Rescaling cities, cultural diversity and transnationalism: Migrants of Mardin and Essen

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Abstract
On the basis of return migration of Christians to Mardin (Turkey) and the location of migrants in Essen’s (Germany) nomination for the European Capital of Culture, this article focuses on the interface between urban restructuration, cultural diversity and migrant incorporation in the context of neo-liberal globalization. Despite the growing literature on the new role of culture in urban economics, scant attention has been given to the place of immigrants/returnees in urban dynamics and in the repositioning struggle between cities within and across border. This article aims to bring together the field of (transnational) migration and studies on culture in scalar politics. It argues that the structural changes taking place in the cities of migrants’ departure and settlement shape the nature of migrant incorporation and transnationalism, the narratives about migrants’ place in urban development, and the venues of translating cultural diversity into a competitive advantage in scalar politics. On the basis of the role migrants/returnees play in the involvement of supranational actors like the EU in Mardin and Essen in the prospects of urban development, this article draws attention to the impact of supranational actors in shaping territorial inequalities, as well as the local trajectories of urban politics. Finally, it raises questions about special European dynamics in changing imaginaries and topographies of cultural diversity in Europe, which go beyond conventional schemes of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Migration; transnational practices; urban restructuration; cultural diversity; multiculturalism.

... no matter where they are and how they ended up in the places they are now, Syriacs are going back to Mardin nowadays. They are building houses and investing in Mardin. They are returning. ...
Why shouldn’t they? Is there any other place like Mardin in the world? Where will you find a place like Mardin in the world with such an old civilization and history? Tell me one other place with such a rich cultural and religious heritage and diversity? You cannot find.’

Christian Syriac shopowner, Vienna

The culture at Ruhr has different facets. For centuries, this area has been a ‘melting pot’. Migrants from Poland, Turkey, Greece, Italy and from many other countries (not only European) came to this place in pursuit of a better life. A ‘Culture of Work’ united the newcomers and the natives. However, with the passing of the industrial society, this bonding could not be taken-for granted anymore. In order to face the future, there is a need for forging new commonalities among the people from hundred different places. Culture is very important in this, if not the motor of this process.’

‘Europa lebt im Ruhrgebiet 2004’, the European Capital of Culture Campaign Office

Mardin in Turkey and Essen in Germany, despite their very different histories, demographic composition and national locations, share a common ground in terms of the way cultural diversity figures in their future prospects. They each emphasize their competitive capacities through a narrative of cultural diversity. In fact these cities are not very different from many other cities in underscoring their cultural diversity as part of their local assets in order to increase their competitiveness within the global economy. Many cities today highlight their cultural diversity as part of the struggle through which they (re)position themselves in relation to other cities both within and across state boundaries. For this purpose, cities like Mardin and Essen are drawing attention to their capacity to mobilize human resources with intercultural competencies, to their diverse ethnic composition, and to their respectively emigrant/returnee and immigrant populations. Migrancy, cultural diversity and the strategies of place marketing become intimately intermeshed.

The migration scholarship that focus on globalization and cities usually concentrates on migrants’ location within the labour force in global cities (Sassen 1988) on their transnational ties, practices and networks reaching out from the cities of migrant settlement (Smith 2001); on the increasing role of local governments in provisioning services to migrants and the challenges they pose for governance (Bommes and Radke 1996; Ray 2005). However, despite this emphasis on the interface between migrants and urban life in the analysis of migrant incorporation, cities have not been differentiated in terms of their positionality within the global economy. Consequently, the
opportunity structures for migrants are still envisaged as nested in national scales.2

There is a growing literature on uneven spatialization of globalization and its effects on the differential livelihood possibilities of urban dwellers. The same line of literature also develops the impact of urban restructuring on the new forms of urban governance and politics (Leitner 1990; Jessop 1999; Sheppard 2002; Brenner 2004). However this kind of scholarship has not been brought together with the studies on transnational migration and the emergent role of culture and cultural industries in cities. This article is an attempt to relate the dynamics in these fields to each other.

In this essay I argue that the ‘success’ of cities in converting culture and cultural diversity into economic assets lie neither in the sophistication of their marketing strategies, nor in the exact demographic composition and exit options available to their migrant population. The crucial parameter of this success is the scalar positionality of these cities within the circuits of capital flow and power hierarchies and their ability to draw in supranational actors, like the EU, which are crucial for creating and maintaining territorial inequalities. I focus on the entanglements between immigrant incorporation, cultural diversity and urban development and argue that without exploring the positionality of the localities in question (namely migrants’ places of departure and settlement), it is neither possible to understand the complex opportunity structures and pathways for migrant incorporation nor the dynamics of migrants’ transnational ties and practices.3

Drawing from scholarship on scale I argue that the migration literature – including the transnational migration literature – has remained confined within the national scale and has ignored the geographically differentiated consequences of contemporary globalization.4 Consequently, places of departure and settlement are not differentiated beyond the national scale.5 In the next section, I discuss the scholarship which I draw on to formulate a scalar approach to migrant settlement and transnationalism in cities. Then, I concentrate on the rescaling processes in Mardin, a city in southeast Turkey. Mardin is a city of massive out-migration, particularly in terms of its Syriac and Kurdish population. After twenty-five years of out-migration, the Syriac emigrants from Mardin in different parts of Europe started to create homeland ties. I focus on the emergent homeland ties forged to Mardin through the lens of the transformations Mardin has gone through within the frame of neo-liberal development agendas. In the last section I briefly consider Essen and the Ruhr area of Germany by way of their efforts to reposition this zone within the hierarchies of power. Essen is home to a large immigrant population and has been selected as the European Capital
of Culture in 2010. I explore the location of immigrants in the new urban politics and cultural diversity narratives in Essen and focus on the opportunities and venues of transnational practices and discourses this rescaling efforts present to the migrants. This section raises questions about the changing imaginaries and topographies of cultural diversity in Europe, which go beyond conventional schemes of multiculturalism and are shaped by the broader European dynamics of US-Europe relations regarding the regulation and the protection of the cultural sector in Europe.

