

QUALITY OF URBAN LIFE STUDIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND LIVABILITY: A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR GAZİMAGUSA (FAMAGUSTA)

OKTAY, Derya
KKTC/NORTH CYPRUS/СЕВЕРНЫЙ КИПР

ABSTRACT

In the last decades, the quality of urban life in cities has been on the agenda of many researchers and mayors in developed countries, and through the classification of cities according to the results of the quality of life research, the issue has been the subject of competitive evaluations. This paper, providing a discussion on the concepts like 'livability' and 'sustainability', conveys an insight to observe what the significant aspects of the quality of urban life for the inhabitants of a city are and how these will affect future generations. In line with these concepts, the paper looks at various studies on assessing the quality of urban life carried out in different countries, and describes an ongoing study in Gazimagusa (Famagusta), as one of the partner cities included in the **International Programme of Research on Quality of Life** coordinated at the University of Michigan, USA, funded by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK).

Key Words: Urban life, quality, livability, sustainability, community, international studies, Gazimagusa (Famagusta).

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20th century social scientists have noted a pattern of population movement away from the large cities as people have sought alternative locations to avoid the problems of urban living and as the opportunities to separate work and home life have increased. The outward migration of people initially to newly developed suburban housing areas, gave way in the 1960s and 1970s to the 'rush' to smaller towns and cities at the expense of the large metropolitan regions (Grayson and Young, 1994). Both these phases of population movement reflect a collective feeling that the quality of life in the city continues to decline. However, the outward sprawl of the city and dispersal of its people into the surrounding areas have raised new problems in terms of cohesiveness of the city, the quality of housing and official environments, and the ecological balance and natural resources. In line with these, growing concern for the future of cities and for the well-being of city dwellers, stimulated by trends in world urbanisation, has focused on the

problems of living in the city. Central to this concern is the relationship between people and their everyday environments.

In this context, the deterioration of the sense of community has received considerable attention in the developed countries, and the idea of 'sustainable communities' is being considered highly significant for better urban life. Sustainable communities offer the chance of an integrated, coherent approach to creating places where people can live in safe and successful communities which offer a better quality of life.

Understanding the Concepts of Sustainability, Livability and Quality of Life

Sustainability, in essence, is a way of thinking about one's relationship to the natural world in the context of time. However, sustainable design is difficult to describe in a sentence or two; its overall goal is to improve the quality of life of human beings – both at the urban and architectural levels – within the capacity of the global ecosystem. At the city level, in agreement with Brundlant Commission's definition of sustainability (**WCED**, 1987: 23), a 'sustainable city' can be defined as a city that enables all its citizens to meet their own needs and to enhance their well-being, without degrading the natural world or the lives of other people, now or in the future.

Although sustainability is a critical quality that should be sought in the development or redevelopment of cities and urban environments, a sustainable city with a decent aesthetic quality may not necessarily be a city where people would like to live. Livability, in this context, is the key concept. Livability, although there is no precise or agreed-upon definition, is an 'ensemble concept' whose factors include many complex characteristics and states. Livability encompasses broad human needs ranging from food and basic security to beauty, cultural expression, and a sense of belonging to a community or a place. It also embraces sustainability and quality of life.

"Quality of life" emerged as a concept within the Social Indicators Movement of the 1960s and questioned basic assumptions about the relationship between economic and social well-being and the complex nature of individual and social material and immaterial well-being. Quality of life - urban life in particular - has become an ever more pressing issue and a central concern for local politics. As was first highlighted by Perloff (1969), quality of urban life is determined through the reciprocal interaction of natural and built environments, and therefore local politics aiming to improve the quality of life should consider both environments. However, quality of urban life, as different from the quality focusing on the quest for sustainability, has some subjective (non-measurable) dimensions such as amenity, sense of place, legibility, collective memory, historical continuity, and considering more contemporary needs of people, possibility of freedom for a multi-cultural society, and inclusiveness. In addition, life standards determined by local urban economics are reflected on

the quality of life in a city as well (Perloff 1969; Tekeli at al. 2004, **National Research Council**, 1994).

As Grayson and Young (1994) state: “At root, quality of life is about a sense of well being. As such, it must embrace three distinct qualities: firstly, it has to be concerned with objective conditions such as housing quality, employment opportunity and risk of crime; secondly, it has to be concerned with the ways in which those objective conditions are actually experienced (as satisfactory or otherwise), interpreted (with hope and confidence or with despair), accounted for and made sense of; and thirdly, it must embody notions of power and empowerment – the belief that undesirable conditions can be transformed by personal and political action”.

In the last decades, the quality of life in cities has been the major issue in the agenda of many researchers and mayors in developed countries, and through the classification of cities according to the results of the quality of life researches, the issue has even been the subject of competitive evaluations.

