

The struggle to belong

Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.

Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

DEBATES ON *RIGHT TO THE CITY* IN ISTANBUL

Hade Türkmen

Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011

Session: 18. Social Justice and the Right to the City

Cardiff University School of City and Regional Planning

Address: Glamorgan Building
Kind Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff , CF10 3WT
Wales, UK

E-mail: TurkmenH@cardiff.ac.uk

DEBATES ON *RIGHT TO THE CITY* IN ISTANBUL

Abstract

The reorganisation of space and the trends in contemporary urbanisation occur in very similar forms all around the world. This standardized urbanisation also creates oppositions and resistance in similar ways. In this contentious political environment, the slogan Right to the City has been reinvented by various scholars and groups both as a mean for contesting neoliberal urbanisation and an opportunity to affect the policy making processes. However, since political, economic and social structures and relations vary in different geographies, the struggle for right to the city takes different forms and meanings, even contrasting layouts among various groups. In this framework, the gap between the theory and practice in the term *right to the city* is the concern of this paper. Although in theory, RttC is used as a slogan for expressing a radical transformation in urban politics, in practice, since the actors have diverse orientations, characteristics and aims, the process of developing RttC struggle remains unclear. Meanwhile, the term 'right' is a discursive and unclear concept, which is difficult to define in urban struggles. This paper tries to explore discursive points in the literature by focusing on emergence of urban movements and the debates on the slogan RttC in Istanbul. I conclude that in order to expose the radical meaning of the slogan, politicisation of urban conflict among various groups is more important than overemphasising the slogan.

Introduction

The reorganisation of space and the trends in contemporary urbanisation occur in very similar forms all around the world. However, although the physical restructuring of the cities are similar to each other, the implementation of this process and the actors' responses whether for or against the current urban projects are changing in different places. It is not possible to say that this standardized urbanisation process takes place in a smooth way. Indeed, great tension among different groups occurs in various patterns. The differences within the processes and responses and the local contextual features determine the tension among the conflicting groups. However, besides the differences, there are also very similar actions and debates in all around the world by the groups. In this framework, recently, a slogan from 1960s, *Right to the City (RttC)* came to the agenda of contentious urban politics.

Right to the City (RttC), which is firstly introduced by French urban philosopher Henri Lefebvre in 1968, has been revisited by urban scholars, urban movements and some institutions both as a mean for contesting neoliberal urbanisation and an opportunity to participate in current policy making process. Although there are various approaches both in practical and theoretical levels, in general, the slogan is conceptualised as a topic for the urban mobilisation and the right to access to urban resources. However, since urban environment, political, economic and social structures and relations vary from one place to another, the struggle for right to the city emerges in different forms. This discursive concept takes various, even contrasting layouts among various groups and geographies. Considering these points, this paper aims to focus on the recent debates on RttC regarding the discussions in the literature and the Istanbul case.

Istanbul is one of the unique examples of current urbanisation but also has many distinct aspects in terms of urban characteristics and power relations. With the rise of neoliberal restructuring of urban space by state and market forces, various resisting groups with different orientations, agendas and militancy have emerged in the city. Very recently, RttC began to be discussed by activists and groups, who take part in urban movements, with the impact of worldwide debates and formations on the slogan. However, although it is discussed in a similar way by various groups, RttC does not have a clear meaning that can define the roles and demands of actors as well as the respondents in different localities. It is argued here that in the neoliberal transformation of the city and restructuring of power relations' process, as a contesting slogan RttC has ambiguous points in defining the roles and actions of the power groups, searching for an answer on the question of how to transform power relations in a radical way.

In this paper, the concept will be critically discussed from the agenda of urban movement groups in Istanbul. Here it is argued that, there is a gap between theory and practice in RttC debates. Although in theory, RttC is a useful slogan to form an alliance among different groups for reclaiming the city, in practice, since these groups have diverse orientations, actors and characteristics, the process of developing RttC struggle is questionable as the 'desire' of groups for the 'future city' and their positions in the power relations and socio-political structure diverge. These divergences affect the militancy and incidence of groups as well as a unified struggle. In this respect, here it is claimed that it is hard to define a clear approach to RttC accepted by various groups since urban space is a struggle area of many groups.

There are many different groups with different political and social characteristics which are not a part of broader movement but emerged due to the problems of the current urbanisation process in Istanbul. However, it is not possible to say that these groups have similar political views and perspectives. Rather, the common point amongst these various groups is the top-down urbanisation policies. With respect to this, as a political aim and target, defining RttC amongst various groups becomes vague. Moreover, there is a gap between theory and practice in RttC struggle in Istanbul. One of the reasons for this gap is the characteristic of current urban uprising by different groups. Although RttC defenders and activists suggests that this is a struggle to appropriate the city, since the core point of urban uprising in Istanbul is against the urban regeneration projects and their consequences such as demolition and eviction, envisioning 'the future city' is not the very beginning of the discussions. This may be a long term target but needs the contribution of various groups which are politically mobilised and comprehend city as a whole. In the current situation, some groups and individuals search for short term results, such as property ownership, construction opportunities or bargaining on the deals, because of the emergency of the cases. In other words, individual rights are much more concerned as a short term demands than collective rights in the city. With respect to these points, here it is argued that, RttC is more taken into account by middle class activists and groups in Istanbul. The debates are raised by these middle class groups and carried to various discussion platforms. However, it is a question that if these efforts work in the formation of an alliance to transform the city. Regarding these points, this paper tries to explore the characteristics of urban uprising and the debates of RttC in Istanbul and raise the question why the slogan is unclear and vague in practice.

