Participation and the right to the city: The case of Turkey

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Abstract

The paper claims that a more comprehensive outlook is necessary for a city that would accord participation a central role and introduces into the discussion the concept of the right to the city. In the light of experience gained from the work on the ground, we inquire into how the concept of the right to the city can be filled with substance and how it can be used as an instrument rather than making it an end in itself. The paper highlights the importance, in work to be carried out in cities, of not neglecting the relationship between the city and the accumulation of capital and of carrying out struggles for an alternative to the present order rather than simply for preserving what already exists.

Key words: The Right to the City, Participation, Turkey

1. Introduction

In the wake of the Gezi rebellion, we have been hearing the concepts of the right to the city and of participation pronounced much more frequently than before. Participation has become the key word for a more democratic, more just, free and equal society. However, participation and efforts to create participatory local politics have been on Turkey's agenda for quite some time, and this despite Erdoğan's drive to reduce democracy to the ballot box.[1] Central and local government agencies have been promoting participation, as well as transparency and accountability, as a precondition for democratisation especially since 2004, when Turkey's candidacy for accession to the European Union (EU) was announced. Local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been developing projects that highlight participation and participatory decision-making practices and supporting and implementing them in various cities of Turkey. Drawing its inspiration from theories of democracy, this work attributes great importance to deliberation, consensus and dialogue and tries to support the participation of NGOs in decision-making mechanisms, the empowerment of civil society, and the bringing together of diverse groups.[2] Nevertheless, the blokcages that exist regarding the participation of citizens in decisions that concern their city cannot be overcome, notwithstanding certain exceptions here and there. The experience on the ground demonstrates that it is not possible for citizens to shape their cities on the basis of a conception of participation and a concomitant effort to improve the administration restricted to elections plus planning geared towards

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[1]   In the modern era, participation in decision making mechanisms has always been associated with voting practice and authors like Dahl, Sartori and Hayek defined democracy as a political method or a set of institutional arrangements characterized by competing elites and their concept of participation referred to voting. See Pateman, C. (1970), *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 14. It could be argued that the shift from the conventional perception that identifies participation in decision-making as voting for political decisions related with the state to a more expanded idea of participation and deliberation started to flourish at the end of the 1960s with the social movements and protests of 1968. With the accelerating effect of these movements and discussions, the domain and the ambit of participation in decising making expanded considerably and the discussion stretched beyond voting in elections and affiliation with political parties. See Deth, W. J. (2001), "*Studying Political Participation: Towards a Theory of Everything?*" (Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research) Grenoble; Benhabib, Ş. (1996), "The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference", in Democracy and Difference, Eds. Ş. Benhabib, Princeton University Press.

[2]   Despite nuances and the variety of deliberative methods developed by different authors, deliberative theories of democracy are deeply concerned with expanding the scope of citizen participation through their focus on communication and consensus. See Habermas, J. (1997) *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse of Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge, The MIT Press; Young, I.M. (1996), "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy", in Benhabib, Ş. (eds.) *Democracy and Difference*, Princeton University Press.

policy development. The work conducted brings out the limits imposed by the existing system, making it obvious that a more comprehensive outlook is needed.

When we reflect on the debate on participation in Turkey, we see that there has been much talk of the strong central state and weak civil society but no attempt to assess in a comprehensive manner what participation really stands for, why it has not been possible to bring it about, and how it can be brought about. The cases that have been accumulating over time, however, are of a nature to facilitate our undertaking a more comprehensive analysis of the problems and difficulties encountered, coming to a deeper understanding of the concept of participation itself, and arriving at better clarification of what kind of world may be imagined thanks to this conception.

This article claims that the question of participation in Turkey should be taken up in conjunction with the concept of the right to the city, a concept that explains the dynamics of the city at the present time, and makes it possible for city-dwellers to think anew, to restructure or even to recreate their city. It is clear that compared to the United Nations (UN) or the European Commission (EC), which reinterpret the concept in an entirely reformist manner, figures such as Lefebvre, Harvey or Souza have a much more critical and radical approach regarding the concept of the right to the city. These authors tend to see the right to the city not as an individual right whose contours are delienated by the existing system, but as a tool through which to rethink relations under capitalism and an instrument to be used in the service of a collective political fight against globalisation and against capitalism. This article highlights those aspects of the concept of the right to the city that force the limits of participation within the present system and even make us grasp those limits. It maintains that struggles waged for the amelioration of daily practices can be used to build new alliances with a view to creating an alternative to the system, but it also asserts that this work should be done without ignoring the nexus between the city and capital accumulation.

To this end, we open up for discussion in the first section of the article the use to which the concepts of participation and participatory democracy are put in Turkey. This is based on observations made and experience gained throughout a period close to a decade. An evaluation of the problems and difficulties encountered in the execution of projects conducted in various cities of Turkey with a view to provide for the participation of NGOs in decision-making processes and to increase the impact of citizens in decisions of importance for the city. The second part dwells on the different approaches to the concept of the right to the city, discusses the meaning and substance of the concept, as well as why this concept is given prominence. Equally in this section, we point out that the conventions and charters adopted by the UN relating to the right to the city

relegate to the background the critical and even anti-capitalistic aspects of the concept and emphasize collaboration between capital, civil society, and the state, in much the same manner as the well-worn approach that we come across in discussions on participatory democracy. In the first two parts, it is underlined that the concepts participation and the right to the city are not the exclusive turf of the left and the democratic sections of the society. On the contrary, forces that have differing political stances or worldviews are found to be at one when it comes to their importance. It is crucial to note that what we understand by these concepts and how we use them are closely linked with the questions of who participates in what as well as whose right to the city we are aiming to address. Thus, the third part underlines the importance of taking both of the concepts, participation and the right to the city on the basis of a comprehensive and radical approach. This part refers to the problems and difficulties encountered during the projects conducted in the light of the debate on the right to the city and indicate the possibilities opened up by the use of the concept by giving examples from the field. İMECE and the People's Houses are given as two examples of movements that bring out the anti-capitalist aspect of the concept right to the city. These examples stress a critical perception of participation especially in struggles against urban transformation in poor neighborhoods. Relying on the observations in the field, this paper advances the idea that the most beneficial aspect of the debate on the right to the city is that it highlights the capitalism-city nexus and points to the inadequacy of any approach in defence of capital. We claim that the concept makes it possible to imagine the future, all the while insisting on the importance of struggles concerning daily practice. Only on the basis of such practice can we demonstrate the limits of and build strong alliances that can create alternatives to the present system.

