DutchCu|ture
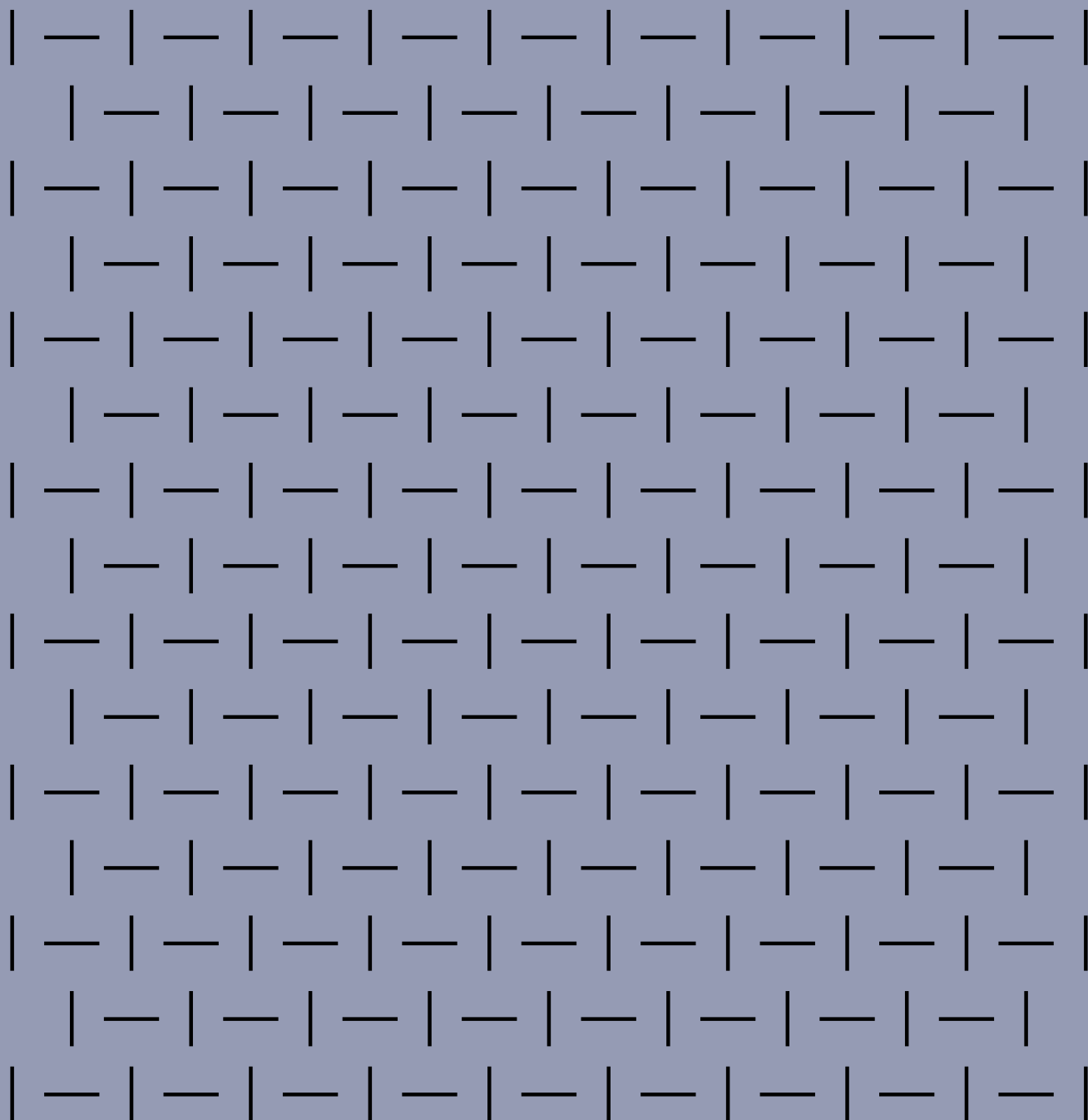
Digital Culture in Turkey

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Version 2019

In 2011, SICA (the predecessor of DutchCulture) produced a comprehensive mapping of the Turkish cultural field. This mapping was written by local experts and edited by Teike Asselbergs and Chantal Hamelinck. The mapping was produce as a means to promote cultural exchange between the Netherlands and Turkey and as a starting point of the year 2012, which marked 400 years of Dutch – Turkish diplomatic relations. The mapping was supported and produced in close co-operation with the Dutch public funds.

An update of these mappings was commissioned in 2018 by DutchCulture while working with the same editors. The existing mappings were revised and several new mappings were added.

The updated mappings are focusing more on giving Dutch cultural practitioners an insight into the Turkish cultural field and its infrastructure, and helping them get in contact with colleagues.

This mapping is supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands.

Contents

Summary

As a result of the Arab Spring that took place in various countries of the Middle East, the year 2011 can be considered as a milestone for the region. It was important because it revealed the impact of digital culture and how it is able to change societies and social relations. For Turkey, 2011 was also a turning point for its internal politics. The rulers, who did not know how to handle these changes in society, played their last cards by becoming more autocratic.

Since 2011, the arts and culture scene in Turkey, and especially in Istanbul, has lost its motivation due to long-term financial uncertainties and increasing political harassment. The potential development in the field of digital culture has also been negatively affected by these political changes. The loosened political and economic ties with Europe have made creating and sustaining connections mutually difficult, especially for individuals, but also for independent organisations. For some institutions, the period since 2011 has been a kind of stand-by one, marked by loss. Since 2016, many creative individuals have increasingly left the country. They are the ones who had been active both in the cultural life of the country and in the digital culture scene: designers, artists, academics and IT professionals. Consequently, since 2011 digital culture has only grown enough to maintain relationships with the rest of the global world – in professional and commercial life. One can no longer find the prolific atmosphere that prevailed in the previous decade, which was objectively productive and influential for the cultural history of the country.

Introduction

Digital culture is no longer the stand-alone concept that it was a few decades ago. In our post-digital times, the digital is integrated into everything, from art and culture to innovation, production, health and education. Therefore, when we talk about digital culture, it can refer to a wide range of areas. In this chapter there will be a focus on digital arts (media arts), design (the creative industries) and critical movements on digitisation. As part of the design-related topics and the creative industries, popular issues and technology are also included. Since digital art is now a subtopic in contemporary art, contemporary art will also be touched upon, even though contemporary art and popular and technological issues are not the primary focus.

