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**INNER-CITY REGENERATION AND THE POLITICS OF RESISTANCE
IN ISTANBUL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SULUKULE AND
TARLABAŞI**

-VOLUME II-

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
a Doctor of Philosophy

City University
School of Social Sciences
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*Dedicated to the loving memory of **Saime Siret Bahçeli***

and

*all gestures and actors of civil opposition that made **#occupygezi** possible in
Istanbul*

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Declaration

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Abstract

Territories of neoliberal urbanization have expanded as local and central governments around the world have increasingly approached and utilized urban land as a rent-generating tool that can as well reproduce the workings of advanced capitalism in full effect. It has thus been inevitable to see the expansion of the territories of urban oppositional movements in direct proportion to the globalization of neoliberal urbanism. Currently, civil, supranational and grassroots organizations are actively raising critical questions with respect to the diminishing chances of citizens to access affordable housing, public spaces, natural reserves, urban resources and services, participatory decision-making mechanisms at the level of local governance etc.

Departing from here, what is being witnessed is the reintroduction of debates on the 'rights to the city' as coined by Henri Lefebvre (1968) and further tackled by David Harvey (2008) to the agenda of contentious urban politics. However, although there is growing literature on the skillful battles of oppositional movements against the forces of capital in various cities of the world, challenges encountered by movements, or the fragilities and vulnerabilities they might experience remain relatively understudied. This poses a matter of concern regarding that it can only be through the acknowledgement and transfer of knowledge emanating from battles against such challenges and vulnerabilities that learning processes can be enhanced and more sustainable movements can be built for the future.

Istanbul's experience is not divorced from any of these developments and thus falls into the coverage of these territories of neoliberal globalization and urban contestation along the given lines. State-led urban transformation projects targeting informal housing zones, inner-city poverty areas, coastlines, large tracts of state owned, and natural and historic reserves, and oppositional views raised against these novel expressions of urban development by diverse civil initiatives can all be interpreted as narratives that reveal the contingency of Istanbul within the given territories. Yet, just as similar to the international context, the Turkish experience has not so far tackled the question of challenges to movement building in the face of such immense pressures as much as needed.

The cases of Sulukule and Tarlabası, however, are highly revealing of the fact that it is incredibly difficult for socio-economically disadvantaged communities to sustain their mode of mobilized resistance against forces of urban transformation since the given forces instigate imminent divides within communities based on the will to access certain securities and gains. That is, although collective resistance and opposition to urban transformation may emanate from poverty zones, a tendency to settle for material securities and gains may also emerge depending on the individually defined capacities of residents as the fear of loss in the battle against transformation climbs. Private ownership and its impact on grassroots mobilization deserves particular attention within the given set of constellations.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AGFE:</i>	Advisory Group on Forced Evictions
<i>ALA:</i>	Accessible Life Association
<i>BM:</i>	Beyođlu Municipality
<i>FM:</i>	Fatih Municipality
<i>HSA:</i>	Human Settlements Association
<i>ICOMOS:</i>	International Council on Monuments and Sites
<i>IMM:</i>	Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality
<i>IMP:</i>	Istanbul Metropolitan Planning Office
<i>INAP:</i>	Istanbul Neighbourhood Associations' Platform
<i>JDP:</i>	Justice and Development Party
<i>MHA:</i>	Mass Housing Administration
<i>MPC:</i>	Multi-Party Commission
<i>NA:</i>	Neighbourhood Association
<i>NHSA:</i>	Nesliřah and Hatice Sultan Association for Solidarity and Development
<i>RttC:</i>	Right to the City
<i>SA:</i>	Sulukule Association for the Solidarity and Development of Roma Culture
<i>SP:</i>	Sulukule Platform
<i>TAPT:</i>	Tarlabaşı Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Progress and Solidarity
<i>UTP:</i>	Urban Transformation Project

6. “It’s a War Without Blood”: The Case of Sulukule

In 2006, Fatih Municipality (FM) declared Sulukule –a thousand year old Roma settlement- as a renewal zone, making it the first neighbourhood within the urban core of Istanbul to become subject to urban transformation via Law No. 5366. The renewal project relied on a demolish and rebuild method for the transformation of Sulukule from an ‘inner-city slum’ into a middle to upper middle class residential neighbourhood with various amenities - including a hotel and diverse commercial establishments. In return, property owners were offered either new units from the project area (on the condition that they would become indebted for the surplus value of new properties), or monetary compensations (as determined by public authorities). Tenants, on the other hand, were extended rights to purchase MHA built social housing units in Taşoluk, a newly developing peripheral district, on the basis of regular payments for 180 months - which in the end would make them the owners of these units.

The immediate response of the community to the renewal scheme was an almost unanimous resistance with the support of an independent civil initiative, Sulukule Platform (SP), formed to defend the rights of those living in Sulukule. Reaction of the community quickly translated into the establishment of a neighbourhood association, ‘Sulukule Association for Solidarity and the Development of Roma Culture’ (SA), to fight against the demolition of the area and the forced displacement of locals. Vigorous steps were taken in the guidance of SP to voice the opposition and demands of the community at many levels (i.e. campaigning, demonstrations, lawsuits etc.). These actions, overall, not only pave the way for the public discussion of critical issues relating to state-led urban transformation for the first time, but also attracted the attention of both national and international organizations – among which were the European Union and such United Nations bodies as the UNESCO, UN-HABITAT and the UN Human Rights Commission.

However, resistance was later countered by a new neighbourhood association advocating for the implementation of the project. Arguing that the renewal scheme would bring diverse economic and social returns for all residents, the ‘Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Association for Solidarity and Development’ (NHSA) sided with the

local government to enable the successful accomplishment of the project. This emergent fragmentation within the community led to the inevitable weakening of firm opposition and thus, the implementation of the project with ease. Sulukule was cleared almost completely by 2009 and constructions for the new project started in 2010. More than 400 families were transferred to Taşoluk. The majority of tenants, however, sold their units to return to the surroundings of their former neighbourhood.

Interviews with the leaders of SA and NHSA revealed that both resistance to and support for the renewal scheme were primarily shaped by pressures exerted by recent urban policies and their interaction with the socio-economic vulnerabilities of community members: Tactics and strategies developed by NAs – with no previous experience of collective action- represent efforts towards the management of inevitable radical changes that are triggered by powerful policies – underlying the renewal schemes- and their equally powerful practitioners. The primary goal of grassroots mobilization resulting from these efforts is both to protect communities against the ill effects of transformation and manipulate forces of renewal in a way to serve the interests of the community. However, tactics and strategies employed for such purposes are not independent from the various heterogeneities (social, economic, ideological etc.) contained in the communities. Thus, although the initial response of the community might be unanimous resistance to create a protective shield over the community, this resistance might later fragment due to the diverse definitions of interests that surface on the grounds of aforementioned heterogeneities.

This chapter will first lay out the historical, social and economic background of Sulukule and then provide an overview of events that took place with the declaration of the neighbourhood as a renewal zone. This will involve an analysis of the aims and methods of renewal as identified by the local government, and the way in which administrative and legal progress of the project gave way to the emergence of civil and grassroots resistance. Following this, conversations with the leaders of two distinct NAs will be used in a way to demonstrate the intricate dynamics that shaped the movement in Sulukule and led to its clearance.

6.1. Mapping Sulukule

Sulukule falls within the administrative boundaries of Fatih district on the historical peninsula of Istanbul. Inhabited by a multi-ethnic and cultural population throughout centuries, Fatih houses some of the most prominent heritage structures of Istanbul and thus is among the major tourist attractions of the city (Fig. 8). Despite its cosmopolitan past, currently Fatih is a predominantly middle to lower middle class Muslim and politically conservative district, marked both by residential and commercial characteristics. Statistically, Fatih cannot be labelled as a low-income neighbourhood overall; however, Sulukule with radical degrees of socio-economic and physical deprivation, stands out within the district as what the local authorities would like to call an ‘urban wasteland’.

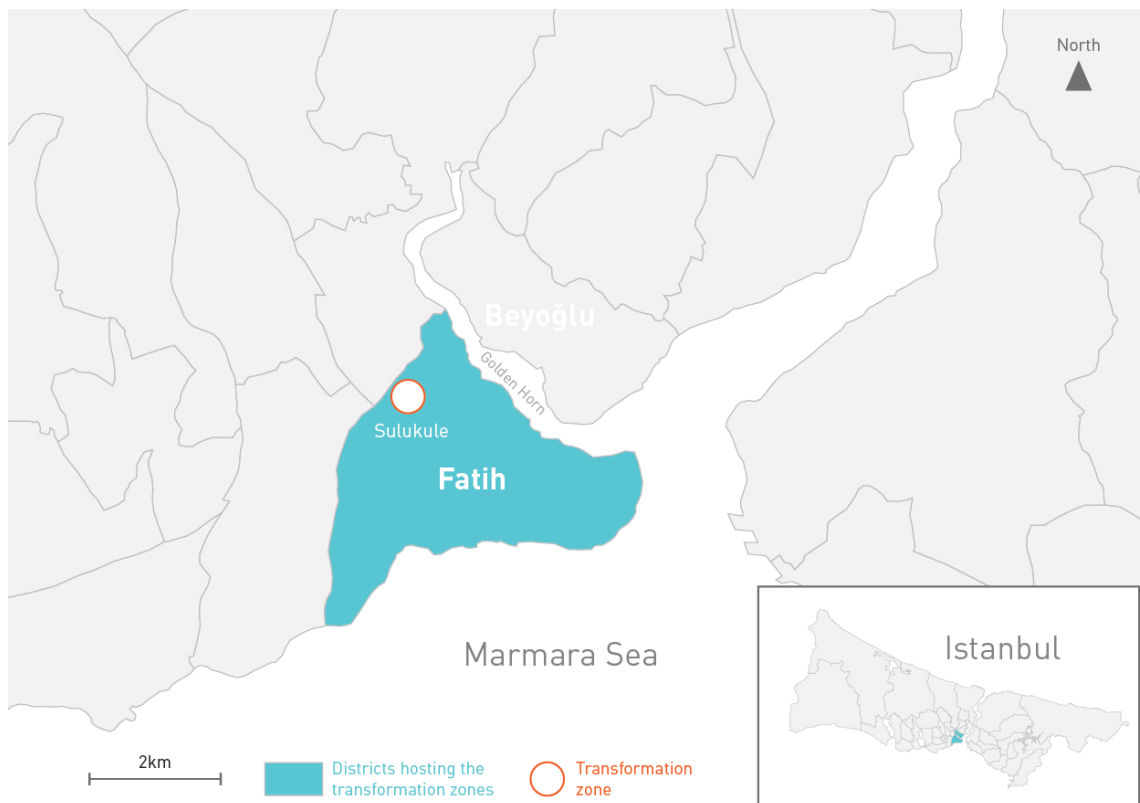


Fig. 1 - Map showing Sulukule within the administrative boundaries of Fatih. (Map by: Emrah Kavlak)

Sulukule is bordered by the ancient Theodosius Walls and the E5 motorway to its west, the Vatan Avenue to its south, the Sofalıçeşme Avenue to its east and the Fevzipaşa Avenue to its north. What these border lines represent also determine the reasons why the area has become a key target of state-led renewal: Sulukule is

not only situated within a heritage zone with moderate commercial activity, but it is also right beside critical connection points which emphasize Sulukule's centrality within the city (Fig. 9). Whereas the E5 is a major artery which connects the city centre to the main international airport and the industrial zones on the periphery, Vatan Caddesi is a boulevard which both has an exit to the E5 and houses some of the major administrative institutions (e.g. The Metropolitan Police Department, Fatih Municipality, Foreigners' Office, Istanbul Governor's Office), public hospitals and new shopping malls in the area; Fevzipaşa Avenue, on the other hand, is a vibrant high street with diverse shopping alternatives for the middle to lower middle classes and in close proximity to the heritage attractions within the area. Sofaliçeşme Avenue does not bear any particular significance in terms of commercial activity, or connectivity, but functions as a symbolic border line that rips Sulukule from the rest of the social, economic and physical geography of Fatih.¹ The east of the avenue is defined by a relatively more middle-class socio-economic and cultural configuration, evident in finer conditions of housing stock and thus, higher rent values. With its narrow streets, worn out housing milieu and inadequate infrastructure, Sulukule presents the view of a typical inner-city poverty zone.

¹ During many of the conversations with residents, the east of the avenue was very often addressed as the 'outside'. The use of 'outside' suggested that the east of Sofalicesme Avenue had relatively better standards of living, not corresponding with the conditions of Sulukule.

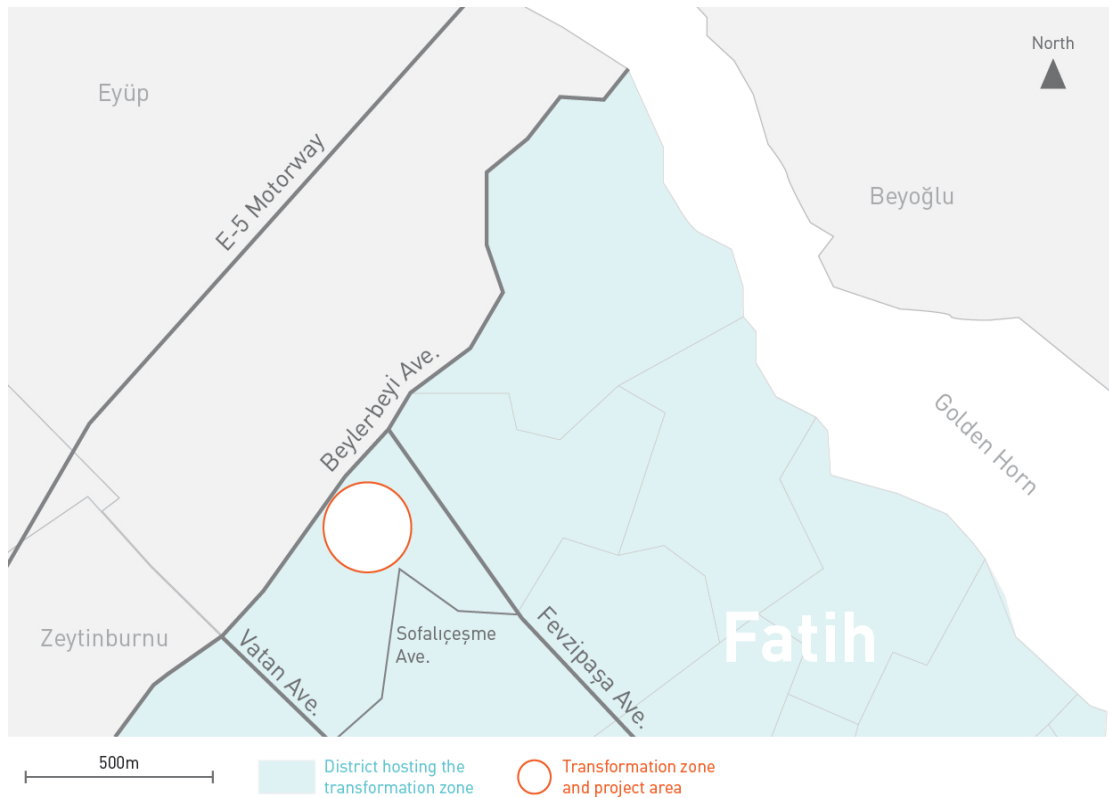


Fig. 2 - Map showing the renewal site in Sulukule, Fatih. (Map by: Emrah Kavlak)

Sulukule is known to be one of the oldest Roma settlements in the world with almost a thousand years' history. Existing literature puts that Roma presence in Turkey dates back to as early as the 11th century, corresponding with the Byzantine period. Roma presence in Sulukule, on the other hand, dates back to the 15th century when the Roma community was granted a certain piece of land in the aftermath of Istanbul's conquest by the period's Sultan due to the community's contributions to the Ottoman victory (Marsh, 2008: 18). Sources indicate that the population of Roma in Sulukule within that period was small; yet, it became a destination for the Roma migrating from Anatolia in the later years, leading to the further settlement of the community and an increase in its population.

The Roma of Sulukule were involved in diverse economic activities ranging from horse-dealing and carting to basket-making and street trading etc. but they made a particular name for the 'entertainment culture' they created with music and dance. This engagement reached such a level that "the tradition of music making and the training of children in the Gypsy community through the guild system produced musicians and dancers of the highest quality that serviced the elites of the palace and pashas' households throughout the Ottoman period." (ibid: 19). This did not

only lead to the community's attainment of a 'specific organised place' within the 'complex ethnic and social mosaic' (ibid: 2008) of Ottoman society, but also to the institutionalization of this particular engagement and culture in the form of 'entertainment houses' (*devriye*) starting from the 19th century. Akcura defines these houses as "small, informal 'listen-watch, eat and drink' places where you could rent the entire house, a hall, or a room to have belly dancers and musicians perform just for you and your friends, or family while being served food and alcohol." (qtd. in Somersan and Kirca, 2006: 100).² Entertainment houses saw the declaration of the republic in 1923 and kept on functioning for long decades, providing the people of Sulukule with a myriad of job opportunities and thus, a thriving economy.³

The area, however, experienced a downfall in the 1960's when demolitions for the construction of Vatan and Millet Avenues led to the clearance of parts of the neighbourhood and the forced displacement of the community. According to Somersan and Kirca (2006), those with certain wealth moved to the relatively better-off parts of the city and cut off their ties with the neighbourhood whereas the more disadvantaged ones moved further towards the city walls, marking the pre-project boundaries of the neighbourhood (ibid: 101). Demolitions and displacement resulted in a cycle of significant poverty and deprivation in Sulukule, however the continued functioning of entertainment houses helped the stabilization of social and economic life in the neighbourhood within time. Still, though, the sector never saw the prosperity of pre-1960s, which many recall as the 'golden years' of Sulukule.⁴

² Somersan and Kirca note that "these houses were connected through intricate labyrinths to the owners' actual one-floored houses and there was constant back and forth between the two homes for service and performances." (2006: 100).

³ Almost all residents interviewed for this research emphasized the fundamental importance of entertainment houses in supporting the livelihood and survival of hundreds of families within the neighbourhood for many generations.

⁴ Marsh argues that another factor which contributed to the decline in entertainment economy in the 1960s was the "changing fashions and tastes that saw more 'liberal' attitudes undermining the traditional notions of propriety that these entertainments had previously observed". (Marsh, 2008: 19).

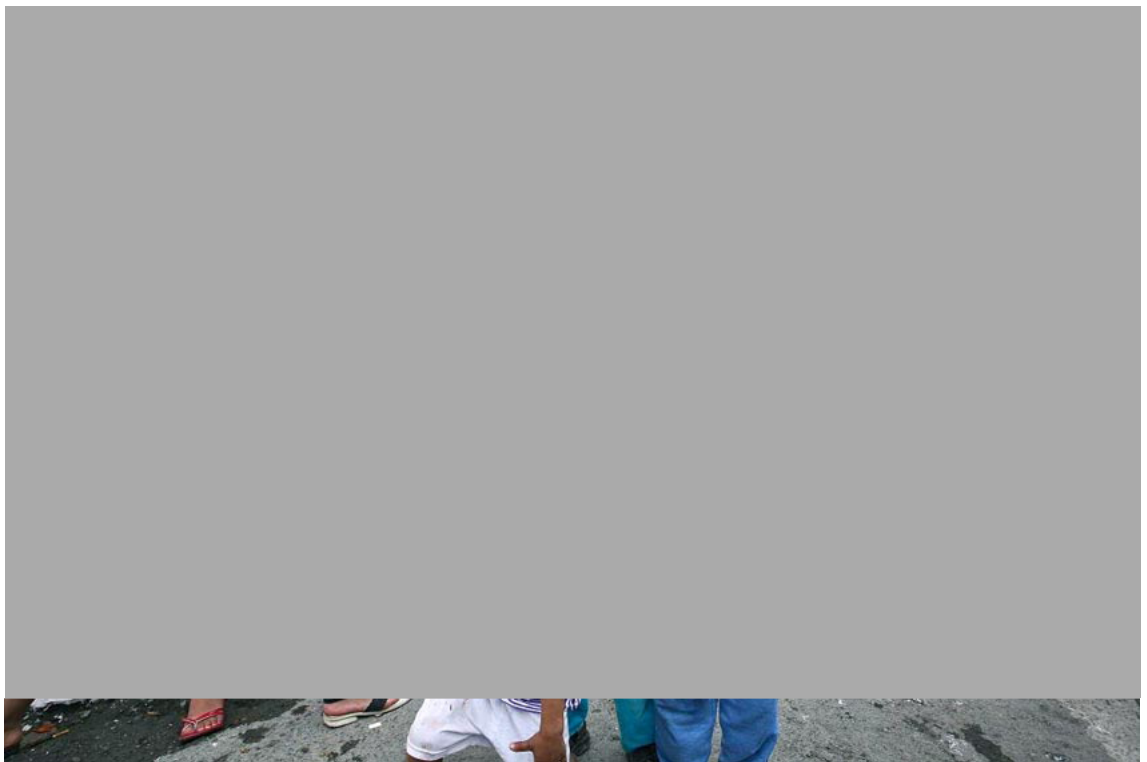


Fig. 3 - Details from the landscape of Sulukule before demolitions. (Photos by: Özlem Ünsal and Nejla Osseiran respectively).

In the aftermath of 1960s Sulukule started to receive gradual migration from rural Anatolia, meaning that those partaking in the entertainment sector multiplied. The majority of the informants were of the view that the arrival of 'outsiders' correlate

with the degeneration of the sector: ‘the quality of entertainment worsened not only due to competition among too many, but also due to the non-familiarity of the entrepreneurial outsiders with the authentic culture’.⁵ Deciding that the “neighbourhood [was] getting out of hand upon rumours that there was petty robbery, drug trafficking and prostitution in the larger neighbourhood” (Somersan and Kirca, 2006: 101), Saadettin Tantan -a mayor of MP in the mid-1990s- declared a war on Sulukule (the *devriyes* being the primary target) in partnership with the period’s police in chief, Süleyman Ulusoy. Throughout this period, the Roma of Sulukule were exposed to extreme police violence and narcotics abuse to the extent of being beaten on the streets, raided in *devriyes* and tortured at police headquarters (ibid.). Consequently all forms of entertainment were banned in the neighbourhood, leaving many musicians, dancers and all others working within the sector unemployed.



⁵ According to Marsh, this transformation is evident in the fact that the clientele of *devriyes* gradually shifted from an elite to a more popular market (ibid.)



Fig. 4 – Sights of Roma music and entertainment in Sulukule. (Photos by: Nejla Osseiran)

From this period on, “most of the musicians had to become street vendors because they had no other choice to keep financially afloat” and “the entertainment houses were offered for rent, or transformed into barns for animals” (Foggo, 2007: 42). The same period has also seen the informal operation of a number of entertainment houses. This severe blow to the area’s economy was accompanied by the stigmatization of Roma, and particularly of those from Sulukule, triggered by the wide coverage of clashes between residents and police in mainstream media. As Marsh put it, “increasingly, the area became identified with social problems that were not being addressed by the local, or other authorities, and the Gypsy population became further marginalized and limited by a narrow and predominantly negative series of stereotypes.” (Marsh, 2008: 19). A combination of these two factors eventually “[reduced] the entire Gypsy community to abject poverty and emigration.” (ibid: 20).

6.2. Sulukule in the Light of Law No. 5366: The Making of a Renewal Zone on Paper

In September 2005, Sulukule was declared a renewal zone on the basis of law 5366 and a three-way protocol was signed among the IMM, Fatih Municipality and the MHA in July 2006 for the initiation of the project.⁶ Here, the IMM functions as the umbrella institution that supervises renewal, whereas the Fatih Municipality acts as the local coordinator (responsible from identifying the tenure structure of the neighbourhood; pursuing negotiation with property owners and undertaking expropriation when needed) and the MHA acts as the project developer (responsible for drafting plans for the area, handling the construction of new units [either on its own, or in collaboration with other construction companies] and providing those in need with social housing).

Explanations as to the aims and methods of renewal, along with justifications presented for renewal, do not only reveal the approach of project initiators to Sulukule but also their points of view regarding good practice when it comes to renewal projects. Below is a detailed analysis of this approach and point of view as articulated on the project web-site supported by an interview with the official project coordinator from Fatih Municipality.

6.2.1. Aims and Methods of Renewal:

According to the website of Fatih Municipality, “the project [aimed] to renew [Sulukule] with sanitized buildings and infrastructure in harmony with the historical urban texture, and in line with the urban and architectural heritage of Historical Peninsula.” The transformation area covers 12 building blocks, 10 streets, 3 main avenues, 354 plots and 22 listed buildings, making up a total area of 46091.19m².⁷ Upon completion of the project, “the area by the walls will be

⁶ The official name of the project is the ‘Renewal Project for Hatice Sultan and Neslişah Neighbourhoods (Sulukule)’. Hatice Sultan and Neslişah are the official names of the neighbourhood but the area is popularly called Sulukule.

⁷ There is no exact and official information on how many individual ‘living spaces’ (as in flats and houses) would be affected by the project. However according to the project director an approximate number of 620 independent units fell into the project area, built over the 354 plots

bestowed with enhanced living spaces, composed of social amenities, parking lots and modern residences in harmony with the historical urban fabric and building plans in effect”. Details revealed in time that in the design was a new residential and commercial centre which includes more than 500 villas, various recreational areas, a hotel and a cultural center that are representative of civil Ottoman and Turkish architecture.



Fig. 5 – Map showcasing proposed plans for Sulukule.



mentioned – this included houses and apartment buildings (not individual flats) but excluded informally built shelters.

Fig. 6 – Model representing and visualizing the proposed plan for Sulukule. (Source: Official website of Fatih Municipality)

The question of what sort of methods were planned to be adopted to achieve these ends and how the residents would be affected by a transformative process as such becomes critical and intriguing regarding that an approximate number of 5000 people were residing in Sulukule prior to the project (Sulukule Survey, 2005); this broke down into 48% property owners, 42% tenants and 10% illegal occupiers.⁸ As stated in Chapter 3, the phrase “no one will be harmed by the consequences of transformation projects” was also uttered for Sulukule on many occasions.⁹ It was also put on the website of FM that the primary aim of the project is “to make it possible for all resident families to keep on living within the neighbourhood.” However, the very same narrative continued as follows:

Tenants cannot be offered housing within the area since they are not recognized as property right holders in legal terms. Yet, for the first time in Turkey and within the context of this project, housing options will be provided for all tenants within the project area. (...) if [the tenants] negotiate with their landlords, they will be able to keep on living within the neighbourhood. The number of residential and business units to be produced corresponds with the number of already existing units; this should be interpreted as a clear evidence of the fact that there is no intention of sending any families out of the neighbourhood.¹⁰

Thus, it can be argued that the possibility of keeping all the resident families in the area has always been a complex issue. Rather than securing the residence of all locals in the area, the project extended certain compensations, which determined

⁸ Again, there have never been any officially declared numbers, indicating the number of people who will be affected by the project exactly. According to the project director, the percentages above represented 759 property owner and 346 tenant households (February, 2009). Regarding that an average of five people lived in each household (on the basis of what the research suggests), the result of a rough calculation corresponds to the approximate number uttered by SP, that is 5000.

⁹ Even in 2011, when the project was underway and the property owners in Sulukule were raising harsh criticisms about the ‘unjustly’ nature of the project in a newspiece, mayor Topbaş had responded back by using this exact sentence “Sulukule’de Dudak Uçuklatan Rant” (Gobsmacking Boom of Urban Rent in Sulukule), accessed on 31 July 2012, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1065796&CategoryID=77>

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that although this is what is stated on the website, during my interview with the project director from the municipality I was told that one of the main concerns was ‘high density’ within the area: “According to the existing plan requirements we should only allow 1400 people to live there. The current number is 3430. So, whereas 1400 people living in normal, civilized and modern standards is ideal, we are talking about a whopping number of 3430 here. This is too much.” (February, 2009) The issue of density was also the basis for the municipality’s rejection of an alternative plan, designed by a group of experts and civil activists with the aim of keeping everyone in the neighbourhood.

whether the residents would be able to keep on living in the area, or not. Owners were either given a certain monetary compensation for what they owned within the project area, or offered new properties within the renewal zone, depending on the preference of owners. The value of existing properties was determined by the assessment of a commission -represented by the members of project initiators- on the basis of real estate figures.¹¹ Once ‘the highest possible value is calculated’ for each property, the owners were offered different options by the municipality.¹² The acceptance of any offer by the property owner on these grounds refers to a ‘negotiation with the municipality’. If the owner showed unwillingness to negotiate, the municipality held the power to expropriate properties.



Fig. 7 – A view of Taşoluk housing units in Arnavutköy. (Photo by: Tolga İslam)

Tenants, on the other hand, were offered MHA built social housing units in Taşoluk, Gaziosmanpaşa – a peripheral neighbourhood 45 km. away from Sulukule- without having to make any down payments. Although authorities repeatedly claimed during many meetings and press conferences that tenants

¹¹ Real estate figures that would function as reference points during the evaluation process would be provided by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Real Estate Agents.

¹² The owners might want to take the monetary compensation offered and move to another area if they wish. However if they want a property from the project area, two scenarios emerge: If the value and size of what is owned fit into what can be offered, then the owner was granted with a new unit without any compensations. If what is owned valued less than what can be offered, then the property owner could agree to pay the difference between the two properties on a long term basis. The latter scenario was usually the case when these two specific options emerged.

were not in any way forced to leave the area and that they could return to the neighbourhood once the project was finalized, this never appeared as a realistic possibility since the renewal project would cause an inevitable rise in real-estate values and living in the area would become predominantly unaffordable for the majority of tenants. Taşoluk was thus designed as a low-cost home-ownership scheme whereby payments for the units would be divided into 180 monthly installments (i.e. covering fifteen years) and those who would gain access to them would become the rightful owners of these units if they managed to pay the installments without problems. In other words, the provision of social housing is constructed upon the promise of property ownership. Departing from these, it can be suggested that both tenants and property owners were offered a share of urban rent through different methods by the state within the process of renewal.¹³

6.2.2. Justifying Renewal

The municipality justified the decision for renewal with the argument that Sulukule had become an ‘urban wasteland’ in need of urgent physical and social rehabilitation. According to the declaration on the municipality’s website, an intervention to these ends requires the execution of detailed research prior to the initiation of the project and also the adoption of participatory methods, whereby civil groups, experts, local authorities and community members participate in the decision making mechanisms.

The use of the term ‘urban wasteland’ is two dimensional, addressing the physical and social problems that mark Sulukule from the point of view of the municipality. Physical aspects of the argument depart from a statement of uniqueness: Fatih district where Sulukule is situated is described as “a unique heritage area that has a timeless importance both for the country and the world”.¹⁴ Then, however, it is stated that the area “could not accomplish its development and evolution due to

¹³ The website also talked of ‘rent support’ to be extended by Fatih Municipality both to tenant families who might have had difficulties in the payment of their monthly installments and also to property owners, who would need to rent a place elsewhere until the project in Sulukule was finalized.

¹⁴ Quotations within this section have been selected from the Fatih Municipality’s website unless otherwise stated.

neglect” and that “it does not only face the possibility of disappearance, but has also become an area of dilapidation and waste in the most central part of Istanbul”. The neighbourhood is likened to a “medieval town” made up of “historical artifacts falling into pieces, shabby buildings, wretched barracks, and informally added units and structures”. Thus, it is argued that physical intervention is much needed since these conditions, more than anything, deem the area extremely vulnerable in the face of much feared earthquake risk. From the same point of understanding, the physical dimensions of an ‘urban wasteland’ prepare the ground for its social dimensions:

Deterioration has not only led to the formation of a physical wasteland, but also an area where socio-economic and socio-cultural problems have become extremely intertwined. These neighbourhoods, where the property-resident relations are either weak, or non-existent, are utilized by migrant, low-income and poor citizens coming from a background of low class and culture, and lacking sentiments of belongingness to the city and the rest of this city’s inhabitants; these groups have no other aim than taking shelter within, or squatting the area.

What deserves attention here is the way in which a stigmatizing lexicon comes into effect in order to strengthen the justification for an action of radical renewal. Within this discourse, the residents become a part of the problem together with physical and social deterioration, and what is more, they become factors that perpetuate the physical deterioration in question. Such interpretation makes it easier to assume that the process of renewal might also be targeting a change in the area’s demographic profile. However this is not clearly stated in any part of the declaration, nor is it that implications towards the contrary are available.

The municipality states that research was conducted by an expert team from the Istanbul University in order to identify the problems and features of the area within the above stated contexts and to design a project proposal on those grounds. The website briefly informs that the “level of education is extremely low” and that “unemployment is eminent” in the neighbourhood but provides no other details of findings. One specific finding which is covered at length, however, is in relation to the cultural and ethnic background of the neighbourhood: According to the survey, the area cannot be associated with a certain Roma culture, or presence. This argument is based on two supposed evidences: First, the presence of historical monuments and artifacts (such as the Neslişah Sultan and Mihrimah Sultan

Mosques and graveyards) which is argued to confirm that “the area was utilized by the middle to upper-middle class citizens of the Ottoman Empire, and not by other groups as a centre of entertainment.” Secondly, the survey tells that only 17% of the residents claim to be of Roma origins: “The rest [of the residents] are low income migrants, working in the lower ranks of service sector and coming from various parts of the country. This situation indicates that there are no homogeneous ethnic/cultural groups within the area.” It is possible to take this statement as an official reflection on the ethnic and cultural composition of the area, based on research; on the other hand, it can also be interpreted as a defense on the part of FM against the possible criticism that the project is a direct threat to a certain ethnic and cultural group.

In the face of severe physical and social problems, as confirmed by research results and “discussions with residents”, Fatih Municipality suggests that there is a need to design the renewal scheme as a *social* project through participatory mechanisms. According to the website,

Meetings were held with residents during the period of May-June 2006. During these meetings and discussions, residents were asked what sort of a project they demand, what their expectations from the municipality are and their requests with respect to participatory mechanisms to be employed throughout the decision making processes.

It is also added that, “related chambers, institutions and civil initiatives are informed by the municipality in order to generate added value for the project. Similarly, the municipality has attended meetings held by these actors to give in-depth information about the project.” Apart from these two notes, however, no other details have been extended regarding the way in which ‘participatory mechanisms’, or other methods were held to enable the involvement of residents in the making of the project.¹⁵ Lack of detailed explanation also goes for the social aspects of the project. Other than stating that, the “IMM, FM and MHA have been assigned as project initiators since only public institutions can ensure the satisfaction of social goals”, no information is given on the website of Fatih Municipality which explains what is meant by a social project and what it entails. This last note is followed by the statement that “only MHA can afford to sell

¹⁵ As it will later be discussed in the following sections, majority of the interviews have revealed that these meetings were more informative than being participatory, where the residents were merely told the sort of project that will take place within the area.

housing units at a cost value.” That is, the social aspects of the project seem to be constructed upon the promise of providing low-income residents with ‘affordable’ housing through decision mechanisms in which the input of residents remain vague and unclear.

Overall, the goals of the project are summed up in five different categories: “the protection of world heritage and living culture”; “maintenance of sustainability in the conservation of historical fabric and the prevention of further physical deterioration”; “realization of economic development”; “achievement of urban integration through the conservation of cultural dynamics and the improvement of the quality of life” and “enforcement of participation”. The emphasis is placed on the fact that Law 5366 is coming into effect for the first time with the implementation of the Sulukule project. On these grounds, it is argued that “the methods used and standards achieved with this project will become an ‘example and model’ on the way to develop an understanding of renewal in [Turkey].” UNESCO principles are taken as reference points within this context, it is said, to ensure that “the surroundings of City Walls are cleared of illegal occupations” and “infrastructural, social and cultural environs are created to protect the living culture within the area.” One of the strongest arguments here is that “the neighbourhood -currently occupied by tenants, squatters and marginal groups- has become a setting of crime and unsanitary living conditions due to the workings of informal economy, and unlawful and indecent activities, where families of 10-15 members pursue lives.” This is argued to hamper not only physical qualities, but also the economic potentials of the area:

Positioned between two main arteries (i.e. Vatan and Fevzipaşa Avenues), right beside the City Walls and on the exit to the outer periphery (that is, other attraction points within the city), the neighborhood is of crucial importance in terms of centrality. Due to its location, it functions as the heartland of residential settlement, tourism, history, culture, commerce and economy.

It is within this context that Fatih Municipality declares to pursue a project of ‘renewal through conservation’ in order to create an “attractive urban centre where living standards in line with human honour and contemporary building techniques meet.” What shaped the project, it is claimed, was:

Repetitive discussions with property owners, residents and community leaders. So far, no major problems have been experienced in our communication with the community that is going to be directly affected by the project. This is because the happiness, health, honour and contemporary needs of the people are the main goals of the project in progress.

However, a close look at the way in which the project has been put into effect reveals that controversies have been prevalent.

6.3. The Storyline: Sulukule as a Battleground of Renewal and Opposition

Following the declaration of Sulukule as a renewal zone in November 2005 and the appearance of various reports in media about the initiation of a project within the neighbourhood, strong criticisms were raised by a number of civil initiatives, among which the Accessible Life Association (ALA) and the Human Settlements Association (HSA) were leading. The main worry in these criticisms, which circulated widely in national media, was that the envisaged project merely focused on physical restructuring in the absence of well calculated support mechanisms and that it would lead to the displacement of Roma community at high social, cultural and economic costs.¹⁶ Anxiety also grew within the neighbourhood as rumours about the launch of a project kept leaking.

An oppositional and active front against the project formed on these grounds and at two complementary levels: First, a diverse group of civil activists mobilized under the name of Sulukule Platformu (hereafter, SP) in June 2006 to campaign against the rumoured project and its potential conditions, methods and consequences. Secondly, a community organization, 'Sulukule Association for Solidarity and the Development of Roma Culture' (hereafter, SA) was set up in the same period to fight against potential threats posed by the project on the community. The protocol signed among IMM, FM and MHA in July 2006 confirmed the rumour. From this period onwards, various events were organized in an active collaboration of SP and SA to demonstrate opposition and raise criticism against the Municipality's decision; a hard-core media campaign was also initiated by the leadership of SP to these ends.

¹⁶ For one of the earliest critical texts on Sulukule renewal project, see "Neither A House, Nor A Land.." [Ne Yer Var, Ne de Yurt] by Korhan Gümüş at http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/ne_yer_var_ne_de_yurt-865997 (accessed 07.06.2008)

Active opposition and advocacy led by these groups contributed to the development of a certain public awareness about this long neglected part of the city and its community. Emerging concerns within the civil society as to the possible social, economic and cultural impacts of the project on the area and its residents became increasingly widespread. Consequently, such leading human rights groups and civil initiatives as the European Roma Rights Centre, Helsinki Citizens Association, Accessible Life Association (ALA) and Edirne Roma Culture Association raised their concerns as to the “negative impact of urban renewal plans on Roma families in Istanbul” and called for “the development of effective solutions for the housing needs of Roma families” in a letter to the Prime Ministry, dated September 2006.¹⁷ However, growing opposition could not prevent the transfer of power to FM to carry out ‘urgent expropriations’ when needed as of October 2006.¹⁸ It was upon this decision that the Chamber of Architects and the SA filed a lawsuit against the decision in February 2007 on the grounds of unlawfulness.¹⁹

¹⁷ For more details, see the letter on <http://www.hyd.org.tr/staticfiles/files/mektup.pdf> (Accessed 07.08.2012)

¹⁸ Normally put into effect at times of war, or natural disasters, urgent expropriation was going to be utilized, this time, for the ‘forced evacuation’ of those who resisted to the terms of the project.

¹⁹ This request was declined by the 6th Administrative Court in June 2009, as stated in the legal reports of the Chamber of Architects

<http://www.mimarist.org/application/uploads/assets/files/hukukcalismalari01.pdf> (Accessed 07.08.2012).

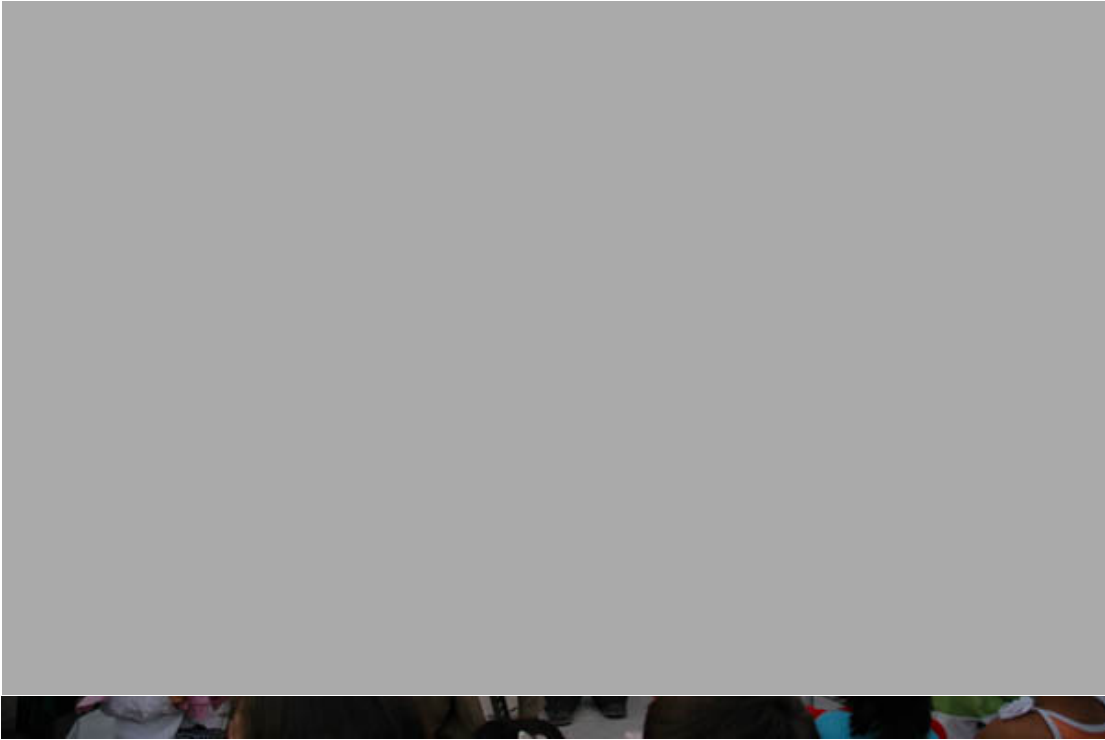


Fig. 8 – A fragment of ‘40 Days and 40 Nights in Sulukule’ events. (Photo by: Matthieu Chazal)



Fig. 9 – Another fragment from ‘40 Days and 40 Nights in Sulukule’ events. The banner at the back reads ‘A Memory of Sulukule Solidarity’. Each bucket exhibited represents civil initiatives supporting the community of Sulukule. (Photo by: Aslı Kiyak İngin)

This development paved the way for the organization of '40 Days and 40 Nights in Sulukule' (40 Gün 40 Gece Sulukule) by SP and SA in March-May 2007. A 'multi-disciplinary and participatory brainstorming festival', the event involved talks, workshops, seminars, screenings, concerts and performances attended by diverse experts (e.g. NGO workers, architects, urban planners, sociologists, artists, musicians, historians, film makers etc.) and community members to work towards the formulation of sustainable ideas and strategies in combatting the destructive effects of the forthcoming renewal scheme.²⁰ Apart from attracting profound media attention, the event contributed to the discussion of issues in relation to urban transformation and its impacts on communities, heritage areas, cultural landscapes, socio-economic welfare etc. by wider civil and intellectual groups. The festival was followed by a survey conducted by SP between August-October 2007 in the neighbourhood.²¹

The combination of 40 Days and 40 Nights events and systematic campaigning did not only boost media coverage and trigger debates on Sulukule, controversies, advantages/disadvantages, and potential consequences of urban transformation, and such terms as 'participatory' planning and decision making, but they also managed to attract the attention of certain public bodies and institutions. Among these was the Committee of Renewal, a body that is of particular significance for all renewal zones in Turkey.²² The committee met the representatives of SP and SA in the neighbourhood and examined the area in the light of research findings, evaluations and criticisms raised by SP. This visit gestured somewhat at the recognition of the emergent opposition and criticism by a state authority; however, it did not stop the committee from approving the proposed project in November 2007, the same month when the visit took place. The decision for approval was never publicly justified.

²⁰ For the programme of the event and more details see <http://40gun40gece-sulukule.blogspot.com/> (Accessed 07.08.2012).

²¹ Deeming the research done by Istanbul University upon the request of FM unsatisfactory and unreliable, SP aimed to retrieve detailed information on the socio-economic profile and tenure structure of the neighbourhood, and also to help develop a better understanding of how the residents related to the process of renewal; the nature of relations between locals and FM on the grounds of renewal; and the expectations of residents from a potential transformation scheme.

²² The Renewal Committee is a public body, devised following the release of Law 5366 in 2005 and responsible for the assessment of renewal schemes proposed by local municipalities and their collaborators (such as the MHA, or private contractors). Official approval of renewal schemes are bound to the decision of this body.

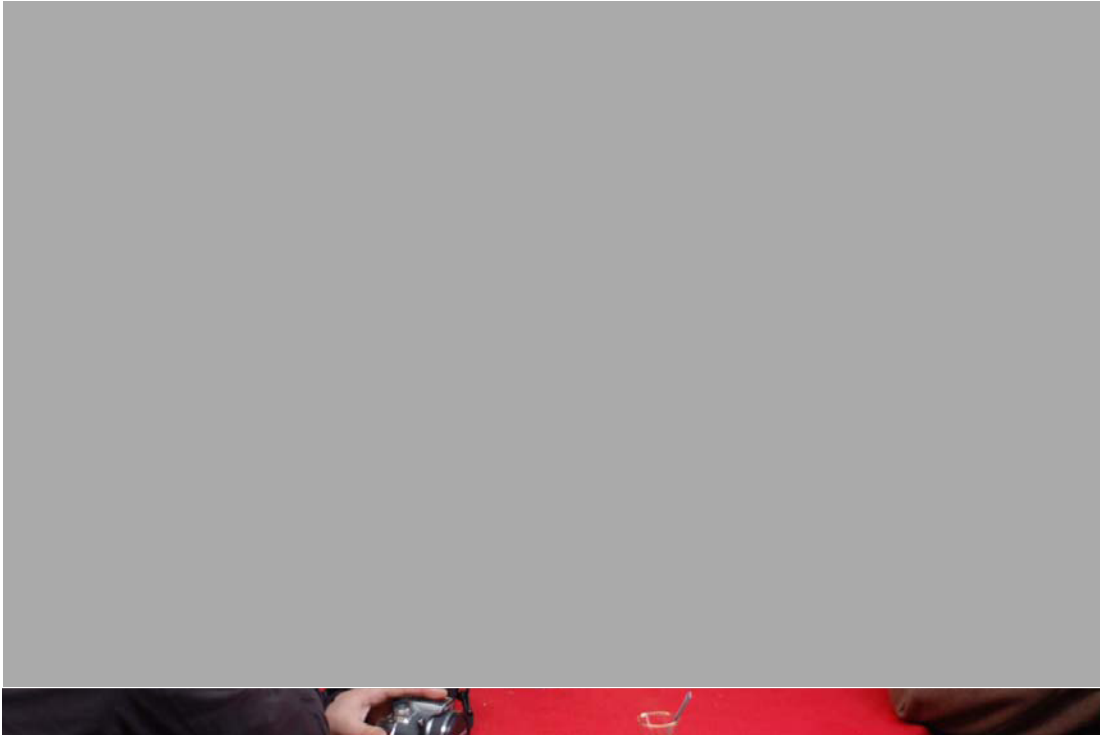


Fig. 10 - Members of the Renewal Committee (on the right hand side) during their visit to Sulukule. (Photo by: Matthieu Chazal)

Although the approval of the project by the committee was a big blow on part of the struggle, attention coming from international organizations and institutions elevated opposition to a whole new level. Again, in November 2007, a one-day conference was organized by the Green Party at the European Parliament (EP) on urban renewal in Istanbul with a specific focus on the case of Sulukule. Among the invited speakers were a member of SP and the head of SA alongside others including the mayor of Fatih.²³ Invitation of these two members of resistance to the conference was a strong hint towards the awareness of EP of the ongoing discussions on urban renewal in Turkey, and its recognition of civil society and inhabitants as legitimate and relevant parties in the debates. More importantly, the spokespeople of resistance had a chance to express their opinions against the

²³ The brochure of the conference had informed that, “the meeting in the European Parliament in Brussels aims to initiate a debate on the question of urban inhabitants protection against the exclusion related to the process of urban transformation in Turkey, which threatens in particular the existence of the minorities. The objective is on the one hand to encourage the consultation between the local authorities and the population of the districts concerned and, on the other hand, to provide support for the implementation of a dialogue with the civil society in Istanbul, which is very active in Sulukule. As the European examples of good urban governance show, the success of the urban projects is inseparable from a participatory decision-making process.” See the brochure at <http://www.avrupainfo.isomertest.com/Files/Sulukule.pdf> (Accessed 07.08.2012)

plans of authorities at an international platform. The meeting was covered both by national and international media at length, further establishing the presence of opposition in the eyes of the public, national authorities and international audience.²⁴

On these grounds, the FM agreed to sign a protocol with the SP, SA and relevant experts to form a Multi-Party Commission (MPC) and activate a participatory mechanism towards the revision of the terms, conditions and details of the project drafted by FM.²⁵ However, this very important step taken did not translate into the suspension of the renewal process. In December 2007, the municipality organized a bus trip for tenants to Taşoluk, the site where the tenants would be transferred to following the construction of social housing blocks by the MHA. Moreover, a highly attended draw was organized two days after this trip to allocate the future residents of units in the making.

²⁴ Two developments are of particular importance here, demonstrating the impact of advocacy and campaigning at this level: First, the issue of Sulukule was mentioned in the European Commission's 2007 Progress Report for Turkey. Here it was put that Roma neighbourhoods were being demolished within the context of "an urban renewal programme, targeting 'wrecked urban areas'" and that Istanbul municipalities had "taken no steps to provide shelter, basic sanitary facilities, or other social and economic services for Roma people after the demolitions." For such reasons, it was stated that "the Roma [were continuing] to experience discriminatory treatment in access to adequate housing, education, social protection, health and employment." For more information, see the report on

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2007/nov/turkey_progress_reports_en.pdf (accessed 07.08.2012). Secondly, the issue of Sulukule was brought to the agenda of the Turkish Parliament in November 2007 by an MP of the opposition party, Çetin Soysal. Soysal had stated in his speech that a vital element of Istanbul was about to disappear with the demolition of Sulukule: "This situation is unable to find place for itself at the Turkish Parliament, but is being thoroughly discussed at the European Parliament. The cry of our 5000 citizens is heard in Strasbourg and Brussels, but not in Ankara. We need to listen out (...) This area, which is of crucial importance for Istanbul with its entertainment and music culture, is in need of socio-cultural as much as physical protection and revitalization in line with the UNESCO norms. That is, urban regeneration should not be about the transformation of culture and people but of the physical landscape with the aim of rehabilitation. Fatih and Metropolitan Municipalities should remember that their duties are for the people and not for the environment only." See the entire speech on <http://anadolu.kanunum.com/kanunum/tutanaklar/TBMM/d23/c004/tbmm23004020.pdf> (accessed 07.08.2012)

²⁵ Meetings among these groups had already started a year ago, in May 2006, with the initiative of European Capital of Culture 2010 Committee of Istanbul in order to devise "sustainable methods of regeneration, not only for Sulukule but also for the entire Istanbul." The willingness of FM to take a more formal step towards the creation of such a commission might be resting on two grounds: The public support and legitimization that the resistance movement earned at many levels, and the news appearing in mainstream media about the sale of properties in Sulukule to the circles of JDP and FM. See 'Sulukule Rantçılarının Elinde' [Sulukule in the Hands of Urban-Rent Seekers] on <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/12/15/ct/haber,A5689CF7939145EBB2D7EC5C73E4A83A.html> (accessed, 07.08.2012)

These two incidents went against the founding principles of the MPC, and thus, led to the failure of the commission without achieving substantial results.²⁶ It was also in this period that a second community organization was set up in the neighbourhood under the name 'Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Association for Solidarity and Development' (NHSA) to side with FM. The aim of this new organization was to encourage fellow residents to either negotiate with the municipality for the sale of their properties, or register for the MHA units offered for tenants, and thus give support to FM for the successful accomplishment of the project. Establishment of NHSA, thus, signalled an emergent divide within the neighbourhood with respect to community stance to the project.

Although the failure of MPC, determination of FM and foundation of NHSA put a big pressure on the resistance movement, oppositional struggle persevered. The project was taken to the court by SA and the Chambers of Architects and Planners in December 2007. The ultimate goal here was to terminate the project, based on its violation of urban planning and building norms, and public interests. Yet, in January 2008, the Minister of Culture and Education revealed details of the project against the grain of the court case: According to plans, Sulukule was going to be revitalized through the erection of Ottoman style architecture, and the area would become a residential zone accompanied with a number of commercial establishments and a hotel. Focusing solely on the physical aspects of the scheme at work, declarations of Minister Günay caused much fervor on the part of resistance and a counter-declaration was issued by SP, accusing the project developers with the violation of architectural, conservational, social, economic and cultural norms, and the adoption of immoral work ethics.²⁷

²⁶ All parties, including the FM, had agreed in principle that "all decisions and actions that would make changes in the statutory rights of residents in Sulukule, within the context of renewal, would be suspended until the protocole was signed and the parties started working together." See "Sulukule Hakkını Aradıkça Belediye Bastırıyor" (The More Sulukule Fights for Rights, The More Does the Municipality Exert Pressure) <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/azinliklar/103340-sulukule-hakkini-aradikca-belediye-bastiriyor> (accessed 07.08.2012) for more details.

²⁷ See 'Sulukule Yeniden Şekilleniyor' (Sulukule is Being Reshaped) for the details of the project as declared by Günay on <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/gundem/?t=02.01.2008&c=1&i=92119>, (accessed on 07.08.2012) and the counter declaration issued by SP, under the title 'Sulukule Platformu'ndan Kültür Bakanı'na Açık Sorular' (Open Questions from SP to the Minister of Culture), on <http://v1.gazeteparc.com/news.php?action=displayNewsItem&ID=23915> (accessed 07.08.2012). The fervor of community members and civil activists climbed as the Commission of Human Rights in Turkey evaluated the appeal of SA and concluded in January 2008 that there were no human rights violations within the project area.

