

SEEKING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SERVICES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: HUMAN RIGHTS CITY

Review Article

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ABSTRACT

Local governments, responsible for city management and the closest administrative units to the public, are made even more valuable by their ability to maintain direct communication with the people. Especially in recent times, changes and developments around the world have made local governments indispensable entities. Their responsibility for urban area management, the development of policies and services aimed at daily public life, decision-making, and the implementation of democratic values like representation and participation at the local level, all while meeting the community's common and local needs equally without excluding anyone, highlights their connection with human rights. This is because the quality of these services delivered by local governments reflects the importance they place on human rights. In this context, the study aims to explain the relationship between local governments and human rights and to identify where human rights stand in the services provided by local governments. Another purpose of the study is to discuss the "Human Rights City" model, seen as the localization of human rights, by examining what it aims to achieve locally through example applications.

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YEREL YÖNETİMLERİN HİZMETLERİNDE İNSAN HAKLARINI ARAMAK: İNSAN HAKLARI KENTİ

ÖZET

Kent yönetiminden sorumlu olan yerel yönetimler halka en yakın idari birimler olmakla birlikte halkla doğrudan iletişim içerisinde olabilmeleri onları daha da değerli kılmaktadır. Özellikle son dönemde dünyada yaşanan değişimler ve gelişmeler yerel yönetimleri vazgeçilmez birimler haline getirmiştir. Kentsel alan yönetiminden sorumlu olmaları, halkın gündelik hayatına yönelik politikalar, hizmetler üretmeleri, kararlar almaları ve temsil, katılım gibi demokratik değerleri yerelde uygulamaları ve bunları yerine getirirken halkın ortak ve yerel nitelikteki tüm ihtiyaçlarına eşit ve kimseyi mahrum bırakmadan cevap vermeleri insan hakları ile arasındaki bağa da işaret etmektedir. Çünkü yerel yönetimlerin yerine getirdiği bu hizmetlerin kalitesi insan haklarına verdiği önemle ortaya çıkmaktadır. Buradan hareketle çalışmanın amacı yerel yönetimler ile insan hakları arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklamak ve yerel yönetimlerin sunduğu hizmetlerde insan haklarının nerede konumlandığını ortaya koymaktır. Ayrıca insan haklarının yerelleşmesi olarak görülen “İnsan Hakları Kenti” modelinin yerelde neyi amaçladığını örnek uygulamalar üzerinden tartışmak da çalışmanın bir diğer amacını oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yerel Yönetimler, İnsan Hakları, İnsan Hakları Kenti, Yerel Hizmet, Kent Yönetimi*

INTRODUCTION

Local governments are constitutional entities that operate within a specific legal framework. These entities are responsible for meeting the common and local needs of the people within their designated geographic area, covering both rural and urban regions, while also serving as the administrative bodies closest to the public. This characteristic allows local governments to identify and address necessary services on-site. Furthermore, compared to central administration, their direct communication with the local population, their ability to produce policies relevant to local citizens, and their direct responsibility in urban area management make them essential institutions.

When considering the economic, social, political, and cultural developments of today, it becomes evident that these changes impact urban areas and have led to an increase in the number of cities worldwide. Consequently, this growth also increases the number of people living in cities. The rising urban population drives up the demand for services provided by local governments, diversifying and differentiating these needs. It also brings expectations that local government services adapt to the conditions of the times.¹ This process has also begun to highlight democratic concepts such as representation in governance and participation in administrative mechanisms. At this point, local governments and human rights intersect,² revealing a strong connection between local governments and human rights. Because human rights are rights that each person possesses solely by virtue of being human. The connection with local governments at this point lies in their obligation to provide essential urban services directly linked to human rights—such as housing, environment, and health—equally to all people living within their geographical boundaries, without depriving them of these services. Additionally, the idea that the city belongs to all individuals residing within the urban space is supported by the presence of “right to the city”

¹ Taş, İbrahim Ethem/ Avşar, Yeter/ Durgun, Sadegül: “Belediyelerin Değişen Dünyaya Uyumu: Dijital Şeffaflığa Doğru”, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2022, p. 1679.

² Baba, İsmahan Gül: “Kentsel Dönüşüm Kavramının İnsan Hakları Açısından Değerlendirilmesi”, Journal of Anadolu Bil Vocational School, No. 37, 2015, p. 31.

or “urban rights” within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.³ Because the rights provided by local governments not only demonstrate the types of rights citizens possess within the city but also concretize these rights, making them more practical and accessible.⁴ Subsequently, the quality of services provided by local governments to the public also reflects the extent to which they prioritize human rights.

With the increasing significance of local governments in the 21st century, human rights have expanded at the local level alongside their international, national, and regional dimensions. Notably, since 2000, the simultaneous growth of locally organized human rights initiatives worldwide has brought about the implementation of the “Human Rights City” model today.⁵ The purpose of the Human Rights City model is seen as aiming to localize human rights. Additionally, it is noteworthy that local actors are increasingly playing a key role in implementing universal legal principles at the local level.⁶ At this point, it has been observed that some cities in Türkiye and around the world have taken the Human Rights City model as an example and tried to reflect the practices that include the characteristics of this model to the city.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explain the relationship between local governments and human rights and to reveal the positioning of human rights within the services provided by local governments. Additionally, another aim of this study is to discuss, through example applications, what the “Human Rights City” model, viewed as the localization of human rights, seeks to achieve at the local level. The study first provides conceptual explanations of local governments and human rights. Then, it explains the nature of the relationship between local governments and human rights. Finally, the study addresses the “Human Rights City” model as an integration of human rights into local

³ Kempin Reuter, Tina: “Human Rights and the City: Including Marginalized Communities in Urban Development and Smart Cities”, *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2019, p. 382.

⁴ Friendly, Abigail: “The Right to the City: Theory and Practice in Brazil”, *Planning Theory & Practice*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2013, p. 170.

⁵ Jackie, Smith: “Local Responses to Right-Wing Populism: Building Human Rights Cities”, *Studies in Social Justice*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2017, p. 347.

⁶ Oomen, Barbara / Moritz Baumgärtel: “Frontier Cities: “The Rise of Local Authorities as an Opportunity for International Human Rights Law”, *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2018, p. 607.

government services, presenting examples of this model from both global and Turkish contexts.

1. CONCEPTUAL EXPLANATIONS

The world is in a constant process of change and transformation, and within this process, it is observed that trends toward local governments worldwide have significantly increased. This is because local governments represent a democratic governance model, and being the units closest to the public, they stand out in the effective and efficient delivery of services. This prominence is explained by their democratic characteristics and their activity in providing services to their citizens within geographic boundaries in an equitable and fair manner, in alignment with human rights.

1.1. On Local Governments

All countries in the world must provide their citizens with public services as a whole, that is, in a complete, equal, and just manner. In order for these services to be carried out effectively and efficiently, countries structure their administrative organizations into “central government” on one side and “local governments” on the other. Moreover, the geographical, economic, socio-cultural, administrative activities, and historical processes of both developed and developing countries influence the manner in which services are delivered to the public and may even lead to differences.⁷ Additionally, local governments stand out as structures that have administrative, political, and financial aspects, which are present in almost all state administrative organizations, whether they are unitary or federal.⁸

Throughout history, local governments have always occupied a very important place within the tiers of administration. Essentially, after the first settlements called villages, settlements called cities were developed and with the emergence of cities, the process of humanity's influence on governance began. Until the modern concept of local governments emerged, cities passed on their experiences of local organization to future generations. With the emergence of modern local

⁷ Toprak, Zerrin: *Yerel Yönetimler*, 10th ed, Nobel Publications, 2021, p. 17.

