

AN ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS: CASE OF SELIMIYE QUARTER IN WALLED CITY OF NICOSIA, NORTH CYPRUS.

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to quest the quality of life of people in a residential environment in order to determine their level of health and well-being. Quality of life is normally taken to mean the general well being of people and the quality of the environment in which they live.

Quality of life is defined as an interaction of social, health, economic and environmental conditions that have an impact on the development of the individual and society where this is more related to objective values. On the other hand, when it is defined as the sense of well-being of the individual, satisfaction of the individual from his or her life; and the quality of life is emphasized as being related to individual perceptions and senses, this is related to the subjective values.

Quality of life in a residential environment is more related to a group of people who are sharing the common physical, social and environmental conditions where objective values determine the quality of life.

In this study, it has been observed that the physical, social, environmental and economic conditions of people living in the Selimiye Quarter in the Walled City of Nicosia are very low. Therefore, various analyses have been carried out to determine their level of quality of life. Accordingly, physical analysis has been conveyed to assess the physical and environmental conditions where questionnaires and interviews have been conveyed to assess the economic and social conditions.

As a result of the analysis, physical and environmental conditions have been determined that there is high level of obsolescence and physical deterioration in the Selimiye Quarter. Besides, there is very low level of economic conditions and poor social life. The detailed analysis results will be mentioned in the paper together with the strategies for enhancing the quality of life in this area. And finally the implementation stage will be discussed to improve health and well-being of people living in this residential environment.

Keywords: Quality of Life, Residential Environment, Social conditions, Economic conditions, Physical Conditions

Introduction:

QOL may be defined as subjective well-being. Recognizing the subjectivity of QOL is a key to understanding this construct. QOL reflects the difference, the gap, between the hopes and expectations of a person and their present experience. Human adaptation is such that life expectations are usually adjusted so as to lie within the realm of what the individual perceives to be possible. This enables people who have difficult life circumstances to maintain a reasonable QOL (Janssen, 2007).

The meaning of the phrase quality of life differs a good deal as it is variously used but, in general, it is intended to refer to either the conditions of the environment in which people live, (air and water pollution, or poor housing, for example), or to some attribute of people themselves (such as health or educational achievement) (Pacione, 1982; Hills, 1995; Benzeval et al., 1995). Central to this developing interest in quality of life is research into the relationship between people and their everyday urban environments (Pacione, 2003).

The **well-being** or **quality of life** of a population is an important concern also in economics and political science. It is measured by build, social and economic environment. There are many components to well-being. A large part is standard of living, the amount of money and access to goods and services that a person has; these numbers are fairly easily measured. Others like freedom, happiness, art, environmental health, and innovation are far harder to measure. Debate on quality of life is millennia-old, with Aristotle giving it much thought in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and eventually settling on the notion of eudaimonia, a Greek term often

translated as happiness, as central. The neologism **liveability** (or **livability**), from the adjective *liv(e)able*, is an abstract noun now often applied to the built environment or a town or city, meaning its overall contribution to the quality of life of inhabitants (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quality_of_life).

Concepts as livability, living quality, living environment, quality of place, residential-perception and -satisfaction, the evaluation of the residential and living environment, quality of life and sustainability do overlap, and are often used as synonyms—but every so often are contrasted. The different concepts find their origin in the various research and policymaking traditions of health, safety, well-being, residential satisfaction and urban physical environment.

Additionally, the concept quality of life is strongly rooted in the thinking about health. In the model of Newman health is considered as an indicator of livability, while in other models the environmental quality is treated as determinant of health (I van Kamp et al., 2003).

Geographers have introduced the concept of *territorial social indicators* to identify and analyze socio-spatial variations in quality of life at different geographic scales, ranging from global to local. A five-dimensional structure for quality of life research using territorial social indicators has employed objective measures derived either from primary field surveys or from analysis of secondary, normally census-based, data sets. Collectively, this line of research has contributed valuable insights into such questions as the extent and distribution of substandard housing, and the differential incidence of deprivation within the city (Pacione, 2003).

The measurement of quality of life is usually undertaken using indicators, either in the form of objective or subjective indicators. Objective indicators are particularly useful at neighborhood, city and country levels (Liu, 1976; Rogerson, Findlay, Morris & Coombes, 1989). On the other hand, subjective indicators have been employed more at the individual level and measure the individual's level of satisfaction with life as he or she experiences it, that is, they represent a subjective, introspective and personal experience-based concept. Subjective QOL is thus QOL as indicated by the psychological state of life satisfaction rather than by objective conditions and settings (such as physical, social and economic settings), although both are inter-related.

