

Romani People in the Context of Urban Belonging in Turkey

Parlıyan, Burak Mert and Hasan Akgün. *Kentsel Aidiyet Bağlamında Romanlar*. Edirne: Paradigma Akademi, 2023, 111.

Kentsel Aidiyet Bağlamında Romanlar (Romani People in the Context of Urban Belonging), co-authored by Hasan Akgün and Burak Mert Parlıyan, offers a critical and comprehensive study of the Roma minority in Turkey, focusing particularly on the intersections between urbanization and identity. The book addresses how urban identity and belonging are shaped and affected by the factors of urban renewal and social integration projects and the challenges faced by marginalised communities like the Roma in this process.

The book is organised into four sections beginning with a theoretical foundation, discussing concepts such as place attachment, marginalization, and identity construction. The first section titled as “Construction of Place Attachment” engages with the theory of place attachment as part of urban sociology in detail and establishes the foundation of the concept of sense of place and the critical role of belonging and place attachment in collective identity. The following chapter provides a brief overview of the historical and current situation of the Roma in Turkey, setting the context for the research methods employed in the study. Third section presents the empirical findings, emphasising the experiences of Roma residents in urban areas. The book is concluded with suggestions and insights, advocating for a deeper consideration of urban belonging in addressing the marginalization of Roma in Turkey’s urban landscape.

The second section discusses the historical context of Roma in Turkey, tracing their presence and experiences from the Ottoman period to the present day. The authors provide an overview of the socio-political dynamics shaping the status of Roma in Turkish society, with a particular focus on the effects of urbanization. The chapter emphasises that rapid urban development has both created opportunities and exacerbated challenges for Roma. In the second half of the second section the authors examine the challenges faced by Roma communities in Büyükçekmece in urban conservation projects and their role and contribution in this process. Although

the examples of economic hardship and social exclusion experienced by Roma provide a general framework, adding specific examples would provide a more concrete and practical way of addressing these issues.

The third section, “Fieldwork and Findings in the Neighbourhoods of Mimar Sinan, Karaağaç and Kumburgaz” examines the Roma’s urban experiences. The chapter starts by presenting demographic insights from their research and explains the perceptions and concerns of the participants about urban transformation. The case studies provided from three Turkish neighbourhoods demonstrates both successful and problematic policy interventions. The chapter concludes with a call for more inclusive approaches to policy-making. However, one weakness in this regard is the book falls short of outlining practical steps that policymakers could take to achieve this. For example, while the book calls for improving educational opportunities and stable employment for the Romani community, it does not provide specific mechanisms or policy frameworks to ensure these goals are met.

The data on the Roma community regarding their perceptions is gathered through interviews with the local residents combining qualitative and quantitative research. To gather comprehensive data on the Roma community in Turkey the authors include fieldwork and analysis of public policy documents. The book successfully incorporates case studies from specific neighbourhoods with the concept of the place attachment. The case study findings contribute to an understanding of how urban changes intersect with personal and communal values.

The authors offer a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of urban conservation policies on the Roma community and how these impacts can be managed by bridging theoretical concepts like place attachment with empirical research. Despite their active role in urban preservation and viewing themselves as integral to the urban identity of Büyükçekmece, they face challenges such as displacement, economic hardship, and social discrimination. The book offers a comparative analysis of the three districts of Büyükçekmece and shows the results of successful urban policies and advocates for targeted social policies for the challenges faced by Romani individuals, such as improving educational and employment opportunities, inclusive urban policies to combating spatial and social discrimination. For scholars interested in Roma minority, urban sociology, and Turkish studies, “Kentsel Aidiyet Bağlamında Romanlar” is a valuable book as well as for a broader audience concerned with the dynamics of identity and belonging in contemporary urban settings.

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