2. Participation, participatory democracy and blockages in Turkey

The practice of participation in Turkey is not one of recent vintage. The short-lived Fatsa experiment was one of the most important cases of participatory local government in Turkey.[3] Once Fatsa was violently crushed, the issue of participation was removed from the agenda until the late 1980s and early1990s. On the international scene, meanwhile, IMF programs not having lived up to expectations, the new concept of good governance was launched with a view to create a new setup in underdeveloped and developing countries. Good governance aimed, on the one hand, to provide for the survival of capitalism by rendering the market economy more efficient and, on the other, legitimised the objective of

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[3]   Uyan, Mahmut Memduh (2004), *Toplumsal Dalganın Kırılışı-Fatsa* (1978-1980) Ankara: Arayış Yayınları.

liberal democracy through an emphasis on economic development and progress. Alongside such concepts as a stable political order, democratic representation, respect for private property, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, cooperation between the triad formed by the state, the private sector, and civil society was of paramount importance. The participation of civil society in decision-making processes in the urban context and cooperation with the private sector were accorded particular importance.[4]

Certain steps were taken along these lines in Turkey as well. In the 1990s and the early 2000s, the concepts of good governance and participation were imported into Turkey presumably for improving the management of the country, with a special emphasis laid on reform in public administration. The European Charter of Local Self-Government was signed, albeit with certain reservations.[5] The reform process of local government was supported by many international organisations and development agencies, as exemplified by Local Agenda 21[6],

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[4] Even though no consensus exists regarding the definition of good governance, some common points may be found. Good governance implied both the formation of an administration that is participatory, compromise-oriented, and accountable, and political liberalisation, respect for human rights and reducing the role of the state. While international development banks stressed the economic instance, policies and good management for economic development, international institutions such as the UN and the EC were more concerned with the political instance. In the 1990s the UN started to substitute the word "democratic" for the word "good" in "good governance". The UN and the EC also laid stress on participation and democratisation in areas outside of the concept good governance, including in various agreements and conventions, focusing on the connection of these to human development. The institutions that made use of the concept may not have been explicit about this, but good governance fundamentally condoned the existing system and linked the occurrence of corruption and breaches of legality and the presence of economic, social and political problems to bad management. If only corruption were to be prevented, private property respected, the state downsized, cooperation between capital and the state guaranteed under the mantle of legitimation accorded by civil society, then everything would be fine and development and democracy would be attained. Hence, good governance was essential.

[5] For further information see TESEV (2010), *Toward a Solution to the Kurdish Question: Constitutional and Legal Recommendations*, Istanbul, Tesev Publications and Keleş, R. (1994), *Yerinden Yönetim ve Siyaset*, İstanbul, Cem Yayınevi.

[6] The initiation of Project Agenda 21 (LA21), endorsed by the 1992 Rio Conference, constitutes an action plan to pave the way for "sustainable development", aimed at intertwining environmental and developmental objectives. In Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, local authorities in each country are called upon to undertake a consultative process with their populations and achieve a consensus on an LA21 for their communities. The project has two main objectives: the first is to promote LA21 and its implications for local governance at the national level and the second is to establish consultative mechanisms in pilot cities, which will foster a local participatory planning process. In Turkey, LA21 processes were launched via a series of projects in late 1997 as a response to the global mandate. From 1997 until 2011 the LA21s proved to be important initiatives to foster a participatory, multi-sector process at the local level through the preparation and implementation of long-term strategic action plans that address priority local sustainable development concerns. The intention was to mobilize local government and local stakeholders to seek control over their cities. In subsequent years, the project ensured the support of the Ministry of the Interior – General Directorate of Local

promoted by the UN Development Program and taken up by many cities. However, decentralisation and local government reform were treated with a lot of reservation on the grounds of the alleged threat of separatism linked to the Kurdish fight for freedom, which intensified in the 1990s. The return of public administration reform and legal arrangements in this area had to wait until Turkey's candidacy for accession to the EU was accepted in 2004. The Local Government Reform initiated in 2005 is linked to the EU process both chronologically and in terms of the conjuncture. New laws were passed and promulgated in the areas of municipalities, metropolitan municipalities, special administrations of provinces, and associations of municipalities.[7] The revisions in the legislation included provisions that encouraged the participation of citizens in decision-making processes.[8] However important these improvements in legislation may have been, it was not clear at all what substance was attributed to participation and how this was to be implemented. Adequate knowledge, skills, and, in some cases even a sufficient degree of interest and willingness were wanting on the side of both the local authorities and the civil society organisations. Nonetheless, projects were promoted and implemented to support this new process from 2005 on.[9]

In the literature on participation in Turkey, the fundamental reason adduced for the absence of participatory democracy in the country is the age-long tradition of a strong central state and the non-existence or underdevelopment of civil society (Heper, 1985). In tandem with this view, the projects conducted have always stressed as a leitmotif the strengthening of civil society in order to increase participation. Not only the World Bank and the UN, but the EU and a variety of other international organisations have supported projects conducted with a view to

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Authorities as well. The various phases and sub-projects of LA21 have been supported by corresponding decisions of the Council of Ministers and have been published in the *Official Gazette* of Turkey as "International Agreements". The project LA21 closed down in August 2011.

