

## **Informal Settlements Upgrading: the *Gecekondus* in Ankara**

### **Introduction**

The forms of the urbanisation process at the present stage of globalisation lead to the observation that, at the beginning of the new millennium, we are at a painful cross-roads, where roads on one side direct towards the promise of a bright future and on the other side towards the threat of an unequalled disaster. While huge parts of the Planet will become desert, the painful dilemma, in the city, will result in pleasant, often hyper-equipped sites or in the hell of peripheries. These two roads, now two aspects of the same reality, are joined by a myriad of paths traced and followed by hundred million homeless, in sharp contrast (D. Rodrik, 1997) with the present process of concentration of finance world-wide in the "Mondial Cities" (P. Hall, 1966) and the "Global City" (S. Sassen, 1991 and 1994). The new geography is generating a new hierarchy of interconnected places and centres (G. Dematteis, 1985).

The masses of immigrants in many cases aren't metabolised by the city and finally occupy illegally unsuitable often dangerous sites. Hence the informal settlements start with the involved political, environmental and mostly social problems by which the administrations are confronted. International and national researchers and institutions in last years concentrated on the problem of informal settlements, reaching the conclusion that the solution of the problem with its different aspects and impact in the various regions of the world, is closely correlated with the interaction of different factors: the participation of inhabitants in the choices, the local government capacity, the available resources, while the "say" of central government is less significant. The growth of globalisation phenomena in the cities is reflected in the two aspects of creation and change in central sites and in the segmentation of the urban space and population, sudden enrichment and impoverishment and increase in diffuse poverty, which change the use and property of huge urban areas.



*Ankara surrounded by informal settlements (gecekondus) as far as the eye can see.*



*View of the gececondus: it is evident the hydro-geologic erosion of the hill on which they are built.*

The so called informal settlements, a present widespread phenomenon of enormous dimensions in the developing countries, has characterised the urban growth of the Turkish big cities from the sixties<sup>1</sup>. These squatter settlements are called *gecekondu*<sup>2</sup>. The huge dimension of the phenomenon after 1960 transformed the original individual urgent need of immigrants for a simple shelter, into a complex social, economic, cultural and thus political problem, involving both the central government and local administrations.

The upgrading of the informal settlement analysed by this study, part of a wider research, should be considered a particular case, or rather an exceptional one, in the general context of interventions and policies adopted in Turkey to solve the problems arisen by this type of settlements. The growth of the apparently merely "physical" phenomenon, in the present phase of globalisation, has become increasingly complex and represents a political, economic environmental and mainly social phenomenon. Laws issued to legalise such settlements were not able to solve the problem, worsened by speculations which have strengthened and widened the phenomenon of illegal land occupation and the building of *gecekondu*.

In this paper the exceptional case of Dikmen Valley – to the south of Ankara in the Çankaya Municipality – is represented by the fact that upgrading has become part of the city planning of Greater Ankara, a planning from which the Dikmen Valley Project has found support for its implementation. The city project has profited from the collaboration of the Mayor of Ankara (as representative of the Great Municipality) and of the Managers of the Metropol İmar A.S., one of the biggest building concerns of Turkey, while the Çankaya Municipality has directed the Dikmen Valley Project. These three outstanding figures are engaged in a process of urban renewal to implement the new residential settlement equipped with facilities, together with the important arrangement as park of Dikmen Valley, to the advantage of the entire city. While this choice has strongly sustained the project implementation, it did not solve the *gecekondu* problem because the experience could not be applied to the huge illegal settlements around the central city which form the great periphery of Ankara.



*Schematic map of Greater Ankara showing the gecekondus in their different status (GETAP Project, 1990).*

The specificity of Dikmen Valley Project, as being located in a consolidated building system, represents an exceptional case of transformation of a huge informal settlement. The high economic value of the land there, has made the elimination of the informal settlement (and the displacement of its inhabitants) convenient and thus feasible, in order to replace it with a new urban complex of high real estate value composed of high-income multi-storey buildings.

