

WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: THE CASE OF
NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES IN BALÇOVA



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SEPTEMBER 2019

Approval of the Graduate School



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ABSTRACT

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Political Science and International Relations Graduate Program

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This thesis analyzes how neighborhood houses contribute to women's political participation. In this context, the structure of Balçova neighborhood houses was analyzed and interviews were carried out with the current and previous mayors, in order to gain information. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with women who were not involved in political activities before joining neighborhood houses. The results show us that women's participation in political life is an unintended consequence of attending the activities of the neighborhood houses. It is argued that women who have participated in the activities in neighborhood houses have become more social and have gained self-confidence, essential for political participation.

Keywords: neighborhood houses, women, political participation

ÖZET

KADINLARIN SİYASAL HAYATA KATILIMI: BALÇOVA SEMT EVLERİ ÖRNEĞİ

Gacar, Beylem

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Yüksek Lisans Programı

Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Filiz Başkan

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Bu çalışmanın amacı kadınların siyasi hayata katılımlarında semt evlerinin nasıl bir rol oynadığını incelemektir. Bu bağlamda Balçova semt evlerinin yapısı analiz edilmiş ve işleyişi anlamak için eski ve yeni belediye başkanıyla görüşme yapılmıştır. Ayrıca semt evlerine katıldıktan sonra siyaset hayatına katılmış kadınlarla derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Sonuç, kadınların siyasal hayata katılımlarının semt evlerinin öngörülmeven sonuçlarından olduğunu göstermiştir. Tezde, semt evlerinin faaliyetlerine katılan kadınların daha çok sosyalleştiği ve siyasi katılım için gerekli olan özgüveni kazandığı ileri sürülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: semt evleri, kadın, siyasal katılım

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood houses in Balçova (Izmir) are established by the local government in order to, via vocational courses, increase employment opportunities and income levels of women who have been forced out of society due to a lack of education and who are economically dependent on their family members. Besides the courses, seminars about education, health and human rights are organized, in order to increase the awareness of women regarding these issues. Self-confidence and awareness lead to participation of women in social life as a natural consequence.

Courses, seminars and activities provide opportunities for women to come together and establish friendship ties. Therefore, women are present there not only during seminar or course hours, but also during their leisure time. They meet with their friends, spend time together, and socialize. This situation is a unique opportunity for women who cannot go out from their own home due to their domestic problems. The husband/father who does not allow his wife/daughter to go out alone and meet her friend or neighbors outside, does not interfere with her wife/daughter about her work or meetings in neighborhood houses.

The name “Neighborhood Houses” was first used in the Balçova Municipality. Although it is similar to some other institutions in terms of operation and structure, neighborhood houses have their own unique function.

They provide a place for women's solidarity and organization, as well as the participation of women in social life, while also improving the quality of life for women by raising their awareness through instructional programs. In addition, they provide employment for unemployed women through vocational courses and making them a part of the economy. In other words, the aim of neighborhood houses is to contribute to women's empowerment.

Beyond their officially intended purposes, neighborhood houses allow women to gain self-confidence as they gain social and economic experience, becoming more aware of the benefits of cooperation. They then wish to take this experience to the next level and realize that if they want to participate in political life, this would not be impossible for them. Women can take action for the society where they live according to the political opinion which they favor. Support is provided by neighborhood houses where there is a wealth of experience and the advantages of being organized can be utilized. Women support and encourage each other, if they intend to become politically engaged.

In this thesis, the relationship between Balçova neighborhood houses and women's political participation are studied. The reason why Balçova has been chosen for the analysis of this relationship is that as the neighborhood houses develop and their effects spread, the number of women who are involved in political activities in Balçova have increased over the years. Unlike others, the neighborhood houses of Balçova use courses as a tool for the empowerment of women and Balçova Municipality does not restrict the aims and objectives of the neighborhood houses to courses. Women who come for the purpose of the course begin to see themselves as a part of the society and become better integrated into society when they are involved in other activities in neighborhood houses (home visits, volunteering work, solving problems of their own neighborhood etc.) and gain accumulation of knowledge, networks and experience. In addition, women can represent the municipality, provide solutions to a problem in their neighborhood, or participate in charity work and make themselves part of the local government. As a result of becoming involved in activities and education, increasing self-confidence and awareness make

women look for new opportunities in their lives. Political participation is one of these new potential opportunities for them to choose. Women, who realize that they are part of society, often decide to do more effective work for that society, such as becoming active in political life. The unintended consequence of this decision to benefit their society makes women who are part of the neighborhood houses participate in political life.

First established by the Balçova Municipality, neighborhood houses have had an unintended consequence beyond their official purpose. Women are empowered as their awareness is raised and as they become more educated, also gaining an income through activities at neighborhood houses. They appear to change, abandoning their gender roles assigned by society for the first time and finding their own identity. With their new identity, some women realize that it is possible to do more for themselves and for their society. These women choose to actively participate in the local government, due to the administrative experience which they have gained indirectly from their involvement in neighborhood houses.

In this research, in-depth interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire were used. In-depth interviews, which are one of the most efficient qualitative data collection methods, are conducted with in-depth details of the interviewee's experience and perspective on a subject (Showkat and Parveen, 2017; p. 4). Qualitative research involves conducting in-depth interviews, often involving sensitive topics which makes this interaction a form of psychotherapy in some ways (Minikel-Lacocque, 2019; p. 1039). The research method of in-depth interviewing is an area under intense research due to its rich capacity to reveal participants' individual perspectives, or a few narrowly defined themes. The questions are often semi-structured and a set of questions are formulated to ask all interviewees. Then, each in-depth interview has the freedom to follow up on related issues, depending on the interviewee's answers (Brounéus, 2011; p. 130). The questions in the interview consist of the core question and many associated questions, and the interview is improved by the spontaneous questions related to topic (Jamshed, 2014; p. 87).

The reason why I preferred the in-depth interview is the fact that participants can feel more comfortable and are likely to be willing to answer the questions. Also, I wished to have an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to get additional information through their behavior and facial expressions by observing them.

The method of semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask new questions on the basis of their stories and prevented the occurrence of an uncomfortable atmosphere. During the interviews, I strived to make the interview more conversations-like, and to create a warm and friendly atmosphere. Thus, participants became increasingly more comfortable in expressing their life stories and political opinions, compared to the beginning of the interview.

The questions of the interview consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Both question types were used to understand participants' social and political life in depth, and to examine how their social life had changed after becoming involved in courses or work in neighborhood houses, and how this had changed their political engagement. These questions were also used to analyze how women's organization makes women wish to create political solidarity.

An audio recorder was used during the interviews. Before I began the interviews, I asked their permission to use one; none of them rejected my request and they graciously allowed me to do so. In addition, I took notes but kept them to a minimum because I did not wish to lose eye contact too often and aimed to preserve the friendly atmosphere in our conversations. To keep the interviews comfortable and friendly, participants were allowed to ask a question to me. Although not very often, I expressed my opinions to encourage them to open up, but I carefully avoided directing them or creating any bias.

I felt that none of the participants were disturbed by my questions and that they freely expressed their ideas with my follow-up questions. None of them showed an unwillingness to reveal their political opinions and conversed

with me very sincerely. Two of the participants did not appear initially to be relaxed during the interview, so I asked more casual questions about their life and talked about myself to warm up the atmosphere. Fortunately, my questions were useful and made them become more willing to share their ideas, allowing the interviews to prove fruitful. Two of the participants appeared glad to be part of this research and answered the questions by contributing further information. The remaining two participants were the most active ones and gave me significant additional information and ideas as well as new aspects to consider for this research.

All the participants of my helped me by telling their stories and expressing their opinions. All questions were answered. I believe that the reason why they were so outspoken is that all these women were active in political life and freely expressed their opinions whether they be about politics or not, in a wide range of contexts.

The participants of this research consisted of six women who are members of the women's branch of the Republican People's Party (RPP) in Balçova, and who are actively involved in political actions. The most important criteria for selecting them was that all six of them had been in Balçova neighborhood houses, either as trainees or employees, before actively participating in political life. There were no criteria for their age, education, career or marital status. The youngest participant was fifty-two years old and the oldest participant was sixty-six years old. Four of the participants were high-school graduates, one of them was a secondary school graduate and one of them was secondary school dropout. Three of the participants had been in business life before retiring and three of them had not been involved in business. This equal division of participants was a coincidence which was not significant for this research. All six participants were married and had children.

In my preliminary research to find participants, I first contacted the head of the Korutürk neighborhood house and explained this research clearly. She recommended me to meet with the Directorate of Social and Cultural Affairs to

get more information. The employee who worked there gave me the names of ten women who might be suitable for this research. Secondly, I contacted the district head of the RPP Balçova branch. When I explained my research and what kind of participants I needed, she informed me that there were many women who worked in the women's branch of the RPP and could be suitable for research. Finally, I analyzed the potential candidates from both sides and made a decision based on which ones had been in Balçova Neighborhood houses, either as trainees or employees, before actively participating in political life. Six of the women were in that way identified as being more suitable, and I therefore decided that they should be the participants of this research. In addition, I made interviews with the current and previous mayors of Balçova Municipality to analyze the structure of Balçova neighborhood houses.

All the participants of my research expressed that they supported the cause of this research and were ready to be helpful. I appreciate their kindness, cooperation and sincerity during the interviews.

The thesis consists of three main chapters, covering a literature review, background information regarding neighborhood houses, and lastly a discussion of the findings. In the second chapter, literature relating to the term women's empowerment and its relationship with women's rights will be reviewed. Women's empowerment in the world will be examined by discussing the examples about women's political participation at the local level. The historical background of women's rights in Turkey will also be provided.

In the third chapter, the general features of Balçova will be studied in order to understand the profile of women who live in this district. After presenting the history of neighborhood houses, their structure and functions will be examined to gain an understanding of reasons behind women's political participation through neighborhood houses. The main differences and similarities between the Balçova neighborhood houses and other neighborhood houses in Turkey will also be discussed.

In the fourth chapter, the findings of this case study will be analyzed. A general profile of the interviewees will be presented, and the conveniences and difficulties encountered during the interviews will be given. The reasons for women's political participation through neighborhood houses will be examined under four main sub-titles. In the conclusion chapter, whole chapter of thesis will be summarized and the case study will be concluded.



CHAPTER 2

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY

Women should have the right to participate in political processes affecting themselves, their families and their communities as well as men. However, human history is full of stories about men's domination over women on the basis of gender and patriarchal views. Women have played their gender roles designated for them and have been in secondary status at home and in society for centuries. However, both women and men are two major and fundamental parts of society and the lack of one would destroy all the balances of society. Communities with high levels of political participation by women are more likely to realize the full potential for their countries and achieve sustainability. Societies in which women have been empowered and gender equality exists often become more inclusive, democratic, developed, and egalitarian. Therefore, international and local women's organizations have a significant role in increasing women's participation in politics by assisting women's empowerment.

The natural consequence of gender equality is women's empowerment, which has become increasingly widespread among various countries over the years and is accepted as one of the most important keys to sustainable

development of society in today's world. It is a global phenomenon attracting considerable attention because empowerment has allowed women to have their own voice and make decisions regarding their own lives about different issues within their communities. Although it is generally defined in the context of economic empowerment or girls' education, women's empowerment does not have a specific definition due to the wide range of different approaches and dimensions. To understand and apply to practice correctly, governments have used different definitions of women's empowerment.

2.1. Women's Empowerment

The term 'women's empowerment' is a recent phenomenon which is an outcome of the development of women's rights and women's modernization. Before defining the concept of women's empowerment, it is necessary to give a brief history of the development of women's rights. Milestones of women's rights started with the United Nations (UN) Charter in 1945 which promoted and encouraged "fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."¹ In 1946, the UN commission on the status of women was established and a system of tracking progress was provided. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Therefore, the first global recognition regarding equality of women and men was declared by means of basic inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms that apply to every human being.

The year of 1975 was an important year in which important decisions on women's rights were made and enforced. Therefore, the year of 1975 was declared International Women's Year by the UN. The UN announced the International Women's Day on March 8, 1975. The first World Conference on

¹ The UN Women - Timeline: The UN at 70 – Gender Equality Milestones & Memorable Moments
<<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2015/9/timeline-un-at-70-gender-equality>>

Women took place in Mexico, 19 June - 2 July, 1975. In this conference a 10-year World Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women was formed and the UN General Assembly announced 1976-1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace to implement the action plan for promoting equal rights and opportunities for women around the world. The 'Decade for women' focused on the 'equity' approach and women's active role in the development process.

In 1979, a Women's Bill of Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), was adopted by The UN General Assembly which is "the most comprehensive international instrument to protect the human rights of women."² The key step for women's rights was the conference which was held in China. An unprecedented number of participants and activists attended the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995. In this conference, political debates ensued on women's rights and a progressive plan for women's empowerment was adopted. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action defined the framework of objectives and actions for women's rights under twelve chapters. Every five years since its adoption, global reviews are made for monitoring the progress.³

To be able to define the concept of women's empowerment, we need to know the meaning of the term. To simply present the concept here, the Cambridge Dictionary defines empowerment as "the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you".⁴ According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is the "authority or power given to someone to do something; or the process of becoming stronger and more

² The UN Women - Timeline: The UN at 70 – Gender Equality Milestones & Memorable Moments
<<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2015/9/timeline-un-at-70-gender-equality>>

³ Ibid

⁴ Cambridge Dictionary

<<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/s%C3%B6z%C3%BCk/ingilizce/empowerment>>

confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights".⁵ According to Luttrell, et al. (2009) "the actual term 'empowerment' was first commonly used in the women's movement, within a discourse of feminism that drew on the influence of popular education and focused on the role of the individual in politics." Therefore, it is a kind of social process which has many dimensions. This process encourages people to use power in their own private lives and their societies; so, people take control of their own lives without any external interference (Page and Czuba, 1999). In one dimension, empowerment brings change, which means "the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer, 1999; p. 437). Thus, women's empowerment simply refers to women's ability to make strategic life choices when it comes to becoming an authority over their own life.

