

# Residents' experiences of a gentrified neighborhood in Istanbul: The case of Akaretler row houses

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## Abstract

The gentrification process has been examined by sociologists, urban planners, geographers and many other professionals since the 1970s. However, despite a great deal of research into the concept, process, and other dimensions of gentrification, there are few studies which consider the importance of the perspective and experiences of residents and users.

This paper focuses on the gentrification process and its impact on the non-gentrifier residents of the Akaretler neighborhood of Beşiktaş, an area which was transformed following a major restoration project 10 years ago. In-depth interviews were conducted with long-term residents and business owners to investigate how they evaluate the changes in their neighborhood as well as the positive and negative impacts of gentrification on their lives. According to the findings, while the majority of respondents acknowledged the physical success of the restoration project, some of them also pointed out the negative economic, social, and cultural outcomes it has raised over the past 10 years. The outstanding negative issues are social integration difficulties, the lack of affordable properties, changes to property functions, and cultural contrast.

## Keywords

Akaretler row houses, Commercial gentrification, Istanbul, Neighborhood change, Residents experience.



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## 1. Introduction

Many scholars have studied the gentrification concept in depth; however, this issue is still considered to be a hot topic because of the power wielded by the construction sector. Especially in the last decade, the gentrification has become a global approach extending its context from the central core to suburbs, and also slums (Cocola-Gant, 2019); moreover, the fundamental motivations behind this development are the financialization of housing market (August & Walks, 2018), the increasing power of economic actors in the urbanization process (Slater, 2017), the remarkable ascendance of neoliberal economic policies (Smith, 2001), and the increasing role of global gentrifiers such as construction companies and states (Rofo, 2003). Therefore; it is clear that the role of financial capital came into prominence after 2000, not only by encouraging home ownership through home loans but also through the rise of corporate proprietors and platform capitalism (Aalbers, 2019) and this concept has been accepted as a global strategy for reaching maximum land value, and it has occurred in varied types in different parts of cities (Lees et al., 2016). Although it extended its scope and transformed to a method containing the reproduction of capital in urban space, the unchanging consequence of this process is the displacement of existing residents willingly or unwillingly (Lees et al., 2015).

While some researchers have attempted to identify gentrification in their perspectives (Hammet, 1984; Smith & Williams, 1986; Ley, 1992; Kempen & Weesep, 1994; Bondi, 1999; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Atkinson, 2003; Bostic & Martin, 2003, Cocola-Gant, 2018), others have examined the main reasons, actors, and driving forces behind the concept (Wheaton, 1977; Kern, 1981; Lees, 1996; Ley, 1986; 1996; Aalbers, 2019). In addition to the investigations into the concepts, processes, and dimensions of gentrification, many scholars have also concentrated on its physical, social, economic, functional, and cultural effects on the existing environment (Sampaio, 2002; Billig & Churchman, 2003; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005; Cameron &

Coaffee, 2005). However, it must be stated that when evaluating gentrification only a few of them have considered the importance of the perspective and experiences of residents (Freeman, 2004; Slater, 2006; Murdie&Teixeria, 2011).

This study is intended to increase the understanding of the impact of gentrification on both residents and business owners living in the areas surrounding Akaretler, the historical row houses located within Beşiktaş, a major population center of Istanbul. In particular, it investigates the effects of the transformation that occurred as a result of the restoration of these houses 10 years ago.

The rest of this paper is divided into 3 sections; a conceptual background of the study that summarizes the concept of gentrification, examples of gentrification in Istanbul and a literature review of the positive and negative impacts of gentrification on neighborhoods is given in the second section. The third section contains information regarding the case area of Akaretler that includes a short history of the district, the project, methodology and the findings of the research. The final section is devoted to conclusions.

## 2. Gentrification and Istanbul

Although there are numerous explanations for the notion of gentrification, it can be basically described as investing to encourage high-income white collar settlement in historic and precious sites in urban cores, and the clearing of these valuable sites of their current low-income residents and users (Smith & Williams, 1986; Ley, 1992; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Atkinson, 2003).

After Glass' (1964) explanation of gentrification, Smith (1986) expanded the meaning of the concept and introduced a new type of gentrification which became known as "second-wave". Although there are differences between these two types of gentrification, such as their causes, actors, processes, and scale, (Hackworth & Smith, 2001), the fundamental and unchanging phenomenon for both is the willing or unwilling displacement of existing residents or users (Smith,

1979). After 2000, researchers started to focus on a third-wave of gentrification derived from a partnership between the state and the private sector (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Davidson and Lees, 2005; Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Uitermark, Duyvendak & Kleinhans, 2007; Hackworth, 2007).

This third wave gentrification has some distinctive characteristics like the partnership between companies and states, effective anti-gentrification strategies, and the expansion of gentrification to the peripheries (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Uitermark, Duyvendak & Kleinhans, 2007; Hackworth, 2007). Lees (2003) identified seven different types of gentrification which are classical, statebased, capital-based, commercial also known as retail gentrification (Hubbard, 2016), mix-use, re-gentrification that was renamed as super-gentrification (Davidson and Lees, 2010), and new-built gentrification. In this scope, many scholars have worked on these types and extended their content; moreover, they also identified new types of gentrification (Cocola-Gant, 2019). These are rural gentrification derived from the increasing attraction of the natural environment for high-middle class occupants (Phillips, 2005), studentification including the development of special regions for students only (Smith & Holt, 2007), and tourism gentrification based on the transformation of residential areas to attractive zones for visitors (Gotham, 2005; Cocola-Gant, 2018). In addition, these different gentrification types can lead to the occurrence of each other in time, and the mutual relationship between tourism and commercial gentrification can be given as an example (Gotham, 2005). While the changing commercial activities increase the interest of visitors for the area, being a touristic destination changes the commercial pattern in depth, and it causes the existence of new functions appealing to visitor's expectations more (Cocola-Gant, 2015).

