

## **THE NEW ADDRESS OF SOCIAL POLARIZATION IN ISTANBUL: GATED COMMUNITIES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of 1990's, globalization has caused changes in Turkey's economic, social, and cultural life, which affected the urban fabric causing sharp transformations on the housing settlements. One of these sharp transformations are the gated communities which are the products of a new culture of consumption influenced by the phenomena of globalization,

The aim of this study is to determine how the gated communities can have the potential of triggering the social polarization in the Turkish urban society . Considering that Istanbul is the city that has been first influenced by the pressures of globalization in Turkey, we chose the Istanbul metropolitan area as the research area of this study.

The effects of globalization in Turkey began in the 1980's and the integration process accelerated in the 1990's. During this time, Turkey's pre-1980's secluded mixed economic system was replaced with the global competitive market conditions of the liberal state. Although globalization is a concept that is commonly used to define new economic developments, it is not a process that only effects the economic arena; it exceeds the changes in economics and defines socio-cultural transformations in a society as well. Thus, we contend that since the 1990's, globalization includes cultural processes and political demands and refers to global integration.

The major actors of globalization are metropolises. Apart from the metropolises the points of exchange for the capital, goods, and services have been the areas where globalization has influenced the most . In that sense, Istanbul is the metropolis which enables this integration to the world system under the process of country's globalization efforts. Istanbul created a close contact with the world trade and became an attraction point for the capital and labor.

This study shows that the gated communities, which are developed especially after 1990's, may become an important social polarization centers in Istanbul. The literature on this matter reflects that polarization is closely related to exclusion, segregation and isolation depending upon the geography and the social structure (Musterd-Ostendorf, 1998). These relationships determine that social structure is the major factor on space configuration on urban readings. We believe that such discussion of polarization in Istanbul can be made on the dynamics of the market structure which determines the housing supply models and consuming patterns. Therefore, the discussion platform of this study is laid out on these aspects.

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## DYNAMICS OF THE HOUSING SUPPLY

Up until the 1990's, public spaces have been defined as common spaces which were open to all people, and private spaces have been defined as special spaces that were open to individuals which were usually housings.

We argue that after the 1990's, definitions on both levels were changed drastically. Prior to that, welfare government usually developed public spaces with the state capital. Due to the privatization efforts, state became inactive on developing public spaces for the purposes of education, health, housing, communication and etc. Therefore, with this new process, the so called "public spaces" became private. For instance, in this new understanding the shopping malls which are developed by the private sector became the public spaces. On the other hand, the transformation and the development of the private spaces contain two interconnected dynamics: The transformation of the structure of the capital for the production and the consuming patterns affect the nature of the demand on housing.

It can be argued that the 1990's is the breaking point for the housing developments in Istanbul; Before the 1990's small scale and singular housings were common; these were plot-size productions appearing in two kinds: legal housing production and condominium , (build and sell (*yap-sat*) system); illegal housing production: squatter housing and condominium (transformations of squatter housing into condominium)

After the 1990's large scale and plural housing production began these were block-size productions: Legal housing production: mass housing (residences, gated communities);

There are various dynamics that affect the production type (such as the difference between build-sell and squatter housing systems) of a single scale housing regardless of scale. Nevertheless, single scale housing production plays a major role on shaping the physical and social texture of metropolises and big cities. During this time different single scale housing production methods met the need of new comers (immigrants) to Istanbul.

At this scale of production, either legal or illegal, there are certain factors that make this system unique. These factors are:

1. owning the house itself without owning the plot (squatter housing);
2. related with the code of law for flat ownership in a single plot (condominiums);
3. build and sell production –when a single house owner becomes a multiple flat owner on the same single plot by demolishing the old single house and builds condominium;
4. obtaining an income through creating a capital by selling and/or renting these flats (capitalist, small investor);
5. ability to produce a house (condominium) without any capitol (built – sell contractor).

Build-and-sell system had been very effective up until the 2000's on small scale housing production. Almost the whole the city, Istanbul, including its center and the newly developed peripheries were shaped by this production system . The illegal process of singular housing has a different path than the legal singular housing. The fundamental difference lies in acquiring the land illegally, which is in fact an illegal occupation. By the end of this process, both the quantity and the quality of the house that were produced and the social relationship of its occupants with the urban life was the major part of the urban problems. Unskilled labors' (immigrants) self effort of housing developed squatter housing units in the metropolis. Such squatter housing stock, integrated with the housing market with no other than a 'use value'. In addition, this housing

stock did not become an economic commodity because of the legal problems on the ownership and disadvantages that came with its poor quality. Their only integration to the urban land was its land value. Until the 1980's the villages that were at the periphery of Istanbul transformed into squatter settlements and became suburbs of Istanbul. As such, as Mübeccel Kiray (1998) stated, Istanbul grew in fringes as in the shape of an oil stain.

