

## The right to inhabit in the city: Yeni Sahra squatter settlement in Istanbul

**Aytanga DENER**

*Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul, TURKEY*

*Received: March 2012*

*Final Acceptance: May 2012*

### **Abstract:**

The informal housing issue was included into the agenda of Turkey in the 1950s. The outskirts of major cities are still crowded with informal and low quality houses. Today, Istanbul is under the influence of global flows and the big scaled urban transformation projects are being planned to rearrange the degraded areas. In this context, the squatters are displaced whereas the land profit is transferred to the big capitalists. However, social movements and resistance arise against these projects and the housing issue of poor people is discussed in various forums for the sake of developing their socioeconomic and cultural status in the cities.

This paper aims to discuss the concepts, "the right to the city" and "the right to inhabit" within the context of the neoliberal regimes and the consequential economic, socio-cultural, ideological and spatial transformation occurred both in the world cities and Istanbul. The first part of the paper is shared for the discussions on the issues of neoliberalism, social exclusion and the concepts, "the rights to the city", "the right to inhabit". The successive phases of gecekondu phenomenon are examined in order to form the basis for the evaluations of the current status of squatters and their houses in the city. In the second part, the physical and social structure of Yeni Sahra squatter settlement in Anatolian part of Istanbul is discussed in relation to the research mainly on the characteristics of inhabitants and houses. The incremental development of the squatter houses versus urban transformation projects is considered by thinking the integration of the inhabitants into the city life.

**Keywords:** *The right to inhabit city, neoliberalism, low-income people, Yeni Sahra squatter settlement, Istanbul*

### **Introduction**

Turkey got acquainted with squatter houses (gecekondus -landed overnight in Turkish) in the early 1950s and still tackle with the problems occurred in relation to this phenomenon. Today, the officially announced number of gecekondu in Istanbul is 278 462 (<http://www.ibb.gov.tr>), but the authorities

assume that the factual number is much higher. Additionally, 70% (800 000) of buildings (1 500 000) are informal and were built without receiving any technical service; similarly more than 60 % of the population live in substandard houses (Demirkaya, 2007). During this 60 year period, not only the general character of gecekondu, but also the composition of inhabiting population changed considerably. So that, parallel to the differentiations, the significance of squatter settlements altered and the interest of the politicians continued in varying ways.

Taking the support of the economically liberal Turkish Government Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, currently, tries to apply urban transformation projects and undertakes evictions in different parts of the city. The governmental authorities defend the large scale projects and displacements of the people living in gecekondu areas by emphasizing the disordered structures of the settlements as well as the danger of earthquake and flood risk at water courses, where a number of informal houses were built in the past.

The local media frequently give information about the demolitions and the strife between the squatter population and police force. However, social movements and resistance arise against the projects prepared without asking the opinions of the people concerned and the consequential evictions. People form organizations and try to make their voices heard by the announcements as: "We are the people, and know that it is necessary to come together and struggle against the ones who want shape our city according to the needs of the rulers but not according to the needs of the people. The impoverished people whose labor is stolen and willpower is ignored have no chance other than gathering and fighting together" (<http://www.barinmahakki.org>).

The theorists discuss on the housing issue of poor people in various international forums for the sake of developing their socioeconomic and cultural status in the cities despite the opposing initiatives of today's neoliberal regimes and their beneficiaries who are profit maximizers. The successive charters proposed in these meetings are mainly based on the rights of urban dwellers and seek to give power and authority back to urban inhabitants.

In this account, this paper aims to discuss "the right to the city" and "the right to inhabit" concepts within the context of neoliberal regimes and the consequential economic, socio-cultural, ideological and spatial transformation occurred both in the world and Istanbul. Thus, it focuses on the case of Yeni Sahra squatter settlement in the Anatolian part of Istanbul and examines its physical and social structure and incremental development of the houses in the scope of the poor and socially excluded people' right to inhabit the city.

### **Methodology**

The paper has two main parts. In the first part, the issues of neoliberalism and social exclusion as well as the concepts of "the right to the city" and "the right to inhabit" are addressed in order to develop a particular theoretical background that support the discussion based on the difficult living conditions of the poor people in the contemporary urban environments. The understanding developed in this context is intensified by the discussions on

the benefits of homeownership and the incremental improvement of the houses. The review on the successive phases of gecekondü phenomenon that occurred parallel to the legislative, physical and socioeconomic changes is added into this part in order to form the basis for the evaluations of the current status of squatters and their houses in the city. In the second part, the physical and social structures of Yeni Sahra squatter settlement are examined. The information about the settlement is obtained from different sources. The mayor's records, the interviews with the inhabiting people, the news articles in the local newspapers and the information in the district websites lead the inquiry on Yeni Sahra and its status in the city as well as the characteristics of the inhabitants.

### **Neoliberalism and social exclusion**

"Neoliberalism" -literally means the "new liberalism", where "liberalism" is considered as "free market economics" (Harman, 2007)- became dominant in the 1970s and resulted in both ideological and practical changes, although some think that it is possible to talk only about a victory of an ideology rather than functional changes in the global economic system (Bourdieu, 1998; Harman, 2007). The neo-liberal regime, minimized the state's role, income support and public service expenses, lifted the blockages in front of the markets, liberated and encouraged the individual enterprises –on the contrary to this widespread belief, by some authors, the increase in the rate of state expenditure in the advanced capitalist countries is accepted as the evidence of the reality that capitalism cannot do without state today. Therefore, the system only has been restructured on an international scale and states continue to play a central role in facilitating and regulating the internationalized production (Harman, 2007). The main idea of neoliberalism is to overcome poverty through economic growth by employing the working population but the expectations did not come to be true and poverty increased in reverse. Currently, a number of unemployed people and the ones working in low paid, insecure jobs, live in deteriorating city areas. They are regarded as unruly, potentially dangerous and economically useless underclass (Gough et al., 2006). For David Harvey, neo-liberalism was a political project trying to consolidate and reconstruct the class power (Goodman and Gonzalez, 2009). The reassertion occurred through a power shift away from production to the world of finance and the leaders gained power in spite of the actual owners of capital. The ordinary people suffer dramatically from the capitalist crises (Harvey, 2005). In this parallel, Marxists argue that capitalist economies and their spatiality produce poverty as the counterpart of wealth and growth, and the applied class power produces exclusion not only through economy but within social life and politics (Gough et al., 2006).

