



From Collective Use Value to Spatial Commodification: The Transformation of Waqf in Turkish Urban Development

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Abstract

The tension between urban capitalism and Islamic philanthropy in Turkey has marginalized *waqf* as a historical urban development institution. This study aims to analyze *waqf*'s transformation and recontextualization within modern Turkish urban development, focusing on institutional dynamics, social distribution, and cultural-religious value shifts. Employing a qualitative thematic literature review of 46 peer-reviewed sources, this research integrates Lefebvre's production of space theory, urban political economy, and institutional theory. The findings reveal four transformative patterns: institutional shift from decentralized community governance to state control; *waqf*'s dual role in reducing and potentially reinforcing inequality; value transformation from religious devotion toward strategic philanthropy; and spatial commodification prioritizing exchange over use value. *Waqf* has fundamentally shifted from collective utility toward commodification, with institutional, market, and state forces reducing its social function while inequality in asset distribution persists. This study argues that revitalizing *waqf* requires integrating religious values, institutional innovation, and inclusive urban policies. The research contributes theoretical synthesis linking *waqf* studies with critical urban theory and identifies pathways for legal and planning reforms.

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Introduction

The currents of modernization and urban expansion in cities around the world, including in Turkey, often proceed in ways that are not aligned with development goals emphasizing social welfare and equity (Babayiğit Sunay, 2023; Sahin, 2023; Yoltar & Yörük, 2021). Urban transformation driven by the imperatives of global capitalism, industrialization, and technocratic planning approaches has frequently displaced and weakened community-based social practices that historically constituted the foundation of societal life (Demirtaş-Milz et al., 2024; Kuyucu, 2022; Yavuz, 2021). In the Turkish context, one of the most significant institutions experiencing such pressures is *waqf*, which since the



Ottoman era has functioned as a central pillar of urban development (Aam & Mi'raj, 2022; Erdoğan, 2024; Sherrindra Avedta, 2023). *Waqf* has served not only as a religious instrument but also as a mechanism for welfare distribution through the provision of public infrastructure such as mosques, hospitals, schools, and marketplaces (International Islamic University et al., 2023; Khan, 2015a; Shehu U.R. Aliyu, 2022). However, the introduction of modern development paradigms oriented toward economic efficiency is often viewed as incompatible with the communal values embedded in *waqf* (Jatmiko et al., 2025; Mohammad Abdullah, 2020; Qurrata et al., 2025). Moreover, contemporary urban development models adopted in many developing countries, including Turkey, are frequently the result of policy transfer from Western contexts that do not always align with local socio-cultural characteristics (Akbaba, 2024; Coskun, 2023; Sönmez Özdemir & Erkut, 2024). In many instances, modern urban development reflects values of individualism and spatial commercialization that conflict with the collective philanthropic ethos of *waqf* (Hisyam & Marwini, 2024; Kahraman, 2021). At the same time, the transition toward modern urban systems has not been accompanied by adequate strengthening of *waqf* institutions, whether in terms of regulation, governance, or integration into spatial planning policies (Kahraman, 2021; Khan, 2015b; Rahmadany et al., 2024). This condition is further exacerbated by the limited readiness of both society and local institutions to adapt the role of *waqf* within an increasingly complex contemporary urban context (Iskandar & Sofuoğlu, 2023; Laallam et al., 2020). Thus, a fundamental tension can be identified between modern urban development systems and the socio-historical character of *waqf* as a community-based development instrument.

To date, studies on *waqf* and urban development in Turkey remain fragmented and have not fully captured the complex relationship between the institutional legacy of *waqf* and the dynamics of modern urbanization. Much of the existing literature tends to situate *waqf* within historical or normative frameworks, focusing on past achievements without critically linking them to contemporary challenges (Dallh, 2023a; Omercic, 2023; Sukmana, 2020). In this regard, many studies examine the role of *waqf* in providing social infrastructure during the Ottoman period, such as education, healthcare, and public services, yet pay limited attention to how modern socio-economic transformations affect the sustainability of these functions (Ayub et al., 2024; Khan, 2015b; Shehu U.R. Aliyu, 2022). On the other hand, some research emphasizes institutional and regulatory aspects of *waqf* in modern states, particularly legal reforms and governance structures, but often neglects the socio-cultural dimensions shaping *waqf* practices at the community level (Chembea, 2021; Dallh, 2023b;

Widiyanti et al., 2023). Additionally, a growing body of literature focuses on optimizing *waqf* through economic and managerial approaches, such as productive *waqf* and integration with modern financial systems, yet tends to treat *waqf* instrumentally without adequately considering its underlying social values (Al-Daihani & Che Abdullah, 2023; Cahyani et al., 2021; Kunhibava et al., 2023). These three strands reveal a significant analytical gap regarding how social, cultural, and urban structural characteristics influence the transformation and adaptation of *waqf* within modern urban development. In other words, the issue of compatibility between *waqf* and contemporary urbanization has not been comprehensively addressed in the existing literature.