[7] Legal measures towards the restructuring and strengthening of local administration in Turkey were not limited to the municipalities and reform also entailed new laws regarding metropolitan municipalities and the special provincial administration. Thus, in mentioning changes in local administration in Turkey in 2005, the Law on the Basic Principles and Restructuring of Public Administration, No. 5227; the Metropolitan Municipalities Act, No. 5216 (12 July 2004) and the Special Provincial Administration Law, No.5302 (22 February 2005) should also be considered along with the Municipalities Act, No. 5393 (13 July 2005).

[8] On the basis of these revisions, City Councils were established. Meanwhile, it is crucial to note the difference between Municipal Councils, local elected bodies and these City Councils, which are open to public participation and came on the agenda in 2005 with the aim of making local administration more participatory.

[9] However important may be a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the projects conducted as well as a discussion on the part played by NGOs, both topics lie outside the scope of the present paper.

increase the participation of citizens in local government.[10] In particular, many projects that supported the participation of civil society organisations in decision-making processes in local government, attributed great importance to deliberation, and aimed to establish participatory democracy by empowering civil society were developed by Istanbul-based NGOs and implemented in diverse cities of Turkey.

3. On difficulties encountered

Projects oriented towards the empowerment of civil society and increasing participation can have different emphases depending on the vision and worldview of the organisation that is conducting the project. Some give prominence to grassroots movements, while others tend towards municipalities and the business community (chambers of industry and trade, exchanges etc.). Despite these differences between the organisations and the projects conducted, it is possible to classify the problems and difficulties observed on the ground with respect to these endeavours under certain headings. In what follows, after mentioning the main blockages encountered in projects that support the participation of citizens in decision-making processes and the development of local policies, we will discuss in what ways the right to the city provides an opening for us.

We can classify the difficulties encountered in the following manner: (a) the scope or extent of the decision-making process and of the participation; (b) the spectrum of civil society organisations and of those that participate in current processes; (c) the methods used to provide for participation; (d) the activities engaged in during the work conducted with a view to empowering civil society; and (e) differences between cities.

The first topic to be taken up, then, is the question of how the decision-making process and participation itself are conceived. It should be pointed out at the outset that regarding both decision-making processes and participation, the first thing that comes to mind is elections. In the new legal arrangement provided for by the Municipalities Act of 2004, No. 5393, the participation of citizens in urban planning was stipulated, at least on paper within six months following the elections.[11] We can say that what local government authorities understood from

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10 The project "Good Governance- Improving Quality of Life" run by TESEV may be cited as an example of such projects. Information regarding this project may be accessed at www.tesev.org. Among the many other projects developed in such a context, another example is the ongoing project "Strengthening Civil Society Development – Civil Society Public Sector Cooperation in Turkey", supported by the EU. For detailed information about this project, see http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/turkey/ipa/2011/tr20110135.07_strengthening_civil_society_development.pdf.

11 The Municipalities Act, No. 5393 (promulgated in the Turkish Official Gazette –No.25874, 13 July 2005) stated that local residents have the right to participate in municipal decisions and municipal services. The comprehensive changes made the preparation of a strategic plan necessary for

the participation of citizens in decision-making processes in the wake of this law turned out to be participation in the strategic plan, which the Municipalities Act required to be prepared. We should note that, apart from participation in the preparation of this plan, which is only once in every four years, there generally was no question of giving citizens a say in the decisions taken concerning the city.

The second heading has to do with what comes under the appellation "civil society organisation" and who participates in the planning process. Local government authorities usually understand by civil society the business community and, in particular relating to the planning work done for the participatory strategic planning required by Act No. 5393, make do with consulting chambers of industry and of commerce, exchanges, and, wherever applicable, the higher echelons of the university. Organisations and initiatives formed at the grassroots level cannot come into the radar screen of entities with which local government authorities collaborate. Participation in decision-making processes may well be a right for all citizens, yet access to rights requires an awareness and knowledge about these rights (Kutlu, 2002). In those (rare) cases when civic initiatives exist that are so active as to have an impact on decision-making processes, the participation provided for by local government authorities remains restricted to the "usual suspects". This implies that the set of people that participate in decision-making processes overlaps with the set of people who have something to say on these processes and are active in the activities organised in the city. Those who are critical of the established order do not participate at all, so the NGOs that do participate are preponderantly made up of liberal groups.

Another issue is the form of participation or the method used to effect participation. Local government authorities that claim to conduct planning in a participatory manner usually send the report prepared to the organisations and institutions that they regard as civil society organisations to seek consent or receive their views through surveys. The reports are commonly prepared by specialistsaway from the actionand in a hierarchical manner; meetings, focus group work, in-depth interviews and the like are not organised with a view to involve the citizens.[12]

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municipalities with a population of 50,000 or more. Article 41 of the Municipalities Act clearly assigns municipalities the task of preparing a development plan and program, as well as a strategic plan in compliance with the regional plan (if any) within six months of the local elections by obtaining the opinion of universities, chambers (if any), and non-governmental organizations.

[12] In meetings organised for consultation, the power hierarchy particularly within the entities of the central administration appears in full force to determine the character of both the presentations and the discussion and the participation. Whoever wields the highest authority has the floor in the meetings and it is simply not possible for other people participating from that same entity to take the floor and comment.

As opposed to local government authorities, civil society projects do frequently have recourse to qualitative methods such as focus group work, meetings, workshops etc. in order to identify the priorities and needs of citizens. In these projects, since meetings are usually held among peers, those who are not their equal or those groups that are systematically excluded remain outside the debate. Decisions rapidly taken and a consensus reached generally without difficulty attest to the fact that there is really no difference of opinion between the participants and that sectors with different interests and different priorities do not participate in these meetings. Although certain efforts that have as their aim supporting spontanoeus movements or including the systematically excluded within decision-making processes may be based on good intentions, they remain focused on civil society development and capacity building and abstain from having a debate on questions like whose consensus it is that is being created and who remains outside.[13]

The fourth heading concerns the activities carried out for the projects. These activities are concentrated in the areas of training and capacity development provided to civil society organisations and programs that teach participants how to develop, conduct and monitor projects. Something else that needs to be pointed out at this stage is the question of continuity within the work done. It is difficult for work that has not organically grown out of local conditions or, in other words, work conducted on the basis of an initiative from outside the city to assure continuity.

