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Article

## A cultural geography review on understanding the mechanisms of transformation in rural settlements: The case of İzmit district

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### ABSTRACT

Rural areas, shaped by their internal dynamics, confront interconnected challenges such as an aging and sparse population, declining rural labor force, land division during inheritance transitions, and insufficient public services, including education, healthcare, commerce, and culture. Migration from rural to urban areas exacerbates pressures on rural areas, particularly heightened during crises such as epidemics, earthquakes, droughts, floods, regional conflicts, wars, and migrations with global repercussions. These challenges negatively impact communities and urban areas, increasing vulnerability to subsequent crises. The legislative framework for rural settlement planning in Türkiye is lacking, leading to the adoption of urban planning tools in rural contexts. However, rural areas, closely connected to nature, possess distinct knowledge. Unfortunately, this unique knowledge, akin to Bourdieu's habitus, is swiftly eroding. This study uniquely explores the analysis of rural areas through the lenses of habitus and cultural geography, combining two theoretical frameworks. The focus on İzmit as the sample field enhances its distinctive value in shedding light on these dynamics. This study delved into the impact of changing global dynamics on rural areas, particularly in İzmit. Uncontrolled transformations stemmed from central decisions, rural labor shifts, and urban migration, impacting culture, agriculture, and public spaces. To address these challenges, planning methodologies must adapt, incorporating on-site analyses and direct engagement with local inhabitants. Striking a balance between urban culture and rural sustainability is crucial. Efforts to understand the unique characteristics of a place, its inhabitants, and global trends are essential for fostering a harmonious transformation amidst the ongoing rapid changes in rural areas.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cities and rural areas embody diverse forms of human-specific cultural production, persisting through the transformation of the opposing elements they harbor. Rural areas, shaped by their internal dynamics, confront interconnected challenges such as an aging and sparse population, a declining rural labor force, land division during inheritance transitions, and insufficient public services, including education, healthcare, commerce, and culture (Kaya, 2020). The migration from rural to urban areas exacerbates pressures on rural areas, particularly heightened during crises such as epidemics, earthquakes, droughts, floods, regional conflicts, wars, and migrations with global repercussions. On the other hand, as mentioned by McCarthy (2008), the contemporary countryside is becoming a global commodity, produced to standardized specifications across diverse locations. Notably, architects, designers, builders, and manufacturers contribute to this trend in various rural settings. This postproductivist rural landscape caters primarily to consumption-oriented uses for elites, driven by shared aspirational representations. These challenges negatively impact communities and urban areas, increasing vulnerability to subsequent crises. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored that, in times of difficulty, rural areas become the first refuge for urban dwellers (TC Resmi Gazete, 2021). On February 6, 2023, a similar scenario unfolded in the aftermath of earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş. Masses (Association for Migration Research, 2023), seeking to mitigate the disaster's material and moral destructive effects temporarily or permanently, relocated to rural areas (Sert, et al., 2023). Various studies, both in academic and practical realms, advocate that a crucial means of coping with aforementioned crises is a shift from current consumption culture to a cyclical, nature-friendly lifestyle emphasizing localism. Rural areas harbor clues for this transformation (Bilgin, 2022; Tondelli, et al., 2020). The final declaration of the Culture Summit 2021 held by the UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) network in İzmir emphasized the potential of "circular culture" as a new concept, aligning with nature, the past, each other, and change, suggesting that "another culture" is possible (UCLG, 2021). In this context, the planning discipline plays a crucial role in shaping the function of transforming "place" into space, determining activities within these spaces, human production, and the ensuing culture. The analysis phase, the initial step of planning, requires an understanding of existing culture, analysis of mechanisms, and identification of relevant phenomena. This study presents findings from the first-stage field studies associated with the question 'What kind of information do cultural landscapes provide about the economy, governance structure, materials, and cultural practices of the period in which they were formed, to be used in planning?' Accordingly, the mechanisms of change

in rural neighborhoods of İzmit district are defined and discussed within the framework of four basic phenomena described in the following sections.

## CONCEPTS: HABITUS, NEW CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY, AND NON-REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY

In the theoretical framework, this study integrates Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," the new cultural geography approach in geography, and non-representational theories from the social sciences. The planning discipline plays a crucial role in transforming places into spaces, determining activities within these spaces, presenting human production, and consequently shaping culture—a fact underscored in planning literature (Ersoy, 2016). Based on Bourdieu's discussion of cultural capital, it is possible to say that understanding the existing cultural structure, which is the first step of planning, is not easy in general. The practice emerges when the habitus, bestowed by cultural capital, combines with economic capital and manifests in a given field (Bourdieu, 1986). In this context, analyzing the practice requires comprehending habitus formation and an accurate interpretation of cultural capital. Bourdieu defines habitus as "the social inscribed in the body of the biological individual" (Cresswell, 2002) and categorizes cultural capital as embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital, acquired involuntarily, varies depending on the period, society, and social class but cannot exceed the individual's capacity for appropriation; it may diminish or disappear with its carrier (Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, planning assumes the challenging task of reading and advancing cultural capital acquired inadvertently and unaccumulable.

