

Urban Regeneration and Local Expectations: The Case of the Central Garage District, Bursa-Turkey

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Abstract: In recent years, different arguments have been made about urban regeneration in Turkey, similar to many other countries in the world. Instead of a comprehensive approach suggesting new partnerships between local authorities and citizens, urban regeneration in Turkey has been generally used as a populist instrument of local authorities mostly to produce physical solutions for political gains in the short run. In this study, the case of Central Garage District in Bursa will be discussed as an example of urban regeneration implementation which started with the aim of rehabilitating a neglected urban area, but which resulted in an urban regeneration process deprived of social/cultural and organizational aspects.

Key words: Urban regeneration • Local participation • Social inclusion • Central Garage • City Square • Bursa

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to evaluate an urban regeneration process in an old terminal area called “Central Garage” in Bursa, Turkey. This evaluation will be based on a case study which compares the local expectations of citizens and professionals and the results of the implementations of the Metropolitan Municipality of Bursa in the Central Garage area.

In these context, firstly urban regeneration concept and the urban regeneration implementations in Turkey will be discussed. Secondly, characteristics of the Central Garage Area and planning activities in the district will be analyzed retrospectively. Thirdly, the results of the questionnaires carried out in the District will be discussed and finally all of the implementations in the District will be evaluated in terms of the local expectations and different dimensions of urban regeneration concept.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the scope of this study, literary and archival analysis and interviews with competent people from related institutions have been used to develop the conceptual framework and to evaluate the area from a historical perspective. In addition a case study was implemented by the authors in the District. In this

process, firstly the demographic, economic, social and physical characteristics of the District were analyzed and then the expectations of 134 local people (70 employees, 60 minibuss drivers, 4 inhabitants) and 14 professionals (architects and urban planners working in Bursa) from the District were determined by means of questionnaires carried out in 2005.

Urban Regeneration Concept and the Implementations in Turkey: Urban regeneration is a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach that embraces three aims: economy, equity and environment. In other words, its aims are maintaining economic competitiveness, reducing inequality, protecting the environment and suggesting a new generation of partnerships among public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations based on more equal relations [1]. More specifically, this concept is related with supplying sustainable development, preventing physical decay and preserving historical fabric, revitalizing economic life, improving quality of architecture and urban life, stimulating cultural dynamics and enabling participation of relevant actors in all scales of the regeneration process [2].

Many professionals emphasize that the success of an urban regeneration project depends on the strong relations among different dimensions, especially social and organizational aspects. It is stated that urban



Fig. 1: The aerial view of the old Central Garage area, 2005

regeneration should seek to ensure consensus through the co-operation of all stakeholders with an appropriate partnership model [3]. Also, the importance of long-term local partnerships, the potential of renewal based on cultural aspects, development of social inclusion policies and fostering social capital are emphasized [4]. In summary, it is clear that regeneration must be more than merely physical renewal and that it must encompass social, economic and environmental issues in a more integrated and responsive way.

However, urban regeneration implementations in Turkey have not been sufficiently undertaken as a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach until the present because of political and economical factors [5]. In general, although the implementations in Turkey are related with urban renewal or urban design projects based on spontaneous and disjoint approaches far from a holistic urban context, the concept of urban regeneration is used for these operations. In addition to these, “Preservation by Renovation and Utilization by Revitalizing of Deteriorated Immovable Historical and Cultural Properties Law” which was accepted in 2005, has been criticized by related people and institutions because it does not express conceptual definitions sufficiently, contradicts other related laws, damages levels and integrity of planning processes and neglects social and participational dimensions of regeneration.

These kinds of implementations are defined by Hausner as short-term, fragmented, ad hoc and project-based approaches without an overall strategic framework for city-wide development. In addition, the most important drawbacks in urban regeneration implementations are lack of clarity of purpose, excessive control from the centre, poor coordination, one dimensional initiatives,

treating neighbourhoods in isolation and a naive view of community potential [6]. This paper aims to evaluate an urban regeneration project in the Central Garage District in Bursa as an example reflecting a few of these drawbacks especially in relation to the social aspects.

