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## An Assessment for "Quality of Life! through "Urban Poverty" Perspective

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**Regional Integration:**  
Europe, the Mediterranean  
and the World economy

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## **An Assessment for “Quality of Life” through “Urban Poverty” Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Quality of Life, as the holistic experience of life, occurs through the interaction of resources and conditions of life and society’s needs, expectations and evaluations concerning those resources and conditions. Land use attributes and their spatial organization, public services and utilization of these services are regarded as the main indicators of Quality of Life (QoL) in an urban environment. As assessments for these indicators bring out the geography of QoL in a city, they also reveal the forms of deprivations faced in the city. In other words, QoL research in urban areas can depict the deprivation forms those the vulnerable social groups suffer in poor neighbourhoods.

With a conceptualization of urban poverty as the state of cumulative deprivations which occurs through the interaction of different domains and dimensions of life, this paper aims to discuss, if an urban QoL research can act as a tool to fight against urban inequality and poverty. With this aim, indicators of QoL are analyzed and compared among different neighbourhoods and socio-economic groups in residential areas of İstanbul.

The findings of the paper indicate the spatial differentiation of QoL as well as the forms and levels of deprivations which the vulnerable social groups face in İstanbul. Through the assessment of QoL, the results indicate that level QoL differ in İstanbul following the pattern of residential area characteristics such as development type, urban fabric and spatial integration to the infrastructure and public services. In this context, residential areas located on the outskirts and previously started to develop as squatter settlements are subject to urban poverty in terms of multiple deprivations and spatial and social disintegration. The study results lead to spatially addressed policies and strategies which would enhance QoL and defeat urban poverty in deprived neighbourhoods in İstanbul. Finally the paper questions if an understanding of QoL through the perspective of urban poverty offers the possibilities of social equity and integration of the vulnerable social groups to the urban social fabric.

## Introduction

Quality of Life (QoL) has been a topic gaining in importance day by day, in a wide range of research and practice field, such as the economics and the urban planning. Most of the time, through the QoL framework, problems such as the disparities between regions and different social groups, unequal distribution of wealth, inequalities in accessibility for fundamental public services, rapid urbanization and industrialization and the threats on environment are taken into consideration (van Kamp, 2003). Furthermore, QOL researches aim to answer such questions as, if social development has been created or not, if the current policies are capable of satisfying people's needs or not and if the investments that have been made are worth for or not (Diener et al, 1997). These questions also confirm Rapley's (2003) statement which describes QoL research field as a pragmatic effort more than an academic field.

Quality of Life, as the holistic experience of life, is a multidimensional concept, which considers different domains of life and is produced through the combination and interaction of different domains. As it is a multidimensional concept, it is also a multidisciplinary research field concerning all the different experts of the domains of life (Cummins 2000). These statements concerning the nature of the QoL concept indicate that it is a context-dependent, research methodology dependent and a dynamic concept. Therefore the literature gives different cases indicating that QOL definitions, research methodologies and QOL indicators differ from one research to another, according to research aims and research scales (van Kamp et al. 2003). Last but not least, the literature gives evidence that there have always been efforts for defining QOL in order to reach an operational definition of the concept and all of which had the underlying meaning of "good life" or "high standards" in common (Rapley, 2003).

Although there is diversity for indicators of QoL, when Urban QoL is the issue of concern, it would be expected that the indicators cover land use attributes and their spatial organization, public services and utilization of these services in the urban environment. Furthermore, the interaction of resources and conditions of life and society's needs, expectations and evaluations concerning those resources and conditions would also be among the issues that should be taken into consideration in order to reveal the QoL in an urban environment (Rapley, 2003; Cummins, 1999; Pacione, 1982; van Kamp et al. 2003).

