

Vulnerable individuals' right to the city. Insights from the Istanbul case

*El derecho a la ciudad de las personas vulnerables.
Perspectivas del caso de Estambul*

Abstract:

This paper, building on the review of the main and complementary concepts and criticisms of Lefebvre's right to the city, aims to fill a gap in literature concerning the right to the city of vulnerable individuals and groups who face several forms of socio-spatial exclusion in everyday life. It argues that the problems associated with the right to the city particularly affect the vulnerable and can be better addressed by examining the accounts of real-life experiences relayed by vulnerable individuals. Such an examination is delivered based on the case of Istanbul through 48 interviews conducted with city residents who identify themselves with one or more major sociological vulnerability categories. From the accounts of the interviewees' perceptions of the socio-spatial relationships they establish in public space, the paper concludes with a discussion of the ways in which the right to the city can be achieved and sustained more successfully.

Keywords: the right to the city; vulnerability; socio-spatial exclusion; urban democracy; Istanbul.

Resumen:

A partir de una revisión de conceptos y críticas principales y complementarias del derecho a la ciudad, este estudio pretende llenar los vacíos en la literatura sobre el derecho a la ciudad de los individuos y grupos vulnerables que enfrentan diversas formas de exclusión socio-espacial en la vida cotidiana. Argumenta que los problemas relacionados con el derecho a la ciudad se pueden abordar mejor analizando las experiencias de la vida real de los habitantes urbanos vulnerables. Dicho análisis, basado en el caso de Estambul, se desarrolló a través de 48 entrevistas realizadas a habitantes de la ciudad que se identificaron con una o varias categorías de vulnerabilidad sociológica. A partir de los relatos de los encuestados sobre las relaciones sociales que establecen en el espacio público, el artículo concluye con una discusión basada en la literatura sobre cómo lograr y mantener con éxito el derecho a la ciudad.

Palabras clave: el derecho a la ciudad; vulnerabilidad; exclusión socio espacial; democracia urbana; Estambul.

Autores:

Imge Akcakaya Waite*
imgeawaite@itu.edu.tr

*Istanbul Technical University

Turkey

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1. Introduction

1.1. Lefebvre's right to the city and the complementary rights to difference, participation, and appropriation

The concept of a collective right to the city emerged as a response to the individualistic world outlook of capitalism in 1960s, introduced by noted philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Writing on the notions of both space and spatiality, Lefebvre positioned urban space very centrally in the right to the city. He took a wide view of space encompassing much more than just the concrete and material; his view included what he called perceived space, conceived space, and lived space (Soja, 2010; also see Álvaro-Sánchez, 2022). *Perceived space* comprises the tangible space that is objective and materialistic. *Conceived* space refers to subjective, internalized mental constructions and representations of space that are more creative and diverse. *Lived space*, which is the concept adopted in this study under the broader term of "space," is the combination of perceived and conceived space, highlighting a person's actual experience of space in everyday life. Social relations and lived space are intimately interconnected for all inhabitants of the city. According to Lefebvre, the production of urban space involves reproducing the social relations that occur within its spatiality. The production of urban space therefore implies "more than planning the concrete space of the city; it involves producing and reproducing all aspects of urban life" (Purcell, 2002, p. 102). In this light, Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city is a collective right and a radical transformation of urban social and spatial relations. Indeed, it is "an active right to make the city different, to shape it more in accord with our heart's desire, and to re-make ourselves thereby in a different image" (Harvey, 2003, p. 941). Similarly, for Lefebvre, the right to the city involves "the right to claim presence in the city, to wrest the use of the city from privileged new masters and democratize its spaces" (Isin, 2000, p. 14; also see McCann, 2002). These assertions support the struggle for the maintenance of socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity within cities.

In order to build on these definitions, it might be helpful to note some concepts complementary to that of *the right to the city*. For instance, Lefebvre (1976) uses the idea of *the right to difference*, which implies a right to resistance, to facilitate the grounds of opposition and collective power. Here, forced classification may be represented by a police order that imposes identity-based discrimination, and the right to difference as a right to question that order and the governing of urban affairs (Dikeç, 2002; Grazioli & Caciagli, 2018). *The right to participation* maintains that urban residents should play a central role in any

decision that contributes to the production of urban space (Nahar Lata, 2021; Pindell, 2006). On this point, what is promising about the notion is not the prospect of an increase in the number of formal participants, but rather "the formation of voices, of political subjectivation it generates in and around urban space" (Dikeç, 2002, p. 96). *The right to appropriation* includes the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy, and use urban space, and it has been the primary focus of those who advocate for the right of people to be physically present in that space (Butler, 2019; Purcell, 2014). However, Lefebvre imagines appropriation to have a much broader and more structural meaning, entailing the right to produce new and occupy established urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants (Soja, 2010; Purcell, 2002).