Indicating a process, social exclusion is a relational and multidimensional term (Haussermann et al. 2004, Room, 2004, Stoeger, 2011). It focuses either on economy or various groups discriminated because of disability, poverty, gender and ethnic reasons (Sen, 1983). They are subjected to surveillance and direction and oppressed socio-culturally. These "underclass" people are pushed to live in deviant places where the culture of poverty is reproduced at neighborhood level. Repressive policies range from isolation and abandonment to eviction and eradication. By the maneuvers of housing markets, private sector consumer services and the sanctions of the states, these neighborhoods are isolated to prevent the poor from contaminating the culture of the respectable working class. The sharp

changes, occurred in the last decades, are the result of the class struggle directed by the capital that wants to increase its authority and profit rate. Then, poverty and exclusion, socio-spatial unevenness, are the logical outcomes in capitalist societies (Gough et al., 2006).

### **Neoliberalism and social exclusion in Istanbul**

After the 1980s, dramatic ideological and resultantly socioeconomic changes occurred in Turkey. Istanbul undertook a great role in the integration of country into global markets. As in other cities in the developing world, the rapid integration into transnational networks created new social groups. A small group of upper class people adhered to the life style and consumption habits of their counterparts in the leading world cities, but the city lost its middle class. During the economic crises occurred in the last decades, employment opportunities and social integration mechanisms deteriorated which resulted in apparent diversification and social exclusion (Keyder, 2005).

Today, the city spaces in the globalized world are abundant with signs, images, texts etc. accompanied by the proliferated cultural values that the economic and political systems are linked in a great deal (Alkiser et al., 2009; Routledge, 2010). In Istanbul, a city under the influence of global flows, manufacture and construction sectors diminished and the job opportunities decreased. Thus, neighborhood upgrading policies increased the interests of multinational companies, private universities and big construction companies in pieces of land once occupied by squatter houses. The national and local politicians turned their faces towards land market instead of establishing clientelistic relations with the new comers. For this reason, the poor people inhabiting these settlements began to be regarded as invaders and were socially excluded (Keyder, 2005). However, some conflicts can be abolished by encouraging the participation of the related actors, local people and authorities, NGOs etc. in the “urban transformation projects” (Alkiser et al., 2009). In this way, they can claim their right to inhabit the city.

### **The “right to the city” concept**

Urban spaces that change under the influences of neoliberal capitalist globalization stage the power struggles among global, national and local actors. They are the products of the politics of inclusion and exclusion and play important roles on democratic rights and justice claims. For example, some groups are ignored and the places that they live are forgotten, whereas others are displaced due to demand for land. Low income people living in developing countries are inherently in need of proper houses (Routledge, 2010).

In the globalized cities, the governing institutions have been restructured. Corporate sector captured the decision-making power and undermined the urban democracy by creating opportunities for these particular people. On the other hand, urban spaces witness resistances that are organized against the dominant power. People struggle and demand the “right to the city”, which lies at the hearth of democracy (Routledge, 2010).

French philosopher Henri Lefebvre first developed the “Right to the City -Le Droit a la Ville” concept in 1968. Since then, this notion has become

influential on the urban policies and practices in worldwide environments. (UN-Habitat, 2005) Lefebvre argues that "right to the city is like a cry and a demand." It is "to return to the hearth of the traditional city, and the call existent or recently developed centralities... It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre, 1996:158). Central points, in the cities are important for him because people can encounter and exchange the city rhythms, time and place usages in those places. He continues with the words that emphasize the importance of an integrated theory of the city and urban society, using the resources of science and art, in the solution of urban problems. According to him, only groups, social classes and class fractions can take revolutionary initiative and realize the final solutions so that the renewed city would become the oeuvre, a body enriched with philosophical and artistic values. (Lefebvre, 1996) Thinking that the cities are the places providing opportunities for every person and each social group, Lefebvre 40 years ago stated the necessity of reshaping the cities with the participation of ALL for ALL's sake. His theory is important, as he defines the "right to change" the city for the first time and raised the following questions: "who has the right to the city" and "how this right is legitimized or undermined" (Leontidou, 2010).

The "Right to the city" concept is widely discussed in international meetings. During Habitat II Meeting in Istanbul -1996, the "right to housing" was considered for the first time and the "World Charter on the Right to the city" was proposed (UN-Habitat, 2005). Recently, the main theme of World Urban Forum -2010, organized in Rio de Janeiro, was designated as the "Right to the city" in the way proposed by the Brazilian social movements. Parallel to these initiatives, Marc Purcell thinks that the right to the city concept may direct people in restructuring the power relations which underlie urban space and transfer control from capital and the state over to urban inhabitants (2004). According to Harvey, to overcome the injustice produced by neoliberal undertakings a political awareness should be developed and social movements have to be organized. Considering that this is an illegitimate system, people have to think about something different like "Right to the city" on the way to democratization and construction of different cities. Housing speculations in the cities are directly related to the denial of right to the city to poor people by expelling them to outskirts in order to open space to sell new buildings to the middle and rich classes. Nothing has been done to protect people (Goodman and Gonzalez, 2009). However, the character of urban social movements, accelerated with new technologies and informational cultures, differentiate with binary changes: material to non-material; right to inhabit (land occupations of squatters-working class) to right to occupy (use of public space and social centers by international migrants, informal sector, young and unemployed locals) and even right to be heard, publicity and communication (Leontidou, 2010).

