Evaluation of Squatter Settlement Transformations in Istanbul in the Context of Sustainability: A Case Study in Fikirtepe

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Outline

- Urban Transformation and Transition in Istanbul, Turkey
- Fikirtepe Squatter Settlement Transformation Project
- Survey results and criticism of the urban transformation process in Fikirtepe squatter neighborhood
- Conclusions
Aims and Method

• to discuss and evaluate the urban transformation process and its possible results through this Fikirtepe squatter settlement case study, and

• to suggest a conceptual framework for sustainable social and physical transformation.

• The method was based on literature review, review of legislation, individual observations, and survey analysis by ITU architectural graduate students.
Introduction

Urban transformation, most popular residential event all over Turkey.

Urban transformation is carried out due to earthquake and squatter settlement issues because of the ever-present threats of earthquakes and the fact that more than half of the urban building stock consisting of illegal and poorly constructed buildings.

Fikirtepe, is one of the oldest squatter settlements located on the Kadikoy and Asian side of Istanbul.
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Urban Transformation/Transition and Sustainability

The evolution of regeneration strategies:

1950’s: reconstruction

1960’s: revitalization

1970’s: renewal

1980’s: redevelopment

1990’s: regeneration

2000’s: urban transformation

by Stöhr, Lichfield, Roberts & Sykes and Beswick & Tsenkova
Urban transformation should function to produce urban projects and carry out an application for renewal, regeneration, rehabilitation, redevelopment, etc. in order to make the problematic areas of a city healthier and more livable by reconsidering and sustaining in detail the social, economic and spatial aspects of urban development.

_The Chamber of Turkish Urban Planners, 2014_

**Urban sustainability** as the dynamic equilibrium (balance) of human well-being and the human and natural environment shares the same criteria for **sustainable urban transformation**. These are related with **quality of life** and socio-economic, environmental-economic, and institutional aspects. During sustainable urban transformation, economic growth has the potential to increase social welfare and reduce environmental degradation.

_Yang, 2010_
1980’s:
with the effect of **neo-liberal policies** in developed countries, **suburbs** accelerated while **squatter settlements** grew in developing countries.

**Istanbul** entered into the process of accelerated, **large-scale urban transformation** over the last decades.

With the on-going urban transformation process in Istanbul, both the **collective memory** and **collective culture** of the city and squatter areas have been **ignored**.
Urban Transformation and Transition in Istanbul, Turkey

Turkey has created two powerful authorities: TOKI and Metropolitan Municipalities.

After the big Marmara Earthquake in 1999, Istanbul’s municipality established the “Istanbul Metropolitan Planning and Urban Design Center”.

TOKI, which is the only institution officially responsible for low-income housing in Turkey, represents a supply-sided, centralized approach to housing issues.

TOKI has focused on squatter settlements having the most earthquake risk and on preparing people for the upcoming earthquake.

TOKI has mostly neglected architectural and morphological patterns, the historical heritage of the city, socio-cultural patterns and values of the neighborhoods, and the requirements of the local residents. Fikirtepe squatter settlement, now under rapid urban transformation, is one of many striking examples of this in Istanbul.
Fikirtepe Squatter Settlement Transformation Project

Kadikoy Location and Fikirtepe Neighborhoods
Fikirtepe Squatter Settlement Transformation Project

Property ownership in Fikirtepe is based on given title deeds to the squatters as a result of amnesty laws, which led to an increase in construction.

Fikirtepe is very attractive for investors due to being so close to the central business district of Kadikoy and to high-income neighborhoods along Bagdat Avenue.

With the transformation process, numerous construction companies have entered the area with proposals of megaprojects due to having access to international financial capital attracted by ever increasing housing prices.
Fikirtepe Squatter Settlement Transformation Project

The Fikirtepe transformation process *became central on the agenda* after the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) *made a master plan* of Istanbul in 2005.
At the beginning of this process developers were projecting that **fifty thousand attractive housing units** in 54 parcels would be built in Fikirtepe by 2015, but as of mid 2016 no projects have yet been completed.
The Ministry has decided to **widen the road axes**, increase **social facility** areas, and change **equivalence values** of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to make the area more attractive and affordable.

