

Who Makes the Plans? Promises and Planning Processes of an Urban Renewal Project in Turkey

In my presentation I would discuss about the planning process implied by the local government and its alliances on the local inhabitants and business owners of the “urban renewal zone” in Eskisehir, Turkey. This very central zone of 56-hectares has been declared as “risky” by the Metropolitan Municipality and approved by the Ministry of Urbanism in 2013 to be renewed in order to assure “security of life and property” against earthquakes. Since then new constructions have been banned, annotations have been put onto existing title deeds, and right owners and tenants could not involve in any buying or selling activities in the zone. Crucially, the renewal project was claimed to be a “democratic, inclusive, and participatory” one which, as alleged, would be a role-model project for Turkey and beyond as it is introduced by a so-called social-democratic municipality. Yet, a very ambiguous and secretive policy and decision-making process has been developed. Current and next steps of the project have not been known even by the elected executors of the neighborhoods of the zone. On the other hand, owners of large plots and old factories have been regularly and accurately informed and negotiated with in order to receive their support and, therefore, actualize the project since, by Law. No. 6306, the municipality needs the support of the two-third of the zone, which means over 37-hectares. Through my case study I discuss the planning and decision making process in an urban setting within the processes of uncertainty of urban plans and insecurity of future housing and living conditions. However, despite the non-participatory planning and emerging frustrations, the locals have not pursue any democratic means to enforce the municipality to become more inclusive. Rather, since the initiation of the project, people have shown a submissiveness towards the whole process that has been planned behind the closed doors. Only very lately new ideas about founding an association emerged among the neighborhoods. On the other hand, In my presentation I will try to present the perception of locals about the renewal plans and emerging differences between the dwelling owners and business-owners as the first group seems to support the project more than the second group. I will try to explain the perceptions and differentiations by questioning the locals’ understandings about democracy and investigating the political culture of the society. Keeping in mind that this is a research in progress, in the next step of my project I plan to study the significant critical turning points in the political and economic history of the country, as well as the city and the neighborhoods and try to understand why this current submissiveness occurred in the risk zone project and why certain groups display passive contestations to the municipality and others do not by questioning the following critical junctions:

- The political culture and political organizations since the Ottoman State and the heritage of this culture.
- Question of democracy and rule of law in Turkey
- The military coup in the 1980 in the country that opened the road to de-politicization in the society, an erosion in terms of class and interest based solidarity, and a growth of submissiveness to the power.
- Structural changes in the economy and the introduction of neoliberal measures, a consumption and rent society has emerged.
- New contestations among the rent society.
- Changing nature of neighborliness relationships.
- The leadership of the social democrats in Eskişehir since the 1999 and new forms of submissiveness that occurred in this new era.
- Historical background of the neighborhoods and their socio-political features that might explain certain positionalities of the dwelling areas (the Tatar neighborhood).