Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park, Istanbul

Büyükçekmece, Ulus, 34537

Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park surrounds a freshwater lake on the western outskirts of Istanbul, Turkey. It's situated in the Ulus neighbourhood of the Büyükçekmece district, approximately 50 kilometres away from the city centre of Istanbul.

This Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park project, delivered by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, seeks to restore, protect, and sustainably manage the water basin while enhancing recreational opportunities. The project is designed to benefit the local community, particularly the residents of the Büyükçekmece region, as well as the city as a whole.

While access to the park from Ulus Neighbourhood is provided via a footbridge a fast-moving four-lane highway separates the neighbourhood from the park. This barrier limits safe and inclusive access, underscoring the need for better connectivity to ensure that the park is accessible and enjoyable for all.

As such, this competition focuses on improving connections between urban spaces and the water's edge to foster ecological sustainability and improve public access to the space. This is a shared priority for Istanbul's urban development strategies, aligning with broader city-wide goals.



Figure 1) View from the lake of the Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park - Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

Approx. site area:
150 hectares, consisting of the Ulus Neighbourhood, road connection and entrance of the Büyükçekmece Lake and green spaces.

Key Information: The Ulus Neighbourhood is home to both migrant and local residents, and a mixture of housing densities, household sizes, ages, education levels, and incomes.

Priority areas & main expectations:
The competition challenges participants to improve pedestrian connections to the park, contributing to the goal of creating a multifunctional space that balances recreation, education, and connecting people with nature.



Figure 2) Competition focus area - Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park Area in connection with Ulus Neighborhood - Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality



Figure 3) Study site (in red) in relation to the rest of the lake - Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

Presentation of the Site & Development Expectations

The Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park is a flagship public implementation of this innovative vision, representing a shift away from the traditional park concept towards environmental sustainability, ecosystem protection and natural resource management.

The project envisions the connection between the neighbourhood and the lake through '**urban blue spaces**', which are essential not only for ecological balance but also for increasing public engagement with water landscapes in urban settings. Urban blue spaces, including lakes, rivers and coastal zones, serve as important areas for recreation and social interaction, providing both ecological value and health benefits to city dwellers.

The main target groups of this project are Istanbul residents, sports enthusiasts, nature lovers, school children and various school groups. By prioritising the protection, restoration and sustainable management of the Büyükçekmece watershed, the project aims to develop recreational opportunities within linear green-blue corridors that extend through

both rural and urban landscapes. By integrating natural water resources, these corridors provide new opportunities for outdoor activities, community events and educational experiences, making them accessible to a wide range of people and fostering a deeper connection between people and urban nature.

In line with the urban blue space literature, such areas create a sustainable interface between natural and urban environments, making water landscapes more accessible while maintaining their ecological integrity. This connection highlights ***how green-blue networks can mitigate the pressures of urbanisation, enhance urban resilience and promote inclusive public spaces that support physical and mental well-being.***



Figure 4) Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park green areas - Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

Prior to the development of the park, the area around the Büyükçekmece basin suffered from uncontrolled use, with waste accumulating around the area and flowing unfiltered into the water, causing significant pollution. The lack of security discouraged local residents from visiting the area with their families, as safety concerns made it an undesirable recreational space.

Since October 2023, the IMM Natural Habitat Parks Chieftaincy has been implementing a series of conservation interventions and awareness campaigns aimed at promoting both conservation and responsible use of the area. These initiatives are part of a broader conservation effort undertaken by IMM in collaboration with ISKI, which was formalised by a Joint Service Protocol on 17 February 2021. This agreement covers key water basins, including Büyükçekmece, Terkos and Ömerli, all of which are integral to Istanbul's ecosystem. *The Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park project not only revitalises the area but also enhances urban biodiversity, protects local wildlife and supports a cleaner, more sustainable environment.*

Through these concerted efforts, the area has been transformed from an unsafe, neglected space into **a vibrant recreational zone** where local families can now safely walk, cycle and gather. This transformation exemplifies the project's emphasis on balanced conservation and use, which is in line with IMM's wider objectives to create accessible, high-quality green-blue spaces that connect people with urban nature and contribute to a more resilient urban ecosystem.

Despite the significant improvements, the **link between the neighbourhood and this urban green space remains underdeveloped**. Improving this link is essential to ensure that the park can be fully integrated into the daily lives of the local community. Therefore, we encourage participating students to propose contemporary urban design strategies that prioritise inclusive and accessible spaces. Approaches such as inclusive design and gamification practices are particularly encouraged, as they have proven effective in creating engaging, user-centred environments that invite diverse community participation.



Figure 5) The entrance, car park and road connection to the neighbourhood. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.



Figure 6) A view from the footbridge connection to the area.

