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An Examination of the Levantine Influence on Turkish Culture in the Context of the Sixth Municipality Department

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Abstract

Beyoğlu emerged as one of the principal centers of Western influence in the late Ottoman Empire due to the presence of Levantine communities and European institutions. This study investigates the role of the Sixth Municipal Department, the first modern municipal organization in the Ottoman Empire, in shaping urban governance, architecture, and cultural transformation in Beyoğlu. Using a historical-analytical approach, the research examines Ottoman archival documents, travelogues, memoirs, contemporary newspapers, architectural evidence, and secondary literature. The findings demonstrate that Levantines occupied influential positions within the municipal administration and significantly shaped urban development through investments in transportation, lighting, sanitation, public spaces, and architectural projects. However, municipal services were distributed unevenly and primarily benefited affluent Levantine and European residents, while poorer Muslim and non-Muslim neighborhoods received limited attention. The study further reveals that the Sixth Municipal Building, designed in a European Neo-Classical style, symbolized the institutional and architectural dimensions of Ottoman Westernization. Beyond urban administration, Levantine influence contributed to transformations in social life, consumption patterns, language, and architectural culture. The article concludes that the Sixth Municipal Department played a pioneering role in the emergence of modern municipal governance in the Ottoman Empire, while simultaneously reflecting the social inequalities and cultural dynamics that accompanied the Westernization process.

Keywords: Turkish culture; beyoglu; levantine; sixth municipal department; architecture

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1. Introduction

Beyoğlu, one of the first areas in Ottoman social and cultural life where Western lifestyles appeared, was home to different ethnic and religious groups. In addition to Muslims and other Ottoman subjects, the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, Europeans, whom the Ottomans referred to as Franks, and the Levantines were also among the inhabitants of the region. Those living in Europe outside the Balkan territories were called Franks by the Ottomans, while Christian groups such as Hungarians, Slavic Europeans, Syriacs, and Maronites were excluded from this category. The term Levant was used by Westerners to refer to the coastal strip under Ottoman control in the Eastern Mediterranean. The French word Levantine, meaning Eastern, began to be used by the Ottomans in later centuries. With its meaning of Eastern, the word Levantine was used by Europeans for Muslims,

Ottoman Jews, and Greeks (Rothman 2012, p. 260). Latin-origin Western Mediterranean people (of Italian and French descent) who settled in Eastern lands and were born in the East were called Levantines, and from the 19th century onwards, this term was also used for English people who began to live in Ottoman lands and were born there. There was a significant Levantine population, especially in cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Tarsus, Iskenderun, Samsun, and Beirut. The area where Levantines predominantly lived in Istanbul was Galata (Ortaylı 1994, pp. 204–7). In the second half of the 15th century, the Ottoman historian Tursun Bey referred to Galata as Frengistan due to its demographic composition (Bey 1977, pp. 130–31).

During the Byzantine era, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) granted commercial privileges to the Venetians in order to receive military assistance, and thus the Venetians began to settle in Istanbul. After the Venetians settled in Bahçekapı and Galata, the Amalfi, Genoese, and Pisans also gained privileges and settled in Galata. After the Latin invasion in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade, the Venetians were expelled, and the Genoese were predominantly living in Galata at the time of the conquest. Following the conquest of Istanbul, the Ottomans granted the Genoese community, known as the Magnifica Comunita di Pera (Magnificent Community of Pera), the authority to settle their internal affairs. After the conquest of Istanbul, Sultan Mehmed II issued a charter on 1 June 1453, granting amnesty to the Latin-origin residents here and guaranteeing their property and lives (İnalcık 2019, pp. 279–81).

After Western countries moved their embassies from within the Galata walls to Pera in the late 1500s, the area inside the walls, formerly the Genoese district, became known as Galata, while the area outside the walls, where the embassies were located, became known as Pera (Bulunur 2014, p. 21). The Pera area outside the Galata walls was a region full of vineyards, gardens, and cemeteries, but it began to develop with the construction of the Galata Palace during the reign of Sultan Bayezid II. The name Pera, meaning "opposite side," was given to the area by the Byzantines because it was located opposite Suriçi Istanbul. Over time, this area came to be called "Beyoğlu" because of the mansion of Alvise Gritti, son of Andrea Gritti, who later became the Doge (Lord) of Venice (İnalcık 2019, pp. 280–82). The Ottomans used the word Beyoğlu to refer to Pera outside the city walls. From the 19th century onwards, Galata, with its inns and port, began to emerge as a commercial district. Pera, with its residences, shops, and hotels, took shape as a residential area. The name Istiklal Caddesi used today, was given during the Republican era. In the 19th century, this street was called Grand Rue de Pera by the Levantines and Cadde-i Kebir by the Muslim Ottomans residing in Beyoğlu. Muslims living in Suriçi, on the other hand, called the street Doğruyol (Right Way) in order to criticize the social life in Beyoğlu (Özendes 2017, p. 55).

During the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, Europeans, who had been in the area since the Byzantine era, gradually increased their population with the embassy building constructed by the French in the region in 1535 (Sakaoğlu 1994, p. 149). In the 19th century, the region experienced significant development following the Baltalimanı Trade Agreement (1838) with the British and the Crimean War of 1853–1856. After the war, many Europeans settled in the area. In the 19th century, some Levantines married Greeks, becoming a cosmopolitan element. There were even Levantines in the region who never visited Suriçi Istanbul during their entire lives. Groups who did not speak Turkish and lived a life closed to outside influences and Ottoman culture, going only to neighborhoods outside Beyoğlu where only Levantines lived, were in the majority (Scognamillo 2019, p. 116). In 1909, the area was described by William Mitchell Ramsay, an English archaeologist based in Istanbul, as a European-style neighborhood (Ramsay 2019, p. 88).

Beginning with the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, classical Ottoman institutions were abolished, and the number of institutions established based on European models increased after his death with the Tanzimat period. In Ottoman Istanbul, modern municipal administration first emerged in Beyoğlu in the 19th century with the Tanzimat period. The Levantines played a significant role in the formation of a Western-style municipality. This study examines the influence of the Levantines in Beyoğlu on late Ottoman society and culture through the history, functioning, and architecture of the Sixth Municipal District in an interdisciplinary manner. Primary sources such as Ottoman archival documents, manuscripts, travelogues, memoirs, periodicals, and secondary sources related to the subject (research works such as books, articles, theses, and encyclopedia entries) were used as references.

To better comprehend the historical trajectory of the Sixth Municipal Department, it is essential to situate it within the broader historiography of Ottoman urban modernization and trans-imperial cultural encounters. Late nineteenth-century Ottoman municipal reforms did not occur in an institutional vacuum; rather, they represented a hybrid synthesis of local administrative traditions and Western urban models. While traditional Ottoman historiography often framed these developments as a straightforward process of passive Westernization, contemporary urban historians highlight the active agency of local actors, particularly Levantine and non-Muslim elites, in translating European urban norms into the Ottoman context (Çelik 1998, pp. 31–49; Ortaylı 2020, pp. 115–19). This process of municipalization was closely linked to what urban historians call the 'globalization of municipal governance' in port cities across the Mediterranean, such as Alexandria, Beirut, and Smyrna. In these divergent urban spaces, characterized by high concentrations of foreign and minority populations, municipal institutions often emerged as arenas of cultural negotiation, economic privilege, and social division. Consequently, the Sixth District of Istanbul serves as a paradigmatic case study for analyzing how Western municipal models were adapted to a multi-ethnic empire, and how these administrative frameworks simultaneously fostered urban development and exacerbated spatial inequalities between different confessional communities (Çelik 1998, p. 43).

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a historical-analytical research method to examine the influence of Levantine communities on Ottoman urban culture, municipal administration, and architecture through the case of the Sixth Municipal Department (Altıncı Daire-i Belediye) in Beyoğlu. The research is based primarily on qualitative analysis of historical sources.

The materials used in the study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Ottoman archival documents obtained from the Presidential Ottoman Archives, contemporary newspapers, travel accounts, memoirs, official records, and period publications. Secondary sources comprise scholarly books, journal articles, encyclopedia entries, and academic theses related to Ottoman urban history, municipal administration, Levantine communities, and architectural history.

Data were collected through document analysis and evaluated using a historical-analytical framework. The study investigates the administrative structure, municipal practices, urban interventions, and architectural activities of the Sixth Municipal Department and assesses their relationship with the social, cultural, and economic influence of Levantine communities in Beyoğlu. Architectural features of the Sixth Municipal Building were also examined through architectural and historical sources. Generative artificial intelligence tools, specifically ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.5), were used solely for translation assistance, language editing, proofreading, and stylistic improvement of the English text. No AI tools were used in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data, nor in the

development of the study's arguments, findings, or conclusions. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

3. The Administration of Ottoman Istanbul Before the Tanzimat

Prior to the Tanzimat era, no central institution was responsible for the administration of Istanbul. The city's administrative affairs were carried out by various officials. At the head of these was the Istanbul qadi, who held the municipal, property, and judicial duties under a single authority. The city of Istanbul consisted of the Central Surici, also known as Nefs-i Istanbul, and the Bilad-ı Selase (Üsküdar, Galata, and Eyüp) qadis. In addition to these four qadi jurisdictions, also known as Mevleviyet (High Qadiship), officials such as the Şehremini, Hassa Baş Mimarı, Galata Voyvodası, Bostancıbaşı, and İhtisab Ağası (Muhtesib) also had authority in the administration of Istanbul. The aforementioned officials served under the qadis. The highest-ranking qadi was the Istanbul Qadi, also known as the Taht Qadi. The qadis were directly subordinate to the office of the Grand Vizier (Kütükoğlu 2018, pp. 346–47).

The municipal duties of the qadis included supervising craftsmen and tradesmen, checking whether the prices of goods in the market were in line with the official price list, and inspecting the quality of food and the scales used. The muhtesibs assisted the qadis in these duties. The city administrator and the chief architect of the imperial palace were responsible for the repair and construction of state-owned buildings. The organization and cleaning of avenues, streets, and roads were the responsibility of foundations and neighborhood residents. The qadi and other officials were more involved in organizing tradesmen and other neighborhood residents to provide municipal services than in providing municipal services themselves. While they focused on supervision and punishment, the cleaning of the bazaar and streets, and the repair of structures such as mosques, madrasas, tombs, elementary schools, inns, baths, and fountains were the responsibility of the neighborhood residents (Ortaylı 2020, pp. 127–35). The necessary expenses were covered by foundations and property owners; no payments were made from the state budget. After the Tanzimat, it was observed that repair costs were covered by the state treasury in some cases. The garbage of Istanbul was collected from homes by the scavenger guild in exchange for a fee. The scavengers sorted through the garbage, took whatever objects they could use, and threw the rest into the sea (Cezar 2002, pp. 305–13).

