



# The last round in restructuring the city: Urban regeneration becomes a state policy of disaster prevention in Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

In Turkey, urban regeneration mirrors a shift towards neoliberal urban policies based on economic strategy-making. The measures in the name of “regeneration for liveable cities” are rapidly transforming the appearance of inner-city areas with great revenue-generating potential. The boundaries of legitimization are described in areas where the process of depression is visible and the social acceptability of the residential population decreases, and at present are under the risk of disasters, mostly in squatter housing areas and dilapidated historical centers. Legal regulations have been reformulating this system since the 1980s so that applications can be supported effortlessly and facilitated through government assistance.

This study discusses the final legal regulation, namely Law No. 6306, which is the Law on the Regeneration of Areas Under the Risk of Disasters. The study leans on the hypothesis that: This law has opened a new gateway for a fast and organized system of urban regeneration. Urban regeneration has gained a new momentum with the inclusion of risk identification in a country under the risk of earthquakes. The study methodology begins with a literature review concerning urban regeneration, development of urban regeneration in Turkey, and disaster risk. Second, legal regulations in favor of urban regeneration and Cabinet decisions on risk areas in Turkey are critically examined. Finally, areas that are designated to be under the risk of disasters in Ankara are analyzed based on earthquake risk identification, urban development, and urban policy strategies in favor of regeneration.

The findings of the study substantiate the hypothesis. Regeneration is now increasing the resilience of societies to natural disasters. However, the development of the criteria of disaster risk as a reason for regeneration is not mature enough to be a part of a mitigation strategy and an integrated planning approach. While all risk areas are in deprived or squatter housing areas, risk assessment is not so difficult in terms of physical vulnerability. Economic and social vulnerabilities are out of the scope, and there is no regeneration perspective. Thus, the interventions that are performed with this law produce the same results, that is, a single recipe of regeneration which is poorly integrated into a planned urban development strategy. Gentrification is still the unpronounced, yet expected, result.

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## 1. Introduction

The opening discussions regarding urban regeneration in Turkey is an extension of the government policies that have been shaped by the efforts at securing a place in the 1980s' extrovert globalized world order. In order to make urban areas attractive for the global capital, restructuring of urban economy has been defined within a system of transformation within this process. In fact, to reacquire the rent gap in the cities' most appealing locations and in the creation of project-based high-income/status office and housing areas within the limits of a reorganized neoliberal market economy, urban revival has been rapid as an essential tool of this system.

To circulate the capital, the preferred intervention style has been the supporting of the property market in this process. This can be

accomplished through a planning environment in which planning follows demand, and plan conditions are determined according to the area to be invested in. In fact this is a global trend: The city's economic and political elites and their discourses legitimize the projects and the associated institutional and regulatory framework (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002). In Turkey, legal regulations reformulate this system so that applications can be supported and facilitated through government assistance. However, regeneration projects for dilapidated but inner-city urban areas have begun to dominate the urban planning agenda (Göksu, 2008; Tekeli, 2003 qtd. in Dinçer, 2011; Güzey, 2013; Türkün, 2011).

For improving the resilience of the society to natural disasters, giving special emphasis to the final legal regulation which has opened a new gateway for the restructuring of urban space now, this study first discusses the evolution of urban regeneration. In order to ease the application of urban regeneration and their enforcement, new

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declarations on urban areas have been formulated that are found to be under disaster risk, evaluated first within the perspective of legal regulations.

The Law on the Regeneration of Areas Under the Risk of Disasters, No. 6306 was realized on 16.05.12. With this law in place, urban regeneration has gained a new momentum with the inclusion of concepts related with disaster prevention such as risk identification, vulnerability, risk mapping, and the like. “Regeneration is now for increasing the resilience of societies to natural disasters within the scope of mitigation strategies,” as declared by the government institutions.

This evaluation conveys a second set of discussion which speaks about the points of legitimization – depression, increasing crime rates, social unacceptability of the population, and currently risk of disasters – developed for urban regeneration to become the basic means of transformation in urban areas. Under these circumstances, the pressure on inner-city areas, which are mostly squatter housing areas and historic urban centers with low standards of living and populated by the urban poor but which have high rent-gaining potential, has further increased (Türkün, 2011).

Within this perspective, the hypothesis of this study is that: Urban regeneration in Turkey is the primary tool to bring deprived urban areas into the real estate market using urban rhetorics based on deprivation, poverty, crime, and currently disaster risk; these rhetorics are legitimized through legal regulations. In fact, to create project-based high-income/status office and housing areas, the regeneration formula, which has reached its maturity as a state policy, with the last regulation, has brought the gentrification of inner-city areas for the restructuring of the city. The boundaries of legitimization are described through the squatter housing areas and historic centers in the hands of a powerful state within the limits of a reorganized neoliberal market economy.

