

# The Quest for Livable City Centers: A Study in Famagusta (Gazimağusa), North Cyprus

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**Abstract:** Concern about the livability of urban spaces has led to an increasing interest in findings from analyses aiming to quantify livability in particular places such as city centers. In traditional cities, city centers have always been known by their diverse functions, activities and social interactions. However, today, with the effect of fast urbanization and the growth of cities outwards of the city centers, we lose the meaning and use of the concept of city center in many cases. This paper therefore aims to explore the characteristics of successful city centers and tries to identify the main parameters to achieve livability. Based on these, a strategy is proposed in order to promote the city center of Famagusta, a city in North Cyprus with a serious problem in its central area, to achieve livability. The study contributes some experiential evidence to investigate the claimed benefits and deficiencies in terms of effects of physical, social and economic parameters on the overall perception of livability of the residents in the central area.

**Key words:** City center, livability, livable city center, urban growth, Famagusta (Gazimağusa).

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, urban growth has had huge effects on cities in terms of physical, economic, social and political aspects through their urbanization processes. As such, central areas in cities are reclaiming their prominence as the focus of business, culture, and entertainment [1]. In the older cities, city centers were distinctive places [2-4]. A city center normally coincides with historic quarters, constitutes the center of communities and is a forum for civic life, but its main characteristic is that of a multifunctional place. City centers have their own local idiosyncrasies, but when they start losing the ability to attract investment and maintain their vitality, it is an indication that urban policies need to be reviewed and modified [5-7]. City centers are no longer the hegemonic commercial centers of previous eras. They now have to compete with other activity centers, but can only remain livable if they reinforce their

uniqueness and sense of place, which comes from the quality of their public realm and the organic mix of diverse uses [8-11]. Paumier [1] noted that, “a well-designed and well-managed public realm evokes community pride, creates a strong and diversified economic marketplace, and attracts the development investment needed to sustain and enhance the economic and social heart of the city”. During the last decades, changes in transportation types, land use, and economy have had wretched effects on city centers. In addition, many cities have become too reliant on the industry sector, and this has compelled the reduction of business diversity, which in turn has caused the lack of use of the city centers. Lack of concentration, intensity of uses, organizing structure, and changes in the city center’s market composition and physical characters are the basic problems, which contribute to loss of vitality and livability in city centers [12]. Thus, in pursuit of exploring the possible effects of urbanization on “livability” of the city centers, this study first seeks to understand the reason why recently, the city centers have lost their meaning and function in many cities; secondly, it tries to understand the

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meaning of the city center both in the history and in current times, and the effects of technology and modernism on the activities of the city center. The paper finally tries to determine the factors to create “a vibrant and livable city center” within the modernist age [1].

## 2. The Problematic Shift in the Meaning of City Center in Modern Cities

According to Oktay, face-to-face human interaction is one of the most essential factors to make a public space livable, safe and identifiable [13]. However, as Fishman discusses, face-to-face communication has been negatively affected and superseded by advanced communication technology [14].

As observed in many cities, city centers have lost their livability and have become mono-functional places due to a variety of reasons. As the residents vacated the central areas and moved to suburban areas owing to various problems they faced in central areas, city centers have become more problematic places; the buildings have been emptied, they have lost their functions, shops have closed, and most of the entertainment activities have moved away from city centers. All these factors have transformed the central areas into unsecure places, especially at night. Many researchers defined this phenomenon as the “urban doughnut effect” which can be portrayed as a spiral of decline or obsolescence that can be characterized as the “urban doughnut effect”, a hole (lack of activity) in the city center surrounded by a ring of suburban development [6, 15].

As such, the city centers have lost their livability due to functional, physical, and financial absences.