The missing scalar perspective

The answer to the question about how effective urban strategies are in translating the ethnic and cultural diversity into an asset lies in the positionality of these cities within the hierarchies of power and circuits of capital flow. The location of the city in urban hierarchies may well lay the ground for the differential livelihood chances, and incorporation opportunities of migrants locally and transnationally. Drawing from the scholarship on scale, I argue that the notion of locality and space have been poorly conceptualized in (transnational) migration studies.6 Transnational migration research needs to include in its analysis the spatial aspects of socio-economic power and the relational inequalities within networked space. Scale scholarship as developed by geographers, political economists and urban sociologists might be very useful in doing this. I argue that in order to be able to analyse the dynamics of migrant populations together with the dynamics of the cities, we need to locate the migrant settlement in relation to the local, national, regional and global circuits of capital accumulation. In short, in order to understand the different modes and dynamics of migrant incorporation and transnationalism, we might need to address the rescaling processes affecting the places migrants leave and are incorporated into.

In migration scholarship there is a striking spatial indifference within the state territory. Not only the place-specific factors of migrant networks and relationships beyond the national have been neglected to a great extent, but also the sending and the receiving states are considered to operate on a principle of equality and homogeneity of the national territory without any spatial differentiations. These principles are assumed to establish the ground for state policies and redistribution schemes regarding migrants, their networks, organizations and the opportunity structures. Despite the rich literature on sending-state policies towards communities abroad (Smith 1998; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003), the analysis remains at a level in which state territory is treated as an even entity vis-à-vis state policies. Consequently, state activity towards communities
abroad and activities in their hometowns in the country of origin are rarely differentiated on the basis of socio-spatial characteristics of the particular localities. The concept of scale, developed by a group of geographers and political economists (like Smith 1992, 1995; Swyngedouw 1992; Brenner 1998a, 1998b; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Brenner et al. 2003; Brenner 2004), is useful for introducing the missing socio-spatial parameters to the analysis of 'locality' in migration scholarship. A scalar perspective allows us to take locality into consideration within the interaction of power hierarchies and enables us to incorporate the uneven character of globalization into our analysis. According to scale theorists, the scalar positioning of a city refers to the placement of it or an urban zone within the circuits that structure the accumulation of capital. They argue that the hierarchies and structural positioning of cities and localities (urban zones) in general are no longer simply nested in interstate or national-regional hierarchies, but are located differently depending on their positioning in relation to global, national and regional circuits of capital flows.

Within the context of globalization, not only the relationship between localities, but also that between localities and states, is altered. In the context of emergent neo-liberal market-oriented restructuring projects, state activity, namely state intervention and activity are institutionally and geographically differentiated, disrupting the homogenous state space of intervention (Brenner et al. 2003). According to theorists advocating a scalar approach to state policies (Jessop 1999; Brenner 1998c; Brenner et al. 2003), states nevertheless continue to be the important players in the globalization process and contribute to the development of uneven geographies of urbanization and territorial inequalities within the national territory. They shape this restructuring process through their spatially differentiated regulations in the form of state subsidies, the provision of key infrastructural facilities and public services. In this way, states enhance the competitiveness of particular zones. Cities compete to attract global and state subsidies. For this reason, a spatialized approach to statehood is crucial for scalar analysis. The new role of culture in urban economics is part of this scalar politics. All the resources, including human resources, are evaluated anew in the context of rescaling processes.

This call to pay attention to the scalar dimension of migrant settlement and transnational practices in cities builds on different streams of scholarship, which take cities as the focal points of post-industrial economic development and immigrant settlement. These streams are: 'transnational urbanism'; 'entrepreneurial cities'; and positionality and scalar perspective on urban politics and growth.

One stream of scholarship approaches to migrant settlement and incorporation in cities from within the frame of globalization, but
underlines the importance of locality in an effort to locate globalization (Dirlik 2001; Smith 2001). They challenge what they argue to be the economic top-down determinist perspective of the global cities approach (Friedmann 1986; Sassen 1988; Harvey 1990), which privileges economic factors and the production functions over social forms, cultural practices and politics of urban life. These scholars criticize the priority given to the structural functional logic of capitalist urbanization in the analysis of urban dynamics at the expense of the local, political and cultural factors (Smith 2001; Ley 2004, McEwen et al. 2005). Another critique of the ‘global cities perspective’ draws attention to the spatial dynamics of globalization, which alters the relationship between all cities and the nation-state. These scholars underscore the geographically differentiated consequences of globalization – not only on the relationship between the global cities and the nation, but on all cities (Brenner 2001, 2006; Samers 2002, 2006).

Smith (2001) argues against the grand narrative of capitalist urbanization of the global cities perspective, which assumes an a priori ordering of cities. He pleads for a historicized reading of the political economy of neoliberalism with attention to the local political struggles of grassroots movements including migrant mobilizations, which determine the urban outcomes. Here it is important to note that Smith conceptualizes locality by no means in natural and communitarian terms or reduces it to a site of resistance or of cultural meaning. Transnational urbanism, according to Smith, is a project of looking at the city as a site in which transnational, political network circuits of communication and transnational practices are localized within the confines of a neoliberal political economy. However, while Smith’s emphasis is correctly on the importance of local political cultures and institutions and on the grassroots struggles in shaping urban politics and social life, he does not explicitly relate the dynamics of local politics and trajectories to the spatial dynamics of globalization. In his approach the city remains as a ‘cultural metaphor’ (2001, p. 5) rather than a geographic site embedded in the differential consequences of globalization. Cities are, for Smith, the crossroads through which transnational social ties are sustained through social and economic opportunities, political structures and cultural practices (ibid, p. 5). In this way, the spatial qualities of cities, and their interplay with the uneven geography of globalization are not theorized and we are left with no structural frame to systematically relate the local urban trajectories to the broader dynamics of global economy.

The scholarship focusing on the interface between economy, the city and cultural politics addresses the issue of urban politics within the context of broader shifts in the nature of capitalist economy. With the transformation from manufacturing economy to information economy, cities come more and more under pressure to compete with each
other in order to attract globally mobile capital. This in turn necessitates specific proactive strategies in order to secure a city’s competitive advantage vis-à-vis other places and gives rise to entrepreneurial cities with emergent forms of urban politics and governance (Mollenkopf 1983; Judd and Ready 1986; Harvey 1989; Graham 1995; Hall and Hubbard 1998). The objective in the entrepreneurial cities is the socio-economic development of the city rather than the provision of welfare services to the inhabitants of the city; thus they are growth oriented rather than concerned with income redistribution. These cities seek to attract new forms of investment for the new economic role of the city, seek to expand the local tax base and foster small firm growth through different forms of state-market cooperation (Graham 1995). In these tasks, a diverse array of new agencies, institutions and actors are drawn into the entrepreneurial governance structures. A new form of urban politics emerges in these cities. In this context, the location of migrants within urban politics and their relation to the natives, to each other and to the city as well as to other places (like their hometowns) become reconfigured. Thus the structural changes taking place in the cities of migrants’ departure and settlement have an impact on the way immigrants and emigrants relate to their respective cities and on their trajectories of incorporation including their transnational ties and networks.