Usually QoL assessments in urban environments are interpreted as an indicator of livability which is often considered in terms of livability of cities and the economic values produced through. On the other hand, as assessments for QoL indicators bring out the geography of QoL in a city, they also reveal the forms of deprivations faced in the city. In other words, QoL research in urban areas can depict the deprivation forms those the vulnerable social groups suffer in poor neighborhoods. This research suggests that QoL framework would substitute as a tool for depicting urban poverty.

Urban poverty is conceptualized as the state of cumulative deprivations in an urban environment. Such a standpoint implies that urban poverty is more than economic deficiency but is a multidimensional state which occurs through the different domains and dimensions of urban life. Urban poverty problem is linked to deficiencies in urban management and policies which result with problems concerning infrastructure, public services and accessibility of education and health services and contribute to social exclusion in cities. Indicators of urban poverty cover issues of integration to labour market, housing right, quality of housing and infrastructure, environmental quality, economic and physical access to health, education and other public services, financial and social vulnerability and other personal risks such as personal health conditions, drug and alcohol use, lack of support for children etc. Assessments for each of these indicators in return yield urban policies and strategies in order to fight against urban poverty. Finally it should be noted that urban poverty is location based. The processes urban poverty arises and is experienced differ from one location to another. Especially in housing areas, as long as neighborhoods' physical and social conditions differ from one another, deprivation forms, levels and coping mechanisms as well, are also unique. The importance of location for urban poverty indicates that it is necessary to consider location factor when assessing urban poverty. Location based evaluations for urban poverty first of all provides a multidimensional evaluation which considers the relations between different aspects of urban poverty. Finally, location based evaluations for urban poverty provides the insights for location based policies through which strategies could be addressed especially in terms of provision of public services. (Curley, 2005; Baharoglu and Kessides, 2004; Wratten, 1995).

Following these brief explanations on "QoL in an urban environment" and "urban poverty", it should be noted that both concepts are multidimensional concerning different domains of life and urban environment. Assessments for both urban QoL and urban poverty, in the end, depict the availability of the resources and the opportunities of life. In addition to this, location, especially housing and its environment is an important factor for both QoL and "urban poverty". Through this framework, a descriptive assessment for basic housing conditions and socio-economic profile in residential areas of Istanbul is held, in order to reveal the QoL / Urban Poverty in this paper.

In the paper, among the QoL / urban poverty indicator groups of public services, especially urban green areas are considered. As one of the fundamental public services, green areas are regarded as a matter of social equity, in terms of availability and physical, social and economic accessibility. As urban green areas provide a resource for the public for recreational needs, physical activity which improves health conditions, social interaction especially for women and elderly, learning and experiencing for the children through play. In addition to these, urban green areas affect environmental quality through their ecological and physical aspects, such as improving air quality and providing a balance for density and openness of built environments (Dunnet et al., 2002). Eventually urban green areas are one

of the fundamental public services which would enhance QoL in urban areas and a tool to tackle urban poverty in areas of deprivation.

Finally, this paper is based on the findings of the author's dissertation (Kisar-Koramaz, 2010) and other studies prepared and presented in different conferences (Kisar-Koramaz, 2012; Kisar-Koramaz and Turkoglu, 2010a; Kisar-Koramaz and Turkoglu, 2010b) all of which cover issues of QoL, housing and urban green areas through different perspectives and in the case of Istanbul. This paper aims to re-evaluate those findings through the framework of urban poverty and particularly focusing on neighborhood characteristics, socio-economic profile and urban green areas as a particular case for public services.

## **States of Quality of Life and Urban Poverty in Residential Areas of Istanbul**

The findings and interpretations in the following section are based on a survey study held in residential areas of Istanbul, during June – July 2009. The data consists of 474 face-to-face interviews, and it covers issues of QoL with a specific focus on residential environment and green areas, social relations and health issues. The residential areas used in the survey study are categorized in four groups, reflecting the development processes and the socio-economic profiles in neighborhoods. Each residential area category is labeled as follows and their spatial distribution can be seen in Figure 1.

