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Research Article

Understanding Social Cohesion from the Perspective of the Host Community: Turkey Example

Sosyal Uyumu Ev Sahibi Topluluğun Perspektifinden İncelemek: Türkiye Örneği

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ABSTRACT

According to recent statistics from the DGMM (Directorate General of Migration Management of Turkey), more than 3,5 million Syrian refugee people are living in Turkey. This number, however, reflects only registered Syrians, not the many unregistered Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers also living in Turkey. In order to cope with the refugee crisis, various projects are being conducted through the support of national and international funds. Social cohesion has been identified as a key to integrating host and refugee communities. Socio-cultural activities hve been designed to include participants from both communities. In this context, this study aims to discover the attitudes of Turks toward social cohesion which is promoted to be built between them and refugees. This limited research relied on a semi-structured in-depth interview technique as research methodology for a random sample of 45 residents of Ankara living in neighborhoods that contain a high number of refugees. The main reason of limiting the number of participants with 45 was related to reputation. According to findings, the members of the host community are in favor of developing social contact with refugees; however, misinformation and rumors, language barriers, and a lack of social connection were considered as the main factors affecting the negative attitudes of the host community members towards refugees.

Keywords: Syrian refugee, Social cohesion, Host community, In-depth interview, Turkey

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1. Introduction

Along with political conflicts and turbulence, economic problems led to migration flows from Syria to mainly Europe and the USA. Another popular destination was Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the crisis in 2011 was incomparable with the previous ones in terms of volume and nature of migration (Yazgan, Utku and Sirkeci, 2015, p.185).

Since the crisis in 2011, 13,1 million Syrian people have been in need and 6.1 million have left their country[1]. According to the DGMM[2] (Directorate General of Migration Management), as of 24.07.2020 Turkey is host to more registered Syrian refugees – 3.604.226 – than any other country. According to the latest records from the DGMM[3], approximately 97.414 Syrian refugees are living in Ankara, the capital. One of Ankara's most crowded districts, Altindag, is even called "Little Aleppo" due to the high Syrian refugee population. Many markets and small-sized companies conduct business in Arabic, serving the local Syrian population[4]. Therefore, in these regions the host community members and Syrian refugees have much more frequent contact than in other areas in Ankara. Furthermore, the professional experience of the author in the related projects conducted in those regions make Ankara a suitable location to examine the main issue of this article. The selection of Ankara is also related to the author's direct observations of this region.

Since the Syrian refugee influx, the status of refugees and subsequently the state of social cohesion have been dominant in socio-political issues in Turkey. The framework of Turkish migration policy was formed by two main legal documents: the 1934 Settlement Law and the 1951 Geneva Convention. Both include the legal terms governing the flows of immigrants and asylum seekers in the country. In addition to the Geneva Convention, additional Protocol was adopted in 1967 upon the status of refugees (Içduygu, 2015, p. 4). Turkey was a signatory country to both "time limitation" and "geographical limitation" of the 1951 Convention. However, in the 1967 Protocol, Turkey accepted only the "geographical limitation", which concerned the determination of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and their status as "persons who have become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe" (Özden, 2013, p. 5). The provision ignores the possibility that non-Europeans might legally qualify for refugee or asylum seeker status. For this reason, early on in the Syrian crisis (2011 to 2014), Syrian refugees were considered "guests" rather than "refugees". They had few civil rights and were not allowed to benefit from any social programs in the country. For Baban et al. (2017, p. 45-46) the "guest" status was a sort of limbo, where the refugee was neither a guest nor a refugee. Being deprived of basic needs and social rights led to worsening conditions for the displaced Syrians.

As the Syrian refugee population increased dramatically so did the need for a settlement policy, which brought about new regulation in 2014. Under the control of the General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM), Turkey has granted "conditional refugee status" to Syrian refugees. Now Syrian refugees gained the right to register for a Temporary Protection (TP) identification card. This card, following certain regulations, has allowed them to access basic social services such as health, education, and employment (Benedetta, 2015, p. 44; Içduygu, 2015, p. 9).