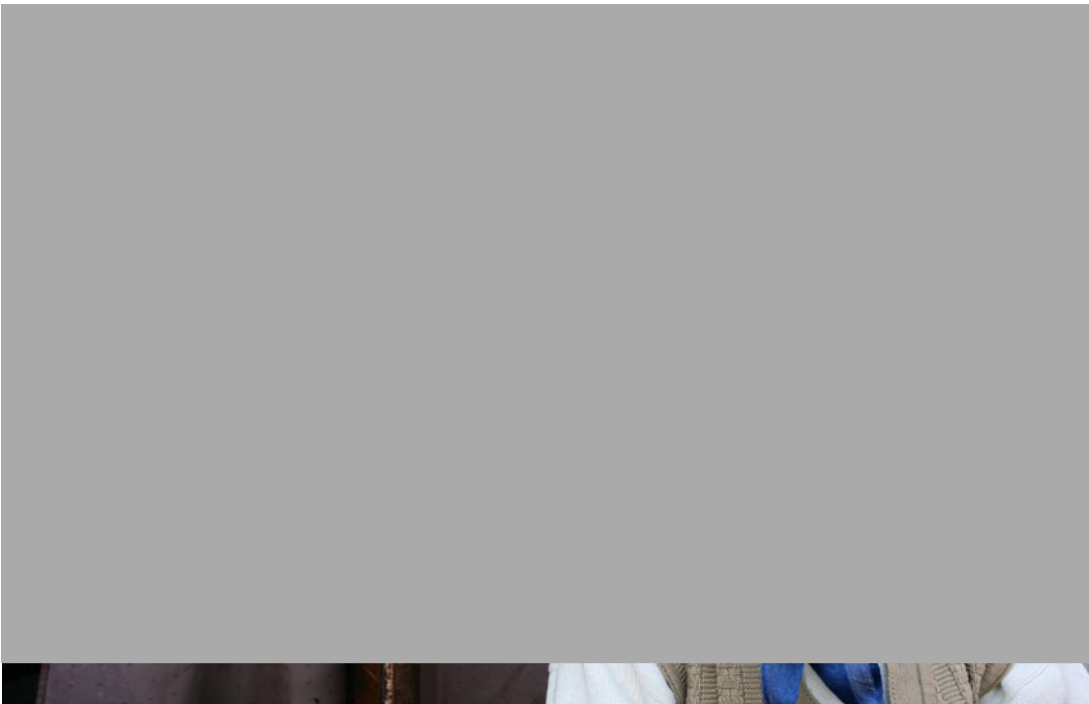


Fig. 11 and 12 – Top: Initial stage of demolitions. Bottom: A tenant with a piece of paper pinned on her window that reads, “TO THE ATTENTION OF THE BULLDOZER: Hayriye Özçivi lives as a tenant in this house. She is waiting to get a response to her appeal for the extension of tenancy rights.” Almost all tenants who were still processing appeals were sticking notes like these on their windows so that their house would not be bulldozed.

(Photos by: Özlem Ünsal and Nejla Osseiran respectively)

Following a survey, conducted by architects and other experts involved in SP, a report was submitted to the Board of Listed Buildings in February 2008. Seeing the project as a threat to the heritage qualities of the area, the report demanded an increase in the number of structures to be protected in Sulukule in accordance with conservation regulations. As much as aiming at the protection of Sulukule's authentic urban fabric, this move also aimed at halting demolitions for the protection of residents. Yet, demolitions started as of February 2008 despite the ongoing courtcase and SP's application to the Board of Listed Buildings.²⁸

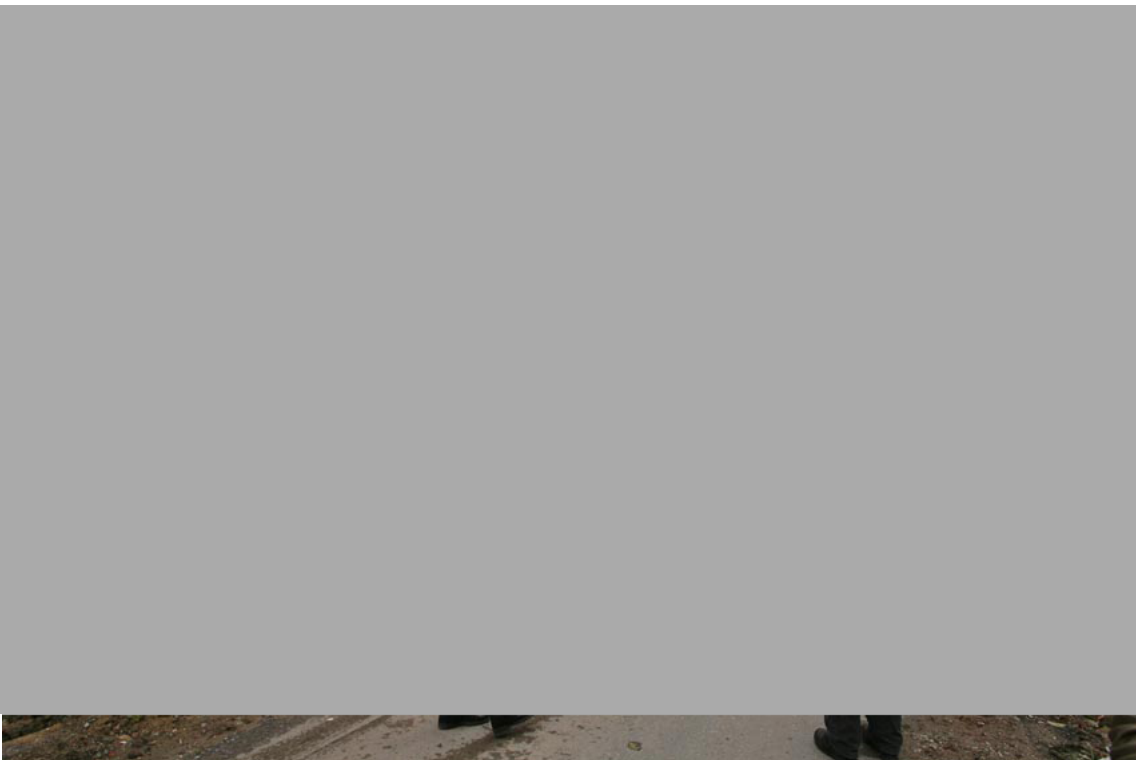


Fig. 13 – Municipal officers accompanying the demolition team in the neighbourhood. (Photo by: Nejla Osseiran)

²⁸ In fact, two of the buildings demolished were already listed. When contacted by media, the Mayor of Fatih put that 'the incident was a mistake'. See 'Sulukule'de Yanlışlıkla Yıkım Var' (There is Demolition by Mistake in Sulukule) on <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=250095>, (accessed 07.08.2012).



Fig. 14 – View from the demolitions of 2008. (Photo by: Özlem Ünsal)

In the periods to come, demolitions peaked as more property owners negotiated with FM, or shook hands with ‘third parties’; parallel to this, tenants increasingly tended towards signing up for MHA housing units due to growing anxiety. Based on these evidences, it can be argued that resistance was being severely challenged in achieving its defined goals. However, the attention and support of national and international organizations kept on growing in the face of escalating pressure. The area was visited by a myriad of crucial figures and organizations such as the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the co-chairman of the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Commission, the UN-HABITAT Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Council of Europe and various celebrities including film director Tony Gatlif and singer Gogol Bordello. Additionally, reports and protests were issued and addressed to the Prime Ministry by a number of other institutions against the activities of FM and IMM.²⁹

²⁹ Not only was the case of Sulukule mentioned in the reports of the OECD (2008), UNESCO (2008) and AGFE (2009) but such officials as the Co-Chairman and representatives of the Helsinki Commission in the United States, and three members of the European Parliament sent letters of concern regarding the forced eviction of Roma community to the Prime Minister, individually. See ‘Helsinki Komisyonu Sulukule’yi Tartışıyor’ (Helsinki Commission is Debating Sulukule) on <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/9907015.asp>, accessed on 07.08.2012, and ‘Avrupa

While these were motivating developments for resistance, the organization of a second draw by the FM in March 2008 to determine the door numbers of future tenants in Taşoluk came as another letdown. This was particularly because the head of SA had participated in this draw.



Fig. 15 – Members of Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE) during their visit to Sulukule. (Photo by: Nejla Osseiran)

Parlamentosu'ndan Basbakan'a Mektup' (Letter from the European Parliament to the Prime Minister) on http://sulukulegunlugu.blogspot.com/2008_05_01_archive.html , (accessed 07.08.2012)

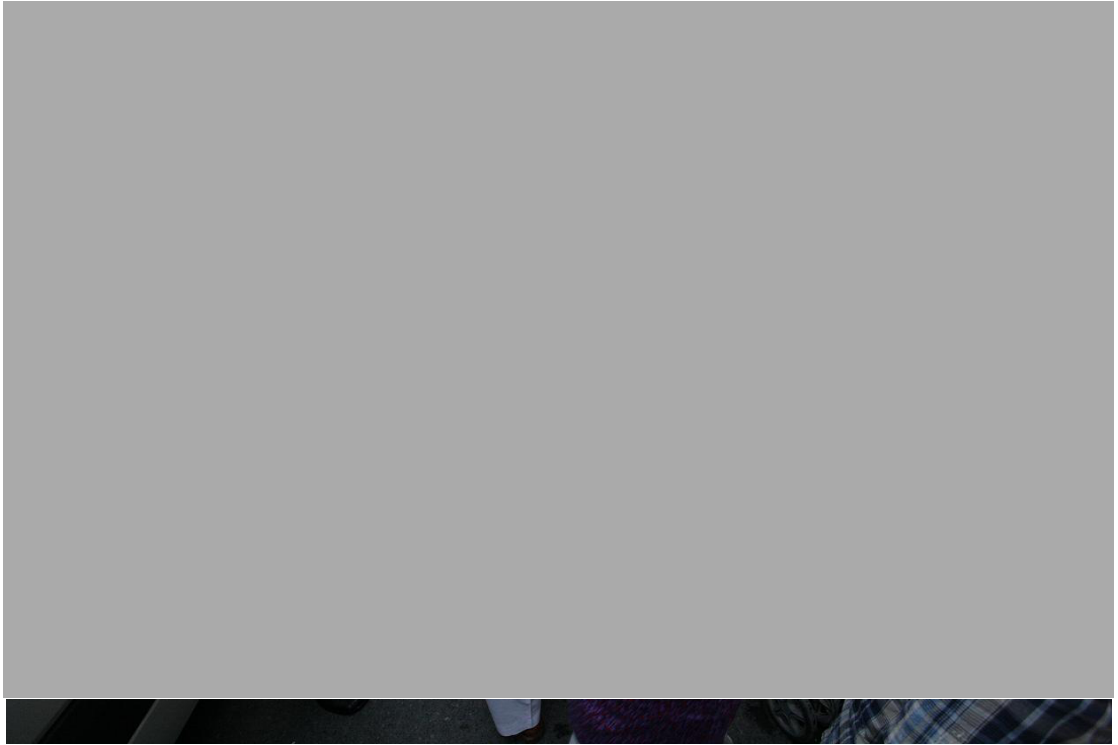


Fig. 16 – Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights at the time, during his visit to Sulukule. (Photo by: Nejla Osseiran)

Meanwhile, the appeal of SP to the Board of Listed Buildings was accepted in the same month, which meant that a total number of 110 (and not 25 as official number suggested) structures within the area would be protected as heritage buildings. Again, this did not mean that demolitions would stop clearing the rest of the buildings. As demolitions continued, Sulukule was visited by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in May 2008 to monitor whether the project was in line with the UNESCO conservation standards.³⁰ In the aftermath of this visit, the Mayor of Istanbul announced that the committee was happy with the work in progress and raised criticisms against oppositional groups.³¹ The director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, Francesco Bandarin, responded to the mayor's announcement to state that he was 'misunderstood':

³⁰ In 2004, UNESCO issue a warning to Turkish authorities, including the IMM, stating that the Historical Peninsula would be removed from the World Heritage List due to poor conditions of conservation. Not only UNESCO, but also ICOMOS raised fierce criticisms as to the methods adopted in renewal by authorities, which, they argued, went against the grains of protecting both the historic environment and the community culture embedded in these areas.

³¹ In his declaration, Topbas claimed that he was told by Bandarin, the head of UNESCO Committee, that 'they were trusted': "We were told thay the work we have done so far is fine. We have made a good progress compared to the past. We don't have any concerns about the future." Topbaş, UNESCO'nun Raporundan Umutlu' (Topbasis Hopeful of UNESCO's Report) on <http://www.cnnturk.com/2008/turkiye/05/14/topbas.unesconun.raporundan.umutlu/459001.0/index.html> , (accessed 07.08.2012).

Whilst discussing the Sulukule Project I clearly put that a balance is needed between conservation and satisfaction of social needs. UNESCO believes that a city is not only made up of monuments and buildings but also of urban communities, who play fundamental roles within the process of conservation, and also that the improvement of these communities' quality of life is one of the most crucial targets of conservation. For these reasons, it is inappropriate to announce –as it has appeared in various media- that the UNESCO has 'approved' of a project, which still needs to establish that fine balance. We insist that a democratic and participatory process should accompany all the decisions to be taken for this area.³²

However, neither did Bandarin's response lead to any changes in the decisions taken within the framework of the project, nor were demolitions suspended. By the end of 2009, the majority of the area was cleared and almost all properties had changed hands. Tenants carrying on with resistance started to face the risk of displacement and homelessness at this point. Under such conditions, SP shifted its attention to giving support to tenants who did not, or could not access the right to benefit from Taşoluk units.³³ Accompanied by volunteer lawyers, tenants were assisted in finding and submitting the required documents to FM and MHA. With the effort of SP, part of the tenants who satisfied the terms managed to access MHA housing; others, who could not, had to move out of the neighbourhood. In this period, a section of SP volunteers worked to give educational, recreational, psychological and social support to the children of the area to protect them against the trauma of demolition. In fact, two particular groups are still keeping on working together with children whose families relocated to nearby neighbourhoods.³⁴

³²See 'Kadir Topbaş UNESCO'yu Yanlış Anlamış' (Kadir Topbaş Misunderstood UNESCO) on <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/446498.asp#storyContinues>, (accessed 07.08.2012).

³³ Eligibility for 'accessing' such rights is defined by certain conditions which will be explained in the section to follow.

³⁴ These groups are Sulukule Çocuk Sanat Atölyesi (Sulukule Children's Art Workshop) and Sulukule Gönüllüleri Derneği (Sulukule Volunteers' Association).

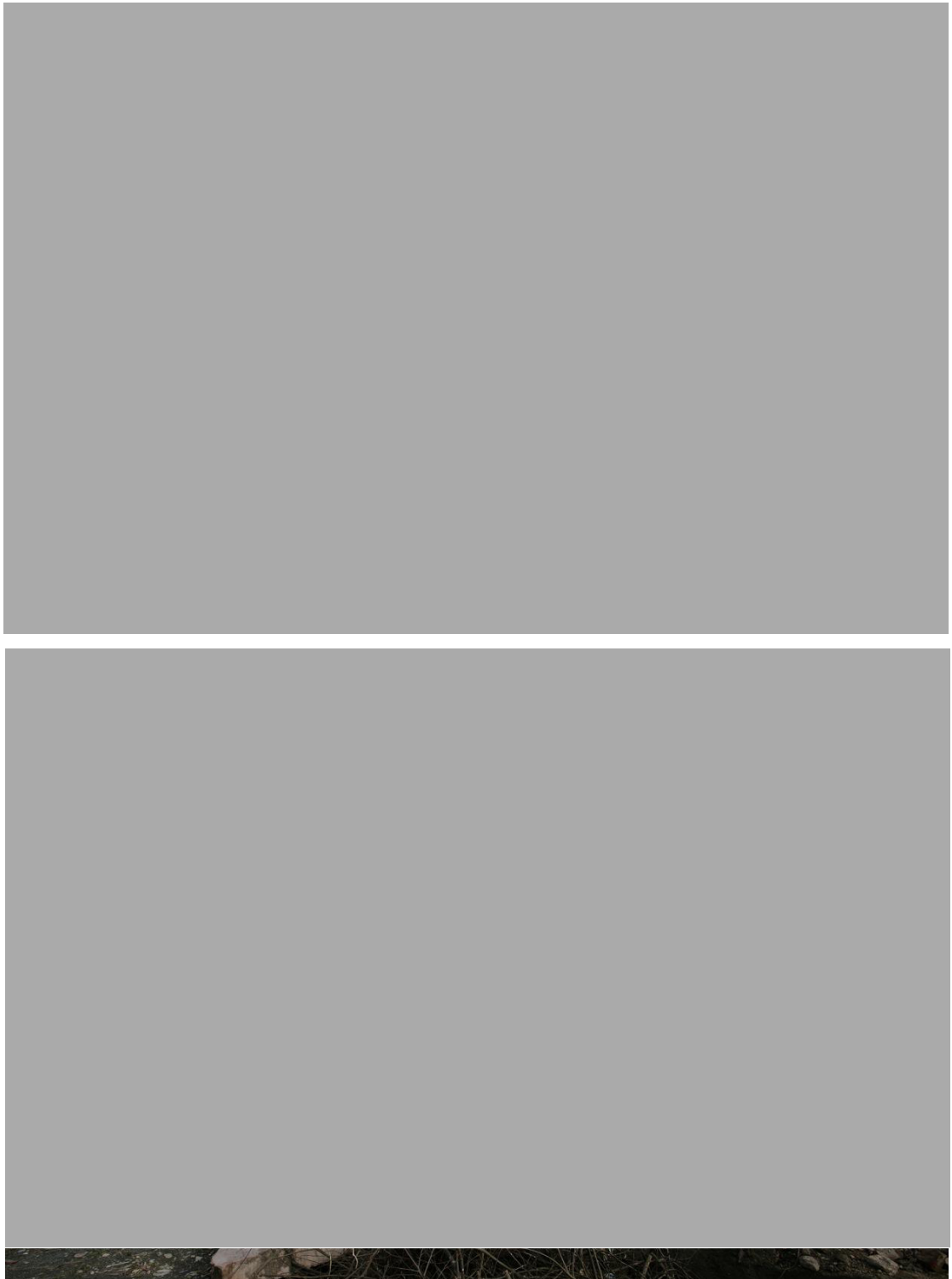


Fig. 17 - Top: Final stage of demolitions. Bottom: Graffiti on wall reads: 'Welcome to the Dead City'. (Photo by: Nejla Osseiran)

By July 2010 the project area was cleared of almost all structures -including some of the listed buildings- and implementation of the project commenced. More than 300 families were transferred to Taşoluk units; however, unable to pay the required rents, an overwhelming majority sold their respective units and moved out of Taşoluk. There are no official mechanisms that follow up on the conditions

and whereabouts of these families. Observations during fieldwork and information provided by SA and SP members suggest that the majority have either moved to neighbouring areas to rent new flats –this time for double, or triple the amount of what they used to pay in Sulukule- and others have found shelter next to relatives. News appearing in media revealed that new property owners in Sulukule are state officials from the upper hierarchies of Turkish public institutions with strong links to JDP and FM.³⁵ As for the former property owners who have negotiated with FM, they are anxiously waiting for the completion of the project. Estimated date for the completion of constructions is summer 2013.

6.4. Voices from the Battleground: Actors of Resistance and Support in Sulukule

The case of Sulukule is a significant one for a number of reasons within the context of urban transformation in Istanbul: First of all, it is the very first neighbourhood that was ever declared as a transformation zone by Law 5366. Secondly, it is again the very first neighbourhood whose experience has triggered intense discussions on state-led urban renewal and transformation within the Turkish agenda at many levels.

As much as there was widespread appreciation of actions and initiatives taken both by SP and SA, there were also criticisms addressing the very same actions and initiatives. Some of these pointed at the emphasis put on the defense of Roma rights and culture, and not housing rights particularly in the initial stages of the struggle; some questioned the grassroots quality of resistance due to the involvement of SP as an ‘outsider force’, and others questioned the motivations of community members in the fight particularly with respect to economic and social gains.³⁶

³⁵ A newspiece, titled ‘Iste Sulukule’nin Yeni Sakinleri’ (Here are the New Residents of Sulukule), was informing that a significant number of ‘third parties’ who purchased properties from the area were the well-off officials from the JDP and FM circles. See <http://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/192944/sulukulenin-yeni-sakinleri.html>, accessed on 07.08.2012.

³⁶ Criticisms raised in these directions were predominantly articulated during meetings among civil initiatives.

For Sulukule's novelty remains within the context of initial experiments on Law No. 5366 triggered transformation, it is of critical importance to understand the impact of the renewal process on the community and the ways in which community response to UTP took shape. For each one of these variables –i.e. the process of renewal and community structure- comprise rather complex dynamics, the interaction between the two and its consequences have inevitably and equally been complex. As the accounts of SA and NHSA representatives will reveal in the coming sections, distinct forms of pressure and challenge posed both by the process of renewal, and the socio-economic weaknesses and expectations of diverse groups have been defining in the shaping of community movements. It is thus of significance to identify these before arriving at clear-cut judgments on the potential 'failures', or 'successes' of NAs.

6.4.1. "Don't Give Me Fish, Teach Me How to Fish!": Sulukule Neighbourhood Association

When SA was first established, it was based in the local coffee shop owned by Şükrü, the president of the association. With the peaking of events in the neighbourhood, the local coffee shop had transformed from a local gathering spot into a lively hub of many encounters: Civil organizations would meet up with SA and SP members alongside local residents; independent activists would visit for support; volunteering lawyers would organize advisory meetings for property owners and tenants; residents would come and consult either experts, or the fellow SA and SP leaders for the solution of their diverse problems; journalists and researchers would interview SA and SP members, and the inhabitants etc. Later, the coffee shop also functioned as the children's workshop, which still operates elsewhere in the surroundings of the neighbourhood.

Şükrü's coffee shop became highly symbolic as the heart of resistance and collective action, however it was demolished by municipal forces in January 2009. The shop then relocated to the ground floor of a building, outside the renewal area, where the interview for this research took place. Currently, it has predominantly retreated to its actual function that is a local coffee shop, frequented by male

residents for pass-time activities (reading newspapers, watching television, playing cards, or backgammon etc.). Yet, from time to time, it still hosts meetings among community members and SP representatives, or receives occasional visits from curious outsiders who would like to meet representatives of SA, or gather information on the process of mobilization in Sulukule.

Şükrü described the neighbourhood as a 'joyful' and 'happy' place to be until demolitions started in 2008.³⁷ However, he also acknowledged that social and economic problems had been prevalent since the mid-1990s. He told that 'drugs were always around since the time of his father and grandfather's childhood', but 'there was no poverty'. In this respect, for the community, the actual decline and worsening started when the entertainment houses were shut down in the 1990s and the core economy of the area was terminated. In his words:

People couldn't make money; that marks the beginning of all sorts of trouble. We always had drugs, alcohol and theft because those you can find everywhere in a big city but we never had poverty before. After the entertainment houses were shut down the majority lost their regular incomes; that's how drug dealing and theft became chronic. Once the economy of a place is over, things start going wrong not only because of poverty but also because of its psychological pressure.³⁸

Şenol, the vice president of SA, stressed that economic activity, originating from the entertainment houses, should not be underestimated since it did not only benefit those who were actively working in the houses, but also other establishments within the neighbourhood. "What I am talking about is a big network, which included the butcher, the green grocer, the jewelry shop... Do you understand? Everyone, without exception, relied on that economy."³⁹

³⁷ All quotes from Şükrü are taken from an interview held on 05.01.09 unless otherwise stated.

³⁸ The psychological pressure seems to emanate not only from poverty but also from the dramatic incidents of the 1990s, when the entertainment houses were raided and shut down by police forces. Majority of memories from that time revolve around the tactics of Süleyman Ulusoy, the police in chief, and seem to make recurring references to the very beginnings of the stigmatization of Sulukule. "They were raiding the neighbourhood every night", said Şükrü; "they would collect the girls and take them to hospitals for check-ups. This, I believe, was part of a big plan to mark the entire area off as a no go area."

³⁹ All quotes from Şenol are taken from an interview held on 07.01.09 unless otherwise stated.

6.4.1.1. Facing Renewal and Steps Towards Recognition: The SA as a Neighbourhood Association

Şükrü and Şenol put that they first learnt about the project via newspapers. However, although they were not aware of it at the time, the first indicator of the soon-to-start renewal was a survey held by FM in 2004. When FM officers started visiting homes for a survey in 2004, residents were told that the aim was to take measures against the possible earthquake. Types of questions asked related not only to the structural conditions of houses, but also to various topics ranging from the socio-economic to tenure status of residents.⁴⁰ There were no doubts about the aim of the survey on the part of residents until rumours spread about a potential renewal scheme, and later, residents were officially contacted by FM. In the words of Şükrü:

We were not informed, or briefed about anything remotely related to urban regeneration at that time. (...) They asked about the household population, the number of rooms we have etc. Then we started receiving letters regarding the results of this survey. Much later, though, these letters became the grounds for defining certain residents as 'rightful residents', and others not. So we were practically lied to.⁴¹

Disclosure of the actual aim of the survey did not only go against the grain of transparency within the project development process, as argued by the advocates of resistance, but also pushed the residents into disadvantaged positions in the absence of their informed participation in procedures. Suddenly, part of the community was categorized as those who could access certain benefits and compensations within the framework of the renewal scheme (i.e. property owners

⁴⁰ Interviews with residents reveal the diversity of questions asked, as it will be demonstrated in Chapter 7. A resident was asked how many times she could afford to buy meat in a month.

⁴¹ 'Rightful resident' is a term introduced by FM and has been a controversial one since the beginning of the renewal process. It refers to those residents who are either property owners with title deeds (thus, able to access monetary compensations, or new housing from the project area), or tenants with formal tenancy agreements (thus, eligible to benefit from MHA housing). However, this framing caused major controversies in two particular situations. The first related to property owners with missing deeds: Although some properties had been in the possession of certain families for generations long, the deeds had either not been renewed, or gone missing. The second, which applied to the majority, related to tenants with no formal agreements. Making verbal contracts with landlords was a common practice in Sulukule, so there were many households that paid regular rents but did not hold proving documents. These altogether became problematic within the renewal process, since demonstration of such documents was a requirement for claiming any rights. Residents in such positions were considered as non-entities by the local government and thus, were excluded from the various rights that could have been extended within the context of the renewal scheme; consequences of this exclusion could reach the point of homelessness at times. On these grounds, one of the main concerns of resistance was to find ways of claiming rights for those who could not prove their status as 'rightful residents'.

and tenants with formal papers) and others as non-entities who were excluded from the entire scheme (i.e. property owners and tenants with no official papers) according to the letters received. It was due to these developments that Şükrü and a number of others demanded a meeting with the mayor in October 2005 to learn more about the details of the scheme. Şükrü reflected on this meeting as follows:

At the meeting we were told that our neighbourhood was a wasteland and that our homes did not constitute livable environments. They said demolitions would start for the construction of luxury villas, which in the end would become available for us. When we raised the question of price and affordability, we were told that the project was still in progress and that we would be informed accordingly but most important of all, we were told that 'no one would be treated unjustly'. They said that they would compensate for everything - including the trees in our gardens. That's why we came up with the idea of forming an association. To become a recognized party.

Despite the reassuring statements of FM, Şükrü put that the foundation of SA was mainly motivated by the possibility of "halting the process of renewal" as much as gaining formal recognition. In the case that this could not be achieved, SA demanded "the right of the entire community to stay put in Sulukule without becoming indebted to public authorities" as Şükrü put it. This sentence is important in summarizing the main objections of SA to the project: From the point of view of SA, what made the project unacceptable was the fact that property owners could only stay in the neighbourhood under the burden of debts, and also that tenants were solely given the option of being relocated to urban outskirts, again under the burden of debts. In both cases, the project would boil down to the predominant displacement of locals from the neighbourhood. Given that residents were highly dependent on the social and economic networks embedded within the neighbourhood, survival mechanisms of the community would weaken and thus, "the community would come under the threat of worsened living conditions".⁴² Particular emphasis was on the tenants within this discourse since they were in much more vulnerable conditions compared to property owners.

With the active involvement of six founding members and the support of SP, a neighbourhood association was set up in a short span of time and residents joined

⁴² The key role of the neighbourhood in the survival strategies of residents is revealed in Şükrü's definition of what home is: "To me, home is my neighbourhood and every element of comfort that comes with it - my neighbours, my friends, circumstances that help me survive, the setting in which I can feed myself and my family. A house is just a physical representation of it." Details on the importance of neighbourhood based social and economic networks for the community will be provided in Chapter 7.

to defend the neighbourhood and their rights regardless of differences in tenure status. Moreover, some of the SA members did not even live within the boundaries of the renewal zone. Şenol, the vice president, is one of these who said that, “if it wasn’t for Sulukule [he] would not have bread to eat”. Close-knit community relations and the strong dependence of residents on the network of social and economic dynamics in Sulukule played fundamental roles in the shaping of resistance. In terms of financial resources, SA was always severely deprived, and if there were no donations coming from civil sources, it relied on the personal savings of its founding members. When asked whether the member residents were able to support the SA, Şükrü said “materially no, but spiritually yes”.⁴³

SP’s active involvement in advocacy for Sulukule started in this early period of mobilization.⁴⁴ The platform provided SA with guidance in undertaking many formal procedures ranging from setting up a formal association to seeking legal advice and maintaining effective relations with media - tasks that were previously unfamiliar to the community. “They showed us how to deal with so many things: The media, administrative procedures etc.”, Şükrü said; “For example, we wanted to get in touch with the Renewal Committee: How could we ever do that on our own? Eventually, though, we arranged a meeting and attended it together with SP; we found support there.”⁴⁵

Şükrü and Şenol both agreed that the biggest return from forming an official association and following the strategies advised by SP was to attain the positive recognition of many agencies -ranging from the media to (inter)national civil organizations- but most importantly of FM. “Previously, they would not even be bothered to respond back to our attempts to communicate; but after we became a formal association, we booked our first appointment instantly”, Şükrü said. From

⁴³ When Şükrü arrived for the interview, he was holding an electricity bill, which belonged to the coffee shop. “350 TL” he said, “which I need to pay all on my own. None of our members are in a position to chip in, there is simply no money.”

⁴⁴ Şükrü told that everything started when Hacer, a civil activist specializing in Roma rights, got in touch with him for a project on Gypsy communities. “I told her that there were some urgent matters -‘our houses are going to get demolished’- and that’s how she got involved.”

⁴⁵ Hacer, an SP member at the time, confirmed this view during an interview: “Before we went to Sulukule it was very difficult for the community to understand the gist of things, let alone dealing with them. We tried to be of help as much as possible so that they could defend, or access their rights. This ranged from explaining the project in detail, or calling at the Renewal Committee to pay a visit to the neighbourhood to getting in touch with lawyers, or filling up forms for various forms of application at the FM.”

the beginning of the process in 2005 till 2009, the SA sat around the table with FM numerous times. In fact, the formation of MPC can be interpreted as a fruitful result of these meetings.

6.4.1.2. Grounds for Division: Understanding Existing and Emergent Cleavages

Developing relations between local authorities and SA, however, came to an abrupt end at the meeting that marked the collapse of MPC as explained in the previous section. Although the FM, SA and SP had in principle agreed to revise the renewal scheme, when it came to the formalization of this agreement the FM had withdrawn from meetings by refusing to sign the required protocole and launching a draw for the allocation of MHA units for tenants.⁴⁶ While this had caused an immense disappointment on the part of SA, the official establishment of NHSA on the exact same day signaled the emergence of another major concern in the front of resistance: Acute divisions were surfacing within the community.

Şükrü interpreted the culmination of events and the foundation of NHSA as consequences of “well engineered divide and rule tactics of FM”. According to this perspective, the local government used its powers in a way to manipulate the pre-existing and emergent cleavages within the community to make way for the successful accomplishment of the project. Among these, divergent attitudes towards and expectations from urban renewal seems to constitute the latter set of cleavages: Whereas some groups insisted on a fierce defense of the neighbourhood in the face of approaching regeneration, others supported the initiation of the project in order to secure various returns. “We always knew that there were a few us who were not entirely convinced with the idea of resistance. They were more interested in what they could get out of the process of renewal ” Şükrü said; “once FM noticed that, it intervened. Some fellows in the neighbourhood were

⁴⁶ Şükrü remembers the day as follows, “They called and confirmed a date for signing the protocole. When we went there the venue was arranged in such a way that you’d think there will be a show going on. There were posters, reading ‘People of The Neighbourhood Have Their Say’. We didn’t quite get it and demanded the seats to be arranged in the shape of a proper round table meeting. They refused it and said ‘there will be no protocole, that’s not what we invited you here for’. Then there was a big chaos. There were people from the SP and the ECC 2010 committee who’d come to support us. Nothing happened. No papers were signed.”

encouraged to set up an association and given the task of convincing both owners and tenants to shake hands with authorities in return of benefits". These benefits were argued to be monthly wages from FM; however, in time, it was also rumoured that NHSA leaders received commissions from 'third parties' (i.e. outsider investors) in search of properties to buy from the renewal by acting as mediators.⁴⁷

Already existing cleavages, on the other hand, related more to issues of identity and belongingness. Accounts of Şükrü revealed that the community was divided between two main fronts and that this had found reflections in the shaping of SA and NHSA: One of the fronts comprised of those who claimed the Roma identity and all ethnic and cultural elements embedded in it whereas the other included those who claimed a 'conservative Muslim' identity, refusing all forms of association with Roma origins. The following conversation between the representatives of SA and NHSA reveals the degree of polarization between these two groups on these grounds remarkably, as reported by Şükrü:

People of the same community started to turn their backs against each other. At the meeting our friends who formed the NHSA said that Roma culture is a culture of shame. There was a lot of tension so we gathered and discussed. I asked why they were going a separate way and not standing by the defense of our neighbourhood with us. In return, they told me that there was no need for a defense and that it would be for the better if the neighbourhood got demolished. I asked them: "What about the people? Where will we all go?". One of the leaders told me that the future of Gypsies should not be our concern and that it'd also be for the better if all left and we stayed here on our own. I said 'we're clearly not for the same cause' and left the conversation there.

According to Şükrü, this division surfaced particularly after the 1990s when narcotics operations in Sulukule triggered a process of marginalization and stigmatization on the part of the community: "It was only after the entertainment sector was criminalized and deemed immoral that what we embraced as our livelihood and lifestyle has become a matter of shame for some". The growing tendency among some groups, from this period on, was to detach themselves from

⁴⁷ Like many other urban transformation zones, Sulukule as well became an attractive area in the aftermath of its declaration for investors in search of valuable urban land. These investors would approach property owners in Sulukule to offer bigger sums than what the municipality would offer within the context of the scheme. Many property owners interested in capital returns rather than a new space within the project area are known to have sold their units to these 'third parties'. It is within this constellation that some of the leading members of NHSA acted as mediators for these groups on the grounds of commissions in order both to boost what they could get out of the process and ease the initiation of the project.

the negative image attributed to Roma culture and identity. It was thus inevitable that this identitarian division was reflected in the shaping of the two associations: Whereas the SA comprised of the Roma front, demanding the development of a renewal scheme that could keep the community in its place and revitalize Sulukule's entertainment sector, the NHSA comprised the conservative Muslim front, embracing the diverse economic returns presented by the project as it was designed – i.e. property ownership, access to MHA housing, or profit from dealings with investors interested in purchasing land/properties from the area.

Şükrü was confident about the intervening force of FM for he stressed that at the very beginning there was a unified front against the threat of regeneration despite variations of opinion on the matter of resistance: “We were all united; everyone was against the idea of leaving the neighbourhood. That is, we were all for a sort of renewal project that would keep us all in Sulukule.” According to Şükrü, the only explanation for this eventual crack is a powerful dynamic, like the FM, which provided the counter movement to resistance with the backing it needed.

When asked whether the NHSA has had any impact on the process of community mobilization and renewal, Şükrü's first response was “Yes, they managed to pave the way for the demolition of the entire Sulukule.” He furthered this statement by arguing that the NHSA did what the FM would actively do within the neighbourhood, if it could demonstrate direct presence: “The divide and rule strategy of FM was performed by the NHSA. They particularly convinced tenants by telling them that Taşoluk was the place to live and also that the quality of life would improve for everyone there.” These statements seem to connect with the overall goals of FM in initiating the renewal project. It can be argued that whether there were any organic relations between the NHSA and FM, or not, the association achieved certain ends on behalf of FM by convincing many property owners and tenants to withdraw from resistance. The main motivation behind this conviction seems to have been the promise of access to rising urban rent in different forms – provision of housing for tenants and cash returns/new properties for owners.

Şenol put that a dynamic, which played an important role in the above-mentioned conviction was extreme poverty, experienced widely within the community. In his

words, the majority could “barely get to see 5, 10, 20 TL in a pile”, meaning that any possible returns in the form of cash, or home ownership became highly tempting quite easily. This is not a vulnerability restricted to tenants, that is the most deprived groups in Sulukule; speculative rises in real estate values within the renewal zone also made it difficult for owners to refuse big sums of money in return for their properties. Although property owners were the relatively better-off groups, it was not possible to frame the advantages that came with ‘property ownership’ in an entirely positive context: Not only were most properties poor in building standards, but also their surroundings were in much need of physical rehabilitation. Thus, the majority of properties were not of substantial values. The renewal project, however, had triggered an immediate boom in the urban rent of the area, demonstrating itself in the offers made by ‘third parties’ regardless of their conditions. “Investors paid billions of liras for sheds that would not cost 2000 TL prior to the project”, said Şenol. “This is a big temptation for someone who doesn’t own much in life.”⁴⁸

A similar situation presented itself in Taşoluk, where tenants were allocated flats for which they would have to pay installments within a period of 15 years in order to become homeowners. Although the temptation at the very beginning for tenants was constructed upon the idea of satisfying housing needs in the short run and becoming homeowners in the long run, the scenario shifted when a peculiar type of real-estate market emerged for these units: Newly built on the urban outskirts with affordable prices, Taşoluk units became desirable objects of investment for lower-middle to middle class buyers in search of homeownership. As investors’ interest for the flats grew in a short span of time, the temptation of Taşoluk units came to be constructed upon their potential values and capital returns within this market.⁴⁹ It is on these grounds that a number of flats were sold in haste and well-

⁴⁸ This observation of Şenol is confirmed by the interviewed property owners and will be explained in Chapter 7.

⁴⁹ Although Taşoluk units have consistently been promoted as ‘social housing units’ by authorities, there are no restrictive rules that apply either for their rental, or sale in regular housing markets. Similar to other units produced by the MHA for middle to lower-middle income groups, they can be easily liquidized by their owners within the dynamics of formal housing markets. The only distinction is that once the prospective owners sign their contracts, they are expected to make the required payments within a span of 15 years, divided into installments summing up to 180 months. Until the completion of these payments, prospective owners can only sell their rights to sell these units, which involved a distinct sort of procedure. More details on this process and its impact on the experience of Sulukule will be provided in Chapter 7.

below market prices soon after their allocation to the tenants.⁵⁰ Later, though, with the rise in demand, the value of units climbed; Taşoluk flats conceptually transformed from 'social housing units' into hot commodities that could be easily liquidized within real estate markets.⁵¹ As Şenol put it,

Among those first sellers, there are those who sold their units for 3000 TL; can you imagine that? Later, when people started to hear about these cheap sales in Taşoluk, the prices started to go higher. Now no one sells anything under 30.000 – 40.000 TL, depending on the size. People took that money to pay their standing debts, buy cars etc. but the important question is, what happens next?

In short, it was the emergent divisions within the community together with the impact of poverty and the ability of local authorities to manipulate these vulnerabilities with the helping hand of the NHSA that weakened the struggle of SA in many respects. Yet, at the same time, it was also the search of residents for certain securities within the process of renewal, which added to the uttered dynamics. As the residents increasingly sought material gains within the framework of the renewal scheme, the goals of resistance as previously defined by its leaders remained unfulfilled.

6.4.1.3. Questioning the Sustainability of 'Gains' and the State's Attitude to Urban Renewal

As stated above, all residents – whether they be owners, or tenants^M managed to access certain material gains within the context of the above constellations: Whereas a minor section of property owners negotiated with the FM to get spaces from the project area, or to receive monetary compensations, the remaining majority sold their units to 'third parties' who offered heightened cash returns. Tenants, on the other hand, increasingly opted to register for Taşoluk units as owners stepped back from resistance. The Majority of gains offered by these dynamics, however, predominantly proved unsustainable within a short span of time due to various reasons: According to Şükrü and Şenol, these reasons are embedded both in the pressure of renewal -which led residents to securing gains

⁵⁰ Some tenants have sold their units without even seeing them, as will later be explained in Chapter 7.

⁵¹ Ambiguities of this emergent market will be explained in the coming section.

than fighting to terminate the project- and also in the failures of local authorities to grasp the physical and socio-economic vulnerabilities defining Sulukule and to develop plans based on such an understanding.

Property owners who negotiated with the FM, or 'third parties' were relatively luckier: Apart from the fact that these were already the better-off groups who were not as threatened by economic deprivations as others, they managed to secure the most substantial of all gains in terms of figures, or investment options – i.e. big sums of money, or new properties. Those who suffered almost immediately and in multiple ways from the consequences of renewal, however, were tenants who registered for Taşoluk units.⁵² By the fall of 2009, more than 350 families were transferred to Taşoluk; yet, the majority moved out before seeing the end of a year.⁵³ Interviews with residents reveal that making the required payments, travelling to the city centre and finding jobs were the predominant reasons for leaving Taşoluk as will be explained in Chapter 7. The majority of tenants thus sold their flats to investors through mediators, sometimes below market prices as noted earlier.⁵⁴ Whereas some of these tenants moved into the homes of relatives, others became tenants in the surrounding neighbourhoods of Sulukule for higher rents.

Şükrü and Şenol seemed to agree with the majority of interviewed residents when it came to their opinions of Taşoluk units: The flats were quite impressive in terms

⁵² It is certain that those who could not even achieve to get recognized as 'rightful residents' were the most unfortunate groups since they had to find solutions in the absence of various resources to homelessness and other drawbacks of forced displacement. Here, however the analysis is restricted to those who have arguably 'accessed certain material gains within the context of urban renewal' in order to assess whether those gains can really be defined as sustainable and just, as stated by authorities.

⁵³ What is very intriguing is nobody knows the number of families that moved out. Both the project coordinator from FM and the management office in Taşoluk also put that they did not follow up on these numbers. There is no official tracking system that identifies the relevant statistics as to the reasons of move-out and the solutions sought in the period to follow. At the time of interview, Şükrü was suggesting that there were only 15 families left in Taşoluk. According to the Management Centre in Taşoluk, though, "these numbers did not reflect the reality and were not as dramatic" as suggested by SA and SP representatives.

⁵⁴ The sale of Taşoluk units peaked within the first three months of relocation as more and more residents came to the realization that they would fall short of making the required payments – more details on this will be available in Chapter 7. In these situations, residents were anxious to transfer their property to others before their debts increased. In many cases, the flats were even sold together with their standing debts. Thus, residents were predominantly deprived of bargaining powers. Added to this was the fact that Taşoluk was not a high-rent area in the early periods of relocation and thus, real estate prices were significantly low. Those who waited for longer managed to secure better returns as the first-time-home-buyers' demand for Taşoluk units climbed.

of what they physically offered. However, they both pointed out that such criteria as distance from the city centre, lack of job opportunities around Taşoluk and the question of affordability in the long run made it difficult for the units to be considered as sustainable compensations for what the community lost. 45 km. to the north of Sulukule, Taşoluk is a recent settlement that emerged as a result of the continued growth of Istanbul within the past decade. When the residents of Sulukule were taken to a tour of Taşoluk units in 2008, during their construction, the area was still deprived of improved transport links, essential infrastructures (i.e. hospitals, schools etc.) and business establishments.⁵⁵ For the community of Sulukule that was highly dependent on social and economic opportunities presented by the city centre, this was a significant drawback since they would be disconnected from their main resources of livelihood. Promise made by FM was that the area was in a phase of development and that it would turn into an affordable living space and earn home ownership and better living standards to its residents. The way in which Taşoluk was presented, however, was never in the form of an option, but rather a compulsion said Şükrü:

They brought people there for viewings and sure, the flats are very nice for our standards. People were told life would be good there: Rents (i.e. installments) would be low, job opportunities would emerge, public transport would be extended etc. This is how people have been tricked. And if people were to refuse this opportunity, they were threatened with homelessness. Property owners were told that their properties would be expropriated and a certain amount of money would be transferred into their accounts without having to look for their consent – and that’s how the tenants would also be condemned to homelessness. So these were the options people had, if you can call them options.

Şükrü argued that what drove tenants into Taşoluk was the pressure exerted by FM on community members as much as the lure of life in new homes, or homeownership status. Impressions of both SA leaders and residents reveal that this pressure had gone to the extent of transforming into threats, taking their strength from the legal powers of FM. It was due to this reason that tenants were drawn into situations that they could not ‘afford’ at many different levels. At the first level, the main problems related to the actual expense of Taşoluk units. Very often, the promise behind purchasing MHA produced social housing units is “to

⁵⁵ Trips taken during the fieldwork shows that by bus (provided by FM particularly for the residents of Sulukule), it takes approximately 75 minutes to get from Sulukule to Taşoluk. By car, the journey drops down to 45 minutes. By regular transport links (requires three interchanges), the journey takes approximately 90 minutes.

become homeowners just by paying rent like instalments.” However, Şenol put that “numbers are all relative”:

What is very little, or cheap for some will not necessarily be the same for others. This is especially the case for people who do not earn regular incomes. I have friends who earn 50 TL one week and 200 TL two weeks later. They say 200-300 TL is nothing but for someone who earns 500 TL a month in a pattern as such, it is half of your monthly income. The FM knows how much each and every person earns in this neighbourhood. Then how is it possible for them to come up with such models that will clearly not work for the tenants - that are the poorest of our community?

Şükrü contributed to this argument by stating that it was not only the instalments themselves but the cost of living in formal units with regular expenditures that worsened the situation of tenants. Such costs as heating, water, electricity maintenance, which were practically non-present in the earlier lives of residents, tripled the amount that needed to be paid each month. One of the major arguments of the project coordinator at FM was that economic hardships should not be a matter of excuse for resistance, or criticism, since the residents had even been offered training options, organized by FM, for future employment opportunities both in Taşoluk and Fatih. However, Şükrü (along with the majority of other informants) indicated that job trainings were only available in handycraft and textiles in return of payments: “They have literally paid people to attend these courses. 35 TL per class. Result: People ended up attending classes just to take that 35 TL – including those who already knew the crafts. Unfortunately, though, I don’t know a single person who found a job in the aftermath of these trainings.” Departing from the criticism on the weakness of transport links to the city centre, FM had also operated shuttle services between Sulukule and Taşoluk at specific hours.⁵⁶ Şükrü argued, however, that the way in which this service operated reflected the disconnection between the realities of everyday life in Sulukule and the local authority’s understanding of it:

Why am I supposed to go back home at 8 pm? Suppose I couldn’t make any money until that time of the day. I can’t go back home before I do that because that’s the only way I can bring some bread to my family. If needed, I will be out maybe till 10 pm. Why am I supposed to take that bus and start working at 8 am? Why is that my only option?

⁵⁶ The Taşoluk-Sulukule service would leave at 7 am and the Sulukule-Taşoluk service would leave at 8pm. Since there was only one bus operating,

The incapacity of Taşoluk units to improve the quality of life for Sulukule's tenants was a problem on its own from the perspective of SA leaders, as demonstrated above at many levels; however Şükrü also drew attention to problems that those who had to move out encountered. "First of all", he said, "rents in Sulukule went up significantly." Thus, going back to the neighbourhood – to the surroundings of the renewal zone- was not an affordable option anymore. This was due to the speculative impact triggered by the renewal project, as already stated. Prior to the renewal process, real estate dynamics used to operate in a fairly unique fashion in Sulukule, compared to other neighbourhoods in Fatih: A good number of families lived in single room units with shared toilet and showers (*avlu sistemi*) on minimum rents, determined by intercommunity relations, and it was common for such public amenities as electricity and water to be consumed illegally. Thus, living expenses were radically low compared to many other parts of Istanbul, rendering life easier to cope with for these communities. Yet, following the launch of the project, these dynamics shifted dramatically.

Secondly, although authorities tended to consider the sale of Taşoluk units as capital returns for tenants, the returning amount seemed to be far from catering for long-term needs. Regarding that tenants mostly returned to the surrounding neighbourhoods of Sulukule, where they could still cling on to their fairly established social and economic networks, it meant that they ended up paying for higher rents and heightened expenses in the absence of sufficient economic resources.⁵⁷ Thus, the amount of capital returns proved unsustainable in a strikingly short period of time. Şükrü explained this in detail:

People sold their houses for 20.000-25.000 TL and then rented houses back in Sulukule, outside the renewal zone for 500 TL. Don't forget that the landlord will ask for a deposit of 1500 TL and a month's rent in advance, which will approximately be 2000 TL. Then they will need to buy furniture, no matter how little. And let's not forget about living expenses – food, electricity and water bills etc. Now tell me how one might be able to survive with that 20.000 TL? One year tops – even that is unrealistic. What's the meaning of 10.000, 20.000 TL in the current times? Where does the economic logic lie in here?

Şükrü stressed that all these problems were fundamentally caused by FM's failure in comprehending the living conditions and survival strategies of Sulukule's

⁵⁷ Even if the tenants might move to other districts, it still means that they will be living in areas where regular and formal real estate dynamics operate. Thus, the expenses will not differ compared to the new conditions of Sulukule.

community. From the very beginning, one of the major demands of SA was a renewal plan that would not result in the displacement of the community, due to the vital ties of residents both to their habitat and to the urban centre:

What the authorities don't understand is that what attached the people to this neighbourhood is proximity. This is where they start to hunt for work. This is where they have neighbours that give them support, or even food when needed. This is where they have local shops where they can buy onions, eggs, diapers etc. at affordable prices. This is where they can instantly borrow money from their close ones at emergencies. It is proximity that help people survive at so many different levels. When you put them in 118 m2 flats 40 kms away from the city, you are not helping.

As noted earlier, FM justified its action for renewal in Sulukule on the grounds that the area had transformed into an urban wasteland where living standards worsened due to heightened poverty and crime. Physical deterioration was a complementary aspect of this worsening and was of alarming importance from the perspective of FM since Sulukule fell into the boundaries of Istanbul's heritage zone. Şükrü and Şenol argued that the increase in crime rates could only be explained with the incapacity of public authorities -such as the police and the FM itself- to perform their duties. They also considered physical deterioration as a weak excuse since there were many other areas, they asserted, that were in need of physical rehabilitation. In their view, it was none of these, but the desire to push Roma and the poor out of the city centre which underlined the main motivation in executing the debated plan.

Şükrü agreed that crime peaked particularly after the 2000s due to severe economic decline in the area. He put it, however, that residents were those who suffered from the consequences of crime the most since it led to the further stigmatization of both the Roma and Sulukule.⁵⁸ However, in his view, the reason for increased crime mostly rested on the absence of relevant measures that could only be taken by state authorities. "Don't you think that increased crime means that someone is not doing his job properly?" he said; "If this is what the mayor is saying, then it would not be wrong to say that he is committing crime as well.

⁵⁸ During our interview with Şükrü, a man sitting at the coffee shop asked Tolga what the word Roma reminded him of. Tolga's answer was 'music' but the man said "someone without a job, a bum.. That's the truth. That's how people perceive you if you say you're Roma. That's what worries me." Şükrü added on to this statement with the following example: "Sometimes I receive phone calls from university students who want to come and interview me for research. I say 'Yes of course, come and be our guest' and they ask 'Will we be safe there?'".

Besides, did they really think that relocating people elsewhere would be a solution to those problems?”

Şükrü went further to argue that another major aim of the renewal project was to assimilate the Roma. This seemed to be a common view within the neighbourhood, as interviews with residents also revealed. There was a strong tendency to interpret the action for renewal as a continuation of the state-approach that the community had to face in the previous decades and this caused widespread fury among those who sided with SA. This fury did not only reinforce oppositional sentiments, but also led to the questioning and reaffirmation of citizenship and Roma identity. Calling this kind of urban renewal, ‘a war without blood’, Şükrü argued that the renewal scheme was a violation of his rights both as a citizen of Turkey and a ‘true’ citizen of Istanbul;

If you’d ask me who I am I’d say first and foremost I am a Muslim, then a citizen of Turkey, and then a proud Roma (...) No matter how powerful it might be, the state shall not dictate how and where I should live. I can live wherever and however I might like within the boundaries of the law. I am aware that this is my primary responsibility as a citizen. No one can touch me as long as I don’t violate any rules, or norms. I am a citizen of this republic as much as anybody else. My ancestors settled in these lands 550 years ago. There’s no one who belongs to this city as much as I do.

Overall, Şükrü argued that the renewal scheme had been poorly designed at many levels for a significant percentage of ownership in Sulukule had been transferred to wealthier outsiders and the majority of tenants who were transferred to Taşoluk had been unable to make ends meet there. Exclusion of residents from the project development process, incapacity of local government in producing alternative plans, deprivation of the project from supportive programmes in social and economic terms, and the failure of FM in grasping the life patterns of the community seem to be primary reasons, in Şükrü’s opinion, that support his argument.

6.4.1.4. The Ideal Scenario, Lessons and Mistakes:

The accounts above have so far shown that the project at work caused major disadvantages for the community in social and economic respects. Departing from

these, Şükrü proposed that alternative projects should had been developed to make sure that the community could choose between options that would suit them the best in terms of economic standards and lifestyle patterns. Absence of alternatives as such, in his view, demonstrated that catering to public interests was not among the primary concerns of project developers. “At least we should have been asked whether we’d like to go to Taşoluk, or stay in the neighbourhood”, he said; “We were criticized for not accepting the terms of the project without even being offered any other alternatives.”

FM’s response to the question, whether residents contributed to project development was positive and the project coordinator added that the scheme was revised ‘at least 25 times’ in line with the needs of the neighbourhood. Şükrü, on the other hand, asserted that, “let alone contribution, the community was not even aware of what urban transformation, or renewal meant while the project was being drafted.” He argued that those 25 revisions must have been made upon the initiative of project managers and experts only, since neither the SP, nor the SA got to see the draft project for almost a year. This, in his perspective, was a major drawback regarding the mentality of ‘project making for communities’:

According to Şükrü, a simple collaboration between property owners and FM would easily enable the accommodation of tenants in Sulukule.⁵⁹ Organization of a setting as such, he argued, would also be in better harmony with their way of life as a community:

Suppose I own a 100m² house. The municipality should have offered me a new property from the neighbourhood, within the context of renewal, but ask me to donate 30 m² of my property. This way, you could create space for tenants as well. You have seen it for yourself: There are families living in single rooms, side by side. People do not have big expectations. No one would object to the idea of living in healthier conditions without having to pay any debts, no matter how small the place would be.

Şükrü also added that a physical plan with the capacity to accommodate tenants should had been accompanied with support programmes that could help create employment opportunities for members of the community. Here, translating the

⁵⁹ An alternative project developed by STOP (i.e. Autonomous Planners with No Limits) had also confirmed that a formula as such could allow for the in situ relocation of the entire community. More details on STOP will be provided in Chapter 7.

skills of the community into resources of livelihood seemed to be of key importance. To these ends, Şükrü had proposed a project, based on the idea of recreating and formalizing the entertainment houses, unique to Sulukule.⁶⁰ “FM should have helped us translate our existing skills into an economy”, he said; “I am not saying that we should be given jobs. We already have jobs, you see; we just need the *grounds* for work. That is, do not give me fish; instead, teach me how to fish.” Achievement of these two complementing goals, in Şükrü’s perspective, would have satisfied the defined goals of renewal – that is, both physical rehabilitation and economic regeneration.

Given the above statements, it is clear that the SA did not pursue an anti-transformation stance; rather, regarding the conditions of the neighbourhood, SA was for a project that would both improve living standards in physical, social and economic respects, and keep communal ties together. Şükrü argued that this was often misinterpreted by others and that they were criticized for taking an anti-transformation stance. What they objected to, he said, were methods and strategies utilized for the realization of the project at work. Among many, serving the interests of others than the community was a leading one:

We have been saying from the start of this process that we are not opposed to urban transformation itself. We are opposed to the way in which transformation is being implemented in a way to serve the interests of certain groups and not others. We did need our homes to be in better shape, so we did need rehabilitation in that respect: Our windows and stairs needed to get fixed, our walls needed to be repainted, our heating systems needed to get upgraded, our sewage systems needed to be reinstalled, our garbage needed to be collected regularly, our streets needed to be cleaned equally regularly, our children need parks, and more important than that, they need kinder gardens etc. (...) What I am trying to say is, we were never against urban transformation, but to the way in which it is put into practice.