## 3. What Makes a City Center Livable?

Livability is an extensive concept; it is related to quality of urban life and determined by various factors. Due to increasing population density, the cities have become denser especially in central

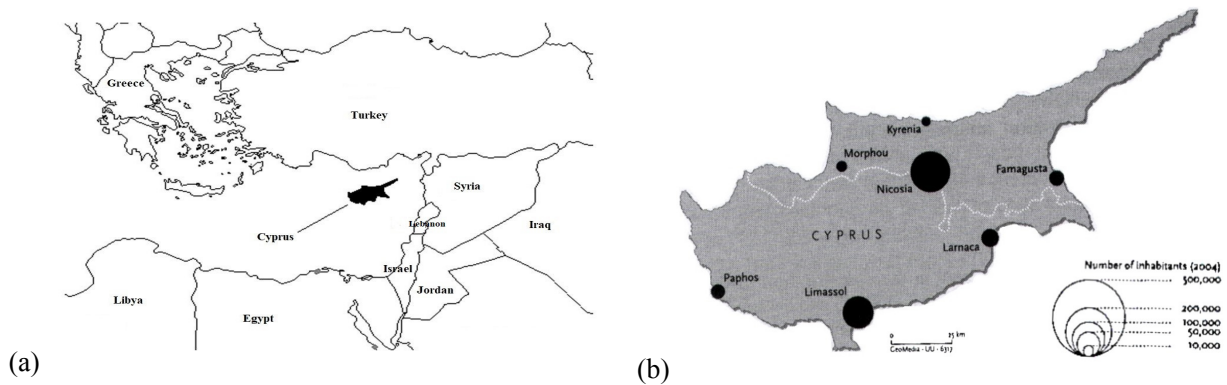
parts, and their centers have become problematic and non-livable because of overcrowding, pollution, traffic, insufficient public spaces, lack of affordable housing, lack of greenery and safety problem.

According to the DOE (Department of Environment), UK [15], the concepts of vitality and viability are key factors as they together can effect livability of a city center and make it a lively place for people who live in or use it [11, 15]. To be noted, if a city center is only a vital place, with a sense of place and time, where the urban environment fits the human body and its activities well, it is accessible and can be controlled, but does not have the ability to attract continuing investment [15, 16]; it is not necessarily a “livable place” [5]. Therefore, a livable city center depends on “a range of retail, leisure and commercial activities, which rely on and attract shoppers, visitors, employees and residents. Retailing is a basic, integral component of the urban life, perhaps the most critical component, and retail planning is crucial for city center livability” [5].

## 4. Case Study: Famagusta, North Cyprus

Famagusta (in Turkish: Mağusa/Gazimağusa; in Greek: Αμμοχostos/Ammochostos) is a city on the eastern coast of the island of Cyprus [13], and the second largest city of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus with a population of 42,000 (Fig. 1). The history and urban development of Famagusta (Gazimağusa) dates back to the first century AD. Over the course of time, the city was affected by uncontrolled urbanization and some other external factors such as the political conflicts and war in 1974. The development of the city can be categorized in three zones: (1) Historic core (The Walled City); (2) Districts developed outside the Walled city in different periods; (3) Major sprawled developments (suburbs) [19] (Fig. 2).

Due to these inappropriate and haphazard developments, the urban fabric in Famagusta faces



