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Change of Daily Life Practices in Disadvantages Groups Settlement through Urban Regeneration

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Abstract

This paper looks into how daily life and identity of Roma people in Turkey are faced of altering by the urban regeneration projects. As a disadvantage group, Roma communities have been faced with urban development projects due to economical, social and physical deformation in their neighborhoods. Consequently, Roma neighborhoods get into subject of urban development plans which are aim to transform existing neighborhood into improved standards of life in the name of generating a decent and healthy social and physical environment for residents, to overcome problems of unemployment and social exclusion. None of projects achieved thoroughly to its aims. Therefore, this paper will focus on two urban regeneration projects on Roma settlements in Turkey which are located in Izmir and Istanbul. While analyzing the completed project in Istanbul, its experience will guide to evaluate ongoing urban regeneration project in Izmir. In so doing, we will voice the demands' of Roma people in Ege district by an in depth analysis of field work which is consist of interviews, authors' observations and surveys. Lefebvre's notion of right to the city movement will stimulate framework for analyzing fieldwork findings. The paper ends with a discussion on how the project cause altering Ege neighborhood's culture and how we can contribute to protect existing daily life of Roma citizens.

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1. Introduction

In Turkey, after 2000s, urban regeneration of squatter housing areas has been an important issue for local and central governments as well as private enterprises. The main concern of regeneration projects generally focused on reconstructing deprived areas, creating healthier, livable environment, and sustaining economical and social development of area. However, in reality, it did not occur as imagined. These regeneration areas aimed at neighborhoods of minorities, marginalized people or where low-income citizens live. Instead of improving life standards of people, projects caused gentrification and displacement of people (Atkinson, 2000:150) Roma people, as a minority group in Turkey, have been the central subjects of urban regeneration projects. Their daily life is being reshaped as a result of these urban interventions and they do not have the power to decide or participate in these projects. They comply with other people's preferences and are forced to accept what others thought and decided for them. In this repressive situation, "right to the city" became a catchphrase for Turkey's urbanization. Social movements increased with the aim of enfranchisement of citizens against the reconstruction the urban environment as in Sulukule case.

In this context, paper we will analyze potential of Lefebvre's idea of "right to the city" against disenfranchisement in literature (Friedmann, 1995; Harvey, 2012; Purcell, 2002; Soja, 2000). His ideas will provide an analytical framework to analyze effect of urban regeneration projects on Roma people of Turkey in two different cities. These projects are Istanbul Sulukule urban regeneration project and Izmir, Ege Neighborhood urban regeneration project. Sulukule project has already been completed; however Ege case is still in project process. In this paper, drawing from the bitter experiences of Sulukule, we will argue how Ege project should process in a way that respects people's right to the city.

2. Notion of Right to the city

"Urban regeneration" literally means recreating, renewing or reconstructing existing urban area. However, it became as a tool of urbanization in a way of absorption of capital's surplus value (Harvey, 2012:7). Cities are being reconstructed and reshaped in the name of urban regeneration. This is called creative destruction (Harvey, 2012: 16). During the process of regeneration projects, main concern is to solve neither physical deprivation, nor social problems. Its aim is to have new fields for absorption of surplus value.

The first urban regeneration took place in 1850s in Paris then it continued in other countries in world such as England, United States. As a reaction to that, in 1968, revolts occurred at cities by those who were excluded urban redevelopment plan. This emergence of urban reform movements were inspired by decline of democracy and enfranchisement in cities. This political and social conjuncture also inspired Lefebvre and he developed "le droit a la ville" (Right to the city) concept based on the parallel social movements in Europe and Latin America. The concept of right to the city originates in Lefebvre's work with "radical restructuring of social, political and economic relations" and it "is an argument for profoundly reworking both the social relations of capitalism and the current structure of liberal democratic citizenship" (Purcell, 2002).

Lefebvre has a more radical and open ended vision for urban politics and argues that new urban politics should involve participation and enfranchisement of inhabitants. According to Lefebvre, inhabitants (citadins) mean the whole society who lives in the city; the term is not used for a specific groups. It is for those who inhabit in a city (Lefebvre, 1996:158) and who contribute to the body of urban lived experience and urban social space. Being inhabitant does not depend on nationality, ethnicity or birth (Purcell, 2002). So in this notion, he mentions people who live in the city not just people who have the capital. In this work, he argues for the idea of shifting the power of the decision-making from capital to inhabitants. This makes the core idea of the right to the city concept. This concept involves two principles which are; right to participation and right to appropriation.

Right to the participation argues that "inhabitants should play a central role in any decision that contributes to the production of urban space" (Purcell, 2002:104). According to Lefebvre (1996) decision making process of shaping urban space is empowering for inhabitants. On the other hand, Right to the appropriation is inhabitants' full and

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