



UNCANNY VALLEYS OF ARCHITECTURE: A STUDY ON POSTMODERN HOUSING PROJECTS IN ISTANBUL

Tuğba ERDİL POLAT

Halic University, Faculty of Architecture, Sütluce, İstanbul, TURKEY, tugbaerdil@halic.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

Fundamental changes in social structure reflect on lifestyles of individuals and accordingly on architecture, which could be perceived as an expression of lifestyles in plastic format. Thus, the unbreakable relation between socio-cultural and socio-economical structure and architecture comes forth once again. In the period of change from modernism to postmodernism, a distinctive break off is observed from the principles adopted by the industrial revolution, which forms the point of origin for contemporary architecture.

The new buildings constructed to meet the accommodation needs of a different migration group having different features in terms of level and education resulted in housing estates/collective group of apartments, which seem to be differing from squatter settlements, though unfortunately having contributed as negatively to the general framework within the urban sprawl. The housing estates/collective group of apartments, essentially started rising with a modernist identification within European countries where a healthy Industrial Revolution was realized in terms of all levels, can be observed to display a postmodernist development in countries such as Turkey, which has got caught between modernity and postmodernity due to failure in keeping up with the prominent countries in this industrialization race.

In this study, simulative tendencies of new social theories emerged as a consequence of postmodern urban life is examined as well as the new housing developments addressing the new life style in which consumption habits are changed, and the similarities of these new housing developments are detected in terms of both their layout plans and their spatial configuration within the concept of uncanny valley theory.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Postmodern Culture, Postmodern Architecture, Simulation, Uncanny Valley

1. RESEARCH AREA AND SCOPE

Space and place have been the focus point of collective movements, social and individual activities all through history. When representative world created by abstraction of the world sensed as real by mankind is generalised by reconciliation, culture emerges. Spatial manifestation of cultural representations is the representation of social, economic and political tendencies of the population they are in. Uncontrolled differentiation of the social trends and consequently that of the changing urban fabric in Istanbul of 2000s introduced the necessity for re-discussion of human – space relationships in the discipline of architecture which has partially undertaken the duty to consciously organise the society. Changes brought to the agenda by life dynamics in human – space – city axis are also valid in the relationship of human – house. House is a shelter, not only physical but also psychological for individuals as the basic life centre, and a personal private area which reflects dwellers' identities. Therefore when especially residential architecture, is considered as the social manifestation instrument

of the society it lives in, it may give fundamental messages about the basic structure of that society (Botton, 2007).

In this globalisation era we are in, in which national economies melt together with nation states, as the global cities emerge as economic centres, image of Istanbul is turning into a neo-liberalism based new image, an image of a “global metropolis”. This image is becoming an “urban transformation” project that increasingly goes on in a political trend exhibited by sentences as “Istanbul must get out of the industrial city identity by authority figures. From now on, Istanbul must be a centre of finance, and a centre of culture and congress tourism” (Aksoy, 2009).

This new era of urban globalisation may be considered as a cultural project as well as political and economic. As in every period in which radical political and economic transformations are experienced, impacts of the change created within the framework of urban discourses on urban fabric primarily started to display clearly legible indicators on residential architecture. Urban transformation attempts, examples of which are observed in Sulukule and Fener – Balat with an elitist approach, inevitably confronts the image of global city Istanbul with the “native” and “original” Istanbul. The areas opened for rent has brought the question of whether urban transformation attempts, as they can be observed in recent projects of Housing Development Administration of Turkey, serve to the purpose of preventing poverty, or to regeneration of poverty in a location far from the city, to the agenda of architecture.

Parallel to such attempts related to elitization, global capital heads towards most profitable areas that are not included in the industrial profile of the city. As a prerequisite of the system, investors prefer projects that meet the ever increasing consumer demand for residence architecture in which entertainment and shopping facilities are designed together with residential projects.