Although there are several types of gentrification based on different motivations, they can be collected under two main approaches which are defined according to the aims of the implementation and the power of the

main actors (McKinnish, Randall & Kirk, 2010). In brief, these approaches are; gentrification as an urban transformation policy and gentrification as a negative consequence of urban transformation (Hyra, 2016).

In Turkey, the gentrification issue gained importance after the 1980s, largely due to the effects of globalization (Islam, 2009). The first wave of gentrification happened organically in Bosphorus neighborhoods during the 1980s, and the first group of new potential residents; artists, writers, poets, and musicians started to arrive, thereby changing both the land values and the local lifestyle. However, that period is characterized by the harmony that was achieved between new and existing inhabitants and few displacement issues were observed (Islam, 2009). While the gentrification process continued in Bosphorus neighborhoods, second wave gentrification started to occur in the historical areas of the city core at the end of the 1990s (Polat, 2016). Historical apartments with views of the Bosphorus, easy accessibility, and access to cultural and entertainment activities appeared after the pedestrianization of İstiklal street made Beyoğlu, Cihangir, Galata and Asmalımescit more attractive for new social groups (Polat, 2016). Ergün (2004, also in 2006) concentrated on the first and second wave gentrification process in Istanbul neighborhoods and produced a detailed map of gentrified zones. After a transitional period, third wave gentrification began with the ratification of law no. 5366. In Istanbul, the Tarlabası, and Sulukule projects are considered to be the first examples of gentrification as part of an urban transformation policy (Islam, 2009). The same period saw many other projects around the city, including the transformation of Fener and Balat, the development of Galataport, and the Haydarpaşa Port Project (Figure 1).

In addition to research that includes the general prospects surrounding the gentrification issue in Turkey, there have been several more recent studies which have evaluated and focused on the consequences of gentrification in-depth through the experiences and thoughts of residents and users (Tuncer & Islam, 2017; Uysal & Sakarya,



**Figure 1.** Gentrification waves in Istanbul.

2018; Uzgören & Türkün, 2018).

The restoration project for the Akaretler row houses was started in 1988 and completed in 2008. It is the largest restoration project undertaken in Istanbul, and can be accepted as a critical case of third wave commercial and mixed-use gentrification. Following this project, the local neighborhood underwent a rapid and significant transformation.

### 2.1. Effects of gentrification

The main concept of gentrification can be identified as providing physical, economic, and especially social revitalization, while also including the conservation of the assessable components of a given area, such as its historical buildings. However, this policy has been shown to have deep effects on the existing urban pattern (Sampaio, 2007). When Appleyard (1981) defined gentrification, he emphasized the combination of economic recovery and physical conservation, and stated that this combination is a “solution”. Tiesdell, Oc, and Heath (2008) accepted Appleyard’s definition, and supported the claim that gentrification is a necessity for the conformance of the urban place to a changing economic system. In addition, they also highlighted the

social outcomes and displacement issues as being undesirable elements of the process. Whether it is a solution or necessity, the gentrification process definitely has both positive and negative influences on existing urban structures (Billig & Churchman, 2003).

One of the basic consequences of gentrification is the segregation that occurs in both the physical and social environments (Chirstafore & Leguizamon, 2018). In the physical context, gentrified zones of cities are comprised of “prestige” elements such as high-quality conditions and facilities, entertainment services, and accessible transportation options that are intended to segregate them (Sampaio, 2002). These zones also arouse the interest of the public sector and the municipal authority, causing them to make upgrades to the urban infrastructure (Billig & Churchman, 2003). In this way, gentrification improves the quality of an area’s physical structure, reverses physical decay, and restores/upgrades individual buildings (Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005; Inzulza-Contardo, 2011).

In the social context, Clay (1981) claimed that the gentrification process develops a neighborhood’s profile and contributes to a more positive



image. Musterd and Ostendorf (2005) described the importance of physical restructuring to solve social difficulties; on the other hand, they also highlighted the displacement issue as an adverse result of gentrification. The social balance that can be identified as a state of harmony between people with different social status is a vital dimension for a healthy neighborhood, and this harmony supports the occurrence of a local identity; however, the organization of interactions between citizens and the integration of newcomers should occur naturally and not be forced (Vance, 1966; Frankenberg, 1994). Thus, gentrification process as an external intervention breaks this balance and causes both displacement and segregation (Sampaio, 2002; Boterman & Gent, 2014; Parekh, 2014; Shaw & Hagesman, 2015; Billingham, 2017). In addition, the existence of newcomers that are highly educated and from high-income groups leads to social pressure on local people, and it is this pressure that complicates the processes of integration and adaptation (Robinson, 1995; Fabula et al., 2017).

Gentrification intervention can also change the functional characteristics of the neighborhood and contribute to the activity opportunities of citizens (Freeman, 2005; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005; Ernst & Doucet, 2014). On the contrary sometimes these activity opportunities which aim to attract future gentrifiers, especially in the case of commercial gentrification (Cocola-Gant, 2015), causes displacement of the local shops or businesses even before the residents and at some point this change in the habitual environment of the long term residents might lead to the loss of sense of belonging. For this reason new opportunities should be planned in detail as they play a crucial role in sustaining the balance between social groups and also support the soul of the neighborhood (Billig & Churchman, 2003; Keels et al., 2013).

From the cultural perspective, Beauregard (1986) classified cultural needs and aesthetic values as the fundamental demand forces behind the gentrification process. In addition, Ley (1996) highlighted the significance of the relationship between the movement of urban artists and gentrification in the city core, and asserted that artists are the pioneers of gentrification (Lazarević et al., 2016). The creation of a free social atmosphere and bohemian lifestyle invites more artists and helps to sustain the gentrification process in a self-perpetuating system (Caulfield, 1994). Ley (2003) claimed that the existence of the creative class that contains people work in art-based jobs or science-related industries (Florida, 2002), contributes to both the cultural and economic capital of an existing neighborhood (McCarthy & Wang, 2015). However, this new creative class threatens the local cultural identity because as the existing community is displaced by the newcomers, they take their local values, traditions, and characteristic behaviors away with them (Tiesdell, Oc, & Heath, 2008).

