

Summer Spaces as a New Form of Social Relations between the Traditional and the Modern

Dr. Sevim Atila Demir
Asistant Professor of Sociology
Sakarya University
Esentepe Kampüsü, 54200
Sakarya, Turkey

Abstract

Summer spaces in Turkey are mostly free from the urban hurly-burly and associated with nature. Moreover, people engage in the small-scale cultivation of various fruits and vegetables in these places. In most cases, summer houses are close to the seaside. In these spaces, social relations are also different than they are in cities. It is observed that neither urban practices nor rural patterns are fully exhibited in such spaces, that is, a new form of social relations is prevalent. The aim of this study is to define this new form of social relations between the traditional and the modern.

Keywords: summer spaces, social networks, rural space, urban space

1. Introduction

The first serious contribution to the sociology of space came from Simmel. He examined the relationship between the space and social interactions, emphasizing that the importance of space was constantly diminishing as it was separated from social organization. He underlined five elements that render space meaningful: uniqueness of space, forms of divisibility of space into units and activities, the level of inclusion of social relations into space, its distance to the city and the impact of the arrival of a stranger (Urry, 1999:20). The uniqueness of space comes from its capability to influence the direction, pace and form of social relations. Space defines and confines social networks, and social practices are defined within the meanings of space.

Anthropological theories have analyzed the relationship between body and space from a wide perspective. Hall aimed to measure the distance between the body and the cultural space (Low, 2003:16). Space also defines the relationship between body and culture. Every space has a distinctive form of behavior, which cannot be considered separate from the cultural structure.

Social practices are organized spatially and these organizations seriously influence social practices. According to Urry, the spatial cannot be separated from the social. In this sense, there is no “pure” space, there are different spatial relations (1999:97). Space is a phenomenon that influences and –most of the time- defines social relations. Individuals learn about space within the process of enculturation, and they forge their practices based on this knowledge. The notion of space/place has been addressed limitedly outside of rural and urban sociology studies, although points of change that are concealed in social relations are mostly visible in spaces (1999:13). For this reason, recent sociological studies address space and maps of interpersonal relations together.

Space has been redefined in the modern era. The saying “We need a vacation” is a modern one that points to the need to spend some time free from working (Urry, 1999:179). There are spaces including summer spaces that we associate with the concept of vacation and in which we define our practices according to that concept. Such spaces are of importance in the modern era in that they satisfy individuals’ longing for the traditional. Summer spaces in Turkey offer people some time outside the urban practices, and at the same time, they satisfy to a certain extent their longing for the traditional. This situation reveals itself in two points: First, practices (growing vegetables, garden arranging etc.) satisfy people’s nostalgia for the traditional, and second, people reconstruct their primary relations. Certainly, every generation has different practices in this regard.

2. Space and Social Capital

For a large part of the society, reciprocity and trust are of importance for maintaining social ties.

Similarly, Putnam, in “Bowling Alone”, defined the important conditions of social capital as trust, reciprocity-based norms and social networks (Putnam, 1995:65-67). Spatial factors play significant roles in the development and direction of these networks. For example, a person goes out for a walk more often if she has a park nearby her house, or she swims more frequently if she is living in a place close to a pool. Therefore, physical facilities play important roles in the participation of individuals in social activities. Such facilities provide people with meeting spaces outside work and home (Lannoo, 2008: 2). It is observed in summer spaces that people establish closer and more intimate relations with the nature. Our practices and rules play significant roles in the vitalization of the local social capital. Especially in social relations, we refer to local social relations in order to understand the level of respect and kindness; because especially respect is essential for the smooth functioning of societies and spaces. If we want to have a sound urban culture and social capital, we need to recognize the ways that would tie communities closely to one another (Harris, 2007: 35-37).

Lannoo conducted a study in Belgium with 1673 participants and obtained the following two important findings: Different social relations exist in different spaces and these differences cannot be accounted for by only one reason.

It is hard to determine the relations between an individual and her environment. For this reason, many questions were asked in the study in order to be able to measure social relations. By asking questions about the frequencies at which a person sees her friends, eats outside, does physical exercises and goes to cultural activities etc; the degree to which that person is happy with her environment was measured (2008: 4). These questions also show the person’s social capital, which is of great importance in defining social relations. There exists a significant correlation between spatial characteristics and the volume of social capital. Given the fact that family relations is an important criterion used in determining social capital, defining summer space and family relations will give us the degree of social capital. For, summer spaces also include characteristics of extended family while modernization turned families rapidly into nuclear families. Transformations that families have undergone due to modernization have influenced the social capitals of all family members individually (Atila Demir, 2011: 913).

