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Research Article



Social Change İn Traditional Neighborhood Culture İn Turkey From The Ottoman Empire To The Present

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ABSTRACT

The word neighborhood, which derives from the same root as the Arabic word "mahall" and means a place to stay, has been passed on to the Turks as an idiom and organization from the Arabs. Although there is no universally accepted definition, neighborhood can be defined as the smallest settlement area of a city or town that is separated by certain boundaries and has the opportunity to live on its own. The subject of this study is the cultural examination of the changes in meaning and function that traditional neighborhood culture, an urban and social organization specific to Turkey, has undergone in certain periods from the Ottoman period, when it was formed, to the present day. Traditional neighborhoods are administrative and physical units as well as an area that has social and cultural aspects, first of all, and contains human values and various social relations. What has kept the neighborhood alive for centuries has essentially been the existence of a tradition. In a general analysis, it can be said that the neighborhood is the meaning, rituals and space produced by a community that is organized under a political superstructure based on a certain worldview and has common values within. In this study, the document and content analysis method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. As a result of this study, it was concluded that traditional neighborhoods, which have undergone rapid change with the urbanization process, have undergone many changes and are in danger of losing their internal cultural identities, but cultural spread continues.

Keywords: Türkiye, Neighborhood Life, Architectural Texture, Neighborhood Culture, Traditional Neighborhood.

Purpose and Method of the Research

The subject of this study is the cultural examination of the meaning and change that traditional neighborhood culture, an urban and social organization specific to Turkey, has undergone throughout the historical process. This examination examines the qualities that neighborhoods, which have an important role in urban life, have lost/gained throughout the historical process and the effects of these changes on urban form and life. In this context, the study first presents a general literature review on neighborhoods and addresses the concept from a social space perspective. In the introduction section of the study, the development of neighborhoods throughout the historical process has been attempted to be revealed. In the first section, traditional neighborhood culture has been emphasized. In the second section, explanations have been made about the architectural texture and characteristics of traditional neighborhoods. In the conclusion section, the results obtained from all sections processed since the introduction have been evaluated. The questions that this study seeks to answer are as follows:

- How many traditional neighborhoods are still livable in Turkey and how are they distributed?
- Sub-problems such as how was the traditional neighborhood management? How did a common person live? What was the general structure of neighborhood life? were evaluated as the questions on which the study was basically structured.

In this study, one of the qualitative research methods, document and content analysis method, was used. Previously published national and international written (reports, articles, books, reports) and visual (documentary, photographs) sources on the subject were examined, classified and written.

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Literature Review

Although numerous studies have been published on traditional neighborhoods in Turkey and these studies have devoted considerable space to the neighborhood phenomenon, no comprehensive study has been developed on the cultural changes of neighborhoods over time. In our country, a limited number of researchers and academics have conducted studies on the social change of our traditional neighborhoods. At the academic level, Bektaş Öztaşkın: 2008; Özcan: 2001, Tuğcu and Arslan: 2019, Çabuk-Demir: 2012, Güneş: 2009 and Ergenç: 1984 have provided important information about traditional neighborhoods and their culture in their studies

Introduction

The history of the division of cities into social and physical subunits can be traced back to the emergence of the urban phenomenon. It is a known fact that in the organization of Egyptian, Greek and Roman cities, the space was divided into parts by considering social classes. In this sense, the first urban planner Hippodamos is known in history as the man who divided cities as well as being known for his grid plan that intersected each other at right angles in the 5th century BC. Hippodamos advocated zoning of cities, which he advocated to have a grid plan, according to functions and social classes (workers, farmers and soldiers), and he put this idea into practice in the city of Piraeus. After the emergence and spread of Islam, Islamic cities developed in the geography where the cities of Byzantine and Iranian civilizations were located. The classical Islamic city was shaped in the triangle of mosque, bazaar and neighborhood (**Çabuk-Demir**, **2012:137-139**).

