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**GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES AND URBAN PLANNING IN
POLONEZKOY IN THE CONTEXT OF MINORITY
SETTLEMENTS**

By *Gizem Karaköse**, PhD Candidate in Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland and MiReKoc Visiting

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Polonezköy, one of the most intriguing minority settlements located in Istanbul, Turkey, stands out as a distinctive history and cultural perspective. The village was established in the mid-19th century with the support of Prince Adam Czartoryski as a result of an uprising for independence from Russia. Prince Adam appointed Michal Czajkowski as the village director, who leased lands near Istanbul from the Lazarist priests for use by Polish settlers. The village's first settlers were soldiers associated with the independence movement that originated in Paris, France. Among them, 38 served in the Ottoman Empire Army under the command of Czajkowski (also known as Mehmet Sadık Pasha). These soldiers later gained influential positions within the community and formed strong connections with the Ottoman Sultan and authorities, all while aspiring for Polish lands' independence. However, the independence movement and final uprising in Poland against Russia did not succeed. This event was significant, considering the aftermath of the Russia-Ottoman Empire War (1877-78) in terms of the settlement and arrival of newcomers to the village. With the increasing population of the village Prince Wladyslaw Czartoryski (Adam's son) purchased the lands from the Lazarists and later devoted them to the Poles residing in the village (1). By the time independence was achieved in Poland, the village had already become entrenched and had been granted equal rights and responsibilities like other villages, and most Poles residing in Polonezköy had adapted to life in Turkey, which encouraged them to stay.

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the village was named Polonezköy (Polish village) by Turkish authorities, replacing Adampol (the name given by Poles

in a religious ceremony, meaning Adam's land), and its residents were granted Turkish citizenship, marking a new phase of identity and belonging. (2). However, in the 1960s, Turkey experienced a broader trend of emigration due to economic challenges, leading many residents of Polonezköy to sell their lands and relocate to other countries, causing a shift in the village's demographics, with Turkish residents beginning to move in.' Those who stayed generated income through rural tourism by establishing hostels and restaurants. Later, in 1994, the village area was selected as a Nature Park, and it gained the status of a Natural Protected Area in 1995 (3). Notably, it became the first officially designated nature park in Istanbul, boasting a rich diversity of wildlife, local culture, traditional practices, and regional products reflecting Polish heritage.

Today, Polonezköy serves as an escape from the hectic metropolitan area with its natural, cultural, and historical heritage in the face of mounting urban pressures. It has emerged as a vibrant centre for active tourism, attracting both local and international visitors (especially from Poland due to its cultural and historical basis), offering opportunities for sustainable wildlife observation, and hosting cultural events like the Traditional Cherry Festival, which has been celebrated for years. However, the village's dwindling population, shifting away from traditional ways of life, lack of support and organisation, as well as poor measures to afford the protection of Polish cultural heritage pose significant challenges.

In 2013, the enactment of Law No. 6360 redefined the boundaries of metropolitan areas in Turkey, incorporating villages like Polonezköy into municipal jurisdictions and subjecting them to new urban planning regulations (4). This administrative change sparked debates about potential landscape degradation and raised concerns regarding ecological sustainability. Urban planning

endeavours should consider the social, demographic, economic, spatial, and cultural dynamics of a locale to facilitate its ideal development (5).

Ongoing discussions between Polonezköy residents and governing bodies have persisted for almost two decades due to inadequate and unsatisfactory urban planning. This situation significantly impacts inhabitants' everyday lives, obstructing their ability to make necessary improvements or adjustments to their homes and restaurants. The present urban plan proposes road widening, encroaching upon both registered and forested areas. The core of the conflict revolves around the allocation of public versus individual areas. This complexity highlights the lack of architectural definition for Polonezköy and broader structural deficiencies. While the village residents emphasise nature conservation and construction issues, they demand the preservation of their existing registered areas and the protection of the natural park, opposing any new construction that goes against their authentic lifestyle.

Although Polonezköy's green areas hold the status of a 1st-degree natural conservation zone, the settlement area is categorised as a 3rd-degree zone, despite the village's historical, cultural, and social significance. Polonezköy's authentic Polish character is evident in its streets, wooden fences, stone walls, houses, food preferences, and religious and cultural activities, which have been preserved from the 19th century to the present day. Any alteration to the village's layout, as anticipated in the current urban plans—such as road widening or the construction of new thoroughfares—threatens the very essence of Polonezköy's cherished features.

City and regional planners have issued a report highlighting that the "Beykoz Polonezköy Village Settlement Area 1/5,000 and 1/1,000 Scale Conservation-

Oriented Master Development Plans" are "not aligned with urban planning principles and techniques." These plans are considered at odds with the encompassing objective of preserving the cultural richness and authentic fabric of the area. In response, Polonezköy residents and various non-governmental organizations, including the Chambers of Architects and City Planners, submitted a total of 178 objections (6).

Despite these efforts, the conflict remains unresolved, which is endangering the community's cultural and social vitality as well as the village's historical authenticity. The village is already experiencing a steady outflow of Polish-origin inhabitants to urban areas, particularly among younger generations, exacerbating urban pressures. Currently, about 50 individuals of Polish descent permanently reside in the village. Polonezköy residents persist in their objection to the ongoing urban planning, which is currently under examination by the courts. The village inhabitants contend that the urban plan is affecting their choices to migrate to urban centres. They state their inability to reconstruct their houses and express concerns about losing their lands due to supposed forest conservation measures, which they suspect might be utilised for activities such as caravan parks. Thus, Polonezköy's importance transcends its ecological status; it holds historical and cultural significance as a minority settlement. It stands as evidence of successful integration despite cultural and religious differences, emphasising the necessity for caution and intervention by relevant authorities to safeguard its unique identity amidst ongoing urban pressures.

**Gizem Karaköse* is currently a PhD Candidate in the Linguistic department at Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland. She earned her B.A. from Selçuk University and an M.A. from Anadolu University in the Sociology

department. She is currently engaged in a research project "The strategies of language and social adaptation of old and new Polish diaspora in Turkey. Preserving language and culture in the short and long term", funded by the National Science Centre of the Republic of Poland, granted under decision number DEC-22021/43/O/H52/00410 while also serving as a Visiting Fellow under the sponsorship of the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA) Preludium Bis 3 at MiReKoc, Koc University. The emergence of the blog has been made possible through the financial support provided by two prominent projects.

Notes

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