Following the Tanzimat Edict proclaimed during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid (1839–1861), the number of Western-style institutions increased, and with a decision taken on 25 July 1855, the Ministry of Taxation was abolished, and the Istanbul City Council was established to deal with Istanbul's municipal affairs in a modern manner (Ortaylı 2020, p. 400). The duties of the qadis, muhtesibs, Şehremini, and Hassa Baş Mimar were transferred to the Şehremini and the Şehremaneti council. In the classical period, the City Mayor was an official affiliated with the palace organization who provided the materials necessary for the repair and construction of palaces and public buildings, but from 1855 onwards, it became a title used for the mayor (Akyıldız 2010, p. 459). Furthermore, while the residences of state officials in the classical period of the Ottoman Empire were also used for official business, independent public buildings began to be constructed for the new institutions that emerged during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II and afterwards with the Tanzimat. This allowed for the establishment of order in municipal affairs and the beginning of steps towards institutionalization. The period that began with the Tanzimat saw the emergence of the concept of a new city center. Instead of the classical period's understanding of cities built on the waqf system, Western-style squares, government residences, clock towers, telegraph offices, post offices, and other public buildings became

part of urban spaces. In this new period, the religiously shaped, mosque-centered city model of the classical era changed, and it was replaced by a government building and square-centered urban planning approach. (In the classical period, mosques, inns, covered markets, madrasas, and bathhouses were located in the center of the city, while mosques, elementary schools, and fountains were located in the center of neighborhoods). The purpose of including elements symbolizing the power of the state, such as coats of arms, tuğras, and insignia, on the main facades of public buildings constructed in the new era was to legitimize the centralizing administrative structure brought about by the Tanzimat through architecture (Yeşilbaş 2021, pp. 73–103).

4. The Establishment, Administrative Structure, and Activities of the Sixth Municipal Department

4.1. The Establishment Process and Historical Background

Although the Prefect (*Şehremaneti*) was established in the Ottoman Empire in 1855, no significant municipal activity was observed over the following two years. In 1856, the Urban Regulation Commission (*İntizam-ı Şehir Komisyonu*) was formed, consisting of non-Muslim and Levantine representatives who almost entirely resided in Galata and Pera, knew Europe closely, and spoke foreign languages. Based on a report prepared by this commission, municipalism in the Ottoman Empire took concrete shape only after the establishment and operations of the Sixth Municipal Department (Karagünlü 2015, p. 29).

By the decision of the Tanzimat Council (*Meclis-i Tanzimat*) dated 9 December 1857, the Sixth Municipal Department was officially established, and it was decided to divide Istanbul into 14 administrative districts, or departments. It is known that Emperor Constantine (324–337) divided the city into 14 administrative sections after founding it. It is believed that the establishment of the Sixth Department drew inspiration from Byzantium in this regard (Keciş 2015, pp. 19–23). Since the 6th district of the Paris municipality constituted the most developed area of the city, the Sixth Municipal Department, established with Paris as a model, was intended to serve as a prototype for subsequent departments. This idea was proposed by Mustafa Reşid Pasha and Âli Pasha, who had lived in Paris for some time (Doğan 2021, p. 18).

The borders of the Sixth Municipal Department, Istanbul's first municipal district, were centered around Galata and Beyoğlu, and partially covered the Tophane region (Bekman 2020, p. 53). The Sixth Department was responsible for an area heavily populated by Levantines, European foreigners, and non-Muslim subjects such as Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. The name "Sixth Department" was preserved until 1913, despite various changes made to the numbering and ordering of the districts; on this date, the term "department" (*daire*) was completely removed from all units. The Sixth Department was referred to by Levantines and Europeans as the "*Palais Communal de Pera*" (İnal 2006, p. 101).

4.2. Administrative Structure, Organization, and Management Staff

Under the 1857 Regulations, a department director was appointed to head the Sixth Department, and a Department Municipal Council was established under his leadershi The regulations required the department director—appointed by the Grand Vizierate (*Sadaret*) and approved by the Sultan—to own property worth at least 100,000 *kuruş* within the municipal boundaries. With the new regulations of 1858, the department director began to be referred to as the "president" (*reis*). While the council consisted of seven members excluding the president, this number was increased to eight in 1858 (Demirakın 2006, p. 46). Council members were also required to own property worth 100,000 *kuruş* and to have resided in Istanbul for at least 10 years. Half of the members were replaced every six months through a lottery method (Toprak 1994, pp. 220–23).

There were no Muslim members in the first municipal council of the Sixth Department; the members consisted of non-Muslims, Levantines, and foreigners (Ortaylı 2020, p. 149). A similar situation was observed in the municipal administrations established in other Ottoman cities following the formulation of the Sixth Municipal District. The 1856 Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*), followed by the Provincial Regulations of 1864 and 1871, laid the legal foundation for the participation of non-Muslim subjects and resident foreigners in local government councils (Seyitdanlıoğlu 2010, p. 45). Accordingly, representatives of well-established Levantine families residing in the region actively took office in the municipal councils of major port cities open to foreign trade, such as Izmir, Salonica, Beirut, and Mersin (Shaw and Shaw 2010, p. 129; Üsdiken 2000, p. 135). A similar case manifested itself in the municipal administrations established in other Ottoman cities after the Sixth Department. The 1856 Reform Edict and the subsequent Provincial Regulations of 1864 and 1871 provided the legal basis for the participation of non-Muslim subjects and resident foreigners in local government councils (Seyitdanlıoğlu 2010, p. 45). In line with this, representatives of prominent local Levantine families took active roles in the municipal councils of port cities open to foreign trade, such as Izmir, Salonica, Beirut, and Mersin (Shaw and Shaw 2010, p. 129; Üsdiken 2000, p. 135).

Kamil Bey, the first director of the Sixth Department, had traveled to many European cities and was also the head of the commission that organized the Ottoman pavilion at the 1855 Paris Universal Exposition, holding the *Légion d'honneur* (Gül 2015, p. 65). The duties of the municipal president were defined by the 1858 regulations as follows:

- Chairing the council;
- Ensuring communication between the council and the government;
- Implementing council decisions, signing documents regarding the council and the appointment of officials, and calling the council to extraordinary meetings when deemed necessary (Tümerkan 1946, pp. 22–23).

Consisting of two organs, the Director and the Department Council, the Sixth Municipal Department utilized the Department Council as its decision-making body; it comprised permanent members, advisory members, deputy directors, and a translator. The duties of the Department Council were designated as inspection, sanitation, opening and repairing new roads, pavement construction, installing sewage networks, maintaining water channels, demolishing hazardous buildings, and collecting taxes (Oktay 2011, pp. 24–25).

4.3. Revenues, Taxes, and Administrative Irregularities

One of the primary duties of the Sixth Department was tax collection. The most critical tax items collected were lighting, cleaning, weight, permit, and title deed taxes, along with contract fees and taxes levied on animals. In addition, taxes were collected from companies and entertainment venues. However, these taxes were structured to benefit wealthy Levantine property owners and placed a heavier financial burden on the poor (Özer 2009, p. 73).

The Sixth Department published a newspaper called "*Ceride-i Belediye*"; this publication excluded news on political matters and exclusively reported on the institution's activities. Following expropriations and land acquisitions carried out by the municipality, rumors spread that Count Alleon was involved in land corruption and making illicit profits (Ortaylı 2020, pp. 150–51). Antoine Alleon, the brother of Count Alleon, served in the management of the Sixth Department for a very long period starting from its establishment (Üsdiken 2000, p. 134). Over time, the phrase "as rich as Count Alleon" spread and became a common idiom in Istanbul (İrtem 1999, p. 122). A document in the Amedi Registry Records (*Amedi Kalemi Defterleri*) dated 1 September 1845, notes that fresh water would be supplied to Count Alleon's residence (BOA, A.AMD, 1/39).

One of the most important revenue sources of the Sixth Department was the aid it received from the Ottoman treasury. While the state provided little to no assistance to other municipal departments, this department was granted a distinct privilege. With its privileged administrative and financial structure, the Sixth Department undertook a pioneering initiative to compile the cadastral map of the region (Ortaylı 2020, p. 154). While the Ottoman treasury provided almost no financial assistance to other municipal departments, the Sixth Municipal Department (*Altıncı Daire-i Belediye*) was granted substantial budgets, special tax collection authorities, and administrative privileges (Ortaylı 2020, pp. 138–40). Due to the insufficiency of their independent funds and a lack of administrative autonomy, the municipal departments established in other areas of the city were unable to perform even the most basic bureaucratic and urban functions, such as garbage collection and street cleaning. In contrast, the Sixth Department possessed a luxurious administrative structure that set it completely apart from the other departments, characterized by its European-educated expert staff, a regular and highly developed budget, and specialized cadastre maps and zoning plans prepared according to modern urban planning principles (Tekeli 2009, pp. 48–50). The structural and financial privileges possessed by the Sixth Municipal Department generated a profound sense of injustice, exclusion, and unrest among the municipal administrators serving in other regions of Istanbul and the local population (Ortaylı 2020, p. 145). The Muslim subjects, who were unable to receive even the most basic municipal services in their own regions, refused to pay taxes in reaction to the luxury urban investments in Beyoğlu; this social resistance rendered the financial crisis of the other municipal departments even more chronic (Ortaylı 2020, p. 146). The administrators of the other departments frequently voiced this inequality in the complaint reports they submitted to the central government, demanding an administrative "equalization" by closing the budget and authority gap between themselves and the Sixth Department (Tekeli 2009, p. 53). However, due to the financial bottlenecks and political dynamics of the period, the Sublime Porte left these demands unanswered; this situation reinforced the perception in the rest of the city that the Sixth Department was a privileged entity serving solely a certain elite class and foreigners (Tekeli 2009, p. 55).

Certain disruptions and irregularities also occurred in the administrative functioning of the municipality. While the stamping process to standardize the weights used by tradespeople on scales was carried out by the *Şehremaneti*, archival documents reveal that the Sixth Municipal Department performed this process irregularly in 1860 and received a warning for it (BOA, A.MKT.NZD, 329-17). In 1890, an investigation was opened against the accountant of the Sixth Department due to embezzlement (BOA, DH.MKT, 1739-76). In the same year, the assistant collector of the Sixth Department embezzled funds and was subjected to an investigation (BOA, ŞD, 742-3).

