

Araştırma-İnceleme

**AN EXAMINATION OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS  
(GECEKONDUS) IN THE CONCEPT OF SOCIOLOGY OF  
SPACE: CASE OF IZMIR**

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**Abstract:** This article examines *gecekondu*<sup>2</sup> in Turkey in the context of space factor by drawing upon the basic arguments of sociology of space. It shows the significant role of space in the integration of *gecekondu* into the urban area and analyzes the relationship between space and society within the context of *gecekondu* settlements. The main hypothesis of this article is that space, with its physical and social features, is one of the main factors that affects the reconstruction process of *gecekondu* and it influences the social and economic integration of residents of *gecekondu* neighborhoods. The argument of this study depends on a comparison of two *gecekondu* areas in the context of sociology of space. The first *gecekondu* district is called Kadifekale which is a deprived inner-city area, and the other one is called Gumuspala which is located in the periphery of Izmir. The data that are discussed in the article are collected as a result of a field research. The argument of this study is based on the conceptual frame of Henri Lefebvre's term *the trialectics of being*. The article discusses the consolidation of *gecekondu* by examining the relationship of space, society and time. As a result of the research, the article asserts that beyond time factor, space is one of the main factors affecting the consolidation of *gecekondu* neighborhoods into urban environments, while it is constructed by society.

**Keywords:** Gecekondu, Slums, Sociology of Space, Henri Lefebvre, The Trialectics of Being, Deprived Inner-city Areas, Urbanization, Izmir, Turkey.

**ENFORMEL YERLEŞİMLERİN (GECEKONDULAR) MEKAN  
SOSYOLOJİSİ BAĞLAMINDA İNCELENMESİ: İZMİR ÖRNEĞİ**

**Öz:** Bu makale mekân sosyolojisi bağlamında Türkiye'de gecekondu olgusunu incelemektedir. Gecekondu bölgelerinin kentle bütünleşme süreçlerinde mekânın rolü ile mekan ve toplum arasındaki karşılıklı

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<sup>2</sup>Slums in Turkey. The term of gecekondu means a squatter house that is built over night.

ilişkiyi irdeleyen bu makalenin temel tezi; fiziksel ve sosyal özellikleriyle birlikte mekanın gecekonduların yeniden inşasını belirleyen temel faktörlerden biri olduğu ve bu gibi bölgelerde yaşayan insanların sosyal ve ekonomik entegrasyonunu etkilediği şeklindedir. Bu çalışmanın argümanı İzmir’de bulunan iki farklı gecekondu bölgesinin mekân sosyoloji bağlamında karşılaştırılmasına dayanmaktadır. Gecekonduların ilki kentiçi çöküntü alanı örneği olan Kadifekale, diğeri ise İzmir’in çeperinde kurulmuş Gümüşpala semti şeklindedir. Saha çalışmasına dayalı olan bu araştırma neticesinde elde edilen veriler incelenmiştir. Tartışma Henri Lefebvre’nin “oluşun üçlemesi” (the trialectics of being) kavramı üzerine temellendirilmiştir. Makale gecekonduların kentle bütünleşmesini mekan, toplum ve zaman olguları arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki üzerinden tartışmaktadır. Ana akım gecekondu çalışmalarının aksine, çalışma zaman faktörünü kontrol altında tutup, gecekondulaşma sürecinde mekân ve toplum arasındaki diyalektiksel ilişkiyi irdelemektedir. Bunun için mekân; konumu, topografyası, uzamsal boyutu, ticari, tarihsel ve görsel değerleri gibi özellikleri bakımından ele alınmasına karşılık, toplum ise gecekondu insanların mekâna yerleşim süreci, sosyal yapıları, etnik ve kültürel durumları, politik tutumları gibi değişkenler bağlamında incelenmektedir. Çalışma sonucunda makale şunu ortaya koymaktadır: Zaman faktörünün yanında, mekân, toplum tarafından inşa edilirken, gecekondu bölgelerinin kentle bütünleşmesini etkileyen ana etmenlerden birini oluşturmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Gecekondu, Mekân Sosyolojisi, Oluşun Üçlemesi, Henri Lefebvre, Kentiçi Çöküntü Alanları, Kentleşme, İzmir, Türkiye.