As a result of the definitions, meanings and measures of Quality of life, indicators to determine the level of Quality of Life in residential environments are determined as follows. Theory put forward that quality of life can be measured through the evaluation of build, social and economic environment in general with the help of objective and subjective indicators of quality of life. The analysis of conditions and settings of both built environment and the social environment through objective indicators together with the analysis of individual's level of satisfaction through the subjective indicators will help to determine the level of quality of life in a residential environment.

Accordingly, the physical and functional attributes of the built environment, standard of living, environmental health, access to goods and services, the economic conditions (amount of money) determined as the objective indicators where the aspects like happiness or freedom are determined as the subjective indicators for the assessment of quality of life in the residential environments. The details for the method of measurement through the use of objective and subjective indicators are discussed below based up on the QOL definitions of Quality of Life Research Unit, University of Toronto (also see Table 1).

Assessment Method:

The effect of physical attributes on the quality of life can be measured by the assessment of the physical conditions of the environment through the analysis of physical characteristics of

the buildings' interior and exterior spaces. Besides the buildings, analysis of the physical characteristics of the public exteriors together with the assessment of the attractiveness of the place in general helps to determine the level of quality of life.

Functional diversity is a significant concern which affects the attractiveness of a place and the quality of life. Determination of different functions in an environment is an important tool and helps to assess the functional attributes which share an effective role on the quality of life issue.

Links with social environment, sense of acceptance by intimate others, family friends, co-workers and neighborhood community is important determinants for social belonging and aspects for the assessment of social attributes.

Physical health, personal hygiene, clothing, physical appearance, number of family members or employment are the factors which affect the standard of living.

Existence of health and social services in a residential environment, air quality, access to resources normally available to community members like availability of educational and recreational programs and community activities are the determinants of environmental health and access to goods factors for the assessment of quality of life. Additionally, the assessment of adequacy of income helps to determine the economic conditions of the residents.

The assessment of psychological health and adjustment, cognitions, feelings, evaluations concerning the self and self control, the quest of personal values, spiritual beliefs, person's fit with his/her environment (home, school, work place, community or neighborhood) can help to determine the level of happiness and freedom. On the other hand, the assessment of purposeful activities carried out to achieve personal goals, hopes and wishes, for instance, day to day activities like domestic activities, paid work, volunteer activities, seeing to health or social needs, and activities that promote relaxation and stress reduction like card games, neighborhood walks, family visits and longer duration activities such as vacation or holiday help to determine the level of freedom or happiness can also contribute to the standard of living.

Within the light of this evaluation; in general, the assessment of the attributes mentioned above can help to clarify whether a person; physically able to get around, free of worry and stress or not, have hope for the future, have own ideas of right and wrong, live in an apartment or a house, live in a poor or a rich environment, is close to the people in his/her family, have a spouse or special person, able to get professional services such as medical, social so far, have enough money, do things around his/her house, working at job or going to school, doing outdoor activities like walking, cycling etc. or being able to cope with changes in his or her life, which are the major determinants to state the level of well-being/livability or a quality of life of a human being. The assessment method is given in an ordered way in the table below (see Table 1).

Table 1: Assessment of Quality of life

Indicator	Determinant	Method of assessment
Physical Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Physical characteristics of building interiors and exteriors, -Physical characteristics of public open spaces, -Attractiveness of place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Determining level of obsolescence -Structural condition -Quality of construction Material
Functional Attributes	Functional diversity	Determining variety of functions in the area
Social attributes	-links with social environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questioning sense of acceptance by intimate others -# of family friends
Standard of living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -employment -physical health -personal hygiene -physical appearance and clothing -# of family members -purposeful activities to achieve personal goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -questioning place of employment -observing general appearance, cleanliness, health -determining # of people living in one house -questioning day to day actions (domestic activities, activities promote relaxation and stress reduction) -cleanliness of the living area
Environmental health and access to goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -presence of health and social services -level of air quality -access to resources available to community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -determining existence/proximity of health and social services -determining availability of educational, recreational programs and community activities -cleanliness of the environment
Economic condition	-level of income	-questioning adequacy of income
Happiness and freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -psychological health and adjustment -feelings -personal values -spiritual beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -evaluations concerning the self and self control -questioning person's fit with his/her environment -questioning connections of the person with his/her environment (home, neighborhood, school, work place, community, neighborhood)

Assessment:

Assessment carried out in Selimiye Quarter in the Walled City of Nicosia, North Cyprus. Selimiye Quarter is a traditional area which possesses historical commercial characteristics in the Walled City Nicosia (Doratli et al., 2004). It inhabits lots of monumental buildings together with unique examples of traditional Ottoman and British houses. Narrow organic streets defined by continuous structure of buildings where these double storey buildings have mainly commercial uses on the ground floor and housing on the upper floors. Houses facing streets have rear gardens surrounded with high garden walls. In addition to these unique examples of houses, there are many mosques, khans, baths and a bazaar in the area. Particularly, besides significant examples of Ottoman and British houses, there are some buildings that belong to the Venetian Period. It is possible to see a cultural mosaic in the quarter (Doratli et al., 1997).

