

The Socio-Economic Impact of the Commercial Street in Achieving Sustainability for Refugees in the Host Community

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Abstract

Türkiye has always been a major destination for the displaced around the world. Recently, Türkiye has hosted a large number of Syrian refugees who have settled in camps and many Turkish cities. It is believed that for the refugee groups to develop themselves and create and augment links with the host community, it is vital to use their culture and previous professional and economic experience to adapt their spatial position and enhance their social life. Hence the significance of the central commercial street in the refugee area is a key point for urban transformation, socio-economic participation, and the ability to integrate later. The study has used a qualitative observational approach to explore the social and economic impact of refugees on the Önder region (Selçuk Street), where the activities of refugees were recorded, documented, and mapped through behavioral observation. Observations were done in three days (two days a week and one day off). The street is divided into three sections of similar length. One-minute short films were recorded from each section every three hours from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm. Then, the films were transferred to street maps, documenting activities, gender, and age through the use of appropriate images. Lastly, the study offers an insight into the details of the daily social life of street users as the socio-economic life of the street can provide academics and designers with clear evidence on which to base future research and design.

Keywords

Socio-Economic Impact, Commercial Street, Refugees, Urban Planning, Commercial Street

1. Introduction

The qualities of the streets and public spaces contribute to the development of the character of urban spaces. These spaces should provide a democratic environment ideally with openness equally to all. Opportunities should be offered to all inhabitants independent from social, cultural, and political differences of the urban dwellers of these urban environments. For the interaction of these inhabitants from different backgrounds, it is important to ensure democratic and inclusive public spaces which provide the possibility of their recognition, representation, and integration.

The ideal inclusive urban environments have been introduced with the term “lively streets” which encourage users’ social interaction by ensuring several activity patterns and pleasure and excitement of the inhabitants. A healthy and heterogeneous spatial design promotes open and accessible pedestrian circulation, the presence and encounter of strangers, mixed uses in public space, a diversity of functions, seating possibilities in cafes with live facades, and the availability of street markets.

Owing to the arrival of a large sum of Syrian refugees, a great disagreement spread over the outcomes and the economic, social, and political consequences of hosting such a huge number of refugees in the continent of Europe (Hudson, 2018). Figures say that there were 68.5 million forced refugees in 2017, the number of displaced people outside their country is 25.4 million, and the number of displaced people inside their country is 40 million, with 3 million pending cases between them. Most of them (85%) live in developing countries (Unhcr, 2018).

Receiving a large number of refugees in a short period is considered a great challenge for any country, no matter how much it has capabilities, let alone. If the country has a limited capacity and the needs of its indigenous people are not enough, then a real crisis will occur as it is possible for the future and the land to be settled forever (Maystadt et al., 2019). This will cause many obstacles and difficulties, especially if global crises occur, such as the Ukrainian war during the Corona pandemic (Choudhary et al., 2022), which resulted in multiple challenges in obtaining the resources necessary for the continuation of people. However, on the contrary, rich countries receive fewer refugees than developing countries, which makes things easier and under control (Bubb et al., 2011). The developing countries need broad international support to serve the refugees, as is happening in Lebanon (Refaat & Mohanna, 2013) and Türkiye (Ahmadoun, 2014), to meet the needs of the refugees in the first place and encourage the demand for materials, products, and services, which increases their prices, and, therefore the indigenous people are forced to share their resources and the high costs resulting from the increase in demand with the same value of living that they receive.

A large number of Syrian refugees have flowed into Türkiye as a result of the Syrian war, and their numbers are estimated at 3.5 million refugees (Akar &

Erdoğan, 2019). Later they formed residential communities and a mighty labor force at all commercial and industrial levels. Thus, considering the given scenario, the current study has selected a commercial street in Türkiye where a large number of Syrians live, work, and study. The aim is to investigate its commercial and social impact on the residents of the area.

