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**UNDERSTANDING SPATIAL SEGREGATION THROUGH GATED  
COMMUNITIES:  
THE CASE OF İSTANBUL**

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

MERVE DANIŞMAN

İstanbul, 2025

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## **LIST OF ABBRIVATIONS**

**TL:** Turkish Lira

**TOKİ:** Toplu konut idaresi Başkanlığı

**ITU:** İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi

**N.D.:** NO DATE

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## ÖZ

Bu çalışma, İstanbul’da son yıllarda artış gösteren kapalı site projeleri aracılığıyla kentteki mekânsal ayrışma incelemektedir. Üst sınıfların ne gibi amaçlar ile ayrışmayı tercih ettiği incelenmiştir. Bu gruplara hitap eden projelerin kullandığı tanıtım söylemleri, şehirdeki sınırların nasıl çizildiğini anlamak amacıyla incelenmiştir. Bu doğrultuda birinci bölümde, mekânsal ayrışma kavramı kuramsal düzeyde ele alınmış, David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre ve Pierre Bourdieu gibi kuramcıların mekân ve sınıf ilişkisine dair yaklaşımlarına yer verilmiştir. İkinci bölümde, Cumhuriyet’ten günümüze İstanbul’un şehirleşme süreci ve mekânsal ayrışmanın tarihsel arka planı incelenmiş; özellikle 1980 sonrası neoliberal politikalar, kentsel dönüşüm ve inşaat sektörünün yükselişi bağlamında kapalı site oluşumları tartışılmıştır. Üçüncü bölümde ise İstanbul’un farklı bölgelerinde yer alan dokuz adet lüks konut projesinin web siteleri ve reklamları içerik çözümlemesi yöntemiyle incelenmiş; bu projelerde sıkça tekrar eden “güvenlik”, “doğa”, “ayrıcalık” ve “prestij” gibi kavramların, hem fiziksel hem de sembolik ayrışmayı nasıl yeniden ürettiği analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, kapalı site projelerinin lüks bir konut modeli, toplumsal statü, yaşam tarzı ve aidiyet duygusunun göstergeleri olduğunu anlatmış ve neoliberal kentleşmenin önemli bir aracı olduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışma İstanbul’daki mekânsal adaletsizlik tartışmalarına katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Neoliberal şehirleşme, Kent Hakkı , Mekansal Ayrışma, Kapalı Siteler.

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the spatial segregation in the city through gated community projects that have increased in recent years in İstanbul. The purposes for which the upper classes prefer segregation are analyzed. The promotional discourses used by projects that appeal to these groups are analyzed in order to understand how the boundaries in the city are drawn. Accordingly, in the first section, the concept of spatial segregation is discussed at the theoretical level and the approaches of theorists such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu on the relationship between space and class are included. In the second part, the urbanization process of İstanbul from the Republic to the present day and the historical background of spatial segregation are examined; gated community formations are discussed in the context of neoliberal policies, urban transformation and the rise of the construction sector, especially after 1980. In the third part, the websites and advertisements of nine luxury housing projects located in different regions of İstanbul are analyzed through content analysis method; it is analyzed how the concepts such as “security”, “nature”, ‘privilege’ and “prestige”, which are frequently repeated in these projects, reproduce both physical and symbolic segregation. The findings show that gated community projects are a luxury housing model, indicators of social status, lifestyle and sense of belonging, and an important tool of neoliberal urbanization. The study aims to contribute to discussions on spatial injustice in İstanbul.

**Key Words:** Neoliberal Urbanism, Right to the City, Spatial Segregation, Gated Communities.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1-Significance of the Study

Neoliberal policies have transformed urban space and created new areas of profit in the city through the privatization of public assets, as David Harvey (2006), argues, in the process of neoliberalism “corporatization, commodification and privatization of public assets while belonging to the state”. While all public infrastructure in the city such as water, transportation, education, health etc. was opened to the service of capital, “wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms” took place (David Harvey, 2006: 153).

In Turkey, this has been reflected in new housing production models, and gated communities have become important structures. Ateş and Yıldız (2022: 58) also emphasized that gated communities “lead to physical and social segregation” in the city. Neoliberal urbanization shows people that the concept of the “right to the city” is becoming increasingly important. According to Harvey (2008: 23), “*the freedom to remake our city and ourselves is perhaps the most precious yet most neglected human right*”. However, gated communities de facto abolish this right. Settlements surrounded by walls, private security, and borders have affected access to the city's common amenities. Kesim Güven and Kar (2013) define gated communities as “residential areas where normally public spaces are privatized and access is restricted” (Blakely and Snyder, 1998, cited in Kesim Güven and Kar, 2013: 10).

This definition may indicate that gated communities ideologically affect public rights. Furthermore, as stated in Kesim Güven and Kar's study, gated communities are generally organized as areas that “house the residences of people from the same income group, surrounded by walls and protected by security guards and closed circuit camera systems” (Şenyapılı, 2003; Kurtuluş, 2005; Işık ve Pıncıoğlu, 2001, cited in Kesim Güven and Kar, 2013: 10). These spaces can affect the right to produce an egalitarian city and to have a say over the city for all segments of society. That is, they can undermine the “right to the city”. The information above

shows us that urban policies affect human life very directly and it is important to produce information about equal and fair use of the city for these reasons. This thesis is important in terms of understanding how these sites reflect themselves and their perspective on general society. It is important in terms of showing how these types of institutions advertise, and separate people even based on their basic rights.

## **2-Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

This thesis aims to examine the language and discourses used by gated communities that cater to the upper income group in İstanbul to promote themselves and to reveal how these discourses deepen social and spatial segregation in the city

The main purpose of this study is to analyze in detail the self-presentation strategies used by closed websites and to reveal the values, ideals, and lifestyles through which these websites market themselves. Accordingly, the main research questions of the study are as follows:

- How do the luxury gated communities in İstanbul present themselves through the language on their websites?
- What symbolic and social meanings do the language and images used by these gated communities carry?
- How do concepts such as privacy, security, prestige, fear, privilege and nature emphasized in the promotions of gated communities produce and reinforce spatial and social segregation?

The research will examine how the strategies of housing projects alone affect social relations and spatial organization within the city. The thesis also aims to understand the motivations of those who choose to live in housing estates and explain how these motivations shape their relations with the rest of urban life.

### **3-Scope of the Study**

The scope of the research included nine luxury gated communities (Köy Zekeriyaköy, Deniz İstanbul, Villa Via, Göl İstanbul, Brand Vadi İstanbul, Pelican Hill, Toskana Vadisi, Mesa Doğa and DenizKoru) located in İstanbul that appeal to the upper income group. This study includes a detailed discourse analysis of the content of websites. These websites were selected because they are found in different parts of İstanbul and address similar economic classes and use similar marketing strategies and language. The study aims to reveal the common social meanings and spatial consequences of discourses and modes of presentation in a comparative manner.

The content analysis of the websites analyzed various types of content such as texts, visual images, and slogans. The focus of these analyses is on how websites promote themselves, what values and symbols these promotions are based on, and what kind of social realities these symbols create. The scope of the research thus focuses not only on physical spatial segregation, but also on the linguistic, cultural and symbolic mechanisms behind this segregation.

### **4-Methodology**

In this study, qualitative content analysis method was used. Content analysis is mentioned as “a research method that aims to systematically analyze the content of written, visual or audio materials” (Alanka, 2024: 64). Metin and Ünal (2022: 275) argued that content analysis technique is frequently used in social sciences and that this technique is an effective tool in revealing general trends about the subject under consideration. In qualitative content analysis, in order to reach reality, what is it? Why? How? To reach reality and thus try to reveal hidden messages that are not superficially visible (Metin and Ünal, 2022: 275).

Qualitative content analysis method is different from the discourse analysis method used in social sciences and Taylan (2011: 67) argues that in the phase from the 1990s to the present day, discourse analysis has transformed into “critical discourse analysis” as it has attracted the attention of critical linguists. Taylan (2011: 67) also stated that critical discourse analysis aims to show how power relations and ideologies shape discourse and how discourse is shaped by power and ideology and how it is effective in the formation of social identity, social relations,

knowledge and belief systems. The main reason for choosing the content analysis method in this thesis is that the focus of the study is on the systematic identification and interpretation of specific concepts and themes used in the promotional content of closed websites. Content analysis contributes to the reliability and validity of the findings of the study by organizing recurring ideas, images, and concepts in the analyzed texts under clear categories. Unlike the more in-depth linguistic analyses of discourse analysis, which focus on the structure and functions of language, especially the power relations produced through language, this thesis focuses on revealing thematic and conceptual tendencies rather than the linguistic structure of the texts. Therefore, the content analysis method provides a more appropriate and practical answer to the research questions in this thesis by clearly revealing how concepts such as “security”, “nature” and “prestige” emphasized in the marketing content of gated communities are associated with social and spatial segregation. This method also provides a strong academic basis as it allows the data to be analyzed in a transparent manner.

As the main data source of the study, the content on the websites of nine selected high-level gated communities in İstanbul and news websites mentioning these projects were used. The texts, slogans, and images on the websites of the sites were carefully archived and analyzed to understand their self-presentation strategies. The methodological approach used in this process recognizes that the sites' marketing content is not only a means of consumption, but also cultural tools that construct social meanings and relationships. The analysis focused on the concepts and images used by the sites to define themselves and attract potential buyers.

In the content analysis, concepts such as “prestige”, “privilege”, “privacy”, “security”, “comfort” and “nature”, which are frequently mentioned in the texts of the websites, were analyzed in detail. The ways in which these concepts are used, how they are interpreted, and their symbolic values were the main points of analysis. The analysis also discusses how the language used by gated communities normalizes and legitimizes social segregation and isolation. The theoretical framework of the analysis draws on the perspectives of theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu's cultural and symbolic capital and David Harvey's neoliberal urbanization, and the

commodification of space. Through these theoretical perspectives, it is aimed to explain how the language, self-representation, and images used by the sites are made meaningful in the socio-cultural context and which social processes they contribute to.

This study has some methodological limitations. The research was conducted only on the digital promotional content (texts, images) of housing projects and did not include data based on field observations or user experiences. This limited the comprehensive assessment of the differences between the marketing discourse of the projects and their real-life practices.

Having previously been in one of these gated communities in İstanbul for a short period of time was the beginning of my questioning of these places. Although the gated community in question is physically located within the borders of İstanbul, the lifestyle, spatial arrangements and architecture it offers is quite different from the general structure of the city. This observation prompted the need to question the relationship of such gated communities with the city and their forms of social segregation. To this end, other projects that utilize similar discursive and spatial strategies were also included in the analysis to investigate how this way of living can be made sense of in terms of urban sociology.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to reveal the dimensions of spatial and social segregation by analyzing the language and self-presentation strategies of selected gated communities in İstanbul. In this way, the study aims to show that gated communities are discursive and cultural spaces where social relations, class structures, and inequalities within the city are reproduced. In other words, it argues that the concepts and images in the marketing language of gated communities are important elements that determine the social and spatial structure of the city.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **1-Definition of Spatial Segregation**

Urban space is a significant topic in social sciences. A lot of theorists have been working on space and producing knowledge to better analyze space and its influence on people. Space might be classified as one of the most influential topics that directly affects society and people's experiences. Urban space is not just a physical entity, so social sciences have been working on space to comprehend and analyze society. It has so many functions that are directly related to the experiences of people. The space is the ground for people to communicate. Social interactions are shaped in space. The urban space might affect how people are living and also what kind of chances they have. It is also related to the socioeconomic status and to the lifestyles of people. As a result, there is an opportunity to observe interactions, social inequalities, and lifestyles in urban spaces. Urban theorist David Harvey even claims that space is formed only by human interactions and spatial arrangements of objects (Harvey, 1969). On the other hand, these spaces are places that offer resources for human action. Space is not a reflection of society; it is a society (Castels, 1996). So, space is not passively reflecting society, it is actually society with all power relations. It recreates power relations and is affected by the power relation dynamics in society. The human being, who continues her life through geography, has a necessary interaction with space. Space is formed at the intersection of economic, social, and material relations operating at various scales (Massey, 2005). Space and society are therefore intertwined rather than two separate realities (Prior, 1988). Space has a direct influence on the lifestyles of people, their social interactions, and economic opportunities. Space is significant in terms of its effects on society.

Spatial segregation is the cumulation of some social groups to specific geographical regions and physically segregated from each other. The segregation might be influenced by economic conditions, socio-economic class, ethnic identity, and political orientations. The acceleration in urbanization process makes the spatial segregation clearer and it is a significant

factor that shapes the structure of the contemporary cities. The difference in the housing market, transportation opportunities, access to the services are the essential factors that deepened the effects of the spatial segregation on the society. Spatial segregation is taking place sometimes willingly, but sometimes it is forced by the economic and the political structures.

Theorists that suggest space is shaped with social interactions, point out that spatial segregation cannot be explained just by physical borders. Lefebvre (1991) suggested that space is not just a geographic location; it is shaped by production processes and the result of societal dynamics. To him, space is a ground where people build relationships and reproduce these social relations. This approach helps to comprehend that the spatial segregation is economic, political, and a cultural phenomenon.

Similarly, Castells (1996), has the argument that space is shaped by power relations, and it also reproduces power relations. Urban space is shaped with the effect of economic and political power on its residents. So, spatial segregation is not related to the geographical cumulation and more significantly a process of embodiment of the social inequalities. Therefore, production of space is directly related to urban planning, housing policies, and infrastructure investments. Massey (2005) suggests the space is constantly changing and is built by social practices. Spatial segregation then is shaped by both the economic structures and the people's interaction with the space. As a result, spatial segregation is a significant phenomenon that intertwines with the social, economic, and political processes. Cities are built with geographic and architectural effects, and also with the social positions and economic power of the residents, and their cultural preferences. When spatial segregation is mentioned, it is also more than just `spatial` as the space is not just a physical entity, but it is society itself. Therefore, it is so significant to accept the spatial segregation is the segregation itself with all the social inequalities and the opportunities. So, understanding spatial segregation is important to find a solution to the urban inequalities and building more inclusive cities.