⁸ Avşar, Yeter: *Yerel Yönetimlerde Güncel Gelişmeler ve Yerel Siyaset Tartışmaları*, (Ed: Aziz Belli, Abdullah Aydın, Ahmet Tunç), 1st ed., Orion Academic Publications, Ankara, 2022, p. 148.

governments, however, these entities diversified, gained power, and transformed into the fundamental tier of governance that forms the basis of modern states today.⁹ As a result of globalization and localization trends, almost all countries in the world have agreed that local governments represent a democratic governance model and an organizational style that delivers services more effectively and efficiently. Local governments have gained new qualities and functions, considering the evolving understandings and structures from industrial society to information society. In this context, the connection between local governments, cities, and urbanization highlights the spatial dimension of the services provided by local governments. Thus, local government units and cities have become the most affected areas due to the ongoing processes of globalization and localization, turning into the centers of democracy and service delivery. In short, this process represents a transition from a centralized industrial society to a localized information society.¹⁰

When looking at local governments in general, they exist outside the hierarchy of central government within the management tier. Services that require a minimum level of homogeneity and provide benefits that extend throughout the country—such as national-level services—are provided by the central government. However, there are certain services that are specific to certain regions, where the existence of different demands is also a consideration. It is at this point that local governments become necessary, and countries shape their administrative organizations accordingly. While the central government ensures unity and integrity in governance, the provision of local needs is met by the units organized as local governments.¹¹ These organizations, defined as public legal entities with an autonomous governance structure whose decision-making bodies are directly elected by the people to meet the common and local needs of a geographically defined local community, are indispensable elements of democratic life.¹² Due to their roles in the effective and efficient delivery

⁹ Parlak, Bekir: *Türkiye’de Yerel Yönetimler*, Değişim Publications, İstanbul, 2020, p. 29.

¹⁰ Ökmen, Mustafa: *Bir İnsan Hakkı Olarak Kentli Haklarının Geliştirilmesi ve Yerel Yönetimler*, 1st ed., İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2005, p. 24-25.

¹¹ Şengül, Ramazan: *Yerel Yönetimler*, 11th ed., Umuttepe Publications, İzmit-Kocaeli, 2020, p. 5.

¹² Kavruk, Hikmet: *Yerel ve Bölgesel Yönetimler*, 1st ed., Nobel Publications, Ankara, 2021, p. 17.

of local services, they have become essential management components in every society.¹³ These levels of governance have created their own space in parallel with the historical process, economic, social, and political structure of each society.¹⁴

Local governments generally constitute an important area of the state and specifically of public administration. As the primary area of organization in a country's public administration, local governments are also in a leading position in the service sector. These public administrations, which are directly responsible for urban management, organize themselves at the local level to form governance structures in developed societies.¹⁵

Although there is no definitive starting date for local governments, it is a prevailing view that democracy began with local governance. Indeed, it is possible to say that in Western societies with parliamentary democracy, local governments emerged first, followed by central governments.¹⁶ Local governments hold a significant position as the starting point of local democracy and the place where it is implemented. They play a direct role in strengthening local democracy, which in turn contributes to the strengthening of national democracy. Therefore, local governments are often referred to as the cradle of democracy. Additionally, they can be expressed as an indicator of a country's level of democratic development.¹⁷ Local governments encompass values such as “public participation in governance”, “the principle of majority”, “the importance of consultation by administrators”, “a constant sense of accountability” and “equality and fairness in the services expected by the public”, which are considered essential elements of democracy. This situation is crucial for the functioning of democracy, and local governments prepare the ground for it. Furthermore, local governments are now associated with values such as effectiveness, efficiency, representation, participation, democracy, and freedom. This is also a direct alignment with the four fundamental principles of democracy: majority rule, protection of minority

¹³ Keleş, Ruşen: *Yerinden Yönetim ve Siyaset*, 8th ed., Cem Publishing House, Ankara, 2012, p. 24.

¹⁴ Çiçek, Yeter: “Geçmişten Günümüze Türkiye’de Yerel Yönetimler”, *KSÜ Journal of Social Sciences*, 2014, p. 54

¹⁵ Parlak, 2020: p. 145-146.

¹⁶ Toprak, 2021: p. 20.

¹⁷ Parlak, 2020: p. 145-146.

rights, political equality, and regular elections. At this point, it is evident that local governments undeniably contribute to the process of democratization in society.¹⁸

It is evident that local governments are in constant motion with changing times, and they are more effective than nation-states in responding to the challenges of the century, ranging from climate change to economic policies and migration, alongside subnational communities and local authorities. It is also clear that national governments are more functional regarding national or regional assistance systems that mitigate the risks and spread the costs of general events affecting the nation, such as natural disasters. However, the increasing power of local communities has made national and subnational units less significant today, demonstrating that policy development and implementation yield more meaningful results at the local level.¹⁹

It is evident that local governments, especially municipalities, play a significant role in the life of an individual from birth to death within their geographical boundaries. The importance of local governments in ensuring the rightful exercise of the inherent rights of individuals cannot be denied. Along with this significance, the developments in today's world have further increased their importance, bringing cities to the forefront. Cities have entered into competition in terms of service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness, quality of work, and most importantly, providing the necessary democratic environment for people.²⁰ With the impact of globalization and the subsequent increase in urbanization, countries have sought to equip local governments, particularly municipalities, with greater powers, responsibilities, and autonomy. In line with these objectives, local governments have been granted significant administrative, legal, and financial authorities through various practices and legal texts, while the rights of the people living within the geographical boundaries of local governments have also been expanded and secured. With the growing recognition of the importance of local governments and cities, urban rights have begun to come to the forefront. The urban rights related to the fundamental rights and duties of the local population within

¹⁸ Çelebi, Burak: “Yerel Yönetimlerin Uluslararası Müdahaleleri İçin Yasal Bir Dayanak: Uluslararası Hukuk ve Kentli Haklar”, TESAM Academic Journal, 2014, p. 132.

¹⁹ Davis, Martha F.: Scoping the New Urban Human Rights Agenda. The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2019, p. 260.

²⁰ Parlak, 2020: p. 145-146.

local governments serve as a fundamental element in involving citizens in the democratic process and ensuring effectiveness and quality in local services. Moreover, urban rights are shaped on the foundation of basic, universal, inalienable, and equal rights and freedoms that all individuals possess.²¹ In this context, urban rights have become increasingly important as a human right.

