

Social Cohesion and Neighbourly Interactions within a Turkish Cypriot Community

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Abstract

Social sustainability is one of the main pillars of sustainability which is a term widely accepted for urban planning and design agenda. Social interactions can be argued to be among significant headlines that have the potential to strengthen social sustainability in cities. Cities are places where disparate kinds of intense dynamics take place. However it has been observed and experienced that in urban environments social cohesion and neighbourly interactions have generally decayed in current times. Northern Cyprus has undergone a process of rapid urbanization within the fifteen years. This urbanization attempts have severe deficiencies regarding the sustainability issues such as urban ecology, biodiversity and waste management. Turkish Cypriot settlements do not achieve a qualified living environment for social cohesion and neighbourly interactions. Within this framework, a user survey was conducted among three different communities which are rural, semi-urban and urban in Turkish Cypriot settlements in order to find whether there is a remarkable change regarding several issues of social cohesion (such as sharing time with neighbours etc.). Results imply that there isn't any significant difference among the three communities regarding the social interaction issues such as 'sharing the garden crops with neighbours', 'asking the needs (food/material) to the neighbours' and 'helping each other'. However, Kalavaç village was significantly different for the item of 'drinking coffee with neighbours' than other two communities.

Keywords: Sustainability, Social Cohesion, Turkish Cypriot Settlements, Questionnaire

Kıbrıs Türk Toplumunda Sosyal Uyum ve Komşuluk İlişkileri

Özet

Sosyal sürdürülebilirlik, kentsel planlama ve tasarım kapsamında yaygın olarak kabul gören sürdürülebilirlik kavramının temel boyutlarından biridir. Sosyal etkileşimlerin, kentlerde sosyal sürdürülebilirliği güçlendirme potansiyeline sahip önemli bir başlık

olduğu iddia edilebilir. Şehirler, insanlar için farklı dinamiklerin deneyimlendiği yerlerdir. Bununla birlikte, günümüzde kentsel çevrelerde sosyal uyum ve komşuluk ilişkilerinin genel olarak zayıflamış olduğu gözlemlenmekte ve tecrübe edilmektedir. Kuzey Kıbrıs, son otuz yıl içerisinde hızlı bir kentleşme sürecine girmiştir. Bu kentleşme girişimleri, sürdürülebilirlik kavramının başlıkları arasında olan kent ekolojisi, biyoçeşitlilik ve atık yönetimi gibi konularda ciddi eksikliklere sahiptir. Kıbrıs Türk yerleşimleri sosyal uyum ve komşuluk ilişkileri bağlamında nitelikli yaşam alanları sağlayamamaktadır. Bu çerçevede, kırsal, yarı kentsel ve kentsel olan üç farklı Kıbrıs Türk topluluğu arasında, sosyal uyumun çeşitli konularında (komşularla vakit geçirmek vb.) önemli bir fark olup olmadığını anlamak için bir kullanıcı anketi yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, '*komşularla bahçe bitkilerinin paylaşımı*', '*ihtiyaçları (gıda/malzeme) komşulara sorma*' ve '*birbirlerine yardım etme*' gibi sosyal etkileşim konularında üç topluluk arasında anlamlı bir farkın bulunmadığını göstermektedir. Ancak, '*komşularla kahve içmek*' için verilen cevaplar anlamlı bir fark içermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sürdürülebilirlik, Sosyal Uyum, Kıbrıs Türk Yerleşimleri, Anket

Introduction

After the industrial revolution, urban environments have become places mostly symbolized with noise, vehicular traffic, pollution, environmental crisis and social and/or cultural degradation (Watson, 2009). However the topics involved in social sustainability have the potential to make valuable socio-psychological, ecological, economic contributions for the urban environment, increasing the citizens' quality of urban life and sustaining environmental improvement as a result (Kefayati and Moztaizadeh, 2015).

Cities in northern Cyprus have currently a rapid urbanization process that mostly achieves negative impacts in disparate dimensions. This urban growth accelerated day by day in an unsustainable path. Such that, the majority of local people and professionals, unfortunately do not value the obviously rich architectural and urban heritage, including the social life patterns of the island (Oktay, 2001). In other words, not only the unique local architectural dynamics but also the local socio-cultural characteristics such as unique traditions, lifestyles and values have been ignored and reduced.

