

Restructuring of Urban Space: Ayazaga Case in Istanbul

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Abstract

The city of Istanbul is in a continuous transformation along with social and economic restructuring, in terms of the reproduction of urban space. Apart from its geographical and demographic characteristics, Istanbul's high level of international connections accelerates the quality and quantity of urban transformation, keeping the city at the forefront of Turkish cities. This study focuses on the spatial transformation and social fragmentation of the Ayazaga neighbourhood, an old industrial area near Istanbul's central business district, and is discussed in the context of spatial and social restructuring. The study aims to identify the factors that trigger the spatial reproduction of the area and its consequences, which forms an urban threshold between the northern city boundaries and the forest areas of Istanbul. Within this framework, the spatial and social fragmentation of the area caused by the rapid transformation of the last two decades is examined from different aspects, using the data obtained by observing and registering the changes in the built environment and the daily lives of the inhabitants. Through the analysis of in-depth interviews, statistical data, visual and textual representations, the selected area was examined in relation to three main categories (open spaces, new spatial organisations and socio-economic differences) representing the assessments of the people living in the area, and further researched and reinterpreted under the influence of these categories through additional written and visual sources.

Keywords

Ayazaga neighbourhood, reproduction of space, spatial segregation, social segregation

1. Introduction

Over the last 40 years, Istanbul, like many other cities around the world, has undergone a radical process of spatial and social restructuring, mainly within the framework of local and international urban policies. A policy that focuses on the reproduction of urban space, which is seen as the easiest and most profitable way to economic growth, is clearly visible in Istanbul. Under this policy, the city is expanding and sprawling rapidly, leading to urban fragmentation.

Although neoliberal policies have changed over the years, the concept of investing in land is still relevant as it requires less effort, money and planning than traditional development policies. In this context, Harvey (2012) points out that the traditional city has been killed by rampant capitalist development, a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of over accumulating capital, leading to endless and sprawling urban growth without regard to the social, environmental or political consequences. Istanbul and similar neoliberal cities are undergoing an identity transformation due to their economic development policies, systematically, politically and spatially imitating the models of the "global city". While development strategies for urban land have become the main policy, some actors have started to create suitable

spaces for global companies in the city. Unlike other cities competing for globalisation, it can be said that global capital has become a power that controls urban planning in Istanbul. Keyder (1999) divides Istanbul's transformation period under neoliberal urban development policies into two phases. First, the phase of partial spatial investment by individuals after 1980, which Keyder (1999) calls 'informal globalisation', and second, the phase of urbanisation supported by large-scale, government-led investment after 2000.

Today, it can be said that Istanbul is home to many global companies and is a metropolis of skyscrapers, mixed-use buildings, shopping malls and luxury offices built under different policies, in different phases and according to different plans. Many of these new buildings have been built along Buyukdere Street, an old industrial axis with large areas needed for new investments. These new structures were supported by transport infrastructures such as highways and bridges and formed the city's central business district on the north-south axis. The first interventions in the area began with the restructuring of existing industrial areas into mixed-use buildings and luxury offices. These developments started as individuals and then evolved into public-private partnerships supported by the government with infrastructure facilities and privileged rights. According to Kurtulus (2005), the redevelopment of Buyukdere Street protected the interests of the elites, which in turn increased income inequality, spatial and social segregation and urban density in the city.

Hence, this study discusses the urban transformation of the Ayazaga neighbourhood, an old industrial area near the above-mentioned Buyukdere Street, in the context of spatial and social restructuring. In the last 60 years, the Ayazaga neighbourhood, which is part of the ecological corridor of the Cendere Valley, faced a radical transformation: from a rural area (until 1960) to an industrial area (from the 1960s to the 2000s) and then to a commercial area (from 2000 to the present). With the onset of industrialisation, not only factories but also squatter houses were built in the valley by industrial workers who needed accommodation. However, due to urban sprawl and the relocation of industry, the region lost its productive identity and the main labour market in the 2000s. As the location and potential value of the region have changed, so have the plans for the region and new areas such as business centres, shopping malls, luxury residences, mixed-use complexes and large-scale investments began in the region. In other words, the identity of the region has changed from a "production area" to a "consumption area".

