

## **AN APPROACH TO URBAN REGENERATION FROM USERS' PERSPECTIVE: ÇUKURAMBAR/KIZILIRMAK NEIGHBORHOODS IN ANKARA/TURKEY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In recent few decades, urban areas have been changing and regeneration projects have been implemented to provide new healthier and more profitable living environment. It is obvious that a social, namely users', aspect also exists in the process of regeneration. This research will reveal an investigation to generate the analysis of urban regeneration from user's perspective. In urban regeneration process, there are certain actors such as old residents (initial property owners), developers, real estate agencies and new residents (latter residents moved to area after regeneration). Çukurambar-Kızılırmak Neighborhoods, as the case study area, were gecekondü (squatter settlement) area in 1960s. After urban development in Ankara towards western and southwestern directions, Çukurambar-Kızılırmak Neighborhoods have become an attractive urban regeneration zone in terms of land values. Therefore, in consequence of urban regeneration, almost all the area has been transformed to high-rise luxury apartment blocks and residence towers.

In this research, social aspect of regeneration process will be examined by the analysis of user's perspective. Apart from physical consequences of gecekondü regeneration by reference to architectural styles and density, a winner-loser analysis will be generated considering the actors in urban regeneration process as a social aspect. In research process, participant observation (author as also a resident in Çukurambar urban regeneration area), in-depth interviews and analysis of written and visual documents will be used as methodology tools. In the end, winners and losers of urban regeneration will be critically discussed by revealing implications on the basis of user's opinions and desires on urban regeneration process.

**Keywords:** Urban regeneration, Gentrification, Users' perspective, Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Urban regeneration is described as the effort, which has a comprehensive and integrated vision and action, for a continuous enhancement of physical, economic, environmental and social

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conditions of an area (Roberts, 2000). Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods in Ankara-Turkey have been experiencing a regeneration process that is removal of living units and construction of neighborhood once again with multi-storey apartment blocks for high income residents in the city. Urban regeneration project that was launched in these two neighborhoods at the beginning of 2000s experienced the sudden abandonment of the local identity of a *gecekondu*<sup>3</sup> settlement, and the embracing of a new identity of a fashionable space in Ankara. This area, as the residential space of many members of the government, has become place where only people with enough money can live. Its center is convivial, and it hosts the best areas for eating and drinking. This old *gecekondu* area close to city center has developed spontaneously into the hyped center of Ankara in period of only one decade. The thing that makes the urban regeneration in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods specific is the influx of conservative people into these neighborhoods, who have made their own contribution to the local identity. Later, this new identity has gradually transformed into a mix of the modern and conservative, the initial identity lingers in people's memories.

Gentrification, as a side-product of urban regeneration, has hit these neighborhoods hard, with the low-income people leaving the area to be replaced by a middle-high income profile of resident. However, the difference between the urban regeneration processes in these neighborhoods and in other areas of Turkey is the lack of dissatisfaction among the displaced population. There were no compulsory displacements, as those that left on the whole did so voluntarily. The former *gecekondu* residents living in this area were very satisfied with their gains from the regeneration process, and for many, their only regret was that they had failed to take advantage of the situation by appropriating more land prior to the launch of the process. Although the initial motivation behind the urban regeneration of these neighborhoods was to make this the area more livable through the removal of the *gecekondus*, control of the process was lost, and the neighborhoods ended up facing a density that exceeded their maximum capacity. In addition to the excessive development rights granted in the area, a number of plan changes were made that saw areas designated as public spaces were re-zoned for construction with the new designation of high-rise buildings. Accordingly, life in these neighborhoods has become intolerable as a result of the high density and owned an unsustainable structure for future. With the surplus of residential apartment blocks, the existing shopping mall and the non-stop construction of high-rise blocks designated as office-residences, the existing structure of the neighborhood that cannot even be sustained today is on the verge of sliding into a very complicated condition.

In order to examine the social aspect of urban regeneration in these neighborhoods, users' perspective will be analyzed and a winner-loser analysis will be inferred related to actors in urban regeneration process as social aspect. User opinions and desires on urban regeneration process in the area will be the focus of research.

