



Community of trust: A socio-cultural approach for community planning and the case of Gaza

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A B S T R A C T

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This paper defines *Community of Trust* as socio-spatial settings in which there are substantial trust relationships among people and where they feel defended (safe) from internal risks. Our scheme suggests five categories of conditions that together create Communities of Trust: Shared place, shared daily-life practices, shared basic beliefs, and shared perceptions of community interests and risks. This scheme was examined in five communities in Gaza city. Data were collected first by informal talks with residents and local decision-makers and then by means of 973 personal interviews in residents' homes. Undoubtedly, the human conditions of the people of Gaza are among the worst in the world. Living conditions in the city have been difficult for the past century due to a number of factors, including: waves of incoming Palestinian refugees of the War of 1948, and decades of Israeli occupation. In spite of difficult housing conditions, poor services and the pressure of lasting internal risks, this study found livable communities and strong trust relationships among people of Gaza's communities. This article explains this by the high levels of agreement on basic beliefs, the shared daily-life practices, the strong shared perception towards external risks and a few common interests, which were found within each studied area. The last part of the paper is related to the issues of generalizing from the case of homogeneous urban community in Gaza to the frequently heterogeneous communities of Western cities. This study concludes that trust relationships are the corner-stone upon which communities are based anywhere in the world. Hence, in order to sustain communities, planners should support trust relationships among residents. This requires culture-sensitive planning.

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Introduction

For more than a century planners and architects have used their professional tools in an attempt to create and maintain communities, and almost 50 years ago Harvey Perloff noted that “the central concern of city planning is the urban community” (Perloff, 1961: viii). This prolonged effort has witnessed the proposal of models and frameworks for neighborhood and community planning, including the neighborhood unit, the contemporary new urbanism, and urban villages. Yet, the meaning of “community,” and the manner in which planning can best promote this concept, remain one of the most fundamental unresolved questions confronting planners today. Moreover, still there is no standard theory of community and the factors promoting good communities (Grant, 2006) and still there is a debate about whether physical environment can foster community

(Ganapati, 2008). This paper aims to help fill this gap by offering a new theoretical framework designed to enhance planners' understanding of the social, cultural, and spatial aspects of communities they strive to plan, and how to approach community planning accordingly. The proposed framework is named *community of trust*. Theoretically and practically, this paper contributes to academic exploration of the factors that promote the planning and building of better community settings, based on in-depth socio-cultural analysis of the communities themselves.

Our point of departure emerges from criticism of the modern deterministic approach to planning or the dark side of community determinism. The deterministic premise of physical design and its alleged social consequences have been criticized by many scholars since the middle of the twentieth century, including Gans (1968, 1991), Carmon (1976, 2001), Ganapati (2008), Harvey (2000), Keating and Krumholz (2000), Patricios (2002), Healey (2002) and Nasar (2003). Talen (2000: 171) summarized the criticism by arguing that “the idea that the physical environment can promote sense of community is really only limited to some forms of social interaction, not deeper social structures such as community.” Therefore, she

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concluded, “planners need to detach themselves from the idea that physical planning can create sense of community” (2000: 181). Such criticism of the deterministic approach to planning provides the basis for *community of trust*, the conceptual framework proposed here. It is also anchored in interdisciplinary work on various bodies of social scientific knowledge relating to “trust” and “risk,” and the interwoven relations between the two (see Jabareen, 2006, 2009).

This paper illustrates the significance of *community of trust* as a theoretical framework by applying it to various communities in Gaza, the largest Palestinian city. The first section defines “community of trust,” and the following section presents and analyzes the findings of the case study in Gaza. The final section engages in discussion on the theoretical framework and the case study findings, highlighting some practical implications for planners.

A new theoretical framework: community of trust

This section defines the concepts “risk” and “trust,” which play a critical role in the theoretical framework proposed here, and then uses these concepts to define *community of trust*. It concludes with a brief discussion of the contexts in which communities of trust may flourish.

