



The Increase of Prestige Gated Communities in Consumption Culture and The Reasons for Their Increasing Popularity

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Abstract

Gated communities are the new forms of residential settlements, which emerged as a response to changing urban dynamics, becoming increasingly common across the world. Fenced or walled off from the surrounding and limiting the access of the nonresidents, gated communities are in an attempt to create an alternative way of living by eliminating the disadvantages of the ordinary city life and providing secure, well-managed, well-maintained and peaceful environments. On the other hand, gated communities are open to ongoing discussions and controversies. Gating attitude is mostly criticized in many fields, especially causing corruptions on the social and physical cohesion of the cities. Turkey is also witnessing these conflicts by the growing number of private residential areas.

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Keywords:

Gated enclaves, prestige communities, user satisfaction, the post occupancy evaluation, Konya, Meram Yeniyol residential settlement

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The start of constructing gated communities for higher-income people in Konya after 1990 points out a significant transformation in terms of city planning, city management and urban class relations. These housing areas having controlled-entrances are the settlement areas that are based on automobile ownership, separated from their environment using barriers such as walls-fences etc., and differentiating from urban life in terms of physical texture and socio-economy. The basic question to be answered is why people choose to live in these prestige islands. In the this study ,the formation period and formation factors of the gated communities were evaluated with the examples in Konya and the parameters providing user satisfaction in these houses were investigated. With the findings of survey, the models for gated communities in Konya such as Meram Yeni Yol Houses were taken into consideration as the sampling area. The user profile and common characteristics of these houses, the reasons for preferring these houses, the satisfactions of their users were analyzed by the help of polls and oral interviews. In the conclusion chapter, the findings of the poll study from which various results were also derived were evaluated. The reasons for preferring gated communities and user profile were defined, and some foresights and suggestions were made on the future of these houses.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the world has witnessed a series of accelerating changes on technological, scientific, economic, cultural and social areas. By the effects of those changes, new modes of living and new patterns of settlements have been developed and as a result housing forms have changed accordingly. Thus, urban spaces were pushed to be in a dynamic process to adapt those changes. Besides its immutable place in forming urban spaces and societies, home, as being the center of the world, has always been on the agenda with its importance in people's lives. Thus, besides only being physical shelters, housing environments have variety of meanings attributed to them in addition to their power of giving shape to social interactions. Therefore, the analyses of residential areas seem to be critical for the evaluation of social and cultural composition of cities for humanity. Gated communities have emerged as new forms of residential settlements due to these changing urban dynamics.

Gated communities are defined as “residential areas with restricted access such that normally public spaces have been privatized” (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). These types of settlements are the reflections of a border between public and private and they require private planning, and a micro-local government. Gooblar (2002) explains the notion of gated

communities similar to Blakely and Snyder (1997) and suggests that they are the developments, which focus on residential environments where there is restricted access and the public spaces are privatized. A number of factors have contributed to the widespread proliferation of these communities around the world. Among the most prominent factors include the need for privacy, exclusivity, conveniency, and a growing desire on the part of residents to be segregated from other sectors of society (Dillon, 1994; Low, 2001; Marcuse, 1997; Wilson-Doenges, 2000; Roitman, 2003). The most common worldwide explanation, however, for the growth of these enclaves is the increasing fear of urban crime and violence (Atkinson and Flint, 2004; Landman, 2000; Landman and Schonteich, 2002). In the past two decades they become popular and widespread residential forms in almost all metropolises around the world and there has been a remarkable growth in this number. However, gated communities differ from country to country, from city to city, and from development to development, and the reasons for their appearance are nearly the same. The types of gated communities differ from each other according to the issues and degrees of amenities, exclusivity and security. Blakely and Snyder (1997a; 1997b) classify gated communities in three basic categories that are based on the primary motivation of their residents. In this typology, there are 3 main categories, viz. lifestyle communities, prestige communities and security zone communities. For example, lifestyle communities are very much developed in South California, US, by retired communities (Blakely and Snyder, 1997b). South Africa has lots of examples of security zone communities because of high rate of crime in the country (Landman, 2000). Gated communities in Turkey are examples of prestige communities because of their target user profile that is high- income group (Arradamento, 2003). Prestige gated communities are conceptualized, represented, and envisioned as affluent fortress islands of prestige (Blakely and Snyder, 1999). Prestige communities are not only housing settlement places for people to live. They also involve sports facilities, shopping areas, swimming pools, parks, gardens, playgrounds for children, restaurants and similar areas which meet the daily needs of the residents. Thus, they make “public” needs “private” for residents; they are located disjointedly in the city center or on the city peripheries; they are separated from the city and other city residents by their security barriers (walls, doors, cameras, security staff etc.) and they are in general places where people in the same income group live (Yıldız, 2011). Those residential areas have impacts on the surroundings they are located. These impacts can be figured out as restricting access, causing some social inequalities, discrimination and segregation.



