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The Enduring Influence of Informality in Istanbul: Legalization of Informal Settlements and Urban Transformation

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Abstract

The phenomenon of urban informality has coincided with rapid urbanization in Turkey from the 1950s onward. By the urban transformation act that was presented in 2012, formal developments and activities have increased in informal areas. Although recent activities are legal/formal, they have caused the reproduction of informality in these areas. With focusing on this spontaneous collaboration of formal and informal activities, this article seeks to understand the new urban fabric that was created by formal and informal builders who are both rule-breakers and rule-makers. The research was carried out in the Güzeltepe neighborhood, a complex neighborhood with a mix of squatter houses and renewal areas. The field study was conducted from 2014 to 2017 with site visits, photo analysis, and archival research. We will reveal and discuss legalization and upgrading processes, and the effects of this transformation. We will then analyze how informality operates as a logic of urban life.

Keywords: Gecekondu, Squatter, Urban Transformation, Urban Informality, Istanbul

Introduction

Urban areas are a kind of competitive playground on which dwellers have to survive and sustain themselves. The concept of informality refers to people creating their own rules by adapting to, or resisting, the prescribed systems of ordering urban space.

In the Global South, informality is often associated with urban spaces that incorporate such features as illegal settlements, slums, and squatter areas. However, the meaning of informality involves multiple concepts in different contexts. Informality is a result of 'finding a way' or 'seeking a remedy.' Informal activities are determined by agreed upon rules between individuals and groups outside of the state's legal framework (Roy and AlSayyad 2004). The reasons for informality vary, but the most critical factors are the existence of poverty and a lack of efficient legal options (Payne 2001; Payne et. al. 2009). A lack of a wide range of property opportunities and weak public administration are common reasons for informal development (Potsious 2014).

Informal activities have increased with industrialization and rapid urbanization, and cities have been affected in terms of economic, social, political, and spatial characteristics since the mid-20th century. During this time, the most powerful actors with regard to urban space, governments, have mainly taken two types of action for eliminating informality in urban areas: preventing illegal land occupation and demolishing

buildings or providing legal recognition (deeds) concerning existing borders/land by granting building licenses (Fernandes 2011; Brakarz 2016).

As one of the cities most profoundly affected by informality, Istanbul has experienced both of these actions. After industrialization in Turkey, large waves of migration from rural to urban areas peaked in the period between 1950 and 1970. When the economic resources proved to be inadequate, the poverty-stricken newcomers started to find their own ways to survive by illegally building dwellings on state lands, and finding jobs in marginal sectors. A new sociophysical phenomenon named *gecekondu* appeared as part of the city's urban fabric. The name given to informal housing (squatter houses) *gecekondu* means "built at night as quickly as possible" (Erman 2001, p. 985). The number of informal settlements increased, especially in big cities. By the 1980s, as a result of political engagement, some of the informal neighborhoods were legalized by the government.

The legalized *gecekondus* have been the main actors of the recent urban transformation initiatives due to the Law on Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk (No. 6306), commonly known as the urban transformation or urban renewal law. As a result of the enactment of this law in May 2012, urban transformation projects began to be implemented in *gecekondu* areas. Both formal and informal modes of spatial production led to a change in social, cultural, economic, and spatial relationships within the city. The influence of initial informal activities in the period 1950–70 can be seen in new developments in the same neighborhood. Early informal builders (*gecekondu* settlers) constructed not only their houses, but also developed the character of the area.

This research focuses on the influence that the original informality has on more recent formal developments, and the activities of informal builders as both rule-breakers and rule-makers. The article seeks to understand the new urban fabric that was created by both informal and formal (legalization and urban transformation) activities.

The research methodology is grounded in theoretical conceptions of informality and carried out through a variety of field study activities. Data were collected by visiting the site, examining formal planning maps produced by the municipality, examining the legal framework, and analyzing national reports on urban space. The field study was conducted in the Güzeltepe neighborhood in the Eyüp district of Istanbul. This neighborhood, which has both informal and formal layers (buildings), has undergone change as a result of different legal and illegal activities. We aim to draw attention to the relationship and intersection of informal houses and newly built apartments resulting from urban transformation projects, with a consideration of the associated documentation. During site visits, sketches and photographs were used for documentation.

Conceptual Framework: Reproduction of Informality

Initial theories of informality were mainly related to economics, with reference to income-substituting activities and poverty. The concept of urban informality reflects a

mode of social, cultural, economic, and spatial production. The implications of urban informality go beyond housing and land sectors.

According to AlSayyad and Roy (2004) urban informality refers to an organizing logic that transforms the urban setting itself. In contrast to the common dichotomy of formal and informal, they suggest that informality is not a separate sector. It is a process of determining the nature of transactions between individuals and institutions, and within institutions (Roy 2005; Neuwirth 2005; Yiftachel 2009). Altrock (2012) sees informality as complementary to formal arrangements. While *formal* is generally described as rule-based, structured, and regular, *informal* is thought to be spontaneous. The categorizations of formal and informal are always deployed by the actor who holds power or by the state. With these governmental classifications and definitions, the formal and informal divide is generally described as being an 'urban problem' (McFarlane 2012). Roy (2009) and Holston (2007) state that informality should be handled as a state of deregulation, and that urban informality cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations.

