

The Role of the Urban Renewal Projects on the Reshaping of the Cities: İzmir (Turkey) Case

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Abstract—The concept of urban transformation came about through interventions aimed at bringing socially and economically problematic areas of cities into use. The issue of urban transformation arose frequently during the post-2000 period in particular, and legal regulations on this matter were also developed in Turkey. Urban transformation project would be a focal point for the formation of the city in the near future. İzmir, which is third largest city of Turkey, is an important trade and port city. But, assessment of the current situation shows that, the majority of existing residential areas was formed with squatters and unplanned settlements in İzmir city center. Therefore an important part of these areas have significant problems in terms of the quality of life, safety and environmental quality. In this study, the central policies in Turkey and local policies in İzmir about urban transformation will be considered. In addition, urban renewal projects that are being implemented in İzmir were discussed and suggestions will be developed in accordance with this policy.

Keywords—Urban transformation, İzmir, urban planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE concept of “urban transformation” in Europe came about through spatial interventions aimed at bringing socially and economically problematic areas of cities into use. It was viewed as a spark, a new planned action to restructure and reconfigure in particular big cities/metropolitan areas expanding in an unplanned and uncontrolled fashion [1].

According to Roberts, urban transformation is the redevelopment and revitalization of economic activity that has ceased; the re-enabling of the operation of a societal function; the provision of social integration in areas where social exclusion exists; and the recovery of balance in areas where environmental quality or ecological balance has been lost [2].

As can be understood from these definitions, urban transformation indicates an integration of multilateral, integrated, and extensive actions aimed at the solution of a variety of problems pertaining to a city’s living spaces (spatial, economic and social). For this reason, the aim of such transformation is not limited to spatial improvement.

On the other hand, it is important that the concept is considered not only from a single perspective identified with urban renewal, but rather from all perspectives, such as preservation, improvement and revitalization.

From the mid-1800s until around 1945, the most important mode of intervention against spatial and social decay in cities

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was urban renewal. Urban improvement and urban renewal projects were prioritized in the 1960s and in the early 1970s. During this period, problem-sensitive and area-oriented urban improvement and renewal projects were developed. While urban decay was considered a social disease until the first half of the 1970s, it came to be explained through structural and economic reasons toward the decade’s end. Policies of “urban restructuring” were commonly implemented in the 1980s. Such transformation projects focused on the economic revitalization of abandoned, stagnant, and dilapidated urban areas in the 1980s. From the post-1990 period until the present day, the most commonly applied urban transformation intervention has been urban renewal or urban revitalization. The importance of contributions from voluntary agencies and different sections of society in addition to the public and private sectors has been emphasized, and new legal regulations and urban transformation programs have been developed toward this end [3].

In Turkey, cities grew rapidly due to post-1960 economic growth and immigration, and this uncontrolled growth was reflected in the city landscape as squatter areas. While squatter areas were legalized through amnesties, the improvement! (reconstruction through building apartment blocks) of these areas mostly resulted in the relocation of their populations.

Policies for urban transformation in the post-1980 period did not remain limited to squatter areas in city centers; unauthorized buildings in the urban outskirts, old industrial areas/harbors that were dilapidated due to economic reasons, city centers and coastal areas were also subject to such transformation. In addition to renewal, improvement and revitalization, approaches regarding the preservation of areas of historical value are also gaining momentum [4].

It has recently been observed that in cities nearing their growth limits, income-based approaches are emerging in those areas where urban land values have risen due to their location at the city center. On the other hand, natural disasters have demonstrated over and over again the problems represented by the current stock of structures. The issue of urban transformation arose frequently during the post-2000 period in particular, and legal regulations on this matter were also developed [4].

Five basic laws that comprise the legal framework regarding urban transformation in Turkey can be cited.

