecting a historical policy of developing a "national economy" that is centred on major metropolitan hubs (Buğra, 2017).

This urban-centric developmentalism prioritises metropolitan needs over rural sustainability, transforming resource-rich peripheral regions such as those surrounding Istanbul into ecological sacrifice zones that bear the cost of pollution and degradation (Aydın, 2019; Cengiz et al., 2019). This top-down, increasingly privatised governance model systematically marginalises local communities, often leading to their being dispossessed of established resource entitlements (Işlar, 2012). Ultimately, by disregarding these social and ecological costs, this approach deepens social inequality and undermines the long-term sustainability of Turkey's resource management strategies.

Water megaprojects in Turkey

Turkey has implemented numerous large-scale IBWT projects to address national objectives related to regional development, agricultural productivity, and urban water security. These capital-intensive engineering schemes reconfigure hydrological systems to support state-defined economic and social goals.

The most ambitious of these is the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), a multisectoral regional development initiative covering nine provinces. Launched in the 1970s, GAP's aim has been to harness the potential of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers for hydroelectric power generation and irrigated agriculture, thereby reducing regional economic disparities. The project's vast infrastructure includes 22 dams and 19 hydropower plants, with water being transferred via extensive networks such as the Şanlıurfa Tunnels, which convey water from the Atatürk Dam to the Harran Plain (Bilgen, 2017). Among those, the Ilısu Dam stands out as one of the most highly contested water megaprojects in Turkey. The flooding of the town of Hasankeyf, a site of immense global cultural and historical heritage, drew opposition from a powerful alliance of local activists, international NGOs and transnational networks (Bilgen, 2020).

Similarly, the Konya Plain Project (KOP) is the nation's second-largest development scheme after GAP. It is designed to mitigate agricultural water deficits in the Konya Closed Basin, a critical agricultural hub that is facing severe drought and groundwater depletion. Its centrepiece, the Blue Tunnel (Mavi Tünel), transfers 414 Mm^3 of water annually from the Göksu Basin for both irrigation and municipal supply. The project is locally perceived as a vital lifeline for agricultural survival, successfully aligning state infrastructure with the immediate material interests of politically conservative farmers (Çetinkaya et al., 2025).

In response to urban demands, the Kızılırmak-Ankara Water Transfer Project was developed to augment Ankara's water supply and to address the scarcity that has been driven by rapid urbanisation. The project transfers water over 130 km from the Kızılırmak River. Although critical for the capital city's water security, the initiative has faced challenges related to high operational costs and to water quality issues that require significant treatment (Işlar and Boda, 2014; Karakaya et al., 2014). Finally, the Büyük Menderes Basin Transfer Projects exemplify efforts to optimise water management in the Aegean region. The initiatives aim to redistribute water resources within the basin and from adjacent basins, in order to

support agricultural needs and mitigate pressures from overuse, pollution and climate change through a system of dams and pipelines (T.C. Tarım Orman Bakanlığı, 2023).

Feeding the beast: The challenge of meeting Istanbul's water demand

> When we undertake a great Project for our country, we have to expropriate [the land]. It is a very beautiful place, a natural wonder, [and] the soil is very fertile. We have to expropriate these places in order to provide water to Istanbul (Quote 24, Government, 2011).

Istanbul's water supply system represents a complex nexus of engineering, urban planning and political economy that is designed to sustain one of the world's most populous megacities. Managed by the Istanbul Water and Sewerage Administration (İSKİ), the system grapples with the immense pressures of a rapidly expanding population, uncontrolled urban sprawl, and the uncertainties of climate change (Cuceloglu et al., 2025). This challenge has necessitated a dual strategy of leveraging local reservoirs and developing large-scale interbasin water transfer projects (Akalın et al., 2025). These infrastructural solutions are not merely technical, however; they are deeply embedded within a national ideology of 'developmentalism', which prioritises megaprojects as symbols of progress. Here, we argue that while such projects are presented as essential for ensuring the city's water security, they simultaneously facilitate a model of urban expansion that results in the degradation of local ecosystems, the displacement of communities, and the paradoxical sacrifice of existing water basins for new, speculative urban developments such as the Canal Istanbul Project (Akay, 2026).

The foundation of Istanbul's water supply consists of a network of local dams and reservoirs. Key among these are Terkos Lake and Alibey Dam on the European continent and the Ömerli and Elmalı Dams on the Asian side (Figure 1). These reservoirs are critical for capturing seasonal precipitation and runoff, providing a foundational level of water security. The relentless pace of urbanisation, however, has rendered these local sources insufficient. Istanbul exemplifies the phenomenon of uncontrolled urban sprawl, characterised by the rapid, unplanned expansion of low-density development into peripheral rural and natural landscapes (Rubiera-Morollón and Garrido-Yserte, 2020). This expansion consumes vast tracts of land and leads to deforestation, habitat destruction, and the degradation of vital water catchment areas.

Figure 1. Freshwater storage in Istanbul and water transfers from the Istranca Streams

Note: The Pabuçdere and Kazandere Dams are outlined in red; the province of Istanbul is shown in grey. Source: Figure created by the authors using OpenStreetMap base maps.

The city's historical struggles with water scarcity date back to before the Byzantine era, but they have been acutely exacerbated by modern population growth. By the 1990s, with a population approaching 10 million, Istanbul faced severe water shortages, which led to rationing and public discontent. This crisis was a significant political catalyst, contributing to a shift in municipal leadership in 1994 and prompting the implementation of more ambitious water procurement strategies. The initial response involved transferring water from the Istranca Streams to the west of Istanbul (Figure 1), but the scale of the demand necessitated a far larger solution, giving rise to the Melen system.

The Great Melen Project must be understood within the broader political context of developmentalism in Turkey, where state-led investment in large-scale infrastructure such as dams, bridges, airports and power plants is equated with national progress and modernity (Flyvbjerg, 2014). As Turkey's economic and demographic centre, Istanbul has been the primary beneficiary and focal point of these 'megaprojects'. While these initiatives have spurred economic growth and transformed Istanbul into a global megacity, they have simultaneously created ecological sacrifice zones in and around the metropolis, systematically destroying critical ecosystems and water basins.

This pattern of resource extraction is not limited to water. To satisfy Istanbul's high energy demands, surrounding regions like Zonguldak and Çanakkale have become sites for coal-fired power plants. These have led to severe air and water pollution and adverse health impacts on local populations (Aydın, 2019). The Great Melen Project follows a similar logic of externalising environmental costs.

The Great Melen Project, conceived as a solution to Istanbul's water crisis, has paradoxically enabled the destruction of the city's own water resources. The assurance of an external water supply has provided the political and logistical justification for sacrificing water basins within the city limits for use as new and highly lucrative urban development schemes. The Sazlıdere Dam Basin is a prime example of this trade-off (Birgün, 2025). Now that the Great Melen Project can compensate for the loss of local drinking water, the government is able to sacrifice this vital reservoir, draining it to make way for the Canal Istanbul Project, which is a highly profitable artificial waterway and real estate venture that is intended to parallel the Bosphorus Strait (Gülersoy et al., 2014; Akay, 2026).

Canal Istanbul is not merely an infrastructure project; rather, it is the centrepiece of a new urban vision called *Yenişehir* (New City). The New City is designed to accommodate a "qualified population"[2] in a modern settlement that is physically and symbolically separate from the old city (TMMOB ÇMO, 2020). Such state-led initiatives to create purpose-built new cities are not without international precedent; indeed, they mirror a global pattern whereby various states have historically and contemporarily established similar planned cities to consolidate territorial control and stimulate economic growth (Moser and Côté-Roy, 2021). This strategy reveals a clear prioritisation of speculative real estate development and economic growth over the principles of environmental conservation. By securing water from the Melen system, the state has effectively freed up local water-rich lands for urban expansion. This represents the central paradox of Istanbul's current development trajectory in that it imports water at great ecological and social cost from distant regions only to sacrifice its internal, local water sources for further urban growth. This approach entails a profound and likely irreversible compromise of the region's long-term ecological resilience in favour of short-term economic and political objectives.