While this new *transformation* adventure of Istanbul turns the image of the global city promising entertainment, tourism and consumption into an export article itself, it also creates a big contrast with the fabric that is the inheritance of the chaotic industrialisation process it has left behind and recalls the realities of recent past. Whereas second and third generation squatter habitants, who are currently living in the shadow of apartment blocks that are cheap and deprived of all design principles due to miscellaneous legal arrangements and development amnesties, cannot be articulated into the new climate of the city created by global economy, this intertwined social structure and cultural split shows itself as “contradictory and opposite” spacing in the urban fabric. This contradiction is created by the identity wars of masses that emigrate from the country to the city during industrialisation attempts and the power struggles between sub culture groups they have produced as the alternative for disappearance and the new urban elite focusing on consumption and entertainment that has taken its share from postmodern discourses. Today, Istanbul displays the togetherness of a fabric made of shopping centres and residence houses, in which consumption culture becomes legitimised on the architectural realm, getting intertwined with slums and mass housing blocks, and they become identical in the general silhouette while they try to ignore the other as an urban scene. Images of these two examples get to be reflecting the silhouette of any part of Istanbul, the city struggling to be a global one. In this context, as the contradictory elements of the urban space increase and become ordinary in the daily life, emerging conceptual phenomena and images are added to the aesthetical culture of the society.

In this study, it has been tried to analyse the housing adventure that has started in the 1950s with the intense immigration to the city after a chaotic industrialisation period in the contexts

of multi coded structure and fractures, and cultural, economic and political splits that show themselves on a social level and in residential architecture in parallel.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Housing Problems of Istanbul Since Early 1960's

Indeed, seeds housing problems of Istanbul must be considered with the results of late and uncontrolled industrialisation history. While the problem of squatters arises in İstanbul at the begging of 60's, which could be built up over one night as the product of a "self-service" urbanisation, was not considered to be a problem until 1980s, furthermore it was a way out for the state. Because of this, it was even supported by the state implicitly by addressing locations, and serving municipal facilities like electricity, water, etc., with the excuse that capacity of the city was not enough to accommodate the immigrants.



Table 1: a) A sight from squatter regions of Istanbul (URL-1),

In this period, it is observed that variety of cultural expression and swiftly changing urban scenes started exhibit a postmodern two-sidedness, in other words a multi code-ness. In this period in which products of popular culture started drawing attraction, squatter taste, arabesque music, intercity bus terminals, aluminium domed cheap neighbourhood mosques became familiar and marginal population started having their own rules in the society (Bozdoğan, 2005).

1980s represent a milestone for squatter areas, which started increasing in value. The door to legitimisation of squatters was opened with the constitution of September 12th. Constitution of September 12th is a milestone for the architectural adventure in the slow modernisation attempts. According to this constitution, '*decision not to consider forest areas that have lost their qualification due to urban occupation any more as forest areas*' is the first step for production of unplanned and irregular apartment blocks (Ekinci, 2007). Another important agent is the Rehabilitative Development Laws. According to the Rehabilitative Development Law, '*if there are squatters in an area, a rehabilitative development plan is to be produced for that area and a four-storey apartment block is to be allowed for each squatter*'. Therefore, inhabitant of the squatter taking 2-3 flats from the contractor is almost awarded for the

squatter he has built. Today, it is no coincidence that these cheap apartment blocks, inhabited by second and third generation squatter dwellers, deprived of all design principles are rising up especially in these suburbs of the city. With these steps taken in the name of modernisation, scientific rationalism of modernism and the desire to create ideal spaces combining science and building art have been completely destroyed.

However design discussions in housing tries to put forward reasonable rules and certain studies tries to put forward real housing requirements in creative ways, it is possible to state today that, housing formations causing visual pollution in Istanbul, in which marginal indicators have become clearly legible, are developing both in centres designed as suburbs at the beginning but then merged by the city and both in different quarters in suburban areas (Hilmioglu, 2017). Generally, isolation from the outer world and the obvious unsightliness outside is observed within the complex area, which is reached through crude roads and which is especially located in areas far from the city centre. Preferably, core areas of the site-plans are reserved for all kinds of entertainment, social areas, sports areas or shopping centres. A chaotic and Disneyland-like illusion is created all over the mass housing area together with some kind of a hyper reality feeling. The new life style presented as a bright, joyous, but at the same time a worthless commodity promises a utopian world to the marginal crowd that tries to adapt to urban life and has left the *other* identity in the city. The attempt to create a common language for people at the same position draws attraction. An order is designed, in which a certain level of protection has been achieved by the sense of being isolated from the outer world, and human beings try to defend their own position by a will beyond their own perception. Usually latest technology facilities are used in flats that are equal to or more than 100m². Thus, whereas the individual is free technologically, he is socially restrained and withdrawn in a life style that is dependent on his house.