The study focuses on the spatial and social consequences of these transformations as well as on the different urban qualities of life that emerged. With the latter, the study aims to determine the factors that trigger the spatial reproduction of the area that forms an urban threshold between the northern city boundaries and the forest areas of Istanbul. Consequently, the spatial and social fragmentation of the Ayazaga neighbourhood caused by the rapid urban transformation of the last two decades is examined from different aspects, using data derived from the observation and registration of the physical and built environment as well as the daily lives of the residents.

2. Ayazaga Neighbourhood

Together with the globalisation process, neoliberal policies have had the greatest impact in Istanbul compared to other Turkish cities. Buyukdere Street, especially the Ayazaga neighbourhood and its surroundings, began to accommodate new structures within its boundaries due to new planning decisions, economic and political policies. During this process, some areas of the neighbourhood were decentralised while others were redeveloped.

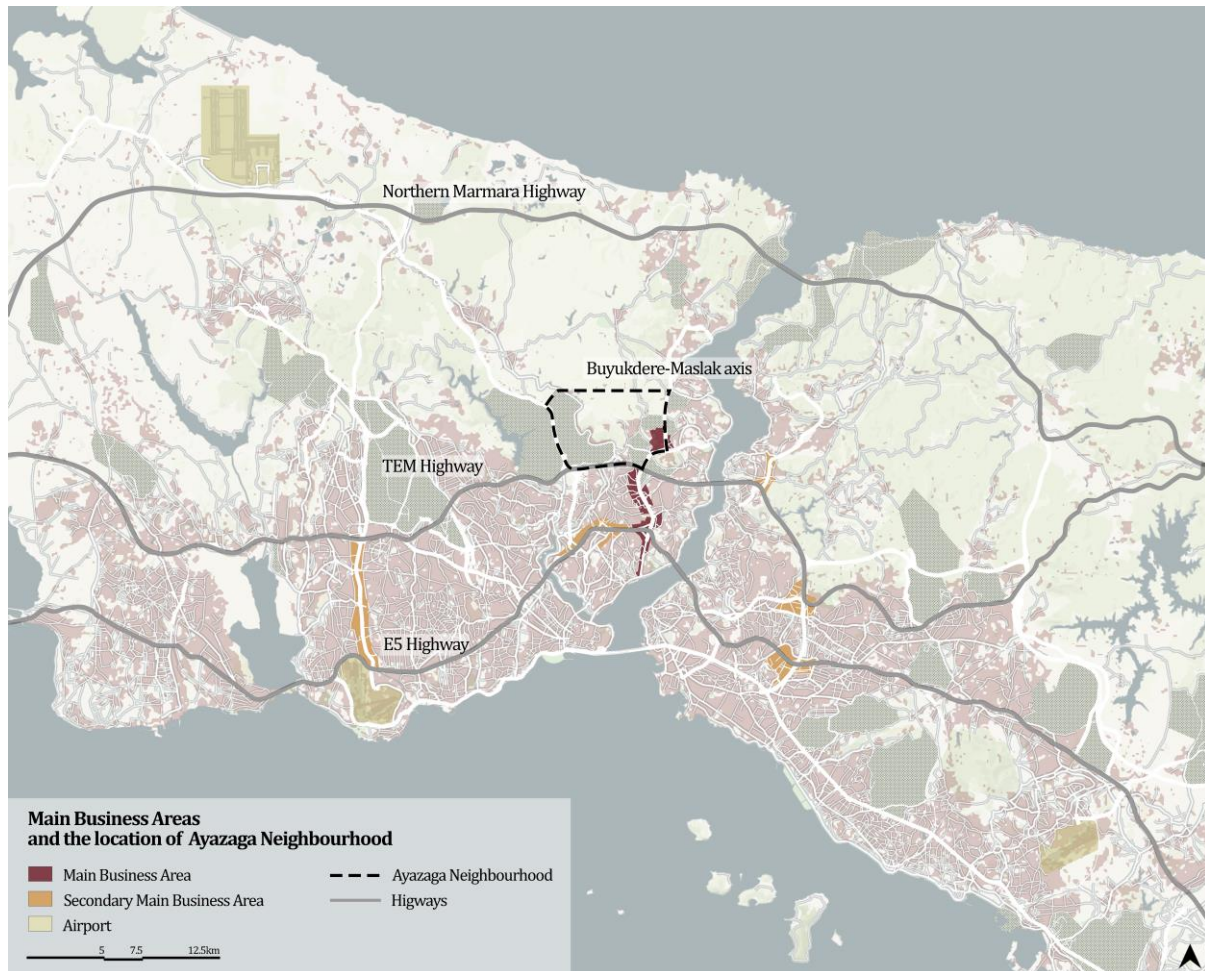


Figure 1. The Ayazaga neighbourhood and its location to the main business district of Istanbul. Source: Kırtaş (2020).