The Great Melen Project: A case of infrastructural ambition and unresolved conflicts

The Great Melen Project is a landmark IBWT initiative that was designed to secure the long-term water supply for Istanbul, one of the world's most populous megacities. The project aims to transfer

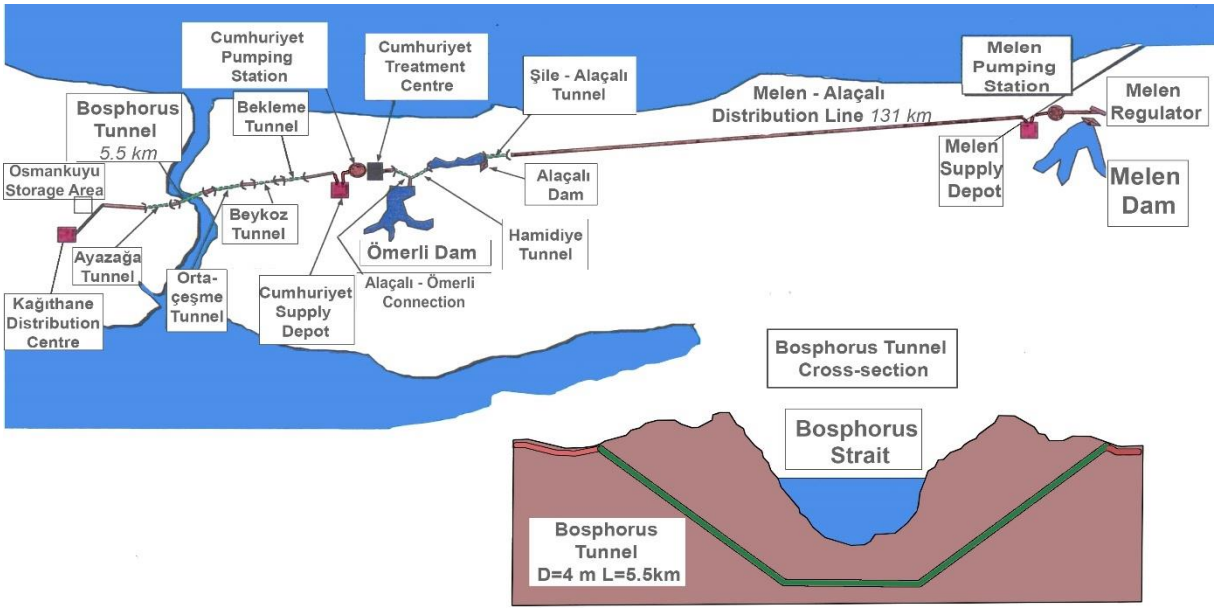
[2] In the changes to the Istanbul Province European Side Reserve Construction Area 1/100,000 Scale Environmental Planning Plan in the 2020 Cycles, emphasis was placed specifically on the Yenişehir Project "creating quality housing and social environment facilities to attract a highly qualified population to Yenişehir" (*Yüksek nitelikli nüfusun Yenişehir'e çekilmesi için nitelikli konut ve sosyal çevre olanaklarının oluşturulması*) (TMMOB ÇMO, 2020).

approximately 1 billion m^3 of water annually to the metropolis from the Melen Stream, located on the provincial border between Düzce and Sakarya. It was conceived as a multi-stage engineering scheme involving the construction of a regulator, an extensive network of pipelines and tunnels (including a tunnel beneath the Bosphorus Strait; see Figure 2), multiple water treatment plants, and, most critically, the Melen Dam (Kalkan and Yanık, 2004; Gerek, 2008).

The Great Melen Project is not a standalone case of a large-scale water transfer project. Similar IBWT projects have been, and continue to be, implemented in the world, such as China's South-to-North Water Diversion Project and India's National River Linking Project. They are perceived as technological solutions to the need to balance uneven water distribution and support agricultural, industrial and urban development (Ghassemi and White, 2007). While these initiatives offer economic benefits to metropolitan centres, they also result in ecological disruptions including biodiversity loss and altered aquatic habitats, whose mitigation requires robust, integrated management (Wang et al., 2016; Yan et al., 2023). These complexities are further illustrated by notable cases such as Brazil's Sao Francisco River Project, where massive cost overruns and implementation delays have failed to address structural inequalities, leaving rural populations marginalised and without meaningful water security (de Andrade et al., 2011; Roman, 2017; Santos and Ioris, 2024).

The initial phases of the Great Melen Project successfully established a transfer system that diverted water to both the Asian and European sides of Istanbul. The Melen Dam – the project's central component – was planned to be built in the second phase of the Great Melen Project and was to be completed in 2016 (*Dünya Gazetesi*, 2012); as of the mid-2020s, however, it remains unfinished. In the first stage of the project, which started in 2001, part of the water in the Melen Stream was diverted through tunnels and pipelines to the Ömerli Dam on the Asian side of İstanbul. In the second stage, the water was also diverted into the Bosphorus Water Tunnel running below the Bosphorus Strait and was connected to the water infrastructure grid on the European side (Figure 1). The volume of water transferred through this tunnel is estimated at about 2.8 Mm^3/day.

Figure 2. The Great Melen Project



Source: Suyapı (n.d.). Note: Figure not to exact scale.

From its inception, the project has been framed by state officials as a definitive and forward-looking solution to Istanbul's water challenges. Successive government ministers and directors of the State Hydraulic Works have promoted it as a guarantee of the city's water security, with projected timelines extending from 2040 to as far as 2071. This official narrative of national necessity and technical prowess was legally reinforced by measures such as the 2015 Melen Stream Sub-Basin Protection Action Plan, which situated the project within the country's broader environmental and development goals.

The implementation of this vision, however, has entailed significant sociopolitical consequences, particularly for the rural communities in the project's catchment area. The village of Ortaköy in Sakarya province serves as a stark case study. In 2014, the community was displaced through an "urgent expropriation" decision to make way for the dam's reservoir. A decade after the forced evacuation, during which essential services such as electricity were cut to compel residents to leave, the dam is yet to be completed, leaving the displaced population in a state of prolonged uncertainty (*Milliyet*, 2014).

The public discourse surrounding the project consistently prioritised the metropolitan needs of Istanbul. This narrative of urban priority was often internalised and reproduced at the local level, with regional media and officials – including Ortaköy Mayor Cemal Angın – expressing a sense of duty or "honour" in supplying water to the nation's economic centre (*Anayurt Gazetesi*, 2011; *Düzce Postası*, 2013). While state-led housing projects were promised for those displaced, the abruptness of the expropriation process forced many residents to find their own solutions, underscoring a significant disconnect between state planning and the lived realities of affected communities.

In many instances, top state officials actively framed the project as an existential necessity for Istanbul and even for the entire nation. The then Sakarya Governor Balkanlıoğlu, for example, explicitly described the Melen Dam as the "insurance" for Istanbul's water supply, stating that it was designed to meet roughly 75% of its needs. By also declaring that "Istanbul means Turkey", he effectively justified such local sacrifices, asserting that "Istanbul being without water means Turkey being without water"(*Anadolu Agency*, 2018). This sentiment was echoed by former Minister of Forestry and Water Affairs, Veysel Eroğlu, who celebrated the project for re-establishing a "water civilization"; he justified the scale of the intervention by insisting that the city is the "pearl of the world" (Eroğlu, 2021). The state also deployed a strong narrative of modernisation as a way to legitimise the massive socio-ecological reconfiguration. Highlighting the project's immense scale and advanced technology, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ultimately framed the project as providing "[undeniable] gains for our country and our nation" (*Hürriyet*, 2009). Together, these official discourses created a formidable developmentalist rhetoric that effectively silenced local distress by rendering displacement an unavoidable, and even patriotic, cost of national progress.

In 2019, the project's trajectory shifted dramatically when a high-profile visit by the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Ekrem İmamoğlu, brought public attention to the fact that construction had been halted due to the discovery of significant cracks in the dam's structure. This revelation transformed the Melen Dam from a symbol of national engineering prowess into a case of profound infrastructural failure. As of 2026, the project remains in a state of stagnation. The unresolved technical issues, coupled with the unaddressed social costs of displacement, represent a latent conflict beneath the surface of a project that was once hailed as the ultimate solution to Istanbul's water scarcity.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE MELEN DAM: THE CASE OF ORTAKÖY

A primary objective of this research is to investigate the attitudes and experiences of stakeholders impacted by the Melen Dam's construction through the conceptual lens of environmental justice. The study's analytical framework is grounded in the three dimensions of environmental justice proposed by Schlosberg (2007). To better understand the environmental justice implications of the Great Melen Project, the research focuses on the displaced community of Ortaköy (Lahna), a former town in the Kocaali district of Sakarya province. Situated 86 km from the provincial centre, Ortaköy, along with the

adjacent villages of Gümüşoluk and Çobansayvant, was a significant centre for regional hazelnut production, which formed the primary livelihood of its residents. The local agricultural economy was further supplemented by the cultivation of various fruits and vegetables for subsistence.