AlSayyad (2004) stressed the *negotiability value* of informality. Given the effects of everyday life and experience, the informal is not isolated from the formal city (Simone 2004; Song 2016). In practice, the boundaries between the informal and formal are quite blurred in an urban space, which is always in a state of flux involving different flows and movements (Ingold 2011). As Perlman (2016) stressed, formal and informal boundaries are quite fluid in terms of the formalization of informal transactions and the informalization of the formal.

Informality or informal space includes perceived, conceived, and lived spaces. As Lefebvre (1991) suggested, production of space is not only a physical production, but also includes all social and moral (mental) dimensions. Space is not a place in which only action takes place; it is a dynamic system (Jabareen 2014). McFarlane (2012) suggests thinking of informal and formal as practices, without identifying them as different kinds of urban space. These practices do not take place in particular places, they produce particular spaces.

Informal and formal movements produce new social structures within cities. There is no single formal or informal process in planning and designing for urban space. The informal is in a strong relationship with the formal; they configure spaces together (Lutzoni 2016).

Watson (2009) states that a significant gap has opened up between marketized systems of government initiatives and the urban and everyday lives of an impoverished urban population, largely existing under conditions of informality. But urban space is shaped by all of the actors. The conflict of rationalities between formal and informal dictates demands, and they should be thought of as part of the planning process.

Another point of view focuses on the legalizing of illegal land occupation (Turner 2007). The economist De Soto (2000) suggests that informal areas can be thought of as a new fund for the state. This system can turn the occupants into entrepreneurs; they do

not have to pay for land. Their survival strategy achieves a richness and has an effect on the micro-economy. The whole process of occupation, building, and sale provides a big potential economic resource. De Soto (2000) argued that the lack of property rights makes the transformation of wealth owned by the poor into capital difficult. Advocating for private property rights, he argues that legalization strategies promise great social and economic gains for society.

In contrast with De Soto, Davis (2006) criticizes this entrepreneurial enthusiasm. Legalization/formalization provides activities for the formal economy only, and it causes urban land to be commodified again. According to Davis (2006), titling is not a solution for squatters.

By accepting informality as being only related to economics, many countries have tried to legalize informal concrete space, while some have only tried to cope with urban poverty. According to the report resulting from the cooperation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG), Eastern Europe and the former-Soviet countries have similar urban informality problems that were caused by poor administration and a weak real estate market. Well-organized legalization processes were presented as the most important course of action for these countries (FIG and UNECE 2017).

It is thought that informality is a land occupation problem. In order to solve it, demolition or legalization activities are sufficient. However, these activites cannot go beyond making a profit or the beautification of urban space or political benefit. The main focus in terms of social issues has been overlooked (Roy 2005). The primary problem in cities with informal practices is that public institutions cannot manage processes (Hall and Pfeiffer 2000). Instead of understanding urban informality, states have tended to focus directly on legalization, leading to new effects on the urban environment.

The legalization process relating to informality in urban areas has been quite a complex activity that has changed physical, social, and economic conditions in such areas. As part of the process, occupied lands, squatter houses, and illegal subdivisions can be part of legal housing markets and urban plans. Moreover, informal settlements have started to become a powerful (land) resource for urban renewal projects.

In urbanized areas, informal settlements not only dominate urban growth, but have also had an effect on implementations developed by government institutions. Both the occupants and their buildings that have been created illegally are part of the economic, social, and political system (Castells 1978; Gilbert and Gugler 1987). In the current era, the number of urban poor (urban marginal or urban disenfranchised) has increased, as have their verified activities within the urban environment (AlSayyad 2004).

Today, although there have been significant urban transformation policies and implementations in many countries, informality practices cannot be prevented. It can be said that informality is not related to concrete space. Informality now manifests in new forms and new places at the rural and urban interface in terms of the development of the idea of property ownership. There are different types of informal accumulation,

and the liberalization era has blurred the boundaries between informal and formal (AlSayyad 2004).

Urban informality cannot be explained only by the physical structure of a city. It is attributed to many causes including inadequate income, unrealistic urban planning, lack of social housing programs, and dysfunctional formal systems (Fernandes 2011). Urban informality does not simply consist of the activities of the poor, or a particular status of labor or marginality. The concept of urban informality is highly differentiated. So are the policies and activities aimed at legalizing or formalizing the effects of informality on the social, cultural, economic, political, and spatial characteristics of the city.

Urban Informality in Turkey and the Impact of the Urban Transformation

The main dynamic of urbanization was based on migration from rural to urban settings. This movement affected the social, economic, and physical characteristics of cities. In Turkey, it was triggered by both local factors such as demographic and political changes, and by global factors such as those that emerged during the postwar period. Due to these factors, a general movement occurred from the eastern part of Turkey to the western part, from the countryside to big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Istanbul was the most targeted city in terms of these migrations (Öncü 1999).

The industrialization of agriculture radically transformed the sector, and the demand for a rural work force was reduced. People from rural areas started to seek new opportunities in the cities. They left their hometowns and became marginalized actors in the economy. Cheap labor and low-income relationships forced the poor to survive in unauthorized dwellings. They built their dwellings illegally on someone else's land or on public land (Erman 2001; Erman 2011).