1 Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html, (Accessed date: 02.02.2018)
2 Available at: https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638, (Accessed date: 04.08.2020)
3 Available at; http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713, (Accessed date: 04.08.2020)
4 Availableat;http://www.milliyet.com.tr/altindag-da-bir-suriye-mahallesi/pazar/haberdetay/29.01.2017/2386604/default.htm; (Accessed date: 01.08.2018) https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1183892-bu-mahalle-ankaranin-sami-oldu; (Accessed date: 01.08.2018); https://www.trthaber.com/haber/yasam/ankaranin-bu-ilcesinde-30-bin-suriyeli-bariniyor-203090.html, (Accessed date: 01.08.2018)

To cope more effectively with the refugee issue, Turkish authorities have also started to cooperate with other local and international organizations. In this vein, various local and international NGOs, UN agencies, and EU and governmental organizations are working collaboratively to minimize the potential for conflicts between the two sides[5]. Social cohesion, along with the humanitarian aid, has also become a buzzword in large and small-sized projects, public discussions and research studies. In particular, the term 'social cohesion' has been popularized by the government and international organizations in order to conceptualize and promote communication between the host community members and refugees. In this context, the current study focuses mainly on this term instead of the similar and widely used concept 'social integration'. Although these two concepts are similar; 'social cohesion' points to the importance of social unity within the tension between individual freedom and social order, while the term 'social integration' addresses the regularized nature of face-to-face interactions and is based on the reproduction of institutions for social order. On the other hand, both are related to the formation of social order in a society (Jansen, Chioncel and Dekkers, 2006, p.190-192).

Most of the studies concerning Syrian refugees have been linked to two research questions: What are the attitudes of Syrian refugees towards Turkish people? (Erdoğan, 2014; Apak, 2015; Karasu, 2016; Kağnıcı, 2017), and how are refugees represented via the media tools? (Efe, 2015; Pandır et al., 2015; Şen, 2017; Boztepe, 2017; Çebi, 2017). On the other hand, some research papers and reports have centered upon other social factors such as religion or legal problems as they relate to social cohesion (Dinçer et al., 2013; Özden, 2013; Içduygu, 2015; Lazarev&Sharma, 2017; Baban et al., 2017). Unlike the others, the research by Şimşek (2018), which was conducted with Syrian refuges living in Turkey, argued that having economic resources supports accelerates the integration process with the host community members. Aydin, Gündoğdu and Akgul (2019) analyzed the integration process of Syrian refugees in Turkey within the context of education. They found that although the integration of refugee children into the national education system is crucial, the content of educational programs lack any discussion with regards to integration and multiculturalism. For the most part, those research papers were based on an analysis of social integration or cohesion from the refugees' perspective.

Therefore, this research is based on the host community's point of view, and their perception of the social cohesion process, and of the Syrians themselves. An examination of attitudes as expressed in the selected sample. In this context, research questions are as follows:

1. What do the Turkish host community members think about the Syrian refugees?
2. Do they support the state of social cohesion as it is?
3. What are the main obstacles to the establishment of social cohesion?
4. How can social cohesion be nurtured?

Within the framework of the research, first, the concept of social cohesion will be thoroughly discussed. Then, research findings will be analyzed within the specific categories. The results will be evaluated in the conclusion.

2. Conceptualization of Social Cohesion

The term 'social cohesion' originated from the Latin word, "cohaerere" which means "to stick" or "to be tied together". In general, this concept emphasizes the shared sense of communi-

5 For comprehensive information check the report prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies of Turkey, see link; available at: http://ailetoplum.aile.gov.tr/data/5429366a369dc32358ee2a92/calistay_raporu.pdf, (Accessed date: 02.03.2018)

ty and solidarity (Grimalda & Tanzler, 2018, p. 4). Social cohesion was widely used and examined in sociology research starting mainly with studies of Durkheim. However, French sociologist Le Bon's work "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind" published in 1897 can be considered the initial reference for social cohesion studies (Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2018). In the 1990s, social cohesion became a phenomenon on account of globalization, economic inequality, and immigration (Dilhey & Dragolov, 2016, p. 164).

Based on the Theory of Collective Behavior and Contagion, Le Bon (1896: 229-230) prioritised cohesion as a factor in the establishment of unity or a "whole" amongst members of society. In support of Le Bon's ideas about the individual unconscious identification, in 1921 Freud described social cohesion as the "identification of one individual with others that share the same characteristics and provide intense emotional senses" (Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2018, p. 3). Durkheim (1984, p. 60) explained the concept of social cohesion as the conformity of each individual's consciousness to a common type. As Friedkin (2004) pointed out, this can be defined as a holistic structure covering the group membership, behaviors and all social processes of the individuals. Above all, cohesiveness is a result of all the forces acting on the members to remain in the group. It is the desire or endeavor to belong to a group (Festinger et al., 1952, p. 7-22). In this way, social cohesion can be described as the common values and purposes intended to maintain in the society a solidarity grounded in a sense of belonging, and shared by people from diverse backgrounds (Cheong et al., 2007, p. 28).

