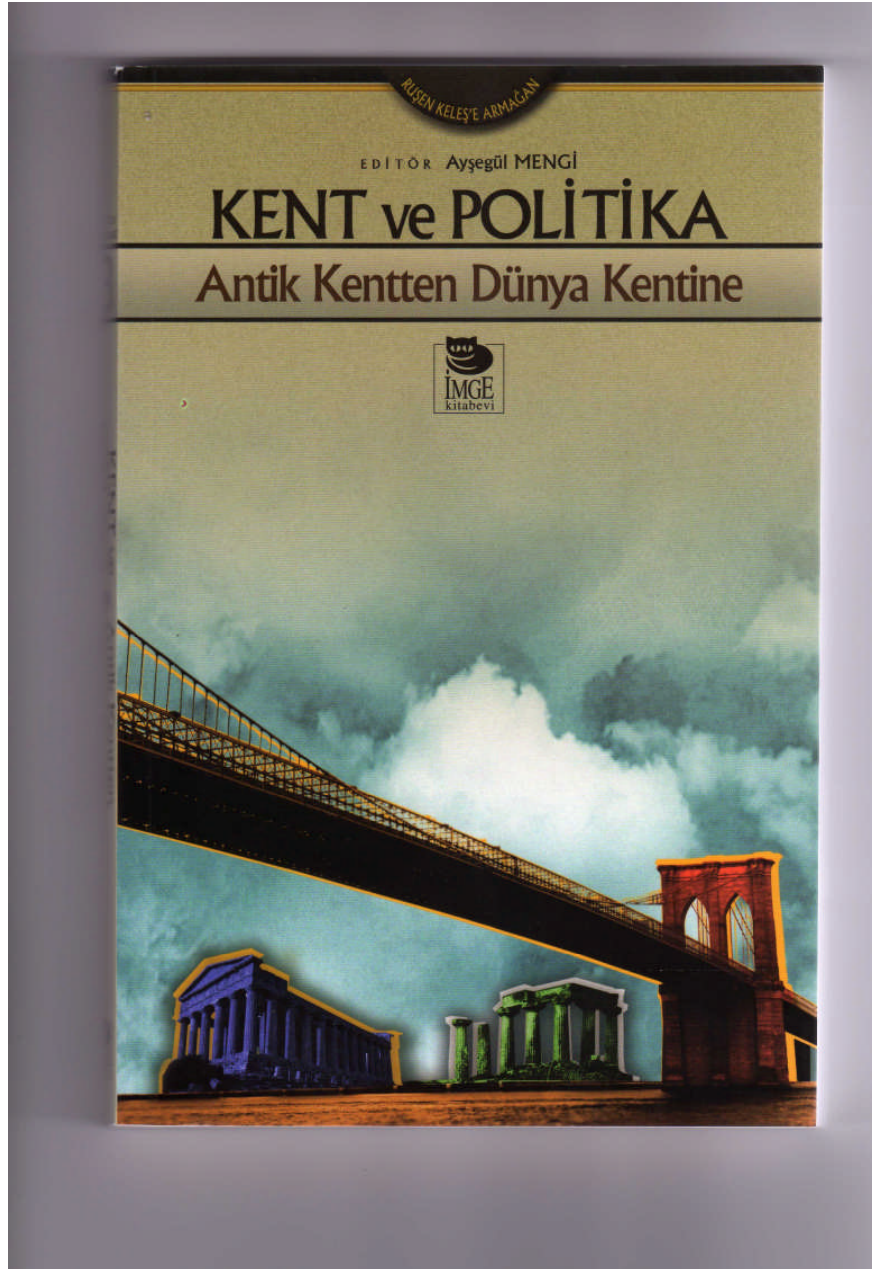


Making it home – Mehmet Ali and the growth of Ankara¹

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¹ This chapter draws heavily on research undertaken initially by the author in 1974, on which Ruşen Keleş was actively involved as an adviser. The author has become good friends with the Mehmet Ali family over the last thirty years.