When Fikirtepe was selected as a pilot development area, **story restrictions were 40 stories high** but **later** the IMM restricted height of the buildings to 80 meters (**27 floor**) with a floor area ratio coefficient of 4. For this reason, developers began to slow down their construction plans.
Survey results and criticism of the urban transformation process in Fikirtepe squatter neighborhood

My class designed and carried out a field survey, having a questionnaire that was answered by 51 respondents with some receiving more in-depth face-to-face interviews.

The survey results were evaluated in relation to political, physical, social, and economic aspects and revealed the following findings in these various categories.
Social Components

Residents and construction firms are confronting each other in relation to the sharing from “rentier” (unearned income). **Twenty two percent** of the surveyed residents did not have any idea about urban transformation.

Traditional neighbor relations among the residents have started to weaken due to physical and social fragmentation.

- 51% living more than 20 years
- 78% satisfied with relationship (74% with homes)
- 1,500 abandoned housing units occupied by refugees
- 65% felt unsafe in terms of crime
Physical Components

Fikirtepe region cannot yet become a good example for a pilot study as it has yet to be fully and correctly implemented.

Protecting existing architectural scale, low density, urban morphology, and spatial identity are not being taken seriously enough. Residential areas have witnessed over-dense housing with very high-rise buildings and low ratio green spaces. High-rise residences are located without a sensitive planning approach and this is destroying the silhouette of Kadikoy as well as the traditional urban morphology.

80% of respondents no longer wish to live in Fikirtepe because 76% think that they will not be able to afford to live in the “new” Fikirtepe and they prefer to move to a similar and close neighborhood.

Old and new physical pattern in 2D and 3D in Fikirtepe, prepared by student group 4.
In Fikirtepe, the transformation procedure has been going on differently than in other neighbourhoods in Istanbul. Here squatters and developers have been negotiating with each other over time according to the rules of Kadıköy Local Municipality, the IMM and the Ministry.

- 57% believe that UT is not going on correctly
- 64% do not know what they will get
- No transparency about the correct information
- 73% do not know where they will be living
- Uncertainty and ambiguity create stress on residents
- Frequently changing rules about Floor Area Ratio
The transformation process has become a way of obtaining unearned profit (rentier). It is directly encouraging only to developers.

Big gap between old and new commers.

39% earn less than 700$ per month

Renters suffer economycally

47% renterand no economic incentives
Conclusions

By focusing on the Fikirtepe squatter district, certain conclusions can be pointed out about urban transformation in Istanbul.

**Social components:** Urban transformation projects should also address social transformation issues such as education, unemployment, poverty, crime rates, and social segregation in the area. Renters living in affected areas should be taken into account.
Conclusions

Physical/spatial components: High-rise or large-scale buildings should not be the only transformation alternative to squatter settlements. Density is an important tool for urban transformation. Quality and controlled density should be proposed for livable environments. Concern needs to be shown to 2D site existing city patterns and morphology as much as to the third dimension. Open and green spaces are vitally essential. Over-gentrification should be avoided in order to address the needs of the residents who lived in the area prior to transformation and their possible resettlement to other locations.
Conclusions

**Economic components:** Low cost and **affordable** housing options should be provided for both **rental** and **purchase** options. **TOKI**, local and central **governments**, and the **private sector** need to **cooperate in** order to build affordable, quality housing projects. Urban transformation can be used as an **economic engine** to develop the neighborhood **local economy**, besides the national economy. **Multi-staged processes** should be considered as being economic housing production alternatives.
Conclusions

**Political components:** A general architectural policy should be created in Turkey. Practices should be based on scientific and applied theories including inclusive policies and planning. The full impact of urban transformation projects needs to be studied and analyzed carefully prior to construction to avoid the quick and fait accompli policies too often practiced in Turkey. Urban transformation projects need input from a variety of stakeholders. Legal and managerial structures should be developed. Local and central governments should ensure long-term leadership to prevent conflicts between stakeholders and developers during the transformation process.
Thank you...

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