The primary question motivating this manuscript is, "Is it possible to formulate a method for analyzing, informed by the theory of cultural geography, to improve planning methodology and management frameworks in rural areas?" On the other hand, this article is predominantly shaped by the related question, "What kind of information do cultural landscapes provide about the economy, governance structure, materials, and cultural practices of the period in which they were formed to be used in planning?"<sup>1</sup>

The current state of historical rural settlements and the rapid transformations they have undergone for various reasons are thought to find their most meaningful interpretation through the perspective of the residents, who are the primary actors in all these dynamics, marking a significant starting point. Drawing on Bourdieu's idea "Only by constructing the objective structures...is one able to pose the question of the mechanisms through which the relationship is established between the structures and the practices or the representations which accompany them, instead of treating these 'thought objects' as 'reasons' or 'motives' and making them the determining cause of the

practices,” quoted by Cresswell (2002), this study seeks to reveal specific phenomena and the mechanisms underlying these phenomena to trace the practices of change in rural areas and answer the aforementioned questions.

This study adopts the new cultural geography approach within the framework of cultural geography theory. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, geography primarily focused on environmental determinism and possibilism in an attempt to comprehend the intricate relationship between humans and their environment. Environmental determinists contended that the physical environment, including climate and landforms, played a decisive role in shaping culture. Conversely, possibilists asserted that humanity held the central position and was the dynamic force in the interaction between humans and the environment, with human power to alter the environment being more influential than the environment's impact on humans (Ari, 2005).

Carl Sauer, the founder of the traditional cultural geography school, introduced a paradigm shift by placing culture at the forefront rather than the environment. Sauer's fundamental principle proposed a geographical science approach that viewed space not merely as a physical entity but critically examined and analyzed the landscape elements within that space, uncovering the human imprint on the landscape. His research emphasized the explanatory aspect of spatial relations, advocating that attention should be directed toward understanding culture (Mathewson, 2009). This approach necessitated revealing changes in the landscape over time by collecting region-specific information. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, a significant proponent of the cultural geography approach, stood out for his focus on understanding how a landscape was formed and deciphering the clues it could provide about its creator, irrespective of aesthetic judgments. Jackson perceived the landscape not as a natural feature of the environment but as an artificial space—a human-made system of spaces on the land's surface, functioning and evolving to serve a community based on cultural, not natural, laws. He defined the collective character of the landscape as something agreed upon by all generations and points of view (Jackson, 1984). In the 1980s, influenced by criticisms of the traditional cultural geography paradigm and the prevailing social science paradigm, a new cultural geography school emerged. This school<sup>2</sup> emphasized landscape interpretation through the lens of social and cultural theories (Kayserili, 2010).

From a cultural geography perspective, places are formed through the intricate interplay of culture and context, constituted by a complex web of traces—marks, residues, or remnants left by cultural activities. Traces, encompassing both material elements like buildings and non-material aspects such as emotions and performances, are influential in shaping the meanings and identities of places. Cultural

geography, in scrutinizing these traces, examines their interactions, motivations, and consequences, providing a critical appraisal of the cultural ideas and preferences that contribute to the dynamic composition of places (Anderson, 2021). Studies and discussions within the evolving field of cultural geography continue to unfold dynamically. The emergence and widespread application of non-representational theories in the realm of social sciences has significantly impacted discussions on cultural geography, prompting a reconsideration of space as a continuous flow, a series of becomings (Anderson, et al., 2003). A crucial aspect of these discussions underscores the necessity of understanding the body and its emotions within this becoming for the accurate interpretation of geography, encompassing both place and space. Hayden Lorimer's trilogy of articles in *Progress in Human Geography* (2005, 2007, and 2008) serves as a valuable resource for exploring the various facets of this debate and assessing the current stage of its development. These articles also offer insights into the contributions of influential thinkers in geography, including Bourdieu, Thrift, and Tuan (Lorimer, 2005, 2007, 2008). The evolving landscape, marked by accretion, change, and lingering forms, serves as a cultural memory bank, reflecting the reciprocal relationship between the land and its inhabitants. This concept, seen as layers or a temporal process, sheds light on the dynamic interplay shaping both the physical environment and cultural practices. While valuable for understanding landscapes, it leans toward regional generalizations and requires consideration alongside the spatial diffusion of change to comprehensively grasp the temporal evolution of a place (Crang, 2013). While studies on the application of cultural geography and non-representational theory in Türkiye are limited, the theoretical introduction of these concepts dates back to the 1980s. Some authors note that these discussions have not yet reached the level of the international academic environment due to limited adoption and practice in the field (Ari, 2017; Okur, et al., 2021). A notable recommendation for incorporating non-representational theories into planning in Türkiye comes from Prof. Dr. İlhan Tekeli. In his speech titled "What kind of changes does the development of non-representational theories make in our understanding of planning and our view of the city?" delivered in 2019, Tekeli states, "The concept of non-representational theories functions as a kind of umbrella. These theories are not entity-based; they are emergent/being-based. By concentrating on how life will take shape, these theories acquire expression within shared experiences." Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of non-representational theories on subjectivity when looking at a place, body, or work of art (Tekeli, 2019). Tekeli's approach, supported by Nigel Thrift's (2007) views, contains the clues of a different perspective in the interpretation of space. Recent discussions on new perceptions of space and