In this research, qualitative methods, including participatory observations, interviews with actors and analysis of publications, were conducted. Besides, I am an active participant of the urban movement in Istanbul, hence, I am trying to observe the debates on RttC in Istanbul from the very beginning.

The first part of the paper will briefly summarize the definitions of RttC and current discussions on the concepts by various scholars. In the second part, economic and political features of contemporary urbanisation in Istanbul and the characteristics of urban movement groups will be highlighted. In the last part, the condition of the claim RttC will try to be analyzed in this contentious urban politics.

Right to the city

In the late 1960s, when the streets were highly mobilised by different groups and claims, French philosopher and urban scholar Henri Lefebvre stressed on the significance of urban space and the power conflicts in the cities and then raised the slogan 'right to the city' as a 'transformed and renewed right to urban life' (Mayer, 2009). In Lefebvrian sense, it was not a legal, simple right but it was a 'cry for the future city' (Lefebvre, 1993) which is purified from capitalist class relations and its domination in organising the urban space.

The concept has been revisited by different groups in recent years in different ways. Some groups grounded the concept as participation to decision making processes (UNESCO, UN HABITAT) which transforms the slogan to a sort of legitimate demand, some other critical groups defined the term as a path to the 'desired city' (Harvey, 2008) which develops the conceptualisation of Lefebvre.

The perspective of the first group can be found in the UN organizations' approaches and practices, which is defined by Margit Mayer (2009) as institutional approach to the concept of right to the city. UNESCO explains the demands raised by right to the city as "legitimate claims to the necessary conditions of a satisfying, dignified and secure existence in cities by both individual citizens and social groups" (UNESCO, Urban Policies) ¹. In this perspective two themes emerge: "first, the need to develop an urban politics of the inhabitant and of communities, rather than a focus on citizens of the nation state; and second, the need to negotiate politics at the urban scale, rather than at the level of state or region" (Brown and Kristiansen, 2009, 17). In this perspective, right to the city is reduced to participation to the decision making processes in local level and ignores the capitalist power relations in the urban space. Furthermore, it can be observed in this perspective that the right is based on the consumption of the cities. As Keil (2009; 237) argues

The 'right to the city' became redefined, in many instances, as the right of the consumer to privatized urban space and differential commodities on the marketplace rather than the right of the urban inhabitants to the possibilities the urbanized societies have to offer and to the historical achievements previous social struggles have yielded.

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/social-transformations/urban-development/urban-policies/> (Access: 06.10.2010)

Nevertheless, Lefebvre's conceptualization of the term has been raised on a deeper analysis and exposition of city; indeed, the city is the *future city* (Lefebvre 1967, cited by Marcuse 2009), not the capitalist city. This is a politicisation process (Marcuse, 2009) of urbanities to transform the existing structure of the city and the power relations in urban space. Thus, the slogan RttC carries a radical and transformative meaning in itself against the capitalist form of urban relations rather than a simple participation mechanism.

The second present perspective is grounded in Lefebvreian terminology in critical urban studies and discussed within the urban movements' alliances² and urban scholars. This non-institutional form of right to the city defines the contemporary capitalist urbanisation and proposes RttC for contesting neoliberalism. In this perspective, RttC is defined as the control on the surplus value emerged in the cities and urbanization. Harvey (2008, 39) points out

to adopt the right to the city as both working slogan and political ideal, precisely because it focuses on the question of who commands the necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use. The democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanization.

The main point in the critical studies about the RttC is the emphasis of the social, political and economic control on the urban space (Harvey 2008, Marcuse 2009, Mayer 2009). In this framework, RttC is proposed as a mean for contesting neoliberalism and democratisation of urban politics which shall be carried by urban movements. Hence, the slogan is appropriated as a ground for progressive urban movement for contesting neoliberalism. Furthermore, the global alliance of movements is also emphasised in the struggle of RttC. Harvey (2008) remarks that since the movements are not strong enough to acquire the demand on controlling the surplus value, the global alliance of the movements becomes crucial to develop a stronger and comprehensive approach to RttC. This approach, which is slightly similar in other critical studies, has some ambiguous points in constructed collective action practices considering the distinct local contextual features, characteristics and targets of contemporary urban groups.

To begin with, the characteristics of urban movements are highly differentiated and it is hard to articulate a homogeneous structure for realizing the collective action (Mayer 2000, 2009). The subjects and repertoires of urban movements are diverse according to the cities, political atmosphere, and practices and responses of local and central governments (Pickvance, 1985).³ The mobilisation in various groups, the goals and actors of the groups, their background and expectations might be different and vary according to the contextual features. For instance, a movement against the evictions and a movement against a big project in urban space might be oriented at different targets while having different mobilisation processes as well as different actors.