After the 1980's the transformation in the economic system also transformed some of the squatter housing from the use value to exchange value when the land value increased parallel to the urban development. Even though these squatter houses carry legal problems related with their ownership they were included into the market as exchangeable goods. Thus, these squatter houses were demolished and new condominiums were built instead.

During this period construction sector boomed because of government's active role as a legislator and investor. *Toplu Konut İdaresi (Housing Development Administration)* and *Toplu Konut Kanunu (Mass Housing Law)* are some of the organizations that the state were able to play as a capitalist in the housing market. Simultaneously, large scale housing became attractive for the private capitalists for the first time in the construction industry. However, all these developments were not been able to generate a liberal scheme's competitive market environment.

In the 1980's the state's new role and power were not able to solve the housing need for the newly developed urban land in Istanbul. It should be pointed out that the definition of 'housing need' in Istanbul was also different for different layers of the society. For low and mid-low income level the definition of need is to own a flat which has a use and exchange value. In other words, owning a flat was also perceived as an investment. On the other hand, for the high-mid and high level income level, owning a house/flat was more than an investment, but it is also -related to its status value- a problem of urban space and its quality as well.

In order to understand the special and social changes in Istanbul after the 1990's, it is essential to understand and comment on the social texture and its reflection on the special morphology prior to that date. Murat Guvenc and Oguz Isik's study on Istanbul's status and ownership of housing based on the 1990 census shows that, although there is a high level of differentiation on the social level of Istanbul metropolitan area, the spread of spatial differentiation is rather soft when it is compared to other central metropolises.

## **CHANGES IN CONSUMPTION PATTERNS**

Similar to the other countries, the neo liberal approach on the political arena decreased the government's active role on Turkey 's economy . Therefore, the private sector became more active after the government withdrew from the economic sphere as an active player. This condition opened a door for the national and transnational capitalists to invest on the housing market. Istanbul as a metropolis which aimed at integrating itself into the global economy was the primary choice for these capitalists.

Another development on the change of the balance from government towards private sector was the inequality on the dispersion of the income. According to Isik and Pinarcioglu (2005) the government's passive role on the economy affected negatively to lower income levels and also ended the social consensus efforts. In that sense, like in no other periods, a new social polarization process took place. The growing gap between the rich and the poor during the

1990's started a differentiation with clear boundaries at the spatial level. The boundaries between the two levels had never been so clear before.

Bali (2005) called the "new mid class" as "the new distinguished" which appeared after the 1990's. This newly-rich is comprised of the service sector workers which were created by the global economy. Despite that the general wage ratios decrease in Turkey and in Istanbul generally, the new mid-class's income increases. Compared to the other periods the most discerning aspect of the rich is the change of their consumption patterns. For the new mid-class of the 1990's, wealth is an aspect to be displayed. Wealth was displayed through the way of consumption. The commodities represent the new mid class's social status and social identity. It wasn't a coincidence that shopping malls became prevalent during that time. In 1993 Akmerkez was built on the European side and Capitol was built on the Anatolian side concurrently where the rest followed with different concepts as spaces of consumption.

### REFLECTIONS OF CONSUMPTION PATTERNS TO HOUSING SETTLEMENTS

Gurbilek described the consumption, which became the display object, as "living on the screen" (2001). This situation forced people (new mid class) to create a new life style according to their consumption patterns. The main objective was to make this new life style more apparent., A house has always been the best for display of status and identity  
Thus, housing became the most predominant object for the new mid class to display their social status. Therefore, housing means more than a private space and a capital investment for the new mid class.

Through its typological, social and interior properties housing became the material reflecting wealth of the class . This reflection is so exaggerated that the housing of the "rich and famous" became the focus of the media (Fig.1).



Fig. 1 Advertisement for the Kemer Country settlement, 1995.

The changing demand of the new mid-class was satisfied with the concept of “luxury housing” followed by the increase in its supply . These housing settlements allowed people to spatially differentiate themselves from the others whom they did perceive belonging to their stratum. This is why these “luxury housing settlements” are the gated communities for the new mid class. High walls which surround the settlements for kilometers, private security staff and the grand gates which are monitored through cameras define the clear boundaries. To be inside or outside of these gated communities defines the two poles. The world in the inside of these settlements is “neat and sterile”. However, right outside, usually adjacent to these settlements, low-income level people live in houses which have only four walls, not painted, far away from minimum standards and usually have neither road nor sidewalks. (Fig. 2, Fig. 3) These housing settlements have similar properties in other central metropolises.



**Fig. 2 Aqua Manor settlement**



**Fig. 3 Evidea settlement**

The most significant aspect of the gated communities is the privatization of the public spaces. The public spaces contain open and closed sports facilities, restaurant, social club, recreation areas, education and shopping facilities which are open only to residents' of the gated community. Since almost all the urban needs are satisfied within these settlements; but evidently, the residents' interaction with the urban life and the 'other' people gradually disappear (Fig. 4, Fig. 5).



