

## Urbanization and Perceptions of Citizens on Urban Transformation: Yeşildere Case

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### Abstract

In the 1950s with the urbanization process of Turkey, rapid migration movements towards the cities have taken place and gecekondu settlements have emerged because of the decrease in agricultural activity, the increase in job opportunities in industry and commerce, and lack of adequate housing stock in the cities. Over time, urban transformation projects of the gecekondu in the city center, which have developed unplanned and have many physical problems, have come to the fore. This study aims to examine the effects of urbanization policies on urban space and the life of the citizens through Yeşildere region. In the research, a case study was conducted on Yeşildere, a gecekondu settlement and urban transformation area, and in-depth interviews were conducted with people who lived and are living in Yeşildere. According to the information obtained from the participants, while living in gecekondu has physical disadvantages and social advantages, the opposite is valid for mass housing or apartments. At the same time, it has been observed that urban transformation projects being implemented are not sufficient and improvements are needed in health, education, transportation, and social services while improving the physical environment. In this sense, it is recommended to carry out multi-layered and community-centered transformation studies with the participation of the public and the cooperation of different actors.

**Keywords:** Urbanization, Urban Transformation, Urban Policies, Gecekondu, Mass Housing

## Kentleşme ve Kentlilerin Kentsel Dönüşüm Algısı: Yeşildere Örneği

### Öz

Türkiye'nin kentleşme süreci boyunca, tarımsal faaliyetlerin azalması ve sanayi ile ticaret alanlarında iş olanaklarının artması sonucunda kentlere doğru hızlı bir göç hareketi yaşanmıştır. Kentlerde yeterli konut stoku olmamasının bir sonucu olarak gecekondu yerleşimleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Zaman içerisinde, kent merkezindeki plansız gelişmiş ve fiziksel anlamda birçok problem barındıran gecekondu mahallelerinin kentsel dönüşüm projeleri ile yenilenmesi gündeme gelmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kentleşme politikalarının kentsel mekana ve kentlilerin yaşamına etkilerini Yeşildere bölgesi

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üzerinden incelemektir. Araştırmada, gecekondulu mahallesi ve kentsel dönüşüm alanı olan Yeşildere üzerinde örnek incelemesi yapılmış, Yeşildere’de yaşamış ve yaşamakta

olan kişilerle derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılardan elde edilen bilgilere göre, gecekonduda yaşamamanın fiziksel anlamda dezavantajları ve sosyal anlamda avantajları bulunurken toplu konut veya apartman için tam tersi söz konusudur. Aynı zamanda, uygulanmakta olan kentsel dönüşüm projelerinin yeterli bulunmadığı, fiziksel çevre geliştirilirken sağlık, eğitim, ulaşım ve sosyal hizmetlerde iyileştirmelere ihtiyaç duyulduğu görülmüştür. Bu anlamda, halkın katılımı ve farklı aktörlerin iş birliği ile çok katmanlı ve toplum merkezli dönüşüm çalışmalarının gerçekleştirilmesi önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kentleşme, Kentsel Dönüşüm, Kentsel Politikalar, Gecekondulu, Toplu Konut

## 1. Introduction

In the process of urbanization of countries, some measures are taken, and regulations are made to ensure that the cities develop in an integrated manner in economic, social and spatial dimensions, and all citizens are accommodated in adequate and healthy physical conditions. In the 1950s, with the urbanization process of Turkey, rapid migration movements towards the cities took place, and gecekondulu settlements emerged because of the decrease in agricultural activity, the increase in job opportunities in industry and commerce, and the lack of adequate housing stock in the cities. Gecekondulu is a type of construction formed to meet the housing needs of individuals who migrated from rural areas to the city for reasons such as job opportunities, better health and education conditions, and security since the 1940s in Turkey. As Işık and Pınarcıoğlu (2001, p.112) stated, gecekondulus have a class content: “They are the residences of those who have just come to the city, who are trying to hold on to the city, and which the state and the market have forgotten and ignored.” These neighborhoods face serious environmental and health problems due to inadequate infrastructure and unplanned settlements. Over time, because gecekondulus are generally close to the city center and there is not enough development area for new residential and commercial areas in the city center, they have started to be seen as a problem by central and local governments. As a result, the issue of demolition of gecekondulus and renewal of regions with urban transformation projects came to the fore. The urban transformation projects aim both for the low and middle-income groups living in gecekondulus to live in planned and healthier housing and for the arrangement of new residential and commercial areas in the city center for the high-income group.

In the past, while city centers were settlements where different income groups lived together in agriculture, trade, and industry sectors, problems such as rapid urbanization, increase in population density, unplanned construction, insufficient infrastructure, environmental pollution, and urban development not being able to progress in parallel with the changes taking place in cities were effective in the emergence of the concept of “urban transformation” (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021, p.2). Urban transformation practices are implemented for different reasons, and methods in different countries and their main purpose is to transform cities into sustainable and resilient cities by producing radical and systematic solutions to their physical, social, economic, and environmental problems (Hölscher and Frantzeskaki, 2021, p.2; McCormick et al., 2013, p.1). In the urbanization process of cities in Turkey, while business areas such as agriculture and industry were moved away from the center, gecekondulu settlements, which had become collapsed areas and sheltered by the workers living in the city center, were demolished

within the scope of urban transformation works and the areas were arranged in a way that would be suitable for new functions and users. Until the 2000s, gecekondu settlements, which were located very close to the center of İzmir and were ignored, started to be seen as valuable lands because of the increase in population density, the increase in the demand for the city center and the gradual expansion of the city. In this direction, urban transformation works being implemented in İzmir are carried out on the grounds of evacuating the areas with disaster risk, demolishing and rearranging the gecekondu areas, which are unplanned and unhealthy settlements, and the urban space.