With the increasing urbanization of the 1960s, new informal structures increased in the city center and on the periphery. The name given to these squatter houses that had been illegally constructed by individuals on unoccupied public or private land is *gecekondu*. The literal meaning of *gecekondu* is "landed in the night," emphasizing the idea of them being "built in one night" (Erman 2011, p. 104). With the use of permanent construction materials, a *gecekondu* is different from other informal houses, such as those found in Latin American cases, which are generally built with temporary materials. In the early construction of *gecekondus*, collective labor and a collaborative work ethic resulted in buildings that were produced cheaply and quickly.

First it started with a few squatter houses, but soon grew to a neighborhood scale. The production method is quite similar to the autoconstruction method identified by Caldeira (2016) and Holston (1991). The surroundings grow gradually. Kinship and friendship became important factors to the formation of a neighborhood. The inhabitants felt powerful living together with their relatives and friends, and they acted as non-governmental organizations to obtain public services. When such a community is created, it is hard to dissolve or demolish it (Keyder 2005). In time, an informal housing

market was created by individuals who built *gecekondus* for someone else, either selling or renting them, and this became their profession.

With the increase of such settlements and the changing characteristics of urban land, government and city dwellers became worried about their presence. Consequently, in 1966, the government published a gecekondu law (No. 775) allowing government agents to demolish informal settlements and prevent the construction of new illegal housing. But this law could not be applied for some political reasons: *gecekondu* residents were potential voters during election times (Tekeli 2011). Ward (2014) and Gilbert (2004) state that as informal housing increases during election times, it is obvious that there is a relationship between informal settlements and elections.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many squatter settlements were turned into residential neighborhoods. Although they were not legal, they were provided with several public services such as infrastructure and electricity (Tekeli 2011; Danielson and Keleş 1985).

The government focused on legalizing/formalizing existing informal settlements and squatter houses rather than demolishing them as a means of prevention. There was a belief that many of the informal settlements could be improved without demolition if they were legalized. The government declared two amnesty laws in 1983 and 1984. They provided an opportunity for the legalization of informal neighborhoods. Moreover, the government gave squatters the right to increase the size of their properties. With the 1983 law, a large portion of the illegal squatter houses built before 1981 were legalized, and a land title was provided. Moreover, the occupants got the right to build up to four stories (Uzun et al. 2010). In the 1986 amnesty law, the squatter houses built before 1985 were legalized, just as with the previous implementation. This legalizing process involving amnesty laws turned into a transfer of ownership rights from public ownership to illegal occupants. *Gecekondus* were legalized by the amnesty laws and became a permanent form of housing. However, this process proved to be an impetus for speculation on urban land and housing (Arefi 2014).

While the main advantages of the amnesty laws were to prevent increasing squatter settlements and improving the spatial and physical construction qualities, these amnesty laws had negative effects for urban dwellers and led to urban ethical problems. They did not only legalize informal settlements, they became a speculation tool for land developers.

These implementations caused a new wave of activity in the real estate market and in urban areas, which changed the characteristics of the informal settlements. With the legal approval of *gecekondus*, some occupants upgraded their one-story houses to multi-story apartment buildings, and the economic value of the land increased (Erman 2001). They developed new urban forms, housing typologies, and new public space uses. This was not only a physical creation, but also a social, cultural, and economic creation in the city.

In the political context of this process, various urban planning approaches were implemented. In the period between 1950 and 1960, destructive modernist urban proj-

ects were applied in the cities. Informal settlements were seen as one of the biggest problems of the city by the government. International funds, such as World Bank funds, were used for *gecekondu* areas. The residents of *gecekondus* never integrated into the city and, moreover, were socially and economically excluded. Between 1970 and 1980, the politicization of the *gecekondu* areas was noted by different groups, and *gecekondu* residents were seen as a threat or danger. The neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s focused on these fragile environments. The cities became actors in the reproduction of capital. The main political approaches of the 1980s were regulated by a privatization-based, export-oriented model (Senyapili 2004).

After the legalization process, the government announced a new law called the Law on Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk. In 1999, a catastrophic earthquake occurred in the Eastern Marmara region of the country, and the government wanted to take control of the existing building stock and build new constructions which were earthquake resistant and of superior building quality. From that time, several pieces of regulation were introduced to address structural resistance and construction systems (Dulgeroglu Yuksel et al. 2014).

The Law on Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk (Law No. 6306) was published in 2012 to improve the safety of old structures and those in risky urban areas. This law has been referred to by different names including 'urban renewal law,' 'urban transformation law,' or 'urban regeneration law' by different scholars. Although all these names refer to the rehabilitation and redevelopment of improvised urban land through large-scale activities, the law does not restrict these changes in terms of scale. Both building and neighborhood-scale transformations are welcome. The legislation determines the details and procedures with regard to renovation and the transformation of areas and buildings at risk (Official Gazette 2012). If a region or building is declared to be 'risky,' the law forces owner-occupiers to rebuild or renovate their buildings. Many incentives such as credit facilities and tax and fee immunities have been offered to owners and contractors.