This mapping will first give a brief history of digitalisation in Turkey. This will be followed by an overview of the current state of the digital art and design scene, with some ideas and suggestions provided for further research. It is impossible to cover the whole field of e-culture, as it is wide-ranging and fragmented into various media channels and communities. But hopefully this mapping will support readers further in their research.

Short history

Technical and procedural background

The first computer in Turkey was an IBM 650 Model I bought in 1960 by Karayolları Genel Müdürlüğü (General Directorate of Highways). This was the first computer in the Balkan and Middle Eastern countries. At the time there was no technical personnel to use the machine and initial reactions among the public were not welcoming. The second computer was the IBM 1620 in 1964, which was used for academic purposes at Istanbul Technical University. Like many other countries, the popularisation of computer technologies started in the 1980s with the Commodore 64. This computer was introduced in 1982 and appeared on the Turkish market in 1984. Before the advent of standard PCs, Commodore, Atari and ZX Spectrum played an important role in creating a huge interest among young people.

The start of digital culture

Digital culture began to have an impact on Turkish culture in general with the internet's entrance into the country in the late 1990s. Middle East Technical University (METU) established Turkey's first internet connection to the US NFSNet (National Science Foundation Network) via TCP/IP protocol in 1993. This line at 64 kbit/sec had been the sole output of the whole country for a very long time. After the first METU connection, between 1993 and 1996 most Turkish universities were connected to the internet through METU. The internet's reach of wider audiences in Turkey, such as commercial establishments and households, only started after 1996. The number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) that have benefited from Turk Telecom's TURNET project's three lines (two from Istanbul at 2 Mbit/sec and 512 Kbit/sec, and one from Ankara at 2 Mbit/sec) reached 80 by October 1997.
http://www.socialmediatr.com/blog/turkiyede-internetin-kisa-tarihi/

Technology usage

In 2017, the population of Turkey was approximately 81 million. According to statistics from TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) from August 2017, the percentage of individuals in Turkey using the internet was 66.8%, while 56.8% of the population used computers. Eight out of 10 households had internet access, and one in every four individuals had shopped online. There were 77.8 million mobile subscribers. Even though the use of computers was 56.8%, TV still played an important role in life, with 98% of the population watching TV.
http://www.tuik.gov.tr/HbPrint.do?id=24862

E-Devlet

E-Devlet (e-Government) is a state portal that provides access to all public services from a single online portal. It was established in 2006, and in 2017, the proportion of individuals using e-Devlet in the age group of 16-74 years was 42.4%.

Internet and bans

While on the one hand, the internet is perceived as an opportunity, on the other hand it is seen as a threat. The history of the internet in Turkey developed in parallel to the history of the suppression of freedom of expression. In 1997, the first related court case in Turkey was regarding a high school student due to his activities on the internet, where he openly criticised Ankara Metropolitan Municipality officials for using violence against protesters in a local event. The case concluded with a 10-month prison sentence for the student. However, the sentence was delayed by the court, which took into consideration his good behaviour. Such cases increasingly continue to be filed, especially with the accusation of insulting the president.

There have always been bans on access to various internet sites in Turkey, in most cases without any court decision. Bans are mostly executed by suppressions on the ISPs. Even Engelliweb (http://www.engelliweb.com/), an activist group that publishes statistics of banned websites, has been banned and cannot be accessed. When you try to access it, there is a message saying: ERR_EMPTY_RESPONSE.

Extent of internet censorship

When so-called harmful content is not removed on time, the Turkish authorities ban access to various websites for a certain period of time. Several websites that have been (temporarily) banned in recent years are YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. In some cases, even when the content is removed, the ban continues. This is the case for Wikipedia, which has not been accessible from Turkey since April 2017.

In an article posted on the website of İYAD (Internet Publishers Association), Yaman Akdeniz, a professor at Bilgi University in Istanbul who specialises in digital law, states that "Turkey currently has a ban on access to 90,000 sites." (http://www.iyad.org.tr/2016/04/23/turkiyede-on-binlerce-yasakli-site-var/) A different article on the same website mentions that a currently proposed legislation suggests that all audio and video broadcasts made online or on the internet, with or without the Turkish language, should be subject to the supervision rules of RTÜK, the Turkish state agency for monitoring, regulating and sanctioning radio and television broadcasts http://www.iyad.org.tr/2018/08/20/internet-yayinlarina-rtuk-denetimi-geliyor/

Protest for internet rights

In August 2011, a protest against the newly introduced filtering system and bans on internet access took place in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, and was joined by several thousand people. It is said to be the biggest-ever protest for internet rights in the world to date, which gives an idea about the volume of the control and scope of the expectations of internet users in Turkey.

Digital art and design

When we look at the history of digital art in Turkey, it becomes clear that this does not go very far back. The history of the awareness and interest in media art in Turkey can be said to go back to the second half of the 1990s, when the discipline gained popularity as a result of burgeoning internet use in the country. The discipline also became more popular when the visual communication design departments of academies began to be transformed into institutions as a continuation of the increase in internet use.

Demoscene

With the arrival of the digital technology in Turkey, replicas of international subcultures were also formed. The first-known Turkish demoscene group Zombie Boys was formed in 1988. On their website http://zombieboys.net/, they introduced themselves as an Amiga & Commdore 64 "scene" group from 1988, founded by Tunç "Turbo" Dindaş and Uğur "Miko" Dalgın. When they changed their name to Bronx in 1990, the group had around 120 international members (http://www.sadecebirmuze.com/rop/bronx.html). Although limited to big cities and certain social groups, these represented the first seeds of the alternative digital culture scene in Turkey.

Contemporary mash-up culture

By drawing the attention of a young population to the works he produced in the 1980s, Serhat Köksal (2/5BZ) is an early example of the representation of contemporary mash-up culture. While he did not directly work in the discipline of new media, his popularity was a result of the music he made, his performances, his work practices and his cultural position. Later, he was considered a predecessor to the subcultures that developed alongside the growth of the internet. This and other similar examples can be considered as starting points to trace the cultural marks of different trends and formations that later emerged within the development of digital culture in Turkey.

