REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Arch. Georgi Nikolov Georgiev

REGARDING: the dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

to SEYID MUHAMMED MARUF ZORTUL

on the topic: “THE EFFECTS OF URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS ON THE PERCEPTION OF SECURITY”

Professional Field 5.7. “Architecture, Construction and Geodesy”

Doctoral Programme “Territorial, Landscape and Urban Planning”

Academic Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arch. Plamen Petrov

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND RELEVANCE OF THE DISSERTATION

The submitted dissertation addresses a topical and socially significant issue in contemporary urban development: the impact of large-scale urban transformations on residents’ perceptions of security, the quality of the living environment and social sustainability. The topic is particularly relevant to cities where the renewal of the existing building stock takes place under conditions of natural hazards, socio-economic disparities and strong investment pressure.

The research focuses on the Fikirtepe neighbourhood in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul—a territory with a history of informal urban development, high residential density and large-scale transformation motivated primarily by seismic risk. The choice of this case study is well justified: it makes it possible to trace the tension between the organically formed urban fabric and the new model of high-rise, controlled residential complexes. An important feature of the author’s approach is that transformation is not considered merely as the physical replacement of buildings and infrastructure, but as a process with complex social and psychological consequences.

The relevance of the topic is also determined by the need to compare technical arguments for safety with the actual experiences of people affected by transformation. The perception of security cannot be reduced to the structural resilience of buildings. It also encompasses physical safety, accessibility and the quality of infrastructure, the social environment, services, trust in institutions and a sense of belonging to a place. This multi-layered understanding gives the dissertation both academic and practical value.

I positively assess the author’s effort to address the shortage of studies that examine urban transformation from the perspective of residents themselves. The author raises the question of whether the promised safer future is perceived in the same way by different social groups, and whether improvements to the physical environment automatically lead to a more equitable and inclusive urban environment.

II. AIM, OBJECTIVES, THESIS AND METHODOLOGY

The main aim is to establish the influence of urban transformation on perceptions of security and to examine the extent to which these perceptions differ according to residents' socio-demographic characteristics. This aim is specified through objectives concerning the assessment of the present environment in Fikirtepe, the wider Kadıköy district and the expected characteristics of the transformation project. The research questions and hypotheses are logically linked to this aim.

A significant methodological decision is the comparative three-level model, in which the same respondents assess three spatial references: the present neighbourhood, the surrounding district and the planned transformation. In this way, the comparison is made within each participant's individual perception, reducing the influence of differences between separate groups of respondents.

The empirical component is based on quantitative correlational research and face-to-face field surveys. The dissertation states that the target population comprises adults living in Fikirtepe, while the sample includes 131 voluntary participants. Each of them assesses three spatial references: Fikirtepe, Kadıköy district and the urban transformation project.

The quantitative approach is appropriate for testing the stated hypotheses and identifying differences in assessments across demographic groups. It is positive that the author explicitly identifies the limitations of the sample: voluntary rather than random selection; a limited number of participants in some categories; and the fact that assessments of the transformation reflect expectations concerning a process that has not yet been completed, rather than an outcome actually experienced. This is an indication of sound academic practice.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation comprises five chapters: an introduction, three substantive chapters and a conclusion, which comprehensively address the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the topic. The total length is 162 pages, including a bibliography and four appendices. The main text contains 25 tables and 33 figures. The bibliography includes 134 literary and information sources in English and Turkish.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The introduction substantiates the relevance of the problem in the context of urban transformation in Turkey and the specific conditions in Istanbul following the 1999 Marmara earthquake and the adoption of Law No. 6306 on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk. The author outlines the contradiction between the need to improve seismic safety and the social consequences of large-scale renewal, carried out to a considerable extent through private investment.

Fikirtepe is presented as a suitable research case because of the scale of the transformation, the historical character of its development and the substantial change in its spatial model. The distinction between the immediate living environment, the wider urban context and the projected future state is an important

analytical decision. The object, subject, aim, objectives, hypotheses and limitations are formulated, providing a clear research framework.

One merit is that security is not treated as a unidimensional characteristic, but is examined through several interrelated dimensions. This raises the question not only of whether the transformation promises safer buildings, but also of whether it creates a better social and infrastructure environment for different groups of residents.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

The second chapter establishes the conceptual and historical foundations of the research. It examines the concepts of city, urbanisation and urban transformation, and traces the development of urban renewal policies and practices in Turkey from 1923 to the present. The physical, environmental, social, economic, and legal-administrative dimensions of the process are covered.

