Determination of the strategies for the urban rehabilitation in the Romani settlement (Canakkale City, Turkey)

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Abstract

Fevzipasa District is one of the central and first historical settlements of Canakkale in which Romani people live. The research area which is called as Fevzipasa District was also approved as “a special project area” with the conservation plans made in 1996. Generally, the district has disordered housing pattern and two or three storey buildings. The quality of life and housing standards are so inadequate and unemployment and poverty has increased. This research aims to determine the problems of the district and consists of the analytical works about the area to be the basis of the future physical and social rehabilitation of the district. First of all, up to date and trusty information about the housing area is required. The participation of the people from the district is accepted as a basis of the study. Moreover, in the end of this collective work, it is aimed to come up with some suggestions and solutions for the rehabilitation and the development of the district.

Key words: urban rehabilitation, quality of life, Romani settlement, Canakkale.

Introduction

According to the researchers The Gypsy Community came from the North India and spread around the world. However, “Gypsy” and “Romani” terms have similar meanings for the researchers, the Romani community disapprove “gypsy” term because of the pejorative meaning which represents for them. Therefore, in this research we preferred to use the term Romani depending on the demand of Romani community we worked with. Romani people generally worked as a illusionist, a witch, a fortune teller
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(Fraser, 2005; Marushiakova and Popov, 2006). In the period of Ottoman Empire, they took up different kinds of occupations such as horse-trading, dance, musicianship, black iron work, portage and basketry.

Depending on the Lausanne Agreement, which was signed in 1923, Romani population who lived in the borders of the Ottoman Empire, in the Balkans came to Turkey after the agreement (Marsh, 2008). Today, the definite Romani population in Turkey is unknown. According to the research done in 2005 (International Romani Research Network, 2005) the population of Romani community in Turkey is between two and five million. Although some of them are still living as nomad, most of them became settled and half settled in the period of Ottoman Empire (Marushiakova and Popov, 2006).

Defining Romani community as an ethnic group still brings about a debate. Guilbernau and Rex (2005, indorser Karlıdağ and Marsh, 2008) explain the ethnic identity with common traditions, common past and “lifestyle” of the ethnic groups beyond the biological analogy. It is obvious that Romani people have their own peculiar lifestyle and culture. However they adopt the religion and culture of the country that they live in, they also maintain their culture. For agelong, they have faced with the marginalization from the society, racial prejudice and poverty which is their common destiny. Generally, the Romani community is seen as a society consists of thieves, atheists, combative and crime prone people. There are a few scientific researches about the Romani Community in Turkey (for the scientific researches about the Romani Community that have been done in Turkey, you can look over the literature of Toprak, Özmen, and Teknikler 2007; Kolukürk, 2006: Kolukürk, 2004; Aksu, 2003; Marsh, 2008; Karlıdağ and Marsh, 2008). In recent years, the urban regeneration projects in poor Romani Settlements, which were implemented especially in metropolitan cities such as Istanbul and Izmir, brought about an important debate among the public (Somersan, 2007). On the other hand, urban regeneration literature in Turkey is not only focused on the spatial characteristics of the regeneration areas, it also deals with the social policies related to the regeneration projects to prevent evictions and emphasizing the importance of the public participation (Kurtuluş, 2006; Özden, 2008; Sönmez, 2006).

In this research, the Romani community’s settlement, Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood is analysed related to its socio-economic and spatial dimensions. The aim of this research is to analyse the current situation of the neighbourhood and related to this, to improve the quality of life by defining the basis strategies and priorities for the neighbourhood with a participative method. The problems of Romani community in Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood can’t be solved only with improving physical conditions and providing accessibility to city services, it is obvious that long term social policies are also necessary. On the other hand, it is clear that the analysis and surveys we made and social policies we propose, will contribute to the researches, which have been done before about Romani community. Besides, field survey, also the process of Romani community’s endeavour to become organisational body is undertaken in this research. The people from Romani Community’s Organisation who live in the neighbourhood and research team constituted a research group under the City Council of Canakkale. This research group worked effectively as a facilitator during the field survey.

