

**“Commodifying the Utopia: The Case of Branded Housing Projects, Istanbul, Turkey”**

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## Abstract:

With global neoliberal restructuring processes since the 1970s, inequalities in urban space have been rising. This rise in inequality fosters segregation in urban space which has become observable through gated enclaves. These have become a way of urban space production in many countries, with different versions and with different conceptualisations such as 'gated communities' (Blakely and Snyder 1997) in US, 'master planned estates' (Cheshire, Wickes, and White 2013) in Australia, 'condomínios exclusivos' (Carvalho, George, and Anthony 1997) in Brazil, 'garden-towers' (Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2010) in Argentina, 'residential parks' (Bodnar and Molnar 2010) in Hungary or condominium developments (Pow 2009) in Singapore. Aligning with this global trend, a new version of housing enclaves has been emerging in Turkey since the early 2000s, following the neoliberal restructuring processes in that country. These housing enclaves are called 'branded housing projects'.

The 'branded housing' concept has been developed by its usage in the news content and project advertisements, and it has become a part of daily language. This conceptual emergence is related to the production processes and marketing strategies of the projects. The projects are produced under certain 'brands' as urban spatial commodities by developers, and heavily use various types of advertising like any other commodity in the market, including TV commercials, print media and outdoor advertisements, as well as internet advertising.

This paper aims **to discuss** the 'branded housing projects' as an emerging version of contemporary gated enclaves **firstly** by giving an overview of the neoliberal urbanization processes which Turkey has been going through as the context, **secondly** by discussing the main characteristics of the projects (i.e. main actors and public-private partners, physical-spatial features, services and facilities provided in the confines of the projects), and **thirdly** by presenting the results of the qualitative content analysis of the news content, project catalogues and print advertisements in terms of representations of branded housing projects in them; and **to question** the relationship of the phenomenon of branded housing projects with contemporary commodification of urban space.

## 1 Introduction

With global neoliberal restructuring processes since the 1970s, inequalities in urban space have been rising. This rise in inequality fosters segregation in urban space which has become observable through gated enclaves. These have become a way of urban space production in many countries, with different versions and with different conceptualisations such as ‘gated communities’ (Blakely and Snyder 1997) in US, ‘master planned estates’ (Cheshire, Wickes, and White 2013) in Australia, ‘condomínios exclusivos’ (Carvalho, George, and Anthony 1997) in Brazil, ‘garden-towers’ (Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2010) in Argentina, ‘residential parks’ (Bodnar and Molnar 2010) in Hungary or condominium developments (Pow 2009) in Singapore.

Aligning with this global trend, a new version of housing enclaves has been emerging in Turkey since the early 2000s, following the neoliberal restructuring processes in that country. These housing enclaves are called ‘branded housing projects’. The ‘branded housing’ concept has been developed by its usage in the news content and project advertisements, and it has become a part of daily language. This conceptual emergence is related to the production processes and marketing strategies of the projects. The projects are produced under certain ‘brands’ as urban spatial commodities by developers, and heavily use various types of advertising like any other commodity in the market, including TV commercials, print media and outdoor advertisements, as well as internet advertising.

This paper discusses the ‘branded housing projects’ as an emerging version of contemporary gated enclaves, which presents contradictions of the imaginary and the real in their discursive formation. The paper is based on a research project<sup>1</sup> which aims to investigate the contemporary commodification of urban space under neoliberal urbanization through the case of branded housing projects in Istanbul, Turkey. The research focuses on 48 branded housing projects which are produced by the partnership of public company Emlak Konut GYO (Real Estate Investment Partnership) and private developers between the years 2003 and 2014 in Istanbul.

The paper focuses on the *discourse formation* in the news content, project catalogues and print advertisements by examining the content regarding the *imaginary* and the *real*, while

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on PhD research which the author is undertaking at Heriot Watt University.

referring to the results of wider analyses of 181 news articles related to the branded housing projects, textual and visual content of 28 project catalogues and 10 print advertisements.

**Firstly**, an overview of the neoliberal urbanization processes which Turkey has been going through is discussed together with the rise of housing enclaves in this period. **Secondly**, the main characteristics of branded housing projects in terms of the main actors and public-private partners, the physical-spatial features, the services and facilities provided in the confines of the projects are discussed as a general overview. **Thirdly**, the results of the content analysis of the news articles, the project catalogues and the print advertisements are discussed in terms of representations of branded housing projects and discourse formation in various media. **Finally**, the role of the discursive formation of the branded housing projects in contemporary commodification of urban space is questioned with a concluding discussion.

## **2 Neoliberal Restructuring and the Rise of Housing Enclaves**

### **2.1 Neoliberal Restructuring**

Neoliberal restructuring processes have been taking place since the early 1970s as a global phenomenon (Harvey 2007; Peck ve diğerleri 2009; Brenner & Theodore 2002). During the late 1970s, neoliberalism gained importance as a “strategic political response to the declining profitability of mass production industries and the crises of Keynesian-welfarism” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 50). Through neoliberalization, states started to dismantle post-war institutional structure (crisis in Keynesian economics and welfare state) and implement policies of marketization, commodification and fostering competition (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 50). According to Harvey (2007), the years of 1978-1980 present a turning point for the world's social and economic history, as the dates correspond to the regime change in China through liberalisation, change in monetary policy in US as well as Reagan’s election with “policies to curb the power of labour, deregulate industry, agriculture, and resource extraction, and liberate the powers of finance both internally and on the world stage” and Thatcher’s election in UK (Harvey 2007, 2). The transformation is not limited to these countries, but is a global phenomenon including more “traditionally social-democratic or Christian-democratic states such as Canada, New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Italy” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 50). Through global transformations in the

world capitalist system, “[b]y the mid-1980s, in the wake of this uneven but concerted realignment of policy agendas throughout the world, neoliberalism had become the dominant political and ideological form of capitalist globalization” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 50).