The Planning History and Characteristics of the Central Garage District:

The Central Garage (Figure 1) which is located near the new city center in Bursa at the intersection of İstanbul, İzmir and Ankara highways, was built in 1961 with the aim of uniting dispersed and small garages in the city by the Municipality of Bursa and the Head Office of Pensioners’ Institute. This complex which was the largest garage of the Balkans in that period, was used as the bus terminal of Bursa until 1978 when a big fire in the Garage building caused it to collapse. After this event, the remaining parts of the Garage was used until 1997. However, not only the increasing population in the city, but also the traffic problems resulting from the location of the Garage brought about the need for a new bus terminal outside the city center.

When the new terminal was opened, the Central Garage Complex (Figure 2) lost its function and was abandoned. Until 2006, the area was used by minibuses as a terminal for inner city transportation and as a parking lot; the old terminal building and the platforms served as a cheap marketplace and also as a refectory for poor people during Ramadan.

At this stage, the district was analyzed in terms of demographic, economic, social and physical aspects. It was found out that, the area showed the characteristics of a transition district near the new city center which had a higher daytime population, experienced a transformation from production to service sector.



Fig. 2: The Central Garage before the fire, 1978

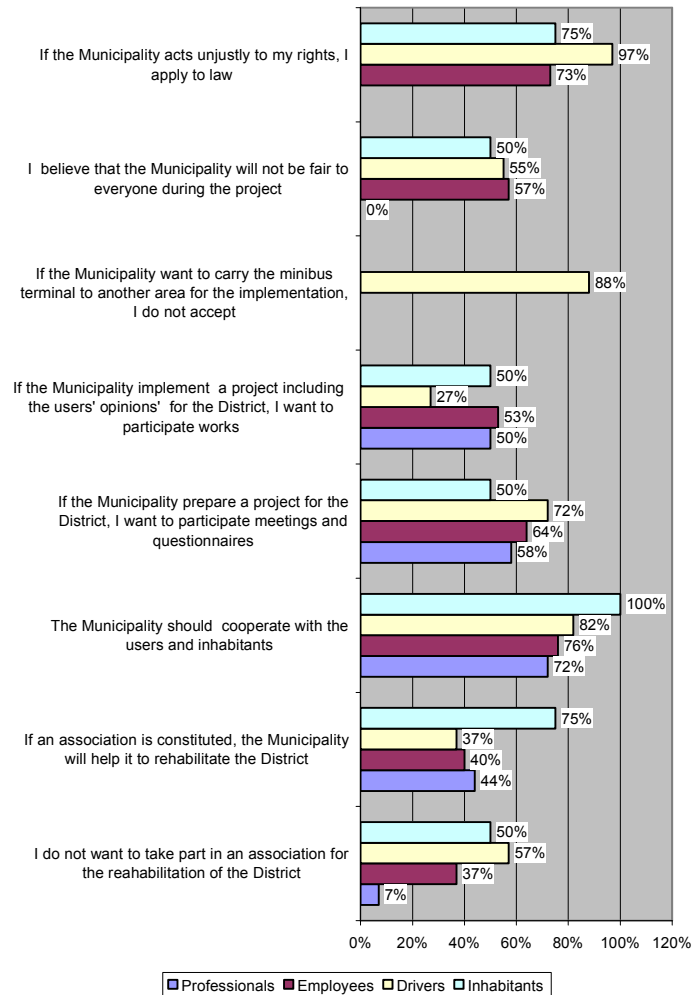


Fig. 3: The results of the questionnaires about the legal dimensions of an urban regeneration project for the District, 2005

Furthermore, the majority of the users in the District were young men from low-income groups with low education level and more than half of them had migrated to Bursa from eastern Anatolia. The physical analysis of buildings showed that more than the half of the buildings were worn out and could be demolished. Thus, it was found out that economic, physical, functional and social obsolescence, filtering and urban decay started in the District.

