

# Culture, Continuity And Change : Structural Analysis of the Housing Pattern in Squatter Settlement\*

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## Abstract

*Squatterization, as a continuing process, is still emerging housing problem around the urban centers in the developing countries related with the rapid physical and socio-cultural changes concerning home environment. During this process of change, housing patterns show a dramatic transition procedure from a temporary shelter to a permanent house in squatter settlements. On the basis of these arguments, this paper aims to explore the transition process focusing on socio cultural aspects of changing housing patterns in squatter settlements and to form an analytic model of squatter housing pattern within the acculturative-urbanization process. The paper examines the reciprocal relationship of the physical environment of the home with the family socio-cultural environment within the context of the urbanization process.*



*The home contains temporal qualities which reflect dynamic, flowing, and changing relationships between peoples and environments. These relationships have both backgrounds and future potentials. In this process, the home is the place which provides continuity from the past towards the future at the level of individuals, families and groups. As a result of enormous migration, the housing environment in Turkey has undergone a dramatic transition, developing from the temporary shelter to the permanent house. The squatter phenomenon is a planning problem which should be managed by taking into account its socio-cultural dimensions, as well as its economic and physical dimensions.*

*This paper is mainly based on the research projects carried out by the author that had aimed to identify the effects of socio-cultural and psychological settings on the spatial formation in home environment during the process of urbanization. The theoretical approach of these studies is based on a holistic concept that includes cultural, psychological, spatial and temporal components in a transactional perspective. In the light of this framework, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate the process of continuity and change in the urbanization process and to analyze the structure of the Housing Pattern in Squatter Settlement. This paper has four major parts: Introduction, theoretical issues and definitions, the method of analysis and the case studies and conclusion. The results obtained from the case study will be used to develop proposals for the improvement of living conditions of the urban poor.*

## Introduction

Turkey, as a developing country, has been undergoing a migration process since the 1950s. Migration from rural to urban areas or from small towns to big cities has created many problems that the governments or local authorities had not faced before. The most severe problems have arisen in Istanbul since it is the most attractive city for all the citizens. Istanbul had been one of the most important capitals of the Mediterranean basin for almost sixteen centuries, starting from the foundation of Constantinople in the 4th century A.D. and ensuring up to the end of the

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Ottoman Empire in the 1920s. Istanbul has had to face three major transformations in its history because of its unique location.

The "Islamization" of the Byzantine city following the Ottoman conquest meant the establishment of new urban policies, a new type of urban administration, new institutions and organisations, as well as the promotion of new building types. In the nineteenth century another transformation took place. In this government-sponsored transformation modernisation efforts recast the traditional urban policies based on Islamic law, replaced the urban administration, institutions and organizations with new ones adopting European precedents, and introduced another set of building types, this time conforming to the requirements of a modern Westernized lifestyle (Çelik, Z., 1991, p.16).

The last and perhaps the most depressing transformation has taken place in the second half of this century. Starting from the Ottoman period in the 19th century, Istanbul has experienced migration from different parts of Anatolia and Thrace at gradually increasing speed. The background of these newcomers has been the most powerful factor in the reshaping of the city during the last three decades. Istanbul has been struggling with the population growth since the 1900's to save its values against these uncontrollable developments. The changes which have occurred in Istanbul in the second half of this century reflect the social and cultural differences of its population within the transition process.

Migration from rural areas to towns and metropolises both means a change from rural to urban life as well as a change from rural production to industrial production. The characteristics of this transition period from tradition to the futuristic are reflected in the physical environment. Squatter settlements are a continuation of rural life styles which develop in urban areas and change through time. Such an urbanization starting with migration to towns from rural-agricultural-traditional areas and ending in an urban, industrial-modern society can be analyzed for its values of culture-space interactions according to different scales, leading to a better understanding of squatterization as a fact, not only as a problem area (Turgut, H., et al, 1995). The settlement and spatial organization of squatter areas differ significantly from those of legal housing areas. The primary determinants of the housing patterns in squatter settlements begin with the acquisition of land on which to build and continue with the organization of living and working activities within the combination of culture-rooted behavioral characteristics and resource limitations. On the other hand, efforts for upgrading of squatter areas have failed because they have not been based on a participatory process involving squatters and users. Squatter settlements which had tremendous potentials in terms of being transformed into settlement areas within the Istanbul Metropolitan region have today assumed an unhealthier, multistory, and fixed housing pattern. The success of an implementation of alternative housing patterns to be recommended for the low income urban sector relies on the continuity of the planning, building and utilization which extends from the individual housing unit to the settlement. Decisions regarding equipment, space, unit housing and settlement must be suitable to the socio-cultural/behavioral characteristics of the population if this continuity to be possible. Conducting planning activities related to the squatter areas without first performing structural analyses of the culture and space interaction in these settlements is only a futile attempt doomed to failure (Turgut, H., 1998).