When Mehmet Ali left his village in Çorum province in 1966, and headed for Ankara soon after he married, the city's population was nearly 1.2 million. Its population is now three times larger and the city has changed dramatically from a primarily administrative town to a major metropolitan centre. How have people like Mehmet Ali, his family and their children coped since those distant days? What lessons do their experiences have for understanding the processes of urban growth, for urban policy in Ankara and for other cities experiencing rapid population increases without large resources to absorb them?

When Mehmet Ali married a girl in his village, they moved in with his parents. His father was comparatively well-off and had more land than most of his neighbours, but he also had six sons and realised the land would not be able to support them all when they had their own families. When they had grown up, he therefore sold enough land to enable four sons to establish themselves in the city and to leave the remainder for the two less educated sons.

Land shortage was not, however, the only reason for people to leave for the city. As in many parts of Anatolia, village life was hard, with extremely cold winters and hot, dry summers. The area was hilly and the soil barren, except for a level part which was irrigated by water from a spring six kilometres away. The water was carried in a pipeline constructed by the villagers themselves using materials and advice provided by the government, yet even this did not make life easy as plots in the irrigated area were much more intensely subdivided and the wheat harvest yielded by each plot was therefore small.

Another threat to everyday life was constant fear of raiders. In winter these consisted of wolves driven by hunger to attack livestock in or near the villages, but at any time of the year, and particularly after the harvest, there was always the possibility of bandits. To keep both at bay, the village muhtar (head man) appointed two guards each day to protect the fields and the houses.

Even these external threats to peace were, however, small compared to that of strife *within* the village. This had two inter-related causes. The first was due to disputes over land ownership and resulted from lack of accurate surveys and the continual subdivision of land parcels over time. Many such disputes ended with one of the parties being killed and his family seeking revenge, which led to hereditary feuds. In 1970, a number of people were killed in such disputes.

Religious differences caused the other source of internal conflict. Until the mid-1960s, the village contained about 700 Alevis (Shia Muslims). When a quarrel broke out between them and the 1,000 Hanefis (Sunnis), violence erupted again. Many were killed on both sides, but the Alevis were defeated and left the village. After these events, an attempt was made to improve conditions. The government built a new school and public standpipes were installed at regular intervals to provide clean water from the irrigation pipeline. Of even greater importance was a legally binding survey of all agricultural and building land which was carried out in 1970. The plans were signed by the muhtar and four officials from a nearby town and this made further disputes redundant.

This, then, was the village that Mehmet Ali left in 1966 to settle in Ankara. Because many other families had migrated to Ankara from his village, he had several contacts and immediately found

rental accommodation in an emerging gecekondu² mahalle (ward) in Dikmen, south Ankara (see Fig 1). His friends also helped him get a job as a cleaner in one of the city's universities. As soon as he was settled in his job, Mehmet Ali started to look for a house and eventually found a piece of public land which he bought from a private speculator for TL2.5 sq.m. For just over TL1,000³ he therefore received a plot of about 450 sq.m and with the help of friends and his wife's brother, who was a builder, he spent another TL9,000 building his house.



Fig 1: Most buildings in the mahalle are along the main road or spread over the valley area.

² The Turkish term means literally 'to land by night' and eloquently described the speed and scale of the mushrooming process of informal housing and land development.

³ All prices quoted are at the rate applicable at the time. During the early 1970s, the exchange rate was UK£1:TL28. The recent rate was UK£1:TL234,173. This is presently 2.34173 New TL

Of the total outlay of TL10,000, Mehmet Ali gave TL200 as a deposit, borrowed TL2,500 from his father, and was able to get credit for the rest from the local ardiye (building materials store). Before he could move in, however, the police visited the area and Mehmet Ali came home from work one day to find the roof and some of the walls had been demolished. His friends advised him to rebuild it immediately and with their help, he was able to move in a few days later (see fig 2). Even when the house only had to accommodate Mehmet Ali, his wife and six children, it was crowded. When their oldest son Fikri got married in 1973 and his wife Afire had their first child a year later, the pressure of ten people made this worse and on the occasions when Arif came to stay, it actually became difficult to move. Mehmet Ali therefore decided that as soon as he was able to, he would build another house on the remainder of his plot.