**Fig. 1** (a) Location of Cyprus and (b) location of Famagusta in the country scale [17].

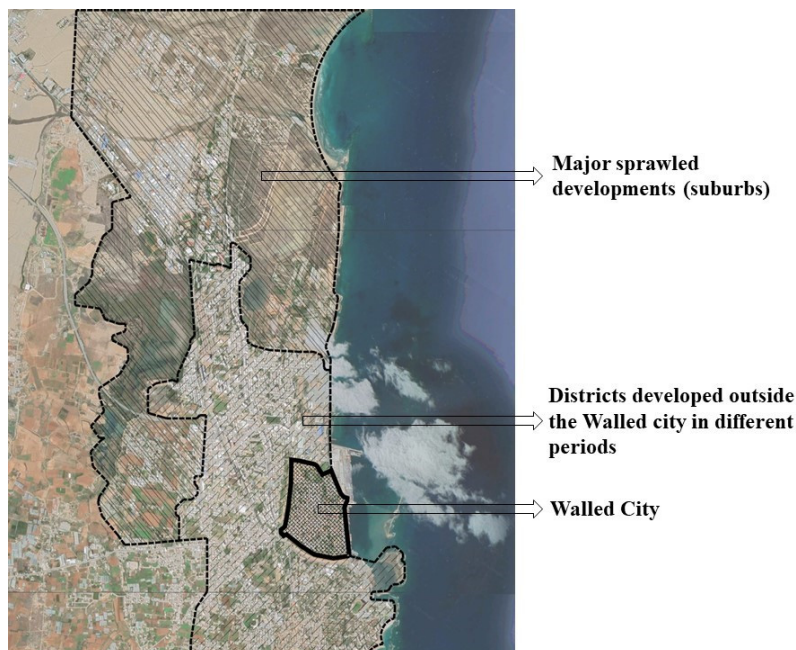
serious urban problems (i.e. more vacant lands and buildings, lack of well-defined and well-used public spaces, growth without any urban planning, losing the vitality and livability, etc.) which make serious threat to the quality of life in general.

In line with the fact that the city development moves from the historic core (the Walled City) towards the university, the survey will focus on three quarters of the city within the existing city center of Famagusta: (1) the Walled City (Namik Kemal Square); (2) Anit Roundabout; (3) Salamis Street area in the newly developed zone (Fig. 3).

## 5. Materials and Methods

The study aims to evaluate the existence of a city center according to physical, social and economic dimensions in Famagusta. Data collection methods include both qualitative and quantitative survey.

The quantitative survey is based on a questionnaire survey, which aims to find out whether Famagusta has a city center in people's mind. The questionnaire was carried out with inhabitants and students who evaluated the existence of the current geometrical city center in Famagusta and questioned the livability of



**Fig. 2** Main development zones of Famagusta (after Oktay and Conteh, 2007), [drawn by author on google map].

**Table 1** General evaluation on existence of city center in Famagusta.

	Yes	No
Resident perception of existence of city center	40%	60%

**Table 2** Percentage of available potential for each area to being city center.

	Locations		
	Namik Kemal Square	Anit Roundabout	Salamis Street
Percentage of use-ability of each area as city center of the city based on resident perceptions	19%	3%	78%

the area based on three main factors, the physical, social and economic. The qualitative survey includes a documentary study, site observation and site analysis.

## 6. Results and Analysis

### 6.1 General Evaluations on Famagusta City Center

As the main structural change of Famagusta has been towards the Eastern Mediterranean University campus, the physical shape of the city as well as economic and social structure has been affected. For this reason, a new generation of immigrants who are mostly students and university staff have moved to the newer parts of the city, and the historical core of the city (the Walled City) has lost its attractiveness over time and lost its function as a livable city center. Considering that expansion of the city after 1974 was towards the university and outside of the wall, changing the types of residential life, the major question of the survey is about the availability of a contemporary city center of Famagusta.

Tables 1 and 2 show that, more than half of the local people (about 60%) responded negatively while the majority (78%) agreed that Salamis Street between UN campus and MAGEM complex has the potential to act as a new city center of Famagusta; and the rest of respondents, about 40%, have responded positively. Accordingly, they believe that Salamis Street acts as the current city center (Fig. 3).

In further analysis the results clearly show that Salamis Street area is an active area (7/24) with high accessibility with public and private transportation as around 75% of the respondents visit the area daily and at all the times of the day. Approximately 70% of

