

**Spaces of Ideology and Capital:
Housing Enclaves of Islamism in Istanbul**

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the intricate interplay between capital, ideology, and the built environment, focusing on Türkiye's urban landscape. Türkiye's urbanization trajectory has been profoundly influenced by the convergence of Islamism (or political Islam) and neoliberalism since the late twentieth century. Within this context, Başakşehir, a satellite city located in the northwestern outskirts of Istanbul, serves as an exceptional site for examining Islamism's spatial experiments across various scales. This research views the settlement as a model town, showcasing how faith-based ideology and capital networks have come together to form a spatial power regime, shaping the town's urban layout, architectural characteristics, and community dynamics. The study of this specific site contributes to a broader understanding of how urban space is transformed into a field of performance for the key players of capital and ideology, thereby enriching the understanding of the relations of power and production behind current architectural and urban space production in Türkiye.

Başakşehir emerged as a modest housing project in the mid-1990s and has since transformed into a provincial district of Istanbul, predominantly inhabited by conservative groups. This dissertation argues that placemaking activities in Başakşehir, in various forms and functions, are the spatial manifestations of Islamism's shifting urban aspirations over the past three decades. Architectural and urban spaces in the settlement act as catalysts, actively propelling and expediting these aspirations. Through extensive fieldwork conducted in multiple institutions and sites, this dissertation examines three components of the built environment: housing, public space, and educational space. These components are analyzed comprehensively, considering their architectural features, ideological imprints, functional aspects, and underlying relations of production.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore l'interaction complexe entre le capital, l'idéologie et l'environnement bâti, en se concentrant sur le paysage urbain de la Turquie. La trajectoire d'urbanisation de la Turquie a été profondément influencée par la convergence de l'islamisme (ou l'islam politique) et du néolibéralisme depuis la fin du vingtième siècle. Dans ce contexte, Başakşehir, une ville satellite située à la périphérie nord-ouest d'Istanbul, constitue un site exceptionnel pour examiner les expérimentations spatiales de l'islamisme à différentes échelles. Cette recherche considère cet établissement comme une ville modèle, montrant comment l'idéologie fondée sur la foi et les réseaux de capitaux se sont associés pour former un régime de pouvoir spatial, façonnant la disposition urbaine, les caractéristiques architecturales et la dynamique communautaire de la ville. L'étude de ce site spécifique contribue à une meilleure compréhension de la manière dont l'espace urbain se transforme en un terrain de jeu pour les principaux acteurs du capital et de l'idéologie, enrichissant ainsi la compréhension des relations de pouvoir et de production qui sous-tendent la production actuelle d'espaces architecturaux et urbains en Turquie.

Başakşehir est apparu comme un modeste projet de logements au milieu des années 1990 et est depuis devenu un district provincial d'Istanbul, principalement habité par des groupes conservateurs. Cette thèse soutient que les activités de création de lieux à Başakşehir, sous différentes formes et fonctions, sont les manifestations spatiales des aspirations urbaines changeantes de l'islamisme au cours des trois dernières décennies. Les espaces architecturaux et urbains dans l'établissement agissent comme des catalyseurs, propulsant et accélérant activement ces aspirations. À travers des travaux sur le terrain approfondis menés dans de multiples institutions et sites, cette thèse examine trois composantes de l'environnement bâti : le logement, l'espace public et l'espace éducatif. Ces composantes sont analysées de manière exhaustive, en tenant compte de leurs caractéristiques architecturales, empreintes idéologiques, aspects fonctionnels et des relations sous-jacentes de production.

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Introduction

The actors, stories, and spaces associated with political Islam have intrigued my mind since I read *Modern Mahrem* (The Forbidden Modern) by Nilüfer Göle in 2012.¹ I purchased the book from one of the oldest second-hand booksellers in Istanbul, Beyoğlu, and started reading it on a bus ride to Ankara. *Modern Mahrem* is centred around the complex relationships between modernity, religion, and gender, particularly focusing on young, veiled women in Türkiye during the early 1990s. Portraying pious women of the time as oppressed identities hurt by the notion of once-dominant secular modernity, Göle discusses various tensions and polarizations in society arising from religiosity, modernism, sexuality, and identity politics.

At the time I read the book, two decades had passed since the book's original publication. During this span of time, Türkiye's political landscape had undergone significant changes. A shift in tone had taken place in the conflict between secular Muslim, conservative Muslim, and non-Muslim groups, and these groups' positions in society had changed. Türkiye had now entered a transitional era once again, characterized by changes in human rights, freedom of belief, and social equality. Following the establishment of the secular Republic of Türkiye in 1923, religious conservatives had been marginalized in the country's different fields for decades. However, in the 2000s, they started to move from the periphery to the centre of society. The effect of this centralization was evident in a variety of fields, including architecture and urban design. From that bus ride onward, I began thinking about the spatial manifestations of upwardly mobile

¹ Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem: Medeniyet ve Örtünme* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1992).

Islamist groups in Türkiye as well as their changing roles as rulers, managers, investors, and beneficiaries of this ongoing transformation.

My initial curiosity about the spatial dimensions of Islamism evolved into an academic pursuit after the Occupy Gezi movement in Türkiye in 2013. A widespread demonstration swept the nation as diverse social groups took to the streets, expressing their discontent following the prime minister's announcement of plans to replace Istanbul's Gezi Park with a shopping mall modeled after an Ottoman military barracks. One of the underlying objectives of this project was to revive Istanbul's imperial history and Islamic heritage within historically significant locations, including Gezi Park and Taksim Meydanı (Square), which had previously been associated with leftist thought. However, deeming this endeavour—the transformation of a symbolic urban space into an attraction centre embellished with historical architectural elements—as a purely political move would be an oversimplification. An additional goal of this project was to restructure Istanbul to entice investment from Muslim-majority countries on an international scale. In essence, it was a market-oriented initiative adorned with ideological undertones. In response, the Occupy Gezi movement emerged suddenly, causing an ephemeral shift in the country's political climate but leaving an indelible mark on Türkiye's collective memory.² Consequently, considering the fervour and disruption brought about by the Occupy Gezi movement, I became

² Following the large-scale demonstrations, smaller groups of people continued to resist other revanchist urban projects. These included student groups protesting a planned highway through the forests of the Middle East Technical University, and Alevi citizens protesting the construction of a place of worship, *cemevi*, in the Tuzluca neighbourhood of Ankara, which was seen as a show of force by a powerful Islamist community against Alevi citizens. Although the public resistance challenged the political actors' urban interventions, these actors have never stopped their market-oriented Islamist pursuits in the built environment. Neşecan Balkan, Erol M. Balkan, and Ahmet F. Öncü, eds., "Introduction," in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, vol. 14, Dislocations (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 4.

increasingly interested in exploring how the ruling actors of the neoliberal Islamism manifest their power in urban spaces.

In the summer of 2015, just before starting my doctoral studies at McGill University in Canada, I read Orhan Pamuk's *Kafamda Bir Tuhaflık* (A Strangeness in My Mind).³ The novel narrates Istanbul's urban transformation through multiple subjects: changing political actors, changing society, and the changing built environment of the city from the 1960s to the 2010s. The city is depicted through the eyes of a street vendor named Mevlüt, who roams the city streets every day, trying to decipher his "strange" sentiments and contemplations about people, life, and the city itself. As a migrant to the city from an Anatolian town, Mevlüt struggles to find a sense of belonging in Istanbul, a city embroiled in conflicts between leftists, nationalists, secularists, and Islamists, along with the social, economic, and spatial manifestations of these conflicts. In this lifelong process, a "strangeness" follows him—stemming from his failed attempts to articulate these conflicts, to become an integral part of them, or to dismiss them. After reading about the multifaceted dynamics surrounding the rise of political Islam in Türkiye through Mevlüt's story, the "strangeness in my mind" became clear to me. It concerned my continuing quest to carve out my own path, cultivate my own values, and construct my own world—as a woman, myself, who grew up in a conservative social environment marked by conditional morals. This dissertation is a testament to this ongoing endeavour.

³ Orhan Pamuk, *Kafamda Bir Tuhaflık* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014).

The problem

This dissertation examines the complex relationship between ideology, capital, and the built environment. While not unique, Türkiye presents a remarkable case where Islamism (or political Islam) and its merging with neoliberalism have led to profound transformations in cities since the late twentieth century.⁴ It is important to note that the country has never been officially grounded in Islamist principles. Nevertheless, faith-based ideology has played an important role in the reorganisation of state institutions, governance of cities, and urban development, particularly for the last three decades. In this context, Başakşehir, a satellite city on the northwestern periphery of Istanbul, serves as an exceptional setting for observing placemaking activities of Islamism in Türkiye. My aim is to scrutinize the spatial and social characteristics of Başakşehir, with a particular focus on its housing projects, public spaces, and educational facilities, along with their socio-political and economic dimensions.

Before delving into the historical background of Başakşehir and situating it within the framework of Islamist placemaking in Türkiye, I would like to clarify certain terms and their usage in the subsequent sections of this research. Firstly, when I refer to “ideology,” I mean a set of ideas, beliefs, principles, concepts, or notions that not only unite a specific group of individuals but also navigate their actions.⁵ Ideology serves to define and enforce what is

⁴ I use the terms “Islamism” and “political Islam” interchangeably, referring to the intersection of Islam and politics. The understanding and usage of these terms vary depending on different contexts, scholars, and individuals. See: Jocelyne Cesari, “Political Islam: More than Islamism,” *Religions* 12, no. 5 (April 23, 2021): 2.

⁵ Ian Buchanan, “Ideology,” in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001/acref-9780199532919-e-345>.

commonly accepted as common sense.⁶ In this regard, this research focuses on the concept of faith-based ideology, characterized by norms and values derived from a deliberate interpretation of a religious or spiritual framework. It examines how ruling politicians, state actors, capital holders, and religious communities instrumentalize faith-based ideology, particularly Islamism, in the creation and utilization of the built environment, and how, in turn, the built environment influences ideology, shaping social interactions, supporting specific economic systems, embodying symbolic meanings, and reflecting ideas regarding the notions such as history, culture, heritage, and privacy. Over time, the design and structure of the built environment actively influence whether prevailing systems of thought are maintained or evolve.

When I mention the terms “Islamist” or “Islamism,” I do not refer to Islam as a religion, nor do I allude to individuals’ commitment to religious faith and their ways of practicing it. Instead, Islamism, in this work, represents a faith-based political system of thought which intertwines Islamic norms with politics and governance, seeking to re-structure, shape, or influence state, and society.⁷ Islamism is a modern concept that is prone to change based on the specific circumstances of a given context. In contrast, Islam, as a religion, is believed to remain unchanged throughout history, regardless of context. In this vein, I also make a clear distinction

⁶ For works that delve into the role of ideology in advancing or defending the social position of a particular group—the ruling class, see the conceptualization the terms ideology by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as well as Marxist philosophers Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Christopher John Arthur, *The German Ideology - Part One* (New York: International Publishers, 1970); Antonio Gramsci, Joseph A. Buttigieg, and Antonio Callari, *Prison Notebooks*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 85–126.

⁷ In this research I do not use the concept of Islamism as a militant ideology seeking to establish Islamic states based on Sharia law. It is a broader term encompassing a range of different movements and political systems of thought that seek to engage with politics for diverse benefits.

between the terms “Islamist” and “Islamic.” I employ the term Islamist to refer to individuals, communities, institutions, and organisations that leverage traditions, norms, beliefs, and rituals of Islam in order to advance their political, economic, and social agendas.⁸ In contrast, the term Islamic refers directly to facets of Islam as a religion and encompasses things or notions associated with Islam.⁹ Additionally, I use the term “religiously conservative” (or simply “conservative”) to denote individuals or groups who embrace religious principles to guide their personal, social, and political choices and consider them integral to their way of life, without necessarily implying wider agendas beyond their religious commitment.¹⁰

In this work, I view Başakşehir as a model town of Islamism, showcasing how the convergence of faith-based ideology and capital networks form a regime of spatial power, shaping the urban configuration, architectural design, and community dynamics of the town. Başakşehir, in the recent history of the Islamist movement in Türkiye, holds significance beyond being a mere geographical area inhabited by religiously conservative groups—given its complex foundation story and the involvement of distinct yet ideologically connected actors in its emergence and rapid growth.

⁸ Islamist also denotes the objects and places produced, managed, operated, appropriated, or transformed by Islamists through specific power networks and means. The characteristics of these objects or places, as well as the symbolic meanings embedded within them, are defined by their builders and users.

⁹ Adam Zeidan, “Islamism,” in *Britannica*, May 11, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamism>.

¹⁰ I utilize the term religiously conservative when referring to individuals or groups who place a significant emphasis on religious practices and observance, actively striving to adhere to Islamic rituals like daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and giving *zekat* (charitable donations), and who may give priority to modesty in dress and behaviour based on interpretations of Islamic teachings. I use the term to refer to subjects whose motivations primarily revolve around the cultural and traditional aspects of religiosity, rather than the political and economic aspects. This does not mean that conservatism, or a conservative way of living, excludes political dimensions. While a chosen way of life often carries political connotations, its primary basis or core principles are not founded on political objectives. Similarly, I use terms such as “Muslim,” “pious,” “religious,” and “devout” when discussing matters primarily related to religiosity and faith, rather than focusing on the political context.

Through an examination of various architectural and urban spaces within the district, I argue that political authorities have cultivated an Islamist environment both socially and physically by leveraging faith-based discourses aimed at conservative segments. Politicians have strategically allocated public resources to cater to a specific societal group, all while advancing their own interests and those of their financial allies, including banks, investors, and construction companies. In this context, the settlement provides a platform to observe the spatial manifestations of neoliberal Islamism across various scales. The vision implemented by the ruling political figures in Başakşehir reflects their urban ambitions on a broader scale. These ambitions extend beyond merely leading a devout life in a community-specific urban setting; instead, they focus on the pursuit and display of power through the transformation of the built environment, ultimately asserting dominance over an urban landscape—that implies a multidimensional composition of physical, social, cultural, and economic elements within the urban environment. I argue that if one were to capture a snapshot of the architectural and urban developments led by Islamist political authorities and major developers since the 1990s, Başakşehir would be the ideal scene for such a picture.

The story of Başakşehir starts with the victory of the pro-Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) in the 1994 municipal elections in Istanbul. As the RP took over the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality from the centre left Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti (Social Democratic People's Party, SHP), the Islamist movement in Türkiye reached a crucial turning point. The RP's supporters described the party's success as the "reconquest" of Istanbul, alluding to the Ottoman

Empire's conquest of the city in 1453.¹¹ As soon as coming to power, the newly elected mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, promptly directed his efforts towards addressing the needs of the low-income conservative demographics in the city that had significantly contributed to his electoral victory. He swiftly embarked on a mission to fulfill the expectations of these groups, offering them government-subsidized housing. This marked the inception of the Başakşehir Housing Project in 1995, merely a year after the municipal elections. The project unfolded in four distinct stages of expansion, culminating in 2007.

The potential of Başakşehir became even more evident in the subsequent decade, when the pro-Islamist Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) achieved a resounding victory in the national elections in 2002. This led to Erdoğan assuming the position of prime minister in 2003. Under the AKP governance, the national government elevated the settlement founded in Başakşehir to the status of a provincial district of Istanbul in 2008. This transformation, accompanied by significant public and private investments, as well as rapid population growth, triggered a continuous rise in land value. Furthermore, it led to an expansion of the housing stock and a discernible shift in the resident profile. These changes have collectively reshaped the district's physical landscape and socio-economic characteristics.

Başakşehir is characterized by a variety of housing projects, public spaces, and institutions, initiated primarily by governmental agencies and Islamist power networks. The built objects within this settlement have been designed in line with political narratives emphasizing piety, nationalism, moralism, developmentalism, ethnic favouritism, and sectarianism. It is important to

¹¹ Tanıl Bora, "Istanbul of the Conqueror," in *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 48.

note, however, that these architectural and urban spaces do not necessarily exhibit visually explicit religious or political references associated with these narratives. Instead, in many instances, these objects are characterized by the subtle infiltration of ideology into their production, design, utilization, and governance. In effect, ideology permeates the settlement by shaping design decisions, spatial layouts, material choices, and symbolism to convey specific beliefs. It steers the assignment of functions, access rights, and planning strategies, often manipulating regulations and policies. This covert influence affects how individuals perceive their self-identity, engage socially, and interact with the environment, thereby ensuring the narrative's continuity. While counterparts or replicas of these architectural and urban edifices exist in other places throughout the country—constructed by the same stakeholders and fuelled by similar intentions—Başakşehir stands out for encapsulating diverse visions of Islamist placemaking all in one place.

This interplay between ideology and the built environment becomes more evident as I approach the housing environment in Başakşehir as a dynamic place for constructing, articulating, and expressing identities, as well as disseminating and reshaping ideology, rather than viewing it merely as an extensive site of towers and slabs designed in isolation. This perspective gains added depth by framing Başakşehir as a “total environment” tailored for a specific community. The term total environment underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of various facets of the settlement, all of which collectively shape the settlement's identity. It implies a comprehensive evaluation of the built environment with its different spatial components, as well as individual and institutional actors, such as politicians, state officers, state institutions, private companies, and residents. Within this context, the resident community, in all its diversity, plays a significant role in shaping the district's evolving Islamist identity, a fluid construct moulded by

both collective and individual interpretations of Islam. Islamization is not a strictly top-down phenomenon; residents' daily behaviours, interactions, and relationships with their surroundings are crucial. Their agency, while existing within certain structural boundaries set by power relations, market trends, and socio-political contexts, allows them to shape, adapt, and influence their settlement. To truly understand this agency and its impacts, it is crucial to understand the very spaces they inhabit and interact with—the spatial components that form this total environment.

In this research, I investigate various spatial components, encompassing state-subsidized and private housing projects, parks, squares, schools, universities, and libraries. My exploration transcends mere design analysis of architectural and urban spaces. Instead, I strive to understand the political histories, cultural fabric, and the pathways that lead to the emergence and evolution of these components. I also investigate the networks of power responsible for managing their emergence, development, and usage, to gain insight about the interplay between physical space and socio-political undercurrents. As I focus on the relations of production concerning these architectural and urban objects, multiple actors, and spaces somehow connected to each other, enter each chapter based on their manifold interests and actions.

In this introductory chapter, I present an overview of how political and faith-based discourses, along with profit-oriented policies, intersect in both global and local contexts and how they manifest in urban designs and architectural structures. First, I focus on the phenomenon of religious revival in the twentieth century, drawing connections to neoliberal political and economic governance models, Islamism, and neoliberal Islamism's spatial manifestations in Türkiye. Subsequently, viewing housing as a key element for establishing settlements, fostering

communities, and shaping lifestyles, I proceed with a scholarly review of state-supported housing supply models, addressing both global and local perspectives. My analysis includes research on the evolution of housing projects in urban areas, considering the influence of larger political changes, including government policies and regulations. It examines the impact of shifting social undercurrents, such as changing demographic patterns and societal norms, as well as economic fluctuations in housing markets and broader economic strategies. The study spans from the late twentieth century to the present day. I also touch upon housing literature that addresses concepts integral to the study of housing, including gender, class, ethnicity, nation-building, and religion. To end this introduction, I detail the methodology I have adopted for this study, provide an overview of the forthcoming chapters, and underscore the unique insights and importance of this dissertation.

Religious revival and its subtle harmony with neoliberalism

During the 1980s, neoliberalism made significant inroads into many countries. It began with the United States and England and then spread to Latin America, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and even communist China, each adopting substantial neoliberal reforms to varying degrees. As Neill Brenner and Nik Theodore point out, the adaptation of states to neoliberal economic systems has yielded varied outcomes across different contexts.¹² To fully grasp these developments, one must examine how neoliberalism interacts with inherited “national and local regulatory landscapes.”¹³

¹² Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, “Cities and the Geographies of Actually Existing Neoliberalism,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 349.

¹³ Brenner and Theodore, 349.

The free-market reforms that emerged during the neoliberal restructuring processes, in general, have substantially eroded the social welfare systems of the post-World War II period, impacting access to free education, health services, and social housing. Neoliberal thought advocated for states to have a diminished presence in the market economy, suggesting reduced expenditure on social programs and emphasizing the importance of free markets, private property, and individual initiative. The state's primary role would be to set up and protect a legal and institutional framework conducive to these practices. These economic and political reforms advanced the notion of empowering individuals to develop entrepreneurial skills within a framework of free markets, free trade, and strong private property rights, all presented as means to enhance human well-being.¹⁴ In such a setting, ruling politicians and capital holders in countries where neoliberalism took root have adeptly shaped discourses on freedom and welfare. They have leveraged cultural, social, national, and religious values, presenting themselves as champions of these ideals. As David Harvey points out, this strategic manoeuvring has enabled them to defend and legitimize their neoliberal practices.¹⁵

In the aftermath of these profound neoliberal transformations, new social and cultural patterns began to surface, reshaping the way individuals and communities navigate their lives in cities. As the neoliberal agenda gained momentum, another substantial transformation surfaced: a resurgence of religiosity, particularly in urban settings. This collective interest in religiosity occurred against a backdrop of rising urbanization and industrialization. As cities expanded and populations shifted from rural to urban centres, they grappled with challenges such as social and

¹⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁵ Harvey, 2.

economic inequality, unemployment, and poverty. These conditions have created fertile ground for the revival of religious movements across the world, mobilizing those burdened by the crises through faith-based discourses. Cities have evolved into focal points where faith-based movements influence societies and the living environments they inhabit. In response to grievances and a sense of marginalization, religious groups have presented a vision of social justice and an alternative framework countering the perceived shortcomings of neoliberalism and capitalism, thus gaining considerable support.

A significant body of scholarship investigates connections between urbanization of cities and religious resurgence.¹⁶ According to Inger Furseth, religious resurgence in the second half of the twentieth century challenged earlier predictions by social scientists, who had considered secularization to be a global trend, solidifying itself as the norm in urban areas.¹⁷ While scholars once believed that migration to cities and uneven urbanization would reduce the prominence of religiosity in urban areas, they have now come to view these issues as challenges only to the “traditional” sense of religion, but not to the modern sense of religion.¹⁸

¹⁶ Nezar AlSayyad and Mejgan Massoumi, eds., *The Fundamentalist City?: Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space* (London: Routledge, 2010); Jochen Becker et al., eds., *Global Prayers: Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City*, MetroZones 13 (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014); Rik Pinxten and Lisa Dikomititis, eds., *When God Comes to Town: Religious Traditions in Urban Contexts* (New York: Berghan Books, 2012); Bülent Batuman, ed., *Cities and Islamisms: On the Politics and Production of the Built Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁷ Inger Furseth, “Why in the City? Explaining Urban Fundamentalism,” in *The Fundamentalist City?*, ed. Nezar AlSayyad and Mejgan Massoumi (London: Routledge, 2010), 27.

¹⁸ In other words, while the global transformations have led to the decline of ‘pre-established’ religious life in cities, they triggered new ‘moderate’ expressions of piety which manifest in the built environment. This kind of religious resurgence was seen in various contexts especially where the economic and political stability is relatively fragile and might be affected easily by the social, cultural, ethnical, and religious phenomena. Furseth, 46.

Over the past three decades, scholarly works have investigated the economic and political forces surrounding religious revival across various regions of the world.¹⁹ Within this framework, social scientists have studied the fundamentalist forms of Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, as responses to the impacts of global modernity.²⁰ As Furseth notes, the “modernization crisis” not only eroded the traditional sense of morality but also led to instances of political oppression and socio-economic inequality.²¹ In such a context, religious revival movements have provided their adherents with both practical and theoretical means to adapt to modern city life, while still adhering to original religious tenets, teachings, or principles.²² In this light, religious resurgence movements, bolstered by supporting political discourses, have laid the groundwork for contemporary forms of faith-based ideology. These forms of ideology serve as guides, often portrayed as rooted in original teachings. They create their own vocabulary encompassing both new and traditional terms to tackle fresh challenges and resolve new dilemmas using religious symbols, narratives, and discourses.²³

A case that exemplifies this phenomenon is Islamism. While the term might suggest a particular faith-based ideology, it encompasses a broad array of context-specific approaches.

¹⁹ Judith Butler et al., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia University Press, 2011); Peter Hopkins, Lily Kong, and Elizabeth Olson, eds., *Religion and Place* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013); Pinxten and Dikomitis, *When God Comes to Town*; Robert A. Orsi, *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

²⁰ Nezar AlSayyad, “The Fundamentalist City?,” in *The Fundamentalist City?: Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space*, ed. Nezar Alsayyad and Mejgan Massoumi (London: Routledge, 2010), 3.

²¹ Furseth, “Why in the City?,” 29.

²² James V. Spickard, “Making Religion Irrelevant: The ‘Resurgent Religion’ Narrative and the Critique of Neoliberalism,” in *Religion in the Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance*, ed. Tuomas Martikainen and François Gauthier (London: Routledge, 2016), 37.

²³ Hassan Rachik, “How Religion Turns into Ideology,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 3 (December 2009): 357.

Instrumentalizing Islamic symbols and traditions, power holders navigate and achieve sociopolitical objectives.²⁴ These objectives vary significantly across regions, as do their interpretations of Islamic tradition and practice. Guilain Denoeux notes, Islamism refers to a political structure based on Islamic traditions, beliefs, and norms, offering political and economic remedies for present-day social and economic problems.²⁵ It envisions a future shaped by innovative interpretations and adaptations of Islamic concepts, creating a unique perspective through which societal challenges can be tackled and economic problems can be overcome. A prime example of this is the infusion of neoliberal economic concepts into the political framework of Islamism, showcasing its endeavour to reconcile Islamic values with market-oriented strategies for economic advancement.

Islamism has effectively incorporated the neoliberal principles of entrepreneurialism into the processes of nation- and community-building in many countries with authoritarian regimes and racial, ethnic, and class polarizations, such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, India, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Indonesia.²⁶ Concurrently, the ascension of neoliberal politicians and individuals holding capital has contributed to the rise of Islamist movements and has left an impact on the urbanization of cities. Stephan Lanz and Martijn Oosterbaan argue urban religious movements have prompted a reconfiguration in the power relations between the ones oppressed by neoliberal processes and those adopting a neoliberal agenda.²⁷

²⁴ Zeidan, "Islamism."

²⁵ Guilain Denoeux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam," *Middle East Policy* 9, no. 2 (June 2002): 61.

²⁶ Batuman, *Cities and Islamisms*, 7.

²⁷ Stephan Lanz and Martijn Oosterbaan, "Entrepreneurial Religion in the Age of Neoliberal Urbanism," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 3 (2016): 497.

The convergence of Islamism and neoliberalism, two seemingly unrelated notions, leads to the creation of a unique socio-economic space marked by market-driven practices crafted by Islamic norms. Indeed, analogous configurations can be observed in other religious contexts too; however, the intensity, outcomes, and consequences of these interactions are contingent on the specific societal contexts. Therefore, it is important to comprehend these configurations in their full complexity, transcending simplified binaries and single narratives.

Islamism as a political ideology in Türkiye

Islamism, in the context of Türkiye, emerged as a political movement during the nineteenth century, driven by the goal of revitalizing the Ottoman Empire and countering its perceived decline through a religious resurgence.²⁸ Supported by a group of intellectuals and political elites, this movement advocated for the reorganisation of the empire based on religious principles.²⁹ After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and foundation of the modern Republic of Türkiye, Islamism evolved into a movement of opposition against the republican state actors and strictly secular state reforms.³⁰ Over the subsequent decades, it has been embraced by marginalized groups oppressed by the secular norms of the Republic.

²⁸ Şerif Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes,” *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 145–65.

²⁹ Burak Gürel, “Islamism: A Comparative-Historical Overview,” in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Türkiye*, ed. Nesecan Balkan, Erol Balkan, and Ahmet Öncü (New York: Berghan Books, 2015), 31.

³⁰ During periods of political reform in Türkiye, such as the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, the removal of the constitutional provision identifying Islam as the state religion in 1928, and the inclusion of secularism as a constitutional principle in 1937, there was an increase in the rivalry between secularists and Islamists. After the introduction of a multiparty system in 1946, the contest between secularists and Islamists has endured, leading to the evolution of reforms concerning the presence of religion and religious practices across various spheres of society. Gürel, 31.

In the 1970s, Islamism developed an institutional structure and established political parties. The first political party with clear Islamist credentials was the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party, MNP). The party was established in 1970 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan with the followers of the social movement called Milli Görüş Hareketi (National Outlook Movement).³¹ After the military intervention of 1971, the MNP was closed by the constitutional court. Subsequent years witnessed the prohibition of several other Islamist parties due to their vocal critique of secularism and their aspiration to establish a governance system rooted in religious ideals.³² Having faced persistent challenges in the years that followed, they recognized the limits of their existing political discourse. İhsan Dağı notes, the Islamists saw that the state, civil society, and the media were powerful in protecting the secular characteristics of the state establishment.³³ Thus, they had to adjust the Islamist movement in such a way that they could gain the approval of the ruling authorities at that time, broaden their electoral base, and simultaneously respond to the aspirations of the emerging followers, seeking their rightful “share of power” within the system.

³¹ This social movement perceived the prevailing state and social structures as morally corrupt and sought to create a “just order” (*adil düzen*) that was framed as a religiously appropriate “third way” to challenge both capitalism and socialism. Ergun Özbudun, “From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey,” *South European Society and Politics* 11, no. 3–4 (December 2006): 545.

³² Being the first political party of the National Outlook Movement, the MNP was replaced by the Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party, MSP) following the 1971 military intervention. After the military coup in 1980, MSP was replaced by the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP). As the most successful Islamist party in the pre-AKP period in terms of its vote share, RP was closed by the Constitutional Court in 1998. The successor of the RP was the Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, FP) which was closed by the Constitutional Court in 2000. Between the 1970s and 2000s, despite the support that the Islamist political actors received from a significant group of low-income and working-class people who were drawn to their messages of eliminating economic oppression and interest-based system, Islamist parties failed to gain enough power to make a structural change in various spheres of the country.

³³ İhsan Dağı, “Post-Islamism à La Turca,” in *Post-Islamism*, ed. Asef Bayat (Oxford University Press, 2013), 86.

The Islamist movement in Türkiye underwent a transformation at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A reformist group among the former Islamist politicians, determined to collaborate with the secular state establishment, abandoned their former discourse of radical Islamism, and adopted a “moderate Muslim” standpoint.³⁴ In 2001, the group of *yenilikçiler* (innovationists), led by the former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, established the AKP.³⁵ Subsequently, the party achieved electoral success, ascending to power during the 2002 national elections. The party portrayed itself as a central-right conservative party, rather than as an Islamist party, targeting local business owners, small and medium-sized enterprises, large corporations, low-income urban populations, and intellectuals supporting freedom of thought and belief.³⁶ It diverged from fundamentalist Islamist norms and adopted a more moderate outlook. Distancing itself from the anti-capitalist discourse of the former Islamists, this moderate Islamist group embraced the tenets of market-driven conservatism during its first decade of power.³⁷

However, the AKP rapidly shifted toward an anti-democratic position following its third term in power starting in 2011, especially after the Gezi Park protests in 2013. During this phase, the government embarked on a series of measures aimed at suppressing dissenting factions within society, exerting greater influence over the media, adopting an identity explicitly rooted in religiosity, and evolving from a conservative democracy into an authoritarian regime.³⁸ Though

³⁴ Cihan Tuğal, “NATO’s Islamists,” *New Left Review* 44 (2007): 18.

³⁵ Özbudun, “From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy,” 546.

³⁶ The burgeoning group of Islamist capital holders during the early 2000s was mainly the builders of the economic and political networks to which the AKP owes its victory. It is also relevant to note the urban poor to whom the AKP provided aid in various ways played a significant role in the AKP’s electoral success. See: Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

³⁷ Balkan and Öncü, “Introduction,” 3.

³⁸ Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem, “Existential Insecurity and the Making of a Weak Authoritarian Regime in Turkey,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 506.

the party as a whole have never aimed to restructure the state or society according to religious norms and practices, nor have they regarded Islam as the determinant of the organisation of society, it has instrumentalized faith-based discourses to further their political and economic goals, particularly in the realm of neoliberal endeavours. This strategic utilization is designed to resonate with the conservative voter base and to formulate effective strategies catering to their worldviews.

The adoption of neoliberal policies in Türkiye diverged from other countries in the global economy with its case-specific market rationale and the state's authoritarian model. Through the implementation of a series of consecutive programs, government interventions in the production or transformation of the built environment in cities were reoriented to support market forces and the accumulation of capital, simultaneously weaving discourses with Islamic themes to resonate with conservative voters.

Spatiality of neoliberal Islamism in Türkiye

Ozan Karaman observes that, in the context of Türkiye, neoliberalism and political Islam have converged to form a “neoliberal-Islamic assemblage.”³⁹ This assemblage has connected numerous actors, including politicians, state officials, institutions, investors, private companies, communities in interconnected networks. The continuous flux of construction activities led by these actors has shaped urban space while simultaneously being shaped. The AKP government initiated a restructuring of urban spatial organisation of cities through a series of legal and

³⁹ Ozan Karaman, “Remaking Space for Globalization: Dispossession through Urban Renewal in Istanbul” (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 2010).

institutional reforms concerning the construction of the built environment. Central to this transformation was the construction industry. Istanbul has been a focus, with the AKP employing a discourse enriched by concepts of economic development, modernization, Islamic morals, cultural values, and a blend of Ottomanism and Turkish nationalism.⁴⁰

In this context, urban design and architecture have enabled politicians and investors to bolster both local and national economies, while also embedding populist ideology in the built environment. In parallel with the national government's attempts to integrate Türkiye into international markets and its implementation of neoliberal policies, Osman Balaban argues, the construction industry, particularly housing construction, has been a driving force in the national economy due to its "strong backward and forward links" with other sectors.⁴¹ This connection arises from the construction industry's reliance on materials and services produced and provided by other sectors such as real estate, finance, transportation, logistics, building materials industry, mining, forestry, landscaping, maintenance and renovation. In return, built artifacts like buildings, highways, bridges, squares, and parks contribute to the growth of these interconnected economic sectors."⁴²

⁴⁰ The AKP has utilized some phrases such as "Vision 2023" (in reference to the republic's centenary) and "New Türkiye" to advance both their financial and ideological agendas. These phrases are central to the AKP's plan to replace the "old Türkiye," which signifies the displacement of the secular, pro-Western Kemalist era of the republic with their own new ruling class. See: Erbatur Çavuşoğlu and Julia Strutz, "Producing Force and Consent: Urban Transformation and Corporatism in Turkey," *City* 18, no. 2 (March 4, 2014): 139; Esra Akcan, "Homo Economicus of the 'New Turkey': Urban Development of Istanbul in the 2000s," in *Neoliberalism on the Ground: Architecture and Transformation from the 1960s to the Present*, ed. Kenny Cupers, Catharina Gabrielsson, and Helena Mattsson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 388.

⁴¹ Osman Balaban, "The Negative Effects of Construction Boom on Urban Planning and Environment in Turkey: Unraveling the Role of the Public Sector," *Habitat International* 36, no. 1 (2012): 26.

⁴² Osman Balaban, "İnşaat Sektörü Neyin Lokomotif," in *İnşaat Ya Resulullah*, ed. Tanıl Bora, vol. 270 (Istanbul: Birikim Kitap, 2011), 18.

Expanding on these dynamics, large-scale urban transformation projects initiated in major cities, particularly Istanbul, have played a role in advancing economic growth, fostering social engineering projects, and suppressing oppositions to the government. Politicians, in alliance with private construction companies and housing construction institutions, have regarded architecture and urban design as tools to attract affluent tourists and global investors. By crafting narratives that evoke Türkiye's "glorious past"—notably the Ottoman era, central to their vision for a new Türkiye—they have not only captivated the masses but also apparently justified their political interventions in cities.⁴³ They have instrumentalized a populist discourse that glorifies Islamic-Turkish-Ottoman history to establish a ground for their undemocratic, revanchist, and profit-oriented urban projects.⁴⁴

In this context, housing has become a major field of interest for ruling politicians, burgeoning Islamist groups, and investors. The allure of new housing estates in urban centres, especially their rapid liquidity compared to other investments, stems from their broad appeal to a wide audience. İsmail Karatepe highlights this trend, noting the growing affinity of Islamist wealth groups for the construction sector—particularly housing—as it aligns with their vision of building "prosperous cities."⁴⁵ The ambition of Islamist politicians to reconfigure cities to reflect their urban ideals, and to eliminate the spatial remnants of the Republic's early years, emphasizes

⁴³ Akcan notes, "the choice of architectural style is hardly irrelevant in this process, as it directly fits the cultural aspirations of the party's 'New Türkiye' project, in which the architecture of interwar modernism favoured by the rulers of the early republican 'old Türkiye' is to be erased and replaced by something else—probably Ottoman revivalism." Akcan, "Homo Economicus of the 'New Turkey': Urban Development of Istanbul in the 2000s," 395.

⁴⁴ İhsan Yılmaz, "Islamist Populism, Islamist Fatwas, State Transnationalism and Turkey's Diasporas," in *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, ed. Shahram Akbarzadeh (London: Routledge, 2020), 22.

⁴⁵ İsmail Doğa Karatepe, "The State, Islamists, Discourses, and Bourgeoisie: The Construction Industry in Turkey," *Research and Policy on Turkey* 1, no. 1 (2016): 6.

their commitment to the construction realm. This concentration is evident in the growing number of residential projects crafted not just to reshape the character of cities but also to meet the housing requirements of societal groups. Yet, comprehending these changes in urban areas and the heightened emphasis on housing necessitates a deeper exploration of the broader concept of housing itself and its multifaceted implications.

Housing as a hybrid concept

The house occupies a central position in both individual and collective lives. As the setting for daily routines, it emerges as a primary anchor, reflecting crucial aspects of occupants' personal identities, social standings, and ways of life. The house is identified not only through its architectural substance but also by the larger context in which it is situated. Thus, the study of housing is inevitably tied to the study of housing environments and their contextual intricacies. An interdisciplinary approach is crucial for comprehending these aspects of housing.

Housing is defined by a set of interconnected meanings and functions: it is a production activity, an architectural object, a fundamental right, and a set of spatial policies. Further, it is a commodity traded among multiple actors. The housing sector encompasses those involved in its provision, construction, and those who derive benefits from it. Regarding its hybrid characteristics, the concept of housing is explored across several academic disciplines, including architecture, urban design, sociology, economics, politics, and geography. Nonetheless, a noticeable gap persists within the current body of literature concerning the interplay of ideology and capital in the design, production, and distribution phases of housing. Likewise, the academic

research focused on the spatial features of housing enclaves inhabited by communities that coalesce around common ideological beliefs or principles is quite limited.

In this research, I investigate the intricate interrelation between ideology, capital, and production of space by analyzing spatial layers of Islamist housing enclaves. My primary focus centres on the evolution of a housing settlement designed for a conservative community in Başakşehir, which came into existence through the collaboration of state and municipal resources, as well as private investments. I explore state-supported housing, examining the complex interplay among architectural, social, and economic elements, while also delving into the pivotal political influences. Additionally, I analyze the impact of these factors on housing construction by private entities, often receiving substantial backing from state and municipal sources.

State-subsidized housing production serves a myriad of functions globally: it acts as a manifestation of societal reforms, a means of disciplining society, a tool for community- and nation-building, a state apparatus for gentrification, and a place to shape faith-based and nationalist thought. Beyond these functions, it has been subject to the influence of neoliberal urban policies since the 1980s—alongside private housing enclaves and gated communities. In Türkiye, starting from the mid-1990s, the rise in the state-subsidized housing programs coincided with the ascent of Islamist city municipalities.

The following sections of this introductory chapter offer a concise overview of the historical background of state-supported housing provision on a global scale, followed by an examination within the context of Turkey. Furthermore, these sections include a review of relevant scholarly literature on the subject. These sections examine scholarship on the terms “social housing,” “state-subsidized housing”, and “mass housing,” which are often used interchangeably.

Social housing provision in the global context

Social housing, in its broadest sense, refers to housing initiatives developed and delivered by the state, municipal bodies, or non-profit entities such as housing associations and cooperatives, addressing low-income people, primarily as tenants. Social housing emerged as a response to the accommodation and health challenges faced by urban labourers who confronted financial barriers in accessing private housing accommodations. The structure and specifics of social housing systems vary greatly based on factors such as size, leasing terms, eligibility requirements, and tenant profile.

Cities around the world suffered severe housing shortages after World War II, which had already been an issue before, but became worse afterward. The war caused significant destruction to urban areas, damaging, or destroying numerous buildings and infrastructure. Additionally, it led to a substantial influx of people migrating from rural to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities, further exacerbating the housing shortage. The combination of war-related destruction and population movement resulted in a significant housing crisis in many cities, requiring extensive efforts to rebuild and provide adequate housing for the growing urban populations.

This period of global housing challenges marked a pivotal juncture that shaped housing policies of previous decades across different regions. Notably, a spectrum of social housing sectors emerged, varying in their extent and approaches. The social housing sector in Western Europe and the Nordic countries is more extensive than in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern and Southwestern Europe. Despite these regional differences, common trends, as well, have surfaced over the past four decades. These trends encompass the imposition of stricter

budgetary limitations on state-supported housing provision, the moderation or even termination of new building projects, the sale of existing housing stocks, and the refinement of eligibility requirements for newly developed housing estates.⁴⁶

In both European and North American contexts, states undertook numerous policies and projects regarding the provision of housing for all to erase the memory of the war and to create a new reality for the society. Among others, the works of Barbara Miller Lane, Kenny Cupers and Florian Urban are crucial for delving into these endeavours, devoting considerable attention to state-sponsored or federally backed housing initiatives in both regions.⁴⁷ Their works focus on the spatial and social features of these developments, as well as their assigned roles in the production of an imagined society after World War II.

In Europe, the politics of the welfare state placed housing at the forefront of its priorities, garnering the attention of urban professionals and architects, both within private practices and social housing agencies.⁴⁸ Nelson Mota and Yael Allweil argue that this shared emphasis on housing provision catalyzed the development of theories regarding the architecture of housing as both a social and a spatial practice.⁴⁹ These ideas flourished and took centre stage at events such as the CIAM, UIA Congresses, Team 10 meetings, and Delos Symposia.

⁴⁶ Alistair Sisson and Dallas Rogers, “Housing,” in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Elsevier, 2020), 70.

⁴⁷ Barbara Miller Lane, ed., *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture* (Routledge, 2007); Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁸ Rob Rowlands, Sako Musterd, and Ronald Van Kempen, eds., “Mass Housing Estates on Different Tracks: An Introduction to the Book,” in *Mass Housing in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 9.

⁴⁹ Nelson Mota and Yael Allweil, “The Architecture of Housing after the Neoliberal Turn,” *Footprint* 13, no. 24 (2019): 1.

In North America, the history of social housing during the postwar era is marked by a mix of successes and challenges. This period saw a surge in the construction of large-scale, high-rise housing projects, primarily constructed in peripheries and isolated parts of cities, built, and managed by government authorities or housing organisations. They aimed to provide affordable housing options for low-income families and alleviate the housing shortage. While there were instances of well-maintained and successful housing developments, numerous cases showed deteriorating conditions, lack of investment, and social issues associated with concentrated poverty and neglect. Susan Briante, Lawrence Vale, Gail Radford, and Dana Cuff discuss the so-called failure of these social housing projects designed within the scope of post-war social engineering projects.⁵⁰ According to Sam Davis, these housing projects failed primarily due to poor planning decisions rather than architectural design issues.⁵¹ Similarly, Katharine Bristol challenges the idea that failures of social housing were linked to the failure of modern architecture, uncovering the policy related, managerial, social, and fiscal reasons behind the failure stories of these projects.⁵²

The social housing histories of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean differed significantly from those of comparatively affluent countries, due to variations in urban poverty, patterns of social exclusion, and state responses to affordable housing crises.⁵³ In the context of

⁵⁰ Susan Briante, "Utopia's Ruins: Seeing Domesticity and Decay in the Aliso Village Housing Project," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 10, no. 1 (2010): 127–39; Lawrence J Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects*, 2007; Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*, Historical Studies of Urban America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (MIT Press, 2002).

⁵¹ Davis, *The Architecture of Affordable Housing*, 16.

⁵² Katharine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 (May 1991): 163.

⁵³ Sean Purdy and Nancy Kwak, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Public Housing Histories in the Americas," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 3 (March 1, 2007): 359.

South America during the 1960s and 1970s, as housing shortages surged, policies advocating for decent housing gained traction as a potential remedy.⁵⁴ However, achieving effective policy implementation remained elusive. Florian Urban points out that a majority of urban working-class Brazilians lived in rental houses built by investors before World War II.⁵⁵ However, by the 1960s, people began to live in favelas—informal settlements near the edge of cities. Due to the housing shortage, calls for a state-supported housing policy became louder, but given the absence of a comprehensive development strategy, few promises have been kept.

Meanwhile, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East have exhibited context-specific patterns of urbanization, while there were some resemblances to Latin America, regarding mass migrations to cities and the prevalence of informal settlements in peripheral and relatively remote locations.⁵⁶ As in many other places in the world, in Middle Eastern cities as well, state-supported housing was considered a response to the quest for finding the right form of habitation on a large-scale. Yael Allweil, Eliana Abu-Hamdi, Mohamed Elshahed, and Hadas Shadar, among others, explore state and government attempts at confronting the housing issue, particularly regarding low-income urban populations and the housing typologies that came

⁵⁴ Sergio Martín Blas, “What Ever Happened to Social Housing?,” in *The New Urban Condition: Criticism and Theory from Architecture and Urbanism*, ed. Leandro Medrano, Luiz Recaman, and Tom Avermaete, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2021).

⁵⁵ Notable studies investigate the changing perceptions of public housing: Blas, “What Ever Happened to Social Housing?”; Nilce, “Public Housing, International Comparative Perspective”; Paul N. Balchin and Jill Stewart, “Social Housing in Latin America: Opportunities for Affordability in a Region of Housing Need,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 333–41; Purdy and Kwak, “Introduction.”

⁵⁶ Miles Glendinning, *Mass Housing: Modern Architecture and State Power – A Global History*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 442.

along.⁵⁷ These works discuss, while large-scale and high-rise housing with generic designs has not always been the most convenient solution regarding the quality of the created living spaces, it has often been deemed the most economically sound answer to the housing problem.

Socialist regimes executed social housing projects similar to capitalist regimes until the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, despite variances in the economy of production, building types, and the extent of the projects.⁵⁸ Inspired by an international discourse centred around ensuring livable accommodations for all in the aftermath of World War II, public authorities in both contexts constructed similar types of housing projects.⁵⁹ However, over time, social housing policies took divergent paths.

In the Soviet Union and China, several social housing experiments were conducted in second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ Especially with the improvements in the industrialized construction techniques, standardized and prefabricated panel apartment buildings mushroomed

⁵⁷ Yael Allweil, *Homeland: Zionism as Housing Regime, 1860-2011*. (Routledge, 2018); Mohamed Elshahed, “Workers’ and Popular Housing in Mid-Twentieth-Century Egypt,” in *Social Housing in the Middle East: Architecture, Urban Development, and Transnational Modernity*, ed. Kıvanç Kılınç and Mohammad Gharipour (Indiana University Press, 2019), 64–87; Hadas Shadar, “Between East and West: Immigrants, Critical Regionalism and Public Housing,” *The Journal of Architecture* 9, no. 1 (2004): 23–48.

⁵⁸ Kıvanç Kılınç and Mohammad Gharipour, “Introduction: Global Modernity and Marginalized Histories of Social Housing in the Middle East,” in *Social Housing in the Middle East*, ed. Kıvanç Kılınç and Mohammad Gharipour, *Architecture, Urban Development, and Transnational Modernity* (Indiana University Press, 2019), 4.

⁵⁹ Urban, *Tower and Slab*, 3.

⁶⁰ Henry W. Morton, “Housing in the Soviet Union,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 35, no. 3 (1984): 69–80; József Hegedüs, Martin Lux, and Nóra Teller, eds., *Social Housing in Transition Countries* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Duanfang Lu, *Remaking Chinese Urban Form: Modernity, Scarcity and Space, 1949-2005* (London: Routledge, 2006); Charlie Q. L. Xue, *Hong Kong Architecture 1945-2015* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016); Lingling Zhang and Zihao Wu, “The Characteristics of Leisure Activities and the Built Environment Influences in Large-Scale Social Housing Communities in China: The Case Study of Shanghai and Nanjing,” *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 21, no. 3 (May 4, 2022): 825–38.

in cities, initiated through ambitious state-sponsored programs. The primary objective was to enhance the living conditions of common individuals who were facing challenges such as poverty and overcrowding.⁶¹ Michael Gentile and Örjan Sjöberg's assessment of the housing distribution system reveals that the Soviet Union undertook an ambitious endeavour in housing construction during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶² While this effort did not fully resolve the entire housing shortage that had accumulated over decades, it had a substantial impact on improving the overall housing situation, despite concerns about the quality of construction.

From the 1980s on, production of social housing has become increasingly entangled in neoliberal urban policies, marked by the privatization of public services, the rise of consumerist ideas, and cuts in social housing subsidies.⁶³ Global shifts in resource allocation and housing market trends, changes in policymaking, power structures, urban governance, and evolving societal norms and attitudes have transformed the concept and meaning of social housing, as well as the approach of states to the housing problem.⁶⁴

Social versus mass housing in Türkiye

Though Türkiye did not take part in World War II, its urbanization was significantly influenced by the unfolding global realities in the aftermath. Research on housing in the second half of the twentieth century is largely devoted to the emergence and transformation of housing supply

⁶¹ Urban, *Tower and Slab*, 13.

⁶² Michael Gentile and Örjan Sjöberg, "Housing Allocation under Socialism: The Soviet Case Revisited," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29, no. 2 (March 2013): 190.

⁶³ Roger Keil, "Third Way Urbanism: Opportunity or Dead End?," *Alternatives* 25, no. 2 (2000): 257.

⁶⁴ Reinhold Martin, "Preface: The Neoliberal Housing System," in *Housing after the Neoliberal Turn: International Case Studies*, ed. Jesko Fezer et al., 1. ed, Wohnungsfrage (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2015).

models and their spatial, socioeconomic, and societal characteristics. Under conditions of mass migration to urban areas, insufficient capital accumulation and the absence of social housing and welfare programs, a substantial informal sector has emerged since the late 1970s.⁶⁵ This informal sector manifests itself through squatter housing and a speculative urban apartment boom, both of which have contributed to the deterioration of social fabric and architectural quality in major cities.⁶⁶ Ayşe Öncü highlights that in the peripheral areas of major cities, close to one million informal dwellings were erected. These informal structures constituted over twenty percent of the entire housing stock constructed between the years 1955 and 1980.⁶⁷

With the introduction of novel credit mechanisms in the 1960s, housing cooperatives became an alternative means of home ownership for middle-income families.⁶⁸ Several public authorities, such as social security foundations and financial institutions (SSK, Bağ-Kur, OYAK, Türkiye Emlak Kredi Bankası) contributed to the development of large-scale housing initiatives, providing loans to related partakers.⁶⁹ Moreover, the Turkish state established the Housing Development Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi, TOKİ) in 1984 to carry out housing projects

⁶⁵ Ruşen Keleş, *Housing Policy in Developing Countries* (London: Routledge, 1990), 148; İlhan Tekeli, *Konut Sorununu Konut Sunum Biçimleriyle Düşünmek* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2010), 55.

⁶⁶ Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 13.

⁶⁷ Ayşe Öncü, "The Politics of the Urban Land Market in Turkey: 1950–1980," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 12, no. 1 (1988): 47.

⁶⁸ Cooperative houses can be identified as the first examples of residential site and gated community housing models in Türkiye, which offer a homogenous and isolated housing environment for their members belonging to similar occupational groups, with similar lifestyle preferences. Ankara Bahçelievler Yapı Kooperatifi and Güvenevler Konut Kooperatifi are two of the first cooperative housing examples in Türkiye, which provided housing to their high-ranking bureaucrat members in the first decades of the Republic. Bozdoğan and Akcan, *Turkey*, 253.

⁶⁹ Ruşen Keleş, *Kentleşme Politikası* (Kızılay, Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1993).

addressing low-income people. Most of the initiated housing projects were multistory, generic, and standardized housing block models due to financial constraints and land shortages.

Following the foundation of TOKİ, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality established a municipal construction company, Istanbul Konut İmar Plan Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc., KİPTAŞ), in 1987 to construct affordable housing in Istanbul. Both TOKİ and KİPTAŞ acted as very significant tools in the provision of housing in the public sectors in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the pivotal shift in state-supported housing production came after the AKP's rise to power in 2002. This led to the restructuring of TOKİ, positioning it as one of the most influential players in the construction industry.

A substantial body of research explores the role of TOKİ and KİPTAŞ in transformation of cities from the 2000s onwards, primarily through urban renewal and housing development projects. In their work exploring the design and construction of housing projects initiated by TOKİ and KİPTAŞ, Ali Cengizkan, Osman Balaban, İmge Akçakaya Waite, and Salih Özgür Sarıca draw attention to these projects' lack of quality regarding the spatial, material, and structural properties.⁷⁰ Tuna Kuyucu, Özlem Ünsal, Jean-François Pérouse, Havva Ezgi Doğru, and Dilek Özdemir analyze how urban renewal and housing development projects carried out by TOKİ are intricately intertwined with financial and ideological concerns, focusing on the AKP period.⁷¹ In

⁷⁰ Ali Cengizkan, "Toplu Konut İdaresi (TOKİ) Bir Tasarım Deneyi: Eryaman 3. Etap ve 4. Etap Konutları," *XXI Mimarlık Kültürü Dergisi* 1, no. 136–143 (2000); Balaban, "The Negative Effects of Construction Boom on Urban Planning and Environment in Turkey"; Salih Sarıca, "Turkish Housing Policies: A Case Study on Mass Housing Provision in the Last Decade.," *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, December 1, 2012.

⁷¹ Tuna Kuyucu and Özlem Ünsal, "'Urban Transformation' as State-Led Property Transfer: An Analysis of Two Cases of Urban Renewal in Istanbul," *Urban Studies* 47, no. 7 (2010): 1479–99; Jean-François Pérouse, "The State without the Public: Some Conjectures about the Administration for Collective

their view, these institutions have transformed cities into places of uniform concrete structures without any sense of architectural, urban, or environmental sensibility, deeply influencing the urban fabrics of cities.

The state promotes the housing model provided by TOKİ and KİPTAŞ as an opportunity for middle- and low-income groups, who are unable to afford housing units in the current market conditions, to become homeowners through long-term monthly installments aligned with their saving capabilities. Cihan Uzunçarşılı Baysal and Jean-François Pérouse note, while such housing is considered more affordable in comparison to private housing on the market and it offers extended mortgages, it remains inaccessible for those with very limited incomes.⁷²

Further, it is important to recognize that the housing model labeled by these institutions as “social housing” does not include a rental system, but rather exclusively proposes homeownership. Karaman states, the only state-supported rental model in the country that bears some resemblance to the widely accepted notion of social housing is the *lojman* type housing (a term derived from the French word *logement*). These units are exclusively available to civil servants and members of the military, thus remaining distant from a genuine social housing

Housing (Toki),” in *Order and Compromise: Government Practices in Turkey from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early 21st Century* (Brill, 2015), 169–91; Dilek Özdemir, “The Role of the Public Sector in the Provision of Housing Supply in Turkey, 1950-2009,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 6 (2011): 1099–1117; Havva Ezgi Doğru, “The ‘Benevolent Hand’ of the Turkish State: Mass Housing Administration, State Restructuring and Capital Accumulation in Turkey,” 2016.

⁷² Cihan Uzunçarşılı Baysal, “Civilizing the Kurdish Population of Ayazma: Ayazma/Tepeüstü Urban Transformation Project,” *Planning* 23, no. 2 (2013): 83–94; Pérouse, “The State without the Public”; Jean-François Pérouse, “Social Housing” in Turkey Since the Early 2000s: Conceptual Misunderstandings, the Redefinition of Actor Systems, and the Invisibility of the Needy,” *NAQD* 3839, no. 1 (2020): 99–120.

policy aimed at assisting the impoverished.⁷³ Social housing policies, as practiced throughout the world in many forms, entail the public (state) ownership of property which is rented out to eligible low-income families at affordable rates. In this regard, it is obvious the housing projects developed by public institutions in Türkiye do not qualify as social housing.

To conclude, the state-subsidized housing projects offered in Türkiye contrast with the traditional mission of social housing, which aims to provide a quality living environment for those needing state support to achieve this ideal. Besides the difference between the housing provision programs regarding the emphasis on home ownership instead of tenancy, this disparity is also evident in the projects' poor architectural quality, the lack of essential social services, and their location in the most remote peripheries of cities. Paradoxically, or perhaps quite strategically, the ruling politicians insist on describing these projects as social housing. However, I regard the term "mass housing" as a more appropriate description of the housing provision activities undertaken by TOKİ and KİPTAŞ, aimed at middle- and low-income groups. This term refers to the way and method by which such housing is produced (rapidly and in large quantities using standardized tunnel-formwork systems). While it targets lower income demographics, it does not cater to the truly needy segments of the population.

Having examined the intricacies of state-subsidized housing models, both globally and specifically in Türkiye, comprehending the state's role (as provider) and the people's perspective (as beneficiaries) is crucial. This understanding highlights the state's dominant position in shaping individuals' lives through the design and organisation of their living environments, as

⁷³ Ozan Karaman, "Urban Renewal in Istanbul: Reconfigured Spaces, Robotic Lives: Urban Reconfiguration in Istanbul," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 2 (March 2013): 723.

well as individuals' relationships with these environments. In this context, housing is more than just a shelter or a policy enactment; it is a hybrid concept with diverse aesthetic, ideological, and socio-economical layers.

Housing beyond walls: Global context

In this dissertation, I analyze housing as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, examining various aspects such as gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and religion that contribute to its intricate and multifaceted nature. The exploration of housing's gender dimension is pivotal; it illuminates how spatial designs both mirror and mould gender norms, reciprocally influenced by these norms across varied cultural backdrops. Further, by probing the nexus between class and housing, socio-economic hierarchies and inequalities that manifest in access to and the quality of housing reveals. Analyzing the intersection of housing and ethnicity reveals the nuanced relationship between built objects and cultural expressions of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization. Additionally, exploring the correlation between housing and national identity delves into the impact of housing policies on nation-building efforts, reflecting broader political motives. Finally, examining the intersection of housing with religion and religion-based ideology provides a lens through which we can observe the infusion of the narratives of religiosity into physical spaces. This in turn shapes collective identities, values, and individual and collective behaviours. Scholarly works from various parts of the world investigate housing's connection to these concepts, presenting a range of theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and empirical findings. These insights are influential for my study.

Scholars, concentrating on the socio-political and economic milieu of the twentieth century concerning housing, investigate the correlation between gender and housing environments, alongside the changing roles of women and men in society and at home, individuals' gender-based housing preferences, the impact of gender on the form and production of housing, and the influence of conventional gender perceptions on house design. Hilde Heynen analyzes the scholarly writings concerning how gender influences modern architecture, architectural discourse, and practices.⁷⁴ She posits that the concepts surrounding domesticity developed as a reaction to the separation between the workplace and the home, emphasizing the distinction between the realms of men and women. Further, Annmarie Adams challenges the conventional perception of the house as exclusively women's private domain, arguing that the commonly viewed private space was, during the late nineteenth century, a fiercely contested and shared space.⁷⁵

Several scholars have studied how the house is viewed as a gendered space in some Muslim-dominated geographies.⁷⁶ Rana Sobh and Russell Belk, focusing on Middle Eastern countries, explore how women utilize spaces divided by gender, as societal norms dictate, and transform them into personal domains.⁷⁷ As they discuss, in the intimate setting of the female salon, Arab-

⁷⁴ Hilde Heynen, "Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions," in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, ed. Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1–19.

⁷⁵ Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870-1900*, McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, Health, and Society (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

⁷⁶ Mohammed A. Al-Hussayen, "Spatial Characteristics of Traditional Houses of Al-Medinah, Saudi Arabia," *Architectural Science Review* 42, no. 4 (December 1999): 271–82; Rana Sobh, Russell Belk, and Jonathan A. J. Wilson, "Islamic Arab Hospitality and Multiculturalism," *Marketing Theory* 13, no. 4 (December 2013): 443–63; Rana Sobh and Russell Belk, "Domains of Privacy and Hospitality in Arab Gulf Homes," *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 2011.

⁷⁷ Sobh, Belk, and Wilson, "Islamic Arab Hospitality and Multiculturalism."

Gulf women gather to exchange recipes, ideas, and showcase designer clothing, fragrances, and beauty products, thereby transforming a space labelled as private into a public one. Similarly, Pamela Karimi's study centres on the objects of domesticity and everyday spaces, providing a detailed examination of Iranian modernity.⁷⁸ The interiors of Iranian homes reflect the evolving norms of gender, roles within the household, and relationships among family members. These transformations are significantly shaped by the broader political context in Iran, particularly the interplay between secular and religious influences.

Reflecting the global social and material transformations since the mid-twentieth century, housing research has increasingly incorporated class and ethnicity. This focus arises from the recognition that housing is not merely a physical structure; it is a complex manifestation of socio-economic and cultural forces, where class distinctions and ethnic identities play integral roles in shaping accessibility, design, and utilization of housing. Among others, Mike Davis's work is crucial for examining class-based inequalities in housing areas. Davis argues, informal settlements in developing cities are the products of context-specific neoliberal urbanization processes.⁷⁹ He observes the emergence of shanty neighbourhoods to be a typical outcome of the rich-poor dichotomy in developing countries.

While not directly addressing architecture, Tim Butler and his colleagues' work is crucial for understanding the class-driven shifts in the East End of London's residential areas, especially concerning alterations in educational institutions.⁸⁰ These changes have been spurred both by the

⁷⁸ Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁷⁹ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso Books, 2006).

⁸⁰ Tim Butler et al., *Ethnicity, Class and Aspiration: Understanding London's New East End* (Bristol University Press, 2011).

arrival of various ethnic communities and by gentrification. As the East End evolved from a predominantly white working-class region to a more ethnically diverse area, the authors contend that both ethnic dynamics and the housing market structure underwent significant changes. With a complementary perspective, Teresa Caldeira offers insights into urban segregation, spatial configurations, and the confluence of class, crime, and identity in São Paulo's residential zones.⁸¹ She argues that the city's gated communities and fortified enclaves reflect societal anxieties and an inclination towards seclusion from public life, emphasizing how housing design plays a crucial role in influencing the city's socio-cultural features.

Scholars explore the concepts of nation and nation-building in relation to the design of the house and housing environments, investigating how housing transcends the function of mere physical shelter. Abidin Kusno, viewing the national housing policies in Jakarta as community- and nation-building instruments, examines these housing policies' impact to the daily life and urbanization in the city, particularly looking at their influence on low-income groups.⁸² Kusno explores how the low-income housing program is integrated into slum renewal projects, land certification, and 'slum-free' initiatives, all as components of neoliberal urbanization processes. These processes entail the integration of the land market, the displacement of low-income communities to the city's margins, and a transformation in Jakarta's urban fabric.

Focusing on housing-oriented nation-building projects, Yael Allweil explores the crucial role of housing in the history of nation-building in Israel-Palestine. Her research examines how housing

⁸¹ Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁸² Abidin Kusno, "Housing the Margin," in *After the New Order: Space, Politics, and Jakarta* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

stands at the core of both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism.⁸³ Allweil views housing not only as a space of identity formation of individuals, but also as a mechanism through which religious and national identities are forged. She contends that housing production stands as the fundamental ideological cornerstone and tangible instrument for Zionist nation-building, a role it has played consistently from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century.

A different perspective is provided by Irene Becci, who investigates Baptist religious communities within the highly secular post-socialist enclaves of Berlin, with a specific focus on their residential environment.⁸⁴ She discusses how religious communities can integrate into residential settlements predominantly populated by secular communities employing several tactics. Following a similar approach, Stephan Lanz investigates the influence of Pentecostal churches on social structures, spatial configurations, and political factors within the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.⁸⁵ He explores how Pentecostalism has become an integral part of everyday life in these communities.

The review of selected works underscores the significance of housing and housing areas across diverse social, economic, and political settings, as they reflect and influence gender dynamics, class distinctions, ethnic identities, nation-building processes, and religious configurations.

While the examined works offer a thorough perspective on the intricate attributes and roles of housing within different cultural contexts, it is important to acknowledge that unraveling the

⁸³ Allweil, *Homeland*.

⁸⁴ Irene Becci, "Religious Involvements in a Post-Socialist Urban Space in Berlin," in *Topographies of Faith: Religion in Urban Spaces*, ed. Irene Becci, Marian Burchardt, and José Casanova (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 149–66.

⁸⁵ Stephan Lanz, "The Born-Again Favela: The Urban Informality of Pentecostalism in Rio de Janeiro," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 3 (2016): 541–58.

unique dynamics of housing within the context of Türkiye is fundamental. This understanding is crucial for studying residential enclaves formed through the intersection of capital and ideology within this specific context.

Housing beyond walls: Türkiye

The literature concerning the multifaceted aspects of housing and its interplay with social, economic, and political factors within the context of Türkiye serves as a crucial source for the present study. In this respect, this review sets the stage for exploring the relationship between faith-based ideology, capital-driven political agendas, and placemaking activities within the housing enclaves of Başakşehir.

Gender

Gender holds a crucial place in scholarly investigations centred around housing and domesticity in Türkiye. This significance arises from the interplay of discourses surrounding Islamism, secularism, modernity, and tradition, which make women's bodies and behaviours within and outside the home subjects of discussion. In these discourses, the house takes on dual roles: it functions as a domestic sphere where women's roles are confined to motherhood and wifehood, and it serves as a locus for homo-sociality manifested through same-sex social interactions, particularly prevalent in a significant portion of traditional conservative families. Accordingly, scholars have studied the gender-based dimensions of housing, interpreting the house's interior as both a gendered private sanctuary and a realm of freedom for women. On the other hand, the

exterior of the house symbolizes what is restricted or forbidden.⁸⁶ In this dissertation, I consider gender a critical factor in shaping the conservative identity of the resident community in Başakşehir. Gender contributes to the reshaping of people's religiosity by assigning distinct roles to individuals and shaping expectations, impacting behaviours and practices both within and beyond the home.

Several researchers investigate the influence of cultural, traditional, and religious dynamics on gendered norms within urban domestic settings. Meltem Gürel and Gülsüm Baydar, for instance, explore the relationship between women and their housing environments, emphasizing the contrast in how women engage with the outside world compared to their homes.⁸⁷ Further, they investigate how women craft, adapt, and utilize domestic spaces, probing the influence of gender norms in these adaptations, and utilizations. Through the application of feminist critiques, they bring a gendered perspective to the study of living spaces, highlighting a dimension frequently underemphasized in housing research.

⁸⁶ Although it is not specifically on housing and architecture, Nilüfer Göle's book provides valuable insights into the interplay of religiosity, women, and domesticity. She examines how the home serves as a space for regulating women's sexuality and facilitating interactions between genders. Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*, Critical Perspectives on Women and Gender (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2004).

⁸⁷ Selected works that mainly focus on the early republican period in Türkiye and mid twentieth century: Gülsüm Baydar, "Tenuous Boundaries: Women, Domesticity and Nationhood in 1930s Turkey," *The Journal of Architecture* 7, no. 3 (January 1, 2002): 229–44; Gülsüm Baydar, "Room for a Newlywed Woman: Making Sense of Gender in the Architectural Discourse of Early Republican Turkey," *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-) 60, no. 3 (2007): 3–11; Meltem Ö. Gürel, "Defining and Living out the Interior: The 'Modern' Apartment and the 'Urban' Housewife in Turkey during the 1950s and 1960s," *Gender, Place & Culture* 16, no. 6 (2009): 703–22.

Tahire Erman also examines the residential landscapes of urbanized women, focusing especially on those from low-income, marginalized, and minority demographics.⁸⁸ She scrutinizes the impacts of top-down initiatives aimed at redeveloping squatter housing neighbourhoods in cities, spotlighting the resultant poverty and dispossession. This becomes poignantly evident when women, displaced from their squatter dwellings, find themselves compelled to inhabit the provided apartment complexes in a different part of the city. By detailing the experiences of women transitioning from squatter houses to apartment housing, Erman explores the significance of home in these women's lives, as it shapes their personalities and influences their behaviour.

In various fields, multiple studies focusing on housing investigate how gender shapes the concepts of privacy and publicness for women. Öznur Şahin's research centres on the everyday lives and social interactions of women within and beyond the confines of their homes in Bağcılar—a district of Istanbul that has been under the governance of right-wing political parties since 1992.⁸⁹ As Şahin explores, women in Bağcılar were primarily limited to socializing with other women in their homes before the pro-Islamist municipality began organising women-only events in different parts of the city. The provision of socialization through conservative venues and women-only organisations have allowed them to attain a sense of freedom outside their homes, albeit limited. As the author highlights, such ventures have been facilitated by

⁸⁸ Tahire Erman, "Women and the Housing Environment: The Experiences of Turkish Migrant Women in Squatter (Gecekondu) and Apartment Housing," *Environment and Behavior* 28, no. 6 (1996): 764–98; Tahire Erman and Burcu Hatiboğlu, "Gendering Residential Space: From Squatter and Slum Housing to the Apartment Estates in Turkish Renewal Projects," *City & Community* 17, no. 3 (2018): 808–34; Tahire Erman, *Mış Gibi Site: Ankara'da Bir TOKİ-Gecekondu Dönüşüm Sitesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016); Tahire Erman and Burcu Hatiboğlu, "Rendering Responsible, Provoking Desire: Women and Home in Squatter/Slum Renewal Projects in the Turkish Context," *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no. 9 (September 2, 2017): 1283–1302.

⁸⁹ Öznur Şahin, "From Home to City: Gender Segregation, Homosociality and Publicness in Istanbul," *Gender, Place & Culture* 25, no. 5 (2018): 743–57.

designating certain urban areas exclusively for women. This means that women's access to public spaces has been both enabled and limited by gender-segregation.⁹⁰

Similarly, Hatice Kurtuluş examines women's socialization in a gated community named *Beykoz Konakları* in Istanbul.⁹¹ Her research reveals that many conservative upper-income families, especially the women in these families, prefer living in gated communities. This choice is not solely based on the allure of a modern, secure lifestyle; it also arises from the unique opportunities these communities offer to women. Beyond serving as residences, these gated communities offer women-only spaces where they can socialize without leaving the secure confines of their community or needing male accompaniment. Kurtuluş's work underscores the intersection of social needs, cultural norms, and architectural design in determining housing choices among conservative women.

Class and ethnicity

In this dissertation, investigating the intersection of class, ethnicity, and housing is pivotal to understanding how neoliberal policies might exacerbate socio-economic inequalities within the Başakşehir district. Through this examination, I explore how housing designs catering to specific socio-economic groups could lead to economic segregation, and how they influence the demographic composition of the settlement. Additionally, this approach offers insight into

⁹⁰ Şahin, 756.

⁹¹ Hatice Kurtuluş, ed., *İstanbul'da Kentsel Ayrışma: Mekânsal Dönüşümde Farklı Boyutlar*, 166 (Bağlam, 2005).

whether the allocation of public resources for housing is inclusive, or it predominantly serves to particular socio-economic groups, in line with a neoliberal Islamist agenda.

Most research on the intersection of class, ethnicity, and housing examines marginalized groups in cities and dwellings. Mehmet Melih Cin and Yakup Eğercioğlu investigate urban regeneration initiatives targeting Roma people in the Sulukule neighbourhood of Istanbul and the Ege neighbourhood of İzmir.⁹² The authors argue that urban regeneration projects, initiated ostensibly to develop cities and enhance the architectural qualities of targeted neighbourhoods, lead to gentrification and the exclusion of marginalized ethnic groups such as the Romani people. The urban renewal in the aforementioned neighbourhoods has prompted the emergence of new luxury housing projects in the renewed areas. Consequently, this has resulted in the displacement of previous residents to the outskirts of the city, where they often face yet another cycle of urban renewal and gentrification.