² For instance, New York Right to The City Alliance in United States, or the international alliance of Reclaiming The Streets try to establish alliances within the urban movements rising on Right to The City. See www.righttothecity.org and www.reclaiming-spaces.org

³ For a further discussion of typology of urban movements and a comparative study of urban movements see Pickvance, 1985.

Secondly, the characteristics of the movements and their mode of relations in political sphere are multifarious in different countries. For instance, in his research Walton (1998) argues that urban movements in developing countries have different characteristics and priorities in comparison with the developed countries. He notices that, although the mobilisation of urban poor is more likely to happen for shelter rights, this mobilisation is not canalized to other struggles such as labour movements in the developing countries. On the other hand, it is more likely to come across a broader movement in the developed countries because of the historical development of the movements and the distinct power relations. In any case, the contextual features that the movements emerged from and the characteristics and relations of movements are the most important determinants in the analysis of particular cases and alliances of the groups. Hence, the unique characteristics of different actors need to be considered for the development of an alliance and collective demands.

The emphasis on local level in RttC is another questionable area in transforming the power relations as the actions and responses are likely to vary in different localities and also in different levels of government, which directly affect the mobilisation processes and the characteristics. Local governments have an attention to the demands of local population (Walton 1998, Mayer 2009, Marcuse 2009, Busa 2010). For instance, giving the property rights in a particular slum area may result with an end in the mobilisation of people, whereas other similar projects in different areas may continue. In addition, some groups have corporative relations especially with the local state, which also allow state to legitimize the processes and control the tension. Even some movements became highly professionalized and their contribution has turned to create alternative strategies to local government (Mayer, 2009). Moreover, although it is claimed that in the neoliberal period local governments has been given much more authority to promote the cities in the competitive environment (Purcell 2002), a controversial situation occurs in some cities and like being in Istanbul central government still has big influence in the decision making and implementation processes. Therefore, it is subtle to constitute a radical transformation process in local level unless there is a broader movement; since the dynamics of power relations at local level, responses of different governmental levels and the relations of urban movements with different levels are effective in demands of urban movements.

Finally, the term 'right' and the struggle for a right are discursive topics. It is hard to define a right both in the abstract and legal sense in the struggles. In the definition of RttC by the critical scholars, it is not mentioned as individual right but collective rights of dwellers (*'citadin'*, Lefebvre, 1996). However, the comprehension of this struggle in the practice is not always homogeneous and varies in different groups. Gough (2011) raises the question about what sort of right within the urban space we need to demand for. Is it right for housing, right for education, right for working, right for transportation? If one of this or all of them, what is the adequate criteria for these urban issues for different groups? For these reasons, to use the term right for a transformative struggle also open to debates.

This brief discussion about the slogan RttC raises questions about the demand for RttC which are crucial to ask in analysing the practices. What are the characteristics and political background of the urban movements and their actors who will express the desires for a future city? Does everybody

agree on values, ideologies, perspectives in urban issues? How the discussion for the 'desired future city' will be carried out by different political groups? How does the collective action emerge within these various groups on urban issues? In the 'post-political era' (Melluci, 1980, cited by Pickvance 1985), when class movement has been lost the power in the political sphere but new social movements are rising and the perspective of broader movements is redefined, the questions mentioned above become important in the reinvention process of the slogan RttC. In other words, the political conjuncture and the existing movements when the slogan was firstly introduced and the contemporary have significant difference, which affects the actors, targets and alliances of the groups. Thus, although the term 'right to the city' is relevant for contesting neoliberalism in theory, there may appear some problems in transforming this transformative strategy to practice because of the features of current urban movements, power relations and political, economic dynamics.

Neoliberal Urbanisation in Istanbul and Urban Movement

Istanbul is one of the unique examples of contemporary urban development trends with the big urban transformation and regeneration projects. Given a start with a military coup, 1980s were the beginning of the neoliberal transformations and celebration of property rights in the urban politics. The commodification process of urban land took a different form than the former period: while commodity was produced in urban space, urban space became a commodity itself in the new economic restructuring. The drastic Marmara Earthquake in 1999 and the economic recession in 2001 are the breaking points that have been given rise to neoliberal urban politics in Turkey and neoliberal politics became much more visible in urban space (Oktem, 2006). Ever since the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government came to power in 2002, the tendency for privatisation of urban services and public lands, massive urban transformation projects including flagship projects and changes in the structure of real estate market can be easily observed. In this period, urban regeneration projects in slum (*gecekondu*) areas and historical neighbourhoods have been added to the strategic projects of Istanbul (Oktem, 2006). While the economic structure of the city has demanded to be transformed from industrial to finance and service sectors, *gecekondu* areas located in the central areas of the city and the historical dilapidated areas began to be seen as land supply for the new urban development and upper class residential areas. In this transformation process, exchange value of urban land is recreated with new projects and "all the socio-spatial scales produced in time by people are reconstructed" (Kurtuluş, 2009, 31).