The increasing refugee populations have become a clear challenge and a burden on the residents of the host region, as this necessitated securing living needs and expenses to ensure that they continue to live within the lowest acceptable conditions (Stein, 1981). All of this must be secured as soon as possible but with sufficient financial, technical, and international support to meet such enormous requirements. The Turks would be able to carry out and secure the required task within the limited capabilities only with the presence of such support, even with subsequent effects that appeared years after this crisis (Gibárti, 2021).

The Syrian war is charged with global emotional and financial support that contributed to the influx of a lot of money that stimulated the Turkish economy on the one hand in the short term, which later created high production prices, increased demand for local workers, and increased production growth at the expense of the availability of resources and raw materials that may be cut off later for some reason. It is happening now in the Ukraine-Russia war, the wheat crisis, and the Corona pandemic, which created successive crises of poor supply chains and a lack of fertilizers and materials needed to manufacture products for any developing and effective economy such as the Turkish economy. Thus, what happened as a result of the Syrian war, and then the influx of refugees in these numbers, has exposed the Turkish economy to a trade shock and has required a lot of work and change.

We will encode the evaluations of the targeted interaction points in the commercial street and compare them with each other based on the interaction rates between the two parties to the study and estimate the most successful by monitoring the variables of demand and the type of business observed. Additionally, it is also aimed at consulting some specialists in urban planning (and everyone who has sold in this commercial and social specialization) on the information that we monitored and the results we obtained after the required adjustment in the target software.

Most of the current studies focus on the short-term impact of crises that cause refugees or displacement in an area due to wars and disasters (Berti, 2015). They study a market, street, neighborhood, or a specific study sample to give results that can help with short-term tactical solutions and neglect the long-term effects because of the large number of variables that affect it and change it in a way that makes it difficult to predict, especially everything related to the economic aspect.

In our study, the economy is considered the core of the studied variables and almost on the guest host community, where we can discuss the interactions taking place and their impact by identifying the winners and losers of the process as a whole, especially by the host population.

- Financial returns for refugees' work.
- The leading role in the existing economic competition.
- Social status of economic activities.
- The level of acceptance at the beginning of the cropping compared to the yield of their intervention.

2. Literature Review

Multiple research scholars have investigated the topic of refugee-host communities from several aspects and have reported noteworthy outcomes to give an insight into the existing conditions. For instance, [Maystadt and Verwimp \(2014\)](#) vividly analyzed refugee flows into Tanzania by showing the results of a heterogeneous environment resulting from an unacceptable interaction between population components, identifying the winners from the losers while analyzing the implications of the policy to protect the livelihoods of refugees in indigenous host communities, especially about food and housing. The outcomes of their study revealed that setting up a refugee camp benefited and increased the well-being of the local population, owing to an increase in consumption of about 1% compared to families in other areas where there are no refugees. However, the effect varies in demographic terms as rich families tend to benefit while the poor experience small negative effects. The main beneficiaries were noted to be professional workers and farmers. In contrast, agricultural workers have lost because they have to compete with refugees in the job market, which has been accompanied by a decrease in wages by about 50%. Thus, it was reported that the high prices in the refugee areas reduced the income and profit of the agricultural communities.

[Del Carpio and Wagner \(2015\)](#) investigated the impact of the job market on the influx of Syrian refugees into Türkiye. The authors discussed that most of the refugees entered the local labor market since Syrians were not allowed legally. It was found that the influx of refugees caused an economic shock to supply in the informal labor market. This is what economic forecasts said that the influx of refugees who get employed in the black-market cause 6% of citizens of the same employment level to lose their job, especially individuals who do not have a proper education have a higher possibility of losing their jobs. At the same time, formal employment of Turkish residents is increasing, and this effect is exclusive to men with low to no skills who haven't finished secondary education and doesn't include highly qualified men and women. Thus, it has been proclaimed that the divergent effects are driven by the employment structure of the Turkish economy. Highly qualified workers usually get employed within sectors that have little informal employment rates, refugees cannot be displaced without a work permit, and their companies do not benefit from cheaper, low-skill informal labor. In summary, the study concluded that the influx of Syrians has had little effect on the employment of the population, but it has extremely high and wider effects. Some workers that have low skills manage to make the transaction

from the informal sector to the formal sector. Nevertheless, the direct effect on workers with low skills in general and on men, in particular, is negative.