1.2. On Human Rights

Human rights are a concept that has maintained its relevance due to the historical interest of multiple disciplines such as law, political science, and political philosophy, along with the definitions, discussions, and interpretations made about it.²² Human rights, in a brief and clear definition, refer to the rights and freedoms that all individuals possess simply by being human. This concept implies that individuals have certain rights that cannot be interfered with by anyone. Additionally, human rights begin at birth and do not end with the individual's death. This is a widely accepted notion, acknowledging that individuals are considered equal regardless of gender, race, ethnic background, language, or religious differences. These rights are regarded as natural rights, recognized as inviolable, non-transferable, and inalienable fundamental rights of human beings.²³ Furthermore, these rights are expressed as fundamental rights and privileges that no government can deprive individuals of. Human rights are a product of natural law, yet they also constitute fundamental rights enshrined in both international legal systems and the domestic legal systems of states. This indicates that they are affirmed by both natural law and positive law.²⁴

The intellectual foundations of human rights, which became part of everyday use after World War II, can be traced back to Ancient Greek and Roman Law. Over the course of history, demands for human rights have continually diversified and reshaped. Basic rights and freedoms, such as the right to life, personal security, privacy, freedom of movement, freedom

²¹ Kaypak, Şafak: “Avrupa Birliği Sürecinde Yerel Haklar ve Kente Yansıması”, I. International Symposium on the European Union, Democracy, Citizenship and Citizenship Education, 2009, p. 2.

²² Şengül, Taylan/Aygen, Anıl: “Arendt ve Douzınas’ın Düşüncelerinden İnsan Haklarını Okumak”, Journal of Human Rights Annual, vol. 41, 2023, p. 106.

²³ Kaypak, 2009: p. 2.

²⁴ Çelebi, 2014: p. 134.

of thought and conscience, freedom of expression and dissemination, the right to work, fair and just remuneration, social security, the right to form and join trade unions, the right to rest, housing, living in a healthy and balanced environment, education, health, the right to participate in citizenship, the right to vote and be elected, and the right to engage in political activities, are products of such a process, indicating that human rights have developed and diversified over time.²⁵

It is possible to say that significant written examples of human rights in Western societies began to emerge from the 13th century onwards. In this context, the Magna Carta Libertatum, signed in 1215 between King John of England and the nobles, stands out as a significant document in this field. This document serves as a human rights charter that encompasses individuals, as it limited the powers of the king, thus making it an important text concerning human rights in the West. Another notable document in England is the Bill of Rights, enacted in 1689. This document contains essential articles related to human rights, such as the presumption of innocence and legislative immunity. Furthermore, it influenced the United States Constitution and shaped the approach to human rights that would emerge at the United Nations, playing a vital role in the formation of texts associated with these entities.

As the 18th century approached, developments concerning human rights continued. The Declaration of Independence, proclaimed in 1776 and considered the founding document of the United States, emphasized that life and liberty are inalienable rights. Additionally, the U.S. Constitution, adopted in 1790 and subject to amendments over time, enshrined many fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, the right to property, freedom of the press, and the right to a fair trial.²⁶ Another significant document in the field of human rights is the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, dated 1789. Although this document is often perceived as a reiteration of the American declaration of rights, it is recognized as an important text in its own right.²⁷ Because this document possesses a more secular and nationalist character,

²⁵ Pektaş, Kadri Ethem/Akın, Fehmi: “Avrupa Kentsel Şartları Perspektifinde Bir Kentli Hakkı Olarak “Katılım Hakkı” ve Türkiye”, Afyon Kocatepe University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Journal, Vol. 12, No. 11, 2010, p. 24-25.

²⁶ Aydın, Ahmet: “Türkiye’de İnsan Hakları Algısı ve Milliyetçilik”, Journal of the Dicle Institute of Social Sciences, no. 36, 2024, p. 258.

²⁷ Çelebi, 2014: p. 135.

it serves as a response to arbitrary power and inequality, emerging as a product of the French Revolution.²⁸

Historically, human rights have become one of the primary areas of interest for societies, cities, states, and civilizations that encompass humanity. In contemporary times, there is a prevailing understanding of recognizing human dignity and inalienable rights. The subject of human rights has been codified into written rules through certain texts. Additionally, human rights have been reaffirmed in international law through various treaties. Moreover, it is evident that they are also guaranteed by constitutions in the internal laws of countries. Today, fundamental international rules regarding human rights are found in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the Paris Charter, and other similar agreements. Furthermore, the articles in these documents regulate what are known as personal and social rights.²⁹ From these documents, it is understood that the issue of human rights has transcended being merely an internal matter of states and has gained an international character. Thus, when states make regulations related to domestic law, they will also have to take into account the international human rights treaties.³⁰

It is possible to list certain characteristics that human rights have possessed throughout their historical development as follows:³¹

- *Universality*; the possession of all humans,
- *Absoluteness*; cannot be conditioned on any terms,
- *Inalienability*; existing since the first human and being the most fundamental rights,
- *Indispensability*; even if voluntarily given up,
- *Individuality*; pertaining solely to individuals,

²⁸ Aydın, 2024: p. 259.

²⁹ Ökmen, Mustafa: “Bir İnsan Hakkı Olarak Yerel Haklar ve Avrupa Kentsel Şartı”, Journal of Local Politics, 2009, p. 13.

³⁰ Aydın, 2024: p. 260.

³¹ Çelebi, 2014: p. 136.

- *Libertarianism*; prioritizing freedom,
- *Justiciability against the state*; considered to have a political aspect.

The aforementioned features, along with the historical process, indicate that there are various stages in the development and diversification of human rights. A general approach exists for classifying human rights. It is a common practice to categorize human rights into three stages, referred to as three separate generations, including their historical development. Accordingly, while some human rights theorists view first-generation human rights, which encompass fundamental rights, as superior, it is evident that human rights cannot be separated, and there can be no hierarchy among them. From this perspective, the view that there are three separate generations of human rights, all of which are significant and valuable in their own right, is currently supported.³² First-generation rights, known as the right to life, the protection of personality, the protection of private and family life, the right to property, the inviolability of the home, freedom of communication and settlement, freedom of religion and conscience, and freedom of association, among others; second-generation rights, known as economic and social rights such as the rights to unionize, strike, work and rest, social security, an adequate standard of living, health, education, and culture; and third-generation rights, such as the right to a healthy environment, the right to peace, the right to development, and the right to respect for humanity's common heritage—all have different aspects according to their characteristics, yet their fundamental qualities remain unchanged.³³

The trajectory of the development of human rights, along with their characteristics and the rights mentioned, indicates that they are protected and realized within specific domains. These domains manifest as cities, where the emphasis placed on urban quality of life is directly linked to the importance given to human rights. This is because cities that are regarded as ideal today are those that guarantee the rights of the people living within them. Consequently, for urban quality of life to be discussed in a city, it is essential to secure the rights of both individuals and communities. These

³² Akkoyunlu Ertan, Kıvılcım/Ertan, Birol: Hakları: Kent ve İnsan Hakları Bağlamında Kentsel Hizmetlere Erişim Hakkı, İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2013, p. 52.