The first media art artists

In the period before the 1990s, one media art artist who needs to be mentioned is Teoman Madra. He produced visuals by using the computer technologies of his time and associated his works, as well as his perspective and identity, with intellectuals and artists in the US and Europe. Alongside Madra, other pioneers of electronic music are İlhan Mimaroğlu and Bülent Arel. They created experimental works in Turkey from the 1950s onwards and can be considered the first artists who worked in media art. Even though these artists did not further their careers in the discipline we currently refer to as media art, they were the first artists who were aware of the discipline in Turkey and who adopted new technologies in their artistic research and creations. Madra continued to produce works in the areas of photography and visuals using computers, while Mimaroğlu and Arel furthered their careers in the US and took their place as pioneers of electronic music. Until the 1990s, there were no other artists who worked in the field of media art in Turkey. Nil Yalter, an internationally renowned video artist who resides in Paris, produced multimedia applications as a continuation of her own artistic practices in the second half of the 1990s. Yalter is the first Turkish artist who used multimedia techniques in her work. She continues to work as a video and performance artist and uses computers in her production processes, as well as one of her artistic media.

The first exhibition in e-culture

The first exhibition of new media/digital art in Turkey was organised at Istanbul Technical University's (ITU) Faculty of Architecture at Taşkışla on November 4, 1975, under the title "Computer Art: The Works of the Ars Intermedia Group". Ars Intermedia was an influential group established by Otto Beckman in 1966 in Vienna who continued working in this field until 1980. It is no coincidence that this first exhibition was held at Taşkışla, as years later the MA programme for Computer Technologies in Design was created by ITU's Faculty of Architecture with a perspective that went beyond the capacities of the prevalent visual communication design departments.

Impact of the Istanbul Biennial

The Istanbul Biennial created a platform for art and can be considered as a contributor to e-culture (digital arts, media art) due to the fact that it urges the arts environment to follow developments around the world. It displays some works that use technology and new media, albeit comparatively few. However, new media (digital arts) has never had a strong enough presence at the Istanbul Biennial that it could influence the discipline as a whole.

The first exhibition in new media art

The first exhibition in Turkey where new media art works were displayed was "Concrete Visions". Beral Madra organised the exhibition, which was held at Anarat Hığutyun School in Kadıköy in 1995. Upon Madra's invitation, Fatih Aydoğdu curated the subsection of the exhibition. Due to the nature of the works selected by Aydoğdu, who was living in Vienna, internet access was required, but in 1995 this was too early to happen in Turkey. At the time, the infrastructure for public internet was still under construction and only universities had a connection. Although Aydoğdu wanted to make connections through universities, the non-existent public internet infrastructure in 1995 meant that the internet couldn't be accessed in Kadıköy, and the works were only displayed offline.

For more detailed information about the history of media art in Turkey, see:
- http://forumist.com/post-digital-histories-new-media-art-in-turkey/
- https://www.academia.edu/14285319/Post_Digital_Histories_New_Media_Art_in_Turkey

Main trends and topics

Social media is the main area of digital culture in Turkey. Turkey is the second nation in Twitter and ninth in Facebook usage. In popular culture, digital is almost equal to social media.

Critical views on digitalisation
There is little awareness of critical topics about digitalisation in the society at large. There are a few initiatives such as Alternative Bilişim Desrneği (https://alternatifbili-sim.org/), plus some artists and activists – mostly academic – and a little academic research and a few events that try to take a critical look at digitalisation. But we cannot say those have an impact on the public opinion. Unfortunately, in 2016, we lost Özgür Uçkan, who was an academic and activist fighting against the anti-democratic legislation and implementations related to internet and technology usage. Another important figure was Mustafa Akgül, often called the father of internet in Turkey, who passed away the following year. Akgül was an academic and advocate for the rights in information technologies and for a more democratic internet. With the loss of these two figures, intellectual and activist movements in the area of internet freedom and rights have partially lost their voice and recognition in the public domain.

Creative industries and innovation
Creative industries and innovation are the main trends in the digital field in Turkey due to the country's large young population, who like to keep up with global capitalism. Although some state institutions try to push new technologies forward in the public sphere, this does not have any social impact since the state does not have an appro-priate policy. There are only few state or sector support programmes in "innovation", without support for research and development in a wider frame. Although the private sector also has some activities to promote innovation, those mostly stay within the sector; they hardly ever target youth.

Digital Education
Technology has not yet entered the domain of formal education – unfortunately, befo-re this can happen, education has many fundamental problems to be solved. One at-tempt to bring technology into schools was made via the Fatih Project, which brought tablets and smart boards into state schools. A huge amount of money was spent on technology and devices, but none on the digital content or on the education of tea-chers. After a few years, the corruption behind the project was brought to light, and

the project ended. According to two academics who researched the project, "Fatih Project is far from achieving social equality, it started to establish a specific (single) market with supplements and by-products, and it is effective on economic transformation by increasing the technology-based education expenditure of families. In terms of educational transformation, it was determined that it had effects that might be considered questionable in a pedagogic and professional sense. It is thought that the transformation projected by the Fatih Project in political, social, educational and economic dimensions should be investigated in further longitudinal studies."
http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/291968

Subdisciplines

Digital Arts

In 2003, the Web Biennial – the first of its kind in the world – was founded by conceptual artist Genco Gülan. It was an early venture that encompassed web art in Turkey. Gülan emphasised the importance of the Web Biennial as a model of interdisciplinary exhibiting. However, it didn't gain traction in Turkey and thus did not have much effect in the artistic environment.

NOMAD

NOMAD (http://www.nomad-tv.net/) began as an initiative in 2002 and was registered as an association in 2006. Quoting from its website, "NOMAD aims to produce and experiment with new patterns in the digital art sphere by using the lenses of various other disciplines." The project was founded by Başak Şenova, Emre Erkal and Erhan Muratoğlu. NOMAD organised the first sound art festival in Turkey in 2003 under the title of "ctrl_alt_del" and repeated the event in 2005 and then in 2007 and 2008. It formed a local network with connections abroad. Since 2002, NOMAD has developed numerous local and international projects, including festivals, exhibitions, performances, multimedia events, experimental film screenings, lectures, panels and publications.