Yeşildere is located in the Konak district of İzmir, and it is a gecekondu area with insufficient infrastructure and unplanned development, where the risk of landslides and floods is high due to its sloping land structure. In order to prevent the dangers caused by natural disasters and to improve the living conditions of the individuals living in the area, the houses that were agreed upon were demolished, and the people living in the region were moved to other parts of the city. In this state, instead of improving the urban space in that place and with its locals, urban transformation is carried out with the method of displacement. With this method, citizens living in gecekondu and having developed a certain lifestyle are dispersed in different places in the city by moving to apartments in different districts and mass housing in the city's periphery. Urban residents who moved from Yeşildere develop new habits and struggles in their new living spaces. In this sense, while the physical properties of the urban residents' settlements in the gecekondu are improved, they experience problems integrating with the city economically, socially, and culturally.

This study aims to reveal how the urban transformation projects and the urbanization policies implemented after 2000 affect the urban space and the people living in the cities in physical, economic and social dimensions and cause changes. In this sense, to organize and develop cities in line with the needs and demands of the citizens, it is necessary to examine the living spaces and establish communication networks and collaborations with both the city's citizens and different experts and actors. In this study, the reason why Yeşildere was chosen as the research area is that the region, which has witnessed the past of the city with its historical aqueducts, has become a gecekondu settlement in the city with the processes of industrialization and migration from rural to urban, and then it has entered a new process by being determined as an urban transformation area in relation to urban policies. In the literature, there are many academic research on gecekondu areas and urban transformation processes in Turkey and İzmir (Ataöv and Osmay, 2007; Eğilmez, 2010; Erman, 2016; Genç, 2014; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, 2001; Karadağ and Mirioğlu, 2014; Keleş, 2014; Kılıç and Göksu 2018; Mutlu, 2007; Şişman and Kibaroğlu, 2009; Taşçı 2017; Tekeli 2009; Tekeli 2011). However, in Yeşildere, where the effects of the urbanization process and urban policies can be observed in İzmir, there have not been enough studies evaluating the transformation of the Yeşildere region, which has idle industrial areas and certain physical, social and economic problems over time, and the opinions of the people living there. This study aims to explore the connection between macro scale and micro scale. In this direction, the originality of this study is (1) analyzing the history and settlement characteristics of Yeşildere in relation to urbanization processes and urban policies, (2) evaluating the decisions taken and practices implemented at the urban scale on the settlements, the lifestyles in the settlements, and the positive and negative effects on daily life by citizen's opinions.

## 2. Material and Method

This study used a qualitative research method, and a case study was conducted in line with the information obtained from written and oral sources after the literature research.

Within the scope of qualitative analysis, observation, in-depth interview, and content analysis methods were applied. Firstly, within the scope of the pilot study, the study area was observed in 2018 and 2019, photographs were taken, and conversations about daily life were made with the people living in the region about their problems, needs, and expectations. In the second stage, within the scope of the field study, in-depth interviews were conducted with people living in Yeşildere and moved from Yeşildere, on basic concepts such as from rural to urban migration, inner-city migrations, urban transformation and demolitions, living in gecekondus/apartments/mass housing. Finally, the information obtained from the participants was evaluated by content analysis. Content analysis is a method used to systematically analyze and categorize oral and written materials and obtain results from these data (Demirci and Köseli, 2017, p.344; Harwood and Garry, 2003, p.479). This method can be used to identify and document the attitudes, views, and interests of individuals, small groups, or large and diverse cultural groups (Drisko and Maschi, 2016, p.2). In order to conduct content analysis, the research problem and research questions must be determined, and the categories must be defined. (Demir, 2017, p.310; Demirci and Köseli, 2017, p.344-351). In this study, the following research questions were used to conduct content analysis:

- What is the reflection of the urbanization process on urban space and living spaces?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a gecekondu and living in an apartment or mass housing?
- What is the urban transformation perception of residents and do the urban transformation practices carried out in the city meet their expectations?

During the interviews, conversations were held to find answers to these research questions. According to Saldaña (2023, p.27-28), coding is used to place the data in a systematic order, classify and categorize the data. In obtaining categories, interrelated codes are synthesized and brought together. The participants' answers to the questions were evaluated according to the codes "life in a gecekondu", "life in an apartment/mass housing", "advantage", "disadvantage" and "urban transformation". "Living in a gecekondu", "advantage" and "disadvantage" codes were analyzed in the first category, "living in an apartment/mass housing", "advantage" and "disadvantage" codes were analyzed in the second category, and "urban transformation" code was analyzed in the third category. Verbal expressions evaluated under these categories were examined in the following sections of the study.

