

# A Study of Housing and Identity in Northern Cyprus

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## Abstract

This research mainly focuses on the relationship between environment and people's identity by centralization of communicative aspects of residential environments. There is this potential to find out the dwellers' identity, and this is where we come to the confluence of housing and identity. Therefore, it is significant to find out the residents' attitudes considering their residences. The concept that enables individuals to retain their routines, costumes, habits and memories makes the focus of "housing and identity" a crucial and feasible research subject. The case studies are selected among high-quality and low-quality neighborhoods in Kaliland zone in Gazimağusa, one of the five districts of Northern Cyprus. In this survey questionnaires are used in order to explore residents' interests, personality and relationships. This research is done based on the principles of home identity, communicating identity and self-perception. Consequently, the significant aspects in creating home identity will be discussed, and finally, the research will conclude the key role of memory, personal features and backgrounds in defining identity.

**Keywords:** Housing, Dwelling, Identity, Residential Environment

## 1. Introduction

As a need to explain the concept of dwelling, it is generally a place of comfort and welfare, and where one could take refuge after finishing daily works, difficulties and routines (Borzooeian, 2014). Housing studies have always had a significant role in recognizing the problems of current dwellings and the requirements for future housing (Preiser, 1989). Furthermore, it is possible to find out people's thoughts and feelings about their residences as an expression of identity. Physical environments and possessions, therefore, can be the mediums by which people perceive each other and express themselves (Goffman, 1959). This paper mainly focuses on the meanings and features that people attribute to their dwellings in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. A dwelling, including its features and attachments, contains some information about the dwellers, their personal tastes and lifestyle. But it gets even more interesting to find similarities in people's thoughts and perceptions when they are evaluating their own or other's social status and lifestyle. This goal can be reached according to information from the interior or exterior of people's homes (Wilson & Mackenzie, 2000). Domestic dwellings, as residential environments, contain the confluence of personal senses, and social/economic circumstances (Errington, 1983). In fact, there are hidden aspects and features in residential environments. It is possible to read this information through dwellings which give us self-concepts. Our lifestyle and where we live, therefore, help us achieve this self-concept about ourselves. Rapoport has pointed out that "identity" depends on culture and housing and is one of the factors which help people know who they are (Duncan, 1982). Humans occupy and appropriate a space and convert it to a place through allocating symbols. The idea of 'home' is basically symbolic, which infiltrate all aspects of human-environment relationship. It symbolizes a spatial or physical condition on one hand and habitual and social conditions on the other hand. We also have "Comparison", which has an important role in creating human knowledge. Humans define themselves in comparison with each other. It is not possible for us to have personal, subgroup or national identity in a contextual vacuum. When there is some measure of control or identification, consequently there is an expression of sense of personalization in that environment. Considering "home" as an origin, it provides us the potential to develop our personal being by making us aware of our identity through understanding local traditions and customs (Terkenli, 1995). This is the main point I intend to take advantage from in this research.

## 2. Literature

As mentioned before, changes in people's surrounding environment can affect their identity (Speller et al. 2002). Identity expression has also been considered as one of important aspects of home (Desprès, 1991; Moore, 2000). It is proved that people value familiar and domestic objects since they can read information about themselves and the others in them. They can express their personal and social identity through these objects (Lawrence, 1987). It might be furniture and decoration which represent an individualistic approach to identity and lifestyle (Gram-Hanssen & Beck-Danielsen, 2004).

Historically, a remarkable amount of research has been geared toward housing strategies. Important subjects such as occupants, their feelings and views, also their emotions, physical and psychological needs in residential environments have always been the focus of researches. Most researches about housing and identity stem from theoretical basics. Many environmental psychologists including Manzo, Gustafson, Fabian, Proshansky, and

Kaminoff believe in the concept of place-identity, although they might have different perspectives. Many of the previous theories debate the relationship between the occupants and the residential environments, concentrating on place attachment, sense of place or place identity as a separate issue instead of focusing on their relation. Although these perspectives refer to the relation between human and place, the connection between them is still unclear or do not completely include all aspects of human's emotional relation with place (Manzo, 2003). There are some distinctions and diversities between the following terms "home", "dwelling" and "house" as Hauge (2009) mentions.

**Home** - The word "home" goes back to a long time ago, about 2000 years (Brink, 1995). Its initial meaning was likely the place of man's origin. But after the sixteenth century it referred to one's own domestic dwelling (Gifford, 2002). The word "home" may have deep meanings for some people. A variety of economic and social relations are needed in order to reach sense of home (Paadam, 2003). It has psychological, social, cultural and physical dimensions in it (Benjamin, Stea, & Saile, 1995). Després (1991) mentions 10 meanings and features of home based on former research studies; Home as control and security, reflection of one's values and ideas, modifying one's dwelling, continuity and permanence, relationships with friends and family, center of activities, indicator of personal status, refuge from the outside world, material structure, and a place to own.