In more recent years, following its revival with the New Urban Agenda, appropriation as a means of the right to the city has been adopted by policy campaigners and civil society organizations in a more incrementalistic, pragmatic manner (Turok & Scheba, 2019). Contemporary trends of planning associated with appropriation include tactical, pop-up and do-it-yourself urbanism, which offer a more inclusive and participatory approach to planning. These concepts are rapid, temporary, small-scale interventions in public spaces led by urban dwellers and designed to reclaim and activate these spaces for public uses. They actively appropriate space for collective use, thus can expand spatial struggles to new actors and provide opportunities for commoning, which contributes to the articulation of the right to the city (Foster, 2020). However, as critics of tactical urbanism and alike models point out, with a focus on aesthetics and placemaking, these interventions may catalyze gentrification by creating affluent and exclusionary aesthetics in urban spaces, which hinders the universality of the right to the city (Foster, 2020; Berglund, 2019).

1.2. Some criticisms toward a vulnerability-focused development of the discourse

There are few significant scholarly attempts that undertake the right to the city in light of numerous states of socio-spatial vulnerability that are inscribed into everyday urban life and encounters (Menezes et al., 2021; Aldinhas Ferreira, 2021; Mavridis, 2014). Despite the conception that the right to the city may empower vulnerable individuals and groups through direct democratic actions, such as the support of the disabled, the refugees, the poor and the elderly, Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city has been subject to expanding debates that aim to assess the practicality of its theoretical value. According to Castells, this notion is overly abstract and utopian because it disregards unequal power relations and repressions that occur in the socio-spatial sphere: "This is why [Lefebvre] adds the condition: *providing this [spatial] concentration is free of all repression*; this is what he calls *the right to the city* [original emphases]" (Castells, 1977, p. 90). Lefebvre's view is particularly problematic in terms of overlooking state power over society, which is undeniably embedded in all urban settings. Purcell (2002) further argues that Lefebvre's right to the city is both overly complex and vague: Instead of democratic deliberation being limited

to state decisions, he claims, Lefebvre imagines that it should apply to all decisions that contribute to the production of urban space. These criticisms are true in particular from the vulnerability point of view, in which vulnerabilities faced by urban dwellers necessitate more empathetic, egalitarian and radical measures to tackle risk factors associated with their vulnerability (Palacios et al., 2022; Menezes et al., 2021; Grazioli & Caciagli, 2018).

On a similar basis, despite the Lefebvrian approach's attention to the ways in which citizenship rights and urban space are produced in relation to one another, McCann (2002) argues that Lefebvre insists on radical openness and endless human potentialities in his discussion of the production of space and related rights to the city. As Harvey notes, however, the openness and expansiveness of Lefebvre's discussion "leave[s] the actual spaces of any alternative frustratingly undefined" (Harvey, 2000, p. 183). Moreover, Lefebvre's discussion of rights "offers little in the way of a normative framework for evaluating contemporary policy-making experiments in cities" (McCann, 2002, p. 78), which involve the abovementioned concepts of tactical urbanism and sister experiments practiced in today's cities (also see Purcell, 2002).

There is a prominent vulnerability focus evident in the recent documents created by human rights institutions in light of the New Urban Agenda with the overarching 'cities for all' slogan. These documents include the *World Cities Report* (UN-HABITAT, 2020) and the *Policy Paper 1: The right to the city and cities for all* (UN-HABITAT, 2017). In particular, the World Cities Report states that "the right to the city means that all people, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups, should have equal opportunities and access to urban resources, services and goods" (UN-HABITAT, 2020, p. xxvi). While the right to the city indeed calls for equal entitlements and opportunities, this definition seems very far away from the practice envisioned by Lefebvre (1996), where inhabitants re-appropriate the use and social value of the urban (Butler, 2019). The originally suggested 'standardization' approach, which spans all inhabitants of the city regardless of their idiosyncratic conditions, needs and perceptions, is thus a significant shortcoming of the institutionalized understanding of the right to the city. Considering the heavy use of internet in management of today's city spaces and the evidence of disproportioned provision of the internet across cities favoring the more privileged (Reeve, 2022), all established forms of vulnerability are further challenged under the premise of standardization.