Trust

Trust is generally understood as a belief in the integrity of other people (Ross, Mirowsky, & Pribesh, 2001). It is “a leap of faith that each is interested in the other’s welfare and that neither will act without first considering the action’s impact on the other” (Kumar, 1996: 95). According to Locke (1976: 122), men “live upon trust” and trust is the fundamental bond of human society (Dunn, 1984). Anthony Giddens (1990: 34) extends the definition of trust underlying social relations to include “abstract principles” (such as technical knowledge) and institutions that relate to modernity. Hence, he defines it as a “confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles.” In other words, trust can emerge in a variety of forms, levels and scales – through face-to-face interactions, ascriptions, institutions, and technical systems. Earle and Cvetkovich (1995) hold that social trust is based on judgments of “cultural values.” Accordingly, individuals would tend to trust institutions that, in their opinion, operate according to values that match (or are similar to) their own. Such values vary over time and between social contexts, as well as among individuals and cultural groups. In addition, Cvetkovich and Winter (2003) conclude that trust is highly correlated to assessments of shared salient values.

Trust has important functions in all societies. It promotes long-term social stability (Cook & Wall, 1980), reduces the costs of exchange and transactions (Fukuyama, 1995; Schmidt & Posner, 1982), and enhances quality of life (Schindler & Thomas, 1993). It also enables more effective, sustained, and rapid cooperation and coordination among people and organizations (Alter & Jerald, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995). Trust is important for social exchange (Kollok, 1994; Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000), an instrument of social control and protection (Barber, 1983), and a vital component of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). Moreover, recent research finds that trust is an important element for community development (Cebulla, 2000; Dhési, 2000) and collaborative planning (Kumar & Paddison, 2000). Absence of trust leads to community and social disorganization, which, in turn, increases crime and delinquency rates (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Threatening conditions and high levels of disorder promote mistrust and destroy a sense of community (Greenberg & Schneider, 1996; Ross et al., 2001; Skogan, 1990; Taylor & Shumaker, 1990).

Theorists emphasize the link between risk and trust (Beck, 1992; Gambetta, 1988; Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1979; Molm et al., 2000). According to Giddens (1990: 35), “Risk and trust intertwine, trust normally serving to reduce or minimize the dangers to which particular types of activity are subject.” Molm et al. (2000: 1402) conceptualize trust as an emergent phenomenon that arises in response to uncertainty and risk. Similarly, Guseva and Rona-Tas (2001) define trust as positive expectations in the face of uncertainty emerging from social relations.

Risk

Risk research typically focuses on the regularity and severity of hazardous events as assessed by experts. After Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky’s (1982) pioneering work on risk perception, social scientists have stressed that risk behaviours and perceptions can be neither understood nor analyzed outside the social and cultural contexts in which they evolve (Sommerfield, Sanon Kouyate, & Sauerborn, 2002). Some argue that understanding a person’s interpretation of risk requires attention to the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts within which this interpretation takes place (Beamish, 2001; Edelstein, 1993). Moreover, the cultural theory contends that risk is defined not by the findings of scientific assessments but rather by cultural factors common to specific groups (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982). It also suggests that members of the same societal group are likely to adopt certain values and reject others and that this process of adoption and rejection determines the perceived acceptability of specific risks (Snary, 2004: 37).

The proposed study expands Renn and Rohrmann’s (2000: 14) definition of risk as “the possibility of physical or social or financial harm/detriment/loss due to hazard within a particular time frame. ‘Hazard’ refers to a situation, event or substance that can be harmful for people, nature or human made facilities. ‘People’ at risk might be residents, employees in the workplace, consumers of potentially hazardous products, travellers/commuters or the society at large.” This study expands this definition to include political as well as physical, social, and financial harm, and considers political and religious conflicts and their real and possible outcomes to be part of risk analysis. After all, risk perception varies according to historical traditions and cultural beliefs, as well as political and administrative structures (Hannigan, 1995: 107; Harrison & Hoberg, 1994: 168; Jasanoff, 1986).

Conceptualizing community of trust

Hillery’s (1995) and Willis’s (1977) reviews of approximately 150 definitions of the concept of “community” in social science literature concluded that social interaction, geographic area, and common ties are essential elements of community life (MacQueen et al., 2001). Therefore, by community, this article means “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (MacQueen et al., 2001: 1929).

The basic argument of this article is that trust is the essence of community; what differentiates community from a mere collection of people in a city is the existence of trust among them. Where there is trust, there is a community.

The following conceptualization of “community of trust” is based on the link between the search for community by architects and planners (as presented in the planning literature), the importance of trust in human relations, and the dialectic relations between trust and risk, as reflected in the social science literature and the findings of our empirical research (to be presented below). This article defines *community of trust* as:

A socio-spatial setting in which substantial relationships of trust among people exist, and in which people feel sheltered and safe

because they do not perceive other community members as posing them risk.

