Untangling Urban Transformation: Assessment of Land Value Changes in Golden Horn / Haliç - İstanbul

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Extended Abstract

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the socio-spatial, economic, and demographic transformations within the Golden Horn (*Haliç*) region of Istanbul, driven by urban regeneration policies starting from 1990s and accelerating drastically in the 2010s. In urban studies /planning literature, a critical distinction is made between "change," which implies a natural evolution of space through internal dynamics, and "transformation" (or regeneration), which denotes a deliberate, conscious intervention by human actors and state apparatuses that does not necessarily follow a natural progression. In the context of the Golden Horn—a highly stratified historic, cultural, and geographical focal point of Istanbul—these urban interventions extend far beyond the mere physical renewal of dilapidated building stocks. Instead, they function as mechanisms for spatial value production, rent generation, and the redefinition of public space, frequently resulting in profound social differentiation and exclusion.

Case Study Area: A Topographical Approach

Rather than relying on arbitrary administrative district boundaries, this study defines the "Haliç Region" based on topography, water elements, valley-slope forms, and visual continuity. This redefined boundary encompasses specific segments of multiple districts of inner Istanbul. These areas, particularly those settled by migrants around the Rami Barracks in the 1950s, share deep historical, morphological, and topographical ties to the Golden Horn, making their inclusion essential for tracking how regeneration-induced rent pressures spill over natural thresholds.

Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative, relational methodology. The primary dataset comprises street-level unit land value prices collected in four-year intervals from 2000 to 2026. Pre-2015 data are obtained from municipal archives, while post-2015 data are gathered from public e-government databases. Data are analyzed by using **Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)**, a relational statistical technique that maps categorical variables onto a two-dimensional coordinate plane. Neighborhoods are clustered based on their value categories of social characteristics and degrees of transformation. By plotting these socio-economic shifts spatially and temporally, the MCA reveals the hidden trajectories of transformation.

Year-by-Year Comparative Analysis of Socio-Spatial Shifts (2000-2026)

The core of this study lies in tracing the dynamic shifts of neighborhood values over 26 years, explicitly comparing each analyzed period with the former one to uncover the spatial progression of state-led transformation.

In the baseline year of 2000, the Golden Horn region was characterized by extreme spatial polarization. The "Very High" value category was restricted exclusively to three neighborhoods in the historic core, while the "High" category contained only seven neighborhoods (five in Beyoğlu, two in Fatih). Conversely, the vast periphery was homogenized into the "Medium-Low" category, which contained 41 neighborhoods. When comparing 2002 to 2000, the region remained highly polarized, but initial realignments began. The "Very High" and "High" clusters merged spatially into the same quadrant on the MCA plane, consolidating the elite status of a select 5 neighborhoods. While the "Medium-Low" cluster stagnated with 41 neighborhoods, subtle upward mobility appeared on the edges. Notably, the historic Bedrettin neighborhood, previously clustered lower, exhibited an atypical shift, breaking away and moving directly toward the "High" and "Very High" value axes.

The 2006 analysis reveals the first severe impacts of changing market dynamics compared to 2002. The massive "Medium-Low" cluster began to fracture, shrinking from 41 down to 36 neighborhoods. The most striking comparative difference in this period was the explosive trajectory of the Mercan neighborhood. In previous years, Mercan was positioned near the "Medium-Low" cluster, but by 2006, driven by intense commercial speculation, it made a massive leap across the MCA plane, landing directly adjacent to the "Very High" cluster.

Between 2006 and 2010, the value gap in the Golden Horn widened significantly. While the "Very High" and "High" apex stabilized with 6 neighborhoods, the "Medium-High" transitional category expanded rapidly from 8 to 12 neighborhoods. The "Medium-Low" category slightly decreased to 35 neighborhoods. Comparing 2010 to 2006, historic core neighborhoods subjected to early renewal discourse—such as Tahtakale, Süleymaniye, Bedrettin, and Mercan—firmly detached themselves from lower-tier clusters and positioned themselves securely between the "Medium-High" and "High" categories, illustrating the aggressive commodification of heritage sites.

The 2014 data capture the aggressive implementation of Laws 5366 and 6306. Compared to 2010, the "Medium-Low" category experienced a sharp decline, dropping from 35 to 30 neighborhoods. The most critical comparative shift in 2014 was the trajectory of the Sütlüce neighborhood. Previously anchored in the "Medium-Low" periphery, waterfront regeneration projects and university developments caused Sütlüce to completely break away from its historical working-class cluster, drawing a highly distinct and isolated trajectory straight toward the "Very High" quadrant.