TECHNE

In 2006, Ekmel Ertan and Aylin Kalem, colleagues at Bilgi University, organised the TECHNE Digital Performance Platform, the first event of its kind in new media in Turkey. A small exhibition, seminars, two dance performances and a few workshops on new media were organised for the week-long festival.

amberPlatform/BIS

amberPlatform/BIS (Body-Process Arts Association) (http://amber-platform.org/) was founded in 2007 with the participation of 11 artists, dancers, academics, engineers and researchers, following a series of meetings. The founding declaration of BIS states: "In a world transformed by technology, BIS aims to create a platform for discussion and production regarding art and technology in its own locality. The concept of body-process proposes researching the complicated and multi-faceted relationship between the human body and technology, the thin line between them and the outcomes." BIS was managed by Ekmel Ertan, Özlem Alkış and Nafiz Akşehirlioğlu until 2011. Ertan has been the artistic director of BIS and amberFestival since its inception. From 2012, Fatih Aydoğdu joined the curatorial team.

BIS has run eight multi-partner international projects in the junction of digital technologies, art and society, supported by the EU Culture Programme (later Creative Europe), Horizon 2020 and other international funding bodies since 2008. The Amber art and technology festival, the only festival for art and digital technologies, was one of the keystone events for nine years of digital culture in Turkey.

Borusan Contemporary

Borusan Contemporary has the only media art collection in Turkey. Although other collectors and institutions have media art works or digital art works, Borusan has the largest collection and refers to it as the Media Art Collection. In addition, Borusan regularly organises media art exhibitions, events and talks.

Other noteworthy initiatives in digital art

The yet-to-be-established new museum of Koç Group is rumoured to have a special section on digital art.

Akbank Sanat has been organising digital art exhibitions, panels and talks for the past decade. Important media art exhibitions have regularly taken place at Akbank Sanat, a central and accessible venue. It has also translated and published some important books on digital media, although they are not distributed or for sale.

For the past two years, the Zorlu Centre has had an ongoing series of events under the brand name Digi-Launch.

These initiatives show that digital art has partly entered the conventional art scene and takes place in galleries and institutional exhibitions.

Design and creative industries

Design culture in Turkey has tended to be elitist. It really began in the hands of a few young people from a high socio-economic background. There has never been any development policy, nor has there been any contemporary coverage of design in the school curriculum. Because existing design programmes are not available throughout the country (let alone in a single city), design culture has not been widely shared. On the contrary, from the beginning it has been a signifier of wealth and higher socio-economic status. Based on consumerism, this understanding has changed – not for the sake of design as a cultural value, but rather as a matter of accessibility.

Actors raising awareness about digital culture and digital design
While the visual communication design departments of universities were one of the first in Turkey to create awareness about digital culture and digital design, the creative industries soon followed because digital technologies created a new and challenging market and provided cheap and easy replacements to the industry's ongoing production tools and methods. Another reason was those graduates who were fully versed in digital culture during their education entered the sector as entrepreneurs or employees with a fresh knowledge and up-to-date capacities. Therefore, creative industries were at the heart of digital culture from quite early on.

Today, design in general has kept its leading position in shaping the digital culture. To see the variety and capacities of the current producers, one only has to look at design studios and local or international advertising and marketing agencies in Turkey. It can be said that certain designers and design studios produce world-class work from conceptualisation to production. Also, many international agencies have a branch in Istanbul to serve the local and Middle Eastern market, and use cheap but quality intellectual and manual labour.

Atölye (https://atolye.io/en/home/) and the British Council collaborated on mapping the creative industries in Istanbul. The overview can be found here: https://graphcommons.com/graphs/21cc69ad-86d7-489d-99ac-524a3aeb15b8?auto=true

YEKON (Creative Industries Association) conducted research on creative industries and the design sector in Istanbul in 2013-14 with the support of the Istanbul Development Agency. The reports can be found here (in Turkish; for the English summary, you can write to them on http://www.yekon.org/index.htm):

Creative Industries in Istanbul
http://www.yekon.org/public/yaratici-ekonomi-atolyesi-raporu.pdf

Istanbul Design Map
http://www.yekon.org/public/tasarim-haritasi-atolyesi-raporu.pdf

https://fazlamesai.net is an interesting micro-messaging platform among enthusiasts of the digital world in Turkey.

Game industry, education and events

In the early 2000s, the gaming industry was a newly developing, alternative field in Turkey, founded by Mevlut Dinç and Cemil Türün. Dinç was an established game developer in England who later came to Turkey and founded his own company that developed and published many games. Türün, the founder of Yogurt Technologies, developed the first commercial game in Turkey. Later, many (mostly) internet companies entered the field and developed web-based small-size commercial games.

Developing the sector
Mevlut Dinç was the first president of the Federation of Digital Games Turkey, which was founded in 2011. (https://tudof.wordpress.com/)
Other associations of game developers are TOGED http://www.toged.org/ and OYUN-DER http://www.oyunder.org/.
Volkan Sel is a blogger who closely follows the gaming scene in Turkey (http://volkansel.com/). The gaming industry has been quite a large and profitable sector in the past few years, and according to the Ministry of Economy, there were many developer companies who earned more than 700 million dollars in export revenue in 2017. A list of game companies can be found on http://volkansel.com/oyun-firmalari/.

GATE
METU (Middle East Technical University) Game Technologies (GATE) (http://gate.ii.metu.edu.tr/) is a postgraduate programme that was established in 2009 within the Informatics Institute at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, one of the world's top ranked universities (before the current government's policies). The primary aim of the programme is to educate the next generation of game developers and designers. In addition, the programme has a strong research component with a prominent interdisciplinary edge. The interdisciplinary aspects of the programme are reflected not only in the academic backgrounds of the faculty members (who are from programmes in computer science and engineering, electronic engineering, industrial design, music and architecture), but also in the diverse backgrounds of the enrolled students.

ATOM METU TEKNOKENT A.Ş
The Animation Technologies and Game Development Centre (ATOM) was founded in 2008 (http://www.atom.org.tr/tr/anasayfa). METU (Middle East Technical University) TEKNOKENT A.Ş. is an established pre-incubation centre. The centre provides support to the teams and young firms that are active in the fields of game development

and animation technologies and creates a healthy ecosystem for the sector's stake-holders.

