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# Urban Poverty Caused by the Immigrants: A Challenge to the Local Government in Bursa, Turkey

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## Abstract

This study presents the industrialization and urbanization processes of Bursa, considering the role of local governments regarding their supply of opportunities for the urban poor in order to improve their livelihoods during these processes. The study has focused on three different kinds of immigrant populations: immigrants from eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey, immigrants from Balkan countries and Syrian refugees. They all have been experiencing the challenges of such rapid urbanization. They are both the reason and the victims of this mostly illegal urban sprawl of the city. Besides urban regeneration studies, attempts for the social inclusion of these immigrant populations are also examined via an archival analysis carried out for the city of Bursa along with the interviews conducted with the key actors of the local governments. Although the conclusions are based on the case study, they are also relevant to other rapidly industrializing cities, which harbor populations of both immigration and domestic migrations.

**Keywords:** urban regeneration, urban poverty, local government, Bursa, Turkey

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## 1. Introduction

Political upheaval and struggles in the Middle East in the last few years are affecting many people together with the local people of the Middle East countries. The large amount of these affected people belong to the neighboring nations. Thus, being a gateway to the Western world, Turkey is the leading country to provide shelter for refugees who do not have any kind of safety for their lives in their own countries. The conducted international policies bring about the increase in the number of refugees. Turkey, where all the Middle East people desperate to migrate, has been especially influenced by Syrian refugees over the past decade. On the other hand, Turkey has been a place for the immigrants from Balkan countries, especially

Bulgaria, since the 1950s. The government has been taking extraordinary efforts to meet the basic needs—such as living, sheltering and education—of not only its own people, but also of the immigrant populations. Furthermore, the national development dynamics of Turkey has given rise to migration from rural to urban areas of the country. Considering the sociocultural, economic and physical problems the country has been facing with, it is obvious that all of these problems resulted with urban poverty and deprivation should be handled by every related platform including academia.

This study presents the industrialization and urbanization processes of Bursa, considering the role of local governments regarding their supply of opportunities for the urban poor in order to improve their livelihoods during these processes. The study has focused on three different kinds of immigrant populations: immigrants from eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey, immigrants from Balkan countries and Syrian refugees. They all have been experiencing the challenges of such rapid urbanization. They are both the reason and the victims of this mostly illegal urban sprawl of the city. Besides urban regeneration studies, attempts for the social inclusion of these immigrant populations are also examined via an archival analysis carried out for the city of Bursa along with the interviews conducted with the key actors of the local governments. Although the conclusions are based on the case study, they are also relevant to other rapidly industrializing cities, which harbor populations of both immigration and domestic migrations.

In the scope of this study, urban poverty and deprivation caused by domestic migrations and immigrations that Bursa has been faced with for many years will be described. Urban regeneration implementations conducted mostly with the collaboration of central and local governments are introduced. The contribution of these regeneration implementations to solve the urban problems is discussed as a conclusion.

## 2. The concept of urban regeneration

Healey et al. define urban regeneration as an idea involving both the perception of city decline<sup>1</sup> and the hope of renewal, reversing trends in order to find a new basis for economic growth and social well-being<sup>2</sup> [1]. Roberts and Sykes define the term as “a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change” [3].

The objectives of urban regeneration are generally listed as follows: improving the physical conditions of the urban environment; increasing the opportunities for local livelihood including activities in order to develop skills of the unemployed; dealing with social needs such as community safety, education and health promotion; developing strategies for improving

<sup>1</sup>Decline in local economies, in the use of land and buildings, in the quality of the environment and social life.

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from Parkinson [2].

locality with community capacity building and community-based organizations and developing a participatory approach for governance [2–4].

To be meaningful, regeneration needs to be a process to change a place, for the better, which is then capable of self-sustainment. It is a dynamic concept rather than an end state. It should therefore go beyond the physical and embrace the social and economic factors. This beneficial effect need not be general, but specific to a place together with its inhabitants.