**Dwelling** - Rapoport (1995) and Coolen, Kempen & Ozaki (2002) discuss the word "dwelling" to use as a research term instead of "home". According to dictionaries, "dwelling" means "housing that somebody lives in". This word underlines a significant relation between man and environment in phenomenology (Norberg-Schultz, 1991). Coolen, Kempen & Ozaki (2002) believe that the word "house" refers to the physical structure, while "home" refers to the relationship between people and that physical structure.

**House** - According to Blunt & Dowling (2006), the word "housing" can have many meanings; however, "home" may be its main meaning. Housing is generally related to some other areas of life and concurs with an employment path. In dictionaries, "housing" means "residences" or "providing a residence". "Accommodation" is also a synonym of the word. Housing refers to buildings and physical structures built to accommodate people. These buildings and physical structures include social, cultural and personal meanings. In this research, the main factors which create meanings attached to the housing unit and neighborhood are physical and social environment (Hauge, 2009). Thus, considering home as a process and the only one of many significations of housing is the reason to base this research on the concept of "housing".

This is also significant to define and know the concepts of "communication" and "home identity".

**Communication** - The house's meaning originates in its setting and characteristics. The outside physical and social environment influences on feelings about the house (Clapham, 2005). On the other hand, a neighborhood which may differentiate among people can also be influential to the identity and lifestyle of its residents. According to Beck-Danielsen and GramHanssen (2004), people make connections between residential neighborhoods and symbolic values. Individuals from various social worlds have different housing conditions in terms of factors such as neighborhood's social and physical features, indoors and decorations, and landscaping styles (Duncan, 1985). Previously, research has demonstrated that people assess social class and wealth of residents based on where they live (Gifford, 2002). Location, building exterior, and also materials help people realize the personality of residents. As an instance, residents can be described as cold, warm artistic or non-artistic according to different building materials or styles (Sadalla & Sheets, 1993). Different architectural styles in residential buildings show different ranges of intimacy and friendliness among the residents. For instance, Farm- Tudor-style houses can indicate friendliest residents, while Tudor- and colonial-style houses can indicate highest status residents, according to Nasar (1989). In interior spaces we can also expect such association between interior styles and social attributes (Wilson & Mackenzie, 2000). Thus, physical environments are known as having communicative and illustrative meanings associated with social attributes, personality or social status, and these may be concerned as aspects of human identity (Hauge, 2007). People behave and speak through mediums. These mediums may include activities, interests, and physical environment (Hauge, 2009). Residents can be judged based on visible clues explicated as indications of identity by outsiders (Gullestad, 2002).

"The spatial world in which we live tells us who we are. We find our self within it, we respond to it and it reacts to us, and by manipulating it we affirm our personality" (Robinson, 2006).

A home can reflect identity based on the fact that house and interior design are both selectable (Rapoport, 1985). If those are not selected, then that is not home. When people are poor, they may probably not have the possibility to choose their environment, although they can still experience having a home. Better opportunities may be offered for self-presentation by homeownership and through housing (Hauge, 2009). But as Paadam (2003) argues, home identity is not only limited to owners. People who own their dwellings have this freedom to choose their surroundings and this can be the reason why people prefer owning their dwellings (Agnew, 1981).

**Home Identity** - Identity features many fields and discourses such as politics, marketing, and self-help literature. According to Jenkins (2008), without knowing other people and having some ideas about who we are, the human world would be unimaginable. Identity can be related to human capacity, and originated in language.

Identification can be done through many criteria or factors; embodiment, answers to questions, language, clothing, accidental or incidental revelation of information, and information from third parties. Humans use this cognitive mechanism to sort out themselves and their companions. Identification is a matter of allocating meanings which always include social interaction. It includes agreement, disagreement, negotiation and communication about differences and similarities (Hauge, 2009). It is possible to search for identity via lifestyle choices which also have significant implications for housing (Clapham, 2002). Living in a specific type of house or in a neighborhood can be considered as having a special lifestyle and people may find it as an expression of identity. Giddens (1991) argues that lifestyle is a unified series of practices of an individual since they accomplish utilitarian needs and also give material form to a special tale of self-identity. These practices include some routines such as modes of behaving, clothing, eating and etc. Lifestyle can be used to explain wider sets of identity in everyday life. Thus, lifestyle can express identity (Chaney, 1996). In modern social life, individuals get more involved with lifestyle choices among a variety of options (Giddens, 1991). Festinger (1971) stated that people realize and validate identity aspects in themselves by considering their own behaviors and actions. People can alter their actions to fit their attitudes, or change attitudes to fit their behaviors. Therefore, Festinger's Cognitive dissonance theory demonstrates that housing and interior may change people. This means people's view of themselves can be influenced by making change in the physical environment. Depressing changes in people's spatial environment can even affect negatively their identities (Speller et al, 2002).

