

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM WITHIN THE PERIPHERY OF METROPOLITAN AREAS: THE POLONEZ VILLAGE (ISTANBUL, TURKEY)

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**Abstract:** Located in the periphery of Istanbul, Polonez village stands out with its authentic attributes for physical and human geography. Being a rural settlement in the forest, the village was founded by the Polish refugees in 1842, with the approval of Ottoman Empire. Originally designed on a temporary basis, it turned into a permanent rural settlement when the immigrating population began to stay. This society reflected their own lifestyle and cultural structure in this village. Although tourism became prominent through the hunting activities in early 1900s, the traditional structure had been preserved for a long time, leaning on agriculture and livestock. Thanks to the infrastructural improvement activities conducted since 1970s, Polonez village began to attract more visitors. Following the inauguration of the Second Bosphorus Bridge in 1988, the interconnecting road allowed easier transportation to Polonez village, and tourism became even more prominent for the development of the village. Being recognized as a “Natural Park” in 1994 and a “Natural Protected Area” in 1995, the village has been able to focus on tourism activities by preserving its authentic nature for a long time, and it has become even more attractive in respect of touristic investments. Currently being an important centre of attraction for daily recreation activities as well as weekend tourism particularly due to its close proximity to Istanbul, Polonez village holds tourism on top of the list, considering its activity structure. 426 people live in the village in accordance with the 2013 data, it is inaccessible by public transport, and there are quite a range of guesthouses and hotels for lodging. Offering an opportunity to visit historical places, to taste local food, to use picnic areas, to take place in a range of touristic activities including nature sports, creative activities and festivals, Polonez village currently faces a change in its structure due to the amendment made on the zoning plan in November 2013, and the recent infrastructure activities conducted within its periphery. Although the village preserved its authentic structure for decades thanks to the consciousness actions of its people as well as the legal restriction, it is now feared that the draft zoning amendment may pave the way for housing, and its authentic characteristics will fade away, with negative effects on its sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, Turkey, metropolitan areas, Istanbul, sustainable development, Polonez Village

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It's well-known that the adoptions of new functions often lead to spatial and community changes in rural settlements. Even though they may generate positive development results, population pressures may adversely affect environmental quality and spatial structure.

In Turkey, where the importance of rural tourism continues to increase (Soykan, 2003), these effects on the sustainable development of rural areas have begun to be experienced more often. Rural settlements, whether located in remote rural areas or

close to cities, often undergo visible structural changes (Soykan, 2001; Akincitürk, 2002; Ceylan & Demirkaya, 2009; Dogan, 2009; Ertürk, 2009; Etikan & Çukur, 2011; Bakirci, 2011; Köşklük Kaya, 2012; Orhan, 2014).

Polonez village, which is located near Istanbul, is such an example. Its unique characteristics include its location, environmental characteristics, and origins, along with the more usual aspects of shape, structure and functions. This multidimensional structure of the village, which synthesizes Polish and Turkish traditions, elevates it beyond traditional Turkish rural settlements. This

intense combination of environmental, social, cultural and lengthy historical qualities provides the village of Polonez with a wealth of activity integrated tourist attractions (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008; George et al., 2009).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This article seeks to scope both Polonez's current tourism potential and potential future risks for its sustainable development.

The relevant fieldwork occurred between June and August 2014. It documented many different aspects of the village's spatial structure: functionalities and activities, community features, diachronic development, territorial designs and so on. Photography was used to capture an almost complete record of these dimensions.

Interviews were also conducted with the local administrator (head of village – he is an elected attendant) and the local residents to determine their views on the role and importance of local tourism and problems arising from the increasing influx of visitors, and the administrator's views about new plans for the development of Polonez village. For that purpose, there were organised meetings with the head of the village and selected residents with different occupations: farmer; accommodation provider; a construction worker; shop owner; restaurant owner; and also with visitors. The people have been chosen randomly except the administrator of the village.

Previous publications about the village were a fundamental data resource in preparing for the study (Beyaz, 1990; Latka, 1991; Latka, 1992; Adamska, 2004; Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). They provided information as about the founding of the village, the significant people who contributed to its development, and the important events happening in the community. Some publications also contributed with visual material such as photographs of different stages of the village's development, which aided the comparison between the past and the present village geography.