3. Impact of Space upon Social Relations

In modern societies, there is an increasing emphasis on leisure time. For this reason, entrepreneurs with “Protestant ethic” are not needed anymore. Instead, there is a need for hedonist people who consume and enjoy their leisure time. To this end, systems of redefining and reproducing leisure time are operating rapidly (Urry, 1999:287). Summer spaces may also be regarded as an outcome of the consumer society as leisure time is redefined in such spaces.

In order to be able to understand cities’ social orders, we need to look not only at their visible cultural elements but also at their histories and ethnic and political structures; because the relational form of social space in cities appear in the form of a mosaic. To understand the relations of space, we need to examine its all components individually (Wells, 2007:136-143). Population is heterogeneous especially in cities, and although general cultural elements reveal the characteristics of space, there is still a need for an in-depth analysis in order to understand social relations. Especially in the globalizing world, the atmosphere of rapid change renders such an analysis inevitable.

Studies in the field of social relations have demonstrated that proximity is not a necessary cause. Homogeneity and heterogeneity better explain the satisfactoriness of social relations. Excessive differences in social relations might cause cold relations and even conflicts (Gans, 1961:135). Today, it has become difficult to define spaces and societies. In addition, people’s identities are of course not stable. Today, we speak of global identities, multiple identities, mass migrations and homelessness (Gupta-Ferguson, 1992:9). For this reason, we cannot assume that spaces have fixed users. That is, there exist numerous factors that constitute and influence spirits of spaces.

Big cities of modernity cannot be considered independently from industrialization. These spaces shape our perceptions and behaviors. High buildings, bridges, tunnels and the perception of time defined in seconds mark such spaces (Kumar, 2004:105). On the other hand, there are solutions for people who long for the traditional. After all, everything in the consumerist society is an instrument for consumption. Summer houses are people’s dreams and yearnings in the form of consumption instruments, just like Featherstone’s metaphor of “fair”...(2005:52).

Summer spaces are the new form of yearning and expectation that bring together the traditional and the modern. However, they are neither of them. Although relations are more intimate, the frequency of seeing people of this space in the winter is lower. The most important reason behind this is that individuals define others via the space and that the daily rush during the winter does not allow for such relations.

Certeau states that everyday practices have been turned into rationally-organized and systematized space and time combinations. These regulations define who or what we are in the society. Bourdieu's understanding that "everything has a time and space" attributes social meanings to spaces and times. According to him, practices are determined via the relationship of the body with time and space (Harvey, 2006: 242). Actors' practices are defined through the characteristics of time and space.

Spatial practices can be analyzed and examined only by analyzing the social relations within which they are located; because these practices get meaning from them and they are consumed and changed within that framework (Harvey, 2006:251). Defining the space also means the definition of the relations.

Space and environment allow individuals to determine their living conditions. Knowing about a space means also knowing about people living or working in that space. Space and relations are defined this way. In this respect, in order to understand the relationship between the individual, the society and the space while examining a space sociologically; it is necessary to know how people living there perceive the space, how they chose it, what do they do and what kind of interactions they are engaged in (Erdönmez-Akı, 2005:68).

4. Space and Power

According to Foucault, the bodily space is a non-reducible element in our social order and disciplining powers are exerted upon this space. Body is within space; it has to submit to the authority or to create its spaces of independence (Harvey, 2006: 239). Summer spaces are an outcome of this antinomy. They are structured in a form that is free from the deep ties of authority but not giving up its obligations. However, it is observed that such spaces become more and more tied to modern obligations and networks. Today, summer spaces are among unique areas that are incarcerated by consumption blended with traditional values.

Foucault, with the concept of submission to the authority, points not only to the oppressive fields in the modern world but also to the system endemic in the process of socialization. Each space has a peculiar system and individuals learn it during socialization and act accordingly.