Through these design proposals, students are expected to *explore innovative ways to bridge the gap between the neighbourhood and the park, promoting spaces that are welcoming inclusively to all ages and backgrounds*. Whether through playful, interactive installations, accessible pathways or social gathering places, the aim is to develop design solutions that not only enhance connectivity but also transform the park into a shared, vibrant space where the community feels welcome and involved.

Therefore, this project represents a pioneering effort by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM). Under the Department of Parks, Gardens and Green Spaces, and more specifically through the newly established Urban Ecological Systems Directorate, this initiative aims to preserve, develop and ensure the sustainability of Istanbul's urban systems. Notably, it is the first time in Turkey, and globally at the local government level, that such an institution has been established with a dedicated focus on urban ecological systems. It aims to raise public awareness of the importance of watershed conservation and environmental sustainability while creating educational and recreational spaces that engage people with nature. This includes promoting nature-based activities such as walking and wildlife watching, while also serving as an open-air nature and water museum for diverse groups.

Specifically, students should on the following strategies to improve the area:

- **Creating an Inclusive and Appealing Space:** Students should develop strategies that enhance the park's role as an open-air biodiversity museum, ensuring it remains inclusive and attractive for diverse user groups.
- **Improving Accessibility and Pedestrian Connections:** Proposals should strengthen access to the park from surrounding neighbourhoods, especially by enhancing pedestrian connections between Ulus and Hürriyet neighbourhoods through Taşocağı Street and Çatalca Road, while preserving local biodiversity.
- **Incorporating Educational and Interactive Features:** To make the area an engaging destination, designs should include educational signage along pathways, wildlife observation points, and digital or gamified elements to attract and educate younger visitors about biodiversity and conservation.
- **Increasing Community Engagement and Stewardship:** Strategies should prioritise community involvement by integrating local knowledge and insights from residents, helping foster a sense of stewardship and active participation in the park's maintenance and activities.
- **Increasing Vegetation and Plant Cover:** Plans should emphasise enhancing the park's ecological landscape by increasing plant cover and vegetation, contributing to biodiversity and creating a natural refuge within the urban setting.
- **Creating a Multifunctional, Ecological Space:** The design should balance ecological awareness with recreational needs by creating a multifunctional space that encourages sustainable use, fosters community engagement, and highlights the importance of preserving natural resources.
- **Fostering Connectivity and Community Bonding:** The ultimate goal is to create a "living museum" that integrates recreation, education, and transportation, building a meaningful link between nature, residents, and visitors in the local community.

Proposals should clearly address these strategies in the project boards, demonstrating how the design effectively conveys its environmental and community-focused goals to the public.



Figure 7) The footbridge connects to the blue area through a four-lane road. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

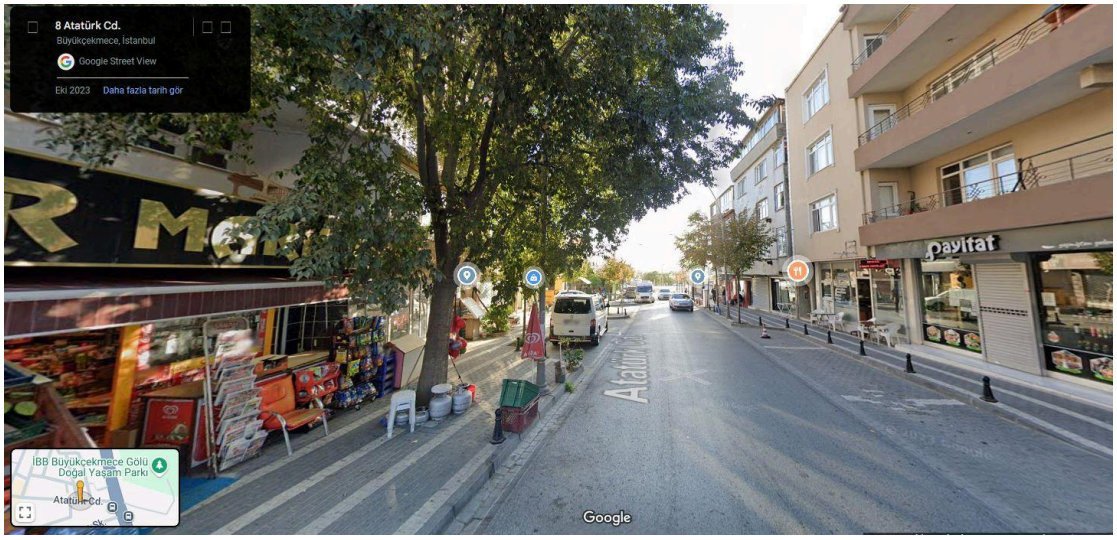


Figure 8) The main street (Atatürk Caddesi) connects to the blue area. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality



Figure 9) A view from the footbridge connection to the area. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality



Figure 10) The traffic lights and pedestrian connection for the blue space. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

The first phase of the Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park covers an area of 1,495,123.50 square metres and is being implemented in two stages. For instance, projects such as the Ayamama Valley, where we have provided technical consultancy in collaboration with C40, highlight the importance of creating seamless urban design connections on behalf of mobility and livability.