The level of quality of life in the Selimiye Quarter determined through the quest of indicators mentioned above through physical, functional analysis and interviews + questionnaire survey carried out in the area. Physical and functional analysis quest the physical attributes and functional attributes of the area. On the other hand, 50 questionnaires were done in the Selimiye Quarter to quest social attributes, standard of living, environmental health, economic condition and freedom/happiness. Questionnaires were composed of two parts. In the first part questions were related to demographic structure, socio-cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the inhabitants as well as human behavior. And the second part was related to the satisfaction from the neighborhood and city besides environmental consciousness.

At first, physical attributes have been analyzed by looking at the physical characteristics of the building interiors and exteriors, physical characteristics of public open spaces, and attractiveness of the place. There are load bearing buildings made up of stone and mud brick with pitched roof structure. In general, they are in poor structural condition with high level of obsolescence both at interiors and exteriors except few renovated ones. On the other hand, narrow organic streets that are defined by continuous building blocks are poor in condition and also insufficient of landscaping and street furnishing elements. There are some public open spaces in various size attached to the street spaces which are filled with rubble which affects the physical image negatively. These negations decrease the attractiveness of place in general (Pasaogullari, 2004).

The assessment on functional attributes, quest the functional diversity through the determination of variety of functions in the area. Selimiye quarter is rich in terms of functional diversity. There are many different uses in the area such as; residential, commercial, recreational, administrative, educational and cultural.

Links with social environment, questioning no. of family friends and sense of acceptance by intimate others help to determine social attributes to measure the level of quality of life. As a result of the interviews and questionnaire survey carried out in the area it is determined that people living in Selimiye quarter have weak links with the social environment since they do not have much connections and communication with people other than their close friends and neighbors. They are living too much introvert and no acceptance by the natives of the area. They have no strong feeling of belongingness to the area. Additionally, interviews and the questionnaire survey results shows that they do not know places other than their living environment and also no ideas about their immediate environments (Fasli, 2003).

Assessment of standard of living which is one of the indicators to measure the level of Quality of Life carried out as a result of questioning the factors like employment, physical health, personal hygiene, people's physical appearance and clothing, # of family members living in one house and the amount of purposeful activities they do to achieve personal goals.

Accordingly, it is interesting to say that only male inhabitants are employed and female are mostly not working anywhere. Additionally, the men are working at temporary jobs and very less number have permanent jobs. Generally 4 or 5 people are living in one house. However, sometimes the number of family members in a house increases to 8 or 10 or more people. People's physical appearance is poor in terms of clothing and personal hygiene is very low. And most of the children are messy looking. They are doing very less number of purposeful activities; for instance, activities such as going to the cinema, theater, exhibition, conference, restaurant or bar are done by 10% only. However, their relationships with close neighbors or family friends are determined as 58%.

In the Selimiye Quarter, there is no health service. The closest one is 1 km away from the Walled City and determined as a result of the analysis that it is intensively used by people living in the Walled City of Nicosia. When environmental health is surveyed, it is observed that especially, during summer time there is a bad smell of rubbish left on the streets which can also affect the personal health. In addition to this, noise pollution in the quarter is excessive.

Mostly, people living in the Selimiye Quarter are low income families which %40 have total income around 500\$ monthly salary, and only 5% have income that is more than 700\$ monthly salary, and the others around 350\$. This is a considerable factor that is effective on the poor state of the physical environment and the personal health. Their income is inadequate for their daily requirements.

Assessment of happiness and freedom analyzed through evaluations concerning the self and self control, questioning person's fit with his/her environment, questioning connections of the person with his/her environment (home, neighborhood, school, work place, community, neighborhood). Accordingly, in general, surprisingly, people are satisfied with their living environment since they have no alternative place to live. Although, majority of population is satisfied with their neighborhood-Selimiye Quarter- if the people had a chance, majority of population would like to live in better environments in terms of building and exterior space qualities besides in an environment where many people know each other.

Evaluation of the Assessment Results

The level of Quality of Life in the Selimiye Quarter can be determined through the evaluation of results of the assessment carried out in the area according to the 7 indicators-Physical Attributes, Functional Attributes, Social Attributes, Standard of Living, Environmental Health and access to goods, Economic Condition, Happiness/Freedom.

As a result of the assessment it has been determined that in terms of Physical Attributes there is a high level of obsolescence in the physical and structural conditions of the buildings. Only few of the buildings physical condition are good. Accordingly, it can be said that this affects the quality of life negatively.

It is determined that Selimiye Quarter is rich in terms of functional diversity and it can be said that variety of uses in the area might affect the quality of life positively.