Within this perspective this study aimed to investigate the relationship among the physical environment and local Cypriot traditions and values. First, a literature review has been carried out on social cohesion and neighbourly interactions which are significant topics of social sustainability. Secondly, social cohesion and neighbourly interaction research and surveys were conducted within three different locations. Finally, the findings were interpreted and recommendations were made for further research.

Social Cohesion and Neighbourly Interactions in Relation to Social Sustainability

Because of the ongoing urbanization process that accelerated since the Industrial Revolution, nowadays % 80 of the population in European Union countries live in cities

and according to UN in 2030 more than % 60 of global population is estimated to live in cities and rural population will be smaller than it was in 1995. Therefore the role of cities in sustainable development has become more prominent (Darlow, 1996) due to the growing urbanization. Such that 2008 marks first time that over half of the world's population are urban dwellers, and these numbers are set to increase by % 72 between 2000 and 2030. (UN Population Fund, 2007 cited in Dempsey et al., 2009).

This rapid urbanization practices consume enormous amounts of land and natural resources, damage ecosystems, produce wide variety of pollutants and toxic chemicals, increase global warming and undermine local communities and economies. Not only the natural resources but also the social structure of the communities living in the urban environment has a serious process of decay.

Within these circumstances, in the year 1983, the UN General Assembly established the UN World Commission on Environment and Development. It appointed Dr. G. Harlem Brundtland, the first woman prime minister of Norway, as chairperson. In the year 1987, four years later, she published the Brundtland Report, and coined the term '*sustainable development*' as a new concept. The Report, defines sustainability as: 'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

"Sustainability" became a key policy concept worldwide since then, combining all the experiences of environmentalism with sensitive social and economic considerations. The term is basically defined within three main dimensions: environmental, economic and social (Figure 1). In the meantime, different academic disciplines have achieved different understanding and perspectives in relation to the concept of sustainability. It should be added that recently, culture has been determined to be the fourth dimension by many academicians and researchers. In general, the concept became one of the most successful approaches to be introduced.

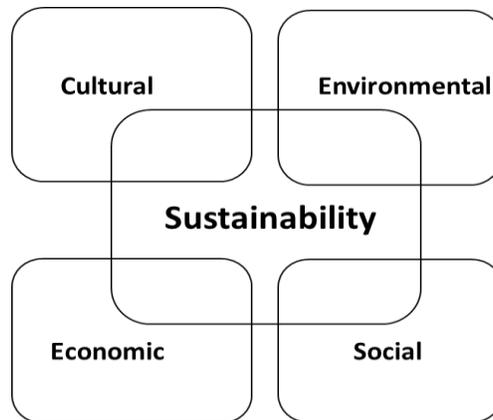


Figure 1: Dimensions of Sustainability

Social sustainability as the focus of this study is one of the main dimensions of sustainability and it has a goal to provide equal access to basic needs such as health care, housing and employment for all citizens, as a must of social justice. It also fights

with the issues like poverty, immigration and wars etc. Issues like community development, social capital, place making, social support, cultural diversity and protecting and sustaining local dynamics such as traditions, lifestyles are also among main concerns of social sustainability.

Social cohesion is a significant indicator of social sustainability. Hence with the help of social cohesion dynamics, a society has the potential to improve its collective skills and to reduce societal conflicts. Social cohesion is the social harmony that enhances the quality of public and civic life by feelings of commitment and trust and participation in networks and civic organisations (Tolsma et al., 2009). Additionally, Kearns and Forrest (2000) suggest that the constituent dimensions of social cohesion are: common values and a civic culture; social order and social control; social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities; social networks and social capital; and territorial belonging and identity. Furthermore Dragolov et al. (2013) suggest that social cohesion has been recently operationalised through indicators to measure social networks, a sense of identity and the commitment to the common good.

It can be argued according to the quotation above, social interaction within communities and families which can be defined as social networks and social capitals is an important element of social cohesion. Wallace et al. (2017) argue that social integration refers to more informal mechanisms of inclusion, including social networks, a sense of belonging, commitment to the common good.

As it is a current focus area within the academic circles and scholars, there is an ongoing discussion seeking to find the appropriate characteristics of the urban environment for embracing such social interaction dynamics. Such that Zhu (2015) suggests that environmental behaviour studies support the importance of the built environment, especially common spaces, for social integration.

