

## A CRITIQUE ON IMPROVEMENT PLANS: A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION OF SQUATTER HOUSING AREAS IN ANKARA (1)

N. Aydan SAT

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### INTRODUCTION

By 1950s, large scale urbanization processes had accelerated at international scale due to significant technological, economic and political changes. Changes with regard to international relations after the World War II were manifest especially among -developed and developing countries. Before the World War II, economies of some developing countries had become dependent on the developed economies. After the War, economic dependency prevailed. Technology and capital transfer to developing countries in return for their raw material and cheap labour, gave rise to new international relations within the context of economic interaction between developed and developing countries. Rapid and comprehensive urbanization processes stemming from industrial investment to urban areas along with agricultural investment to predominant rural areas and consequent migration from latter to former became the pattern of development in the developing world. As other developing countries, Turkey was also influenced by these changes. During the period between 1923 and 1945, from foundation of the Republic to the beginning the World War II, Turkey empowered internal markets; increased its industrial investments and improved its transportation network. Changes in economic structure gave rise to an industrialization process which, in turn, shaped the urbanization process in Turkey.

Ankara and İstanbul, were faced with these rapid urbanization processes following the World War II. Urban population of Ankara increased from 74.553 in 1927 to 122.720 in 1935 (65 % increase in 8 years). In fact, growth rate in the urban population of Ankara was higher than the average rate for Turkey. It has been widely accepted that, the reason for this increase was the new role assigned for Ankara as being the capital city of the young Republic. The period from 1950s up to today is no different from that period, as the increase in urban population of Ankara has always been very high compared to the average for Turkey.

1. The article rests on the field study and findings of the Master of Science Thesis, supervised by Prof. Dr. Tansı Şenyapılı, submitted to the Department of City and Regional Planning at METU in 1997.

Urban population growth through natural causes in addition to rural-urban migration led to an increase in the demand for housing, particularly in the large cities of Turkey. Migrants have satisfied their residential needs through informal settlements, particularly in the peripheral areas of large cities mainly due to insufficient government policies in balancing housing supply and demand. The squatter housing, which are called “*gecekondu*” in Turkish, are consistent features of cities in many developing countries. The process of land acquisition and shelter provision is often illegal, but in many cases it is the only solution, as public housing projects fall far short of demand and are often benefited by middle-classes rather than the poor. Turkish governments have developed two different models in the quest to propose solutions to the *gecekondu* problem; which are the “improvement plans” and “urban renewal projects”. While improvement plans are prepared by individual municipalities, urban renewal projects are prepared through competitions or by planning bureaus for specific critical areas.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the solution models for transformation of squatter housing areas in Turkey, by deriving an empirical study in Ankara, the capital city. The empirical study is limited by improvement plans made in Ankara up to 1997, when almost all of the improvement plans for squatter areas in Ankara were completed. Following the introduction, second section provides a brief depiction of improvement plans and legal arrangements related to squatter housing areas. Methodology used in this study and the results of empirical study are given in the third section. Finally, the paper is concluded with an evaluation and discussion on the effectiveness of improvement plans as a tool for transformation of squatter housing areas.

## IMPROVEMENT PLANS AND RELATED LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Different solutions have been developed for transformation of squatter housing areas in in different countries. However, the results reached through these different arrangements do not vary all over the world; using informal solutions, like *gecekondu* in Turkey, as a political tool, enacting a number of legalization acts and with lack of an efficient, powerful planning system, all have deepened the problem and limited possible solutions (Durand-Lasserve, 1996).

Actually, faced with the problem, Turkey has also enacted several legal arrangements since the 1940s (Table 1). The concept of “transformation” in *gecekondu* areas was first introduced by a series of Improvement and Development Acts issued after 1948 (Şenyapılı and Türel, 1996 cited in Dündar, 2001, 392). However, the first definition of improvement plan was made in the Act No: 2805 as;

“It is an urban development condition drawn on existing maps that determines building regulations with the aim of bringing balanced, regular and healthy conditions for unhealthy, uncontrolled built up areas or building blocks in clearly defined borders with the consideration of existing conditions”.