Ogude (2018) explored the influence of the Syrians on the host Tanzanian economy. The results narrated that the influx of refugees generated a very influential demand wave that was the reason for a significant increment in production and the establishment of new companies and caused lower labor costs to increase the profits of local enterprises where small and medium-sized businesses have benefited much more than large companies, construction, hotels, and restaurants are the most profitable. However, the relative price changes of goods are differentiated over the host community as higher prices benefit producers and harm consumers. The authors also noted that the higher food prices had affected real incomes, and the employment offer for refugees has significantly reduced the prices of a wide range of non-food items in countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The net effect was unknown and depended on the consumption pattern of each household, where rural families benefit while urban families lose.

In another study, Alix-Garcia and Saah (2009) provided evidence that urban families close to refugee camps have fewer assets and invest less in their homes than those farther away. It was also found that rural households closer to camps show higher levels of wealth compared to their counterparts in other regions. Alix-Garcia et al. (2012) also reported that households that own real estate or land or small businesses that provide non-tradable goods and services usually make significant gains from the refugee influx.

Besides, studies (Luecke & Claas, 2017; Maystadt & Verwimp, 2014; Whitaker, 2002) have also worked on the policy framework for interactions between refugees and residents and have revealed a significant impact on the labor market and domestic product markets.

In short, a large influx of refugees will usually affect the population differently according to their resources, occupations, and consumption patterns. As per Mills (2021), here appears the political strategy that plays a role in mitigating the negative presence of refugees and increasing their usefulness in the host community in the long run and thus increasing local economic development to the benefit of both parties (refugee-host). Figure 1 depicts the intervention logic for the socio-economic development.

The results of the criteria by which Mills (2021) assessed the refugee situation in the host community are the extent to which the basic needs of the poorest refugees are secured. It is divided into two parts. The first is to receive economic support and economic support compared to gender, age, and the identity of persons with disabilities in the assessment, and then used performance indicators that measure the available data in the data collection process.

By the report presented by Çiftçi et al. (2021), more than 240,000 refugees have benefited from the services provided by local and international initiatives since October 2017. Support has reached 58,000 people with special needs and

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	OUTPUTS	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	LONG TERMS OUTCOMES
SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT Cash transfers. Vocational/employability training. employment services, language lessons, SME grants, community centers, etc. (ESSN, TOBB/ISKUR projects)	- Refugees are provided with monthly resource transfers	Basic needs of the most vulnerable refugees met	JC 10.1
	- Refugees and host community participation in employment-related services increased	Employment prospects of refugees and host community members improved	JC 10.2
	- Entrepreneurship capacity promoted through SMES support	Livelihood opportunities created through economic activity	JC 10.3
	- Social interaction between refugees and host community members promoted	Improved social cohesion between refugees and the communities that host them	JC 10.4
			Improved socio-economic conditions for refugees and host communities in Turkey

Figure 1. Intervention logic for socio-economic development (Mills, 2021).

the poorest beneficiaries. Overall, 67,000 have benefited from counseling services, and many others have benefited from all forms of support of various types and sources, as shown in **Table 1**.

The data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively through a field survey and through survey and post-support monitoring, which enabled the study to accurately monitor the gap through a team of representatives of refugee surveys in Türkiye, and then they provide us with a vision about the total number of refugees. These data are collected directly from the ground, and the study gives many eyes and accuracy in targeting the quality of statistical and other analysis in order to measure the extent of the refugees' integration with Turkish society and to reach the gaps and reasons for the failure of the sustainability and success of this relationship.