### **The right to inhabit and the squatter settlements**

Home ownership gives various satisfactions parallel to the provided opportunities; people can control their lives and ameliorate their physical and psychological health; they can involve in the activities of the social organizations and participate in communal decisions; children can improve their school performances by better cognitive abilities and lessen the juvenile delinquencies; low-income homeowners expectantly vote more than renters and become politically engaged (Haan, 2005; Shlay, 2006). In this account,

home ownership can be assumed as a political right symbolically equivalent to citizenship (Shlay, 2006).

Occasionally, authorities intervene the housing market through zoning, urban renewal and slum clearance and public housing thinking that poor housing is the source of many problems. For this reason, low housing policy is accepted as a remedy (Shlay, 2006). According to the study of United Nations Economic Commission (UNECE) in 2009, informal settlement problem affects over 50 million people in the UNECE region –countries of North America, Europe, Central Asia and Israel. Poverty and social exclusion are key drivers of the formation of illegal settlements in most countries and inadequate housing is a central issue for informal settlements - squatter and refugee settlements, overcrowded and dilapidated housing receiving no facilities. Appropriate housing policies that provide social equity, social justice and improve the living standards of disadvantaged groups should be available. Upgrading the existing houses or developing alternative housing systems must be framed by long term strategies, also to achieve wider societal goals they have to be based on the principles of sustainability and social fairness. Joint and inclusive approaches to governance would ensure better results. Strategies for informal settlements must be based on clear understanding of the nature of deprivation and should pursue an integrated, people- focused and place-based approach (Edgar, 2009). These opinions are verified by the results of research held in Africa; the goal of housing of all residents by 2014 and full upgrading policies will not be achieved because of poor delivery and this may result in civil unrest. Instead, the incremental upgrading could have a greater effect in stabilizing the growing public protest and yield much greater utility among more beneficiaries (Mistro and Hensher, 2009).

### **Squatter settlements in Turkey**

Since the years that the squatter houses first appeared, both the buildings and the characteristics of the dwellers changed parallel to political, legislative and social transformations in Turkey. Making various studies, theorists and researchers show the tendency of interpreting the squatter housing issue in different successive phases (Isik and Pinarcioglu, 2001, Senyapili, 2004) (Table 1). At the beginning, squatter houses in the major cities were described as deviant components and the inhabiting people were mostly excluded by the authorities although the gecekondu dwellers gained sympathy from the public as they were poor people tackling to overcome poverty (Baslevant and Dayioglu, 2005). However, in later years some accepted the gecekondu phenomenon as a defacto reality in regard to their contributions to the social relations and economic structure as well as the political importance. The voting potential of the gecekondu people changed the attitudes of the political parties so that in time, by the amnesty laws the houses were legalized. The infrastructure of some settlements improved and even they became indistinguishable from middle income neighborhoods. The land speculators, commercialized companies and other agents involved in the process and the beneficiaries became unclear (Baslevant and Dayioglu, 2005). Consequentially, not only the squatter houses have been transformed but also the socio-economic status of their dwellers changed considerably.

**Table 1.** Transformation of socioeconomic conditions, squatters' experiences, legal conditions. Source: Bayraktar, 2006, Erder, 1996, Isık & Pinarcioglu, 2001, Senyapılı, 2004, Yörükhan, 1968

1950 The number of Houses: 50 000 (1955)	<b>Social and Economic Conditions</b> Liberal development –multi party system; Industrial development -new job opportunities in the cities. Population increased. After the World War II the people who turned back from military work began to search for jobs. In the scope of US aid - Marshall Plan- tractors were sent. Villagers lost their jobs.	<b>Squatters' Experiences in the cities</b> People from rural areas migrated to the neighborhoods where their relatives and fellows were settled in big cities. They built squatter houses with low quality materials on private and/or state's lands by using family members' labor. No technical aid and no infrastructure	<b>Legal Cond.</b> 1953: squatter houses (without building permit) were legalized	<b>Housing Systems</b> Inadequate housing; Squatter houses- mobility and flexibility
1960 The number of Houses: 240 000 (1960) 430 000	<b>Social and Economic Cond.</b> Planned development; Export oriented economy was shifted to import substitution models	<b>Squatters' Experiences in the cities</b> Adaptation to urban life; Mostly young people who have the courage to struggle with difficult socioeconomic conditions of big cities started to work as servants, door keepers, office boys in companies, craftsmen and street vendors.	<b>Legal Conditions</b> 1961: Government has to bring precautions to build houses for low income people 1966: Squatter Law: the buildings, built on the lands that belong to others without getting permission from their owners and regardless to the development & construction laws and regulations	<b>Housing Systems</b> Small sized land owners and contractors make agreements to build apartment blocks- build and sell system
1970 The number of Houses: 600 000 (1970)	<b>Social and Economic Conditions</b> Populist policies; The global petroleum crisis triggered the endeavor of restructuring. Criticism directed to import substitution model. Modernism and positivism failed to eradicate poverty and inequality.	<b>Squatters' Experiences in the cities</b> They integrated to the city life; gained permanency in economic space and effective pressure in political space. Their attitudes, wife-husband relations, educating their children, house decoration and dressing were changed slightly. They stood in-between city and village, partly traditional and rural. They were the new citizens, changed by the city but also changed the city.	<b>Legal Cond.</b> Amnesty laws: Registration, land tenure	<b>Housing Syst.</b>
1980 The number of Houses: 1 150 000 (1980)	<b>Social and Economic Conditions</b> A radical break in socioeconomic system. A new political party supporting liberal projects gained the elections in 1983 Privatization based on export-oriented economic model, disrupting effects on the urban-labor markets	<b>Squatters' Experiences in the cities</b> Previous inhabitants moved to a higher status on the shoulders of the new comers. The categorization of communities realized. The squatter houses were more flexible at the beginning and could be changed according to the needs of the users. They lost these properties gradually; the lands gained value but the environmental quality diminished.	<b>Legal Cond.</b> 1984: Mass Housing Law 1983-1988: Amnesty Laws	<b>Housing Systems</b> Luxurious housing complexes; Squatter houses expanded both horizontally and vertically. Improvement & Development Plans