In the first part of this paper a theoretical framework is established, explaining and discussing culture, continuity and change in the process of urbanization.

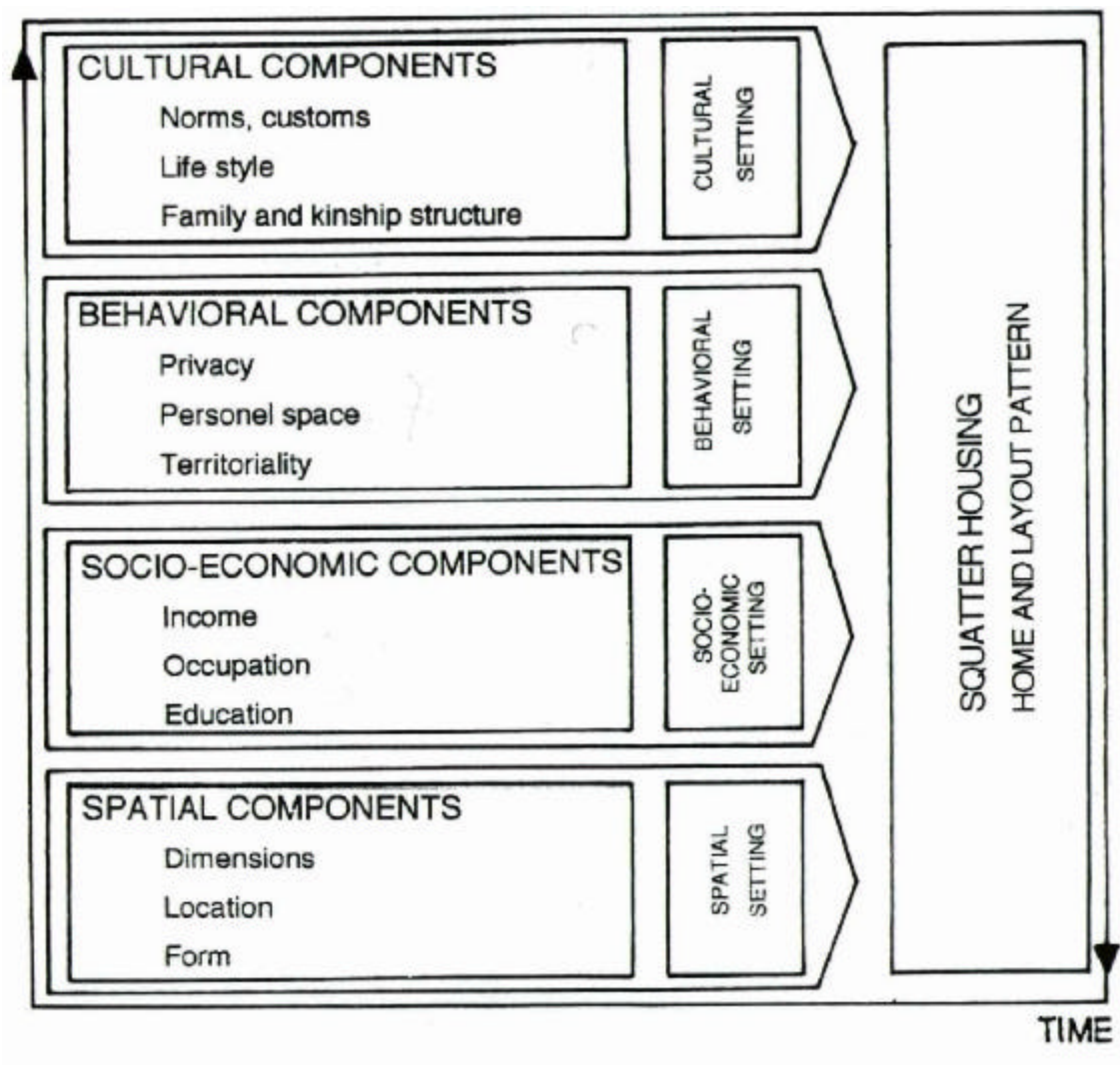
## Theoretical Framework

In the last decades the squatter phenomenon has been studied and interpreted by different researchers having various perspectives. As these researchers have taken into account different aspects of this phenomenon in relation to their background, the definitions and the interpretations have differed from each other to a large extent. This differentiation demonstrates the complexity and the multidimensional nature of the problem. According to the first definition we have chosen "Squatterisation is a transition process from rural to urban life, a transitional life style and its reflection to space". The second defines this from the view points of distribution of wealth (income), social structure and social security rather than only being a shelter (Arslan 1989, 34-37). The third approach takes into account the aspects related to ownership, legislation and construction processes and defines this phenomenon as "the casual buildings which have been built on lands or plots without having any ownership and the right to built on it in terms of building legislation and laws." These definitions show that the fact of squatter settlements and the squatting process itself are complex subjects due to their socio-cultural, psychological, economic, political and physical attributes. We can not isolate these different attributes from each other; for example, we can not study the subject as if it is only a social problem or just a shelter or socio-economic and political problem. We have to have a holistic approach in order to reach much more comprehensive definitions and interpretations (Saglamer, G. et al, 1994).

After having summarised the different definitions and the interpretations of squatter settlements and the emergence of this phenomenon in big cities, we would like to focus on structural analysis of culture, continuity and change in squatter settlements.

Squatter settlements are among the those housing patterns which have the most visible reciprocal interactions between user groups and their cultures. The housing pattern in the urbanization process contains the spatial setting which is appropriate to the cultural, behavioral, socio-economic characteristics of the user group and their alterations in the course of time. Layout patterns and spatial organizations of squatter housing show dramatic differences from legal housing patterns.

Cultural, behavioral, socio- economic and spatial characteristics formed in the process of urbanization can be grouped as structural components composing housing patterns. Cultural components consisting of norms, customs, mores, life-style, family and kinship structure form the "Cultural Setting"; behavioral processes such as "personal space", "territorial behavior" and "privacy" form the "Behavioral Setting"; components of "dimension", "location" and "form" the "Spatial Setting"; characteristics of "income", "profession", "education" form the "Socio-economic setting". In this structural analysis of housing pattern, each sub-system - output form an input for the other sub-system and, together, they form the "Housing Pattern" (Turgut, H ,1996).