Comparing 2018 to 2014, the upward pressure generated by state-led regeneration solidified. The "Medium-Low" cluster shrank further to 29 neighborhoods. The transitional "Medium-High" and upper-tier clusters maintained their density, but their spatial positioning on the MCA plane became more entrenched. Neighborhoods like Demirtaş, Sarıdemir, Bedrettin, Kalenderhane, and Süleymaniye, which had been slowly migrating upwards since 2006, are now permanently cemented in the highest value classes. Sütlüce continued its exceptional ascent, maintaining its unusual, high-value trajectory independent of its geographic neighbors.

The period up to 2022 marks a critical transition where value increases began spilling heavily into the outer periphery. Compared to 2018, the absolute top tier stabilized ("Very High" with 8 neighborhoods, "High" with 3). Interestingly, the "Medium-Low" cluster numerically expanded back to 35, but an internal fracture occurred: 7 peripheral neighborhoods (Halıcıoğlu, Piripaşa, Ali Kuşçu, Topçular, Kaptanpaşa, Zeyrek, and Sütlüce) began a

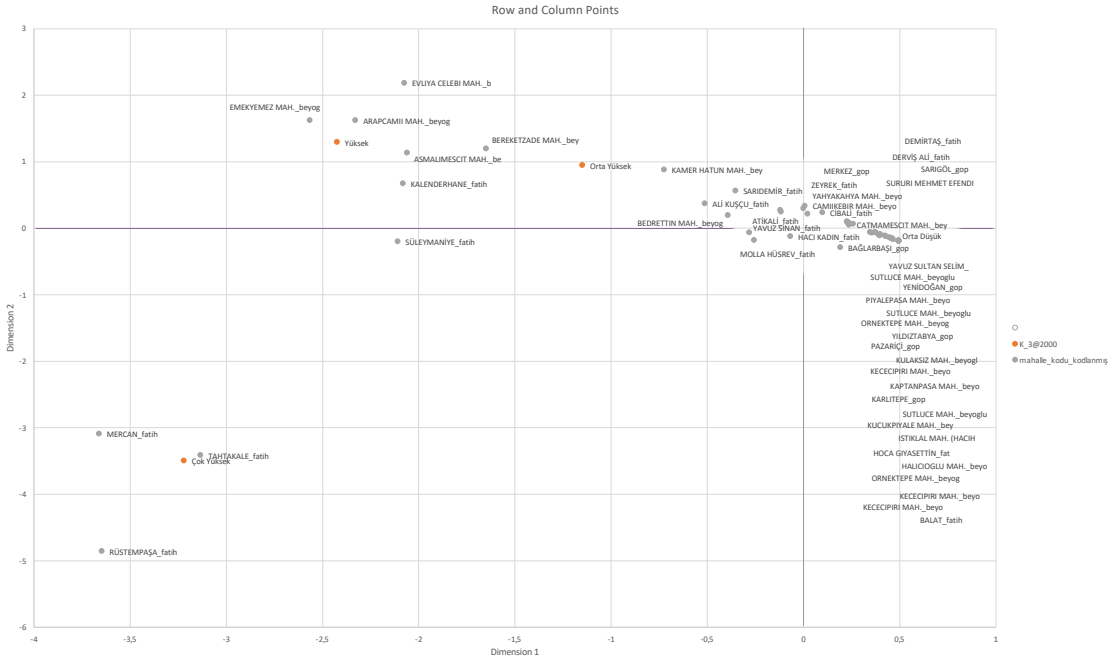
pronounced spatial drift toward the "Medium-High" axis. Comparing this to the stagnation of 2018, the 2022 data indicate that the rent gap in the historic center had largely closed, forcing speculative capital and rent pressure outward into previously ignored, deeper hinterlands of Eyüpsultan and Beyoğlu.