³³ Çelebi, 2014: p. 135-136.

rights encompass not only the human rights that urban dwellers possess as individuals but also all the rights pertaining to the urban and environmental values of the city and the community to which they belong. From this perspective, it can be concluded that cities are the embodiment of human rights within urban spaces.³⁴ Cities are also spaces where social change occurs, and this, in turn, brings about social and cultural transformations for the people living in those cities. In this context, such change and transformation create variations in people's expectations, leading to both an increase and diversification in the demands for human rights among urban residents. Furthermore, this situation results in the adoption and implementation of international human rights norms at the urban level, and subsequently, at the local level. Therefore, local governments, which are responsible for city management, have obligations to protect and promote human rights through the local policies and practices they establish. Additionally, local governments play significant roles in this process.³⁵

2. UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As mentioned earlier, human rights have progressed over the course of history. The internationalization and even supranational development of human rights is directly related to the economic, social, cultural, and political-administrative understandings and structures observed in the world and within countries. The conditions surrounding capitalism, nation-states, and liberal democracy, which are common topics of discussion today, have brought significant changes to understandings and structures related to human rights. Developments and innovations emerging from the dynamics of globalization, democratization, and localization have revealed the close relationship between local governments and human rights.

Urban rights, which refer to the fundamental rights and responsibilities of the members of local communities within the geographical area for which local governments are responsible, serve as a means to involve community members in the democratic processes of local governments and ensure effectiveness and efficiency in the local services provided by these governments. These rights, referred to as urban rights,

³⁴ Pektaş / Fehmi, 2010: p. 25.

³⁵ Canalıoğlu Çınar, Eser: “İnsan Haklarının Yerelleşmesi ve İnsan Hakları Kenti”, Ombudsman Academic, Vol. 10, No. 20, 2024, p. 280.

are fundamental, universal, and inviolable rights that all individuals possess and are shaped upon the foundation of equal rights and freedoms.³⁶

Cities are the spaces where urban rights materialize, and especially with the increasing shrinkage of rural areas and the growing population living in urban environments, this situation becomes even more significant. The fact that more people reside in cities keeps the rights of the individuals living there consistently in the spotlight.³⁷ Cities are not merely passive recipients of human rights in international law and policy; rather, they are significant governance units that act as subjects or norm entrepreneurs.³⁸ Moreover, city administrations have the capacity to produce and implement policies that integrate human rights through their roles as democratic, rule-making, and service-providing institutions. Given their formation, city administrations possess the potential to fulfill local-level obligations and political declarations. Incorporating human rights into city governance is not only a complement to good governance but also a rational option in both political and economic terms. While the responsibility for human rights obligations lies with the state, it is the state that becomes a party to international human rights treaties, and the state exercises these powers through its subordinate structures, which are public administrations. Additionally, human rights come to the forefront in cities due to citizens' interactions with public administrations in their daily lives, making it easier for citizens to demand these rights in urban settings. Consequently, fostering a culture of human rights has become crucial in shaping the implementation of local policies over time.³⁹ As a result of recent developments, the increasing importance of urban rights or urban rights leads to improvements in the quality and effectiveness of local services, the creation of economic, social, and cultural opportunities within local communities, and the enhancement of the sense of community. Furthermore, the effective citizen participation in local governments that arises from these rights also adds value to urban rights.⁴⁰ Of course, it can be observed that all these developments occur through local governments.

³⁶ Ökmen, 2005: p. 28.

³⁷ Kaypak, 2009: p. 12.

³⁸ Oomen, Barbara/ Elif Durmuş: "Cities and Plural Understandings of Human Rights: Agents, Actors, Arenas", *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2019, p. 141-150.

³⁹ Canalıoğlu Çınar, 2024: p. 283.

⁴⁰ Kaypak, 2009: p. 12.

The democratic nature inherent in the definition of local governments demonstrates their compatibility with universal human rights, while local governments also serve as a prerequisite for respecting human rights and promoting their development and expansion. From this perspective, the advancement of human rights appears to be impossible without genuine local governance and democracy. The structure and functioning of local governments directly influence the recognition and safeguarding of human rights by citizens. By embedding the protection and promotion of human rights in local focal points, local governments also provide the most suitable environments for practices concerning particularly vulnerable segments of society.⁴¹ Additionally, the fact that local governments serve as indirect carriers of human rights by utilizing governance-based methods, ensuring the participation of particularly at-risk and disadvantaged groups, incorporating civil society into decision-making mechanisms to the broadest extent, and embracing principles of accountability and transparency serves as an indication that local governments reflect human rights in everyday life.⁴² This has manifested itself in the form of urban rights.

When examining the historical foundations of urban rights or, in other words, urban rights, it is evident that the origins of these rights date back to ancient times. The documents that recognize these rights for urban residents are of great importance, as they contain the rights that must be respected, fulfilled, and protected in order to prevent human rights violations that arise in today's cities.⁴³ It is possible to specify these chronologically as follows:⁴⁴

- The first document is the 1871 *Paris Commune*, which addresses individual freedoms as well as human rights related to municipal freedom.
- In the 1871 *French Municipal Law*, there was a mention of the protection of urban environmental health.

⁴¹ Ökmen, 2009: p. 29.

⁴² Akay, Hale: Yerel Yönetimler İçin İnsan Hakları Temelli Programlama ve Hizmet Sunumu, Türkiye Avrupa Vakfı Publications, İstanbul, 2015a, p. 4.

⁴³ Zeybekoğlu Sadri, Senem: Kentsel Dönüşüm ve Kentte İnsan Hakları, İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2013, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Akkoyunlu Ertan/ Ertan, 2013: pp. 58-62.

- The 1941 *Athens Agreement* is another document that contains fundamental urban principles.

- The *constitution* enacted by the *World Health Organization* in 1946 stated that being healthy is a fundamental right.

- *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations*, dated December 10, 1948, is the first document that establishes the framework for rights and freedoms globally, detailing the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes rights to life, food, clothing, housing, healthcare, and essential social services.

- *The European Convention on Human Rights*, adopted in 1950, included first-generation rights related to urban citizenship.

- *The European Social Charter*, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1961, provides important information regarding economic and social rights.

- *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, dated 1961, also emphasizes rights related to economic, social, and cultural aspects.

- *The UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I)* held in Vancouver in 1976 discussed state obligations regarding urban rights, such as housing and urbanization. Similar conferences have been held in subsequent years, highlighting urban rights.

- *The European Urban Charter*, adopted by the Council of Europe from March 17-19, 1992, is considered a starting point for urban rights. This Charter aims to shape the management of urban living spaces with democratic and participatory elements, focusing on developing urban rights that are guaranteed as human rights, under the slogan of "a better life in towns." The Charter also describes how an ideal city should be structured to guarantee urban rights and the right to live in a healthy city. The fundamental philosophy of the Charter is to define the responsibilities of local authorities for urban development, establish universal principles for urban development and quality of life, foster solidarity among administrative units, and affirm that citizens possess a number of fundamental urban rights that apply to all residents without

discrimination.⁴⁵ The Charter also includes numerous guiding universal principles in parallel with the call for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. Two principles that are notably adopted in the Charter are “cooperation and solidarity”. The Charter emphasizes these two principles to enhance the quality of life in urban living by decentralizing decision-making mechanisms from central authorities to local governments, thereby aiming to “understand the various problems of cities closely and involve local populations in decision-making processes.”⁴⁶

As a third-generation human right, urban rights can be categorized in various ways due to their integration with local governments and the contribution they make to quality of life⁴⁷ through democratic, egalitarian, inclusive, and community-development-supporting policies. These can be listed as follows: ⁴⁸

- The right to live in an urban environment that respects human rights and is open to the development of this right, providing opportunities for the welfare and personal development of its citizens.
- The right to live in a safe city protected from attacks and crime.
- The right to live in an urban environment free from environmental issues such as air, water, and soil pollution, where ecological balances are preserved.
- The right of urban residents to request the necessary infrastructure to develop their economic and social initiatives.
- The right of urban residents to have access to a variety of goods and services.
- The right to have suitable working conditions and job security and to benefit from the local economic development of the city.