Five factors together constitute and facilitate the production of communities of trust:

1. Shared beliefs – Basic beliefs and attitudes shared by people. These may include religious beliefs, community ethos, and attitudes towards fundamental aspects of life, such as traditional or nontraditional ways of life and the status of women.
2. Shared perceptions of risk – Perception of risk may be related to a common enemy or to natural or man-made hazards perceived as threatening one's property, freedom, or livelihood.
3. Shared interests – Shared interests may evolve around social, cultural, environmental, political, or economic issues.
4. Shared daily-life practices – Concrete daily behavior and interaction, such as shared leisure activities or the mutual provision of assistance to others in the same local space or housing environment (family members, neighbors, and friends).
5. Shared space – The traditional approach understands community as “a preeminently social phenomenon, in places, an inherently spatial phenomenon” (Wellman 1999: xiv). However, more contemporary approaches regard community as “a social network rather than a place” (Wellman 1999: xiv). While this ontology has facilitated the emergence of a virtual approach to community, this paper focuses on place-related communities only.

The conceptual scheme of community of trust does not assume causal relationships between the factors listed above, but rather supposed interrelationships among all of them. When a few of the factors exist, they tend to reinforce one another other. Although each is a potential facilitator of a sense of trust and relationships of trust, none is a necessary precondition for community of trust.

The case study

Our research on housing and cultural issues in Gaza City was conducted as part of the doctoral dissertation of the first author of this article, under the direction of the second author. The research dealt with the relationship between local culture and housing arrangements and did not originally aim to investigate the concept of *community of trust*. Nonetheless, our fieldwork findings and additional consultation of relevant literature led us in this direction. What captured our minds was the contrast between what we found in the neighborhoods of Gaza and what we know of neighborhoods in advanced Western countries.

Gaza is a city of refugees, poverty, and absence of open and free borders and access to the entire world and the West Bank. It has been living under the Israeli enclosure and fenced for decades until today. Even though, occasional visitors to the Palestinian neighborhoods of Gaza will be struck by the personal relations they observe around them. People seem to know each other well, and they greet each other frequently by name. Because many neighborhoods have no street names, it can be difficult for visitors to find a specific house; however, visitors approaching a local resident for directions often quickly discover that s/he knows exactly where to lead them. In many of Gaza's neighborhoods, people are poor and their houses are small and run down. However, in Gaza there is no correlation between poverty and crime and delinquency. A quick assessment of Gaza's crime and vandalism rates reveals that crime in Gaza is surprisingly low, in comparison to large cities in Europe and North America.

What accounts for the striking difference between the visibly warm interpersonal relationships and interactions in the neighborhoods of Gaza (including the very poor)? This question is what

motivated us to conceptualize and construct the scheme proposed above (Fig. 1) and to undertake the following secondary analysis of our fieldwork in Gaza city.

Gaza city: background

Gaza is an unfortunate city. It is a city of refugees and displaced people, which have the lowest GDP in the world (World Bank, 2009). The city has no open and free borders and access to the entire world and the rest of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank. Gaza is one of the world's most ancient cities (Meyer, 1997). It is also the main city of the Gaza Strip, a small, thin 360 square-kilometer coastal strip inhabited by a population of 1.2 million, most of them are refugees of the 1948 War following the establishment of Israel. Today, the Strip is bordered by Egypt to the south, Israel to the north and east, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. The Strip only became a separate political entity in 1948. Until then, it had been part of the surrounding territorial units of the times. Between 1917 and 1948 it was an integral part of British Mandate Palestine. As a result of the first Arab-Israeli war and the establishment of the state of Israel, the area came under Egyptian military rule in 1948 (Al-Mebed, 1987; Salha, 1997). During the two decades of Egyptian rule the followed, little was done to improve local living conditions: Gazans held no citizenship and a large portion of the population continued to survive on relief provided by the United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA, 2009), as many still do today. In 1964 the first meeting of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was held in Gaza. During the 1967 war, the Strip came under Israeli occupation, and two decades later, in 1987, the Palestinians launched their first uprising (*intifada*) against the Israeli occupation (Al-Mebed, 1987; Salha, 1997). In 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, after which Israeli forces withdrew from most parts of the Gaza Strip, transferring control to the newly established Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Our fieldwork was carried out in 1999, a time of hope for future Palestinian-Israeli peace and a time of local economic growth.