Gated communities are frequently criticized and treated as an indicator of increasing levels of social division (Calderia, 1996) and by increasing the privatism they are charged to destroy traditional community ties of neighborliness, community and cohesion.

Because of the above mentioned reasons, the issue of gated communities raises important questions about the future forms of urban development. The purpose of this study is to examine the emerging process of prestige gated communities in Turkey, and in Konya specifically, and to determine the reasons for the preference for these housing settlements. The Konya Meram Yeniyol Residences, which appeal to high-income groups, were chosen for the stated purposes of the present study.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Production and Marketing of Prestige Communities in Turkey

The rise of prestige gated communities in Turkey can be considered as a relatively recent development. In the 1980s, especially after 1984, when neo-liberal economy policies and related urbanization policies were adopted, a new housing style and approach emerged alongside new consumption habits and life styles.

Gated communities are the fastest growing housing types in the 21st century. They; (i) represent the hope of security; (ii) appeal to consumers searching for a sense of community and identity; (iii) offer an important niche marketing strategy for developers in a competitive environment; (iv) keep out the unwelcome; (v) often come associated with attractive amenities; and (vi) increase property values (Blakely and Synder, 1997a; 1997b; 1999; Mcgoey, 2003; Townshend, 2002; Webster, 2002). Gating a housing estate is a way for developers to market a property as more exclusive. For developers, they can be a marketing angle, another way to target specific submarkets. Developers build gated communities to meet niche markets: demand for security-by-design, for prestige living and for life-style of community living (Webster, 2002). For some property owners, gating is a mechanism to protect property values from being affected by changes in the city. For many urban planners, prestige gated communities represent a physical withdrawal from civic, urban life (Gooblar, 2002). These settlements come complete with swimming pools, tennis courts, horse riding and golf facilities. The demand for living with people of the same social and economic status was also effective in the development of these kinds of gated communities (Yıldız, 2011). This “enclosed world” which contains the swimming pool, the restaurant, a sports center and a kindergarten as well as the

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homes, functions unfailingly. This is because this functioning increases the speed of capital returns in private sector investment. Such housing is an attractive investment for the private sector. These enterprises, all details about which are pre-determined, promise their users security and privilege; ownership becomes a tool for social status. As above-mentioned, it is important to quickly transform the production into benefit and use for it to be a source for new investments. In this sense, new relations emerged which accelerated the buying of houses. In other words, people who lived in the city center became dissatisfied with a crowded, polluted space dense with traffic. They came to prefer luxury housing estates far from the city center. These housing estates are preferred not only because they present a new accommodation style but also because they present a new way of life; a new fashion was created, a new social environment. The above-mentioned modern life style triggered individuals to live a consumption-oriented life (Bilgin, 2002), (Figure 1).

