

# Housing Environment in The Process Of Cultural Change and Transformation; Study in Istanbul/Armutlu Squatter Settlement

**Asli Sungur Ergenoglu**

Faculty of Architecture  
Yıldız Technical University, [asungur@yildiz.edu.tr](mailto:asungur@yildiz.edu.tr)  
+90-212-259 70 70 (2574 ext)

**Cigdem Canbay Türkyılmaz, Cigdem Polatoglu Baytin, Ayfer Aytug**

Faculty of Architecture  
Yıldız Technical University, [ccanbay@yildiz.edu.tr](mailto:ccanbay@yildiz.edu.tr), & [baytin@yildiz.edu.tr](mailto:baytin@yildiz.edu.tr) & [aytug@yildiz.edu.tr](mailto:aytug@yildiz.edu.tr)  
+90-212-259 70 70 (2572 ext)

**Keywords:** Squatter settlements, social activities, cultural change, Istanbul

## Abstract:

While the population increase is 2% in Turkey, it has reached 4.5% in Istanbul. The main reason for migration is unemployment and Istanbul is subject to migration from all over Turkey. Consequently, people with low income, who move to the city from rural areas, find ramshackle traditional areas and illegal squatter settlements as their potential settlement areas. While Istanbul is a city shared in terms of space, it is far from a city shared in terms of culture. The immigrants coming from the same area choose a special area in order to live side by side strengthening the bonds among themselves. The psycho-social insecurity caused by urban life is coped with in a sense of by developing these bonds. However there are cases that these bonds are exploited and seen as a source of power in carrying illegal processes. Furthermore, those are squatter settlements that act like shield against other settlements. These settlements don't let anyone of another culture to take refuge among them. So in these settlements an inward oriented life style persists. In the city, the problems about the planned and the unplanned settlements can only be solved by interactive solutions. The core of the problem is that, while the squatter settlements do not constitute a problem at the time they are formed because of their far-off location, later they get unfair increase in their value as an outcome of their central locations in the enlarging city. The problem has transformed from unhealthy one-storey structures to multi-storey squatter buildings. Gradual increases in unplanned and illegal constructions have reached to 75 percent and the squatter settlements to 55%.

The aim of this paper is to display the perspectives of the spatial expressions of cultures of the two unplanned residential areas sharing the same geography but separated by a highway 20 years after their foundation. A planned residential area with a prestigious environment on one side and a squatter settlement that has been positively affected in terms of rent (profitability) by the enlarging city but still with an inward oriented life style. As the result of the case studies carried in terms of the demographic and physical characteristics of both areas the current profile of the existing settlements are maintained. The data obtained are cross-examined to scrutinize the cultural change and transformation process of the residential settlements. In this process, the bonds between the individuals, the images they brought with them in connection with their former settlements, the shaping of the residential environment and the housing identity affected by their ethnical origins have been searched. The paper aims to search answers to questions like should there be different settlements in the same geography with the help of an experimental study. Creating a discussion media for different ideas concerning the positive or negative aspects of this phenomenon will be great help to find different solutions to the present problem of the county.

## Introduction

Informal housing settlements are common facts in many developing and third world countries. One of the typical characteristics of the developing countries is the formation of settlements that are irregular in their physical settings and illegal in ownership issues. These settlements are consequences of the migration from rural to urban areas. The aims of the migrants are to obtain better job and life style opportunities, to get away from the communal pressure of the rural areas and to have their freedom not completely but partly.

Migrants do not only wish to be rescued from their destinies, but also to have an effective role in determining the future of the community. Thus, they participate in every urbanistic action and organizations (Toker, 1993). Because of the absence of legal institutions and solutions that provide help, migrants develop their solutions to survive in urban areas. They build their own houses collaborating with people who live in similar conditions. They generally use second hand materials which they find around.

Like many of the countries, migration from villages to urban areas causes the cities to enlarge rapidly in Turkey, too. While 24% of Turkey's population was living in urban areas in 1927, this percentage has reached to 59% in 1990 and to 66% in 2000 (DIE).