The word "integration" was derived from the Latin term for "integer" which refers to "complete" or "whole" (Mortensen, 1999, p. 13). This term underscores the establishment of holistic structure of a society without losing its heterogeneity. In this context, initial social integration theory traces back to the studies of theorists such as Durkheim, Marx and Spencer. Marxist analysis centered upon the communal division of labor including various dichotomies such as town-country, production-circulation and so on. The approach was mainly related to class consciousness (Keyes, 1998, p. 122). Spencer's "utilitarian" view sought to understand functional integration within the scope of society, defined as organismic analogy. He underscored the mutual relation between cooperation and solidarity within the integration. As society facilitates cooperation, so cooperation makes society possible (Corning, 1982, p. 360). Society develops an increasingly integrated social whole (McKinnon, 2010, p. 442). Amongst them, Durkheim problematized individualism in a social order in terms of the integration process (Gough & Olofsson, 1999, p. 1-2). In this vein, he scrutinized the connection between suicide motivations and the problem of social cohesion (Pahl, 1991).

Out of this social cohesion emerged a moral community based on mutual trust (Larsen, 2014, p.2). As Helliwell and Wong (2011: 42) stated, because humans are social beings, trust is an essential component for any social setting. If trust cannot be built between the parties, no social connection will be formed. To establish trust, either past experiences or longer social interaction need to exist. In case of different cultural and social contexts, social interaction must be conducted over an extended period of time (Alesina & Ferrara, 2002, p. 210). Therefore, to build a healthy "consensus" process is seen as the main idea or aim in social cohesion definitions (Bruhn, 2009, p. 47).

In general, social cohesion consists of five different domains: 1) common values and civic culture (common aims and objectives, common moral principles, etc.); 2) social order and social control (tolerance and effective informal social control); 3) social solidarity (harmonious social and economic development); 4) social networks (high degree of social interaction), and 5) place attachment and identity (strong attachment to place and place identity). (Forrest & Kearns, 2001, p. 2129).

Social cohesion, unlike other measures of the health of a society, can be described as the connection between various societal units such as individuals, groups, and associations. (Schmitt-Berger, 2000, p. 2). From this perspective, social cohesion has become a watchword of social policy approaches since 1990's. The Canadian Government has been among the first to use the term 'social cohesion' in the context of long-term social policies. The main purpose of using this concept is to promote multiculturalism in a society. Social integrity, relatively balanced income distribution, employment, housing, healthcare and access to education systems have been identified as the indicators of the social cohesion (Chan, To and Chan, 2006, p. 277-278). Within the framework of the social policies, policy documents of the Canadian Government, the French Government, the OECD and The Club of Rome have underlined five common principles of social cohesion (Schmitt-Berger, 2000, p. 3; Jenson, 1998): *Belonging, Inclusion, Participation, Recognition,* and *Legitimacy.*

Considering the above-mentioned principles, social cohesion can be defined as the complicated process beginning with an individual's belonging to any society. This period is followed by experiences of inclusion, participation, and recognition. The final phase is the legitimacy, or membership in the society. As Dandy and Pe-Pua (2015, p. 340-341) wrote, the belonging phase can be understood as a sense of connectedness. Inclusion means access to key resources such as employment, health care, and education on equal basis. Participation refers to communal/political/civil participation. Recognition, on the other hand, is about mutual tolerance and respect. Legitimacy describes a more formalized, legally significant validation of ones' 'belonging'.

In order to establish and preserve this fragile social cohesion, the state is collaborating with local NGOs and other institutions. Thus, civic integration and social cohesion have come to be interrelated: the development of each leads to the establishment of a holistic social integration.

In 2008, The Council of Europe defined social cohesion as something similar to social solidarity, in that "individuals and groups feel common cause with others and can recognize and are prepared to act for the collective good, seeing themselves as members of the community" (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 8). The related report of the Council therefore claims social cohesion involves social factors, together with economic, political, and cultural factors. This framework consists of five main dimensions: solidarity, shared values, a sense of belonging, trust among the members, and a reduction of inequalities (Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2018, p. 5).

