**Urban renewal in working class areas in Istanbul: De-industrialization and urban renewal in Beykoz - Paşabahçe Istanbul**

**Abstract**

There is a parallel between the production and reproduction of the cities and capitalism. As Lefebvre pointed out once, on the global level capital is reproducing itself either by occupying or producing a space fit for its existence, restoration and renewal. In Istanbul capital is producing itself by occupying the environment and the urban land by capturing, controlling and renewing.

Beykoz-Paşabahçe has been an industrial area near Bosphorus with three important factories, Glass-Bottle (Paşabahçe Şişe-Cam), Leather-Shoe (Beykoz Deri Kundura) and Alcohol (Tekel) for more than 70 years, founded as a result of the industrialization movement of the Republican era.

The region has been a typical working class residence area. There is a tendency of de-industrialization in urban areas of Turkey, especially of Istanbul. The factories in Beykoz-Paşabahçe closed during 2000’s and the neighborhood is changing radically since then turning out to be a deprivation area whereas living next door to upper class gated-communities in the higher elevations. There is high unemployment and increasing poverty in the area with increasing spatial segregation and the type of labor is changing from regular and organized work to an irregular and unorganized form. The existing working class culture is also changing through time. There is a process of radical urban renewal in the area that will change the profile of the residences.

In this process the labor is removed out of the existing neighborhoods to the outer districts of the city as a result of neoliberal urban policies whereas finance and service sectors, gentrified neighborhoods take their places. The construction industries in the central parts of the city are removed, as a result the working class neighborhoods are displaced with the processes namely urban renewal.

In our research project we are dealing with the formation of the labor force in the area with migration from various parts of Anatolia doing oral history recordings about family histories. We are asking questions about the ways in which different generations were employed; about unemployment and the current forms of irregular/part time jobs and poverty. We are also trying to see the effects of the loss of public health/social security services and the missing of social and cultural/educational facilities those factories were providing for years.

Taking as an example of a specific working class neighborhood in Istanbul, we are trying to see the overall change in the urban structure before and after neoliberal policies are implemented; not only as a change in the urban space with new, modern buildings but also a change in the urban social structure and functioning with public spaces and facilities, with culture and ways of life.

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**Research group and questions in the beginning**

In 1990s we have been visiting Paşabahçe, a neighborhood near Bosporus, which was a working class area with three big factories.[[1]](#footnote-1) Since 1980s the fate of the area planned to change and discussions about the possibility and the form of change was a hot topic among intellectuals, union and political circles.

We have worked with a group of young researchers on urban renewal, theory and applications with a multi-disciplinary social research questions in various different neighborhoods in Istanbul for a couple of years, one of which is Fikirtepe. We have planned to make a research in Beykoz-Paşabahçe as it is a working class district near Bosphorus we have personal experiences since 1990s in the process of factory closures.

Beykoz-Paşabahçe has been an industrial area near Bosphorus with three important factories, Paşabahçe Şişe-Cam (producing glass, 1899), Beykoz Deri Kundura (producing leather and shoe, founded in 1810 as a tannery) and Tekel (producing wine, spirits a small factory became a public enterprise in 1933) for more than 70 years, founded as a result of the industrialization movement of the Republican era.

The region has been a typical working class residence area. There is a tendency of de-industrialization in urban areas of Turkey, especially of Istanbul. The factories in Beykoz-Paşabahçe closed during 2000’s and the neighborhood is changing radically since then turning out to be a deprivation area whereas living next door to upper class gated-communities. There is high unemployment and increasing poverty in the area with increasing spatial segregation and the type of labor is changing from regular and organized work to an irregular and unorganized form. The existing working class culture is also changing through time. There is a process of radical urban renewal in the area that will change the profile of the residences.

Our research group consists of young researchers who in fact tried to learn about the research techniques as well as working class neighborhoods and de-industrialization and urban renewal processes at the same time. We have planned and organized visits to the area and starting with the more experienced, opinion leaders, union workers and civil society activists interviewing with ordinary citizens who was born in the region, children of factory workers or retired or unemployed workers themselves.