- **“Gr.FD-Ld; Formally developed - Low density Residential Areas”**, (116 respondents)
- **“Gr.FD-Md; Formally developed - Medium density Residential Areas”**, (120 respondents)
- **“Gr.ID-Ld; Informally developed - Low density Residential Areas”**, (118 respondents)
- **“Gr.ID-Hd; Informally developed - High density Residential Areas”**, (120 respondents)

Formally developed residential areas (Gr.FD-Ld and Gr.FD-Md) comprise traditional settlements in Istanbul which developed in the earlier periods. These settlements developed through planning regulations and urban development plans. Among them there are also mass housing settlements which developed according to specific plans and projects. Among the neighborhoods in formally developed low density residential areas (Gr.FD-Ld) are traditional housing located among Bosphorus and mass housing areas located in Besiktas and Bakirkoy. Neighborhoods in formally developed medium density residential areas (Gr.FD-Md) are traditional housing and mass housing areas located along Marmara sea, on both sides of the city. Neighborhoods of Gr.FD-Ld have low density values (30-120 person/ha; 0,3-1,6 BCR) while density of Gr.FD-Md neighborhoods can be referred as medium compared to the other groups (110-630 person/ha; 1,6-2,8 BRC). Generally in formally developed residential areas, observations for the quality of the neighborhood environment and quality of the building structure are significantly higher than the informally developed residential areas. In addition to this, environmental quality and building structure quality is the highest particularly in formally developed low density residential area neighborhoods. Similarly

residents in formally developed neighborhoods evaluate their neighbourhoods in terms of maintenance and accessibility more positively when compared to the residents of informally developed neighborhoods. Finally a consideration for availability and accessibility of urban green areas, as one of the public services indicates that neighborhoods of formally developed residential areas especially those located along the Marmara Sea coast are in better conditions (Figure 2). Residents' use of urban green areas and their evaluations for the green areas in their neighborhoods are higher especially in formally developed medium density residential areas. Finally residents' satisfaction from their neighborhood environment is high in formally developed residential area groups. Last but not least, following the relatively better neighborhood quality levels, both of the formally developed neighborhoods have high land values (63.000-490.000 TL for Gr.FD-Ld and 80.000-450.000 TL for Gr.FD-Md).

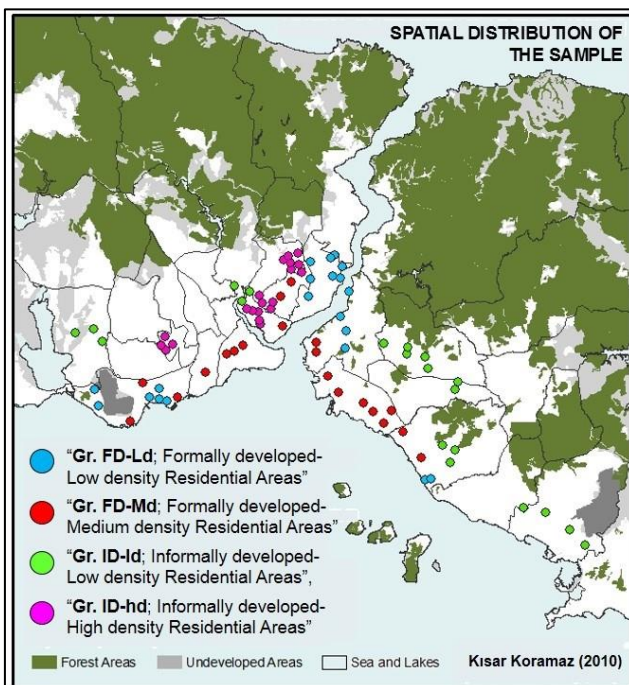


Figure 1: Spatial distribution of the sample (Kisar-Koramaz, 2010)

