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SENSING HOUSING IN ISTANBUL: A HOUSE THAT IS BREATHABLE İSTANBUL'DA KONUTU DUYUMSAMAK: NEFES ALABİLEN EV

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the effects of housing approaches and policies by negotiating the “power” of housing associations in Turkey through an experimental art project held in Sefaköy, İstanbul. The process of the project addressed questions of authority, the distribution of power, and understand designer-dweller interaction in housing by asking how an open dialogue could be developed in the researcher and dwellers’ mind through role sharing. Based on mass housing evaluation and the construction sector in Turkey, the art project, *Okkito* aims at understanding the perception of dwellers in areas under transformation in İstanbul and transcending this in order to intervene in dwellers’ perception, which is generally focused on the housing administration-oriented housing production sector. Housing is evaluated not only through the manifestations of outcomes of top-down planning, but also through the simultaneous-evolving perception of dwellers and planners. By overthrowing the existing ontology in context of housing in İstanbul, opening new ways and potentialities and enabling a poetic transfer of ideas, it was observed that perception of housing mirrored emerging ideas and potentialities where dwellers were laterally embedded with those of planners.

Key Words: Housing, Art Project, Installation, Social Practice, Participation, Interaction, İstanbul.

ÖZ

Bu makale Sefaköy’de gerçekleştirilen deneysel bir sanat projesi çerçevesinde Türkiye’deki konut kurumlarının “güç” olgusuna dayanarak konuta yaklaşımların ve konut politikalarının etkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Sanat projesinin süreci; rol paylaşımı aracılığıyla araştırmacı ve ev sakinlerinin (dweller) zihninde açık bir diyalogun nasıl oluşabileceği üzerine soru üreterek, otorite, gücün dağılımı ve tasarımcı ile ev sakini arasındaki etkileşimi anlamaya yönelir. *Okkito* adındaki sanat projesi; Türkiye’de toplu konut değerlendirme ve üretim sektörüne bağlı olarak, İstanbul’da kentsel dönüşüm altındaki alanlarda ev sakinlerinin algısını anlamayı amaçlar ve konut yönetimi odaklı üretim sektörünün genel olarak odaklandığı durumları aşarak ev sakinlerinin algısına müdahale eder. Konut; yalnızca tepeden inme planlama pratiklerinin çıktısı olan belirtiler aracılığıyla değil, aynı zamanda ev sakinlerinin ve planlamacıların eşzamanlı evrimleşen algıları aracılığıyla değerlendirilir. Yeni yollar ile potansiyeller yaratarak ve İstanbul’da konut bağlamında var olan mevcut ontolojiyi alaşağı ederek düşüncelerin şiirsel transferine olanak tanıyan deneysel proje ile yaratılan konut algısının ev sakinlerinin planlamacılarla yana doğru bütünleşik hale geldiği, yeni düşünce ve potansiyelleri yansıttığı gözlemlenir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Konut, Sanat projesi, Yerleştirme, Sosyal pratik, Katılımcılık, Etkileşim, İstanbul.



1. INTRODUCTION

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the first meeting of the *Okkito* Housing Association. Today, we are proud to make our first public appearance in Istanbul. We are a young corporation affiliated with the government and founded in 2009. We are interested in housing and mass housing development. We differ from previous associations that have been happy to construct masses of low-quality houses without proper substructure and lacking a social environment. We have reconsidered housing's social and environmental aspects. We are an organization that aims to increase public awareness of living in the city. Our ideas derive from the view that dwellers determine how to live and construct their environment according to various personal and public aspects. Thus, we put forward the perceiver, or the creative dweller, instead of the former 'user,' changing the meaning of house to home, in other words, to lived space. We think that how you live is your identity—how you connect to the world, how you become, or how you are articulated to the city—it is a becoming of the world...Our point of departure is that İstanbul's dwellers know how to live in the city. We consider housing to be a living organism, a self-organizing system that is beyond any production of image.