In the beginning we didn’t have a structured question form but in the meantime we have decided to have a set of open ended questions to get maximum information from the informants. We have used semi-structured in-depth interview form. After a set of questions defining the identity and conditions of the informant starting with the family background, wife/husband and children, we had questions such as how long they lived in the area, where did they work, are they happy to live in the area, differences before and after the factories closure, what do they think about the closure process and about the projects related to the area. We have started with the key informants and we are working on the project while photographing the area.

**The history of the neighborhood**

Beykoz is a district of Istanbul in the Anatolian side consists of 20 villages and 25 neighborhoods near Black Sea entrance of Bosporus. Paşabahçe is one of the well known neighborhoods near Bosphorus where during Ottoman State there were some seaside residences of the Ottoman Pashas, it was a small fishing village which had a non-Muslim Christian population.

The area gained its contemporary meaning with the foundation of factories which were occupied an important role in the industrial and labor history of Turkey. Beykoz had a well known glass production namely ‘Beykoz Style’ during Ottoman times with its traditional Turkish glasswork which became well known in the last part of the 19th century increasing modern life style and consumption culture. Glass products identified with the name of the area where more than one small factory was in production; one was producing ‘Çeşmi Bülbül’ in Çubuklu, the other was a small enterprise opened in 1899, having Jewish owners, Modiano, producing daily use glass items in Paşabahçe.[[2]](#footnote-2) After the first quarter of the 20th century modern glass industry was settled and in 1934 foundation stone of the main factory was set by the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü namely Paşabahçe Şişe Fabrikası which was producing glass bottles and other glass artifacts, not window glass. There were other workshops producing shoe turned out to be a big factory, Bekoz Deri Kundura producing especially boats for the army. Another important factory of the district was Tekel factory producing wine and spirits.

Most of the population of the working class basin came to the area from Black Sea region, Ordu, Kastamonu, Mesudiye and other places as a result of pull factor of the employment potential of the factories.

**Social life and cultural patterns in 1950s and 1960s**

Beykoz had non-Muslim inhabitants especially Greek and Armenians in Ottoman times. Then after the formation of the Republic because of the factories the area turned out to be an industrial basin. With the pulling effect of the factories and industrialization new inhabitants of the area came from Anatolia and that shaped a special working class culture.

On the other hand, it is obvious that during 1940s and 1980s the cultural atmosphere of the area created distinctive characteristics. The first migrant generations that settled and constituted the working class were from the Balkans, and then workers from the Black Sea region came and settled. As Beykoz was a remote place, a small fishing village near Bosphorus, for many years they had limited access to transportation and communication to central Istanbul. As a result, we are told in our interviews that the newcomers, mainly the workers of the factories in the basin created a closed neighborhood culture.

In our interviews, we are told that most of the time need of housing resolved by the squatter (gecekondu) houses built by collective work (imece), and most of the social and cultural needs of the workers were provided by the means and resources of the factories. After 1960s with the growing power of the working class organizations and unions they could get more benefits for the workers. In the example of Şahap Kocatopçu who was a well known manager of the glass factory, some managers of the factories used personal initiative to enrich workers daily lives in and out of the factories.

Especially in 1960s factories supplied nurseries and day care facilities to workers families that would increase the quality of social life and created good and well remembered traditions in the basin. In the glass factory and in the other companies organized parties for the rituals of circumcise of the children of the workers, where many famous modern singers and folk music celebrities were invited. The glass factory organized “lamb festival”s, where they gave lunch boxes to workers that contained meat. In the feasts they organized competitions and contests, and other festivities. This kind of social rituals and practices created a working class culture that created an identity and commitment, a vivid relationship and solidarity among themselves.

The factories played a major role in the formation of a modern city culture with their social and recreation activities among factory workers and their families. For example Tekel factory had a special beach where families could benefit.[[3]](#footnote-3) There was a cinema in Beykoz Shoe Factory; in the social club of the glass factory they organized tea parties where whole families joined, men and women. The cultural atmosphere in given decades claimed to be effected and looked alike the non-Muslim communities whose existence was decreasing in consecutive events in the Republican period. But they were still on the scene in the social life as narrated in our interviews.

Therefore it is obvious that for the first migrant generation, factories contributed to the social and cultural atmosphere out of which they could get an urban culture, improve their preferences and possibilities for their families and children. They say that their families who had only a primary education created a life style, on the level of survival between home and work; they expected and facilitated better conditions for later generations.