## 3. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF POLONEZ VILLAGE

Polonez is located in the Marmara Region, on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. The village, which is situated on a 100 m high plateau sectioned by small rivers, is 15 km away from the shores of the Bosphorus and 23 km away from the shores of the Black Sea (Fig. 1).

Polonez covers an area of 175 ha. Being located within a forest, it is situated between the valleys of Değirmen and Üçpınarlar rivers, two of the branches of Riva River (Fig. 2). It slopes from west to east and the highest point locally is Küçük Alemdağ hill (299 m), located at the southwest of the settlement.

The surrounding dense forest consists mainly of oak, chestnut, hornbeam, fagus, lime and pine. Some fruit trees, particularly cherry trees, are found in the village. The forest also hosts many ground flora. The gardens of private residences have also enriched the local plant variety.

The surrounding areas are home to a rich wildlife including migratory birds (storks, falcons, hawks) and wild animals such as roe deer, wild boar and squirrel. For the purpose of protecting biodiversity, in addition to the hunting reserves, pheasant and roe deer production farms have also been created within the natural park.

## 4. POLONEZ VILLAGE EVOLUTION

Despite being a village in the administrative sense, Polonez has an impressive evolution with characteristics recorded in numerous studies (Latka, 1992; Adamska, 2004; Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). Here we focus primarily on community and spatial changes of the village over time, which have been less documented.

In the world, people having to leave their current habitats for various reasons and creating new settlement units in the sites they have immigrated to is a situation that can be frequently observed. The immigration that caused the Polonez village to be created has certain political, military and social meanings rather than being a result of the arriving population's efforts to find new living spaces.

Poland's failed struggle for independence in the 1800s triggered out-migration to both European countries and the Ottoman Empire. In one such example, the Polish independence leader rented a farm belonging to French (Lazarist) priests located near Istanbul (Latka, 1992; Adamska, 2004; Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). This leader therefore pioneered the establishment of the first Polish village founded outside the borders of Poland on rented land in 1842, which was named Adampol after him. The first group of immigrants consisted of 12 people (Latka, 1992; Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). Until 1856, the population of the settlement varied between 10-20 people (Latka, 1992). Following the end of the Crimean War (1853-1856), 58 ex-soldiers joined further the settlement (Antonowics-Bauer, 2006) whose population reached 121 people (Adamska, 2004).