Gaza, the main city of the Gaza Strip, is the largest Palestinian city with a population exceeding 400,000. Close to half of all Gaza residents are refugees. Most of the refugees living in Gaza arrived from other parts of Palestine following the 1948 war and the

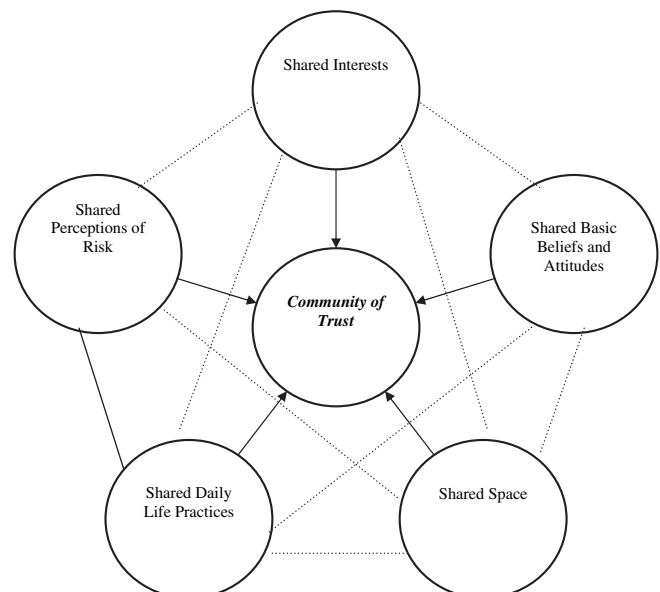


Fig. 1. Conceptual scheme of community of trust.

establishment of Israel. While many of the refugees live in poor neighborhoods and camps, people with greater means live in relatively wealthy neighborhoods.

Data collection and research questions

Data collection began in Gaza city in early 1999. The first phase of data collection included several types of activities: informal conversations with a few dozen residents and a dozen city government decision-makers; two group meetings, each participated in by 30–40 members of local NGOs; and collection of available data, documents, maps and reports about Gaza, its residents, and its residential areas. The second phase of data collection focused on an extensive household survey. The survey involved a structured questionnaire soliciting demographic and socio-economic information about the interviewees and their families, and their attitudes towards religion, politics, gender, family planning, and housing preferences. 973 interviews were conducted in five neighborhoods representative neighborhoods: 1) The Old City, which was established centuries ago; 2) Al-Rimal al-Janubi (al-Rimal), a higher status neighborhood, established during the British Mandate (in approximately 1930); 3) Al-Shati` refugee camp, which was established by UNRWA in the early 1950s; 4) Sheikh Radwan (Radwan), established in the 1970s by the Israeli occupation authorities to house families from refugee camps in multi-unit buildings; 5) `Ebad al-Rahman (Rahman), also established by the Israeli occupation authorities, in the mid-1980s, to house refugees on family lots. The selected neighborhoods represent adequately the entire population of Gaza. These neighborhoods represent various populations in Gaza (refugees, natives), different socio-economic levels of neighborhoods, age of the neighborhood, and different housing types. The interviewees were randomly selected in each neighborhood. The interviewers selected only one household in every fifth residential building (i.e. to select the buildings numbered fifth, tenth etc.).

It is important to mention that the data collection process was done in 1999, and the collection of data could not have been done after 1999 because Gaza Strip has been under enclosure since 2000.

As noted, applying the conceptualization of community of trust to Gaza was an afterthought, and was not in mind when the research questionnaire was designed. However, after receiving unexpected findings concerning relationships within the communities under examination, the study developed the theoretical scheme presented above (Fig. 1), and formulated five research questions, which are presented below together with the indicators used to examine them:

1. Do most residents of Gaza's neighborhoods share basic beliefs and attitudes? Two types of beliefs and attitudes – religious beliefs and attitudes towards women – were examined, each by means of one question in the household questionnaire.
2. Do Gaza neighborhood residents share daily-life practices? Indicators included evidence of shared meals, communal child rearing, and common leisure activities.
- 3–4. Do most Gaza residents share a similar risk perception? Do they have common interests? In this case, assessment was based not on the above-mentioned questionnaire but on ethnographic evidence collected by the first author in his numerous visits to Gaza, through conversations with residents and officials, and a number of semi-structured interviews.
5. Do most Gaza residents live in a "community of trust"? Indicators of trust included sentences selected from dozens of informal conversations with residents of Gaza city, and one formal question in the household questionnaire: "Do you feel safe in your neighborhood (safe, not very safe, not safe)?"