Method

While defining the strategies of urban improvement, we planned the research in three stages which were in relation between each other. In the first step, the physical conditions of the neighbourhood – such as the physical quality of the buildings, the standard of the dwellings, the accessibility of the infrastructure system, density- and also the socio-economic conditions of the people in the neighbourhood were evaluated. This research comprised all the dwellings and the buildings of the neighbourhood. The second step was constituted of the meetings with the people from the neighbourhood and these meetings were made to understand the problems and the demands of the people. Besides the meetings with the people from the neighbourhood, also the meetings with responsible and related people were organised about this research and the current situation of the district and also what could be done for the district. The process and the method of the project are seen in the Figure 1.
Before the field survey, the preliminary research about the characteristics and dimensions of the survey were done. In this stage, we made the meetings with the mayor, the headman of the neighbourhood, the chairman of the association of Romani Community, and also with the architects who made the conservation plan of the neighbourhood. The field survey, which can be defined as a simple step for planning, was the hardest stage for this research because of the reaction of the people from the neighbourhood, because they approach the people suspiciously who come from another district and they do not want to answer questions properly. Even they answer the questions, they don’t give right answers to the questions. With the help of the volunteers of this research who live in the neighbourhood this problem was overcome through not asking some personal questions -such as the ownership situation- and making interviews instead of sample survey. Depending on the demand of the research team, residents were informed about the research in the square of the neighbourhood before the field survey.

Before the field survey, also some researches were done about the indicators of the urban development and the quality of the housing areas (such as Sönmez and the others). For the standardization of the physical and socio-economical data, three types of survey sheets (building, dwelling, household) were prepared. The data derived from the field can be seen from Table 1. For the survey, research team was composed of five people. This group consisted of academics and activists who have social sensibility and ability to denote their views.

Table 1. Selected indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Dwelling</th>
<th>Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction type Number of storey Land use Physical condition Number of houses</td>
<td>Number of person in the house Number of rooms Existence of bath, kitchen and WC Infrastructure Furniture</td>
<td>Age Sex Education Employment Income Social security Health Place of birth Living length in neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
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The data derived from the field survey, was shared with the city-dwellers through the City Council of Çanakkale. For improving the quality of life and the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood the process of defining the strategies maintains. Although this paper consists of the field survey analysis, which
covers the basis data of the research, we haven’t finished the research about the neighbourhood yet, and we aim to develop the research.

**Çanakkale City Vision and Plan Decisions for Fevzipaşa (Romani) Neighbourhood**

Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood, known as first settlement was founded just near Çimenlik Castle, which was built by Mehmed the Conqueror for the defence of Dardanelles strait. Near the castle there is Fatih Mosque which was built for soldiers and gave the name Çami-i Kebir to the neighbourhood (Çanakkale Sokak Adılarında Yaşayanlar, 2001). Despite any written reference, it is widely accepted that Romani community who worked for the construction of the castle made settled in there by the Emperor (Erten, 2006; Governorship Web Site, 2011). This probability is proven by the information about Romani community was employed for the construction and renovation in Ottoman period (Marushiakova and Popov, 2006). Beside the settlement of Romani community in the neighbourhood is controversial, it is accepted that they are the first settlers of the city, which gives positive relation between city and Romani community. They feel as a native community of the city and the citizens see Romani community as a cultural heritage of Çanakkale.

After the establishment as a city on a strait, Çanakkale became a multi-cultural port and commercial city. Around the Çimenlik Castle, firstly soldiers and their families, and then Greeks, Armenians and Jews settled (Çanakkale City Guide, 2008). The traces of those settlements still can be seen. It is known that Romani people usually worked in transportation that includes portage, horseshoeing and forging. During the Ottoman period, acorn, which was an important raw material for textile industry, was stored in the depots in the neighbourhood and carried to the ships waiting in strait through Sarıçay river. Some of these depots still exist and need restoration. During the Republican period the city has lost its commercial function because of the effect of the Cold War period and transformed from border city to a defence city. Today, the main sector in Çanakkale is service sector with a population of approximately 100 000 people consist of mainly students, civil servants and retired people (TUİK, 2011). Employment is mainly in service sector. Çanakkale and research area are seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. City of Çanakkale and Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood
There are some researches that compare the development level of the neighbourhoods in Canakkale. Using some development indicators like unemployment, education, quality of house and health, these researches show that Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood has the lowest standards in the city (TESEV, 2008; Başaran-Uysal et al., 2011). Furthermore, the neighbourhood has a risk of flood and earthquake risk.

