
An Attempt to Question the TOKI Housing Project in Neoliberal Turkey: Integrating the Poor?

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Résumé

In Turkey, the housing issue has always been significant for the governments. Especially by the 1980s, together with the neoliberalization of economy and society, the housing policies have come more to the front. Rising urbanization and its effects on the lives of the poor have determined the way these policies made. So, the housing issue in Turkey has often become a gainful channel for the political parties to appeal to the masses. Benefited mostly by the right wing politicians, housing of the poor has always been a part of an integrative discourse. In other words, housing projects done by the governments have become the means to embrace the masses. In fact, these projects have become the guarantor for the governments to maintain power. In this sense, the 2000s, the years when the government of Justice and Development Party (JDP) has been mostly in power and also the years that witnessed extensive neoliberalization in all aspects, indicated a much more "developed" housing policy understanding. Especially after the 2008 economic crisis, the construction sector has risen as the main engine of Turkish economy. The construction based economic policies have almost replaced the productive sectors. As a reflection of this, TOKI (Housing Development Administration), founded in the year 1984, has been highly empowered in the 2000s. The JDP government has given TOKI specific powers to administer the construction sector in Turkey. Not only limited to housing projects, but also dealing with different public projects such as highways, recreation areas, etc., TOKI has now become the main decision-maker in the construction sector. Beside these, TOKI has been the runner of different housing projects, including also the upper class housing projects which are claimed to be the subsidies for the social housing projects done by the institution. TOKI's institutional priority is to meet the housing needs of the poor. Hence, the increasing power of the institution during the JDP government is not indicating a uniform process. This process could well be explained by two levels of analysis. First of all, the JDP government's intervention to the construction market by empowering TOKI, makes the construction sector the life saver of Turkish economy and also the guarantor for the ongoing power of the government, despite in the short run. On the other hand, TOKI housing project for the poor people is also much cheaper and practical way to mask the harsh economic and social circumstances these people faced under extensive neoliberalization of the economy in recent decades. It somehow indicates a parallel vision towards the poor with the anti-poverty programs of the neoliberal world that target the integration of the poor into the neoliberal market system. Considering all these, this study is an attempt to question the TOKI housing project in neoliberal Turkey along with the integration of the poor.

Mots-Clés: housing policy, neoliberalization, construction

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