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A Hidden Node in the Build-and-Sell System: Estate Agents

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Abstract

Discussing how the way different actors in the property market are informed by different perspectives and agendas, stemming from different practices and how this, in turn, leads to different ways of acting is an important issue. It is such a diversity in ways that triggered this research. The author's experience in the design and construction process of an apartment block in Bağlıca, Ankara, built with the build-and-sell system, disclosed the impact of estate agents' expertise in reading the market on architectural design and construction processes.

This paper explored how estate agents foresee their role in this system by talking with the agents about their work. By considering the build-and-sell system as practice, the paper shared the findings of the content analysis of eight semi-structured interviews with executives involved in the build-and-sell system and mostly working in Bağlıca, Ankara, as estate agents, architects, and builders-and-sellers and two interviews with architects working in the municipality. The findings show that estate agents are a node, a bridge among builders, landowners, and architects in certain areas while considering themselves as design-decision supporters/consultants for many builders. The paper discusses how estate agents' knowledge, skills, and meanings interact with the constitutive elements of build-and-sell practices.

Keywords: *estate agent, home-building industry, build-and-sell, Ankara, Bağlıca.*

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Yap-Sat Sisteminde Gizli Bir Düğüm Noktası: Emlakçılar

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Öz

Emlak sektöründeki farklı aktörlerin, farklı pratiklerden kaynaklı farklı görme biçimleriyle nasıl bilgilendirildiği ve bunun nasıl farklı davranış biçimlerine yol açtığı tartışılması gereken bir konudur. Bu araştırmayı tetikleyen bu bilgilendirilme biçimlerindeki çeşitlilik olmuştur. Yazarm, Ankara Bağlıca'da bulunan çok katlı bir apartmanın tasarım ve yapım sürecinde edindiği deneyim, emlakçıların piyasayı okumadaki uzmanlıklarının mimari tasarım ve inşaat süreçleri üzerindeki etkilerini göstermiştir. Ancak, Türkiye konut sektörü üzerine günümüze kadar yapılan araştırmalarda, belki de farkında olunmadan, emlakçıların özellikle yap-sat konut üretimi ağındaki rolü tartışılmamıştır.

Bu yazı, emlakçıların yap-sat modeline dayalı olarak çalışan konut sektöründe rollerini, kendilerinin nasıl gördüklerini ve tanımladıklarını yine emlakçıların kendileriyle konuşarak ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır. Yap-sat sistemini pratik olarak kabul eden bu yazı, Ankara, Bağlıca bölgesinde yap-sat faaliyetlerinde emlakçı, mimar ve müteahhit olarak görev alan sekiz kişiyle ve belediyenin ilgili biriminde görev alan iki mimarla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerin nitel analizinin sonuçlarını paylaşmıştır. Bulgular, emlakçıların müteahhitler, arsa sahipleri ve mimarlar arasında bir köprü olduğunu ve kendilerini birçok küçük ölçekli müteahhit için tasarım kararı destekçisi/danışmanı olarak gördüklerini göstermiştir. Yazı emlakçıların yap-sat ağına taşıdıkları bilgi, beceri ve anlamların müteahhitlerin, mimarların ve toprak sahiplerinin pratiklerini nasıl etkilediğini tartışmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: emlakçı, konut sektörü, yap-sat, Ankara, Bağlıca.

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Introduction

This paper explores estate agents' roles and practices in one of Turkey's prevalent housing production types, the build-and-sell system, and how estate agents interact with the actors in this system. Compared to large-scale construction companies or property developers, small-scale contractors/builders, in this study's case, those working in line with the build-and-sell system, rely on external bodies, as this study will illustrate, for two motives: evaluating the shifts in market demand, hence the properties most profitable to build (Orderud, 2006) and finding suitable/profitable land (Tekeli, 2009).

Guy (2002) points out how the way different actors in the property market are informed by different perspectives and agendas, stemming from different practices and how this, in turn, leads to different ways of acting. It is such a diversity in ways that triggered this research. The author took part in all the design and construction phases of an apartment building in Bağlıca, Ankara, built with the build-and-sell system. This experience drew the author's attention to how estate agents' ways of seeing owing to their 'expertise in reading the market' had shifted other involved actors' practice, thus different ways of acting, in this network.

In the Turkish home-building industry, a structure comprising many interactions between different and 'new' actors at different stages and functions has emerged over the last two decades. This structure resulted from "the period after 2002 characterized by property-led and construction-dependent economic growth (Ünlü, 2019, p. 54)." Based on the impacts of neoliberal policies (Tekeli, 2009; Ünlü, 2019), existing literature discusses the role of these actors, thus market, in defining housing provision and forms of tenure (Uğurlar and Özelçi Ecerel, 2014) and shaping urbanscapes (Çalışkan, 2009; Ünlü, 2019). At a bilateral level, we see diverse research streams that reflect on the altered relationship between architects and their employers following the "Flat Ownership Law" no. 634 of 1965 (Balamir, 2003; Koca, 2015) and the reciprocal relationship among plots, implementation plans, and housing forms (Ünlü and Baş, 2017). However, the field lacks recent research on one of the critical builders/actors working on these plots in line with the build-and-sell system, i.e., in Turkish "yap-sat." As one of the most common models used in authorized housing provision in Turkey (Pamuk, 1996; Uzun, 2019), the build-and-sell system has been a pillar of what Tekeli calls the self-organized Turkish cities (2014, p. 11). Previous work has only discussed the logic

behind the very existence of this system (Tekeli, 1986; Türel, 1986) and the qualities of housing outcome (Uzun, 2019), but has never, maybe unwittingly, focused on one of the essential actors in this system, estate agents.

This paper aims to draw academic attention to this system and the key areas where its actors get the knowledge based on which they act in the market. It aims to disclose the role of estate agents in the design and construction phases of housing built via the build-and-sell system in Bağlıca, a newly developed neighborhood of Ankara, and capture the fact that many disparate actors together produce the built environment.