- “Mass Housing Law” no 2985
- “Municipality Law” no 5393
- “North Ankara Entrance Urban Transformation Project Law” no 5104 (Special Law)
- “Law no 5366 on the Renewal and Preservation and

Usage by Sustenance of Worn-out Urban Fabric”

- “Law no 6306 on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk”

This situation indicates that in the near future, urban transformation will be the focal point in the structuring of cities. The future of these cities is directly related to how these practices will be implemented. Urban transformation policies will be decisive in either the negative or positive evolution of the potential transformation process.

II. CURRENT STATE OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN İZMİR

As with other big cities, İzmir saw a more rapid population increase during the post-1945 period compared to that of Turkey as a whole. In other words, while the Turkish population increased by approximately five times in the last 82 years, İzmir’s population has grown by approximately 7 times [5]. Despite this, İzmir has also been limited regarding development/growth. The city is limited by thresholds surrounding it (protected areas such as forests, great divides, agricultural areas, archeological sites and topographical-geological thresholds), and this has caused an increase in density at its center on the one hand, and haphazard development on the other.

Concerning the population density data, defined as the population per square kilometer, Turkey’s population density was 96 people/km² in 2010, whereas that of İzmir was much higher, at 329 people/km². İzmir ranks third for this statistic, following İstanbul at 2,486 people/km² and Kocaeli at 421 people/km² [6].

Research on immigration to İzmir indicates that while the rate of immigration to the city was 17.1% in 1950, this climbed to 27% in 1965, 37.9% in 1980 and 42% in 1990; due to increasing immigration, the housing deficit rose during these years [7]. This increased housing need was met through squatters and illegal settlements. The squatter population in İzmir was 29.7% in 1965 but rose to 44.7% by 1986 [8].

On the other hand, especially given that İzmir’s earthquake risk status, the safety/soundness of existing structures in the city outside of squatter areas is disputable. Based on a study conducted by the İzmir Branch of the Chamber of Civil Engineers in 3 pilot areas (1,490 buildings) as part of the İzmir Symposium on the Reduction of Disaster Risk to establish a sample of the city’s stock of structures, it has been determined that building quality in İzmir is 3% good, 52% intermediate and 45% weak/bad [9].

It is of importance that “Improvement and Renewal Program Areas” were determined in the 1/25,000-scale Land Use Plan approved in 2009, in terms of the issue being considered based on city and plan integrity. In the 1/25,000-scale land use plan, 4,371 hectares of area were designated as “Improvement and Renewal Program Areas”.

On the other hand, the first urban transformation project and implementations in İzmir were initiated in the Bayraklı and Kadifekale districts, where the most expansive squatter areas are located.

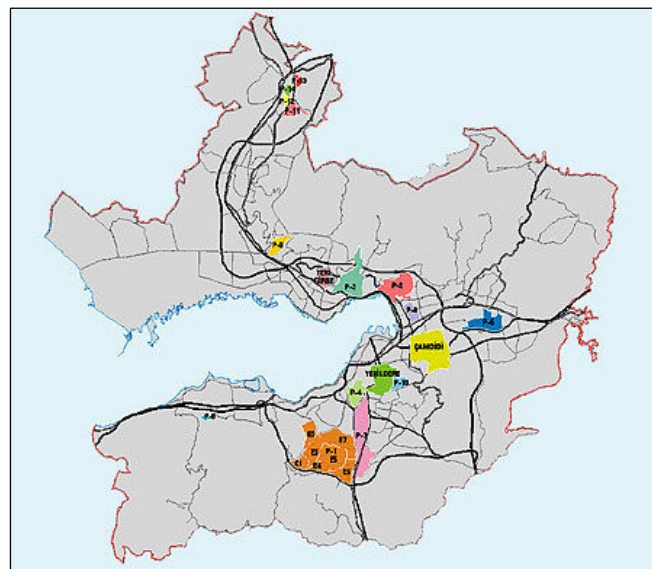


Fig. 1 Improvement and Renewal Program Areas [10]