Based on this hypothesis, the method of the study is threefold:

1. A review of literature consisting of the study and publications from national and international sources relating to urban regeneration, development of urban regeneration in Turkey, disaster risk identification, and disaster reduction
2. Examination and comparison of legal regulations in favor of urban regeneration and Cabinet decisions on risk areas in Turkey
3. Analysis of risk areas in Ankara based on earthquake risk identification, urban development, urban policy strategies in favor of regeneration, and urban rent development.

Based on the key points of the literature survey, first the study critically analyzes the legal regulations (laws and bylaws) for “the success” of urban regeneration in Turkey. All laws and bylaws that were structured directly for urban regeneration and the related articles of all other laws in implementation are examined separately. Each article related to urban regeneration is then analyzed in order to understand the development of “the way” to ease the implementation of urban regeneration in Turkey. This is done to increase the level of achievement of the targets set by the players of the urban regeneration projects.

The last legal regulation, the Law on the Regeneration of Areas Under the Risk of Disasters, No. 6306, is briefly examined to define the final criteria of disaster risk that was developed to be the reason for urban regeneration. Meanwhile, each Cabinet decision on risk areas within the scope of 6306 (220 in total) is first analyzed in order to find a common criteria for risk identification. Second, in Turkey, risk areas with respect to earthquake zones, flooding zones, and erosion zones are examined in different cities are examined. Analysis of risk areas is further used to draw out the main issues and considerations of how planning and building regulations are contributing to disaster risk reduction through urban regeneration in Turkey. Then the attainability of these common criteria in the scope of urban regeneration projects is evaluated within the framework of initially Istanbul but in a general scope, and then in Ankara where urban regeneration is most common and intensive in Turkey. Risk areas in Istanbul are analyzed with respect

to earthquake zones, as well as the geological structure. The urban regeneration areas in Ankara, which is the primary focus of this study, are analyzed first based on article 73 of the Law of Municipalities, which is the preliminary legal regulation in favor of regeneration. Second, these areas are analyzed based on Law No. 6306 to find the common criteria for risk identification. By doing this procedural analysis, through the development process, the researcher can find ways to ease the implementation of urban regeneration in Turkey. Risk areas in Ankara (28 in total) are analyzed with respect to only earthquake zones because there are no intense zones of flooding and erosion in this city.

Although most of the urban regeneration projects are situated in squatter housing areas, two neighborhoods, Namık Kemal in the district of Çankaya and Seyfi Demirsoy in the district of Altındağ, are found to be in regular settlement areas. This is interesting because the physical structure prepares the necessary grounds for risk identification, which is eliminated in these cases. Thus, these areas are examined in detail because they are found to be under disaster risk. Because they are subject to widespread public rejection, media discussions on their approval as risk areas are discussed as well.

Thus, the review of literature and the legal regulations, the discussion on Cabinet decisions, and risk areas are used to describe the main issues and considerations of how urban regeneration has become a government-assisted tool of achievement of first physical restructuring and then gentrification in central city areas with urban land rent touching high expectations.

## 2. Evolution of urban regeneration in Turkey

During the last decade, with the market-supporting reforms of the 1990s, the state’s role in recasting urban space in Turkey entered a new phase. The inner city has now become the main source of capital growth. This is part of a global trend, namely a “New Urban Policy,” which is associated with new forms of urban interventions, characterized by less democratic and more elite-driven priorities (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Swyngedouw et al., 2002) such as high-quality office and residential areas mostly in central locations (Fig. 2.1).

### 2.1. The new urban policy

Large-scale and emblematic projects support the new global urban policy prescribed (Swyngedouw et al., 2002) and are often presented as project-focused, market-led initiatives, which have replaced statutory planning as the primary means of intervention. Yet, despite the rhetoric, the replacement of the plan by the project has not displaced planning from the urban arena. There has been a drastic reorganization of planning and urban policy-making structures and a rise of new modes of intervention, planning goals, tools, and institutions (Gunder, 2010; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Taşan-Kok, 2010) that are reformulated within a system of legal regulations of the powerful state apparatus. At present, the state is the central authority enabling the local governments; the related state institutions; and the private sector such as developers, landowners, advisors, and professionals to be a part of an urban coalition with the same neoliberal discourse of increasing urban land rents and real estate development. This coalition in itself contains the neoliberal rhetoric shaped by institutional regulations, the motivation to increase urban profits, and the support of ownership-based development plans which look more evident by means of legal regulations and the increasing initiatives of the state institutions (Türkün, 2011). Thus, based on the reasoning concept that considers economic efficacy first, the areas where the planning discipline could intervene were limited only to mega-projects to be realized at the positions that would attract the investment capital of the urban elites.

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