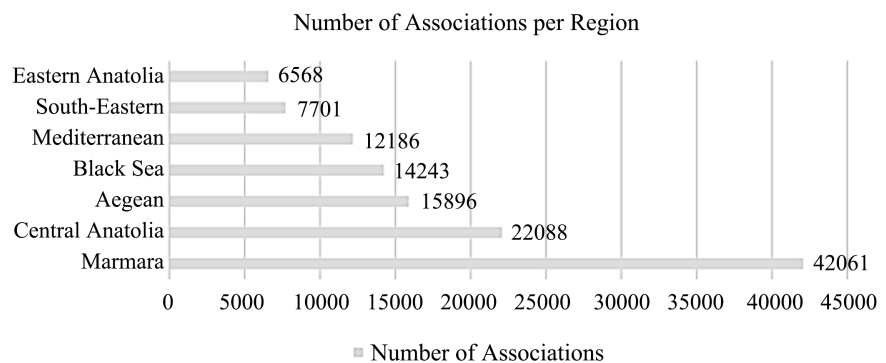
In the above graph, the regional distribution of associations supporting refugees is very unfair as most of them are distributed in the Marmara region with 34.84% and the Central Anatolia region with 18.29%. It is followed by the Aegean region with 13.17%, the Black Sea region with 11.8% and the Mediterranean region with 10.09%. The entire regions of Eastern and Southeast Anatolia receive only 11.82% of all associations in Türkiye, with 5.44% and 6.38%, respectively (See **Figure 2**).

The analysis of socio-economic support covers all interventions that were intended to contribute to the long-term outcome of “improving the societal and economic conditions of refugees and Turkish communities”, across the following four areas:

- Periodical financial support for refugees.
- Increasing the effectiveness of cooperation between refugees and Turks in receiving and providing products and services.

Table 1. Turkish Red-Crescent Society (TRCS) community centers service provision and comparison to the overall population (Çiftçi et al., 2021).

Provinces	Population	No. of registered refugees under temporary protection	Percentage of the city population	Red Crescent# Beneficiaries		
				Protection Services	Psychosocial Services	Livelihood Services
Istanbul	15,067,724	497,775	3.30%	33,435	71,843	3483
Ankara	5,503,985	96,711	1.76%	7469	3572	1831
Kilis	142,541	108,328	76.00%	7327	7066	1866
Mardin	829,195	88,421	10.66%	1885	90	213
Mersin	1,814,468	212,022	11.69%	3071	5687	1081
Adana	2,220,125	246,034	11.08%	4430	2997	610
Total	25,578,038	1,249,291	4.88%	57,617	91,255	9084

**Figure 2.** Number of associations' population (Çiftçi et al., 2021).

- Supporting the most profitable joint small projects between Syrians and Turks.
- Strengthening social interaction between refugees and Turks through several conducted interventions, which ensures the continuity of support for the basic needs of both parties.

2.1. Materials and Methodology and Research Design

The current study is grounded in a qualitative research design. The main aim of the analysis is to comprehensively address the activity patterns of refugees and spatial configuration as the main object of social interaction and integration of refugees. To this end, it examines the impact of socio-spatial properties which improve the adaptivity of refugees to the host community. After a literature review, an observational study was conducted on a district commercial street in Türkiye, which has been a habitat for Syrian refugees. The purpose of choosing the observational approach lies within its potential to assist with exploring and spotting the patterns of activities and different phenomena in the most natural setting possible (Delve, 2023). An observational research design not only enables

access to an unfiltered frame of behavior and choices of the target sample but also allows for designing themes and outlining behavioral manners in an uncontrolled environment like focus group experiments and labs. Therefore, considering the suitability of this approach for the aim of the current research, the given research methodology was adopted. Moreover, an investigation has been conducted through basic mapping techniques which reveal the relationship of spatial conditions and social behaviors.