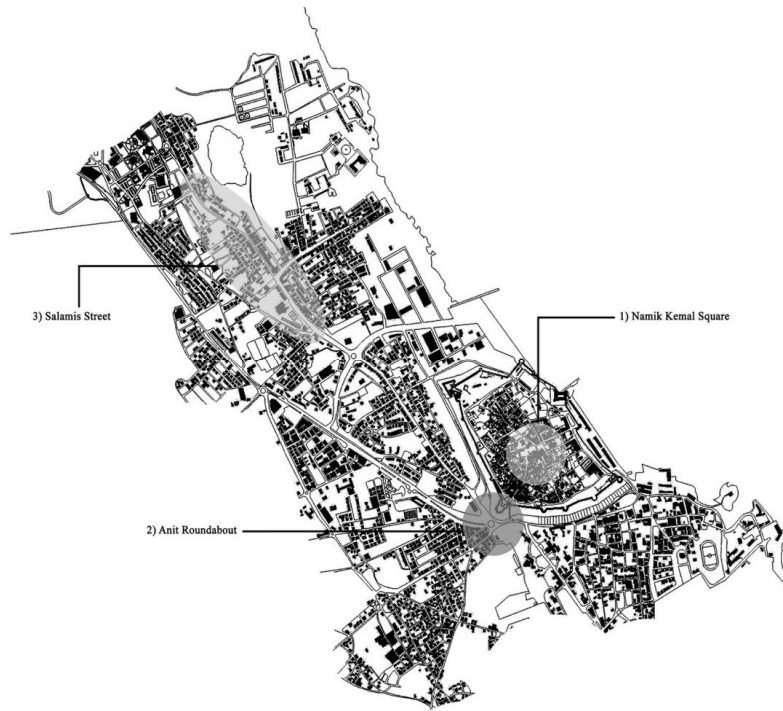
users travel to the city center by bus, about 55% used their own car, nearly 38% walk and more than 20% use bicycle. It is understood that the area is highly accessible with public and private transportation.

### 6.2 Evaluation of Livability

According to the previous result, currently there is no specific city center in Famagusta and most people believe that Salamis Street (between UN Campus and MAGEM complex) has more potential of becoming the center, furthermore based on Fig. 3 after Salamis street around 19% of the result shows Namik Kemal square, also had the potential to act as a city center. Therefore, at this level of evaluation, the survey has helped interrogate the livability of Namik Kemal Street, the old city center, and Salamis Street, which currently acts as the city center of Famagusta from a physical, social and economic perspective.

#### 6.2.1 Physical Quality

In the first part of the analysis, as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2, the physical quality of the old city center (Namik Kemal Square) was generally ranked high, especially for its public space, seating areas, pedestrian access, cycling routes and car parking. Thus, existence of more retail functions such as shops, restaurants, cafes mixed with residential function created a robust framework for the area from a physical perspective. Furthermore, according to Fig. 4a, in Salamis street, in terms of physical aspects, there are some important factors, which are equal or even higher than the old city center such as public transportation, green area, retail activity, offices and some mixed-use functions, generally, from the



**Fig. 3** Three areas with a potential of being a city center.

physical point of view there is not much contrast between the qualities of both spaces.

#### 6.2.2 Social Quality

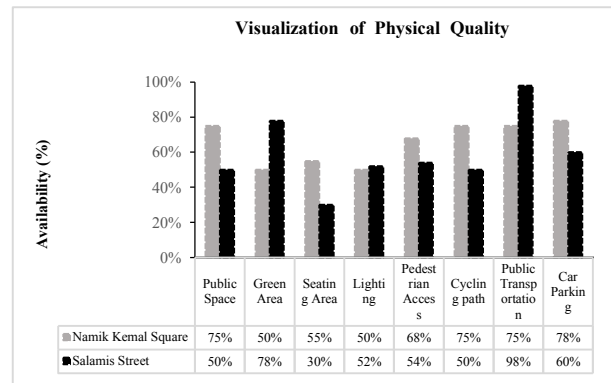
In terms of social quality, as shown in Fig. 4b, safety and security, which are the most important factors to make Salamis Street a liable place, ranked high in the evaluation. Furthermore, leisure activities of the space also ranked higher than Namik Kemal Square. For example, the existence of more cafés and restaurants working until midnight is very effective in the vitality of the area and has a higher impact on the safety of the area especially at night.