...We want to explore the changing meaning of housing in İstanbul. Meaning is plural and is formed by the dwellers. Together, we will design houses in specific fields. Because of our current construction capacity, we can build up to four houses that vary in size from 7 to 9 m² on a piece of land of 15 m², which is easily extendable. We build on-site solutions. Our *Okkito* assistants will help during the construction of houses. On 20th of August, there will be a raffle to distribute the houses and determine the dwellers. We want you to reconsider your own house because we believe that land is your public space!" (Özdamar, 2010a) (Fig.1).



Figure 1. The founder and the spokesman of *Okkito* in discussion with participants (Özdamar, 2010a)



The content of the below speech is very familiar to residents in Turkey who are demanding appropriate housing and are interested in advertisement from housing corporations. However, the speech differs as it is partially parody and part of an art project attempting to change housing policies in Turkey (Özdamar, 2011). The project addresses users as perceivers in planning housing, where the designer and dweller intersect mutually, thus opening up discussions on new forms of participation in housing in İstanbul.

Today, in the urban environment, public land is frequently provisioned politically, and the ‘efforts devoted to the globalization of İstanbul have gone far beyond the consumption of Coca-Cola and McDonaldization’ (Erkip, 2000, p. 374). As Erkip notes, ‘beginning from the 1980s, Turkey has been pursuing a market-oriented and outward-looking growth strategy, which is a fundamental shift from the previous protectionist, import-substitution growth strategy’ (Erkip, 2000, p. 372). The grand project of the commercialisation of İstanbul as a global city—starting in the 1990s and becoming increasingly prominent since the 2000s—has begun to display discouraging results, including the displacement of local residents to the peripheries of the city. This massive transformation has shaped both the form and content of İstanbul. The urban open space has been profoundly affected by certain forms of invasion and intervention, such as the rapid proliferation of residences, gated communities, and gentrification sites that have invaded the city, being homogenised through the elimination of different fragments of urban life. The urban master plan has been regarded as an ephemeral tool, changed with every political election. The result has been the irregular formation of the city.

Between the privatization and commodification of land, authorities in İstanbul regard housing and dwellers as two distinct issues or fragments. According to Keyder, incorporation into the urban fabric through settlement and housing is more important than social integration through employment. The dynamics of incorporation into urban life depends on the ease with which immigrants can access land and housing (Keyder, 2005, p. 125). Thus, access to appropriate housing is one of the most important issues for housing authorities. As one of these authorities, TOKİ (Housing Development Administration) provides appropriate mass housing in Turkey. However, unused housing stock in İstanbul is not properly evaluated; it is mostly evaluated by housing authorities in terms of gentrified areas and the potential for urban transformation.

Based on mass housing evaluation and the construction sector in Turkey, *Okkito* is aimed at understanding the perception of dwellers in areas under transformation in İstanbul and transcending this in order to intervene in dwellers’ perception, which is generally focused on the housing administration-oriented housing production sector. Housing is evaluated not only through the manifestations of outcomes of top-down planning, but also through the simultaneous perception of dwellers and planners.



In a wider context, in housing quality research, Peter King and David Clapham's contributions to the meaning and perception of housing have been a guide in developing the art project. King makes a distinction between dwelling policy and housing policy, considering dwelling as a principal activity and housing as a minor element of lived experience. He has argued that housing policy cannot create dwellings and has sought a phenomenological interpretation for constructing a housing theory (King, 2009, p. 44). With a similar approach to understanding the built environment through a social framework, Clapham has mentioned the social constructionist approach—a term developed by Anthony Giddens—in housing policy and practice. The emphasis of this approach is on the meaning, explanation, and negotiation of lived experience and on the premise that "life is constructed by people through interaction" (Clapham, 2002, p. 61). Clapham has focused on the outcomes of the interaction with the household patterns and linguistic and societal construction of reality (Clapham, 2002).