The household survey was conducted in Arabic in mid-1999. This was a period of relative peace and prosperity in Gaza: six years after the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PNA and one year before the beginning of the second Palestinian Intifada in October 2000. Crossing points between Gaza and Israel were open for the daily, though not unfettered transfer of people and goods. Twelve local students carried out the interviewers. They were instructed to select one household in every fifth residential building and to interview one member who was over 18 years of age. In total, 973 adults in five neighborhoods were interviewed in their residences, as detailed in Table 1. Of the total body of interviewees, 57% were female and 43.3% were male. The average age was 36, the average number of household members was seven, and the average housing density was 1.8 persons per room. The average length of residence was 16 years in neighborhoods and 10 years in apartments.

Findings

Shared basic beliefs and attitudes

In terms of religion and ethnic origin 98% of its residents are Muslim Palestinian Arabs and the remaining 2% are Christian Palestinian Arabs. Our examination therefore focused not on the mere fact that a respondent was a Muslim but rather on intensity of his or her religious beliefs. Our findings revealed that religion played a significant role in the lives of almost all interviewees: 84% agreed with the statement "religion guides my behavior," 15% partially agreed, and only 2% disagreed. 71% of all interviewees believed that "women should dress according to the Islamic *Shari'a* (Islamic law), while 25% partially agreed and only 4% disagreed. This research found no significant variation by gender, age, education, or economic status. Indeed, although a chi-square test revealed significant variation among neighborhoods regarding women's dress code, about two-thirds of the participants in each neighborhood agreed that "women should dress according to the Islamic *Shari'a*," and fewer than 7% disagreed (see Table 2). Hence, according to the selected indicators, we can conclude that shared traditional Islamic beliefs and attitudes characterize most Gaza residents.

Shared daily-life practices

As reflected in Table 3, a large majority of interviewees live in multi-unit buildings occupied in their entirety by members of their own extended families alone. This arrangement facilitates a long list of shared day-to-day practices, such as: cooking and dining together a number of times a week; assisting each other in caring for children and the ill; and spending leisure time together. On the neighborhood level, residents also participate in shared everyday practices. One common activity is praying in the neighborhood mosque five times a day (men only). Another shared activity on the neighborhood level is attending neighbors' weddings, which usually take place in the streets of the neighborhood. A third activity is participation in the mourning rituals of a neighboring family; when a resident dies, his or her family builds a temporary

Table 1
Interviewees by neighborhood and gender.

Neighborhood	Interviewees	Female (%)	Male (%)
Total sample	973	56.6	43.4
The Old City	199	36.5	63.5
El-Remal	184	63.6	36.4
Shati Camp	194	71.4	28.6
Radwan	301	53.5	46.5
El-Rahman	95	64.2	35.8

Table 2
Basic beliefs and attitudes, by neighborhood (%).

	Total	Ebad El-Rahman	Sheikh Radwan	Shati Camp	El-Remal	The old city
“Religion is directing my behavior”						
Total	(n = 963)	(n = 94)	(n = 295)	(n = 193)	(n = 184)	(n = 199)
100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Agree	83.6	95.7	76.1	76.2	85.3	92.4
Partly	14.7	4.3	17.9	23.3	14.1	6.6
Disagree	1.7	0.0	4.0	0.5	0.5	1.0
“Women should dress according to the Islamic Shareah”						
Total	(n = 963)	(n = 94)	(n = 295)	(n = 194)	(n = 184)	(n = 196)
100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Agree	70.9	80.9	68.5	63.9	81.5	66.8
Partly	24.8	17.0	24.7	34.0	16.3	27.6
Disagree	4.3	2.1	6.8	2.1	2.2	5.6

tent in the neighborhood to host neighbors who come to offer their condolences.

Shared risk perceptions

The formal questionnaire did not include questions concerning risk perception. In the case of Gaza, however, it is clear that the frequent transition of foreign rulers throughout the 20th century has created a perception, shared by many residents, of uncertainty regarding the political future. Specifically, the unsolved issue of the Palestinian refugees from 1948, in conjunction with three decades of Israeli occupation, have created a collectively perceived “environment of risk” in Palestinian society.

