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Author

Özdamar, Esen Gökçe

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Still-Life Architecture

By **Esen Gökçe Özdamar**

Edited by **Lana Salman**

Tepekent, a six-million-square-meter development with an estimated population of 10,000 inhabitants, is Turkey's biggest gated community. Tepekent is located near Çatalca in the western outskirts of İstanbul. Originally proposed as an "eco-city," this gated "villa town" has recently turned into "still-life architecture." Many of the homes were not completed and are now abandoned, and those that were completed are infrequently occupied, lending the area the feeling of a ghost town.

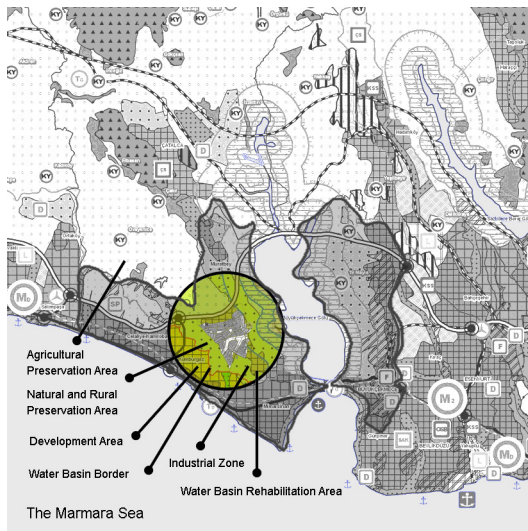


Figure 1: Tepekent and Büyükçekmece water basin preservation areas, Map derived from part of 1/100.000 scale İstanbul Environment Plan, 2006 available at: <http://sehirrehberi.ibb.gov.tr/map.aspx> (accessed April 15, 2014)

The first settlement in Tepekent started early in the 1990s, when mass housing construction and population growth in İstanbul peaked. Beginning in the 1990s, many of İstanbul's wealthier residents began searching for second homes or summer houses at the peripheries of the city, far away from complexities such as squatter homes. Housing has become an important space of commodification for the Turkish middle class. The primary driver of demand for these settlements was the idea of a so-called "secure lifestyle" which is symbolic of ideological and socio-cultural polarization (Öncü 1997). TOKİ, the Mass Housing Administration of Turkey, also played a major role in orienting the housing market towards

projects like Tepekent by promoting gated communities. TOKİ is a catalyst for massive urban transformation that has been occurring across the country. In addition to mass housing blocks, gated communities became popular in and around İstanbul as a new mode of urbanization. Gated communities, “physical private areas with restricted rules and prohibited access, where outsiders and insiders exist” are a product of the real estate market threaten both natural and social sustainability (Baycan-Levent and Gülümser 2009).



Figure 2. Author photo.



Figure 3. Author photo.



Figure 4. Tepekent site plan. Photo courtesy of Tepekent Administration Public Affairs.

In addition to dense housing blocks, gated communities became popular in and around İstanbul as a new mode of urbanization in response to increasing housing demand in the 1980s. Gated communities, “physical private areas with restricted rules and prohibited access, where outsiders and insiders exist” are a product of the real estate market and threaten both natural and social sustainability (Baycan-Levent and Gülümser 2009).

Tepekent’s housing area was designed as an alternative to the chaotic urban nature of İstanbul. Planned as a summer resort, Tepekent consists of 1,830 villas of forty-four different types, with varying sizes from 300 to 400 square meters to 2,000 to 5,000 square meters. The town includes a social center and a university and was built by a union of seventy-three building

cooperatives. These facilities cover about 40 percent of the land area, while the remaining area is left for reforestation, canola and sunflower production..

There are 980 people currently registered in this town; however, one can rarely see any inhabitants. From the empty window frames, one confronts a still-life architecture. Although the area was designed as a natural settlement, it is an ecological asset to the city only in terms of a small

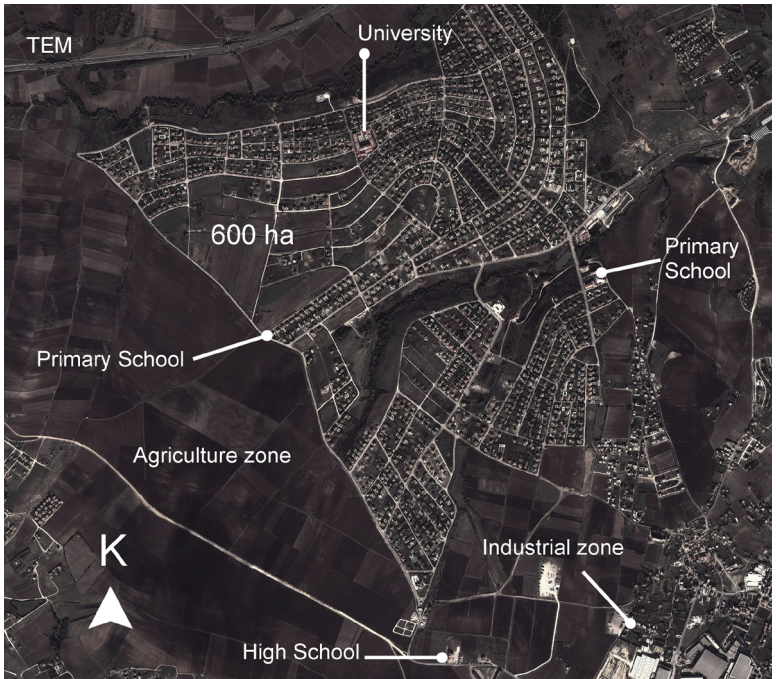


Figure 5. Aerial photograph courtesy of Tepekent Administration Public Affairs.



Figure 6. Photo courtesy of Tepekent Administration Public Affairs.

amount of reforestation. Its layout pattern and facility development are too defined and rigid to transform and meet possible future ecological needs.

Tepekent can be classified as a horizontal gated villa town, which consists of detached single-unit dwellings with a private garden built for upper- or upper-middle-class families with children. These gated villa towns use their horizontality to set up a more “people-friendly” settlement while regenerating lost social values with traditional or international patterns (Baycan-Levent and Gülümser 2007). In the Tepekent case, although the settlement is human scale, there are few shared public spaces, known locally as “social facilities.”



Figure 7. Photo courtesy of Tepekent Administration Public Affairs.



Figure 8. Aerial photograph courtesy of Tepekent Administration Public Affairs.

Tepekent is the biggest gated community and the first “eco-city” project in Turkey, but this is somewhat of an empty title. Although it is situated in one of the main ecological corridors in İstanbul, the Büyükçekmece Lake Basin, industrial activity occurs in conservation zones, with groundwater being consumed at an unsustainable pace by the housing development and nearby factories (Ergen 2010).



Figure 9. Photo courtesy of Tepekent Administration Public Affairs.



Figure 10. Author photo.

Esen Gökçe Özdamar is Assistant Professor and Head of Department at Namik Kemal University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Design and Architecture, Department of Architecture in Turkey.

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