During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, classical Islamic cities were divided into neighborhoods based on various groups. These neighborhoods were headed by administrators called Reis or Sheikh. (Aktepe, 2023). The migration movements of the Turks from Central Asia to Anatolia between the 4th and 13th centuries led to the formation and development of the cultures of Central Asian urban life. The Iranian-Islamic culture prevalent in the Khorasan, Transoxiana and Iraq regions and the Greek-Roman culture dominant in Anatolia influenced the newly established Seljuk state in every sense (Eray-Kutlu, 2021:508). The Seljuk State reshaped its cities in Anatolia by taking into account Islamic rules as well as its own traditions. This innovation and change began in the regions that were passed through Byzantium and continued during the Ottoman Empire. It is known that with the Tanzimat Period practices, traditional and local elements began to be replaced by modern ones in the basic units of the city such as streets, avenues, houses and neighborhoods, and that neighborhoods were formed according to different principles in this process (Atabas, 2018:70).

During the Republic period, neighborhoods were considered very important as administrative units and arrangements were made to meet the needs of the people living in the neighborhood, ensure their security and ensure healthy communication with the government. The Village Law was accepted on March 18, 1924. Neighborhood Headmen were legally abolished with the Temporary Law on the General Administration of the Province dated 1913; however, they continued their activities with the permission of the government until 1934. With the law numbered 2295 enacted on January 1, 1934, the activities of neighborhood headmen and councils of elders in places with municipal organizations were effectively terminated. With the "Law on the Organization of Neighborhood Headmen and Councils of Elders in Cities and Towns" dated April 10, 1944 and numbered 4541, the Ministry of Interior re-established the neighborhood organization in order to prevent these problems (Neighborhood Culture in Ottoman Civilization, 2020). Türkiye'nin yönetsel yapısı özellikle Cumhuriyet döneminden sonra birçok modern resmi kurumun getirilmesiyle değişmiş olmakla beraber mahalle birimi, en küçük yasal yerel yönetim birimi olan muhtarlık örgütlenmesi altında, resmi statüye sahip, canlı bir kurum olarak geçmişten günümüze var olagelmiştir (Sipahi, 2016: 852).

Neighborhoods are the places where individuals spend most of their time in the city and meet most of their needs. Neighborhoods, which were inherited from the Ottoman Empire, continue to exist as the cornerstone of cities that have not lost their essence and preserved their values, despite the changes in their settlement patterns. Neighborhoods contribute to the urban culture formed in cities with the culture that individuals transfer to each other. These settlement areas, where individuals first spend time with themselves, establish neighborly relations, and first get to know cities, can be considered as areas where the first steps of the concept of urban consciousness are taken. The foundation of the neighborhood is space and people; it is the integration of space and people/life (Tuğcu and Arslan, 2019:97). In this case, neighborhoods are administrative units where physical boundaries are drawn, but they can be defined as places that contain certain cultural values and beliefs shaped by human hands. Neighborhoods are not just places with geographical boundaries, but rather social structures where individuals living in the neighborhood transfer their values, beliefs, cultures, lifestyles, customs and traditions to the neighborhood. Neighborhoods are areas of residence where people share all their characteristics such as beliefs, culture, values and lifestyles with each other, which enable the formation of a neighborhood-specific culture through mutual communication. Neighborhoods, which constitute the indispensable building blocks of the city, are areas where people socialize (Candan-Kazak, 2019: 1050-1053).