Shared perceptions of risk were expressed in informal conversations conducted by the first author with residents of Gaza during his year of frequent visits to the city. An elderly man who spent his entire life in Gaza summarized the political chronology of his city as follows: “I was born in 1911 during the Turkish [Ottoman] period. I married during the British Mandate. Then the Egyptians controlled the city and Israel occupied it in 1967. Since 1994 we have had the Palestinian Authority, but the Israelis are still around. The whole time, we have been uncertain of our future.” A refugee who lives in al-Shati` Camp explained: “Gaza is a city of refugees. Until 1948, I lived in *Yafa* [also known as Jaffa, incorporated into Israel in 1948]. After the 1948 war, I became a refugee in Gaza. For more than 50 years, I have been living with a feeling of temporariness, like the tens of thousands of other refugees in the city. We are still unsure about our future.” Another interviewee summarized his perception of living in high risk as follows: “Because of our political situation, you cannot plan your future. Sometimes you are unable to plan your tomorrow. Palestinians never know what tomorrow holds in store.” This political uncertainty has also resulted in economic uncertainty. One businessman interviewed explained: “Until 1993, it was very risky to invest in Gaza. Who has the courage to invest under occupation? For businesses, you need the right environment. After the Oslo Accords, the situation became relatively healthy for investing.

Table 3
“Who lives in your (multi-unit) residential building?” by neighborhood (%).

Neighborhood	Total	Residing with kins only	Residing with “others”
Total	100 (n = 935)	83.5	16.5
The Old City	100 (n = 188)	77.7	22.3
El-Remal	100 (n = 171)	71.9	28.1
Shati Camp	100 (n = 189)	98.9	1.1
Sheikh Radwan	100 (n = 294)	88.8	11.2
Ebad El-Rahman	100 (n = 93)	68.8	31.2

Table 4
Feeling of safety, by neighborhood (%).

Neighborhood	Total	Highly safe	Partly safe	Not safe
Total sample	100 (n = 935)	84.2	12.7	3.1
The Old City	100 (n = 199)	78.4	11.6	10.1
El-Remal	100 (n = 159)	86.4	12.5	1.1
Shati Camp	100 (n = 173)	89.2	8.8	2.1
Sheikh Radwan	100 (n = 296)	79.7	17.9	2.4
Ebad El-Rahman	100 (n = 95)	81.1	16.8	2.1

However, because of the new Israeli closure and the difficulties moving goods to and from Gaza, it is still risky.” Another interviewee said: “About 60,000 employees worked in Israel prior to the peace agreement. However, since the Oslo Accords, most of these employees have not been permitted to work in Israel. Today, Gaza is full of unemployed people.” In this way, the high risk of unemployment in an area that has never had an organized system of social security is another shared risk perceived by the residents of Gaza.

Social interests

For many decades, the Palestinian communities in Gaza (and the West Bank) managed there lives under occupation and political turmoil with no formal state institutions whatsoever. This absence resulted in enhanced social solidarity and concerted efforts to maintain the existing social order.

An important indication of shared interests on the neighborhood level is the establishment of local informal voluntary associations. The first Intifada (1987–1993) witnessed the establishment of “neighborhood committees” in almost all neighborhoods in Gaza, many of which were still active at the time of our fieldwork in 1999. These committees contributed to the maintenance of social order during the period of Israeli occupation. One neighborhood committee leader described the body’s role during this period as follows: “The committee acts like a small state. When the army closed the schools, we opened rooms for education in private houses. By doing so, we tried to minimize the occupation’s damage to the new generation.” Another activist said that “the neighborhood committees support families in need – primarily poor families and the families of political prisoners – and enhance security in the neighborhoods themselves. They rid the neighborhoods of crime and criminals.”

Community of trust

Community of trust was assessed by two primary indicators: a sense of safety, and a sense of trust among neighborhood residents. The first indicator, a sense of safety in the neighborhood, was assessed by means of a direct question in the formal questionnaire. The findings shows that the vast majority of participants (84%) possessed a high sense of safety in their neighborhoods, while only a small portion (3%) stated that they do not feel safe. In each neighborhood, 78–89% of interviewees felt “very safe.” Although responses varied by gender (87% of women respondents felt very safe, in comparison to 80% of the men) and economic status (79% of low-income respondents felt very safe, in comparison to 88% of the higher-income), a clear majority of all groups considered displayed a high sense of safety in their neighborhoods [Table 4](#).

