# Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey

**Cemre ŞAHİNKAYA and Geoffrey PAYNE, Turkey**

**Abstract**

Reviews of the interaction of urban planning and housing policies, programmes and outcomes over a long period in a city can offer a valuable foundation for future planning. Ankara (Turkey) is a prime example of a city that has evolved from a small town to a major capital in less than a century. It has experienced all the challenges caused by rapid growth similar to many cities in urbanizing countries and is therefore an interesting subject of research. This paper is based on evaluating Ankara's current situation concerning the SDGs in terms of urban planning via a reference research study undertaken in 1975-6 by Geoffrey Payne in Ankara. The reference study includes a large number of household surveys, key informant interviews with leading stakeholders in public and private sectors and in-depth case studies with individual households which allow to compare the city's conditions in past and present. Therefore, the city's current socio-economic situation and urbanization process are analysed and evaluated parallel to the reference work and other sources in this presented paper. These aspects of the study are also elaborated regarding three of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [i.e., No Poverty (SDG 1), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)]. Therefore, the paper aims to create a foundation for achieving these SDGs as part of the city's improvement during the last 40 years. The study also identifies current issues of interest for the development of future policies to address the needs of an expanding city and the needs on urban economy, land, housing and services for its population in the light of the SDG targets. Hence, the paper will give a valuable understanding of how the city developed and changed over the last four decades and how these changes can be analysed for Ankara to reach the selected SDG targets by 2030.

**Keywords:** Urban planning, urban growth, urban economy, SDGs

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cities are dynamic structures that change and develop throughout history. Recently, many countries have been experiencing rapid urbanization due to various reasons such as drastic population growth, limited economic opportunities in rural areas, and changing living standards. Turkey has also undergone considerable urbanization particularly since the 1950s and the capital city, Ankara, has become a significant representative of this process. Therefore, Ankara was addressed as the prominent place for urban planning and industrial investments as the capital city since the first years of the Republic (World Bank, 2015). Particularly after the 1960s, the city has received a vast number of migrants from the other parts of Anatolia and carried on its rapid growth. Today, even though Ankara is mostly described as an 'officer city', it is still popular with its many attractions that led to an annual urbanization rate of 5.5%. However, the city has not yet succeeded in being an 'ideal capital city' for the country in terms of economic, physical and social aspects (Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, 2017).

## 2. THE ANKARA PROJECT AND THE REFLECTIONS OF THE STUDY

The Ankara Project is based on the original study undertaken by Geoffrey Payne in 1975-6 and aims to discover the changes in Ankara over the last 40 years in terms of planning policies and applications. Therefore, the study provides a good opportunity to investigate changes in SDGs via a literature review. Since the reference study gives an extensive range of data about the city in the 1970s, it is discovered that the findings are closely related with three of the SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 12 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) as well. These goals are analysed to reflect the progress of the city over the years with help of comparisons between the original study and ongoing projects and literature reviews.

### 2.1 No Poverty (SDG 1)

Poverty can be defined in many ways. While some sources are focusing on the meaning and indications of poverty, it is also possible to come across some other sources that link poverty with the parameters. The United Nations (n.d.) describes poverty both in relative and absolute terms and explains, "*Absolute poverty measures poverty in relation to the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Relative poverty defines poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context*". Besides, the World Bank (2020) defines '*extreme poverty*' as living on less than $1.90 per person per day and aims to terminate it by the end of 2030 (in PPP 2011).

Similarly, GNP (Gross National Product) is considered as another significant poverty parameter. In Turkey, the GNP value was around $6000 per year in the 1960s. In 2017, this value increased to $13.000 on average for the country. In parallel, the GNP for the inhabitants of Ankara was calculated as $13.680 in the same year (Haberturk, 2019).

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

There are also other indicators to be used to observe of the poverty in the literature, such as the number of slums. According to UN-Habitat (2018), slums are considered the representatives of deprivation and exclusion and a symbolic factor for poverty endurance. The slum areas also have a significant place in the capital city Ankara's urbanization process in Turkey. In Turkish, 'gecekondu' term is considered the equivalent of slums. The Turkish Language Association (TDK) defines 'gecekondu' as "*A shelter or house which is illegally built on somebody else's or public land without having permission*". The term is used for illegal settlements that could also be described as "*A building that landed overnight*" in Turkish (World Bank, 2015). In the reference study, Payne (1977) summarised *gecekondu*s as a single term covering all informal or unauthorised housing processes that are landed by night in the country. However, he also underlined that occupying public land on the outskirts of the city and building their own shelters were the only way for the urban poor and the migrants in the 1970s to meet their urgent housing needs in the city. In parallel, the General Population Census showed that while the population of Ankara was 1.250.000, 60% of the population (i.e. 750.000 people) had been living in slums in 1970 (Karaboran, 1980), and this number increased significantly until the early 2000s.