⁴⁵ Kaypak, 2009: p. 11.

⁴⁶ Pektaş /Akın, 2010: p. 28.

⁴⁷ Kaşıkırık, Ayşe: “Avrupa Yerel Yaşamda Kadın-Erkek Eşitliği Şartını İmzalayan Belediyelerin Kadına Yönelik Şiddetle Mücadele Perspektifi”, Econdor International Academic Journal, No. 5, Vol. 1, 2021, p. 25.

⁴⁸ Ökmen, 2005: p. 30- 31.

- The right to have opportunities to acquire a pluralistic urban culture.
- The right to live in a city where no one is excluded from working and social life due to cultural differences, where they are not relegated to secondary positions, in a multicultural integration, and to live in a city that they can identify with, which gives them a sense of belonging and identity.
- The right of urban residents to elect and be elected to local governments that provide services in the cities, to participate in decision-making processes, to maintain ongoing democratic oversight over governance, and to have the right to tax themselves in a way that enables the improvement of the urban environment and services.

While it is possible to increase the number of items listed above, it is evident from these points that local governments, as the management units closest to citizens and individuals, provide significant contributions in various ways to the process of protecting and developing human rights. Important contributions of local governments also include effective local, national, regional, and global democracy, freedom of information and expression, and respect for individuals' privacy in the face of technological society and the state. Additionally, ensuring that there is no discrimination of any kind, establishing effective equality among the poor, the underprivileged, and minority groups, and protecting the rights of local community members—namely urban rights—are among the most important of these contributions, as well as analyzing the fundamental concepts of human rights in democracies.⁴⁹ As seen, local governments have taken on an important role as actors in the context of official and international human rights frameworks.⁵⁰ The existence of local governments in all stages of the establishment and development of human rights is an undeniable reality. Based on this, it is possible to outline the responsibilities of local governments in the field of human rights as follows:⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ökmen, 2009: p. 15-16.

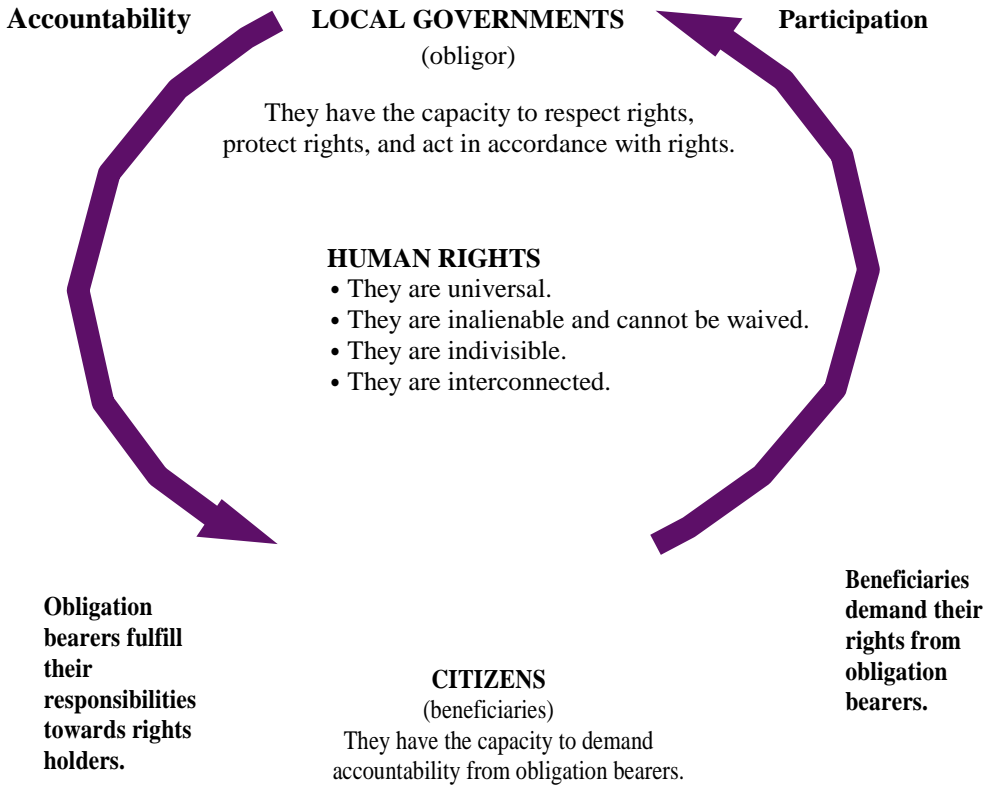
⁵⁰ Oomen/ Durmuş, 2019: p. 142.

⁵¹ Akay, Hale: Yerel Yönetimler İçin İnsan Hakları Temelli Yaklaşım: Kavramsal Çerçeve ve En İyi Uygulama Örnekler, Türkiye Avrupa Foundation Publications, İstanbul, 2015b, p. 5.

- *Duty to Respect Rights:* This responsibility means that local authorities should avoid infringing on human rights through their actions. Local authorities must not interfere with the rights and freedoms of their citizens within their jurisdiction. For instance, with regard to freedom of religious belief, local governments should allow religious groups to use public spaces within defined limits for their religious celebrations. Similarly, regarding the right to health, local governments should refrain from actions that would prevent certain communities or groups from accessing health facilities within their jurisdiction.

- *Duty to Protect Rights:* This duty involves taking measures to ensure that citizens' rights and freedoms are not violated by others within the local government's geographical boundaries. For example, local governments should act against any activities that prevent children from attending school. Additionally, creating safe urban spaces to reduce or completely prevent violence against women is an example of the local government's role in protecting rights.

- *Duty to Enable and Facilitate the Use of Rights:* This responsibility involves local governments taking actions to facilitate citizens' enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. For instance, local governments can support access to education rights through the educational resources they provide within their jurisdiction.



As seen above,⁵² local governments, as duty-bearers, are responsible for fulfilling their human rights-centered duties to citizens, who are the rights-holders. Additionally, it is essential that they exercise accountability and pursue participatory policies in carrying out these responsibilities.