Analysis of the second indicator, a sense of trust among neighborhood residents, is based on ethnographic data. A well-known *hadith* (an oral tradition concerning the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, with a special role in Islamic practices) among Palestinians calls for Muslims to respect and be good to their neighbors. People in Gaza often say, “The prophet recommends being good [even] to the seventh neighbor.” On the whole, Islamic tradition improves relations between neighbors. It is believed that

Muhammad also secured neighbor-related rights related to everyday interactions. According to another hadith, the Prophet said:

The rights of the neighbor is that, when he is sick you visit him; when he dies, you go to his funeral; when he is poor you lend him (money); when he is in need you protect him; when he is happiness you congratulate him; when he is struck with a calamity, you condole him; don't raise your building above his to cut off the wind from him; don't harm him with the good smell of your food unless you let him have part of it (Mentioned in Tabarani and quoted in Sakr, 2008).

One interviewee defined her neighborhood as a “place where you feel safe; move freely among familiar people; where you can ask others for help; where your children play without fear and their mothers do not worry; and a place where you trust your neighbors to take care of your children and to not harm you.”

Discussion

Undoubtedly, the human conditions of the people of Gaza are among the worst in the world. Living conditions in the city have been difficult for the past century due to a number of factors, including: waves of incoming Palestinian refugees of the War of 1948, decades of Israeli occupation, enclosures, and the recent war on Gaza, which left it devastated. In spite of these obstacles, this study found a society with livable communities of trust. This surprising finding is especially salient in al-Shati^h refugee camp, which is known for its remarkably high population density. Our explanation is that the modernization processes that took place in Gaza were relatively moderate and therefore did not destroy the population's traditional socio-cultural frameworks. Old values were retained and observed, traditional residential patterns remained in place, and the socialization of the younger generation continued almost as it always had. This cultural setting has created and maintained residential spaces in which people know each other, relate to each other, and feel safe to flourish.

Based on the findings of our fieldwork in Gaza, the literature on aspirations of planners to create communities, and the social science literature on trust and risk, this article proposes *community of trust* as a socio-cultural perspective for analyzing and understanding communities. Although it can be taken a step further. *Community of trust* might also be regarded as a goal in the planning of new localities. In a recent article, Sandercock (2002: 203) described the history of planning as an “attempt to manage fear in the city,” and Jabareen (2006) suggests that planning has the power to create undesired spaces of risk. This article acknowledges the fear of various risks as an organizing factor in cities, but it proposes formulating the goal in positive terms: fostering trust rather than managing of fear.

This amounts to a call for planners to maintain and/or develop places characterized by relationships of trust and in which people feel safe. This study emphasizes the distinction between *maintaining*, i.e. supporting trust where it already exists, and *developing*, i.e. creating trust where it either barely exists or is totally absent. Despite the obvious differences, an analogy with medicine may be helpful. A fundamental tenet of medical doctors is “to do no harm” (Latin: *primum non nocere*), and another is to cure illness in order to establish health. In our analogy, the first tenet of planners should be to refrain from damaging relations of trust where they already exist (for example, to avoid demolition and redevelopment in places inhabited by communities that maintain relations of trust), and the second would be to plan with an eye towards developing relations of trust where they are absent.

Critical Sociologists like Richard Sennet (1996) and Zygmunt Bauman (2000) reject and disqualify the ideal of urban community, because in their view it oppresses freedom and individuality, and

because it is unrealistic – a pleasant fairy tale, but not a reality in our world. This article recognizes the potential disadvantages of cohesive communities, yet it believes in the power of humanistic education to overcome at least some of the disadvantages. In this way, it adopts the aspiration and joins the search of planners to foster community. This study regards the search for community as a real and major social force, one that is embedded in human nature and reinforced by the rapid changes and growing risks and uncertainties of our time.

Conclusions

As we have noted, the Gaza area is actually a small thin seashore strip with a rapidly growing population, much of which lives in poor housing conditions. The city would appear to be in dire need of large-scale demolition and redevelopment projects to facilitate the construction of high-rise residential buildings with new infrastructure, as well as open spaces for Gaza's many children and other groups. Indeed, it is possible and advisable to build apartment buildings for limited segments of the population, particularly those who can afford expensive residential units and who are not enmeshed in local traditional social arrangements.