TABLE I
IMPROVEMENT AND RENEWAL PROGRAM AREAS

Size (hectares)	NEIGHBORHOODS
1207,0	Cennetçeşme, Uzundere, Aktepe, Ermez, Peker
310,0	Bayraklı, Çiçek, Alparslan, Muhiittin Erener
347,0	Yamanlar, Gümüşpala, Emek
165,0	Kadifekale, İmariye
120,0	Güzeltepe, Şirintepe
237,0	Mevlana, Doğanlar
510,0	Karabağlar, Uğur Mumcu, Akıncılar, Seyhan
107,0	Adalet, Mansuroğlu
24,0	Narlidere Atatürk, 2. İnönü
81,5	Gültepe, 26 Ağustos
93,4	Asarlık 1. Region
42,1	Asarlık 2. Region
27,2	Asarlık 3. Region
30,6	Menemen
639,3	Altındağ-Çamlibi Renewal Area
109,5	Yeni Girne Renewal Area
322,2	Yenişehir-Gürçeşme-Yeşildere Renewal Area

Transformation implementation carried out by the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality in the Kadifekale region is among the most important transformation implementations for Kadifekale, which is a geologically disadvantaged area, the traditional city center, and also part of the old urban fabric, one of the city’s most important symbols. Work was initiated in the area in 2005 and demolition took place in stages in 2010 and 2012. The area was evacuated due to being disadvantageous and forestation works are still in progress. Residents of the region have either been transferred to residences in Uzundere or had their properties expropriated.

This implementation increased positive expectations that other problematic areas in the city could also be transformed. Critiques/evaluations on the adaptability of the residents to the living conditions in the place where they were transferred aside, important gains brought about by the implementation are: the fact that it was not income-directed, its having made a

positive contribution to the urban identity, and above all, that it prevented potential losses by the evacuation of an at-risk area.

The İzmir Metropolitan Municipality opened the “Bayraklı Urban Transformation Communication and Introduction Center” to inform citizens about the transformation efforts carried out in Bayraklı. The center’s stated aims were to reinforce the regional social infrastructure, determine the people’s expectations and demands facilitate their contribution to planning and project design, and the production of area-specific projects.

Transparency and participation are considered as inevitable regarding transformation implementations. For this reason, endeavors in this direction should also be considered positively.

Again by the Metropolitan Municipality, efforts regarding urban transformation are being carried out for the entire Bayraklı region, the Ballıkuyu, Yeşildere, and Limontepe regions, as well as in Aktepe-Emrez.

Also, through recently arrangements, the central government has become as efficient as local governments. In addition to the existing authorization of the Mass Housing Administration, the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning is also authorized and in charge at various stages, from the approval of plans to their implementation. Based on statements made, it has been acknowledged that İzmir is among the pilot cities where urban transformation implementations will be initiated by the central government. The establishment of Directorates of Infrastructure and Urban Transformation in the Bursa, İstanbul, and İzmir provinces as field services of the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning affiliated directly with the center has been resolved upon based on the Cabinet Decree dated August 13, 2012, which was proclaimed in the official gazette and took effect in September.



Fig. 2 At-risk areas determined by the İzmir Directorate of Infrastructure and Urban Transformation [11]

821 ha of area inhabited by approximately 75,000 people have also been detected as an at-risk area within the scope of

Law no 6306 by the İzmir Directorate of Infrastructure and Urban Transformation.

TABLE II
AT-RISK AREAS DETERMINED BY THE İZMİR DIRECTORATE OF
INFRASTRUCTURE AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION

Proclamation date	Neighborhoods	Size (hectares)	Population
2012	Karabağlar (Cennetçeşme, Salih Omurtak, Bahriye Üçok, Limontepe, Ali Fuat Erden, Umut, Gazi, Özgür, Yüzbaşı Şerafettin, devrim, Yurtoğlu, Abdi İpekci, İhsan Alyanak, Uzundere Peker)	540	53.500
2013	Menemen (Ahıdır, Seydi, Nasurullah, Kazım Paşa)	44	6.550
2013	Narlıdere (Çatalkaya, Atatürk, II. İnönü, Narlı)	43	6.700
2013	Karabağlar, Buca (Osman Aksümer, Aşık Veysel, Aydın, Seyhan)	191	8.500
2013	Karşıyaka (Cumhuriyet)	3	400