Prior to its dissolution, Ortaköy was a municipality governed by a mayor from the Justice and Development Party (the ruling party, AKP), who had been elected in the 2009 local elections. Effective 30 March 2014, however, the legal personality of the Ortaköy Municipality was terminated pursuant to Law No. 6360, which also restructured numerous other metropolitan municipalities (*Resmi Gazete*, 2012). That year, the construction of the Melen Dam necessitated the expropriation of land and the subsequent evacuation of residents from Ortaköy and the surrounding villages (*Milliyet*, 2014). Thirteen villages were evacuated, which constituted a total population of around 7500 people (*Anayurt Gazetesi*, 2011).

To achieve its aim, the study began with preliminary desk research to establish the study's structure and identify relevant stakeholders. This was followed by a series of online and on-site in-depth interviews with selected stakeholders, including two local government representatives, two experts, two journalists, and one former resident. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.[3] Due to difficulties in reaching unresponsive stakeholders for detailed comments, we examined open-source archives, including local newspapers and video media, to collect statements that were already in the public domain. The research also involved a June 2024 field visit to the Melen region, which included Ortaköy, the Melen Dam, and the İSKİ regulator sites.

Regarding the Ortaköy case, social media analysis was employed to identify and reach residents. To capture local perspectives in Düzce and Sakarya, we searched Facebook groups using keywords such as 'Melen', 'Melen Stream', and 'Melen Protection'. Three primary groups were identified: (1) *Ortaköy 'Lahna' Town Archive*, (2) *Big Melen Basin Protection and Sustenance Association*, and (3) *Güzelköy (Melen) Solidarity and Assistance Group*.

Although the Melen Dam Project impacts multiple villages, the *Ortaköy 'Lahna' Town Archive* was identified as the primary active digital community for displaced residents. This group functions as a platform for solidarity, sharing information on community milestones such as weddings and funerals and preserving village history through photo albums. To gather data on the circumstances in Sakarya, we conducted interviews with the leadership of the Big Melen Basin Protection and Sustenance Association.

Five principal stakeholder groups were delineated for this analysis:

1. *Government*: This was represented by the State Hydraulic Works (DSİ), the agency responsible for the planning and execution of the dam project. As direct interviews were not granted, the analysis relies on public statements from DSİ officials during the project period.
2. *Local Government of Istanbul*: This group was represented by İSKİ, the project beneficiary and operator of Istanbul's water supply infrastructure. The role and perspective of this group was distinct from that of the national government.
3. *Experts*: This group was comprised of representatives from the Chamber of Environmental Engineering, including a former branch manager; members of this group provided technical and policy-related insights.
4. *Local residents*: This consisted of 17 displaced individuals from Ortaköy who were identified through the aforementioned Facebook group and archived video news reports.
5. *Media representatives*: This group included local journalists and reporters from national and regional newspapers.

[3] Despite several attempts to contact them, central government representatives remained unresponsive and were unavailable for an interview.

A total of 70 quotes containing statements about an environmental justice issue were gathered from these stakeholders.[4] The collected data was subsequently coded and categorised according to the environmental justice dimensions of economic and ecological distribution, recognition and participation (Schlosberg, 2007). It is described as follows:

- Procedural justice:
  - *Recognition:* the ability to consider and recognise the rights of other human and non-human beings (Honneth, 2001)
  - *Participation:* the decision-making process through which environmental demands can be met through long-term interaction with communities (Arnstein, 1969)
- Distributive justice:
  - *Ecological distribution:* the distribution of hazards or pollution due to increased social metabolism (Martínez-Alier, 2009)
  - *Economic distribution:* The distribution of economic benefits, opportunities, risks and costs across individuals or communities in an affected society or across generations over time (O'Connor, 2002)

The desktop and field research indicated that no protest had happened during the expropriation of Ortaköy. It also suggested that there were problems related to governance and project management, which in turn led to a lack of communication and information sharing between the villagers and governmental bodies. Due to this lack of communication, many of the displaced villagers were only able to receive compensation for their losses in the short term, while the long-term difficulties of migration from the village where they had lived for centuries were mostly ignored.

Most of the quotes collected from the villagers indicated that the project had had negative environmental and socio-economic effects, mostly related to displacement; they pointed mostly to the distributive and procedural dimensions of environmental justice. Against this, the discourse by the governmental institutions was that such development projects could cause displacement and some ecological impacts, but that these projects were necessary and had to be built (Quote 25); this referenced the complete dependency of Istanbul's water resources on Melen. Governmental officials also stated that all the actions mentioned in the related legislations had been taken after due consideration, thus reducing the justice and compensation aspects of the project to a legal procedure (*Anadolu Agency*, 2018).

In the remainder of the section, selected relevant quotes are highlighted under procedural (recognition and participation) and distributive (economic and ecological) dimensions.

Procedural justice

Recognition

The dimension of recognition justice emerged as the most salient theme among stakeholder testimonies. Their statements consistently demonstrated how the community's history, culture and rights to information and decision-making were disregarded throughout the project's implementation. As one local resident put it, "This project means erasing our history. My life will be sold here. We will suffer great stress after leaving here" (Quote 18, Resident, 2011).

The project's execution thus failed to adequately recognise, value or incorporate the perspectives of the residents or the historical significance of the village. Long-standing social networks among relatives and neighbours that had been nurtured over decades were severed (Quote 12, Resident). This

[4] The complete compilation of categorised quotes and their original version in Turkish is presented in the Appendix.

engendered a profound sense of loss and disorientation among the displaced population. As a consequence of the expropriation, residents – some of whose families had inhabited the region for centuries – faced the irreversible loss of their social bonds, cultural heritage, and collective history (Quote 64, Expert).

Residents frequently cited the lack of information and communication from authorities regarding the project's status and asserted that their full and informed consent was not transparently obtained (see Quote 62, Resident). The expropriation procedure was poorly managed, resulting in residents receiving short notices for evacuation with a limited preparation time of one month (Quote 60, Resident). This is indicative of a top-down governance model in which, as one journalist noted, "human-centred, long-term guidance is not given" to the affected population (Quote 32). As one resident stated, "The government may victimize us through the resettlement and provide Istanbul drinking water, not only until 2041 or 2071, but until apocalypse – as long as Istanbul stands and [Melen] river flows. However, [for this to happen] our consent must also be received" (Quote 62, Resident, 2014).

Despite these grievances, organised public demonstrations against the expropriation did not materialise. This lack of collective action is attributed by one interviewee to a "lack of awareness" (Quote 34, Journalist) among villagers regarding the long-term effects of displacement; this stemmed, they felt, from a significant breakdown in information dissemination by the government. This information deficit led residents to "prioritize 'what do, *I* get?' first" (Quote 36, Journalist). This focus was reinforced by an official narrative that, as one stakeholder noted, reductively framed the issue as a financial transaction underpinned with the attitude of, "Didn't they receive their money?" (Quote 43, Journalist). This approach effectively reduced the comprehensive rights of local residents to the sole issue of monetary compensation.

Quotes from local residents revealed a delayed awareness of the project's adverse impacts. This suggested that earlier and more comprehensive information could have prompted a different collective response (see Quotes 10 and 11, Resident). A journalist corroborated these accounts, noting the severe and persistent psychological effects of displacement on the villagers, particularly the elderly, who have struggled to adapt to new urban environments. This outcome highlights the necessity for improved resettlement procedures and emphasises the importance of addressing the cultural and mental health needs of impacted residents in addition to financial remuneration. As one resident put it,

> Now it's very difficult for people. If all the villages had united against it back then, maybe it wouldn't have happened. Could they build a dam in Rize? The whole village united and resisted, but back then, everyone was only interested in money; our villages didn't matter to them (Quote 10, Resident, 2023).

Another resident said that, "The villages are gone, the people scattered, the roads are in ruins, and now, even if it's talked about, it doesn't matter anymore" (Quote 11, Resident, 2023). A journalist stated further that, "The elderly people of Ortaköy now live in different districts. When we talk to them, we notice a significant difference between their current mindset and the one they had while living in Ortaköy. We are also aware of those who have started using antidepressants" (Quote 35, Journalist, 2024).