According to Foucault, disciplining dynamics are everywhere, but we feel the presence of power clearly in institutions. For this reason, institutions, especially hospitals and prisons, are formed with the aim of controlling people rather than curing them (Foucault, 1995: 85). In fact, modernity established the tendencies of submitting and being objects instead of the feelings of comfort and happiness (Atila Demir, 2009:11). Summer spaces are new fields of power, which have been formed along with the individual's aim of becoming a subject but are increasingly marked by power. These spaces have a very important characteristic that the expression of all kinds of thoughts in actors' minds is surrounded by power.

Space in modern thinking is a context in which reality is produced and perceived. That is, consciousness is produced within space. In addition, space is an instrument of power and all forms of power are intrinsic to space. It involves a hierarchy that reveals power. It is also the field of creating identities. Foucault explained the relationship between modernity and space within the framework of power. All spaces he mentioned in "Great Confinement" are also places of punishment by the power. According to him, space is the absolute form of power. Space reveals itself through its virtual nature and unseen characteristics rather than its absolute form (Kahraman, 2007:155-159). For, the meanings involved in space define and confine actors' practices. This situation contains two paradoxes. While actors construct different spaces as areas of freedom, they are most of the time controlled in these spaces without being aware of the impositions of power.

Within the framework of definitions of global village, greater freedom, locality and cultural tribalism are observed. For this reason, space and place politics have become more important. Space now has a sharper, clearer and less controllable meaning (Morley-Robins, 1997: 91). Blaise Pascal says "men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness". Ernest Becker, while interpreting this idea, argues that human beings are outside the nature but are also inside it desperately. We are inevitably involved in life individually and socially (Bauman, 2005:9).

Even though globalization has penetrated into urbanization, individuals continue to create personal spaces. Due to the limitedness of sharing space, we do not observe similarities among spaces in cities, unlike small rural places.

5. Space and Neighbor Relations

If summer houses are the traditional form of the modern individual, how do neighbor relations develop? In a study conducted in a Southern England small town, the degrees of privacy and sociality in neighbor relations were examined. The study also explains what the definition of “good neighbor” corresponds to in this space. The argument in that study is that the balance of privacy and sociality is quite important in neighbor relations. Neighborhood is a value that could be maintained by respecting others’ personalities. Therefore, it is emphasized that individuals’ lives are so private that they cannot be overcome by curiosity. Neighbors should respect each other’s privacy in order to be able to continue the relationships between them. Besides, the degree of neighbor relations is also linked with the age groups. Some authors repudiate macro effects (globalization, individualization) on neighbor relations arguing that these relations can be understood through micro-level examinations (Crow et al., 2007:127-128). The meaning of neighborhood differs from one person to another. In order to explain neighbor relations; cooperation, exchange of goodness and social interactions are examined. In addition, emotions and spiritual support are implicit elements in neighbor relations. The Manchester Neighbourliness Review defines three common approaches to neighbor relations.

- 1- Knowing about the conditions of neighbors
- 2- Respecting their private lives
- 3- Voluntarily helping them when they are in need.

Furthermore, neighborhood networks ensure informal social control and reduce crime. It strengthens support and aid between people, and enhances social development (The Young Foundation, 2007:5-7). A healthy analysis could be performed with a holistic perspective, because every space that creates a form of relationship is influenced by the global processes.

Space defines the web of social relations; however, there exist elements that individually influence the forms of social relations. Studies on social life have shown that similarities and backgrounds are of importance in befriending such as age, socioeconomic status, value judgments, personal interests, child rearing styles, leisure activities, and so forth. These findings indicate that social relations are explained through diversity and similarity of individuals. In determining social relations, we get help from the homogeneity or the level of population in the field. Among some other factors are affinity and kinship. However, studies have shown that similarities in personal characteristics are more influential and decisive in kinship. Friendship demands similarity. Especially in kinship and affinity, neighborhood requires face-to-face communication. It is necessary to turn visual contact into social relationship especially between neighbors (if there is not enough reason or courage). For this reason, physical distance (between neighbors) is of importance. It is inevitable to establish communication especially with next-door neighbors. However, being face-to-face in high buildings in cities does not create the same effect (Gans, 1961:135). In a study on the North Carolina population, a sample of 1796 adults was examined for leisure and physical activities. The study found that physical environmental conditions influence practices, dense urban conditions negatively influence the form of social relations, and thus the form of social relations in city centers is different from that in rural spaces (Huston et al., 2003: 63).