This study addresses this gap by providing a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between *waqf*, society, and modern urban development in Turkey. It argues that the transformation of *waqf* within urban contexts is influenced not only by economic and regulatory factors but also by the social, cultural, and religious characteristics of society. Public perceptions of *waqf* as both a religious institution and a mechanism for social welfare play a critical role in determining its capacity to adapt to contemporary urban challenges. Accordingly, this study raises three interrelated research questions. First, to what extent are existing institutional and regulatory frameworks prepared to integrate *waqf* into modern urban development, including spatial planning and urban policy systems? Second, how do social structures and urban inequalities influence the distribution and utilization of *waqf* assets, and how effectively can *waqf* function as a redistributive instrument for promoting social equity? Third, how have cultural and religious values shaped the transformation of *waqf* from the Ottoman period to the present, particularly in response to the increasing commercialization and privatization of urban space? By addressing these questions, this study seeks to advance both theoretical and practical understanding of *waqf* as an urban development instrument that promotes not only economic development but also social justice and long-term sustainability.

This study is based on the premise that the misalignment between the *waqf* system and modern urban development stems from the fundamental differences between the social nature of *waqf* and the dominant logic of contemporary urbanization. *Waqf* is inherently grounded in the principles of social solidarity, collective responsibility, and long-term sustainability, making it an important instrument for promoting social cohesion and public welfare (Abdullah, 2020; Jadalhaq & Russi, 2020). By contrast, modern urban development is largely shaped by the imperatives of efficiency, capital accumulation, and global competitiveness, which often weaken these communal values (Vergara-Perucich & Arias-Loyola, 2023; Vergara-Perucich & Boano,

2024). Consequently, integrating *waqf* into contemporary urban development requires more than technocratic or market-oriented solutions. It demands a holistic approach that recognizes the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which *waqf* operates. This perspective is particularly relevant in Turkey, where the Ottoman *waqf* tradition continues to influence contemporary social institutions. Accordingly, revitalizing *waqf* requires institutional strengthening, regulatory reform, and the reinterpretation of *waqf* values to address present-day urban challenges. Ultimately, this study argues that *waqf* has considerable potential to become an alternative model for inclusive and sustainable urban development when its traditional values are effectively integrated with the evolving demands of modern society.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a thematic literature review to examine the transformation and recontextualization of *waqf* in modern urban development in Turkey. A thematic literature review is appropriate for synthesizing interdisciplinary knowledge, identifying research gaps, and developing conceptual frameworks (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). The study is informed by a social constructivist perspective, which views the meaning and function of *waqf* as socially and historically constructed through cultural, institutional, and political processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The literature search was conducted between October 2025 and March 2026 using Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Index Islamicus. The search employed combinations of keywords such as “*waqf*”, “*awqaf*”, “Islamic endowment”, “urban development”, “spatial justice”, “Turkey”, and “Ottoman.” Only peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and official reports published between 2000 and 2026 were included, while seminal studies were retained to provide historical and theoretical context.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2022) thematic analysis, involving familiarization with the literature, coding, theme development, theme refinement, and interpretation. The coding process combined deductive categories derived from the theoretical framework with inductive themes emerging from the literature. Four major themes were identified: (1) Institutional and Regulatory Transformation; (2) Social Distribution and Urban Inequality; (3) Cultural–Religious Value Transformation; and (4) Spatial Production and Political Economy. The analysis was guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space, Harvey’s urban political economy, and institutional theory to examine the relationships among *waqf*, urban space, governance, and socio-economic

transformation (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991; North, 1990; Scott, 2014). To enhance analytical rigor, the study applied source and theoretical triangulation by comparing findings across multiple scholarly sources and theoretical perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the study relies on secondary data and focuses on the Turkish context, the methodological approach provides a robust basis for understanding the evolving role of *waqf* in contemporary urban development.

Table 1
Analytical Themes of the Reviewed Literature

Analytical Theme	Main Focus	Contribution to This Study
Institutional and Regulatory Transformation	Evolution of <i>waqf</i> governance, legal reforms, and state regulation	Explains institutional changes affecting contemporary <i>waqf</i> governance.
Social Distribution and Urban Inequality	Redistribution of <i>waqf</i> assets and access to public welfare	Examines the role of <i>waqf</i> in addressing urban inequality.
Cultural-Religious Value Transformation	Changing social and religious meanings of <i>waqf</i>	Explores the shift from charitable tradition to strategic philanthropy.
Spatial Production and Political Economy	Commodification of <i>waqf</i> assets and urban spatial transformation	Analyzes the interaction between <i>waqf</i> , capitalism, and urban development.

Source: Developed by the authors based on the reviewed literature.