III. POTENTIALS REGARDING URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN İZMİR

Assessments regarding the current situation indicate that the majority of current housing areas in the İzmir city center have been structured through squatting and reconstruction amnesties. For this reason, a considerable majority of these areas have crucial problems regarding life quality, reliability, and environmental quality. In licensed housing areas, whether the buildings constructed prior to the legislation developed after 1999 Adapazarı earthquake can provide the required levels of safety or not must be discussed.

Yet it has been stated previously that the issue of transformation should not be considered as mere renewal. For this reason, outside of the city’s housing areas, there are sections such as the Historical City Center (Kemeraltı), New City Center, disorganized industrial and working areas, and areas that have been abandoned or evacuated due to economic reasons that need to be improved, revitalized and redeveloped.

This situation reveals that almost the entirety of the city must be considered as transformation areas. At this point, developing a multi-dimensional approach by determining priorities and varying methods of intervention within the framework of an integrated plan is important.

İzmir has been one of the biggest and most important cities of Turkey for a long time, and it embodies an outward-oriented structure with its harbor and multicultural structure. Innovations, change, and transformation would not be abnegated by İzmir. İzmir has constantly gone through a process of change since the past and internalized living within such dynamism. A structure that attempts to manage and orientate changes in a positive manner is in question, rather than one that resists change. This is the most important advantage the city has regarding transformation.

İzmir has been an important city, with its natural and historical values, agricultural fields, industry, trade, tourism and harbor for centuries, and for this reason an awareness of urbanization has been adopted. If the right policies can be

implemented, the people of İzmir would support the creation of healthier, safer and more habitable urban environments.

A settled corporate structure, years of planning experience, a trained/expert urban planner capacity, developed vocational organizations, and universities will make considerable contributions to the positive orientation of urban transformation implementations.

One of the important potentials of İzmir is its having adopted strategic approaches in planning efforts regarding the construction and transformation of the city from past to present.

For example, the issue of planning the area behind the Harbor, one of the most problematic areas in İzmir, was raised recently, and a broad expansion was targeted by making the transformation of this area the subject of an international competition. The success to be obtained in this area will be of incentivizing character for other areas of transformation.

The determination of areas of renewal and improvement in the recently developed land use plan across the entire city also possesses important potential. In addition, efforts initiated in some of those areas as well as the realization of the implementation in the Kadifekale region its results becoming visible have created a positive expectation that these implementations can be realized in other regions as well.

Unlike İstanbul, the fact that income-oriented transformation projects have not been implemented much in İzmir is also considered to be an advantage. For this reason, neither a robust negative public opinion nor opposition has emerged against transformation.

Another advantage is related to the social projects that are among the important dimensions of transformation projects. It is generally accepted that transformation implementations should not only be considered with regard to spatial dimensions, as its economic and, more critically, social dimensions are of vital character. İzmir has important experiences and corporatized structure regarding social projects. Its metropolitan and district municipalities have developed several social projects from past to present. In addition to this, opportunities in this regard have increased recently with the establishment of the Development Agency and the facilitation of European funds, and an important capacity has emerged.

A similar case applies to the issue of participation. Enabling participation is considered among the prerequisites for successful transformation projects. Local governments in İzmir have experience in realizing implementations by promoting participatory and democratic approaches. For example, the Kemeraltı Preservation Intended Construction Plan was realized with a participatory approach and in the Kadifekale transformation area, a goal was established to inform the public at all stages of the transformation process. Additionally, the presence of negotiator platforms such as the City Council enabled the acquisition of experience as regards participation.