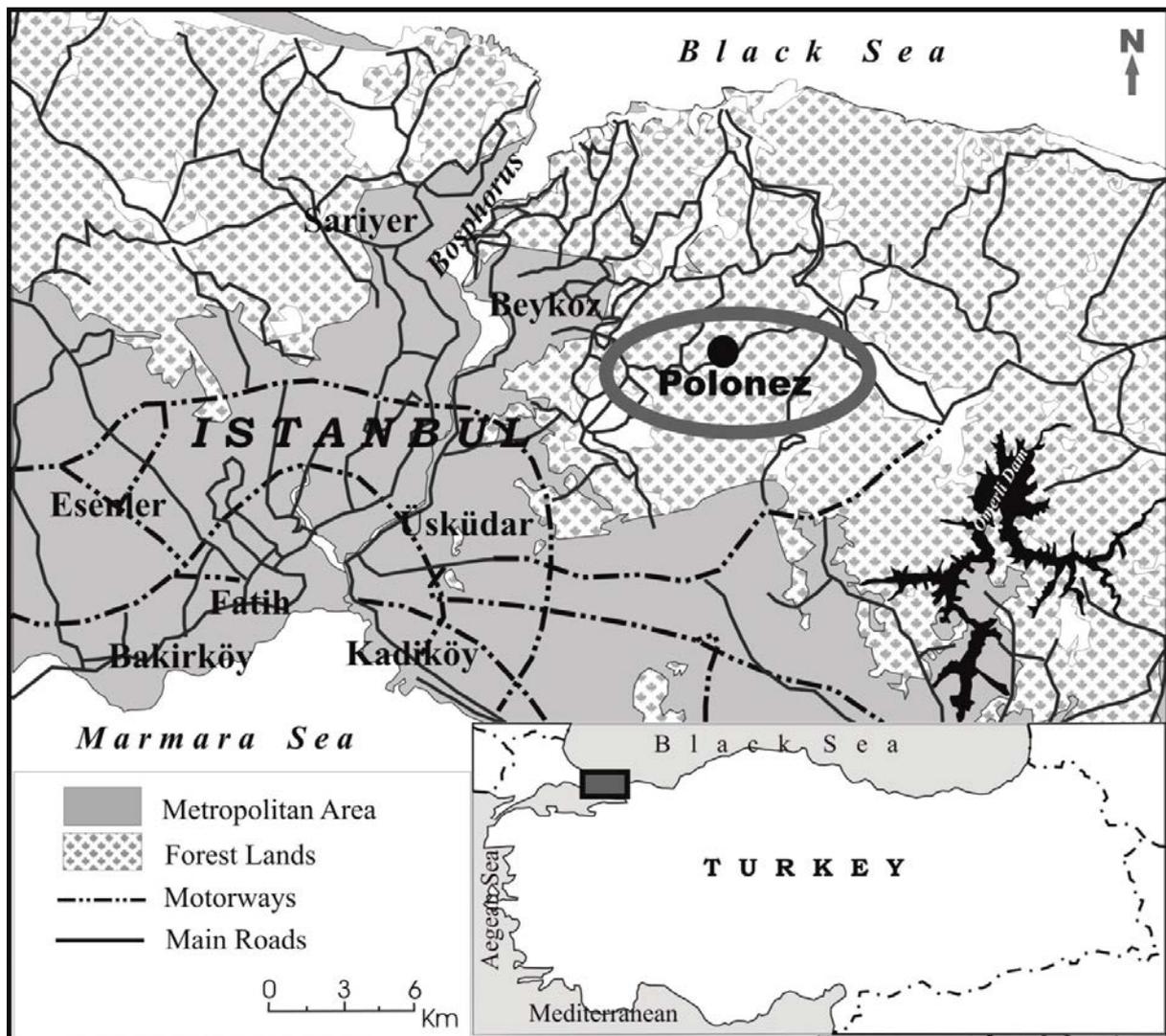


Figure 1. Location Map of Polonez Village

The failure of the rebellion against the Russians in 1865 led to a further influx of refugees into Adampol, which was now home to 100 Polish families (Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). After the land previously rented by Adam Czartoryski was purchased by his son Wladyslawin in 1883, Adampol had a new status (Adamska, 2004) and a certain amount of independence until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 3). But it became equal with the other Turkish villages in terms of rights and responsibilities by 1908 (Adamska, 2004).

From the beginning of the 1900s, the population of Adampol increased, growth activities became more stable and an evident wealth was reached, but such progress was halted by the First World War when the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany which was nominally against Tsarist dominated Poland.

Poland's gaining its independence in 1918 had impacted adversely on Adampol. The emergence of their country, for which they fought for years and

then left, was received with great enthusiasm – and a portion of the population returned to Poland.

Adampol began to be referred to as the Polonez karye (village) from the beginning of the 1900s and after the foundation of the Turkish Republic (1923) it was named the Polonez village (Polonezköy).

The founder of the Turkish Republic, after visiting the Polonez village in 1937, caused an important change in its administrative status. The population of Polish origin, living in the village with passports, was given citizenship of the Republic of Turkey in 1938 (Beyaz, 1990).

At the end of the 1960's, ethnic changes began to emerge after properties belonging to the heirs of Czartoryski family were left to the use of the village population. This situation enabled property sales in the village for the first time. Turks also began purchasing and living in properties sold by the residents of Polonez village who emigrated to other countries for various reasons (Antonowics-Bauer, 2006).