**Table 1. (Continued)**

1990 +	Social and Economic Conditions	Squatters' Experiences in the cities	Legal Cond.	Housing Systems
The number of Houses: 1 750 000 (1990) 2 000 000 (1995)	Dissimilarity of social groups became apparent. The contradicting life qualities increased the crime rates and formed the basis of identity crisis, injustice and cultural gaps. Protection of private sector by governments ended. Subsidies and social aids reduced. Socio-political contradictions; poverty and security reasons pushed new groups of people towards the big cities. The squatter housing stock commercialized.	The economically weak groups do not have adequate equipments to express themselves culturally. Their culture is under the control of mass culture, status quo and media and defined as "kitsch" and "arabesque". They reflect the struggle of regaining identity.		Neighborhoods expanded. Houses once occupied fringes partook within the contexts of the cities. Luxurious high rise buildings and satellite settlements; Urban transformation projects

**The case of Yeni Sahra squatter settlement**

Yeni Sahra (New Sahra) Neighborhood is a part of the extensive squatter area at Anatolian side of İstanbul named in regard to the formerly built settlement "Sahra i Cedit" –ironically, "Sahra" in Arabic means "desert" and "Cedit" is "new"; thus it means new sahra/desert already- taking place at a close distance. It was in the borders of Kadıköy district until 2008. İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality established new districts depending upon the argument, the governing difficulty of enlarging metropolitan area and increasing population, though some propositions against this decision bring suspect of being political manipulation in order to diminish the power of social democrat district municipalities. Today, Yeni Sahra is one of the 17 neighborhoods in Ataşehir. The district has a resident population of 345 888. (<http://www.yeni.atasehir.bel.tr>)

D-100 Highway (E5) borders Yeni Sahra at the south, whereas other squatter neighborhoods extend at the west and the north. Once empty pieces of land, at the east are now covered with newly built satellite settlements. Many luxurious multi storied blocks take place at the site. Close to Yeni Sahra, a huge housing settlement (Atasehir) was established in the 1980s by the cooperating institutions, Anatolian Bank, Real Estate Bank and Mass Housing Administration (<http://www.atasehironline.com>).

In early the 1990s, a gross market and several outlet stores were built along the highway. A multistoried outlet center and a big luxurious shopping center were added in 2009 (Figure 1). The site is quite close to the districts' centers and has many transportation facilities so that it attracts many people.

Currently, the neighborhood has mosques, primary schools, a student hostel and a football field but neither a library nor a cultural center. There are several cafes for men (kahve) and internet cafes for the young. A vocational training center for women was opened but later it was closed because of political conflicts between municipal authorities. The women of the settlement prefer to spend their time with their children in the shopping centers built around recently. Today, a sewage canal exists only along the main avenue.



**Figure 1.** Outlet stores along the Highway, E5

The research in Yeni Sahra was held in different phases. Firstly, the mayor (muhtar) of the neighborhood was interviewed, who migrated from Trabzon-a city in the Northeast region, in 1969 when he was five years old and settled in the site. His family belongs to the pioneering group that built the first informal houses. Secondly, the records of randomly chosen 58 household leaders, their ages, original cities, the duration of inhabiting and household sizes were enlisted by the help of the mayor's archive. Thirdly, visited squatter houses were measured and photographed in order to draw the plan schemes. Their inhabitants were interviewed in detail to understand both their social status and their relation with the houses and the settlement. Lastly, the news articles about Yeni Sahra, published in a local newspaper (Milliyet Gazetesi) in the period of 1978- 2010, were examined.

#### ***The establishment of the settlement***

The first squatters at Yeni Sahra appeared in late the 1960s. In those days there were few buildings (about 40-50). The pioneer families were the immigrants from the north of Turkey, Black Sea region. The area was covered with trees and the stream flowing beside was clean so that the inhabitants were able to go fishing. People used to water the vegetables planted in their gardens by using well water. They raised small livestock and kept chickens just like once in their home towns. Coming together with relatives and fellows the family members constructed their own houses with the assistance of the craftsmen. The neighborhood lacked a sewage system and there were no social facilities. In the 1980s, second generation informal houses were built by the new comers and the site became denser (Figure 2). After the 1990s, the lands began to be registered and the inhabitants received their title deeds.



**Figure 2.** Transformation of Yeni Sahra Square Settlement. Source: <http://www.ibb.gov.tr>

In the first years, squatter areas were politicized. They were influenced from the atmosphere of socio-political contradictions in Turkey based on unemployment-poverty and political oppressions in great scale. The inhabitants of Yeni Sahra were mostly of pro rightist-conservative ideologies, whereas the people living in the adjacent squatter neighborhood, 1 Mayıs (named in relation to 1st May, Worker's Day) were under the influence of leftists and Marxist thoughts. Ironically, in the 1970s, people called Yeni Sahra as "Demirel Neighborhood", in referring to the leader of a liberal party and former prime minister (1965-71, 1975-78, 1979-80, 1991-93) and "1 Mayıs" as "Ecevit Neighborhood", in the name of the leader of a social democrat party and former prime minister (January-November 1974, June-July 1977, 1978-79, 1999-2002) (Ozdemir, 2008).