## **2- History of Spatial Segregation**

Spatial segregation is deepened with the modern urbanization processes and after the industrial revolution it has become a concrete phenomenon. The Industrial Revolution had been a reason for cities to grow. As the economic chances were increasing, people migrated to the cities from rural areas for work. This migration process is thought to be one of the reasons for inequality within cities and it became observable in space. While unhealthy and low-standard neighborhoods where workers lived densely formed around the centers of industrial production, the bourgeois class settled in healthier and more comfortable areas away from the city center (Engels, 1845/2023). Friedrich Engels suggests that the working class in industrial cities are forced to live in the regions that physically separate places and show the economic and class aspects of this spatial segregation when he works on the English working class and industrial city. On the 19th. Century in cities like London, Paris and New York, the separation between has become clear between poor and wealthy neighborhoods with the effect of industrialization. David Harvey (2008) evaluates urban separation as an integral part of capitalist urbanization and suggests that “Capitalist cities are shaped according to the flow of capital, and spatial separation is the inevitable result of this process”. The cities have been becoming places not only for industrial production, but at the same time the places that show the spatial aspects of capital accumulation.

In the mid 20th century in Western Europe and Northern America some social policies tried to reduce the level of segregation. For example, in 1947, the Town and Country Planning Act aimed to provide better living conditions for the working-class residents of the city and with the New Towns Movement new cities had been built around London (Madge, 1962). This kind of policy might be the state’s effort to regulate the unequal conditions of cities. Similarly, France has initiated a policy called "Les Grands Ensembles” aimed to regulate the increasing city population and provide housing for the working-class people. However, this project resulted in the accumulation of the low-income people, and it did not help to reduce segregation (Power, 1993). According to Mustard and Ostendorf (1998), the social housing projects in Western

Europe firstly aimed to integrate the different social classes together, due to economic crises and neoliberal policies these kinds of social housing projects have become the cumulation of the socially disadvantaged people. This situation is significant evidence that spatial segregation cannot be reduced with physical planning, long term policies and social policies need to be made to reduce the segregation.

Since the 1970s neoliberal policies have been increasing and this has had an effect on urban social policies as well. The urban transformation projects result in exclusion of the working class, and it also causes an increase of urban spatial segregation. Neil Smith (1996) has mentioned this process as “gentrification” and he suggests this urban project deepens segregation. Gentrification is generally made by the upper classes in low-income neighborhoods. This process, low-income classes might leave the gentrified regions because of the increasing rents and living expenses. This is one of the reasons for segregation and to give the upper classes the opportunity to move to the city centers (Smith, 2002). In large metropolises, the capital gained a lot of power and influence to shape the city. Cities have been affected by neoliberal policies and capital, even the public spaces affected by the process. So, gentrification is also related to spatial segregation and the urban inequalities. The urban inequalities and the spatial segregation are both increased by the class differences and the neoliberal policies that restructure the urban areas. Today, spatial segregation is a much more complex phenomenon when compared to past times. Neoliberal policies influence the increased segregation. The process has become more complex with the new policies, and spatial segregation is now more concrete. The increase in gated communities are one of the factors that the upper classes’ physical separation sometimes from city centers and low-income classes. This kind of segregation is generally obvious in metropolises like İstanbul. Gated communities are housing preference, and beyond that there are also concrete examples of the spatial segregation (Low, 2003: 11).

### **3- Effects and Reasons to Spatial Segregation**

Spatial segregation is a sort of phenomenon that occurs with the cumulation of some different societal groups and effected by a lot of reasons. Social, economic, and political reasons

are effective in segregation. It is important to understand the reasons and the effects of the problem in order to address it. The most significant and effective reasons for spatial segregation are economic reasons. Income differences, housing costs and job opportunities are the reason for different income level groups living in certain neighborhoods (Harvey, 1973). So, low-income people generally live in the areas that have affordable housing opportunities. The upper classes live in more prestigious and secure areas of the city. The perception of housing as an investment and capital accumulation is also a reason for the low-income groups that are living in segregated areas (Smith, 1996). The local government's urban policies and housing projects are some of the reasons that increase or decrease segregation in urban settings. For example, the social housing projects that have been made in certain regions in the city foster the low income's marginalization (Marcuse & Van Kempen, 2011). In addition to that, big urban transformation projects often increase the spatial segregation and often causes a movement of low-income people to move from city centers which are sociologically named as gentrification.

Urban fear is a significant phenomenon in sociology and researchers have been analyzing it for a long time. Sharon Zukin (1995) mentioned her works about the policies that create the perception of urban fear and its results. The stranger people in the public space and also the fear of violent crime causes a growth in the police forces, gated and barred communities, design of the public spaces for maximum surveillance; this has been a source of contemporary urban culture (Zukin, 1995). The search for security is also a reason for the upper classes to want to live separately from others. Luxury gated communities have been a choice for people that want to buy the feeling of safety. Atkinson & Blandy (2013), suggests we observe the increasing numbers of gated communities that pursue the creation of defensible spaces for its residents and excludes the "unwanted". So, we see that the spatial segregation is now broader than being just economic, it is also affected by security and fear reasons. The gated communities might cause exclusion of the unwanted people and create urban isolation. Perception of insecurity among social classes brings segregation and leads upper classes to live in gated communities. Atkinson & Blandy, (2013) also suggests that in addition to the fear reasons, desire for status, privacy and the investment potential of gated communities are people's motivation to live behind the gates.

Historical and cultural factors have been reasons for the spatial segregation. Certain ethnic groups and immigrant groups have been living in certain neighborhoods, and this became a permanent spatial segregation (Wacquant, 2008). Pierre Bourdieu's habitus notion might be a significant frame to have a better understanding of spatial segregation. According to Bourdieu, habitus have been individual's perceptions, thoughts, and their way of life that they live according to their practices, history, experiences (Bourdieu, 1984). As Pierre Bourdieu (1986) said, cultural and social capital is shaped by social status and habits as well as their economic capital. The habitus notion shows the people's tendencies to maintain certain lifestyles and how it is related to the environment that they interact with. So, space should be perceived as a place where people build and maintain their social relationships, also reproduce these social relationships. Economic capital is the main factor in the formation of gated communities. Gated communities are places where individuals with high income levels prefer to display their lifestyles and economic power spatially. In addition, cultural and social capital can cause people with similar education levels, tastes and lifestyles to prefer common spaces, and it can be said that individuals with similar social networks come together and strengthen these relationships. Finally, symbolic capital may enable gated communities to emerge as a symbol of prestige, status and elite position in society. So, cultural, and social capital affects people's decisions on the places in the city they live in and might be one of the reasons for spatial segregation to continue itself. A relation might be made between the habitus notion, cultural and social capital to the spatial segregation. An individual's class belongings and their cultural history and social class determine the neighborhood they live in, which region in the city they want to be and even where they feel comfortable. For example, upper class people might want to move to areas that protect their lifestyles. On the other hand, low-income classes might prefer to stay in the areas where they can keep their habits and their social circles. This situation might show the significant relation between the preferences that are affected by cultural and social capital. For example, people with certain education levels might want their children to get a good and international education, that affect their choice on where they live, and similarly social status and job

opportunities for themselves might affect their location preferences in the city. So, the class belongings, cultural preferences and social relations all shape the spatial segregation.

#### **4 - Gated Communities and Spatial Segregation**

Gated community residence areas that are generally surrounded by big walls and have security which controls the entry to the inside of the walls. Certain people prefer to live in this kind of gated community due to various reasons. These types of residence places are preferred with security, prestige and improving life quality motivations, and prevalent in the places where income inequality is high (Blakely & Snyder, 1997). This might show that in the cities where economic inequalities are high spatial segregation and the number of gated communities are high. Gated community phenomenon is one of the important reasons that deepens spatial segregation. The motivation behind the prevalence of gated communities are diverse around the world. It is important to examine these different dynamics that vary between different countries and different cultures. The United States is one of the places where gated communities are so prevalent. Low (2003:9) argued that the development of these settlements was shaped by demands for security and privacy and the expectations of the economically wealthy for private services.

Blakely and Snyder (1997) also wrote that gated communities increased in the USA after the 1980s due to income inequality, the search for security, and neoliberal urban policies. The number of people living in gated communities is nearly 10 million (Minton, 2002). The population living in the gated communities in the USA might be expected to have been rising since Minton's research. At first these gated communities mostly located in states such as California and Florida for high-income groups and retirees, these communities have spread to the middle and upper middle classes over time, becoming widespread in suburbs around large metropolitan areas (Blakely & Snyder, 1997).

In states such as California, Florida, and Texas, gated communities are spatial equivalents of economic and social segregation. Projects in California that are geared toward upper-income groups have features such as private golf courses, social clubs, and security. However, these structures can increase social isolation and prevent interaction with

disadvantaged groups in the area (Le Goix, 2005). In Florida, projects such as The Villages, with a population of over 130,000 and its own hospitals, shopping malls, and infrastructure, have become residential areas for retirees, but have been found to have weak economic and social ties to the surrounding area (Sampson, 2019). In Texas, projects such as The Woodlands near Houston are designed for middle- and upper-class families and have been described as socioeconomically distinct from surrounding low-income neighborhoods (Atkinson & Blandy, 2016).

These examples show that one of the most important effects of gated communities is social segregation. Studies show that people living in such settlements use public spaces less than others and their contact with the rest of the city is weakened (Low, 2003). This situation means not only individual solidarity, empathy, and social ties are weakened (Blakely & Snyder, 1997). Segregation brings both social and economic differentiation. Le Goix (2005) notes that such settlements promote socio-economic homogeneity and that boundaries between public and private spaces limit social interaction.

The increase in gated communities might deepen social and urban inequalities. Land and housing prices in the regions where these projects are built increase, and it might cause low-income groups to be excluded from these regions. So, cities are more clearly divided into regions where the wealthy and the poor live separately (Atkinson & Blandy, 2016).

It can be seen in a lot of research that gated communities stand as not only physically enclosed residential areas but also as areas where segregation, class-based access restrictions, and urban inequalities are institutionalized in the US. Elena Vesselinov (2008) argues that gated community structures are a more institutional model of discrimination than classical race and class-based housing discrimination. According to her, gated communities are surrounded by administrative tools such as internal regulations and community agreements, as well as physical boundaries. She explains that some regulations in these structures institutionalize the exclusion of individuals with certain income levels, lifestyles, and ethnic identities (Vesselinov, 2008:538–539). Spatial analyses conducted by Le Goix and Vesselinov (2014) argue that gated

communities deepen discrimination not only because of the social homogeneity in their internal structures, but also because they have less contact with surrounding neighborhoods. Weak interaction with low income and ethnically diverse neighboring neighborhoods leads to geographical reinforcement of urban polarization (as cited in Branic & Kubrin, 2017: 411).

These structures may seek to protect existing residents while also limiting access for potential residents. Branic and Kubrin's (2017:412) analysis explains that high real estate prices, dues, and strict community rules make these types of living spaces inaccessible to low income and minority groups. Such barriers create inaccessible spaces within the city, contrary to the principle of spatial justice, and make these spaces the exclusive living spaces of wealthy classes.

dynamics such as spatial segregation and class-based discrimination are also related to gated communities in the USA. The studies of Vesselinov (2008) and Branic and Kubrin (2017) argue that these structures are spatial indicators of institutionalized inequality and discrimination within the city. It can be understood that gated communities in the USA are a symbol of social class and prestige as a type of housing. These current studies show that gated communities in the USA have become a kind of place that reproduces urban inequalities besides being a residence to upper classes. Spatial segregation relation to the exclusion, unequal distribution has to be understood. Gated communities in the USA should be understood and examined as urban projects with their political, economic, and cultural meanings.

This type of segregation can be seen in different countries in various forms and for various reasons, Caldeira (1996) wrote about the social segregation and enclaves in São Paulo, where segregation is not only reshaped by geographical distances, but also by high walls, security systems and private property. These new structures establish a structure in the urban space that prevents different classes from interacting, even if they are physically close. Caldeira (1996) argues that the discourse of security, and in particular the fear of crime, plays a central role in legitimizing segregating structures in the city. This fear creates both symbolic and physical distances between different classes of society. Caldeira notes that the increasingly widespread "gated communities" in São Paulo have become a new way of life used by the upper and middle

classes to isolate themselves from other social groups. These compounds are private, introverted spaces that encompass not only housing but also work and consumption spaces. Wardhani (2016), in a similar study for Indonesia, argues that gated communities that have developed in urban peripheries are shaped not only by the desire to provide security, but also by the desire of individuals with similar incomes, lifestyles and cultural values to coexist. This is said to produce a new way of life that reduces social diversity in urban spaces. Qureshi's (2023) study examines the development of gated communities in the Global South, revealing that countries in these regions have very different social, economic and physical contexts. Stating that the US-based Blakely and Snyder model is limited, the author emphasizes that this lifestyle cannot be universally applied in the Global South because geographical, cultural and administrative differences directly affect housing preferences. Qureshi (2023) argues that in the Global South, due to the weakness of local governments, basic services such as infrastructure and security are provided by the private sector and hence the problem with gated communities is privatized solutions to common problems.

The examples of gated communities examined in this section shows that spatial segregation is not limited to local conditions. It can be understood that gated communities have become an important process that affects urbanization in metropolises. Gated communities, shaped in different cultural and economic environments, share certain common dynamics, for example the search for security, the function of being a symbol of social status, expectations of prestige and the increased privatization of public spaces among these common characteristics. However, each region has its own unique historical structure. While in some regions they are shaped more by individual ownership and security concerns, in others rapid neoliberal urbanization may be the reason for the emergence of such settlements. This diversity may suggest that spatial segregation has both universal causes and is differentiated according to local contexts. These reasons, which are seen around the world, can also be seen in Turkey, and especially in İstanbul. As a city where different social classes and cultural groups live together, it is important to examine how neoliberal policies have affected İstanbul. There are academic studies on a process of spatial segregation within the city due to the impact of widespread urban

transformation projects and luxury housing projects. At this point, it is important to examine the history of urbanization and spatial segregation in İstanbul. It is important to examine how spatial segregation affects the city today. In accordance with this, the next section will attempt to describe the urbanization process of İstanbul and its relationship with spatial segregation and gated communities.



