

The Role of Women Assemblies from the Perception of Their Members & Women NGOs in Gaziantep: A Case Study with MAXQDA

Gaziantep'teki Kadın STK'ları ve Üyelerinin Bakış Açısından Kadın Meclislerinin Rolü: MAXQDA ile Vaka Çalışması

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Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article

Makale Bilgisi

Geliş/Received:

25.06.2024

Kabul/Accepted:

15.07.2024

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.12779069

Keywords

Empowerment of Women,
City Council Women's
Assembly, Women's Civil
Society Organizations

ABSTRACT

City Council Women's Assemblies include women-friendly practices regarding the representation of women in the social sphere in terms of the relationship between women and the city. By focusing on a framework based on qualitative analysis, this article tries to analyze how the activities of the Gaziantep City Council Women's Council and Gaziantep women's NGOs appear from the outside, and the relationships and information networks between them. Our methodology focuses on identifying and understanding women's organizing within the dominant patriarchal political structure and complex ethnic and immigrant groups and power dynamics, especially in the context of Gaziantep province. Interviews with the MAXQDA 2020 Program were held between October 2023 and December 2023. In addition, our article also discusses the successes and efforts of the coordinated structure formed in the period after major disasters such as the Covid-19 Pandemic and the February 6 Earthquake. The article highlights the challenges of integration when trying to support marginalized women's tissues. While it highlights the importance of responsibility towards targeted communities by promoting inclusivity, validating different perspectives, it offers an insight into the fact that the city council women's council does not have a legal identity.

ÖZ

Kent Konseyi Kadın Meclisleri, kadın ve kent ilişkisi açısından kadınların toplumsal alanda temsiline ilişkin kadın dostu uygulamalar içermektedir. Bu makale, nitel analize dayalı bir çerçeveye odaklanarak, Gaziantep Kent Konseyi Kadın Meclisi ve Gaziantep kadın STK'larının faaliyetlerinin dışarıdan nasıl görüldüğünü ve aralarındaki ilişki ve bilgi ağlarını analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır. Metodolojimiz, özellikle Gaziantep ili bağlamında, egemen ataerkil siyasi yapı ve karmaşık etnik ve göçmen gruplar ve güç dinamikleri içinde kadınların örgütlenmesini tanımlamaya ve anlamaya odaklanmaktadır. MAXQDA 2020 Programı ile görüşmeler Ekim 2023 ve Aralık 2023 tarihleri arasında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca makalemizde Covid-19 Pandemisi ve 6 Şubat Depremi gibi büyük felaketlerden sonraki dönemde oluşturulan koordineli yapının başarıları ve çabaları da ele alınmaktadır. Makale, marjinalleştirilmiş kadın dokularını desteklemeye çalışırken entegrasyonun zorluklarının altını çiziyor. Kapsayıcılığı teşvik ederek, farklı bakış açılarını geçerli kılarak hedeflenen topluluklara karşı sorumluluğun önemini vurgularken, kent konseyi kadın meclisinin yasal bir kimliğe sahip olmadığı gerçeğine dair bir içgörü sunuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kadınların
Güçlendirilmesi, Kent
Konseyi Kadın Meclisi,
Kadın Sivil Toplum
Kuruluşları

Citation/Atf: Balci-İzgi, B. & B. Suna, (2024). The Role of Women Assemblies from the Perception of Their Members & Women NGOs in Gaziantep: A Case Study with MAXQDA. *Journal of Western European Social Sciences*. 1/1, 11-30.

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1. Introduction

Recently, the city council women's assemblies have been taken attention for the increase in women's social representation. These councils, which provide opportunities for women-friendly practices in the context of the relationship between women and the city. They operate at the local level with the aim of empowering women and benefiting the city by creating public opinion on various issues concerning society. Civil society organizations, on the other hand, are significant social entities that demonstrate women's activities across all fields. According to the research findings, the participants know enough about the city council women's assemblies and the commissions therein. Regarding whether the city council has a legal personality, almost half of the participants stated that the women's assemblies do not have a legal personality, while it is observed that the other half had no opinion on this matter.

In the relationship between today's civil society and local governments, city councils and their subgroup, women's councils, hold particular importance. The practices of city councils, which began in 1996, became mandatory with the adoption of local government legislation in 2006. From city councils, the mission of developing urban vision and citizenship awareness, implementing principles of sustainable development, and accountability is expected.

The empowerment of women and economic development are interconnected in two ways: On one hand, development can play a significant role in reducing inequality between men and women on its own; on the other hand, empowering women can contribute to growth. Reviewing the literature on the empowerment-development nexus from both sides, Duflo's article (2012) argues that the relationship between empowerment and development may be too weak to sustain itself, and continuous policy commitment to equality and continuous determination for equality may be necessary.

These platforms, consisting of representatives from unions, notaries, universities, public institutions, and headmen, are also supported by municipalities. The opinions formed on these platforms are considered essential and valuable. Currently, there are 192 active city councils in Turkey. Women's assemblies, which currently exist in some provinces, carry out work on issues such as violence against women, gender equality, culture and arts, academia, the environment, and many more. (www.icisleri.gov.tr).

This study focuses on the activities of the women's assemblies' initiative in Gaziantep province and its relationship with women's NGOs in the province. Publications addressing the topic of Gaziantep City Council were thoroughly examined, but no publication on this topic was found. This study, which focuses on the activities of city council women's assemblies and approaches the subject from the perspectives of members and NGOs, has an authentic quality in this regard.

2. A Brief Literature About Women, Women Assemblies and Women NGOs

The need for a city council arises due to situations such as the protection and improvement of the social, economic, and environmental balance in urban areas, the protection of the rights and laws of the city, sustainable development, environmental awareness, and social assistance and solidarity (Akdemir, 2017). City councils have emerged as an essential participation mechanism in Turkey through Local Agenda 21 practices (Akman, 2018).