2.2. Housing As A Reflection of Consumer Identity

It is observed that elements like the general silhouette of the city and connection of the housing complex to surrounding roads are completely neglected when such housing complexes are being planned in Istanbul, in which number of such housing complexes continually increases. At this point, Debord's thesis that there is nothing left that is not stained or changed by the instruments and benefits of the information industry except old works and old buildings proves itself in the urban fabric of Istanbul. These settlements emerge as legitimate examples of the understanding defined by Debord as "*a world pattern that is expressed physically and objectified visually*" (Debord, 2002).

Whitin today's postmodernism discussions, Venturian way suggest to get along with the new tendencies which consumption culture offers (Venturi, Brown, Izenour, 1993). This sort of architectural advices are determined in the book named "Learning From Las Vegas" by methaporising Las Vegas city as a heaven of simulations. While Jean Baudrillard discusses the simulacrs as a problematic value of postmodernism (Baudrillard, 2005); this tendency is applaused by Charles Jencks too; who is reading the language of Postmodernism (Jencks, 1994). Indeed what Jencks underlines in parallel to the Venturian architecture is the collage attitude of Postmodern architecture which offers to bring things together whether they are related to the past or any kind of simulacra. Thus, Postmodern architecture doesn't seem to be afraid of creating Dreamland-like imitations of reality.



Table 2: A view from Las Vegas City which includes hyper-realistic simulations from iconic architectures of the world. (URL 2)

2.3. Uncanny Valleys of Simulative Architecture

So it is noticed that in climbing toward the goal of making robots appear human, our affinity for them increases until we come to a valley which Masahiro Mori Calls the “*uncanny valley*.” Within this simulation tendency, creating the simulation of reality can be named as a hyper-reality which aims the user to live in a simulative concept which can cause some side effects just as “uncanny-valley” syndrome which Masahiro Mori declared in his article of human-like robot’s affections on human mind (Mori, 2012). Mori says; The mathematical term *monotonically increasing function* describes a relation in which the function $y = f(x)$ increases continuously with the variable x . For example, as effort x grows, income y increases, or as a car’s accelerator is pressed, the car moves faster. This kind of relation is ubiquitous and very easily understood. In fact, because such monotonically increasing functions cover most phenomena of everyday life, people may fall under the illusion that they represent all relations. Also attesting to this false impression is the fact that many people struggle through life by persistently pushing without understanding the effectiveness of pulling back. That is why people usually are puzzled when faced with some phenomenon this function cannot represent.