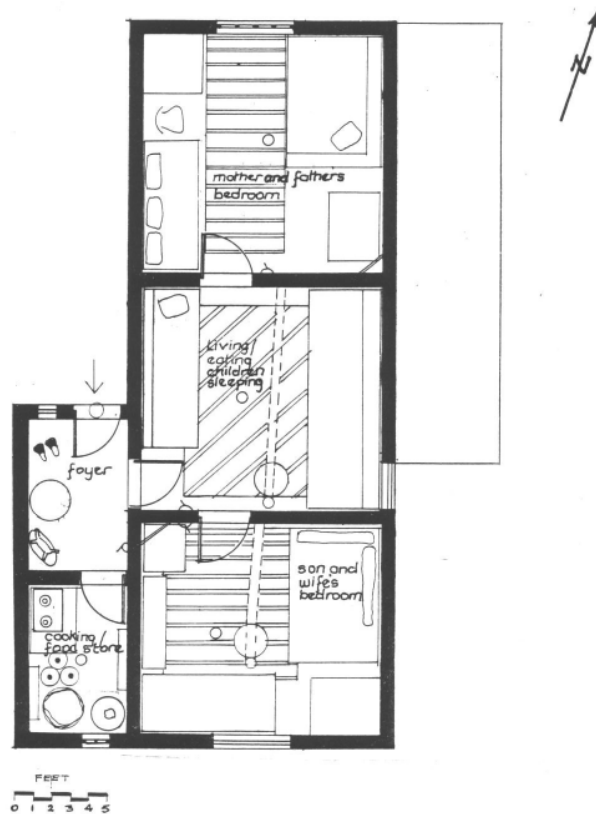


Fig 2: The house Mehmet Ali and his family built in 1967.

Mehmet Ali was over thirty when he arrived in Ankara and his views on life were naturally heavily influenced by life in the village. He regarded the city as a corrupt place where people drank, gambolled and ceased to visit the mosque. He did, however, appreciate the economic benefits and educational opportunities available to his children and hoped they would be more

successful than he had been. For that reason, he was optimistic about the future and had no regrets about leaving the village.

Mehmet Ali's brother Adil came to Dikmen in 1967, soon after he was married. With Mehmet Ali's help, he found a good quality gecekondü house 200 metres from Mehmet Ali's which he was able to rent. This was a standard eight by eight metre single storey building with three rooms, kitchen and external toilet with an area in front for growing vegetables. He got a job as a house painter and this paid better than Mehmet Ali's job. As a result, he was more positive about city life and had higher expectations, complaining about the slow speed at which urban utilities and services were provided in his area.

In 1968, Ibrahim, another of Mehmet Ali's brothers, also came to live in Ankara. Mehmet Ali again provided temporary accommodation and helped his brother find a small apartment nearby, so they were all able to live together. The apartment was one of four in a two storey block and had two rooms, kitchen, large entrance hall and an internal toilet. For the first few years, it was more than adequate and Ibrahim was able to accommodate his father during visits to Ankara, but when their second son arrived, he felt he needed a house. As soon as he had saved enough from the job Mehmet Ali helped him get in the university, he started looking for a site.

Ibrahim was much younger than his brothers and when he arrived in the city he quickly acquired an urban outlook. He even started to learn English in the hope of getting a better job, but he was sufficiently dependent on the rural network to feel proud of his marriage to the sister of the village muhtar. With three of his six sons established in the city within three years, Arif felt confident about the future. Before allowing the youngest son, Mustafa to follow in his brothers' footsteps, however, he thought it advisable to let the first three consolidate their positions and wait until Mustafa was older.