Institutional and Regulatory Infrastructure Readiness of Waqf in Modern Urban Development in Turkey

The readiness of *waqf*'s institutional and regulatory infrastructure in modern urban development in Turkey cannot be fully understood without tracing its historical evolution from the Ottoman era to its transformation within the framework of the modern state. Historically, *waqf* constituted a fundamental instrument in shaping the social, economic, and spatial structure of Muslim societies. In the Ottoman context, *waqf* functioned not merely as a philanthropic mechanism but as an institutional system that sustained the provision of public services and urban development. Studies indicate that *waqf* assets accounted for a significant proportion of the Ottoman economy, encompassing a large share of urban property, thereby positioning *waqf* as the backbone of urban spatial organization and social infrastructure (Dallh, 2023; Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). Thus, from its inception, *waqf* possessed strong institutional capacity to support urban development, long before the emergence of the modern welfare state.

From an institutional perspective, the Ottoman *waqf* system exhibited a high degree of complexity and maturity. Management was carried out through the *mutawalli* (*nazhir*), who exercised relative autonomy in administering assets

in accordance with the founder's stipulations. The existence of *cash waqf* further expanded its economic function as a flexible and productive financial instrument, utilized in various schemes such as *qard hasan* and *mudarabah* to mobilize funds for economic activities and social development (Iskandar, 2022). Moreover, the diversity of *waqf* forms, reaching more than one hundred types, demonstrates the institution's adaptability in responding to societal needs and urban dynamics (Aam & Mi'raj, 2022). Institutionally, *waqf* during the Ottoman period functioned as a system capable of integrating social, economic, and spatial dimensions in urban development. However, the institutional readiness of *waqf* underwent a fundamental transformation in the nineteenth century through the *Tanzimat* reforms, which marked the centralization of *waqf* administration. The establishment of the *Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti* in 1826 constituted a critical turning point, shifting governance from a decentralized system to a state-centered bureaucracy (Arikan, 2023; Dallh, 2023). While this reform aimed to enhance efficiency, accountability, and state control over *waqf* assets, it also altered the core character of *waqf* from a community-based institution into a component of the state administrative apparatus. From an institutional theory perspective, this transformation reflects a process of formalization and rationalization within modern governance systems. Nevertheless, centralization also reduced the flexibility and autonomy that had previously been key strengths of the *waqf* system.

The transformation continued during the Republican era, when secularization policies fundamentally reshaped the position of *waqf* within the socio-political system. In 1924, religious institutions, including *waqf*, were incorporated into the secular state structure, with their administration placed under official state authority (Dallh, 2023). Subsequently, *waqf* underwent nationalization, followed by partial restructuring and reintegration into the social sector through foundations and non-governmental organizations (Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). This evolution indicates that institutional readiness in modern Turkey is characterized by strong state dominance in governance, markedly different from the classical community-based model. Nonetheless, this approach offers advantages in terms of policy coordination, integration with national development planning, and improved transparency and accountability. From a regulatory perspective, the development of *waqf* law in Turkey reflects a complex interplay between tradition and modernity. Legal reforms initiated during the *Tanzimat* period, including land regulations and registration systems, significantly altered the structure of ownership and management of *waqf* assets (Arikan, 2023). This process was also linked to the commodification of land, whereby *waqf* assets became increasingly integrated into market economic

systems. In the modern period, legal frameworks have been strengthened to provide a basis for professional and productive *waqf* management. However, despite these reforms, certain legal rigidities remain a major challenge, particularly the principle of perpetuity, which limits flexibility in asset utilization (Dallh, 2023).

One of the primary challenges in integrating *waqf* into modern urban development lies in the tension between its normative characteristic as an inalienable asset and the need for flexibility in spatial planning. In the context of contemporary urbanization, adaptive land use requirements often conflict with legal restrictions mandating that *waqf* assets adhere strictly to their original purposes. This constraint can hinder the optimal utilization of *waqf* land in urban development projects. Additionally, overlapping legal regimes, ranging from Ottoman legal legacies to modern national law, further complicate effective *waqf* governance (Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). On the other hand, innovations in *waqf* management present new opportunities for integration into modern urban development. *Cash waqf* holds considerable potential to support urban financing, having proven effective in promoting economic activities and social welfare during the Ottoman period (Iskandar, 2022). In contemporary contexts, the concept of *productive waqf* can be leveraged to finance strategic projects such as affordable housing, public infrastructure, and social services. This demonstrates that, with appropriate regulatory support, *waqf* can function as a sustainable and inclusive alternative financial instrument.

Beyond regulatory and financial aspects, successful integration of *waqf* also depends on institutional capacity for professional asset management. Historical experience from the Ottoman era indicates that the effectiveness of *waqf* was closely tied to governance quality and managerial integrity. In modern contexts, this necessitates institutional reforms emphasizing transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Studies suggest that effective *waqf* management requires a combination of value-based traditional approaches and adaptive modern management practices responsive to changing socio-economic conditions (Aam & Mi'raj, 2022). In spatial terms, integrating *waqf* into modern urban development also requires sensitivity to historical heritage. Many Turkish cities still retain spatial structures shaped by *waqf* institutions from the Ottoman era. Infrastructure such as mosques, markets, schools, and social facilities funded by *waqf* remains integral to the morphology of contemporary cities (Erdogan, 2024). Therefore, modern urban planning must incorporate this legacy within broader development frameworks rather than disregard it. Such an approach is essential not only for cultural preservation but also for ensuring continuity in urban development. Failure to integrate *waqf* heritage into modern development

can lead to disruptions in urban continuity, resulting in the erosion of urban identity and weakening of social dynamics (Samourkasidou & Kalergis, 2022).