Participation

Deficiencies in public participation were another frequently cited theme among residents, media representatives, experts and local Government of Istanbul stakeholder groups. Analysis of the quotes indicates that a pervasive lack of information constituted a clear participatory injustice. While residents were notified of public meetings such as the environmental impact assessment (EIA) presentation (Quote 41), the necessary information was reportedly not conveyed in an accessible or comprehensible manner. This failure of communication created a significant knowledge gap, hindering the community's capacity for informed preparation and meaningful participation. This communication deficit was acknowledged even by local Government of Istanbul representatives, who nonetheless maintained that all procedures

had been conducted in accordance with existing legislation. As one representative put it, "We have no communication with the public about when the dam will be completed. We implement everything according to the special obligations prepared by TÜBİTAK"[5] (Quote 50, Local Government of Istanbul, 2024).

The persistent lack of communication regarding the dam's completion date – which still remains uncertain – further exacerbated the community's exclusion from the project's timeline. As one resident said, "We are worried as citizens. We want the officials interested in the Project, the Minister of Environment, to come and gather our people and at least inform them about the stage of the Project, where and how the public will be directed" (Quote 23, Resident, 2011).

Distributive justice

Ecological distribution

Residents frequently referenced the favourable environmental living conditions in Ortaköy prior to their displacement (see, for instance, Quotes 12, 19 and 28). The subsequent environmental degradation resulting from prolonged dam and road construction (ongoing for nearly a decade) has engendered a sense of abandonment within the community (see Quotes 21 22, 23 and 56). Despite perceiving the situation as an "environmental disaster" (Quote 5, Resident), organised public protest has been notably absent. A prevailing sentiment among residents is that the 2014 expropriation, which led to their forced departure, the demolition of their homes, and significant land disruption, was undertaken for a project that has failed to materialise. This has created a sense that their sacrifice has been futile. As one resident said, the failure to complete the dam is a primary source of grievance, suggesting that the tangible benefit of a completed dam might have mitigated their sense of loss. "If the dam was built, we would probably go on a trip with our children, but since it was not built, we are victimized [even more]" (Quote 26, Local Resident, 2023).

The perspective of government officials on the project is complex. One official statement (Quote 16) identifies the Melen River as a more "suitable point" for the water source for Istanbul than the Sakarya River Basin, thereby justifying the "sacrifice" of the area to meet the city's water demands. The government perceives the project as an essential measure for ensuring Istanbul's water security, despite the acknowledged ecological consequences. This position exemplifies the classic development-versus-environment dichotomy, wherein the state prioritises developmental objectives and cost criteria over local ecological well-being. "It's a very beautiful natural wonder, the soil is very fertile. [But] it must be expropriated to supply water to Istanbul" (Quote 25, Government representative, 2011).

Ecological issues affecting both Istanbul and Ortaköy were a central topic during the in-depth interview with the Chamber of Environmental Engineering's Istanbul Branch. Expert testimony indicated that transferring water using only the existing regulators, without a completed dam, is energy intensive and therefore economically and ecologically unsustainable (Quote 49, Expert). At the same time, they acknowledged that, "The entire water system of Istanbul depends on Melen" (Quote 48, Expert), thus implying that the dam was necessary despite its attendant ecological and social problems. This over-reliance on a single basin also poses water security risks for Istanbul's population. Synthesising these issues, the interviewed expert ultimately opposed the project, arguing that, "The correct solution is to protect Istanbul's watersheds; building a dam is not the [correct] solution" (Quote 53, Expert). This recommendation contrasts with current policy, as exemplified by the fate of the Sazlıdere Dam. The Presidential Decree of 15 September 2022 terminated the official status of the dam as a drinking water source, and therefore "the drinking water basin protection area" provisions around the dam were lifted

[5] TÜBİTAK is the Turkish acronym for the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu).

(Birgün, 2025). The land in the catchment zone was thereby opened to urban development. This approach, as characterised in Quote 67, reflects a growth-oriented policy mindset: "Since water is available [now, coming from Melen, anyway], the basins [in Istanbul] should be given up for development". Consequently, while Istanbul's residents benefit from a distant water source, they at the same time experience the ecological loss of protected natural areas within their own metropolitan region.

Collectively, the testimonies demonstrate that the Great Melen Project and the broader management of Istanbul's water system create a significant ecological distribution problem. A rural community has been exposed to profound ecological and social harm stemming from incomplete dam infrastructure and extensive land expropriation. The project's framework – characterised by over-reliance on a single water source, the environmental degradation of the Melen River, and a stark inequity in resource allocation – illustrates a classic case of spatially displaced impacts, where the benefits accrue to the metropolitan centre of Istanbul while the substantial costs are borne by the local source community.

Economic distribution

A predominant theme within the collected statements was the inadequacy of the financial compensation provided through the expropriation scheme. Community members were thus severed from their primary livelihood as agriculturalists, with insufficient funds to purchase agricultural land elsewhere.

The expropriation of Ortaköy and adjacent villages occurred in 2014, at which time residents received compensation based on their land holdings; however, the fairness of this compensation remains a contentious issue. The process resulted in the economic disempowerment of the villagers, who lost their primary livelihoods, including hazelnut orchards and land for livestock farming (see Quote 4, Resident). Residents consistently reported that the compensation was inadequate relative to the economic value of their properties. As illustrated in Quote 20 below, the sum offered for a significant parcel of land was insufficient for anything beyond basic living expenses, precluding the purchase of new property. Residents were thus left with severely limited economic opportunities (see Quote 28 below). Relocation to urban centres did not guarantee employment and available work often consisted of low-wage jobs that failed to provide the financial security of their former agricultural livelihoods. This structural lack of economic opportunity has inhibited the displaced residents' ability to improve their financial circumstances. As put by one local resident, "The money for 3 acres is barely enough for tea expenses, I can't buy anything. If they give me the rest of the money, then let them come and build the dam here" (Quote 20, Local Resident, 2011). As another resident stated,

> Due to the destruction of the village in 2014, some received a compensation payment of 110,000 TL [~€35,000 in 2014]. Before they could collect the expropriation money, the villagers were forcibly evicted from their homes, and electricity and water were cut off. (…) The houses of those whose homes were demolished were built by the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), but the houses were offered for sale at 50,000 TL [~€17,000 in 2014]. Villagers with hazelnut orchards and two-story houses were forced to live in the city on a minimum wage (Quote 28, Local Resident, 2023).

Inefficient management of the expropriation process caused significant economic instability among the residents. The compensation received was often insufficient to facilitate resettlement within the same locale, compelling migration to other cities such as Düzce, Akçakoca, İstanbul and İzmit (Quote 29, below). The influx of compensation funds led to what one resident described as "economic turmoil" that had several consequences. Some residents sold their remaining land at undervalued prices (Quote 28, Resident), while others, unaccustomed to managing large sums of money, faced financial difficulties (Quote 31, Journalist). Paradoxically, some wealthier residents then attempted to sell land outside the expropriation zone, viewing any government land acquisition as a potential economic opportunity (Quote 45, Journalist). "Since the process was managed late, very few of the residents settled in the district [of Kocaali] and others bought houses and orchards in Karasu, Düzce, Hendek, Adapazarı, İzmit, Akçakoca" (Quote 29, Journalist, 2024).

A statement from a government representative (Quote 24) articulates the official rationale for expropriation, framing it as a necessary component of large-scale investment. This perspective highlights a policy approach wherein the economic burdens of national development projects are systematically transferred to local communities via the loss of land and livelihoods. Such a methodology institutionalises the displacement of communities by prioritising capital-intensive investments over the welfare of those directly affected. This illustrates an economic framework that favours infrastructure development at the expense of social and environmental justice. "When a project is undertaken in our country (highway, high-speed train, dam), if we're making a large investment, we must carry out expropriation" (Quote 24, Government representative, 2011).

A key statement regarding the project's economic nature (Quote 70, below) articulates how capital interests have asserted control over Istanbul's water basins for profit, underlining the commodification of natural resources. This situation reflects a broader economic distributive injustice, where resources that should be managed as a public trust are instead controlled by capital. The displaced villagers were not equitably compensated for their losses and were consequently forced into precarious economic circumstances that were often worse than their previous conditions. This demonstrates that the economic burdens of the project were disproportionately placed upon already vulnerable communities. As put by one expert (Quote 70, 2024), "Istanbul has been rendered helpless, and the only reason for this is that all of Istanbul's water basins have been surrendered to capital for profit".