Alozie and Manganaro (1993) defined city councils as *"advisory bodies established in accordance with Article 76 of Law No. 5393 on Municipalities, where views and suggestions are presented for the development and beautification of the city, and participation in decision-making processes is ensured."* City councils are areas where various groups come together and play a vital role in the progress of local democracy and participatory governance in Turkey, sharing goals related to urban life and generating standard solutions (Aksu and Taştekin, 2020; Smith et al., 2009).

City councils are essential in strengthening local democracy by promoting a participatory governance approach, bringing together different perspectives and solution proposals for urban issues, enhancing communication and collaboration among NGOs, professional associations, public institutions, and city residents, contributing to decision-making processes for urban development, and fostering the development of a transparent governance approach (Turkey City Councils Union, 2024).

City councils are generally established by local governments and consist of members from NGOs, representatives of the private sector, academics, and local residents (Inayatullah, 2011). Municipalities play a significant role in the establishment and functioning of city councils. Without the support of municipalities, it becomes difficult for city councils to operate effectively and achieve their goals (A. T. Özdemir, 2011). In

addition to municipalities, active participation and support from citizens are crucial for this platform, where they can share their ideas and suggestions regarding urban life (Kara and Şimşek, 2016).

Women's councils, established to express the problems and needs of women living in the city and to produce solutions (Altun and Toker, 2017), are considered as a sub-unit of the City Council (Kestellioğlu, 2011). The active participation of women in founding, managerial and employee roles in NGOs stands out as an important necessity in terms of gender equality and social development (S. Özdemir et al., 2009). NGOs are organizations created by the society, non-profit, independent of the state, operating on a specific subject and having their own decision-making bodies and budget (Eroğlu et al., 2023). NGOs can operate in different areas such as women's rights, education, health, combating violence, economic empowerment, art and culture (Duruel, 2023).

Eroğlu et al., (2023) stated in their study that women, children, youth and disabled people are among the disadvantaged groups and that these groups need more activities. Yatkın (2013) attributed the reason why women are in the disadvantaged group to the fact that Turkish society exhibits masculine society characteristics and focuses on traditional/religious values on the way to modernization. At this point, NGOs and women's councils play an important role in raising awareness on issues such as gender equality and women's rights (Turan and Şen, 2014). NGOs and women's councils make regulations that improve the living conditions of women and ensure equality by making legal changes on women's rights through their protective work (Mete, 2022). Efforts to solve women's problems and women's participation in decision-making processes ensure women's awareness and empowerment. Access to city council and women's council activities is important in terms of contributing to improving democracy, participation, gender equality, transparency, accountability and local development (Alozie and Manganaro, 1993; Bekebayeva et al., 2019).

When the literature is examined, Akman (2018), in his study examining the role and importance of women's councils in local governments in Turkey, emphasizes the role of women's councils in order to support women's active participation in politics and social life. In the study of Altun and Toker (2017), Izmir City Council; Küçük and Akpınar (2018) analyzed the functionality of women's council members of Esenler and Kağıthane City Councils as a mechanism for participation in local governments and the role of women in this process. As a result of the study, the importance of including women more in decision-making mechanisms was emphasized. Örselli et al., (2016) examined the role of women's councils in Turkey through the example of the Karatay Women's Council, and Sayın, (2022) examined the role of women's councils in Turkey through the example of the Adana City Council Women's Council. They suggested that women's councils can play an important role in increasing the visibility of women in urban life, enabling local governance and providing services in cooperation with local governments.

Sumbas and Ömürgönülşen (2018) examined the problems that prevent women's councils in Ankara from being effective stakeholders in local decision-making processes and emphasized that the obstacles must be overcome. Candan (2019), on the other hand, examined the social marketing activities of the Manisa Metropolitan Municipality City Council Women's Assembly and evaluated the effectiveness and success of the integration of social marketing practices in the work carried out by non-profit organizations for the benefit of society. Yılmaz et al., (2021) examined the activities of Malatya City Council and the contribution of Malatya Metropolitan Municipality to these activities.

It is clear that city councils are an important tool in strengthening local democracy. Therefore, this research is important in filling a gap in this area regarding the perspectives of women's NGOs and female members of the city council in Gaziantep, and it contributes to the literature by providing a new perspective.

3. Data and Methodology

The research conducted to evaluate the Gaziantep City Council Women's Assembly activities among its members and women's NGOs in the city, a qualitative research technique was used to gather more detailed information from the participants. Qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' opinions by comprehensively addressing events and phenomena in their natural environments (Aydin, 2018:63).

A case study involves the systematic analysis of data collected to deeply examine a specific situation or event, relying on observations of events occurring in a real environment. Through this method, the results obtained reveal why the particular event occurred in this manner and indicate which areas should be focused on in the studies (Subaşı and Okumuş, 2017: 420). In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the data. The interviews were conducted through online meetings between October and December 2023. The data obtained were subjected to content analysis using the MAXQDA 2020 program.

The study sample consisted of members of the city council and members of NGOs. A total of 14 participants contributed to the research. Purposive sampling techniques, precisely the snowball sampling technique, were employed to determine the study participants. In snowball sampling, a reference person related to the subject of the study is selected, and through this person, other individuals are reached. This process is repeated, with participants guiding the research and the sample size increasing (Yağar and Dökme, 2018:5).

Online interviews were conducted with the participants. They were asked five sociodemographic questions and eight semi-structured interview questions. These questions are as follows:

Sure, here are the translated questions:

1. Can you share your knowledge about the structure of the city council?
2. Are you aware of the activities conducted by the city council and women's assembly in your province?
3. Do you know what kind of activities the city council women's assembly engages in? Could you elaborate on what you know?
4. How do you evaluate the activities of the city council women's assembly?
5. What do you think are the benefits of city council women's assemblies for empowering women in the province?
6. How do local governments support the women's initiatives led by the city council? Could you provide information on this?
7. Could you evaluate recent women's assembly activities compared to past ones?
8. How would you assess the communication between the city council women's assembly and NGOs?