Cihan Uzunçarşılı Baysal explores how most of the society sees minority groups as uncivilized people and how the state instrumentalizes this perception for its neoliberal urban transformation projects.⁹³ The focus is on the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the Ayazma Urban Transformation Project in Istanbul. Following the clearance of the Ayazma neighbourhood's old squatter houses, the squatters were relocated to a new housing development constructed by TOKİ in Bezirganbahçe, another neighbourhood in Istanbul. In their new environment, these former Ayazma inhabitants encountered the state's disciplinary mechanisms,

⁹² Mehmet Melih Cin and Yakup Eğercioğlu, "A Critical Analysis of Urban Regeneration Projects in Turkey: Displacement of Romani Settlement Case," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 216 (January 6, 2016): 269–78.

⁹³ Cihan Uzunçarşılı Baysal, "Civilizing the Kurdish Population of Ayazma: Ayazma/Tepeüstü Urban Transformation Project-Küçükçekmece, Istanbul," *Planning* 23, no. 2 (2013): 83–94.

predominantly through social programs aimed at instructing them on apartment living etiquette.

As the author argues, the ruling politicians and state actors instrumentalize urban renewal projects to transfer urban lands from low-income groups to high income ones and introduce novel strategies for disciplining the so-called “untamed” populations. In this context, housing emerges as both a mechanism for defining urban class dynamics and a means of social discipline.

Hatice Kurtuluş, in her work on changing class representations and spatial segregation in the residential landscapes of Istanbul, examines the rise of gated communities, questioning the evolving socio-economic factors fueling this trend.⁹⁴ She compares various types of gated communities, analyzing their spatial organisation, inhabitants, and lifestyles. She contends that Türkiye’s integration into neoliberal global policies since the late 1970s has driven the growth of these communities, leading to significant capital investments in housing for the emerging middle and upper classes. This phenomenon has not only reshaped traditional neighbourhoods, creating a fragmented appearance across the city, but also fundamentally altered the experience of residing in Istanbul for its inhabitants. With a similar research focus, Seda Aydın compares the gated communities of the 1980s to those of the 2000s, emphasizing the changing spatial qualities and resident profiles.⁹⁵ She highlights that while gated communities of earlier decades catered primarily to affluent segments, those established post the 2008 economic downturn have resonated with a wider swath of middle-class urbanites. Prestigious amenities, once the hallmark

⁹⁴ Hatice Kurtuluş, “Gated Communities as a Representation of New Upper and Middle Classes in Istanbul,” *İ.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 44 (2011): 49–65. For a similar approach to the emergence of new wealth groups living in gated communities see: Perouse Jean-François, “Zenginliğin Mekânda Yeni Yansımaları: İstanbul’da Güvenlikli Siteler,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 4 (2005): 92–123; Rıfat N. Bali, *Tarz-ı Hayat’tan Life Style’a: Yeni Seçkinler, Yeni Mekânlar, Yeni Yaşamlar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002).

⁹⁵ Seda Aydın, “İstanbul’da ‘Orta Sınıf’ ve Kapalı Siteler,” *İdealkent* 3, no. 6 (2012): 96–123.

of elite gated communities, are now prevalent. Correspondingly, with a broadening target demographic, the marketing rhetoric for these projects has pivoted, adopting populist narratives underscoring the “Turkish family structure” and “family values” to appeal to the burgeoning middle class. Aydın’s research enriches our comprehension of how urban class dynamics impact the housing sector and the strategies employed to resonate with potential residents.

Nation-building and religion

Nation-building projects and the propagation of faith-based ideology often hinge on the creation of a shared identity among diverse populations and housing plays a crucial role in realization of these ideals. Housing policies, designs, and spatial organisations can both reflect and promote ideology, significantly shaping the societal fabric along with the physical landscape. The scholarship exploring the symbiotic relationship between ideology and housing production provides a meaningful context for understanding how ideology is materialized within housing policies and practices, thereby fostering a sense of national identity, and belonging among the residents of a community.

In several studies focusing on the early decades of the Republic, housing production is presented as both a symbol and an instrument of Kemalist nation-building. These studies suggest that the house was perceived as an idealized architectural container, poised to either accommodate or dictate a modern, secular, and Western lifestyle. Sibel Bozdoğan, in her own research, as well as in a collaborative study with Esra Akcan, characterizes state-supported housing construction as

the state's mechanism for moulding national identity and exerting control over society.⁹⁶

Although the political discourse of the Kemalist nation-building project has changed drastically after the 1950s and veered off in new directions, the changing state actors have continued to use housing as a tool of encouraging and deterring the identity production processes of different social groups.

While many scholars have studied the production of urban and architectural space for nation- and community-building objectives, especially during the AKP era, only a handful have centred their research on housing production and the architectural and urban characteristics of housing environments. Ozan Karaman analyzes the interplay between neoliberal urbanism and Islamism in Türkiye, specifically investigating the “spatial reappropriation dimensions” in Istanbul.⁹⁷ Using an urban renewal project in the city as a case study, Karaman examines how political actors leverage Islamist discourse to facilitate the implementation of urban renewal initiatives in Istanbul's poor neighbourhoods. This exploration into the nexus between political ideology and urban redevelopment resonates with Aksu Akçaoğlu's work. Akçaoğlu examines the transformation of housing environments of conservative middle-income groups paralleling the rise of Islamism in Türkiye, through the case of the residential landscape in the Çukurambar neighbourhood in Ankara.⁹⁸ The author investigates how this once squatter neighbourhood has transformed into a magnet for the conservative segments of the middle class, driven by the rise

⁹⁶ Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Bozdoğan and Akcan, *Turkey*.

⁹⁷ Ozan Karaman, “Urban Neoliberalism with Islamic Characteristics,” *Urban Studies* 50, no. 16 (2013): 3412–27.

⁹⁸ Aksu Akçaoğlu, “The Making of Conservative Habitus: The Case of an Uppermiddle Class Neighborhood in Ankara” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2017).

of new and opulent high-rise residences. This tangible metamorphosis of the area parallels the shaping of a “conservative middlebrow taste” that aligns with bourgeois sensibilities.⁹⁹

Ayşe Saktanber conducts research into the Islamic way of life within a conservative community residing in a housing estate located in Ankara.¹⁰⁰ She examines how the members of this community adapt themselves to “live Islam” as *şuurlu* (conscious) Muslims in their living environment. Saktanber’s work is not primarily focused on the spatial and urban qualities of the residential complex, yet her work provides insight into how a conservative community built and transformed their living spaces in compliance with their religiosity, isolating themselves from the pressures of the secular establishment and the intolerant social groups of the 1980s’ Türkiye.

Beyond the aforementioned works that analyze the social, political, and economic aspects of housing and housing enclaves, I would like to highlight three studies concerning Başakşehir and Islamist community-building in the settlement. These studies have been a consistent source of inspiration throughout the development of my dissertation.¹⁰¹ Of the three works, two extensively explore the historical context, political complexities, community dynamics, and cultural influences shaping Islamist community development in Başakşehir. Notably, these

⁹⁹ Akçaoğlu, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Ayşe Saktanber, *Living Islam: Women, Religion and the Politicization of Culture in Turkey* (London: Tauris, 2002).

¹⁰¹ See also other works on different urbanization processes of Başakşehir and the social life there: Selin Gürgün, “A Visual Ethnographic Approach to Islamic Lifestyles: The Case of Başakşehir” (Ankara, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2014); Duygun Ruben, “Neoliberalization of Social Housing in Turkey: The Case of Kayaşehir” (Unpublished Master Thesis, Istanbul, Boğaziçi University, 2019); Erbatur Çavuşoğlu and Julia Strutz, “From Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir—A City Grows ‘Out in the Sticks,’” in *Massive Suburbanization: (Re)Building the Global Periphery*, Global Suburbanisms (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 165–80.

works do not specifically concentrate on the design and construction of the physical environment.

Cultural anthropologist Ayşe Çavdar's Ph.D. dissertation on Başakşehir and the politics of religiosity stands out as a crucial study.¹⁰² Çavdar investigates the intricate ways in which modern city life influences religiosity and, in turn, how religiosity is manifested within urban confines. Her insights into Başakşehir's history, its unique social and physical features, and the shifting ethical perspectives of its residents, combined with her analysis of the rise of conservative middle-class lifestyles, have significantly influenced the formulation of my research inquiries and arguments. By delving into these aspects, I contextualized my architectural and urban analyzes within a broader framework affected by the interplay of social factors (such as cultural norms and community relations), political influences (such as government policies and urban planning decisions), and economic forces (such as investment patterns and market forces).

In a parallel vein, sociologist İrfan Özet, in his Ph.D. dissertation, explores how the living areas of conservative groups in Türkiye have evolved in tandem with their shifting power relations.¹⁰³ By chronicling the historical trajectories that birthed new strands of conservatism in Türkiye, he elucidates how these shifts have shaped daily life and identity formation within residential contexts. Özet focuses on Fatih and Başakşehir—two neighborhoods in Istanbul renowned for

¹⁰² Çavdar, "Loss of Modesty: The Adventure of Muslim Family from Mahalle to Gated Community". Also see the author's publications on the same topic: Çavdar, "Building, Marketing and Living in an Islamic Gated Community"; Ayşe Çavdar, "Müslüman Getto Çakma Modernite," *Express* (115), 2010, 44–48.

¹⁰³ İrfan Özet, "Kentli Muhafazakârlarda Habitus Dönüşümü: Fatih ve Başakşehir Örneği" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Isparta, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, 2018). Also see the author's book on the same subject: İrfan Özet, *Fatih-Başakşehir: Muhafazakar Mahallede İktidar ve Dönüşen Habitus*, vol. 448 (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019).

their conservative resident communities—and conduct an analysis of these groups, contrasting and examining their respective residential settlements. His in-depth analysis of Fatih and Başakşehir, two settlements symbolizing different visions of Islamist community building, has informed my perspective on the evolution of Islamism’s urban ideals, paralleling the transformation of the Islamist movement and its aspirations.

While both studies offer a profound understanding of the sociopolitical forces and the historical contexts of community-building within Başakşehir, my research diverges in its emphasis on the architectural and urban fabric of the settlement. Specifically, I explore the built objects within the district, examining how their form and function not only mirror but also mould the prevalent ideological leanings and sociocultural layers. This focus on the built environment serves as a lens to interpret the spatial nuances of forming a resident community. Instead of merely understanding Başakşehir as a backdrop to socio-political changes, I posit that the architectural and urban dimensions actively shape, and are shaped by, the ideological and cultural dynamics at play. Through this lens, the buildings, and urban layouts in Başakşehir are not just passive structures but active participants in the continuous evolution of the community’s identity and aspirations.

The third study crucial for my research is a book chapter penned by architectural historian Bülent Batuman, where he shines a spotlight on Başakşehir as an Islamist housing landscape.¹⁰⁴ What makes this work stand apart from the other two on the same settlement is its astute spatial evaluation. Batuman explores the instrumentalization of state-supported mass housing projects

¹⁰⁴ Bülent Batuman, “Housing Subjects of New Islamism,” in *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism: Negotiating Nation and Islam through Built Environment in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 61–107.

for building Islamist communities and community-specific residential towns, taking the initial mass housing project in Başakşehir by KİPTAŞ and comparing it with a similar project in Ankara orchestrated by TOKİ. By examining and contrasting these two instances, he highlights the AKP's use of housing projects as tools for "making of the *millet* [nation] at a micro-level," viewing these endeavours as mechanisms for shaping national identity and fostering nation-building.¹⁰⁵ Batuman's insights into the political narratives that paved the way for the emergence of new Islamist classes in Türkiye's urban centres—coupled with his comparative assessment of the Başakşehir Housing Project and the North Ankara Housing Project, have greatly refined my critical stance. This understanding has augmented my grasp of the ideological motivations and economic imperatives that characterize state-affiliated housing initiatives.

In my research, I thoroughly investigate and analyze diverse aspects of the built environment in Başakşehir, spanning across multiple scales. While I position housing at the core, recognizing it as the primary constituent of living environment, I expand my focus beyond dwellings. This broader examination includes public spaces, educational institutions, and other key infrastructural elements. These spatial components significantly influence the formation and evolution of Islamist identification and community formation within the area. My objective is to unravel how the design and utilization of these spaces encapsulate the intricate interplay of social, political, and economic forces that underpin the processes of Islamist identification and community formation.

¹⁰⁵ Batuman, 61.

Methodology and sources

This dissertation is based on fieldwork research conducted in several institutions in Istanbul and public and private spaces particularly in Başakşehir. The primary sources comprise semi-structured interviews, site photographs, and personal observations. In addition, I analyzed architectural drawings, newspapers, periodicals, official documents, housing catalogues, community bulletins, publicity brochures, and development reports.

The initial stage of data collection involved consulting with KİPTAŞ, TOKİ, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Başakşehir Governorship, and Başakşehir Municipality to obtain official information about Başakşehir, its origins, and its development history. Further, I visited several private construction companies active in Başakşehir. From these institutions, as well as from state and municipal offices, I retrieved zoning plans, maps, architectural drawings, development reports, municipal journals, publicity brochures, and community bulletins of mass housing projects in the district. I analyzed these documents to understand the spatial and social characteristics of the district, as well as housing enclaves, public spaces, and educational institutions.

In the next stage, I conducted extensive fieldwork in the Başakşehir district. Before the data collection phase of my research, my familiarity with the region was limited to the district's fame as a popular residential hub and the images of a handful of housing blocks. Accordingly, I intended to restrict my analyzes to the initial state supported housing project in the district, Başakşehir Housing Project, and its four stages catering to different socio-economic groups. However, having never actually visited Başakşehir, my initial perception of the settlement as a dry cluster of housing blocks underwent a significant transformation over time.

The first time I visited Başakşehir was in July 2017, marking two years since I selected the district as my research focus. By the end of the first day, my camera's memory was almost full of thousands of pictures capturing people, parks, streets, schools, mosques, clothing stores, real estate agency displays, graffiti works, street signs, and posters, in addition to housing towers. This experience expanded my interest beyond decoding the visible and metaphorical layers of residential blocks associated with Başakşehir. Now I was interested in understanding the diverse spatial components and socio-political and economic dynamics of this residential environment, as well as the stories, actors, narratives, and networks that play a role in its inception and development. In this light, this research gradually evolved into an in-depth examination of the built environment, specifically investigating how the intertwining of Islamism and neoliberalism manifests in various forms. I was inspired to delve deeper by recognizing the profound interconnectedness of Başakşehir's urban fabric with Türkiye's socio-political dynamics.

I made multiple visits to the district between July 2017 and July 2022. During these visits, I attended public events organised by Başakşehir Municipality, such as Ramadan festivities, Friday meetings, seminars, and women-only tea-time meetings. In these events, I recorded my field observations through photography and a fieldwork diary. With the assistance of the *muhtars*, (mukhtars, the official neighbourhood representatives) I met with residents and had the opportunity to visit several households and participate in community picnics with settlement residents. Additionally, I directly engaged with real estate agents to gather insights into the local housing market. Furthermore, I proactively established connections with state officials, municipality officers, and private construction company owners through my own initiatives.

Between January 2019 and November 2019, I conducted sixty semi-structured interviews encompassing a variety of actors, including state officers, *muhtars*, private construction company owners, real estate agents, housing estate managers, shopkeepers, and district residents. Each interview lasted from thirty minutes to one and a half hour. Throughout these sessions, I purposefully refrained from probing into participants' political or religious affiliations to ensure a neutral and impartial approach. Instead, I directed my inquiries toward the broader urban, architectural, economic, and social dynamics of the district. This method enabled me to pose objective and unbiased questions, devoid of personal viewpoints, aiming to capture a spectrum of perspectives, even those diverging from my research themes. This ensured the incorporation of diverse voices within my study.

My research focuses on understanding how specific power dynamics influence both the formation of a community and the physical landscape in Başakşehir. I have observed instances where these dynamics led to a more uniform community and physical environment in certain parts of the district, while in other areas, there was noticeable diversity or variation in terms of demographics, architectural styles, or social structures. These interviews have been crucial in unveiling the complex social fabric, political landscape, and economic influences shaping Başakşehir. They have shed light on the motivations driving settlement development, reasons for state and private investment in housing projects and public facilities, as well as residents' motivations for choosing Başakşehir as their home. To maintain confidentiality, interviewees' identities are anonymized to protect their privacy. Pseudonyms have been utilized where necessary, unless specified otherwise.

Data pertaining to self-interest-based relationships among politicians, investors, and religious communities is gleaned from alternative/non-mainstream newspapers, NGOs, and individuals such as residents, shopkeepers, and real estate agents. While some unofficial information on specific relationships or networks might be publicly available, it often remains underexplored or inadequately examined, occasionally leading to speculative interpretations. However, documenting and mapping this data holds significant value. It serves as a crucial tool in revealing patterns of influence, collaboration, and potential conflicts of interest. Its significance is particularly pronounced in a context where accurate insights into these relationships are often elusive due to government censorship and the suppression of media, urban activists, researchers, and scholars.

Chapter outline

This dissertation is structured thematically, with five chapters exploring spaces of habitation, publicness, and knowledge. Housing projects, public spaces, and educational institutions serve as the primary platforms through which I examine the interplay among the built environment, ideology, and capital.

Spaces of habitation are the main pillars of the settlement in Başakşehir, as the marker of the community identity, a generator of capital accumulation, a mirror of societal status, a stage of community and nation-building, a medium of social discipline, the reason and outcome of class struggle, ideologically constructed basis of gender segregation, and the representational site of piety. Given these multifaceted characteristics, I place my analyzes of housing development projects at the core of this research.

In contrast to the private nature of housing, spaces of publicness denote the platform where public activities occur, and where capital, ideology, and religion are visibly expressed and reproduced. These spaces act as stages for observing, being observed, body politics, and disciplining others' bodies. They play a significant role in the authoritarian or organic creation of collective identities. Also, capital accumulation is facilitated and accelerated through a spatial fix in these spaces of publicness.

While the spaces of habitation and spaces of publicness correspond to the major private and public domains of the settlement, spaces of knowledge serve as venues to form the subjects of these domains through education. The analysis of spaces of knowledge is crucial, not only for their assumed role in constructing future pious generations, transforming existing generations, and controlling their subjects' relationships with the social and physical world around them, but also for their prominence in urban settlements as architectural objects.

My selection of the objects of investigation—namely, the spaces of habitation, publicness, and knowledge—is based on their roles as arenas where capital and ideology are continuously reproduced. Additionally, they play significant roles in community-building processes, operating at both individual and societal levels. The settlement boasts a diverse array of public and private institutions and buildings, including health clinics, stadiums, malls, retail shops, mosques, and government offices. These entities collectively wield substantial influence, shaping interactions and relationships among community members while also exerting significant impact on the district's financial and commercial dynamics. Notably, Başakşehir City Hospital and Başakşehir Stadium have sparked debates recently, not only due to their prominence in populist discourses of politicians, investors, and pro-government media, but also due to speculations about

corruption. While studying these places is crucial in revealing the complex interplay between capital and ideology, I limit my research to houses, urban parks, squares, and educational spaces, where the subjects of the community experience the deepest levels of privacy and public engagement and where these subjects are formed. Similarly, while I acknowledge the valuable insights from scholarly works exploring the symbolic significance of mosques in political Islamist discourse and their role in practicing Islam as a belief system, my analysis intentionally omits mosques. I perceive them as representative places of religion. Instead, I investigate spaces without direct links to the Islamic faith.

Chapter I investigates the stories, spaces, and actors that define Başakşehir as an Islamist housing landscape. It explores the historical evolution of the residential landscape, the urban areas where this settlement was created and gradually expanded, and the individuals and communities who have shaped these histories and crafted these spaces. This examination sheds light on how the evolution of Başakşehir from a mass housing project on Istanbul's periphery into one of the largest districts in the city are tied to the resurgence and transformation of Islamism in Türkiye since the late twentieth century.

Chapter II and Chapter III respectively explore the spaces of habitation in Başakşehir. Chapter II focuses on the establishment and evolution of the Başakşehir Housing Project, developed by KİPTAŞ as a municipal construction company. This initiative marks the initial housing endeavour within the settlement. It delves into how, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the collaboration of Islamist politicians and capital holders led to the creation and growth of this housing project, shaped primarily by municipal institutions. This analysis establishes a connection between KİPTAŞ's transformation from a municipal institution focused on mass

housing production to a large corporation that constructs housing projects for higher-income groups, and the expansion of the Başakşehir Housing Project through the introduction of new stages. Initially intended as a mass housing development for low-income families, the project gradually expanded its targeted socio-economic class. The project's transformation over a decade, as well as the spatial features of its former and later stages, are examined against the backdrop of the policy changes, economic oscillations, and societal transformations during the mid-1990s and early 2000s.

Chapter III examines the mass housing and luxury housing endeavours undertaken by TOKİ as a state institution and several pro-government private companies. Recognizing Başakşehir's financial and spatial potential, these actors invested in the development of a new settlement, Kayaşehir, within the Başakşehir district. As Kayaşehir has experienced growth over time and drawn the attention of high-income residents, this phenomenon has catalyzed the development of upscale housing projects, public spaces, and institutions. As a result, there is now a wider selection of housing options available, marking a transition from predominantly catering to conservative residents from low-income groups to accommodating people from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. This chapter posits that the first housing settlement in Başakşehir, constructed by KİPTAŞ, encapsulates the urban desires of traditionalist Islamism that was prevalent in the 1990s. In contrast, the Kayaşehir settlement exemplifies the manifestation of contemporary neoliberal Islamism in Türkiye. To explore the transformation of Başakşehir's housing landscape, it further explores networks among pro-Islamist political and economic actors. Within this complex interplay of capital and ideology, these public and private actors have developed a series of mass and luxury housing projects driven by both financial and

ideological objectives, thereby transforming Başakşehir's identity from a modest settlement to a popular residential hub.

Chapter IV investigates the spaces of publicness, focusing on two types: urban park and town square. Through case studies of Sular Vadisi (Water Valley), Kayaşehir Millet Bahçesi (Nation's Garden), and Başakşehir Kent Meydanı (Town Square), this chapter explores how the same actors responsible for the development of the previously discussed housing projects also play a central role in orchestrating these public spaces. This chapter critically examines the spatial attributes of these public spaces, encompassing their physical elements, arrangement, design, layout, and overall urban configuration. It further delves into the intricate interactions and activities that unfold within these spaces, shedding light on their significance as venues for community engagement, social gatherings, and cultural exchanges. Additionally, the chapter explores the financial dimensions tied to these public spaces, analyzing their potential influence on the local economy, commercial activities, and notably, their contribution to the increase of land value in the area.

Chapter V examines the spaces of knowledge, where the pious generations envisioned and framed by politicians as the pillar of an ideal society, are formed. These knowledge institutions serve a purpose beyond their educational capacity; they act as tools for the national government to build conservative communities, shape everyday life in the district, and influence the urban spaces in which they exist. This chapter explores three such spaces in Başakşehir: Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School, İbn Haldun University, and Kayaşehir Millet Kırathanesi. The chapter argues that these institutions not only offer educational services but also encapsulate the political, religious, social, and cultural ideology of their founders through their architectural,

urban, and social features, as well as specific programing. Furthermore, they provide a platform for the inception and cultivation of ideology.

Contribution and significance

In my Ph.D. project, I investigate the interplay between neoliberal Islamism and the built environment, specifically focusing on housing enclaves and their communities in Istanbul's Başakşehir district. I argue that ruling politicians, in collaboration with state-owned entities, municipal bodies, and aligned investors, exert significant influence over the architecture and urban design of cities. They strategically craft faith-based narratives targeting their conservative electoral base while utilizing publicly owned resources. Within this framework, architecture and urban design transcend mere aesthetics or functionality. Instead, they emerge as potent tools not only for the formation and dissemination of ideology but also for propaganda and economic profit. In this research, I scrutinize built objects, examining their social, political, and economic underpinnings alongside their distinctive material and design elements. I seek to challenge prevailing views in architecture and urban design that are confined to just tangible elements. My objective is to expand our understanding of architectural entities, moving past their overt features to see them as significant agents and platforms shaping wider urbanization agendas. This understanding equips urban scholars, architects, and planners with an enhanced perspective to decode the intricate narratives inherent in existing structures and to anticipate the implications of future architectural and urban endeavours.

Viewing the urban settlement in Başakşehir as a total environment, I adopt a comprehensive analytical approach. In this sense, I examine diverse yet interconnected components of the built

environment under the themes of habitation, publicness, and knowledge. The aim is to understand and highlight the individual and collective role of these components forming a settlement within the framework of Islamist placemaking efforts in cities. As a result, this research emphasizes the imperative in urban design to view settlements as cohesively integrated assemblies of distinct elements. Each architectural element possesses unique attributes that, when combined, craft the distinct character and identity of these settlements.

When we direct this lens towards the broader academic landscape, a discernible gap surfaces within the realm of social sciences. There is an expanding body of research delving into the political, economic, and societal implications of ideology-driven movements in urban settings, yet their spatial dimensions remain largely uncharted. Scholars in fields such as sociology and cultural anthropology have probed the domestic cultures of communities established through Islamist networks, as well as the ideological and fiscal incentives behind political support for these communities. Nonetheless, the residential landscapes birthed by these Islamist community-building endeavours have not been thoroughly explored, especially in terms of their formal, material, and functional attributes. In this research, I examine a spatial habitus of Islamism through a detailed analysis of its architectural and urban dimensions. Thus, I provide a new perspective in the social sciences, emphasizing the crucial role of design and placemaking in not only shaping and spreading belief systems and political thought but also in nurturing unique community structures.

Further, in this dissertation, I investigate the individual, collective, and institutional stakeholders (politicians, state institutions, private companies, state officers, religious communities, and residents), and unpack their roles in Islamist space production in cities. Studying the crony

networks among these agents is vital to raising academic and public awareness about the ideological and profit-seeking renewal of cities. By revealing the links among agents involved in the design, construction, management, and use of the built environment, we can trace how such interconnections might lead to comparable spatial transformations in cities characterized by analogous power relations. Through understanding the interplay and influences of various actors in urban space, urban planners and policymakers can identify and avoid past pitfalls or shortcomings in urban development, ensuring more comprehensive urban environments in the future.

Chapter 1 | Başakşehir: Stories, Spaces, and Actors

When I began my fieldwork in Istanbul in 2018, the name of Başakşehir emerged as a hot topic in the Turkish media, due to the success of the Başakşehir Soccer Club in the national soccer league. The club's success was unexpected but what carried it to the national news was its controversial relationship with the ruling government. The focus of my doctoral research was not on soccer, or the soccer club named after the Başakşehir district, but rather the spatial and social characteristics of Başakşehir, as well as the political structures that lie beneath them. However, I eventually realized the dubious trajectory of the soccer club was not irrelevant to Başakşehir's evolution within three decades from a mass housing project on the fringes of the city to one of the largest districts with an Islamist housing landscape.

Established in 1990 by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the Başakşehir Soccer Club was initially named the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Sports Club. In 2014, businessperson Göksel Gümüşdağ, a distant relative of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, acquired the club from the municipality.¹ The club underwent a name change under the new management and board—closely associated with the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP), the Erdoğan family, and the former municipality committee—becoming the Başakşehir Soccer Club.²

¹ Dağhan Irak, *Football Fandom, Protest, and Democracy: Supporter Activism in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2019), 76.

² For a detailed analysis of the power and capital relations among state, governmental, and business actors linked to the Başakşehir Soccer Club, see: Hüseyin Kalaycı, "The Network of Capitalist 'Cronies' of the AKP: Başakşehir and Başakşehirspor," *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 4 (2022): 578.

While the club's initial vision was to represent the entirety of Istanbul, the new name specifically alludes to the Başakşehir district and, more pointedly, to the Başakşehir Housing Project. This renaming was in homage to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who championed the idea of creating a settlement in Başakşehir during his tenure as Istanbul's mayor from 1994 to 1998. In appreciation of this gesture, the Başakşehir Municipality offered to fund the construction of a soccer stadium for the club, which would cost approximately seventy-three million dollars.³ Kalyon Construction, a pro-government firm, was tasked with the project and remarkably completed the stadium in just sixteen months—significantly faster than the typical timeframe for such undertakings.⁴

Rumours concerning Başakşehir Soccer Club's political connections and government's financial backing drew criticism from soccer enthusiasts and opponents of the government.⁵ Despite the club's denial of such allegations, the stadium's opening ceremony was unmistakably political, doubling as a backdrop for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's presidential campaign ahead of the upcoming elections.⁶ This event showcased an exhibition match at the newly built stadium, where Erdoğan played soccer with his son, son-in-law, and several pro-government celebrities. Donning a Başakşehir jersey marked with the number twelve, he symbolically highlighted his

³ "Başakşehir bedavaya gitmiş... Akrabaya 'kiyak' satış!" *Cumhuriyet*, January 16, 2018, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/Başakşehir-bedavaya-gitmis-akrabaya-kiyak-satis-905831>.

⁴ Since its foundation, Başakşehir Soccer Club's primary sponsors have been a group of pro-government construction firms, including Fuzul Construction and Makro Construction. These firms have played a significant role not only in supporting the club but also in transforming the built environment of the Başakşehir district. Patrick Keddie, *The Passion: Football and the Story of Modern Turkey* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 123.

⁵ "Site Başakşehir'in para kaynakları: 8 maddede iktidar ve sponsor gerçekleri," *Sol Haber Portalı*, January 18, 2019, <https://haber.sol.org.tr/spor/iste-Başakşehirin-para-kaynaklari-8-maddede-iktidar-ve-sponsor-gercekleri-254967>; "Başakşehir bu parayı nereden buluyor?" *Sol Haber Portalı*, December 31, 2018, <https://haber.sol.org.tr/spor/Başakşehir-bu-parayi-nereden-buluyor-253807>.

⁶ Irak, *Football Fandom, Protest, and Democracy*, 77.

ambition of becoming Türkiye's twelfth president. State television commentator was effusive in their praise of Erdoğan's goals, seamlessly blending his enthusiasm with political affirmations. In reference to the ongoing conflict in Gaza and Erdoğan's anti-Israel politics at that time, the commentary exclaimed, "This is a goal for Gaza! This is a goal for Palestine! This goal comes from Erdoğan!"⁷ In the days following the match, the club chairman, Gümüşdağ, organised an exhibition to commemorate the event. The exhibition featured video replays of Erdoğan's goals and prominently displayed his jersey in a vitrine.⁸ The opening ceremony and exhibition exemplified the penetration of economic and political power networks into the realm of soccer, mirroring what has occurred in many other fields such as education, health, tourism, construction, real estate, and architecture. This convergence of politics with soccer allowed politicians to utilize the sport as another avenue for asserting their dominance, transforming it into a platform for populist discourses imbued with Islamist, nationalist, and authoritarian overtones.⁹

However, despite its remarkable success, Başakşehir Soccer Club struggled to attract supporters, particularly when compared to other big clubs in Türkiye.¹⁰ In April 2018, during a gathering

⁷ "Ertem Şener'in Başbakan'ın Golünü Anlatışı Sosyal Medyayı Salladı," *CNN TÜRK*, July 27, 2014, <https://www.cnnturk.com/haber/bilim-teknoloji/sosyal-medya/ertem-senerin-basbakanin-golunu-anlatisi-sosyal-medyayi-salladi>.

⁸ Dağhan Irak, "Football in Turkey during the Erdoğan Regime," *Soccer & Society* 21, no. 6 (August 17, 2020): 686.

⁹ The relationship between soccer and national politics in Türkiye neither began with the establishment of Başakşehir Soccer Club nor with Erdoğan's rule. This interplay has deep roots in the history of the country. For an in-depth exploration of why soccer in Türkiye has always been politically charged, while simultaneously maintaining a facade of apoliticism, see: Dağhan Irak, *Football Fandom, Protest, and Democracy: Supporter Activism in Turkey* (Routledge, 2019).

¹⁰ The 2017–2018 season saw Başakşehir come very close to winning the league title, but it only averaged 5,112 spectators per match, while other big teams in the league averaged over 30,000. Irak, "Football in Türkiye during the Erdoğan Regime," 686.

event held in Başakşehir, Erdoğan expressed his disappointment with the vacant stands of the Başakşehir stadium during its matches. He called upon Başakşehir residents to rally behind the soccer club that bears the name of their neighbourhood:¹¹

Başakşehir should aim to win the title in the political league as well as the soccer league. Sad to say, but, as long as there are empty seats at the stadium, I have a question mark. The youth of Başakşehir should fill that stadium. It is your team that is playing for the title; you should fill the stadium. We will be weak in politics if we are not present in these fields. You cannot just say, “I will not watch that.” Our party’s young followers will show themselves in sports like basketball, soccer, and swimming.¹²

These words were not mere rhetoric; they signaled a strategic effort to align the club with his political agenda. Hüseyin Kalaycı notes, Erdoğan was now aiming to use Başakşehir Soccer Club as a means to not only dominate the realm of soccer but also to advance his ideological and physical influence over the city and the country.¹³ Thus, he appealed to Başakşehir residents—presumed to be his followers—to support the club he had founded. Now, he was employing the same discourses and networks that had been established during the development of Başakşehir, in order to assume control of a soccer club and strengthen political backing.¹⁴

¹¹ Çağıl M. Kasapoğlu, “Başakşehir: Turkey’s ‘pro-Government’ Football Club Is Topping the League – and Dividing Opinions over Its Success,” *Çağıl M. Kasapoğlu* (blog), January 15, 2019, <https://cagilkasapoglu.wordpress.com/2019/01/15/Başakşehir-turkeys-pro-government-football-club-is-topping-the-league-and-dividing-opinions-over-its-success/>; Bilgin Gökberk, “Başakcity,” accessed December 27, 2019, <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/733959/Başakcity.html>.

¹² My translation. The original reads as: “Biz Başakşehir’in tıpkı futbolda olduğu gibi siyaset liginde de şampiyonluğa oynamasını bekliyoruz. Fakat kusura bakmayın. Stadının tribünlerini doldurmadığınız sürece soru işaretim devam eder. O tribünleri gençliğin doldurması lazım. Buna var mıyız? Şampiyonluğa oynuyorsunuz tribünlerin dolması lazım. Bu alanlarda olmadığımız sürece siyasette de zayıfsınız. Bunları halletmek lazım. Onun için kalkıp sadece belli şeyleri seyredemem dersiniz olmaz. Bu alanlarda meydanlarda AK Partinin gençliği kendini gösterecek. Futbol, basketbol, yüzme de de gösterecek.” “Erdoğan: İstedikleri Kadar Kur Silahı Kullansınlar,” *Hürriyet*, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/Erdoğan-istedikleri-kadar-kur-silahi-kullansin-40805159>. Translated by the author.

¹³ Kalaycı, “The Network of Capitalist ‘Cronies’ of the AKP,” 577.

¹⁴ Kalaycı, 578.

Erdoğan's approach fits into a broader pattern observed in populist leadership. As Kurt Weyland points out, populist leaders typically appeal to a diverse and heterogeneous mass of followers, many of whom may have previously been excluded from mainstream development but are now ripe for mobilization.¹⁵ Such leaders engage with their followers in what appears to be a direct and quasi-personal manner, bypassing established intermediaries such as political parties and interest associations. This was particularly evident in Erdoğan's speech, where he addressed the residents of Başakşehir, a community that was once marginalized in society. He spoke to them as if he were one of them, expressing his hopes for their success in overcoming their secular opponents and urging them to excel in areas that were traditionally dominated by secular groups.

This brief account of how a once-insignificant municipal sports club evolved into a major player in the national league in a short period of time reveals insights into the rapid development of the residential settlement in Başakşehir.¹⁶ The sports club and the settlement transcend mere physical entities; they are also imbued with profound political connotations and objectives. Much as the Başakşehir Housing Project has evolved into a settlement and a showcase of Islamist placemaking practices in a short span of time, Başakşehir Soccer Club has become an ideological tool utilized to promote similar political ambitions. Both the initiatives of founding a settlement and establishing a sports club were intended to enable the mobilization of the public through populist discourses based on religiosity, patriotism, nationalism, and developmentalism. The intricate interplay of narratives, histories, spaces, and stakeholders has not only led to the

¹⁵ Kurt Weyland, "Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31, no. 3 (1996): 5.

¹⁶ Kalaycı, "The Network of Capitalist 'Cronies' of the AKP."

establishment of the housing project in 1995 and the soccer club in 2014 but has also significantly shaped their subsequent trajectories of development.

* * *

Başakşehir, since its inception as a mass housing project in the mid-1990s, has represented more than just a cluster of concrete blocks for the Islamist movement in Türkiye. This is because of the ideological interests behind its founding, the historical processes it has undergone, and the myriad individuals and institutions that have fostered its growth. Today, Başakşehir stands as a housing landscape, a conservative community, a settlement associated with religious organisations, a provincial district, and a soccer club backed by the political establishment.

This chapter explores selected stories, spaces, and actors of Başakşehir. It traces the journey of the settlement as it evolves from the modest Başakşehir Housing Project to its emergence as a sprawling conservative residential landscape, culminating in its recognition as one of the largest districts of Istanbul, the “Başakşehir district.” The focus of the chapter lies on the historical episodes Başakşehir has witnessed since its establishment, the spaces in which this settlement was founded and expanded over time, and the actors that formed these stories and produced these spaces—while simultaneously being formed and produced by them. Through this lens, the chapter posits that Başakşehir’s evolving social, economic, and spatial facets intertwine with the broader transformation of Islamism in Türkiye, especially from the late twentieth century onwards.

I regard the residential landscape built in Başakşehir as an Islamist “habitus.” Habitus, according to Pierre Bourdieu, is characterized by mutually dependent relations between individuals (the builders and users in our case) and their built environment (where the habitus acquires spatiality).¹⁷ While acknowledging Bourdieu’s emphasis on habitus as a result of complex and “unconscious” processes, suggesting a lack of deliberate action among community members, the term remains fundamental in shaping our understanding of the formation of distinct communities. In the context of Başakşehir and the resident community, intentionally influenced or supported by external forces like governments, investors, or religious entities, comprise individuals who, somewhat “unconsciously conniving,” converge around a shared worldview. Therefore, while the establishment and community in Başakşehir are not solely the outcomes of entirely unwitting town-building and community-forming processes, the term habitus provides a dynamic framework to analyze a social and physical space shaped by an ideological framework. Habitus refers to a set of dispositions that are ingrained in individuals through social and cultural conditioning.¹⁸ These dispositions are not innate but are constructed through experiences, education, and social interactions within a specific social context or community. They then become embedded in the way people think, perceive, and act. The concept does not exist in isolation; it is deeply intertwined with the physical environment in which a community resides. Understanding the relationship between habitus and physical spaces is a crucial and intricate aspect of comprehending how communities develop and sustain their unique characteristics, as

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology; 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 55.

well as discerning which actors support this social and spatial habitus formation and their underlying motivations.

In Başakşehir, the spaces of the habitus are intertwined with the conservative outlook embraced by the majority of the resident community. It is crucial to note that neither the entire built environment nor the resident community can be viewed as a uniform body with identical features. Differences and distinctions are evident in both the architectural characteristics of the district and the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of its inhabitants. Not everything within the boundaries of Başakşehir contributes equally to the formation of an Islamist settlement there, especially when considering the ethnic, class-based, and ideological divisions prevalent in the district. The boundaries of what I refer to as the Islamist habitus in Başakşehir are not solely defined by its geographical borders but rather by the influence and reach of politicians, municipalities, public and private companies, religious communities, and residents actively shaping and propagating Islamism throughout the settlement.

In the following sections of this chapter, I begin by revisiting earlier endeavours to establish residential areas tailored for conservative groups and explore the spatial characteristics of these initiatives. Then, I trace the story of the Başakşehir Housing Project and the Başakşehir district from the mid-1990s onward. Subsequently, I shift my focus to the diverse components—including individuals, municipalities, religious organisations, architectural structures, and social events—that contribute to the formation and maintenance of the district's Islamist identity. Additionally, I discuss the growing immigrant community in the district and explore their spatial impact on the settlement as a newly emerging but rapidly expanding component of the Islamist

habitus. After examining what this habitus encompasses and excludes, I investigate the contested areas of the district that lie beyond the symbolic boundaries of the prevailing Islamist influence.

To be able to trace all these stories, spaces, and actors linked to Başakşehir, I consult the interviews I conducted with a variety of people—including *muhtars* (mukhtars, the official neighbourhood representatives), real estate agents, construction company owners/partners, tradespeople, and residents—the photographs that I took during my site visits to Başakşehir, and articles and images from newspaper archives.¹⁹

1.1. Islamic aspirations of building community spaces

As conceptualized by Benedict Anderson, the nation is a socially constructed community, a product of the imagination of those who see themselves as a part of it.²⁰ Hence, he refers to nation as an “imagined community.”²¹ This notion embodies a profound sense of belonging that unifies all citizens, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, race, or identity, within a defined territory rich with symbolic spaces. Even in the smallest nations, members may never know, meet, or even hear of most of their compatriots, yet they all share a mental image of their collective bond. The sense of belonging among the community members does not necessarily depend on close relationships or familiarity with each other. Anderson uses the word “imagined” not to suggest the connections between community members are fictionalized but to emphasize

¹⁹ All personal names of the interviewees, unless indicated otherwise, are pseudonyms.

²⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

²¹ Anderson, 6.

how members are connected unconsciously, even without having personal ties or communication.

The bond shared among members of a nation, often regarded as almost sacred, is distinct from the connection felt among members of a neighbourhood community. Yet, Anderson's term "imagined," used to describe nation-building, can aptly be applied to understanding the community-building processes in Başakşehir. Although the residents of the settlement become members of this community of their own accord and consciously—unlike members of a nation—they still form an imagined society grounded in a particular thought. Within this framework, members are connected not by nationalistic ties, but by imagined bounds shaped by religious, cultural, and ideological motivations. Arising from this dynamic is a spatial habitus—be it a workspace, a social environment, or a residential area—that facilitates and perpetuates the formation and sustenance of the community.

The evolution of community-specific spaces in Türkiye, particularly those established on faith-based discourses, establishes a historical precedent for the observed developments in Başakşehir. Before Başakşehir was even conceived, some religious groups in Türkiye attempted to create their own community spaces across different cities. In response to the 1970s' prevailing anti-conservative attitudes of the secular establishment, some religious groups sought small islands in cities to live in isolation. This desire birthed residential complexes such as Akevler in İzmir and Öz Elif Sitesi in Ankara.²² These small residential complexes were built in remote areas of cities, far from the city centre. With their subtle designs blending seamlessly into the landscape, they

²² Saktanber, *Living Islam*; Aksu Akçaoğlu, *Zarîf ve Dinen Makbûl: Muhafazakâr Üst-Orta Sınıf Habitusu*, vol. 444 (İletişim Yayınları, 2018); Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumlar* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1990).

symbolized an “isolated religiousness” and a secluded life separated from the mainstream secular society.²³

During the following decades, followers of the growing Islamist movement became increasingly interested in creating broader living environments for wider populations, beyond these small-scale initiatives designed for “conscious Muslims” to “live Islam.”²⁴ As noted by Cihan Tuğal, this imagination envisaged towns with a mosque as the centre, encircled by commercial spaces, marketplaces, educational institutions, and cultural facilities.²⁵ Moreover, conservative intellectuals proposed design principles for larger urban spaces and ideal Muslim cities deeply rooted in Islamic values, targeting conservative populations.²⁶ In their portrayals, they accentuated design elements centred around modesty, humility, and a deep reverence for nature. They disseminated their visions of ideal cities and conservative living environments through books, public speeches, newspapers, and journals. These representations became a significant part of the discourse among Islamist politicians.

Prominent architect and urban planner, Turgut Cansever, who later in his career adopted a conservative perspective, opined that the architectural and artistic decisions in the design of

²³ Burhan Aykaç and Şenol Durgun, “The Changing Political Discourse of the Islamist Movement in Turkey,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2018): 167.

²⁴ Ayşe Saktanber argues that what differentiates a “conscious Muslim” is the determination to lead the life—the way they live Islam—in accordance with Islamic precepts, instead of only believing in and following major pillars of Islam. Saktanber, *Living Islam*; Akçaoğlu, “The Making of Conservative Habitus,” 114.

²⁵ Cihan Tuğal, “The Greening of Istanbul,” *New Left Review* 51 (2008): 72–73.

²⁶ Some key works conceptualizing the notion of ideal Muslim city: Nurettin Topçu, *Yarınki Türkiye* (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1997); Mustafa Armağan, *Şehir, Ey Şehir: Şehir Üzerine Düşünce Okumaları* 2, vol. 41 (İstanbul: İz, 1997); Mustafa Kutlu, *Şehir Mektupları* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1995); Cihan Aktaş, *Şehir Tutulması* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2015); Cihan Aktaş, *Eksik Olan Artık Başka Bir Şey: İslamcılık* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2014).

physical spaces should mirror one's piety and faith.²⁷ He believed that architecture should be based on the spirit of Islam. Cities must be built following local and traditional principles of placemaking instead of mimicking the modernist tenets of city planning in the West.²⁸ Houses should be constructed as low-rise buildings with private gardens in a manner that allows for privacy among families. The height of the buildings should not exceed that of symbolic buildings of a settlement, such as mosques, madrasas, and monuments.²⁹

In 1975, Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the pro-Islamist Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party, MSP), voiced his ambition to establish a settlement for conservative populations in Istanbul. His plan involved constructing a village on the outskirts of Istanbul, aimed at rallying the party's supporters around a common ideological objective. With reference to the party's name, he named his project Selametköy (Salvation Village). Envisioned within this proposal were five thousand houses with yards, mosques, schools, and hospitals spanning about six hundred hectares of land area.³⁰ In 1976, several business circles associated with Necmettin Erbakan adopted his dream of building a settlement for his followers. Milli Gazete, the MSP's semi-official daily, ran a publicity campaign inviting readers to purchase parcels of land in Selametköy and establish their own communities.³¹

Initially, the newspaper depicted Selametköy as a planned settlement intended to consist of residential units available for purchase. However, due to tensions between Islamist politicians

²⁷ Turgut Cansever, *İslâm'da Şehir ve Mimari* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2006), 132.

²⁸ Turgut Cansever, "İslâm Mimarîsi Üzerine Düşünceler," *Divan*, no. 1 (1996): 145.

²⁹ Cansever, *İslâm'da Şehir ve Mimari*, 123.

³⁰ Bahadır Özgür, "Fights over Land from Salvationville to ErdoğanCity," December 19, 2019, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/columns/2019/12/19/fights-over-land-from-salvationville-to-Erdoğan-city/>.

³¹ Özet, "Kentli Muhafazakârlarda Habitus Dönüşümü: Fatih ve Başakşehir Örneği," 184–85.

and state, the developers faced challenges in obtaining required building permits for the designated land. Consequently, rather than constructing the promised houses for the Selametsköy project, the developers subdivided the land into parcels. They then marketed these parcels, encouraging followers of the MSP to purchase a plot. This strategy aimed for individuals to build their own homes and establish a settlement, where they could reside alongside those with similar worldviews. However, a *coup d'état* in 1980 brought about significant shifts in diverse spheres of the country. The upheaval led to the cancellation of the Selametsköy project, causing financial losses for many who had invested in it.³² As the dream came to an end, deep despair was felt by the supporters of Necmettin Erbakan in particular and the Islamist movement in general.

1.2. Islamist takeover of Istanbul

After the *coup d'état* in 1980, all political parties were disbanded by the military regime. Necmettin Erbakan and other members of the MSP were prohibited from engaging in political activities. However, the Islamist movement saw a significant resurgence in the early 1990s under the new banner of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP), which also accommodated members from the previously banned MSP.³³ Alongside its appeals to the conservative segments of society, the political propaganda of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) promised to address unemployment and poverty, championing discourses of welfare, equality, benevolence, development, and a just order. This political strategy enabled the RP to win the 1994 municipal

³² Özet, 185.

³³ Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey* (Pittsburgh: RAND Corporation, 2008), 41.

elections in twenty-eight cities, including Istanbul and Ankara, which marked a turning point in Turkish politics in general and the history of the Islamist movement specifically.³⁴

The profound symbolism of this resurgence is most evident in how Islamists viewed their electoral victory in Istanbul. Tanıl Bora observes, the Islamists thought of Istanbul's takeover as the city's second conquest after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.³⁵ Istanbul occupies a central role in the imaginations of the Islamist movement. As Bora states, in historical narratives on Turkish nationalism and Islamism, the city is referred to as the "promised land.": The Prophet Muhammad is said to have foreseen the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul by stating that a great commander for Islam would take over the city.³⁶ In these narratives, Istanbul is depicted as "blessed" but perceived to have "lost, divorced from its true essence" due to modernization. The city was believed to have lost both its aura and beauty due to Western-oriented policies implemented by the secular republican establishment.³⁷

From the standpoint of secular groups, Ankara, the capital of the republican regime, was seen as the city symbolizing the nation. It was built from scratch as a modern, secular, national city out of an insignificant village. However, as Alev Çınar argues, for the Islamists of the 1990s, the city

³⁴ Rabasa and Larrabee, 42.

³⁵ Bora, "Istanbul of the Conqueror," 48.

³⁶ Bora, 48.

³⁷ It should be noted that, throughout the 1990s, even before the onset of "Erdoğan's reign" in Türkiye, his political discourse focused on using Istanbul's religious heritage primarily to appeal to global capital and tourism instead of using it as the foundation for establishing an Islamic state. As the AKP government took power in Türkiye, the pious groups began advocating for the construction of concrete towers in the city's new financial centres. Cihan Tuğal points out, the pious Muslims of the earlier periods aligned with the AKP—and now viewed themselves as conservatives rather than Islamists—might utilize religion to reconstruct the city in a manner that contradicts their Islamic city aspirations. Tuğal, "The Greening of Istanbul," 75.

that represented the heart and soul of the nation was Istanbul. The city was declared as the centre of Ottoman-Islamic civilization, representing the core identity of the Turkish nation.³⁸

In line with this perspective, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the RP's mayoral candidate, stated before the 1994 local elections that Istanbul must be "conquered back from the Kemalist elites and brought into the light."³⁹ Erdoğan revealed his intention to transform Istanbul both physically and culturally in an interview he gave to the journal of the Türk Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği (Turkish Industry and Business Association, or TÜSİAD) just before the elections. In describing his plans for the city, he stated:

We see a world city when we look at Istanbul. Above all, it is a city that was praised by our prophet. Unfortunately, it does not deserve that praise any longer. Firstly, it needs to regain its cultural and historical texture. It should acquire the identity of a Muslim city based on its origins and traditions.⁴⁰

As soon as Erdoğan took over the governance of Istanbul, he promptly initiated efforts to foster a local culture that embraced its unique identity while seeking to minimize Western influences in the city. He announced plans to build new architectural projects such as a grand mosque and Islamic Culture Centre in Taksim Meydanı, intended to showcase the city's Islamic heritage. Furthermore, leveraging his political authority, Erdoğan actively oversaw, modified, and

³⁸ Alev Çınar, "Cities, Squares and Statues: The Use of Public Space in the Making of the Nation," in *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 102.

³⁹ Bora, "Istanbul of the Conqueror," 48.

⁴⁰ My translation. The original reads as: "Biz İstanbul'a baktığımızda bir dünya kenti görüyoruz. Her şeyden önce peygamberimizin de methiyelerini almış bir kenttir. Ama artık bu methiyeyi hak etmiyor. Ona öncelikle tarihi ve kültürel dokusunu yeniden kazandırmak gerekiyor. Bir kere aslına ve geleneklerine uygun olarak bir Müslüman şehri kimliğini kazanmalı." Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "İstanbul Stres Değil, Huzur Kenti Olacak," interview by Necla Zarakol, 1994, 43.

moulded the daily life of the city through various avenues. A set of regulations was issued to redefine the urban public culture. This included heightened regulations on bars and the consumption of alcoholic beverages within municipally owned restaurants, as well as integrating symbols with religious and cultural significance into public spaces.⁴¹

Among all the plans and regulations for the spatial and social transformation of Istanbul, Erdoğan prioritized creating new urban environments reflecting Islamist urban visions. Following his election, Erdoğan immediately began carrying out the vision of his mentor, Necmettin Erbakan, by developing a housing settlement through Istanbul Konut İmar Plan Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc., or KİPTAŞ)—a municipal construction company founded in 1987 to construct affordable housing in Istanbul.⁴²

1.3. An old dream comes true: Building a habitus in Istanbul

When Erdoğan became the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, the city was facing a problem of inadequate affordable housing, leading to the emergence of unauthorized (squatter) settlements.⁴³ This issue was fuelled by rapid population growth, urbanization, and migration. In response to this challenge, Erdoğan viewed the provision of low-cost housing as a crucial solution to address the affordable housing shortage in the city. However, his vision for affordable housing extended beyond serving the public's basic needs. Drawing inspiration from the unrealized *Selametköy*

⁴¹ Cihan Tuğal, "The Urban Dynamism of Islamic Hegemony: Absorbing Squatter Creativity in Istanbul," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 3 (December 1, 2009): 431.

⁴² "Hakkımızda," accessed July 20, 2023, <https://www.kiptas.istanbul/hakkmzda>.

⁴³ M. Melih Pınarcıoğlu and Oğuz Işık, "Segregation in Istanbul: Patterns and Processes," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 100, no. 4 (September 2009): 158.

project, Erdoğan aimed to create a new residential environment in Istanbul, so the conservative residents of the city would have their own enclaves.

In this regard, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality initiated two major housing projects as part of its housing program. The housing project built in the European part of Istanbul was called Başak (wheat ears), while that in the Asian part of the city was called Hilal (crescent), referring to the RP's emblem: a wheat spike and crescent.⁴⁴ The neighbourhoods where the Başak and Hilal projects were constructed were named Başakşehir and Hilalşehir, respectively. Though both were quite small neighbourhoods that were far from qualifying as “cities,” the politicians behind these projects promoted the neighbourhoods as Muslim cities within the city of Istanbul. They used the word city—a branding term associated with neoliberal urbanism—to denote these residential areas. With 1,284 units, Hilalşehir was a relatively small housing settlement, whereas Başakşehir was much larger with 3,004 units.⁴⁵ Over the course of time, the Başakşehir Housing Project was extended in stages and expanded beyond its initial boundaries. As of 2023, the project, in four stages, comprises 18,760 housing units.⁴⁶

When the construction of the Başakşehir Housing Project began in 1995, there was no settlement nearby except the İkitelli Organised Industrial Zone, which housed thousands of small and mid-sized businesses and enterprises and their employees, most of whom were members of existing

⁴⁴ Çavdar, “Building, Marketing and Living in an Islamic Gated Community,” 515.

⁴⁵ “Pendik Şeyhli Hilalşehir Konutları,” KİPTAŞ, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://www.kiptas.istanbul/en/our-projects/completed-projects/en-pendik-seyhli-hilalsehir-konutlari>; “Blok ve Daire Sayıları,” accessed October 13, 2022, <https://Basaksehir1.com/dy/blok-ve-daيرة-sayilari/>.

⁴⁶ “Tamamlanan Projeler,” KİPTAŞ, accessed January 18, 2023, <https://www.kiptas.istanbul/tamamlanan-projeler>.

Islamist networks.⁴⁷ The proposed location of the housing project was far from the city's core districts in the broadest sense.⁴⁸ Even though the once suppressed and neglected conservative groups were now gaining economic and political power and becoming more visible in the public sphere, their political leaders were still reluctant to construct the long-awaited housing settlement for their imagined community in a central district of the city. Given the prevailing tension between the state and conservative groups and the rough media propaganda against the pro-Islamist political attempts, the location of the Başakşehir Housing Project in a peripheral area of the city, instead of in a central district, was understandable.

⁴⁷ İsmail Doğa Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey: The Case of Public Housing*, International Comparative Social Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 159.

⁴⁸ Even today, to be able to reach Başakşehir from the central parts of the city, for example Beyoğlu as one of the popular districts of the European side of Istanbul, one should spend an average of forty minutes by car, and at least one hour forty-five minutes by bus or the metro line.

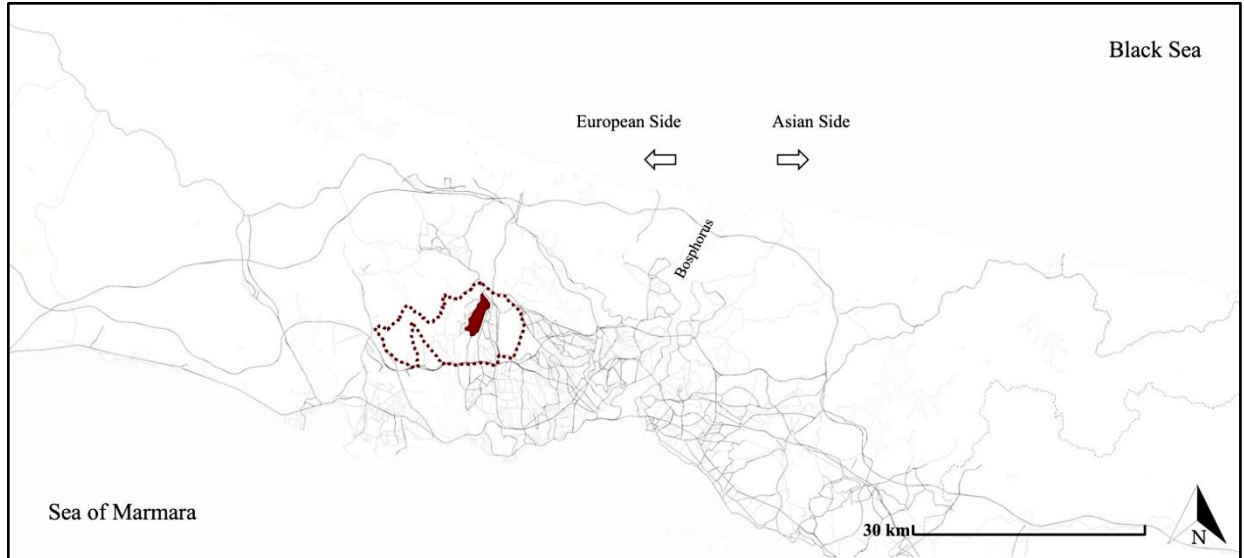


Figure 1: Istanbul map. Başakşehir neighbourhood and Başakşehir district are highlighted. Source: Google Maps image modified by the author. The Başakşehir neighbourhood, where the initial stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project were constructed, is highlighted with red colour on an Istanbul map. The area shown with red dashed line represents the boundaries of the Başakşehir district established in 2008.

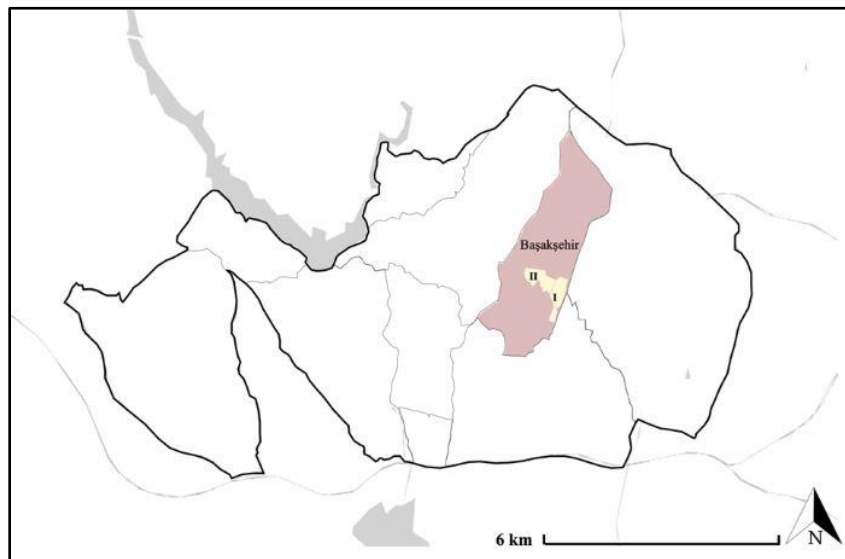


Figure 2: Initial two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project and the Başakşehir neighbourhood are highlighted on a map of the district. Source: Google Maps image modified by the author.

The residents that the Istanbul Municipality and KİPTAŞ envisaged for the Housing Project were low- and middle-income families, who were ideologically close to the pro-Islamist RP. A senior KİPTAŞ manager, İsmail, points out two major reasons that drove these families to buy a house in a distant part of the city.⁴⁹ First, “after facing prolong struggle and marginalization, the conservative groups placed their trust in Tayyip *Bey* [Mr. Erdoğan] when he announced his entry into the housing market,” explains İsmail. Trust was a significant factor that made the Başakşehir Housing Project appealing to those people. In İsmail’s words, although the land was “*dağın başında*” (out in the sticks) they still wanted to buy a house there.

Second, the availability of affordable housing options was limited, leaving housing cooperatives as one of the few viable choices. According to İsmail, those aware of others’ negative experiences with housing cooperatives perceived both KİPTAŞ—as a municipal company—and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—as the newly appointed mayor who had promised to help low-income people during his election campaign—as reliable. As İsmail explains, “They had paid monthly fees to the housing cooperatives over decades... They had waited for ages to become homeowners.” People saw KİPTAŞ’s offer as an opportunity to own a house. As İsmail says, “the institution completed the housing project in fifteen months—as promised, and the residents moved in at the end of the period.”⁵⁰

For a comprehensive understanding of İsmail’s perspective, it is crucial to have a look at the broader context of the housing market during that time regarding cooperative housing.

Cooperative housing, which had emerged as an alternative homeownership model for low- and

⁴⁹ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager), In Person, July 13, 2018.

⁵⁰ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager).

middle-income groups in the 1930s, had unfortunately lost much of its appeal by the mid-1990s.⁵¹ Cooperatives had previously benefited from being able to purchase land at below-market prices from public institutions and municipalities for decades.⁵² However, due to worsening economic conditions such as high inflation, this housing supply model lost its momentum. As government support decreased and the state's credit program for housing cooperatives was cancelled, the number of cooperatives declined.⁵³ Construction often took longer than promised and costs ended up higher than anticipated, while many policy restrictions and regulations related to cooperative housing made it difficult for cooperatives to obtain the required permits.⁵⁴ In some cooperatives, construction that began in the 1980s remained unfinished due to these circumstances and inadequate funding.⁵⁵

Yakup, a manager of one of the housing estates in Başakşehir, similarly claims how the “unreliability” of housing cooperatives in the 1990s led people to consider buying a flat in Başakşehir.⁵⁶ Interestingly, his views align with those of İsmail, despite the fact that Yakup, as a secular retired soldier, did not share İsmail's pro-government stance. Yakup offers an anecdote about the housing cooperatives of the 1990s:

⁵¹ Keleş, *Kentleşme Politikası*, 293.

⁵² Ali Türel and Hülya Koç, “Housing Production under Less-Regulated Market Conditions in Turkey,” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 30, no. 1 (March 2015): 58.

⁵³ Gülden Berkman, “Türkiye’de Konut Kooperatiflerinin Konut Üretimine Katkısı ve Başarı ve Başarısızlıklarının Değerlendirilmesi,” in *Konut Araştırmaları Sempozyumu* (Ankara: Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı, 1995), 150.

⁵⁴ Alper Özkan, “A Critical Evaluation of Housing Co-Operatives in Turkey within the Framework of Collective Action Theories: A Case Study in Ankara and İstanbul” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2009).

⁵⁵ Berkman, “Türkiye’de Konut Kooperatiflerinin Konut Üretimine Katkısı ve Başarı ve Başarısızlıklarının Değerlendirilmesi,” 150; Ruben, “Neoliberalization of Social Housing in Turkey: The Case of Kayaşehir.”

⁵⁶ Yakup (Community manager), In Person, May 17, 2019.

Years ago, I was working in a recreational centre in Istanbul. A man in his nineties came by one day. As I accompanied him to the elevator, he told me about himself. He was a retired judge living with his son, a doctor in his fifties. Although they lived in a small apartment, they had difficulty paying their rent. He had always aspired to become a homeowner but had not yet succeeded. He had entered a cooperative established by a group of judges at the beginning of his career, fifty-five years ago. And since that day, he had continued to pay the cooperative housing dues and yet he had nothing. Fifty-five years! He still believed he would become a homeowner one day!

These stories underscore why the Başakşehir Housing Project gained traction at a time when people were skeptical about investing in housing projects marketed by contractors, private construction companies, or cooperatives. Without other viable alternatives and given their limited budgets, people felt more at ease purchasing a house from KİPTAŞ, a municipal company with a strong mandate.

Bu Kampanyayı Kaçırmam

Başak-Hilal Konutları
İKİTELLİ-KAĞITHANE-PENDİK SATIŞ KAMPANYASI
MALİYETİNE 80 m² - 84 m² - 123 m² DAİRELER
24 Haziran - 25 Temmuz

İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi
KİPTAŞ

1. KAMPANYADAKİ HAK SAHİPLERİNİN KONUTLARI 24 TEMMUZ'DA TESLİM EDİLİYOR.

TEŞEKKÜR
İSTANBUL BÜYÜKŞEHİR BELEDİYESİ'nce hayata geçirilen
BAŞAK KONUTLARI'nın, halkımızın takdirine sunulması amacıyla düzenlenen, 2. Satış Kampanyası Açılış Töreni'ne katılarak, bu dev projenin hakkı gururunu bizimle paylaşan
HALKİMIZA
ve
RP Genel Başkanı Prof. Dr. Sayın **Necmettin ERBAKAN**
İst. Milletvekili **Mukadder BAŞEĞMEZ**
RP MKYK **Hasan Hüseyin CEYLAN**
RP MKYK **Azmi ATEŞ**
RP İst. İl Bşk. **Mehmet Ali ŞAHİN**
RP İst. İl Bşk. **Ethem ERDEM**
Kağıthane Bld. Bşk. **Atif CALBAN**
Ünvanı Bld. Bşk. **Mehmet BİNGÖL**
Başarmış Bld. Bşk. **Hüseyin BÜRGE**
Bağcılar Bld. Bşk. **Feyzullah KİYİKLİK**
Gözcümen Bld. Bşk. **Recep KORAL**
Kazırgan Bld. Bşk. **İsmail KORKMAZ**
G.O.P. Beşiktaş Bld. Bşk. **Bahri KAZANKAYA**
Beşiktaş Bld. Bşk. **Hüseyin Hilmi OKSÜZ**
en kalbi teşekkürlerimi sunuyorum.
R. Taysip ERDOĞAN
İSTANBUL BÜYÜKŞEHİR BELEDİYE BAŞKANI

Figure 3 (Left): A newspaper advertisement from *Milliyet*, June 26, 1996. Source: Milliyet Newspaper Archive, <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/>.

The advertisement by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and KİPTAŞ about the release of the apartments in Başak and Hilal housing projects say: “Do not miss this campaign.” The choice of a woman wearing headscarf in the advertisement speaks to the intended audience of the housing projects.

Figure 4 (Right): A notice of gratitude by the mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from *Milliyet*, October 3, 1995. Source: Milliyet Newspaper Archive, <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/>.

Erdoğan expresses his gratitude to the public, the RP leader Necmettin Erbakan, some party members, and the mayors of the RP-governed districts in Istanbul for attending the Başak Housing Project's sales campaign event. Although the project was initiated by a municipality-owned company and realized using public funds, the notice of gratitude implies the RP was the only actor in the development of the housing project. The mayor of Istanbul and the RP used the mass housing project as a propaganda tool.

Apart from KİPTAŞ's credibility as a municipal institution and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's burgeoning reputation among the low- and middle-income conservatives in Istanbul, other factors also contributed to the project's success. The land upon which the Housing Project was built belonged to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, which had allocated the land to its subsidiary company, KİPTAŞ. This condition reduced the project's budget, granting an enormous privilege to the company. However, lacking resources was still an urgent problem for KİPTAŞ. After acquiring the land and planning the housing project's development, KİPTAŞ searched for investors who would fund the project and sought inexpensive construction credits from public banks.⁵⁷ The ruling central government, coalition of Doğru Yol Partisi (Truth Path Party, DYP) and Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti (Social Democratic People's Party, SHP), was refusing funding applications from the RP-governed municipalities.⁵⁸ Furthermore, only a few businesspersons were willing to invest money in KİPTAŞ's housing project due to the fear of being labelled as Islamist, given the state's stance towards this label at the time.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Çavdar, "Building, Marketing and Living in an Islamic Gated Community," 8.

⁵⁸ Bülent Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism: Negotiating Nation and Islam through Built Environment in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 67.

⁵⁹ Çavdar, "Building, Marketing and Living in an Islamic Gated Community," 8.

Meanwhile, the secular mainstream media of the 1990s was consistently reporting on the RP's agenda of creating Islamist hubs in Istanbul and other cities in Türkiye, citing the Başak and Hilal Housing Projects as a model. For instance, one article in the press stated that the leader of the RP, Necmettin Erbakan, was interested in Islamic-style urban projects prepared by German and English architecture firms, and declared that they would consult with these firms when constructing housing projects for Istanbul's conservative residents.⁶⁰ According to the same article, Yahya Stone, a Muslim urban planner working for a German firm, indicated the firm had based their housing settlement designs on the privacy principle of Islam. For example, they proposed segregating single people's houses from family houses in residential settlements to minimize disturbance for families. The rooms occupied by men, which Stone referred to as "*selamlık*," had windows facing the street; the bedrooms occupied by women, called "*haremlık*," had windows facing the courtyards; the kitchen windows also did not face the street. These terms reflect the gendered conceptualization of the spatial configuration of the units.

⁶⁰ Utku Çakırözer, "RP'den 'İslami Banliyö,'" *Milliyet*, April 1, 1996.

RP'den 'İslami banliyö'

Utku ÇAKIRÖZER
ANKARA

RP Lideri Necmettin Erbakan'ın kamuoyuna "Kentlerin dışında yeni kentler kuracağız" diye duyurduğu "İslami banliyöler" projesi hızla ilerliyor.

Erbakan, partisinin konuyu olarak geçen hafta Ankara'ya gelen "İslami mimari ve kentleşme" uzmanlarının projelerini gördükten sonra, biri Alman diğeri İngiliz iki firmadan danışmanlık hizmeti alabileceklerini açıkladı.

Ünlü Alman Mimar Bodo Rasch'a ait SL'in İngiliz asıllı Müslüman Şehir Plancısı Yahya Stone, Erbakan ve kurmaylarıyla RP'li belediye başkanlarına Semerkant için hazırladığı "İmam Buhari Hadis Merkezi" projesini anlattı. Stone, daha sonra projesinin uygulanabilirliğini araştırması için Konya'ya götürüldü.

İslamiyette çok önemli olan "mahremiyet" ilkesini

Erbakan, Ankara'ya gelen "İslami mimari ve kentleşme" uzmanlarının projelerini inceledi ve iki firmadan danışmanlık hizmetleri alacaklarını açıkladı



esas aldıklarını belirten Stone'un projesinde, bekar evleriyle ailelerin evleri kampusun ayrı bölgelerinde yer alırken, evlerin her birinin iç bahçesi bulunuyor. Stone'un "haremlik" diye nitelendirdiği yatak odalarıyla

mutfağların sokağa bakan penceresi bulunmazken, "selamlık" dediği oturma odasının camları dışarı bakıyor. Haremlik kısmının tüm pencereleri ise duvarla çevrili "iç bahçe"ye bakıyor.

Stone, Milliyet'in "Bu proje, RP'nin yapmayı düşündüğü banliyöler için uygun mu?" sorusunu şöyle yanıtladı:

"Pek değil, ancak firmamızda yerleşim merkezi projeleri de var. Biz İslam'a uygun bir yerleşkenin nasıl olması gerektiğini, temel özelliklerini biliyoruz. Evler bu projedeki gibi müstakil değil, apartman şeklinde de olabilir."