Besides, lack of confidence and social dilapidation started to be experienced.

Actually, many projects were proposed for the District by different local authorities after the complex lost its original function, because the area was expected to become the new administrative and commercial center of the city in the 21st century. However, none of them were implemented until 2005, when the development plan was

revised and the old terminal area was determined as a mixed use public square, followed by the decision to implement an architectural and urban design competition for this area organized by the Metropolitan Municipality of Bursa.

Considering the importance of the views of local people in any kind of urban project, the authors decided to carry out questionnaires in order to measure the problems and potentials of the Central Garage District, in addition to analyzing the characteristics of the area and its planning history.

Evaluation of the Results of the Questionnaires About an Urban Regeneration Project in the Central Garage District: In this part of the study, the expectations of users and professionals about the physical, social, economic and legal dimensions of an urban regeneration project to be implemented in the District were found out and compared by means of questionnaires (Figure 3).

When the ideas of users and professionals about the physical dimensions of the urban regeneration project for the District were compared, it was found out that both groups wanted the District to be rehabilitated. However, their answers about the means of physical implementation and the functions that should be in the District were different. Users wanted the minibuss terminal and manufacturing activities to be reorganized; otherwise they were afraid that the density of usage in the District would decrease, causing them to lose their jobs or profits. However, professionals wanted these functions to be carried outside the area because they believed that they were not suitable for the identity of this area. Users suggested retail activities and open spaces, while professionals preferred cultural activities and open spaces for the District.

Users' and professionals' ideas about the social dimensions of the urban regeneration project for the District were almost same. They stated that if an urban regeneration project is implemented in the District, social decay could be prevented. However, their thoughts about the economic dimensions of the urban regeneration project for the District were very different. Professionals stated that the Municipality should not take on financial responsibility during the implementation process of the project. Drivers and owners of dwellings, on the other hand, wanted their moving costs to be paid and employers wanted to be the prior tenants with the same conditions as the present, after the project was implemented.

Users' and professionals' thoughts about the legal dimensions of the urban regeneration project for the District were also different. Both wanted to participate in the project process, but in contrast to professionals, users stated that the Metropolitan Municipality of Bursa would not be fair to everyone during this project. Thus, they did not want to take an active role in the rehabilitation of the District.

Finally, it was found out that, except professionals, answers of user groups changed according to their materialistic and moral values. Besides, it was discovered that users did not want comprehensive changes in the District, because they did not have enough information about this subject and they were uncertain about their future.

Although, this research was presented to the Municipality, it was not taken into consideration and the Municipality preferred to organize the Bursa Central Garage City Square Architectural and Urban Design Project Competition in 2005 in order to bring an easier solution in the short run. When analyzed from this perspective, the competition and the project implementation processes comprised certain problems in terms of the different aspects of regeneration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The arguments related with the Central Garage, which have continued for years, resulted in the organization of the competition with the aim of providing a city square and necessary functional arrangements which would give vitality to the square and symbolic reference to urban identity. However, both the competition process and the implemented project (Figure 4) were criticized by many groups, because the first project was changed physically and functionally during the implementation process and "the City Square" lost its public character and was transformed into a controlled and semi-public courtyard of a shopping mall.

If the project is evaluated in terms of the physical expectations of users and professionals about an urban regeneration project for the district, it can be concluded that the district was not developed according to the expectations of users who wanted the district to be reorganized with the present functions and professionals who wanted basically cultural facilities and open spaces. The resulting commercial areas are more dominant than open spaces and the area is not accepted as the City Square of Bursa. Instead, it is called the City Square Shopping Center.