As part of these restructuring processes, neoliberal urbanization processes have been observable through the practice of production of space. Contemporary cities have been under rapid urban transformations and restructuring processes, and have become central places for neoliberal restructuring projects strategically (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 49). According to Peck et al. (2009, 57), cities are the key areas for the neoliberal rollback strategies since they were the central places for Keynesian systems, while being the key areas for the rollout of neoliberal programmes and policies since they are the centres of growth and innovation and places for experimenting devolved governance and institutional transformations. Peck et al. (2013, 1093) argue that cities are not passive recipients of neoliberalization processes, but the neoliberalization processes are continuously and actively constituted through global urbanizing regions. In this respect, “cities have become critical nodes, and points of tension (resistance, conflict, even riots, etc), in the evolving scalar politics of neoliberalization” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 49). Therefore, since the 1990s, urban areas have become critical places to understand dynamics such as limits, contradictions or changes of neoliberalism (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 49).

In this context, Peck et al. (2009, 49) classify restructuring processes and practices as: the moments of destruction – *dismantling moments of the previous system*; the moments of creation (of creative destruction of neoliberal urbanization) – *the creation of new practices*; and the mechanisms of neoliberal urbanization – *the processes which lead to these destruction and creation moments*. Within this practice, the practice of neoliberal urbanization produces and fosters spatial inequalities and fragmentation in urban space. To illustrate this, through transformations of the built environment and urban form, the urban housing stock has been restructured. Public-social housing stock has decreased and rent controls have been eliminated, while opportunities for speculative investment have been created through redevelopment and restructuring of the urban housing market (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 59–62). In addition, working class neighbourhoods have been subject to redevelopment for speculative development, and gated enclaves and “‘purified’ spaces of social reproduction”

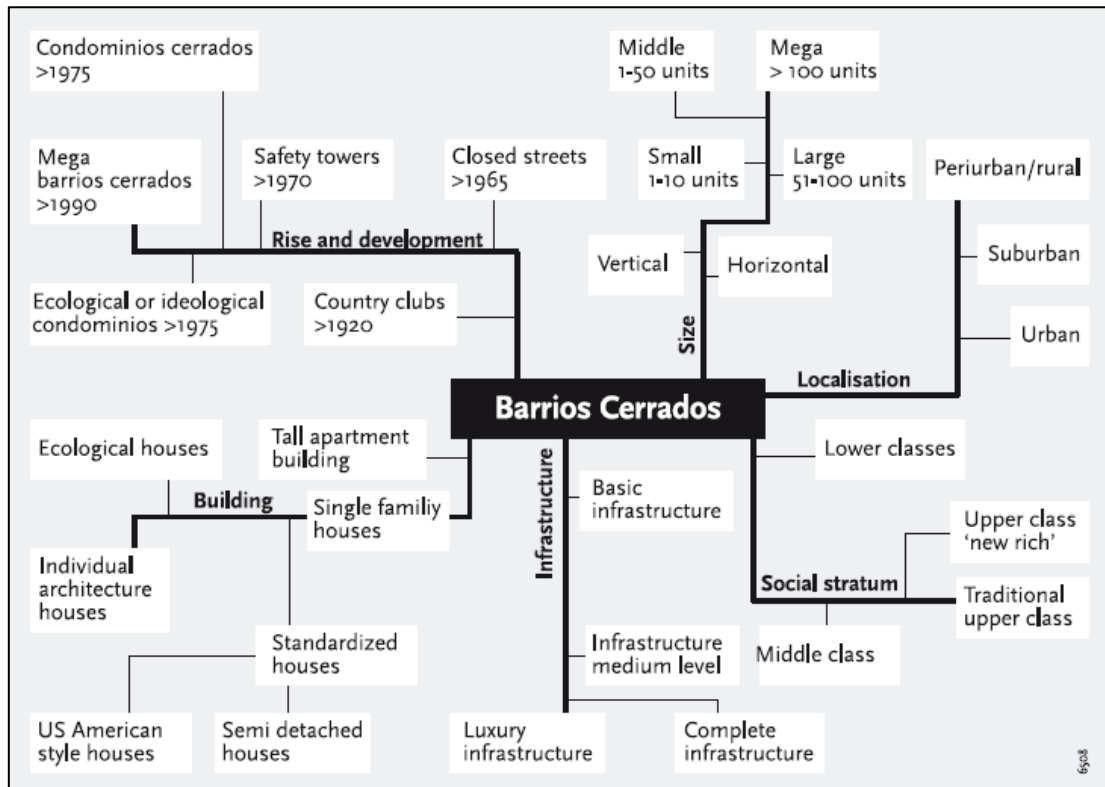
have been produced (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 59–62), which deepen existing spatial inequalities and fragmentation while producing new ones. The provision of urban infrastructure has changed. Graham and Marvin (2001) argue that “parallel set of processes are under way within which infrastructure networks are being ‘unbundled’ in ways that help sustain the fragmentation of the social and material fabric of cities” (p.33) while defining contemporary *splintering urbanism*. Graham and Marvin (2001) also discuss the gated enclaves as part of splintering urbanism, as the residential face of secessionary tendencies.