A strength is the positioning of the Fikirtepe case within the broader context of Turkey's urban transformation policy. The specific project is not examined in isolation, but as an expression of a model in which the argument of natural hazard becomes a basis for profound changes in ownership, development patterns and social structure. The author links the topic to spatial injustice, place attachment and the formation of elite localities.

The theoretical framework is relevant to the problem under consideration and supports the interpretation of the empirical results. Particularly important is the distinction between the physical improvement of the environment and the social distribution of its benefits. The chapter provides a basis for a critical assessment of transformation beyond formal indicators of new construction and investment volume.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

The third chapter presents the research design, instruments, sample, data collection procedure and statistical methods. The detailed description of the comparative model and the three scales is important for the traceability of the research procedure. Each of the three environments is assessed using a common set of urban parameters, while the transformation scale also includes statements specific to the intervention itself.

The sample of 131 participants is suitable for an initial empirical study of perceptions in the specific case, but it does not allow the results to be generalised to the entire population of Istanbul or to all residents of Kadıköy. The author correctly acknowledges this limitation. It is also important that the research was conducted during a transitional period; consequently, assessments of the new environment are expectations and perceptions, rather than measurements of an achieved effect.

The methodological contribution is substantial: three different spatial conditions are compared using a single instrument and the same respondents. This model can be adapted to other territories where transformation has been announced or initiated but has not yet been completed. One opportunity for

improvement would be to include qualitative interviews and observations, which could provide a deeper explanation of the reasons behind the statistically identified differences.

Chapter 4. Empirical Study and Data Analysis

The fourth chapter is the core empirical part of the dissertation. It presents the demographic profile of the respondents, descriptive statistics, tests of normality and comparative analyses. Perceptions of Fikirtepe, Kadıköy and the transformation project are examined, as are differences according to gender, age, income, education and length of residence.

Among the important findings is the distinction between the different dimensions of security. According to the results presented, the transformation has the potential to equalise perceptions of overall security across income groups, but confidence in seismic resilience and assessments of social services remain associated with economic status. This is a significant observation, as it shows that improving physical safety does not automatically lead to equal access to a high-quality urban environment.

The author identifies differences in assessments according to educational attainment and length of residence. Particularly interesting is the finding that the group with a medium length of residence emerges as the most dissatisfied and alienated. This calls into question the assumption that longer residence necessarily produces stronger place attachment. The concept of “urban fatigue” describes the accumulation of dissatisfaction resulting from chronic deficiencies in services and the environment.

The discussion links the empirical observations to spatial injustice and the risk of gentrification. The author argues that the promise of security may be perceived as a common good, while the quality of infrastructure and services remains unevenly distributed. This is an important conclusion for urban planning practice, as it directs attention to social safeguards and the meaningful participation of affected communities.

The results should be interpreted within the limits identified above. Voluntary sampling and the small number of participants in some demographic categories limit the statistical power of certain tests. Furthermore, expectations concerning future transformation may differ from the actual conditions after construction is completed. These circumstances do not invalidate the results, but they define the limits of their applicability and the need for further research.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The fifth chapter summarises the main findings, considers whether the hypotheses have been confirmed or rejected, formulates theoretical and practical implications and proposes directions for future research. The author identifies as the main result the contrast between the unfavourable assessment of the existing environment in Fikirtepe and the high expectations concerning the transformation project. The chapter also discusses the differing significance of income, age, education and length of residence for the perception of

individual parameters. The practical recommendations focus on the integration of existing residents, displaced residents and newcomers, more active community participation and measures to promote social harmony. Suggested directions for future research include longitudinal monitoring after completion of the project, qualitative interviews and focus groups, comparative case studies and more balanced samples.

IV. SCIENTIFIC AND APPLIED SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Empirical study of socio-spatial differences in the perception of urban transformation. The research provides quantitative data on differences between income groups in their assessment of the present environment and of individual aspects of the expected transformation. The contribution lies in specifying the parameters in which differences emerge—primarily infrastructure and seismic safety—and those for which assessments are more similar. The claim of "proving" segregation should be formulated cautiously, since the research measures the perceptions of a limited voluntary sample rather than actual processes of displacement or socio-economic segregation following a completed transformation.

