

Stream 19: Learning from urban conflict

Hate Gentrification, Love the Gentrifier: Conservative Resistance in Tophane

Dicle Kızıldere, PhD Student, The Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI)- Urban Studies Department, Viale Francesco Crispi, 7 67100 L'Aquila (AQ), ITALY. T: 00905056756900 E: diclekizildere@gmail.com

Zeynep Günay, Associate Prof. Dr., Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Taskisla - Taksim TR-34437 Istanbul, TURKEY. T: +902122931300/2841. E: gunayz@itu.edu.tr

This paper examines conservatism as one of main the contextual causalities that have potential to resist to gentrification. Since the 1960s, there has been a sizable literature concerning causal explanations on gentrification. Most of these, though, have either presented “an oversimplified ideal Weberian type of gentrification” or focused on similarities of “successful” processes and outcomes around the world. The paper argues that the generalizations brought by these scholar works have introduced a limited overview on the conflict and eventually provided a risk to miss the verified nature of this chaotic concept, including the context-dependent causalities of “unsuccessful” but “resistant” gentrification stories. To overcome this dominant explanatory framework and inadequate representation of different gentrification processes, the paper highlights Tophane case in Istanbul, where “conservatism” plays a key role as a succeder local causality in resisting gentrification.

Tophane, which is encircled by already gentrified and gentrifying zones including new large-scale redevelopment project sites at the south and the economic and cultural hub – Beyoglu at the north, is the latest and “inevitable” hotspot both for indirect and state-led gentrification. The process that captured neighbourhood’s transformation through the blooming of galleries, design shops, hostels and local retail stores was seemed very predictable in the beginning of 2000s. Approaching to the 2010s, neoliberal restructuring together with gentrification politics of the state started to be challenged, interestingly and unexpectedly, by the neighbourhood’s local causalities including relative embeddedness of local Tophane community and presence of political activism -whereas conservatism is of major importance. Conservatism, which can be understood as socio-political norms and values defined largely through religion in Turkish context, has become the main safety net to guard against the socio-economic vulnerability in coping with the market forces and resist gentrification in an era ruled by the Islamist Justice and Development Party. Today, Tophane is a battlefield of extreme tension and power struggle between closed and radically conservative local community networks and the increasingly

visible and morally alien opportunist new comers; thus it is a major playground to question the local limits to gentrification with a particular focus on conservatism.

Within this scope, the paper addresses this urban conflict by adapting critical realist methodology. It critically reviews the causalities of “resistance-based limited” gentrification; and examines conservatism as one of the pioneer local causalities through an intensive empirical research built on causality analyses and semi-structured interviews. Derived from the reality that the theory of gentrification is diverse and subject to change, the paper contributes to the existing literature with a critical manifestation, in which the strong presence of state-led conservatism ironically creates “successful” resistance to state-led gentrification, while putting its inevitableness under question.

Keywords: Gentrification, resistance, conservatism, critical urban theory, Tophane, Istanbul