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Gated Communities as Urban Reproduction Practice: Semiotic Analysis from Istanbul**

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the design of urban spaces that distill the genetic codes of historical and cultural accumulations, geographical features, and architectural forms into a minimal formula, which is then transcendently reproduced in a different context beyond time and place. In postmodern consumer society, decontextualized and redefined images, emptied of their original meaning, have been commodified as alluring objects of desire. In a consumer society where needs evolve into desires, gated communities also serve as a form of urban intervention embodying a practice of reproduction. This study focuses on the design and marketing strategies of gated communities shaped by consumer culture, alongside the displaced spatial structure they create within the city. This structure arises from the commodification of history, physical geography, and cultural traces, which are reconstituted in a hyperreal space reminiscent of a theatrical stage. This study aims to critically reframe gated communities within a theoretical framework, analyzing them through the lens of hyperreality, with a particular focus on imitation and displacement. It seeks to reveal the reflections of postmodern consumption indicators in the production of gated communities and their urban spatial effects. For the field research, gated communities in Istanbul that instrumentalize the reproduction of images from diverse contexts, -such as Venice, the Bosphorus, and Tuscany- through an imitation of life narrative were selected. A semiotic analysis was conducted to examine the internal dynamics, marketing strategies, and spatial characteristics of these gated communities. The verbal, written, and visual materials obtained from promotional brochures, advertising films, catalogs, websites, and real estate portals constitute the basis for the semiotic analysis. In this direction, a critical reading has been developed by discussing displacement in gated communities, formed through the reproduction of place via the imitation of images.

Keywords: Displacement, Gated Communities, Hyperreality, Imitation, Semiotic Analysis

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Öz

Bu çalışmanın motivasyonunu; zaman ve yerötesi aşkınlıkta tarihi ve kültürel birikimlerin, coğrafi özelliklerin ve mimari biçimlerin genetik kodlarının minimal bir formüle indirgenerek başka bir bağlamda yeniden üretilmesi ile tasarlanan kentsel mekanlar oluşturmaktadır. Postmodern tüketim toplumunda, kendi bağlamından koparılan, özgün anlamından arındırılan ve yeniden tanımlanan imgeler, baştan çıkarıcı bir arzu nesnesi olarak metalaştırılmıştır. İhtiyaçların arzuya evrildiği tüketim toplumunda, kapalı konut yerleşmeleri de bir yeniden üretim pratiği olarak kentsel müdahalenin alanını oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma, tüketim kültürü tarafından şekillendirilen kapalı konut yerleşmelerinin tasarımı ve pazarlama stratejileri ile kent içinde yarattıkları yerinden edilmiş mekânsal yapıya odaklanmaktadır. Bu yapı, tarihin, fiziksel coğrafyanın ve kültürel izlerin metalaştırılması yoluyla inşa edilmekte ve teatral bir sahnede hipergerçek bir mekânda yeniden üretilmektedir. Çalışma, kapalı konut yerleşimlerini, özellikle taklit ve yersizleşme sorunsalı çerçevesinde, hipergerçeklik perspektifinden analiz ederek kuramsal bir çerçevede eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla yeniden konumlandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, postmodern tüketim göstergelerinin kapalı konut yerleşmelerinin üretimindeki yansımaları ve kentsel mekânsal etkilerinin ortaya konulması hedeflenmektedir. Alan araştırması kapsamında, Venedik, İstanbul Boğazı, Toskana gibi farklı bağlamlardan alınan imgelerin yeniden üretimini taklit bir yaşam kurgusu üzerinden araçsallaştıran, İstanbul'da yer alan kapalı konut yerleşmeleri seçilmiştir. Seçilen kapalı konut yerleşmelerinin içsel dinamiklerini, bir meta olarak pazarlama stratejilerini ve mekânsal özelliklerini deşifre etmek amacı ile göstergebilimsel çözümleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Tanıtım broşürleri, reklam filmleri, kataloglar, web siteleri ve emlak portalleri üzerinden yapılan tarama ile ulaşılan sözlü, yazılı ve görsel bilgiler göstergebilimsel çözümlemenin materyalini oluşturmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, imgelerin takliti ile yerin yeniden üretilmesi sonucu oluşan kapalı konut yerleşmelerine yersizleşme tartışması üzerinden eleştirel bir okuma geliştirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yersizleşme, Kapalı Konut Yerleşmeleri, Hipergerçeklik, Taklit, Göstergebilimsel Çözümleme

1.Introduction

This study examines gated communities as problematic reflections of global capitalism, neoliberal urbanization policies, and postmodern consumption practices. Additionally, it explores spatial formations imbued with artificial meanings through the concepts of imitation and territorialization. Furthermore, the study critically analyzes the marketing techniques and architectural design features of gated communities, which are identified as urban spatial outcomes of consumption culture. The study highlights the issue of territorialization, which is shaped by thematic fiction that reproduces and imitates architectural (historical and/or regional) images.

Postmodern consumer culture produces hyperreal spaces and thematic life fictions by commodifying images from different times and contexts, thus intervening in urban space. Consequently, deterritorialization forms the theoretical foundation of this study.

The literature on gated communities covers a wide range of topics, including their history, typologies, the diverse reasons behind their emergence in different geographies, and the social and spatial segregation they generate in urban settings. "Although gated communities were initially designed in response to security concerns arising from the heterogeneous structure of the neoliberal city, they are now widely recognized as marketing products that promise status and prestige" (Sinirlioğlu, 2018, p.86). In general, gated communities have been addressed as a result of the establishment of social hierarchies and a concrete manifestation of forms of social inequality.

The aim of this study is to develop a critical reading of gated communities as a phenomenon that shapes discourses of existence. This encompasses not only aspects of security, prestige and social similarity but also their alignment with postmodern consumption habits in the global context. Gated communities, which have been a focal point in urban studies due to the social and spatial segregation they cause in cities, also introduce issues such as imitation, territorialization, fragmentation of urban collective memory and the reproduction of space.

According to Güzer (2007), 'place' constitutes the fundamental element of architecture and the basis of existence. Every architectural evaluation and meaning attributed to an architectural product is subject to reinterpretation and alternative readings within its shaping context. This study discusses the loss of depth caused by consumer culture and the placelessness resulting from the reproduction of spaces as simulations, detached from their original context with a misleading appeal, within the framework of imitation.