The uniqueness of Dikmen Valley Project rules out its generalisation: the problem of informal settlements not only in Ankara, for a mid-to-long-term solution will require some structural reforms involving the regional planning, a higher degree of administrative autonomy, the local finances. At short term the intervention of urban upgrading should be circumscribed, targeted and gradually and essentially based on the culture and participation of the inhabitants and on their collaboration. This is the meaning of the conclusive message of this paper, concerning the interesting experience carried out with the inhabitants of Zafertepe *gecekondu* and two important technical co-operatives.

Current projects of Ankara Çankaya Municipality are not simply upgrading, but transformation projects in the *gecekondu* areas. They are very connected to the macro planning principles of the city. The projects do not show much difference in principle in the sense that they follow one basic solution. That is to transform *gecekondu* dwellings into modern units of urban life, apartments. As neither the local government nor residents have financial resources, developers and builders have been attracted by increasing density and opportunities. But projects overlooked the social and community aspects of the *gecekondu* areas and did not try to integrate local people in planning and design of their future environments. It is not a coincidence that all these sites are next to very prestigious residential areas which are already expensive and have good municipal services. Increasing value of urban land is likely to do away with *gecekondu*. In long term, however, this seems to benefit to construction companies and speculators rather than *gecekondu* households.

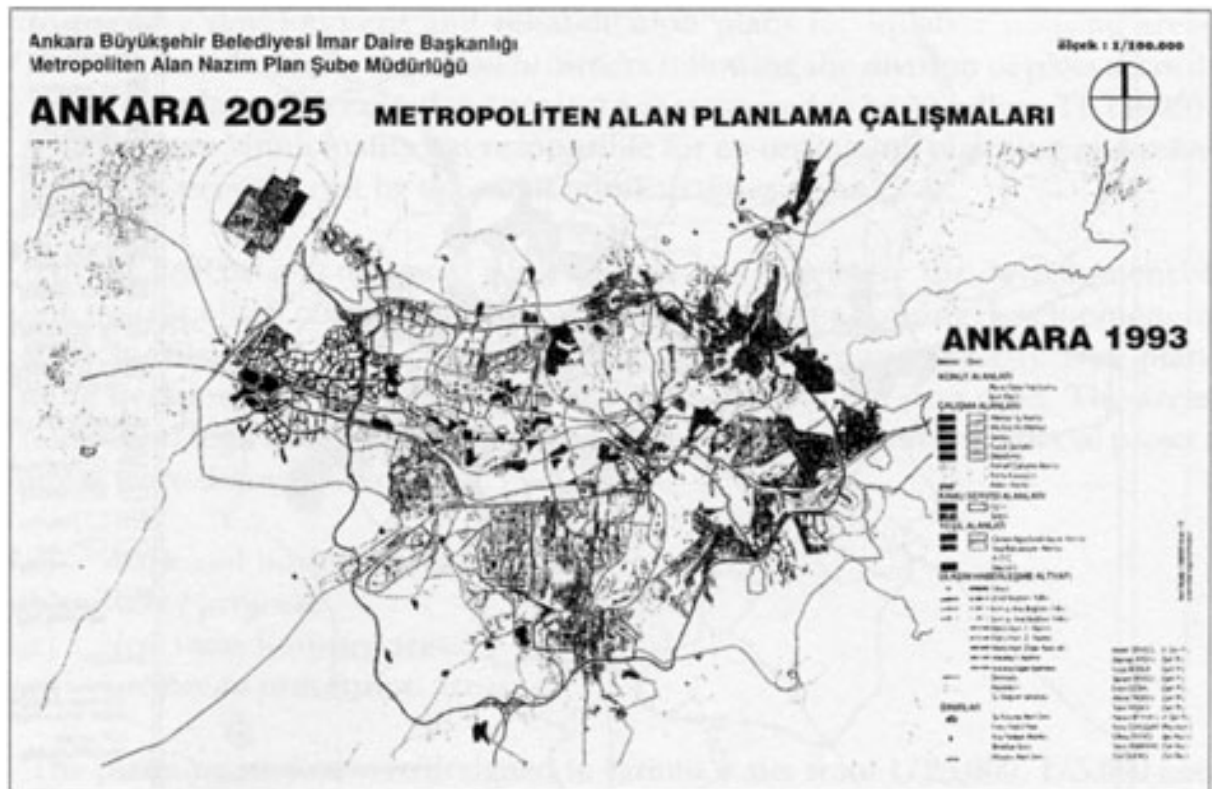
### A case study: the Dikmen Valley project in Ankara