BUG and game design departments

The game lab "BUG" (https://buglab.bau.edu.tr/) was created by Güven Çatak at Bahçeşehir University. In addition to designing games, BUG participated in the making of a documentary on the gaming industry in Turkey. They continue to publish online lecture notes. Bahçeşehir University – BUG opened the undergraduate game design department in 2016, a first in Turkey. Prior to that, in the 2014-2015 academic year, the Game Design post-graduate programme had started.

Events in the gaming field

The first event in the gaming field was made possible in 2008 with the participation of artists from Europe and Turkey within the scope of amberFestival, in cooperation with Gamerz Festival8. The amber'08 festival exhibition was the first time that gaming appeared before an audience in Turkey in such a format.

In 2011, Kurye Festival focused on gaming with the title "Space Invaders". The festival was held at the Building Information Centre (YEM) in Istanbul and presented significant content.

Open-source movement

The open-source movement found a powerful backing in Turkey, especially among developers and academics. Mustafa Akgül's interview – in Turkish and broadcast on Açık Radyo – can be found here: http://acikradyo.com.tr/arsiv-icerigi/ozgur-yazilim-ve-acik-kaynak-nedir

Tubitak (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) also started the Pardus project for an open source Linux version supported by the government.

Blogs and web resources

Körotonomedya

Körotonomedya was an important intellectual group in Turkey. They launched the website in 1984 in METU, even before the internet went public. Körotonomedya was a group of academics and artists who gathered around Ulus Baker at METU, and the group especially had an effect on critical thinking on new media, art and technology. Körotonomedya is no longer active, but its archive is open and accessible on the web. http://www.korotonomedya.net/

Ekşisözlük

Established in 1999, Ekşisözlük (https://eksisozluk.com/) is a crowdsourced subjective dictionary about anything and everything. It has a cult following among Turkey's internet users. In several interviews, founder Sedat Kapanoğlu stated that The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy was the inspiration for the creation of Ekşisözlük. Ekşisözlük has been subjected to many court cases and access was banned several times. However, it is still active and remains a popular source of information in Turkish digital culture.

Düğümküme

Düğümküme (http://dugumkume.org/) is another actor that contributed to the proliferation of digital culture and the formation of the current new media art environment. Düğümküme was a techno-cultural criticism blog. It drew the attention of a curious and interested group of people in a short period of time. Started in 2005, the blog continued until early 2011; it is currently inactive but still accessible. The blog was spearheaded and developed by Burak Arıkan with over 500 posts, 450 of which were written by Arıkan himself and featured many discussions in the comments sections of each post. Although 500 may seem a low number over a six-year period, Düğümküme brought many significant subjects to the agenda and initiated discussions on these subjects. Burak also organised forums alongside the blog. Throughout the time it was active, he held five forums on the fundamental issues of new communication and information technologies such as Distributed Processing, Hybrid Public Space, Distributed Identity, Versions of Reality and Open Governance.

Vikipedi, the Turkish version of Wikipedia

Vikipedi (https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anasayfa), the Turkish version of Wikipedia, started in 2003 and reached 322,112 items with 1,021,645 registered users by 2019. Vikipedi and Wikipedia were banned for more than a year in Turkey due to politically motivated reasons.

Digital art, an integral part of the art scene

Now that we are digitalised, the situation of digital art is different from the first years of the internet and digitalisation. There are many art blogs edited by one person or group of people apart from the online art magazines, but none is specialised in digital art or the intersection of art and technology specifically. The reason for this is not only because technology and digital art have become an integral part of the contemporary art field in general, but also there is not much happening in Turkey in the field of digital art. There are a number of technology blogs where one can find art and technology news and articles. Serdar Kuzuloğlu is a popular figure who writes and talks about the digital world in Turkey; he also has a blog.
https://www.mserdark.com/

E-publishing

Commercial e-publishing

E-publishing is a developing area in Turkey. There are currently only a few publishers that also publish e-books. Sayısal Grafik (the company) started a database titled Sayısal Kitap (http://sayisalkitap.qulto.eu/#/home) for Turkish e-books in which around 1,400 items have already been collected. Serdar Katipoğlu, a former librarian at Bilgi University, has been leading the process of convincing publishers to convert their publications into e-books to develop this new sub-industry.

Independent e-books

Most independent organisations also publish e-books, mostly in pdf format, with or without an ISBN number, since they are cheap and widely accessible. Online media is still a free expression platform without any requirement to inform the authorities, as is the case with print publishing.

Manifold

Manifold (https://manifold.press/) brings together writers, designers, artist and organisers at the intersection of technology, art and design. Manifold is a close follower of the arts and culture scene in Istanbul. Manifold is curated with the specific design-oriented taste of its founder Esen Karol.

e-Skop

e-Skop (http://e-skop.com/default.aspx) is an important critical publication on art and culture led by Ali Artun. Artun is a renowned art critic and the founder of one of Turkey's first respected private art galleries. E-Skop is important not only because of its focus on digital art but also because it is one of the few media outlets that offers a critical

approach on digitalisation.

Art and Culture Blogs

Sanatatak (http://www.sanatatak.com/) is an art and culture blog – zine – founded by art journalist Ayşegül Sönmez. Sanatatak acts like an art newspaper that covers art and culture events in Istanbul.

Art Unlimited (https://www.unlimitedrag.com) is another online and print publisher of art and culture news and articles.

Artfull Living (http://www.artfulliving.com.tr/) is another e-zine that covers the art and culture scene like Art Unlimited, without a special focus on the digital culture.

Popular

While digital art is not popular, design is a bit more visible. Among the young generation, communication design is the least valued compared to other design disciplines such as architecture, interior design, industrial design and art. Still, "digital" is the most visible in art and design as an innovative and future-looking form of design.

Audiences

During Bilgi University's student exhibitions (the "TRACK" exhibitions) and especially during the amber art and technology festival an audience was formed, which was a mix of those from the worlds of art and design, as well as technology and social sciences. Except for these specific events, it is not easy to talk about a distinct audience other than the usual art one. Besides this art audience, some of the diverse groups still follow specific digital-art focused events at Borusan and Akbank Sanat and Zorlu Digi-Launch.