IV. CONCLUSION

One of the important risks regarding urban transformation is

enabling piece by piece implementations within the city. The abandonment of general planning principles and the integrated planning approach in the transformation of areas considered to be in disharmony with the city/in need of transformation would result in nothing but the creation of new problem areas.

The city must be considered a living organism. Intervention in one part of it will cause either negative or positive reactions. For this reason, integrated approaches are required for the evaluation of these potential impacts.

A. What Can Be Done on the National Scale?

The central government's attaching importance to urban transformation in big cities in particular can be seen as an important advantage in terms of accelerating urban transformation implementations in İzmir. However, this also reveals the importance of coordination between local and central governments. As stated above, the realization of implementations in line with systematic, determined priorities across the city and within the integrity of the plan depends on this coordination above all else. Otherwise, while some problems might be resolved in sections of the city, the resolution of important problems across the entire city would be postponed, and moreover, new problem areas would be created.

One of the important contributions to be made by the central government, especially in İzmir, which is among the cities determined as pilot areas, should be the development of models that are of leading character for future implementations. With the sample implementations:

- Not only spatial transformation is targeted, but also the economic revitalization and improvement of societal living conditions for those inhabiting the transformation area should be developed.
- Processes that are not under the control of great investors or capital alone, but in which the people living in the transformation area primarily, as well as different city actors (local-central administrators, occupational organizations, NGOs, universities, etc.) should be involved.
- A participatory and transparent process in which required information is provided at all stages should be designed.
- The processes of planning-implementation-monitoring-evaluation should be an integrated form.

The realization of sound/good transformation implementations accepted by all sections of society can only be possible if the abovementioned conditions are secured.

B. What Can Be Done on the Local Scale?

The designation of renewal improvement program areas in the city's land use plan has been stated as an advantage, however, policy, strategy and approaches must also be developed concerning the evaluation of the current condition and future configuration of the other built-up areas. This issue must be considered in the upper-scale plan efforts to be conducted.

Another issue concerns the determination of priorities and staging implementations. In line with the strategies

determined, directing resources toward priority areas should be considered a necessity in terms of yielding more efficient, faster results. The cooperation of different actors is also important in this regard. The reconciliation of different actors in the city that yield authority in the determination of priorities must be considered important.

Again, the fact that nearly the entire city is being considered a transformation area must be regarded as an opportunity in terms of being able to make strategic decisions regarding the city in its entirety. While the more intense, compact urban development that prioritizes public transportation and pedestrian/bicycle access is promoted at an international level, İzmir's current structure is too far from that.

Transformation should be considered as a potential means for improving social and technical infrastructure and thus increasing life and environmental quality, as well as reducing the development pressure on areas of the city that must be preserved.

Our planning approach regarding current areas is limited to the analysis of existing and prior plans and their consequent transfer to new plans. This hinders new strategic approaches regarding the entire city.

For example, it has been acknowledged that the number of registered vehicles in traffic has increased by almost three times in Turkey in the past 15 years. This situation is even more striking in big cities. However, especially in built-up areas of the city, as efficient public transportation systems were unable to be developed based on past structuring and plans, and also because vehicle shafts remained as they were planned in the past, these roads are now being used by 3-5 times more vehicles than originally planned. This has led to the lack of a solution to the transportation problem in cities.

In consideration of the matter of transformation, efficient public transportation systems that will serve the entire city in the long term must be planned, and the distribution of population density must be realized in a way that would enable the efficient use of these systems.

The determination of long-term infrastructural needs and project design for the entire city and the realization of such projects within transformation stages prior to the superstructure transformation, within the context of an integrated project and in parallel to the transformation stages, are crucial for sound urban development.

Unplanned structuring in our cities has been reflected in the infrastructure in the worst way and the lack of planning combined with constant change and lack of coordination have nearly been acknowledged as unchangeable facts for infrastructural investments. However, it should be kept in mind that the creation of a habitable and environmentally sustainable city can only be achieved with a healthy infrastructure to begin with, and this issue must be considered with great attention within the scope of transformation efforts.

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