4.4. Urban Infrastructure, Road Construction, and Zoning Activities

When Ottoman archival documents are examined, it is clear that during the municipal presidency of Artin Dadyan Pasha in 1874, recently constructed pavements were repaired (BOA, HR.MKT, 862-78). In 1875, the streets in Pera were paved with coarse, crooked, sharp stones, muddy, and lacked drains or grates (Gül 2015, pp. 67–68). An archival document dated 1893 shows that these pavements were repaired again, and the pavement master, unable to collect his fee from the Sixth Department, submitted his grievance to the *Şehremaneti* to file a complaint (BOA, BEO, 285-21363). Kolağası Mehmed Raif, a witness of the period, stated that most houses in Beyoğlu were masonry and new, but the streets were narrow and winding, expressing that he did not find the district beautiful (Raif 2021, p. 188).

In 1863, the Sixth Municipal Department began demolishing the historic Galata walls, which were constructed during the Genoese period and had survived until then through Ottoman repairs; these demolition works continued until the end of the century (Okur 2011, p. 79). The Galata walls were 3 km long, featuring 12 gates that provided entry into the walled city and 24 bastions (Marmara 2020, p. 21). The destruction and erasure of these approximately 500-year-old walls and bastions, which possessed historical and artistic value, provoked various public backlashes (Akın 2011, p. 107).

While the demolition of bastions and gates was carried out, reference was made to the Paris walls demolished in France at that time, taking the works of Napoleon III and the Prefect of Paris, Georges-Eugène Haussmann, as models. Emulating the Paris implementation, streets and avenues were constructed in the newly cleared areas, certain streets were connected to existing roads, and some of the plots were put up for sale to generate revenue for the treasury of the Sixth Municipal Department (Önver 2019, p. 31). Residents of Istanbul found the taxes collected and the expenses incurred by the municipality in Beyoğlu strange (Ortaylı 2020, p. 158).

4.5. Public Spaces: Relocation of Cemeteries and the First Parks

The cemeteries located in the area where Taksim Gezi Park is situated today, and in the region stretching from Tepebaşı toward the ridges of Kasımpaşa, were relocated to the Şişli district between 1857 and 1866 (Önver 2019, p. 31). The cemetery in Taksim, called "*Grand Champs des Morts*" (Great Cemetery), and the cemetery in Tepebaşı, called "*Petit Champs des Morts*" (Little Cemetery), contained Muslim and non-Muslim graves in separate sections (Orha, 2008 p. 80). Following the evacuation of the cemeteries, public gardens were constructed in these areas. The Tepebaşı and Taksim gardens became the first public parks created in the Ottoman Empire (Freely 2014, p. 111). The park in Taksim was given the names "Taksim Municipal Garden" and "*Belvü*" (Belle-vue) (Alus 2019, p. 42).

After removing the Muslim cemetery in Tepebaşı, despite public backlash, an English-style garden was built there by the Sixth Department and opened on 24 July 1880 (Şenyurt 2024, p. 555). Muslim Ottomans did not show much interest in this garden, where Levantines drank alcohol and watched the view. Furthermore, a theatre building, partially made of wood and consisting of two sections for winter and summer use, was built here by architect Hovsep Aznavur. When the theatre burned down in the 1970s, the current multi-story car park was constructed during Bedrettin Dalan's tenure as mayor (Durudoğan 1994, pp. 250–51).

4.6. Social Life, Health, and Public Order Problems

The first legal brothel in the Ottoman Empire was established in Galata during the era of the Sixth Department. Foreign embassies reacted fiercely against the Ottoman government's request to bring the brothel under sanitary control; they prevented it by stating that this implementation was an interference with personal rights and freedoms and constituted a violation of the capitulations. A health board was established in 1879 for brothels that had operated without inspection until that date. The main purpose of this board was to protect the health of Levantines and European foreign sailors. Later, the "Sixth Department Municipal Hospital for Women" (*Altıncı Daire-i Belediye Nisa Hastahanesi*) was established within the body of the Sixth Department for venereal diseases (Toprak 1994, p. 221).

For the construction costs of the hospital, it was proposed to use the money given to the Ottoman Bank by the Red Crescent Society (*Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti*) during the 93 War (1877–1878 Ottoman–Russian War)—on the condition that the wounded would also be treated in this hospital during any future war (BOA, DH.MKT, 1624-49)—but this proposal

was rejected by the ministry (BOA, MV, 44-46). A lottery was organized by the Sixth Department to cover the hospital's construction costs, but it did not receive much interest (BOA, DH.MKT, 1615-112). In 1889, when the Sixth Department suffered losses from the lottery, funds were requested from the Red Crescent Society, and the requested amount was paid to the municipality (BOA, Y.PRK.ŞH, 3-24).

Ali Rıza Bey, the Director of the Fish Market (*Balıkhane Nazırı*), noted in his memoirs that the debauched lifestyle in Beyoğlu led people first to dissipation and then to misery, and that the traditional image of the Muslim Ottoman Turk was on the verge of vanishing because of this region. He also wrote that many people living in Istanbul fell into the clutches of severe sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea and syphilis due to the prostitution venues located in this area (Ali Rıza Bey 2011, p. 191). Ahmed Lütfi Efendi, one of the Ottoman historians, also criticized the Sixth Department in his work "*Tarih-i Lütfi*" for failing to forbid activities such as prostitution and gambling (Önver 2019, p. 34).

It is also observed that foreign travelers coming to Beyoğlu during the era of the Sixth Municipal Department voiced grievances regarding security and cleanliness. The American writer Francis Marion Crawford, who visited Istanbul in the 1890s, mentioned that the streets of Galata were filthy and dangerous, gambling was secretly operated in venues, people were threatened in these places, and there was no inspection whatsoever (Crawford 2018, p. 72). Archival documents reveal that despite being forbidden, gambling was allowed in the coffeehouses of Galata, and municipal police turned a blind eye to it (Engin 2001, p. 66). It is determined from a document found in the İrade-i Hariciye files dated 17 July 1861, that a decoration was given to the deputy mayor, Ali Bey, by the Austrian state for his services (BOA, İ.HR, 186/10329). Pierre Loti also stated that the serenity, calmness, peace, and security found in Walled Istanbul did not exist in Galata (Loti 2009, p. 58). Basiretçi Ali Efendi, who lived in that era, wrote in his 1873 article that Beyoğlu was unsafe at night and people were robbed in the streets (Ali Efendi 2011, p. 208).

4.7. Lighting and Public Transport Investments

The municipality made various investments in city lighting. During the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid, gas production began in 1856, initially illuminating the area between Dolmabahçe Palace and Galata. The lighting was carried out with gas mantles and lanterns, and the illumination of the region was completed in 1867. Lighting activities in Pera started in 1857, and the area between Hüseyin Ağa Mosque and Galata Palace was illuminated with gas lamps. However, the fact that the Sixth Department's lighting efforts were carried out only in wealthy regions populated by Levantines drew public resentment. While the *Grand Rue de Pera* was illuminated from top to bottom, the residents of the Tophane sector, where Muslims were concentrated, pooled money among themselves to purchase gas and tried to meet their lighting needs on their own (Güneş 2020, p. 163).

Looking at the municipality's investments in public transport activities, although the population of Walled Istanbul was much higher than that of Beyoğlu, horse-drawn tramway and metro services were brought to Galata and Pera specifically through the efforts of the Sixth Department. The first horse-drawn tram line was established between Azapkapı and Beşiktaş in 1871 and began its operations. In 1875, the Tünel, the world's second metro line after London, was put into service. On this line, transportation between Galata and Pera began to be provided by cars. The desire to serve Levantines was the determining factor in the investments made. The funicular-style metro, cited under the guise of "public interest," was actually built to save the Levantines and foreigners moving between Galata and Pera from walking up and down the slopes, providing them with comfort, convenience, and time savings. This was influenced by the fact that Galata was a business center featuring the port of Istanbul, inns, and offices. This transport vehicle was

put into service to facilitate the commute of the aforementioned class to the Pera region, where their residences were located. In contrast, the Aksaray-Topkapı horse-drawn tram line, opened after Beyoğlu, utilized the most dilapidated cars and the weakest horses (Çelik 1998, pp. 77–79).

The owner of the Dersaadet Tramway Company, which carried out these public transport operations, was a Levantine named Konstantin Crepano. The tender was awarded to this company, and the projects were approved by the Sixth Municipal Department. According to the census conducted in 1885, only 21% of the population living in the neighborhoods under the jurisdiction of the Sixth Department was Muslim (Çelik 1998, p. 34). This situation clearly demonstrates why a certain segment was favored in the execution and delivery of services.

4.8. Cultural Impacts, Westernization, and Language Use

Since the Ottoman Empire took France as an exemplar in Westernization movements, the Sixth Department also prepared its municipal legislation based on the Paris model (Aydın 2019, pp. 2708–27). In 1867, during the municipal presidency of Server Bey, the name of Pera's main street, *Cadde-i Kebir*, was changed to "*Grande Rue de Pera*". From the same date onward, French signs began to be used in shops and offices by business owners in Beyoğlu. In the issue of the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar* dated 15 September 1862, the Sixth Department's practice of giving French names to streets or resorting to French expressions was criticized (*Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 1279, 20 Rebiülevvel 1279).

Furthermore, both Turkish and French were used in the official correspondence conducted in the Sixth Municipal Department, though it is known that French correspondence was more prevalent. French names were also used in the Western-style shops opened during this period; moreover, the European goods sold attracted people and began to popularize Western-style luxury consumption (Boyar and Fleet 2017, p. 347).

As understood from an archival document dated 25 January 1862, Levantines—the majority of whom belonged to the Catholic faith—applied to the Sixth Municipal Department, claiming that a theatrical play performed by non-Muslims mocked the Catholic sect, and complained about the play (BOA, HR.SYS, 2937-53). Consequently, the performance of the play was banned by the Sixth Department (Yıldız 2021, p. 49). This situation demonstrates the power and efficacy of the municipality and the Levantines in the region.

From an imperial decree dated 15 February 1895, it is observed that Sultan Abdülhamid II requested the municipality to ban the use of the name "palace" (*palas*) in hotels in Beyoğlu (BOA, İ.H, 46). However, the Sixth Department took no action on this matter, and the Levantine business owners in the region did not comply with this ban.