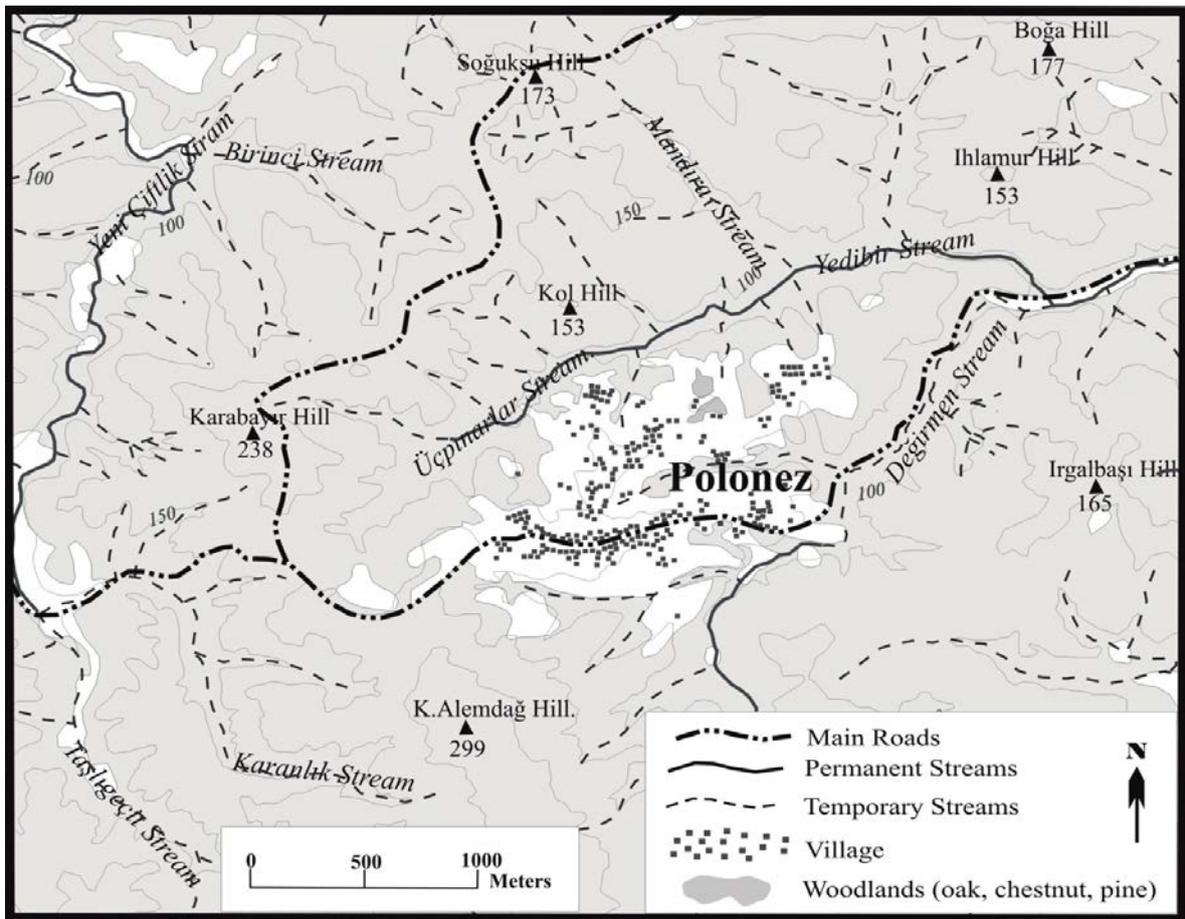


Figure 2. Polonez Village and its Surroundings

Income also began to be obtained from tourism as of 1971, and halted the emigration from the village to a large extent. Some of those who had emigrated to other countries also returned (Latka, 1992). Starting from this date, Polonez began to transform rapidly from its traditional territorial and community structure.

While there were 10 farms belonging to Turks in the Polonez village in 1975 (Antonowics-Bauer, 2006), in 1990, the number of the Polish residents declined to 63 people (Beyaz, 1990).

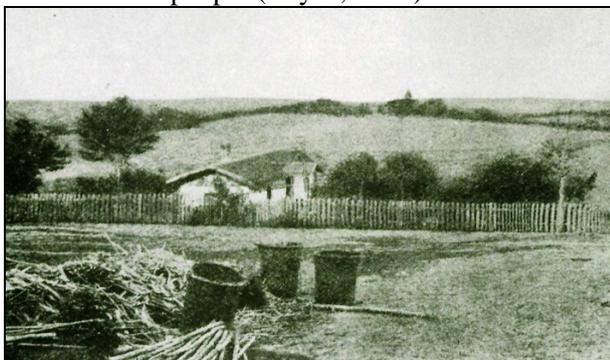


Figure 3. Polonez Village in 1906 (Latka, 1992)

The village population reached 776 people in 2000 but following this year it displayed a tendency

to decrease again. By 2006, two-thirds of the village property became Turkish owned and only 70 residents, in a population that had declined to 400 people, claimed Polish origins (Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). By 2013, the resident population was of 426 people – of whom 80 inhabitants were Polish.