The projections and current data for 2026 reveal a profound structural rupture when compared to 2022. A complete "symmetry shift" occurred within the 2D MCA plane. Unlike previous years where categories are somewhat scattered, by 2026, the value categories formed a strict, linear ordinal relationship. The "Very High" (7) and "High" (3) neighborhoods immortalized their elite status. The most shocking comparative difference is the explosion of the "Medium-High" category, which swelled to 16 neighborhoods (including Kamer Hatun, Bedrettin, and Kulaksız). While 35 neighborhoods remain technically in the "Medium-Low" cluster, the entire spatial alignment shifted. By 2026, the wave of state-supported transformation had successfully radiated from the historic epicenters to the absolute boundaries of the Golden Horn's topography, systematically closing rent gaps across the entire urban fabric.

Conclusion

This research empirically proves that the urban regeneration applied in the Golden Horn region is not a natural process of physical improvement, but rather a deliberate mechanism of state-led transformation and uneven geographical development. The comparative, year-by-year analysis of unit land value prices perfectly illustrates how capital initially targeted the deeply depreciated historic cores (Fatih and Beyoğlu) in the early 2000s, pushing land values upward and displacing the original populations. As the rent gap in these central nodes closed over the 2010s, the pressure systematically rippled outward, ultimately engulfing the peripheral industrial and working-class districts by 2026.

