Introduction

In the book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre contended that:

> the space serves as an instrument of thought and action; it is at the same time a means of production, a means of control, hence of domination and power, but it partially escapes, as such, from those whom it serves.

(1974: 35)

This statement shows how it is complicated for a specific actor to control entirely the production of space. Even if public and private actors want to design the space according to their own objectives — whether political or for profit — there will always be other kinds of power relations and attempts at resistance from inhabitants and/or civil society in order to participate in their design. The interaction of all these actors often transforms the urban space, and this transformed space also constrains these actors so they constantly adapt their behaviour, tactics and strategies in order to maintain their place and influence.

This chapter aims to show how this interaction between different actors for the appropriation of space takes place in Turkey, especially in the context of neoliberal urban planning under the rule of the Party of Justice and Development (AKP) since 2003. I propose to analyse this interaction from the perspective of the concept of right to the city and spatial justice. Drawing on Lefebvre’s theory, I think that both concepts are closely related and complementary. Edward Soja, who largely reinstated Lefebvre’s thought in urban studies by his theory of the spatial turn, emphasises this relationship:

> Paris in the 1960s and especially the still understudied co-presence of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault, becomes the most generative site for the creation of a radically new conceptualization of space and spatiality, and for a specifically urban and spatial concept of justice, encapsulated most insightfully in Lefebvre’s call for taking back control over the right to the city and the right to difference.

(2009: no page)
The purpose of this chapter is to study different urban resistances in Turkey in the light of the right to the city and spatial justice and to analyse how these concepts are perceived and mobilised by inhabitants. My field study is based on two neighbourhoods, Dikmen Valley in Ankara and May Day neighbourhood in Istanbul, both composed mostly of informal settlements. Their creation and development were similar. Both neighbourhoods emerged as a result of the housing need of rural migrants coming from different parts of Anatolia in the 1970s. In the beginning the first settlements were founded by the initiative of radical left revolutionary groups that were relatively powerful in metropolitan cities during this period. Both neighbourhoods therefore have an important heritage of political and collective action. Another common point is that they now have a high estate value because of their central location and are threatened by large-scale urban transformation projects. Unsurprisingly, some inhabitants in these neighbourhoods have for several years been organising resistance and mobilisation in order to protect their everyday life spaces and houses and to participate in the decision process of these projects.

First I will present in detail these neighbourhoods by locating them in the context of neoliberal urban planning in Turkey. Then, I will focus on the emergence of different forms of resistance despite their similarities. The right to the city and the attempt to appropriate space will be central to my purpose.

Informal neighbourhoods in the newly restructured urban system

Urbanisation in Turkey can be explained through three historical phases: the period before 1980, the period between 1980 and 2001 and the period after 2001. The first phase corresponds to the beginning of urbanisation in the 1950s and is clearly related to the high rate of rural migration (Öncü 1988). This period is marked by the absence of public policy on housing. The housing question was never entirely addressed in Turkey as a policy in the political agenda of changing governments, and housing needs were long managed by individual initiatives by constructing informal settlements generally called gecekondus (Türkün 2011). After the 1980s, these informal settlements have been progressively legalised by different governments who saw these places as a potential source of political support for the elections.

During the phase after 2001, metropolitan cities in Turkey have become central to the reproduction and continual development of neoliberalism itself, constituting increasingly important geographical targets and laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policy experiments, all aimed at increasing the value of the land. This process, observed in many cities in the world, was particularly accelerated in Turkey during the AKP rule and became the main tool for economic growth. The AKP decided to restructure the governance of Turkish real-estate markets and urban planning through the implementation of a number of legal and institutional reforms, with significant consequences for the socio-economic geography of cities and the rural environment. Social policies in the city and the search for spatial justice fostering social diversity and support for disadvantaged populations have been gradually downgraded. It also combined neoliberal strategies with the conservative-Islamist restructuring of urban space.