## 2.2 Rise of Housing Enclaves

In this context, housing enclaves have become a way of urban space production in many countries, with different versions and with different conceptualisations. Blakely and Snyder (1997) define *gated communities* as “residential areas with restricted access in which normally public space are privatised” (p 2), while drawing a comprehensive picture of gated communities in the US. Gated communities are defined as “security developments with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by nonresidents” (Blakely and Snyder 1997, 2). The authors differentiate gated communities from condominium buildings in terms of restricted access to shared spaces and facilities. Gated communities’ “walls and fences preclude public access to streets, sidewalks, parks, beaches, rivers, trails, playground – all resources that without gates or walls would be open and shared by all citizens of a locality” (Blakely and Snyder 1997, 2). In this definition, *restriction on the access to shared spaces and facilities by being gated* is the main criterion for a development to be considered as a *gated community*.

Borsdorf and Hidalgo (2010) point out the widespread development of, and boom in, gated communities – *barrios cerrados* – in Latin American countries. The concept of *barrios cerrados* (*closed neighbourhoods*), which is developed in the literature as an overarching concept for different types of housing enclaves, refers to “a dwelling complex that contains more than one unit, has a common infrastructure, and is separated from the public by gates and fences or walls” (Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2010, 26–27) with urban infrastructure and social facilities. According to the authors, *barrios cerrados* are being developed throughout Latin American countries, from the integrated regions with global system and medium size towns in Brazil to extreme southern regions of Chile. The *barrios cerrados* can be seen in different types of

“fenced neighbourhoods” (Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2010, 26) and are not limited to those for upper classes. Borsdorf and Hidalgo (2010) summarize different types of *barrios cerrados* developed in Latin American countries in terms of their rise and development, size, location, building type and social class in the mind map shown at Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The types of *barrios cerrados* in Latin American countries (their rise and development, size, location, building type and social class) (Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2010, 28)**

Another version of housing enclaves is the *condominium estates* in Singapore (Pow 2009). Rather than being a product of the real estate market, according to Pow (2009), condominium estates are developed with state involvement. The *condominium estates* are also gated and have private security. According to Pow (2009), *condominium estates* are closely related to “the selling of a gracious lifestyle and the exclusive good life” (p.221), therefore the *gates* and *walls* are more related to prestige and exclusivity than security. Pow (2009) asserts that *upscale condominium estates* in Singapore are similar to *fortified enclaves* in Sao Paulo in

terms of offering “a ‘total way of life’ that articulates common basic elements such as prestige, security, seclusion, social homogeneity, amenities and services” (p.221).

Cheshire, Wickes and White (2013) point out four characteristics of *Master Planned Estates* (MPEs) in Australia, which present similarities with other housing enclaves: First of all, MPEs provide physical and social infrastructure together with housing. Secondly, these facilities are provided either by the private sector or by partnerships of public and private actors. Thirdly, there is a considerable effort in beautification of the estates (landscaping and housing design) in order to foster exclusivity, and fourthly an effort by developers to build communities in MPEs. The authors criticize the tendency aiming to use Master Planned Estates as an overarching concept for various types of developments such as “large-scale comprehensively planned estates, prestige communities, retirement communities, suburban new towns, gated communities and privately governed estates” (Cheshire, Wickes, and White 2013, 282) in Australia.

Bodnar and Molnar (2010) criticize the concept of *gated community* in terms of putting “an emphasis on gating, which shifts attention unduly from social to physical exclusion and exaggerates the novelty of this type” and overstressing “the private nature of gated communities” (Bodnar and Molnar 2010, 790), while defining another version of enclaves – *residential parks* – developed in Hungary. According to Bodnar and Molnar (2010), *residential parks* have emerged as “a new genre of housing” (p.790) in Budapest, considering their emphasis on “upper-middle-class lifestyles, exclusive services, safety and seclusion” (p.790) in marketing of these housing projects.

To conclude, these examples show that *housing enclaves* have become a global phenomenon that has developed since the 1970s and has been expanding globally. They also show that the enclaves present many similarities as well as differences according to their contexts, development patterns and practices. As part of this global phenomenon, *branded housing projects* have developed in Turkey as a version of housing enclaves, since the early 2000s following the deepening of neoliberal restructuring processes in that country.



### **3 Branded Housing in Turkey**

#### **3.1 Neoliberal Urbanisation and the Construction Boom in Turkey (2000s)**

Turkey has been going through neoliberal restructuring and neoliberal urbanisation practices starting from the 1980s and deepening since the beginning of the 2000s. Kuyucu and Unsal (2010, 1484) argue that the 2001 economic crash, as a “major accumulation crisis”, is the breaking point for establishing a “fully neo-liberal system” in Turkey. Through this restructuring, cities in Turkey have been facing a construction boom (Balaban 2012). Balaban (2012) defines this construction boom as the increase in the volume of construction activity in Turkey in terms of increase of the construction sector’s share in GDP, rising share of the construction sector in employment, and financial and capital investments in construction, by showing the unprecedented rises in these three areas between the year 2001-2007. In addition, according to the Statistics Institute of Turkey (TUIK) Building Permits Report (2013), the total area of buildings which were given building permits in the year 2012 was five times higher than in 2002, which shows continuity of this expansion in construction up to 2013.