The snowball sampling method was used to determine the participants in the research. First, the headman of the neighborhood (mukhtar) was contacted, and the eight participants were reached through the headman's guidance. The interviews were carried out in the people's houses and in the headman's office, the real names of the participants were not used to protect their privacy, and the numbers were given according to the interview order. Table 1 summarizes the personal information of the participants, whether they live in Yeşildere or moved from Yeşildere, and information about the house they live in. Although most of the participants are men, the age range of the participants varies between 27-71. The educational status of the participants varies from not educated to primary school, high school, and university graduates, and most of them are retired or unemployed. The reasons for people living in Yeşildere are family and regional problems,

migration, being born there and finding a job. There are mostly three people living in the participants' houses, and the houses vary from one room and one living room or two rooms and one living room. These data show the demographic characteristics of the participants. Voice-recorded interviews and notes were transferred to written text with the permission of the individuals. The participants were asked questions about their personal life, domestic life, relations with their neighbors and neighborhoods, problems they experienced, thoughts and expectations about urban transformation. In order not to cause discomfort to the participants, the interviews were conducted in a conversational atmosphere, and mostly personal answers were received.

Table 1. Personal information of the participants, their relationship with Yeşildere and information about their houses

	Gender	Age	Education	Employment status	Relationship with Yeşildere	Reason for coming / living in Yeşildere	Number of people living in the house	Number of rooms in the house
Participant 1	Male	37	University	Working	Still living	Family problems and migration	3	1 room and 1 living room
Participant 2	Female	52	High school	Not working	Moved	Marriage	3	2 rooms and 1 living room
Participant 3	Female	27	University	Not working	Moved	Born in there	3	2 rooms and 1 living room
Participant 4	Male	39	High school	Working	Moved	Born in there	4	2 rooms and 1 living room
Participant 5	Female	65	No education	Retired	Still living	Family problems and migration	3	1 room and 1 living room
Participant 6	Male	71	Primary school	Retired	Still living	Family problems and migration	3	1 room and 1 living room
Participant 7	Male	58	High school	Retired	Still living	Find a job	3	2 rooms and 1 living room
Participant 8	Male	63	High school	Working after retired	Moved to TOKI	Regional problems and migration	1	2 rooms and 1 living room

### 3. Urbanization and Gecekondu in İzmir and Turkey

According to Keleş (2014, p.20), urbanization is a population accumulation process that increases the number of cities and their growth due to economic development and leads to city-specific changes in people's behavior and relationships. The concept of urbanization is directly related to change in size, density, and heterogeneity of cities (Vlahov and Galea, 2002, p.1). Although it varies according to countries and societies, in urbanization processes, the city reaches a certain level economically, socially, and spatially, and undergoes a change in a certain direction (Tekeli, 2011, p.16). One of the biggest problems that developing countries face in the rapid urbanization process is insufficient housing areas (Malik and Wahid, 2014, p.87).

Gecekondu in Turkey emerged in the 1940s in connection with the industrialization and urbanization processes and they are defined as “a shelter that is hastily built in a place that does not belong to it, contrary to zoning laws, health and science rules” (Keleş, 2014, p.365). Since the 1960s, the 5-Year Development Plans of the State Planning Organization, which aimed at planned development, addressed gecekondu settlements and the needs of families in the low-income group, focusing on issues such as the inability of those living in gecekondu to integrate with the city, preventing illegal construction and owning housing in mass housing. Despite these studies on urban policies, informal settlements could not be prevented because integrated improvement in the economic and social structure could not be achieved.

Although the concept of gecekondu is unique to Turkey, there are housing settlements with similar physical characteristics, where low-income groups live, in underdeveloped, developing and even developed countries. These houses, which are similar to gecekondu in terms of economic structure and physical characteristics, are defined as “ghetto” in the United States, “suburban” in France, “quarteriperiferici” and “quarteridegradati” in Italy, “problemomrade” in Sweden, “favela” in Brazil and “villa miseria” in Argentina (Wacquant, 2011, p.11). Gecekondu are informal settlement areas as they are formed outside the planned development of the city and have an impact on the formation of the informal labor market for those living in these areas (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu, 2001, p.50). This situation brought the problem of economic and social segregation and inability to integrate with the city along with physical segregation (Roy et al., 2018, p.269; Vithayathil and Singh, 2012, p.61).

Due to different urbanization policies and processes, squatter processes in Turkey can be examined in periods. Between 1950-1960, with the effect of industrialization, the first migrations from rural to urban took place and those who migrated were considered as cheap labor. While gecekondu were located around the industrial areas in the city center between 1960 and 1975, between 1975 and 1985, the industrial areas and gecekondu began to disperse to different parts of the city. After 1985, with the increase in job opportunities, informal settlements expanded within the cities, and the Gecekondu Law paved the way for them to be transformed into 2-3-storey buildings. After this process, gecekondu’s feature of being a house that meets the need for shelter remained in the background, and they began to be commercialized by renting out.

Cities reflect the political and economic structure, social and cultural characteristics of the society to the urban space. At the same time, the city’s production capacity and trade movements not only affect the urban space, but also ensure the growth and development of the city. İzmir Port, which has been working since the 16th century, not only contributed to the development of İzmir as a big city and business center but also affected the city’s spatial, economic, and social structure. In addition to the commercial activities in İzmir Port, the establishment of electricity and gas companies, the establishment of food, textile, chemical, cement, iron, and steel enterprises with industrial investments (Kaya, 2010, p.61, 89), connection with Anatolia by railway lines are important developments in the urbanization process of İzmir. Before the migration from rural areas and surrounding cities to İzmir started in the 1950s, Rene and Raymond Danger developed an İzmir Plan to reorganize the city between the years 1924-1925 under the consultancy of Henri Prost (Bilsel, 2009, p.12). In 1939, Le Corbusier worked for a new city plan that would allow the city’s development, and the idea of a green industrial city emerged in this plan (Akış, 2011, p.65). In 1951, a competition was held to create a viable city plan, and the plan prepared by Kemal Ahmet Aru, Gündüz Özdeş and Emin Canpolat was selected and came into force in 1953. This plan divides the city into functional zones, and workers’ quarters separated by green areas in industrial zones are designed. In these years, due