However, despite the emphasis put on the importance of city governments in shaping migrant pathways of incorporation, the interplay between the regulatory structures, the sectoral opportunity structures and the cultural industry/politics of cities are not related to the spatial dynamics of globalization, which operates on an uneven landscape of state regulation vis-à-vis the cities within the same state territory. Although state regulation is differentiated on sectorial bases, the regulatory structures and measures are still envisaged within the vision of the welfare state based on a ‘homogenized’ state territory (Rath and Kloosterman 2000). However, in the context of neoliberal globalization, statehood is also rescaled and state regulations become important means in creating and maintaining territorial inequalities (Leitner and Sheppard 1998, p. 304). The inequality of state-city relations as well as the increasing influence of the European Union lay the ground for systematic and persistent inequalities in the effectiveness of urban entrepreneurial activities for different cities. The positionality of cities (Sheppard 2002), i.e. both the vertical, hierarchical and the horizontal geographic relations of cities shape the local trajectories of globalization and local urban politics, as well as the effectiveness of entrepreneurial agendas. The success of cities is only partly based on their ability to create and sustain certain economic and political characteristics encompassing migrants and their transnational networks and cultural practices. It is the scalar
positioning of the city that is crucial for the effectiveness of these qualities.
Within this framework, ‘no amount of tinkering with local conditions is sufficient to bring development to the city’ (Leitner and Sheppard 1998, p. 305). Thus despite the widespread commodification of cultural diversity and efforts to transform diversity and the presence of migrants into an economic asset, the effectiveness of migrants transnational (economic and non-economic) ties, and of the strategies these cities adopt to increase their competitiveness all depend on the relational positioning of these cities and their ability to draw in supranational actors into their struggles to gain competitive advantage.7

Drawing from this literature on the importance of scalar positioning of cities, I argue that in analysing migrant incorporation and transnational ties and practices of migrants we need to consider the rescaling of political and economic space within the context of the neoliberalization of regulatory systems. This is a call to relate the analysis of migrant formations to rescaling processes and it is, ironically, a plea to bring socio-spatial considerations into the analysis of a process that is itself primarily about spatial mobility – namely migration. Despite the recognition of the temporal dimension in migration research, the spatial aspect of statehood remains neglected. The relationship between states to their (im)migrant and emigrant populations not only change in time, but also vary in relation to the positioning of migrants’ places of departure and settlement within state spatiality. A spatialized approach to the sending state’s policies as well as to the context of migrant incorporation is long overdue. In fact, a historicized reading of migrant incorporation and transnationalism also requires a spatialized reading.

Mardin, free zones and Syriac return migration

The transnational ties of migrants (including homeland ties) are rarely related to the socio-spatial processes taking place in migrants’ specific place of departure. The recent homeland ties of the Syriac immigrants in Europe from Mardin are important to draw our attention to the entanglements between the immigrants’ transnational ties and the local dynamics in migrants’ places of departure.

Bordering with Syria, Mardin (province) in Turkey has been home to different religious and ethnic communities, such as Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Yezidis, Turks, and Syriac Christians (both Catholic and Orthodox) for centuries. Under different regimes of power, this area has been subject to different streams of displacement and replacement, resulting in changes in the social and political demography of the city and the province. Consequently, property has also changed hands
many times in Mardin. Most often it was the property of Kurds, Yezidis, Armenians and Syriacs in Mardin, which were appropriated, confiscated or occupied.

Although Mardin is a province which has experienced out-migration several times throughout its history, the most recent massive out-migration started with the deterioration of the political situation in Turkey in the 1980s. The economic motive of migration in the 1970s was increasingly replaced by a political one in the 1980s and the 1990s. The military conflict going on between the PKK Kurdistan Workers Party and the Turkish military forces since the mid-1980s gave rise to high numbers of internally displaced people [IDPs], mostly Kurds and Syriacs in Turkey from this region. Caught between the PKK, Hizbollah and the Turkish state, the Syriac population of Mardin immigrated to different parts of Europe, but also to the USA and Australia. Today, it is estimated that there are 25,000 Syriacs living in Turkey. 12,000 of this population are in Istanbul and 2000 are in Mardin. Today, there is rather a large Syriac diaspora of 3.5 million people, which has spread to the USA, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Austria, France, Belgium and India. The Syriac population in Europe, which fled the discrimination and insecurity in Turkey, hardly kept any ties to their homeland (other than ties to their churches) over the last two decades.

However, this situation has been changing since 2002. Pictures and news about houses, which are being built or planned in the villages of Mardin province by the Syriac migrants living in Europe, loom large in media and on the websites of the Syriac diaspora. Elbegendi (Kafro) village became one of those exemplary villages which are depicted in media as a ‘dream village’, or ‘little Switzerland’ (Edis 2004). Luxurious triplex villas in Elbegendi village, designed and built in the local architecture style, are part of a project which Yahko Demir initiated. Yahko Demir is a migrant from the Elbegendi village itself. He is a Swiss citizen who migrated to Switzerland twenty-five years ago and who became the president of Kafro Mutual Aid Association – a hometown association [HTA] or the village development association, which was founded in January 2002 in Switzerland. Kafro was one of the villages which witnessed a massive out-migration; today 182 Syriac families from Kafro live in different countries of Europe. Yahko Demir is one of those migrants from Mardin who not only invested in his hometown, but also returned to Kafro. He is not unique in this move. In the last four years, there has been an increasing investment flow – though most of the time into private housing – to Mardin from the Syriac emigrants from Mardin in Europe. The example of Yahko Demir and the Elbegendi (Kafro) village could easily be expanded. The Syriac media abound with news of Syriac diaspora in Europe whose members, after twenty or thirty years of living in Europe, have
either returned to Mardin or are forging homeland ties and investments to lay the ground for a transnational life which will be split between Mardin and their emigration places in Europe. Together with Yahko Demir, seventeen Syriac families from Europe returned to Kafro (Midyat Habur 2006). Midyat is another place in Mardin province to which 100 Syriac families have returned (ibid).