● "NİÇİN İSLAMİ?"

Erbakan'ın talimatıyla Yerel Yönetimlerden Sorumlu Genel Başkan Yardımcısı



İngiliz asıllı Müslüman Şehir Plancısı Yahya Stone, Erbakan ve kurmaylarına İslami Banliyöler şehir projelerini anlattı.

Fehim Adak ve Ağrı Milletvekili Ziyaeddin Tokar'ın bir yıldır süren çalışmalarıyla şekillenen "örnek yerleşim merkezleri" projesine göre, RP'li belediyeler kent çıkışlarına Paris'in banliyölerine benzeyen yerleşim merkezleri kuracak. Bu banliyölerde okul, cami, mescit, hastane, kreş, alışveriş merkezlerinin yanı sıra imam hatip liselerinin kurulması da hedefleniyor.

Tokar, projenin belediyelere ek kaynak sağlayacağını belirtirken, yeni banliyölerin İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi'ne bağlı KIPTAŞ şirketinin İktisadi ve Pendik'te yaptırdığı "Hilal" ve "Başak" konutlarının modelinde olacağını söyledi.

Figure 5: A newspaper report entitled "The RP's Islamic banlieue" from *Milliyet*, April 1, 1996. Source: Milliyet Newspaper Archive, <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/>.

The newspaper article reveals that Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the RP, is keen on Islamic-style urban projects conceptualized by German and English architecture firms. Erbakan declares that there would be collaboration with these firms in creating housing projects tailored for conservative Istanbul residents. This move symbolizes a blend of Western design expertise with Islamic aesthetics and underscores the Islamist politicians' endeavour to appear aligned with urban authorities across the world. Furthermore, it signifies a targeted effort to resonate with the preferences of conservative residents in Istanbul.

As the RP continued to gain political prominence in the 1990s, rumours about the party's and municipality's intentions to create an Islamist settlement in Başakşehir gradually intensified, leading to an escalating tension between secular and conservative factions.⁶¹ Therefore, KİPTAŞ and some high-ranking members of the RP sought new solutions for finding financial support for the Başakşehir Housing Project, including reaching out to diverse religious communities and inviting their investment participation in the project.⁶² As a part of KİPTAŞ's resource-finding and marketing activities, the institute even named mosques after local religious leaders.

Nevertheless, the actions led by secular forces, primarily the military, reached a critical point with the Military Memorandum on February 28, 1997. This memorandum set off a chain of events that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, the dissolution of his coalition government, the closure of the RP by the Constitutional Court due to its breach of Türkiye's secular principles, and the subsequent imprisonment of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Consequently, these events effectively halted the progression of efforts aimed at advancing the Başakşehir project.

Following this military intervention, the land that KİPTAŞ had intended to utilize for the third stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project was left under the control of the Küçükçekmece Municipality, administered by the secularist Democratic Left Party (DSP). Küçükçekmece Municipality ignored the RP's plans for developing the third stage. Instead, it collaborated with a

⁶¹ Çavdar, "Building, Marketing and Living in an Islamic Gated Community," 514.

⁶² Çavdar, 8.

group of housing cooperatives to construct new housing projects in the designated area for the third stage.⁶³

1.3.a. From “nowhere” of Istanbul to a district of Istanbul

Despite the initial delays in construction due to military intervention, KİPTAŞ, fuelled by the satisfaction of residents living in the completed first and second stages, decided to build more housing blocks in the area in the late 1990s, this time catering to upper-income groups.⁶⁴ After the cancellation of the third stage due to the military intervention, the company decided to proceed directly with the fourth stage. The construction of the fourth stage started in 1998 and was completed in 2002. With the dawn of the AKP era and the election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the prime minister in 2002, the construction and development of the fifth stage accelerated. It was started in 2005 and completed in 2007. As the visionary behind the inception of the initial Başakşehir project, Erdoğan, now empowered by an increased degree of influence, paid particular attention to the projects’ further progress. This commitment played an important role in the transformation of the housing area into a provincial district of Istanbul.

⁶³ The housing cooperative (1998-2000) would be called Onurkent. Onurkent and Oyakkent (1998-2008), which was built by retired soldiers—have been left beyond the symbolic boundaries of Başakşehir. Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism*, 71.

⁶⁴ By the end of 1998, both of the housing complexes were already populated, with 15,000 residents in the first stage and 10,500 in the second stage. Batuman, 69.

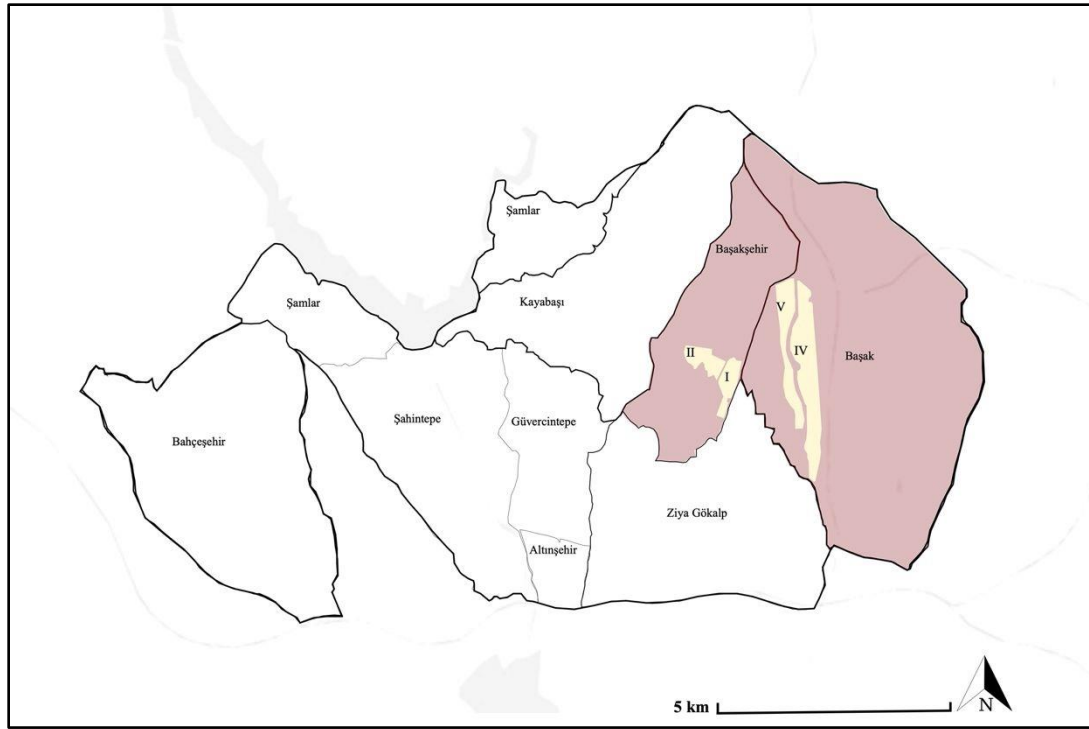


Figure 6: Başakşehir map. Source: Map drawn by the author. The map shows the boundaries of Başakşehir district and its neighbourhoods. Başakşehir and Başak neighbourhoods, and the first, second, fourth, and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project are highlighted.

This forward momentum extended into 2008, when the Turkish Parliament enacted new legislation governing the administrative restructuring of Istanbul. Eight new districts were established within the boundaries of Istanbul. The housing settlement in Başakşehir, along with several adjacent neighbourhoods, was incorporated into one of Istanbul’s thirty-nine municipal districts—achieving 104,33 km² surface area.⁶⁵ The redistricting process garnered extensive media coverage and sparked notable public reactions, with claims that it would bring about a

⁶⁵ As of 2022, Başakşehir is a district of Istanbul with a population of 514,900. “Nüfus Yapısı,” Başakşehir Belediyesi, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.basaksehir.bel.tr/nufus-yapisi>.

significant change in Istanbul's economic and governmental structure.⁶⁶ Interestingly, these changes came just a year before local elections, leading some to speculate about their potential impact on the electoral outcomes. Critics argued that the AKP government had strategically merged several anti-government neighbourhoods into pro-government districts to ensure its victory in the 2009 Istanbul municipal elections.⁶⁷ Concurrent with these political and administrative changes, Başakşehir underwent a surge in recognition and appeal. The fourth and fifth stages of the project became a centre of attraction for then wealthy conservative families and a variety of public and private housing projects began to spring up around these stages—with the extended authority of KİPTAŞ and Toplu Konut İdaresi (Mass Housing Administration of Türkiye, TOKİ) and the empowerment of pro-government private companies.

Once vacant land without any settlements nearby, Başakşehir became associated with luxurious housing projects. Moreover, the development of the Kayaşehir area in the district and the implementation of rent-maximizing infrastructural and social projects—which I will delve into in the subsequent chapters—led to an appreciable rise in the land value of Başakşehir. As Başakşehir transformed due to the influx of new housing projects, it began to attract interest from diverse

⁶⁶ “İstanbul’a Sekiz Yeni İlçe Kararı Siyasi Mi,” *Hürriyet*, February 20, 2008, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/istanbul-a-sekiz-yeni-ilce-karari-siyasi-mi-8267398>; “İstanbul’un Haritası Değişiyor,” *Habertürk*, February 11, 2008, <https://www.haberturk.com/yasam/haber/55130-istanbulun-haritasi-degisiyor>; “Bahçeşehir’e Başakşehir Şoku,” *Habertürk*, February 25, 2008, <https://www.haberturk.com/yasam/haber/57649-bahcesehir-basaksehir-soku>; “Belediyemizi Kapattırmayız,” *Evrensel*, February 2, 2008, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/230501/belediyemizi-kapattirmayiz>; “İstanbul’a 9 İlçe Geliyor,” *Gazete Vatan*, February 11, 2008, <https://www.gazetevatan.com/yasam/istanbula-9-ilce-geliyor-161434>; “Sarıgazililer Sancaktepe İsmini Almak İstemiyor,” *Evrensel*, March 3, 2008, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/228696/sarigazililer-sancaktepe-ismini-almak-istemiyor>.

⁶⁷ Jean-François Pérouse, “The Tremendous Making and Unmaking of the Peripheries in Current Istanbul,” in *Understanding the City through Its Margins* (London: Routledge, 2018), 34; Dilek Tüzün Aksu and Zeynep Ocak, “Location of Municipal Centres for New Counties within the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality,” *Journal of Urban Planning and Development* 138, no. 2 (2012): 143.

income groups, which in turn started to erode its homogeneity. Although conservatism remained a crucial factor in preserving the community bond in Başakşehir, the introduction of upper-income housing enclaves has led to conflict between old and new residents based on their lifestyle and class.



Figure 7: Başakşehir Housing Project and Bahçetepe Istanbul Housing Project. Source: The photograph of Başakşehir Housing Project (below) is retrieved from KİPTAŞ. Two snapshots from the housing enclaves reveal two different worlds within Başakşehir. The upper image showcases green areas, walking paths, a children’s playground, and a car parking area, all surrounded by trees, situated between the housing blocks within the first stage of the Başakşehir

Housing Project by KİPTAŞ. In contrast, the lower image presents an open-air common space featuring green areas, trees, benches, and shady spots around a pond in the housing project called Bahçetepe Istanbul in Kayaşehir, constructed by a private company, Akyapı İnşaat. While the housing blocks in the first image have relatively simple façade organisations, those in the second image appear more articulated and expensive. The differences in the exterior appearances of the buildings, the designs of the common spaces between the housing blocks, and the amenities provided within these spaces highlight the social, spatial, and economic divisions within the settlement.

1.3.b. Caught between old imaginaries and contemporary realities

The sweeping power dynamics in Türkiye in the early 2000s laid the foundation for Başakşehir's remarkable social and physical transformation during the following two decades. This era witnessed significant empowerment of Islamist groups, enhancing their influence over the construction of the built environment. In a sense, the social and architectural landscape of Başakşehir became a mirror reflecting these shifting power structures, simultaneously nurturing and embodying them.

During the initial phases of the housing project in Başakşehir, Islamist politicians saw the project as an opportunity to realize their vision of creating a new settlement in Istanbul. They aimed to convince their followers that they were capable of building a safe haven for the previously overlooked members of society due to their lifestyle and conservative values.⁶⁸ The initial proposal suggested that the built environment should respond to local needs and desires while preserving family ties and nature, as seen in old Ottoman neighbourhoods.⁶⁹ However, the Başakşehir Housing Project—with its original plan of predominantly residential high-rises

⁶⁸ Çavdar, "Loss of Modesty: The Adventure of Muslim Family from Mahalle to Gated Community," 75.

⁶⁹ Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey*, 160.

developed in the late 1990s, as well as its evolved version developed in the early 2000s—appeared to diverge from the imagined settlement model. During different periods of Başakşehir—namely the 1990s, early 2000s, and after 2008 when the settlement became a district—the urban visions and criticisms on modern cities by conservatively oriented architects and ideologues were seemingly disregarded by the project’s decision-makers.⁷⁰

This divergence echoes Ayşe Çavdar’s argument that Islamism has failed to provide an authentic alternative to the modern settlements that evolved from the experiences of Western societies.⁷¹ During the 1990s and early 2000s, neither sufficient time nor financial resources were available to envisage and plan such an alternative.⁷² In the following years, however, the Islamist movement gained power and resources to establish such a settlement characterized by equality, architectural modesty, humility, and respect for nature—as previously envisioned. Nonetheless, developing neighbourhoods based on market demands proved more profitable. Moreover, the organisation of urban spaces based on financial and ideological considerations, as well as the instrumentalization of politically charged architectural forms and signs, was more feasible and efficient.

In his interpretation of the Islamist movement’s encounter with capital and political power in the 2000s, İsmail Karatepe argues that the land market and housing market structures did not allow

⁷⁰ Tanıl Bora quotes architect Turgut Cansever, these visions opposed “technocratic architecture” that standardizes the whole world with almost the same building types and its passion for building monumental structures. Tanıl Bora, “Türk Muhafazakarlığı ve İnşaat Şehveti – Büyük Olsun Bizim Olsun,” in *İnşaat Ya Rasulullah* (Istanbul: Birikim Kitap, 2011), 9–15; Turgut Cansever, *Kubbeyi Yere Koymamak*, ed. Mustafa Armagan (Istanbul: Timaş, 2010), 201.

⁷¹ Çavdar, “Loss of Modesty: The Adventure of Muslim Family from Mahalle to Gated Community,” 75.

⁷² Çavdar, 75.

the proposed urban visions to be realized.⁷³ This led to a significant divergence between expectations and reality. On the one hand, younger Islamist generations viewed the urban proposals from previous decades as peripheral to the main discussion and core concerns, deeming them insufficiently modern and realistic. On the other hand, certain factions within the construction industry candidly admitted that these proposals were simply unrealistic, in the light of current market conditions and elevated housing price.⁷⁴ The idea of building settlements similar to the neighbourhoods of Ottoman times, complete with low-rise dwellings and gardens, was now seen as a distant dream, especially in a city like Istanbul.⁷⁵

This dream's distance from reality is manifest in the evolution of the Başakşehir Housing Project and Başakşehir district. While the Housing Project evolved over time regarding the size, quality, and infrastructure, the district turned into a concrete landscape with diminishing green space. Rezzan, a resident who has lived in Başakşehir since its foundation, observes that her neighbourhood has changed significantly over time.⁷⁶ Comparing the design of the first two stages with the last two, Rezzan notes a decrease in shared spaces and green areas between apartment blocks. At the same time, the height of the apartment buildings in the fourth and fifth stages has increased to accommodate more units and generate higher profits.

As Necmi observes, the growth and development of Başakşehir led to the installation of fences around housing enclaves in the fourth and fifth stages, as well as the hiring of security staff, and implementation of restricted access to these enclaves. This has resulted in the weakening of

⁷³ Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey*, 160.

⁷⁴ Bora, "Türk Muhafazakarlığı ve İnşaat Şehveti – Büyük Olsun Bizim Olsun," 11; Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey*, 161.

⁷⁵ Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey*, 161.

⁷⁶ Rezzan (Vice community manager), In Person, May 17, 2019.

community bonds among residents.⁷⁷ In this context, residents of the initial neighbourhoods of the district, Başak and Başakşehir, have closer ties than the residents of the recently developed neighbourhoods of the district. A strong sense of neighbourliness exists, particularly among women, thanks to the weekly Qur'an recitals and informal religious lessons conducted in the basements of their apartment buildings.

Alongside the residents who are discontent with the shifting features of the district, the Başakşehir NGO Platform, a collective of thirty-six non-governmental and faith-based organisations, has also voiced concerns over the district's rapid growth and transformation. The Platform established a *şehircilik komisyonu* (urbanization commission) in 2009, which prepared a report in January 2010 detailing their assessments and recommendations concerning the district's societal and physical state.⁷⁸ The report, entitled "Başakşehir City Centre Project and Analysis of General Situation," was prepared as a response to the district municipality's project of moving the centre of the district from the Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods to a new neighbourhood, Kayabaşı (or Kayaşehir), and the development of new infrastructure and new mass housing projects there. The NGO Platform, identifying itself as a voice for the whole body of residents in Başakşehir and a protector of the district's moral values, was intent on preserving the central status of the Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods—the foundational sites of the initial Islamist habitus. The Platform criticized the ongoing urban development projects for their incompatibility with the established neighbourhood culture, contending that these projects were compromising the integrity of "*their* Başakşehir" in a quest for being modern. According to the

⁷⁷ Necmi (Mukhtar), In Person, May 17, 2019.

⁷⁸ Şehirçilik Komisyonu, "Başakşehir Kent Merkezi Projesi ve Genel Durum Analizi" (Istanbul: Başakşehir STK Platformu, January 2010).

report, creating new urban spaces that cater to the demands of modern city life does not necessarily entail distancing the community from “*their* cultural values.”

Despite the Platform’s apparent disapproval of developing a new central neighbourhood in the district and its suggestions for canceling ongoing projects, the report nonetheless offered revisions to key issues, should the municipality decide not to cancel the projects. It was recommended that the newly developing areas should be centred around religious and cultural spaces, such as mosques and *külliye(s)*, as in the Ottoman times.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the report suggested that the planned high-rise housing projects should be reconfigured into three- or four-story buildings, excluding elevators due to the concern that they might hinder daily interaction among residents.

The NGO Platform highlighted the importance of people’s encounters with each other and underlined the threat of a loss of traditional neighbourhood culture. It offered several solutions, particularly focusing on the infrastructure of the settlement and reconfiguration of the spaces around mosques and *mescit(s)* (prayer rooms). Recognizing these places of worship as centres of social and cultural interaction among people, as well as facilitators of the city’s daily rhythm, the report recommended incorporating small shops, libraries, and social centres in close proximity to them. This approach would encourage people to spend time together before and after prayer sessions. Moreover, in accordance with the report’s recommendations, Islamic and cultural spaces should be equipped with the required provisions to enable focused religious practices and

⁷⁹ A *külliye* was the functional centre of a well-defined neighbourhood in the Seljuk and Ottoman times. It is a complex of buildings centred on a mosque and managed within a single institution, often based on a charitable foundation, and composed of a madrasa, a hospital, kitchens, bakery, bath, and buildings for charitable services.

provide spaces for reading, gatherings, and relaxation. Additionally, the proposal to position parks, kindergartens, green spaces, and eateries near these religious spaces aimed to draw children towards prayer.

The report from the NGO Platform was appended to the Social and Qualitative Research Report, which was prepared and presented to KİPTAŞ in June 2010 by BİMTAŞ (Bosphorus Landscape Build Consultancy Technical Services Ltd.), a municipally owned consultation and research company. Although KİPTAŞ considered the NGO Platform's report as a potential guide for future housing projects, neither the proposed "Ottoman neighbourhood" concept nor the "horizontal city" model were put in action. Much like previous endeavours to create ideal Islamic cities, the critiques and recommendations offered by the NGO Platform for further Islamizing Başakşehir were seen as imaginative yet impractical concepts and were consequently disregarded.

This anecdote effectively illustrates the transformation of the envisioned ideals for conservative groups and their living environments in response to shifting social, political, and economic forces, influenced by the ascendant presence of Islamist groups in political and economic spheres. Throughout these changes, the conservative worldview has remained a cohesive element within the community, adapting its characteristics over time while maintaining its unifying role.

1.4. Expressions of Islamism in urban space

During my fieldwork, I met Ayten, a veiled elderly woman who has lived in the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project for the past twenty-two years. When I inquired about her perspective

on the neighbourhood and asked her to encapsulate it in a single word, Ayten confidently responded with “*Tesettür*” (veiling).⁸⁰ In her response, the term “*tesettür*” carried a straightforward yet profound significance, serving as a multi-layered descriptor that encapsulated both her community and the environment she calls home.⁸¹ Discussing the demographics of the district and the residents’ conservative lifestyle, Ayten remarked, “I like here because people live Islam.” She further added, “Before moving to Başakşehir, I, myself, was not veiled. But after getting acquainted with my neighbours and admiring their way of life, I made the choice to adopt the veil.”⁸²

Ayten interprets the veil as a symbol of the religious devotion in her community, a representation that is conveyed through the bodies of women within the neighbourhood. In this sense, the veil becomes a loaded symbol and an icon representing a specific lifestyle in the eyes of observers or residents. The layered connotations of the term stem from the veil’s role in identifying its wearers’ worldviews as religiously conservative. Similarly, growing a beard is a sign of religious conservatism among men. These practices extend beyond their religious significance for

⁸⁰ Ayten (Resident), In Person, May 16, 2019.

⁸¹ Originating from the Arabic root *s-t-r*, which means covering, the term *tesettür* is utilized in the Turkish language to refer to the Islamic practices involving women covering their heads and bodies, as well as avoiding interaction with unrelated males. In Türkiye, *tesettür* has developed both abstract and tangible connotations. The abstract meaning parallels the more globally acknowledged Arabic term, *hijab*, which represents the ideal of Islamic modesty in women. In Arab societies, the term *hijab* not only refers to the headscarf women wear, but also encapsulates the philosophy it embodies, which is to shield oneself from men who are not family to maintain self-dignity, religious piety, and familial honour. Notably, in Türkiye, *tesettür* seems to symbolize this modesty principle, alongside denoting specific modest clothing items such as headscarves, loose coats, chadors, skirts, and so forth, which are worn to fulfill this ideal. Banu Gökarıksel and Anna Secor, “The Veil, Desire, and the Gaze: Turning the Inside Out,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40, no. 1 (2014): 177–200; Banu Gökarıksel and Anna Secor, “Islamic-Ness in the Life of a Commodity: Veiling-Fashion in Turkey,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35, no. 3 (2010): 330.

⁸² Ayten (Resident), interview.

individual Muslims, evolving into ideological symbols embodied on the body, thereby transmitting social information to those who observe. These tangible markers render religiosity visible within the public sphere. In Ayten's perspective of Başakşehir, the veil not only communicates one's religiosity to others but also seamlessly merges with the urban space, creating a profound association.

In Başakşehir, the veil is a prevalent attire among the majority of females, including young girls and teenagers. Further, as part of certain groups' fundamentalist practices, some women don burqas (loose-fitting, full-length robes that cover the body from the head to the feet), while some men wear long garments, loose robes, and headgear. During the early decades of the Republic, attempts were made by the state to impose restrictions on wearing such symbolic clothing, like burqas and garments associated with sects and tariqas, except within places of worship and prayer.⁸³ Nonetheless, due to the lack of stringent enforcement of these restrictions, it is quite common to encounter individuals dressed in such attire in certain Anatolian cities and within conservative neighbourhoods of larger urban areas. Yet, such attire is not as prevalent as the simple practice of veiling. In this context, Başakşehir provides a suitable setting for adherents of Islamic fundamentalism, besides moderate conservatives, to express themselves in public in their preferred attire and appearance without feeling uncomfortable.

⁸³ Enforcing regulations on dressing codes in the public sphere was a component of a broader effort to construct a modern nation and define the role of the modern citizen within the newly evolving society during the initial decades of the Republic. For further insights see: Hale Yilmaz, "Women, Politics, and the Culture of Dress in the Making of a New Turkish Nation," in *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey 1923-1945* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 78–138; Hale Yilmaz, "Dressing the Nation's Citizens: Men's Clothing Reforms in the Early Republic," in *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey 1923-1945* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 22–77.

Fehmi, a resident of the Kayabaşı neighbourhood, highlights conservatism as the primary reason for choosing to reside in Başakşehir. Despite his complaints about the poor material quality, structural problems, and spatial shortcomings of his apartment in the Kayaşehir Housing Project initiated by TOKİ, Fehmi underscores the comfort his family experiences within their neighbourhood in contrast to other areas of Istanbul. He notes that in secular neighbourhoods, people often cast curious glances at conservatives walking the streets, with their clothing, walking style, beard, or veil drawing attention. He concludes, “Hence, we feel much more at ease here.”⁸⁴

Furthermore, Fehmi points out that the safety of outdoor spaces is a distinctive feature of Başakşehir that holds particular significance for pious people, particularly women and children. During his extended business trips, which often span several days, he notes that his wife can “at least” take a stroll around their neighbourhood with a sense of security, “even in his absence.” Consequently, Fehmi sees the prevailing conservatism within the resident community as a factor that contributes to a more comfortable life for his family. His wife, as a veiled woman, is no longer concerned about strangers’ stares when she leaves the confines of her home, provided she stays within the boundaries of the district. Fehmi has confidence in his neighbours, valuing their religious sensitivities, particularly regarding the respectful demeanour conservative men display towards conservative women who are forbidden to them according to religious norms.

This patriarchal mindset is not peculiar to Fehmi or other conservative men in the district. In some traditional families, only men—as the head of the family and the protector of the women at

⁸⁴ Fehmi (Resident), In Person, August 1, 2019.

home—have a public role and a public life outside. Contrary to this, the home is the domain of women, where they interact primarily with their husbands, children, and sometimes their female neighbours. Viewed from this perspective, women face numerous perceived threats when outside the home without their husbands. As a result, they often find themselves with limited options: either staying at home or, if necessary, wearing appropriate clothing and being accompanied by a chaperone (such as a male relative or an elderly woman, someone whose sexuality is no longer a societal concern, like a mother-in-law) to ensure their safety when they venture outdoors.

The roles of women, both within the home and in the public sphere, have long been central topics in political and religious discussions. The Republic's founding figures believed that women's presence in public life and their visibility beyond the household were crucial for establishing a modern, secular, and progressive identity for Turkish society. Gülsüm Baydar notes, the participation of modern women in diverse realms of the public sphere was widely promoted as a testament to the triumph of Turkish modernization.⁸⁵ This was seen as a stark juxtaposition to the perception of veiled Muslim women restricted to the private realm of domestic interiors. However, the systemic reforms aimed at the emancipation of women were not sufficient to transform the rigid patriarchal family structure, particularly within certain conservative factions. Traditional patriarchal and moderately conservative families living in cities needed more than a few decades to embrace the concept of women's equity with men both inside and outside the home—at least in a discursive manner. On the other hand, in many religiously fundamentalist families, regardless of social status or class differences, socially constructed spatial boundaries between men and women persist. The concept of public and

⁸⁵ Baydar, "Tenuous Boundaries," 229–30.

private are defined in these families according to the Islamic concept of *mahram* and *na-mahram*. For example, places, both inside home and outside, where one might encounter individuals who are not closely related (*na-mahram*) are demarcated as restricted zones for both women and men. In such shared spaces, adhering to appropriate dress and behaviour is considered mandatory. In this context, it becomes clear that spaces are not inherently public or private. Rather, it is the (potential) interactions among individuals within these spaces that categorize them as such.

In Fehmi's perspective, the home is traditionally associated with the private realm of women and children, while the outside world aligns with the public sphere of men. Yet, in describing his own living environment, Fehmi portrays these two realms as interconnected rather than separate. When Fehmi speaks of how the conservative nature of their community mitigates the potential risks common spaces could pose to his family, he indirectly suggests that living in the Islamist settlement blurs the boundaries between the private and public for his wife. The outside areas within Başakşehir, therefore, offer a level of privacy and safety closer to that of their own home, compared to any other shared spaces outside Başakşehir.

For another resident, Nevin, everything is conveniently packaged for religiously conservative families in her neighbourhood: a house that meets the needs of a family with two or three children, a moderate resident community, common spaces used by individuals with similar religious sensibilities, and amenities catering to residents regarding their lifestyles. As she states, "Even the Migros [a chain grocery store in Türkiye] in Başakşehir does not sell alcohol. There are no bars or nightclubs here. Those things that disturb conservatives in other parts of the city

are absent in Başakşehir.”⁸⁶ As indicated by Haluk, a real estate agent in the district, the absence of alcohol in grocery stores and restaurants makes families more comfortable spending time outside.⁸⁷ He elaborates on how this conservative environment reshapes the notions of safety and insecurity beyond the confines of home.

The public display of faith in the district serves as a magnet for conservative families living in other parts of the city as well. In this context, conservatism serves as an economic catalyst for the housing market. Haluk notes that his clients, primarily upper-income families, are motivated by conservatism when looking to rent or buy. These families are interested in upscale, gated communities that offer amenities such as swimming pools, gyms, Turkish baths, and saunas. A unique selling point that appeals to these high-income conservative families is the gender-segregated usage of these amenities—areas designated as women-only and men-only.

Most residents of the neighbourhood are satisfied with the social atmosphere, but some who do not define themselves as conservative feel restricted there. Fehmi states, some of his neighbours drink alcohol, but they do not leave bottles at their apartment entrances to be collected by their doorman, in order not to be noticed.⁸⁸ “It must be difficult for them to deal with this pressure,” Fehmi adds. On the surface, conservative values seem to bring together community members from diverse social and economic backgrounds. However, it is crucial to understand that this unification does not necessarily equate to a voluntary sense of togetherness among all residents. Beyond religious sensitivities, “*mahalle baskısı*” (neighbourhood pressure or neighbourhood

⁸⁶ Nevin (Resident), In Person, May 14, 2019.

⁸⁷ Haluk (Real estate agent), In Person, July 8, 2019.

⁸⁸ Fehmi (Resident), interview.

mentality) also perpetuates the image of an apparently homogenous community regulated and prospered by faith.⁸⁹

Conservatism in Başakşehir goes beyond merely strengthening community ties; it also empowers residents to actively shape their social and physical environment. This influence is evident in various aspects of life, from the way residents utilize their living spaces to how they interpret and practice their religious beliefs. It also manifests in their choice of attire outside the home and in their interactions within the community. Such choices extend to decisions about housing, the schools their children attend, interactions with neighbours, and participation in community events and institutions. These choices, driven by conservative values, define the unique social and spatial fabric of the Başakşehir community. In this context, while residents may not have a direct hand in shaping the district's physical and ideological structure, they play an indispensable role in its Islamization. Even within the limitations set by existing power hierarchies, market forces, and socio-political contexts, residents are far from being passive consumers of a pre-determined landscape shaped by the intersection of capital and ideology. Instead, they actively engage with their environment, interpreting, negotiating, and influencing it in ways that mirror their own needs, beliefs, and lived experiences.

⁸⁹ Şerif Mardin used the term *mahalle baskısı* to describe the negative impact of community interactions over individual freedoms. In an interview on 2 May 2007 by Ruşen Çakır with Şerif Mardin, Mardin suggests a major potential threat against the nurturing of a liberal environment in Türkiye was “the neighbourhood pressure ... which is a mood very hard to delineate by the social sciences.” Ruşen Çakır, ed., *Mahalle Baskısı: Prof. Şerif Mardin'in Tezlerinden Hareketle Türkiye'de İslam, Cumhuriyet, Laiklik ve Demokrasi*, 1st ed., Söyleşi 1 (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2008), 17.

1.4.a. The symbols and guards of Islamism: Monuments and actors

Beyond the ideological perspectives and lifestyles of its residents, Başakşehir's urban landscape and identity are influenced by a diverse array of entities. These include municipal actors, local communities, non-governmental organisations, and architectural structures. These agents not only shape representations of the settlement but also actively work to mould the social environment accordingly.

In particular, religious communities and governmental institutions play a critical role in the Islamization of the district. They visibly integrate themselves into the built environment and influence the social fabric of the area. Their symbolic monuments attached to urban space include mosques, social and cultural centres offering complimentary arts and sports courses, temporary structures like tents and kiosks set up for community events, billboards covered with ideologically loaded messages and announcements, paintings on city walls, travelling exhibitions, and toponyms in urban spaces.

Mosques hold a central place in the everyday life of Islamic faith, especially in cities with predominant Muslim populations. Beyond just places of worship, they are architectural embodiments of religious discourse, playing a crucial role in fortifying and disseminating piety. As centres that facilitate collective rituals and interactions, mosques act as arenas for socialization. As Bülent Batuman notes, their architectural design and spatial presence not only offer a place for prayer but also foster a sense of community and cultivate collective identities anchored in shared faith.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism*, 14.

The urban landscape of the cities in Türkiye is interspersed with mosques, and their ubiquitous presence extends even to the most secular neighbourhoods. Hence, the mere presence of a mosque does not necessarily denote a conservative neighbourhood. However, the concentration and positioning of mosques in a specific area can reveal the religious nuances of that locale. Additionally, the investors of a particular mosque in an urban area, such as religious communities and their leaders, as well as the people who visit that mosque regularly for prayers or other religious events, provide an insight into the significance the mosque holds for a particular neighbourhood, region, or city. The symbolism of these structures transcends their functionality as social components of the built environment, considering their number and capacity, as well as their proximity to one another.

As of 2023, Başakşehir houses 128 mosques.⁹¹ This number stands out compared to other districts with much higher population densities.⁹² A second point worth noting is the location of the mosques in Başakşehir, mostly in the central parts of neighbourhoods or within housing developments. Although they are not positioned at the centre of each neighbourhood, as in the

⁹¹ “Camiler,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, accessed July 20, 2023, <https://www.basaksehir.bel.tr/camiler>.

⁹² In Başakşehir, which is home to a population of 514,900, there are 128 mosques. This yields a ratio of 25 mosques for per 100,000 population, a figure that, while not particularly striking, is notably above the average for the city of Istanbul. What is remarkable, however, is the capacity of these mosques. Of the 128 mosques, data on capacity is available for 112, and the cumulative total capacity for these reaches an impressive 126,000. Considering that Istanbul’s male population aged 15 or older constitutes 39.5% of the total population, and applying this ratio to Başakşehir, there are approximately 203,000 adult males in the district. This means that a significant 62% of the entire adult male population can be accommodated for prayer in the mosques simultaneously. The numeric data about the number of the mosques, population, and surface area is retrieved from the websites of the Turkish Statistical Institute, Başakşehir Municipality and the Presidency of Religious Affairs. “Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi Sonuçları, 2022,” TÜİK Kurumsal, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Adrese-Dayali-Nufus-Kayit-Sistemi-Sonuclari-2022-49685>; “Camiler”; “Camilerimiz,” T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://camiler.diyamet.gov.tr/>.

Islamic urban visions of the previous decades, these mosques are still situated in critical locations. Particularly noteworthy are the proximity and number of mosques in Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods—as the symbolic centres of Islamist habitus and the first settlements in the district. Several religious communities are involved in the development of these neighbourhoods.⁹³ In their mosques, these communities meet regularly, pray on Fridays, and organise talks.

Zeynep Kezer points out that during the republican era, state-enforced reforms aimed to dismantle Turkish tariqas and religious communities by prohibiting their activities and closing their communal spaces and sacred sites.⁹⁴ Despite these restrictions, these communities have continued to operate in an unofficial capacity. Since the ascent of the AKP to power, both central and local governments have supported these communities' social and economic initiatives, sometimes visibly and sometimes in more discreet ways, as speculated by opposition media, especially concerning resource allocation. Municipal authorities have also claimed to be actively collaborating with these communities to advance various political goals, including governance, policymaking, and the exercise of power.⁹⁵

⁹³ Within the precincts of Başakşehir, mosques affiliated with religious communities and tariqas mark various neighbourhoods, streets, and squares. These communities enhance their visibility and influence in urban space through the presence and interaction of their members, as they spend time around these mosques, wait for each other on street corners, exchange small talk, and discuss politics.

⁹⁴ Zeynep Kezer, *Building Modern Turkey: State, Space, and Ideology in the Early Republic* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 97.

⁹⁵ The district of Başakşehir is notable for the pronounced activity of certain faith-based organisations. Among these, the ones claimed to have ties with the Erdoğan family or the government—such as Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı (Türkiye Youth Foundation, TÜGVA), Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı (Türkiye Youth and Education Service Foundation, TÜRGEV), Ensar Vakfı (Ensar Foundation), İnsani Yardım Vakfı (Humanitarian Relief Foundation, IHH), and Yardımelî Uluslararası İnsani Yardım Derneği (Yardımelî International Humanitarian Aid Association)—are notably active in the district. Reports from both mainstream and alternative media outlets indicate that these prominent organisations in Başakşehir

As Yakup observes, in Başakşehir, various religious communities carry out their public activities through non-governmental organisations, largely because they lack official recognition for these undertakings.⁹⁶ The establishment of these organisations allows these communities to operate within the country's legal and regulatory framework. While not directly assigned to religious service, these organisations are designed to implement faith-based projects, which address social, environmental, or humanitarian issues. They also launch specific campaigns, mobilizing communities especially in areas of charitable giving and crisis management in the Muslim world. With the potential to secure diverse funding sources such as donors, grants, and partnerships, these organisations provide additional financial support to religious communities. Moreover, by fostering inclusivity and open collaboration with individuals from varying backgrounds these organisations enable religious communities to extend their reach and establish meaningful connections with a broader audience.

Several non-governmental organisations affiliated with religious communities have strategically located their offices within the Başakşehir Housing Project and some private residential developments. This positioning allows them to easily interact with residents and integrate

secure their funding through unofficial means, typically involving appeals to and negotiations with high-ranking government officials. See: "İBB Hangi Vakıf ve Derneklere Ne Kadar Para Yardımı Yaptı?," *Sputnik*, April 20, 2019, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201904201038821198-ibb-hangi-vakif-ve-derneklere-ne-kadar-para-yardimi-yapti/>; Mehmet Kızmaz, "İktidarın Ensar Sevgisi," *Cumhuriyet*, February 16, 2020, <https://www.cumhuriyetarsivi.com/oku/?clipId=37268711&home=%2Fmonitor%2Findex.xhtml>; Ozan Çepni, "Tarikatlara Kırmızı Halı," *Cumhuriyet*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.cumhuriyetarsivi.com/oku/?clipId=32517925&home=%2Fmonitor%2Findex.xhtml>; "İBB'den AKP'ye Yakın Vakıflara 847 Milyon TL," *Cumhuriyet*, April 20, 2019, <https://www.cumhuriyetarsivi.com/oku/?clipId=35606938&home=%2Fmonitor%2Findex.xhtml>; Çiğdem Toker, "İBB'den Vakıflara 'Hizmet' Raporu," *Sözcü*, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/yazarlar/cigdem-toker/ibbden-vakiflara-hizmet-raporu-3288303/>.

⁹⁶ Yakup (Community manager), interview.

seamlessly into the community fabric. Often, these organisations enhance their visibility by placing signboards on apartment facades or establishing standalone buildings within housing complexes. They also contribute to the visual vocabulary of urban space, temporarily showcasing ideologically charged posters, banners, and announcements on building façades, billboards, and highway arches.

During Ramadan, these organisations coordinate and host fundraising campaigns with the objective of providing aid to impoverished Muslims in other countries, including Palestine, Bosnia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Almost every neighbourhood is adorned with posters promoting these organisations, appealing for donations with messages like “Be like Ramadan in a fraternity,” “Touch Jerusalem,” and “Hand in hand for aid.” Similar posters, commonly seen during religious festivals and sacred days, stress the importance of charitable giving through slogans like “What you share is yours” and “Sacrifice for your God.” Like the signboards on the apartment buildings, these posters also temporarily alter the visual characteristics of the district.

Apart from their visual influence, these organisations also play a crucial role in shaping daily life, aligning it with Islamic traditions, and organising a range of social, cultural, and retail events, including charity collection drives, prayer meetings, reading groups, Islamic concerts, exhibitions, community discussions, and film screenings. These activities not only strengthen engagement within the established religious community but also allow these organisations to expand and grow their community by attracting and involving newcomers. Furthermore, some organisations arrange occasional mobile exhibitions centred on religious and ideological themes.

These exhibitions traverse the district, temporarily pausing at central locations, and at times, within housing estates, after obtaining necessary permissions from the municipality.



Figure 8: Photographs of Minia Kudüs (Mini Palestine) exhibition. The exhibition, Minia Kudüs by Filistin Vakfı (Palestine Foundation), exhibits a miniature model of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The exhibit is housed in a trailer, creatively transformed into a display case where the model is situated. The walls are designed to imitate the windows of a traditional Palestine house. This mobile exhibition, strategically stationed at various spots within Başakşehir, including the various stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project, draws crowds from diverse segments of the

community so achieves community engagement. The organisers are dedicated to promoting cultural exchange and aim to educate visitors, especially those who may not have the chance to visit the actual site, about the significance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Revered by Muslims as the third holiest mosque after Al-Haram and Al-Nabawi, the mosque holds immense importance. Moreover, the organisers aim to draw attention to the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the issues related to Jerusalem and serves as a platform to advocate for the Palestinian cause and the rights of the Palestinian people.

Beyond religious communities and their allied non-governmental organisations, Başakşehir Municipality is the most powerful official actor in maintaining the dominant conservative atmosphere in the district. It also plays a pivotal role in actualizing the continuously renewed urban aspirations of ruling politicians and their allied investors. The municipality offers a diverse range of venues, including centres specifically designed for women's activities and youth engagement. Within these municipal spaces, esteemed Islamist authors, poets, sociologists, and psychologists impart talks on religious and ideological themes such as motherhood, raising children with Islamic values, becoming conscious Muslims, and patriotism. In addition, the municipality offers men-only and women-only courses in sports as well as in traditional arts and music such as *hat* (Islamic calligraphy), *ney* (reed flute), and *ebru* (marbled paper art) which are popular forms among religiously conservative people.

In shaping the identity of Başakşehir, the practice of naming urban spaces stands as a pivotal mechanism. Urban toponyms, chosen strategically, steer the perceived political positioning of the settlement within the larger city context. Public facilities, such as streets, parks, schools, and cultural centres, often bear the names of historical religious figures, authors, poets, or political leaders. Key examples include streets named after influential figures like Ahmet Yesevi, Cahit Zarifoğlu, Erdem Beyazıt, Necati Çoşan, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Necmettin Erbakan, Nurettin

Topçu, Sabahattin Zaim, and Şeyh Samil. These individuals are notable scholars, thinkers, poets, and political leaders who have significantly influenced Islamic thought, literature, and ideology in Türkiye. Some have made substantial contributions to politics and societal reforms. Utilizing their names for urban spaces signifies a desire to honour their contributions and creates representational spaces rooted in ideology. These names imbue the district with an ideological continuity linked to the principles these figures advocated. It communicates a narrative that respects their legacy and shapes the district's image and identity within the broader Istanbul and Türkiye context.

1.5. The immigrant community and their traces in urban space

Amid the national government's efforts to frame Türkiye as a leader in the Muslim world, Istanbul and other major cities have seen a dramatic increase in their Muslim immigrant populations over the past decade. Türkiye has become a major destination for Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict that erupted in their home country in 2011.⁹⁷ Districts like Fatih, Arnavutköy, Zeytinburnu, and Küçükçekmece have become focal points for this influx, with Başakşehir attracting not just Syrians but also migrants from other Muslim-majority countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Among these migrants, those who relocate to Türkiye voluntarily, not as a direct result of war, often choose Türkiye due to its geographical and cultural affinity with their native lands. Moreover, they often hold a nostalgic view of

⁹⁷ According to the data retrieved from the Immigration Administration of Türkiye on March 30, 2020, it is estimated around 3.6 million Syrian refugees reside in Türkiye as of 2020, and approximately five hundred thousand of them are settled in Istanbul. "Geçici Koruma," T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

Istanbul, remembering its past as the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which once ruled over their homelands.

Building on this influx and the nostalgic allure of Istanbul, the district of Başakşehir has gained additional prominence. It has become increasingly attractive to international businesspeople from predominantly Muslim countries, largely due to its reputation as a predominantly conservative residential landscape. This reputation has had a palpable impact on the district's land values. As demand from upper-income immigrants for new housing projects in the area has escalated, the number of such developments has correspondingly increased. This influx of high-income immigrant groups has cemented Başakşehir's transformation into a diverse Muslim hub, welcoming migrants from a wide array of nations and socio-economic backgrounds. In line with this evolution, Başakşehir now offers a diverse range of housing options, from affordable mass housing units to upscale apartments and villas, accommodating a blend of both affluent and low-income immigrants from various ethnicities. While the wealthier immigrant groups often opt for luxury gated communities within the district, lower-income families tend to reside in the initial stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project and TOKİ's mass housing developments in Kayaşehir.

The appeal of Başakşehir as a destination for wealthy immigrants received an additional boost following the Turkish government's 2016 announcement.⁹⁸ This policy, initially targeting Syrians but implicitly applicable to other nationalities, provided a pathway to citizenship through investment. This catalyzed a surge in foreign investment in the district's construction sector. In response, real estate agencies throughout Başakşehir began aggressively marketing property

⁹⁸ "Suriyeli Kardeşlerimize Vatandaşlık İmkânı Vereceğiz," T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı, February 7, 2016, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/45574/suriyeli-kardeslerimize-vatandaslik-imkni-verecemiz.html>.

investment as a means to citizenship, filling their display windows with promotional posters and advertising signboards. Sami, a real estate agent in the district, draws attention to the potential urban and economic consequences of this rising demand from high-income immigrants in the housing market.⁹⁹ In 2018, he sold fifty houses—forty-nine of them to Arab buyers and just one to a Turkish buyer. Sami warns that if this trend continues, there may soon be no local buyers left in the market. Based on observations from Sami and other residents, it is evident that this strategy could significantly reshape Başakşehir's demographic landscape, given the growing number of foreign property owners. Such a demographic shift could have multiple socio-economic implications, including driving up property prices, modifying the range of local services and amenities, and creating potential tensions between residents and foreign investors. The fervent promotion of property investment could also indicate ongoing or upcoming gentrification in Başakşehir, where an inflow of wealthier residents could displace former inhabitants and alter the district's social and economic character.

⁹⁹ Sami (Real estate agent), In Person, May 13, 2019.



Figure 9: Real estate advertisements. Real estate offices situated around the housing enclaves in Başakşehir advertise in their windows and on their billboards, declaring that foreigners can obtain Turkish citizenship through property investment in the district. The prevalence of these advertisements significantly impacts the aesthetic and cultural landscape of Başakşehir. This recurring marketing message emerges as a distinctive feature, shaping the visual identity of the district's streets.

The growing multi-ethnic immigrant population in Başakşehir has impacted not just the economic landscape but also profoundly altered the district's social and cultural climate. This transformation is evident in the visual elements of the urban space. Particularly noticeable are bilingual (Turkish and Arabic) and trilingual (Turkish, Arabic, and English) street signs and signboards. The district also features a diverse array of foreign apparel on its streets, traditional restaurants, *nargile* (hookah) coffeehouses, and ethnic markets. Additionally, specialized

businesses have emerged to cater to foreign residents, including international call centres, consultancy services for obtaining Turkish citizenship, and language schools.

The evolving dynamics in the district, which include changing demographics, shifts in the social atmosphere, and economic fluctuations, are having a notable impact on community relations. Some residents voice concerns about the rising number of immigrants in the area and the cultural differences between the host community and these newcomers. Ceyda, a resident of one of the district's most prestigious housing developments, appreciates the spatial organisation of her neighbourhood, the neat outdoor spaces, and the public services the district municipality provides. However, she still finds her neighbourhood unsuitable for raising a family. Due to the increasing immigrant community, she plans to move to another district in Istanbul. While Ceyda is cautious about what she says and how she says it, she is quite bold in expressing her political views:

Now, people from distinct cultures, countries, and backgrounds live here... Imagine a four-lane road suddenly becoming a one-lane street. On each lane are people of different nationalities, and they are forced to share the same lane. Foreign voices, cultures, flavours, odours... I do not want to live with foreigners. Okay, I support President Erdoğan; I have always voted for him. I have respect for him. But he should not have allowed this to happen. This neighbourhood was my home. Now I feel like a stranger here.¹⁰⁰

To avoid being negatively judged by me and by Faruk—the *muhtar* (the official neighbourhood representative) of her neighbourhood who witnessed our conversation—Ceyda mentions the respect she has for President Erdoğan and his political standing. Despite this, she does not hold back in conveying her ethnocentric and segregationist views toward her immigrant neighbours.

¹⁰⁰ Ceyda (Resident), In Person, May 16, 2019.

In contrast, there are residents like Faruk who align themselves with the national government and refer to the Syrian community as “*misafir*” (guest).¹⁰¹ Faruk adopts the language of ruling politicians when discussing the Syrian community, emphasizing “our government’s” and “our people’s” generosity toward the Syrians “for the sake of God.” His views on the Syrian population in his neighbourhood are quite different from Ceyda’s:

All of us are servants of God. Nobody chose to be Turkish, Syrian, Arab, Kurdish, European, or American. It was not our choice to be like this; it was God’s decision. These people [Syrians] did not come here on their own accord. Where is the best place in the world? America? Europe? Russia? One’s own country is the best place in the world. This is true for all these people. There is no way any of them would like to be in this situation. They left their homes, jobs, and belongings behind. They had no choice but to escape and take shelter in Türkiye. No other country would help them like *us*. This country still survives despite all the challenges and tribulations it has faced so far because *we* helped these *garip gureba* (waifs and strays). I believe the prayers and blessings of these miserable people helped us overcome the coup attempt on our government on June 15th, 2016.¹⁰²

No one can truly discern whether Faruk is sincere or merely attempting to secure his position as a mukhtar when he discusses the Syrian population in his neighbourhood. His effort to express himself after witnessing Ceyda’s reproachful comments about the government’s open-border policy are understandable, given his role as a neighbourhood representative. Nevertheless, this anecdote highlights the diverse perspectives on the current demographics.

¹⁰¹ As per official classification, the Turkish government uses the term “*misafir*” (guest) to refer to Syrians without providing them with “refugee” status. Due to Türkiye’s partial commitment to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967), the country grants refugee status solely to citizens of member states of the Council of Europe while providing temporary asylum for asylum seekers from Europe or other regions. Designating Syrian immigrants as guests allows the government to retain flexibility in its approach to the Syrian crisis without formally conferring refugee status, thereby avoiding the specific international protocols associated with such recognition. Seçil Dağtaş, “Whose Misafirs? Negotiating Difference Along the Turkish–Syrian Border,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 4 (November 2017): 662.

¹⁰² Faruk (Mukhtar), In Person, May 16, 2019.

While some residents disapprove of the influx of immigrants and the burgeoning Arab culture in the district, immigrant members of the community in Başakşehir are generally better integrated into the host society—especially in social and cultural terms—than those in neighbourhoods outside the symbolic boundaries of the Islamist settlement in Başakşehir: Bahçeşehir, Güvercintepe, Şahintepe, and Altınşehir. Although these neighbourhoods are within the territorial limits of Başakşehir, they differ from the rest of the district not only in their physical qualities but also in terms of their social and economic dynamics.

1.6. The “others” and the spaces of “others”

The neighbourhoods Güvercintepe, Şahintepe, Altınşehir, and Bahçeşehir, together with their communities, have been perceived as the ‘others’ of the district since they were incorporated into Başakşehir in 2008. Information from local and anti-government newspapers suggests that this process of ‘othering’ arises both from the attitudes of municipal actors toward these neighbourhoods and from the views of the other neighbourhoods’ residents toward the inhabitants of these areas.¹⁰³ İrfan Özet, in his analysis of the underlying dynamics of religious

¹⁰³ Regarding Güvercintepe, Şahintepe, and Altınşehir, it is not possible to provide any interpretations about the residents’ sentiments towards the rest of the district and the municipality, due to the absence of conducted interviews with the residents of these areas. In contrast, for the case of Bahçeşehir, based on conducted interviews with residents and mukhtars, it can be confirmed that this sense of ‘otherness’ is mutual. For local news regarding the discontent in these neighbourhoods see: “Güvercintepe’deki Yıkımı Anlatan Filistin Mahallesi Belgeseli Yarın Gösterimde,” *SOL Haber Portalı*, May 7, 2021, <https://haber.sol.org.tr/haber/guvercintepedeki-yikimi-anlatan-filistin-mahallesi-belgeseli-yarin-gosterimde-31740>; “Kentsel Dönüşüm: ‘Başakşehir’de Değerlenen Araziden Yoksul Kürtleri Atmanın Peşindeler,” *Bianet*, May 15, 2009, <https://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/114536-basaksehir-de-degerlenen-araziden-yoksul-kurtleri-atmanin-pesindeler>; “Bahçeşehir Yoğun Bakımda,” *Parola İstanbul*, December 28, 2016, <http://www.zerparola.com/vip-roportaj-bahcesehir-yogun-bakimda-11-0-1732.aspx>; “Başkan, yuvama dokunma!,” *Basaksehir Times*, February 12, 2013,

conservatism in the Başakşehir district, argues that these neighbourhoods—characterized by the identity, ethnicity, lifestyle, and social class of their residents—exist outside the symbolic boundaries of the district.¹⁰⁴ Lifestyle, one of the most notable of these dynamics, denotes the role of religiosity in determining life choices.

Güvercintepe, Şahintepe, and Altınşehir are characterized as informal housing neighbourhoods, predominantly inhabited by low-income, working-class individuals and marginalised Kurdish and Alawi communities. Contrasting sharply with the newly constructed residences in Kayaşehir and the well-preserved, older settlements in Başakşehir and Başak neighbourhoods, the residential buildings and streets are in a state of disrepair, necessitating significant renovation. These neighbourhoods are notorious for their substandard living conditions, deficient infrastructure, and prevalent criminal activity.

Furthermore, public amenities within the district such as the public hospital, mayor's office, and governor's office, are significantly distant from these neighbourhoods. They have reduced accessibility to essential municipal services like infrastructure, environmental maintenance, and public transportation. Considering this, local politicians from opposing political factions, and authors contributing to opposition newspapers, have voiced their concerns and grievances about the inadequate municipal services and unequal allocation of the district municipality's budget for the development of these areas, compared to Başakşehir, Başak, and Kayaşehir.¹⁰⁵

<https://www.basaksehirtimes.com/guvercintepe/baskan-yuvama-dokunma-h1942.html>; "Başakşehir'in 814 Yaşlı Binası," *Parola İstanbul*, February 28, 2021, <http://www.zerparola.com/-basaksehir-in-814-yasli-binasi-0-0-2993.aspx>.

¹⁰⁴ Özet, "Kentli Muhafazakârlarda Habitus Dönüşümü: Fatih ve Başakşehir Örneği," 230.

¹⁰⁵ "Parola Bahçeşehir," November 11, 2020, <http://www.zerparola.com/-altinsehir-care-pesinde-0-0-2914.aspx>; "Parola Bahçeşehir," March 14, 2022, <http://www.zerparola.com/-sahintepe-direniyor-0-0->

Some residents of Başakşehir, Başak, and Kayaşehir express their discontent with the inhabitants of Güvercintepe and Altınşehir, claiming illegal activities taking place there and safety concerns. Özge, a doctor working in a health care centre in Başakşehir, mentions some patients who moved from Başakşehir to other parts of Istanbul, because some people from Güvercintepe come to Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods to sell drugs around the primary schools.¹⁰⁶ Although these illegal activities are thought to stay only within the “marginal” parts of the district, they infiltrate other spaces one way or another. Residents who have financial means often move to safer housing estates and send their children to nearby schools when safety concerns arise, while others seek safer neighbourhoods outside Başakşehir.

Similarly, Yakup, a community manager in a housing development in Başak, claims that drug gangs inhabit the shanty houses of Güvercintepe.¹⁰⁷ According to him, while the conservative community in Başakşehir describes their neighbourhoods as the “places of peace” and “castles of Islam,” they often overlook “what is happening in the backyard.” Başakşehir is a district with multiple faces. Yakup suggests that the conservatives’ perception of “being in peace” renders them oblivious to crime in peripheral neighbourhoods. Indeed, compatible with Yakup’s argument, the district municipality’s monthly bulletins and the construction companies’ posters all refer to the district as “the city of peace,” often evoking religious connotations. As a result, both the conservative community and the municipal actors who represent them remain silent about societal issues to uphold the district’s reputation as a peaceful neighbourhood.

3301.aspx; Hakan Zat, “Parola Bahçeşehir,” September 19, 2019, <http://www.zerparola.com/-cemevi-neyi-bekliyor-0-0-2728.aspx>.

¹⁰⁶ Özge (Resident), In Person, July 27, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Yakup (Community manager), interview.



Figure 10: A snapshot from Güvercintepe. Güvercintepe is a shanty neighbourhood marked by poor living conditions and scarce resources. The buildings in the image, visibly run-down and inadequately maintained, echo the general state of disrepair. The commercial spaces, typically situated in the basement floors of these apartments, further contribute to the neighbourhood's tangled and chaotic image due to their severe deterioration. Intriguingly, Güvercintepe is in close proximity to the prosperous region of Kayaşehir, which houses numerous upscale housing developments as well as TOKİ's mass housing projects, public facilities, well-maintained infrastructure, and vibrant public spaces. However, the stark contrast between the two areas makes Güvercintepe feel like a distant town, separated by more than the mere 2 km distance to the closest housing development area in Kayaşehir.



Figure 11: A distant view of Kayaşehir from Güvercintepe. Photograph shows the view of a luxury housing enclave with its new, modern high-rise apartment blocks and TOKİ's mass housing project in Kayaşehir, all set against the desolate landscape of Güvercintepe.

While the aforementioned neighbourhoods are marginalized based on the ethnicity, class, and the crime attributed to the poor, the Bahçeşehir area (including both Bahçeşehir I and Bahçeşehir II neighbourhoods) is also regarded outside the symbolic boundaries of Başakşehir due to the ideological and political stance of the community.

Originally developed in the late 1980s as a satellite city, Bahçeşehir was conceived to cater to upper-middle and upper-income citizens of that era.¹⁰⁸ The project incorporated a variety of functions, encompassing commercial, residential, recreational, educational, and healthcare facilities.¹⁰⁹ Prior to 2008, Bahçeşehir constituted a segment of the Büyükçekmece district. However, in 2008, it amalgamated with ten other neighbourhoods to establish the district of Başakşehir. The integration of Bahçeşehir into the Başakşehir district triggered social unrest among the residents of Bahçeşehir. This unrest was primarily due to their resistance towards having their secular neighbourhood governed by an AKP municipality. The residents express discontent with being associated with Başakşehir, a district widely recognized as the stronghold of Islamist ideology. Seda, the mukhtar of Bahçeşehir-I neighbourhood, convey that while the affiliation with the Başakşehir district has minimal influence on the local community, the mere notion of being officially linked to Başakşehir evokes discomfort among many individuals in Bahçeşehir.¹¹⁰ She says:

It has been ten years since I moved to Bahçeşehir. Several of my friends asked me if I was sure about my decision prior to moving here. The people told me that Başakşehir was a place of narrow-minded and radically religious people, so living there would be difficult and uncomfortable for me. There is, however, a difference between Bahçeşehir and the other neighbourhoods of Başakşehir. We, the residents of Bahçeşehir, are not perfect, but we have a modern worldview.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, "Modernism and the Millennium: Trial by Space in Istanbul," *City* 2, no. 8 (December 1997): 21–36.

¹⁰⁹ Kadriye Füsun Erkul, "A Cross-Cultural Analysis of New Urbanist Neighbourhoods in the US and Turkey: Neighbourhood Form, Community Life, and Resident Experiences." (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 2009), 96.

¹¹⁰ Seda (Mukhtar), In Person, August 1, 2019.

¹¹¹ Seda (Mukhtar).

Seda highlights the differentiation of her neighbourhood from the broader Başakşehir community, emphasizing the contrasting lifestyles of the two groups. Similarly, Songül, a resident of Bahçeşehir-II, refuses to be identified with the associated conservatism in Başakşehir:

Our neighbourhood is part of Başakşehir, but we live in Bahçeşehir. People here are open-minded. Being a woman and a single mother, I do not feel disturbed by others' gazes here. I can do whatever I want; I can wear whatever I like. It would be impossible for me to find this comfort anywhere else in Başakşehir.¹¹²

Derya, the mukhtar of Bahçeşehir-II, complains about the merger with Başakşehir due to political tensions between the district municipality and residents of her neighbourhood.¹¹³ As she points out, Islamist spatial and social politics are gradually infusing Bahçeşehir's neighbourhood culture, especially concerning social activities with religious themes: talks, meetings, exhibitions, and public education courses. Further, the opening of new mosques, municipal cultural centres, and public and private housing projects as well as the transformation of existing public institutions under the authority of Islamist politicians have a profound effect on the spatial reconfiguration of the Bahçeşehir-I and Bahçeşehir-II neighbourhoods, whether from an Islamist or a developmental perspective.

Bahçeşehir, which translates as "Garden City", was conceived as a housing settlement centred around an artificial pond. Around the pond is the Lake Park which remains the most popular area for outdoor recreation in Bahçeşehir; it features paths, green areas, coffee houses, restaurants, and municipal social venues. Notably, certain areas within the park serve alcoholic beverages, which is unusual for the district. Adding to its distinctiveness, two statues of Mustafa Kemal

¹¹² Songül (Assistant mukhtar), In Person, August 1, 2019.

¹¹³ Derya (Mukhtar), In Person, August 1, 2019. Derya and Seda are the only female mukhtars in the Başakşehir district.

Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye, are strategically positioned along the walking path within Lake Park and at the square adjoining the park's entrance. These ideologically charged urban elements are unique to Bahçeşehir and cannot be found elsewhere within the confines of the Başakşehir district.



Figure 12: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk statues placed in and around the Lake Park in Bahçeşehir.

Atatürk is an assertively promoted symbol of the nation. His statues have decorated the centres of every city and town in Türkiye since the early days of his leadership. Republican ruling cadres considered placing his statues in public spaces as a significant means by which national ideology could be materially represented in the public sphere. Decades after the founding of the Republic, after the *coup d'état* in 1980, the military junta once again instrumentalized Atatürk statues, this time to restore authority and achieve unity in society, as well as invoke an image of a strong and

unified state.¹¹⁴ They placed numerous Atatürk statues, in addition to the existing ones, in the most central locations of cities.

During the 1990s, as Islamism gained greater prominence and religious symbols became more visible in various contexts, state officials and military officers aligned with secularism introduced numerous statues, busts, and portraits of Atatürk into public spaces.¹¹⁵ In shanty towns with conservative working-class populations at the time authorities took steps to erect new statues. Alev Çınar's account reveals that in 1996, a Turkish military officer, representing the strictly secular stance of the institution, personally oversaw the installation of an Atatürk statue in Sultanbeyli.¹¹⁶ Notably, the residents of Sultanbeyli had predominantly voted for Islamist parties during that period. This instance serves as an illustration of how the placement of an Atatürk statue could be viewed as a forceful imposition of secular nationalism within an Islamist community.

The strategic placement of Atatürk statues in prominent public areas served as a tangible representation of the national ideology, establishing a material presence and asserting authority within the public realm. Given the increasing influence of Islamist city administrations in the 2000s, it is unsurprising that these statues have vanished from such towns. Jeremy Walton states, in line with the diminishing hegemony of official secularity over urban space, the absence of the panoptical gaze of Atatürk has been a characteristic of Islamist space production.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Esra Özyürek, "Miniaturizing Atatürk: Privatization of State Imagery and Ideology in Turkey," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004): 379.

¹¹⁵ Özyürek, 378.

¹¹⁶ Çınar, "Cities, Squares and Statues," 100–101.

¹¹⁷ Jeremy F. Walton, "Practices of Neo-Ottomanism: Making Space and Place Virtuous in Istanbul," in *Orienting Istanbul* (Routledge, 2010), 97.

Başakşehir serves as a prime example of a distinct shift in aesthetic representation, where Atatürk statues, typically symbolic of republican nationalism and secularism, are conspicuously absent. The public spaces within the settlement are characterized by a “distinct aesthetics of absence,” concerning the icons of republican nationalism and secularism, paired with the presence of specific signs, symbols, or traces of Islamism.¹¹⁸ Conversely, the presence of icons associated with secular republican ideology characterizes the public spaces in Bahçeşehir, revealing the community’s secular, pro-Republican, and Atatürkist socio-political stances. Similarly, the absence of ideologically loaded elements, such as monuments, symbols, posters, ornaments, and advertisements that the district municipality and its allied religious organisations typically incorporate into the built environment, especially in Başak, Başakşehir, and Kayaşehir, also defines the character of public spaces in Bahçeşehir.

The Atatürk statues in Lake Park were constructed in the late 1990s, before the merger of Bahçeşehir region with Başakşehir district. These urban features did not develop under the current administration. The social venues that serve alcoholic drinks around Lake Park also were established before Başakşehir Municipality took office. The district municipality and the district governor have the authority to intervene in the organisation and management of these spaces. However, in order not to exacerbate the existing political tension with Bahçeşehir, they do not make any significant moves that could cause dispute—except for their rent-seeking interventions in Bahçeşehir region.¹¹⁹ Rather, politicians, and administrative officials in Başakşehir draw

¹¹⁸ Walton, 97.

¹¹⁹ Başakşehir District Municipality has changed the construction regulations of the zone around the Lake Park in Bahçeşehir which led to the emergence of numerous housing projects and caused land speculation in the region. See the news about these attempts: Sefa Uyar, “Danıştay’ın ‘dur’ dediği Başakşehir’deki projede yeni aşama,” September 18, 2022, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/danistayin-dur-dedigi->

benefits from the neutral and non-aligned social and spatial features of the Bahçeşehir region when they need a venue without any Islamist connotations. For instance, the governmental and state actors organise official and mandatory events such as Republic Day celebrations and Atatürk Remembrance Day at the Atatürk statue in Bahçeşehir. On the other hand, they organise other events such as religious holiday celebrations and July 15th Democracy and National Unity Day in other neighbourhoods of the district.¹²⁰ In doing so, the ruling local politicians avoid bringing the official and must-attend celebrations and commemorations associated with the old regime in Türkiye, or secular republican state traditions, within the symbolic boundaries of the *habitus*.

The ‘others’ within the district and their respective spaces do not merge into the Başakşehir community or their spaces, which are identified as conservative, or Islamist at times. Builders of Başakşehir and their “imagined community” are concerned with their own spaces, such as the Başak, Başakşehir, and Kayaşehir neighbourhoods, without significant intervention in the neighbouring regions.

Conclusion

Başakşehir, which initially emerged as a residential complex on the outskirts of Istanbul, has undergone significant transformations since its inception. Over the years, it has developed multiple identities, serving not only as a mass housing project expanded in four stages but also as

Başakşehirdeki-projede-yeni-asama-1982211; Sefer Levent, “Gölete inşaat değil Bahçeşehir’e yol lazım!,” May 6, 2017, sec. ekonomi, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/golete-insaat-degil-bahcesehire-yol-lazim-40448653>.

¹²⁰ The Democracy and National Unity Day is one of the public holidays in Türkiye, commemorating the “national unity” against the *coup d’état* attempt on July 15th, 2016, when a faction of the Turkish military launched a coordinated attempt to topple the AKP government.

a residential community, a provincial district, and even a soccer club. These identities have evolved in response to the shifting social and political climate in Türkiye since the 1990s. This chapter unravels the factors that make Başakşehir a notable landmark in the history of the Islamist movement in Türkiye, shedding light on the diverse identities and meanings assigned to the settlement in three decades.

This chapter analyzes instances, narratives, architectural and urban spaces, and key players in Başakşehir, all contributing to its evolution as a spatial hub of Islamism. Understanding the distinctive spatial and social characteristics and comprehending the prevalence of specific social practices and conditions within this residential landscape necessitate a deep grasp of the historical processes that have molded it. Additionally, understanding the motivations of the founders, initiators, governors, and community members is crucial for deciphering why this settlement holds particular significance. Through a study of the various stories, spaces, and actors in Başakşehir, the chapter explores how ideology shapes its subjects, how these subjects create their own communities, and how these communities collectively form a spatial habitus in Başakşehir.

At the time of its founding in the mid-1990s, the political actors of the Islamist movement envisioned Başakşehir as a modest housing settlement for low- and middle-income conservatives in Istanbul. However, the settlement has evolved significantly over time in terms of its architectural and urban features, size, economic forces, and resident profile. This chapter argues that Başakşehir, through its various historical processes, has served as a microcosm of the different phases and shifting urban imaginaries of Islamism in Türkiye. The evolving

characteristics of the settlement reflect the continuously fluctuating modes of Islamism regarding its relationship with the political and economic power.

The Islamist characteristics of the physical environment and social life in Başakşehir are connected to diverse forms of placemaking and ways of organising daily life in the district. In this context, focusing on the different enclaves and resident communities in the area raises questions about the uniformity of the settlement, especially in terms of ethnic, class, and ideological polarizations. This chapter argues that Başakşehir is a heterogeneous place, featuring neighbourhoods with changing spatial characteristics, demographics, and socio-economic profiles. It highlights the role of Islamism as a determining factor shaping both spatial and social life yet points out that its influence is not uniform across the district. With respect to this heterogeneity, the chapter suggests that the boundaries of the Islamist habitus in Başakşehir are not defined by the geographical limits of the area, but rather by the activities of political, economic, and religious actors who spread Islamism in urban spaces.

In this context, the Başakşehir Housing Project holds a unique place as the first residential development in the area and serves as the initial cornerstone of the symbolic habitus established in the district. The project stands out as a remarkable case when compared to similar residential projects initiated by similar ideological circles in the past. With its size, population, and availability of housing units for a variety of economic groups, as well as its ideological and economic dynamics, the Başakşehir Housing Project is an outstanding project. The next chapter delves into the evolution of the Başakşehir Housing Project, exploring its shifting architectural and social characteristics since its first stage was initiated in 1995.

Chapter 2 | Spaces of Habitation (I): Başakşehir Housing Project

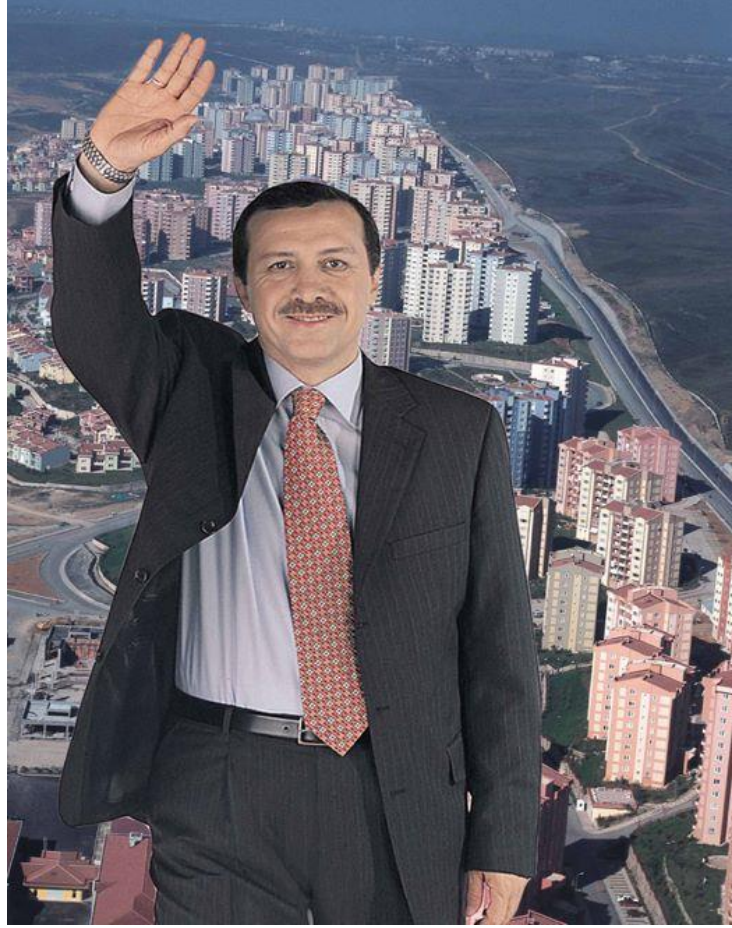


Figure 13: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan poster, 2000s. Source: Photograph retrieved from KİPTAŞ. The poster, produced by KİPTAŞ to promote the completion of the first two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project, prominently features Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the project's founding father. Portrayed as a driving force behind the project's realization, he is depicted in an almost heroic light. Set against an aerial view of the project's first stage, he is seen waving to the people of Istanbul, exuding both pride and a sense of accomplishment for providing them with housing. This poster not only commemorates the project's achievements but also extends an invitation for people to invest in the project's upcoming stages.