The problem of economic distribution is also intrinsically linked to ecological distribution. This is demonstrated by the destruction of hazelnut orchards, which severed the community's connection to its primary means of livelihood (see Quote 4). Hazelnut orchard owners were affected by two distinct expropriation schemes. First, properties within the planned reservoir were expropriated, leading to the destruction of homes and the displacement of residents. Second, areas within the 300-metre strict protection zone were also expropriated and cleared. Due to the project's stall, some individuals have illicitly returned to their orchards and even rebuilt homes. According to a journalist (Quote 37), government and State Hydraulic Works officials appear to be tacitly ignoring these recent developments. As one local resident put it, "They expropriated thousands of acres of hazelnut orchards, demolished hundreds of houses, barns, and haylofts, and they no longer exist" (Quote 4, 2023).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

> The recipe is as expensive as it is unimaginative: pump water from wherever it is still reasonably fresh and in great supply. (…). Megapumps (…) for a megalopolis and between them: megadistances. (Robert 1994: 40)

The conflict surrounding the Melen Stream, as examined in this study, serves as an illustration of the larger environmental struggles taking place globally. Overt clashes between environmental activists and government agencies have been documented in a number of other better-known cases. The more subtle and often silent conflicts, however, remain largely understudied. Like the one involving the Melen Stream that we discuss here, these are also characterised by complex power dynamics and result in environmental degradation and social injustice. This study, through an analysis of the statements collected from different stakeholder groups, aimed to understand these injustices and how they are legitimised.

A central finding of this research is the multifaceted nature of the environmental injustices resulting from the Great Melen Project. These injustices were manifested across both distributive and procedural domains. From a distributive perspective, the project caused severe ecological and economic dispossession. The destruction of natural habitats and productive agricultural lands, particularly the region's vital hazelnut orchards, represents a clear case of ecological mal-distribution. This was compounded by the displacement of villagers who were subjected to expropriation of their primary

sources of livelihood and intergenerational wealth. Critically, these distributive outcomes appear to be symptomatic of a more foundational procedural failure, that is, the mal-recognition of residents' rights, cultural heritage and deep-seated connection to their ancestral lands. This fundamental lack of recognition directly enabled the subsequent procedural failings, including the systemic under-representation of the community and the absence of their meaningful participation in the making of decisions that would irrevocably alter their lives.

The political dynamics of the Great Melen Project are representative of large-scale infrastructure development globally. Such projects are rarely neutral acts of engineering; rather, they are potent instruments of state-making and territorialisation. By prioritising the strategic interests of a metropolitan core – in this case, ensuring water security for Istanbul – the state reinforces dominant power asymmetries and reconfigures access to vital resources.

Crucially, examining why the evacuation of Ortaköy did not translate into overt resistance reveals the mechanisms by which a conflict becomes silent. First, procedural injustices created a severe information deficit. Residents were initially left uninformed about the full scale and long-term consequences of the expropriation; instead, they were placated with promises of fair, substantial and prompt financial compensation. This perceived windfall temporarily neutralised opposition, but it ultimately fell short of the true value of their land and livelihoods. Second, the state – as in other large-scale dam projects – employed a developmentalist narrative to manufacture consent (Akbulut et al., 2018). As highlighted above, the villagers largely perceived the dam as an unquestionable state mandate. The prevailing motto that "if the state is doing it, it is for a reason" reflects a deep-seated belief within the community that local sacrifice is to be honoured, even expected, for the sake of the greater national good. Driven by this perception, the villagers' reluctance to act is further magnified by the presence of other political risks. Villagers were likely discouraged from mobilising by their awareness of the broader political climate in Turkey, where grassroots environmental protestors are often labelled as terrorists or enemies of the state (Kurtiç, 2022).

Over time, however, disillusionment set in as villagers encountered delays in receiving compensation, realised the inadequacy of the funds they had received, and struggled to adapt to their new living conditions. Even amid these hardships, the villagers' discourse remained focused on resentment rather than on outright rebellion against the state. Their grievances centred on a perceived lack of respect for, and acknowledgement of, their sacrifice. This was expressed in sentiments such as, "[they should have at least] asked for consent from the villagers".[6]

The state's employment of developmentalist arguments to justify the construction of the Melen Dam highlights a common tactic used in such projects. By framing the provision of water to Istanbul as an apolitical, technical necessity that was vital for the nation's economic engine, the state effectively depoliticised a fundamentally political decision about who wins and who loses. This manoeuvre created a rationale where the Melen Basin was reconstituted as a sacrifice zone, that is, as a territory whose local ecological integrity and social fabric were deemed expendable for the benefit of the metropolitan centre. The long-term environmental degradation, forced displacement of communities, and erosion of cultural heritage were thus framed not as injustices, but rather as necessary and unavoidable costs of national progress. This utilitarian logic effectively silenced alternative visions for the region and marginalised the voices of those who bore the project's heaviest burdens.

While this analysis has centred on the state-community dynamic, a comprehensive understanding demands a multi-scalar and networked approach. The outcomes of environmental conflicts are rarely determined by local or national actors alone. A more complete picture must account for the broader

[6] See Quote 62 by a local resident, "…ama bizim de helalliğimiz alınmalıdır" (but they should have our consent), and Quote 58 by another local resident, "bizim mağduriyetimiz bir nebze evlerimiz olduğu zaman giderilmiş olacak, biz de devlete olan hakkımızı helal etmiş olacağız" (our grievance will be alleviated to some extent when we have homes, and we will give our blessings to the state).

assemblage of interests at play. This includes the role of private corporations – in this case real estate developers – who may have vested interests in the new development opportunities unlocked by such projects. Lifting of the protected status of drinking water basins in Istanbul, for instance, opened them to real estate development once an alternative water source had been secured. Examining the intricate connections between state agencies, corporate actors and local communities is essential for appreciating the complex political economy that drives these environmental conflicts.

In conclusion, the case of the Great Melen Project and the dissolution of Ortaköy offers insights into the anatomy of 'silent' environmental conflicts and the powerful discursive strategies that states employ to legitimise developmental agendas. It illustrates why reconciling development with justice remains so difficult. This difficulty stems from the fact that mega-infrastructure projects are often tied to the very legitimacy of the state. When development is framed as an existential technical necessity for a metropolitan core, local justice is viewed not as a compatible goal, but as an obstacle to be managed or compensated for.

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AI ASSISTANCE DISCLOSURE

Certain sections of this article were refined with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools. These tools were used primarily for language editing and stylistic improvements. The authors have thoroughly reviewed, edited and validated all content generated or refined by AI to ensure accuracy and academic integrity. The authors maintain full accountability for the facts, interpretations and original research presented herein.