Before the 1980 coup d'état, political crimes- murders, combats and fighting were the common news that take place in the local newspapers. The nationalist (called fascists by the counter groups) and the leftists (called anarchists by the authorities) gangs instigated against each other were fighting although they were sharing the same poverty and social deprivation. After the 1980s, the subjects of the news articles change. The transportation problems, deaths by the accidents –workers died by electric shocks, children drawn in rain water pools, epidemic diseases, lack of social facilities were carried to the newspaper headlines. However, by the 1990s and 2000s, mass housing constructions, new planning ideas are added to the subjects parallel to the ones informing floods, disappearance of children who make vending in the city center to support the family budget and the wedding of couples after having several children because of financial troubles (<http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr>).

### **Social composition**

According to the records of the mayor (muhtar) of the neighborhood, 20 000 people live in Yeni Sahra today. There are some big groups that migrated from particular regions of Turkey: 7000 people are from the Eastern Black Sea region, whereas 1200 people from Western Black Sea region and 1500 people from Sivas, the city in the Middle Anatolia region in addition to 1000 Romans accommodating at the west side of the neighborhood. Four years ago, about 800 people came from Mardin, the city in the Southeast region. After the first group settled in the 1960s, the second big migration from the Northwest and Middle Anatolia regions –the cities, Sinop, Samsun, Ordu, Sivas, Yozgat and Corum- occurred in the 1980s (24. 14 %) and the third flow came mostly from the Southeast cities –the cities, Mardin, Diyarbakir, Adana and Malatya (25. 86 %) in the 2000s (Table 2). In the 1980s, the significant break in the socioeconomic system as well as the 1984 Mass Housing Law and 1983-88 Amnesty Laws probably influenced on the people

who wanted to change their destiny in the major big cities. However, in the 2000s, the ethnic and political conflicts pushed the poor people from the Southeastern cities.

**Table 2.** *The years that the squatters settled in the Yeni Sahra*

	-1979	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-
Number of households	4	14	4	2	5	15	8	3
Percentage	6.9	24.14	6.9	3.4	8.6	25.86	13.8	5.17

In regard to the ages of the household leaders it is possible to say that the young people who have the courage and the power to struggle in the tough conditions of the big cities came and settled in the settlement since 20.6 % of the household leaders' ages are between 30-39; 25.85 % between 40-49; 24.13 % between 50-59 and only 29 % are older than 60 (between 60-81) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *The number of household leaders in different age intervals*

Age	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-
Number of hshld ldrs	7	5	6	9	10	4	2	3	4	8
Percentage	% 12.06	% 8.6	% 10.34	% 15.51	% 17.24	% 6.89	% 3.44	% 5.17	% 6.89	% 13.79

They are not well educated; considering the records of 58 household leaders, it is understood that 5.17 % of them are illiterate; 74.13 % graduated from primary school; 12.06 % have middle school and 8.6 % high school diplomas. The women are either illiterate or have primary school diplomas and declare that they are housewives. The men, some of them were retired, work as craftsmen or run small scaled business -minibus or taxi drivers, coffee house, restaurant, clothing or shoe store owners etc. There were several groceries within the neighborhood, but the owners ended their business since it was not possible to compete with hypermarkets. The family stories of the people interviewed during the research study verify these results. They are all low income or lower middle income people, and tackle with the troubles created by financial and social shortages.

**Table 4:** *The number of people in the households*

	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-
Number of households	13	19	19	3	2
Percentage	22.42	32.76	32.76	5.17	3.45

The number of people living in the households is quite high. The families composed of only three persons are only 22.42 %. On the other hand, there are some houses in which 10-19 people are living together (Table 4). This situation can also be accepted as another result of not well educated families and poverty.

### **Physical characteristics**

Yeni Sahra houses extend over a steep hill. The streets are formed irregularly. The multi colored houses have varying dimensions, heights and forms. Some of them are in row order, whereas the others are placed at one

side of the plot. The houses along the main avenue have some stores on their ground floors.

The environment reflects the economic weakness. Especially the new comers live in worse conditions. The neglected places in the West where mostly Romans live seem to be the worst part. At this region some people even live in old, broken cars (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Poverty environments in Yeni Sahra Squatter settlement

Few of the starter houses in the settlement remained in the way that they were built once but modified in various ways. Depending on the changing needs most of them have been enlarged by the addition of some structures, rooms or stories when they can afford. Some of the inhabitants, by demolishing the prior houses have preferred to build larger and higher apartment blocks. However, they continue to live together with their close relatives or fellows in these buildings. This incremental development fits to their gradually improving financial and social status in the city (Figure 4).