In July 2018, I scheduled an appointment with İsmail, a senior manager working in Istanbul Konut İmar Plan Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc., KİPTAŞ), to gain a firsthand perspective on the conception and development of the Başakşehir Housing Project. Upon entering his office, I was greeted by a large photograph of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, smiling and waving at the camera. Erdoğan's silhouette was framed by an aerial view of the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project. İsmail's decision to prominently display the promotional picture of the Housing Project within his office, depicting Erdoğan as the project's central figure, was no coincidence: Erdoğan was the (re)founder of KİPTAŞ; KİPTAŞ's inaugural project was Başakşehir, and İsmail was a leading figure in both KİPTAŞ and the Başakşehir Project. İsmail, once he saw me looking at the picture on the wall, said proudly: "Başakşehir holds a place of honour in the history of our institution; we built Başakşehir from scratch."¹

As we settled into our conversation, İsmail elaborated on the story of Başakşehir. The land where the Başakşehir Housing Project now stands was once a dairy farm. Under KİPTAŞ's direction, it transformed into an urban enclave complete with highways, electrical lines, and essential amenities. As a testament to the impressive transformation KİPTAŞ achieved in Başakşehir, İsmail stated, "We, as KİPTAŞ, constructed everything you see there—schools, mosques, parks. We brought flowers, trees, and even trash cans to develop a settlement in Başakşehir. Our biggest motivation was to provide families with a house where they could live in peace."

¹ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager), interview.

In the Islamic thought, a house transcends its physical boundaries by serving as a spiritual space for prayer and worship, thereby blurring the boundary between the worldly and the spiritual. According to Ayşe Saktanber, the house serves as a key metaphor that helps Muslims situate themselves both on earth and in the hereafter by tying together significant elements of faith and practice.² The house is not just a living space essential for family; it also embodies sacredness. Given that the family is considered a holy entity within Islamic thought, a house specifically designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment for a family transcends its role as a mere commodity. Recognizing this faith-based conceptualization of the house, Islamist politicians of the 1990s identified housing provision as a pressing concern that should not be governed exclusively by market forces.³

As soon as the Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) won the 1994 local elections in Istanbul and Ankara and became part of the government in 1995, they took active steps to intervene in the housing sector. Their actions were particularly aimed at the low- and middle-income groups, which formed the backbone of their electoral support.⁴ Başakşehir Housing Project was realized in such a context and evolved with the political shifts, economic fluctuations, and societal transformations. Initially built as a mass housing development, the project gradually evolved into stages widening its targeted socio-economic class.

The inception and expansion of the Başakşehir Housing Project (1995 -2007) were facilitated by the restructuring of KİPTAŞ as a municipal construction body to provide affordable housing in

² Ayşe Saktanber, *Living Islam: Women, Religion, and the Politicization of Culture in Turkey* (London: Tauris, 2002), 39.

³ İsmail Doga Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey: The Case of Public Housing*, International Comparative Social Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 143.

⁴ Karatepe, 143.

Istanbul. My analysis draws parallels between KİPTAŞ's expanded authority and capabilities in the subsequent years, and the evolving social and spatial features of the Başakşehir Housing Project, its changing resident profile, and the empowerment of the Islamist movement in the country from the mid-1990s to the 2000s. I posit that the housing production facilitated by public means and institutions in Başakşehir reflected the increasing influence of political Islam in diverse spheres of society, as well as the growing political and economic power of its supporters.

KİPTAŞ initially undertook the construction of the first two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project with a focus on accommodating low- and middle-income families in Istanbul, without an emphasis on additional financial gain. However, in constructing the fourth and fifth stages, the institution adopted a dual approach, motivated by both financial and ideological objectives. Specifically, these later stages were designed to offer additional housing options that would also attract upper-middle-income conservative families, thereby broadening the socio-economic range of the envisioned conservative community within the settlement. This shift broadened the socio-economic range of the imagined conservative community in the settlement and led to disparities in architectural and urban qualities between the initial and later stages of the project. I examine the Başakşehir Housing Project's social and spatial characteristics by focusing on each stage. I explore community relations and assess how these stages interact with both their immediate surroundings and the district as a whole.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the Başakşehir Housing Project's first and second stages, focusing on the urban characteristics of these stages as well as the architectural qualities of the housing blocks and apartments. Moreover, it explores how lifestyles, worldviews, tastes, and social classes are expressed in this housing environment. In this context, the chapter investigates

both the resident profile and community bonds within these initial stages. Following this, the chapter transitions into a comprehensive exploration of the project's fourth and fifth stages. It scrutinizes various aspects, including their design characteristics and how they integrate with and impact the surrounding urban context. Further, it examines the community relations in these stages in comparison to the initial stages of the project. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the subjects, reasons, and outcomes of residential mobility across different stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project.

The foundation of my analysis is built on interviews that I conducted with municipal officers, KİPTAŞ officers, residents, real estate agents, and mukhtars (official neighbourhood representatives). The interviews serve as primary sources, unfolding the tangible and social metamorphoses within Başakşehir. They offer insights into residents' lived experiences, illuminating their daily interactions, perceptions, and spatial relationships. Moreover, these dialogues enable me to explore the complex dynamics of the district, examining the socioeconomic drivers of change and the ideological influences shaping its identity and residents' worldviews. In addition, I utilize photographs and drawings of the housing estates, housing units, and common spaces to dissect spatial attributes. This analysis aids in discerning patterns of usage, while offering insights into the original intentions and objectives of the builders behind these structures.

2.1 Inhabiting the habitus: Başakşehir Housing Project

Addressing the long-standing issue of housing shortages in Istanbul was a cornerstone of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's 1994 municipal election campaign. Following his electoral victory,

conservative and low-income segments of society, who had lived in shanty districts of the city for decades, held expectations that Erdoğan would elevate their living standards. Further, they hoped to be relocated to well-designed housing complexes where they would no longer face marginalization.⁵ Erdoğan's plan was to build well-planned housing estates in accordance with the urban visions of earlier decades and relocate these marginalized groups from squalid neighbourhoods and poor shanty areas.

The developers of the Başakşehir Housing Project envisioned it as a remedy for the housing needs of these specific demographic groups, as well as for the working-class individuals employed in the İkitelli Organised Industrial Zone and in small and medium-sized enterprises on the outskirts of Istanbul's European side. Although the designated site for the project was relatively distant from the central urban areas, it was strategically located near the newly developed industrial zone in İkitelli, which at the time was emerging as a new economic hub. Undertaking the construction of this ambitious initiative was KİPTAŞ, a municipal company established in 1987 with the aim of providing affordable housing to low-income groups in Istanbul. Capitalizing on publicly owned land from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, KİPTAŞ was responsible for executing all four stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project.

According to İsmail, the housing units produced by KİPTAŞ in the initial two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project fell short of meeting quality standards in terms of materials, workmanship, and architectural features.⁶ He indicates that the project was caught in a conflict between the aspirations of urban professionals and the demands of politicians. While the leaders

⁵ Çavdar, "Loss of Modesty: The Adventure of Muslim Family from Mahalle to Gated Community," 19.

⁶ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager), interview.

of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP), including Erdoğan, aimed to offer cheap housing in large quantities, the urban professionals at KİPTAŞ insisted on developing higher-quality plans for the Başakşehir Housing Project. However, both time and budget were limited, making the better-quality design proposals unsuitable for producing a large number of housing units at a low cost. İsmail recalls, “We would have preferred to build low-height buildings of vernacular architecture with private gardens for each family, but the conditions were not suitable.”⁷

Mustafa is another witness of the early years of KİPTAŞ and the development of the Başakşehir Housing Project. He worked as a civil engineer for the institution during the construction of the first stage. As he remembers, two weeks prior to the inauguration ceremony of the first stage, Mayor Erdoğan visited the construction site with the architects, engineers, and the officers working on the project:

Together, we climbed up to the sixth floor of one of the apartment buildings in the area. Tayyip *Bey* (Mr. Erdoğan) looked down from a window and asked about the location of parking garages. There was a moment of silence. Since there were no enclosed parking spaces in the project, we were all surprised by this question. One of the vice presidents of KİPTAŞ said, “We do not have parking garages, sir. In mass housing projects, we do not build them.” Tayyip *Bey* responded with anger: “How can you say such a thing? I traveled all around the world. Parking garages are found in social housing projects even in poor post-Soviet cities, such as Moscow. You could build the parking lots below the ground and cover them with plants. Then you can both protect the cars from the sun, wind, rain, and snow, as well as create a playing field for children.” We were all puzzled. He had such a broad vision! “Sir, the legislation does not allow us to build garages underground in this project.” Tayyip *Bey* responded in anger: “What is legislation? Is it God’s word?” he asked. The legislation is me. The ruler is me. You are just trying to find a pretext for your faults.” The KİPTAŞ officer replied, “Sir, we have only two months until the opening ceremony.” Tayyip *Bey* insisted again, “Your *ecdad* (ancestors) moved ships on land to conquer Istanbul; how can you say, ‘We cannot,’ it is a shame on you.” Tayyip *Bey* has always been a man of wisdom.⁸

⁷ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager).

⁸ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat), In Person, July 9, 2019.

When Mustafa finished his story, which he seemed enormously proud of telling, I asked if they were able to build enclosed parking garages underneath the ground. Mustafa replied, “No, we could not add any garages to the project.” There were economic and legislative limitations during the construction of the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project, which were not easily overcome given the limited power of the Islamist politicians involved.

At that time, political Islam was burgeoning, and its proponents in the political and economic realms were eager to establish a strong presence across all spheres of society. They had already gained significant power by taking control of the governance of Istanbul and Ankara after decades of anticipation. However, they still faced obstacles that needed to be cleared before power could be fully consolidated in their favour. In areas like the business world, society at large, parliament, and the judicial system, there was a decisive majority opposed to the expansion of Islamist influence. Regarding the political landscape of Türkiye in the 1990s, Erdoğan and his associates had to wait until 2002 to make a significant impact. It was then that the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) era would begin in Türkiye, allowing them to gain the necessary power to effectively influence society without encountering significant obstacles.

However, despite the limitations and challenges posed by the prevailing circumstances of that era, the establishment of a residential settlement in Başakşehir, designed to harbour a community that would actively bolster the political initiatives of the empowering Islamist faction, emerged as a remarkable milestone during the 1990s. That would start a new chapter in the history of Islamist (and then neoliberal) urbanization in Istanbul. KİPTAŞ initiated the construction of its first stage in 1995, achieving completion within a year. Following the triumph of the initial stage

characterized by rapid production and a substantial demand for apartments within the project, the institution embarked on the second stage in 1996, concluding its construction within a span of two years.⁹

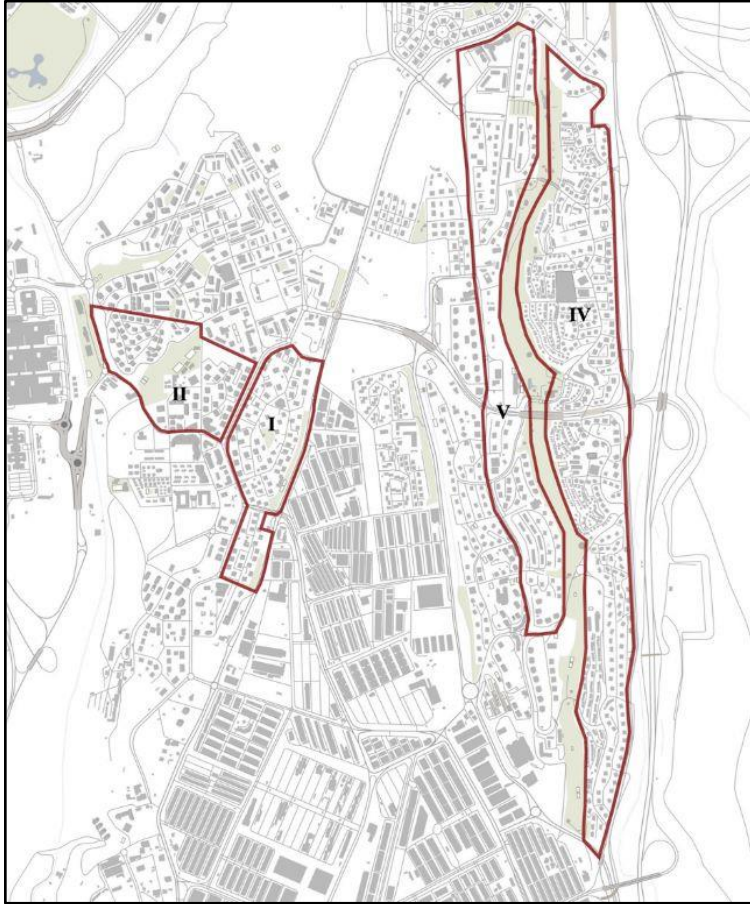


Figure 14: A map illustrating the location and the boundaries of the first, second, fourth, and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project. Source: Google Maps image modified by the author.

⁹ The first stage has seventy-nine apartment blocks with four different building models. There are 544 apartment units named type A, 1160 apartment units named type B, 740 apartment units named type C, and 560 apartment units named type D. Each of the apartment blocks has different apartment types with varied sizes (68 m², 80 m², 101 m², and 120 m²). There are 3004 housing units in total in the first stage of the housing development. The second stage has sixty-two housing blocks and 2304 housing units in total with three different apartment types. There are 1072 apartment units named B, 1064 units named D, and 168 units named C. These types differ in size and number of rooms (84 m², 122 m², and 143 m²).

Başakşehir Housing Project Stages	Started	Completed	# of Housing Units
1 st stage	1995	1996	3,004 apartments
2 nd stage	1996	1998	2,304 apartments
4 th stage	1998	2002	7,972 apartments 484 villa-type houses
5 th stage	2005	2007	4,996 apartments
Total			18,760 units

Figure 15: The table shows the start and end dates of construction of four stages and the number of units of each stage. Source: The information is retrieved from KİPTAŞ, and the table is produced by the author.

In both stages, the institution employed the tunnel-formwork technique, which encompasses the pouring of load-bearing walls and floors in-situ to create a unified structure, achieved through a single continuous process. Developed during the post-World War II period for efficient mass production, this production method aimed to swiftly construct new buildings on the sites of demolished ones, while minimizing costs and construction time. Since the late 1970s, this approach has been widely adopted in housing production within Türkiye, particularly in the creation of housing estates characterized by high-rise housing blocks.¹⁰

¹⁰ Duygu Koca, “Remapping Contemporary Housing Production in Turkey: A Case Study On Housing Patterns And Marketing Strategies” (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2012), 132.

The tunnel-formwork technique, primarily founded on the repetition of standardized units and blocks, contributes to the creation of monolithic structures within designated areas.¹¹ In this regard, the housing blocks in both stages have similar appearances in terms of their height and façade. The blocks range from six floors at their lowest to ten floors at their highest. Each housing block, with its simple and symmetrical arrangement across all four façades, is nearly indistinguishable in appearance. The use of diverse colours on distinct sections of the façade creates a sense of depth, contributing to its overall uniform yet visually engaging design. The architectural layout, which is replicated across the blocks with minor variations within each stage, is directly tied to the builders' objective of efficiently producing a significant number of cost-effective housing units in a short timeframe. The clustering of nearly identical housing blocks paints a picture of a landscape dominated by concrete in the skyline of Başakşehir.

The substandard apartment blocks and housing, set within a living environment marked by a lackluster and monotonous ambiance, sparked a sense of bewilderment among the project's initial residents. This was due to the evident disconnect between the promises that had been made to them and the reality of what was actually delivered. Evidently, for the first inhabitants of the Başakşehir Housing Project, the offered housing enclaves with repetitive high rise housing blocks and inadequate dwellings were at odds with the long-anticipated aspirations of Islamist groups and the urban aspirations prevalent in the 1970s.

¹¹ In the following decades, Housing Development Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi, TOKİ), adapted and repeated this housing construction technique utilizing the same tunnel formwork system to produce identical house plans in all cities and in the same way to satisfy the minimum requirements of a traditional family.



Figure 16: An aerial view of the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project in 2005, ten years after the start of construction. Source: Photograph retrieved from KİPTAŞ. Buildings with a generic design were erected in isolation, on the periphery of the city. The housing enclave looks like a composition of concrete towers stamped in a row rather than a residential settlement in harmony with the landscape.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the project's deficiencies in design and aesthetics have not diminished its ideological appeal. By leveraging political and economic networks and deploying a range of financial and political resources, a unique Islamist settlement was established in Başakşehir. In that context, the ideological stances of those who initiated, founded, and built the Housing Project, as well as the municipal body overseeing social and spatial organisation, were effective in attracting conservative groups to the settlement. Most notably, the resident community, centred around a specific way of life, played a significant role in the settlement's being an ideal location for future residents. The settlement's spatial organisation, management of shared spaces, and arrangement of social life in accordance with a modest lifestyle also contributed to the project's overall allure.

The initial residents were drawn to the settlement due to their trust in the politicians who championed the project, as well as their desire to live amongst individuals who shared similar ideological beliefs, despite the potential difficulties of residing in an underdeveloped area on the outskirts of the city. After a short period of time, the settlement became a tested and proven area, with a range of housing options and ongoing developments in infrastructure, social amenities, cultural activities, and educational facilities. Thus, the people who moved in Başakşehir after its initial period of establishment chose to move into the settlement not only for its established Islamist identity but also for the amenities it provides.



Figure 17: The general appearance of the housing blocks in the first and second stages and the landscape from a distance. Source: The photograph below is retrieved from KİPTAŞ. In both stages, the apartment buildings have generic, discreet, simple, and neutral-coloured façades. The height of the buildings varies from six-story to ten-story. Mosques exist in various locations within the stages, in close proximity to each other, as well as the housing blocks.

2.1.a. Spatial and social qualities of the first two stages

Despite the overall substandard quality, the apartments in the first and second stages provided a marked improvement in living conditions for certain groups—specifically those who had previously lived in the shanty towns of the city before relocating to Başakşehir. In this sense, the modest apartments in Başakşehir succeeded in pleasing those residents. The organisation of the interiors, the existence of utilities such as central heating and hot water, simple yet clean kitchen and bathroom designs, built-in furniture such as cupboards and cabinets, and elevators in the apartment buildings, were some of the features that were of a modern lifestyle.

Candan, a resident of the first stage since 1997, recalls that when she first moved to Başakşehir, the neighbourhood had no grocery stores, bazaars, pharmacies, or schools.¹² A truck would arrive weekly to sell essential goods to the residents. Instead of paved walkways around the buildings, only nature trails were present. Dilan, another resident of the first stage, says the apartment blocks were in the middle of grassland where cows grazed, when she moved to Başakşehir in 2000.¹³ With no other buildings in sight, the landscape was dominated by open pasture. “We used to watch the sunset from the trail around the housing blocks,” Dilan reminisces. However, she expresses her dissatisfaction with the constant construction and proliferation of buildings in today’s Başakşehir, particularly in the newly developed areas of Kayaşehir, as she recalls the quiet and unspoiled surroundings of earlier years.

¹² Candan (Resident), In Person, May 16, 2019.

¹³ Dilan (Resident), In Person, May 16, 2019.

Today, the first and second stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project are surrounded by bustling commercial activity. Department stores, grocery shops, supermarkets, real estate agencies, barbers, bookshops, coffeehouses, bakeries, and restaurants line the streets. Notably, most department stores specialize in women's clothing. While these stores offer a broad range of products, their focus is on modest and pious attire, as evidenced by veiled mannequins adorned in modest clothing displayed in the windows.



Figure 18: A department store's display of women's clothing. The mannequins are not veiled, but they are dressed modestly—long sleeved and wide cut, floor-length dresses without eye-catching patterns, appealing to Başakşehir's conservative residents. A simplicity—compatible with the Islamic way of life—is emphasized with the choice of single- or two-coloured, loose, and long clothes.

Complementing this commercial landscape are several concept shops that cater to a religious clientele, selling items like modest clothing, Qur’ans in various forms, hadith books, prayer beads, prayer rugs, bookrests for the Qur’an, *ilahi* (hymn) recordings, and Islamic content books. The names of these department stores have religious connotations, and quotes by religious leaders adorn store entrances. Some shops belong to faith-based organisations, which receive financial support from the sales of goods. Islam-themed stores and associations are found in several neighbourhoods of Başakşehir, creating piety-themed commercial zones.



Figure 19: Display windows of department stores in Başakşehir neighbourhood. On the left, Nur İman Gift Store sells Islamic books and goods. There are two female mannequins in the window display, one adult and one child, both wearing burqa. On the right is a branch office of another faith-based association, “Vatan İlmi Araştırmalar Derneği” (Vatan Islamic Science Research Association). A showcase in the office displays images of the Kaaba and Al Masjid an Nabawi in Mecca.



Figure 20: Display window of a bookstore. Guraba Publishing, owned by the faith-based association. “Our aim is to live the Islam that was lived during the time of Prophet Mohammed” is written on the nameplate of the store above the entrance.

The first stage was initially planned as a *site* without controlled access, yet monumental gates for both automobiles and pedestrians stand at its two entrances. *Site*, a rendition of the French word *cit  *, is the Turkish name for housing enclaves with certain borders and gateways. They refer to distinct clusters of apartment buildings or houses that have been developed together as part of a unified plan. *Sites* are not necessarily monitored by security. In contrast, gated communities are enclosed by walls, gates, and fences and safeguarded by security guards and closed-circuit

television cameras. They are designed as so-called ideal life capsules with schools, clinics, cafes, gyms, pools, grocery stores, workspaces, and other facilities that serve only their residents.

While the first stage does not meet the criteria for a gated community, its monumental gates qualify it as a gated housing estate.

Despite the presence of monumental gates, the first stage still remains easily accessible by pedestrians and cars. An entrance corridor, which links two main roads on either side of the development, allows both pedestrians and vehicles to enter without any security screening. This corridor not only facilitates access to the first stage but also serves as a passageway to other parts of the neighbourhood. In this sense, the gates function more as symbolic markers than as actual barriers. Contrastingly, there are checkpoints at the gates of the second stage, where a security guard controls the check-in and check-out of residents.



Figure 21: The entrance gates of the first (left) and second stages (right). While anyone can enter the first stage freely, a security guard in the entrance gate of the second stage controls the pedestrian and vehicle traffic entering and leaving the *site*.

While some residents of the first stage express dissatisfaction with the lack of controlled access and the *site*'s permeability, Ruşen, the community manager, highlights a different form of security—one rooted in community vigilance. While drifters and potential thieves can technically enter the *site*, residents keep a close eye on unfamiliar faces until they depart, especially if they seem suspicious. This level of community watchfulness serves as a de facto security measure. According to Ruşen, this naturally developed system actually renders the first stage a safer housing enclave than even some of the luxury housing projects in the district that are guarded by private security companies:

The luxury gated communities in the recently developed neighbourhoods of Başakşehir are much more insecure than here. We hear about robberies there. Thieves rent an apartment unit in these so-called secured gated communities and live there for two or three months to spy on the people living there and watch the hours people enter and exit the housing development. After a while, when the *site*'s inhabitants get used to them, the thieves rob their neighbours' apartments. Robberies are typically committed in upscale housing complexes in a professional manner. What about here? What can a thief possibly find in the first stage other than a few pieces of old furniture?

Ruşen's notion of security rests on the strong relationships between neighbours that motivate individuals to watch over each other's houses and cars in the housing development. Additionally, the economic deprivation of the inhabitants provides a sort of "theftproof" feature to the housing area.

Apart from surveillance by residents, security cameras are installed all around the apartment blocks at both stages. These cameras, managed by a private company hired by the *site* management, monitor the movements of residents and visitors. Their oversight extends not only to security-based concerns but also adherence to the community's moral principles. This latter aspect becomes apparent in the signs placed around the green spaces, warning, "National moral

principles should be followed in the park.” Such directives subtly exert pressure on both residents and visitors of the housing area to conform to the moral norms tacitly accepted by the “nation.” Though these norms are not explicitly defined, they seem to discourage intimate interactions between men and women, encourage modest attire, and promote quiet conduct.

2.1.b. Housing blocks, apartments, and life inside and around

The apartment blocks in both stages are remarkably similar in façade designs, materials, and heights. The housing blocks lack spacious lobby areas or large circulation spaces. Mailboxes and notice boards hang on the wall in the entrance halls of the buildings. Besides the notices from the building manager to the residents, advertisement posters of *tariqa*-related *sıbyan mektepleri* (infants’ schools) providing unofficial religious education to young children, brochures of faith-based associations calling for fundraising during religious events such as *Kurban Bayramı* (Eid al-Adha) and *Ramazan Bayramı* (Eid el-Fitr), and mosque associations’ calls for donations are displayed on the entrance walls. These Islamic-themed posters hung on walls or displayed in locked displays (organised by the doorman or manager of each apartment on purpose) provide insight into the residents’ worldviews. On the basement floor of the apartment buildings, a public meeting room is available for each block’s residents. The managers of both stages say that the female residents organise weekly gatherings (*sohbet*) in these common spaces to recite the Qur’an together.



Figure 22: The notice boards in the entrance hall of a housing block in the first stage. The existence of the board is indicative of the channels through which residents receive official and informal updates and news within the community. The notices from the building manager and advertisements for tariqa-related infant schools are displayed in a locked showcase. A mosque association's call for donations on the wall. The fact that these notices are in the entrance hall of a housing block suggests an intent to ensure every resident or visitor is exposed to these messages, reflecting their centrality in the ideological landscape of the community. Furthermore, the combination of notices from a building manager and those related to religious education or donations reflects the mesh of administrative, cultural, and religious priorities in the community. It suggests a blending of the mundane (like building maintenance) with the spiritual or religious, showing how intertwined these elements might be in daily life.



Figure 23: Entrance of an apartment building in the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project. The use of plastic flowers as decorations showcases an appreciation for nature-inspired beauty and creates a warm, welcoming atmosphere within the building, without the need for

regular care or replacement. A framed Qur'anic verse hung on the wall serves as both a spiritual reminder and an emblem of shared faith among residents. Displaying such a symbol could be seen as an effort to ensure that the Islamic faith is embraced by all residents, integrating this shared value into the daily lives of the apartment building community.



Figure 24: Plan drawings of the smallest apartment type, A1 (68 m²), and largest apartment type, D1 (120 m²), in the first stage. Source: Drawings modified by the author based on the drawings retrieved from KİPTAŞ

The plan schema and construction materials of the apartments in both stages are similar, despite the differences in size. No studio or one-bedroom apartment options are available. Even the smallest units have one primary bedroom, one child bedroom, and a living room. In the first stage, the smallest units are sixty-eight square metres and in the second stage eighty-four square metres. While the unavailability of different apartment types can be attributed to the limitations of the mass production technology that KİPTAŞ adopted in Başakşehir, as well as its subsequent projects, the proposed apartment layouts, in fact, are the products of a particular ideology. Each of these types is based on the same modern apartment building model designed for a family with at least one child, regardless of size and design. There is not a housing unit designed to address the needs of single people or couples without children. This provides an insight into the resident profile desired by KİPTAŞ.

Apartment entrances are small and serve as a barrier to prevent direct visual access to the living areas. The entrance connects to a corridor, which provides access to the rooms. A separate room near the entrance is equipped with an *alaturka* toilet. The word, *alaturka*, is a transliteration in modern Turkish of the French expression “à la façon des Turcs” referring to the squatting toilet.¹ The bathroom(s) contains a bathtub or shower stall and an *alafranga* (in the style of Franks/Europeans) water closet. Guests use the *alaturka* toilet space, while the bathroom is private to the residents of the house.

Meltem Gürel notes that the *alafranga* lavatory has been conceptualized as “modern, civilized, and sanitary” and a symbol of modernity in most houses in Türkiye, especially since the mid-

¹ After the French word *à la turque*, pertaining to Turks and their taste and style.

twentieth century. In contrast, the *alaturka* facility is regarded as “anachronistic, unhygienic, and uncivilized” and seen to “represent past bodily practices that do not suit the present.”² During the latter half of the twentieth century, *alafranga* lavatories started to become standard in home designs, particularly in large cities.³ While the newly built apartments of the time began to feature *alafranga* toilets, residents of older houses also started to replace their *alaturka* lavatories with *alafranga* versions. However, traditional conservative people continued to prefer *alaturka* lavatories in their homes. Although they have no opposition to the existence of *alafranga* lavatory fixtures in their bathrooms, they consider an extra room for an *alaturka* toilet as essential.⁴ They mostly regard *alaturka* toilets as religiously proper for keeping the body clean for worshipping. Some disapprove of the shared use of the same water closet by people who are not part of the immediate family.

Therefore, in the context of the Başakşehir Housing Project, the strategic arrangement of facilities is in line with the cultural and religious sensibilities of both the builders and the residents. *Alafranga* toilets are purposefully positioned within the bathrooms, designated as private areas solely for household members. In contrast, *alaturka* fixtures are installed in small toilet rooms near the apartment entrances, serving as semi-public spaces primarily intended for the convenience of guests visiting the household. In both instances, both the *alafranga* toilet rooms and *alaturka* toilet rooms are placed in the interior layout of the housing unit in a way that they do not face the qibla, the direction of prayer.

² Meltem Havva Gürel, “Bathroom as a Modern Space,” *The Journal of Architecture* 13, no. 3 (June 1, 2008): 230.

³ Gürel, 219.

⁴ Saktanber, *Living Islam*, 114.

Studying material culture, spatial organization of shared spaces, and interior design shows how traditional values, faith, modern apartment living ideas, and gender norms are blended into daily life. Further, the selection of furnishings and choice of decorative elements—such as Islamic symbols, Qur’anic verses, and sayings of Prophet Muhammad adorning the walls, alongside the presence of Islamic books on bookcases—provide valuable insights into the lives and beliefs of the residents of the first and second stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project.

Every decorative or functional object is chosen with the limitations and needs of the existing lifestyle in mind. Moreover, Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “taste,” as the origin of people’s distinct traits, significantly influences the selection of these objects.⁵ Taste functions as the key factor in shaping a person’s lifestyle, arising from the distinct choices that differentiate them, even among those in comparable social and economic settings. Reflecting Bourdieu’s theories, our lifestyles are principally formed by our decisions, which are in essence manifestations of our tastes. For instance, in apartments located in the first two stages, decorative objects featuring religious symbols, icons, Qur’anic verses, and prophetic hadiths, as well as daily prayer calendars displayed in visitor-accessible spaces like corridors and living rooms, reveal the lifestyles and faith of the inhabitants through their domestic taste. It is worth noting that the use of Islamic items as decorations is not exclusive to the houses in these stages, similar items can be found in the fourth and fifth stages as well. However, differences in the quality of material and style of the items become noticeable, serving as subtle indicators of class disparities.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 175.

In children's bedrooms, bookcases are full of religious books such as the Qur'an, hadith books, Islamic storybooks, and Islamic dream interpretation books. In Türkiye, it is not uncommon to find religious books, especially the Qur'an, in any home, including those of secular families. Notwithstanding, finding these types of books in a child's or an adolescent's bedroom is uncommon, except in conservative families. These rooms, aside from providing a private space for the children, also serve an additional purpose of ironing and storing clean clothes due to space constraints in the apartments. The dual functionality of these bedrooms, encompassing both rest and household chores like ironing, brings attention to the spatial limitations within the dwelling.



Figure 25: Photographs show the interior of children's bedrooms in the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project. In the left image, a religious calendar is hung on the wall. The presence of this religious calendar in a children's bedroom underscores the central role of Islam in daily life. This importance is further underscored by the fact that the calendar displays the daily prayer times, indicating not only religious belief but also active religious practice. The bookcases are filled with novels and Islamic books. The combination of novels and Islamic books suggests an integration of religious education with secular entertainment.

While most of the residents in both stages are property owners, some are renters. They are mainly low- and middle-income families. Built-in furniture is worn and ragged in most apartments. With limited economic resources, families do not spend much money on decorative elements, replacing old furniture, and paying attention to the harmony between curtains, carpets, and furniture. Most residents use low-priced machine-made carpets and curtains. The shared choices among people residing in the same housing environment reliably reflect their common cultural norms, preferences, habits, beliefs, and similar economic situations.



Figure 26: Living rooms of two apartments in the first stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project. The rooms serve multiple functions due to a lack of sufficient space in the dwellings. They are used for evening relaxation, watching TV—which is placed across the sofas—and for sleeping during nighttime. This is because some family members lack private bedrooms and beds, leading them to sleep on the sofas. During the day, sheets, covers, and pillows are neatly stowed on the sofa. Similarly, due to limited space for drying laundry, a clotheshorse is placed in the living room when needed. These living rooms differ markedly from those in more affluent middle- or upper-income groups' homes, a difference evidenced by the absence of elaborate decorations, larger coffee tables, high quality carpets, curtains, and furniture. This disparity is particularly notable when compared to the living rooms in the fourth and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project.

The subject of residential satisfaction in Başakşehir is a complex matter that manifests divergently across its demographic landscape. Though complaints about construction materials, workmanship, and insulation are prevalent, residents frequently express contradictory feelings of discontentment alongside a sense of privilege. For instance, Candan embodies the shared satisfaction felt by many.⁶ Before relocating to Başakşehir, she was deeply concerned about her former neighbourhood fraught with social ills such as teenage substance abuse. Başakşehir offered her a contrasting experience, one characterized by tranquility and outward display of piety. She particularly highlights the peace and the sense of safety she has found in the district, considering them invaluable for her children's upbringing. However, her endorsement comes with reservations, most notably about the quality of her apartment. Candan highlights her continual struggle with dampness and disrepair, stemming from poor insulation.

In an extension of Candan's concerns about construction quality, Necmi provides an insightful comparison. He argues that KİPTAŞ improved significantly in the quality of building materials and construction techniques over the years, particularly evident when comparing the initial two stages of housing with the subsequent ones. According to Necmi, the reason behind this improvement is the institution's increasing profits from housing sales in the subsequent stages, which allowed for more budget allocation towards better materials and construction.⁷ In each new stage, KİPTAŞ increased the quality of the housing units. Every succeeding housing project by KİPTAŞ is better in terms of appearance, material, and spaciousness than its predecessors.

⁶ Candan (Resident), interview.

⁷ Necmi (Mukhtar), interview.

While Candan and Necmi generally express satisfaction with the life in Başakşehir, not all residents share this view. Hale, Candan's niece, who has resided in the district's second stage since 2008, offers a contrasting perspective.⁸ She is disappointed with her apartment's and with maintenance problems in her building, arguing that these issues fail to meet her expectations for a quality living environment. Furthermore, Hale finds Başakşehir's social atmosphere to be dull, describing it as more appropriate for "retired people." She feels confined by what she perceives as the district's "oppressive" conservative climate and societal pressures from its devout community. The sole factor keeping her in Başakşehir is the affordability of her apartment's rent.

Following Hale's critique of Başakşehir, Candan finds herself compelled to defend her community and neighbourhood. Disturbed by her niece's dissatisfaction, she enumerates what she believes to be the unique qualities of the district, attempting to sway Hale's opinion: Our district is clean, unlike other parts of Istanbul. The atmosphere is pure, there is greenery everywhere, and the streets are secure. Additionally, our neighbours are wonderful people; they are all devout individuals."⁹ Deeply proud of her residence in Başakşehir, Candan is reluctant to entertain any criticisms from Hale. While she acknowledges that her apartment shows signs of aging and needs some maintenance, Candan argues that, by comparison to her previous neighbourhood in Bağcılar—known for its shantytowns—Başakşehir offers a far cleaner and safer environment.

⁸ Hale (Resident), In Person, May 16, 2019.

⁹ Candan (Resident), interview.

2.2. KİPTAŞ for housing versus housing for funding KİPTAŞ

The evolution of urban spaces often mirrors broader societal changes, reflecting shifts in ideology, economics, and community values. A striking example of this phenomenon can be observed in the Başakşehir Housing Project, where the changing tastes and demands of an emerging conservative middle class have profoundly influenced the project's subsequent stages.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a nuanced analytical framework for exploring the complexities of societal structures, particularly in how they shape individual and collective choices, behaviours, and tastes.¹⁰ Following this line of reasoning, habitus serves a dual role when considering the evolving preferences of social groups. It identifies the behaviours common to individuals within a particular group and distinguishes the collective lifestyle of that group from the lifestyles of other social groups or classes. Emerging from the internalization of class divisions, habitus is expressed through specific tastes and appreciations that articulate the lifestyle preferences of a group, effectively setting that lifestyle apart from others.

In the early 2000s, Türkiye experienced a significant shift in its political landscape, characterized by the growing influence of Islamist ideology, shifting social hierarchies, and changing class dynamics. This transformation redefined the concept of conservatism and had a particularly strong impact on the lifestyles of socially ascending groups.¹¹ The burgeoning conservatives

¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 175.

¹¹ Rifat Bali highlights the identity crisis that Türkiye has experienced since the late 1980s by exploring how cultural values, consumption habits, fashion, music, business, media, and politics have undergone significant changes. Trying to adapt to the rapidly changing trends of producing and consuming, diverse socio-economic groups have developed their own modes of life, which consequently manifested in their living spaces. Bourgeoning social groups such as seculars started to move into gated communities and *sites* that fit their ideology, social preferences, and status. Bali, *Tarz-ı Hayat'tan Life Style'a*.

began to adopt alternative tastes and lifestyles, differentiating themselves from the prevailing preferences of the lower- and middle-income conservatives, constrained by their financial means.¹² This change in conservative values notably influenced the housing market. The engagement of these newly emerging conservative groups led to a redefined concept of “conservative taste” within domestic settings.¹³ This newly developed taste created a wave of new demands and necessities for living spaces, particularly in the conventional understanding of a “house” and its spatial organisation.

To better serve the needs of these socially ascending groups, KİPTAŞ initiated the fourth and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project. These new stages provided housing options that catered not only to those with limited financial resources but also to these upwardly mobile social segments. By this point, the construction institution had amassed considerable resources and expertise, allowing for improved construction techniques in their housing units. This marked a departure from KİPTAŞ’s earlier days when it was building the initial stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project and was comparatively less experienced. Both the governing politicians and KİPTAŞ had now come to recognize the substantial profit potential of Başakşehir, further motivating their developmental efforts.¹⁴

As İsmail notes, the first two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project were planned and executed according to the resources and construction regulations available at the time, which imposed limitations on creativity and potential.¹⁵ Consequently, the final product closely

¹² For a detailed analysis of this transformation: Aksu Akçaoğlu, “Transformation of Conservative Politics, Urban Space, and Taste in Contemporary Turkey,” *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 1 (2022): 77–100.

¹³ Akçaoğlu, 78.

¹⁴ Yakup (Community manager), interview.

¹⁵ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager), interview.

mirrored the initial proposal. In contrast, during the fourth and fifth stages, discrepancies between the “envisaged” and “actualized” became inevitable. Although the conceptual designs for these later stages initially promised fewer housing units, more green spaces, and additional social facilities, KİPTAŞ deviated from these plans. The institution added extra housing units to the project to maximize profits.

Before initiating the construction of the fourth stage, KİPTAŞ’s urban planners and architects drafted a conceptual design for the designated area. The plan included five thousand housing units, encompassing both apartment buildings and single-family detached homes. The design was well-suited to the land, offering a balanced distribution of green areas, buildings, walking paths, and communal spaces. However, as Yakup recalls, when some senior officials from Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality reviewed the final proposal of the project, they insisted on increasing the number of housing units from five thousand to eight thousand five hundred. This adjustment aimed to appeal to a broader demographic and potentially securing more votes.¹⁶ This situation offers a clear illustration of the complex relationship between politics and the societal needs to which it responds.

The construction of the fourth stage commenced in 1998 and concluded in 2002, taking longer than initially anticipated. One of the key factors for the delay was the Turkish military’s stern memorandum issued against the national government on February 28, 1997, which led to the dissolution of the po-Islamist RP. By the time the fourth stage was completed in 2002, Türkiye was in the midst of significant transformations that would reshape its established power

¹⁶ Yakup (Community manager), interview.

structures, liberalize its economy, and alter its social norms. The establishment of the AKP government in 2002 and the appointment of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as prime minister marked a turning point. The construction of the fifth stage commenced in this transformed atmosphere in 2005 and was completed in 2007.

In designing and constructing the fourth and fifth stages, urban professionals and politicians collaboratively explored the project's architectural possibilities and developed strategies for increasing the profit that KİPTAŞ, intermediary firms, and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality would realize.¹⁷ In this context, the 2000s saw several key factors shaping the production and development of these stages: the expanding neoliberal land market, the rising political and financial influence of Islamist groups, and the demands of conservative wealth groups on Başakşehir. The shifts in power dynamics in political governance, economic regulation, and social discourse manifested themselves in both the physical and metaphorical transformations of the community and the spaces of community in Başakşehir.

While the fourth and the fifth stages diverge from the previous two stages with the existence of housing for high-income residents, these two stages also include housing options available for both lower income people. This juxtaposition of housing options within the later stages provides a lens through which to view KİPTAŞ's transformation as a municipal construction institution. Over the course of less than two decades, it evolved from a construction company primarily focused on producing housing for low- and middle-income families without a significant profit motive, into one that now also develops luxury housing for wealthier residents, ostensibly to

¹⁷ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager), interview.

generate funds for affordable housing initiatives. An assistant manager of KİPTAŞ, Orhan, describes this transformation by emphasizing the broader customer spectrum the institution addresses today.¹⁸

As Orhan explains, KİPTAŞ now produces different housing models for families according to their “scale of income.” The first model, called “social housing,” addresses low- and middle-income families. This housing model is built with comparatively low-cost materials and designed with limited or no social facilities. It provides a modest shelter for families with limited funds who wish to become homeowners. The second model is called “*memur etabı*” (civil servant housing), which targets high-income and senior state officials. In this model, the architectural program of the projects provides social facilities such as women-only and men-only swimming pools and gyms, and *mescit*(s) (prayer rooms) constructed with superior-quality materials. The third model is called “fund-raising housing.” KİPTAŞ produces and sells high-end housing projects to upper-income families for higher prices and makes a significant profit compared to the other two housing models and funds Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality with the money received. In the third model, KİPTAŞ develops profit-sharing projects in collaboration with private companies for the design and construction of the housing projects.

2.2.a. Spatial and social qualities of the fourth and fifth stages

The fourth and fifth stages of the project occupy strips of land that are parallel to each other and strategically separated from the first two stages. Originally, the housing enclaves within the fifth

¹⁸ Orhan (KİPTAŞ manager), In Person, July 13, 2017.

stage were conceived as gated communities from the outset, while the fourth stage was planned as an open housing estate.¹⁹ However, the fourth stage underwent a transformation over time, with the introduction of gated entrances for vehicles and a card-entry system for pedestrians. These features were implemented for each individual cluster of housing blocks and villas. Consequently, the fourth stage transformed into a series of gated communities, isolated from the surrounding areas by walls and fences, and safeguarded by surveillance cameras.

What further enhances both stages are the incorporation of a variety of open-air communal spaces, such as children's playgrounds, hiking trails, and sports courts. Educational and religious institutions—like mosques, kindergartens, and schools—as well as retail stores, are seamlessly integrated within the confines of these stages. Together, these features contribute to a comprehensive living experience for residents. Far from being mere afterthoughts, these amenities are important components that make each housing complex feel like a small, self-contained neighbourhood.

Besides the individual characteristics of each stage regarding the spatial features of the housing units they involve, the most significant quality exclusive to the fourth and fifth stages is a large green valley of 550 thousand square metres between these two stages, called Sular Vadisi (Water Valley). The Valley was the first open-air public space in Başakşehir, constructed by KIPTAŞ in 2008, after the completion of the fourth and fifth stages.²⁰ This green valley contains municipal

¹⁹ Necmi, working as mukhtar in the district, says the housing project was not determined as a gated housing project initially, so there is no central mechanism providing gated community services to the inhabitants, such as fully controlled security services and maintenance of the trails and roads. However, the district municipality regards this stage as a private gated complex, so it does not provide general maintenance and security services. Necmi (Mukhtar), interview.

²⁰ I investigate the Water Valley project in detail in Chapter 4.

venues, wedding halls, cafeterias, hiking trails, playgrounds, and lit ponds. Both the apartment blocks in the two stages and the villas in the fourth stage face the Water Valley. Alongside the superior quality craftsmanship, construction materials, and architectural solutions of the fourth and fifth stages, the valley is a major contributor to property values in the area.



Figure 27: An aerial view of the fifth (left) and fourth (right) stages and the Water Valley in-between. Source: Photograph is retrieved from KİPTAŞ.



Figure 28: A distant view of the fourth stage of the Başakşehir Housing Project. Source: Photograph retrieved from KİPTAŞ. The villas in the foreground and a mosque and apartment blocks in the background. The buildings are positioned so that they face the Water Valley.

Turning to the social dimension of these later stages, the narrative is more nuanced. While residents generally express satisfaction with life in the district, there are some reservations, particularly concerning the social fabric of the fourth and fifth stages. A resident of the fourth stage, Özge is as a doctor in a public health centre in the Başakşehir neighbourhood.²¹ In her line of work, she regularly interacts with people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. According to her, the residents of the earlier stages tend to be warmer and more genuine compared to those in the fourth and fifth stages. Surprised by the residents when she moved into the fourth stage, Özge had always imagined pious people as modest and dignified, but now finds

²¹ Özge (Resident), interview.

her neighbours in the fourth stage impolite and pretentious. Despite her negative perception of the residents, she finds her home and neighbourhood convenient.

Expanding on the nuanced social fabric of the newer stages, Necmi, who used to live in the fourth stage and has since moved to the fifth, asserts that both stages are distinctive not only within Başakşehir but also in the broader context of Istanbul.²² He praises their unique spatial features and their seamless integration with human-made natural settings. Specifically mentioning the Water Valley, Necmi feels privileged to have access to such an expansive green space for his morning walks. Moreover, he describes the fourth and fifth stages as “modern” places, complete with streets, parks, coffeehouses, and sports areas. To underline his view of what makes Başakşehir modern, he observes, “You will even find veiled women from the fourth and fifth stages smoking *nargile* (hookah) in the coffeehouses of the Water Valley, or women wearing burqas driving cars—these stages are unlike the previous ones.”

According to Necmi, the changing lifestyles in Başakşehir are closely tied to shifts in class dynamics. He believes that as conservative groups have become more economically empowered, their lifestyles have evolved. The greater their economic power, the more amenable they are to the demands of contemporary urban life. Consumption patterns—once deemed unacceptable—are now embraced as components of a quality life within a traditional context.

Although this economic and social transformation has elevated living standards for many, including Necmi, offering improved housing, streets, parks, and other social venues, it has also led to weaker community bonds. Despite the myriad positive features of his current living

²² Necmi (Mukhtar), interview.

environment, Necmi still yearns for the modest and tranquil neighbourhood life he found in the first two stages. These earlier stages were rich with green spaces, parks, trails, mosques, schools, and warm neighbourly relations—qualities he finds lacking in the fourth and fifth stages, as well as in other housing projects throughout Başakşehir.

2.2.b. New houses for new imaginaries

Taking Islamic city narratives as a reference point—where low-rise housing and gardens feature prominently—the Islamist actors of the 1970s and ‘80s envisioned the development of low-height houses or villas with private gardens. However, due to economic and political factors at the time, these proposals did not come to fruition in the initial stages. It was not until the fourth stage that this dream was realized, albeit in a manner divergent from the modest vision initially conceived.

The fourth stage is divided into two separate housing zones, encompassing both villa-style housing and apartment types.²³ In this stage, recognizing shifts in market-based life satisfaction indicators, KİPTAŞ tailored the spatial and social characteristics of its residences to suit the specific preferences of the intended demographic. As a result, it has incorporated a spectrum of modern amenities, from American-style kitchens and open-concept, doorless living areas to fireplaces. Furthermore, they have introduced specialized rooms, each purposefully designed for personal development, relaxation, and leisure activities, such as sports rooms and hobby spaces.

²³ There are five apartment types and six villa types in the first zone, while there are four apartment types and four villa types in the second zone, varying in size, interior space organisation, number of rooms, and the quality of the construction materials. In these zones, there are 211 housing blocks with 7972 apartment units in total. Unlike the earlier stages, there are also 484 villas of varying sizes.

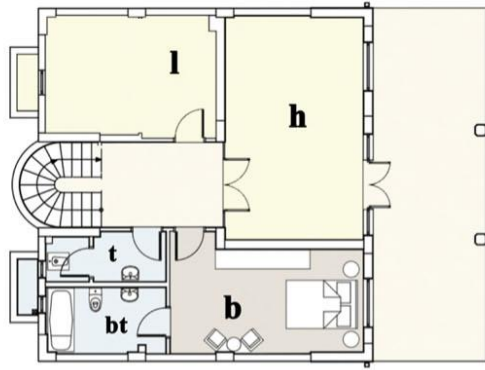


Figure 29: Apartment blocks and villas and in the fourth stage. Source: Photographs retrieved from KİPTAŞ.

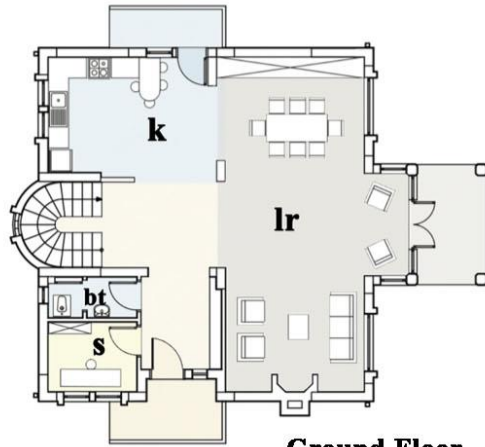
The villas in the fourth stage include basement floor, ground floor, and first floor. The basement features a large primary bedroom, complete with a bathroom and a dressing room—a standard offering in all villa types. Additionally, this floor provides direct access to a private garden.

Some basements also include a “hobby space,” as labeled by KİPTAŞ in their architectural drawings. This space signifies a lifestyle that values leisure or specialized activities, and it may also serve as a flexible room, adaptable to a family’s changing needs.

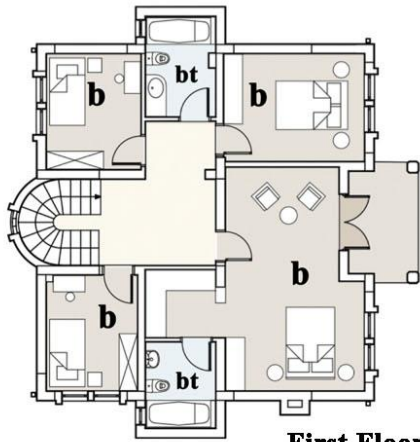
Other bedrooms and bathrooms are located on both the ground and first floors. Having bedrooms on three different floors allows for a separation between more public and private spaces, potentially enabling family members to use the first floor and the basement for their privacy and opening the ground floor to their guest staying overnight. Given the public nature of the ground floor, *alaturka* toilets are preferred over *alafranga* toilets for the same reason as in the first two stages. This floor also includes a living room, a kitchen, and a dining room connected to the kitchen.



Basement Floor



Ground Floor



First Floor

- lr: Living room
- b: Bedroom
- k: Kitchen
- bt: Bathroom
- t: Toilet
- h: Hobby room
- s: Study room
- l: Laundry room

Figure 30: Plan drawings of the K1 villa type (300 m²) in the fourth stage. Source: Drawings modified by the author based on the drawings retrieved from KİPTAŞ.

In some villa types, the inclusion of open, American-style kitchens presents an interesting shift from traditional conservative perspectives on privacy and domestic spaces. The integration of the kitchen and living room effectively influence established traditional norms, as it exposes what is commonly viewed as a women's space to the others. This design choice has implications for the distribution of domestic labour within the family. The open-concept kitchen makes women's domestic work more apparent, which can be observed not only by other members of the household but also by the guests. As a result, family members are more likely to share housework tasks, challenging traditional gender roles and contributing to a more equitable division of labour at home.



Figure 31: The entrance hall, kitchen and living room of a villa type house in fourth stage. The interiors of these villa type houses differ from the apartments in the earlier stages in terms of the built-in structure, spatial layout of the housing units, and the users' choice of furniture and decorative objects. These functional, organisational, material, and aesthetic differences arise from the targeted socio-economic group and the corresponding tastes that are shaped accordingly.

While in the kitchen, women can engage in conversation with their husbands and children or watch television. The open kitchen design also allows households to display items, visible even to the visitors of the house. Additionally, given that the kitchens are open to guests, maintaining their cleanliness and neatness becomes essential. This is often taken care of by domestic workers hailing from the less developed neighbourhoods of Başakşehir.

The experiences of residents in the fourth and fifth stages of Başakşehir offer a nuanced tapestry of satisfaction and criticism. On one hand, there are those like Sanem who find the transition uplifting.²⁴ She upgraded from an apartment to a villa, reveling in the new space that allows her and her extended family to live more comfortably. “We still live according to our faith and moral values but in a higher-quality environment,” she notes. Though she misses her old neighbours, the privacy and garden space more than make up for it.

On the other hand, residents like Sare and Özge point out the shortcomings in the development’s design and maintenance. Sare, is discontented with her villa’s open layout, which includes an open kitchen and a living room without doors.²⁵ This design creates discomfort for her when her husband’s male friends come over, as she finds herself needing to cook in full view while consciously opting not to sit with them at the table due to her personal beliefs and customs regarding interactions with unrelated men.

Özge, on the other hand, is critical of the landscape maintenance in the area.²⁶ While she acknowledges KİPTAŞ’s progress as a housing institution and its efforts in providing common

²⁴ Sanem (Resident), In Person, July 20, 2019.

²⁵ Sare (Resident), In Person, July 20, 2019.

²⁶ Özge (Resident), interview.

spaces in the later stages, she condemns the municipality's inadequate upkeep of both private and public green spaces in the fourth and fifth stages.

Transportation challenges further complicate the residents' experiences. Travelling within the district, or to other parts of the city, is time-consuming. It takes around forty minutes by car and nearly two hours by bus or metro to reach other central districts of Istanbul, such as Kadıköy. The public transportation system is ill-equipped to handle the district's size, resulting in long wait times. Although the first two stages provide better access to public transportation, residents of the fourth and fifth stages often resort to using their personal vehicles. This increased reliance on personal vehicles has led to parking issues. As Özge points out, initially, each villa was allocated only one parking space.²⁷ However, as families in the fourth and fifth stages acquired more vehicles, parking within the housing complex became problematic. According to Özge, many residents of these stages were newly prospering conservatives when they moved to Başakşehir, and their wealth has increased over the past decade due to connections with ruling political actors and pro-government business circles. As a result, the living standards offered by KİPTAŞ at the time of construction no longer meet the residents' growing demands.

Apart from introducing villa-type houses to accommodate the evolving demands of residents at the time of the project's conception, KİPTAS also strategically incorporated more expansive apartment options to cater to its newly targeted demographic in the fourth stage. These larger apartment types (ranging from 126 m² to 151 m²) include a closed room in addition to the children's bedrooms and living room, which are furnished and referred to as guest rooms in the

²⁷ Özge (Resident).

architectural drawings. Unlike the open plan concept used in some villas and apartments in the same stage, the living spaces and the kitchen are enclosed by walls, enhancing spatial privacy.

Although the target market for the fourth stage boasts higher income levels than the first two stages, the development includes comparably compact apartment types (67 m², 75 m², and 87 m²) to offer more affordable housing alternatives. Despite variations in height and construction material quality, these apartment blocks bear a resemblance to those in the first and second stages. Even the smallest apartments within these blocks encompass one primary bedroom and one child's bedroom, along with other living spaces of varying sizes. This planning arrangement underscores that, despite architectural alterations and contemporary concepts implemented in the spatial layout of houses within the fourth stage, KİPTAŞ remained committed to projecting an image of its ideal resident community, predominantly composed of families with children, rather than accommodating singles, homosexual couples, or heterosexual couples without children.²⁸ This emphasis on standardizing housing units, along with regulating social life within shared spaces according to constructed norms, facilitates the normalization of citizens in alignment with the “ideal society” visions upheld by governing politicians.

In the fifth stage, KİPTAŞ constructed 152 housing blocks with 4996 apartment units in varying sizes (ranging from 95 m² to 194 m²) in two separate housing zones. The housing blocks are clustered within gated communities named after several neighbourhoods of Istanbul, such as Ortaköy, Kavacık, Kanlıca, and İstinye, Emirgan, and Tarabya. These seaside neighbourhoods are often associated with comparatively higher socio-economic standards and leisure. By naming

²⁸ While the child bedrooms in the 67 m² and 75 m² apartments are furnished with one single bed in the sample interior plan drawings of KİPTAŞ, the child bedrooms in the 87 m² apartments are furnished with two beds.

the housing enclaves after these neighborhoods, the institution suggests similarities between these developments and the prestigious areas, elevating the perceived value of the properties. Further, by adopting these names, the gated communities become more than just physical spaces; they become representations of the atmosphere and lifestyle associated with those neighbourhoods. In this sense, the choice of these names becomes part of the project's marketing and storytelling.

Adopting a similar approach, the housing institution assigned flower names to each apartment type, such as *lale* (tulip), *çiğdem* (meadow saffron), *kardelen* (snowdrop), and *zambak* (lily). Similar to the fourth stage, the fifth stage encompasses various housing types tailored to individuals of different income levels, with a significant portion of the addressed community belonging to the upper-income bracket. KİPTAŞ communicates this clearly on its website: “We constructed social housing type Lale Houses (95 m²) specifically for citizens who do not own a home. Similarly, we introduced Çiğdem Houses (115 m²) for low-income groups. Kardelen Houses (135 m²) were conceived for middle-income groups, and Zambak House (193 m²) cater to large families.”²⁹ In this comprehensive information note detailing the sizes and market characteristics of various housing types, the housing institution overtly underscores its commitment to serving low- and middle-income groups through the provision of smaller, economically priced apartment options. An intriguing contrast emerges when considering the institution's choice of wording: rather than directly mentioning “high-income groups,” it opts to

²⁹ “Başakşehir 5. Etap,” Genel Bilgi, accessed July 30, 2020, https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1_9lcw2ytOHfTZc9CjrLASxgXdUM.

employ the term “large families” when referring to those who are envisioned to occupy the more spacious apartments.

As the smallest among the social housing types, the layout of Lale Houses bears resemblance to the smallest apartment types found in previous stages, albeit with larger dimensions for the Lale apartments. These units comprise a primary bedroom, a child bedroom (depicted with two single beds in the plan drawings crafted by KİPTAŞ, implying accommodation for two children), a living room, a kitchen, a guest toilet featuring an *alaturka* toilet, and a bathroom. The Zambak Houses, representing the largest apartment types, offer a distinct layout. They consist of a primary bedroom with an attached bathroom, two child bedrooms, a living room, a salon, a spacious kitchen, an additional bathroom, and a guest toilet. In addition to differences in size, the number of rooms, and the spacious interiors within each apartment type, the socio-economic profile of residents is further communicated through various indicators. These include the quality of the built-in furniture, the appearance of the housing block facades, and the arrangement of the landscape in the exteriors of the housing blocks. Notably, these aspects are notably more refined in housing blocks designated for higher-income families, creating a notable contrast with the apartment blocks intended for low-income households.



Figure 32: The living room of a villa in the fourth stage. Unlike the living rooms in the previous stages, which served multiple purposes such as storage, bedroom, and laundry alongside their primary function, this living room is used solely for sitting, watching TV, relaxation, and socialization. There is no need to maximize the use of available space, so it includes semi-decorative and semi-functional elements such as a large coffee table in the centre of the room, a fireplace, genuine in nature, used for decorative purposes rather than for heating, a piano, and a lampshade for decoration.

The resident community in the fourth and fifth stages display their socio-economic status through house decoration, personal appearance, and engagement in leisure activities. The harmony between the colours and patterns of different fabrics attracts attention. In some apartments, unlike those in the first and second stages, paintings of flowers or landscape scenes hang on the walls instead of religious sayings and symbols. On the other hand, some other houses have interior decoration rich in details that align with a conservative aesthetic. For instance, Arabic calligraphic plaques, gilded decorative objects, silk carpets featuring Islamic

motifs, depictions of whirling dervishes, and Ottoman symbols like sultans' edicts adorn the walls of these living rooms and kitchens. These elements resemble the decorative choices of households in the first two stages in terms of their content but by no means their material, quality, and fanciness. Similarly, while most households choose modern furniture, there are some that favour retro-style sofa sets resembling the thrones once used by Ottoman sultans.



Figure 33: The interior of a luxury apartment in Başakşehir. The interior is decorated with maximalist details—gilded, upholstered, expensive, and ornate furniture, silk carpets adorned with oriental patterns, and silk curtains. These choices not only reflect the economic status of the household, but also their tastes and cultural preferences. The presence of such costly items indicates that the occupants can afford a certain degree of luxury and comfort. Furthermore, these elements suggest a connection or affinity with traditional culture, underscoring a preference for traditional aesthetics of opulence over modern minimalism, a trait that might be linked to conservative values.

2.3. Residential mobility within the settlement

The housing units situated in the fourth and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project exhibit a notable advancement over those in the initial two stages, particularly concerning their spaciousness, construction materials, craftsmanship, built-in furnishings, and the available communal spaces for the inhabitants. However, some families residing in the fourth and fifth stages are actively seeking alternative housing options within the newly developed complexes in Kayaşehir. This pursuit is driven by the fact that their current residences are falling short in meeting their ever-evolving needs. Notably, Kayaşehir presents a more appealing prospect, offering a range of advantages including more spacious housing units, dedicated parking areas, enhanced security services, recreational hobby gardens, and specialized single-sex swimming pools and fitness centres.

As families improve economic conditions, their search for enhanced housing options within Başakşehir is in line with the evolving housing norms among higher-income groups and the changing demands of residents. This mobility phenomenon is not exclusive to residents of the fourth and fifth stages; it extends to various other resident groups across different stages and areas. According to Ruşen, this economic progress is closely linked to their associations with the rising Islamist movement and its influence in both the political and economic spheres.³⁰ Consequently, their changing financial status has prompted a series of residential transitions: moving progressively from the earlier stages, they successively advanced to the fourth stage and later to the fifth stage, all in pursuit of improved living standards. Originally emerging as low-

³⁰ Ruşen (Community manager), In Person, May 16, 2019.

income families during the early 1990s, their socioeconomic landscape underwent a remarkable transformation. By the 2000s, they transitioned into middle- or upper-middle-income households, a trajectory that persisted in the subsequent decades, with their prosperity steadily growing throughout the 2010s and beyond.

In the contemporary context, a new chapter is unfolding as residents in the fourth and fifth stages transition to private housing projects in Kayaşehir. This account offers a compelling chronicle of the ongoing developments in Başakşehir and the lives of its inhabitants. It captures the complex interplay between changing financial circumstances, aspirations for improved lifestyles, and the dynamic choices that shape their residential trajectories.

Ceyda, a resident of a private gated community in Başakşehir, adds nuance to this narrative.³¹

Although residents may experience economic prosperity and aspire to move to better neighbourhoods, she observes that they generally limit their options to within the boundaries of Başakşehir instead of relocating to other districts in Istanbul. This trend seems to reflect a shared desire to live among like-minded neighbours and perhaps points to an overarching preference among conservatives to maintain a conservative community.

Further solidifying the insistence of staying within the boundaries of the habitus is a collective aspiration to maintain various networks that hold significant influence within the community.

For those involved in government or trade, the desire to sustain political networks that affect power and governance is particularly strong. Similarly, economic networks crucial for commerce

³¹ Ceyda (Resident), interview.

and social networks important for community cohesion and societal interactions are also highly valued.

In echoing this narrative, Yusuf, a resident featured in a BBC documentary on Başakşehir, offers yet another layer of explanation for why residents opt to stay within the district despite improvements in their economic conditions.³² According to Yusuf, the majority of those living in Başakşehir have seen their fortunes rise during, and partly because of, the AKP era in Türkiye. These residents, including Yusuf himself, initially gained visibility and representation in the political sphere, later fulfilled their aspirations for a conservative residential setting, and ultimately accrued even more influence over urban landscapes. Their identification with the AKP, and Başakşehir, therefore, runs deep. In this context, being part of a network characterized by power and wealth becomes not just an attractive proposition but a meaningful reason to reside among people with similar life experiences and values. This dedication shows a complex decision-making process that considers economic factors, political views, and shared social and cultural values.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the multifaceted aspects of the Başakşehir Housing Project, from its architectural design to its socio-political implications. An analysis of the historical transitions of the project not only exposes the complex interplay of actors such as politicians, state institutions,

³² BBC News Türkçe, “Başakşehir: ‘Beyaz Muhafazakârlar’ ve Siyaset,” YouTube, June 21, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K6BSU1IqS0>.

and religious organisations, but also serves as a lens to examine the ever-changing dynamics of the Islamist movement in Türkiye.

Building upon this premise, it may initially appear that the Başakşehir Housing Project is similar to many other mass housing projects worldwide. Specifically, it does not overtly express a unique political discourse through its architecture. Yet, a deeper analysis reveals key stakeholders—including politicians, allied businesspeople, and KİPTAŞ—leveraged architecture and urban design as vehicles to manifest and perpetuate ideology. This was achieved through the organisation, utilization, control, limitation, and management of space. Additionally, the adoption of standardized housing was viewed as a mechanism for standardizing citizens.

The complexity of the Başakşehir project is further highlighted when examining both its visible and concealed social, political, and economic dynamics. From its interaction with the surrounding environment to its underlying production dynamics and public portrayal, the project reveals much about the Islamist community it aims to establish in Başakşehir. This extends to the apartment layouts designed for families with children, Islamic-influenced common spaces, and even the type of lavatories included in the housing units. Moreover, the lifestyle choices of the resident community offer additional layers of understanding concerning the conservative ethos being cultivated. It is worth noting that this community formation is not merely top-down; residents have also actively shaped their environment, furthering the project's evolution.

Central to this discussion is the role of KİPTAŞ, a municipality-owned construction company that was restructured under Erdoğan during his term as mayor of Istanbul. The chapter traces the company's involvement from the project's inception through to its fifth stage, documenting its transition from a focus on low-income housing to profit-oriented strategies. This chapter

provides a picture of how a mass housing area was turned into a settlement targeting upper income families and how a housing institution founded to provide shelter for low-income families turned into a profit-seeking municipal instrument. I argue that this spatial, institutional, and economic transformation is both a manifestation and cause of the changes that Islamism and Islamist urban imaginaries have undergone for decades.

When the Başakşehir Housing Project was initiated between 1995 and 2007, the housing estate itself and the neighbourhoods it expanded upon served as the centres of the Islamist habitus in Başakşehir. However, Kayaşehir evolved into the new centre of the district in the 2010s, becoming a prominent real estate hub not only for the district but also for the entire city. It caters to different income groups through its diverse housing stock. While KİPTAŞ was the most influential player in Başakşehir's early emergence and development, TOKİ, Emlak Konut REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust—a developer owned by TOKİ), and private companies have taken over KİPTAŞ's leading role in the district for the past two decades. Today, low-income groups tend to prefer mass housing constructed by TOKİ, while upper-income groups gravitate toward luxury housing projects built through public-private partnerships. In the following chapter, I will examine the housing production practices of various actors, including TOKİ, Emlak Konut, and pro-government private companies, in the development and expansion of the Kayaşehir neighbourhood as the new heart of Başakşehir.

Chapter 3 | Spaces of Habitation (II): Kayaşehir as a Real Estate Heaven

While Ayten, a resident of the first stage, summarized her perspective on Başakşehir with the word “*tesettür*” (veiling), Ayhan, a real estate agent who lives and works in Kayaşehir, captured Başakşehir in a single word, “*inşaat*” (construction).¹ These divergent perspectives offer a nuanced view of the area, each highlighting different facets of life there. The term “*tesettür*” symbolizes a spiritual practice revered by practicing Muslims, while “*inşaat*” represents the more materialistic, financial aspects of the settlement. These contrasting descriptions can be attributed to the unique characteristics of their respective neighbourhoods and what these residents observe and encounter there every day.

The Başakşehir neighbourhood, where Ayten resides, is an established area that has attained a sense of stability with limited new construction. In the 1990s, the first two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project were initiated in this locality, marking the realization of a long-awaited Islamist settlement in the region. Notably, two prominent religious communities, İsmailağa and İskenderpaşa, have established their offices in this neighbourhood. Their members reside in close proximity to these offices and their affiliated mosques. Predominantly, the neighbourhood is home to the more traditional factions of the conservative community. Consequently, in Ayten’s neighbourhood, the presence and visibility of these groups and their activities in publicly used spaces have been instrumental in shaping the neighbourhood’s identity as Islamist.

¹ As I recounted in Chapter 1, Ayten, is an elderly woman, who have lived in the first stage for twenty-five years. Ayten (Resident), interview; Ayhan (Resident), In Person, August 1, 2019.

Kayaşehir (officially known as Kayabaşı), where Ayhan lives, is a recently developed neighbourhood bustling with a variety of new construction activities. Numerous completed and ongoing upscale housing projects dot the area. Billboards throughout the neighbourhood and newspaper advertisements herald the launch of new luxury housing initiatives, infrastructure developments, and public investments in the vicinity. These promotions also highlight the projects' close proximity to major urban developments in Istanbul, such as the Third Bridge, the New Istanbul Airport, and Canal Istanbul.

In this light, Ayten and Ayhan associate Başakşehir with multiple keywords in a constant state of flux: veil, piety, conservatism, religion, or construction, development, housing, land value, and investment. Concurrently, the relocation of the district centre from the older Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods to Kayaşehir has introduced new identifiers, descriptors, and keywords, reshaping the identity of both the district and the aforementioned neighbourhoods.

Kayabaşı, formerly a wild and sparsely populated area on the outskirts of Istanbul within the periphery of the Başakşehir district, underwent a remarkable transformation, evolving into a vibrant neighbourhood over the course of a decade. In the late 2000s, Toplu Konut İdaresi (Housing Development Administration, TOKİ) and private construction companies extended the boundaries of the Islamist habitus in Başakşehir, resulting in the establishment of the Kayaşehir neighbourhood as the new centre of attraction in the district. This profound alteration was made possible through a combination of public and private investments in the area. In this transformative process, TOKİ, as a public institution, played a pivotal role by spearheading the development of the required infrastructure. This was followed by the construction of a large-

scale mass housing project in the area, and subsequently, building partnerships with private companies to initiate upper-scale housing estates as well as new business centres.

Beyond ideological motivations for extending the boundaries of the Islamist habitus in Başakşehir, the builders and investors pursued financial benefits from the new settlement in Kayaşehir. These construction and real estate activities were bolstered and facilitated by influential political figures and the local municipal body, serving multiple objectives. These included nurturing pro-government companies through enabling the construction of luxury housing projects on publicly owned land, in return for financial benefits and political support from these companies. Additionally, the activities involved providing housing to lower-income families through the development of a mass housing project, thereby securing their electoral support in return. As an outcome of these motivations and actions, Kayaşehir has evolved into a spatial convergence of political Islam, political power, and capital.