Besides this introduction, this paper has six sections. The first section explains the rationale behind the focus on estate agents. It then summarizes the evolution of the build-and-sell system to specify why and how it has fitted the Turkish home-building industry from past to present. Based on an 'ideal type' of practice theory developed by Reckwitz (2002), the second section posits that the build-and-sell system is a practice formed from its actors' routine actions, the actual material setup and regulative rules. This proposition expands the scope to mesoscale, allows examining routine actions, and actors' role in this system.

The research is empirical. It reveals how estate agents define their role in this system by talking themselves about their work. It benefits from the thematic content analysis of five semi-structured interviews with estate agents, mostly working in the two neighborhoods of Ankara, which are Ümitköy and Bağlıca. The study held another set of interviews with three executives engaged in build-and-sell as builders mostly working in the same neighborhoods and two municipality planners working in the Etimesgut Municipality to triangulate the role estate agents attribute to themselves. The research is intentionally limited to examining the agents' practices in Bağlıca, a newly developing neighborhood of Ankara. We may say that builder-and-sellers determined the urbanscape of Bağlıca, where there is no social housing estate and just a few housing estates built by cooperatives. Given there is no prior research on Bağlıca, the third section informs the reader about the context regarding regulative and normative rules structuring the build-and-sell practice.

The fourth section shares the content analysis findings that point to two crucial roles of estate agents in the system: (1) A knowledge asset for actors, (2) A bridge between different actors in the system. The fifth section discusses how estate agents' knowledge, skills, and meanings interact with contractors, architects, and landowners' practices. The paper concludes by speculating

about the intricate relationship between urban development plans, the image of the existing building stock, market demands, estate agencies, builders, and architects.

Estate Agents and the Build-and-sell System

There is substantial research on the role of estate agents in structuring the choices of people looking for buying new homes (Palm, 1976), in terms of property prices (Gardiner et al., 2007) and the choice of location (Palm, 1976). Other research focuses on agents' professional practice, with a focus on their practices within their offices (Blåka and Filstad, 2007). Schiellerup and Gwilliam's research proves that estate agents have a crucial role in guiding the decision making of different actors "in terms of the kind of property to invest in, the specifications to which new property should be built and existing property should (or should not) be refurbished, the kind of space that one, as an occupier, can have [...] (2009, p. 804)." That suggests that the field requires more research on estate agents' practices within the home-building sector.

In Turkey, studies on estate agents are scarce. There is a study on the factors influential in consumers' housing choices (Karahan and Özüekren, 2009; Memiş, 2018). Yirmibeşoğlu (2008) studies the spatial distribution of real estate agents across İstanbul following the 1999 earthquake and discusses the rationale of the tenants' housing choice regarding neighborhood and apartment qualities. Notwithstanding, there appears to have been little academic interest in estate agents' role in guiding the development of housing built via the build-and-sell system, not only at the design phase per se but at the incubation phase.

The build-and-sell system

The build-and-sell system in the housing industry was first developed around the late 40s by the middle class facing housing shortage for increased land prices that put a burden to register "a single building on a single parcel of land in a single name (Tekeli, 2009)." Tekeli states that the middle classes could then share the cost of a single parcel of land by fragmenting the ownership (2009). In this delivery system, the builders-and-sellers

- (1) get land from landowners while exchanging for a certain number of independent units in the building block to be built on that land;

- (2) contract an architect, communicate with the municipality, get the required permits, make necessary payments for these permits, and supply the required finance -including project design finance and material supplies (Uzun, 2019);
- (3) in sum, finance the whole design and construction process;
- (4) put the units remaining from the ones allotted to landowners on the market (Pamuk, 1996; Tekeli, 2009).

What distinguishes builders-and-sellers from property developers lies in their financing strategy. The presale of the remaining units typically finances the whole process, as “the majority of private-sector builders are small-scale, have little capital, and do not have access to commercial or public sector construction financing at favourable terms, if any at all (Pamuk, 1996, p. 109).” They rarely have the capital to finish the whole building without selling. In this study, one interviewer, an estate agent, underscored that the name of the system misrepresents the process by correcting it as, sell and build, as builders-and-sellers aim to sell first and then build (EA5, personal communication, September 29, 2019).

The first legal framework of 1954, enabling flat ownership has increased the share of builders-and-sellers in the housing sector (Tekeli, 1986; Türel, 1986). Consequently, all notarized agreements since 1948 have become legitimate. Following the ‘Flat Ownership Law’ no. 634 of 1965, which allowed registering a building in more than one name, this model has spread across Turkey’s home-building industry (Uzun, 2019). Because of the increased development rights on parcels, this provision system has first been applied over the central part of cities. At first, this solution led to the formation of residential areas that lacked adequate infrastructure and densities higher than envisioned in plans (Tekeli, 2009).

From the 1970s to the present, housing provision in Turkey went through many transformations and has increased in variety by time (Doğan, 2008; Türel, 1986; Uzun, 2019). After the economic crises of 2001, the construction sector has become a tool for economic recovery. The tax incentives to private companies are especially explained to have played a crucial incentive in stimulating housing production (Türel and Koç, 2015).³

³ Türel and Koç underline that “the reduction of VAT to 1 % (instead of 18 %) when [builders] sell housing that they have produced with a net floor area of up to 150 m, are refunded VAT above 1 % that they pay for material or labour inputs during construction (2015).” Currently, three different VAT rates are applied.

Until today the build-and-sell practices, outlined above, have remained unchanged and has played a crucial role in the urban scene by the 1980s. By the 1980s, the decentralization of the Central Business District (CBD), increases in the private automobile ownership and construction of high-quality highways, and the extraordinary rise of land prices in the CBD have spread the city to the periphery via large scale projects. Tekeli (2014) suggests that the city is a self-organizing system and maintains its consistent urban form by “us[ing] small capital groups like the good old “yap-satçı” and others (2014, p.11).” Tekeli emphasizes that builders-and-sellers' attachment around large group capital group activities has helped achieve the internal consistency of the self-organizing system (Tekeli, 2014).