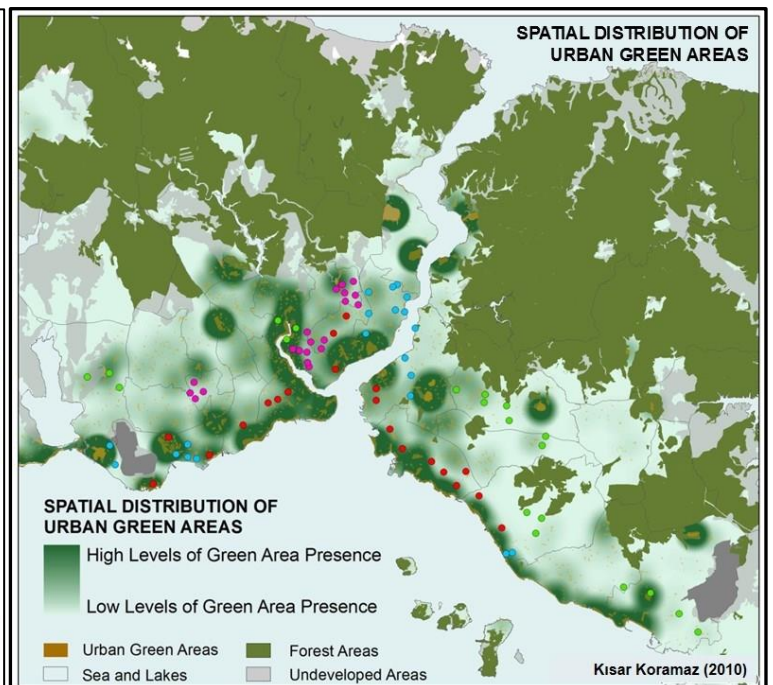


Figure 2: Spatial distribution of urban green areas (Kisar-Koramaz, 2010)

When residents' socio-economic profile is considered, it would not be wrong to say that socio-economic structure of the residents overlaps with the environmental quality indicators and land values of the neighborhoods. Formally developed low density residential areas, with the highest land values and environmental quality indicators, also have the highest socio-economic profile in terms of education and income level. In this group more than half of the residents are graduated from university (67%) and are in high income group (65%), as well as higher figures for self-employees (35%). In other words, formally developed low density residential area group represents the highest social profile among all residential area groups. On the other hand, in formally developed medium density residential areas, middle

income group comprises approximately the majority (48%), and proportions of low income and high income groups are in approximate figures. For education level, proportions of high school graduates (40%) and university graduates (41%) are in similar figures and together they comprise the majority in this residential area group. Likewise, in this residential area group, proportions of employees, house-women and retirees are also approximate. From these figures it may be noted that formally developed medium density residential area groups can be considered as middle class citizens while the formally developed low density groups give a higher profile.

Informally developed residential areas which are labeled as Gr.ID-Ld and Gr.ID-Hd had started to develop as squatter areas. Most of these informally developed residential areas are legalized in time and planning efforts were also made in order to rehabilitate the quality of the environment. Even so, the figures still indicate that the building quality and the environmental quality are still very low in informally developed residential areas. Neighborhoods in informally developed low density residential areas (Gr. ID-Ld) are located on the periphery, particularly on the Anatolian side. The density figures (population density: 50-280 person/ha; BCR: 0,5-1,5) indicate that development process of these neighborhoods is still uncompleted. On the other hand, informally developed high density residential areas (Gr.ID-Hd) comprise densely constructed settlements with the highest density figures (300-840 person/ha and 1,8-3,3 BCR), and they are located surrounding the city center and sub-centers on the European side. For both of the informally developed residential areas, environmental quality and building structure quality is very low when compared to the formally developed residential areas. Similarly residents have negative evaluations for maintenance, accessibility and safety of their neighborhoods. In addition to this, Figure 2 indicates the deficiencies in terms of urban green areas in informally developed residential areas. Especially availability of urban green areas is very low for informally developed low density residential areas which are located on the outskirts on the Anatolian side. It should also be noted that the availability of urban green areas on the informally developed high density residential areas is also very low when the green area sizes and high population densities are considered. Residents' evaluations for urban green areas in their neighborhoods are negative and satisfactions are very low. Not surprisingly all of these figures for neighborhood quality lead to low levels of neighborhood satisfaction. Finally it should also be noted that both of the informally developed residential areas have low land values (5500-40.000 TL or ID-Ld and 10.000-50.000 TL for ID-Hd).