time highlight three interconnected characterizations that have gained prominence. The concept of relative space emphasizes a more flexible understanding of space and time, portraying them as dynamic and animated, akin to a river with perpetual motion, challenging the traditional surveyor's static depiction on maps. This viewpoint sees space as continuously evolving, framed by serpentine movements and patterns of vortices (Thrift, 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

Rural settlements in Türkiye have evolved under diverse legal, historical, economic, and political conditions (Eres, 2023). Notably, literature from the 2010s has frequently emphasized the insufficient inclusion of ancient rural knowledge, traditional modes of production, and locally shaped culture in conservation planning studies on Türkiye's historic rural areas (Kayın, 2012; Ögdül, 2019; Güler, 2019; Bilgin, 2022). In this study, we aim to understand the mechanisms of rapid rural settlement transformation, shedding light on ancient knowledge still preserved in rural areas, to contribute more prominently to the planning discipline. The theoretical framework of the aforementioned study integrates the concepts of the cultural landscape from cultural geography and Bourdieu's concept of habitus from cultural capital into the application of non-representational theories within the planning field. Based on these approaches, which emphasize the importance of subjectivity and people's experiences in a particular place, the fieldwork is intended to be enriched with qualitative methods such as oral history and guided tours. Through this approach, and in line with the reasons mentioned in the introduction, the goal is to uncover the mechanisms driving change in the rural settlements of Kocaeli, İzmit, and similar regions across Türkiye, emphasizing place-specific realities. The incorporation of oral history in cultural geography studies serves as a valuable method for capturing and comprehending the human experience within a distinct cultural and spatial framework. This approach not only introduces diverse perspectives but also unveils personal narratives, establishing a profound connection to the lived experiences of individuals in rural settlements. By doing so, it enhances research by filling gaps and enriching the exploration in dimensions that may otherwise be overlooked (Riley, et al., 2007). In the initial phase of oral history interviews for this study, participants were identified by reaching out to local administrators known as 'mukhtars'. Subsequently, during the second phase, the snowball method was employed to expand the pool of interviewees. Oral history interviews were conducted with middle-aged or older individuals who have devoted a significant part of their lives to the rural environment in which they were born, using a semi-structured questionnaire that emphasized the exploration

of life narratives. Within these interviews, pertinent details concerning the settlement and its resident community were gathered through inquiries that delved into social practices, traditional agricultural methods, traditional handicrafts, and the community's connection with the landscape. In the initial phase of the study, we examined the booklet, "History and Nature of İzmit Neighbourhoods (Villages)", published by İzmit Municipality in 2018 for 50 neighborhoods (previously in village status before the Metropolitan Law) (İzmit Municipality, 2018). The information conveyed through these booklets was used to create a database. Simultaneously, we examined the web pages of TUIK, Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, İzmit Municipality, Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, and Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. Then, the information gathered from these resources about the physical structure, socio-cultural and economic context, and planning history was systematically incorporated into the database. The data categorized under the headings<sup>3</sup> of physical structure, socio-cultural and economic status, and planning history were then visually represented through mapping in the ArcGIS program (Figure 1). This spatial representation allowed for the geographic revelation of important clues about the phenomena associated with the current mechanisms of change.