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Figure 1.
The magazines of prestige gated communities

The Development Process of Prestige Communities in Konya

Konya encounters serious problems among which the need for shelter and hence urban residential land are more pronounced. The main reason for this problem is the rapid urbanization of Turkey particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in an increase in population concentration in big cities. Tekeli (1998) defines the changes on urban development and scale beginning from the mid 1960s in Turkey. These changes can be put forward as social stratification within urban centers and the increase in the size of urban settlements. Throughout the 1980s, Turkish cities had a transformation from a homogeneous structure into a heterogeneous formation (Bilgin, 1988; Tekeli, 1991). After 1980s, gated communities housing estates which appeal to the upper-intermediate and upper classes started to rise in Konya. Overcrowded city centers created major problems such as car parking, environmental pollution, insufficient green areas and traffic problems. The dense urban fabric and problems in Konya caused high-income groups to move out of the city center. Luxuriously equipped gated communities estates (with car parking areas, green areas, kindergartens, swimming pools etc.) were built in Meram, which is near the city center. Settlements were not constructed very far from the city because of transportation problems. Over time, upper income groups began to move to areas outside of the city center because of the land shortage. These luxury housing estates were constructed by big enterprises, with designers and architects who work on their behalf, in line with the market's demand and its marketing anxiety. New speedy production techniques (tunnel mould etc.), prefabricated façade elements, the imported and domestic luxury materials (such facings as metal, marble, ceramics, granite etc., reflective glass) were used in these projects.

It is seen that secure housing estates, which have increased in number in big cities, have also increased in number in Konya. Safety, having the "neighborhood" that were nostalgic for you and having neighborhood relations are the most emphasized features of these housing settlements when they are marketed. Gated communities estates which are self-sufficient have increase rapidly in number in the Havzan region of the Meram district, the new settlement region, Real-Otogar, of the Selçuklu district and other districts of the city (Figure 2).



Figure 2.
Prestige gated communities in Konya

Definition of the Research Area

Gated communities estates, which have recently increased in number, do not only increase across Turkey, but also specifically in Konya. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the effects of this spatial and social situation on the users who live in these housing estates. For the purposes of the present study, the Meram Yeniyol Residences, one of the gated community estates designed for the upper-income group over the past 5-6 years, were examined; and the reasons why users prefer these housing estates were analyzed. Meram Yeniyol Residences is a housing estate which is 5 km away from the city center and located in Havzan Town of the Meram district in the Konya province (Figure 3). The construction of the housing estate was begun in 2006 by the Okyanus Group and it was terminated in 2007. The entire housing estate covers an area of 26.000 m². It consists of self-contained villas and apartment blocks. There are 156 luxury houses in the project which has a closed area of 58.000 m² (Figure 4).

Figure 3.
Location of Meram Yeniylol
Residence



There is a fitness center, sauna, Turkish bath, steam room, shock pool, massage saloon, hairdresser, cafeteria, game and rest room, a small mosque and a mini market in the social facility building of the housing estate. There is a decorative pool, walking and running tracks and bicycle tracks in the open area as well as a tea garden and a kindergarten (Figure 5).

The housing estate is monitored 24 hours a day by the security staff. The parking area has a capacity for 400 cars and is in the basement. A green space is surrounded by the buildings. There are social facilities, a tea garden and a kindergarten in this area. The living spaces have a view of the middle area which was organized with the aim of recreation. Meram Yeniylol Residences consist of 15 blocks and a total of 156 flats.

The houses in the housing estate cost nearly 350.000-450.000 TL. Their rent cost 1.500-2.000 TL. Condominium costs 450 TL. Generally doctors and tradesmen live in the housing estates. Permission of the manager of the housing estate was asked in order to conduct the questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed in 28 days by making face-to-face negotiations. Questionnaires were conducted with totally 45 houses in the Meram Yeniylol Residences, composing 29% of the sample area as the housing estate consists of 156 flats.

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Figure 4.
General view of Meram Yeniyoł Residences

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Figure 5.
The views of sports fields and social interaction areas



Figure 5.

The Underlying Reasons Inducing People to Live in Prestige Communities

Residents of the Meram Yeniyol Residences were asked some questions in the questionnaire about the house and environment of the house in order to measure their satisfaction and to determine the factors which were effective for them in their preference for living in these housing estates.

The participants of the study were asked whether they found these residences to be “luxury” or not; and 88% answered “yes” (Table 1). When they were asked about the criteria which make these houses luxury, they first cited the security unit, the sufficient social equipment and the large garden (Table 2). They also cited the beautiful appearance, quality materials and the large and useful spaces as their criteria for that luxury.