Later, Jacobs and Manzi have addressed the deficiency of this approach based on the idea that it does not mention "power" within micro and macro relations. Instead, they have suggested that, this approach can be more available for new openings of the terminology used by housing production (Jacobs & Manzi, 2000, p. 38). This approach helps the housing researcher develop an effective criticism of current behaviour and policies. For Jacobs and Manzi, this approach can be best understood and applied in housing research in investigating housing organisations and how they market their policies and themselves (Jacobs & Manzi, 2000, p. 36). Manzi focuses on the imaginative experience in housing, that literary works and literature develop the use of imagination and illustrate how a study of literary texts about power, identity, insecurity and inequality in the workplace, analogies and metaphors can aid in the understanding of the complexity in housing policy (Manzi, 2005, p. 117). According to Manzi, literature and "the use of humour, irony and other narrative devices" can help in creating "structural pattern" and metaphors that can be applied in an organisational context (Manzi, 2005, p. 118). Additionally, Manzi has suggested an imaginative approach, which helps understanding the cultural context, economical and political changes within housing issues, urban dynamics and organization methods in housing researches. An imaginative approach figures out various experiences of housing and opening out the neglected social status of housing, apart from the orthodox modes of understanding. He examines the representation of housing policy from a literary context enabling a number of insights into attitudes, experiences and interpretations of housing issues from the perspective of a broader cultural milieu, linking it to literature and films studies as a creative act (Manzi, 2005, p. 125).

These theoretical approaches such as the construction of reality and the multidisciplinary ways of approaching the phenomena were evaluated as how to approach the dweller as more than active role participation. Within this complex nature of urban housing, one of the main problems with approaches to housing has been to regard housing within a one-sided and limited environment of research in İstanbul. However, in the variety of the housing map of İstanbul, there is a problem arising from a lack



of hermeneutics in this randomness relation, and thus, meaning must be decoded grounded on a societal fulcrum in a network of changing values and a new economy. In current housing policies in Turkey, excessive emphasis is placed on following global trends and transforming cities into competitive brands, and these top-down strategies lack the support of local communities (Broekema & Kuipers, 2013).

1.1. An Overthrow Ontology Towards Understanding Active Participation

The word "contemporary" refers to something that still is evolving, changing, transforming or "happening, existing, living, or coming into being during the same period of time" and "existing or happening in the same time period: from the same time period" (Merriam Webster, 2017). The definition of contemporary raises questions on the notion of changing and evolving during the process. The transitory nature of phenomena awaits understanding of tacit knowledge. In the complexity of housing, the researcher/author/ designer catches the notion of "the changing" through tacit knowledge. The transitory nature of phenomena awaits understanding of multiple relations in a design process of the form of meaning of housing and dweller perception.

There is a link between tacit knowledge and forms of active or imageless participation, since they both demand regarding differences and diversity in housing approach rather than a top-down planning. They transform designed narratives by designers into spaces of living. Within this context based on creative act and hermeneutic interpretation of dweller perception among housing associations and use value, *Okkito* Housing Corporation, a public interactive art project and a parody of TOKİ, was established. *Okkito* follows patterns of artistic research with an irerepeatable nature (Hannula, Suoranta, Vadén, 2005). Due to the transient nature of performance and public art, the ambiguities arising from the process shaped the process of the project. Following the public speech of the founder and spokesman, *Okkito* Housing Association was founded to establish an open platform for public debate on contemporary housing. *Okkito* was established on the Internet and advertised on posters throughout the city. *Okkito*'s aim was to understand different aspects of housing and public space through interaction: where do boundaries begin and end in the city in terms of one's own house? (Özdamar, 2011) (Fig. 2). Subsequently, a 1/10 scale model was made of pieces of fabric sewn together to display a symbolic house that was soft, 'breathable', and flexible metaphorically and triggered a haptic sense of touch. Participants participated in a raffle through e-mail for houses with a 7-m² base surrounded by 25 m² of land. The houses and the fabric land were given to families who would live in them using their own household furniture to encourage them to think about the meaning of housing. Additionally, 50x50-cm fabric patches were provided to the participants. The patches were modular and provoked a sense of a possible intervention to the public space through the dweller's own house, such as resizing the house and land. However, due to management changes during the process, more than one dweller or family became the owner of the houses (Özdamar, 2011). Afterwards, an



approximately 150-square-meter-lot in Sefaköy¹—an urban transformation area in İstanbul—was rented for fifteen days and two symbolic houses with the same dimensions were constructed and temporarily installed (Figs. 3, 4, 5).



Figure 2. Announcement of *Okkito* through posters (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 3. The site (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 4. Sewing with fabric: From patches to land speculation (Özdamar, 2010a)

¹ Sefaköy is known for its immigrant population. In Sefaköy, response to the problem of urban diversity is concretized through a static form of living and prototypical mass housing.