One of the crucial processes carried out by the AKP government is the restructuring process of the State agencies, which also redefines the role of the central and local governments in the urbanization. Although the emphasis on local governance and localities are heavily on the duty in neoliberal discourse, contradictorily, central governments' power is increasing. In this process, as a central government agency, the Housing Administration Agency of Turkey (TOKI) became the most important state institution in implementing the neoliberal land policies (See Kuyucu 2009 for further discussion). Established in 1984 for providing social houses to low-income groups, TOKI has been reinvented in the early 2000s, and with the legal amendments passed since 2001, TOKI has become the absolute planning authority in the urban regeneration projects and the lands owned by the state (see Lovering and Turkmen 2011, Kuyucu 2009). Hence, this central governmental agency also became one of the most important actors in the real estate market. However, the dominant role of TOKI does not mean to abolish the private real estate market; rather, TOKI manages the market and awards the private sector. Thus, neoliberal urbanisation in Istanbul is realised hand in hand by the

State and market forces. In this process, the state puts in legitimate power and force to implement the agenda and therefore, urbanisation has gained much more top-down characteristic in the last decade. This characteristic does not only shape the physical fabric of the city but also it determines the power relations and the tension of the conflicts.

With the rise of top-down proposed transformation projects and the direct intervention of the state, urban resistance groups became more visible in the political sphere, which are mostly oriented to urban regeneration projects. Urban regeneration projects especially in the residential areas are the faces of authoritarian urbanisation along with the flagship projects like Olympia Village, 3rd Bridge Project or the projects prepared by the star architects⁴. More than 40 residential neighbourhoods were announced as urban regeneration areas which mean that almost 2 million people will be directly affected under the current plans. As causes of demolition and eviction in the gecekondu areas and historical dilapidated centres, these projects are defined as class-cleansing, hegemonic projects put into action by the state (Gough and Gundogdu 2009, Lovering and Turkmen 2011, Turkun 2011). All with its discussions, impacts and consequences, urban regeneration projects became the main focus of the urban uprising. Hence, although there are groups and alliances⁵ considering broader issues and various urban projects, the agenda of the urban movement in Istanbul is mostly determined by urban regeneration projects. Furthermore, this topic has crucial importance in determining the militancy, incidence and targets of the groups. As expected, the debates on RttC are also formed within this context. So, in order to analyze the discussions on the slogan, it is important to understand the characteristics and emergence of the urban movement groups in Istanbul in this context.

Urban Movement in Istanbul

The organizations emerged after the announcement of the regeneration areas are generally neighbourhood organizations formed by the residents of neighbourhoods. In addition to them, there are different groups mostly formed by academics, students, professionals – i.e. middle class groups – which are involved in the struggles of the neighbourhoods in different ways. Besides, some political groups and parties, generally left-wing organisations, participate into the struggles. However, rather than a unified struggle, there is a partial resistance in the neighbourhood scales against the urban regeneration projects based on the demands of neighbourhood. Although the neighbourhood associations are significant, it is important to mention here that not all the neighbourhood residents are mobilized and involved in the actions or meetings of the associations. Some neighbourhood associations have very low level of representative power of the neighbourhood population.⁶

Since urban regeneration projects are significant in the formation of resistance groups against the urban projects, it is important to focus on the characteristics of the struggle and the actors for analysing the debates on RttC in Istanbul. In addition, briefly summarising the urbanisation in

⁴ One of the popular one is Kartal Urban Transformation project designed by Zaha Hadid, see http://www.arcspace.com/architects/hadid/kartal_pendik/kp.html

⁵ One can come across the use of word 'platform' in Turkish for expressing the alliances of different groups on a specific topic.

⁶ A recent survey held in 6 urban regeneration neighbourhoods shows that a very low portion of residents, especially males are becoming active members of the neighbourhood associations. Only in the neighbourhoods having urgent problems, residents are going to the neighbourhood associations' meetings and activities. ("Urban Regeneration and Socio-Spatial Restructuring in Old City Centres and Gecekondu Neighbourhoods in Istanbul" Research Project, Forthcoming).

Istanbul is worth to comprehend the attitudes of the groups and the actors, and the distinct contextual features of Istanbul.

The most industrial and dense city of Turkey, Istanbul was subjected to long term blind-eye politics of the state in the construction of illegal buildings. Rapid industrialisation due to the import substitute and developmentalist policies during 1950s, industrialisation as well as the mechanisation in the agricultural production process caused to migration to cities from rural areas in all around Anatolia. However, the State did not have the resources to respond to the basic needs of the new comers. In 1950s, first *gecekondu*⁷ were built in the periphery of Istanbul, close to the industrial centres. During 1960s and early 1970s, there was a tension between the state forces and *gecekondu* dwellers since the state tried to knock-down *gecekondu*s. However, there were no housing alternatives for the workers provided either by state or the factories. Then, the state unofficially allowed the construction of *gecekondu*s in the lack of social housing policies and *gecekondu*s became the unofficial housing policy of Turkish urbanisation during the industrialisation period. There was an agreement between state and market forces to allow *gecekondu* settlements since reproduction of labour power was more important than the value of the urban space. In time, Istanbul was surrounded by *gecekondu* areas which were not only a physical urban fabric but a significant social, political and economic phenomenon in Turkish urbanisation process since they were the working class neighbourhoods of Turkey.