Informal settlements have emerged because of the need for shelter in the cities that is caused by the increased population. The first informal settlement was seen in the year 1946 in Istanbul. This informal settlement has been formed in Kazlıçeşme- Zeytinburnu area that is near to the leather industry. Various industries (leather, glass, textile, rubber, beer, textile, match and chocolate factories) developed from that time on, have caused the squatter settlements to spread in Istanbul. Apart from this, migration from countries like Bulgaria and Yugoslavia also has caused these types of settlement to spread. Another factor accelerating and encouraging the squatter settlements is the appearance of 'amnesty laws' that are transforming illegal settlements to legal settlements (40 amnesty laws in 50 years). Formation of new transportation networks also speed up the enlargement process of the squatter settlements (I. Bosphorus Bridge and its periphery roads developed between the years 1970-1974, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, Trans European Motorways and Anatolian Motorway).

In Istanbul, the population living in squatter settlements was 4.7% of the urban population in 1955 and in 1995; this percentage has increased to 35%. Today, it has reached to 55%.

In order to be able to argue the cultural change and transformation in squatter settlements, some settling characteristics have to be examined about that area first. These characteristics can be classified as the headlines given below:

- I. the location and the development of the settlement;
- II. ownership issues;
- III. the socio-economical status of the owner;
- IV. the physical, social and cultural dynamics shaping up the formation;
- V. the transformation and the development potential of the settlement.

Still, there are some other important issues. These are the variousness, multi-functionality and flexibility of the space as well as the power/ability of the environment in meeting the human requirements and making socialization possible. In this context, it is important to examine the cultural change and transformation in the planned and unplanned settlements.

## **Description of the Study Area**

The aim of the study is to analyze the distribution of social and cultural areas in urban areas and the usages of these areas, participation and life-styles of the people, by focusing on squatter settlement. In the paper Armutlu (Fatih Sultan Mehmet District-unplanned settlement), Etiler, Akatlar and Konak Districts (planned settlements) are chosen as study areas. Especially, physical conditions and the social life between the settlements formed by authorized hands and settlements formed by the user themselves will bring a point of view to the country's development policies. The physical formation and the social lives of planned and unplanned settlements are determined via observation and interviews conducted in the area. It has been made use of the information about population, user profile and physical development gathered via questionnaires by ITU work-group in 1998. Examination of the study areas has been based on the classification of environmental quality issues.

## **The Characteristics of Planned Settlement (Etiler, Akat and Konak Districts).**

### **I. the location and the development of the settlement**

The Districts are planned Etiler, Akatlar and Konak districts located on the south of TEM, bounded to Besiktas County. These districts started to develop in 1970's, after the formation of Levent District in 1950's. The most intensive settlement has been developed between the years 1980-2000. District is bounded to city center and Anatolian part via TEM, Büyükdere Boulevard and Prom.

### **II. ownership issues**

These licensed houses built by individual contractors and prestigious construction firms are in form of 2-3 storey villas to 5-10 storey apartment blocks, guarded and well-cared for residences.

### **III. the socio-economical status of the owner**

Area is the residing place of middle, middle-upper and upper income groups.

### **IV. the physical, social and cultural dynamics shaping up the formation**

Residing purposes being the main function, in the last 10 years, bureaus of prestigious firms and branches of every bank, supporting functions, entertainment centers (cafés, bars, restaurants, music halls) and shopping malls have increased the attractiveness of the area. Sport areas, recreative areas (children parks and theme parks), education buildings (primary school buildings, colleges), cultural centers, malls and supermarkets, native and foreign boutiques and religious buildings are the social and cultural dynamics shaping up the formation.

#### V. the transformation and the development potential of the settlement

Because the rights given by the planned settlement are fully used, a future development is not going to take place. However, work-place/trading functions are seen according to the developing/changing needs in the existing housing settlements.

### **The Characteristics of Unplanned Settlement (Armutlu- Fatih Sultan Mehmet District Squatter Settlement)**

#### I. the location and the development of the settlement

The area is in the north of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge's European base, bounded to Sarıyer Municipality, called 'Fatih Sultan Mehmet' or widely : 'Armutlu'. Unplanned area takes place between three main highways: Prom following Bosphorus, Büyükdere Boulevard bounded to Sarıyer from Taksim which carries a heavy rush-hour traffic load and TEM, which provides the connection to Anatolian part. Transportation is possible by busses that municipality provides or by privately owned mini-busses.