The narratives of rural neighborhood residents utilized in this study were extracted from analyses of oral history interviews conducted by a team, including the first author, as part of the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in İzmit Rural Neighborhoods Project initiated by İzmit Municipality.<sup>4</sup> These analyses were approached through the lenses of representation, identity, landscape, individual-public dynamics, and heritage concepts shared between cultural geography theory and the planning discipline (Atkinson, et al., 2005). This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the site-specific and individual-specific dimensions of the phenomena's mechanisms, shedding light on diverse facets that had been explored in earlier analyses.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Kocaeli, situated in the Marmara Region, is bordered by Sakarya to the east, Istanbul to the west, Yalova and İzmit Bay to the south, and the Black Sea to the north. İzmit, founded initially as Astakos in the Başiskele District on the south side of the Gulf in the third century B.C., later relocated to its current position. Acting as the capital of the Roman Empire between 284 A.D. and 330 A.D., İzmit endured invasions during the Byzantine period and fully came under Ottoman rule in 1333 (Çalık, 2007). Becoming a pivotal hub for caravans from Anatolia in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Kocaeli played a crucial role in the shipment of goods to Istanbul. Following a major earthquake in 1776,





were often rejected due to unfavorable conditions, prompting them to explore and settle in areas with better environmental features, such as ample trees and fresh air.

The attractiveness of İzmit as an escape, especially for those from earthquake-prone metropolises like İstanbul, intensified post the COVID-19 pandemic and the February 2023 earthquakes. The categories of local, settled, and newcomers are proposed as concepts that can be used in studies to understand such areas that have received migration in the distant and recent past (Demirtaş, et al., 2023). Despite newcomers arriving by chance, through acquaintances, or real estate transactions, fundamental conflicts between them and the locals are notably scarce. Nevertheless, subtle distinctions in their relationship with space and the local community become evident, reflecting their status as newcomers. For instance, while the locals are familiar with the invisible yet acknowledged borders between long-cultivated and fallow fields, newcomers often demarcate their newly acquired agricultural plots, where temporary constructions are allowed, with visible wire fences or walls (Figure 3). This signifies a shift in attitude, behavior, and culture, introducing practices that may not align with the established trust systems, oral memory-based social consensus structures, and communal production norms of the village. Recalling the statement that "a practice is realized when the habitus, bestowed upon society members by cultural capital without explicit notice, combines with economic capital and comes to life in an area," disparities emerge when comparing local practices with those introduced by foreign communities. In instances like the example mentioned above about the borders of the fields, where the cultural capital (and habitus) shaping the practice is imported by a foreign community, it becomes apparent how these divergent cultural elements influence and reshape the rural landscape.

These differences are reflected across various facets of daily life, particularly in land utilization. The newcomers do not have the habitus to sustain traditional agricultural practices, such as cultivating wheat, oats, clover, barley, and sunflowers in the fields they buy. This shift causes alterations in the



**Figure 3.** New borders on the lands of İzmit rural settlement Güvercinlik.

landscape texture that result from traditional agricultural production. Newcomers' ability to acquire property in rural İzmit is only possible through the disposal of fertile fields, divided by inheritance, to meet the "urban" needs of the local younger generations. Older local individuals frequently but reluctantly consent to the sale of their hard-earned fields by their descendants. This circumstance is exemplified by the words of an elderly female resident in the Sapakpinar neighborhood: "...there is no field or anything left; we sold them all. They divide them all, they are sold, and nothing is left. Only this garden was left, and we divided it among them all. Now, they have each built a house. However, they have nothing to share with their children. They will fill one pot of earth each and divide it among their children" (İzmit Municipality, 2022).

In the past, a significant group of individuals from the rural neighborhoods of İzmit had resettled in the city center, another city, or abroad for work. After retirement, they resettled with their families in the rural neighborhoods where they were born and grew up. There is also tension between this group, which has a continuous and satisfactory pension, and the group that needs to earn income from the land by laboring in the village despite their old age. The lifestyle of retirees, attempting to recreate urban comforts in the village, influences and transforms the existing village community. Intriguingly, in some interviews, local women who have never left the village perceive themselves and their lifestyle as "more urban than city."

It is essential to think about the phenomenon of the old villagers and the new urbanites' use of the space together with the question of how the newcomers and the local young generations will affect the future of İzmit in order to grasp the importance of the issue in the planning discipline. However, with the current property law, this resource of land is on the brink of depletion. This has widespread consequences not only in rural İzmit but also across the entire country. The absence of indications regarding a potential revision of property laws to safeguard agricultural land and the traditional culture rooted in agriculture raises concerns. Simultaneously, the rapid changes in ownership interrupt the continuity of the habitus concept, playing a transformative role in the landscape distinct from traditional norms.