Empowerment of women was born with the improvement of women's rights. There are several definitions which are related to each other. Women's empowerment can be defined as "a situation in which women are given the opportunity to participate fully in social, political and economic spheres of life" (Manuere and Phiri, 2018; p. 58). This concept encourages women to participate in decision-making and even administration processes, and to improve their status in literacy, education, training and raising awareness. Therefore, these are subjects related to women's empowerment as well as gaining income and enhancing access to job opportunities, protection of a woman's human rights, their reproductive health and property ownership (Bayeh, 2016; p. 2).

Empowering women does not always mean giving women equal or higher levels of education, or creating more career opportunities for them. When political debates about women's empowerment are started, people mostly tend to think about the education of girls. Girls should be provided with opportunities for education regarding the meaning of concepts and their multi-dimensions, as well as school education. Women should understand the real rationale under the

⁵ Oxford Dictionary <<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/empowerment>>

name of gender equality and women's empowerment (Manuere and Phiri, 2018; p. 62). An individual who has learned concepts well begins to change the society in which she lives. If the mind is freed from economic, political and social injustices in society, women's empowerment begins to provide benefits for that society. Therefore, every policy maker and government should focus on issues related to women's empowerment in their future plans.

The cause and effect relationship between gender equality and women's empowerment has not been explained clearly. The cause and the effect are generally considered to correspond to gender equality and women's empowerment respectively, despite there being no clear distinction between the two. Gender equality results in a shift in institutions, norms and power relations affecting women in their private and public lives. Women begin to experience societal shifts such as acquiring control of their sexuality and reproduction; changes in labor force structures, economic systems, shifts in marriage, family functions, roles, power relations and changes in political systems (Malhotra et al., 2009). All these innovations give way to women's empowerment in their lives. In other words, women's empowerment strengthens and maintains women at individual, household, community and broader levels. Through empowerment and self-efficacy, access to and control over household resources and life events, as well as access to employment and income occur.

In addition, according to the UN, gender equality, which is defined as applying equal opportunities, rights, responsibilities and equality before the law to both women and men in a community, as well as women's empowerment are one of the most important consequences of this achievement.⁶ After achieving this, women's empowerment encourages women to gain power and control over their own lives allowing them to make their own choices.⁷ In this context, the United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN) presents five main

⁶ The Gender Statistics Manual, Glossary of Terms

<<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/genderstatmanual/Glossary.ashx>>

⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality <<https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1102>>

components of women's empowerment:⁸ (a) women's sense of self-worth; (b) their right to have and to determine choices; (c) their right to have access to opportunities and resources; (d) their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and (e) their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Women's empowerment is also essential for the sustainable development of countries. The concept of sustainable development has economic, social, and environmental dimensions in addition to political development, which is related to protection of human rights and effective governance. For instance, Ethiopian women represent half of the country's population but the widespread gender gap is a huge barrier hindering the usage of the country's full potential for economic, social, political and environmental development. Providing women with empowerment and achieving gender equality are the key points of development out of all the foundations of sustainable development, allowing countries to utilize their full potential with women. Changing the well-accepted positions of women in society and building gender equality in the public sphere may need the strong support of governments, but will ultimately have a positive and spreading effect on the country's sustainable development (Bayeh, 2016; p. 6).

Women's roles in society have been defined by mothers, wives, housewives, daughters and sisters throughout human history but the role of women has been changing in the modern world due to the struggle for women's empowerment and gender equality. Through all these developments, shifting the relations between men and women in society makes unequal society more equal. Nevertheless, the majority of women remain bound by their gender roles and experience little progress in their overall status and position in society (Mandal, 2013; p. 62). There is a fact that problems and barriers faced by

⁸ The UN – Women's Empowerment

<<https://www.un.org/popin/unfpa/taskforce/guide/iatfwemp.gdl.html>>

women are almost the same in both underdeveloped and developed countries in different continents. Contrary to popular belief, Western women do not have much better status and equality in society, politics, education, legal spheres and their business life, compared to women in the rest of the world. Regardless of whether it is an underdeveloped, developing or developed country, each nation still seeks solutions for gender inequality and various ways to empower women. Women still cannot get what they deserve in economic, social, political, educational, religious and legal areas, although women constitute approximately half of the world population.

In order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment several international and local women's organizations have been established. The role of these organizations in increasing women's participation is a significant and even fundamental one. Women's organizations, whether or not they are supported by the government, are the major agents in providing and maintaining women's empowerment within society. There are several academic case studies and extensive field work explaining which factors are barriers and which ones support women's empowerment. Although the literature covers case studies from different countries, this academic work mostly focuses on barriers and support mechanisms such as social or political reasons for low participation, support provided towards non-governmental organizations (NGO) for women, or affirmative actions of local governments.

Women should be involved in the political process in order to eliminate inequalities in society and to ensure development. The role of women's organizations during the history of the women's movement has led to an increase in political participation of women at local government level despite still having its own limits. I will explain these situations with examples from different countries. For instance, in Bangladesh, social empowerment of women was provided by the enactment of reforms initiated by local governments in 1997 (Panday, 2010). As a result, women have not been socially empowered yet at a significant level in the twelve years following the enactment of the reform.

Women's access to education and information has still been limited and their movement was not enough outside the home as expected, and elected women members were not well accepted in the society due to the ongoing conservative attitude of the majority of males towards women. On the other hand, members of the lowest local government tier have changed some of their attitudes by means of the reforms. Women have become successful even at the lowest level; they already feel satisfied and encouraged, although Bangladeshi society has widespread deprivation and victimization. In addition to reforms that were made by local governments, NGOs have played a role by presenting different programs in Bangladesh for raising awareness among women so that they could consider the participation in the political process (Panday and Feldman, 2015).

A government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO), in India, aims to empower women by increasing their self-development and social change. There is a program, Mahila Samakhya, which has resulted in the empowerment of women by giving education regarding their equality. It is not only supported by local governments. The central government, UNICEF and the World Bank, among others, have supported the education for women's equality program.⁹ This program was launched in 1989 to ensure to rise women's awareness, make them more empowered, capable, and self-confident; and to minimize the male-dominant political culture in the institution, in order to create a political sphere for women's participation, initiated by the Government of India in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka. It attempts to find solutions to the problems of the local self-government institutions via high levels of women's participation in the government, and facilitate a transformation of the culture and functioning of local government institutions. In Karnataka, the result of these solutions has led to a change in the culture and functions of the local self-governments regarding women's engagement (Batliwala, 1996). In addition, there was a struggle between neoliberal governmentality and state reformation in India for women's

⁹ UNICEF, Mahila Samakhya <<http://unicef.in/PressReleases/337/Mahila-Samakhya>>

empowerment. Collaborative governmental projects for women's empowerment offer a political possibility as well as risks in a neoliberal context (Sharma, 2006). Feminist empowerment programs for rural women were launched through neoliberal governmentality. Because the intersection between neoliberal ideologies, empowerment strategies, and GONGOs shows the changing process of developing states and governments in postcolonial India; it provides a sample of paradoxical nature of state-sponsored women's empowerment: On the one hand, there is the self-development of women regarding social change in a neo-liberal context. On the other hand, there is a GONGO, which is under government control as a non-governmental organization. However, India aims to have the co-operation and active participation of both men and women in all spheres, which will provide women's empowerment to achieve the India Vision 2020 (Mandal, 2013; p. 62).

Another example is a civil organization, the Shaanxi Research Association for Women and Family, which aims to increase women's political participation in China, Shaanxi. Women have increased the level of their political participation and their rate of being elected in the village elections over the years. They owe their success mainly to this civil societal organization. In addition, these women in villages have won in fiercely competitive elections, without support from upper-levels of the party and government leadership. Their activities have also affected the local gender division of labor and rooted gender attitudes. The Shaanxi Research Association for Women and Family and the All-China Women's Federation have worked together to increase women's political participation in the Heyang county and the Shaanxi province. The collaboration of these organizations has contributed to the protection of women's rights (Xiaoxian, 2010). The Shaanxi Research Association focuses on international feminist practices to provide women's empowerment through gender training courses because women must be prepared to face possible local and institutional resistance. Xiaoxian (2010) showed that cooperation of feminist civil organizations and Women's Federation within the country has

made a contribution to China's contemporary movement for gender equality regarding political engagement.

Staudt (1980) used the organizational theory perspective to examine how local governmental officials create and coordinate women's mobilization in Kenya. Women focused and changed organizational functions and sources of funding, but they did not question the structure of gender discrimination. Nevertheless, these organizations encourage women's political activity, using compulsion to induce participation. However, women's political dependency to local officials continued, and this dependency led to organizational crises over the dispensation of funds. On the other hand, women's empowerment is not the process of co-optation, but it is the larger ideological regime structure for which women co-opted. Since women's interests are different for each class, sexual subordination and sex-based organization provide barriers against empowerment in the absence of a collective ideology. The study suggests that there is a male-dependent empowerment of women, and economic and gender discrimination must be restructured under the redistributive regimes. As a result, class issues are more important than group issues in political conflicts and, without a group consciousness and ideology, empowerment for women depends on other class issues with which they are identified.

Similar organizations for women's empowerment have also been pursued by developed countries. QUANGOS, quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations, are a hybrid type of organization which have features both of NGOs and bodies of government. This term is notable in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Canada and the United States (Friedrich and Ukrainski, 2013). Sperling (1998) focused on the shift from elected and regulated local government to the appointed QUANGOS in Great Britain from 1980 to 1998. This shift was the basis of a debate about the nature of democratic accountability and empowerment of the users of public services by decentralization. However, the shift of local authorities and service delivery may affect different groups of service users of public services such as women; despite being well represented by local authorities. The only concern here is that

if decision making moves away from public view, dissimilarity of people and representative diversity might disappear.

Although they have been participants of social activism for a long time, Japanese women are relatively new in the political participation process and political parties. To increase women's political engagement, especially at local government levels, education and training for the purpose of raising awareness were provided by NGOs and other grassroots organizations in the country (Sheel, 2003). However, most political parties still continue to offer only limited opportunities for women.

Kominkan is a Japanese community learning center which provides cultural activities and education about arts, handiwork, health, sports for children, youth and elders. It is under the control of local governments and was also founded by them. The Ministry of Education announced for the inauguration of the Kominkan establishment in 1946, and Kominkans were subsequently established with the enforcement of the Social Education Act in 1949.¹⁰ Similar to neighborhood houses, Kominkans are also defined as neighborhood organizations. Their identity is defined as "Your closest community organization, organized by the people who live in your neighborhood" on the leaflet.¹¹ Besides education, neighborhood work is done together such as cutting grass along roads. They aim to increase the communication of neighbors with each other and make them socialize more, as well as providing mutual aid in times of emergency, as a result of a deeper sense of connection within the neighborhood.

Feminist and adult education creates a critical space to support women's involvement in local governments in the province of British Columbia, Canada (McGregor and Clover, 2011). Persistence of gendered discourses and patriarchal practices within political systems affect the experiences of women who have been elected to local governments. The role of education programs

¹⁰ Kominkan in Japan <<http://www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/pub/pdf02/025-02.pdf>>

¹¹ Kominkan in Japan

<<http://cms.city.miyakonojo.miyazaki.jp/tempimg/130403141625201304031414460f.pdf>>

was not at a sufficient level for women's political engagement, when compared to the expectation of potential feminist perspectives. Gendered discourses of political participation create negative facts like shaping men and women differently, undermining the value of women's social experiences in communities, describing women as less knowledgeable; and emphasizing gendered identities of men and women to position them differently with regards to political life.

After discussing organizations established for women's empowerment in different countries, the next section will examine the history of women's empowerment and women's political participation in Turkey.

2.2. Women's Political Participation in Turkey

Turkey still has major challenges regarding women's empowerment and faces the reality of gender inequality as a developing country. The individual-level factors and locally-specific factors are the two different dimensions concerning women's empowerment in Turkey. These are affected by a variety of factors such as socioeconomic, political, and demographic determinants (Çınar and Köse, 2018; p. 380). Çınar and Köse suggest that women's empowerment might relate to higher levels of education and income, and religiosity at the individual-level. It was found that women who live in areas with higher unemployment, urbanization and ethnic minorities tend to be less empowered, while women who live in more religious areas tend to become more empowered. More recently, it has been demonstrated that the institutionalization of gender-sensitive policies and the struggle at the local level are important and strongly linked with women's empowerment (Sumbas and Koyuncu, 2018; p. 246).

After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, several reforms have been carried out for women's development in their private and public life, in order to improve the position of women in Turkish society. The Republican period aimed at ensuring equality before the law for Turkish women. Therefore,

the enactment of the civil code in 1926 and women being granted the right to vote and to be elected in 1934 were significant signs of encouragement towards women's empowerment.

The right to vote and to be elected for women might be considered a fundamental reform for women's political engagement. Undoubtedly, this alone is not sufficient and should be supported by other civil rights. To empower women, legal regulations must be made and their rights must be protected by law. During the early republican period several social and cultural reforms for women were introduced such as gaining access to education and work, achieving equality before the law, and providing equality between men and women in social life, making women's participation in social and economic life much easier. Besides all these social and cultural improvements, women should remain involved in political life to enhance, ensure and defend their own rights.

During the War of Independence, women's right to vote and to be elected was undermined. After the establishment of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, women were not included in the electoral process, despite the fact that the electoral law had been changed (Uzun, 2017). Tunalı Hilmi Bey, Member of Parliament for Bolu, underlined the significance of guaranteeing women the right to vote and to be elected as well as women's inclusion in the census, during his parliamentary speech on April 3, 1923. His ideas were rejected by other MPs and he was not even allowed to complete his speech (Yılmaz, 2016; p. 268). This event revealed the fact that at that point in time there was not yet a suitable environment, even for discussing the issue of women's political rights.