The multi-faceted development of Polonez attracted visits from numerous statesmen and celebrities, including the founder of the Turkish Republic, a successor president, Prime Ministers of Poland, and many others. They enhanced the village's reputation and attracted visits from others who spread its renown while endowing a cultural-political mission – namely its Polish heritage bestowed by immigrants from Poland.

The growth of tourism was the most important factor in the village territorial transformation and development. Other villages in the area have similar physical geographical conditions, but intense tourism differentiates Polonez from the others.

## 5. DEVELOPMENT OF POLONEZ VILLAGE

During its 172 years of existence, Polonez has partially protected its ethnic and community structure.

But it has also evolved, particularly in the sense of its development, with changes occurring in three stages.

Between 1842 and 1900, agriculture and stockbreeding dominated the traditional lifestyle. The second stage, which lasted until 1960, saw the development lodging houses used primarily for hunting. Tourism subsequently became the dominant activity of the third stage in addition to the traditional activities as of the previous century, and resulted from improved transportation (Erdönmez & Yurdakul Erol, 2009).

During the first stage, interaction with the external world was limited. A largely closed activity structure developed based on grain, potato and corn production (Fig. 4) in difficult circumstances due to the heavy covering of forests and bushes (Latka, 1991). Ultimately, the search for new sources of income became mandatory, which led to stock-raising and hunting (Latka, 1992).

The second stage saw wealthy residents of Istanbul becoming interested in hunting. They came to the village and stayed here for the night, starting the concept of rural or farm tourism. Even though other traditional activities continued, the greater contact with Istanbul saw an increasing portion of local farming production, particularly pork meat being sold at markets in Istanbul. This interaction enabled a semi-closed activity structure to emerge.

More radical changes emerged after 1960. It was the first time when a road connecting Polonez to Beykoz district was opened and enabled access by motor vehicles rather than horse-drawn carriages. Many more people came to Polonez for the travel experience and to rest. Increasing visitation drove demand for services, including the operation of more lodging houses, which were easier and more profitable than farming.



Figure 4. Agricultural Activities at Polonez Village in 1906 (Latka, 1992)

Change in the third stage was triggered by a new ownership system. Ownership rights to village property, which belonged to the heirs of Czartoryski up to 1968, were transferred to residents from 1969,

enabling the public to buy and sell land (Adamska, 2004). External ownership by wealthy people, and especially artists and businessmen from Istanbul, also increased demand for labour from outside the village – for example construction workers, guards, gardeners, lodging house, hotel and restaurant workers – stemming from the intensification of tourism activities.

Such development in the 1990s, swallowed agricultural land and decreased farm production significantly. Moreover agricultural production shifted towards serving the needs of visitors to Polonez. Of the 15 people involved in agriculture and stockbreeding in 2011, five produced vegetables, eight raised stock and two were involved in apiculture (Doldur, 2011). Traditional corn, potato, wheat, oat, cherry, fig, plum and apple production is now supplied from other villages.

## 6. STAGES OF SPATIAL CHANGES OF POLONEZ VILLAGE

Changes in the spatial structure of Polonez reflect the community and development changes that have taken place. We may identify 4 stages. Between 1842 and 1900, residences, and their additions, were created only for the purpose of meeting the community's basic needs. Residences were constructed in a simple way and their sloped roofs, bearing the characteristics of the rural residence architecture of Poland, were covered with grass (Fig. 5). Organization of land for agriculture and stockbreeding during this period undoubtedly reflected the traditional Polish practice.



Figure 5. A Polonez Village Residence at the end of the 1800s (Latka, 1992)

Between 1900 and 1970, existing residences were reorganized or new ones constructed for use as lodging houses. During this period, residents could not own land and house construction was only permitted where need could be demonstrated, limiting the volume of construction. So, of barns and storage houses were sometimes converted to lodging houses. This sometimes also impacted on farming operations

since, for example, pig farms were moved outside the village on account of their air polluting effects.