The demolition of unsafe buildings and the construction of new, safe ones were encouraged by this law. Although it was developed for areas and buildings at risk of disaster, many individuals and construction companies applied it to any building with the aim of getting increased floor area ratio that they thought they could rebuild for profit. Mostly, these urban transformation initiatives were applied to individual parcels, rather than to building an entire newly-planned neighborhood. Since 2012, different projects have been developed for the *gecekondu* neighborhoods in Istanbul.

Therefore, the act that aimed to create qualified built environments became a new economic development tool for informal housing stock and *gecekondu* neighborhoods. A very common procedure has been implemented in recent years. The process of building new formal projects on (legalized) informally-occupied land usually proceeds as follows: contractors offer a certain amount of money to the owner or occupier of the parcel/land in a legalized informal area, and they then develop a multi-story

apartment building on the parcel. If the particular parcel cannot be made profitable, a couple of parcels or more will be purchased to widen the footprint of the new project.

Public places may become smaller than existing ones, and building and dweller density may increase with the introduction of newly constructed vertical living projects. Undoubtedly, in the process of the reproduction of physical space, profit is the strongest motivator with regard to these urban renewal projects. Thus, legalized informal houses have been demolished to build new high-density residential buildings.

Since these activities have become a kind of microeconomic tool, the owners of the formalized *gecekondus* have obtained power in negotiations with developers and construction companies regarding their land. If the redevelopment of the land is not feasible for the formalized *gecekondu* owner, they typically prefer not to sell/redevelop their *gecekondus*. Consequently, some formalized *gecekondus* still have not been bought up and redeveloped. In addition to formalized *gecekondus*, today there are still illegal *gecekondus* built after the 1980s. The remaining *gecekondus* in the cities include both illegal and legalized/formalized *gecekondus*.

The conflict regarding the intersection of remaining *gecekondus* in a particular area and new apartment buildings in close proximity to that area has affected both the urban fabric and social, cultural, and economic relationships.

Reproduction of Urban Informality in Istanbul, Guzeltepe Neighborhood

In the last decade, the image of the Eyüp and Kağıthane districts have changed as a result of new urban transformation projects. Although they were small villages in the 1950s, the area of which they are a part became one of the central districts of Istanbul in the 1980s. The unplanned and disorganized development of the area continued until the 2000s, and the area has now been turned into a part of the city center, with newly built shopping centers, mass housing projects, and mixed-use buildings. The area is located in a valley and surrounded by highways. Officially, the Güzeltepe neighborhood, at the intersection of the Eyüp and Kağıthane districts, is operated by the Eyüp Municipality. It is mainly affected by Kağıthane socio-spatial relationships (refer to fig. 1).

The Eyüp and Kağıthane districts have a multilayered physical, social, and cultural heritage that provides historical information about Turkey's informal settlements or "*gecekondu* practice."

The population increased in the 1950s due to rapid urbanization. The opportunity to work in industrial facilities that were established in urban areas, and the economic difficulties that existed in rural areas, all had an impact on the increase in mass migration from rural to urban areas. In that period, the industrialization of Eyüp played an important role in attracting rural people to the area. During the 1980s, the district became an important area in terms of both industrialization and squatter living. In the 1990s, migration and the number of informal settlements increased, and with changing governmental regulations, the area changed from an industrial area to a residential one (Kurtulus et al. 2014; Yenen et al. 2000; Eyüp Municipality 2018).

Figure 1   Eyüp and Kağıthane Districts in Istanbul *(Image by the authors)*

When we look at the formal and informal development history of the area, the first industrialization movements started in 1950 with the spread of industry from the Golden Horn area. The people who worked in the resulting factories changed the socio-spatial structure of the area (Yetman 2013; Keles 2015; Aslan 2006). In 1985, with new urban planning regulations, industrial firms started to move away from the area, and in the 1995 master plan, the decentralization of industrial facilities increased. In the 2000s, these industrialized buildings were regenerated to serve other functions such as university buildings, art galleries, etc. The area has become an attractive place for developers (Yener et al. 2013).

There were only a few *gecekondus* in the area in the late 1940s and 1950s as seen in a 1946 air photo. In the 1970s, increasing industrialization in the area turned it into a new type of neighborhood that was mostly comprised of *gecekondus*. The factories were located in the valley while the slopes of the valley were filled with dwellings, as can be seen in a 1970 air photo (refer to fig. 2).
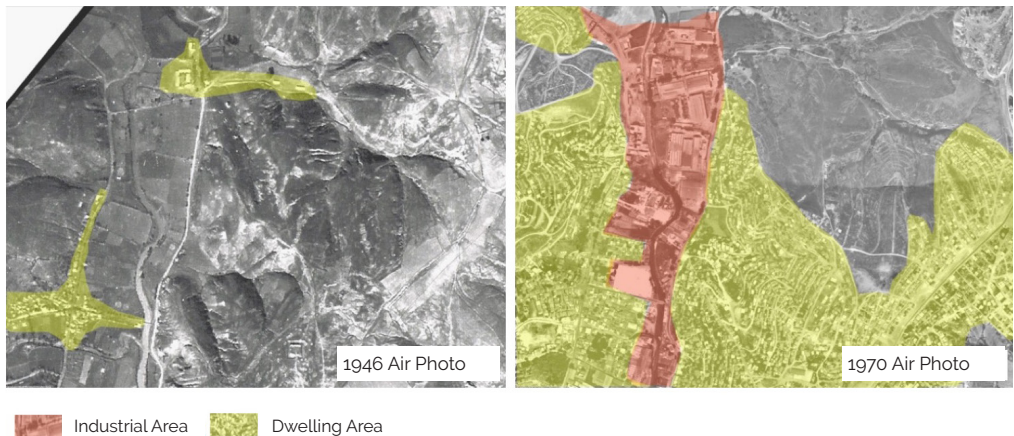