The hypothesis is confirmed: neighborhoods subjected to large-scale, state-backed transformation projects exhibit unit price increases that radically outpace regional averages, acting as catalysts for broader transformation. Furthermore, redefining the Haliç Region through topographical and visual basins rather than administrative borders proved vital, as the data show value increases freely spilling across district lines along natural and constructed thresholds. Ultimately, post-2000 urban policies in Istanbul have utilized legislative instruments to commodify historical and cultural heritage, fundamentally fracturing the Golden Horn's socio-spatial landscape. The resulting geography is one of deepened inequality, where the success of "transformation" is measured by maximized land values and the inevitable displacement of traditional, lower-income communities.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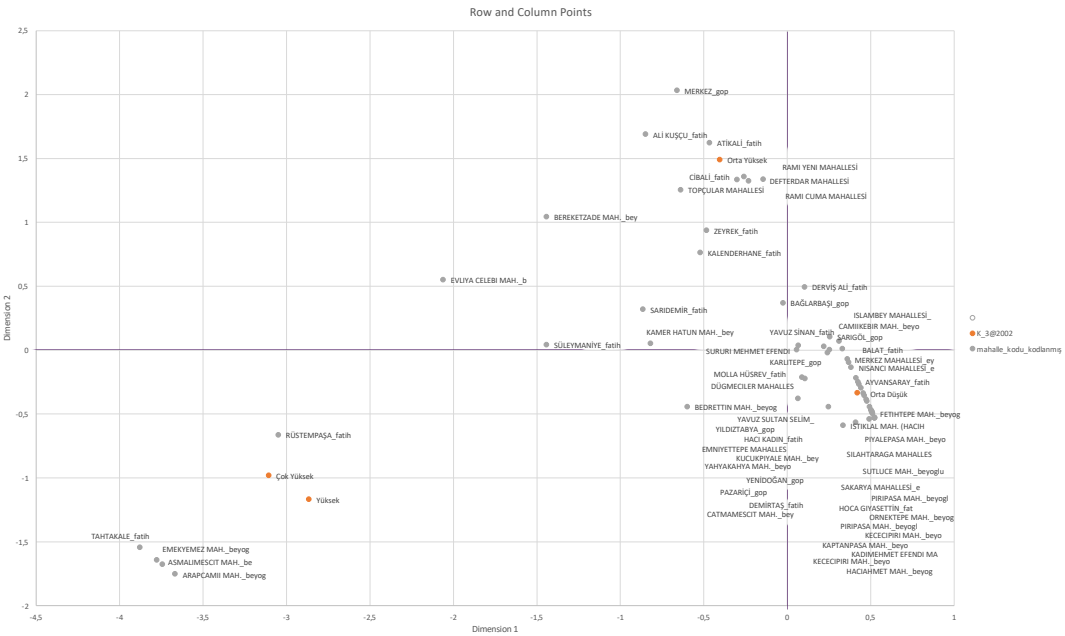
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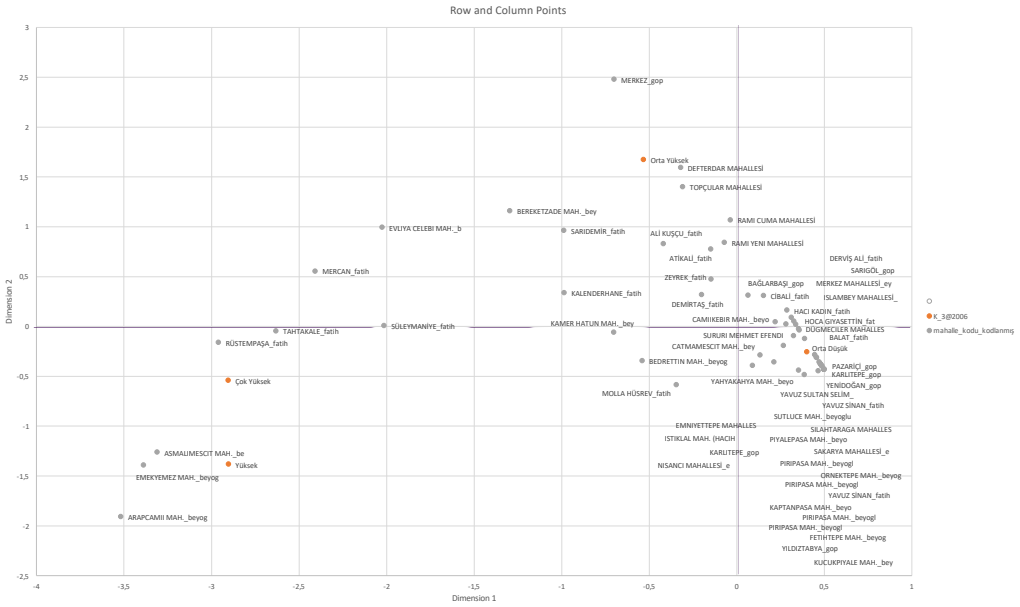