Finally, it may be said that the projects do not usually take sufficient note of the differences between and the diverging needs of cities. Because activities and training programs are formulated so as to be identical for each and every city, they are implemented without any modification in very different cities.[14]

In conclusion, the experience on the ground demonstrates that it is not possible for citizens to shape their cities on the basis of a conception of participation that is limited to planning and amelioration of the existing administration. For a more comprehensive perspective, what is needed is an

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[13] At this point it is also important to mention Laclau and Mouffe's point that rather than trying to reach a consensus that is impossible and hard to maintain once it is there, the task is to think of how to create the conditions under which aggressive forces can be defused and diverted in society. Mouffe argues that there is a mistaken emphasis on consensus and power, that conflict and passions are not credited enough. See, Laclau, E. And Mouffe, C. (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso; Carpenter, N. and Cammerts, B. (2006), "Bringing Hegemony, Agonisms, and Political into Journalism and Media Studies: an Interview with Chantall Mouffe", *Journalism Studies*, 7(6), 967.

[14] In cities such as Çanakkale, where income per capita is above the average for the country, citizens show a relatively greater interest in participatory urban planning, while in cities like Kars, with income levels per capita below the country average, the interest shown in participation and the projects developed is lower.

approach that permits to extend the participation of citizens in the decision-making process over and beyond the planning process, empowers citizens in directions that make it possible for them to change and transform the city, and brings together the different sectors that are to be found in the city so as to help them create grounds for a common struggle. The concept of the right to the city should be perceived as a new approach and a new instrument that would help us take participation outside of the vicious circle in which it finds itself. The following section will explore the meaning of the concept to provide a backdrop for the analysis of the case studies that will be taken up in the third section.

4. The debate on the right to the city

The concept of the right to the city was first proposed by Henri Lefebvre in 1967. In promoting this concept in the socially and politically charged atmosphere of the period of 1968, Lefebvre was dwelling on the relationship of the city to capitalism, a point to which scarce attention had been paid up until then by Marxists, and drew attention to the original part played by the city in the development of capitalism. According to Lefebvre the city meant something beyond being the space where surplus-value was produced. In the city, the entire gamut of relations characteristic of capitalism were reproduced. The city played a part in the softening of the inner contradictions of capitalism. The city was, so to speak, instrumental in providing for the survival of capitalism. Beyond being subject to commodification, the city was a common product formed by its citizens, an "*oeuvre*" created by those who live inside the city. Lefebvre held that the city had to be opened up to and recreated by its citizens, who, together, created and shaped it. Two important rights that defined and gave flesh to the right to the city were particularly emphasized: participation and appropriation (Purcell, 2002; Mitchell, 2003; Kofmann and Lebas, 1996; Sadri, 2013). Participation denoted more than participation in the existing system, it implied a revolt and a rebuilding of the city. Citizens had to appropriate the city, seize it, and participate actively to reshape it (Lefebvre, 1996). The right to the city distinguished between appropriation and property. Indeed, it regarded the former more important than the latter and stressed the importance of the citizens seizing and utilising the city with a view to its recreation (Lefebvre, 1998).

Almost four decades separate the publication of the article in which Lefebvre has recourse to the concept of the right to the city and the article by Harvey that bears the same title. After a long interlude, the concept re-entered circulation in the 2000s. It is vital to explain why, after a period lasting almost four decades, this concept came to occupy a prominent place and became so popular in the 2000s. For this, one has first to look at the city-capitalism nexus emphasized by Lefebvre and the dynamics of capital accumulation processes so

often stressed by Harvey (Harvey, 2008). Self expansion of capital, predominantly based on industrial production up until the 1980s, assumed a new character in the post-1980 period, in which speculation and finance became dominant. Face to the insurmountable structural problems in capital accumulation and increasingly vanishing possibilities for profitable investment, large-scale capital in particular started to invest more and more in land and real estate. Whilst before 1980, land and real estate were seen as relatively passive elements of the capital accumulation process, they became instruments of the commodification of the city with the aim of overcoming the blockages in the way of that same process. No longer was the city the site of production and of factories, but it itself became a gigantic mass of exchange value at this beginning of the 21st century. The real estate market came to be seen as the means through which economic crises could be overcome. Just how much urban land was valued at (i.e. its exchange-value) became incomparably more important than what the city meant to its citizens and how they made use of it (its use-value). Governments offered public land for sale openly for the benefit of capital; parts of the land in inner cities that appreciated in price were opened up for the use of capital under the appellation "urban regeneration". The part the state plays has diminished gradually, while the restructuring of the city with the purpose of increasing the profitability of the private sector was put in practice at full speed on the basis of large-scale urban regeneration and gentrification projects. Throughout this process, not only was there no participation of citizens in decision-making processes, but they did not possess any means of having a say on the destiny of the city in which they lived. The city no longer belonged to its citizens, but was the exclusive property of capital. And all the decisions made with respect to the city reflected the interests of capital.

The process of the commodification of the city, experienced in many a city around the world, did not pass without the people standing up against it. In various cities, people displaced as a result of projects of urban regeneration and movements leaning on the right to shelter started to pick up and strengthen. As Harvey himself points out, these movements did not necessarily have direct recourse to the concept of the right to the city, but they came up against the conversion of the city into a commodity, their displacement from their homes, and the offer made of their humble living premises to the private sector voracious for profits (Harvey, 2012). The movements in Latin America, in particular, were able to make their voices heard and, as a result, the city was accorded the pride of place in the 2002 World Social Forum. Groups having different sensibilities and visions came together on a common basis and began to discuss and debate the city and the right to the city. Alongside these developments, Harvey followed the footsteps of Lefebvre in bringing to the fore the anti-capitalist characteristics of

the concept of the right to the city. He recast Lefebvre's formulation of the reproduction of the city in terms of a labour process. Pointing out that the right to the city was not an individual right that was derivative of the right to property, but equally that its characterisation as a collective right was not adequate, Harvey stressed the importance of a radical approach (Harvey, 2012). Drawing attention to the importance of reflecting on how this whole process has shaped us and is shaping us, he claimed that the right to the city could manifest itself as the demand to control the production and use of the surplus product. Those who created and reproduced the city should claim a rightful say over the city and reshape the city in the image of their own dreams (Harvey, 2012).

