

SPACEPOL PROJECT NEWSLETTER #3

**Updates from the ANR Project on
Space and Politics in Capital Cities**

Ankara, Astana, Abu-Dhabi, Cairo, Moscow, Tehran



Interventions by the team in recent seminars, workshops and conferences



Project director Gülçin Erdi and *Dr. Clara Rivas Alonso* presented their work, “The production of space as a political and symbolic tool: the case of capital cities,” at the Cetobac/Ifea seminar on February 20, held as part of the joint “Political Sociology of Contemporary Turkey: Spatial Approaches” event organized by OVIPO of the Contemporary Pole in 2024. The seminar was coordinated by Yohanan Benhaïm, Claire Visier, Lucie Drechselova, Emmanuel Szurek, and Élise Massicard, and provided a dynamic platform for discussing the relationship between urban spaces and political symbolism.



On the occasion of its *30th anniversary*, *IFEAC* organized a two-day conference in Paris after the November 2023 celebrations in Bishkek. *Clara Rivas Alonso* presented the project and its partnership with IFEAC in the framework of this celebration.

Paul Wolkenstein presented his paper, “Brezhnevian Operations in Architecture and Urban Planning in Central Asian Capitals,” at a two-day conference in December 2024 organized by **Julien Thorez**, among others. Hosted under the GIS Moyen-Orient et Mondes Musulmans and in partnership with CeRMI, IFEAC, the Central Asian Archaeology Centre Zoostan (CNRS, KazNU), and CREE, the event aimed to strengthen the field by showcasing its dynamism and diversity, fostering exchanges among researchers across a broad geographic area—from Iran to Mongolia and Afghanistan to Russia—and covering topics ranging from heritage, religion, and power to territory, digital innovation, and climate change.

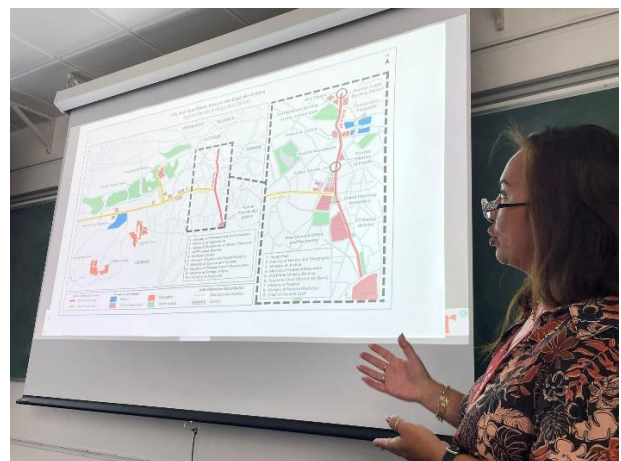
At IGC 2024 in Dublin, our SpacePol team made a impact with three engaging presentations that highlighted our research. *Clara Rivas Alonso* presented her research on women and gendered monuments in Ankara and Abu Dhabi to an enthusiastic audience. In addition, our colleagues, *Professor*



Gülçin Erdi and *Vladimir Pawlotsky*, delivered insightful interventions on urban dynamics in Ankara and Moscow, respectively. We extend our sincere gratitude to the organizers, panel chairs, and audience for facilitating these dynamic discussions on the intersections of gender, space, and politics in capital cities.

At the second Atlas Global Network workshop in Athens (<https://tinyurl.com/2j6zmkhn>), held in the Ecole Française d'Athènes on 29 November 2024, *Prof. Gülçin Erdi* presented the SpacePol project alongside network colleagues, focusing on capital city transformations and the importance of interdisciplinary urban research.

At the *Royal Geographical Society Conference RGS-IBG24* in London, the SpacePol team delivered a dynamic panel presenting their latest research on mapping urban environments in Cairo, Ankara, Tehran, and Abu Dhabi. Organized by *Clara Rivas Alonso*, the session featured insightful presentations from SpacePol members *Gülçin Erdi*, *Ahmed Zaazaa*, *Azadeh Mashayekhi*, and *Clara Rivas Alonso*, each offering a unique analytical approach to understanding these cities. It was a great opportunity to disseminate our project's research work and showcase innovative methodologies in urban mapping.