Actors in the system

Tekeli (1982) represents the formal actors and their respective roles in Figure 1. Beyond the ones represented in this graphic, there are many actors in the process, such as mechanical and electrical engineers, material providers, and utility companies. Mapping the dynamics among the actors in this system is a substantial task, yet this paper aims to add another, but hidden, actor to this graphic.

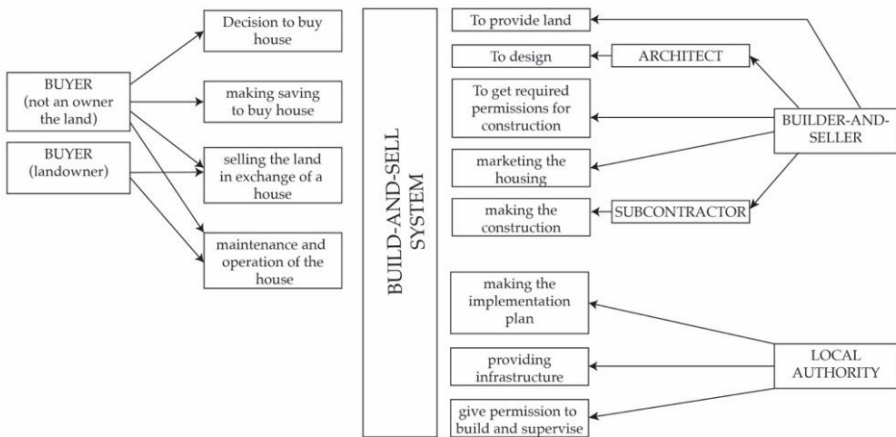


Figure 1. Representation of the build-and-sell system (Source: Tekeli, 1982)

Figure 1 depicts the actors’ formal relationships, yet lacks informal procedures leading to two agreements in this system. Pamuk (1996) points to the informality in the landowners’ selection of builders-and-sellers, which are

“carefully conducted based on information from social network systems in one’s community (1996, p. 109).” Another informality that this study will point to and where estate agents are seen to have a decisive role lies in the agreements among the landowners sharing either the same plot or having plots within the same city block.

The role of architects

The ‘Flat Ownership Law’ had implications on the relationship between architects and employers. The shift of housing production from the state to the private sector producer following the enactment of this law turned housing into marketable units, thus into a profitable commodity (Koca, 2015). While all forms of housing built from the establishment of the Republic until 1965 were meaningful in terms of use-value, they gained exchange value after this law (Koca, 2015). Koca (2015) emphasizes that this shift in value has created new bonds between architects, employers, and contractors. Hence this has altered the architectural design process of housing. After this period, Balamir (2003) maintains that we can no longer define a direct architect-user relationship with the user’s anonymization. With the intertwining of employer-contractor-investor concepts into housing design processes, Balamir states that architects have relinquished conceiving housing in line with the needs and desires of their dwellers (Balamir, 2003). For housing provision via the build-and-sell system, Tekeli states that “since the user is determined after the design process, the design is made with the concern of maximizing the sales value in the market rather than maximizing the use value. Therefore, marketing values assumed to valid dominate design decisions (1982).”

Challenges awaiting builders-and-sellers

Property developers, either as independent firms or as departments in larger companies, are key actors in the housing industry while managing the whole process from the beginning to the end (Orderud, 2006). Large-scale companies usually have the competence to perform property development in-house, for which small-scale contractors refer to external bodies (Orderud, 2006). In large-scale private housing projects, the design evolves in close collaboration with project developer agents. In contrast, small-scale contractors, especially those without prior experience in specific contexts, cannot determine the shifts in market demand, thus the properties that will be the most profitable to build. Notably, the developers working based on the build-and-

sell strategy (Tekeli, 2009) do not have time and capital to find a suitable/profitable land. For the Turkish context, Koçak and Sey (2008) indicates the following challenges these small scale housing producers/developers/builders face in practice: (1) Finding information about new job opportunities; (2) Tendering large-scale projects; (3) Widening their geographical span of operation; (4) Their lack of marketing skills. We may read these challenges as indicative of the points that estate agents might intervene in the system.

Theoretical Perspective and Methodology

The author's experience draws on the lack of research on estate agents' practices within the build-and-sell system. Hence, this study centered on how estate agents foresee their role in this system. This research is empirical, but I shall outline a theoretical perspective, which was both the origin and guide of this study.

Build-and-sell system as a practice

The paper posits that the build-and-sell system is a practice involving routine actions, interactions, competences, and knowledge. There is no definite theoretical approach or model to analyze practices. There are several versions exemplified in authors such as Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1986), Foucault (1995), Garfinkel (1967,) or Schatzki (2001). The paper takes up an 'ideal type' of practice theory developed by Andreas Reckwitz (2002) to examine agents' practices, as it focuses on the elements generating practices. Reckwitz defines the practice as: "routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (2002). He maintains that practice, for example, a way of working, cooking, or investigating, shall depend on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements. Individuals make the interconnection of elements (Reckwitz, 2002). As a 'block,' a practice defines a pattern, including many single and unique actions capable of reproducing it (Reckwitz, 2002).

As a bodily and mental agent, an individual carries a practice or, in other words, routinized ways of understanding, knowing, desiring, and doing. People know the elements that shape a practice, such as things, bodily activities, know-how, norms, rules. They are the patterns of our daily life. The

practice theory expands the scope to mesoscale by examining practices that are shared collectively. At this upper scale, meanings, purposes, understandings, and know-how are not attributes of the human subject, and they are "elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250)." Hence knowledge becomes a feature of groups, including their material setup (Schatzki, 2001).

The interaction between the constitutive elements of practice (meanings, skills, materials) fills out, reproduces, sustains, or even changes the pattern. The elements might also change (Pantzar and Shove, 2010). Practices are thus not stable and comprise their history and future within these elements.