An important element of successful regeneration process is that the planning vision should make use of the existing social and physical characteristics of an area, rather than eliminate them. Many practitioners now agree that urban projects should begin with a survey of all existing elements, planned or not, and that the individual qualities of a place should be enhanced by developing new proposals out of what is already there [5].

As understood from the above definitions, urban regeneration includes not only the physical attempts but also values the social and cultural issues. However, in Turkey, most of the local governments perceive urban regeneration process as a replacement of old and poor quality elements of building stock and physical infrastructure with new and quality ones. Such a perception does not cover any aspect of sociocultural and economic issues, which an ideal urban regeneration process should. Furthermore, in almost every city in Turkey, urban regeneration implementations transform deteriorated areas with the same rules and policies. Thus, locational, physical and sociocultural differences that shape diversity are out of concern [6]. Ataöv and Osmay believed that urban regeneration strategies of Turkey are similar to the physical planning approach of the 1950s and 1960s in Western developed countries because of the large-scale construction operations, which lack the social significance of space [7].

However, TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey) summarizes Turkey's low-income housing policy as the construction of modern, low-income social-housing estates as part of the "regeneration" of poor areas, especially former illegal settlements. TOKİ also promotes "urban regeneration" as the main tool to create and modernize the domestic housing market [8]. On the other hand, some researchers indicate that this urban regeneration approach not only intends to both modernize and improve the housing stock of cities but also stimulates national economic development [9, 10].

### 3. The urban challenges in Turkey

Due to its geopolitical situation, being like a bridge in between the East and the West, Turkey is a land that has been a subject to major migrations for centuries (**Figure 1**). International and domestic migrations have had much negative impact on both rural and urban areas. On the one hand, we have the rural areas that are being abandoned by its population thus contributing less and less to the economy of the country, and on the other hand, we have the urban areas struggling to accommodate populations way over their capacities, both of which have been separately subject to diverse impacts such as domestic migrations. As to immigrants, they usually prefer a progressive process of settling. They initially settle in rural areas



**Figure 1.** Location of Turkey between the West and the East.



**Figure 2.** Some views of squatter areas in Turkey.

and gradually reach certain living standards and then migrate to urban areas with expectations of better income. Therefore, as the urban areas expand into its outskirts, the impact of urban reflection on these rural areas displays itself at levels of physical, social and economic transformation.

Unregistered housing areas keep increasing as well. Illegal squatters (*gecekondu*)<sup>3</sup> that can accommodate up to three to four families, keep getting constructed with only a title to the land, after which the local governments provide these illegal quarters with basic infrastructure of electricity, water and sewage, so that the votes in question can be assured for the upcoming elections, which leads to even faster growth of unregistered housing areas (**Figure 2**). Thus, this practice turns into a long and difficult process of transforming such unsanitary and unsafe living quarters into liveable residential areas, mostly due to disagreements in between the municipal administrations and the family members who claim rights to these squatters.

Solution-oriented operations regarding such physical, locational and sociocultural problems due to urbanization process in Turkey take place on two separate platforms. The first one is the operations directed by the subsidiary units of the central government under the leader-

<sup>3</sup>The definition of “*gecekondu*,” according to the law of *gecekondu* numbered 775, adopted in 1996, is as follows: the house unit illegally built in anyone’s building plot without his permission. For further information, see [www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.775.pdf](http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.775.pdf) [11].



ship of the “Ministry of Environment and Urbanization” and the “Ministry of Development,” and the other platform is directed by the local governments along with the municipal administrations. The most outstanding operation directed by the central government is KENTGES<sup>4</sup>. Politics and activities to solve legal, technical and managerial problems that emerge during urban development process, in a sanitary, well-balanced and safe manner, were determined based on this action plan. It is a vision of urbanization and housing, in the context of spatial planning, settlement and building, aiming to accomplish by the year 2023, which is the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. While evaluating the resources, the opportunities and the possibilities of Turkey, corresponding goals, strategies and action plans, which can be inter consistent and swiftly applicable, were also determined.