to the developments in the fields of trade and industry and increasing employment opportunities in İzmir, migration from rural to urban areas started and the population in the city started to increase rapidly. Due to the rapidly increasing population and insufficient housing areas in the city, these plans could not be implemented, and informal settlements such as Yeşildere, Ballıkuyu, Bayraklı, and Gültepe, which are close to the city center of İzmir, became gecekondu settlements. Gecekondu neighborhoods that were close to the city center and expanded around the industrial areas between the years 1950 and 1980, turned into collapsed areas after the closure of the industrial areas or moving out of the city center after 1980 and turned into neighborhoods that were described as undesirable and dangerous in the city.

### 3.1. History of Yeşildere and Life in Yeşildere

In the 19th century, camel caravans and train lines were used to transport the products purchased from producers in İzmir and the surrounding provinces to İzmir Port. In this period, Yeşildere, which houses waterways and aqueducts, became a transit area for camel caravans to reach the inns and the port in the city center. Since the 20th century, camel caravans have almost completely disappeared with the widespread use of highways along with railways. There are many waterways and aqueducts in İzmir. Kızılçullu Aqueducts, which were built in the Roman period and located in the Buca district, very close to Yeşildere, and the Vezirsuyu Aqueduct, which was built during the Ottoman period and located on Yeşildere Street today, were built to meet the water needs of the city (Figure 1). These structures are important historical artifacts that describe the past and physical structure of the city with their location and architectural features. However, nowadays, it is seen that gecekondu and vehicle roads damage these structures, and the structures are not adequately protected and maintained (Figure 2).

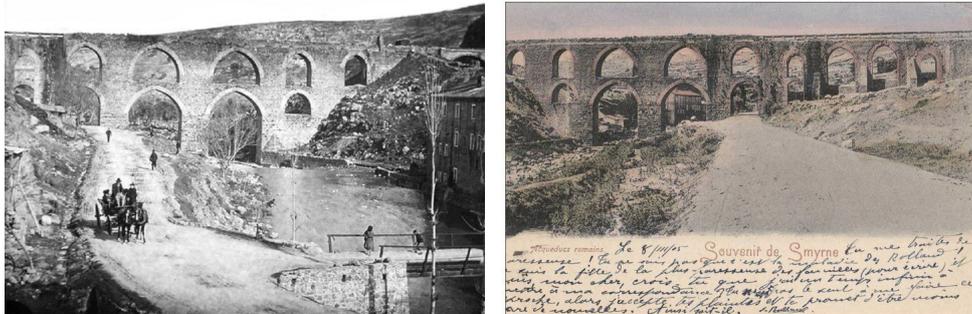


Figure 1. Left: The previous state of Kızılçullu Aqueducts and the caravans (URL-1); Right: The previous state of Vezirsuyu Aqueduct (URL-2).



Figure 2. Left: The current state of Kızılçullu Aqueducts (Authors' archive); Right: The current state of Vezirsuyu Aqueduct (Authors' archive).

The first gecekondu in İzmir, including Yeşildere, began to emerge in the 1930s, and the process of squatting continued rapidly until 2000 (Karadağ and Mirioğlu, 2014, p.47). Since the 1960s, the density of housing in Yeşildere started to increase due to the job opportunities offered by the leather factories and industrial facilities around the Meles Creek, and the one-storey gecekondu built on treasury lands turned into two or three-storey buildings over time. When the current situation of Yeşildere is examined, it is seen that the İZBAN (İzmir Suburban System) suburban line and Yeşildere Street, which are the important transportation lines of the city, pass through the region, and there are gecekondu and mostly abandoned commercial and industrial areas around Meles Creek (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Left: Informal settlement in Yeşildere (Authors' archive); Right: Inactive industrial areas in Yeşildere (Authors' archive).

Regarding the increase in the population and industrial facilities in the city, one of the biggest problems of İzmir has been the pollution and odor problem of İzmir Bay since the 1990s. One of the reasons for this problem is that the industrial facilities around Meles Creek pour their wastes into the creek. For this reason, some of the leather factories and other industrial facilities in Yeşildere were demolished within the scope of the “Meles Delta Improvement and Arrangement Project” initiated by the local government in 2000 (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). Some facilities that were not demolished were abandoned, while others began to be used as temporary commercial areas. These buildings are considered as dangerous and undesirable places for the residents of the region and other citizens, as they are neglected and used as crime scenes.

The fact that people who migrated to İzmir for economic reasons, have a housing shortage, working in temporary and low-income jobs, have caused them to be unable to integrate socially and spatially with other urbanites, and to experience material and moral adjustment problems. For this reason, they have created a different kind of lifestyle in which they maintain their own culture and habits in the city. They have created a “gecekondu culture” while continuing their rural life habits in the city and at the same time trying to integrate with the city (Keleş, 2014, p.415). It is difficult to talk about a scientific and sanitary living space because gecekondu are unplanned settlements, environmental pollution cannot be prevented, and houses are built with low-cost, poor quality or alternative building materials (Ocak, 2007, p.147-156) (Figure 4). On the other hand, the advantages of living in the region are that the residents shape their houses according to their needs and income and they have the opportunity to socialize with their neighbors in the streets, gardens and balconies of their houses.