Neoliberal urban regeneration policies have three major characteristics in order to legitimise this process and to reduce potential channels of resistance. First, they are supported by a wide-ranging legal framework as indicated above, that government adapts according to needs and conditions. Second, urban security discourses are used for these policies in the public arena in order to legitimise human consequences such as forced displacements and the destruction of homes. In this perspective, many informal and degraded neighbourhoods have been presented as areas of crime, terrorism and social alienation. Third, this neoliberal restructuring of cities in Turkey has an authoritarian character since it ignores the demands and desires of the majority of
residents, namely lower-middle and poor classes, and privileges the market priorities in order to integrate cities like Istanbul and Ankara in global economic, financial and cultural flows.

To ensure sustainability for the construction sector considered as the catalyst of economic growth, all gecekondu areas and old ‘unhealthy’ neighbourhoods have been opened up to regeneration and gentrification (Türkün 2011). The neighbourhoods inhabited by the city’s poorest, which at the same time carry the highest potential in terms of the rising value of urban land, are refashioned by local municipalities and the Mass Housing Administration of Turkey (TOKI) in order to launch urban transformation projects. In this sense, the neoliberal restructuring of the urban space raises some questions about the meaning, the production and the appropriation of the space by those who structure it and those who live in it. Lefebvre argues that the production of space not only manifests various forms of injustice but also produces and reproduces them, thereby maintaining established relations of domination and oppression (Lefebvre 1974: 41).

In this perspective, social groups with low incomes occupying old and unhealthy neighbourhoods and the inner-city, gecekondus are now considered undesirable. Current urban renewal projects displace these communities in order to confine them to new resettlement areas far away from their previous neighbourhoods. This is observable in many urban projects in Istanbul where the inhabitants are the last ones to know about the details of such projects. This process reflects what Lefebvre calls difference of perception between conceived and perceived space, which is often adversarial in capitalist urbanization (Lefebvre 1974).

In an urban space conceived under a neoliberal logic based on market value of place and without a participative process taking into account the needs and desires of inhabitants, neighbourhood becomes the place where many social groups (including minorities, and political and/or religious groups) create enclaves wherein their identity is recognised without repression, and these environments enhance the development of a relatively shared identity, connected to the neighbourhood, inside the community. Many inhabitants, especially in informal neighbourhoods concerned with several planning projects, try to organise resistance even if it is sometimes weak and not a general reaction. This is the case for the Dikmen Valley and May Day neighbourhood. These communities have sometimes organised themselves in independent structures and developed their own local protests. Their protest campaigns and their daily, unspectacular survival strategies challenge the connection between urbanisation and civilisation as claimed in neoliberal ‘development’ concepts (Mayer 2012: 79). In other words, the state’s desire to renew these areas constitutes a direct threat to the community’s shared identity, thereby triggering resistance in order to protect it. Resistance, here, is understood as active but also passive and sometimes invisible actions, strategies and tactics used by inhabitants individually or collectively in everyday life in order to protect their way of life and the social and cultural specificities of their community which are widely shaped inside their neighbourhood. In this article, this type of resistance is analysed in connection with the right to the city that Lefebvre developed in order to explain the right of all people living in the city to participate in decisions concerning their everyday life and to exist with their own life-styles, identity and cultural habits in the city. The right to the city is considered then as a resistance to the standardisation of city life. Michel de Certeau (1980) analyses this as a tactic used by the ‘weak’ through which everyday spatial hegemonies are covertly transgressed, and identity is projected through claims to a particular space of power which is neighbourhood.

Two cases from Turkey are selected in order to discuss this relationship between the neoliberal city and right to the city due to the intensive neoliberal urbanisation undertaken by the AKP government, and because this process has dramatically affected the living environments of these different communities. The first case, the May Day neighbourhood (the name was unofficially given by inhabitants to refer to the Labour Day), is a poor working-class neighbourhood
situated on a hill in the Ümraniye district of Istanbul. The urban transformation of the Ümraniye district, whose inhabitants live mainly in gecekondus, is one of the priorities of the Metropolitan Town Hall of Istanbul, largely due to this area’s geological resistance to earthquakes. Attempts have been made to destroy the shantytowns on several occasions in the past, but each met with a high-level resistance from the May Day neighbourhood. This location, close to two of the city’s main motorways and the new location of the National Bank of Turkey, is only 15 minutes away from the Bosporus by car, making it extremely desirable to the private construction industry (Gülhan 2011) (see Figure 44.1).