The operations of the local governments are conducted within the authority and the responsibilities that are determined by the municipal law of 5393<sup>5</sup>. This law assigns multiple tasks to the local administrations, embodying the social politics of the central government along with the “social municipality” approach<sup>6</sup> [12]. In order to accomplish these tasks, it is essential that more of public expenditure should be allocated to the issues of health, education, housing and environment [13].

Within the law in question and by the provisions of the articles<sup>7</sup> of social municipality, the municipal administrations are responsible to carry out or at least supervise various social services and support them to help people gain skills and professions [14]. It is the responsibility of the municipal administrations to provide all types of medical services to the permanent population through medical centers, hospitals and mobile medical units. They are also responsible to set up social facilities in order to carry out and develop other social and cultural services. They need to allocate funds and resources to implement social services for the poor, the indigent and the orphans. They are also required to build mass housing units for these vulnerable members of the society [15–17].

Besides such topics of operations as summarized above, we should also refer to the operations that aim solving the problems of the Syrian refugees, which has been the agenda for the last 5 years. In the Report of Turkey 2016—Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan—it is indicated that the government of Turkey has been playing a leading role by providing protection and help to the Syrian refugees via AFAD<sup>8</sup> especially in the southeast of the country (**Figure 3**).

As indicated in Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2016–2017 (3RP), NGOs play an effective role in providing protection and service especially to noncamp Syrians who are trying to live in cities. There are 139 international NGOs; half of them were accredited after the beginning of the huge migration from Syria. Implementing Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (3RP)

<sup>4</sup>Integrated Urban Development Strategy and Action Plan.

<sup>5</sup>Urbanization Council was undertaken by the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement with the participation of 356 members from 151 institutions in 4–7 May 2009. It is an advisory council on urbanization affairs that has the main aim of developing an action plan, which enables sustainable urban development throughout the country. Official Journal dated 13.07.2005, Number 25834, Published municipal law of 5393.

<sup>6</sup>Keleş defines “social municipality” as the municipality of social welfare state [12].

<sup>7</sup>The articles including social municipality approach are: md 14, md 7, md 38/n, md60/i, taken from Özgökçeler and Bıçkı [14].

<sup>8</sup>Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency.



**Figure 3.** Some views from refugee camps.

activities, they provide support to local NGOs. One of the most hopeful progresses in this process is the private sector actors willing to alleviate the unfavorable impacts of the refugees on the local people and the positive respond of the 3RP partners for the engagement with the private sector [18].

#### **4. Local governments' effort to rise to the challenge of urban poverty in Bursa**

Following the general evaluation of the situation in Turkey, the operations of the local governments of Bursa, which is the second major city of the Marmara region after Istanbul, are discussed (**Figure 4**). It is the first capital of the Ottoman Empire and is located on the historic Silk Road and the Spice Road. Its textile industry that was founded in the Ottoman period continued to develop during the Republican period of the country. New industrial developments



**Figure 4.** Location of Bursa in Turkey.



**Figure 5.** A view from the planned labor housing area.

including mainly the textile and the automotive production that began at the 1950s caused the city to expand rapidly. The establishment of the first industrial zone of the country in Bursa in 1966 initiated the rapid and unplanned urbanization process of the city. The macro form of the city, which developed in parallel to six separate master development plans from 1924 to 1984, has a linear geographic attribution of east to west, leaning on the skirts of Uludağ on the south side and expanding towards the abundant plains of Bursa on the north side [19]. The purpose of these strategic plans was to be able to control the rapid urbanization, which was triggered by a 10-year rapid industrialization process from 1960 to 1970. In 1998, “Bursa’s Strategic Plan of 2020” was prepared with the objectives anticipated for the year 2020. The 1/100.000 scaled strategic plan of Bursa and its surroundings, which began to be prepared with a participatory approach in 2010, have not yet been approved.