In addition to the social and cultural aspects of gentrification, the economy is always one of its major driving forces, and this is reflected in its potential not only to increase property values (Smith, 1979; 1996), but also to maximize the value of living in urban core.

**Table 1.** Positive and negative effects of gentrification.

The Effects of Gentrification on	Positive	Negative
Physical Conditions	<p><b>Physical conservation</b> (Appleyard, 1981), Providing "<b>prestige</b>" factors for citizens (Sampaio, 2012), <b>High interest</b> of private sector and municipal authority (Billig &amp; Churchman, 2003), The <b>Decrease in physical decay and improvement of housing situations</b> (Kennedy &amp; Leonard, 2001; Musterd &amp; Ostendorf, 2005; Inzulza-Contardo, 2011), The increase in <b>activity opportunities</b> through the new functions (Freeman, 2005; Ernst &amp; Doucet, 2014)</p>	<p><b>Physical segregation</b> between neighborhoods in terms of quality (Sampaio, 2002; Chirstafore &amp; Leguizamón, 2018 ), Functions that are <b>not open for all</b> (Billig &amp; Churchman, 2003).</p>
Economic Conditions	<p><b>Economic recovery</b> (Appleyard, 1981), Supporting to reach the <b>highest potential value of the property</b> (Smith, 1979; 1996), The Increase in <b>demand</b> for a place and the increase in <b>land values</b> (Billig &amp; Churchman, 2003; Bardaka et al, 2018)</p>	<p><b>Commodification and consumption</b> of culture, art, and place (Cameron &amp; Coafée, 2005; Meltzer &amp; Ghorbani, 2017), The <b>Decrease in the affordability</b> due to the high market value of buildings (Billig &amp; Churchman, 2003)</p>
Social Conditions	<p>Developing a <b>neighborhood profile</b> and Providing <b>positive image</b> (Clay, 1981), The <b>Decrease in social difficulties</b> (Musterd &amp; Ostendorf, 2005)</p>	<p><b>Displacement</b> of marginal groups (Tiesdell et al, 2008; Shaw &amp; Hagesman, 2015; Billingham, 2017), the <b>social integration difficulties</b> between existing users and newcomers (Vance, 1966; Frankenberg, 1994), <b>Social segregation</b> (Sampaio, 2002; Boterman &amp; Gent, 2014 Chirstafore &amp; Leguizamón, 2018), The <b>social pressure</b> on local people (Robinson, 1995; Fabula et al., 2017), Lack of neighborhood soul (Billig &amp; Churchman, 2003).</p>
Cultural Conditions	<p>The <b>Increase of existing cultural capital</b> (Ley, 2003; McCarthy &amp; Wang, 2015), <b>Free social atmosphere</b> and bohemian lifestyle (Caulfield, 1994)</p>	<p>New cultural capital <b>threats local identity, values, traditions and characteristics</b> (Tiesdell, Oc, &amp; Heath, 2008)</p>

Smith (1979) argues that the process of gentrification is more related to the occurrence of capital than the return of people to the central core of cities; moreover, he also stated the contribution of gentrification to reach the highest value of the property. Therefore; gentrification is considered to provide a reliable path to economic recovery because the physical investment attracts high-income groups and increases demand; thus, the market value of the buildings and land increases (Billig & Churchman, 2003; Bardaka et al, 2018). The rise of investment and demand from high-income groups also attract private sector developers, thereby increasing the number of projects in the surrounding areas (Smith, 2001; Bishaw, 2014). In addition, and as mentioned above, gentrification attracts the cultural class and this class develops cultural capital. This circular situation causes the commodification of culture and the consumption of art; and whether the commodification is positive or not, it makes an economic contribution and increases economic capital (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Meltzer & Ghorbani, 2017) but also consequently causes a social transformation in the area. As a conclusion, the most commonly mentioned positive and negative effects of gentrification in the literature are summarized in (Table 1), and these effects can only be restricted by concentrated efforts at conservation (Sampaio, 2007). However, Bandarin (1979) claimed that there is no way to provide physical, economic, and social conservation simultaneously. Cities can be affected positively only by systematic organization, an increase in the participation capacity of citizens, and detailed planning (Bandarin, 1979).

### 3. Case study: Akaretler row houses restoration project

#### 3.1. Location, history and physical characteristics

Akaretler is a group of row houses at what is now the intersection of the Şair Nedim and Süleyman Seba streets in the Beşiktaş district of Istanbul (Figure 2). This is one of the most characterful districts within the city due to its central location, historical heritage, local

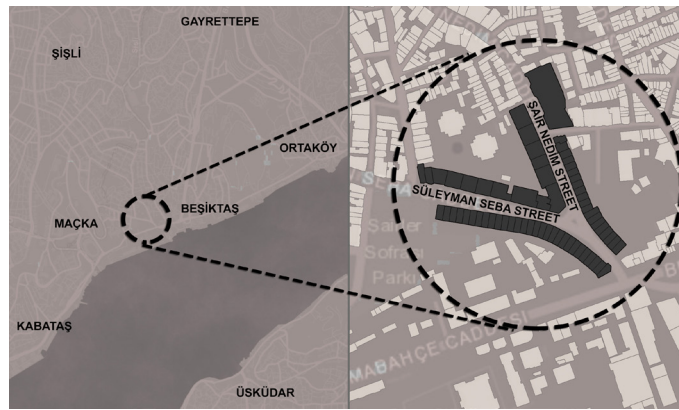


Figure 2. Location of Akaretler row houses.

shops and markets, and the variety of functions it offers. It is also a critical focal point of the European side of Istanbul with a significant potential for both day and night usage, and until recently, it has managed to preserve much of its local atmosphere. Many different social groups have been attracted to this area, but a majority of its current residents are middle-class families and university students.