There was, however, a very active women's movement during the early republican period. One of the most important figures at the beginning of the women's movement in the early years of the Republic was Nezihe Muhittin. She believed that the new republican regime would bring an egalitarian political culture for women and men, and also new opportunities for women to express themselves. Her target audience was women rather than men and she insisted that women should obtain the place they deserve through gaining their own

rights in social and political life (Toprak, 1994; p. 4). To achieve her goals, Nezihe Muhittin and her female friends decided to convene a women's committee for women's rights in 1923, even before the foundation of the Turkish Republic. In this committee, a political organization was established under the name of Women's People's Party but the establishment's petition was rejected by the government (Uzun, 2017).

The rejection was not an obstacle for Nezihe Muhittin and she transformed Women's People's Party into an association, named Turkish Women's Union (TWU) on February 7, 1924, making it the first women's association of the Republic of Turkey (Toprak, 1994; p. 4). It was an organization which aimed at providing social equality for women and men in Turkey. President Nezihe Muhittin explained the aim of the association as follows:

We, Turkish women, should take the place we deserve in social and political life. First, we should raise awareness and educate Turkish women. We need to tell them to ask for more and how to get it. Our goal is social, economic and political equality of women and men in Turkey.¹²

The TWU worked on educating women in intellectual and social fields, helping widows and orphans, educating poor children and giving lectures to women on various subjects (Uzun, 2017). The TWU published the "Turkish Women's Road," a magazine produced via their own efforts in 1924, to express the political demands of women (Toprak, 1994; p. 4). In addition, the leaders of the TWU demanded the recognition of the vital and political rights of women as soon as possible by the newly established Republican government. In 1927, the TWU declared that its work targeted the achievement of women's political rights and they added a clause to the association's charter. The 1927 general

¹² Türk Kadınlar Birliđi, Tarihçe <<http://www.turkkadinlarbirligi.org/tr/kurumsal/1/Tarihçe>>

elections provided the opportunity once again to discuss the right to vote and to be elected for women.

The development of women's rights in Turkey was in the agenda of the TWU. The Civil Code, adopted in 1926, shaped women's identity in the society. Turkish women had their political rights for the first time in the 1930 local elections. By means of the enactment of the Municipal Code on April 3, 1930, women gained the right to vote and to be elected for municipal elections in Turkey (Kartal, 2018). Women won the right to be elected to village councils and to become members of parliament in 1933 and 1934 respectively. During these years, the TWU held two major women's public demonstrations in Istanbul, in 1930 and 1934. Finally, on the 5th term parliamentary elections held in 1935, 18 female MPs entered the parliament and the TWU decided to terminate the association as it had succeeded in reaching its goals.¹³ The association had reached to 45 branches countrywide before its closure in 1935 (Toprak, 1994).

However, the TWU reopened in 1949, due to a need for the protection, development and extension of women's rights, as well as for gaining rights (Toprak, 1994; p. 8). In 1954, the TWU was granted the status of a Public Benefit Association, by the decision of the Council of Ministers¹⁴ and the association still continues its activities to this day.

Turkish women had their political rights for the first time in the 1930 municipal elections. By the enacting of the Municipal Code on April 3, 1930, women were granted the right to vote and to be elected for municipal elections in Turkey (Kartal, 2018). In 1930 local elections, Sadiye Hanım was elected as a mayor of Kılıçkaya in Artvin and she became "Turkey's First Woman Mayor of Town".¹⁵ She was able to carry out her duties as mayor for two years.

¹³ Türk Kadınlar Birliği, Tarihçe <<http://www.turkkadinlarbirligi.org/tr/kurumsal/1/Tarihçe>>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ KA.DER - Türkiye'de Kadınlar İlk Kez 1930 Yılında Seçtiler ve Seçildiler
<<http://ka-der.org.tr/turkiyede-kadinlar-ilk-kez-1930-yilinda-sectiler-ve-secildiler/>>

The 1930 local elections lasted almost one and a half months, from September to the 20th of October. Two female candidates of the Republican People's Party (CHP), Hasane Nalan Hanım and Benal Nevzat Hanım, were elected to the Izmir Municipal Council. Seniye İsmail Hanım (Beykoz), Latife Bekir (Beyoğlu), Nakiye Hanım (Beyoğlu), Ayşe Remzi Hanım (Beyoğlu), Rana Sani Yaver (Eminönü) and Refika Hulusi Behçet (Eminönü) were elected to the Istanbul Municipal Council (Kartal, 2018; p. 191). As can be seen from Table 1, the voting rates of candidates in Istanbul, both at the district and general level, were surprisingly high.

As mentioned above, in 1933, women gained the right to be elected as the village headman and to village councils¹⁶ and thus peasant women were the first women who exercised their rights to be elected in Turkey. After elections in the Demircidere Village in the Aydın Province, Gul Esin became Turkey's first female village headman (Güneş, 2010). Considering that the majority of the population of the country lived in rural areas and villages in the early republican period in Turkey, the right to be elected as the village headman and village councils was a significant step for women's rights regarding political participation. What is interesting is that there were no different or opposing opinions speculating about the right of women to be elected and elected as village headman, and the press only wrote that the parliament had discussed this issue (Özer, 2013; p. 147).

Turkey's first woman mayor of a province was elected during the multi-party period. In 1950, the mayor was elected from among municipal council members according to the election law for local governments in Turkey. Müfide İlhan from the Democratic Party (DP) was nominated as a member of the Mersin Municipal Council in the local elections held on September 3, 1950. She was elected as the Mayor of the Mersin Municipality and became "Turkey's First Woman Provincial Mayor" (Bozkurt and Bozkurt, 2014; p. 51).

¹⁶ Türk Kadınlar Birliği – Tarihçe <<http://www.turkkadinlarbirligi.org/tr/kurumsal/1/Tarihçe>>

The constitution and the election law had to be amended in order to give women the right to elect and be elected as an MP. Ismet Inonu and his 191 friends submitted a proposal to the Parliament about the amendment of Articles 10 and 11 of the constitution and some articles of the election law (Özer, 2013; p. 148). Amendments were approved after the discussions in parliament on December 5, 1934. Articles 10 and 11 of the constitution were changed as follows:¹⁷

Article 10 - Every Turkish male and female who has reached his or her twenty-two years of age has to right to elect a member of parliament.

Article 11 - Any Turkish male or female who has reached his or her thirty years of age may be elected as a member of parliament.

Giving Turkish women the right to vote and to be elected as an MP was welcomed throughout the country and meetings were held in many provinces about this development. For instance, in the Ankara People's House, girls' high school teachers and women held a meeting on December 6, 1934. On December 8, 1934, women gathered at the Adana People's House and sent a thank-you note to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In addition, meetings were held in Siirt, Antalya, Kilis, Zonguldak, Maraş, Ordu, Samsun, Kars, Denizli and many other parts of the country to send thank-you notes to Atatürk, and the Presidency of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Özer, 2013; p. 149). On December 7, 1934, the TWU decided to hold a women's public demonstration in Istanbul and women from Izmir gathered at the Izmir People's House to express their satisfaction about the political rights given to women.

Women used their right to vote and to be elected as an MP for the first time in February 8, 1935 (Sezer, 1998). The elections ended on the same day and 17 female MPs were elected to enter into the parliament (Yüceer, 2008). In

¹⁷ TBMM, 1924 Anayasası <<https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/anayasa/anayasa24.htm>>

the 1936 elections, another woman, Hatice Özgenel, was elected as MP of Çankırı, and the number of female MPs increased to 18 (Sezer, 1998).

Unfortunately, the process that started with this remarkable success in 1935 did not sustain the same high rates up until the 2007 general election as can be seen in Table 2. The rate of women's representation in parliament has been considerably low until this year. However, the rates were considered to be high in Turkey, despite the rest of the world having higher rates compared to Turkey in 2007 (Yüceer, 2008). As of 2018, the number of women currently in the parliament does not have the highest rate so far, but the number of female MPs is at its highest, as seen in Table 2. Nevertheless, Turkey is ranked 29th out of 43 countries worldwide, as seen in Table 3, which is very low. In terms of local governments, as seen in Table 4, Turkey does not show an improvement. In the 2019 local elections, only four females became mayors of provinces.¹⁸ The number of women village headman had been 674 in the previous election and this number increased by 71,78% reaching 1,065 in the local elections on March 31, 2018.¹⁹

In Turkey, the rate of women's representation in parliament and in local governments has been alarmingly low throughout the republican history. Equal opportunities for women's political participation at local levels do not exist, although local governments have created more participation channels of administration. This situation can be explained by social roles given to women, the perception of local politics being a technical issue, a focus predominantly on national politics by women's organizations, and not addressing politics as a woman's issue (Biricikoğlu, 2013). NGOs, independent women's organizations for increasing political participations or organizations depending on administrations are common in Turkey. A major and famous NGO focused on

¹⁸ NTV, 81 İlde Sadece 4 Kadın Aday Belediye Başkanı Oldu

<<https://www.ntv.com.tr/2019-yerel-secim/81-ilde-sadece-4-kadin-aday-belediye-baskani-oldu,2-8N0bddwEO2MZu9E8yKAA>>

¹⁹ KA.DER: Yerel Seçimlerde Kadın Muhtar Sayısı % 71,78 Arttı

<<https://ab-ilan.com/ka-der-yerel-secimlerde-kadin-muhtar-sayisi-7178-artti/>>

the political participation of women is the Association for Supporting Women Candidates (KA.DER), which was established in March 1997. The aim of KA.DER is defined as “ensuring equal representation, primarily in politics. Ensuring equal representation in the political field will pave the way for equality between women and men in all fields.”²⁰ The elimination of inequality, ensuring the participation of all citizens in decision making processes, increasing women’s experience and their ability to produce solutions in social and political areas are the primary areas of focus for KA.DER. This organization ultimately aims to increase the rate of women’s representation in all decision-making bodies.

People’s houses, which provided the original models for neighborhood houses, were established for the purpose of educating both men and women and allowing them to socialize together. Women’s empowerment had a great importance in reaching a homogeneous and functioning society and this was one of the purposes of the People’s Houses. Women gained education and socialized via courses, and they earned money by selling what they produced. Both men and women attended courses and conferences and actively participated in events, making women become part of society. However, besides all these positive developments regarding women, they have also sometimes experienced difficult situations due to traditions and thoughts from the past. The effects of the social reflections of the political revolution on women created a struggle between the contemporary woman figure needed by the Republican regime and the traditional woman figure in the minds (Aydođdu, 2018).

Neighborhood houses were an opportunity for women to become more economically powerful. Women who do not participate in the labor force and social life take vocational courses to earn an income and participate in business life through Balçova neighborhood houses. The Balçova Municipality has become a role model for other municipalities by using the Active Labor Market Policy (Germir, 2013). Economically empowered women have increased their

²⁰ KA.DER, About Us <<http://ka-der.org.tr/en/ka-der-ingilizce/>>

self-confidence at the same time, which gives them courage if women want to be part of politics.

Although Turkish women have had the right to vote and to be elected for many years, they may not refrain from voting but they do avoid becoming a candidate. This distinction is behind the differences between individual political participation and social political participation, two different types of political participation (Ayata, 1991). Individual political participation involves basic rights like “the right to vote,” while social political participation is about the part of “the right to be elected” as well as political party membership. The principle of the secret ballot in particular emphasizes the individuality of this political participation. On the other hand, social political participation needs human relationships, group behavior and social activity. Undoubtedly, the problems affecting women’s political participation in these two types are different. The factors such as socio-economic status, religion, race, education and age affect women’s voting behavior. Ayata stated that women’s right to vote has been encouraged and has received great support by the government and society since 1934, while campaigns on the right to be elected were limited.

According to Ayata, the reason why women are not prevented from voting despite the patriarchal family structure is that voting does not change the domestic life of women or their relationship with the world outside their home. Therefore, women’s individual political participation is encouraged and supported, and even most political parties use female icons to increase their votes. In sum, problems about women’s participation in politics begin with the active participation of women in politics.

The distinction between the private and public sphere for women affects their tendency of political participation. While the common opinion is that women belong to the private sphere, politics is certainly a public sphere phenomenon. Therefore, while voting in their private sphere does not present a major problem, women’s participation in politics in the public sphere is faced with resistance within the society. In most cases, women are politically involved

in women-related issues such as childcare, women and family, social welfare and health.

Young people, women, students, housewives, people with high levels of education and people living in the city mostly have a positive opinion about the presence of women in political life. Interestingly, a female mayor is more likely to be approved. The reason behind it might be that municipalities are closer to private spheres of women and the status of mayor is less important than president (Ayata, 1991).

There are several women who actively participate in politics despite all the obstacles. According to Ayata (1991), the obstacles for women's political participations have come from women as well as men. Most female politicians stated that their spouses did not oppose their endeavors, but on the contrary supported them.

All male politicians in the research carried out by Ayata (1991) wished for women to actively be in politics. Most women tend to vote independently of their spouses and this phenomenon is widely known by politicians as informal information. Therefore, active female politicians are the most important tools to reach and mobilize the female electorate. The best and safest way to reach women in small locations is to again use women. Women can go into the houses and communicate with housewives "woman-to-woman". Female politicians become a vote-making machine for the parties because they use special networks for women to mobilize them. At this point, women-to-women relationships become important and can even result in male candidates falling into the background. Ayata states that "men are elected and women work for their selection."

Women's branches of political parties were established for these purposes before 1980 in Turkey. For the first time, the RPP established a women's branch in Istanbul in 1954, although women gained the right to vote and be elected in 1934 (Ayata, 1991). However, women began to work actively in political parties as groups after the 1960s. A former MP stated that provincial and district heads of parties avoided establishing women's branches, despite the

party leader's instructions in the early period. From their opinion, the reason was that the traditional structure of the region prevented women's participation in politics. After the 1960s, women's branches were encouraged due to the potential power of women's networks and the opportunity to earn money through women's gatherings or tea-parties for political parties.

Women's branches of right- and left-wing parties are different from each other in their methods of working. Right-wing parties tend to be more conservative and also tend to focus on women-to-women relations. Their most active periods are the election period and the activities are reduced when the elections are over. The Motherland Party (MP), a right-wing example, had its own women's organization which is called the Foundation of Turkish Women's Empowerment. This foundation worked as a voluntary association to deal with women's domestic problems and health. These activities have been very effective among low-income families and housewives (Ayata, 1991). Despite the adversity women have faced, women's participation in politics had begun increasing slowly before 1980. Even women's participation in the Istanbul Municipal Council increased to %10 (Ayata, 1991).