During the early 1970s, each brother gradually adjusted to city life and improved his position. As the oldest brothers, Mehmet Ali and Adil considered their progress in terms of what they could have hoped to have achieved in the village. Their suspicions of the city made them keep to themselves and the network of village friends they met regularly in the local coffee house and this was all they wanted. Their wives spent much of their time in each other's houses and continued the rural custom of spending one day each month making unleavened bread for their families. They wore the same type of dress as they had in the village and, although their lives were much easier, they still had to work hard and remained subservient to their husbands.

This situation changed markedly as their children grew up. Each child obtained their primary school certificate and most of the boys went to the local secondary school, something unheard of in the village. They all absorbed urban interests, such as going to the cinema, watching television and going to football matches in the city stadium. Although Mehmet Ali's son Fikri did not dare tell his father, he even enjoyed a drink (or two) and gambolled occasionally.

To a lesser extent, housing conditions also led to changes in living patterns. All the brothers lived in much smaller houses than they had occupied in the village and this made it difficult to continue the old extended kinship household they were used to in the village, so that each couple got used to living separately. They were also unable to allocate a separate guest room for the men and encouraged the women to eat in the same room as their husbands. They also acquired the urban habit of separating bedrooms from living rooms whenever possible.

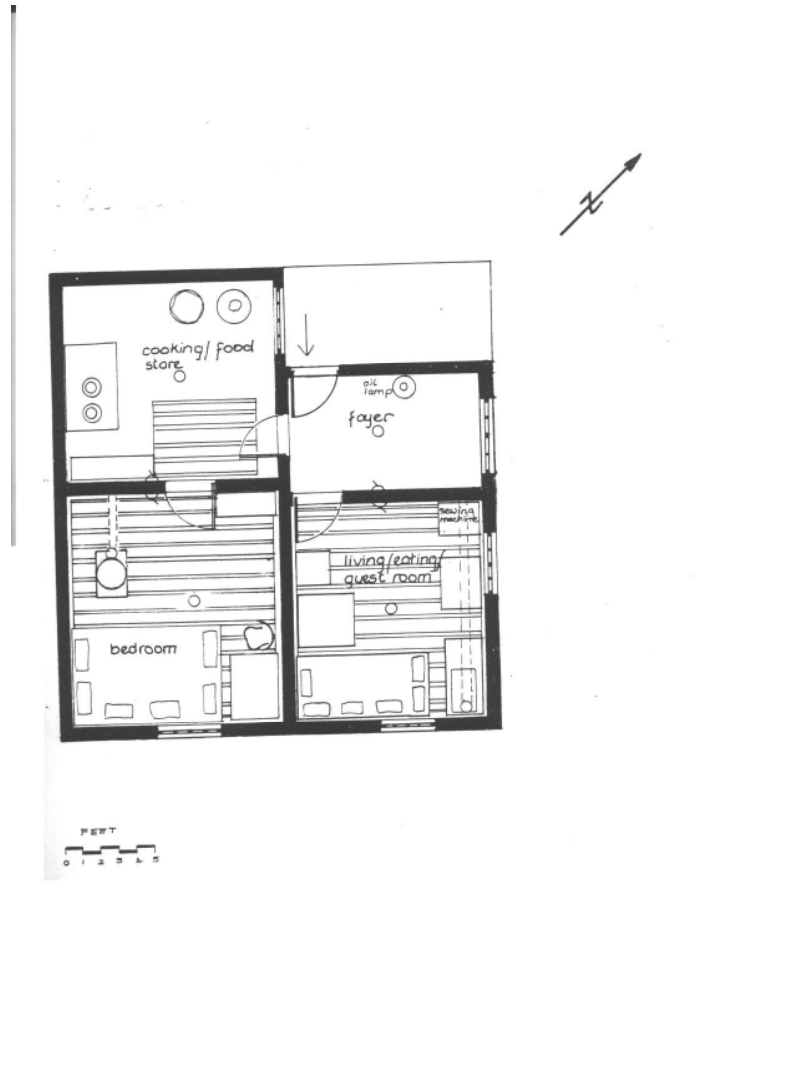


Fig 3: The gecekonduldu house which Mustafa and his family rented when they moved to Ankara in 1973.