The use of the concept of the right to the city in formulating the issue of urban development has also come from a different quarter, that of international organisations and, in particular, development agencies. It did not take long, in effect, for the UN itself to assimilate the concept of the right to the city, accord it a place in conventions and redefine it in a manner that would accord with its own temperament. The World Urban Forum, organised for the first time in the same year as the World Social Forum, held a seminar that focused on the right to the city. In projects mostly affiliated to the UNESCO and UN Habitat, the right to the city was defined in a framework that gave it quite a narrow interpretation, linked to the Millenium Development Goals, focussing on access to rights in the urban environment. Linked to the right to shelter and the right to a decent environment, the right to the city was redefined at the level of urban policy in connection to the use of urban space. In conventions and projects developed in accordance with this, the holistic and transformative perspective of the right to the city as well as its emphasis on the recreation of the city were left out. Divorced from its anti-capitalist character, the concept was now reformulated on the basis of cooperation between the state, the private sector and civil society (Kuymulu, 2013). The fundamental concern in the projects developed was the minimisation of conflict, as well as the creation of cooperation and consensus between the public and private sectors (Boer, 2009). According to Souza, the right to the city was subjected to a reformulation whereby it was deemed to come up against neoliberalism but not capitalism, professed to protect the environment by trying to reconcile ecological objectives with the logic of the market, and endeavoured to mend and support the existing order through participation (Souza, 2011: 185).

It is obvious that the two conceptions perceive the right to the city in different manners, bring it on the agenda with different demands, and present us with different road maps on the basis of cooperation with different groups. On the other hand, the distinctive characteristic of the right to the city was that it was not something you were given but something that could only be gained through struggle and something whose definition was ever-changing (Harvey, 2008;

Dikeç, 2001; Boer &Vries, 2009). The fact that, as Harvey suggests, the right to the city is an empty signifier creates the opportunity for different sectors to use it referring to different things (Harvey, 2012: xv).

5. The right to the city, blockages, possibilities

We know from the experience on the ground that on the basis of participation limited to planning required by local government legislation, it is not possible for citizens to reshape their cities. Hence, it would not be very productive to try to create new openings and overcome the blockages that are encountered in the perception of participation dominant in Turkey through the adoption of the approach of the UN to the right to the city, which limits it to access to rights in the urban environment and participation in existing decision-making processes. However, the more critical and radical conception of the right to the city does not provide us with a ready-made recipe regarding how citizens are to participate in decisions made about their city. Nevertheless, it is clear that by treating participation in a more open-ended manner, this critical conception creates wider room for manoeuver for citizens.

The anti-capitalist perspective adopted by those who approach the concept of the right to the city in a critical way is almost a challenge to the perspective of enhancing participation through the development and the empowerment of, as well as the provision of information to, civil society organisations. We would like to explore, on the basis of some concrete examples, the possibilities that can be opened up by refraining from attributing the concept the status of an end in itself and rather using it as an instrument for the purposes of anti-capitalist struggle that would open the way for citizens to reimagine their cities. Through a review of the cases of IMECE and the People's Houses, the former a civil initiative, the latter a politically organized group, both sharing an anti-capitalist orientation, we will asses the the relationship between the quest for survival in day-to-day struggles and anti-capitalist struggles that take their cue from daily life.In what follows, we will recall the difficulties encountered in Turkey in the course of the work conducted towards participation and discuss how a critical conception is put to use in practice.

We have already noted that participation in Turkey is limited to elections and the planning process carried out after the elections due to legal requirements. The radical approach that defines the right to the city in a critical manner taking its cue from Lefebvre, on the other hand, conceives participation in a manner that goes beyond voting in elections and expressing one's views in the process of urban planning. The right to the city implies that all who live in the city participate in the life of the city, use it, recreate it and are empowered to have a say in the decisions made about it. In Harvey's words: "To claim the right to the

city in the sense I mean it here is to claim some kind of shaping power over the process of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities are made and remade, and to do so in a fundamental and radical manner" (Harvey, 2012:5).

However, we know that today many issues concerning the city are not decided by central government or local government alone, but even more so by the investment decisions of the private sector. As Harvey says, "... it has become clear to all that state and capital are more tightly intertwined than ever, both institutionally and personally" (Harvey, 2010:219). Hence, it may be said that what is meant by the right to the city comprises not only the opening of the decisions of central government and local government, but also all the decisions of the private sector regarding the city to the citizens. The radical conception of the right to the city stresses the need to recast the relation of forces existing in the production of urban space and to take away control from the state and capital in order to turn it over to citizens. Participation itself should be not conceived as participating in the existing order, being a part of it, and approving it, but as the forcing of the limits of what is and forming a movement that can recreate the city this way. The first advantage of the radical conception of the right to the city is this.

We have already noted that local government authorities focus on employers' organisations such as chambers of industry and/or trade or exchanges and that grassroots movements and right-wing and left-wing political groupings are not part of the decision-making processes of these authorities. The critical conception of the right to the city, on the other hand, approaches the question of whose rights and who the citizens are in a comprehensive and critical manner. Lefebvre defines the right to the city as a right for everyone who lives in the city, without any restrictions whatsoever with respect to nationality or citizenship in the legal sense of the term. The right to the city is independent of legal citizenship and belongs to all who live in the city (Lefebvre, 1998; Purcell 2002). Referring to Marx, Harvey points out that where equal right reigns it is power that decides and adds that under the present system capital possesses a monopoly of this right. Marcuse lists those who already enjoy the right to the city: "Some already have the right to the city, are running it now, have it well in hand. They are the financial powers, the real estate owners and speculators, the key political hierarchy of state power, the owners of the media" (Marcuse, 2009:191). When the question of who enjoys the right to the city is posed in this manner, one has also explained who among the claimants cannot participate in decision-making processes and hence cannot exercise their right to the city. What we are interested in is these sectors, that is, those who do not enjoy the right to the city. This is precisely why the distinction between those who enjoy the right to the city and those that do not should be enunciated clearly. In this context, the importance of

asserting unequivocally that the fight for the right to the city is in fact identical with an anti-capitalist struggle waged against capital becomes clear.