Figures for the socio-economic structure of the informally developed residential areas indicate low socio-economic profiles. More than half of the respondents of informally developed residential area groups have only completed primary education. Likewise in ID-Ld 65% of the respondents and in ID-Hd 63% of the respondents are in low income group which refers to a monthly household income less than 1000 TL. Assessments for employment status indicators indicate that in informally developed residential areas (ID-Ld and ID-Hd), higher proportions of house-women and lower proportions of employees are observed.

Especially relatively low numbers of students and retirees and high numbers of unemployed are accommodated in informally developed-low density residential areas those located on the outskirts of the city. These figures indicate that residents' integration to the macro systems of the society such as the education system and the labour market is low. On the other hand, when social relations and social networks of the residents in informally developed residential areas are considered, it should be noted that these residents have mostly spatially dependent relations. In other words in informally developed residential areas neighboring relations are stronger when compared to their spatially independent relations such as relations with friends and acquaintances from school, work etc. Following the size of the networks, the level of social support received from neighbors is also high among the informally developed residential area neighborhoods. Here it should also be noted that for these particular social groups especially in poor neighborhoods, these kind strong relations are referred as a coping mechanism in order to survive in those negative conditions. However in formally development residential areas, residents do not have such networks based on neighboring relations.

## **Conclusion**

The findings given in this paper, particularly concerns indicators of neighborhood quality and socio-economic profiles in formally and informally developed residential areas of Istanbul. Following these findings, it should be noted that formally developed residential areas are in better conditions in terms of neighborhoods' environmental quality, building quality and user evaluations and satisfaction levels as well. Likewise, in formally developed residential areas, residents' socio-economic profile is higher which indicates a stronger integration to the society. In Istanbul case, these results would be interpreted as states of higher QoL in formally developed residential areas.

On the other hand, such a QoL assessment for the informally residential areas, reveal the particular forms and levels of deprivations in these areas. The findings indicate that low quality of the environment and the building structure, deficiency of urban green areas as one of the public services, are accompanied by the low socio-economic profile and weak integration to the society both in terms of integration to the macro systems and integration through social relations. All of these results lead to the state of urban poverty in informally developed residential areas. These results also point at the vulnerability of the residents and the openness to the risks both in terms of economic problems, loss of social ties and earthquake risk as well.

In conclusion, the findings given in this paper would contribute in policies which aim tackling urban poverty in informally developed residential areas. Among them, strategies such as provision of new urban green areas and improving quality of the existing ones would contribute in increasing the QoL in informally developed residential areas and tackling



particular forms of urban poverty. Especially, when the women's, elderly's and children's demands and requirements for socializing in their own neighborhood environments are considered provision of available and appropriate urban green areas in neighborhood environments gains in importance more than ever. But it should also be noted that, provision and improvement of neighborhood green areas would only be complementary in tackling urban poverty.

Before concluding, it is obvious that the findings which are based on previous studies on QoL in residential areas of Istanbul, have all pointed to the remark that especially the low income groups whose social integration is low in terms of structural and interactive dimensions, mostly suffer from deficiencies concerning urban green areas. Also it seemed that improvement of the green areas should be considered crucial as an urban strategy in order to improve their QoL. However, in Istanbul, very recently, the Gezi Resistance events which started by the end of May 2013 and the way they continued in different and new forms, yields new questions. Following these new events, in further studies, the role, function and the meaning given to urban green should be questioned again.

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