Introduction

This document explains a short micro-research experiment, carried out over 6 days in Istanbul in February 2025. As part of the European BASICC programme, Yeditepe University (Istanbul) asked a group of students to work on gentrification in the Yeldegirmeni neighbourhood. A research group of 19 people was thus formed to deal with this subject for 6 days. The participants in this micro-research constructed a research design based on a plan established by Yeditepe.

The Yeldegirmeni research group produced three research outputs: a fanzine, a mapping and a short written report. This last document is composed of several parts: explanation of the research questions, the defined methodology and the collected data (I), elements on the origins and consequences of gentrification in Yeldegirmeni (II) and main results (III).

1. **Research questions, methodology and data collected**

The group defined three main research questions.

- What are the origins and consequences of gentrification?
- How do the people of Yeldegirmeni perceive gentrification?
- What actions exist to limit gentrification?

In terms of methodology, the group first organised itself according to themes: business, housing, cultural center, street and spaces.

This made it possible to identify more specific questions. The tasks were then divided up according to fieldwork. Some of this work was predetermined by Yeditepe, to be carried out over a day and a half: 1 city walk, 5 interviews and 1 visit to a protest space. For example, the participants in the public space group took photos of the different spaces in the neighbourhood. The different thematic groups were also organised based on the situations known by the Turkish students who participated in the research experiment.

Then four analysis groups were formed on specific topics: public spaces, housing, business and community engagement.

2. **Elements on the origins and consequences of gentrification in Yeldegirmeni**

First, we worked from two scientific articles and a course on gentrification given by Hakan Yukel, professor at Galatasaray University. The first article (Arisoy and Paker, 2019) focused on gentrification in Yeldegirmeni. The second article (Durgun, 2021) provided a better understanding of the territorial changes in Istanbul neighbourhoods, in relation to the concept of Mahalle. The course offered by Hakan Yukel provided an opportunity to reframe the phenomenon of gentrification in the context of more global trends and to clarify certain issues specific to Istanbul.

These three scientific materials have enabled us to identify the origins of the gentrification phenomenon at different territorial scales, in Istanbul, Kadikoy and Yeldeğirmeni. They show

that this urban and social phenomenon has been driven by political will since the 50s (modernization, globalization, beautification) and accelerated by the combined effect of major metropolitan projects, real estate developer projects, municipal reconstruction plans and urban transformation plans.

The various sources reveal four pivotal moments in this gentrification phenomenon: in the 50's, a phenomenon of modernization and "beautification" of the city of Istanbul in a globalized context (a), in the 90's an acceleration of this phenomenon (b), in the 2000's, the 1999 earthquake had a real impact on the way of thinking about the making of the city, with a strong will to build while often evading the issues of rehabilitation and heritage (c) and, after 2013, a displacement of creative populations and activists after the Gezi movement (d).

Sezgi Durgun's article (2021), focuses on Rasimpaca, a mahalle of Kadikoy where Yedelgermini is located, and on the transformation of this district, with the following question as a common thread: How do the local shopkeepers perceive the recent changes in the neighborhood and what are their reactions regarding the past present and future of neighborhood? Rasimpaca is a historically cosmopolitan neighborhood and a popular centrality that has been attracting a creative middle class for the past decade. Its demographics are becoming more heterogeneous (36% of residents are graduates, 53% are aged between 15 and 45), with more and more students, artists, activists and young professionals, while the neighborhood is becoming a place of leisure, culture and freedom. The main effects are inflation and conflicts of use and cultural conflicts (alcohol, music, etc.) that are disturbing some of the historic residents. There is a perceived tension between a more individual lifestyle and the Mahalle community lifestyle, but the strong cosmopolitanism of the local community, due to its history, means that this gentrification movement is experienced as less violent than in other neighborhoods, with a relative mix and relatively peaceful co-presence between communities.

The article by Alp Arisoy and Nurbin Paker (2019) shows that the historical functioning of building courtyards as semi-public spaces in the neighborhood finds its continuity in cafés and art studios, themselves becoming liminal spaces of sociability. Local vendors are also brokers, intermediaries between different populations. After 15 years, homophilic relationships tend to become heterophilic ones.

3. **Main findings concerning public spaces, housing, business, community engagement**

- **Public spaces**

<u>The initial hypothesis was :</u> Is there a spatial distribution of the different effects of this gentrification phenomenon?

<u>We method we used combine :</u>

- Map existing infrastructures (health, education, worship...), vacant buildings, urban hollow spaces, shops (distinguishing between old and new shops) and housing. NB - Non-exhaustive referencing approach
- Sensitive approach (surveying, photography, etc.)

- Spontaneous discussions with residents, local residents or shopkeepers

The results show :

- Hollow spaces turned into parking lots
- Old shops and cafés closing down in favor of newcomer-friendly outlets, except for a few that are holding out because of their usefulness
- Certain infrastructures have a strong impact on urbanization: the railway workers' union is close to the station, and medical equipment stores are concentrated near the hospital
- Lack of completeness prevented us from identifying very clear-cut areas

On the walls, you'll find both large murals, which contribute to the aestheticization of the district and appeal to newcomers, and political slogans inherited from the Gezi movement Animal care is still very strong, and is shared by all residents

The current stage of gentrification still allows for a certain mix of uses, but the rapid pace of change suggests that, without regulation, there won't soon be much of a mix.