In 1996, a preservation plan was approved for the old city, which also included the Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood. In that plan, the area which was densely populated by Romani community, reserved as a "special project area" because of getting insufficient data (Erten, 2011; CHVIP, 1997). In 2000's Çanakkale Municipality started to form a "participative budget" derived from the experience of Porte Allegre and selected Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood as a pilot area. The scope of this approach was defining the priority of making investment to a neighbourhood with a participative process, therefore the results of this research were used for strategical plan (Akman, 2011). Also, at the same years City Action Plan which was prepared by the leadership of Local Agenda 21, suggested actions of struggling against poverty, supporting disadvantaged groups and establishing community service centres in the neighbourhoods (City Action Plan, 2007). The concepts of sustainable development, participatory local democracy, pluralism and peace were insisted on vision of City Action Plan. In spite of all these visions, nothing has been till today for the Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood.

Struggle against the poverty is perceived as a problem of income in Turkey. It is clear that poverty isn’t perceived only as economic problem, it also indicates social and cultural deprivation (Urbanisation Council, 2009). The main reason of poverty of Romani community is discrimination and social exclusion that they have to face with related to their ethnic origin. Urban poverty has been discussed with in a frame of migrated or socio-economically disintegrated people in urban areas (Urbanisation Council, 2009). Romani community faces with poverty both in urban and rural areas. The policies in Turkey about struggling with poverty haven’t mentioned ethnic exclusion yet. In addition, Turkey has been developing policies about struggling poverty and social inclusion due to European Union adaptation process. In 9th Development Plan (2007-2013) the Commission of Struggle Against Poverty and Income Distribution defined four strategies; (i) constitution of public social services and aids - fair income distribution, (ii) implementation of policies that are led by political will and public - social inclusion (iii) development of institutional capacity - partnership and coordination in social aid (iv) struggling against unemployment and informal sectors - increasing the employment. Also the plans of Canakkale are developed parallel to these strategies. City Action Plan and Stratagical Plan emphasizes on social and cultural aspects on struggling poverty while being lack of policies against exclusion. The neighbourhood community believes that even to be born in Fevzipaşa is enough to be excluded. Citizens of Çanakkale also think that it can be dangerous to enter the neighbourhood, which is seems as a closed urban block from the city center.