Audio recordings were made during the interviews with the necessary permissions obtained from the participants. These audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher conducting the study and subjected to content analysis using MAXQDA (2020), a qualitative data analysis program. Content analysis is a systematic and repeatable method that involves examining texts according to specific rules and categorizing them into content categories (Kaya and Usluel, 2011: 50). The data obtained from the participants were thoroughly read and examined by the researchers. Then, the data were divided into codes and sub-codes based on their meanings and classified under themes while maintaining the integrity of the subject. Subsequently, the codings between the two coders were reviewed, and it was determined that there was a 76% agreement between the coders. This rate indicates that the coding reliability of the data was sufficient (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the coding process, the analysis results were presented in the findings section using code statistics graphs and figures, hierarchical models of code-subcode, code-subcode model, frequency analysis, code cloud, and word cloud.

4. Findings

This research was conducted to evaluate the Gaziantep City Council Women's Assembly activities among its members and women's civil society organizations in the city. In the findings section, the results of the interviews conducted with one male and 13 female participants who participated in this research are presented in detail, including socio-demographic information, themes, codes, and sub-codes.

4.1. Socio-Demographic Findings for Participants

In accordance with ethical principles, the identity information of the participants has not been disclosed in this research. Table 1 presents information regarding participant codes, gender, marital status, educational status, employment status, and membership in NGOs. Findings related to demographic information are shown below.

Table 1: Findings Regarding Participants' Socio-Demographic Information

Participants	Gender	Marital Status	Educational Status	Employment Status	Membership in NGOs
K1	Female	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	Yes
K2	Female	Single	Master's Degree	Employed	Yes

K3	Female	Married	Master's Degree	Employed	Yes
K4	Female	Married	Associate's Degree	Employed	Yes
K5	Female	Married	PhD	Employed	Yes
K6	Male	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	Yes
K7	Female	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Unemployed	Yes
K8	Female	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	Yes
K9	Female	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	Yes
K10	Female	Married	Associate's Degree	Employed	Yes
K11	Female	Married	Associate's Degree	Employed	Yes
K12	Female	Married	PhD	Employed	Yes
K13	Female	Married	Master's Degree	Unemployed	Yes
K14	Female	Married	High School	Employed	Yes

In the planned interviews for this research, there are a total of 14 participants, including one male. When the demographic information of the participants is evaluated according to marital status, 4 participants are single, and 10 participants are married. Regarding educational background, 5 participants hold bachelor's degrees. Three participants hold master's degrees. Three participants have associate's degrees. One participant is a high school graduate. 2 participants hold a PhD. In terms of employment status, 2 participants are not employed. Twelve participants are employed. Additionally, all participants are members of a non-governmental organization (NGO).

4.2. Findings Related to the Research

After analyzing the data obtained from the research titled "Evaluation of Gaziantep City Council Women's Assembly Activities among Members and Women's NGOs in the City," it was found that the data consisted of 2 themes, seven codes, and 49 sub-codes. These themes were identified as "overview of city councils and women's assemblies" and "activities and development of women's assemblies." In the coding section, the following codes were determined: structure of city councils, access to city council and women's assembly activities, communication between city councils and NGOs, support from local governments, opinions on city council women's assembly activities, opinions on the development of city council women's assembly, and finally, transformation in the activities of women's assemblies.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Overview of city councils and women's assemblies

In this section of the research, findings regarding participants' evaluations of the structure of city councils, access to city council and women's assembly activities, communication between city councils and NGOs, and support from local governments are presented. The findings based on participants' data analysis resulted in 4 codes, as shown in Figure 1.

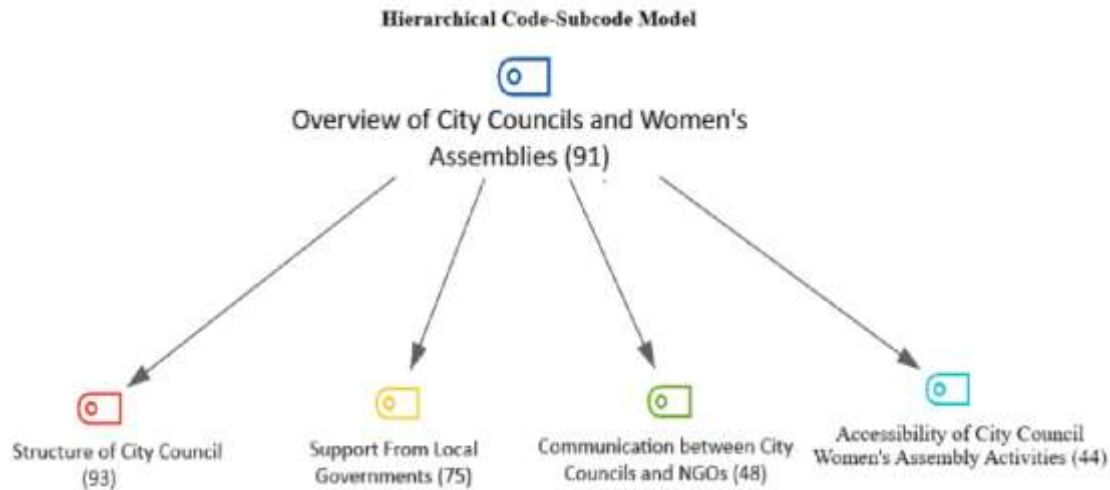


Figure 1: Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model for an Overview of City Councils and Women's Assemblies

In the area related to the structure of city councils, 93 codings were conducted, while 75 codings were conducted regarding the support from local governments. Additionally, 48 codings were performed on the communication between city councils and NGOs, and 44 codings were carried out regarding the accessibility of city council women's assembly activities.