Industrial Area   Dwelling Area

Figure 2   Changes in the area 1940-70s period *(Image from Istanbul Municipality Archives and adapted by the authors)*

The area was very suitable for the expansion of informal settlements. This caused the creation of a local political network that included both formal and informal land developers. The socio-spatial character of the area has been altered with the actions of several actors over different periods. Until the 1980s, this local coalition attempted to solve informal housing and ownership problems in the area (Aslan 2006). The municipality was working on the development of the area, while organizations and groups were illegally sharing or selling parcels of public spaces (state land) to people that were willing to have or build a *gecekondu* on the land. These illegal groups were also a kind of social authority in other informal neighborhoods. They controlled both social life and public space parcels. This process made the building of informal housing settlements easier during that time (Kurtuluş et al. 2013).

Over time, building and population density increased in the neighborhood, and one-story squatter houses turned into multi-story squatter apartment (*apart-kondu*) buildings. In 1984, with the legalization of existing squatter houses and occupied lands, and with squatters obtaining licenses, poor families started to demolish their *gecekondu* houses to put legal buildings in their place, or cooperated with contractors pushing for the development of urban renewal projects (Tekeli 2011; Keles 2015).

In summary, there have been three main periods of change with regard to the Güzeltepe neighborhood. First, the 1940–50 migration movement caused the emergence of *gecekondu* settlements. Second, in the 1980s, by obtaining licenses these informal houses were transformed into multi-story apartments. The final feature of this transformation was the urban renewal law of 2012, as a result of which new apartment buildings were built in the area. Today, all these layers are visible within the new form of the city.

Field Study: The Enduring Influence of Informality in the Guzeltepe Neighborhood

This research was undertaken to determine and discuss the influence of initial informality, in terms of rule-making and rule-breaking, on formal housing developments. In this paper, we have researched the ways in which informal urban areas have been affected by both formal and informal activities. Is the conflict between formal and informal a powerful factor when it comes to reproducing informality? To examine this conflict, the research was conducted in the Güzeltepe neighborhood located in the valley between the Eyüp and Kağıthane districts. This neighborhood was chosen because it is rich in squatter settlement history and the urban transformation of recent years. Informal formation, the formalization (legalization) process, and the effects of the urban transformation act are the focal points of this field study.

The field study was conducted by visiting the Güzeltepe neighborhood and focusing on the informal and formal contradictions and intersections that existed on-site. There were several social responsibility projects in the area. This research was started following a participatory project by KEDV (Foundation for the Support of Women's

Work), Kagithane Municipality, and ITU (Istanbul Technical University) that focused on disaster preparedness and relief in Güzeltepe (KEDV 2015).

In 2014–2017, several detailed site visits were conducted in different parts of the Güzeltepe neighborhood in order to identify any significant examples of informality. During the site visits to the Güzeltepe neighborhood, first, general observations were made. A specific part that was very rich in urban layers was chosen. In this particular part, a total of 221 buildings were analyzed with regard to their relationship to the neighborhood and other buildings, and to the affect of interventions on the urban fabric and the local environment. A focus group was conducted with 20 *gecekondu* households in the neighborhood, in an attempt to understand the evaluation of the neighborhood since the 1980s. During site visits, buildings were categorized according to their physical quality and construction period, function analyses, and by the original municipality map and dimensions of new construction parcels. The effects of informal practices were photographed. The analysis of the data was conducted in two parts. First, the neighborhood and buildings that have changed due to several formal and informal activities were analyzed in terms of function, topographic use, and land dimensions (footprint). For the second part, focus was placed on the intersections of formal and informal practices.

Part One: Settlement and Building Analysis

Functions/Land Use

To understand the site's characteristics, a function analysis of the chosen part of the neighborhood was undertaken. It was noted that while 189 buildings had a residential function, 20 buildings were of mixed-use (commercial ground floor + residential apartments) while the rest (2 buildings) were religious buildings (mosques; refer to fig. 3). The commercial ones are located on the main road linking to other districts in Istanbul.

Existing Settlement Pattern and Topography

The settlement pattern is determined by the topography of the area and by other spatial relationships that have evolved over time. Examining the settlement pattern can help provide clues about social life, the relationships between people and their physical environment, and their interactions. This organic pattern tells us that the neighborhood grew over time without any holistic planning, and is not complete or static. This growth refers to auto construction behavior, such as is found overseas in Latin American squatter settlements. It began with only a few squatter dwellings, then turned into a collective creation (step by step) in terms of both natural and built environments (Caldeira 2016; Holston 1991). This is a common, ongoing process for informal areas, and one that is found in many informal neighborhoods in Turkey. Topography has been a strong factor in determining the informal parts of the Güzeltepe neighborhood settlement pattern (refer to fig. 4).