The Akaretler row houses are con-

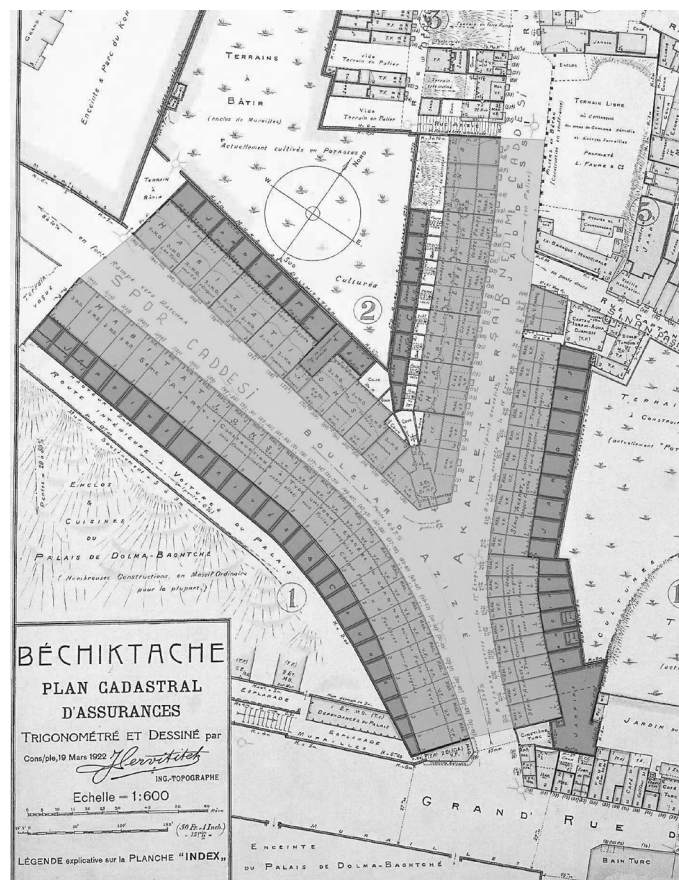


Figure 3. Pervititch map (Source: <http://www.tas-istanbul.com/portfolio/portfolio-4/page/22/>).





**Figure 4.** Akaretler row houses type 1.



**Figure 5.** Akaretler row houses type 2.

sidered to be the first mass housing project of the Ottoman Empire and are accepted as Istanbul's most continuous and monumental example of attached houses (Özsoydan, 2007; Batur, Yücel, & Fersan, 1979).

The architect of the Akaretler project was Sarkis Bey Balyan, and it was undertaken on the orders of Sultan Abdülaziz in January 1875. The houses were originally intended for the guards and workers of Dolmabahçe Palace to use as lodgings, but some were rented separately by people from middle and low income groups. (Koçu, 1993). During the Republican period, the ownership of the row houses was transferred to the General Directorate of Foundations, and their usage was allocated for public institutions and organizations. In addition to their original purpose, the row houses have been used as an officers' residence, a district post office, a police station, the Mimar Sinan University campus, a primary

school, a center of the CHP political party, and Turkey's first mental health hospital (Batur, Yücel, & Fersan, 1979).

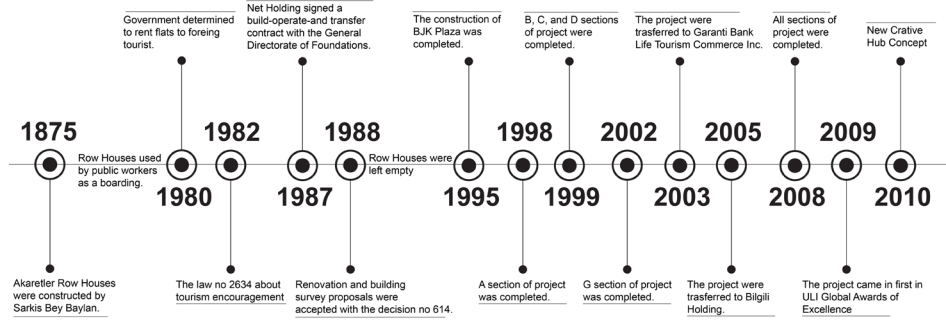
In total, the row house group consists of 66 parcels and 133 residential units (Figure 3). The parcel sizes are generally similar, and the plots are divided by vertical lines. There are two main building typologies and only minor variations were applied during their original design (Figure 4-5) (Ak-bayar, 1998).

### 3.2. Akaretler row houses restoration project

By the beginning of the 1980s, Akaretler had been confronted by numerous physical and social problems. As a possible solution, the ministry of culture and tourism planned the restoration of the row houses (Milliyet Newspaper, 1980). To further this aim, the existing tenants were evicted by the municipality and the speed of this process caused a great deal of bad feeling (Eğilmez, 1982).

In 1982, law no. 2634 was ratified. This law was intended to encourage tourism, and was the first step of a new renovation project. According to this law, the private sector could invest in public properties under the auspices of the regulations covering public land allocation for tourism. In order to initiate the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project, Net Holding signed a build-operate-and-transfer contract with the General Directorate of Foundations on October 15, 1987. This contract stipulated that they follow the rules set out by the Ministry of Tourism. At the end of the build and operation period, which was defined as 49 years, the company was required to transfer the buildings to the General Directorate of Foundations.

Net Holding developed a proposal which included the Atatürk Museum, offices, an apart hotel, a hotel, stores, and parking functions that all fell within the scope of the Akaretler Development Project. According to the proposal, the project was to be carried out in three stages, but construction did not start until 1996 because of economic and political problems. The long period of inactivity between 1988 and 1996 was regularly in the news and was a



**Figure 6.** Development process of Akaretler.

subject of great debate. Sabah Newspaper had a headline which stated, “History is dying” for Akaretler in 1994. According to the news article that followed, the area had suffered physical and social depression since it fell into disuse (Sabah Newspaper, 1994). However, after a construction license was granted in 1996, the image of Akaretler changed in the print media, as illustrated by subsequent headlines such as: “Heavenly Project for Akaretler” and “Akaretler is Shining” (Radikal Newspaper, 1996; Sabah Newspaper, 1998).