Neoliberal turn resulted in crucial changes in urban politics which means also a turn in the *gecekondu* policies. The process that mentioned by Hernandez de Soto in his book *The Mystery of Capital* (2005) about the inclusion of informal settlement to the market by giving their property rights have been taken into action in Turkey in the very beginning of the neoliberalisation period. The amnesties given to *gecekondu* owners made the areas turn to apartment settlements from one storey shelters. In this period, *gecekondu* became an asset that can be bought and sold in its 'own' market even though the buildings were still illegal and not registered.

After 2000s, with the changing characteristics of the real estate market and the increasing land value especially in Istanbul, *gecekondu* phenomena moved to another stage. The areas became a target for new urban development plans, which are formed within the framework of global urbanisation trends. From then on, *gecekondu* residents were excluded and marginalised by the dominant discourse. *Gecekondu*s were faced with demolition and eviction.

The responses of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods to the process which began almost a decade ago change from one neighbourhood to another. Although there are attempts to unify the struggles in different neighbourhoods, it is not possible to talk about a single *gecekondu* movement as an actor in the urban conflict. There are several reasons in this partial uprising. To begin with, each *gecekondu* neighbourhood has different characteristics although historical developments of the areas and the class structures are similar. The inner dynamics, social and political development of the neighbourhood and existing relations are quite important in defining the mobilisation of the dwellers. For instance, the political characteristics of the neighbourhoods and the power relations

⁷ Literally *gecekondu* means 'landed at night'. This illegal housing unit became one of the basic features of Turkish urbanisation.

determine the militancy and incidence of the associations. In several researches it is shown that the neighbourhoods where left-wing political groups are dominant have much more ability in mobilisation, developing networks and taking actions (Lovering and Turkmen 2011, Deniz 2010, Yıldız 2010). In addition, clientalist political structure and the relations in the neighbourhood scale are important factors in the militancy and incidence of groups. With respect to this, it is important to mention that rural ties and the fellow-man (*hemşehri*) relations are quite important in determining the politics in the neighbourhood scale. Indeed, rural ties and relations have more influence in formation of political relations rather than urban class relations. This rural characteristic of working class and gecekondu neighbourhoods affects the inhabitants' ties and comprehension of the city as a whole structure. The interviews and observations show that the ties of gecekondu inhabitants with the city and the urban life are quite limited to the neighbourhood. The inhabitant defines his/her belonging to the city with his/her own neighbourhood but not with the city itself. The use of urban space and the resources that the city serves in broader sense are limited for the gecekondu inhabitants – or in general for the poor neighbourhoods including the historical neighbourhoods⁸; and the reorganisation of the city, leading to spatial segregation increases the impact of this situation. However, it should be noticed that gecekondu neighbourhoods are also very much politicized, especially in 1960s and 70s when the working class movement in Turkey was rising. Nevertheless, in contemporary politicization process, the struggle on urban issues or the context of new social movements are not perceived very easily. In the scope of urban movements, it can be said that the main targets in the neighbourhoods are centred in the neighbourhood area and in the problems of neighbourhood rather than the whole city. In that sense, the inhabitants of gecekondu neighbourhoods are not likely to consider the other sort of urban regeneration projects or big scale projects that are transforming the existing structure of the city. If a more comprehensive perspective emerges, this takes place in the politically active neighbourhoods where left-wing politics are dominant (Lovering and Turkmen 2011, Deniz 2010).

Although the development of historical dilapidated areas is quite different from gecekondu settlements, similar processes and responses are observed in some cases. The very poor population living in these areas, mainly came with the second stage of migration.⁹ In these areas, the migrated population does not have strong ties, not only with the city but also with the neighbourhood as well. Therefore, a broader conceptualisation and political mobilisation against the neoliberal urban transformation is not strongly on the stage by the urban resistance groups.

Along with the narrowed scale resistance in the neighbourhoods, the other questionable point in the uprising against urban regeneration projects is the struggle for property rights by the inhabitants. Property ownership in these areas has always been at the very centre of the mobilisation on urban issues of the dwellers. Getting property rights is seen as a means of protection to avoid an

⁸ Serif Mardin famously emphasises the rural characteristics of the neighbourhoods in Istanbul as in the 1970s and 1980s “the ruralisation of the cities outran the urbanisation of the new comers”. This rural characteristic affects the ‘use of city’. In one of the interview held in the scope of this paper, the interviewee from a gecekondu neighbourhood said that “we became a part of the neighbourhood but not Istanbul”. But urban policies also increase the segregation in urban space and service, which is significant in the comprehension of the cities.