Reflection on these criticisms in the context of Turkey and Istanbul reveals certain challenges of urban democracy and the right to the city. In Turkey, citizenship and patriotism are associated with a total allegiance to state authority, putting minorities—in particular ethnic and religious minorities—under social and political threat (Lelandais, 2013). However, this conservative tradition has been challenged in the last two decades by the globalism-led universalization of human rights, environmental activism, the country's integration to European Union, and the massive immigrant flow resulting from unrests in the region. Turkish cities at various levels of capacity have thus been home to demographic, social, and political

changes of varying degree. Istanbul is undoubtedly at the fore of Turkish cities affected in this way due to its diverse socio-cultural profile and access to housing, jobs, and urban facilities. Today, the city's residents are subject to socio-political and economic polarization, spatial segregation triggered by gentrification-driven urban regeneration projects, and resulting rising anxieties in the public sphere (Oz & Eder, 2018). In Istanbul, the right to the city is thus characterized by tensions between the state and a polarized society, as well as socio-spatial exclusion that targets vulnerable groups and individuals, while attempts to claim the right to the city are focused on protests against enviro-spatial destruction, such as the Gezi Park protests of 2013 (Kuymulu, 2013) and those against displacement via urban regeneration (Tsavdaroglou, 2020; Waite, 2020; Oz & Eder, 2018; Lelandais, 2013).

This study undertakes to examine the right to the city as it is perceived in Istanbul from a wider perspective, i.e. beyond the documented protests and claims, through more subtle everyday encounters of urban dwellers who associate themselves with diverse types of vulnerability in the public sphere. The theoretical standpoint of this study, based on the right to the city and its sister concepts, takes into consideration the abovementioned criticisms of the concept's normativity, abstractness, vagueness, standardization and resulting potential inefficacy. Consequently, this paper argues that the problems associated with the right to the city affect vulnerable urban individuals in particular, and that these problems can be better understood and addressed by examining accounts of the real-life experiences relayed by these individuals. The empirical research set out in this paper was designed with this understanding and aims to contribute to the discourse by taking on two further points of focus. From a spatial perspective, it focuses on the public space as a medium or setting in which all types of societal interactions take place. Here, public space is defined as an inseparable entity of a two-way process between *public* and *space* (Sendi & Marušić, 2012). From a social perspective, it focuses on vulnerable individuals who are inherently more disadvantaged than the rest of society in claiming the right to the city, participation, appropriation, and difference due to more difficult life conditions and the social exclusion they face as a result of both their treatment by fellow urban inhabitants and systemic discrimination from the state. In doing so, this study aims to fill a gap in literature on the realities and problems of vulnerable individuals' and groups' right to the city through socio-spatial exclusion.

2. Methods

The aim of the empirical research is to examine the everyday life experiences of vulnerable individuals and groups and their perceptions of their socio-spatial exclusion in relation to relevant vulnerabilities and the right to the city. More specifically, the study aims to critically evaluate vulnerabilities' relevance to the right to the city and the criticisms associated with the concept through the case of Istanbul. For this purpose, a set of interviews was conducted over a three-month period in 2022 with residents of different quarters of the city who identified themselves in one or more of the main sociological vulnerability categories. The interview

guide was designed to uncover the relationships the subjects establish and sustain with the greater society or their communities that are not overtly associated with their vulnerabilities and the spatial reflections of these relationships. Various states of vulnerability within the public sphere across Turkey were compiled based on the main vulnerability groups typology in social sciences literature (Turner, 2021), with each group well represented in both the literature and in the Turkish context. Nine major vulnerable groups were thus examined in this study: children (under the age of 18), women, LGBTQI+ individuals, the elderly (age 65 and over), the disabled, immigrants and refugees, belief minorities, ethnic minorities, and the poor and the homeless.

The participants were recruited through the 'purposeful sampling' method (Whitehead & Whitehead, 2016), in which persons living in Istanbul and overtly identifying themselves with one or more of the vulnerability categories above volunteered to answer questions focused on their vulnerability and everyday encounters in Istanbul's public spaces. The sample size was determined in accordance with the saturation point principle of most qualitative sampling methods (Sim et al., 2018); in order to obtain subject diversity and balance, a minimum of five participants were recruited for each vulnerability category. For all vulnerability categories, leading Istanbul-based civil society organizations that pursue rights-based activism for relevant groups were contacted and their contacts utilized. Balanced distributions were sought in both the gender of participants—where applicable—and in their residential location across Istanbul. The resulting interviews comprised 48 participants (see Table 1). Although face-to-face interviews were preferred and primarily pursued, some were conducted by telephone and video calls due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. A minority of interviews were conducted via email. Children were interviewed in presence of their guardian(s) and with both parties' consent. Turkish was the main interview language; however, interviews with non-Turkish speakers (i.e. immigrants and refugees) were conducted in English.

The interview guide consisted of four open-ended questions: (1) How do you feel in public space in Istanbul regarding the vulnerabilities you identify with? (2) How do you describe relationships you establish in public space regarding the vulnerabilities you identify with? (3) Do you think public spaces exclude you regarding the vulnerabilities you identify with? Why/why not? (4) What difficulties do you encounter in public space regarding the vulnerabilities you identify with? The questions thus inquired about participants' everyday experiences and subsequent emotions when in touch with the community in the city, the relationships they establish with the rest of society and the positive and negative interactions therein. The final question requested any additional perceptions, observations, or other remarks the participants had regarding the research topic. The answers were first transcribed, then coded by vulnerability type and relevant research theme and further analyzed through discourse analysis (Powers, 2001). Finally, the researcher's ethnographic interview notes were integrated into the analysis and findings as appropriate.