As Şenol asserted, it was not only the experiences of residents but also news appearing in media, which confirmed that Sulukule’s renewal first and foremost served the interests of others. News appearing in mainstream media by March 2009 had revealed that the majority of new owners in the area were predominantly bureaucrats and officers from the FM and JDP circles. In this respect, the declared winners of transformation had become a ‘privileged few’ rather than the community itself, or the public at large. The promise of the

⁶⁰ This project was dismissed both by the FM and NHSA due to reasons that will be explained later.

project that 'no one would be treated unjustly' had thus remained unfulfilled. Instead, according to SA leaders, their vulnerabilities were manipulated in a way to satisfy the benefits of a limited and privileged circle, against the grain of social justice. As Şenol put it:

There has been an unfair competition here, that is all I can say. The FM offered 40.000 TL for my cousin's house; on the other hand, investors from outside were willing to pay 150.000 TL for the same house. Why do you think that is the case? People are clearly not idiots! I'm telling you, these houses are not going to cost less than 1 million dollars here. I can bet on this on all grounds. When I accept to sell my house for 150.000 TL, or 40.000 TL to someone, am I at a loss? No, even worse: People are seeing my poverty, my weakness as an opportunity. It is exactly like the rules of the jungle: Who does the lion attack? The weakest, the least fit...

When it came to lessons learnt from the experience of building a resistance movement and mobilizing a community, Şükrü first started from his individual experience and touched upon the degree to which his perspective on social, economic and political life transformed. This, he told, was particularly the case for his point of view on the relationship between governors and the governed, and his rights as a citizen. What triggered this transformation, he argued, was the support given by civil groups to SA - the SP being the leading one. "I would definitely say that my vision has broadened" he said, "I learnt what it means to take decisions together with people, for the people. I also learnt about how things work in general. Everything I learnt came from people like you, visiting and talking to us." This, in his view, applied not only to himself but also to each and every single member of the community.

Despite the positive impact of mobilization, Şükrü put that their "failure as a community lay in [their] inability to stay as a collective and organized group with a strong will force." According to Şükrü and Şenol, this required the firm stance of both property owners and tenants on the grounds of their specific circumstances so that collective goals could be achieved. That is, whereas the property owners should have "refused to sell their properties", "the tenants should have insisted on being offered housing from Sulukule under the same payment conditions as Taşoluk, and adamantly rejected to be transferred to Taşoluk" in Şükrü's words. Şenol continued as follows: "If everyone demonstrated determination and people

were given housing from Sulukule, then the community members could at least keep on relying on each other like the way they used to.”

These accounts underline one more time the importance of staying as a community in familiar surroundings for it to be able to survive the fierce forces of urban living. According to Şenol, the project is a failure for this reason only, since “it led to nothing but the displacement of people.” Although the majority of SA leaders’ arguments suggest that real problems start in the aftermath of displacement, what is intriguing is that SA did not follow the course of events especially after the demolitions were complete and the majority of tenants were transferred to Taşoluk. When asked what the situation of those who were still trying to claim their rights to access MHA housing (with the support of SP) was, Şenol told that he did not know what was happening at all. In response to the question of what they had recently been doing as a community organization, Şenol gave the following answer:

Nothing. When you think about it, none of these people have stood against the project, or showed solidarity with us properly. You lose confidence in your own people when you face such situations (...) The demolitions are underway, resistance has dissolved... People have given up with their own neighborhood. What is there left for me to do? (...) We held them from their hands, tried to lift them up so that they would not fall but what do you do if the person says ‘let me fall’? Then go knock yourself out falling. That’s all I have to say.

Departing from here, it can be argued that the SA’s function as a community organization started to erode as residents showed heightened tendencies to access certain securities and gains. Community relations persevered as much as possible under the conditions of displacement, yet the SA’s role as a provider for those in need was substituted by the efforts of SP to a great extent.⁶¹ Both Şükrü and Şenol made various points in stating what the ‘mistakes’ of the community were and how the pressure of renewal paved the way for the vulnerabilities of the community to transform into what they defined as ‘mistakes’. Departing from here, again, both of them stated that they saw the case of Sulukule as a learning opportunity for other neighbourhoods within the historic inner-city. “They should learn a lot from us because we have become a model – simply because we were the first

⁶¹ As stated earlier, the SP gave efficient support to those who were trying to satisfy the conditions of accessing Tasoluk units as demolitions continued. Here, SP was in a leading position since they could provide the community with the resources they had such as volunteer lawyers and people with the relevant knowM how in bureaucratic matters.

neighborhood to have gone through this process, especially in the inner-city”, said Şükrü; “Tarlabaşı, for example, will surely do better if they learn from us. They should watch out for all the mistakes we have made and try to avoid them.”

6.4.2. “One Should Not Confuse Obligations with Happiness”: Neslişah and Hatice Sultan Neighbourhoods’ Association (NHSA)

The office of NHSA was already shut down at the time of interviews. However, one could catch a glimpse of it on the website of the association: Furnished with newly bought couches, chairs, desks and heaters, the office was decorated with Turkish flags hanging on the walls and a wide screen television. One of the images showed Güven and Kaya sitting on the couch (captioned, ‘two of the leaders’), whereas Oktay was missing. Since the office was shut down shortly after tenants started to relocate to Taşoluk (Güven said there was ‘no need left for it’) the meeting for interviews took place at a coffee shop twenty meters away from the coffee shop of Şükrü. Oktay, Kaya and Güven said that now, this place functioned as their headquarters.⁶²

Oktay started off by telling that the neighbourhood had not been in a good state in a long while and that people were not ‘living happily together’. “There was lack of bonding”, he says; “People did not respect each other anymore. Neighbourly relations were deteriorating severely.” Oktay, Güven and Kaya all agree that this distress was fundamentally caused by the decline in Sulukule’s economy within the past two decades. Although this decline had diverse negative effects on the everyday life of Sulukule, widespread drug problem was the most severe among all from the perspective of NHSA - affecting almost 75% of the youth, they argued. Oktay said,

We were not living in peace – neither at our homes, nor outside. Imagine people drinking and smoking heroin at your doorstep. You tell them to go away but they just won’t. It was

⁶² Among these leaders, Oktay owned three properties within the renewal zone. He sold one of these to an investor and regarding the other two, he negotiated with the FM – he will be given a new property in return of two shops. (...) Güven, on the other hand, was atennats who gained access to Taşoluk units and was living there at the time of interview.

impossible to sleep until 3-4 am in the morning. People were carrying guns. We were losing our kids; there was some sort of social pressure on them to use drugs - otherwise 'you're not a man'. It was getting worse and worse. What I am saying is, this place was in serious need of help.⁶³

It can be suggested that the NHSA and SA were on similar pages regarding their interpretation of problems affecting the neighbourhood. The only difference was that, according to NHSA, economic problems had triggered social problems beyond control, which turned the neighbourhood into an 'unbearable place' to live in. It is within this framework that the project was perceived as a 'way out': "While we were waiting for a light of hope, our state introduced this opportunity to us. We were in need of help and attention like this for a long time."

6.4.2.1. Steps Towards Recognition: NHSA as a Neighbourhood Association

Oktaý admitted that they were not particularly supportive of the project at the very beginning, similar to the SA, since there was 'lack of transparency and information'. Just like every other community member, they had also learnt about it through newspapers and were fearful that "[their] homes would be confiscated" and that "[they] would be left out on the street".⁶⁴ Yet, it was after their meeting with the municipality and the Mayor of Istanbul that they had come to the realization that the project could bear advantageous results for community members. In explaining these advantages, what Oktaý brought to the fore was predominantly the residents' financial gains through their potential access to rising urban rent, triggered by the renewal scheme. This was confirmed by an example he gave:

We asked the mayor what would happen to us in the case of demolitions and the first thing he said was, 'no one will be treated unjustly.' We were also told that all potential benefits would be returned to the right holders in the neighbourhood and we saw the truth in this

⁶³ When asked whether he used any drugs in his youth Oktaý said, "Whose story do you think it is that I am telling you about?"

⁶⁴ Here, Kaya agreed with SA leaders that the survey held by FM within the neighbourhood did not produce reliable results. He said, "It had many flaws. Some people, when they were approached, refrained from giving the right answers to officers since they were fearful of what was to come. Some of the owners presented themselves as tenants to avoid trouble whatever that would be. Thus, it would not be possible to take it as %100 reliable departure point in determining rightful owners."

in a very short span of time. For example we saw properties, not worth 3000 TL, being sold at 135.000 TL.

What comes across intriguing is that the phrase, 'no one will be treated unjustly', which caused much skepticism and controversy on the side of SA, formed the basis of big expectations on the side of NHSA that were fulfilled as the project got implemented. This is mainly because the ways in which 'justice' was conceptualized by the two associations were radically different. Whereas for SA it would be the extension of rights to all residents to stay within the neighbourhood and the revitalization of entertainment sector as an economic support mechanism, for NHSA it was the collection of maximum financial benefits from an area with no future in their perspective. Oktay's reflections to follow revealed that the local government played a significant role in fostering and shaping the underlying logic of NHSA's conceptualization of 'justice' within this perspective: "We were in a constant dialogue with the FM and were told that we needed to be patient: 'You have suffered from the conditions of this neighbourhood for decades. Wait for two more years and then sell your properties to enjoy the outcomes of regeneration.'"

In this framework, what the leading actors of NHSA saw in the project was an opportunity for upward social mobility that would be catered for by the financial rewards of the renewal project. Given the social and economic circumstances of the neighbourhood, in the perspective of Oktay and others, the renewal project promised an opportunity that would otherwise never emerge and thus, could not be refused. What is more, this opportunity was interpreted as a form of social support provided by the state:

We saw the model of the project - it looks spectacular. I mean, if people keep patient they will become million dollar men. Don't the people of this neighbourhood also have the right to live in luxury and comfort? Why should they keep on living in filth and dirt? (...) Regarding the quality of life in here, a project as such is of very high importance; it can only serve the benefit of the people. I don't know any other community that was given such great social support.

It is within this framework that Oktay deemed "any action that would try to come in the way of this process absolute evil." Since its foundation, the NHSA had not only been critical of SA's approach to the renewal project, but also of outsider groups who gave support to resistance. In the view of Oktay, such standpoints

failed to capture the distinction between the conditions in which people were forced to and the conditions that they strived to live in:

Some professors who raised objections to the project were saying such things like 'let these people sit on their three legged chairs'. Why do they not understand that one day that chair is bound to collapse? They think that people were happy, living like that. We are absolutely against this. One should not confuse obligations with happiness.

What is quite striking is that the NHSA leaders adopted the same discourse as the FM in justifying the renewal of the area as a preparation towards the year of ECC. Kaya says: "It is beyond comprehension to have an area like this in the middle of such a metropolis as Istanbul. It's a shame to have neighbourhoods and living standards like this in a region that is a World Heritage site. Demands of those who want to keep it that way are also beyond comprehension."

6.4.2.2. The Grounds for Division

Besides their approval of the project, there were a number of other reasons for NHSA leaders to counter the resistance initiated by SA. Among these, economic concerns and fragmentations within the community seem to stand for the two leading grounds upon which NHSA tried to become an organized unit. Mobilization of NHSA around these themes also prepared the grounds for NHSA to receive the full support of FM.

In an attempt to reflect on the rift between NHSA and SA, Oktay argued that there is a strong correlation between the financial capabilities of residents and resistance. That is, in his view, only the wealthier in the neighbourhood could afford the many costs of resistance – both money and time wise. Those who were economically deprived did not have the 'luxury' to resist and were in need of the potential returns of the renewal project as soon as possible. As he put it:

For example, Hacı Asım's [a supporter of SA] economic conditions were much better compared to mine. He was not happy with what he was offered [by FM] in return of what he owned and he said 'I am going to stand against the project'. I, on the other hand, had lots of debts and needed to sell my property to be able to solve my problems. Thus, he stood by SA and we initiated our own movement.

NHSA leaders were also highly critical of the defense of Roma rights and entertainment culture upon which resistance to renewal by SA and SP was established to a great extent. In their view, an attempt for such defense was meaningless since the Roma community had 'long disappeared from Sulukule'. The existing community, NHSA leaders claimed, was the end result of many migration waves that did not have any relations with Roma origins. In light of this, making a defense of Roma rights and reclaiming entertainment culture was considered equally pointless in their opinion. Moreover, they argued that what is referred to as 'entertainment culture' is a severely degenerated version of an ancient practice –which 'belonged' to others- only being reclaimed for the purposes of economic gains in the current times.⁶⁵ In Oktay's words:

A few cunning ones came up with the idea of imitating this entertainment culture to make money out of it, and in their version of it, there is more scandal than anything else (...) People leaving the entertainment houses end up at our doorstep, drunk. Others might define this as a form of culture, but to us it is a matter of shame. Where is the culture in this? They arrange two dingy barbecue grills, two broken chairs and a futon, and make a woman do belly dance in a place that stinks worse than a barn. They take money off from people for such idiocy (...) We are all one and against this.

Güven argued that the neighbourhood became a stage for a series of 'embarrassing incidents' due to this economy, in their most corrupt version, and that the residents suffered from the damages of this 'embarrassment' at many levels. The impression of others of them and thus, the social stigma placed on the community was one of these, in their perspective. Güven put that "When you have that sort of thing going on in your parallel street and when someone [from outside the neighbourhood] you know takes a walk into that street by mistake, they think that

⁶⁵ These statements take us back to the matter of 'identitarian fragmentations' remarked earlier, this time revealing the point of view of the NHSA. Many statements made by the leaders point at a determined effort to disengage from Roma origins by making repetitive references to their Turkish and Muslim (or, 'faithful' and 'conservative') identity. This seems to be grounded upon two planes: Their interpretation of the ethnic and cultural traits of Sulukule's residents, and a variety of moral judgements they attribute to Roma and refuse to get associated with. Oktay made a lengthy explanation to the background of Sulukule's residents and emphasized that it is a community of migrants more than anything else. In his view, the connection of their community with entertainment culture only came from their exposure to the culture of 'others' they shared the same neighbourhood with long ago: "All of us, including Şükrü, are the sons of migrant families from Bulgaria – whose origins go back to Konya-Karaman, central-Anatolian town", he said; "When our families arrived here, they were given these houses by the walls where communities dating from the Byzantian period were also living. These minority groups were the true owners of this entertainment culture but they completely disappeared after the 1950s. The entertainment culture, on the other hand, came to be adopted by migrant families for economic purposes. What I am saying is, we are not the true owners of this supposed entertainment culture and the people who actually owned it have gone long ago."

you and your family are also a part of it.” For these reasons, they stated that the resistance performed by SA could not find support from a ‘substantial’ segment of the community. As Kaya put it:

99.9% of this neighbourhood is against this phenomenon, which they like to call ‘Sulukule culture’. The starting point of SA was the protection of that sort of culture and entertainment but in the end, they could not find many supporters when they did so. If they had picked themselves another starting point, then maybe they could find more followers. They could not demonstrate sustainable presence only because they established themselves on the grounds of culture and identity.

Güven’s accounts reveal that it was this ‘non-inclusive’ aspect of resistance, as defined by the NHSA leaders, which triggered the process of mobilization for them with the support of FM. Güven said that although they were “quite keen on the project from the start” and that they “interpreted it as equivalent to winning the lottery”, it took them time to get into ‘action’ in official terms due to the strength of communal ties.⁶⁶ It was only when “resistance groups started to make a lot of noise”, as he put it, that they decided to act for their own cause. The first step taken here was to establish connections with the municipality to develop a better understanding of the renewal process. This meeting, consequently, did not only mark the foundation of NHSA but also the beginning of a committed collaboration between FM and NHSA.

When they explained the details of the project we cheered and said, “Thank God for you, this is such an incredible piece of work!” (...) What we were told in return was this: ‘Now that you are here, maybe we can ask for a favour from you. You know, your fellow neighbours are not very literate; no other people came here like the way you did and asked all these questions. For this reason, we would be grateful if you could explain your community members our aims and plans so that they can be as informed as necessary. At the end of the day, they will feel more comfortable with you because you are one of them. If we are doing anything wrong, or if we are missing crucial points, you can also come and warn us so that we can revise the plans.’ This is how we got established as a formal NA.

It is on these grounds that SA’s argument, which suggested a direct relationship between FM and NHSA, was confirmed by the leaders.⁶⁷ The material aspect of this

⁶⁶ Güven elaborated on the impact of communal ties as follows: “At the end of the day Şükrü and the rest of the lot are people that we grew up together with; we didn’t feel the need to raise a voice and object to their arguments [although we did not want to live in this sort of environment anymore]. We were thinking that the whole idea of resistance was a big mistake from the start but we also thought that they would somehow realize that.”

⁶⁷ Oktay told at one point that he has things to do at the municipal building almost everyday: “We know everyone there” he says, “at the end of the day, the municipality needed people who would believe in this project and that happened to be us.”

relationship, however, was never clarified during interviews – it was only stated that the rent of the office they used in the neighbourhood and its monthly expenses were covered by FM. In explaining their responsibilities as an association, leaders often used the word ‘mediation’. Mediation here referred to a process of reconciliation whereby NHSA leaders would talk with residents in a way to both promote the advantages and benefits of the project, and communicate the concerns and needs of residents to FM. In their view, this was needed in order to tailor the project according to the needs, circumstances and demands of people so that it could become much more feasible and sustainable. In Oktay’s words:

We constantly tried to assess things in a way to make sure that the renewal plan would serve the interests of people; we were constantly exchanging ideas with people and informing FM about the concerns people might have so that the plans could be revised accordingly and community members would not find themselves in troubled situations. We were the ones who pressed for tenants’ right to access social housing. At the end of the day, people from the outside do not know the area that well, or can only defend our rights to a certain degree even if they might be experts; that’s why the FM needed our mediation. They didn’t want to be accused for any mistakes, so they asked us to warn them when necessary during the process.

The procedure for mediation to take place was simple: Community members would pay ‘constant visits’ to the NHSA office, ‘day and night’, and the NHSA leaders would take notes of people’s concerns, demands and needs to be reported to FM. Oktay and Kaya asserted that the range of issues they dealt with varied from the identification of people with basic needs (e.g. heating, transport, employment etc.) to the resolution of problems people noticed within the project. Accumulation of such data would reveal certain unanimities and commonalities, and these would constitute the need to bring those issues to the attention of FM. It is due to this method, they asserted, that the budget of the project was re-adjusted through significant reductions (on the grounds of what people could afford); support was extended for the removal procedures (at the time of transfer from Sulukule to Taşoluk); job trainings had become available, and electric heaters were offered to tenants in Taşoluk for free in early periods when gas connections were still not installed. Oktay noted that in some cases they did not even need the telling of people and yet could spot problems, only because they knew the neighbourhood and the community well.

On these grounds, Oktay suggested that “contrary to what people tend to think, [they] constituted the majority in the neighborhood” in terms of supporters. The ‘false’ impression, he believed, was caused by the media hype around SA. Once this was accompanied with the support of SP (which had direct links to various media organizations), Oktay said, public attention had concentrated on SA whereas the NHSA had become ‘invisible’.⁶⁸ Another factor that contributed to their marginalization, they believed, was the dismissive approach of both SA and SP. These altogether, in their perspective, placed an unfair stigma on NHSA despite the fact that they worked to help community access certain benefits. As Oktay explained it;

If there are 15,000 people in this community, 14,500 represent our followers. The media paid attention to this crowd of 500 people [the side of SA], only because they were good material for TV and such like. We tried to explain the situation of the neighbourhood, or the conditions in which we live but we were constantly ignored. That crowd of 500 people constantly pushed with the music and dance, and overshadowed our presence. Of course, I understand that this is what they need to do if this helps with what they want to gain out of the project but what about SP? Why did they only give support to that 500 people crowd and turn their back against us? We were constantly treated as an ‘opposition group’ throughout the entire process by SA and SP.

Contrary to the strong public image they built, Güven argued that the SA front constituted the real minority since “the project [had] progressed to its current stage.”⁶⁹ Kaya proposed that the trust people had in FM and the state was one good reason for the project to find so many supporters. “If you check the rate of success, it is easy to tell”, he said; “I mean if you look at the number of tenants who agreed to sign contracts and move to Taşoluk units, you can tell how much support the project has found.” The way in which Kaya conceptualized ‘support for the project’ and ‘success of the project’ is intriguing at a number of levels: To start with, the context within which ‘consent’ to the project developed did not constitute any significance. That is, once the NHSA would talk community members –and especially tenants- into the project, leaders did not consider the impact of such issues raised by SA leaders as ‘pressures exerted by authorities and the project’, or

⁶⁸ According to Kaya, one of the reasons why resistance had succeeded in establishing such good public relations was due to the presence of SP. “They are very well organized, cultured and they also have the skills and power to access the tools and networks you might need within a struggle like this. These of course, were great advantages for SA”, says Kaya.

⁶⁹ During this time, which was January 2009, demolitions were underway with significant portion of landlords having negotiated either with the FM, or third parties, and tenants had already been transferred to Taşoluk units – part of them were already returning to Sulukule’s surroundings.

'the non-availability of alternative options' as factors that determined the decisions of residents. Secondly, they tended to rate the 'success' of the project simply by relying on the number of people who came to terms with the project, disregarding the follow up to these decisions. The following conversation is quite telling in both respects:

Kaya: "Do you know what the problem was at the beginning? None of the people were actually convinced enough to sign up for Taşoluk units - despite the temptation of offers they were presented with. They kept insisting that they would not live there, that they would go and look for places elsewhere if needed. It was only after we kind of pushed them that they agreed to sign up."

Ozlem: "Why did they not want the Taşoluk units?"

Kaya: "They didn't want to find themselves in debts. These are the sorts of people who do not want to hassle with bureaucratic procedures, or anything to do with banks: 'I don't want debts, hence I don't want money, or even a house.' That's the way they think."

Ozlem: "So, under the given conditions, do you think it is right to push people into buying houses as you put it?"

Güven: "Well, but still no one could force them into signing anything if they *really* didn't want any houses, don't you think?"

It is within the confines of this discourse (i.e. 'making people show consent') that the NHSA was criticized by the SA. From this critical point of view, underlining this attitude was the motivation to secure the benefits of those who led the organization rather than that of the community. In this line of thinking, NHSA members and leaders had 'forced', or 'tricked' tenants and owners into showing consent for Taşoluk units and negotiating with authorities/third persons only to be able to access certain rewards extended to them by authorities.⁷⁰ In response to these criticisms Kaya said, "Tell me someone who is *not* acting so. Don't forget that many of these people have sold their properties, or signed up for Taşoluk units to access individual benefits!". Oktay also agreed that "everyone prioritized his/her own benefits" and that "no one actually cared about others".

It is important to note here that according to Oktay, the leader of SA was not exempt from the tendency to secure individual benefits since he had not only signed up for Taşoluk housing units and sold his mother's property to a developer,

⁷⁰ This criticism was so much in circulation that I asked leaders a number of times, during various encounters, whether there was any truth in them getting material rewards from the municipality in regular terms, or anything else along similar lines. Whereas most of the time the question was evaded, or ignored, one day Oktay gave the following response: "You have been coming here for a long time. You know, it's a time of economic crisis in the country these days. Have you ever heard anyone in this coffee shop complain about the economy? This should tell you something."

but also created 'his own market out of resistance'. Oktay said that as resistance started to peak and SA acquired heightened media visibility, Şükrü's band started to get more offers to perform at various venues. That is, Şükrü had also secured certain gains out of the project, although from a different angle, since they were making 'good money' out of these performances. "You see, that's how the system works", said Oktay; "Is it resistance? Well, it is the kind that provides you with a living."

6.4.2.3. Questioning the Sustainability of Rewards

According to NHSA leaders, sustainability of rewards that become available with the project was very much dependent on people's willingness to change their lives. That is, the rewards would only sustain and improve the living standards of community members permanently if the opportunities presented were well utilized by the people. This, in the view of the leaders, required a departure from previous ways of living within the neighbourhood and an active effort towards going up the ladders of social and economic mobility with the means they were presented. The leaders' reflections on the concerns raised by SA reveal this standpoint most clearly.

In responding to SA's criticism on the distance to/from Taşoluk, Oktay asserted that any criticism raised by SA on this particular matter was of minor significance when the potential benefits of owning a Taşoluk unit were considered. "It is true: Last year [2008] when we were taken to a tour around Taşoluk developments the whole area was a big construction site dipped in mud", said Kaya; "That's why it was difficult to see what the units would look like in the future, let alone how valuable they could become." Yet, from Oktay's point of view, the units shortly became assets that no one from the community could reach under normal conditions and therefore deserved a careful assessment:

What about the fact that the state is providing you with an opportunity for homeownership? What about the fact that you are only obliged to pay as little installments as rent costs? What about the fact that you hold all the right to do whatever you like with these units? Currently, the value of these units is approximately 30.000-40.000 TL. If people wait until summer, the prices will go up to 100.000 TL. So people will either own

properties of this value, or make money out of it by selling it. Under these circumstances, don't you think a discussion on how long it takes to go back and forth Taşoluk is a bit ridiculous?

A similar argument was raised on professional trainings and rent support mechanisms made available by FM. Oktay asserted that "everything about this project represented a form of social support" and added that "people were not only being presented with homes, but also job trainings." In these respects, a certain reward was being backed by another so it was "up to the initiative" of the person to take advantage of it, or not. Rent support mechanisms, on the other hand, were non-existent at the time of this interview –as confirmed by SA members and residents at large- however Oktay asserted that "starting from this month (January 2009) the municipality [would] extend 100 TL support to each tenant in the payment of their installments." As such, Oktay proposed that, "there was nothing left for the municipality to do" and that he did not think "the world had seen such a wellM thought project to this date."

In the leaders' point of view, underlying the resistance of tenants was simply the fact that "poverty and laziness had become a way of life for [the members of the community]" in Güven's words. "All the basic services were previously used illegally in Sulukule - the water, the electricity..." he said; "People didn't like the burden of bills. No one even paid rents regularly. That's how they managed to get by for so long in this area." Thus, a radical 'regime change' in everyday life M brought by the projectM was not welcomed since it would erode the previously existing dynamics that allowed people to survive. However, in his view, now that the entire neighbourhood was getting demolished, change was inevitable. The best option was to adapt to that change by utilizing the means extended to them by the project and abandon former ways of living:

This is like someone offering you food and you expecting the person to teach you how to chew. What I mean is, people need to make an effort. There is no room for laziness anymore (...) Everyone is supposed to work, everyone is supposed to learn how to make money! (...) These people do not hesitate to spend money on a bottle of raki every night but then they complain about the amount of installments – that is, 300 TL.⁷¹ One way or another they are capable of finding the money so being able to afford the installments, or not is a pointless debate.

⁷¹ The approximate retail price for a bottle of raki is currently 70 TL (May 2013).

Despite their strong commitment to this perspective, NHTA demanded the right for tenants to sell Taşoluk units without having to wait for a year.⁷² In this way, people could access an alternative form of reward, divorced from the cons of holding on to Taşoluk units. Güven asserted that he took the issue to FM personally and explained the mayor that some tenants would not be able to afford the expenses of living in Taşoluk for various reasons. Thus, having the possibility to liquidize units in real estate markets in an earlier period could provide tenants with another form of compensation in the face of displacement. Although this was initially met with an interesting counter-argument by the FM, the request was accepted and time, within a short span, had proven Güven right:

Majority of those who signed up for Taşoluk units made requests towards the right to sell them right away in case they would find themselves in financial trouble and could not afford making further payments for them. Officials from FM, including the mayor, almost begged us not to sell on the grounds that if we keep patient the values of properties would 'hit the ceiling'. This was actually not an unfounded prediction, regarding that the value of similar MHA units in other districts were peaking fast.⁷³

That is, FM had advised tenants to wait until the exchange value of 'social housing units' climbed within the dynamics of formal housing markets so that people could access 'enhanced rewards' thanks to the dynamics of the free market. NHTA leaders stated that the advice was rational, regarding that the real estate values of Taşoluk did experience an increase within a period of six to eight months; however, waiting would bear significant risks for many. Legally speaking, failure to pay the required instalments for a period of three months would lead to the confiscation of properties by authorities, and the emergence of additional debts for tenants. Within this framework, the option of selling the units would create a safety net for the weakest of all groups. "At the end of the day, these units would again serve the purpose of helping people get on with their lives even if people might decide to sell them", said Güven; "They will have money in their pockets to look for apartments/houses elsewhere."

⁷² According to the initial contracts, this was the period after which the units could be sold to others.

⁷³ Research done in another social housing area built by the MHA, Bezirganbahce, revealed that a real estate market similar to the at of Tasoluk emerged following the relocation of community members from Ayazma, a formed *gecekonu* zone which became subject to urban transformation. For more details, see Baysal (2010) and Kuyucu (2009)

6.4.2.4. Reflections on an Ideal Scenario and the Consequences of Renewal

According to Oktay the project as it was designed by FM had the potential to cater to the many needs of Sulukule and its community right from the start: Whereas a historically central part of the city would be upgraded in line with the requirements of ‘modern living’, community members would access diverse compensations and rewards that would improve the quality of their lives, in social and economic terms. To them, landlords were lucky from the start since they had managed to pocket either big sums of money in return for their properties, or get hold of new spaces from the renewal area. Tenants were equally lucky, from the same perspective, for having grasped the opportunity to become homeowners in Taşoluk. However, this once-in-a-life-time opportunity was ‘wasted’, in their view, since the majority of Taşoluk units were sold by their owners in a very short period of time.

The future of tenants in Sulukule within the context of renewal had always been a fragile topic since they represented the most vulnerable groups within the neighbourhood M and both SA and the NHSA acknowledged that. In the previous section, it was already stated that in an ideal scenario the SA was on the side of giving the entire community –i.e. both landlords and tenantsM the opportunity to stay in the neighbourhood This was particularly because the most vulnerable could only survive renewal with the support of communal ties. In their opinion, the dispersal of the community would mean worsened living conditions for each family since they would be torn apart from their socio-economic networks. The NHSA, however, defended the complete opposite and argued that members of the community would be better off settling in other places among others to be able to improve their lives. Underlying this conviction was the belief that living together as a community in the way they did was what came in the way of their upward mobility. In Oktay’s words:

If our people stay together, as a community, they won’t live a better life. This is because they do whatever they like in their own terrain. The way in which they behave here, in Sulukule, and the way in which they behave in Karagümrük [the adjacent neighbourhood] are completely different. They pay more attention to how they act among others (...) Our people are in need of seeing more elite people around them, or the community should be dispersed within the city. That’s the only way out for each one of us.

Here, 'the way out', implied the potential upward mobility that residents could achieve with the helping hand of the renewal project. In these respects, staying as a community in the established surroundings of Sulukule signified a failure in making use of the opportunities presented by Sulukule's transformation. 'The way out' stood both for 'a step up the ladders of social and economic well-being' and a new living environment that would only become available if the rewards of change were well utilized. For all these reasons, Taşoluk was perceived as the place, which embodied all these potential 'achievements' on the part of tenants.

According to Oktay, in an ideal scenario, people should have made an effort to live in Taşoluk for it did not only offer new and modern living spaces, but also because it came together with the exquisite promise of homeownership. Oktay did acknowledge that Taşoluk was a challenge for many due to the many costs it bore, however he also insisted that in the face of inevitable change, making an effort towards settling there was an opportunity that should not have been missed. "If you go and have a look at those who are currently living in Taşoluk, you will see that some of them are going through many hardships", he said; "However, they are all happy to get by. No one among those will utter a complaint about not being able to afford the installments." Güven was one of those, and he confirmed Oktay's statements:

I've been living there for the past four months. I am very happy. There are people like me who are happy, and there are also people who are thinking about selling their units due to lack of transport and job opportunities. However, I never heard anyone complain about the flats. What more can we expect from the FM? We need to make compromises as well.⁷⁴

The NHSA was also aware of a number of families whose new homes were confiscated by authorities since they had not been able to make their payments regularly. Intriguingly, however, the NHSA did not follow up on those groups who decided, or had to move out – despite having helped them move into Taşoluk initially. Neither did they know, at the time of this interview, how many people were still living in Taşoluk units. This drew attention to a peculiar similarity

⁷⁴ Another factor, which renders Taşoluk units worthy assets is the overall difficulty to access homeownership through formal and regular procedures. "A decent flat costs something around 100.000 TL", said Oktay; "Under regular conditions, the majority of our community would have to work for 100 months and not spend a penny to be able to accumulate that money. Now that you have this opportunity, why not make use of it?"

between the SA and the NHA: The capacity of both NAs was limited to guiding the community members into acting in certain ways but if the expected stances were not taken, dealing with the consequences of these went beyond the capacity of NAs. What is more, as demonstrated in the previous section as well, people's decision to act in 'undesired' fashions cause fury among NA leaders. This was predominantly because NA leaders were also part of the community, exposed to such radical change, and they were affected by the decisions of the majority as much as others. Intimate relations within the community affected the way in which NAs work significantly.

Another reason for the strong tendency to sell the units, according to Oktay, was the community members' weakness for 'hot money' as he referred to it. In a similar line to SA, Oktay explained how extreme poverty invigorated people's desire for immediate cash that was usually spent in the absence of long-term investment plans. "They live the day", he said; "If they have money, they will spend it in a day." However, in his view, the way in which the units have been liquidized in real estate markets has not been wise and thus, the opportunity to utilize the benefits of renewal were missed in this way:

We have been telling everyone that they should at least wait until summer, when the value of properties will climb and hit something around 100.000 TL. If you wait and then manage to get minimum 80.000-90.000 TL in return, then you can buy houses for 60.000-70.000 TL here, around Sulukule. As I said, though, they are only interested in immediate money. They kid themselves to such excuses as 'Taşoluk is very far, it is cold etc.' and refuse to deal with minor problems although there might be gains in the end. The distance can be dealt with by using the free shuttle service that the FM has provided, at least for a while. However, they are not keen to wait at all; they are selling their units for 35.000-50.000 TL, putting themselves at a loss.

This was not to suggest, Kaya argued, that tenants were not aware of the worth of what is presented. The efforts of those residents who were legally defined as 'no-right-holders' to gain access to housing from Taşoluk -with the legal support provided by SP- was demonstrative of that. However, in his view, this was an attempt born out of poverty, or 'thirst for money', to corrupt a fair mechanism: According to Kaya, not all residents who were trying to gain access to MHA housing were actually rightful; instead, these were tenants, or property owners, who had already accessed certain gains but were trying to exploit the system at work to be able to claim further gains:

Some people had already proven their tenancy status, accessed units from Taşoluk, sold them after some time (meaning they made money out of it) and now they are trying to claim units from Taşoluk again by documenting their wives, for example, as tenants in the properties of their own parents.

Despite their appreciation of the project at work, NHSA leaders were aware that the scheme did not produce equally pleasing results for all members of the community. They predominantly believed that it was the resident's inability to take advantage of the change that was coming into effect, however they put that they would have fought more effectively and for better terms if they could find the space to side with SA. "We could have stood together with SA from the beginning if they had not prioritized this whole business of entertainment culture and economy", said Oktay. This friction was undoubtedly based on the identitarian fragmentations and tensions that pre-date the project; yet, Oktay added that, "for the common benefits of the community, a collective stance could have been taken."

Altogether, NHSA leaders were of the view that the experience of getting mobilized around the cause of renewal provided them with a certain knowledge of where and how to look for their rights as citizens. This was similar to the reflections of SA with one difference: Whereas the SA was supported by SP in acquiring this knowledge, the NHSA was supported by the local authority. "We had no clue as to how bureaucratic procedures worked when it came to these matters", said Kaya; "We had no idea about how we should be looking for our 'rights', if there were any, and we did not even know where and how to make demands towards them. We had to act collectively, form this association among ourselves and think together, out of necessity."

Conclusion:

Having long suffered from various social and economic hindrances, Sulukule, an inner-city poverty zone, came to be affected by new forms of pressure caused by an urban renewal project in 2005. The weight of these pressures was first felt at the time when the project to be initiated was overshadowed by a lack of clarity on the details of the process, and ultimate displacement and dispossession seemed

inevitable. Resistance to the renewal scheme became vocal in this specific period as SP, a civil initiative, and SA, as newly formed neighbourhood association, came on to the scene to protect the community against the ill-effects of regeneration and to raise demands towards a renewal process, which prioritized *in situ* relocation, and social and economic rehabilitation through participatory decision making mechanisms.

Although an oppositional stance demonstrated effective and successful campaigning and advocacy at national and international level, pressures posed by the project alongside rewards and compensations extended to residents translated into a shift in the community's response to the project. This shift became most visible with the emergence of a second neighbourhood association, NHSA, which took a proM project stance and aimed to promote it as a scheme that would secure certain benefits more than giving way to material losses. This promotion found expressions in such ways that it both emphasized the possibility for lowM income tenants to satisfy their housing needs and also the opportunity for the relatively better off to access heightened material rewards through sales to third parties. It was due to the desire to escape the downsides of regeneration under the pressure of the scheme at work that residents started to resort to these opportunities and resistance came to fragment, consequently.

Accounts of SA and NHSA leaders reveal that sentiments triggered by the renewal project within the community found their starkest expressions in the formation of NAs with distinct goals at different stages: Whereas fear and anxiety caused by the project first paved the way for collective resistance -led by SA- gains and securities extended by the project were approached as mechanisms that could reverse the potential feared effects of regeneration – as promoted by NHSA. What underlies both stages, or the shift between one state and the other, is undoubtedly the interaction between the degree of pressures built by the renewal scheme and the socio-economic capacities of community members. The more limited these capacities and resources are, the more likely it is for residents to withdraw from the first stage and move on to the second stage. Similarly, the more residents wish to secure what they already have, the more inclined they will be to try their luck at

enhancing their gains. These different stages were all tried to be managed by newly formed NAs with no prior experience of community mobilization.

What comes across as striking is that in the aftermath of the shift to the second stage, resistance retreated to a position that prioritized residents' access to certain material securities as well. This can be explained with the conviction that progress of the project was considered inevitable and resistance would no longer achieve its initially defined goals under the existing circumstances. That is, both NAs became oriented towards achieving short-term material instead of long-term goals in the urgency to avoid social and economic harms of the project. Yet, the sustainability of these rewards -however they may be promoted especially by the latter formed NA- remained as a question mark. Both groups admitted to the fact that they would idealize plans that would promise in situ relocation. However, under the pressing dynamics of urban regeneration and in the absence of security nets provided by public authorities, opportunities presented by the scheme and its by products became the only choice for both groups.

7. A Street View: Grassroots Experience and Reflections on Collective Action in Sulukule

Interviews with the residents of Sulukule were held between November 2008 and January 2009, corresponding to the time when the demolitions were coming at an end and the relocation of tenants to Taşoluk units had already started to take place. The total number of semi structured in depth interviews held is 30. Among these, 13 of them have been analyzed as conveyors of insightful information on the multiple aspects of the transformation process; its impacts on the community; the way in which NAs responded to the process, and the cumulative consequences of these responses. The names of all informants within this analysis were changed for privacy reasons.

Overall, residents' reflections confirmed the majority of the key arguments raised by the NA leaders. Yet, the residents' views have also added new perspectives to the impact of NAs both on the transformation process and the way in which the community was affected by transformation. The predominant view is that the NAs could not go beyond serving the interests of certain groups who could access certain gains within the existing constellations. This perception seems to be grounded upon two main reasons. First relates to the pressure of renewal, which poses severe challenges for the acts of resistance: According to residents, there was a limit to how far the NAs could resist since the terms and conditions of renewal, and the strategies adopted by FM were too stringent to be fought against.

The second reason had to do with the already existing and emergent fragmentations within the community. Whereas the former are founded upon identitarian polarizations -as have been uttered during interviews with NA leaders- the latter were based on the expectations of different groups from the consequences and potential returns of transformation in the absence of alternative solutions. Residents were of the view that the efforts of NAs failed to address what might be defined as the 'interests of the community', since coming up with a homogeneous definition of 'community' is arduous in the face of such divisions. Instead, different strategies pursued by different groups within the community have led to the achievement of certain gains that originate from distinct socio economic expectations and aspirations. More importantly, interviews with residents have revealed the diverse ways in which members of the

community were affected by the project. These both point at the range of degrees to which residents either suffered, or benefited from the consequences of renewal, and the ways in which they tried to steer and manage impacts of the project – either in the guidance of NAs, or on the basis of individual efforts.

The following chapter narrates the views of residents over the neighbourhood, their experiences of the transformation process, the diverse ways in which they could, or could not benefit from the returns of the project, and most importantly their observations on the role and impact of the NAs throughout the renewal process.

7.1. Reflections on the Neighbourhood and Encounters with Renewal:

Residents' sentiments over the neighbourhood seem to show some fundamental similarities: Almost all informants stated in various ways that life in Sulukule used to be 'jolly good', marked by close-knit community relations and the 'feel of a proper neighbourhood'. Cemil described it as a happy place to be throughout his childhood -filled with "love, respect and peace"- whereas Hüsni talked of the beauty of what he called "authentic Sulukule houses". The majority of the positive attributes, however, seem to be heavily built upon the many benefits of community life and solidarity, which made life significantly easier within an area of extreme poverty. In Ertan's words:

We would be altogether at our weddings and funerals... If my child got sick, my neighbours would take care of him if I did not happen to be around – they would take him to the hospital and even search for blood if needed. Some of us were poor, unable to buy bread for the day; those of us who earn more would give them the support they needed.¹

What complemented the support of solidarity networks was the central location of Sulukule, which provided notable advantages for the community in terms of livelihood. Oğuz explained these advantages as follows:

There are many ways of finding money within the neighbourhood: If you need 10 liras, you first knock on the door of your neighbour. Or, you do 10 liras worth shopping from the local grocer's and make your payment within the next few days. Or, if none of these

¹ It is within this framework that a tenancy structure, quite unique to Sulukule, also developed as noted in the previous chapter – the courtyard system (*avlu sistemi*). Ertan is one of those property owners who adopted the system and explained that he allowed a family to stay in one of the rooms available in the backyard of his property "without having to pay rent since they would not be able to afford it anyway.."

options work, you walk down the neighbourhood towards Fatih, Aksaray, Güngören, Eyüp etc. and sell a t-shirt. You are only half an hour away from the most central parts of Istanbul, crowded by people who will eventually buy a t-shirt from you.

Almost all informants agree that close community relations and centrality of the neighborhood did not only function as the main constituents of their survival strategies but also established a security net against the dangers of the 'outside world'. This particularly came to the fore in the accounts of female residents who unanimously emphasized that "[they] could go out as late as 1-2 am in the morning since everyone knew and protected each other", as Gönül put it.

However, life in the neighbourhood was not without downsides, mainly defined by 'criminal activities' that increased within the past two decades. According to residents, these predominantly included drug dealing as well as informal operation of a number of entertainment houses. General consensus suggested that such activities, which led to the severe 'deterioration' of the neighbourhood, started after the 1990s when local authorities banned the formal operation of entertainment houses, and the majority, who were employed within the sector, lost their jobs consequently. In the absence of regular incomes, committing crime, or engaging in informal businesses constituted the only option for certain groups to be able to make a living. In Bilal's words:

People were making a decent living in entertainment houses and the entire sector around it only until Hortum Süleyman came up with the ban. From the musicians to the tea-makers serving at the door, everybody earned decent money within this system. It was only after they criminalized the entertainment houses that many people were left unemployed and thus prostitution and drug dealings took-off. There was none of this at earlier times.

Cemil added that crime somehow became an established business as "outsiders started to join in", leading to the corruption of the entire entertainment industry. It was due to this turn in events that Sulukule also attained a negative image in the public eye -with the helping hand of mainstream media- which the residents were highly aware of. Some of the informants reported that they tended not to reveal where they lived to colleagues at work, or employers during job interviews. For example, prior to our interview, Hüsnü asked for his real name not to be disclosed since he did not want his colleagues to learn from any potential sources that he was living in Sulukule. Necmi explained this tendency through a personal experience:

You pass by a house and someone asks you, shouting, if you are 'in search of girls'. Guess what happens when all these things appear on television? To give you an idea, the trader who made a deal with me asked if that's my neighbourhood! How can I possibly tell him that I live right in the middle of it?! I basically lied and told him that I live in Kariye because I knew I would not get the next deal if he knew the truth. He said, "Oh god, how do people live in such filth I don't understand". Now tell me if you would do the same as I did, or not?²

Similar to the case of community leaders, residents did not officially learn about the project until property owners received letters from the FM regarding the negotiation processes to start. This confirmed one of the major arguments of SA with respect to residents not having been involved in the project development process.³ Prior to the arrival of official news, however, rumours regarding the renewal project were already circulating and causing anxieties particularly among property owners. İsmet was one of those who went up to the FM upon rumours and demanded detailed information before the arrival of a letter. He said that following his negative reaction to the project, the first thing he was told by officers was that the project would 'help triple the value of his properties':

They told me that demolitions would take place for the initiation of the project and of course, I reacted badly. I told them that this was all I had and also that I get by with the rents I collect from my tenants. But then they told me that the project would enhance the value of our properties, instantly, and that we would be given spaces from the project area in return of what we have. That did relieve me, I must say; in fact that's how I ended up negotiating with the FM later.

As mentioned earlier, what actually hinted at the presence of the project was a survey held in 2006, which later was used to identify the 'right holders' who could access certain compensations in due course. Informants, however, unanimously claim that they were never told what the purpose of the survey was. Başak was only told that this was required information since "[the FM] would strengthen the infrastructure against the earthquake risk, but no word of demolitions was uttered." When it came to the reflection of residents on the potential motives of the project, two matters complementing each other came forward: The image of Sulukule as an urban wasteland in the public-eye, and the growing awareness that

² A good number of informants also pointed out that in their view crime was everywhere in the city and that they did not feel as threatened by illegal activities ongoing in the neighbourhood as much as they did by the negative image of the neighbourhood. They asserted that security had never been an issue for them "even if they knew their neighbour was a drug dealer", as Gökhan put it, since they were the insiders of the neighbourhood: "We were living with people who were maybe drug dealers, but they were also good neighbours. We did not have anything to do with each other's business." Gülizar also noted that drugs were commonly available throughout Sulukule.

³ There were also extreme cases like Gülizar, who didn't know about the project until demolitions started. What lies behind these extreme cases is inconsistencies in the distribution of information by FM.

Sulukule bore significant rent potential due to its location. In other words, the informants were predominantly of the view that the FM aimed to transform Sulukule from 'an inner-city slum' into 'a luxurious neighbourhood' in order to boost the real-estate value of the area.

In Kader's view, the image of Sulukule as an urban wasteland was not coincidental since the neighbourhood had started 'deteriorating' particularly after the demolitions of 1957, followed by the arrival of 'outsiders' in the 1960s. According to the majority of informants, migrants arriving in this period were responsible for the corruption of entertainment houses, which led both to their closure in the 1990s and the perception of the area as a crime and prostitution zone. Hüsni, who was 65 at the time of this interview, remembered the entertainment houses prior to this downfall as 'humble' places that transformed Sulukule style entertainment into a 'signature'. On a similar note, Gülizar who used to work in these houses during the late 1950s told that the clientele was 'classy', including the bureaucrats, artists, politicians and the intellectuals of the time.⁴ This, however, came to an end when 'outsiders' in search of money arrived into the neighbourhood following the first demolitions and the mode of entertainment started to get 'spoiled' in her words:

There was live music, singing and dancing. I was 14 then. While the guests would eat and drink, we would sing and dance. The clientele was not only male, there were ladies as well. After the show everybody would go home - my mum used to pick me up- there was no waiting. But then the 'waits' came in: New girls started to 'wait' outside the main door after the show to get 'picked up' and that meant the end of entertainment as we knew it.

It is due to the negative image of Sulukule born out of this transformation, combined with the criminalization and informalization of the entertainment sector in the post-1990s that the residents believed Sulukule became the target of a large-scale cleansing operation via the renewal project. What accompanied this motive, in their view, was also the rising importance of the area within the context of larger plans envisioned for Istanbul. Residents were aware of the fact that Sulukule is located in a very central area and that all central parts of Istanbul have increasingly become subject to transformative processes on the grounds of recent urban policies. Thus, the common belief was that the authorities aimed to turn Sulukule into an area that could generate 'wealth' with the aid of a renewal project.

⁴ During the interview Gülizar also talked about Şükrü's and his family's long lasting background within the entertainment sector of Sulukule.

Hüsnü's comments were expressive of this opinion, stating that "the FM [was] trying to buy the land off for 1 lira and sell it for 500." İsmet agreed with this statement and further argued that the plans drafted for the area were highly reflective of this urge:

The FM announced that the reason why they were sending people off to Taşoluk units rested on the fact that there is no space for social housing in Sulukule. Well, if you choose to build 50-65 square meter flats instead of 180 square meter condos you can create that space. Besides, we know that they have increased the number of villas to be built. The problem is that they want to make the most of the urban rent that will become available here; constructing social housing units in an 'up-and-coming' area is not the way to secure that. That's why the project is in the shape it is.

Cemil said that at the bottom line, all reasons behind the clearance of Sulukule applied to all renewal zones within the current logic of large-scale transformation in Istanbul. He was convinced that one by one all informal housing and inner-city poverty areas would go through this: "They are trying to get rid of all sorts of 'filth'. It's not just Sulukule. We are keeping on hearing of so many places being declared renewal zones and they are all either informal housing zones, or inner-city slums. It's not a coincidence. They will not leave a single neighbourhood of these profiles untouched."

7.2. Shuffling Places: Reorienting the Self Within the Context of Renewal

This section provides an overview of how property owners and tenants were influenced by the process of renewal and how they chose to act within the context of options that became available to them as a result of myriad dynamics emanating from the scheme at work. Regarding that there are two distinct pathways designated for property owners and tenants, experiences of each group have been evaluated in two separate categories.

One of the most outstanding observations that emerged from this analysis has to do with long-term sustainability of the gains from the renewal project. Although renewal might have extended certain gains to certain groups, the majority of these gains were short lived -whether the recipients might be property owners, or tenants- and satisfaction coming from gains were easily replaced by concerns for the future to a substantial degree. These concerns were also valid for those who were still enjoying the gains they accessed at the time of interviews.

7.2.1. Comprehending the 'Essence of Urban Land': The Case of Property Owners

Property owners that constitute 48% of Sulukule were considered as the 'lucky ones' from the start, not only because they represented the relatively better-off segment of the neighbourhood but also because they were the only ones who could, one way or another, secure the most substantial gains from the process of renewal. These gains, as explained earlier, could either be in the form of monetary compensations in exchange of the transfer of ownership to FM, or the acquisition of new properties from the renewal zone on the grounds of conditions defined by FM. In either case, unlike tenants, they were the only ones who had the solid option of claiming space in Sulukule following the completion of the project in return of what they owned.

Among the 13 residents whose testimonies have been under the focus of this chapter, six of them represent the resident owners and the analysis here is based on their accounts. Information gathered has revealed that the owners' experiences cannot be confined to two options only - that is, either negotiating with the FM or not. The combined effects of the economic conditions of owners; the offers they received in return of their properties; the stance FM took during the negotiation processes, and the emergence of 'third parties' in search of valuable land in the project site have all led to various situations which in some cases served the interests of, and in some other cases created more economic challenges than gains for owners.

As explained earlier, the negotiation process for property owners started when FM sent out invitations for one-on-one talks over what could be offered for the property. The value of each property was calculated by a commission -represented by the members of project initiators- and these values were based upon pre-project real estate conditions rather than post-project. This meant that the effect of the emergent boom in property values was not reflected in the offers made by the FM: If the owners opted for getting new properties from the renewal zone, the rent gap between the former and future properties often equalled to a significant amount since the worth of new properties were based on speculative increases in real-estate values. The payment period for this debt was fifteen years, meaning

that the total amount that needed to be paid was divided into 180 installments on a monthly basis.

Findings reveal, overall, that four of the six resident owners negotiated with FM under varying conditions: While Kader and Erman opted for getting new properties from the project site, Ertan and İsmet both sold their properties to third parties and negotiated with FM for new properties.⁵ However, almost all owners were of the view that estimated values provided by FM for their properties were well below their expectations. This meant that they needed to pay enormous amounts of debt within the coming 15 years in order to be able to claim the ownership of their new properties. Negotiating despite such major dissatisfactions, or concerns was explained with the claim that it was not possible to resist pressures coming from local authorities, which in some cases were addressed as 'threats'.

Findings also reveal that three of the four owners -Kader, Erman and Izzet - became tenants in other properties following the negotiations until the finalization of the project and the completion of their new dwellings; Bilal, that is one of the remaining two owners who sold his property to a third party without negotiating with FM for a new property also became a tenant in Güngören. All of the four expressed their worries over the economic challenges of having become tenants. The remaining owner, that is Ertan, is probably the luckiest among all informants (including tenants), whose story reveals how the speculative effects of the project have created a dubious climate in which property owners can secure other gains than those presented by the local municipality, as will be explained later.

Widespread dissatisfaction regarding the offers made by FM is based on two reasons: First of all, owners claimed that FM minimized the sizes of properties on paper and justified this reduction on the basis of technicalities.⁶ Secondly, as stated earlier, owners were aware of the speculative impact of renewal in

⁵ One of the remaining two owners negotiated with a third party only and the other was unwilling to negotiate, waiting for the expropriation process to start at the time of interview.

⁶ Kader told that although her flat was more than 100 square meters, FM claimed it to be 80 square meters on the letter of offer. "They don't count the balcony, the stair shaft, or the ventilation shaft", she said; "However, our title deed *did* confirm that our flat was more than 100 square meters." Upon Kader's objection a group of surveyors paid a visit to her address and "decided that it was 83 square meters without even going into the building."

Sulukule and they were of the view that they should had been paid more for their properties.⁷ Being able to access only minimal values due to these reasons had at least two worrying consequences for this group. First, as explained earlier, the rent gap between the former and future properties would widen and the owners would be obliged to pay huge amounts of debt in the long run to be able to claim ownership. For example, whereas the value estimated for two flats İsmet owned (120 square meters in total) was 120.000 TL, the value of new flats he was offered (372 square meters in total) was 440.000 TL. This meant that he was expected to pay a debt of 280.000 TL within a period of 15 years – corresponding to 1500 TL per month approximately.⁸ Secondly, those property owners who only accepted to get monetary compensations found it difficult to buy new properties elsewhere in the city. Bilal is one of those:

FM offered 65.000 for my 110 square meter house, which I was not pleased with, so I ended up selling it to an investor [i.e a third party] for 127.500 TL. This money was not enough to buy a house elsewhere so I also got credit from a bank and managed to buy a flat in Gungoren. However, I could not make the required payments for the credit. I sold the flat, paid my debt without it getting too overwhelming and now I am a tenant in Gungoren - paying a rent of 550 TL per month. So I am not only in a tight situation now but also I am no longer a property owner.

'Loss of ownership' was not only valid for such cases like Bilal's but also for property owners who negotiated with FM for new properties and become tenants elsewhere until new residences would be complete. Kader is one of those who resented that she suddenly turned into a tenant in debt although, in theory, she was still a property owner. It is true that in the aftermath of negotiations, whereby property owners exchanged their existing properties with prospective ones, many became tenants who had to pay both rents for their current residences and monthly installments for their future properties. When the project was announced, one of the initial promises of FM was to provide property owners in such situations with rent support; however, none of the informants who had become tenants during the time of interviews were receiving such support. Kader told that

⁷ Although Erman negotiated with the FM in return of a new property, he put that "the value estimated for [his] property was too low since Sulukule [was] now becoming the centre of not only Istanbul but also of Turkey due to this project." Hüsnü, on the other hand, decided to go for expropriation by refusing the 139.000 TL offer made for his 200 square meter house by the FM since "what was offered by the FM [was] not the worth of his house, regarding that the municipality [was] now making trillions out of the area."

