The Possibility of Collective Action in Tozkoparan against Urban Regeneration Project from the Perspective of Political Process Theory

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Abstract
This study focuses on the Tozkoparan neighborhood and investigates the collective action and mobilization dynamics against urban regeneration project. Neighborhood is a social housing area which is developed as an owner occupation site. Tozkoparan is also distinguished by its high level of neighborhood belonging, large public spaces, and low building density. Although the regeneration efforts are not being at the stage of physical destruction, we have found out that both the demands on capitalizing exchange value and the need to renovate small and old dwellings are effective in residents’ attitude. In this context, Neighborhood association formed against top-down project management can become an agent of mobilization only if it pursues politics of compensation on behalf of residents. Furthermore, although the local government's repressive strategy leaves little room for collective action, unfair management of the process as well as producing results like loss of rights and displacement, can generate new political opportunities.

Keywords
Urban regeneration • Collective action and mobilization • Political opportunities and threats • Local government's repressive strategies • Tozkoparan social housing area

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Istanbul has been witnessing a large scale urban regeneration process, however, collective action and mobilizations have developed with more limits relative to the pre-1980 period. Studies that discuss collective action and mobilization have examined mostly squatter areas in Turkey. However, this study focuses on a social housing area which is established as a squatter- prevention zone in public leadership with a great percentage of ownership assurance. There are several factors that account for the limited collective action against this ongoing transformation. This study analyses those factors determining the boundaries of collective action against the urban regeneration in Tozkoparan, a neighborhood in Güngören district, within the framework of the political process theory which examines the relationship between the qualities of the political context and the collective actors’ strategies and activities.

In this context, first propositions of political process theory and the urban political context of opportunities and threats will be revealed, and, the way the project has been implemented and the local government’s discourse and actions will be examined as political opportunities and threats in the example of the progress in Tozkoparan. An investigation of socio-political and spatial relations, property relations, neighborhood affiliations and loyalty, the neighborhood association’s role, contention repertoire, and capacities follows the analysis of the mobilization structures and interpretational frameworks.

The political process model, beginning with Eisinger (1973) asking why racial and poverty revolts arose in 43 American cities in the 1960s, was carried to a more comprehensive and comparative framework later by Tilly (1978). Eisinger openly used the concept of political opportunity for the first time as the reason for the riots, and referred to the role that city administrators’ openness or being closed played in these riots (Eisinger, 1973, pp. 11–28; Meyer 2004, p. 128). In the foundational work, From Mobilization to Revolution (1978), Tilly asserted that three components – interest, organization, and opportunity- explain collective action. “Interests represent the potential gains from participation; organization, the level of unified identity and networks; and opportunity, the amount of political power, the likelihood of repression, and the vulnerability of the target” (Caren, 2007). Tilly argues in the same work that political openness or closeness to the participation plays a significant role in determining mobilization or demobilization. Relatively open political system diverts protest movements to the traditional channels, and renders protestors to demobilize. In the work, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency (1982), McAdam pushes the theory further, and analyzes the rise and the fall of US civil rights movements by three factors: political opportunities, organizational strength, and cognitive liberalization. Theory has evolved after McAdam, and thus framing and mobilizing structures have largely taken the places of cognitive liberation and organizational strength, respectively. Framing is the conscious efforts by the claimant
to share a common understanding of the world and of themselves that motivate collective action, in turn. Mobilizing structures, on the other hand, are the formal and informal channels through which claimants mobilize (McAdam, 1996b, p. 339). Later, the concept of “contentious repertoire” has been introduced to the theory by Tilly’s two studies, *The contentious French* (1986) and *Popular contention in Great Britain* (1995). Contentious politics “involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and brings in government as mediator, target or claimant” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 5; Tilly, 2003, p. 26). Contentious repertoire is the set of tools of actions taken by the claimants in order to achieve a common aim. The theory has reviewed by the joint efforts of McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow (2001) who criticized the classical theory that we have portrayed so far, in terms of its static nature, well-functioning in single-case, and focusing on opportunities instead of threats. They proposed a more dynamic analysis to contentious politics and identified causal dynamics and mechanisms recurring within each episode. These are brokerage; identity shift and boundary formation; co-option, diffusion and repression (McAdam et al., 2007, pp. 14–17).