Female politicians, who actively participate in political life despite all obstacles, stated that they have two different periods in their lives (Ayata, 1991). In the first period, they said that they had support and encouragement from the party, but not the same support and encouragement from their family and friends. In the second period, they gained their family and friends' support after a while, but this time they faced the obstacles of their male competitors in politics.

Ayata (1991) objected to the idea of the association between women's success in politics and the "masculinity" of women. She stated that most women work in politics while remaining in their own gender roles, even if they are the roles that men determined, indicated and managed for female politicians.

In this chapter, literature about the term of women's empowerment and its relationship with women's rights has been reviewed. Women's empowerment in the world has been examined by discussing examples of

women's political participation at the local level. The historical background of women's rights and women's empowerment in Turkey has also been provided.

In the next chapter, the history of Balçova neighborhood houses and their structure and functions will be examined to be able to understand the reasons behind women's political participation through neighborhood houses. The main differences and similarities between the Balçova neighborhood houses and other neighborhood houses in Turkey will also be explained.



CHAPTER 3

NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES OF BALÇOVA MUNICIPALITY

The history of the region where Balçova is located is very old due to its thermal springs, going back an estimated 3000 years. The region, which was named as Balçikhavli Village during the Ottoman period, was a village in Izmir until 1963. Over time, this region developed from a village into a town as the number of households and population increased. This developing region was finally transformed into a district and the first municipality in the region was established on March 1, 1963. However, the municipal status of the region was withdrawn and the district was connected to the neighboring district Narlıdere in 1980. After twelve years, the Balçova Municipality was re-established on June 3, 1992.²¹

Balçova is a medium-sized district in the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, located in the south of the Izmir Bay. It is one of the central districts of Izmir and completely connected to the city center in many aspects. The surface area of the district is approximately 29 square kilometers with more than 6 kilometers of coastline.²² According to 2018 data, the population of the

²¹ Balçova Municipality, History <<https://www.balcova.bel.tr/Sayfa/49/tarihce>>

²² Ibid

district is 79.357 with more than half being women (40.523).²³ Mostly retirees and middle-class citizens prefer to live in Balçova so the average age of the population is high. Interestingly enough, students live in dormitories and homes in the district due to Izmir University of Economics within the Balçova border but this situation does not significantly affect the official population. The average age of the population has not decreased because the students' residence addresses are not in Balçova.²⁴

Balçova Municipality embraces a social municipality understanding, and its services for citizens support this notion.²⁵ Balçova is a welfare region due to its social status, with social and sports facilities, investments for women, children, and persons with disabilities. The district is completely residential and is an example of planned settlement. There are one-story and garden villas as well as multi-story buildings²⁶. Social facilities include Thermal Facilities, Telfer, and Inciraltı City Forest which are used as picnic and sightseeing areas, in addition to standard areas and businesses such as parks, bars, cafes, restaurants, cinemas, amusement parks and hotels. The business and shopping centers on the main streets in the region keep the social and economic life of the district vibrant.

The municipality has advanced facilities in terms of sport activities. There is a sports hall belonging to the Provincial Directorate of Youth and Sports and Balçova Municipality's own sports complex including football, basketball, volleyball courts, tennis courts, gymnasium hall, aerobic hall and table tennis. The project of "*Free Sports for Everyone from 7 to 70*" was started in 2004 and the residents of the district have started to play cost free sports at the municipal facilities with the materials and equipment provided by the municipality. 25 employees who graduated from the Faculty of Physical

²³ Izmir Governorship, Izmir with Statistics <<http://www.izmir.gov.tr/istatistiklerle-izmir>>

²⁴ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Balçova Municipality, History <<https://www.balcova.bel.tr/Sayfa/49/tarihce>>

Education and Sports were hired for cost free sport activities (Balçova Municipality, 2019). Thus, approximately 6500 people from all ages, genders and socio-economic groups have sports training annually.²⁷ In addition, two major green areas are located within the district: Inciraltı City Forest on the coastline, and Balçova Therapy Forest present an opportunity for outdoor sports and activities such as trekking, camping, fishing and running.

Balçova Municipality has built a Modern grandstand with a capacity of 2000 people and Disabled Rehabilitation Center within the sports complex in the Korutürk Neighborhood (Balçova Municipality 2004 - 2018, 2018). Moreover, the Disabled Rehabilitation Center provides handcraft courses for handicapped youth to produce products and sell these products at the Disabled Center. They also produce candy and ornaments for special days like engagements, weddings or birthdays. At the same time, Balçova Municipality, which opened a 'Down Cafe' in the town center, selected all the employees from disabled youth and provided them the opportunity to become involved in social life, as well as with employment. The Balçova Municipality Borderless Technology Education Center (BETEM) was established in the building of the Disabled and Rehabilitation Center in 2016.²⁸ In this center, one-year software training was given to graduate disabled people living in Balçova (Balçova Municipality 2004 - 2018, 2018).

Women living in Balçova mostly prefer neighborhood houses, which are the subject of this thesis, as opposed to the sports and social activities mentioned above. They find opportunities for self-improvement, education, and socialization in these places that are reserved only for women. Neighborhood houses were first established in 2004 and have spread to every neighborhood in time (Annual Report, 2018). Women have cost free courses on different topics and they are informed via the training programs and conferences. In addition to indoor activities, they also organize and attend outdoor trips and visits.

²⁷ Balçova Municipality, Sports Schools <<http://www.balcova.bel.tr/Sayfa/164/kurumsal>>

²⁸ Balçova Municipality, BETEM <<http://www.balcova.bel.tr/ProjeDetay/13/betem>>

3.1. Neighborhood Houses in Balçova

The idea of “social justice” forms the basis of the neighborhood houses which aim to put women on center stage and to promote pioneering women, as a method of re-establishing close relations with the public. For this reason, the candidate for mayor of the Republican People’s Party in the 2004 local elections, Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, had a priority to put the Neighborhood Houses Project into practice.

The first project of the newly elected mayor of Balçova was the inauguration of neighborhood houses. The project was presented to the district council following the 2004 local election.²⁹ Çalkaya explained the main reason behind the project as follows:

Firstly, I have to empower and organize the women. Organizing women in one region is a fundamental purpose if you want to have power and be permanent in that region. Maybe it is difficult but success comes with women. This is my basic philosophy.

Balçova generally seems to be one of the most welfare-focused districts in Izmir and is preferred by retired and middle-class citizens, as mentioned before. In spite of this, there were about 2000 people listed without social security in 2004 (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). Although there were no shanty towns, some neighborhoods had poverty issues and inequality that needed to be eliminated. Therefore, this project was implemented to empower the women and overcome this inequality.

Neighborhood houses have given women the chance to spend their time efficiently and to earn money by selling their products. The purpose of

²⁹ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

establishing neighborhood houses is defined in a report by the Balçova Municipality: producing women, who are isolated from society and economically dependent on their families due to a lack of education and economic insufficiency are reintegrated into the society (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). After attending vocational courses and experiencing an increase in job opportunities and their income levels, women finally become self-confident people. This makes them say “I am a productive part of this society.” As stated above, women’s participation in political life has never been one of the official goals. It is one of the unintended consequences of the neighborhood house period, during which women spent their time and raised their awareness.

Neighborhood houses take place in the organization as a sub-unit of the Directorate of Culture and Social Affairs of the municipality (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). They serve women who live in the neighborhood of Korutürk and residents of this neighborhood can find answers to their requests and complaints without going to the town hall. These houses have given women the chance to evaluate their time and to make a profit by selling their products.

The first neighborhood houses were established in the Eğitim neighborhood on 12 October 2004 (Annual Report, 2007), the number increasing to seven in each neighborhood by 2019. Çetin Emeç (March 20, 2005), Teleferik (March 8, 2006), Onur (June 22, 2006), Fevzi Çakmak (April 5, 2007), Korutürk (April 17, 2008), Meşale (October 10, 2008) are the names of the existing neighborhood houses (Neighborhood houses Annual Report 2008).

From 2004 to 2013, 11.000 women benefited from vocational courses and training seminars (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). Participation of women in business life was provided as a result of vocational courses and products put up for sale in national and international fairs and

exhibitions. As a result of the increasing need, a women's cooperative was established to enable them to produce for national and international wholesale.

The recent courses given in neighborhood houses are wood painting, jewelry design, rug weaving, soft furnishings, machine embroidery, ribbon embroidery, brazil embroidery, painting, computer, felt trimming and literacy (Neighborhood Houses Annual Report 2018).

In neighborhood houses, the mayor participates in meetings held in order to listen to the problems of the neighborhood residents and to produce solutions and exchange ideas regarding various streets. Visits are made to the patients who live in the neighborhood and their health status is monitored. Interviews, panels, seminars and trips are also held in neighborhood houses as well as at various other places. Trips are made to different cities and places (Neighborhood Houses Annual Report 2008). Even women who cannot leave their houses without their husband's permission are often able to go to the local neighborhood house and its outdoor activities without permission, after a while.

Neighborhood houses also enable each individual to participate in the local government. The trainee who comes to the neighborhood houses relates the problem of her street and brings this problem to the solution authority through the neighborhood houses. She begins to feel responsible and sees herself as a part of administration. Thus, each individual enters the administration indirectly and it creates a loop. This was a targeted result of neighborhood houses and was achieved successfully.³⁰ The municipality thus begins to be managed by the public, in a sense.

The responsibility comes with women's identity which is developed in neighborhood houses. For instance, if a woman introduces herself in meetings or activities, she introduces herself, e.g. "I am Ayşe from the Eğitim neighborhood or Emine Hanım from the Teleferik neighborhood"³¹. Therefore,

³⁰ Interview with Fatma Çalkaya, 2019

³¹ Ibid

she appears to have a sense that a duty has been given to her, and holds a feeling of responsibility.

There are women who are called representatives of the street. There are also women who submit problems to the municipality about the problems of each neighborhood, who then support their solutions and follow them up. There are more than 400 streets with corresponding responsible women in the Balçova district.

The RPP's district president of Balçova, Aygül Eryılmaz (2019) was also a volunteer at neighborhood houses before becoming president. Therefore, she has experience allowing her to see the advantages of neighborhood houses:

Especially in the large-sized districts, neighborhood houses must be established because of their beneficial structure. Neighborhood houses are the solution centers of the municipality in each neighborhood. Therefore, the model should be taken by other municipalities in order to facilitate their work.

Neighborhood houses have a major importance for both former and current mayors. The current mayor, Fatma Çalkaya was one of the active employees of the neighborhood houses and the one who carried out this project as spouse of the mayor before the 2018 local elections. In spite of other work that she had to deal with as mayor, the neighborhood houses are still her priority:³²

I have been working as mayor for 1.5 months. I want my schedule to be empty between 12:00 a.m. and 14:00 p.m. During those hours, I go to the neighborhood houses. There are not only courses. I also go to visit the

³² Interview with Fatma Çalkaya, 2019

babies, newborns, patients, elderly people and to give condolences. I am trying to make time. I love being there and having conversations with people. I tell my friends: “Don’t put me in the office too much. At least leave me two hours a day, I want to be with women.”

Women in each project of the municipality are very important. Çalkaya (2019) points out that “Many municipalities organize events, seminars, panels and marches, but participants are mostly male. On the other hand, our meetings, walks and seminars consist mostly of females.” Every field and activity of the municipality has the voice and labor of women. 80 percent of participants are usually women in any case, and the means of communication with all these women is through neighborhood houses.³³

3.2. Goals of Neighborhood Houses

There are eight official goals of neighborhood houses which are listed below (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016):

1. To remobilize solidarity, to raise awareness of individuals in the decision-making process and to ensure women’s organization: In a country where social solidarity is gradually decreasing, providing a place where women can achieve these goals is the most important step. It was thought that they will be able to mobilize together more easily in a place where they can feel as comfortable as they do in their own homes.
2. To improve the quality of life for people and families in society: As a bridge between the community and municipality, citizens can find a solution for the problems of the neighborhood rapidly. People can call the nearest neighborhood house to inform them about the situation, and the

³³ Interview with Fatma Çalkaya, 2019

neighborhood houses will inform the relevant department, allowing the problem to be solved quickly, without wasting time in bureaucratic processes. Society becomes more comfortable with this efficient method and the quality of life of people is improved.

3. To raise awareness by means of instructional programs: In addition to the courses, there are educational seminars about health, childcare and women's rights. Women who benefit from these seminars become an active and knowledgeable part of society with their increasing awareness.
4. To provide a sustainable development for women as a result of vocational courses: Women who only do housework and have made no attempt to earn their own money, get a chance through vocational courses in neighborhood houses. As a result of these courses, women can continue producing and they can be part of a productive life.
5. To provide the participation of women in social and economic life: In addition to the participation in economic life as mentioned above; voluntary work for neighborhoods, participation in the activities and trips of neighborhood houses or the municipality, and spending time outside home with friends are some opportunities for women to socialize more.
6. To support equality between women and men in terms of social security: Women who have an income and increase their self-esteem, are empowered against men living around them. In this way, the inequality between them can be eliminated to a certain extent, helping to make a more peaceful society.
7. To ensure women's participation in the labor market: As a result of vocational and hand craft courses, women can be part of the labor market if they are willing. The handiwork or products which are produced by women are taken to the sales points with the assurance of the neighborhood houses and the earned money after the sale is given to the woman without a commission.
8. To help to provide employment for unemployed women: They do not merely participate in the labor market with production. If any labor force is needed

within the municipal boundaries, women who are looking for a job can get a job, provided they are qualified.