APPENDIX

ID	Quote (Turkish)	Quote (English Translation)	EJ Dim	Date	SH Gropu	Source
1	Geçmişimizi bitirdiler.	They destroyed our past.	Recognition	2023	Resident	In-depth interview
2	Baraj gövdesi çatladı, su tutmaya cesaret edemediler. Şu anda bu barajın yıkılıp yeniden yapılması gerekiyor, çevre yollar batakhaneye döndü.	The dam body cracked, and they didn't dare to hold the water; now this dam needs to be demolished and rebuilt. The surrounding roads have turned into a swamp.	Ecological Distribution	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
3	Araçla zorla köylerimize gidiyoruz, toz toprak çok kötü bir durum var. "Bu bozuk yola beton dökün tozdan kurtulalım" diyoruz fakat ilgilenen yok; terk edilmiş bir inşaat alanı oldu.	We barely reach our villages by car; the dust and dirt are in terrible condition. We say, "Pour concrete on this broken road so we can be free from the dust", but no one cares; it has become an abandoned construction site.	Ecological Distribution	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
4	Binlerce dönüm fındık bahçesini istimlak ettiler, yüzlerce ev, ahır, samanlık, yıkılıp yok oldu.	They expropriated thousands of acres of hazelnut orchards, demolished hundreds of houses, barns, and haylofts, and they no longer exist.	Economic Distribution	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
5	Köylerimize baraj içinden zorla geçiyoruz. Baraj içindeki tozlu, yapraklı taşlı yolu kullanıyoruz, araçlarımız perişan oluyor fakat ilgilenen yok. On köyün yolu bu baraj içinden geçiyor, perişan haldeyiz tam bir çevre katliamı yapıldı burada.	We pass through the dam, but there is no proper access road around it; we use the dusty, leaf-strewn, rocky road inside the dam, and our vehicles are in terrible condition, but no one cares. Ten villages use this road through the dam, and we are in a miserable state; a complete environmental disaster occurred here.	Ecological Distribution	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
6	Baraj projesi oldu, herkes dağıldı. Kimse kimseden haberdar değil. Bazı köylülerimiz aynı bölgede ikamet ediyor, bazıları il değiştirdi, cenazeden veya düğünden haberleri olmuyor, biz de katılamıyoruz. Hastası olana sayılı kişiler destek veriyor, bazıları selamını "Belki para ister" diye düşünerek kesiyor. Bazıları düğün yapıyor zenginleri çağırıyor, fakirler cenazeye davet ediliyor. Bazıları hastane önünde karşılaşıyor fakat yüz çeviriyor. Bize ne oldu? Elli yıllık hukukumuz geldi geçti.	The dam was built, and everyone dispersed. Nobody knows anyone anymore. Some of our villagers live in the same area, some moved to another province, but they have no idea about each other's funerals or weddings; we can't attend either. Few people offer support to the poor; some have cut off greetings because they think they might ask for money. Some invite the wealthy to their weddings, while the poor are only invited to funerals. Some meet outside hospitals but turn their faces away. What happened to us? Fifty years of our relationships are gone.	Recognition	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
7	Millet bitti, Ortaköy kalmadı. Köyü bedavaya kapattıla,r ne ölü kaldı ne diri; birileri bu işten rant sağladı, yani köyümüz bir hiç uğruna kayboldu.	The people have perished; Ortaköy no longer exists. They took it away for free, and neither the dead nor the living remained; some people profited, and our village disappeared for nothing.	Economic Distribution	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
8	Baraj havzasında hayatı araştırılacak kim kaldı ki halkın %80 dertten keder üzüntüden öldü.	Research who's left alive in the dam basin – 80% of the population died from grief and sorrow.	Recognition	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
10	Şimdi çok zor geliyor millete. Zamanında bütün köyler bir olup da karşı çıkılsaydı belki olmazdı. Barajı Rize'de yapabiliyorlar mı sanki? Bütün köyler bir oluyorlar, karşı çıkıyorlar. Herkes paraya tamah oldu o zamanlar köyler umurlarında değildi.	Now it's very difficult for people. If all the villages had united against it back then, maybe it wouldn't have happened. Could they build a dam in Rize? The whole village united and resisted, but back then, everyone was only interested in money; our villages didn't matter to them.	Participation	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
11	Tabii ki yaşlılara gerçekten zor gelmiştir, çoğu kişi de rahmetli oldu. Benim küçüklüğümden beri çalışma yapılıyordu. Köyler gitti, insanlar dağıldı, köylerin, yolların perişan olduğu doğru. Ama artık konuşulsa da bir şey fark etmiyor.	Of course, it was really hard on the elderly. Most of them have passed away since my childhood when the surveying began. The villages are gone, the people scattered, the roads are in ruins, and now, even if it's talked about, it doesn't matter anymore.	Recognition	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
12	Ortaköy beldesinin bir bireyi olarak her geçişimde ağlıyorum. Zira, tahmini olarak 10 veya 15 köy, Ortaköy'ün bir parçası olma, güzelliğinin ve harika insanlarının tadını çıkarma şansına erişmişti ve şimdi 70 yaşıma kadar birlikte yaşadığım insanları artık göremediğimin hüznünü yaşıyorum. Onları Ortaköy'de bulamamak, görüşememek gerçekten çok zor ve bu beni duygusal olarak yıprattı.	As a resident of Ortaköy, I cry every time, I. pass by. Because, in my estimation, about 10 or 15 villages were blessed to be part of Ortaköy and enjoy its beauty and wonderful people, and now, I. am filled with sadness because, I. can no longer see the people, I. lived with until, I. was 70 years old. It's really hard not to find them in Ortaköy, not being able to meet, and it has worn me down emotionally.	Recognition	2023	Resident	Facebook group comment

13	Baraj bölgesi tamamen terk edilmiş bir durumda, bilhassa gece geçerken insanı korkularla başbaşa bırakıyor.	The dam area is completely abandoned, especially at night; it's terrifying.		2023	Resident	Facebook group comment
14	2006-2007 yıllarında büyük kuraklık yaşandı, İstanbul büyük kuraklık tehdidi altındaydı. Veysel Eroğlu'nu "şafak harekatı" ile birlikte 20 ekim 2007'de 20.59'da suyu basmayı başardık.	In 2006-2007, there was a severe drought, and Istanbul was under the threat of a great drought. Together with Veysel Eroğlu's "Dawn Operation", we managed to pump water on October 20, 2007, at 20: 59.		2011	Government	Video news
15	2007'de %7'lere düşmüş baraj doluluk oranları vardı. Suyu İstanbul'a vermeseydik Nisan 2008'de Istanbul susuz kalacaktı.	In 2007, dam water levels had dropped to 7%. If we hadn't supplied water, Istanbul would have been without water by April 2008.		2011	Government	Video news
16	Sakarya Nehri'nin havzası itibariyle su almaya uygun bir noktası yok. Düzenli depolama yapacak baraj nehri bulunmuyor. Su fiziksel olarak Melen'e göre daha kirlidir. Melen'in baraj yapmaya elverişli bölgesi var.	The Sakarya River Basin has no suitable point for drawing water. There is no dam river suitable for regular storage. Physically, the water is dirtier compared to Melen. There is a suitable area for building a dam.	Ecological Distribution	2011	Government	Video news
17	Şehir [İstanbul] muhakkak yedekli kalmalıdır, İstanbul'un şu anki barajları kriz anında yetersizdir.	The city must always have a backup; the current dams in Istanbul are inadequate in a crisis.	Ecological Distribution	2011	Government	Video news
18	Bu proje bizim özgeçmişimizi silmek demektir. Benim hayatım satın alınmış olacak burada. Büyük stres çekeceğiz buradan gittikten sonra.	This project means erasing our history. My life will be sold here. We will suffer great stress after leaving here.	Recognition	2011	Resident	Video news
19	Buradaki rahatlığı başka yerde bulamayacağımızı biliyoruz. Evimiz, yerlerimiz, bostanımız kalacak. Nereye gideceğimizi bilmiyoruz.	We know that we won't find comfort like this elsewhere. Our homes, lands, and gardens will remain behind. We don't know where we will go.	Recognition	2011	Resident	Video news
20	3 dönüm yerimizi aldınız, 12 dönüm yerim dışarda kaldı. 3 dönüm yerin parasını çay parası yapar harcarım, bir şey alamam. Diğer parayı da verirlerse o zaman buraya baraj yapmaya gelsinler.	You took 3 acres of our land; 12 acres remain outside. The money for 3 acres is barely enough for tea expenses, I can't buy anything. If they give me the rest of the money, then let them come and build the dam here.	Economic Distribution	2011	Resident	Video news
21	Diyelim 1-2 dönüm yerim var. Nereye gideceğim belli değil. Gittiğim yerde aynı işimi yapabilecek miyim? Bize bilgi vermediler.	Let's say, I. have 1-2 acres of land. I don't know where, I. will go. Will, I. be able to do the same work where, I. go? They didn't give us any information.	Economic Distribution	2011	Resident	Video news
22	İnsanlar belirsizlikten evlerine bir çivi dahi çakamıyorlar. Bu insanların ihtiyacını devlet görecek de insanları yerleştirecek mi?	People can't even drive a single nail into their homes due to uncertainty. Will the state take care of these people's needs and resettle them?	Recognition	2011	Resident	Video news
23	Vatandaş olarak tedirginiz. Projeyle ilgilenen yetkililerden, Çevre Bakanı'ndan gelip halkımızı toplayıp en azından bilgilendirme amaçlı projenin ne aşamada olacağının, halkın nerelere ne şekilde yönlendirileceğinin anlatılmasını istiyoruz.	We are worried as citizens. We want the officials interested in the Project, the Minister of Environment, to come and gather our people and at least about the stage of the Project, where and how the public will be directed.	Participation, Recognition	2011	Resident	Video news
24	Ülkemizde bir proje yapıldığı zaman (otoyol, hızlı tren, baraj) eğer büyük bir yatırım yapıyorsak kamulaştırma yapmak zorundayız.	When a project is undertaken in our country (highway, high-speed train, dam), if we're making a large investment, we must carry out expropriation.	Economic Distribution		Government	Video news
25	Çok güzel tabiat harikası bir yer, toprağı çok verimli. İstanbul'a su verebilmek için buraları kamulaştırmak durumundayız.	It's a very beautiful natural wonder, the soil is very fertile. [But] It must be expropriated to supply water to Istanbul.	Ecological Distribution	2011	Government	Video news
26	Baraj yapılsaydı çocuklarımızla gezmeye giderdik belki ama yapılmadığı için mağduruz.	If the dam had been built, maybe we would have gone on trips with our children, but since it wasn't built, we are victims.	Ecological Distribution	2023	Resident	In-depth interview
27	Köyde fındık bahçelerimiz vardı ve geçimi hayvancılıktan sağlıyorduk.	We had hazelnut orchards in the village, and we made a living from livestock farming.	Economic Distribution	2023	Resident	In-depth interview
28	2014 yılında meydana gelen köy yıkımı sonucunda dönem bedeliyle 110 bin TL kamulaştırma bedeli aldı bazı kişiler. Kamulaştırma bedeli tahsil edilemeden köylüler zorla evlerinden tahliye edildi, elektrik ve su kesintileri yaşandı. Ev bulamayanlar ve mağdurlar bölgede kaldı. Evleri yıkılan köylülere Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı (TOKİ) tarafından evler yaptırıldı ancak evler 50 bin TL'ye satılmaya çalışıldı. Fındık bahçeleri ve iki katlı evleri olan	Due to the destruction of the village in 2014, some received a compensation payment of 110,000 TL. Before they could collect the expropriation money, the villagers were forcibly evicted from their homes, and electricity and water were cut off. Those who couldn't find homes and those who were victims remained in the area. The houses of those whose homes were demolished were built by the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), but the houses were	Economic Distribution	2023	Resident	In-depth interview