In our interviews we are told that in 1970s almost 3 thousand workers from all factories in Beykoz donated their three day wages for the construction of Ferit İnal Senior High School. This example shows that there was a high relation and interaction between social life and factories in the basin. We are also told that the first generation of workers aimed to have better education for their children. In the narratives, the elder children of the first generation tended to work in the same factories but in time other children who could have a better education tried to have better career, white collar jobs in different parts of Istanbul. Furthermore the factories functioned as facilitating education of the children of the workers. Our interviewers said that in summer time factories gave small jobs for the children so that they can collect money for their education. They also told us that there were some examples of working and studying at the same time; this kind of student workers were encouraged to study in working hours. In the changes of the cultural texture and the social life of the basin this was emphasized. Since the second generation preferred and managed to reach better career opportunities, the new generation of workers was composed of the newcomers from Anatolia. This group of workers as they were new in the city had close relationship with their villages and kept their traditional values and life styles. As a result a new generation of “peasant” workers emerged. We are told that with the high migration rates the profile of workers in the basin changed and they could not be accommodated to previous conditions. On the contrary they changed and reconciled existing social relations. There were many reasons presented for that, not only for Beykoz-Paşabahçe but for other neighborhoods of Istanbul as well, one of which was that in 1950s and 1960s most of the non-Muslim population felt uneasy for political reasons and left the country. But for Beykoz, there were other reasons too. In 1970s the society was politicized and the most of the workers were effected from left wing politics. After the coup d’etat of 1980 the working class organizations, trade unions were banned. At the same time the biggest flow of migration from the rural parts of Anatolia came to big cities, to Istanbul and Beykoz as well. This two social and political phenomenon changed labor relations and the social context of the region.

As a matter of fact for Beykoz we should say that in 1960s and 70s there were a mobile and colorful social and cultural life in the region whereas this characteristic was changed upon impact of the restricting political and social atmosphere of the country. In our interviews we are told that the new generation of workers played a role in this change with their traditional way of life combined with the new political trends in the society. The first generation was going to beaches of factories with their families, attracted by the social and sports clubs run by factory administrations. After 1980s new generation of workers showed characteristics of worker-peasants who did not oriented themselves to urban life. This tendency started after 1980 continued and obtained new aspects with the closure of the factories.

**The Closure of the Factories and its Social Impacts**

During 1980s major decisions were taken that changed the whole area of a working class basin. The area being close to the forests near Istanbul and with its beautiful view near Bosphorus, having natural beauties, attracted a special attention by neo-liberal urban planning. The major decisions that changed the destiny of the region were taken in 1984[[4]](#footnote-4). According to the decision on Beykoz and surrounding area, the whole basin was changed from an industrial area to a tourism center. On the other hand the decision was not shared and discussed collectively; only after 1990s the results could be seen with its harsh outcomes and consequences creating many struggles and discussions. But the decisions were not effected and changed.

When the closure of the factories came to the fore the organized trade unions in three big factories namely Deri-İş, Tek Gıda-İş and Kristal-İş created a platform for the union spokesmen and resisted the whole process. In this struggle the active union leaders, some of them we have interviewed, told us that the mainstream political parties backed the workers struggle against the closure of the factories. It is for sure that this process was part of neo-liberal policies and de-industrialization in Turkey as it was in the whole capitalist world economy. So the mainstream political parties and ideologies supported or adopted this trend in this way or other. The struggles of the workers in 1990s slowed down the closing process but could not stop completely.

For example, Beykoz Şişe Cam Factory closed at August 2002. As it was one of the main factories of the Republican period and because of the characteristics of the region there were mass protests by the workers, workers families and the local inhabitants of the area. The owner of the factory was Türkiye İş Bankası and RPP (CHP).

The factories did not get new workers for a long time and in the end the workers were offered gradual retirement facilities or they could get the premium plus their legal right and just left work. As a matter of fact nobody in the region wanted to lose their jobs and it was also a closure for the future opportunities of works in the region. The factory was evaluated as a sunken ship under the condition of globalization.