⁸ Another example is Erman who was offered a flat of 130 square meters at the price of 170.000 TL in return of a house of 100 square meters valued at 56.000 TL. The total amount of debt thus corresponds to 110.000 TL approximately to be paid, again, within 15 years. Erman also owned a flat and the coming paragraph will reveal the kind of settlement he opted for it.

although she could easily live on her monthly earnings previously, this became a challenge after becoming a tenant since her monthly expenses increased significantly. “It has been three months that we have become tenants and it’s already tight. As long as we pay the rent, it seems we will not be able to pay the electricity and water bills”, she said.⁹ In this sense, negotiating with the municipality was a procedure that needed to be ‘afforded’.

It is under the pressing circumstances of renewal -as presented in the cases of Bilal and Kader- that some other exchange mechanisms emerged, providing property owners with additional opportunities: Those who could not ‘afford’ to negotiate with the FM due to above stated reasons and found the monetary compensations unsatisfactory chose to sell their properties to third parties who were interested in purchasing plots from the renewal area via mediators.¹⁰ What made the offers of third parties advantageous was that they were reflective of the speculative rises in property values around Sulukule, and hence, fairly higher than offers made by FM. Parallel to the case of Bilal, Erman who owned a house and a flat of 55-60 square meters preferred to sell the flat to a third party for 135.000 TL rather than settling for the offer of FM at 38.000 TL.¹¹ It can thus be argued that due to this set of constellations, property owners could sell their properties in return for fulfilling offers without having to get into debts for new properties, and instead, try to buy properties elsewhere. Moreover, some owners coupled the benefits of this mechanism with the opportunities presented by FM: Apart from Erman, who negotiated with FM for the house he owned, Ertan sold his house to a third party at a ‘good price’ and bought a house *and* a shop from the renewal area in order to be able to negotiate with FM for new properties.

Three reasons seem to come forth that explain the owners’ willingness to negotiate with FM, or shake hands with third parties. The first one has to do with the overall economic conditions of both the neighbourhood and owners: Being in the possession of properties within a socio-economically challenged area, owners in

⁹ The monthly income of Kader was between 800–1000 TL and the monthly rent she needed to pay was 400 TL. Moreover, she was indebted to FM by 53.000 TL for the coming 15 years, which meant that she would have to pay an additional amount of 300 TL approximately.

¹⁰ Interviews with residents, overall, have revealed that those who sold properties to third parties have almost never met the actual buyers and instead dealt with the entire procedure via mediators based in the neighbourhood. More on who these mediators were will be explained in the coming section.

¹¹ Kader also told that she had found a third party, willing to buy her flat at 140.000 TL; however it had been too late since she had already negotiated with FM.

Sulukule were not as advantageous as other owners in the relatively better off areas of Istanbul. Reflections of property owners who either negotiated with FM, or third parties indicate that what shaped their decision were the appealing offers they received in return for their properties.¹² It can thus be suggested that owners had become extremely aware of the emergent rent value of Sulukule and the impact of this boom on their properties. Such extreme cases like that of Ertan, who first sold his properties to a third party and then bought others from the project site to be able to negotiate with FM for future properties, confirm the heightened sense of investment prevalent among owners to a great extent.¹³ Aware that their properties were worth little value in real-estate markets, owners were keen to enjoy this emergent ‘opportunity’ since they also believed that the project “[was there] to be implemented without the slightest possibility of being terminated” as Bilal put it. Erman’s comment is worth mentioning at this point since he suggested that it was due to this project that he got to comprehend ‘the essence of urban land’ as he put it: “They used to say that the stone and earth of Istanbul is made of gold but it does not always work like that. Sometimes you need to wait for what you have to turn into gold.”¹⁴

The second reason related to pressures exerted by FM during the process of negotiations. A good number of owners among the informants stated that they were openly ‘threatened’ by public authorities with the act of expropriation when they raised objections to the offers they were extended, either on the grounds of dissatisfactions, or unfairness. Kader, for example, faced such treatment when she objected to the fact that her property’s size was minimized by FM on paper:

I was never for the demolition of my property; we were ready to resist as a family but they told us that if we attempted to take the issue to the court, it would last many years. We made requests for readjustments to the floor size and reported that we were not keen to

¹² This even applied for those who were initially not happy with the offers made by the FM but nevertheless ended up negotiating such as Erman. As noted earlier, he had negotiated with FM in return of a new property although he thought the value estimated for his former property was very low.

¹³ There are also some other cases, as shown in the table, whereby owners with multiple properties have both negotiated with the FM and shaken hands with third parties.

¹⁴ This was also the reason why some of the owners who initially objected to the project gave in after a certain period of time. İsmet is one of those who put that he was critical of the project “since [it would] cause severe harms on the lives of most deprived groups in the community” but added that “it was difficult to resist to the positive impacts of the project on his properties”: “At this stage, all I want is to see the start of demolitions as soon as possible so that we can make some money”, he said.

carry on with anything before this was resolved. In response, we were openly told that we would lose all our rights to our property if we took a route as such.

Similar stories told by many others in particular forms confirmed that a good number of property owners agreed to either negotiate with FM, or third parties, solely because they could not challenge the threats and pressures they were exposed to. This was also related with the residents' perception of stately authority and their relationship to it as seen in Ertan's account:

I was not keen on giving my properties away but I still went to FM to see what the mayor had to say. I could not even find the space to talk back. You know, his authority comes from a higher ground, the state, so he talks with that sort of confidence. In essence, we were told that it did not matter whether we wanted to negotiate or not, that they would open some bank accounts in the state bank and put the worth of expropriations in those accounts. He said, "you take or leave it; doesn't matter for us."

İsmet states that an additional element to how residents felt in the face of an approach as such was the 'ignorance' of the community at large and the ability of public authorities to manipulate it. "At the end of the day, we are illiterate people, we don't have the tools to fight against this sort of pressure and they know it", he said; "I told them that I was not willing to sell my properties and that I'd take the issue to the court. The response was 'don't hesitate, the state has a lot of money to spend to be able to do whatever it wants.' I thought 'who am I dancing with?', got scared and just shook hands with them." In İsmet's view, this was one of the primary elements that got in the way of owners in joining any collective struggle.

The third reason seems to be an observed desire to get out of the neighbourhood due to negative views held of it.¹⁵ Although owners could actually afford to move elsewhere to a certain degree, such factors as family ties and work relations had been obstacles to taking such initiatives. Thus, some of the owners saw the renewal project as an opportunity and chose to negotiate either with FM, or investors to make their way out of the neighbourhood. "I had been wanting to move out for years but I was both lacking the required security nets and tied up with the neighborhood due to various reasons. This was a once in a life time opportunity and I took my chance", said Erman. These sorts of sentiments were particularly valid for residents with kids: Observed concerns suggested that the

¹⁵ Negative views held must be understood as the resident's personal concerns about the uncanny atmosphere in the neighbourhood due to criminal activities and also the judgments of outsiders on Sulukule, which had rather stigmatizing effects on the residents.

'negative' circumstances of Sulukule could 'threaten' the future of youngsters. "I have four kids", said Bilal; "I am always worried that they will either make bad friends, or start using drugs. It's not because I don't trust them, it is because the environment in the neighbourhood is bad".¹⁶ There was also widespread conviction that low levels of education in the neighbourhood had direct links with the negative influence of Sulukule on kids. Erman reflected on this situation as follows:

The kids were unable to attend school properly. The level of education will tell you that easily. I was born in 1968 and I only managed to go to school at the age of nine. I graduated from a vocational school. Why do you think it happened this way? Because of the environment. We had moved out of the neighbourhood for a while when I was a kid, as a family, and that's how it became possible. I know that if I tried to raise my kids here they would end up facing my fate, perhaps in a different scenario. I didn't want that.

In the presence of options available –regardless of the limitations and pressures accompanying them- property owners were aware that there were not many people in the neighbourhood who were as 'lucky' as they were. Thus, they were equally aware that the project would influence the lives of the majority in a negative way. Bilal said, "Those who could afford negotiations in return of new spots was not more than 10%, which meant that only a selective group could secure the option of staying in the neighbourhood. The rest, which is the majority, is currently struggling badly." For these reasons, owners were predominantly of the view that the project had not done any good to the community of Sulukule, or even if it might have, this only applied to a small minority. "Maybe I was not one of those to worry but the majority, that is the tenants, the most deprived group in the neighbourhood, became subject to extreme mistreatment because of the project", said İsmet. What is more, as Ertan openly told, there was the widespread view that even if people would be able to access certain gains, there was a possibility that these gains would only be short-lived and thus the project would fail to achieve such long-term and permanent goals as improving the living standards of a community, suffering from various social and economic circumstances. In his words:

Yes, people are selling their properties, or finding ways of creating some sort of benefits out of this whole process but how long do you think the advantages of these rather

¹⁶ Kader does not have kids but tells that, "The kids replicate what the elders do in the neighbourhood. It is not rare that we see kids with plastic guns in their hands, pretending to shoot others. You should not forget that when their fathers drink, the next day it's the kids who go and deposit those bottles."

monetary gains will last? Three years? Five years? Soon that money will be gone and people will be going back to the conditions they used to live in – those who were committing crime will do it again, or those who were poor will go back to poverty.

In other words, the individual satisfactions of property owners did not necessarily translate into a more general satisfaction when it came to the returns of the project for the community. To the contrary, there was notable belief that promises of the project at the time did not bring about sustainable results since they had only boiled down to monetary returns. Moreover, the ephemerality of benefits was a matter of concern also for property owners who negotiated with the municipality and would end up becoming homeowners in Sulukule. Kader is one of those who believed that she would not be able to afford living in Sulukule since the costs of living in the area would be beyond what she could afford. She told that she was planning to sell her property once she managed to claim the ownership of the new property. In fact, a similar concern was shared by Bilal who chose not to negotiate with FM and instead shook hands with a third party. “How could I both get indebted to FM and also become a tenant? And what about later, when I started living there? There was no way I could afford all this”, he said.

For all these reasons, İsmet told that he would only consider himself as a winner within the context of the project if he could both afford to live as a tenant and manage to pay his debts to be able to get his new residence in the project area. “If they keep up with the calendar and deadlines they announced, this is good news. If not, I will no longer be a winner”, he said.

7.2.2. “We Were Only Pushed Aside”: The Story of Tenants

Contrary to property owners, tenants who constituted 42% of the population represented the most vulnerable of Sulukule since they were both the poorest and most insecure groups in terms of housing. According to the scheme at work, tenants were being removed from the neighbourhood without the security of in situ relocation and, instead, provided with the only option of being transferred to state-subsidized social housing units in Taşoluk, 45 km to the north of Sulukule. Since they would have to make certain payments for these units, they were not only being forced out of their familiar surroundings (both in physical and social terms) but also loaded with financial burdens in the absence of relevant capacities.

Among the 13 residents who were interviewed in Sulukule, 7 of them represent the tenants. Data collected revealed that majority of these tenants took up the option of moving to Taşoluk units due to the unavailability of other options and in the face of potential homelessness.¹⁷ However, data also showed that consequences of this option have been diverse: A small minority relocated to Taşoluk and settled down despite challenges. The majority, however, sold their units at varying rates - but mostly below market prices. Among this majority, some sold their units upon relocating to Taşoluk and suffering from severe economic problems, unemployment, isolation and the dissolution of solidarity networks; others, on the other hand, sold their units without even moving to Taşoluk, or seeing the units, due to the fear of not being able to pay the required installments in the future. Following this category are those who could not even gain access to Taşoluk units despite sustained efforts. Those who left, or never went to Taşoluk took shelter in their relatives' homes elsewhere, relocated to other parts of the city, or moved to the neighbouring parts of the project site at higher rent costs. Groups who never accessed housing in Taşoluk followed this second strategy as well, although those who were most vulnerable only managed to take shelter in houses that were awaiting demolition.

As explained earlier, tenants were given immediate access to MHA built and state-subsidized Taşoluk units if they satisfied the conditions of being a 'right holder'.¹⁸ According to this, only those tenants who were registered as 'tenants' during the survey held in 2005 by officials, or those who could prove their tenancy with official papers (i.e. contracts, utility bills, or equivalents) would be allowed to benefit from the scheme. Once eligible, tenants would be expected to make regular payments within a span of fifteen years - divided into 180 installments- to be able to claim the ownership of their respective units. Value of flats would depend on the size, the cheapest requiring a monthly payment of 250 TL and the maximum 450 TL at the time - excluding bills. In such cases whereby the appropriator of a flat would fail to pay the installments in three consecutive months, s/he would both be legally penalized and removed from the scheme -meaning that they would become

¹⁷ This does not only apply to the 13 residents whose accounts will be covered here, but also to more than 300 families who were offered housing within the context of the scheme.

¹⁸ The detail of 'immediate' access is quite important here since those who would want to benefit from MHA housing under normal conditions would have to go through certain procedures that would place them on waiting lists. For the tenants in Sulukule, however, this procedure was lifted in order to encourage tenants to register for Taşoluk units. .

homeless. Those who were not be eligible would have to relocate elsewhere within their own capacity.

Findings reveal that among the 7 tenants interviewed, only Gönül and Oğuz were still living in Taşoluk. Whereas Gönül was on the brink of selling the flat and returning to the surroundings of Sulukule due to adaptation problems at many levels, Oğuz was determined to stay despite 'minor difficulties' as he put it. Başak is the only one who moved to Taşoluk and then relocated to another part of the city (without selling her flat and keeping on failing to pay the installments), next to relatives. Cemil and Gökhan represent those who gained access to Taşoluk units and sold them without even seeing with the fear of not being able to make the required payments in the future. The gap between the values at which they sold their flats is immense, as it will later be demonstrated, and both used mediators to be able to liquidize their properties. Gülizar and Necmi, on the other hand, represent those who could not gain immediate access to housing in Taşoluk at the time of interview and were waiting for the procedures to bring results. Whereas Necmi had been able to rent a flat in Karagümruk in the meantime at regular market values, Gülizar was taking shelter in a house that was soon to get demolished.

Cemil said that when he first heard about the project he was "fearful of the consequences of it" as a tenant. Cemil was not the only one who was concerned since tenants, in general, had become quickly aware of the fact that property owners were in a much more advantageous position compared to them within the framework of the project. This awareness thus led to visible resentment among tenants over the reinforcement of existing inequalities within the community through the project. Gülizar's words express this resentment remarkably:

Let's get real, the property owners did just fine: They made a lot of money! Some bought cars, some organized big weddings, some bought jewelery etc. They had the circumstances to choose from a variety of options - they could get a new place from the project area, sell it to third parties, in short make money out of what they already had some way round. What about us though? We were only pushed aside.

Introduction of the 'right to access' state-subsidized Taşoluk units, thus, brought a certain degree of optimism since tenants were presented with the opportunity 'to become homeowners by paying small installments' as it was put by the officials. Alongside the fact that this was the only option provided for tenants, the big appeal

here was the promise of homeownership at affordable rates and thus the opportunity was welcomed by many, despite skepticism. Cemil told that he was glad to hear, at the time, that they would be offered housing. “We could get either two or three bedroom flats, depending on what we could afford”, he says; “I went for a two bedroom as I was worried that I would not be able to afford anything bigger than that.”

However, the procedure to access Taşoluk units required tenants to attain a ‘right holder’ status, as stated earlier. That is, all tenants who did not happen to be present at their home address during the time of survey, provided misinformation due to various reasons, or did not hold any official papers despite paying regular rents were automatically excluded from the scheme. Thus, in an area where owners tenant relationships were predominantly established upon informal networks, the achievement of ‘right holder’ status became a challenge for a significant portion of the tenant population.¹⁹ Cemil was a member of the ‘luckier’ group: “At the time of survey I was not at home but my father was”, he said; “He put my name down in the list without having any idea of what he was doing and that is how I became a right holder.”

A story from the opposite end belongs to Necmi who could not become a right holder since he was not at home on the day of survey. At the time of this interview, he had relocated to a flat in Karagümrük –where he paid five times more rent than his previous place- and was still fighting for his right to access Taşoluk units in the absence of a tenancy agreement but utility bills. Similarly, Gülizar was not present at her address during the survey: “I was out, working, and so were my sons”, she said. Moreover, since she was not contacted by FM to notify her of a visit as such, she only got to know about the process at work when she received an eviction letter. At the time of this interview, she had handed the relevant documents to FM with the support of SP and was waiting for the results of the process.²⁰ Meanwhile, the house in which she lived as a tenant had been demolished and she had taken shelter in another which was also waiting to get demolished. Although Gülizar

¹⁹ The challenge applied particularly for residents who used electricity and water illegally. The combined absence of tenancy agreement and utility bills thus made it extremely difficult to claim ‘right holder’ status for this group since they did not hold any documents which proved their residency in the neighbourhood. One of the major tasks of SP was to give support to this particular group.

²⁰ For Gülizar was illiterate, she relied heavily on the support she received from SP.

knew neither about the required costs of Taşoluk units, nor about the location of Taşoluk, she said that she would move there despite potential hardships once she earned her right holder status since the only other option she had was homelessness:

I am assuming that the rent costs in Taşoluk won't be much since it's only the poorest ones who are left out (...) My only income is my pension and support from my son who is a street vendor. You see, I don't have a place to live; simple as that. Currently I am sitting here with no water, or electricity. How could I keep on living like this? They say Taşoluk is far, I'll take the train. They say it's expensive; well, it is still better than 500-600 TL I will have to pay if I end up staying in the surroundings of Sulukule. I can't possibly afford anything that will be more expensive than Taşoluk units, I don't even have the money to buy furniture. So I am bound to taking my chances to gain access to them. I don't have any other options; I am bound to living wherever they tell me to live.

More than anything, Taşoluk units stood for 'places of hope' for many not only because they constituted the only available option extended to them by public authorities –although not without costs- but also due to their physical standards especially compared to their former homes. Başak told that she enjoyed settling in for the first few weeks since she “had never seen a place like that before. The bathroom, the kitchen, the entire flat was just beautiful”. What made the units particularly appealing, however, was the fact that they came together with a promise of homeownership. Oğuz told that although he was critical of the project envisaged for Sulukule, he was also happy that he had “come close to being a homeowner at the age of forty.” Here, however, 'homeownership' must be understood as a title that does not only earn the tenants with the possession of a home, but perhaps more important than that, the possession of a financial asset that did not exist before. In Oğuz's words:

May God protect, this is all I own now if you know what I mean. When you own something like this, it grants you with a degree of power to do, or say as you wish. I ask myself, “Oğuz, have you ever had something like this at hand before?” No. So now that I am granted with an opportunity like this, my responsibility is to make sure that I make the most of it - I have kids you know. Maybe in two years, living in Taşoluk will be a burden for me; then I can as well sell my unit. I can do whatever I may wish.

Due to the combination of these factors, Taşoluk units signified better living standards and a step forward in the social and economic hierarchy, especially for families with children.²¹ However, the accounts of those who gained access to the

²¹ Necmi, who was trying to gain access to Taşoluk units at the time of this interview, had seen the units when his brother, Fırat, was granted with one. Although Fırat sold his unit in a short while, Necmi said that his advice was the opposite: “The flats are big, spacious and clean. All you need to do is to put your furniture in! (...) If the financial burden becomes too much you can always sell it in the future for a good value but if I were him I'd try to stay (...) Do you know why? I have two kids,

units have proven that living in Taşoluk was not an easy task: Overall judgment of tenants -who both made attempts to relocate to Taşoluk and those who could not- is that, however appealing the units were in theory, relocating tenants with irregular financial resources to Taşoluk was an unsustainable solution due to fundamental drawbacks. Among these, affordability, infrastructural deprivations and isolation appear to be the leading problems.

Affordability constituted the main problem for many who either moved back from Taşoluk to the neighbouring parts of Sulukule, or those who sold their units without even moving to Taşoluk. As surveys held by SP in the neighbourhood also revealed, the majority of tenants were deprived of steady incomes, or sufficient financial resources. This crucial fact made it difficult for a substantial segment of families to make regular payments both for installments and the monthly expenses of living in formal units, rendering the housing scheme designed for tenants an unrealistic one for the majority. Oğuz told that the contracts signed *did* signal the potential costs of living in Taşoluk; however, he also added that “it [was] not easy to detect those signals, particularly for those who are not literate” and also that “some issues were never uttered by the FM, or other authorities”.²² He gave the experience of a neighbor of his as an example:

Ali has a family of ten – his parents and in-laws live with them as well. He was previously a tenant in a moderately big unit in Sulukule but when he relocated here he was given a two bedroom flat. He sells t-shirts and what not out on the streets, so he doesn't have a regular income. I, as someone who has regular income, am coping with all the things that I need to afford here; imagine him. I heard that he started to get indebted to the local markets here to be able to bring home food. It hasn't even been six months since they moved.

A first hand experience along similar lines came from the newly wed Gönül, who had been living in Taşoluk for three months but was thinking of moving-out if a buyer emerged. She put that if it was just the installments that needed to be afforded they could cope but she explained that the main difficulty for them were the monthly utility bills and transport “which [they] were not used to paying for

they are very smart. They pick everything like that. In Sulukule, the boy learnt to talk dirty at the age of five. Now that we had to relocate -although forcefully- he has changed. No matter how difficult life might be at the moment for me, I am glad that they live in a better environment where they will become better people. Compared to Karagümruk, Taşoluk would be much more affordable, so I'd want to take my chance there.”

²² Those issues that were not uttered include the bulky deposits that were required for the installment of water and heating supplies. Many tenants had learnt about these procedures after moving in to Taşoluk and had opted for not subscribing for gas, which left them without heating. Electric heaters were distributed by the NHSA for this purpose.

before”. Gökhan explains that this was exactly the reason why he did not attempt to move to Taşoluk although he had managed to access a unit: “Gas for the heating, water, electricity... I was simply scared that I would never be able to pay any of these –let aside the installments- so I decided that selling it right away was the best option, no matter how deprived I was of other options.” Necmi’s brother Firat confirmed that he was put-off by the fact that he was asked to pay for too many things well before moving in and that he felt “[he] could not rely on [his] unsteady earnings in trying to afford all these expenses.”

Another big challenge for tenants was the unavailability of job opportunities and other infrastructural essentials around Taşoluk, such as hospitals, transport links and schools. This meant that tenants were not only relocated to an area from which they would face difficulties in accessing their centrally located jobs and social networks, but also they would encounter severe problems if they intended to search for their substitutes around Taşoluk. That is, while the scheme extended housing to an economically fragile population, it simultaneously tore them apart from their most vital resources, which aided them in surviving the many challenges of urban living. As Gökhan put it:

It doesn’t matter if they are giving me a house for 200 TL a month. What are we going to do about the fact that my sons and I work in the city centre? This is not a sustainable plan because they are kicking us 45 kilometers away from where we make a living! This is not to my advantage at all, I have to eat and feed my family. If I need to travel everyday back and forth between Taşoluk and Fatih then I will be unable to do that, let alone paying the bills and the rent!²³

As noted above, scarcities were not limited to job opportunities but also included such amenities as education and health care. Gökhan drew attention to the unavailability of hospitals and said, “if my child suddenly got sick, there would be no hospitals to take him to within the vicinity of the housing area, and more important than that, I would not have the money to take him to another one at a distance.” Having lived in Taşoluk for three months, Başak told that “one would

²³ Unaffordability of Taşoluk units by tenants and the infrastructural shortages of Taşoluk were matters, also acknowledged by property owners. Ertan supported Gökhan’s view by asserting that, “tenants tend to sell their units there because there are no job opportunities. Previously people could just walk to the main street and try to sell their products out on the pavement. Being in Taşoluk means having to travel, which is unaffordable to many. I am not even mentioning such expenditures as water, electricity etc. the question is, how is it possible for state authorities not to consider any of these fundamental issues?”

become deprived of the simplest things s/he could formerly access at ease. No shops, no markets, no nothing. That is, the lure of the units fades away once you experience the absence of so many things that were previously present.” According to Necmi, these were some of the fundamental matters which encouraged people to sell their Taşoluk units and move back to the surroundings of Sulukule: “People choose to pay 500 TL and bills for a unit in Karagümrük, the centre of life as they knew it, over paying 250 TL and bills for a unit in the middle of nowhere because the former is of better value.” In other words, Taşoluk fell severely short of compensating for what the centrality of Sulukule catered for tenants.

What added to the underdevelopment of essential infrastructures was the distance at which Taşoluk is located and the difficulties encountered in reaching the city centre in the absence of public transport links. This was particularly a problem for those who had regular jobs in central areas. These groups were highly dependent on the shuttle services operated by FM between Sulukule and Taşoluk, as noted earlier, which left Taşoluk at 7.00 am in the morning and left Sulukule at 8.00 pm in the evening since there were no other regular means of transport. Başak told that it was neither possible for her, nor her husband to make use of these services since timings did not match with their shifts:

My shift starts at 2 pm and finishes at 10 pm. Normally I would use the free shuttle service provided by the company that is hiring me to ease transport between my workplace and Sulukule, but during the two months when I tried to live in Taşoluk I could neither use that service, nor the shuttle bus operating between Sulukule and Taşoluk. After finishing at 10 pm, I could only make it home by midnight. Now that I have a small kid as well, it is beyond impossible to think of such scenario.

The isolation of Taşoluk from the centre constituted a problem also for those who earned their livelihoods by only taking a short walk from Sulukule to Fatih. Gökhan is one of those, together with his sons, who explained that “because [they] cannot afford public transport, [they] are highly dependent on travelling on foot for selling shirts around Fatih.” The non-affordable aspect of travelling to and from Taşoluk was also emphasized by Oğuz’s wife who put that she “[spent] most of her time at home not only because it takes a lot of time to travel but also because it would cost too much to do so.”²⁴ This situation was not only limited to the example of Oğuz’s

²⁴ Oğuz’s wife also emphasized that because they could not reach the city centre, they were also deprived of the options of shopping at bargain prices. All tenants who paid visits to Taşoluk

wife: Many of those who moved to Taşoluk would either stay there all the time due to difficulties in travelling to Sulukule, or spend very little time there and mostly stay next to their family members who still lived around Sulukule. During the interview, Gönül was trying to calculate how long it had been since she had taken the shuttle service to Sulukule to stay over at her parents’.

What added to the discomfort of living in isolation from Fatih and its centrality was the feeling of insecurity emanating from their exclusion by others living in Taşoluk.²⁵ Oğuz’s wife put that the way in which the settlement pattern was arranged in Taşoluk was quite telling of this exclusion: “It is like there is a separation between us and them.” Başak, on the other hand, mentioned the online forums where anti-Roma comments circulated upon the community’s arrival to Taşoluk:

These were platforms whereby other residents of Taşoluk were making such comments as “Oh, the Roma have moved here; now it’s show time!”. Other comments were also available, stating that there was a boundary between the upper and lower parts of Taşoluk and that we would not be allowed there. How can you cope with that?

According to Cemil, thus, part of the reason why some people left Taşoluk was not only about economic matters but also about the discrimination they faced: “People experienced another round of stigmatization this time outside their living environments. Women, especially, were automatically considered as belly dancers, or entertainers working for the industry although they were not, necessarily.”²⁶

Many tenants who could not cope with such challenges found the solution in trying to sell the units. At the beginning, however, this was not legally possible since the units were barred from sales. Thus, those who were most desperate sold the units to others in semi-legal ways for very cheap returns.²⁷ The bar on sales

remarked how expensive it was to shop from supermarkets there since their owners knew that they were the only few outlets within the vicinity of the housing area.

²⁵ Taşoluk, which houses approximately 1600 units, was also resided by lower middle class groups coming from Esenyurt, who benefited from the affordable housing schemes of the MHA.

²⁶ Necmi had also put that during a conversation with a resident of Taşoluk, coming from elsewhere, he was told: “We hope these gypsies sell their units as soon as possible, they don’t have a place in here.”

²⁷ According to this procedure, tenants would sell their ‘right to transfer ownership’ in the presence of a notary. This meant that the person selling the unit would still appear as the owner of the legal title although the person who purchased the ‘right to transfer ownership’ would be responsible for paying the required installments. Once the installments were cleared, the buyer would become the new owner.

was lifted six months following relocation due to the demands of NHSA, making it possible for tenants to sell their units at market prices. Under these changing circumstances, many people who sold their units at earlier stages found themselves at a loss. Gökhan is one of those who sold his unit for 5000 TL instead of a possible 25.000 TL since his deceased wife was a cancer patient, at the time, in need of treatment:

At the time when I decided that I wanted to sell my unit I found a buyer who was willing to pay 25.000 TL. However I was told by FM that I was not allowed to do that. I was also not allowed to rent it out (...) Thus I ended up selling my 'right to transfer ownership' since my wife needed an operation, urgently. I received a total of 5000 TL, which was all spent on the surgery. Then they lifted the bar but it was too late. If only I was allowed to sell my unit properly at the time, then at least I would receive 25.000 TL and have something to hold on to.

It is within this context that a precarious and competitive housing market emerged out of these semi-legal sales whereby the early sellers only secured minimal gains and the followers managed to access bigger sums. Cemil is one of those who made 22.000 TL out of the very same sales model that Gökhan used. It is also important to note that he sold his flat without even seeing it:

At the time I was being paid daily for my job, that is 30 TL per day. If I had relocated to Taşoluk I'd have to spend 10 TL of it for transport (...) My monthly earning was summing up to 900 TL whereas the costs of living in Taşoluk would be around 1.500 TL monthly (...) How could I ever pay for the installments, let alone, the monthly bills?! It occurred to me pretty soon that I would find myself in a mess if I ever attempted to live there and that's how I sold my right to ownership (...) We went to the bank, the notary was there, we signed the papers and all was done.

The majority of these sales took place via mediators, as explained earlier, whereby certain members of the community would link potential buyers with the owners of units in return of commissions. Cemil's case was no different since a mediator (who was also a friend) had arranged the sales for him as well. Cemil said, "I received 22.000 TL upon sales but I am guessing that he got something around 30.000 TL. We never talked about this but I don't mind since I sold my flat and got what I wanted." Although many adopted this strategy in disposing their flats, there were also others who could not trust the system due to its precarity. Başak is one of those who had not yet sold her unit at the time of this interview although she and her family had already moved out knowing that they would not be able to afford living there: "I know that it is not entirely legal to sell the flats so I am not selling it right now; I don't want extra trouble."

Liquidization of Taşoluk units did not necessarily produce sustainable results, as confirmed by the experiences of those who sold their ownership rights. Necmi told the story of an acquaintance who received 6000 TL and a car that was worth 6000 TL in return of his unit, only for the money to disappear in a short while: “He ended up selling the car for 5000 TL but how long could that amount sustain? Now he is staying next to a relative with his four kids and wife.” Those who had no other option than becoming tenants within the formal housing markets faced even more challenges: This did not only mean that higher rents needed to be paid compared to the past but also that such regular expenses as utility bills needed to be afforded. What is more, for those who settled in the surroundings of Sulukule, rents were at a steady climb due to the speculative impact of the renewal project. Necmi, who could not even access a unit to be liquidized from Taşoluk and ended up settling near the neighbourhood, gave his experience as an example:

The monthly rent of my old house was 100 TL. It had three rooms and a garden. Now I pay 500 TL and this month I received a gas bill of 200 TL. How am I supposed to pay for this? I decided to cut the gas connection and am thinking of using electric heaters during the winter. I even thought about going back to my old house until it would get demolished but I found out that someone else did it for the exact same reasons.

Some of those who were still living in Taşoluk but having difficulties in making the payments asserted that even if they would not have such problems, they would not want to live there due to the inherent drawbacks of Taşoluk, as listed above. Oğuz, who was considered to be among the ‘most comfortable’ living in Taşoluk stated that he could see himself moving out of Taşoluk in the future due to economic challenges:

I can feel that this will start pushing my limits at some point. The money just flows down the drain here, it is difficult to keep up with the expenses. It takes me ages till I get back home from work, and on top of that I keep using illegal cab services for transport. Our conditions do not allow for such spending in the long run. I spend more than half of my monthly salary on transport. If only we were provided with employment opportunities here, I would save that lot that I am currently spending but you know, they did not do that. It is quite likely that we will not last here for too long.

Thus, predominant view among tenants was that no one would stay in Taşoluk in the end – including those who were happy at the time.²⁸ During the time of interviews it had been three months that the residents were transferred to Taşoluk

²⁸ This view was also shared by the property owners. Bilal, one of those, told that his wife wanted to get a flat from Taşoluk after selling their property in the neighbourhood since all their close ones had relocated there; yet, Bilal put that he convinced her by stating that “everyone [would] eventually come back.”

and rumours were already in circulation regarding the number of people who were left there. Whereas Gökhan argued that this number was fifty families, Necmi was claiming it to be 35 families.²⁹ Departing from here, Necmi argued that “Taşoluk had already become a place where strangers lived.”

7.3. Mapping The Neighbourhood Associations on the Landscape of Urban Transformation: The Way Community Sees It

The almost unanimous view among informants was that NAs in Sulukule triggered decisive fragmentations within the community, defined by conflicts of interest among residents. Once the inevitability of transformation was accepted, both property owners and tenants of distinct social and economic capacities tended towards defining certain goals on the grounds of potential gains and expectations. Groups with diverse motivations, thus, developed different tactics in order to secure these specific gains and fulfill their expectations. Both the SA and the NHSA can be considered as agencies that adopted polarized tactics underlined by the targeted gains of their leaders, and fragmentations surfaced as these distinct sets of tactics clashed.

Undoubtedly, the definition of gains and expectations were heavily dependent on the correlation between the financial resources of residents and the degree of pressures exerted by the renewal scheme on these resources. That is, the possible impacts of transformation on residents and the economic capacity of residents to deal with these impacts were the main determinants in identifying gains and expectations: Since the most vulnerable tenants were facing the risk of homelessness, they made efforts towards securing housing from Taşoluk units regardless of economic challenges posed by the costs; the most powerful property owners, on the other hand, targeted at acquiring new spots from the renewal zone, or selling properties at maximum rates with the fear that their properties would get devalued, or and expropriation of their properties.

²⁹ Hüsnü said that his kids tried living there but could not cope since it felt abandoned and empty: “It was like a doomed place; now they returned and settled in Karagümruk.”

Yet, regarding the efforts of those who accessed housing from Taşoluk to liquidize their units in semis legal and legal markets, and the efforts of those property owners to maximize their gains, it can be argued that the inevitability of transformation quickly translated into opportunities for many to achieve certain social and economic securities and upward mobility, if possible. As noted, the role of pressures imposed by policies; terms and conditions of the scheme at work, and absence of alternative options has been immense both in this translation and the definition of such gains, securities and expectations.

It is under these conditions that residents approached those groups that would provide them with the support they needed in accomplishing their goals, and avoiding the destructive outcomes of transformation. There have been two inevitable consequences to this pattern: First, different fronts emerged, who considered each other as obstacles to achieving certain ends. Secondly, solidarity needed for resistance against the implementation of the project and demolition of the neighbourhood arrived at an unavoidable dissolution. Thus, what emerged as collective opposition at the beginning evolved into fragmented efforts to secure diverse survival plans at the scale of opponent alliances.

7.3.1. The Crossroad of Securities and Gains: Picking Sides

According to Gökhan, one would at least expect the NAs to “inform people of what was about to happen in the neighbourhood and what was awaiting the residents in the face of the project.” Gönül, however, put that “the NA’s only provided material things like heaters and free shuttle services”. These two statements signal the gap between what could have been expected of the NAs in an ideal scenario and what their practices have actually boiled down to through the eyes of community members. In Kader’s view the only result which emerged from the formation of NAs was the fragmentation of the community along the lines of divergent benefits: “On one hand there was the NHSA, networking with the FM and on the other hand was the SA who fought to stop the demolition of Sulukule, both to secure material gains of different kinds.” Moreover, accounts of informants suggested that the practices of NAs, and particularly that of the NHSA had instigated and bred a wave

of corrupt attempts on the part of community members to be able to access material benefits.

Widespread assumption explaining this statement was that the SA was against the demolition of the area and implementation of the project as it was designed only because its founding leaders had long standing stakes in the entertainment sector; interests of this particular group would best be served if the renewal plan was revised in a way to revitalize the entertainment sector and rebrand Sulukule as its epitome. On the other hand, the NHSA was more interested in developing its relations with the municipality in order to have easier access to the flourishing real estate markets in Sulukule and Taşoluk; this outlook of NHSA was also heavily defined by the opposition of this group to the entertainment sector and its social and cultural implications. Although divisions along these lines were already present, according to the informants, what heightened them was the pressure of regeneration.

Moreover, as it became clearer that the renewal plan would be implemented without revisions, the SA, which represented the oppositional voice among the two, had also tended towards benefiting from the emergent housing markets – either in Taşoluk, or Sulukule. Almost all informants explained the eagerness of NAs to satisfy their own interests due to the invincible forces of poverty, however they were also in the view that “at the bottom line, the NAs became more interested in filling some pockets than fighting for solidarity” as Bilal put it. Consequently, in their view, NAs found support only from those residents who could align themselves with the specific interests of one, or the other. Cemil, a former tenant admitted to this personally and put that “[he] managed to get what he got by approaching the group that was right for him.”

Informants acknowledge that the SA was the only one that vocalized the residents’ opposition to the demolition of Sulukule. However, it was also argued that placing the defense of entertainment sector and its culture to the centre of opposition had offended and discriminated those who did not necessarily approve of the sector, let alone having any stakes in it. “It is true that many people made a living out of that sector”, said İsmet;

However, there are two issues: First, not everyone was involved in that sector so when you adopt a language like that you are automatically leaving a substantial group of people

out; not everyone are dancers, musicians etc. so not everyone has a stake in it. Secondly, the corruption of the sector by means of drugs and prostitution generated a certain disapproval of it among the community. Some people did not want to be associated with the entertainment sector, or its culture since they suffered from the stigma of it - even the way in which people settled in the neighbourhood revealed that division. So the same thing happened when the SA defended the entertainment sector whilst voicing out resistance: Some stood against it, including myself, and some, that is those with interests on those grounds, gave support.³⁰

Cemil was on the same page with İsmet to a great extent and accepted that although he was not supportive of the demolition plans he could not sideline with the SA for the given reasons. "I fully understood their defense of the sector since their livelihood depended on it", he said; "but I could never claim the culture and customs that the sector forged (...) The project ripped families apart and I was never for it but I also could not fight for things that I didn't approve of."³¹ On the other hand, Ertan argued that even if the SA was supported by an overwhelming majority it would never be able to succeed in terminating the project, or having it revised since the SA was battling against a front that had the backing of FM. That is, "what Sukru failed was a battle with the state and not the NHSA", as Ertan put it. What is more, there were reactions towards Sukru, for he had eventually sold his property and also registered for a Taşoluk unit. "I am sure he was not looking at it commercially, primarily, but then I think what he can be interpreted as a way of him, turning his back against us all", said Bilal.

It is at this level, İsmet argued, that part of the community approached the NHSA so that potential material losses could be avoided and access to emergent housing markets in Sulukule and Taşoluk could be secured either in the form of housing, or capital returns. This applied both for tenants who were in need of becoming eligible for Taşoluk units and property owners who wanted to sell their properties at maximum rates. More than anything, İsmet's brother in-law argued that the NHSA made 'home ownership' possible for many tenants who could previously never dream of it:

³⁰ It is also interesting and important to note here that İsmet's father and grandfather once owned an entertainment house in Sulukule.

³¹ This remark takes us back to the community leaders' accounts, which related to identitarian splits within the neighbourhood. Findings revealed that similar sentiments were shared among residents; that is, they have confirmed in their responses that there as a divide on the grounds of identitarian definitions and also that this divide had an effect on the way in which community response to the renewal process had an impact. However, this was not raised as the primary dynamic that shaped grassroots positioning.

Take me, for example: I am 47 years old. I was born and raised in this neighbourhood with no prospect of positive change. I could never dream of becoming a homeowner and nor could my children. Now, however, a possibility emerged for many people like me. These people [i.e. the NHSA] guided us in terms of accessing certain opportunities that our state presented. Otherwise, how can you know and make use of your rights? Don't forget that those 300 people who were transferred to Taşoluk would become homeless had it not been for the efforts of the NHSA.³²

The capacity of NHSA to satisfy such ends depended very much on its relations with the FM defined by certain reward mechanisms: the NHSA operated almost like an 'office' where community members were redirected to by the FM for the issuing and resolution of their administrative and various other problems, and in return, the NHSA leaders received monthly salaries from the FM.³³ Necmi put that whenever he would visit the FM for an inquiry he would openly be asked "to get in touch with the NHSA." Many tenants like him would hand their formal documents to the NHSA office to be processed in order for their residential status in the neighbourhood and access eligibility for Taşoluk units could be proven.

When it came to the case of property owners, however, a shadier mechanism worked whereby the NHSA leaders would find buyers (i.e, third parties) - willing to pay big sums for the properties- in return for profitable commissions. Bilal is one of those who sold his property through a mechanism as such: "I sold my house for 127.500 TL but from what I know the mediators transferred it to a third party for 200-250.000 TL. We can as well say that the NHSA leaders have become the new realtors in the neighbourhood."³⁴ Gökhan argued that it was these two reward mechanisms that established the foundations of NHSA; however, what deserved particular attention here was the presumably reciprocal element to the relationships at work: Whereas the FM needed the NHSA as an insider force to ease the process of project implementation, the NHSA needed the FM to be able to access certain benefits - including power and information. Başak put that it was due to these inter-related mechanisms that the NHSA leaders became the winners

³² This is not an entirely correct statement since one of the most substantial contributions of SP was to provide those tenants with no proving documents of residence with the support they needed in gaining access to Taşoluk units. However, it is important to take a note of this impression since it draws attention to the sort of image that the NHSA built up among the residents.

³³ Necmi also argued that the office in question was fully equipped by the FM: "There were LCD screens, computers, decent office furniture, electric heaters etc. Until about a few months ago these people were selling meatballs on the street. How could they ever afford to buy all that, let alone renting an office for 600 TL?"

³⁴ It was also rumoured that the third parties arranged were from the circles and networks of the FM. These speculations even found voice in mainstream media, when the daily Hurriyet published a story on the front page and dealed the 'failure' of the project due to the displacement of the community at the expense of transferring ownership to JDP and FM circles.

of the regeneration at work and thus the new rich of the neighbourhood: “Until yesterday, Cesur was selling meatballs out on the street. Now he has a car, a house and other things. Only God knows how many properties they might have sold. Of course they will never talk badly of the project.”

As stated earlier, it was not only the NHSA leaders but also the community members who made use of the mentioned networks either to secure housing from Taşoluk, or sell properties in Sulukule at satisfying rates. However, there was also the popular belief that the way in which NHSA operated put the trust relations within the community at a stake since it bore certain corruptions and immoralities. These corruptions and immoralities surfaced particularly as tenants in Taşoluk tended towards liquidizing their newly appropriated units. Since the sale of units in Taşoluk were initially banned by FM, the relocated tenants could only sell their ‘right to transfer ownership’ at significantly low rates. This was to change after this ban was lifted. However, according to informants, it was in this early period of cheap sales that the NHSA leaders bought the rights of many vulnerable tenants only to resell them at high rates after the bans were lifted. This is to suggest that the leaders knew about the changes to come –due to their links with the FMs and kept this information to themselves only to maximize their share from the emergent housing markets. In Necmi’s words;

You know all these people who sold their units at 1000-2000 TL, right? They were told by these fellows that this was ‘good money’ for what they had, regarding that the ban was still in effect. They collected lots of units like this in Taşoluk and sold them at rates that were ten times more than what they paid after the ban was lifted. In the worst case, they would buy a unit from you at 20.000 TL and sell it for 30.000 TL. If you split that amount among four, you don’t need any other earnings.³⁵

In Gökhan’s view, this meant that the NHSA took advantage of the vulnerabilities of such people as himself: “They knew I was in urgent need. First they helped me move out to Taşoluk, then I sold my unit to them for 5000 TL and then *they* sold it to others for 25.000 TL. These were all calculated, I believe.” An immorality of different sort was in sight for owners in Sulukule, who could not sell their properties to third parties since the mediators were not satisfied with the amount of commissions they were offered. Kader said,

³⁵ Necmi reported that this mechanism provided the NHSA leaders with such wealth that “after they earned enough, they shut down the office in the neighbourhood. So you can say that there is no such thing as the NHSA anymore.”

It was the mediators who were controlling the market in Sulukule since they were the ones who had the links to potential buyers. They enjoyed the cream of sales, so as to say. They openly told me that there were buyers who were willing to pay the amount I wanted for my property but also that they were not satisfied with the commission they were offered. My hands were tied in a situation like that.³⁶

A combination of these claims suggest that the role of NHSA could not go beyond distributing certain gains within the community out of the emergent housing markets in Sulukule and Taşoluk – through working links with the FM. This distribution, however, was unequal since it primarily aimed to serve the interests of the founding members of the NA, and only provided material gains to community members on immoral and corrupt grounds in the eyes of residents.³⁷ Departing from here, Ertan proposed that the NHSA was only founded to generate wealth and not to defend rights. “People did not say anything about it because, knowing that the NHSA was backed by the FM’s side, there was strong belief that it would not be possible to cope with them (...) How can you fight a state within the state?”

The anti-NHSA view suggests that the formation of the NHSA has not only led to the division of the community along the lines of distinct forms of benefits but also paved way to the mistreatment of the community by the local government. Goksel argued that the establishment of the NHSA was a direct intervention of the municipality to extend certain rewards to a handful few so that they could work in a way to convince the entire community to approaching negotiations, or the Taşoluk scheme. However, this had practically led to a process whereby certain groups could access certain gains whereas others could not. Goksel said, “Suddenly there were these more privileged groups who had access to FMs networks and others who were less privileged since they were dependent on the ways in which these more privileged groups distributed rewards by their own will.” From a polar opposite perspective, Cemil put that at least the NHSA helped take certain issues to the municipality and convinced them on some small yet important matters, which made life easier for tenants such as the provision of ‘electirc heaters for free’. However, he also agreed that the main winners of the NHSA mobilization was

³⁶ Kader also told that out of the seventeen flats in her building, only two negotiated with the FM. All the rest sold their properties to third parties via mediators.

³⁷ Goksel argued that alongside other wrongdoings, the NHSA members prioritized their family members and acquaintances in the provision of housing from Taşoluk units.

limited to the leaders themselves since they had managed to access and secure 'power and network'.

When asked which side they picked in the struggle of the neighbourhood, majority of informants responded back by stating that they did not take part in any struggle. This is not to suggest that none of the informants aligned themselves with any of the NAs that were active in Sulukule. This was more in a way to insinuate that there had been no 'struggle' in the neighbourhood towards full resistance. From this perspective, people had taken sides more in a way to satisfy their benefits then struggling against project, or protecting the neighbourhood. In Başak's words:

Everyone was more interested in making money. They sold houses and pocketed 5000 TL. Then they sold more houses and pocketed 10.000 TL. They bought gold, jewelry. Those who did not have shoes to wear started driving around in brand new cars. No one even cared about the neighbourhood after that point. Once they smelled the money, they sold their homes, their neighbourhood and even themselves. Can you see anyone who is claiming Sulukule? No, because there is no one left.

Başak's comments were not only shared by many others, as noted earlier, but it was taken to a new level on the grounds that people adopted 'corrupt tactics' both to be able to access benefits extended by the renewal scheme and enjoy the opportunities which emerged as a by-product of the very same scheme. While Bilal and Hüsnü addressed those 'who accessed housing in Taşoluk via fake papers although they were originally home owners', Necmi pointed at others 'who took commissions from the sales of homes to investors'. Combination of these sentiments suggest that trust relations required for the maintenance of solidarity among residents had eroded and resorting to individual strategies had become the only feasible option for many. İsmet's reflections are expressive of this stance:

When you look at it, those who established the NAs are people we have known for our entire lives. Yet, I don't know no struggle. All I am interested in is what I can access in realistic terms under the present conditions. If the neighbourhood is getting demolished and if I can access certain compensations, I will just take them because I only care for myself. What is the point in struggling? What is there to make a struggle for?³⁸

³⁸ One of the most extreme reactions to the question of struggle came from Necmi, who put that if he could go back in time he would adopt exactly the same tactics as those he was criticizing today since "in the absence of solidarity, that would be the only way for him to secure his future."

Another dynamic, which played a significant role in the inability to ‘demonstrate solidarity’, as uttered by Ertan, and the tendency to pursue personal interests is poverty. In fact, this was a matter, which was touched upon by some of the NHSA leaders: In the absence of various social and economic securities, making efforts towards maximizing cash returns, or claiming opportunities for home ownership (either in Taşoluk, or the renewal zone) had become inevitable. In addressing those, who had sold their homes to third parties and immediately started enjoying the returns of these deals, Gökhan said, “While all these people were thinking that their homes were worthless, suddenly they found thousands of liras in their pockets. It’s a bliss for someone who does not own much in life.” According to İsmet and Bilal, this was complemented with the fact that people were not educated, or informed enough to know their rights, or understand the pros and cons of the project in the long run and take a stance towards what might happen. Departing from the combination of these two important matters, Gökhan argued that the FM ‘cunningly’ manipulated these vulnerabilities with the use of powerful policy tools:

The FM openly told people that if they do not show consent to the project it would confiscate properties by the force of law. In my opinion, this is a clear threat. They used the card of expropriations to put pressure on people. “I am giving you 50.000 TL for your house. If you like it, take it. If not, I will expropriate it against your will and out the money in a bank account for you. Take it, or leave it.” This is the strategy.

Departing from here, some argued that resistance did not have any chances from the start since the plans were developed by authorities *only* to be initiated. However, even if there was resistance at the beginning, there was not a chance for it to last long due to the social and economic vulnerabilities that residents were suffering from. Consequently, it was possible to observe substantial consensus over the assumption that the sort of mobilization performed by both of the NAs ended up serving the interests of privileged residents in terms of economic resources and ownership alongside the FM itself. Ertan said, “Eventually, all those leading the NAs have managed to secure some benefits. It was all about rent from the start and it boiled down to that, only.”

Accounts above revealed the widespread belief among informants that the community was too fragile against the forces of state-led renewal, and that it was inevitable for the majority to seek individual interests in the attempt to escape the

social and economic ills of urban transformation. Yet, almost all stated that if they had seen a glimpse of solidarity, they would have committed themselves to resistance and refrained from negotiating with FM, or third parties, and registering for Taşoluk units. In Ertan's words:

For better, or worse, we were a family. We could carry on living here like the way we used to if we had managed to stand together. Instead we sat down, kept our mouths shut and turned a blind eye towards the wrong doings of others. You cannot deal with that on your own. Maybe if you are rich and can afford to hire lawyers and all you can but for people like us, there is no room for resistance if you are standing on your own.

Hüsnü also agreed that he was not for the demolition of the neighbourhood but asserted that he did not take part in what was referred to as the resistance movement since resistance 'was not performed in the right way': "Resistance only becomes possible if owners adamantly refuse selling their properties." Hüsnü's take was shared by Kader who said that although she was for resistance as well, she did not take part in its movement since she did not trust the leaders, "who were one of the first to sell what they owned". This interpretation applied not only to SA, but also to NHSA, since majority of informants saw the NAs in the neighbourhood as agencies that only managed to serve their own interests. When asked what the NAs contribution had been to the process they had gone through, Başak said, "I don't think there has been any contribution whatsoever apart from taking the advantage of what happened here."

7.3.2. "The Houses Look Nice But Why Do We Have To Leave?": The Ideal Scenario

All informants, without any exceptions, agreed that Sulukule was in bad conditions and that it was in need of extensive rehabilitation in social, economic and physical terms. From this perspective, urban renewal as a procedure was not a matter of objection for many since it could help clear areas suffering from social and economic disadvantages and improve the living standards of communities. Among many, Bilal put that it would help clear Sulukule from drug sales and use, and thus 'save the image of the neighbourhood' for the future. These possibilities were particularly celebrated by families with kids, as stated earlier.³⁹ Some like

³⁹ Necmi gives an example of how his kid has changed after moving out of the neighbourhood: "When we were back in the neighbourhood, this little kid aged five was constantly swearing. After

Hüsnü were also of the view that Sulukule's renewal should have heavily relied on rehabilitation that would require the conservation of buildings dating back to centuries ago.

Yet, the informants were predominantly in protest of the *methods* used in the translation of renewal into practice. All informants were of the view that regeneration was being implemented in Sulukule for its future transfer to relatively better off classes. In other words, both owners and tenants were almost certain that those living in the neighbourhood following the completion of the project would be 'the rich' coming from other parts of the city.⁴⁰ Negotiation of some owners with FM in return for new spaces from the renewal zone did not constitute convincing foundations for informants either.⁴¹ İsmet said, "Part of me believes that [authorities] are waiting for the moment when we can no longer resist the pressure of debts and end up selling our places." Added to these were widespread concerns for those who would be excluded by the new owners of new properties, if they ended up staying in their neighbourhood. Kader's comment hinted that thoughts on this possibility derived mainly from what tenants experienced in Taşoluk:

I wonder what the reaction of those moving in here will be to us. I do expect tensions since this is exactly what happened in Taşoluk. We heard many stories ranging from attacks on cars to the harassment of young girls. This was part of the reasons for people to start selling their properties there and returning to the surroundings of Sulukule - areas where people feel safer among people they are familiar with.⁴²

As an ideal scenario, informants -and particularly the tenants- were almost unanimously of the view that they should have been given the option to stay in the neighbourhood within the context of the project. That is, those who thought there was some value in the project (for it could help cleanse Sulukule from its 'filthy'

we moved here, to Karagumruk, I told him that if he swore they would kick us out of the house. I said this only once and in time I saw that he changed dramatically not only because I warned him but also because he no longer saw people talking like that around him. He's like a different kid now. I want them to grow up with these sorts of manners."

⁴⁰ Cemil said that according to mainstream media, celebrities "ranging from footballers to singers, and actors to renowned bureaucrats" had already bought properties from Sulukule.

⁴¹ Even in this period, it was rumoured that the number of owners who had secured new spaces from the renewal zone was not more than 30. This number was not confirmed by FM at the time of interviews.

⁴² Accounts of informants revealed that the desire to 'live together as a community' was accompanied with the desire to live 'without the intrusion of strangers. That is, the residents seemed to be reluctant to the idea of having new comers in the renewal zone. Kader argued that if the project was designed as a rehabilitation scheme, then they would not have to live with 'strangers'. Also, Bilal put that "any project that would not allow strangers into [their] living areas would be an ideal one."

aspects, or bring social and economic rewards to residents) also embraced this view. Among these was Bilal, who said:

I might not be in favour of what has been happening in this neighbourhood in terms of crime rates, drug sales and all sorts of other things, and I might also be thinking that the project might help sort all that out but this does not necessarily mean that I like the project. I don't like it simply because I am not considered as part of the project, and so is the community. What could the worth of a project as such be for me, if I am not to live in it? I wish the state could provide housing for each and every one of us in this renewal zone, regardless of whether it be owners, or tenants.

Bilal's views on *in situ* relocation were shared and supported by many, and the importance of keeping the community together despite tensions was also equally repeated. In a similar manner to Bilal, İsmet also suggested that FM could produce housing for the community in the area if smaller units were built instead of luxurious condos.⁴³ The importance of staying together as a community for such tenants as Gülizar was paramount since they relied on the solidarity networks the community had established throughout years despite tensions; hence her comment, "I would be just fine if I squeezed into a tiny gap." Cemil added a new perspective to the idea of *in situ* relocation by suggesting that "if the project was developed for the area and for the people it would have been even better for the future because it would give people a chance to put themselves together and start a new life." In his view, if such was the case, "at least families would not fall apart."