4.9. The 1870 Great Beyoğlu Fire and Its Consequences

The fire, mentioned in Ottoman period sources as "*Harik-i Kebir*" (the Great Fire), started on Sunday, 5 June 1870, in the house of a Levantine on Feridiye Street. It affected a vast area, engulfing the Taksim, Tarlabaşı, Tepebaşı, and Galatasaray neighborhoods, as well as Kasımpaşa. It is known that over 3000 structures were damaged by burning as a result of the fire, which lasted for approximately 13 h. This incident became the largest fire Istanbul experienced throughout its history, excluding the 1912 İshakpaşa fire. The presence of wooden architecture and the flammable liquid gas used for lighting in shops were effective in causing the fire to last so long and inflict such heavy damage. Additionally, the lack of equipment among the fire pumpers (*tulumbacılar*) delayed the extinguishing of the fire. Although it was claimed that new equipment had been purchased for the fire pumpers by the Sixth Municipal Department, the gear used during the fire proved useless; moreover, it emerged that they were not much different from the tools used by

pumpers in other regions, which drew criticism in the press of the period (*Basiret*, 1287, 18 Rebiülevvel 1287).

After this fire, Beyoğlu began to expand; the Elmadağ, Pangaltı, Harbiye, Tatavla (Kurtuluş), Feriköy, and Osmanbey neighborhoods were established, and mansions, houses, and shops began to be constructed there. Another important consequence of the fire was that wooden architecture gave way to masonry structures. With the regulations issued, masonry building construction was made mandatory (Ergin 1995, p. 1447). During the 1870 fire, most of the residences in Beyoğlu were wooden. Those living in masonry buildings closed the iron shutters of their windows, thinking they would not be harmed by the fire. Because of this, many people suffocated from smoke or burned to death.

Upon pressure exerted on the Ottoman government by insurance companies owned by Levantines and European foreigners, who had to make massive payouts due to the fire, a fire brigade regulation was formulated based on the Hungarian example. Count Ödön Széchenyi of Hungary was placed at the head of this organization and was later granted the title of "Pasha" (Çelebi 1994, pp. 306–7).

Another outcome of the fire was the construction of Akaretler, the first mass housing structures of Ottoman Istanbul (Keyvanoğlu 2017, p. 174). The word "*akar*", meaning revenue, was used in the Ottoman Empire for structures built to generate income for foundation (*vakıf*) properties, such as inns, baths, bazaars, and shops. The expenses of structures like mosques, madrasas, and primary schools were met with the revenue coming from these properties. The sultan of the period, Sultan Abdülaziz (1861–1876), began the construction of his mosque, which he named Aziziye, in Maçka; he had Akaretler built to bring revenue to this mosque and to provide housing for those harmed by the fire. Upon his dethronement and killing in 1876, the construction of the mosque remained unfinished and did not materialize. A massive construction boom began after the fire, and Beyoğlu was virtually rebuilt. Many Ottoman structures we see today on İstiklal Avenue and around Tarlabaşı were constructed after this fire.

4.10. Prominent Municipal Presidents and the Term of Edouard Blacque Bey

Seventeen municipal presidents, or department heads, served in the Sixth Municipal Department between 1857 and 1913 (Table 1). Edouard Blacque Bey, who held the municipal presidency for the longest period after Mehmed Ali Bey, was a Levantine of French origin. Born in Izmir, Edouard Blacque worked as a journalist and served as a diplomat in the Ottoman foreign service. In 1867, he became the first Ottoman envoy sent to Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States.

After returning to Istanbul in 1872, he served as a member of the Council of State (*Şura-yı Devlet*), was appointed to the Directorate of Press (*Matbuat Müdürlüğü*) on 30 June 1876 (BOA, İ.MMS, 134-5709), and became the president of the Sixth Municipal Department in 1879. While in this office in 1882, he requested a salary increase, stating that his salary was insufficient and he could not make a living on this amount (BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ, 6-12). According to an archival document dated 25 September 1883, an investigation was launched against him by the government following complaints that Edouard Blacque Bey had allocated his mansion at the entrance of the Black Sea to the use of the Russian envoy and that Russian soldiers gathered there (BOA, MB.İ, 128-17).

Blacque Bey continued his aforementioned duty until 1890. In the same year, he became the envoy to Bucharest; upon his predecessor Macit Bey becoming a member of the Council of State, he was reappointed to the presidency of the Sixth Department on 23 February 1893 (BOA, BEO, 160-11949). The relevant document shows that Blacque Bey's salary was increased shortly after he was reappointed to office (BOA, Y.PRK.ŞH, 4-31). It

is understood from archival records that a decoration was given to him by the German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, in 1889 (BOA, İ.DH, 1162-90806).

Table 1. Sixth Municipal District Mayors and Their Terms of Office (Önver 2019, p. 46).

Mayor	Term of Office
Mehmed Kamil Bey	1857–1860
Emin Muhlis Bey	1860
Salih Efendi	1860–1861
Hayrullah Efendi	1862–1863
Server Efendi	1863–1868
Selahaddin Efendi	1868–1869
Ali Rıza Bey	1869–1870
Kadri Paşa	1871, 1873 (İki Kez)
Muhtar Bey	1871–1872
Sakızlı Ohannes Efendi	1872
Artin Dadyan Paşa	1873–1874, 1875 (İki Kez)
Osman Hamdi Bey	1877–1878
Edouard Blacque Bey	1879–1890, 1893–1895
Macit Bey	1890–1893
Mehmed Ali Bey	1895–1908
Hacı İhsan Bey	1909–1911
Azimzade Mehmed Fevzi Paşa	1911–1913

According to a document dated 22 April 1889, Blacque Bey's son Edmond, who was studying at a military school in Germany, was granted the rank of Honorary Cavalry First Lieutenant in the Ottoman army as an equivalent to the rank he held there (BOA, HR.TH, 88-76). Edouard Blacque passed away in 1895 and was buried in the Feriköy Catholic Cemetery (Koloğlu 1994, p. 261). Before his death in 1895, he was awarded the "*Légion d'Honneur*" decoration by the French state (BOA, İ.TAL, 73-11). After Blacque Bey passed away, his wife requested a pension, and a retirement pension was granted to her by the Sixth Department (BOA, ŞD, 940-75).

After the soil and debris generated during the construction of the Tünel were dumped in Tepebaşı, the activity of acquiring the necessary land for the park to be built there was carried out by Blacque Bey. In this way, Blacque Bey ensured that the land containing the "*Petit Champs des Morts*", where Muslim and non-Muslim cemeteries were located, was incorporated into the Sixth Department. As actor Ahmed Fehim Bey mentioned in his memoirs, the person who put forward the idea of dumping the soil in Tepebaşı, namely into the "*Petit Champs des Morts*", was Edouard Blacque, the President of the Sixth Municipal Department. Moreover, Ahmed Fehim Bey states that Blacque received a sum of money for this job from Eugène-Henri Gavand, the engineer of the Tünel project, based on the volume of the soil (Alpman 1977, pp. 21–22). In addition, a large part of the Muslim cemetery in Tepebaşı remained under the aforementioned soil and failed to survive to the present day (Orha 2008, p. 80). It is understood from an archival document that the retaining walls surrounding the garden built in Tepebaşı fell into disrepair about 10 years after their construction and were repaired in 1885 (BOA, ŞD, 714-15).

4.11. The End Process of the Autonomous Structure and Class Inequality in Services

While executing all these activities, the Sixth Municipal Department acted by relying on its privileged, virtually autonomous status. Subordinated directly to the Grand Vizierate rather than the Istanbul *Şehremaneti* as a higher authority, the Sixth Department carried out its activities freely and away from interference. Although its privileged status legally ended in 1877, this situation remained merely on paper. In 1889, a person who owned a house and a shop underneath near the Hüseyin Ağa Mosque requested a permit from the Sixth Department to carry out repairs; however, when the municipality unfairly demanded a cleaning tax from him, he submitted a petition of complaint to the *Şehremaneti* (BOA, DH.MKT, 1671-80). Another complaint occurred in 1893, again during Blacque Bey's presidency. The body of a non-Muslim was buried in a Muslim cemetery, which drew public backlash, and the residents applied with a petition demanding the rectification of the situation (BOA, Y.PRK.ŞH, 4-104).

The slaughterhouses and other facilities that the Sixth Department had built on the Golden Horn increased the filth of the region—which was already polluted due to industrial structures and sewage waste—and caused great harm to the environment (Işın 2006, p. 209). A document dated 1 January 1862, demanding the prevention of sewage being discharged into Muslim graves located within the boundaries of the Sixth Department, is encountered in the Documents of the Chairmanship of the Supreme Council (*Meclis-i Vâlâ Riyâseti Belgeleri*) (BOA, MVL, 846/34). In the satirical newspaper *Hayal*, the mountain of garbage in Kurtuluş, where Greeks and Armenians lived densely, was satirized with the comparison that "it was higher than the Alps, if not as high as the Himalayas" (Erdinçli 2021, p. 332).

Poor Turks, Greeks, and Armenians residing in Kasımpaşa, Pangaltı, Feriköy, and Tatavla could not benefit from the services of the Sixth Department (Freely 2014, p. 111). One of the environmentally harmful practices carried out by the Sixth Municipal Department was the dumping of waste and garbage into the Kasımpaşa Creek (Mazak and Güldal 2011, p. 63). Particularly due to the discharge of slaughterhouse waste here, pollution and related diseases increased in the Golden Horn (Seyitdanlıoğlu 2010, p. 83). The Kasımpaşa Creek became polluted where it merged with Dolapdere, which carried the wastewater of Pera, Kurtuluş, and Pangaltı; the cause of the cholera epidemic seen here in 1893–1894 was rooted in this situation. Cholera, which was mostly transmitted through contaminated water, was seen much less in Pera and its surroundings, where Terkos water reached. In any case, the primary objective of the company distributing Terkos water was to deliver the water to the upper class in Pera (Kentel 2023, pp. 52–71).

The fact that the municipal council was largely composed of foreign merchants, bankers, and embassy representatives raised concerns within the conservative Ottoman bureaucracy that sovereign rights were being surrendered (Seyitdanlıoğlu 2010, p. 88). The Sixth Department was able to receive direct financial and political support from foreign embassies and Levantine bankers. This situation was criticized by local intellectuals and conservative circles as the establishment of an autonomous "Kingdom of the Sixth Department" in Pera—one serving the interests of foreign powers and operating entirely outside the control of the Sublime Porte (Gülersoy 1993, p. 43).