In the theoretical framework of this study, gated communities are examined under the concept of hyperreality, due to the mobility of images across space and time. The factors contributing to this beyond-reality situation are explored through the concepts of imitation, pastiche and thematic life fictions, with the image being regarded as a seductive object. The spatial effects of these developments in the city are discussed under the heading "Gated Communities and Deterritorialization."

The sample consists of gated communities, with the first of its kind, Bosphorus City, constructed in Turkey in 2012. The selection was based on factors such as the number of users, physical size, impact on the city and the reproduction of the image through commodification. Accordingly, gated communities in Istanbul were selected for their use of thematic life fictions that reproduce images of different contexts, such as Venice, the Bosphorus and Tuscany, as representations of Mediterranean life.

Semiotic analysis is needed using verbal, written and visual materials to decipher the utopian discourses, physical formations and presentation methods of gated housing settlements produced with image-oriented signs as objects of desire. The spatial connection to the city was discussed by analyzing the language of imitation created through the semantic expression of the images. In order to decipher the internal dynamics and characteristics of the selected gated communities, the information gathered from advertising films, promotional brochures, catalogs, websites and real estate portals constitutes the material of the analysis. This process aims to identify the codes hidden behind these indicators, allowing for the spatial reflections of the entire theoretical framework to be linked. Consequently, this study develops a critical reading of gated communities within the theoretical context of image reproduction, which is further tested through field research.

1.1. Neoliberalism and Urbanization

As globalization and capitalism have expanded, neoliberal policies have progressively supplanted the Keynesian approach, bringing about significant transformations in urbanization practices. As David Harvey (2012, p.5) notes, "capitalism needs urbanization to absorb the surplus products it constantly produces." Harvey (1985, p.14) further argues that capital's secondary cycles materialize in space through investments, shaping the production, transformation, and consumption of the built environment. This process has intensified competition among market forces in shaping urban spaces. Featherstone (1996, p.107) highlights that "under global conditions of intensified competition and the freeing of market forces for investment and capital flows, cities have become more entrepreneurial and aware of their image and the ways in which this image translates into jobs for the local economy." Lefebvre (2011, p.326) similarly points out that "not only has capitalism laid hold of pre-existing space of the Earth, but it also tends to produce a space of its own." In line with this, Mayer (2012, p.14) argues that "capitalist cities have long served as spaces for envisioning and indeed mobilizing toward, alternatives to capitalism itself, its associated process of profit-driven urbanization and its relentless commodification and re-commodification of urban spaces."

With globalization, nation-states have been replaced by "global cities," positioning multinational capital as an active agent in the production of urban space. According to Harvey (2009, p.56), "the difference in the abilities of cities to respond to change are a major source in generating spatial inequalities." These inequalities manifest as regional instabilities, urban concentration and spatial disparities (Turner, 2002, p.15).

Practices such as gentrification and displacement, especially in rent-driven urban spaces, have triggered social and spatial issues, including urban inequalities, segregation, otherization, fragmentation and disjunction. Additionally, in the competitive arena of global cities, capital markets have commodified urban spaces, transforming them into objects of consumption and turning urban images into instruments of design and marketing.

In an era where images are consumed as signs, a socio-cultural structure emerges, commonly referred to as the consumption/spectacle society. In this context, consumption codes, influenced by media and information technologies, become determinants of identity and significantly affect urban space. According to Erol (2013), "in this new affect emerging in lifestyle, space also takes on various roles. Among these spaces, gated residential communities are expected to be consumed as a marker of a certain class and social and economic power, while simultaneously separating their inhabitants from the rest of society." Forms that have transformed into consumption objects serve as the visible face of the cultural and subcultural realities behind symbols, encompassing much more critical societal debates in the background. Undoubtedly, within the history of neoliberal urbanization, architectural practices can be examined in a multilayered manner, considering social, cultural, political, economic, and psychological dimensions. However, this study examines the urban spatial structure shaped by the commodification of urban imagery within the global capital market, analyzed through the lens of postmodern consumption. It can be seen that under the influence of the postmodern consumption concept, different forms of reality are reproduced in the 'global limitlessness' through images and integrated into the circulation of capitalism. Consequently, it can be argued that the postmodern individual's consumption desires construct a lifestyle and urban environment interwoven with signs and realities.

2. Gated Communities in the Shade of Hyperreality

In consumer society, which perceives illusion as reality through representations of the unreal, Baudrillard defines hyperreality as ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality’—a form of simulation (Baudrillard, 1994, p.1). He argues that contemporary society is shaped by postmodern processes, where ‘late capitalism surrounds individuals with an endless play of signs, images, and simulations,’ immersing them in hyperreality.

The postmodern consumer society has created a transcendental space between reality and simulation. This space, which is a means of making the consumption environment magical, “like a distorted image reflected in a convex mirror”, “resembles a ridiculous reflection” of the reality it simulates, swallows and artificializes the real (Baudrillard, 2019, p.11). As an imaginary construct, hyperreality surpasses the reality it replaces by masking and replicating its flaws.

According to Baudrillard, there are different levels of relationships between reality and image. Simulacrum is formed at the level where the image is a reflection of reality, where the image changes and conceals reality, where the image hides the absence of reality and finally where it replaces reality. This last level of relationship that the image establishes with reality creates simulations that are devoid of self-existent imagination, produce themselves synthetically and pretend to possess realities that they do not possess, rather than rational reality.

The simulation, through the miniaturization of reality, reduces cities to their smallest dimensions via a memory that belongs to no one and forgets nothing (Baudrillard, 1994, p.72). In this reduction, where the boundaries between reality and fiction blur, the disconnection between the molecules of the genetic code has fostered a new social order, resulting in fragmentation in urban spaces. This simulated universe, formed by images endlessly reproduced in infinite numbers, circulates globally through media and mass communication technologies. Sarup (1993, p.169) argues that media practices reshape our perceptions of space and time by layering images and signs, ultimately constructing an illusion of reality. Baudrillard describes this as the loss of subjectivity, where the content of reality is emptied and replaced by pure objectivity (Baudrillard, 2016, p. 129). Gated communities embody their design concepts, marketing discourses and thematic constructs through the reproduction of images via real signifiers within cross-border hyperreal spaces.

