

**Towards a New Urban Praxis:
Reading The New Concept of Practice Through Socio-spatial Outlook to Urban
Refugees;
Cases of Onder and Ulubey Neighborhoods, Ankara**

Dissertation

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Problems addressed

This dissertation addresses a number of urgent issues at the intersection of migration and urban space, with a particular focus on the socio-spatial challenges encountered by Syrian urban refugees in Ankara. One of the most significant issues is the systematic exclusion and marginalization of refugees within urban contexts, which manifests as obstacles to housing, employment, and access to essential urban services. These challenges are further compounded by spatial segregation, which isolates refugee communities and limits their opportunities for social and economic integration.

Another significant issue is the absence of holistic inclusive urban planning and policy frameworks that address the needs and contributions of refugees. The tendency for institutionalized representations of space to fail to acknowledge the active role of migrants, asylum seekers, urban refugees¹ in shaping urban environments has the effect of providing inadequate support and perpetuating inequalities. Furthermore, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the ways in which refugees negotiate and transform their urban environments through their everyday practices, thereby creating representational spaces that reflect resilience and adaptation.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the discrepancy between theoretical approaches to migration and their practical applications in urban studies. The thesis addresses the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive framework to analyze the dynamic relationship between migration and space by integrating spatial theories with migration studies. In conclusion, the issues highlighted in this study emphasise the necessity for a rethink of urban policies and planning strategies in order to foster more inclusive and equitable cities.

Aims of the dissertation

This dissertation primarily aims to examine and analyze the relationship between migration and urban space, with a particular focus on the spatial practices, experiences, and transformations that have been shaped by Syrian urban refugees in Ankara, Turkey. The objective is to elucidate the manner in which refugees interact with, adapt to, and reshape their urban environments, thereby fostering new forms of social inclusion. By investigating the dynamics within Syrian neighborhoods, this study aims to gain insight into the complex processes through which space is (re)produced in accordance with Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as a triad comprising spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. The research addresses the ways in which refugees navigate and reshape their physical and social environments through daily practices, cultural expressions, and interactions, while simultaneously responding to structural constraints and opportunities. The objective is to identify the ways in which

¹ In accordance with Article 91 of the Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection, Syrians who are "under temporary protection" status according to the Temporary Protection Regulation, which entered into force after being published in the Official Gazette on October 22, 2014, will be referred to as "urban refugees" in this research in order to harmonize and have a consistency with the international literature.

Data retrieved from: <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/10/20141022-15-1.pdf>
Last access date: 05.06.2024

these processes facilitate or impede social inclusion within the urban context, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics at play.

One of the objectives of this research is to bridge the gap between migration studies and spatial theory, with a view to elucidating the socio-spatial dynamics of displacement and integration. The research aims to critically investigate the ways in which refugees' daily practices, institutionalized representations of space, and their lived experiences contribute to the production of space. It also addresses systemic challenges such as housing precarity, employment struggles, and social exclusion. By applying the theoretical framework of the spatial triad to the case study of Syrian neighborhoods in Ankara, this dissertation makes a contribution to the broader discussions on migration, urban integration, and spatial justice.

Furthermore, the dissertation seeks to provide actionable insights for urban policymakers and planners by underscoring the active role of migrants in the creation of inclusive urban spaces. The research combines theoretical analysis with an empirical case study in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of migration and the necessity of spatial thinking in addressing contemporary discussions on topics such as forced migration, socio-spatial integration, and the role of marginalized groups in reshaping urban spaces. In conclusion, this research endeavors to promote the implementation of urban policies that recognize and facilitate the autonomy of refugees, thereby contributing to the creation of more dynamic, inclusive and resilient urban environments.

Relevant current research in the scientific field covered

The field of migration and spatial studies has witnessed considerable advancement in recent years, with interdisciplinary research concentrating on the socio-spatial dimensions of migration, forced displacement, and urban integration. The role of spatial practices in understanding how refugees navigate and reshape urban environments is a key focus of contemporary studies, which draw on theories from urban sociology, geography, and anthropology. One area of significant research is the investigation of the socio-spatial dynamics of refugee settlements in urban contexts. Many scholars investigate the interconnection between migration, urbanization, and governance, emphasizing how migrants and refugees adapt to and transform urban spaces despite systemic exclusion. The spatial triad proposed by Henri Lefebvre remains a foundational framework in this field of study. Recently, scholars have extended its application to analyze refugee agency in reconfiguring urban environments.

Another emerging area of interest is the nexus between digital technologies and spatial mobility. The influence of mobile apps, social networks, and GPS technologies on migrants' navigation of urban spaces and access to resources is a topic of growing research interest. These studies provide new insights into spatial practices and agency.

The objective of these studies is to identify optimal practices and to provide insights that can inform the formulation of policies for the development of inclusive urban planning. This dissertation is situated within the broader scholarly discourse on migration and space, offering insights into the specific context of Syrian refugees in Ankara.

Methods applied

This dissertation employs a qualitative research methodology, integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical analysis, to investigate the socio-spatial dynamics of Syrian urban refugees in Ankara. The case study approach, which focuses on the Önder and Ulubey neighborhoods in the Altındağ district and represents densely populated areas of Syrian refugee settlements, was selected as the research methodology for this study.