The readiness of *waqf*'s institutional and regulatory infrastructure in modern urban development in Turkey reflects a complex dynamic shaped by the interaction between historical legacy and the demands of modernity. On the one hand, the Ottoman *waqf* system provides a strong foundation for the development of modern *waqf* institutions. On the other hand, institutional and regulatory transformations since the nineteenth century have introduced challenges that require innovative and adaptive policy responses. By integrating the foundational principles of *waqf* with modern institutional and regulatory frameworks, Turkey holds significant potential to develop an inclusive, sustainable, and value-based model of urban development.

Figure 1

Institutional and Regulatory Transformation of Waqf in Turkey

Historical Phase	Period	Governance Model	Key Changes	Strengths	Challenges	References
 Classical Ottoman Waqf	14th–19th Century	Decentralized / Community-based 	- Managed by <i>mutawalli</i> (<i>nazhir</i>) with relative autonomy >100 types of <i>waqf</i> - Cash <i>waqf</i> for <i>qard hasan</i> & <i>mudarabah</i>	- High flexibility and adaptability - Strong community ownership - Integrated social, economic, and spatial functions	- Limited centralized oversight - Dependence on founder integrity and managerial quality	 Aam & Mi'raj (2022); Dallh (2023); Iskandar (2022)
 Tanzimat Reforms	1826–1922	State-centered / Bureaucratic 	<i>Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti</i> established (1826) - Centralized administration - Land registration (<i>ifraz</i>) and commodification	- Improved accountability - Standardized governance procedures - Enhanced state control over assets	- Reduced local autonomy - Loss of institutional flexibility - Beginning of market integration	 Arkan (2023); Dallh (2023)
 Early Republican Era	1923–1950	State-dominated / Secular 	- Integration into secular state apparatus (1924) - Nationalization of <i>waqf</i> assets - Administrative restructuring	- Strong policy coordination - Integration with national development planning - Centralized resource mobilization	- Erosion of religious and social foundations - Loss of community ownership and participation	 Dallh (2023); Hughes & Siddiqui (2024)
 Modern Period	1950–Present	Hybrid / State-supervised 	- Partial reintegration through foundations and NGOs - Professional management frameworks - Revival of cash <i>waqf</i> and productive <i>waqf</i> concepts	- Increased professionalism - Transparency and accountability mechanisms - Innovation and financial potential	- Legal rigidity (perpetuity principle) - Overlapping legal regimes - Tension between social mission and commercial logic	 Aam & Mi'raj (2022); Hughes & Siddiqui (2024)

Source: Developed by the authors based on the reviewed literature.

Figure 1 summarizes the institutional and regulatory transformation of *waqf* across four historical phases in Turkey. The table reveals three significant patterns essential for understanding *waqf*'s current institutional readiness. First, there is a clear trajectory from decentralized community-based governance toward centralized state control, which reached its peak during the Early Republican era. This centralization, while enhancing accountability and policy coordination, also reduced local autonomy and community participation that

had been key strengths of the classical system (Dallh, 2023; Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). Second, each phase introduced new regulatory frameworks that addressed contemporary challenges but also created new rigidities. The principle of perpetuity, for instance, while protecting *waqf* assets from dissipation, continues to constrain flexibility in urban planning and land use adaptation (Dallh, 2023). Additionally, overlapping legal regimes, ranging from Ottoman legal legacies to modern national law, further complicate effective *waqf* governance (Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024).

Third, the contemporary period represents a hybrid model that seeks to balance tradition and modernity, creating both opportunities and challenges for *waqf*'s integration into urban planning. The revival of *cash waqf* and *productive waqf* concepts offers potential for innovative urban financing, including affordable housing and public infrastructure (Iskandar, 2022; Aam & Mi'raj, 2022). However, legal rigidity and governance fragmentation remain significant barriers that require regulatory reform and institutional strengthening. These patterns demonstrate that while the Ottoman period provides a strong institutional foundation, modern challenges require innovative policy responses that balance *waqf*'s foundational principles with contemporary urban development needs. By integrating the foundational principles of *waqf* with modern institutional and regulatory frameworks, Turkey holds significant potential to develop an inclusive, sustainable, and value-based model of urban development.