## Introduction

Time and space are the basic conditions of life. This statement has a common acceptance in social sciences, but it is also an issue for a big debate. The debate occurs around the relationship and opposition between time and space, and the domination of one at different times in the history of social sciences. In social theory, that argument is related with the domination of time from 18th century till the middle of 20th, but after the 1960’s, due to the texts of Henri Lefebvre (1991), Michel Foucault (2007), David Harvey (2009), Edward Soja (1989, 1991) and Doreen Massey (1998). Those texts and new debates on social production of space caused new thinking on space as not a subject of interest to only geographers, architects or urban planners, but also to philosophers, psychologists and sociologists. Rising use of space as a key term in the social sciences provided urban sociology with a new discipline which is the sociology of space.

In the discipline of sociology space it is one of the main questions that how space and society interact each other. In this sense, this article seeks this question within the context of informal settlements called *gecekondu* and their integration into urban area. The research is realized in city of Izmir in Turkey. The article considers the question in the context of sociology of space that explores an interrelationship between society and space. It sees space as one of

the main elements that can be one of social indicators and affects process of social reconstruction of society while it is being constructed in reverse. In this manner, cities, neighborhoods, slums and ghettos can be considered as examples of constructed spaces.

The methodology of this article depends on field work, with data collected through questionnaire, observation and depth interviews. This article argues that space is a critical factor of the consolidation process of *gecekondu* areas while it is constructed by society. It asserts that, like time factor, space is one of the main factors that can influence consolidation of *gecekondu*s within urban areas positively or negatively. However, this effect is not unilateral, but also bilateral related with society. That is to say, the consolidation of *gecekondu* neighborhoods with urban area is based on interrelationship between space and society, in the course of time.

### **Lefebvre's The Trialectics of Being and Gecekondu**

The argument takes its base from Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of *The Trialectics of Being*; *historicality* (time), *sociality* (being-in-the-world) and *spatiality* (social production of space). According to Edward Soja (1996) the Trialectics of Being generate three ontological fields of knowledge formed from what for so long has only been one (Historicality-Sociality). The three elements of the ontological trialectic thus contain each other; they cannot successfully be understood in isolation or epistemologically privileged separately (Soja 1996, p. 71).

As Lefebvre states, space is a social product. Once it is built, in return, it starts to build society. As a social product, space contains social, economic and cultural dimensions of society. As Lefebvre argues, construction of space cannot be considered apart from relation of production, and that is spaciality. Spaciality (social production of space) is the third dimension of existence beyond historicality (time) and sociality (being-in-the-world). The research presented here takes three dimensions into account, furthermore it focuses primarily on interrelationship between space and society.

In order to accurately assess the effects of interrelationship between space and society on the consolidation process of *gecekondu* neighborhoods into urban areas, variations in time were kept at a minimum. That is, in comparison of two *gecekondu* neighborhoods, Gumuspala and Kadifekale, social groups sampled share a common period of migration and a similar social-cultural background. Therefore, squatters who migrated from Mardin and now live in different districts of Izmir are the focus of this research.

### **1. Spaciality**

Spaciality is one of the main terms of Henri Lefebvre. This special term illustrates the organization of space as a social product and space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic (Lefebvre, 1991). Space has been produced and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space

is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies. Taking this term as a base, it is possible to seek some demonstrations of it in the context of *gecekondu*.

### **1.1. Location and Commercial Value of the Place**

This research, determined that space is one of the main factors affecting the consolidation of *gecekondu* neighborhoods into urban environments, while it is socially constructed. One of the questions of the research is about the effect of location. Gumuspala and Kadifekale are located in different parts of the city, which the former situated in the periphery and the latter in the inner city. Location drives the commercial value of the land. Since Kadifekale is close to downtown Izmir, its space has a high commercial value, which leads to dividing the land into small-scale parcels. Land parcels in Kadifekale average between 70 and 90 square meters, while they are between 100 and 150 square meters in Gumuspala. Small-scale parcel obstructs necessitates houses with one or two stories to grow into apartments with three and four stories, and also requires houses in Kadifekale to be built close together. Thus, space fabric in the district is cramped, with narrow streets and stairs. These small scale parcels also prompt residents to invest their savings in other parts of the city, rather than on developing their current homes. Unlike Kadifekale, in Gumuspala land parcels are wide enough to build apartment blocks, and space does not prevent household from investing in expansion of their homes.