There are twelve official stages for the establishment of neighborhood houses which are listed below and examined in detail (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016):

1. Decision of the municipal district council
2. Allocating funds (for culture and social affairs)
3. Detection of region
4. Determination of staff to work
5. Finding of the venue (a place of municipality or lease method)
6. Carrying out survey studies
7. Determination of course leaders for preferred courses as a result of the survey conducted (for fee-earning and permanent employees)
8. Setting of the venue
9. Ensuring the participation of trainees
10. Providing of the items to be used in the course of 10 weeks (free of charge)
11. Preparation of the study plan (determination of course days and hours - between 3 to 6 hours per week for each course)
12. Determination of up to 15 trainees for each course

After the decision of the municipal district council, allocating of funding is needed. The municipality's own budget as well as some external funds were originally used to establish neighborhood houses. The Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Fund from the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services and the Social Risk Mitigation Project from World Bank was involved in the project of Balçova Neighborhood Houses with contributions and as it has

continued to work with the support of the Social Risk Mitigation Project since December 1, 2005 (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016).³⁴

The Eđitim neighborhood was the first district to establish a neighborhood house. It was decided with observations made during the 2004 local election campaign, that the needs of the Eđitim neighborhood were higher than the others. This neighborhood had a minimum share of investments; its residents had migrated to the city, lived in the city but stayed away from urban culture and had various domestic problems (Report of Balçova Neighborhood Houses Projects, 2016). Most women there were illiterate. The number of women with many children were much higher. In addition, most of the complaints about the municipality came from this neighborhood.³⁵ Therefore, it was decided that the first neighborhood houses would be established in this neighborhood which have several problems.

Field work was carried out before the opening of the neighborhood houses. One by one and door by door the neighborhood was profiled. Staff visited the neighborhood for four months. They entered houses and collected significant data about numbers of children and the disabled, including information regarding education and where individuals came from.³⁶

First of all, the basic problems of the district were identified by people who knew the neighborhood well, and problems and possible solutions discussed were. The planned neighborhood house should be in the center of the neighborhood and people with problems should be able to access them easily to feel that they are cared for by the municipality.³⁷

The priority of neighborhood houses was education. According to surveys, women in the Eđitim neighborhood would be educated in the neighborhood houses and courses would be primarily focused on literacy. The

³⁴ Interview with Mehmet Ali alkaya, 2019

³⁵ Interview with Mehmet Ali alkaya, 2019

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

process of neighborhood houses began with literacy courses but soon expanded with different courses and education (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016).

The first need for the neighborhood houses was finding a suitable building. The building would not have to be particularly attractive, but would have to have easy access for residents so that problems could be easily observed. The building was renovated and equipped with the tools to be used in the neighborhood houses such as tables, chairs, cabinets etc. (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016).

The first field studies began while the building was being renovated and equipped. Every home was visited with flyers and people were informed about what could be done in the neighborhood houses.³⁸ The purpose of the neighborhood houses, the courses and types of education to be given were explained in detail and people were invited. To increase easy acceptance of this place, the name ‘neighborhood houses’ was chosen especially for residents: ‘House’ was the main term used to strengthen the sense of home for increased cooperation.³⁹ In these houses, the municipality have a branch, in one sense. Problems of the citizens were also aimed to be resolved in the neighborhood houses.

It was expected that neighborhood houses would provide economic freedom for independent women. Initially, the financial resource of the grant was received from the World Bank (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). Hand skills courses were initiated with a protocol with girls’ vocational high school teachers, ensuring that women’s contribution to family budgets must be achieved. As women began to earn money by selling what they produced in these courses, their self-confidence increased and they wanted to socialize and work together more. However, courses for the purpose of women’s incomes were not enough for women. Since they spend all their time with

³⁸ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

³⁹ Interview with Fatma Çalkaya, 2019

cooking, cleaning and childcare at home, they began to express their wish to receive education about different topics.

Thus, the idea of organizing educational seminars emerged in neighborhood houses and awareness of women began to be raised. For the seminars, the Faculty of Medicine at Dokuz Eylül University, which is located in the province, was contacted, and women's health, child care and hygiene were the basis of common seminar programs. Other areas of focus were gynecology, contraception methods, breast cancer and ways of prevention, blood sugar, heart and blood pressure disease, respiratory tract and osteolysis, as well as childhood diseases, the importance of the family in the development of children, sibling relations and school failure (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016).

In addition, jewelry design, wood painting, fabric painting, folkloric doll making, macramé, ribbon embroidery, glass painting, ceramics, patchwork making, kilim weaving, computer and children's development courses were started with girls' vocational high school teachers. And also, theater, chess and computer courses were offered for children (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). The materials used in the courses were provided from the municipal budget, a practice that is still ongoing.

There was an intense demand with the start of the courses, but also there was a reservation at the same level. The biggest reservation was that neighborhood houses are a party organization of the RPP. To eliminate this reservation, it was stated that the neighborhood houses are the home of every citizen and the women who have different political opinions are welcomed to these houses.⁴⁰ Many women, who thought that their ideas and complaints were ignored, believed that they would find solutions to their problems in neighborhood houses.

⁴⁰ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

The demographic structure of the neighborhood where a neighborhood house would be opened would have to be well known to be able to serve the public better. A survey was conducted to determine the unemployed, people without social security, handicapped and income levels in the Eđitim neighborhood in 2004 (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). Related questions were asked to every family and a wide range of needs within the neighborhood was determined.

Women who were from different streets were the most important aspects. In this manner, daily information could be obtained from each street; women in different streets could come together and socialize with each other on the courses in the neighborhood houses.

Women with leadership characteristics in each street were identified and they were made representatives as individuals responsible for their own streets.⁴¹ There are 400 streets in the Balçova district and more than this number of women who have been chosen as representatives of their street. These women identify the needs and problems of the streets and submit problems to the municipality as well as information regarding families with newborns and funerals, and new people who move to their street. This information is then submitted to the neighborhoods house. In this way, the problems of the streets are solved in a short time and their needs can be resolved. Diapers are given to families with newborns and houses with funerals are visited. Welcome visits are made to people who move to the neighborhood. In this way, the prejudices against the neighborhood houses are broken, while levels of interest and trust are increased.

⁴¹ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

3.3. From Neighborhood House to Cooperation

After providing a strong organization of the neighborhood houses, the rate of production also increased in a considerable manner, naturally creating a market problem. It was necessary to take a step-in order to sell products easily and expand the product range. With this aim, Balçova Women's Environment, Culture and Business Cooperative (BAL-KAD) was established in 2010. Today this cooperative has a hundred-twenty partners (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). Women, who produce products in the neighborhood houses, needed a cooperative for themselves because they wanted to produce more and earn more money. According to the head Eryılmaz⁴², the cooperation would not have existed without women from neighborhood houses. Women who attend the neighborhood houses were the pioneers of the cooperation.

The official purpose of this women's cooperation is: to provide an income, to fulfil their needs about social and cultural activities, to market the products that they produce nationally and internationally, to maintain a healthy and developed environment where they live and to provide branding for women (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016).

A joint protocol was signed with Ege University during the establishment process of the cooperative (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). According to this protocol, women began to produce in the facilities of the university and on unused land. They received the training given by academicians of the university. Their products were sold under the name of their neighborhood house brand at the determined sales points.

There are two types of production in the BAL-KAD. One of them is the production of handicrafts like rugs, jewelry, wood painting, ribbon embroidery, felt design, machine embroidery, etc. and the second one is food production,

⁴² Interview with Aygül Eryılmaz, 2019

involving products such as noodles, tarhana, jam, pickles, tomato paste, olives, bakery foods, desserts and appetizers.

The benefits of BAL-KAD are examined under six titles and some of them share the common goals with neighborhood houses (Report of Balçova Neighborhood House Projects, 2016). These are ensuring the continuation of a successful women's organization, reintegrating women who do not work into business life, increasing women's contribution to the household economy, creating employment for women, ensuring the economic independence of women and preservation of local tastes in the convenience food sector.

Cooperative partners have training sessions to achieve their goals in a short time and to be informed about this new field. They are informed about leadership education, financial literacy, political participation, women's rights education, entrepreneurship and marketing, and food production.

The current mayor Fatma Çalkaya⁴³ stated the importance of the economic pillar of neighborhood houses and the necessity of BAL-KAD as follows:

Rather than building women's shelters, women should be liberated. In other words, women need to strengthen themselves in the economic sense. I think that if a woman is economically strong and knows her rights, she is a strong. If she earns money and she stand on her feet, there is no need for women's shelters.

⁴³ Interview with Fatma Çalkaya, 2019

3.4. Street Meetings

Although there are more frequent meetings in the neighborhood houses, street meetings are also organized to solve the general problems of one specific street. These meetings are organized by the neighborhood houses and it is decided which street will be chosen for the meeting and the information given by the individual responsible for that street. The mayor participates in these meetings allowing, so to speak, for the municipality to come to the neighborhood. In these meetings, not only the problems of the municipality are mentioned but also citizens share their personal problems with the mayor for solutions.⁴⁴ The solutions are then discussed in the atmosphere of a small public assembly in the streets. Former mayor Çalkaya (2019) stated that:

There were serious problems on the streets where the meetings were held. For example, we decided what we needed in the street and where the problem was going to be (e.g. a tree to be cut, painting, building a staircase or canal etc.). At the end of the day, we all gathered and we held many meetings at the gardens or in the houses. Therefore, we were able to detect problems on the very spot.

During these meetings, the director of science and development directorate, the social service and public relations unit, attend together with the Mayor. They listen to the discussions and each unit makes its own notes for solutions. They take photos and inform the Mayor about the day on which solution will be implemented and how long it is likely to take.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

⁴⁵ Ibid

Relations among neighborhood houses, street meetings and participation in the local government are explained by Mehmet Ali Çalkaya (2019):

If a neighborhood house says that location has more problems, we organize a street meeting. Chairs are placed, a sound system is set up and I sit at the table with my team. Problems are expressed and notes are taken. If the necessary work has not been done on the promised date, I say ‘you will find me through the neighborhood house’. So, I get them involved in solving the problem and make them participate in the administration.

Street meetings are not scheduled with pre-planned months, days or hours. Such gatherings are organized if there is a need to solve key problems, as opposed to meetings in neighborhood house which are more scheduled. Çalkaya did not prefer to attend meetings in neighborhood house as he did not wish to disturb women in a place where they feel at home. Therefore, his spouse attended meeting and represented mayor, listening to problems and engaging in activities. She worked in coordination with the social services unit for solutions.⁴⁶

3.5. Examples of Neighborhood Houses in Turkey

The name “neighborhood house” was first used by the Balçova Municipality and the first example was opened with this name in 2004. Some municipalities within Izmir have sometimes opened such places with the same name and sometimes with different names based on this model. There are some municipalities in the different districts of Izmir, similar to the Balçova

⁴⁶ Interview with Fatma Çalkaya, 2019

Neighborhood Houses model, but they appear to see the courses given to women as the ultimate goal, rather than a tool for socialization. Nevertheless, some cities do have the same model of neighborhood houses.

The Gaziemir Municipality in Izmir has opened a center under the name “Republic Neighborhood Houses,” based on the models in Balçova. Unlike Balçova, however, there are also extra courses for children not only for women. The number of centers opened with the motto “One Municipality per Neighborhood” is now twelve.⁴⁷ Therefore, these centers, similar to the Balçova neighborhood houses, are also the local solution centers and represent the municipalities.

The Konak Municipality in Izmir has established twelve Neighborhood Centers in total.⁴⁸ In order to ensure the effective and high-level participation of women in social life and to support their economic empowerment, vocational courses, foreign language courses and traditional handicrafts courses, as well as various hobbies and skills courses are provided for women. Approximately three thousand people attend these certified courses each year. These courses are organized as a result of identified needs revealed in the interviews carried out by NGOs which are professional chambers and other employers’ organizations, allowing women to find jobs as well as open their own workplaces.

The Karabağlar Municipality in Izmir has fifteen Neighborhood Centers in total.⁴⁹ In order to increase the quality of life of individuals belonging to each age group and to ensure their equal participation in society, neighborhood centers were opened in the neighborhoods deemed appropriate. The target group is primarily people who are affected by internal and external migration; and people who live near the city but lack access to resources and are deprived of

⁴⁷ Gaziemir Municipality, The Neighborhood Houses <<http://www.gaziemir.bel.tr/sem-t-evleri.html>>

⁴⁸ Konak Municipality, The Neighborhood Centers <<http://www.konak.bel.tr/sayfa/sem-t-merkezleri>>

⁴⁹ Karabağlar Municipality, The Neighborhood Centers <<http://www.karabaglar.bel.tr/sayfa/sem-t-merkezleri-ve-kurslar>>

equal opportunities. Neighborhood Centers provide protective, preventive, educational and developmental services within the framework of gender equality. They aim to empower women as individuals and to contribute to production. In addition to awareness-raising and empowerment training programs, groups are provided with business and professional skills courses, hobby courses and summer school courses for children. Thus, women and children benefit from the courses, seminars and trips organized by the center and have the chance to participate in society. These centers, unlike in the Balçova context, are multi-purpose buildings as opposed to a small course office, often including a health center, a gym, a meeting and conference room, and course rooms.⁵⁰ Bayraklı and Çiğli Municipalities also have these Neighborhood Centers for the same purpose.

In the other neighborhood houses, like Balçova, there are courses, seminars and activities for women. However, the Balçova Municipality does not restrict the aims and objectives of the neighborhood houses to these. Its aim is that women should have an opportunity to apply the accumulation of knowledge, networks and experience gained through neighborhood houses elsewhere as well. Women should be able to go to the neighborhood houses at any time and be a part of every activity they want. They can represent the municipality, provide solutions to a problem in their neighborhood, or participate in charity work and make themselves part of the local government. If they wish, they can transform this experience into political party membership and formally go into an active political life.

Neighborhood houses elsewhere have also followed the Balçova model, often with the same targeted purpose; the Söke Municipality⁵¹ has eight in Aydın, the Kemer⁵² Municipality has three in Antalya, the Sarıyer

⁵⁰ Karabağlar Municipality, The Neighborhood Centers <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/karabaglara-yeni-semt-merkezi-40544796>>

⁵¹ Söke Municipality, The Neighborhood Houses <<https://www.soke.bel.tr/kurslarimiz>>

⁵² Kemer Municipality, The Neighborhood Houses <<http://www.antalya-kemer.bel.tr/semt-evi-kurslar>>

Municipality⁵³ has six and the Beşiktaş Municipality⁵⁴ has one multi-purpose building in Istanbul.