#### *Characteristics and implementation of the Project*

The Ankara Greater Municipality and the Municipality of Çankaya proposed the Dikmen Valley Project in the master Plan of Ankara in 1989. The valley was included in the previous plans of Ankara but in the Jansen Plan (1932) it was out of the urban development area. In the Yucel-



*The first City Development Plan of Ankara (1932), designed by the architect Hermann Jansen. Aside, the Proposed Open Space in the "Urban Development Strategy: Ankara 1970-1990".*



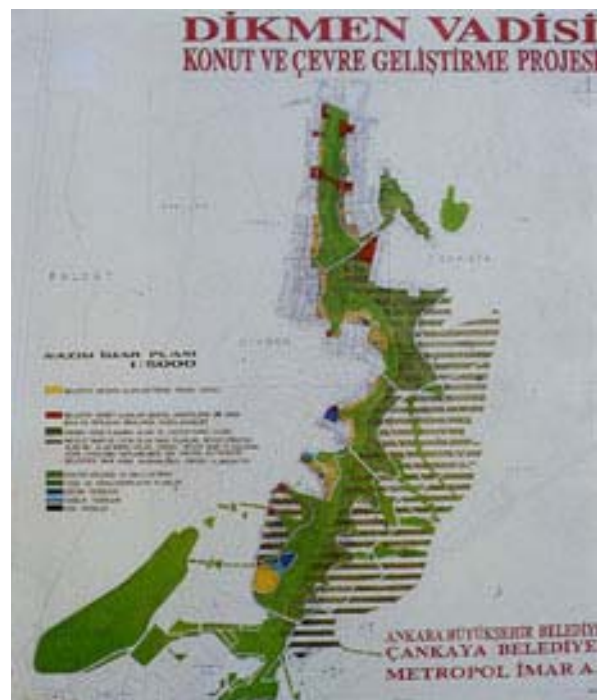
*The "2025 Master Plan for the Metropolitan Area" (1993).*

Uybadin Plan (1957), the Dikmen Valley was designed as a green belt between residential areas. After the 1960s, parks and green areas were gradually developed within valleys in the city. However, the Dikmen Valley was left on its own and became an attractive site for *gececondus*. Piecemeal plans and projects implemented in and around the valley encouraged illegal buildings. In 1986 the Ankara Greater Municipality prepared a comprehensive plan (at the scale of 1/5,000) in order to develop an urban park in the valley (*Dikmen Vadisi-2*, Dikmen Valley stage 2). This plan was not implemented but it was reconsidered and redesigned as a housing and recreational project in 1989. A semi-public company, Metropol İmar A. S., was established in partnership with the Çankaya Municipality (1990) in the same year to undertake the project (*Dikmen Vadisi-1*, Dikmen Valley stage 1). Many surveys were done: maps of the area were drawn in various scales, geological reports were done, interviews were conducted with the residents, and five co-operatives were established in five neighbourhoods.

The plan proceeded and an air corridor of 6 km. was established according to the principle of the metropolitan plan. The Dikmen Valley was thought to be the most appropriate site to begin. There were three major targets in the project:

- to create an open air corridor for the green belt and to reduce the air pollution;
- to develop an urban landmark with well planned cultural and recreational areas;
- to supply low cost housing for the inhabitants (Akyürek, 1990).