Practices do not exist alone. As Reckwitz said, "the individual is the unique crossing point of practices, of bodily-mental routines" (2002, p. 256). Individuals recruit them in a continuum with various practices in daily life, including the work environment. Even further, individuals may integrate the same elements into diverse practices. Tats points to the relations between practices, as they are interdependent and complementary to each other. We may then speak of complex systems of practices (Pantzar and Shove, 2010).

The actors in the build-and-sell system recruit constitutive elements of this practice, and beyond their routine, the available materials or institutions in upper regimes might stabilize their practice. In practice, each actor gets into the scene with diverse skills and meanings, other words, intentions. While certain elements are not open to change, like the regulative rules, normative rules such as selecting materials in building and approach to design constraints represent diversities. As outlined above, builders-and-sellers pursue step-by-step routine actions. For example, their action, in agreeing with landowners and determining the number of flats to be given to builders in line with regulations, becomes part of these routines.

Concerning the challenges awaiting builders-and-sellers, this study assumes that builder-and-sellers are drawn to estate agents to retrieve the meaning attributed to the housing sold in certain neighborhoods. This meaning is shared not only by buyers but also with estate agents. Besides, landowners have expectations from builders. Pamuk revealed how informal discussions among landowners become the mean for determining the 'correct' builder. Hence, the study's second assumption is that builder-and-sellers refer to the estate agents' skills in gathering new construction opportunities.

The housing outcome ultimately reflects the regulative and normative rules recruited into practice by all the actors. The study's third assumption is that, in an upper scale, existing urbanscape and the characteristics of existing

buildings, such as building materials, the number of rooms in a flat, the kitchen dimensions, structures/defines the prospective build-and-sell apartment blocks.

Methodology

The study pursued three tactics to draw the elements structuring the build-and-sell practice in Bağlıca: (1) Examining regulative and normative rules prevailing in Bağlıca; (2) Examining online advertisements for lands published on oft-used housing websites; (3) Interviewing key personalities working in the system.

The study endeavored to hear what Schiellerup and Gwilliam (2009) call 'tales of practice.' These tales are apt to reveal the pattern block of build-and-sell practice with a particular focus on the knowledge, skills, and meanings estate agents weave into the system.

Given its breath in capturing a detailed account of agents' real work environments and focus on how the respondents make sense of their circumstances (Groat and Wang, 2013, p. 219–224), a qualitative approach and interviewing estate agents would yield those tales. The study carried out five semi-structured interviews with estate agents mostly working in the two neighborhoods of Ankara, which are Ümitköy and Bağlıca.

In Bağlıca, there are twenty-one estate agency firms.⁴ The following criteria are applied for selecting estate agent interviewees: At least having five years of experience in Bağlıca (Table 1) and, given the necessity to openly share the tales of practice, will, and ability to give relevant information. Except for one agent, all the agents have been working in Bağlıca for long years and were able to explain not only their practice with builders-and-seller but also their prolonged relationships with many landowners who are mainly Bağlıca villagers' heirs.

The study held another set of interviews with one architect having a long experience in this area and two builders-and-seller to triangulate the role agents attribute to themselves. The study interviewed one builder who was constructing his/her first building block and the other who has been working in this neighborhood for over ten years, to disclose whether builders' prior experience in this neighborhood affects their interaction with estate agents.

⁴ There is no database containing this information. Hence the number of estate agency firms is derived from a search engine map.

The interviews with two architects working in the directorate of construction affairs of the Etimesgut Municipality enabled the study to illustrate the impact of the regulative and normative rules on the housing outcome.

Table 1. The list of interviewees

Profession and occupation	Pseudonym	Years of experience	Years of experience in the neighborhood
The estate agent (1)	EA1	25	10
The estate agent (2)	EA2	4	2
The estate agent (3)	EA3	10	10
The estate agent (4)	EA4	10	10
The estate agent (5)	EA5	8	8
Architect / Builder-and-seller	A1	20	3
Architect / Architect	A2	25	16
Civil Engineer/ Builder-and-seller	CE1	20	9
Architect/municipality planner	M1	10	6
Architect/municipality planner	M2	10	8

The study defined a set of occupation-specific open-ended questions based on a set of themes to stimulate the interviewee to give his or her assessments and reasoning. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. The author conducted all the interviews. All the interviewees were first informed about the research objectives and signed informed consent forms for this interview. The interviewees' names and any reference to other parties uttered in the interviews were then made anonymous, via pseudonyms for each person.

The study made the thematic content analysis of these interviews by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. There is no specific justification for this choice, except for its widespread use in social sciences. Specific research question(s) and the researcher's theoretical or analytic concern on the topic drive this research. Thus, all the data were analyzed via a top-down/theoretical thematic analysis. The analysis proceeded at the semantic level to identify/find repeated patterns of meaning and theme. Therefore, the themes are defined with the explicit and surface meanings of the data without looking beyond what the interviewee said (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It started with revealing the patterns and continued with the interpretation. It discussed the significance of the patterns concerning their broader meanings and repercussions, and their relation to existing literature. Two separate researchers coded the same data. Based on an essentialist approach, the study revealed certain assumptions about the nature of data and how the interviewee

represents 'the world' and 'reality.' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is maintained that an essentialist or realist method can be pursued for reporting experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants. The study used qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA 2018.

Determining the sample size in qualitative research is a highly debatable topic, given the dependence of data saturation on the research scope and questions, the recruited participants, and the epistemological framework (Constantinou et al., 2017; Hennink et al., 2017). The study achieved saturation after the 3rd interview with estate agents because it stopped identifying new themes.

Setting the Scene: Bağlıca, Etimesgut

Bağlıca is a neighborhood of Etimesgut District on the northern part of the Ankara western axis, Dumlupınar Avenue. It is adjacent to Ahi Mesut and Alsancak in the north, Erler in the east, Fatih Sultan Mehmet and Yaprıcak in the south, Ayyıldız and Yaprıcak neighborhoods in the west (Figure 2). Bağlıca village is one of the oldest settlements of Etimesgut. Ceramics belonging to the Chalcolithic, Old Bronze Age, Phrygian and Roman Periods found in the Kepir area and the village indicate that this area has been a settlement since ancient times. Bağlıca has been a settlement in the Seljuk and Ottoman Periods as well as in the Roman and Byzantine Periods (Murat, 2018b). The Ahi Mesud lodge in Bağlıca village, now in the neighborhood, which is the source of inspiration for the old name (Ahi Mesud) of Etimesgut, shows that the village has been a Turkish village since at least the 1400s (Murat, 2018a).