Particularly after the Transformation of Areas Under the Risk of Disaster Law (the Urban Regeneration Law), this situation has conspicuously been changed over the recent years in Turkey. According to the Law, it was decided to demolish the slum areas to provide a better and healthier physical environment in 2012. Besides, the Law brought a new regulation and arrangement system for the illegal properties that were physically unstable and risky for the natural disasters in particular (Candas, Flacke, & Yomralioglu, 2016).



*Figure 1: Gecekondu and the current building views from the north of Ankara in 1975 and 2019*

Currently, the number of slums in Ankara was approximately 30.000 in 2016, and 17.000 of them were demolished in early 2017, according to the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

(2017). It is noted that the number of *gecekondus* is decreasing in the city, and there is a significant number of ongoing urban regeneration projects country which aim to transform slums into new residential areas, as represented in Figure 1 above.

To reach the main target of SDG 1 (No Poverty), '*eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions',* UNDP Turkey is conducting a number of projects that are mostly related to ending poverty. According to the Ministry of Development of the Republic of Turkey (2016), the proportion of the population living under $1.25 a day, which was 1.1% in 1994 and 0.2% in 2002, was reduced to nil in 2006. The food poverty ratio, which was 1.35% in 2002, declined to 0.48% in 2009. It is also found that the 10th National Development Plan of Turkey is consistent with the SDGs, which supports ending poverty and hunger and aims to provide healthy lives at all ages (Alarslan, 2018). In parallel, it was noted that there was no extreme poverty left in Ankara. However, 7.3% of the inhabitants were facing poverty with less than $2.50 per day in the city (Ankara Development Agency, 2012).

As it can be understood, the city and the country are not behind the SDG 1 target and made good progress, particularly in the last half-century. Even though there were not many projects ongoing with the stakeholders, particularly in Ankara, the performance of the country seems promising. Nevertheless, the conditions can be improved with the help of more decisive actions and collaborations.

**2.2 Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)**

Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) is described as "*increasing employment opportunities, particularly for young people and reducing informal employment and the gender pay gap and promote safe and secure working environments to create decent work for all*" by the UN-Habitat. In order to correlate this aim with the current economic situation of Ankara, it would be beneficial to discover the city's and the country's progress in the last century.

In the 1950s, Turkey was described as an '*agrarian country*' with 25% of the urban population living in cities. Today, the situation has become reversed, and approximately 75% of the population live in the urban areas (World Bank, 2015). Although several governments have tried to establish a new urban development system in the whole country regarding increasing urban needs, the priority was given to the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir and not many investments could be applied in the rural. As a result of the decline in agricultural production in rural areas, and the increase in the industrial sector in urban, a massive number of people started to migrate from rural to urban areas in the late 1940s (Balamir & Payne, 2001). As shown in Figure 2 below, the country's rural population has dramatically decreased, particularly after the 1980s, and a rapid increase in urban population has carried on.