Social Structure, Urban Inequality, and the Distribution of *Waqf* Assets

The social structure and dynamics of urban inequality in Muslim cities, particularly in the Turkish context, cannot be separated from the historical distribution of *waqf* assets as a key instrument in organizing social welfare. Since the Ottoman period, *waqf* has functioned as a redistributive mechanism that is not merely philanthropic but also deeply embedded within the social structure of society. It enabled elite groups, both ruling authorities and the upper-middle class, to channel their wealth into public services such as education, healthcare, and social assistance. In this sense, *waqf* acted as a bridge between wealth accumulation and welfare distribution, thereby contributing to the reduction of social inequality in urban spaces (Dallh, 2023; Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). In practice, the distribution of *waqf* assets during the Ottoman era exhibited a strong spatial dimension. These assets were not only geographically dispersed but also integrated into the urban fabric through the development of public facilities such as mosques, madrasas, markets, hospitals, and caravanserais. This infrastructure formed socio-economic networks that enabled relatively equitable access to basic

services, particularly for poorer segments of society. Thus, *waqf* functioned as a spatial mechanism for welfare distribution, capable of reducing intra-urban disparities. Studies indicate that the extensive presence of *waqf* in Ottoman cities made it a central pillar in the provision of social services without full dependence on the state (Iskandar, 2022).

Nevertheless, the distribution of *waqf* assets was not entirely free from inequality. In many cases, the location and type of *waqf* reflected the social, political, and economic preferences of the *waqif*. *Waqf* assets tended to be concentrated in urban centers or strategically valuable areas, such as commercial districts and major transportation routes. This resulted in uneven distribution patterns, where peripheral areas and marginalized groups had more limited access to the benefits of *waqf*. In other words, while *waqf* functioned as a redistributive instrument, it could also reproduce certain forms of spatial inequality within the urban structure (Erdoğan, 2024). These inequalities became more complex with the introduction of Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century, which brought the logic of capitalism and land commodification into the management of urban space. Land reforms and registration systems transformed the treatment of *waqf* assets from socially oriented functions into components of a broader market economy. The process of land parceling (*ifraz*), including *waqf* land, created opportunities for commercialization and accelerated market-driven urbanization (Arıkan, 2023). In this context, the distribution of *waqf* assets increasingly came under the influence of market mechanisms, potentially widening disparities between those with access to economic resources and those without.

This transformation continued into the modern period, when the state assumed many of the social distribution functions previously carried out by *waqf*. The emergence of welfare state institutions and municipal governments shifted the role of *waqf* in providing public services. On the one hand, this increased distributive capacity through more organized and standardized systems. On the other hand, it reduced the role of communities in managing social welfare and weakened *waqf* as a community-based redistributive mechanism (Naïli, 2022). In contemporary Turkey, the distribution of *waqf* assets faces new challenges associated with increasingly complex urban inequalities. Rapid urbanization, population growth, and urban expansion have intensified pressures on access to housing, public services, and livable urban spaces. In this context, *waqf* assets hold significant potential to contribute to reducing inequality, particularly through the provision of affordable housing and social facilities. However, the realization of this potential depends heavily on how *waqf* assets are managed and distributed within broader public policy frameworks.

A major challenge in the contemporary distribution of *waqf* assets is the unequal access experienced by different social groups. Although *waqf* resources are substantial, their benefits are not distributed equitably due to limited public awareness, complex administrative procedures, and weak integration between *waqf* institutions and government social welfare policies. In many cases, *waqf* assets remain underutilized because of governance constraints and the limited adoption of innovative management practices (Aam & Mi'raj, 2022). In response to these challenges, various initiatives have sought to revitalize the role of *waqf* in reducing urban inequality through more inclusive and productive management models. The concept of productive *waqf* promotes the utilization of *waqf* assets in income-generating activities, with the resulting returns reinvested to finance social programs for disadvantaged communities. Moreover, the integration of *waqf* with Islamic financial instruments, such as *sukuk* and *cash waqf*, creates new opportunities to expand investment in urban development and strengthen the contribution of *waqf* to sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development (Iskandar, 2022).

The social dimension of *waqf* must also be understood within the broader context of power relations and identity in urban societies. The distribution of *waqf* assets often reflects wider social dynamics, including relationships between the state, society, and various social groups. In some cases, disputes over *waqf* assets emerge as part of broader political and identity conflicts, as observed in several former Ottoman regions (Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). This indicates that *waqf* is not merely an economic instrument but also a site of social and political contestation. Moreover, the decline of the cosmopolitan character of Ottoman cities following the formation of modern nation-states has also affected the distribution and utilization of *waqf* assets. Many *waqf* assets that once served multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities have become marginalized or neglected in modern development processes. This has contributed to the emergence of new forms of inequality, both in access to urban space and in the representation of cultural identities (Samourkasidou & Kalergis, 2022).

Overall, the analysis of social structure, urban inequality, and the distribution of *waqf* assets demonstrates the dual role of *waqf* in urban development. On the one hand, *waqf* serves as an effective redistributive mechanism capable of reducing social and spatial inequalities through the provision of public goods and welfare services. On the other hand, in the absence of effective governance and proper management, it may also reinforce existing socio-economic disparities. Therefore, policy frameworks should integrate *waqf* into inclusive and equitable urban development strategies. Looking forward, enhancing the contribution of *waqf* to addressing urban

inequality requires reforms across institutional, regulatory, and governance dimensions. Transparency, accountability, and meaningful community participation are essential to ensure that *waqf* resources are managed efficiently and distributed to those who need them most. Furthermore, integrating *waqf* into urban planning policies and broader social welfare systems can strengthen its role as a sustainable development instrument. With appropriate institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms, *waqf* possesses considerable potential to become an effective solution to the persistent challenges of urban inequality in modern cities, particularly in Turkey.