In evaluating the administrative and ideological nature of the Sixth Municipal Department, a key question arises regarding the character of its public utilities: did they reflect any early elements of 'municipal socialism,' or were they driven by private concessionary capitalism? Unlike late nineteenth-century European municipalities—particularly in Great Britain and France—where municipal authorities increasingly took direct control of public utilities (water, gas, transport) under the banner of municipal socialism to ensure equitable public welfare, the Sixth District operated on a highly privatized, concessionary model. The municipal administration did not directly run or finance major urban services; instead, it

functioned as a regulatory body that awarded lucrative, monopolistic contracts to European and Levantine private syndicates, such as the Dersaadet Tramway Company or the Terkos Water Company (Çelik 1998, pp. 129–35).

Furthermore, this model catalyzed the growth of a highly specialized municipal bureaucracy in Beyoğlu. This new administrative class was bilingual, trained in European law and engineering, and often traveled to European capitals like Paris and Vienna to study municipal bookkeeping, waste management, and street alignment technologies. However, this bureaucratic expansion was seen as an anomaly by other districts in Istanbul. Traditional quarters regarded the Sixth District as a privileged outlier (*'imtiyazlı istisna'*) that monopolized state resources and treasury grants, while other newly proposed municipal districts struggled to establish basic bureaucratic functions due to a lack of independent funding and administrative autonomy (Ortaylı 2020, p. 121).

The privileged and semi-autonomous status of the Sixth Municipal District, vigorously protected by foreign embassies and capitulatory agreements, increasingly clashed with the late Ottoman state's centralization efforts. The political transition accelerated after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, which championed a centralized, constitutional Ottoman identity and sought to dismantle the exceptional status of foreign-backed enclaves. The Young Turk administration viewed the administrative autonomy of the Sixth District, along with its fiscal privileges and heavy reliance on foreign concessionary companies, as a direct threat to national sovereignty and administrative unity. Consequently, the historical trajectory of the Sixth District was brought to a decisive end with the enactment of the *'Dersaadet Belediye Teşkilatı Hakkında Kanun-ı Muvakkat'* (Provisional Law on the Municipal Organization of Istanbul) on 30 January 1913. This legislation abolished the exceptional status of individual districts, bringing all of Istanbul under a single, highly centralized municipal prefecture (*Şehremaneti*). This legal unification marked the end of the Levantine-dominated municipal autonomy in Beyoğlu, successfully reintegrating the district into the broader national administrative framework (Toprak 1994, p. 222). With this law, which entered into practical force in 1913, all autonomous municipal departments with legal personality in Istanbul were officially abolished, and in place of the former 20 independent departments, 9 municipal branches hierarchically subordinated directly to the Prefect (*Şehremaneti*) were established (Ergin 1995, p. 132). Under this regulation, the Sixth Municipal Department, which had possessed financial and administrative privileges since its inception, also lost its independent legal personality and was transformed into an administrative branch of the *Şehremaneti* in Beyoğlu (Ortaylı 2020, p. 141).

In conclusion, the closure of the Beyoğlu Sixth Municipal Department in 1913 was not a political punishment, but rather a product of rationalization and centralization efforts. The military and economic losses suffered during the final years of the Empire necessitated the centralized control of resources in local governments, as in every other field of the state apparatus; this situation ultimately brought an end to the Sixth Department's half-century-long autonomous status (Tekeli 2009, p. 79).

5. Sixth Municipal Building

The structure, which was the first municipal building of the Ottoman Empire, was built by architect Giovanni Batista Barborini during the presidency of Edouard Blacque Bey (Nasır 1991, p. 67). Barborini, an architect of Italian origin, lived between 1820 and 1891 and was buried in the Feriköy Latin Catholic Cemetery (Girardelli 2011, p. 103). In addition to the Sixth District building, the Santa Maria Assomption Latin Catholic Church in Moda, the Dutch Embassy on Cadde-i Kebir, the German Protestant Church in Tarlabaşı, the Grand Vizier Ali Pasha Mosque and Fountain in the Mercan district, and the Çemberlitaş Darülfünun building are Giovanni Batista Barborini's existing structures that

have survived to the present day. After Gaspare Fossati's workshop, Barborini's workshop on Sakızağacı Street is one of the first identifiable architectural offices in Ottoman Istanbul (Can 2020, p. 210). Barborini also contributed to the creation of the book Usul-i Mimarî Osmanî (Ottoman Architectural Principles), compiled in 1873 by Nafıa Nazırı İbrahim Edhem Paşa. In addition, the project for the Dolmabahçe Palace Theater, which has not survived to our time, was also prepared by architect Barborini (Can 2020, p. 111). Barborini was also involved in projects such as the restoration of Çemberlitaş and the opening and reorganization of its surroundings, as well as the widening of Divanyolu Street (Yazıcı 2007, pp. 246–47). In addition to these, he was also involved in the construction of the Darüşşafaka building and the renovation of the Bab-ı Âli offices (BOA, HR.TO, 451/45).

The Sixth Municipal Office building was constructed between 1879 and 1883 during the first presidency of Edouard Blacque. Located on a steeply sloping plot, the building was constructed on an elevated platform accessible by stairs from Şişhane (Figure 1). It stands at the intersection of three streets and avenues (Meşrutiyet, Yolcuzade İskender, Müeyyit). Built in the European Neoclassical style, the masonry structure is flanked by Metro Han at the rear and, on the north side, the Levantine Decugis family mansion, which currently serves as a hotel, located next to the stairs connecting the Şişhane district and Tünel Square. The building, which has a rectangular plan (Figure 2) with three floors above the basement, has ramps on its south and east sides leading to İstiklal Avenue. The Sixth District building was responsible for the district where it was built being named 'District' at the time of its construction. The openings on the platform on which the building was constructed were covered with vaults as a roof unit. The lower part of the platform functions as a basement. In the masonry structure, there is an entrance section on the ground floor along the axis, and offices that receive light around corridors extending from this section to both sides. The rooms on the west side of the corridor are wider, and there is a reception room in the middle of these rooms. The floor plan is the same on each floor of the building, and access is provided by stairs. The profiled moldings between the floors add movement to the structure. The floor heights in the building are approximately 4.5 m. The stairs are located opposite the entrance section. The large hall on the first floor above the entrance section currently serves as the 'Municipal Council Hall'. The attic of the building was converted into a normal floor in the 1980s, and a spiral staircase was built here. The floor coverings of the Sixth District were made of wood but have now been replaced with reinforced concrete slabs. Only the vaulted ceiling on the ground floor has retained its original state (Yeşilbaş 2021, p. 86). Most of the building's interior architecture and decorations have not survived to the present day due to interventions. The triangular pediments and the symmetry of the facade reveal the Neo-Renaissance influence (Figure 3). The distinct cornice lines separating the floors horizontally, the fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals placed between the windows (Figure 4), the symmetrically positioned cornices at the eaves level and the concave consoles supporting the eaves, the moldings around the windows providing external openness, and the rectangular and round-arched windows symmetrically placed on the facades with triangular pediments are other elements that reveal the influence of the Neoclassical style in the structure. The facade of the entrance, animated by the columns and round arches, the wide floor and eave moldings, and the railings (Figure 5), protrudes outward from the main mass of the building (Can 1994, pp. 223–24). The keystones above the long, round window arches are in the shape of acanthus leaf motifs (Figure 6). Said Naum Duhani mentions in his memoirs that he spoke with Barborini's daughter, who said that the architect's daughter had forgotten that her father was going to build a central door in the hall of honor of the Sixth District building and therefore opened two side entrances (Duhani 2017, p. 25).

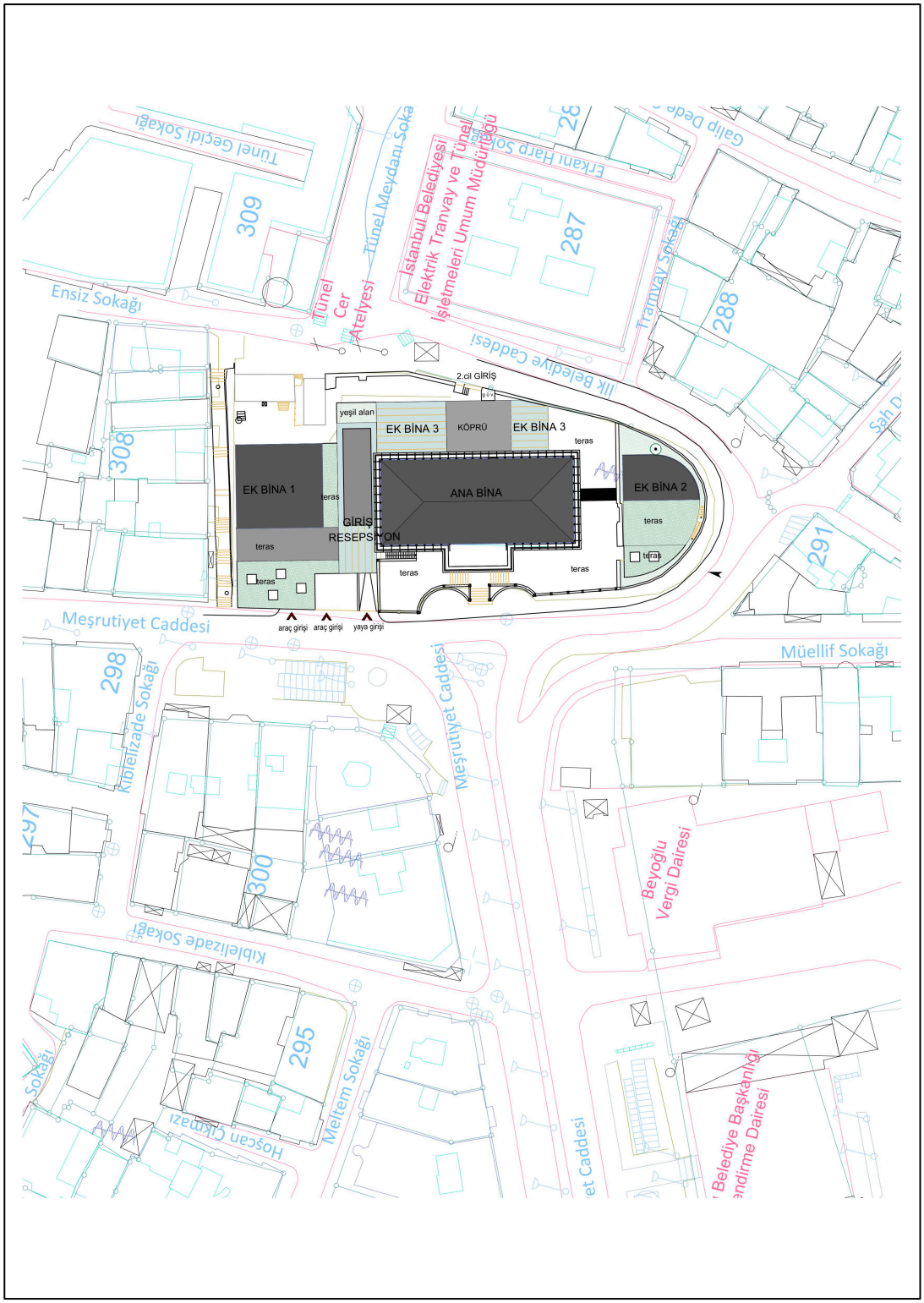

Figure 1. Site Plan (Beyoğlu Municipality Archive).