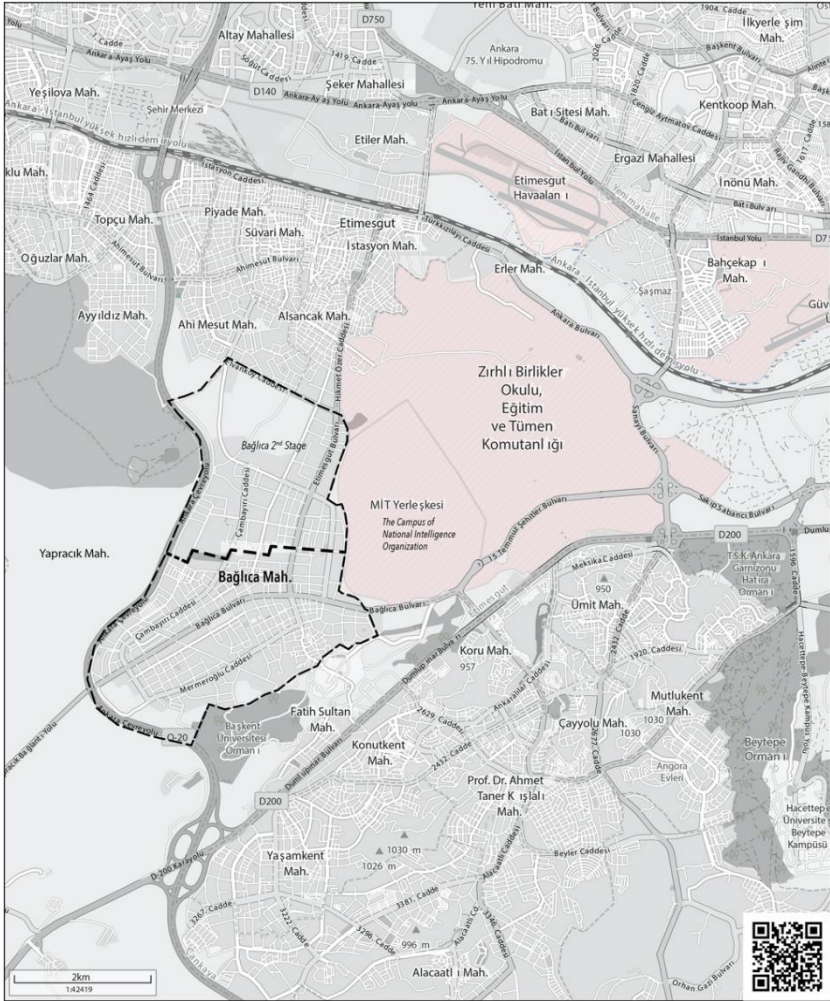


Figure 2. Map of Bağlıca (OpenStreetMap contributors, 2020) The. Black dashed area represents Bağlıca neighborhood.

2023 Capital Ankara Master plan (Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2006) defines Bağlıca as the southern development axis of the Etimesgut settlement Residential Development Areas (KG2) determined by approved plans. The 2023 planning population forecast assigns 105.000 people to this area (Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2006, p. 581). Bağlıca became a neighborhood with the

decision of the Etimesgut Municipality Council dated 05.08.2008 and numbered 354 (Murat, 2018a). The population rise coincides with the establishment of the neighborhood.

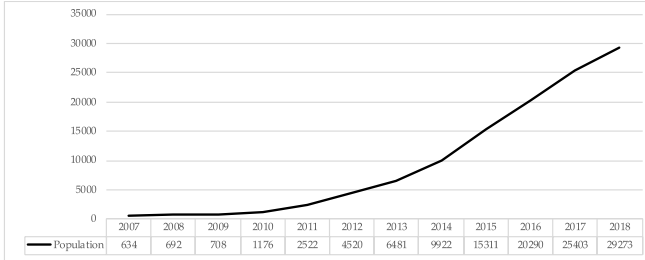


Figure 3. The population of Bağlıca across the years 2007-2018 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018)

Two main avenues divide Bağlıca into four parts. Bağlıca Avenue runs east-west through Bağlıca and reaches Dumlupınar and 15 Temmuz Şehitler Avenues at the east, Ankara Ring Road at the west. Etimesgut Avenue, at the north-south axis, commutes the neighborhood to Etimesgut district center. All the interviewers underlined that three developments within and around Bağlıca would draw more people to this neighborhood. The first development is the connection of Bağlıca Avenue to Sakıp Sabancı Boulevard via 15 Temmuz Şehitler Avenue that was built following the opening of military zones in 2016 and will be connected to the western beltway. The 2023 Capital Ankara Master plan defines all these avenues (Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2006, p. 479). The municipality also believes that the Ring Road connection will increase the 'value' of the neighborhood (Murat, 2018a).

The second is the construction of a new Health Campus of Ankara University right across the beltway. The third is the new campus of the National Intelligence Organization (NIO) located in Erler neighborhood next to Bağlıca Avenue. These new developments are seen to have taken their place in recent advertisements given by estate agents.

Regulative Rules

Etimesgut Municipality Implementation Plan defines three crucial regulative rules affecting practices. The first is building plots. The Turkish planning system concentrates mainly on single buildings by determining the size of the plot, with its allowed construction area, setbacks (the distances from the road or the adjacent plot,) and maximum building heights. Ünlü and Baş (2017)

assert that the plot has become the critical morphological element shaping the urbanscape of Turkish cities. 1/1.000 scale implementation plan of Etimesgut District is public and available online on the municipality website (*Etimesgut Municipality Implementation Plan, 2019*).