The right to the city perspective has the potential of bringing together on the same platform many different struggles. The right to appropriation as an instrument of common struggle can be characterised as a right that confronts squarely private property, the backbone of capitalism and liberal democracy, one that challenges capitalist relations and institutions (Harvey, 2012; Purcell, 2002, 2008). What is aimed at here is not solely the appropriation of the urban space, but the creation of new space as well (Lefebvre, 1996: 192; Purcell, 2002: 103). This right highlights the importance of practices that emphasize use-value rather than exchange-value. It also comprises the right to the appropriation of spaces through direct intervention in these spaces. Struggles that are waged to make urban space our own, for instance the struggle for Taksim Square on the occasion of May Day or the struggle for the preservation of Gezi Park, have provided opportunities for bringing together different sectors. One of the most important observations, confirmed by our experience on the ground, was that doing things together or waging common struggles was much more effective in bringing diverse groups together than all the meetings or the training provided. The practice of the right to appropriation signifies the restructuring of all social relations, particularly those of a spatial nature, on the basis of the idea of the production of space realised. In struggles related to the right to the city, we also see that groups and social movements that embrace the struggle for displaying ownership of the city itself are successful, since the city is, in the last analysis, a platform for common struggles. As was seen in the struggle for Gezi Park, struggle waged in common provides possibilities for diverse groups to restructure both their relations and themselves in the course of new alliances.

Daily needs and struggles that are waged for access to rights in the city are also important for establishing platforms for new alliances. In looking for answers to the question of how we can instrumentalize and how we can interpret in an anti-capitalist perspective the concept of the right to the city, it may be of assistance to us to benefit from instances of concrete struggle that focus on daily needs and access to rights in the city. Here priority may be given to struggles against urban transformation. As elsewhere around the world, many urban transformation projects, large or small, were speedily put into practice, leading to changes in the economic and social geography of cities. These projects target shantytown areas or dilapidated depression areas in inner cities and aim, simultaneously, at "improving" certain neighbourhoods in the physical and demographic sense and establishing a regime of neoliberal management (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010, Aksümer & Yücel, 2011). Again as elsewhere in the world, urban transformation

projects have become instruments for converting all aspects of the city into commodities for sale and removing the poor from the city centre.

First of all, neighbourhoods where urban transformation is carried out are usually spaces inhabited by the urban poor. Hence, in struggles against urban transformation, the urban poor and labouring masses are naturally the fiercest opponents of the transformation since they are the social actor that is most directly influenced by this process (Harvey, 2010; Aksümer & Yücel 2011). Studies conducted show the existence of differences in the fight waged against urban transformation depending on the different social structures and different property regimes involved (Aksümer & Yücel 2011; Kuyucu & Ünsal 2011). For instance, the comparative study carried out by Kuyucu and Ünsal on Başıbüyük and Tarlabaşı has shown that differing property regimes and differential imposition of state violence have been factors in determining the effectivity and success of the fight waged. Hence, studying these cases one by one, analysing the points at which struggles flared and died down and the reasons thereof presents great significance both for extending short-term gains for the struggle and for establishing long-term alliances.

The struggles of the labouring and poor population against urban transformation are usually confined to individual and property-based rights and demands. These struggles geared toward the amelioration of day-to-day existence usually base their conception of the future on arrangements and reforms to be carried out within the existing system. Struggles that develop organically out of community life usually do not display an anti-capitalist course, nor do they have recourse to the concept of the right to the city (Harvey, 2012; Türkmen, 2011). In this context, it may be said that these struggles are waged in a certain sense for the preservation of the right to property and do not correspond to the radical conception of the right to the city. Hence, it becomes important to look at how movements that attribute central importance to the city-capital nexus establish a relation between the effort to protect the individual right to a shelter and the right to property and the anti-capitalist struggle. Here, one can take up two movements, the People's Houses and İMECE, which conceive of the struggles waged in neighbourhoods in an anti-capitalist light and link up to these movements in order to support them. Now, let us briefly look at these two examples to see how the right to the city can open up new paths for us and how the concept can be made to function as an instrument for anti-capitalist struggles.

The People's Houses is a political formation.[15] It has branches in different cities of Turkey and is organised particularly in shantytown neighbourhoods.

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[15] In presenting its history, the People's Houses talks about three different stages. Whereas between 1932-1951 it boasted 478 People's Houses and 4,322 People's Rooms and between 1963-1980 the number of branches of the People's Houses reached up to a thousand in addition to 333People's

Since the mid-nineties the People's Houses has been conducting what it characterises as "the Struggle for the People's Rights" in the areas of education, health care, shelter, transportation, the plunder of nature, demanding that these rights be provided through public agency. Although all of these rights in the areas of shelter, education, health care, women, the disabled, the city and the environment, and work life are raised as questions at the level of the neighbourhood, we need to dwell among these on the right to shelter, since this is directly related to the struggles waged against urban transformation.