## 2. CONCEPT OF URBAN REGENERATION

Urban regeneration is a part of the process of urban change which contains some certain aspects difficult to be maintained for the future. In order to sustain these aspects, urban regeneration enables urban uses and activities to be revitalized for obtaining livable urban spaces for present time, and also for future. Thus, it is significant to realize that insufficiency

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<sup>3</sup> *Gecekondu* is a structure constructed illegally by an individual on an occupied public or private land (Uzun, Çete, & Palancıoğlu, 2010). Within this research, the term *gecekondu* is preferred instead of similar uses in the literature such as slum or squatter houses.

of existing livability in urban areas is differentiated depending on different contents and contexts of urban change, and considering distinctive characteristics of cities and regions. In other words, any de facto rule for the areas of urban regeneration cannot be taken as commonly accepted. According to Turok (2004), urban regeneration is defined as a comprehensive vision and practice trying to produce permanent solutions for the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of a district that experiences changes in order to figure out solutions to urban problems. In addition, according to Keleş (2004), urban regeneration is defined as the change of the entire city or some parts of it and its getting into a different structure. This concept is analyzed among city planners apart from the addition of new settlements to a city. Urban regeneration is a change that occurs at the inner structures of a city constructed upon its previously existing past and the relationship with other settlement units. Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods have experienced urban regeneration, and upcoming parts of research will reveal the process of urban regeneration in these neighborhoods together with its social aspect.

### **3. URBAN REGENERATION IN ÇUKURAMBAR AND KIZILIRMAK NEIGHBORHOODS**

According to the first inhabitants of Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods, when they started to settle in the area, infrastructure was quite inadequate for the people who were living there. There were not any electricity and water services; in addition, the district did not include any social amenities such as market place, green areas or educational units. In order to travel from the area to city center, residents used to walk long distances and then get on a vehicle. Moreover, roads in the neighborhood were too inadequate and muddy. One of the old inhabitants of Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods (I1) mentions that, “I came to Çukurambar when I got married in 1964. There was wide range of agricultural areas in this district. There was no electricity and we used kerosene lamp. We brought water from well in winter and summer”. Later on, electricity was provided in the area as a result of insistence of inhabitants, and then water was supplied to Çukurambar district in 1966. In the interviews made with old Çukurambar residents, their neighborhood relationships and life styles before demolition of their *gecekondu* was mentioned. It was told that in time of *gecekondu*, each residential unit had a garden together with trees including fruit growing; besides, sheep and goat breeding was made although there were just a few number of animals (Figure 12). An interviewee, (I1), expresses this situation as:

“Our neighborhood of Çukurambar was very beautiful, it was greenery, and our neighborhood relations were very good. Each family has a garden with 300 m<sup>2</sup>, 500 m<sup>2</sup> 100 m<sup>2</sup>. Each family surrounded their gardens with wall enclosing its greenery structure. We cultivated our garden; our fruits were very nice. Afterwards, our comfort was corrupted. There was an asphalt construction site on the location where Hayat Sebla Residences exist now. The smoke of it came to us and it disturbed us very much. Our fruits started to dry. We all wife and children went there to stone for the aim of removing the asphalt construction site formed there, but we failed”.

Under favor of close neighborhood relationships and the spirit of collective work, Çukurambar was created out of nothing. As mentioned before, there were only *infields* in the area that Çukurambar exists now. Then, *gecekondu* structures started to be constructed one after another; however, at this time, infrastructure and social facilities remained insufficient. Therefore, the residents all together collaborated to construct all these insufficiencies from the very beginning, and they recreated everything by means of their team spirit.

Two decades ago, urban regeneration in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods was started with the plans prepared by the municipality for the area. After approval of Implementation Plan, agreements have been arrived through the merging of parcels of landowners, and then contractors have started to manage the construction of high rise apartment blocks instead of old gecekondü settlements. Regeneration has been completed for a significant part of the area by the association of various factors. In regeneration process, almost 50% part of the rights of property owners were taken by local government legally. A land owner from Kızılırmak Neighborhood (I2) expressed this process as;

“We took our development deeds in 1996. However, during the redevelopment process, 48% of my 421 m<sup>2</sup> land was taken away by municipality. In addition, an extra 48 m<sup>2</sup> space was also taken in order to supply school area. As a result, 200 m<sup>2</sup> area remained from a total of 421 m<sup>2</sup> land of mine”

Consequently, land owners in these neighborhoods reached an agreement with contractors and gave to the contractor their land for the new apartment block construction. Generally, the agreement between contractors and landowners were based on half-and-half share. Regeneration process was not easy and took a long time for the neighborhood because one parcel could be shared with more than one person. Therefore, it was difficult to come together and reach an agreement all the time. Today, the number of old gecekondü residents settling in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak does not seem to exceed 20%. The reason for remaining in such a minority is that selling their existing apartment in newly constructed apartment block in the area has seemed quite profitable since they can purchase several apartments from other districts of Ankara. Although urban regeneration in the area seems to be completed, there still exist gecekondüs in the area since either gecekondü owners cannot come to an agreement with other landowners or they wait for the expectation of an extra profit through their land or they have a desire to construct high rise building on their own property.