A study carried out in Germany examined the impact of mobility upon neighbor ties. Mobility is among the elements that negatively affect social capital. The study determined that social relations among neighbors went into a decline as mobility increased (DIW, 2009:35). Modern individual is a mobile individual (Urry, 1999:193) and the form of this mobility is changing every day.

We stated earlier that summer spaces represent a new form of construction between the traditional and the modern. Instead of an appointment-based system, we can speak in these spaces of the habit of visiting neighbors without notifying beforehand. However, the form of this habit, like many others, is neither fully modern nor fully traditional. In addition, the style of neighborhood in summer spaces is not retained during the winter. People who go back to cities in the winter are engaged in their daily activities and most of the time they suspend their summer neighborhoods.

Furthermore, the internet has had a significant impact upon the transformation of neighborhood ties, which are negatively influenced by spatial mobility and technological developments (DIW, 2009:38). The virtual world weakened real social relations and sometimes even replaced them.

It is generally believed that people of the past are more friendly and warm-hearted. Different living conditions brought about different forms of social relations. It is known that people support each other much more especially in hard times. In studies on families and kinship, quality of social relations and types of support between neighbors were examined. Attitudes and behaviors in the modern times, on the other hand, are much more technological. Individuals have access to more options to do in their leisure times such as TV and computers. These developments in communication technologies have transformed forms of social relations (The Young Foundation, 2007:4). Although technological elements are not decisive in the formation of the postmodern geography, they play significant roles in the emergence of new relations and inclinations (Morley-Robins, 1997: 110). This effect proves that interpersonal relations cannot be addressed independent from macro transformations. Summer spaces are outcomes of the longing for the past. However, the forms of relations and living conditions in such spaces are shaped according to modern standards.

Based on many expressions recorded in the study, respect among young people in neighbor relations has begun to fade away; because grand transformations reduce the need for neighborhood. Also, most opportunities are utilized through individuals' own values and practices. However, neighbor relations involve more irregular and common practices, and thus neighbor relations and respect are less common in cities. It is observed that people are less likely to cooperate (Harris, 2007: 38); which is a global condition today.

The findings of the study are of importance in this respect. If we ask "what changed or what disappeared?"; the answer would be "union". Then, what do we need? We need various kinds of togetherness (meetings, parties etc.) in order to develop informal social relations. It is necessary to render local relations stronger. Respect can be established by strengthening social capital. These values in the lives of people become meaningful with other people around them (Harris, 2007: 39-40).

There are serious differences between urban and rural spaces including different webs of relations. Primary and close relations are prevalent in villages, whereas urban spaces are marked by secondary relations. Summer spaces, on the other hand, combine some features from these two.

According to Simmel, urban personality is reserved, tired and distanced (Urry, 1999:20). The peculiar dynamics of the village now fail to meet all expectations of people in the modern world. For this reason, summer spaces amount to a rising reality of modern times as they combine the sincerity of the rural with the comfort and facilities of the urban. Different structures in modern cities do not play moral functions anymore. Therefore, the most meaningful spaces in contemporary cities are centered around consumption and tourism. These spaces divide individuals into different social groups and clearly differentiate between the public and private spheres (Urry, 1999:37). Each space has its peculiar consumption patterns. Summer spaces could then be labeled as consumption centers; offering artificially-designed natural life...

Conclusion

Actors shape their behaviors through the characteristics of spaces, which change depending on time and conditions. New spaces are formed due to new needs. Although actors shape spaces based on their needs, they move within the boundaries set by consumption and power. Also, the fact that globalization requires mobility influence individuals' perceptions of space and their relations with it.

Summer spaces in Turkey are modern consequences of the longing for the traditional. This situation becomes visible both in physical features of space and in forms of social relations. We observe a new form of social relations in summer spaces in Turkey, which is fitting neither to urban life practices nor to the practices of rural space. It is more sincere and natural than the relations prevalent in cities. On the other hand, it is more systematized and ordered than rural areas. When they are back in cities, actors utilize the social networks that they establish in summer spaces less; because the size, complexity and working hours of city do not allow for this. However, these networks are re-established every summer as if it was never interrupted. Individuals create their own spaces here by running away from modern obligations. However, the influence of the modern system is increasing and it is redefined by power.

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