Table 1.

The participants of the study were asked whether they found these residences to be “luxury” or not

Residences luxury or not;	Meram Yeniyol Residences	
	N	%
Yes	38	88
No	5	12
Total	43	100

Table 2.

Which make these houses luxury?

Which make these houses luxury	Meram Yenyol Residences	
	N	%
Beautiful appearance	28	9
Decoration	23	6
Furniture	12	3
Number of rooms	14	4
Size	20	6
Quality materials	33	9
Large and useful spaces	22	6
The size of the garden	26	8
Social equipments	34	11
Playground	25	8
Sports facilities	26	8
Security unit	35	11
The Site Team	32	10
Other	5	1
Total	335	100

In the Meram Yenyol Residences, the users were asked to evaluate the indoor size; and more than 80% of the participants found the living room, master bedroom, parents' bathroom, bathroom, kitchen and other spaces sufficient. Forty one percent of the participants found the parents' dressing room and storeroom smaller than they should be. The participants found the spaces mostly sufficient (Table 3).

Table 3.

The users were asked to evaluate the indoor size

Meram Yenyol Residences	AREA						TOTAL
	Small		Sufficient		Big		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Saloon	5	0,13	29	0,80	2	0,07	36
Living room	3	0,07	35	0,93	0	0	38
Parent bedroom	3	0,08	32	0,92	0	0	35
Parent dressing room	13	0,41	18	0,59	0	0	31
Parent bathroom	6	0,16	30	0,84	0	0	36
Children's bedroom	6	0,17	28	0,83	0	0	34
Bathroom	7	0,20	27	0,80	0	0	34
Kitchen	3	0,08	33	0,92	0	0	36
Pantry	13	0,41	18	0,59	0	0	31
Shoes	8	0,29	19	0,71	0	0	27
Entrance hall	14	0,14	86	0,86	0	0	100
Total	81		355		2		438

As is seen in Table 4, when the users in the Meram Yenyol Residences were asked about the criteria which were effective in them choosing these residences, 22% of the residents

showed security as the reason, 16% showed social facilities, 12% showed sports facilities, 11% stated that it was the landlord, 9% showed the garden, 8% showed the fresh air and 7% showed the increase in their incomes.

As is seen in Table 4, criteria for choosing these houses were evaluated. The most effective criteria in preferring these houses are 24-hour security, the social equipment and the recreation areas, while the criteria which are less effective are the landlord, the increase in incomes, fresh air; and the least effective criteria are not loving the previous neighborhood, the small size of the previous house, noise and traffic, the distance from school and disputes with neighbors.

Table 4.
Reasons for choosing these houses

Reasons for choosing these houses	Meram Yenyol Residences	
	N	%
Previous housing is smaller	8	6
Increase to property	9	7
Reduction to tangible	0	0
Close to school	0	0
Deplore the previous quarter	4	2
Noise and traffic	7	4
Dispute with neighbors	1	1
Own property	16	11
Garden to be	15	9
Social facilities to be	26	16
Sports facilities to be	20	12
For safety reasons	35	22
For fresh air	14	8
Other	4	2
Total	159	100

As is seen in Table 5, the participants in the Meram Yenyol Residences evaluated the features of the housing estate's environment with a 5-point scale method by grading them as very good, good, average, bad, very bad.

The features which were effective for the participants in choosing this housing estate and which they evaluate as very good are as follows: the housing estate is safe (58.5 %); it has sports facilities (55.2%); it is decent (50%); it is refreshing (50%); it is well kept (45.23%); the car parking facility is adequate (40.5); and it is well organized (40.5%). According to the questionnaire results, the criteria that the participants evaluate as very bad are as follows: quality building (7.7%); adequate car parking (7.14%); adequate green area (5.26%); little population (5.4%); and fresh air (5.12%). The percentages of features that the users evaluate as good and good enough are

similar. The percentages of features evaluated as very good are very high. In line with this result, it is seen that the participants in this survey of the Meram Yenyol Residences are generally satisfied with the features of the immediate environment of their houses.