The Ayazaga neighbourhood is located in the northern part of the Cendere Valley, an ecological corridor that intersects with the Buyukdere-Maslak axis, the city's main business district (Figure 1). In other words, it is located at an urban threshold between the city and nature. The old industrial area of the Ayazaga neighbourhood has become a location with high investment potential due to its proximity to the Buyukdere-Maslak axis and the emergence of various infrastructure investments in the area.

With “special permits” in certain places and fragmentation within military zones, the current transformation began with the Buyukdere-Maslak axis and continued around the Ayazaga neighbourhood. Instead of the former industrial areas, gated communities, shopping malls, luxury residential buildings and offices were built in a complex structure (Figure 2). Meanwhile, these new structures are physically and socially separated from the squatters who continue to live there and have a high population density in the area. It becomes important to discuss whether the radical changes in a city with neoliberal ideals also lead to spatial and social changes around the spatial interventions that are the main objectives of the study.

3. Methodology

In the last 60 years, mainly industrial workers and their families have lived in the Ayazaga neighbourhood and its surroundings. Today, with the emergence of new housing investments, the upper-income class settled in the area, allowing old residential areas and new housing developments to coexist in the same

urban fabric and people from different demographic backgrounds to live in the same place. However, sharp socio-spatial boundaries emerged between these areas, creating unequal conditions for public access even to the most basic urban services and deepening inequalities.

To study the Ayazaga neighbourhood and its surroundings, research techniques combining qualitative and quantitative methods were used. After reviewing the literature and analysing the site, a field study was conducted. 30 residents from different demographic backgrounds participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The number of people to be interviewed was not pre-determined and the interviews were terminated due to the diversity of people and repetitive discourse. The interviews were then translated into a written text and the discourses were decoded. After decoding the interviews, recurrent or divergent discourses of the participants were identified using the grounded theory method. The main categories that emerged in the final step of the method were consequently combined with the earlier data from the field.

3.1. Data Collection and In-depth Interviews

The study focuses on the spatial interventions in the Ayazaga neighbourhood and how these changes affect the social and daily life of the residents who live in different types of houses. To identify, both, the spatial changes and the social impact on those who use the space daily, the qualitative research method was preferred. According to Creswell (2013), the general aim of qualitative research is to elicit participants' opinions and ideas about a topic. In this case, prior to the interviews and grounded theory method, background data was collected from literature, maps and historical documents, which shaped the closed-ended structured and open-ended semi-structured questions for the in-depth interviews. The closed-ended questions on demographic data remained the same throughout the interviews and the semi-structured in-depth questions changed their form as the interview progressed.

The participant profile was determined by residence in the Ayazaga neighbourhood, as it is believed that changes in an area can best be observed by those who live there. Therefore, 30 different people were interviewed, with participants selected according to the type of house they live in. The interviews took place between 1st and 11th March 2020. The number of participants was determined during the interviews and the interviews were stopped when it was decided that enough information had been collected after a certain number of interview repetitions. Care was taken in the selection of participants to ensure diversity and to obtain a sample that better represented the general demographics of the region's residents in terms of variables such as age range, type of residence, education level and length of residence in the region. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 77 years, their length of residence in the region from 7 months to 77 years, and their level of education from primary school to post-graduate studies.

3.2. Analysing the Data: Grounded Theory Method

After the interviews, the oral data were analysed, and the Grounded Theory method of qualitative research was applied. The discovery process of the grounded theory involves coding the raw data obtained from the interviews and categorising these codes through theoretical frameworks. The researcher focuses both on the raw data collected and the ideas that these data suggest. Although the theory in question is embedded in the data, after coding, the researcher discovers a new concept or theory from the data. In this context, fieldwork is characterised by the discovery of hidden data in the interviews. Therefore, this theory was preferred to analyse the situation that is the subject of the research from the perspective of the urban actors.

Table 1. Phases of the Grounded Theory Method. Source: Kırtaş (2020).

