

Organizing squatters in Turkey: The case of Zafertepe

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Introduction

One-fifth of the world population is today homeless and 100 million people live on pavements or empty lots. Half of the people in the Third World are in ghettos or squatter areas; 30 million children live in streets; and 50 thousand people, mostly children, die every day of bad living conditions.

If the three-fourths of Turkey's population will soon be living in urban areas and if half of its present urban population could not be provided with appropriate services so far, the above global context becomes relevant and the need for major decisions to be taken obvious.

According to 1985 official statistics, 53 percent of the Turkish population lives in urban areas.

The rapid change, which has led to urban population exceeding rural population for the first time, began in the 1950s as a result of economic and social circumstances of Turkish history. During the 40 years between 1945 and 1985 the urban population increased 6 times whereas the rural population 1.7 times. The share of rural population in the overall population decreased from 75 percent, remaining almost static between 1945 and 1950, and began to drop rapidly, becoming 47 percent in 1985.

These quantitative population changes did not result in qualitative changes, since the necessary services could not be provided for the new urban population. The inability of both central and local administrations to cope with this rapid rural-urban migration has caused many problems, including shortage of housing.

Public initiatives to cope with the housing problem began in the 1930s but no significant results could be achieved till the 1960s, with the five-year development plans, in which housing has always been considered a problem and solutions have been sought. However, even in the five-year plans the rate of housing construction

remained always below the rate of increasing housing needs (table 1).

Table 1
Turkey — Housing construction shortage in the first five-year planning periods, 1963-1983

Plan/Years	Shortage*	Construction licences issued**
1st Plan (1963-1967)	418,793	348,420
2st Plan (1968-1972)	900,000	713,720
3st Plan (1973-1977)	1,220,000	987,361
4st Plan (1978-1983)	1,705,065	1,416,966
1963-1983 (20 year)	4,243,858	3,457,476

(Sources: * State Planning Organization
** State Statistics Institute).

At the end of the twenty years of the first four planning periods, the difference between constructed housing units and housing needs was 786,391. Furthermore, the share of public investments in the realized housing, which was 9.0 percent in the 1st and 2nd planning periods, dropped to 6.5 percent in the 3rd and 4th periods.

As a consequence of governmental inability to take effective measures for the production of urban services during the process of urbanization came squatter housing, a solution given to the housing problem by the people themselves.

Migrants, especially those with low incomes, began settling down in privately or publicly owned lands and building their own houses. This phenomenon of illegal squatter housing (*gecekondu*) has been a continuing pattern of housing development since the 1950s.

In the early years of the urbanization process the public attitude towards *gecekondu*s was negative and there were calls for their demolition. However such efforts had no success. The proportion of *gecekondu*s to licenced houses increased to 17 percent in 1960 from 5 percent in 1955 (table 2).

Table 2
Squatter houses versus licenced houses in Turkish cities,* 1955-1985

Year	Squatter houses	Licensed houses	Total of houses	Share of squatter houses in overall housing stock
1955	50,000	1,000,000	1,050,000	4.7
1960	240,000	1,200,000	1,440,000	16.6
1965	430,000	1,450,000	1,880,000	22.8
1970	600,000	1,951,716	2,551,716	23.5
1975	800,000	2,663,049	3,443,049	23.2
1980	950,000	3,652,266	4,602,266	20.6
1985	1,200,000	4,447,687	5,647,687	21.2

*With over 10,000 population

After 1960, *gecekondus* started being considered a "social and economic fact" instead of "illegal houses" and policies on preventing, upgrading or ameliorating them began to be determined. The general tendency was to seek for proper ways of legitimizing them by way of granting title-deeds.

Further to the information contained in table 2 concerning cities of over 10,000 people, it is to be noted that *gecekondu* areas cover almost more than a half of the major cities of Turkey today. In Ankara 70 percent of the overall population live in *gecekondus* (table 3).

Of importance is the location of the *gecekondu* areas in relation to the city center. Squatter areas, which at the beginning were located in the periphery, with time found themselves on the development axis of the city with limited improvement, if any, in overall conditions as sufficient services could not be provided. Thus the squatter housing problem in terms of technical infrastructure and environmental design remained an important item on the agenda. The current tendency is to stabilize the population density through Improvement Plans of squatter housing areas (fig. 1).