Considering legal aspects of land use changing policies, any kind of illegality cannot be found since municipality took the decision through the agreements in municipal council; therefore, any positive result cannot be gained from the rejections. (I2) exemplifies this process through some luxury residences:

“The real owner of these luxury Residences is not the Metropolitan Municipality, but us. They got our land from us under the name of expropriation by saying that we will use your areas to create green areas. In short, they grafted our money. After that, they constructed residences on these areas and provided rent to themselves through our lands”.

### **3.1. Gentrification in the Area**

To examine the gentrification, it is significant to emphasize that excessively high land values have existed in the area over the years by means of its central location close to business centers and universities. The most appropriate example to prove the existence of high land value in the area seems to be that each gecekondü landowner has owned at least approximately 1.5 or 2 share of high priced luxury apartments after regeneration depending on the size of the land. One of the landowners living in Çukurambar (I8), explains high land values in the area in the interview as:

“I had 550 m<sup>2</sup> land in Çukurambar. After the legal deductions by municipality, my share decreased to 300m<sup>2</sup>. As a result of my agreement with contractor for this remaining land, I deserved two apartments and one shopping store share in the neighborhood. I sold my store share and bought apartment to my son. I have been living in one of the other apartments and my daughter in the other one”.

Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods have also become new fashion places of Ankara in which outstanding trademarks as cafés or restaurants and offices of private companies in business centers have preferred to operate. All these new activities in the area, initiated after urban regeneration by means of its potential of existence of high income people, have contributed not only to the reputation of these neighborhoods, but also to gentrification potential in the area.

Two types of displacement have also been experienced in the area as voluntarily and involuntarily. According to Dündar (2003), *gecekondu* residents mostly have difficulties in affording ordinary costs of apartment block which they owned after urban regeneration, and renters are obliged to come up against involuntary displacement. Other reasons of involuntary displacement are the adaptation problem between existing residents and new comers, and inconvenience of newly constructed residential units to the life style of *gecekondu* residents. On the contrary, voluntary displacement occurs for the expectation of acquiring share from urban rent. *Gecekondu* residents, whose existing properties are replaced with luxury high-rise apartment blocks, leave from the area voluntarily to benefit the financial return of the gap created with increasing real estate values after regeneration. most of land owners leaved from these neighborhoods voluntarily since selling the existing property and purchasing several apartment blocks from various peripheral districts in Ankara seemed more profitable. According to the interview carried out with a resident in Çukurambar (18), who can be exemplified as the fact that voluntary displacement has been experienced in the area, it is mentioned that:

“Each landowner left from the area by making profit without being unhappy. They bought several apartments from Etimesgut and Sincan with the money they gained from selling one apartment from this neighborhood. Therefore, they both provided their children the opportunity to own an apartment and got revenue by renting these apartments”.

In addition, the interview, carried out with Çukurambar Neighborhood Mukhtar, (13), demonstrates that the decrease in poverty by the increase in land values of *gecekondu* landowners as:

“In this neighborhood, *gecekondu* landowners have almost had three apartments. The people owning four or five apartments also exist in minority. Today, if they want to sell these apartments, each one is priced as 138,800 \$, meaning 555,500 \$ in total for a *gecekondu* landowner. Can you imagine that a *gecekondu* landowner, having monthly 222 \$ retirement pension, would have had a property valuing 555,500 \$ in a while. There is a landowner in our apartment block who owned three apartments after urban regeneration. He sold one of them 12 years ago, from a certain amount of money, and bought a five-storey apartment block from another part of the city. He also gave his name to his apartment block”.