## URBANIZATION IN İSTANBUL

### 1- Urbanization in İstanbul from the Republican Era to the 1980s

#### 1.1- Demographic Transformation and Population Growth

From the early Republic to the 1980s, İstanbul's population increased rapidly. This became more visible after 1950. According to Parin and Yıldız (2010: 205), the population grew from 1.16 million to 4.74 million between 1950 and 1980. As the city became more crowded, its share in Turkey's total population also got bigger. In 1927, only 5–6% of the population lived in İstanbul. By 1980, this had nearly tripled (Parin & Yıldız, 2010: 203–204). This made İstanbul the largest city in the country. The population structure also changed a lot during this period. After the effects of war and population exchanges in the 1920s, the population started growing again in the 1950s. Many people from across Anatolia moved to the city and played a big part in this growth.

During these periods, İstanbul's population growth was largely driven by migration from different regions. Since the early 1950s, there has been an intensive population mobility within the country, and as always, İstanbul has been the most important stop to migration (Parin & Yıldız, 2010: 205). The city's population didn't grow much until the 1940s. But after 1950, migration from rural areas caused a big increase.

In the 1960s and 1970s, this migration became even stronger and clearly changed İstanbul's population structure. By 1980, many people living in the city were born somewhere else. During this time, there were also big changes in things like education levels, age groups, and income distribution. With the addition of the young and working-age migrant population from rural areas, the structure of İstanbul has diversified (Parin & Yıldız, 2010).

It can be argued that the political and economic situation has led to a large population movement from rural areas to the cities. From the 1950s onwards, mechanization in agriculture

and rural poverty led people from all over Anatolia to migrate to big cities in the hope of work and a better life. İstanbul received a large share of these migration flows. A significant number of migrants turned to low-skilled jobs in the manufacturing industry, construction sector or the service sector in İstanbul. Those who could not find a job worked informally. In this process, it is seen that İstanbul has absorbed the population coming from different regions.

## **1.2 - Industrialization and Transformation of Economic Structure**

The impact of demographic change on urban space became more visible with the momentum of industrialization. Gökburun (2017) explains that İstanbul has been the economic center of the country since the foundation of the Republic and became a focus of rapid industrialization after 1950. The import-substitution industrial policies implemented especially in the 1950s and the encouragement of the private sector led to the establishment of new factories in and around İstanbul. The industrial enterprises established and developed in İstanbul, which pioneered industrialization in Turkey, directed migration movements within the country directly to İstanbul (Gökburun, 2017: 119). It can be understood that the job opportunities in İstanbul attracted a large labor migration from Anatolia.

In the 1950s, it is observed that various plans were made to spatially direct industrial activities in İstanbul. The industrial plan prepared for the European side in 1954 opened the areas between Mecidiyeköy-Levent, Mecidiyeköy-Şişli, Bomonti and Kasımpaşa-Kâğıthane to industry. This plan directed industrial facilities to certain areas within the city. The İstanbul Industrial Plan of 1955, which came into force in the following year, froze the existing industrial settlement in the Haliç to some extent and directed towards identifying new industrial areas on the peripheries of the city. This led to the development of new industrial areas, especially around Topkapı-Rami and Levent (Gökburun, 2017: 117).

In his analysis, Gökburun (2017: 119) further highlights that industrial enterprises significantly shaped the internal migration pattern toward İstanbul. By 1970, with a population of over 3 million, and expanding urban functions, İstanbul began to resemble a metropolis. While

the population of the historical core continued to grow, its share within the overall urban fabric declined, and unplanned urbanization accelerated.

### **1.3 - Migration, Social Dynamics, and Slum Formation**

The expanding industrial economy and demographic growth brought with them notable changes in the city's social structure. When large masses of people who grew up with rural culture settled in the city, they activated their networks of fellow citizenship and solidarity relations in order to hold on in the city. Migrants often moved to areas where their relatives or people they knew were already living. With their support, they tried to find a place to stay and a way to earn money. As a result, people from the same hometown ended up living close to each other in specific parts of the city.

Another consequence of the migration phenomenon was the problems of adapting to the city. The rural population had difficulty adjusting to the anonymous and complex life structure of the big city, which led to problems of unplanned growth in the city, referred to as "unplanned urbanization" (çarpık kentleşme) (Gökburun, 2017: 119). Urban planning and infrastructure proved inadequate in the face of rapid and massive population growth and failed to respond to the needs of migrants in the first place (Gökburun, 2017: 119).

In the post-1950 period, the increasing population and intensive internal migration in İstanbul led to a serious housing crisis. Newcomers to the city needed a place to live. The inability of low-income migrants to access the housing market led them to seek their own housing solutions in uninfrastructure and unregulated areas around the city; this led to the proliferation of the so called "gecekondu" Slums are a physical and at the same time a social condition. They were shaped based on both the economic deprivation and social solidarity practices of migrants.

These neighborhoods, which are concentrated around industrial zones such as Zeytinburnu, Kağıthane and the Haliç coast in İstanbul, have come to the fore as areas where migrant workers try to meet their housing needs with their own means (Gökburun, 2017: 117-

118). These areas were places where newly arrived urban workers tried to solve the housing problem with their own means.

"Gecekondu", as the name implies, are simple and irregular structures that are usually built illegally and without permission, secretly and quickly without informing the local authorities. Families newly migrating to the city usually come to the neighborhoods where their fellow countrymen they already know are located and start living in that area by building a simple dwelling in which they can put their heads down without paying rent (Kara, 2010: 110). This definition is similar to the reality of slums in İstanbul at that time. In the late 1950s, migration and the housing shortage in İstanbul led to the construction of mass slums on the peripheries of the city to meet the housing needs of the low-income population coming to the city. So, by 1960, İstanbul had become a semi-slum city, nearly 40% of the housing was slums and 45% of İstanbul's population was living in these neighborhoods (Karpaz, 1976: 11). The fact that about 40% of İstanbul's housing units were slums by 1960 may show that the city's growth was larger than planned and infrastructure capacity was therefore insufficient.

This may be a sign that central and local governments were inadequate in planning the city, and that urbanization was largely driven by the people's own efforts. The emergence of slums on the peripheries of the city by migrants may also indicate the formation of an important social inequality through the right to housing. People who must live in İstanbul to work are seen to be segregated from the general structure of the city. So, these slums might represent social and physical segregation in İstanbul.

#### **1.4- State Response and Legal Framework**

It took time for the state to assess this process realistically; a comprehensive housing policy could not be developed for many years, and urbanization was largely left to local initiatives (Şengül, 2009: 123). The fact that the state has watched this rapid urbanization from afar may indicate that the understanding of urbanism in İstanbul has been delayed for many years. The absence of a policy on the housing issue may have legitimized the slum areas. This seems to have led people to find individual and illegal solutions.

However, the "Gecekondu" Law No. 775 enacted in 1966 introduced the first comprehensive legal regulation on slums. This law aimed to rehabilitate existing slums and prevent the construction of new ones and envisaged the establishment of "*slum prevention zones*" where low-cost housing would be built (Dülgeroğlu-Yüksel, 2023: 67). Still, slumnization continued into the 1970s.

An important move of the period was the granting of legal status to slums on land and plots owned by municipalities with Law No. 1990, which began in 1976 (Dülgeroğlu-Yüksel, 2023: 68). This partial law was insufficient to solve the root of the problem. Slum had become a permanent part of urban housing structure by the 1980s. It is a late but important step in the intervention of the state in the urbanization process.

It can be said that this law was a long overdue search for regulation. The basic approach of the law was to legalize squatter settlements and prevent new ones, but it may not be easy to control the structures created by inadequate housing policy. Slums were a formation based on both physical and socio-economic reasons and should be approached without disregarding structural reasons. Law No. 1990 practices contributed to its permanence. The state functioned not as a rule maker but as an "*approval authority*" accepting the situation; thus, unplanned urbanization became a reality (Dülgeroğlu-Yüksel, 2023).

Öncü explains the urbanization process in Turkey between 1950-1980 was driven by market dynamics shaped around the short-term interests of different social groups rather than central planning. This situation increased land rents and paved the way for the unplanned and irregular growth of cities (Öncü, 1988:38-40). Öncü explained that while municipalities were inadequate in basic services due to limited budgets, they used zoning permits, plan amendments and licensing processes to garner political support, thus transforming urban planning from a technical tool into a political negotiation (Öncü, 1988:44-45).

İstanbul has transformed from a small-scale city into a huge metropolis with a rapidly growing population. The demographic structure of İstanbul has been examined as it has changed with the intense internal migration from Anatolia. It has been explained that the social fabric of

the city has become more heterogeneous. It has been explained that new urban dwellers coming from rural areas have created new living spaces for themselves in the city by creating slums on the periphery of the city due to the inadequacy of the housing. Slums have become permanent in urban life as a concrete expression of housing shortages, economic inequalities, and social exclusion.

The industrialization movement that accelerated during this period transformed İstanbul economically, turning it into Türkiye's industrial production center; in turn, it changed the city's physical space and infrastructure. However, the rapid and uncontrolled growth of industry brought with it urban problems such as unplanned construction. Development plans and infrastructure investments were often inadequate to keep up with the rapid population growth, and this situation. It also showed that urbanization processes were not sufficiently taken into consideration by central and local governments.

Academic research emphasizes that the example of İstanbul, whose population has quadrupled in a period of approximately thirty years, contains social vitality and economic potential as well as the problems brought about by unplanned urbanization (Parin & Yıldız, 2010: 205). By the 1980s, İstanbul had strengthened its position as the commercial, cultural and industrial center of Türkiye. It was a step on the way to becoming a global city, on the way to the globalization process. The lessons learned from this period shaped the urban policies of the following years, especially in terms of strengthening local governments, developing social policies and adopting more participatory approaches in the planning of infrastructure investments. These early experiences showed that ignoring social needs during the urban growth process can cause bigger problems later. For this reason, they helped decision makers understand why cities need better and more inclusive planning approaches.

## **2- The Post-1980 Urbanization Process in İstanbul**

The neoliberal policies and globalization trends that were put into practice across Türkiye in the 1980s radically transformed the economic, social and spatial structure of İstanbul.

During this period, İstanbul, as the most developed and industrialized city in Turkey, was subjected to rapid internal migration and its population exploded. Öztürk, M. (2007: 94). Transformations in the economic and political structure led to the emergence of new classes, consumption patterns, and lifestyles in the city. So, urbanization processes in İstanbul are analyzed with a focus on economic restructuring, population growth, migration movements, class cultural segregation, and how the spatial structure has evolved into a city.

In the post 1980 period, İstanbul's economic structure was reshaped according to free market principles, moving away from the centrally planned development approach. So, İstanbul became one of the centers of attraction for international capital and assumed the role of a global city by integrating into world financial markets. As Erbaş emphasizes, the traditional industrial city form grew and spread spatially in İstanbul with the strong impact of industrialization (Erbaş, 2018).

However, since the 1980s, the shift from industry to the services sector has become more pronounced, with finance, tourism and trade rapidly gaining prominence (Erbaş, 2018). She also mentioned the Maslak-Levent-Şişli regions in İstanbul developed as a multi centered finance and commerce district during this period.

The restructuring of the economic structure may lead to income inequality in İstanbul. With the free market reforms, the influence of large construction and finance companies on urban planning has increased, and urban rent-oriented projects have intensified. In this process, privatization of public services became widespread, and commercialization and competition in urban life came to the fore. In the 1980s, housing regulations and the increase in demand for housing accelerated housing production; high rents, competition in the housing market, and the differentiation of classes deepened class and spatial segregation in the city (Özker, 2020). Economic transformation in post 1980 İstanbul has changed the physical environment and reshaped the social fabric of the city. Economic transformation causes the changes seen in the to be visible in the urban space.

After 1980, population growth in İstanbul has been high. In the 1980s, the population growth in İstanbul, which was examined in the previous section, increased due to the accelerated internal migration, which increased the number of people in the city. According to Öztürk's studies, İstanbul's population increased from 800 thousand in 1927 to more than 10 million in 2000; while the total population of Turkey increased 5 times in this period, İstanbul's population increased more than 12 times (Öztürk, 2007:87).

### **3-The Rise of the Construction Sector and the Deepening of Urban Segregation**

#### **3.1- The 2000s and the Urban Renewal Process**

In the 2000s, urban transformation policies in İstanbul gained speed, and spatial inequalities became more visible across the city. Many slum areas and historical neighborhoods were subjected to large-scale renovation projects, carried out mostly by local and central government institutions such as TOKİ. These projects changed the physical structure of the city but also had serious social consequences. While they were introduced with the aim of improving the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods, studies show that they often caused the displacement of the poor and deepened class divisions (Giritlioğlu, 2023).

Giritlioğlu (2023) emphasizes that urban transformation has mostly focused on poor areas, and this has led to a situation where many low-income residents cannot continue living in their old neighborhoods. As a result, people are pushed out of their homes, and this process creates new forms of spatial injustice. Urban space has started to be organized not only physically, but also economically. Cities are no longer seen just as places of production and services, but as areas of investment for global capital (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010: 1481). One of the main consequences of these renewal projects is dispossession. In many cases, low-income groups lose their property rights and become unable to afford to live in the renewed areas. According to Giritlioğlu (2023), those who cannot adapt to the new environment after the transformation are forced to move to other parts of the city, which causes poverty to spread instead of being solved. This leads to a cycle, people first lose their homes, then fall into debt, and eventually lose their

former living standards completely. So, even though the official claim was that these projects would improve quality of life, the actual outcomes have often been the opposite especially for the urban poor (Giritlioğlu, 2023).