Given the above-mentioned characteristics and dimensions, social cohesion can be defined as a "social glue" for maintaining social order holistically. This order should be based on reciprocity and mutual trust, and shaped by common standards (Stovring, 2012, p. 135). Therefore, as Maxwell (1996) stated, social cohesion refers to a multi-faceted process aimed at building shared values, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and most importantly, enabling individuals to become members of the community.

Among the many factors of reciprocal influence on the state of social cohesion, racial diversity, economic inequality, education, historical events, GDP, subjective well-being, and health have been outlined widely (Grimalda & Tanzler, 2018: 5-7). However, this list can be extended depending on cultural context. For Turkey, Lazarev and Sharma (2017) highlighted the influence of religion on social cohesion between Turkish host communities and Syrian refugees. The authors believe that religion could serve as the basis for a shared sense of community to reduce prejudice and redraw social boundaries. On the other hand, Beltekin (2016) underscored the role of education in the social integration process of Syrian refugees. In the framework of economic conditions, Ceritoğlu et al. (2017) focused on the Syrian refugees' effects of on host community's

labor market. The current study aims to analyse the host community's perception of the social cohesion process and to suggest ideas for the development of the process.

3. Research Method

Based on qualitative research methodology an in-depth semi-structured interview technique was used in the study. The descriptive structure of qualitative research methods allows the researcher to draw a general portrait of the selected research problem (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.808). The appropriateness of this method is related to its ability to yield a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints of the participants concerning any issue (Erdoğan, 2003; Lindloff & Taylor, 2005). Exploration and probing of respondents' viewpoints promotes a deeper understanding of any specific issue. Such a structure allows the interviewer to pose follow-up questions, and observe the situation in a comprehensive way (Erdoğan, 2003, p. 190; Arıkan, 2011, p. 69). Based on this research technique, thematic categorizing was used to identify the common schemes. Thematic categorizing is an effective tool to identify, analyze and report the patterns (themes) in qualitative research (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). In this vein, the identified themes helped to summarize the impressions of the participants. In this context, seven main categories were determined for the analysis of findings.

Fifteen main questions were identified and posed to a total 45 participants. Additional relevant questions were sometimes asked during the course of the interview. The interviews were carried out face-to-face. A voice recorder was used with the participants' consent in order to more effectively analyze the responses. The participants were selected by random sampling. The interviews were conducted with 45 Turkish (23 male, and 22 female) participants living in the Altındağ and Mamak districts of Ankara, where there is a high refugee population As stated above, the main reason for selecting those regions are related to their large refugee populations and direct observations of the author.

As stated above, the main reason of selecting this methodology is to reveal the attitudes and perspectives of the host community members. Because of the delicate nature of the issue, all ethical principles were followed, and the participants were informed about the purpose and content of the research prior to the interviews. On the other hand, the number of participants was limited to 45 due to the repetition of perspectives.

4. Findings

The findings of this limited research derive from 45 in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting from 22 to 43 minutes. All the interviews were conducted and transcribed by the author. The interview transcripts were likewise translated from Turkish into English by the author. In accordance with the privacy statement, the information related to sex, age and profession of participants were mentioned. In order to analyze the findings, seven common categories were designated:

4.1. Who is Syrian Refugee?

In this category, the aim was to understand the mental images and ideas that came to the participants' minds when they imagined a Syrian refugee. The objective was to understand how the participants view these Syrians. The participants were asked to express their opinions about Syrian refugees who have been living among them for eight years. They were asked to describe what Syrian refugees have come to mean to them. Two main expressions were common: "war-weary" and "poor children".

The majority of participants (55%) discussed the Syrians' victimization due to the endless Middle East wars. They underlined the hardship of displaced persons living in a foreign country. All these were indicated with deep sorrow:

> *"Syrian people. Um. They're the ones who are suffering from the wars and miseries. They are really the innocent victims of the pointless power struggles in the Middle East" (F, 28, Lecturer).*
>
> *"I am very sure that they didn't want to abandon their countries. Nobody wants to be displaced person. The war has had terrible results. It's so sad" (M, 32, Psychologist).*
>
> *"Very bad conditions. There are no words to say. Even to move to another country is a long-term and difficult process. To be a refugee is a terrible experience" (M, 24, Technician)*