Figure 4. Left: Environmental pollution in the area (Authors' archive); Right: Children's playground in unsanitary conditions (Authors' archive).

Regarding the gecekondu culture, people living in the region were asked whether their houses were adequate, their neighborhood relations, and usage areas such as gardens and balconies, and the following answers were received from the participants:

“They bought the land and built a house in which they thought it was a gecekondu, then built additional rooms. Then, when the marriage event, that is, their son's marriage took place, they thought that he was at our top floor in terms of saving money, at least more importantly he would not pay rent. ... Of course, one room, one living room, one bathroom. Was it enough? Never. But there was nothing else to do. That was our capability...” (Participant 2)

“Usually, the people there are homeowners. So, they have a home and a built-in order because they built the house themselves. That's why neighbors and friendships are deeply well-established. In other words, you know everyone very well, her/his good and bad, because they are not constantly displaced, because there are no tenants. Either friendship or neighborly relations were deeper there.” (Participant 4)

“We had fruit trees in that area in the sense of a garden, but we were sharing as much as enough to ourselves and our neighbors. In their garden, people were cooking tandoor bread, there were chickens, usually there was tandoor. There was mulberry as a fruit, we had fruit, we had many trees. Everyone was sharing, children were coming and eating mulberries, nobody was saying a thing.” (Participant 3)

“(While living in Yeşildere) Honestly, for a family of 5 members, a 2-room house is insufficient. So it has to have at least 3 rooms, especially if one of the children is a girl. ... (After getting married) The house we live in now has two rooms, a living room and 95 square meters. We have our own room, our common area is the living room, our girls have a room. ... Well, for now, it meets our needs, but we have different forward-looking thoughts. We want to sell this place and buy a different house. Again in this district.” (Participant 4)

“(For Terrace) In summer we are spending our time there. We sleep and eat our food there. We are not living here in summer. When the time comes we move, O.K. ... It is very cool, look how comfortable to sleep. He is not sleeping (for his son).” (Participant 6)

Participants living in Yeşildere and who lived in Yeşildere expressed their problems regarding the quality of living space, access to public services, transportation to the city center and other districts as follows:

“Also, there is nothing in the neighborhood. What can I say? There is no park where the children go, nowhere to eat. You want something to eat, they don’t make delivery because it’s a dangerous place. How many times have I experienced it. ... There are a lot of people with criminal records. That’s why they don’t bring food here.” (Participant 1)

“... nothing is done. For example, we have been there for 24 years, only road and the bridge have been built, so technical things are being done, there is nothing for young people. Nothing changed, no matter what you say. Always same. If a person who came 24 years ago comes 24 years later, he will see the same things remain the same.” (Participant 1)

“... the location where we were living was a place approximately had equal distance to both Kaynak Neighborhood and Yeşildere. So, to go to Kaynak District, we had to go uphill to get on the bus. We had to go downhill to use the public transport to the bus or minibus in Yeşildere. So it was a problem. ... Especially when we think of it as winter, evening time, it is really hard when we think that we have something to carry of a certain weight.” (Participant 2)

According to the information obtained from the participants, the positive aspects of living in Yeşildere are that they can own a house according to their income, have the opportunity to expand their house in case of need, be close to the city center, grow fruit and vegetables in their balconies and gardens, and socialize with their neighbors. However, the negative aspects of living in Yeşildere are that the technical and social public services are not sufficient, the physical properties of the houses are not in good condition, the topographic features of the region are challenging, and the crime rate is high. For these reasons, there is a need for a transformation that takes into account the lifestyle and needs of the people living in the region.

#### **4. Urban Transformation Practices in İzmir and Turkey**

Political, social, and economic events that occur in cities affect the urban space. In these change processes, the concentration constantly changes, affecting the city’s center and the new centers to be formed, causing the city to be reproduced (Lefebvre, 2013, p.113-114). During the creation of new orders in cities, the decisions and practices of central and local governments are decisive. In order to meet the changing needs of cities in the world and in Turkey, transformation works that differ in terms of purposes, application methods and results are carried out (Şişman and Kibaroğlu, 2009). After the 2000s in Turkey, because of the decentralization of sectoral areas such as agriculture and industry in cities and the demolition of gecekondu within the scope of urban transformation projects, people living in those areas moved to apartments in other districts or to mass housing in the city’s periphery. This situation has allowed urban centers to be reproduced spatially and functionally in a way that will appeal to the high-income group.

About urban transformation, TOKİ (Mass Housing Administration) is a publicly supported organization in Turkey, and it has been one of the leading institutions in the execution of the country’s housing policies since the 1980s. TOKİ produces low-budget houses with certain physical standards to meet the housing needs of the low-income group and to

provide housing for those living in demolished gecekondus. In the legal regulations regarding urban transformation, local administrations have been given the regulatory task of taking over and transferring lands, while TOKİ has undertaken the task of constructing mass housing. According to TOKİ, the main goal of urban transformation is to “establish neighborhoods that prioritize values by solving many problems such as increasing the quality of life in urban projects, balancing increasing economic imbalances and global pressures, eliminating social inequality and housing shortage” (TOKİ). In relation to this goal, after the damage caused by the Marmara and Düzce earthquakes, decisions were taken to prevent the risks of natural disasters and to improve the physical characteristics of living spaces. Yet practices aimed at improving the economic, social, and cultural conditions of individuals in the transformed regions were not sufficiently included. In this sense, it is possible that urban transformation practices in Turkey mainly focus on improving physical space.