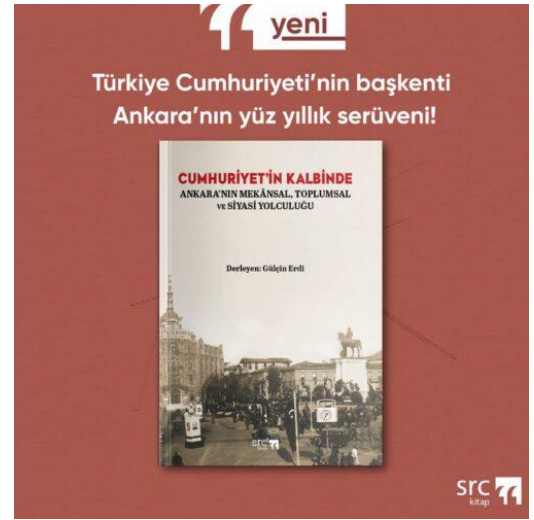


Publications



We are delighted to announce that the book “*Cumhuriyet’in Kalbinde: Ankara’nın Mekânsal, Toplumsal ve Siyasi Yolculuğu*” is now available in Turkish, published by SRC Yayınları. Get your copy here: [SRC Yayınları](#)

This volume comes as a direct outcome of the SpacePol 2023 Ankara Conference, testifying to the huge success and growing interest in Ankara studies. The book brings together chapters written by some of the leading scholars of the city, including **Professor İlhan Tekeli**, and edited by SpacePol director, **Professor Gülçin Erdi**. We are also honoured to include contributions from SpacePol team members, **Professor Savaş Zafer Şahin** and **Dr. Sibel Akyıldız**, whose work further enriches this comprehensive study of Ankara’s spatial, social, and political transformations.



The book sheds light on the historical traces and contemporary reflections of Ankara, exploring the efforts to create a modern and secular society, urban planning initiatives, and the political forces that have shaped the capital. As Ankara enters its second century, this book stands as a tribute to the Republic that built a city in the heart of the steppe.

Prof Vladimir Kolosov and *Maria Zotova* have published a new study titled “Evolution of the Political Landscape of Moscow as Capital”, available [here](#). Their work examines how Moscow’s built environment—from government buildings to monuments—reflects the nation’s political history and the prevailing ideals of urban identity. The study traces the evolution of these material elements, confirming the historical hyper concentration of administrative institutions in central areas such as Lubyanka, Kitai-gorod, and the Moscow City business complex. Despite the relocation of some federal institutions outside the centre, the overall spatial configuration remains largely unchanged, while the enduring dominance of WWII monuments continues to shape the capital's political and symbolic landscape.

Roman Stadnicki published an article on the site of the Universal Expo Dubai—which is currently undergoing transformation into a new city—in issue 19 of *Urbanités: Faire ville ou refaire événement : le dilemme de Dubai Expo 2020* (Building a City or Reinventing an Event: The Dilemma of Dubai Expo 2020). This special edition is devoted to exploring the relationship between urban spaces and major events. Accessible [here](#).

Laura Monfleur had a chapter published in the American University in Cairo Press book, *Cairo Securitized: Reconceiving Urban Justice and Social Resilience*. Titled “Challenging Urban Militarization in Post-2011 Downtown Cairo: Walls and Checkpoints,” her contribution adds to an valuable collection of essays that explore the complexities of urban security and social resilience in Egypt’s capital.

Amin Moghadam’s latest publication, *Migration and Cities: An Introduction*, is now available [Open Access](#). In his chapter on managing and representing urban diversity and its link to spatial justice, he introduces an analytical framework that examines how urbanisation differs between smaller and larger centres and across regions.

Other news



Roman Stadnicki successfully defended his Accreditation to Supervise Research (HDR) titled “Modern Urbanities in Confrontation - Yemen, Egypt, Gulf Emirates” in June 2024. His 323-page thesis, which builds on 27 publications and extensive field research across Yemen, Egypt, Kuwait, and the UAE, offers a comparative, empirical-analytical exploration of contemporary urban modernity. The work examines how local institutions, infrastructures, and everyday practices shape diverse modernization processes, providing both retrospective insights and forward-looking perspectives on the transformation of urban spaces in the Arab world. **Congrats Roman!**

UNIVERSITÉ PARIS 1
PANTHÉON SORBONNE



Modernités urbaines en confrontation
Yémen, Égypte, Émirats du Golfe



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Soutenance d’habilitation à diriger des recherches

par Roman Stadnicki
UMR CITERES-EMAM, Université de Tours



SpacePol professor, *Savaş Zafer Şahin*, representing the Ankara Kent Konseyi project, received the 2024 IPI Network award in the field of democracy and political science in Barcelona. At the ceremony held, he was honoured with the innovation award by European Commission Vice President Dubravka

Šuica. Prof. Savaş Zafer Şahin expressed his gratitude to IPI Network, Ankara Kent Konseyi, and his colleagues for their support. Huge congratulations on this well-deserved achievement!

