THE UNIQUE CASE OF SQUATTER PREVENTION PROJECTS IN TURKEY: TOZKOPARAN NEIGHBORHOOD

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Istanbul is a metropolitan city that owes its present form to many harsh city planning decisions made in the 1950s. Rapid urbanization and internal immigration created an urgent need for housing, resulting in uncontrolled, unplanned urban growth. Public authorities, constrained by inertia, offered only limited solutions to the problem of sheltering the urban poor. Instead, public investment was used for the construction of new highways and housing for the middle and upper-middle classes. Old neighbourhoods in the historical center of the city were torn apart in order to accommodate a new, automobile-based lifestyle, while many former residents of the city were evicted and relocated. Tozkoparan neighborhood was the first example of "Squatter Prevention Projects": it was an exception, as a public housing project intended to shelter those evicted from their houses or incapable of dwelling in their former homes. A limited number of Squatter Prevention Projects were put into place across Turkey after being made possible by the Squatter Act of 1966. Yet, with shifting urban politics from the 1980s onwards, these projects became the target of a new urban renewal discourse which would result in a radical transformation of the neighborhoods they were based in. Our paper offers a short overview of the last 40 years with the aim of highlighting the emerging issue of neoliberal policies being used against the urban poor.

INTRODUCTION

An investigation of the changing politics of housing in Turkey shows that state organizations were late in their attempts to deal with internal immigration and the unplanned expansion of illegal neighborhoods.[1] From the mid-1950s on, immigration provided essential labor power for a growing Istanbul, yet the housing policies put in place were insufficient for managing the increase in urban population.[2] Even though public housing was very much on the agenda, the housing projects implemented for the urban poor remained far outnumbered by illegal neighborhoods, especially in Istanbul. In the 1970s the *gecekondu* (the Turkish for "built at night", used for slums) phenomenon was a part of the populist discourses of political parties and a resource for early ideas of evolutionary architecture. But following the military coup of 1980, new governments no longer expected to find solutions to illegal housing and the uncontrolled expansion of the city in urban planning: instead, they decided to legalize all of the illegal buildings that met certain conditions.[3]

In this paper, the particular story of modernization and the built environment in Turkey is investigated through the unique case of Squatter Prevention Projects (SPPs), and we aim to highlight two different aspects of social engineering in the context of social housing: firstly, the top-down attempt to create an ideal environment for an ideal citizen, and secondly, using the discipline of urban planning to help those in urgent need of healthy housing. From the 1980s, the transformation of economic politics and the new consumption patterns of post-industrial society changed the appearance of social housing in different discourses.

After World War II, the architectural profession was discredited for not fulfilling its promises and achieving an industrial utopia.[4] The narrative of architectural history has also been reconstituted after the massive construction programs of the post-World War II years.[5] Architectural practice committed itself to a vanguard position in achieving a utopian industrial society, and was later criticised for losing its critical positioning in social matters.[6] Through the reevaluation of an example of social architecture—in this case the Tozkoparan Squatter Prevention Project, the first example of a SPP put into practice—and exposing local dynamics through a historiographical approach, we can point out an important moment of urban history, in which professionals prioritized the urgent needs of society. The housing politics of the 1960s and 1970s were considered steps towards a welfare society,[7] but the dream of a welfare society did not come to fruition. Accordingly, Tozkoparan and other neighborhoods resisting transformation are important and represent the time in the past, when there was a belief in that unfulfilled dream.

This paper, adopting a mixed methodology, depicts the Act of 1966 and the Tozkoparan Project, offering a short overview of the last 40 years of the neighborhood and dealing with the emerging issue of neoliberal policies that disadvantage the urban poor. Spatial interventions carried out by inhabitants themselves throughout this period are also considered as an important aspect of the overview. Many of the developments are also examined to show the qualities lacking in the planning of the project.

The outcomes of this research are provisional. However, this paper aims at contributing to a broader understanding of social housing for the poor in Turkey and in general.