Over the last few years, the Syriac population from Turkey in Europe has been organizing a project called the ‘Project of Return’ in order to facilitate and mediate the ‘return to Homeland’. This project is anchored in the hometown association of Kafro in Switzerland. There are several HTAs of the Syriac community in Europe, and although Syriac migration to Europe from Mardin dates back to the 1970s, all these hometown development associations were founded after 2002.

In the 1980s, the Syriac population left Mardin in very difficult and life-threatening political conditions as they were caught between the armed forces of PKK, Hizbollah, and the Turkish military. While the political situation changed and the armed conflict ceased in the area, life has never been easy for Christian populations in Turkey and particularly in the Southeast and it is still not easy for the Christians living there. It is important to note that in most cases, the villages were practically abandoned: altogether only twenty-five families were left in seven villages of Midyat. Under these conditions, the Syriac population in Europe kept their transnational ties to other places in Europe, Australia and the USA, but they have not kept their homeland ties. Homeland ties have only been developed after 20–30 years of migration and first with the ‘Project of Return’. This project not only stimulated the Syriac immigrants from Turkey and particularly from Mardin in Europe to forge homeland ties, but has strengthened their transnational ties to each other within Europe. Furthermore, it has reinforced the migrants’ institutional incorporation in their places of settlement in Europe. The establishment of the Kafro HTA in Switzerland, intensified the ties between the Syriacs in Switzerland and those from Kafro in different cities of Germany, like Wiesbaden, Augsburg, and Stuttgart. The ‘Project of Return’ connects the emigrants from Mardin to different institutions in Europe. The representatives of different European Syriac churches, organizations for the protection of Christian rights, particularly in the Orient; the representatives of diverse Syriac and Aramaic associations and federations from different parts of Europe all come together at several events and celebrations that take place within the framework of Syriac migrants’ return project to Mardin.

The opening of the Syriac Cultural Center in Midyat in 2004 was one of such occasions taking place in Mardin. This opening brought the inhabitants of Mardin and the representatives of cultural, religious
and human rights institutions in Europe together.\textsuperscript{14} Ironically, the Kafro HTA, which mediates ties and flows from Europe to Kafro in Mardin, simultaneously provided a medium for connecting and incorporating the migrants from Kafro in Switzerland (most often through the churches) to Swiss and European institutions further. A five-year project that aimed to secure the Christian migrants’ return to Mardin (particularly to Tur Abdin) was one of the transnational outcomes of homeland-centred activities of the migrants from Mardin.\textsuperscript{15}

There is a rich literature on the entanglements between migrants’ hometown associations, sending states, international development agencies and local politics, including the transnational grassroots politics (Goldring 1998; Smith 1998; Landolt \textit{et al.} 1999; Orozco 2000a, 2000b; Sorensen 2004). These studies document how migrant HTAs acquire a new economic and political importance in the context of increased flow of remittances and of increased interest and involvement of international development and finance agencies. However, in this literature, migrant HTAs are not framed in the context of changing state-space relations of neoliberal globalization. I argued elsewhere that it is not possible to explain the uneven spread and success of HTAs without the socio-spatial analysis of the locality beyond the national scale ( Çağlar 2006b). In the case of Syriac HTAs too, as long as our analysis remains within the confines of the national scale, it will be difficult to understand why migrants from Mardin started founding HTAs in different places of Europe after so long. In both cases, the national scale is simply assumed to be the most relevant scale for the analysis. Once we consider the fact that the equality of state territory has been disturbed in the context of uneven global order and neoliberal agendas, then it becomes necessary to focus on space-specific factors of the place of origin and of settlement. The local scale cannot be assumed to be nested solely in the national scale.

The GAP, free zones and the RVRP

What kind of processes and changes that are taking place in Mardin have an impact on Syriac migrants’ transnational practices, including homeland ties? In order to historicize the transnational networks and ties the Syriac migrants from Mardin forge, I will focus on the socio-spatial factors, namely the Southeastern Anatolian Project (Güney-doğu Anadolu projesi, GAP) and its transformations within the neoliberal context. GAP is a major regional development project encompassing the area. Then I explore how the status of Free (Trade) Zone affects Mardin’s efforts to attract spatially mobile capital; finally I concentrate on the ‘Return to Villages and the Rehabilitation Project’ (Koye Donus ve Rehabilitasyon Projesi, henceforth RVRP), which the
Turkish state launched in 1998 and which played a crucial role in Syriac families’ return decisions. In the context of such regional development and rescaling efforts which affect the broader region, Mardin’s cultural heritage and the subsequent repositioning of its culturally/religiously diverse composition become important factors to carve out a competitive edge for Mardin in the region.

Mardin falls into the domain of the GAP, covering nine provinces which are also declared to be Regions of priority in development. GAP is a very comprehensive state-led infrastructural project initially formulated within a developmental ideology. Its goal is to overcome the socio-economic gap between the country’s more developed regions and the Southeast Turkey by mobilising resources like water and soil. Although GAP started as a state-led infrastructural development project, it went through several changes in the context of neoliberal restructuring of Turkish economy and politics in the 1980s and the 1990s. Now, GAP has become the medium of the market-led social developmental model in Turkey (Ozok-Gundogan 2005, p. 110).

Congruent with the liberalization process that the Turkish economy and politics have been going through since the 1980s, several areas, regions and urban zones in Turkey have been declared as Free (Trade) Zones. In order to create a more convenient business climate, special sites within state-territory are considered to be outside of its customs territory. In these sites, the otherwise valid regulations related to foreign trade and other financial and economic areas are (or partly) declared to be inapplicable. Free Zones illustrate the breaking down of the unity of state territory in the context of neoliberal globalization. This fragmentation of state territory by means of state regulations is part of the rescaling process. State spatiality loses its homogeneity and becomes an uneven terrain for state regulatory action and intervention. The state relates to places like Free Zones within its territory on the bases of different regulations and conditions. Since 1995, Mardin has been a Free Zone, meaning that any kind of investment in Mardin or business and trade transactions in Mardin are subject to more profitable conditions compared to other areas which are not Free Zones in Turkey. It is important to note that Mardin and Gaziantep are the only Free Zones in the Southeast Anatolia region.