Corten Pérez-Houis successfully defended his doctoral thesis in Geography at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, under the supervision of Éric Denis and Alice Franck. His thesis, “*La ville dans le moule. Mise en ordre et résistances des filières de brique rouge dans la production du Grand Caire (Égypte) et du Grand Khartoum (Soudan)*,” examines the organization and resistance within the red brick supply chains that have shaped the development of Greater Cairo and Greater Khartoum. This impressive work contributes valuable insights into the processes of urban production and transformation. Congratulations Corten!

Network news



ATLASGLOBALNETWORK

SpacePol has joined the [Atlas Global Network](#), a collaborative platform uniting independent projects that map and analyse social structures and urban practices worldwide. This partnership, announced by Prof. Gülçin Erdi in January 2024, will enhance the comparative understanding of urban issues and the dissemination of evidence-based knowledge through interdisciplinary exchanges. Established following an initial meeting in Athens in October 2022, the network aims to foster regular communication and innovative collaborations among its diverse members, while preserving the unique research profiles of each project, thereby broadening the debate on the social dimensions of cities.

REPORTS

Opening of the SpacePol Photographic Exhibition at the Ankara Kent Konseyi, January 2024

The SPACEPOL photo exhibition “Changing Capital, Resilient Professions: Ankara” (*Değişen Başkentte Direnen Meslekler: Ankara*) opened on January 10 2024 at the *Ankara Kent Konseyi Sergi Salonu*, following its initial run at the Institut Français. Curated by Prof. Gülçin Erdi and featuring photographs by the talented photographer Vincent Delcourt, the exhibition was organized as part of the SPACEPOL research project in collaboration with IFEA, in celebration of the Anniversary of the Republic and the establishment of Ankara as the capital. The display examined Ankara’s evolving urban landscape and celebrated the resilient professions that had withstood the pressures of rapid transformation.



**Değişen Başkentte
Direnen Meslekler:
ANKARA**

Küratör
Gülçin Erdi

Fotoğraf Sanatçısı
Vincent Delcourt

Sergi Açılışı
10 Ocak 2024
Saat 19:00
Ankara Kent Konseyi Sergi Salonu
Atatürk Bld. No 18, Alınaloyu/Ankara (Opera Binası Yanı)

100 Ankara Cumhuriyeti ANKARA KENT KONSEYİ anr* IFEA EFA

In conjunction with the exhibition opening, project director Gülçin Erdi was interviewed on the “*Ankara Neydi Ne Oldu?*” podcast by Rasim Özgür Dönmez and Fevzi Can Gürüz. The discussion explored Ankara’s transformation processes and highlighted how various professional groups had resisted sweeping changes—a theme central to the exhibition. You can listen to the full interview [here](https://spacepol.hypotheses.org/).



Abu Dhabi SpacePol Fieldwork and Seminar, April 2024



Last March part of the SpacePol team visited Abu Dhabi to carry out a 10-day research trip and participate in the SpacePol seminar on Abu Dhabi and Tehran: we reflected and engaged with the research stemming from the two capitals of our project. We had the opportunity of visiting the different neighbourhoods and urban development projects in Abu Dhabi, also familiarising ourselves with the work our Abu Dhabi team is currently working on.

The SpacePol seminar continued its comparative exploration of urban realities by examining the capital cities of Abu Dhabi and Tehran. The focus was on three main themes: perceptions, actors, and controversies. Discussions delved into the symbolic functions and historical significance of these capitals, including the role of iconic

buildings and mega-projects in shaping their image. The role of various actors in influencing urban policies and the dynamics between public and private stakeholders were analysed. Additionally, social reactions to urban policies and the resolution of public issues were examined through case studies that highlighted the frictions and competing discourses at the municipal level.