The Communist Party of Turkey (CPT) has also opened Neighborhood houses by using the same name directly, but with a different function. At the conference “To the Workers” in September 2018, it was announced that the party would take ‘localization steps’ in neighborhoods in different cities. They stated that the aim was to turn the neighborhood houses into centers of enlightenment, solidarity and campaigning. To achieve this goal, workshops, courses and interviews would be held and these would be open to people of all ages and genders living in the neighborhood. To this end, the CPT opened the first neighborhood houses in Izmir, Çiğli in Evka 2, on December 16, 2018. Since then, CPT has also opened neighborhood houses in other districts and neighborhoods and increased its number of branches. In Karataş, Çınartepe, Balçova, Çiğli (Proletarian House), Bayraklı, Kuruçeşme, Yamanlar and Çeşme, as of June 29, 2019, the CPT have increased their number of branches in Izmir to nine. Interestingly, there are two centers in Balçova which were established by the RPP and the CTP under the name of the neighborhood houses. In Istanbul, the first neighborhood houses were opened in Tuzla Aydınli on March 09, 2019 and the number of centers increased to eight with Kartal Uğur Mumcu, İçerenköy, Gazi, Beyoğlu, Altayçeşme, Uskudar Selimiye and Sarıyer branches, in a short span of time.⁵⁵ The CPT also established neighborhood houses in different cities: Three in Ankara,⁵⁶ two in Mersin,⁵⁷ one

⁵³ Sarıyer Municipality, The Neighborhood Houses

<<http://www.sariyer.bel.tr/Icerik/semt-ve-yasam-evleri/155>>

⁵⁴ Beşiktaş Municipality, The Neighborhood Houses <<http://www.besiktas.bel.tr/Sayfa/1074/dikilitas-semt-evi>>

⁵⁵ The CTP, The Neighborhood Houses <<http://www.tkp.org.tr/tr/parti-orgutleri>>

⁵⁶ Eryaman, Dikmen and Keçiören (firstly opened on March 3, 2019)

⁵⁷ Yenice and Karaduvar (firstly opened on March 3, 2019)

in each city of Samsun,⁵⁸ Çorum,⁵⁹ Kocaeli⁶⁰ and Adana⁶¹. Thus, CPT has centers under the name of neighborhood houses comprising twenty-six different branches in Turkey.

In this chapter, I presented the general structures of the Balçova district and Balçova Municipality to be able to understand the importance of neighborhood houses. The goals and stages of establishment of the neighborhood houses were examined, and the relationship between BAL-KAD and the neighborhood houses were focused on. Examples of neighborhood houses in Turkey were shown, and similarities and differences were analyzed. In the next chapter, I will analyze the findings of in-depth interviews with women who participated in the activities of the neighborhood houses and how the neighborhood houses have played a significant role in women's empowerment.

⁵⁸ Atakum (opened on June 17, 2019)

⁵⁹ Bahçelievler (opened on June 2, 2019)

⁶⁰ Gebze Mevlana (opened on April 28, 2019)

⁶¹ Akkapı (opened on September 14, 2019)

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES

Since the number of women who attend neighborhood houses and participate in the political process is low, it was more appropriate to do in-depth interviews instead of surveys. To be able to understand how neighborhood houses contribute to women's participation in political life, in-depth interviews were conducted. These will be analyzed in this chapter. With in-depth interviews and semi-structured questions, participants can feel more comfortable and be willing to answer the questions. There is also an opportunity to attain additional information through follow-up questions as well as through their behavior and facial expressions by observing them. Participants of this research comprised six women who were members of the women's branch of the Republican People's Party (RPP) in Balçova and who were actively involved in political actions. All of them had experience in the activities of the neighborhood houses before becoming involved in political life.

On the basis of the findings of these interviews, we could argue that neighborhood houses have been contributing to women's empowerment in Izmir in four ways: increased self-confidence, role modeling, women's

solidarity and organized power, and being a step to political life. These interviews reveal that these contributions are not separate from each other; on the contrary, four of them supported each other and one of them become a result of another or vice versa. Now, I will explain these four ways one by one.

4.1. Increased Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is one of the most important key points in an individuals' life. People always require self-confidence, either in their personal life or in their social life, in order to achieve their goals and make their whole life easier. However, self-confidence is not inherent in all people at equal levels. Some people have already gained self-confidence while they were growing up via the support of their families or social environment. Some of them possess it but it is not enough for them and they require more to change their lives. There is also a lack of self-confidence in some people as it may have never developed due to the environment in which they grew up. At that point, neighborhood houses become unique opportunities for women.

Neighborhood houses help to increase the self-confidence of women due to their institutional structure. Women's awareness is raised through courses, seminars and education provided there. By doing volunteer work and participating in activities, they feel that they are efficient and useful for other people, and their self-confidence, as well as their self-respect, is increased. Interviewee #2 emphasized how attending these courses lead to more self-confidence as follows:

The women who came there were afraid of talking when they first attended the course. But they started to talk and express their opinions over time, and they realized that they were not alone, that many problems they had were common and that they were not helpless. This made them

stronger. These women are becoming more active in making decisions about themselves or their families. Moreover, they said: “I have the chance to make my voice heard and become part of society.” All this is only happening around the tables on the course.

Interviewee #6 underlined the importance of how neighborhood houses increased women’s self-confidence through spending time with other women. According to her, sometimes coming to neighborhood houses can be the first time out of their home for women who have low self-confidence. At that point, neighborhood houses are important because these individuals find similarities between their own lives and others’ lives. Women realize that all negative parts of their lives are not specific to her and this makes them more comfortable. They understand that they are not alone and helpless. They begin to learn where they can receive support and how they can do something for themselves. Legal and psychological support is provided if they need it. Therefore, this type of woman has been strengthened in the neighborhood houses not only with support but also through earning money by selling their products. Interviewee #6 also stated:

One woman realized that she was never alone and that she could be involved in organization not only in political parties or NGOs, but also in a woman’s cooperative, in order to earn her own money, because some women from neighborhood houses are also partners of the BAL-KAD.

The money that is earned from the sales of the products they produce returns to women as assurance and self-confidence. Eryılmaz (2019), the RPP’s district president of Balçova, stated: “Some of them do not hide this income from family but some of them do. One woman hid the money she had earned

thinking that she might need it if one day she had to leave her husband and her house. This situation encouraged her and she saw it as her guarantee.”

According to Fatma Çalkaya (2019), women have an active life here and this place becomes part of their social life:

Imagine you are always at home and you are not involved in anything other than laundry, dishwashing, house cleaning, food, child care. However, you also get a female identity and learn about your own rights through the education provided. This woman socializes and makes friends. It strengthens her economically and she acquires self-confidence by making money.

The courses are part of the neighborhood houses for women who may have no detailed information about them. According to Interviewee #6, the support for women in all aspects of their lives are provided there and the neighborhood house becomes an institution not only concerning the woman, but also her family and even other human beings. Women with self-confidence begin to change their lives first and then deliver changes for their families and their society. Therefore, other women also became more motivated when they see the power of neighborhood houses.

All interviewees agreed that education and seminars provided by neighborhood houses were beneficial for women. Interviewee #1 explained: “The information which is learnt through education and seminars not only helped to raise my awareness, but also in transferring this information to women who did not come to the neighborhood houses.” Having access to information about health, education or childcare and to be able to transfer this information to other women appeared to make them feel strong.

Neighborhood houses are effectively women’s second home, one that makes them powerful and self-confident, even a kind of therapy and solution

center for women, according to Interviewee #3. She stated: “We relax by talking about all our problems with our friends in the neighborhood houses. It has the same comforting feeling as being in my own home.” Therefore, women can focus on their problems and possible solutions providing self-confidence in return, and making their lives better.

There is also another aspect which was presented by Interviewee #1 who had a handicapped brother. Before she had been in a neighborhood house, her handicapped brother was welcomed warmly there; and even the mayor met and had a heart-to-heart talk with him in through a neighborhood house. So, as a person with a handicapped person in the family, she said: “They caught my interest with their honest behavior without actually showing it.” In addition, she was welcomed when she first went there herself. They did not care which party she supported or ideology she had. All of these made her feel comfortable in neighborhood houses and she could focus on what she wanted to do for herself. She expressed that her relationship with neighborhood houses has continued with affection and respect because she became an active member of a political party as a result of her increased self-confidence. Before she had been there, she was not active in the workings of any political party and she had only attended meetings two to three times.

Women who are not trusted by their husbands and are not allowed to go outside, have the chance to socialize and raise their awareness. Most women had doubts or fears since the very beginning. Interviewee #3 related that she had met friends who had had these kinds of feelings on courses. The husband of one of her friends was very suspicious and did not want to send his wife on the course. He thought his wife was lying and came to see if the neighborhood house really existed. Likewise, some husbands come to find out what neighborhood houses and the courses actually are about. But then, when they see what is really happening, they trust their wives and do not interfere with their relationships with the neighborhood houses. Interviewee #3 said: “I can say that men have a feeling of suspicion and insecurity rather than women. Interestingly, some of

the men who visited the neighborhood houses, wanted a neighborhood house for themselves.” The fact that their husbands are comfortable about their actions and the fact that they can then participate freely in the activities of neighborhood houses makes women feel relieved. The women who gain a private sphere independent from their family life turn their attention to their own lives. During the courses or voluntarily work, they raise their self-confidence with the help of their increased self-awareness.

One of the important education programs for women was organized by Women for Women’s Human Rights (WWHR) – New Ways which is an independent women’s NGO, whose aim was “to promote women’s human rights, equality and non-discrimination in Turkey and on the international level”. The WWHR and Balçova Municipality signed a protocol and women of Balçova participated in a Human Rights Education Program for Women (HREP) lasting sixteen weeks. In this program, women were informed about their rights, they acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to protect their rights, and they learned the power of individual and collective actions. Many women with different political tendencies and even an apolitical one joined HREP. They were educated in many fields such as law, education, gender, personal development and political actions. Interviewee #4 had a very inspirational story about this program. She defined her progress with these sentences:

I was a very shy person and I did not want to talk in public. If someone asked me a question or wanted me to talk about something, I would prefer to escape and hide. While I was working there voluntarily, I became part of the society in which I live. The process of working in neighborhood houses voluntarily and attending HREP made me feel strong. My self-confidence through this process has led me to work more in political life. Step by step I started to talk and listen, and I told others

what I learned. At the end of this process, I made a public speech and now nobody can silence me.

Lastly, self-confidence which is promoted through neighborhood houses can go beyond its limits. With the neighborhood houses, self-confidence of women appears to have increased and after a while neighborhood houses become insufficient to women. According to Interviewee #6, women want to move to the next step and do something more effective. This is generally becoming a member of a political party according to their political opinions and working actively to create change. Some of these members even become president of a women's branch in a political party. Interviewee #2 was the one who personally experienced this. Before the neighborhood houses, she did not have any thoughts of being part of political life. She maintained that during the volunteer work in neighborhood houses, she liked the work and she became aware of the power that she had. Working to make connections with other women and to help them had increased her self-confidence. After a while, she enthusiastically became a member of a political party and started to work in the party actively.

To sum up, self-confidence of women is increased by neighborhood houses in many different aspects, regardless of whether women previously possessed it or not. In addition, self-confidence is both the reason and the result of becoming part of political engagement. Self-confidence is the result of opportunities delivered by neighborhood houses as well as being a reason for women's organized power and solidarity and role modeling to other women. On the other hand, some women do not need the organized power obtained by neighborhood houses and they take the next step and become a member of a political party with their increased self-confidence.

4.2 Being A Role Model

Self-confidence is not enough for women's political engagement; women need something else in addition to their self-confidence, such as role models to encourage them. As a woman's organization, neighborhood houses offer experience of a wide range of different individuals. Some of them are already role models with their high self-confidence and success in political life, while others improve themselves and become someone else's role model through neighborhood houses.

I mentioned in the previous chapters how women come to neighborhood houses and take courses, get training and attend seminars, thereby becoming involved in activities with other women to make their self-confidence increase. While they are doing all these things, there are also women as trainees or employees who are involved in political life. Women have an opportunity to take them as role models and they are encouraged by them. If they want to do something for themselves whether financially or morally due to this increase in self-confidence, there are many examples in front of them. With this courage and self-confidence, women want to be a part of society and begin to work. According to Interviewee #6, a group wanted to go to a protest together and they managed to join in the March to End Violence Against Women in Bursa, in 2018. If these women had not been organized through neighborhood houses, they would not have been able to go to Bursa for the protest march. In addition, to earn money, they are able to sell their products made in courses through neighborhood houses or become a part of the Balçova Women's Cooperative and they continue to produce and sell there.

I would like to continue with perhaps the finest example: Interviewee #4. As I mentioned in the previous section, she increased her self-confidence by working in neighborhood houses and the Human Rights Education Program for Women voluntarily to become a woman who is highly vocal. She said that when she worked as a member of the political party, few people knew her but the

work done through neighborhood houses made her a well-known person among people on the street. Therefore, neighborhood houses have become the source of her power and shaped her new political identity. Also, she added that she had admired the powerful women around her at one time and had aspired to be like them. Now she proudly stated that she told the story of her transformation to everyone everywhere, in order to encourage women. She also helps university students who live in Balçova to find accommodation and household goods. She and some of her friends visit and prepare food to have dinner in students' houses. She said that the university students know her due to these visits and they have her phone number to call in case of need. This situation makes her popular among her social sphere. Therefore, being a shy and reserved woman did not prevent her from transforming into the role model she once wanted to be.