Another group of participants (45%) emphasized the misery of innocent Syrian children. They expressed sadness about Syrian refugee children. The participants indicated that they feel sorry for their lost innocence. All the participants condemned the war and the conditions that the children have been mercilessly exposed to:

> *"When you asked about Syrian refugee people I am reminded of the Syrian refugee children panhandling and crying in the streets. This is really very dramatic. They are so innocent. They don't deserve that kind of treatment" (F, 37, Civil Servant).*
>
> *"[...] I think about the little Syrian boys and girls who do not understand this world yet, but who are facing all the difficulties. I feel so sorry for them" (F, 26, Postgraduate).*
>
> *"I think the most innocent ones are children. They didn't deserve it. So dramatic" (F, 43, Civil Servant)*

As expressed in these examples, half the participants expressed empathy towards the refugees living amongst them. They are aware of suffering and indignities faced by the refugees, not the least of which is inadequate shelter. Their empathy notwithstanding, the participants expressed some irritation concerning Syrian refugees, often the result of widespread rumors.

4.2. Rumor Has It

One significant finding relates to the negative rumors that participants heard about Syrian refugee people. Those rumors spread baseless claims about the unsettling and problematic behaviors of Syrian refugees, from theft to murder. Almost all participants (77%) mentioned such rumors, and expressed discomfort about them.

> *"As far as I know, they are disturbing other people. I've heard about some knife attacks, and rape incidents too -- even attempted robbery. It's so horrible" (F, 41, Secretary)*
>
> *"I've heard many incidents of Syrians causing problems where they are settled. I even heard about brawl between an older Syrian man and a Turkish woman. My friend told me. The woman ended up dead. But I don't know if it's true. I've just heard about such incidents" (FM, 22, Undergraduate)*
>
> *"I heard about many conflicts, many unpleasant occurrences. Those make me a little bit worried. I heard robberies are going up[...]." (M, 30, Security Staff)*

On the other hand, 42% of the participants touched upon rumors of the free social services and other privileges available to the Syrian refugee community, including free and easy university admission, easy professional recruitment, and high salaries, none of which exist. Although some expressed doubts about these rumors, the negative reactions of the participants were evident in the responses:

> *"I've heard stories about them, especially the stuff about the free services like free admission to the universities, even to any faculty they want. Maybe it is not real. Well, if it is, um, that is interesting" (F, 23, Undergraduate)*

"It's been mentioned recently that everything is free for them. Is this true? Easy recruitment, free transportation, health care… I don't know [...]" (M, 30, Sales Assistant)

"Well, I am worried about the children and about my future. Sorry, but it is not fair to provide numerous social, health and education services for them. What about us?" (F, 34, Housekeeper)

Rumors have affected the perception of the participants in a negative way. Whether or not these rumors have any basis in fact, these misunderstandings have drawn serious reactions from the participants against the socialization process. These misunderstandings impede the socialization process between Syrian refugees and the host community.

4.3. Any Attempt for Socialising?

In this category, the participants were asked to speak of any experiences communicating or socialising with Syrian refugees. Given the fact that the refugee crisis has lasted almost eight years, stunningly, half of the participants (54%) reported not having communicated or socialised with them, not even once. As a follow up, participants were asked if they would like to be in contact with the Syrian people, if the relevant conditions were met. Fifty percent responded affirmatively:

"I haven't had any communication with them but I would like to if I could understand them or they understand me. I mean, there's the language problem" (F, 31, Project Officer)

"Well, um. Sometimes I think about meeting them. I can see they need us. They are like our guests. But, the different language…" (M, 22, Undergraduate)

"I just saw them. But contact or connection... I don't know the reason, but I didn't need any. By the way I would like to help them as well" (M, 26, Unemployed)

Thirty-one percent of the participants stated that they had made some connection with the Syrian refugees. The participants expressed positive feelings towards this connection. In this respect, they emphasised the similarities between two the cultures, contrary to what is believed. And they suggested more intercultural activities to be carried out for both Turkish and Syrian people:

"I see them in parks, sometimes in our neighborhood. I always try to talk with them. They are very nice people. They are like us [...]" (M, 38, Cleaning Worker)

"I have met some. As far as I can remember, they were undergraduate students. They were so kind. Just like us. I noticed no differences" (M, 26, Unemployed)