In addition, the existence of mixed-use complexes and a variety of functions in Salamis street made this area more sociable. By contrast, from a cultural point of view, museums, galleries, theatres and public events in the current city center were ranked lower

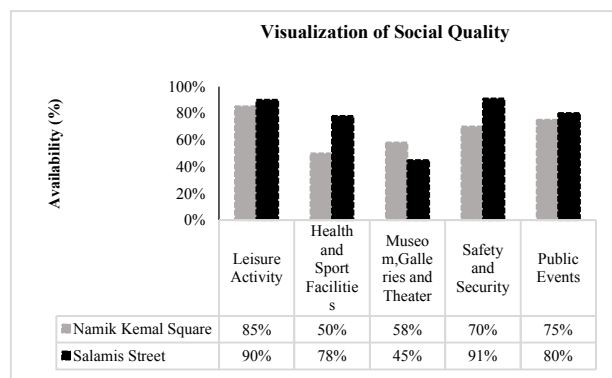
than the old city center (Fig. 4b).

#### 6.2.3 Economic Quality

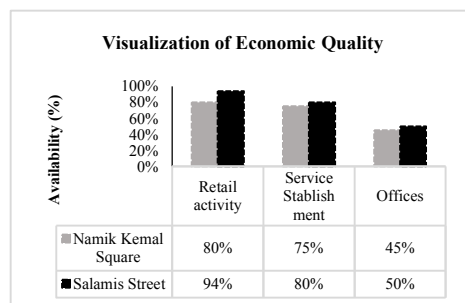
According to the economic evaluation of both spaces, the old city center and Salamis Street ranked equal with high and very high quality due to their retail activities but offices need more attention in order to improve the economy of the area (Fig. 4c). Findings revealed that the general qualities of Salamis Street and Namik Kemal Square are equal although some factors in Salamis street ranked higher compared to Namik Kemal Square, i.e. in terms of transportation and green area. On the other hand, in Namik Kemal square public spaces and pedestrian accessibility were ranked higher. Furthermore, based on the physical analysis of both spaces, it is clear that Namik Kemal Square is more impressive than Salamis Street, for its sense of place and developed infrastructure.



(a)



(b)



(c)

**Fig. 4 a) Visualization of physical quality, b) Visualization of social quality, c) Visualization of economic quality.**

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

A livable city center as the heart of the city is the most important element of urban identity [18]. However, changes in transportation, land use, economy, and so forth, have affected city centers from various perspectives. This study shows that, the lack

of an experiential livable city center in Famagusta, the case study area, has been related to the loss of its retail and residential uses in its historic central core. Therefore, based on the obtained result currently, there seems to be no perceived city center in Famagusta.

Further analysis obtained from survey, site analysis

and observations imply that both Namik Kemal Square and Salamis Street, the major strip extending from the central area to the university, have their strengths and weaknesses as current central areas. For instance, factors of variety and interest, visual and functional continuity and physical quality in both areas are approximately equal. However, there are differences between these two places in terms of their positive aspects. Namik Kemal Square has high-level quality through its organized structure, specific-historic-identity and comfort, whereas Salamis Street has higher quality through its convenience of accessibility, providing better comfort and leisure activities around the clock.

Since, it is not likely for Salamis Street to have a strong identifiable character like in Namik Kemal Square, and the discussions above, the following recommendations are proposed in order to promote livability in the city center of Famagusta:

- Regenerating Namik Kemal Square and its environs, the original city center, through enhancing economic and social parameters that can be very beneficial to the regeneration of this space by increasing the number of commercial places, increasing the number of civic buildings, enhancing leisure activity for young people, creating efficient public transportation, improving some physical parameters such as safety, lighting, public spaces, introducing public art, and so forth.

- Enhancing the qualities of Salamis Street area through physical factors such as, increasing number of public and social spaces for different age groups especially for children; creating more cultural, health and sport facilities; improving physical parameters like; lighting, cleanliness, green spaces, car parking, and so forth. Although so many pros and cons of city centers have been explored in this study, further research is still required in order to establish a strong framework for making city centers livable in all cities in transformation.

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