Mina Saïdi's presentation focused on the transformation of public spaces in Tehran, using the "Bamland" project as a case study. Saïdi's analysis highlighted the unintended consequences of such developments on personal freedoms and the broader implications for urban planning.

SpacePol Seminar Series

SPACEPOL citierES جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي NYU ABU DHABI anr

**Capital Cities in Focus:
Abu Dhabi and Tehran
in Conversation**

15 March 10:30-18:00
NYUAD, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi
By Invite Only. Please contact clararivasspacepol@gmail.com

Laure Assaf's presentation on Abu Dhabi's Mina Zayed explored the city's urban renewal and the memory of its historical port. The demolition of the Mina Plaza towers symbolized a new stage in the port's redevelopment, transforming it into a retail hub.

Roman Stadnicki's examination of Aldar's role in Abu Dhabi's urban development provided insights into the power dynamics between public and private spheres. Aldar's evolution from a real estate developer to an influential urban planner exemplified the fusion of economic and political elites.

Amin Moghadam and Jérémie Molho compared the urban development strategies of Abu Dhabi and Doha, focusing on their aspirations to become "knowledge capitals." The presentation examined projects like Saadiyat Island and Education City, which aim to attract knowledge professionals and establish these cities as global centers for knowledge creation.

Anahi Alviso-Marino's research focused on place-making, national storytelling, and un-monumenting through monuments in Abu Dhabi. Her presentation examined the biographical trajectory of these monuments in public spaces, highlighting the processes through which monuments are established and transformed. Using significant monuments like the monumental portrait of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan al Nahyan and The Constellation, Alviso-Marino explored how these structures intersect with the city, state, and art. She emphasized the challenges of accessing information and negotiating clearance issues, which reflect broader societal and political changes in authoritarian contexts. The transition from Sheikh Zayed's portrait to The Constellation symbolizes a shift in national storytelling and urban identity, showcasing the evolving dynamics in Abu Dhabi's public spaces.

Azadeh Mashayekhi's presentation focused on the politics of planning urban mega-projects in Tehran, using the Abbas-Abad hill development and Maskan Mehr as case studies. Her analysis delved into the interplay between power and urban space in Tehran, emphasizing how the polarized political structure of Iran influences urban planning and development. Mashayekhi highlighted the role of the state in using urban projects to consolidate power and maintain legitimacy, reflecting the political transitions and ideological shifts since the 1979 Revolution. Her study revealed the fragmented nature of Tehran's urban development, influenced by changes in the Iranian political landscape, and underscored the importance of accessibility and the role of political actors like the mayor in shaping these projects.

Clara Rivas Alonso explored gendered dimensions of public monuments in Ankara and Abu Dhabi, analysing their impact on women's perceptions and interactions with these spaces. By examining the Güven Monument and Mamsha Al Khair, she highlighted how these symbols reinforce traditional gender roles and the emerging challenges to these narratives. Her ongoing research emphasizes intersectionality, considering ethnicity, race, and class in understanding gender dynamics in public spaces.

Academic Writing Workshop, Istanbul, May 2024



From May 7 to 10, 2024, IFEA (*Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes*) in Istanbul hosted the SPACEPOL Writing Workshop— a collaborative, intensive event aimed at refining the abstracts and drafting the book chapters for our collective volume, one of the project's key deliverables. The workshop provided a structured environment for idea generation, constructive feedback, brainstorming, and collaborative writing. Participants engaged in an interactive feedback “game” that allowed them to candidly share their perspectives on key concepts such as Global South/Global East, Neoliberal Urbanism, Authoritarianism, Everyday Life, and

Public Space. The event was structured around four primary objectives: fostering brainstorming based on fieldwork insights, offering a platform for detailed critique, encouraging resource sharing and potential co-writing, and setting clear targets and deadlines for chapter revisions.

The workshop started on Tuesday, May 7, with a warm welcome and an introduction to the collective book project. Each participant presented a concise, five-minute abstract—using up to three slides—to outline their research proposals, setting the stage for in-depth feedback sessions. These discussions not only helped refine individual chapters but also facilitated the tentative

allocation of abstracts into three thematic sections: (1) the spatial imagination of capitals and spatio-symbolic power struggles; (2) global urban governance and the geopolitics of power; and (3) the dislocation of power in urban space through everyday experiences and collective resistance. Intensive writing sessions, paired feedback exchanges, and individual review meetings over the following days ensured that each contribution received comprehensive input, ultimately fostering a culture of care and mutual support among our diverse team.