Today, the Başakşehir and Başak neighbourhoods within the district of Başakşehir embody an Islamist habitus shaped in earlier decades. Originally promoted as areas conducive to a genuinely Islamic lifestyle, these neighbourhoods have evolved both socially and spatially. Their characteristics have adapted to different interpretations of what was once considered a ‘truly Islamic lifestyle,’ influenced by shifting economic trends in the 1990s and early 2000s. On the other hand, Kayaşehir now serves as the locus for the evolving spatial aspirations of Islamism, as well as its intersection with neoliberalism in a broader context.

This chapter examines the transformation of Kayaşehir from a small village into a vibrant neighbourhood, highlighting key public and private actors involved in this metamorphosis. It places particular focus on TOKİ, its affiliated real estate developer Emlak Konut REIT (Real

Estate Investment Trust), and several pro-government private companies. Subsequent sections delve into TOKİ's role as a major force in Türkiye's real estate and urbanization sectors. I scrutinize the institution's evolution into a profit-driven state entity and discuss its role in facilitating private investment in the built environment. More specifically, I analyze how TOKİ, Emlak Konut, and their allied private companies have reshaped the built environment in Başakşehir. I investigate TOKİ's Kayaşehir Housing Project, along with other housing developments constructed by pro-government firms in Kayaşehir. My objective is to dissect the complex interplay of architectural elements, urban spaces, societal dynamics, and economic objectives that establish Kayaşehir as a town of Islamist placemaking practices.

I analyze photographs taken during my fieldwork to explore the ideological and financial factors shaping the residential landscape in Kayaşehir. To gain a comprehensive understanding, I draw on interviews with various stakeholders: builders, to understand their motivations for investing in the area; real estate agents, to obtain insights into the demographic composition of residents and their economic status; state officials, for official data on the district's historical development; and residents themselves, to understand both their initial expectations and their actual lived experiences in Kayaşehir.

3.1. TOKİ as a politically driven construction machine

Established in 1984, TOKİ initially functioned as a state initiative to offer subsidized loans to developers, builders, and individuals, aiming to address the shortage of affordable housing in cities. However, its construction activities were relatively limited until the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, or AKP) came to power in 2002. Bolstered by additional

resources and capabilities provided by the successive AKP governments, TOKİ has since transformed into the dominant authority in the construction sector. Rather than focusing solely on building comparatively affordable housing for low-income groups, as originally intended, it has increasingly operated more like a private construction company.

As the AKP consolidated its administrative authority, TOKİ gained a monopoly over all aspects of planning, including the creation, revision, and approval of plans. This shift was facilitated by significant regulatory changes, which involved a series of laws aimed at centralizing planning powers within the institution.² With the revised arrangements, the scope and impact of TOKİ's power far surpassed what it enjoyed before the AKP era. TOKİ was also given the power of establishing its own companies, making partnership agreements with private companies, providing credit and land to them, and directly undertaking urban transformation projects. All the assets and duties of the former Land Office were transferred to TOKİ, expanding its land stock.³

Additionally, TOKİ was granted the authority to develop plans on multiple scales, encompassing urban transformation projects in squatter housing areas, historic centres, and dilapidated inner-city neighbourhoods, as well as on all state-owned lands under the auspices of TOKİ. Following these transfers and legal adjustments, the institution has transformed into a major real estate entity and the primary producer of market-rate housing in Türkiye.⁴ Eventually, the institution

² Balaban, "The Negative Effects of Construction Boom on Urban Planning and Environment in Turkey."

³ As indicated on the institution's web site, "the size of TOKİ's land portfolio (square metre area of the land under stock records) amounts to 209240,318 m², by August 2019." "Financial Position," TOKİ, accessed October 27, 2020, [https://www.TOKİ.gov.tr/en/financial-position.html](https://www.TOKI.gov.tr/en/financial-position.html).

⁴ For detailed analyzes and evaluations of TOKİ see: Ayşe Buğra and Osman Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014); Havva Ezgi Dogru, "The 'Benevolent Hand' of the Turkish State: Mass Housing Administration, State Restructuring and Capital Accumulation in Turkey," 2016; Tuna Kuyucu and Özlem Ünsal, "'Urban Transformation' as State-Led Property

started collaborating with private companies to execute profit-oriented housing projects on publicly owned parcels, primarily employing a revenue-sharing model.

In Istanbul, specifically, TOKİ collaborates with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to identify potential sites for urban development. In return for a share in real estate development, the institution transfers public lands, often at below-market value, to private companies. These companies are then tasked with implementing large-scale urban renewal projects. This practice leads to the formation of crony networks among TOKİ, its affiliate Emlak Konut REIT, and the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, as well as municipal entities and pro-government private companies. These networks create an unfair and uncompetitive environment for private companies that are either unable or unwilling to penetrate the close circles of the government.⁵

In this context, through the involvement of TOKİ and its affiliate Emlak Konut REIT, the state expands its role beyond merely financing the housing sector to actively participating as a developer in housing production. Concurrently, ruling politicians act as the primary initiators of this process, promoting urban renewal projects in Istanbul under the guise of achieving planned urbanization, enhancing the built environment, and improving living conditions for the urban poor. However, these projects often result in the eviction of the urban poor from central

Transfer: An Analysis of Two Cases of Urban Renewal in Istanbul,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 7 (2010): 1479–99; Sinan Tankut Gülhan, “The Honorable Exception: State and the Social Production of Concrete Space in Istanbul” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Binghamton, State University of New York at Binghamton, n.d.); Jean-François Pérouse, “The State without the Public: Some Conjectures about the Administration for Collective Housing (TOKİ),” in *Order and Compromise: Government Practices in Turkey from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early 21st Century* (Brill, 2015), 169–91; Duygu Koca, “Remapping Contemporary Housing Production in Turkey: A Case Study on Housing Patterns and Marketing Strategies” (Unpublished, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2012).

⁵ Zeynep Enlil and İclal Dinçer, “Residential Experiences in Times of Shifting Housing Regimes in Istanbul,” in *The Self-Build Experience*, by Zeynep Enlil and İclal Dinçer (Policy Press, 2020), 181.

neighbourhoods in cities, as well as the transfer of the transformed urban land to entities and individuals aligned with ruling systems of thought, all to their political and financial benefit.⁶

It is crucial to emphasize two key points related to both the discursive and financial dimensions of Türkiye's construction industry, particularly in the area of housing construction. First, as İsmail Karatepe points out, politicians and investors who control the sector view it as a pivotal driver of the economy, largely due to its connections with subsidiary sectors.⁷ They consider it “a crucial element of growth not only through its significant share of the gross domestic product (GDP) but also through its strong linkages with other industries.”⁸ Second, Islamist politicians and capital holders have always had a growing enthusiasm for rebuilding cities—as a manifestation of their power and as a way of growing their financial wealth—which, in return, encourages extensive and direct government intervention in the production of urban space in large cities.⁹ These insights collectively highlight the complex interplay between economic growth, political influence, and urban development strategies within construction sector, and defines its crucial role in Türkiye's broader socioeconomic landscape.

3.1.a. TOKİ emerges as a new actor in Başakşehir

The inception of a new settlement in Kayabaşı, a sparsely developed rural area in the northern outskirts of Istanbul, commenced after Başakşehir was established as a municipal district in

⁶ Karaman, “Remaking Space for Globalization.”

⁷ Karatepe, “The State, Islamists, Discourses, and Bourgeoisie,” 13.

⁸ Karatepe, 3.

⁹ Karatepe, 13.

2008. When TOKİ announced a mass housing project in the area, Kayabaşı was primarily undeveloped village, with only a few clusters of squatter houses. Subsequently, the village transformed into a newly developed neighbourhood, retaining the name Kayabaşı. In 2008, the population of Kayabaşı stood at 5,529, but it had surged to 97,268 by 2020.

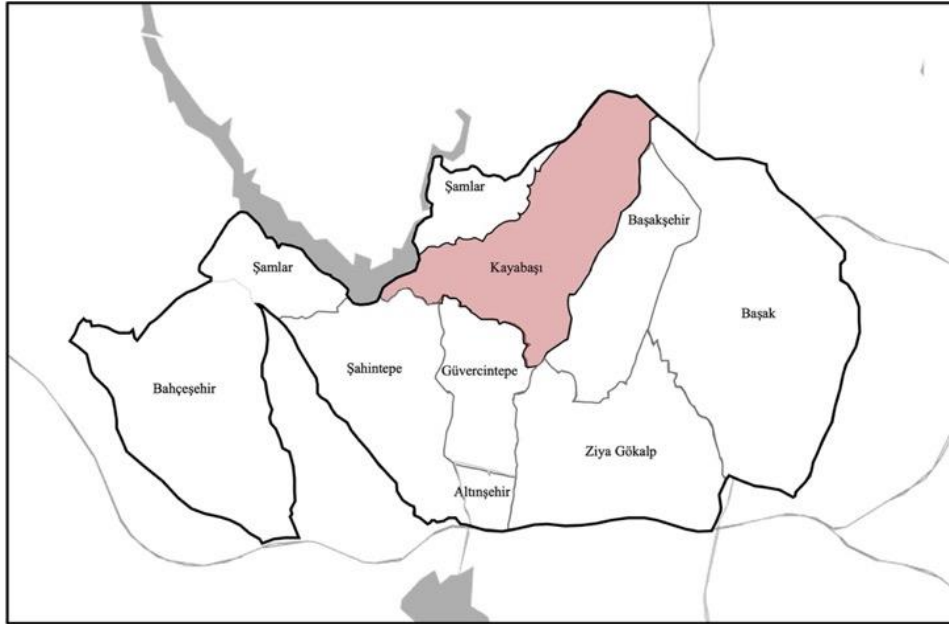


Figure 34: Map shows all neighbourhoods in Başakşehir after the settlement became a municipal district in 2008. It highlights the Kayabaşı neighbourhood, where TOKİ constructed Kayaşehir Housing Project and private companies constructed luxury housing. Source: Map drawn by the author.

Derviş, the mukhtar of Kayabaşı, shares that the neighbourhood was originally a small village called Aya Yorgi, which was primarily populated by Greeks until the 1920s.¹⁰ During the population exchange between Greece and Türkiye in 1923, the Turkish State relocated the Greek community from the village to Greece, replacing them with a group of Turkish individuals who

¹⁰ Derviş (Mukhtar), In Person, October 17, 2019.

had been sent from Greece. The village's new residents called it "Kayabaşı." Today, although a village by the name of Kayabaşı still exists there, its surrounding area has evolved into a neighbourhood within the boundaries of the Başakşehir district, carrying the same name as the original village.



Figure 35: Google Earth snapshots show the urbanization of Kayaşehir in 2008, when TOKİ entered the Kayabaşı area and in 2019. Source: Google Earth image modified by the author. As seen in the second image, the neighbourhood grew significantly in a short period of time.

Derviş provides insights into the region's transformation before and after TOKİ announced the construction of a new settlement there. His grandparents were relocated to the Kayabaşı village during the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Türkiye. Born and raised in the village, Derviş spent his life there, once engaged in animal husbandry and ranching. Before TOKİ's intervention, the area was largely rural; vacant plots of land were mostly used for fox hunting. Villagers kept animals, grazing them here and there on the available land. However, all of that changed when TOKİ began constructing apartment blocks on these undeveloped parcels. This development signaled a significant shift for the area, transforming it from a small, rural village into a burgeoning neighbourhood. "Everything was different in the beginning," Derviş reflects. "There was just a small village surrounded by empty lots. Twenty years ago, nobody would have believed that Kayabaşı would one day become a city of concrete towers."

In May 2008, then president of TOKİ, Erdoğan Bayraktar, announced plans for a "satellite city" to be developed around the Kayabaşı village in the Beşiktaş district. Envisioned to include a substantial number of housing units along with various public amenities—such as educational facilities, healthcare centres, recreational spaces, and infrastructural projects—the Kayabaşı Housing Project was touted as the "largest housing project" ever undertaken by TOKİ.¹¹ After the announcement, both the government and mainstream media began referring to the new housing development as "Kayaşehir," which translates to "city on the rock." This name was perhaps deemed more appealing than "Kayabaşı," which means "head of rock," a name that reflects the area's rocky terrain.¹² In the unfolding narrative of Kayaşehir's creation and

¹¹ "İstanbul Kayabaşı'nda 4 milyar dolarlık yeni şehir kurulacak," *Hürriyet*, May 4, 2008, sec. gündem, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/istanbul-Kayabaşı-nda-4-milyar-dolarlik-yeni-sehir-kurulacak-8852223>.

¹² Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, "From Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir – A City Grows 'Out in the Sticks,'" 165.

transformation as an extension of the residential hub in Başakşehir, TOKİ emerged as a significant public actor in the district, wielding more influence than Konut İmar Plan Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc., KIPTAŞ).

TOKİ expropriated the land in Kayabaşı in 2006. At that time, neither the state treasury nor TOKİ owned any land in the neighbourhood.¹³ Following a brief period during which tactics were developed to convince landowners to sell their properties, TOKİ acquired the vacant parcels of land where the housing project would later be constructed. As Erbatur Çavuşoğlu and Julia Strutz highlight, the value of the land was quite low.¹⁴ This was due in part to the neighbourhood's distance from the central settlements of the city. Additionally, the recent Master Plan of Istanbul seemed to restrict any future expansion of the city to the north, where Kayaşehir is located. "It was plain sailing for TOKİ to convince owners to sell their parcels of land, as obviously no private investor would be interested any time soon," Çavuşoğlu and Strutz continue. The National Treasury purchased the lands from the landowners in Kayabaşı at low prices and subsequently transferred them to TOKİ.¹⁵

While the initial stages of the Kayaşehir Housing Project were in progress, TOKİ simultaneously constructed various public facilities in the area, including primary schools, high schools, kindergartens, daycare centres, community health centres, mosques, sports centres, playfields, cafeterias, trade centres, and buffet spaces. In addition, TOKİ built highways and sidewalks while also designing the landscape surrounding the housing stages. Urban life in the settlement

¹³ Derviş (Mukhtar), interview.

¹⁴ Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, "From Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir – A City Grows 'Out in the Sticks,'" 168.

¹⁵ TOKİ obtained seven million and three hundred thousand square metres within the boundaries of Kayabaşı neighbourhood, an area of eleven million seven hundred thousand square metres. Derviş (Mukhtar), interview.

revolves around a central downtown area, distinguished by key landmarks: a mosque, a shopping mall whose facade mirrors an Ottoman caravanserai, and a clock tower that reflects the style of the Seljuk period towers. This area bears the unmistakable imprint of TOKİ. With its name displayed on all four sides of the clock tower, TOKİ visually asserts its presence within the urban space, appearing to observe society from this central point. This serves to emphasize TOKİ's integral role in the construction and design of the entire settlement.



Figure 36: A promotional image published on TOKİ's website to demonstrate the features of its satellite cities. Source: Photograph retrieved from TOKİ's website, <https://www.toki.gov.tr/uydu-kentler>.

The photograph of Kayaşehir's centre shows a large mosque, a shopping centre resembling an Ottoman-period caravanserai, and a clock tower inspired by Seljuk-period architecture. In the distance, the blocks of the Kayaşehir Housing Project can be seen. The combination of a clock tower and shopping centre mimicking historical forms, along with a mosque at the heart of the town centre serving the Kayaşehir Housing Project, suggests an ideological framework that aims to harmonize religious values, national (historical) identity, and consumer culture.



Figure 37: The clocktower in Kayaşehir. The photograph on the left shows the clocktower resembling Seljuk era clocktowers, on a roundabout, with roads and sidewalks. The name of the builder, “TOKİ,” is written on the top of the clocktower on its four sides. The presence of the builder’s name on all four sides of the tower highlights the role of the state (or state-affiliated institution) in urban development. The photograph on the right shows the inscription on the clocktower: “The urban transformation project of 65,000 residences, which started in the west axis of Istanbul in 2009 by order of our Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been put into service for our people.” The sheer scale of the project implies a significant change in the urban landscape, potentially leading to socio-economic shifts as well.

By 2007, TOKİ had acquired approximately thirty percent of the 1,500 hectares in the neighbourhood, setting the stage for its planned housing project.¹⁶ Then, in 2008, coinciding with the year Başakşehir became a separate district, TOKİ announced the initiation of the Kayaşehir Housing Project. Touted as the largest housing initiative in Türkiye, the project aimed to build

¹⁶ Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, “From Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir – A City Grows Out in the Sticks,” 168.

60,000 housing units across 760 hectares of land, with the capacity to accommodate 250,000 residents upon completion.¹⁷

Between 2008 and 2023, TOKİ built approximately 28,000 housing units in the Kayaşehir Housing Project.¹⁸ The initial inhabitants of the Kayaşehir Housing Project were predominantly low- and middle-income individuals, much like those in the first two stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project. These early residents typically hailed from the nearby urban fringes and were employed in the İkitelli Organised Industrial Zone, situated about fifteen kilometres from Kayabaşı. Initially, TOKİ offered apartments in the project at below-market prices due to the site's low land value. In collaboration with state banks, TOKİ also presented payment schemes that were comparatively flexible.¹⁹ Despite these advantages, the basic monthly expenses turned into a substantial financial strain for residents who already had unstable and limited financial resources.

The project comprises multiple housing stages, each enclosed by exterior walls and chain-link fences, and accessible only through controlled barriers. Already isolated from the rest of the district by their remote location and the surrounding major motorways, these walls further sever them from their immediate environment. Social life within these housing stages is confined to sitting on benches or in pergolas, which are placed in the common spaces between housing

¹⁷ “İstanbul Kayabaşı’na 60 binlik uydukent,” *Milliyet*, February 12, 2006,

<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/istanbul-Kayabaşına-60-binlik-uydukent-146132>.

¹⁸ There are 26 completed stages as of 2023. The 27th stage was still under construction as of April 2023. “50 Bin Konut Kampanyası Kayabaşı 4.467 Konut Bilgilendirmesi,” Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı, April 28, 2023, <https://www.toki.gov.tr/haber/50-bin-konut-kampanyasi-kayabasi-4467-konut-bilgilendirmesi>.

¹⁹ Melih Yeşilbağ, “The Mortar of Hegemony: The Political Economy of the Construction Boom in AKP’s Turkey” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Binghamton, Binghamton University State University of New York, 2016), 145.

blocks. These areas lack vibrant greenery or well-planned landscaping. In this regard, the Kayabaşı project contrasts with the promised neighbourhoods with a vivid neighbourhood life.



Figure 38: A distant view of the Kayaşehir Housing Project. Source: Photo courtesy of Sinan Logie. TOKİ built the Kayaşehir Housing Project in vacant terrains of Başakşehir, where no regular settlement, infrastructure, or built landscape existed. It has taken less than two decades for generic concrete towers to take over the skyline, where the sky meets the virgin landscape.



Figure 39: A promotional image of the Kayaşehir Housing Project. Source: Photograph retrieved from TOKİ’s website, <https://www.toki.gov.tr/uydu-kentler>.

The image was published on TOKİ’s website to demonstrate how the institution created a “satellite city” in Kayaşehir from scratch. The image displays housing towers ranging from ten to fifteen floors, separated from adjacent blocks by narrow gaps. These towers are erected on vacant land and arranged in a rigid pattern, with no connection or reference to the surrounding environment or landscape. In this context, rather than enhancing the existing settlement in Başakşehir with new housing options, the project aims to establish a new city within the district that will develop independently.

TOKİ adopted a tunnel-framework method like KİPTAŞ and utilized a series of pre-designed architectural layouts for the Kayaşehir Housing Project, aiming to create variations by adjusting the size and quality of the apartments. In this context, the interior layouts of the apartments and the spatial qualities of the common areas in the Kayaşehir complex are consistent with those in TOKİ’s other mass housing projects across various cities. While the housing administration did attempt to introduce new housing prototypes by organising architectural competitions for the

project's later stages, these efforts fell short in providing healthy living environments. This failure is due to TOKİ's adherence to existing spatial guidelines, obligatory construction methods, and institutional principles shaped by prevailing political systems of thought.²⁰

The project offered eighteen different apartment plans for all housing, varying in size, number of rooms, and interior layout. The smallest apartment type measures forty-five square metres, while the largest spans a hundred and forty-seven square metres. Similar to what KİPTAŞ previously did in planning the spaces for an idealised community profile in the Başakşehir Housing Project, TOKİ also omits studio and one-bedroom apartments from its offerings. The designers planned the units with the assumption that they would accommodate heterosexual families with at least one child. As such, even the smallest apartment units are equipped with two bedrooms: one for the parents and another for the children.

²⁰ Evren Aysev Deneç, "Türkiye Kentlerinin Mekansal Üretiminde TOKİ Etkisi," *Mimarlık Dergisi*, 2014.



Figure 40: Kayaşehir Housing Project. A view of TOKİ's standardized apartment blocks in Kayaşehir reveals a striking resemblance in terms of architectural layout, height, façade design, colour scheme, and simplicity. These housing blocks find their place amidst neglected green spaces, particularly noticeable during the summer season. Rows of identical trees serve as a clear territorial demarcation around the community. This natural boundary is complemented by a line of fences that, although not particularly sturdy, help delineate the site's borders and offer a sense of security. This array of concrete towers, tinged with a hint of green, fails to evoke a sense of a vibrant neighbourhood; instead, it implies a cluster of concrete structures interspersed within a subdued rural landscape. Enclosed within this distant, fenced-off area, a mosque stands prominently on a hill in the background, its use reserved solely for the residents of these housing blocks.

The new mass housing project on the city's most remote periphery was touted as a comprehensive solution to various urban issues. It offered to provide more affordable housing, enhance living conditions for low-income groups, alleviate poverty, cultivate an authentic neighbourhood culture, and establish a green settlement.²¹ Despite the ambitious promises, the realized housing project fell short of expectations on multiple fronts. Not only were its social objectives less convincing from the start, but even its physical attributes did not align with the original description.

Insufficient public transportation options make commuting within and outside the district difficult. In some of the stages, residents must walk more than twenty minutes to reach the nearest grocery store. The project's considerable distance from the central areas of the city, coupled with financial constraints, severely limits residents' ability to move freely, often confining their activities to essential errands and tasks. The communal facilities of the project are also lacking. The areas between the various stages of the project are notably empty and lack communal gathering or relaxing spaces. Contrary to initial promises, some amenities like healthcare services, schools, daycares, and shops within walking distance are notably scarce. Additionally, residents face financial pressures beyond just their monthly installments. They are required to pay the site management for services like cleaning, repairs, gardening, and security in communal areas.²² There is no transparency or resident oversight in how these additional fees are

²¹ "İstanbul'a Osmanlı ve Selçuklu mahallesi kurulacak," *Yeni Şafak*, October 2, 2009, <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/istanbula-osmanli-ve-selcuklu-mahallesi-kurulacak-214241>; "TOKİ Kayabaşı Projesine Yoğun Talep," *Architecture Magazine*, Arkitera, October 2, 2009, <https://v3.arkitera.com/h45696-TOKİ-Kayabaşı-projesine-yogun-talep.html>.

²² Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, "From Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir – A City Grows 'Out in the Sticks,'" 171.

utilized, further exacerbating financial insecurity. Residents who fail to keep up with these extra payments are at risk of losing their homes.²³

Despite the project's numerous constraints, Derviş points out that it has become a sought-after location for people from various parts of the city.²⁴ While initial demand was low given the project's considerable distance from the city centre and its lack of both public and private facilities, transportation options, and infrastructure, the situation has changed over time, largely due to improvements in infrastructure. Investments by TOKİ in the land and surrounding areas have significantly enhanced both the popularity and value of Kayaşehir, as Derviş notes:

Our government has worked a lot, TOKİ has worked a lot, and our district municipality has worked a lot. They, hand in hand, have created a city from scratch here. They transformed a wild town into a modern city. Today thousands of people struggle to buy an apartment from TOKİ in Kayaşehir. TOKİ will have constructed around 100000 housing units in Kayabaşı when it completes the project in a few years. Can you imagine it? 100000 apartments only in Kayabaşı neighbourhood! A new housing kingdom in the middle of nowhere...

Derviş identifies two primary factors that draw people to TOKİ's housing in Kayaşehir: affordability and a sense of community that aligns with their values. According to him, individuals and families with low to middle incomes, who often have conservative and traditional family structures, are attracted to the conservative nature of the neighbourhood. This manifests in various ways, from the attire of people on the streets to the layout and organisation of public spaces, mosques, and schools. Additionally, the overall neighbourhood culture, the role of municipal authorities, community events, and religious organisations contribute to an environment where these residents feel comfortable and at home.

²³ Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, 171.

²⁴ Derviş (Mukhtar), interview.

This sense of belonging is something Fehmi, a local resident, can attest to, despite his reservations about the quality of housing. Fehmi finds himself torn between the low material quality and structural problems of his apartment and the cultural fit it offers for his family.²⁵ Despite the high monthly installments he pays to TOKİ, he feels that the quality of his housing leaves much to be desired, particularly when compared to his previous residence in Beylikdüzü. However, Fehmi continues to reside in Kayaşehir, willing to make certain compromises for the “conservative atmosphere” he feels is beneficial for his family. This illustrates how social and cultural factors can sometimes outweigh material concerns in shaping residents’ housing choices.

In a similar vein, Haluk, a real estate agent in Kayaşehir, emphasizes that the conservative lifestyle is the primary factor drawing people to TOKİ’s housing projects in this remote area.²⁶ “Living in Kayaşehir does not feel like living in Istanbul,” he notes, alluding to its far-flung location. “You cannot consider it as a part of Istanbul when it takes three hours to reach Kadıköy via public transport.” However, despite these inconveniences, Haluk finds a unique peace and comfort in Kayaşehir, something he believes would not be possible elsewhere in the city.

Similarly, Büşra, another resident in TOKİ’s Kayaşehir housing blocks, walks a fine line between satisfaction and dissatisfaction.²⁷ On one hand, she appreciates the conservative community; on the other, she is far from pleased with the quality of her apartment. Her issues range from deteriorating parquet floors to faulty wooden doors and window frames—problems she attributes not to aging but to the poor quality of materials. Looking ahead, Büşra envisions a

²⁵ Fehmi (Resident), interview.

²⁶ Haluk (Real estate agent), interview.

²⁷ Büşra (Resident), In Person, May 13, 2019.

future where she can upgrade to a better TOKİ unit or perhaps a residence in Emlak Konut REIT houses within Kayaşehir, though she acknowledges this dream is currently out of reach.

Another voice of criticism comes from Lale, who, like Fehmi and Büşra, cites TOKİ's use of low-quality construction materials.²⁸ Beyond that, she bemoans the lack of space for storage and an extra room for guests, which she stresses is a cultural necessity in Turkish society. Her grievances align with those of other residents who consider relocating either within Başakşehir or to more suitable housing, contingent on their improving financial situation or a fair selling opportunity.

Returning to Derviş, while he appreciates the changes that he has seen in Kayaşehir over the past decade, he does not shy away from criticizing TOKİ's profit-driven moves.²⁹ Specifically, Derviş takes aim at TOKİ's revenue-sharing arrangements with private investors, including its projects with Emlak Konut REIT in Kayaşehir. He contends that such partnerships turn public lands in the area into vehicles for private, profit-driven endeavours. "TOKİ is a state institution and should behave accordingly; it has no business intervening in market mechanisms," he declares. In addition to these criticisms, Derviş disapproves of TOKİ's practice of purchasing publicly owned land from residents at low prices under the pretext of developing social housing, only to later sell it to private construction firms. He argues that this approach benefits the wealthy while leaving the broader community at a disadvantage.

Validating Derviş's criticisms is the area's rapid transformation. Initially conceived as a solution for affordable housing, the Kayaşehir Housing Project has led to the development and sale of

²⁸ Lale (Resident), In Person, July 25, 2019.

²⁹ Derviş (Mukhtar), interview.

previously vacant public lands in its immediate vicinity. While TOKİ originally acquired land in Kayaşehir under the pretext of creating affordable homes for those in need and built the necessary infrastructure, it subsequently opened up adjacent lands for private investment. Despite being promoted as a source of affordable housing and a place where homeownership could be achieved at reasonable prices, Kayaşehir has become increasingly dominated by private companies and public-private partnerships, significantly changing both the economic and social landscape of the community.

3.2. Kayaşehir as the centre of a new Istanbul

While construction was underway on various stages of the Kayaşehir Housing Project, TOKİ explored new avenues for utilizing the land in Kayabaşı, which it had consolidated under its authority through its immense powers. The rapid development of TOKİ's mass housing project in Kayaşehir, coupled with swiftly executed infrastructural projects throughout the neighbourhood, heightening the popularity of this emerging settlement. Besides these infrastructural developments, the developers of the neighbourhood looked for new instruments to make the highest profit from the lands TOKİ owned.

In 2011, amid his national election campaign, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan revealed plans for the construction of Canal Istanbul—an artificial waterway connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara.³⁰ Additionally, he introduced New Istanbul, an inland urban development endeavour

³⁰ Selected sources on the canal and urban development project, exploring their possible outcomes and the reactions against them: Ipek Türeli and Meltem Al, "Walking in the Periphery: Activist Art and Urban Resistance to Neoliberalism in Istanbul," *Review of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 310–333; Evinç

encompassing novel residential, entertainment, and financial districts strategically situated around the canal. The government presented the Canal Istanbul and New Istanbul projects as opportunities to enhance Istanbul's global appeal and attract international entrepreneurs to invest in the city. Many academics, economists, and activists warned the politicians about the canal project's irreversible consequences, as news of its construction triggered land speculation around the designated areas for these two connected projects.³¹ Nonetheless, the anticipation of forthcoming developments associated with the canal project spurred investor interest, leading to a surge in land prices.

In 2012, Erdoğan Bayraktar, the then Minister of Environment and Urban Planning, announced that the Kayaşehir area in the Başakşehir district would serve as the focal point for this new urban development project named New Istanbul, intended to accommodate approximately one million residents.³² All residential, commercial, and public projects would be developed around the housing hub created in Kayaşehir. Accordingly, the public authorities—Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Başakşehir District Municipality, TOKİ, and KİPTAŞ—launched an extensive promotional media campaign to showcase these projects and their future contributions to the development of Kayaşehir. They presented the neighbourhood as the heart of the “New Istanbul” and the upcoming core of the city itself. In reaction to these endeavours by public authorities,

Dogan and Aleksandra Stupar, “The Limits of Growth: A Case Study of Three Mega-Projects in Istanbul,” *Cities* 60 (February 1, 2017): 281–88.

³¹ “İşte Erdoğan’ın Çılgın Projesi: Kanal İstanbul,” *Hürriyet*, April 27, 2011, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/iste-erdoganin-cilgin-projesi-kanal-istanbul-17648284>.

³² “Bayraktar: Kayaşehir, 1 Milyon Nüfuslu Şehrin Çekirdeği - Son Haberler - Milliyet,” July 8, 2012, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/amp/ekonomi/bayraktar-Kayaşehir-1-milyon-nufuslu-sehrin-cekirdegi-1577310>.

both local and foreign entrepreneurs began expressing a heightened interest in the available land within Kayaşehir, recognizing its potential for accommodating new projects.

Yet, the recently established infrastructure in the region, the recently disclosed canal project, and the proposed urban initiative outlining the creation of a new city centred around the canal, were not the exclusive ventures leveraged by public entities to promote Kayaşehir's development.

According to Altan, a real estate agent actively operating in Kayaşehir, the impactful presence of landmarks such as the Başakşehir Central Mosque, the Kuzey Yakası project, and a collection of state-sponsored public spaces including the Millet Bahçesi (Nation's Garden) and the Town Square, played a pivotal role in driving up real estate values within the vicinity.³³ Moreover, the proximity of Kayaşehir to the newly constructed Bosphorus Bridge and the recently inaugurated Istanbul Airport acted as catalysts for heightened land speculation in the area.³⁴

With landmarks, public spaces, and strategic proximity enhancing its allure, Kayaşehir has evolved into a nexus of real estate interest and speculation. It bears witness to the profound interplay between ambitious urban planning and market dynamics. This development story not only unveils the layers of an emerging settlement but also offers insights into the intricate mechanisms that underpin the broader socio-economic and ideological implications of the production of the built environment in Kayaşehir.

³³ Altan (Real estate agent), In Person, August 7, 2019.

³⁴ Interestingly the pro-AKP media announces the impact of the public spaces that TOKİ and Emlak Konut constructed in Kayaşehir in the rise of the housing prices, without regarding the fact that the land on which the private housing projects were constructed was public property. See: "Bahçe Geldi İşler Açıldı," *Yeni Akit*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/bahce-geldi-isler-acildi-552464.html>.

3.2.a. TOKİ and Emlak Konut hand-in-hand in town

TOKİ, similar to KİPTAŞ, categorizes its housing initiatives into two main types: resource-development projects and what it terms “social housing” projects.³⁵ TOKİ collaborates with its real estate subsidiary, Emlak Konut REIT, to launch resource-development projects through a public-private partnership model.³⁶ In this arrangement, profits generated from the housing projects are shared with private companies. Specifically, TOKİ supplies the land for these projects, while the private firm takes on the roles of design and construction. Upon completion, both parties divide the profits.³⁷ This collaborative approach allows TOKİ to maximize earnings from its land stock, while also granting private contractors access to valuable real estate for profitable ventures.³⁸

As described by TOKİ, their operational model involves resource development projects, often referred to as subsidized luxury housing initiatives, aimed at generating funds for the construction of more affordable housing schemes.³⁹ Karatepe highlights that, according to the official narrative, this resource development approach aims to address the financial difference

³⁵ Ruben, “Neoliberalization of Social Housing in Turkey: The Case of Kayaşehir,” 80.

³⁶ Emlak Konut is a housing corporation established in 1953, acting under its namesake bank, Emlak Bank. Until the late 1990s, the corporation operated as the only state foundation engaged in housing development projects. After the 2001 Banking Crisis, Emlak Bank put an end to its operations, and in 2002, the development corporation became a real estate investment corporation under the control of TOKİ. Gülhan, “The Honorable Exception: State and the Social Production of Concrete Space in Istanbul.”

³⁷ Bilge Serin, “The Promised Territories: The Production of Branded Housing Projects in Contemporary Turkey,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 23 (December 12, 2016).

³⁸ As Melih Yeşilbağ affirms, this model is a “special form of the *yapsat* model on a larger scale and under the supervision and guarantee of a public authority that not only drastically diminishes the entry costs by land provision, but also makes the bureaucratic procedures of construction permits much easier and faster.” Yeşilbağ, “The Mortar of Hegemony,” 152.

³⁹ “Kaynak Geliştirme ve Gelir Paylaşımı Projeleri,” Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.toki.gov.tr/kaynak-gelistirme-ve-gelir-paylasimi-projeleri>.

between the immediate costs of investment and the income expected to be generated over the long term.⁴⁰ However, Jean-François Pérouse observes that TOKİ exploits its institutional authority and power in matters of expropriation and planning.⁴¹ He notes that TOKİ delegates land and work to favoured partners while professing to prioritize social welfare. This façade, Pérouse suggests, portrays TOKİ as a “Robin Hood” figure taking from the affluent and giving to the disadvantaged, while masking its growing focus on the high-end property market.⁴² However, Murat Güney highlights, assuring the genuine public welfare use of funds derived from luxury housing projects by TOKİ is challenging due to the lack of transparency in both TOKİ’s and Emlak Konut’s budgets.⁴³

The majority of luxury housing projects in Kayaşehir operate on a revenue-sharing basis, wherein TOKİ obtains profits in return for providing a strategically located piece of land from its land inventory. Periodically, TOKİ also arranges auctions to sell its publicly owned land to private sector entities.⁴⁴ Throughout the transition from Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir—evolving from a remote village into a sought-after real estate hub in Başakşehir—private companies with strong affiliations to the ruling AKP government have emerged as the primary beneficiaries.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Karatepe, *The Cultural Political Economy of the Construction Industry in Turkey*, 22.

⁴¹ Pérouse, “The State without the Public,” 179.

⁴² Pérouse, 178.

⁴³ K. Murat Güney, ed., “Building Northern Istanbul: Mega-Projects, Speculation, and New Suburbs,” in *Massive Suburbanization:(Re) Building the Global Periphery* (University of Toronto Press, 2019), 187.

⁴⁴ Ruben, “Neoliberalization of Social Housing in Turkey: The Case of Kayaşehir,” 107.

⁴⁵ Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, “From Kayabaşı to Kayaşehir – A City Grows ‘Out in the Sticks,’” 173.

3.2.b. The symbiotic ties between governments and allied private companies

Since its inception, the successive governments led by the pro-Islamist AKP have consistently emphasized the concept of “*halka hizmet*” (service to the people) and prioritized construction activities aimed at benefiting the public. This commitment has remained central to their political discourse, portraying the party as solely driven by a dedication to serving the people.⁴⁶ The party has embraced the slogan “serving people is serving God,” a popular refrain echoed repeatedly by right-wing traditionalists and Islamists since the 1990s.⁴⁷ From its inception, the party has consistently portrayed construction activities as the most conspicuous manifestations of “service to the public,” promoting them as the foremost actions taken by politicians to advance the well-being of the general populace.

Since the early 2000s, TOKİ has emerged as a pivotal tool for realizing this commitment. Being the sole authority responsible for urban planning and land valuation, it has evolved into a tool for effectively managing the construction sector.⁴⁸ Within this context, political actors have endorsed the institution’s role in selecting urban land for new projects, acquiring the land thanks to its immense authority, involving both public and private stakeholders, and subsequently overseeing construction on these lands for both ideological and financial gains facilitated by TOKİ. This forms a crucial part of their narrative of “service to the people.” However, this narrative frequently overlooks the individuals who benefit and those who face adverse consequences due to this process. In this regard, while the pro-government businesspeople,

⁴⁶ Doruk Tatar, “The AKP’s Delirious Spaces: Enjoying the Notions of Construction and Architecture in Neoliberal Turkey” (Unpublished MA Thesis, Sabancı University, 2012), 80.

⁴⁷ For a critical commentary on the right wing politicians’ interest in construction activities, see: Bora, “Türk Muhafazakarlığı ve İnşaat Şehveti – Büyük Olsun Bizim Olsun.”

⁴⁸ Karatepe, “The State, Islamists, Discourses, and Bourgeoisie,” 2.

Islamist business associations, as well as political actors deriving overt and covert financial and electoral benefits are beneficiaries, the disposed, displaced, marginalized, and neglected communities and spaces are victims.⁴⁹

TOKİ's focus on revenue-sharing housing projects in Istanbul's most valuable areas generates profits for privileged businesspeople and their companies. As Karatepe asserts, a majority of these private actors have relationships with Islamist business associations through which they build overt and covert connections to senior AKP officials.⁵⁰ Furthermore, in specific cases, these private actors establish connections either through kinship and *hemşehri* (shared regional origin) ties to AKP officials or by offering financial support to the party organisations.⁵¹ This enables them to participate in TOKİ's revenue-sharing projects. Consequently, TOKİ's housing endeavours have become centralized within a handful of construction companies.⁵²

Regarding the construction monopoly and its beneficiaries, two noteworthy aspects warrant consideration. Firstly, the narrative of the ascendancy of Istanbul-centred Islamic large businesses and their consolidation through government backing bears similarities to the growth

⁴⁹ Ruben, "Neoliberalization of Social Housing in Turkey: The Case of Kayaşehir," 80–81.

⁵⁰ Especially, Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Independent Businessmen and Industrialists Association, MÜSİAD) was established as the 'business arm' of Islamist politics in Türkiye in 1990, as the representative of the Islamist bourgeoisie, which was able to compete somewhat with the secular bourgeoisie represented by Türkiye Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, TÜSİAD). MÜSİAD have played a crucial role to build the network between different enterprises in different cities based on religious identity. The organisation is commonly recognized as the Muslim Businessmen and Industrialists Association, although the initial letters "MÜ" of the acronym officially represent "independent" (in Turkish, *müstakil*, meaning "independent") rather than for "Müslüman" (Muslim). See for further insights: Karatepe, "The State, Islamists, Discourses, and Bourgeoisie"; Dennis Mehmet, "The Architects of New Turkey: Globalization of Urban Space in Istanbul and the New Islamic Gentry," in *Dislocating Globality*, ed. Šarūnas Paunksnis (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 153–81.

⁵¹ Mehmet, "The Architects of New Turkey," 171.

⁵² Dogru, "The 'Benevolent Hand' of the Turkish State," 12.

trajectories of major corporations during the pre-AKP era.⁵³ Dennis Mehmet points out that while the authoritative power and networking avenues of political agents in the 1980s and 1990s differ from those in the AKP era, the success stories of beneficiaries from both eras share resemblances. These similarities stem from the symbiotic relationships these winners cultivate with ruling ideology and leaders.

Secondly, the rapid rise of Islamist or pro-AKP corporations in the 2000s cannot be attributed to their exceptional professional acumen and entrepreneurial prowess when compared to the beneficiaries from previous periods. This seemingly “divine” elevation is connected to shifts in prevailing systems of thought and ruling political figures, as well as the introduction of new privileges bestowed upon ideologically favoured business figures.⁵⁴

Both the construction industry as a whole and the housing sector, in particular, constitute substantial segments of the labour market. As the dominant player in the construction sector, TOKİ presents a diverse range of business opportunities and allocates them to multiple private companies through its housing projects. In this context, as highlighted by Ayşe Buğra and Osman Savaşkan, construction companies, especially subcontractors providing a wide array of construction-related products and materials, find increased motivation to support and finance the ruling government’s political activities in return for their collaboration with TOKİ.⁵⁵

⁵³ Mehmet, “The Architects of New Turkey,” 170.

⁵⁴ Mehmet, 170.

⁵⁵ Described condition applies not only to the luxury housing projects, but also mass housing projects by TOKİ. The construction of these housing projects, the majority of which are built in provincial cities and did not require high levels of technical expertise, benefited small and medium sized construction firms. Buğra and Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey*, 86.

The private companies in Başakşehir “blessed by God”

In Kayaşehir, both public and private investments—including landmarks like the Nation’s Garden, the Nation’s Library, the City Hospital, primary and high schools, newly constructed highways, and new commercial and business centres—are encompassed by luxury housing projects developed by private construction companies. In this context, numerous signboards crowning these housing projects command the visual landscape of the Kayaşehir area. Among the array of company names adorning these structures, two names, Akyapı İnşaat and Makro İnşaat, stand out prominently due to their frequent appearance. These two companies hold sway over the construction endeavours in the neighbourhood, facilitated by collaborations with TOKİ and Emlak Konut. They have played a pivotal role in erecting some of the most expansive and high-end housing projects, not only within Kayaşehir but also spanning the broader Başakşehir district.

During a visit to Akyapı İnşaat in 2019, I had the opportunity to meet Mustafa, one of the partners of the company. He initiated our conversation by sharing his memories of Başakşehir and proudly displayed a plaque he held in his hands—an award presented by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Mayor of Istanbul in 1996. This intricately crafted plaque featured a specialized certificate of appreciation acknowledging Mustafa’s notable contributions to the Başakşehir Housing Project. Overflowing with pride, Mustafa delved into recounting his experiences within the construction sector, emphasizing that the Başakşehir project had marked a transformative

juncture in his life, effectively serving as the cornerstone of his career.⁵⁶ At that moment, I was quite certain that every visitor to this room had been shown this award at least once.

Mustafa's journey began as a young civil engineer employed by KİPTAŞ, precisely when the construction of the Başakşehir Housing Project commenced in April 1995. He was a site chief in the construction of the first stage. By 1996, KİPTAŞ had successfully completed the construction of the apartments, just one year after the project's initiation. Notably, before the apartment units were handed over to their owners, an opening ceremony was orchestrated by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and KİPTAŞ. During this event, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Mayor of Istanbul at that time, rewarded the leading figures who had contributed significantly to the project's construction. Mustafa was among those recognized, receiving a plaque bearing Erdoğan's signature.

One year subsequent to this ceremony, owing to his exceptional achievements in overseeing the construction of the project's first stage, Mustafa was entrusted with a new assignment—this time in Hilal Housing, another endeavour of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP), situated in the Pendik district of Istanbul. Upon the successful completion of the Hilal Housing Project, Mustafa embarked on a new chapter of his career. In 1998, alongside his partner, he established his own construction company, Akyapı İnşaat. Since its inception, Akyapı İnşaat has played a substantial role in reshaping the urban landscape of Başakşehir and various other areas of Istanbul. As of 2020, the company's portfolio boasts an array of projects, including the construction of middle- and high-end residential buildings, gated communities, individual housing projects, factories,

⁵⁶ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat), interview.

industrial sites, business centres, malls, hospitals, schools, social facilities, infrastructure projects, and landscape ventures.

Mustafa's tale of triumph, transforming him from a young salaried engineer in a municipal construction firm to a founder of one of Türkiye's renowned construction enterprises within a short span, is attributed by him to the "will of God."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the winds of change that propelled Mustafa from an employee position to a position of influence were stirred by the intricate interplay of political and personal networks fostered by the regime—networks that gained momentum with the rise of the Islamist RP and its takeover of Istanbul in 1994.

Following the establishment of their company in 1998, Mustafa and his partner embarked on constructing housing projects in Başakşehir—a settlement that was still in its nascent stages. Mustafa described their decision to invest in Başakşehir as a seemingly fortuitous turn of events driven by destiny. According to him, their choice was guided by their sense of being "familiar with the area," a phrase that, in fact, alluded to their intricate connections with the influential figures responsible for leading, governing, and shaping the trajectory of Başakşehir. These connections encompassed religious community leaders, politicians, state officials, and prominent residents.

As per Mustafa's account, their familiarity with the cultural essence of Başakşehir allowed them to closely monitor the evolving needs of the local community. This observation unfolded against the backdrop of Başakşehir's remarkable transition, shifting from its origins as a modest housing

⁵⁷ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat).

settlement into a sprawling district characterized by a burgeoning resident populace and appreciating land values. Mustafa's keen observation extended to the shifting behaviours and aspirations of individuals, particularly those who experienced upward mobility during their residence in Başakşehir. This transformation was evident in changes to their attire and the brands of their newly acquired cars. These nuanced shifts underscored changing aspirations.

This realization served as a catalyst for Mustafa's company to formulate a strategic decision: they determined to embark on the construction of upscale projects tailored to individuals who, despite experiencing improved economic conditions, chose not to relocate to more developed regions of Istanbul, due to their affinity for the social and cultural dynamics of Başakşehir. This narrative underscores how Mustafa's company arrived at the choice of creating high-end residential offerings within an area that had long been recognized as the residence of Istanbul's low- and middle-income conservative population.

Over the past decade, both Akyapı and Makro—alongside another prominent construction company that has risen in prominence within the district—have significantly impacted the landscape of Kayaşehir with an array of projects ranging from housing developments to malls, retail stores, and business centres. These companies have collaborated on luxury housing projects with various partners, such as TOKİ, Emlak Konut, and Başakşehir Municipality—a secondary but impactful player in the district's housing sector. Notable projects include Seyran Şehir, Bahçetepe Istanbul, Park Maveria-I, Park Maveria-II, Park Maveria-III, Park Maveria-IV, Maveria Homes, Maveria Residence, and Maveria Comfort. The first Park Maveria project is centrally situated within Kayaşehir, neighbouring the new Town Square, the Central Mosque, the Nation's Garden, the Nation's Library, and Emlak Konut's Kuzey Yakası project.

Encompassing a vast parcel of fifty-three thousand square metres, the project comprises eight apartment towers, accommodating a total of 670 housing units along with 332 commercial spaces. The available apartment types encompass two bedrooms and a salon (136 m²); two bedrooms, a living room, and a salon (195 m²); and three bedrooms, a living place, and a salon (208 m²). Notably, even the smallest housing unit is designed to accommodate a primary bedroom and a child bedroom. This design approach ensures that all the apartments cater to families with children, aligning with the trends seen in other public and private housing options across various areas of Başakşehir. In the subsequent projects undertaken by the same builders in Kayaşehir, a distinct emphasis is placed on offering larger apartment options, intended to cater to the requirements of larger families. As Mustafa points out, larger apartment models cater to the needs of today's affluent and conservative families with at least three children.⁵⁸ To meet the needs of high-income families in Başakşehir, more spacious apartments with multiple rooms are designed and built accordingly.

Park Maveria-I offers residents a variety of innovative features. According to the catalogue published by Emlak Konut, the project is envisioned as a “fictitious village” where the cultural and religious sensitivities of families are prioritized.⁵⁹ However, this concern for cultural and religious sensitivities is limited to the provision of gender-segregated common spaces. In the housing advertisement brochures published by Akyapı and Makro, keywords such as “value,” “tradition,” “family,” “culture,” and “sensitivity” are prominently featured. These keywords are

⁵⁸ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat).

⁵⁹ “Katalog,” Emlak Konut, accessed October 28, 2020, <http://www.emlakkonut.com.tr/tr-tr/parkmavera/magazine-71#71/2-3>.

often accompanied by photos of gender-segregated common spaces, reinforcing the companies' slogans.

The emphasis on both modern and traditional aspects is evident in the design of the housing project's façade and its integration with the overall architectural design, blending elements of traditional Seljuk architecture, such as a succession of contiguous pointed arches, with contemporary high-rise blocks. This design approach caters to a housing market segment that values historical continuity, cultural identity, and nostalgia reflected in traditional design elements, while also seeking the convenience, lifestyle, and prestige associated with modern high-rise living. Inside the apartments, the exclusive use of *alafranga* lavatories—contrasting with the *alaturka* style that KİPTAŞ employs even in their high-income projects as a supplementary to a lavatory space with *alafranga* toilet—is noteworthy. All primary bedrooms have a bathroom and a dressing room. These are modern architectural concepts that Akyapı and Makro introduced to the settlement. These changes signal a strategic alignment with modern amenities, resonating with a conservative affluent demographic open to balancing traditional values with contemporary comforts.

Another insightful aspect of the project is its name, Maverá. Derived from the Arabic term “*māverā*,” which means “a metaphysical world of unseen” or “what lies beyond,” the name hints at a deeper, philosophical layer often present in Islamic discourse, one that prioritizes essence or spirit over superficiality.⁶⁰ This name, evocative of the metaphysical and traditional, subtly caters to the project's target demographic. It also poetically alludes to the common spaces within the

⁶⁰ “Mavera,” in *TDK Sözlük*, accessed July 27, 2023, <https://sozluk.gov.tr/?kelime=mavera>.

complex that lie beyond its arched façade, which are adorned with ponds and green areas, further enhancing the appeal for residents. The marketing logic here is cleverly adjusted to emotional and cultural triggers. It combines both the conservative group's historical appreciation for modesty and spiritualism and their newly found aspirations for an upgraded lifestyle. By weaving these two threads together—the traditional and the modern, the modest and the aspirational—the project presents an idealized version of life that this burgeoning conservative demographic could fit themselves quite comfortably.



Figure 41: An aerial photograph of Park Maveria-I in Kayaşehir. Source: Photograph retrieved from Akyapı İnşaat’s website, <https://www.akyapi.com.tr/projeler/parkmaveria-1>.

The visibility of the builder companies, Akyapı and Makro İnşaat, is prominently marked by their signboards, strategically positioned at the top the apartment buildings. This placement serves not just as a simple identification marker, but also as a symbolic crowning of their creation, emphasizing their role in shaping the community’s living environment.

At ground level, the complex features an arcaded section, an architectural element that serves multiple roles both aesthetically and functionally. Architecturally, the arches are included in the design as a stylistic nod to traditional elements, reminiscent of the arches of Seljuk architecture, thereby attempting to ground the otherwise modern structure in a deeper cultural context.

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the arcaded section houses various commercial spaces that cater to various needs and lifestyles, including real estate agencies, coffeehouses, restaurants, hairdressers, and office spaces, nestled beneath the residential units. While these commercial spaces are open to the public, access to the residential areas and common spaces—featuring green areas and ponds at the heart of the complex—is strictly controlled. Entry is limited to residents and their approved guests, a restriction enforced through the use of security cards.

As per Mustafa's explanation, the upscale housing projects developed by private companies in Kayaşehir are primarily directed towards conservative high-income families.⁶¹ When conceptualizing apartments of varying sizes, these developers take into consideration the religious sensitivities of their clientele, whom Mustafa refers to as "our conservatives." Privacy is a paramount concern for their clients in Başakşehir. To address this, Mustafa stresses that they provide distinct recreational areas with separate entrances and exits for each gender, rather than enforcing separate schedules based on gender for using these spaces. Moreover, they incorporate gender-segregated *mescit(s)* (prayer rooms) into these housing projects, intended for collective prayers and gatherings where individuals engage in religious discussions (*sohbet*).

Turning attention to the spatial characteristics of the luxury Park Mavera projects, Mustafa accentuates the notion of organising interior spaces according to the *haremlık - selamlık* (women and men sitting separately) arrangement, especially when the residents of an apartment have guests. Recognizing the inclination of conservative families towards multiple *haremlık* and *selamlık* spaces within a home, they provide larger apartments with two living rooms designated for separate use by male and female guests. Alternatively, some apartments offer spacious kitchens with a distinct seating arrangement for female guests. The kitchen, dining room, and lounge are interconnected so that, as Mustafa elaborates, the "lady of the house" can conveniently set the table by moving between these areas without being in view of male guests. Once the tasks in the dining room are completed, the "lady of the house" can retreat to the kitchen, allowing guests to access the dining room from the lounge without navigating other parts of the house. This strategic interior design accomplishes gender segregation, maintains a

⁶¹ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat), interview.

clear demarcation between family life and external visitors, and ensures the privacy of female occupants from the gazes of male guests.



Figure 42: A promotional image of Park Mavera-I project. Source: The catalogue is retrieved from Emlak Konut's website, <https://www.emlakkonut.com.tr/tr-TR/parkmavera/magazine-71>. On the left page, the concept of “double-social facility” is introduced, denoting the gender-segregated common spaces such as pool, gym, and sauna within the housing development. On the right page, the interconnecting kitchen-dining room-living room concept, that Mustafa describes as a preference of conservative families, is introduced.



Figure 43: Architectural plan of the Park Mavera II (Block A2 and A3) Housing Project prepared for the promotional catalogue. Source: The image is retrieved from the website of the Makro İnşaat and modified by the author, <https://www.makroinsaat.com/proje/park-mavera2/tr>. The kitchen and dining room is highlighted, and arrows are added by the author. The red arrows indicate the movement of the “lady of the house,” and the green arrow indicate the movement of the male guests.

Likewise, Ziya emphasizes taking account of their customers’ lifestyles in Kayaşehir.⁶² His company designs large houses for traditional pious families because they generally have at least three children. Besides, these families want separate spaces for men-only and women-only gatherings, says Ziya—just as Mustafa states. Ziya’s emphasis on “family life” advances when he mentions the lack of studio-type apartments in their projects. “We do not address single people but families,” he says.

⁶² Ziya (Partner of Fuzul Yapı), In Person, July 9, 2019.

Similarly, Ender, a sales representative of Park Mavera projects, introduces the audience as “those who desire to live regarding our religious and traditional values.”⁶³ Notwithstanding that Ender continues his words by saying, “but it does not mean that we reject other people; we produce housing for all people from all walks of life.” He says most of their current customers are from Arab countries. As mentioned in Chapter I, there is a demographic change in Başakşehir in line with the increasing demand of immigrant groups, dominated by Arab nations, in the district. The high-income immigrant population prefer buying an apartment in Kayaşehir instead of renting. Foreigners can acquire Turkish citizenship by investing 250 thousand dollars equivalent of Turkish Liras, so there is a large group of immigrants who buy an apartment in Kayaşehir to acquire citizenship and live there. During my visits to the district, the real estate agents I met describe this condition as the “Arab spring in Başakşehir.” Sami, one of these real estate agents working in Kayaşehir, states that he had sold fifty houses the last year, and forty-nine of the buyers were Arab, and only one was Turkish.⁶⁴

In the context of the growing allure of Kayaşehir, it is particularly noteworthy to consider Ziya’s specific target demographic.⁶⁵ He defines his company’s market in Kayaşehir as wealthy Arab families. When I reminded Ziya that the density of the Arab population was not peculiar to Kayaşehir, and that there were several other districts in Istanbul where these migrant groups reside, he had an intriguing perspective to offer. Ziya pointed to a distinguishing feature—what he termed “piety”—that sets the Arab population in Kayaşehir apart from those in other parts of Istanbul. To elaborate on this, he shared the following anecdote:

⁶³ Ender (Sales representative), In Person, July 9, 2019.

⁶⁴ Sami (Real estate agent), interview.

⁶⁵ Ziya (Partner of Fuzul Yapı), interview.

I was in Bodrum (a touristic town on the southern Aegean coast of Türkiye) last week. There were many Arab people on the streets, in restaurants, cafes, and bars. None of them was wearing a burqa or tabard. They were all drinking alcohol. They were all modern looking. Their attire was much different from the Arab people living in Başakşehir. I mean that there are thousands of Arab people in Istanbul and other parts of Türkiye now. They are everywhere, but the conservatives are in Başakşehir. While the lower income Arabs live in Başakşehir and Başak neighbourhoods, the high-income Arabs live in Kayaşehir.⁶⁶

In light of Ziya's observations, Kayaşehir emerges as more than just a series of construction projects or a growing suburb; it is a symbol of a particular kind of aspiration and lifestyle. Ziya emphasizes that both Turkish and Arab families who have made the move to Kayaşehir consider it a status symbol. "The new centre of Istanbul will be Kayaşehir soon," Ziya says. According to him, "with numerous public spaces, green areas, education, and leisure facilities, modern infrastructure, transportation network, and the new and modern life that our luxury housing projects offer, Kayaşehir will be the new heart of Istanbul." Further substantiating this point, Mustafa indicates, Kayaşehir has become an emblematic housing settlement of the burgeoning conservatives of Istanbul and the new foreign citizens of Türkiye.⁶⁷ These groups prefer to live there, not only for the faith-oriented promotion of the housing area and the religious-content services offered to them but also the branding of the area by the state and the private sector as the modern housing hub of traditional and conservative wealth groups.

So how did Kayaşehir transform from vacant land into a housing destination for conservative, affluent residents? This dramatic shift can largely be attributed to the sustained and strategic

⁶⁶ Ziya (Partner of Fuzul Yapı).

⁶⁷ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat), interview.

efforts of multiple stakeholders in the region. A synergy between the private and public sectors has been pivotal in crafting Kayaşehir's current identity and allure.

After completing the Park Mavera-I project in 2016, Akyapı and Makro, in collaboration with other companies, continued to develop many other residential projects in the centre of Kayaşehir. During this time, Emlak Konut took on an ambitious task. In 2018, it stepped in to construct the Başakşehir Town Square, promoting it as the largest square in the city.⁶⁸ Adjacent to the square, Emlak Konut also built the Başakşehir Central Mosque—the largest in the district—which includes a conference hall and a Qur'an education space. Additionally, in partnership with Balamir-Ahbal Construction, a company reported by alternative media to have close ties with the AKP, Emlak Konut erected a new municipal service building for Başakşehir, strategically situated to face the newly developed square.⁶⁹

Adjacent to the square and mosque, Emlak Konut inaugurated the first Nation's Garden in 2018 and the city's largest Nation's Library in 2019, as part of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's 2018 presidential election campaign. Emlak Konut also brought to life a multi-functional building complex called Kuzey Yakası, situated next to the Nation's Garden. This project features ten separate buildings, offering a mix of business, leisure, and cultural amenities such as a hotel, a sports centre, a conference hall, offices, and retail spaces. TOKİ and Emlak Konut strategically positioned these public facilities near prestigious housing developments, including Park Mavera-I through Park Mavera-IV by Akyapı and Makro, as well as other private housing projects from

⁶⁸ I investigate the Town Square in Chapter IV.

⁶⁹ The exorbitant tender price of the building got the attention of media coverage: "AKP'li Başakşehir Belediyesi'ne 130 Milyona Yeni Başkanlık Binası," *Sol Haber Portalı*, accessed October 22, 2020, <https://sol.org.tr/haber/akpli-Basaksehir-belediyesine-130-milyona-yeni-baskanlik-binasi-13057>.

various companies. These concerted efforts have collectively elevated the land value in Kayaşehir and boosted the demand for housing.



Figure 44: An aerial view of the Başakşehir Nation's Garden. Source: Photograph retrieved from Emlak Konut's website and labelled by the author, <https://sales.emlakkonut.com.tr/project/kuzey-yakasi-ofisleri/tr>.

Aerial view of the Başakşehir Nation's Garden, showcasing the blend of residential, municipal, leisure, transportation, worship, and tourism spaces developed by TOKİ, Emlak Konut, and through public-private partnerships. While it illustrates a comprehensive urban planning approach, a closer look reveals underlying political and economic motives. The urban development initiatives in Başakşehir by TOKİ and Emlak Konut encompass political objectives such as electoral appeal, strategic partnerships, and social engineering, alongside economic aims like boosting land value, encouraging investment, and catalyzing local job markets. These projects exemplify a multi-faceted approach to urban development, intertwining underlying political alliances with economic advantages.

Amid the completion of the initial stages of the Park Maveria-I, II, and III projects in Kayaşehir, an undeveloped parcel of land awaited its transformation into the future Nation's Garden. During this time, Akyapı and Makro unveiled pre-launch prices for various apartment types in these projects, but their efforts failed to garner significant attention. Altan, a real estate agent in Başakşehir, confirms that the apartment units facing the vacant lot that would become the Nation's Garden were initially offered on the market for around 800 thousand Turkish Liras, but received a poor public response.⁷⁰ Following the Garden project announcement, Altan indicates that demand for the apartments increased in tandem with the development of the vast leisure space, enabling the companies to ultimately sell the apartments for twice their original launch prices. Concurrently, the city authorities proposed the establishment of four different metro stations in Kayaşehir, a move anticipated to further stimulate neighbourhood growth and development. Altan points out, "This condition not only impacted the prices of luxury housing in town, but also the so-called 'social housing' that TOKİ constructed there. The sale price of TOKİ apartments was raised from 500 thousand TL to 850 thousand TL. As a consequence, even the apartments in the Kayaşehir Housing Project started to shift away from their initial purpose of catering to low and middle-income groups, progressively becoming accessible only to individuals with higher financial means.

Connecting Altan's observations with Mustafa's insights provides a multi-layered understanding of Kayaşehir's transformation. Mustafa's perspective echoes the market trends that Altan describes, emphasizing that the area's development was not just a result of brick-and-mortar projects but also of strategic storytelling. Mustafa expressed that people like hearing stories

⁷⁰ Altan (Real estate agent), interview.

about a neighbourhood before moving there, so they created stories for the people.⁷¹ They started a story for their housing projects in Kayaşehir with the news of the to-be-constructed City Hospital in Kayaşehir; they continued with a story for the Nation's Garden. Then they inserted the Nation's Library into their narrative. Afterward, they began discussing the new metro stations that TOKİ would build there. "That is not all!" as Mustafa continued, they informed people about the new tramline project. They talked about the third Bosphorus bridge, the new airport, and the to-be-constructed Canal Istanbul project. As Mustafa indicated, first and above all, they sold stories to people, and their stories will never end.

⁷¹ Mustafa (Partner of Akyapı İnşaat), interview.



Figure 45: A view from Kayaşehir. The photograph captures the urban transformation in Kayaşehir, showcasing the collaboration between the state and private sectors in town development. In the background stands Emlak Konut's Kuzey Yakası Project. Dominating the central frame is the Başakşehir Central Mosque, flanked by a flagpole, serving as a poignant testament to the town's piety and nationalist values. Behind the mosque and its courtyard, unauthentic Seljuk vaults are towering the housing blocks of Park Mavera I, with signboards from the construction companies, Makro and Akyapı, on top.

The image highlights the shared endeavours of state and private entities, underlining a strategic approach to urban growth. The Kuzey Yakası Project and the towering housing blocks of Park Mavera I, both emblazoned with their respective company names, represent the involvement of private enterprises in the urban transformation. Anchoring the foreground is a woman cloaked in a black garment that covers the whole body. Her silhouette merging with the setting behind symbolizes the interplay between a traditional and conservative image and the contemporary urban vision envisioned by the politicians and investors in the town. The vantage point of this capture is an undeveloped plot adjacent to the mosque, signaling another upcoming luxury development there.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore the shifts in the identity of Başakşehir and its community dynamics, which were closely aligned with the evolving characteristics of political Islam and the rise of new affluent groups in society. This transformation manifested itself in two ways: first, by the shift in the centre of the Başakşehir district from the old neighbourhoods of Başakşehir and Başak to the new neighbourhood of Kayaşehir; and second, in the changing demands and life expectations of the resident community in this settlement.

Initially, KİPTAŞ was the leading player in Başakşehir's development between 1995 and 2007, a period that began with the start of the Başakşehir Housing Project and ended with its completion. After completing the first two stages of the project and gaining popularity accordingly, KİPTAŞ broadened its market focus, which was initially limited to low- and middle-income families. To adapt to the then-current trends in the private housing sector and meet the evolving demands of newly emerging conservative groups, KİPTAŞ constructed luxury houses for upper-income families on municipally owned land during the project's fourth and fifth stages. While KİPTAŞ's adaptation to new cultural dynamics and architectural trends was well-received by the ascending conservative community, the changing political landscape and power dynamics with the onset of the AKP era in 2002 necessitated further action.

Consequently, after Başakşehir was designated a municipal district of Istanbul in 2008, KİPTAŞ stepped back from its leading role in the area's development, ceding its position to TOKİ. By this point, the AKP governments had already elevated TOKİ to a dominant role in the construction sector, with a specific focus on the commodification of urban land. Bolstered by new state

funding and a broader administrative remit, TOKİ evolved into a profit-driven construction and mediation company in Başakşehir.

First, TOKİ launched the Kayaşehir Housing Project, aimed at low-income residents who identified with the district's Islamist character. Rather than focusing on social and spatial qualities, the project prioritized providing housing. TOKİ expanded the project in various stages, concurrently developing essential infrastructures like public spaces, transportation networks, and commercial facilities. This set the stage for Kayaşehir to become a focal point for future public and private investments.

As a second step, TOKİ opened up vacant land in Kayaşehir for private investment, attracting affluent conservatives to a new centre in Başakşehir. In collaboration with its affiliate Emlak Konut and several private construction companies connected to Islamic and political business networks, TOKİ developed and supported high-end housing projects. These projects were tailored to attract the affluent conservative groups emerging in the district, offering modern amenities that also catered to religious sensitivities.

This chapter argues that TOKİ, following in the footsteps of KIPTAŞ but with considerably more power and authority, has significantly influenced various Islamist placemaking processes in Başakşehir, targeting conservative families across different income levels. As a result, Kayaşehir has emerged as a contemporary model of neoliberal Islamism in Türkiye.

Chapter 4 | Spaces of Publicness: Green and Void

Public spaces serve as focal points for a wide range of social activities, allowing people to come together, interact, socialize, and become components of urban life in cities. Numerous scholars have extensively examined the role of public spaces in controlling the flow of unplanned daily life activities, encompassing a spectrum of social and political performances, appearances, manifestations, dialogues, and conflicts among citizens.¹ According to Setha Low, these spaces are not merely a reflection of a cultural order through a simple “correspondence between spatial arrangements and meaning.”² Instead, they are also the result of a continuous process of “culture-making” with the involvement of designers, politicians, investors, users, and commentators.³

This chapter seeks to examine how public spaces in Başakşehir assume a pivotal role in the continuous processes of culture-making and community-building within the district. It aims to explore how the active engagement of distinct actors facilitates the emergence of these public spaces as focal points for such endeavours. In contrast to the housing projects examined in previous chapters, which represent comparatively “private” spaces of the resident community, the public spaces investigated in this chapter serve as venues where the individuals engage with

¹ Ali Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces of the City* (London: Routledge, 2003); Ali Madanipour, “Why Are the Design and Development of Public Spaces Significant for Cities?,” *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 26, no. 6 (1999): 879–91; Stephen Carr et al., *Public Space* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Mark Francis, *Urban Open Space: Designing for User Needs* (Washington: Island Press, 2003); Kristine F. Miller, *Designs on the Public: The Private Lives of New York’s Public Spaces* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Peter van Gelle Ruppe, “Urban Public Space and the Emergence of Interdenominational Syncretism,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society* (Routledge, 2020), 326–35; Setha M. Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

² Setha Low, “Urban Public Spaces as Representations of Culture: The Plaza in Costa Rica,” *Environment and Behavior* 29, no. 1 (1997): 5–6.

³ Low, *On the Plaza*, 50.

the broader “public” domain. These spaces go beyond the private confines of home, providing an urban experience that profoundly shapes the social life in the district in line with the engagement of a variety of actors.

This chapter investigates two city parks and a public square in Başakşehir: Sular Vadisi (Water Valley) built by Istanbul Konut İmar Plan Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş. (Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc., KİPTAŞ), and Başakşehir Millet Bahçesi (Başakşehir Nation’s Garden) and Başakşehir Kent Meydanı (Başakşehir Town Square) built by Emlak Konut REIT (Emlak Konut Real Estate Investment Trust). I focus on understanding the deeper and complex mechanisms that influence the creation, evolution, and functions of these public spaces and how they, in turn, shape these dynamics. I regard the public spaces as sites of community-building, identity-claiming, and the influencing financial dynamics of urban spaces.

The selection of these three sites is based on their individual representational qualities, spatial characteristics, functional roles, social implications, and economic impacts within the district. The Water Valley is in the Başak neighbourhood. It is the first public park built in the Başakşehir district, offering various public and private facilities. Before the construction of the Valley, there were no open-air spaces designated for socialization, collective events, ceremonies, and everyday activities, apart from the limited presence of small playgrounds and walking trails surrounding the residential compounds. The Water Valley holds symbolic significance within the district, not only due to its spatial characteristics but also because of the social amenities it offers. However, the Valley has experienced a decline in popularity over time, aligning with the evolving dynamics of society, the transformation of the resident profile in Başakşehir, and the increased

interest of private investors in establishing new public spaces, such as such as the Nation's Garden and the Town Square, within the developing areas of the district.

The Nation's Garden is located in the Kayaşehir neighbourhood of Başakşehir, which has replaced the Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods as the district's most popular area. During the 2018 presidential election campaign, President Erdoğan announced a nationwide program to build new urban gardens in cities. The Nation's Garden was one of the first and is still the largest of its kind. The Garden is a significant site that neoliberal Islamism has created in Istanbul, regarding its political symbolism; its location in Kayaşehir as one of the most valuable parts of the Başakşehir district; its proximity to new housing projects, highways, public projects, and business centres, and commercial spaces; and its presence as a green urban space that hosts a variety of performances and social events organised by the district municipality and governorship.

Situated in close proximity to the Nation's Garden, the Town Square stands as another prominent public space within the district. The builders of the project, namely the Başakşehir Municipality and Emlak Konut REIT, promoted the Town Square as be the largest square in Istanbul, surpassing even the renowned Taksim Meydanı (Square), which has long been associated with secular-nationalist and leftist ideology throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

The architectural organisation, spatial program, relationship with the immediate surroundings, and provided amenities of each of these public spaces collectively serve to establish and strengthen the socio-political identity of the district. The selected sites have become settings for the principal politicians, investors, project developers, religious communities, and other power holders, to manifest their authority over society and their counterparts through the spatial layout,

configuration, and composition of architectural and urban components, and the deliberate use of symbolically assertive forms. Additionally, the planning and implementation of spatial programs, the careful selection of public and private venues within these public spaces, and the organisation of public events are all coordinated in alignment with the defined objectives and purposes that guided the construction of each space. Furthermore, these public spaces function as a conduit through which wealth is transferred from different sectors of society to a privileged financial class, prioritizing investment and economic gain in the creation of public space over their advertised social benefits. Consequently, these public spaces have evolved into catalysts for the commodification of the urban areas that surround them. They have become platforms where the monetary interests of politicians, investors, and construction companies are catered to.