Employment was reduced prior to the closing of the factories, by not replacing pensioners and by shifting some production phases to subcontractors. The Glass factory, Paşabahçe Şişe Cam reduced the employment from 3000 to 1100 workers, shoe factory, Deri Kundura from 1500 to 600. Investments to technological improvements were wholly canceled in order to prepare the ground to privatization and closing after then.

Another policy was the early retirement of workers who had to work still for two years. The social security contributions of these workers were paid in advance as well as severence pay. Workers thought that they got a fair shake, did not feel any displeasure at all, but on the contrary they were glad with their plans to set new businesses.

In the production phases subject to subcontracting, new small factories were set up, such as ornamental workshops related with glass industry, concretely Şişe Cam factory and also many small enterprises were created in textile sector, known with the extensity of unregistered employment. Workers who were retired or left their job in the main factories shifted to these domains.

However another impact of the developing neoliberal markets was the lack of competitiveness for the small enterprises which led them to bankruptcy. In recent years many such businesses closed down. As a result the local population became dominated by two rising unemployed groups, one relatively aged people who turned to be unemployed after having early retired, and the second youth unable to find a job.

Due to relative distance of the basin to city centers of Istanbul, young people are limited to reach new employment opportunities. The ones, who are employed are mostly work in service sector probably in Kavacık, or different regions in Istanbul, most of which are far away. With the service sector’s – which often offers insecure and short-term work opportunities- becoming the main field of employment in basin, a severe decrease in income level and general life quality of working class is observed.

High unemployment rate, especially among young population has important impact on social life and cultural patterns in neighborhood. Consistently, during the interviews it is often mentioned that, these undereducated and unemployed young population internalizes a kind of lumpen proletariat culture; there is a severe increase in crime and addiction rates. This desperate atmosphere increases the feelings of helplessness among the people and makes them more open to internalize the legitimizing discourses produced by main stream politicians and media, who basically proclaims that with the closure of the factories, the basin will turn to a tourism region so the lands and houses owned by poor people will rise in value.

During the interviews, we are often mentioned that, the expectancy among poor people that they would gain some advantages in spite of the closure of the factories, weakened their resistance day by day.

**What will happen in the neighborhood? What are the projects?**

In 1990s there were discussions on the closure of the factories and new plans for the area. People were claiming that after the closure, the whole area would open to tourism and with the projects namely Cam Kent (Glass City) the basin would lose its labor character.

In a blog the Mayor of Beykoz Yücel Çelikbilek said that they will make Beykoz a world city in 2023, in the centenary of the foundation of the Republic, god willing.[[5]](#footnote-5) Besides the routine works he claims that they will make a Faculty of Medicine, a Turkish-German partnership University, and a 7 star hotel in the region. Beykoz Foundation is planning with Beykent University board to build a Faculty of Medicine in the place of Paşabahçe Tekel factory. The plans for the region claim that the main characteristic of the area marked with education, culture and tourism. In fact our experience in Istanbul is that the same arguments were told for the valuable, historical places. As we know that the coastal band is going to open to business and capitalist enterprises. It is claimed that the region has a brand value and this will increase with the new projects. The Mayor and the media coverage claim that the process the inhabitants of the region will benefit from the changes.

Another project is constructing an offshore marina that will serve for the new inhabitants of the region. A company namely İSPARK is investing for an offshore marina in Beykoz and Paşabahçe and the project planned to finish in 2014. The Mayor said that they have projects to build an excursion tower that will have the most extraordinary view of Bosphorus. In fact the whole area is protected but the investments and renewal projects are overwhelming.

On the other hand, an immediate change for the area will happen due to so called 2B legal regulations that are about the lands which have been settled by people for many years and lost their attribute of forest land.

As mentioned before, the first generation of workers who migrated to the region had to solve their needs for accommodation by building “gecekondu” on public lands collectively. Overtime, the status for the usage of the land and the building partially legalized. They were provided a kind of deed for joint ownership for the land. However, most of them still do not have proper deed for the lands and buildings they live in. Therefore, government regulation on land 2B, in general, which means privatization of forest lands and will open public lands to usage of upper classes, creates hope for the people of the region for purchasing the land they live on. Although the declared prices of the land shows that, it is nearly impossible for mostly poor and unemployed families to manage to buy their land, the discourse used by the politicians and media creates a hopeful perception on the side of the people of the region. Consistently, weakens their resistance against the process.