Codes	<i>green spaces, interventions on nature, public spaces</i>	<i>spatial interventions, accessibility, infrastructure, spatial differences, shopping areas, new buildings</i>	<i>social life, socio-economic differences, economic concerns, demographic structure</i>
Sub-categories	<i>natural green areas, recreation areas</i>	<i>interventions that trigger spatial transformation, mixed-use complexes</i>	<i>demographic structure, social relations, social segregation</i>
Main categories	OPEN SPACES	NEW SPATIAL ORGANISATIONS	SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

In grounded theory analysis, it is crucial to identify and focus on the primary and important concepts in the data. The pioneers of this theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990), identified three stages in this process: 'open coding', 'axial coding' and 'selective coding'. The first stage of the theory is called open coding. In this stage, the data collected during the interview is separated and labelled conceptually. In this stage, labelling was applied to all 30 interviews, resulting in a total of 527 different or similar open codes. Subsequently, 13 different codes were created by inductively grouping these open codes. The second phase is axial coding, where the codes obtained from open coding are categorised based on their similarities (Table 1). The process of axial coding requires inductive and deductive thought processes, questioning methods, various suggestions and comparisons. From the 13 codes obtained in the open coding phase, 7 different subcategories were formed. Selective coding is the final stage of the theory. In this stage, the main categories were identified after combining the subcategories into similar categories. In this process, the main categories were determined while a story was created by grouping the subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The 7 different subcategories discovered in the previous phase were conceptually grouped in this phase and 3 different main categories were determined.

4. Main Categories

In line with the Grounded Theory method, three different main categories were determined through a recursive analysis of the data obtained in order to classify the findings in the field. These main categories, including the concepts of "Open Spaces", "New Spatial Organisations" and "Socio-economic Differences", represent the participants' personal experiences of the Ayazaga neighbourhood.

The first category focusing on 'open spaces', the most frequently mentioned concept among the research findings, is primarily shaped by the physical characteristics of the area. The underlying assumptions of the concept relate to how people physically interact with their surroundings. It examines how people living in different types of housing interact with open spaces such as natural green spaces, parks and recreation areas, and public spaces that are important for the quality of life. As a second common discourse, 'new spatial organisations' focus on large-scale spatial interventions and mixed-use structures that have recently proliferated in the city. This category is about what kind of urban services are offered by the new spatial structures that bring significant changes to the area and how accessible they are to residents. Finally, the category that focuses on 'socio-economic differences' deals with people's social relations and social segregation in the same place between people living in different spatial structures and focuses on concepts that prevent alienation in the city, such as social relations, neighbourhood and community.

4.1. Open Spaces

"Open Spaces" is the concept that is the most frequently mentioned by interview participants. Following the research data, this concept was discussed in relation to the physical structure of the region and people's daily living experiences, focusing on changes in the natural environment, the use of public space and physical boundaries. This category examines the extent to which people living in different urban fragments within the site can relate to urban service areas that are critical to the quality of life, such as natural green spaces, parks, recreational areas and public open spaces.

In today's dense urban environment, the relationship with green spaces is essential for human health. However, with the expansion of the city of Istanbul towards the northern periphery and the pressure on forested areas, the green spaces of the Ayazaga neighbourhood began to disappear. Although the neighbourhood is surrounded by natural green areas on three sides, the participants claim that they cannot use the green areas properly. They claimed that these areas are not actively used and only provide a landscape view that they can see every day. As an alternative to natural green spaces, the interviews revealed that participants use the urban public spaces in the city more often than the natural green spaces in their neighbourhood. On the other hand, participants mentioned green spaces as an important factor in their housing preferences, regardless of the type of settlement. They emphasise that the location of their house in green space improves the quality of their daily life, even if this cannot be physically experienced. They stated that the chirping of the birds in their houses, the green outside their windows, the fresh air, etc. have a positive impact on their lives. These statements clearly show that although proximity to a green space is something positive, the proximity of a neighbourhood to a green space alone does not improve the quality of life of its residents and that it is crucial to create the conditions to access green spaces in the city.