Although both being a Free Zone and part of GAP made any investment in Mardin more attractive than investments in other places, Mardin was not able to attract the expected investment and alter its position within the urban hierarchies. Mardin, like other Syriac, Kurdish populated towns in Southeast Turkey, was a place which went through extensive depopulation through forced internal displacements and out-migrations. With the military conflict between the PKK and Turkish military losing its grip on the area and with returning of ‘peace’ to the region new initiatives for regional development
emerged. As internal displacement came to be framed as a problem of development, some incentives for resettlement of the IDPs were introduced. RVRP, which was initiated by the prime minister in 1998, was such a programme. In 1999, it was recast in terms of regional development. In order to initiate the return of those who had left their villages during the armed conflict between PKK and Turkish military forces. This project targeted twelve cities, and Mardin was one of these. RVRP was formulated to attract the former inhabitants of the villages through a series of monetary and/or in kind incentives. The goal was to revive the economic life in those basically depopulated areas. Furthermore, this project also aimed to create incentives for investment in this region (Ayata and Yukseker 2005, p. 23). It linked return, resettlement and regional development to each other. Between June 2002 and May 2004, 120,000 displaced people returned within the frame of RVRP. However RVRP was not sufficient to convince the Christian population abroad from Mardin to return, to invest there and to put claims to their property. In June 12, 2001, Prime Minister Ecevit issued a call particularly addressed to Christian population from the region to return to their hometown and villages. The call promised that their religious and property rights would be secured. Thus the goal of RVRP was not a simple repopulation of the area, but also the reconstitution of the cultural and religious diversity of the region.

Obviously, Turkey’s drive to join the European Union, the country’s rather bad record in securing minority rights and the pressures from the EU on the Turkish state to officially recognize and protect their religious minorities played an important role in issuing this call. In fact, the restoration of many abandoned convents, monasteries, and sacred places of Christian minorities in Southeast Turkey, as well as the provision of freedom to religious education and practice in these places, right away became heated topics in public and political debates after the call. The Abbot of the monastery Mor Gabriel, the governor of Mardin Province and the local Bishop were all involved in putting this call into practice. In fact, the Bishop immediately contacted the expatriate villagers of Kafro. He met them in Germany in the autumn of 2001. The foundation of the Kafro HTA in January 2002 followed this meeting.

GAP, Free Zone designations and the RVRP paved the way for differential infrastructural support and state subsidies to Mardin and allowed attractive financial and tax conditions to investments into the area. One of the aims was to establish the conditions for the flow of EU funds, especially for the preservation and the restoration of religious/cultural heritage (mainly the monasteries and the cloisters) in the area, which will in turn establish the ground for the heritage tourism industry. There were concentrated efforts to include certain religious sites in UNESCO’s list of World Heritage.
The EU looms large in the future prospects of Mardin and the returnees. EU funding and the expectations from the EU to secure rights for Christians are very present in the discourse of returning Syriac migrants to Mardin. According to the Archbishop of Mor Gebrail, the continuity of many recent and positive developments regarding the Syriac population in Mardin is simply dependent on EU surveillance. The Archbishop of the Deyrulzfaran Monastery sees the protection of Christian minority rights critical for Turkey-EU relations. ‘..[W]e would like to see Turkey in the EU to live better and practice (sic) our culture better. We, as Christian minorities, have a great task in establishing ties between Turkey and the European Union’ (Culpán 2004). It is symbolically significant that the flag waving on the Syriac Cultural Center in Midyat is an EU flag, and the cafeteria and kindergarten at this centre were financed by EU money.

Since the question of the Christian population’s return to Mardin is closely entangled with Turkey’s human rights record in terms of providing and securing the Christians’ property and religious/historical rights and with the question of regional development (OVG 2005), issues of cultural and religious diversity shape and dominate the narratives of return. It is noteworthy that the minister responsible for human rights in the Turkish parliament was part of the group which visited Mardin and its villages to inspect the Syriac migrants’ return in June 2006 (Midyat Habur 2006). Officials from the European Parliament are part of many festivities in Mardin related with the Syriac population. Within this context, the public enactment of cultural/religious diversity becomes crucial for the repositioning of Mardin within the regional development landscape. Both the cultural/religious heritage (which are important to secure the financial and institutional support of the EU) and the related tourist industry become economic assets for the regional/urban development. The Archbishop of Tur Abdin, Samual Aktas expresses these hopes very clearly. According to him ‘the church, the government and the Muslim population all hope that the returnees will develop the region’ (Trauthig 2003). For this reason there are several activities and festive occasions in which the religious and cultural diversity in Mardin are repeatedly performed as the cultural capital of Mardin. These assets are expected to increase the city’s competitiveness in relation to the other cities in the region.²⁴

The Mardin example draws attention to the fact that not only the states, but also the supranational actors – in this case the EU and UNESCO – play a crucial role in laying down and maintaining the uneven field of play on which cities reposition themselves, vis-à-vis other cities. The EU and UNESCO are important supranational actors which are shaping the local trajectories of politics in Mardin. The interests of Turkish state and EU are strongly entangled in their support of Christian
population’s return to the region. Turkey would like to improve its human rights record, thus removing an important obstacle for its accession to the EU. On the other hand, the EU’s insistence on securing and facilitating Syriac migrants’ return is also partly related to the EU’s desire to see the return of some of the refugees from Mardin in Europe. In fact, Germany already started in the summer of 2006 to return to Mardin the migrants from Mardin who took refuge in Germany in the 1980s on the premise that they are no longer in danger as a religious minority group in Turkey (Radikal 2006).

The cultural/religious diversity and heritage became an important factor in public, social and economic life once they became part of the efforts of regional/urban rescaling. In fact, it is this context of Mardin’s repositioning struggle which shapes the transnational ties and practices as well as the homeland ties of the Syriac migrants living in Europe. Mardin is an example of the importance of different multinational and supranational institutions in the politics of scale. In restructuring the scalar location of Mardin, two areas came to the forefront: religious diversity and heritage. However, these areas gain prominence due to their importance in Turkey’s accession to the EU and due to the importance of diversity in the broader agendas of the EU and UNESCO. Religious/cultural diversity and the associated heritage industry programmes come to the forefront as the motor of local economic development which will reposition Mardin vis-à-vis capital flows. The Syriac migrants are the pillars of this process in Mardin.