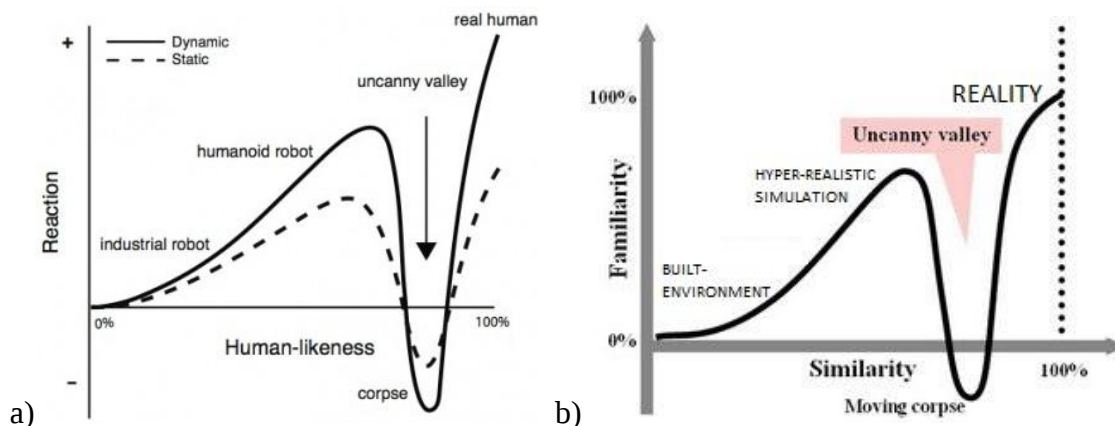


Table 3: a; Uncanny Valley Diagram for Robotic Design. b; Uncanny Valley Diagram for Architectural Design (URL-3)

Hence, if rejection of reality is internally increases while simulative codes are getting closer to reality, this means dissatisfaction causes some kind of unhappiness subconsciously. Examples of uncanny valley syndrome works very similar with the industrial design works.

In the examples which appeal rather to the high income level, it may be stated that basic concepts stay the same. A chaotic and Disneyland-like hyper reality feeling is created all over the mass housing area. Proposals for “life as if” introduced by Baudrillard in his Simulation theory, in which reality is reproduced with an artificial construct become clearly legible with miscellaneous spatial fantasies. The consumer is provided with a self created dream world to simulate his daily life in the boundaries of this world in the entertainment world presented by consumption habits that may be called postmodern over these fantasies (Boudrillard, 2005).



Table 4; An example from İstanbul serving the high income consumers in which the Bosphorus is simulated physically (URL-4).

As seen above in Table 4, an example of mass-housing settlements from İstanbul creates an intellectually productive ground for examining uncanny logic in Architecture. This settlement which intends to simulate iconic semiotics of Bosphorus region, basically offers housing options for medium-high consumer scope. This consumer scope can be considered as those whoever cannot effort to have a real villa from the real Bosphorus-side. As Reiner Funk addresses postmodern consumers’ psychoanalyses (Funk, 2009), users tends to own imitation of things which they cannot own the real versions. While Funk describes this kind of consumer type as “the passive user”, the role of advertisements are considerably affective on postmodernist mass-production strategies.

Main component, which is designed in this simulation and which realises itself, is actually the promise of consumption and entertainment that is a representation realm belonging to the global city. Especially when luxury housing consumption of Istanbul in the recent years is examined, emphasis on the “as if (simulative)” spatial fantasies shows itself within the framework of changing consumption habits. Now, the good that is consumed in the consumption cycle reproducing itself continuously is the “house”. Breakaway from the nature, natural and reality in the intense and accelerated city life re-introduced human being and human – nature relationship – or longing – when the building type in discussion is housing. Luxury housing market of Istanbul seems to have taken its share in the global twist in which discussions of ecological architecture shaped by danger of natural resources’ extinction and the threat of global warming are also effective in housing architecture. In the history of architecture, designs based on “sustainability” principle which aims to produce its own energy or minimise emission of hazardous wastes by using natural – low cost energy sources in immediate future becomes a market not to be overlooked by investors in the new global process housing market of Istanbul has entered.



Table 5: A Mass-Housing project from İstanbul that offers to “taste the adventures of İstanbul all in one “Picture Clollage” (URL 5).

Another example seen on Table 5 has more hidden codes rather than direct simulations which were used in Bosphorus example, yet it still works with the same strategies of collaging culture. Primary commonness is the purpose and advertisement slogan which offers to have “beauties and adventures of İstanbul city are got all together in one heavenly decorated settlement. Primary difference is that in this example gives more hidden codes but yet whit the same aim; you can’t understand which iconic city landmark is imitated physically since the names of each apartment uses an iconic names of high-cost regions of Istanbul again.

However, such realities become invisible in the simulative medium that is experienced. In this respect, the city exhibits a new higher level marginal code with its structure in which various ethnicities melt in each other. In a point of view, the simulation that is lived in and the attempts that can be considered as some kind of make-up on the urban fabric may also be evaluated as the imaginative-simulation of this global centre which is deprived of the infrastructure required for being a global centre of the late capitalism or neo-liberal economy.