During the third stage between 1970 and 1994, there were important changes to village land-use and residential architecture. Traditional houses – which had steeply sloping roofs, were usually two floored, had gardens and were surrounded by low fences – were replaced with multi-stored reinforced concrete houses (villas) (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Villa Type Residences at Polonez Village (August, 2014)

The most important driver of change was represented by the Turks beginning to build second homes according to their aesthetic preferences on lands purchased from the Polonez residents. Such homes were almost isolated from village life since they were only used during limited periods of the year and were detached from the general community

structure of the village. Some apartment blocks, hotels and other public facilities were also constructed.

After 1994, the final stage saw the rapid restructuring of the previous period slow down after the village and its surrounding areas were declared a Natural Park.

Even though natural park rules limit housing development along clear cut lines, developers try to overcome regulations with new development plans, negatively impacting the new sustainable development territorial targets.

The current land area occupied by Polonez appears as unconstrained by plans. The settlement extends into the forest area according to every residential need. However, the most evident constricting factors for the village's future are the two main streets and the dead-end streets connected to them (Fig.7; Fig. 8). Beykoz Street, which is one of the two main streets of the village (and takes the name of Cumhuriyet street after passing the village square) is also a transit road (Fig. 9).The other main street is 75. Yıl street. Private properties belonging to Polish and Turkish residents (a portion of which are used for tourist accommodation), together with commercial and touristic structures (hotels, restaurants, cafes, stores) or picnic and tea house sites, line these two streets.

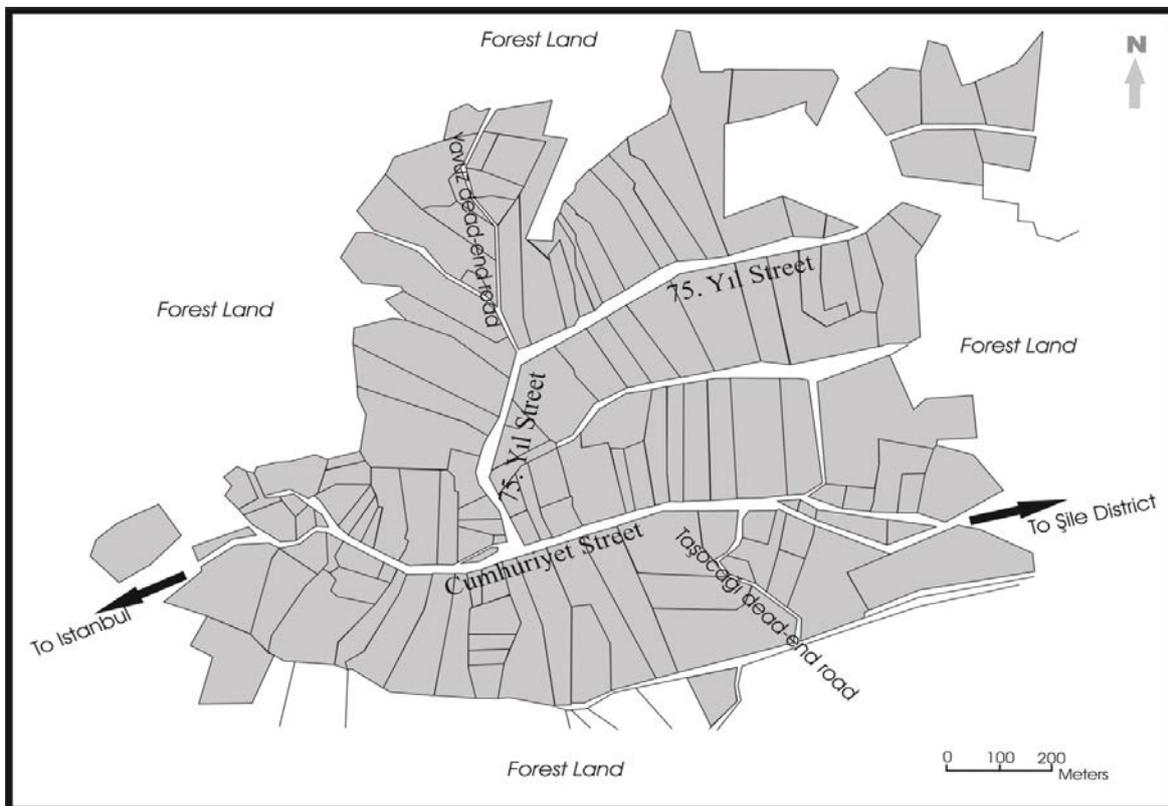


Figure 7. Polonez Village Plan



Figure 8. Polonez Village territorial development  
Source: Google Earth (September, 2013)