The Sulukule example makes this process clear. After the renewal of this Roma neighborhood, most of the original residents couldn't afford new housing. Many had to move to the outskirts of the city, and in their place, mostly foreign nationals or wealthier groups moved in (Giritlioğlu, 2023). This shows how displacement and dispossession are not accidental, but rather part of a class-based logic in urban renewal. This legal process was shaped by important laws. The 2004 "Renewal Law" (Law No. 5366) and the 2012 "Law on the Transformation of Areas Under Disaster Risk" (Law No. 6306) gave legal backing to these urban interventions. Although these laws were presented as technical and safety related, they often targeted slum areas and poor neighborhoods, labeled as "risky zones" (Türkün, 2011: 64). This shows how transformation, while framed as a technical need, was also a political and economic choice. In practice, these laws allowed authorities to clear out low-income areas to open up space for new, profitable developments.

In public discourse, these policies are described as efforts to create healthy and safe living spaces. But in practice, most projects have focused on increasing the land value in city centers and attracting new investments, rather than addressing the actual needs of local residents (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010: 1490). Sulukule, Tarlabası, and Fikirtepe are examples of neighborhoods where this process was intense. The people who lived there before the projects were usually low-income groups. After the transformation, they could not afford the new housing, and they had to move to the city periphery, where access to services is often limited (Türkün, 2011: 66).

This has deepened spatial injustice and made social divisions more visible in urban space. Urban transformation has often pushed poor people out of the city center, turning class inequality into something we can now see clearly in the structure of the city (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010: 1495). At the same time, mega projects like the Third Bridge or the İstanbul Airport have caused the city to grow northward, opening natural areas for construction. These projects didn't

just change the city physically; they also helped reproduce spatial separation between different social groups (Türkün, 2011: 68). In the end, urban transformation in İstanbul has had complex outcomes. On one hand, it has been presented as a necessary tool to modernize the city and protect it from disasters. But on the other hand, it has served economic interests and pushed vulnerable populations to margins. The idea of improving life quality has often been used to justify projects that actually benefit real estate markets and investors more than local communities. This process shows that urban space is not neutral. It is shaped by policies, capital, and power. The transformation of İstanbul has not been simply about fixing physical problems, but about reorganizing the city in a way that benefits some groups while excluding others. Displacement, dispossession, and increasing inequality are not side effects of this process; they are built into it.

### **3.2- Effects of Urban Renewal Projects and gentrification**

Starting in the 2000s, urban renewal projects became a key factor in deepening spatial inequality in İstanbul. In neighborhoods like Tarlabası and Sulukule, these projects pushed longtime residents out and contributed to growing divisions between social groups. In Tarlabası, the urban transformation process resulted in the removal of low-income residents, most of whom were tenants. The unclear property ownership and gaps in legal protections made it easier for properties to change hands, which reduced the economic and social rights of the local people (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010: 1489). In Sulukule, the transformation caused the loss of both cultural heritage and the everyday life of the community. The neighborhood, known for its strong Romani identity, was reshaped in a way that forced many residents to move to far parts of the city with limited access to social and economic opportunities (Kocabas & Gibson, 2011: 423). This not only led to physical displacement but also to the breaking of social ties and networks. Communities were fragmented, and many people became isolated (Bartu Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2008: 12).

Most of these projects triggered gentrification. As new housing and spaces were created for higher income groups, former residents were pushed out. The result was the formation of more socially and economically homogeneous areas. These changes reduced the diversity in urban space and made it harder for different groups to live together (Taşan-Kok & Stead, 2013: 86). Disadvantaged communities were once again excluded from the center of the city.

Gentrification is a key issue in this context. According to Çeker and Belge (2015), gentrification means “the replacement of low-income groups living in cities with middle- and upper-income groups through the renovation of housing” (Çeker & Belge, 2015; Kozacıoğlu, 2021). What happened in İstanbul fits this pattern. The neighborhoods that were seen as poor and neglected were later transformed into buildings and living spaces designed for wealthier groups.

Kozacıoğlu (2021) points out that in the Sahabiye transformation, for example, TOKİ built modern housing for the new middle class. At the same time, many city center projects were shaped by the expectations of upper-income groups. As the social structure of these neighborhoods changed, former residents struggled to adapt. Uzer and Sallan Gül (2023) describe how people experienced a “loss of sociality,” meaning they felt disconnected and isolated in their new environments.

This shows how gentrification and neoliberal urban policies work together. According to Kozacıoğlu, the real goal of many transformation projects is to reshape the city in a way that fits the lifestyle of the new middle class (Kozacıoğlu, 2021). Older neighborhoods in central areas become attractive for investment, and the people who used to live there are pushed out. The city becomes a space designed for wealthier groups, while low-income residents are moved to the margins. These projects change the physical and social structure of neighborhoods. When low-income people are removed from their homes, they have a place to live but also connections to neighbors, services, and support networks. This makes it harder for them to adjust to their new lives and deepens existing inequalities in the city.

Urban transformation policies, therefore, need to go beyond just economic growth. They should also focus on social justice, inclusion, and the rights of existing communities. Otherwise,

these projects will continue to be used as tools to displace and exclude vulnerable groups. In the case of İstanbul, urban renewal projects have become a way to reorganize both space and society. Even though the projects are often presented as “transformation”, their outcomes tell a different story. Tarlabası and Sulukule are clear examples. In Tarlabası, legal and property problems made it easy to remove people who had lived there for years. In Sulukule, a whole community lost not just their homes, but their culture and way of life. These projects often follow the logic of gentrification. They reduce the chances for people from different backgrounds to live together in the city. In the end, they reflect a broader approach to urban development, one that puts economic interests above social concerns.

#### **4- The Emergence of Gated Community as Luxury Housing Projects**

“Gated community” type housing projects emerged in parallel with urban transformation in İstanbul since the 1980s and have become a phenomenon that reshaped not only the spatial structure but also the social and economic structure. These projects stand out as clear indicators of the reflection of neoliberal economic policies on urban space. The liberal policies and the wave of privatization after 1980 formed the basis for the construction and real estate investment boom experienced in the city, especially during the Özal period (Baycan-Levent & Gülümser, 2007: 5). Developed in areas located outside the city center such as Kemerburgaz, Zekeriyaköy, Büyükçekmece, and Beykoz, these projects are housing areas that appeal to the upper income group, are secure, planned, and include various social facilities. Projects such as Alkent 2000, Acarkent, and Kemer Country are among the symbolic examples of this period (Baycan-Levent & Gülümser, 2007: 7). Unlike the traditional neighborhood order, these structures offer a living space that is defined by physical boundaries, closed to the outside world, and exclusive. In these projects, housing ceases to be a unit that only meets the need for shelter; it also becomes a spatial manifestation of the desire for social status, prestige, privacy, and security. As Baycan-Levent and Gülümser (2007: 8) emphasize, the houses in such projects are not only an expression of property but also of a lifestyle. In addition, these gated communities were designed with the desire for social homogeneity and caused the class-based segregation in urban space to become

physically evident. Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu (2008: 21) analyze these structures within the framework of the concepts of “new publicity” and “new privacy” produced by neoliberalism in urban space and define these sites as privileged living spaces. The spread of gated communities has gained momentum with the privatization of public services, the substitution of municipal functions by local privatization, and the city’s planning authorities opening space especially to market actors. This situation has led to the division of the city not only spatially but also socially (Geniş, 2007: 773). Therefore, these types of gated communities that have developed since the 1980s have institutionalized the spatial segregation in the city and have become the basic mechanisms that determine the position of the middle upper class in the city.

Gated community projects reproduce the class hierarchy in the city and make it permanent in space. While individuals living in these settlements are physically separated by invisible social walls in the city, they also maintain their advantageous positions in terms of access to services, social networks, education, and cultural capital accumulation (Pérouse & Daniş, 2005: 104–106). While these structures respond to the desire of the middle classes to “live with those like them,” they produce homogeneous communities instead of social mixing and heterogeneity. The opportunities offered by these sites are not only material but also symbolic. Walls, security cameras, special entrance systems, and the fiction of belonging imply that those insides are “chosen”, and those outsides are seen as “risks” or “threats.” For this reason, gated community projects are not only a form of housing but also an urban strategy that reproduces urban exclusion and symbolic violence (Daniş & Kayaalp, 2005: 292). Moreover, with the rise of these projects, the concept of public space has also begun to erode. Private parks, walking paths, sports fields, and shopping malls within the sites have started to replace inclusive and accessible public spaces. This privatization of public space minimizes random encounters and heterogeneous social relations among city dwellers. Thus, the culture of common life is weakened (Geniş, 2007: 784; Pérouse & Daniş, 2005: 119).

In the regions where gated communities are rising, the surrounding economic and spatial structures are also transforming. With these projects, land values are rapidly increasing,

pushing low- and middle-income groups to more distant areas. The increase in urban rent through such projects becomes another factor that spatially reinforces social segregation. Thus, space in İstanbul is turning into a ground where both wealth and exclusion are embodied. As a result, gated community projects in İstanbul reflect not only the search for physical security and quality of life, but also the effort to spatially draw class boundaries. These projects, as one of the most obvious products of neoliberal urban transformation, offer both a new urban aesthetic and a new social order. However, this order produces a structure based on inequality and spatial injustice; it perpetuates segregation, not coexistence, in the city. Gated communities, especially in big cities, market nature as an image of a luxurious lifestyle that appeals to upper income groups. In these projects, nature is at the center of the marketing discourse and is almost turned into a commodity that is exchanged in exchange for the “well-being” of the residents (Nas, 2017) A research conducted in İstanbul has shown that gated communities emphasize the narratives of ‘green’ and “natural life” in every element from brand names to advertising slogans (Nas, 2017). For example, the names and logos of many projects use green, and symbols associated with nature, creating an “anti-urban” image with the promise of escape from the chaotic atmosphere of the city (Nas, 2017). These sites usually promise 50-80% green space (much of it artificially created by landscaping) and emphasize that the area occupied by buildings is less green space (Nas, 2017). Thus, it is claimed that an alternative to concrete density in the city center is offered. However, behind this “abundant green space” presentation lies the fact that the projects are usually realized on cheap land on the periphery of the city; the possibility of low-cost construction on large plots of land allows companies to allocate more landscape space (Nas, 2017). This shows that behind the discourse of sensitivity to nature lies the neoliberal urban logic. Companies instrumentalize nature not out of sincere ecological concern, but as part of a marketing strategy (Nas, 2017). Indeed, as one study emphasizes, while these projects commodify housing with nature centered promises, “neoliberal urbanization uses the green discourse to expand the market for the city's environmental and natural spaces” (Nas, 2017) In this context, “nature” in gated communities is both a physical privilege and a symbolic value that is marketed.

## **5- Right to the city Discussions and İstanbul**

The concept of the right to the city was first introduced by Henri Lefebvre and later expanded by David Harvey. It refers not only to the right to access and use urban space, but also to the right to be involved in how the city is shaped and governed (Lefebvre, 1996). Harvey (2008) defines this right as a tool for challenging the spatial and social inequalities produced by neoliberal urban policies. He believes all people living in a city should be part of shaping it.

İstanbul is one of the cities where debates on the right to the city have become very important. Since the 1980s, especially with the rise of neoliberal policies, the city has gone through major changes. Large urban projects and infrastructure developments have changed both the physical structure of the city and the way people live in it (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). These projects were mostly led by the government and private companies. Local people and civil society were rarely involved in decisions.

As these changes happened, public spaces in İstanbul became smaller and harder to access. Gated communities, malls, and privately controlled parks started to replace open and shared public areas. This makes it harder for different groups of people to come together and take part in city life (Geniş, 2007). The city has become more divided, and urban life has become more closed off. In İstanbul, places like luxury housing and commercial areas make it harder for low-income groups to be present or feel they belong. This creates both material and symbolic exclusion. It makes some people more visible in the city, while others are pushed out. In daily life, this change is easy to notice. Parks surrounded by fences, residential sites with gates, and malls that require money to enter are replacing open spaces. These new areas are not really public. They are controlled, limited, and often feel close to certain people. This makes many residents feel excluded and disconnected from the city. Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu (2008) also point out that the new urban spaces built in İstanbul increase social separation. They say that these spaces limit the rights of people to take part in the life of the city. So, current urban policies in İstanbul go against the values of justice and participation that Lefebvre supports. To make the right to the city possible in İstanbul, urban policies need to be fair, open, and participatory. The city should

be managed in a way that includes all people, protects public spaces, and allows everyone to take part in decisions. Without this, social divisions will continue to grow.

The growing separation in space also affects how people feel and act. It puts psychological pressure on communities, weakens social bonds, and reduces civic engagement. The right to the city helps us understand these problems and imagine a more just and inclusive urban life. These issues are strongly linked to the rise of gated communities, which were discussed in the previous chapter. They also prepare the ground for the next section, which will look at how gated communities represent themselves and how these representations create new forms of exclusion in the city. These examples show that urban transformation in İstanbul is not only about physical change. It also decides who can stay in the city and who cannot. In places like Tarlabaşı and Sulukule, people were pushed out without being part of the process. They were not asked, and they had no influence over what was happening. This means that their right to the city was taken away (Lefebvre, 1996). Lefebvre talks about this right as not just living in the city but also being part of shaping it. Here, people lost that. They lost their homes, but also their social ties, daily routines, and familiar places. Even if people live in the city, they are not equal if they can't take part in decisions or access basic resources. In many cases, former residents were moved to areas far from the center, where public space is limited, and life is more isolated. At the same time, public spaces in the transformed neighborhoods became less open. Streets and squares are now surrounded by gates or linked to private projects. These changes make it harder for different groups to share space. So, gentrification in İstanbul is not only changing who lives where, but also who gets to participate in city life at all (Eraydın & Taşan-Kok, 2013; Kozacıoğlu, 2021).



Photo 1: Kağıthane , Google Maps Satellite View, captured May 16, 2025.