In this period, together with construction, the number of urban development projects has boomed. Kuyucu and Unsal (2010) define large “urban transformation projects” as main mechanisms for neoliberal restructuring in urban governance and housing markets in Turkey. There are no statistics showing the number of urban development projects. However, according to the news article based on the Branded Housing Projects Report of EVA Real Estate, in Istanbul % 7.7 of the total housing stock is provided by branded housing projects (400 000 housing units out of 5 103 586), and the number of these projects built in Istanbul has reached 852 (Gökkaya 2014), which provides some clues as to the volume of this boom in project-based development.

#### **3.2 Branded Housing in Turkey**

In daily language and media coverage, the term *branded housing projects* is used to define housing enclaves which provide various amenities (e.g. social facilities, open green spaces, sport facilities) within the confines of the projects for the project residents exclusively. The

projects have been produced as commodities for the market by private developers or public-private partnerships under particular *brands*.

### **3.2.1 Actors in the Branded Housing Projects**

The public sector plays a crucial role in the development of *branded housing projects* in Turkey. Balaban (2012, 26) emphasizes the role of the public sector in the construction boom that has taken place in Turkey, which development of branded housing projects is a part of. According to the author, the public sector “enthusiastically contributed to the development of construction boom between 2002 and 2007 in Turkey” (Balaban 2012, 26) and “government undertook significant steps to encourage public agencies and private developers to initiate large-scale urban (re) development projects” (Balaban 2012, 26). Within this process, new actors and partnerships (public-private) are being founded (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010). Housing Administration of Turkey (TOKİ) and Emlak Real Estate Partnership (Emlak Konut GYO) have been restructured and empowered in order to act as public developers for profit-oriented housing projects. After its transformation into a real estate partnership in 2003 until 2014, EmlakGYO took part in development of 48 branded housing projects in İstanbul (Emlak Konut GYO 2014), which constitute the scope of this research, and continues to develop more branded housing projects throughout different cities of Turkey.

### **3.2.2 Spatial Features of the Branded Housing Projects**

The projects present similar spatial patterns in terms of their design schemes and spatial segregation from the surrounding environment. Firstly, many branded housing projects have been designed as introverted cluster-like spatial formations. The buildings are located on the perimeters of the project area, which forms a spatial boundary, an *edge* in terms of Lynch’s (1960) terminology. Within the project area, the facilities which provide services exclusively for the residents are located inside this spatially segregated *district* (Lynch 1960). To illustrate, Figure 2 shows a typical example of introverted design and segregation pattern of the projects.

In some cases, publicly accessible facilities, such as supermarkets or shops, are located within the project areas. In these cases, access to these facilities is designed to allow non-residents access to them without entering into the confines of the projects.

Secondly, in addition to this design approach, the project areas are also physically segregated by being gated and walled. The boundary elements vary from concrete walls to razor wires. To illustrate, Figure 3 and Figure 4 show examples of physical segregation elements – gates and walls. In addition to their function of controlling access, by attaching the name of the brands onto the gates of the projects, these present a spectacle by combining the physical entrance with a representational one.

This spatial segregation enables packaging of the urban space within tangible borders as an urban spatial commodity which can be bought and sold. In other words, this spatial pattern fosters commodification through segregating *a slice of urban tissue* spatially.



**Figure 2: Istanbul Project, Ispartakule District, August 2015, Personal Archive**



**Figure 3: Gates, Ispartakule District, August 2015, Personal Archive**



**Figure 4: Boundary Elements, Atasehir District, August 2015, Personal Archive**

#### **Land Use Pattern**

### **3.2.3 Land Use Pattern of the Branded Housing Projects**

The branded housing projects present a similar land use pattern. According to the research, the facilities provided in the project areas can be grouped as open space facilities, indoor facilities and facilities provided both indoors and in open spaces. While open space facilities can be listed as parks, playgrounds, recreation areas; indoor facilities can be listed as restaurants, cafes, social rooms, and health and education facilities. Sport facilities (in the form of sport centres or sport areas) and carparks can be listed as both indoor and open space facilities in the project areas.

Access rights to these facilities and services are usually rights which are gained by being residents of the projects<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, buying or renting a house in the project grants residents the access rights to the facilities and services. Although the services and facilities in the projects are in general for exclusive use of the project residents, some publicly accessible facilities (with separate entrances) and limited access facilities (based on membership) can be found in the projects areas as well. In the case of limited access facilities, the access to the facilities is on a membership basis, and being a resident does not grant access right. In such conditions, residents usually receive discounts in membership fees.

The residents are responsible for paying monthly payments to management companies of the projects in return for receiving services and management of the facilities. Therefore, within this practice, the access rights to services and facilities are being commodified.