On the further stages of urban regeneration, not only conservatives, but also modern people have started to move into Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods. Sometimes, conflicts have also been seen in the area between these two groups, which is exemplified by a resident living in one of the luxury residences in Çukurambar (19), as:

“I am living in Gökteşehir Residences. In our block, one specific day was determined for women about the use of swimming pool upon the request of conservative dwellers. The women, who want to use the pool together with her husband, can also use within the days specific to men; but, in the days for men, conservative men come to the pool

as a group. Therefore, it is impossible to go to the pool with your wife comfortably. Furthermore, there was a tennis court within the boundaries of the site. Again the conservative people wanted to transform it into football field; but, the modern people living in the site objected to such a transformation for the reason of where to play for their girls within the site. In our block, we have frequently experienced such conflicts between conservative and modern groups of people”.

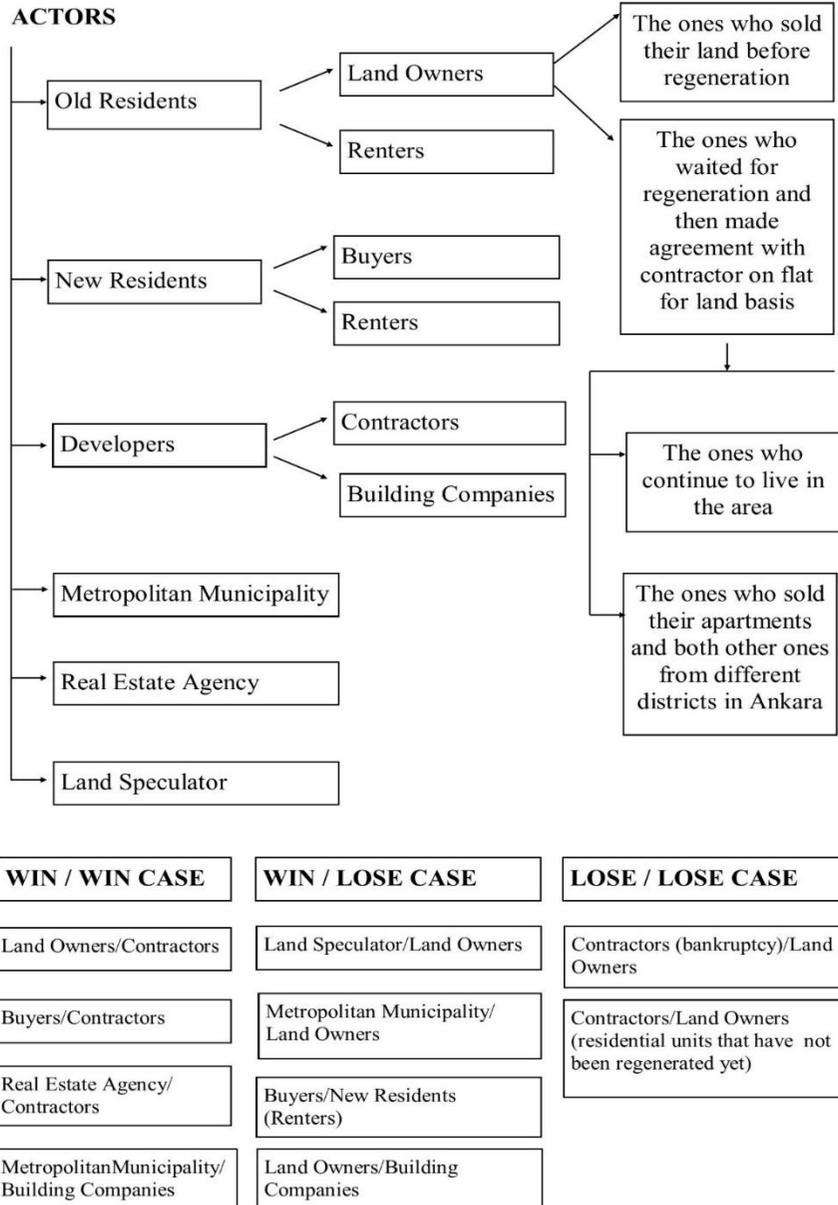
### **3.2. Evaluation of Urban Regeneration Processes regarding Winners and Losers**

In the procedure of urban regeneration, different actors take part in the process at different stages. The process of urban regeneration is based on a multi-actor and multi-sector collaboration. In the analysis of regeneration in Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods, related actors can be classified into six main headings. The first one has been, namely, old residents who were living in the area before urban regeneration as landowners or renters. The second actor group has consisted of developers who have managed the construction process as a whole from the very beginning to the end. In the regeneration of Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods, contractors and building companies have played the role of developers for new construction processes. Thirdly, new residents in the area have been another actor group including buyers and renters who moved to newly built residential units after regeneration by purchasing the house or paying rent for it. Later on, another critical actor has been Metropolitan Municipality as public sector shareholder within the process by cooperation with developers or building companies. In determining Metropolitan Municipality as winner or loser in the process of Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods, it is remarkable that it has significantly had the power to get legal share from private properties. Then, another actor group seems to be real estate agencies playing the role of being mediator for purchase and sell of residential units. Finally, land speculators has been another actor within the process who use their existing capital on private property before transformation and then sell it to make more profit in case that the area is about to be regenerated (Figure 1).