The construction of the first and second stages and the carpark unit were completed between 1996 and 2002. In 2003, Garanti Bank Life Tourism Commerce Inc. purchased the shares of the Akaretler Project, and in 2005, Bilgili Holding took control. Between 1987 and 2008, the project changed 13 times because of changes that were made to its requirements (Figure 6) (Sürmegöz, 2010). The new developer intended to transform the area into a luxury-shopping district and so the project included a hotel, 55 residence units, and 34 shops when it was completed in 2008 (Figure 7). In 2009, the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project won the first place in the ULI Global Awards of Excellence which included 39 projects from 17 countries. The award was mentioned in magazines and newspapers and was used as an important advertising tool.

Despite all the advertisements and developments, the row houses did not attract as much attention as expected. Therefore, the land use policy of the development company underwent a radical change and the area entered a transformation period to convert it into an art and design district. Empty

shops were rented to art galleries and design studios, and many cafes, restaurants, and bars were opened. However, after this process, and like the previous stores, some of these restaurants and art galleries shut down and the units were again left empty. During this period, Akaretler was reintroduced as an investment opportunity that stood in contrast to more instantly profitable properties (Severöz, 2017). Currently, the units previously used by shops and boutiques have become branded restaurants, cafes, bars, and art galleries and still there are empty buildings that remain for rent. The area hosts, except from the new residents of the row houses, mostly upper middle and upper income residents and daily visitors from Istanbul.

### 3.3. Effects of Akaretler row houses project

In this study, both the negative and positive impacts of the project on the



**Figure 7.** The latest proposal for Akaretler (Source: Bilgili Holding).



neighborhood is evaluated according to the perspective of local residents. To understand how both non-gentrifier residents and business owners, who might also be the subject of displacement in the future, interpret the impact of gentrification on their neighborhood, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 local people. The in-depth interviewing method allows a primary connection to the knowledge source without the need for mediation and creates a comfortable atmosphere in which the participants are more likely to reveal genuine feelings and opinions (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). While 22 of the respondents were local residents or business owners, there were also 2 academic urban planners, 2 urban planning authorities from the Beşiktaş municipality, and 2 real estate agents. All of the interviewees were over 35 years old and were aware of the past and present situations of the Akaretler row houses and their surroundings. The educational level of the research group ranged from high school graduates to holders of bachelor degrees and Ph.Ds. The majority of the respondents (60%) are self-employed with workplaces located in the surrounding areas of Akaretler. Information was obtained in the summer and fall 2018 and each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes.

In this study, the effects of the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project have been evaluated according to their physical, economic, functional, cultural, and social aspects.

### 3.3.1. Physical effects

The interviews made with the local people shows that the majority support the changes in the physical conditions arising from the restoration project. All the respondents have lived in the district for more than 30 years, and when they compare the before and after situation of the row houses, they find the restoration to have been successful and are pleased with the new physical environment. In addition, they asserted that their own properties have been positively affected by the project in terms of better above ground facilities and also improvements to underground infrastructure such as the water supply and sewage systems.

*“The physical atmosphere is definitely more impressive than the former condition.”* (Male, 65, Tradesmen)

*“The row houses were changed from unwanted wrecks to impressive elegant buildings due to the project. Today, when I walk on the street, I feel like I am in a movie scene.”* (Female, 45, Resident)

*“Today, the whole environment is totally unusual and immaculate. Also, the Şair Nedim and Süleyman Saba streets developed with the project and this state has increased the attractiveness and value of our properties.”* (Male, 48, Tradesmen)

In addition to the local users, academicians and authorities in the local municipality claimed that the improvement and renovation of the physical pattern can be accepted as the most successful part of project (Figure 8). For these historically and architecturally valuable buildings, the conserva-



**Figure 8.** Akaretler row houses before and after restoration (Source: Bilgili Holding).

tion and development approaches were combined appropriately.

*“The whole physical structure, both above ground and underground, was renovated. This new environment has attracted users and investors, especially big brands, and has increased the liveliness and motion in the site.”* (Female, Urban Planner for Beşiktaş Municipality)

*“The balance between the conservation and development approaches is very successful and the restoration proposals are highly suited to the historical pattern.”* (Female, 45, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)

Consequently, as Kennedy and Leonard (2001) pointed out, a high quality physical environment that provides prestige for newcomers is one of the authentic outcomes of the gentrification process. In addition, according to the interviews and observations in this study, it can be stated that the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project improved the quality of the physical structures while protecting their historical and architectural value. Although Sampaio (2002) emphasized the physical segregation between the inside and outside of a revitalization project, the physical segregation of Akaretler had always existed due to its architectural value.

### 3.3.2. Economic effects

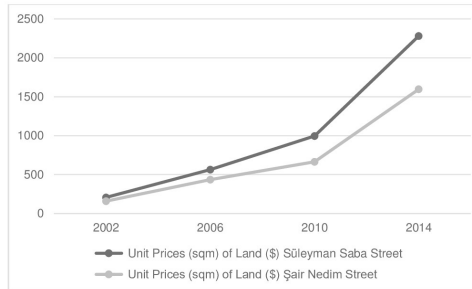
Together with the increase of commercial activities such as services and tourism in the project area, it can be argued that an economic revival and improved employment rates were created in the neighborhood. After the revitalization project, Akaretler became a new focal point like the Taksim and Nişantaşı neighborhoods. However, it could not become as economically developed as hoped, and the concept was changed from that of a luxury shopping district to that of a creative hub. Nevertheless, the imposition of high rents continued to decrease the demand for the buildings, and so the real estate policies underwent a further revision.