According to Baudrillard (1994, p.92), the absorption and meaninglessness of everything on the surface, called advertising, seduces people into a surprising hyperreality. Signs that have been decontextualized and reproduced and transformed into objects of collective consumption have lost their significance and meaning.

2.1. Seductive Effect of Image in Gated Communities

The postmodern consumption paradigm, proliferating globally through communication networks, media influence, and globalization, is propelled by new production methods. Within this process, the symbolic value of commodities overtakes their use value, with images serving as the primary catalyst for consumption desire. Hays (2015, p.65) asserts that ‘...the object is severed from its use value, transforming into a mere signifier of monetary exchange; the objective now is to dialectically redefine its hollowed-out components and imbue them with new meanings.’ Images, detached from their original context and loaded with new meanings, stimulate desires through deceptive signs.

In contemporary society, the image, evolving alongside consumption and signification, accrues to the extent that it functions as capital. Condensing the entirety of a spatial image into a singular representation renders it an object of desire—a commodified entity within the phantasmagoric domain of hyperreality.

Eisenman states, “on closer inspection, these objects reveal that they contain nothing; they are solid, lifeless blocks that seem to have been formally added to the context. On the ground, there is a trace of their movement, of their disjunction from life. They leave traces, pointing to the absence of their previous existence. Their presence is only an absence” (Eisenman, 1980, as cited in Hays, 2015, p.65). The image, stripped of its content and recontextualized with mere formal references, is commodified by anchoring it to the absence of the reality it once represented.

2.2.The Journey of the Image Beyond Time in Gated Communities

In postmodern consumer society, the reproduction of place transcends borders, accompanied by the revival of urban experiences and lives that have left traces in memory throughout history. The manipulation of history and its transformation into a desirable commodity for consumption create a sense of timeless transcendence between the past and the present. George Ritzer defines the blurring or disappearance of boundaries in time and space as “implosion” (Ritzer, 2010, p.115). These implosions contain indicators that serve to re-enchant the desire to consume by destroying the boundaries of time in postmodern consumer societies.

“According to Baudrillard, all things are capable of melting not only into each other, but also into a single huge, undifferentiated mass (a kind of black hole)” (Baudrillard as cited in Ritzer, 2010, p.168). Ritzer interprets this phenomenon as an ‘inability to differentiate’. The blurring of boundaries fosters similarity rather than differentiation. In postmodern consumer societies, the spectacle and phantasmagoric manipulation of time construct a re-enchanting world of consumption that appears limitless.

Reinhold Martin comments on the rapid dissemination of architectural styles and visual codes circulating within the global economy of architectural production and consumption, stating that an architectural project is therefore any work in which what may once have been threatens, in the present, to return transfigured at some unspecified future time. “In this light, architecture appears as a cipher in which is encoded a virtual universe of production and consumption, as well as a material unit, a piece of that universe that helps to keep it going” (Martin, 2010, p.11).

Cities are shaped by the accumulation of spatial traces of time, arranged in layers, side by side, or on top of each other. Eisenman argues that “architecture in the present is seen as a process of inventing an artificial past and a present without a future” (as cited in Hays, 2015, p.55). In line with this view, cities emerge as fragmented patterns of imposing images that evoke timeless interactions and historical references that are independent of the experienced moment. Urban spaces shaped by such images are constructed as collages of fragments, each reflecting different temporalities that either transcend time or bridge distinct periods. In gated communities, historically referenced images of the past are reproduced as commodified objects that fuel consumer desire.

2.3. Imitation and Pastiche in Gated Communities

The multicultural, fragmented, and layered structure of contemporary postmodern production practices can be described as 'pastiche'. The term 'pastiche', derived from the French word of the same spelling, is defined as 'a work of art created by imitating the works of other artists' (TDK). Jameson (2011) identifies pastiche as a universal strategy of postmodernity, describing it as the imitation of original cultural accumulations. According to Jameson, pastiche emerges as a patchwork of fragments resulting from the plundering of history and the past through nostalgia (Jameson, 2011, p.80). This process reflects the hybrid condition produced by interweaving formal and cultural codes within interdisciplinary platforms such as art, literature and architecture.

Defined by the relationship between form and imitation, pastiche refers to all kinds of commonalities in predecessor and successor structures that reflect the characteristics of a period, region and style (Büyükçam & Zorlu, 2018, p.489). Thus, an eclectic and heterogeneous structure is formed by assembling decontextualized images. "In this context, pastiche is an element of an eclectic composition that contains phenomena such as old-new as a patch-work, in which ideas or opinions are brought together in a random, chaotic, disorganized, collage-like manner" (Rosenau as cited in Şahin, 2016, p.116).

"Pastiche has been accepted as the basic formal feature and universal practice of postmodern urbanization processes" (Duvall as cited in Özkan Eren, 2013). The multi-layered reproduction of pastiche is closely linked to the production of the spatial structure in contemporary cities. Ritzer (2000, p.199) defines pastiche as the 'spectacle use' produced by new forms of consumption through the 'implosion of past, present, and future'. He identifies Disneyland, a timeless entertainment center, as one of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon. Similarly, the thematic fiction produced through an imitation-based approach in gated communities can also be regarded as a form of pastiche. Sarup (1993, p.158) defines pastiche, which is evident in the spatial formation and urban impact of gated communities, as "a superficial postmodern mode of production without depth."

According to Uğur Tanyeli (2017, p.220), images that are free from cultural contexts and connections can exist everywhere, even as they lose their meaning. "Loss of meaning, freedom of circulation and commodification are closely connected to each other. In other words, images circulate as they are commodified, lose their meaning as they circulate and continue to circulate as they lose meaning.

Soja, while explaining the urban transformation process in the postmodern city, emphasizes the virtual city image, which consists of hyperreal and simulacrum spaces that affect our urban life experience through simulations of the real World (Soja, 2002, p.290). This virtual environment is presented to the consumer's experience through advertising and media channels and the desire to consume is stimulated through signs as a tool.

The issue of imitation in architecture has been ongoing throughout history. What is meant by 'imitation' in this study is not an architectural approach that is built on the codes of its predecessors, where a priori knowledge and ways of doing shaped by architectural knowledge and doctrine are taken as references. According to Güzer (2007), the ordinary repetition of prototypes formed in tradition, where it is not possible to talk about the first product, is not perceived as imitation. At a time when information production, access, flow and sharing are so effective, it is considered normal multi-dimensional and layered

codes are reinterpreted according to the paradigm they are in during the creative production process and transformed into design.