Similar to simulating all the landmarks of a Istanbul city manifests itself just by creating hyper-realities of another city in Istanbul. As seen in Table 7, an example from housing settlement from İstanbul, İzmir city is re-created with its significant landmark “Kordon” region all in one architectural concept. İzmir is a city which is located near Mediterranean sea. The city has many vocation spots around, which naturally affects urban life directly. This example presents its hyper-reality by bringing seaside restaurants and other adventures of Kordon by creating the simulative version of “waterside-ness” feeling. Some sort of vocation-like activities concentrated on relaxing are planned selectively just likes sea-side arbours (Table 7a).

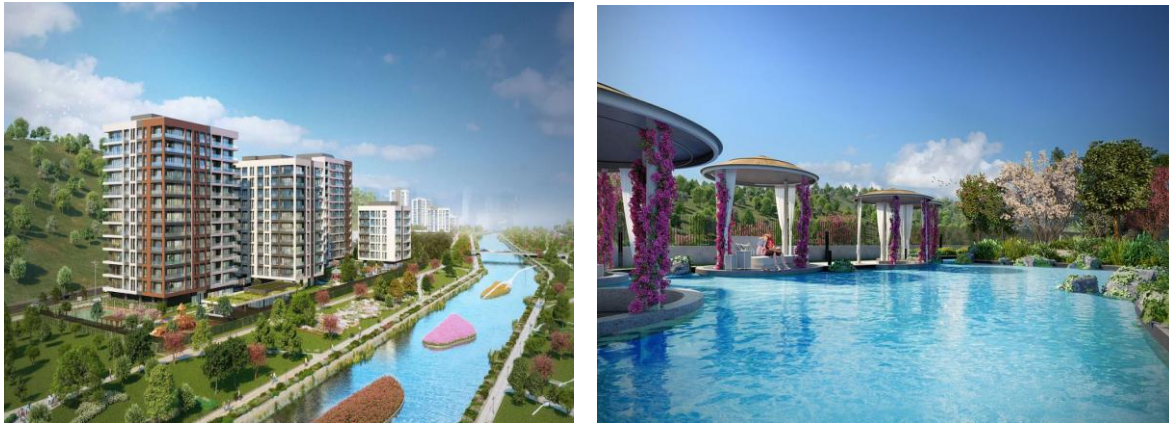


Table 7: a) Settlement which aims to simulate Kordon region from İzmir b) Outdoor designs reflecting seaside harbours from Mediterranean vacation spots (URL-6).

2.4. Contradiction of Uncanny Architecture: Building Ghettos and Isolation From the City

On the other hand, some other examples produce so spatially introvert formations which makes it necessary to rediscuss ghetto term under a new perspective of creating uncanny subliminal. As mentioned below, main arteries of city centre becomes unable to live in by the side effects of complex periods until early 60's (Table 1a). However, this issue may be great negative affects on urban life, every handicap becomes an occasion for postmodern economical dynamics. Lefebvre explains this period by production of space theory explaining how space and architecture is been produced according socio-economical waves (Lefebvre, 1991). In parallel to Lefebvre, David Harvey (Harvey, 2009) puts forward his discourse by explaining the pragmatic logic of postmodern economy which looks forward to create occasions to transform problematic issues to occasional economic income matters.

Hence Manuel Castells expresses the idea of “*selling hope*” to the hopeless masses who let down by chaotic urban life by creating simulative fantasies in built-environment (Castells, 1992) and names it by creating the “*possessive identity*” role in the population. Thus, if all these discourses are discussed all together it can be said that possessive identities created in the society and they are constantly encouraged by the dream of buying a “happy place” in the middle of the chaos and own their own space of heaven however in a simulated of an image of hyper-reality. According to Harvey again, (Harvey, 2009) this can be a subliminal control system for a chaotic urban society for keeping them away from social rebellion and the only way to do this is to keep these masses “*happily occupied with a fantastic dream*”.