**Figure 1.** Structural Analysis of Squatter Housing Pattern in the Process of Urbanization.

In the forming process of housing patterns which consist of cultural, behavioral, spatial and socio- economic dimensions, the temporal dimension gains significance. According to the definition of Altman, Oxley and Werner, homes contain temporal qualities of linear, cyclical and spiraling time which reflect dynamic, flowing and changing relationships between people and environments. (Altman, I., Oxley, D., Werner, C.M., 1985.) Linear time deals with the continuum of past, present and future. Cyclical and spiraling features of homes refer to repetitive and recurring activities and meaning, with cycles potentially recurring daily, weekly, monthly, annually or in some other regular or semi-regular fashion.

Changes in cultural, behavioral and environmental components which have these temporal qualities form the housing patterns in historical perspective. The structural analysis of squatter housing pattern in the process of urbanization made above is summed up in Figure 1. As described in Figure 1, there is a transactional relationship among spatial, cultural, behavioral, socio- economic components.

## Case Studies

### Analysis of Squatter Housing Patterns:

As the aim of this paper is to focus on the transition process of migrant poor in Istanbul, the information which will clarify this process have been analysed in this part of the paper.

Analysis made by author are exemplified with field studies from squatter settlements of Pinar, Gültepe, Akadlar. In order to collect the necessary information, measured drawings have been prepared with the schematic site plans, observations and interviews have been carried out and questionnaires have been applied.

The migrants from Anatolian villages moved to these areas and built their squatters illegally without tenure, plan and permit. The tolerance and non-involvement by the state encouraged the inhabitants and squatter sites were enlarged, improved, developed or rebuilt. During these periods layout and settlement patterns have changed dramatically, from **temporary shelters to permanent housing blocks**, reflecting alterations in cultural, behavioral and spatial dimensions. At the beginning, the squatter houses which were built on state, municipality, foundation or private lands were given title deeds in one way or another. Starting from the beginning, the newcomers gradually began to accept the urban life style and the flats have become for them the symbol of being a citizen. As ownership gives them comfort and as they wanted to obtain rent from their land, they have tended to build multi-storey buildings on their plot in order to rent them out. The squatter inhabitants who have not obtained the title deeds of their plots tend not to build multi-storey buildings because of this problem.