4.2.1.1. The structure of city councils

In this section, participants were asked about their level of knowledge regarding the structure of city councils, their knowledge about membership, their familiarity with commissions, and whether they had information about legal personality status. The responses were visualized using a hierarchical code-subcode model, as shown in Figure 2.

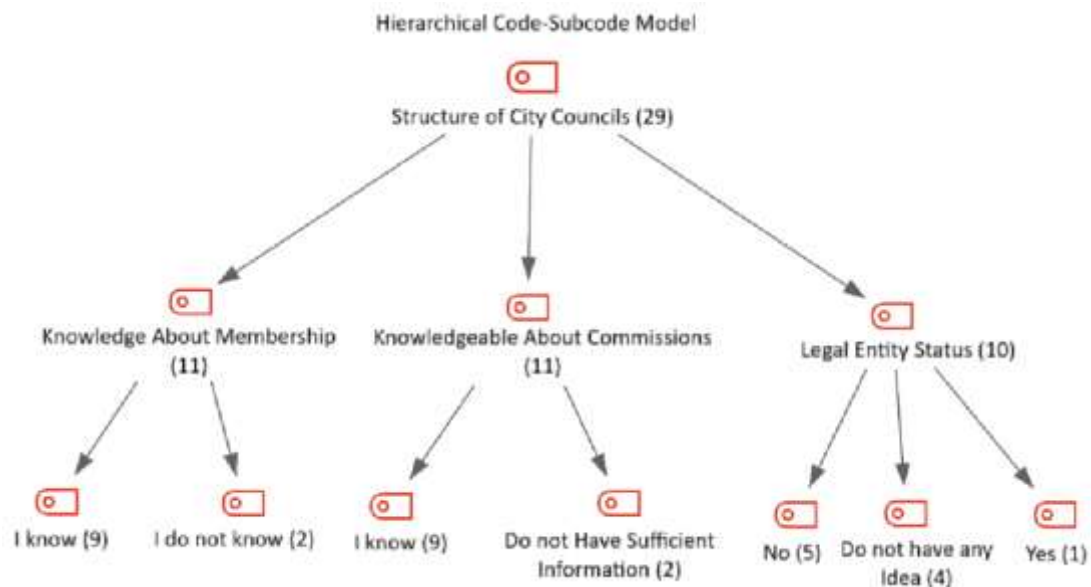


Figure 2: Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model for the Structure of City Councils

In this context, it was found that 9 participants (K1, K2, K4, K5, K6, K8, K9, K10, K14) have knowledge about membership, while 2 participants (K3, K12) do not have any membership information. Additionally, it was found that 9 participants (K1, K2, K4, K5, K6, K7, K9, K11, K14) are knowledgeable about commissions, while 2 participants (K3, K12) do not have sufficient information. When evaluating participants' thoughts on whether the women's assembly has legal personality status, it was determined that 5 participants (K2, K3, K5,

K6, K8) are aware that the women's assembly does not have legal personality, 4 participants (K1, K3, K9, K12) do not have any idea, and according to 1 participant (K11), the women's councils have legal personality.

4.2.1.2. Support from local authorities

In this section of the research, questions were asked regarding the support of local authorities for women's assemblies. The responses were visualized using a code theory model, as shown in Figure 3.

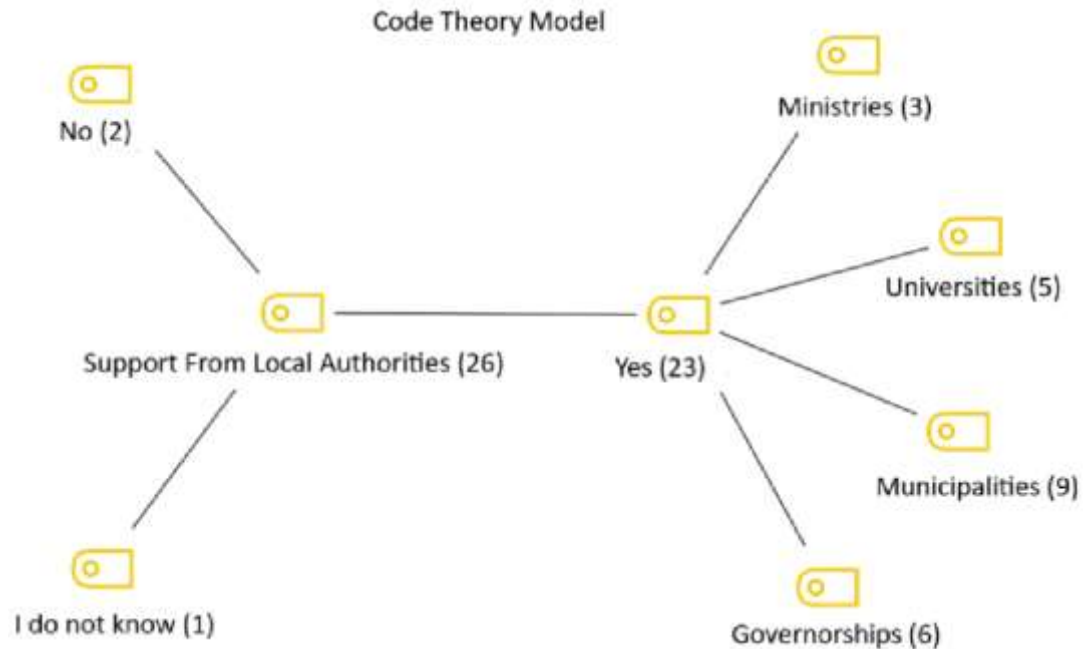


Figure 3: Support from Local Authorities - Code Theory Model

According to the majority of participants (K3, K4, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10, K11, K12, K13, K14), it was found that women's initiatives receive support from local authorities. Among the local authorities mentioned to provide support, ministries (K4, K9, K10), governorships (K4, K6, K7, K9, K10, K11), municipalities, and universities (K4, K6, K9, K10, K14) were highlighted.