The Ruhr area, ‘transformation through culture’ and migrants

‘Within the frame of its candidicy for the European Cultural capital, the Ruhr area will celebrate the first ‘Melez’ festival in Bochumer Jahrhunderthalhle between October 28–30 (2005). Melez is a Turkish word and means ‘cross-over.’ We are all cross-overs of different cultures and origins at Ruhr! In fact, Ruhr exists because the people had the strength to make this foreign place their own, to make their ‘home’.

‘Europa lebt im Ruhrgebiet 2004’

In this section I focus on the interface between scalar restructuration and migrant incorporation and transnational ties at a specific place of migrant settlement. I concentrate on the processes taking place in the Ruhr district, which has been a major migrant settlement area since the turn of the century. On 11 April 2006, the European Commission’s expert jury recommended Essen to be the European Capital of Culture in 2010, together with Pécs in Hungary and Istanbul in Turkey. Essen
represents the whole Ruhr Area which is composed of fifty-three local governments and eleven major cities. 630,000 of the region’s 5.3 million inhabitants are of foreign background from 140 nationalities. It has been estimated that in 2010, more than 50 per cent of the children in the Ruhr area will have a migration background. The culturally diverse composition of the population, which Essen highlighted in its campaign for the European Capital of Culture title, is in fact part of its industrial heritage.

The Ruhr area, which was once Europe’s biggest industrial region with coal and steel industry, has gone through a striking metamorphosis. After 150 years of industrial urbanization, this region faces the challenges of post-industrialization. Today, in this former industrial complex, only 20 per cent of jobs are in manufacturing industry and 80 per cent of the jobs are in the service sector. The Ruhr area is trying to reinvent its future in medical technology and in cultural industries. After the massive deindustrialization, Essen and the Ruhr area are trying to reposition themselves within the urban hierarchies and circuits of capital flow by means of a structural change linking urban development and culture. It is clearly a process of repositioning of the area, and Essen’s case is a rather successful case of transformation and regeneration of a post-industrial society. Ten of Germany’s 100 largest companies have their headquarters in Essen (Rossmann 2006).

The Zollverein, the set of mining and coking plants with Bauhaus-style architecture, is symbolic of the structural changes that have taken place in a mining region. The industrial complex which has been on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list since 2001, now functions as a cultural, artistic and leisure centre. The Zollverein simultaneously represents both the heavy industry past and the post-industrial future (Rossmann 2006). The metamorphosis surrounding Zollverein is also symbolic of the new role that culture assumes in such post-industrial societies. Jobs, future economic growth and the cultural economy are all concentrated in this industrial complex, which used to be the key workplace and the driver of urbanization in the region. It now stands for the importance of the cultural economy in creating jobs and initiating urban economic growth and development (Buurmsnik 2004; Scott 2004).

What is at stake in becoming European Capital of Culture is not an issue about these cities’ cultural image per se but more a question of urban economics, local development and urban competitiveness. For this reason, this title is not simply about a possibility to revalue the city’s cultural status. This title brings the much desired tourist revenue. Furthermore, the honour of this title comes with millions of euros in support that will help to fuel long-term developments by refurbishing local infrastructure, restoring museums and other cultural centres, and creating cultural programmes. The European Capital of Culture title is
about increasing competitive advantage of the city (or entire urban zone in this case) to attract global mobile capital, state subsidaries and most importantly EU funds. This title is evidence of the structural urban transformation, but in turn has an impact on the rescaling process itself.

It is important to have a closer look at the Jury’s statement about its decision and the main points of Essen’s campaign for the title. On examining both, it becomes clear that what brought Essen this title was the way the concept of culture was formulated and used and the way it was related to the migrants and to the transformations in the urban landscape. The success of Essen in the European Capital of Culture competition lies in its ability to cast its history, its current situation, its young heritage and its culturally diverse minorities in dialogue with an emergent perspective on culture in European cultural policies. While other competing cities were emphasizing their contemporary museums and exhibitions (Kassel), their literary heritage (Lübeck), or their architectural heritage (Brandenburg), Essen highlighted its ‘bottom up’ culture, put its young and ever changing heritage to the forefront, and most importantly, located the newcomers and the cultural diversity very consciously as central to its motto ‘transformation through culture – culture through transformation’. In this context, migrants and the cultural change become the social resource for the future.

Essen’s application envisages the role of culture in structural change both as motor and resource. Its central idea is regeneration through culture. Culture, in this sense, is not only the motor of development, but is also a renewable social resource. This approach to culture is very much in line with the emergent ‘cultural diversity’ model of European Council and succeeds in appealing to the EU institutions, which promote this model. In this context, the migrants are included in processes of creating new European identities, cultural conglomerates beyond the static and compartmentalized schemes of culture (be they folkloric and/or multicultural). Migrants, on the basis of their cross-border ties and networks, are expected to contribute to the regeneration and reinvention of the region. Their transnationalism is seen as an asset for the regeneration of the cultural sector in the region. They are envisaged as part of the social resource of the transformation.

Migrants contribute to the dynamism, and the cultural diversity of the city through their cross-border ties, which keeps culture in constant making. For this reason, their mode of incorporation into the cultural landscape of the city fosters at the same time their transnational (not necessarily homeland) networks. This dynamism is conceptualized through the concept of Melez, through which ‘The artists, performers and the 2nd and 3rd generation migrant writers are building a Ruhr-specific Transitculture with new artistic languages that are forged at
the juncture of daily life and intercultural networks. These people become the new actors of current art scene in the region beyond the confines of folkloric and multicultural clichés. In reality this is: Melez’ (‘Europa lebt im Ruhrgebiet 2004’, p. 29). This model of cultural diversity, which is defined not as an agenda of preserving pre-given cultural differences, but as a frame for an open-ended change which creates new languages and new forms, fosters transnationalism, which is less centred on homeland ties than transversal ties. In fact the programme of Melez festival clearly illustrates that all the music, theatre and dance performances, the literary events chosen within the frame of this festival are based on cosmopolitan rather than on strict homeland ties of the migrants. Interestingly, all the groups and artists performing in this programme are somehow located in Istanbul and / or divide their lives between Istanbul, Hamburg, Paris, Berlin, Montreal, etc.27

It is important to note that Melez, the concept of cross-over, is used for everyone in the Ruhr and the cultural cross-border networks are seen as a resource to develop an urban life transcending borders. Essen’s application locates the migrants into the urban landscape and into the midst of the transformation processes through culture – which in turn is crucial for the repositioning of this area within and beyond state borders. The Melez festival concentrates exactly on the interface between migration, migrant cultures with their cross-border ties and the cultural transformations. Such a cultural (which is at the same time an economic) development programme provides different terms, grammars and opportunity structures for migrants’ participation in urban politics.