Here comes the discussion of creating these overly happy architectural spaces which reflects the obsession of keeping people independent from chaotic urban life. Main architectural codes becomes semiotic signs of creating a built-environment not only offers a house but also brings shopping centres, business offices, hotels, restaurants and many other possible leisure time activity places all together which instantly recalls a new formation of ghetto. Many of these ghetto like experiments can be read between the design codes of some examples from Istanbul as seen in Table 8 and Table 9.



Table 8 a) Vadi İstanbul Project located in Kağıthane which offers housing, business and entertainment options all together. b) Business boulevard from the settlement c) Shopping boulevard from the settlement d) Interior design from the shopping center (URL-7).

This extraordinary ghetto-likeness intensely observed in consideration of the urban aesthetics in physical, cultural, social and economic areas, perceptual, functional and experiential dimensions shows that the image of the city may be defined as “marginal”. Whereas in many definitions, marginal places and urban spaces are defined as “other” places in which living, ideology and space do not reach an equilibrium, the Way out addresses the three different fractions of spatial marginality (Ergeçgil, 2003);

- 1- Space of the “others” alienated economically, socially or politically,
- 2- An avant-garde spatial proposal outside of the dominant and sovereign architectural point of view,
- 3- Utopias, utopian architectural designs or “*spatial fantasies*”.

As a matter of fact, Foucault defines marginal space and the “*other place*” as a spatial formation as “*existence of more than one time-space-code in a single real space*” (Foucault, 2005). In this context, marginal space which is contradictory and other is the synchronous togetherness of countless alternatives and styles of life, space and organisation that exist and may exist in the aesthetical culture that is lived without casting out each other. This togetherness created by contradictions represents “opposite place” and “opposite posture”, that is the “marginal” by intertwining of codes that do not comply with each other while uncanny hyper reality is presented altogether.

This kind of contradiction in urban space can be observed in the urban fabric of Istanbul as an urban image, which has no structural or semantic connection to the existing, and they become parts of the same fabric although having different codes. Istanbul, which has entered a new era with the discourses of global city, is pregnant to a new silhouette that goes beyond “unplanned urbanisation” discussed in the 80s frequently to reach the edge of “urban contradiction”.

3. CONCLUTION

Housing as an act of natural animus, seems to be a never-ending problem in Istanbul since the industrialisation period had started far later from European cities. It can be seen that postindustrial society creates new theories specific to itself in parallel with new developments and contemporary artistic and architectural environment sustain their progress within this direction. There are as many deviating points of these theories as the overlapping ones. For instance, the connection of information society with information technology lies in the center point of other theories as well. Furthermore, globalization, variation, localization and subjective approach are also included in the common points.

The point separating the questioned theories from each other can be summarized as the frameworks they use to examine the changes and transformations actualized. An optimistic picture can also be drawn, as to art, which had lost its mission of social pioneering under the current conditions, would continue to be perceived as an ordinary commodity produced for utilization by current consumption culture, however with adequate reactions to constitute a majority, salvation could be refound in modernist principles. Today, what İstanbul faces through newage housing settlements, are the fact that some important postmodern semiotics can be seen according to consumption theory of architecture. Many of the examples which have been discussed under the theory of uncanny valley puts forwards semiotics of postmodern culture which reflects the tendencies of consumption through space while creating hyper-realistic fantasies or by simply imitating real pleasures.