On the grounds of such opinions, it can be argued that the trust of informants in local government and other public authorities had diminished by the time of interviews. Both owners and tenants made frequent references to the initial promise that "[they] would not face injustices", and stated that the promise was not kept at many different levels either in their own, or others' cases. In response to FM's argument that all owners could secure a place in the renewal zone, Başak reported that this would necessarily translate into reality in the way it

⁴³ It is important to note here that when İsmet came up with this suggestion, the NHSA leader Oğuz was also at the coffee shop where the interview was taking place, and intervened to tell that the reason why FM could not provide *in situ* relocation was that there was not enough space in the neighbourhood. The same explanation was given to me by the project coordinator at FM. Oğuz went on to say that there was only one formula for *in situ* relocation to become available: "All owners will need to sacrifice from their plots so that everyone can fit." In response, İsmet said "I wouldn't mind doing that if we are to live together later on" and Oğuz put the final note by stating that "[he] would mind." Also important to note is that different project ideas developed by a student groups from the University College London (2008) and an activist planners' and architects' collective, STOP (2009), demonstrated that it was technically possible to house all existing residents in the renewal zone. STOP got the chance to introduce the project to the mayor Fatih, Mustafa Demir, at his office, but was met with negative reaction as the mayor said, "the project was produced with insufficient expertise."

as put: "I have four uncles and an aunt who were property owners and not one of them negotiated with FM; they ended up selling their properties to third parties and left for different parts of the city. it's because they were not offered feasible option by the FM." With respect to justice, Bilal came up with strong criticisms against the attitude of FM towards tenants with missing papers; he accused FM of allocating units in Taşoluk to people who were not eligible for them (such as owners who presented fake papers which showed them, or their family members as tenants) while tenants with missing papers were left homeless - as it happened in the case of her mother-in-law.

Whereas some like Ertan argued that "the project was formulated without developing a foresight to its potential results", İsmet stressed the way in which FM made cunning uses of available laws and policies to accomplish its targeted goals. Departing from here, he added that, "at this stage, even if someone would file a lawsuit against FM, it would not be possible to accuse it with any form of illegality." Still, however, there was an overall disappointment over the fact they were not provided with clear information from the start and instead left vulnerable to the ambiguities and consequences of renewal, whether they might have been good, or bad. Interviews with informants did not only reveal the degree of inconsistent knowledge held by residents over the workings of state-led renewal but also the fact that they had not been informed of the inevitabilities of demolitions and possibilities regarding expropriations. Başak's account is a particularly striking one along these lines:

The local government started everything off with a series of mistakes, primary of which was being evasive about everything that was about to be done. I see two options for this project: Either it should have never been implemented if it was to end up being like this, or the FM should have gathered people together and said, "We are about to demolish this neighbourhood", just like that. They should have explained what options that could be made available for us and ask for our opinions. What I mean is, they should not have fiddled around. When we saw the Taşoluk units, demolitions had just started in Sulukule and it was too late to change things. Sales were also taking place in the same period. Then the draws took place and suddenly everything came to an end.

Behind these sentiments are undoubtedly the material and immaterial values that residents attached to Sulukule and their disappointment in getting 'torn apart' from it - either with, or without losses. Whereas Ertan put that "it hurt to be ripped away from the place where [his] ancestors were buried", Gökhan expressed his sorrow for "the displacement of [his] people from their birthplace and the

disappearance of all [his] neighbours who provided [him] with the spiritual support [he] needed at tough times.” From a distinct perspective, however, Cemil asserted that there was not too much of a point in blaming the FM for what happened in Sulukule since “almost everyone managed to make something out of the renewal process in terms of benefits.” Gülizar also argued that for people without options, complaining was a luxury at a time like this: “We are people who would never ever be able to access housing with our own efforts. Now that we have this chance, at least, we should do our best and try to live in Taşoluk however hard it may be.”

In the end, all informants believed that the project led to the dispersal of the community and that NAs worked more in a way to try to turn renewal into material benefits, or economic securities than come in the way of the project’s implementation. This is not to suggest that the community members disapproved of this entirely: Part of the informants clearly stated that it was due to the efforts of the NHSA that it had been possible for some to sell properties at maximum rates, gain access to Taşoluk units and shortly, go through the process without being entirely empty handed. On the other hand, tenants were appreciative of the SA’s efforts to guide tenants in filing the right documents for officials so that they could become eligible for Taşoluk units.

According to İsmet, the only thing that could make a difference in the opposite direction, that is either the termination, or revision of the project, was the determination of owners to not to sell their properties: “If we were a big, decided crowd, then we could raise whatever demands we had”. Yet, it is accepted almost unanimously that there were too many challenges on the way to achieving such adamancy. Pressures exerted by the policies at work, attitude of public authorities towards residents, and the interaction of these dynamics with the social and economic vulnerabilities of citizens seem to have constituted the major obstacles to such ends. Interviews with residents have revealed that consequences of transformation have predominantly translated into worsened living conditions at worst and short-term comforts -not entirely divorced from concerns for the future- at best. Moreover, although resistance was seen as the only way of changing the course of events, there was also unanimous conviction this was an unaffordable option for many. “In short,” said Gökhan, “we have all become exiles”.

Conclusion:

In-depth interviews have confirmed that some of the most fundamental issues raised by NA leaders were shared by community members to a great extent: Residents did not hold an anti-regeneration attitude, and to the contrary, asserted that social and economic rehabilitation was much needed regarding the pre-project conditions of Sulukule; what is more, they considered the renewal scheme at work as a tool of dispossession and displacement on the way to transforming Sulukule into a rent generating area through state initiative. However, despite the commonalities in perspective, residents were predominantly of the view that more than aiming to serve the interests of the community, both NAs operated in a way to secure material gains and rewards for themselves. Departing from here, almost all informants argued that a resistance driven struggle had hardly been the case in Sulukule.

According to informants, the existential foundations of the NAs were grounded upon two distinct sets of benefits: Whereas the SA demonstrated resistance for rehabilitation for the revitalization of the entertainment sector and *in situ* relocation (due to the leaders' stakes in the sector), the NHSA had taken a pro-project attitude to be able to access various rewards presented by the renewal scheme (due to their strong networks with the local government). Reasons behind this fragmentation were not only defined by distinct social, economic and cultural divisions within the neighbourhood, but also by the ways in which these heterogeneities were pressurized by state-led transformation. From the same perspective, each informant was integral to this scene. Almost all informants admitted that they followed their individually driven tactics in order to protect themselves from the socio-economic harms of the project within their own capacities, which meant that they refrained from what could have been collective resistance.

One of the main reasons for such tendency was the informants' conviction that there was no room for opposition to secure any gains, either in material or immaterial terms. Thus, whereas those with most limited chances of economic survival (i.e. predominantly tenants) resorted to registering for Taşoluk housing

units, those with certain resources tried their luck at taking the opportunities for enhanced material benefits and upward mobility. Thus, all possibilities that could develop into collective resistance dissolved under the weight of socio-economic incapacities and the renewal scheme, and only boiled down to individually oriented struggles to secure optimum, or maximized gains. What is more, majority of material gains did not prove to be long lasting: Those who negotiated with third parties were about to, or had already consumed their short-lived gains, and those who accessed housing from Taşoluk units ended up liquidizing their properties under precarious conditions to avoid further indebtedness and worsened quality of life in the absence of their most vital social and economic resources.

Another main reason underlining the community's reluctance to resist was their lack of trust both in the NAs available for such purposes, and other members of the community under the conditions set by the renewal scheme. Almost all informants put that if the NAs had not been so focused on their own interests and embraced the community as a whole, and if they had trusted their fellow neighbours in demonstrating genuine resistance, they would not have sold their properties, or agreed to register for Taşoluk units. This is because all informants favoured *in situ* relocation and rehabilitation over any other option, for they admitted their dependence on the solidarity networks built in the neighbourhood and the centrality of Sulukule despite many hardships they encountered.

8. The Case of Tarlabası: “No to Pittance, Yes to Rights and Justice”

It was 2006 when Tarlabası, one of the most centrally located poverty zones within the inner-city of Istanbul, was declared a renewal zone by the Beyoğlu Municipality (hereafter, BM) on the grounds of the same law that affected Sulukule – i.e. Law No. 5366. Yet, differently from the case of Sulukule, Tarlabası was due to face a renewal scheme under the coordination of a public-private partnership, involving the BM and a private developer that is GAP Constructions (hereafter, GAP). According to the envisaged plan, a predominantly residential area of 20.000 square meters -which covered 278 buildings- would be transformed into a multi functional site with residences, office buildings and various commercial establishments. The scheme involved a radical design intervention developed by nine architects whereby the facades of buildings would be preserved (for conservation purposes) and the interiors would be demolished to be joined into nine buildings blocks with enhanced spatial capacities for future functions.

Since the property owners were offered certain compensations, which were deemed controversial by their potential recipients in various respects, and tenants were not taken into account, the response of the community has been fiercely negative. Hence, it did not take a long while until community members set up a neighbourhood association titled ‘Tarlabası Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Progress and Solidarity’ (hereafter, TAPT) following the official announcement of the project. In a short period of time, TAPT demonstrated rather effective and novel skills in grassroots mobilization, and managed to build itself a representative status by acquiring the official consent of more than 200 property owners and the moral support of tenants. Conclusively, TAPT achieved to make entry into the official talks between BM and GAP as a third party. Here, TAPT’s aim was to make sure that the property rights of owners and housing rights of tenants would not be violated within the context of the scheme.

With the guiding force of three volunteer lawyers and the determined approach of its leaders, TAPT played an active role during the official talks -raising demands and concerns- and communicated the content of meetings to its members regularly alongside the circulation of serious and regular documentation. Yet, TAPT withdrew from official talks five months following their start for the demands and concerns of the community were not taken on board. Upon a collectively taken

decision among members, TAPT blocked the way for project initiators to continue one-on-one dialogues with property owners and actively engaged in advocacy and legal battles against the project. At this stage, the aim was to come in the way of the implementation of the project on 'unjust grounds' as they interpreted it. The efforts of TAPT found support both from national and international organizations among which were the Chamber of Architects and the UNESCO.

However, following a sustained battle of almost three years, demolitions took off in Tarlabası and the collective base of grassroots mobilization dissolved severely. Interviews with the leader and spokesperson of TAPT reveal that this dramatic turn of events has predominantly been caused by the overwhelming pressure of the tools and strategies of state-led renewal. Although it was initially possible to observe a determined solidarity among owners and tenants to fight against potential dispossessions and displacements, it became inevitable for this joint will to erode as legal, bureaucratic and strategic dynamics emanating from the course of renewal overwhelmed those who were exposed to them. Thus, collective resistance against the project was gradually interrupted by individual tactics geared towards the achievement of certain securities and interests in the face of potential material and immaterial losses.

The aim of this chapter is to reveal the ways in which collective resistance evolves in content and practice as the pressure of state-led renewal builds up over the members of the community. As the accounts of the leader and spokesperson of TAPT also unveil, grassroots mobilization is capable of achieving specific goals that protect the well-being of communities to an extent. Yet, in the course of time, it becomes a challenge for the socio-economically vulnerable members of the community to stand against both material and immaterial weights of renewal schemes, defined by powerful actors, tools and working mechanisms. The end result is that resistance does not disappear, but its meaning transforms.

8.1. Mapping Tarlabası

Tarlabası is situated within the administrative boundaries of Beyoğlu, one of the longest-standing and most dynamic districts of Istanbul in commercial, social and cultural terms. The significance of Beyoğlu does not only derive from its dynamism

throughout history, but also from the heritage qualities it bears in both tangible and intangible terms: Beyoğlu’s development as the preferred living and working space of Istanbul’s non-Muslim communities during the Ottoman era defined its social, cultural and physical landscape in very distinctive ways (Akın, 2011; Arkan, 1998; Belge, 2003).¹ Beyoğlu both experienced a territorial growth in administrative terms following the declaration of the republic and acquired a new sort of cosmopolitanism due to the transformation of migration waves shaping Istanbul. Yet, the central role of the district in the urban life of Istanbul has been sustained. Today, Beyoğlu constitutes one of the most thriving geographies of Istanbul with coasts to the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus.

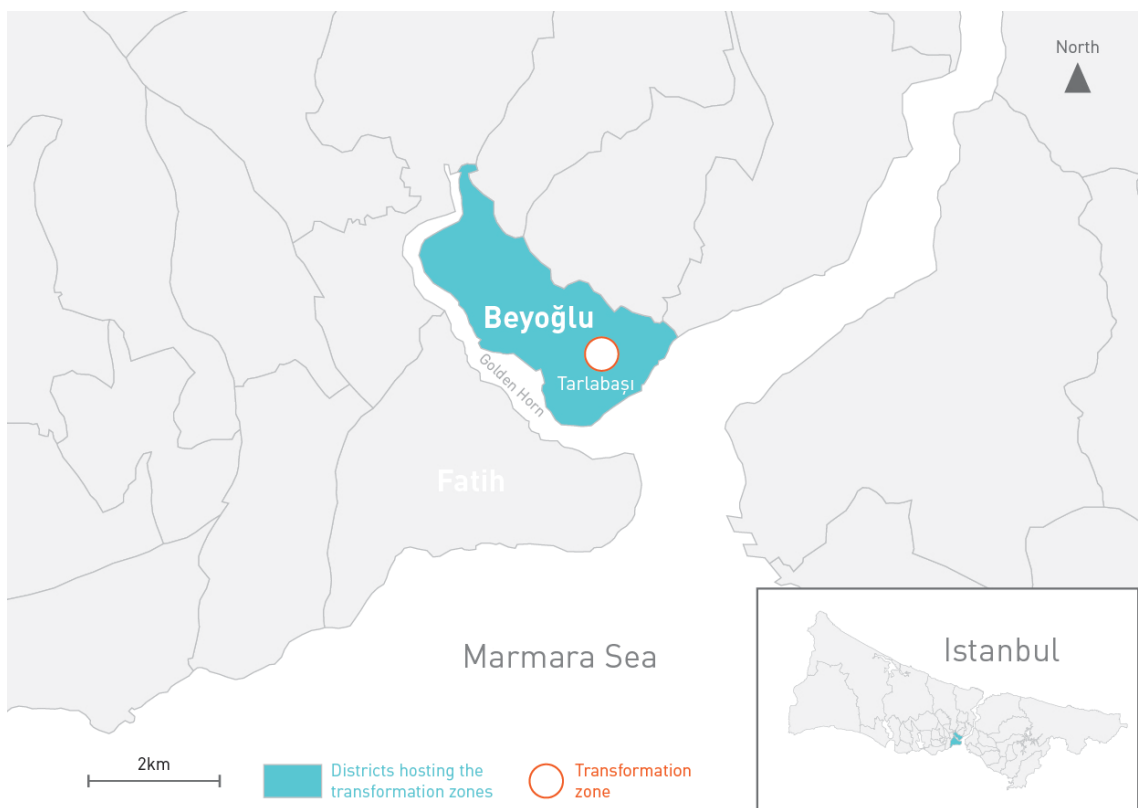


Fig. 18 – Map showing Tarlabası within the administrative boundaries of Beyoğlu.

(Map by: Emrah Kavlak)

¹ The emergence of Beyoğlu was integral to the development of Galata around the 12th century, one of the oldest ports of Istanbul, where exchanges between Istanbul and the Western world were rooted. It was due to the activity in Galata that its hinterland, Karaköy, became the commercial centre of Istanbul whereas the northern part of Karaköy (which at the time was coined as Pera) became the residential centre of the region. It is this combination of commercial and residential centres which constituted the origins of Beyoğlu in the centuries to come, where Western cultures and lifestyles spatialized as it was predominantly frequented by the non-Muslims and ‘Westernized Turks’ of the city (Akın, 2011: 82-86)

Location-wise, Tarlabası sits within a terrain of immense development that has been continuing since the mid-1980s. The neighbourhood is bordered by Tarlabası Boulevard to its east, Dolapdere Avenue to its west, Talimhane neighbourhood and Taksim Square to its north, and Aynalıçeşme neighbourhood to its south. Constructed in the 1980s, Tarlabası Boulevard is a dynamic extension of the main CBD axis (connecting the post-1980s financial district to Atatürk International Airport), which also functions as a borderline between Tarlabası and İstiklal Avenue – the most popular high street of Beyoğlu. Dolapdere Avenue, on the other hand, has gained significance within the past decade after a new campus was built in Dolapdere for a private university and new plans came underway for the construction of a motorway network, which the avenue connected to. These developments have consequently triggered new housing projects and hotel constructions alongside Dolapdere Avenue and highways connecting to it. To the south of Tarlabası is Aynalıçeşme, which is very similar to Tarlabası in terms of demographic and physical conditions but has been going through a process of gentrification since the mid-2000s.² Most dynamic areas neighbouring Tarlabası, however, are Talimhane and Taksim on the north. Talimhane, a former residential and commercial area, was transformed into a new hotel quarter following its pedestrianization in 2007 in order to enhance the bedding capacity of Taksim for incoming tourists.³ In the middle of these constellations, Tarlabası represents the missing piece of a big jigsaw puzzle due to its economic, social and physical negligence.

² Residential and commercial gentrification is one of the major dynamics that has been shaping Beyoğlu since the late 1980s when İstiklal Avenue re-emerged as a pedestrianized commercial and cultural centre. It was following to this development that neighbourhoods with cheap housing stock in the avenue's surroundings came to be preferred by middle class groups with social and cultural capital in need of access to this new urban centre. Much research has been done on gentrification along these lines in such neighbourhoods as Cihangir, Asmalımescit and Galata, whose demographic and socio-economic profiles –alongside real estate values– have transformed radically in the past three decades (Behar and İslam, 2006). In the current times, this trend has spilled over Aynalıçeşme, which has become particularly appealing for those who cannot afford to buy, or rent in the previously noted areas but still want to be in close distance to the Taksim region. Among those interested, foreign buyers constitute the majority according to *Emlak Kulisi*, a real estate new portal. See “Talep Arttı, Fiyatlar Fırladı!” (Demand in Rise, Prices in Rise!) on <http://www.emlakkulisi.com/talep-artti-fiyatlar-uctu/580> (accessed 04.05.2013)

³ Taksim is one of the few and most thriving squares of Istanbul that functions as a main attraction point for the locals and tourists not only because it connects to the trendy İstiklal Avenue, but also because it is a main hub of public transport, meeting point and a defining public space where celebrations, political demonstrations and marches on dates of significance take place.

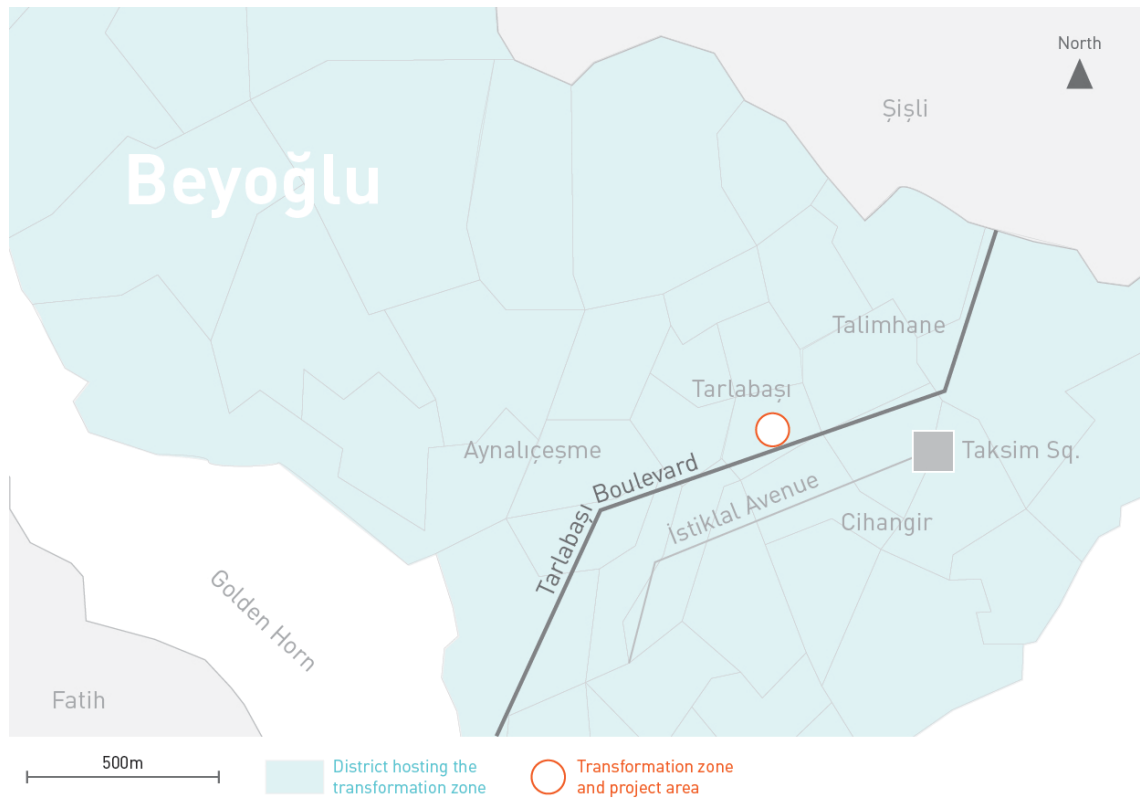


Fig. 19 – Map showing the renewal site in Tarlabası. (Map by: Emrah Kavlak)

Emergence of Tarlabası in the 19th century can be considered as a consequence of the vibrancy of İstiklal Avenue – or, Grand Rue de Pera as it was coined in this period. Crowded by international banks, foreign embassies, trading companies, hotels, apartment buildings, churches, synagogues, opera houses, movie theaters, European style cafes and eateries, the avenue did not only offer a lively atmosphere for the commercial, social and cultural life of Beyoğlu, but also provided a wide range of job opportunities for diverse socio-economic groups. Tarlabası, thus, developed as a residential neighbourhood, which particularly attracted the middle to lower-middle class non-Muslim groups, employed in clerical and service jobs available on İstiklal Avenue (Belge, 2003: 251).⁴ In fact, both Tarlabası and Talimhane were the very first areas where novel experiments on western style, apartment oriented residential planning schemes were implemented. Belge writes that although Tarlabası was not as ‘chique’ as Grand Rue de Pera, the built environment demonstrated a continuity in terms of architectural typology. Designed predominantly by architects of Greek and Armenian background, these structures constitute the building blocks of what is

⁴ Belge puts that it was mainly “those groups who could not afford to live on Grand Rue de Pera but wanted to be in its surroundings that settled in Tarlabası.” (ibid.)

known as the *Levantine* architecture of Istanbul and paved way for the designation of Tarlabası as an urban conservation zone in 1993.⁵ Rows of residential blocks, churches and schools designed by non-Muslim architects in European styles marked the built environment of Tarlabası.



⁵ In 1993, certain areas within the district of Beyoğlu were designated as urban conservation sites among which was Tarlabası due to the historical quality of the built environment. According to decision number 4720 -taken by the Board of Listed Buildings- these areas would be governed by plans, which needed to prioritize conservation norms. For a detailed plan and report of this decision (in Turkish), see http://www.beyoglu.bel.tr/beyoglu_belediyesi/haber_default.aspx?ContentId=21698 (accessed, 04.05.2013)

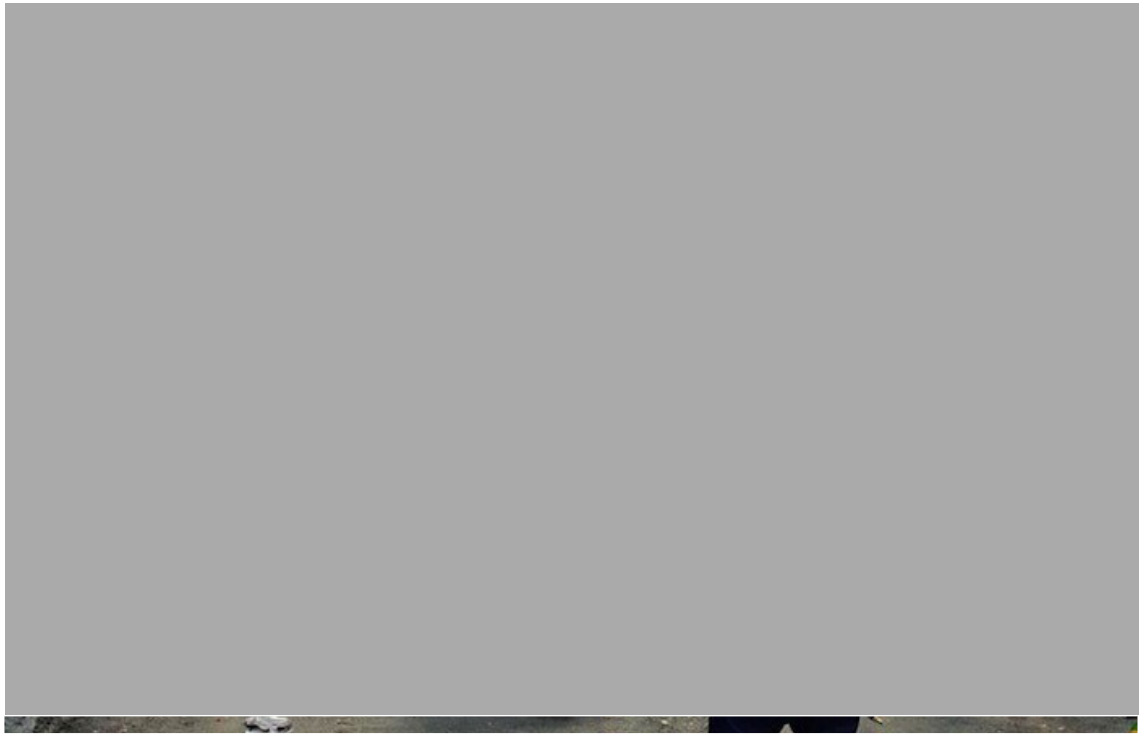


Fig. 20 and 21 – Details of street life, and architectural and urban texture in Tarlabası. (Photos by: Ali Öz)

What triggered the social and economic downfall of Tarlabası is two major incidents: The large scale exodus of its Greek residents in 1964 (Demir and Akar, 1994; Güven, 2005) and the construction of Tarlabası Boulevard in 1986 (Ekinci, 1994; Çeçener, 1995). The exodus of 1964 was prompted by the termination of a long-standing agreement between Turkey and Greece - allowing Turkish and Greek citizens to freely work and reside within the territories of each other- due to political tensions.⁶ Consequently, many Greeks had to face deportation without being permitted to claim their savings, or properties, and a substantial number of buildings were left abandoned in Tarlabası (Demir and Akar, 1994; Güven, 2005),

⁶ The Seyrisefain Agreement (i.e. Commerce, Navigation and Residence), signed in 1930 on the grounds of good intentions, was a mutual agreement between the two countries and similar rights were valid for citizens of Turkish origin living in Greece. Although reasons for the tension which gave way to the termination of agreement are often linked to Cyprus incidents of 1963, Güven puts that it should more be interpreted in continuity with ‘Turkification’ policies that had been adopted by various Turkish governments since the declaration of the Republic. In Güven ‘s words, “although the new Republic had secured the rights of Christian minorities (Greeks and Armenians) for self-governance within the context of the law of nations, the governments of 1920s and 1930s had openly followed assimilation policies against them. Although the rights and duties of all citizens were seemingly equal in legal terms -theoretically speaking- the predominance of belongingness to ethnic Turkish identity in everyday life constituted the foundations of national identity politics” (2005: 84) in a way to contribute to nation building. These tendencies had found their strongest expressions in the Thrace pogroms of 1934, the Wealth Tax (1942-1944) schemes applied to non-Muslims and violent acts taken particularly against Greek communities in September 1955. For more details on the incidents of 1964 and their backdrop, see Güven (2005).

only to be taken over by rural migrants arriving from Anatolia in the years to follow.⁷ The latter incident, that is the demolitions of 1986, was triggered by Dalan's decision to extend the already existing CBD axis in order to connect the newly developing financial centre in Maslak with the international airport on the outer periphery (Ekinçi, 1994: 75-79). More than 300 listed buildings in Tarlabası were cleared on these grounds despite fierce criticisms of civil initiatives and since its construction, the boulevard has functioned as a borderline between Tarlabası and İstiklal Avenue.

Cut off from the social and economic dynamism of Beyoğlu, Tarlabası entered a phase of gradual isolation and dilapidation as socio-economic downfall also triggered physical dereliction. It is important to note here that certain areas within the administrative borders of Beyoğlu –including Tarlabası– were designated as urban conservations sites in 1993 by the Board of Listed Buildings (under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) due to the heritage characteristics of its built environment. Yet, bureaucratic and financial challenges posed by conservation norms meant that legal frameworks developed for the protection of architectural heritage in Tarlabası have in practice led to its further decay as residents were predominantly deprived of the resources to confront these challenges.

By the mid 1990s, "Tarlabası entered in the course of social degradation and became a place famous for petty crime, drug dealing, brothels.." (Yılmaz, 2003: 14). It evolved into a low-cost living zone which especially attracted internally displaced Kurds, international refugees and such marginalised groups as transvestite sex workers alongside the formerly settled rural migrants. The socio-

⁷ Ban on the sale of properties rested on the logic of keeping the capital savings of non-Muslim citizens within national boundaries (Güven, 2005: 145). Those properties left behind were governed by a particular scheme whereby official caretakers (*kayyum*) would become responsible from renting these properties out in the name of actual owners and protect them within the dynamics of real estate markets. Rents collected from these properties would be saved in bank accounts made available in the Central Bank of the state. Yet, in time, corruptions occurred in the system as "abandoned properties were rented out by unauthorized individuals to third parties in return of unearned gains, or as properties ended up getting squatted, or as unjustified caretaking was put into practice." (Demir and Akar, 1994: 160). It was within this context that real estate values of properties dropped so dramatically that they had become easily accessible for rural migrants arriving into the city. Also important to note is that if owners failed to follow up on the state of their properties for a period of 10 years, properties in question would be transferred to the state treasury. Demir and Akar (1994) state that the ownership of %40 of such properties in Istanbul were transferred to the treasury, summing up to a value of 200 million dollars approximately. For more details on this, see Demir and Akar (1994).

economic and physical decline of Tarlabası became even more striking as its surrounding areas Cihangir, Galata and Talimhane either got gentrified, or were exposed to radical restructuration processes by the hand of the local government.⁸ Consequently, Tarlabası came to be established as an inner-city poverty zone, inhabited by socially and economically disadvantaged populations with little social and economic securities.



⁸ Cihangir and Galata have been known as the pioneer zones of gentrification, predominantly inhabited by creative middle classes since the late 1990s (Behar and İslam, 2006). Talimhane, on the other hand, was first pedestrianized and then turned into a hotels' district by the local Beyoğlu Municipality in 2005.



Fig. 22 and 23 – Diversity in Tarlabası: Figure 30 shows the interior of a beer house and figure 31 shows an ethnic wedding ceremony. (Photos by: Ali Öz)

According to the 1990 and 2000 national surveys, the population in Tarlabası is 'significantly below' the Istanbul average on educational attainment, income, job security and status of occupation (Güvenç, 2005). The illiterate population in Tarlabası has greatly increased since 1990 and illiteracy, in general, constitutes a large percentage. In Tarlabası, majority work in low-end service jobs, with minimal social security. Services represent the dominant sector in Tarlabası because of its proximity to Taksim, where the concentration of entertainment centres generates low-paid jobs such as waitressing, cleaning or dish washing. Aside from the existence of a mixture of small privately owned businesses such as grocery stores and textile workshops, Tarlabası is also a major centre of informal economic activities that include refuse collection, stuffed mussels production, and prostitution (Perouse, 2011: 285).

8.2. Tarlabası in the Light of Law No. 5366: Manufacturing a Renewal Zone

In February 2006, Tarlabası was declared as a renewal zone on the basis of Law No. 5366 and a tender was launched by the Beyoğlu Municipality (hereafter BM) in November 2006 to attract private developers into the area. GAP Constructions

(hereafter GAP) won the tender in April 2007 and a three-partied protocol was signed among the IMM, BM and GAP. Here, similar to the case of Sulukule, the IMM functions as the umbrella institution that supervises renewal whereas the BM acts as the local coordinator (responsible from identifying the tenure structure of the neighbourhood; assisting GAP during negotiations with property owners, and undertaking expropriation when necessary) and GAP acts as the project developer (responsible from the development of plans for the area and the implementation of construction works).⁹

Similar to the case of Sulukule, explanations with respect to the aims and methods of renewal –alongside justifications for renewal- reveal both the approach of project initiators to Tarlabası and their point of view regarding good practice in urban renewal. Here, however, there is an additional actor to the process, which is the private developer, GAP Constructions. In this respect, there is an opportunity to understand what the take of a public private partnership might be in transformative processes. Below is a detailed analysis of the approach in question as articulated in the project catalogue issued by BM in partnership with GAP. This will be complemented with selected statements from the project coordinator at GAP, the deputy mayor of Beyoğlu and an officer from BM where relevant.

8.2.1. Aims and Methods

The project catalogue starts off by explaining how the project will become a role model for other potential transformative processes in general and identifies the aims of the project in four main bullet points:

- Establishment of participatory partnerships between the local municipality, investors, property owners, non-governmental and civil organizations and local residents;
- Adoption of a conservation and renewal approach that will transform small plots, unable to accommodate contemporary functions, into spacious building blocks in line with principles of design and functionality;

⁹ The fieldwork has revealed that, contrary to the case of Sulukule, boundaries between the duties and responsibilities of the municipality and the developer are strikingly blurry. As will be explained in the following sections, GAP and BM were equally actively present in the dialogue and negotiation processes. The level of involvement on the part of GAP was so intense that the company rented office spaces right across the renewal site in order to hold meetings with residents. Moreover, a particular space was spared for municipal officers in this building.

- Intervention with the aim of improving the quality of life standards and the social and economic development of resident communities.
- Utilization of a vision that will substitute urban fragmentation with well-integrated, liveable spaces.

To accomplish these ends, the winning project of GAP envisions the creation of a new residential, commercial, touristic and business centre in the heart of Taksim. The renewal site spreads over an area of 20.000 square meters and targets at 278 buildings, 208 of which are listed according to the norms and standards of the Conservation Law. On these grounds, the project claims to adopt a 'conservationist renewal' approach, whereby the facades of listed buildings will be preserved and the interiors will be demolished from within in order to create more space for future functions.¹⁰ Design proposals from nine Turkish 'star architects', as they are addressed in the catalogue, demonstrate that the 278 buildings under question will be clustered into nine building blocks with the adoption of this technique. The ultimate goal, however, is "to make sure that both property owners and those who have long been living in the area to keep on living in Tarlabası upon the completion of the project and benefit from the surplus value generated in the area" as put in the same catalogue.¹¹



¹⁰ Plot structures in Tarlabası are typically narrow, meaning that they are not spacious enough to be used as hotels, offices and other forms of commercial activity that aim to attract big crowds. In these respects, built environment as it exists in Tarlabası is not considered to be profitable. Thus, the entire renewal scheme rests on the idea of creating building blocks by demolishing and joining the apartments from within, and the preserving the façades on the outside to satisfy the norms of conservation.

¹¹ Unless otherwise stated, all quotes used in this section will be taken from the "Tarlabası Renewal Project Catalogue", published by GAP and BM in 2008.

Fig. 24 - Image from the project catalogue, marking out the renewal zone in Tarlabası.

In explaining the strategies to be followed, special emphasis is made on physical renewal and social regeneration in what is claimed to be an integrated fashion. From this point of view, physical renewal should be complemented with a social plan in order to improve the quality of life in Tarlabası in a more inclusive fashion. Here, physical renewal is tackled at two different levels: One is based on a “conservation focused” and the other on a “modernization focused” approach. It is claimed that the combination of these two approaches give way to the previously noted ‘conservationist renewal’; according to this, while the facades of those buildings with heritage value will be preserved and renovated, newer buildings with no historical significance will be modernized in harmony with the historical ones, and in line with the functional requirements of the project. The main goal in this sort of intervention, as put, is “to protect the historical identity of the neighbourhood, remove all structural and life threatening risks, and create a secure and contemporaneous urban environment that will be of value both for the property owners and other residents”.

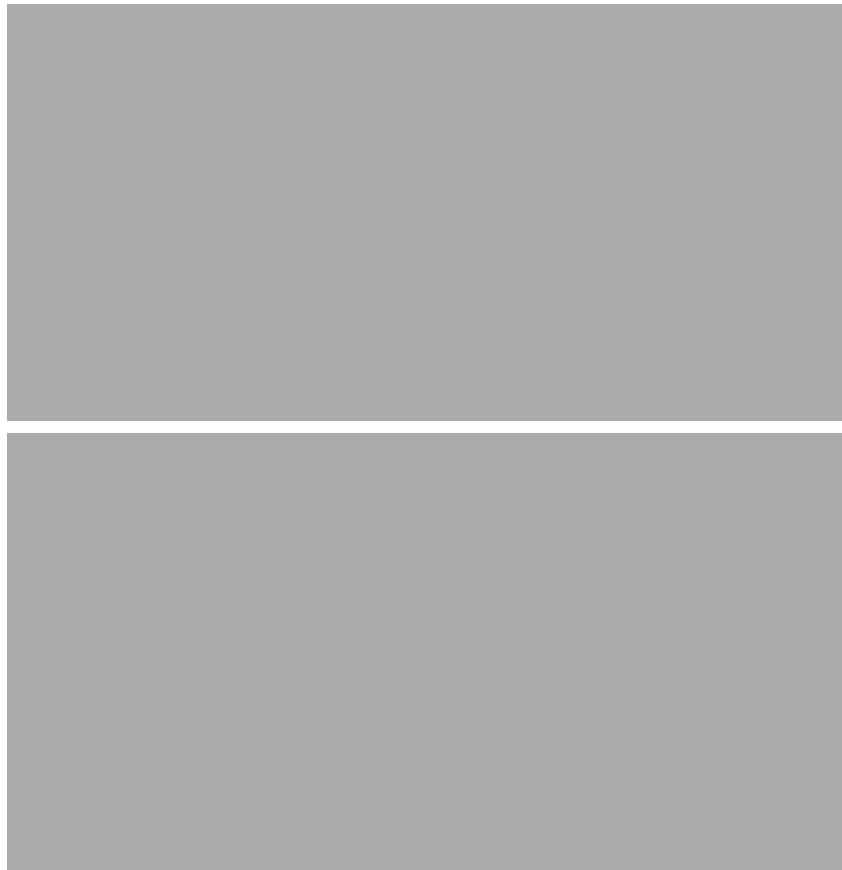


Fig. 25 and 26 – Images from the catalogue, showing before and after project visualizations.

These interventions, accompanied with the introduction of commercial, touristic and “quality service” sectors, is expected to bring economic regeneration both to the renewal site and its surroundings. Social regeneration comes into the scene at this stage, when the catalogue puts that “a social plan will be prepared in order to create job and living opportunities according to the criteria that constitute the social profile of resident communities.” This ‘Capacity Improvement Programme’, as it is coined, “is developed so as to provide either short term (e.g. in construction works), or long term (e.g. in service sector that will later become available) job opportunities for the residents of the renewal site.” Integral to this programme, it is put, are professional trainings to be offered by the Tarlabası Social Centre that will be established by BM within the context of the project. Throughout the narrative, it is openly and repetitively stated that the ultimate goal in pursuing these strategies is to make sure that property owners and other residents in the renewal site benefit from the process of renewal and its results.

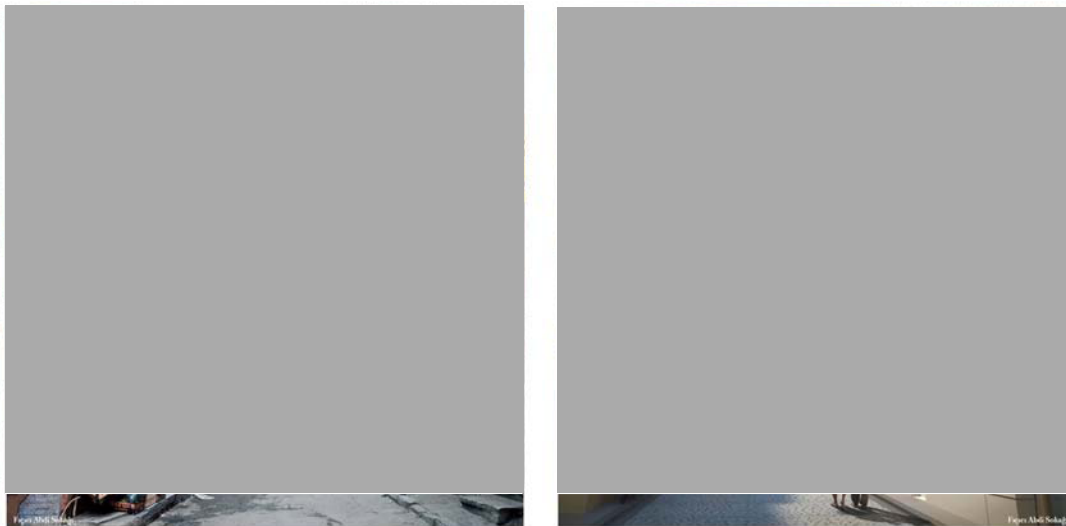


Fig. 27 - Image from the catalogue, showing a before and after project visualization.

It is on these grounds that participatory methods were claimed to be utilized in order to secure the achievement of these ends. Key actors of participation were defined as BM, GAP and last but not the least the residents; added to these are also civil initiatives and NGOs of relevance. It is argued that the incorporation of the opinions, demands, suggestions and ideas of these actors will determine the

sustainability of the scheme.¹² Yet the working mechanisms of participation are not identified at any level. It is only in the case of residents that the notion of ‘negotiation based participation’ is uttered. Accordingly, if property owners agree on the terms and conditions of the project as identified by the project initiators, then ‘participation’ is considered to have been achieved. That is, all actors except for BM and GAP –i.e. residents and civil initiatives– are included in the project development process after the fact. Contrary to the assumption that the project is developed from the start in the presence of all these actors, the project is only open to manipulations by these actors on the basis of their objections and additional suggestions.



Fig. 28 – Image from the catalogue, showing a section on the ‘social progress’ programme, promised by the project.

Research done by Kentsel Strateji, a consultancy company specializing in urban planning and research, revealed that an approximate number of 3000 people are to be directly affected by the project (Kentsel Strateji, 2008); this broke down into 75% tenants, 25% property owners and 5% illegal occupiers as noted earlier. Regarding the compensations, owners were offered either a certain monetary return for what they own within the project area, or new properties within the renewal zone similar to the case of Sulukule. The value of existing properties was

¹² It is important to note here that the civil organizations that the project coordinator named during an interview predominantly had background in conservation (...). That is, the organizations consulted were only related to the physical aspects of the project. When asked whether this observation was right, the project coordinator said that “the project was drafted as an architectural project in the first hand” and that “the social plan had to be developed later”.

determined by the criteria of a semi-public assessment company, registered to the Capital Markets Board of Turkey.¹³ The main distinction between the case of Sulukule and Tarlabası, however, lies in what they were offered from the project area. On the grounds of the project drafted by GAP, owners could only get new units that constitute 42% of their already existing ones.¹⁴ What is more, it was not guaranteed whether owners will be able to access new spaces from the original spot of their former properties.¹⁵ Acceptance of any of these offers referred to a 'negotiation with GAP'.

Although there were no initial compensations drafted for tenants, offers that were similar to the tenants of Sulukule were formulated in the course of time: Tenants of Tarlabası were extended the right to access MHA built social housing units in Kayabaşı, Büyükçekmece – a suburban neighbourhood, 40 km. away from Tarlabası- without having to go through the bureaucratic procedures that apply to regular home buyers. Again, similar to the case of Sulukule, if they would manage to pay rents within a span of fifteen years (i.e. 180 months), tenants would become the rightful owners of these units.

Although offers extended to tenants were optional, it was hardly the case for owners: If owners did not show willingness to negotiate with GAP upon either of the options, the municipality held the right to expropriate properties. This meant that properties would be confiscated by the local government in return of compensations that would be significantly less than the offers made by GAP.

¹³ The Capital Markets Board of Turkey (CMBT) is a regulatory and supervisory authority operating under the umbrella of the Prime Ministry that is responsible for ensuring fairness, efficiency and transparency in Turkish capital markets. It is expected that companies registered to the CMBT come up with objective valuations that are not influenced by competitive dynamics of the free market.

¹⁴ That is, if someone owns a 100 square meter unit, s/he can only get a 42 square meter unit from the project area, as it will be explained in more detail in the coming sections. I was told by the project coordinator at GAP that the company won the bid because "it was the only one that offered such a high percentage back to property owners."

¹⁵ Reasons for this will be explained in the coming sections.

8.2.2. Justifying Renewal

The language in which the catalogue has been put together consistently addresses Tarlabası as an area of social, physical and economic decay and asserts that the area 'could not integrate with the dynamics of cultural and economic development' due to these conditions. Departing from here, it argues that Tarlabası is in need of urgent operation to be able to welcome 'large scale commercial activity'. The following quote from the catalogue summarizes such statements in a fairly condensed fashion:

Although Tarlabası neighbours such central locations as Taksim Square and İstiklal Avenue, it could not benefit from the peaking economic and cultural vitalization in the area. Even those buildings on the main boulevard could not accommodate substantial commercial activity due to high rates of crime and image problems deriving from the wasteland characteristics of Tarlabası. This area of high potentials has thus marked the memories with its empty buildings and weary streets.

Inter-relationships between physical, social and economic decay and the way in which these have led to the supposed negative image of Tarlabası earns emphasis in explaining the necessity to intervene into Tarlabası repeatedly. Thus emerges a stigmatizing language which does not only give the impression that the social profile of the area is considered a problem by authorities, but also that the project partly seeks to attract a new flight of city dwellers into the area.¹⁶ This language particularly surfaced during interviews with project coordinators, both from BM and GAP. In answering the question why this particular area has been chosen as a renewal site within the entire Tarlabası, the vice-mayor of Beyoğlu used the following words:

Tarlabası is an area where negative physical conditions have attracted people of negative qualities. Not only should the social profile must change, but also workshops should be cleared from an area of such great touristic potential. There is no essential and sufficient physical infrastructure for those groups who are attracted to the city centre. Here, the current residents keep herds of sheep in their basements.¹⁷

¹⁶ This is most evident in the handbook accompanying the catalogue, "Tarlabası Renewal Project in 50 Questions". As stated earlier, although there is emphasis on the aim of keeping the community in its place, the question and answer style informative booklet on the project includes a question which goes along the lines of "Has it been decided where the families will move and which schools the kids will get registered to?". The answer provided by BM is as follows: "Some families are renting places in other districts and others are either moving into other properties that they own, or into their relatives' places. Once the new addresses are clarified, the BM will provide assistance in the registration of kids to schools."

¹⁷ Interview held on 28.01.2009. All quotes from the vice-mayor are derived from this interview unless otherwise stated.

The vice mayor went on to argue that the number of vacant and run-down buildings in the area is another factor that has shaped the decision for intervening into this particular spot. According to surveys undertaken by BM, the rate of such buildings in the renewal site is 50%. From the vice-mayor's point of view, these buildings both pose physical and social threats since they either fall apart in time, or attract illegal occupiers into the neighbourhood.¹⁸ This, he argued, established the very foundations of informality within Tarlabası whereby transient circulation of occupiers with 'shady' backgrounds led to unaccountable fluctuations in the demographic profile of the neighbourhood. Departing from all these, the vice mayor argued that, "if areas of worst quality are improved successfully in Tarlabası, then the almost complete improvement of Tarlabası can also be achieved in time."

The standpoint of GAP is not too different from that of the municipality regarding the possibility of attracting relatively better-off groups into the neighbourhood. The language used in referring to the social profile of the area was relatively and politically much more 'correct', compared to that of the municipality, however the project coordinator from GAP agreed that the arrival of new groups into the area is both inevitable and needed. According to the project coordinator, it is evident that certain groups will settle into the renewal site since "this is what urban change is all about".¹⁹ She asserted that the entire history of Tarlabası's demographic transformation (i.e. the initial settlement of non-Muslim groups and then of rural migrants of predominantly Middle-Anatolian and Kurdish origin) is exemplary of this sort of change and cannot be avoided. Thus, she put that particular groups of people will move towards this part of the city as a result of the renewal process:

These groups, of course, will not be suburban elites who live in villas with swimming pools in Zekeriyaköy, or Beykoz.²⁰ Those people who enjoy quite a distinct relationship with the urban core; live professionally and actively in the city centre;

¹⁸ Here, problems originating from the way in which conservation norms work constitute a matter of discussion as well. According to the vice mayor, conservation norms have predominantly fallen short of either protecting the built environment, or enhancing the investment potentials of the area: "There are people who would like to restore their buildings but it is all up to the Council of Listed Buildings to decide for it, which usually requires property owners to wait for a very long time. Suppose they did wait and finally got the permission to carry out restoration, then the problem is that the building right next, or opposite to these might be in complete ruins. In that case, the act of restoring your building fails since it will never boost the rent potential of restored buildings."

¹⁹ Interview held on 18.10.2008. During the same interview, the coordinator went to the extent of predicting that %60 of the renewal zone will be inhabited by newcomers. All quotes from the project coordinator at GAP are derived from this interview unless otherwise stated.

²⁰ Zekeriyaköy and Beykoz are two suburban neighbourhoods crowded by gated communities that only developed in the past three decades and predominantly preferred by white-collar middle to upper middle class groups.

like to invest their energy into the city, and choose to be close to Beyoğlu due to their cultural status and social life.

The coordinator went on to argue that this is a much needed sort of change since it will trigger a process of 'learning' for those groups who have long been living in the neighbourhood and would like to keep on doing so. In her point of view, this learning process will be the most important contribution of the project since it will force these groups to learn from the newcomers about what 'urbanity' is and change the way in which they live in the city. Making an effort as such, she asserted, will be the only option for these groups if staying in their own neighbourhoods is what they really expect:

For example, don't you think all these laundry lines hanging from one building to the other is a problem? See, this will disappear once this sort of change takes place. These people need to get educated over matters like these. Only %2 of the households have access to hot water so the majority do their laundry out on the street with hoses and hang them on these lines. These people need washing machines and units for airing the laundry in the house; the knowledge of taking your shoes off and bringing them in once you take them off at the doorstep etc.. Of course, this will take time and as you can see the problems are quite varied. Hopefully they will get urbanized, improve their capacities and manage to stay - but of course, some will inevitably have to leave; this, unfortunately, is the fate of all renewal areas.

Hidden in the accounts of the project coordinator throughout the interview was the assumption that the already existing community of Tarlabası would carry on living in the area without any doubts and that the sort of change that is envisaged for Tarlabası will be born out of the interaction between the newcomers and the locals. The coordinator also noted that the expectation on the part of both GAP and BM was that "this wave of change [would] spread from one building block to the other", crossing the borders of the renewal zone and transforming Tarlabası in its entirety.

8.3. The Storyline: Actualizing Renewal and Resistance in Tarlabası

In 2008, when BM organized a meeting to inform the residents of the upcoming project, community members were already familiar with the possibility of renewal. In 2006, the municipality had held a meeting with property owners and tenants and announced that a rehabilitation process - financed by the World Bank- could be initiated. The overall response of the community to this possibility was positive since the decades' long challenges of undertaking renovations, or small repairs,

and thus investing on properties would finally be eliminated.²¹ However, when it was revealed that the project would be implemented on the grounds of 5366 and that a tender bid was already launched and won by a private developer, these sentiments were quickly taken over by anxiety. Having learnt from the example of Sulukule, the fear was that the owners would lose their properties in return for minimal compensations and the tenants would lose their living spaces in no time.²²

Consequently, a neighbourhood association was set up in March 2008 to defend the rights of both property owners and tenants in the face of the project. In a short while, the association demonstrated a very effective form of mobilization at legal and bureaucratic levels: Founding members persuaded three lawyers to take care of legal matters on a voluntary basis and more than 200 letters of attorney were collected from the property owners, stating that they recognized the association as a representative body. The legitimate and official entity of the association was thus established and the 'Tarlabaşı Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Progress and Solidarity' (hereafter, TAPT) was recognized by the Beyoğlu Municipality and GAP as a third party in talks, representing the community.

²¹ The positive response of the community to the World Bank led rehabilitation is noted in an open declaration issued by TAPT in 2008 and included in the file put together, again, by TAPT: "We believed in this possibility full heartedly, thinking that it took our troubles on board. At least, we had developed faith that decades' long problems we suffered due to municipal regulations, conservation norms and obstacles posed by other public institutions would come at an end with the renovation of our properties. It was on these grounds that we gave support to the project since it would turn our buildings into livable places." In fact, initial dialogues between BM and community members had started due to this project.

²² What is quite important to note here is that the moment at which the process started to roll in Tarlabaşı coincided with the time when demolitions were taking place in Sulukule and the tenants were moving out to Tasoluk. This juxtaposition of 'the beginning' and 'the end' held strong implications for the community members of Tarlabaşı since the experience of Sulukule provided them with a foresight as to what could happen in the future. It can also be said that the case of Sulukule acted as a guideline for the association leaders whilst developing strategies. It is for this reason that majority of the informants in Tarlabaşı made consistent references to the case of Sulukule, revealing that a learning process was present.



Fig. 29 – Scene from a mass meeting held at a local coffee shop in Tarlabası, July 2008. (Photo by: Özlem Ünsal)

The talks initiated a process whereby BM and GAP shared details of the project with TAPT to satisfy the principles of participatory decision-making and fair negotiation as recommended by the law. Starting from March 2008, TAPT reviewed the details presented, officially documented the meetings, shared the information received with the residents at mass meetings held at local coffee shops and took the objections, concerns and hesitations of residents back to the talks with BM and GAP. Other than these, one of the most significant contributions of TAPT was to convince the implementing actors to revise the survey undertaken by GAP within the renewal area. According to TAPT, the findings fell short of reflecting the reality of the neighbourhood, and the development of a social plan as part of the project had to depend on the availability of reliable data.²³ Thus, a new survey was held by a company (i.e. Kentsel Strateji) hired by GAP and members of the association accompanied surveyors in order to ease their way to entering homes and talking to community members. These altogether would aid the development of the social dimension of the project as the association would raise demands, objections and changes departing from their knowledge of the needs of the neighbourhood and its residents.

However, TAPT withdrew from official talks in July 2008 due to problems of transparency in the exchange of information, injustices observed in financial and

²³ Details on what these problems were will be provided in the following section.

social compensations, and a wide range of other issues.²⁴ On these grounds, the association decided not to attend meetings with project initiators any further and moreover, members were asked to refuse all invitations for one-on-one talks by the BM and GAP. Underlying this decision was the belief that project initiators could tactically manipulate talks and convince owners for negotiations much more easily.²⁵ The only way possible for further talks would be under the condition of collective meetings, where all property owners and tenants to be directly affected by the project would be present. Since GAP and BM refused to hold collective meetings, this decision of TAPT blocked the way for the progress of the project. At the time when the project coordinator was interviewed for this research, she had put that the ratio of property owners who negotiated with GAP was not more than %20.