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

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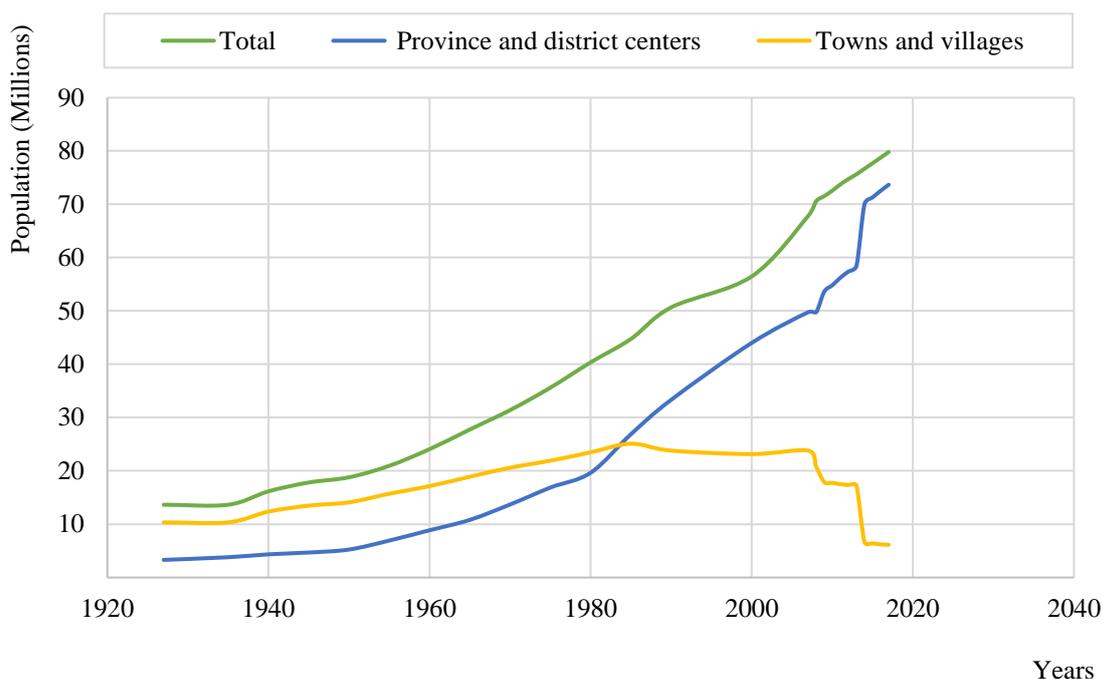Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

*Figure 2: Population changes in Turkey (TUIK [Turkish Statistical Institue], 2019).*

In the reference study, Payne (1977) mentioned that the employment tendencies depended on the urban and rural population changes in the country. He also emphasised that despite the industry and manufacturing sectors' investment priorities in the urban areas, these were not successful at creating productive employment for the population in Ankara. Parallel to this outcome, it was also seen that agricultural activities remained as the primary sector in the country until the late 1970s. The sectoral distribution of the working population in the country is shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Working Population in Turkey in 1970 (Payne, 1977)*

| Sectors | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|
| Agriculture | 66.41 |
| Mining and manufacturing | 9.55 |
| Construction | 2.90 |
| Trade | 5.06 |
| Transportation | 2.73 |
| Financial institutions | 1.23 |
| Public services | 12.12 |
| Total | 100.00 |

It was also discovered that only 27% of these employees were skilled, and the rest 73% were consisted of labourers, traders etc., according to a survey by the government in 1962 in Turkey (Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement, 1966).

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

Besides, Keleş (1976) stated that while 25% of the Ankara population worked for industrial sectors, 70% were still working for services in 1965, as shown in Figure 3 below.
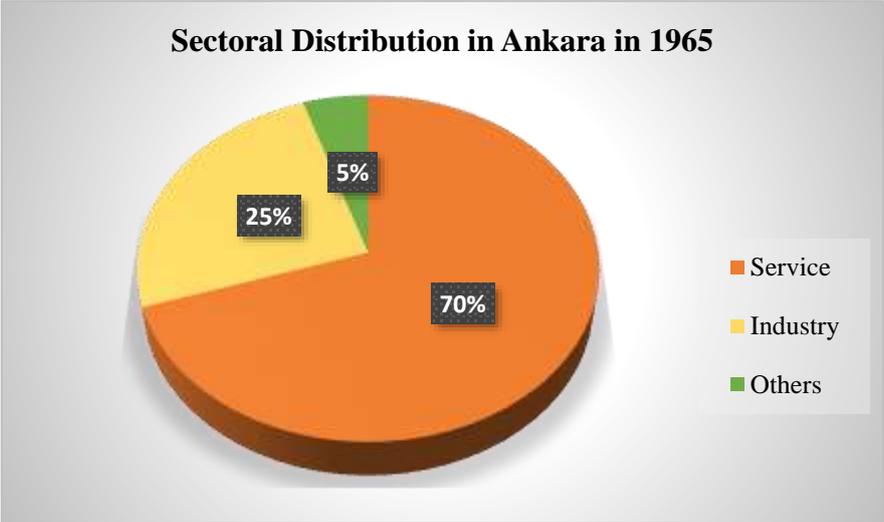