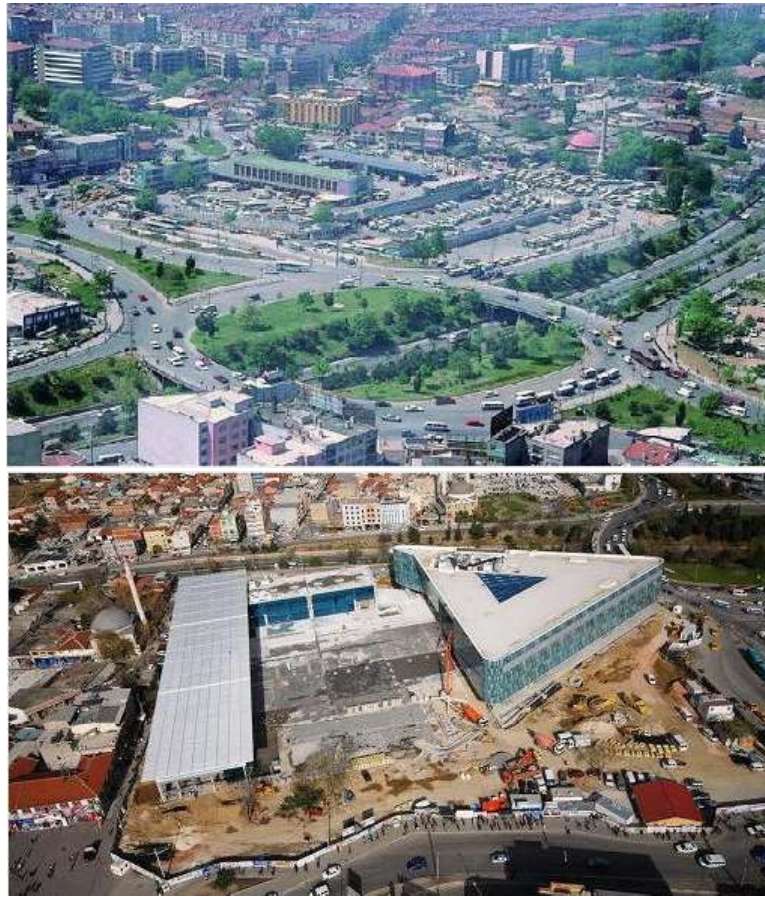


Fig. 4: The old Central Garage Area and the New City Square and Shopping Center

In terms of social dimensions, although social decay has been partially prevented in the district, the expectations of users have not been met completely, since the new commercial activities are not socially and economically suitable for the users most of whom are from low income- groups and also it is not integrated successfully with its environment. In addition from the perspective of professionals, if more cultural activities could be included in the area, social relations would have improved.

In terms of economic dimensions, the decision of the Municipality not to take on any financial responsibility during the implementation process of the project contradicts the expectations of users. However, this decision is parallel to the ideas of professionals. Actually, both owners of the area (the Municipality and the Head Office of Pensioners' Institute) wanted to raise the value (speculative income) of this district by increasing the commercial areas in the project. At the end of the implementation, the value of the district increased, but this speculative income was not shared with the

citizens. Instead, the City Square shopping center was rented for 49 years by a private company which built the complex.

In terms of legal dimensions, although the presidents of the Chambers of Architects and Urban Planners, academicians from different universities and related people from various institutions were involved in the jury process of the competition, the social and organizational dimensions of the project were not analyzed comprehensively. Since the local people and the other related actors were not represented in the project process effectively, the project was not adopted by the users.

In short, although the implementations in the Central Garage Area were described as an urban regeneration project in the Annual Report prepared by the Municipality in 2008, only the physical dimensions of the District were taken into consideration. The area was declared as an urban regeneration and development district after the project competition was organized. In this process, the Municipality neither prepared a systematic project for the District, nor utilized the analyses, reports and the urban design projects made before this stage.

However, the competition could be one of the action plans of an urban regeneration project with physical, social, economic and legal dimensions and it could be developed in the context of Bursa Central Business District Planning process in a transdisciplinary way with a multi-sectoral partnership model.

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