Lefebvre (2013, p.122) describes places that are the same in close order with the concept of “isotopic space”, other places that are excluded and intertwined with the concept of “heterotopic space”, and places that have value but are not given importance, such as transition places with the concept of “neutral space”. Gecekondus are “heterotopic spaces” intertwined with their spatial characteristics, neighborhood relations, and common life features and excluded from their spatial, social, and economic differences within the city. On the other hand, mass housing units are “isotopic spaces” where standard and monotype housing is produced without considering the social and cultural characteristics of the society. In these housing types, while the physical features of mass housing, which are isotopic spaces, are physically more livable, gecekondus, which are heterotopic spaces, have features that make social life and sharing possible. Therefore, there is a need for housing policies that will ensure economic development and maintain and increase social sharing while improving physical space.

Since the objectives, content and method of urban transformation applications are determined according to the characteristics of the area where the transformation will be carried out (Karadağ and Miriođlu, 2014, p.43), it is essential to consider the expectations and needs of the residents, unlike standard applications (Von Wirth, 2014). Regarding the opinions of the residents, the participants who joined the research expressed their thoughts on İzmir’s urban problems and urban transformation projects as follows:

“When we think about İzmir’s shortcomings and problems, I say that some deficiencies were caused by immigration in time. As I just mentioned, this is the parking problem, then the infrastructure problem because the geographical location of İzmir is not on flat ground. As such, the climate of İzmir is mostly rainy in winter. This brings up the insufficiency of infrastructure for us. In this sense, I say it is inadequate. Another, of course, I think is the inadequacy of our highways. That is why, when it comes to the migration intake, or when people’s indulgence in luxury is at the same time, the inadequacy of the highways stands out. ... For some districts, maybe shopping malls are not enough. Alternatively, entertainment places are not enough.” (Participant 2)

“The urban problems of İzmir, their roads are very bad at first. The municipality does not provide any kind of service in this regard. Infrastructure is problematic, when it rains, you know İzmir, generally a mountainous area, streets are slopes. The points where those slopes end are filled with water. In other words, urbanization in İzmir is very bad, unorganized. In some places, the buildings are

very high, and in beautiful places/grounds, that is very low, too. While it should be the opposite. İzmir is a complete problem itself. Don't believe when they say it is beautiful." (Participant 4)

"They are not doing it for the general interest in urban transformation. They do it so that certain people make money. There is ill-will. There is rent. As I said, A... Construction, we met that mukhtar, they had 20 of houses from that neighborhood. Why are you buying them? Because there's a plan in there. ... I would like it. For example, I would like Yeşildere to be like Porsuk Creek in Eskişehir." (Participant 1)

"So when I say urban transformation, I think of it as the complete elimination of the shortcomings I experienced in the past. What can this be, that is, from the house I live in, to the park where my child plays or to the school where he/she is educated. Or to the means of transportation. So I would like to see everything as a whole, adapted to that urban transformation, as a fully structured whole. ... I think that just one thing remains new or renewed doesn't mean much." (Participant 2)

The completed and ongoing urban transformation and development projects in İzmir are carried out within the scope of Article 73 of Municipality Law No. 5393. Under the leadership of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, urban transformation works are carried out in Ege Neighborhood and Ballıkuyu, Kosova, Kocakapı, Yeşildere, Akarcalı Neighborhoods of Konak District, Aktepe and Emrez Neighborhoods of Gazimir District, Uzundere and Yurtoğlu Neighborhoods of Karabağlar District, Güzeltepe Neighborhood of Çiğli District, and Örnekköy Neighborhood in Karşıyaka District (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2022). In these projects, while providing on-site transformation is primarily targeted, housing types and sizes are offered and contracts are made on the basis of the new construction rights calculated while reaching an agreement with the beneficiaries. Apart from on-site transformation, different projects, such as new project implementation or expropriation, are implemented according to the characteristics of the region.

#### **4.1. Urban Transformation in Yeşildere**

İzmir has risks for natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides due to fault lines passing through the city, alluvium surrounding the bay, and illegal settlements built on steep lands (Gümüş, 2013, p.559). Yeşildere is a residential area established between two hills. The richness of groundwater in the region, insufficient infrastructure to perform rainwater drainage and steep land structure with loose soil have caused floods and landslides. Therefore, in Kadifekale and Yeşildere, contracts have been signed for demolition works between the beneficiaries of the gecekondus that are at risk from natural disasters and the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality. Demolitions, which started in 2007, were completed in 2011 (Figure 5), and afforestation work was carried out to prevent landslides in the area where gecekondus were demolished (Figure 6). It is aimed to transform the afforested area into a "City Forest" by increasing the existing green area and enriching it with children's playgrounds and common areas (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2022).



Figure 5. Traces of demolished houses due to disaster risk (Authors' archive).



Figure 6. Left: The afforestation area (Authors' archive); Right: Not demolished gecekondu and industrial facilities (Authors' archive).

Yeşildere Street is a main road with heavy traffic that provides transportation between the airport and the city center. The Homeros Boulevard and Konak Tunnel, completed in 2015, significantly reduced the traffic on this road. In this context, the region is becoming a new development area with the demolition of risky houses and infrastructure investments. However, while these arrangements were being made, no solution could be found for abandoned industrial buildings and gecekondu with unhealthy and inadequate physical conditions. In this sense, while technical infrastructure works are carried out around the region with road arrangements, practices aimed at improving the technical and social infrastructure within the region are not carried out at a sufficient level.

