

Legalize it? Spatial inequality and policies toward informality: a comparison between Istanbul and Buenos Aires

Nadia Nur

nadianur@yahoo.com

The aim of the paper is to compare spatial inequality patterns in Istanbul and Buenos Aires, pointing out how national and supra-national policies and different levels of responsibilities on the urban land, determine the making of “gray spaces”, in which inhabitants can benefit only a sort of “second level citizenship”.

Both cities are turning progressively in global cities (although since the conclusion of the research many events are undermining this statement), in which massive urbanization and neoliberal transformations impact on the living conditions and on the housing market, engendering informality and increasing social and spatial inequality. At the urban level, neoliberal policies, gentrification, renewal of historical areas, geographical expansion, are in contrast with segregation, lack of housing policies, forced evictions, unaffordability of housing market. From a social point of view, growing migration, the re-composition of the social structure and the changing nature of the middle class, are causing the emergence of new social movements and the development of a more conflictive citizenship.

Assuming that the city-scale is the starting point to analyze locality within a global frame, I selected two case studies, both presenting a great percentage of immigrant population: the former, Villa Rodrigo Bueno in Buenos Aires, is an informal settlement, the latter, Tarlabasi in Istanbul, is a mixed formal/informal neighborhood. In both cases, on the one hand neoliberal approach in urban transformation policies have deeply affected the inhabitants, generating social and spatial exclusion, forced evictions or displacement attempts, on the other hand, inhabitants (mostly immigrants, both internal and international) have transformed the urban space through appropriation and production of informality, developing different strategies of negotiation with the governance of the city, also involving grassroots movements.

The research was based on a comparative approach in order to highlight differences and similarities in two cities/region. The case studies have been carried out through various qualitative research techniques, namely interviews, observation, active participation.

The theoretical framework of analysis was the “Right to the city”, to be considered as a broader concept that could sketch the outlines of a new idea of citizenship within the global rescaling process. Nowadays the right to the city is object of negotiation between authorities, economic powers, civil society and a multifaceted community, both sedentary and migrant, both visible and emergent. Whose the city? How can we apply the theory of the right to the city to highlight urban inequality and immigrants disadvantage? Could the right to city constitute a valid frame of analysis for the cities of global south?

Assuming the city-scale as a starting point to understand broader scalar transformations, the local administrations attitude towards informal settlements and immigrants communities can help to understand the interaction between different layers of policies/politics. On the one hand, administrators in Buenos Aires have made a commitment to negotiate with villa leaders, on the other hand, inhabitants of Tarlabasi were evicted in the frame of a State-led gentrification process. Thus, legalization, upgrading or eradication of informal settlements can be considered as different consequences of uneven policies on the urban land and freedom of movement. Different results of negotiations and mobilization, can be explained taking into account the different legal and political environment.

© by the author(s)

Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The transgressive city: Comparative perspectives on governance and the possibilities of everyday life in the emerging global city” Mexico City, 21-23 July 2016. <http://rc21-mexico16.colmex.mx/index.php>