Figure 9. Polonez Village Square – the intersection between 75. Yil Street and the Cumhuriyet (Beykoz) Street  
(August, 2014)

## 7. TOURISM POTENTIAL AND TOURISTIC VALUES OF POLONEZ VILLAGE

The most advantageous element in Polonez's in tourism potential is its proximity to metropolitan Istanbul although this link also poses territorial threats. The fact that the village is close to the city but it also seems culturally remote renders it attractive, along with its natural forest environment with natural park status. These twin attributes provide an opportunity for integrated and sustainably developed rural tourism, and we will evaluate their dimensions here.

The foremost natural attraction is the forest, which enables walking and jogging, cycling, horse-riding, hunting, wildlife observation and picnicking.

Village attractions fall under two headings: buildings and activities. The foremost building is the church which dates from the establishment of the village (Fig. 10). An important factor in the preservation of the unique structure of the village, it was constructed with the donations collected by countess Zborowska (Antonowics-Bauer, 2006). Restored in 1918, it was also used as a primary school.

The village cemetery, which also dates from the establishment of the village, is important in recording its history since tomb stones contain important information regarding the people who lived here. The memory house of Aunt Sofia (Zofia Rzy), built in 1881-1883, houses Polonez's historical archive. The house, in which photographs and objects are exhibited, was opened to visitors in 1992.



Figure 10. Polonez Village Church (August, 2014)

The culture house, located at the village square and which also acts as a library, hosts many of the community activities carried out in the village throughout the year.

Another house belonging to a family of original settlers was the place where the founder of the Turkish Republic stayed in during his visit to Polonez while it also has a historic value.

On the site organized as an open air museum at the village square there are various wood carving sculptures.

The village's most prominent annual event is represented by the cherry festival, which has become a tradition and it is organized each year in June. Folk dance groups and artists from Poland come to the village and show-case Polish culture to numerous visitors (Fig. 11).

Despite having deteriorated to a large extent today, various religious and national ceremonies enacted by village residents are also attractive for those interested in such ceremonies.

Proximity to Istanbul, accessibility during all seasons, and the natural and cultural environments also make it an attractive venue for meetings, conferences and wedding ceremonies.

The increasing number of visitors to Polonez has led to the local construction of numerous lodging facilities. Although present for a long time, development escalated from 1970. Up to 1981 the

focus was on family type accommodation. From this date such accommodation became officially certified and purpose built hotels of various sizes were constructed to take advantage of the village's growing tourist potential.



Figure 11. Polonez Village Cherry Festival (June, 2014)

By 1990, there were 18 lodging houses, 16 of which were Polish-owned with Turkish managers running the rest. These had a total capacity of 180 beds (Beyaz, 1990). By 2014, 7 hotels and 25 lodging houses provided a total bed capacity of 1300 people.

Although visitors come to Polonez in every season of the year, the busiest seasons are the Spring and Fall when, particularly on the weekends, there is a highly lively population. The village, which can be accessed by private vehicles, taxi or tours, is visited primarily by the people in Istanbul as well as visitors from other Turkish cities or from abroad (particularly from Poland). Even though the exact number cannot be determined, in the busy season, approximately seven thousand visitors come in daily.

## 8. NEW PLANNING REGULATIONS ON POLONEZ VILLAGE

Polonez has encountered various administrative and regulatory problems. The most prominent dangers on the sustainable development of its territory are intense housing construction and damage to forest areas.

Polonez is protected from these to a large extent since it has a status of a natural reserve and sustainable development goals to achieve. However, in the surrounding villages, which do not have such legal protection, forest areas are being rapidly damaged and opened to construction and housing. The demand is so high that even the dam water collection basins have been opened to housing despite such being prohibited. Both negligence and corruption are the main factors that give rise to this negative result on the sustainable development of the rural area. Rising urban population city is fuelling

housing demand above people's recreational needs. Alas, frequent amendments to the development plans are facilitating this outcome which will mean the destruction of the characteristics that render Polonez a unique rural environment.