3. Results

3.1. General perceptions regarding the public realm of existence

When asked how they viewed and felt about the relationships they establish in public space with a view to the vulnerabilities they identified with, the interviewees offered varied perspectives, some of which presented common themes. For instance, although they constitute half of the population and thus comprise the largest and most dominant vulnerable group in it, women who were interviewed shared perceptions to those who belong to minority vulnerable groups. Describing their behavior in public space as "hasty" and "uneasy" in general, female interviewees between ages 25 and 40 expressed these feelings in relation to bodily and sexual associations, while older women interviewed emphasized issues of communication. One point that stands out from interviews with LGBTQI+ individuals is that the attitudes and behaviors they endure from the public depend on the extent to which their atypical gender identity or sexual orientation is exposed. Another interesting point concerns these individuals' views and expectations of the public regarding the acceptance of their sexual preferences. For instance, 32-year-old bisexual woman described her feelings during social encounters in the public realm as "nervous and anxious," a 31-year-old lesbian as "timid," a 39-year-old gay man as "cold and distanced," and a 37-year-old gay man as "superficial, translucent, and sometimes distant;" on the other hand, a 31-year-old lesbian and a 27-year-old gay man used the word "open" to describe their "amicable" interactions with public. The age distribution of these perceptions suggests that younger LGBTQI+ individuals interviewed hold a more positive outlook regarding the topic.

The children interviewed, ranging in age between 5 and 17, stated that outside of their immediate family, they establish communication only with their friends, peers, and teachers. A 13-year-old girl living and attending middle school in Bakırköy and stated that, feeling uncomfortable in public space, she avoids interaction and voluntarily excludes herself from social encounters. A similar restraint is observed in the elderly who were interviewed. They generally describe themselves as "deliberate" in public space due to fears of the violence and deception they might be exposed to. A 72-year-old man implied that he had no other choice but to exist in society when he described his situation in public space as "tough and without alternative." A woman of the same age stated that although it depends on the part of the city and the type of public space, she usually feels "anxious" in these spaces, while another woman, aged 74, who argued that she had a positive attitude towards life in general, claimed that she interacted with people with ease as she "tried to open up her fun and good-natured side," and that in return, she earned their love and respect, with no negative encounters or interactions with bad people. Similar to the elderly interviewed, a 42-year-old man who is blind asserted that societal relationships depended on the location of public space in Istanbul, denoting the socio-economic and education levels of the relevant community. Another person who is blind, a 33-year-old woman, described

Primary vulnerability category	Participant identifier	Women	LGBTQI+	Children (-18)	The elderly (65+)	The disabled	Ethnic minorities	Belief minorities	Immigrants/Refugees	The poor	The homeless
Women	37F	●									
	32F	●									
	25F	●									
	64F	●									
	40F	●									
LGBTQI+	32F, bisexual	○	●								
	31F, lesbian	○	●								
	37M, gay		●								
	39M, gay		●								
	27M, gay		●								
Children	13F	○		●							
	5F	○		●							
	9F	○		●							
	17M			●							
	17M, Kurdish			●			○				
The elderly	72F	●			●						
	69F	●			●						
	74F	○			●						
	72M				●						
	86M				●						
The disabled	9M, mentally disabled			●		●				○	
	59F, physically disabled					●					
	48M, physically disabled	○				●					
	33F, visually disabled					●					
	42M, visually disabled	○				●					
Ethnic minorities	55M, Assyrian, Orthodox Christian						●	○			
	27M, Kurdish						●				
	42M, Kurdish						●				
	25F, Kurdish, poor	●					●			○	
	44M, Roma, poor						●			●	
Belief minorities (may have ethnic focus)	30F, Alawite Muslim	●						●			
	35F, Alawite Muslim	●					○	●			
	68M, atheist				○			●			
	37F, Jewish	○					●	●			
	40M, Jewish						●	●			
Immigrants (including refugees)	50M, Armenian, Orthodox Christian						●	●			
	21F, refugee, Syrian	●							●		
	19F, refugee, Syrian	●							●		
	24F, refugee, Syrian	○							●		
	41M, immigrant, American, agnostic						○	○	●		
	26M, immigrant, Iranian, atheist						○	○	●		
	52F, immigrant, Armenian, Orthodox Christian	○					●	○	●		
33M, immigrant, Azerbaijani						●		●			
The poor & the homeless	35F, poor	●								●	
	55M, former homeless, poor, physically disabled					●				●	○
	56M, former homeless, poor									●	○
	65M, homeless				●					●	●
	52M, homeless									●	●

Table 1: Interview participants' basic descriptions and self-identified vulnerability categories (● indicates primary vulnerability; ○ indicates secondary vulnerability)

Source: Author

her relationships in public realm as “compulsorily candid to get work done,” while among the interviewees with physical disability, a 48-year-old man and a 59-year-old woman expressed no serious problems with their public interactions. Based on the overall responses they relayed during the interviews, the responses of the two latter individuals indicate that their positive perception may be a result of their normalization of their self-image so as to empower themselves and adapt to structural elements by omitting their vulnerability.