Figure 5. Fabrication process: From waste to surface (Özdamar, 2010a)

The spokesman for the housing corporation wore worker's clothing during construction and interviews to display the on-going process and stayed in front of the symbolic house every day—cleaning it, sitting in front of it, and waiting for interaction with the participants. On-site open discussions and interviews about likes and dislikes in housing policies and approaches were held with different participants, including children and the elderly, during the fifteen-day period. The corporation and the houses were dismantled at the end of the process. From the installation to the dismantling, the process became an insightful interaction for discussing housing at the social and political levels. Emerging and disappearing forms of institutions and their power on society, orientation of housing demands, and life-styles were metaphorically addressed. The discussions enabled experiences both for the performers and the participants (Figs. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).



Figure 6. Young participants (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 7. Inside as a reflection of ideas (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 8. A young participant leaning and swinging against the 'smooth' surface of the houses while talking (Still image from video by Özdamar, 2010b)



Figure 9. Interview with a dweller in the neighborhood (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 10. Discussion with participants (Still image from video by Özdamar, 2010b)

The transient nature of public interaction and the ambiguities arising from the process shaped the on-going direction of the project even though it has been previously planned. Throughout the whole process, interactive dialogues with participants displayed that housing reflects a contradictory point: housing is a tool for urban transformation, a mirror of corporate identities and contradictions, and a space of thought. During the project, a family in one of the apartments close to the site took responsibility of the houses, observing them at night. It performed as a residence and a dinner space for a homeless person. Some used it as a private chatting space, for storage, and a facade for reflections of thoughts by drawing ideal and non-ideal dwelling forms (Özdamar, 2011). The houses stayed on the site for 15 days. From construction to demolition, the act of emerging and disappearing was metaphorically addressed. These two issues are rapidly orienting housing demands, and life-styles. A mukhtar offered to transform the houses into a gathering space for the neighbourhood and a temporary kindergarten (Özdamar, 2010a) (Figs. 11, 12, 13, 14).

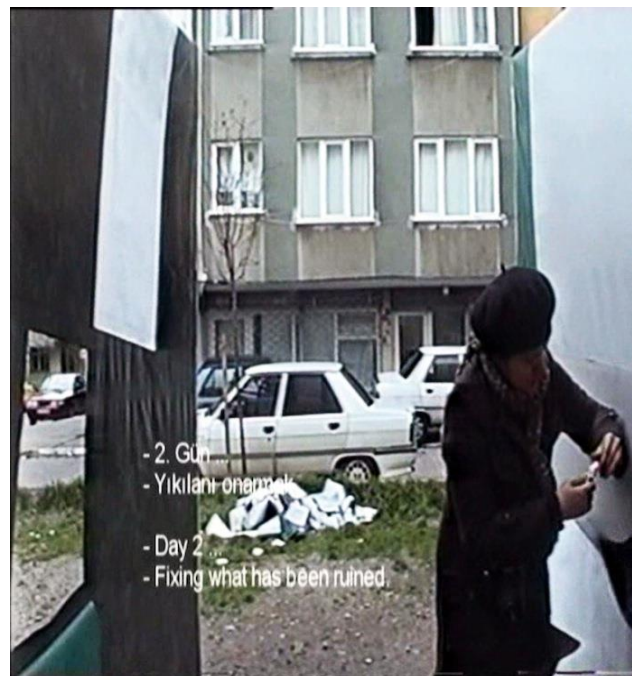


Figure 11. Fixing the houses (Still image from video by Özdamar, 2010b)



Figure 12. From the inside: the houses have outlooking eyes (two windows), which are the main entrance point to the interior (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 13. Dismantling the houses (Özdamar, 2010a)



Figure 14. After dismantling: traces of a closed housing corporation (Özdamar, 2010a)

During the process dialogues with getting permissions outlined a general view of the dwellers that also had a position in real-estate market. Some of the dialogues outlined the approaches of housing institutions:

Director of cartography, X Municipality (August 27, 2009): I feel a lot of rent-seeking here... I understand you and your project...Let's forget it. Instead, here we are four people from the same university. Let's make a new housing project and sell it...