### Decisions of the Central Government and Local Responses

Its proximity to İstanbul, being a significant industrial city, and its location at the intersection of transportation networks have often led the district of İzmit in the province of Kocaeli to transform, primarily due to central government decisions. In 1936, the initiation of the SEKA factory marked a turning point for the city, diverging from the Jansen plan of 1939, which envisioned the city as a resort city and deviating from the decisions outlined in that

plan. This substantial industrial investment by the central government not only reshaped the city but also triggered cultural changes in the rural areas of İzmit. Following the 1950s, as industrial investments increased, there was a swift shift from agriculture to industry in the region (Binici, 2012). The subdivision of agricultural land ownership and the diminishing size of land per household for the new generation resulted in the migration of the rural workforce to newly established industrial zones.

Nonetheless, İzmit presents an interesting case where villagers could commute from rural areas to the factory, returning in the evening to engage in agricultural work and reunite with their families (Figure 4). As recounted by an elderly resident of Kulfallı, a village renowned for its grapes and cherries, those times were described: "My family used to live on grapes and cherries. Retirement has only recently become prevalent in this village in the last 10-15 years. Previously, everyone relied on grapes and cherries, engaging in animal husbandry. For instance, my father had a job in a factory and he worked together with us on grapes and cherries. We returned from work at 4 o'clock and spent our weekends in the vineyard. We do not have a holiday at the seaside, here or there. We had toiled in the vineyard and garden from March to November, laboring and struggling..." (İzmit Municipality, 2022).

This theme emerged consistently in various interviews. While the rapid growth of industry in and around İzmit might initially seem detrimental for the rural parts of the district, the fact that industrial facilities were within daily reach from rural areas facilitated the continuation of agricultural production. The generation born between 1950 and 1980 worked both in the industrial and service sectors in the city and continued their activities in the village, except for those who were constantly engaged in farming in the village. Consequently, this back-and-forth movement between the city and the village played a role in transforming rural culture. This aspect of cultural change in the rural areas of İzmit is different from the transformation

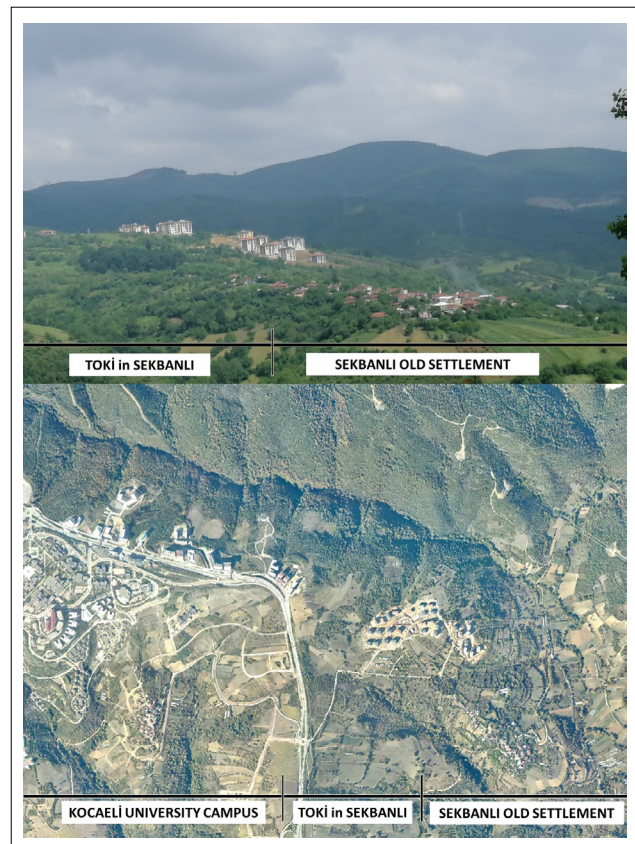


**Figure 4.** Seka Paper Mill is in the foreground, and the villages on the hills where workers live and walk to work are in the background (Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, 2013).

in rural areas that have stood out with resort characteristics in Türkiye, requiring it to be handled as a unique typology.

