Gülsuyu & Gülensu:
A Self Organising Community?

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WHY THE UNIVERSITY LEADS?

- Questioning the function of a university?
- Questioning the function of knowledge and the knowledge holder?
- Questioning the production and sharing mechanisms of knowledge?
- Questioning the responsibilities of university education to the cities & societies?
HOW THE UNIVERSITY LEADS?

- Trying to understand the existing situation rather than writing prescriptions…
- Leading people or accompanying them in their struggles?
- Giving a voice to them or helping them to create their own voice?
- A choice between organic relations & observations?
- Trying to understand the limits to understanding…
- Putting the technical and scientific knowledge to the service of the people…
After fieldworks that were organised to various gecekondu areas & getting to learn and understand the gecekondu issue, a question was raised in one of the neighbourhoods whether there is an alternative way to plan gecekondu neighbourhoods:

- Instead of gentrification…
- without moving them out of the city and their neighbourhoods, where they have established social relations we long to see…
- by solving their both physical, legislative, property, social & economic problems…

A search for an alternative…
Solidarity Planning Studio

- Radical – community based planning experience...
- A community who believes
  - in the rights of gecekondu people in this city...
    - Academics, students, professionals, professional chambers, initiatives and the gecekondu people themselves...
  - in the growth and functionality of knowledge and experience only when it is shared with and used for the people...
  - in the duty of the university to produce knowledge for and share it with the people...
  - in not becoming their voice but helping them in strengthening their voice...
  - in the decisions taken in democratic environments, in thinking and acting together...
  - in plans only when everybody using that space can contribute with their words, thoughts and realities...
Solidarity Planning Studio

I will stay at my home in my neighbourhood with my neighbours.
GÜLSUYU – GÜLENSU
Neighbourhoods at the Anatolian site and north of E-5 motorway...
The first settlers at Gülensu...
## General Characteristics of the Neighbourhood

- **Population**: 60000
- **Surface area**: 197 ha
- **Residential Area**: 119 ha (%61)
- **Empty Space**: 8 ha (%4)
- **Facilities**: 1,23 ha (%0,6)
- **Green Areas**: 1,7 ha (%1)
- **Average Net Density**: 220 ki/ha
- **Total Number of Buildings**: 5286
- **Unemployment rate**: 34%

- **High crime rate**
- **High illiteracy**
- **Low education level**
- **Home to illegal political organisations**
The view from Gülensu
Examples of Housing at Gulensu
Portraits at Gulensu...
PLANNING HISTORY AT GULENSU

- 2004: Regeneration via master plan.
  - Reducing the population density meaning relocation and luxury housing.
  - Local meetings led by the headmen.
  - Expert opinions on the plans.
  - Foundation of the neighbourhood association.

- Organised opposition to the plan:
  - 7000 objection petitions against the plan.
  - 32 trials to cancel the plan.

- Revision of the municipality.

- An original plan note on the revision:
  - « …the lower scale plan will be produced with the participation of the relevant headmen, neighbourhood associations, NGOs, professional chambers and universities… »
Participation & Self-Governance Model of the Neighbourhood

Maltepe Municipality

Neighbourhood Commission

Street Representatives

Street Commissions

Street Representatives
Meetings – more than 200 in the neighbourhoods
Street meetings and works in every single street
Interviews
Questionnaires of almost 100 sampling

Now, almost everybody is aware of the plan and what it will bring!
Moreover, they now know what a plan is...

Neighbourhood commission
Street representatives

Self-governance
Women-children-youth works and commissions
Arts – photographing, paintings, sculptures???
QUESTIONNAIRES & INTERVIEWS

- Questionnaires were designed by the academicians & students.
- Training to the street representatives by the academicians.
- Applied by the street representatives & students.
- Sampling was almost 100 percent.
- Academicians & students executed in-depth interviews.

These work

- Created knowledge for the neighbourhood for its own use
  - In getting to know itself
  - In preparing the plan
  - In negotiating with the municipality and etc.
- Founded an organic relationship with the people in the neighbourhood
- Made the street representatives legitimate…
"we oppose this plan because our existence is completely ignored. Otherwise the plan should be prepared. We do not support to live without plans... We only oppose the ignorance of our existence... It is not only housing right that is being taken from us, it is our living rights... 

"Nobody asked us whether we want anything and why we oppose these plans!"