Mamanager of a Recognized Light-steel construction firm for sponsorship (November, 21 2009): If we are going to build houses that violate current housing policies, then we are contradictory with ourselves. We have to solve this inner tension; otherwise, we won't be able to go on...

These excerpts, along with many others displayed that there is a public fear and state of suspicion of future aspects and active participation. People do not carry a belief that they can actively share their ideas on their ways of living, but confine themselves to the represented and commodified images they confront in their everyday life; from the newspapers to the urban space as a permanent open construction site and urban transformation.

Therefore what do we need for an active participation? Globalisation has brought about a speed of change in human life, alienation and deficiency from the powers that are shaping lives and bringing complexity in patterns of urban development. It has not only transformed the patterns in housing production, but more importantly; active participation and non-governmental organisations have



become increasingly influential in the planning of housing to a certain extent regarding the global housing agenda.

What Deleuze and Guattari mention for rhizomatic thinking can enable us understand an imageless form of participation: ‘Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...)...they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology,..it is where things pick up speed’ (Deleuze, & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

Rather than merely analysing comparative and descriptive layers of housing, we need to understand the effects of emerging fragments in a global world and its long-term effects on urban environment and dwellers. How does housing production form ways of living in the city more than creating "new narratives" which may not be understood or perceived by dwellers. How can a seamless and imageless way of approach be developed for understanding housing aspects of dwellers today? Between a top-down planning approach of housing authorities, institutions and views of dwellers, there is a need to develop a platform for exchange of roles. The search for possible answers through the perspectives of policy makers, housing authorities, architects, urban planners, and dwellers can be understood throughout different levels of confrontation of the researcher with the tacit knowledge of the research phenomena.

The awareness of the social problems arising from migration caused changes that started in early 1960s and exacerbated in 1980s in İstanbul urban landscape. The idea of including the other rather than the formal understanding of the work as "participation", has become a constant feature of artistic practice and an intrinsic part of the work as Bourriaud mentioned (Bourriaud, 2002 p. 99-100). Echoed in 1960s, participatory methods in architecture and urban planning at an individual, institutional level has been applied in many countries. Only very few projects and local projects organized by NGOs could be realized to some extent in Turkey. This time, the attempt was a small-scale practice and experimentation of planning process within dwellers of an urban transformation area, where the observed micro-milieu and inner dynamics of the place could be realized. As Michel de Certeau defines, city becomes concrete with social activities and with the movement of people in that place and thus can be defined as a physical space depending on ‘people’s experience of creative practice’ (de Certeau, 1984, p. 117).

Therefore, this short-term project on urban housing in İstanbul addressed questions of authority and the distribution of power and imagined sharing the roles of dwellers and designers. *Okkito* overthrew the existing ontology, opening new ways and potentialities and enabling a poetic transfer of ideas: houses became more than spaces of void and mirrored emerging ideas and potentialities where



participant and dwellers were laterally embedded with those of planners. Regarding the public reaction and disbelief in the ability to involve in the process of housing production, the perception of the community on housing and its relation to the city needs to be addressed at a deeper level, engaging imaginative approach and indirect forms of participation in İstanbul.

However, a "seamless collaboration", which we can call as "imageless", can diminish the boundaries between the subject and object. In urban housing, the paradox of housing becomes more visible in terms of its orienting the narrative of the city through its strategic position because the layers or fragments surrounding urban housing are interwoven with ambiguity and tacit knowledge. The complex structure of cities need to be evaluated within such an imageless approach, where the participants create their own bricolages through an exchange of roles with housing authorities. However, the planning of participation in such a methodology awaits an overthrow ontology towards current housing policies.

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disciplines participating in the transdisciplinary approach was approached with uncertainty. The parody in this sense was aimed not at acting against or overthrowing corporations, but rather at understanding this new methodology and underlining its difficulties in application. Thus, this need transforms our knowledge of housing. We need to handle this transformation due to the rising ambiguities and different forms of hybrid housing, such as mixed-use planning. Moreover, post-occupancy evaluation or user satisfaction research may be bordered within the single object as housing in a diverse urban space.