This neighbourhood, located on the Asian side of the city, grew in stages in the 1970s via the gecekondus built by economic migrants from rural Anatolia. Initially the building plots were sold by the land mafia, but from 1976, left-wing socialist organisations started to settle in the neighbourhood (Aslan 2004). During the second half of the 1970s, control of the neighbourhood passed over to these political organisations, resulting in land distribution which favoured dissenting families, particularly the Alevis from the Kurdish cities of Tunceli, Kahramanmaraş and Sivas. The Alevis are one of the main religious minorities in Turkey and they interpret Islam in a secular way, have religious rituals dramatically different from Sunni interpretations and they are often politically close to Kemalist left in Turkey (Massicard 2012). In May Day, various services and institutions were gradually established across the gecekondus. Community centres, schools and co-operatives for purchasing food, fuel and construction materials were designed and managed by the residents via popular committees. The district earned a reputation for political dissidence by repelling the gecekondu demolition teams three times in the 1970s, making it a site of resistance in the public imagination. However, after the military coup of 1980, in 1983 the neighbourhood was ‘legalised’ by the military regime which took over its control. A muhtar (legal administrator democratically elected) was chosen, and the neighbourhood was renamed Mustafa Kemal, which remains its official name today. In 2008 the neighbourhood was divided and each portion attached to a different district, so that the historic May Day neighbourhood now composes parts of the Aşık Veysel and Mustafa Kemal neighbourhoods attached to the Ataşehir district. Even so, kinship networks between people coming from the same Anatolian city are still important, with many hometown associations still operating in the area (Toumarkine and Hersant 2005).
The second neighbourhood is the Dikmen Valley in Ankara. Initially, what is now called the Dikmen Valley was a small village with some vineyard gardens, relatively far from the city centre of Ankara (the new capital of the young Republic of Turkey), designed in 1928 according to the urbanisation plans of German planner Herman Jansen. These plans were based on a city of 300,000 inhabitants by the 1980s and planned to preserve the village of Dikmen and its surroundings in order to maintain its agricultural activities, and to preserve green areas.

Subsequently, strong demographic pressure, unexpected and therefore not planned for, rendered Jansen’s master plans obsolete. The urgent need for housing for rural migrants, expecting to find jobs in the new capital city, has gradually widened the city’s borders, and the Dikmen Valley is one of the areas where gecekondus have multiplied since the 1960s. The construction of these dwellings was accelerated in the 1970s under the impulse of the left-wing radical groups who were looking for unoccupied lands in various Ankariot districts in order to distribute them – sometimes by using force – to working-class immigrants. This tendency was observable in many other neighbourhoods in metropolitan cities in the country such as Mamak Tuzlucaýr in Ankara, May Day or Gazi neighbourhoods in Istanbul and Gültepe in Izmir. In the case of Dikmen, the neighbourhood was composed of people coming from different cities of Central Anatolia like Çankırı, Çorum or Sivas. Some of them were Alevi, as in May Day, but the majority of inhabitants were Sunnis. Before the launch of the project, the ethnic, religious and political diversity of the neighbourhood had as a corollary the absence of organised political actions or political consciousness, which was able to generate collective solidarity. Compared to May Day, the different parts of the neighbourhood were not interacting daily. Some respondents on this point highlight, for example, the tendency of families from the same Anatolian city to gather together by constructing their houses next to each other. Daily exchanges related to the use of the grocer, the bus stop or the neighbourhood café existed, but in the absence of a common risk of destruction of their homes or life spaces, they were limited. Everyone preferred to socialise in their street, with their neighbours, the people they knew through family or town of origin.