Above the section of the main façade (Figure 7) where the railings are located (Figure 8), there is a clock from that period within a round pediment (Kolay 2023, p. 35). During the restoration, a tuğra (monogram) belonging to the aforementioned sultan (Figure 9), thought to be related to the repairs carried out during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, was found. The wall and flooring materials and technical details lost their original qualities during this process. However, the originality of the wall structures in the basement and the door frames of the rooms (Figure 10) has been preserved (Figure 11).



Figure 2. Ground Floor (Beyoğlu Municipality Archive).



Figure 3. First Floor (Beyoğlu Municipality Archive).

The building, which was damaged in the great earthquake that struck Istanbul in 1894, underwent repairs in 1895 (BOA, İ.ŞE, 7-30). Archival documents indicate that the Sixth Department building was repaired again in 1908 (BOA, ŞD, 838-42). The money needed for the repair costs was paid by the Council of State Treasury (BOA, İ.ŞE, 24-17). The building, which underwent restoration in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s during the Republican era, is currently used by the Beyoğlu District Municipality. To appreciate the socio-political significance of the Sixth Municipal Building, its design must be analyzed in comparison with contemporary European town halls (Hamburg Rathauser or Paris Hotels de Ville). In nineteenth-century Europe, municipal architecture was highly symbolic; town halls were designed as secular 'cathedrals of modernity,' utilizing historicist styles (such as Neo-Gothic in Vienna or Neo-Renaissance in Paris, Hamburg) to project civic

pride, bourgeois dominance, and democratic autonomy against the monarchical state. In contrast, Barborini's design for the Sixth Municipal Building in Istanbul presents a unique trans-cultural adaptation. While borrowing the classical vocabulary of European Neo-Classicism and Neo-Renaissance—with its symmetrical facade, Corinthian pilasters (Figure 12), Baroque motifs (Figure 13), rose motifs (Figure 14), keystones (Figure 15) and projecting central bay it was scaled down to reflect the bureaucratic nature of Ottoman municipalism, which was ultimately subordinate to the imperial palace rather than an autonomous civic body (Şenyurt 2018, p. 147).

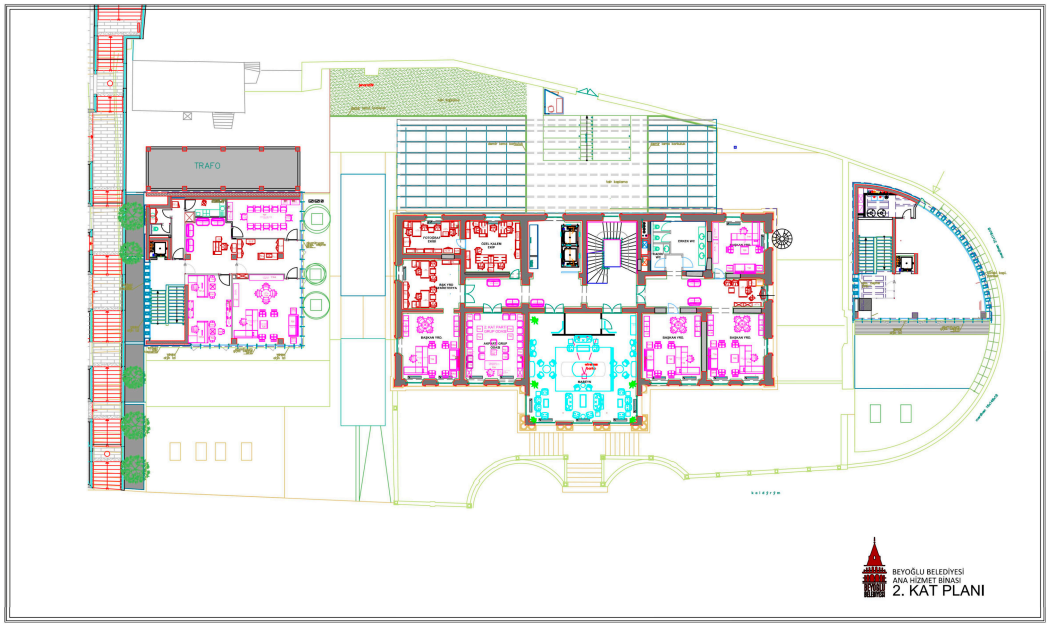

Figure 4. Second Floor (Beyoğlu Municipality Archive).

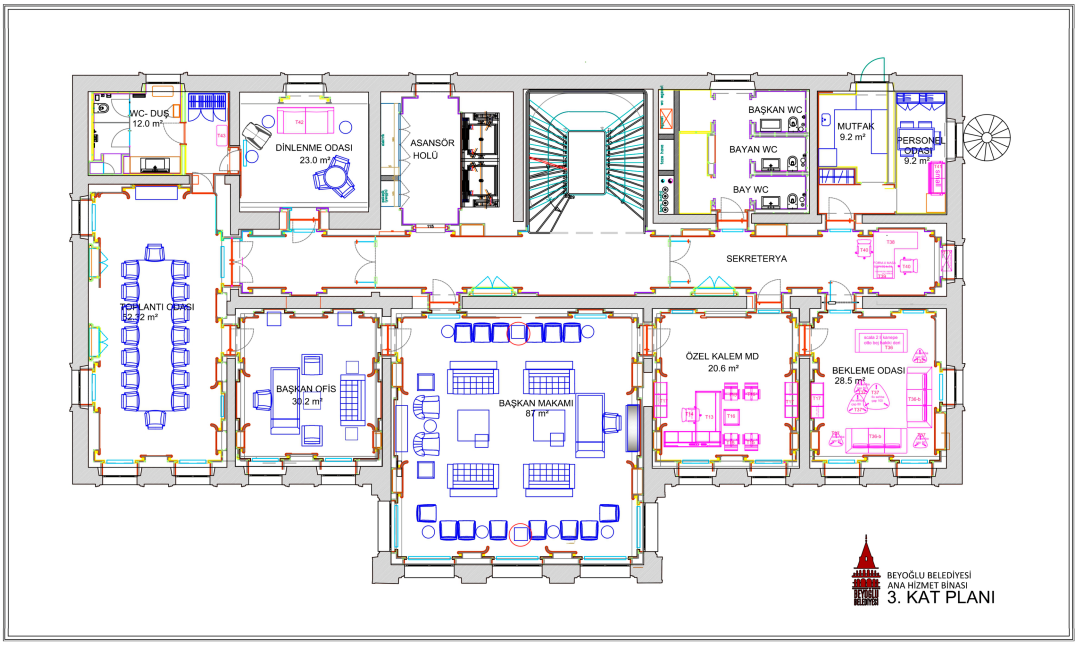

Figure 5. Third Floor (Beyoğlu Municipality Archive).



Figure 6. Sixth District Building (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).



Figure 7. Sixth District Building Facade with Projecting Entrance Section (Photo by Mert Ağaoğlu).



Figure 8. Sixth Floor North Facade View (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).



Figure 9. Sultan Abdülhamid II's Seal Retrieved from the Well During Restoration (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).



Figure 10. General View of the Reception Room Located on the First Floor (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).

Furthermore, unlike European counterparts that featured grand open plazas to facilitate democratic public gatherings, the Sixth Municipal Building was situated on a steeply sloping plot in Şişhane, structurally constrained by the surrounding urban fabric. Its architectural grandiosity was directed inward and upward, projecting the authority of the modernizing Ottoman state and the economic dominance of the Levantine elite over the multi-ethnic population of Beyoğlu, rather than celebrating independent civic representation. The integration of Sultan Abdülhamid II's imperial tuğra (monogram) alongside European architectural ornament perfectly encapsulates this dual identity: a

European-styled civic palace serving as an instrument of imperial centralized governance (Çelik 1998, pp. 43–46; Şenyurt 2018, p. 150). Although it was designed on a smaller scale compared to its European counterparts, the inclusion of a clock element on the main facade and the Neo-Renaissance influences still demonstrate that it was inspired by the West.



Figure 11. Sixth Municipal Building Basement Rooms (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).

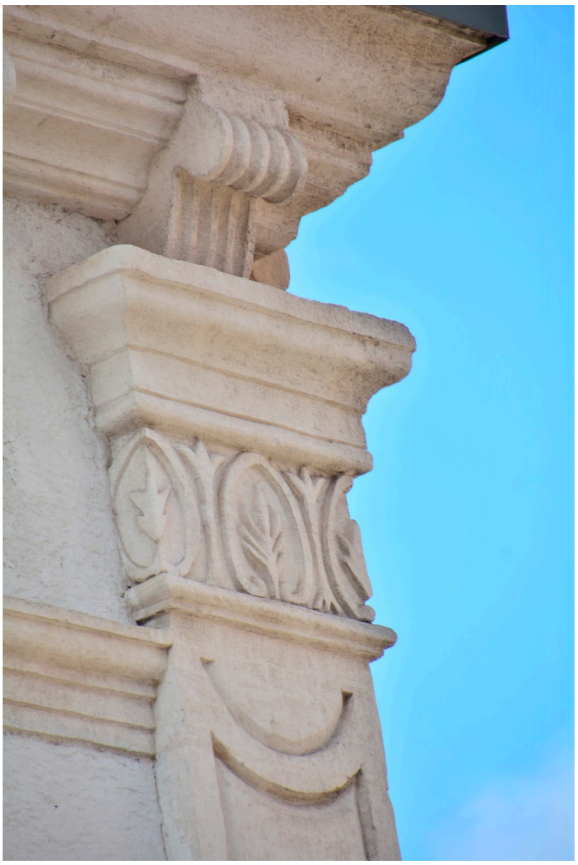

Figure 12. Relief Floral Ornaments on the Exterior Facade of the Sixth Municipal Building (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).