The second is the floor area ratio (FAR), defined in implementation plans for each plot, that describes development rights based on plot size. FAR signifies the ratio of the permitted floor area of a building to the total area of the lot on which the building stands. In Bağlıca, the FAR ranges from 0.35 – 0.50 – 0.70 with relatively big plots.

The third is the plan note defined in nearly all the plots in Bağlıca. This note determines the maximum number of independent units within the building(s) on a plot by dividing the total allowed construction area to 125 sqm. This note hence determines an approximate size of a, for example, flat.

The fourth rule, not defined in plans and executed in all planned areas, is plot consolidation permission. Plots found in the same city block can be consolidated with all the landowners' consents and the approval of the municipality. If the landowner(s) of one plot inside a city block does not accept the consolidation request of other landowners or there is a mismatch between interested parties' expectations and one plot might remain detached from the consolidated city block. The figures below, produced by the author based on the Etimesgut implementation plan, illustrate several remaining plots and how individual buildings raise on these plots and shape Bağlıca's urbanscape.



Figure 4. The representation of the city blocks after plot consolidation (*Etimesgut Municipality Implementation Plan, 2019*) Grey plots were not included in the plot consolidation.

The Capital Ankara 2023 Master plan had an integral approach towards the newly planned settlements in the urban periphery that deviates from the overall quantitative and individual perspective in development plans. It encourages “block-based plan implementations, to avoid parcel-based applications (Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2006, p. 21).” That is the case in Bağlıca, where most building blocks in Bağlıca have over one owner as maintained by all the interviewed agents. That means all landowners shall approve to give their share in the plot to a builder. In case of disagreement, a partition lawsuit (izale-i şüyu) may be opened.

The housing outcome

The housing outcome connotes the normative and regulative rules overarching in practices. Each estate agent was asked about the most popular housing type in Bağlıca. Following the interviews, the study carried out an analysis of the number of houses put up for sale on a daily base⁵ through oft-used housing websites⁶ based on the following search criteria:

- (1) Housing for sale in Ankara, Etimesgut, Bağlıca
- (2) Housing types: apartments, residences, villas, building block
- (3) The number of living rooms and rooms in apartments.

Table 2. Number of housing for sale in Bağlıca across housing types (*Hürriyet Emlak*, 2019, 2020; *Sahibinden.com*, 2019, 2020)

Housing type	sahibinden.com	Hürriyet Emlak	sahibinden.com	Hürriyet Emlak
Apartment block	868	1329	700	598
Villa + Detached house	145	193	172	95
Residence	28	27	11	7
Total	1041	1549	883	700

⁵ September 20, 2019; July 02, 2020; These numbers do not have any statistical significance for this study. They inform the reader about the housing outcome.

⁶ There is, unfortunately, no alternative database to retrieve this data.

Table 3. Number of housing for sale (in apartment blocks) in Bağlıca across housing types (*Hürriyet Emlak*, 2019, 2020; *Sahibinden.com*, 2019, 2020)

Housing type in apartment blocks	20/09/2019		02/07/2020	
	sahibinden.com	Hürriyet Emlak	sahibinden.com	Hürriyet Emlak
1+0	5	8	4	1
1+1	27	40	25	19
2+1	51	89	45	32
3+1 and 3,5+1	183	279	102	61
3+2	3	-	-	-
4+1	562	848	488	446
4+2	1	6	-	-
5+1	14	19	15	13
5+2	8	-	7	9
6+1	5	9	7	9
6+2	3	3	2	3
7+1	3	2	4	5
7+2	-	1	-	-
8+2	1	-	1	3
9 or above	-	1	-	-
Total	866	1305	700	598

This data shows that the available house for sale is what is called 4+1 flats.⁷ The apartment blocks defined as residences are mainly built for university students studying at Başkent University. In Bağlıca, each apartment block or small-scale housing estate for the sake of representing an image of a gated-community builds walls around its land borders. All the agents underlined this as the demand of buyers. The FAR allows builders to have big green areas around apartments, and for marketing issues, builders-and-sellers build playgrounds inside these gated areas.

Online advertisements for lands

The study examines the advertisements for lands (Table 4) published on housing websites to illustrate the knowledge and meaning estate agents look for conveying to the actors, either builders or housing customers. The cost analysis of plots and the analysis of regulative rules shape the estate agents' practice in publishing these advertisements, which only provide the details of plots weaved with the plan notes and the floor area ratio and estimations about the financial revenues for interested parties.

⁷ These online websites provide a filter as inside a housing estate; however, detailed analysis shows the inaccuracy of several advertisements.

Table 4. Several online advertisements put online by estate agents⁸

	Details provided by estate agents on online advertisements
1	<p>At the entrance of Bağlıca, the floor area ratio is 0,70 427 sqm 420.000 TL 434 sqm 450.000 TL Might be sold separately. 861 sqm in total, this allows constructing 607,7 sqm closed area. 5 flats or 5 villas can be built. Each plot is at the corner (İzciler Gayrimenkul, 2019b).</p>
2	<p>In Bağlıca 1st stage 570 sqm allotment within a plot of 2070 sqm in total, the floor area ratio is 0,70. It will bring 1,60 flat. The approximate price of a flat in this area is 650.000 TL. Based on this, your revenue is approximately 1.000.000 TL (İzciler Gayrimenkul, 2019a).</p>
3	<p>In Bağlıca 1st stage, the floor area ratio is 0,70. 718 sqm lot within a plot of 3178 sqm in total. The plot allows building 18 flats. Your allotment will be 4 flats. After setting an agreement with a constructor, 2 flats will remain. The approximate price of a flat in this area is 600.000 TL. Based on this your revenue is approximately 1.200.000 TL You will have 2 flats with the price of one flat. Ready for settlement has required infrastructure in terms of electricity and water supply. There are public settlements in this area. The construction of the connection of Bağlıca to the beltway has started. A good area without transportation problems (İzciler Gayrimenkul, 2019).</p>
4	<p>In Bağlıca 1st stage, The floor area ratio is 0,70. Single land title of 619 sqm. 3 flats might be built. If you make the union with the adjacent plot, 7 flats might be built</p>
5	<p>Has the required infrastructure ready for starting the construction. In Bağlıca The plot area is 750 sqm, the floor area ratio is 0,70. In the upper parts of Bağlıca with a good vista. The total construction area is 525 sqm, according to plan notes, 4 flats or 4 villas can be built (EWARSA Gayrimenkul Yatırım ve Değerlendirme, 2019).</p>

Findings

This section shares the findings of the content analysis of the interviews and online advertisements. The research reveals two key roles of estate agents in guiding the build-and-sell practice:

- (1) Estate agents are knowledge assets for the actors;
- (2) Estate agents are bridges between different actors in the system.