“We cannot live in mass housing sites. How can I do with 300 YTL income (100 pounds)? How can they expect me to live in those areas without increasing my income? I do not need to pay for extra money for the caretaker, apartment contribution and etc when I am living in this neighbourhood. And I will not have neighbours like this in those sites, who help each other when necessary. That how we live. We share our poverty! What shall I share with those people in those mass houses?“

The interviews:
MEETINGS

• Were organised to discuss;
  • What a master plan means for a neighbourhood,
  • What is the meaning of a master plan for the authority and for the people living in the neighbourhood,
  • What is the meaning of self organisation of the planning process and its potential benefits for the people,
  • Whether the people in the neighbourhood will participate to the process and how…

• After the discussions the people of the neighbourhood agreed on self-organisation & created mechanisms to facilitate it such as neighbourhood commission and street representatives…
Process

• Meetings with the ex-municipality…
  • The municipality declared that they would approve the plan prepared by the neighbourhood.
    • This was actually a declaration of their non-belief in participation. No cooperation and/or assistance was offered.

• Meetings with the planning bureau of the greater municipality.

• Meetings at the university with academics.

• Neighbourhood Commission’s decision to prepare its own plan for better living conditions…

• The new local government proposes a neighbourhood commission to proceed the planning process but there are questions of control.
A Traditional Coffee Shop was used as the planning centre...
Street Representatives before training

Students inputting data
The general meeting
It was not all about planning:
Working with local kids…
The only non-political graffiti in the neighbourhood…
Cultural Activities...
Integration of local youth with the university students...

Work for women...
Tophane Stage: Findings & developing ideas with the local people
The neighbourhood is founded on a slope and this characteristic brings its advantages and disadvantages.

SAFETY PROBLEM: There remains the question whether the buildings are constructed properly as it should be on a slope...

VIEW: There is an amazing view of the neighbourhood towards the Princess Islands... This advantage has now become a disadvantage as luxury villa developers put an eye on the area...
The purple colored area has landslide risk.

A great majority of the neighbourhood is solid for settlement.
Most of the buildings in the neighbourhood are houses. On the main streets, there are also commercial units established at the basement.

There are not sufficient social facilities in the neighbourhood including health centres, schools, libraries, green areas and etc.
Most of the buildings were constructed with concrete and some with piles. There are almost no houses that are made of jerry built materials except from a few on the hill.
There is just a minority of buildings with 5-6 floors. Most of them are only one floor. The average number of floors for the buildings in the neighbourhood is 1.5.
Majority of the land is owned by either the borough or the Treasury.

Some areas in the neighbourhood had gained the benefit to buying the lands they constructed their houses on via amnesty laws. However, most of the people could not benefit from this advantage as they could not save the money, which is relatively low, to buy the land.
“Real knowledge…”
Architectural assistance from a professional bureau...
Discussion Session for the findings & ideas
Basic Principles of Planning in Gülsuyu-Gülenasu:

1. Nobody in the neighbourhood will be victimised, moved out of the neighbourhood without his/her consent, defraued.

2. A plan not only physical but also social and economic;
   • that do not disturb social relations and living style that have been established in the neighbourhood for long;
   • that do intervene to unemployment, crime, poverty, lack of women in the public sphere etc...

3. A plan that solves the property problems in the neighbourhood promising a future for the people, removing uncertainty...

4. A plan using its self values and resources first...

5. A plan that aims to develop together with its surrounding...

6. A plan that considers direct participation as *sine qua non* via developing the public space in the neighbourhood...
A memorial...
Conclusions…

• For the neighbourhood:
  • There is no plan at the moment.
  • There are alternatives that the neighbourhood keeps to use when necessary.
  • The municipality prefers to keep a distance.
  • There is a strong sense of organisation and being together.
  • There are conflicts in the neighbourhood on the issue of self-organisation.

• For the other neighbourhoods:
  • This was taken as a model and most of them got organised.
  • They founded the union of neighbourhood associations.
  • Some are having the workshops in a similar fashion.

• For the university:
  • Interest to the gecekondu areas is increased.
  • Various groups of students and academics working on related issues…
  • Difficulties in understanding the limitations to understanding gecekondu…

• For the municipality:
  • Asking for a neighbourhood commission of its control…
  • Still not transparent and accountable…
  • Questions on new plans with the interest groups…
Conclusions…

• **For planning:**
  - A concrete model for a self organisation process…
  - A return to planning for and by people rather than the state and/or capital…

• **For the people of Istanbul:**
  - Creating their own word against the dominant discourse…
  - Publicising their own word with the power of their organisations…
  - Raising self confidence and the sense of freedom…
  - Increasing consciousness about their cities/neighbourhoods and planning processes…

• **For Istanbul:**
  - A hope to act against regeneration for the capital and turn it into a regeneration for the people…
  - A hope for a real world city with all its differences/richnesses keeping its own people valued…
  - A hope to be in peace with its inhabitants…
  - An opportunity to make peace between the formal & informal again…