When the older brothers had fully established themselves, the younger brother Mustafa finally came to join them in 1973 and moved into a good gecekonduldu house which Mehmet Ali found for him (see fig 3). It was on a plot of 350m² which enabled him to cultivate some trees and vegetables. He also had a large bedroom, a kitchen, foyer, verandah and basement store for coal. The toilet, however, was outside. The main advantage of the house, apart from its size, was that it was close to Mehmet Ali's and for this reason Mustafa was happy with it. He disliked the idea of renting, however, and was determined that as soon as he could save money from his job as a school caretaker, he would get a house of his own. He had brought TL200 to the city for that purpose, though he quickly realised that this would not be enough for more than a small deposit. What forced him to realise this was that Ibrahim and Adil purchased a plot in Dikmen on which they intended to build a house. Adil completed his first, but found that the site was too far from his brothers, so he told neighbours that he wanted to sell it and, because he had a land title, eventually received an offer from one of his village friends of TL75,000. This made Mustafa realise they it would take much longer to get a house of his own and he decided to stay in his present house for the near future.

Ibrahim had also decided to settle nearer to Mehmet Ali and in 1975 bought a plot of 258m² for TL24,500. This had a shared title and was on the other side of Ata Yolu, the main road linking the area to the city centre. When Adil sold his house in Dikmen, Ibrahim received money for his share of the plot and this enabled him to organise his own house. He appointed a local *usta* (builder) to supervise construction and imposed upon his brothers and friends to provide labour. The materials cost TL22,000 and the labour about TL2,000 and the whole structure was completed in ten days, using concrete blocks on stone foundations. To save paying TL300 rent a month on his previous accommodation, Ibrahim moved in as soon as the structure was complete and finished the interior while living in it.

Adil made a good profit on his Dikmen house and when he had finished helping with Ibrahim's, he set to work organising a new one of his own. He wanted to live near his brother and saw an advertisement by an *emlakçi* (land agent) offering land with titles for sale nearby. He was able to buy a plot of 300m² for TL40,000 (including TL1,500 legal fees) and although this was far more than he wanted to pay, he still had TL30,000 left for construction. Adil decided that he wanted to build a small but modern house with this money and therefore asked a local contractor to erect a concrete frame with brick infill panels. He expected this to cost about TL6,000 more than his budget, but felt it would be a good investment.

The success of his younger brothers prompted Mehmet Ali to rebuild his own house and during 1976 he started to buy stone for the foundations and ordered timber from the village. His only reservation was that he did not have title for his plot, but all his friends and neighbours assured him that he would not be taking a risk. He therefore went ahead and the family moved into the new house in 1980, leaving the old one for Fikri and his new family.

With all his sons now firmly settled, Arif took to spending the winters with his sons in Ankara and returned to his village in spring when the snow had melted. He was not able to resolve increasing tensions between the brothers living in the village and this developed into a strong rift, in strong contrast to the mutual support practiced by those in Ankara. The older brothers were upset by this, but the younger ones and the children were too busy leading their own lives. Mehmet Ali's eldest son Fikri started a new job on completing his army service and one of his other brothers studied every evening at a commercial high school while working in a *bakkal* (store) during the day. The pace of life for the extended family began to change even more rapidly as this second generation built their own lives in the city.

With Ankara's population increasing rapidly during the 1970s and 80s, families like Mehmet Ali's were busy building not just their individual lives, but the city itself. As the population and density of Dikmen increased, the initial *mahalles* were subdivided several times and the need for communal facilities, such as schools and mosques increased, together with the demand for better access roads, water and sanitation systems.