"I am always trying to make contact with them. There are two families crowded in one apartment. When I see them, I definitely say hi or nod. Maybe all of use need more intercultural activities to know each other better" (F, 27, Call Center Staff)

On the other hand, some participants (15%) were negative towards the idea of socializing with Syrian refugee people. The reasons were not stated clearly. Whatever triggered these negative attitudes was disguised by the participants. Therefore, the answers were quite short:

"I haven't met them before and I won't" (M, 34, Hairdresser)

"Sorry, but I don't think that I would like to communicate or socialize with them. Please, check that!" (F, 42, Archivist)

"Well. I don't think I would want to. I don't know. I haven't any need to" (F, 44, Research Assistant)

Despite the participants' non-clarification of the reasons, taking into account the totality of participants' responses, it was revealed that these negative attitudes are rooted in rumors, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation of refugees via media. In particular, exaggerations about the scope of social aid programs and public services for Syrian refugee people has negatively affected the perceptions of those participants. These findings are scrutinised under the next category.

4.4. Concerning Aid or Support for Refugees

Under this category, two opposing views vis-a-vis social aid or support for Syrian refugee people emerged. Half of the participants (52%) stated that they understand the seriousness of the situation and want to help the refugee population individually as well. Moreover, they emphasised the need for more support to meet the needs of Syrian refugee people:

> *"Well, I am putting myself in their position. And I think that if I were a refugee and had to leave my country, what would I do? No doubt, I would need more aid, more support" (F, 41, Civil Servant)*
>
> *"[...] Not only does the government help them, but also the Turkish people are very supportive in meeting their needs. That's because they are our guests and they need help. I can say on behalf of myself that I am always trying to help them with food and clothing" (M, 38, Cleaning Worker)*
>
> *"As far as I know, there are more than 3 million Syrians. The number is terrible. They need more help and support. More integrated help is must" (F, 53, Academician)*

In the sense of the opposite view, the remaining half of the participants (48%) pointed out that there are many aid programs in place for Syrian refugee people which are meeting their needs sufficiently. Therefore, these participants believed that the refugees do not need more support. Some even suggested that the Syrians are abusing this goodwill:

> *"Yes, it is true that they need help. Everybody can agree on that. However, we see in the media that adequate aid is being provided for them. That's why I think additional support from us is not needed" (F, 45, Unemployed)*
>
> *"[...], there is a large amount of aid and support programs for them. All of us see and get the news via media. So, I think that they have better conditions" (F, 23, Assistant)*
>
> *"I think they are getting a lot of support. It is being provided by the related services. The country has other necessary issues as well to focus on" (M, 33, Unemployed)*

As mentioned in the previous category, there is a correlation between respondents' negative attitudes and the misinformation about the aid programs conveyed by the media. Misinformation and rumors clearly contribute to negative attitudes of the participants.

4.5. Rethinking the Society Holistically

In the category, the purpose was to determine where the participants, as members of host community, position of the Syrian refugees in the holistic structure of the society. In this context, they were asked about their experience living together in a common community. The majority of participants indicated that neither the refugee- nor the Turkish population is pleased with this situation. Nearly all the participants (89%) alluded to the Syrian refugees' uncertain fate. The participants expressed uncertainty about the future, believing that the refugees will not return to their homeland. There is confusion as to whether Syrians are "temporary" or "permanent" habitants:

> *"Neither of us is happy. In fact, nobody is satisfied being like that in the society. It's unpredictable whether they will stay or go back. It is so odd" (F, 36, Unemployed)*
>
> *"It is so difficult. Neither Turks nor Syrians can adapt to each other. Above all, the main question is whether they want to return to their country or to stay here with us. For that reason, I can't imagine the whole society at peace while based in such uncertainty. (M, 28, Storekeeper)*
>
> *"Every day, we are hearing so much news about them. But we still don't know whether they will go back to their country or not, or whether they are really guests or not" (M, 55, Driver)*

This uncertainty has directly and negatively influenced social integration as well. This issue is a topic of political discussions, especially among dissidents. As a result, the lack of reliable and timely information has become an urgent problem.