At its creation, the Dikmen Valley was hardly connected to the city centre of Ankara and difficult to access. It had no basic infrastructure or services such as roads, electricity networks or...
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Moreover, the connections to these latter two services were carried out clandestinely. Due to the rapid increase in population and *gecekondus*, policymakers were finally forced to administratively recognise the neighbourhood during the 1980s and provide basic public services. Some of the inhabitants of *gecekondus* even managed to obtain certificates of ownership from the municipality during this period. If this official acknowledgement was necessary in view of the size of the neighbourhood and the population, it also largely met electoral considerations: with the legalisation of the building and the recognition of the district, successive governments hoped to obtain votes.

In the early 1990s, the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality and the Çankaya Municipality, both led by the People’s Republican Party (CHP), decided to carry out an urban renovation and included the Dikmen Valley project in the master plans of Ankara in 1989. At the beginning, this renovation project was fairly participative and tried to respect the right of owners. However, the project evolved in the 2000s under the AKP rule of Ankara and became entirely a ‘for-profit’ housing project, and the new mayor refused to cooperate and to negotiate with inhabitants.

Compared to the May Day neighbourhood, known for its historical political involvement in the 1970s and for the presence of activists affiliated to various extreme left political organisations, politicisation of a large part of the inhabitants of Dikmen seems to be more closely linked to the spatial changes and stigmatisation. The neighbourhood constitutes a life space in which social ties, networks and social solidarities are forged and contributes, to a large extent, to the socialisation of individuals. It thus plays an important role in the processes of building individual and community identity, particularly in the sense attributed to it during collective mobilisation and resistance. As a result, any attempt to transform and destroy it is seen by some inhabitants as a threat to their existence within the city.

In Dikmen Valley, as in May Day, ordinary people are mobilised in a context characterised by permanent social uncertainty and urgency, like the deficiencies of basic equipment and services. These two districts constitute zones of economic, social and communitarian segregation and could be considered also as differentiated spaces in a Lefebvrian sense as they have a historical political heritage and a collective identity construction related to belonging to their neighbourhood, which is different from the other parts of the city. In both cases the municipal authorities have sought to change the composition of these neighbourhoods by destroying the *gecekondus*. The police forces have confronted the inhabitants several times either to enable the demolition of houses or to repress political mobilisation related to some commemorative events like the 2 September 1977 resistance in the May Day neighbourhood against the destruction of *gecekondus*, even causing the deaths of some protestors. In both instances, public organisations have been unable to transform these districts either culturally or politically.

These confrontations have also come at a cost for the inhabitants. The precariousness of the housing, due to the constant risk of demolition, and the resultant difficulty in accessing safe and legal housing, remain common problems in both districts. In the following section, I will explore the place of the right to the city concept in the development of neighbourhood resistance and especially the way inhabitants represent this concept in both case study neighbourhoods.

**Right to the city in neighbourhood resistance**

Lefebvre perceived the right to the city as a way of legitimating ‘the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization’ (1996: 197). For Lefebvre, the urban is not simply limited to the boundaries of a city, but includes its social system of production. Hence the right to the city is a claim for the recognition of the urban as the (re)producer of social relations of power, and the right to participation in it (Gilbert and Dikeç
In that sense, the right to the city could be described as a right to the appropriation and the participation of the inhabitants. As Marcuse explains, it is at the same time:

> a right to produce the city as well as to enjoy it and the two are integrally linked. It is not only the right to a choice of what is produced after it is produced, but a right to determine what is produced and how it is produced and to participate in its production.

(Lefebvre 2012: 36)

Lefebvre’s conception of the right to the city is for inhabitants to retain the ability to produce their spaces without conforming to the dominant modes of spatial production, and to participate in reshaping the existing norms and forces in which space is being produced within the neoliberal order, rather than being themselves engulfed in those modes (Fawaz 2009). The concept of right to the city in this sense has been introduced in Turkey by some urban activists and their organizations and transmitted to inhabitants in their collaboration to resist the urban projects. These activists are often urban planners and architects with Marxist ideas, defending an alternative vision of city-making against that of public and private actors involved in urbanisation. They are often members of the Union of Chambers of Architects and Engineers or associations like Solidarity Studio or One Hope. In the case of May Day and Dikmen Valley, these organisations were present at the beginning of the mobilisation but progressively left the place to inhabitants themselves but also to leftist political groups. In any case, the inhabitants adopted the term, combining it with spatial justice. During the mobilisation they built neighbourhood associations, and these associations, thanks to their interaction with professional activists, developed their own discourse of justice and right to the city. In fact, the sense of the term was present from the beginning of the resistance as the mobilisation was never limited to housing rights but broadly to the right to exist in the city with the choice of life space, the access to all city facilities and the right to enjoy their own cultural and political tools and social relations. For one of the urban activists:

> The right to the city is a revolutionary right, not a mere right of dwelling; right of access to centrality or to the urban services. It must be elaborated as related to the use-value of space with a democratic urban imagination. Urban struggle must aim for the right to the city, targeting a more democratic, just city based on the use value.

(Ergin and Rittesberger 2014: 51)

Concretely, both neighbourhoods I have studied started to resist the urban transformation projects from 2007. Unlike Dikmen Valley, May Day was not directly threatened but with the construction of a large gated community opposite the neighbourhood, rumours started to be spread about the future of this informal settlement, which was the target of the government for several years because of political and cultural reasons, and the opportunity presented by its high estate value. Because of the iconic case of Sulukule, a Roma neighbourhood in Istanbul which was destroyed and gentrified entirely by a state-led urban project (Erdi-Lelandais 2013), inhabitants in May Day were determined to stay active and to be ready to defend their neighbourhood against threats of destruction. The importance of resistance is underlined by one of the founders who still remains in May Day:

> I think we should keep our neighbourhood alive because we earned it by the blood of our comrades. There are resistance memories in every corner of it. This neighbourhood marked our social memory. It gives always a place for revolutionary activities and leads the
production of progressive ideas. Despite all problems and political measures targeting the
neighbourhood, it is still a revolutionary and red neighbourhood.

(Hüseyin, age 60, interview)

Neighbourhood cements a shared identity related to the place among residents, but not just
in relation to the specific codes and practices associated with ethnicity. This identification is
also enriched by: traditional customs, social networks, rituals, symbols, collective memories and
mechanisms of mutual aid that exist only within the physical living environment of that com-

May Day is a place where there is no oppression and where everybody can find their place
and live. It’s a left-wing neighbourhood. The human being is central to the vision of people
here. I understand the value of May Day when I’m outside. Other neighbourhoods are
stand-offish, conservative. Individual rights are limited. When I come back here, I relax. In
May Day, there are opportunities for people to develop themselves. They [state institutions]
tried to destroy it but they didn’t succeed.

(Kamil, age 41, interview)

In May Day, the inhabitants argued that state agencies were seeking to pervert the revolu-
tionary character of their neighbourhood by encouraging criminal activity. For them, this was a
government strategy stigmatising May Day in order to legitimise an urban transformation
project, so their action was focused on this issue. A neighbourhood website was created with
the title ‘Against degeneration, defend your neighbourhood’ (this site does not exist any-
more). Regular meetings are held by the two main political organisations, the Socialist Party
of Oppressed People and the Revolutionary Popular Front. In addition, the Association of 2
September organises cultural events, dramas, study programmes and an annual festival in order
to maintain the neighbourhood’s collective identity. In this case, collective action appears
to be in keeping with a highly charged and constantly reiterated local history, allowing the
district to remain in a state of a permanent memorial mobilisation. Resistance is framed and
organised by one or two political organisations that control access to the neighbourhood,
both physically and in relation to land and property ownership, so the protest is not gener-
ated externally. There are often confrontations between the police and young activists, mainly
members of the Revolutionary Popular Front, some of whose members are currently serving
custodial sentences.

In the case of Dikmen Valley, this leftist character is rather in the background of the mobilisa-
tion even if the role of leftist activists and their historical capital of activism is undeniable in the
organisation of resistance. The specificity of Dikmen Valley was the primary role of inhabit-
ants and especially women in the acts of resistance. Strong ties were established during the resistance
thanks to a socialist organization, Halkevleri, whose activists, having lived in the neighbourhood
for several years, knew how to promote political consciousness around the right to the city
amongst its inhabitants. This connection was partial in May Day, as some inhabitants were tired
of street battles between leftist groups and the police. In Dikmen Valley, street battle was only
engaged in to prevent the destruction of the neighbourhood, and the resistance was organised
entirely by one unique organisation, the Office for Housing Rights, which was constituted by
inhabitants themselves and whose representatives were chosen by the inhabitants of each street.