### **3.3 Branded Housing Projects in the Media: Discourse Formation through the Dialectic of the *Imaginary* and the *Real***

*“Dream a place.... which touches your heart whenever you look at it ...”*  
(“Bizim Evler 4 Project Catalogue,” n.d.)

The branded housing projects are widely promoted and advertised through various media, which produces a hegemonic discourse for branded housing projects. In media content, while the imaginary life at branded housing is produced, the urban reality with its problems and the practical solutions these projects offer are presented as well. Within the dialectic of the imaginary and the real, the discourse idealises the branded housing projects as the best places to live.

As Mosco (2009) argues, “communication is more than the transmission of data or information; it is the *social production of meaning that constitutes a relationship.*”(p 6). Following this relational definition of communication, this paper argues that the hegemonic discourse produced by the media for branded housing projects plays a crucial role in discursive

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<sup>2</sup> In some cases, access right can be bought by the non-residents as well. An example for this is buying a membership for a sports centre which is located in a project area. However, this is only the case for the facilities and services with access rights which can be separated from their location.

formation of the projects. The discourse formation in media is investigated by analysing the news articles, project catalogues and print advertisements of the branded housing projects.

### 3.3.1 News Content

The discourse formation regarding branded housing projects in the news content has been investigated by undertaking content analysis of the news articles about branded housing projects as the first research subject. For this investigation, a news article database was created by collecting the articles from two sources: online databases of the newspapers and news archive of the 'Institut Francais d'Etudes Anatoliennes' (IFEA) (print newspaper clippings).

The online databases of the first four newspapers with the highest circulation numbers- Zaman, Posta, Hurriyet and Sabah- were reviewed<sup>3</sup> in order to select the news articles about branded housing projects published between the years 2003-2014. Due to the high return of news articles (around 800 news articles); the results were narrowed down to those about the six projects from the scope of the research. Via this filtering process, database of 181 news articles was created, which includes 164 news articles from the online databases and 17 news articles collected from IFEA archive.

Six aspects were identified as a result of inductive content analysis of the news articles: the branded housing, the extremes, the gain-win-benefit through the projects, home ownership, the speed of development, the services and facilities, and the economic development. Two aspects are focused and discussed here in relation with the imaginary, the real and commodification of urban space: *the branded housing* and *the services and facilities*.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the circulation, there is a threshold between the 5th highest circulated newspaper and 6th highest. The circulation of the 5th highest newspaper (around 300 000) is nearly as twice as for the 6th highest newspaper (nearly 150 000). This threshold limits the newspaper sample to the 5 most widely circulated ones. One of the five newspapers, Sozcu, is excluded from the sample, since the newspaper was founded at 2007 and this publication period does not overlap with the scope of the research (2003-2014).

Branded Housing:

*“When saying KentPlus<sup>4</sup>, we would like that a particular standard comes to mind.”* (Evran 2006)

In the news content, branded housing is associated with quality and luxury housing. *Being branded* is associated with having a certain quality standard, which proposes a guarantee for what residents are buying. Identifying the *quality housing* with *branded housing* contributes to presenting branded housing projects as *ideal living environments*. Via this framing, projects differentiate themselves from the rest of housing stock with the claim of *providing high quality living standards*.

The second claim identified in the content is that branded housing projects are different from the rest of the housing stock as they provide a *living environment*. They are not *just housing*, but *more than housing*. The developers put emphasis on the fact that their product is not just a housing unit, but a living area. For example, in one excerpt, the developer states that *“we do not sell houses, we sell living area”* (“Agaogly My World Europe Project Catalogue,” n.d.). In this case, the developer presents the living area itself as a *commodity*, and proudly states that *the real product* they sell is *the living area*, which means the living area is commodified in such discourse.

Services and Facilities:

*Cetinsaya said that in the project there will be a city square, a 45-thousand-square meter grove, a four-star hotel, 15 shops, pharmacy, café and restaurants. In the grove, there will be common areas like swimming pools, walking and running tracks. In Atakent 3, there are a big pool, waterfalls between housing blocks, and pools as well.* (Yoldas 2011)

As in the excerpt above, the services and facilities the projects provide are listed in the news content, which presents buyers a list of products in return of their payment.

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<sup>4</sup> *KentPlus* means *CityPlus* in Turkish.

The services and facilities are presented in the news content in relation with provision of urban infrastructure and provision of technical services (with after-sale provisions). Provision of green open spaces and access to sport facilities are emphasized in the content, both of which are very poorly provided in Istanbul. According to World Cities Culture Forum Report (BOP Consulting 2013), the ratio of public open spaces (public parks and gardens) within the total macroform of the city of Istanbul is only 1.5%. Therefore, the provision of these in the projects presents pragmatic/practical solutions to these everyday problems for the people who can afford to live in the projects.

### **3.3.2 Project Catalogues**

*A big city for the ones who have big dreams* (“Batisehir Project Catalogue,” n.d.)

The discourse formation regarding branded housing projects through project catalogues has been investigated by undertaking a content analysis of the catalogues as the second research subject.. A database of 28 project catalogues was created by selecting a sample of catalogues from different brands and different developers, selecting catalogues of both completed and continuing projects, and selecting both online and print catalogues.