4.6. On the Question of Social Integration

Following the previous category, the participants were asked to share their general view of the social integration process. The objective was to understand the challenges faced by host community members. They were asked individually to discuss the social integration effort. The majority of the participants (77%) pointed to the language barrier as a major obstacle to social integration:

> *"[...] I don't think that there is successful social integration. We have different cultures. Most importantly, we don't speak the same language. If we don't have a common language, how can we talk about socialization or integration?" (W, 29, Lawyer)*
>
> *"[...] I am aware of the social integration attempts being conducted by the state, international organizations and local authorities. These are crucial steps in establishing social cohesion. However, the main issue – the language difference –remains problematic. So this won't be so easy" (M, 29, Unemployed)*
>
> *"We already have our own internal integration problems. How can we integrate with any others? There is another big problem: the language. If we can't communicate, how can we integrate?" (M, 58, Banker)*

Some participants (19%) on the other hand, stressed on the idea of "colonization," referring to the specific districts where Syrian refugee people live. They believe that the concentration of the refugee population inhibits social integration. This creates a dilemma:

> *"I think Syrian people are not interested in establishing social integration or cohesion whatever it can be called. I've also seen that they are living in ghettos where only Arabic -- especially Syrian -- is spoken. Everybody knows these colonized streets and regions. For instance, the neighborhood of Önder in Altindağ" (M, 58, Auditor)*
>
> *"[...] This situation reminds me of Turkish migrants living in Germany. As we know, they are living in particular areas, like Turkish colonies. Even so, many of them do not know German. I realize that the same thing is happening now in Turkey but with Syrian refugee people. I think this is the main problem" (M, 34, Human Resources Officer)*
>
> *"For me, why not? We can get to know each other better. But they are trying to isolate themselves from the society. For example, the neighborhoods of Tuzluçayır, Gülveren in Mamak" (F, 30, Healthcare Professional)*

The participants were asked to offer their suggestions to foster social cohesion. The related suggestions were scrutinized in the next category.

4.7. Suggestions for Social Cohesion

Under this category the participants were asked to suggest prudent and effective ways to promote social cohesion. The majority (62%) pointed to more education programs and career opportunities for refugees. They indicated that language courses must be the focus of these education programs. Other interactive and innovative methods were suggested. As to career opportunities, the common idea was that both Syrian and Turkish people ought to benefit equally. Respondents suggested that if recruitment is provided for only Syrian refugee people, it will draw negative reactions from members of the host community:

"Well. Absolutely education programs are a must. Yes, they have to learn our language. They have to be aware of our education curriculum. This will lead to cultural exchange. Career opportunities must be created for them, but certainly not only for them -- for us too. [...]" (M, 23, Undergraduate)

"First, living and working standards must be raised. The other important issue is education. I am a teacher and I know how necessary it is for people to be able to adapt to society. But the education program or project -- whatever it is -- should be designed very carefully. I know well that unemployed Syrian and Turkish people must be recruited on an equal basis. Otherwise, it can be so problematic because we have our own unemployment problem [...]" (F, 35, Teacher)

"The number of language courses must be increased. Without language, how can we even mention cohesion?" (M, 26, Promoter)

Concerning the other suggestions, 22% of the respondents emphasized that socialization must begin with school age children. Specifically, they believed that encouraging social cohesion starts when the perception of "refugee" is formed at school. If the host community does not understand what "refugee" means, or why living together is important, there can be no social integration. Therefore, awareness must start in the schools; but it must not end there. There must be large-scale programs for adults as well. Tolerance was the key word in the perspectives expressed below:

"Well, initially, I have to highlight that the social cohesion process isn't easy. And it takes time. Anyway, it won't happen until after the next generation. [...] And the main problem is that Turkish people have no idea about being a refugee, which is normal. The attitudes and perceptions of the majority are shaped by the misinformation presented in the media, by false rumors, or by the images of children begging or lying in the streets. The host community must be encouraged to empathize with them. On the other hand, the development of living and working standards is also important in this period" (F, 51, Academician)

"I think children are very important factors in building social integration with the immigrants. I have always said children must get along first with each other. You know, it is like starting from the beginning. Of course, living and working standards should be raised on an equal basis" (F, 37, Civil Servant)

"First the perception of "refugee" must be formed. Therefore, schools can be the start" (M, 40, Translator)

As shown in the examples, the majority of participants support the social cohesion process. They did not object to living in harmony with Syrian refugees. However, they want the programs to be developed more fully and fairly. The need for more effort and time was commonly mentioned. In this vein, they are aware that this constitutes a long process that requires collaboration.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Although it has been almost nine years since the start of the Syrian crisis, and numerous aid/support projects/programs have been conducted to meet the needs of the displaced, the situation remains problematic for members of both the host and refugee communities. Due to various social, cultural and political factors, the social cohesion process and the policies intended to support it were not adequately implemented. 'Social cohesion', (sometimes referred to as 'social integration'), a term to describe social interaction or unity with Syrian refugees, has been praised and promoted by the Turkish government as well as by international organizations. Therefore, social cohesion has become a "buzz word". By focusing on this key word,, this study aimed to discover the attitudes and reactions of, in this case, Ankarans, toward hosting such a significant population

of refugees. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 45 individuals residing in the districts of Altindağ and Mamak, where a significant refugee population lives.