*Figure 3: Sectoral Distribution of Employees in Ankara in 1965 (Keles, 1976).*

When it comes to the 2000s, it was noted that the dominance of the services was not changed among the other economic sectors, even though the percentage of qualified employees have significantly increased. The distributions of the sectors in Ankara in 2016 are represented in Figure 4.
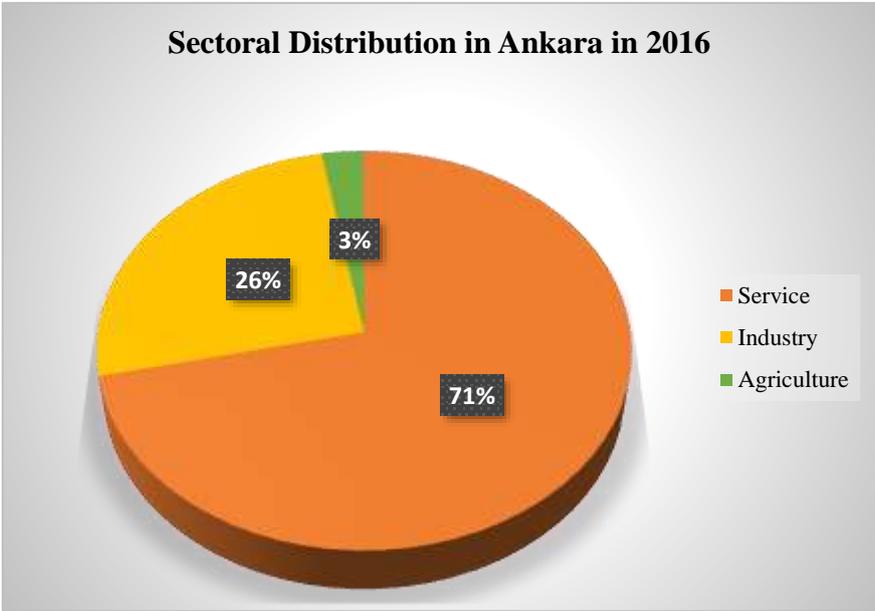


*Figure 4: Sectoral Distribution of Employees in Ankara in 2016 (Ankara Development Agency, 2017)*

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

Moreover, the proportion of women in the non-agricultural activities among economically active women aged 15 and over was only 10% in 1970. It was seen that 3.9% of women were in the industry, and 7.7% were in services in 1975 (Toksöz, 2012).

In 2010, while the male labour force participation rate was 70.8%, the same rate was 27.6% for women for the country. Furthermore, the unemployment rates were calculated as 11.4% and 13% for men and women respectively for the same year (Memiş, 2016). It is also noted that 68.7% of men and 25.3% of women participated to labour force in Ankara in 2010, even though the population is equally distributed between male and female and the rate of the working age (15-64) population is 71% for the city (TUIK, 2013).

As seen from the statistics, although the employment rates and the participation in the labour force have been amended, there is still a need for providing gender equality in the working system of Ankara. The investments in training and educating the staff for the different sectors would support improving the economy in the city to meet the targets of SDG 8 well deservedly.

## 2.3 Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)

Sustainable Cities and Communities Goal 11 aims to decrease the number of people who live in slums in urban areas globally. Currently, over 1 billion people are living in slums that need to create urgent actions. In addition to unsatisfactory physical conditions of the houses, having no good-quality air, limited accessibility to the transportation facilities and lack of open spaces are the main focuses of this goal to be improved (UN-Habitat, 2019).

As mentioned in the previous sections, Turkey has experienced a rapid urbanization process after the 1940s. Parallel to this situation, Ankara has been one of the leading cities that had to face the issues caused by urbanization and slums (*gecekondu*s) (Payne, 1977). Particularly in the early 1950s, the city's population went beyond the projections of the plans, and later on, the city's growth could not be controlled due to the massive number of people migrating from rural areas and increasing housing demand *gecekondu*s. The growth of the *gecekondu* areas in 1928, 1965 and 1990 and the changing city borders are shown in Figure 5 below.