Figure 3   Building Function in the area in 2014 *(Image by authors)*
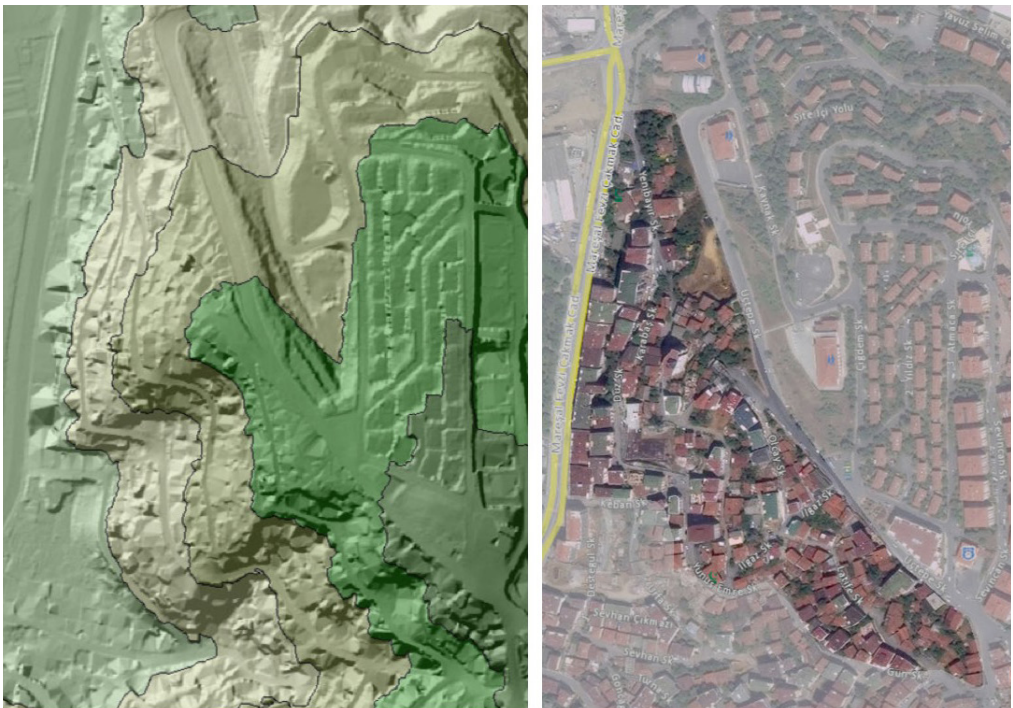

Figure 4   2017 Topography Map and 2017 Air Photo *(Images from Istanbul Municipality Archives and adapted by the authors)*

When we look at the historical development of squatter settlements in the area, we see that the occupants mostly preferred to settle on sloping areas that seem relatively unattractive in terms of use by legal authorities. The occupants created their own common built environment on such sloping areas to satisfy their essential needs. They built patterns with or without any experience or expertise. Steep roads for vehicles and pedestrians followed earlier paths worn by the *gecekondu* occupants.

Building Layers in the Neighborhood and Land Dimension Changes

There are four important time layers in the neighborhood in terms of informality and urban renewal activities. The first one was dated between the 1950s and the 1980s, when squatter dwellings started to be built. The second period started with the legalization by the government of what had been illegal houses and occupied land in the 1980s. When occupants obtained their building licenses (deeds), they rebuilt or renewed their *gecekondus* legally. In the 1990s, some occupants sold their squatter houses and land with their license to contractors, allowing them to build multi-story apartment buildings. After publication of the urban transformation law in 2012, contractors and developers focused on bigger parcels (lots), or on bringing together adjacent parcels to obtain bigger construction sites and more marketable footprints. Two or more parcels that were adjacent became one big parcel. This kind of parcel combination changed the existing ratio, solid-void balance, and construction density of the area. When we zoom in on a part of the neighborhood, it is obvious that parcels have been combined, especially on main roads (refer to fig. 5).
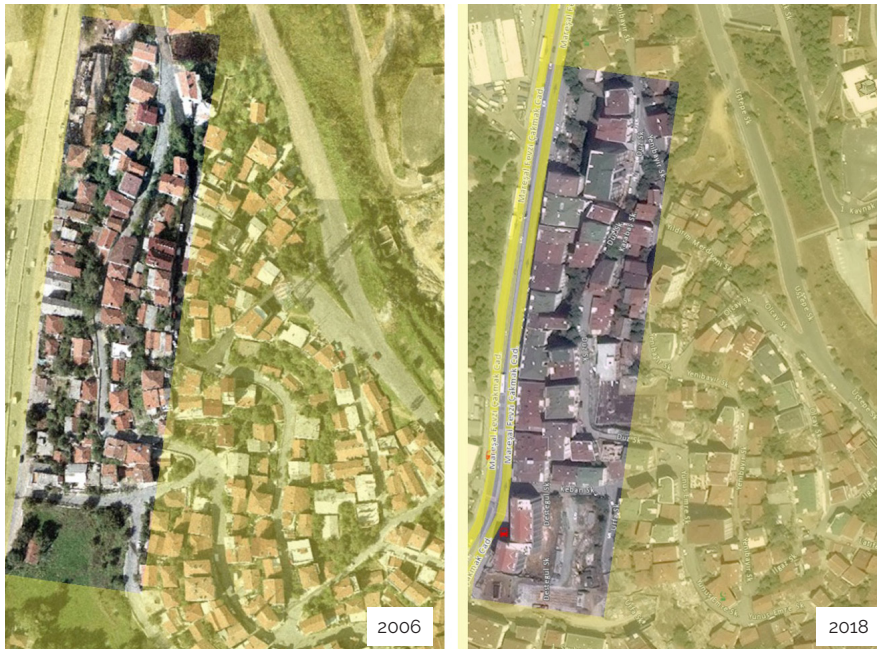