Based on the findings, first, it can be noted that, the host community is in favor of living with refugees in the same community. They understand the seriousness of the situation. While 55% of the participants bemoan the victimization of Syrian refugees due to war and harsh conditions, 45% cited the misery of innocent Syrian children. The participants seemed to be keen to help them. On the other hand, some contradictions emerged during the course of interviews.

In the interviews, participants mentioned about some obstacles that are impeding the cohesion process, specifically rumors, the language barrier, the employment problem, and lack of social connection. According to the findings, 42% of the participants believe that Syrian refugees enjoy limitless rights and unfettered access to the social services which they themselves, as citizens, cannot enjoy. On the other hand, there are toxic rumors that refugees are involved in crimes such as robbery and sexual offenses. The findings further show that the majority of the participants were misinformed about the aid/support programs by both media and their social circles. Many believe that all the refugees are receiving housing and financial aid in addition to job opportunities and high salaries. The participants (19%) also pointed to the high concentration of refugees in specific regions and neighborhoods. The other commonly-cited obstacle (mentioned by 77% of the participants) to social integration was the language problem.

Although misinformation and rumors may seem irrelevant, they affect the perception and attitudes of the host community towards refugees. As Helliwell and Wong (2011), and Larsen (2014) indicated, both misinformation and rumors inhibit establishing mutual trust and, most importantly, social connection, a key element of social cohesion. Under such conditions, the main functions of the social cohesion process, which were asserted by Forrest and Kearns (2011), cannot work. Since the host community members will not attempt to make social connections with refugees, neither common values nor objectives can ever be established. Worse still, such social segregation may foster intolerance on both sides. Another point revealed in the interviews was the importance of providing job opportunities for members of both communities on an equal basis. Equality of access is essential to promote social solidarity. The respondents' emphasis on "colonization" and grouping of refugees is the other significant finding to focus on. Segregation and social disconnection can lead to serious problems when there is no common space for groups to meet. More research can be conducted on this issue.

The findings also revealed the importance of the language barrier in the social cohesion process. Seventy-seven percent of the participants underlined the language barrier, an issue frequently raised by media. In order to overcome this problem, many language and vocational courses are offered by local NGOs with the support of governmental agencies and international organizations. As underlined in the social cohesion principles of the Council of Europe (2008), the formation of a sense of belonging and shared values is closely related to the existence of commonly spoken language in any community. As can be seen in the study of Maxwell (1996), sharing values is the foundation of the social cohesion process.

Given the above-mentioned problems and conditions, social cohesion cannot function as "social glue" for "good", i.e. holding the community together; on the contrary, rather than bring these communities together, these conditions (Stovring 2012) exacerbate the social segregation. Therefore, a more collaborative communication platform based on participatory social activities must be created and promoted to include members from both sides. As participants highlighted in their responses, the concept of "refugee" must be defined and effectively conveyed to the host commu-

nity members by means of social and intercultural activities in schools. Likewise, media can be used more effectively in order to correct misinformation about the refugees and their rights. This will require programming to be produced and broadcast, and materials to be published and distributed to support the self-expression of refugees. Above all, more comprehensive research must be conducted in all the relevant provinces of Turkey.

The study can be helpful for understanding social cohesion process theoretically and practically within the Turkish example. In contrast to other studies, this study was mainly based on the term 'social cohesion', which has become a maxim and key word in the projects supported by the Turkish government and funded by the international organizations. In addition, this study aimed to project the perspective of the host community members rather than that of the refugees. On the other hand, the study was carried out with a limited sampling. For further findings and recommendations, research must be conducted with participants residing in different regions. By including refugees along with the host community members in the interviews, studies can be better integrated, and research more detailed. In this context, the current study can be a useful directive for future research.

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