The beginning of the first squatter settlement in the area is around 1970's (1969). In the last 20 years, together with the development of the 2. periphery road(TEM) and its connections, existing settlements enlarged and the empty spaces between these settlements and privately owned lands are invaded. In the Bosphorus coast and the areas next to the coast, there are licensed houses and residences, formed between 17th century and today, mostly belonging to upper-class income groups, takes place. However, on the upper parts and slopes of the hills, Armutlu District has emerged on the public or private owned lands, as the settlement area of low-income groups, working in the factories and service sector around the area. The illegal settlements mostly formed on the slopes of the hills facing Bosphorus destructs the natural formation of Bosphorus while affecting the appearance negatively.

#### II. ownership issues

The settlement is on the campus development area allocated to Istanbul Technical University. Lack of protection of the land resulted in the formation of the settlement on the south-southeast part of the land.

48% of the families has built their houses themselves. 41% has owned the houses by purchasing. This situation shows that the squatter settlement has transformed into a property that is bought and sold rather than being a place of shelter. A point that attracts the attention is; every house in the area being unlicensed, the buildings of police station and chief of the district are also unlicensed. Government organizes elections for determining the chief of the district and a temporary-usage certificate is given to the families who live in this settlement.

### III. the socio-economical status of the owner

When the family size was examined, it was seen that most of the families consisted of 3-4 people (43%). While the married couples were 86% of the population, others are either unmarried, divorced or widowed. When the age groups are examined, it was seen that %16 of the population was between the ages of 0-12, 38% was between 13-20, 40% was between 20-55 and 6% was between 55 and over. Population percentage aged under the age 20 was 54.

Percentage of the residents who never went to school is 8. Percentage of the residents who continued education after primary school is 35. This last percentage is higher than the other squatter settlements. Percentage of the residents who are graduated from high school is 40 and percentage of college graduates is 3.

The most important indicator defining the social layer which the families are on, is that more than half of the residents are coming from a rural area in the study area. It was determined that most of the migration is from Black Sea Region when searched for the birth places. Mid Anatolia follows this percentage with 32. Residents born in the Marmara Region is 13%. It was determined that 20% percentage of the residents migrated to this settlement before the year 1980 and 80% migrated after this year.

When searched about the occupations of the residents, it was seen that %3 are working in the service sector, 25% are workers, 19% are self-employed, 10% are tradesmen, 8% are drivers and 5% are officials.

When searched for another economical indicator, ownership issues, it was seen that 22% of the residents living in the area are owners of another house, 22% have their own cars and 76% have telephones. Percentage of the ownership of the main consumer goods (refrigerator, washing machine, vacuum cleaner and color television) varies between 63% and 80%. also a percentage of 56% wishes to purchase a dishwasher at the first chance they get. In the observation study made in the area, it was seen that the open garages the residents built for their private cars are, the result of the influence from the high-income group's environment. Mentality adopting this formation is in fact trying to give the idea that the economical status is not actually low, by having such a detailed space which can be considered as unnecessary in their lives. These kinds of detailed approaches shows us that they plan to settle in those places for a very long period of time and also somewhere in their lives, they had the opportunity to obtain the financial support for such things. Also air conditioners found in shelter-like houses are other expressions of this idea.

#### IV. the physical, social and cultural dynamics shaping up the formation

It is seen that the settlement is dense in the slope areas next to TEM and the density begins to loosen relatively in the inner parts of the settlement. A major part of the empty spaces are the gardens of the houses.

The settlement carries the characteristic of the first generation squatters. The majority of the houses are 1-2-storey houses with gardens. Residing function is dominant. Small scale shops exist to meet the everyday-life needs.

The settlement has a lower density than the other squatter settlements on in population and building density. 60% of the buildings are single-storey, 20% are 2-storey, 10% are 3-storey and 10% is 4-5-6-storey. Heights of the buildings are perceived different from different sides of those buildings as a result of using the slope. Low-storey buildings are sometimes below the street level.