Transformation of Cultural and Religious Values in *Waqf* Practices from the Ottoman Era to the Modern City

The transformation of cultural and religious values in *waqf* practices from the Ottoman era to the modern city represents one of the most significant shifts in the history of Islamic philanthropy. Conceptually, *waqf* refers to the permanent dedication of assets for public benefit and has historically functioned as an institution that integrates spiritual, social, and economic dimensions within Muslim societies. In Islamic tradition, *waqf* is understood not merely as charitable giving but as a manifestation of religious devotion oriented toward the continuity of benefit (*sadaqah jariyah*). Accordingly, in the Ottoman context, *waqf* served as a key mechanism in shaping both the social structure and the spatial organization of cities, reflecting cultural values centered on solidarity, sustainability, and collective responsibility (Dallh, 2023; Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024).

During the Ottoman period, *waqf* emerged as a highly dominant institution in both social and urban life. Studies indicate that a substantial portion of public infrastructure, including mosques, madrasas, hospitals, markets, and water systems, was financed through *waqf*, making it the backbone of the social welfare system (Iskandar, 2022; Mi'raj, 2022). In this regard, *waqf* extended beyond its religious dimension to play a strategic role in urban development. The *külliye* complex, for instance, represents a concrete manifestation of the integration between religious and social functions within a unified urban space, illustrating how Islamic values were institutionalized in the physical form of the city. Thus, *waqf* in this period was inseparable from the cultural and religious identity of society, serving as a primary medium through which relationships between individuals, communities, and the divine were articulated.

The religious values underpinning *waqf* in the Ottoman era were also closely linked to notions of social justice and wealth redistribution. *Waqf* enabled elite

groups to channel their wealth to the broader community, thereby creating relatively inclusive mechanisms of distribution.

In this context, waqf served as a bridge between capital accumulation and social welfare, playing an important role in reducing inequality within urban society (Dallh, 2023). Nevertheless, waqf practices were not entirely detached from power relations and competing social interests. As Hughes and Siddiqui (2024) observe, waqf frequently reflected dominant social values, including cultural norms and hierarchical structures, and in certain circumstances even contributed to the reproduction of existing inequalities. A major shift in the value orientation of waqf emerged during the nineteenth-century Tanzimat reforms, which introduced modern administrative mechanisms and centralized waqf governance. The establishment of institutions such as the *Evkaf-ı Hümayun Nezareti* represented a transition from community-based management to a more formalized system of state control (Quddus & Hasib, 2023). Although these reforms were intended to enhance administrative efficiency and transparency, they also transformed the normative foundations of waqf. The religious principles that had long constituted its primary basis increasingly became embedded within the logic of bureaucracy and modern legal administration. Consequently, waqf was no longer understood solely as an act of religious devotion but also as a socio-economic asset that required professional management within the framework of the modern state.

This shift intensified with the emergence of the modern nation-state, particularly in Turkey following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Secularization policies integrated *waqf* into the civil legal system and placed it under state authority. In this process, the meaning of *waqf* was redefined, from an autonomous religious institution into a component of the state's administrative structure (Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024). This reflects a broader shift in values from spiritual orientation toward institutional and legal rationality. *Waqf* thus became not only an expression of individual piety but also an instrument of public policy in national development. Beyond state intervention, the transformation of *waqf* values has also been shaped by the penetration of market logic into modern life. Within a capitalist economic framework, *waqf* assets are increasingly viewed as resources that can be optimized for economic returns. Concepts such as productive *waqf* and cash *waqf* represent adaptive responses to these demands, whereby assets are managed through investment mechanisms to generate sustainable income (Iskandar, 2022). While such innovations open new opportunities for the development of *waqf*, they also create tensions between religious values and economic imperatives. The principle of perpetuity and the social objectives

of *waqf* often conflict with the need for flexibility and efficiency in asset management.

At the same time, transformations in cultural values are reflected in changing notions of community and identity. During the Ottoman period, *waqf* often embodied broad social affiliations, including family networks, local communities, and the wider Muslim ummah. In contrast, in modern contexts, *waqf* is increasingly framed within narrower identity categories, such as specific religious or national communities. As highlighted by [Moumtaz \(2025\)](#), the redefinition of *waqf* as “property of a religious community” may narrow its inclusive meaning and create potential exclusion of other groups. This indicates that the transformation of *waqf* extends beyond institutional change to encompass shifts in social structures and cultural identities. Despite these transformations, the religious values inherent in *waqf* have not disappeared. Rather, they have undergone processes of reinterpretation and adaptation within modern contexts. *Waqf* continues to be viewed as an important instrument for achieving social justice and public welfare, particularly in response to the limitations of state welfare systems and market failures. In recent decades, efforts have emerged to revitalize *waqf* through innovative approaches, including integration with Islamic financial instruments and collaboration with the private sector ([Hughes & Siddiqui, 2024](#)).