Estate agents as a knowledge asset for the actors

All the agents considered themselves a key knowledge asset for constructors willing to work in this neighborhood.

We know what people want. We are the primary asset/reference for builders willing to start construction in this area (EA1, personal communication, September 28, 2019).

⁸ Advertisements are translated by the author.

In terms of developments foreseen as build-and-sell in most cases, builders get in touch with agents either to obtain information about their planned construction or to recruit them for the sale of their future/recently completed building blocks.

We have experience arising from being old in this industry. We are selling flats. We are getting the presale of the builders 50-100 apartments. We give them the first idea of the most profitable interior design of the flat; we give them direction. Because we know, rather than the builder, what customers want (EA1, personal communication, September 28, 2019).

How do they gain this knowledge?

Their knowledge about the consumers' behavior and attitude (practice) and the selling performance of the existing building blocks are believed to accumulate from their experience in this business. On purpose, the author asked the agents whether they conduct any survey on the expectation of customers from new housing in Bağlıca.

We are already in the business of selling housing. There is no need to do a survey. We are already seeing the profile because we are always breathing the same air (EA3, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

We have experience arising from being old in this industry. We are selling flats. (EA1, personal communication, September 28, 2019).

I'm looking at the buyer profile. We have such an informal inquiry while buyers come to see a new flat: Where do you live, where do you come from, where did you go and look for new apartments, how long have you been searching for a flat (EA2, personal communication, July 15, 2019)?

Since we are actively selling property in this region, it is the consultants who closely follow the trend (EA4, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

What do they know?

They know the existing building stock and what they can 'sell' in this neighborhood.

What does the neighborhood need? What is the surplus of housing? Should 1+1, 2+1 apartment format be in the project? Should not (EA2, personal communication, July 15, 2019)?

This research justified their accounts via the quantitative analysis of online housing advertisements. On this issue, C1 states that

Estate agents do regular real estate sales business. As the buyers ask them which type of apartments they are looking for, they inform about the trends. Since we are continually producing and selling housing, we can keep the pulse of the buyers. However, estate agents who are more loyal to their business can give you more information about that trend (C1, personal communication, July 20, 2019).

How do they intervene in the design and construction process?

They represent the expectations of costumers, in terms of materials, apartment size, etc. based on their knowledge about the existing building stock and what they call 'housing trends' in certain neighborhoods.

We say that in this region, make big 4 + 1, or make the whole 1 + 1 or 2 + 1, or at most 3 + 1. Or make it mixed. We define it according to the nature of the project. It also changes according to sqm. Some projects have 700 housing. Some have 50 housing. Now we don't add much diversity to a 50-housing project [...] This is the sales tactic [...] it will be determined according to people's purchasing power, when you say 4+1, the price is 600-700, for 3+1 is 450-500. [...] According to the demographic structure of the neighborhood, we evaluate what people can pay based on their financial structure (EA2, personal communication, July 15, 2019).

When the company arrives in the region and wants to invest in the region, the consultant directs it to the architect and the best consultant who explains the texture of the architectural region is the agent. You have to do the hall like this, they like the balcony, the dressing room is a must here. The consultant draws the whole line so that sqm should be this at a minimum (EA4, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

They also maintain that if the builder recruits them in an earlier design phase, maybe even before agreeing on land, he/she would have a better revenue. A2, an architect who has been working in build-and-sell projects in Bağlica, explains the meetings held with builders, architects, landowners, and agents. A2 states he has never seen a builder attending these meetings without an agent. A2 maintains that:

[Estate agents] have a vital trump [...] What is that? [Estate agents while speaking to a builder-and-seller state] This can't be sold. This can be sold

quickly.⁹ Now, the sentence that this can be sold quickly is so appealing to people that it is tempting for the employer, the employer is captivated by [estate agent] and goes after [estate agent]. Whatever you do as an architect does not change anything, they want what that agent says [...] [The architect], of course, have an impact, [...] but the other one outweighs it because contractors have the build-and-sell logic, they're going to do these constructions by selling, as estate agents are the seller, and [agents] say, "I can sell this product" (A2, personal communication, August 8, 2019).

In sum, they do research on planning documents of plots, delineate allowed construction areas, the number of independent units, and the cost analysis for both sides of the system. They represent costumers' expectations in terms of materials, apartment size, etc. to interested builders and/or recruited architects. They provide information about the existing building stock and the housing trends that shape the expectations.

Estate agents as a bridge between different actors in the system

The second stream of practice is searching for new plots for future property developments. Over their plot search, estate agents either learn the names of plot owners or those having an acquaintance in the neighborhood already know the landowners, even to the extent to recognize them of their surname, which is an indication of a Bağlıca villager (EA4, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

Stepping on their cost analysis, they contact the landowner or landowners sharing the same plot or having plots in the same building block and prepare a 'suitable' agreement among these owners for 'giving' the plot to a builder. Once they are asked how they reach an agreement among the landowners who have a shared plot, they answer:

[Agreeing with owners] is a very tedious process. [...] You find the landowner, if you do it by yourself you speak to them in a certain way or if you will give the land to a builder or if you will buy the land, you speak in that way to the landowner(s), and you try to get out of it. You find a plot. Then you search for a builder as if you are consolidating the plot (EA3, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

⁹ The estate agent said 'peynir ekmeğ gibi' in Turkish.