In order to gain an understanding of the complexity of spatial practices and socio-spatial transformations, the research makes use of a combination of in-depth interviews with focus groups, participant observation, an interdisciplinary epistemological qualitative methodology, and a critical approach, quantifying qualitative data regarding Syrian urban refugees in Ankara. In-depth interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees, local residents, and key stakeholders, including municipal officials and non-governmental organizations, to gain insights into the lived experiences, daily practices, and challenges faced by refugees. These interviews were complemented by participant observation, which facilitated a nuanced understanding of the interactions between refugees and their physical and social environments. The conceptualisation is structured around Lefebvre's spatial triad, which encompasses the examination of spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces.

Furthermore, the research employs an examination of institutional data and policy documents to elucidate the broader structural and governance frameworks that shape refugee settlements and integration. By integrating data from multiple sources, the study ensures a comprehensive and multi-layered analysis. The integration of these qualitative methods with spatial theory provides a robust framework for exploring the dynamic relationship between migration and urban space.

Main results / outcomes

This dissertation offers significant insights into the socio-spatial dynamics of Syrian urban refugees in Ankara, with a particular focus on their spatial practices, challenges, and contributions to urban transformations. The principal findings are as follows:

Spatial practices and adaptation: The research illustrates how refugees proactively transform their urban environments through their daily practices. The findings demonstrate that Syrian refugees are actively engaged in the reshaping of urban spaces through their adaptive spatial practices, including mobility patterns, modifications to physical spaces, and the establishment of social networks. This encompasses the formation of informal networks for housing and employment, modifications to physical spaces such as alterations to housing and commercial areas, and the establishment of social and cultural hubs within their neighborhoods.

Socio-spatial segregation and mobility: The study uncovers patterns of spatial segregation in refugee settlements, which are driven by socio-economic disparities, institutional barriers, and societal perceptions. Notwithstanding these obstacles, refugees demonstrate noteworthy mobility within the city, traversing public and private domains to secure resources and opportunities.

The representation and perception of space: The portrayal of refugee settlements in institutional settings is often characterised by a problematic framing, which in turn informs policy decisions and shapes public attitudes. However, the lived experiences and cultural expressions of refugees challenge these representations, underscoring the discrepancy between policy narratives and ground realities.

Transformative potential of refugees: The findings underscore the transformative role of refugees in the shaping of urban spaces. By engaging in spatial practices and utilizing representational spaces, they contribute to the socio-cultural diversity and economic vibrancy of their neighborhoods, despite the systemic exclusion they face.

Housing, employment, and service challenges: Persistent issues such as inadequate housing, insecure employment, and restricted access to urban services serve to illustrate the existence of systemic barriers to integration. These challenges emphasize the necessity for the implementation of more inclusive urban policies.

Theoretical contributions: By employing spatial theories such as Lefebvre's spatial triad, the research enhances the comprehension of migration as a socio-spatial phenomenon. It illustrates the complex interplay between migrants' agency, institutional structures, and urban transformations.

The dissertation highlights the imperative of rethinking urban policies to foster inclusion and equity, acknowledging the active role of refugees in shaping dynamic and diverse urban futures. The study emphasizes how migration is a transformative process that redefines urban socio-spatial dynamics, establishing a continuum of inclusion, exclusion, and negotiation in urban spaces.

Areas for potential further research

This dissertation identifies several avenues for further investigation in the fields of migration and spatial studies.

- A further avenue for research would be comparative urban studies. Further research could undertake a comparative analysis of the socio-spatial dynamics of refugee integration across different cities or countries.
- An investigation of the variations in governance models, cultural contexts, and urban planning approaches could provide insights into the optimal strategies for fostering inclusion and resilience in diverse urban settings.
- A longitudinal analysis would be beneficial. An examination of the evolution of spatial practices and socio-spatial integration over time may provide insights into how refugees adapt to changing socio-political conditions and urban transformations. Such studies could also examine intergenerational differences in adaptation and spatial navigation. An intersectional approach would be beneficial in this context.
- Further research could investigate the intersection of migration with other factors, such as gender, age, and socio-economic status, in order to gain insight into how these factors shape spatial practices and experiences. For example, an investigation into the distinctive challenges encountered by women, children, and elderly refugees could enhance the comprehension of vulnerabilities within displaced populations.

- An examination of the impact of digital tools and platforms on the spatial practices and resource access of refugees represents a promising avenue for further investigation. Such topics as the facilitation of navigation, employment, and social connections in urban settings by technology could be considered.
- The relationship between climate change and migration is a topic worthy of further investigation. An investigation of the nexus between climate-induced displacement and urban planning could yield insights into sustainable and inclusive strategies for integrating environmentally displaced populations into urban areas.
- An evaluation of the impact of urban policies and institutional responses on refugee integration could inform the development of more inclusive and equitable governance strategies. This includes an examination of the role of local governments, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations in addressing migration challenges.
- Further research could expand on the concept of spatial justice, exploring how refugees claim their “right to the city” and negotiate agency within restrictive urban environments. This could also involve examining the role of grassroots movements and community-led initiatives.

These areas not only build on the findings of this dissertation but also address the evolving challenges and complexities of migration in an increasingly urbanized and interconnected world.