In representing the ethnic minority profile of Istanbul, which is similar to that of Turkey as a whole, interviews involved Kurdish, Assyrian, Armenian, and Roma individuals. A member of the Kurdish community, which constitutes an estimated 15-20 percent of the country's population and has grown to be a significant demographic in Istanbul over the last 70 years (Gambetti & Jongerden, 2015), argued that ethnic minorities in Istanbul and in Turkey in general “have to prove themselves as good people to the rest of society” and that the relationships they build in society are offered as a “blessing” to them. In similar fashion, a 27-year-old Kurdish man described his feelings in public realm as “oppressed,” while a 25-year-old Kurdish woman described her public interactions as “formal and brief.” A common experience of Kurds, who comprise a significant part of the city's population, and Assyrians, who are relatively fewer, is a sentence both groups have claimed to have heard in a majority of their encounters: “I have a [minority category] friend, too.” Although often uttered in friendliness and sympathy, the interviewees found this expression discriminatory. The situation is quite similar for religious minorities. The interviewees from this category represent the major religious minority groups of Istanbul: Alawite Muslims, Jews, Christians, and atheists. The two Alawite women who were interviewed felt that they had to escape otherization and interrogation in public because of their religion and argued that they acted “highly distant” to avoid having non-superficial encounters in crowds. A similar statement was offered by a 37-year-old Jewish man: “I don't establish any relationships.” An Armenian Christian man, aged 50, complained that society labeled him an “infidel” when his identity was exposed through his atypical name, and that he has “not been able to figure out the reason for this otherization.” In relation to such adverse attitudes in society, a 68-year-old atheist man described his feelings as “infuriated.”

The types of immigrants interviewed reflect the immigrant diversity of Istanbul over the past 20 years. Although these persons did not initially express major problems in relation to their immigrant identity, their later more in-depth responses indicated otherwise. For instance, a 52-year-old Armenian woman who has been living in Istanbul for 18 years shared that when addressed in Armenian she does not respond in her native language, fearing isolation from society if exposed as an immigrant, and dislikes the fact that she may be mistaken for an Armenian Turkish person with deep roots in Turkey. Interviewees who immigrated from Iran and Azerbaijan recorded that they expend extra effort to prove themselves as harmless and thus establish positive relationships in public. One non-Turkish speaker, a 41-year-old American male expat, expressed no significant connection with every day public spaces or

the public itself, implying that he is content because he is free of expectations. All three Syrian refugee women interviewed associated the refugees' societal experiences in public realm with the part of the city they inhabited, followed by the descriptions “nice” and “normal” to denote their lives in a Syrian quarter. Similar to these women, a 35-year-old Turkish woman who identifies herself as poor described her socio-economically deprived neighborhood as “comfortable” and the people in it “easy to communicate with.” On the other hand, the two hidden homeless men interviewed expressed trust issues toward the general public, regardless of location, due to the discriminatory statements and behaviors they have had to endure. A 52-year-old homeless man who works a day job isolates himself from public spaces for similar reasons and only interacts with the people he feels close to.

3.2. In-depth accounts of socio-spatial exclusion and responses

When inquired more deeply concerning the social interactions and relationships they establish in the public realm, the interviewees offered more detailed narratives. Among the women interviewed, one 40-year-old expressed a preference for interacting only with “decent-looking people” or incumbents on site. While not feeling as if she had experienced active discrimination due to her gender, the same person observed that women prefer to interact with other women for quick and simple encounters such as asking for directions. Another woman, age 37 and working freelance, recalled multiple accounts of men cutting in front of her in line only because she looked vulnerable as a woman. A 64-year-old retired woman asserted that when she sought assistance in public spaces, male personnel looked and acted toward her with prejudice.

The LGBTQI+ individuals interviewed explained the hostility towards them in public space by referring to Turkish socio-cultural structure and anti-LGBTQI+ discourse in Turkish politics. A 32-year-old doctoral candidate who identifies as a bisexual activist woman strongly despises the strong social exclusion this vulnerable group encounters in their everyday lives at school, work, and in other public spaces: “LGBTQI+ people are classified either as terrorists or as forces that demolish their religion, home, and family. If only they could remember that LGBTQI+ people are only human, then they would also remember that we are merely a part of their diversity and that we are one of them.” She then relayed many accounts of exclusion, discrimination, harassment, violence, and even arrest and murder LGBTQI+ people experienced at the hands of society and law enforcement. A 37-year-old fashion designer who lives in Küçükçekmece and identifies as gay man stated that despite finding his social encounters “usually relaxed and comfortable,” he sometimes has difficulty expressing his thoughts and thus censored himself regarding sexual orientation, political ideology, and social and cultural differences. Another self-identified 27-year-old gay man who lives in Beyoğlu and works as a medical assistant stated that he finds himself “abstaining from acting like himself in public space,” referring to his sexual identity.