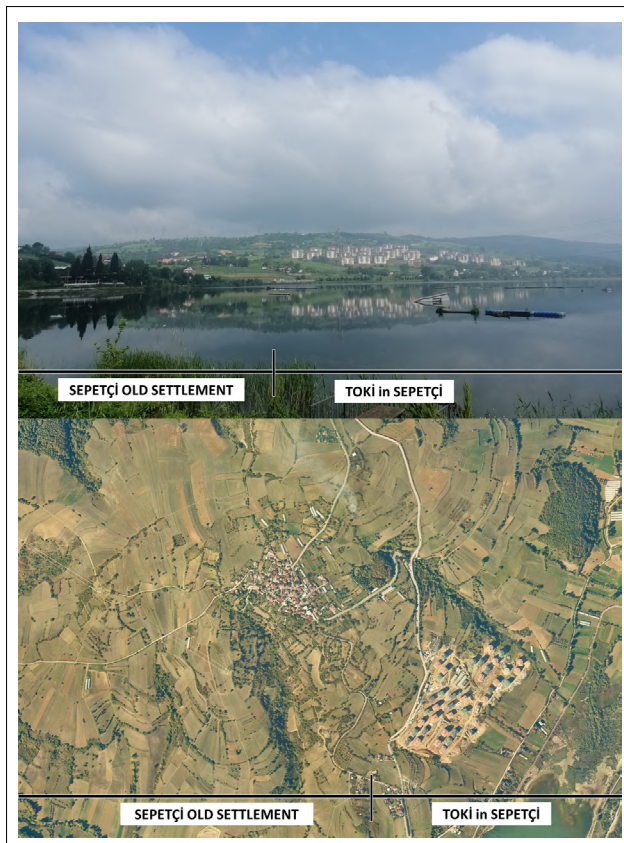
On the flip side, the increasing trend of local institutions having minimal influence in the face of top-down planning and project decisions by the central government, coupled with the alteration of locally produced plans by central decisions, has become more prevalent in Türkiye since the 2010s. In the case of İzmit, investments such as the Northern Marmara Motorway, Kandıra Food Specialised Organised Industrial Zone, Kocaeli University Campus, and Small Industrial Site were initially not on the 1/50000 scale Environmental Plan but later added through amendment plans. An interviewee from Sekbanlı, a village that had lost some of its land to the university campus by expropriation, had shared an interesting memory of himself: "You are familiar with the location of the current university. Last night, when I became unwell, I visited the emergency room at the university hospital. I shared with one of the attending nurses, 'I used to herd animals and play ball here.' She glanced at me with surprise, eventually believing my words with some hesitation" (İzmit Municipality, 2022).

As of June 2023, construction is underway for settlement areas planned by the Housing Development Administration



**Figure 5.** Sekbanlı aerial view and photography showing the contrast between TOKİ houses and the Kocaeli University settlement.





**Figure 6.** Sepetçi, a nearby neighborhood to Sekbanlı, its aerial view and photography showing the contrast with TOKİ houses.

(TOKİ) in Sekbanlı, based on a central decision (Figures 5 and 6). It is anticipated that the issues arising from this practice, leading to the expropriation of some agricultural lands in areas suitable for farming, may exacerbate in the future. Numerous narratives echo this sentiment, as expressed by a middle-aged male interviewee in Sekbanlı: "One year, two years later, this place will be finished. I mean, even if we plant, we will not get a crop; we will see that. This summer, my tomatoes in the greenhouse were so many. The next day I was going to collect them to sell in the local market. When we got there to the greenhouse, there was not a single tomato. This year, they harvested my peppers three times (he means other people he does not know)... So we will have more problems in the future. We cannot do this job, farming. Thank God we have a pension. I wish the children could get a job" (İzmit Municipality, 2022). Their words vividly convey their despair and resignation towards abandoning the production culture.

The mass resettlement of communities with different habitus to rural areas through centralized project decisions has the potential to affect not only the areas they are placed in but also the areas that are the crucial sources of livelihood for rural settlements. Conflicts in the socio-cultural sphere over time, as indicated by the narratives above and similar ones, are also within the realm of possibility.

### Coexistence of Concrete Houses and Adobe Haystacks

This study explores both the material and non-material dimensions of unavoidable<sup>5</sup> changes in the cultural fabric of life. The disappearance of tobacco cultivation in rural İzmit, a decline in grape production, and the cessation of silkworm and flax cultivation have not only altered daily life but also reshaped traditional spatial constructs, aligning them more closely with urban frameworks. Instead of employing architectural construction techniques rooted in local resources like oak wood from nearby forests, wild hazelnut sticks, mud from the village's soil collection site, bricks from nearby quarries, wheat straw from the fields, flax stalks, a shift towards the reinforced concrete frame construction system has become prevalent due to its easy accessibility, affordability, cleanliness, and high insulation properties (Figure 7). While old houses constructed with traditional methods continue to be repurposed as haystacks or barns, constructing new reinforced concrete houses within gardens has become a common practice. The destructive impact of the 17 August 1999 Gölçük Earthquake in some parts of rural İzmit has further accelerated this transformation. In interviews, the decrease in the number of local craftsmen and cost considerations have emerged as significant factors influencing the preference for the reinforced concrete system, in addition to other features of reinforced concrete positively perceived by users.