On the final day, focused writing sessions and a subsequent round of feedback allowed participants to polish their drafts, culminating in a wrap-up session that outlined post-workshop targets and the publication process for the book. Overall, the workshop not only advanced the substantive content of our forthcoming volume but also reinforced our collective commitment to collaborative and interdisciplinary urban research.



Immediately following the workshop, on May 11, seven intrepid SPACEPOL members embarked on an enriching field trip to Ankara, led by Professor Gülçin Erdi. The tour offered a comprehensive exploration of Ankara's rich history, cultural landmarks, and contemporary urban dynamics. The group visited pivotal sites such as the historical train station, Ulus Square—with its iconic Atatürk Monument—the Museum of the Turkish Republic, and the Ankara Palas Museum. They also explored the Hacı Bayram-ı Veli Camii, traditional markets like Ulus Hali and Suluhan Çarşısı, and enjoyed panoramic views from the Ankara Tower and Gençlik Park.



The itinerary further included a visit to Ankara Kent Konseyi, providing insights into local governance and civic initiatives, and a reflective stop at Anıtkabir to honour the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. A traditional lunch at Duveroğlu and subsequent explorations in the bustling district of Kızılay, including visits to Güven Park and the famous Dost Bookstore, enriched the day's experience. Observations on the rapid urbanization at the city's outskirts, marked by the construction of TOKİ buildings, underscored the evolving urban landscape of Ankara.



In summary, the SPACEPOL Writing Workshop and the Ankara field trip not only advanced our research and publication efforts but also exemplified the strength of our collaborative spirit. These initiatives have charted a clear path forward for our collective work, reinforcing the value of multidisciplinary engagement in understanding and transforming urban spaces.

SpacePol Fieldwork Trip Report: Astana, June 2024

In June 2024 a team of SpacePol researchers—Gülçin Erdi, Vincent Delcourt, Mina Saïdi, and Adrien Fauve—undertook a fieldwork trip to Astana. The purpose of the trip was to combine urban exploration with cultural and academic engagement while documenting the city’s evolving landscape.

Upon arrival, they observed local interactions that reflected a strong sense of community identity. The team visited several key landmarks, including the Hazret Sultan Mosque, the district near the USA Embassy, and the high-rise residential blocks along the Ichim River. A visit to the Pyramid of Reconciliation and Peace in Presidential Park provided an opportunity to note the interaction between modern infrastructure and community life.

On the second day, the team visited the National Museum, which offered a concise overview of Astana’s cultural heritage and its transition from a historical town to the current capital. The museum exhibits, which included artifacts of Turkish influence and other historical finds, helped frame the city’s transformation. In addition, the group observed several monuments along the Ichim River that mark the city’s administrative and symbolic core, as well as urban renewal projects in the central area.



The final day focused on academic engagement and potential collaboration. The team visited Nariqbayev University, where discussions were held with university officials about future urban planning projects. They also met with members of the Q88 collective at venues such as Astana Hub and Satbayev University. These meetings addressed issues related to rapid urbanization, the challenges of urban planning, and the need for improved public infrastructure. In summary, the Astana fieldwork trip provided the team with direct insights into the city's urban development and cultural heritage. The observations and discussions from the trip will contribute to SpacePol's ongoing research on urban environments and transformation processes.



UPCOMING EVENTS



At the upcoming GIS MOMM Conference in June in Strasbourg, Roman Stadnicki will organize a panel titled "Urban Actors in Circulation between the Capitals of the Middle East and Central Asia." <https://tinyurl.com/3rkz9t4r>. The panel will explore how new investment channels and urban cooperation are reshaping cities such as Abu Dhabi, Ankara, Tashkent, and Astana. Participants, including Roman Stadnicki, Prof. Gülçin Erdi, Paul Wolkenstein, Jeanne Gorin, and Julien Thorez, will examine the interplay between capital flows, urban players, and planning models, discussing whether these processes encourage local emergence or reinforce established real estate dominance.

STAY TUNED: We will hold a final SpacePol conference in June 2026. More info soon!

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