Figure 13. Baroque Motifs Inside and Under the Pediment of the Sixth Municipal Building (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).



Figure 14. Rose Motifs on the Columns of the Sixth Municipal Building (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).



Figure 15. Sixth Municipal Building Keystone in the Shape of an Acanthus Leaf (Photo by Nefise Yazkan).

6. Discussion

The establishment and operationalization of the Sixth Municipal District (*Altıncı Daire-i Belediye*) in Istanbul during the second half of the nineteenth century reflect a multilayered historical process in which cultural encounters, spatial segregation, and socio-economic transformations intersected. At the center of this municipal experiment lay a distinct cultural duality. On one side stood a relatively inward-looking Muslim community shaped around religious foundations (*waqfs*), neighborhood solidarity, and traditional social relations; on the other side was a European-oriented Levantine and non-Muslim bourgeoisie that had integrated into global capitalist networks and embraced an individualistic lifestyle alongside a nuclear-family-centered spatial organization.

The findings of this study demonstrate that this cultural encounter did not result in a homogeneous and harmonious adaptation process. The coexistence within the same urban entity of Pera—with its well-lit, paved streets and relatively safe European residential areas in terms of hygiene—and Muslim neighborhoods like Kasımpaşa, characterized by inadequate infrastructure, dark streets, and struggles with epidemic diseases, rendered the inequalities in the distribution of municipal services highly visible. This situation generated significant discontent, particularly among the Muslim population, reinforcing the perception that the Sixth District was an institutional structure prioritizing the interests of Levantine elites and European foreign concessionaires who benefited from the legal protections afforded by the capitulations.

The impacts of this cultural segregation were felt clearly not only in the distribution of municipal services, but also in the linguistic, spatial, and symbolic transformations of the period. The influx of numerous words of French and Italian origin into daily language, the rapid proliferation of Western-style consumption spaces (such as cafes, patisseries, boutiques, and theaters), and the relocation of traditional Muslim cemeteries to create public parks like the Tepebaşı and Taksim gardens stand out as prominent indicators of the profound shift in Istanbul's cultural landscape. Within this framework, the historical legacy of the Sixth District bears a dual character. While evaluated on the one hand as an administrative structure that exposed the socio-spatial inequalities emerging from Ottoman Westernization, it also gains significance on the other as one of the first institutional laboratories of modern municipal administration, redefining the relationship among citizens, the state, and urban space.

When historical evidence is evaluated within the broader context of administrative transformation, the Sixth Municipal District (1857–1913) is seen to hold a critical position within Ottoman Westernization movements. The transformation process that began under Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) with the abolition of the Janissary Corps and the *Kapıkulu* system, the closure of the Palace School (*Enderun*) in favor of European-style educational and administrative institutions, and clothing reforms, attained an administrative framework through the Edict of Tanzimat declared during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid (1839–1861). The Sixth District emerged as the first institutional example of this transformation in local governance; it implemented practices such as paving avenues, illuminating streets with gas lamps, systematically collecting waste, naming streets, and numbering houses and shops for the first time through a centralized municipal body.

However, historical documents demonstrate that these services were not distributed equally among all segments of society. The municipality's operations were largely shaped by the demands of bankers, merchants, and economically dominant groups in Galata; investments in roads, pavements, and lighting were heavily concentrated in areas where municipal council members resided or conducted business. Foreigners and Levantines who leveraged the legal privileges of the capitulations assumed a decisive role in prioritizing

municipal services, whereas the needs of the region's impoverished Muslim, Greek, and Armenian residents remained largely secondary (Tabakoğlu 2024, pp. 185–86).

The reflections of this inequality in public opinion of the era are equally striking. The immense piles of garbage in the Kurtuluş district, inhabited densely by Greek and Armenian populations, were satirized in *Hayal*, a contemporary satirical journal, as being "higher than the Alps, if not the Himalayas" (Erdinçli 2021, p. 332). Similarly, numerous petitions archived in the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency clearly reveal local complaints regarding the inadequacy of municipal services. In particular, petitions drafted by local tradesmen criticizing the Sixth District's high tax rates and collection methods serve as significant historical sources illustrating the impact of the municipality's fiscal policies on the local community.

The services provided by the Sixth District primarily benefited the Levantine and European populations residing in Pera. In contrast, poor Turkish, Greek, and Armenian residents of Kasımpaşa, Pangaltı, Feriköy, and Tatavla were unable to benefit from these services to the same extent (Freely 2014, p. 111). One of the municipality's most heavily criticized practices was the discharge of solid and liquid waste into the Kasımpaşa Creek (Mazak and Güldal 2011, p. 63). Dumping slaughterhouse waste into this creek in particular worsened environmental pollution in the Golden Horn and consequently heightened the risk of epidemics (Seyitdanlıoğlu 2010, p. 83). The severe contamination of Kasımpaşa Creek where it met Dolapdere—which carried wastewater from Pera, Kurtuluş, and Pangaltı—is considered one of the factors facilitating the spread of the cholera epidemic observed in the region in 1893–1894. Conversely, it is notable that cholera cases—transmitted primarily through contaminated water—remained far more limited in Pera and its environs, where Terkos water was supplied. A key reason for this was that the concessionary company distributing Terkos water prioritized supplying clean water to the upper-income groups in Pera (Kentel 2023, pp. 52–71).

The directing of garbage and liquid waste predominantly toward Kasımpaşa Creek, where the Muslim population lived, indicates that municipal services were not equitably distributed among different social groups. Furthermore, leaving trenches dug during municipal infrastructure projects unclosed for extended periods caused serious public safety hazards, resulting in various accidents and injuries. Considered together, these practices suggest that the primary objective of the Sixth Municipal District was not to deliver urban services equitably to the entire population, but rather to cater to the needs of Pera-centered economic and diplomatic circles.

The selection of Beyoğlu as the pilot region during the division of Istanbul into fourteen municipal districts demonstrates that Ottoman local government reforms were prioritized in an area where international trade, diplomatic missions, and foreign capital were concentrated. While the establishment of other municipal districts was delayed, it is noteworthy that municipal districts were formed in Tarabya and subsequently in the Princes' Islands in 1867, despite not being included in the initial administrative division planned in 1864 (Bekman 2020, p. 56). This development highlights not only administrative restructuring, but also that Istanbul's spatial development was shaped in accordance with socio-economic priorities.

While Levantines and other European foreigners resided mainly in Beyoğlu during the winter months, they moved during the summer to seaside embassies, mansions, and *yalı*s along the European shore of the Bosphorus, or to resort settlements such as Yeşilköy, the Princes' Islands, Moda, Fenerbahçe, and Erenköy. Levantine residents and foreign diplomatic circles played a significant role in the development of these summer settlements. The incorporation of Tarabya and the Islands into the municipal framework can also be evaluated as closely linked to their intense usage as summer retreats by Levantines and

European foreigners. This situation implies that economically and diplomatically powerful social groups were influential in setting municipal service priorities.

Moreover, with the Provincial Administration Law (*Vilayet İdare Kanunu*) enacted in 1870, the approach of conducting local administration in provincial centers solely under the supervision of governors was abandoned, making the establishment of municipal organizations mandatory in every city (Shaw and Shaw 2010, p. 129). However, an examination of the Sixth Municipal District's activities reveals that operations continued to be shaped largely around the expectations of embassy circles, foreign companies, the Levantine bourgeoisie, and commercial sectors. Consequently, although the institution's jurisdiction legally encompassed its entire district, municipal investments were practically concentrated in specific areas. In this respect, while the Sixth Municipal District contributed significantly to the physical development of Galata and Pera and the institutionalization of modern municipal administration in the Ottoman Empire, its practices prioritizing certain social groups and the imbalances in service distribution subjected it to criticism in contemporary public discourse.

From an administrative perspective, Muslim Turks were represented to a limited extent in the management of the Sixth Municipal District. A primary reason for this was the requirement of high financial standing, property ownership, and at least ten years of residence within municipal boundaries to serve as mayor or municipal council member. Levantines, European foreigners, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews constituted a significant portion of the region's population. The Tanzimat Edict substantially reorganized the legal status of non-Muslim subjects within the empire's multi-ethnic structure, a transformation that became even more pronounced following the Imperial Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*) (Akın Ertek 2025, p. 24). During the same period, non-Muslim entrepreneurs operating in banking, foreign trade, and finance expanded their economic power. Therefore, that the groups possessing the requisite financial means to hold municipal office were largely drawn from these communities represents an expected outcome within these historical conditions.

Levantine and foreign entrepreneurs owning companies and stores collaborated closely with the municipal administration. Indeed, concessions and operating rights for large-scale urban infrastructure projects such as coal gas, the underground funicular (*Tünel*), and tramways were awarded by the Sixth District to firms owned or co-owned by Levantines and European foreigners. Supported by the legal protections of the capitulations, European foreigners established their own schools, hospitals, police stations, and even prisons in Beyoğlu. These privileges amplified the influence of foreign communities over municipal policies and paved the way for international trade circles to gain considerable weight in the Sixth District's decision-making processes.

Beyoğlu served as one of the primary centers where Western-style social life first emerged in Ottoman society before spreading over time to other regions. Many innovations in Ottoman urban life made their initial appearance here. The earliest apartment buildings, modern restaurants, cafes, *cafés-chantants*, arcades, department stores, hotels, banks, photography studios, fashion houses, bookstores, delicatessens, travel agencies, theaters, opera houses, cinemas, patisseries, bars, *balo*zes (dance halls), beer halls, wigmakers, hatters, tramways, and the underground metro emerged in Galata and Pera (Eldem 2006, p. 25). Levantine entrepreneurs and foreign capital circles in close relations with the Sixth Municipal District played a decisive role in introducing a major portion of these innovations to Istanbul.

A significant portion of Western travelers asserted that Levantines did not speak Turkish, maintained limited social interactions with Ottoman society, and preserved their European cultural identity. However, these evaluations should also be approached as

observations framed within the Orientalist discourse of the era. Indeed, Levantines did not remain entirely detached from the Eastern society in which they lived; they were influenced to a degree by Ottoman culture through daily lifestyle practices, commercial relations, and social networks. Consequently, Europeans referred to them as "*tatlısu Frengi*" (Levantine/"Freshwater Frank") (Çakıcıoğlu 2007, p. 339).