Let us first look at how the People's Houses conceives the question of urban transformation. On their web site, the text bearing the title "On Urban Transformation: A Conceptual Introduction" under the general heading "The right to shelter", urban transformation is attributed to postmodernism and globalisation (Neccar, 2006). Postmodernism has produced a perception of the city that is divided and differentiated because it is formed by diverse communities and groups where each community shapes the different particles in its own manner while globalisation has created the theoretical and ideological milieu for the affirmation of competition between cities and the treatment of the city as a commodity. In this text, the People's Houses highlights the city-capital nexus and advocates the waging of the urban struggle together with citizens. In line with the perspective provided in the text, the People's Houses carries out activities that organise movements of resistance in neighbourhoods inhabited by working people and are geared towards the setting up of links between the fight for rights and the anti-capitalist movement. Alongside the effort put in to publicise and organise movements of resistance in neighbourhoods threatened by urban transformation, in particular in Istanbul and Ankara, meetings, film showings, diverse courses and training programmes are held, offices for the right to shelter are opened, and, when needed, legal assistance is provided to the community activists. In these activities, the demand for the citizens to have a say in decision-making and for rights, powers and decision-making mechanisms to be turned over from capital to the people is voiced. It is specifically underlined in the brochures and texts produced that the needs of the people should be taken up with a rights-based approach rather than an approach that regards this in terms of "aid" or "assistance". Although the right to the city is brought on the agenda in the work of the People's Houses, it is not defined as a separate right. The right to the city is put forth in forums and educationals in order to highlight the city-capital nexus. The right to the city is not presented as an objective that is to be attained, but used as a domain of struggle that is in harmony with an imagination for the future of

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Rooms, in 1987 it started its work with a total of 24 branches,18 in Istanbul and 6 in Ankara. At present it wields 73 such branches, most of which are in poor neighbourhoods, where violations of rights are the most frequent.

the country that aims to go beyond the frontiers of the system in place.[16] In all the work conducted, anti-capitalism is constantly stressed and struggle against the neoliberal assault that aspires to turn over all areas of life to the market is fundamental. In conformity with this approach, the principle of socialised property over the means of production is advocated in all the forums and rallies organised or in campaigns for free education, free health care and free transportation rather than, for instance, pressing for house ownership for all on the basis of individual property.

The İMECE Community Movement for Urbanism, for its part, is a civic initiative that focuses on urban questions. Established in 2006, the initiative describes itself in the following terms: "As long as we did not stand together, our voice was hardly heard. Precisely for this reason, we came together and continue to do so, people from different professions, community people, employees, academics, students, jobless people... saying 'the urbanist, that is you!'"[17] İMECE does not take up only the right to shelter, but all rights necessary for city-dwellers. It defends the idea that "it is vital not to remain in a defensive position vis-a-vis the system in place but to construct a constitutive and comprehensive alternative." It insists that it is independent of all existing political, professional and civic organisations. İMECE stands up against the assault on the living spaces of the people and hopes for another future. On its web site struggles waged in nine different neighbourhoods threatened by urban transformation are monitored (Ayazma, Başıbüyük, Fener-Balat, Gülsuyu-Gülensu, İç-Dış Kumsal, Sulukule, Şen mahalle, Tarlabaşı, Tozkoparan) and reports on Istanbul or the third bridge over the Bosphorus, articles that defend life zones, or press releases are also posted. Before the local elections, it organised a series of public meetings with the purpose of preparing a report on local government.

When we look at the principles advocated and the texts published on the web site, we see that the right to the city is not particularly highlighted as an objective to be attained. Although support is extended to community struggles against urban transformation, the work conducted in neighbourhoods is not really the central focus of the organisation. When we look at the press releases and reports signed by İMECE, we see some interest in the protection of public spaces and the defense of the art-city nexus. However, İMECE considers it to be a priority to make a holistic kind of assessment with respect to the city and to lay bare the city-capital nexus as it supports community struggles or makes a press statement.

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[16]   http://www.sendika.org/2014/02/halkevleri-yerel-yonetim-forumu-siyasal-krize-hak-mucadeleleri-ile-mudahale/

[17]   www.imecetoplumunsehirciliknhareketi.org

While the People's Houses has a political perspective defending labour and carries out its work actively in neighbourhoods threatened by urban transformation and in cities and communities where it has branches, İMECE, due to the composition of its membership, tries to support existing movements and to prepare reports and to keep the question of the city actively on the agenda.[18] İMECE conducts its policies in a participatory form and dreams of a world where the citizen is in the centre, where the city belongs to the people rather than a handful of capitalists.

Although the two movements exhibit some differences in the activities that they conduct, we can say that there are also similarities in that they both have an anti-capitalist bent and display a holistic approach to the issue of the city, an approach that goes beyond access to rights in the city. In addition, both movements criticise the unwieldy nature of academic language divorced from living society and emphasise the importance of fighting hand in hand with the community and generating and spreading the knowledge. Both movements highligt the capital-city nexus and stress the idea that what is important is not participating within the system, but the questioning of that very system. Although their forms of active participation may differ, both for the People's Houses and for İMECE the support given to the ongoing struggles in communities threatened by urban transformation and struggles in rights-based areas such as health care or education rights is fundamental. However, for both movements the issue of urban transformation is only one element of their overall work. Contrary to the perspective dominant in communities towards the preservation of private property, neither İMECE nor the People's Houses ignores the wider context of the demands and aspirations at the micro level. However, İMECE and the People's Houses do not restrict their struggles to either urban transformation or access to the right to the city. The most important for them is to bring out into the open the city-capital nexus and to build a new alternative and use this to reimagine the city.

In conclusion, after the Gezi rebellion, although it proved possible to save Gezi Park from destruction as a gain of the movement, the city continues to be vulnerable to falling prey to the stranglehold of capital under so-called urban transfromation projects. To see the right to the city as an instrument for the world that we wish to create rather than an end in itself to be attained and to conceive the struggle waged for access to rights in the city through the focus of the city-capital nexus may create new possibilities for the grasping of the limits of the existing

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[18] This paper does not intend to analyse in detail the work conducted by either the People's Houses or İMECE. It simply assesses these movements as instances of entities that perceive and interpret urban work in a holistic manner on the basis of the account provided on their respective web sites, as well as personal observation. Although a detailed analysis of these movements is important, that lies outside the scope of this paper.

order. To conduct the struggle for the right to the city without reducing this to a struggle for access to rights in the city and to stress the anti-capitalist dimension will demarcate us from an attitude of simply trying to improve the existing system and a conception of the right to the city limited to individual rights.