### **1.2. Feeling Temporal and Permanent on the Land**

The high commercial value of land in Kadifekale also causes squatters to feel themselves temporary to the space. Because they know that the land on which their houses located has very high commercial value, they think that “the power” will not allow them to live there forever. They believe that there is always a high possibility of demolition of their homes and forced evacuation to other parts of the city, cause squatters in Kadifekale to feel temporary in the space. On the other hand, the commercial value of land in the Gumuspala district is much lower than Kadifekale. Thus, residents do not have a fear of demolition of their houses, and so feel permanent in the space. Feeling temporary or permanent within space in turn, affects both the construction of the space and spatial movement. Unlike in Gumuspala, residents in Kadifekale who save enough capital to buy or rent houses in different parts of Izmir city generally tend to move to other districts. In this sense, one can claim that there is high correspondence between social and spatial movement in the neighborhood. However, in Gumuspala, people tend to invest their money in developing their homes. This can be understood as an example of interrelationship between space and society.

### **1.3. Historical and Visual Values of the Land**

Beyond commercial value, in Kadifekale space also has historical and visual values. Its historical value draws from the ancient castle called *Kadife Kale* (Velvet Castle) around which the neighborhood is situated. The historical nature

of these ruin have resulted in parts of the district attaining the status of archeological areas. Furthermore, in terms of the visual value of space, Kadifekale has one of best of the views of Izmir –another reason beyond the commercial for the land to become very valuable. In considering this combination of commercial, historical and visual values, one can assert that space in Kadifekale does not encourage squatters to build or develop their homes and become permanent in the district. In this context, the higher value of *gecekondu*'s space unlikely it will consolidate into an urban area.

#### **1.4. Topography**

Another finding of this research demonstrates the importance of topography and history of settlement and construction in the consolidation process. Topographic structure differs between Kadifekale and Gumuspala. The landscape in Kadifekale is steep and the neighborhood is built on a drastic slope, while in Gumuspala the topography of the landscape is only slightly hilly. This difference can have a direct effect on the construction of buildings and whether they are vertical or horizontal. Suitable topographic structure allows squatters to invest their savings in housing, thus affecting the way of their accumulation.

#### **1.5. Space Fabric**

Another key space influencing consolidation of *gecekondu* neighborhood is the formation of space fabric. In this context, one of the biggest differences between Gumuspala and Kadifekale is that the former is built on a wasteland with construction beginning from a zero point, but the latter is rebuilt on a pre-existing space fabric with houses added much later. This diversity is important in terms of construction and the possibility of transformation of space. According to the research findings, construction on virgin terrain provides squatters with more advantages than that on an already constructed space, as it is easier to lay a foundation and build a house from the beginning than to reshape an already built home. Fresh construction allows householders to design their homes based on the number of stories they plan to add later. It is also easier to plan the space fabric of a district on a wasteland. In contrast with fresh construction, reconstruction in a pre-existing space fabric restricts transformation of the space, and construction must occur accordingly. That is why Kadifekale's space fabric is much less planned and complicated significantly more than Gumuspala's.

Space fabric reveals information about a neighborhood; in other words, the physical conditions of a space serve as a social indicator. From its outer appearance Kadifekale resembles slums in Latin American countries in many ways, and its narrow and complicated streets, and cramped houses indicate that Kadifekale is a neighborhood where lower class people live. Gumuspala, on the other hand, in some aspects does not differ from other districts of the city, despite being a *gecekondu* neighborhood.

## 2. Historiicality

Historiicality here demonstrates time and in this research it is examined in the context of immigration from rural area to urban.

### 2.1. Immigration and Settlement

Squatters earliest to arrive in Gumuspala had migrated to Izmir in 1951 and in Kadifekale in 1943. And the most recently arrived came to Gumuspala in 2009 and Kadifekale in 2008. The average year of immigration is 1978 for Gumuspala residents interviewed is 1978 and 1979 for those from Kadifekale.