#### **Textual Content:**

First, twelve aspects were identified as a result of inductive content analysis of the textual content of the project catalogues: being forward looking, the brand and branding, the design aspects of the projects, the dreams and expectations, the exclusiveness of the projects, the gain-win-benefit of the residents, the life, the location aspects, the services and facilities, socialising and social relations in the projects, the superior nature of the projects, and wellbeing and welfare at the projects. Two aspects are focused and discussed here in relation with the imaginary, the real and commodification of urban space: *the dreams and expectations* and *the facilities and services*.



Dreams and Expectations:

*Everything has been started with a dream...We dreamed to build a peaceful place about which everyone would say "glad I am here". In order to realize our dream, we inspired from your dreams. Your expectations encouraged us and we started out. ("Bizim Evler 4 Project Catalogue," n.d.)*

In their catalogues, branded housing projects are idealised as the best places to live, like they are presented in the news content. The projects are framed as desired places in which everyone wants to live, the places which people dream of, and the places where all expectations are met.

In these representations of space, while the projects are framed as the *ideal living spaces*, the concept of *ideal living space* is also discursively re-produced. The excerpt below exemplifies this discursive formation:

*Think about an ideal life and ideal living space. Let there be a pond, open and closed swimming pools, walking tracks, schools in it, and a subway station at its entrance. As practical as you could go for shopping whenever you would like to, and as romantic as you could be with nature whenever you would like to. ("Idealist Kent Project Catalogue," n.d.)*

While representing the branded housing projects as the *ideal*, the discourse redefines the *ideal* as per the characteristics of the projects.

In the textual content of the catalogues, the only idealised aspect is not the space itself. The life in branded housing projects is idealised as well. This idealisation is fostered by the aspects of personal life, for example, "[a] healthy and fit living is not a dream" ("Idealist Kent Project Catalogue," n.d.), or as in this example "*the exclusiveness you dream of is in your life*" ("Istmarina Project Catalogue," n.d.). It is also fostered by the aspects of social life, to illustrate, "[a] decent life and sincere neighbourhood relationships are not dreams" ("Idealist Kent Project Catalogue," n.d.). As these examples demonstrate, the references can be tangible aspects (like *a healthy life*) or more vague concepts (like *exclusiveness which a person dreams*

of). In all of these cases, living in a branded housing project is represented as a ticket to an *ideal place to live* and an *idealised way of life*.

Facilities and Services:

*Bulvar Phase, where wide **walking tracks** within the **lavender gardens** come across with **restaurant-cafe** by the **pond**, is designed for the ones who would like to socialize and meet with nature.* (“Bulvar Istanbul Project Catalogue,” n.d.) (bold emphasis added)

The services and facilities provided within the confines of the projects constitute a core part of the discourse produced in the textual content of the catalogues. The types of facilities and services which residents will have access to are presented to the readers. They are presented as amenities which ease residents’ life and increase residents’ living standards; and their contribution to the residents’ quality of life is emphasised.

In some cases, the amenities are presented as the ones which are not easily accessible or which are lacking of in the city (in Istanbul) but the projects make these accessible to their residents.

*In Idealist Kent<sup>5</sup>, to go to the school, children will not wake up very early in the morning to take to the roads. In Idealist Kent, three schools, two of which are public and one of which is private, are located within walking distance of your children. Without suffocating in the traffic of Istanbul, your children will go to the schools on foot in the greenery.*(“Idealist Kent Project Catalogue,” n.d.)

In this sense, with the imaginary of an idealised life within the branded housing project, *living in a branded housing project* is presented as a solution to the real life problems of living in the city of Istanbul.

The facilities and services are presented together with the activities the residents can experience, which is directly related to their daily life, as exemplified in the excerpt below.

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<sup>5</sup> *Idealist Kent* means *Idealist City* in Turkish

*In order for you to start the day every morning with running among the trees, to inhale fresh air, to have peace with the purity of nature, we allocate 90% of the project area to green areas. ("Bizim Evler 2 Project Catalogue," n.d.)*

In such content, the *imaginary* actions of an idealised life and an idealised spatial experience are presented together with the *real* facilities provided by the project to the residents (e.g. 90% of the project area is allocated for green areas).

In this sense, buying or renting a house in a branded housing project, which grants to access to these facilities, is presented as a ticket, this time, to these imaginary actions.

### **Visual Content:**

Second, six aspects were identified as a result of inductive content analysis of the visual content of the project catalogues: the spatial features of the projects, the facilities, the people living and working in the projects, the activities taken place in the projects, the transportation modes, and the use of plans and diagrams. Two aspects are focused and discussed here in relation with the imaginary, the real and commodification of urban space: *the spatial features* and *the facilities*.

#### Spatial Features and Facilities:

The representations of spatial features of the projects are recurring aspects of the project catalogue visuals. The projects are represented most often by using the models of open spatial features which are building façades and the external shared spaces of the projects. The external shared spaces are represented by the visuals showing the facilities of the projects. In terms of facilities, two features were extensively used: green open spaces and recreational areas, and water bodies including swimming pools and ponds.

In addition to building façades and external shared spaces, models or photos of the houses are also used to represent the projects.



**Figure 5: Project Catalogue Visual** (“Gol Panorama Evleri Project Catalogue,” n.d.)

The visuals frequently combine the spatial features with activities by using figures of residents. These visuals aim to demonstrate the *promised life* in the projects together with the *promised place to live* for the residents.