The municipal authorities and planners emphasise that it is not primarily a housing project but a large-scale recreation project for the valley. The project designed in the hills of the valley as high rise housing and proposed recreational and cultural activities. A series of surveys on geology, physical environment and social structure was carried out. This recreational corridor was not only for the valley residents but for the whole city. While housing areas are moved on the hills. The valley is designated to green areas, parks and cultural services. The Dikmen stream is planned to be rehabilitated and a lake is designed at the bottom of the valley. However, one of the major activities in this project is the service and commercial complexes. The most striking of them are twin towers on each side of the valley. These high-rise buildings, connected to each other with a big bridge-building, are also the most controversial elements of the project as they block the air passage at the narrowest part of the valley.



*A partial view of the area occupied by the gececondus before the transformation (1990). Aside, Dikmen Valley Development Plan (Metropol İmar A.S.).*



*The 1991 approved project of the Dikmen Valley and its main infrastructure: the Yıldız-Oran Axis. Aside, the study of the subdivision of the land ownership.*

In order to realise the project the *gecekondu* people had to be resettled and this required a complex procedure. The holders of rights in the area are defined as those who have an average plot size of 300-350 square metres, and who applied to be legalised before 1985. Any household which complied with these conditions is granted one new flat. Any plot size greater than the average was expropriated, and if it was less it was either expropriated or the owner paid for the rest of the land. Right holders were given financial help to rent another place throughout the construction in the valley. Those who were not right holders had to leave the area. The Greater Ankara Municipality paid for the expropriation and many tenants left the area. No households got more than one flat. *Gecekondu*s which were built before 1985 had no legal right in this project. According to the land surveys the real owners of *gecekondu* areas are very diversified and complex in the valley. For example, in the Ayrancı district, 65 per cent of land is belong to the municipality while in the İlkadim and M. Akkus districts over 70 per cent of land is the property of private holders (*Dikmen Vadisi-3, Dikmen Valley stage 3*).

*Gecekondu* areas were demolished and several types of buildings were constructed by private construction firms. However, site plans and housing architecture were developed by the municipality itself. In total over 4,092 flats were produced and 2,046 were given to the construction company, the rest was given to the *gecekondu* families. This is found to be a cheaper method due to financial difficulties of the municipality and poor family budgets of *gecekondu* residents. Flats were originally designed to be 80 sq.m but residents objected to this and the flat size was increased to 85 sq.m. Good quality neighbourhood roads and pavements were constructed. Twin towers were built but were not yet fully completed for commercial and office uses. Almost all the green areas and cultural activities remained unfinished. Therefore, the overall achievement of the project's targets have been limited and simply half-done. Since the current political dispute between the Greater Ankara Municipality and Çankaya Municipality is likely to go on, there is not much hope for any improvement in the short-term.



*Dikmen Valley, 1995: the first part of the project is being implemented (4,095 flats); the green spaces are starting to be built.*

The administrative-economic structure of the project was:

- The Mayor of Ankara, Greater Municipality;
- Managers of Metropol Imar A.S.;
- Director of the Dikmen Project, Municipality of Çankaya.

In this decision making structure there is no representative from the residents of the area. The Metropol Imar tried not to reveal the details of the project as they feared unfair competition and speculation which could have prevented the project. After the initial stage, however, representatives of the local people met regularly the project officers and this provided some information flow. The Greater Municipality was responsible for the co-ordination and the administration of the project at the top level, and it was the final decision maker of the project. Metropol Imar A. S. was responsible for the surveys, the design of the project and its building. It also informed the people and proposed alternatives. The duty of the Municipality of Çankaya was to join the meetings as an authority and provide co-ordination.

#### *The Dikmen Valley Project evaluation*

As far as the Dikmen Valley Project is concerned, there are some successes and failures to be mentioned. First of all the project was organised and proceeded fast. Many tenure and legal complications were solved in a relatively short span of time. Its concern for environmental and construction quality is remarkable. The planned open air corridor with cultural and recreational activities has brought a whole new idea to the city. However, in the valley, air ventilation is very much blocked by the two studio towers and the bridge between them, in contrast with the original objectives. They also create an immense density of office and commercial space as well as urban rents in the valley. The construction and management of green areas, parks and cultural service areas are not solved.