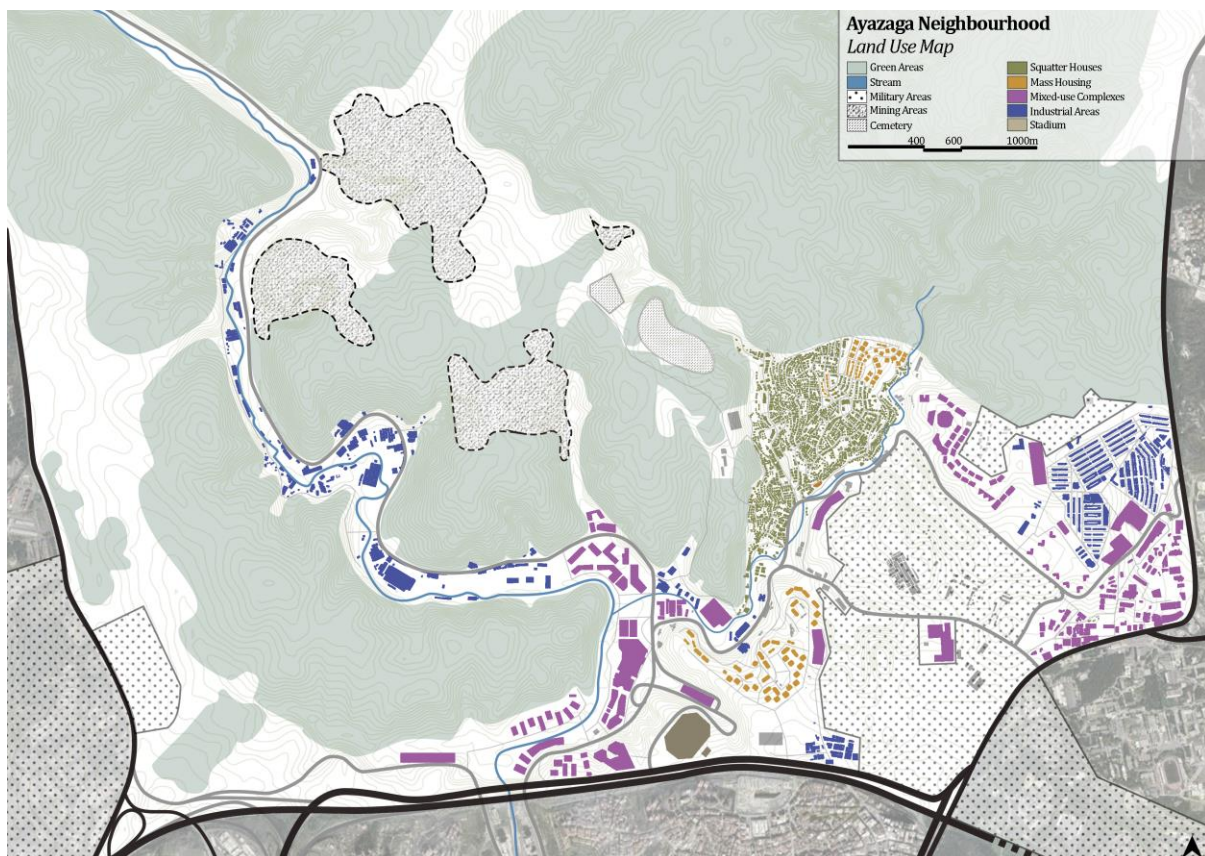


Figure 2. Land use analysis of the Ayazaga neighbourhood. Source: Kırtaş (2020).

One of the main reasons for the participants' view that green spaces are not accessible in their neighbourhoods is the physical boundaries between the city and nature. A look at the land use map of the area (Figure 2) shows that military areas and mixed-use buildings are surrounded by high walls and other physical barriers that limit the interaction between people and the natural environment. However, the limited access to green spaces, e.g. in military areas, restricts the spread of spatial development while protecting the natural environment. On the other hand, the fortress walls of mixed-use buildings present nature to their users only as a visual element and do not provide a physical experience. While the people living in these complexes are protected from the environment, they also restrict the environment from themselves.



Figure 3. Mixed-use complex and its boundaries with nature. Source: Kırtaş (2020).

When we examine the quality of life in the region in terms of open spaces, we find parks and recreation areas as places where people spend their leisure time in the dense urban fabric. Participants indicated that they use parks as an alternative to inaccessible natural green spaces that allow them to experience green spaces on a smaller scale. However, the definition and use of the term 'park' varies depending on the type of house they live in. While parks in squatter and mass housing areas appear as spaces where people can move around relatively freely, giving their users a sense of belonging. In mixed-use complexes and gated communities, they appear as landscaped arrangements that form the front or backyard of commercial areas where aesthetic concerns play a greater role. These privately owned public spaces are designed with elements such as ornamental ponds, fountains and carefully arranged plants, where security checks and CCTV cameras take control, restricting individual freedom in public space. It is reasonable to say that the right to public space is under the control of private authorities, which lowers the quality of life in the city and restricts citizens' freedom.