The children who were interviewed, in particular those 13 or younger, stated that they do not interact with adults in public spaces in line with their parents' warnings and teachings. A 9-year-old delivered one learned protection mechanism vividly: "Some time after I make friends with a peer, I trust them. Stranger adults, however, can do harm by holding my hand or doing bad things to me, so I don't talk to them. For the same reason, I don't help people I don't know even if I want to."

The situation is not very different for those age 65 or above. Two women, ages 69 and 72, expressed similar in explaining their preference for minimal social interaction and how they lengthily observe a stranger before they build trust for them. An 86-year-old retired bank employee residing in the affluent neighborhood of Suadiye reflected on this lack of trust towards society and thus the public realm: "I have encountered people who stopped me to exploit me by asking for money, or to swindle me. Therefore I remain at bay from those people and from public spaces." A similar stance was offered by two other elderly interviewees who believed their health problems prevented them from existing in public space as much as they would want. However, a 74-year-old housewife also living in an affluent quarter in Gayrettepe claimed that she had never experienced social exclusion or exploitation; on the contrary, "people kindly offer their seats or places in line in hospitals, pharmacies, banks, and on public transportation." Perhaps the most interesting account was offered by the 86-year-old man described above who rationalized the social exclusion he experiences with some self-criticism: "When I was young I viewed the elderly as useless. I made fun of them like everyone else. Now I am at that age and see myself as useless. Sometimes people don't take me seriously, but I acknowledge them. I only resent when they imply, even covertly, 'You're gonna pass away very soon here.'"

The accounts of interviewees with disabilities resemble those of the elderly to an extent. The mother of a 9-year-old boy with severe autism and associated mental illnesses stated with sadness that her son's condition deems it "very difficult" to exist in society and in public space. On the other hand, a 59-year-old physically disabled woman living in Ataşehir and a 48-year-old physically disabled man living in Beykoz and working in the public sector both claimed that their disabilities did not pose an obstacle to their social interactions and adaptation. However, a 33-year-old woman who is blind, lives in Bahçelievler, and works as a civil servant claimed that she could only socially realize herself in certain places of higher education and socio-economic levels. More specifically, a 42-year-old man who is blind and serves as the president of a leading blind organization stated the following: "Sometimes we encounter communication issues; for example, those who don't know how to interact with the disabled approach us with fear, hesitation, and the like."

All ethnic minorities interviewed complained about the prejudice and the accompanying social exclusion and discrimination their groups were subjected to in public realm. One member of the largest ethnic minority, the Kurds, a 27-year-old university graduate living in Eyüpsultan, stated that they "are predisposed to meaningless bad looks" when they speak in their

own language, Kurdish. A 42-year-old Kurdish man, a business owner in the historic city center who allegedly experienced similar discrimination throughout his life, claimed that he has friends and acquaintances from all segments of society due to his work and admitted that as a defense mechanism, he occasionally applies positive discrimination, favoring his fellow Kurdish friends over other acquaintances or strangers. The Kurds and non-Muslim ethnic minorities interviewed also complained about the active discrimination they faced during recruitment in the public sector, sometimes even when benefiting from public services, which they perceived as part of longstanding government policies. A 55-year-old Assyrian man running a jewelry business asserted that it was not a coincidence that he was in the jewelry sector, a majority of which is run by Assyrians and Armenians in Istanbul. Therefore, he claimed, he does not face discrimination in his business and family-focused social circles; he may, however, albeit rarely, encounter astonishment at his ethnicity in public realm but avoids any negative experiences by establishing positive relationships. On the other hand, a 44-year-old Roma man living in Çatalca, the president of a local rights-based Roma people's association and a musician—as Roma population are widely known for in the city—and factory worker, claimed that general public "gives the Roma people the evil eye" for their accent, clothes, attitudes, and behaviors that differ from those of the dominant urban culture. He elaborated that the Roma people do not "act extra courteous" in public space, meaning "they act like their true selves in parks or on the street, although they are careful with their behavior in other more specific public spaces." Coming from a Roma culture cloistered within enclaves, he highlighted the importance of cultural adaptation by observing how Roma individuals who blended into and established dialogue with the greater society changed in their outlook and culture.