Legal arrangements for squatter housing problem have changed over time in Turkey; but two of them have been accepted as turning points in the transformation of squatter housing areas. The first is the Act No: 775 in 1966 and the second, the Act No: 2981 in 1984. During 1960s, governments had a negative attitude to squatter housing areas and their populatons, seeing them as sources of social ill in the urban system (Dündar, 2001). Thus, the Act No: 775 prepared in these years had been focused on forbid,

ACT NO	DATE OF APPROVAL	TARGET	RESULT
5218	14.06.1948	*empower the Municipality to undertake improvements in gecekondu areas *allot parcels of land to potential gecekondu builders	*dense <i>gecekondu</i> areas were reserved for housing development *areas where gecekondu were not exist were transferred to the Municipality
5228	28. 06. 1948	*extend the act 5218 throughout the country *supply financial credits for housing	*financial credit provisions helped middle income groups instead of low income groups
5431	06.06.1949	*avoid illegal housing problem *demolish the houses which had been constructed up to that time	*could not be achieved perfectly
6188	24. 07. 1953	*produce land for housing *legalize the illegal houses built up to that time	*state owned land was transferred to the municipality to be used as housing sites *demolition of squatter houses was never carried out fully
775	20. 07. 1966	*improvement, clearance and prevention of squatter houses	*although 1.3% of squatter housing areas had been cleaned, this aim could not be achieved perfectly
2805	16. 03. 1983	*preservation, improvement and demolishment of squatter houses	*Ankara Municipality determined 22 improvement plan areas
2981	24. 02. 1984	* preservation and improvement of squatter houses	*Tapu tahsis belgesi and title-deed were given to squatter owner
3290	22. 05. 1986	*enlargement of illegal housing concept	*offices and houses transformed from houses were included in the definition of illegal housing

**Table 1.** Targets and results of acts related to squatter housing area prevention and improvement (Related acts).

clearance and redevelopment of squatter housing. However, this situation changed in 1970s, preparing the necessary ground for rehabilitation and upgrading. In contrast, in 1980s renewal was evaluated in a global context and equalled regeneration. Following 1980s, squatter housing areas have again been considered as problem areas to be transformed for the capitalisation of global interests, in the name of urban rent (Dünder, 2001). Under these conditions, the Act No: 2981 was introduced not only for legalisation of these squatter housing areas, but also transfer of urban rents, created by improvement plans, among squatter owners and building contractors (Türksoy, 1996). This act is accepted as a turning point, since legalisation and preservation for all squatter housing areas have been supported by governments.

All in all, these two acts clarify the changing attitudes of governments to the squatter housing problem; from forbid to legitimization.

### EMPIRICAL STUDY: EFFECTS OF IMPROVEMENT PLANS ON SQUATTER HOUSING AREAS IN ANKARA

The scope of this empirical study is the boundaries of Ankara Greater Municipality. Ankara has eight district municipalities (Altındağ, Çankaya, Etimesgut, Gölbaşı, Mamak, Keçiören, Sincan and Yenimahalle); however only six of them are included in this study, i.e. two of them - Gölbaşı and Sincan- are not included, since they do not have improvement plans (Figure 1). The 188 squatter neighbourhoods in these six district municipalities are examined in two periods: 1984-1990 and 1990-1996. These two periods have been decided for their particular improvement



**Figure 1.** Neighbourhoods which have improvement plans in Ankara (1997; by the author).

plan phases, which also provides the possibility of process comparison between different improvement processes.

In order to assess improvement plans as tools for transformation of squatter housing areas, changes in population densities, social and technical infrastructure values in squatter housing areas are evaluated before and after the plans. Act No: 3194 (Regulation Act) is a critical reference for this comparison, due to the fact that, it gives minimum required values for liveable urban areas. In addition to the analysis of changes in population along with social and technical infrastructure, land prices are also assessed before and after the improvement plans. This comparison will increase the understanding on the effects of improvement plans not only in squatter housing areas, but also on the urban macroform.