In that sense, the neighbourhood and the city give rise to a strong sense of belonging, and the
resistance aims above all to preserve the place and the social and cultural practices of everyday
life that are related to it. In the present case, this resistance is expressed by a proclamation of the
inhabitants, which reminds us that this territory is theirs and is constituted and supported by a collective identity. They claim their right to occupy this area, to own it and to preserve it:

Before this struggle, I did not know many people in the neighbourhood. The struggle has brought us together. Without making religious, language or ethnic distinctions, we have become like sisters to share our misfortunes, our happiness, our hopes. We women have learned that life is not only in our homes but also in the barricades. While we hardly ever go out and end the day between four walls, today we are everywhere. We have learned to claim the life we desire and not the one we are forced to do. The valley has become a great learning school for women.

(Sultan, age 39, interview)

In the Office for Housing Rights, for example, it was decided that every ‘owner’ of gecekondu should ensure that his garden is beautiful, tidy and welcoming, that everyone should participate in the cleansing of the neighbourhood and commit to not dumping rubbish. The installation of Syrian refugees and waste collectors in abandoned houses was also discussed. The inhabitants believe that both were incited by the Mayor of Ankara with the aim of creating a climate of conflict in the neighbourhood. However, in order to reinforce their reputation for tolerance and friendliness and to defeat the mayor’s strategy, it was decided to accept these newcomers and invite them to meetings in order to establish collective rules of ‘living together’. In this strategy, the will of the appropriation of space by inhabitants is clearly present.

Conclusions

In the examples of May Day and Dikmen Valley, resistance opposes both the discrimination apparent in the spatial organisation of the city and the rules of institutional citizenship which disciplines space by fixed power relations. The inhabitants of these threatened neighbourhoods organise resistance through what Michel de Certeau (1990) defines as the ‘tactics’ of making do. In both May Day and Dikmen Valley, the inhabitants who were interviewed emphasised the particular character of their neighbourhood, and the strong solidarity of its residents. Through this discourse, their living-space was used to construct and reflect another vision of the neighbourhood, far away from its common image of being an undesirable area. Through their everyday rituals, by maintaining their customary habits and by creating alternative lifestyles, they assert their right to exist in the city.

The example of two neighbourhoods studied in this chapter proposes alternative ways of thinking about the conception and the use of urban space. As Lefebvre points out in The Production of Space, space becomes a place of struggle for its appropriation and conception between public actors and their opponents. In this struggle, the right to the city is chosen as a tool by urban dwellers in order to legitimise their right to ‘be’ in the city. Neoliberal hegemony tends to absorb alternative logics and shape them to its ends.

The case studies outlined in this research also show the importance of space and its appropriation through the organisation of daily resistance. This means that even the neoliberalisation of public planning is radically reorganising the supra-urban scalar hierarchies in which cities are embedded; cities thus remain strategic arenas for socio-political struggles (Purcell 2008). The recent protests organised for the protection of Gezi Park in Taksim Square in Istanbul during May–June 2013 showed the importance of symbolic spaces (neighbourhoods, squares, parks) in the emergence of resistance, as the citadins would not allow top-down public decisions concerning their life space, which is considered part of their identity and a mark of their everyday life.
Urban resistance in Turkey (Erdi-Lelandais 2016). The acts of resistance described here also show that the appropriation of space is a more complex process than is usually acknowledged. Despite all the tools of physical and symbolic domination wielded by state institutions, social activism and resistance within the city is striving to transform the socio-territorial organisation of capitalism itself on multiple geographical scales (Purcell 2008). If the right to the city shows the will of mobilised inhabitants to remain in the city and to participate in its everyday construction, this will is also closely connected to the claim of spatial justice. Inhabitants refuse also to be stuck in specific areas of cities and want access to all amenities and public services as urban dwellers regardless of their social and economic status.

References