On the other hand, the governmental authorities plan to establish a financial center in the region. The prime minister of the day announced that they want to carry headquarters of various banks into Atasehir settlement. Thus, the area will be the finance center of Balkans, Caucasia and the Middle East. Some of the squatter settlements think that these developments will increase their land values (Ozdemir, 2008). According to the real estate agency managers, after these news, several upper level bureaucrats wanted to buy apartments in the region and no one want sell their properties. There are already 8022 luxurious houses in the settlements such as “My World”, “In City”, “Kent Plus”, “Palladium”, “Stargate” and “Uphill Court”. The demands



a. Typical layout of the first squatter houses (starter house); This house was extended with only a light frame in front of the house.

b. The first layout of the house did not change. The second story was added by the owner in later years.

c. The first house was demolished and a multi storied apartment block was constructed

**Figure 4:** Incremental Development of the Squatter Houses

increased the housing rates three times so that the construction companies planning to build 8000 houses more in three years. (Hazan, 2008). The mayor of the Kadikoy district has some worries, although he is not against the urban transformation projects assuming that they aim to rehabilitate the urban environments and to add social facilities -schools, hospitals and libraries- that will accelerate the inclusion of the new comers to the city. According to him, these should not be the projects that provide rant for the big capitalists by the state. The squatter house owners must not be displaced, but have to be supported to upgrade the existing houses and their environments (Erdogan, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

As in other globalized cities the governmental authorities make large scale urban transformation projects for Istanbul. For sure, the realization of them provides considerable benefits for the two shareholders: capitalists and politicians. The capitalists, land speculators, construction companies, finance sector etc., will gain in tremendous amounts whereas the politicians will increase their votes and receive the powerful support of the business environments. However, the situation of the squatters is unclear. They are pushed to leave their houses in the squatter settlements and move into the high rise buildings for the sake of "urban rehabilitation". Displacement of the low-income people will result in the transfer of the surplus to the other beneficiaries.

The squatters do not want to live in the apartment blocks built by Mass Housing Administration (TOKI) because it is not possible for them to afford the required expenses, monthly maintenance and security payments. They live close to their relatives in squatter settlements and have good relations with their friends and neighbors. Thus, they feel secure in this way and want to continue their lives in the way that they have become used to.

The research results held in Yeni Sahra reveal once again that migration to Istanbul did not cease yet and the people who came to the settlement in the 1980s and 2000s with different reasons carried the problems to a more complex status. The poorer newcomers who try to take shelter in the settlement live in deprivation and they do not have stable jobs. Still, the number of people living in one household is very high and none of the inhabitants can benefit from proper health facilities. They are not well educated whereas some people, especially women, are illiterate. In regard to the news articles, the problems of the squatters differentiate in years but main reasons -poverty, inadequacy of social and physical services- never change. Obviously, the inhabitants of the neighborhood have not integrated to the city life entirely because of socio-cultural differences. It seems that the new projects will increase social segregation.

Somehow, the squatters must have the right to make their own choices and to direct their lives as well as participating in the decisions given for the urban space. The new technologies and information cultures can play effective role in their demands. The top to bottom projects must be reconsidered in this account. It is necessary to provide democracy for these communities to take initiative in protecting their socio-cultural relations and values.

## References

- Alkiser, Y., Dulgeroglu-Yuksel, Y., Pulat-Gokmen, G. (2009), An Evaluation of Urban Transformation Projects, **Archnet-IJAR, International Journal of Architectural Research**, Vol. 3, No. 1, 30-44.
- Baslevant, C., Dayioglu, M. (2005), The Effect of Squatter Housing on Income Distribution in Urban Turkey, **Urban Studies**, Vol. 42, No. 1, 31-45.
- Bayraktar, E. (2006), **Gecekondu ve Kentsel Yenileme**, Ekonomik Arařtırmalar Merkezi. Ankara.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998), **Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time**, Polity, London.
- Demirkaya, M. (2007), İstanbul'da Kacak Kabusu, **Milliyet Gazetesi**, 26 February.
- Edgar, C. (ed.), (2009), **Self-Made Cities**, United Nations, NewYork.
- Erder, S. (1996), **İstanbul'a Bir Kent Kondu: Ümraniye**, İletişim, İstanbul.
- Erdogan, E. (2008), Yeni Sahra ile Fikirtepe'de dönüşüm değeri 10'a katlar, **Sabah**, 13 March.
- Gough, J. Eisenschitz, A. McCulloch, A. (2006), **Spaces of Social Exclusion**, Routledge, NewYork.
- Haan, M. (2005), The Decline of the Immigrant Home-ownership Advantage: Life-cycle, Declining Fortunes and Changing Housing Careers in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, **Urban Studies**, Vol. 42, No. 12, 2191-2212.
- Harman, C. (2007), Theorising Neoliberalism, International Socialism, A quarterly, **Journal of Socialist Theory**, No. 117. <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=399>
- Harvey, D. (2005), **A Brief History of Neoliberalism**, Oxford University, NewYork.
- Goodman, A., Gonzalez, J. (2009), **Marxist Geographer David Harvey on the G20, the Financial Crisis and Neoliberalism, Democracy Now, A Daily Independent Global News Hour**. [http://www.democracynow.org/2009/4/2/marxist\\_geographer\\_david\\_harvey\\_on\\_the](http://www.democracynow.org/2009/4/2/marxist_geographer_david_harvey_on_the)
- Häussermann, H., Siebel, W. (2000), **Soziologie des Wohnens**, Frankfurt/Main.
- Hazan, Y. (2008), Banka Rüzgarı ile Ataşehir'de Ev Satışları 3'e Katlandı, **Hurriyet**, 06 February.
- Isik, O. Pinarcioglu, M. (2001), **Nobetlese Yoksulluk Sultanbeyli Ornegi**, İletişim, İstanbul.
- Keyder, C. (2005), Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul, **International Journal of Urban and Regional Research**, Vol. 29, No. 1 124-134. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00574.x/abstract>
- Lefebvre, H. (1996), **Writings on Cities**, Oxford, Blackwell, Massachusetts.
- Leontidou, L. (2010), Urban Social Movements in Weak Civil Societies : The Right to the City and Cosmopolitan Activism in Southern Europe, **Urban Studies**, Vol. 47, No. 6, 1179-1203.
- Mistro, R., Hensher, D. A. (2009), Upgrading Informal Settlements in South Africa : Policy, Rhetoric and What Residents Really Value, **Housing Studies**, Vol. 24, No. 3, 333-354.
- Nisanyan, S. (2009), **Sözlerin Soyagaci Cagdas Turkcenin Etimolojik Sozlugu** Everest, İstanbul. <http://www.nisanyansozluk.com/>
- Ozdemir, S. (2008), Demirel, Ecevit ve 1 Mayıs'a "Merkez" Piyangosu Vuracak, **Hurriyet**, 12 January.