In the *Research-Based Report on the Role of Local Governments in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights*, prepared for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2015, the relationship between local governments and human rights was highlighted. This report serves as an international acknowledgment of the strong connection between human rights and local governments. According to the report, local governments are the bodies responsible for the management of cities, positioned closest to citizens within local communities to address their daily needs and frequently dealing with human rights issues. Therefore, a clear and strong link is seen between local governments and human rights. Local governments, in fulfilling their duties, responsibilities, and

⁵² Akay, 2015a: p. 16.

obligations, make decisions and implement them on matters such as education, housing, health, and environment, which are directly related to human rights and influence the ability of residents to benefit from these rights. Additionally, local governments are at risk of directly encountering discriminatory practices against groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities. However, by integrating human rights into their activities, local governments can prevent situations that might lead to such rights violations. If human rights-based activities by local governments are not perceived by authorized institutions or the public as human rights practices, and human rights are excluded from policies and practices at the local level, issues related to human rights are likely to arise. At this point, it should be remembered that the development, strengthening, and true impact of human rights are first experienced at the local level.⁵³

3. ADDRESSING THE "HUMAN RIGHTS CITY" IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The approach of the Human Rights City has taken its place on the global agenda over the past decade and is observed to have an increasingly significant importance today. When examining the foundation of this approach, it becomes evident that while human rights are addressed universally, internationally, and nationally, especially in the context of norm-setting, the authority, duties, responsibilities, and functions of local governments are crucial in the implementation and realization stages of these rights. The key factor in the widespread adoption and importance of the Human Rights City concept is the increase in urban populations and, subsequently, the number of cities, along with the substantial population movement that has brought about changes in the function and effectiveness of cities. This urbanization brings together many different individuals with diverse needs and expectations. Consequently, structures and approaches that provide new solutions to the resulting complex problems have become necessary. The Human Rights City, which places a rights-based perspective at its core for addressing current issues and solutions, emerges today as cities that, combined with local governments, embody and implement values and approaches such as local representation,

⁵³ Akay, 2015b: p. 4.

participation, democratization, and equality, creating a new culture of coexistence.⁵⁴

3.1. Human Rights City

The human rights city is, in its broadest sense, an approach that brings together local governments and human rights. It is defined as the implementation of the existing human rights norms and standards at the universal level at the local level, particularly with municipalities, which hold a dominant position within local governments, using these as a reference. As is well known, while the primary responsibility for supporting and protecting human rights lies with central governments, municipalities are the institutions that implement international and national human rights strategies and policies in everyday life. Furthermore, the serious pressures created by migration, urbanization, and the subsequent population increase have transformed local governments, especially municipalities, into key actors in the human rights city approach. In this context, today's developing sustainable cities, social cities, healthy cities, smart cities, energy cities, walkable cities, intercultural cities, age-friendly cities, women-friendly cities, child-friendly cities, and many similar urban networks target local governments, with their fundamental aim being to improve urban life and the environment and ensure its quality. At the core of this objective are human rights, including the right to health, the right to the environment, economic, social, and cultural rights, which are implemented through local government policies and practices. In this direction, it is aimed to adapt human rights to the local context and daily life through local governments by integrating them into urban policies, practices, and services with the human rights city approach.⁵⁵ The human rights city emerges from the solidarity and collaboration among various social actors, including civil society and human rights organizations, municipalities, and their networks.⁵⁶ Additionally, the concept of the human rights city represents a global initiative aimed at localizing human rights. This idea views cities as key players in the protection, support, implementation, and development

⁵⁴ Şenesen, Gülay Günlük/Arun, Özgür/Aykara, Aslıhan/Sunata, Ulaş/Thibert, Âdem Arkadaş/Yücel, Yelda: İnsan Hakları Kentleri Göstergeleri, Emsal Printing House, Ankara, 2021, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Şenesen/Arun/ Aykara/Sunata/Thibert/Yücel, 2021: p. 10.

⁵⁶ Grigolo, Michele: The Human Rights City: New York, San Francisco, Barcelona, Routledge, Londra and New York, 2019.

of human rights. Furthermore, it envisions a city that is governed in accordance with human rights norms, along with a local population that is aware of this consciousness.⁵⁷

In recent times, an interesting development regarding the interaction between human rights and legal pluralism has been the emergence of human rights cities. These cities can be understood as local governments that explicitly base their policies on international human rights law. Here, cities become a shorthand for local governance, representing the lowest tier of public administration within a given state. This certainly includes small hamlets and districts, as well as metropolises that have economies larger than some nations. However, the common denominator here is the situation of possessing a certain degree of official power related to governmental functions and being the level of government closest to citizens. The ways in which local governments engage with human rights are equally diverse. These entities may undertake activities such as signing declarations and agreements, establishing dedicated human rights offices and councils, and developing comprehensive local human rights policies. Such engagements contribute to the proliferation of human rights in various forms both within the cities and towns themselves and globally.⁵⁸

The concept of a human rights city was first used in 1997 by an international civil society organization called the “People’s Movement for Human Rights Education”, based in the United States. Following this, with a program developed around this concept, the municipal council of Rosario, Argentina, recognized the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as guiding fundamental principles for the municipality in the same year. Other cities, such as Graz (2001), Montreal (2006), Mexico City (2010), Barcelona (2010), Gwangju (2011), Utrecht (2011), Vienna (2014), New York City (2017), and Lund (2018), have also adopted these relevant fundamental principles, taking Rosario as an example. Furthermore, since 2011, the “World Human Rights Cities Forum” has been held annually in Gwangju, South Korea. During the 2014 forum, guiding principles for the implementation of the human rights city concept⁵⁹ were established. This guide includes 10 principles, which

⁵⁷ Akay, 2015b: p. 7.

⁵⁸ Oomen/Durmuş, 2019: p. 145.

⁵⁹ Bkz. World Human Rights Cities Forum (2014) Guiding Principles for a Human Rights City (Gwangju Principles), <https://www.uclg->

exemplify concepts such as the right to the city, the prevention of discrimination and affirmative action, participatory democracy, and accountable governance.⁶⁰

Today, for a city to define itself as a human rights city, it needs three intertwined types of human rights organization. The first is the localization of human rights by the city through its local policies and practices, which is carried out by local governments. The second is that the city administration, in its efforts to implement human rights, must cooperate and demonstrate solidarity with all levels of governance, including international parties. The third is the development of initiatives and networks among city administrations themselves.⁶¹ In this context, the human rights city approach, which is embraced and developed by cities, networks, platforms, local governments, and civil society organizations, has also been recognized and supported by regional and global international organizations that engage with central governments. In this scope, the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985), developed by the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, is an important document that outlines the fundamental characteristics of local democracy, autonomy, and decentralization principles. Additionally, especially the European Urban Charter I (1992) and the European Urban Charter II (2008), developed as a manifesto for a new urbanity, have become key policy documents serving as guidelines for citizens' rights in local governments.⁶² The European Urban Charter III (2023) provides an updated compilation of common principles and concepts that enable cities and towns to respond to the challenges facing today's urban populations. The Charter builds on the original European Urban Charter, the European Charter of Urban Rights (1992) and the European Urban Charter II - Manifesto for a New Urbanity (2008). The updated Charter takes into account the transformations that have taken place in recent decades and the major challenges affecting urban societies, such as the Russian Federation's aggressive war against Ukraine, terrorism,

cisd.org/sites/default/files/Gwangju%20Guiding%20Principles%20for%20Human%20Rights%20City%20adopted%20on%2017%20May%202014.pdf, Accessed: 01.10.2024.

⁶⁰ Kentisel Stratejiler ve Yerel Uygulamalar Derneği: Kentte İnsan Hakkı, 2022, p. 9. (<https://www.kentlab.org/index.php/yayinlar/125-kentte-insan-hakki-2022>, Accessed: 01.10.2024.