Displacement is the movement and process from one place to another. The realization of this relocation movement due to compulsory or personal preferences affects the adaptation processes to the new space. As a result of changing their economic and social situations over time, individuals living in gecekondu moved to different neighborhoods or mass housing in the city with their own will or because of displacement within urban transformation works. While the adaptation processes make it easier for people to move at their own will, adaptation problems are encountered in urban migrations due to displacement. In line with the decision of the local government, because of the relocation of the leather factories and industrial facilities from Yeşildere to the "İzmir Free Zone" in Menemen, some of the people living in the region became unemployed, while the other part moved either to Menemen or to other districts to find a

job. The participants who moved from Yeşildere expressed their new living spaces and their changing habits and needs as follows:

“... somehow differentiated, so our quality of life has changed. This, of course, affects our budget, so there was both a plus and a minus. ... We were washing dishes by hand, using single dish detergent. But now I also use it in the machine dishwashing detergent. I also use it for hand when I wash it in my hand. So luxury increases, this time costs increase.” (Participant 2)

“The area with the garden there was very good. There is a garden of our own, there is none in here. There is an area for 20 apartments for everyone, which is very, very little if you divide it to per person. Of course, the children are much better growing up with the trees. What was the good thing about the apartment? A more organized structure, namely the number of rooms, your environment, security or transportation.” (Participant 3)

“This place (Yıkıkkemer) is more organized, easy to access. There are a lot of shopping opportunities. Grocery-style places are more popular in Yeşildere. There are no big supermarkets, shopping malls or something. This region is more comfortable, the area we just moved.” (Participant 4)

In line with the “planned restriction” strategy (Wacquant, 2011, p.101, 105) implemented by Turkey in informal settlements, it is aimed to reorganize the city center within the scope of transformation projects, as the industrial facilities in Yeşildere have been moved and the unplanned gecekondu have become collapsed areas over time because of not improving them. Thus, the transformation process in the region started with the removal of factories from the region and the demolition of some houses due to the disaster risk, but this transformation has not yet been completed. For this reason, the implementation of a project planned with the principle of on-site transformation and participatory method to the gecekondu that continue to exist in the region will contribute to a more equitable, comprehensive, and sustainable urbanization.

#### **4.2. Uzundere TOKİ Mass Housing**

In 2006, a Liaison Office was established in Kadifekale and Yeşildere to negotiate with the owners of the gecekondu planned to be demolished due to the danger of landslide and to reach an agreement. Promotional trips were organized to Uzundere TOKİ residences in 2006 and 2007, and the first draw was made in 2008 for those who want to live in mass housing. After the agreements were made with the beneficiaries, the demolition of the gecekondu began and the residences in Uzundere started to be delivered in 2010 with a 15-year repayment plan. 1100 of the 1700 beneficiaries in the region preferred to live in mass housing, while the remaining 600 beneficiaries demanded the expropriation fees to move to other regions (Kılıç and Göksu, 2018, p.206-212).

Uzundere TOKİ is located within the borders of Karabağlar district, and its distance from the city center is approximately 9 kilometers. There are a total of 3080 residences in 4 residence types in high-rise buildings on an area of 469.425 square meters (Figure 7). TOKİ carried out the construction work of the project, and İzmir Metropolitan Municipality transferred some of the houses it bought from TOKİ to the residents whose houses in Kadifekale and Yeşildere were demolished, and reconciliation was reached (Kılıç and Göksu, 2018, p.206, 214). Other flats were put up for sale through auctions. As in this application, if the urban transformation project is carried out by displacement method

rather than on-site transformation, it will be necessary to ensure that the site selection does not pose a danger to disaster risk, to develop the necessary technical and social infrastructure, to meet the needs and expectations of the inhabitants, and to produce sustainable solutions in physical, social and economic dimensions.

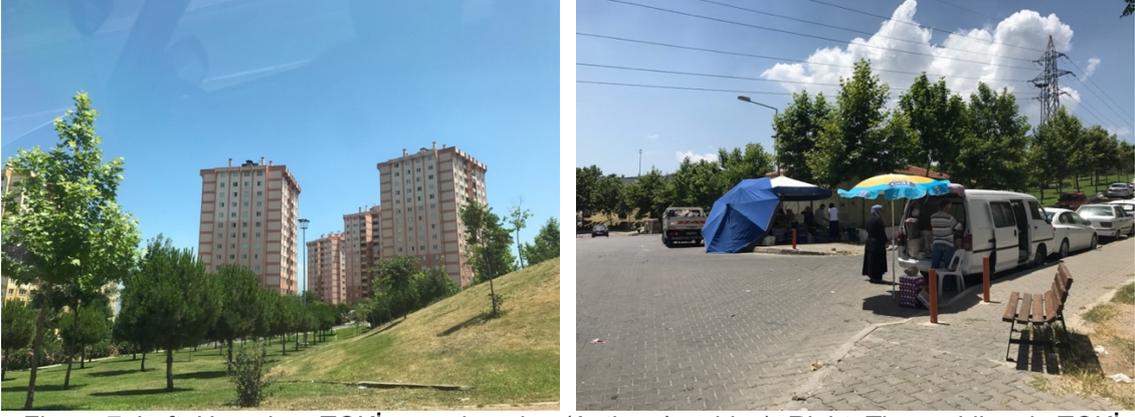


Figure 7. Left: Uzundere TOKİ mass housing (Authors' archive); Right: The peddlers in TOKİ (Authors' archive).

