

## **Disadvantaged women's satisfaction with mass housing projects that are developed in the context of squatter housing regeneration: the case of Ankara, Turkey**

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Since the endorsement of the “cities without slums” action plan at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, the pace of slum demolition increased starkly in many parts of the developing world. Ankara is one of these cities with a declining squatter housing population. Keles (1993) states that, in the year 1990, approximately 58% of the city's population (1.74 of 3 million residents) was living in an informal or squatter housing, known as *gecekondu* (a Turkish expression for houses erected illegally in one night usually on public land). Although scholars like Karpat (1976: 24) describe *gecekondu*s as “a source of poverty, rundown housing, crowded construction of lower-class people, high rate of crime and divorce, violence, (...), racial discrimination, (...), and later, urban guerrillas,” others like Duyar-Kienast (2005) discuss the positive attributes of these areas, including the strong sense of community, low-rise buildings with gardens, and the liveliness of public open spaces. According to a recent report published by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Internal Affairs (2013), by the year 2013, the number of people living in such settlements in Ankara decreased to approximately 7%. The Mass Housing Development Administration of Turkey's Prime Ministry (TOKI), which is tasked with the mission of alleviating the country's housing shortage and transforming the informal housing areas, play a key role in this transformation.

In squatter housing regeneration projects, TOKI uses a property-led regeneration model. This entails the demolition of squatter houses and replacing them with mass high-rise apartments, which are usually constructed on the same site and at a higher density (Karaman, 2013). These mass housing units are then made

available to displaced residents for purchase via mortgage loans and to the public at market prizes. Therefore, although the former president of TOKI claimed that TOKI's mass housing projects are "public housing" (Bayraktar, 2011), and although there may be many similarities between these developments and some public housing projects regarding their physical attributes, Karaman (2013: 723) states that "TOKI's mass-housing projects do not qualify as public housing, as they are homeownership programs."

A typical TOKI mass housing project includes high-rise apartments that look alike. The apartment buildings are designed merely for residential purposes. They are clustered around small playgrounds or parking lots, and are surrounded with passive green areas. In typical TOKI projects that are developed in the context of squatter housing regeneration, there are no sports facilities or commercial places. Automobile usage is promoted. Streets are usually empty. In Ankara case, while some of these mass housing developments are located inside the heart of the city, some others are located in the urban periphery, away from jobs and urban amenities.

Although there is a growing literature discussing the residential satisfaction of people living in mass housing (e.g., Kellekci and Berkoz, 2006; Berkoz et al., 2009; Herfert et al., 2013), little is known about disadvantaged women's satisfaction with these areas, especially with mass housing developments that are located in inner-city neighborhoods. This research aims to understand the predictors of women's satisfaction with mass housing projects that are developed in the context of squatter housing regeneration. More specifically, the paper asks whether and to what extent does moving to mass housing affect women's satisfaction with their home and neighborhood, and how does moving from a squatter settlement affect women's relationship with mass housing developments?

Data is drawn from an on-going research project in Ankara. Research participants are selected from two inner-city mass housing developments that were built in the context of squatter housing regeneration. Next, from the selected sites, women with ages ranging from 25 to 55 years participated in a residential satisfaction questionnaire (n=59) and a group interview activity (n=18). While some of the participants moved to TOKI units from the destroyed squatter settlements (31%), some

others moved from more affluent areas. The average family household income of the participants ranged between \$590–885. This amount is way below the country's poverty level for a family with two children, which was approximately \$1500 in 2015 (TURK-IS Haber Bulteni, 2015). In the questionnaires, the authors investigated women's satisfaction with their past and current home, as well as with their past and current neighborhood. Women were also asked questions to understand their attachment with past/current home and neighborhood, since place attachment and place satisfaction are highly related constructs (Amerigo and Aragonés, 1990; Fleury-Bahi *et al.*, 2008). The author measured the predictors of residential satisfaction among women by using ordinal regression analysis.

The results show that the specific features of the dwelling and neighborhood that were critical in predicting women's residential satisfaction with mass housing include: size of the apartment, cost of the house, construction quality, indoor brightness, familiarity with the neighborhood, proximity to the children's school, presence of trusted neighbors, safety actions provided by the authorities, and municipal services. In general, women's satisfaction with the neighborhood significantly decreased after their resettlement; no change occurred at the dwelling level. While women's satisfaction with two of the ten features of the dwelling increased significantly, their satisfaction with a large number of neighborhood features (including proximity, quality and quantity of shopping, cultural and recreational places, and strength of social ties) decreased significantly after they moved to TOKI. Group interview results support these findings. Many women emphasized that they are dissatisfied especially with the safety of the neighborhood, lack of shopping and recreational places, sense of community, construction quality of the houses and the services provided by the apartment managers. Furthermore, both survey and group interview results revealed that while satisfaction with home increase among women who moved from the squatter settlements, no change occurred among those women's satisfaction with the neighborhood. These findings indicate that TOKI's mass housing program is unable to regenerate the social fabric of the neighborhood. Instead, evidence shows that TOKI developments promote alienation and a sedentary lifestyle. These findings will assist planners and designers to create better places for women to live.

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