The statement of Participant K3 regarding the subject is as follows:

"... Since it works for the municipality, the municipality supports the initiatives undertaken within appropriate facilities, both in terms of spatial and equipment aspects..."

Participants mainly indicated that municipalities provide the most support for women's initiatives. Additionally, 2 participants (K1, K2) mentioned that no support is provided for women's initiatives by local governments, while 1 participant (K11) was found to have limited knowledge on the subject.

4.2.1.3. Communication between City Councils and NGOs

In this section, participants were asked about their opinions regarding the evaluation of communication between the youth council, women's assembly, and NGOs. The responses were visualized using a hierarchical code-subcode model, as shown in Figure 4.

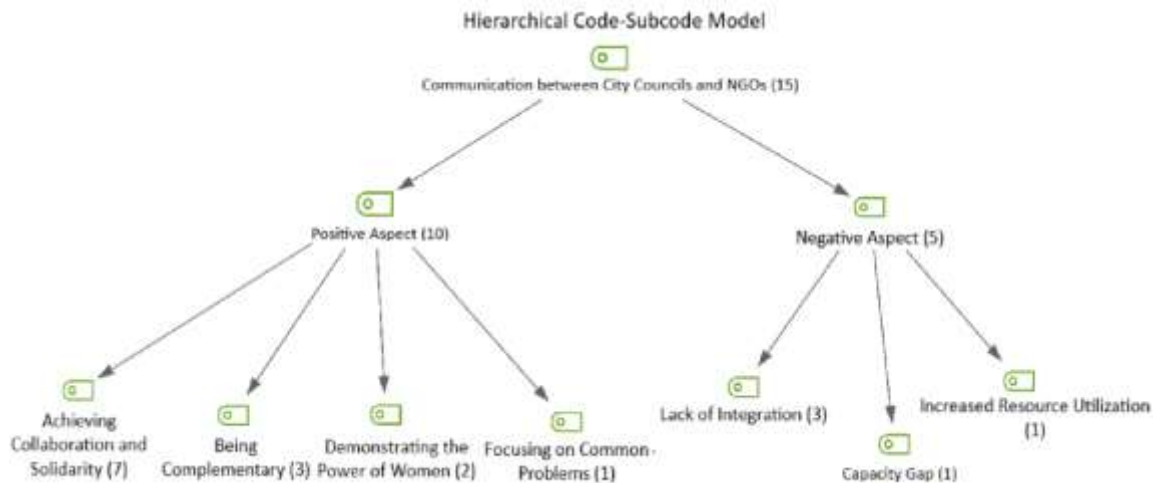


Figure 4: Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model for Communication between City Councils and NGOs

The participants in the research evaluated the "positive" and "negative" aspects of communication between city councils, women's assemblies, and NGOs. The findings regarding the positive communication between city councils and NGOs have been visualized in Figure 5.

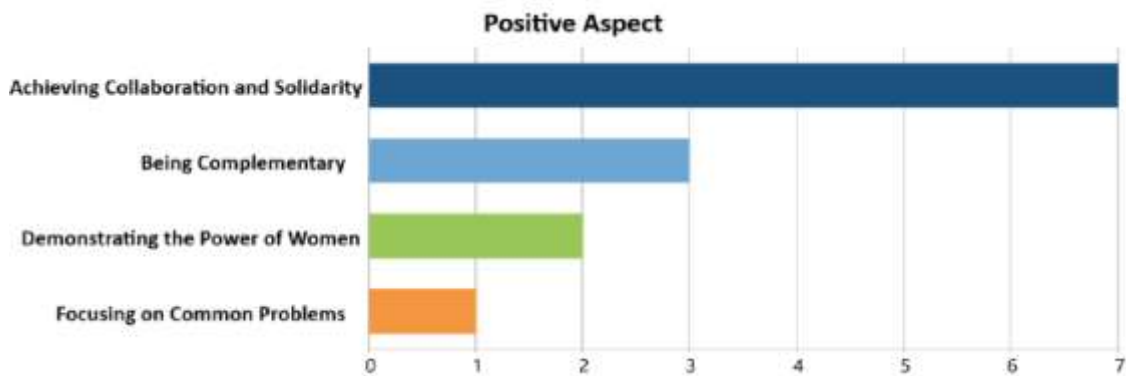


Figure 5: The statistics of the positive communication of city councils with NGOs

Among the positive aspects of communication are; focusing on common problems (K8), demonstrating the power of women (K6, K11), being complementary (K9, K10, K14), and achieving collaboration and solidarity (K2, K7, K9, K10, K12, K13, K14).

Participant K7 expressed the importance of collaboration and solidarity in communication as follows:

"... They were always together. I mean, when they could not manage on their own, when their own strengths were not enough, they supported each other. I have seen this. Like, we can take this from there, we can take that. They continue with the natural account that strength comes from unity..."

The findings regarding the negative communication of city councils with NGOs have been visualized in Figure 6.