While 48% of the houses have 3 rooms and 33% have 2 rooms, 14% of the houses are smaller than 70 m<sup>2</sup>, 28% are bigger than 100 m<sup>2</sup> and most of them are between 70 and 100m<sup>2</sup>. The flexibility and adaptability of the houses are in the form of %64 adding an extra storey, %23 adding an extra room, 13% adding balcony to the closed spaces. If thought how quickly these houses are built, these additions can be considered as a natural consequence. Most of the buildings are in average situation quality wise. Half of the buildings are built in concrete; other half are built of stone or brick. There is not sufficient infrastructure in the area.

Table 1. Functional use (N. Gülersoy et. al.)

Usage type	Number	Percentage
House	4,421	78,36
House+shop (upper storey is house, bakery, stationary, market, pharmacy on the street level)	201	3,56
Trade (everyday needs)	58	1,03
Education	7	0,12
Factory	1	0,02
Storage+Empty store	875	15,51
Constructon	68	1,21
Religious	11	0,19
Total	5,642	100,00

#### V. the transformation and the development potential of the settlement

Reflecting the characteristics of a rural area at first, the settlement began to be an imitation of the apartment blocks in the planned settlements. Increasing profit accelerated this process. Physical settling turned to be in vertical direction.

In social context, especially new generation think the relationships between people in the squatter settlement are too close and want to get away from the image of the person living in a squatter settlement. They wish to move to a planned settlement. On the other hand, the same situation is one of the reasons why older residents choose to live in a squatter settlement. Older age group thinks that apartment life (planned settlements) is too formal and personal.



## Findings

Squatter settlements are perceived in a very positive way among the migrant from rural to urban. Close social relationships and collaboration between the resident are important characteristics of these settlements. Residents try to support each other and act respectfully to each other. One of the reasons for the people belonging to the same ethnical group to live together is this characteristic; because, they know they will get support when faced with a problem.

The low quality of the houses, the insufficiency of services and infrastructure are the common issues that the squatter settlement's residents perceive as a problem. Many of the residents think that living conditions are more comfortable and the environment is cleaner in the planned areas.

Especially among the squatter settlement residents, there is a widespread opinion that squatter settlements are suitable for the migrants from rural to urban and planned areas are suitable for town-dwellers. These people think that the residents of the planned areas are in a higher level of social and economical status.

Especially the people reside in squatter settlements see these areas as 'toleranced' living spaces that the residents can act freely. These people also think that the living spaces in the planned areas are 'pressuring/ restraining' that one has to be more cautious.

For the squatter residents who have adopted themselves to the modern communal way of living, squatter settlement is perceived as; restraining/ pressuring, violation of privacy, social control and having to share the same atmosphere with the people they want to get away from.

When compared to the squatter settlements, it is seen that the residents of the planned areas have more positive feelings about their environments. The reasons for this can be explained in different ways. The migrant population living in planned settlements shows a more homogenous economical situation than the residents of squatter settlements.

Social and cultural equipments are formed sometimes by the government but mostly by Armutlu residents themselves to meet the basic needs. Government undertook the responsibility for building educational buildings and building of the chief of the district. The mosque and Pir Sultan Abdal Union considered as religious buildings are, on the other hand, built with donations. This dual development in religious buildings is the expression of ethnical and religious identity.

The Pir Sultan Abdal Union formed in the area aims to provide a cultural platform to the residents. The types of activities carried here are chosen by the young people who reside in the area. The union's physical structure and social activities are not acceptable citywide, so residents of the planned settlement do not come to the union. Yet, Armutlu residents use AKM (theatre, drama courses), MKM (next to TEM, meeting rooms and shopping areas) and cultural and artistic activities which are in the planned settlement near to their area. This behavior is especially seen among the young generation. However, residents of the planned settlement come to the Armutlu District once in a week to find cheaper and fresher groceries in the open market that is been set up for a day.

It is observed that the residents of squatter settlement are still continuing the rural way of life. Activities like standing in front of the doorway and baking bread with neighbors or feeding animals are rural life activities that can also be continued in squatter settlements. The residents can even provide support to the family budget with the groceries they raise.