REFERENCES

- Aksoy A., 2009 “İstanbul’un Seçimi (Choice of Istanbul)”, Urban Age İstanbul Conferances-İstanbul Briging Cultures, LSE(London School of Economics).
- Baudrillard J., 2005, Simülakrlar ve Simülasyon (Simulacres et Simulation), Doğu-Batı Yayınları, Vol.3, Trans.:Oğuz Adanır, İstanbul.
- Bozdoğan S., 2005, ‘Türk Mimari Kültüründe Modernizm – Genel Bir Bakış’, Türkiye’de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik, Vol.3, Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, İstanbul, s.121.
- Botton A., Mutluluğun Mimarisi (The Architecture of Happiness), Trans.: Banu Tellioglu Altuğ, Sel Yay., Vol.2, İstanbul.
- Castells, M., 1997, Kent, Sınıf, İktidar (City, Class and Power), Trans.: Asuman Erendil., Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları, Ankara.
- Debord G., 2002, Gösteri Toplumu (La Societe du Spectacle), Trans.: Ayşen Ekmekçi, Vol.2, Ayrıntı Yay., İstanbul.
- Ekinci O., 2007, Kent Çevre Ve Demokrasi Açısından 12 Eylül 1980 Darbesi Paneli, Mimarlar Odası Antalya Şubesi, Eylül 2007, s.28.
- Ergeçgil Ç.Ş.,2003, “Güncel Mimarlık Ve Marjinallik”, D.E.Ü., Mimarlık Fakültesi, Mimarlık Bölümü, Mimarlar Odası İzmir Şb. Bülten, 1-45.
- Foucault M., 2005 “Başka Mekanlara Dair”, Özne Ve İktidar, Çev.: Işık Ergüden-Osman Akıncay, Ayrıntı Yay., İstanbul, 2005.

Funk, R., 2009, Ben ve Biz Postmodern İnsanın Psikanalizi, Çev.: Çağlar Tanyeri, Vol.:2, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul.

Harvey, D., 2009, Sosyal Adalet ve Şehir (Social Justice And City), Trans.: Mehmet Morali, Vol.3. Metis Yayınları. İstanbul.

Hilmioğlu S., 2017, Çok Aile Konut Tasarımına Yönelik Bir Evrensel Tasarım Modeli, İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Yayınlanmış Doktora Tezi, İstanbul.

Hira İ., 2006, 'Sanayi Sonrası Toplum Kuramları', Bilgi Toplumu Dergisi, Ekim 2006.

Houthakker H.S., "The Present State of Consumption Theory", Econometrica, Vol.29, No:4, October, 1961.

Jencks, C., 1994, The Story of Postmodernism, John Willy & Sons, West Sussex.

Lefebvre, H., 1991, The Production of Space (La Production De l'espace), Trans.: Donald Nicholson-Smith, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Mori M., 2012, "A Valley in One's Sense of Affinity", IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine, June 2012.

Venturi, R., Brown, D.S., Izenour, S., 1993, Las Vegas'ın Öğrettikleri (Learning From Las Vegas), Trans.: Serpil Merzi Özaloğlu ve Şevki Vanlı. Mimarlık Vakfı Yayınları, Ankara.

URL 1: <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/yasam/gecekondu-gormeye-gidiyorlar-7614.html>

URL 2: A View from Las Vegas hotels regions. <http://www.minitime.com/trip-tips/WalletFriendly-Las-Vegas-Hotels-for-Families-article>

URL 3: Uncanny Valley diagrams explains the logic of the discourse in industrial design and architectural design. <http://vtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/UncannyValley>

URL 4- An example from İstanbul serving the high income consumers in which the Bosphorus is simulated physically <http://www.topluketim.com/sinpas-bosphorus-city-istanbul/>

URL 5- A Mass-Housing project from İstanbul that offers to "taste the adventures of İstanbul all in one "Picture Collage"
http://www.resimistanbul.com/landing/?utm_source=adwords&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=branding-resim-istanbul&gclid=Cj0KCQjw7Z3VBRC-ARIsAEQifZSdDSSm4pBXWqEcrlUWFJYDCzYkAUjwzxQ8iNu_Q63lOGeXvf2ZB4aArFgEALw_wcB#index

URL 6- An example from İstanbul which reflects İzmir city with its Mediterranean soul. https://www.google.com.tr/search?q=kordon+istanbul&rlz=1C1NDCM_trTR755TR755&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjN5tGRkO_ZAhWjFJoKHdIvDuAQ_AUICigB&biw=1280&bih=615#imgsrc=PSBvUVA7U_RQvM

URL 7- Vadi İstanbul project from İstanbul <http://konuttimes.com/guncel-projeler/vadi-istanbul-bulvar-satilik-ofis-fiyatlari/33862>