Neighborhood houses have employees who are paid salaries, as well as volunteer employees. Interviewee #1 and Interviewee #4 defined themselves as members of a team of volunteers so that if neighborhood houses needed urgent help, they would be ready to work there. In return, respect and thanks are all they require, as they are glad to work for their district and its citizens. This sort of voluntary work becomes an example for other women. With these small steps, it is made clear that every woman can become involved in voluntary work. For example, a person who lives in the neighborhood dies and the family would like to donate a wheelchair to someone. One neighbor delivers this information to the neighborhood houses with the permission of the family and following a simple phone call, the wheelchair is collected from that home and delivered to whoever needs it. This process is efficient thanks to neighborhood houses and gives every woman a chance to become involved. This small example of cooperation can apply to other achievements as well, such as political engagement.

While Interviewee #5 was attending the course in a neighborhood house, after a while the other women there learnt that she was a member of a political

party and was actively involved in political actions and street works with the party. Women trusted her as a friend, and some of them said that they wanted to work with her. Interviewee #3 stated that women got to know her and saw no significant differences between each other. This led them to say “if she can do it, so can I”. Another example like this happened during the field work of a neighborhood house. Being able to see what women were doing in the district through neighborhood houses gave confidence to women from that neighborhood. Most of these women wanted to work with them voluntarily and joined them.

Interviewee #6 expressed her experience about role models and presenting another telling example regarding the encouragement of women. She said that when she was in the neighborhood house, she became motivated and wanted to work more when she saw others. In addition, according to her, working with a woman who is the Balçova district president of a political party is also very motivating. Because she had her doubts: if they had had a male district president, would a woman who came to the party to become an official member through a neighborhood house work as actively as she was working now? Her answer was that it would not have been the case. Therefore, women who come from neighborhood houses are more confident, as they see other successful women. She regarded this process as the first ring of the chain; the process started in the neighborhood house and continued in the party, leading to the part acquiring 52% female party members in the RPP’s district organization.⁶² Eryılmaz (2019) says that this is the highest rate in Turkey and the source of this success is neighborhood houses. In addition, she shares the same opinion with Interviewee #6. The fact that the district president of one political party is a woman gives courage and hope to other women. Whether they have been involved in politics before or not, these women want to become members and do something useful.

⁶² Interview with Aygül Eryılmaz, 2019

According to Eryılmaz (2019), women who are not interested in politics beyond merely voting find the opportunity to develop their own political opinions. During course hours, they might, for example, have a conversation about news they watched and exchange ideas with each other. They discuss with each other about who is right and what is correct in the news, and sometimes they even manage to convince each other. They freely express their opinions and thoughts there because the place has a warm and friendly atmosphere. The fact is that a woman is able to create her own political opinion and sometimes even changes her husband's opinion by convincing him.

Being a role model and becoming someone else's role model is one of the main motivating aspects of women deciding to become involved in political life. Naturally, role models and self-confidence are related to each other but there is not always a cause-effect relationship between them. Before the high level of self-confidence, there could be a desire towards political engagement as a result of meeting successful role models.

4.3. The Power of Being Organized

The power of being organized and being in solidarity are one of the key factors towards political engagement for women. Interviewee #4 simply explained that if women wanted to do something in political life, it was very difficult to do it individually but there would always be a neighborhood house functioning as a step for them to unite. As part of this organization, they would have a more prominent voice and a more efficient influence.

The courses are not the purpose but the tool for socializing, activities and training. Women form their own group of friends and socialize together outside their homes. After a while, they want to do something together for their community and decide to become active members of a political party.

Interviewee #2 deeply related how the "soul of solidarity" was created through neighborhood houses. To examine the process, firstly the environment of the courses should be specified. The courses are held with participants sitting

around one big table. While women are doing the work in front of them, they can chat with the people around them and make many friends. After a while, a woman will learn about the life of the others there: Is there a domestic problem in her home? Does she have a sick person in her family? Does she have a child? Does her daughter/son go to school? Does her husband have a job etc.? A union and warm relationships are established by sharing this information. Also commonly discussed are daily political issues of the country we live in, and most of the issues are ones that mainly affect them as women. In this way, women start to talk about many issues, including politics, regardless of which ideology they hold, and a mutual exchange of ideas begins. At the same time the neighborhood houses function as a news center regarding the municipality. Women can learn every activity which is organized by the municipality from there and join in with their friends from there. For Interviewee #4, neighborhood houses were a women's organization which take women out of their houses; and moreover, they are a kind of house of aid and organization that is open to every woman from each political ideology. Therefore, women who are in places other than their homes have the experience of being part of women's solidarity and organization, regardless of their political opinion; and they feel the power of unity.

The power of being organized is important not only for women who are not members of a political party, but also for women who are already members. Interviewee #5 stated that while she was a member of the political party, she participated as a trainee in the neighborhood houses in 2006. Even though the courses which she went to ended, she never lost her connection with them, due to the warm atmosphere there. As a volunteer, she continued to participate in the events or to work for activities organized by the neighborhood houses. In addition to her experience in the political party, she expressed that the organization of neighborhood houses was more effective for women's political engagement. This is the reason why she was unwilling to end her affiliation with them.

“Neighborhood houses are like your home, and your friends there are like one of your family” said Interviewee #6. This is the reason why women have adapted to be part of them in a short time and taken the responsibility without hesitation. They do not discriminate between their home and neighborhood houses. Within this paradigm, they do what they have to do in order to attain accomplishment. When they learn about the power of being together, they apply this method to political actions. For example, women from the same political party regardless of whether they are members or not, work in campaigns during elections. They use their organizational knowledge obtained from their experience in neighborhood houses.

Interviewee #6 expressed her experience regarding how she became aware of women’s power of organization and solidarity through neighborhood houses. The schedule of neighborhood houses is sometimes busier and extra employees are needed, such as at school opening times. At these times, neighborhood houses identify families who need help with school stationary, delivering necessary supplies to needy families. During her course periods, Interviewee #6 observed this busy time and wanted to help together with other women. She really enjoyed the common spirit of comradeship and felt more capable of changing something. As long as they stayed together, she thought that she could accomplish everything, including politics. Therefore, after the course she continued to be there to work voluntarily, albeit not regularly as she had become an active member of a political party. In addition, she emphasized one point regarding neighborhood houses, which she believed had the greatest importance:

Neighborhood houses are an organizing center but never a center of political organization. They are a place where women from all political ideologies, religions and races gather together. Thanks to this mix, women continue their friendship outside the neighborhood houses. They share the experience of solidarity and learn the power of being organized.

So, although they are an institution of the municipality, women are the center of this organization, not ideologies.

Women can decide on what is best for them or what they need. The addition of new courses, seminars or projects for raising awareness also depend on the participating women's demand. According to the example given by Interviewee #6, in addition to the seminars already planned by neighborhood houses, the demands of the trainees and volunteers are also taken into account. Breast cancer screening and the Project of Heart of Balçova are consequences of attendees' demand for the opportunity to raise awareness towards protecting themselves from serious health problems. In addition, Interviewee #3 shared her experience about the process of requests. If there are some shortcomings, suggestions or demands, women prepare a report to be presented at meetings in the neighborhood houses. After they present the reports to the Culture Directorate, the reports are evaluated, and if they are acceptable, action is taken. Until now, women's requests have never been ignored and have always been taken into consideration.

All the achievements mentioned in this chapter are significant at the individual level. When women feel ready for political engagement, the importance of neighborhood houses have become apparent. Interviewee #1 narrated her experience about how organized power made her become part of political life. She said that although she was already someone who loved to work and help people, neighborhood houses had become a step for her to socialize even more. Then she realized the extent to which organized power and solidarity could create a difference and she started to work to help people through the local neighborhood house. She had become actively involved in politics with the power that she has attained from being with other women. Women form their own group of friends and socialize together away from home. After a while, they want to do something for their community and decide to become a member of a political party to work actively. The fact that the district president of the

political party is a woman is a relief to members' husbands and sometimes some spouses say that their husbands would not have sent them there if it had not been for the female president's presence.

Another example of the power of neighborhood houses to organize women was presented by Mehmet Ali Çalkaya.⁶³ His nomination for mayor was canceled by the Supreme Electoral Council before the 2018 local elections. He said: "8,000 people gathered in front of the municipality at 12:00 a.m. on a cold Sunday, and 6,000 of them were women." In a short period of time, the women were informed by using the communication network they had established among themselves and they had become organized all on their own.

To make it clear, women realized that if they became organized and stood together, they could become more and more powerful because they had learned the connection between being together and being strong. Then they started to look for other areas that could benefit from this power such as NGOs or political parties. Therefore, it can be argued that neighborhood houses are an important step for women towards becoming aware of their power.

4.4. Neighborhood houses as a Step to Political Life

Self-confidence, role models and the power of becoming organized are sometimes part of steps to political engagement. However, in some situations, women who are educated, those who have an awareness or a political background and self-confidence cannot be participants in political life. They just do not have enough encouragement for political engagement. As Interviewee #6 put it, if a woman wants to do something in political life, neighborhood houses become the first choice. They are the step which gives the woman enough encouragement by providing an opportunity to test herself. I

⁶³ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çalkaya, 2019

will now elaborate on how these establishments can become a vital step, using their own stories.

Neighborhood houses appear to have become a step towards political life. After attending neighborhood houses, all of interviewees become more active in political life regardless of their political backgrounds and whether they had previously been members of a political party. Interviewee #1, Interviewee #3, Interviewee #5 and Interviewee #6 were members of some political parties; Interviewee #2 and Interviewee #4 became members of political parties after being in neighborhood houses. All of them had their own life stories which had kept them away from politics and they also all had some political background and awareness.

Interviewee #2, who was not involved in politics before, met with neighborhood houses coincidentally. After she moved to Balçova, one day while she was walking, she saw the Fevzi Çakmak neighborhood house. She met the head there and got into conversation, obtained information from her about what kind of its place was. The head wanted her to come the next day, and she accepted, as she had liked the environment very much. The next day, the head offered her volunteer work there based on the conversation they had had the previous day. She accepted the offer and worked there voluntarily for eight months from that date. She also participated in courses that were of interest during her voluntary work period. While she was working there, she became a member of a political party and began to work in both places. When she had to stop her work at the neighborhood house due to family problems, she did not come back again. However, she never considered quitting her work with the political party. Her father was interested in politics and they had had conversations about it since childhood. Therefore, she had developed her own clear political opinion. She never thought of becoming a member of political party and active working in it herself, before beginning to work in neighborhood houses. For this reason, she was glad to be part of society in political ways and

her political engagement still continued although her connection had ended with neighborhood houses.

The last participant who was not actively involved in politics and who was not previously a political party member was Interviewee #4. She had also grown up with parents interested in politics. Therefore, she always had a political opinion and also had been in some political association in the 1980s. However, when she got married to a soldier, she stopped being involved in politics, adhering to military rules. This is why, although she had always wanted to work with her political party and become a member, she could not. During her husband's working life, she refrained from being in political life, but still she had the feeling that she should have done something for the country which she lived in. After her husband retired, she started looking for a way to be part of politics. At this point, she joined a neighborhood house and her journey began. This establishment had recently opened in her neighborhood but she had learned what kind of places they were through other neighborhood houses in the past four years. She volunteered to go and help at the opening stage. She willingly took part in this of this because she believed that neighborhood houses could be a bridge between the municipality and the citizens, and she could in this way become part of the local government indirectly. After a few months, she became a member of her political party and achieved what she wanted most: an active political life.

Interviewee #6 became a member of a political party after she retired. It was hard for her to get into political life. When she was fifteen years old, she witnessed the coup of 12 September 1980 so her family always kept her away from politics to protect her. Her friends, the places she went, and books she read were constantly under her parents' control. During her youth, she read and questioned all the political perspectives, gradually shaping her own political opinions. While she was working, she often became involved in political discussions with her colleague and children, expressing her ideas. After she retired, she wished to take a more concrete step and became a member of

political party as well as an NGO; and attended joint meetings at the women's branch. Although she attended meetings and was involved in work, she was more in the position of observer aiming to figure out how things worked. Here, she attended the Çetin Emeç neighborhood house as a trainee. She made friends and socialized during the courses. Spending time there made her feel more as though she was part of province due to the volunteering work. Finally, she emphasized that despite her lifelong ambition to be active in political engagement during her life; it was ultimately the neighborhood house that had made her a politician, leading her to even become the head of the women's branch of the RPP for one term in Balçova.

As a woman, Interviewee #3 also had the common problems shared by most women. She had to focus on her children; house work and her business life although she wanted to be part of politics. She was a member of the Democratic Left Party together with her husband while both of them were working. However, she could not work as effectively as she wanted. While her husband was working at the party in addition to his job, she was working and caring for their children. During the 2004 local elections, she followed the political meetings of mayor candidate and heard about his project of neighborhood houses for women. After she retired, one opened in her own neighborhood, and she attended the first course in 2006. When they were chatting during the course hours, she shared the information of families living in the neighborhood who need help. As help was arranged for these families, she also attended visits together with neighborhood house employees. She found herself participating in courses as well as work in the neighborhood houses with time. She worked there as a volunteer for about a year and a half. Then, she was offered a position as a paid employee. Until 2014, she had worked in the Teleferik neighborhood house. During her period with neighborhood houses, she decided to change her political party and she became an active member of the Republican People's Party. She has been active in the women's branch here for the last five years.

Interviewee #1 is the daughter of a mother who was interested in politics and frequently participated in demonstrations and protests. On the other hand, her father got angry and wanted to prevent her, as he was a soldier who must not get involved in politics with his family. However, her mother did not care and she participated in protests even with her children. She was the one who organized the people around her for demonstrations so Interviewee #1 learned how to be organized and the meaning solidarity from her mother. Therefore, Interviewee #1 got used to being part of political actions. After she got married to a soldier herself, she did not behave like her mother and instead, stayed away from politics. But as soon as her husband retired, she immediately became a member of a party. Her work in the party was soon not enough for her and she joined a neighborhood house. She did not want to be bored at home and wanted to work with women. She stated her feelings:

I am 66 years old and I want to work without resting until I die. This passion for politics has been within me all this time. Until I began to work in neighborhood houses, I did not put this passion directly into practice. Therefore, neighborhood houses were a step for me to find myself in active involvement in politics.

