



The Rebuilding of Istanbul through Contradictions: The Tarlabası Case

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In the last two decades of globalizing Istanbul, emerging social, economic, cultural contradictions have been physicalized by series of urban and architectural projects. In the 1990s, researchers have outlined the emerging dynamics of the city through Manuel Castell's notion of flows in terms of fluidity of the borders not only in the field of finance but also in social, cultural and political issues. Whereas contemporary Istanbul witnesses the re-emergence of 'a conservatist new border regime' surrounded (Ayse Oncu, 2009). And Tarlabasi, an ethnic and traditional neighborhood located in central Istanbul exemplifies this. The multi-faith Tarlabasi neighborhood had been developed in the late 19th century. Following the departure of its non-Muslim population due to a series of economic Turkification policies from 1930s to 1960s, the neighborhood has welcomed low-income immigrants from Anatolia. The 1980s has been an important break point for Tarlabasi with massive number of urban demolitions of the 18th-19th century stone buildings for the construction of a large boulevard, causing a large number of immigrants to move out. As a result, the remaining northern part of the constructed boulevard has become an isolated 'ghetto' for a group of Romans and the émigrés from Africa to Iran. In the new multi-linguistic social structure, the so-called marginal inhabitants are mostly low-income, and only 30% of them are house-owners. In March 2007, the Beyoglu Municipality has initiated the "Tarlabasi Project". In the first phase, the 3, 5% of the site has been developed with an architectural vision reflecting partly a 'neo-Ottoman', partly a 'new modern' image, physicalising emerging controversies of the society. In the second phase, seven Istanbul based well-known Turkish architecture companies have been commissioned to project a 'city block' at Tarlabasi. With a non-transparent decision-making process based on a motto of 'we must clean Istanbul for a new vision' and 'the making a livable city', the second phase imposes physical change accompanied by social gentrification - as part of a large-scale anesthetization project. In this regard, we argue that the local and central authorities have a hidden agenda based on the clearance operation against the low-income marginal groups from the city centre to the periphery. However, in the textual and visual representation of the rebuilding of Istanbul in the 21st century in the media, the discriminative rhetoric as well as politically non-correct terminologies of social actors have been legitimized. Our study investigates the seven proposals through their textual and visual representation. Following a theoretical framework, first of all, the proposals have been architecturally described. Secondly, the rhetoric of social actors and the visualization of projects have been introduced. Finally a brief concluding remark is given. This study may give a broader understanding of the rebuilding of Istanbul in the 21st century within in political and cultural frameworks.

KEY WORDS: Urban clearance, ethnic neighborhood, public policies, globalizing Istanbul.