1. Traditional Neighborhood Culture

The concept of neighborhood has gone through different processes and gained different meanings since its emergence. Initially defined as a settlement where individuals with similar characteristics lived together, where social relations were strong, self-sufficient and closed to the outside world, the neighborhood has gained depth over time, both with urbanization processes and with the concept entering the field of interest of different disciplines such as social sciences, urban planning and urban design. The dialectical relationship between the physical space and the social structure seen in the neighborhood has made it no longer an abstract concept, but has made it gain meaning with components such as the geography, society, history and culture of that society (**Turan and Ayatac**, **2020**: **194**). The word neighborhood, which is a place name derived from the root hall (halel and hulûl), which means "to land, to settle, to settle somewhere" in the dictionary, refers to small settlements established for permanent or temporary residence (**Yel and Küçükaşcı**, **2003**: **323**). İnalcık expands the definition of neighborhood to include non-Muslims: A neighborhood is an organic unity, a community that is settled around a mosque, church or synagogue and has its own identity (Özcan, **2001**: **129**).

In the Ottoman Empire, neighborhoods were the first stage of the civil, municipal (urban) and judicial organization. In the Ottoman city administration, the neighborhood was a social whole with its school, madrasah, mosque, square, fountain, coffeehouse, market and even bathhouse (Güneş, 2009: 114). Daily life in Ottoman society is a concrete form of the social, religious, economic and cultural activities of a society, depending on time and space. Daily life in Ottoman cities was shaped in neighborhoods. The neighborhood system was based on people of different religions, sects and beliefs living in separate neighborhoods. This order continued until the changes in the 19th century. In the Ottoman Empire, neighborhoods, where daily life took place, contained places of worship, bazaars and houses. In Ottoman culture, the neighborhood was the first community for an individual after his/her family (Çetin, 2013: 282-283).

The establishment of cities in the Ottoman period began with the establishment of neighborhoods. The establishment of neighborhoods, which began with the establishment of a mosque and a few households, was carried out by expanding in circles, taking the mosque as the center. Religious leaders were given great responsibility in the establishment of the neighborhood, and they paid particular attention to the settlement of nomads around neighborhood mosques or külliyes. The most striking feature in the establishment of Ottoman neighborhoods was the care taken to ensure that people with the same beliefs and traditions came together and resided. During the Ottoman period, the neighborhood was perceived as a house where all neighbors stayed together. Neighborhoods, which were structured in a way that allowed neighborhood members to communicate easily and be in solidarity, were also established by taking into account the security of the people in the neighborhood. In addition to the construction of houses in accordance with cultural life in Ottoman neighborhoods, care was taken to establish markets outside the neighborhood (**Baday**, **2011: 21-24**).

In Ottoman society, with the effect of adhering to Islamic rules, neighborhoods continued to have many of the characteristics of Islamic cities, such as the structure of the mosque, which is a religious place, and the characteristics of the city identity such as housing, roads and dead-end streets (**Uğur**, **2021:18**). The people of the neighborhood who live as a community gather in religious places such as mosques, which literally mean "gathering, bringing together", or masjids, which serve the same purpose. In this context, the mosque represents the main center of socialization. The competence of this form of socialization has led to the establishment of relations with the central administration not at the individual or family level, but rather at the neighborhood level (**Açık**, **2014:11-12**). The mosque and the imam have an important place in the neighborhood, both socially and as an administrator. The duty of the imams was extremely important. The imams were subject to the supervision of the judge and were constantly inspected. At the same time, the imam was a kind of assistant to the judges and was appointed with a sultan's charter. The imams represented the neighborhood people against the state and the state against the neighborhood people (**Can**, **2010**).

Neighborhood life, which can be traced back to the Ottoman period, is an environment that is woven within a certain culture, value, belief, ritual and tradition framework, and is equipped with its own structure, identity and lifestyle in this respect. In the neighborhood environment where face-to-face relationships are seen, everyone is responsible for each other and an environment of solidarity is seen. This solidarity both establishes a control mechanism over people and connects individuals to each other. The neighborhood is a social environment that is seen as the continuation of the house and constitutes an important leg of the socialization process. The neighborhood, which reflects a certain lifestyle and has its own daily activities, control mechanisms, behavioral patterns and rituals, has also been evaluated as an important step in the acculturation of the individual (**Tekin**, **2018**: **104-105**).