In the later work (*Contentious Performances*) Charles Tilly asserts that regimes and repertoires shape each other and regime differences account for different forms of contentious politics. For him, claimants always negotiate on the boundary between what is forbidden and what is tolerated. The propensity and capacity of government’s repression are shaped by several factors such as whether it is democratic or authoritarian in character, and whether it is relied on patronage or exclusion of the masses (Tilly, 2008, pp. 146–174).

If a general evaluation is to be made, in the theory, it’s argued that timing of a collective action is determined by the political threats and opportunities and the decision about the threats and opportunities depends on the perceptions rather than the objective conditions. The theory also emphasizes the role of mobilizing structures and framing processes along with contentious repertoires.

In the second part, Istanbul case is situated within this frame of reference; since an analysis of an urban movement is involved here, the neoliberal urbanization across the globe as a context of social change of political contention is presented. The localization of neoliberalism, or urban structuring in its national-local context, reveals how it takes form within institutional arrangements, policy preferences, urban regime, and political struggles (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). We conclude that neoliberal urbanization has its distinctive character regarding the role of the state in shaping both the property relations and social hygiene during urban regeneration. Political environment in neoliberal urbanization provides limited opportunities for collective action. Furthermore, In Eastern/South countries, government is shaped with more
authoritarian practices, more favorable capital development, and a more speculative real-estate market. In the essence, the government undertakes an obvious role in the formation of real estate and land markets on one hand, and in approaching the urban complaints and movements that form on the other. The arrangement of property regimes and political relationships is different in Eastern societies and various factors are put forth in shaping the political relations that generate extra constraints for the collective action. One of these factors is informality: Bayat (2000; 2002; 2012) evaluates informality as the survival strategy of the subalterns, whereas Roy (2005) points out the role of the state in the production and reproduction of the informality. Thus, they both take informality as a demobilizing factor that distinguishes the East from the West. Furthermore, political clientelism (Auyero et al., 2009) stands out as another factor that explains the collective inaction in Eastern societies. In several studies, the illiberal state (Bayat, 2012) and the use of violence are pointed out as preventing factors for the mobilizations (Eraydın & Taşan-Kok, 2014).

In the third part, we provide some information on the urban regeneration area, and its location and status; following this part, information regarding the methodology of the study is presented. Istanbul has experienced a transformation that covers quite a large area simultaneously; this transformation takes place through the accumulation of individual decisions on one hand, and under public leadership on the other. Tozkoparan has witnessed an urban regeneration led by the state. Under the state-led regeneration there are two categories of areas; ones that experienced physical destruction and the ones that are not subjected to destruction yet (Duman, 2015, p. 410). Tozkoparan belongs to latter. There are various studies that have been conducted in Turkey to understand urban resistance; and a significant portion of these studies are related to squatter areas. Being a social housing area with great percentage of legal deeds, the dynamics of collective action or inaction in Tozkoparan neighborhood have different features than squatter areas which provides an opportunity to make contribution to the relevant literature. The urban regeneration has been a topic of discussion in Tozkoparan since 2008; however, there are still uncertainties about this process. The process has been continuing for 7 years, and the threat of demolishment seems far away; yet both factors seem to restrain collective action. However, keeping this in mind, the aim of the study is examining the probability of collective action by analyzing other dynamics.

In this context, the probability of a compromise that would break what Tarrow (1994, p. 19) calls “habitual passivity” and factors that affect the formation of the mobilization or collective action have been evaluated in two sections. The first section is on the political opportunities and threats where we discuss the impact of three factors on collective agent and mobilization. First one is related with the reactions authorities take against the collective agent and discourse frame on urban
regeneration; the second is top-down and ambiguous project implementation; and the third one is delegation of power to local authority along with political clientelism. The other section is labelled as mobilizing structures and interpretative frames. In this section; i) the Neighborhood belonging, social relations; ii) the political repertoire of the neighborhood; and iii) the role, representative power and interpretative frames of neighborhood association have been analyzed.

In the study, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used in obtaining data. Face-to-face surveys were conducted between November and December 2013 with 639 people. When implementing the survey, eight different housing types were identified based on the hypothetical sociological decomposition of Tozkoparan’s housing regions; surveys were distributed proportionally according to the total number of buildings that occurred within these types. Specific quotas were also met when applying the survey: (a) 15% are renters b) distribution in accordance with voter parties from the March 2009 local elections, and c) the ratio of working women. The authors conducted in-depth interviews following statistical analysis of the surveys.