Following traditional rural practices of self-help that had been used to build the water supply in their village, the Dikmen residents campaigned for the improvement and paving of the main access road to the city centre. The municipality sent engineers and surveyors to assess the best route and this was approved by the community and implemented with community participation by 1980. A wave of local investment followed quickly and individual houses on the main road were quickly replaced by apartment blocks, shops, cafes and other facilities. During the 1980s and 90s, the pace of change increased steadily as the ease of access to the city centre and available land made it a haven for lower income groups. Land for building became increasingly scarce and the price increased dramatically. People started to realise that land was too valuable



Fig 4: Gecekondus housing with plots for sale.

to allocate it at a discount to friends or relatives from their village and as the older generation began to retire or die, so rural ties inevitably weakened and during the 1980s commercial considerations assumed primacy in land transactions (see Fig 4). As a result, the original settlers began to sell their plots to developers who would buy up several gecekondus houses, demolish them and erect apartment buildings in their place. Local development plans by the municipality provided the basis for re-blocking informal layouts into regular street blocks and developers would make sure their new buildings conformed to these and would then regularise the development, transforming illegal into fully legal developments in the process. For the original settlers, the process was extremely profitable, since most would negotiate a number of apartments in the new blocks in return for surrendering their squatter or other rights. Of course, not everybody benefited from these developments at the same time. The transformations inevitably began in prime locations near main roads, but spread down into the valley and less accessible locations during the 1990s, enabling many low-income households to become suddenly wealthy beyond their imaginations.

Arif died in 1980 and so did not live to see these changes. His four sons in Ankara contributed to the development of their area, though Mehmet Ali also died in 1995, having seen his brothers and his own five sons and one daughter become fully-fledged urban dwellers with families of their own. His brothers gradually exchanged their gecekondus houses for apartments in new multi-storey blocks and their children left school to build their own lives. Not all succeeded; Fikri, Mehmet Ali's oldest son, took to drinking more than occasionally, was divorced and retired

early, remaining in the original family home and waiting for a developer to confirm a deal to replace it with apartments. Mehmet Ali's widow, Afire Khanum, moved into the apartment of one of her sons and also stays with other family members. Until she became too frail, she helped look after her grandchildren, but now just enjoys being with them.

For Mehmet Ali's family, and countless others, housing was their means out of poverty and into the property-owning middle class. Of course, they had little in common with their new middle class neighbours and some caused friction by maintaining rural traditions and leaving their shoes outside the doors of their apartments. Nonetheless, housing was the means by which the rural poor became the new urban rich, much to the irritation of some leftwing observers who had criticised the *gecekondu* processes in the 1970s and 80s as exploiting the poor by making them build their own houses, only to complain that the same people were now far more affluent than they were on their modest state salaries!

During the early 1990s. Ankara had one of the highest proportions of informal or illegal development of any large city. As such, it was considered by some to have failed to manage the process of urban growth. Yet few other cities growing at the rate experienced by Ankara have been able to provide jobs, land, housing and services on such a large and sustained scale. That it did so with minimal municipal resources is a testament to both the determination and ingenuity of numerous families like Mehmet Ali's and the traditional sense of community self-help that they drew on. It is also a credit to the flexible 'as hoc' approach adopted over many years, by the city's administration, albeit out of necessity⁴.

Now that community cohesion has weakened and market forces have asserted their dominance, the scope for these semi-legal forms of accessing land and housing for the poor are declining and more formal planning systems have evolved. How this will serve Ankara's future population remains to be seen, though the resilience shown by its population suggests they will find a way.

So what lessons do families like Mehmet Ali's have to teach us about the processes of urban growth and for urban policy in other cities facing the same challenges as Ankara?

The first lesson is that it is difficult or even impossible to anticipate changing needs and therefore to control urban growth based on conventional master plans. Since it was designated as the national capital in 1923, Ankara's development plans have tended to follow rather than anticipate development. However, the ineffectiveness of conventional planning did not prevent the growth of the city or its ability to absorb large-scale in-migration throughout later decades. Ankara grew from about 20,000 people in 1918 to its present level of 3.7 million, a staggering increase from such a narrow base, especially taking into account the minimal revenues available to the municipality throughout this period. This achievement can be largely explained by the ingenuity of migrants to solve their own problems through collective action and by the flexibility of the municipality in allowing migrants to pursue the traditional process of occupying and developing state land as permitted under the 1858 Ottoman Land Act, rather than seeking to impose inappropriate plans.