To pave the way for a healthy squatter environment with the present housing density in such areas, Kent-Koop has initiated the "Squatter Improvement Project" with the purpose of helping squatter people conceptualize

the social dimensions of environmental problems and, consequently, get organized to raise their living standards.

Such an effort is represented by the pilot project we introduce here. It refers to the organization of people in a squatter area and their efforts and success in improving their quality of life.

Zafertepe squatter improvement project

The Limited-Liability Squatter Improvement Cooperative of Zafertepe (Çevre-Koop), founded on May 4th, 1987 under the leadership of Kent-Koop, is the first attempt in Turkey to raise the living standards in a squatter district by organiz-

Table 3
Squatter houses and population in Ankara, 1950-1985

Year	Squatter houses	Squatter population	Share of squatter population in overall urban population (%)
1950	12,000	62,400	21.4
1960	70,000	364,000	56
1970	144,000	784,000	63
1980	275,000	1,450,000	77.2
1985	300,000	1,560,000	70.0

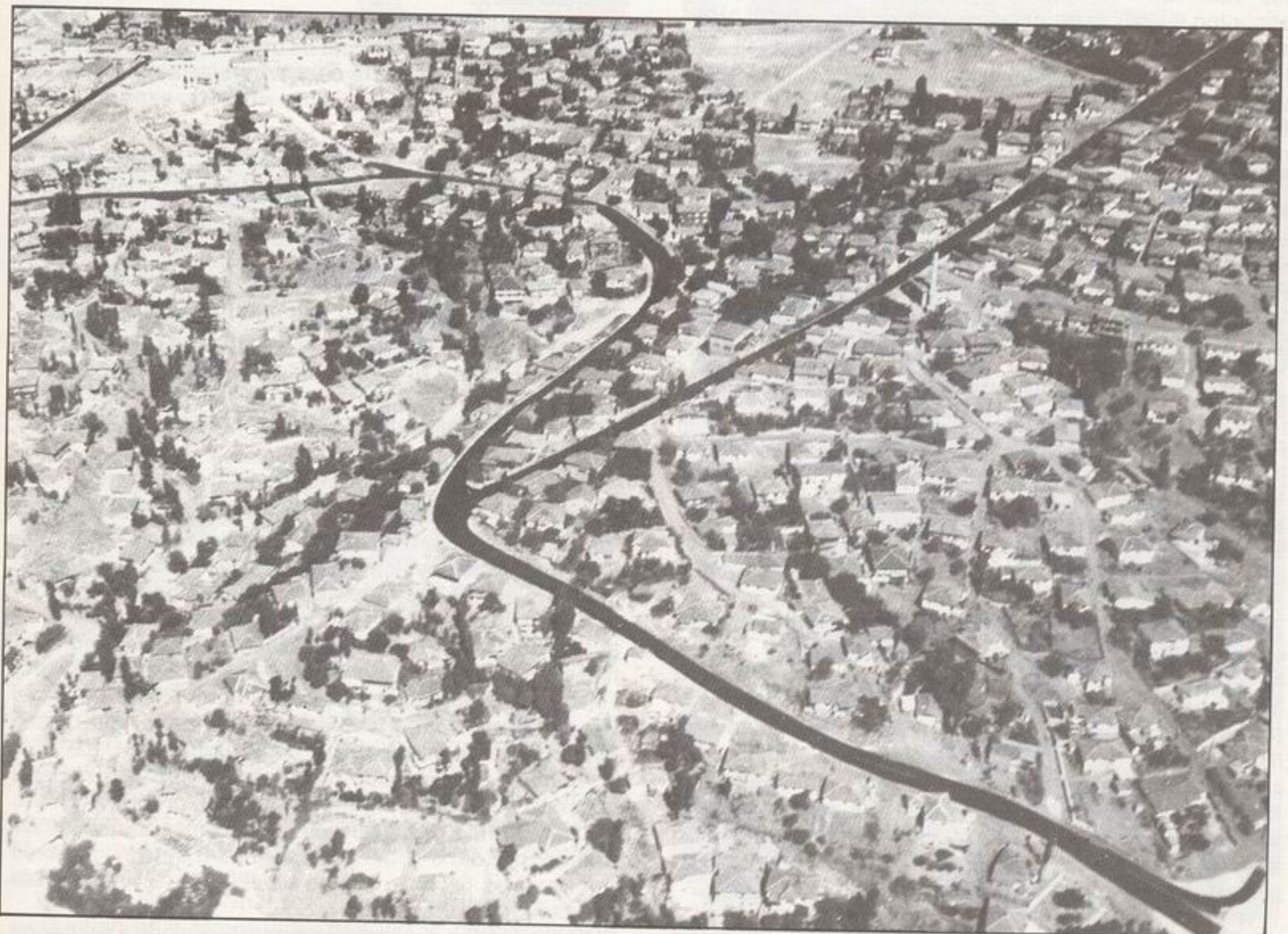


Fig. 1: A typical squatter area in Ankara.