**Conclusion**

We are still working on this research and the process is continuing. The discussions among the inhabitants of the area are increased with the groundbreaking ceremony of the third bridge over Bosphorus, near Beykoz. As we have seen and told in our interviews that the urban segregation in this area is continuing. The rich gated communities created after 1980s have no access and no relation with the culture and economy of the basin. With the closure of factories there is increasing unemployment but no struggle against the process. This can be explained by the political and ideological impact upon inhabitants of the region and media coverage promoting changes. The inhabitants are not struggling against the way in which the whole area will turn out to be and they are not organizing against the future plans that will affect their daily lives and even their existence in the area. They expect the value of their lands will increase and they can get most out of what they have -a small piece of land their houses were built on, most of which have marvelous scenery. But as we know that most of the inhabitants do not have proper title deed and most of which are divided among many heirs. We have also seen that there are a lot of tenants living in the area who will have to leave without taking anything. So the process and the discussions and struggles are going on in this working class urban basin in Istanbul.

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**Interviews**

Murat Dilek (b.1961 Paşabahçe)

Hürriyet Yaşar (b.1960 Paşabahçe)

Abdullah Süreyya Özdemir (b. 1952 Paşabahçe)

Uğur Özdemir (b.1955 Paşabahçe)

Şeref Kamburoğlu (b.1953 Paşabahçe)

Tayfun Akarsular (b.

Yılmaz Darcan (b.1960)

Ünal Karababa (b.1957)

**Introductory questions:**

Interviewee

Address

Date of interview

Place of interview

Length of interview

Telephone number

Date of birth

Place of birth

Education

Monthly income / side income

Landlord / tenant

How long they live in Paşabahçe

How many people live in the household?

**Questions open ended**

1. Can you talk about yourself?
   1. How long do you live in Istanbul?
   2. Did you live any other place in Istanbul?
   3. When did you migrate to Paşabahçe/Istanbul?
   4. When your relatives are living?
2. Where do you work?
   1. Are you happy with your work?
   2. Where is your work place?
   3. How do you get to work?
3. Are you married? Where is your wife/husband working?
4. Are your children working? Where? Where do they live?
5. Are you happy living in Paşabahçe?/ Do you want to live in another place?
6. What kind of job you were doing in the factory (tekel/şişe cam/deri kundura)?
7. How was living conditions and environment in Paşabahçe?
8. How do you remember old times in Paşabahçe?
9. What kind of differences you see between old times and now?
10. Can you tell us about the closure process? How did you learn that the factories would close?
11. Were you a union member?
12. How did you think about the closing of factories?
13. What kind of differences you had in your life?
14. Did you have any differences in schooling or health services etc.?
15. Do you know what will happen to the places of factories?
16. How do you think Paşabahçe will change in the future / what are the projects about the region?
17. How do you think the region will turn out to be?
18. Do you think the changes will affect you and your family?
19. Do you think these changes will affect the place you live? How?
20. Do you think you will be living in Paşabahçe in the future? If yes why, if no why?

1. The population of Beykoz is estimated around 242 thousand in 2010 data and expected to reach 350 thousand with the renewal projects. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hakan Koçak, “Paşabahçe Semtinde İşçi Sınıfının Oluşumu, Cam İşçi Hareketinin Gelişimi ve Yönelimleri”, Unpublished PhD.Thesis, İstanbul, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Family members were working in different factories, as a result almost all the workers families were joined different social occasions organized by factories. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The de-industrialization of Bosphorus area in İstanbul in 1980’s was not limited to Beykoz. Some factories found in the other side of the Bosphorus, namely in İstinye and Ortaköy even in Haliç, where transportation by sea was very easy, for many years offered employment opportunities for people living in Beykoz, closed in this period. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kader Gür, “Yücel Çelikbilek, Hedefimiz 2023’te Beykoz’u Dünya Kenti Yapmak”, 25 December 2012. http://blog.milliyet.com.tr/yucel-celikbilek--hedefimiz-2023-de-beykoz-u-dunya-kenti-yapmak/Blog/?BlogNo=394278 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)