The Analysis of Current Situation of Fevzipaşa Romani Neighbourhood

The population of Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood, which is in the historical centre, is 2833 (TUIK -Turkish Statistical Institute-, 2011). The area of the neighbourhood is 12 hectare. On the south of the Fevzipaşa there is a river called as Sarçay and on the west of it there is a castle called as Çimenlik Castle and also it is by the Marmara Sea. Fevzipaşa is circumscribed with the two main streets on the north and the east in which the commerce is dense. The historical street, which is on the north, was pedestrianized and with this pedestrianization surroundings of it became important as a touristic area. The neighbourhood generally consists of two or three storey buildings and an organic pattern of streets. As a result of the building and the dwelling analysis, it is understood that the block of houses have different qualities (Figure 3). The inside of the neighbourhood defined as the first zone depending on the findings and the quality of the dwellings and the quality of life in here is really low. Parallel with this, also the urban infrastructure system is insufficient and the poverty in there is the most critical. Inside of the neighbourhood is socially and spatially more isolated than the other zones of the neighbourhood. The outer part of the neighbourhood called as Zone III holds key for the architectural conservations and public spaces. In generally the structures in there are in better conditions and so they can be fixed with basic restorations. Zone III is surrounded by the public spaces and the pedestrianized trade axis, which city-dwellers use frequently.
For the field survey, we analysed 462 dwellings and interviewed with 471 households. The findings showed that the number of people per house isn’t as much as we assumed before the field survey –the number of people per house is 2.8 person/house-. Also we understood that this low percentage is because of the young marriages in the neighbourhood, which results in moving another house after marriage. On the other hand the number of people per room is quite much. The average number of the people per room is 1.5 person/room. Also most of the dwellings are with one room (%30.7) and two rooms (%43). Most of the houses with one room are located in the Zone I. After field survey, it is understood that the utilization of the toilets, bathrooms and kitchens are insufficient. It can be said that for the %17 of the dwellings, the toilets are located outside the dwellings or shared with other dwellings or the dwellings doesn’t have any toilets. Also %25 of the dwellings doesn’t have any bathrooms and %19 of the dwellings doesn’t have any kitchens. Also the current bathrooms, toilets and kitchens in the dwellings are drastically insufficient. In case of need, the people in the neighbourhood use the historical Turkish baths, which are located in the centre of the city and they maintain the rituals of Turkish baths. Also the accessibility of the dwellings to the urban infrastructure system is problematic. %3.4 of the dwellings don’t have any network with city water system and %54 of the dwellings don’t have any network with sewerage system. Generally, these dwellings have one room and they were built in another’s garden or in the middle of the block. On the other hand, the current sewerage system and the water system of the neighbourhood are really old. Especially in rainy days, sewer overflow is experienced. Moreover, there are some problems with waste handling system of the municipality. Depending on the interviews with municipality, it is realized that the garbage trucks have problems to go into the some streets because of their narrowness. Also according to some dustmen’s statements, there is a risk to be harassed when they go into the neighbourhood, because of this they don’t want to go into the neighbourhood to collect the garbage. Also depending on the basic furniture of the houses such as televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, dishwashers, cell phones, computers, telephones, we tried to understand the comfort of the dwellings. %92 of the dwellings have television and also in most of them there is satellite dish. %29 of the dwellings have refrigerator, washing machine and television. %7.8 of the dwellings have
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telephone, dish washer, cell phone. Only the %16 of the dwellings have computer. During the field survey, we interviewed with 471 households of 462 dwellings. The number of men we interviewed is 351 (who is responsible for the economy of house) and women is 433 (who works for the economy of house or who is a housewife). As a result of these interviews, it is understood that unemployment is the most important problem in the neighbourhood. Only %31 of the employed population has steady income. The percentage of the unemployed people among the responsible people for the economy of house is %43. %62 of the responsible people for the economy of house don’t have steady income and works at informal sector. Even they have steady income, most of the men work as a painter, a street peddler, a porter, a musician and a waiter. In the neighbourhood, there are a few people working as a civil servant in a public body. It is told that people who got a job in a public body as a civil servant left the neighbourhood to hide their ethnic identity. Generally the women in the neighbourhood don’t work in any job. %96 of 433 women are housewives. The small amount of women who have a job, work in an informal sector -as a cleaner, a street peddler- without social security. Also very few of them can benefit from the social security of their fathers’ or husbands’. Most of them (%88) don’t have any social security. The families mostly receive a benefit in kind from the municipality as a food and a fuel (coal) for heating. 180 families of 472 families (%38) have “green card” with which they can be treated in state hospitals free of charge.

Another important problem in the neighbourhood is education. Men are generally primary school graduates (%53) and some of them (%10) are only literate, they didn’t graduate any school because of leaving the school in their early ages (primary school). The amount of high school graduate is really low (%6.5). The situation of women is worse than men. %45.7 of women are primary school graduates and %27 of them are only literate, they don’t have any graduation from any school. Only %3 of the women graduated from high school. In the neighbourhood leaving the school in early ages is common. Although the families, who are interviewed with, accept the requirement of the education, they claim that they can’t send their children to school because of their poverty. On the other hand, it is understood that most of the children leave school because of the adaption of new social environment, which comes up with changing their schools. Previously the children of Fevzipaşa were going to school, which was close to the neighbourhood, but now they are sent to the schools in other neighbourhoods (three neighbourhoods which are close to Fevzipaşa) because of a policy of the state, which aimed to put them together with the children from other neighbourhoods to solve the adaptation problem of Romani Children to school and education system, but this didn’t work. Now children have new kind of adaptation problem, which is because of the difficulty of getting used to the social life different from theirs.