The applicational development plan for preservation purposes prepared by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization on in 2013, arguably for the purpose of utilizing and organizing the village area and its surrounding area better, was objected to by the village inhabitants, the village protection association and NGOs. As a result of these objections, certain small amendments were made in the plans and the new plan was carried into effect in 2014. NGOs have an inclination to object to the revised plan as well.

On the other hand, under the metropolis law which came into effect in March 2014, all the villages within the borders of the metropolis became districts of the city. With this law, the metropolis municipalities will have full authority in re-organization of the villages. After a 5 year transitional phase, the Polonez settlement will no longer be officially called "village". The housing pressure on Polonez village, which currently has a legal protection and a special administrative organization with the status of a national park, and a preservation area, will increase in the coming 5 years, adding new impacts on the rural area sustainable development.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

Polonez, which is a historic village placed within a forest, is also situated within the borders of Istanbul metropolitan area, whose green spaces are rapidly deteriorating or disappearing, arising issues of sustainable development.

The village is one of the few sites that have managed to preserve its natural environmental and community characteristics to a large extent, but it is potentially sensitive to the metropolitan expansion which may threaten its fragile local structure and natural characteristics.

Local residents took different territorial decisions about their village independent of the central administration for a long time and the development process was largely ensured in accordance with the residents' preferences; and it seems to have been an efficient planning system. In this context, externally imposed planning schemes will be seen as a threat to the territory.

Turkey has numerous examples of where loss of local control has caused rural settlements to lose their uniqueness and specific rural environment.

The fact that the educational level and the

environmental protection awareness of Polonez's population is high, causes them to react to the new regulations, monitor such works and object to them if necessary. For example, the development plan prepared at the end of 2013 was objected to and it was ensured that certain partial amendments were made, albeit insufficiently.

In particular, housing construction to increase tourism will mean more tourists visiting Polonez, with the likely result that the unique community structure of the village will change rapidly with new territorial requirements and expectations.

What needs to be done here is not to ignore tourism, which is highly important for today's development and activity structure (Sharpley, 2000; Hall & Mitchell, 2004) but on the contrary, to ensure that the natural and anthropic elements rendering the village unique are protected and used in a sustainable manner.

Lots of tourists mean lots of income. However, lots of tourists will also mean lots of damage to the territory in relation to its sustainable development. So that, the fundamental goal for Polonez must not be more tourists visiting this place, but to ensure a tourist profile consisting of a small number of tourists, suitable for the basic sustainable tourism principles of visiting this place.

New spatial arrangements will inevitably evolve according to the needs of the day, the most explicit example of this being the construction of parking lot areas. During weekends and festivals, the whole village takes on the outlook of a big parking lot. This situation, which causes both visual and noise pollution, can be prevented by the visitors leaving their vehicles in qualified parking lots created outside the settlement and only a small number of vehicles belonging to villagers being allowed to be parked within the village.

Even though the houses were built according to certain architecture precepts in the past, no commonality can be observed in the village landscape today. Therefore it is difficult to impose traditional rural residence architecture in the village. Residences built recently are mainly made of reinforced concrete and are multi-stored, imparting an urban design to the village.

The fact that Polonez has civil organizations for preserving the sustainable development of the village and its surrounding area is an advantage. That's because sometimes natural resources also need to be protected from the public administration, which is supposed to protect them. As in all rural sites and settlements, the fundamental need is to observe the territorial preservation-utilization balance. There are many examples of activities carried out with the sole

purpose of utilization resulting in natural resources losing their characteristics.

Polonez has a special territorial prominence with its structure and community specific which it has managed to preserve to a large extent for 172 years and can be considered to be an example of sustainable development for similar rural settlements.

If it can be protected from the expansion of metropolitan Istanbul, it will be a proof that unique and sustainable rural life and rural tourism activities can be carried out even near such cities.

The way to protect Polonez is to protect the values that render it unique. This means the complex territorial characteristics being preserved and re-organized in an integrated and sustainable manner. Otherwise, constructing luxurious and comfortable residences, building large hotels and creating holiday villages will cause more tourists to visit this place and it will possibly result in more income in the short term. However, then, Polonezköy will no longer be "Polonez" village and a sustainable rural area.

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