*“After a few years from the completion of the project, the demand for the row houses started to decrease due to their high rent and sale prices; moreover, even the people from high-income groups did*

**Table 2.** Land unit prices (in \$) of Akaretler based on revenue administration.

Years	Süleyman Saba Street	Şair Nedim Street
2002	206.60	158.92
2006	564.67	434.63
2010	994.96	663.30
2014	2280.69	1596.48

**Table 3.** Unit prices of Akaretler based on revenue administration.



*not prefer these buildings. Many brands started to close their shops and these were transformed into restaurants, coffee shops, and bars. However, the real estate firm of the project kept their prices pegged for a long time.”* (Yeşiltaş, Real Estate Agent)

*“... the big brands began to close their branches because of the high rents... Then, they planned to invite art studios and revised their project visions from finance to art; however, the prices were not affordable, especially for artists and small studios.”* (Usluca, Real Estate Agent)

In addition to the financial situation of the project itself, its economic effect can also be observed in the property values of its immediate surroundings. According to data from the reports of the Revenue Administration (Table 2), the dollar unit prices of land increased between 2002 and 2014 along the Şair Nedim and Süleyman Saba streets (Table 3). Especially after the completion of the project in 2010, this progress has continued to accelerate.

On the other hand, the project drew the attention of the investors to the neighborhood and a new large-scale housing project was planned and completed during the same period.

*“When the restoration project was completed, the demand for its surroundings developed rapidly. Some large-scale housing projects like Maçka Residence were constructed. Due to the restoration project and large-scale housing estates,*

*the square meter unit prices of buildings were at least doubled.” (Yeşiltaş, Real Estate Agent)*

*“It can be clearly said that the restoration project increased the economic power of the district. It also affected property values positively and became a driving power behind the making of new large-scale investments.” (Female, Urban Planner for Beşiktaş Municipality)*

*“The restoration project increased the rents and prices in its surroundings. In particular, students started to complain about high rents because property owners point to the project as a precedent. This situation is the basis of the gentrification concept.” (Female, 77, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)*

Physical improvements increase the market demand for an area and increase the highest potential value of the properties within it (Smith, 1979; 1996; Billig & Churchman, 2003). This effect also spreads beyond the project borders and produces similar results in its surroundings (Smith, 2001). In the case of the restoration of the Akaretler row houses, the economic value and activity caused by the project cannot be ignored. The increased land values, unit prices, and employment level, and the overall economic revival in the area can be accepted as positive economic outcomes of the project especially from the point of landowners. On the other hand, serious financial issues arising from the real estate policies surrounding the project and affecting the tenants, some of whom have been living in the area for a long time, must be counted as a major negative consequence. This tendency might lead a residential gentrification in the surrounding area in the long run.

### 3.3.3. Functional effects

According to Batur (1979), and as previously mentioned, the Akaretler row houses have had many different functions. The majority of local users remembered these functions and they emphasized their public nature. They claimed that the row houses were more open to public use before the restoration, but today their commercial functions as cafes, bars, and hotels that appeal to mostly middle and upper-income residents and visitors from

different parts of Istanbul limit user diversity due to the financial constraints of the local people.

*“The community center where we spent our free time was very important for us. There was a coffeehouse in the center where people used to met each other and discuss daily issues. Also, there were some sport activities like table tennis for young people to spend their time.” (Male, 54, Tradesmen)*

*“There were different functions like a grocery store, shoemaker, ironmonger, and other shops in the row houses. We used them a lot, especially the community center.” (Male, 65, Resident)*

*“The row houses were open to us, it was free, today we have to pay money to do something in there.” (Female, 40, Resident)*

*“When the project opened to the public in 2008, we were shocked because of the big brands, expensive shops, and restaurants. We knew that the restoration would change many things; however, we did not expect such radical changes.” (Male, 50, Tradesmen)*

After the completion of the project, in order to attract the desired social profile the type of functions totally changed (Figure 9), so the local identity. Today, some of the row houses have residential functions, but the majority are used by service industries such as rented office spaces, art studios, restaurants, bars, cafes, and a hotel. Although local users complain about this change, academicians and authorities support this transformation and the new functions. They emphasize the importance of the row houses and claim that they should be used for more suitable purposes.

*“The project is in harmony with the touristic aspect of Beşiktaş. There are several different facilities and most of them attract users from different areas. The area also has strong connections with the Nişantaşı, Taksim and Bosphorus neighborhoods. In short, it is a very vivacious place in Beşiktaş and the project has allowed this to be possible.” (Female, Urban Planner for Beşiktaş Municipality)*

*“The functional pattern of area totally changed with the project. There is a strong relationship between these new functions and the surrounding areas.*





**Figure 9.** Functional change of row houses (Source: Bilgili Holding).

*The project has an integrated spatial scenario in terms of its functional systems.*" (Female, 45, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)

In brief, it can be said that the project has played an important role in promoting new functions and supporting mixed use. The functional change, occurred in Akaretler, spread and continued along Süleyman Saba and Şair Nedim Streets. The number of coffee shops, restaurants, hotels, art galleries, and specific retail activities like organic food market started to increase in these streets. While this commercial transformation contributes to the demanded urban space quality by the newcomers, the same urban space causes a decrease in the life quality of especially low income residents. Despite the difficulties and concerns regarding public access, these new functions have created a new focal point in Beşiktaş and increased interest in the area and its close surroundings. They play a critical role in sustaining the balance between local users and newcomers, and as new functions are planned, both the needs of existing users and the expectations of outsiders should be evaluated to provide a sustainable social environment (Billig & Churchman, 2003; Freeman, 2005).

### 3.3.4. Cultural effects

In terms of the cultural environment, the first visible result is the Atatürk museum which is open to the public on weekdays. In addition, the exhibition halls, design studios, and art galleries which were converted from retail stores after 2010 along with the transformation of the district into a venue to hold street festivals, celebrations, and shows changed the cultural pattern of the area. The new activities which offer various consumption al-

ternatives and support the trendy life style, made Akaretler more attractive to especially high-income groups and daily tourists. The interviewed academicians evaluated these developments as a contribution to the existing cultural capital of the Beşiktaş district and to the row houses:

*"Beşiktaş has always had cultural potential; therefore, the project does not affect the area's cultural perspective too much. It just increased the type of users, such as tourists, and supported a greater variety."* (Female, 45, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)

*"Cultural events increase the attraction of the row houses... The row houses have become a popular place with the help of event advertisements in magazines."* (Female, 77, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)

However, the majority of local users asserted that events and festivals do not match their expectations, and believe that they should include more local values or traditions. In addition, they emphasized that there is not a sincere atmosphere that would prompt them to communicate with the newcomers, especially tourists. Therefore, they generally do not attend these organized events.