The reasons for immigration both coincide and differ between two gecekondu areas. *Economics* was the primary reason for immigration to Izmir for residents in both neighborhoods, almost half of interviewees stating that they migrated to find a job or to work in the city. However, the second most common reason for immigration in Gumuspala is *dependent immigration*, where in households migrated as a result of decision of husband or parents. In both *gecekondu* areas the other reasons for immigration are marriage, job transfer, or vendetta with other families. However, in Kadifekale the second most common reason for immigration related to *safety and security concerns*, regarding conflicts between Kurdish rebels and the Turkish military. Many people had to immigrate because of evacuation of villages or pressure asserted by village guards, the army etc. While Gumuspala residents also immigrated due to security reasons, there are not as many of these Kadifekale. In fact, the concentration of people who immigrated to Kadifekale as a result of security related reasons caused this neighborhood to become one of the foremost centers of forced migration in Izmir. Related with Kurdish issue, forced migration was rapid and intolerant. Unlike earlier migration process, people who were subjects of “forced migration” did not have a chance to consider and prepare where and how they would move. Therefore, it is more tragic than earlier migration movements.

While settlements in Gumuspala increased gradually during the 1970's, Kadifekale experienced a settlement “boom” during the mid 1980s, which lasted approximately 10 years. These neighborhoods also differed in their residents' motivations to settle in a particular area of the city. Their social and economic features and their space fabric were key in the decision –making process.

### 3. Sociality

Development of space fabric is shaped by not only topography, and parcel scales and the types of construction, but it also from the social dynamics related to space. Namely, slums or ghettos are generally where people with low level of income live, as they provide poor people with cheap accommodation. Although different ethnic and cultural social groups live in slums, these neighborhoods are mostly homogenous in class structure. Those districts are generally viewed as “dangerous places”. Once places labeled in such a way, it is difficult to integrate their social groups into the larger city. This is the point where sociality affects spatiality and social and spatial segregation correspond to each other.

### 3.1. Social Bonds

Social bonds are dominant in making decision on settlement in Gumuspala, in Kadifekale economic conditions come first. For instance, existence of fellow countryman and relatives in the district is the top priority for Gumuspala's dwellers, but for Kadifekale's dwellers it is low rent price and a place that is affordable for low-income people. Some of residents – especially originally from Mardin- who live in Gumuspala once used to live in Kadifekale for a while. Those transitions occurred at the beginning of construction of Gumuspala and when the land was cheap.

While the decision to settle in Kadifekale was determined mostly by economic conditions, these decisions were also made with very limited options, and were not the only factors. For example, historically Kadifekale has been one of the main destinations for immigrants. Particularly, people who emigrated from Mardin's villages (Kutlubey, Calpınar etc.) created a unique immigration route between Mardin and Kadifekale after the 1970's. Another consideration is the correspondence of tolerance and social surroundings in space. For instance, although nobody would rent his/her house to a household of 8 or more in other areas within Izmir, Kadifekale provides shelters for big families. Another example of this correspondence is the production of stuffed mussels – a job populated by people with no other options and want to survive in city life. Kadifekale is the center of production of stuffed mussels in Izmir; the work is difficult and the production malodorous preventing mussels production from occurring elsewhere in the city.

### 3.2. Social and Ethnic Structure

In the case of Kadifekale, it has been one of the main destinations for new comers since the 1970's, but became a unique center of Kurdish people who migrated from eastern Turkey as a result of forced migration during the 1990s. One of the main reasons Kadifekale became a foremost destination for such immigrants were its affordability. As a decayed inner city district, Kadifekale provided the lowest income groups with social tolerance and cheap accommodation. Another reason can be referred to as social surplus a term corresponds immigration with the existence of relatives and fellow countrymen in the neighborhood.

Concentration of a unique social group (namely, Kurdish people who are from Mardin) in Kadifekale caused the district to develop a mostly homogenous social structure. Called Little Mardin, Kadifekale is essentially a rebuilding of the city of Mardin within Izmir, and thus functions as continuation of the homeland. Beyond social relations, the space fabric is built in a way reminiscent of Mardin, as with the mosque in the neighborhood. Its decoration, design, and even its smell resemble the mosques in the homeland.