Furthermore, developments in the study of Muslim philanthropy indicate a conceptual shift from “charity” toward “philanthropy,” emphasizing strategic and sustainable forms of giving ([Fallas, 2023](#)). Within this framework, *waqf* is understood not only as an act of charity but also as a development instrument capable of generating long-term impact. This transformation illustrates how religious values are translated into modern language and practices without entirely losing their spiritual essence. Nevertheless, a key challenge in the transformation of *waqf* lies in maintaining a balance between religious values and the demands of modernity. An overly profit-oriented approach risks neglecting its social and spiritual objectives, while an excessively conservative stance may hinder innovation and effectiveness. Therefore, an institutional and regulatory framework is required that can harmoniously integrate these dimensions.

In conclusion, the transformation of cultural and religious values in *waqf* practices from the Ottoman era to the modern city reflects a complex and dynamic process. *Waqf* has evolved from a community-based institution grounded in religious values into a system increasingly integrated with the state and the market. Yet, amid these changes, its core essence as an instrument of social solidarity and an expression of religious values persists, albeit in transformed forms. This evolution not only illustrates the development of *waqf* as

an institution but also reflects broader dynamics in the relationship between religion, society, and the state in the modern world.

Recontextualizing *Waqf* in Modern Urbanism: An Analysis through the Lens of the Production of Space and Urban Political Economy

This study aims to recontextualize the role of *waqf* in modern urbanism by employing the theoretical framework of the production of space developed by Henri Lefebvre, alongside the perspective of urban political economy. Specifically, it seeks to examine how the transformation of *waqf*, from a pre-modern institution grounded in religious and collective values into a component of urban capitalist systems, has altered its function, meaning, and relevance in contemporary urban life. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a qualitative approach based on theoretical synthesis, integrating Lefebvre's spatial triad, David Harvey's critique of capital circulation in urban development, and contemporary literature on the right to the city.

The main findings reveal that *waqf*, which originally functioned as an instrument of space production based on collective use value and social solidarity, has undergone a transformation into an asset increasingly governed by the logic of spatial commodification within modern urban capitalism. This shift is not merely administrative but constitutes an epistemological transformation that reshapes how space is understood, produced, and utilized. More specifically, the study finds that historical *waqf* played a central role in shaping urban social infrastructure, such as mosques, schools, and public facilities, that sustained everyday life (Arıkan, 2023; Spanu, 2023); that modernization and colonialism facilitated the conversion of *waqf* land into tradable economic assets (Mathotaarachchi & Thilakarathna, 2021); that the marginalization of *waqf* correlates with increasing spatial inequality in modern cities (Vives-Miró, 2022); and that there remains significant potential to revitalize *waqf* as an alternative instrument for achieving spatial justice through a right-to-the-city approach (Huss & Margalit, 2024). The significance of these findings lies in their ability to demonstrate that contemporary urban crises are not solely the result of technocratic policy failures but also stem from the erosion of social institutions that once balanced the logic of capital. Accordingly, this study offers a new understanding of *waqf* as a potential mechanism for inclusive and equitable space production, while opening avenues for further research on integrating *waqf* into sustainable urban development policies.

The interpretation of these findings indicates a consistent pattern of transformation from space based on use value to space driven by exchange value, as articulated in Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (Vives-Miró, 2022).

This pattern suggests that changes in *waqf* practices are not random but follow the structural logic of capitalism, which tends to commodify all aspects of life, including space and the social institutions that govern it. The findings reinforce the hypothesis that capitalism not only reshapes the physical form of cities but also reconstructs the social and religious meanings embedded within urban space. However, variations exist in how this transformation unfolds across different social and geographical contexts. In some regions, *waqf* continues to maintain its social function as a provider of public services, while in others it has been fully integrated into market systems as a commercial asset.

These variations can be explained by differences in state regulation, the strength of civil society, and historical and colonial legacies that shape patterns of ownership and governance (Huss & Margalit, 2024). Theoretically, these findings not only support Lefebvre's argument that space is a socially produced entity embedded with power relations (Arikan, 2023), but also extend it by demonstrating how religious institutions such as *waqf* become arenas of contestation between collective and capitalist logics. Furthermore, the findings align with Harvey's critique of capitalist urbanization, which posits that urban development often serves as a mechanism for capital accumulation rather than the fulfillment of social needs. From a socio-cultural perspective, the transformation of *waqf* reflects a broader shift in values within modern Muslim societies, from collective and spiritual orientations toward more individualistic and economistic ones. This shift is evident in the changing function of *waqf* land from social infrastructure to commercial property, ultimately altering how urban residents experience and interact with space.