**Fig. 4 My Town settlement-inside**



**Fig. 5 My Town settlement-outside**

These settlements create their almost independent mini municipalities and isolate themselves from the local municipality because they finance their own underground utilities, roads, parking spaces, security, garbage collection, and the maintenance of their common spaces.

These gated communities, which exist as islands of welfare, are not only segregated from the urban land surrounding them but also they are isolated from each other. Although these settlements spread separately between each other, they can be categorized into two according to their location:

- Gated communities which are built within the city.
- Gated communities which are built at the periphery.

***Gated communities built within the city:***

Gated communities within the city can be a multi storey building that is usually built on a single plot. These gated communities represent a closed world isolation from the urban life vertically. In other words, they separate themselves by rising upwards and create a tower of prestige within the urban space. Such settlements are called “residence”. The residences eliminate the new mid-class’ worry of prestige and become their spaces of social status. The numbers of these residences increase drastically in Istanbul. (Fig. 6, Fig.7)

Residences in Istanbul are mostly located at the heart of the service sector axis such as the ones between Buyukdere and Maslak and between Sisli and Mecidiyekoy. These residences are mixed used complexes which include a shopping center, offices, sports facilities, movie theaters and restaurants. Although they are rather large scale settlements, housing units are only a part of the complex.



**Fig. 6 Polat Tower, Fulya**



**Fig. 7 Metrocity, Levent**

The demand for such residences usually occur due to the use of technology and their valuable location. Despite the fact that these residences are presented as “smart buildings” indeed, with the level of technology does not exceed the use of electronic lock systems, security cameras and etc. (Fig.8)

**34 Se SELENIUM PANORAMA**

**KENTİN ENERJİSİNİ DİNAMİK ÇİZGİLERLE YAŞAYIN**

Kentin kıpır kıpır enerjisinin merkezinde:  
Sıradığı dinamik çizgilerle yaratılmış  
Her ayrıntısıyla sizin dünyanızı yaşatan  
Bambaşka bir keyif mekanı

Sabahın ilk ışıkları pencerenize vurduğunda,  
denizden esen rüzgar yüzünüzü okşadığında,  
gördüğünüz bu manzara karşısında bir kez daha  
Selenium'lu olmanın mutluluğunu duyacaksınız.

**FARKLI ZEVLERE SAHİP ÖZEL İNSANLAR**

Bu olağanüstü projenin tüm ayrıntıları, farklı zevklere sahip özel insanların hareketli yaşamlarına daha fazla rahatlık ve değer katmak için düşünüldü. Benzersiz Marmara ve Boğaz manzarası ise Seleniumlular ve tüm yakın arkadaşları için vazgeçilmez bir keyif...

**Fig. 8 Advertisement for the Selenium Residence**

***Gated communities built at the periphery:***

There is an ongoing discussion whether the gated communities at the periphery are the suburbs of the city or not. Almost all of them are built within the municipality regions rather than the rural areas (**Fig. 9**). Such examples to these kinds of gated communities are: My Country, My Town, My City, Yeşilvadi Evleri, Sinpaş Aqua City, Evidea, Grenium Evleri, Aqua Manor at Umraniye municipality Cekmekoy county, Optimum Konutları, Yankı Evler, Yamaç Evler at Umraniye municipality Omerli county; Istanbul-Zen, Istanbul-Bis, Istanbul-Istanbul, Kemer Hill, Doğa Meşe Park Evleri, Selenium Country at Kemerburgaz municipality Gokturk county. It is not a coincidence that these gated communities are not built within the limits of the metropolitan municipalities. Therefore, they do not necessarily need to oblige with the zoning codes of the metropolitan municipality. At the peripheries these settlements can develop their own zoning plans, which explains why most of the settlements are constructed in Istanbul's water and forest basins. Thus, despite the city planners recommendations on the city's development toward east and west direction, the city continues growing on the north and south directions.



**Fig. 9 Gated communities in Göktürk**

Since the settlements at the periphery are not developed within a plan they are dispersed and isolated from each other. Their close contact to the regional municipality and development without a general zoning plan accelerate their production speed when they do not need to wait for the common legal process that happens in the metropolitan area. According to Inal (2002) gated communities will increase the tax and indirect income of the county municipalities which will increase their development capacity within the region.

The gated communities which are at the periphery are built on a rather large scale land (the smallest is built on 10 acre and the biggest is built on 1000 acre). These settlements are composed of low-rise buildings when compared to the ones in the city and town houses.