6. In lieu of a conclusion

The occupation of Gezi Park and the ensuing rebellion started out as a reaction to the cutting down of the trees in the park, but can really be characterised as a fight for the right to the city. This series of events created an occasion through which was discussed the whole set of issues around the city and participation, something that had been on Turkey's agenda for quite a long while. There is no doubt that the echo created by the urban debate is closely related to the increasing acceleration of the process of commodification of public spaces that started in the 1980s. Land belonging to the public treasury being offered for sale, forests marketed, the whole debate on the third bridge across the Bosphorus, urban transformation projects, legislation in the area of mass housing – all these are instances that demonstrate how rapidly urban land is being sold and bought. Harbouring one fifth of the country's population, wielding a high ground rent revenue, Istanbul naturally is of special importance and the topic of fierce controversy. For a long time now, a host of institutions and civic initiatives as well as the victims of urban transformation have been conducting critical urban work against the conversion of the city into a gigantic rent machine. Having started their work long before the Gezi rebellion, such groups mushroomed after the Gezi resistance with the establishment of forums first at the Abbasağa Park a few kilometres away from the Gezi and then with the spread of the same idea to all the parks of Istanbul and these devoted a lot of energy to ideas of the right to the city and participation. The Gezi revolt made it clear that much more could be demanded than was being talked about in UN conventions under the right to the city or participation in urban planning processes and brought out into daylight the discontent that was rampant against the existing social order.

Despite this effervescence in the urban opposition movement, the conception of the government, focussed as it is on elections and limited to these, is way behind the legal reforms enacted in the years 2004-2005, but never effectively implemented.[19] Participation means nothing more than consulting

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[19] Finally, we should also mention a recent development in parliament. On 8 October 2013, İdris Baluken, the deputy head of the parliamentary group of the People's Democratic Party (HDP), tabled a motion for the opening of a parliamentary investigation todiscover the concept of the "right to the city" with a view to accord it constitutional status in order to increase the participation of the people in the setting up of urban policy. With this motion the concept has entered officially for the first time the annals of parliamentary life in Turkey.

groups of capitalists or, as in the case of the plebiscite that was offered by the prime minister himself for Gezi Park, legitimising decisions already made. The work carried out with the aim of empowering civil society organisations with a view to promote the participation of city-dwellers in decision-making processes, on the other hand, despite all the good intention and the effort that go into this kind of work, ends up being limited to work done to inform a small section of the city's population on legal arrangements in this area and the skills necessary to develop and implement projects. While supporting collaboration between the state, civil society and the private sector, such projets do not adopt an approach that renders possible long-term change and transformation in detail, with participation being exclusively perceived as the contributions made to the planning process that is legally stipulated.

This paper has defended the idea that, the concept of the right to the city can contribute to city-dwellers' efforts to construct a world outside of the existing order by grasping the city-capital nexus, by intervening in decision-making processes and by reimagining the city. On the other hand, it is clear that the concept of the right to the city raised in UN documents is restricted to participation in present decision-making processes and access to rights in the urban environment. However, we know from our present experience that efforts to improve the existing system cannot be sufficient to overcome the blockages of that system. Questioning capitalism itself, interpreting the right to the city as an instrument for the demand of a more comprehensive change and a new aspiration for the city, and lending an ear to the anti-capitalist nature of this concept critical of the existing order may open up a new path of radical change for us. Expressing the way we reimagine the city and orienting today's struggles accordingly should be our main target.

While looking for an answer to the question of how to give concrete form to the right to the city and the participation of citizens in the decision-making processes in the city, it is important to possess knowledge of urban struggles and the difficulties encountered and the gains achieved during these struggles. There is so much to learn from the experience of the struggles of different cities and communities. The experiences of participation that would strengthen movements of the right to the city should be opened for discussion. The instances at hand provide for us the possibility, on the one hand, of drawing the boundaries of the existing order by showing who can participate to what extent, and, on the other, suggest clues as to possible and probable blockages and difficulties that have to be overcome in reimagining the city.

To sum up, this paper rejects the use of the concept participation in a way that brings to the fore consent for the maintenance of the existing order and contends that participation and the right to the city, two concepts developed in

relatively independent debates, should be used jointly, but also in a more radical perspective. The concept of the right to the city is neither a magic wand nor panacea for the problems created by capitalism. At present, the right to the city functions in practice as the right of capital, although this is not made explicit. For this right to turn into a right of citizens who produce the city and their winning over of an effective power over decisions made about the city requires that the existing social order be questioned and transformed. Supporting the grassroots struggle, backing the work already being done, learning from the struggle itself, and widening the collaboration, as well as being ever mindful of questions such as what we participate in, why and how we participate, and who we struggle against, will strengthen the struggle to make the city ours. We should never forget that radical struggle will only grow out of existing struggles. As Harvey points out, "Changes arises out of an existing state of affairs and it has to be harness the possibilities immanent within an existing situation" (Harvey, 2010: 229). The People's Houses and İMECE prove for us that, whether with or without political commitment, this kind of approach is possible.

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Özet

Katılım ve kent hakkı: Türkiye örneği

Bu yazı, katılımı esas alan bir kent için kapsamlı bir bakış açısının gerekli olduğunu savunuyor ve kent hakkı kavramını bu bağlamda tartışmaya açıyor. Yazıda, kent hakkı kavramının içinin nasıl doldurulabileceği ve kavramın kendisini bir amaç haline getirmeden araç olarak nasıl kullanılabilceği saha çalışmalarından elde edilen deneyimler ekseninde sorgulanıyor. Yazı, kentlerde yürütülecek çalışmalarda, kent ile sermaye birikimi arasındaki ilişkiyi gözardı etmeden sadece varolanı korumak için değil, düzenin alternatifini yaratmak için yapılan mücadelelerin önemini vurguluyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kent Hakkı, Katılım, Türkiye