Interview with (I4), who was living in Çukurambar Neighborhood in *gecekondu* before regeneration and has continued to live in there also after regeneration, summarizes the economic dimension of urban regeneration as:

“We migrated to Çukurambar Neighborhood in 1970 through our relatives, and then constructed firstly a single-storey *gecekondu*. Later on, we added one more storey to our *gecekondu* for our son to settle in. At the end of 1990s, when we heard the rumor that our *gecekondus* were about to be regenerate, we firstly resisted to give our *gecekondu*. But after that, we agreed with contractor depending on flat for land basis thinking that we could make profit from urban regeneration. We were ten right holders on the land that new apartment block would have been built, and then we dealt with the contractor depending on flat for land basis. After regeneration, contractor would have got half-share of new apartment block. The share that we got after regeneration was the share of 1.5 apartment and shop. We sold our shop and half share in order to allocate them to our children, and we have been living in our remaining one apartment share”.

**Winners and Losers in Terms of Economic Aspect in  
 Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods**



**Figure 1.** Analysis of Actors Including Their Win-Lose Cases in terms of Economic Aspect in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods

As seen in the example of (I4), both old gecekondu residents and contractor won economically after urban regeneration. The interview carried out with a resident, (I5), living in Çukurambar reveals that:

“We bought our apartment in this neighborhood in 2004 after its three year construction period. At that time, we paid 48,611 \$ to the contractor; and today, if we want to sell this apartment block, its value is about 138,800 \$. I am quite satisfied from my investment and apartment”.

As mentioned in this example, contractor is categorized into the group of winner actors since he succeeded to find a buyer who brought a satisfactory profit at that time for his apartment block. In addition, buyers also win after urban regeneration process because of increasing value of their property over the years. As a result, both contractors and buyers win in this process. In addition, land speculators, who bought the lands of loser actors, are also called as winners in urban regeneration process. (I6), who is both an old resident of Kızıllırmak Neighborhood and an entrepreneur, explains two different types of land speculators in this area as:

“Firstly, businessmen who have monetary power and secondly local people of Balgat who are inherited by their ancestors are two types of land speculators. These entrepreneurs started to collect the lands in the neighborhoods by making agreements with landowners when the rumors of urban regeneration was getting around. Since they did not also have economic concerns, they waited until those lands would have been increased in value. The common characteristic of these land speculators is that they were farsighted and did not have economic concerns”.

One of the old residents in Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods (I2), also explains how he/she became loser against Metropolitan Municipality as:

“I had 412 m<sup>2</sup> land in this neighborhood, 200 m<sup>2</sup> of my land was taken by Metropolitan Municipality as legal shares. These deductions were also made from the lands of other people in an approximate ratio of 48% to reserve these lands for public use. I wish they remained them as public spaces. However, plan changes were made in some areas to make them zoned for construction. Therefore, I think Metropolitan Municipality was unjust against us”.

One of the landowners (I7), explains his/her process as:

“We bought our land from Kızıllırmak Neighborhood in 1977. In 1980, we constructed our gecekondu on our land. We lived in this neighborhood for 24 years. Many contractors demanded our land in time of urban regeneration in these neighborhoods. Finally, we came to an agreement with a contractor and gave our lands as eight partners in 2004. Generally, agreements with contractors depend on 50% share of newly constructed apartment block in Çukurambar and Kızıllırmak Neighborhoods. We also agreed with the contractor in that way. Then, in the construction process, we moved to other district as renter, and the contractor covered our rent expenses. We did not have any problem until that time. However, the construction was continuing quite slowly. The construction, which should have been finished depending on our agreement in 30 months, could not be finished somehow. Indeed, the contractor went bankrupt. Later on, the construction of our apartment block was finished, but the contractor did not want to give our shares. Then, we ended up in court. By 2014, we have not still got any part of our share from apartment block”.