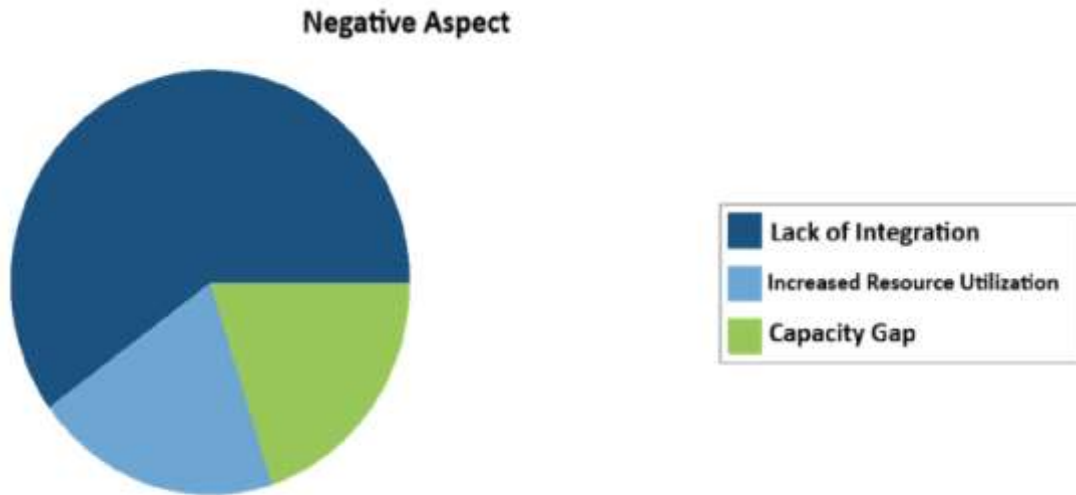


Figure 6: Pie chart on the negative communication of city councils with NGOs.

According to the findings, among the negative aspects of communication are lack of integration (K1, K3, K4), increased resource utilization (K6), and capacity gap (K2).

Participant K6 expressed the negativity in resource utilization as follows:

“...If new projects do not emerge, resource utilization is not negatively affected by revolving around the same issue...”

In this study, the evaluation of city councils' communication with non-governmental organizations has been conducted. About this, Figure 7 illustrates the frequency distribution of code frequencies among the participants.

Coding System	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14	TOTAL
Overview of city councils and women's assemblies															91
Communication between city councils and NGOs															15
Positive Aspect															5
Lack of integration															3
Increased resource utilization															1
Capacity gap															1
Negative Aspect															10
Focusing on common problems															1
Demonstrating the power of women															2
Being complementary															3
Achieving collaboration and solidarity															7
TOTAL	9	15	9	10	6	15	7	8	14	11	10	10	6	9	139

Figure 7: The frequency distribution of code frequencies among the participants

According to the frequency distribution table, the findings indicate that there are varying levels of opinion expression among the participants. Particularly, it is emphasized that participants 2, 6, and 9 expressed their views more frequently regarding the issue.

4.2.1.4. Access to city council and women's assembly activities.

In this section, participants were asked about the methods of being informed about the activities of city council assemblies in their cities. The statistics of sub-codes regarding the responses are visualized in Figure 8.

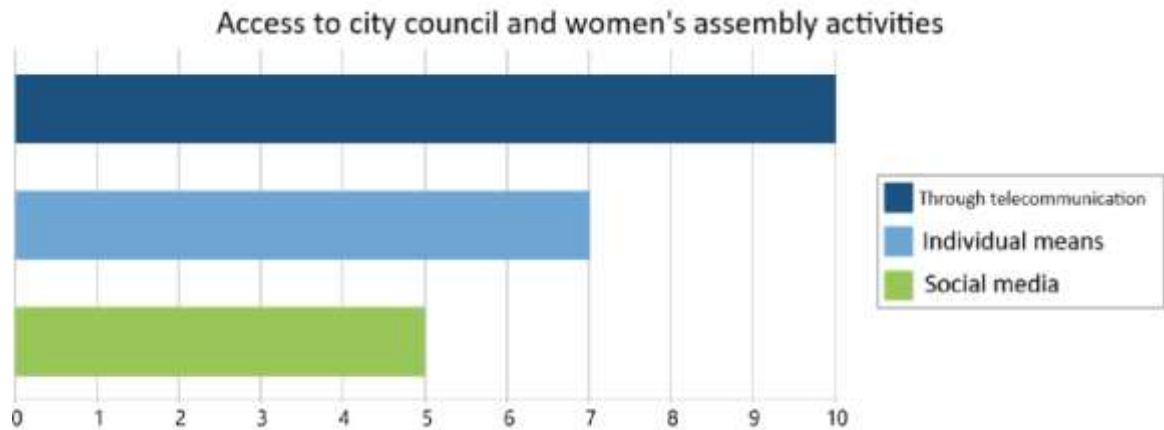


Figure 8: The statistics of sub-codes regarding access to city council and women's assembly activities

According to the findings, 7 participants (K2, K3, K8, K9, K10, K13, K14) access activities through individual means, 10 participants (K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K7, K8, K11, K12, K14) through telecommunication, and finally, 5 participants (K2, K5, K6, K9, K12) through social media. Therefore, it is concluded that the majority of participants follow city council activities primarily through telecommunication.

The statement of Participant K5 expressing their thoughts on being informed about activities through social media is as follows:

“... Social media is the most important and effective communication tool of our time. Therefore, I definitely advocate for the announcement of these activities through social media ...”

Participant K4 expressed their thoughts as follows:

“... I am aware. I have also been part of WhatsApp groups. I was more active in the past period. Due to personal reasons, I have not been actively involved in this period. However, I still see announcements via WhatsApp, and during my time in the city, I try to participate ...”

4.2.2. Theme 2: An Overview of City Councils and Women's Assemblies

In this section of the study, opinions on the development of city council women's assemblies, views on city council and women's assembly activities, and findings regarding participants' evaluations of the transformation in women's assembly activities are presented. The participant data analysis revealed three codes, as illustrated in Figure 9.