- Purcell, M. (2004), Globalization, Urban Enfranchisement, and the Right to the City: Towards an Urban Politics of the Inhabitant. In D. Wastl-Walter, L. Staeheli, L. Dowler, (eds.) **Rights to the City**. IGU, Rome.
- Routledge, P. (2010), Introduction: Cities, Justice and Conflict, **Urban Studies**, Vol. 47, No. 6, 1165-1177.
- Sen, (1983), Poor, Relatively Speaking, **Oxford Economic Papers**, Vol. 35, No. 2, 153-69.
- Senyapili, T. (2004), Charting the 'Voyage' of Squatter Housing in Urban Spatial 'Quadruped', **European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey** (ejts.revues.org/index142.html)
- Shlay, A. B. (2006), Low-income homeownership: American Dream or Delusion?, **Urban Studies**, Vol. 43, No. 3, 511-531.
- Stoeger, H. 2011, Housing and Social Exclusion in a Comparative View, (Unpublished paper, presented in **23 ENHR Conference, 'Mixité': an Urban and Housing Issue?**, Toulouse-France, 05-08 July).
- UN-Habitat, 2005
- Yörükhan, T., (1968), **Gecekondu ve Gecekondu Bölgelerinin Sosyo-Kültürel Özellikleri**, İmar İskan Bakanlığı Mesken Genel Müdürlüğü Sosyal Araştırma Dairesi: 1.
- <http://www.atasehironline.com>
- <http://www.barinmahakki.org>
- <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr>
- <http://www.ibb.gov.tr> (Habitation and Squatter Housing Head Office Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul –Mesken ve Gecekondu Müdürlüğü)
- <http://www.yeni.atasehir.bel.tr>

### **Şehirde yaşama hakkı: Yeni Sahra (İstanbul) gecekondu yerleşmesi**

Gecekondu olgusuyla 1950li yıllarda tanışan Türkiye bugün hala bu sorunla başa çıkmaya çalışmaktadır. İstanbul'daki konutların % 60'ının düşük standartlı olduğu bildirilmektedir. İlk görüldüğü yıllardan bu yana, gecekondu kadar içinde yaşayanların yapısı da değişmiştir. İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi ekonomik açıdan liberal politikaları uygulayan hükümetlerin de desteğini alarak kentsel dönüşüm projelerini uygulamaya çalışmakta ve birçok yerde yıkım yapmaktadır. Buna karşılık, gecekonducuların ve kötü koşullarda yaşayan kişilerin protestoları gündeme gelmekte ve "şehir hakkı" kavramı uluslararası toplantılarda tartışılmaktadır.

Bu makale, neoliberal rejimlerin oluşturduğu ekonomik, sosyokültürel, ideolojik ve mekânsal dönüşüm bağlamında şehirde yaşama hakkını tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, İstanbul'un Anadolu yakasındaki Yeni Sahra gecekondu yerleşmesine odaklanarak yerleşmenin fiziksel ve sosyal yapısını fakir ve dışlanmış grupların şehirde yaşama hakkı çerçevesinde incelemektedir.

Makale iki kısımdan oluşmaktadır. Birinci kısımda, ekonomik ve toplumsal açıdan güçsüz kişilerin günümüzün şehirlerinde içinde buldukları çetin koşulları temel alan tartışmayı destekleyen bir kuramsal arka plan oluşturmak amacıyla neoliberalizm, toplumsal dışlanma konuları ve "şehir hakkı", "şehirde yaşama hakkı" kavramları tartışılmaktadır. Bu anlamda oluşturulan anlayış, konut sahibi olma ve konutların zaman içinde iyileştirilmesi durumunun getirileri üzerine yapılan tartışmalarla derinleştirilmektedir. İlk kısma, gecekonducuların ve bu konutlarda yaşayanların bugünkü durumlarını değerlendirmek amacıyla Türkiye'deki gecekondu olgusunun farklı dönemlerde geçirdiği evreler üzerine yapılan bir inceleme de eklenmiştir. İkinci kısımda, Yeni Sahra gecekondu yerleşmesinin fiziksel ve sosyal yapısı

incelenmektedir. Yerleşme hakkındaki sorgulama, farklı kaynaklardan edinilen bilgiye dayanmaktadır.

1970lerde güçlenmeye başlanan neoliberalizmin ideolojik ve pratik sonuçları arasında, devletin rolünün azalması, gelir desteğinin ve kamu harcamalarının düşmesi, girişimcilerin önündeki engellerin kaldırılması ve teşviklerin artırılması bulunmaktadır. Amaç, ekonomik büyüme ile fakirliğin ortadan kaldırılmasıdır. Ancak bu gerçekleşmemiştir ve bugün birçok kişi çöküntü alanlarında kötü koşullarda yaşamaktadır. Bazı kuramcılar, harcamalarının artmasına bakarak gerçekte devletin rolünün azalmadığını ancak sistemin uluslararası ölçekte yeniden yapılandırılmış olduğunu ve uluslararası üretimin kontrol altına alındığını belirtmektedirler. Böylece, sınıf gücünün yeniden yapılandırılmasını amaçlayan politik bir proje yaşama geçmiş olmaktadır.