An 85-year-old male interviewee from Hasancıklar village compared the reinforced concrete house he now resides in post-earthquake with the mudbrick house from his past, stating, "Do not be afraid that it will be cold in winter in that adobe house. In today's concrete houses, it is hot in summer and cold in winter. My house was timber-supported mudbrick." He narrated a visitor's positive experience, "A friend from İzmit visited me; there was a wedding here, and he stayed as a guest. We got up in the morning, and he said, 'I slept comfortably tonight! I slept warmly; I rested here. You cannot sleep in a concrete house where we live. It is cold! If the stove is lit, you can get warm; if not, you cannot!'" (İzmit Municipality, 2022).

Significant changes have also occurred in the use of water and water-related spaces. In the past, the village's spring was often one of the main reasons for settling there; fountains and water-powered mills fulfilled physical needs and had social significance. Over time, factors such as meeting water needs from the urban water supply system, the withdrawal of spring waters with constructed dams, population thinning, and the mechanization of agriculture have led to a decrease in these places and their uses (Figure 8). The words of an 82-year-old female interviewee regarding an inactive mill in Akmeşe offer insights into the building and the production and consumption culture of that era. The 82-year-old female respondent, reflecting on the disused mill in Akmeşe, recalled, "Water used to flow through the gutter, making the mill wheels turn. In those days, people did not buy flour; everyone used to grind their



**Figure 7.** Old houses being used as haystacks in rural settlements of İzmit.



**Figure 8.** Unlike many water springs in İzmit, the one in Balören is still being used not only for drawing water but also for traditional practices.

corn and wheat there. Now, you buy it ready-made in sacks. How can you make 'kuskus' with a sack that costs 200 liras? The wheels were large and could produce flour, like henna.

It stood there until recently, but now they have dismantled, poured, and demolished it. Nowadays, you have to buy everything" (İzmit Municipality, 2022). Her memories provide important information about the architectural and cultural practices related to production and consumption during that era (Akçakaya, 2019). The emotional connection that an 85-year-old woman interviewee from Dağköy expresses about the village spring is formulated with the words "Akpınar, our spring was there. We used to draw water from there. Now they have ruined it. I do not go there, and I do not see it. They demolished our fountain. You cannot go there. We had perfect water... It flows like ice in summer, and it flows hot in winter. We have such abundant water, but no one knows its value. Houses were also built there" (İzmit Municipality, 2022).

In questioning the mechanisms of the concrete houses and adobe haystacks occurring together in a place, it is imperative to explore how planning in this swiftly changing habitus should reorganize itself to sustain the culture of producing environmentally sustainable buildings and settlements rooted in local materials.

### Individualized Society and Spaces Stripped of Their Public Nature

Social practices play a crucial role in acquiring habitus, and active participation in these practices facilitates the transfer of cultural capital. The evolving social structure and global influences speed up the changes in social practices, rendering traditional ones unapplicable over time. Consequently, places associated with these social practices lose their former significance and transform. In the rural settlements of İzmit, public places special for festivals are frequently cited in narratives as integral to social practices. Despite their proximity to the city, and perhaps because of it, villages now appear deserted during festival days. The younger generation, visiting their elders in cars, tends to return to the city before nightfall. Contrastingly, in the past, festival sites were vibrant with daily celebrations, featuring organized wrestling competitions and communal swings. Special preparations were undertaken for these festive occasions.

A 68-year-old male interviewee from Dügmeçiler village vividly recounted the past state of the festival place: "Every village had its own feast day; neighboring villages visit the hosting village on that day. Tables were set up in the village square for catering, weather permitting, hosting guests. It was a festive atmosphere, with wrestling matches taking place where our school and football field now stand. Even though it is winter, this tradition continued; straw was spread on the snow, and the wrestling bouts unfolded there" (İzmit Municipality, 2022). A female interviewee from Sapakpınar village reminisced, "As the feast approached, we gathered chains and set up a swing. When the festival arrived, we took out our 'dayre' (tambourine), sat down, played music, and swung on the swings... There was a large oak tree down there, where we used to set up our swing. Another oak at the village exit was also a favorite spot for our swings" (İzmit Municipality, 2022). She not only described the crucial locations during the old festivals but also expressed her positive feelings about the swing set up by the municipality, recalling the old tradition during the previous festival.

To comprehend the phenomenon of an individualizing society and spaces losing their public nature, it is imperative to carefully examine whether the repurposing of public spaces in rural areas extends beyond superficial gatherings. Because social capital changes similarly to cultural capital, it prompts the swift transformation of habitus.

