

Istanbul, 'Self-service' production of built environment :**A retrospective view, as the model fades out and urban renewal is put on the metropolitan agenda**

by Orhan Esen

The metropolis of Istanbul chronically faced striking public investment deficits: This fact became particularly evident when after 1945, the city overcame shrinking tendencies of 1930s and entered a new boom period and its population grew by 1500 % to 12 millions in 60 years. In this process, the production and renewal of the built environment was mainly financed by the micro-capital created by a whole set of 'self service' processes using peoples' own resources. Land, that inevitable resource of this process was rendered as a governmental contribution to the model, at least initially, 'for free', when the production of built environment still took place for the **use value**, in form of the classical 'gecekondu'. ('built-over-nite') This 'self-service' model based on production of the urban through the agency micro-capital seems dominant, for a longer period, also after the rather fast disappearance of the phenomenon 'classical' gecekondu: In a second phase of the spontaneous urbanization after 1980, the production of the urban fabric took place predominantly for its **exchange value**, in form of the 'post-gecekondu', with the small 'informal' capital still being the main agent. A situation only to be changed radically in these days, with the introduction of the big businesses into the so called 'housing market for lower income groups'.

We speak of an urbanization model without major public subsidies, -except the housing coop movement of late 80s- without social engineers, without a conducting state, and at first without involvement of major capital funds. Especially the re-densification through *yapsat* ('build and sell or, gr: antiparochi) system is a characteristic of this Istanbul model, the driving force behind an unplanned bottom-up modernization. The "SelfServiceUrbanization" with many actors created socio-economical and political buffer, retention and integration mechanisms that eased the immense and otherwise indigestive consequences of a massive immigration process. Istanbul became the synonym for a place where, rather painlessly –in comparison for instance with the proletariat of 19th century western European industrial metropolises- and within two generations, millions of impoverished peasants made their dream of accessing an urban middle-class come true. The international demand of the "Habitat"-movement for *secure tenure for all* did even not turn up here since the diverse forms of production prevented a quantitative problem of homelessness to emerge.

A major component of the micro capital invested into the urban fabric was the own human and social resources of the migrants. Their skills, visions on housing and settlement as well as their

organizational and networking capacities which they brought from their native rural areas was then shaped by their own labour and only supported by their initially limited financial resources. The allocation of land as a common resource en masse in the initial, classical period of Gecekondu for the use value had a strong regulatory aspect. Hence, an oversimplifying equation of informality and non-, or de-regulatory regimes should be avoided. The transition into exchange value based post-gecekondu in mid 1980s however, inaugurates a period of non regulation. Finally, strong de-regulative measurements were necessary, to introduce the new, big actors into the urban game. They became fairly visible after the urban crisis 1999-2002 was overcome and the production of the urban became the major tool for capital accumulation. Re-regulatory regimes remained rather weak, limited to the period 1984-99, mainly limited to the support of the then strong co-op movement through the state mass housing agency, TOKI. Today this agency also functions as a major neo-liberal, deregulatory tool, just when the neoliberal transformation of the informal urbanisation dominates the agenda, leaving a vacuum for policies of reregulation.