Küreselleşen dünyada da etkisi görülen bu dönüşüm, şehirlerde birçok kişinin fakirlik, cinsiyet ve etnik farklılıklar nedeniyle ayrıştırma, ilgi göstermeme, yıkım, yer değiştirme gibi yöntemlerle dışlanmasına neden olmuştur. Türkiye’de, 1980lerde ideolojik ve sosyoekonomik bir kırılma yaşanmıştır. Ülkenin küreselleşen dünya ile bütünleşmesinde, İstanbul önemli bir rol oynamış ve hızlı değişim sonrasında sınıfsal kutuplaşmalara sahne olmuştur. Buna bağlı olarak kentsel dönüşüm projeleri gündeme gelmiş, uluslararası şirketler, büyük yapı firmaları, özel üniversiteler, gecekonduculardan boşalan ve değeri yükselen arazilere ilgi göstermeye başlamışlardır. Bu noktada esas, gecekondu sahiplerinin söz sahibi olması ve kent üzerinde alınan kararlara katılımı olmalıdır.

Şehir hakkı kavramı, ilk olarak 1968 de, kuramcı Henri Lefebvre tarafından ortaya atılmıştır. Lefebvre, şehirde yaşayanların şehrin sunduğu olanaklardan faydalanma isteğinin bir “yakarış” ve haklı bir “talep” olduğundan söz etmiştir. Bu kavram pek çok uluslararası toplantıda tartışılmaktadır. Örneğin, İstanbul’da düzenlenen Habitat II toplantısında “konut hakkı” nı konu edinen bir tüzük düzenlenmiştir. Yine, 2010 yılında, Rio de Janeiro’da Brezilyalı toplumsal hareket temsilcilerinin girişimiyle Dünya Şehir Forumu’nun ana konusu “şehir hakkı” olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu toplantılarda, David Harvey, neoliberal girişimlerin oluşturduğu haksızlıklara karşı bir farkındalık yaratılması ve toplumsal hareketlerin düzenlenmesi gerekliliğinden söz etmiştir.

Konut sahipliği, insanların yaşamını düzenlediği, çocukların fiziksel ve ruhsal sağlığını olumlu yönde etkilediği ve politik kararlara katılımı artırdığı için önemlidir. Gecekonduların tümüyle bir anda iyileştirilmesi, gereken hizmetin istikrarlı biçimde verilememesi nedeniyle mümkün olmamakta ve huzursuzluk ile sonuçlanmaktadır. Bu nedenle, zamana yayılan, tedrici iyileştirmenin etkisinin daha olumlu olduğu gözlemlenmektedir.

Türkiye’de gecekondu olgusu farklı evrelerden geçmiştir. Başlangıçta üstesinden gelinmesi gereken ve şehirlere zarar veren bir olgu olarak değerlendirilirken sonraları sosyal patlamaları önleyen yönü ve ekonomik değeri fark edilmiştir. Politikacılar ise oy potansiyelini düşünerek farklı dönemlerde çıkartılan af kanunları ile gecekonduların yasallaşmasında rol oynamışlardır. Bugün, arsa spekülâtörleri, bazı yapı firmaları ve diğer kurumlar gecekondu olgusu içinde pay sahibidirler ve artık gerçekte durumdan yararlananların kimler olduğu belirsizleşmiştir.

Yeni Sahra gecekondu yerleşmesi, İstanbul’un Anadolu tarafında yer alan gecekondu bölgelerinden biridir. 1960ların sonlarında, Doğu Karadeniz Bölgesinden göç eden gruplar tarafından kurulmuştur. Son yıllarda, yakın çevrede birçok lüks konut blokları, alışveriş merkezleri ve hipermarketler yapılmıştır. Bu yerleşmede, mahalle muhtarının arşivindeki kayıtlara, mahalle sakinleri ile yapılan görüşmelere, gecekondu sahiplerinin evlerinde yapılan ölçüm ve fotoğraflarla oluşturulan tipolojik çalışmaya, gazete arşivlerindeki haber taramalarına ve ilgili web sitelerinden edinilen bilgiye dayanan bir araştırma düzenlenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre; 1980lerde ve 2000lerde farklı nedenlerle yeni göç akımları meydana gelmiştir. Eğitimsizlik ve özellikle bazı kadınların okuma yazma bilmemeleri sorunlar oluşturmaktadır. Konutlarda yaşayan kişi sayısı oldukça yüksektir ve sağlık olanaklarından düzgün

biçimde yararlanılamamaktadır. Konutlar ise zaman içinde yapılan eklemelerle veya tamamen yıkılıp yeniden yapılarak değişmiştir.

Yaklaşık 50 yıllık bir süre içinde bu yerleşme ile ilgili haberlere bakıldığında ise konuların değiştiği ancak temelde fakirliğe, eğitimsizliğe ve ilgisizliğe dayalı sorunların değişmediği görülmüştür. Küreselleşen diğer şehirlerde olduğu gibi İstanbul'da da gecekonduların yaygınlaşmasıyla yararlananlar büyük sermaye sahipleri ve politikacılar olurken gecekonduların sahiplerinin durumu belirsizliğini korumaktadır. Gecekondularda yaşayanlar, kendilerine önerilen yerleşmelere taşındıklarında konut giderlerini ödeyemeyeceklerini ve mevcut durumda, akrabaları ve hemşerileri ile birlikte yaşadıkları mahallerinde kendilerini güvende hissettiklerini, eskiden beri alışa geldikleri yaşam biçimini sürdürdüklerini söylemektedirler. Bir biçimde kendi yaşamlarına ilişkin kararları verme, seçim yapma ve bunun yanında şehir hakkında verilen kararlara katılma haklarının göz önünde bulundurulması gerekmektedir.