ing the people of that district into a cooperative. The purpose of this organization is specified as follows in its constitution: "To conduce to the coming together of the squatter people to fulfill their physical and social requirements including the environmental arrangement and to seek for common means to solve their problems."

Definition of problems

Zafertepe, where the squatter improvement project was to be implemented, is located in the southeast of Ankara within the boundaries of Çankaya Municipality and it is surrounded by the Kücüksat squatter area in the west — which is included in the reconstruction plan initiated by the Municipality — and by squatter areas in the other directions: the Türküzü squatter area in the east; the Arka Topraklik squatter area in the north; and the Umut squatter area in the south.

With a population of 9,000, the Zafertepe squatter area is basically a housing district, situated on a hilltop with houses dispersed over the hillsides, where the slope is over 40 percent. The houses show little variety in terms of height and building quality, except those along the main road on the ridge connecting the district to the town where houses are 2- or 3-storeyed of better quality. The land is used for housing, commerce — limited to the main road on the hilltop, so that people do their shopping mostly in neighboring Kücüksat — and other social services which consist of a primary school and two mosques. There is no health facility — the people use facilities in the town center which is not far from the district — no kindergarten, no park, no playing ground, no green area, except for the trees in the gardens of houses. These gardens and the private property at the lower section around the former Incesu creek give the district a green appearance.

The area has no problems in relation to water and electricity. But sewage disposal presents problems arising from the increased density in some sections of the district, the aging of the existing sewage system, and the steep slope.

Vehicular traffic is carried out through the main roads lying parallel to the ridge and the skirt line. But, because of the slope, there is no road connecting the ridge to the skirt, only a few blind alleys. Furthermore, access to the hilltop, where all the social facilities are concentrated, from the skirt is only possible with great difficulty by means of steep and dangerous footpaths. So, pedestrian circulation seems to constitute the problem that calls for immediate action.

The problems of Zafertepe squatter district — more or less typical of all squatter areas in Turkey — call for solutions which under normal circumstances should be provided by the central and/or the local administration. In the production of urban services, however, governments usually lag far behind the rate of urbanization and thus the problems accumulate and their solution becomes more difficult with time. The purpose of the squatter improvement project is therefore to urge the squatter people to get organized so that they themselves provide solutions to some of their problems.

With this understanding, the problems which the Zafertepe people could solve, as a first step, were determined as referring to:

- Pedestrian access to social services;
- Park(s), kindergarten(s) and other open spaces;
- Training concerning illiteracy and development of handicraft skills; and,
- Sports.

A series of more specific proposals developed by Kent-Koop experts for the solution of the first priority problems were the subject of a series of discussions. In the meantime, the Management Board of Çevre-Koop decided on June 18th, 1987 to go ahead with the immediate construction of five stairways which were to provide access from the hill-skirt to the hilltop where the social facilities are situated.

Cooperation

For the implementation of the project, an agreement was signed between Kent-Koop and Çevre-Koop on July 1st, 1987 at the Coffee-House Ayyıldız.

The project relies on the cooperation of Çevre-Koop and Kent-Koop, which are both civilian organizations, on the basis of the above agreement specifying the individual tasks, rights, responsibilities and obligations as approved by the management boards of Kent-Koop and Çevre-Koop, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Planning and design** work — architecture, engineering — as well as social design, if required, would be provided by Kent-Koop;
- **Materials and equipment** would be provided by Çevre-Koop, whose facilities would be utilized, when requested;
- **Demand organization** would be undertaken by Çevre-Koop assisted by Kent-Koop with its experience in organization;
- **Labor** required for the implementation of the project would be provided by the cooperative. In other words, Çevre-Koop would participate in the project with the contribution of work by its associate members, while "quality" requiring labor would be provided through a labor Cooperative of Builders and Building Hands founded under the leadership of another cooperative, Emek-Koop.