“In architectural discussions, the concept of imitation is mostly used for language features that determine the semantic expression of the finished product. This may be the direct imitation of other buildings, or it may correspond to the reproduction of some building components that constitute consumption, sign and identity value outside their own contexts” (Güzer, 2007). Hyperreal spaces created by bringing together the identity determinants and architectural elements of a place, out of context and disconnected from each other, in architectural discontinuity and variable temporalities constitute the basis of the imitation debate in architecture.

As a reflection of consumption relations in urban spaces, gated communities have also found their place in imitation debates featuring the thematic lives they offer. This situation has led to the detachment of architectural products from their contexts and the commodification of images within the postmodern consumption approach.

In particular, in the gated communities produced in Turkey in the last 10 years, fake/imitation urban fragments are created that affect the urban living experience, urban identity and collective memory and render them devoid of content through the reproduction of the image by detaching it from its roots.

2.4. Thematic Life Fiction in Gated Communities

In general, the commodification of lifestyle within the framework of a theme can be defined as disneyfication. This themed way of life, centered on leisure activities, is inherently consumption-driven. According to Ritzer, “Disney World represents a model of environments or structures that enable us to consume all kinds of things” (2010, p.23). Disneyland, which is “one of the first consumption-oriented structures of postmodern simulated experiences” (Şişen, 2009), shows a sterile, closed, controlled and all-encompassing spatial structure.

According to Baudrillard (1994, p.13) “The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp.” It is a simulacrum intertwined with a miniature reproduction of the culture values. In parallel with Baudrillard, Jameson considers “Disneyfication as postmodernity and its simulacrum” (Jameson, 2009, p.291). According to Jameson, Disneyfication is a multicultural process that artificially reproduces inherited cultural traits in the image of a complex term or resolution. Disneyfication blurs the boundary between reality and fantasy by creating artificial culture.

Gottdiener (2005, p.155) asserts that, “Disneyland is not a real city or urban experience; it is an imitation urban space run smoothly by a large corporation, free from many of the diseases common to the cities that exist in our society”. For humans, who are subjects of consumption and experience a thematic life that is purified of all its flaws compared to reality, living in a dream world is part of consumption. Accordingly, consumers experience “...simulated motion through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images” (Urry, 1999, p.203). This blurring of the boundaries between what is represented and what is real reflects social and cultural indifference. Disneyland, which was first established in California in 1955 and the mode of production—a spatial reflection of consumption—are generally encountered in theme park projects, shopping malls and more recently in gated communities.

In this study, gated communities are associated with the concept of Disneyfication, especially in the context of thematic fiction. The fact that Disneyfication reproduces the cultural and spatial characteristics of other contexts by simulating them in thematic fiction is an important motivation for the production and marketing strategies of gated communities and for strengthening the desire to consume. Thus, the superficiality and artificiality of the spatial structure within the walls underscore the need for a critical analysis of gated communities in the context of territorialization.

3.Gated Communities And Deterritorialization

According to Baudrillard (1994, p.3) "to dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. Simulation is to pretend to have what one does not have. One implies a presence and the other an absence". The spaces of postmodernity are shaped by relational forms that do not align with physical proximity, instead fostering artificial relationships dictated by social distance" (Aytaç, 2013, p.160). This distancing leads to social and spatial segregation, eroding the sense of belonging. Consequently, individuals' connections to their cities have weakened, and their ties have been severed. This state of non-relationality makes it more likely that individuals prefer to live in fragmented, thematic and hyperreal spaces created by postmodern consumer culture's reproduction of place. With their conceptualization based on poststructuralist thought, Deleuze and Guattari describe the process of social and cultural restructuring of capitalism and the weakening of ties as deterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, p.82).

Eisenman notes that "the consumption-based mediatic city now collapses under its own weight, producing sameness instead of difference" (Hays, 2015, p.11). The reproduction of globally circulating images and the realities they represent are trapped within the duality of sameness and difference. This difference disappears during genetic coding. The deprivation of the power of determination should be sought in the absence of a relationship rather than a coincidence between molecules (Baudrillard, 1994, p.34). This deprivation and absence appear in urban spaces as territorialization. "The power that creates the dynamics of territorialization reproduces the place with a new embodiment" (Koçyiğit, 2013, p.543). Here, as a reproduction practice of postmodern consumer culture, the irrelevance produced by gated communities at the point where they stand against the city is problematize. Displacements can be defined as the fading/blurring of references to identity, time and context. Architecture, instrumentalized in the process of deterritorialization, reproduces the image of identity, time and context through commodification.

4.Field Research

The field research aims to re-read gated communities through image-driven consumer culture/imitation and position them in today's urban production process. In this context; gated communities that construct their design ideas and marketing strategies through the similarity of physical images and imitation through verbal and visual indicators are deciphered. In particular, settlements that align with the theoretical framework in terms of physical formation, marketing strategy and advertising discourses and that represent the first instances of this approach, have been selected.