The case studies scrutinized in this chapter are not unique to the Başakşehir district or to Istanbul, as they echo similar traits in terms of their architectural characteristics, community relations, and financial aspects with parks and squares located in some other geographical contexts. Nevertheless, the public spaces in the district still stand out from similar spaces elsewhere due to a combination of political or historical symbolism associated with these spaces, distinct architectural features, the user groups they cater to, the programming of the space with pre-organised collective events and social organisations, as well as unstructured daily usage, and the visual elements embedded on urban surfaces, such as signboards, publicity posters and banners that adorn parks and squares. These factors collectively differentiate the public spaces in Başakşehir from their counterparts in other locations, even though they share many similarities in other aspects.

The chapter adopts a thematic approach in examining the public spaces in Başakşehir. It focuses on two key motivations behind their construction: (1) the assertion and formation of community identity and (2) the financialization of public space, which refers to the process by which the public space influences the financial forces of the surrounding area, particularly real estate values and investment.

The sources of information are my onsite observations, photographs, interviews, exploration of related media coverage, public and private actors' promotional catalogues, the district municipality's community bulletins, and the political actors' public speeches and press releases. In an attempt to identify and situate each motivation within the broader context of Türkiye, I explore the architectural nuances, societal fabric, and economic attributes of Water Valley, the Nation's Garden, and the Town Square. By examining each case, I also uncover whether and how these spaces fulfill the intentions of their creators, as well as how their intended (or unintended) users experience them through their everyday interactions within these spaces.

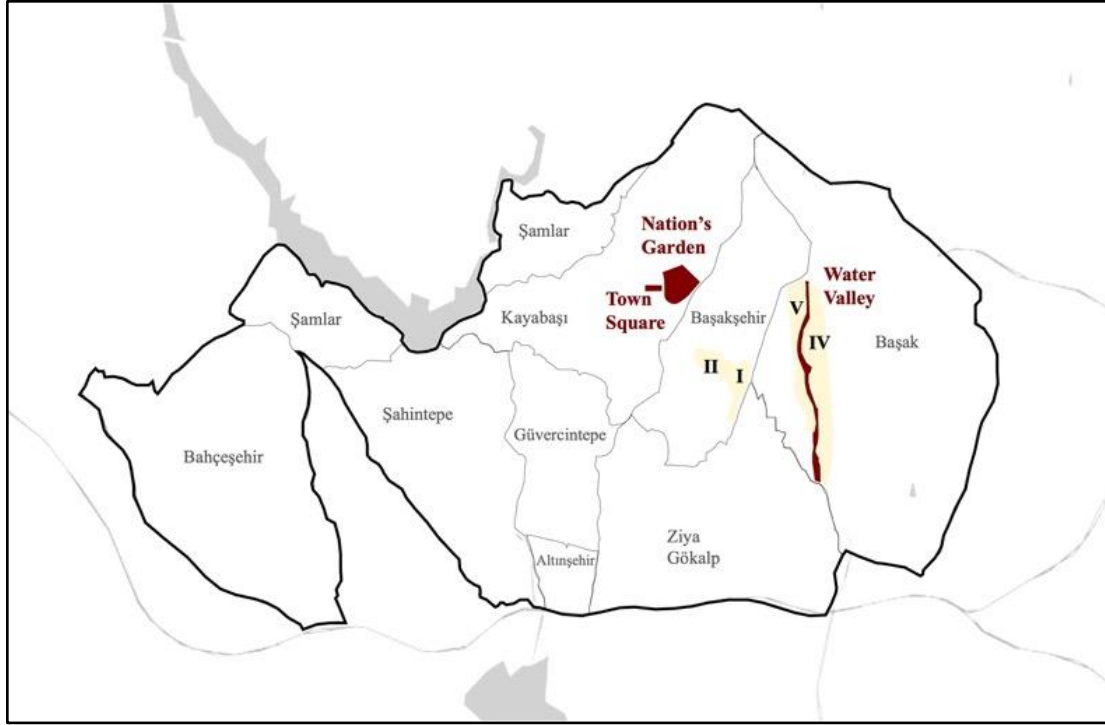


Figure 46: Beşiktaş map shows the location of the public spaces investigated in Chapter IV.
Source: Map created by the author.

4.1. Public space as a stage for visibility

Many scholars see public space as a stage, where strangers come together, interact with, and mutually observe one another.⁴ It is perceived as a site that offers visibility to its users, facilitating social interactions and shared experiences.⁵ The presence and accessibility of a public

⁴ Erving Goffman, “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,” in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, vol. 259 (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 46–61; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

⁵ The concept of visibility has received attention in writings about the modern city, which celebrate urban social life as a ground for surprises, excitement, and stimulation. Visibility is specifically associated with public spaces, identified as spaces of “appearance”. Visibility is a fundamental aspect of urban social life, as it offers citizens opportunities to experience individuals and groups from different life choices and backgrounds. It is considered a key feature of public spaces, which characterize their “public” character as open and accessible. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago press, 2013);

space, however, is based on various factors and conditions, as builders, investors, politicians and user groups members might engage with a particular space for practical, symbolic, or other reasons.⁶ It is crucial to recognize that, a public space may implicitly include or exclude some audiences regarding their class, ethnicity, belief, and gender, through its design, organisation, and management. The representational aspects of a public space, including its location within the city, the presence of symbolically assertive design elements, and its place in collective memory, can contribute to the formation of social hierarchies among varied user groups. As a result, public spaces can evolve into battlegrounds for control and access, becoming contested areas where questions arise over who gets to design the space, dictate its functions, establish its rules, and determine how it is maintained or reproduced.

The idea that public spaces serve as platforms for social and political disputes is not merely a theoretical concept; it has tangible manifestations in real-world settings. In this vein, Türkiye, has a myriad of examples that illustrate how the political interests of the state and government actors are intertwined with the creation and organisation of public spaces. The Republican modernization that took place in Türkiye starting from 1923 entailed the construction and redesign of public spaces as sites for ideological representation. Several scholarly works focus on the role of these spaces in building a relationship between state and society. They interpret the state's architectural and urban interventions as nation-building attempts.⁷

Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Andrea Brighenti, "Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences," *Current Sociology* 55, no. 3 (2007): 323–42; Tali Hatuka and Eran Toch, "Being Visible in Public Space: The Normalisation of Asymmetrical Visibility," *Urban Studies* 54, no. 4 (March 2017): 984–98.

⁶ Madanipour, *Whose Public Space?*, 98–99.

⁷ Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan, *Turkey: Modern*

The Republican vision embraced the establishment of new open-air public spaces, offering alternatives to the existing public spaces in cities that were emblematic of Ottoman public life. These included mosque courtyards, bazaars, fountains, *kahvehane* (gender-segregated coffeehouses), picnic areas, and existing town squares constructed during the late nineteenth century. In pursuit of modernization, the Republicans sought to create new public spaces that would depart from traditional norms and cater to a broader range of social activities and interactions. The establishment of parks, gardens, and squares was envisioned as the foundation for the emerging social life in cities, particularly in Ankara, the newly designated capital city.⁸ These spaces were intended to facilitate recreational activities, sports, and public leisure, acting as focal points for community engagement. Furthermore, public spaces played a role in reproducing and displaying the founding discourse and dominant ideology of the time through their physical design and layout.

According to Zeynep Kezer, these new public spaces, especially urban parks and squares, were the new regime's spatial attempts to "control and reshape the citizenry's leisure activities" in cities "rather than the generous social services of a welfare state."⁹ These public spaces were seen as sites of visibility that needed to be dominated and controlled, rather than being seen as platforms for negotiation and the exchange of ideas.¹⁰ As Nilüfer Göle highlights, in this modernization process which included the transformation of the built environment, the aim was monopolize, organise and regulate the public sphere and promote a "secular and progressive way

Architectures in History (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); Zeynep Kezer, *Building Modern Turkey: State, Space, and Ideology in the Early Republic* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

⁸ Bozdoğan and Akcan, *Turkey*, 30.

⁹ Kezer, *Building Modern Turkey*, 229.

¹⁰ Kezer, 235.

of life.”¹¹ This involved top-down regulations that aimed to silence religious signs and performances within public institutions. These efforts to control the public sphere and suppress alternative political systems of thought manifested itself in architectural forms and platforms; among them, the new public spaces were at the forefront.

While the principal authorities of Turkish modernisation pushed religious sects to the periphery of society in the first half of the twentieth century, these religious groups experienced a resurgence in their social standing as new players in response to the changing economic and political forces and the global wave of liberalism, individualism, and freedom of belief since the late 1980s.¹² Accordingly, as republican power factions lost their exclusive control over the creation and utilization of public spaces,, the rising Islamist actors started to transform the built environment to claim urban space and gain physical and financial visibility.

Following the victory of the Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP) in the 1994 local elections, which resulted in the first Islamist administration in republican Istanbul’s history, new public spaces emerged and Islamic trends became a part of everyday life in the city.¹³ Ayşe Saktanber claims “the new Islamic force in Türkiye appeared largely as an urban phenomenon, with its own intellectuals, its own living spaces, and its own alternative models of sociability.”¹⁴

¹¹ Nilüfer Göle, “Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries.,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 176.

¹² Buket Türkmen, “Islamic Visibilities, Intimacies, and Counter Publics in the Secular Public Sphere,” in *Visualizing Secularism and Religion: Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 47.

¹³ The increasing visibility of the Islamic way of life in the urban Turkish landscape provoked fear among those who define themselves as secular, modern Turks. For them, the secular public sphere, rather than being integrative toward the newly rising actors of the society, was exclusive and defensive. Türkmen, 48.

¹⁴ Ayşe Saktanber, *Living Islam: Women, Religion, and the Politicization of Culture in Turkey* (London: Tauris, 2002), 21–22.

New spaces of Islamic consumption emerged as well, such as alcohol-free coffeehouses that served *nargile* (hookah), especially prevalent in conservative neighbourhoods. The ruling actors of the rising Islamist movement regarded production of new public spaces through their own or appropriated spatial instruments a medium of expressing their presence in society. The interventions in existing urban areas and the production of new symbolic spaces have been central to a reorientation of once-neglected Islamist groups, through identity-building and their declaration of the new or radically changed public spaces as the heart of everyday city life.

The burgeoning Islamists of the late 1990s and onward saw these transformations in cities as indicators of empowerment, development, modernization, and progress. Because of this construction passion and embrace of neoliberal urban policies, forests were destroyed, and green public spaces were reduced. Objections have been raised against preferring built objects over green public spaces and the destruction of nature in urban areas as a response to political and urban authorities' interventions. Rather than merely dismissing criticisms for implementing anti-environmentalist initiatives, these authorities have developed "green city" politics and a populist discourse focused on creating environment-friendly cities. In this sense, the municipal actors in large cities like Istanbul have made efforts to build new public spaces mimicking nature, referring to old Ottoman towns one more time with regard to their relationship with nature. It should be noted that the design, construction, management, and utilization of public spaces have consistently been a battleground involving various entities such as the state, urban professionals, and private investors. Besides, the provision of urban parks as "green spaces" has become a controversial topic especially since the early 2000s, regarding the criticism directed at the city authorities and political actors due to the "concretization" of cities and destruction of green areas in cities.

4.2. Parks as urban stages

In European and North American contexts, landscape architecture and city planning developed simultaneously as possible entities for solving urban problems during the nineteenth century. This led to the development of parks as public spaces and their conceptualization as part of city planning. The progressive thinkers of the era held a positive view on the capability of design and planning to better social and environmental conditions.¹⁵ This hopefulness was reflected in urban planning and design ideas such as Garden City and City Beautiful which led to the emergence of new inventions in urban planning.¹⁶ The notion of urban planning underwent a major transition from being seen as an art form to a technical discipline in the twentieth century. The understanding of the city as a functional entity began to overshadow the artistic superiority of earlier periods. The economic situation prompted city officials to develop inner-city neighborhoods intertwining leisure and retail offerings near residential areas. Public parks and forests became important spaces in these communities, providing spaces for residents to unwind and find entertainment.

The early figures of landscape design recognized that a thriving landscape, recreation, and functional systems are complementary in building cities; green spaces with architectural forms, landmarks, meeting places, and recreation are prerequisites for public health in urban settings.¹⁷ As such, parks, besides enhancing daily life in cities, serve as dynamic settings for building

¹⁵ Mohammad Gharipour, ed., *Contemporary Urban Landscapes of the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

¹⁶ Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jon A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," *Journal of Urban History* 2, no. 4 (1976): 415–34.

¹⁷ Mark A. Benedict and Edward T. McMahon, *Green Infrastructure: Linking Landscapes and Communities* (Washington, D.C. London: Island Press, 2006), 26.

identities for communities. As public spaces that simulate nature, parks play an instrumental role in establishing new subjectivities and social routines. Scholars theorize that cultural meanings surrounding nature have positioned parks as particular sites for constructing subjects and as sites for disciplining and surveillance of the urban populace.¹⁸

In Türkiye, urban parks emerged with the process of westernization and the implementation of modern urban planning in the late Ottoman period. As part of the Turkish nation-building project actively implemented during the 1920s and 1930s, landscapes built in cities served as evidence of the “civilized world.” Urban parks were one of the innovations representing a modern way of life under the newly imposed republican regime, as it sought to transform everyday life through sweeping reforms. Places like the Atatürk Forest Farm, Youth Park, and Güven Park were crafted as settings where evolving lifestyles unfolded, contributing to the nation-building initiative of the republic.¹⁹ In this sense, there is a strong historical precedent underlying the use of urban parks as stages for mirroring imagined lifestyles as well as elevating profit-oriented construction activities by the urban authorities and political actors in their own versions of nation/community building.

This study focuses on analyzing two key urban parks in Başakşehir: Sular Vadisi (Water Valley) and Başakşehir Millet Bahçesi (Nation’s Garden). These parks are vital public spaces within the district, intended for fostering community building, shaping collective identity, and driving

¹⁸ Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig, “The Park and the People: Central Park and Its Publics: 1850-1910,” in *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870-1930* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994), 108–34; Francis, *Urban Open Space*; Miller, *Designs on the Public*; Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Kıvanç Kılınç and Duygu Kaçar, “In Pursuit of a European City: Competing Landscapes of Eskişehir’s Riverfront,” in *Contemporary Urban Landscapes of the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2016), 47.

economic growth. They are promoted as integral green spaces crucial for the town's development.

4.2.a. Sular Vadisi (Water Valley)

The Water Valley is the first open-air public space in Başakşehir, officially opened by the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2008 with a public ceremony. Spanning across an impressive 550 thousand square metres of land, this urban park was meticulously designed as a green corridor. It is situated amidst the strip-like terrains of the fourth and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project. The Water Valley serves multiple purposes, functioning as a pedestrian pathway, an urban garden, a hub for commercial spaces, and a designated place for prearranged meetings tightly regulated by municipal authorities. Moreover, it also serves as a platform for the state to convey its ideological messages through monumental symbolism.

The completion of the Valley, the first open air public space of Başakşehir, was a source of pride for its builders including politicians and dependent construction companies. Just after its inauguration, several pro-government newspapers and periodical magazines published advertisement posters and promotional articles describing the Valley's spatial qualities. They introduced the Valley as the "prestige project," the "new cultural centre," and the "culture valley" of Istanbul.²⁰ The promotion of the Valley as the "new cultural centre" of the city—beyond the district of Başakşehir—had ideological and economic undertones. This description

²⁰ Başakşehir Belediyesi, "Sular Vadisi Kültür Vadisi Olacak," *Başakşehir Bülteni*, 2011; "Sular Vadisi İlçenin Çehresini Değiştirdi," *Yeni Şafak*, February 20, 2010, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yenisafakpazar/sular-vadisi-ilcenin-cehresini-degistirdi-242623>.

suggests Islamists' journey of moving from the periphery of the society to the centre. The design and promotion of the Water Valley as a new cultural site for the city and an urban forest to make Başakşehir the "greenest" district of Istanbul can be seen as a component of broader efforts by the local administration to transform the district into an envisioned model town, shaping a desired societal image in the public sphere.

Leila Hudson argues the modern environment as a symbolically rich field engraves "a visual grammar of power" on urban spaces.²¹ The built environment shaped by an Islamist vision since the late 1990s, created a visual and spatial "grammar of power" in contemporary Türkiye. The Water Valley, particularly, exhibits a comprehensive grammar of power, by means of its architectural components, urban signifiers (posters, banners, signboards, etc.), statues, monuments, and the organisation of the built environment with ideological concerns. With all these architectural objects, indoor and outdoor spaces, and its spatial organisation as a public park, the Valley does not display a visually or ideologically consistent image. It rather embodies an architectural cacophony, a striking combination of elements, images, symbols, messages, and transitory political discourses.

²¹ Leila Hudson, "Late Ottoman Damascus: Investments in Public Space and the Emergence of Popular Sovereignty," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 152.

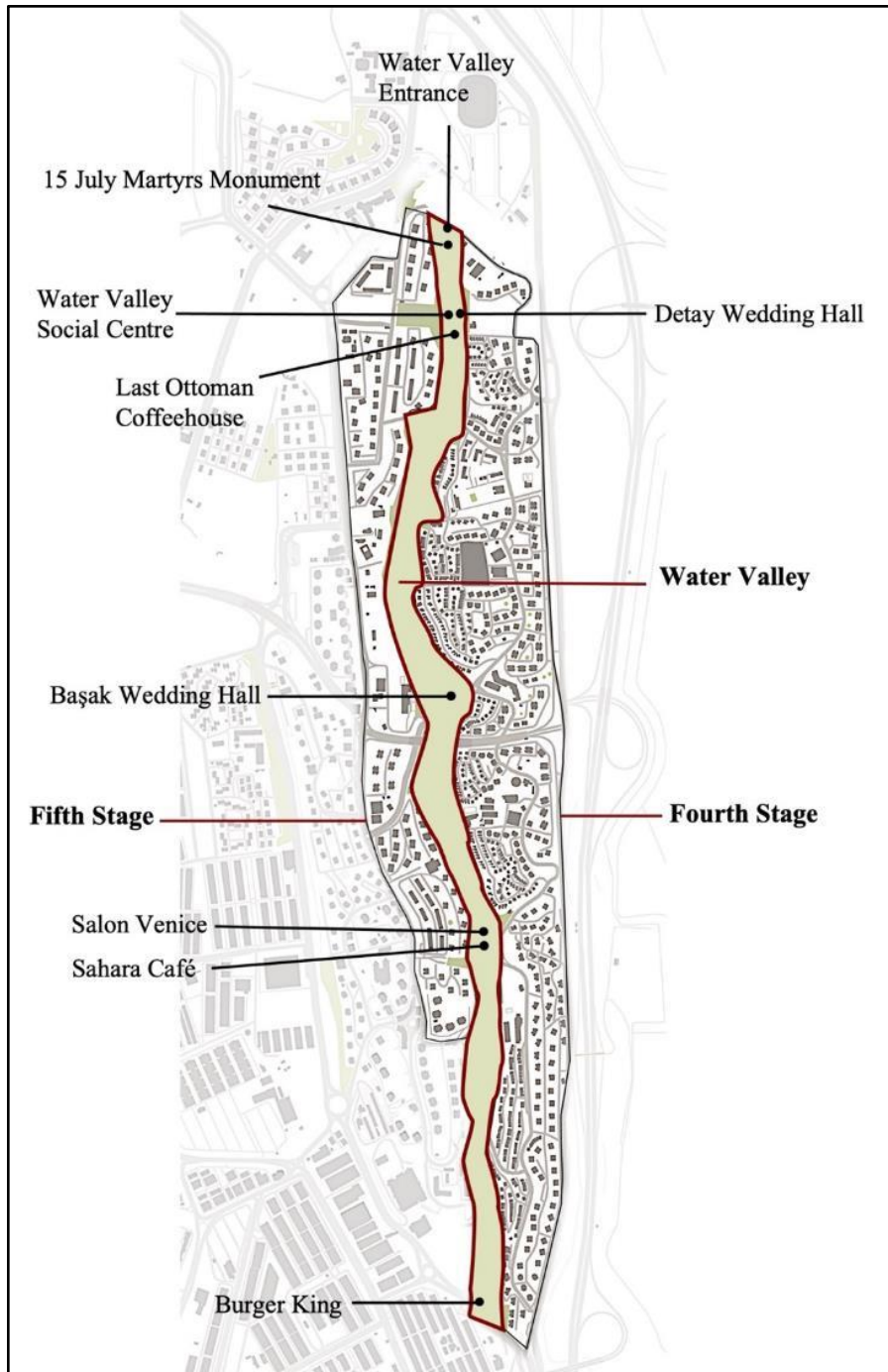


Figure 47: A detailed map of the Water Valley, showcasing the locations of private venues.
Source: Map created by the author.

In the Water Valley, water is used as a design element in a variety of ways, that resembles the use of water channels and pools in Ottoman gardens.²² As an urban park, the Valley exhibits a wide variety of tropical plants that are mostly not native to Türkiye's climate. It features bridges, sloping hills, and walkways that span the entire site and merge at some points, playgrounds, fitness areas, playfields, skateparks, reflection pools and artificial waterways. Commercial facilities include restaurants, coffeehouses, *nargile* cafés, and wedding halls. In addition, five different mosques exist within and around the park.

A huge gate on the northern boundary of the park marks the entrance of the Valley. Inside the park, the 15 July Martyrs Monument commemorating the victim-heroes of the coup attempt of 2016 welcomes the Valley's visitors.²³ Although the Monument was not a part of the initial design of the Valley implemented in 2008, it found its place in the site's contest of images and architectural elements. Başakşehir Municipality erected it in July 2018, on the second anniversary of the coup attempt.

The Monument symbolizes the incident. The iron tank tracks represent the aggressor force which hits the concrete wall of the national will and is broken. This composition represents "the glorious resistance of the veterans and martyrs against the traitors," as indicated on the

²² Gülhan Benli, "The Use of Courtyards and Open Areas in the Ottoman Period in İstanbul," in *Advances in Landscape Architecture*, ed. Murat Özyavuz, 2013, 814.

²³ On the night of 15 July 2016, military units deployed to a variety of public spaces and government institutions in Ankara and Istanbul, declaring military law and attempting to detain government officials. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, prime minister Binali Yıldırım, and other members of the military command forcefully denounced the coup attempt, with Erdoğan famously addressing the public via FaceTime on the cable channel CNN Türk. After the coup attempt's failure, the government declared a state of emergency and began a project of identifying and prosecuting those who carried out or supported the coup, a project that focused on the movement associated with the community leader Fethullah Gülen.

Municipality’s website.²⁴ Two Turkish flags and one white flag written “15 July 2016” are on the top of the wall. A black marble wall bears the names of 251 martyrs on metal plates. The bottom of the wall is ornamented with a relief surface covered with red poppies, symbolizing sorrow and death. A plastic surface in the form of a waving Turkish flag is attached to the back of the marble wall.

²⁴ “Başakşehir 15 Temmuz Şehitler Aniti,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-15-temmuz-sehitler-aniti>.



Figure 48: Views of the 15 July Martyrs Monument. The Monument with a broken tank tracks symbolizing the enemies of the nation, a concrete wall as an abstracted expression of the nation standing against the enemies, and Turkish flags on the top of the wall. Behind the tank, metal plates with the martyrs' names are hung on a marble wall.

An overview of the AKP's use of symbolic politics and instrumentalization of urban spaces as a medium for continuously producing these politics, especially in the last decade, helps us analyze the Monument. Since 2002, the AKP government has persistently sought to shift the focus of Türkiye's official historical narrative from the Republican era to the Ottoman past. As they were seeking new symbolic imagery and narratives to fuel their Islamist nation-building efforts, the 15 July 2016 coup attempt was a historical moment. It helped the AKP develop a new visual grammar of power and expand their verbal and visual repertoire to enhance political discourses.

The narrated history and memories of the coup attempt have been disseminated in public speeches, TV programs, newspapers, and school textbooks; the images of the night have been circulated through various media from web pages to billboards in the most crowded public spaces and eye-catching murals on buildings. The incidents and stories of the night have been visualized through spatial reminders, such as statues of the heroes and other commemorative monuments.²⁵ The ruling actors have instrumentalized the public resistance to the coup attempt as “a vast repertoire of images” to construct their portrayal of the envisioned “new Türkiye.”²⁶ Timur Hammond highlights that despite its recent occurrence, the attempt has swiftly ascended to a level of historical significance comparable to Türkiye's fight for independence following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.²⁷

²⁵ Political discourse is embedded in landscape in various ways, including monuments. Regarding Benedict Anderson's thesis that nations are imagined political communities, public monuments are the spatial articulations of nationalist political discourses. They are the tools for the expression of how class, 'race', and gender differences are negotiated in public space. Nuala Johnson, “Cast in Stone: Monuments, Geography, and Nationalism,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13, no. 1 (February 1, 1995): 51–65; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

²⁶ Timur Hammond, “Making Memorial Publics: Media, Monuments, and the Politics of Commemoration Following Turkey's July 2016 Coup Attempt,” *Geographical Review* 110, no. 4 (2020): 541.

²⁷ Timur Hammond, “The Politics of Perspective: Subjects, Exhibits, and Spectacle in Taksim Square, Istanbul,” *Urban Geography* 40, no. 7 (2019): 1043.

The construction of monuments in urban contexts is not simply a contested commemorative practice staged in public space but a claim for a place through which identities and imaginaries are articulated and performed at multiple scales.²⁸ As Alev Çınar states, the construction of monuments is one of the vital means through which the national ideology finds material presence and authority in public life. The placement of such urban objects enables the organisation and reconstitution of public life around national norms, thereby “nationalizing the public sphere.”²⁹ The night of 15 July became the symbolic founding moment of this new vision, which had already been in the making. In this sense, the 15 July Martyrs Monument at the entrance of the Water Valley is one of those symbolic objects in urban space that functions as a reminder of a designated and re-written history for the community in the town.

Today, the Monument is a site for annual commemoration ceremonies during which state and governmental actors and martyr families and veterans meet. Besides the speeches of the senior administrative officials on themes of heroism and patriotism, the municipality organises Qur’anic recitations and *ilahiler* (hymns) around the Monument. These meetings and some political actors’ visits to the Monument with the agents of visual and written media enable regular re-writing of the history of the incident to suit the political agenda. As Katharyne Mitchell indicates, “the repetition engaged in commemorative events and rituals is crucial in blurring the differences between individual interpretations of events, and creating a single, highly idealized, composite image,” that lays the groundwork for future recollections.³⁰ As time passes, individual memories often align with this collective framework. Hence, the 15 July Martyrs Monument is a

²⁸ Hammond, “Making Memorial Publics,” 538.

²⁹ Çınar, “Cities, Squares and Statues,” 100.

³⁰ Katharyne Mitchell, “Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory,” *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5 (2003): 443.

space of remembrance that evokes some memories through repeating commemorative events and rituals for building an imagined community.

Starting from the ceremonial entrance of the Valley, a walking trail goes directly to the Water Valley Social Centre—a hemisphere-shaped building resembling a spaceship with its dome roof, glass openings, radial steel beams, and aluminum panels covering its façade. During the first years of the Water Valley, the Social Centre building served as a coffeehouse named Uzay Kafe (Space Coffeehouse), run by a private company. The district municipality transformed the building’s design, added some new interior spaces, and turned it into a municipal wedding hall in 2014. The municipality presents the new wedding hall building to the Başakşehir people as “a unique composition of Turkish-Islamic architecture and modern architecture” on its website, referring to the use of gold and velvet details as “Turkish-Islamic” and the spaceship-like appearance of the building as “modern.”³¹ The small domed pavilion across the entrance of the building mimics the design of *köşk* (kiosk) buildings in Islamic architecture for the wedding car to be parked during the ceremony.³² The building stands like an island, encircled by a large pool and adorned with tropical plants imported from around the world.

This architecturally uncanny and undefinable building is undoubtedly the most recognizable space in the Valley. It features prominently in nearly every image that the Başakşehir Municipality posts while sharing news about the Valley, advertising events taking place there, or promoting the district’s green public spaces. For the municipal authorities, the grandiosity and

³¹ Başakşehir Belediyesi, “2014 Faaliyet Raporu,” 2014, 93, http://www.sp.gov.tr/upload/xSPRapor/files/kf2zQ+Başakşehir_2014_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf.

³² The term “köşk” in Turkish translates as “kiosk” in English. In Islamic architecture, a kiosk refers to an open circular pavilion consisting of a roof supported by pillars. “Kiosk,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/kiosk-landscape-architecture>.

conspicuousness of the structure matter more than its beauty or functionality. What matters most is the visibility of its existence, rather than its mere existence.



Figure 49: A view of the two neighbouring wedding halls in the Water Valley from above. Source: Photograph retrieved from KİPTAŞ. On the right side of the photograph, the municipal wedding hall—the spaceship-like building—stands surrounded by a large reflection pool. On the left side is a private wedding hall with a timber roof. There is no coherence or unity between these two buildings other than their circular forms.

Adjacent to the Social Centre, the Detay Wedding Hall is a circular, two-story pavilion with a timber roof that bears a resemblance to the tiered pagoda roofs commonly seen in wood structures across Southeast Asia. A private entity leases the building from the district municipality and runs it as a coffeehouse. It houses celebrations such as wedding parties, engagement ceremonies, or circumcision feasts. A vacated open-air coffeehouse area named Son

Osmanlı (The Last Ottoman) stands nearby. A circular wooden canopy on the top of a concrete cylinder creates a shady spot occupied by café tables in the summertime. On its signboard, a painting depicts an Ottoman coffeehouse with a group of men in traditional clothing who smoke from a *nargile*. In a small kiosk inside the cylinder, food, beverages, and *nargile* were prepared. Today, the coffeehouse is permanently closed, looking like a ghost space.



Figure 50: The photographs of the Last Ottoman Coffeehouse in the Water Valley. Source: The photograph above is retrieved from KİPTAŞ. The photograph on the top shows the Coffeehouse when it was open and run by a private enterprise. As shown on the visual menu hung from the eaves, the coffeehouse served *nargile*, *semaver* (tea-urn), Turkish coffee, and snacks. Even in this photo taken when the cafeteria was still int service, it was a flimsy structure with old and battered fences and furniture. The photograph below shows the condition of the structure after the coffeehouse closed.



Figure 51: The photograph of a bench under the wooden roof of the Last Ottoman Coffeehouse. The bench was perhaps moved from another corner of the Valley by someone who needed shelter from the sun on a hot summer day. Above the bench is a painting depicting an old Ottoman coffeehouse with a group of men in traditional clothing, smoking *nargile*. On the right of the painting, is an Ottoman tughra (a calligraphic signature) of Sultan Abdulhamid II, who is accepted as the “last Ottoman” sultan by some Islamist and nationalist groups in Türkiye though he was not the last dynast.

Başak Salon, another entertainment venue in the area, is a glass-domed building surrounded by a row of arched openings—PVC windows and doors—mimicking Ottoman arcades recessed into the ground level. The building houses wedding, engagement, and circumcision celebrations. Unlike other entertainment venues in the park, the ground floor is used only by men, while women use the upper floor due to religious concerns. Personnel of the same sex serve in these spaces. Some residents see Başak Salon as superior to other places in the Water Valley due to the organisation of the space regarding their “Islamic sensitivities.”³³

³³ Reza (Resident), In Person, June 20, 2019.



Figure 52: Images of Başak Wedding Hall. The photograph above shows another glass-domed structure along the Valley, with arched PVC openings, the Başak Wedding Hall. As seen in the photograph below, the building has two separate entrances for men and women guests.

Along the walking trail are two buildings KİPTAŞ built as part of the initial conceptual plan for the Water Valley. The municipality leased them to private enterprises. Salon Venedik, another wedding hall on the site, named after the city of Venice, features a steel-framed glass dome structure and serves as a dining hall for celebratory gatherings. Sahra Café is a single-floor, membrane-covered place surrounded by a large pool, seemingly inspired by tent structures found in the Sahara Desert, as its name suggests. The coffeehouse offers food, beverage, and *nargile*.

Among many other restaurants, teahouses, and *nargile* cafés, and the aforementioned ceremony spaces for wedding, engagement, and circumcision celebrations on the hillsides of the Valley, a circular two-floor building surrounded by a pool is remarkable. This building, though not necessarily the most visually striking, is notably thought-provoking due to the ideological implications it carries. While the upper floor is run as a dining hall by a private company, the ground floor serves as a Burger King Restaurant.



Figure 53: A distant view of Burger King restaurant in the Water Valley. Source: Photograph retrieved from KİPTAŞ. Highrise apartment blocks of the fourth stage oriented toward the Valley and a mosque are seen in the background.

At the time when the Başakşehir Project was imagined in the early 1990s, Necmettin Erbakan, the then leader of the Islamist RP and the father of the idea of an Islamist community in Istanbul, held a hostile stance against American products and brands.³⁴ Erbakan and his followers were then boycotting American and Israeli products due to the Israel-Palestine conflict, which they regarded as Jewish political persecution of Muslims, to cut off the financial sources of Israel and America—as the most powerful ally of Israel. Although many other chain restaurants, cafes, and

³⁴ The Islamist *movement*, named Milli Görüş (*National Outlook*), embraced a set of aspiring yet ambiguous references to the Ottoman past and directed criticism against cosmopolitanism as opposed to the national. The movement supported a statist developmentalism and Islamist lifestyle and espoused a discourse of new economic and social order based on “national” as opposed to Western principles. It was infused with anti-Western concepts and inundated with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

department stores within the district today, Burger King was the first American firm in Başakşehir when it opened in 2008. The partaking of a popular American fast-food brand in the first public space of the district, regarded as political Islam's earliest footprint in Istanbul, is another indicator of the transformation of the Islamism, its actors, their relationship with capital and capitalists from the 1970 to the 2000s, and the traces of all these transformations in the built environment.

The competing concepts, notions, ideas, and ideology embedded in the space and the architectural cacophony of the Valley resemble a nation-themed miniature park or a world exhibition park from anywhere around the world. As Ipek Türeli indicates, nation-themed miniature parks combine the “authentic” reproductions of symbolic architectural objects from a particular context.³⁵ These parks provide a setting for expressing/experiencing national identities in a context-less place where the assumed elements of these identities are “frozen in time.”³⁶ The built environment of a specific setting is replicated by adopting the spatial techniques of “simulation” and “miniaturization.”³⁷ However, the Water Valley is neither a nation-themed miniature park nor a world exhibition intended to display countries' spatial vocabularies and national identities, but an open-air public space for spending leisure time. The visual and semantic complexity created in the Valley is not a result of a curator's composition. It is an outcome of the urge of politicians, private companies, and investors to be in the limelight by building the “biggest” and “greenest” public spaces of the city, featuring showy buildings, symbolic spaces, and imageries with overt and covert messages. KİPTAŞ imagined the Water

³⁵ Ipek Türeli, *Istanbul, Open City: Exhibiting Anxieties of Urban Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 110–11.

³⁶ Türeli, 112.

³⁷ Türeli, 110–11.

Valley, the first public space of Başakşehir, to be attention-grabbing, recognizable, desirable, Islamic, local, and global (even “Western” at times—to imply a “modern” atmosphere) all at the same time.³⁸

In the Valley, the builders and managers effectively establish a distinct and captivating presence in the urban fabric by incorporating architectural elements from diverse design vocabularies, avoiding direct imitation of original styles while drawing resemblance to them. This pursuit of uniqueness and societal attention aligns with the foundational motives behind the initial Başakşehir Housing Project, establishment of infrastructure and development of the Başakşehir and Başak neighbourhoods encompassing different stages of the housing project, and the emergence of new projects and settlements surrounding these neighbourhoods over time, which symbolize the rise and progression of an Islamist settlement in Istanbul.

Water Valley as a venue for collective events

Besides all the municipality-operated and private spaces for commercial leisure activities, the Valley houses the social and cultural activities that Başakşehir Municipality arranges for the Başakşehir community. The most remarkable of these events is the annual collective

³⁸ Despite the variety of public and private services along the Water Valley, the occasions these venues host are limited to specific traditional rituals such as weddings, engagements, and circumcision ceremonies. The services offered in the municipal and privately run commercial spaces cater to conservative lifestyle in the district. The cafes and restaurants mainly serve *nargile* and non-alcoholic beverages. For the last two decades, in line with the increasing Arabic influence in cities, especially where the immigrant population from Arabic countries is high, these cafes serve as the new entertainment spaces for the conservative youth, to whom, sitting in a coffeehouse with friends and smoking *nargile* substitutes for drinking alcohol. Hence, *nargile* plays a crucial role in traditional entertainment culture, and the spaces of leisure in Başakşehir have not been indifferent to it.

free *iftar* (fast-breaking) dinners and night feasts organised in Ramadan. During Ramadan, the Water Valley becomes a prominent festival place, dominated aurally by an ethereal sound from reed flute and by prayers. A dinner table of five kilometres long seats thirty thousand people. In each annual activity report, the district municipality summarizes its public services during the year, describes how the municipality spent the effort and money during the previous year, and emphasizes the significance of the Ramadan festivities for the community in Başakşehir.³⁹ Pro-government newspapers report the news of these Ramadan festivities and describe the event as the “largest” iftar held in the country.⁴⁰

³⁹ Başakşehir Belediyesi, “2010 Faaliyet Raporu,” 2010, https://www.Basaksehir.bel.tr/Content/files/stratejik-yonetim/Faaliyet_Raporlari/2010_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf; Başakşehir Belediyesi, “2013 Faaliyet Raporu,” 2013, https://www.Basaksehir.bel.tr/Content/files/stratejik-yonetim/Faaliyet_Raporlari/2013_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf; Başakşehir Belediyesi, “2015 Faaliyet Raporu,” 2015, https://www.Basaksehir.bel.tr/Content/files/stratejik-yonetim/Faaliyet_Raporlari/2015_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf; Başakşehir Belediyesi, “2017 Faaliyet Raporu,” 2017, https://www.Basaksehir.bel.tr/Content/files/stratejik-yonetim/Faaliyet_Raporlari/2017_Faaliyet_Raporu.pdf.

⁴⁰ “On Binler Sular Vadisi’nde İftar Açtı,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, June 25, 2018, <https://www.basaksehir.bel.tr/on-binler-sular-vadisinde-iftar-acti>; “Türkiye’nin En Büyük İftar Sofrası Sular Vadisi’nde Kuruldu,” *Milliyet*, June 26, 2016, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/istanbul/turkiye-nin-en-buyuk-iftar-sofrasi-sular-vadisi-nde-kuruldu-11443877>; “Türkiye’nin En Büyük Sokak İftarı Sular Vadisi’nde Kurulacak,” CNN Türk, May 28, 2017, <https://www.cnnturk.com/ramazan/turkiyenin-en-buyuk-sokak-iftari-sular-vadisinde-kurulacak>.



Figure 54: The photograph shows the collective *iftar* (fast-breaking) dinner organised by the Başakşehir Municipality. Source: Photograph retrieved from Başakşehir Municipality. The five-kilometre-long table along the Water Valley and the crowds breaking their fast are seen. Some groups of people also have their meals on the grass area.

Alongside these communal dinners, the municipality arranges *sahur* (late night meal) events, collective prayer sessions, Qur'an recitations, *ilahi* (hymn) concerts, Islamic poetry recitations, *sema* dances (Sufi whirling ceremonies), and children's theatre plays. It organises Islam-themed exhibitions along the walking trail in the Water Valley, including the display of Qur'an verses embroidered on fabric, a collection of drawings rendering the Prophet Mohammed's hadiths, and a collection of caricatures depicting the conflict between the Muslims and Jews in Palestine.⁴¹ The municipality places temporary kiosks where religious books,

⁴¹ "İple yazılan ilk Kur'an," *Yeni Akit*, July 9, 2014, <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/iple-yazilan-ilk-kuran-23362.html>; "Çizginin ustadı Hasan Aycin Başakşehir'de," *Yeni Akit*, July 17, 2014, <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/cizginin-ustadi-hasan-aycin-Basaksehirde-24230.html>; "Sular Vadisinde Filistin Karikatür Sergisi," *Başakşehir Rehberi*, August 15, 2011, <http://www.Basaksehirrehberi.com/icerik/15715-sular-vadisinde-filistin-karikatur-sergisi>.

accessories, decorative articles, ice cream, and beverages are sold. These turn the urban space into an Islamic showcase and a space of consumption.

The collective events held in the Water Valley are not limited to the month of Ramadan. Occasional circumcision festivals and mass weddings organised according to religious rituals also take place in the Valley. Moreover, the Platform of the Non-Governmental Organisations in Başakşehir organises *mehter takımı* (Ottoman military band) performances, pious poetry nights, folk dance performances, lectures by religious scholars, historical plays, and kite festivals for children.⁴²

The Water Valley, though not as popular as it once was, is visited by many people living in the nearby housing blocks, especially in the evenings depending on the weather. Özge, a resident of the fourth stage, says the Valley is one of the unique relaxation spaces of the district, so she goes there for a walk on weekends with her family. While she expresses discontent with the growing conservatism, changing resident profile, and increasing crime rate—particularly drug abuse—in the district, she appreciates living close to the Water Valley as “one of the last breathing spaces of Istanbul.”⁴³ Likewise, one of the neighbourhood mukhtars describes the Valley as a reason for living in Başakşehir, mentioning how each empty spot in the city of Istanbul is zoned for construction and how rare the green public spaces like the Valley left in the city.⁴⁴ Another neighbourhood mukhtar says it is not possible to find such a large park in the midst of a residential settlement even in the most popular cities in Europe and the United States, comparing

⁴² “Sular Vadisi Kültür Etkinlikleri 2” (Başakşehir Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları Platformu, 2010); “Sular Vadisi Kültür Etkinlikleri 3” (Başakşehir Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları Platformu, 2011).

⁴³ Özge (Resident), interview.

⁴⁴ Derviş (Mukhtar), interview.

Central Park of New York City with the Water Valley of Başakşehir at the end of his speech.⁴⁵

Conversely, some residents like Ceyda express nostalgia for the Valley's earlier years and dissatisfaction with the park's current management. Ceyda also critiques the evolving visitor profile, describing them as individuals who lack proper behaviour in public spaces.⁴⁶

Economic aspects of the Water Valley

In addition to housing walking tracks, urban gardens, ceremonial spaces for organised meetings, and stages for state's ideological manifestations, along with facilitating commercial activities, the Water Valley has also played a significant role in boosting land value, especially so during its early period. When KİPTAŞ decided to construct the fourth and fifth stages mainly for upper-income residents, the construction of a green corridor with various public facilities was already settled. Then, the apartment blocks in both stages and particularly the villas in the fourth stage were placed so their residents could see the scenery of the Valley.⁴⁷ As Cahit, a real estate agent in the district, indicates, the proximity of the apartments and villas in the fourth and fifth stages and their view to the Water Valley became a factor for KİPTAŞ in determining the rental and sale prices of these housing units.⁴⁸

After the completion of the Water Valley, KİPTAŞ transferred its control to the district municipality, and contracted management of the retail spaces to private entities. In this way, while the project increased the real estate prices even before its construction, and the catering

⁴⁵ Necmi (Mukhtar), interview.

⁴⁶ Ceyda (Resident), interview.

⁴⁷ İsmail (KİPTAŞ manager), interview.

⁴⁸ Cahit (Real estate agent), In Person, May 14, 2019.

spaces surrounding the green strip generated more commercial activities in addition to the coffeehouses, teahouses, wedding halls, and restaurants along the Water Valley. The commercial places in the park, most of which were not included in the initial site plan, were constructed in the later stages. In this sense, regarding the role of this public park in the rise of the land values of the district—particularly the apartment prices in the fourth and fifth stages of the Başakşehir Housing Project, the Water Valley is the earliest example in the district where the financialization of public spaces has increased in later years. This concept does not suggest that the public space itself is commodified, for example, transformed into a commodity that can be bought or sold for profit. Instead, it denotes that the very existence and state of such a public space can influence the financial value of the surrounding private properties.

The Water Valley has lost its popularity over time since its opening in 2008. As a consequence of the authorities' disregard of the physical space (with neglected ponds, grass areas, trees, park furniture, and walking paths), the Valley has become a shadow of its former self. In response to the shifts in Başakşehir's societal landscape, fluctuations in its economic conditions, and the transformation of its spatial characteristics, the ruling politicians and allied private companies decided to build new centres of attraction around the developing parts of the district, for the new upper-income residents. In this sense, the municipal and financial actors have shifted their attention (with regard to municipal services, maintenance, organisation of symbolic political and religious meetings, community events, commercial activities) to these new centres of attraction.

As the influence of neoliberal Islamism in various spheres of society has kept increasing, the politicians, municipalities, and financial actors of the time have sought new spaces for community (re)building, display of political power in the built environment, as well as for

monetary benefits. The Water Valley, as the first public space of Başakşehir, has lost its vibrancy and audience. In response, new alternatives, such as the new Nation's Garden and the Town Square projects in Kayaşehir neighbourhood have emerged.

4.2.b. Başakşehir Millet Bahçesi (Nation's Garden)

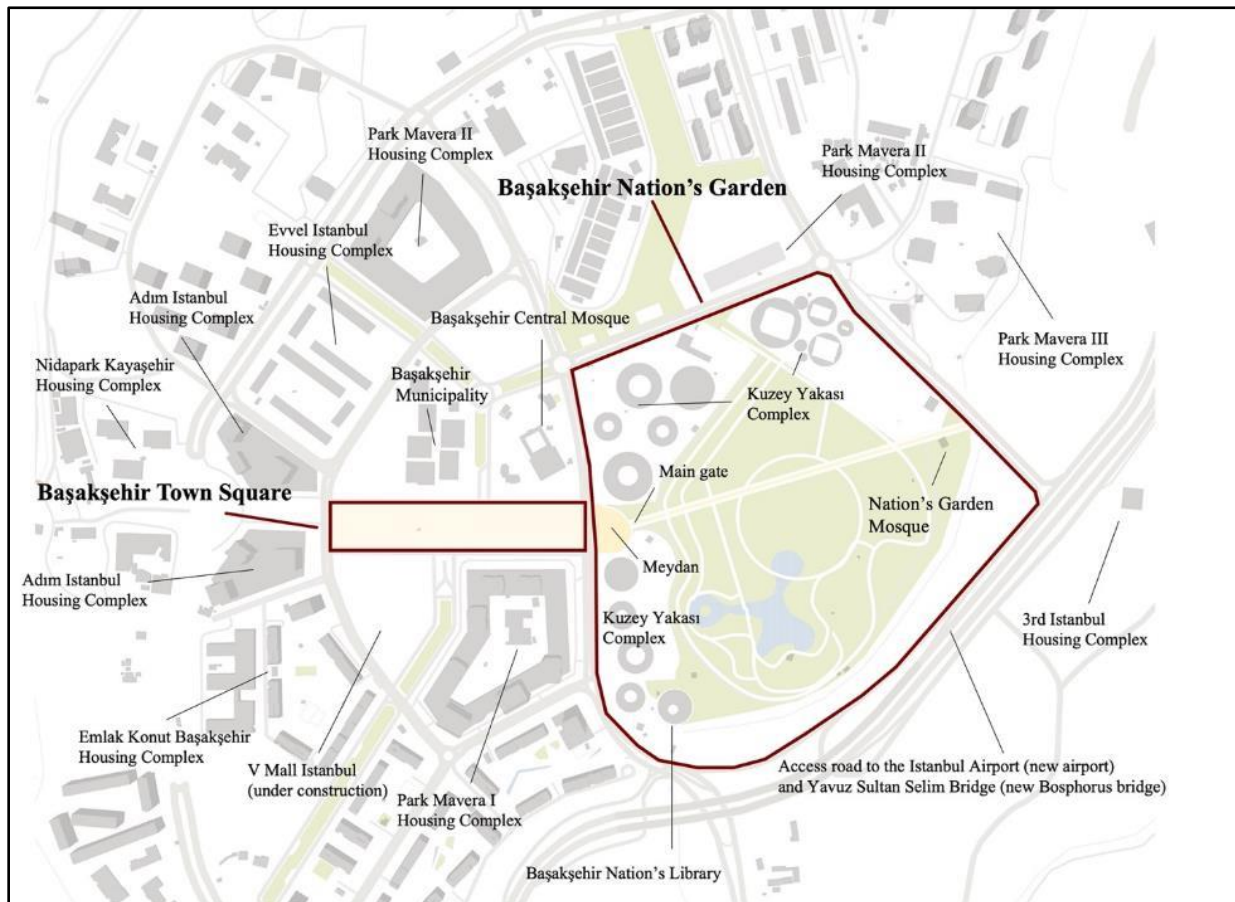


Figure 55: A map highlighting the Nation's Garden, the Town Square, surrounding private housing complexes, and public spaces. Source: Google Maps image modified by the author.

Başakşehir Nation's Garden is one of the newest public spaces built in Başakşehir. It covers approximately 360 thousand square metres of land in Kayaşehir neighbourhood, configured as

the “new heart” of the district. The Garden is located at a developing residential and business area, close to the northern peripheries of Başakşehir, where numerous housing and office projects have risen recently. A promenade starting on the western edge of the Garden ends at another gate in the east aligned with the entrance of the Town Square and the Central Mosque across the road. The Garden includes thematic playgrounds, trees, flower gardens, benches, pergolas, a small mosque (notwithstanding the proximity of the newly constructed Central Mosque), walking and bicycle trails, a large green space, and an artificial lake with several wooden bridges. A monumental gate on the west border and a small *meydan* just before the entrance are connected to the main promenade, which crosses the Garden in a straight line.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ A *meydan* refers to an open public space, mostly found in the center of a town or city, often used for gatherings, events, or as a focal point for social activities.



Figure 56: The monumental entrance of the Nation's Garden and one of the buildings of the Kuzey Yakası Project.

The Başakşehir Nation's Garden was constructed in the scope of a larger project. Shortly before the presidential and national elections held in June 2018, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced his government was planning to build new urban parks throughout the country. He called them *millet bahçeleri* (nation's gardens), referring to the nineteenth-century Ottoman nation's gardens as a model of modernity, sidestepping the country's republican history.⁵⁰ Successive speeches by Erdoğan, and other government officials emphasized the significance of the nation's gardens for cities and described their features and spatial qualities.

⁵⁰ Berin Gölönü, "From Graveyards to the 'People's Gardens': The Making of Public Leisure Space in Istanbul," in *Commoning the City* (Routledge, 2020), 105.

In May 2020, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change prepared a guidebook on the project. The guidebook explained what a nation’s garden means by revisiting a reconstructed history of the notion with a strong emphasis on projects from the Ottoman Empire and only a few sentences about gardens from the republican period.⁵¹ The guidebook provided a general framework for local governments to consider the suggested principles, spatial qualities, infrastructural properties, and landscape design in the process of the design and construction of gardens—although it was already fourteen months after the declaration of the project. At that time, several gardens had already been constructed.



Figure 57: A snapshot from the Başakşehir Nation’s Garden. The Garden is surrounded by numerous upper scale housing developments, new business centres and the new Central Mosque. The Garden sees sparse daytime visitors, possibly due to limited tree cover for shelter and haphazard bench placement—despite being the focal point of surrounding developments.

⁵¹ “Millet Bahçeleri Rehberi” (T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, 2020), <https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/db/mpgm/editordosya/milletbahcesirehber.pdf>.

According to this guidebook, the use of some design elements such as landscape (trees, flowers, walking and bicycle trails, and lakes), architectural structures (squares, monuments, exhibition areas, benches, pergolas, teahouses, mosques, and nation’s libraries), playgrounds for children and sports arenas for the young are specified. In this sense, the government institutions have determined a standard design concept for all the nation’s gardens without regard or mention of local needs, community dynamics, urban planning principles, green and built space ratio, or possible land speculations of the site. The political authorities regarded and imagined the gardens as generic spaces to fit anywhere desired, ignoring the unique characteristics of each context.

In the scope of the “100-day action plan” announced by Erdoğan in his election campaign, the Emlak Konut REIT constructed the first five gardens in a short period. Three of the first five gardens were in Başakşehir: the Hoşdere Nation’s Garden, the Kayaşehir Nation’s Garden, and the Başakşehir Nation’s Garden, where a mass opening ceremony was held in November 2018. The completion of the first five gardens was symbolically celebrated, with the attendance of President Erdoğan and several state and government officers. Before cutting the opening ribbon with President Erdoğan, the Head of Türkiye’s Directorate of Religious Affairs delivered a prayer.⁵²

Erdoğan gave a speech at the opening ceremony in which he emphasized his goal of creating “greener cities” and stressed the number of trees his government had recently planted in Istanbul. He called out environmental activists who complain about the depletion of green spaces in cities—especially pointing out the protestors of Gezi Park in 2013—to come to the new nation’s

⁵² “Milletin Adamı, Milletin Bahçelerini Başakşehir’de Hizmete Açtı.,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, November 17, 2018, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/milletin-adami-milletin-bahcelerini-hizmete-acti>.

parks and see what “true environmentalism” means.⁵³ As an attempt to improve his public image, domestically and internationally, Erdoğan made room for the issues of environmentalism and green cities in his political discourse. Erdoğan depicted these new urban parks as initiatives purely aimed at increasing green spaces in cities for the common good.

The total green area in the Garden is indicated on media platforms as 280 thousand square metres, the pools as fifteen thousand square metres, and the flower gardens as thirty thousand square metres.⁵⁴ The highlighted statistics about the Garden are not limited to its size. The accolades for the project continue with a point about the greatness of the green areas, pools, and flower gardens; the number of landscape elements; the capacity of the parking lots; and even the number of litter bins. The quantity of the things and services provided to the public displaces their quality in the political discourse of the political leadership. The users’ experience of any public space, particularly an urban garden, is linked to their encounters with bodies, things, and spaces—instead of the size, length, or the number of the things that surround these bodies, things, and spaces. Here there is an imbalance between the official emphasis on quantitative properties and the Garden’s spatial qualities.

Despite similar intentions of staging state power and political ideals and building new identities for communities, the AKP’s nation’s gardens project differs from the public green spaces of the

⁵³ “İstanbul’da 5 Millet Bahçesi Hizmete Açıldı,” *Yeni Şafak*, November 17, 2018, <https://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/istanbulda-5-millet-bahcesi-hizmete-aciliyor-3409444>.

⁵⁴ See the Başakşehir Municipality promotional video and the newspaper reports by several pro-government agencies: *Başakşehir Millet Bahçesi’nde Hazırlıklar Son Aşamaya Geldi*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3pmVQvjAPk&ab_channel=Ba%C5%9Fak%C5%9FehirBelediyesi; Çiğdem Alyanak, “Bakan Kurum Başakşehir Millet Bahçesi’nde İnceleme Yaptı,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/bakan-kurum-basaksehir-millet-bahcesinde-inceleme-yapti/1311400>.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁵ Urban policies of the past aimed to enable modernization of state and society. In general, the planning and design features of public green spaces served as tools for spatializing the state's modernization ideals, often mirroring patterns observed in Western examples.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the builders of today's gardens praise the urban reforms of Türkiye's Ottoman and Islamist history (in promotional speeches, posters, videos, and articles on recent gardens), not because of the developmental intentions behind them, but merely because they belong to Ottoman history rather than Türkiye's republican history. This occurs somewhat ironically, as they do not provide a detailed analysis or even mention the intentions behind these reforms.

While the builders and investors have continuously stressed their achievement of bringing nature into the city life through the new parks, this Nation's Garden still fails to mimic nature. All around the vast lawn dominating the garden, benches and pergolas are placed randomly without concern for the shading of the trees, the walking trails, or other seating areas. While some areas are equipped with trees standing like soldiers on parade, other parts are left open. The lack of trees in these areas allows individuals to view each other's movements from a distance. In this way, public displays of affection, drinking alcohol, and any other behaviour that violates Islamic norms are monitored and discouraged. The public space is thus controlled by both the conservative community and local authorities.

⁵⁵ İpek Kaştas Uzun and Fatma Şenol, "Türkiye'deki Kamusal Yeşil Alanların Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Yeni 'Millet Bahçeleri,'" *Art-Sanat*, August 5, 2020, 236.

⁵⁶ Kaştas Uzun and Şenol, 236.



Figure 58: Photographs show benches placed randomly in the Nation's Garden. While the Garden was touted by politicians as evidence of their commitment to urban green spaces and used by private investors to market their housing projects due to their proximity to it, the authorities seemed to neglect its actual development after construction. Despite its promotional use during the conceptualization, construction, and inauguration phases, they did not ensure it became a vibrant and frequently used green space for the city.

Henri Lefebvre argues, while describing the duality of nature and its constructed simulations in cities, “Nature is shrinking, but the signs of nature and the natural are multiplying, replacing, and supplanting real nature. These signs are mass-produced and sold. A tree, a flower, a branch, a scent, or a word can become signs of absence: of an illusory and fictive presence.”⁵⁷ These simulations (found in generic spaces that can be created anywhere in cities) are “simply a poor substitute for nature, the degraded simulacrum of the open space characteristic of encounters, games, parks, gardens, and public squares.” While planting a few trees in an urban plaza and then marketing it as a “green space” or “nature oasis” might create a pleasant environment and bring certain benefits, Lefebvre argues that this falls short of a genuine encounter with the natural world.

In the case of the Nation’s Garden, this manufactured green space situated amidst a concrete landscape only represents nature symbolically through its landscape elements but does not offer a genuinely natural environment. Here, the genuineness of a green space would not merely hinge on the presence of trees, grass, or other natural elements. Instead, it is about how the space was created, who it serves, and what kind of interactions it fosters. In the case of the Nation’s Garden, the answers to these questions highlight the role of the ruling political and urban authorities, and their aspirations for designing and managing public spaces. The builders, the beneficiaries, the targeted public, and the Garden itself are all part of a network driven by political Islam and its continuously evolving political discourses. The interactions that occur within the park are not spontaneous or organic; rather, they are shaped by the intentions and desires of the ruling authorities.

⁵⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 27.

Besides the design decisions limiting the capacity of the public space, its durability and endurance have become a matter for complaint among users. Despite being one of the newest public spaces in the city, constructed with a high budget, the lawn was partly destroyed, some of the trees were dead, and park furniture was broken in a few years after its construction. As of 2022, the Municipality replaced the paving stones on the walking paths. The poor quality of the construction materials, and the design flaws of the landscape infrastructure suggest the park was roughly constructed in the scope of Erdoğan's "100-day action" plan and left unattended since. The Garden, like an uncooked meal, appears hastily prepared and inadequately maintained.



Figure 59: The photograph displays repair work conducted in the Nation's Garden. The photograph was taken in August 2022, merely four years after the opening of the Garden. This could potentially indicate issues with low construction quality or insufficient maintenance.

Nation's Garden as a stage for collective performances

As a platform for the political actors to manifest their ideological claims through media, the Nation's Garden hosts exhibitions, events, and collective meetings. Since the opening of the Garden in 2018, Başakşehir Municipality has organised public displays, such as a photography exhibition held during the week of November 29, the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People, in the *meydan* in front of the Garden's entrance gate in 2020 and 2021.⁵⁸ Another exhibition was named "Palestine Under Siege," with the photographs displaying the cruelty of the conflict.⁵⁹ On the exhibition's opening day, the open space was turned into a stage for the government officers, civil servants, and residents to see the others and be seen by them. This performance created the publics of the public space.

Another exhibition in the Garden featured research about the district's history, culminating in a book supported by the district municipality in 2021: *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde*

Başakşehir (Başakşehir in Ottoman Archival Documents).⁶⁰ As a collection of selected

⁵⁸ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on the agenda of Türkiye, especially during the AKP period, due to the national government's claim to position Türkiye as one of the leading and influential countries in the Muslim world. Besides its significance in Türkiye's international agenda and Erdoğan's portrayal of himself as the protector of Palestinians and the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, the Palestinian issue has also served as a symbolic rallying point within the country's internal politics—a populist emblem for Islamist groups. In this sense, exhibitions, protest meetings, and marches have been organized by non-governmental and governmental organisations, including AKP-led city municipalities.

⁵⁹ See the promotional video and newspaper reports: "Başakşehir'in kalbi Filistin için attı," *Sabah*, November 29, 2020, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/istanbul/2020/11/29/Başakşehirin-kalbi-filistin-icin-atti>; "Başakşehir'de Filistin Halkıyla Uluslararası Dayanışma Günü'ne özel sergi," *Hürriyet*, November 29, 2021, sec. Başakşehir, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/istanbul/Başakşehir/Başakşehirde-filistin-halkıyla-uluslararası-da-41949805>; "İsrail'in zulmü fotoğraf karelerinde," *Yeni Şafak*, December 1, 2021, <https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/israilin-zulmu-fotograf-karelerinde-3723868>.

⁶⁰ The book and exhibition can be read as the municipality's attempt to rewrite an urban history for Başakşehir and silence the general idea of a town in the middle of nowhere by emphasizing its past. The book was introduced to the public with an official event in the Başakşehir Nation's Library. Başakşehir Municipality also made a short promotion video about the book. See the book and the promotional news

documents from the Istanbul archives, the book traces the history of Başakşehir to thousands of years ago. The book depicts Başakşehir as the heart of civilization, enlightenment, culture, and architecture in the city of Istanbul. It even goes so far as to assert that, “City life had commenced in Başakşehir prior to any other locales in Istanbul.” The purported historical facts and evidence from the book were displayed in the frontal *meydan* of the Nation’s Garden. This transforms the public space into a secondary medium (with the book being the primary one) for exhibiting a reconstructed and rewritten history of Başakşehir.

about it: Raşit Gündoğdu and Ebul Faruk Önal, eds., *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Başakşehir* (Istanbul: Başakşehir Belediyesi, 2021); “Başakşehir’in Köklü Tarihi Gün Yüzüne Çıktı,” Başakşehir Belediyesi, Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, January 27, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-in-koklu-tarihi-gun-yuzune-cikti>.



Figure 60: The photograph shows the exhibition of the book, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Başakşehir* (Başakşehir in Ottoman Archival Documents). The exhibition was held in the small *meydan* at the entrance of the Nation's Garden in December 2020. A collection of selected official documents from the book are exhibited on display boards.

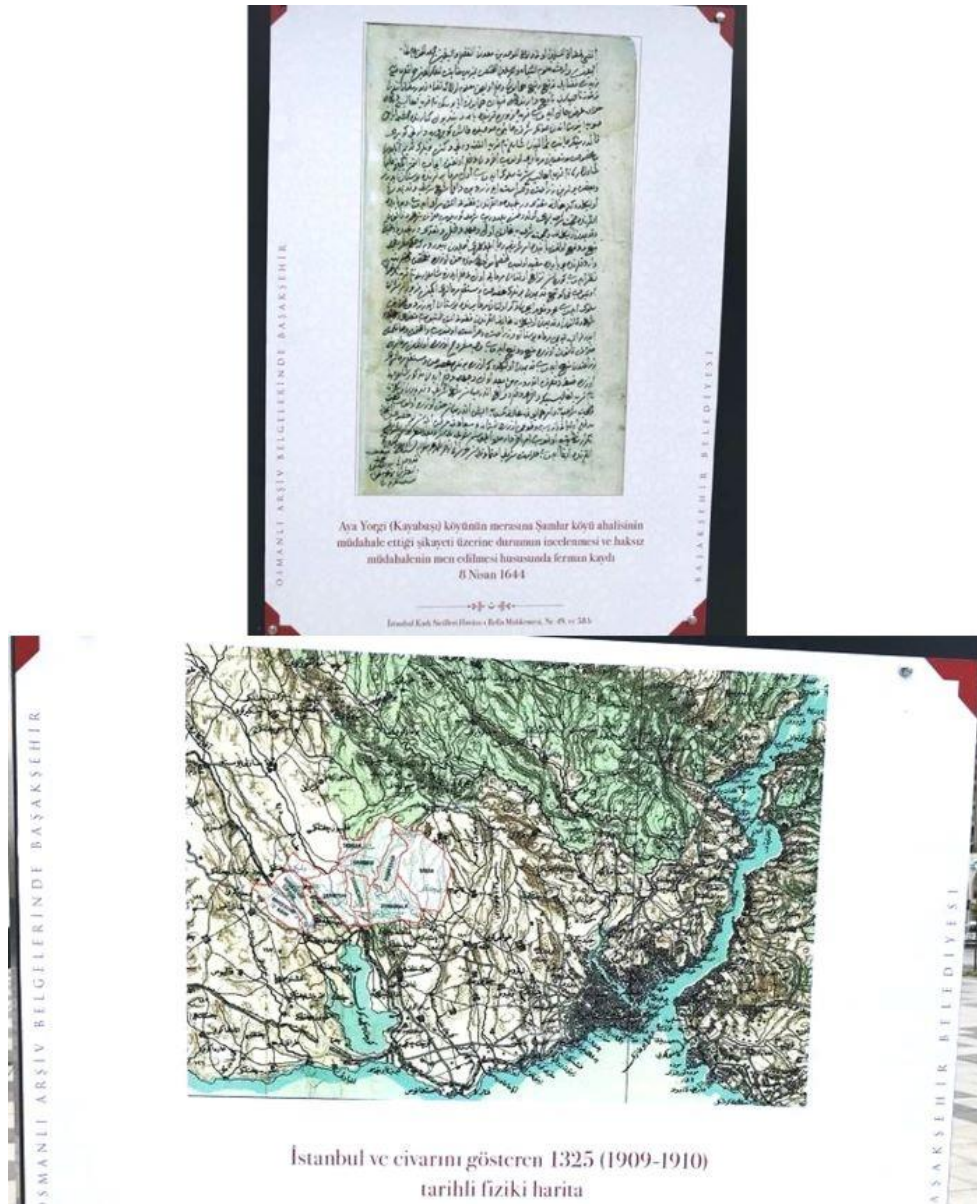


Figure 61: Two archival documents from the exhibition, *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Başakşehir* (Başakşehir in Ottoman Archival Documents), held in December 2020. The photograph above shows an imperial order from 1644 about a quarrel between the people of Kayabaşı and Şamlar villages, which were in today's Kayabaşı neighbourhood. The photograph on the left shows a partial map of Istanbul from 1909. Although the district did not exist then, the imaginary boundaries of the district and its neighbourhoods are highlighted with red lines on the map, suggesting an older history for Başakşehir than known. Despite lacking a direct link in content or context, and without a clear organizational structure in their presentation, the exhibited official documents share a common purpose. They were published and displayed with the explicit aim of tracing Başakşehir's history back thousands of years, spotlighting the district as a pivotal location in Istanbul's historical narrative.

The Garden has also been a stage for collective performances such as morning prayers during religious feasts with the attendance of state officers, government officers, and the Başakşehir community. Due to Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions on the use of interior spaces—including mosques—the Başakşehir Municipality organised open-air morning prayers on Fridays and in the *Kurban Bayramı* (Eid al-Adha) and *Ramazan Bayramı* (Eid el-Fitr) in the Başakşehir Nation's Garden in 2021, with the attendance of “thousands of people” as the Municipality emphasizes.⁶¹ The Garden has been a setting for film screenings that the Municipality organised.⁶² Moreover, the Municipality organised relatively small events Garden for Disability Awareness Week in May and Children's Day in October 2021.⁶³ As seen in these examples, besides the daily usage of residents, the Garden has been opened to public usage for events the state and municipal authorities chose and organised. The Nation's Garden hardly qualifies as a public space that influences the everyday life in the city, provides areas for social interaction and exchange of ideas, and creates and strengthens community ties; rather it is a tool for display of power and changing desires of political authorities.

⁶¹ “Başakşehir’de Açık Havada Sosyal Mesafeli Bayram Namazı,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, May 13, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-de-acik-havada-sosyal-mesafeli-bayram-namazı>; “Başakşehir’de Açık Havada Bayram Namazı Coşkusu,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, July 20, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-de-acik-havada-bayram-namazı-coskusu>.

⁶² “Başakşehir’de Açık Havada Sinema Keyfi Başladı,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, July 12, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-de-acik-havada-sinema-keyfi-basladi>.

⁶³ “Başakşehir’de Engeller Kalktı, Hayat Bayram Oldu,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, May 13, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-de-engeller-kalkti-hayat-bayram-oldu>; “Başakşehir’de Dünya Çocuk Günü Etkinliklerle Kutlandı,” Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, October 3, 2021, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-de-dunya-cocuk-gunu-etkinliklerle-kutlandi>.



Figure 62: An aerial view of the Başakşehir Nation's Garden. Source: Photographs retrieved from the Başakşehir Municipality's website, <https://www.basaksehir.bel.tr/basaksehir-de-acik-havada-sosyal-mesafeli-bayram-namazi>.

The photograph shows an open-air morning prayer held in the Garden during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. The under-designed landscape of the Garden enabled the devout to lay their prayer rugs on the lawn, orienting towards the Kaaba all in unison.

Nation's Garden as an instrument of "spatial fix"

Capital accumulation requires some capital be fixed in place. The production of public space is a useful tool for fixing investments spatially and embedding them in the land, a process known as "spatial fix."⁶⁴ Building new public spaces for common good becomes a key mechanism for fostering capital accumulation. The Nation's Garden, at the core of the new residential commercial, and recreational centre of the district, is a stage of spatial fix.

⁶⁴ David Harvey, "Globalization and the 'Spatial Fix,'" *Geographische Revue: Zeitschrift Für Literatur Und Diskussion* 3, no. 2 (2001): 23–30.

When the national government declared its nation's gardens project in 2018, it proposed new parks in cities, citing a decrease in green spaces and a need for more public parks. Following the launch of the project, several new gardens were built from scratch. However, in some cases, the builders renamed already existing parks as "nation's gardens," as if they were newly constructed, adding a few supplementary functions. In addition, in some cases, the authorities built new gardens on the lands of old city stadiums and urban parks, which had been constructed during the early republican period and protected as sites of architectural heritage. These actions suggest that the government's initiative to embellish cities with these urban parks was driven more by political and economic motives than environmental concerns.

The presence of nation's gardens, particularly those integrated into new housing developments in burgeoning urban areas, has significantly increased land values and plays a pivotal role in the site selection for construction companies.⁶⁵ Additionally, the deliberate utilization of architectural designs conveying political messages and the promotion of these gardens with reconstructed historical references underscore the notion that the nation's gardens project serves as a tool for greenwashing the ideological interests of politicians.

⁶⁵ "Millet Bahçeleri Rant Kapısı Oldu," *Cumhuriyet*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/millet-bahceleri-rant-kapisi-oldu-1042572>; Hakkı Yırtıcı, "Millet Bahçeleri: Kentin Yeşil Yamaları," *Duvar*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2019/03/14/millet-bahceleri-kentin-yesil-yamaları>; "Millet Bahçeleri Değil Rant Bahçeleri," *Birgün*, April 26, 2020, <https://www.birgun.net/haber/millet-bahceleri-degil-rant-bahceleri-298238>; "Millet Bahçeleri Rant Projelerine Yeşillik Oldu," *Birgün*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.birgun.net/haber/millet-bahceleri-rant-projelerine-yesillik-oldu-301743>; "Erdoğan 'Millet Bahçesi Olacak' Dediği Araziye 20 Kat İmar İzni Verdi," *Duvar*, October 2, 2021, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/erdogan-millet-bahcesi-olacak-dedigi-araziye-20-kat-imar-izni-verdi-haber-1537134>; İsmail Şahin, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Millet Bahçesi Olacak Dediği Araziye 20 Kat İmar İzni Verdi," *Sözcü*, October 2, 2021, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/ekonomi/millet-bahcesi-olacak-dedigi-araziye-20-kat-imar-izni-verdi-6682714/>.

In response to these contentious circumstances surrounding the nation's gardens projects, the Chamber of Architects and the Chamber of City Planners have published several press releases revealing the hidden agenda behind the government's discourse of "greening cities" through nation's gardens.⁶⁶ Furthermore, experts and scholars have criticized the government for ignoring urban design principles, disregarding the existing natural and cultural heritage of the sites, proposing contextually irrelevant architectural programs, and using these projects as land speculation tools for the benefit of pro-government construction firms.