Besides the domestic migrations that were triggered by the rapid industrialization, immigration from the Balkan countries,<sup>9</sup> which took place between 1925 and 1995, has increased the need for housing. The grid-layout planned housing area, which was anticipated for the Bulgarian immigrants arriving in 1968, was set up to direct and move such housing process towards the plains of Bursa. Following the foundation of this new district along with the development of the organized industrial zone, this housing area expanding with four separate districts has become a region especially for accommodating labor (**Figure 5**).

Housing needs of such unorganized labor along with the migrating population from the rural areas could only be fulfilled with the partnership-titled plots of land or the illegal ones. Hence, illegal housing was once again triggered by the inability to fulfill the needs of the people with low and middle income, due to the mass immigration in 1989 along with the poor economic circumstances of the time. These illegal housing districts covered very extensive areas, located on the north side of the Mudanya-Bursa-Ankara highway on the west side of the city and the north and south side of the Bursa-Ankara highway on the east side of the city. As to the skirts of Uludağ, another illegal housing area was formed on the upper side of the housing zone in the central city [20]. (**Figure 6**)

<sup>9</sup>Especially Bulgarian immigrants who came with four major waves of mass migration between the years 1925–1949, 1950–1952, 1968–1979 and 1989–1995 caused a huge increase in the amount of housing units.





Figure 6. Some views from illegal neighborhoods in Bursa.

Unfortunately, planned development of the housing areas, which was much needed because of the increasing demand in housing, due to these domestic migrations that were triggered by the increase in employment opportunities, was unable to be expedited. The inability to prevent this process of immigration and domestic migrations, which have significantly changed the social, economic and cultural structure of the population of Bursa, has led to inevitable disappointments of such immigrants and migrants, who were hoping to find employment and obtain decent livelihood. Furthermore, this situation caused a decrease in local residents' quality of life and also a decline in their job opportunities (Figure 7).

Two of the biggest municipalities of Bursa metropolitan city of which areas are subject to immigration have adopted social municipality approach in order to offer solutions not only for their local people but also for the immigrant families. The municipality of Yıldırım county, locating on the east of Bursa and hosting the biggest amount of immigrant families, provides too many social facilities. With its slogan of "Safe and peaceful city of Yıldırım" and corresponding objectives, the municipal administration has established social centers to facilitate educational courses especially for youngsters and women to help them gain professions.



Figure 7. Some views from changing neighborhoods in Bursa.

Named as “the district halls,” these centers are open to everyone. The most outstanding ones of such social projects, which are conducted with the related NGOs, are as follows: “you are valuable, stay healthy” project to cure and decrease drug abuse among youngsters, “healthy women and happy families in Yıldırım” project to solve the health issues of women, “women’s guesthouse” project to protect and accommodate women who have been subject to violence and “virtuous youth, virtuous Yıldırım” scouting protocol to instil and inspire children and youngsters with moral and ethical values [21].

The municipality of Osmangazi county, locating at the center of Bursa, has also been in demand of the immigrants. Especially, the skirts of the mount Uludag and the plain of Bursa are occupied by illegal houses of the immigrants. Osmangazi Municipality also provides some social facilities for people living in its boundaries. The most noteworthy of them is the “Career Development Courses” that has been offering 75 different kinds of courses in 22 centers and 109 neighborhoods. “Education Houses” in five different districts of the county serve young people and children with their physical opportunities including libraries, computer laboratories, workshop studios, multifunctional halls, sports halls and educators. “Psychological counseling and guidance centers” in four different districts serve the families via individual psychological counseling, family counseling and partner counseling services [22].