There are advantages and disadvantages of moving from gecekondu to mass housing. People who moved to mass housing expressed their satisfaction as they had the opportunity to access housing and schools, sports fields and green areas with better physical conditions and a healthy living space. However, people who moved from Yeşildere to Uzundere have moved away from the city center, where they could easily reach by walking or public transportation before, their social sharing decreased due to the changing housing environment, and they faced economic difficulties due to the obligations of living in an apartment and the lack of sufficient shopping places in the vicinity. For example, while most of the shops in the shopping center in the complex are empty, it is seen that the residents prefer to shop from the bazaar and the peddlers in the streets (Figure 7). In short, there are spatial, economic and social differences between living in a gecekondu and living in an apartment. While these differences cause some people not to want to move to mass housing, some individuals who move to mass housing experience social and economic problems and adaptation problems in their new living spaces. In this context, while the living space is supported by technical and social infrastructure with better physical conditions, spatial arrangements that will make it possible to develop social belonging and connections in accordance with their economic structures will be more effective and efficient in the long term.

## 5. Conclusion

In the studies carried out as a result of the research problem and research questions, some results were obtained from written sources in the literature and in-depth interviews. Firstly, the following results were obtained for the research question "What is the reflection of the urbanization process on urban space and living spaces?":

- In the historical process, İzmir has been a city that has influenced production-consumption relations with its international, domestic, and urban connections and distribution networks. The fact that İzmir is active in the industry, trade and service sectors in terms of economic activities has led to immigration from other cities and reaching a certain population density in parallel with the urbanization process. Migrations from rural areas to the city have affected the physical and social fabric of the city, revealing gecekondu settlements and gecekondu culture.

- Since the 1950s, legal regulations and interventions have been implemented by central and local governments to prevent urban problems caused by industrialization, urbanization and migration from rural to urban areas. Although discourses aimed at preventing gecekondu and meeting the housing needs of the society were brought to the agenda in these regulations, gecekondu could not be prevented and over time, single-storey gecekondu turned into two or three-storey buildings.
- In the periods when industrial areas were in the city center or in areas close to the city center, informal settlements were mostly built near these areas. In parallel with the city planning strategies of central and local governments, after the removal of industrial areas from the city center and the city center entering a new transformation process, gecekondu neighborhoods, which have many technical and social deficiencies, have begun to be seen as problematic areas.
- As a result, while gecekondu, apartments, and high-rise buildings can be seen side by side in cities, polarization between citizens with different social, cultural, and economic structures is increasing.

Secondly, the following results were obtained for the research question “What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a gecekondu and living in an apartment or mass housing?”:

- According to the participants, the advantages of living in Yeşildere are being close to the city center, neighborly relations, and having common sharing and socializing areas such as gardens, balconies and streets. The disadvantages of living in Yeşildere are insufficient and low-quality living space, lack of social and technical facilities, transportation difficulties and environmental pollution.
- According to the participants, the advantages of living in an apartment/mass housing include having a better physical quality living space, access to social and technical facilities, and various open and public spaces. The disadvantages of living in an apartment/mass housing are mostly paying debts to own a house, moving away from the city center, increasing transportation and other costs, and decreasing neighborly relations.

Lastly, the following results were obtained for the research question “What is the urban transformation perception of residents and do the urban transformation practices carried out in the city meet their expectations?”:

- Since the 2000s, transformation studies have been carried out with TOKİ, local government and private sector partnerships to create new urban areas in some planned and unplanned developed districts of İzmir.
- When the participants were asked about their thoughts on urban transformation, they stated that the urban transformation practices carried out by the displacement method or on the basis of buildings were not good and sufficient, and that improvements in health, education, transportation and social services were needed together with the improvement of the physical area. In this sense, the transformation practices being implemented cannot adequately meet the needs and expectations of the society.
- Compared to the gecekondu, the spatial arrangement of the mass housing built for low and middle-income groups has qualities that increase individual consumption and support retreat into private life rather than maintaining common culture and actions. However, these individuals who change their living spaces are not offered employment or an economic system to cover their expenses. In these projects, the protection of environmental values and the improvement of the economic and social structure are expected together with the spatial

transformation, while the general focus is on the regeneration of the physical environment in Turkey. These practices are essential for improving the living space but are insufficient for a multi-layered transformation that will be effective in the long run.

According to the information obtained from the visits to Yeşildere and from the interviews, it has been seen that the people living there are struggling to survive due to financial and moral difficulties and deficiencies. However, at the same time, the region has many potentials. The historical features of the area, its proximity to the city center, and the idea of rehabilitating and re-functioning abandoned buildings contain potential and possibilities for its development. The infrastructure projects should be organized to improve the physical space, healthy and sustainable living spaces should be created, transformation should be carried out with the locals, the integration of the inhabitants of the region with the city should be ensured by improving the level and quality of education and creating social opportunities. It is necessary to inform the public about the project process, ensure their participation, and cooperate with different actors such as management units, experts, and citizens. The importance of this study is the evaluation of the decisions made at the macro scale in line with urban policies and the reflections of the practices implemented at the micro-scale in urban space and life through the example of Yeşildere. For future studies, it is recommended to research to understand the changing and transforming urban space in different places and scales.

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### **Author Contribution**

The authors declare that they have contributed equally to the manuscript.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors of the study declare that there is no financial or other substantive conflict of interest that could influence the results or interpretations of this work.

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