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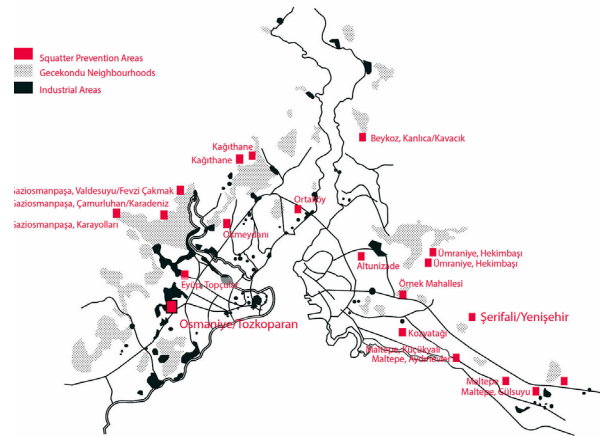
FIGURE 1 Tozkoparan Squatter Prevention Area

FIGURE 2 Location of industrial areas, illegal neighborhoods and SPPs in Istanbul between 1960-1980

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The roots of the fast and complex evolution of Istanbul are to be found in the socio-economic transformation which occurred in the second half of the 20th Century.[8] This time period saw a transition from import-substitution policies to a liberal approach prevailing on the socio-economic scene. Although the housing politics of the 1960s and 1970s were not as effective as intended, they were actions that represented steps towards a welfare society.[9] In 1950, the Democratic Party (DP) won both the general and municipal elections. Before 1950, the DP's election argument was based on democracy and liberalism[10] and the discourse supported the construction of populist urban politics, redirecting long-lost attention back to the neglected metropolis of Istanbul.[11] This decade also witnessed a loss of "not only its [Istanbul's] ethnic diversity, but its traditional largely non-Muslim merchant and industrial classes".[12] These populations were replaced by a wave of Muslim immigrants from Anatolia, and this shift had serious effects on both urban culture and populist politics.[13] Concurrently, urbanization issues began to dominate the political discourse.[14] Rapid industrialization in this period increased the demand for housing, private transport encouraged further sprawl, the appropriation of the old city center affected the everyday lives of its inhabitants, and forced evictions resulted in extensive housing problems, and yet state institutions could not afford a real solution.[15]

The military coup carried out on May 27, 1960 had serious reverberations on the fields of planning and architecture.[16] The period was dominated by the ideal of economic progress based on self-sufficient national industry. The theme of reconstruction[17] also became one of the important topics of architectural debate.[18] Yet neither during the DP government, nor after the military coup, did these idealistic pursuits realize their intended outcomes.[19]

HOUSING POLITICS AND SOCIAL HOUSING IN TURKEY[20]

Shortly before the 1980 coup d'état, the housing issue became an instrument of political struggle and discussions on housing were transformed into multi-sided exchanges of views and public debates.[21] Early attempts at constructing public housing neither met the needs of those in urgent need of housing nor were accessible to them, leading to harsh criticisms of the early projects.[22] In this period, housing issues became heavily politicized, and housing questions became a crucial component of class struggle.[23]

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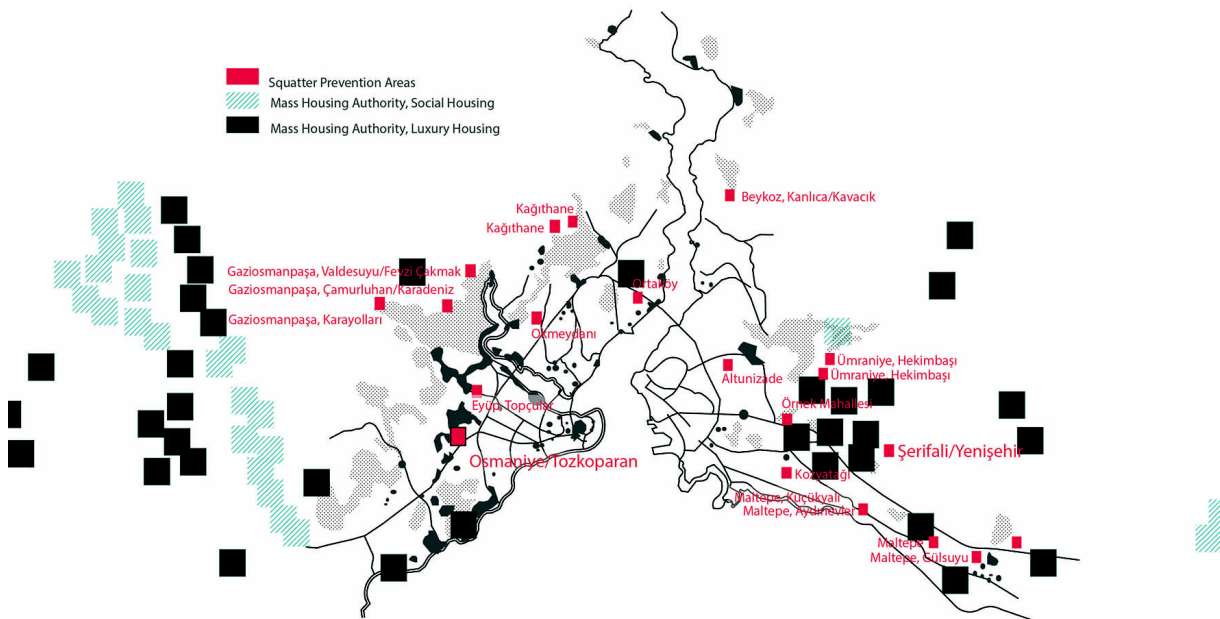
FIGURE 3 Locations of SPPs built by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement in relation to social housing and luxury housing built in Istanbul by the Mass Housing Authority from the 1980s onwards.