*"I have never been to the Atatürk Museum, I do not even know if it is free or not. A few days ago, there was an exhibition but I do not know what exactly it was. I saw the posters when I walked by on the street."* (Male, 54, Tradesmen)

*"The user profile totally changed after the restoration project. Especially due to the existence of the W Hotel, the number of foreign tourists has increased. Also, people from high-income groups have started to come to Akaretler. But, I have no communication with them."* (Male, 44, Resident)

*"Many events have taken place there,*

*but I never attend. I have no time or money for them, I have to work.”* (Male, 42, Tradesmen)

*“At New Year, they arranged a celebration party in the street. However, this celebration led to traffic problems and noise pollution. We complained to the authorities, but we did not get a result.”* (Male, 55, Resident)

*“How can I go to a shopping festival? Everything is too expensive for me. I prefer the neighborhood bazaar. There should be more local and cheaper events.”* (Female, 40, Resident)

The restoration project transformed the row houses to a place for cultural events which in turn raised their popularity. However, while these attractions invite the desired new user profile, they exclude local residents due to their economic and social constraints. In response, these residents demand cheaper activities that contain both local and traditional values.

### 3.3.5. Social effects

As mentioned above, there are some positive physical, economic, functional, and cultural effects of the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project. However, the social outcomes of the project have proved to be the most wide-ranging. All of the other effects of the project have a direct connection with the social environment, and they have led to some problematic changes and conflicts.

The first issue to result from the project was the forced displacement of the existing tenants, and this is a key memory for many of the participants in this study.

*“Before the beginning of the construction, I think in the 1980s, my relatives and other people were removed and transferred to other public housing in Beşiktaş. People from the municipality told them that the row houses will be used for tourism. Because of their jobs, my relatives were not affected too badly; however, some of their neighbors had some difficulties due to this sudden eviction.”* (Female, 48, Resident)

*“Many stores in Akaretler closed before the beginning of the construction. Many people had to leave their homes.”* (Male, 50, Resident)

*“My grandparents lived in the row*

*houses. They did not think that they would be evicted by the government because of the project. However, they suddenly had to find a new house to move to, and this process was very distressing. There were many families like us...”* (Female, 45, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)

The second issue is the economic disparity between users. Although the project has provided a recovery in the neighborhood economy, local people could afford and use these row houses before the restoration. Today, they only appeal to incoming high-income groups, and the high rents mean that they are not affordable for local residents. This condition is exemplified by the huge gap between the unit prices of Akaretler and those outside of the project area.

*“Rents were more affordable before the restoration process. Now, the situation is the total opposite. Rents start from 10000\$, and so living in Akaretler is like a dream. Akaretler means money for us. If you don't have money to spend there, you cannot use anything from there.”* (Male, 55, Tradesmen)

*“I spent my childhood in the row houses, and when I compare the past and present situation, I accept the positive physical effects of the restoration that have increased the aesthetic value of the environment. However, none of the new functions appeal to us. At least the name of the hotel could be Turkish. I miss the neighborhood soul, the honest grocery owner, and the entertaining times in the coffee house.”* (Male, 57, Resident)

*“When the construction started, I read a news item that was like an advertisement for the project. The headline of the news was “Cooking onions or garlic and eating kebabs is forbidden!” Just this news gives an idea about the user profile of the project.”* (Male, 48, Resident)

The last issue was derived from the functional and physical effects of the project. Although the quality of the physical environment has increased and the projects have provided a new type of mixed-use functions, these opportunities appeal only to the predetermined high and middle-high income user groups. Local residents do not prefer the new facilities due to their

high prices and they use the Akaretler row houses as a shortcut. In the past, the row houses had local shops and public facilities and were more open to public use. People could spend their time without spending money, especially in the community center.

*"The row houses were more open to public use and there were more proper facilities and spaces for us. We could use the school, community center, and other commercial facilities like the grocery store. Now, the row houses appeal to a specific social profile, especially high-income groups."* (Male, 54, Resident)

*"None of these restaurants and upper-class shops appeal to us. I hope they will not spread to other parts of the Şair Nedim and Süleyman Saba streets."* (Male, 42, Tradesmen)

*"We can only use the streets of the Akaretler to walk through, they are the only free things in there."* (Female, 47, Resident)

*"The multi-story parking garage could be very beneficial for us because of the parking problem in Beşiktaş; however, the prices are so high. I have only used it once and I cannot afford regular use."* (Male, 55, Resident)

*"The new functions and new users do not affect my jobs positively. I never get a job from the people living there. If there is an electrical problem, they will not hire me to fix it."* (Male, 65, Tradesmen)

Although academicians and authorities in the municipality support the opinions of the local residents and identify this project as an example of gentrification, they also claim that it is successful because it increases the quality of the physical and social environment, promotes a better vision of Beşiktaş, and also protects the deserved architectural and historical significance of the row houses.

*"I think that the restoration project is a successful example of gentrification. The social environment changed positively after the project... The other functions have also changed the dominant user profile that is, generally, white collar workers. From the state officials of foundations to high-income white collar workers, that means gentrification."* (Female, 77, Resident, Urban Planner-Academician)

*"The project invited a new social pro-*

*file that includes white collar workers, artists, and international tourists.... Also, with the restoration, the property prices in Süleyman Saba and Şair Nedim streets increased rapidly. I can say clearly that the project initiated the current gentrification process in Akaretler, and that the social consequences of the project should be observed and studies should be done in the future."* (Female, Urban Planner for Beşiktaş Municipality)

Consequently, as seen in Table 4, Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project has affected the economic, physical, functional, social and cultural environment both positively and negatively. According to existing residents, these changes have had a negative influence especially on the social environment. Some positive effects such as the economic contribution of the project do not affect local residents and business owners directly; therefore, there is an argument to be made that the majority of the positive effects are valid only within the site, and do not apply to its surroundings.