There was no status differentiation within the neighborhood, families from different classes, rich and poor, lived side by side in different sized houses. In studies conducted on Islamic cities, it is recorded that the economic, religious and social life of the people of the neighborhood did not differ to a degree that would lead to a clear stratification within the neighborhood, and that scientists, merchants, craftsmen and civil servants lived together in the same neighborhood; however, it is also stated that a relative impoverishment is felt as one moves from the city center to the outside or outside the city walls. In addition to the religious element and ethnic origin, it is also natural that there are close kinship ties between the people of the neighborhood. It can be seen that in commercial areas, the shops of people in the same profession are together, and the houses they live in form a neighborhood named after that profession (Özcan, 2001: 131).

Thanks to the internal structure rules of Ottoman neighborhoods, any kind of speculative and immoral approach at the neighborhood level was almost impossible. Ensuring general security in neighborhoods was one of the issues that the Ottoman center emphasized. When it comes to inner-city security, perhaps the most important of the measures taken to ensure this was that the neighborhood residents mutually vouched for each other. Thus, when the perpetrators of the crimes committed could not be found, the punishment was taken from the entire neighborhood (**Düzbakar**, **2003**: **99-100**). The people of the neighborhood are responsible for issues such as the management, safety, cleaning and maintenance of the neighborhood, as well as meeting the infrastructure needs of the neighborhood and looking after those in need (**Karakuyu**, **2007**: **3,4**). Classical Ottoman neighborhoods could consist of one hundred to five hundred households, while there were also those consisting of thirty to forty households, which is not inconsiderable. Assuming that the density was low in the years of its foundation (50-100 people/hectare) and increased in the 19th century (50,400 people/hectare), it is known that the size of the neighborhood was between 1-5 hectares, with exceptions reaching up to 10 hectares (**Özbek**, **2012**:1155).

2. Architectural Texture in Traditional Neighborhoods

The root of the word city/city comes from the Persian word "şehr" and the dictionary meaning of the word is expressed as "A settlement area, city, site where most of the population is engaged in trade, industry, service or management, and where there are generally no agricultural activities". It is related to the basic structure of the society living in cities and contains the characteristics of the communities that form it. Lapidus evaluates cities in Islamic societies as organizations that include the components of "Empire or state organization, organization of society among sects, tradesman-ahi organizations (guilds), neighborhoods (neighborhood units that have homogeneous socio-economic and religious characteristics)". Neighborhoods are the places where the individual spends most of his time in the city and meets the majority of his needs. The neighborhood, which was inherited from the Ottoman Empire to the present day, continues to exist as the cornerstone of cities that have not lost their essence and preserved their values, although their settlement patterns have changed today (Candan-Kazak, 2019: 1050-1053).

One of the most important factors determining the physical structure of cities in the Ottoman period is the creation of new neighborhoods as an old Turkish tradition. In the 15th century, the establishment period (urbanization) is synonymous with the formation process of new neighborhoods and determines the physical structure of cities. Homogeneous groups consisting of immigrants coming from various centers or villages settled in small-family communities and generally around a religious center, according to their ethnic origins or belonging to the same social, professional or religious groups, and established new neighborhoods. Thus, the formation of the integrity of the neighborhood character in the city, the establishment of neighborhoods formed by communities with different ethnic and religious origins, the development of residential areas with newly created neighborhoods and the emergence of a new city appearance were ensured (Ergenc, 1984: 69). In scientific research on the cultural history of the Turks, it can be proven that the lives of the Turks before they migrated to Anatolia were called nomadic or nomadic and that they generally carried traces of a nomadic lifestyle. Depending on the nomadic culture, the Turks lived a settled life in cities called "balik" in the winter months, while in the summer months, they lived in tents called "otağ", which were easy to make and carry, especially in the plateaus and pastures due to animal husbandry activities. The Turks attached special importance to the dwelling culture. They saw the dwelling as a part of social life and created a systematic in this direction while structuring it. In fact, if an etymological evaluation of the word "house" is made, it is encountered that the same characteristics come to the fore. In Turkish society, the word "house" is a sacred concept like homeland, state and family (Sarı and Kayserili, 2021: 189-190). The house is one of the main elements that form the neighborhood. The house, which is one of the basic elements of the neighborhood, is the center of social life and the place where the family, which forms the core of society, lives, which causes it to be seen as the basic element that creates the neighborhood. The house is also an important place because it creates the neighborhood life and directs this way of life. In the planning of traditional houses, the functional unit and development consists of three elements; room, eyvan (the volume between the rooms), gallery or sofa opening to the courtyard or garden (Işık, 2017: 9).