To explore this evolution of formation, three housing patterns have been presented ;

- Original squatters as temporary dwellings (Late 1950's-to recent days.)
- Acculturation example as semipermanent dwellings (Late 1960's to recent days)
- Multi-storied rental housing blocks as permanent dwellings (Late 1980's to recent days)

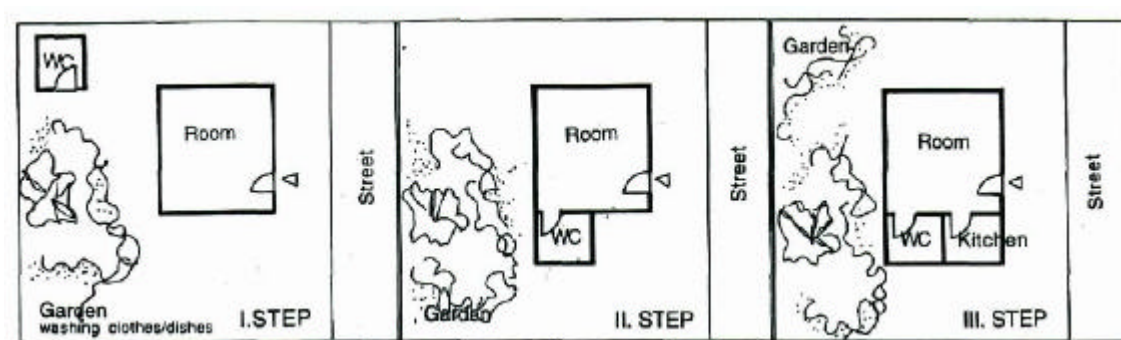
Starting from the neolithic period, many dwelling types and settlement forms have emerged in Anatolia. The individual shelter was the first step in this process. As subsequent steps, individual shelter began to constitute groups to set a social environment and they also acquired different characteristics to meet the requirements which mainly emerged as a consequence of social and cultural developments.

### Temporary Dwellings

In its simplest form, a dwelling unit contains a single space which house all sorts of activities. The number of rooms is obviously a function of the well-being of inhabitants as well as cultural constraints. The migrants who are settling as a low-income groups in big cities also have a low-income origin in their native towns. Therefore, they usually use simple space organizations in the first phase of squatterization (Saglam, G., 1993).

The dwelling units which contain up to 3 spaces have very simple layout organizations. The rooms are not specialised for certain activities in this phase and have multi-functional use with minimum furnishings. They have very low standards of building material and construction. All houses have individually drainage and waste disposal systems and the toilets are generally located

in a corner of the garden. The inhabitants still maintain their rural life style and rituals, high level of privacy and territoriality (Figure 2).



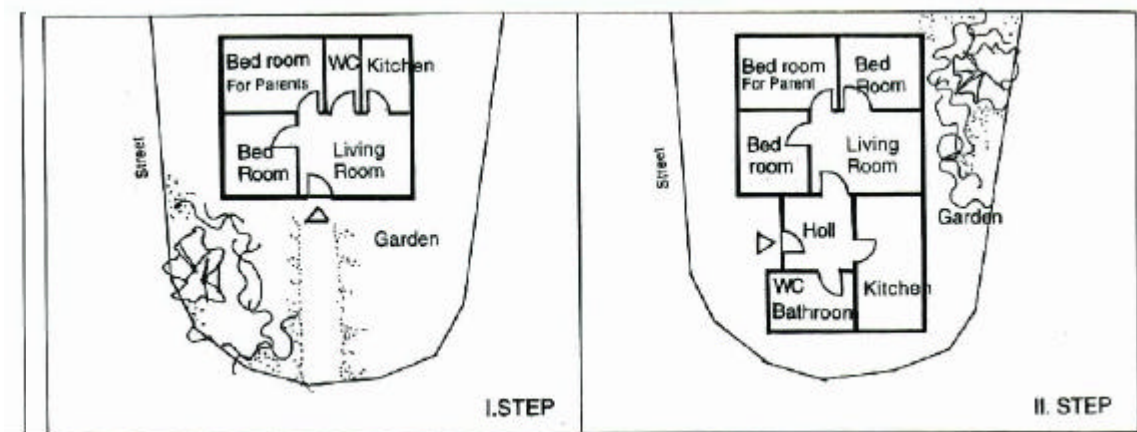
**Figure 2.** Examples of Temporary Dwellings

### Semi-Permanent Dwellings

In the second step of squatterization the dwelling units which have more than 3-4 rooms have generally been obtained by adding one group of spaces to the other. Thus instead of setting up complex space organizations, users preferred simple groupings of spaces for their changing requirements. Adding an individual unit or a group of spaces to the existing layout demonstrates the feature of expandibility of the dwellings in rural and squatter settlements.