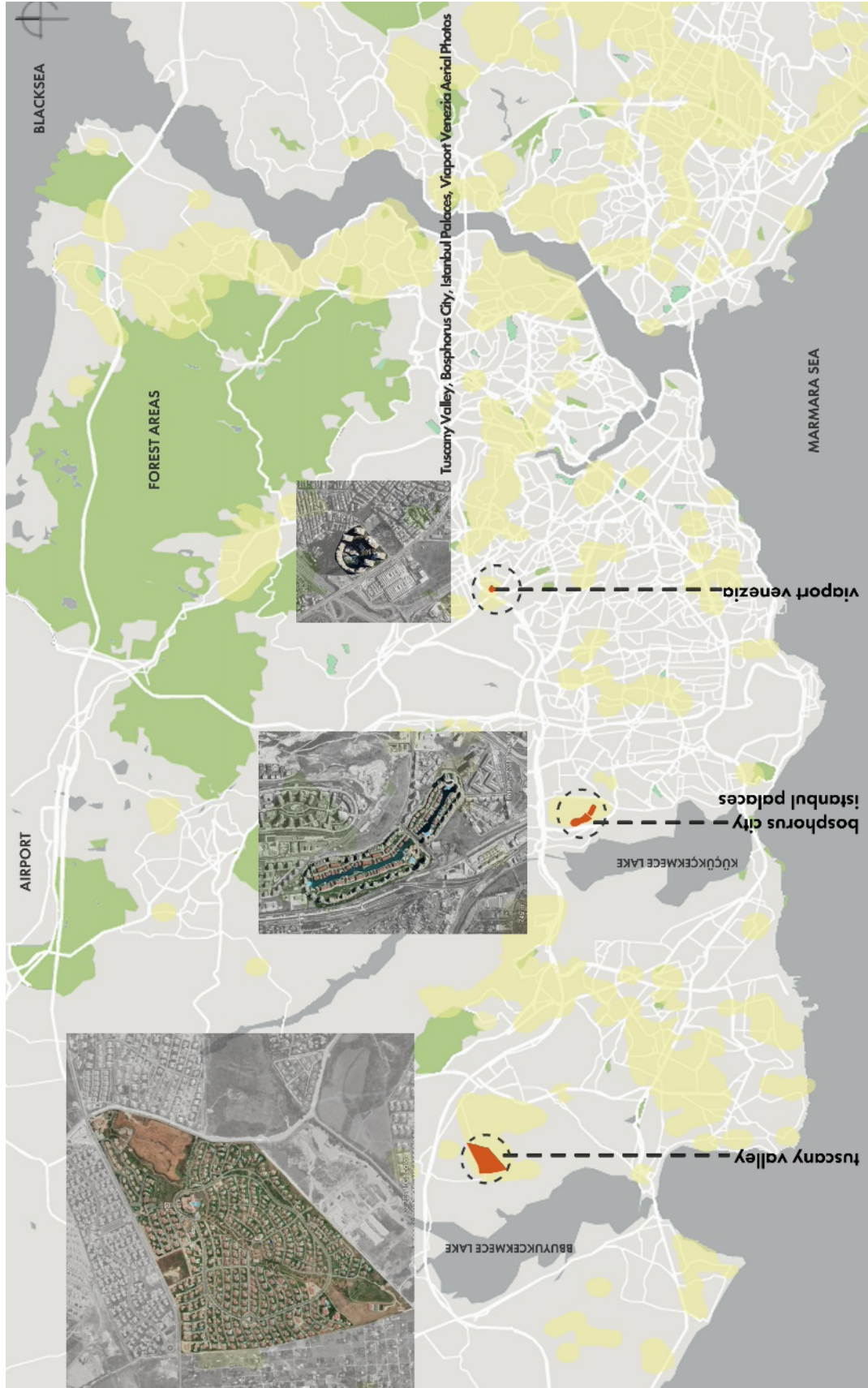


Figure 1. Location of Selected Settlements on the Map of Istanbul
(Image produced by the author).

These gated communities:

- Bosphorus City replicates the genetic code of the Bosphorus, an iconic geographical feature of Istanbul, by commodifying elements such as the Bosphorus Bridge, historical mansions, the Marmara Sea, and settlements along the Bosphorus shoreline.
- Istanbul Palaces, in which palace life is prioritized with reference to the past through the remembrance-based approach of a dystopian discourse based on forgetting, palace life is determined as the design concept with historical reminders.
- Viaport Venezia, where the utopia of living in Venice paradoxically becomes a reality with the architectural structures of San Marco Square, Campanile Tower, the Basilica of San Marco, the Palace of Dukes, the geographical formations of the Venice water canals, gondola rides and cultural accumulation
- The Tuscany Valley Houses were created by imitating images of urban identity through the commodification of the physical and geographical identity of Tuscany, which is characterized by its architectural style, stonework construction technique and natural landscape elements (see Figure 1).

Reading the map, it can be seen that the sample areas selected in the field research are located in the Çekmece Lake Basin, which has been developing on the west side of Istanbul, especially after 1994 and has attracted attention because of its distance from the social, economic and historical centers of the city. The availability of high-quality living spaces and recreational areas, coupled with its distance from the congestion of the city center, has made this area attractive to both investors and residents. Tuscany Valley Houses (Büyükçekmece), consisting of low-density, low-rise villa-type settlements; Bosphorus City and Istanbul Palaces (Küçükçekmece), consisting of high-rise apartment buildings and villa-type residences; and Viaport Venezia (Gaziosmanpaşa), consisting of high-rise residential blocks, were selected as sample areas.

4.1. Methods and Data Collection Techniques

Semiotic analysis examines both the denotative and connotative meanings of signs, which consist of the signifier and the signified. It explores signs, sign systems, and the underlying codes embedded within them. "A semiosis is generally defined as any form, object, phenomenon, etc. that represents something other than itself and therefore can replace what it represents" (Rifat, 2014, p.11). The semiotic analysis method focuses on interpreting both the denotative and connotative meanings of signs, analyzing sign systems, and deciphering the codes embedded within them. "While the signifier points to what is seen or heard in physical form, the signified is a reflection of the signifier in the mind. While the denotation refers to the first meaning of anything that comes to mind, the connotation embodies the meanings hidden in more ideological patterns in communication studies" (Dumlu, 2021, p.148). "The semiotic analysis method, which deals with how meanings, emotions and pleasures are produced in visual expressions" (Çeken & Aypek Arslan, 2016, p.508) focuses on the connotative meaning, that is, the extraction of invisible meanings, rather than the denotation of the analyzed text.

In this study, the semiotic approach developed by Roland Barthes, building on the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, was employed. According to Barthes, there are two levels of signification: denotation and connotation (Barthes, 2016, p.111). The signifier indicates the denotation and the signified indicates the connotation. Whereas the denotation describes what a sign represents through direct and unencrypted visual

messages, the connotation defines how the sign represents through an encrypted visual message.

In gated communities produced with capitalist consumption relations in the global world, the image is transformed into an object of desire through signs containing social, spatial and historical references. Signs related to the desired lives beyond time and place include fragments consisting of a collage of images and utopian discourses in advertisements. Accordingly, the method of field research was semiotic analysis of selected gated communities. The analysis was performed using table analysis.