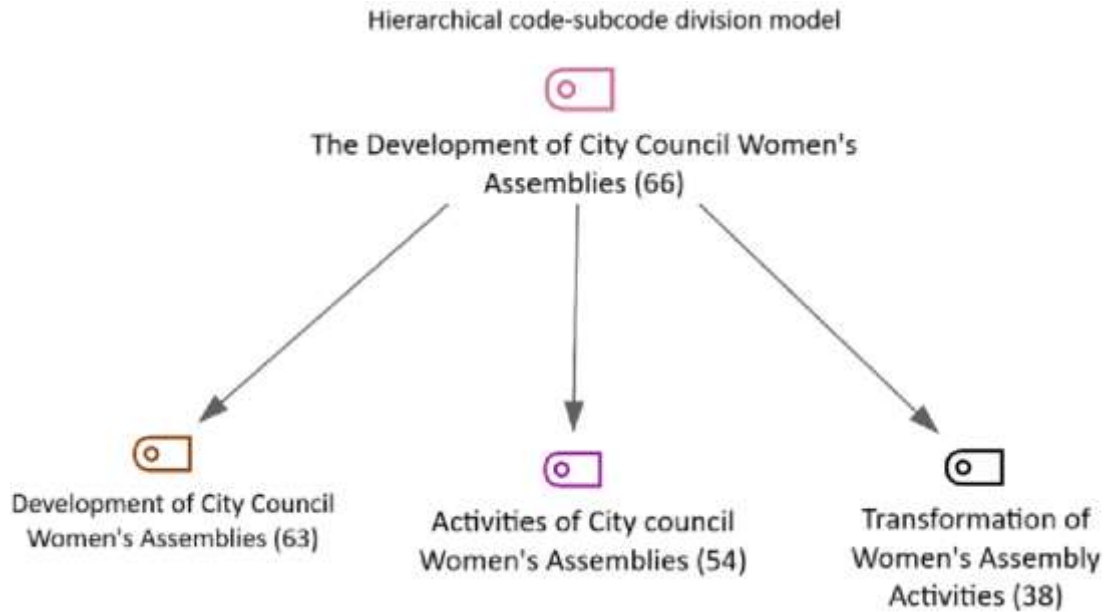


Figure 9: Hierarchical code-subcode division model for the communication of city councils with NGOs

In the section regarding the development of city council women's assemblies, 63 codings were conducted, while 54 codings were carried out in the section discussing the activities of city council women's assemblies. Additionally, 38 codings were performed regarding the transformation of women's assembly activities.

4.2.2.1. Opinions on the development of City Council Women's Assemblies

In this study section, participants were asked about their opinions on the development of city council women's assemblies. Figure 10 visualizes the hierarchical code-subcode division model regarding the development of city council women's assemblies.

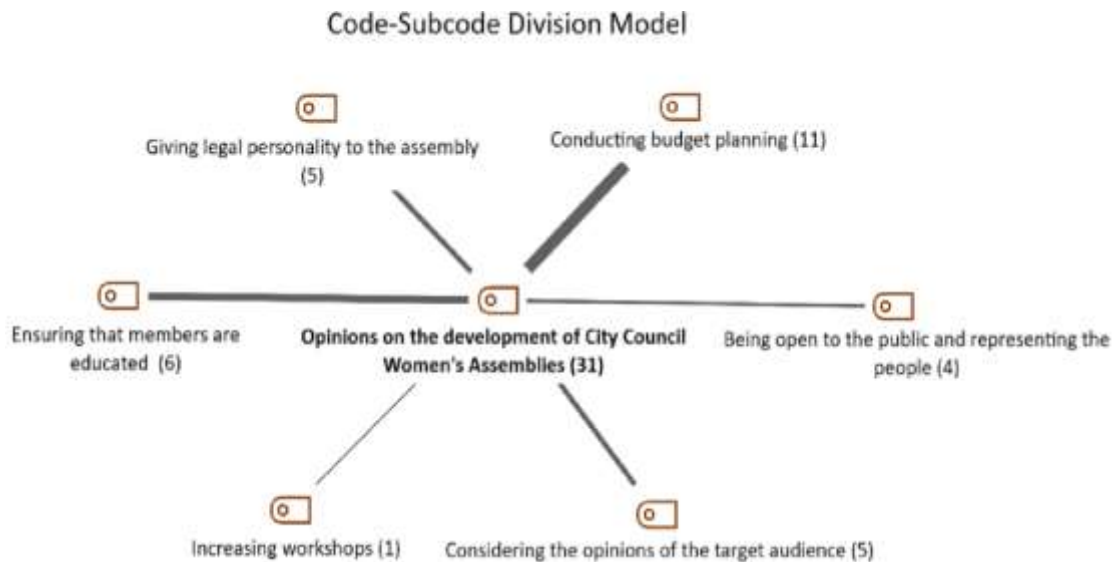


Figure 10: The hierarchical code-subcode division model for the communication of city councils with NGOs

Participants shared various opinions on how to make the assembly more effective and efficient. These include the assembly being open to the public and representing the people (K3, K7, K13), considering the opinions of the target audience (K4, K5, K10, K11), increasing workshops (K5), ensuring that members are educated (K2, K4, K6, K8, K9, K12), giving legal personality to the assembly (K1, K3, K6, K8, K9), and finally, conducting budget planning (K1, K2, K4, K6, K8, K9, K10, K12, K14).

According to the findings, participants have indicated that budget planning for the development of city council women's assemblies is the most prioritized step.

Participant K14 expressed their views on budget planning as follows:

"...Yes, this is one of our most important issues. We have budget issues. Sometimes, when we want to organize a program or invite guests, it all comes down to the budget. We struggle with the budget. For example, I know the Adana city council has a very good budget, but they are not as active as we are. However, the municipality has allocated a very good budget for themselves, but we do not have that. We can do these things a bit on our own ..."