Studies on Measuring the Quality of Urban Life

In recent years, a number of cities have developed indicator programmes aimed at tracking their progress toward becoming more sustainable and livable. At the same time, programmes have been launched in several cities that aim at measuring the quality of life and more specifically, quality of urban life. These programmes have used either a series of objective measures to assess quality of life or resident surveys that tap the attitudes and behaviours of citizens. As highlighted by Marans (2007), “seldom have both types of measures been employed. Typically the programmes have been designed to inform policy decisions of local governmental, corporate, and non-profit organisations. Yet few programmes have been guided by theories emanating from academia”.

Studies that focus on assessing the quality of community life have a long tradition. The Detroit Area Study (DAS), which is organized by scholars at the University of Michigan (2001) as a revised larger application of studies started in the beginning of 1950s, is among the best known examples in the United States of America. Based on the success of the mentioned research, similar studies are currently underway (or planned) including Istanbul (TURKEY), Detroit (USA), Brisbane (AUSTRALIA), Belo Horizonte (BRAZIL), Brabant (NETHERLANDS), Linz-Salzburg (AUSTRIA), and Gazimagusa (NORTH CYPRUS), coordinated by the University of Michigan in collaboration with the directors of each study. (**Figure 1**, see p. 1046)

There are two critical issues facing those operating in the context of the public policy and planning for urban areas and social sciences. One deals with the meaning and measurement of quality of life. The other deals with the identification and use of measures or indicators to assess changes in the quality of community life.

The environmental data file includes land use information (e.g. percent in each land use category, degree of mix, percent of open space and natural resources, etc.), accessibility measures to recreational land, major employment centers, shopping areas, etc., and various density measures. The density measures using census data cover the number of housing units and the size of the population for blocks, block groups, and tracts.

A Research Framework to Assess the Quality of Urban Life in Gazimagusa

The city of Gazimagusa (Famagusta), the second largest city of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, with a historic core but also with a harbour, has a population of 35,381 (**TRNC 2006 Population & Dwelling Census**). The city was an important trade and tourism centre and served as a regional centre before the division of the island. Today, despite some restrictions on its capacity owing to the new circumstances of the island, the harbour still plays an important part in the trade activities of the northern region. In addition to the port, the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), with a student population of nearly 15, 000 from 67 different countries, has been a major factor in the overall economic and social structure of the city in the last few decades. Today, Gazimagusa accommodates a wide diversity of residents, including the local Turkish-Cypriots, the immigrants of 1974 coming from the southern part of the island and different parts of Turkey, and university staff and students from many countries. As the city has a very dynamic socio-economic structure owing to the continuous growth of the Eastern Mediterranean University, and as bigger changes may happen in the future in line with the political situation of the island, evaluating the quality of life in the city and its surroundings has great significance (Oktay 2005). (**Figure 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, see: p. 1046-1047-1048-1049**)

Certain aspects of the city of Gazimagusa through which we perceive an overall urban quality can be identified as the following: Demographic movements following the growth of the Eastern Mediterranean University, declining quality of the old core of the city where functional and physical deterioration prevail, uncontrollable and unplanned growth (sprawl) of the city, haphazard development of housing and commercial areas, and the felt increase in life standards. However, whether there is a consciousness amongst residents about these aspects and their response to the changes can only be found out through a comprehensive survey.

The Gazimagusa Study titled “Measuring the Quality of Community Life in Gazimagusa” and directed by the author of this paper, is one of the partner cities included in the International Program of Research on Quality of Life coordinated at the University of Michigan, USA, under the coordination of Robert Marans. The study was funded by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) for the period of September 2007 – May 2008,

and is placed under the auspices of the Urban Research & Development Center of Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU).*

The study has five purposes. First, both local residents' and university students' perceptions of various dimensions of quality of urban life will be assessed. Second, the explanatory power of residents' perceptions of various dimensions of quality of life in relation to the overall quality of urban life will be explored. Third, relationships between perceptions of urban conditions and measures of the actual conditions will be explored. Fourth, baseline information will be created so that changes in quality of life in Gazimagusa can be assessed in the future. Finally, a quality of life database will be developed to create opportunities for international comparison across the world cities that have undertaken similar studies. (**Figure 8 see: p. 1029**)

Within the context of this study, both objective and subjective measures of quality of life are being compiled. In the first stage, subjective measures were collected by administering a questionnaire to a sample of 400 households in Gazimagusa through face-to-face interviews. As quality of life considerations are not universal and are likely to vary from a city in one culture to that of another (Mazumdar, 2003), local cultural relativity of certain ideas were highlighted through modifications in the survey questions, although the general framework of the survey was in line with the larger context of the international programme. The survey booklets including a comprehensive set of questions were prepared in two versions, in Turkish and in English to be able to include the foreign households.