In order to decipher the internal dynamics and characteristics of the selected gated communities, the material of the analysis consists of information obtained by scanning advertising films, promotional brochures, catalogs, websites and real estate portals. In these materials, the spatial structure established through the reproduction of the image represents formal signs, while the content of advertisements, which are designed to reconstruct the individual's desire to consume and urban identity, represent discursive signs. Semiotic analysis was conducted on the assumption that formal signs convey plain meanings that convey unencrypted visual messages, while discursive signs convey connotations that convey encrypted messages. Signifier/signified and plain meaning/literal meaning analysis tools were used in the analysis.

4.2. Analysis and Findings

4.2.1. Semiotic Analysis of Bosphorus City

The design and promotion of Bosphorus City are shaped by the replication of the Bosphorus' genetic code—an iconic geographical feature of Istanbul—through the commodification of its landmarks, including the Bosphorus Bridge, historical mansions, the sea, and the names of settlements along its shoreline. Bosphorus City, launched in 2021, is Turkey's first concept housing project. Situated in Küçükçekmece, Istanbul, the complex spans 246,000 m² and comprises 2,796 residential units, including apartments, villas, and residences. Housing options vary in size, ranging from 60 m² to 736 m². It offers users rich opportunities in terms of security, social facilities and sports activities. A key feature of the project is the so-called 'artificial Bosphorus,' a 750-meter-long, 35–80 meter-wide, and 1.3-meter-deep water body. Two bridges span this artificial waterway, modeled after the Bosphorus Bridge and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge.



Figure 2. Bosphorus City Photographs and a Site Plan (URL 1).

As can be seen in Figure 2, Bosphorus City uses a water element to represent the Marmara Sea, a bridge connecting the two sides of the water element to represent the Bosphorus Bridge and low-rise apartment buildings or villas with the same name arranged around the water element to represent the mansions on the Bosphorus.

In the introduction of the gated residential settlement, it is said that Bosphorus and Bosphorus life has moved to Küçükçekmece and that urban experiences in highly representative districts of Istanbul such as Ortaköy, Emirgan, Kanlıca and Kandilli can be experienced in this settlement. The Bosphorus City Settlement was created with codes representing the Bosphorus Strait.

Table 1. Analysis of Formal Signs in Bosphorus City / Denotation

FORMAL SIGNS	Signifiers of Denotations	Signification of the Denotation
		
	Boats tied to the pier in front of the mansion	
		
	Relationship between water supply and mansion apartments along the shore	Mansions lined the shore of Bosphorus.
		
	Ocher painted mansion apartments	Bosphorus bridge
		
	Artificial bridge as a Bosphorus bridge imitation	Bosphorus bridge
		
	Low-rise residential buildings on both sides of the water feature and bridge	Bosphorus, Bosphorus Bridge and the Two Sides

SIGN: BOSPHORUS, İSTANBUL

As can be understood from the advertising visuals and the name of the settlement, what is primarily shown is the emphasis on the Bosphorus, from which this gated community also takes its name. The mansions, piers and mosques on the Bosphorus bear traces of urban collective memory and reflect historical layers and are signifiers of the fictional reality created by placing them on both sides of the artificial water element.

Table 2. Analysis of Discursive Signs in Bosphorus City / Connotation		
DISCURSIVE SIGNS	Signifiers of a Connotation	
	Significations of the Connotation	
	<p>A new geography, the 2nd Bosphorus of Istanbul</p> <p>Sinpaş is building a new “Bosphorus City” in its Largest Luxury Housing Project “Bosphorus City”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bosphorus can be moved to another place or reproduced in another context.
	<p>From Yeniköy to Paşabahçe and from Hisar to Kanlıca! Ortaköy Life Comes to Life in Bosphorus City, Designed by Taking Inspiration from All the beauty of Bosphorus!</p> <p>Where Did Ortaköy Square Go!...Where Did the Mansions Go?...All the beauty of the Bosphorus Are Being Moved One by One.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying all the beauty of the city means leaving the ‘bad’ ones behind. • A utopian life proposal is offered, far removed from all the dystopias of the city.
	<p>To Make You a Host, Not a Guest, of the Bosphorus Pleasure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With your purchasing power, you can own all the beauty of the Bosphorus in a new geography or city. • The image of the Bosphorus has been transformed into a purchasable commodity.
	<p>Sinpaş Bosphorus City, Like Living on the Bosphorus...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life on the Bosphorus is a sign of luxury and an elite lifestyle; thus, urban identity and social status can be reconstructed in a fictionalized space.

The replication of Bosphorus mansions as simulations closely resembling the originals serves as a spatial response designed in an 'as if' framework, as reflected in the advertising slogan: 'Sinpaş Bosphorus City is like living on the Bosphorus...'. From this perspective, both verbal and visual signs reinforce the connotation of Bosphorus life.

Neighborhoods such as Ortaköy, Bebek, Emirgan, Kandilli, Kanlıca, which are on the shores of the Bosphorus, have found a place in this fiction to establish a neighborly relationship regardless of their status with each other. In addition to visual indicators, verbal indicators were used as a marketing strategy. Accordingly, the denotative / connotative signifiers and signifieds of the visual and discursive signs used in the design idea and advertising of Bosphorus City are presented in Tables 1-2.

4.2.2. Semiotic Analysis of Istanbul Palaces

In Istanbul Palaces, the palace life is prioritized with reference to the past through the remembrance-based approach of a dystopian discourse based on forgetting. Thus, the place is evaluated as memory and a place-identity-time pattern is established. Istanbul Palaces, where palace life is determined as the design concept with historical reminders, is a housing simulation established as a continuation of Bosphorus City.

Istanbul Palaces, a gated community in Küçükçekmece, spans 119,500 m² and consists of 1,244 villas and residences. The housing units vary in size, ranging from 51 to 426 m². It continues the spatial and design approaches of Bosphorus City.



Figure 3. Istanbul Palace Visuals and Site Plan (URL 2-3).

This gated community draws on the historical codes of the grand palace life, reflecting the social and spatial structure, as well as the cultural legacy, of the Ottoman Empire. The Istanbul Palaces gated community is designed as a simulation of Bosphorus and palace life. It features low-rise villa-type buildings along the water, high-rise buildings behind them that mimic the Bosphorus silhouette, and pier structures stylistically similar to the façades of Istanbul's palace buildings, all referencing the Bosphorus (Table 3).