Tozkoparan urban regeneration area is utilized for accommodating people who are affected by the demolitions in other areas of the city since 1950s, established as a squatter prevention zone by state-led initiative, and consists of social houses. Since its establishment, the public authorities had legitimacy; the private market is unable to supply regeneration service in the area and the public authorities has to be involved to create lots with adequate sizes to profit the developers. The location of the area offers huge expectations regarding rent. Strong legal position and being an urban site developed through formal housing market, high potential for rent seeking, the impossibility of realizing this rent without public intervention, and experiencing no clashes with the public authorities since its establishment, all seem keep residents in the “wait and see” position. The excessive public land provides an opportunity for regeneration without any loss of rights. This potential has the determining role in the attitudes and strategies of both the inhabitants and the municipality.

Besides, long regeneration process, which progressed with ambiguities, has conflictual outcome; on the one hand, it led a speculative housing market in the area which pushed residents to seek for higher rent on the other, it decreased the interest of third parties and inhabitants on this process. A previous study conducted in 2009-2010 in Tozkoparan shows that 61.5% of the interviewees stated negative attitudes towards urban regeneration (Ünsal & Türkün, 2014, p. 324). However, this study identifies strong demand in favor of urban regeneration over the past years. 86.7% of the inhabitants of Tozkoparan neighborhood replied as “necessary” regarding the question whether they believe that urban regeneration is necessary or not. Moreover,
61% of the interviewees expressed their opinions by saying “If fair and just urban regeneration is implemented, it should benefit all of us. There is opportunity for me.”

The community spirit in Tozkoparan neighborhood is stronger in comparison with other neighborhoods which functioned as an organizing channel during the establishment of Neighborhood Association. However, strong community attachment that could support a collective action in Tozkoparan neighborhood is divided by different interests, and remains secondary since the inhabitants demand their share from the development of the area first. Moreover, an ethnic/religious sect or political belonging which can be incorporated to local activism could not be determined. Further to that the local government has been implementing significant strategies and tactics to prevent the emergence of a collective agent and mobilization. In this context, the ambiguities and top down management and the implementation of the process, the discourse of the municipality including “a square meter for every square meter” and “in situ urban regeneration”, persistence on individual communication, delegitimizing strategies against the neighborhood association, and the support for the establishment of a new association in the neighborhood step in as preventive strategies against the formation of collective action and collective agent. As the inhabitants of the neighborhood are relatively better educated and have urban roots, they are more inclined for individualistic and traditional repertoire and the politics of compensation. We identified urban transformation projects in Istanbul generally to be centralist and frivolous types of applications. Güngören municipality suffered from negativities similar to the way the Tozkoparan urban regeneration project is being applied. The political process model highlights two elements in collective action and mobilization. The first is individual perceptions in the direction that urban transformation will not be realized justly; the second is having a sense of the effectiveness related to creating a change that has the necessary structural and objective conditions for various types of resistance. The data obtained from the field survey as related to the first situation is quite striking. The predominant majority of residents evaluated protecting rights as conducting an individual or collective struggle. Therefore, experiencing “lost rights” or “no exhibition of a just administration” was assessed as an important source of mobilization. Regarding the second issue, the weakening of hope that something can be changed in the face of harsh state interventions which is independent from the example of Tozkoparan, and residents’ poverty in the case of Tozkoparan could be effective. Thus, the ratio of those who were thought to have no effect on municipal decisions is quite high; this carries a striking quality on collective action and mobilization. Those who feel that nothing will change are not expected to join a collective action. Again, that the transformation process has yet to be completed and that no result has come about. In this framework,

3 Asman Türkün, Personal interview of Betül Duman, 20 Ocak 2016, YTÜ
based on the commitment to the neighborhood and locale, as well as individual interest and motivation, in comparison to the risks that the political structure will form, the problem of the extent to which contention is sustainable will be connected to how the process will be shaped. In this case, neighborhood association formed against top-down project management of authorities can become an agent of mobilization only if it aims politics of compensation on behalf of residents. Besides, we found out that although the political repression of local government leaves little room for collective action, failure to manage the process fairly, losses of rights, and displacements can pave the way for new political opportunities.

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