4.2. New Spatial Organizations

The second category, “New Spatial Organisations”, addresses big-scale spatial interventions in the area that took place after 2000. As Park (1967) explains, people are not only rebuilding the city but also themselves. And according to Tanyeli (2016), citizens define themselves in the same way they define where they live or want to live. At this point, we can say that physical space reflects social identity and that the roles citizens assign to space are also representative of their individual lives. This category is about new spatial structures that bring radical changes to the area, their physical conditions, the type of urban services they provide and whether or not they are open to the public.



Figure 4. View of the Ayazaga neighbourhood with four different types of buildings. Source: Kırtaş (2020).

According to Soja (2012), the effects of economic restructuring and globalisation increased the number of physical borders. This discourse supports the recent emergence of new spatial structures with physical boundaries in the Ayazaga region. Since 2014, investments in mixed-use buildings have increased significantly in the area. In the six years to 2020, 15 large-scale projects - 11 mixed-use buildings and 4 luxury residences - were built in the region (Figure 2). 10881 housing units were built, which means that three times as many people now live in the region as before these new complexes. The inadequate and inaccessible infrastructure and green spaces in the region, combined with the rapid population growth of the region, will inevitably exacerbate the already existing problem of urban facilities and urban conditions in the region and deepen the inequalities.

The land use map of the Ayazaga neighbourhood (Figure 2) shows that the residential characters are divided into three different types: squatter houses, mass housing and mixed-use complexes. However, the segregation between these residential areas extends beyond physical differences. The interviews

showed that participants do not consider mixed-use complexes as part of the neighbourhood. Residents of squatter houses described mixed-use complexes as "rich areas", while residents of mixed-use complexes described squatter house residents as "lower class". This shows that people living in different spatial organisations in the same region perceive and exclude each other according to their social status. According to Castells (1972), Harvey (1973) and Friedmann (1985), one of the most important factors transforming urban space is the class division created by capitalist relations, as in the case of Ayazaga.

The large-scale mixed-use complexes that became common in the region in recent years are designed as self-contained building complexes that provide a variety of services to their users, such as sports facilities, entertainment facilities, recreational areas, health services, cultural facilities, shopping areas, etc. These complexes are inspired by the idea of an ideal life, far away from the complexity of the city, with all the necessary services inside. These areas are mainly preferred by upper-class employees and foreigners working in the central business district on the Buyukdere-Maslak axis, as they make life easier. These new spatial structures, on the other hand, are described by participants as "gated islands" within the region. These "gated islands" are safe and restrict access for outsiders, but they also prevent residents from having experiences with the outside world.

Shopping centres, particularly, play an important role in these complexes, both in terms of the space they occupy and their role in daily life and the other urban services they provide. Contrary to the old trend, shopping centres can develop their appeal without necessarily being located in the city centre. These places, which have become popular entertainment destinations in recent years, allow people to socialize in a consumption-oriented environment that encourages spending. For example, the majority of participants indicated that they spend their free time in shopping malls rather than nearby green spaces. Artificial open spaces in complexes that are on the edge of natural green spaces only provide a visual connection to nature, limiting users' experience and confining them to the artificial, consumerist landscape they create around them. Moreover, these places use and shape these recreational areas, designated as public space in zoning plans, as private property, using citizens' rights to the city for their economic benefit.

According to Sennett (1977), in the public space of the city, the individual ceases to be an actor and becomes a spectator, and this situation silences the public space. According to him, the possibility of sociability disappeared when coffee houses were moved to shopping areas. The urban public space became silent and social life took place in the shopping zones. The "commons" is weakened along with consumerist and privately produced public space, which undermines the collective idea of urban life.

4.3. Socio-economic Differences

The last category "Socio-economic Differences" examines the social relations of people in space and the social separation between people living in different spatial structures. This category allows us to appreciate the extent to which people feel connected to and belong to the urban environment. In the context of concepts such as neighbourhood, citizenship and social fragmentation between people living in different types of housing in the same neighbourhood, the question is asked how and to what extent spatial conditions affect individuals' sense of belonging to the urban environment.