Professional groups and organisations

Since the digital field intermingles with a large number of other disciplines and sectors, there is no one organisation dedicated to e-culture. Validation of the actors in e-culture rely on their multinational digital tribe or real life group that comes together around certain events and festivals.

Educational institutions

Digital culture has gained a lot from the existing design education, and especially from visual communication design, which in turn is derived from the traditional graphic design departments. Visual communication design has replaced the traditional graphic design departments. Art education, however, has stayed away from those developments. Art education in Turkey generally follows a conventional fine arts practice. On the other hand, contemporary art practices that utilise 3D installations, or tools such as sound and visuals, have increased since the 1990s and have begun to be accepted in the more traditional institutions such as Mimar Sinan University and Marmara University. However, there are no departments that focus solely on new media in any of the university arts faculties in Turkey.

Visual communications design departments
Digital culture in Turkey showed a parallel development with that of the visual communications design departments that were established in the late 1990s. Screen-based digital design gained momentum with these departments that were created in Turkey in both state and private universities over the past 15 years. VCD departments began to be established in universities from 1996 onwards. Yıldız Technical University was the first to initiate a programme in this field and issued both the first master's and PhD degrees. Similar departments quickly increased in number as private universities followed suit.

The Visual Communication Design (VCD) department of Bilgi University began organising annual exhibitions of students' works in 2001 and is one of the pioneers in this area. The "TRACK" exhibitions that were held annually until 2011 created widespread awareness of digital technologies among young people.

Today there are 186 universities and academies in Turkey, 56 of which are located in Istanbul. Most of these in Istanbul and a few in the bigger Anatolian cities such as Izmir, Ankara, and Eskişehir have a VCD department or similar design programmes in the intersection between design and technology.

ISEA

In 2011, ISEA (https://isea2011.sabanciuniv.edu/) took place in Istanbul with the cooperation of Sabancı University. ISEA was established in 1990 in the Netherlands as the Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts to organise a symposium initiated by a group of academics in 1998. Later, its name was changed to the International Symposium on Electronic Arts. ISEA is a non-profit organisation with the aim of extending the interdisciplinary academic discourse among international individuals and organisations that work in the areas of art, science and technology, and to develop an exchange of knowledge and experiences. Since its establishment, it has been organising symposiums, panel discussions, workshops and exhibitions in different countries by co-operating with local universities.

Non-professionals

Maker Movement (https://www.makerhareketi.com/), which was established in 2014 in Turkey, is coordinated by Halil Aksu, who is the initiator of the movement in Turkey. The first exhibition in collaboration with the international maker movement took place in 2015 at SantralIstanbul. In the same year, many maker initiatives started in parallel and collaborated with one another. One of the most established ones is Makers Turkey https://makersturkiye.com/. Many small semi-commercial or commercial initiatives also supported the movement. Since then, the maker movement has spread to other Turkish cities and in informal education as well.
Here is an article based on interviews published in 2018:
https://www.dunyahalleri.com/noldu-o-is-turkiyede-maker-hareketi/

Hacker spaces
The first hacker spaces paved the way for the maker movement, as some of its members came from the hacker spaces. One of the first hacker spaces was in Kadıköy in the late 2000s. In 2018, Hackerspace Istanbul was founded.
https://hackerspace.ist/index.html

Youth and e-culture

As everywhere in the world, youth are the native users of digital technologies. Although digital technologies are not an intrinsic part of formal school education, on average, 67.7 % of youth (15-24) use the internet in Turkey, with 80.6 % for men and 55.4 % for women. A large part of the internet usage occurs on mobile devices, mostly for accessing social media.

There are 12 million people in the 15-24 age group in Turkey – 16.3% of the population.

The digital art and design scene partly consists of students. Among this age group are graduates and young professionals and most are located in Istanbul and other big cities. Outside the big cities, very little is going on in respect to digital art and design culture.

Maker Atölye (https://makeratolye.com/) is a fab lab founded in 2015 in the area of Levent in Istanbul. They have a fully equipped fabrication laboratory and several educational programmes. They also have a section titled MakerÇocuk or MakerChildren (https://www.makercocuk.com/) that organises courses, workshops and learning events for children.

Venues

Atölye

Atölye (https://atolye.io/en/home/) is a "transdisciplinary innovation platform", by their own definition. Their story and reflections about the digital scene can be found in their publication:
https://atolye.io/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ATÖLYE-Reflections.pdf

IKSV

IKSV (http://www.iksv.org/en) is the most influential institution in the cultural life of Istanbul. IKSV has organised the Istanbul Film Festival for over 35 years now, as well as events such as the renowned Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul Music Festival, Jazz Festival and the Design Biennial. Thus, they are the best recognised and most active institution in many fields of culture. They are planning to open a fab lab next to Salon, a concert and event hall in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. This is set to become one of the most important locations for the digital art and design scene.

Others

Other venues where the digital communities gather apart from the maker places and fab labs are co-working spaces.

Also, cultural institutions especially Borusan Contemporary, Akbank Sanat and Zorlu Digi-Launch invite interested people based on their events.

Festivals and events

amberFestival

The "amber Art and Technology Festival" (http://amberplatform.org) was an annual festival including a new media exhibition, performances, workshops, seminars and artists' presentations. It was held in the second week of November. The amberFestival had nine editions between 2007 and 2015 and was successful in creating international visibility to the fields of art, technology and new media in Istanbul. It contributed to the proliferation of new media art in Turkey, aided art networking in Istanbul and was the catalyst for new ventures. The amberFestival is currently in a standby state due to the latest political and economic conditions in the country, including the withdrawal of Turkey from Creative Europe.

The festival founders define the aims of the initiative as follows: rendering the individual and social effects of new technologies visible through a critical approach and bringing them up for discussion; conducting research and being productive regarding new artistic expression that benefits from new technologies; increasing the visibility of young artists in Turkey working in the field of art and technology; introducing works of art from the international arena to art-lovers and artists in Turkey; incentivising active and creative usages to develop the young generation's perceptions of technology; highlighting important subjects relating to the field of art and technology to the public; and forming a new international art and technology network in Istanbul. Since its initial stages of development, the amberFestival succeeded in creating an international art and technology platform in its locality through reaching its aims to a great extent. The themes of the festivals held in past were: "Voice and Survival", "Interpassive Persona", "(Un)Cyborgable?", "Datacity", "Next Ecology", "Paratactic Commons", "Did You Plug It In?" and "Decentralisation". With each theme, the festival tried to bring the critical aspect of new technologies into the public domain.