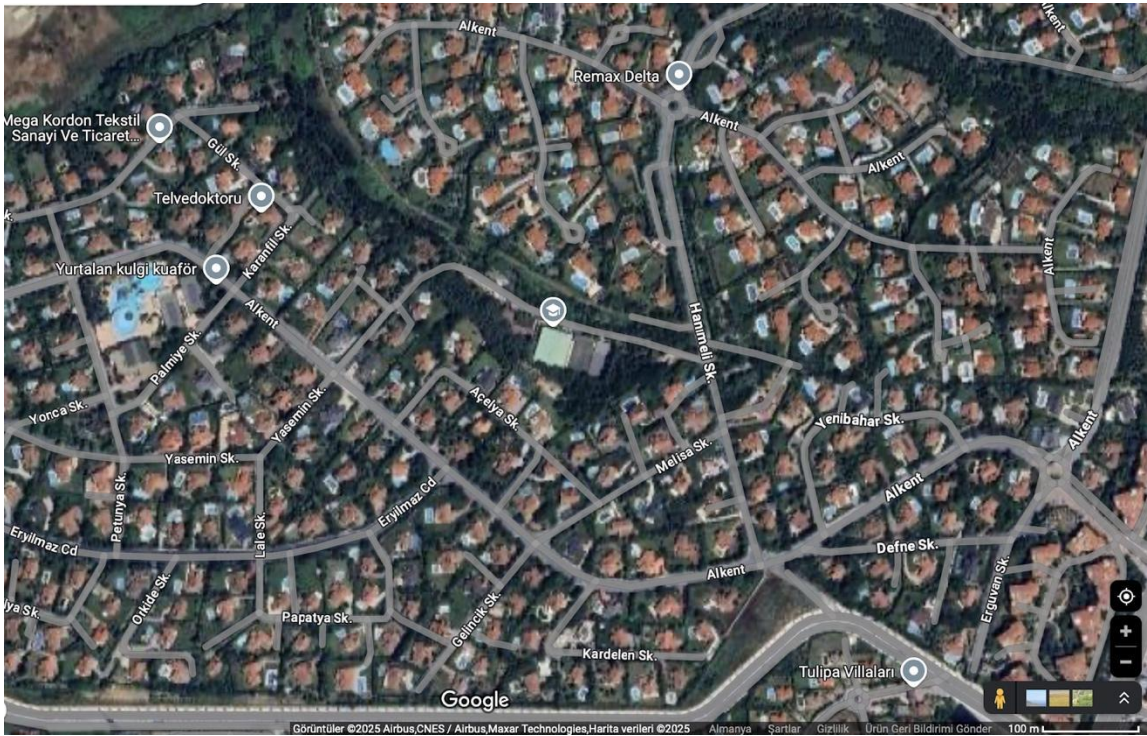


Photo 2: Alkent, Google Maps Satellite View, captured May 16, 2025.

The two satellite images shared here, when viewed side by side, offer uncomfortable differences between different regions in İstanbul. They show different types of urban planning and different relationships to the city. The first image, taken from Kağıthane, captures a densely built neighborhood irregular street lines, small lots, and a near absence of public green space. It's a landscape shaped less by design and more by necessity, the outcome of long histories of migration, informal settlement, and systemic underinvestment. And yet today, they remain visibly underserved; crowded housing, limited infrastructure, and few safe common spaces are there. People here live in the city often close to its very center but their access to the city's resources remains deeply limited. That limitation is not accidental; it is part of a broader logic of selective investment and exclusion, shaped by neoliberal urban policy. The second image, taken from Alkent, shifts the scene entirely, wide roads, single family homes with gardens, and green areas in the image. This is not a space that grew out of collective adaptation, but one that was enclosed and protected. This kind of urban form reflects a specific ideal of city life: private, quiet, safe, and separated. These two areas are not just shaped differently because of architectural choices or planning tools, but because the people who live there are situated very differently within the city's social and economic order. One neighborhood is deemed in need of intervention, regulation, or even removal; the other, investment, a promise of security and return. David Harvey builds on this, writing that the "right to the city" is not just about being present in urban space, but about having a say in how that space is made, for whom, and to what end (Harvey, 2008). In today's İstanbul, the right to the city is increasingly distributed unequally. Neoliberal urban policies in the city might result in a model of development in which investment flows toward profitability, not public need. As a result, visibility, access, and comfort are concentrated in areas that generate economic value.

This logic of exclusion becomes all the more visible when we think about where public funds are directed, where green space is protected or introduced, and which neighborhoods are considered worth upgrading. As Harvey (2008) notes, cities have become spaces where capital seeks to fix itself, not necessarily where people seek to live in solidarity. We see this

clearly in contrast between these images, one neighborhood underserved and overburdened; the other, over resourced. The city, as currently structured under neoliberal governance, extends comfort and care selectively. Both these neighborhoods exist within the same metropolis.



## ANALYSIS OF SELECTED GATED COMMUNITIES IN İSTANBUL

### 1- introduction

In this section, nine different gated community projects selected to understand the processes of spatial segregation in the city are discussed in detail. Each project is explained in terms of its physical characteristics, spatial positioning, marketing language and target audience, and how these living spaces relate to social structures. Following these introductions, the projects were evaluated under three main headings through thematic analysis: prestige and privilege, privacy and security, comfort and nature.

The first theme of the analysis, prestige and privilege, examines the class positioning of gated communities within the city, how privileged lifestyles are encoded in space and how this privilege is presented with a narrative of superiority. The second theme, privacy and security, analyzes the physical boundaries of gated communities, control mechanisms and forms of “othering” through the perception of threat. The last theme, comfort and nature, examines the symbolic relationship established with nature in these projects and how the promises of “comfortable living” are constructed. This chapter aims to demonstrate that gated communities are structures where socio-cultural identities, fears, aspirations and dynamics of segregation find representation in space.

## 2- Selected gated communities



Photo 3- Brand Vadi villa example (Brand Vadi)

### 2.1. Brand Vadi İstanbul

Brand Vadi İstanbul targets the upper-middle- and upper-income groups with its pricing and housing features. Villas in the project range in size from 406-980 m<sup>2</sup> gross, with the lowest price starting from 1,830,000 USD which makes more than 70 million TL (Güncel Proje Bilgileri, n.d.). Offering discounts for advance payment is also a strategy aimed at buyers with high budgets (Güncel Proje Bilgileri, n.d.). Thanks to elements such as international schools, hospitals and shopping malls in the immediate vicinity, upper-middle class or wealthy families with children are targeted (Brand Vadi, n.d.; Güncel Proje Bilgileri, n.d.). The frequent use of the phrases “trust and peace with the family” in the project slogan indicates that the target audience expects a family-oriented, calm and elite life (Brand Vadi, n.d.). Considering the high prices and the segment (large villas from 5+1 to 10+1), it is understood that Brand Vadi appeals to an audience with high income levels who prefer luxury housing. In this context, statements such as

“Forget the villa projects you know” are used to create a sense of privilege and loyalty in the buyer as an effort to give a sense of belonging.



Photo 4, Pelican Hill, (Keleşoğlu Holding)

## 2.2. Pelican Hill (B y k ekmece)

On the other hand, the target audience for the “Pelican Hill Mansions” (single villa projects) is much more upscale; the project includes 713 mansions and offers ultra luxurious mansions (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d). Houses in this segment can cost millions of TL, with some real estate websites showing villas for sale for 70 million TL to 93 million TL ( Hepsiemlak, n.d.). (Since Pelican Hill is described as “the most exclusive residential project” and praised for its special architecture and landscaping, its target audience is individuals with high socioeconomic status (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). The provision of “residents-only” facilities such as private estate roads and sports facilities in both sub-projects reinforce the emphasis on community belonging

and prestige (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). To summarize, while Pelican Hill Residence attracts upper middle-class families, mansion projects are designed for a very high-income clientele.



Photo 5, (Toskana Vadisi)

### **2.3-Toskana Vadisi**

The price policy of Toskana Vadisi is aimed at the upper income group. In official promotions, apartment/villa prices are presented as “starting from USD 400,000” on (Emaar Türkiye). On real estate websites, these prices are quoted in dollars and range from USD 475,000 to USD 2,250,000 (Emlakta Son Dakika, 2014). which, at today's exchange rates, amounts to around 90 million Turkish liras. These figures indicate that the project is targeting upper income families or investors. Compared to other villa projects in the region, Toskana Vadisi is in the luxury segment. The implications for the target audience are mostly high-income buyers with international or overseas connections. The project's sports club, private social facilities and foreign language promotional materials also point to a prestige-oriented clientele. Lifestyle expectations include those looking for “Mediterranean comfort”, those who want to be close to

nature and yet benefit from city amenities. Toskana Vadisi marketing seeks to create a sense of belonging by creating privileged environments, such as the membership based “Dolce Vita Sports and Life Club” (Emaar Türkiye). This responds to the need to “feel privileged” in an elite social environment.

#### **2.4-Mesa Doğa (Ömerli)**

Mesa Doğa also targets a high income, nature loving target group. The fact that the project consists of only 82 twin villas gives an image of boutique living. Although prices are not specified in the official data, the emphasis on “ecofriendly materials”, “decentralized luxury” and sustainability suggests that this project is also aimed at a very high-income group. The location, relatively far from the metropolitan area (Ömerli forest), may have been targeted at families or professionals who want a life in touch with nature but want to maintain their connection to the city. The phrase “elite villa community” (Mesa Doğa) suggests that the project aims to create a community of people of the same social status. This is an indication of an effort to create a sense of belonging and privilege in the customer. The lifestyle of the target audience is envisaged as a profile that values nature, wants a large living space, attaches importance to privacy, is far from the city chaos but does not break away from opportunities.



Photo 6 - (Mesa Doğa)



Photo 7, (DenizKoru)

### **2.5-DenizKoru (Sarıyer)**

With its location and emphasis, DenizKoru Sarıyer is clearly aimed at a very high-income and prestige-oriented audience. The project offers residences in Sarıyer with Bosphorus and forest views, with prices ranging between TL 30 million and TL 180 million (MBANY Real Estate). Thus, the target audience is the income group that can afford to pay for villas in İstanbul's most exclusive district. The emphasis on “qualified educational institutions” (ITU, Koç University) and health centers (DenizKoru, n.d) in the project promotion is generally prioritized by high socioeconomic families. The theme of belonging and exclusivity is also emphasized; the site emphasizes prestige by talking about the “privileges of living” (DenizKoru). Since DenizKoru aims to offer a lifestyle that includes the comfort and natural beauties of Sarıyer, it

can be said that the target audience consists of both people with high financial power and those who desire a peaceful life intertwined with the sea and nature.



Photo 8- Villa Via

## 2.6-Villa Via (Beykoz)

Villa Via projects appeal to the upper income group by stating that they offer luxury villas located in prestigious areas of İstanbul. In marketing, the concepts of “exclusive location” and “prestigious villa owner” are frequently mentioned (Villa Via). The mention of “investment value” in the site content suggests that Villavia's target audience is wealthy buyers who care about both quality of life and financial return. In terms of the prices of villas for sale, there is a perception that it is generally aimed at the upper segment of customers: For example, the Villa Via blog, one of the official sources, describes the area as “luxury villas are in the higher price segment, while villas within the complex can offer more affordable options”(Villa Via). This implies that Villa Via generally offers luxury detached villas, and that its clientele has high budgets. Accessibility is low; projects are exclusive with limited plots and number of villas (project-based) rather than retail. Villa Via promises to find the “most suitable options” for its customers, but this does not change the luxury nature of the project, Even the statement “We

increase the investment value by offering our customers the most suitable options for İstanbul villa prices” carries a tone that speaks to loans and investors (Villa Via, n.d). In addition, the emphasis on customer satisfaction (Villa Via) indicates that customized solutions are offered to meet the expectations of buyers. The brand image is built on high income families and real estate investors. “Exclusivity” is at the forefront to create a sense of belonging with “the most exclusive location”, ‘a privileged life’ kind of notion. (Villa Via, n.d) Thus, Villa Via aims to create the perception of belonging to an elite community in its target audience.



Photo 9- (Göl İstanbul)

## **2.7- Göl İstanbul (Büyükçekmece)**

Göl İstanbul is also positioned in the “luxury villa” segment. In the official introduction, the phrase “97 luxury villas” stands out (Göl İstanbul). The mention of the project's “A Plus living” concept and its extensive social facilities (sports fields, swimming pools, playgrounds, etc.) gives the impression that the buyer is a person with a high income who attaches importance to comfort (Göl İstanbul). The project also emphasizes the status of “invites you to move to the life of your dreams” (Kullar İnşaat), indicating that the target audience is high end consumers who desire ‘the prestigious life of their dreams’. Although there is no official information on pricing, the developers' use of the words “A Plus” and “top quality materials” (Göl İstanbul)

suggests that prices will be very high. Göl İstanbul's villas with gardens and lake and sea views in Büyükçekmece are targeted at the upper middle- and upper-income group due to the size of the plot and the privileged location, although they are in a quieter location compared to the center of İstanbul. In the promotional language of the project, expressions such as “only for you”, “decent and full of comfort” are used to create a sense of belonging (Göl İstanbul, Kullar İnşaat). These emphases aim to make customers feel that they belong to an elite group. For example, the statement “*Your villa is independent from other villas and designed in such a way that no one can see it*” reflects the buyer's expectation of privacy and a privileged environment (Göl İstanbul)



Photo 10- (KÖY Zekeriyaköy)

## 2.8- Köy Zekeriyaköy

From the presentation and price information of Köy Zekeriyaköy, its target audience is high income. The housing advertisements on the website indicate that 5+1 villas are priced between 50-145 million TL (KÖY Zekeriyaköy). According to the advertisements, the Phase 1 villa with a pool is 145 million TL and the 6+1 twin villa is around 68 million TL. The project is also being marketed by a Keller Williams Luxury division consultant; the advertisement

mentions “Luxury segment” (KÖY Zekeriyaköy), indicating that the buyer will be selected from the affluent segment. The target audience is likely to be senior executives and high-income professionals. Socio economically, this segment of the population seeks housing that is in touch with nature but within reasonable commuting distance to the city center showing 3rd bridge 7 minutes, Maslak 15 minutes; Köy Zekeriyaköy's transportation information addresses this demand (KÖY Zekeriyaköy). In terms of accessibility, due to the high prices, the project is only open to wealthy families. However, the general tone emphasizes exclusivity and security; for example, the advertisement highlights privileges such as 24-hour security, private outdoor parking lot and feeds the perception of “safe and elite settlement.” (KÖY Zekeriyaköy).