Another problem is the social and physical transformation of low density *gecekondu* areas in the valley. The apartment houses have not been favoured by all *gecekondu* people. For example, some *gecekondu* owners sold their flats and bought two *gecekondus* in other parts of the city. Speculation by construction firms and increasing value of land is another important issue. This physical transformation also ignored the question of lifestyles and sense of community.

Some of the current problems are related to the difficulty to quality of life for *gecekondu*

families in small apartment blocks without gardens and with no sense of neighbourhood they are expecting for. Residents have often large families and tight community networks through kinship or birthplace. In the new settlement they are entering in contact with other tenants who come from different socio-economic background. This certainly creates a problem of social identity and integration. Nevertheless, planners point out that some of the former families moved to other *gecekondu* areas of the city. But in the case of the informal settlements, this planning policy is leading to a radical, very peculiar 'urban renewal' approach, rather than a practice of upgrading as usually intended.

The development plan which includes a detailed building project, provides for the squatters' temporary relocation, to carry out the demolition of the existing *gecekondu* and the clearance of the project area for new buildings. The implementation of the Çankaya's policy, which foresees the participation of the squatters and co-operative organisations, is based on a few crucial points:

- the definition and approval, by the municipality, of the development plan (or 'rehabilitation plan') for the operation of 'urban renewal';
- the normalisation of land tenure in the project area;
- the attribution of building licence;
- the assignment of the implementation of the building project to a public utility company (with the participation of the municipality).

All the operations are guided by the municipality. As seen, the semi-public company, the Metropol İmar A.S., in partnership with the Çankaya Municipality, had the task to maintain the general management of the 'urban renewal', to protect the public interest, controlling in some way the development and implementation of the plan and possibly to set a model for other operations of 'renewal'.

At the meetings promoted by the Municipality of Çankaya, December 1995, the administrators emphasised the slogan saying "Only one Çankaya", meaning that the aim of the administration was to formally unify, as a tendency, the habitat standard for all the citizens living in Çankaya. But as neither the local government, nor the *gecekondu* residents have financial resources for reaching that objective, the price to be paid to the building companies will be: an increase in the building density while giving them opportunity to make speculative profits. Another effect of that slogan could be the organised proliferation of new *gecekondu* areas in view of future amendment laws<sup>3</sup>.



*Dikmen Valley, 1998: Dikmen Park works starting and new houses under construction on the hill.*





*Dikmen Valley, 1998: the two 30 floors 'twin towers' and the connecting bridge built across the valley are being accomplished.*

The conclusive analysis of the Dikmen Project casts light and shadows on the important albeit initial experience going on in Ankara.

The issues faced by the Çankaya Municipality were to provide two actions: a 'survey of [housing] demand' and a 'capacity building project' concerning the improvement of the *gecekondu* in Ankara. The two requests need two separate answers. About the *first* one, namely the existence of an housing demand, the statistics show a growing housing demand in Turkey. According the 4th housing Plan 1978-1983, the growing deficit, in 1985 was of about 290,000 houses. In the same year the *gecekondu* in Ankara were 300,000 and the squatters living in them the 70 per cent (1,560,000) of the Ankara inhabitants. The content of the squatters' demand and its consistence are fragmentary and not clearly expressed, also if they certainly exist. The example of the *gecekondu* settlement of Zafertepe, which is reported in the last part of this paper, shows that a demand of upgrading as more generally intended, exist in Ankara and is sustained by the co-operative organisations. Moreover, this example demonstrates that it is possible to produce upgrading results, not merely physical, but also improving the social and cultural organisation, through a gradual process of physical transformation. The *second* request concerning the 'capacity building' survey, (aimed at a capacity building project), appear to be more clear, specially if referred to the 'urban renewal' policy of the Çankaya Municipality and to the case of Dikmen Valley Project and its implementation process.