In other words, there is a common opinion among related circles of scholars and academicians that contemporary urban development tendencies do not contribute positively for social cohesion. Such that vehicular movement is mostly dominating the contemporary urban land use patterns and additionally as a result of heavy urbanization continuum, there is a lack of public spaces which have a high potential to improve social dynamics.

Turkish Cypriot settlements have also experienced a transformation that is mostly not familiar to their local, environmental and cultural dynamics. Therefore, we have hypothesized that Cypriot rural communities hold better social cohesion dynamics than the communities living in urban settlements.

Material and Methods

Study Area

Three different communities in Cyprus were selected for this study: first one was a rural village which is located at east northern side of Nicosia city along the southern slopes of Kyrenia Range mountains; second one was at west northern side of Nicosia city which is almost connected to the city and can be categorised as semi-urban area, and the third one was Nicosia city community.

The first community was from a rural village called `Kalavaç` which has a total number of 255 residents (DPÖ, 2013). Kalavaç village still has traditional Cypriot village lifestyle, residents are still baking bread within their traditional handmade Owens, most of them are working from their home and farms within the village, producing their local cheese and making handcrafts for tourists (Figure 2).



Figure 2: A street view from Kalavaç Village (Ö. Özden)

The second community was chosen from semi-urban area which is dominated by villa houses and few apartments; it is called “Gönyeli”. It has a total number of 17 277 residents (DPÖ 2013). Although there are some local residents who still cook traditionally and serve local food in their own restaurants, most of the residents has modern lifestyle and achieve an adaptation towards contemporary city life (Figure 3).



Figure 3: A street view from Gönyeli (S. Laleci)

The third community was from Northern Nicosia as a Mediterranean city of Nicosia. Southern Nicosia is the capital city and seat of government of the Republic of Cyprus, the part of the island inhabited by Greek Cypriots. Northern Nicosia is the capital of the Turkish Cypriot 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', declared in 1983 but unrecognized internationally. Turkish Cypriot community used to have a modern life within the city (Bollens, 2001). There are many built modern apartments, little shopping centres. Nicosia city with the northern part of the island has around 94,824 residents who have more or less a modern lifestyle (DPÖ, 2013) (Figure 4).



Figure 4: A street view from northern Nicosia (S. Laleci)

Data Collection

Field work and interviews were carried out in 2016-2017 by two members of the research team. A standard questionnaire has been used in order to identify different communities' attitude on neighbourly interactions. In the first section of the questionnaire socio-demographic data was collected in order to obtain information about age and gender profile of the respondents. The second section of the questionnaire contained five items: *garden existence of the house owners, sharing locally produced crops with neighbours, helping each other*. With the help of these items, it was aimed to obtain information about the respondent's social life and neighbourly interactions within their own community, such as 'garden crop share' and 'asking help to neighbours'.

During the surveys a total number of 30 house owner has been visited from selected three different communities. Structured interviews were conducted with the house owners and questionnaire data forms were completed. Interviews with the home owners lasted from 20-30 minutes. After the surveys collected information has been transformed into excel data sheets and then selected questionnaire items were analysed and compared between different communities.

Results

According to the research results 10 % of the respondents were male and 90 % of the respondents were female in total. Different communities' gender profile has been given within the Table 1. Results shown that, most of the respondents were female.

Table 1: Gender Profile

Gender	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
<i>Male</i>	0	10	20	10
<i>Female</i>	100	90	80	90

Also 60% of the participants were between the ages of 46-70, 33.3 % of the participants were between the age of 26-45 and 6 % of the participants were between the ages of 16-25. Age profile of the participants from three different communities has been given within the Table 2. Results shown that young age profile has not been noticed within the Kalavaç and Gönyeli regions. However young age profile was recorded from the Nicosia city.

Table 2: Age Profile

Age	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
16-25	0	0	20	6
26-45	20	40	40	33.3
46-70	80	40	40	60

When we evaluated the data of the responses to the item “*garden existence of the house owners*” we found that 83.3 % of the participants had little house garden which they were producing some vegetables and herbs together with their ornamental plants. And 16.6 % of the participants did not have any garden. The detail garden existence of different communities has been given within the Table 3.