[Agreeing with owners] is a very tough issue, but we have formulations for [agreeing with owners] (EA1, personal communication, September 28, 2019).

Agents are nodes, bridges between builders-and-sellers, and landowners in certain areas. They find a suitable builder-and-seller for the plot and arrange the agreement between the builder-and-seller and the landowners. The formulation revolves around the portion to be given to the builder, convincing some landowners who share the same plot. This process might also be taken to court with the elimination of partnership cases.

We arrange a marriage between the landowner and the builder (EA3, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

We are always the mediator, a bridge among the landowners, and from the owners to the architect (EA4, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

Herein this study draws on the estate agents' roles in creating an informal network that binds landowners to builders.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research started following the author's perplexity upon her first-hand experience with estate agents in a build-and-sell practice in Bağlica, Ankara. This experience has drawn the author's attention to the agents' practices in shaping, informally, other actors' practices in this system. Nevertheless, previous work has not inadvertently considered them as a node in this system.

By considering build-and-sell activities as routinized practice, this paper disclosed how estate agents foresee their role in this system by talking with the agents themselves about their work. The findings showed that estate agents are a node, a bridge among contractors, landowners, and architects in certain neighborhoods. Based on their long-term experience in selling and renting housing, they foresee themselves first as an authority in reading the market, and second as design-decision supporters/consultants for many builders. As maintained by the interviewed builders and architects, small-scale builders refer to estate agents to read the evolution of the market, and landowners look for making the most of their land. Thus, they have become

a knowledge asset for interested parties and act as project developers for many builders-and-sellers.

Building for profit within allowed limits

Estate agents weave knowledge, meaning, and skills into this practice. 'What may be easily sold?' is the knowledge they possess. The easiness becomes a meaning for builders. For builders, they decipher the estate trends and cycles to predict the best time for development, buying and selling, and set about targeting the right demographic, to know whether to focus on apartments, mid-rise, mixed-use buildings, or other typologies. In the Turkish context, this translates as "3+1, 4+1, etc." Over the interviews, some agents, upon the question on how they interfere in the design process of buildings, started explaining what they call "must design decisions" mostly on the sqm of rooms or balconies.

This knowledge correlates with the meaning of 'house' they convey to the builder. Agents' phrase 'I can sell THIS quickly' referred by the architect and builder A1, the architect A2, the builder C1, and the municipality planner M1 illustrates this meaning. All the interviews with the estate agents revolved around the term 'economic rent.' Agents have the potential to represent only the demand and what makes money in the short-term. The client is anonymous. Their monetary discourse becomes the primary driver of design decisions. A good architect becomes the one that designs the biggest sqm in allowed rules. That confirms previous research (Koca, 2015; Ünlü and Baş, 2017).

Equipped with the skills that ease creating bonds among landowners, they know how to convince the landowners in accepting certain articles in agreements or flat distribution. Afterward, they become the bridge between the landowners and the builder owing to their existing network. These agents are thus essential elements sustaining the self-organization of this system.

Estate agents as the implementers of the development plans

Previous research underlines the incapacity of city master plans in "ensuring spatial quality by defining the overall form at once [...] or only by defining the macro-structure without an explicit formal characterisation of the parts [...]" (Çalışkan, 2009, p. 47)." To mitigate this problem, Çalışkan (2009) suggests pursuing a new master-planning perspective sensitive to bottom-up formations defined with context-sensitive morphological design approaches

and compositional rules effective at an intermediate scale. This proposition aims at solving the fragmentation of urban form and constitutes “a holistic structure of metropolitan urbanity” (Çalışkan, 2009, p. 47). Herein, the parts or the bottom would still face two main challenges that estate agents deal with to some extent.

First, as mentioned above, the ownership of land becomes a burden in implementing these plans. Many building blocks or plots are owned by more than one person. To build a building on these plots, all the landowners should have an agreement. Estate agents are seen to have created a common ground uniting landowner based on an alliance, and accordingly, the study suggests that they become the hidden implementor of urban development plans. Therefore, the legislative practices planning decisions must be financially sustained, given the builders' financial incapacity in acquiring bigger scale lands and allocating a flat for each landowner. This role must be discussed from the master planning perspectives.

The second issue this study determined does not correlate directly with estate agents' practices, yet agents become part of it. Current policies allow for consolidating plots within the same city blocks based on specific rules. This unification increases the allowed construction area of an apartment block, allows building more independent units, consequently, alters the plot shape. Estate agents' practices include plot consolidation. Thus the study presumes that they, beyond shaping the design process, ultimately delineate the urbanscape.

Turkey's development plans are limited to the FAR and maximum building heights that replaces the rigidity of plans with flexibility (Ünlü, 2019). The plans do not include any qualitative indicators; thus, the development of the urban form is shaped anew for each plot or each city block by developers and their land finder agents, who are pursuing more profit. That leaves the urbanscape to uncertainty. Builders-and-sellers looking to build as many units as possible to maximize profits yields an urbanscape of prototype buildings detached from the contextual layouts (Ünlü, 2019) with the biggest sqm in allowed FAR based on the expectations of the market co-designed by the whole network with its facilitator estate agents.

Limitations and future research

This study is the first step towards enhancing our understanding of estate agents' roles in this system. However, it was limited to a newly developed neighborhood of Ankara, Bağlıca, on which there was no prior research. The

findings might not be representative of estate agents working with builders-and-sellers in different neighborhoods across Turkey. Thus, further data is required from other locations. Future work will shift the data collection method in two ways. First, it will document the whole design and construction process of apartment blocks. Second, it will organize forum group meetings among all the actors in a build-and-sell practice, given its aptness in creating a common ground for negotiations. Hence, the picture is still incomplete. This research has revealed that all the interviews with agents were replete with the term 'economic rent.' Future research needs to elaborate on the implication of this monetary discourse on other actors in the network.

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