Photo 11 - architecture (Deniz İstanbul)

## **2.9- Deniz İstanbul**

Deniz İstanbul's target audience is also composed of high-income and investor families. The project's seafront or very close location, prestigious social facilities such as marina, sports club, private beach, etc. and villa heavy structure indicate that it is targeted at the upper middle- and upper-income group. Apartments start from “13 million TL” and the advertisements for

villas show “125 million TL” levels (MBANY Real Estate). In the language, phrases such as “marina town” aim to evoke both a prestigious location that offers the opportunity to live by the sea and a sense of belonging in this location (Denizİstanbul). The potential buyer profile is likely to include wealthy local entrepreneurs, expatriate Turks and those looking for a second home with a seaside flair. The project is touted as “İstanbul's largest seaside town” (Güncel Proje Bilgileri) and the privilege of a “prestigious sports and lifestyle club” exclusive to residents is emphasized (Denizİstanbul). This creates both a sense of inclusion in an elite community through private clubs and social facilities and a sense of belonging.

The villa projects analyzed in İstanbul are generally planned for the upper middle- and upper-income groups, offering luxury living opportunities. Projects such as Pelican Hill and DenizKoru appeal to the higher segments of these classes in terms of pricing. Housing prices in these projects are at very high levels, and the large areas, special services and location features offered by the projects point to the concept of luxury living. In projects such as Brand Vadi İstanbul and Toskana Vadisi, prices are quoted in foreign currency, which is in line with strategies aimed at wealthy domestic and international buyers. The fact that Toskana Vadisi is marketed by an international firm and its high foreign currency denominated prices indicate a global target audience. Elements such as the size of the houses, private social spaces and landscaping are intended to meet demands for specific lifestyles beyond the need for housing.

Projects such as Köy Zekeriyaköy, Villa Via and Göl İstanbul similarly cater to the upper income group but respond to differentiated demands by offering more diverse price ranges. In this framework, the pricing structures of the projects reflect the economic aspects of spatial differentiation and become one of the factors shaping life preferences in the city. It is seen that housing is positioned only as a means of shelter and investment in projects. In projects such as Villa Via and Deniz İstanbul, emphasis on "investment value" and "future earning potential" is frequently used to draw attention to the economic value of real estate. This approach attracts both individuals looking for a living space and those considering long term investment.

Similarly, projects such as Pelican Hill, Köy Zekeriyaköy and Toskana Vadisi aim to meet both investment and living expectations. The high prices in these projects offer buyers an investment environment that can provide both prestige and economic security. This emphasis on investors shows that the target audience of the projects is not only related to their socioeconomic status, but also to the meaning they attach to housing. In this context, the projects also produce lifestyle-oriented housing with investment potential. This is an indication of how urban living preferences and economic strategies are intertwined.

### **3- Prestige & Privilege**

In this section, the themes of “prestige” and “privilege” in gated community projects in Istanbul are analyzed. Through the promotional language, architectural fiction and marketing strategies of the projects, it is revealed how the space is constructed not only as a physical living space, but also as a symbolic and cultural space that appeals to the upper income group. The discursive data obtained from different projects are evaluated through representational narratives and metaphors, and then these narratives are interpreted in the light of the theoretical frameworks of David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre and Pierre Bourdieu. In this way, it is attempted to show how regimes of privilege and spatial polarization in the city are reproduced through housing projects.

The increasing number of luxury housing projects in Istanbul in recent years draws attention not only as physical living spaces, but also as spaces where a certain lifestyle, social status and cultural symbols are produced. In this context, the concepts of “prestige” and “privilege” play a central role in the architectural design and promotional language of gated community projects. In this section, how these concepts are represented and spatially reproduced will be analyzed; the ideological and sociological dimensions of these living spaces that appeal to the upper income group will be discussed based on the promotional texts of the projects.

The emphasis on spacious rooms and large terraces/balconies in the interiors indicates a lifestyle focused on luxury and comfort. The metaphors in the introductory articles (olive tree

symbol, Lake Como tranquility, 12-month sea view) also indicate that the design aims to provide nature, health and comfort throughout time (Brand Vadi, n.d). In summary, Brand Vadi offers a villa life in harmony with the landscape, with views that “enjoy the sunset to the fullest” and common areas where families can socialize comfortably. Brand Vadi language is often emotive, emphasizing concepts such as peace, prosperity, abundance, and trust by saying “our villas with sea views, as durable as olive trees” (Brand Vadi, n.d.).

The design of Pelican Hill projects is shaped by American California villas and Mediterranean influences. In the mansion project, each house is designed as a 2-3 storey luxury villa, and wide avenues. Parks and squares have been created within the site, which spreads over a total of 2000 acres (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). The architectural design was planned by a team of conceptual architects from the USA; the landscape has Italian features (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). So, the project offers an international quality design with the motto “American concept, Italian landscape, Turkish interiors”. Pelican Hill projects appeal to a resort-like socialization and luxury-oriented lifestyle, painting an image of ultra luxury community living with large-scale landscaping, golf and parks. Pelican Hill's language emphasizes prestige and exclusivity. On Keleşoğlu Holding's promotion page, Pelican Hill Residence is described as “Turkey's most exclusive and popular residence project of 650 residences in California architecture” and the idea of “a life in touch with nature next to the city” is emphasized (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d). In the promotion of Pelican Hill mansions, ambitious expressions such as “Turkey's largest mansion project” are used; the project is described as having 713 mansions at a cost of more than 1 billion dollars and attracting attention with its “large area and lake view ”(Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d). This language carries connotations of luxury, privilege and greatness. Pelican Hill texts include phrases such as “the splendor of California architecture merges with Mediterranean lines” (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d). In metaphorical language, Pelican Hill uses abundant imagery with images such as “the embrace of green and blue” and “the splendor of California architecture” (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d). So, Pelican Hill emphasizes an ultra-luxurious and unique lifestyle in its image.

The language of Toskana Vadisi is based on the emphasis on “Mediterranean lifestyle” and luxury. The project emphasizes that it will offer nature and modern comfort together by using the themes of “the Tuscan life you dream of” and “Mediterranean breeze” (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.; Emaar, n.d). The promotion uses emotional language, for example, metaphors such as “enchanted atmosphere” (büyüleyici bir atmosfer) and “living spaces that will dazzle you” (“gözlerinizi kamaştıracak yaşam alanları”) to emphasize the romance of the dream being sold (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.). A total of 469 “luxury villas” are introduced. Italian themed social facilities such as “Dolce Vita” and sports clubs are used to imply an elite lifestyle (Emaar, n.d). An emotional attraction is created with expressions such as “Tuscan life that is true for life”, “charming atmosphere”. In addition, an idealized image of life is drawn with cultural references such as “Tuscan breeze” (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.; Emaar, n.d).

Mesa Doga’s texts emphasize social status with the phrase “exclusive villa community” (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). Exclusivity and Community: The word “elite” appears repeatedly in the text, e.g. “elite villa community” (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). This is a language strategy aimed at making the target audience feel privileged.

DenizKoru offers value as a lifestyle like the calmness of a prestigious town by the sea and forest. While giving the impression of a remote coastal town, it is emphasized that it is very close to city amenities (transportation, education, health). The Strategy of the Project is based on escaping from urban chaos, emphasizing comfort and prestige. Metaphor and Associations: Cheerful slogans such as “There is life in DenizKoru!” and “There is trust in its nature!” are used, as well as descriptions such as “Very close to the beauties of Sarıyer”, reminiscent of the quiet coastal town of İstanbul (DenizKoru, n.d.).

Villa Via projects emphasize an architectural approach that is “innovative and modern” (Villa Via, n.d.). The website states that “each villa project is realized with impeccable design and carefully planned details” (Villa Via, n.d.). In its language, Villa Via emphasizes its “unique and luxurious” living spaces (Villa Via, n.d.). The site's texts frequently use the terms “a new lifestyle”, “comfortable and peaceful”. The promotion of the project emphasizes being in touch

with nature and prestigious living: “Villa Via offers the opportunity to meet the unique nature and prestigious life of the region with its villas located in the most exclusive locations of Beykoz” (Villa Via, n.d.). The themes of nature, luxury, modernity, and prestige are also clearly emphasized. For example, the website uses the phrases “unique and luxurious living spaces” and “innovative and modern architecture” (Villa Via, n.d.). These phrases contain both emotional reasons such as tranquility, privilege, life beyond dreams and rational reasons modern architecture, technology, and customer satisfaction emphases. Villa Via presents itself as a “social, safe and prestigious environment”, not just a house (Son 32, 2025). Marketing materials use terms such as “at the heart”, “prestigious”, ‘privileged’, “sustainable” to emphasize both nature and quality of life (Villa Via, n.d.). Metaphorically, the expressions “beyond dreams” and “innovative vision” also pointed to the past, quality and the promise of the future (Villa Via, n.d.).

The use of state-of-the-art technology and “first-class workmanship” are emphasized in the architectural details (Göl İstanbul, n.d.), which suggests modern materials and high construction quality. As a lifestyle, Göl İstanbul offers the image of “independent luxury escape.” The project is described as “a unique, calm, peaceful life like water,” evoking a tranquil nature and waterside atmosphere (Kullar İnşaat, n.d.). At the same time, with the promises of “moving to the life of your dreams” (Kullar İnşaat, n.d.), it is emphasized that a lifestyle that is far from the crowds of İstanbul but meets modern requirements is offered. Residents' comfort expectations are addressed with the words that they will have a “spacious and prestigious life” (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). When we look at the metaphors and connotations used in Göl İstanbul, we see the description of the main entrance square that makes you feel that you are “setting sail for a spacious and prestigious life” (Göl İstanbul, n.d). It is also emphasized that the project offers “lake and sea views”; the project is introduced as “the new address in İstanbul for a unique, calm, peaceful and magnificent life like water” with both lake and sea views (Kullar İnşaat, n.d).

The content of the participation of a world-renowned architectural office with the name “Hopkins Architects” is emphasized (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). This is a argument that feeds the project's prestige and perception of quality. The promotional materials use the phrase “as chic as

the city” paired with luxury and modernity. The architects were inspired by the human-scale construction in Bebek and Arnavutköy mansions and traditional designs such as Sedad Hakkı Eldem; they “follow the modularity of traditional Turkish architecture with modern details” by emphasizing elements such as bay windows and eaves in the residences (Merdim, 2016). This approach provides diversity by combining symmetry and asymmetrical arrangement on the facades (Merdim, 2016). To summarize, the marketing of Köy Zekeriyaköy is emotionally driven by the themes of nature and family, while the references to Emlak Konut and famous architects create an image of trust and exclusivity.

Deniz İstanbul shows prestigious sports and life club facilities called “midclubs” are reserved exclusively for project residents (Denizİstanbul, n.d). This club includes facilities such as an indoor/outdoor pool, sauna, tennis court, and cinema room (Denizİstanbul, n.d). This structure and organization provide residents with “a comfort that does not look like hotel privileges” and integrates social life with the seaside (Denizİstanbul, n.d). For example, thanks to these facilities, which are stated to be “at the service of Deniz İstanbul residents” in the promotional text, residents can focus on sports and entertainment away from their daily lives. Deniz İstanbul's content also includes more rational arguments. For example, the Forbes Turkey reference at the opening of the website points to the financial attractiveness of the project: “It is ranked in the top 5 of the most profitable projects in İstanbul” (Denizİstanbul, n.d). The emphasis on investment value supports the elitism of the project on a rational basis. Marketing also uses terms such as “residence-like life” and “ideal villa” to imply a luxurious and privileged style (Denizİstanbul, n.d). Metaphorically, phrases such as “town with marina” and “marina city” (the website's title) evoke the uniqueness and exclusivity of the project. In general, Deniz İstanbul's communication uses emotional language to convey the feeling of “a peaceful and exclusive life by the sea” but also includes rational elements that guide the investor towards investment.

The concepts of Prestige and Privilege assume a central role in the design and promotional texts of gated communities in Istanbul. In the light of David Harvey's neoliberal urbanization theory, the architectural and social features of such projects can be evaluated as

mechanisms that support capital accumulation in urban space. According to Harvey, neoliberal policies transform the city into spaces where capital invests and shape it in line with the demands of upper income groups. The projects analyzed emerge as symbols of luxury and prestige and spatially reproduce the social status of their residents. For example, Pelican Hill is promoted as "Turkey's most privileged housing project", embodying privilege with its international design features and ultra-luxurious lifestyle. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space emphasizes that these projects are not only physical spaces, but also spaces where social relations and cultural values are reproduced. Metaphors such as "marina city" and "life in touch with the sea" used in projects such as Deniz Istanbul constantly reproduce the dream of luxury life and privilege. This shows that the right to use urban space, in terms of the concept of the right to the city, belongs only to privileged groups. In terms of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and social capital, the promotional texts and designs of the projects clearly express cultural codes and symbolic capital for the upper income group. Expressions such as Villa Via's "unique and luxurious living spaces", Toskana Vadisi's "dazzling living spaces" and Mesa Doğa's "elite villa community" clearly reveal the combination of symbolic capital with architectural spaces. From Bourdieu's perspective, these projects become a means for residents to increase their social capital, gain prestige, and maintain their class position. As a result, these gated communities in Istanbul are a spatial expression of neoliberal urban policies and the habitus of upper income groups. The architectural designs and marketing language of the projects reproduce privilege on both a symbolic and practical level, making urban space accessible only to privileged groups. This situation can be considered as the spatial embodiment of urban segregation and social inequalities.

#### **4- Privacy & Security**

This chapter examines how the themes of privacy and security are constructed and represented in gated community projects in Istanbul. In these projects, which especially appeal to the upper income group, how individual freedom spaces and collective security expectations are

met spatially is discussed. Through the selected projects, it is analyzed how privacy and security are legitimized on emotional and rational grounds through both physical design and promotional language.