In Istanbul, the inability of the state to provide housing led to a growing self-regulated construction and housing market.[24] At the beginning of the 1960s, however, came a shift of the responsibility for housing from local to central government. In 1958, Hürriyet daily newspaper covered the detection and demolition of squatter houses around the Florya and Mecidiyeköy neighborhoods located on the edges of the city.[25] The article mentioned new apartment blocks to be built around Kazl?çeşme (which is also located outside of the city walls, near to neighboring industrial facilities) for the *gecekondu* settlers. Another newspaper in 1962 indicated that local authorities might start construction on the empty municipal land (Milliyet, 1962). The Real Estate and Credit Bank had given housing loans to cooperatives in preceding decades, but by the second half of the century, both the Bank and the cooperative system were accused of not having provided a real solution for the underprivileged, and for using their resources to construct luxury dwellings.[26]

A critical threshold was the new Gecekondu (Squatter) Act (No. 775), passed in 1966, which authorized the state to provide shelter directly. The Squatter Act of 1966 was a legislative and also a cultural threshold, being the first law to include the word *gecekondu*. The aim of this act was the "rehabilitation and clearance of existing squatters and the prevention of further illegal constructions". Mass housing was proposed as a solution for the first time in the second Five-Year Development Plan for the period 1968-1972.[27] In 53 neighborhoods, Squatter Prevention Projects were designed for the prohibition and removal of illegal construction between 1966-1980.[28]

Throughout the 1960s, industrial facilities outside the city centre, on the coasts of the Golden Horn and on the periphery of the historical peninsula were surrounded by illegal settlements. Squatter areas were mentioned in the newspapers, accompanied by images of their demolition.[29] In the early period, when state institutions first proposed prevention projects as a valid solution to the housing problem, the areas the project would encompass were chosen in accordance with the logic of illegal settlements. Yet, in the 2000s, and particularly after 2007, when the Mass Housing Authority acquired all the authority and responsibilities granted to the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement by the Gecekondu Act, the squatter prevention areas were targeted by governmental institutions as areas for renewal. The redefinition of this land from areas for social housing to areas for urban renewal is indicative of the changing politics of housing in Turkey.

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TOZKOPARAN, A CASE STUDY

Tozkoparan is located on the European side of Istanbul, to the north of the E-5 highway, which connects the city centre to the west.[30] The so-called Reconstruction and Resettlement Blocks in Tozkparan consist of standard types developed by the housing agency of the central government. The first blocks in the Tozkoparan neighborhood were those built in order to house people who lost their homes due to demolitions on the historical peninsula.[31] The land for the Tozkoparan SPP was expropriated by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement in 1962. Research from 1977 stated that 26% of the land taken over already belonged to the public, and official parliamentary reports show that infrastructure works, such as roads, the sewerage system, water and electricity were continuing in 1965.[32] The construction of 6,000 housing units were planned, yet as of the year of study, only 2,914 units had been completed.[33]

The partially realized project of 1973 had many qualities in common with contemporary housing projects. It consisted of low-rise blocks in which small repeated units were positioned freely. Spaces in central locations were reserved for public uses, such as education, sports, culture and shopping. Four variations of apartment blocks and the nuclear single-family houses appeared as different housing types. The smallest units, of around 30-35 square meters, were in the A-blocks, which had a courtyard. The rationalistic general layout of the project was developed around a main axis in the north-south direction. The main centre consisted of small shops. Apart from the schools, there were two neighborhood parks and plentiful empty in-between spaces. These planning principles clearly corresponded with modernist planning in terms of functional zoning and the usage of green belts for isolation. Yet the project also reflects important negative criticisms pointed at post-World War II modernism: the lack of reference to topographical and climatic conditions, geographical variations, or any reflection of the area's cultural heritage.