Self-confidence, role modeling and the power of organization make an important contribution to political participation, but sometimes these alone may not be enough. Women who are educated, who have an awareness or a political background and self-confidence cannot have the chance to participate in political life, even if they had an intention before. At that point, neighborhood houses might become the first option of encouragement towards political engagement for women. The doors of the neighborhood houses are not only open to women during the course hours. Any woman who wishes to participate in aid, visitations or activities that are part of the social municipality

understanding can do so, and in this way test herself as a part of a political mechanism.

The findings of the case study were presented and analyzed in this chapter. A general profile of the interviewees was presented as well as the conveniences and difficulties encountered during the interviews were touched on. The finding of interviews shows us that as a result of women's empowerment, women can participate in political life. They become more enthusiastic due to their skills gained in the neighborhood houses. The women's empowerment through neighborhood houses has been contributing to women's political participation in four ways; increasing self-confidence, role modeling, women's solidarity and organized power, leading to the first step into political life.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The case of the neighborhood houses in Balçova was examined in this thesis. Women's empowerment and women's political participation are supported by the activities of neighborhood houses. To be able to understand this support, women's empowerment in the world and in Turkey was examined, and the structure and functions of neighborhood houses were presented. The reasons behind women's political participation through neighborhood houses were clarified through in-depth interviews. The relationship between these two topics revealed that the working style and contents of neighborhood houses promote women to be more self-confident, which encourages them to participate in political life.

In the second chapter of the thesis, literature about the term women's empowerment and its relationship with women's rights were reviewed. Women's empowerment in the world was examined through discussing the examples about women's political participation at the local level. A historical background of women's rights and women's empowerment in Turkey were provided.

In the third chapter, the general features of Balçova were studied, in order to understand the profile of women who live in the district. After presenting the history of neighborhood houses, the structure and functions of neighborhood houses were examined to be able to understand the reasons behind women's political participation through neighborhood houses. The main differences and similarities between the Balçova neighborhood houses and other neighborhood houses in Turkey were mentioned.

In the fourth chapter, the findings of the case study were analyzed. A general profile of the interviewees was presented and the convenience and difficulties encountered during the interviews were mentioned. The reasons for women's political participation through neighborhood houses were examined under four headings.

Although the purpose behind the establishment of neighborhood houses was women's empowerment, the participation of women in political life is an unintended consequence. This consequence is achieved by these four headings: increasing self-confidence, role modeling, women's solidarity and organized power, and being a step to political life. These appear to be the first steps towards political life that determine how women become a part of politics through neighborhood houses. These contributions are not separated from each other by distinct borders; contrarily four of them supporting each other and sometimes one of them becomes a result of another or the other way around.

Self-confidence was the result of the effects of neighborhood houses upon women. Being out of their own home, socializing with other women who are similar to themselves, raising their awareness through education and seminars, earning money by selling their handiwork or becoming a partner of BAL-KAD, volunteering work and solidarity are key processes that increase women's self-confidence day by day. The activities, which are carried out in both their daily lives and in the neighborhood houses, become insufficient for them and they want to do more for the society in which they live. According to their political opinion, they join a political party or its women's branch.

Self-confidence is sometimes not enough for women's political engagement; women need something else in addition to their self-confidence, such as role models to encourage them. In neighborhood houses, there are women from a wide range of professions, educational backgrounds, ideologies, religions and ages. Therefore, some women, who are already active members of a political party, make friends with other women on their course. With the encouragement of those women, some become members of political parties and begin to work.

The power of being organized and being in solidarity are one of the causes of political engagement for women. If women want to do something in political life, it is very difficult for them to do it individually but when there is a neighborhood house functioning as a step for them to be together, this becomes possible. As a part of this organization, they have a stronger voice and greater influence. The experience of organized power leads to more collective work in political actions.

Self-confidence, role models and the power of being organized sometimes are part of steps towards political engagement. However, in some situations, women who are educated and have an awareness cannot participate in political life, even if they have a political background and self-confidence. They just do not have enough encouragement for political engagement. Neighborhood houses are the first choice for women who want to do something in political life. It is the step which gives them enough encouragement, giving the opportunity for them to test themselves. For women who want to do something for themselves but do not know how to, neighborhood houses can become a starting point. Whatever they want to do such as socializing, becoming more educated, earning money or becoming involved in politics, neighborhood houses can guide women.

Although the initial aim of the neighborhood houses was not to increase the women's political participation, the end result is that women who attended the neighborhood houses have been empowered through increasing self-

confidence, role modeling, solidarity and organized power, and being a step to political life. We have observed that women's political participation in Balçova has been increasing due to women's empowerment provided by the neighborhood houses. So, we can claim that women's political participation is an unintended consequence of attending the activities of Balçova neighborhood houses.



Table. 1 Voting Rates of Female Candidates in the 1930 Local Election in Istanbul (Source: Kartal, 2018; p. 191)

Female Members From the RPP	Number of Votes	Voting Rates of Candidates in Electoral District	Voting Rates of Candidates in General Istanbul
Seniye İsmail H. (Beykoz)	2050	34	16
Latife Bekir H. (Beyoglu)	8445	66	17
Nakiye H. (Beyoglu)	6283	72	49
Ayşe Remzi H. (Beyoglu)	5967	68	47

Table.2 Numbers and Rates of Women MPs in the Parliament Grand National Assembly of Turkey by Year (Source: TÜİK General Elections 1923-2011, www.ysk.gov.tr)

Election Year	Total Number of MPs	Women MP	Women Representation Rate (%)
1935	399	18	4,5
1939	429	16	3,7
1943	455	16	3,5
1946	465	9	1,9
1950	487	3	0,6
1954	541	4	0,7
1957	610	8	1,3
1961	450	3	0,7
1965	450	8	1,8
1969	450	5	1,1
1973	450	6	1,3
1977	450	4	0,9
1983	399	12	3,0
1987	450	6	1,3
1991	450	8	1,8
1995	550	13	2,4
1999	550	23	4,2
2002	550	24	4,4
2007	550	50	9,1
2011	550	79	14,4
2015	550	98	17,8
2015	550	81	14,7
2018	600	104	17,3

Table 3: Women in Lower or Single Chambers After Parliamentary Renewals in 2018
(Source: Women in parliament in 2018: The year in review (IPU))

Country	Total seats	Total women	% women
1. Rwanda	80	49	61,3
2. Cuba	605	322	53,2
3. Mexico	500	241	48,2
4. Grenada	15	7	46,7
5. Sweden	349	161	46,1
6. Costa Rica	57	26	45,6
7. Italy	630	225	35,7
8. Timor Leste	65	22	33,8
9. Monaco	24	8	33,3
10. Zimbabwe	270	85	31,5
11. El Salvador	84	26	31,0
12. Latvia	100	31	31,0
13. Djibouti	65	17	26,2
14. Iraq	329	83	25,2
15. China	2975	742	24,9
16. Turkmenistan	125	31	24,8
17. Slovenia	90	22	24,4
18. Armenia	132	32	24,2
19. United States of America	434	102	23,5
20. Bosnia and Herzegovina	42	9	21,4
21. Bangladesh	350	72	20,6
22. Mauritania	153	31	20,3
23. Pakistan	342	69	20,2
24. Barbados	30	6	20,0
25. Luxembourg	60	12	20,0
26. Fiji	51	10	19,6
27. Colombia	171	31	18,1

28. Gabon	134	24	17,9
29. Turkey	600	104	17,3
30. Togo	91	15	16,5
31. Cambodia	125	19	15,2
32. Bahrain	40	6	15,0
33. Brazil	513	77	15,0
34. Paraguay	80	12	15,0
35. Bhutan	47	7	14,9
36. Sao Tome and Principe	55	8	14,5
37. Malaysia	223	31	13,9
38. Sierra Leone	146	18	12,3
39. Hungary	199	23	11,6
40. Antigua and Barbuda	18	2	11,1
41. Democratic Republic of the Congo	485	50	10,3
42. Eswatini	69	5	7,2
43. Lebanon	128	6	4,7

Table. 4 Women's Representation in Local Governments in Turkey (Source: Biricikliođlu, 2013:68, KA.DER, www.ysk.gov.tr)

1999 Local Election	Number of Women	Women Representation Rate (%)
Mayoress	20	0,6
Alderman	541	1,6
Member of Provincial General Council	44	1,4

2004 Local Election	Number of Women	Women Representation Rate (%)
Mayoress	18	0,56
Alderman	817	2,37
Member of Provincial General Council	57	1,78

2009 Local Election	Number of Women	Women Representation Rate (%)
Mayoress	26	0,88
Alderman	1340	4,2
Member of Provincial General Council	110	3,25

2014 Local Election	Number of Women	Women Representation Rate (%)
Mayoress	40	2,9
Alderman	2198	10,72
Member of Provincial General Council	60	4,8

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Appendix. 1 Annual Report of Neighborhood Houses in 2007

- Health screening is made by municipality for citizens in the Eđitim Neighborhood.
- On various streets, the mayor has participated in the meetings held to listen to the problems of the neighborhood residents and to produce solutions and exchange ideas.
- Some residents were also visited in their homes.
- Children who are living in the neighborhood with insufficient economic capacities were taken to the cinema, Thermal Hotel Aqua City and Yassica Island.
- Trainees in neighborhood houses organized fairs in various places to display their products after the courses.
- In the neighborhood of Eđitim families with newborns were visited and 61 families were given diapers as a gift from our municipality.
- A condolence visit was made to 37 families in the Eđitim district and food was sent to each family.
- On 19.01.2007; Anıtkabir / Ankara tour was organized.
- On 03.04.2007; Women who live in the Eđitim neighborhood were taken to Ödemiş/ Bozdađ.
- On 28.03.2007; Yeşilyurt Nursing Home and Gül Nursing Home were visited.
- On 02.03.2007; A panel for “Children with Learning Difficulties” was organized.
- On 09.07.2007; Kindergarten students started education.
- On 30.05.2007; Çanakkale Martyrdom trip organized.
- On 28.08.2007; Kindergarten students end the training period.
- On 24.09.2007; Within the framework of the “Welcome to Ramadan” activities and performances including a Hacivat Karagöz show, a ‘ney’

concert and the Balçova Municipality Turkish Classical Music Choir took place.

- On 02.10.2007; As part of the “Welcome to Ramadan” activities, an ‘iftar’ dinner was organized in neighborhood houses.
- On 15.11.2007; the ‘Balçova’s Heart’ (BAK) project was initiated in the Eğitim neighborhood, which was organized jointly by the Dokuz Eylül University Public Health Department and the Balçova Municipality for the protection and monitoring of heart health for every citizen over 30 years of age. This project is planned to last 10 years
- On 23.11.2007; BAK Project started.

Source: Balçova Municipality, Neighborhood Houses Annual Report 2007

Appendix. 2 In-depth Interview Questions

1. How did your trainee/volunteer work process start in the neighborhood house? Which courses did you attend?
2. Have the training and seminars you attended in the neighborhood house made any difference in your life? If so, what are these?
3. What do neighborhood houses mean to you?
4. Did you have any suspicion when you decided to attend courses in the neighborhood house? (environment, quality of courses, concern about it being a political organization, etc.)
5. What does the concept of politics mean to you?
6. What did the idea of being in political life mean to you? Did you have the idea that you should do something as part of this society?
7. Did your traineeship/volunteer work process in neighborhood houses lead to an increase in your self-confidence? Does this feeling play a role in your active involvement in political life?
8. Did you ever consider becoming involved in political life before you were in the neighborhood? If so, what is your reason for postponing this idea?
9. Can you make a connection between socializing among women in neighborhood houses and your decision-making process to be active in politics?
10. Did you think that you had a voice in the local government when you were in the neighborhood houses? Were you able to make contact with the municipality easily and play a role in solving problems?
11. What was the reaction of your family and friends when you became involved actively in political life?
12. Do you think there are any deficiencies of neighborhood houses? If so, what are they?

Appendix. 3 Interview Questions for the Previous and Current Mayors

1. We could say that the effects of neighborhood houses established by the local government on women involve a wide social circle of increasing self-confidence and awareness given through seminars. Some of these women later become part of the local government by developing their own voice. Was this consequence one you expected?
2. You say that you have established neighborhood houses as a continuation of people's houses. When establishing the neighborhood houses, did you consider the features that you wanted to be the same and different from the people's houses?
3. In the 2004 local elections, you had this project on the agenda to put women in on center stage to engage with the public. Why are women so important for this relationship? How did this idea arise?
4. Why did you choose the Eđitim neighborhood to establish the first neighborhood house?
5. What is the reason for choosing the name 'neighborhood house'? Why did you emphasize the word 'house'?
6. The neighborhood house is the solution center of the citizens, and it has become a kind of administration of its own neighborhood. In your opinion, does this mean that people, especially women, have indirectly a say in the local government?
7. Do women who do not vote for the RPP come to the neighborhood house? Do these voters have a prejudice on grounds that it is a kind of political party organization?
8. Neighborhood houses are the tool for many organizations and events. In addition to being part of this, you also participate as mayor. How does the

feedback that you receive from women affect your decisions within the municipality?

9. Is there a schedule for the street meetings you attend? What are you told at these meetings?
10. Almost all of the participants in the 2007 general election campaign were women from the Egitim neighborhood. How do you interpret this development which has occurred in just three years? What do you think about how the neighborhood houses create political consciousness among women?
11. (Current mayor) Before becoming a mayor, you were very active in the organizations of the neighborhood houses as the spouse of the mayor. In some decisions, you have worked together with the people from the neighborhood house. How do you intend to manage your relationship with the neighborhood since you are the mayor now?
12. (Current mayor) Do you have any upcoming projects for neighborhood houses?
13. (Former mayor) You had 38% votes in the 2004 local elections, 69% votes in the 2009 local elections, 60,60% votes in 2014 and 67,22% votes in 2019. What do you think the role of women and neighborhood houses is in the increase of these votes?
14. (Former mayor) Do you think that the project of neighborhood houses has been successful?