Table 3: Garden Existence

Garden	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
<i>Exists</i>	80	80	90	83.3
<i>Not Exists</i>	20	20	10	16.7

Within the research we also evaluated if the participants were sharing their garden crops with neighbours. We found that 70 % of the participants emphasized that they are always sharing their locally produced crops from their home garden, only 30 % of the participants mentioned that they are not sharing their crops with the neighbours. There was not any significant difference between the three communities. In Kalavaç, Gönyeli and Nicosia 70 % of the participants were sharing their crops and 30 % of the participants were not sharing their crops within their community (Table 4).

Table 4: Sharing their garden crops with neighbours

	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
Yes	70	70	70	70
No	30	30	30	30

When we look at the neighbourhood relationships we questioned *‘how often they visit their neighbour for a coffee’* as coffee drinking is part of the Cypriot tradition. We found that Kalavaç village was the most frequently visiting and coffee drinking community (Table 5).

Table 5: Drinking coffee with neighbours

Visiting Period	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
<i>Everyday</i>	60	20	30	36.7
<i>Once a week</i>	-	-	-	
<i>Several times a week</i>	20	30	20	23.3
<i>Once a month</i>	10	20	20	16.7
<i>Never</i>	10	30	30	23.3

When we look at the neighbourhood relationships we also questioned *‘if they ask their needs (food/material) to their neighbour’*. Interestingly we found that 33.3 % of the participants from all communities are happy to ask needs to their neighbour however 66.6 % of the participants would not prefer to ask any needs to their neighbour (Table 6).

Table 6: Asking the needs (food/material) to their neighbour

	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
Yes	40	30	30	33,33
No	60	70	70	66,67

In addition, we also evaluated the data of the responses to the item “*helping each other*” and we found that 93.3% of the participants were happy to help to their neighbour if there need any help which is part of the Turkish Cypriot culture (Table 7).

Table 7: Do you help each other?

	Kalavaç Participants %	Gönyeli Participants %	Nicosia Participants %	Total
Yes	90	90	100	93.3
No	10	10	0	6.7

Results imply that there is not any significant difference among the three communities regarding the social interaction issues such as ‘*sharing the garden crops with neighbours*’, ‘*asking the needs (food/material) to the neighbours*’ and ‘*helping each other*’. Merely the suggestions for the item ‘*drinking coffee with neighbours*’ have meaningful difference among the three communities. Kalavaç village residents were the ones who visit the neighbours the most for drinking coffee.

Discussion and Conclusion

Cities are influencing modern society’s current lifestyles more and more as more people are choosing to live in urban environments. Therefore the necessity of sustainable urban development and planning has been acknowledged worldwide. Additionally dynamics of social sustainability is a significant focus of concern within this framework. However issues such as social interaction, social capital and social justice etc. that build social sustainability have been mostly neglected due to the present continuum of the rapid urban growth.

Turkish Cypriots have qualified, valuable social dynamics as their unique culture based on remarkable local traditions and values. It can be observed that Cypriots were very sensitive to their natural environment and had an environmentally friendly lifestyle. ‘*Cypriot cuisine*’ which are involving consuming local rural vegetables/fruits can be a significant sign for environmentally responsive lifestyle. Although research results display that individuals still tend to preserve their valuable local dynamics, this valuable lifestyle shaped with local characteristics is currently under pressure due to the several reasons. One of these reasons is unsustainable urban development tendencies. Therefore it is necessary to adopt sustainable urban development characteristics for

Cypriot settlements. One of the most eligible ways to contribute to the sustainability in Cyprus is to understand vernacular Cypriot settlements. As observed from the vernacular settlements, spaces should be designed within a hierarchy of public, semi-public, semi-private and private spaces allowing social integration and ecologically sensitive planning (Oktay, 2001). Public space such as community parks, squares and public playgrounds is another remarkable asset of sustainable urban environments embracing social ties. In that sense, Paşaoğluları and Doratlı (2004) suggest that much of the urban design and planning literature stresses the importance of public space (Glazer and Lilla, 1987; Vernez Moudon, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Tibbalds, 1992; Worpole, 1992), where social interaction and the daily experience of urban life take place (Madanipour, 1992).

As concluding remarks it can be suggested that, aiming to protect our local characteristics and reflecting them via urban planning and architectural design features will eventually be contributing for the sustainability attempts which are acknowledged worldwide.

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