### Population, Area and Density

**Table 2** shows the percentage of squatter housing population covered by the improvement plans in total urban population for the districts of Ankara. It is observed that although the percentage of squatter housing population in total urban population decreased in five district municipalities, this percentage increased in the districts within the Çankaya Municipality. Two types of improvement plans have been implemented in the area of the Çankaya Municipality since the Act No: 2981 has been put into effect. The first improvement plan type, which was called a "Type-A Improvement Plan", was prepared only to solve the property problems in these areas. After 1990, in addition to the new improvement plans for all squatter housing areas that had Type-A Improvement Plans, "B Type Improvement Plan" was prepared to improve liveability in these areas.

DISTRICT	Total Urban Population		Existing Squatter Population with Improvement Plan		% of Squatter Pop. in Total Urban Pop.	
	1985	1990	1985	1990	1985	1990
Altındağ	403781	417616	140862	137392	34.9	32.9
Çankaya	665128	712304	149945	238268	22.5	33.5
Etimesgut	-	69960	-	57896	-	82.8
Keçiören	433559	523891	148234	155065	34.2	29.6
Mamak	371904	400733	203353	118050	54.7	29.5
Yenimahalle	360573	343951	215196	10502	59.7	3.1
TOTAL	2234945	2468455	859575	719163	38.4	29.1

**Table 2.** The percentage of squatter population with approved improvement plans in total urban population (1985 and 1990 Census of Population, SIS [5] and field survey by the author, 1997).

Therefore, increase in the percentage of squatter housing population in total urban population is a result of this two-step planning approach.

The percentage of squatter housing population of Yenimahalle Municipality in the total urban population, is the highest with 59.7 %; on the other hand the lowest value is 22.5 % for the Çankaya Municipality in 1985. If we examine the situation for 1990s, the highest percentage of existing squatter housing population is 82.8 % in the area of the Etimesgut Municipality and the lowest value is 3.1 % in that of Yenimahalle. This rapid decrease in the values for the Yenimahalle Municipality may be explained by the fact that most of the planning work in existing squatter housing areas were completed in the period 1984-1989. The districts within the Etimesgut Municipality (established in 1990) had the highest percentage of squatter housing population in total urban population during the period 1990-1996, according to improvement plans.

**Table 3** shows the existing and proposed populations of squatter housing areas of Ankara in the periods 1984-1989 and 1990-1996. Differences between the existing and proposed situations and differences between these periods are very high. On the other hand, Yenimahalle has the highest population density changes with 327 %; where density also increased from 67 to 286 person/ha in 1990-1996 in this particular district. This value is, in fact, the highest in both periods. The lowest population density change is 113 % for the Altındağ Municipality in the period 1990-1996 (from 97 to 255 person/ha). Consequently increases in the population and density values are observed not only between the existing and proposed values, but also between two periods.

District	Squatter Population				Squatter Area				Density (person/ ha)				Changes in Density	
	1984-1989		1990-1996		1984-1989		1990-1996		1984-1989 (a)		1990-1996 (b)		%	
	Existing	Proposed	Ex.	Prop.	Ex.	Prop.	Ex.	Prop.	Ex.	Prop.	Ex.	Prop.	(a)	(b)
Altındağ	140862	297430	137392	202000	1439.7	1168.7	796.7	548.5	97	255	173	368	163	113
Çankaya	149945	272726	238268	301003	1815.4	1135.2	2201.5	1064.7	83	240	108	272	189	152
Etimesgut	-	-	57896	267080	-	-	584.4	641	-	-	99	386	-	290
Keçiören	148234	403115	155065	360773	1689.9	1245.9	1379.3	1015.2	87	324	112	355	272	217
Mamak	203353	455553	118050	257052	2701.2	2576	1681	966.7	75	177	70	266	136	280
Yenimah	215196	528666	10502	9650	961.1	837.7	157.5	33.7	223	631	67	286	183	327
TOTAL	857590	1957490	717173	1397558	8607.3	6963.5	6800.4	4269.8	100	281	106	327	181	209

**Table 3.** Existing and proposed populations and densities for squatter housing areas in Ankara (Field Survey by the author, 1997).