There is a kind of introvert living of the families since they are just visiting the close friends and close neighbors. Besides, there is no acceptance of these people by the intimate others and weak relationships with the social environment which the mentioned factors affects the quality of life negatively.

Standard of living determined as very low since they have very low income, they have poor appearance in terms of clothing, in some cases there are plenty number of family members living in one house and most of them have not any purposeful activities that might increase there standard of living. The determined issues affect the quality of life negatively.

There is poor environmental hygiene in the area, and inadequate number of health services besides inadequate income which is a considerable factor for the personal health that affects the quality of life in the area negatively in terms of environmental health and economic conditions.

The assessment of quality of life in terms of happiness/freedom determined that people living in the Selimiye Quarter are happy of being in this area since they have no alternative to be in a better environment. Survey resulted that the environment which they migrated from does not have better physical/ functional/ social or environmental conditions compared to the present one. They responded that they are freer in this environment than the previous one. Since they are happy and free, according to them the quality of life they are living is positive. However, when it is evaluated according to the theory and the ideal they should be expecting for more.

Determination of the level of Quality of Life in Selimiye Quarter

Measurement of the level of quality of life can be provided through the scaling of the factors which affect the 7 indicators of Quality of Life. Accordingly, the scale range determined as satisfactory- average- and poor. The level can be measured by checking the number of factors in poor condition, average condition and satisfactory condition.

Table 2: Assessment results

Indicator	Method of assessment	Assessment (Range: satisfactory-average-poor)
Physical Attributes (Physical characteristics of building interiors and exteriors, Physical characteristics of public open spaces, Attractiveness of place)	-Determining level of obsolescence	Poor
	-Structural condition	Poor
	-Quality of construction material	Average
Functional Attributes (functional diversity)	Determining variety of functions in the area	Satisfactory
Social attributes (links with social environment)	Questioning sense of acceptance by intimate others	Poor
	-# of family friends	Average
Standard of living (employment, physical health, personal hygiene, physical appearance and clothing, # of family members, purposeful activities to achieve personal goals)	-questioning place of employment	Poor
	-observing general appearance, cleanliness, health	Poor
	-determining # of people living in one house	Poor
	-questioning day to day actions (domestic activities, activities promote relaxation and stress reduction)	Poor
	-cleanliness of the living area	Poor
Environmental health and access to goods (presence of health and social	-determining existence/proximity of health and social services	Poor

services, level of air quality, access to resources available to community members)	-determining availability of educational, recreational programs and community activities	Satisfactory
	-cleanliness of the environment	Average
Economic condition (level of income)	-questioning adequacy of income	Poor
Happiness and Freedom (psychological health and adjustment, feelings, personal values, spiritual beliefs)	-evaluations concerning the self and self control	Average
	-questioning person's fit with his/her environment	Poor
	-questioning connections of the person with his/her environment (home, neighborhood, school, work place, community, neighborhood)	Poor

There are 18 indicators which affects the quality of life. As a result of the assessment it is determined that 12 (66.6%) indicators are in poor condition, 4 (22.2%) indicators are in average condition and only 2 (11.2 %) indicators are in satisfactory condition. The results proof that generally the quality of life in Selimiye Quarter is low although the functional diversity and availability of educational, recreational programs & community activities is satisfactory.

When it is evaluated in a detailed manner, the poor condition of the physical attributes is the reason since the buildings are too old and needs to be renovated. However, low level of income of the families living in these buildings is the most effective factor on the poor structural and physical condition of the buildings. The efforts of these families to refurbish these buildings are both inadequate and also inappropriate. The techniques and methods that are carried out by them harm the buildings' architectural quality and structural conditions which decreases the level of quality of life.

The assessment of functional attributes determined as satisfactory which increase the quality of life positively. However, people living in the Selimiye Quarter mostly do not take advantage of these places due to their low level education and cultural background. Despite of the results achieved in Table 2 that this factor affect QoL positively in general, in reality, personally people's quality of life do not effected positively though functional diversity of the area since they do not get benefit of the existing situation.

In order to increase the level of Quality of Life in the Selimiye Quarter, the physical quality of the built environment should be improved by the supports of local and governmental authorities since the residents have no right knowledge to maintain besides low level of income. Additionally, self and environmental consciousness should be increased in order to orient this people to take advantage of the community activities taking place in the area. On the other hand, increase in the level of standard of living can be satisfied when female member of the family support the male members' income through doing additional works to earn some money even at home. Also, the ideal number of family in one house is one and the # of people living in one house should be optimized as one family not more. Besides these, services given by the local authorities should be increased especially on environmental maintenance and cleanliness, and the people should support these services. Furthermore, as the final suggestion, a closer health service should be provided at the area for personal health. The realization of the mentioned factors can help to increase the level of quality of life in the Selimiye Quarter.

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