### CONCLUSION

This study addressed the question: "What kind of information do cultural landscapes provide about the economy, governance structure, materials, and cultural practices of the period in which they were formed, to be used in planning?" The interviews conducted in the rural areas of İzmit were evaluated through this perspective,

and the narratives were systematically categorized. This approach revealed insights into the unique dynamics of the studied site and its connection to the local culture. The results shed light on the points where the framework for controlled change was lost, unveiling underlying mechanisms. The rapid transformation in the rural areas of İzmit can be attributed to some key mechanisms:

- Decisions and practices originating from the central administration, disregarding local repercussions, lead to uncontrolled development, ignoring the habitus concerning physical, cultural, and social transformations in rural areas.
- Since the 1950s, the shift of the rural labor force to the city center, driven by the development of industry in İzmit, has accelerated the transformation of rural culture. However, the proximity of industrial areas and rural regions supporting agriculture allowed for continued agricultural production, albeit in a transformed manner, postponing long-term dehumanization.
- The settlement demands of urban residents, mobilized by the driving force of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and earthquakes, have diverse effects on the population, physical structure, and economy of rural areas.
- Newcomers significantly impact the transformation of existing culture in rural areas, reflecting an urban perspective and causing changes not only in physical aspects but also in the social and cultural fields of rural traditions.
- Since the 1980s, particularly after the 17 August 1999 earthquake, traditional architectural practices in rural İzmit have given way to the reinforced concrete construction system. Changes in agricultural production have also affected spaces related to water use.
- The individualization of society has led to decreased participation in social activities, diminishing the importance of public spaces associated with these practices.

The aforementioned mechanisms, derived from the field study and categorized under the themes of "practices in the utilization of space by old villagers and new urbanites," "central government decisions and local responses," "coexistence of concrete houses and mudbrick haystacks," and "the individualizing society losing its public spaces," underscore the impact of the changing world on rural areas, as exemplified in the rural areas of İzmit. While not a novel or unexpected scenario, the implications of uncontrolled, unplanned, and unpredictable changes extend beyond the rural landscape and its residents, affecting the broader environment and the city within its confines. In light of the significance of rural areas in terms of sustainability, locality, and self-sufficiency, addressing the downsides of such changes is imperative.

Planning methodologies must evolve to navigate this rapid transformation effectively. Analyzing the mechanisms underlying these phenomena on-site, supplemented by interviews with local inhabitants, fosters a direct understanding. Establishing a continuous, one-to-one relationship between users and those conducting planning activities for the public and developing implementation strategies for this symbiotic situation can contribute to a controlled realization of change in rural areas amidst the ongoing era of rapid transformation.

Understanding a place and the perspectives of its inhabitants, together with global trends, the unique characteristics of the area, and the habitus of the society that produces it, requires a significant effort. It is anticipated that such efforts will significantly contribute to reconciling oppositions inherent in the transformation. It is believed that when this effort is made, there will be a substantial contribution to transforming the contradictions within the phenomena into a meeting point and blending the facilitative aspects of urban culture with the sustainable and in harmony with nature aspects of rural culture.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on the first stage work of an ongoing thesis entitled “Bir Kültürel Coğrafya Okuması: İzmit Kırsal Yerleşmelerinde Koruma Yönetimi” by the first writer under the supervision of the second writer. The article is limited to exploring the mechanisms of the transformation of rural areas and expressing them as phenomena.

<sup>2</sup>Especially in this school, geographers such as Peter Jackson, James Duncan, and Denis Cosgrove have stated that Sauerian cultural geography is far from understanding the complex urban life, culture, and its complex relations with politics, power, and economy.

<sup>3</sup>Physical structure analyses include the height of the built-up area above sea level, population change status, the number of sub-settlements, the titles of the towns it was included in before the metropolitan law, socio-cultural and economic situation analyses; the most income-generating agricultural activity, cultural identity, immigration and migration history. The information analysis obtained about the planning history includes the level of being affected by zoning activities produced by central decision, the level of being affected by zoning activities produced by local decision, the level of being affected by the new Kandıra road, the level of being affected by the North Marmara highway, the level of being affected by the Anatolian highway, the level of being affected by the presence of industry, the presence of plans and the year of plan making, the status of protected areas in the neighborhoods.

<sup>4</sup>In İzmit rural neighborhoods, 96 interviews were conducted with 52 men and 51 women. A semi-structured questionnaire shaped on the basis of İzmit Municipality Rural Neighborhood booklets was used. In accordance with the subject of Intangible Cultural Heritage, it was paid attention that the interviewees were over the age of 50-55 and had spent a large part of their lives in the rural area where they lived. We would like to thank the Mayor of İzmit Municipality, Mrs. Fatma Kaplan Hürriyet, for making it possible to use the interview recordings of this study.

<sup>5</sup>Unstoppable=spontaneous=means adapting to time, keeping pace with time.

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