When we look at the project commission processes within the Ministry,[34] we find a repetition of the same typology. The most effective state mechanism for housing production reflected principles such as efficiency and functionalism. Still, the block designs were deprived of topographical, climatic and cultural inputs, mainly because the provincial organizations responsible for local adaptations were not effective enough. A further reason for negative impressions on the public was the lack of maintenance in the long term. Architect Melih Karaaslan,[35] who was the editor of Mimarl?k (Architecture) magazine between 1985-1994, stated that this process facilitated the legitimization of an image of architecture as incapable of producing buildings appropriate to the conditions of the country.

The buildings in Tozkoparan, which were erected using traditional construction methods, benefited in a limited sense from the potential of the concrete frame structural system, which allowed the possibility of a free-facade organization. Narrow, cantilevered balconies amounted to only a small proportion of the entire facade in terms of width, leading to less flexibility and limiting the possibilities of intervention. Academic studies, news reports and interviews carried out with the inhabitants show the absence of many elements of a housing environment when the first settlers arrived. Although the apartment blocks were complete, the open spaces were neglected and many infrastructural elements were missing. Crucial missing requirements included storage bunkers specifically for coal or vegetation, a preschool, a study centre, a library for the younger population, and sports facilities. These oversights by the municipality, which was responsible for common spaces, led the inhabitants to initiate individual or group interventions and reproduce these public spaces. These acts had both positive and negative outcomes on the present-day situation. The strong community and solidarity within the community is based on its past deficiencies. Yet, many of the physical alterations—specifically the unit-based interventions—have led to a feeling that the structural system is insecure.[36] Interventions by residents appear at various scales. There are many transformations at the unit scale, such as incorporating balcony spaces within the apartments, changing the plan or facade organization, making extensions, etc. Also, we have evidence of many common spaces in and between the blocks being created. The earliest proof of space-making is on the news of 1967, which reports that inhabitants were building coal storage bunkers with found materials.[37] Recent interviews have shown that the majority of

dwellers in an A-type apartment block decided to block the open entrance to the courtyard and started to use the space for mutual gatherings, celebrations, weddings and birthdays (Interview 1, 2014). The staircases and open corridors were also used by the neighbors jointly as living and storage spaces. Consequently, the popular use of common spaces created unexpected encounters and strong bonds after many years.[38] In any transformation, the neighbors were forced to tolerated one another. Yet many others became part of the everyday life of the blocks. Entertaining guests together was seen as a positive outcome resulting from an initial negative condition: the inadequate size of units. However, the urban renewal process after 2008 interrupted the organic transformation of the space. The owners of the rental apartments are concerned about the future of their buildings and are not enthusiastic about investing in them.[39]

Tozkoparan was declared as an urban renewal area in 2008. The risk of an earthquake was the underlying reason given for the decision.[40] The neighbourhood organization and residents of the area have been taking legal action against the urban renewal process from 2008 to the present day. They demand a transparent, inclusive process. Yet the dwellers and their lawyers seem to be on a different side of the operation to different municipal and governmental bureaucrats, officials and big construction firms providing services including all of the architecture, planning, landscape and infrastructural design and construction. Instead of state institutions preparing and implementing top-down projects and introducing these projects to the existing urban texture, recent socio-economic conditions have rendered the private sector responsible for new proposals.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The commodification of housing in the post-industrial, global world economy has largely replaced the belief in a welfare society achievable through the tools of urban planning and architecture. However, the history of this transition of the urban environment occurred on many different levels which are rarely touched upon, such as through major political decisions, socio-economic changes, urban transformation, public investments, maintenance issues and building scale.

In this narrative of local modernity in Turkey, the urban professionals of the 1960s who contributed to the creation of social projects are acknowledged as social engineers within the modernization project of a developing country. Yet, with the economic and cultural shift of the 1980s, the socialist position that lay behind this project was abandoned. With the aim of highlighting how the discipline of city planning and architecture abandoned its tradition of social engagement, this study has focused on the investigation of the outcomes of early housing politics and how the built environment has been transformed by them. After an analysis of a critical 50-year period in the history of urban planning, the question that this research asks is whether urban planning professionals need to take a second look at the bottom-up transformation of the top-down planned space and start learning from the failures of the discipline, without mystifying them, in order to contribute to a better physical environment.