In conclusion, plan implementations increase the population density of planned areas at the neighbourhood scale (**Figure 2, 3**). In fact, if the density proposals of improvement plans for Ankara were fulfilled, the city population would have to reach to nearly 5 million by the end of 1990s (1990 population is 3 million). Aside from environmental problems, the pressure of population increase exerted on the city is likely to create very significant liveability problems. In addition, 2015 Master plan of Ankara is based on the central theme of population decentralization. However, if improvement plans are implemented, it will be impossible to realize the decentralization process. At this point, the needs for adequate social and technical infrastructure in improved areas should also be taken into account.



Figure 2. Examples from improvement plan implementations. (Source: <http://maps.google.com>).

### Social and Technical Infrastructure

**Table 4.** Social and technical service areas which need to be added according to the Act 3194 (in ha) (Field Survey by the author, 1997).

Since there is no information regarding to the value of proposed technical infrastructure in some of the municipality improvement plan reports, values provided in the table are clearly very limited  
n.a. : not available

The most crucial problem in squatter housing areas is the insufficient provision of social and technical infrastructure (**Table 4**). In spite of the fact that improvement plans are expected to meet the demand, proposed values with reference to the Act No: 3194 (Regulation Act) are quite limited as well: **Table 4** shows the total area of social and technical infrastructure to be added, in order to reach the standards of the Act No: 3194.

	Education			Health		Socio-Cult.			Green Area			Commercial			Tech. Infrast. <sup>1</sup>		
	Exis.	Prop.	Added	Exist	Prop.	Added	Exis.	Prop.	Added	Exis.	Prop.	Added	Exis.	Prop.	Added	Exis.	Prop.
Altındağ	1.1	45.0	160.4	-	4.1	47.2	-	4.2	149.9	-	140.8	218.6	-	7.2	69.8	n.a.	434.1
Çankaya	15	56.4	178.3	-	8.2	50.4	-	5.4	170.6	-	205.6	205.1	-	10.7	77.3	n.a.	198.6
Etimesgut	-	17.3	89.5	-	3.9	22.8	-	7.4	72.7	-	124.8	62.2	-	10.4	29.7	n.a.	146.7
Keçiören	7	66.4	239.2	-	11.7	64.7	-	19.2	210.0	-	175.7	359.0	-	14.2	100.4	n.a.	205.0
Mamak	24	93.5	191.6	1.2	10.8	60.5	-	5.0	208.8	-	73.8	425.0	-	63.6	43.3	n.a.	21.0
Y.Mahalle	0.6	25.0	199.8	-	3.4	52.8	-	3.7	165.0	-	71.1	322.4	-	11.3	73.1	n.a.	13.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>303.6</b>	<b>1058.8</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>298.4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>977.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>791.8</b>	<b>1592.3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>117.4</b>	<b>393.5</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>1019.3</b>

The total area of social infrastructure, i.e. areas spared for education, health services, socio-cultural areas, green and commercial activities, and the quantity of technical infrastructure i.e. water, electricity, drainage facilities, roads and car parks are very limited in quantity both before and after improvement plans are implemented. Although lack of technical infrastructure is one of the most important problems in squatter housing areas, the proposals do not bring about adequate supply (Table 3).

The lack of adequate social and technical infrastructure standards in improvement plans appears to be an opportunity missed to improve the squatter housing areas. Municipalities make use of the regulation share (d.o.p.) which should be assigned to social and technical infrastructure, to solve the property problems. But revision plans, which are prepared for adding new storeys, result with increased population density, and could not assign d.o.p again. This also affects the inefficiency of social and technical infrastructure.

Another problem is the existing squatter housing areas, as an obstacle to improve the technical infrastructure. In fact, improvement plans attempt to protect all squatter houses that, in turn, cause degradation in social and technical infrastructure. Although improvement plans propose population increase for these areas, they fail to propose solution for social and technical infrastructure problems.

The provision of reasonably good housing in a well-kept environment has profound effects not only on the well-being of the occupants but also on their health and productivity, hence on their contribution to their national growth (Mellor, 1977, 88). In this respect, adequate social and technical infrastructure for squatter housing areas is expected from improvement plans. Yet this study indicates that even proposed values for infrastructure are very limited when compared to the standards of the Act No: 3194. In addition to the inadequacy of proposals related to the infrastructure and emphasis of plans on the legalization of property, other problems relate especially to details of technical infrastructure can be pointed out. For instance, although it may be cheaper to provide sewage for squatter houses since they do not contain cellars and are mostly located on slopes; services provided will be shared by lower densities. Moreover, new parcellation according to improvement plans brings about the need for building a new technical infrastructure system that can be extremely costly.