As Shaw & Hagemans (2015) stated, the displacement issue is an adverse result of gentrification. In addition, as the existing community is displaced

**Table 4.** Positive and negative effects of Akaretler project.

The Effects of Akaretler Project on	Positive	Negative
Physical Conditions	<b>High physical quality</b> <b>Development</b> of underground facilities  <b>Aesthetic Atmosphere</b> <b>Strong balance</b> between conservation and development	<b>Physical segregation</b> between inside and outside of the project in terms of quality The spread of functional transformation Threat of <b>residential gentrification</b> in the surrounding area
Functional Conditions	High quality <b>service functions</b> (restaurants, bars, hotel, offices) Supporting <b>mixed use</b>	<b>Decrease in the publicness</b> of functions Transformation of local shops
Economic Conditions	Economic <b>recovery</b> / Becoming <b>new focal point</b> New <b>employment opportunities</b> Reaching to the <b>highest value</b> of property/land <b>Increase in the interest</b> of private sector <b>Increase in the demand</b> for surroundings	<b>Decrease in the demand</b> for the project due to high prices and financial policies  <b>Decrease in the affordability</b> in close surroundings
Social Conditions	<b>Positive social profile</b> <b>Increase in the social capital</b> Existence of <b>creative class</b>	<b>Displacement</b> of old users <b>unwillingly</b> <b>Economic disparity</b> between existing users and newcomers <b>Lack of balance</b> between new functions and existing users
Cultural Conditions	Increase in the <b>cultural capital</b> Transmutation to the <b>attraction center</b> for events Increase in the <b>interest of creative class</b>	<b>Social integration</b> difficulties <b>Lack of the connection to the local values, traditions, and characteristics</b> of Beşiktaş neighborhood Change in the neighborhood identity causes



by newcomers, they leave with their local values, traditions, and characteristic behaviors (Tiesdell, Oc, & Heath, 2008). On the other hand, external interventions often break the natural harmony between social status and complicate the integration process (Robinson, 1995). In this context, the interviews and observations show that while the public accessibility of the row houses decreased, the privatization of the public spaces increased. Those responsible for the project have not been able to provide integration between the social groups, and this has led to segregation.

#### 4. General evaluation and result

Gentrification is a physical, economic, social and cultural phenomenon, and commonly involves an invasion “by more affluent users” (Hackworth, 2002) of a previous group’s area and the replacement or displacement of many of the original occupants (Kempen & Weesep, 1994; Bondi, 1999; Bostic & Martin, 2003). From the first wave to the third wave of the process, gentrification has been transformed from an unexpected result of the transformation process to a deliberately applied redevelopment policy tool (Hyra, 2016).

In Istanbul, with the third wave, the role of private firms and public-private partnership increased and gentrification became a legitimate redevelopment policy (Çeker and Belge, 2015). In this sense the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project can be accepted as an example of third wave gentrification because of the roles of both the state and private sectors. However, even though it started with the aim of conserving the existing pattern and the revitalization of physical conditions, it has led to the gentrification of the area and has brought some negative social consequences.

In terms of the physical impact; Akaratler Row Houses Project provided tangible positive results such as a higher environmental quality, the development of amenities, and a better aesthetic atmosphere. In addition, the success of the project in terms of sustaining a balance between preservation and development is highlighted. However, local residents remarked on the

physical disparities between the project and the surrounding area, which is in-line with the claims of Chirstafore & Leguizamon (2018).

In functional terms, high-quality mixed-use functions decreased the public access to the site, despite the fact that new proposals should be open to all groups (Billig & Churchman, 2003). The changes in the physical and functional environment increased the demand for both the site itself and its surrounding area and so increased the value of land and buildings. Even though the Akaretler Row Houses Restoration Project has provided economic recovery, after the project the area transformed into a new focal point like Taksim, Ortaköy, and Nişantaşı and gained a new identity which is far from its previous local identity. In addition, local residents pointed out the lack of affordability and the high prices of the row houses. New economic conditions bring new social profiles (Musterd and Ostendorf, 2005) and these new social groups, namely; white-collar workers, apply social pressure to existing users, leading to social segregation (Boterman & Gent, 2014; Parekh, 2014). Although the responding academicians highlighted the existence of a positive social profile in Akaretler, local respondents dwelled on the economic disparity between the groups, a lack of social balance, and integration difficulties. And also, some respondents still remember the eviction of their relatives from the row houses with a degree of bitterness. The social integration problems have also affected the cultural consequences of the project. In Akaretler, according to the academicians and the municipal authority, the new profile supports the cultural value of the area, and the project has transformed the row houses into an attractive venue for cultural events. On the other hand, the local respondents indicated that they do not attend these events, as they do not appeal to them either socially or economically. In such cases, the perceived lack of respect for the local identity makes social integration more difficult, even impossible as indicated by Tiesdell and his colleagues (2008).

Even though the Akaretler Row

Houses Restoration Project can be stated as being successful physically, today the district appeals only to the pre-determined high-income groups it was intended to attract, rather than offering its services to all, and it would not be incorrect to predict that this process will spread to most of its surrounding areas as already happened along the Süleyman Seba and Şair Nedim Streets. With an expansion of the effects of gentrification, the negative impacts on the neighborhood can only increase and even these effects might lead to new forms of gentrification in the district.

Urban transformation should be a process that protects residents' rights and place memory, and which also ensures their participation. It is the local authority that can and should prevent capital-oriented transformation, the privatization of public spaces, the displacement of local people during this process, and the destruction of local culture. As a result, there is a need for clearer urban policies regarding the protection of social and cultural patterns while attempting to conserve or repurpose architecturally valuable examples of the physical structure.

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