2.2. Study Area (Selçuk Street)

The apparent approach to observe daily life in shared areas is the immediate monitoring of attitudes, with a designated attention on their influence on special features (Jan & Birgitte, 2013; Stevens, 2014). Close up monitoring assists us to realize why some areas are used more often than others. Understanding the public's usage of the space to obtain the connection between monitored activities and the surrounding environment and where they happen (Stevens, 2014).

The information was obtained via case studies and monitoring of occupants in their daily routine regarding 3 main aspects. Every clip was recorded for one minute from 9 am to 8 pm (Figure 3) illustrates the main segments of the street.

The clips then were filtered and sorted into tables according to the type of activity they are concerned with, where they took place, the age scope, the time the activity took place and the nature of the activity usage of the street as illustrated in (Figure 4).

Selçuk Street is located in the Önder area, which the refugees chose as their place of residence for several reasons, including cheap rents compared to the adjacent neighborhoods and its proximity to the industrial area of Siteker, which facilitates the movement of Syrian workers from their residential area to their work areas as many of them chose to walk to reach the place of work. At the

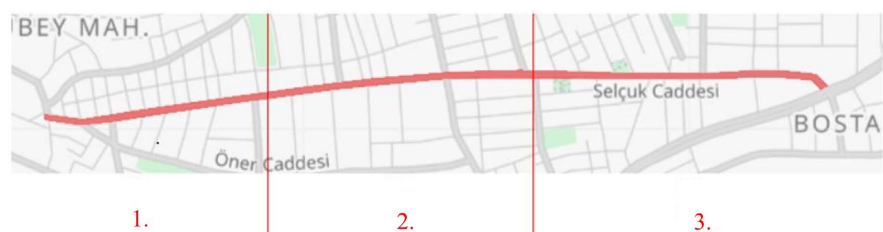


Figure 3. Segments of Selçuk street (by the author).

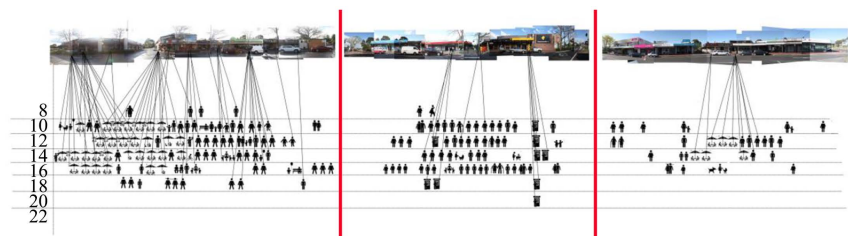


Figure 4. Crowdedness according to day hours (by the authors).

beginning of 2013, the refugees started opening their small projects along Selçuk Street, which included service and commercial projects such as opening small restaurants and clothing and food stores on both sides of the street that serve the culture and needs of the refugees (see **Figure 5**).

Commercially, the sidewalk extends on both sides of the street and along it. However, the pedestrians are not welcomed due to the over crowdedness and oldness of the street. Therefore, there is no trace of civil functions in it. By observation and scrutiny, we found that the street was commercially, socially, and vitally active, serving the residents of the region in addition to serving many consumers from the Arab communities due to the proximity of cultures and customs, and traditions.

3. Results and Discussion

Commercial streets can be used for a myriad of diverse purposes. The proportion of different types of users can be directly related to the nature of the street. For example, the diversified use of retail stores brings together many users of different age and culture groups, thus exchanging many customs and traditions and sharing each other's culture (Cihanger Ribeiro, 2022).

3.1. Diversity of Usage

Many different services and uses have been developed in the central and southern sectors. This proximity has resulted in a variety of uses and users, refugees and local business owners, as well as local and Arab consumers who go to the street to return to their culture of saying hello and getting mingled with their fellow people. Visitors also come here for the purpose of listening to some Arabic songs and tasting some traditional foods from Arabian cuisine. Through observation, we found an increase in the movement of social and economic activity due to the movement of consumers from outside the region, which has become a destination for them to meet their daily needs. However, the economic activities in the region were minimal at night, as it is still an almost non-moving area as the evening approaches (Farahani et al., 2015).