When situated within existing literature, these findings demonstrate strong correlations with prior studies on urban transformation and *waqf* institutions. For instance, Arikan (2023) shows that changes in spatial planning systems during the late Ottoman period paved the way for the commodification of *waqf* land, which is consistent with this study's conclusions. Similarly, Mathotaarachchi and Thilakarathna (2021) highlight the dominance of capital accumulation logic in modern urban political economy, which marginalizes non-market institutions. However, this study contributes novel insights by systematically integrating Lefebvre's theory of space production into the analysis of *waqf*, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between space, power, and social institutions. Unlike previous research that tends to focus on legal or economic aspects, this study emphasizes the spatial and symbolic dimensions that are often overlooked. Methodologically, the use of theoretical synthesis allows for cross-contextual analysis beyond a single geographical setting, generating broader and more nuanced findings. The

implication is that the transformation of *waqf* should be understood as part of the global dynamics of capitalist urbanization, requiring analytical approaches that are not only local but also structural and comparative. In this regard, the study fills a significant gap in the literature by linking *waqf* studies with critical urban theory.

From a causal perspective, the transformation of *waqf* in modern urban contexts is shaped by multiple interacting factors. The primary driver is global capitalism, which demands efficiency and profitability in land use, thereby encouraging the commodification of *waqf* assets (Vives-Miró, 2022). State policies that integrate *waqf* into formal economic systems also play a crucial role in reshaping its function and governance. Historical factors such as colonialism have further accelerated this transformation by restructuring land ownership systems and introducing more secular legal frameworks (Mathotaarachchi & Thilakarathna, 2021). Additionally, shifts in social values toward pragmatism and economic rationality have contributed to the changing role of *waqf*. It is important to acknowledge potential biases in the analysis, particularly given that much of the literature is context-specific and may not be fully representative. To mitigate this, the study employs triangulation of theoretical perspectives and sources. Nonetheless, the complexity of factors involved indicates that the transformation of *waqf* cannot be explained by a single variable but is the result of interactions among economic, political, and cultural forces. This also opens new research avenues, such as exploring the adaptation of *waqf* in the digital economy or the role of technology in enhancing governance efficiency.

Importantly, these findings suggest that the transformation of *waqf* is not deterministic, leaving room for policy intervention and institutional innovation. From a practical standpoint, this study carries significant implications for urban policy development and the future management of *waqf*. Revitalizing *waqf* as an instrument of inclusive urban development requires re-emphasizing its collective use value and social sustainability. Integrating *waqf* into urban planning, particularly in the provision of affordable housing and public spaces, offers a viable alternative to addressing urban inequality. Institutional reforms are also necessary to ensure that *waqf* governance becomes more adaptive to modern contexts while preserving its core religious values. The development of technology-driven productive *waqf* represents a promising innovation to enhance its social and economic impact. More broadly, this study demonstrates that *waqf* can serve as an alternative model for equitable urban development, not only in Muslim societies but also in a global context. Ultimately, the transformation of *waqf* reveals that the crisis of modern cities is not merely technical but also deeply rooted in issues of values and social orientation.

Therefore, efforts to revitalize *waqf* should be understood as part of a broader project to create cities that are more humane, inclusive, and sustainable.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *waqf* in Turkey has experienced a profound transformation from a community-based institution grounded in religious values and collective welfare into an institution increasingly influenced by state regulation and market-oriented urban development. The analysis identifies four interrelated dimensions of this transformation. Institutionally, *waqf* governance has evolved from decentralized community management to a centralized administrative system, while the contemporary hybrid model seeks to reconcile state oversight with institutional autonomy. Socially, *waqf* continues to function as a redistributive mechanism capable of reducing urban inequality, although weak governance and unequal access may also reinforce existing disparities. Culturally, *waqf* has shifted from an expression of religious devotion and collective solidarity toward a more professional and strategic philanthropic institution. Spatially, *waqf* assets have increasingly been integrated into market-oriented urban development, creating tensions between their social function and commercial utilization.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by integrating Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Harvey's urban political economy, and institutional theory to explain how *waqf* has become a site of interaction among religious values, state governance, and market forces. Rather than viewing *waqf* solely as a religious endowment, this framework demonstrates its dynamic role within contemporary urban transformation and institutional change. Practically, the findings suggest that strengthening the contribution of *waqf* to sustainable urban development requires integrated legal, institutional, and governance reforms. Regulatory frameworks should provide greater flexibility for productive asset utilization while preserving the perpetual character of *waqf*. At the same time, improving institutional capacity through professional management, transparency, accountability, and digital innovation is essential to enhance public trust and operational effectiveness. Integrating *waqf* into urban planning strategies, particularly in affordable housing, public infrastructure, and community services, would further strengthen its contribution to inclusive urban development. This study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature and the absence of primary empirical evidence. Future research should incorporate field-based investigations across different Turkish cities to examine governance practices, community perceptions, digital transformation, and innovative financing models. Such

studies would provide a deeper understanding of how *waqf* can contribute to reducing urban inequality while supporting environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive cities. Overall, this study demonstrates that *waqf* possesses significant potential to serve as an alternative model of equitable urban development when its religious and social foundations are effectively aligned with the institutional and spatial demands of contemporary society.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical Approval

This study is a thematic literature review based exclusively on secondary data from published academic journals, official reports, and policy documents. It does not involve primary data collection from human subjects, animals, or any form of direct intervention. Therefore, ethical approval was not required for this research.

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