	köylüler, şehir hayatında ve asgari ücretle yaşamak zorunda kaldı.	offered for sale at 50,000 TL. Villagers with hazelnut orchards and two-story houses were forced to live in the city on a minimum wage.				
29	Süreç geç yönetildiği için bu insanlar kamulaştırma bedellerini aldıkları zaman ilçeye çok az yerleştiler. Karasu, Düzce, Hendek, Adapazarı, İzmit, Akçakoca civarlarında yer ev ve konut aldılar, fındıklık aldılar.	Due to the process being managed poorly, when these people received their expropriation money, very few settled in the district. They bought homes and hazelnut orchards in places like Karasu, Düzce, Hendek, Adapazarı, Izmit, Akçakoca.	Economic Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview
30	Gündeme İstanbul'un su sorunu veya buradaki halk gelmedi.	Istanbul's water problem or the local population here never came to the agenda.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
31	Ekonomik savrulma yaşayan insanlar ellerinde hiç göremeyecekleri bir para ile karşılaştılar.	People experiencing economic turmoil were confronted with money they could never have seen in their lifetime.	Economic Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview
32	Kamulaşma bedeli alan insanların %80'i çeşitli nedenlerle mağdur durumdadır – kendi hataları da oldu ama esasen yerel ve merkezi hükümet bu sürecin nasıl yönlendirileceği konusunda gerekli çalışmaları yapmadı. Yani insan insan odaklı uzun vadeli yönlendirme sağlanmadı.	80% of the people who received compensation for expropriation are in a disadvantaged position for various reasons – their own mistakes played a role, but fundamentally, local and central governments did not carry out the necessary work on how to guide this process. In other wors, no long-term, human-centred guidance was provided.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
33	Bölgenin sosyolojik yapısı protesto tarafında yeterli seviyede değil.	The region's sociological structure is not sufficiently conducive to protest.	Participation	2024	Media	In-depth interview
34	Atalarının yüzyıllardır yaşadığı yerden taşınmasının bedeli para ile ölçülemez. Bunun farkında olan insan sayısı çok azdı. "Keşke yerlerimizi geri verseler, parasını iade edip oturmaya devam ederdik", diyen köylüler oldu. Bilinç düzeyi yeterli olmadığı için, getiri ve götürülerini fark edemediklerinden, köylüler uzun vadeli zararları göz ardı etti.	The cost of relocating from the land where their ancestors lived for centuries could be measured in money. Very few people were aware of this. Some villagers said, 'If only they would give our land back, we would return the money and conitnue living there'. Due to a lack of sufficient awareness, since they could not perceive the benefits and drawbacks, the villagers overlooked the long-term damages.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
35	Yaş almış Ortaköy beldeli insanlar farklı ilçelerde yaşıyorlar artık. Bu kişilerle görüştüğümüz zaman Ortaköy'deki dünyaya bakış ve ruh halleri ile şimdiki ruh halleri arasında çok büyük farklar var. Antidepresan kullanan kişilerin varlığından da haberdarız.	The elderly people of Ortaköy now live in different districts. When we talk to them, we notice a significant difference between their current mindset and the one they had while living in Ortaköy. We are also aware of those who have started using antidepressants.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
36	Olabilecekleri tahmin eden siyasi partiler bu konulara eğildiler, ama bizim insanımız önce ben ne alıyorum konusunu önceliklendirdikleri için etkili olmadı.	Political parties (those who could foresee what might happen) focused on these issues, but since our people prioritised what they would receive first, it was not effective.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
37	Kamulaştırılacak arazi problemi de oldu. 300 m koruma bandı alanı içerisinde kalan kamulaştırılan yerlerin dışında, arada kalan arazi sahipleri baya bir sorun yaşadılar. İlgili kurumlar fındık bahçelerine müdahale edilmesini istemediler, cezalar kesildi. En son yetkililer bu konuya müsaade etme durumunda kaldılar, çünkü projenin bu hali ile sürüncemde kaldığı için artık DSİ'nin kamulaştırdığı bölge dışında kalan bölgelerde "mutlak koruma bölgesi" denilen alanlarda insanlar kendi konutlarını yeniden yapmaya başladılar.	There was also a problem with the land to be expropriated. People who owned land within the 300-metre protection zone experienced significant problems outside of the expropriated areas. The relevant authorities did not want any intervention in the hazelnut orchards, and fines were issued. In the end, they allowed this issue because, with the current state of the project dragging on, people started to rebuild their homes in areas outside the region expropriated by the State Hydraulic Works (DSİ), which was labelled as a 'strict protection zone'.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview
38	Burada su tutulduğu zaman, Kocaali'nin baraj suyu yakınında olan ancak hala yerleşim bulunan köylerde fındık üretiminde sorunlar yaşanacaktır.	When the water is retained here, it will cause problems for hazelnut production in the villages along the streams in the Kocaali region, particularly in those near the dam but still have settlements.	Economic Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview
39	Buharlaşma ile soğuk bir araya geldiğinde fındık üretiminde verim konusunda %60-70'lere varan bir zaiyatı olacaktır.	When evaporation combines with cold, there will be up to 60-70% loss in hazelnut production.	Economic Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview
40	Melen çayı Karadeniz'e dökülüyor. Karadeniz kıyısındaki köylerde sadece fındık değil, mısır ekimi de yapılıyor.	The Melen River flows into the Black Sea. In the villages along the Black Sea, not only hazelnuts but also corn is grown. If	Ecological Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview

	Karadeniz suyunun rüzgarla zaman zaman iç kesimlere ilerlemesine karşı önlem alınmazsa, bu durum fındık ve mısır mahsüllerini etkileyecek ve köylerin çevresindeki arazilerin artık tarıma elverişli olmayacağına dair akademik çalışmalar bulunmaktadır.	precautions are not taken against the wind sometimes pushing the Black Sea water inland, it will affect the hazelnut and corn crops, and there are academic studies suggesting that the lands around the villages will no longer be suitable for agriculture.				
41	Kamu ile gerekli bilgi akışı, yerel halkın anlayacağı şekilde aktarılmadı. Teknik bilgiler yoğunlukla verildi. Kulaktan dolma bilgilerle süreç içerisinde insanlar kontrol edilmeye çalışıldı. Bu etik değil. ÇED raporu sunumu Ortaköy'de yapıldı, fakat konular teknik dille ifade edildiği için insanlar pek anlamadı.	The necessary information was not conveyed to the public in a way they could understand. The focus was mainly on technical details. People were controlled during the process through hearsay information. This is not ethical. The environmental impact assessment (EIA) report presentation was also made in Ortaköy, but since the topics were expressed in technical language, people did not understand much.	Participation	2024	Media	In-depth interview
42	İnsanların kültürel varlıkları konusunda erozyona uğratıldı. Yüzyıllardır olan yaşam alışkanlıkları ellerinden alındı, fakat bir arada yaşayabilmeleri hususunda hükümet bir girişimde bulunmadı.	People's cultural heritage has been eroded. Their centuries-old living habits were taken away, but no government initiative was made to ensure they could continue living together.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
43	Devlette "Paralarını almadılar mı?" algısı var devlette. Ama insanların sonra nelerle karşılaşacakları konusunda bir fikirleri yoktu.	There is a perception in the government that 'Didn't they take their money?' But people had no idea what they would face later on.	Recognition	2024	Media	In-depth interview
44	Toplum hazırlanmadı, devlet organizasyon birimleri devleti devlet yapan ağırlıkta hareket etmedi.	The society was not prepared; the state organisations did not act with the weight that makes the state a state.	Participation	2024	Media	In-depth interview
45	Vahşi yöntem denendi burada. Belirlenen kamulaştırma bedelleri üzerinden pazarlık yapıldı, "Kamulaştırılan yer dışında bölgelerim de var, onları da al". diyip pazarlık yapanlar da oldu. Bu sefer 10 lira olan fiyat için alırım ama daha düşüğe alırım diye pazarlıklar yapıldı.	A ruthless method was tried here. Negotiations were conducted based on the determined expropriation values, and some said, 'There are areas outside the expropriated places, take them too', and bargaining took place. This time, those who had previously received 10 liras made negotiations to get even less.	Economic Distribution	2024	Media	In-depth interview
46	İlçe halkı süreçten sonra bilinçlendi, doğru yöntemlerle halka doğru bilgiler aktarıldıktan sonra kimyasal OSB'ye karşı çıktılar.	The district residents became more aware after the process; after correct information was conveyed to the public through correct methods, they opposed the chemical organised industrial zone (OSB).	Participation	2024	Media	In-depth interview
47	Göçün bu kadar travmatik olduğunu bilmiyordum.	I didn't know migration was this traumatic.	Recognition	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
48	Bütün İstanbul su sistemi Melen'e dayalıdır.	The entire water system of Istanbul depends on Melen.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
49	Karadenize beslenen suyun %70'i alınıyor, regülatörlerle bu enerjinin taşınması mümkün değil.	70% of the water fed into the Black Sea is taken; it is not possible to transfer this energy with regulators.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
50	Güncelde barajın ne zaman biteceği ile ilgili halk iletişimimiz bulunmuyor. Her şeyi TÜBİTAK tarafından hazırlanan özel yükümlülüklere göre uyguluyoruz.	We have no communication with the public about when the dam will be completed. We implement everything according to the special obligations prepared by TUBITAK.	Participation	2024	Local Government of Istanbul	In-depth interview
51	Çoğumuzun yeri yurdu belli olmadı. 4'te 1'imiz bir yerlere sığındı. Geri kalan dağıldı.	Most of us do not know where our place is. A quarter of us took refuge somewhere; the rest scattered.	Recognition	2020	Resident	Video news
52	Şehre alışamadık, şehir bize göre değil. İnsanlar stresten duramıyor yerinde.	We couldn't get used to the city; the city is not for us. People are so stressed they can't stay still.	Recognition	2020	Resident	Video news
53	Doğru çözüm İstanbul'un su havzalarını korumak, baraj çözüm olmayacaktır.	The correct solution is to protect Istanbul's water basins; building a dam is not the solution.	Ecological Distribution	2020	Expert	Video news
54	Melen'den [İstanbul'a] suyun getirilmesi daha yüksek maliyetli su teminine, [İstanbul'daki] insanların daha yüksek bedelle suyu temin etmelerine neden olacak.	Bringing water from Melen will lead to higher costs for water supply, causing people to pay more for water.	Economic Distribution	2020	Expert	Video news
55	Havzada yaklaşık 320.000 insan yaşıyor ve sanayi tesisleri de var. Bu deşarjlar Melen çayına yapılıyor bu da suyun kalitesini	About 320,000 people and industrial facilities live in the basin. These discharges are made into the Melen River, reducing the water	Ecological Distribution	2020	Expert	Video news

	düşürüyor. Bu sebeple Melen Havzası'nı zaman zaman 3. veya 4.sınıf dediğimiz su kaynağı olma niteliği taşımayan havza kabul edebiliriz.	quality. From time to time, we can consider the basin as not being a water source of the 3rd or 4th class.				
56	Ortaköy halkı olarak buradaki yerleşimimizin yeni yerde de devam etmesini istiyoruz, halk olarak tek istediğimiz bu. Mezarlarımız nereye ne şekilde gömülecek onu bile bilmiyoruz.	As the people of Ortaköy, we want our settlement here to continue in the new location as well. This is all we want as the public. We don't even know where and how our graves will be buried.	Recognition	2014	Resident	Video news
57	Hepimizin elinde tebligatlar var, bir ay sonra evlerimizi boşlatmamız isteniyor.	We all received notifications; we are being asked to vacate our homes in a month.	participation	2014	Resident	Video news
58	Bizim mağduriyetimiz bir nebze evlerimiz olduğu zaman giderilmiş olacak, biz de devlete olan hakkımızı helal etmiş olacağız.	Our grievance will be alleviated to some extent when we have homes, and we will forgive our rights to the state.	Recognition	2014	Resident	Video news
59	Köy halkına beklediğinden daha çabuk boşaltma tebligatı geldi.	The village people received an evacuation notice faster than expected.	Recognition	2014	Resident	Video news
60	Bize tanınan çok komik bir süre, bir ay içerisinde evlerimizi boşaltmamız söyleniyor. İnsanların buna ön hazırlığı yok. Bize vereceklerini taahhüt ettikleri alanda işler istediğimiz hızda ilerlemiyor.	We were given a very short time, and we are told to vacate our homes within a month. People have no preparation for this. The work in the promised area is not progressing at the speed we want.	Recognition	2014	Resident	Video news
61	Yerimizden çıktığımız zaman bize verilen evlere yerleşeceğimizi hayal ederek bir çok şeyi sineye çektik.	When we left our place, we endured many things, dreaming that we would move into the houses that were promised to us.	Recognition	2014	Resident	Video news
62	Yerleşim konusunda devletimiz tarafından mağdur edilirsek, İstanbul'un içme suyunu değil 2041, 2071, kıyamete kadar İstanbul durduğu ve Melen aktığı sürece sağlayabilirsiniz. Ama bizim de helalliğimiz alınmalıdır.	The government may victimize us through the resettlement and provide Istanbul drinking water, not only until 2041 or 2071, but until apocalypse – as long as Istanbul stands and river flows. However, our consent must also be taken.	Recognition	2014	Resident	Video news
63	Köylerden apartmanlara taşınan insanlar çok zor durumda kaldı.	People who moved from villages to apartments are having a very difficult time.	Recognition	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
64	Köylülerin bir kısmı o bölgede yüzyıllardır yaşayan insanlarıydı ve aslen Hemşinlilerdi.	Some of the villagers were people who had lived in that region for centuries and were originally Hemşin.	Recognition	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
65	"Mezarlarımızı bile kaldıramadan apar topar bize köyü boşalttırdılar" demişti insanlar.	People said, 'They made us evacuate the village in a hurry without even allowing us to move our graves'.	Participation	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
66	Melen karşı olduğumuz ve yapılmaması gereken bir projeydi. Bir kent kendi su ihtiyacını karşılayamıyor, iki şehir sonra su temin ediliyor.	Melen was a project we were opposed to and should not have been carried out. A city cannot meet its own water needs, and then two cities down the line are being supplied with water.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
67	Bu suyun İstanbul halkı için bir bedeli var. Sermayenin "Nasılsa suyunuz var, o zaman havzalarınızı verin, biz de havzalarınızı yapılaşmaya açalım" diye yaklaşımı oldu.	This water comes at a cost to the people of Istanbul. The capital took the approach of 'Since you have water, then give us your basins so we can open them up for development'.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
68	Melenin suyu çok berekteli değil. 400 bin insan yaşıyor ve 6 milyon canlı hayvan var, burada da bir kullanım var.	Melen's water is not very abundant. Approximately 400,000 people and 6 million livestock live there; there is also usage there.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
69	Melen günü kurtaran bir proje. Geçici bir çözüm ve ortada baraj da yok.	Melen is a project that temporarily solves the problem. It is a temporary solution, and there isn't even a dam in place.	Ecological Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview
70	İstanbul çaresiz hale getirildi, bunun da tek nedeni İstanbulun tüm havzalarının sermayenin rantına teslim edilmesidir.	Istanbul has been rendered helpless, and the only reason for this is that all of Istanbul's water basins have been surrendered to capital for profit.	Economic Distribution	2024	Expert	In-depth interview

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