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Endnotes

1   *This paper is an outcome of an ongoing doctoral study at ITU. We are grateful for ?hsan Bilgin and Arda ?nceo?lu's contributions during the writing process.*

2   Government institutions in Turkey were only able to intervene in the housing problem from the 1950s onwards, when economic conditions finally began to synchronize with the world market. (?hsan Bilgin, Bedelsiz Modernleşme (2002 [1999])).

3   As a consequence, a mass of illegally-built and unplanned housing became part of the housing market (Şükrü Aslan and T ahire Erman, The Transformation of the Urban Periphery: Once Upon a Time There Were Gecekondus in Istanbul (Cambridge, 2012) 106.).

4   It became integrated with capitalist development to its full extent and contributed to the emergence and proliferation of new types of spaces such as shopping malls, condominiums, gated communities, and iconic cultural buildings. Susan Buck-Mors mentioned the ruins of the modern city "evoke a nostalgia (…) for the belief that such a utopia is possible at all" (1995, 9). According to Hilde Heynen (2000, 19-23, 11), there are many different modernisms in architecture, embracing or rejecting the characteristics of modernity, and the main dilemma of architecture has been the dependence of the practice on the tools of capitalist development.

5   The built environment associated with modernism was criticized for its over-fascination with new mass-society culture and with industrial development. (Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture (Massachusetts, 2000) 11.)

6   Ibid, 12.

7   Bozdo?an and Akcan, Turkey: Modern Architectures in History, 141.

8   Basic components of this urban transformation were fast industrialization, internal immigration, the expansion of the city to the east and west, unsystematic urban interventions, the adaptation of the old street network to automobiles, demolitions and forced evictions, and increasing demand for housing. Moreover, the inertia of the state mechanisms in creating a housing solution, a self-regulated urbanism, the development of new middle/upper-middle class neighborhoods and a shift of the central business district to the edges of mid-century Istanbul, the spread of *dolmuş* (a self-regulated form of public transportation), a subdivision of agricultural land and residential plots etc. can be added to these basic components.

9   Bozdo?an and Akcan, Turkey: Modern Architectures in History, 141.

10   Ahmet Makal, Türkiye'de çok partili dönemde çal?şma ilişkileri: 1946-1963 (?mge, 2002)

11   Joseph Szyliowicz explains the tension in society as follows: the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) government's harsh decisions and the economic struggle during the World War II contributed to the increase in the opposition party's shares of the votes. (Joseph S. Szyliowicz, "The political dynamics of rural Turkey." Middle East Journal 16, no. 4 (1962): 437-438.)

12   Although Istanbul was not officially a part of population exchange agreements between Greece and Turkey, the city lost many of its Greek-Orthodox inhabitants, along with many other ethnic groups, such as Armenians and Jews (Alan Duben. "Which Istanbul? Whose Past? Whose Future?." South European Society and Politics 17, no. 4 (2012): 593.).

13   ?pek Akpinar, "Urbanization represented in the historical peninsula: Turkification of Istanbul in the 1950s", in Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey, Architecture across Cultures in the 1950s and 1960s, edited by Meltem Ö. Gürel, New York: Routledge, 2015: 56-84.

14   In 1956 Prime Minister Menderes declared that the government would continue to pursue plans for Istanbul's redevelopment despite economic difficulties. The Menderes government proposed a new, automobile-oriented urbanism for Istanbul.

15   Ça?lar Keyder, "Enformel Konut Piyasas?ndan Küresel Konut Piyasas?na" in Istanbul: Küresel ile Yerel Aras?nda, ed. Ça?lar Keyder (Istanbul: Metis Yay?nlar?, 2009 [2000])

16   Urban planning professionals in government institutions saw their influence on urban spaces increase and these professionals adopted a more socialist perspective in parallel to state organizations (Ekinci, 1994; Tekeli, 1992; Batuman, 2011).

17   ?pek Akpinar, "The Rebuilding of Istanbul after the Plan of Henri Prost, 1937-1960: from secularisation to Turkish modernisation," (PhD diss., Bartlett School of Graduate Studies, University College London, 2003).; Bozdo?an and Akcan, Turkey: Modern Architectures in History, 173.

18   Another important issue was the role of the architect. Architects and planners who criticised the existing system, on the one hand cooperated with state bodies, and on the other, participated or worked as jury members in architectural competitions for public buildings (Bozdo?an, and Akcan, 2012; Tekeli, 2003),.