Besides these attempts in order to provide a higher quality of life for their citizens and immigrants living in Bursa, these municipalities undertake some urban regeneration implementations in collaboration with the Metropolitan Municipality of Bursa. Although the main aim of these regeneration implementations is to offer a healthy and safe living environment for the residents, they also contribute to overcome the urban deprivation in and around these districts. In Osmangazi county, there are two big urban regeneration projects, one of which has been under construction since 2014. This project includes 2076 housing units and 202 retail units in 420,000 m<sup>2</sup> area, where 85% of the total area will be green area. The other project is for the regeneration of illegal housing areas over the skirts of the mount Uludag and will be implemented over 7000 m<sup>2</sup> area including 230 units. In Yıldırım county, urban regeneration operations are carried out in 11 different residential areas, which correspond to 33% of Yıldırım. The construction facilities in two of the areas have already started. The implementation of the one is about to finish, and the design process of the other eight is going on. All of these urban regeneration projects undertaken in two counties of Bursa are developed for the housing areas that need to be strengthen against any probable earthquake. Also, these regeneration areas formerly included unhealthy and unsafe building stock that need to be changed. Some views from these implementations are shown in **Figure 8**.



**Figure 8.** Some views from urban regeneration studies in Bursa.



## 5. Conclusion and policy recommendations

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of urban regeneration, which includes sociological, psychological, economic, physical and spatial dimensions, is still not dealt with a holistic approach in Turkey. Demolishing the existing areas and building more housing only with reasons, such as unhealthy conditions and location of a disaster area, are considered and accepted as “urban regeneration.” Construction operations, disregarding the needs and living styles of the residents, but being built with concerns of generating more revenue, result in dense residential blocks, detached from the local contexts and unsatisfactory not only for the residents but also for the citizens. Furthermore, as in many other cities with immigrants, shareholding in adjacent parcels and sharing the right of ownership for residences with no garden is a great economic problem in Bursa. It is a difficult and unresolved process to persuade the beneficiaries and claimants that the right approach is not the “net usage area,” instead “value”-based rights exchange. These problems are observed almost all over Turkey<sup>10</sup>.

Economic problems experienced during the renovation of the housing stocks make the process more complicated. The fact that most of the housing stocks of these two counties of Bursa are built on either the dangerous or the protected natural areas makes the operations crucial. Additionally, the low-standard building materials and techniques used in the construction of “squatters” pose a serious threat to the residents. This shows that in real terms, it is definitely essential to begin an “urban regeneration” with the collaboration of all of the actors by using a holistic and participative approach.

It was noted that the priority to determine the areas of urban regeneration is to take over and continue from the point that the previous management had left<sup>11</sup>. It has also been observed that the management has not been very successful in convincing the public to evaluate properties based on “value” rather than the “usable space,” even though they have tried. On the other hand, it was stated that the flats that were produced through similar constructional operations during previous periods of management have quickly gained value, examples of which should increase and be known by the public, which will make it easier to convince them. However, efforts or even intentions to convince the public that the anticipated new housing areas should be mixed used and vital urban environments were not observed. No participatory approach was adopted to raise the public’s awareness regarding the determination of their expectations and the meaning of actual urban regeneration. The biggest problem of the municipality has been to determine the financial model of the operations conducted as urban regeneration and find the appropriate contracting companies. Considering the dynamics of a middle-income country such as Turkey, the problem in question is undeniable. Nonetheless, it is overlooked or not yet recognized that the implementation of high-quality urban environments fulfilling diverse needs will definitely help in solving such issues.

<sup>10</sup>It is also studied and evaluated by many researchers in national and international literature. For example, Candan, A., B., Kolluoğlu, B., 2008; Erman, T., 2001; Karpat, K., 1976; Keyder, Ç., Öncü, A., 1993; Öncü, A., 1988

<sup>11</sup>The previous management had determined the areas in question based on the priority of the need to strengthen their construction systems to establish earthquake-resistant features.

It can be concluded that the local governments' fight against urban poverty in Bursa is appreciable but unfortunately not effective enough. There are so many municipal initiatives some of which are implemented. There are also voluntary undertakings handled by NGOs. However, the lack of coordination between the related actors brings about waste of time and effort throughout these well-intentioned exertions. Further research is required to plan and organize multidisciplinary studies that should be undertaken with an integrative and participatory approach.

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