Fig. 30 and 31 – Posters hung by TAPT around the renewal zone. Top poster in the first image reads: "Yesterday we were the owners and now it will be GAP", "This is not a project of renewal and restoration but a project of exile and demolition", "The municipality will demolish our homes and GAP will get rich." Poster at the bottom in the first image reads: "Our businesses will be torn down and we will remain jobless", "One level for us, 14 levels for GAP"; "No to pittance, yes to rights and justice", Tarlabası is ours, Manhattan is yours; we have created history and you are destroying it." Poster to the left in the second image reads: "Put an end to the partnership between a

²⁴ The open declaration remarked earlier provides the following details with respect to TAPT's reasons for withdrawal: The BM's attempt to launch a tender for an area composed of private properties; the involvement of the local government in a process which aims to serve commercial rather than public purposes; provision of unclear information at different levels; injustices in financial and social compensations; none recognition of tenants as official parties; overall violation of property rights; none abidance with conservation norms; none provision of access to the owners' right to undertake their own renovation schemes (as allowed by Law No. 5366), and the exertion of pressure and threat by project initiators to secure negotiations. These will be analyzed in further detail along with the comments of TAPT leaders in the following section.

²⁵ As the accounts of informants also reveal, owners were often told during one-on-one meetings that if they should did not take offers extended by GAP they would have to face expropriations, which meant that they would only access minimal monetary compensations. In other cases, owners were also told that 'majority of owners had already negotiated'.

municipality and a company”, “A project of urban rent sharing, not transformation”, “A project of demolition, not renewal”, “Your justifications for your actions fell short of convincing us”, “Say no to rent based transformation.”
(Photo by: Özlem Ünsal)

It was following to this period that TAPT moved on to an intense period of campaigning and advocacy to highlight owners’ and tenants’ concerns, fears and criticisms of the renewal scheme, build political and civil support, and make way for the termination of the project. Mass meetings with relevant NGOs, professional chambers, academic groups and various MPs from opposition parties were held in the presence of community members in order to unravel the content of disagreements and demand support for future developments. Detailed reports on the issues discussed during meetings and various copies of documents exchanged between TAPT and project initiators were shared not only with the groups stated above, but were also sent out to diverse media groups, ranging from the most mainstream to most radical. Such efforts of TAPT found support from the Chamber of Architects and the Chamber of Planners. In fact, the Chamber of Architects had already filed a lawsuit against the project back in April 2008.²⁶ Accompanying this were supportive visits from various civil initiatives to the neighbourhood and TAPT office, and demonstrations organized on the main boulevard to raise awareness with respect to the controversies of the renewal scheme.²⁷

²⁶ The lawsuit was filed on the grounds that the project violates the 5th, 35th, 46th and the 63rd clauses of the constitution. These related, respectively, to the violation of the state’s responsibility towards citizens, property rights, public good and conservation norms. For a summarized documentation of the lawsuit see <http://www.mimarist.org/odadan/1903-TMMOBMimarlarOdasiIstanbulBuyukkentSubesiTarlabasiYenilemeAlaniDavaDilekcesi.html> (accessed on 12.05.2013)

²⁷ One of the most influential was held in December 2012 in collaboration with S.O.S., a civil initiative, where buildings facing the boulevard were covered in striking posters which aimed to draw attention to the voice of the community. In a press statement, S.O.S. said, “We believe that perfectly intact historical buildings are being demolished, and their inhabitants evicted without having been given a real choice, in order to make huge profits for the municipality (...) Today, on September 23, 2010, we are sending out a SOS signal from Tarlabası Boulevard. We call out to all concerned institutions and all attentive citizens to protest against this secretly and quietly conducted project that will lead to the destruction of important physical and social structures in the very centre of the city.” For a lengthier version of the press statement see <http://www.tarlabasiistanbul.com/2010/09/sos-istanbul-comes-to-tarlabasi/> (accessed on 12.05.2013)



Fig. 32 - Demonstration organized by the S.O.S Istanbul on Tarlabası Boulevard, December 2012. (Photo by: Duygu Başoğlu)

As the dialogue between project initiators and TAPT came to a sustained halt in this period, GAP and BM followed the strategy of approaching *waqfs* and other institutions in possession of properties within the renewal area first.²⁸ Later, efforts were made towards convincing property owners to attend one on one talks on the grounds of revised offers. Owners selected within this context were predominantly those in possession of colossal buildings, located on the most advantageous spots in the renewal area (i.e. close to the Tarlabası Boulevard). It can be argued that the logic here was to try to weaken resistance by convincing those owners with the highest expectations in terms of compensations.²⁹ Among those whom GAP tried to get in touch with were also owners who had chosen not to join TAPT. In the meanwhile, TAPT kept on working both at advocacy and legal levels, and succeeded in making an application to the European Human Rights

²⁸ Although these *waqfs* and foundations were not identified to me by BM or GAP, it is known that some buildings in Tarlabası are owned by foundations and hospitals with non-Muslim background and churches.

²⁹ I derive these conclusions from the fact that part of the owners that I was in touch with kept receiving letters which included revised offers and invitations for talks whereas others were contacted neither by BM, nor GAP after TAPT's withdrawal from talks. The main commonality among those getting revised offers was that they all had either numerous properties in various parts of the neighbourhood (including the main boulevard), or spacious buildings, which directly faced the boulevard. My observations and comments were in synch with those of the spokesperson and TAPT leader.

Court to call for the prevention of expropriations. This was also the period when TAPT received a letter from the UNESCO, stating that the organization “[shared TAPT’s] concerns on the possible adverse impacts of [Law No. 5366] on the conservation of historic heritage.”³⁰

Although this sustained halt managed to delay the initiation of the project quite severely, it also helped build-up a weight of uncertainty on the neighbourhood with at least two major and negative impacts on the dynamics of resistance: First of all, fearful of what the future would bring, tenants started to move out of the area gradually. What nurtured this anxiety was not only uncertainties embedded in the process of wait, but also rumours about owners who were approaching one-on-one talks with GAP and BM. It can thus be argued that tenants, representing the most insecure groups in Tarlabası, wanted to protect themselves from the negative consequences of sudden displacement. Consequently, and secondly, owners started to experience financial shortages as they lost tenants and could not find new ones due to prevailing uncertainties. In light of these developments, owners showed heightened tendencies towards approaching one-on-one talks in order to avoid expropriations. This cyclical chain of events led to an irreversible erosion of trust relations between property owners and tenants with inevitable impacts on the anatomy of resistance: Whereas owners lost trust for tenants who were moving out, tenants lost trust in owners who showed heightened tendencies in approaching one-on-one talks. Thus, previously existing solidarity between owners and tenants started to erode progressively.

Combination of these elements, eventually, triggered a discord among property owners with another round of negative impact on the dynamics of resistance. As some owners started to hire private lawyers to initiate their own channels of struggle to secure heightened gains out of the renewal project, hierarchical tensions arose among property owners. Whereas those with weaker hands in terms of ownership wanted to carry on with resistance and face expropriations if necessary, those with stronger hands in terms of ownership started to adopt a

³⁰ This letter, dated September 2010, was a response to TAPT’s attempt to communicate the community’s concerns to the UNESCO. Aside from showing support for TAPT, the letter also noted that the organization would get in touch with the Permanent Delegation of Turkey to UNESCO, Advisory Board of the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS International on this issue. For a copy of the letter, see <http://www.tarlabasimagdurlari.com/images/b001-b.jpg> (accessed on 12.05.2013)

more 'negotiation' oriented approach. That is, the content and practice of resistance fragmented together with the fragmentation among the actors of resistance – which was not only limited to a fragmentation between owners and tenants, but also among the more restricted group of owners.



Fig. 33 and 34 – Demolitions in Tarlabası. Image on the right shows scaffoldings set in front of evacuated buildings, April 2013. (Photos by: Özlem Ünsal)

Emergent fragilities within the community reached a climax following the local elections of 2011. Once it was confirmed that JDP would keep its seat at the BM, letters of expropriation were sent out to resisting owners in a short while. The arrival of these letters, which translated into the initiation of legal procedures, triggered another wave of anxiety within the neighbourhood that led to a new wave of tenants moving out. At this stage, the number of property owners who took the offers extended by GAP climbed significantly. The combined effect of all these developments was crowned by the initiation of demolitions in August 2011. Demolitions intensified as of November 2011, although shopkeepers were allowed to stay until full evacuation would come into effect.³¹ Currently (as of May 2013) the renewal site is predominantly empty with a few buildings still in legal dispute. It is possible to see that those tenants who could not find solutions as yet are still living in these buildings, surrounded by the ruins of others.

³¹ Shopkeepers explained this permission as a 'favour' of GAP in an attempt to provide those working in the neighbourhood with an opportunity to save on rents. In line with this thought, GAP allowed shopkeepers with businesses in buildings whose ownership were transferred to the company following to negotiations to keep operating without paying for rents until demolitions would take place.



Figures 35 and 36 – Demolitions in Tarlabası, April 2013. (Photos by: Özlem Ünsal)

8.4. Understanding Grassroots Mobilization in Tarlabası

The experience of Tarlabası is marked by a number of novelties that deserve particular attention within the context of resistance against urban transformation in the inner-city poverty areas of Istanbul. These novelties are best understood when the process that led to the renewal of Tarlabası is analyzed in a comparative manner with that of Sulukule: First of all, contrary to the experience of Sulukule, resistance in Tarlabası was shaped by grassroots dynamics right from the start. Despite the support provided by the Chamber of Architects and some other civil organizations in the course of time, the driving motives of mobilization had originated from below. Secondly, the sort of mobilization that found expression in Tarlabası achieved some substantial gains in a very short period of time and during the initial phases due to particular strategies adopted. These gains were quite atypical within the larger framework of the experiences of transformation areas in Istanbul and instigated a sense of hope, at the time, on the part of neighbourhoods facing similar pressures.

Of course, these sentiments were substituted by resentment within the larger community of civil initiatives as the number of property owners negotiating with project initiators climbed, and evacuations speeded up following a long period of uncertainty. This is not however to suggest that there were no criticisms directed

towards resistance until the demolitions went underway. From the very start, a number of civil groups had argued that the stance of TAPT towards the project was not clear – did the resistance aim to secure more gains, or was it there to help terminate the project? It was again in this context that the association was accused of falling short of adopting an ‘anti-capitalist’ discourse as it was coined. Although it is not possible to judge whether TAPT has ‘failed’, or ‘succeeded’ in demonstrating resistance on the grounds of these criticisms, they are important in making an attempt towards understanding how the strengths and weaknesses of resistance have taken shape from the very beginnings of the transformation process till the start of demolitions.

With this aim in mind, the following sections will dwell on a critical analysis of the way in which resistance found expression in Tarlabası from the point of view of the president of TAPT together with the long-term spokesperson of the association. Whereas the first section will focus on the peak moments of resistance, the latter will concentrate on the particular turn in the movement, which was followed by the demolition of the neighbourhood.

8.4.1. Agencies and Expressions of Grassroots Mobilization: Tarlabası Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Development and Social Aid

In November 2011, the signpost reading Tarlabası Association of Property Owners and Tenants for Development and Social Aid (hereafter, TAPT) was hanging on the façade of an abandoned building overlooking Tarlabası Boulevard. The building was recently covered by scaffoldings that stretched within a distance of 300 metres, promoting the renewal project to be implemented with the use of powerful visuals. The demolitions were just about to start and the building hosting the signpost was evacuated to this end. TAPT was not where it was said to be; yet, this had not always been the case. In March 2008, the same signpost used to hang 500 metres up the boulevard on another façade, which again faced Tarlabası Boulevard. The headquarter of TAPT was located on the first floor of this building, on the ground floor of which was a local betting office and coffee shop frequented by the men of the community. The main door to the building, together with that of the

office, would be open from lunchtime till late hours of the evening with tea service brought up and down regularly.

Here, Erdal Aybek (the spokesperson of TAPT) would meet property owners and tenants who would ask questions about the bureaucratic procedures at work, or needed help in understanding what the various letters they received from the BM and GAP meant. Another group of visitors comprised of academic researchers, students and journalists with diverse curiosities, and civil activists together with the representatives of many other neighbourhood associations for support. Erdal Aybek would sit behind a desk topped with an old computer and surrounded by pages of files, and answer myriads of questions regarding the renewal process while at the same time tapping on the keys of an all-present calculator, pointing at the official map of renewal zones in the municipal area of Beyoğlu, and flipping through the pages of many title deeds, official letters, project catalogue, various reports etc. Leaning towards the wall on which hung the official map of Beyoğlu's renewal zones was a cabinet, modestly decorated with flags representing Turkey and BM.

8.4.1.1. What Triggers Mobilization: Fear

Erdal put that renewal as a possibility was not unexpected for the residents of Tarlabası since the meeting organized by the BM in 2005 had informed the community of a potential project to be funded by the World Bank. According to this, a certain budget to be provided by the World Bank would be utilized in a way that the property owners would renovate their buildings in line with the norms of conservation and in the guidance of local government and relevant public bodies (e.g. The Board of Listed Buildings). Erdal stressed that at the time this idea was very much celebrated both by the property owners and tenants since this would mean that the cycle of physical decay would come to an end. Ahmet shed light on the problems, which owners suffered from in the past due to the workings of conservation principles, in an attempt to explain the positive reaction of owners:

In the past, if you would make an application to the Board of Listed Buildings for building works on listed buildings, it would take you years to get the required permissions (...) This applies for all buildings in the historic core of Istanbul so if you look at such neighbourhoods as Sulukule, Fener Balat, Tarlabası, Kumkapı and others, you get similar sorts of views. One might argue that it is those who own, or

use the buildings who are responsible from the crumbling state of the built environment but the contribution of bureaucratic challenges caused by the board should not be underestimated. If you would try to mend the leak on your roof without getting permissions, you would be handed big fines (...) This was the starting point of the mayor at that meeting; he said “We have made changes to the law and from now on you will not encounter any bureaucratic problems. If you wish to renovate your properties, we will present you with the opportunity (...) We will offer incentives for those owners who want to come together and renew their building blocks. If they want to do it with their own resources they will be free to do that, but if they want to work with private contractors that will also be possible” (...) So everyone was of course happy to hear that.

However, news arriving in 2008 with respect to the project revealed that the framework and methods of renewal had changed completely. Similar to the case of Sulukule, news arrived in fragments and very often through informal sources until some of the property owners started to receive letters, or calls from the BM for one-on-one meetings. With the involvement of the personal lawyer of one of the property owners (who later became one of the three volunteering lawyers of TAPT), however, it was understood that the scheme on the agenda was a transformation project to be implemented on the grounds of a public-private partnership between BM and GAP.³² A request was made for a collective meeting with the BM and it was announced during this meeting that the 20.000 square meter area had been declared as a transformation zone back in 2006; the fact that GAP had won the tender launched by the BM in 2007 was also announced that day. “Until this moment not only did we not know about any of these important developments, but also the legal period set for objections had expired”, said Erdal.

Collective meetings were repeated to further discuss the details of the project and most important of all, to receive information on how the residents would be affected by the scheme. Erdal stated that it was in this period that anxieties surfaced at a number of different levels. The first issue, he put, was in relation to transparency in the provision of information. Despite demands on the part of community members to see the project details on official documents and drafts,

³² One of the lawyers volunteering for TAPT stated that he got involved in the struggle when one of his clients from the neighbourhood got in touch with him in late 2007 to get advice on what action he and others should take in response to invitations they were receiving from BM for meetings. It was after this initial clue that the lawyer had paid visits to the municipality to make further inquiries into what the purpose of invitations were: “I talked to one of the lawyers at BM and he showed me some big maps which sort of revealed to me that there was a bigger story behind the invitations than what was visible to the eye. I was not properly aware of the entire urban transformation issue at the time but I could tell that this was something that the community had to take a unified stance against for the protection of their rights.” Interview with this lawyer was held on 05.09.2008.

these were not shared by project initiators, and no justifications were provided for not doing so.³³ Besides, many of the questions raised by the residents were answered in vague and inconsistent manners. The second major issue, on the other hand, related to how residents would be affected by the scheme in material terms. In Ahmet's opinion, the main problem of the project was its none recognition of the diversity of actors present in the project area –i.e. owners and tenants of various socio economic backgrounde and its inability to formulate ideas that will relate to the specific situation of each actor. It was due to the absence of these ideas that the project was not only unjust but also lacking in realistic terms:

Let's assume that GAP managed to negotiate with all property owners under the conditions that we demanded for. They should not have expected their problems to be solved because they were not touching upon the issues of tenants (...) If GAP is making an attempt for such a big project, then it should had been able to take all aspects of the situation on board. We repeated again and again that tenants should get solid financial support within the context of the project. We also noted that if they did this, we would be much more eager to negotiate as a community. GAP should not had expected the tenants to leave empty handed, they needed to understand that this is the neediest of all segments in the renewal zone. On top of this, there were those with commercial establishments there, who needed a different sort of treatment (...) We made a rough list of all these matters and we can say that with an estimated budget of 3e 4 million dollars they could sort all of them out to a great extent. This number corresponds to the price of three flats that they want to sell in Tarlabası but they did not show the intention of taking an approach as such. Thus, the result is condemned to be built upon injustice.

Within the specific context of owners, Erdal explained the injustices surfaced as follows:

We were asked what the sizes of our properties are and depending on our answer, we would be offered some sort of compensations. For example, if I have a 50 square meter unit I would be offered 100.000 TL off the top of their heads. No explanations were given as to how these estimates were calculated. Or, if I have a 100 square meter unit, I would be offered a 42 square meter new unit from the project area but if I asked for a parking space I would automatically get indebted by 25.000 TL. In case you would not be happy with any of these offers, you would be pressured by the possibility of expropriation (...) Moreover, tenants were not even recognized as official parties – they were left to developing their own solutions. People might not be entirely happy about living in a place like this but at least, before all this happened, they lived without fear that someone would come and take the possession of their belongings. We were not harrassed.

³³ It was argued both by Erdal and Ahmet that the draft version of the project shared with TAPT did not provide any substantial details on how the project was shaped. In response to this argument, the project coordinator from GAP put that the document they shared should had been enough since that was the only copy that they could share: "It had the potential to give the residents an idea, we have a copy of the same draft. Apart from that, we have the project report which we developed with various experts and consultants and shared with authorities but that is too technical – yet, if wanted, we can share it. Anything more detailed than this, we cannot legally share because that is entirely private and commercial. That kind of information is available at the BM because that is what we offered to them and they accepted all. BM is the main party we are responsible for."

Combination of anxieties and trust issues born out of these matters thus led to the foundation of an association, which aimed to defend the rights of both property owners and tenants within the renewal zone. Added to trust issues, however, was also the residents' knowledge of the case of Sulukule. Both Ahmet and Erdal made consistent references to the experience of Sulukule in various attempts to explain the 'negative consequences of urban renewal' as it was being implemented in this period, the variety of 'pressures exerted by project implementers', and perhaps most important of all, the urgency of 'collective mobilization' to be able to fight against the process at work. Thus, TAPT was founded in a significantly short period of time, demonstrating effective strategies towards instigating a community movement and slowing the process down for the project initiators. Ahmet reflected on the emergence of TAPT as follows:

Back in February 2008, when we first founded the association with a few others from the neighbourhood, we worked hard. We wandered around the neighbourhood till midnight, visiting people at their homes; explaining the process and risks we were facing, and asking for their support. In about a month, we had 124 members already so we immediately issued a written warning. We did that through a notary because we wanted everything to be as official as possible so that we could demonstrate how serious we were. In this warning, we said "For the sound implementation of this project, we would like to start a dialogue with the initiating actors under such and such conditions." That's how we initiated the three-partied talks and attended approximately 13 meetings within a period of four months.

By formalizing its official status and collecting letters of attorney from more than 250 property owners within a period of three months following to its establishment, TAPT quickly transformed into an entity -representing both owners and tenants- and achieved recognition to the extent that it was accepted as a third party in official talks among GAP and BM. It had thus been possible for TAPT to attend a series of 13 meetings, approximately, March 2008 onwards.

8.4.1.2. "We Won't Give Up Easily on Hanging Our Laundry in the Streets": Establishing The *Raison D'etre* and Practice of Resistance

The attendance of TAPT to official meetings with GAP and BM opened the doors for resistance to build on its own capacity: TAPT actively participated in all meetings, created formal reports out of the issues discussed in organized manners, brought

the matters of debate to the attention of residents by arranging mass meetings at local coffee-shops, searched for consent when needed and set up an office that would be open till late hours for those who wanted to pop by and make inquiries. The support of volunteer lawyers had been noteworthy, ranging from providing assistance in filing official documents for exchanges between GAP and BM to going abroad for meeting some of the absentee landlords and explaining the situation in Tarlabası.³⁴ Another important contribution of TAPT was to convince GAP to undertake a new survey in the renewal zone since they had deemed it unreliable. It was due to this revised research that a grounded social plan was produced by Kentsel Strateji in 2008.

Actions taken by TAPT earned much respect within the agenda and among the actors of resistance in Istanbul during this period - to the extent that Tarlabası was pointed out as an example of 'good practice' in terms of resistance, emerging from inner-city poverty zones exposed to transformation.³⁵ It is true that no other grassroots movement with little support from civil organizations had demonstrated such effective and organized resistance against projects at work within the inner-city poverty zones until then. Determination of property owners and tenants; assistance of legal advisors, and widespread awareness as to the experience urban transformation elsewhere in Istanbul were some of the dynamics that contributed to the formation of such resolute action. Aside from the clear definition of problems and objections, however, the determination to protect the rights of both owners and tenants was perhaps one of the primary factors that paved way for the emergence of such steadfast resistance in Tarlabası. Ahmet put forth that the community stood as a unified force behind all decisions taken by TAPT and that keeping everyone equally informed of the developments taking place was an essential aspect of their struggle:

When we decided to set up an association, we discussed what the name should be and we came up with the "Tarlabası Association of Property Owners and Tenants for

³⁴ Whereas the interviewed lawyer stated that he took a trip to Athens to get in touch with one of the absentee landlords living there, Erhan put that the other two lawyers took similar trips to Brussels and Spain.

³⁵ Majority of these sorts of sentiments surfaced during meetings held by civil initiatives giving support to various transformation zones. During these meetings, TAPT was often addressed as a potentially successful association with an ability to mobilize in a fashion that had not been seen in inner-city poverty zones. It is not possible to provide a document that proves these statements made at meetings, yet a feature which appeared in the monthly journal *Express* (August 2008) introduced the case of Tarlabası and its struggle as a "an association that is firmly standing against so-called democratic and civilized forces." (p. 47)

Progress and Solidarity'. During these discussions one of the owners asked why it was necessary to include the tenants in the struggle, regarding that we are talking about the violation of distinct sort of rights here. This may be true but it was not just property owners who live in the renewal zone; tenants constituted the majority. So it was impossible to think of a struggle in their absence. We needed their cooperation and it was essential to integrate the protection of their rights to the talks with authorities. It is true that their rights cannot be defended in similar ways to that of owners but we need to develop strategies towards those ends and at least make sure that they attain certain social securities within the context of the project.

This, perhaps, is one of the most unique features that earned a distinct character to TAPT in the course of its struggle. In the effort to set a joint path to defend the rights of both groups, Erdal and Ahmet stated that they primarily focused on the violation of property rights via the act of expropriation within the context of the project. This was, in fact, a direct criticism to Law 5366 and concerned other transformation zones as much as Tarlabası. According to the law, local governments hold the right to expropriate private properties for the purposes of renewal schemes. Yet, it is also clearly stated in the first clause of Law 2942, that is the Law on Expropriation, that expropriation only applies for situations whereby public interest will be satisfied. Although under such circumstances expropriation could be rational and legitimate, from the perspective of TAPT, catering for public interest was the least of the concerns of the project drafted for Tarlabası. As Erdal argued,

Law 5366 grants the local government with the right to launch a tender bid for *private* properties, meaning real estate that legally belongs to individuals. The code clearly emphasizes that transformation projects should aim at the improvement of social development standards; creation of job opportunities, and the betterment of living conditions within project areas. However, when you look at the practice, what constitutes priority is the generation of maximum urban rent – after all, it is a private company that is developing the project. The improvement of my property's physical standards, or my living conditions is not on the agenda of the company. What is more, the private developer is receiving incentives from the state in order to be able to act so.³⁶

What is more, Ahmet stressed that launching a *tender bid* for the acquisition of private properties – in the absence of the consent and knowledge of owners- was an issue that called for public and legal scrutiny.³⁷ He said,

They keep saying that GAP won the tender bid but my question is what did they exactly win the tender of? It cannot be our properties. The law clearly states that even in the case of expropriations, the act should rest on negotiation and mutual

³⁶ Private companies can benefit from tax exemptions and similars if they become project implementers in renewal zones, as the 3rd clause of Law NO. 5366 permits.

³⁷ It was for these reasons that in 2009 TAPT issued a criminal complaint against BM in the name of more than 120 owners on the grounds of launching a tender bid for private properties.

agreement with owners. If you really want to launch a tender bid, you first need to inform the owners and get their consent; but then again you can only launch a tender bid for construction works.

The second issue for TAPT related to the material impacts of the project on residents. As already explained, material impacts were often defined in the framework of potential dispossessions and displacements that would affect both owners and tenants. In time, it was revealed that owners would be extended monetary compensations, or allocations from the renewal site whereas tenants were excluded from the schemes of compensation – although this would change later on. Economic and social insufficiencies were among the leading problems of the offers in question, as was repeatedly pointed out by Erdal and Ahmet. Yet, another issue of significance was their mistrust in the formulation of compensations. From the very beginning, TAPT had been skeptical about both the methods used in the evaluation of properties and the criteria used in the very same evaluation processes. To start with the first, TAPT had never been presented with evidence as to how expert surveys (which would form the basis of evaluations) were held. In the words of Erdal;

The evaluation company, from what we know, calculated the value of our properties just by checking our formal deeds, without surveying them on the spot. They announce the results online however if you check, you see that there is no content there. You still do not know where the numbers are grounded upon. We know that they did not visit the neighbourhood for these evaluations, otherwise at least some of us would notice. That is, no experts have seen our buildings before calculating their values.

Confirming Erdal's arguments was a static report issued by Istanbul Technical University, stating that "surveys were held from the outside, without entering the buildings".³⁸ Yet, even in the absence of a report as such, Ahmet put that the residents' testimonies would be equally confirming: "If experts had been around, people would know because they would actually see them in the buildings. There is no way that evaluation can take place without someone surveying the building from inside to the outside." Despite repeated demands on the part of TAPT to receive more detailed information on the evaluation process, these were left predominantly unanswered both by GAP and BM. Thus, according to Ahmet and Erdal, there were serious issues of transparency in their dialogues with project initiators. Not having been informed about the final size of the construction site

³⁸ This report was among the files of the Chamber of Architects, which had issued a lawsuit for the project back in April 2008.

and the expected real estate value of future units were some other missing variables, which affected the formulation of compensations for TAPT. In their view, a sound contextualization necessitated the owners' full information of the evaluation criteria, and the final size and future real estate value of the project area. Erdal's reflections are important in clarifying what is meant by these:

GAP won the auction with the promise that 42% of properties would be returned to their rightful owners. The project site has been conceptualized in the form of nine building blocks, each block containing 20 to 50 buildings. The entire project site is 20.000 square meters, however if you include all the independent units (i.e. all storeys and flats), you get a total sum of 64.000 square meters. We were told that we would get 42% of this total sum as a return. We asked, naturally, what the total sum would be when the project is finalized because we know that the structure of the area will completely change and that this will reflect on the final area size. They refused to give an answer. Neither did they share the draft project with us. However we do know that there will be a 14e storey shopping mall in the area. Majority of the new units, we believe, will be within the range of 9e 14 storey buildings. Now, if you calculate the final area size by taking the lowest reference point, that is 9 storeys, then the results is 180.000 square meters (20.000 x 9). The 42% of this number is approximately 80.000 square meters. We raised that offers to be made to us should be calculated on the grounds of this number e not the previously mentioned 64.000e and they refused because obviously departing from the existing area size serves their financial benefits better.

Similarly, Ahmet proposed that under different circumstances it would not be possible for a contractor to negotiate with a property owner under other circumstances than 50-50 deals:

In these sorts of situations you need to take the new building as the grounds of discussion. That's how the business is done. If you are building a 10 storey building, you are expected to spare %50 of this space to the property owner. Not only do they not do that, but they also try to make a bargain on the grounds of %42 of the already existing area. A crude calculation with reference to what they want to build here reveals that we are only being extended %10, or %12 of the project site. Is this a joke? Suppose someone owns a 100 m² space and you are building a 10 storey structure on top if it. So after creating a space of 1000 m² out of the existing plot, would you offer only 80 m² of it? What sort of a bargain is this right in the middle of Taksim? This is nothing but a desperate attempt for fooling people.

Distrustful aspects of the project also concerned the demographic survey, as stated earlier, undertaken by GAP in partnership with a state university to reveal the social, economic and physical profile of the renewal site. It was when TAPT started to attend the official talks as a third party that they had managed to see the results of the survey in question. Erdal put that anyone familiar with the area could spot that the information provided did not reflect the reality in many respects. "For example, the survey was arguing that there are only 30 kids within the entirety of two blocks", he said; "in each block, there are at least 300 flats.

Families in our neighbourhood are densely populated and the streets are filled with kids running around. There is no way that this number is realistic.” Underlying the demand for revising the survey was this conviction, and the project initiators accepted to hire a private company, Kentsel Strateji, to handle the survey in the attendance of the members of TAPT in July 2008. Each independent unit in the renewal site was visited by this group to produce a more reliable version of the previous.³⁹

Primary motivation behind the request to generate a reliable survey was closely connected with the third major concern of TAPT, which was the non-availability of substantial social programmes as part of the project. As the information provided also reveals, compensations extended to residents were initially and predominantly defined in material terms, and did not acknowledge the social aspects of the coming transformation, or consequences of the envisaged intervention contrary to what was suggested in the project catalogue. Moreover, tenants who represented the most insecure groups within the renewal site were not even included in compensational schemes - although they were later presented with the opportunity to benefit from MHA units in Kayabaşı due to the efforts of TAPT. However, none of the schemes offered (either to owners, or tenants) included well-adjusted support mechanisms that could back the economic compensations introduced.

Departing from here, TAPT regarded the availability of a trustworthy analysis of the renewal site as an essential database for the production of a working social plan. TAPT had repeatedly stated during various occasions that economic aids on their own would not be sufficient in securing the wellbeing of community members in Tarlabaşı, particularly considering the living conditions of the most underprivileged in socio-economic terms. Thus, absence of a programme that could provide residents with educational, professional, social, childcare etc. support was interpreted as a major drawback since the immaterial costs of the project would be as immense as its material and financial costs. In Erdal’s words:

They cannot expect money, or new residences to sort the problems of this area out because there are more social challenges in Tarlabaşı than what they might think. For people living here, even transport from home to work is a massive issue. %70 of

³⁹ According to this survey, the number of individuals under the age of 21 was 721 whereas the number of kids under the age of 7 was 261.

our residents are outside the mechanisms of all social security schemes. Most of them work in temporary and insecure jobs that are 200 m. away from where they live. Accessibility to İstiklal Avenue is a big advantage since they can find all sorts of jobs there, ranging from cleaning to selling flowers by the street corner. That is, you need careful analysis to be able to create sound plans for Tarlabası if you really want to improve the quality of life in the city centre.

A fourth issue for TAPT was the way in which the project violated both the property owners' right to implement their own renovation, and the conservation norms as defined in the relevant legal frameworks. According to Law 5366, property owners hold the right to renovate their buildings on their own in line with conservation norms –even if there might be a more inclusive scheme to be implemented- as long as they complete building works within the timeline of the larger project. Although a substantial number of owners had individually and officially inquired into the possibility to use this right, they were not given their rightful permission on the grounds that the design of the larger project would not allow for it. Erdal explained this as follows:

[The project initiators] have based the entire project on this method, 'one building block one plot', whereby our independent buildings are all combined into one big cluster in the scale of a building block. For example, the BM says "I want a shopping mall/hotel on this block" and that is it. Your building as an independent unit does not exist anymore within this vision, thus it becomes impossible for you to carry out your own renovation scheme. They tell you that allowing you to take that sort of an action will go against the grains of their integrated plans and that's it.⁴⁰

While the way to undertaking individual renovations was blocked for reasons of integrity, TAPT argued that the way in which the project was designed did not fit with the norms and standards of conservation. Having been challenged by strict conservation rules and their administrative responsibilities for long decades, community members were highly critical of the fact that the renewal scheme did not have to look for abidance with Law No. 2863, that is the Conservation Law.⁴¹ According to Law 5366, if a certain area is declared as a renewal zone, then all legal frameworks that previously applied for that area get nullified. Tarlabası stands as an example, where more than 200 buildings in the renewal site were governed by the Conservation Law and physical interventions of all sort would require long and costly procedures at bureaucratic levels. Departing from here,

⁴⁰ Although property owners officially demanded to use their right to undertake their own renovation schemes as allowed by Law No. 5366, BM gave a negative response on the grounds that "the project requires the creation of new building blocks in the renewal zone and thus, individually undertaken renovation works [would] interrupt the integrity of the project." This document was available among the files that TAPT kept in record.

⁴¹ Insights of residents on this matter are provided in Chapter 9.

TAPT argued that the exemption of the project from previously existing legal sanctions did not only violate the norms of conservation, but also did injustice to residents who had suffered from the administrative burdens of these frameworks for long decades. Below is a reflection from Ahmet:

We found it awkward that this project, which suffers from so many controversies within the context of conservation, has been approved by official bodies. The building heights are just one of the problems I can mention. Traditionally, our buildings are three to four storeys maximum and the regulations clearly state that you cannot build anything taller than these – otherwise you will be fined. Well, not only some people managed to add a few extra storeys on their buildings here in the past e through corrupt wayse but also the project takes these illegal heights as a minimum reference point. There is a 14 storey shopping mall in the project, for example. How has this been possible? We are face to face with a situation whereby the municipality says, 'The Board would not allow anything to be done here in the past, but now we are free to do whatever we like!'

Coming to the fifth matter, TAPT put forth that the fear of expropriation heightened the tendency of residents to negotiate with authorities even if they would not necessarily approve of the project. Erdal stated that the act of expropriation was very openly and repeatedly used as a means of pressure (and at times threat) so that the transfer of ownership to GAP could be secured effectively. "Law 5366 puts that expropriation can only take place if all channels of dialogue are consumed with those groups in opposition", said Erdal; "besides, according to the Turkish constitution, expropriation can only be utilized for public ends – i.e. construction of a main road, school, hospital etc. Here, there is no such situation." This statement from Erdal connects with the argument that the priority of the project is not conservational concerns, or the welfare of the already existing community in the renewal site as narrated in the project catalogue, but the attraction of better-off groups to boost the real estate value of the area:

If you look at the name of the law, it seems to promise historical conservation, revitalization and reintroduction of the area to the city together with its community. Besides, it assures that participatory methods will be activated to incorporate the opinions of residents, community organizations, NGOs etc. into the project development process. However, none of these mechanisms came into effect in our neighbourhood (...) They keep saying that they will turn Tarlabası into Manhattan. How are we to survive in a place like Manhattan? Just the monthly expenses of a flat in Manhattan would cost 600\$e 1000\$. How can they expect us to afford such numbers? In short, the world that they want to create here is not for us. If that was the case, all they would do would be a large scale renovation project and that is it.

Ahmet agreed that "core ideas of the law and the project are in a severe clash" and drew attention to the class based character of urban transformation by suggesting

that “authorities would never initiate a project like this in Etiler”.⁴² In the view of TAPT, transformation projects are not driven towards ‘ethnic cleansing’ as argued by some but rather aim at areas that failed to integrate with urban economy in boom due to acute poverty.⁴³ From the same perspective, since the uttered areas are predominantly resided in by groups with minimal education and relatively little awareness of their rights, it becomes easier for authorities to manipulate communities and force them into situations that they might not be able to afford. Thus, according to Ahmet, not only do UTPs seek to reverse the economic circumstances of certain areas but also create a new socio economic class that can become even more vulnerable than it used to be:

UTPs in Istanbul make way for the creation of a new vulnerable class, whatever methods they might adopt. Geopolitically speaking, they are primarily initiated in areas where the poorest and most marginalized groups reside. Local governments do two things: First, create a political pressure, and second, erase the previously existing urban texture with the helping hand of both public and private actors. This is how they create this new class (...) It is not a total coincidence that all renewal zones are resided by people who are least aware of their rights, or the legal conjuncture of what is to happen. It is easier for the authorities to intervene into such areas with projects and tenders. The residents only learn what is to happen when someone knocks on the door and says, “Hello, we are here to buy your property”.

It is on these grounds that TAPT succeeded in gaining the firm support of both property owners and tenants in Tarlabası and established a representative status through the collection of more than 150 letters of attorney in the month following to its establishment. The degree of popularity it achieved demonstrated itself at its best when TAPT decided to withdraw from the three partied-talks in July 2008 due to the absence of transparency in the exchange of information and weakness of trust relations in dialogues and upon the unanimous consent of its constituents. This decision was sustained as the residents also abided with the principle of not attending any one-on-one talks. The support and attention that TAPT received both from national and international NGOs in the period to follow, and the inability

⁴² Etiler is a neighbourhood on the northern part of the city, which developed as an upper middle to upper class area on the fringes of the Maslak-Buyukdere axis - that is the CBD of the post-1980s.

⁴³ As Chapter 6 and 7 have also demonstrated, part of the NA leaders and residents in Sulukule were in this opinion. Chapter 9 reveals that similar sentiments were shared particularly among the Kurdish residents of Tarlabası.

of GAP and BM to proceed with negotiations in full effect should also be thought as a consequence of the noted approach to resistance and its practice.⁴⁴

The suspension in dialogues should not be understood as a period whereby TAPT remained passive and inactive in its fight, but rather as a phase of vigorous campaigning and legal struggle. During the period of halt TAPT kept pursuing effective advocacy in order both to raise the oppositional voice of the neighbourhood in public sphere and put pressure on authorities. Documents reflecting official exchanges between GAP, BM and TAPT were bound in a file and copies of it were sent out to various media organizations in a way to publicize injustices and confusions caused by the project. Also sent out were letters to public institutions of relevance, explaining their concerns about the potential consequences of the project at various levels.⁴⁵ Demonstrations took place both in front of the BM and on Tarlabası Boulevard in collaboration with civil initiatives in support.

As letters of expropriation started to arrive, TAPT's efforts were accompanied with legal action to nullify decisions for expropriation and objections both to the methods used by authorities and also to the amounts offered. It was also in this period when TAPT joined in the lawsuit of the Chamber of Architects to terminate the project. In 2010, these were topped with an application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to denounce the project and come in the way of expropriations.⁴⁶ Part of the court cases relating to expropriation have arrived at an end, whereas others are still continuing, and so far, there has been no response from the ECHR (as of May 2013). Yet, the efforts of TAPT along the given lines did not only enhance its oppositional stance but also created an awareness within the wider public as to what was happening in central Taksim.

⁴⁴ The project coordinator at GAP openly said that they were significantly 'barred from talks with TAPT members' which caused them delays in the continuation of the process.

⁴⁵ Among these institutions were the Presidency, the Prime Ministry, four different ministries, the headquarters of five different political parties, five different professional chambers and the Board of Listed Buildings in Istanbul.

⁴⁶ For a press reflection of this, see "Tarlabası'nın Kamulaştırılması AİHM'de" (The Expropriation of Tarlabası at the EHRC) on <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25088274/> (accessed on 13.05.2013)

8.4.1.3. Together We Stand, Divided We Fall: The Resilience of Resistance?

As discussed earlier, the advantages and successes of this sustained period of halt and active struggle were gradually replaced by severe disadvantages and drawbacks that hampered resistance and thus eased the way for the actual implementation of the project. The move out of tenants; changes in the attitude of some of the property owners towards resistance, and finally the erosion of unity and trust relations among residents were all caused by these negativities with direct impacts on the workings and resilience of resistance. As legal wars between TAPT and BM continued, the period following the local elections of 2011 saw both a determination on the part of GAP and BM to implement the project by heightening the existing pressure on community members, and a transformation in the former attitudes towards resistance.

Interconnected relationships between developments stated above seem to rest on two dynamics, one being the pressure of the project at work, and the second being strategies adopted by GAP and BM. Departing from Ahmet and Erdal's accounts, it can be argued that the pressure in question predominantly resulted from the initiation of court cases for expropriation and uncertainties posed by the project on the future of the neighbourhood. Representing the most insecure groups, tenants were the first who responded to these dynamics by starting to move-out. As rumours of property owners attending one-on-one talks with project initiators to get revised offers began to spread, this trend continued at a steady pace. The move-out of tenants, on the other hand, heightened the already existing pressures on property owners as they did not only lose tenants, but also could not find new ones. In light of this development, attending one-on-one talks became an increasingly feasible option for owners who did not want to lose their properties for no returns. Insecurities kept climbing and breeding each other as owners followed individually driven tactics to secure satisfying compensations whereas tenants kept moving out since their previously existing solidarity with property owners started to fade. During a repeat interview, Erdal reflected on this phase as follows:

That period of suspension surely had some positive results. First of all, we caused a serious delay for GAP; they were planning to complete the constructions as of 2010 but they could not even finalize the negotiations. Secondly, real estate prices went up within the area. This meant that even if owners would have to face expropriations, compensations would be at a higher rate. Last but not the least, we learnt

so much more about what it requires standing against such a catastrophe. Yet, the disadvantages of the very same period have had some harming impacts on TAPT. In the face of pressures climbing in the area, we started to lose tenants and see owners face more challenges. Perhaps the most unfortunate consequence of these developments, though, was the emergence of individualistic tactics, which eroded our collective stance. I was most upset when I found out that those in the leading positions of TAPT started to hire private lawyers. That signified a clear separation of paths among some members. It was after this that we started to hear more and more news of owners attending one on one talks.

What nurtured the tensions uttered were strategies adopted by project initiators, as stated above, which manipulated not only the actions and decisions of both property owners and tenants, but also their relationships to each other. For example, those owners with the most spacious and ideally located properties (usually overlooking the boulevard) would get revised offers from the project initiators. Intrigued by the offers made and pressurized by uncertainties lying ahead, some of the most powerful owners who were also the founding members of the association -as stated by Erdal and Ahmet- ended up violating the principle of not attending one-on-one talks. This, inevitably, fostered a fragmentation and division within the structure of the association as much as the practice of resistance. In the words of Ahmet:

Within a span of 7-8 months the BM managed to acquire a number of properties. They tricked those that they could. They sent spooks into the neighbourhood who would walk around and offer people more money in return of their properties than GAP and convince people but in reality these were were working for GAP and BM. This was followed by expropriations; one by one, they sent letters out which read 'you need to be at this place in 15 days for the procedures to start'. That is, the level of manipulations reached such a serious level from this moment that it became more difficult for some to resist as they did.

Moreover, once the property owners agreed to negotiate with GAP and BM, contracts that were to be signed enforced owners to evacuate their properties fully prior to their transfer to the company. "This actually means that you need to confront your decades' long tenants, some of whom might have become closer to you than your own relatives, in order to satisfy the ends of this condition", said Erdal. This, in his view, was a crucial dynamic, which catalyzed the level of tension between owners and tenants. Erdal also put that tenants were most pressured when GAP took the possession of certain buildings and forced tenants into paying more rents on the grounds of official market figures:

There was this tenant, living in a 34 square meter flat for the past seven years on a rent of 100 TL. As soon as the owner of this building negotiated with GAP and the company became the legal owner, the tenant received a letter stating that the rent

went up to 500 TL and that the s/he should either agree to pay this amount, or move out. It's the company's legal right but they don't have to practice it. We heard such stories from 4-5 other tenants. The usual consequence is that people opt to move out.

The move-out of tenants meant significant financial losses on the part of property owners whose livelihood strongly depended on the rents they collected. Added to this was the fact that once tenants moved out, it was not possible to find new ones since the area was severely affected by uncertainties posed by the project. Financial losses were not limited to the case of residential units but were also valid for properties where owners had established businesses. A tactic used by BM in such cases was to refuse the renewal of licenses for these businesses, thus pushing them into closure. Combined effects of these inevitably meant a weakening within each group –i.e, owners and tenants- and parallel to this, trust relations between the two groups weakened with inevitable impacts on the anatomy of the NA.

It was in this period that TAPT predominantly shifted its focus on the protection of property rights by prioritizing the fight against expropriations, and not sustaining its firm oppositional stance. These criticisms were most vocal when TAPT took time to partake in the lawsuit issued by the Chamber of Architects towards the termination of the project.⁴⁷ According to these criticisms, TAPT had prioritized the goal of securing the gains of property owners rather than defending housing rights and fighting against the displacement of all residents, regardless of their status – i.e. owner, or tenant. Erdal admitted that a 'radical anti-project' stance never found expression on the side of TAPT, partly due to the state of confusion and panic instigated by the project. Especially at the start, this confusion and panic was a response to the pressure and threat posed by unknown variables and obscurities embedded in the project as much as the possibility of expropriation:

I can very honestly tell you that when we were first faced by the project and the possibility of expropriation we panicked. Once we got to know more about the project our panic climbed and it got worse when we learnt about the date of the tender and the expiration of our objection period etc. We were completely unaware of what was happening. Our reaction to all this, therefore, was 'give us what we deserve, at least, if you are really going to expel us from here' rather than what might be called firm opposition. We were forced to arrive at this separation point.

⁴⁷ It was during a mass meeting held among civil initiatives fighting against neoliberal urban policies and neighbourhood associations at the Chamber of Architects that the hesitance of TAPT to join the lawsuit caused clear tension between the lawyer of the chamber and the spokesperson of TAPT in the summer of 2008. The lawyer had asked clearly whether the reason behind not joining in the lawsuit was triggered by TAPT's desire to keep the option of bargaining for more with BAM and GAP open. TAPT responded to the question by stating that they were still debating the option.

These criticisms thus triggered a debate whereby the primacy of *ownership* rights over *housing* rights was questioned. From the point of view of those criticizing, the sort of resistance that TAPT performed increasingly focused on the first rather than the latter, going against the grains of social justice which TAPT was expected to achieve. According to Erdal, though, if it had not been for the emphasis they had put on ownership rights, it would not have been possible to form grassroots resistance of such strength within the renewal site. Erdal also added that making a defense of housing rights is impossible without making a defense of ownership rights in the first hand, under the existing conditions of urban transformation in Istanbul:

You cannot dismiss the situation of owners and focus on tenants; it is just impossible. You can only talk about what you can do for tenants, that is people who have been living here for the past 50 years in close touch with their landlords, only after you sort the problems of owners. How is it possible to keep the tenants in their place if we do not make a defense of ownership? Hence, fighting for property rights is of primary importance to us.

By putting this argument forth, Erdal raised the question over the potential vitality of defending ownership rights in order to secure the struggle of both tenants and owners. In this view, the struggle of both groups could only become possible within the context of a defense as such. This did not, however, translate into a hierarchical division among these groups in the vision of TAPT. To the contrary, the tenants' strong dependence on the neighbourhood and the vitality of this dependence on their livelihoods was thoroughly acknowledged by the association. "We are very clear about what we are against and that is the expulsion of our community as a whole", Erdal said; "Our people do not have the chance of making it in any other neighbourhood of Istanbul. Why? Because this is where people sell flowers, shoes etc., or work as office cleaners. That is, for the majority, life starts from here."

It is on these grounds that TAPT has also been critical of the extension of benefits to tenants for purchasing social housing units provided by the MHA on the outer fringes of Istanbul. Although the extension of this benefit to tenants was a success on the part of TAPT, for at least it meant that tenants were recognized as parties to whom compensations should had been made available, the offer itself -if taken- would not improve the quality of life of tenants, Erdal argued. This strongly related with the financial costs of living there at many levels;

The idea might sound good at the start but don't forget that these apartments are in Buyukcekmece, that is 27 km. away from Tarlabası. And what about the prices? 80.000 TL. Now forget the expense and let's assume that a tenant has managed to buy a unit: 75% of residents living in the renewal site work in businesses nearby as waiters, security guards, street vendors, construction workers etc. That is, the only distance they need to travel is from one side of the avenue to the other and that's why they can make a living with the 500 TL they earn in a month. Now, what will happen to all these people once you push them to the periphery?

Despite the noted awareneses and sensitivities, some of the most powerful property owners –who were also the founding members of TAPT- started to attend one-on-one talks with GAP and majority of them either shook hands with GAP, or hired separate lawyers to initiate their own channels of struggle with the goal of securing more gains out of the renewal project. Resistance started to fragment and hierarchical tensions arose this time among property owners. Whereas those with weaker hands in terms of ownership wanted to carry on with resistance and face expropriations if necessary, those who were stronger started to adopt a more 'negotiation' oriented approach. That is, the meaning of resistance fragmented together with the fragmentation among the actors of resistance.

8.4.2. The Ideal Scenario

Aside from the various pressures exerted both by the project and the tactics of its initiators, Erdal and Ahmet argued that one of the most significant elements that left them vulnerable to the processes at work was their loneliness within the struggle. The support they received from civil initiatives and media, in their view, could not get beyond a certain extent and there is substantial resentment on their part on this particular issue. What they defined as the main cause of their loneliness, however, was the widespread approval of the project in public opinion and the success of authorities in creating this consent through the active marginalization and stigmatization of Tarlabası. In Erdals' words,

People, and particularly the urban elite, never liked to see and were always intimidated by Tarlabası on their left as they drove up from Şişhane towards Taksim area. So when the authorities appeared and said "Taksim is our shop window and it should not be in the state it is e in ruinse inhabited by bad people and infected by crime", people did not object.

The term that has often been used by authorities in addressing Tarlabası is 'urban wasteland' and it became one of the most significant tools in trying to justify the project since Tarlabası's declaration as a renewal zone. Erdal did not reject the

severe decay in the physical, social and economic qualities of the area, however he stressed that those to blame were no one, but the local authorities:

It is true that the area is suffering from problems yet those who are responsible from them are the authorities themselves. If there is a guy selling heroin on the corner, why should I be blamed and not the police station adjacent to the very same corner? We can give more examples: The garbage collection trucks are unable to enter these streets, simply because the streets are too narrow due to the way in which they were constructed in the 19th century. I can understand that but how about the garbage collectors actually walking into the streets and collecting the garbage? This is not happening and thus the area suffers from none sanitized environments, leading to kids getting infected easily (...) Similarly, if there are pickpockets finding shelter in empty buildings and if the police is dismissing this reality, then who is responsible from that? They also argue that %30 of the stuffed mussel sweatshops in the neighbourhood are unlicensed. Well, if people can open up shops without licenses and sell seafood without being confronted by any officials, what is the role of residents in this? Can we say that they openly accept the ongoing bribery between the police and certain groups? If there are situations that risk public health and security, who is to fight this in official terms? Is it not the municipality and the police?"

Here, Erdal drew attention to the public responsibilities of local authorities towards areas suffering from urban decay at many levels. Departing from here, he proposed that the project should had been designed with the aim of improving the quality of living standards in the renewal zone for its community, if the real motivation of the project was to eradicate these problems. While both Ahmet and Erdal repeatedly stated that they did not in any way think that the aim of the project was to serve public interest, they also emphasized that Law No. 5366 provided the owners with the right to undertake their own renovation schemes in line with conservation norms. Departing from here, both argued that TAPT had from the very beginning pressed for the extension of this right to the owners use, so that both the property rights of owners could have been protected and the housing rights of tenants could be secured. In words of Ahmet:

If you have a look at all the papers we prepared throughout our administrative fight, you will see that we have made official demands for two things: Of priority is the demand to be able to use our right to renovate our properties in line with plans that aim to improve the built environment with a conservationist approach. The municipality is in hold of the original papers that prove our demand and the court is aware of our demand as the municipality confirmed it upon legal inquiry. Yet, so far this awareness has not brought any returns for us. What we want is nothing but to make use of our legal rights to stay put in the area as a community, without anyone touching our properties against our will.

According to Ahmet and Erdal, the indifference of authorities to this demand is proof to the assumption that the actual aim of the project is to generate urban rent in Tarlabası for the benefit of others and transfer its ownership to wealthier groups than anything else. Erdal put that Law No. 5366 clearly gives away the fact that the initial aim is to invite capital groups into areas that were previously barred to entrepreneurial operations and “attract the urban elite and white collar groups in place of the poor in the centre.” Erdal also stated that TAPT was not an anti-capitalist organization *per se*, but was strictly against the displacement of vulnerable groups in favour of the relatively better off.

As it can be seen, when it came to the formulation of compensatory ideas for the community, regardless of whether its members be owners, or tenants, these two leading actors of TAPT argued that ‘fairness’ and ‘justice’ were their primary prerequisites. Hence, Erdal put that TAPT would also be approval of schemes whereby the community would be relocated elsewhere in the presence of social and economic programmes that could secure its settlement without encountering worsened quality of life. In confirmation of Ahmet’s emphasis on the right to undertake self-managed renovations, Erdal said “for TAPT, any solution that prioritizes the improvement of living standards for our community, provides the citizens with humanitarian living conditions and presents them with the opportunity to integrate with the social and economic dynamics of this city wherever they may be is a rightful and just one, and it will earn the approval of everyone.”

Conclusion:

The experience of Tarlabası shows that state-led renewal as it is currently being practiced signifies more insecurities and disadvantages than improvements in the quality of life for communities deprived of social and economic resources. To put it more specifically, whereas owners fear dispossessions, tenants fear displacement as they face the conditions of renewal schemes. This is how a joint will emerged from Tarlabası, which aimed to protect the well-being of community members by making an attempt to defend the property rights of owners and housing rights of tenants. As Ahmet and Erdal put it, it would not be possible to engineer grassroots

mobilization in the absence of either groups if the primary goal was to protect the common interests of the community in its entirety.

It has been possible for TAPT to voice these concerns and establish itself as a representative body to the extent that it was recognized as an official party by project implementers. This recognition and representative quality earned certain privileges to TAPT within a short span of time, which translated into meaningful returns for the community of Tarlabası: For TAPT gained access to attend official talks, it became possible for it to communicate demands and concerns directly to BM and GAP, keep systematic records of exchanges between parties, and transfer relevant information to the community.

Similarly, as TAPT attained legitimacy as a civil body, its links with other civil organizations, neighbourhood associations and activist groups developed which initiated a learning process from the experiences of others. In the longer run, TAPT succeeded in putting enough pressure on authorities to reproach certain elements of the project and develop ideas that could be proposed as compensations to tenants. Perhaps most important of all, TAPT has been able to take a unified stance against decisions and conditions which they found controversial and block the way for the project to proceed further for a substantial period of time.

Although each of these meant winning moves for TAPT, they have fallen short of deeming the collective base of grassroots mobilization sustainable for the future. Pressures exerted by the administrative and legal aspects of renewal, and the way in which these pressures were handled by project implementers translated into significant erosion for collective resistance. Following a sustained pause in dialogues between BM, GAP and TAPT, and in the aftermath of local elections 2010, the process of expropriations were initiated, and allegedly, seemingly informal tactics were also used to pressurize residents as addressed by Ahmet and Erdal. Finding the social and economic costs of heightened pressures unaffordable at multiple levels, both tenants and owners drifted away from collective action and resorted to more individualized tactics in trying to protect themselves against the ills of renewal. Thus, inevitably, the content and practice of resistance to renewal experienced a recognizable shift.