The members of religious minorities interviewed offered variety of accounts of interactions with and perceptions of Istanbul society. A 30-year-old Alawite woman who works as an engineer and lives in the Alawite-dominant Sultangazi district asserted that because her belief system and gender are not accepted by men of the dominant religion, she cannot actualize her beliefs freely in the public realm. Another Alawite woman, a 35-year-old government officer living in Şişli, and a 68-year-old atheist male electrical engineer living in Kadıköy argued that religious minorities are actively ignored by the government and society at large. However, the atheist man interviewed stated that he was never reluctant to share his religious views in public on the occasions he deemed it necessary thanks to his social and political activist circles. On the other hand, during his interview, a 26-year-old Iranian immigrant and self-identified atheist recalled accounts of serious negative reactions he had to face in circles of his own ethnic roots and culture in Istanbul when his religious identity was exposed. A 40-year-old Jewish man working in the textile sector recalled only a few instances of adverse interactions to his Judaism throughout his whole life in Istanbul, asserting instead that he is frequently warmly welcomed for his minority identity because of "the careful continuation of the positive image of Jewish people in business ethics to our day." A 50-year-old Christian man and small business

owner painted a similarly positive picture and stated that he is selective in his social interactions to avoid any "potential troublemakers in public."

Although the immigrants interviewed may not fully represent the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of Istanbul, their detailed responses offer a considerable range of perceptions. Syrian refugees who were interviewed had very similar responses to Kurdish interviewees regarding speaking their native language in public, complaining about how people "ridicule" them when they speak Arabic. These refugee women also gave accounts of Turkish men making them uncomfortable with "very careful looks and disturbing speech." A 41-year-old American expat working as a faculty member at a prestigious state university and living in Kadıköy—unlike many Syrians, who live in clusters in relatively deprived parts of the city—expressed contentment with speaking in his native language in public, but stated that he sometimes feels isolated because his Turkish is not sufficient and that at times he seeks assistance of a Turk in public spaces. A 52-year-old Armenian woman living in Istanbul for 18 years and residing in Fatih recalled "crying often" in her early years in the city because she did not speak Turkish and thus suffered from socialization and interaction problems and the resulting feelings of social exclusion, but she overcame these problems as she improved her Turkish in later years. A 33-year-old Azerbaijani immigrant man who lives in Eyüpsultan and works as a waiter in a café explained the social exclusion he suffers as follows: "The people view us immigrants in a very bad light. When we seek jobs, they tell us 'you have no place in our country. Go back to Azerbaijan.'" He stated that he feels "very bad" when exposed to this kind of attitude in public.

The poor and homeless who were interviewed also emphasized the effects of the social and spatial exclusion they endure on their mental well-being. A woman who identifies as poor, living in Kağıthane and working in consulting, claimed that she has been on multiple occasions denied greeting in some parts of the city because of her appearance while other more affluent-looking people were warmly welcomed. A physically disabled 55-year-old hidden homeless man living in Fatih stated that he prefers not to interact with others and that if he has to he would "only communicate with stray cats and dogs." Another hidden homeless person from the same area, a 56-year-old man, was irritated by the unfriendly—sometimes hostile—looks directed at him in the public realm, as well as by the homeless people he cannot align himself with; as a result, he usually isolates himself from the public. Finally, a homeless and jobless man aged 65 living in Beyoğlu expressed his fondness for socializing with strangers in public but relayed that he experienced coldness and physical distance from some people when they find out about his homelessness: "They exclaim 'Oh, you live on the streets?' They don't shoo me away, but they imply it with their body language and attitude, and that saddens me a lot." This person mirrored other homeless individuals interviewed when responding to the strong societal bias towards them: "We are portrayed as hobos, rapists, predators, extortionists, or murderers. This is the dominant public perception. However, check out all the news channels and you will see that no single person who lives in streets is associated with any of these allegations!"

4. Discussion and conclusions

The case study shows that many vulnerable individuals living in megacity conditions endure difficult everyday life experiences associated with their vulnerabilities. At times these hardships are spontaneous and singular, at others they are systemic and bound to socio-cultural norms, but all leave significant impacts on the lives and well-being of vulnerable inhabitants. For these individuals, such hardships manifest themselves as emotions such as fear, anger, resentment, and desperation, and behaviors such as abstention, hastiness, forced candidness, and appeasement in public. These conditions pose a significant obstacle to the ability of vulnerable individuals to feel safe enough to act 'natural' and 'normal' and to actualize themselves in public space. In a passive light, the right to the city means that inhabitants of the city build an attachment to society fostered by positive relationships and interactions with their communities and the accompanying positive emotions, perceptions, and behaviors they accumulate. In a proactive light, it is the creation of an enabling socio-spatial environment and the encouragement of vulnerable individuals to realize themselves in public space to their heart's content. In the absence of these measures, the social exclusion vulnerable individuals and groups face contradicts Lefebvre's depiction of *lived* space and Harvey's anti-capitalistic take, both of which are deeply embedded in the understanding of the right to the city.