Photo 1. A view from the courtyard of traditional Şanlıurfa houses.
Source: Author Archive

In traditional neighborhoods, the streets are narrow and the city architecture extends horizontally. Different stones are used according to the area of use in traditional civil architecture. Wood is used in windows and doors and decorations are generally concentrated on doors and windows. Since traditional neighborhood houses are 2-3 stories, 2-3 generations live in the same house and the patriarchal family structure is dominant. This situation has changed with urban transformation, houses have become smaller and as a result families have become smalle. (**Şirin**, **2019**: **316-318**). In traditional neighborhood houses, the outer door would open to the outer courtyard, and the inner door would open to the inner courtyard. The courtyards would form the "freedom areas" of children and women. In one corner of some courtyards, there would be a grape press where molasses was made, a kilim and cloth weaving workshop. In another corner, there would be a stove, a washing stone, a mortar, an oven, a fountain or a well. If the courtyard was large enough, one corner would be turned into a vegetable garden, and the family's vegetable and fruit needs would be met. Families with large gardens would share the vegetables and fruits they produced with their neighbors, and some of them would be distributed to the needy. Women's days were spent almost entirely in the courtyards (Can, 2010).

The street where the traditional neighborhood houses are located is also a remarkable part of the neighborhood. The street, being the basic unit of the neighborhood, directly affects the culture and social life of the neighborhood. Streets are social spaces where common life, sharing, transportation and mobility have emerged since the time when people started living together and social life was adopted. They are important spaces of the human socialization process. People form society on the streets. Children learn life and gain experience on the streets. The front of the street door is also an extension of the house. In this way, the neighborhood sees the neighborhood, is outdoors and watches people. In addition to being a domestic activity, this is also a means of socialization (Özkul and Aydın, 2019: 85-87).

Antep Houses, one of the places that preserves its traditional architectural texture in Turkey; are structures that are isolated from the outside as much as possible, behind high walls and facing Hayat (Courtyard). The console projections made on the second floor of the houses to the street are called kiosks. Such structures, the exterior of which is covered with metal, are also called houses with kiosks. The main entrance of the house is provided by entering hayat from the street. There are spaces such as ocaklık (kitchen), hazna (cellar) and lavatory around hayat. The houses are built as single, two and three stories. Due to the fact that women in the introverted lifestyle are at home all day and life is spent constantly in life, especially in the summer, importance is given to this place. There are flower beds on the edges of hayat and usually a pool called Gane in the middle. The upper floors of the house are reached by external stairs. There are rooms with iwans, usually lined up around the sofa. The upper part of this section, called iwan in the region, is closed and the front side faces the courtyard. The rooms opening to the sofa are multifunctional spaces. These rooms are built in a way that responds to functions that include daily life such as eating, sleeping and sitting. There are also cupboard niches called cubbies for storing food and mattresses in the room (Gaziantep Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2023).



Photo 2. A view of historical Antep houses. Source: Author Archive.

The distinctive feature of the houses reflecting the traditional Harput/Elazığ architecture is spaciousness and airiness. There are wide and high şahnişins and projections. The houses have both outer and inner courtyards and the stone arched outer doors have two wings. The lower floors of the houses are in the form of a warehouse and cellar. On the upper floors, there are harem and selamlık sections. Stone and wood workmanship are important (Elazig Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2023).