In today's urban life, security and privacy are believed to be one of the basic needs that come to the forefront in housing projects, especially for upper income groups. In gated community projects in Istanbul, these two concepts are clearly emphasized through both architectural designs and marketing strategies, and individual freedom spaces and social security expectations are met spatially. This section will examine how the theme of “Privacy & Security” is constructed and represented.

In Brand Vadi project, each villa has its own private pool, garden and ergonomic living spaces, as well as areas for activities such as tennis courts, basketball courts and jogging tracks (Güncel Proje Bilgileri, n.d.). At the same time, the suitability for family and community life is implied by emphasizing social facilities such as walking paths and social facilities within the gated community. For example, the promotional literature states, “Our social facilities with wide walking paths are designed for you to spend time with your family with confidence and peace” (Brand Vadi, n.d.). In the Pelikan Hill project each house has its own private pool, garden, basement, and semi-open barbecue areas (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). Rational emphasis can be seen in detail such as “each house has its own pool and garden, 24-hour security”.

In Mesa project, the use of space offers residents a secluded living environment with large gardens. Neighborhood relations and common areas such as gardens and walking paths are well designed. Mesa Doğa's lifestyle is based on “boutique living in the forest” and sustainable luxury, promising a home life away from the city noise, in touch with nature but with modern comfort (Mesa Doğa, n.d.).

DenizKoru on the other hand, promise for a “safe and comfortable home” is emphasized with practical features such as earthquake safety (DenizKoru, n.d.). DenizKoru Sarıyer's representation language is shaped around the idea of “safe, horizontal life in nature”. The project

is described as “Sarıyer, one of the districts of İstanbul with the safest ground in terms of earthquakes” (DenizKoru, n.d.). In addition, trust is emphasized with the phrase “living spaces where you will always feel safe” (DenizKoru, n.d.).

Villa Via project is also implied that social facilities are also given importance such as “settlements that have social facilities, prioritize security and offer an aesthetic environment with landscaping” and that Villa Via meets these criteria (Son 32, 2025). Villa Via prioritizes “functionality and security” as well as modern lines in terms of architecture; with the mission of “improving your quality of life”, usability is emphasized as much as aesthetics (Villa Via, n.d.). The sense of community is ensured because the projects are generally in a housing estate concept (Son 32, 2025).

In terms of the use of space, Göl İstanbul attaches importance to the villas being independent and detached. In the introduction, privacy is emphasized by saying “Your villa, garden and pool are designed in a way that is independent from the other villas, and no one can see them” (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). In this section, neighbor noise is prevented, and each residence is designed with its own private space. Community and social areas are planned throughout the site, and the project is equipped with facilities such as “sports and activity areas” and “24/7 security” (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). “A private life for you” is the most prominent slogan in Göl İstanbul promotion and “Are you ready for a peaceful, happy and very private life away from prying eyes where you can enjoy your personal freedom to the fullest? Your living space in Göl İstanbul villas is just for you” (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). This language emphasizes the feeling of individual freedom and privacy. Therefore, the marketing approach is both emotional, emphasizing freedom, happiness, peace and rational: earthquake resistance, high technology, security. Even the titles “Earthquake resistant” and “24/7 Security” are included in the page icons (Göl İstanbul, n.d.).

Köy zekeriyaköy project the site is designed as a gated community with 24/7 security and a pet walking area (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). Social facilities within the project support a sense of neighborhood and community; for example, daily activities such as breakfast or sports can be organized within the complex. Social facilities include family-oriented elements such as

children's playgrounds, indoor/outdoor swimming pools, sports fields, and outdoor parking lots (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). Gathered under the theme of “Privacy & Security” in this section, gated community projects aim to meet the privacy needs of individuals and social security demands spatially. When the examples in Istanbul are examined, it is seen that the design of each project gives importance to the individual privacy of the residents, and private gardens, pools, and independent spaces are frequently emphasized. Projects such as Brand Vadi and Pelikan Hill state that each villa is enriched with private living spaces as well as social activities. Such spatial arrangements allow for a controlled social life while protecting the personal privacy of residents. Projects such as Mesa Doğa and Villa Via indicate that social spaces and neighborhood relations are also well planned spatially, encouraging residents to participate in safe social relations alongside their privacy. In DenizKoru and Göl İstanbul projects, the emphasis on security is emphasized, and residents are offered peaceful and secure living environments with practical features such as earthquake safety, technology and 24/7 security services. In addition, the privacy needs of individuals are supported on an emotional level with expressions such as “personal freedom” and “private life away from the eyes of others”. In the KÖY Zekeriyaköy project, both individual privacy and community belonging are constructed in a balanced manner with 24/7 security and social activity areas. In terms of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social habitus, the areas of security and privacy offered by these sites are spaces where the lifestyle and social practices of the middle and upper class are spatially reproduced. Thus, the concepts of "Privacy & Security" become elements where individual and social demands intersect and social segregation becomes spatially evident in gated community projects in Istanbul.

## **5- Comfort & Nature**

This chapter examines how the desire for a life in touch with nature and the expectation of modern comfort are combined in housing projects that appeal to the upper-middle- and upper-income groups in Istanbul. It analyzes how the themes of comfort and naturalness are represented

through spatial designs, promotional discourses and lifestyle constructs. The selected sample projects show how nature is treated not only as a physical element, but also as a life ideal and social status indicator. These themes also reveal how the relationship with nature becomes a strategic tool in the production of space.

The desire for a life in touch with nature and the expectation of modern comfort has become an important design and strategy, especially in housing projects that appeal to upper-middle- and upper-income groups. Gated community projects in Istanbul reinforce the notion of the “ideal life” by offering spatial arrangements that combine the serenity provided by nature with contemporary living standards. This section will examine how the themes of nature and comfort are represented in architectural approaches and promotional discourses.

Brand Vadi İstanbul's architectural approach blends the modern villa concept with Mediterranean/Spanish style elements. All villas are oriented to the south facade, maximizing daylight and they show this as “Architectural Structure on Which the Sun Does Not Set” (Brand Vadi), providing each home with ample natural light and views throughout the day. Large social facilities and green areas around the villas support a life in touch with nature throughout the complex (Brand Vadi). Brand Vadi İstanbul's self-representation language emphasizes “nature” and “peace”. In the marketing materials of the project, the sense of calmness and relaxation is emphasized with expressions such as “living spaces where you can get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life and sit in peace” (EMS YAPI, n.d). While concepts such as “green areas, fresh air and tranquility” are frequently used in the project promotion, a message of integration with nature is given by pointing to the Marmara Sea and Büyükçekmece Lake view as the location (EMS YAPI, n.d.; Brand Vadi, n.d.). However, rational elements are also added by emphasizing the location advantages of the project such as proximity to E-5 highway, access to health and educational institutions (Güncel Proje Bilgileri, n.d.). The language often contain metaphors and connotations in the introduction, the project is called “The Architectural Structure on Which the Sun Does Not Set”, giving the project an image in which the sun is emphasized (Brand Vadi, n.d.), while the villas are described as “calm as a lake, durable as an olive tree ” (Brand Vadi,

n.d.). With this strategy, Brand Vadi tries to draw an image that offers nature and family concepts together with the emphasis on luxury and modernity. In Pelican Hill Residence, the residence blocks consist of low-rise buildings, again reflecting the Californian style; 25,000 m<sup>2</sup> of recreational space, outdoor sports areas, a golf course and a horse farm are planned around the blocks (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). Both projects include community living areas such as social facilities and sports complexes. For example, Pelican Hill mansions offer luxury spa services such as indoor/outdoor Olympic pool, Turkish bath and sauna, fitness center, children's playgrounds in an exclusive 6000 m<sup>2</sup> social facility (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d.). Pelican Hill texts include phrases such as “a safe and peaceful life in the lap of green and blue” (Keleşoğlu Holding, n.d), imagining an Eden-like environment.

The concept of Toskana Vadisi is a Mediterranean/Tuscan inspired villa compound. The official promotions describe “single storey villas designed with stone walls, tiles and wood” (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.). These details give the image of Italian country house style buildings, often with large gardens and red tile roofs. The project includes social facilities such as indoor and outdoor pools, sports fields, tennis/squash courts and large green park areas (Toskana Vadisi, n.d., Emaar Türkiye, n.d.). In terms of space utilization, the villas are positioned to face the lake and sea views; large gardens and rich green areas in the landscape are emphasized (Toskana Vadisi, n.d., Emaar Türkiye, n.d.). The transportation plan provides a 50-minute connection to the city center, balancing a quiet country life with the city. In terms of lifestyle, Toskana Vadisi aims to offer a boutique community-like experience within the complex. The daily life here is that of a gated community with extensive social and sporting opportunities. The project image emphasizes “life away from the city, in nature but with the comfort of a club” (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.). The concept emphasizes expressions such as “a perfect life where nature and modern life meet” (Emaar, n.d). Emaar complexes list detailed social and sports facilities like “Dolce Vita Sports and Life Club”, indoor/outdoor pool, tennis, sports courts (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.; Emaar, n.d). Mediterranean/Tuscan Architecture and Life and the concept of “Tuscan architecture” is emphasized with elements such as stone walls, tiles and wood. The project was even assigned the slogan “The New Style of Mediterranean Living” (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.; Emaar, n.d). Nature and

Lake View is also used Büyükçekmece Lake view, large green areas and landscaping are emphasized. Metaphors such as “modern life on the shore of nature” promise a peaceful environment in touch with nature (Toskana Vadisi, n.d.; Emaar, n.d).

Mesa Doga's architecture reflects the harmony of modern and natural components. The website states that these villas are built with “architectural design that blends natural materials such as wood and stone with contemporary touches” (Mesa Doğa, n.d). Details such as open-plan kitchens, living areas with marble fireplaces and wooden wall panels give the spaces a chalet feel that is both modern and cozy (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). The boundary between indoors and outdoors is deliberately blurred; the villas open to forest views with large glass facades (Mesa Doğa, n.d). The gardens that surround the house 180 degrees are mentioned, the use of stones and modern wooden flooring that give the appearance of a village house is mentioned, nature is a constantly mentioned architectural feature (Mesa Doğa, n.d). The project also mentions “sustainable interior solutions”, emphasizing elements such as environmentally friendly materials and efficient use of energy (Mesa Doğa, n.d). Sustainability is emphasized with the title “Nature-Friendly Architectural Design”. Natural materials (wood, stone) and arrangements opening to the forest view with large windows stand out in the villa interiors (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). Luxury architectural details such as open plan kitchens, fireplaces, marble surfaces, bedrooms with private bathrooms are listed (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). These elements position the project at a comfort level that appeals to the upper-middle- and upper-income groups. Mesa Doğa project stands out with the theme of “human nature relationship”. Slogans such as “Inside Life, Inside Nature” are used in marketing to present the dream of a personalized, idyllic life (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). The website includes phrases such as “a world just for you” and “the key to your new lifestyle” (Mesa Doğa, n.d.). This language is often emotional, and story driven; for example, the project was built around the concept of “It's Your Story You're Listening To” (Mesa Doğa, n.d.).

Denizkoru is characterized by horizontal architecture and landscape-oriented residential settlements. The project is planned in two phases, one phase consisting of blocks with Bosphorus view and the other with forest view (DenizKoru, n.d.). The buildings are low-rise, thus ensuring

horizontal architecture and maintaining a silhouette that is easy on the eyes. Houses are generally spacious with terraces and gardens. Architecture emphasizes a “modern yet people-oriented” style (DenizKoru, n.d.). Large green areas are intertwined with tree-lined walkways and social facilities (children's playgrounds, sports facilities, etc.). For example, “social richness” is emphasized and walking, jogging and cycling activities on the Bosphorus are encouraged (DenizKoru, n.d.). Describing the project as “waking up with the smell of the Bosphorus, you are in the Belgrade Forest in one breath” by drawing a fiction that offers forest and sea views in a few steps from the living room and shows that the lifestyle is nature-oriented (DenizKoru, n.d.). Nature and Landscape have a significant meaning. Emphasis is placed on two phases of construction, “one with a forest view and the other with a Bosphorus view” (DenizKoru, n.d.). The promise of a life intertwined with nature is presented with statements such as “in Sariyer, the favorite of the Bosphorus and with Bosphorus and forest views” (DenizKoru, n.d.). Horizontal architecture is shown, Low rise, horizontal architecture emphasizes “The harmony of low-rise horizontal architecture with nature” (DenizKoru, n.d.). The image of a low density, villa/residence-style settlement is given. The site emphasizes the advantage of location with phrases such as “get out of the city quickly thanks to the tunnel, metro, new bridge, new airport and highways” (DenizKoru, n.d.).

The Villa Via project refers to minimalist, contemporary forms and high-quality materials. The villas are often built adjacent to forested areas, and it is stated that they offer “peaceful living spaces that integrate with nature” (Villa Via, n.d.). For example, “our villas, nestled in the forest, promise a lifestyle in harmony with nature with large, landscaped areas, designs that make the best use of natural light and an oxygen filled atmosphere” (Villa Via, n.d.). This text indicates that Villa Via has designs that emphasize large gardens, terraces, and green surroundings. In terms of the use of space, villas in Villa Via are generally multi storey and widely planned. It is understood from the website content that the projects will offer plans suitable for family life; the Çavuşbaşı project was introduced with “plans suitable for family life” (Son 32, 2025). Indeed, social areas such as sports fields and walking paths may have been envisaged in Villa Via projects. As a lifestyle, Villa Via represents a life “boutique and

intertwined with nature”. The texts state that it offers a “peaceful”, ‘comfortable’ lifestyle “in harmony with nature” (villavia.com.tr, Son 32, 2025). Although high ceilings or interior details are not mentioned, it can be inferred from phrases such as “modern architectural details” and “houses with large gardens” that spacious and open space layouts are preferred (Son 32, 2025). The project promises an escape from the city and a life intertwined with greenery; it is said that peaceful projects are developed for “those who want to get away from the chaos of İstanbul” (Villa Via, n.d.). Villa Via's texts also contain symbolic imagery. For example, under the title “In the Heart of Nature”, the website talks about a peaceful life in the heart of the forest (Villa Via, n.d.). Images such as “We make your dreams come true” and “waking up to the sound of birdsong” aim to create an emotional connection.