The visuals together with the textual content re-produce the images of ideal places to live and ideal way of living for the residents.

### **3.3.3 Print Advertisements**

The discourse formation regarding branded housing projects through print advertisements has been investigated by undertaking content analysis of the advertisements as the third research subject. A database of the print advertisements was created for this investigation. In the scope of this paper, three advertisements are discussed in terms of representation of branded housing projects and discourse formation in relation with the imaginary, the real and the commodification of urban space.

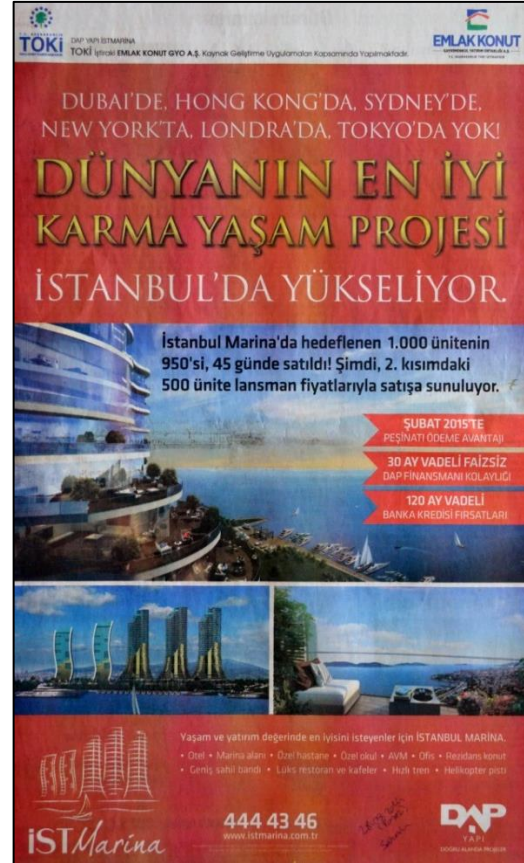


Figure 6: On the left Idealist Kent Project Newspaper Advertisement (“Idealist Kent Newspaper Advertisement” 2006) , on the right Istmarina Project Newspaper Advertisement (“Istmarina Newspaper Advertisement” 2014)

The first one is the newspaper advertisement of Idealist Kent Project (Figure 6). The slogan of the advertisement is “All the ideal things in Istanbul came together!” referring that the project will provide the ideal *states* of Istanbul. The sub-heading explains what these ideal *states* can be: “In an ideal Istanbul: Schools should be close to homes... Children should play at safe areas... Windows should be opened to a lush green happiness...” In these sentences, five topics can be identified: the convenience of accessing social facilities, the safety, a children-friendly environment, the greenery, and the happiness. The advertisement continues with a second slogan: “You are invited to live in your ideal Istanbul”. Within this sentence, the ideal *states* which will be provided in the project are defined as *ideals of the residents*. In this sense, the developer claims that the project will meet the expectations of the residents by embodying their ideals. The text includes listing the *items which are included in the package* as houses,

exclusive social facilities, open spaces, education facilities, sport facilities and a commercial centre. Thus, the text redefines the ideals of the people.

The advertisement also uses the images of general views of the project, the external shared spaces of the project, and the types of buildings located in the project. These images are combined with slogans such as “With its every fine details, it is designed to provide you a glorious life...”.

The slogans found in the advertisement present the project as an ideal place to live and a life-changing ticket, a ticket for a better life experience.

The second one is the newspaper advertisement of Istmarina Project (Figure 6). The headline slogan of the advertisement is that “There is not any [project like this] in Dubai, Hong Kong, Sydney, New York, London or Tokyo. The best mixed life project [referring to mixed use] in the world has been raising in İstanbul”. In this example, the emphasis is on the uniqueness of the project, and its provision of different uses. Another slogan used in the advertisement is that “Istanbul Marina, for the ones who want to have the best in life and investment value”. In this case, the emphasis is not only on the life and facilities which residents will have access to, but also on the economic value of the project. This emphasis is also supported by listing the payment options in the advertisement. In addition, the text includes listing the *items which are included in the package* as hotel, marina area, private hospital, private school, shopping mall, offices, serviced apartments, wide coastal strip, luxury restaurants and cafes, speed train, and heliport.

The advertisement also uses the images of general views of the project, the views from the houses, images of balconies as vista points, the marina area, and the seaside. Through the images, advertisement uses the sea-side location of the project to promote it. In this respect, living in the project is presented as a ticket to live in a place with such a view, while the slogans present the project as an exceptional place of which residents will be privileged.

**MY WORLD**  
ATAŞEHİR

**Dünyanın 9 harikası**

**Bu harikalar dünyasında, aradığınız yaşamı bulacaksınız...**

Bir sabah uyanırsunuz ve kendinizi dünyanın 9 harikasından birinde yaşadığını buluyorsunuz! Burada, My World'ün ve kentin en göz alıcı mahallelerinden biri. Her mahalle, 5 yıldızlı bir otelin tüm olanaklarıyla donatılmış, işlevsel ve estetik mimari çözümlerle farklı beğenilere göre yaşamın sunan bu mahalleri, birbirinden çekişli adlar ile de farklılaştırarak...