If the institutional frames of the locality shape migrants’ patterns of organization and strategies of participation, then the ‘transformation through culture – culture through transformation’ motto of Essen’s candidacy opens new venues of including migrants in the urban landscape beyond the secluded publics of multiculturalism. It mediates a different mode of incorporation and transnationalism through distinct opportunities and venues, which are not nested in the national scale, but in transversal urban networks. However, this move by no means overlooks the ongoing presence of other powerful discourses anchored in national modernism which situate the migrants into the society in a different way. It is important to remember that at the time of Essen’s application and the awarding of the title of European Capital of Culture, there were very different, mainly negative public discourses about migrant, especially about the second and third generations: these included debates around the role of migrant children in Germany’s rather low ranking in the Programme for International Student Assessment [Pisa] study; the question of violence at schools largely comprised of migrant children; migrant children’s rather poor German language competency; calls to ban the use of native tongues other than
German in Kindergarten; and the discussion of integration models which consider transnational ties as a major hindrance to migrant incorporation. Despite the wide circulation of these discourses in Germany, migrants are situated discursively, and to an extent institutionally, on a very different basis within Essen's European Capital of Culture programme. The important role that the question of sustainable cultural diversity plays within the agendas of European Union institutions results in the favourable positioning of migrants in the rescaling efforts of cities and regions. Migrants become one of the venues that attract the involvement of supranational actors into the repositioning struggle of cities. However, it is important to frame the emergent model of sustainable cultural diversity in the agenda of European institutions within a broader context of US – EU relations in times of globalization. The tensions between the US and the EU regarding the regulation and the protection of the cultural sector in Europe give impetus to the rise of such models in the EU institutions.

In Essen's European Capital of Culture programme, all the migrants, not only the migrants from Turkey, come to the fore. What is important in this agenda is the experience of migrancy, rather than migrancy from a particular country or ethnic group. What has been presented as the Melez programme about Turkish migrant cultures in the autumn of 2005 will continue for the different migrant groups, on the same principles of transversality until 2010. However, no matter how strongly the category of migrancy instead of ethnic categories will be promoted in this programme, it will by no means homogenize the migrants in terms of their location in the urbanscape of Essen. The imaginaries about the Polish, Turkish, and Italian migrants all carry different histories and are embedded in different connotation fields in the Ruhr area that their differential positions in the collective memory could not be flattened out simply by the programmes centred around Essen's title of European Capital of Culture in 2010.

Concluding remarks

On the basis of return migration of Christians to Mardin and the location of migrants in Essen’s nomination for the European Cultural Capital, I have emphasized the importance of spatial aspects of socio-economic power in light of the dynamics of migrant homeland ties and migrant settlement. The Mardin case illustrates that without taking into consideration the changing geographical organization of Turkish state intervention in the context of liberalization, it is not possible to analyse the emergent hometown ties and the return of the Christian population and their investments to Mardin. Ironically, the strengthening of hometown ties incorporated the Christians from
Mardin further into the institutions in their places of settlement and in Europe.

To attract domestic and foreign capital as well as to increase local competitiveness, regional and/or local governments enter into different entrepreneurial experiments. Not only are states becoming partly privatized, but migrant formations developed outside state power are also becoming more and more part of the new geographies of state intervention and rescaling processes. Furthermore, the Mardin case illustrates the importance of the EU as a supranational actor in the creation and the maintenance of territorial inequalities. The Mardin case illustrates the importance of linking migration scholarship to the analysis of political economy in both contemporary states and cities. Once we detach it from the political economy, we fail to understand why Syriac HTAs were founded at a particular time, why emigrant Syriacs were returning to the area, and why they were investing in the places from which they fled 20–30 years ago. We also fail to explain the entanglements between regional development, cultural diversity and the return to Mardin in the narratives of Turkish authorities and the returnees.

Similarly, considering Essen’s nomination for the European Cultural Capital 2010 by way of the Ruhr’s massive deindustrialization and its developmental hopes for cultural industries enables us to locate and frame the importance of ‘cultural diversity’ for such economies. Essen’s genuine attempt to reframe the migrants as part of their urban public sphere might be a warning not to immediately equate any kind of emphasis on culture regarding migrants merely with the ‘culture talk’ of multiculturalism (Caglar 1997). The dynamics and the narratives in Essen’s candidacy and the location of the migrants in these draw our attention to the particularly European dynamics involved in the emergence of imaginaries and topographies of diversity in Europe beyond the canonized registers of multiculturalism. Although, this aspect of the EU institutions’ impact on migrant incorporation and transnationalism remain mostly veiled in migration scholarship, Essen’s success underscores their importance for transforming culture into an asset for socio-economic development. In (transnational) migration scholarship, neither the place of origin nor the place of settlement have been adequately theorized beyond the national context. Despite recent interests in the sending and receiving states and on policies concerning migrant transnational networks, changing state-space relations embedded in neoliberal globalization are rarely taken into consideration in the analysis of these formations, especially with regard to migrants and cities. Much migration research remains confined within the concept of the national state space as if all spaces within the national territory were even and homogenous in terms of the opportunity structures they provide to the migrants for
incorporating and/or forging transnational ties. Instead, I argue that by recognizing processes of scalar positioning which affect places of origin and settlement, social scientists will arrive at better understandings of modes of migrant incorporation as well as of the dynamics of migrants’ transnational ties. Unless we link the shifting opportunity structures facing migrants to the scalar positioning of their locality, we fail to appreciate adaptive migrant practices, collective patterns of organization, strategies of participation and the ways these are linked with significant transformations underway within the context of uneven globalization.

