

*PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN URBAN
REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: GAZİOSMANPAŞA
CASE*

evrim özkan töre
zeynep ayşe gökşin
yasemin erkan yazıcı

This article is based on the findings of a TUBITAK-supported research project conducted between 2015 and 2016 [1]. The project highlighted participatory approaches in urban redevelopment processes. Fundamental issues concerning the topic were opened to discussion, drawing on the analysis of redevelopment process in Sarıgöl-Yenidoğan Urban Redevelopment Area (URA) since 2005. This area was one of the 13 redevelopment areas in Gaziosmanpaşa District.

Gaziosmanpaşa, located on the European Side of Istanbul and housing %3,4 of the city's population [2,3], is 1,173 hectares in area and the redevelopment areas designated within the district comprise %37,9 of all redevelopment areas in Istanbul [4]. Sarıgöl-Yenidoğan URA is a *gecekondu*¹ area [4] of 33,2 hectares with 24,470 inhabitants [5] and is one of the areas where Roma community lives in Istanbul.

The findings of the research were primarily based on interviews with stakeholders. 259 household surveys and 63 interviews were conducted with local residents as individuals or groups and in focus group meetings. Tenants, alongside owner-occupiers were included in household surveys as a group directly affected by the process, 24% of the respondents. 22 unstructured and semi-structured, individual and group interviews were conducted with the representatives of public sector, private sector and NGOs.

¹Self-built, usually single story migrant dwellings on under-used state land.

The existing physical pattern of the area was organic and dense with problems in community facilities, urban services and infrastructure. Also, there were unhealthy and uncomfortable shelters where the Roma community lived that had worse conditions than *gecekondu*. Approximately half of the respondents in the household survey stated that they were unhappy with their houses because they were old, small and damp *gecekondu* buildings with high maintenance costs.

The local residents had a distinctively low economic profile. 70 % of the residents in the URA lived on minimum wage where only 2 out of 10 people had a job. 75 % of the residents work in ‘unqualified jobs’ such as paper collectors, stallholders, vendors, restaurant workers, garbage collectors and cleaners.

Urban redevelopment in the area began in 2005 and was implemented in three phases. The first phase started in 2005 when Article 73 of the Municipality Law [6] was passed, giving powers to municipalities to designate urban redevelopment areas and implement redevelopment projects. In this phase, urban redevelopment areas were designated in Gaziosmanpaşa and redevelopment plans and project were developed. However, the process was cancelled in 2007 due to upcoming local elections and thus the first phase ended.

The second phase began in January 2010 when a protocol was signed between Gaziosmanpaşa Municipality and TOKI (National Mass Housing Agency) to develop a *Gecekondu* Redevelopment Project. In order to protect the stake of the Roma residents living in the project area, Sarıgöl Roma Solidarity Association was established. In July 2010, upon TOKI’s approval, 285 hectares in Sarıgöl-Yenidoğan Neighbourhoods was designated as a ‘*Gecekondu* Prevention Area’ based on *Gecekondu* Law no.775 [8]. During this process, the Municipality revised the existing development plan, increasing the development rights and abolishing maximum height restriction, resulting in an increase in total construction area and building density. Some of the *gecekondus* in the area were demolished and replaced with 9 housing blocks each with 16-storeys. The project had no provisions on how the existing residents would afford to pay monthly maintenance fee of these blocks with luxurious facilities. Since most of the residents in the area had only pre-title deeds, they were not identified as rightful owners. Thus, they sold their houses to the Municipality and left the neighbourhood at the beginning of the process. Some of the dwellers with title-deeds did the same due to fear of expropriation. Meanwhile, tenants were forced to leave the area as they were not accepted as stakeholders in the process. Social housing, a requirement in the *Gecekondu* Law for redevelopment areas, were not built.

The other criticism about this phase was the disruption in the construction work due to the incapability of contractors. The freedom of trial-and-error implicitly given to the contractors had adverse impacts and decreased the trust to the Municipality which commissioned the

firms. Failure in completing the construction of housing efficiently established a bad example for the next phases.