Gentrification potential for future in these neighborhoods, caused by income and affordability differences among the residents, is stated by the owner of a real estate agency (I10) in Çukurambar as:

“There have sometimes been some problems about the expenditures for apartment block and maintenance fee in our building. A person, working as a civil servant, bought his apartment at one time from a low price. However, today the maintenance fee in our apartment block is about

300-325 TL and he has been insisting on to cut down common expenses of the building for the reason that he has made his children educated necessitating many expenses”.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The main characteristic and difference of this research is that the analysis does not own ideological preconceptions purely focusing on the story of losers regarding how they have become deprived or loser in urban regeneration process. Studies on urban regeneration in Turkey mostly reveal that urban regeneration is a process damaging some previously acquired social values, displacing residents from their living environment and forcing them to live in mostly other peripheral parts of the city. Neighborhood relations, belongingness to the area and pre-constituted social networks are ignored by policy makers; besides, these implementations are criticized for being purely rent-oriented. On the other hand, some practices in Turkey reveal that almost all the actors have become winners in the process economically. Even old residences would have been displaced from the area; they have become satisfied from the profit that they own by means of their private property. Considering the fact that old residents living in urban regeneration area -for instance gecekondü dwellers- are mostly low income people, urban regeneration together with accompanying gentrification process does not stand as an implementation to be avoided in some cases. On the contrary, it seems to be a process in which almost all the actors such as landowners, developers and municipalities win economically that makes urban regeneration desirable for the area. Within this research, the thing that makes Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods different from some other practices in Turkey is almost all the actors have satisfied from urban regeneration practice, and gentrification has completely been experienced voluntarily by old gecekondü residents.

Urban regeneration in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods has been implemented through reaching agreement between gecekondü landowners and developers, and it has derived considerable amount of profit to the actors within the process. However, such an urban development in the area has resulted in increasing residential density, new transport infrastructure and road network, business centers and commercial activities. As a result of these findings, some questions stand as discussible which are: Did gentrification after urban regeneration process annihilate deprived residents and create losers? Are Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods excellent places to live, work or spend time; or are there sustainability difficulties in the area?

This research reveals that gentrification has not been a process that always creates losers as experienced in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods; yet, it seems significant to realize that only economic aspect has taken into account in this statement. In other words, there might be some losses socially within the process such as annihilation of neighborhood relations, displacement from the area, and loss of social interaction and belongingness to living environment for old residents. However, at the end of the research, it has been concluded that despite the social concerns of urban regeneration, this process as well as gentrification in Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods have not generated losers with a few exceptions contrary to the ones experienced in other cases in Turkey. Outcomes of this research is not compatible with the context of other gentrification discussions for the practices in Turkey meaning that old residents have not been annihilated from their living environment; on the contrary, they have desired to leave from the area voluntarily for their economic revival. In other words, in the process of urban regeneration in these neighborhoods, economic welfare concerns have predominated the continuity of social well-being of old gecekondü residents.

Consequently, they have mostly preferred to leave from the area after regeneration for the sake of their financial gains and satisfied from the process.

It can be concluded from the research that the way of experiencing gentrification is a significant determinant for the winner or loser actors in urban regeneration process as scrutinized in the comparative study of Çukurambar and Kızılırmak Neighborhoods with four areas of gentrification. The most remarkable difference between these neighborhoods is whether the land is owned by individuals together their with real estate deed; on the other hand, in other districts in İstanbul, the land has been owned by public and gecekondu residents have occupied the land to meet their sheltering needs. These people have been displaced towards the peripheral parts of the city without having the right to declare their desires. Therefore, they have involuntarily displaced from their living environment since they have not satisfied financially from the process in order not to have any deed for their land. Consequently, in Turkey, voluntariness of gentrification is directly related with economic concerns, namely financial satisfaction, of old residents in the area.

#### LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee Code Mentioned in the Text	The position of Interviewee within the Research
I 1	Resident in regeneration area
I 2	Owner of <i>Mavi Emlak</i> Real Estate Agency
I 3	Mukhtar of Çukurambar
I 4	Resident in regeneration area
I 5	Resident in regeneration area
I 6	Manager and Investor of <i>Vişnelik Residences</i>
I 7	Resident in regeneration area
I 8	Resident in regeneration area
I 9	Resident in regeneration area
I 10	Owner of <i>Yüksel Emlak</i> Real Estate Agency

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