19   This inactivity was caused by the lack of economic and political stabilization, and by clashes between the mostly social-democratic local governments and the conservative central government. (?lhan Tekeli. Belediyecilik yaz?lar?,(1976-1991). IULA-EMME, 1992: 99).

20   For a recent discussion see Ipek Akpinar and Funda Uz, "chronology", in "Geç Olmadan Eve Dön", National Exhibition on Housing, Vitra Ça?daş Mimarl?k Dizisi 5, 2016.

21   The arrangement of conventions and workshops, and gatherings at universities and professional organizations enabled different social groups to discuss the subject from many perspectives.

22   Such as Ataköy and Levent (which ended up as upper-middle class neighborhoods) that resulted in efforts to establish housing standards (Tekeli, 2010, 4).

23   Housing solutions should not arise from a top-down process, but from participatory practices learning from the *gecekondu* experience (Aslan, 2011; Batuman, 2006; Tekeli, 2010).

24   Since housing production was mainly conducted and controlled by the private sector, the state could place constraints on taxes and loans (T.C. Başbakanl?k Devlet Planlama Teşkilat?, 1963, 433). In 1953, Law No. 6188 redefined and extended the area of jurisdiction for the municipalities.

25   "Istanbul'da gecekondu inşaat? yeniden artt?", Hürriyet Daily Newspaper, October 11, 1987.

26   Zeki Sayar, "Mesken Davas?!," Arkitekt, 305(1961):151, Ruşen Y. Keleş, Sosyal Konut Politikas? Kavram? Üzerinde Bir Deneme ve Türkiye de Sosyal Konut Politikas?." Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi 21, no. 02 (1966):191.

27   T.C. Başbakanl?k Devlet Planlama Teşkilat? Müsteşarl???, 1968, 273.

28   Property ownership status and expropriation costs, the location and its relationship with the rest of the city, the accumulation of population, distance to areas of employment and connectivity in terms of public transportation were taken into consideration in the determination of the project areas. (Zekai Görgülü, Istanbul Metropoliten Alan?nda Gecekondu Önleme Bölgelerinin Mekenasal Konumlar? ve Fizik Mekan Çözümlemeleri, (Y?ld?z Technical University: 1982) 117)

29 The area outside of the city walls, accommodating factories and workshops, was also surrounded with squatter neighborhoods. Zekai Görgülü's (1982, 176) studies show that in the period between the new legislation in 1966 and the year of study in 1982, the designated Squatter Prevention Areas were concentrated around Bak?rköy, Eyüp, Gaziormanpaşa and Ka??thane on the European side of Istanbul; and Kartal, Maltepe and Üsküdar neighborhoods on the Asian side of the city.

30 For a recent reading see Şebnem Şoher, "Tozkoparan, Sosyal Konut", in "Chronology" edited by Ipek Akpinar and Funda Uz, "Geç Olmadan Eve Dön", National exhibition on Housing, in Vitra Ça?daş M,marl?k Dizisi 5, 2016.

31 Binnur Öktem Ünsal and Asuman Türkün, "Tozkoparan: Bir Sosyal Mesken Alan?n?n Tasfiyesi," in Mülk, Mahal, ?nsan: Istanbul'da Kentsel Dönüşüm, ed. Asuman Türkün (Istanbul: Bilgi Yay?nlar?, 2014), 315.

32 Cumhuriyet Senatosu Tutanak Dergisi, (Ankara, 1965), 106.

33 Orhan Tuna, Istanbul Gecekondu Önleme Bölgeleri Araşt?rmas?, (Istanbul: Bilmen Bas?mevi), 31.

34 Gülay Andaç, "Bay?nd?rl?k ve ?skân Bakanl???n?n proje elde etmek yöntemleri ve organizasyonu." Mimarl?k Dergisi, 224 no.3 (1987):39-46.

35 Melih Karaarslan, "Bay?nd?rl?k ve ?skân Bakanl??? ve Mimarl???m?z". Mimarl?k Dergisi, 224, no.3 (1987):32.

36 Interview 1, 2014; Interview 3, 2015

37 "Sosyal Meskenlerde Gecekondu", Milliyet Daily Newspaper, August 13, 1967.

38 Interview 1-2, 2014.

39 Interview 3, 2015.

40 "TOK? Güngören'in çehresini de?iştirecek", Mimdap, Accessed June 12, 2014, http://www.mimdap.org/?p=5231.