The unique and diverse problems and aspirations posed by the vulnerable individuals interviewed offer a way to address the literature-led criticisms of the right to the city discussed earlier and a pathway to a more detailed review of Lefebvre's thesis when assessed against lived experience. The interview responses indicate these individuals' challenging relationship with the state, which in many ways is complicit in their exclusion from the public sphere, lending credence to Castells and Purcell's argument that the omission of state repression in Lefebvre's undertaking of the right to the city is problematic. On the other hand, while the complementary concepts of the right to difference and the right to appropriation imply coercive opposition of the vulnerable, the case study findings indicate a tendency of vulnerable individuals to seek inclusion through recognition and peaceful reconciliation. This latter point is understandable in a world of structural determinants heavily felt in complex urban settings, particularly in public spaces. Although it is extremely challenging—and perhaps problematic—to try to draw too stark of a line between individual agency and systemic incentives, pressures, and assumptions, as the individual and the structural are deeply intertwined, with all individual decisions are constrained in some way by the state-led system in which lived experiences occur, it is clear that there is no individual agency that is not influenced by a complex web of structural determinants such as the state, laws, history, and culture. In that sense the lived experience is led by structural and spatial elements and nuanced by individual agency, and they constantly inform and shape each other. These implications suggest that while the right to the city should be considered by urban thinkers as well as policy-makers, as representatives of the state, in a whole new light that is more inclusive,

people-centered, and locality-focused, vulnerable individuals and groups should organize to claim their right to difference, participation, and appropriation through collective means of action.

The case study also shows that in addition to the socio-political organization, spatial organization of public space is a crucial factor in achieving vulnerable individuals' right to the city. Factors such as the walkability of pedestrian paths and proximity to activity areas are among the determinants of these inhabitants' involvement in urban life. The level of micro-mobility in a city determines our experiences and habits, and even attitudes and values, and thus defines our social and spatial relations in the city. Recent accounts of appropriation through tactical and pop-up urbanism offer practical responses to inhabitants' everyday public space needs. On a larger scale, depending on the type and severity of vulnerability, vulnerable individuals and groups may tend to live in semi-scattered clusters or enclaves and on the urban fringe out of necessity, safety, solidarity, and need for freedom. These tendencies are observed in many parts of the world; however, in a city like Istanbul with a dominant ethnic and religious identity, they may deepen social and spatial exclusion, and thus segregation, towards those outside the norm. Moreover, adverse consequences such as learned helplessness and self-isolation, as observed in the case of the poor and the homeless in particular, may become prevalent. In line with the extended undertaking of the concept of the right to the city, the vulnerable individuals and groups should thus be empowered through access to engage actively in participation and appropriation, while at the same time general public programs should work to increase awareness and tolerance toward the vulnerable. In order to establish and sustain reconciliation between the vulnerable and the greater society, the power relations that underlie the production of urban space should be restructured to achieve balanced and egalitarian outcomes to favor urban inhabitants rather than capital.

As Harvey (2012) suggested, a public sphere that promotes active democratic participation requires that we imagine a more inclusive city system based not only upon a different ordering of rights but upon different political and economic practices. The contemporary rise of participatory decision-making processes provides an opportunity to make claims for existing and new rights to the city but should be accompanied by socio-spatial inclusion principles. These new processes and methods can be critically engaged in order to question the efficacy of the spatial reorganization and reproduction from a perspective of vulnerability, so that pluralist solutions can emerge to tackle multiscale urban problems of the day. As Friedmann (1995) specifically put decades ago, it is in the streets of a city that people express their sovereign right to the city as a political community, with a memory of itself and a name. This emphasis on identity and citizenship is only one of the themes in the core of the right to the city. One common call regarding implementation of this concept is for the enabling of collaborative movements through which governments, private institutions, NGOs, and inhabitants can work together to create more just and livable urban environments. When it is ensured that this type of understanding is accompanied by inclusive measures

geared towards vulnerable individuals and groups and combined with participatory, comprehensive planning regimes on the ground, the right to the city should yield tangible positive results in today's cities.

5. Recommendations

In addition to the primary sociological vulnerability categories examined in this study, there are several vulnerabilities that are subtler or more overlooked, perhaps less substantial but equally important, such as those faced by caregivers, students, the unemployed, those living on the periphery, and those with chronic illnesses, among others. Adding to these the intersectionality—multiple vulnerabilities possessed by an individual—and rich spatial distribution patterns of vulnerabilities, it is possible to examine the city, and the right to the city, in a novel and more in-depth light. The aspiration here is further advancing the right to the city discourse to address its above-discussed shortcomings. Therefore, future studies might pertinently investigate such vulnerabilities specific to locality through detailed ethnographic research, for which this study hopefully may serve as a basis.

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