A private construction firm, Yapı Yapı, known for its close relationships with the ruling government, constructed the Başakşehir Nation's Garden with Emlak Konut. Although the public tender act in Türkiye allows closed tenders only in the cases of natural disasters, epidemic processes, and other emergencies, the Emlak Konut invited several private companies to submit a tender for the construction of the Başakşehir Nation's Garden. In this way, the institution selected the most convenient contractor company.⁶⁷ Emlak Konut has followed the same tender

⁶⁶ "Milletin Değil Rantın Bahçesi," TMMOB Mimarlar Odası Ankara Şubesi, December 19, 2018, <http://www.mimarlarodasiankara.org/index.php?Did=9876>; "Mekan Politiktir; Millet Bahçeleri İktidar İdeolojisinin Mekansal Boyutta Yeniden Üretilmesinin Bir Aracıdır," TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası, December 14, 2018, https://www.spo.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=9597&tipi=3&sube=0; "İnşaat Yapmanın Yeşil Yolu: Millet Bahçeleri," TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası, June 18, 2020, https://www.spo.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=10173&tipi=3&sube=0; Gölönü, "From Graveyards to the 'People's Gardens'"; Orkun Aziz Aksoy, "(Public) Space as Economic, Political and Social Struggle Arena and as a Public Phenomenon: The Case of Ataköy Coast from 'Public Beach' to 'Public Garden,'" *Tasarım + Kuram* 16, no. 30 (2020): 37–60; Bülent Duru, "Türkiye'ye Özgü Bir Projenin Görünmeyen Yüzü: Millet Bahçeleri," *Mimarlık Dergisi*, 2020, <http://www.mimarlikdergisi.com/index.cfm?sayfa=mimarlik&DergiSayi=426&RecID=4960>; Kaştaş Uzun and Şenol, "Türkiye'deki Kamusal Yeşil Alanların Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Yeni 'Millet Bahçeleri,'" 232.

⁶⁷ See the article 21/b of the public tender act: "Kamu İhale Kanunu," January 4, 2002, <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.4734.pdf>.

selection process for the construction of the many other nation's gardens, disregarding the criticism published in oppositional newspapers.⁶⁸

The Garden is surrounded by public institutions, new business projects and housing developments constructed through Emlak Konut's partnerships with allied private actors such as Makro İnşaat, Akyapı, and Fuzul Yapı. Not surprisingly, the images of the Garden were published in promotional catalogues and websites for housing projects, with an emphasis on proximity to the "Nation's Garden scenery."⁶⁹ These luxury housing projects are situated on the ground in a way that they have a view to the Garden. In this sense, the visitors run across a vista of the newly rising housing development projects from any corner of the Garden. Thus, the Garden, a non-profit public project, serves both as an apparatus of "urban growth machine" to increase the values of these private housing projects and a display catalogue for watching how this "growth machine" many housing projects rising as oriented toward the Garden from its different corners.⁷⁰

The state-sponsored projects in Kayaşehir, (the Nation's Garden, the Town Square, the Central Mosque, and Kuzey Yakası) have enhanced real estate prices in the area.⁷¹ When Akyapı and Makro started the construction of the three Park Mavera housing projects in Kayaşehir (in

⁶⁸ Sinan Tartanoğlu, "Millet Değil Şirket Bahçeleri," *Cumhuriyet*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/millet-degil-sirket-bahceleri-1159198>.

⁶⁹ "Mavera Projects," Mavera Projects - Başakşehir Housing Projects, accessed December 19, 2021, <https://maveraprojects.com/en/detay/17>; "All Roads Will Lead to 3. İstanbul," 3. İstanbul Başakşehir, accessed December 19, 2021, <https://thirdistanbul.com/>.

⁷⁰ The "urban growth machine" concept, originally proposed by Harvey Molotch, highlights the role of a coalition of interest groups, all of whom benefit from a city's continuous growth and expansion. According to this concept, not only are the city and its components the focus of the growth machine, but they also become integral parts of the machine itself. Harvey Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (1976): 309–32.

⁷¹ Altan (Real estate agent), interview.

partnership with Emlak Konut REIT), the land where the Nation's Garden is located today was a vacant lot.⁷² After completing the first apartment blocks, Akyapı and Makro put the apartment units facing the vacant land on the market for around 800 thousand Turkish Liras, but received little interest from the targeted upper-income community of the district. After Emlak Konut REIT started the Garden project, on land the Housing Development Administration (Toplu Konut İdaresi, TOKİ) had bought from individual landowners at relatively low prices on the pretext of building municipal service sheds, the demand for the apartments facing the Garden increased in a short time. The companies, then, have been able to sell the apartments for twice their original launch prices.⁷³



Figure 63: The photograph shows cranes rising from the sites of new housing projects around the Garden.

⁷² Altan (Real estate agent).

⁷³ Altan (Real estate agent).

The Kuzey Yakası project by Emlak Konut REIT is located along the west side of the Garden. The complex comprises ten similar cylindrical buildings housing the Başakşehir Nation's Library, a hotel, a convention centre, a sports centre, business offices, and a few shops. By their shapes, the buildings appear to be related to the curvilinear ponds and walking paths within the Garden and the circular *meydan* at the entrance gate, making the Garden look part of a larger urban project. The site plan of the Nation's Garden, including its immediate environment, more closely resembles an open-air shopping mall—with its promenades, greenery, and flashy retail stores—than an urban park intended for public benefit. As a public space funded, constructed, managed, and controlled by an interconnected network of public and private actors, the Nation's Garden has become a platform for not only their financial gain but also their ideological displays. The public does not have a say in determining the function, spatial arrangement, or event calendar of the lived space. This lack of voice is evident in the absence of public consultation during either the pre-design or design stages of the Garden, as well as in the programming of the space. However, their choice to either attend the municipally orchestrated events or frequent the space—or not—defines its publicness.

The Başakşehir Nation's Garden serves as an example of how neoliberal Islamism has influenced the development of public spaces in the city. Its strategic location within the district, along with its proximity to major infrastructure projects and its role as a venue for pre-organised cultural and political events organised by the municipality, make the Garden an emblematic space associated with both the ideological and economic motivations of its creators. During politically charged events organised by the municipality on some occasions throughout the year, the public space appears to be frequented by politicians, government officials, members of non-governmental organisations, and residents. However, it lacks the characteristic of being an

everyday space visited by the local community in their daily lives. This can be attributed to its failure to effectively engage the surrounding community, which has been influenced by design choices regarding the arrangement and placement of landscape elements such as trees, benches, grass areas, and pedestrian paths, as well as maintenance issues.

4.3. Squares as urban stages

In contrast to the Water Valley and the Nation's Garden, which are prominent public spaces in the district developed with a politically constructed discourse of urban greening, the Town Square distinguishes itself as a non-green urban void that serves comparable purposes and achieves similar outcomes. Positioned as an urban stage surrounded by housing development projects, roads, and public buildings, the Town Square serves as another medium for displaying the ideological visions of dominant power actors and influencing the symbolic and economic significance of other projects in its vicinity.

Urban squares, in an ideal sense, are conceived as comprehensive public spaces that reflect the complex interplay of cities' societal norms, political systems of thought, and cultural trends. They function as common grounds for community members to convene, connect, and participate in a variety of pursuits, be it organised events, public protests, or individual pastimes. These open spaces provide visibility and foster a sense of belonging for individuals within the urban landscape. Ideally, they play a crucial role in promoting community cohesion, facilitating social connections, and enhancing the overall livability of cities. According to Paul Zucker, public squares are important elements of city design due to their role as open spaces for collective gathering. They take part in individuals' socialization through mutual contact and interaction,

while also providing a refuge from the chaotic nature of urban environments.⁷⁴ Furthermore, squares serve as pivotal urban focal points where everyday activities intersect with significant political events.⁷⁵

In Türkiye, urban squares have played a crucial role in the spatialization of nation-building processes and have become a setting for visibility and claiming urban space. In the early years of the Turkish Republic, new urban squares were created adjacent to administrative and government structures, serving as venues for national ceremonies. As Kezer states, these newly established squares were consistently named after the Republic (Cumhuriyet Meydanı) and adorned by a monument commemorating Atatürk and the War of Independence.⁷⁶

With the increase of urbanization after the 1950s, cities expanded uncontrollably, and city centres gradually became more and more crowded with people and cars. Political developments influenced the use of open public spaces, and public squares have become protest sites due to their historically and symbolically charged identity.⁷⁷ Not only did these squares showcase the authority of the ruling national power, but they also embodied alternative ideological perspectives that collectively formed the nation's identity. Throughout the 1970s, city squares, particularly in Ankara and Istanbul, bore witness to numerous protests and gatherings involving

⁷⁴ Paul Zucker, *Town and Square: From the Agora to the Village Green* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 1.

⁷⁵ See works of Tali Hatuka for public space and political resistance. Tali Hatuka, *The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space* (New York: University of Texas Press, 2018); Aysegul Baykan and Tali Hatuka, "Politics and Culture in the Making of Public Space: Taksim Square, 1 May 1977, Istanbul," *Planning Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (January 2010): 49–68.

⁷⁶ Zeynep Kezer, "An Imaginable Community: The Material Culture of Nation-Building in Early Republican Turkey," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, no. 3 (June 2009): 517.

⁷⁷ See for a detailed research on the politics of public squares: Ayça Köseoğlu, "Civil Protest, Urban Design, and the Transformation of Public Space in Istanbul, 1960-2013" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Montreal, McGill University, 2022).

diverse social groups, evolving into hubs of dissent. As the 1990s unfolded, people began to favour indoor leisure activities over open public spaces.⁷⁸ The neoliberal economic policies of the time and the changing cultural norms have prompted the growing number of shopping malls and the newly developed housing areas around them, contributing to the deterioration of some public squares. Nonetheless, urban squares kept their position of being the backdrop for numerous protests, from Islamist movements to broad-based demonstrations addressing issues of gender, class, ethnicity, and race. Yet, much like in other countries worldwide, public squares and various open public spaces have seen a decline in their crucial roles within urban life, be it from architectural, societal, or fiscal standpoints.

In post-2002 Türkiye, like many other components of the built environment, urban public squares have also transformed. Thanks to their openness and emptiness, public squares are the most visible medium for the expressions of urban life, the places to observe changes in the economic structures, such as the gentrification of surrounding areas or the transformation of commerce within the squares, social structures, like demographic shifts and changes in community interactions, and political structures, evident in demonstrations, protests, or the presence of symbols reflecting political power or ideology, of cities. While the role of squares in enabling a vivid urban life by providing a setting for diverse activities has gradually declined, they still stand as the spatial mediums of identity claims, nation-building and displays of state and community power processes.

⁷⁸ Murat Memluk, "Designing Urban Squares," in *Advances in Landscape Architecture*, ed. Murat Ozyavuz (InTech, 2013), 518, <http://www.intechopen.com/books/advances-in-landscape-architecture/designing-urban-squares>.

4.3.a. Başakşehir Kent Meydanı (Town Square)

Başakşehir Town Square, next to the eastern boundary of the Nation's Garden, is another public space project that Emlak Konut REIT built in the process of moving the centre of the Başakşehir district from the Başak and Başakşehir neighbourhoods to the Kayaşehir neighbourhood. It was completed in 2018.

The Square, with its narrow rectangular plan, spans approximately thirty-seven thousand square metres. However, the Municipality's websites and promotional catalogues, along with those of Emlak Konut REIT and private housing companies, tout a significantly larger figure of sixty thousand square metres. They describe it as an equipped public space, emphasizing its substantial size, high-quality design, central location, proximity to the Nation's Garden and the Nation's Library, and the added value it brings to surrounding housing projects.⁷⁹ Prior to construction, the builders and their allied companies heralded the Square as the "largest in Istanbul," surpassing even the famous Taksim Meydanı (Square). Taksim has long been associated with secular-nationalist and leftist ideology throughout the twentieth century and beyond.⁸⁰ It has become a space of resistance, and accordingly, a threat to the ruling national government, especially since the Gezi Park Resistance in 2013. Considering the emblematic significance of Taksim for society and its ideological connotations, Başakşehir Municipality's comparison of a new, empty, and nonhistorical town square in Başakşehir with Taksim Square draws attention. By aspiring to create a square that rivals Taksim in size, the builders aimed to

⁷⁹ "Başakşehir Yeni Kent Meydanı ve Başakşehir Merkez Camii," Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, January 9, 2020, <https://www.Başakşehir.bel.tr/Başakşehir-yeni-kent-meydani-ve-Başakşehir-merkez-camii>.

⁸⁰ For an analysis of the significance of Taksim Square as a public space in the history of Türkiye, see: Köseoğlu, "Civil Protest, Urban Design, and the Transformation of Public Space in Istanbul, 1960-2013."

assert their influence over urban space. Yet, drawing an analogy between these two squares in terms of their size can be interpreted as pointless. Taksim Square has never been labeled as the largest square of the city. Employing a similar approach to shaping collective memory and discourse, promotional news and videos circulated to the press portrayed the Square project as the “first planned urban square of Türkiye.”⁸¹

The Central Mosque, constructed by Emlak Konut REIT in the same period, stands in about nineteen thousand square metres on the right edge of the town square. The builders regarded the mosque as a part of the Square and preferred to mention the total area. Likewise, the public and private actors introduced the mosque, with a capacity of five thousand people, as the “largest mosque” of the district.⁸²

⁸¹ “Emlak Konut Başakşehir Yeni Merkez’de...,” *Hürriyet*, November 11, 2019, sec. advertorial, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/emlak-konut-basaksehir-yeni-merkez-de-27432483>; “‘Dev Meydan’ Talep Topluyor,” *Milliyet*, February 24, 2015, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/ekonomi/dev-meydan-talep-topluyor-2018444>; “Makro-Akyapı’dan Başakşehir Yeni Merkezde Yeni Proje,” *Yeni Akit*, February 9, 2015, <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/makro-akyapidan-basaksehir-yeni-merkezde-yeni-proje-51393.html>.

⁸² “Başakşehir Yeni Kent Meydani ve Başakşehir Merkez Camii.”



Figure 64: A view of the Başakşehir Town Square. The photograph, taken from the western boundary of the Square, features the Central Mosque on the right and the Park Mavera Housing project on the left. In the absence of events, the area appears more like an undefined, leftover space between buildings rather than a vibrant public space inviting people to gather.

The Central Mosque is one of the most dominant components of the built environment that defines a corner of the Square. The Mosque was designed to mimic the classical *selatin* mosques of the Ottoman period, of gigantic size with a large dome and smaller semi-domes, four minarets of sixty-five metres each, and smaller buildings in its courtyard for additional functions.⁸³ While the Mosque is visually attached to and promoted as a physical and social component of the Square, its large courtyard opens onto another side of the mosque, instead of the Town Square. Although there is a secondary entrance from the town square to the mosque, the Square and the Mosque's courtyard—both intended as gathering spaces—do not mesh well together.

⁸³ “Selatin mosque” is a term that refers to mosques built by Ottoman sultans, sultans’ sons, daughters, and wives, using their own budgets.



Figure 65: A view of the Başakşehir Central Mosque. The photograph is taken from the north of the mosque. It shows the main entrance gate and the front courtyard of the mosque that opens onto a pedestrian walk instead of the town square on the other side of the mosque. The Town Square, Park Mavera Housing project, and Kuzey Yakası project are seen in the background.

Mosques are the centre of social life in Muslim majority countries and act as crucial components of cities. Especially in the Ottoman era, markets and commercial districts were located around mosques, the places where social life took place. The mosque, along with its accompanying courtyard, held a paramount role as the central urban area, comparable to the agora in ancient Greek cities and the public square in medieval Western cities.⁸⁴ Similar to the function of the

⁸⁴ As Nasser Rabbat indicates, in fact, in numerous cities of antiquity that were absorbed by the expanding Islamic caliphate, such as Damascus, Antioch, Alexandria, Cordoba, and later Constantinople (Istanbul), the open space of the main congregational mosque may have actually, and probably consciously, replaced

agora, the mosque served as the hub within the city where the adult male population engaged in political activities, particularly evident on Fridays. During this day, the community would reaffirm its loyalty to its leader or express dissent through vocal responses to a standardized oath embedded within the sermon.⁸⁵ In this sense, the mosque and its courtyard was a major information and mass communication hub: news was shared and announcements were made after prayers.⁸⁶ A mosque, as Batuman indicates, is a “social site generating as well as controlling the mobilization of collective practices. As a space of not only prayer but also socialization, the mosque serves as a means of maintaining sense of community and the spatial-practical production of identities built on shared religion.”⁸⁷

Mosques continue to serve as significant places of communication, encounter, and visibility, particularly in small neighbourhoods and Anatolian towns. They have, however, lost their role as gathering places for users of busy financial and commercial districts, now neighbourhood life no longer has strong community ties. In this sense, the new Central Mosque as a place of worship attached to the Town Square—located at the heart of the new housing projects, governmental buildings, commercial stores, and business offices, has a place in the district that is no more significant than other mosques. While more popular and symbolically significant mosques associated with particular religious communities exist around the district, the Central Mosque is

the agora in both its urban and political functions. Nasser Rabbat, “The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space,” *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012): 200.

⁸⁵ Rabbat, 200.

⁸⁶ Hussam Hussein Salama, “Tahrir Square: A Narrative of a Public Space,” *ArchNet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research* 7, no. 1 (March 2013): 129.

⁸⁷ Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism*, 14.

the official place of worship for the gathering of the leading municipal, state, and business actors during the religious ceremonies and religious festivity prayers.⁸⁸

Two parallel roads establish the eastern and western borders of the Square, effectively sandwiching it in between. There is no transitional space that connects the roads to the Square. Instead, its boundaries are sharply defined—accentuated by a group of large flowerpots and a series of bank ATMs—eschewing other spatial strategies or tools typically employed in architectural space definition. The Square’s spatial connection with the streets is undermined by its ambiguous delineation, achieved through objects strategically placed to form boundaries rather than through more intentional and effective design methods. Regarding the (non)design of the space and the movements of the people in and around it—crossing from some place to some place—the Square looks like a giant sidewalk between roads, housing blocks, retail shops and the mosque.

⁸⁸ There are many other mosques in Başakşehir associated with specific *tariqa* such as Mehmed Zahit Kotku Mosque and Mahmud Esad Cosan Mosque, which are two well-known and very popular mosques in the district associated with İskenderpaşa Community. These mosques hold religious events shaping the daily life not only in their neighbourhoods, but the whole district.



Figure 66: Eastern and southern boundaries of the Başakşehir Town Square. The public space is demarked proficiently with strict lines—emphasized with a cluster of large flowerpots and a series of ATMs—instead of any other method of defining an architectural space.

The Square does not function as the meeting and melting area but as a transition hub for those who visit the mosque, the municipality building, and the commercial spaces around the Square. Nevertheless, the Başakşehir Municipality and Emlak Konut exert every effort to promote the Square as a public space occupied by scores of people in the promotional renders they use in community bulletins, local announcement posters, and promotional publications. The Municipality decorates the Square as a public space with night lights and eye-catching urban furniture: colourful billboards, ornamented benches, and an installation comprised of the letters of Başakşehir Belediyesi (Başakşehir Municipality) imitating similar city sign installations in Amsterdam, Toronto, Vancouver, and Budapest, which become popular locations for taking selfies, emerging as some of the most frequently captured sites within these cities.



Figure 67: A couple posing for a photo in front of the Central Mosque and the Başakşehir Belediyesi (Başakşehir Municipality) letter installation. The mosque and the installation together seem to serve as a centre of attraction for some residents of the district.

The Square is paved with stones and coloured with saplings on small grass areas in varying shapes. Benches, streetlamps, and trash cans are placed around the space. Small elevator kiosks give access to the underground parking area. Likewise, randomly placed ventilation shafts become a spatial element of the Square. These kiosks and ventilation shafts unsettle the integrity and form of the Square and turn it into an undefined space. Besides these design problems, some quality and maintenance problems exist regarding the building materials and the urban furniture. As of December 2020, only two years after the opening of the Square, the keystones of the

ground are loose, the benches are worn out, the stones surrounding the grass areas are broken, and some of the trees and saplings are already dead.



Figure 68: The photograph shows the randomly placed benches, loose and broken keystones, and some dead trees around the Square.

Town Square as a medium for ideological performances

The Town Square in Başakşehir, while not a place for spontaneous social interactions or civic community gatherings, does serve a particular function. It acts as a platform for ideological performances—actions or events that convey or enact specific ideologies or belief systems. These performances are orchestrated by an intricate network of state officers, politicians, municipalities and municipality-owned companies, private companies, and investors. This

mirrors what's observed in the Water Valley and the Nation's Garden. Night festivities that the district municipality organises during Ramadan started as of 2019 are the most popular and crowded event among other smaller organisations the Municipality holds there. As the first open-air leisure space in Başakşehir, the Valley was the primary venue for open-air Ramadan festivities. However, this changed with the construction of the new Town Square in the Kayaşehir area in 2018. Following this, the Municipality moved the district's pious festivities and nighttime Ramadan activities to the new location. As a result, the once vibrant nightlife of the Valley during Ramadan ceased. The Town Square then took centre stage, hosting a variety of activities throughout the month-long Ramadan event. Now, during Ramadan, The Municipality not only hosts entertainment activities but also opens its venues to certain faith-based non-governmental organisations for their social, commercial activities, and charity work. In return, these NGOs offer electoral support, financial aid, and reinforced power networks.⁸⁹ In this sense, this public event represents a mutually beneficial arrangement for everyone participated.

⁸⁹ Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism*, 91.



Figure 69: Snapshots from the Başakşehir Town Square. The photograph above shows the temporary fair grounds in the Başakşehir Town Square set for the Ramadan festivity in 2019. It is just before the fast-breaking time so there is no crowd yet. The photograph below shows a scene from the Ramadan festivity held in the Town Square in 2019. After the fast-breaking, the crowd gathered in the Square enjoying the *ilahiler* (hymns) and theatre shows, buying religious books and souvenirs from the small kiosks, and socializing.

These Ramadan events start with fast-breaking and continue until dawn. The attendees enjoy Sufi music (along with the popular songs of the day), *nargile*, a wide variety of snacks, Turkish tea, Turkish coffee, traditional *Karagöz* shadow plays, and children's theatre with religious content.⁹⁰ While the stage shows presented during the festival are free to watch, merchants and shopkeepers cater to the attendees (particularly kids), selling goods strictly on a cash basis, as they enjoy the performances. These festivities provide a platform for the reaffirmation and reconstruction of the community identity. Furthermore, they serve as a stage for the manifestation, performance, and embodiment of a particular lifestyle and worldview preferred by the ruling entities.

Town Square as tool of land speculation

Several public and private projects were started and completed around the Square while it was being built: the Nation's Garden and Kuzey Yakası, the Central Mosque, a municipal building, a district governorship building, a shopping mall, and Park Maveria Housing Project. The juxtaposition of these public and private projects in this area was not a coincidence; they were components of an urban planning project that TOKİ, Emlak Konut, and private construction companies, (including Makro, Akyapı, and Fuzul) initiated and supported in many ways. In this sense, as promoted by its builders, the Town Square was an "planned urban square."

⁹⁰ Cihan Tuğal, "Islam and the Retrenchment of Turkish Conservatism," in *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, ed. Asef Bayat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).



Figure 70: A rendered image from the promotional catalogue that the Emlak Konut prepared for the Kuzey Yakası project. Source: Image retrieved from Emlak Konut’s website, <https://sales.emlakkonut.com.tr/project/kuzey-yakasi-ofisleri/tr>.

The Town Square is seen at the top of the image, flanked by the new municipal building, the new Central Mosque, Kuzey Yakası project, the Nation’s Garden, Park Maveria Housing Project, and a new mall building. The text states “Take your place in the natural living spaces of the Kuzey Yakası without delay.”

Next to the Central Mosque, Emlak Konut constructed a new municipal building with a private company, Balamir Construction, known for family connections to the AKP. The company won the tender, although other bidders offered lower prices.⁹¹ The new municipal building is designed in the same architectural style as the many other state buildings TOKİ and Emlak Konut constructed during the AKP era. A reinforced concrete structure covered with marble imitates the architectural forms of Seljuk and Ottoman architecture, with large pointed-arch windows dominating the design of the façades. Similarly, the Park Maveria Housing Project, on the other

⁹¹ In an inspection commission report the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People’s Party, CHP)—the main opposition party in the parliament, filed to the Istanbul Municipality Commission, they accused Emlak Konut of collusive tendering. See newspaper reports on this collusion claims: “AKP’li Başakşehir Belediyesi’ne 130 Milyona Yeni Başkanlık Binası,” *Sol Haber Portalı*, August 27, 2020, <https://sol.org.tr/haber/akpli-Başakşehir-belediyesine-130-milyona-yeni-baskanlik-binası-13057>; “AKP’li belediyede milyonluk ihale oyunu,” *Cumhuriyet*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/akpli-belediyede-milyonluk-ihale-oyunu-1840580>.

side of the Square, has a massive base volume mimicking the arcades of Seljuk building complexes, with offices and retail stores opening onto the Square. Next to the Park Maveria Housing Project, the construction of a new mall building was ongoing as of 2022. With these buildings, the Square gains a commercial character. This merger of new housing projects and retail spaces integrated into the public space explains why the private actors of the housing and mall project promote the new Town Square as if it was a part of the housing projects in their promotional catalogues and websites.⁹²



Figure 71: A view of the Park Maveria-I housing project. The photograph shows project bordering the Square with the promotional signboards of the builder companies, Akyapı and Makro, on the top of the housing blocks, the signboards of the shops, coffeehouses, real estate agencies, consultancy offices, and private teaching institutions on the first two levels of the housing blocks, and a group of bank ATMs, which all together strengthen the already commercial character of the Square.

⁹² “Kuzey Yakası Cadde Dükkanları,” Emlak Konut Websitesi, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://www.emlakkonut.com.tr/tr-tr/kuzeyyakasi-ofisleri>; “V Mall,” V Mall Istanbul, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://vmallistanbul.com.tr/>.

It is clear that the Town Square project, together with the Nation's Garden, the Nation's Library, the Central Mosque, and the new infrastructure projects around it, has been a land value booster in Başakşehir. As such, during their launch events, the sales agents of the neighboring housing projects highlighted the Square as the new “urban magnet” of Başakşehir. They accentuated the Square and the proximity of the housing projects by prominently featuring their models. The Square, promoted as an urban magnet to increase the land value of the neighbouring projects, has also turned into a medium for promoting these projects, with billboards and promotional posters temporarily placed in the Square from time to time.



Figure 72: A site model of the Park Mavera-I. The model is exhibited by Akyapı and Makro during the launch of the project. The model shows the location of the housing project near the Town Square, Başakşehir Central Mosque, the Nation's Garden, and some other new projects in Kayaşehir.



Figure 73: A billboard placed in the Square, promoting Avrasya Housing Project in Başakşehir by Emlak Konut. The builders and investors actively use the Square’s presence to promote their nearby investments across different mediums. Additionally, they employ the Square as a platform for advertising these investments through marketing billboards.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that public space, with its ever-changing meanings and symbolic references, and contested uses, is intricately sculpted by the interplay of political and financial forces. It is influenced by the aspirations, societal roots, and power relations among distinct social agents, such as community groups and residents, political entities, including governmental institutions and activists, and financial stakeholders, which may encompass developers, businesses, and investors. I explored the layered meanings of a public space, and it traced motivations for building them. More specifically, I focused on claiming public space as a

medium for community building and financialization of public space as two of these motivations. I illustrated how politicians and municipal actors, through the production of public spaces and regulation of the flow of daily life, attempt to manifest their authority over society and how they—in collaboration with private actors—financialize urban spaces. I approached ideology and capital as two significant factors that play a role in the production, management, and use of public spaces.

In this chapter, I examined the interplay between ideology and capital in design, production, and utilization and of public spaces by analyzing three specific cases in Başakşehir. In revealing the stories and imagery generated and disseminated within these spaces in line with the fluctuating advantages of those in power, this chapter delved into the societal interactions, architectural peculiarities, ideological underpinnings, and fiscal considerations that characterize these public spaces. (Re)construction of public spaces is a means of producing ideology and transforming it into a concrete form, consolidating the state's symbolic power in everyday life. Public space is not static but dynamic production that reproduces the past, constructs the new, and reflects state-society relations. Building a community and re-writing the history requires producing ideologically loaded and ideology-producing (public) spaces, where the community internalizes, experiences, and performs the re-written history. Designing public spaces with a symbolism of architectural elements and developing the spatial program of these spaces have been a channel of visibility and power manifestation in society. In this sense, I argued that the public spaces in Başakşehir have become a setting for the political actors to manifest their cultural domination and a medium for building their “imagined communities.”

Among many other cities in Türkiye and other districts in the city of Istanbul, Başakşehir is a showcase for the architecture of the neoliberal urbanism and political Islam in Türkiye. The builders and investors of Başakşehir continuously market it as a place of the superlatives (the “firsts” and “mosts”) of both the city and country. Similarly, these actors have occasionally promoted the public spaces as the “first,” “largest,” “greenest,” and “most significant” in Istanbul and Türkiye.

Today, market-oriented growth models revalorize public spaces as urban leisure and consumption centres, leading to commodification trends. City authorities, planners, and developers use public space as a marketing tool to create attractive places and brand cities through appealing images. In line with the changing trends on a national and global scale, the production of public space has been a way of maintaining the economic growth of political and financial actors. The Islamist power groups—both political actors and the allied private actors—have utilized the production of public spaces for their financial benefit. This chapter asserted that the public spaces in Başakşehir have become spatial tools to propagate ideology, manifest populist discourses, spread conservatism and increase the real estate values in the district.

The next chapter analyzes another stage that enables the processes of capital and ideology, spaces of knowledge, in Başakşehir. It uncovers the motivations of building and organising various forms of educational institutions and explores how the subjects of the conservative community in the district is formed through education and acculturation in these spaces.

Chapter 5 | Spaces of Knowledge: Apparatuses to Raise a Pious Generation

We aim to raise pious generations. Do you expect us, as a conservative-democratic party, to foster atheist generations? You may well have such an aim, but we do not. Our goal is to raise a conservative, a democratic generation that believes in the values passed down through history. This is what we aim to do.¹

Raising pious generations has long been central to the national government's political agenda. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has consistently articulated this vision in his public speeches, as a response to the republican elites' emphasis on raising fiercely secular generations during the first decades of the Republic. Erdoğan's vision is linked to the desire of forming ideal citizens for a "new Türkiye"—a new era for the country that has been conceptualized as a departure from the Kemalist era of a strictly secular establishment. Realizing this objective necessitates a thorough overhaul of the national education system, which entails not only transforming existing educational institutions, but also establishing new spaces of knowledge such as schools, universities, and libraries. These institutions carry ideological nuances that align with the political and economic strategies of the ruling authorities. Such nuances manifest in content adjustments—like crafting curricula, designing academic programs, and forming the social atmosphere within institutions. Moreover, they are evident in the physical form of these

¹ Erdoğan, then prime minister of Türkiye, addressed Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the Republican People's Party, in a public speech in 2012. Erdoğan stated his party's goal of raising "pious generations," in answer to his opponents, blaming him for the recent Islamist transformations in the education system. The original speech text in Turkish: "Benim ifademde dindar bir gençlik yetiştirme var. Bunu yine söylüyorum, bunun arkasındayım. Sayın Kılıçdaroğlu, sen bizden, muhafazakar demokrat parti kimliği sahibi AK Parti'den ateist bir nesil yetiştirmemizi mi bekliyorsun? O belki senin için olabilir, senin amacın olabilir. Ama bizim böyle bir amacımız yok. Biz muhafazakar ve demokrat, milletinin, vatanının değerlerine, ilkelerine, tarihten gelen ilkelerine sahip çıkan bir nesil yetiştireceğiz. Bunun için çalışıyoruz." "Dindar Bir Gençlik Yetiştirmek İstiyoruz," *Cumhuriyet*, February 2, 2012, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/dindar-bir-genclik-yetistirmek-istiyoruz-317328>.

institutions—through architectural designs that convey historical references, or spatial configurations reflecting the ideological predispositions of those who construct or use them.

Başakşehir is home to an extensive array of schools, universities, and libraries established with a purpose of advancing the objective of raising pious individuals, subsequently cultivating pious communities through their spatial organisation, academic atmosphere, and social life developed and encouraged there. Furthermore, these spaces, which have emerged in conjunction with the current relations of production within the framework of Islamist and neoliberal urbanism, are envisioned to drive both the social and material transformation of cities.

When crafting the architecture for these spaces of knowledge, political actors often order their designers to incorporate iconographies to communicate with citizens and transmit their messages by using symbolic architectural components. The building envelopes of these educational spaces are regarded as a means of to imply an ideological vision. Façades are adorned with architectural elements from the Ottoman and Seljuk periods, attempting to channel the grandeur of imperial times, potentially inducing collective amnesia for today's societal crises. Alternatively, in some other spaces of knowledge, the concerns of political authorities and their allied investors about the financialization of urban space override their insistence on adorning buildings with (a)historical ornamentation. Especially in prestigious neighbourhoods, there is less emphasis on the imperial or Islamic appearance of buildings and the ideological messages that architecture might convey, allowing for a warmer embrace of contemporary global aesthetics. In this sense, a spatial analysis of these educational institutions is vital, considering their prominence within urban landscapes, the importance of their organisation and programing in fostering a dialogue with their users, and the substantial resources required for their construction and maintenance.

This chapter outlines how education has been spatially embedded in the contemporary nation-building processes in Türkiye, through an analysis of three distinct spaces of knowledge in Başakşehir: the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School, a state-endorsed institution recognized as the country's largest religious high school; the İbn Haldun University, a private institution and the district's inaugural university; and the Başakşehir Nation's Library, the first library constructed under the nationwide "nation's libraries project." My analysis centres on their symbolic role within the settlement, their function as conduits for conveying ideological messages either through their architecture or through their capacity as social platforms, and the relationship between these structures and their users. I argue these institutions, beyond merely offering conventional learning facilities, contribute to the maintenance and growth of the Islamist habitus in Başakşehir. Furthermore, I contend that the underlying forces and power networks that influence the design, funding, construction, and management of these institutions mirror those I explored in other components of Başakşehir's built environment in preceding chapters.

Firstly, I examine two educational institutions, Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School and İbn Haldun University, designed with ideologically loaded design elements on the exterior envelopes of their buildings. In addition to architectural compositions attached to the exteriors of the structures, these institutions, with their modern interiors, convey messages through utilization of the space, spatial organisation, decoration, and symbolic visuals. I investigate these institutions' symbolic presence in the district, their architectural forms with historical references, and their embedded iconographies, images, and messages. In addition, I analyze the academic atmosphere created in these places. Secondly, I investigate Başakşehir Millet Kırathanesi (Nation's Library) as an educational and cultural space with relatively limited iconography attached to its architecture. The institution serves as an emblematic place to house the

educational practices and cultural activities of the dominant political and economic actors in general. My personal observations and photographs of these spaces of knowledge serve as primary sources for this chapter. Moreover, I analyze architectural drawings, promotional catalogues, media coverage, the district municipality's community bulletins, and political actors' public speeches and press releases.

5.1. Building a nation through spaces of education

The desire to shape society through education and educational spaces has not been unique to Islamists, nor limited to the last two decades, in the history of modern Türkiye. Knowledge institutions, in their role as venues for cultivating knowledge and fostering a sense of national identity, have played a particularly significant role in nation building. The foundational period of the Republic of Türkiye marked an epoch, where the establishment of a new state set in motion a series of transformations. In the wake of this founding, the transformation of society, the creation of new urban and architectural spaces, the formation of educational institutions, and the development of a new education system all unfolded simultaneously in a highly visible manner. The founders of the Republic considered education as an apparatus to encourage the forgetting of society's Islamic past. They believed that the national educational system should be purged of all religious elements, refashioned as aligned with the ideals of the republican nation-building endeavour. While viewing the strictly secularized curriculum as a means to shape a nation in line with republican norms and values, the authorities saw schools, in Sabiha Bilgi's words, as giving

“a visual expression” to the republican regime’s aspirations.² This vision was embodied in the architecture, layout, and the disciplinary and hierarchical organisation of these institutions, symbolizing enlightenment, civility, order, and progress.

Although there were concentrated efforts to secularize education and shut down Islamic schools in the early decades of the Republic, the complete disentanglement of religion from education never occurred in the subsequent years. The contestation among social groups in the political arena—including republicans, leftists, liberals, nationalists, and Islamists—ensured that issues about Islamic education schools, regulating access to these schools, amending Islamic content in the national curriculum, and the question of veiled women attending universities remained hot topics for decades.³

The AKP ascended to power in 2002, pledging to diminish the constraints on Islam in politics and society. They claimed to reform the education system as part of their overarching agenda to liberate society. Throughout the successive AKP administrations, they gradually dismantled the state-enforced secularism in various spheres of society as part of an overarching social engineering initiative. Over time, this project evolved into a form of governance that exhibited

² Sabiha Bilgi, “Monuments to the Republic: School as a Nationalizing Discourse in Türkiye,” *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no. 3 (2014): 356; Bekim Agai, “Islam and Education in Secular Türkiye: State Policies and the Emergence of the Fethullah Gülen Group,” *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, 2007, 149 and 151.

³ In this process, there was a growing realization among some segments of the secular power groups that many years of repressive politics regarding Islam had not achieved the desired effect. On the contrary, due to the absence of medreses or any other controlled form of religious education with standards of teaching, people were seeking their Islamic knowledge elsewhere. This led to the emergence of new authorities over which the state had no influence and training it could not control. The solution was seen in an enlightened form of ‘republican Islam’, propagated by the state itself through the creation of new institutions of Islamic teaching and learning. Agai, “Islam and Education in Secular Türkiye,” 152.

traits of totalitarianism, autocracy, and anti-democracy—an ironic shift, adopting characteristics that the republican establishment had been criticized for decades.

Concurrent with these political changes, the field of education underwent profound alterations. Notable legal and institutional reforms have been introduced in this domain. Numerous religious schools have been opened throughout the country and many public schools in the most secular neighbourhoods of large cities have been converted into *imam hatip* schools—state-endorsed religious institutions—without seeking public consent. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has incorporated Sunni-Islamist motifs into school curricula and textbooks, elevating Sunni Islam above other Islamic sects. Additionally, while political authorities have not explicitly sanctioned it, they have turned a blind eye as religious communities actively engage in education. These communities have set up unofficial educational platforms like *sıbyan mektepleri*—Ottoman-modelled infant schools in which religious instruction is provided to young children younger than school age—taking advantage of loopholes in both the law and the education system.

5.2. Ideology on the envelope

Beyond the structural and content-focused interventions in education, the national government has recognized the architecture of new educational institutions as a potent tool for public engagement, a medium for expressing existing ideological narratives while also shaping new ones. The idea to adopt a new architectural language for the education institutions initiated with a

nationwide project in 2005.⁴ The project, named as *Gelenekten Geleceğe* (From Tradition to Future). Under this initiative, as proposed by Hüseyn Çelik, the then Minister of Education, the government aimed to introduce school buildings as alternatives to the prevalent generic designs, which lacked a “unique identity” and did not reflect the “national characteristics” of the country.⁵

Bülent Batuman states, monumental gates, pointed arches, wide eaves supported by brackets, overhanging roofs, ornate tile decorations, and bay windows have been used in the design of these buildings. The use of these elements mirrors the political authorities’ desire to demonstrate power by “imitating the glory of the imperial image.”⁶ Concurrently, Zafer Çeler observes, alongside the government’s populist political and cultural discourses that allude to an imagined imperial past, state educational policies have been reflected in pseudo-historicist architectural designs.⁷ An eclectic architectural style, which draws from historical design elements of pre-Republican eras, particularly from the Seljuk and Ottoman eras, has been used in schools, universities, libraries, and other educational facilities.

Following the architectural trends promoted by the “From Tradition to Future” project, *imam hatip* school buildings, considering their symbolic significance for the Islamist movement, have

⁴ In 2006, the Ministry of Justice declared a similar project for building new justice palaces or cladding the old ones in Ottoman style. And in time, such projects became an integral part of the policies and the discourse of the central and local governments. Police headquarters, local government buildings (*hükümet konakları*) and those of the municipalities were added to this process of Ottomanization of public architecture in Türkiye. Zafer Çeler, “Pseudo-Historicism and Architecture: The New Ottomanism in Turkey,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 5 (September 3, 2019): 507.

⁵ Within the scope of this project, the Ministry of National Education organised an exhibition named “School Architecture from Tradition to the Future,” which displayed the new official architectural style of twenty one school projects (out of forty-one). “Okulların Mimarisi Değişiyor| Yapı,” accessed March 12, 2023, http://www.yapi.com.tr/haberler/okullarin-mimarisi-degisiyor_22727.html.

⁶ Batuman, 115–61.

⁷ Zafer Çeler, “Pseudo-Historicism and Architecture: The New Ottomanism in Türkiye,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 5 (September 3, 2019): 506.

emerged as pivotal platforms for showcasing these architectural expressions. The Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School stands as a prime example. This structure not only captures these architectural shifts but also acts as a symbolic medium for politicians, municipal actors, and construction companies. Its grand size and capacity convey clear messages of success and power. Furthermore, it underscores politicians' endeavours to highlight the country's pre-republican history by drawing inspiration from the architectural designs of the Ottoman and Seljuk eras and transmitting messages through various medium, events, and activities offered with the envelope of the space of knowledge.

5.2.a. Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School

In 2013, at Ramadan celebrations in the Water Valley, an architectural model of the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School attracted an enthusiastic crowd. Following the unveiling of the model to the public, the mayor of Başakşehir announced the upcoming school building would be the “largest” *imam hatip* school in Türkiye, in keeping with Başakşehir's reputation for being the town of the “firsts” and the “mosts.” Pro-government news agencies praised the model exhibition and announced the school would be opening soon.⁸ The promotional material emphasized the relative physical and technical superiority of the school building over its counterparts. In the days to come, a partner of the company that constructed the school, Makro İnşaat, said the beauty of the model attracted the attention of Başakşehir residents so much that even he was

⁸ “İşte Türkiye'nin en büyük imam hatip lisesi,” *Haber7*, July 19, 2013, <https://www.haber7.com/egitim/haber/1051653-iste-turkiyenin-en-buyuk-imam-hatip-lisesi>; “Başakşehir Belediyesi Ramazan Etkinlikleri, Siyasetçileri Ağırlamaya Devam Ediyor,” İhlas Haber Ajansı, July 22, 2013, <https://www.ihb.com.tr/istanbul-haberleri/Başakşehir-belediyesi-ramazan-etkinlikleri-siyasetcileri-ag-irlamaya-devam-ediyor-496141/>.

unable to register his children at the school, because the school's capacity had been filled in a very short span of time.⁹ His statement subtly underscored the unexpected and overwhelming demand for the school, serving as an indirect compliment to both the allure of the school and the quality of work done by his construction company.

Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School was built in nine months—shorter than other projects of similar scale—by Makro İnşaat and opened in 2013. The Başakşehir Municipality financed the school's construction. Despite the municipality's declaration of a budget of fifty-five million Turkish Liras for the project, some opposition newspapers claimed the actual budget was seventy-five million Turkish Liras and accused the municipality of spending one-fifth of its yearly budget on a single school project.¹⁰ The municipality planned to name the school complex after Tenzile Erdoğan, the mother of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, but he decided it to be named after Muhammed Emin Saraç—a famous Naqshbandi Tariqa sheik who had been close to him since his youth.

A partner of Makro İnşaat indicates, the company initially planned to build a generic, modern school building with plain façades and no historical references.¹¹ Erdoğan, however, emphasized the project should be an “aesthetically pleasing” and a “well-equipped” structure. So, the construction company designed it to resemble historic buildings with exaggerated forms and fragmentary pieces taken from Ottoman and Seljuk architectures. Consequently, the project

⁹ Oktay Mehmet, “Üniversite Gibi İmam Hatip Lisesi,” September 11, 2013, <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/universite-gibi-imam-hatip-lisesi-562511>.

¹⁰ Mustafa K. Erol, “75 Milyonluk Okula Şeyhin Adını Verdi,” *Aydınlık*, February 10, 2017, <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/haber/75-milyonluk-okula-seyhin-adini-verdi-64847>.

¹¹ Oktay Mehmet, “Üniversite Gibi İmam Hatip Lisesi,” September 11, 2013, <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/universite-gibi-imam-hatip-lisesi-562511>.

would be described as a *külliye* (an Ottoman complex built around a mosque that was the centre of social life) in several articles published in pro-government newspapers and in a promotional video prepared by the district municipality.¹² High ranking government officials and pro-government media agents labelled the architecture of the educational complex as “Ottoman-Seljuk style,” referring to its eclectic visual compositions of unrelated design elements from those architectures.

The opening of the school was heralded in most pro-government media as signaling the dawn of a transformative era in education. Such promotions suggested that even the country’s most accomplished students would opt to attend this school, despite being qualified to join other top-ranking institutions in the city. An article in the district municipality’s monthly bulletin described the “remarkable” and “gorgeous” architecture of the school, presenting it as a display of Seljuk architectural excellence.¹³ The article was published with the title “Başakşehir’in ‘Büyük’ Mutluluğu İmam Hatip Lisesi” (Başakşehir’s “Big” Happiness İmam Hatip High School), with the word “Big” in quotation marks to underscore the expansive nature of the educational facility. In tandem, a national pro-government newspaper heralded the school’s launch, proclaiming

¹² Although the school is called “*imam hatip külliyesi*” colloquially, the nameplate at the entrance of the building complex reads “M. Emin Saraç Anadolu İmam Hatip Kampüsü.” Interestingly, the English loanword “*kampüs*” (meaning campus) is used instead of the more traditional “*külliye*.” This choice in terminology suggests an intent to convey the school as being as expansive and well-equipped as a university campus.

“Türkiye’nin En Donanımlı ve En Büyük İmam Hatibi Başakşehir’de,” 09/08/2013, Basaksehir Times, accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.basaksehirtimes.com/guncel/turkiyenin-en-donanimli-ve-en-buyuk-imam-hatibi-basaksehirde-h2396.html>; Haber7, “Türkiye’nin En Büyük İmam-Hatip Lisesi Açılıyor,” *Haber7*, September 12, 2013, <https://emlak.haber7.com/projeler/haber/1072821-turkiyenin-en-buyuk-imam-hatip-lisesi-aciliyor>.

¹³ “Başakşehir’in ‘Büyük’ Mutluluğu İHL,” *Başakşehir Bülteni*, 2013, 22.

“Başakşehir has become the showcase of Istanbul and the centre of education.”¹⁴ By positioning Başakşehir in such a light, it accentuates the district’s rising importance and the school’s pivotal role in this ascent. In essence, the media coverage and promotional materials surrounding the school’s opening are laden with symbolic meanings and political implications. They serve to promote the school as an institution of academic, architectural, and cultural significance while also aligning it closely with the government’s vision for the future of Türkiye.

In light of this backdrop, why were politicians, including Erdoğan, the president of Türkiye, so deeply invested in the conceptualization and promotion of this project? What motivated their personal involvement in the naming, design, and construction of what appears to be just another school building? Why were the district municipality and the construction company driven to expedite the project’s completion within nine months? To fully comprehend the motivations and the layered narratives underpinning the design and construction of the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School, it is crucial to first understand the historical significance of *imam hatip* schools in Türkiye. Additionally, recognizing the implications of establishing the country’s largest *imam hatip* school in the Başakşehir district, which resonates with the design of a *küllîye*, is crucial.

Imam hatip schools, originally designed to train *imams* (mosque priests) and *hatips* (preachers) have been the subject of heated debates between right-wing political thought, secular republicans, and left-wing factions.¹⁵ Established after the proclamation of the Republic, these

¹⁴ “Başakşehir İstanbul’un Vitrini Eğitimin Merkezi Oldu,” *Yeni Akit*, November 17, 2013, <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/basaksehir-istanbulun-vitrini-egitimin-merkezi-oldu-7316.html>.

¹⁵ Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address these struggles in detail, choice, and demand discourses in relation to *imam hatip* schools can only be understood in relation to them. Indeed, choice and demand are politically, socially, and economically generated.

schools sought to ensure state control over Islamic education in line with secular guidelines. Over the years, these schools faced closures, re-openings, and significant curriculum changes. However, during the AKP era, they have resurfaced prominently on the agendas of Islamist authorities, who often emphasize the victimization of pious segments of society and top-down restrictions on Islamic education.

The year 2012 marked the beginning of a new chapter for *imam hatip* schools in Türkiye. A comprehensive educational law was passed quickly after Prime Minister Erdoğan mentioned the party's desire to "raise a religious generation" and hinted at their plans to transform the national education system.¹⁶ This legislation allowed *imam hatip* schools to extend their offerings to include middle school education.¹⁷ This resulted in the conversion of many secular schools and the construction of new ones dedicated to religious education.¹⁸ These schools would now become symbolic landmarks of the Islamist movement, born out of the extended tension between the country's diverse ideological spectra. They would evolve into platforms for disseminating political narratives and nurturing Islamist cadres. Moreover, they would serve as sites for showcasing newly invented architectural designs that draw inspiration from specific historical periods.

¹⁶ "Dindar Bir Gençlik Yetiştirmek İstiyoruz," *Hürriyet*, February 1, 2012, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dindar-bir-genclik-yetistirmek-istiyoruz-19819295>.

¹⁷ The new educational policy changed the eight years of uninterrupted basic education system to a 4+4+4 model. With this policy change middle school sections of *imam hatip* schools, which had been closed in 1997, were reopened. Sezen Bayhan and Fatma Gök, "Education Policy in an Era of Neoliberal Urbanisation: A Case Study of Istanbul's School Relocations," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38, no. 4 (2017): 591.

¹⁸ Consequently, families who wished their children to enroll in secular schools near their residences often found themselves relocating to different areas of the city. Alternatively, if relocation was not feasible, they sometimes had no choice but to send their children to *imam hatip* schools against their preferences.

Immediately following the enactment of the *imam hatip* school reform, Başakşehir Municipality announced the *imam hatip* school project, which would be completed by the 2013-2014 academic year. Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School, with 60,000 square metres of interior and twenty-five acres of outdoor space, was designed to accommodate 2,500 students. The school complex consists of four buildings with various academic and social facilities. Two U-shaped buildings across from the main gate are used for middle school and high school education; a linear building facing the courtyard of the high school is as a dormitory for male students at the school; and a small building between the schools hosts the Emin Saraç Cultural Centre, owned by the Başakşehir Municipality.¹⁹



Figure 74: A view of the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School from the outside of the monumental gate, produced as a mimicry of the Seljuk period portals.

¹⁹ Another dormitory off-campus accommodates female students at the school.

The school is nestled among mid-range private housing developments, supermarkets, and real estate agencies. Additionally, nearby stores offer a range of Islamic-related items, including conservative clothing, Qur'ans, Hadith books, prayer beads, and prayer rugs. Set within this urban landscape, the educational complex is encircled by a fenced wall, with a monumental gate on its northern side. This gate, inspired by Seljuk portals, features three arches adorned with intricate geometric designs with fourfold patterns and eight-pointed Seljuk star reliefs. The arches house cubicles for two security officers who monitor the entrance to the educational complex. Upon passing the gate, one is greeted by a vast patio, its ground embellished with a mosaic Seljuk star pattern.



Figure 75: The view of the as-if-historical gate of the educational complex from the interior of the *külliye* and a composition of mosaic tiles forming the Seljuk star pattern applied on the ground.



Figure 76: A view from the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School. The monumental campus gate opens onto a patio, where a composition of mosaic tiles on the ground forms the Seljuk star pattern. Behind the planters, the middle school, Muhammed Emin Saraç Cultural Centre, and the high school buildings of the educational complex are seen, from left to right.

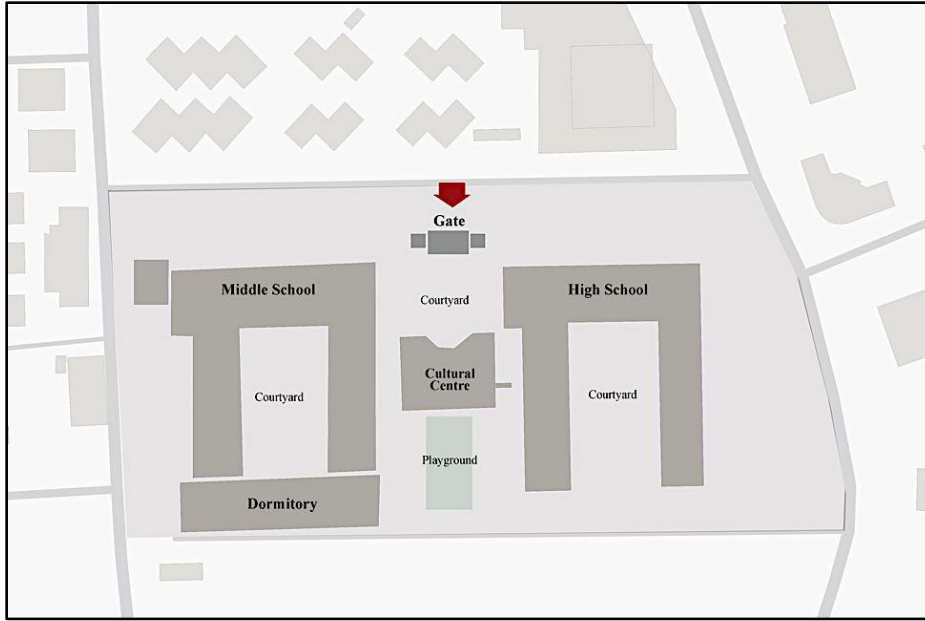


Figure 77: A map of the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School complex, highlighting its boundaries, entrance, and buildings. Source: Google Maps image is modified by the author.

The high school, middle school, and dormitory buildings, at first glance, appear as standard multi-floor school buildings with conventional floor plans. They consist of identical classrooms lining long corridors, communal spaces and staff rooms, and central courtyards. Yet, a closer look reveals figurative elements on their building envelope, such as concrete brise-soleils with Seljuk patterns and pointed arch jambs framing window openings, elements selected from the government's newly developed architectural repertoire. The aluminum frames of the windows and doors and the plastic nameplates at the entrances somewhat contrast the historic architectural nods, highlighting a peculiar amalgamation of past and present. By merging contemporary design layouts, modern materials, and historically inspired elements, these buildings present an eclectic fusion.

While the building's envelope—including the façade and exterior—is adorned with historical architectural elements, the interiors juxtapose contemporary aesthetics with ideologically charged objects, images, and quotes. These elements, either gracing the walls or shaping the space, enhance the visual ambiance. But they are more than just decorative; they also convey deep-seated ideological and religious messages.

This is evident in the high school section of the educational complex. The area is equipped with classrooms, science laboratories, hobby rooms, sports halls, film screening rooms, restrooms, canteens, dining halls, *mescits* (prayer rooms), a library, and an infirmary. Upon entering, visitors are immediately met with a reception desk made of plexiglass, complemented by a wall adorned with plexiglass panels and modern lighting fixtures. This design showcases an effort to align with contemporary trends, juxtaposing the building's historical exterior. To the left of the reception desk stands a glass cabinet displaying gold medals and trophies. These awards, won by students in football, volleyball, mathematics, physics, and religious competitions, suggest that the school takes pride in its achievements not only in religious areas but also, notably, in diverse fields like sports and science. This is a way of signaling success and prestige to both visitors and students. On the right, a framed Turkish flag and the national anthem's lyrics are displayed, a common feature in educational institutions that emphasize national identity and aim to foster a sense of patriotism.

Apart from the aforementioned visual elements, a phrase displayed on the wall and attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (yet unheard of) causes a ripple of confusion among the space's users: "While a nation without religion cannot survive, a school without religious training cannot be

imagined.”²⁰ One may find this dubious statement both surprising and rambling, given the endless debates surrounding the uneasy relationship between religion and the image of Atatürk (and his secular followers). Introducing a quote that emphasizes the importance of religion, especially in educational settings, starkly contrasts with his widely recognized secular beliefs. It might be seen as an attempt to reconcile or reinterpret Atatürk’s views within a modern religious framework, or even as a political move to provide a new context to his legacy.

On a wall adjacent to the reception desk, a verse from Sezai Karakoç’s poem “Sürgün Ülkeden Başkentler Başkentine” (From the Land of Exiles to the Capital of Capitals) is prominently displayed.²¹ The verse delves into the spiritual exile and longing of a soul searching for meaning amidst the bustling distractions of the modern world. Karakoç is one of the most influential Islamist poets in Turkish literature. This particular poem holds special significance for Erdoğan, who has frequently recited it during election campaigns and in his public speeches. The poem, by extension, serves as a nod to contemporary politics, aligning the school’s identity with specific political and religious views. Given that these elements are located near the reception, they play a crucial role in setting first impressions. Visitors, students, and staff are immediately introduced to the institution’s ideological stance. The combined presence of Atatürk’s quote and Karakoç’s poem suggests a nuanced navigation of Turkish identity, intertwining secular history and contemporary religious and political sentiments. In this sense, the reception area sets the tone and

²⁰ “Dinsiz toplum düşünölemeyeceđi gibi din eğitimi vermeyen okul da düşünölemez.”

²¹ “Sakın kader deme kaderin üstünde bir kader vardır/ Ne yapsalar boş göklerden gelen bir karar vardır/ Gün batsa ne olur geceyi onaran bir mimar vardır/ Yanmışsam külömden yapılan bir hisar vardır/ Yenilgi yenilgi büyüyen bir zafer vardır.” (Do not you ever say fate for beyond fate there is a fate/ Whatever they might do there is a providence coming from the empty sky/ So, what if the sun sinks, there is an architect restoring the night/ If I am burnt there is a fortress built of my ashes/ There is a victory growing defeat by defeat.)

offers a prelude to what visitors might expect inside. Here, visitors, students, and staff are immediately introduced not merely to the school's educational mission but to its ideological orientation.

Again, on the entrance floor, a wall facing the main staircase features a striking poster. It displays portraits of renowned right-wing figures from Türkiye's political history, including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Necmettin Erbakan, Turgut Özal, and Adnan Menderes. These leaders have a common story: during their leadership, they faced interventions by the state, military, or adversaries through coups or assassinations. Moreover, above these figures, Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II is depicted. His depiction at the top signifies not just a chronological starting point but also the deep historical roots of the Islamist movement. Abdülhamid II's ousting by the Young Turks serves as an early instance of political intervention against Islamist rule. The background of the poster includes the Grand National Assembly building and the Turkish flag, symbolizing the nation's unwavering support for these leaders. At the heart of this composition, merging with the Turkish flag, is a profound saying by Ertuğrul Gazi, the father of Osman I, the founder of the Ottoman Empire: "Sefer bizden zafer Allah'tandır" (The war is ours, but the victory belongs to Allah). This not only underscores the pivotal roles of *sefer* (war) and *zafer* (victory) in the nation's history but also stands as a testament to the nation's defiance against any form of interference and its unwavering resolve to uphold its will. The poster is layered with multiple intentions: it offers a historical narrative, a political declaration, ideological affirmation, and a call to unity—all encapsulated in a single image. It seeks to inspire its viewers, fostering feelings of pride, determination, and belonging. It acts as a potent reminder of their roots, the challenges they have faced, and their enduring purpose.



Figure 78: A poster displaying portraits of several ring-wing leaders from Türkiye's political history. These leaders epitomize varying moments and intensities of tension between secularist and conservative-Islamist factions within Türkiye. Erdoğan's confrontation with the July 15th coup attempt serves as a contemporary reflection of this enduring tension. The poster's lower section vividly captures the events of the July 15th coup night, bridging the gap between historical and contemporary challenges faced by Islamist or conservative leaders. This indicates a ceaseless battle, with conservative-Islamist leaders perpetually under threat.



Figure 79: A poster covering the underside of the staircase in the school building on the theme of July 15th coup attempt. The poster merges political, religious, and nationalistic themes. It serves as a visual testament to the intertwining of religion with national identity in Türkiye, especially in the context of the political events surrounding the July 15th coup attempt. The poster is not just a representation of past events but is designed to inspire future generations. By invoking the sacrifice of martyrs, the love of leaders, and the collective spirit of the nation, it seeks to mould the perspectives of the students, emphasizing the importance of patriotism, sacrifice, and the preservation of national and religious identity.

Another poster situated beneath the main staircase of the building pays tribute to the heroes of the July 15th coup attempt against Erdoğan's rule, conveying powerful political sentiments.²² The central image depicts President Erdoğan affectionately kissing the Turkish flag. The portrayal of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan kissing the Turkish flag situates as a central figure in the narrative. This act symbolizes his unwavering commitment to the nation, emphasizing his patriotic fervour and dedication. It humanizes the leader, grounding him in emotion and love for the country, rather than mere politics. Adjacently, the events of the July 15th night are represented, highlighting a portrait of the martyr Ömer Halisdemir.²³ Above this scene, a verse from the Turkish anthem implores patriots to defend their nation against enemies.²⁴ According to

²² Following the July 15th coup attempt, the government swiftly declared a state of emergency, initiating a large-scale operation to identify and prosecute those involved or supportive of the coup. This operation predominantly targeted the movement linked to the terrorist organisation claimed to have orchestrated the coup. This expansive crackdown led to the arrest of over 80,000 individuals and the dismissal of more than 150,000 from their jobs. However, such sweeping measures required significant public justification. Critics accused the government of manipulating these operations as a strategy to further centralize power around President Erdoğan and his close circle. To cement the narrative, the government expedited the erection of martyrs' statues, constructed monuments illustrating that tumultuous night, and organised commemorations and special prayer sessions for the fallen. A pervasive theme honouring the July 15th martyrs now adorns various public spaces, from schools to bus stations. The names of those lost are omnipresent. This constant immortalization and visibility serve as unceasing reminders of the coup attempt and its casualties. Consequently, these monuments and their associated memories have become integral to the daily lives and routines of the Turkish populace. For detailed research on this topic see: Timur Hammond, "The Politics of Perspective: Subjects, Exhibits, and Spectacle in Taksim Square, Istanbul," *Urban Geography* 40, no. 7 (2019): 1043; İhsan Yılmaz and Omer Ertürk, "Authoritarianism and Necropolitical Creation of Martyr Icons by Kemalists and Erdoğanists in Turkey," *Turkish Studies*, June 2021, 7; Lerna K. Yanık and Fulya Hisarlıoğlu, "They Wrote History with Their Bodies': Necrogeopolitics, Necropolitical Spaces and the Everyday Spatial Politics of Death in Turkey."

²³ On the night of July 15th, 2016, the Bosphorus Bridge was one of the first sites where Istanbul residents encountered military units moving to establish martial law. It later became the scene of fierce fighting between military units and protestors and the source of some of the most iconic images of the evening. Its many images have been used in various mediums for commemorating the incident and engraving it into the collective memory. For further analysis: Hammond, "Making Memorial Publics," 545.

²⁴ The lyrics of the national anthem by Mehmet Akif Ersoy: "Arkadaş! Yurduma alçakları uğratma sakın, / Siper et gövdeni, dursun bu hayâsızca akın. / Doğacaktır sana vadettiği günler Hakk'ın, / Kim bilir, belki yarın belki yarından da yakın." (My friend! Leave not my homeland to the hands of villainous men! / Render your chest as armour and your body as a bulwark! Halt this disgraceful assault! / For soon shall come the joyous days of divine promise; / Who knows? Perhaps tomorrow? Perhaps even sooner!)

the verse, patriots must not be deterred from defending their nation by the power of their enemies. The verse emphasizes that patriots should remain undeterred in their defence against overpowering adversaries. The spirit of hope and faith, rooted in genuine optimism, prevails over the enemy's might.

Esra Özyürek argues that since the 1990s the Islamist movement in Türkiye has positioned itself as the true representative of the people, embodying the “we” or the nation, in contrast to the secular state establishment, which they view as the oppressors or the “they.”²⁵ Even after ascending to power in the 2000s, the AKP maintained this narrative, depicting itself as a revolutionary force against the secular establishment of prior decades, the military, and external adversaries. In both this and the previous poster, the compositions delineate a clear binary opposition between two sets of actors in war and victory. On one side, there are those deemed enemies of the nation and betrayers of the homeland, accused of undermining the nation's will through coups, attempted coups, and other aggressive acts. Contrasting them are the heroes who rise to defend their homeland against these adversarial onslaughts. The narrative frames a battle (*sefer*) between “us” (patriots, martyrs, and heroes) and “them” (betrayers, enemies, and traitors, and secular establishment at times), wherein divine intervention supports “us.” The wording here allows the reader to imagine a condition in which the people are united in the sacred defence of the nation, rather than reflecting the factual circumstances of the context.

Transitioning from ideological debates to the architectural domain, the representation of a political stance is not merely confined to visual or textual forms within the school; it also

²⁵ Esra Özyürek, “Commemorating the Failed Coup in Turkey,” *Jadaliyya*, August 18, 2016, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33489>.

manifests in the design and arrangement of physical spaces. The arrangement and utilization of the interior spaces are a testament to such multi-dimensional implications. The school, like many other *imam hatip* schools in Türkiye, practices gender segregation in various areas including classrooms, corridors, halls, sports facilities, canteens, and screening rooms. Guided by Islamic principles which advise that close interaction between unrelated men and women might lead to immoral behaviour or inappropriate relationships, the school's gender-segregated spaces are designed to minimize these interactions.²⁶

The layout of the building mirrors that of typical school structures. What distinguishes it is not a radical difference in the floor plan but the specific utilization of spaces to separate genders. For certain activities, there are multiple yet functionally identical spaces allocated for the same purpose. For instance, there are separate *mescit(s)* (prayer rooms) and *abdesthane(s)* (wudu rooms) for males and females. Students use these dedicated spaces for activities such as Qur'anic studies, collective prayer sessions, and daily worship. Moreover, while male students interact in the courtyard facing the main street, female students use the courtyard behind the building. This ensures double seclusion for the girls from the internal scrutiny of the male students and the external gaze of passers-by.²⁷ The gender-centric spatial arrangement also shapes faculty interactions, with distinct lounges for male and female teachers. Occasionally, these spaces

²⁶ In addition to the gender-specific use of spaces, the dress code – especially veiling – acts as another layer of protection for female students from the male gaze. Veiling stands as a significant avenue through which religious practices and devout conduct are ingrained and perpetuated. In Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip High School, akin to many other *imam hatip* schools, nearly all female students and teachers—though not a mandatory in theory—don headscarves and modest attire. As Özgen states, veiling emerges as a crucial pedagogical tool, inculcating an alternative, more devout lifestyle into both the educational ethos and daily routines. Özgen, 146.

²⁷ Zeynep Özgen, "Schooling, Islamization, and Religious Mobilization in Turkey" (PhD Thesis, Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2014), 144.

operate in shifts, allowing both genders access to the same area at alternate times. Such setups shape students' views on gender interactions, influencing their understanding of how genders should interact in various social settings.

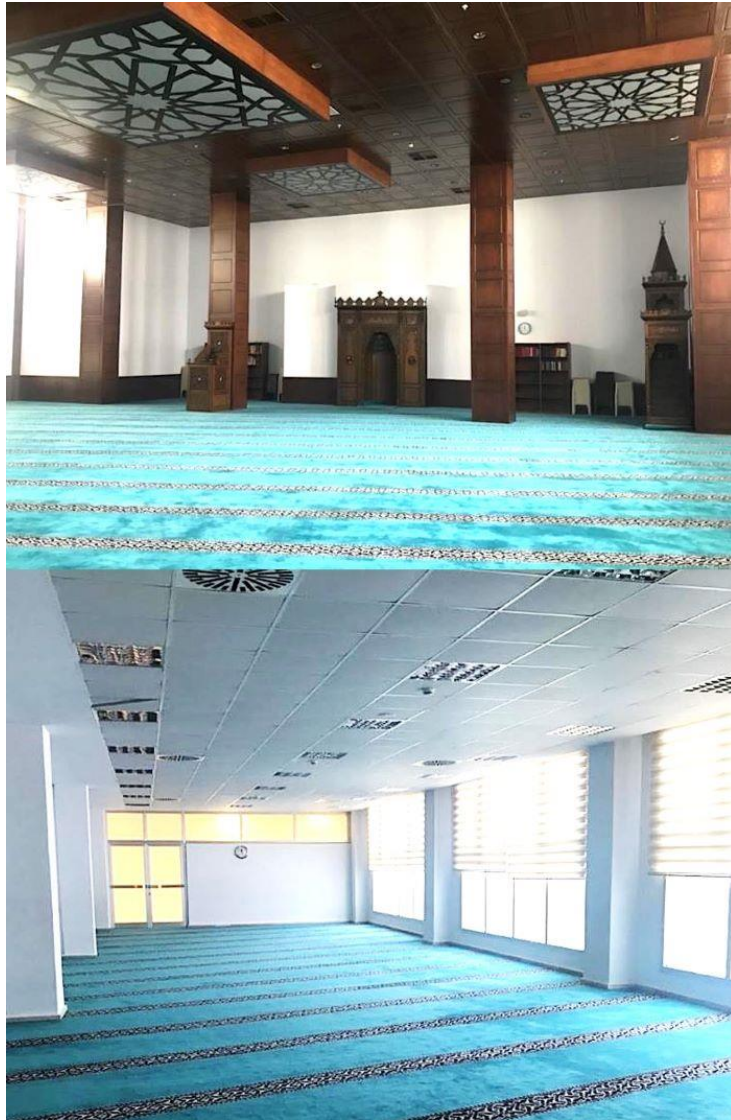


Figure 80: Male and female prayer rooms. The school is not only a place for formal education and work, but also for devotional practice. The significant difference in decoration between the men's and women's prayer rooms stands out. The men's prayer room is elaborately adorned with wood carvings, suggesting a rich aesthetic experience aimed at uplifting the spirit and enhancing the sense of connection to the divine. On the other hand, the emptiness of the women's prayer room might convey a stark, minimalistic environment. This difference suggest that the men's spaces are given more attention or considered more significant by the school's administrators.

Venturing deeper into the school, the naming of the interior spaces present another dimension of the institution's ideological emphasis. The hallways are named after cities in the Islamic world, including Kudüs (Jerusalem), Halep (Aleppo), Isfahan (Esfahan), Saray Bosna (Sarajevo), and Buhara (Bukhara). Symbolic pictures representing each city are displayed on the walls of the hallways. Naming the spaces within this educational complex after Islamic cities outside of Türkiye aligns with politicians' assertions that the Ottoman and Seljuk Empires are historical precedents for the entire Muslim world. Moreover, it underscores an ambition to situate the nation, especially Istanbul, amongst cities that were historically part of Turkish territories in the country's pre-Republican era. This could also be interpreted as a manifestation of current political aspirations to reassert Türkiye's influence over those territories. In this vein, beyond the posters loaded with mixed narratives of shadowy enemies and heroes, the name plaques suggest that the school's managers aim to expand students' horizons beyond their homeland and towards Islamic territories outside of Türkiye.

The school's engagement with the wider Muslim world does not end with just naming the interiors. Hung within the learning spaces are framed photographs showing wells in the Republic of Chad and Bangladesh. Hung within the learning spaces are framed photographs showing wells in the Republic of Chad and Bangladesh. These wells were funded by money raised by the school's students and supported by the İnsani Yardım Vakfı (Humanitarian Relief Foundation, IHH), a faith-based and pro-government non-governmental organisation.²⁸ By situating these

²⁸ Not surprisingly, in various parts of the school complex, one might come across flyers and posters of other faith-based organisations such as Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı (Türkiye Youth Foundation, TÜGVA), Ensar Vakfı (Ensar Foundation), and Kudüs ve Civarındaki Osmanlı Mirasını Koruma ve Yaşatma Derneği (Ottoman Heritage Protection in Jerusalem, MİRASIMIZ), which are funded through informal channels of pleading and lobbying with high-level government representatives.

images within the learning spaces, the institution integrates a global perspective into the educational environment. It underscores the importance of outreach and the broader Ummah (global Muslim community) in its pedagogy. By emphasizing that the funds for these wells were raised by the students themselves, the school underscores the students' agency and capabilities. It is a testament to their capacity for activism and impact. Further, the school's association with the IHH subtly aligns the school's activities with the current political leadership. This interplay of charity and politics, while emphasizing student agency, can also serve as an endorsement of the current power actors' values and priorities.