Actually, most improvement plans just aimed to solve property and ownership problems of squatter housing areas, instead of improving the prevailing environmental conditions.

### **Land Prices**

Land prices in squatter housing areas before and after the implementation of improvement plans are also examined in quest for assessing effects of the regularization process on urban land prices and thus the urban macroform. Along with the implementation of improvement plans, an increase in the level of service supply is seen. Acquisition of construction rights also accelerates the level of increase in land prices in the squatter housing areas. The increase is even higher in those neighbourhoods located at the urban fringe.

For the relationship of distance from the city centre and corresponding land prices, an inverse ratio should be expected. However, due to the effects of improvement plans, this ratio could not be observed in this research: land prices can reach the highest values even further away from the city centre.

DISTRICT	Land Prices of Districts with Improvement Plans in 1986-1989							Land Prices of Districts with Improvement Plans in 1990-1994						
	Land Price In 1986	Land Price In 1990	Land Price In 1994	Change 1986-1990 (%)	Change 1990-1994 (%)	Change 1986-1994 (%)	Distance from city center (km)	Land Price In 1986	Land Price In 1990	Land Price In 1994	Change 1986-1990 (%)	Change 1990-1994 (%)	Change 1986-1994 (%)	Distance from city center (km)
Altındağ	99658	88181	399918	-12	354	301	16	122408	161933	644442	32	298	426	18
Çankaya	527024	699682	400183	33	-43	-24	11	95488	210599	18480	121	-91	-81	17
Etimesgut	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	162235	177077	n.a.	9.5	n.a.	n.a.	85
Keçiören	99686	151950	1341025	52	783	1245	27	78210	86530	867660	11	903	1009	19
Mamak	131880	302847	442308	130	46	235	25	314215	324890	412138	3	27	31	22
Yenimahalle	88398	227710	366198	156	61	314	14	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>189329</b>	<b>294074</b>	<b>589926</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>154511</b>	<b>192206</b>	<b>485680</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>32</b>

**Table 5.** Land Prices of Districts with Improvement Plans in 1986-1994 (Field Survey by the author, 1997).

Analyzing the effect of distance from the city centre on land prices appears to be a very significant task. **Table 5** shows the changes in land prices according to districts with reference to their distance to the city centre. Areas that are not close to the city centre have higher land price increases in comparison to the inner-city districts, since central areas had already been improved and transformed.

## CONCLUSION

Due to the prevailing lack of balance between housing supply and demand, rural migrants have met their residential requirements through informal settlements particularly in the peripheral areas of large cities in Turkey. In many cases, this form of illegal land acquisition and shelter provision appeared to be the only option as public housing projects fell far short of demand and often benefited by the middle class rather than the poor.

In general, attempts to provide solutions for the problems of squatter housing areas have remained within the limits of legalization of these areas, instead of increasing the liveability of cities. Moreover, legal arrangements related to prevention, clearance and improvement of squatter housing areas have remained insignificant in the face of this particular problem. All attempts devoted to the solution of squatter housing area problems have mainly aimed at solving the property problems in these areas.

This paper aimed to evaluate the solution models for transformation of squatter housing areas in Turkey, through an empirical study in Ankara. Population density, social and technical infrastructure propositions of improvement plans and land price changes in urban macroform have been analyzed. Findings of the paper can be summarized as;

The increase in densities of planned areas, accompanied by centralized growth in urban area at large; degradation of environment takes place due to failure in improving technical and social infrastructure, in parallel with further urban development and increasing, in fact searing land prices in peripheral areas leading to concentration of population in central areas, which constitutes significant problems.

In addition to impacts on density, infrastructure and land prices, other negative aspects include the transfer of urban rents to squatter owners and contractors, which is a most likely consequence of implementation of improvement plans. Density increases along with the land prices; however, insufficient provision of infrastructure prevails. This, in turn, leads to direct and indirect degradation of urban areas by these improvement plans, which succeed in legalizing but fail in creating desirable environment.