Throughout the nine editions of the festival, more than 250 artists and researchers, such as pioneers or renowned artists Stelarc, Bill Vorn, Marcel·lí Antúnez Roca, Mladen Dolar, Robert Pfaller, presented their works.

amberConference

AmberConference was the first international art and technology conference in Turkey. The conference was organised by BIS in 2009, in parallel with the amber art and technology festival, with the cooperation of Istanbul Modern and the support of Sabancı University. The aim of the conference was to bring about a discussion platform addressing many themes and subjects in which science, art and technology come together. However, due to a lack of academic interest, the format of the conference was changed in 2012 to exclusively give place to seminars by invited speakers.

Kurye Video Organisation

Established in 2009, the Kurye Video Organisation has compiled a video archive and organised many events. One of these is the Kurye Festival, a video festival which has had two editions. The Kurye Video Organisation partnered with different festivals across the world, focusing on the field of new media and design, and became their affiliate in Turkey organising different new media festivals for a few years.

Plug-In: Digital in Art Fair

In 2017 and 2018, Irmak and Ceren Arkman, the founders and directors of the Kurye Video Organisation, organised the media art section Plugin as part of the Contemporary Istanbul art fair. This section constitutes a first in view of the representation of new media works in the art market, and generally comprises video and new media works selected from Turkey and abroad. An audio-visual holographic installation by Candaş Şişman and Deniz Kader found a buyer for a relatively high price during the 2014 edition of Contemporary Istanbul, which was the first time for a local media artwork in the local art market. In the following years Ebru Yetişkin curated the section for two more editions till its end as a section in 2018.

SantralIstanbul

In 2009, SantralIstanbul announced that it was opening the most comprehensive new media exhibition to date in Turkey. The exhibition was organised by İhsan Derman, head of the VCD department at Bilgi University, Ahmet Atıf Akın, an academic, and Bernhard Serexhe, the head curator of the ZKM. It comprised works from ZKM's collection and the "TRACK" exhibition in which VCD displayed its students' works. With the collection of the ZKM, the most important works in the field were collectively exhibited in Turkey for the first time. This exhibition titled "Haritasız" was also one that stuck in the minds of many people who weren't directly interested in new media.

In the same year, Pixelist, a satellite festival comprising of workshops for students, was held at SantralIstanbul with the cooperation of PixelAche of Helsinki.

In 2014, another exhibition titled "Formless" focused on the subject of "Fluid Reality" in new media art. Held in the Energy Museum on the SantralIstanbul campus with the participation of artists from Turkey and Serbia, it was co-curated by Derya Yücel and Una Popović.

Sabanci University and ISEA

One of the largest exhibitions in Istanbul opened during the ISEA conference, one of the biggest and oldest international academic events on new technologies. The Istanbul edition was organised by Sabancı University in 2011. Curated by Lanfranco Acetti and Özlem Şahin, it was held in public spaces and spread across the city in various locations such as Taksim Cumhuriyet Art Gallery, Şirket-i Hayriye Art Gallery, Kasa Gallery, Çemberlitaş Hamam and Nuru Ziya Suites. The exhibition was also important from the perspective that Istanbul got to host one of the most significant academic events dedicated to the field of new media.

Borusan

Borusan Music House exhibited its two new media selections in 2010 and 2011 under the title of "Matter-Light", which were accessible and memorable experiences for the general public in Beyoğlu. Later, Borusan Contemporary started regularly exhibiting its media art collection, besides temporary media art exhibitions and events, at its headquarters in Hisar. Borusan Contemporary is the only institution that has a focus on media art with its small but well-curated collection.

Zorlu Performing Arts Centre

The Zorlu Performing Arts Centre has organised digital/media art events since 2016. The touring exhibition on digital arts and history, "Digital Revolution", was their first show (http://dijitaldevrim.zorlupsm.com). Later they continued to organise digital-related events under the brand Digi.lounge. More than being a cultural institution, Zorlu PSM is a performance arts centre attached to a mall and residential complex targeting a well-heeled secular audience.

Dalgalar

Dalgalar (http://www.ebruyetiskin.com/dalgalar/) was the first large new media exhibition outside of the frame of a festival or institution. Dalgalar showed the works of Turkish media artists, commissioned by curator Ebru Yetişkin and organised with Block Art Space. Yetişkin curates exhibitions and writes about digital art.

Other important events

The 4th Istanbul Design Biennial that took place in 2018 became a meeting point for the digital design scene, with its digital art-related events and exhibitions. In 2010, Pera Museum hosted an exhibition titled "Japanese Media Arts Festival".

Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture

Istanbul 2010 ECC Agency (ECCA) did not show any special attention to new media or digital art, apart from amberFestival, which was selected by Visual Arts Department of ECCA -directed by Beral Madra- and supported for three years (2008-2010).

During 2010 ECC, Beral Madra organised touring exhibitions titled "Taşınabilir Sanat", taking contemporary art to the neighbourhoods of Istanbul that normally did not get touring exhibitions. In this frame "amber selection" a selection of new media works – curated by Ekmel Ertan was exhibited in the suburbs of Istanbul.

Prizes and grants

There is only one grant that promotes projects in the digital art field: bang. Art Innovation Prix (http://www.bangprix.org/), which began in 2017. The programme is organised by ArtBizTech and curated by Esra Özkan. It aims to inspire innovative business and technology ideas and support young people from different disciplines such as fine arts, engineering, design and genetics who combine science and technology with artistic perspectives. In 2017 and 2018, bang. Art Innovation Prix awarded 30 young artists and designers and promoted their work with an exhibition and a catalogue. The third edition of bang. Art Innovation Prix takes place in 2019.

Financial situation

Digital art is not supported by the state in Turkey, as is the situation for other contemporary art disciplines, except cinema. The Ministry of Culture or other state institutions such as the municipalities do not have any funding structure for contemporary art or digital art.