The third phase began in 2013, after Disaster Law no. 6306 was passed in 2012. This law made it possible to designate ‘Areas at Risk’, which have vulnerable building stock or bad ground conditions and all buildings in designated areas to be demolished and rebuilt. It initiated a new phase in favour of the Municipality with powers to demolish all existing buildings, develop new housing and force all stakeholders in the area to agree with their project terms. In this new phase, the municipal construction company GOPAŞ was appointed as the project coordinator. The design firm KEYM was commissioned by GOPAŞ to run the planning and negotiation process, whereas design and construction were contracted to construction companies. In this phase, the Municipality had serious shortcomings in informing local residents about the process and this concerned the residents about the possibility of having to leave after redevelopment.

The research established that most residents were aware of the imminent redevelopment but the information had not come from the Municipality/GOPAŞ or KEYM, the coordinators of the process. Information obtained from unreliable sources, acquaintances and neighbours in particular, confused the residents and it raised their level of concern about the possibility of losing their houses. They, visiting the local office, could get some partial information, but even the residents who were about to sign agreements could not see architectural designs. Rightful owners with no clear information on the replacement housing, hesitated when it came to signing agreements to transfer their houses to the municipality.

It is evident that information-participation-negotiation mechanisms were ill-managed. This became a significant problem in signing agreements with rightful owners, so the Municipality used urgent expropriation powers to complete the process. In April 2016, expropriation of properties on 407 plots in Sarıgöl-Yenidoğan URA was included in the urgent expropriation decision issued for Gaziosmanpaşa [10]. Although the Municipality announced on its official website that it was not going to implement the decision, psychologically, it certainly felt like ‘coercing to agreement’ than ‘negotiating’ for the residents. However, in contemporary urban redevelopment approaches, ‘real’ participation methods such as conciliation, partnership and empowerment, are used besides informing and placation, instead of ignoring and manipulating the rightholders. Empowering communities to establish their own needs and wishes can be considered as the highest level of participation [11,12,13,14,15]. In this regard, processes in both developed countries and in informal settlements of developing countries [16] provide important pointers for redevelopment of *gecekondu* areas such as Sarıgöl-Yenidoğan.

This research underlines three fundamental issues related to the process management in the case study area. The first is that the socio-economic and spatial realities of the area have

been disregarded. In fact, socio-economic data should form the basis of planned redevelopment projects. However, it was established that this type of data was not collected and the social and economic profile of the area were not included in the redevelopment process. The second is the existence of management problems. It is evident that neither the designation of the redevelopment area nor the process management were conducted in a transparent manner; ignoring participatory tools and methods. This experience underlines the fact that when the municipality is the only decision-maker, community organisation is triggered and this causes serious problems. The third is that the projects implemented in *gecekondu* areas are for profit. In redevelopment projects with no public subsidy, the projects inevitably are led by private sector for profit. This tendency paves the way to produce more luxurious and larger houses in higher numbers. One consequence of this is the increase in development rights, the other is the emergence of luxurious housing estates in redevelopment areas. This type of housing that does not meet the residents' socio-economic and spatial needs also poses an important problem for the rightful owners to stay in the area.

Within this context and based on the case study, principles for a more participatory redevelopment process in *gecekondu* areas are presented below.

The first principle is the importance of establishing a vision. The vision should take into account the profile of the area and its residents, their problems and needs. It is important that household surveys are completed before the design of redevelopment projects and the data collected regarding the profile of communities is used, especially while developing the mathematical model. Today, particularly in Western countries, there are contemporary approaches which use tools such as deprivation maps to identify and work from socio-economic realities of the redevelopment areas. Establishing and preserving the accurate profile of the areas and guaranteeing their sustainability under different local governments is essential.

The second principle is about the organisational structure. Here, different demands of the interested parties during the process and the difficulties they faced because of these should be emphasized. The circumstances of the developer who had to pay rent to owners for years due to the halted process or the rightful owners who wanted to live in a safer house should be considered. Adopting a transparent and participatory process management which involves all stakeholders is clearly the solution to prevent a halted process.

The last principle is about the financial structure. Achieving in-situ redevelopment in low-income neighbourhoods requires a non-profit approach and a financial structure which enables it. A huge task of producing social-rented housing in neighbourhoods with economically disadvantaged communities such as the Roma fall upon central and local governments and organisations such as TOKI.

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