The following issues were included in the sample survey considering the peculiarities of Gazimagusa:

- People's perceptions of quality of life (local residents' and students' perceptions being assessed separately).
- Neighbourhood and neighbourliness (physical, social and cultural dimensions).
- History of the residence / mobility of the resident.
- Public services and facilities.
- Public urban spaces, their use and meanings.
- Maintenance of the environment and open space.
- Perceivable benefits of parks and recreation areas.

* Robert Marans (**Planning & Community Development Studies**), Ruşen Keleş (**Political Sciences & Environment**), and Ahmet Rüstemli (**Social Psychology**) have been serving as the advisors to the project. Can Kara has served as the facilitator during the interviews and provided graphic documentation.

- Travel behavior/type, destination and frequency
- Public participation and the sense of belonging
- Education services
- Energy consumption of the residents
- Health and health care services
- ‘Town and gown’ relationship
- Town and sea relationship.

The interviews of the survey were held by the graduate students of the Faculty of Architecture and the Faculty of Communication of the Eastern Mediterranean University, who were instructed through a training seminar by the Coordinator and Advisor of the International Programme of Research and the project director. The methodology of the sampling was such that each house in the city, regardless of its location or its dwellers’ nationality, status, income, ages, etc. had equal opportunity of being included in the survey in order to achieve reliable results.

All housing units in Gazimagusa Municipality boundary have been counted by parcel plots within the boundaries of 15 neighborhoods and the total number of the housing units has been found as 13,455. Although the target number of interviews was decided to be 400, in line with the known response rate in such surveys in Cyprus (75 percent), a sample of 540 housing units was selected at the beginning. These household units were selected from all neighborhoods based on the proportion of the number of housing units from the total population. For example, Karakol has 25.1 percent of total housing units in Gazimagusa (3,370/13,455). Therefore, 25 percent of 540 or 136 questionnaires were administered in the Karakol district.

The selection process followed a methodology of random sampling and involved several steps. First, the appropriate sampling fraction was determined for each neighborhood. In some cases, the neighborhood was divided into several sections according to their inherent characteristics, and these sections were divided into smaller pieces in order to make sampling easier and to get more reliable results.

In this first stage, the files containing census data, personal data, environmental data, and community data associated with each respondent are currently being merged with the survey data file. These data sets are expected to suggest numerous possibilities to examine relationships between contextual data and questionnaire responses. For example, an analysis might address the question of how density (as reflected by multiple density measures) affects people’s responses to crowding, their knowing the names of neighbors, and their interactions with them, or where people live who feel negatively about their city.

In the second stage, objective environmental measures for the residential environments of the respondents will be compiled using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping techniques. Environmental and community measures, together with survey data will be analyzed by use of statistical techniques and GIS mapping and spatial analysis techniques. In this context, the measures will be interpreted in general, from local people's point of view, and from university students' point of view.

The results of this study will first provide information that can inform governmental, corporate, and institutional and community policy makers as they plan for and implement programmes designed to enhance the quality of life of their constituents. Second, they will produce indicators that will be a baseline for assessing societal changes in the city that occur throughout the 21st century. Third, they will determine how much perceptions and behaviours about quality of life correspond to the (objective) community and environmental conditions.

CONCLUSION

Today, a majority of the world's population lives in urban places. The quality of the urban environment as a living space for its inhabitants, therefore, is an issue of fundamental concern for academic researchers, policy makers and citizens. In line with this, increasing concern over the nature and extent of these socio-spatial divisions in urban environmental quality and human wellbeing has focused international research attention on the problems of living in the contemporary city. These studies are useful guides and if built on theory and appropriately funded, can make theoretical and methodological advances, create rich opportunities for exploring people-environment interactions, and inform public and private decision-making. In a larger context, cross-cultural studies focusing on the quality of life in different cities of the world can illuminate both common and unique problems for the attention of urban planners and policy makers.

The programme to study the quality of community life in Gazimagusa, as partner of the Michigan (USA) based **International Programme of Research on the Quality of Urban Life**, was designed to combine policy interests with scientific or theoretical concerns. From a policy perspective, the programme was intended to provide public and private sector planners and other decision-makers about the quality of life in the city as experienced by its residents. At the same time, information about the contributions of place to the quality of life experience was a central goal in the study.

In addition, as the city of Gazimagusa has a very dynamic socio-economic structure owing to the continuous growth of the Eastern Mediterranean University, and problems are observed in the everyday urban environment, the results of the ongoing research on quality of life in the city and its surroundings will have great significance in determining and increasing the level of consciousness amongst residents about their environment and the changes.

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