During 2010, the Istanbul European Capital of Culture period, the scene was supported through the 2010 IECC agency.

The only support available until 2016 was the EU's Creative Europe funding. Many independent organisations including amberPlatform/BIS supported themselves through Creative Europe projects.

Artists in the field of digital art or new media are mostly working in universities or running their own design-based business for a living.

Projects are mostly supported by either European funding bodies or local cultural institutions or companies. Cultural institutions only support projects if they are the main partner and if the activity is at their venue and in their programme.

Critics and researchers

There are very few people who write about digital art. Ebru Yetişkin is a productive researcher and writer in the field. Ekmel Ertan publishes critical and informative articles, as well as edited books and extended exhibition or festival catalogues. Fatih Aydoğdu also publishes online articles on digital art and sound art. Başak Şenova wrote many articles during the active period of NOMAD.

There are a few young researchers, curators and critics who write on the digital arts or digital culture in general either from the perspective of their profession, such as architecture or design, or with an interest in what is new or in case they have some political concerns.

If we look from the point of view of innovation, creative industries and the like, then a larger group of bloggers or video commenters can be mentioned. Serdar Kuzuloğlu is one of those who write about digitalisation in general with a critical approach.

(Social) media about e-culture

There is no long-term dedicated Facebook page or Twitter account focusing on digital culture.

Resources

In 2001, the 81st issue of the magazine Sanat Dünyamız focused on internet art. In its section titled "Contemporary", it included a Turkish translation of "BitStreams and 010101: An Online Symposium on Digital Art", a symposium held regarding the exhibitions titled "BitStreams" (Whitney Museum of American Art) and "010101" (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). The section dedicated to the symposium included Faruk Ulay's article titled "Net.Art: Alone But All Together"; Melih Katıkol's article titled "Frozen Conversation"; and Cem Gencer's "Net-Art? What's That?" This was one of the first publications on the discipline of new media in Turkey to appear on the shelves.

Since then, many magazines have published articles on digital culture, but there is no dedicated digital art, design or culture magazine apart from the commercial ones on digital games, digital photography, Photoshop, etc.

amberPlatform publishes amber Art and Technology Festival's catalogues, the catalogues of their other exhibitions and edited books on media art and digital culture. See http://amberplatform.org for pdf files and more.

Bilgi University's research centre for cultural policies and culture management (KPY) has many research and published many books (https://kpy.bilgi.edu.tr/tr/yayinlar/kitaplar/) on cultural sectors; some of them include the creative industries and digital culture. Please check the link for details.

IKSV has research and publications on the arts sector, not specifically on digitalisation, but their publications also include some related topics. The reports can be found here: http://www.iksv.org/tr/kultur-politikalari-calismalari/raporlar

Facilities

In Istanbul you go to Perşembe Pazarı, a neighbourhood in Karaköy, if you need to get anything from metal to wood, aluminium, electric motors or pneumatic devices. You can also get custom parts produced. You can also go to Selanik Pasajı in Karaköy to get electronic components. Since the work is cheap and the craftsmen are capable of bringing quick solutions and deliver quality work, artists and designers collaborate with them to get production services.

There are a number of fab labs in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul. In this text you'll find only the ones listed in https://www.fablabs.io/, which is the online social network of the international fab lab community.

ATÖLYE is a fab lab – called Prototyping Lab – with a wide community. They explain the aim of the lab as follows: "In Prototyping Lab, we aim to develop and materialise ideas that form in creative minds. We provide physical and digital prototyping equipment in our laboratory to individuals with a common purpose and a passion for production, and help them to turn their ideas into designs, and their designs into products." (https://atolye.io/en/prototypinglab/) Prototyping Lab is one of the assets of ATÖLYE. They define themselves as a transdisciplinary innovation platform that provides a creative and innovative foundation for its team and community of like-minded individuals to develop new collaborations and projects with long-term value. ATÖLYE is also a co-working space and an important actor in the field of digital design. It was started in 2015 by two young entrepreneurs and has since become a successful model of its type.

Fablab Istanbul opened in Kadir Has University with the support of the Development Agency Istanbul in 2014. It was project-managed and founded by a young entrepreneur on behalf of the university and it started operating with his suggested team. After the founders left, it became an internal lab for students with only a few public events per year.

Maker Atölye https://makeratolye.com/ is a fab lab founded in 2015 in Levent Istanbul. They have a fab lab and several educational programmes. They also have a section titled MakerÇocuk https://www.makercocuk.com/ (MakerChildren), which organises courses, workshops and learning events for children. InnoFablab is a touring fab lab, which coordinates with Turkish universities. Innofablab is integrated into the InnoCampus innovation and entrepreneurship programme. Containers are set up in central, accessible locations on university campuses or in cities. The fab lab is accessible by the public and is also actively used by the programme startups that build their prototypes here. The container structure is 90 square metres, which consists of the lab and a co-working space where the workshops take place.

Fabutopia is situated in the Esenyurt area of Istanbul, which accommodates tens of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. They do not yet have a website (at November 2018), but are registered in the fab lab network https://www.fablabs.io/labs/ fabutopia, where their development can be followed. On this website, we can read that the reason for setting up Fabutopia is as follows: "Since many refugees cannot find a suitable fab lab in Istanbul because of the language gap, we decided to provide a creative environment for the Arabic speaking refugees in Istanbul." The founders are a group of engineers living and studying in Istanbul who decided to do something to help the refugees, and found that the best route was to start a fab lab and create a community of makers, by providing the necessary tools and giving courses in electronics and mechanical work.

OPENFAB https://openfab.ozyegin.edu.tr/tr is another university that initiated a fab lab; it was founded under the umbrella of the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Özyeğin University to promote the "maker movement", support hardware entrepreneurship and serve in the field of education technologies. Believing that technology is for everyone, Openfab endeavours to teach individuals and organisations how applications, tools and devices work, and demonstrate how they can be produced by everyone. Since its establishment in 2015, Openfab has offered numerous creative training programmes on coding, 3D printing, design and entrepreneurship to more than 3,000 participants. IKSV is also planning to open a fab lab in their building next to Salon IKSV. Follow the link http://www.iksv.org/ for further information.

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