Figure 5   2006 and 2018 Air Photos *(Images from Istanbul Municipality Archives and adapted by the authors)*

Besides *gecekondu* areas, empty plots of land were combined and used for construction. As a result, the density of the area increased, as can be seen in figure 5. This is very typical of attempts in recent years, in terms of urban transformation activities. According to the regulations, if two or more parcels/lots are unified for building on as one parcel/lot, the developers can gain more construction rights on the site, such as increasing the floor area ratio.

Construction companies and real estate developers have generally focused on profit rather than aiming to improve urban quality and decrease disaster risk. The urban transformation system supported by the 2012 act gave rise to new actors with regard to the land, such as individual business developers. Although they may not have had the necessary know-how or building capacity, they caused the emergence of new informal practices. They have put another layer into the urban fabric. New intersections and building combinations have emerged.

Part Two: Intersections of Formal and Informal Practices

The neighborhood has developed different layers of formal and informal activities since the 1940–50s. Today, the housing stock in the Güzeltepe neighborhood includes legalized *gecekondus* resulting from the amnesty laws of the 1980s, illegal *gecekondus* built after the 1980s, and newly developed multi-family apartment buildings. In terms of the remaining *gecekondu* stock, some of the legalized *gecekondus* have been redeveloped by developers and construction companies. Negotiations between developers and legalized *gecekondu* owners are continuing, and the area is changing.

In the first part of the field study, building and settlement analyses were used to obtain information about the changing characteristics of the area in terms of formal and informal relationships in the neighborhood. The second part of the field study, with the help of these analyses, focused on new patterns/products arising from informal and formal contradictions. There are many details that can be seen regarding this intersection in the form of gaps, roads, stairs, and sidewalks, that are part of the urban environment.

With the findings from site observations and analyses, significant effects were revealed about urban patterns and characteristics. The process involving informal settlement following legalization, and urban renewal in the same part of the neighborhood, have been the cause of a number of new informal symptoms such as the following: changes in the solid and void balance of the neighborhood, new formal and informal open spaces that have emerged, the development of informal passageways to allow access to main roads from houses—steep stairs, steep roads, and sidewalks—loose spaces leading to dramatic gaps between buildings, and artificial topographies caused by excavations or filling-in during informal activities.

Changes in the Solid and Void Patterns of the Neighborhood

In the period between the 1970s and 1990s, with the increasing number of *gecekondus*, the area became increasingly dense. In the earliest period of *gecekondu* settlement, there were larger gardens and more open spaces. However, after the 1980s, *gecekondus* turned into objects of profit. Consequently, the density of the neighborhood started to increase.

With the 2000s, urban transformation projects that involved combining two or more parcels increased the footprint of the construction area, and changed its solid and void pattern. Land which previously contained small *gecekondu* buildings was filled with huge, bulky, multi-story apartment buildings that had various shops on the first floor (refer to fig. 6). Such changes were particularly visible on the parcels of land that were located on the busy main roads.

Figure 6   New Buildings after Transformation in the Area *(Photo by the authors)*

The early urban transformation activities started generally in the most valuable parts of the neighborhood, specifically land with access to main roads.

Changing Open Spaces, Roads, and Connections

In the Güzeltepe neighborhood, the incremental creation of the neighborhood was related to a number of factors. In the early years, while the occupants were building their *gecekondus*, they focused on their relationships with other occupants, such as kinship, friendship, and being from the same hometown. Open spaces consisted of land on which there were no buildings. In time, during the 1970–1990 period, these open places were filled with new *gecekondus*. Open spaces in the neighborhood consisted of land left over from all the formal and informal building activities (refer to fig. 7).

Figure 7   Changing Open Spaces *(Photos by the authors)*

Given that there are not a lot public spaces such as parks and playgrounds, the streets, roads, and sidewalks have become important for informal meetings and socializing. Occupants created their own pattern of early roads and entrances to *gecekondus*. These came to exist based on their experience and relationships. With the formalization of the legal ownership process, the municipality and other government offices provided public services such as electricity, water, and other infrastructure services including roads and sidewalks. It can be seen that public works, roads, and sidewalks were constructed with no relationship to (legalized) informal houses. After the construction of roads and sidewalks, the occupants adapted their environment to create access from their homes. Super-steep roads and stairs were used in many parts as connecting elements (refer to fig. 8).