The development of economic activities in this street led to the liveliness and social life in the area, and thus played an effective role in the daily life of refugees and facilitated their integration into their surroundings. **Figure 6** demonstrates the diversity of uses in the street.



Figure 5. Categories of Selçuk street's buildings (by the authors).



Figure 6. Building diversity in Selçuk Street (by the authors).

3.2. A Point of Social Interaction

Selçuk Street is in the center of Önder district, and it has the highest refugee population in the city of Ankara. It offers a public space that different groups of people can visit for different purposes, i.e., daily passengers who go to the Sitelер Industrial Zone and street vendors who maintain their economic activities. This study connects economic activities with the science of societal interaction. Hence, in this sense, the meetings and interactions of everyday life offer a dialectical perspective of socio-economic reality (Farahani et al., 2015).

This study depends on the spatial to provide reliable examples of social or personal economic influence on the interaction of refugees and their integration into the surrounding society, where we can easily notice the creation of a common living space with social characteristics between the refugees and the host community. The continuous production of economic activities in the street reflects the diversity and possibilities of social dynamics that can create an environment suitable for co-existence, starting with the processes of re-employing places and activating them economically. For example, the selection of location and public participation in venues for street daily activities reshape the area pattern, and thus “perceptual morphogenesis” also reveals the informal character as an economic sector (Laguerre, 1994). The economic relationship with social life also contributes to the creation of a cohesive, self-organizing society (Dovey, 2016).

Through the use of signage, users are redefining the “buying effect” (Hall & Datta, 2010), recreating the social aspect of the street by using chaotic but fresh visuals. The presence of personal belongings in semi-shared areas, such as chairs, plant pots, and decorated forecourts, soften and clarify the very fine line of artistic taste provided by the architecture (Habracken, 2000). Local styles generate the living aspect of the street area, a place where social life is first embraced and then converted into the physical environment. These patterns extracted from the street revealed that urban space represents social practices and physical modifications made by residents that help them feel a sense of belonging to the place. **Figure 7** covers some of the daily activities in the street.

Overall, it was observed that the routine lives in the street portrayed a sense of belonging and comfort among the refugee-host community by integrating them under one roof and showing patterns of parallel factors that complement each



Figure 7. Examples of the activities Taking Place in Selçuk Street (by the author).

other by resembling the components of both societies. The adaptation of the refugee community into their surrounding environment, along with the little inter-actural elements between the groups, signified the development of better, sustainable, and prosperous relationships both socially and economically for the impending future in the longer term.

4. Conclusion

In drawing things to a close, it can be concluded that the economic and commercial activities affect social behavior in the streets and create new spaces that allow people to change urban plans as they transform physical space into daily co-existence spaces in which they express their culture and ideas and create opportunities to co-exist while seeking new opportunities in life.

This study confirmed that the active economic activities were able to create social spaces between the refugees and the surrounding community, through which they were able to express their cultures, customs, and traditions, and opened the door for themselves to integrate within their new society. This practice will not only help them transform their suffering from an ordeal into a blessing but also improve the social and economic conditions for refugees and host communities alike in Türkiye. By evaluating the required average interaction on Selçuk Street and determining the targeted progress toward achieving real results in a gradual, thoughtful, and legible manner, the present work has reported an insightful review of the topic. After studying ways of continuous improvement in the possibility of achieving the goals of long-term support in its various forms, the researchers recommend the need of addressing the following:

- Supporting small and medium enterprises for both refugees and members of the host community.
- Meeting the basic needs of the most vulnerable refugees.
- Improving labor market participation for refugees and host community members.
- Enhancing economic activity by increasing opportunities to improve the standards of living.
- Improving social cohesion between refugees and Turks by creating more spaces to bring them together.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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