The privileges of being a courtier and the splendor of palace life has been the subjects of advertising films. This effect was tried to be further strengthened with an advertisement film (URL 4) in which Nebahat Çehre, one of the actors of the “Magnificent Century” series, which is one of the popular series of the period when the gated community was built, tells the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent of the Ottoman Empire (URL 4). The words of Nebahat Çehre, who played the character of Ayşe Hafsa Sultan, the mother of Sultan Suleiman in the Magnificent Century series, in the advertisement film; “It has

never been so easy to go to the palace. Now you can experience the privileges of being a palace owner.” “So everything will be magnificent” and the fact that she is shown as a sultan with her costume and jewelry, in a palace-like residence interpreted with modern architectural language, contains references to both being a palace dweller and the series. Here, the ostentatious and privileged life of palace life is made marketable as an object of desire. (Table 3-4)

Table 3. Analysis of Formal Signs in Istanbul Palaces / Denotation
Signifiers of Denotations Signification of the Denotation

FORMAL SIGNS



Mansion Apartments



Mansions along the shore of the Bosphorus (Sait Halim Pasha Mansion)



Piers in residential areas



Historical piers /Çengelköy Pier



The tower structure inside the water element



Maiden's Tower



Arches as landscape elements in settlements



Istanbul Historical Aqueduct/ Bozdoğan Arch

SIGNS: ISTANBUL' PALACES, GROVES and HISTORICAL DISTRICTS

Table 4. Analysis of Discursive Signs in Istanbul Palaces / Connotations

	Signifiers of a Connotation	Significations of the Connotation
DISCURSIVE SIGNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Istanbul Palaces brings the Bosphorus to your home! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Bosphorus can be moved to another place, it can be reproduced in another context. suddenly everything will be magnificent”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where time is still... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a space between space and time, timeless spaces of reproduction have been established.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not miss the 21st century palace life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation of culture into a desirable commodity indicator through the revitalization of daily life practices from historical periods.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established in the most beautiful parts of Istanbul, the palaces are not only a place to live but also represent the characteristics of the people who lived there. This brand-new city of palaces awaits its new sultans with a wide variety of living options, such as mansions, mansions and palace apartments. “Getting into the palace has never been so easy.” “Now you too can experience the privileges of being a courtier.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through the privileged world, social status and glamorous lives of those living in the palaces, a new identity is produced for being a “courtier” and a “sultan.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “So everything is going to be amazing” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is also a reference to the series “Muhteşem Yüzyıl”.

4.2.3. Semiotic Analysis of Viaport Venezia

In field research in Istanbul, another example that reproduces urban space in accordance with global consumption relations and presents it to the commodity chain of the capitalist system is the Viaport Venezia gated community.



Figure 4. Viaport Venezia visuals and site plan. Viaport Venezia visuals and advertising discourses were accessed from the website of the relevant settlement (URL 5).

Viaport Venezia was built in 2015 in the Gaziosmanpaşa urban transformation area. On an area of 82.000 m2, there are 5 tower blocks named Bellini, Puccini, Marco Polo, Palladio and Vivaldi, 2200 housing projects of different sizes and types, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, shopping and catering units, advanced security technologies and technical features.

Table 5. Analysis of Formal Signs in Viaport Venezia / Denotation
 Signifiers of Denotations Signification of the Denotation



Tower Structure in a Settlement



The Belfry of San Marco (Campanile)



Facade layout of open shopping areas



Palace of the Dukes of Venice



Square in a residential area



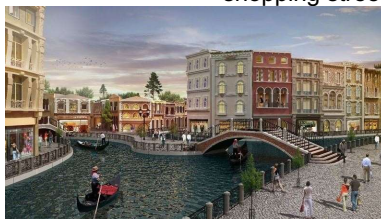
Piazza San Marco



Water features and gondolas along the shopping street



Canals of Venice



Bridges over water elements



Arched bridges over Venetian canals

FORMAL SIGNS

SIGNS: VENETIAN ARCHITECTURE, SAN MARCO SQUARE, CAMPANILE TOWER, VENICE CANALS, GONDOLA RIDES, BRIDGES

With the architectural structures of Piazza San Marco, Campanile Tower and the surrounding Basilica of San Marco, the Palace of Dukes, the geographical formations of the Venetian water canals and the cultural accumulation of gondola rides, a simulation universe has been created where the utopia of living in Venice paradoxically turns into reality (see Table 5). As can be seen in Figure 4, many images associated with Venice have been re-produced at Viaport Venezia as a design and consumption tool, detached from their original contexts. As in all the gated communities analyzed, the housing units in Viaport Venezia have been given names that bear traces of the area that are stylistically imitated. Here, it is observed that not only form but also culture is commodified (see Table 6).

Table 6. Analysis of Discursive Signs in Viaport Venezia / Connotation
Signifiers of a Connotation Significations of the Connotation

DISCURSIVE SIGNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All that makes Venice Venice and more is rising right next to you in Istanbul with the construction of the Via Port Venezia, one of the largest projects in the world. Venetian Palaces, Istanbul's most stylish Italian Let's Go to Venice and Stay in Istanbul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venice can be relocated and reproduced in another context.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Reflection on Venice in Istanbul: A Single City and More Not 4 Days 3 Nights, Venice for a Lifetime, Venice is Established on the European Side of Istanbul Cafes and Restaurants in Via Port Venezia are also different. Delicious pasta, Lasagna and World Famous Coffees—in other words, everything in Italian Food Culture is here. Via/Port Venezia offers you so many alternatives at once that a perfect world that you cannot find even in Venice is waiting for you on the European Side. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An urban fragment in which all urban facilities can co-exist One can own a reproduction of Venice, which is usually experienced for 4 days and 3 nights in vacation packages.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Winner Wins Senior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life here is reproduced as utopian and sterile, with all the negative aspects of the real city stripped away.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With the use of the word "sensitive," an indicator of upper class and seniority, a new identity is imposed on users, giving them privilege and status.

4.2.4. Semiotic Analysis of the Tuscan Valley

The closed residential settlement, designed to imitate the original architecture of the Tuscany region, features natural stone facades (limestone, marble, and travertine) found in Italy, terracotta roof and floor tiles, wooden beams, wrought iron doors and railings. It is situated in a large green area with low-rise villa-type buildings.