⁶¹ Canalıoğlu Çınar, 2024: p. 284.

⁶² Şenesen/ Arun/ Aykara/Sunata/ Thibert/ Yücel, 2021: p. 15.

growing inequalities, accelerating climate change, natural disasters and public health crises.⁶³

The human rights city approach has been supported at international, national, regional, and local levels, as seen,⁶⁴ and countries have prioritized local governments in the development of cities, particularly in protecting, advocating for, and promoting the rights of their citizens. The concept of a human rights city also highlights local governments in the protection and implementation of fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by constitutions at the local level. In this context, it is observed that cities declaring their intention to become human rights cities commit to considering human rights as a primary principle in their local policies and practices and to implementing them.⁶⁵ Countries that are parties to the policy documents mentioned above, which are considered significant in the context of human rights cities, also demonstrate their progress toward becoming human rights cities by incorporating the principles outlined in these documents into their domestic policies.

3.2. Examples of Human Rights City Practices From Around the World And Türkiye

As a result of recent developments, international and regional organizations are trying to incorporate human rights into local policies and practices through local governments, making them part of urban policy. Consequently, human rights cities emerge as municipalities that integrate international treaties into local policies and practices. Encountered as human rights actors at the local level, human rights cities give a local meaning to the existing international understanding of human rights and adopt a governance approach based on the principles of participation and equality. Therefore, city administrations play an important role in the implementation and development of international human rights law.⁶⁶ At this point, city administrations are currently striving to become human

⁶³ The European Urban Charter III (2023):
<https://www.scribd.com/document/776996152>, Accessed: 05.12.2024

⁶⁴ Domaradzka, Anna: Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Urban Mobilization. *Voluntas, International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2018, p. 607.

⁶⁵ Canalıoğlu Çınar, 2024: p. 288.

⁶⁶ Canalıoğlu Çınar, 2024: p. 286.

rights cities and reflecting human rights-specific policies and practices in their governance.

Below ⁶⁷ are some cities considered human rights cities from around the world and Türkiye. When selecting these cities, the most important criterion was their direct reflection of human rights in local-level policies and practices.

- In the city of Utrecht, Netherlands, a democratic experiment has been initiated to share and expand the responsibility of creating an energy plan that will help achieve climate neutrality by 2030. The initiative is based on the slogan "City Talks on Sustainable Energy: The Silent Majority Speaks." While it is known that energy affects everyone, city managers have realized that discussions about the energy action plan in Utrecht typically only engage citizens who have a specific interest in the topic. In response, the city has implemented a program to reach citizens who are normally not part of the discussion. As a result, Utrecht has included 10,000 randomly selected citizens in the process of developing the city's new energy action plan. The plan outlines Utrecht's journey toward carbon neutrality by 2030. The city has involved these 10,000 citizens, along with 166 experts and other stakeholders, to help define the city's energy transformation. Granting this responsibility to citizens within the city, while shaking traditional thinking, promotes the generation of new ideas and establishes a citizen-inclusive approach in the plans and programs for sustainable energy.⁶⁸ The city's initiative to engage in such an effort demonstrates its commitment to citizen participation, which embodies the practical implementation of human rights in local policies and practices on the path to becoming a human rights city.

- In Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Ireland, under the 2014 reform of local government legislation, the Municipal Councils establish committees known as Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) to evaluate issues related to the formulation, development, monitoring, and review of policies concerning the functions of local authorities. These committees facilitate citizen participation in the public policies being developed by establishing direct connections with citizens. The SPCs, which actively engage with local governments, hold significant responsibilities in their respective

⁶⁷ Akay, 2015b: p. 29- 33.

⁶⁸ Urban Sustainability Exchange: <https://use.metropolis.org/case-studies/city-talks-on-sustainable-energy-the-silent-majority-speaks>, Accessed: 05.10.2024.

areas—such as environment, housing, transportation, etc.—and maintain strong connections with public institutions. Moreover, the SPCs are formed with citizen participation,⁶⁹ aiming to give citizens a voice in shaping and directing policies and practices throughout the city.

- In Berlin, Germany, the “Youth Election Project U18” is a representative voting initiative that takes place nine days before actual elections, either local or national. The project is designed to spark interest in politics among young people and support their political education. Due to the distance young people often feel from politics in Berlin, the U18 project helps make political engagement fun and accessible. Throughout the year, participating youth examine manifestos, form parties, and engage in discussions with politicians, culminating in a mock election held a week before the actual elections. Organizations that work with young people, from schools to youth centers, can register as “voting centers” and benefit from online educational resources. The program addresses the noticeable gap in political education in schools, and its success in reaching 198, 365 young people from diverse backgrounds during the 2013 parliamentary elections, alongside the project's growth in both scale and reputation,⁷⁰ marks significant steps in strengthening the local application of human rights.

- *In Victoria, Australia, the municipality* has prepared numerous guidelines aimed at incorporating human rights principles into its existing strategic plans and service delivery activities and practices. Additionally, citizens can access these guidelines online.

- *The municipality of Galdakao in Spain* has initiated a study to identify the specific needs of women in terms of their freedom of movement and the design of urban spaces. This research involved interviews with nearly 70 women from nine different neighborhoods. The opinions and recommendations of the participating women were gathered to increase their access opportunities, improve public transportation services, and ensure the appropriate design of urban spaces. Following this study, a report was prepared, which was then transformed into an Action

⁶⁹Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2019-2024: https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/default/files/atoms/files/adopted_strategic_policy_committee_scheme_2019_-_2024_25_11_2019.pdf, Accessed: 06.10.2024.

⁷⁰ Urban Sustainability Exchange: <https://use.metropolis.org/case-studies/youth-election-project-u18>, Accessed: 06.10.2024.

Plan. The aim here is to ensure equal representation at the local level and to find solutions to gender issues.⁷¹

• *The city council of Vienna, Austria*, has signed the Human Rights City Vienna declaration. This declaration states that the fundamental principles of human rights will be accepted and promoted in all areas of political and administrative decision-making and activities in Vienna.⁷²

As seen in the examples selected from around the world above, cities have engaged in significant efforts and activities at the local level on the path to becoming human rights cities. The example practices and outcomes are the clearest evidence of this.

Due to rapid population growth and rapid urbanization, local governments in Türkiye are increasingly in need of financial resources and up-to-date plans to keep up with developing technologies. On the other hand, the mobility of people in cities due to migration caused by various reasons creates pressure on the services provided locally and increases social conflicts. In response to these and similar current issues identified as problem areas, the “Cities of Human Rights” project has been taken up in Türkiye with the aim of creating inclusive solution areas for local governments that are sensitive to different social groups living in that region. In Türkiye, the human rights city project aims to adapt and reflect the rights of disadvantaged groups such as “elderly”, “disabled”, “women”, “children” and “refugees/migrants”, which are guaranteed by international and national laws, into urban life as principles through daily local governance and municipal services. The three-year project, covering the period from 2018 to 2020, is conducted in partnership with Lund University in Sweden, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, the Union of Turkish World Municipalities, and Research Worldwide Istanbul. However, the sustainability of this project continues today. Within the scope of the project, the metropolitan municipalities of Ankara, Antalya, Gaziantep, Istanbul, and Mersin have been selected, focusing on a rights-based approach to the municipality’s strategic plans for the year 2019.⁷³ In

⁷¹ Akay, 2015b: s. 29- 33.