### 3.3. Politicization

With its population of Kurds forced to migrate, Kadifekale gained a politic identity in addition to its economic one. Politicization of the district enhanced

fear in Kadifekale among city residents. The knowledge of this fear is mutual, with both squatters and city residents aware of this discomfort. This keen awareness causes the neighborhood to become isolated and residents to build closed relationships. Segregation is a reason for a district to both turn into a ghetto and become a decayed area. For Kadifekale, since it is the place where low income people are concentrated and has highly politicized identity, state institutions moved from the district except the police station. Lack of social services led to decay of the space fabric. As such, one can claim that consolidation of the neighborhood into the larger urban area and the integration of residents in to the city culture is extremely difficult due to a pronounced sensation of segregation, a feeling absent in resides self-id in identification. As previously mentioned very few residents in Kadifekale identify themselves with the city of Izmir city, but more than half of them identify themselves with the neighborhood. The effects of sociality on spatiality, politicization, concentration and segregation are the main reasons Kadifekale has turned into a decayed inner city district. In this sense, the so-called “Little Mardin”, can be defined as a *gecekondu* neighborhood that follows a path toward becoming a slum and a ghetto.

### **3.4. Homogeneity and Heterogeneity**

Contrastingly, the Gumuspala neighborhood includes different ethnic and social groups beyond people who are from Mardin and have a Kurdish identity, and thus, it is more heterogenous in terms of its ethnic and class composition. Beyond Kurdish community in Gumuspala, there are Turks, Arabs, Alaouites and other ethnic groups. Like the nickname of Little Mardin for Kadifekale, Gumuspala can be described as “Little Anatolia,” since it contains groups who emigrated from different parts of Turkey. The diversity prevents the neighborhood from being identified with a specific ethnic or social group, particularly with Kurdish community, lack of this distinct political affiliation enables Gumuspala to avoid fearful associations and city residents do not avoid visiting this neighborhood. Therefore, a sense of segregation is not apparent in Gumuspala as it is in Kadifekale, and one can claim that the integration of squatters in Gumuspala is much higher than in Kadifekale. This absence of segregation leads to the accumulation of squatters, wherein residents invest their savings in construction within the neighborhood, thus changing the space fabric from a *gecekondu* neighborhood to a core district of the city. In this sense, Gumuspala can be described as a neighborhood that follows a *gecekondu* process that likely ends with consolidation into the larger urban area, such as happened with many *gecekondu* neighborhoods in different cities in Turkey over the past.

### **Conclusion**

Examining urbanization of Turkey throughout history, one can assert that urbanization took its shape through *gecekondu* process in Turkey. In other words, urbanization of Turkey means also *gecekondu* of Turkey. One can



easily see that just by searching the literature on urbanization in Turkey prior to 2000's. Internal migration has been the main dynamic for urbanization which started around 1940's and escalated after 1950's. Gecekonduzation occurred as result of inadequateness of accommodation in cities, and it has become one of the biggest issues of urbanization as migration from rural areas to urban did not stop.

By examining the literature on terms of gecekondu in Turkey, we also see that gecekonduzation is investigated mainly in the context of time fact (Yasa 1966, Karpat 1976, Kartal 1978, Tatlıdil 1989). In other words, consolidation of gecekondu areas with urban space was perceived as a matter of time. In this context, consolidation of peripheries with the city is considered as process that will be occur as time passes while its dwellers also get integrated with city culture. This perspective emphasizes on time factor, but not space and it consider space as passive fact. However, time and space are integral conditions of existence, and space has is one of the main subjects of social sciences. Hence, as a starting point of this research, I aimed to focus on role of space for consolidation of gecekondu areas with urban. In this sense, the article argues that space is a critical factor of the consolidation process of gecekondu areas while it is constructed by society. It asserts that, like time factor, space is one of the main factors that can influence consolidation of gecekondu within urban areas positively or negatively. However, this effect is not unilateral, but also bilateral related with society. That is to say, the consolidation of gecekondu neighborhoods with urban area is based on interrelationship between space and society, in the course of time.

In the context of this research, one can assert that time is not a sufficient fact to explain the consolidation of gecekondu with the city in every aspect. Thus, we need to take into account other facts which are space and social factors. In this sense, Henri Lefebvre's terms – spaciality, historicity, sociality- which are discussed under the term of "the trialectics of being" provide a good range of explanation. Accordingly, the facts which are related with spaciality such as location, topography, historical, commercial and visual values of the land are examined during the research. In the context of this research, we saw that space as a built phenomenon can affect the integration of gecekondu in a positive or negative way according to its features and dynamics. In this sense, space turns into a social indicator just as other social facts. Thus, one can claim that beside time and social facts, space is one of the main factors that affect the consolidation of gecekondu with urban.

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**Map:** Izmir City and Location of Gumuspala and Kadifekale Neighborhoods