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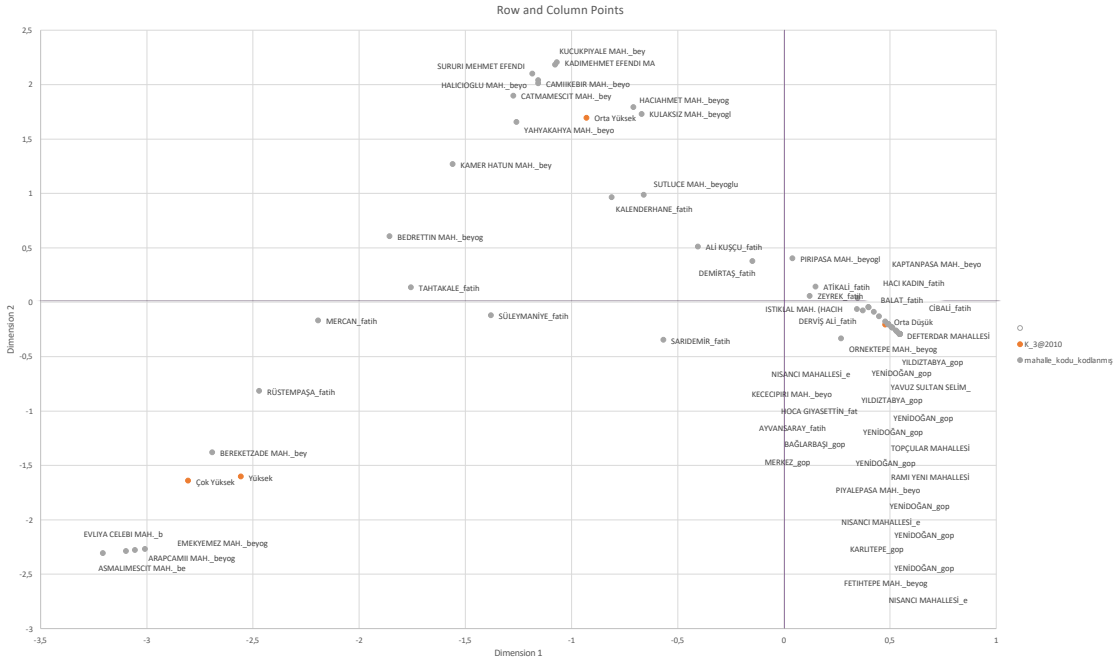
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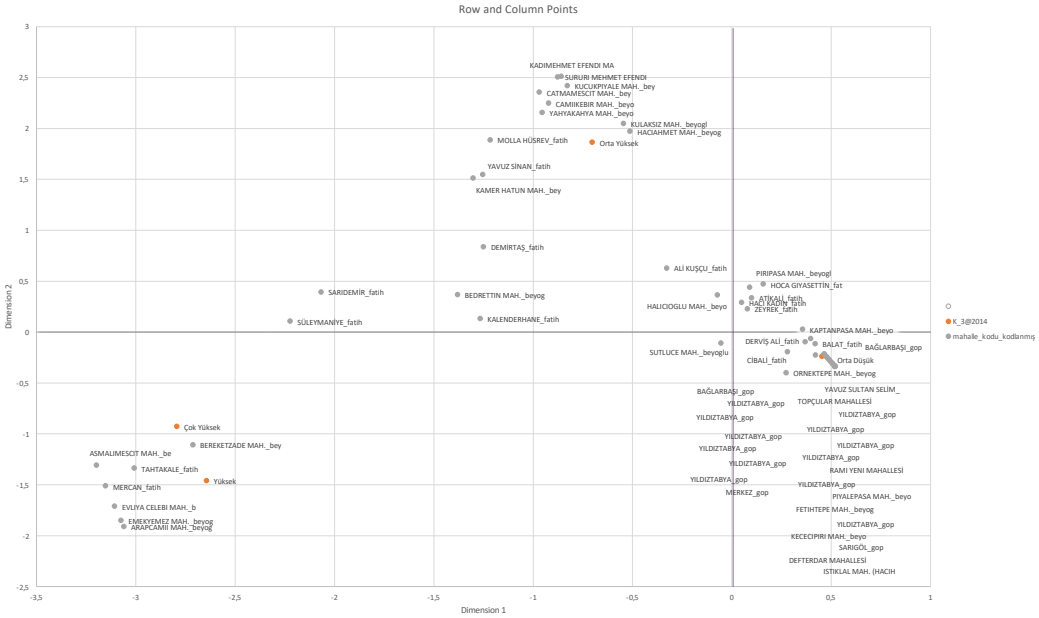
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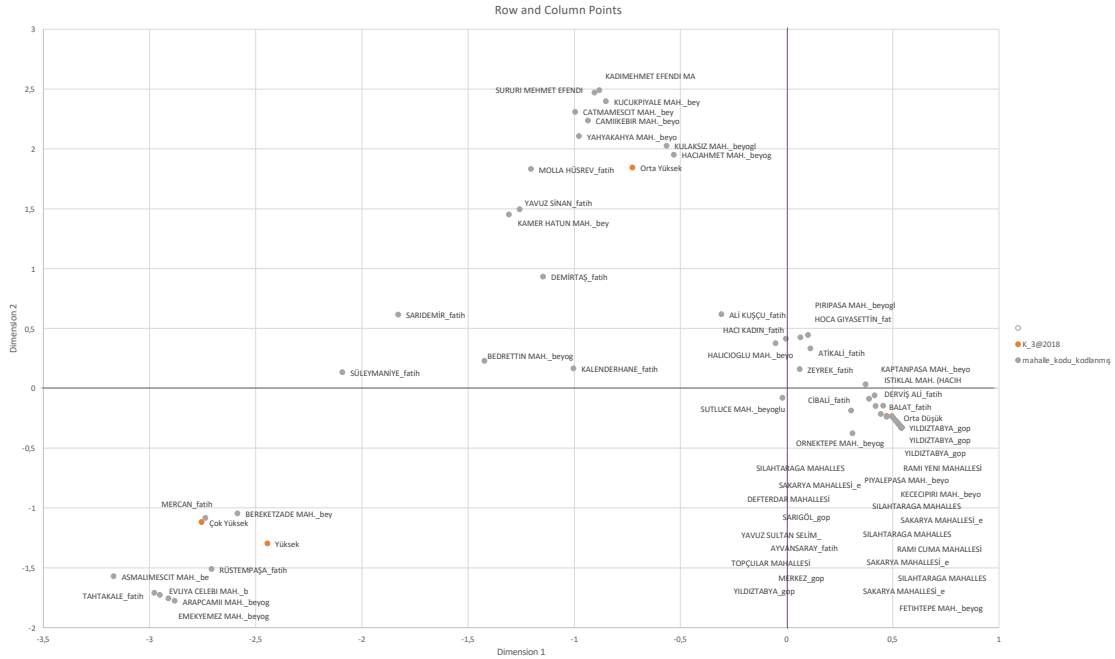
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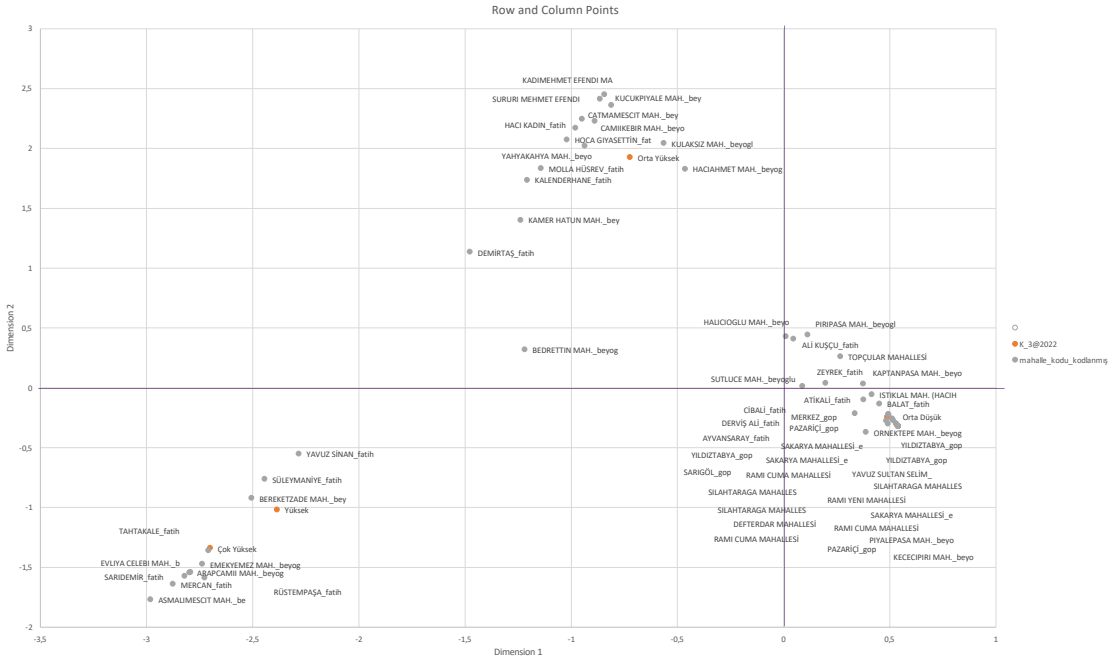
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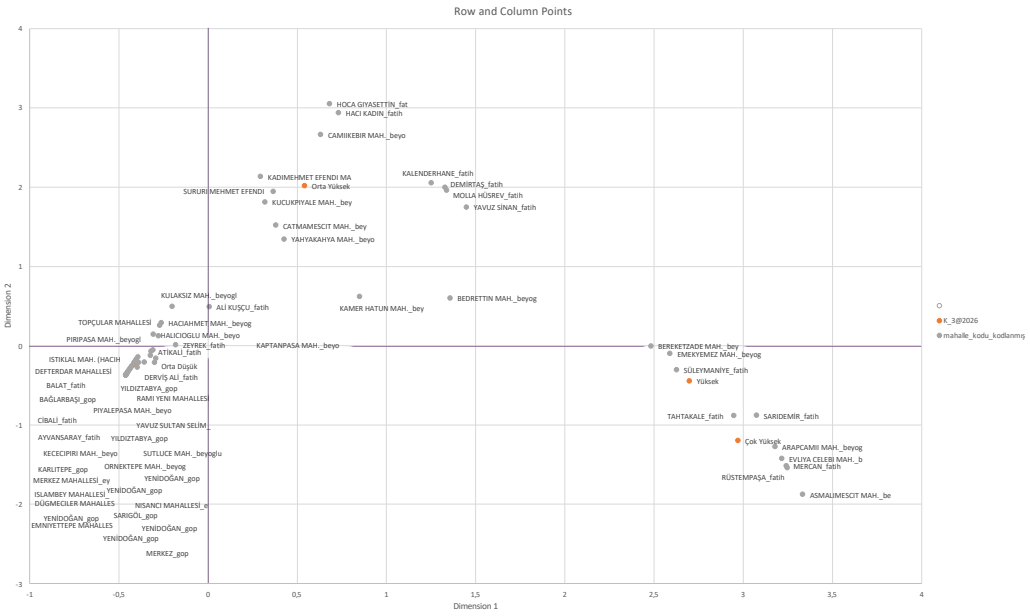
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