Notes

1. From this perspective, both Essen and Mardin are far from being exceptional in flagging out their cultural diversity as an economic resource for growth and prosperity. On the contrary, the literature on the cultural economy of cities and cultural industries have repeatedly illustrated the entanglements between place, culture and economy (Scott 2000; Philo and Kearns 1993). There is a rich literature on the valorization and the commercial use of cultural diversity within city’s symbolic economy, (Zukin 1991; 1995) on the increasing commodification of diversity in place marketing (Philo and Kearns 1993). Concepts like creative cities (Hall 2000) and the entrepreneurial city (Jessop 1997; Harvey1989) have been deployed to capture the emergent significance of knowledge, tourist and cultural industries in conjunction with urban economic growth in times of contemporary globalization.

2. For an alternative conceptualization of the opportunity structures of migrant incorporation beyond the national scales, see Glick Schiller, Caglar and Gulbrandsen 2006; Caglar and Glick Schiller 2006 and Glick Schiller and Caglar (forthcoming).

3. For the discussion of migrant pathways for incorporation, see Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004 ; Glick Schiller, Caglar and Goldbrandsen 2006.

4. In this argument, I elaborate the framework we have started developing in our article Glick Schiller, Caglar and Goldbrandsen (2006) about the importance of city scale for the analysis of migrant incorporation (see also Caglar and Glick Schiller 2006). In addition to the arguments developed in these works, this article specifically draws attention to the interface between cultural diversity narratives, rescaling processes and migrant incorporation and transnationalism at migrants’ places of departure (see also Caglar 2006b). The critique against the hegemony of national scales in migrant incorporation builds on the pathbreaking work of A. Wimmers and N. Glick Schiller (2002) on ‘methodological nationalism’ in migration scholarship.

5. The Global city literature conceptualizes the city beyond the national scale, but limits it to a set of cities, which are defined as global. The impact of the decoupling process between the city and nation on other cities are not taken into consideration. For the incompleteness of global city approach in conceptualizing urban positionality, see Brenner 2001; 2006; Samers 2002 and Caglar and Glick Schiller 2006.

6. For a full discussion of the undertheorization of locality in migration scholarship, see Caglar and Glick Schiller 2006.

7. There is a rich literature on the interface between migrants and the urban dynamics, which focus on the place of migrants’ in public sphere (Bodaar and Rath 2005), in commodification of multiculturalism (Welz 1996), in the festivalization of cities (Zukin 1995) in public enactments of diversity (Knecht and Soysal 2005) in tourist industries (Judd and Feinstein 1999; Rath 2006), in (ethnic) entrepreneurship (Portes 1995; Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Kloosterman and Rath 2003), in multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism (Vertovec and Cohen 2002), and in grassroots transnationalism (Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Although
migrants find their place in this “urban turn” in scholarship on socio-economic development, the positionality of cities of migrant settlement in global economy is not framed in terms of the scalar dynamics of globalization and statehood.

8. Since the turn of the century, this region went through a drastic demographic change in terms of its Christian population. In this period, the Christian population fell from 20 to 0.03 per cent.

9. In 1998, according to a parliamentary investigation report, the number of IDPs reached to 378,335 people (Ayata and Yukseker 2005, p. 15).

10. The number of Syriacs who left Turkey for abroad after the 1980s is estimated to be 40,000.

11. According to the information supplied by the Archbishop in Istanbul.

12. See the prominent Syriac websites (www.suryaniler.com; www.midyat.net; www.ihwo.de; www.turabdin.org; www.arkah.de and particularly suryani online's forum). Here it has to be noted that migrant plans and desires of return and their investments in private housing in their hometowns toward this end abound the migration literature. It is also well illustrated in the literature that only very few of those migrants return for good and in most cases the majority of these migrants construe a transnational life connecting the place of settlement and the hometown.

13. There have been several hostile incidents against the returnees in Mardin. However, it is difficult to disentangle these hostilities against the Christians from the hostilities to the returnees from those who had occupied their land in the Syriac emigrants’ absence.

14. For the details of this opening, see http://istanbul.inmedia.org/news/2004/10/11470.php

15. It was initiated and led by a Catholic Priest (Aesch-Birmindorf Uitikon), but the Evangelical Church in Bayern and Baden Wuettenburg, the former German ambassador to Turkey and the Austrian organization, “Christian Orient – Friends of Tur Abdin” were among the patrons of this project.

16. These provinces are Adiyaman, Batman, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Sanliurfa and Sirnak.

17. GAP includes several dam projects and investments in energy, health care and educational infrastructure (Turkish economy 58–63).

18. This change was also reflected in the organizational structure of GAP. While it was initially carried out by the State Planning Organization, in 1989, its coordination was given to a new institution, the Southeastern Anatolia Project Regional Development Administration. Furthermore, the Master Plan of GAP was replaced with the Southeastern Anatolia Project Regional Development Plan in 2002 (Ozok-Gundogan 2005: 98)

19. According to a parliamentary investigation report in 1998, 905 villages were evacuated in the 1980s and 1990s (Ayata and Yukseker 2005:15)

20. Villagers returning to the villages were entitled to in-kind aid, like construction material and/or animals (Ayata and Yukseker 2005: 23)

21. It is important to note that this project was coordinated by the ministry of internal affairs and was administered by GAP.

22. The state undertook the provision of water and electricity to the places where returnees are settling.

23. It has to be noted that tourism is one of the privileged areas of investment within the frame of GAP.

24. These include conferences and workshops on religious dialogue and tolerance (Sevindi 2004) and the ifthars – fast breaking – given by the Syriac religious leaders to the Muslim community there (www.haberler.com/haber_500785.asp).

25. See Caglar 2006a for a discussion of a ‘cultural diversity’ turn in European cultural policies.

26. Here I refer to a model of cultural diversity, which found its full formulation in the Declaration of Cultural Diversity in 2000. This is a model aimed to attain sustainable cultural diversity in Europe in the context of globalization. The sources of diversity in this model are located to be in the continuous crossbreeding of cultural formations. For a
discussion of the ambivalent location of migrants within European cultural policies see Çağlar 2006a.

27. See the programme of Melez Festival about the groups and performances like Mor ve Otesi, Semaver Kumpanya, Heybeden Gereckistu Ask, Kudsi Erguner, Fuat Saka and band, Fazil Say, Orientation, Mercan dede and Secret Tribes, Muanmer and der Ruhr.

28. For example, the Polish migrant cultural formation(s) in the Ruhr area is the topic of 2006 activities.

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