⁷² İnsan Hakları Kenti Viyana: <https://www.wien.gv.at/tr/birarada/insanhaklari/>, Accessed: 04.10.2024.

⁷³ Research Worldwide İstanbul: <https://www.rwistanbul.org/insan-haklari-kentleri.php>, Accessed: 06.10.2024.

the first stage, these municipalities were within the scope of the project. Subsequently, the following municipalities have not only left their work within the scope of the project in the strategic plan, but have also put it into practice. Below, various practices of municipalities that can be considered on the road to becoming a human rights city are evaluated.

- *Istanbul Zeytinburnu Municipality* aims to enable individuals with various disabilities who receive services from the Family Women's Support and Disabled Center to express the accessibility issues they face through its implemented “Change Project”. The project encourages these individuals to think about solutions to their problems.⁷⁴ At this point, the aim is to enhance communication between the municipality and disability groups.

- *Izmir Karşıyaka Municipality* has carried out two activities on the path to becoming a human rights city. One of these is the establishment of the “Human Rights Unit” within the municipality, and the other is the “Rights Center Unit”. Through these activities, it has been stated that the municipality will collaborate with public institutions and civil society organizations to create a culture of human rights in society, promote the understanding, protection, and development of these rights, and implement joint projects and events. Additionally, it has been indicated that awareness-based conferences and training programs will be organized, with the goal of developing rights-based local government policies.⁷⁵

- *Konya Karatay Municipality* has organized training sessions and seminars on human rights for its staff to raise awareness and ensure the adoption of the human rights city project. It has been stated that these trainings and seminars were also conducted online. In this initiative, the municipality has particularly highlighted human rights principles such as the right to a healthy environment and the right to peace.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Zeytinburnu Belediyesi: <https://zeytinburnu.istanbul/projeler/sosyal-projeler/degisim-projesi/>, Accessed: 06.10.2024.

⁷⁵ İzmir Karşıyaka Belediyesi: <https://karsiyaka.bel.tr/karsiyaka-insan-haklari-kenti-olacak>, Accessed: 05.12.2024.

⁷⁶ Karatay Belediyesi: <https://karatay.bel.tr/haberdetay/1192/karatay-belediyesi-personeline-insan-haklari-konul>, Accessed: 06.10.2024.

• *Istanbul Maltepe Municipality*, within the framework of the human rights city project, has created a link⁷⁷ “in the name of participation in the city” to invite various institutions and citizens to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the municipality's activities and projects.⁷⁸ This situation allows for the participation of all institutions and citizens within the city in the services provided by the municipality and demonstrates the importance the municipality places on feedback regarding its services. Additionally, the realization of participation and the municipality's redesign of its services based on these results contribute to the development of human rights within the city.

• *In collaboration with Antalya Muratpaşa Municipality*, a workshop was conducted in 2019 as part of the Human Rights Cities Project, carried out by the Turkish World Municipalities Union and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in partnership with Research Worldwide Istanbul. This workshop focused on the development of services for disadvantaged groups in municipalities in Türkiye, including the elderly, disabled individuals, women, children, and refugees. Throughout the workshop, presentations, workshops, and information sharing sessions were held.⁷⁹

• It has been observed that *68 municipalities in Türkiye* have signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (CEMR), which is seen as an important step towards becoming a human rights city. This charter aims to ensure that all segments of society benefit equally from services at the local and regional levels in Europe. The charter supports the participation of citizens in the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes of municipal services. It emphasizes that different segments may have different needs and that municipalities should shape their services accordingly, assessing this within the framework of human rights.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Bkz. <https://kentekatilim.org/gorus/19.3427.1.8.2.F1>, Accessed: 05.12.2024.

⁷⁸ İstanbul Maltepe Belediyesi: <https://kentekatilim.org/gorus/19.3427.1.8.2.F1>, Accessed: 04.10.2024.

⁷⁹ Antalya Muratpaşa Belediyesi: <https://muratpasa-bld.gov.tr/haber/4819/insan-haklari-kentleri-icin-calistay>, Accessed: 04.10.2024.

⁸⁰ European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (CEMR) https://www.tbb.gov.tr/Tr/icerik_cemr-avrupa-yerel-yasamda-kadin-erkek-esitligi-sarti_304, Accessed: 03.10.2024.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

With the 21st century, as a result of the economic, political, social, and cultural developments and changes occurring worldwide, positive advancements in areas such as representation, participation, democratization, and human rights have been witnessed, while on the other hand, various problems have emerged, including international environmental issues like climate change and the challenges posed by migration. Additionally, as a consequence of this process, a significant increase in the number of cities and the populations residing in them has been observed. This situation makes local governments important institutions as they are the units directly responsible for the management of urban areas, and with the effect of globalisation, local governments, which are the units that citizens will be in direct contact with, are becoming more and more effective.

Local governments are considered the cradle of direct democracy, and their role in protecting and promoting human rights based on the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens living in the city is an undeniable reality. The urban right that exist in practice within the context of the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens are implemented by local governments. These rights are also included in international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Urban Charter, and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, guiding policies and practices produced at both the national and local levels. In this regard, local governments play a crucial role as significant actors in the protection and implementation of human rights at the local level.

Historically, the emergence of urban rights has been rooted in urban areas, and recent developments observed in these areas have brought the approach of human rights cities to the agenda of countries. In short, the human rights city, which brings together local governments and human rights, aims to transfer and establish the rights and freedoms existing at the universal level to the local context. In this process, cities are making various efforts to become human rights cities, and the common point of these efforts, as previously stated, is to reflect human rights in the local context.

When looking at cities around the world striving to become human rights cities, it can be observed that their practices focus on involving citizens in local services and policies, allowing citizens to evaluate the

services offered, including all groups within the city in local services, approaching citizens based on the principle of equality, preventing discrimination, and protecting and supporting fundamental rights and freedoms. However, it should be noted that the aspects mentioned do not exist as a whole in a single municipal example. Municipalities are seen to work on the human rights city project by focusing on specific areas. Given that these rights are interconnected, it is important for the projects to focus on the entirety rather than concentrating on just one aspect of urban rights from a holistic perspective. Looking at examples in Türkiye, local governments are seen to attempt to implement international documents that address human rights regarding fundamental rights and freedoms. In this context, it has been observed that the municipalities mentioned in the study mainly focus on awareness-raising initiatives. However, while it is stated that various projects are carried out within the framework of human rights cities, the lack of information on the sustainability and outcomes of these projects can be considered a shortcoming. In this regard, in an age where information and communication have advanced, the active use of institutional websites for municipalities to provide necessary information can significantly enhance awareness on the path to becoming human rights cities. Alongside all of this, the importance that local governments, particularly municipalities, place on the delivery of local services is directly related to the value they give to citizens, which is considered equivalent to their respect for human rights. In the changing conditions of today, local governments bear significant responsibilities and are primary institutions in ensuring human rights at the local level. Therefore, the increase in the number of human rights cities will also be facilitated by the contributions of local governments.

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