It is possible to conclude many different design implications from the theories that focus on the relation between home and occupant. It is a necessity to pay attention to aspects of place meaning which are associated to the specific community when working in a special context or with specific populations, in order to create, design, and build suitable dwelling options. All individuals with different ages and with any background or experience are somehow connected to their residential environments. Studies of hunter-gatherer societies demonstrate that an individual's turf provides him/her privacy, security, intimacy, identity and protection from stress. When we cross the threshold, we feel being in a protective enclosure of memories which helps maintain our persona and this is why we find our homes so precious and valuable (Gallagher, 1993). Gallagher's research has proved the significance of home for individuals, although meaning within the place may not always be positive. Moreover, an adequate and supportive housing can be created for specific population groups through using the concept of housing as identity by designers, developers and planners. Many of theories surrounding identity give priority to design concepts and implications related to housing. These theories are mostly based on the ideas of home as identity (Lien, 2009). As an instance, Manzo's (2003) theory underlines how people choose environments. Individuals choose environments which provide duration and continuity, and fit their self-concept. They also expect the environment to meet daily needs and facilitate self-development. When places are considered as symbols of life events, individuals should be allowed to have their memorable environment and live close to it, or, revisit their home environment for special events. We can find design implications also in Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's (1996) identity theory. Self-identification includes a feeling of locality as a large part of it in the residence. It should be noticed when bringing up locations for alternating care facilities and housing. Unwanted alterations in the physical environment may cause loss reaction. Thus, the self may be threatened by undesirable emotional disruptions. Individuals' sense of identity can be significantly influenced by the changes of the home environment (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). According to Proshansky et al. (1983), it is significant to maintain a sense of identity in home environments and among residents. Because social and physical identities are formed during time and might be connected to other environments. Since individuals' place identity can be represented through spatial past of them, the role of individuals can be defined by the meanings and implications found in the physical setting and through how well they qualify as supporting physical systems. When home transforms from a single-family to a multi-family environment, the behavioral changes which accompany such transformation and relocation can be seen accordingly. This transition therefore needs to be mediated so that residents do not feel a sense of isolation or discomfort in their living environment. Hence, it is important to consider flexibility in the environment to let residents act according to their habits, routines, and abilities. A better sense of place can be fostered simply by adding some supplements to the residence, like providing easier access to tool in kitchen. It can maintain the individuals' well-being in the home environment. The environmental modifications are also significant. The residents can be allowed to personalize their spaces according to their taste and preferences. By this way, the main goal which is affirmation of the individual's self-identity can be reached (Proshansky et al. (1983).

### 3. Field study

Two case studies are selected in Kaliland zone in Famagusta. The first one which is considered famously as a high-quality and luxury apartment complex in this zone is Northern Land. The second case includes low-quality apartments of the opposite side of the main road. As it is shown in the following images, case studies are neighborhoods. Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 show Kaliland zone, Northern Land apartments, and low quality apartments. Thus, we will compare high-quality and low-quality cases in the following. To collect data about

these comparative case studies, I used questionnaires. The results of the survey can be generalized to similar conditions and contexts (Yin, 2003).

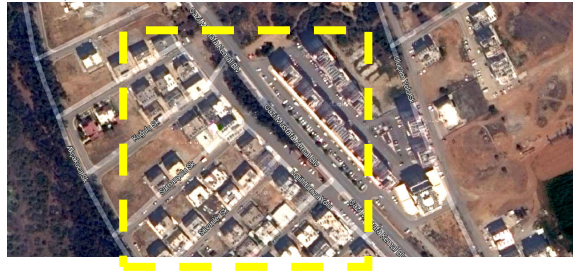


Figure 1. Kaliland zone in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus

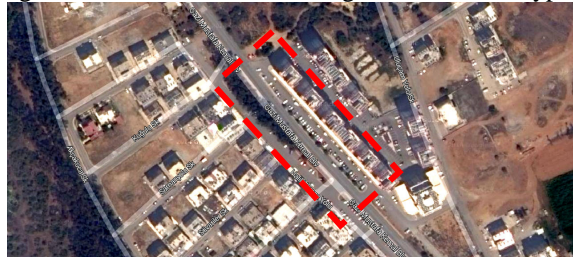


Figure 2. Northern Land apartment complex in Kaliland (high-quality case)



Figure 3. Low-quality apartments

***Northern Land apartments (high-quality case)*** - This residential complex includes several blocks containing modern, well-furnished, big size apartments. Architectural standards are well met in this complex (Fig. 4). With very high prices for renting or purchasing, this complex is known as one of the most luxury ones in Famagusta. The rent price in these apartments, for instance, is about 6000-7500 dollars yearly which is quite expensive in this area.