Streets bordered by one or two storey houses do not form an insecure environment for the children to play. These streets are mostly used by the residents themselves and sometimes other people who use shortcuts but in this case, speed is limited by these narrow streets anyway. Narrowness of the streets is not forming a negative perspective thanks to the few-storey houses and spaces between them. This settlement pattern shows similarities with the settlement pattern and life style where they move from. However, the planned settlement across the highway does not even make people think about children 'playing on the streets' with its fully equipped and sufficient number of social equipments.

## **Conclusion**

The cultural changes occur in a community form in a long period of time. Every community shows different developments/changes in its cultural process. Istanbul, being the largest city of Turkey, can be defined as the first place that cultural processes began to occur country wide. In the interpretation, cultural processes are defined as; enculturation, cultural diffusion, acculturation, culturation and cultural shock.

- Enculturation process is the community becoming conscious thanks to education given, knowingly or unknowingly. In this process, individuals begin to understand and learn the life styles, behaviors and habits of the society they live in, by experiencing themselves. Understanding these concepts influence the formation of spaces in housing settlements. Every individual of the household wishing for their own private rooms is the influence of this process on space formation. In Armutlu, there began a process of moving away from the houses carrying rural characteristics and apartment type houses are beginning to be seen more widely. This cultural system is valid for all squatter settlements in Istanbul.
  
- Cultural diffusion occurs when a community uses technology, inventions and developments of the bigger community they begin to live in. Cultural diffusion emerges as the new house furniture and equipments influence/change the space formation. For example, while eating on a platform on the floor in rural areas transform to the activity of eating on a table in the city, the emerging need for a table and a space for arranging this activity, also effects the space formation. The washing machine in a bathroom and the dishwasher in a kitchen are the technological equipments effecting the arrangements of those spaces (see p.7).
  
- Acculturation is the cultural interaction between individuals or groups coming from various cultures in a community. In this process, there occurs a cultural differentiation mutually. Cultural interaction results in the re-formation of life styles and habits. People moving from one place to another, use many characteristics of their culture in their new settlements. So, culture can be seen as a symbolic expression of their former situation (Lang, 1987). Turkish housing culture is one of the best examples of ‘acculturation’ process by being a synthesis of Middle East, Islamic, Mediterranean and Middle Asian cultures.
  
- Culturation is the process when different societies and sub-culture groups come together to form a new culture. In this process, new cultural groups emerge as a result of the interaction and then cultural interaction ends. Finally, there exists a new culture occurred as a result of the combination of rural and city culture and unplanned/squatter settlements are the most important examples of this new culture. In Istanbul, second and third generation squatter residents, especially young people, prefer urban life style and requirements.

- Individuals who are trying to pass from one culture to another, live difficulties, have emotional stress and react to these feelings in the adaptation process. This is called cultural shock. Individuals, being between two different cultures, have contradictions and react to these contradictions. Squatter settlements take their shapes as a result of these contradictions. Also the contradiction occurring among the urban area residents and people who also live in urban areas but are not able to define themselves as residents of urban areas, influence the formation of the housing settlements.

When limited land use put forward for legal settlements and high costs of construction supplies combine with the rapid population increase caused by migration, squatter settlements rapidly increases. Even though there are different conditions and backgrounds resulting in the emergence of squatter settlements, providing better life conditions for the people residing in those settlements and to unite them with the urban life style is a common hope.

## **References**

State Statistical Institute . Available: [www. die.gov.tr](http://www.die.gov.tr)

Biltin Toker , (1993). Adaletsiz Gelir Dagilimina ve Kapitalist Somuruye Karsi Bir Ozgurleşme ve Demokratikleşme Sureci Olarak Istanbul'da Goc ya da Katilimci Demokrasi Yolunda Bir Özyonetim Modeli. Istanbul ve Goc, 17-33.

Rusen Keleş, (1993), Gocun Nedenleri ve Tarihsel Gelisimi (Reasons of Migration , Istanbul ve Goc, 1-9.

Nuran Zeren Gülersoy, et.al. (1999), I.T.U Ayazaga Kampusu Arazisinde Olusan Gecekondur Bolgesinin Planlamasina Yonelik Bir Arastirma.