This case – through a precise division of tasks and responsibilities among the partners – shows that the capacity of organisation is well known and practised in Ankara at every level and in all sectors, from the management/planning to the implementation of complex projects. The Çankaya Municipality is efficient and ready to perform and carry out important works of transformation of the Capital City and so the developers and building companies (Metropol İmar A.S., Kent-Koop, Mesa). In particular the Çankaya Municipality applies the policy of producing 'development plans' (or 'rehabilitation plans') for the *gecekondu* settlements according to the criteria established by the Structural Plan 'Ankara 2025'<sup>4</sup> and the Municipality's approach to the *gecekondu* problem, actually applied to the central part of the city, is pursuing the objective of the legalisation of the informal settlement through a formal planning policy, but this effort doesn't seem to correspond to the social and cultural demand of the squatters.

Certainly the more central *gecekondu* areas in Ankara will benefit (together with the neighbouring residential areas) from the legalisation and the planning policy adopted by the municipality for rehabilitation, but several questions arise from the ongoing experience.

– How far the Dikmen Valley model could be extended to the peripheral urban areas where there is little convenience for upgrading, also considering the huge size of the *gecekondu* phenomenon?

– Who will pay for the financial and social costs of the kind of rehabilitation adopted by the Çankaya Municipality of Ankara?

– Land speculation by the construction companies and illegal squatters' organisations seems to become an important issue, since some *gecekondu*' owners are selling the apartment obtained by the 'renewal' operation, to buy two *gecekondus* in other parts of the greater Ankara, or worst to build them in illegal plots, offered by illegal land dealers organisations. Than the doubt arises whether the experience ongoing in Ankara could not become a reproduction mechanism of the *gecekondu*.

– What will be in the future the policy that the 'radical' administration could eventually adopt for resolving the problem of *gecekondu*?

### **An alternative solution of upgrading with inhabitants participation**

#### *The gecekondu and the rise of the co-operative movement*

Among the questions above, the most worrisome is the huge size reached by the phenomenon of the illegal housing, estimated in over 70 per cent of the total number of housing units<sup>5</sup>. This data indicates that even if the expansion of the *gecekondu* could be stopped, their legalisation and rehabilitation as implemented in the case of Dikmen Valley, would be so slow as to leave for a long, indefinite period the great majority of the inhabitants in their situation of housing discomfort.

This consideration is pushing the inhabitants of the *gecekondu* to search for more direct forms to solve the problem of upgrading illegal settlements. Some form of co-operation is developing between the inhabitants of some peripheral areas, aimed at the maximum exploitation of the spirit of social and cultural cohesion (*Imece*) characteristic of the squatters for gradually upgrading their settlements with the help of technicians and by putting pressure on local administrations. This procedure of self-help is rather silent, not much evident, at least in Ankara.

In the period immediately before the elections of December 1995, this procedure, already at advanced stage was carried out where the participation of professional staff allowed to let this ongoing experience of rehabilitation be known abroad and be propagandised. This is the case of the association of two co-operatives, whose experience is briefly recalled here in the terms it has been made known<sup>6</sup>. In fact its features seems to correspond or be consistent, at last in part, with the UNCHS objectives and policies. Namely to verify whether in that community there is a demand for technical, social, managerial help, and whether the building capacity which is already germinating, could be further stimulated for settlement upgrading.

#### *The Zafertepe experience*

The two co-operatives are: the Cevre-Koop composed of about 9,000 inhabitants of Zafertepe at the south-east periphery of Ankara and Kent-Koop composed of professional people with a proved experience of co-operation in the sector of low-income housing.