⁹ During late 1980s and 1990s, a huge population migrated from Eastern part of Turkey because of the armed conflict between Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish army. Most of the people were forced to migration from their villages. These new comers to the cities had worse conditions than the first group. They did not have the chance to reach the resources (Keyder, 2005).

intervention to the neighbourhood. Therefore, the property struggle is a significant determinant in the responses of urban resistance groups. Having the 'proper' property ownership, which is comprehended as security for the houses and the existing neighbourhood structure, is seen a rapid solution to prevent the demolition caused by urban regeneration projects. However, this understandable demand by the *gecekondu* dwellers is not working in the neoliberal authoritarian urbanisation. Whether it is a legal property or not, state can develop and implement a project in the urban space. The only difference between a legal property right owner and illegal housing is the offers brought by the state during the implementation of the urban regeneration process. Putting aside this fact, it can be said that this orientation in the struggle avoids developing a unified reaction and a comprehensive approach to the urban problems. Rather, it segregates the property owners and the tenants and other groups during the mobilisation. More important than this, struggle for property rights, either for protecting a single house or a neighbourhood develops individual's actions rather than a broader collective action including different groups. Additionally, the struggle for property rights can determine the degree of political mobilisation. It may open the way for bargaining process which is ended with the fading of radical political mobilisation (Kuyucu and Unsal 2010).

Another important question about the scale of neighbourhood resistance is the scale of the responded government institution. Resistance raised in the neighbourhoods against urban regeneration projects in Istanbul generally targets the local governments in the actions and responses. One of the main reasons behind this direction is that municipalities have been consented as the first stage governmental agency dealing with the urban services and the property issues. Indeed, most of the municipal services have been brought by the local municipalities to the neighbourhoods rather than the metropolitan municipalities or central government agencies. In addition, as district municipalities are the first level elected local government, people living in the district's borders still have pressure and affect the elections and therefore the elected officials in the district municipalities consider the needs of the inhabitants comparing the responses of the metropolitan municipality. Hence, as a pressure group, dwellers foresee to solve the land problem within the municipal borders. However, when the urban regeneration projects began to be used as a means for establishing new power relations and transforming the urban space, the power of this municipalities' has been abated and the power has been given to central government, i.e. TOKI. With this shift, urban regeneration project can be implemented from the very beginning to the end by the central government, which means the main responded became the central government. Thus, the border of the struggle is actually exceeding the local political level. But neighbourhood associations are not apt to direct action towards to centralized power. There were some attempts to raise the voice against the central government agency, TOKI, but these actions were not appropriated effectively by mass population.

It is not likely to say that RttC is widely on the agenda of neighbourhood mobilisation. Although some of the neighbourhood organisations' representatives get into the debates and contribute to the development of the struggle for RttC, it is not the demand for most of the inhabitants. Then, the question of who carries this topic to urban movement's agenda becomes important. The middle class activists groups, professionals, academics, students and political groups' involvement to the urban conflict is important in raising the slogan in the urban struggle in Istanbul.

These groups involve into the resistance against the urban regeneration projects with different means but mostly by supporting the neighbourhood associations. The mobilisation of neighbourhoods against the projects drew the attention of professionals and political organisations. In that sense, neighbourhoods are comprehended as new 'agora's for improving the political space (Baysal, 2011). Furthermore, these groups have broader action area and perspective on urban issues. Pickvance (1985) emphasises the distinct impact of middle class involvement to urban movements and notices that middle classes have more opportunity to reach the urban resources and appropriate the city, then, their comprehension of urban issues are broader. In this respect, it can be claimed that whereas the neighbourhood organisations' actions are more reactive due to the urban regeneration projects, middle class groups' involvement in urban conflict is more proactive. Hence, RttC is a slogan carried out by these groups to the agenda of urban struggle. Within this respect, the slogan is used to unify the struggle and a discussion ground for different urban issues in the first hand; and secondly, it is seen as a means to overcome the narrow ground of the neighbourhood struggle which mostly concerns local level.

The question of how to realize RttC struggle in Turkey has been discussed for couple of years. Meetings are held by the urban movement groups and the concept RttC come to the agenda of these meetings as an umbrella slogan to unify various struggles for collective action. In these meetings, the question of how to contest current destructive urbanisation process was discussed. Although the groups were aiming to develop collective action against the destructive urbanisation and claiming that 'whole city is our right', the main theme was the resistance against the urban regeneration projects and evictions of the inhabitants from their livelihood. Other urban issues were also raised especially by middle class groups, and emphasised their significance for contesting neoliberalism but they were in a latter position.

One of the crucial points observed during the interviews and meetings is that, RttC is defined as a process and there is no unique definition of the term; rather it is formed during the actions. It is defined as a process for appropriation of the city and it will develop during the struggle. RttC is seen as an umbrella topic for the oppressed and *citidants* to unify the actions for appropriation of the city, but what sort of action is taken by whom and what sort of demands are supposed to be developed are unclear points in the debates. Since the demands and action styles of groups are different, how to interpret RttC is a question. Then the explanation for the term is coming as a process rather than a single term. It is suggested that rather than discussing on the term, it need to be explored in practice. When it is asked to the defenders of RttC if it is abstract or concrete, it is emphasised as concrete. From this point of view, it can be said that since the RttC suggests a unified struggle but the groups have many different features avoiding them to come together, RttC can be explored in practice to abolish the differences and conflicts amongst different groups rather than discussing on the term. However, it is a question if these conflicts and differences amongst groups can be eliminated in practice.