However, for most people in Gaza, who constitute a culturally homogeneous population consisting almost entirely of observant Muslims, this article proposes a different strategy – one of carefully upgrading the existing housing without disrupting the traditional socio-cultural setting. Actually, a process of residential upgrading has already started spontaneously. At the time of conducting the fieldwork, the study observed self-help upgrading of residential units in all the neighborhoods under consideration. 31% of respondents added apartments to their buildings, usually by adding 1–3 additional floors, and half of those added more than one apartment in order to provide residences for married brothers and sons. 28% of the 973 households interviewed enlarged their homes, usually by adding 2–3 rooms to each renovated apartment. Planners can encourage such development, first and foremost through formal facilitation and regulation of this user-controlled upgrading process (on the facilitation of user-controlled upgrading and updating of housing see Carmon, 2002a, 2002b). Encouraging this process also requires the provision of public financial support, some directly to low-income households, and more to be invested in the development of much needed public facilities in residential areas. Our major conclusion is that for the communities of trust in Gaza neighborhoods to be preserved, culture-sensitive planning is the name of the game. In other words, housing technologies should respect and follow local socio-cultural conditions and changes and not vice versa.

Recommending upgrading instead of demolition and redevelopment may not sound new to those familiar with housing issues in developing countries. Yet, while the most common causes for preferring the upgrading alternative have to do with land scarcity, financing problems (Mukhija, 2001), and environmental concerns (Ndyuki, 1999), we propose putting socio-cultural considerations first.

Relationships of trust among people living in the same locality are common in traditional societies and are relatively easy to reinforce in socially homogeneous areas. Such relationships are much less common and far harder to promote in the culturally and socially heterogeneous human environments typical of large western cities. As a means of coping with their fear of heterogeneity, practices of inclusion and exclusion are common among the residents of such cities. One dramatic expression of this type of solution is found in the United States, where “gated communities” are flourishing (see Webster, Glasze, & Franz, 2002). Towards the end of the twentieth century, McKenzie (2003) found that CIH (Common Interest Housing, i.e., privately governed residential enclaves) housed one-sixth of the population, and that more than 50% of annual new home sales were

in “community associations” (Fuller & Durso, 2000). These forms of CIH all accept only “people like us,” thus reducing the sense of risk that seems to go hand-in-hand with socially mixed residential environments. Planners are aware of the advantages that residents find in homogeneous communities, in which relationships of trust are created and maintained relatively easily, yet many advocate heterogeneous housing, pointing to the many disadvantages of rejecting “others” by these exclusionary communities (Cityscape, 1997). Pointing to disadvantages, however, is not enough. The real question is whether planning can do something to create communities of trust populated by non-homogeneous populations.

Following our analysis, the answer to this question may be positive. The first step this study suggests is diagnostic: using indicators to analyze existing levels of trust and fear among residents in a target area. This step requires collaboration between social scientists and planners. If a low level of trust is found, it is possible to use the above community of trust scheme (Fig. 1) to generate hypotheses regarding possible avenues to a solution. This scheme is not a system of causal relationships that advance in one direction, from the independent factors to the dependent variable of community of trust. However, the study does assume that there will be interaction among the factors and that reinforcing one may result in the reinforcement of others. In this way, the surrounding factors may be understood as conditions and circumstances in which communities of trust are more likely to thrive. Planners may therefore consider designing interventions that influence these factors.

With regard to the first factor – “shared beliefs and attitudes” – no planning action is proposed. Unlike some architects and planners, this article does not agree that the strategic design of buildings, streets, and services can change people’s values and basic attitudes. And that it is as the role of planners to work to change the values of other people. It therefore objects to methods of housing provision that may disrupt cultural and social fabrics, such as forcing residence in anonymous high-rise apartment buildings on people who are used to other types of housing that better facilitate close relationships among neighbors.

To some extent, planners of housing in socially heterogeneous neighborhoods may want and may be able to influence the factors of “shared daily-life practices” and “shared interests.” Through the establishment of local services for daily use and the construction of small meeting points for parents and their children and for youth and the elderly, planners can increase shared daily-life practices. Organizing residents to fight environmental hazards in proximity to their homes or to fight for improved educational and community services may enhance “shared interests.” Distributing a neighborhood phonebook and establishing a neighborhood electronic network are also ways to enhance shared interests and daily-life practices.

This paper demonstrates the utility of “community of trust” as an analytical tool for understanding urban areas as socio-spatial structures, and proposes that maintaining existing communities of trust and developing new ones be regarded as important goals for planners of new localities. Needless to say, a better understanding of this proposal and how to go about implementing it will require creative thinking, additional research, and intensive learning from experience. Finally, this research suggests that community of trust is appropriate not only for Gaza, but the concept does have relevance to other communities and culture in the world. This concept might have broader applicability in various communities around the world. Eventually, *community of trust* has various spatial, social, cultural and economic planning ramifications.

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