Figure 8   Connections Between Houses and Roads *(Photos by authors)*

The neighborhood is set on steep land. When the early *gecekondus* were built, the occupants followed the natural topographic lines as shown in the first image. Following the legalization period, local authorities provided all public services to the occupants. Taking into consideration the existing *gecekondus*, new roads were constructed. Then, with these new implementations, the *gecekondus* had a new relationship with their immediate environment in terms of connection to the main streets, garden usage, or scenes.

While some *gecekondus* stayed below the main road level, others stayed at the upper level of the new roads. These new levels and terraces have caused three-dimensional pattern changes in urban places.

Loose Space-Dramatic Gaps between Buildings

The first *gecekondus* in the 1950s were built according to the occupants' own rules, and with regard to their degree of relationship or kinship with neighbors. After the legalizing process, new apartment buildings had to follow not only municipal guidelines, but also the guidelines that emerged from the earlier *gecekondus*. For example, if there was still a (legalized) *gecekondu* behind land earmarked for new construction, when building the new apartment, the developer respected the existing *gecekondu*'s façade openings such as entrance or windows (refer to fig. 9). Some such spaces are not quite wide enough to clean or maintain, and seem to act as unclaimed spaces.

Figure 9   Gaps Between Buildings *(Photo by the authors)*

The gaps are not only between two or more *gecekondus* or between *gecekondus* and newly-built, multi-story apartment buildings. Such gaps can also be seen between new multi-story apartment buildings that were built in line with the urban transformation regulations.

Though they may not have realized it at the time, the early squatter groups were constructing not only houses but also the character of the area. The initial informality laid down a set of rules that later formal developments had to follow.

Non-Morphological Aspects

Since the 1950s, the neighborhood has changed in terms of socio-cultural and economic characteristics as a result of formal and informal activities. Relationships which were once based on kinship and friendship in the area have evolved into different types with the arrival of new residents who live in the multi-story apartment buildings that followed urban transformation (Ergin and Rittersberger-Tilic 2014). *Gecekondu* owners had a chance to profit from the spaces they occupied with the introduction of legalization and urban transformation regulations. This led to a new form of informal collaboration between developers, construction companies, and occupants. In the past, the area was seen as an informal dwelling area. Since the introduction of the urban transformation regulations, the area is now considered an investment area by developers. New real estate practices emerged with the selling of *gecekondu* lands to developers, with the expectation of a profit above its market value (Hurriyet Emlak 2018). However, these new investments are still influenced by the existing layout of the informal *gecekondus*; they caused the creation of an unplanned built environment on the part of developers, and new builders followed.

In June 2018, the government published a new amnesty law absolving illegal building activities in urban areas. According to the amnesty, the owners of illegal buildings that were built before 2017 can apply to get their deeds (Official Gazette 2018). The affects on the area of this new legislation are yet to be seen.

Conclusion

Informality is not only the result of illegal implementations. Sometimes it can emerge as a result of collaboration among legal and illegal activities and of the contradictions that exist. The new developments must conform to the rules, and the character of the neighborhood created by the initial informal builders. They are both rule-makers and rule-breakers of urban activities.

In Turkey, informal urban practices have evolved from the 1950s to the present day in terms of these activities. There are different urban layers/periods: the informal settlement period between 1950 and 1970; the legalization as a result of the government regulations of the 1980s; and the act of urban transformation with regard to areas under risk of disaster. Each of these has affected the case study area, the Güzeltepe

neighborhood. Today, the existing building stock in the neighborhood varies in terms of different periods and characteristics. Not only are there dwellings, there are also a range of different types of buildings with several functions. All the buildings and their users have added new features to the urban fabric of the neighborhood.

In the first period, the occupants created a new informal neighborhood. In the second period, with the help of government regulations, many of the informal houses were legalized and the occupants obtained their licenses/deeds. The economic value of the land in the neighborhood increased, and contractors and construction companies focused on the area. State-led interventions have been used as a tool to develop new formal/legal projects and to profit from urban space.

Moreover, such developers had the right to benefit from the urban transformation act. *Gecekondus* have become commodified objects or investments rather than just dwellings. Developers have started to pay the legalized squatters for their parcels of land on which they can then build multi-story apartments or other dense-occupancy buildings.

Besides morphological reproduction, such developments have led to social, cultural, and economic changes. With the serial amnesty regulations that have been enacted, urban informality has been mainly concerned with physical upgrading and real estate investment. It has caused rapid socio-cultural changes. When living costs increased in the area, it became difficult for users to remain in the neighborhood.

In this study, we examined the emergence of a multi-layered informality in terms of collaboration and the contradictions associated with formal and informal activities in an urban space. Informal and formal practices have a strong relationship in urban areas, in that they jointly configure the urban space, and feed off of each other in order to reproduce themselves. The influence that the initial informality has had on recent legal/formal developments, in the form of urban transformation activities, can be observed in the area. The power of informal practices remains. This research shows that informal builders are as much rule-makers as they are rule-breakers, as later construction has to follow the rules set out by the *gecekondu* settlers. In addition, the presence of existing informality and adaptive practices of the *gecekondu* settlers, after the implementation of urban transformation policies aimed at formalization, demonstrate the power and influence of the informal city in an urban setting.

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