It has been inevitable for the above stated changes and tensions in the renewal zone to find reflections in the defining dynamics of TAPT. As the accounts of Ahmet and Erdal also reveal, the focus of struggle shifted from terminating the project and nullifying expropriations to securing the property rights of owners as much as possible. In their view, this visible transformation in the practice of resistance was an inevitable consequence of the way in which state led urban renewal operated. Under these circumstances, prioritizing the defense of property rights had become the only way for protecting the housing rights of both owners and tenants. Although this gave the impression to certain civil groups that TAPT favoured the security of gains for property owners at the cost of abandoning Tarlabası, Ahmet and Erdal argued the opposite. As they put it, TAPT had from the start idealized a solution whereby owners could utilize their right to undertake selfe maintained renovations as allowed by Law No. 5366 and thus, the right for the entire community to stay put could be secured in improved social and economic environs.

9. View From The Neighbourhood: Grassroots Experience and Reflections on Collective Action in Tarlabası

The previous chapter placed the focus on the evolution of Tarlabası from a middle class non-Muslim neighbourhood to an inner-city poverty zone defined by migration; its exposure to urban transformation and renewal; the emergence of a rather unique type of grassroots resistance -within its period- against these processes, and finally on the reflections of the leading representatives of TAPT with respect to the practice and meaning of resistance against the forces of state-led renewal. Interviews with the leader and spokesperson of TAPT were held within the period between 2008 July (when TAPT had just withdrawn from three parties with GAP and BM) and February 2009 (when the explained suspense was still in effect). Yet, repeat interviews held in July 2012 with the same informants provided a number of important updates on how these two leading actors interpreted the evolution of grassroots resistance.

This chapter, on the other hand, will reflect on the ways in which residents of Tarlabası describe life in the neighbourhood; comment on the community's exposure to urban renewal; express their sentiments on the project as it was devised by GAP and BM, and finally deliver their opinions on collective action. The total number of semi-structured in-depth interviews held is 25 and among these, 12 of them have been selected as conveyors of insightful information on the multiple aspects of the transformation process. The names of all informants within this analysis were changed for privacy reasons.

It should be kept in regard that interviews with residents were held between 2008 October and February 2009, corresponding almost to the same period when the NA representatives were interviewed. After about a year and a half, that is around July 2011, the process had taken a dramatic turn as the ruling JDP won the local elections and kept its seat at BM: Expropriations speeded up, tenants started to move out, owners showed greater tendency to attend one-on-one talks, and demolitions started by November 2011. Since the majority of informants had already moved out of the neighbourhood, I only managed to access a limited number of informants upon my return to the field in October 2011. Thus, I did not include repeat interviews with this restricted number of residents in the main

analysis presented here and preferred to use fragments from these recent updates in the main conclusion of this research.

Yet, even in the absence of these updates, it will be seen that the reflections of property owners and tenants provide powerful statements on not only the way in which residents related to the renewal project and justified grassroots resistance, but also how each group positioned itself within the context of emergent mobilization. This was accompanied with equally potent views on the future of resistance with notes on its potential vulnerabilities under the pressure of state-led renewal.

Although residents were somewhat confident about the prospective success of the NA in defending the owners' and tenants' rights, they were aware of the sort of fragmentations that could surface between the two groups once the pressure of renewal and expropriation would peak. What is more, it was clearly stated both by owners and tenants that these fragmentations would be dependent on the stance of owners within resistance: Once the owners would be tempted to secure their rights to their own properties, or enhance their gains from the process of renewal, the solidarity between the two groups would be disrupted. In a situation as such, the grounds for grassroots mobilization would either weaken, or collapse.

This is not to suggest that there was a rift between owners and tenants at the time of interviews. It can even be noted that tenants had developed empathy towards the situation of property owners to a certain extent, as will be demonstrated. To the contrary, despite their awareness of the potential vulnerabilities and fragilities of resistance, both groups were unified on the conviction that their resistance was established upon the very pressures underlying these vulnerabilities and various forms of injustice that could born out of them. Yet, it can be argued that the content and character of resistance performed in order to stand in the way of injustices had the tendency to transform in line with the progress of the renewal process and evolution of relations between owners, tenants, BM and GAP.

9.1. "It's Rarely a Choice": Living in Tarlabası

Unlike Sulukule, whose residents had mostly been based in the neighbourhood since birth, Tarlabası came to be known as a migrants' settlement in the past five

decades as explained earlier. Driving forces of migration for those who became the residents of Tarlabası seem to be extremely varied: One can find the Anatolian migrants of the 1950s and 1970s, the internally displaced Kurds of the 1990s and the international refugees of 1990s and 2000s all in one place. Halil stated that he and his family ended up coming to Istanbul out of necessity since “agriculture was no longer possible and infrastructure for trading was significantly insufficient” in his hometown in middle Anatolia. The overwhelming majority, however, is constituted by the likes of Hasan, who had to migrate to Istanbul forcefully due to clashes between the Turkish army and Kurdish militia in South Eastern Anatolia:

We could not even go to our fields and collect our harvest due to the unrest in the region. If you would have a look at the surroundings of my area [Dağgeçidi], you would notice that there were more than 200 villages. Currently, around 180 of these have either been evacuated, or they ceased to exist. I would say the number of villages that are still in their place is not more than 20. The communities of all those hundreds and thousands of villages in South Eastern Anatolia have faced forced migration like myself and my family. To be honest, regarding the land and properties I had there, I was not too keen on coming to Istanbul but we simply had to.

Tarlabası became an attraction point for these diverse migrant groups primarily due to its centrality. In close proximity to industrial and commercial zones of activity, and with a stock of cheap housing, Tarlabası stood as an ideal destination for those in search of easy access to job opportunities and housing solutions. Murat, who is the vice president of a solidarity union based in Tarlabası, explains the reason why they chose the area as their main office and social centre with the following words: “Taksim is where the majority of our members work so there could not be a more ideal meeting point, socially speaking. Members living in various parts of Istanbul can also easily find us here since it is so central.”

This quality of Tarlabası has thus kept attracting newcomers and led to the development of various solidarity networks, which provided members of socially and economically disadvantaged groups with many forms of support when needed.¹ Other groups, such as transvestite sex workers, also preferred settling in Tarlabası since it is one of the few places in the city where ‘marginalized groups’ came to be accepted. Asu explains the convenience of Tarlabası for herself with the following words:

¹ Hasan is among those who preferred Tarlabası due to the presence of his relatives who moved to the city in an earlier period: “I only chose to live in Tarlabası because my uncle told me he could be of support. I cannot imagine myself trying to settle in Aksaray at that time, where I knew nobody.”

Because we are sex workers, we are usually asked to pay more as tenants. Whereas you would be asked to pay 300 TL, for example, we are asked 400-500 TL. This applies for almost all neighbourhoods apart from Tarlabası, hence the reason why I live here. The area constitutes an advantage also because I do not work out on the street. I do not stop cars, or wait for customers on the pavement. I work at clubs, majority of which are based in Beyoglu. I do not need to take a cab, or anything like that. I simply walk there in my everyday clothes, change into my costume at the club, then change back into my normal outfits when I am done and walk back home in two minutes.

The ethnic, social and cultural complexity of Tarlabası, born out of these movements, is an intricate matter to address. As it was stated in the previous chapter, the leader and spokesperson of the NA tend to put emphasis on the multicultural aspect of Tarlabası -which in their view constitutes its cosmopolitan quality- as an asset that should not be lost in the city. Interviews with residents, however, reveal that multicultural dynamics prevailing in Tarlabası are far more complex and not without controversies. Departing from the accounts of all twelve informants, it can be argued that there are tensions between communities of distinct cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds. Murat explains these tensions with the following statement:

It is true that there is a certain cultural mosaic in Istanbul -inherited from the Ottomans- which has bestowed people with the ability to tolerate each other's customs, values etc. This won't change even after a century. We have become somehow mixed. I really do like this quality, I mean the ability of people to live together despite differences. Tarlabası is currently a very cosmopolitan area yet it is a place where people look at each other in anxiety and doubt. Apart from families that have a long past in this neighbourhood, I don't believe anyone is sincere with each other. People are stressed, they approach each other in caution; you can see all that in the way people behave. The mosaic theory only applies for people who can really live and talk with each other. If you consider your neighbor as a thief, a drug seller, or any other thing that you don't approve of, how are you talk to that person *really*?

Accounts provided by other informants supported Murat's view: Whereas Fusun argued that "[her] Turkish neighbours do not trust [her] as much as [she] does not trust them", Kirkor stated that "[he] never rented any of [his] flats to Kurds since they do not know how to fit in". Or, while Asım defined his neighbours as "indecent people who help criminals hide away" and his mother referred to them as 'Gypsies', Gözde told that the houses of transvestite sex workers -like herself- get regularly 'stoned' by kids (guided by adults). Gözde also added that she would not walk into some parts of the neighbourhood since she would fear the reaction of others who are not familiar with her.

These are not to suggest that the tensions in question pose particular threats to the well-being of residents in the neighbourhood. Nor do security issues experienced

in Tarlabası originate from these anxieties, in the view of many. It is thus important to note that community members managed to establish a certain equilibrium within this complexity and found ways of living side by side. As much as there were traces of hostility in some accounts, there were other remarks made by residents which confirmed that “no one gave harm to each other”, in the words of Hasan, and also that “living together was still possible”, in the words of Faruk.² Pathway to such equilibrium passes through multiple routes, among which are daily examples of solidarity and small gestures of ‘keeping an eye on each other’. According to overall view, poverty is one important element, which brought these distinct groups together and pushed them into developing the ability to live together. Becoming subject to a top-down renewal project, from this perspective, has widened the grounds of the shared platform for the community. Thus, in the words of Gzde, the best trick to easing life within the neighbourhood is “to not to see, hear, or know anything. As long as you play the three monkeys, there’s no trouble. Don’t mess with anyone, don’t talk too much and always look ahead. Three very simple rules.”

Almost all residents stated that they were not happy with the living conditions in Tarlabası. What bred these sentiments need to be understood within two different contexts: Dereliction of the built environment and manifestation of criminal activities in the neighbourhood. According to Kirkor, the common factor lying beneath these two seemingly distinct matters is ‘lack of ownership’ which started with the ‘forced abandonment’ of the area by its former residents almost five decades ago. In his view, the abandonment caused a ‘void’ in both physical and social terms, leading to the deterioration of the neighbourhood at multiple levels:

As you know this neighbourhood was predominantly resided by non-Muslim groups – mostly Greeks. Following to the war in Cyprus, these communities were exposed to a sort of pressure, which finally led to their deportation from the country. The houses were left empty. Before they became residences for rural migrants, there was this period when the mafia took the neighbourhood over and some apartments were turned into warehouses, bases of drug smuggling and all other sorts of criminal activity. When this started to happen, the Armeninas left as well. Later, most of these buildings changed hands: They

² To give more details, while Hasan stated that “[he] was never treated badly by any of [his] neighbours” and also that “[he] would never discriminate between [his] neighbours”, Galip put that he “got on well with all his neighbours” and that he “never discriminated anyone in the neighbourhood throughout the 37 years [he] lived there”. Similarly, Asu told that she had a certain dialogue with her neighbours on an everyday basis and that “these neighbours kept telling the kids who stone [their] building off whenever they would see it happen”.

were squatted, sold to other individuals, the ownership of some were transferred to non-Muslim foundations etc. So for a long time, Tarlabası was not 'owned up' by anyone.

İlhan states that for these reasons, Tarlabası transformed into an area "suffering from many problems, roughly put". To start with the physical aspects of problems, many buildings went through a process of severe deterioration in the past five decades. As stated earlier, many buildings in Tarlabası had been registered as listed buildings starting from 1993, meaning that the built environment came to be governed by conservations norms. As renovation became a painstaking and costly process following to this development, many buildings started to suffer from major infrastructural problems - making life difficult for those who both owned and lived in them. In Murat's words:

Since there was no one who would bother to take care of these buildings for a long while, in the later years many of them would be inhabited for a while and then abandoned again, due to their conditions. A brief look at the surroundings explains it all. Since this is a conservation zone, we are not even allowed to put a nail on the wall without getting the required permissions. That's why the worse the buildings get, the more people tend to move out than attempting to do repairs. This also paves way for squatters to come along and break into those buildings even if they might be in a bad shape.

Physical dereliction, from this perspective, was accompanied with heightened levels of criminal activity as the area became an easily penetrable zone with close proximity to Taksim, the commercial centre of the Beyoglu region. Many of the informants put that the criminals were not usually the 'insiders', but rather the 'outsiders' who used Tarlabası as a vanishing and exit point from Taksim where majority of the crimes were committed.³ However, the main sufferers of these activities were mainly the residents of the neighbourhood. Below is a glimpse from Asım's experience:

An uncanny atmosphere developed throughout the years as petty crimes climbed and Tarlabası came to be frequented by unlawful characters and gangs. The police was unable to control the area, to be honest there was overwhelming angst. At times it was impossible to sleep at night, there would be too much noise. Even in the summer, when the kids would find it to be too hot at home, we were scared to sleep with our windows open. If we would do that, we could smell weed being smoked right in front of our building by people we did not know.⁴

³ İlhan stated that although criminal forces were coming mostly from the outside, in time these forces linked with some of the insiders due to economic problems people were suffering from: "At the start, inter-communal relations did not allow for such links to get established, in time some of the residents were drawn into collaborating with criminal groups. As people wanted to sort their economic problems out, they got involved with the nastiness that was taking the neighbourhood over."

⁴ Again, İlhan puts that the presence of the Kurdish political party, BDP (which had a stronghold in the neighbourhood) helped minimize the level of crime to a certain degree: "Imagine if they were

Asım, thus, put that “problems caused by the conditions of Tarlabası became integral parts of everyday life”. These, inevitably, found reflections in the real estate values of the area as Kirkor also noted: “The past 10 years’ rent that I collected from my flats is, to be honest, not worth talking about.” In fact, this was the exact reason why the neighbourhood was popular among low-income tenants, as explained earlier. There was strong belief among the informants that although measures could be taken to improve the quality of life in Tarlabası by authorities, this had not been the case. There were problems with service delivery and infrastructural maintenance apart from lack of crime prevention schemes. Residents explained this with the shared assumption that the police had stakes in the crime scene in Tarlabası. According to these assumptions, the police was either commissioned by gangs operating in the area, or were being bribed by the same groups to keep things quiet. Galip commented on this as follows:

There is a police station 200 meters away from here. If they really wanted, they could put the area in shape in 24 hours. I called the municipality almost 50 times to ask for the street lamps on my street to get fixed. In the end, they did not do it on the grounds that ‘we kept on breaking it again and again.’ Well, you are not claiming these streets as public authorities to start with. There are loads of people out here, walking on the street, who do not only break the lamps but also steal from people. And on top of that, these authorities are making money out of all the wrongdoings happening here. Of course they would not want to interrupt that (...) Everyone knows that 90% of the officers operating in this area is being bribed by mafia and such like.⁵

All informants stated that one of the primary consequences of these conditions was the extreme stigmatization of communities living in Tarlabası. Halil told that anyone who happened to learn that he lived in Tarlabası tended to give negative reactions, including relatives:

When they come here they see transvestites walking about, sketchy characters waiting at street corners, drug dealers taking patrols. We are from the heartland of Anatolia, these

not around, it would get even worse. It would be impossible to walk in the neighbourhood in the day time, let alone the night.”

⁵ Galip’s views were supported by Hasan and Gözde with additional comments. According to Hasan, all those who were committing crime either in, or around Tarlabası were already known by authorities: “They have their names in records. Sometimes they arrest them and then let them out on the street within three to five days, only because they have profit driven relations with them. Otherwise, to me first there is Allah, then the prophet and then the state: Meaning, they have enough power to handle this.” Gözde, on the other hand, argued that these were the efforts of greater authorities to prepare grounds for the implementation of the renewal project by deliberately letting the neighbourhood fall into pieces: “It’s all on purpose, they are trying to turn this place into a shit hole so that they can justify future demolitions. They are literally turning a blind eye to everything that is happening here. They do a few searches, check some identity cards, put people in jail for a few days and that’s it. No one can argue that the police the state, or the army are incapable of taking further control in a small neighbourhood like Tarlabası. This is an overt strategy of marginalization and criminalization.”

kinds of stuff is unacceptable in our culture. I was told by my relatives that the money I make here is never going to be *halal*. We tell them that none of this gives harm to any one of us, and that all we do is work work work but it's difficult to explain, you see.⁶

Stigmatization does not always originate from civilians like friends, acquaintances and strangers, but also from public authorities as the accounts of Asım and Faruk also reveal. Both Asım and Faruk had to confront the police for no justifiable reason, in their view, apart from the officers' conviction that they could be the suspects of any possible crime just because they lived in Tarlabası. Asım was once arrested since he stepped out of a local restaurant just as the police was chasing a group of thieves: "I simply happened to be in their way and they arrested me. I stayed in jail for five days. You tell them that you have nothing to do with the whole thing, your family gives testimony but it is difficult to make people believe if you are a resident of Tarlabası." Faruk, on the other hand, was assaulted by the police on his way to Taksim for no reason after an ID check and a warning to not to smoke out on the street: "By now, this sort of treatment has become routine", he said.

On the grounds of the reasons remarked, the majority of the informants put that they were in need of extensive rehabilitation in Tarlabası. Residents told the story of a Malaysian family who were trapped in a crumbling building on fire and saw the death of the father since firefighters could not access the narrow streets of Tarlabası. Stories of similar types keep circulating among residents who feel that almost everyone "faces similar risks as long as they live in the current conditions", as Fsun put it. However, informants were careful to stress that the sort of rehabilitation they need should not cause displacements and disrupt the working networks of solidarity in the neighbourhood. As explained earlier, while some of the community members were vitally dependent on the centrality of Tarlabası for their livelihood, others relied on resources provided by communal ties that had long been established. Hasan's response on this matter touched upon the significance of such support mechanisms effectively:

⁶ Similar to the case of Sulukule, most residents were predominantly worried about the way in which both the troubled conditions of the neighbourhood and stigmatization can affect their kids. İlhan and Füsün who have five kids explained that it is not easy to raise kids in an area like Tarlabası. İlhan said, "so far, so good. We are surrounded by so much trouble but I have managed to keep them away from it all, but of course just for now" whereas Füsün stated that "being a mother in Tarlabası is a difficult task." Similar remarks were made by Asım and Hasan's wives.

No matter what, we know people here. I am %100 confident that if I ever got in trouble, my neighbours would be there for help. We are also surrounded by people coming from our region, our village. A few years ago my cousins moved here as well, I mean I have everything I need. If I ever have money issues, my uncle is here for all sorts of support. Where could I find such aids if I was to live elsewhere, away from everyone I know?

9.2. From Restoration to Transformation: Encounters with Urban Renewal

Similar to the residents of Sulukule, members of the community in Tarlabası gathered the hints of the upcoming project through random incidents and sources: Some heard rumours, some took notice of strangers walking around and taking pictures, and others read about possibilities towards a project in newspapers. After about almost two years, property owners were invited over for a meeting with the private developers and municipal officers. That is, when the residents were officially informed of the project, the main decision making processes for the development of the renewal scheme were complete. Asım put that majority of the questions directed to them were more along the lines of ‘will you agree with this, or that decision?’. As Faruk put it:

The very initial news were delivered to us via television news. We heard about the tender bid and then we were invited for an official meeting. What you need to understand here is that this tender bid was launched and finalized in the absence of our knowledge and consent. We only learnt about all these things when everything was already decided for by others.

Accounts of informants reveal that following three meetings like this, the language of project implementers evolved from ‘undertaking renewal with the support of Beyoglu Municipality’ to ‘the power of the municipality to expropriate properties in case of disagreements’. It was on the grounds of this shift that initial reaction to the project had predominantly been negative. Owners, in particular, interpreted this as a violation of their property rights since “a tender was launched by the municipality for an area populated by private properties without consulting the owners”, as Murat put it, or more importantly, in the absence of their consent. In reflecting on this, Halil drew attention to the significance of that shift in language:

Initially they were talking about some sort of a restructuration process whereby the physical environment would be fixed. Old buildings would be renovated and the municipality would give the needed support. Then, suddenly, there was a turn from that talk of renovations and rehabilitation to potential expropriations if we did not agree to their terms. Of course, it is not an easy matter to take in. This is where we have been living for the past 40 years. Our livelihood, home, it is all here and aside from these, many of us have nothing else.

It is important to note, however, that there were some owners who took things from a more positive perspective. While Asu and Faruk told that some owners showed willingness to cooperate with project implementers under the stated conditions, Kirkor admitted that he was initially “thrilled to get the news”:

They put things so nicely and showed such impressive images that I thought ‘oh, finally that day when Tarlabası will be saved and our properties will finally find their worth has arrived!’. When I took the project catalogue home my wife and daughters were all cheering with happiness, saying that we had done the right thing by not selling the building earlier.

Here, what comes forward is the expectation of owners for their properties to find value in the changing dynamics of real estate speculation. Kirkor was not alone in his sentiments, yet he changed his position later due to reasons that will be explained. Others who thought alike, however, did not change their view and shook hands with authorities exactly due to reasons that triggered Kirkor’s initial enthusiasm. Asim’s case is particularly interesting since he was first hesitant about the project but was persuaded by the talk of the vice mayor. As Asim’s reflections reveal, the talk was predominantly founded upon pumping up the optimistic expectations of property owners:

The vice mayor said, “Imagine a guy who owns a flat of 20 m², worth 150.000 TL. Here, you own 150 m² buildings that are barely worth 20.000 TL. This guy comes all the way to Taksim every weekend to have fun and then goes all the way back to Atakoy to sleep. Why does he not buy a property from Beyoglu? Because it is not as peaceful and secure (...) At the moment, your properties are not as valuable as they should be. With the help of this project, however, you will get what you deserve.” At the start I was a bit hesitant about this whole expropriation issue but the talk made me think and finally I decided to just go ahead with it. After all, buying a place from here will be much more difficult after the project is complete.

It is important to note here that Asim is one of the few among the informants who was supportive of the project at the time of fieldwork. In fact, and overall, those who were in support of the project constituted a minority in this period. The resistance was on and talks with authorities were at a halt. Aside from those that have already been stated, another reason for the overwhelming negativity towards the project was deriving from the knowledge of what happened in other renewal zones throughout Istanbul. Sulukule was among those that the residents kept referring to as a case, which did not bring any good outcomes neither for property owners, nor tenants. Below is a reflection on this from İlhan:

I saw it on television, what happened in Sulukule. They evacuated and demolished the entire place. The whole issue was taken to the court. Authorities tend to justify these actions on the grounds of preparations towards 2010 European Capital of Culture but

from what I know, even experts from the European Union officially announced that the project went against the grains of all principles they defend. What does forcefully evicting people have anything to do with the aim of promoting culture, history and decent living? This is exactly what they are trying to do here in Tarlabası as well.

9.3. Situating Property Owners and Tenants within the Framework of Renewal

This section provides an analysis of owners' and tenants' comments on the potential impacts of the renewal scheme as it was devised by authorities, and the stances they adopted within the context of options that became available to them. Regarding that there are two distinct pathways designated for property owners and tenants, experiences of each group have been evaluated in separate categories, similar to the analysis presented in Chapter 7 for Sulukule's residents.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding observations that emerged from this analysis is that both owners and tenants were pretty much on the same page with respect to their opinions of the project and the capacity of TAPT to defend the case of both groups against the ills of the project. Of course, this opinion is strictly dependent on the timing of interviews: Resistance was at its peak and the community had seen a number of winning returns from effective and unified mobilization at grassroots level. These returns provided both owners and tenants with visible optimism of a certain kind.

Yet, even more striking was the awareness of both owners and tenants with respect to potential fragmentations that could surface between owners and tenants, as pressures would climb in the long run. These pressures were already there for those owners who had chosen to negotiate with GAP in return of new spaces from the renewal zone: Some of the owners among the informants saw the project and the conditions under which it was being implemented as a significant threat to their social and economic well being and hence, taken a pro-project stance in the hope that they could turn their properties into investments for the future. Tenants, on the other hand, were the most vulnerable against such pressures and could only resist pressures to the extent that they had faith in the stance of owners. Overall, however, it can be argued that there was predominant determination among informants to reject negotiations for any kind for returns as much as they could.

Still, it is important to note that despite such adamancy, all informants were of the view that TAPT would fail in terminating the project altogether, or coming in the way of displacements and dispossessions. In the view of many, TAPT certainly held the capacity to secure certain gains and securities for all groups at social and economic levels, and this was the maximum goal it could achieve. However, anything more than this was beyond the capacity of TAPT in the opinion of almost all informants.

9.3.1. “If You Think Too Much About It, It Makes You Go Nuts”: The Case of Property Owners

Property owners that constitute 25% of Tarlabaşı were considered ‘lucky’, similar to those in Sulukule, not only because they represented those who were relatively privileged when compared to tenants, but also because they were the only ones who could secure substantial gains from the process of renewal - again, similar to the case of Sulukule. These gains, as already explained, could either take the form of monetary compensations in return of their properties, or the acquisition of new properties from the renewal area on the grounds of conditions defined by GAP and BM. In either case, unlike tenants, they were the only ones who had the solid option of claiming space in Tarlabaşı following the completion of the project in return of what they owned.

In their attempt to explain their approach to the project, property owners tended to start from the journey they took in acquiring and investing in their properties. The driving motive in addressing this journey was to classify the worth, or value of their properties which did not only derive from the workings of real estate markets but more from their efforts to transform the built environment into livable, or workable places. It was through the calculation of this worth, or value in alliance with the future speculative value of the entire Tarlabaşı region that property owners found the compensations offered unfair.

The accounts of property owners reveal that compared to many central areas of Istanbul, little was paid in the acquisition of properties in Tarlabaşı following to

1965.⁷ This was either because part of the non-Muslim owners wanted to sell their properties before they left the country, or because the social economic and physical downfall of the area in the following years found reflection in real estate values. Halil remembers his father buying their building off from a non-Muslim neighbor for “peanuts”; Hasan, on the other hand, told that although the money asked for the flat was very little, it was still a big sum for him to bring together: “When I heard that they were selling the flat I immediately asked how much it was and they said 5000 TL. We sold all the jewelery we received from the family on our wedding and we also borrowed money from my father and aunt. Even for such little money, we had to get indebted.”

Owners state that they made numerous attempts in the past to renovate their properties in line with conservation norms but either failed to get the necessary permissions, or could not afford the expenses of required procedures. Consequently, many ended up doing minimal repairs informally; yet, these actions could have costly returns since those owners who undertook renovations without permission would be charged significant fines if noticed by authorities. Melda is one of those who suffered from an experience as such: “We wanted to repair our building because one of the balconies was about to collapse so it posed a big threat to the lives of both ourselves and those passing by the street. We did everything possible to get the required permissions but we failed. Hence, we did the repairs needed informally but then we were charged fines.”

Unofficial repairs were enough to keep the properties together, or make them more livable/workable, but not enough to improve their values in real estate markets. For these reasons, all the money that was invested either in repairing the buildings and/or paying fines for undertaking informal renovation works was paramount for most of the owners and constituted importance when it came to the judgment of the worth of properties. Hasan said, “Especially those who came through forced migration after the 1990s invested everything they had on this area. How can I easily give up on the past 20 years’ accumulation?”. Many owners were also critical of the fact that although they had to pay big fines for all the unofficial

⁷ Almost all informants had bought their buildings after 1965. One exemption is Kirkor, whose property was passed on to him from his father. The title deed showed that the building had belonged to them since 1928.

repairs they had done, the project itself was designed in such a way that it went against the grains of all the norms that they had to abide with in the past.

The fear of loss among property owners was also based on the fact that these properties were important sources of income for many. All building owners interviewed had *at least* three flats on rent. Melda is one of those, worried that she would experience financial instability if she lost her tenants. Yet, since she was in support of the project, her hope was for the project to start and finish as soon as possible so that her problem could be sorted:

Our building is situated on a lively part of the neighbourhood and is crowded with families. Among the five families who have been renting there are those who have been there for the past 15 years. I get 300-400 TL from each. We also have a shop on the ground floor that would rarely stay vacant but for the past year or so we have been keeping it empty. We are worried that if we rent it out, it will soon be our possibility to ask the tenants to leave due to the project. Everyone knows about the project by now anyhow so it's harder to find new tenants. All in all, our property is a major source of income for us so we want to see the project finalized if it is to start.

As noted earlier, the project was met by the overwhelming reaction of residents following to its confirmation by officials. It was due to this reaction that there was enough motivation to establish an NA in a short while. Yet, the negative response under question should not simply be understood as the objection of property owners to the project and demolition of the neighbourhood. Instead, the reaction was far more complex than this, revealing the variation of opinions among the property owners' expectations. The fear of not being able to access fair compensations was one of the main constituents of the referred complexity. That is, for this group it was not a matter of agreeing with the project or not, but more a matter of being able to get a fair share of the emergent rent from the area. A number of property owners did clearly state that they had been waiting for the day when their properties would become valuable again. Melda, as seen above, was one of those:

Our priority is our children and grand children's future and we are aware that we are living in Taksim, that is the centre of not only Istanbul but also Turkey. We want our property, which is only meters away from the main square, to gain value. And how is this to happen? It is more than clear that trying to rely on our own efforts to succeed is beyond our strength, or capability. Coming together with a number of other property owners and using our right to renew our own buildings will also not do the job. Thus, our hopes are in this project. Maybe we are only getting a small flat in return of a huge building but in its current state, our building can never match the value of that small flat in the future.

Kirkor is another owner who shared the same view as Melda. He was initially happy to hear that his property would become valuable, as his dialogue (given below) with the project developers revealed. Yet, he put that his opinions changed following to his talks with other owners in opposition:

They told such great things that I instantly said 'yes' to. They responded by offering me 168.000 TL, 'the value of your property, as they put it. I said 'no, I want a new space from the renewal area.' They said 'ok', I picked my space. Then they asked for some documents for the completion of procedures. I was just about to bring them in when I came together with others from the neighbourhood who asked me to listen to them. I am glad I did that since I ended up discovering the other side of the coin.

The other side of the coin, as Kirkor put it, was predominantly defined by injustices posed by compensations offered to property owners. These need to be analyzed within two different categories, being monetary compensations and allocation of new spaces from the renewal zone. Starting with the first, owners were offered a total sum of money, reflective of the actual value of their properties. However, the way in which compensations were determined caused one of the biggest controversies among property owners since the values offered were based on the pre-project conditions of Tarlabaşı, disregarding the speculative effect of the project on post-project real estate values. Whereas Hasan fiercely criticized the offer of 750 TL per square he was offered at the time of interviews, Murat was questioning how his 85-90 m² space could only worth 49,000 TL. Below is the statement of Kirkor, which sheds light on to what he thought was wrong with the offer made:

Ahmet [leader of the association] told me that real estate value per square meter in this part of Beyoglu is 5000 TL; yet, all compensations offered by GAP are grounded upon a base value of 3000 TL. If you deconstruct the offer they gave me, this is what you discover. How unfair is that? It does not make sense for an area so close to Talimhane and Taksim to be so low in price. The new development here will be huge so there is no question about the degree of rent that will emerge from here. Before I was warned I had considered the 168.000 TL offered as a good price, can you imagine?

As formerly stated, owners were aware of the speculative rise to emerge in the real estate sphere of Tarlabaşı so they did expect to see the impact of this in monetary compensations. In fact, this much expected speculative boom was the main reason for some to approach the idea of negotiation. Asım's reflections is explanatory of this tendency to a great extent:

I have been in the construction business for some time. I would buy buildings in bad condition and sell them flat by flat. In that period, you would buy a building in ruins for 5000-10,000 TL. If I need to be frank, our buildings did not even worth that before this

project came on the agenda. Even if a building of four stories with a size of 89 m² was offered at 50,000, or 60,000 TL, no investors showed interest. We were living like losers in our own homes. It has only been after the announcement of this project that our properties have suddenly been of worth. So we do see this opportunity as a secure investment for our future.

The second option, that is allocation of new spaces from the renewal zone, was equally problematic since the owners were only offered spaces that made up %42 of their existing properties by GAP. Issues of concern with respect to this option were numerous: Some argued that the supposed 42% was not consistent among offers for various reasons. Melda, for example, told that there was a mismatch between the size of the space she was offered and 42% of her existing property.⁸ Others were concerned that their crowded households would not be able to fit into spaces that would correspond to 42% of their existing properties. Hasan is one of those who had troubles trying to figure how he could fit a family of seven into a 20m² space, which he was offered.⁹ Finally, almost all owners held serious concerns about the enormous amounts of debt they would find themselves in due to the rent gap between the current and future value of their properties. Regarding that the current value properties were calculated on pre-project grounds and the future value of properties were estimated on speculative grounds, this debt was difficult to handle for many.¹⁰

Moreover, although developers had argued that owners could choose their new spot as they liked, in practice owners were not even offered the actual location of their existing properties if they wished so. In some cases, owners were offered spaces away from the main boulevard and further down the slope to Dolapdere, which was not appealing for many.¹¹ This was particularly a problem for those

⁸ When she inquired into this mismatch Melda found out that although her flat was shown as 95m² on her deed, GAP had arrived to the conclusion that it was 85m² for a number of technical reasons. So she was only offered 42% of the size that GAP identified.

⁹ This was also an issue for those who were living with their extended families in one building, such as Faruk. In return of his five storey building, measuring up to a little more than 500m², he was only offered a 90m² flat which caused a major problem since he would then have to find solutions for the housing needs of his mother and uncle.

¹⁰ This pressure even applied for those who had already agreed to getting new spaces from the project area. One of the luckiest among this crowd is Melda who managed to get, with her sister, three flats of 58m² in return of a building of 550m² without getting indebted. Melda said, "I would never get into this deal if I was asked to make extra payments. I cannot even afford to pay the difference of one square meter, that is how difficult my situation is."

¹¹ As it happens in cities with hilly landscapes, properties on top of slopes with close connections to main access points are more valuable than properties at the bottom of the same slopes. This also applied for properties in the renewal zone of Tarlabası, and the mathematics of compensations and allocations depended on this defining element. In situations whereby owners demanded larger

owners who had properties on the main boulevard and did not want to lose the advantage of centrality. What is more, there were limitations to how the offered spaces could be used within the renewal zone as Murat noticed:

We agreed to get not only what we were offered but also an additional spot since we needed a larger space, which meant that we would pay quite a lot of money. Yet, these new spots we were shown were slightly away from the main boulevard; we were not given the chance of staying where we were. I asked why and I was told that I would not be allowed to use that spot as a social centre and association like the way I used to. They told me that this was the decision of the municipality. So what is the point in me getting two flats of 200m² each if I cannot do what I used to do? We do not have any other aim than offering a space of socialization for our members. I insisted on my demand but I have so far been left unanswered.

Aside from monetary compensations and spots from the renewal zone, owners were also extended the opportunity to purchase TOKI built units on the grounds of long-term installment plans in Kayabaşı. This option was devised by authorities later to the talks in an attempt to please owners. Yet, none of the informants considered this as an option, both because Kayabaşı was far too peripheral for the requirements of their everyday lives, but also because they had heard about the experiences of those who had left Sulukule for Tasoluk, an equally peripheral area.

They told me that two months following to our talk I could gain access to brand new flats near Büyükçekmece, built by TOKI. I immediately said no. I asked whether I would be asked to pay a difference and they said, 'Yes but in small amounts and within an extended period of time.' I was told that my current property only covered half the price of the new flat in Kayabaşı – my property was worth 40,000 TL and the new flat would be 80,000 TL, which pointed at a difference of 40,000 TL. I told them that I did not have such money. This is not the only issue though, what about my daily costs of transport? I would have to spend at least 5 TL extra everyday in order to be able to come here for work. On top of that, I will have to get up at least at 5 am to be able to start my shift at 8.30 am. Then, if I finish work at 7.30 pm, it will not be earlier than 9.30 pm that I will make it home. Who will afford the costs of all that? Who is ready to face the consequences of such a radical move? Isn't that exactly what happened to people in Sulukule?¹²

These accounts demonstrate that although owners were keen to see their properties gain value in the real estate markets of Istanbul, they were highly critical of the envisaged project due to the terms, conditions and methods of renewal. For they observed inconsistency and non-clarity to the calculation of compensations, and for the terms and conditions of negotiation in any form

spaces with less elements of debt, the spaces to be offered would be located in areas further down the slope.

¹² In a similar tone, which drew attention to the centrality of Taksim and the meaning of this in terms of property values, Melda said "I would never leave a place in Taksim and go to Küçükçekmece in a million years. After all, I am fully aware that I would not be able to afford a property in Taksim from scratch even if it would be 10m² place and even if I worked my entire life."

pushed owners into further financial vulnerability, owners were predominantly in the view that the project was founded upon unfair grounds.

Accounts also confirm that especially those who negotiated with GAP in return for new spaces from Tarlabası were not entirely confident about what the future held for them. The first problem encountered by this group was rent support: According to contracts signed, GAP would provide owners with rent support until the completion of the project. However, in such cases when a building was shared by households from the same family, rent support would only be granted to the household in possession of the deed - and not others. Asım, for example, was one of those in this position and was clueless at the time of interview as to how he could both pay for his rent and find solutions for his brothers' families who used to share the building with them.

The second problem, on the other hand, was the question of whether the owners would be able to keep their new properties at hand. Both Melda and Asım, representing those who had already shaken hands with GAP on similar conditions at the time of fieldwork, stated that they only agreed to negotiate since they wanted to take the opportunity of securing their families' future by investing on actually valuable properties in Tarlabası. In his effort to reflect on this matter, Asım put that he had deliberately chosen to get a new space from the renewal zone rather than accepting the monetary compensation since this could be a longer lasting investment. However, he was already fearful that he would not be able to pay his debt:

I could take the money and buy a new property elsewhere, you know. We could simply move into a new flat and start a new life without having to pay a rent. However, I didn't want to miss the opportunity of making an investment in better possibilities for the future. If my plans do not work out, my family would be the first to make me regret my decision but you see, we are already in it. If you think too much about it, it makes you go nuts. To be honest, I am not entirely sure how I will manage to both pay that debt of 220.000 TL and feed my family with a minimum wage. God knows, maybe I will die without seeing myself pay the whole lot.

For an overwhelming majority in the same period, however, the project was not acceptable by any means: It did not only violate the property rights of owners, but also their rights to housing in many cases. What was more, it was giving way to forceful eviction and displacements with irreversible consequences. In the words of Hasan:

I told the officials from the very first day that I was fully against this project simply because it is violating our rights to our own properties alongside our right to housing. We are being violated at so many different levels. This is where I work and live with my five kids, and what they are doing with this project is to push me to out of this city, as far as the Traces.

9.3.2. “As Long As We Live Here, We Will Never Starve To Death”: The Case of Tenants

Tenants who constituted 75% of the neighbourhood represented the most vulnerable groups of Tarlabası since they were the most disadvantaged groups in terms of economic well-being and housing security. At the outset, the renewal project did not include support mechanisms for tenants. However, later to the three parties talks between GAP, BM and the NA they were extended the opportunity to benefit from state-subsidized social housing units in Kayabaşı, 45 km to the south west of Tarlabası. That is, tenants were not only to be forced out of their familiar surroundings (both in physical and social terms) similar to the case of Sulukule’s tenants, but also they were to be loaded with financial burdens in the absence of relevant capacities.

As the percentage of tenants in the renewal zone also reveals, Tarlabası has long been a popular destination for those in search of cheap housing options with easy access to diverse employment opportunities. As Erder also notes, inner city neighbourhoods in close proximity to small industries had become popular among rural migrants in the aftermath of 1950s and Tarlabası had been an integral part of this preferred geography. Single men moving to Istanbul in search of industrial jobs would sort their housing problem by renting out rooms, or flats with other fellow migrants until they would save enough money to bring their families into the city. İlhan reflected on the place of Tarlabası in this scene:

Not everyone was lucky enough to migrate to Istanbul as a family, especially in the 1950s. In that period it was not easy for migrants, coming into the city as single men to find shared living spaces. You would not be able to do that in middle class neighbourhoods but Tarlabası was pretty much abandoned in the 1960s; no one cared who was living where and why as long as someone paid a certain amount of rent for a crumbling place. This was a great advantage for tenants of this sort. When you live around Taksim, you can get to

anywhere in this city with a single bus ticket. This is how Tarlabası became an ideal spot particularly for poor tenants looking for jobs and cheap housing.¹³

Previous descriptions of the neighbourhood demonstrated that Tarlabası continued to establish itself as a migrants' settlement following to the civil unrest in South Eastern Anatolia during the 1990s and the flow of international refugees throughout the 2000s. Dependency of low-income tenants on the neighbourhood was primarily determined by the availability of cheap housing options. Yet, this was also accompanied with accessibility to various other resources, which made life easier to cope for socio-economically disadvantaged members of the community. Although these resources were equally important for property owners, tenants were *vitally* dependent on them since they lacked some of the securities that property owners possessed. Galip's comments draw attention to this dependence clearly:

We can find ways of feeding ourselves and that's important. As long as we live here, we will never starve to death. I have a humble job that helps me get by but if they demolish my shop, I have no idea how I will manage looking after my children. The best idea they can come up with is to send me away to a far off place but living here should be my right. Kicking me out of here and bringing the better off in is a violation of this right: This is where we find food, send our kids to school, work and survive.

Although these resources and availabilities provided the tenants with vital support, this did not necessarily mean that living in Tarlabası had always been cost effective. In fact, most of the accounts by tenants revealed that they made as much investments into their living spaces as the property owners due to the conditions of the built environment. Gzde told that she called an architect friend of hers with specialization in conservation to mend the holes on the flooring although she could not get the required permissions; "at least I am aware of the fact that these are historical buildings and need special treatment" she said. Galip, on the other hand, gave the example of his son and cousin who started a small business in Tarlabası and "set up a workshop out of scratch which meant installing everything from anew" while at the same time paying for their debts. İlhan, who rented his building from a foundation, had a similar experience:

¹³ Hasan was one of those single migrants living in Tarlabası before he bought his flat. In reflecting back to his days as a tenant he said, "My cousin was also here, sharing a basement with others. May God believe you, the place was in such a stat that even rats would not bare; we spent almost five years there. I was married with kids but it was not possible for me to bring them to Istanbul at the start."

When we first moved in, it was not even possible to live here. It was clear that we would have to make certain investments. I talked to the manager of the foundation, which owns the building, and he told me that they did not have the required permissions for repairs. Any physical changes I would make would be commitment to crime but making a request for permission would also mean a long wait for me. I thought through it and decided that moving elsewhere as two families would cost more so we ended up doing some repairs informally. Can we say it has done the job? Not really. The ceiling still leaks and I changed the window frames myself. Wooden stairs were in pieces so I converted them into cement; I also fixed the toilets. And still, it is difficult to live; no matter how clean you might try to keep it, it is generally in a bad shape. I know what took me to bring it to date and while doing so I kept on paying my rent.

In the light of these, it is not difficult to predict that tenants do agree with the property owners that the area is need of substantial rehabilitation. When it comes to the envisaged project, however, many state that it was a tricky matter for tenants. Almost all tenants were conscious that they were in a much more disadvantaged position compared to property owners on the grounds of how much they could cope with the consequences of renewal. To them their vulnerability was mainly founded upon their non-recognition as stakeholders within the context of the project although they would be affected by the consequences of renewal much more dramatically. These sentiments were most clear in the reflections of İlhan's wife Füsün:

I have two thoughts regarding the project: First of all, if renewal takes place, it will become a much more decent living environment. On the other hand, there are lots of poor tenants living here. If you consider things from their perspective, the consequences of the project can be a disaster because no one will be able to afford the new rent here. After all, Tarlabası will become a luxurious place. That is, in its current state, the idea of renewal can only lead to the displacement of the poorest living here. Even the foundations that own our buildings will be unable to resist the pressure of renewal because the laws are working in the benefit of project implementers. If they get the consent of %70 property owners, then they can just go ahead with the project.

Despite these sentiments, tenants had developed a degree of empathy with the situation of property owners: They were aware of the kind of investment made on these properties and thought they deserved to access fairer deals. İlhan said, "not only is it that we have all settled here due to lack of options at different levels, but a lot has been invested in here which the authorities should keep in regard during negotiations." Bedri approached the matter at a similar angle, emphasizing how the property owners should be extended more substantial offers at least due to their success of keeping Tarlabası within the real estate markets of Istanbul – for better, or worse:

Without the migrant settlers, 60% of Tarlabası would have collapsed. Their arrival meant that Tarlabası was reclaimed after years of neglect and this act of reclaiming involved lots

of serious effort -no matter how informal they might have been- to the extent that people cut down from their budgets on food, taking care of their children etc. when necessary. If the municipality and private developer would like to implement a project here, they need to calculate compensations very carefully.¹⁴

Regarding the offers they were presented with, however, tenants were extremely unhappy. The same offer of getting the chance to purchase TOKI units by a long-term installment plan in Kayabaşı were also extended to tenants. The argument behind this offer was the same as it were in Sulukule: Giving tenants the chance to become homeowners just by allowing them to pay rent-like installments within an extended period of time. Of course, however, this would be a more costly deal on the part of tenants compared to property owners since they did not have assets that could cover the cost of down payments. These difficulties were coupled with concerns over the social and economic costs of living at a far away place, similar to the worries of property owners. Another similarity with property owners was that tenants were equally aware of the experience of Sulukule's residents. Thus, altogether, the informants put -without any exceptions- that they would not consider moving to TOKI units. Asu's comments also reveal that there was not much trust left for authorities under these conditions:

To be honest, even if it was for free, I would not take the offer. The entire Turkey has seen how people suffered from the scheme so far [referring to Sulukule and Basibuyuk]. They will throw us to some blocks in Küçükçekmece and if we do not like it, they will say "Well, your choice!" and kick us out of there as well. On top, they will say, "We have offered them homes but they rejected it." This is a pattern, which they keep repeating.

Although tenants were firm about their decision to not to join the TOKI housing scheme, they were not as clear about the kinds of solutions they were after. The only commonality among all these vague options, though, was that they were keener on devising their own solutions rather than making demands. When asked what kind of demand they could make from authorities, one clear option raised was their desire to be relocated to a nearer place than Kayabaşı together with social and economic support. In the absence of these, tenants were worried that they would encounter difficult problems, as expressed by Galip:

I have no clue about where I would go. If they relocate us to a nearby place maybe we can get by. In far away places, we will not be able to survive. It is all due to poverty, we just

¹⁴ İlhan's wife Füsün also claimed, from a similar perspective, that if it was not for the efforts of property owners it would not be impossible to cultivate on the rent potential of Tarlabası. "Some buildings that were only worth 10,000 TL in 1995 went up as much as 20.000 TL under the current conditions", she said: "The future rent to emerge on the grounds of the proposed project will rise on the shoulders of these values."

don't have the means. Even if I might try going back to my hometown, it would cost me more than 100,000 TL to set up my business there. My kids need to be schooled, I am not sure if these opportunities are available there at the moment. If not, what will they do there? I need to be able to feed a family. At least I have a job here; there, it is likely that we will starve. I would take a chance if they provided me with the opportunity to set up my business in my hometown, otherwise it is not possible. I mean, even if I might consider going back I simply cannot. We have been here for the past 13 years and yet, we haven't lived a decent day like a normal human being.

9.4. "Only Those Who Hold the Honey Will Lick Their Fingers": Reflections on Mobilized Action

It is due to the above worries and concerns that community members joined forces in an attempt to form a unified front against the project envisaged. As explained earlier, the NA had earned wide recognition among the community members from the start: Whereas more than 200 letters of attorney were signed by property owners, stating that they recognized the NA as a representative body, tenants had given visible support to property owners by such gestures as accompanying their fellow landlords to meetings held with authorities.

Interviews also confirmed that property owners and tenants showed joint willingness to pursue organized opposition against the renewal plan.

It is important to note, however, that aside from concerns over unfair compensations and displacements, both property owners and tenants referred to the use of force by law as the main object of opposition. Here, the mentioned use of force had found its most paramount expression in the power of the municipality to undertake expropriations and this act bore dramatic consequences for both groups. In the case of owners, it meant a direct threat over their property rights and the NA was considered as a legal weapon that could be used in fighting against it. Faruk explained this as follows:

They were offering a 90 m² space in return of a 500-600 m² building. We said we would not accept this and asked to settle for 40% in line with the bid results. They said 'no', so in return we told them that their project was deprived of the basic principles of justice and fairness. This led to a bit of tension there, whereby we were told that if we did not agree to their offers our properties would be expropriated. On top, we were advised to agree with the existing terms and conditions since we would get more money that way than through expropriation. If not, they told us that we would be deprived of all possible gains. These sorts of scare mechanisms were often used and that is one of the main reasons why we took mobilization so seriously.

The sort of anxiety triggered by potential expropriations was not only felt among owners in opposition but also those who had agreed to negotiate with authorities from the start. In fact, it was this exact anxiety and the overwhelming weight of legal pressures that led some of the owners to take a stance as such. Asim's account is an indicator of this:

What difference would it make if I had argued against the project? I made a lot of research into this matter. There was nothing within the limits of logic that we could do. There is a law, which clearly states that these sorts of projects aim at satisfying public needs. There was no room for me to object. Everything was in line with procedures, there was nothing illegal.

Expropriation was an equally concerning matter for tenants since they would automatically lose their homes and work spaces in a situation whereby the owners lost their properties. Hence, opposition to expropriation became a binding element, which encouraged the two parties to join forces for a shared cause. Whilst commenting on the impact of expropriation, Gözde put that it was the term used for "confiscating owners' rightful properties with the force of law." The way in which tenants empathized with owners within this context is also visible in such statements as Galip's:

No one is willing to sell their properties by force, it is perfectly understandable. If the project did not rely on such radical terms and instead took a more sensible approach then there would not be any problems. Yet, in its current state, they are causing harm to thousands of people while trying to make a handful of people rich; this should not be allowed for. I don't even own a property here but as a tenant, I think this is wrong.

Impact of the NA on the grounds of this unison had been noteworthy. Mass meetings were held in the neighbourhood where the language used by the spokesperson appealed both to owners and tenants. The NA office was frequented both by owners and tenants, and the NA had the capacity to inform all groups. Impact of the firm attitude born out of this harmony had not only been celebrated by the civil society and NAs based elsewhere, but was also confirmed by project initiators. During an interview, an officer from GAP put that "if the association did not exist, [they] would have been done with all the talks and started with the construction works by [that time]." In other words, the NA had succeeded in causing a significant delay in the implementation of the project through effective mobilization.

The accounts of property owners and tenants have revealed, however, that although joint objection to the project had been established, it did not necessarily

lead to the formation of a platform where working strategies were devised to address the variation of concerns among the owners and tenants. This is a matter of significance since the reflections of informants demonstrated that the core matters of concern showed fundamental variations between property owners and tenants: Whereas tenants put emphasis on displacement and the potential impacts of its consequences on their social and economic well-being, property owners stressed their inability to access fairer deals within the context of the project – i.e. heightened monetary compensations, bigger units from the renewal zone etc.

In other words, although property owners acknowledged the anxieties of tenants and embraced them as part of their struggle in discourse, visions as to what strategies could be developed as remedies to these anxieties did not seem to exist. On the other hand, although tenants knew that they had the owners' support and recognized the violation of property rights as a priority matter in their agenda, they were also fully aware that the defense of these rights would not necessarily secure the tenants' position. That is, although there was a joint will to fight against envisaged plans, it was not possible to observe a joint platform upon which solutions for all groups could be formulated.

Interpreting this variation of concerns and priorities as a trigger element for future 'fragmentations' within the community may not be a long shot. After all, even if there was predominant criticism towards the project, reflections of residents on how they responded to initial news regarding the project had shown that there were mixed views within the given context. Asu's observations from one of the meetings at GAP offices confirmed the residents' different takes on the project:

We did hear some say 'oh, with Allah's will, we will see the demolition of this neighbourhood' and others say 'are you aware of what some of us will get deprived of if this project gets implemented?'. Those who adopt the latter language are residents who are fully dependent on this neighbourhood as the sole resource of their livelihood whereas the first group is comprised of the wealthiest in Tarlabası. 'You are strong, nothing may happen to you in the end but what about others who are the weakest?' is the question that begs an answer. We have seen the hints of such clashes during meetings.

As already stated, the predominant view in the neighbourhood at the time of this research was built upon an overwhelming objection to the project, no matter how diverse the reasons were, and there was ultimate belief in the capacity of the NA to defend the rights and serve the interests of distinct groups in the neighbourhood. It is, however, important to note here that whereas the property owners were

highly critical of the terms and conditions of the project, they were not opposed to the renewal scheme *per se*. The flaws, in their view, were more in the *methods* of renewal than being in the idea of renewal. In other words, almost all property owners interviewed put that if they were extended 'fairer' deals under more appealing conditions, they would be willing to negotiate with authorities. As Murat put it,

No one is against the idea of renewal here, this is for sure. Yet, as one might expect, we want to get what we deserve under the given circumstances. Isn't it better for someone to get 45 m² instead of 26 m²? In the worst case scenario there should be a 50-50 sort of a deal. Isn't it always like that, procedure wise? What is possibly wrong with a demand as such if you think of the forces we are facing? Do not forget that one will always try to shape situations in line with his own interests.

The tendency to search for 'fairer deals', thus, became a part of 'resistance' for property owners. Halil put that they "would never give up on [their] properties and spaces in the renewal zone unless [they] were offered the actual value of their possessions." In his wordings, "expropriation could only serve justice on the grounds of such conditions". Departing from here, one can argue that it is the pressure and inevitability of urban transformation that leads owners into settling for, or trying to secure 'fairer' deals. Or, in other words, the reaction of owners must be understood within a framework whereby lack of options within the context of the project and direct pressure exerted on property rights -with the use of public policies- come into play.

Expropriation, as already stated, was an integral part of the mentioned sort of pressure. Scare mechanisms created by such powerful tools had immense impacts on the way in which owners took position within the struggle. It is interesting to note, however, that although expropriation had been one of the major catalysts of unified oppositional action, it was approached as an opportunity that could secure certain gains for owners: The strategy of the NA, as explained earlier, had evolved in a way to opt for expropriation in the attempt to demonstrate 'full resistance'. According to this plan, property owners could secure better monetary compensations this way, as sustained resistance would help owners benefit from the speculative rise that would surface in real estate markets within time. However, this did not satisfy the expectations of some from the process of a potential struggle. Property owners who did not join forces with the NA, for example, stated

that fears of expropriation has had a big influence on their decision to negotiate with authorities. Melda is one of these:

The NA kept pushing people towards expropriation after a while since the belief was that there could be better returns in it. They wanted to secure heightened gains but that was not what I wanted. I do not want to lose my property, that is my only wish. I am ready to take all financial burdens if I can make sure that I will keep my property in my hands. This is the only belonging that my father has left for us and we cannot lose it.

In the case of tenants, on the other hand, the matter of priority was to come in the way of displacement and avoid the risk of losing touch with their social and economic support mechanisms. Almost all informants were aware that the owners' priorities were different from theirs; they were clear on the ways in which forces of renewal were affecting the owners' rights to their properties and they had developed full awareness in that direction. However, as much as they acknowledged this fact, they expected a similar sort of empathy from owners in the defense of their rights to stay put in Tarlabası. In Asu's words:

We know that those who are against the project are more than those who are for it for all the right reasons. Yet, I want to remind all those who are both for the project and not to consider their tenants. We need, or even *have to* live here more than they do. I am at the age of 38 now and it is for sure that I will never get a 'normal' job that will provide me with insurance. My only security at the moment is my ability to live and work here until I have enough savings to get retired. Other than this possibility, I have nothing – not even the security of my own life.