Kent-Koop has initiated and undertaken responsibility for major tasks of this project (table 4) in order to provide a case and an example to the central administration, the local administration and the squatter public.

Initial implementation

Following a decision by the Çevre-Koop Management Board for the construction of five stairways — a priority item within the physical context of the squatter improvement project — implementation was immediately taken up. The five stairways with a length ranging from 90 m to 150 m were designed on the existing pathways connecting the hill-skirt to the hilltop, and one of them, with 130 steps measuring 110 m between the 26th Street and the cluster of social facilities on the main road on the hilltop, was selected to be constructed first.

As agreed, Kent-Koop provided the form boards and concrete and, following the completion of the formwork, the inhabitants of Zafertepe, men, women and children, infilled the forms with rubble stones that they gathered from around to make up the blocking layer underneath the concrete (fig. 2).

Following the necessary preparatory work, a gathering was fixed to take place at 10.30 a.m. on July 27th, 1987

for the pouring of concrete. The squatter people stood at arm's length apart from each other on either side of the formwork to transfer, hand to hand buckets, filled with concrete and bring them back to be refilled. The pouring of concrete started at the highest step of the stairway and proceeded downwards. Those who tired were immediately replaced by fresh ones standing by until concrete was poured in each of 130 steps along the 110 m of the stairway by 2.30 p.m. (figs. 3 and 4).

When, in the evening of the same day, those who had participated in the construction of the stairway hastened



Fig. 2: Zafertepe people working together.



Fig. 3: Women of Zafertepe working with joy for improving conditions in their new urban life.

to walk on the stairs, Kent-Koop staff and the Zafertepe inhabitants were there to share the excitement.

In this way what Kent-Koop desired was achieved: the enthusiasm of the rural people to accomplish collectively — typical social behavior among rural people — was mobilized to improve their new urban condition. The Zafertepe squatters became conscious of the fact that they can benefit from their inherent tradition of *imece*¹ to find solutions to the problems they encounter in the city.

Following this first achievement of what we may call urban *imece*, the second and the third stairways were constructed by the same procedure (fig. 5).

Immediately after this project a number of requests were presented by Zafertepe people to the Çevre-Koop Management Board, particularly from women asking for training programs to learn how to read and write; from girls wanting to learn dressmaking; and from youth in general for sports facilities. Having assessed these requests, the Board contacted the relevant public institutions for help. As a response the Public Training Directorate of Çankaya initiated corresponding courses which started on October 1st, 1987 in a house provided by the cooperative in Zafertepe (fig. 6).

Furthermore the Regional Directorate of Body Training provided sports field equipment for the children and youth of Zafertepe who had organized themselves for football, basketball and racing.

Thus, cooperation in the physical infrastructure — the production of a stairway — has led to cooperation in the promotion and development of social infrastructure.



Fig. 4: Pouring concrete for the construction of the first stairway in Zafertepe.



Fig. 5: Now, after a day's work, the people of Zafertepe can use the stairway.



Fig. 6: Girls learning dressmaking in a house provided by the cooperative in Zafertepe.

Conclusion

Many of the services required by the urban people in Turkey have not been delivered adequately by the public sector. Therefore, the urban people must go into organizing themselves so as to provide for their urban requirements. The failure of the public sector in producing sufficient and efficient housing has brought urban people together and they have managed to solve a substantial part of their housing problem by themselves. Kent-Koop, having succeeded in finding a solution to the same problem by organizing the people within the framework of the Batikent cooperative project, firmly believes that the urban public must get organized for the production of other services, too. The Zafertepe Squatter Improvement Project is the first application of this idea.

The government, having limited its involvement in the squatter problems to the mere granting of title-deeds, has ignored and/or neglected the *imece* power and dynamism of the squatter people. The initiative of a pilot squatter improvement project is hoped to arouse the interest of both the central administration and the local authorities, in making use of the *imece* potential of the squatter people in relation to any decisions they make concerning the amelioration of urban conditions. For example, the experience of the Zafertepe project may help for more effective, practical and applicable decisions to be taken within the context of the reconstruction improvement plans which are currently being prepared by Çankaya Municipality prior to the granting of title-deeds and the increasing of housing density in the area. There is no doubt that the collaboration of civilian organizations in the production of urban services will also contribute to the modernization of the urbanization process and the democratization of urban life.

Note

1. Work done for the community by a whole village.

Bibliography

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