2. Differentiation of the perception of security as a multi-component phenomenon. The results show that the overall assessment of security, seismic safety, infrastructure and social services are not influenced in the same way by socio-economic characteristics. This is a significant result for urban planning research, as it points to the need for a multidimensional assessment of security and the quality of the urban environment, rather than the use of a single composite indicator.

3. Reconsideration of the relationship between length of residence and place attachment through the interpretative concept of "urban fatigue". The more negative assessment identified among some residents with a medium length of residence raises questions about the automatic association of long-term residence with positive attachment. The contribution is interesting as an empirical observation and analytical hypothesis, but it should not be presented as a direct measurement of emotional attachment, since the instrument used does not include a separate scale for this concept.

4. Methodological contribution through a comparative three-level model for measuring perceptions. The comparison of the present neighbourhood, the wider district and the planned transformation by the same respondents is a clearly identifiable result. The model enables direct comparison between the experienced present and the anticipated future and has the potential to be adapted to other urban transformation areas, provided that the instrument is further validated and adjusted to the specific context.

The recommendations concerning community participation, social integration, equal access to services and monitoring of outcomes after project completion also form part of the applied scientific value. They follow logically from the research, but constitute guidelines for planning and management rather than a demonstrated effect of policies already implemented.

Overall, the contributions are consistent with the empirical and applied nature of the dissertation. The most significant value of the work lies in the empirical operationalisation of different dimensions of

perceived security and in the comparative model, rather than in a claim to have created a comprehensive general theory.

V. AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION, PUBLICATIONS AND ABSTRACT

The submitted abstract shows that the results have been disseminated through participation in three international scientific conferences in Bulgaria and Turkey and through publications in the journal "Engineering Sciences" of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and in the e-journal of Varna Free University. In the publications and conference papers, Seyid Muhammed Maruf Zortul is the first author, co-authoring with his academic supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arch. Plamen Petrov.

The abstract presents in detail the aim, objectives, hypotheses, methodology, results, limitations, contributions and publications. Its structure follows the logic of the dissertation and makes it possible to trace the research process. In my view, it adequately reflects the main propositions and results of the dissertation.

VI. OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPLICATION, CRITICAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results obtained have potential for application in urban planning practice, in the preparation and evaluation of urban transformation programmes, and in the development of mechanisms for public participation. The proposed dimensions of security may be particularly useful in assessing projects justified on the grounds of natural hazards. The approach could be used by municipal and national administrations, design teams and researchers.

As a recommendation for the future development of the topic, I would suggest conducting a follow-up survey after completion of the transformation, so that expectations can be compared with outcomes actually experienced. It would be useful to enlarge the sample and include more balanced groups by income and education, as well as to study separately property owners, tenants, displaced residents and newly settled households.

A second recommendation is to supplement the quantitative research with interviews and focus groups. This would make it possible to clarify the mechanisms underlying the formation of urban fatigue, trust or distrust in institutions, and the different meanings residents attach to the concept of "security". A third direction would be to compare the case with other transformation areas in Istanbul or in other cities, in order to establish the extent to which the observed relationships are specific to Fikirtepe.

The critical comments are aimed at expanding and further verifying the results, rather than questioning the fundamental research logic. They do not diminish the quality and significance of the results and contributions achieved by the dissertation.

VII. STATEMENT REGARDING PLAGIARISM

The dissertation includes a declaration of originality, signed by the author, in which he declares the independent nature of the work and the proper citation of the sources used. On the basis of the material available to me, I have found no specific grounds for alleging the unauthorised appropriation of another person's text; however, the final assessment should take into account the results of the university's official plagiarism check and the decision of the academic jury.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The dissertation by Seyid Muhammed Maruf Zortul addresses a topical and significant problem in urban planning theory and practice: the relationship between large-scale urban transformation and the perception of security. The research is distinguished by a clearly formulated problem, a comprehensive theoretical framework, independently conducted field research, the use of statistical methods and an attempt to interpret the results in the context of the socio-spatial consequences of urban renewal.

The author demonstrates knowledge of the subject, the ability to conduct independent empirical research, process and interpret data, and formulate conclusions with practical applicability. The critical comments and recommendations set out above identify opportunities for the further development of the topic without diminishing my positive assessment of the work achieved.

In view of the foregoing, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation entitled "The Effects of Urban Transformations on the Perception of Security" and recommend that the esteemed Academic Jury award Seyid Muhammed Maruf Zortul the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 5.7. "Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy", Doctoral Programme "Territorial and Landscape Planning and Urban Planning".

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