For Romani community the meaning of their neighbourhood is living in solidarity and confidence. Even though having a steady income, some families still live in the neighbourhood. The deficiency of the current houses and the necessity of housing are other urgent problems of the neighbourhood. When we compare the rents of Fevzipaşa with other neighbourhoods, we realize that the rents are not lower than the other neighbourhoods. The Romani Community, who move to another neighbourhood because of the limited space in the neighbourhood or because of preferring to live in another neighbourhood, prefer to move to the neighbourhoods close to Fevzipaşa.

Strategies for Urban Improvement

Unemployment, lack of education and social security are the most important problems within housing and infrastructure system problems of neighbourhood. It continues to become poorer in vicious cycle of these problems. It is thought that social exclusion is considerably a reason for economically based problems in Fevzipaşa Neighbourhood in addition to education and lack of occupational experience. Four strategies are determined to support Romani community for their participation in all spheres of social and economic life and improvement of their quality of life. These are:

(i) Prevention of social exclusion and discrimination,
(ii) Participation to decision making mechanisms,
(iii) Enabling social and economical integration,
(iv) Development of building, house and infrastructure quality.
Through these four key strategies, the actions of short term and long term are suggested below:

(i) Prevention of social exclusion and discrimination
- Development of social inclusion programs for Romani community which is the most disadvantaged in issue of struggling against poverty,
- Setting up of infusive programs for Romani identity and culture to be acknowledged,
- Defining strategies against social exclusion and urban discrimination,
- Development of programs for preventing children and young people against social exclusion in schools,
- Forming partnerships for education with educational institutions, local government, NGOs and neighbourhood community.

(ii) Participation in decision making mechanisms
- Developing the culture of participation and pluralism in city,
- Supporting the organisation of Romani community to make them solve their problems by themselves,
- Supporting Neighbourhood Assembly that is formed by City Council in the decision-making mechanisms of the city.

(iii) Enabling social and economical integration,
- Setting up programs for encouraging children and young people to continue their education,
- Supporting students economically and academically,
- Supporting, education and raising awareness of teachers and managers,
- Making programs for women's education,
- Education and employment programs for committed children,
- Development of skills of employment in tourism and commerce,
- Supporting for accessibility to technology,
- Developing special programs in vocational high school,
- Forming partnerships for making possible in employment in formal sectors,
- Supporting self-entrepreneurs

(iv) Development of building, house and infrastructure quality.
- Setting up a participatory urban regeneration approach for Zone I. The building stock in this zone suggested to be demolished and rebuilt due to life style of community.
- Supporting property owners and tenants economically and technically for renewal in building or parcel scale.
- Redesigning of public places - Sarıçay Riverside, Zafer Square, Jewish Depots - to support the integration to the city and development of social life in neighbourhood.
- Renewal of infrastructure in whole neighbourhood.
- Developing a special model and funding for housing and regeneration.

Conclusion

As in many cities, the Romani Community in Canakkale also keep up with the changing economical conditions and their bonds with economical life weaken over time. According to the Romani Community and also the other actors in the city, the education deficiency and the housing problem of Fevzipaşa are all related to unemployment problem of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, because of the racial prejudice against Romani Community, the residents of Fevzipaşa are discriminated from the economical and social life of Canakkale, which is the basis of their problems. Economical, social and cultural discrimination also bring about spatial segregation.
Moreover, the integration of the women, the aged, and the children with the city is limited. Also, the low quality of dwellings and insufficient infrastructure system threatens the public health. Local government haven’t managed to implement the policies of struggle against poverty. The residents of Fevzipaşa live dependent on the community aids because of the absence of the social security programme for the neighbourhood. However we propose the solutions to housing and the other problems related to the dwellings urgently, we are aware of the necessity of long-term solutions for the integration of social, economical and cultural life of the city and in fact we consider these long-term policies much more. Moreover we add that besides the policies of central and local government against poverty, also the policies for social inclusion should be developed.

References


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