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Urban Transformation Processes in Illegal Housing Areas in Turkey

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Abstract

The urbanization problems encountered by Turkey over the last 50 years have also caused deep-rooted problems in other sectors. This study examined the transformation processes that ultimately created the squatter communities and the illegal housing areas in Turkey during the post-1980s. To provide an objective picture of the transformation processes in those areas, two different samples were selected because different transformation processes emerged in different squatter areas in which the same improvement plan was applied. We investigated the Ankara-Çankaya and Izmir-Konak municipalities to determine the effects of market-based urban transformation processes on the organizational structure of individuals and constructors in the squatter communities and illegal housing areas where the improvement plans were applied.

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1. Introduction

In the 1950s, Turkey was subject to mass migrations, with people moving from rural to urban areas. The national population was 19 million in 1945, and the population living in the cities represented 25% of the total. However, over the next 10 years, the urban population ratio increased to 32%. By 1980, this ratio had grown to 44% and by 2000, 65%. However, this apparently rapid process resulted not only in changes in the spatial organization of the population but also in a series of important changes at the economic, political, social and cultural levels. Turkey's government could not provide adequate shelter to the new 'urban population'; therefore, the migrant groups built

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their own dwellings a special and original form of housing called the ‘gecekondus’. In the 1950s, the government began to view the large population who lived in the gecekondu as potential votes. With the Law of Gecekondu (no.775), these areas garnered infrastructure and new roads and streets, and the areas took on a lower-middle-class, residential character (Uzun, Cete and Palancıoğlu, 2010). However, after the 1960s, the gecekondu, which had begun as individual solutions to the housing needs of the urban poor, grew in number and changed character. Because the public land stock was eroded during the 1960s, it became impossible for poor individuals to invade public lands and build their own gecekondu. Therefore, some newcomers needed to become tenants of the gecekondu owners who had already constructed their second or third gecekondu to obtain rental income (Demir and Yılmaz, 2012).

This study’s objective is to investigate the conditions under which this transformation process occurred in Turkey, its causes, and its organizational structure by focusing on two different cities. Another purpose of this study is to investigate the formation of organizational and financial structures in the transformation processes and to understand the effect of decisions regarding the improvement plans on this process.

1.1. The Case of Urban Transformation

Urban transformation emerges as a possibility that can be implemented through the determination and evaluation of all city institutions, the production of alternative solutions, and the making and implementation of decisions as well as by taking responsibility for monitoring the process as a whole (Karakurt, 2013). There are different definitions of the concept of urban transformation put forth by various scientists: Linchfield (1992): ‘Urban transformation is the reconciliation of the need of better understanding of processes of urban decay and results, obtained in the reconciliation process’, Donnison (1993): ‘Urban transformation is the method of resolving the problems, concentrated in urban blights, in a coordinated manner’, and Robers (2000): ‘Urban transformation, as a comprehensive and integrated vision and action, is trying to ensure the continuous improvement of area’s economic, physical, social and environmental conditions’. Urban transformation can be broadly summarized as the action of providing a permanent solution to the economical, physical, social and environmental problems in a comprehensive manner for an altered urban area. Thus, the understanding and reconciliation of the urban decay process, the improvement of low living conditions for the public health, the elimination of the lack of physical and social infrastructure and the coordination and resolution of problems in a continuous manner can be highlighted. In addition, planning and coordinating existing places instead of creating new areas and restoring the lost continuity in the urban tissue can be highlighted as other aspects of the transformation (Durguter, 2012).

Rhodri (2012) states that problems of residential decline should be addressed across the entire residential area because they appear not only in commercial and business areas but also in residential areas, with physical and socio-economic features (Rhodri, 2012). Today, in European countries and in Turkey, residential transformation is widespread. In Europe, to reduce the negative impact of residential transformation, various precautions have been undertaken for 60 years. However, Turkey has considered this an important issue for 20 years. The concept of urban transformation began to emerge in the early 19th century when the city’s social, cultural, and economic needs, impacted by physical factors, led the city to change. Urban areas resemble living organisms that also become dilapidated over time because of increasing population, natural disasters and poor construction (Şişman and Kibaroğlu, 2009). The earthquake phenomenon has been extremely influential in placing the concept of ‘urban transformation’ on the agenda in Turkey. In particular, the Marmara Earthquake in 1999 compelled people to understand the seriousness of the earthquake factor in large cities. This earthquake strikingly demonstrated the disadvantages of unhealthy, unsafe construction and the importance of urban transformation. In Turkey, the concept of urban regeneration was first introduced in the early 2000s under the concept of urban transformation. This concept was presented as an approach that could solve the urban problems of rapidly growing cities in Turkey. To date, legislation in Turkey around urban transformation has resulted in fragmented and unconnected projects inside and in the peripheries of the cities; this supports gentrification, social isolation, and exclusion (Saraç, 2015). The rapid increase in housing construction in Turkey has resulted in under-occupied housing stock. The under-occupation of these newly constructed areas is dependent on household income and the ability to purchase and/or rent these new housing units due to affordability problems; the occupants elect to reside in less expensive neighborhoods.

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