The Tuscany Valley residences are built on a total land area of 1,700,000 m². The gated community consists of 469 villas with 24 different project types ranging from 149 to 940 m². The compound also includes a bazaar, social facilities, a life club, both indoor and outdoor sports areas. Security measures include controlled entrances and exits, along

with cameras. Advanced technological equipment enhances comfort in the residential units. Phase 1 was completed in 2009, and Phase 2 in 2013."

Table 7. Analysis of Formal Signs in Tuscany Valley / Denotation

Signifiers of Denotations	Signification of the Denotation
	
Stonework architecture	A house in a Tuscan village called Montefioralle (URL 7)
	
Mediterranean culture	Market in Lucca
	
Large green areas	Tuscany Valley/Italy(URL 8)

Located in the Büyükçekmece Lake Valley, the settlement emphasizes the Mediterranean lifestyle through its olive groves, vineyards, wines, and other agricultural products, part of its re-identification process. Designed to offer a town life away from the city center and crowds, the area features mostly single-story villas, along with facilities such as cafes, markets, bakeries, grocery stores, libraries, and social life centers (see Table 7). The clubhouse, named 'Dolce Vita' (meaning 'sweet life'), reflects the theme of the gated community, where the streets are named after cities in the Tuscany region.

When formal signs (URL 6) are analyzed, it can be said that especially architectural structures with stone craftsmanship and low-rise urban textures are used as signifiers of the architectural structure of Tuscany. As can be seen in Table 8, the sign of Mediterranean culture is the visual market consisting of products containing Mediterranean eating habits.

Table 8. Analysis of Discursive Signs in Tuscany Valley / Connotation	
DISCURSIVE SIGNS	Signifiers of a Connotation
	Significations of the Connotation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuscan Breeze in Istanbul: From Stones to Texture and Taste to Culture Olive groves and vineyards, the symbol of fertility and abundance in Tuscany Orizzonte and the lush green environment that stretches along the valleys of Tuscany meet the residents of Istanbul with all their splendor.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The geographical structure, natural environment, culture and architecture of Tuscany can be relocated and reproduced in another context.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuscany Orizzonte, which brings Mediterranean flavors to Istanbul, aims to bring a longed-for town atmosphere to the residents of the project with its Village Coffee, Village Bakery, Village Grocery Store and Library.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As an urban fragment where all urban facilities can be found, Tuscany Valley Houses offer a town life away from the city center and its hustle and bustle. Sincerity, friendship and living with nature and natural products, which are part of the town life, are lifestyle indicators for Tuscany Valley Houses.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Fairytale Life Fueled by Mediterranean Breath
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In these geographies, being Mediterranean is considered a privilege, with its unique cuisine, civilization, health and olive groves representing fertility, "a fairytale life nourished by a Mediterranean breath" is a privileged identity marker.

The Tuscany Valley visuals and advertising discourses were obtained from the project brochure prepared by EMAAR and the website of the relevant company (URL 6).

5. Discussion

All the gated communities analyzed in this study exhibit a sterile spatial design, characterized by advanced technological infrastructure, controlled access points, stringent security measures, expansive recreational areas, and extensive social amenities.

Findings from the semiotic analysis reveal the following patterns:

- The selected thematic life fictions reproduce city-specific images by destroying their social, cultural, historical, temporal and contextual content.
- The signifiers represent a phantasmagoric world created by fragmentarily bringing together different urban parts in an unrelated unity.
- As can be seen from the advertising discourses, there are promises of a utopian life.
- Images from different contexts and/or times are instrumentalize as the driving force for the desire to consume.
- The cultural codes in advertising discourses point to a new privileged and prestigious social status that is unrelated to the city and urban identity.
- Paradoxically, while trying to differentiate, sameness/imitation is produced.

In the gated communities of Istanbul, the genetic codes of the city have been reproduced without regard to the organic laws of the city as a whole. Baudrillard likens the reproduction of the genetic code to a minimal formula for cancer pathology. "Cancer designates a proliferation ad infinitum of a base cell without taking into consideration the

organic laws of the whole.” (Baudrillard, 1994, p.101). Accordingly, with the assumption that the city is a living whole with genetic codes; it is thought that it is possible to pathologically liken such gated communities, which are copied and reproduced, to cancer cells and metaphorically say that they are urban diseases.

6.Conclusion

This article critically examines the reproduction of place within postmodern consumer culture, focusing on the circulation of images in the globalized world and the development of gated housing communities. Hyperreality and simulation emerge from the commodification of genetic codes extracted from different historical and spatial contexts, transforming them into objects of desire. This phenomenon forms the theoretical foundation of reproduction practices. Within this framework, as a consumption-driven spatial production strategy, attempts to differentiate from the 'other' paradoxically result in the reproduction of sameness, eroding distinctive identity features.

Cities, by nature, thrive on diversity and dialogue. However, the spatial configuration of gated communities—characterized by physical barriers and a social structure reinforced through the discourse of the 'other'—disrupts this urban dialogue. This situation can be considered a sign of the fragmentation created by gated communities in urban spaces. The reproduction of temporal traces within collective memory signifies cultural and social displacement. The commodification and decontextualization of time and space serve as primary mechanisms of territorialization.

Urban spaces produced by the reduction of architecture to a form based on signifiers, forgetting its functional and representational requirements, are designed and constructed through themes and simulations. In this case, spatial differences arising from the diversity of meanings, experiences and sociocultural origins as cumulative components of the context are at risk of disappearing. This threat is manifested in the notions of de-identification, uniformization, sameness and incommensurability. Within this framework, gated communities reconstruct the city through an alternative relational network, fostering processes of standardization and commensurability.

The housing sector has a large share in cities shaped by capitalist production and consumption relations in the global world. It is thought important in terms of the discussion of place and identity that gated communities, which justified their discourse on the basis of security at the beginning of their construction, are spreading like an urban disease with an approach that adopts the reproduction of urban images with imitation at the present point. In addition, life is exhibited like a theater stage in the gated communities designed like Disneyland. In this sense, the selected examples can be considered to support the theoretical discussion.

Author Contribution

The entire study belongs to the author.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors of the study declare that there is no financial or other substantive conflict of interest that could influence the results or interpretations of this work.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics, and did not require ethics committee approval.

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