The approach in Göl İstanbul is defined as a “horizontal living concept” (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). This means that the villas are built with single-storey arrangements that spread horizontally. The project already has 5+1, 6+1 and 7+1 single-storey villa options (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). Therefore, instead of high-rise apartment buildings, there are wide and low-rise residences. The villas are placed horizontally to optimize views of the pond and the sea (Kullar İnşaat, n.d.). 4-meter-high ceilings and terraces provide spaciousness, while comfort features such as large rooms with air conditioning and underfloor heating are offered (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). In addition, each villa has a private garden and a 60 m<sup>2</sup> swimming pool, indicating a focus on outdoor activities, pool and garden enjoyment (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). In addition, the width of the project area (172,300 m<sup>2</sup>) and the large entrance square of 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> show that collective spaces are given importance (Göl İstanbul, n.d.). The metaphorical repetition of “a life just for you” reinforces the dream of a private world of one's own (Göl İstanbul, n.d., Kullar İnşaat, n.d.).

The village has a satellite view of Zekeriyaköy showing numerous low rise villa blocks intertwined with large green grove areas. Designed by Hopkins Architects, Köy Zekeriyaköy interprets traditional Turkish residential elements with modern details (Merdim, 2016). The project includes a variety of apartment and villa types from 1+1 to 6+1 (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). Horizontal, low-rise blocks and villas are preferred in the layout of the project; 25% of the

buildings are in the form of independent villas. The architectural layout is built around large gardens and grove areas. The presence of a 118,000 m<sup>2</sup> grove throughout the site guarantees that the buildings are interwoven with a green texture (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). As a general lifestyle, Köy Zekeriyaköy aims to create a calm, family-oriented environment in a natural setting. To summarize, the architecture of Köy Zekeriyaköy represents a horizontal settlement style that preserves the historical texture and is intertwined with nature. In the marketing of the Köy Zekeriyaköy project, the theme of nature is emphasized the most. Among the slogans of the project, the expression “As simple as a village, as elegant as a city; a cozy home” stands out (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). In addition, the motto “In the city, next to nature” is used in the project promotion to evoke both the advantage of the metropolis and the opportunity to live in nature (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). Emphasis on groves and forests is frequent; for example, 118,000 m<sup>2</sup> of grove area is stated throughout the project, emphasizing the large green areas (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.). The word “Village” is used as a metaphor in marketing language. The name of the project (“KÖY”) and the metaphor “like a village” evoke a sense of natural living. In the promotional materials, adjectives such as “simple” and “cozy” are used to describe the intimate atmosphere for the family. Other metaphors used include “warm home” and “village life”. The phrase “a warm home” in the promotional language directly addresses family and trust (KÖY Zekeriyaköy, n.d.).

The design of Deniz İstanbul focuses on horizontal layout and sea views. The project is presented with the concept of “town with marina” located close to the beach. Marina Residence, one of the phases, stands out with its terraces opening to the sea and large gardens (Denizİstanbul, n.d.). In the Residence, which is planned with a total of 187–338 m<sup>2</sup> apartment options and a green area ratio of up to 70%, the blocks are horizontal and low-rise (Denizİstanbul, n.d.). Mediterranean inspired classical columns, curved eaves and wide balconies, and terraces are used in the facade design; thus, sea views can be obtained from the balconies on every floor. Architectural materials include light colored stone and plasters and red tile roof details. Another phase of the project, Mercan Mansions, consists of comfortable apartments for families, designed as “low-rise apartment buildings” (Denizİstanbul, n.d.). In this mansion concept, family type

apartments up to 4+1 are offered with private garden or terrace options on the ground floor (Denizİstanbul, n.d). By using expressions such as “balconies with sea view”, “balcony gardens” and “light coming through the windows” in the architecture and design—for example, “you will feel nature at every point of your home on the balconies overlooking the unique sea view” (Denizİstanbul, n.d)—the relationship with the open air and natural environment is strengthened. In terms of lifestyle, Deniz İstanbul offers the texture of a vacation town. The project includes social facilities such as a marina, private beach, yacht club, water sports and equestrian club (Denizİstanbul, n.d). In short, the architecture and layout of Deniz İstanbul offers a dynamic lifestyle centered on the sea, sun, and sports. Deniz İstanbul's marketing language is built around the themes of sea, marina and peace.

The project's motto is “İstanbul's marina town” emphasized in large font on their website (Denizİstanbul, n.d). The words “marina, sea, sandy beach” are frequently used side by side in promotional texts and the idea of coastal living is imposed by emphasizing the phrase “opportunity to live in touch with the sea” (Denizİstanbul, n.d). There is also an emphasis on nature: “designed to be intertwined with nature and greenery”, evoking spaciousness and peace. The sub message of escape from the city noise is: “Let the noise and chaos of the city stay in the city. Come to Denizİstanbul for a complete and peaceful life.” (Denizİstanbul, n.d). This language is also largely emotional; the investor is promised ‘peace’ and ‘perfect life’.

Gathered under the theme of “Comfort & Nature” in this section, gated community projects promise their residents a life intertwined with nature and offer a high level of comfort. Projects such as Brand Valley, Tuscany Valley and Deniz Istanbul create living spaces that are integrated with nature and associate their architectural and landscape designs with the peace, freshness and calmness offered by nature. For example, Brand Valley's slogan “The Architectural Structure Where the Sun Never Sets”, Pelican Hill's emphasis on “a safe and peaceful life in the embrace of green and blue” and Deniz Istanbul's “marina town” concept present living in touch with nature as a prestigious way of life. In Mesa Doğa and Villa Via projects, sustainability, eco-friendly architectural elements and nature-friendly designs are emphasized, creating a lifestyle

where nature and modern comfort are combined. Mesa Doğa's slogan “Life in Life, Nature in Nature” and Villa Via's emphasis on forest views and large landscape areas promise its residents both individual comfort and the peace of being in touch with nature. Göl İstanbul and Köy Zekeriyaköy projects adopt a horizontal architectural approach, creating comfortable living spaces where residents can interact directly with nature. High ceilings, private gardens, and large social areas stand out as architectural spaces where comfort meets nature. The metaphor of “village warmth” in Zekeriyaköy symbolizes a family-oriented lifestyle close to nature. From a theoretical perspective, these projects can be evaluated within the framework of Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. In the light of Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus and lifestyle, these living spaces that combine nature and comfort spatially reproduce the privileged lifestyles of the upper-middle class. In this context, living in touch with nature, which is frequently emphasized in the marketing language of projects, serves to spatially reinforce and reproduce the social identities and privileges of the residents.



Photo 12, (Brand Vadi)



Photo 13, Pelikan Hill - (Keleşoğlu Holding)



Photo 14, (Toscana Vadisi)



Photo 15, “Close to the Sky and Forests, Homes Inspired by Nature” (Mesa Doğa)



Photo 16, (Deniz Koru)



Photo 17, (Villa Via)

## **6- General Evaluation on the Gated communities**

In the housing projects analyzed, nature, security and safety are used as a symbolic tool that emphasizes social and economic privilege, rather than just a physical environmental element and rights for every person. Rather than a simple ecological component, the representation of nature in these projects is transformed into a determinant indicator of luxury and prestige, expressing the lifestyle of the upper income group. In the projects, nature is reproduced as an emotional aesthetic that promises calmness and escape from the chaos of urban life, thus gaining meaning in the context of consumer culture. In Toskana Vadisi, nature is romanticized and presented with pastoral images specific to Mediterranean culture, and this romantic aesthetic creates an atmosphere that reinforces the upper-class identity of the residents. Similarly, in the DenizKoru project, views of the Bosphorus and the forest are used not only as an aesthetic preference but also as prestige symbols that clearly indicate social status. In the Mesa Doğa project, nature is positioned as part of the search for calmness and distance from urban life, making it part of a privileged lifestyle that appeals to the upper income group.

The common point in the representation of nature in these projects is the aestheticization of nature as an integral component of "luxury" living and its positioning as an indicator of the class and cultural capital of the upper income group. Therefore, nature ceases to be merely a consumed or protected asset and becomes an element through which social differentiation is spatially and symbolically reproduced. In this context, the aestheticized image of nature emerges as a powerful tool that reinforces the symbolic meanings of social status and identity indicators.

The themes of privacy and belonging, which are prominent in the strategies of gated community life, promise a safe and comfortable space where individuals belonging to the upper income group can separate themselves both physically and symbolically from the "other" urban life. While on the one hand, these concepts reinforce the perception of a "chosen environment" by giving individuals the feeling that they are part of the community to which they belong, on the other hand, they deepen social isolation by weakening the relations established with social spaces outside the site. For example, the phrase "just for you", which is frequently emphasized in the Göl İstanbul project, glorifies the isolating nature of the space, while the high security measures in projects such as Villa Via and Pelican Hill encode the outside world as a potential threat and construct the life "inside" as sterile, controlled and closed to the outside. Thus, privacy means not only the protection of individual space, but also the limitation of social contact. Although the sense of belonging is presented as a class solidarity in such projects, in reality, this belonging often means a selective and exclusionary community constructed only among individuals with similar socioeconomic statuses. This weakens the culture of encounters in the city and erodes the social function of public spaces by eliminating areas of contact between different classes.

As a result, although privacy and belonging in gated communities are legitimized with discourses of social security and tranquility, it is seen that these concepts render invisible and even reproduce the spatial segregation and class polarization that are becoming common in urban life. So, the spaces where belonging is constructed are surrounded by not only physical but also symbolic boundaries and become a reflection of unequal lifestyles within the city. The language and architectural designs of the projects analyzed attempt to strike a balance between the

tranquility and natural beauty of rural life and the opportunities offered by the city. Discourses such as "village life near the city" in Köy Zekeriyaköy or Deniz İstanbul's promise of a lifestyle "far from the city but with a marina" clearly reflect the efforts of upper income groups to combine their longing for the quiet and natural atmosphere of rural life with proximity to the city center.

This tension is evident in the reconstruction of space as a privileged area shaped by economic and cultural capital. This lifestyle, which does not completely give up the comforts of urban life but at the same time seeks to escape the chaos of urban life, promises both urban amenities and a life in touch with nature at the same time. Thus, such projects use the discourse of escape from the city as a strategic tool that protects and maintains class privileges. The presentation of nature as a privileged commodity accessible only to upper income groups in the housing projects analyzed paves the way for various sociological problems in society. Ignoring the idea that access to nature, security and peace should be fundamental rights for everyone, the marketing of nature as a privileged and hard to access elements reinforces social inequality within society. The privileged access to nature encouraged by such projects increases social inequalities by deepening the inequitable distribution of resources.

Privacy and belonging are often in advertisements of gated communities. Gated community life is turning into a structure that weakens social ties in the city and reduces interaction between different income groups. This leads to a decrease in empathy and solidarity between different groups of society, deepening social polarization and segregation. Moreover, people both long for rural life and want to be close to urban amenities. However, people with higher economic power can combine these two desires more easily. This increases social injustices. In conclusion, access to nature should be provided equally and fairly for all, and planning should be done accordingly so that all segments of society can establish a balanced relationship with nature.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, a comprehensive discourse analysis has been conducted on the digital promotional content of nine gated community projects in İstanbul that appeal to the upper income group. The main purpose of the research is to reveal how these projects represent themselves, the values and symbols through which these representations are constructed, and how these symbols interact with social and spatial structures in the city.

The findings of the study reveal that the concepts and images frequently used in the marketing discourses of the gated communities have a function as cultural tools that reproduce social segregation. Themes such as “nature”, “prestige”, “privilege”, ‘privacy’ and “security”, which are prominent in the promotional content of the websites, are seen to carry symbolic meanings that reinforce the class identity of the upper income group.

In the analysis of the thesis, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic and cultural capital, David Harvey's critique of neoliberal urbanization, and Henri Lefebvre's perspective on the production of space were used. Through this theoretical framework, it has been revealed that the concepts used in the marketing discourses of the sites are not accidental but rather gain meaning within an ideological structure that normalizes and legitimizes urban inequalities. For example, the way nature is represented, instead of seeing it as a universal right accessible to all, turns it into a sign of class and economic privilege. The fact that the estates present themselves as “far from the city but close to urban amenities” shows that the way they resolve the tension between the desire for rural life and access to urban amenities is shaped by privileges based on economic power.

The intensive use of “privacy” and “belonging” in the marketing strategies of these projects is intended to create a sense of a safe, comfortable and exclusive community for the residents of the estates. However, while these emphases make residents feel special and privileged, they also function to foster social isolation and sever ties with the city. The discourses of security and the practices of creating enclosed spaces define urban life and its inhabitants as

“the other”, thus weakening social ties with the outside world. In this process, social interaction between class groups within the city gradually decreases.

This research makes an original contribution to the literature by demonstrating that spatial and social segregation in the case of İstanbul is not limited to physical planning and economic resource distribution but is also actively produced and supported by discursive and symbolic means. Analyzing the marketing content of gated communities is critical to understanding the symbolic production processes of social and spatial segregation.

This thesis has reached the following conclusions regarding the research questions identified: In response to the first research question, gated communities introduce themselves through the language of their websites around themes such as nature, prestige, security and privilege, and use these concepts to offer a special lifestyle to their target audience. Regarding the second question, the language and images used produce symbolic capital, clarify social status, and reproduce the privileged position of the upper income group in the city. In relation to the third question, emphasizing concepts such as privacy, security and prestige supports and reinforces physical and social segregation and increases social polarization by reducing social interaction in the city.

In conclusion, the discourses used in the promotion of gated community projects are part of ideological and cultural processes that transform the social structure of the city. So, combating urban inequalities requires not only physical planning, but also the development of policies that ensure equal and fair access to nature, social opportunities, and resources for all individuals living in the city. Questioning the effects of such discourses on social integration in the city and examining user experiences through more comprehensive field research might be an important area of research for future studies.

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