Here it is claimed that, this naive approach on RttC is derived from the unclear suggestions of the term. The term does not strongly emphasise the power structure and conflicts in the space. RttC suggests appropriating the city; however, it does not define the way to contest power relations. Contemporary discussions on RttC do not directly mean the power struggle or the class structure in the cities, rather they define an unclear axis of urban struggle. In addition, as the responsible units of

RttC, urban movement groups are considered progressive and similar (Byron 2005, Mayer 2000), which is also very questionable in terms of the expectations and targets. As mentioned above, the expectations vary amongst groups.

Another important point in the debates of RttC in Istanbul is the blurred position of the respondents. Local actions in the urban movement in Istanbul are quite important; however, although their impacts are seen clearly in the localities, whole city is under a transformation project. In other words, in some cases, particularly if neighbourhood organisations are considered, the scale of resistance and the scale of actions by dominant power groups in the city are not appropriate to each other. It is a question whether the urban movement in Istanbul aims to transform the power relations or not. Indeed, this question refers to a counter-hegemonic struggle which needs a broader front.

Conclusion: *RttC is a romantic slogan*

One of the interviewee who is living in a gecekondu neighbourhood, a member of neighbourhood association and a defender of RttC concept for unifying the urban struggle expressed the term as such:

RttC is a very impressive and very romantic slogan. It has the power to bring us together, to develop a collective struggle line, it has that synergy. But we do not talk about it since we do not know it properly at present. It is not a slogan which is debated so much and formed with the needs of the struggle; thus we are trying to realise it without talking about it.

When I asked a question about the practicality of the RttC and challenging issues between theory and practice, the same person, who is a very active member of the urban movement, told me that he does not have the answers but I may find them from academicians. I conclude from this that although the slogan has an impact on the urban struggle, the theoretical definitions have more impact on the popularity of the slogan rather than the practices of it. In their review of the conference on RttC, Horlitz and Vogelpohl (2009) also noticed the domination of academy in the enrichment of the slogan. At this point, I conclude that, Marcuse's stress (2009) on the development of urban struggle as 'exposition, proposition and politicisation' becomes very significant in defining RttC. Hence, RttC finds its transformative, radical meaning if the politicisation process is realized and the actors, both individual and institutional levels, aim to change power relations. Otherwise, it is interpreted as a concrete 'right' which is almost impossible to define in the urban sphere and very much problematic.

RttC is a slogan used for contesting destructive capitalism, but it is hard to define the 'processes' for this struggle for different contextual features, for different groups with distinct orientations. On this contentious politics, the comprehension of the slogan by the actors become important in contesting the meaning; however the expression of it by different groups can be changed from one to another and this may lead to confusion since the same term is used for different aims and processes; like being in the critical approach and institutional approach to the concept currently. So, I conclude here that for a radical urban movement aiming the 'future city', the politicization process of urban issues by the masses and emphasizing their significance in the class conflict become further than exposing the slogan. Not only the urban movement groups, but a broader front including other struggle groups

such as education, health etc along with urban issues is needed for exposing the radical meaning of RttC and develop the claim for the 'desired city'.

References:

- Adanali, Y. and I. Balanli (2010). Interview with Erdogan Yildiz Istanbul: Living in Voluntary and Involuntary Exclusion. Istanbul, Open City Exhibition: 12-13.
- Baysal, C. U. (2011). "Right to the City From Global Urban Peripheries to Istanbul's Gecekondu Neighborhoods." A Glimpse on Istanbul Conference Presentation
- Boer, R. W. J. and J. d. Vries (2009). The Right to the City As a Tool For Urban Social Movements: The Case of Barceloneta. The 4th International Conference of the International Froum on Urbanism. Amsterdam/Delft.
- Busa, A. (2009) "The Right to the City: The Entitled and the Excluded " The Urban Reinventors Online Journal, 1-13.
- Byron, M. (2005). "Castells' The City and the Grassroots: 1983 and Today." International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, **30**(1), 207–11.
- Dayanismaci Planlama Atolyesi (2007). "Gulsuyu ve Gulensu Mahallelerinde Alternatif Bir Planlama Deneyimi." Olcu Dergisi Mart 2007(Kentsel Donusum): 65-76.
- Deniz, M. B. (2010). "Grassroots Action Against Gecekondu Renewal Projects: The Case Of Istanbul Başibuyuk And Ankara Dikmen Vadi." Bogazici University, Istanbul. **Ms**
- Goonewardena, K. (2009). "Urban studies, critical theory, radical politics: Eight theses for Peter Marcuse." City **13**(2-3): 208-218.
- Gough, J. (2011) "Interview with Jamie Gough on Right to the City." İktisat Dergisi. *Forthcoming*
- Gough, J. and I. Gundogdu, Eds. (2008). Class-cleansing in Istanbul's World City Project. Whose Urban Renaissance? An international comparison of urban regeneration strategies. London, Routledge.
- Gundogdu, I. (2009). "Kentsel Donusum" ve TOKİ: "Yeniden Dagitimci" Kentsel siyasalardan birikim amacli "otoriter devletci" kentlesmeye gecis. İktisat Dergisi. **499**: 70-78.
- Harvey, D. (2008). "The Right to the City." New Left Review **53**: 23-40.
- Horlitz, S. and Vogelpohl, A. (2009). "Something can be done! – A report on the conference 'Right to the City. Prospects for Critical Urban Theory and Practice', Berlin November 2008." International Journal of Urban and Regional Research **33.4**: 1067-72
- Keil, R. (2009). "The urban politics of rollwith-it neoliberalization." City **13**(2-3): 230-245.
- Keyder, C. (2005). "Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul." International Journal of Urban and Regional Research **29.1**.
- Keyder, C. (2009). Istanbul In a Global Context. Urban Age Istanbul Conference Istanbul, Urban Age Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science: London
- Kurtulus, H. (2006). "Kentsel Donusume Modern Kent Mitinin Cokusu Cercevesinden Bakmak." Planlama Dergisi, TMMOB Sehir Plancilari Odasi Yayini **2006/2**: 7-11.
- Kurtulus, H. (2007). "Devlet, Sermaye ve Kentsel Arazi Bapları Cercevesinde Kentsel Donusum " Olcu Dergisi Mart 2007(Kentsel Donusum): 81-85.
- Kuyucu, T. (2009). Making of a Neoliberal Urban Regime and Housing Market in Istanbul: 2001-2008, Poverty, Property and Power: Making Markets in Istanbul's Low Income Informal Settlements. Washington, University of Washington. **PhD**