14'lerden 5+7'ere kadar seçkin sunan Starland, Equinox ve SunCity'deki dairelerden birini ve de gönlüneceğiniz ve yıldızları seyredeceğinizi Diamond'daki çatı dairelerden birini seçebilirsiniz. Residence konforu arıyorsanız, en harikası Andromeda'da bulacaksınız. Birbirine bağlı 4 kuleden oluşan bu harika yapı, giriş bölümündeki dokuzuncu harika My Club ile My World'ün en hareketli yeri olacak. Seçeceğinizi yaşam ister HighPark ya da MoonTown'da, ister Sapphire'de olsun, harika bir dünyada yaşayacaksınız.

Tavsiyemiz, sadece zevkinizi gözetmez; çünkü seçeceğinizi ev hangisi olursa olsun, tekniğe ve sosyal altyapı zaten eksiksiz tamamlanmış olacak. Tabii böyle bir dünyadaki evinizin yüksek yatırım değerlerinden de emin olacaksınız.

My World'e yaşıyorsanız, artık bir site sakini değil, evrensel bir yaşama anlayış ve felsefesi ile çevrelenmiş bir dünya vatandaşısınız... Dünyada yaşam çok yakında başlıyor. Gelin, bu müthiş başlangıç sizin de yaşamınızdaki dönüştürücü gerçekleştiretin.

**www.myworld.com.tr | 444 6 777**

**Agaoglu**  
Yaşam Mimarı

**Figure 7: Project Agaoglu My World Atasehir Magazine Advertisement (“Agaoglu My World Atasehir Magazine Advertisement” 2005)**

The third one is the magazine advertisement of Agaoglu My World Atasehir Project (Figure 7). The headline slogan-“the nine wonders of the world”- refers to the nine different sections of the project and the Seven Wonders of the World. Through this self-avowing, the advertisement claims the preciousness and uniqueness of the project’s nine sections. The sub-heading continues with this claim by stating that “In this world of wonders, you will find the life you are looking for”. The text continues by arguing the advantages to live in the project and that will come with the purchase of a house in the project. It also includes a list of the *items which are included in the package* such as “natural living area” referring to the project’s the open green spaces, “eye-catching harmony of functional and aesthetic architecture”, social facilities (open-closed swimming pools, playgrounds, walking tracks, botanical gardens, tennis and basketball courts, meeting rooms), entertainment and shopping centre, technologic infrastructure (internet, TV, phone, air-conditioning, white goods) among others.

The advertisement also uses the images of a general view of the project, the greenery (which is very vaguely pictured without any borders), the projects' different sections and their external shared spaces, and a diagram showing transportation routes together with the location of the project. The surrounding environment of the project is covered by greenery, which is deceptive since the project is surrounded by the urban area in reality.

Again in this advertisement, living in this project area is presented as a ticket to a new life. Buying or renting a house in the project is defined as a life-changing moment that allows resident to live in an exceptional place; a world of wonders.

#### **4 Commodifying the Utopia: Production of Social Consent for Commodification of Urban Space**

The findings of the analyses of discourse formation in media regarding branded housing projects show that the projects are idealised as best places to live. The projects are aggrandized by endowing them with 'imaginary powers' as places which provide imaginary solutions to real life problems.

Lefebvre argues the relationship between the imaginary and the real in the production of space, which constitutes a part of the discursive formation of branded housing projects in this case. As Kipfer (2002, 140–141) explains:

Neo-capitalism takes root in everyday life by integrating utopian aspirations into these everyday spaces [the homogenised and fragmented landscapes of bungalows (*pavillons*), high rise apartments (*grands ensembles*), freeways and leisure spaces (beaches and resort towns)] which become associated with desires for a different, erotic appropriation of body and nature, hopes for non-instrumental human relationships, or daydreams about freedom from repetitive drudgery. (Kipfer 2002, 140–141)

This hegemonic discourse formation which integrates *utopian aspirations* into *everyday spaces* poses questions regarding the *production of social consent for commodification of urban space*. As Kipfer (2002) argues, conceptualisations of hegemony by Gramsci and by Lefebvre



are “infused with spatial and urban dimensions” (p 134), which provide a theoretical opening to investigate this production of social consent for commodification of urban space.

According to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, “[the ruling power] must be able to reach into the minds and lives of its subordinates, exercising its power as what appears to be a free expression of their own interests and desires” (Jones 2006, 4). According to Mosco (2009), Gramsci “sought to understand the specific contours of advanced capitalist societies by concentrating on their capacity to base control on *consent* more than on physical coercion” (p 206). In this sense, hegemony represents “the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it accept it as ‘common sense’ and ‘natural’ ” in addition to political and economic control (Chandler 2011).

Harvey (2005) points out the importance of Gramsci's approach to understand the ramifications of abstract frameworks in the daily life of the masses. In this case of branded housing projects, in media discourse regarding the projects the *utopian aspirations* (e.g. freedom, nature, peace) are infused with the *abstract frameworks of hegemonic groups* (ownership of privileged services and facilities, exclusiveness, particular ways of life) while framing the projects as *idealised places to live*.

These representations of spaces produced in media discourse contribute to the production of social consent for spaces like branded housing projects, which are intensively commodified spaces according to the research. In other words, the case of branded housing projects demonstrates the practice of social consent production for contemporary commodification of urban space through media discourse, which is the hegemonic discourse for idealised places to live and ways of living.

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