Similar to the gated communities in the city, these settlements are not only composed of housing units. They also contain social and sports facilities and recreation areas which are only available for the use of their own residents. It is argued that the most important reason to prefer living in the gated communities at the periphery is to be isolated from the disadvantages of the city, such as traffic, parking problems, air pollution, noise, decrease in the level of recreational areas and etc. Indeed the marketing strategies and advertisement slogans are pretty much derived upon the same arguments defined above (**Fig.10**).

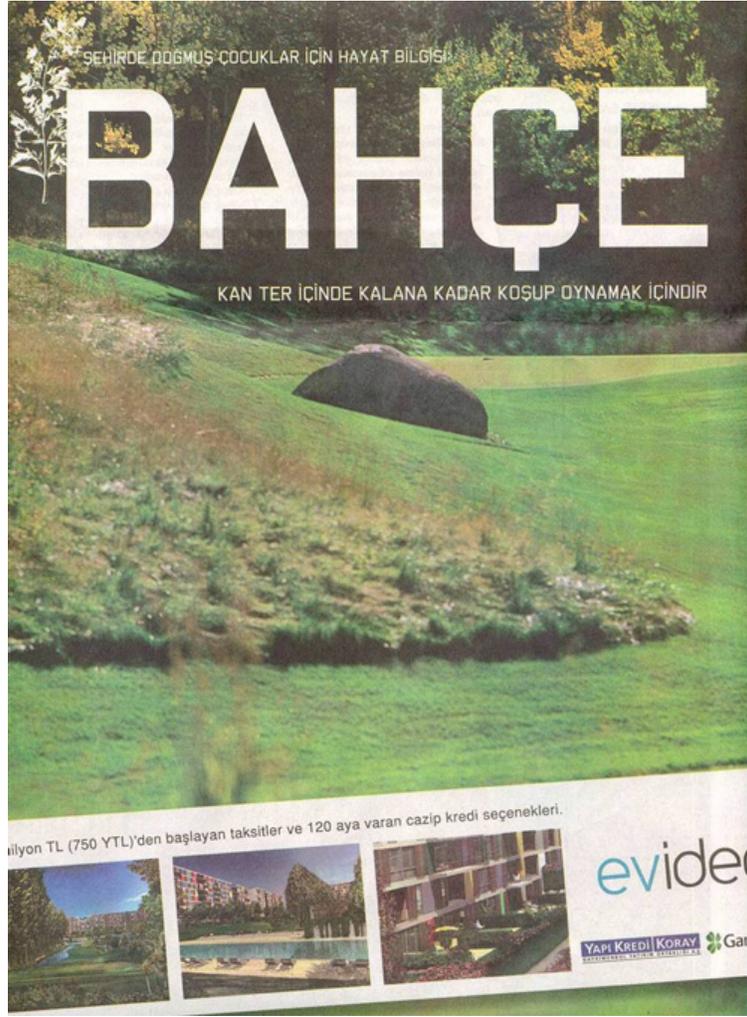


Fig. 10 Advertisement for the gated communities built at the periphery

## CONCLUSION

There is no argument that Istanbul is the driving force on Turkey's integration with the global world. Istanbul is not the capitol of the country, but no doubt that it is the center of the national and transnational capital. Especially, the transnational capital not only boosted the economy but also brought in its culture as well. This globalized culture affected the society deeply and wholly. The rules and the definitions are different now; and the residents of the metropolis are in the process of understanding and adapting them. Therefore we believe that analysis on the new developments (may not be so new for other global metropolises) are vital for understanding the phenomenon and possibly stop repeating the similar mistakes that are made in similar central metropolises. We believe that constructive comparisons may accomplish this issue.

Globalization efforts reconfigure the classes in the society in Istanbul where "new mid-class" established with the new set of demands and consumption patterns. The new consumption patterns are mostly imported from other globalized countries and somehow are blended with national characteristics. This new mid-class have similar range of income but their lifestyles

with the society may vary a lot. What we can question is for understanding whether these gated communities satisfy the demand or not; if so to what cost to the society?

The economic gap between the new middle class and the rest of the society reflects the reconfiguration of public and private space. In this study we define this reconfiguration as the development of gated communities which aggravates polarization in the society. As the residents of Istanbul we believe that we have not started living the consequences of this polarization yet. This argument is supported by Keyder, he states (2005) "there is no sign yet of a guilty bourgeois conscious". However, that does not change the fact that social harmony is jeopardized. "What is happening is the economic fact and market reality" is the current argument; and it may describe the present condition but that doesn't necessarily address potential problems of polarization in the society.

There is also another side of polarization affecting the quality of space. Based on the observations on site, we argue in this paper that even though the consumption patterns vary there is not much difference on the end product. It is questionable whether the outcome product reflects what was promised initially for these new gated communities.

And finally one should ask the question that although majority of the new gated communities have foreign names with prestigious connotations whether they satisfy the demand and increase the urban quality or not.

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