Table 5.
The features which were effective for the participants in choosing this housing estate

Meram Yenyol Residences	The features of the housing estate's environment										
	Very bad		Bad		Average		Good		Very good		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
It is decent	0	0,0	1	2,38	3	7,14	17	40,47	21	50	42
It is well organized	0	0,0	0	0,0	14	33,4	11	26,1	17	40,5	42
It is well kept	1	2,38	3	7,14	4	9,52	15	35,71	19	45,23	42
It is refreshing	0	0,0	0	0,0	8	19,1	13	31	21	50	42
It is interesting original	1	2,63	0	0,0	13	34,2	14	36,9	10	26,3	38
The housing estate is safe	0	0,0	2	4,87	1	2,43	14	34,1	24	58,5	41
availability of sports facilities	0	0,0	0	0,0	6	15,8	11	29	21	55,2	38
having less noise	2	5	1	2,5	9	22,5	14	35	14	35	40
It is quality building	3	7,7	5	12,9	7	18	14	35,9	10	25,7	39
Comfort and Functionality of the dwellings	0	0,0	3	7,32	6	14,6	19	46,34	13	31,70	41
It has fresh air	2	5,12	0	0,0	6	15,3	18	46,15	13	33,4	39
no population problem	2	5,4	2	5,4	12	32,4	12	32,4	9	26,4	37
having adequate green areas	2	5,26	1	2,63	11	29	13	34,21	11	29	38
The car parking facility is adequate	3	7,14	3	7,14	4	9,52	14	33,4	18	42,85	42

EVALUATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

As a result of the questionnaires and interviews), it was determined that the educational and economic levels of the families living in the housing estate were high. It was observed that the residents were generally tradesmen, freelancers or high-ranking officials. It was determined that the residents also owned other houses apart from the one they lived in.

First of all, the general satisfaction level of the residents was sought concerning the features of their houses. General satisfaction levels were examined under 2 categories: indoor and outdoor. According to the questionnaire results, it was seen that the residents of Meram Yenyol Residences had positive opinions and their satisfaction levels varied between 80% and 90%. Consequently, living in these kinds of gated communities estates satisfy people. For this reason, collective housing in the form of housing estates enriched with social facilities is a valid form of production. In addition to the physical features of these housing estates, the socio-economic structures of the users, their cultural



backgrounds, their expectations from the houses, the feelings of safety, having good relations with their neighbors in a homogenous community provided them with satisfaction in relation to where they live.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSITIONS

The main argument for the construction of gated communities is the safety factor; however the main reason why these housing estates have multiplied is the life style, the “elite” factor. It is possible to say that life style and the elite factor are the main triggers for their construction besides the fear of crime. The “World of Privileges”, is the key concept and there are none of the negative associations of “the real world” or “real life” in this world. Such places are designed for the idealized life of the individual. Only persons who can “pay the price for it” can enter inside and the possibility of encountering unwanted situations is eliminated. Here is a place where the demands of individuals are enhanced when compared to the rest of society. Possessing such a house means being involved in a supposed abstract world of upper-class consumption group of the world; and sharing the same life style with them (Yıldız, 2011).

No matter which reasons are given, the above-mentioned enclosures which were created have caused a social and spatial separation; they (besides being secured self-enclosed house settlements) codify urban spaces and transform them to places “which cannot be stepped out of” for elites and phobic places “which cannot be stepped into” for others. This situation creates social division.

Consequently, despite the positive and negative aspects of gated communities estates, we can say that the expectations for the spaces and environments of these houses which presently appeal to upper-income groups will also become the widespread expectations among lower-income groups; positive spatial changes will become general expectations in time and they will affect the environments designed for other income groups.

It is now well documented that gated communities can be seen as a response to the fear of crime [Atkinson and Flint, 2004] but other drivers also appear significant. In particular the desire for status, privacy and the investment potential of gated dwellings all form important aspects of the motivation to live behind gates. For many housing researchers drawn to new social problems and forms, gated communities appear a profoundly interesting and relatively new object of study in the European context.

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