Conversely, the influence of Levantines on Ottoman society was equally pronounced. Their social lifestyles, entertainment culture, consumption habits, culinary practices, and clothing styles spread first among non-Muslim Ottoman communities and subsequently began influencing the upper and middle-income strata of Muslim Turkish society. Thus, a distinct social duality emerged in Ottoman society between "*alaturka*" (traditional) and "*alafranga*" (Westernized) lifestyles. While this duality manifested more visibly among statesmen, bureaucrats, pashas, and intellectuals, a vast majority of the public continued their traditional way of life and preferred not to cross the bridges connecting historical Istanbul (within the city walls) to Galata except for routine daily needs.

The designation of Beyoğlu as "*Frengistan*" in contemporary sources serves as an important indicator of this cultural perception. This naming refers both to Europeans identified as "*Frenk*" and to the disease syphilis (*frengi*). A segment of conservative Ottoman society drew a symbolic connection between the Western lifestyle, moral decay, and disease. Nonetheless, the new lifestyle offered by Beyoğlu exerted a strong pull on certain segments of Ottoman society. A new urban class emerged that adopted Western-style consumption habits, shopped at European stores, frequented entertainment venues, and emulated the Levantine lifestyle. This transformation was clearly reflected in the literary works of the period. The characters Felâtun Bey in Ahmed Mithat Efendi's *Felâtun Bey ile Râkım Efendi* and Bihruz Bey in Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem's *Araba Sevdası* stand out as symbolic archetypes representing the social and cultural ramifications of the Beyoğlu-centered Westernization process.

In parallel, the traditional neighborhood structure in which different income groups lived together within the same neighborhood during the classical Ottoman period began to diverge in Beyoğlu, particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. Following the establishment of the Sixth Municipal District, a distinct spatial segregation based on economic status became visible among neighborhoods.

The influence of Levantines on Ottoman society was not limited to social life, Westernized public spaces, and the spread of European architecture. This influence was also felt markedly in the vocabulary of Ottoman Turkish, particularly regarding daily conversational speech, commercial terminology, and concepts related to urban life. Numerous words of Italian and, to a lesser extent, French origin entered Ottoman Turkish through Levantines, becoming a natural component of daily usage over time. Words such as *avanta, banka, bavul, çaçaron, damacana, daniska, depozito, erkete, falso, favori, fatura, filinta, fiyasko, fiyaka, forma, flört, furya, jargon, ispiyon, istif, işporta, kambiyo, karambol, kaparo, karantina, karavana, karyola, kodes, kumpas, lokanta, moda, palyaço, racon, riziko, tente, tombala, torpil, voli,* and *volta* stand among the most striking examples of this linguistic interaction (Kaptan 1989, pp. 169–99; Türker 2023, pp. 62–63). That a portion of these terms came to be used not only in daily speech but also in official Ottoman documents underscores the reach of this cultural exchange into institutional correspondence.

A similar transformation is observed in the naming of healthcare institutions. Within the Ottoman state organization, the word "*hastahane*" (hospital) was used for the first time by the Sixth Municipal District for the *Nisa Hastahanesi* (Women's Hospital), established to treat venereal diseases. Following the opening of this institution, the same terminology was adopted by newly founded healthcare facilities; thus, the term "*darüşşifa*", widely used in the classical Ottoman period, gradually gave way to the concept of "*hastahane*".

This terminological shift should not be evaluated merely as a linguistic variation. On the contrary, it should be regarded as a key indicator reflecting a conceptual transformation regarding the function of healthcare institutions and the impact of Western institutional models during Ottoman modernization. Indeed, while the concept of "*darüşşifa*" translates directly to "a place where healing is given," "*hastahane*" signifies "a building where the sick reside." This distinction highlights the transformation in the conceptualization of health services and the shifting perspective regarding the social function of such institutions.

The gradual replacement of classical Ottoman *darüşşifa*s—established as charitable trusts (*waqf*s) providing free medical treatment and medication—by secular hospitals organized along Western lines forms an integral part of this transition. In the same context, it is noteworthy that the Sixth District organized lotteries and sold tickets to finance the construction of the *Nisa Hastahanesi*. This practice can be evaluated not only as the adoption of a novel financing method, but also as an early institutional application of lotteries, which were not previously widespread in Ottoman society.

With the founding of the Sixth Municipal District, not only did the organization of municipal services change, but the institutional structure and spatial organization of Ottoman cities underwent significant shifts as well. Plaza and square arrangements similar to European urban planning concepts were introduced; government headquarters (*hükümet konakları*), symbolizing the centralized governance that began under Sultan Mahmud II and accelerated with Tanzimat reforms, were built in provincial capitals. These structures were followed by new civic buildings such as clock towers, telegraph offices, post offices, and municipal halls. Consequently, the mosque-centered urban organization of classical Ottoman cities structured around the *waqf* system gradually transformed into a more secular, administratively centered urban planning model focused on public buildings.

The catastrophe known in the literature as the "Great Fire" (*Harik-i Kebir*) of 1870 marked a new turning point in the physical development of Beyoğlu. The extensive reconstruction of the district following the fire paved the way for Beyoğlu's architectural character to align more closely with European cities. However, the municipality's projects to implement a grid-plan street network after the fire and to relocate the district center to Tepebaşı could not be executed due to objections from property owners (Emecen 2025, p. 199). This situation demonstrates that the tension between modern urban planning concepts and private property rights was acutely felt in the late Ottoman era.

The ethnic, religious, and cultural identities of Levantines were directly reflected in their architectural preferences. Through the residences, commercial buildings, and public structures they constructed, Beyoğlu acquired a distinct architectural identity reminiscent of European cities within Istanbul. The Sixth Municipal District actively encouraged abandoning timber construction in favor of masonry (*kâgir*) structural systems, particularly following the Great Fire. The fact that the majority of structures built in Beyoğlu after the fire were masonry and designed by non-Muslim, Levantine, and European architects clearly reveals the actors behind this architectural evolution. Architects such as Domenico Pulgher, Domenico Stampa, Hovsep Aznavur, William James Smith, Gaspare Fossati, Giovanni Battista Barborini, August Jasmund, Alexandre Vallaury, Raimondo D'Aronco, and Giulio Mongeri played a decisive role in shaping not only Beyoğlu's character, but also the general trajectory of late Ottoman architecture.

Although Western influences in Ottoman architecture began appearing during the reign of Sultan Mahmud I (1730–1754), these influences remained limited throughout the eighteenth century. By contrast, in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, European-derived Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Gothic, Eclectic, and Art Nouveau styles were widely applied in Istanbul's architecture. Transferred into Ottoman architectural practice through the aforementioned architects, these styles became defining features

of Beyoğlu's physical appearance. The Sixth District building itself, dominated by the Neo-Renaissance style, serves as one of the most prominent examples of this transition. Reflecting European municipal concepts in its architectural language as much as in its institutional identity, the building stands as one of the most visible institutional representatives of Western-derived administrative and architectural approaches in the late Ottoman period. In this regard, the Sixth Municipal District not only marked the beginning of modern municipal governance in the Ottoman Empire, but also established a historical model that directly influenced the development of municipal organizations in the Republican era. Ultimately, the institution's legacy carries a multidimensional character, serving both as a pioneer of modern municipal practices and as a historical case study reflecting the socio-spatial inequalities produced by late Ottoman modernization.

7. Conclusions

The establishment and activities of the Sixth Municipal District (*Altıncı Daire-i Belediye*) constitute a significant historical case study for understanding both the administrative structure of the Westernization process pursued by the Ottoman Empire from the nineteenth century onward and the socio-spatial dynamics generated by this transformation. The municipal practices conducted primarily in Beyoğlu marked a decisive turning point in Ottoman urban history in terms of modernizing urban infrastructure, developing a new urban planning concept centered on public buildings, and establishing an institutional local governance system. However, the historical evidence evaluated within the scope of this study reveals that this modernization process did not reflect equally across all segments of society. The concentration of municipal services in specific districts and among certain social groups, the ethnic and spatial differentiation in service distribution, and practices directly affecting public health demonstrate that the modern municipal experience was simultaneously a process that generated substantial socio-spatial inequalities.

When historical findings are evaluated from a broader cultural perspective, it becomes clear through the example of the Sixth Municipal District that the impact of the Levantine community on Ottoman institutions, urban culture, and daily life was not limited to municipal practices alone. Although the Levantine population and its social visibility have diminished significantly today, the cultural heritage formed throughout this historical process continues to endure in specific districts of Istanbul. Traces of European-derived urban lifestyle practices and consumption culture can still be observed today, particularly in Beyoğlu and its surrounding areas, as well as in neighborhoods historically settled by Levantines, such as Beyoğlu, Kadıköy, Moda, Fenerbahçe, Suadiye, the Princes' Islands, Bakırköy, and Yeşilköy. Rather than representing a direct cultural continuity, this phenomenon can be evaluated within the framework of the persistence of spatial memory and social habits shaped over a long historical process. Even though the Levantine population no longer resides in many of these areas, the architectural environment they built, their public space culture, and certain daily practices continue to serve as essential components of these neighborhoods' historical identities. In this context, the Levantine community assumed a role of cultural mediation between East and West, tradition and modernity, and the local and global, thereby contributing to long-term interactions between "*alaturka*" (traditional) and "*alafranga*" (Westernized) lifestyles within Ottoman society.

In conclusion, this study—conducted through the lens of the Sixth Municipal District and the Pera/Beyoğlu experience—does not merely explain a specific period of Ottoman Westernization; it also offers an evaluative historical framework for contemporary debates surrounding urban governance, spatial inequality, cultural identity, heritage preservation, and urbanization policies in modern Turkey. By eschewing an approach that views municipal history solely through the lens of institutional development, this study presents

a holistic framework that evaluates local administration at the intersection of cultural interaction, social differentiation, spatial transformation, and modernization processes. The experience of the Sixth District serves as a vital historical reference point, allowing for a combined assessment of the reflections of Ottoman modernization on local governments, the impacts of this transformation on distinct social groups, and the continuity of this historical legacy extending to present-day cities. Within this scope, while contributing to the re-evaluation of the relationship between municipalism, urbanization, and cultural interaction in the late Ottoman period, the study aims to open the multidimensional role of the Sixth Municipal District to a more comprehensive discussion within Ottoman urban history and modernization literature.

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