This phase covers horizontal development of the squatter settlement. There is still rural type of space organization but the house is no longer a temporary shelter. Squatter house has a more specialized space organization based on functional needs.

The inhabitants start to change their rural life style and the level of privacy and territoriality tend to decrease (Figure 3).



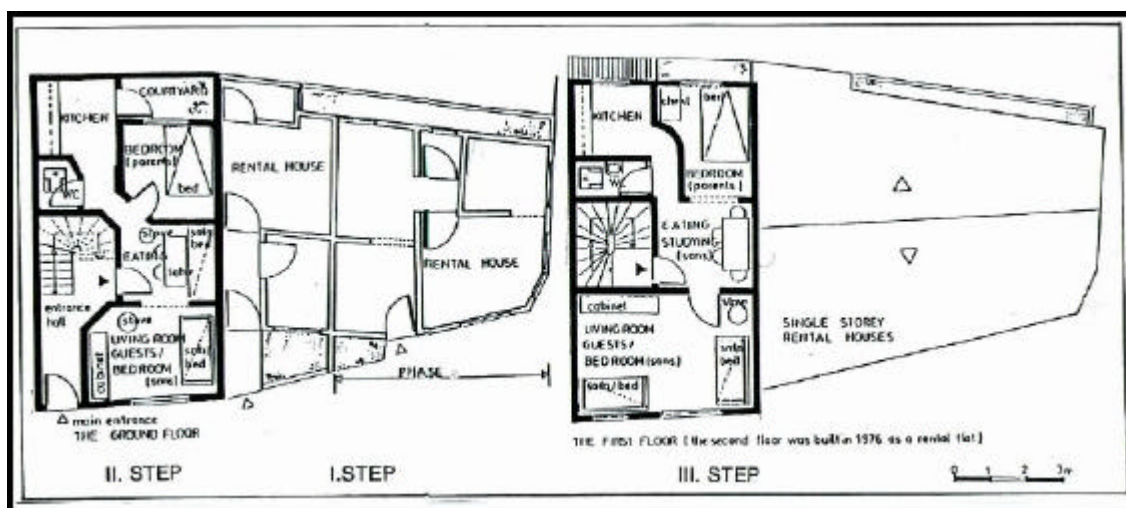
**Figure 3.** Examples of Semi-Permanent Dwellings

## Permanent Dwellings

In the third phase, the inhabitants start to build their dwellings with the idea of building a multi-storey apartment block. After the first floor is built, the family moves in. They built the second floor as a rental flat or a flat for close relatives. After attaining sufficient financial resources, the second and the third floors are added and the owner family moves up to upper floors as a status symbol.

The new life styles which the migrants start to adopt in big city effect the formation of the new apartment blocks and these multi-storey blocks demonstrate the radical changes in migrants life in terms of socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The extended family of the traditional living pattern has been replaced by the nuclear family; relatives who used to live in the group have been excluded from the household. Expectations and preferences for the future have begun to form an urban way of living. Rural norms, customs, values and habits have lost their effects on the family-life.

The main feature of spatial setting shaped in this phase is the certain level of "space spacialization" with a high density use of furnishings. The multi-functional nature of the rural space organization has left its place to spacialized space organization (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Examples of Permanent Dwellings

### 3. CONCLUSION

The Squatter Housing Patterns and the case studies represented in this paper helped us to explore the transition process in terms of the cultural, behavioral, socio-economic, politic, spatial and morfological settings in an historical perspective.

In the last decade the multi-storey apartment blocks became the major informal housing type in Istanbul. Most of the newcomers have opportunities to buy plots with shared title deeds and built apartment blocks on it without any permission from local authorities. Although these buildings contain flats like the ones the urbanized population use, there are many important differences between these flats. Informal housing block still have rural features in their space organisations, forms, texture and color of the facades.

The speed of changes in physical environment which emerged because of economic and political factors is less than the speed of the changes in socio-cultural concepts in the continuum of space. Transition process has to struggle with this phase difference until the process ends.

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