Photo 3. A view of the historical Harput street and houses.

Source: https://islamvemedeniyet.firat.edu.tr/tr/page/9698 (Access Date: 31.02.2023).

The old Antakya houses located in the center of Antakya, the central district of Hatay province, have unique structural features in terms of architecture. The houses, also defined as "traditional Antakya houses", are located in the area between the east of the Asi River, which divides the city in two, and the Habib-i Neccar (Silpius) mountain (Cengiz, 2014: 116). Antakya houses, with their high stone walls and generally single or double-storey architecture with rooms arranged around a courtyard, reflect the lifestyle, traditions and customs of the people. Except for the small details exhibited according to the financial situation of the homeowners, the same plan layout is seen in all of the houses. The ancient city streets where the old Antakya houses are located create a unique complex layout as they intersect each other perpendicularly. These streets, which are usually narrow and paved with stones with water channels passing through the middle, also aim to block winds and prevent floods (Hatay Gastronomy, 2023). Apart from these traditional neighborhood examples, other neighborhoods that have preserved their architectural texture in Turkey are as follows:

Ankara: Altındağ, Beypazarı,Antalya: Elmalı, Kaş, Side,

Aydın: Kuşadası,
Bilecik: Osmaneli,
Bolu: Göynük, Mudurnu,
Bursa: Cumalıkızık,
Diyarbakır: Sur, Silvan,
Erzincan: Kemaliye,
Karabük: Safranbolu,

Şanlıurfa: Center.



Photo 4. A view of the narrow streets and houses of historical Hatay Source: https://www.hatayavlu.com/antakyanin-degerleri/ (Access Date: 31.02.2023).

Conclusion

From the foundation of the Ottoman Empire to its collapse, neighborhoods played very important roles. The reforms carried out during the Tanzimat and Early Republic periods, the zoning movements of the municipalities after 1950 and the intense migration from rural to urban areas changed the physical formation of the cities as well as the structure and borders of their neighborhoods. Today, in order to observe the lifestyle and physical texture of old neighborhoods, it is necessary to go to towns such as Göynük, Taraklı and Kemaliye, which have been able to protect themselves from change and whose numbers have decreased considerably. In areas where the social, cultural and economic diversity in the neighborhood, sharing, information, face-to-face communication, social facilities and values, and physical environmental characteristics such as the street-building-human relationship allowing communication regarding the space, pedestrian transportation, access to services, and the size of the neighborhood are strong, the situation of neighborliness and being a neighborhood member continues, while in areas where these characteristics are weak, it is observed that the neighborhood does not have much meaning in the life of the city and the individual.

In Turkey, today, neighborhoods are located within the administrative and scale boundaries of districts and function as auxiliary administrative units that are of little interest to those living there, apart from population and address information, and whose boundaries determined on the map cannot actually be followed. Although the definition of a neighborhood is "an administrative unit within the municipality borders that has similar needs and priorities and has neighborly relations among its residents," it is seen that this definition is not vital in some places. Therefore, these settlements that cannot achieve this integrity within themselves cannot constitute a place in the urban structure. Today, the administrative-socio-cultural and spatial characteristics of the neighborhood mentioned are almost completely disintegrating. One of the most important problems of the neighborhood, whose primary function from the past is especially directed towards administrative-managerial purposes, is the uncertainty of its place within the public administration system; the neighborhood does not have a separate legal personality. Neighborhoods, which are dispersed together with the disintegrating urban spaces, are shifting to different areas in the city and on the city fringes, trying to reformulate, and trying to reestablish a sense of belonging and locality. However, these new formations, rather than being a founding element of the city, seem to be struggles for survival and attachment to the city. The neighborhood scale, with its dimensions awaiting such physical analysis, contains important messages about constructive formations in the context of urban life and spatial quality, together with the accumulations it carries from the past, which still require research.

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