- Kuyucu, T. (2010). The Paradox of Turkey's New Low-Income Housing Policy. Istanbul: Living in Voluntary and Involuntary Exclusion. Istanbul, , Open City Exhibition: 16-17.
- Kuyucu, T. and O. Unsal (2010). "'Urban Transformation' as State-led Property Transfer: An Analysis of Two Cases of Urban Renewal in Istanbul " Urban Studies **Vol. 47**(No. 7): 1479-1499.
- Lefebvre, H. (2009). State, space, world : selected essays / Henri Lefebvre. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Leitner, H., E. S. Sheppard, et al. (2007). Contesting Urban Future: Decentring Neoliberalism. Contestin Neoliberalizm: Urban Frontiers. J. Peck, E. S. Sheppard and H. Leitner. New York, The Guilford Press.
- Lovering, J. (2007). "The Relationship Between Urban Regeneration and Neoliberalism: Two Presumptuous Theories and a Research Agenda." International Planning Studies **vol. 12**(No. 4): 343-366.
- Lovering, J. and Turkmen, H. (2011) "Bulldozer Neoliberalism in Istanbul: The State-Led Construction Of Property Markets, And The Displacement Of The Urban Poor". International Planning Studies **16**(1): 73-96.
- Marcuse, P. (2009). "From critical urban theory to the right to the city." City **13**(2-3): 185-197.
- Marcuse, P. (2010). "In defense of theory in practice." City **14**(1-2): 4-12.
- Mayer, M. (2000). Urban Social Movements In An Era of Globalisation. Urban Movements in Globalizing World. P. Hamel, H. Lustiger-Thaler and M. Mayer. London, Routledge: 141-157.
- Mayer, M. (2007). Contesting the Neoliberalization of Urban Governance. Contesting Neoliberalizm: Urban Frontiers. J. Peck, E. S. Sheppard and H. Leitner. New York, The Guilford Press: 90-115.
- Mayer, M. (2009). "The 'Right to the City' in the context of shifting mottos of urban social movements." City **13**(2-3): 362-374.
- Oktem, B. (2006). "Neoliberal Kuresellesmenin Insaasi: AKP'nin Kuresel Kent Soylemi ve Istanbul'un Kentsel Donusum Projeleri." Planlama Dergisi, TMMOB Sehir Plancilari Odasi Yayini **2006/2**: 53-63.
- Parnell, S. and E. Pieterse (2010). "The 'right to the city': Institutional imperatives of a developmental state." International Journal of Urban and Regional Research **34**(1): 146-162.
- Pickvance, C. (1985). "The rise and fall of urban movements and the role of comparative analysis." Environment and Planning D: Society and Space **3**: 31-53.
- Purcell, M. (2002). "Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant." GeoJournal **58**: 99-108
- Smith, N. (2002). "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." Antipode **34**(3): 427-450.
- Swyngedouw, E. (2000). "Authoritarian governance, power, and the politics of rescaling." Environment and Planning D: Society and Space **18**(1): 63-76.
- Turkun, A. (2011). "Urban Regeneration and Hegemonic Power Relationships". ". International Planning Studies **16**(1): 61-72.
- Yalçintan, M. And Cavusoglu, E. (2009). "Kentsel Dönüşümü ve Kentsel Muhalefeti Kent Hakkı Üzerinden Düşünmek." Mimarist, **33**.
- Walton, J. (1998). "Urban conflict and social movements in poor countries: theory and evidence of collective action." International Journal of Urban and Regional Research **22**(3): 460-481.