- **Housing Evolution in Kadıköy: Socio-Spatial Dynamics**

Cultural Influence: Kadıköy's housing reflects its cultural diversity as levantines and Jews shaping grid-based neighborhoods and this diversity led to clustered settlements and commercial areas with a grid system, particularly in central Kadıköy. Despite urban changes, these cultural footprints remain visible in the area's architectural diversity.

Densification and Transformation: Population growth has led to the replacement of low-density homes with high-rise apartments, reducing green spaces and altering the urban fabric. Mixed-use developments are now more common in central areas. From single-family homes to multi-story apartments: transformation into a more vertical city.

Economic Inequalities: High-income groups prefer areas with green space and privacy wherease low-income residents adapt to rising urban costs. These disparities have heightened socio-economic divisions in Kadıköy.

The area fulfill various public needs: the needs of families (gravitate around urban centers, living needs), students: inside the dense areas, for temporary periods (bars, clubs, etc), elders & retired: mixed-use and dense environment (living needs & accessibility…).

- **Business**

Because the local population can't afford the things sold in the shops, prices are way too expensive. Thus, owners choose to sell online to adress to people of upper class no interaction between locals and customers of local shop.

As consequences, Yeldegirmeni became an attractive place for hipsters and fashions ("instagrammable neighbourhood"). It existes less and less places for locals. Moreover, old people and families aren't represented in streets while we can observe a capitalization of the

neighbourhood's aesthetic with a radical modification of shops in a very short time (habits of locals are forced to change). It echoes with a globall awarenes that this neighborough doesn't econmically fit the locals and, in a way, of a phenomenon of economic marginalization of the locals.

- **Community Engagement**

Our readings (cf. bibilography) show that there are no regulatory levers capable of slowing down or halting the current gentrification process. Putting these readings into perspective with the interviews, it appears that the position of peoples interviewed on this gentrification phenomenon is ambivalent, sometimes perceived as positive, particularly on a micro and individual scale, sometimes perceived negatively, on a macro and collective scale. No citizen movements against gentrification exist on a neighborhood scale, with the exception of the Rasimpaca muhtar Sultan Aksu. She doesn't directly fight against touristification, recognizing that this phenomenon is also one of the causes of the neighborhood's cosmopolitanism, she does fight against one of its symptoms and the unprecedented development of Airbnb, driving up property prices, and provoking evictions of tenants, thus participating in a gentrification phenomenon. Sultan Aksu has little recourse to resolve this situation, however, as he has no power on his own scale, and cannot mobilize existing local, regional or national legislation.

Moreover, Gunce explains that because of the price raising, people who make money in this process are fighting to maintain it : "locally, nothing can be done against gentrification, money comes first". Thus, social activists have very few power. Gunce is complaining about the lack of care for the patrimony strength of the neighborhood.

The tools to counter gentrification are many, and among the most effective is certainly encouraging bottom-up participation and promoting horizontal approaches in designing community-related dynamics. In this context, it is essential to develop initiatives that truly address the needs of the residents, avoiding projects and interventions imposed from above without considering the real needs of the area.

A significant example of how this approach can be applied is the design atelier TAK, a place that has the potential to further encourage the process of urban regeneration. Although redevelopment efforts can carry the risk of driving up prices and fueling gentrification, if developed with awareness and a long-term vision, such transformations can improve the livability of an area without compromising its authentic nature.

From the cooperative shop it came out the there is an awareness about the gentrification process, that is also due to the Gezi, since many structures were relocated from Taksim, so Kadıköy inevitably became part of the gentrification process. However "Gentrification is also driven by landlords and real estate agents. We expect that rents here will rise so much that we might not be able to stay. However, our presence itself is a form of resistance. »

The gentrification process has lead Yeldegirmini to host a large diversity of political groups and communities. Many tensions result from this because their interest

converge. First, according to Gunce (a social network organizer), a conservative community is still implemented. Even if it is less and less symbolically important, it rejects all kind of changement. One big debate is the alcohol selling or the actions in favor of the areas around Haydarpasa train station (that is still very precarious : drug traffic, prostitution...) which are not morally justifiable to them : "it is very difficult to raise awareness on these topics". However, Gunce, whose job is to coordinate NGO activist programs in the neighborhood, also talks about a solidarity issue between all the activist communities. According to her the root of this problem is a lack of self-organisation capacities. Associations don't receive any money from public authorities, they work with private funds which prevail independence from the municipality but also let these programs baseless and without formal power.

Thus, the activist groups use Facebook groups to communicate and base their community. These groups are very closed from each other. This situation even lead to real scissions between some groups : the community manager worker talk about how feminist and trans activist put an end to their common battle because of disagreement about ways of protest. The other main reason explaining the lack of solidarity in the militant network is the lack of common place to debate. They mostly complain to the local governor or on digital platform, but there is no real confrontation in Yeldegirmini.

Nevertheless, Gunce point out some exceptions of few common places where the neighborhood is invited to gather and communicate. First, the coffee shops, they are a real tool for the community organizers who gather there. For instance, *Cafe Boni* is widely known for his "Kadikoy sessions" where most of the concerns and discussions about the neighborhood emerge. The second exception is the *Toy House* where a man is squatting for years with his family. This man has been describe by the community manager as an "entertainment leader" and as an actor of "pacification between groups". He is very respected by the locals (population and authorities) because he represents the only entity doing links, organizing common events. We just have to specify that these spaces are frequented mostly by militant and artist population.

References

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