Improvement plans have remained within the limits of legalization of squatter housing areas, only by giving title deeds (*tapu*). Thus, a dual structure has emerged in the urban areas at large: production of legal and liveable urban districts and production of legalized urban districts by improvement plans, with high storey and high density apartment blocks, low spatial standards and unliveable cities.

Inconsistency between urban macroform plans (1/5000) and improvement plans (1/1000) constitutes another crucial problem for improvement plans. Partial solutions to squatter areas and high density propositions at city centre, in spite of decentralisation brought by urban plan.

Lastly, housing areas transformed by improvement plans are filled with high storey, inflexible, apartment blocks. Actually, usability conditions of these houses can not fit the preferences of squatter owners. This creates socio-cultural problems for squatter owners, who are used to live in one-storey houses in a garden, but now are obliged to develop new neighbours in apartment blocks.

Positive aspect of improvement plans, on the other hand, includes the legalization of squatter housing areas being already completed to a great extent. At present, almost all squatter areas are legalized in Ankara.

All in all, it can be concluded that "improvement plans" that aimed to meet the housing needs of low income groups could not reach up to their goals but created a tool of investment both for squatter owners and building contractors. The only success of these plans is to legalize all squatter housing areas in Ankara. Two important reasons for this failure are: the first, there is no consistency between proposed population densities and social and technical infrastructure proposals in these plans. Secondly, improvement plans propose high population densities and land prices at the city center and this contradicts with the urban decentralization policy. Improvement plans bring important problems affecting the liveability and sustainability standards of Ankara.

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## **ANKARA'DA GECEKONDÜ ALANLARININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ İÇİN BİR ARAÇ OLARAK ISLAH İMAR PLANLARI**

Bu çalışma, Türkiye kentlerinde 1980'lerden itibaren gündemde olan "gecekondü alanlarının ıslahı" ve özellikle son 10 yıldır sıkça sözü edilen "kentsel dönüşüm" konularını, Ankara özelinde gerçekleştirilen ampirik bir inceleme ile bilimsel olarak değerlendirme amacını taşımaktadır. Ülkemizde ıslah imar planlarıyla, gecekondü alanlarının gecekondüdan temizlenmesi hedeflenirken, kentsel dönüşüm projeleri ile kentin gelişimi için önem arz eden özellikli alanlarda gelişimin sağlanacağı düşünülmektedir. Ancak, bu çözüm önerileri sonucunda kentlerde yaratılan mekanların ne ölçüde yaşanabilir olduğu yeni tartışmaları da beraberinde getirmektedir.

Çalışmada, Ankara'da ıslah imar planlarıyla yenilenen alanların, ıslah imar planı öncesi ve sonrası sosyal ve mekansal verileri karşılaştırılmaktadır. Bu tür planlama yaklaşımlarıyla kentte yaratılan mekanların yaşanabilirliği ve dolayısıyla bu yaklaşımların başarısı sorgulanmaktadır.

Çalışma sonuçlarına göre, kurumsal bir dönüşüm modeli olan ıslah imar planları gecekondü alanlarının yasallaştırılması dışında başarı sağlayamamıştır. Bu başarısızlığın iki temel nedeni bulunmaktadır. Birinci neden, ıslah planlarıyla artacak nüfus yoğunluklarının ihtiyacını karşılayabilecek teknik ve sosyal altyapı gelişiminin önerilememesi ve dolayısıyla kent içinde yüksek yoğunluklu düşük kaliteli yaşam çevrelerinin oluşmasıdır. İkinci neden ise özellikle Ankara'da kentin desantralizasyonunu destekleyen kent planlarına rağmen geliştirilen ıslah imar planlarıyla, kent içinde nüfus yoğunluklarının ve arazi fiyatlarının hızlı bir şekilde artırılmasıdır. Bu nedenlerle, ıslah imar planları kentin bütününde yaşanabilirlik ve sürdürülebilirlik düzeyini etkileyen sorunları da beraberinde getirmekte ve gecekondü alanlarının yasallaştırılması çalışmasından öteye gidememektedir.