When it comes to the ways in which they positioned themselves under the umbrella of the NA, almost all tenants stated in various ways that "since they [were] not recognized as official parties in the negotiations, [their] presence in the NA [was] dependent on the presence of property owners" as Fevzi put it: "I can only 'be there' if my landlord is there to defend me". In a similar tone, Asu put that she never paid a visit to the office of the association since the renewal project was primarily of the property owners' concern. Her account reveals how their non-recognition by authorities found reflection in the structuration of grassroots resistance:

In official terms this is not my problem, is it? I mean that is how the issue is treated by the municipality and all. Let's be honest, our situation is fully dependent on the attitude of the owners. If they negotiate with the developers, that's it for us. Who knows, maybe one day they will also decide to negotiate collectively and ask us to leave. Who knows?

These are not to suggest that there were rifts between tenants and property owners at the time of fieldwork. However, there were strong hints towards both parties' awareness with respect to the slippery grounds of fighting against

pressures they were exposed to. More than anything, these comments signaled the emergence of hierarchical tensions in relation to the knowledge that those in better conditions (predominantly in terms of what they owned) would become the 'winners' of the actual renewal process. Murat's reflections demonstrate this perspective at its best: "Only those who hold the honey will lick their fingers. It has always been like this and it will not be any different here, in the end. Let's accept that from the beginning. Everyone wants to get what s/he wants but some will get more than others."

Under these circumstances, some of the residents put that the actual aim of the NA would not go beyond securing the gains for property owners than anything else. Statements of this sort were made quite liberally by those who had not become members of the association. Asım, for example, argued that the NA did not have a strong point in claiming opposition: "Everything that has so far been said boils down to something like 'I am not against the project but I am against what is being offered to me'. Simply put, they want more for their members." For these reasons and similars, Melda stated that she found it pointless to become a member of the association for the sake of fighting against the project:

I bumped into one of the founding members one day who is also a real estate agent. He was talking about hiring lawyers, filing lawsuits and securing better returns. This was all he was talking about. I don't see where opposition lies here. Hence, I don't believe there was opposition in the neighbourhood.

It is important to note here that some of the property owners showed reluctance to become members of the association not only because they wanted to benefit from the project itself, but also because they could not see the space in which they could possibly stand against it, as stated earlier - whether it be at an individual, or community level. This perception came both from the pressures they faced and also from the knowledge they derived from other neighbourhoods' experiences. Again, in Melda's words:

Now that I have negotiated with the municipality and developers, do you think I am satisfied? Of course not. We were definitely expecting better offers but tell me what I could do. What would *you* do? What could I achieve if I had become a member of the association? Let me tell you: I don't think they can achieve anything better. We are face to face with very powerful laws. I consulted various lawyers myself. The law is there and they are making it work. The operations are underway, all around the city. We have seen what the communities of Başbüyük and Sulukule experienced despite resistance. It made no difference.

Still, this view was not widespread among community members during the course of fieldwork. To the contrary, there was strong belief both on the part of tenants and property owners that they would carry on with their joint fight under the tag of the association and also that they would provide each other with the support they needed. Whereas Bekir stated that he “[trusted his] landlord that [he] would not let [him] down in protecting [his] rights alongside his”, Kirkor put that “[they], as the property owners, were convinced that the value of [their] properties were much higher than what was proposed and thus, [they would] show resistance in not leaving the area without getting satisfied.” In a similar tone, Faruk put that he would “take it to the end until [they] faced the police.” The best possible scenario that could come out of this process, according to İlhan, was as follows:

The property owners might not be able to access what they desire by 100% but I would say, if the NA carries on like this, they can guarantee 80% satisfaction. As part of the same process, maybe the owners can press for good deals for tenants such as rent support schemes for six months, or a year etc. Yet, we cannot know any of these by now. Time shall reveal.

Despite the noted atmosphere of optimism, those who had sensed the slippery grounds of fighting against renewal were on the side of being wary. Among those was Asu who argued that ‘no one could ever know what the others would do’:

After all, owners are receiving offers and invitations from the developer individually. It is not possible for everyone to know what each and every single person owns, or what the offers promise in proportion to what is owned. If the owners start paying visits to GAP by violating the ‘no-one-on-one-meeting code’, no one will notice it until it is too late. We already started hearing rumours as such. Without even knowing, one might get kicked out of his/her home only because the owner has agreed to getting a new property from the renewal zone. No one knows what the next day might bring.

Although the outcomes of the process were yet to be seen at this stage, Kirkor argued that the association had made one important mistake as it got established, making an impact on the entire way in which it set its strategies, or adopted a certain discourse. This reflection draws attention to the ratio between the will behind the engineering and implementation of the project, and the will behind resistance in a way to question the sustainability of strategies devised by resistance. In other words, the big question here becomes, ‘are the strategies defined by resistance sustainable enough to fight against a will as grand as such?’:

One failure of the association was to act as though we were fighting against the local government. The truth, however, is that the local government is backed by the central government. There is a grander will behind all this than what is assumed to be. The association could not see that. We are talking about enormous amounts of rent that is

expected to emerge from here. The mayor, the prime minister, everyone knows about this... The association once suggested that we should go to Ankara [i.e, the parliament] to make our demands known. I immediately said, "You think they don't know any of this?". Even the company, which has won the tender, is GAP, whose CEO is the son-in-law of the prime minister. Does that decision rest on the will of the local government? Of course not. Thus, we are face to face with the very state itself. We should had devised our strategies in line with this awareness.

9.5. Demanding The Right to Stay Put:

As the accounts of informants also confirm, owners and tenants were equally aware of the potential pitfalls of collective resistance under the fierce forces of renewal. However, it was still possible to observe an almost unanimous belief in the NA's capacity to accomplish its goals in a way to satisfy the expectations of all stakeholders in the neighbourhood. At least, this was a shared sentiment among those who were in support of the NA. Below is a statement from Gözde, which confirms this view:

I have not personally been into the association's office, or became an official member as yet, but my friends have all done that. I know that the NA is doing a great job. It was due to them that there has been a turn in the flow of events; they have made impressive attempts in the defense of our rights as tenants and property owners. They are fully aware of what is happening and they are taking the relevant measures in line with them. They engaged lawyers into the process; set up the NA as an official body; filed lawsuits in protest of the project etc. The result is that the talks have come to a halt. I take all of these, together with their presence, as positive signs.

Interestingly, however, the overall view also suggested that the supposed 'success' of the NA would not secure the possibility of the residents to stay put in the neighbourhood. All informants, without any exceptions, stated that displacement would be inevitable, and that everyone -including the owners- would have to move out of Tarlabası. Thus, it can be argued that the informants pointed at a distinction between the capacity of the NA to reach certain goals, and inability to fight against some other dynamics. From this perspective, the NA could succeed in its efforts to satisfy the expectations of property owners to an extent and, in an ideal scenario, secure alternative solutions, or support mechanisms for tenants - although there were no solid hints to how this latter goal could be accomplished. Yet, the NA was not seen strong enough to fight against grander forces such as that of the state; thus, realization of the project and the consequent displacement of existing community was considered to be inevitable.

What lay beneath this conviction, according to informants, was the commitment of the local government to raze the neighbourhood for its transfer to wealthier groups and the will to 'sanitize' Tarlabası by eradicating its seemingly 'marginal' characteristics. To start with the first assumption, almost all informants were convinced that the aim of the project was to turn Tarlabası into a 'neighbourhood for the rich'. Whereas Kirkor, Murat and Faruk addressed the project as a 'rent project' that would create financial resources both for BM and GAP, Gözde interpreted it as a building block towards the preparations for 2010 European Capital of Culture events to lure foreign buyers.¹⁵ Hasan's reflections on the aims of the project were as follows:

This project aims to attract the rich, I cannot tell anything else. All these new residences, massive buildings, offices, parking lots, green courtyards and such like do not because I am not meant to benefit from them anyway. They are for the rich, not for me. Hence, what's the use of Tarlabası turning into heaven if I am being sent to hell?

What is striking is also that staying in the neighbourhood was not considered as an attainable option for those who negotiated with GAP in return of new spaces. Asım is one of these, who put that living in Tarlabası following the completion of the project would become practically impossible for Tarlabası's actual residents since the cost of living would rocket up – even if they would be more privileged when compared to the most vulnerable groups. Thus, he explained his decision to get a new space as an attempt for making an investment for the future:

We are definitely considering the option of selling our new spaces in the future. We know we will not be able to live in them because these will become luxurious spaces, which will be too expensive for us to afford. There will be such expenses for the security, maintenance etc. that is, even if we might want to stay, we will not be able to because we are four brothers and sisters with families, all of which work on a minimum wage.

Faruk argued that "if the project rested on a clear partnership between the implementers and the community, no one would protest anyway." Yet, accompanying this opinion was also the belief that the project was crafted as a tool to sanitize Tarlabası. From this perspective, the authorities aimed to clear Tarlabası of its image as a crime and poverty zone by pushing its community out. Many of the informants were in the view that they were the 'unwanted elements'

¹⁵ According to this scenario in Gözde's view, which was also shared by İlhan, "[the authorities] are rebuilding Istanbul with the excuse of 2010 European Capital of Culture events, only to market Istanbul to foreign buyers with this opportunity. All those fancy brochures and catalogues aim to serve that purpose, they are not for us. We are not the ones who live in those, it will be those rich foreigners. We are fully aware of this."

in the city centre and that the project was crafted as a powerful instrument in driving them to the urban periphery. Below is a comment from Asu:

I think this is all political. The primary aim here is to prevent drug sales and prostitution in Tarlabası. They do not want us here because they consider us as agencies responsible for the negative image of the neighbourhood. While the engineers are working to fill the pockets of the developer and the municipality, they are also getting rid of the people - which I think is what they really want.

Fusun, on the other hand, argued that the aim was to get rid of the Kurdish population in Tarlabası similar to the way in which non-Muslim groups were deported in the 1960s:¹⁶

It was 1997 when we got here and started to buy properties. That was also the time when the prime minister had started to develop this talk of applying a visa and passport scheme for Istanbul.¹⁷ Now we form the majority here and they do not like it - they never did. They cannot set up a fire and destroy the entire neighbourhood, so similar to the mindset of the 1960s, they are forcing us to leave Tarlabası with the use of a renewal project.

When it came to how they would want the project to be designed, all informants without exceptions stated that they wanted the owners to be able to use their right to renovate their own properties; this, it was argued, would not only come in the way of dispossessions but also secure the chances of everyone to stay in the neighbourhood. Asu noted that it was important for her to at least make sure that the order of her life did not change since any change like “displacement [would] mean living a less secure life, since [she would] have to start working out on the street.”

It is interesting to note here that this formula was uttered both by the owners and tenants. The main point of departure for informants was that everyone agreed with the idea of rehabilitation. In their view, however, this could only be achieved with the involvement of community members so that real public good could be achieved. In the words of Hasan:

¹⁶ Fusun’s view was shared among all Kurdish informants to the extent that the experience was coined as *üçüncü göç* (third migration) throughout the community. In Faruk’s words: “We have been through this before. First we were forced to move from our villages to nearby towns, then to Istanbul and now to they are pushing us to the peripheries of Istanbul. We call it our third migration.”

¹⁷ In 1995, prime minister Erdoğan –who at the time was the mayor of Istanbul- suggested the introduction of visa application procedures for those who wanted to migrate to Istanbul. Erdoğan repeated this suggestion in 2007 on the grounds that Istanbul had become over populated and needed regulations for more sustainable living conditions. For more details on this, see “Erdoğan: İstanbul’a Vize Uygulansın” (Erdoğan: We Need to Apply Visa for Entries to Istanbul) <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/396867.asp?cp1=1> (accessed on 17.05.2013)

If they want to demolish this place, let's do this together. This is the only way of protecting people from potential harms. All they say, however, is "we are offering you money." They are not willing to give us a piece of this place. We are not against the idea of renewal and we are clear on that; we are only critical of its methods. We do not want anyone to find themselves in trouble at the end of it all. Thus, we are ready to get involved if they want to carry out a project .

Gözde suggested a similar formula as a tenant:

I think this should mainly be a restoration project. People have been suffering from the expense of materials and procedures needed for restoration works for years. Owners can be extended financial support by the state to be able to take care of their buildings. Such synergy can do wonders. If the authorities made an attempt to share the costs of a rehabilitative project as such in an even manner, I don't think anyone would object to it (...) If not, the state could extend credits to people. They are providing credits for so many unnecessary things, why are they are not doing it for the heritage qualities of this city? Why do historical beauties and homes of people – all of which belong to this country- not deserve this?

Galip stated that supporting owners to implement their own renovation works would "provide benefits for a much bigger crowd than a few company owners and state officials". From this perspective, no one would have to lose their jobs, living spaces and existing support mechanisms in a scenario as such while at the same time the physical surroundings and real estate values of Tarlabası would improve. A similar point was made by Asu, who put that the renewal project was designed more as a physical plan to push 'the ugliness' aside –which she thought she was a part of- than a social and economic programme that could help underprivileged members of the community integrate with social and economic life.

Why are we not talking about rehabilitation and improvement schemes? Why am I not considered as a part of that plan so that I can become a citizen who can serve for people? Why am I not considered as an asset? I don't necessarily mean the sex industry here, why am I not worthy of getting trainings in other fields? Instead of offering us ways of investing in ourselves so that we can improve our living conditions, they are trying to push us aside in closed rooms. (...) All I want is to live like a normal human being with the rights of a normal citizen.

Faruk, on the other hand, drew attention to the fact that it is the responsibility of the state to devise fairer and just solutions for areas like Tarlabası, where the social, economic and physical conditions may be dire but the residents are regular taxpayers. In concert with this line of thinking, Faruk argued that the residents – whether they may be owners, or tenants- deserved their demands to be met and he added that the right to stay put in the neighbourhood could be within the pool of these valid demands:

If the project rested on fairer grounds there would be no reason for me to object to it. Yet, what I really want is to secure my right to stay here. For better or worse, I am happy to live in Tarlabası. We have some well working solidarity networks. I believe that since we are taxpayers, the state has responsibility towards us. We want this to be taken seriously. After all, negative elements observed here can be resolved with sensible strategies. This task rests on the shoulders of the state. We want to stay here.

As noted earlier, interviews with informants were held at a time when three partied talks between GAP, BM and the NA had come at a halt. Although anxiety was prevalent, optimism with respect to the potential success of NA could equally be felt within the neighbourhood. Yet, there was also a strong sense of uncertainty regarding the future due to the pressure of approaching local elections – that was 18 months later. A number of residents, among which was İlhan, pointed out that the future would be defined in line with the election results: If JDP got voted out, this could translate into the termination of the project; however, if JDP ended up staying in power, it could mean that the project would be implemented without further a due.

In a situation whereby the second scenario applied, informants shared the view that the pressure of project would overwhelm resistance and both dispossessions and displacement would become inevitable. Moreover, in line with these trends, individual tactics would surface in the absence of viable options. Thus, the success of the NA was going to be determined by the future political constellation in the district. As Faruk put it:

If we get similar results to that of the previous elections then I suggest that tenants should start looking for their own solutions. It will be ruthless around here, no one will pity anyone. Neither the NA, nor other forces.. Nothing will be able to come in the way of these guys. Let's hope that the opposite happens and they lose the elections. In a scenario as such, the best that can happen is negotiations in return of better deals. I mean, no one will be happy %100 but the owners will be able to improve the compensations by %70-%80. If I can secure %80 of my property under those conditions, then the best way to think is 'may the %20 of my property be a sacrifice to a better future in this city and country.' At least that's what I will do.

Conclusion:

Semi-structured in depth interviews held with seven property owners and six tenants have revealed the various advantages, disadvantages, securities and insecurities of life in Tarlabası. Accounts along the given lines suggested to a great extent that although Tarlabası provides its community with such fundamental

advantages as solidarity networks, affordable housing and centrality, the neighbourhood is in need of extensive rehabilitative schemes - targeting both at the built environment and socio-economic well-being of residents.

Yet, in the view of informants, the envisaged project is far from satisfying these ends for it is primarily designed to attract wealthier groups to the city centre rather than improving the quality of life in run-down areas. Departing from here, majority of the informants were in protest of the project for it was built upon unfair, anti-democratic and anti-transparent grounds, and would result in the dispossession and displacement of residents in the absence of much needed support mechanisms. An overwhelming unison between owners and tenants on these grounds could easily be observed.

Yet, it was equally striking to spot powerful insights into the potential transformation of not only the strengths and vulnerabilities of resistance, but also the very content of resistance in the period to follow. Insights suggested that pressures to emanate from the procedures of renewal –among which expropriation took the lead- could instigate fragmentations amid the constituents of resistance. It is important to note here that aside from the affinities of residents with the complexities of administrative processes integral to the renewal scheme, it was the experiences of other regeneration zones –among which Sulukule was leading- that contributed to the formation of this view. Thus, overall, informants stated that it was very likely for property owners to change tactics and try to either secure their property rights, or transform their potential losses into gains if they were pressed by possibilities of dispossession. At the time of interviews, it was already possible to see some owners who had negotiated with project implementers either in return of new spaces from the renewal zone, or monetary compensations since they did not want to lose their properties for nothing, or wanted to protect themselves against the risks of dispossession.

It is also important to note that these insights belonged both to property owners and tenants. Yet, the stated awareness, or points of view had not yet caused recognizable rifts, or clashes within the community. On the contrary, tenants could empathize with the situation of owners and accepted the priority of property rights in the agenda of owners. In fact, they also accepted the fact that they could only secure their right to housing in Tarlabaşı if the owners could secure their

rights to their properties on the grounds of self-managed renovations only. That is, in a situation whereby owners would make deals for monetary compensations, housing securities would not become available to them.

In this period, TAPT was carrying on with legal battles and public campaigning quiet effectively. However, the informants were predominantly confident that TAPT would only be strong enough to secure limited rights, or gains on the part of owners and tenants, and would not be able to prevent displacements, demolitions and dispossessions at an overall level. In an ideal scenario, however, almost all informants wished they could use their legal right, as stated in Law No. 5366, to initiate their own renovation schemes within the boundaries of their properties and thus create a platform whereby the rights of both owners and tenants to housing and private property could be defended while at the same time the real estate value of the area could be improved.

A Final Evaluation: Updates and Concluding Remarks

This final chapter will start with an update on the policy frameworks underlying urban transformation, renewal and regeneration in Turkey, and also on the current states of field areas, Sulukule and Tarlabaşı. Changes that have taken place both in policy frameworks and neighbourhoods within the past four years (February 2009 – February 2013), following the completion of fieldwork for this research, are significant for at least two reasons: First, legal and institutional tunings are highly reflective of the intensified efforts of state authorities in integrating urban land reserves to central growth mechanisms at a national scale. Secondly, the very same tunings showcase the potential impacts of heightened neoliberalism not only on the urban landscape of Turkey, but also on the very patterns of neighbourhood mobilization in Turkey. On this note, the chapter will follow with a condensed analysis of the central argument of this research, which may apply for cases elsewhere: Property ownership can be a significant impediment to the establishment of collective fronts against top-down interventions into innercity zones where severe conditions of poverty overrule everyday lives of resident communities. Any attempt to diminish the impact of ownership initially requires RttC debates to acknowledge and tackle the relationship between property ownership and collective mobilization.

10.1. Urban Transformation and Field Areas Revisited

In the past four years (2009-2013), following the completion of fieldwork for this research, there have been a number of radical changes both to the policy and institutional frameworks surrounding the processes of urban transformation, and also to the states of Sulukule and Tarlabaşı alongside other neighbourhoods and sites in Istanbul. Laying these changes out -prior to addressing the central argument of this research- is necessary for they both point at the direction taken in Turkish policy-making and set the grounds upon which urban opposition takes shape and finds expression.

To start with the first, the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement has been converted into the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning in June 2011 for “the maintenance of enhanced quality of life in cities and sustainability in the environment with an approach that takes regulatory, supervisory, participatory and solution oriented practices central in the implementation of relevant operations”.¹ To these ends, the ministry currently holds such extraordinary powers as taking and initiating planning decisions not only on state-owned land and areas that bear disaster risk, but also in military zones and natural conservation sites where planning decisions and operations were previously rather restricted.² Moreover, the minister in charge is currently the former president of the MHA, Erdoğan Bayraktar. Upon its institution, the ministry became the target of many criticisms raised by a range of civil and non-profit organizations, among which is the Chamber of Architects and Engineers. “The Ministry holds the titles of the entire country”, said president Soğancı: “No matter who might hold the titles of a particular land –whether it be public institutions, private individuals, or the state- the Ministry has now been declared as the sole party who has the right to take decisions for and implement plans on all available plots.”³

¹ See the official web site for the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning <http://www.csb.gov.tr/turkce/index.php?Sayfa=sayfa&Tur=webmenu&Id=7167> (in Turkish) (Accessed 19.02.2013).

² These powers were granted to the ministry on the grounds of a statutory decree issued by the Council of Ministers. Statutory decrees are released by legislative powers in Turkey and become effective once they are issued, without having to look for the consent and approval of the parliament. For detailed information on the powers of the ministry, see <http://www.csb.gov.tr/dosyalar/images/file/644%20sayili%20KHK.pdf> (Accessed 19.02.2013).

³ See “Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı'na sınırsız yetki” (Infinite powers for the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning) <http://haber.sol.org.tr/sonuncu-kavga/cevre-ve-sehircilik-bakanligina-sinirsiz-yetki-haberi-45598> (Accessed 21.02.2013).

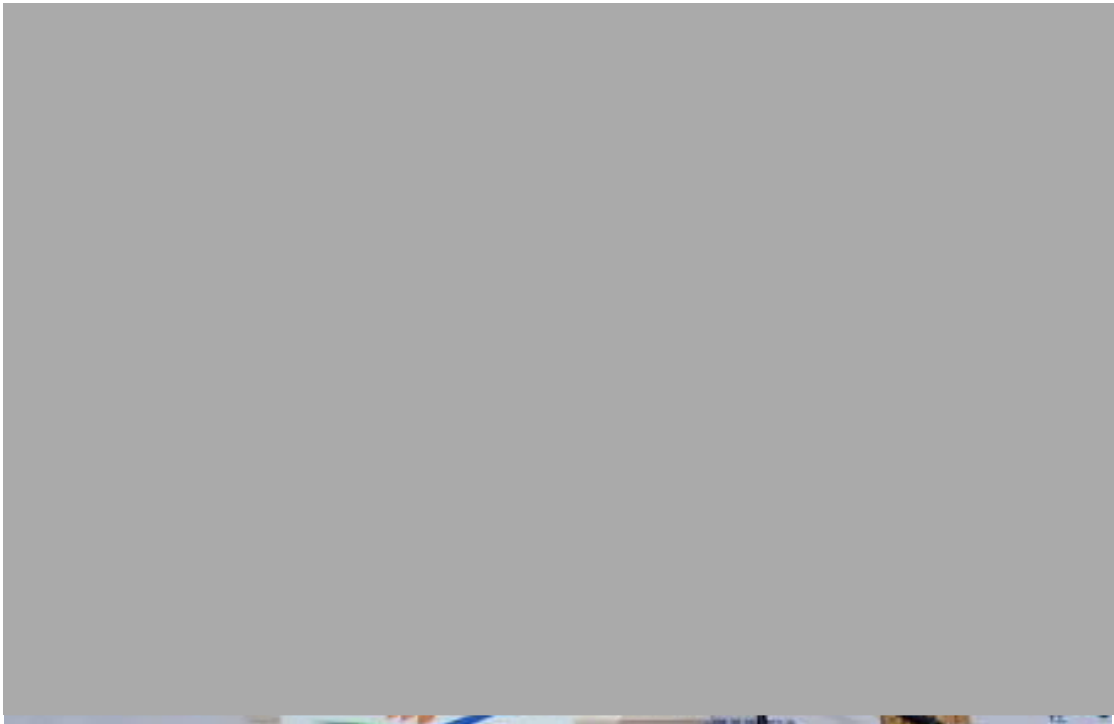


Fig. 37 - Minister of Environment and Urban Planning, Erdoğan Bayraktar, giving a speech on urban transformation. Background reads: "Urban Transformation has started for decent cities and a decent future." (Source: İstanbul Bülteni).

Another groundbreaking development, which complements the above stated, has been the release of the much feared Law on Disaster Risk in May 2012. The law, as it is put, seeks "to establish the principles and procedures for the improvement, liquidation and renewal of areas and developments under disaster risk for the creation of sanitized and secure living spaces in line with scientific and aesthetic standards and norms."⁴ As Adanalı (2013) also states, the release of a law as such in an earthquake prone country and the willingness of political authorities to minimize risk and cure other issues of urgency while eliminating disaster risk can be taken as a positive matter.⁵ However, civil initiatives and professional chambers are extremely wary of the law since, in their view, "disaster risk is used as an 'excuse' to legitimize and gear up urban transformation projects"; from this perspective, the law is likely to cause social and economic suffering for citizens since it will pave the way for forced evictions, state led gentrification and violation of property rights.⁶ Although these concerns were raised by various civil bodies

⁴ For detailed information on the law see

<http://www.csb.gov.tr/gm/dosyalar/belgeler/belge547/20120531-1.htm> (Accessed 19.02.2013).

⁵ For a critical analysis of the law in relation to urban transformation in Istanbul by Yaşar Adanalı, see <http://reclaimistanbul.com/2013/01/21/legal-transformation-of-the-urban-frontier/> (Accessed 19.02.2013).

⁶ To name a few, "the law penalizes all attempts towards defending housing rights, one of the most fundamental of human rights, and showing objection to top-down decisions (...) worrying

throughout the past few years that led up to the release of the law, these oppositional groups were deemed as ‘cunning *provocateurs*’ and ‘illegal groups’ by state officials, who want to ‘create their own ghettos in transformation zones’ and ‘seize all profits that will become available in these areas’.”⁷

A little more than a month following the release of the bylaw for Law No. 6036, which made it effective as of August 2012, nation-wide ceremonies were staged simultaneously in 33 cities of Turkey in the attendance of state officials – leading among which was prime minister Erdoğan. During these ceremonies, broadcast live on national television, buildings targeted for demolition in the 33 cities were exploded in a synchronized fashion with the use of high-tech dynamites (for the first time in Turkey).⁸ This occasion has since been argued to mark the beginning of the grand urban transformation of Turkey, which will result in the demolition of a total number of 7 million buildings ‘under risk’ at a cost of 400 billion dollars.⁹ According to the latest news in the Official Gazette, more than 39 neighbourhoods

applicability of the law on risk-free buildings when deemed necessary is against the constitution (...) non-provision of buildings under risk with public services [i.e. power, water, or natural gas] is a clear violation of fundamental rights and principles of the social state unless supported by decisions on the solution of the housing problem (...) obliging local residents to cover the costs of infrastructural expenditure and demolition will increase the debt burden of impoverished populations, and thus, contradicts with the principles of just and social state (...) authorization of the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning on the grounds of both legislation and commission will lead to the exclusion of local governments which are the actual agencies responsible from settlements (...) few plots left in the hands of public realm will be privatized and public poverty will be elevated to a new level (...) once it becomes possible to transfer real-estate owned by public agencies outside the Treasury (schools, hospitals etc.) to the Ministry -whether prone to disasters, or not- privatization of public possessions will gain speed (...) laws that have so far protected natural and historical assets are being given up on (...) integration of grazing land to urban development has become easier with the justification of renewing risky structures (...) restrictions brought to the use of property rights is a violation of the constitution (...) the authority to impose ‘special’ standards on planning resolutions can lead to a decline in the social and technical qualities of infrastructure and render renewed areas unlivable (...) nullifying all previously existing laws, which made it possible to make decisions in line with the principles of public good may come in the way of producing livable environments.” For more details, see the press release issued by the Chamber of Planners in May 2012

http://www.spo.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=3957&tipi=3&sube=2 (Accessed 25.02.2013).

⁷ Whereas the first quote comes from Minister Bayraktar, the second one comes from prime minister Erdoğan. For more on the first quote see “Erdoğan Bayraktar Yalan Söylüyor!” (Erdoğan Bayraktar is Lying!) <http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/Erdoğan-bayraktar-yalan-soyluyor-haberi-55792> and for the second quote see “Erdoğan: Kentsel Dönüşümü CHP ve Terör Örgütleri İstemiyor” (Erdoğan: RPP (Republican People’s Party [i.e. central opposition] and Terrorist Organizations are Against Regeneration) <http://www.cnnturk.com/2013/turkiye/02/23/erdogan.kentsel.donusumu.chp.ve.teror.orgutleri.i.stemiyor/697643.0/index.html> (Accessed 13.03.2013).

⁸ See “İlk Kez Profesyonel Dinamitli Yıkım Yapılacak” (Professional Demolition with the Use of Dynamite for the First Time in Turkey) <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25387875> (Accessed 20.02.2013).

⁹ See “Başbakan Kentsel Dönüşümü Başlattı” (Prime Minister Launches Urban Transformation) <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2012/10/05/basbakan-kentsel-donusumu-baslatti> (Accessed 20.02.2013).

have been declared as risky areas in the nine cities of Turkey between December 2012 and January 2013, meaning that they have become open to various kinds of regeneration projects. Twelve of these neighbourhoods are based in Istanbul.¹⁰

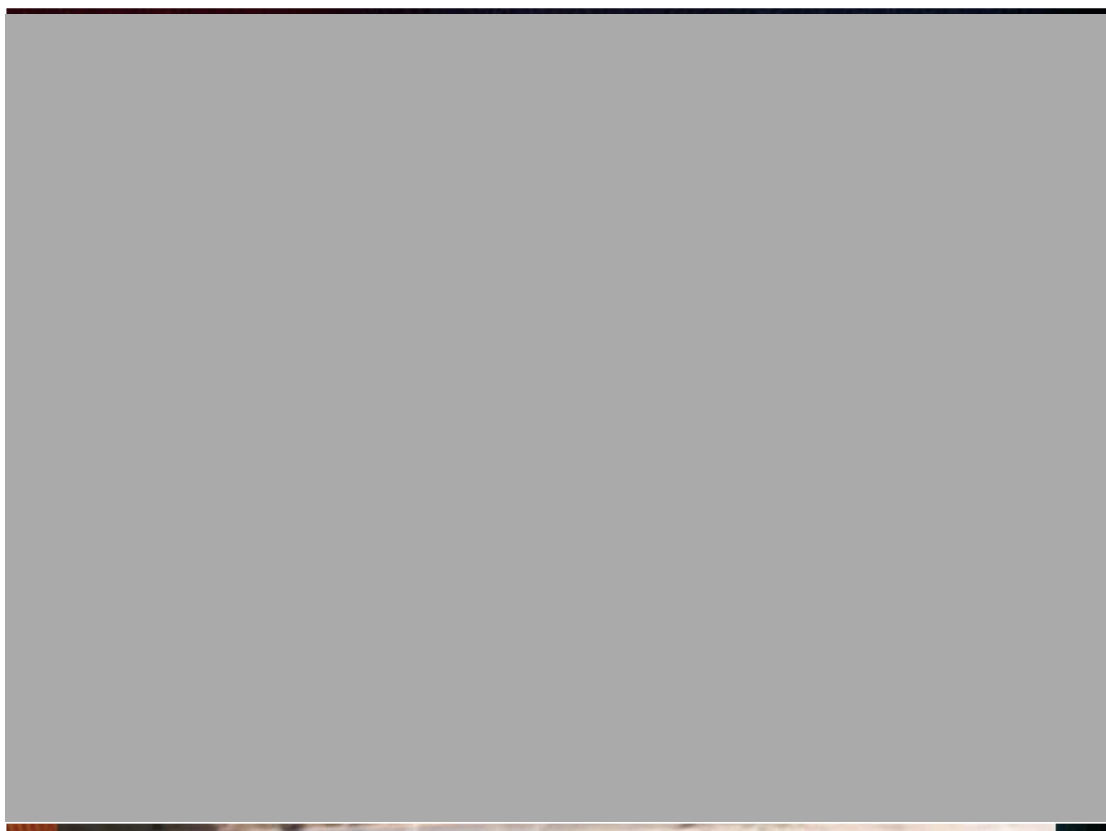


Fig. 38 – A screen capture from a news channel, NTV, broadcasting live from Hatay during demolitions. Subtitle reads: “Urban transformations kicks start: Military residence in Hatay getting demolished.” (Photo by: Özlem Ünsal)

In the meanwhile, construction of more than 500 up-scale residential units (built in the form of villas) and more than 50 commercial units in Sulukule has been completed by March 2012. Between 2007 and 2009, more than 300 houses were razed in the area, resulting in the displacement of approximately 3500 people. According to news media, prices of newly erected villas jumped from 500 TL per square metre to 3.500-4.500 TL per square metre before their completion.¹¹ However, joint legal proceedings initiated by the Chamber of Architects, Chamber of Planners and the SA resulted in a victory for the SA: In June 2012, the High Administrative Court concluded that the regeneration scheme did not satisfy the

¹⁰ Data available on the website of Official Gazette <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/default.aspx>

¹¹ See Letsch (2011) “Turkish Roma make way for property developers in historic Istanbul district” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/09/sulukule-roma-housing-row-istanbul> (Accessed 20.02.2013).

requirements of public good.¹² The project envisaged by the FM was thus legally barred from proceeding further. Demir, the mayor of FM, responded to the decision by stating that ‘the court did not get the essence of the laws at work’, and hence, defended in confidence that the decision would be nullified by the Council of States: “Law No. 5366 is above all plans that could apply for this area. Once we declare an area as a renewal site, we don’t have to depend on any other law than that. Now there is also the new Law for Disaster Areas; we are free to apply the rules of Law No. 5366 for all areas other than conservation sites.”¹³ Later, the Minister of Environment and Urban Planning, Bayraktar, announced that ‘the new constructions in Sulukule [would] not be demolished’ as a result of the court decision: “They are done and finished, demolition cannot be the case. We will most likely extend compensations.”¹⁴ So far, no steps have been taken along the given lines.



Fig. 39 – New Sulukule, months before the completion of constructions. (Photo by: Nuray Tatlu)

¹² See “Sulukule Projesi Mahkeme Kararıyla İptal Edildi” (Sulukule Project Terminated on the Grounds of Court Decision) <http://haber.sol.org.tr/kent-gundemleri/sulukule-projesi-mahkeme-karariyla-iptal-edildi-ama-haberi-55851> (Accessed 20.02.2013).

¹³ See “Sulukule’de Evleri Dağıtacağız” (We will Hand the New Residences over to Their Rightful Owners) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1091657&CategoryID=77> (Accessed 20.02.2013).

¹⁴ See TOKI Sulukule Konutları Yıkılmayacak! (TOKI Sulukule Residences will not be Demolished!) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1091235&CategoryID=78> (Accessed 20.02.2013).

Although the court decision could still induce a degree of optimism, the present situation does not really allow for it. The community seems to have become dispersed within the city, depending on their resources: A rather limited group of property owners, who negotiated with the FM on the grounds of getting new properties from the project area, have predominantly become tenants in the surroundings of Sulukule. In the light of current conditions, it remains unclear whether these groups will be able to move into their new units. News appearing on the speculative boom in Sulukule suggest that they might not be able to do so: A news piece in *Radikal*, dated November 2012, told the story of families who faced a tremendous increase in the amount they are entitled to pay as prices per square meter doubled in a period of less than two years.¹⁵ On the other hand, those who negotiated with the municipality in return of cash, or sold their properties to third parties, bought units either in other parts of the city, or within the neighbouring parts of the renewal zone. As informants have previously noted, the sustainability of this option remains questionable. Another category of residents, who are believed to constitute the majority, has resorted to becoming tenants within the surroundings of Sulukule - mainly Karagümrük.¹⁶ This latter group is believed to represent one of the most disadvantaged groups since its members currently pay rents that reflect both the formal market dynamics and the speculative impact of the regeneration scheme. The main sufferers of the entire process, however, are those who found shelter in the homes of relatives and friends, or moved to rural towns where cheap housing is available. Both of the NAs have become

¹⁵ According to the news piece, property owners who swapped their old houses for new residences in Sulukule had signed agreements on the grounds of a payment of 1250TL per square meter. However, this amount doubled up and reached a whopping 2500 per square. Moreover, owners (whose numbers do not exceed 50 according to the reporter) are not free to choose the size of the residence they will be given, hence they cannot balance their budgets out by going for a smaller unit. One of the owners who previously owned a three-storey building and rented three of the flats in this building stated in this piece that he would not be able to complete the payment for the house with his retirement pay of monthly 875 TL, given that his debt went up from 200.000 TL to 400.000 TL. Another owner argued that “the municipality aims to get rid of all the people from the community so that they can sell the houses to wealthier at higher prices.” See İnce (2012), “Sulukule Evleri Duple Borca Batti” (Sulukule Houses Buried in Double Debt) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1107479&CategoryID=77> (Accessed 21.02.2013).

¹⁶ It is important to note, here, that there are no official mechanisms –initiated either by the FM, or other public institutions- that follow up on the aftermath effects of the project on the community. Thus, providing scientific and statistical data on the movements of the community is currently impossible. Information provided here relies on the observations of both activists working in the neighbourhood and community members -some of which were the informants of this research- together with media coverage.

dysfunctional, yet community centres supported by the SP have become further established.¹⁷

It was when the court gave the final decision for the Sulukule project that demolitions began in Tarlabası - without trials initiated by the NA or individual owners, arriving at a conclusive end. The area is predominantly covered by towering scaffoldings, which do not only hide the site away but also exhibit the future look of the neighbourhood to the public eye. More than 3000 people are believed to have left the area, last of which were tenants who could not yet find housing solutions as the demolitions started. The municipality allowed these groups to stay without having to pay rents in the renewal zone until the scaffoldings were put up – although this permission was not consistent among all residents in similar situations. These, in the end, moved into other flats available down the slopes of Tarlabası, outside the renewal zone, where rents are relatively cheaper.

¹⁷ Currently, two centres based in Karagümrük are in operation. One of them is 'Sulukule Çocuk Atölyesi' (Sulukule Children's Atelier) which provides extracurricular activities (especially dance and music) and support in formal education for kids and youngsters; 'Kader Kismet Atölyesi' (Fate and Kismet Atelier), on the other hand, is a crafts workshop run by women who faced forced evictions and displacement due to the renewal project. Profits made from the sales of hand-made bags, shawls, t-shirts and other accessories provide the households of these women with income.



Fig. 40 – Image shows Tarlabası under demolition in February 2012 (Photo by: Özlem Ünsal).

Resettlement patterns to follow show similarities with the case of Sulukule: Those who negotiated with GAP on the grounds of getting new properties from the renewal site became tenants in nearby neighbourhoods (such as Eyüp, Kurtuluş and Kasımpaşa) until the completion of constructions. Those who received cash returns from GAP moved to various parts of the city. It is interesting to note here that part of the Kurds predominantly picked areas where (lower to) middle-class Kurdish migrant networks have long been established in the hope that they can achieve upper mobility with the support of these networks.¹⁸ Moreover, tenants in better economic conditions have followed a similar strategy. A group of tenants, it is believed, has rented units in neighbourhoods surrounding Tarlabası such as Dolapdere and Kurtuluş. Demolitions are still continuing and among those that have partly been torn down is the building where the office of NA was once located. During a repeat interview in July 2012, the president of the NA noted that ‘the battle was still on’ for them:

¹⁸ Musa, one of the informants, is one of many who took this route alongside other members of his family. Currently he lives in the basement of an apartment building with his family of six and pays double the amount he used to pay in Tarlabası.

The court decision for Sulukule has heightened our hopes that a similar decision might be made for Tarlabası. One victory achieved in one neighbourhood means victory for another in similar conditions. We are positive that the true aims of the project will be understood by authorities and we will get what we deserve as property owners; legally speaking, there are no obstacles to that. If not here, we will achieve our ends at the European Court of Human Rights. This is not over yet; our struggle will succeed.

As this quote also reveals, what is witnessed is a radical transformation in the goals of resistance as the renewal process evolved from 'rumours' to 'actual demolition and reconstruction'. This does not only apply for Tarlabası but also for Sulukule where NA leaders clearly put that they tailored their strategies and goals 'as needed', in accordance with the evolution of the process. Taking it a step further, it is likely that similar may apply for neighbourhoods with comparable characteristics undergoing renewal, unless the legal frameworks and mechanisms surrounding these processes go through radical change.

10.2. Ownership and Urge to Secure Material Gains as Impediment to Collective Grassroots Resistance

To sum it up, this research has revealed that property ownership is a significant impediment to the establishment of collective fronts against the implementation of renewal plans in the inner-city zones of Istanbul where severe conditions of poverty overrule everyday lives of resident communities. Recent research dealing with the impacts of urban renewal on the residential areas of Istanbul tends to suggest that ownership only becomes an issue in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods subject to transformation, where tenure structures are defined by varying degrees of informality; this study, however, demonstrates that ownership is equally defining in inner-city zones where property ownership is not divorced from radical degrees of poverty.¹⁹

As the cases of Sulukule and Tarlabası have revealed, cleavages and tensions surface not only between property owners and tenants, but also among the more and less privileged property owners and tenants as pressure emanating from the

¹⁹ Among notable works see Tuna Kuyucu's (2010) "Poverty, Property and Power: Making Markets in Istanbul's on Başbüyük; Cihan Baysal's (2010) "İstanbul'u Küresel Kent Yapma Aracı Olarak Kentsel Dönüşüm ve Ardındaki Konut Hakkı İhlalleri: Ayazma(N)'dan-Bezirgânbağçe'ye Tutunamayanlar" [Urban transformation as a Tool for Making Istanbul into Global City and Housing Right Violations Behind It: The Displaced from Ayazma to Bezirganbahce] on Ayazma, and Ufuk Poyraz's (2011) "Looking at the Urban Transformation Project from gecekondu Dwellers' Perspective: The Case of Mamak" on Mamak, Ankara.

renewal process builds up. What explains these tensions at a time when transformation evolves from a 'possibility' to a 'reality' -defined by conditions that cannot be escaped, or can only be changed minimally- is the emergence of certain questions that relate to the expectations of residents from the outcomes of transformation: How is it possible to survive transformation with minimal social and economic disadvantages? Can potential harms be converted into benefits? What is the likelihood that better living conditions can be achieved at the end of the process, or what tactics can be used in order to avoid worsened living conditions? The total effect of these questions finds reflection in the ultimate transformation of the content and strategies of 'resistance'.

The mentioned transformation in the content and strategies of 'resistance' should be understood in two phases: In the initial phase, the implications of renewal trigger a shared fear amongst the resident communities. Fear relates both to the potential loss of community life, which provides social and economic support for all members of the community, and material possessions -leading among which are properties owned by members of the neighbourhood- take priority. These concerns result in the prompt formation of a collective reaction, which finds expression in unanimous resistance against the plans of local authorities. The typical aim of resistance here is to stop the implementation of the project and come in the way of potential dispossessions and displacements. In the second phase, when pressures start to build-up due to tactics used by project initiators and the evolution of the process, residents confront a strong sense of insecurity for at least two reasons: First is the adamant progress and 'inevitability' of transformation – that is, loss of faith in the possibility of halting envisioned plans. The second, in relation to the first, is the urge to survive the process with minimum loss and harm in both material and immaterial terms (i.e. dispossession, homelessness, isolation from social networks and resources etc). It is on these grounds that previously collective stance against project initiators and forces behind them starts to fragment with the adoption of individually driven survival strategies.

Strategies in question are highly dependent on the socio-economic capacities of community members and the degree to which they can(not) protect themselves from the destructive influences of renewal with the use of these capacities. It is at

this point that cleavages start to surface between property owners (who either try their luck at negotiating with local authorities and private developers to be able to access new spaces from the renewal site, or sell their properties in return for maximum cash) and tenants (who either resort to provisions extended by local authorities if they are fit for them, or develop their own solutions to satisfy their housing needs). Whereas part of the gains accessed are made available by the project itself (i.e. gains through negotiations sales etc.), others can be created with the corruption of emergent constellations as the residents develop certain tactics in the absence of alternative options – as seen in the case of Sulukule. It is also important to note, once again, that rifts do not only surface between the property owners and tenants, but also among the more and less privileged members of each category.

Altogether, one can argue that almost all individual strategies mentioned here are underlined by hopes that range from securing varying degrees of gains made available by the projects at work to ensuring optimum protection from potential dispossessions, depending on the socio-economic capacities of residents. It is within this context that resistance shifts from commitment to halting the prospective projects and preventing the ultimate demolition of neighbourhoods to the development of strategies to access certain securities in order to escape from the negative impacts of renewal. Needless to say, this transformation is fundamentally shaped by the sort of pressures and (at times) threats exerted through recent urban policies, which take ‘ownership’ as the only grounds of recognition in dealings with communities: In a framework whereby property owners are deemed to be the sole legitimate parties of contact and negotiation, and tenants are rendered as non-entities, it becomes inevitable for the dualism established between stronger and weaker actors not to find reflections in the patterns of grassroots resistance and mobilization especially within poverty zones.

For resistance has so far satisfied the gains of a relative minority and led to the socio-economic deprivation of a majority, there is a rightful tendency among civil actors engaged in RttC struggles to interpret the fragilities embedded in the recent experiences of neighbourhood-scale mobilization as markers of ‘weakness’ (Yalçintan, 2009; İMECE, 2011; Türkmen, 2011). However, avoiding such clear cut conclusions could be a better option for at least two reasons: First of all, as

explained, there are groups that have accessed (or, wait to access) certain gains which have contributed to their upward mobility in social and economic hierarchies, or those who have managed to establish relatively more secure conditions of living compared to the pre-project period. As put earlier, these constitute a minority compared to many who have found themselves in extremely deprived circumstances; however, experiences of this minority should not and cannot be ignored since they have admittedly been shaped by what they define as their own strategies of 'resistance'.

More important than this, and secondly, the past decade's experiences have generated extensive knowledge and contributed to the accumulation of solid information on grassroots mobilization against neoliberal urban policies in the metropolitan cities of Turkey. The study under assessment here has focused merely on two neighbourhoods in Istanbul but there is a growing literature, which provides scholars and experts with insights from neighbourhoods in Izmir, Ankara, Bursa etc. For these reasons, it should be kept in regard that these individual cases form integral parts of a long term learning process, contributing to the development of more sustainable models that can help serve benefits for citizens at a broader range.

It is within the context of efforts towards developing more sustainable models that the recently established Sariyer Neighbourhood Associations' and Cooperatives' Platform should be mentioned although briefly.²⁰ The platform, founded in January 2012, represents the cooperatives of four *gecekondu* neighbourhoods within the boundaries of Sariyer district.²¹ Similar to the formerly existing Neighbourhood Associations' Platform, the cooperatives' platform also raises demands towards securing the future of neighbourhoods it represents on legal grounds and objects to top-down approaches that do not acknowledge residents as rightful citizens.²²

²⁰ See "Rant Projelerine Karşı Mahalle Kooperatifleri" (Neighbourhood Cooperatives Against Rent Oriented Projects) http://www.birgun.net/lifes_index.php?news_code=1327321394&year=2012&month=01&day=23 (Accessed on 22.02.2013).

²¹ These include Pınar, Kazım Karabekir, Derbent and Reşitpaşa neighbourhoods.

²² Concluding remarks of the press meeting, held by the platform on 21 January 2012, included the following statements in bullet points: "We will do our best to prevent the implementation of projects that have not earned the full support of our communities... For we have established our lives in these neighbourhoods over many years, we refuse to be approached as occupiers and non-entities... Both the IMM and Sariyer Municipality must act upon their responsibilities... They [IMM and Sariyer Municipality] should defend the rights of people rather than that of a handful of profit seekers... We claim all our legal rights in the effort to secure the success of our struggle... We will

What is particularly novel about the platform, however, is the way in which it tackles the issue of ownership. Concluding remarks of the press meeting held by the platform on 21 January 2012 includes the following remark: “Our proposed solution is clear and simple: We demand the legal ownership of the lands upon which we have settled –regardless of which individuals and institutions they might belong- to be transferred to neighbourhood cooperatives.” In other words, the platform brings the question of whether a fight for ‘collective ownership rights’ can become key to accessing housing rights in unanimity. What is more, a new model is being experimented to achieve these ends by forming cooperatives and networking them within the boundaries of their administrative geographies. This, it is argued, “will provide each member of these neighbourhoods with an equal say” and thus create more democratic grounds of dialogue, not only between projects initiators and the citizens, but also among the citizens themselves.²³ The press meeting was attended by the mayor of Sarıyer (alongside officials from the Municipality), representatives of four other political parties and also of a union of labourers. According to *Birgün*, a national newspaper, speakers from the platform put that:

They are not ‘occupiers’ and that they brought life to neighbourhoods, once without water, electricity and roads. They also added that they are aware of the interests of rent seeking groups on their neighbourhoods, now that they have become valuable. In the light of these, representatives of cooperatives have stated that they will not accept to abandon their neighbourhoods and that they will fight collectively in organized manners. Reminding the politicians of the promises they make to gecekondu communities in the pre-election periods, the speakers said, “We have had enough of empty promises. We are aware of our rights and we are claiming them. We demand the transfer of our neighbourhoods to our collective ownership.”²⁴

On these grounds, it needs to be re-emphasized that sustainable models that will grant citizens of all backgrounds the right to housing cannot be achieved unless the potential impacts of private ownership on patterns of resistance in poverty zones are not acknowledged and directly addressed within the context of RttC debates. As neighbourhood associations and non-governmental initiatives operating at

stand against all projects drafted with the excuse of disaster risk as long as they do not prioritize our rights to live in sanitized and safe neighbourhoods...” See “Rant Projelerine Karşı Mahalle Kooperatifleri” (Neighbourhood Cooperatives Against Rent Oriented Projects) http://www.birgun.net/lifes_index.php?news_code=1327321394&year=2012&month=01&day=23 22.02.2013

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

national and international scales refrain from touching upon this defining matter, creation of the grounds for collective action might not become possible within certain urban contexts. Existing literature reveals that private ownership as a matter that might interrupt unanimity in resistance has not yet been tackled; on the contrary, issues relating to 'private' ownership are predominantly marginalized in debates since 'collective' rights to housing constitute priority. At least, the latter argument seems to apply for Turkey, Istanbul in particular.²⁵ The tendency in question might have its origins in ideological reasons: For RttC discussions are predominantly adopted by organizations aligned with the political left, integrating 'private ownership' into discussions is often considered unfitting since it might make way for a defense of 'property rights' – a key constituent of advanced capitalism.

What is suggested within the framework of this research, however, is far from making a defense of property rights in order for grassroots movements to reach 'success'. Quite the opposite, it is argued that legal ownership does not necessarily provide security for citizens in the face of heightened neoliberalization, particularly when conditions of ownership are still tied with extreme socio-economic vulnerabilities. Scarcity of international data available makes it difficult to suggest whether this applies for other urban, national, or regional contexts. However, cases from Turkey demonstrate that focusing on ownership as a dynamic factor with various impacts on both the relationship between authorities and urban citizens, and among communities themselves can present the opportunity of understanding emergent rifts and formulating relevant approaches that can help provide broader benefits for all socio-economic groups.

For the reasons stated, this study proposes that property ownership must be recognized and taken on board as a potential impediment to the formation of

²⁵ A dialogue between the two participants of a public meeting on the commons, organized by a civil initiative, is demonstrative of the stance towards introducing private ownership into the agenda of anti-capitalist opposition as a matter of debate. Following a speech which tackled the importance of the fight for commons at many different levels, including the urban context, a member of the audience asked why the issue of private ownership is skipped perhaps far too easily and quickly during discussions although it could be worthy of attention since (in her opinion) it posed certain challenges to ongoing struggles in the city. In response to this, another member of the audience (who is an activist working under the umbrella of a civil initiative, involved in the struggle of a number of neighbourhood associations) stated that "a discussion on private ownership can create fragmentations and tensions within illegal, or semi legal settlements where tenure structure tends to be mixed and problematic. These fragmentations and tensions may come in the way of forming collective opposition. Thus, it is better if debates are grounded upon the achievement of housing rights without addressing the issue of ownership."

collective resistance among poverty groups and tackled as a key matter by urban oppositional groups to prevent fragmentations among communities pressed by urban regeneration. In the absence of an approach as such, it will not be possible to develop future models of mobilization that can defend and secure the housing rights of citizens sustainably, no matter whether they might be owners, tenants, or illegal occupiers.

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APPENDIX C

A) INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF SULUKULE

1. Since when have you been living in Sulukule?
2. How would you define everyday life in the neighbourhood?
3. When was the first time you heard about the project and how did you hear of it?
4. What kind of details do you know about the project?
5. Have you been informed by (municipal) officials in a systematic fashion?
6. What are your views regarding the project?
7. Why do you think Sulukule is being exposed to a transformation process?

(a) If a property owner:

1. Have you been contacted by the municipality so far? If yes, what have you been offered on the grounds of the project?
2. Have you attended any meetings with officials?
3. Will you accept the offer available? If yes, what has convinced you to accepting it? If not, what are your reasons for not accepting it?
4. If you are not willing to accept the offer, what kind of a strategy will you follow throughout the transformation process?

(b) If a tenant:

1. Have you been contacted by any officials and informed about the project as a tenant?
2. Have you been contacted by your landlord regarding the project?
3. Have you attended any meetings with officials?
4. Are you being offered a form of compensation on the grounds of your tenancy agreement?
5. Will you accept this offer, or not? If not, what kind of a strategy will you follow throughout the transformation process?

8. Do you think the offers made need improvement? If yes, how?
9. Have you been in touch with either the SA, or the NHSA?
10. How do you think the NAs in your neighbourhood operate?

11. Do you think any of the NAs have made an impact on your individual situation? If yes, how? If not, why?
12. Do you think the NAs have made an impact on the way in which transformation is taking place? If yes, how? If not, why?
13. What would be your comment on the community and NA relations?
14. Do you think the NAs available have reached their goals? If yes/no, why?
15. How would you comment on the support of civil initiatives to your cause?
16. What is your knowledge of other transformative processes going on in Istanbul? Do you think you might have learnt something from them?
17. How do you think your neighborhood will survive the renewal plan?

B) INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF TARLABAŞI

1. Since when have you been living in Tarlabası?
2. How would you define everyday life in the neighbourhood?
3. When was the first time you heard about the project and how did you hear of it?
4. What kind of details do you know about the project?
5. Have you been informed either by municipal, or private officials in a systematic fashion?
6. What are your views regarding the project?
7. Why do you think Tarlabası is being exposed to a transformation process?

(a) If a property owner:

1. Have you been contacted by the developer so far? If yes, what have you been offered on the grounds of the project?
2. Have you attended any meetings with officials?
3. Will you accept the offer available? If yes, what has convinced you to accepting it? If not, what are your reasons for not accepting it?
4. If you are not willing to accept the offer, what kind of a strategy will you follow throughout the transformation process?

(b) If a tenant:

1. Have you been contacted by any officials and informed about the project as a tenant?
2. Have you been contacted by your landlord regarding the project?
3. Have you attended any meetings with officials?
4. Are you being offered a form of compensation on the grounds of your tenancy agreement?
5. Will you accept this offer, or not? If not, what kind of a strategy will you follow throughout the transformation process?

8. Do you think the offers made need improvement? If yes, how?
9. Have you been in touch with the TAPT?
10. How does the TAPT operate?
11. Do you think the TAPT has made an impact on your individual situation? If yes, how? If not, why?
12. Do you think the TAPT has made an impact on the way in which transformation is taking place? If yes, how? If not, why?
13. What would be your comment on the community and TAPT relations?
14. Do you consider it likely that the TAPT will achieve its goals? If yes/no, why?
15. How would you comment on the support of civil initiatives to your cause?
16. What is your knowledge of other transformative processes going on in Istanbul? Do you think you might have learnt something from them?
17. How do you think your neighborhood will survive the renewal plan?