Figure 11) Entrance to the Park. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.



Figure 12) A view from inside the green park area with biodiversity information panels. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.





Figures 15 & 14) View from the green park area to the lakeside.Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

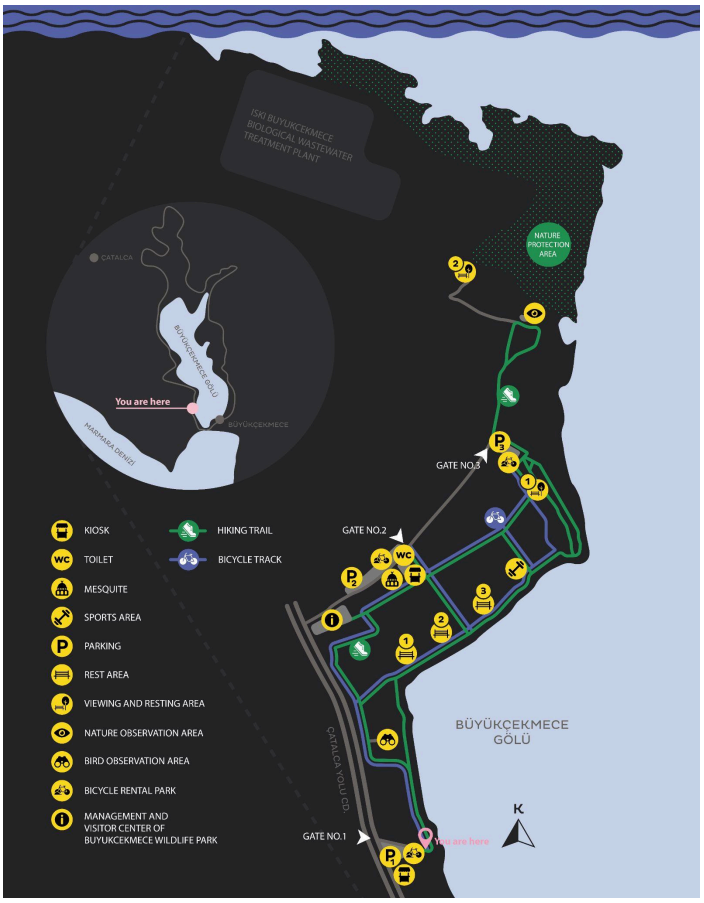


Figure 17) The map of Büyükçekmece Lake Natural Habitat Park

City Climate Priorities and Specific Environmental Challenges

Istanbul is committed to reducing its carbon emissions and becoming a climate-resilient city. As a rapidly urbanising coastal city, it is highly vulnerable to climate change-related hazards such as flooding, heatwaves, changing precipitation, drought and the urban heat island effect.

To mitigate these impacts, Istanbul is investing in strengthening its green infrastructure and increasing forest cover in the city. In particular, the city has expanded its carbon sinks, waste infrastructure, and green transport and is shifting towards a more circular economy, through rainwater harvesting and wastewater recovery infrastructure.

IMM has set effective targets for emission reduction and adaptation strategies in the fight against the climate crisis. Following this process, climate justice will be taken into account in social policies for vulnerable groups that will be most affected by climate change. All of IMM's plans and work will be carried out in a way that serves the Sustainable Development Goals with a priority on climate action.

Related plans
Istanbul Climate Change Action Plan: As a member of the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) signed the Deadline 2020 document in October 2019 and adopted its goal of becoming a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient city by 2050. This increased level of commitment means the city needs to develop and adopt a revised climate action plan – a strategic document setting out how Istanbul will

achieve its 2050 carbon-neutral goal. This report has been prepared by the IMM team within the context of the C40 Technical Assistance Program specially offered by C40 for Istanbul.

Istanbul Sustainable Energy And Climate Action Plan: SECAP targets energy efficiency measures in the sectors with the greatest potential for energy savings, such as buildings, industry, transport and waste. IMM is responsible for public transport, waste management, water supply, sewerage and treatment, recreational areas, road paving, town planning and zoning.

Specific Planning Rules and Regulations

Construction is not permitted within a 300-metre distance from the lake to ensure the protection of the ecosystem and water resources.

Language Requirements

Proposals must be submitted in English.

City-specific Awards

Selected projects will be given the opportunity to present their proposals to the relevant department heads and municipal directorates. A special meeting will be organised to allow the students to share their ideas directly with the decision-makers and potentially influence the future development of the park.