The site is the hill of Zafertepe on which the squatters have built their *gecekondu*, placing on top of it some shops for essential goods and basic utilities. Most likely the location was chosen to avoid to go up heavily loaded. In fact, this additional fatigue of going up and down repeatedly along steep pathways, has become one of the problems the inhabitants have tackled first to try upgrading the housing conditions of the settlement. Kent-Koop has met the request expressed by Cevre-Koop members and has prepared a project where the solution



*The Zafertepe inhabitants and members of the Cevre-Koop during the construction of one set of steps in their settlement (from Goksu, A. Faruk, 1996).*

of the problem of the access to the top was conceived with the construction of 4 sets of steps 90 to 150 meters long with the participation of the inhabitants of Zafertepe *gecekondus*. Women have collected the stones for the construction of the foundations, men have supplied the labour to the skilled workers of Kent-Koop. The latter has supplied the iron and concrete for the construction of the work. The implementation of the sets of steps has supported, so to say, the planning capacity of Zafertepe inhabitants, who combining the community spirit typical of Ankara squatters with the help received by the municipality (which generally supplies water and power) and with the technical co-operation of Kent-Koop, have started to organise new activities for their settlement: courses of sewing, courses of literacy for the inhabitants, the construction of playgrounds for children.

It looks like the inhabitants of Zafertepe will be able to develop by themselves the upgrading projects. With the non occasional, technical help of Kent-Koop they have learned how to formulate the objectives of a project, how to work out a project, how to implement it. Zafertepe inhabitants still hope to acquire full legalisation of their *gecekondus*. While waiting they use the dynamism of the community spirit, the *Imece* to improve their present housing and living condition.

We thought it important to recall Zafertepe experience, which should be considered among the possible 'best practices' since whatever the evolution of the experience of legalisation pursued by the Municipality of Ankara will be, the problem of upgrading the *gecekondus* cannot overlook or ignore the logic and reality of self-help, especially if it is going to be supported and directed by the local administrations.

It should be kept in mind that the *gecekondus* of Ankara in 1985 occupied 47 per cent of disorderly areas with 57 per cent of the population of Ankara and 69 per cent of the urban territory<sup>7</sup>. The growth of *gecekondus* areas has continued in subsequent years. It looks like that self-help and co-operatives is where the upgrading action should be applied most effectively. A specific reference for such actions might be represented by Kent-Koop and the experience this important organisation has gathered about initiatives of public housing in the major settlement's project implemented in Ankara: Batikent neighbourhood, north-west of the city<sup>8</sup>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Turkey, the dynamics of the phenomenon of illegal settlements is outlined by two censuses: the start of the phenomenon in 1927 and the result of its evolution in the 90s. The Turkish population at the time of first 1927 census was of 13,000,000 inhabitants of whom 75.8% composed of the rural population. The 1990 census showed the national population to be of 56,000,000 inhabitants of which 56.3% living in urban areas.

<sup>2</sup> The Turkish expression 'gecekondu' literally means [illegal shelter] "put in place in one night".

<sup>3</sup> The first law that legalised the buildings illegally built is the Amendment Law 2981-24/2/1984.

<sup>4</sup> The new "Ankara Metropolitan Plan 2025" adopted in 1993 delimits formally the Metropolitan area and establishes a clear direction of expansion toward East of the city. This latter choice connects two main poles: the historical centre of Ankara (Ulus-Kizilay) and the new industrial pole at the extreme West of the Metropolitan area (Sincan) and the connected largest housing localisation foreseen by the Plan.

The Plan also delimits precisely the *gecekondu* areas surrounding almost completely the central city with a thick belt. In some of these areas that the Rehabilitation Projects have been applied, as is the case of the Çankaya Municipality which is proceeding in the implementation of the Dikmen Valley and Geçek Projects.

<sup>5</sup> Akcura, Tugrul (1971), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Goksu, A. Faruk (1996).

<sup>7</sup> Karayalçın, Murat (1987), tab. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.294. Batikent is a mass development project for lower and middle-income groups located on the Ankara-Istanbul Highway, at 11 Km from the centre of the city, covering an area of 10.5 millions sq.m.

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