In various parts of the building, including the dining room, canteen, entrance hall, and corridors, another pro-government organisation prominently establishes its presence through banners and promotional posters: the İlim Yayma Cemiyeti (Association for the Dissemination of Knowledge, İYC). Playing a crucial role in the school's foundation, the İYC provided financial backing for the construction and ongoing management of both the school and the adjoining male dormitory. Beyond mere fiscal support, this foundation organises Islamic-themed social gatherings, alumni meetings, graduation ceremonies, career days, and conferences within the education complex.²⁹ These events find their hub in the Mehmet Emin Saraç Cultural Centre, which stands as the primary gathering space for both students and the wider district residents.

The Cultural Centre building visually echoes the aesthetic qualities of other buildings in the complex, bearing a historical mask on the exterior and a contemporary appearance and spatial organisation inside. The entrance is dominated by a reinforced concrete arcade mimicking the

²⁹ Even the NGO's own general assembly meeting was held in the school campus with the attendance of several government officials. Yeni Şafak, "70 Yıllık Çınar: İlim Yayma Cemiyeti," *Yeni Şafak*, October 10, 2021, <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/70-yillik-cinar-ilim-yayma-cemiyeti-3706188>.

stone arcades of Islamic cultures. Contrasting this, the interior showcases a fusion of modern, arabesque, and traditional visual elements: freestanding columns; a reception desk adorned with granite; a wall complemented with wood-effect plastic panels; the Municipality's gilded sign gracing the walls; and the Cultural Centre's vibrant logo, enhancing various surfaces within the space. The prominent display of the Municipality's sign and the Cultural Centre's logo reinforces institutional pride and identity. The sign and the logo, drawing inspiration from the eight-pointed Seljuk star pattern, tie the space back to a particular historical era, suggesting a conscious alignment with Seljuk heritage.

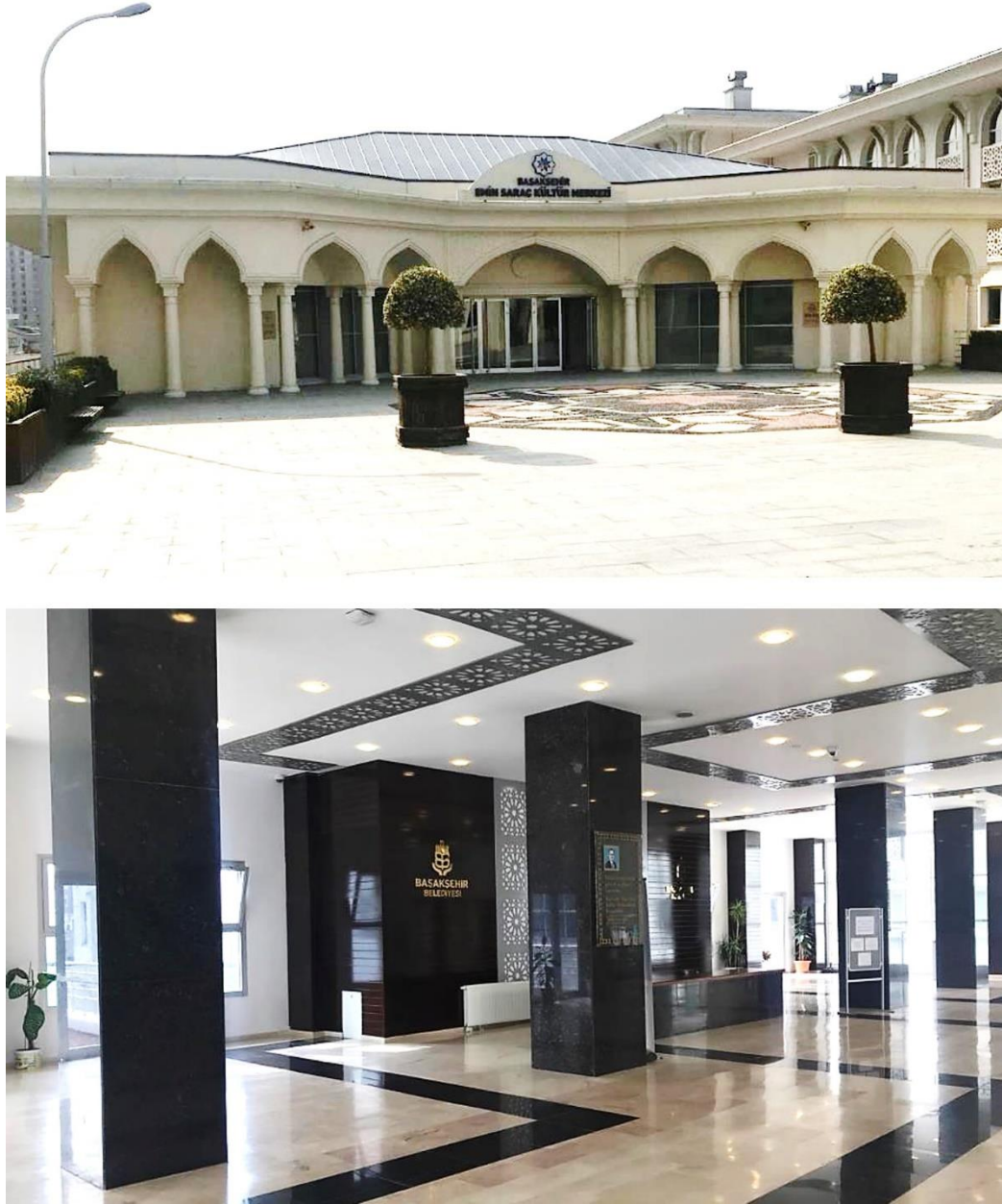


Figure 81: Views from the exterior and interior of the Cultural Centre building within the hatip school complex. The photographs show the disjunction between the exterior and interior of the Cultural Centre building, in material, equipment, and decoration. This eclectic blend of modern and historical architectural elements makes the reception hall evoke the ambiance of a contemporary hotel lobby rather than a historic structure. This *mélange* of styles aims to ensure functionality and cater to contemporary tastes, while still embedding the space within a distinguishable cultural and historical framework.



Figure 82: Entrance hall of the Cultural Centre. The name “Başakşehir Municipality” is prominently displayed on various parts of the wall across the entrance, and nearby, a smiling photo of the district mayor further extends a welcome to visitors. On a free-standing column, a tableau of text explains that the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip Külliyesi, the largest *imam hatip* school in Türkiye, was introduced to the district with special courtesy and attention of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The deliberate placement of this information communicates a tale of official endorsement and collaboration. The explicit acknowledgment of President Erdoğan’s involvement is not just a formality but signifies the school’s strategic alignment with his political and religious vision for Türkiye. And while the school welcomes students from all districts, the emphasis on its introduction to this specific district by the municipality underscores a targeted community outreach effort. This reaffirms the central role of religious education and institutions in community-building, reflecting local identities in harmony with broader national and political discourses.

The Cultural Centre in Başakşehir is a multi-functional hub, featuring exhibition halls, conference rooms, mosques, restrooms—labelled as *şadırvan* on signage, referring to the Ottoman term for such spaces—and indoor parking. Managed by Başakşehir Municipality, it acts as a communal space, hosting theatre performances, seminars, and exhibitions for the district’s residents. This centre has garnered popularity not just in Başakşehir but across Istanbul, becoming a focal point for a myriad of Islamic cultural and social gatherings. A notable annual

event orchestrated by the municipal authorities is the “The July 15th Photographs” exhibition. This temporary display commemorates the public’s resistance to the coup attempt, showcasing poignant scenes from that fateful night across Istanbul, including those captured in the district.

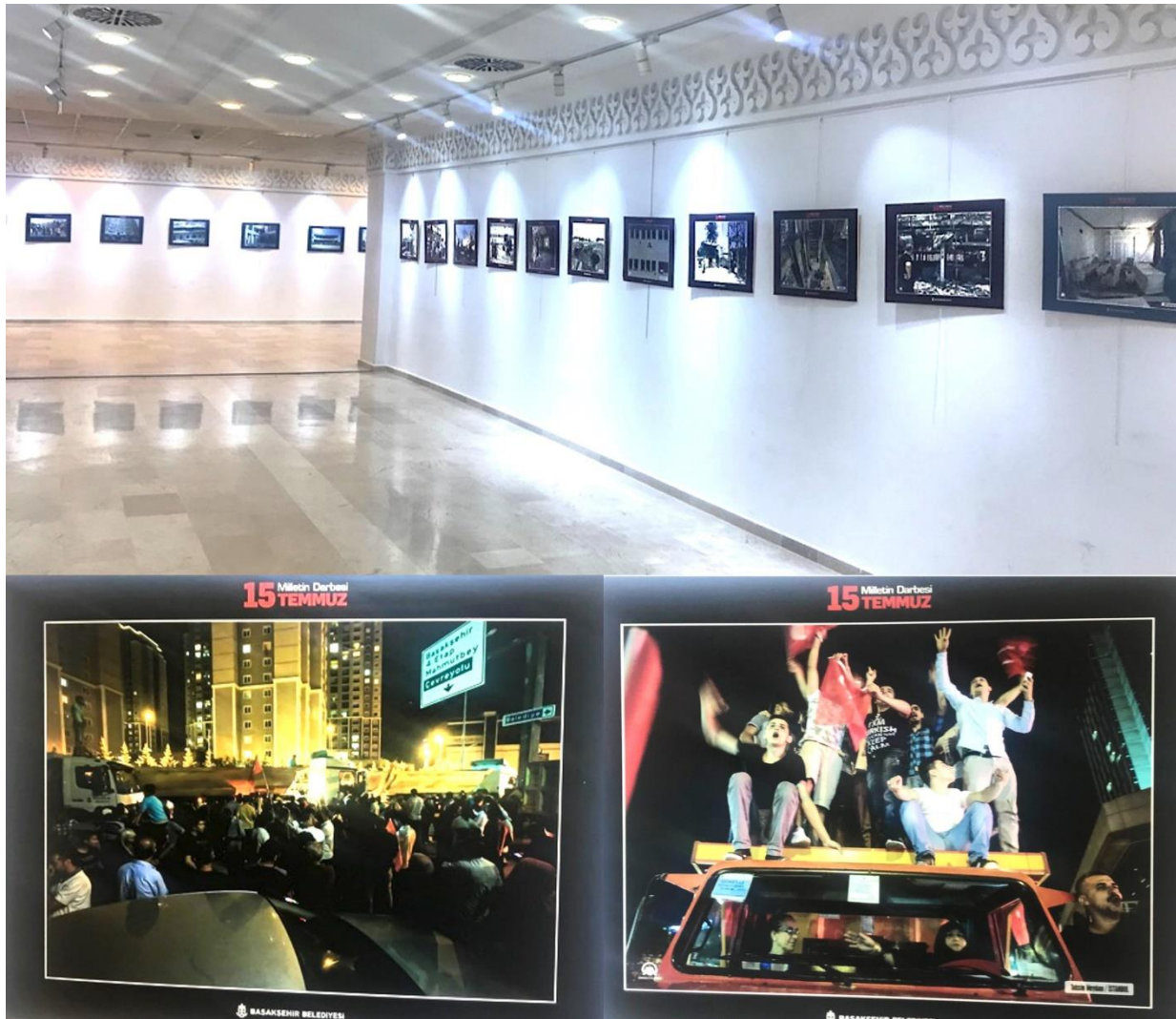


Figure 83: Annual photography exhibition commemorating the July 15th coup attempt, featuring images of Başakşehir residents in protest. With its dual themes—the coup attempt and local resistance—the exhibition offers a layered narrative. The former emphasizes national resilience within a broad political framework, while the latter captures the essence of community agency and local defiance.

In conclusion, the Muhammed Emin Saraç İmam Hatip School complex, with its distinctive architectural elements, spatial layout, and religious curriculum, serves as a tangible representation of the educational aspirations set forth by the current political leadership. The involvement of a myriad of entities in its design, construction, and administration, ranging from governmental bodies to faith-based institutions, accentuates the intensifying collaboration between religious organisations and the state. Its architectural approach, which blends (a)historical imageries with modern interiors, mirror the government's broader attempts to rekindle the country's Ottoman past while simultaneously embracing the conveniences of contemporary life.

While the architecture of the envelope is crafted convey political narratives, the interior of the envelope furthers this communication through symbolic imagery, emblematic surfaces, and deliberate object placements, all complemented by the strategic organisation and utilization of spaces. The school's features, such as its religious curriculum, gender-segregated living arrangements, and an unofficial yet widely accepted dress code for female students, along with the religious routines shaping a student's day, all amplify its purpose beyond mere academia. The charity initiatives championed by certain religious organisations and the array of social events hosted underline the school's significant role as a cultural hub. Through such events, the school emerges as a pivotal point for cultural, religious, and social interactions, extending its influence beyond the student body to the wider community.

5.2.b. İbn Haldun University

In addition to the increasing number of public schools adopting historicist building envelopes, some privately-owned institutions are also embracing this architectural trend to evoke a sense of a glorious past. Investors, particularly those aligned with the ruling political figures, tend to adhere to the aesthetic preferences of these authorities when selecting an architectural style for their projects, including private schools and universities. İbn Haldun University, the first university established in Başakşehir, sets an example of this trend with its distinctive architectural design. The university, characterized by its distinct architectural style, conservative portrayal in the media, the power network behind its emergence, academic council, and the campus experience it offers, emerges as another symbolically significant educational establishment rooted in the contemporary socio-political milieu of the country.

The campus is situated at the northern edge of the district, beyond the housing blocks by TOKİ designed for low and middle-income groups. Promotional catalogues and the university's website describe the location as "fairly close to the newly built Istanbul International Airport." However, a closer look reveals that aside from the mass housing blocks, the campus is primarily surrounded by empty plots and a sprawling highway that stretches as far as the eye can see.³⁰ Yet the decision to choose this location might hint at long-term planning. While the immediate environment might lack certain amenities or appear isolated, the surrounding vacant land suggests potential for future development, especially given the district's rapid growth.

Universities often serve as catalysts for urban development. Thus, in the near future, these plots

³⁰ "İbn Haldun University Complex," İbn Haldun University, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.ihu.edu.tr/en/ibn-haldun-university-complex>.

could transform into housing, commercial areas, or other infrastructure, all driven by the university's presence.

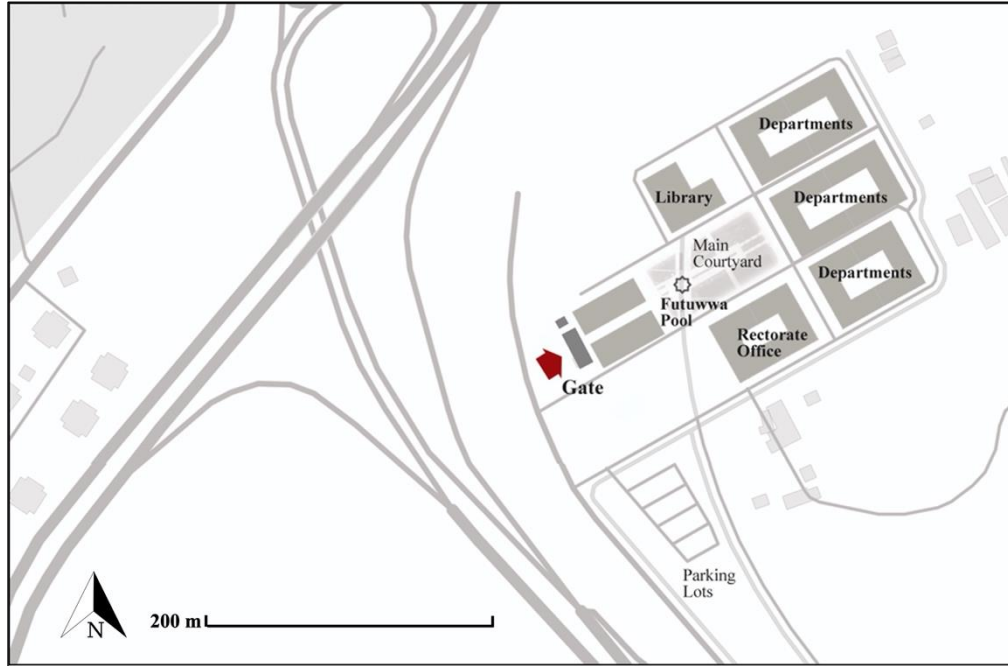


Figure 84: A map of Ibn Haldun University campus. Source: Google Maps image modified by the author.

The university was established by the Türkiye Youth and Education Service Foundation (TÜRGEV) in 2015. This non-governmental organisation was founded in 1996 by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his tenure as the mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Erdoğan's family members and their political/business connections manage the foundation. To facilitate the university's construction on designated public lands in Başakşehir, the foundation sought a building permit from the Ministry of Treasury. Following approval, the Ministry transferred the required lands to TÜRGEV. Subsequently, the Başakşehir Municipality amended the necessary development plans and also contributed financial support for the project's landscaping using

municipal resources.³¹ The university's board of visitors comprises Erdoğan's family members, the Başakşehir mayor, business magnates known for their extensive construction projects during the AKP era, and selected members of the AKP.³²

Before initiating the project, TÜRGEV held an architectural design competition for the İbn Haldun University in 2017, inviting eight architecture and construction firms to participate.³³ The competition guidelines explicitly asked participants to derive inspiration from the architectural traditions of the Ottoman and Seljuk periods, seeing this as pivotal for the “advancement of Turkish society.” The design was expected to feature quadratic elements, reminiscent of the traditional structures of madrasa and *külliye* architecture.³⁴ A substantial explanation of the role of square as a geometric form in Islamic architecture was provided, with reference to the cubic form of the Kaaba, the Muslim pilgrimage building in Mecca.³⁵ Despite these precise directives, none of the proposed designs resonated with the competition's advisory committee. Interestingly, this led them to engage an English architecture firm to steer the design process, possibly reflecting a desire to merge traditional aesthetics with contemporary global architectural standards and practices.³⁶ The construction task was entrusted to Rönesans Holding, a

³¹ “Başakşehir Belediyesi’nden Estetik Çevre Düzenlemesi,” 12/07/2020, Başakşehir Belediyesi Websitesi, accessed August 16, 2023, <https://www.basaksehir.bel.tr/basaksehir-belediyesi-nden-estetik-cevre-duzenlemesi>.

³² “TÜRGEV’in Külliyesinde İlk Faz Bitti,” *Sözcü*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/turgevin-kulliyesinde-ilk-faz-bitti-6087627/>.

³³ Although I consulted several people working for İbn Haldun University for information about the architectural design competition and the invited firms, I was unable to learn the names of these firms. Tamer (Assistant Chancellor of İbn Haldun University), In Person, December 20, 2019.

³⁴ “İbn Haldun Üniversitesi Eğitim Külliyesi Davetli Mimari Proje Yarışması” (İbn Haldun Üniversitesi, January 2017), 47.

³⁵ “İbn Haldun Üniversitesi Eğitim Külliyesi Davetli Mimari Proje Yarışması,” 45–46.

³⁶ As mentioned previously, I was unable to learn the names of these firms neither from the chancellor nor other employees of the chancellor office.

construction firm noted for its governmental affiliations. After the project's conclusion, the university's chancellor, Recep Şentürk, emphasized that the design inspiration was deeply rooted in a sixteenth century masterpiece, Atık Valide Külliyesi by Mimar Sinan—often referred to as Sinan the Architect.³⁷ He drew attention to the low-rise architectural style, with educational rooms enveloping multiple courtyards. Each courtyard is accentuated by individual gardens and shared spaces tailored for different departments. Additionally, he emphasized the green zones centralized around a main courtyard, the presence of colonnades framing the buildings, intricate ornamental patterns, standalone architectural elements, and the distinct materials chosen for the open space pavements.

³⁷ Şeyma Nazlı Gürbüz, “Turkey’s Ibn Haldun University Opens with Objective of Intellectual Independence,” *Daily Sabah*, May 20, 2017, sec. Education, <https://www.dailysabah.com/education/2017/05/20/turkeys-ibn-haldun-university-opens-with-objective-of-intellectual-independence>.



Figure 85: An aerial view of Atik Valide Külliyesi. Source: SALT Archives <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/89421>.



Figure 86: An aerial view of Ibn Haldun University campus. Source: Source: İbn Haldun University Website, <https://www.ihu.edu.tr/en/ibn-haldun-university-complex>.

The inauguration of the campus took place on October 19th, 2020, in the presence of President Erdoğan and his family, TÜRGEV members, the AKP members, members of the board of trustees, vice-presidents, deans, academics, and honorary guests including Haji Allahshükür Hummat Pashazade (Sheikh ul-Islam and Grand Mufti of the Caucasus) and Sheikh Thani bin Hamad Al Thani (brother of the Qatari emir). In his address, President Erdoğan highlighted the pitfalls of merely following the dominant Western intellectual paradigms and current global order.³⁸ He argued for the importance of deriving intellectual strength from the country's own rich traditions. Overlooking the involvement of the English firm in the design process and countering criticisms of merely "imitating the West", he expressed pride in the university campus's architectural conception as an Islamic *küllîye*. By naming the university campus *küllîye*, there is a clear intent to evoke the architectural principles of madrasas and mosques from the imperial eras.

³⁸ AA, "Cumhurbaşkanı İbn Haldun Külliyesi'ni açtı," *Hürriyet*, October 19, 2020, sec. eğitim, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/egitim/cumhurbaskani-ibn-haldun-kulliyesini-acti-41640146>.



Figure 87: The monumental entrance of the Ibn Haldun University. The gate is the most prominent structure on the campus, resembling the portal of a Seljuk *külliye*. It serves as a potent symbol, capturing the institution’s ideological stance and reflecting a respect for the past as portrayed by leading political figures.

The entrance of the campus is truly monumental, characterized by a grand flight of steps, an expansive vault, and two decorative arches on either side. Evoking the grand portals of Seljuk *külliye(s)*, it immediately captures the attention of visitors. To the right of the entrance, a clock tower stands tall, serving as a contemporary counterpart to the traditional minaret of a *külliye*, which is typically seen from outside a surrounding wall, asserting its dominance against the skyline. Both the tower and the portal showcase Seljuk star patterns and ornamented niches on their façades. The entrance leads to a passageway nestled between two buildings, which in turn opens to the central courtyard of the campus. Intriguingly, amidst this historically themed ambiance, visitors are met with modern-day smart-card access turnstiles as they pass through the vaulted entrance.



Figure 88: Entrance of the Ibn Haldun University. The smart-card access turnstiles at the end of the vault and the downlighters hung on the vault's wall cast a shadow over the historical atmosphere created in the campus entrance. It sends a message that while the institution upholds a glorious and continuously re-written history, it is not confined by it and is willing to embrace contemporary technological advancements.

Lawns and paths divide the central courtyard, an elongated space covered with paving stones. A marble pond named Futuwwa, in the shape of an eight-pointed Seljuk star, stands at the intersection of several paths in the broadest section of the courtyard. The Arabic term *futuwwa* refers to groups of Muslim youth during the Seljuk and Ottoman periods who adhered to a code of honour and practiced noble ethics to gain spiritual perfection.³⁹ These ethics and associated character traits include generosity, humility, loyalty, courage, and turning a blind eye to others' sins. These eight traits are written on gold plaques embedded in the ground at each corner of the Futuwwa Pool. The university's promotional webpage states that the concept of *futuwwa* represents the institution's foundational educational principle. It suggests that the moral values, once championed by virtuous youths of the past, should be resurrected by adapting them to contemporary contexts.⁴⁰ With its eight-pointed star shape and guiding plaques, the small marble pond appears to symbolize this 'divine' service. By situating a pool in the centre of the courtyard and surrounding it with nameplates inscribed with the aforementioned virtues, the administrators express their belief that this symbolic representation can promote the resurgence of moral conduct aligned with Islamic teachings. This approach also indicates that the university's educational direction might predominantly appeal to Muslim youth.

³⁹ Gürsoy Akça, "Fütüvvetçilikte ve Türk Fütüvvetçiliğinde (Ahilik) İdeal İnsan ve Ahlâkı," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12, no. 3 (January 1, 2017): 41.

⁴⁰ "Futuwwa," Ibn Haldun University, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://ihu.edu.tr/en/futuvvet>.



Figure 89: Futuwwa Pool in the central courtyard of the Ibn Haldun University campus and nameplates with inscribed virtues. Positioned at the heart of the campus, the pool is seen by the university administration as a historical reminder. They believe it emphasizes that these virtues are not just relics of the past but play a role in shaping the present and future of both the university community and the broader society.

The visual emphasis on a historic appearance gradually diminishes from the monumental entrance portal to the courtyard, which is surrounded by typical three or four-story concrete buildings with plain façades. This visual transition suggests an intentional sequencing that reflects the prioritization of certain spaces. The prominence of the entrance emphasizes public image and identity projection, while the subsequent areas accommodate the practical and functional aspects of education.

However, efforts to disrupt the architectural monotony of the buildings are evident in the two-storey red wooden colonnades adorned with traditional motifs. PVC window frames are discreetly hidden behind these curtains to maintain the historic ambiance, an ambiance crafted through selective appropriation of specific elements. Some buildings have courtyards covered with red hexagonal stones. As the chancellor of the University explains, these stones represent the educational architecture of the Ottoman period.⁴¹ The explanation provided by the chancellor regarding the red hexagonal stones and two-story reinforced concrete colonnades reveals an interesting interplay between architectural symbolism, historical interpretation, and the construction of an ideological narrative.

⁴¹ Zeynep Rakipoğlu, “İHÜ’yü ‘Kampüs Üniversite’ Kimliğine Kavuşturan Külliye Açıldı,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/egitim/ihuyu-kampus-universite-kimligine-kavusturan-kulliye-acildi/2011400>.

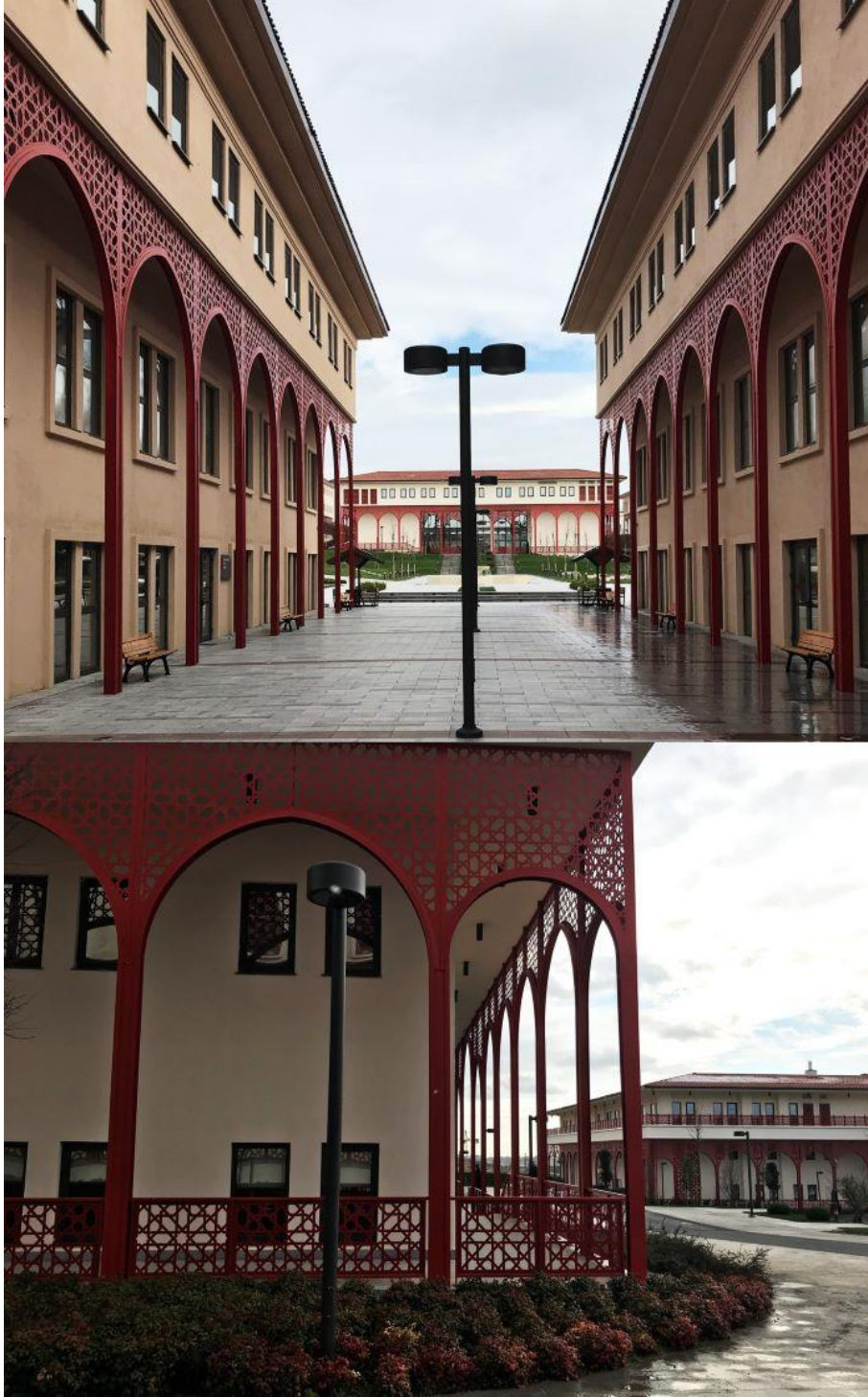


Figure 90: A view from inside the Ibn Haldun University campus. Two-storey wooden colonnades adorned with traditional ornaments encircle the educational buildings, dominating the courtyard with a red contour that flows throughout the entire space. This contour upholds the institution's proud historic identity, breaking the monotony of the façade organisation in the buildings.

The toponyms of the buildings surrounding the courtyard and interior spaces carry layered meanings. These choices contribute to an ideological landscape within the campus that not only emphasizes religious and cultural identity but also seeks to integrate them with global collaborations and a sense of national belonging, all underpinned by an Islamist perspective.

There are halls named Mesnevi (an acclaimed work of Islamic mystical literature by Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi), Muqaddimah (a book by the historian İbn Haldun), and Mehmet Akif Ersoy (a distinguished Turkish Islamist poet and the author of the Turkish national anthem).

Additionally, there is a space named Doha, named after the capital of Qatar. This designation honours a memorandum of understanding between the Doha Institute and İbn Haldun University, which emphasizes student exchange, financial and procedural support for students, as well as collaboration on joint workshops and summer programs. This partnership is explained to be intended to foster academic exchange, collaboration, and financial support, reinforcing the affinity between the institutions. This reinforces the ideological ties and mutual interests shared by both institutions, allowing for a cross-pollination of ideas and resources that align with an Islamist worldview.

Within the interiors, the aspiration to evoke a historical, monumental, and splendid ambiance, which dominates the campus's exterior, gives way to the builders' commitment to fulfill contemporary technical requirements and their ambition to forge a modern aesthetic. When considering building materials, furniture, minimalist objects, and technical and lighting equipment, little inside the buildings mirrors the ceremonious exterior. However, it is the subtle details, such as historical patterns used decoratively across various surfaces, and the significant design elements reflecting daily campus life, that reveal the builders' and founders' ideological leanings cemented into the very structure.

The artworks gracing the interior walls of the buildings instill a historical ambiance within the otherwise quiet, unassuming spaces. For example, the library building, the campus's one of the most frequented spaces, is furnished with standard furniture and has a stark white colour scheme. Within this backdrop, paintings in gilded frames convey layered messages that celebrate the era before republican Türkiye, primarily the days of the Ottoman Empire. One standout piece is a reproduction of the renowned portrait of Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, believed to be by Gentile Bellini. Another notable reproduction is a work by the Ottoman-Italian artist Vittorio Pisani, which depicts the Greek forces landing at İzmir and their subsequent defeat by the Ottoman forces in 1919. Other paintings throughout the library depict everyday life in Ottoman settings and portray significant historical figures who championed Islamic ideals or contributed to Islamic thought, reinforcing the significance of these figures in the students' minds.

Beyond the design language used to engage current and prospective students, the visual and textual narratives crafted for the university's promotion offer a glimpse into the targeted and desired student community within the institution. The promotional videos and photographs emphasize the university's architectural aesthetics, educational facilities, and serene campus environment. However, it is noteworthy that these initial advertising materials were created during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, which prohibited in-person education. As a result, the scenes often appear staged with a limited number of students. In this quiet backdrop, the photographs depict individuals, primarily of the same gender, engaging in discussions, studies, or relaxation. This contrasts with more conventional college promotional photographs that often depict mixed-gender groups enjoying recreational activities, lying on the lawn, and having fun together. One photograph shows students reading or discussing a book with their peers in an open-air seating area on campus. In another image, two female students are captured

in the central courtyard, sitting silently on the lawn, pulling their knees toward themselves with a half-hidden yet expressive smile on their faces. Similarly, another photo showcases students, surrounded by books, reading, and studying intently with their same-gender peers in the library's solemn ambiance. This portrayal emphasizes the campus primarily as a space for academic productivity and rigorous commitment to education, sidelining casual social interactions that do not directly relate to learning. This unique representation of campus life also suggests that the administrative decision-makers at the university are not only promoting but perhaps idealizing a more modest, dignified, and distinctly gender-segregated campus life. Such an approach might be a conscious effort to appeal specifically to children of conservative families, encouraging them to choose this university over others.



Figure 91: Promotional images show the campus life in the İbn Haldun University. Source: İbn Haldun University Website, <https://www.ihu.edu.tr/tr/galeri>.

The images stand in stark contrast to the conventional lively college photos. The curated selection and composition of these materials suggest a tailored approach to resonate with a specific student demographic, notably the conservative youth.

A clear reflection of the intended conservative social life in the campus can be discerned from the nature of its social activities and events. The range of conferences, meetings, discussions, and celebrations, both online and on campus, is shaped by the influential network that not only

founded and funded the university but also remains active in its administration. This includes politicians and their families, municipal authorities, businesspeople, and religious organisations. Events feature collective fast-breaking dinners in the central courtyard of the campus during the month of Ramadan, Islamic celebration events held in religious holidays, *sema* dances (Sufi whirling ceremonies), seminars, and conferences on issues such as morality, Islamophobia, the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans, the July 15th coup attempt, the significance of Jerusalem for Muslims, and other discipline-specific events.

To conclude, both Muhammed Emin Saraç Imam Hatip School and Ibn Haldun University are significant landmarks reflecting the populist architectural trends of the past decades. Beyond their roles in fostering a pious youth, they offer an academic and social environment in harmony with the historicist, traditionalist, and Islamist narratives championed by political leaders. Their architectural design cleverly weaves historical elements, symbolic visuals, and texts into a cohesive tapestry spanning both exterior and interior spaces. However, the intentional blending of historically unrelated visual elements, which both cater to and draw inspiration from various political narratives, causes these spaces to stand as eclectic portrayals of a reimagined history. Zafer Çeler contends that by simplifying architectural history into isolated and randomly selected stylistic elements, structures produced in the contemporary political milieu become manifestations of a “Disneyfied history.”⁴² The term underscores the oversimplification and manipulation of history for political gains, urging a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between architecture, ideology, and historical representation.

⁴² Çeler, “Pseudo-Historicism and Architecture,” 507.

Unlike many other institutions that feature unremarkable, generic architecture, these particular projects often garner positive feedback and are well-received, especially among the targeted demographic.⁴³ The distinctive qualities of these spaces are often accentuated with superlatives like “the most,” “the first,” and “the largest,” underlining the accomplishments of those pivotal to their design, construction, foundation, and organisation. The beauty of these spaces is further emphasized by the historicism evident on their façades, which is said to convey a deep reverence for tradition and history. However, not all feedback is positive. Numerous architects and urban planners question this approach, highlighting the use of free eclecticism and the seemingly random assembly of architectural elements in the name of establishing an identity.⁴⁴

Some critics prioritize the ideological underpinnings veiled within historicism over simply assessing the validity of eclectic architectural approaches. They argue that the debate over whether the new Ottoman-Seljuk architecture accurately references historical periods is redundant, given the absence of any architectural style that authentically merges both Ottoman and Seljuk influences. Despite its intricate evolution over the centuries, Ottoman architecture has never manifested a consistent and unified style.⁴⁵ Thus, delving into the underlying meanings in the design, production, and spatial organisation of these structures holds greater relevance than mere critiques of the eclecticism of architectural language. Uğur Tanyeli adds that, although these newly invented architectural compositions, marketed as historical, bear little resemblance to actual past designs, they serve a strategic purpose: the architectural discourse that

⁴³ Bülent Batuman, “İdeolojik Tarihselcilik Olarak ‘Osmanlı-Selçuklu’: Bir Araştırma İzleği Önerisi,” *Arredamento Mimarlık* 340 (2020): 70.

⁴⁴ Çeler, “Pseudo-Historicism and Architecture,” 506.

⁴⁵ Çeler, 507.

commemorates a powerful empire, which once challenged other major nations, aids today's ruling entities in establishing and justifying their own oppressive regimes.⁴⁶

Architecture is often viewed as a strategic tool for validating contemporary political regimes by invoking the legacies of historical empires. However, it is not the only instrument that power actors use to build a community aligned with their ideology. The educational approaches within institutions, the use of symbolic stimulators, and the envisaged social life are all orchestrated to mutually support the construction of desired communities.

5.3. Ideology within the envelope

Attempts to forge a historicist discourse within architecture have a dual nature. As Nilgün Lale emphasizes, on one hand, creators of this new architectural style, infused with conservative-nationalistic content, seek legitimacy by turning to the past.⁴⁷ On the other hand, they present it as modern, proficient, and on par with its Western counterparts in terms of equipment. The references to the Seljuk and Ottoman eras, juxtaposed with concerns of being overshadowed by Western influences, summarize today's uncertainties and tensions.

This duality, a desire to be both traditional/conservative and modern/contemporary, extends beyond just political discourse. As Ömer Kanıpak notes, when political and urban authorities aim to construct traditional-looking public institutions to appeal to a broader audience, their

⁴⁶ Uğur Tanyeli, "Kanayan Yaramız Yeni Milli Mimarimiz: Ne O Osman Ne O Selçuk," *Arredamento Mimarlık* 340 (May 2020): 56.

⁴⁷ Nilgün Lale, "Tracing Conservative Modernization of Turkey between 2010-2020: School Architecture in Istanbul's Historical Peninsula" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ankara, Bilkent University, 2021), 49.

architects draw from a repertoire rich with motifs from Ottoman and Seljuk architectures.⁴⁸

Conversely, when designing ‘prestigious’ institutional buildings catered to an upper-income demographic, architects opt for Neoclassical architectural forms, of which examples can be found in contemporary Western cities. These are characterized by their grand scale, symmetrical façade, relative simplicity, and minimal ornamentation. Here, the selection of styles is guided by the targeted socio-economic group and their assumed aesthetic preferences.

Approaching from a similar yet nuanced angle, I posit that the architectural imagery chosen by political and urban authorities for public buildings is influenced not just by socio-economic targeting but also by the project’s location and its immediate surroundings. For instance, a school or police headquarters situated in a traditional or modest neighbourhood might embrace an Ottoman-Seljuk architectural style. In contrast, a building in an emergent, socio-economically ascending district might veer towards a more contemporary and somewhat minimalist design, which leans away from historical (be it traditional, local, or national) motifs and more towards an international aesthetic. This decision-making process frequently reflects the established political and economic agendas of politicians, along with the interests of their financial collaborators involved in the project or invested in the area.

Başakşehir Millet Kırathanesi (Nation’s Library) is one such example. It is intended as a space of knowledge with the purpose of grounding a base for the ruling politicians’ discourse of acculturation and nurturing a conservative youth. However, its design approach differs from previously analyzed educational institutions. This library exemplifies how concerns of

⁴⁸ Ömer Kanipak, “Yeni Başbakanlık Sarayı ve Giydirilmiş Sandalyeler,” *Mimdap* (blog), June 5, 2014, <http://mimdap.org/2014/06/yeni-bathbakanlyk-sarayy-ve-giydirilmith-sandalyeler/>.

government authorities and major developers about creating a prestigious image, gaining capital, and financializing urban space can, at times, override their intention to display power with (a)historical references.

The building was constructed by Emlak Konut in 2019 as part of President Erdoğan's initiative to build nation's libraries across the country. This project was publicly announced by Erdoğan during his electoral campaign preceding the 2018 elections. Of the forty-six nation's libraries built in Istanbul, the Başakşehir Nation's Library, unsurprisingly, was prominently promoted by its builders and the district's municipal figures as the city's first and largest. This aligns with the district's established reputation for leading the city in "mosts" and "firsts."⁴⁹

5.3.a. Başakşehir Millet Kırathanesi (Nation's Library)

The nationwide "Nation's Libraries" project was introduced as a vision for new library spaces intertwined with social facilities in cities. These spaces were named *kırathane*, an old term derived from the Arabic words *qiraat*, meaning reading, and *hane*, meaning house. Historically, this term referred to Ottoman coffee houses exclusive to men, where one could peruse newspapers and magazines over a cup of tea or coffee. The ruling political actors preferred the word *kırathane* over *kütüphane*, the Turkish word for library, due to the connotations of the word associated with everyday life in Ottoman times. They envisioned these spaces as multifunctional venues, combining the attributes of a library, a coffeehouse, and a cultural centre.

⁴⁹ "Başakşehir Millet Kırathanesi," *Başakşehir Bülteni*, 2019, 28.

Some critics view Erdoğan's "Nation's Libraries" project as an alternative to the Halkevleri Project (Peoples' Houses) of the early republican era.⁵⁰ Established in 1932, with the purpose of serving to the ongoing nation-building process and "educate the populace according to the nationalist, secularist, and populist principles," these community centres boasted libraries, educational venues, and cultural facilities.⁵¹ Zeynep Kezer says the establishment of the peoples' houses was a state attempt to permeate the spheres of social and cultural life.⁵² Although many of these institutions were housed in pre-existing historical buildings, some of the seventeen peoples' houses that opened in Istanbul were in newly constructed buildings specifically designed for that purpose. Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan emphasize that architects gave these buildings modern aesthetics, integrating offices, libraries, classrooms, and multifunctional spaces for activities like lectures, meetings, and celebrations.⁵³ As important landmarks of modern architecture in Türkiye, the peoples' houses symbolized a deeply desired modern life. Beyond the assigned tasks of promoting the new regime and embodying ideological perspectives, they introduced dynamism in cities and contributed to the establishment of a modern and secular ambiance. In light of this history, critics perceived the contemporary "Nation's Libraries" initiative as mirroring the legacy of the iconic peoples' houses from the early republican era.

⁵⁰ Yılmaz Özdil, "Millet kıraathanesi," *Sözcü*, June 9, 2018, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/yazarlar/yilmaz-ozdil/millet-kiraathanesi-2457578/>; İhsan Çaralan, "Millet Kıraathaneleri AKP'nin Halk Evleri Olmasın!," *Evrensel*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/81659/millet-kiraathaneleri-akpnin-halk-evleri-olmasin>; Sibel Hurtas, "What's behind Erdogan's Promise of Free Coffeehouses?," *Al-Monitor*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/06/turkey-erdogans-coffeehouse-project.html>.

⁵¹ Kemal H. Karpat, "The Impact of the People's Houses on the Development of Communication in Turkey: 1931-1951," *Die Welt Des Islams* 15, no. 1/4 (1974): 69.

⁵² Kezer, *Building Modern Turkey*, 226.

⁵³ Bozdoğan and Akcan, *Turkey*, 35–36.

While the former was portrayed as a symbol of progress and alignment with modernist precepts, the latter is framed as an endeavour to rejuvenate historical values.

Today, the number of completed nations' libraries exceeds a hundred, with more still under construction. Regarding the interventions in the architecture of educational buildings since the early 2000s, one might anticipate these library buildings to adopt a common spatial language compiled from the architectural elements of historical periods. However, no specific design was determined for these structures. Unlike many public spaces and institutions including the nation's gardens and school buildings created or transformed for the last two decades, no standard form or design principles were prescribed for the nation's libraries.

Despite the dominant political actors' push to integrate historical elements into public building architecture, they demonstrated more flexibility with the nation's libraries, favouring minimalist styles over rigid ideological connotations. These buildings do not adhere to a generic architectural image; instead, they are context sensitive. In some instances, existing public libraries were re-branded as nation's libraries such as in Nevmekan Bağlarbaşı and Merkez Efendi Millet Kırathanesi, or historical structures were refurbished to function as libraries like in the cases of Nevmekan Selimiye and Nevmekan Sahil. Some libraries, especially those in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, were established by converting a floor of an existing building into a library space, as observed at Zeytinburnu Millet Kırathanesi. In comparatively backward areas, low-cost buildings were constructed, such as Aydos Millet Kırathanesi and Taşoluk Millet Kırathanesi. Attractive and relatively high-quality buildings, such as Veliefendi Millet Kırathanesi, were built in developed neighbourhoods. a potential source of windfall profits for a

select group of government supporters, who would undoubtedly be given the privilege to establish and operate the libraries.

The Başakşehir Nation's Library is located in the heart of Kayaşehir—the most popular and valuable part of Başakşehir, surrounded by new housing blocks, business towers, commercial projects, public facilities, and highways. Spanning an area of 2,500 square metres, the Library is strategically positioned at the western corner of the Nation's Garden. Its location holds significance due to its proximity to the intersection of Adnan Menderes Boulevard—an important road within the Kayaşehir vicinity—and the North Marmara Highway, a crucial route linking to the new Istanbul Airport and the recently-constructed Bosphorus Bridge. The library's placement at the intersection of a main boulevard and a major highway indicates careful consideration of accessibility and visibility. By situating the library in this prominent spot, its builders underscore its role as a cultural and civic cornerstone in the district's layout. Further, by situating the library in a burgeoning neighbourhood surrounded by various new developments, the government and investors aim to enhance property values, attract investments, and stimulate economic growth in the area.



Figure 92: A view of the Başakşehir Nation’s Library. The building is well-situated in its immediate environment, boasting a sleek, organic façade and a contemporary appearance. New housing projects under construction, visible in the background, along with the Garden, the Library, and several other newly initiated developments not shown in the photograph, collectively form a harmonized and intentional composition. Each element contributes to the urban growth and development project underway in the Kayaşehir region.

Adjacent to the library is the Kuzey Yakası project by Emlak Konut, comprising seven low-rise cylindrical buildings with sleek glass façades. The Nation’s Library itself features a cylindrical design, seamlessly integrating with the Kuzey Yakası complex. The flat roof of the library merges with the landscape of the Nation’s Garden behind the building. The top of the roof is covered with a grass carpet as a continuum of the grasses as those surrounding the Nation’s Garden.



Figure 93: A distant view of the Başakşehir Nation's Library. Source: A snapshot from a promotional video on the new residential and commercial spaces built in Kayaşehir by Emlak Konut, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kt7nK_j54X8&ab_channel=ekgyoas. The Kuzey Yakası project by Emlak Konut is visible on the left side of the Library, framed by the Central Mosque and new housing developments from private companies in the background. The Library's organic form seamlessly integrates into the central landscape of the Kayaşehir area. Beyond the membrane shelters and plant pots that contribute to the building's tranquil atmosphere, a towering flagstaff bearing the Turkish flag underscores the building's attributed significance.

The building has a modern appearance with its rounded, sleek, white, and simple frontage, a stripped-down portico with rustic columns and large glass windows. This design is harmoniously integrated into its newly developing and prestigious neighbourhood. A glass dome on the green roof lets sunlight into the entrance hall. The entrance opens onto a panoramic space housing an indoor library café on the right side and a lounge area for waiting and sitting in the centre; the restrooms, *abdest* (wudu) spaces, *mescit(s)* (praying rooms), and a multi-purpose hall are on the left side; the main library space is beyond the lounge area. The café provides service during the year, except in the month of Ramadan. The decision to keep the library café open year-round but

closed during Ramadan underscores the managers' perception of fasting as a commonly practiced form of worship by all members of the Başakşehir community, as if it were a homogeneous entity. This approach aligns with the larger goal of creating a space that caters to the cultural and religious sensitivities of the population it serves, while overlooking those not fasting. Consequently, while people occupy the tables throughout the day during the year, the café is a ghost space during the Ramadan.

The lounge space is well-positioned under the glass dome of the building, lighting a seating area for visitors, an area for children with bookshelves and seats, and an exhibition space around the seating area. The lounge is designed and embellished in an eclectic way mixing historical-looking ornaments and contemporary furniture and decorative items: colourful sofas and seating units, a plastic palm tree in the centre, an abstracted Seljuk star hanging from the glass dome, and a stucco stained-glass panel with Seljuk motifs on the wall of the main library space.



Figure 94: The children's area is positioned beneath a glass dome. Located directly across the library's entrance, this lounge infuses the interior with a lively ambiance, featuring colourful and modern furniture specifically tailored to children's height and weight.

Beyond the lounge and exhibition area, the main library space unfolds. Accessible through a secondary entrance designed for card-based entry, this area serves as the building's centrepiece. Contrasting with the minimalist atmosphere of the rest of the building, the library space is notably ornate. The space features a semi-circular ground plan, with bookshelves aligned along the curve of the room in two parallel rows in some sections. A mezzanine level adds additional

bookshelves and desks. Capable of accommodating up to 350 people, the library's semi-circular rows of desks face a platform and staff desk, creating a panoptic layout.



Figure 95: The interior of the main library hall of the Nation's Library building.

Today, the modern library is not just a book-lending service; it has evolved into a dynamic hub where books, media, people, and ideas converge. Offering a diverse range of activities such as talks, readings, and children's programs, libraries stand as enduring architectural symbols of cultural capital and intellectual growth. They serve a dual mission in community development:

they are both sanctuaries for reading and study, and agora-like settings for intellectual exchange and social engagement.

In this context, when President Erdoğan unveiled the Nation's Libraries Project in 2018, he framed the concept of a national library as more than a repository for books and artifacts. Instead, he pictured it as a meeting place and a centre of intellectual activity for cities. These libraries were seen as instrumental platforms for distributing a specific type of cultural capital to targeted audiences and for enhancing the Islamist community's reputation. The library's interior design complements this vision by doing more than just facilitating individual study and exploration; it is also convertible into a performance space complete with its own stage. This adaptability makes the library a significant venue for shaping the community's intellectual capital. It hosts a variety of public events like speeches, book talks, and poetry nights, organised by the ruling politicians and municipal authorities of the district.

The ruling political actors' focus on cultivating cultural capital and fostering intellectual spaces for Islamist groups is tied to an underlying concern: despite their ascending political and economic clout, they feel culturally and educationally marginalized. Even though the ruling political actors have enabled economic and political upward mobility of their supporters and the government has consolidated its power to the extent of operating a de facto party state over the past two decades, their discontent with a perceived deprivation of cultural power and educational competence has continued unabated.⁵⁴ Despite numerous educational reforms, adjustments to the national curriculum, an increase in the number of *imam hatip* schools, and the founding of

⁵⁴ Özgür Yaren, Cenk Saraçoğlu, And Irmak Karademir-Hazır, "The Quest For Cultural Power: Islamism, Culture And Art In Turkey," In *The Routledge Handbook On Contemporary Turkey* (Routledge, 2021), 418.

private universities by pro-government entities, the government's aspiration to exert significant influence over culture and education remains unfulfilled. Their control over mainstream media, which could have been a powerful tool in shaping public perception, has likewise not translated into the cultural and educational dominance they desire.

President Erdoğan lays the blame for this perceived cultural deficit at the feet of a select group of “elites.”⁵⁵ These elites, often implicitly understood to be secular power groups, have long held sway over the arts, theatre, cinema, and poetry, and they typically regard both the conservative populace and Erdoğan's party as “uneducated.” While criticizing these elites for their stranglehold on culture and education, Erdoğan candidly acknowledges that these domains have been the weakest areas of his party's long-standing governance.⁵⁶

To address this, recent state initiatives have focused on leveraging both ideological and financial resources to gain a foothold in cultural and educational sectors. Steps have included the funding and promotion of new historical movies and TV dramas that glorify the eras and sultans of the Ottoman and Seljuk Empires. Additionally, the state has been actively building monuments and statues in urban public spaces, as well as organising and financing the Yeditepe Biennial, an event focused on traditional arts that serves as a counterpoint to the Istanbul Biennial. The New

⁵⁵ “Onlara göre biz siyasetten, sanattan, tiyatrodan, sinemadan, şirden, resimden, estetikten, mimariden anlamayız. Onlara göre biz okumamış, cahil, alt tabaka, verilenle yetinmesi gereken, yani zenci bir güruhuz. Bugün de aynı nazar, aynı anlayışla, aynı gözle bakıyorlar.”

“Gezi Parkı, İşgal Alanı Değildir,” *Cumhuriyet*, June 11, 2013, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/gezi-parki-iskal-alani-degildir-427122>.

⁵⁶ Erdoğan states: “Ülkemizin geçtiğimiz 14 yılda yaşadığı büyük dönüşümün en zayıf halkalarını ne yazık ki eğitim ve kültür oluşturuyor... Bu konularda hayal ettiğim düzeylere ulaşamamış olmamızdan fevkalade müteessirim. Bu bir öz eleştiridir ama gerçektir. Önümüzdeki dönemlerde bu alanlara özel önem ve öncelik vererek hem eksiklerimizi tamamlayarak hem de çok daha büyük başarılarla imza atarak bu eksikimizi gidermeliyiz.” “Gezi Parkı, işgal alanı değildir,” *Cumhuriyet*, June 11, 2013, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/gezi-parki-iskal-alani-degildir-427122>.

Art Foundation has also been established with government officials and pro-government individuals forming its executive board. The foundation aims to produce “yerli ve milli” (native and national) arts, thereby imbuing the ruling power structures and their supportive communities with the sort of cultural capital that is highly valued in twenty-first-century Türkiye.⁵⁷

Besides all these interventions to gain visibility in culture and education, one might interpret the nation’s libraries in the context of Erdoğan’s grumblings that the AKP failed to establish supremacy in the cultural and social realm despite being in power since 2002. In this context, the Nation’s Libraries can be seen as yet another strategy to cultivate cultural capital, which, as sociologist Bourdieu described, is “convertible, in certain conditions into economic capital [and] may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications.”⁵⁸ In this regard, the Başakşehir Nation’s Library can be seen as a stage to read Bourdieu’s theory through its spatial, functional and symbolic layers.

The Library is already a popular study and reading place, especially for young people, and also a stage that houses cultural and educational events with ideologically loaded content. These events include traditional music concerts and public talks given by religious intellectuals, conservative artists, pro-government journalists, writers, historians, and sociologists on some patriarchal,

⁵⁷ The Istanbul Biennial is an international contemporary arts event held by a civil initiative, Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), since the 1980s. “AKP’den ‘Kültürel İktidar’ Hamlesi: ‘Yeni Sanat Vakfı’ Kuruldu,” *Evrensel*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/418258/akpden-kulturel-iktidar-hamlesi-yeni-sanat-vakfi-kuruldu>; “Yeni Sanat Vakfı Kuruluşunu İlan Etti,” *İslami Analiz*, November 13, 2020, <https://islamianaliz.com/haber/7469923/yeni-sanat-vakfi-kurulusunu-ilan-etti>.

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58.

political, and religious issues such as women and religion, family and society, Islam and arts, and Türkiye's political power within the global scene.



Figure 96: A view from the Nation's Library. Başakşehir Municipality organises religious talks given by famous conservative thinkers, historians, writers, and poets. The photograph shows a significant crowd gathered at the Nation's Library late at night, eagerly awaiting a religious talk.



Figure 97: A big crowd gathered at the Nation's Library for a religious talk around 10 pm on a Friday night.

Some of these events, especially talks by famous public figures, draw heavy attention from the district residents. The library space is so crowded it becomes almost impossible to find a spot—even for standing. Besides the events the district municipality organises, the exhibition space in the entrance hall houses exhibitions of the traditional arts, including *tezhip* (Islamic art of Illumination), *ebru* (Turkish art of painting on water), Ottoman miniature, mosaic, *hat* (Islamic calligraphy), and poster and photography exhibitions commemorating national historical events.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, education has become one of the targeted channels of Islamist nation-building and spaces of education as architectural objects have been the medium for forming and manifesting ideology. Since the onset of the AKP era in 2002, politicians' actions and rhetoric concerning raising pious generations have resulted in many outcomes. These include the transformation of the national academic curriculum with a greater emphasis on Islamic themes, bolstering Islamic foundations and their ostensibly unofficial religious education spaces, the conversion of existing schools into *imam hatip* schools, the establishment of nation's libraries as spaces of acculturation, and the manifestation and enforcement of ideology through deliberately designed architectural forms for these educational spaces. This chapter traced the ideological, structural, and spatial aspects of transforming the educational system in line with the discourse of raising pious generations, and investigated the spaces of knowledge in Başakşehir, as the model habitus of Islamism in Türkiye. To be able to examine the link between manufacturing ideal citizens and the production of the built environment, this chapter approached educational institutions as architectural objects and explored the intersection of architecture, education, and

ideology, examining how these elements are assigned to contribute to the production of a pious generation in Başakşehir.

As institutions of knowledge and cultural formation, schools, university campuses, museums, archives, and libraries are significant components of community building and platforms for forming and expressing collective identities. In contemporary Türkiye, these institutions have become important constituents of neoliberal Islamist urbanization. As such, they are spaces of capital and ideology, for the benefit of those who build, support, fund, organise, manage, and use these spaces.

The focus of this chapter was on the spatialization of historicist, Islamist, and populist discourses in spaces of knowledge. It examines the symbolic, architectural, and operational aspects of three such spaces in Başakşehir. These educational spaces serve as mediums where meticulously crafted academic content, political narratives, and social practices are enacted, discussed, and adapted—while simultaneously being produced through the organisation and usage of architectural space. Despite differences in their appearances, political discourses, audiences, and the educational and cultural services they provide, these institutions display similarities in their messages and activities.

This chapter discussed that spaces of knowledge are influenced by the urban processes unfolding around them. Simultaneously, they impact their context through their contribution to fostering a community identity and crafting a collective narrative that spans societal matters, political issues, and economic realities. Thus, each of the selected knowledge spaces within Başakşehir plays a unique role. They contribute to the district's development by influencing societal interactions and community building, shape the physical and functional attributes of the district, and play a

part in its economic prosperity by attracting potential residents. By looking at how contemporary education and knowledge institutions in Başakşehir fit together with a network of interrelated populist discourses available in twenty-first-century Türkiye, this chapter investigated how the spaces of knowledge become mediums of narrating and imagining pious generations.

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Conclusion

This research began with a fundamental inquiry: How does the interplay among ideology, capital, and the built environment manifest within urban and architectural spaces, and how does space influence this dynamic relationship? I have centred my investigation on Istanbul's Başakşehir district as a model town of neoliberal Islamist placemaking practices in Türkiye, carefully considering its political history, economic forces, and social dynamics. The urban fabric and community formation in Başakşehir are intricately interwoven with the broader socio-political landscape of the country. The settlement's inception and development since the mid-1990s have been deeply affected by broader societal tensions surrounding the issues of secularism and public expressions of piety—a conflict traceable from the Republic's establishment in 1923 to the present day—and the role of politics and economics in mediating these tensions. The establishment of Başakşehir and its succeeding transformation fuelled by a multitude of public and private investments supported by Islamist power networks makes it an ideal town for studying the architectural and urban manifestations of neoliberal Islamism.

Historically, conservative groups in Türkiye faced significant challenges, often being marginalized in the country's cultural, political, and economic spheres for prolonged periods. The Islamist movement, however, underwent a profound transformation during the late 1990s and early 2000s, elevating previously marginalized groups to positions of considerable influence. Thus, those who had long been excluded from decision-making processes in the country's urban development trajectory began to gain prominence. This led to rising Islamist political actors adopting strategies and tactics to dominate or expel opposing social groups. In this context, Başakşehir offers an ideal place to investigate the spatial implications of this shift. The district is

characterized by a set of built objects that, through their form, function, usage, promotion, and the networks driving their creation, serve as both representations and generators of ideology. Urban and architectural artifacts within the settlement facilitate dialogue with users, upholding prevailing political narratives and sparking new ones.

In this research, I view the district as a total environment, comprising diverse architectural and urban elements at various scales. Through this perspective, I have investigated the emergence of a spatial power regime driven by the ideological and monetary interests of ruling political actors and their allied investors. I have categorized the sites of investigation into three main themes: spaces of habitation, publicness, and knowledge. Throughout five chapters, I have explored how these spaces emerge and contribute to the formation of a spatial and social environment in the district.

Chapter I offers an in-depth look at Başakşehir's evolution, tracing its journey from a modest settlement to one of the largest provincial districts of the city. This overview has allowed me to investigate the architectural, urban, economic, ethnic, and cultural aspects of the settlement, uncovering the factors that characterize it as an Islamist landscape. This chapter has sought to shed light on how the changing physical and socio-economic features of Başakşehir since its establishment are tied to the resurgence and transformation of Islamism in Türkiye since the late twentieth century.

Chapter II and Chapter III have explored the first theme, habitation, focusing on the social, economic, and spatial aspects of residential projects and features of their resident communities. These two chapters have viewed housing as the main pillar of the social and physical environment established in Başakşehir. As a symbol of social status and identity, housing shapes

its occupants' perceptions of themselves and their place in society. Bringing diverse groups of people together, housing enhances social cohesion. It becomes a venue to build a community, attract potential members to an already established community, and retain existing members. A domestic space can serve as a platform for nation-building, a medium for social discipline, a source of capital accumulation, a site of ethnic and racial discrimination, a basis for gender segregation, and a secluded but representational space for expressing ideology and faith. Hence, I have placed my analyzes of housing projects in the district at the core of my research. By examining several spaces of habitation, I have delved into the shift in meanings and identities associated with Başakşehir. I have posited that the evolving urban visions and discourses of Islamist groups are reflected in the architectural features of their residences and the changing depictions of their ideal homes. These architectural manifestations profoundly influence the social interactions, cultural values, and economic activities in the district.

Chapter II has focused on the Başakşehir Housing Project, built between 1995 and 2007 by KİPTAŞ. It has traced the project's evolution from a mass housing initiative aimed at low- and middle-income families to a large-scale development that accommodates a broader spectrum of social groups, including those with higher incomes. The rapid transformation of the project, in terms of its mission, targeted demographics, and architectural qualities, is tied to the reformation of KİPTAŞ as a profit-oriented company. These tangible and intangible shifts are connected to the changing nature and aspirations of Islamism in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the changing political and economic landscape, and the emergence of new affluent groups in society.

Chapter III has centred on multiple public and private actors involved in the further development of the district. Keys among these are TOKİ, its affiliate Emlak Konut REIT, and a selection of

pro-government construction firms affiliated with Islamist business networks. The chapter has specifically investigated the public and private housing projects in the Kayaşehir region initiated by these entities. Benefiting from their privileged positions, these actors swiftly dominate the urban real estate market, creating new housing landscapes that align with contemporary trends in the housing sector and respond to the evolving demands of Islamist groups.

Chapter IV has revolved around the concept of publicness, examining how public spaces in Başakşehir contribute to the district's Islamist identity and its reputation as a popular housing hub. While spaces of habitation are the private domains of the settlement, spaces of publicness are the stages, where capital and ideology are openly and visibly reproduced. These two clusters of spaces—housing and public space—interact and mutually influence each other, moulding the private and public life within the settlement. Public spaces function as platforms where individuals, groups, or entities in positions of power exercise their authority over society through the design, regulation, and management of these spaces, thus shaping collective opinions, beliefs, and fostering collective identities. Simultaneously, these spaces serve as venues that users, especially the resident community in the district, exert their influence in shaping the Islamization of the built environment. This influence is evident in their presence, behaviours, actions in these public spaces, and their participation in social activities arranged by the ruling politicians. In addition, public spaces are the tools to facilitate the financialization of surrounding urban spaces by attracting private investment and increasing land values. As such, these spaces become a medium for transferring wealth from a broad section of society to a narrow economic group with affiliations to politicians and religious communities.

Chapter V, focusing on the theme of knowledge, has investigated specific educational spaces in Başakşehir, where the subjects of the spaces of habitation and publicness are formed through education and acculturation. These spaces play an instrumental role in forming the subjects in spaces of habitation and publicness. Schools, universities, cultural centres, and public libraries play a pivotal role in building pious generations and influencing their interactions with the social and physical environments they live in. The significance of these spaces lies primarily in the deliberate and strategic decision of their location within the city or town as architectural entities on their own, beyond their primary function of delivering educational services. In my analysis, I have examined the spatial and social strategies deployed during the design and management, regarding their role in fostering ideal citizens and cultivating a sense of community. The engagements of students and residents with these spaces of education, their commitment to in-house social activities, involvement in charity giving projects, and interest in student-led school newspapers provide insights into the level of dialogue with society these spaces of knowledge achieve.

Based on my analysis of the housing projects, public spaces, and educational institutions in Başakşehir, I have concluded that the clash between the secular and conservative groups in society—fluctuating between periods of stability and moments of escalation. This clash, driven by narratives produced and disseminated by different political groups, has profoundly impacted the trajectory of the Islamist movement in the context of Türkiye, supported its gradual ascent to power, eventually making it a dominant stakeholder in the production of cities.

Cities have transformed into stages where the influence of the Islamist movement, and its supporters, is increasingly apparent through architectural and urban manifestations. Meanwhile,

the social and spatial influence of other societal groups has diminished. This shift in power relations in the production of urban and architectural space involves numerous stakeholders. On one front stand investors, contractors, subcontractors, banks, private enterprises, state, and municipal bodies. On the other side, politicians, religious communities, non-governmental organizations, state institutions, and residents are involved. All these actors, to varying degrees, have played a role in the Islamist transformation of cities since the 1990s. Faith-based political narratives combined with monetary interests have brought these actors together, making them distinct beneficiaries of this setting. Within this framework, I have argued, that architectural and urban space transcend being mere representations of power struggles and identity formations within society. They are not just products of the society in which they exist; they also function as platforms for power struggles, political performances, and identity formations.

In this context, Başakşehir stands as an urban setting for observing Islamism's spatial experiments in Türkiye. The vision the ruling political figures have implemented in Başakşehir mirrors the broader urban aspirations of these actors on a grander scale. Politicians, in collaboration with municipal institutions, religious communities, and allied private firms, have cultivated the district as an Islamist environment, to cater specifically to a distinct societal segment. By astutely instrumentalizing faith-based discourses and prudently allocating public resources, politicians have addressed the urban desires of conservative communities, ensuring both their electoral support and financial backing. Concurrently, they have prioritized the economic agendas of their associates, including banks, investors, and building corporations. Within this framework, architecture and urban design have gone beyond aesthetics or functionality, emerging as robust tools for the formation, propaganda, and dissemination of ideology and gain economic profit.

The architectural and urban spaces in the settlement embody a unique synthesis of ideology and an economic model. It is not just the form, plan, façade design, interior layout, architectural program, or building technology that identifies an architectural object or settlement as the product of a specific ideology. Rather, it is the comprehensive interplay of all these elements and the underlying relations of production. Ideology infiltrates various stages of the production, design, and utilization of these architectural and urban spaces. It is crucial to note that the housing types, public spaces, and educational institutions investigated in this research are not exclusive to Başakşehir and Istanbul, or Türkiye in general. While similar spaces, not necessarily linked to Islamic culture, can be found in some other contexts, it is the sheer concentration of built objects emerging through networks of a neoliberal Islamist assemblage that makes Başakşehir a remarkable settlement. Başakşehir is significant as it encompasses diverse visions of Islamist placemaking all in one place.

The active and passive actors of the building activities in Başakşehir can be found in many other contexts: politicians, officials, state institutions, private firms, religious communities, faith-based and non-governmental organisations, residents, and students. Similar actors operate in or influence other settlements, cities, and even countries. In this framework, Başakşehir is a platform where religious communities, politicians, and pro-government private firms are more active than elsewhere, due to their powerful presence in the district and connections to the resident community. This presence has enabled them to wield a greater influence over the settlement, making it a hub of activity for their respective interests.

The insights gleaned from Başakşehir offer a compelling foundation for a more comprehensive dialogue about how shifting societal power structures are reflected in the design, construction,

and use of urban spaces. Comprehending the spatiality of power relations within this housing landscape enables us to recognize how particular groups or institutions manipulate the distribution and organisation of space, and how urban and architectural spaces navigate and negotiate the interactions among these groups and institutions within such spatial contexts.

This research aims to fill a notable gap in the in the literature of architecture, urban design, social sciences, with a particular focus on the spatial aspects of ideology-driven placemaking activities, which particularly leverage religious and national norms and values. While there is an expanding body of research on the political, economic, and social ramifications of Islamism and Islamist community-building in cities, there remains an understudied area concerning the physical spaces where these movements manifest and where communities settle. Sociologists and anthropologists have extensively studied the domestic landscapes of Islamism, uncovering the ideological and economic forces that drive the formation of Islamist communities. However, there is a notable lack of scholarly exploration into the architectural implications of these environments. This research offers a fresh perspective to the social sciences, highlighting the crucial influence of design and placemaking in shaping and disseminating faith-based ideology as well as fostering associated community formations.

This dissertation has adopted a comprehensive analysis of an urban settlement with its various architectural components, exploring these components' roles in the production of an Islamist settlement and development of a community identity. The aim is to understand distinct built objects' individual and collective functions within the framework of Islamist placemaking endeavours in cities. Viewing architectural structures not just as physical entities but as active agents in broader political and economic processes of space creation, this study aims to push the

boundaries of architecture and urban design, moving their traditional focus beyond the formal, structural, and material dimensions of built objects. This research is an important resource for urban scholars, architects, and city planners, enabling them to grasp the multifaceted social, political, and economic facets of pre-existing built objects and foresee the possible implications and multiple layers of forthcoming urban developments. Additionally, this study emphasizes the significance of viewing urban settlements as a cohesive assembly of distinct architectural entities. Each of these entities boasts individual traits that, in tandem, shape the urban identity of these settlements.

Further, this work highlights the networks among the key players of the built environment for demonstrating how power is distributed, revealing hidden collaborations between public and private actors, illuminating the flow of capital, and unveiling the symbolic meanings and connotations of architectural objects. This exploration does not aim to prioritize production relations over the content of the built environment, or to reduce it to a mere invention of political and economic networks, but to understand the factors that make it a *habitus*.

In this sense, this research has unpacked the roles of various stakeholders in Islamist space production in cities. Studying the crony networks among the collective and institutional agents is vital to raising academic and public awareness about the ideological and profit-seeking renewal of cities. Unveiling the connections between buildings, urban spaces, and the agents engaged in their design, construction, management, and utilization enables the tracing of how these interconnections bring about spatial transformations in any city where similar objects, subjects, and relationships exist.

This research aims to offer insights for future research in similar contexts or for comparative studies across different regions or political systems of thought that examine how other dominant ideologies, beyond neoliberal Islamism, influence urban landscapes. This would provide a broader view of the relationship between political ideology and urban development globally. Further, it can be used to better understand how similar trends might be appearing in diaspora communities outside of Türkiye and how neoliberal Islamist principles manifest in urban spaces where the community is in the minority. Additionally, it can give insight for studies investigating any counter-movements or resistances to the spread of neoliberal Islamist spaces.

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