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

*Figure 5: Ankara's gecekondu areas in 1965 (in dark grey) and in 1990 (in light grey) and the plan borders in 1928 (in red) (Batuman, 2013).*

After the 1990s, Ankara carried on sprawling until the early 2000s with a growing number of *gecekondu*s. Ercoskun (2013) summarizes this growth of the city by indicating that Ankara's borders have grown 30 times more in the period of 1924 and 2023, according to the master plans. In addition to this, it is noted that the population of the city went up almost 73 times between 1927 and 2018 (TUIK, 2018). However, it is beneficial to add that *gecekondu*s are mostly considered a 'way-out', rather than a problem for the governments and the inhabitants. A prestigious academician Ilhan Tekeli explains this situation "*Gecekondu not only provided cheap labour for industry, but also reduced the resources allocated to urbanization, which could now be transferred to industrialization. Gecekondu, which was a problem from an urban planner's viewpoint, could hence be seen by an industrialist as a solution*" (Bozdogan & Akcan, 2012).

Lately, UN-Habitat Turkey (2019) published a progress report and a SWOT analysis was undertaken considering short, medium and long-term targets for the country regarding the SDG 11. In the analysis, having an ongoing rapid urbanization process, an adequate number of personnel and capacity instruments and decreasing number of slums (*gecekondu*s), and the Urban Transformation Law (2012) that speeded up the transformation of the slum areas were noted as the strongest points of the country. In the report, the most critical weak points of the country were also underlined. Firstly, it was mentioned that there was no nationwide strategy or plan settled yet in order to meet the SDG 11 target yet in the country. Secondly, it was emphasised that a large-scale integrated plan that covers urban and urban areas was still needed

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

as well as disaster plans, real estate assessment and housing market regulations. Lastly, prior challenges of rapid urbanization such as unemployment, migration issues, high housing demand, recycling and environmental problems were noted as the critical points to be still solved.

However, the country has still a number of opportunities that could be used as effective instruments to reach to the SDG 11 targets. In the SWOT analysis, the high potential of the country's urban areas to apply new projects, being in cooperation with the international organizations (EU, UN etc.) and having ongoing projects such as *Zero Waste*, *Sustainable Environmental Management Systems* and *Energy Efficiency,* were noted as the valuable opportunities.

As the last point, threats facing the country were analysed. Therefore, rapid changes in the institutional system, including a poorly integrated regulative structure and setbacks in control mechanisms for sustainable development, were seen as the threats in the country (Alarslan, 2018).

To sum up, it is obvious that both the city and the country have experienced enormous urbanization growth over the last decades, which is not easy to tackle. However, the boost of the ongoing urban regeneration projects, using the potentials and strengths with sound policies and a comprehensive planning approach, could help the city and the country reach the SDG 11.


## 3. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In the presented study, the current situations of the country's and the capital city Ankara's related to the three of the SDGs [No Poverty (SDG 1), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)] are elaborated with the help of the reference study undertaken by Geoffrey Payne and the literature review. It is seen that the country and the city have improved their profiles in all the aspects over the last four decades, and Ankara has become a successful representative for the country, considering its experiences in rapid urbanization that would be difficult for any city in the world.

As understood from the study, these three SDGs are closely related to each other, and one may easily affect the others' development. Even though the selected SDGs are presented under different titles, the issues that boost the SDGs' current situation in Ankara and the country can be very similar. For instance, the slums *(gecekondu*s) emerged due to the migration from the rural areas to Ankara, and it was accepted as a 'housing self-solution' of the newcomers. However, the issue is currently considered an indicator of poverty and limited economic conditions and became an obstacle to sustaining the city's urban development. Therefore, any improvements in the *gecekondu* issue in Ankara would help improve the conditions in terms of poverty and economic activities and urbanization and support to reach the SDGs targets at the same time.

Obviously, the legislative regulations would be a key factor in meeting the SDGs by 2030. As Payne (1977) stated in the reference study, the approaches of the politicians should be more

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

objective to make the inhabitants feel free to discuss the issues with them. Therefore, a more participatory approach is needed to create better and applicable planning in the city.

Lastly, the country can also make a step on environmental issues to provide more sustainable cities and communities. This could be conducted via many serious climate actions, such as signing the Paris Agreement and creating new environmentally-friendly policies nationwide concerning the global climate crisis.

Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

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Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
Cemre Sahinkaya (Turkey) and Geoffrey K. Payne (United Kingdom)

FIG e-Working Week 2021
Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021

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Evaluation of a Capital City's Transformation over 40 Years in Relation to the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case Study of Ankara, Turkey (11097)
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Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality
Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021