Figure 4. Northern Land, Kaliland zone

***Low-quality apartments of Kaliland (low-quality case)*** - These apartments are located right in the opposite side of Northern Land apartments and they are built and invested by different owners. See Fig. 5. I assessed housing quality in this area as a part of my previous research. These apartments mainly have significant qualitative problems in a variety of aspects and suffer from lack of standards (Borzooeian, 2014). The rent price in this area is about 2500-4000 dollars yearly. This area includes old and small apartments in comparison with Northern Land complex.



Figure 5. Low-quality apartments, Kaliland zone

Since this research is based on residents' satisfaction, and as mentioned before, using questionnaires was required. Using questionnaires in this survey make it easy to find out how residents feel and think about their apartments and what opinions they have. Through their answers we will be able to realize the relation between housing and identity in our special cases. The questionnaire contains a range of questions, from informants' age, sex, education, income, etc. to their current and former housing conditions, priorities, their feeling about their apartments, and etc. (Hauge, 2009). 30 questionnaires are gathered from the residents of each case, totally 60. The percentage of male/female informants is 50-50 totally.

For instance, one question is; thinking about how satisfied you are with your apartment, what qualities are important to you, and does your apartment have these qualities? Then the questionnaire provides informant several qualities in the following. Same question is asked about their neighbourhood.

#### 4. Results

The following table demonstrates the differences between two cases based on the two-tailed T-Test.

Variable	A: High-quality case			B: Low-quality case			t-value	df
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
Income	49	3.79	1.442	52	2.59	1.362	4.293**	97.664
Education	54	3.95	1.306	45	2.48	1.310	5.567**	93.704
Children at home	59	1.11	.975	57	2.31	1.141	-6.080**	110.016
Years in dwelling	53	2.18	1.266	50	7.58	5.621	-6.636**	53.686
Satisfaction neighborhood	53	3.75	1.114	55	2.32	1.265	6.240**	105.161
Satisfaction apartment	60	3.53	1.586	59	2.15	1.246	5.282**	111.588
Home feeling	56	3.57	1.545	52	2.63	1.316	3.411**	105.238
Moving plans	55	3.65	1.364	46	1.73	1.466	6.765**	93.087

\*=Significant at .05, \*\*=significant at .01, \*\*\*=significant at .001

Table 1. T-test results, differences between two case studies.

There are outstanding differences in some aspects. The variables are measured on a five-point scale. Table 1 shows that there is a higher level of resident satisfaction as well as moving plans in the high-quality case. It is demonstrated that the years of dwelling in the low-quality case are more than the same factor in the high-quality case. As another example, there is a higher sense of place in the high-quality case as the factor 'home feeling' shows. Another question which is asked in the questionnaire is about the awareness of residents about what their dwelling and neighborhood may say about who they are. The results show that 50% of informants have been aware of it in case A and 40% in case B. But when they are asked about whether this matter is important to them or not, 60% of them declared its importance in case A and 45% in Case B.

#### Conclusion

Theories related to social and physical environment form the basis of place identity. As theoretical discussions mainly emphasize social aspects, the physical environment is neglected. According to Twigger-Ross and Uzzell

(1996), there is a dynamic relationship between residential environments and identity processes. These processes develop in dealing with the environment. Identity then remarkably includes and sustains the environment. As Hayden (1995) argues, identity and memory are closely tied. The memory manifests itself in place and involves social aspects of environment.

According to Relph (1976), home is the place of greatest personal significance in our life. The unselfconscious intentionality which determines “place” as center of human experience significantly includes the essence of place, where we can find consciousness of the places we were born and grew up in, or where we live now. This association forms a source of cultural and individual security and identity. Therefore, home is an appropriate setting to study and look for identity. It can evoke and inspire many meanings such as an individual’s birthplace, nationality, or feelings and emotions like belonging or happiness (Moore, 2000). As Lien (2009) mentions, when creating new theories in this regard, it is significant to consider that how identity is formed. All of our experiences including feelings, attachment to neighborhood and community, interior spaces of the home, and social identity can be dominant in giving meanings to identity. In addition to many aspects of individual’s identity, it may change over time. The identity which can be influenced by sense of place may change and transform according to individual’s life changes or states.

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