Another lesson is that the city authorities focused on the key issues, such as available land and the provision of roads and infrastructure. This enabled peri-urban areas to be urbanised according to needs and to benefit from access roads, public utilities and facilities such as

⁴ See Payne, G 'Self-help housing: A critique of the *gecekondu*s of Ankara' in Ward, P (Editor) *Self-Help Housing: A Critique* Mansell Publishing, London 1981 for a discussion on 'ad hoc' planning in Ankara.

schools. In some cases, local communities both identified and protected sites for such facilities, thereby assuming the role of urban planners, though often with professional advice.

As in many urbanising countries, traditional systems of social support were vital in the development of Ankara, especially in the early stages of development when rural-urban migration accounted for a high proportion of total population growth. Rural traditions of self-help were always very strong in Turkey, and this was harnessed to great effect in building the city from the 1950s onwards.

Decentralised control systems, as in the strong role of mahalles in deciding priorities for local development, enabled needs to be identified and addressed in ways which maximised local contributions in addressing and resolving them. Such arrangements can also serve to allocate scarce external resources where they are most effectively deployed. This is particularly important in the initial stages of land development when local community spirit may be most active and where decisions will have a fundamental influence over subsequent development. As an area consolidates and the initial community cohesion weakens or changes, the nature of decisions will be less fundamental and so local control may be less critical. This appears to be the experience of mahalles in Dikmen, which now fulfil different roles than when the area was originally urbanising.

Perhaps the single most important lesson is that when the conditions are appropriate, housing and urban development can be a major means of lifting vast numbers of people out of poverty. Those who complained about exploitation of the poor in the 1970s now agree that many early migrants enjoy greater levels of affluence than they could have anticipated and that the informal processes of housing development have enabled them to achieve this. Moreover, there have been few victims in this process of social and economic development. As Mehmet Ali's brothers found, an open housing supply system (ie one which encourages a range of housing options, including private rental, empty plots and pre-built housing) serves the needs of initial migrants and the very poor. The process of incremental development also gives poor households, especially tenants, time to adjust to rising rent levels or find alternative accommodation.

How can governments facilitate the processes which helped Mehmet Ali and his family? The most crucial is to ensure the supply of land for urban development matches levels of demand, so that prices remain affordable at the point of entry into the market. Probably the single most effective means of achieving this is to tax all privately owned land in and around urban levels at its full market value *and* make sure such taxes are paid. In addition, governments can release state owned land for development according to social and economic development priorities. This can also help to stimulate the market and increase municipal revenues, especially if undertaken as some form of public-private partnership.

A second priority should be to review the regulatory framework of urban planning and building regulations, standards and administrative procedures. This will help ensure that they focus on issues of primary public concern, such as public health and safety, rather than interfering in aspects of immediate concern only to the owners of individual properties and their immediate neighbours. Of course, for schemes involving industrial development, or places where people are gathered together for work, worship, living or recreation, such as apartments, schools or mosques, controls need to ensure that construction standards are adhered to. The key point is that by concentrating on issues of primary concern, rather than spreading limited professional resources too thinly, it will be far easier to enforce such norms as are considered vital.

Thirdly, it is important for government to encourage a diverse supply of housing to meet the equally diverse and changing patterns of demand for housing. Tenure policy should therefore encourage private rental, communal ownership, leasehold, co-operative ownership and customary or other tenure options as well as individual ownership, so that people are free to choose the option that suits them at a given point in their lives.

As with all large and expanding cities, Ankara has its problems and difficulties. However, few can claim to have grown so fast over such a long period and enabled their population, including its poorest members, to find land, housing, services and employment as successfully as it has. From its initial plan to its present dynamic reality, Ankara provides a laboratory for the analysis of urban development and a lesson from which other cities can learn a great deal. A key ingredient in such a process is the people themselves, as the story of Mehmet Ali, Afire Khanum and their extended family has demonstrated.