The relocation of industry from the area was decided in 2009, and the subsequent restructuring of the new spatial organisation that began in 2011 led to both spatial and social changes in the Ayazaga neighbourhood. As Sassen (2011) notes, the new industries that emerged as a result of the relocation of the industry and the labour market led to social and spatial segregation in the city with the new economic structures. In the case of Ayazaga, instead of large-scale urban renewal and gentrification projects for the whole neighbourhood, a fragmented spatial transformation through large-scale projects is taking place. Today, these large-scale projects are emerging as mixed-use complexes that coexist with squatter houses

built during the industrialisation period and mass housing built in the early 2000s. This means that this restructuring enables many different classes to live together.



Figure 5. Physical difference between mixed-use complexes and squatter houses. Source: Kırtaş (2020).

To understand the relationship between these different classes, people living in different housing structures were interviewed. From the discourses, it appears that participants living in mixed-use structures are most often associated with the phenomenon of 'alienation'. Residents of mixed-use buildings indicated that they had no neighbourly relations, while squatter residents indicated that they had strong social relations with their neighbours. This difference in social relations could be related to belonging. Giddens (1995) claims that societies in places where immigration took place still practise traditional forms of relationships. This belonging and togetherness of squatters are motivated by the struggle for survival in the neighbourhood during and after industrialisation. In contrast, the residents of the squatter houses rely on each other, while the residents of the mixed-use buildings do not value neighbourly relations in their daily lives. These people see these luxury spaces only as a place to settle down in their busy lives. They also stated that they do not have time for relationships such as neighbourliness in their daily lives. The dynamic nature of this big city life, which emphasises individuality and where the density of individuals in business and social life is high, also contributes to this perception. Bauman (1999) referred to gated communities as "modern ghettos". Due to their isolation from the rest of the city, residents of similar social status define their economic and social belonging in these areas and feel safe. Although people with similar demographic characteristics live together, the opportunities for communication, interaction and collaboration between neighbours in these new spaces are dwindling as people can quickly satisfy their needs online or through privileged services.

The gated communities in the study area are one of the factors contributing to the increasing social and spatial segregation in the city. These large-scale mixed-use building complexes promise a high quality of life, but in reality, lead to physical and social segregation in the existing urban pattern. These areas are at the forefront of those that limit the opportunities to experience diversity and thus the richness of urban life. On the other hand, these areas were observed to reduce the quality of urban life by limiting the right to public space and the possibility to meet in the same places, creating alienation both inside and outside the complex.

5. Results

Istanbul experienced a social, cultural and economic restructuring of its urban space over the last two decades due to neoliberal policies, mainly through large-scale projects. Investment in land is seen by both the government and private investors as the easiest and most profitable way to economic growth. In response to the demands of the neoliberal market, new spaces were built, mainly in the form of large-scale mixed-use complexes to meet international standards. As the "traditional" gave way to the "global" during this period, society quickly adapted to the new way of life. In this framework, it is crucial to understand urban interventions not only as physical changes to the urban environment, but also to examine their role in social, economic and spatial change and to better understand their consequences in a broader urban context.

In this study, the urban condition of the Ayazaga neighbourhood was re-examined using the different categories mentioned above and some similar discourses were found. Firstly, although the neighbourhood is surrounded by green spaces on three sides, it remains a vista when these spaces are not accessible. Secondly, the upper middle and upper classes preferred new mixed-use residential areas to live a privileged life, but there is a situation where they are forced to live within these complexes without contact with the outside world. Thirdly, it was noted that public facilities are mostly limited to shopping malls, which provide public spaces that are under constant surveillance, encourage the desire to consume more than necessary, do not create a sense of belonging and weaken social relations. Fourthly, by changing the zoning plans, these new structures overbuilt the existing natural green spaces and put additional pressure on the northern periphery, which is a natural protected area of the city. These new buildings not only destroy the existing natural environment but also do not give citizens their right to public amenities. These areas do not constitute a common public space that is freely accessible and equally usable by all citizens. They make the already inadequate urban facilities even more problematic in the face of a growing population. Finally, the spatial restructuring in the area not only creates a heterogeneous spatial construct within the urban environment but also creates fragmentation within society and segregation between people based on their socio-economic status. With the newly settled upper-income class, the social characteristics of the neighbourhood have become more diverse. While this situation allows for the existence of many different social identities in the same area, it also causes the area to differ in terms of the physical environment, social relations, access to urban services and quality of life.

*This study was prepared by Emine Ecem Kırtaş based on the master's thesis completed under the supervision of Banu Tomruk, Assistant Professor, Ph.D. at Istanbul Bilgi University.

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