Participant K3, who advocates for city council women's assemblies to have legal personality, expressed their views as follows:

"... In Gaziantep, the city council women's assembly has no legal personality. It operates within a system affiliated with the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality. Therefore, I actually wish for both the city council and the city council women's assembly to have a more democratic and independent system..."

4.2.2.2. Opinions on the activities of City Council Women's Assemblies

Within the scope of the research, participants were asked to evaluate the activities of the city council women's assemblies. Opinions on the activities of the city council women's assemblies were visualized using a hierarchical code-subcode model, as shown in Figure 11.

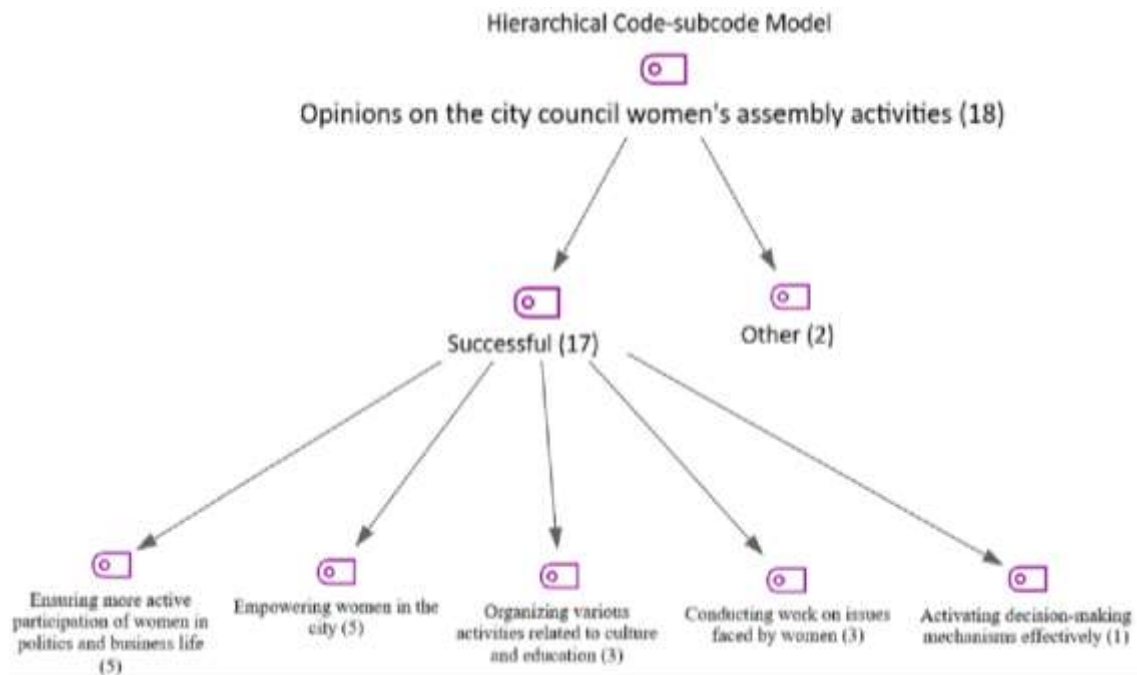


Figure 11: Opinions on the city council women's assembly activities using a hierarchical code-subcode model

As a result of the evaluations among the participants, it has been observed that the city council women's assembly activities are perceived as successful. Among the points considered successful are activating decision-making mechanisms effectively (K6), ensuring more active participation of women in politics and business life (K3, K9, K12, K13), organizing various activities related to culture and education (K1, K3), conducting work on issues faced by women (K6, K9, K10), and finally, essential findings have been reached regarding empowering women in the city (K2, K4, K7, K8, K9). There are no participants who find the activities of the city council women's assembly unsuccessful.

Participant K6 expressed their views on women's assembly activities as follows:

“...Including women from all walks of life in the city, aiming to ensure their right to a better quality of life and to identify solutions to common problems they face on a daily or general basis, and activate decision-making mechanisms...”

“...Our Gaziantep city council women's assembly is quite successful. It is evident that within the women's assembly, through the sub-committees they have established, they actively engage in every area concerning women ...”

Figure 12 displays a word cloud model visualizing positive views on the activities of the city council women's assembly.

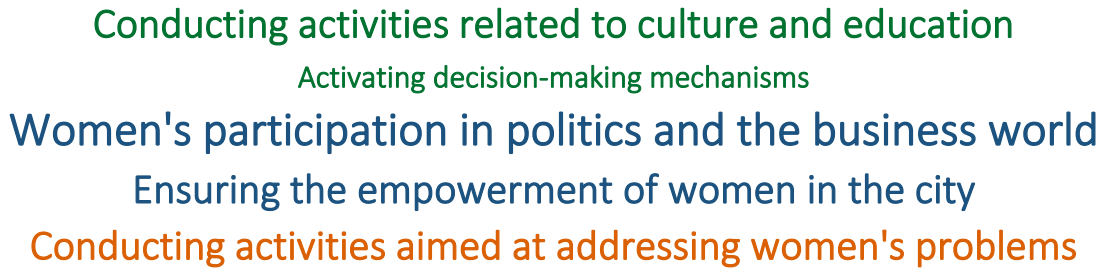


Figure 12: Word cloud model of positive views on the activities of the city council women's assembly

"The active participation of women in politics and business life" has been the most frequently repeated expression among positive views on women's activities.

Participant K3, who indicated that the assembly activities have had successful impacts on women, expressed their views on the activities of the city council women's assembly as follows:

“...I believe the greatest advantage is, in my opinion, the significant importance of re-empowering women and reminding them of what they are capable of. There are ongoing efforts to demonstrate this...”

4.2.2.3. The transformation in the activities of women's assemblies

In this research section, participants were asked to evaluate past period women's assemblies' activities and express the changes up to this period. The transformation in the activities of women's assemblies is visualized in Figure 13 using the statistics of sub-codes.

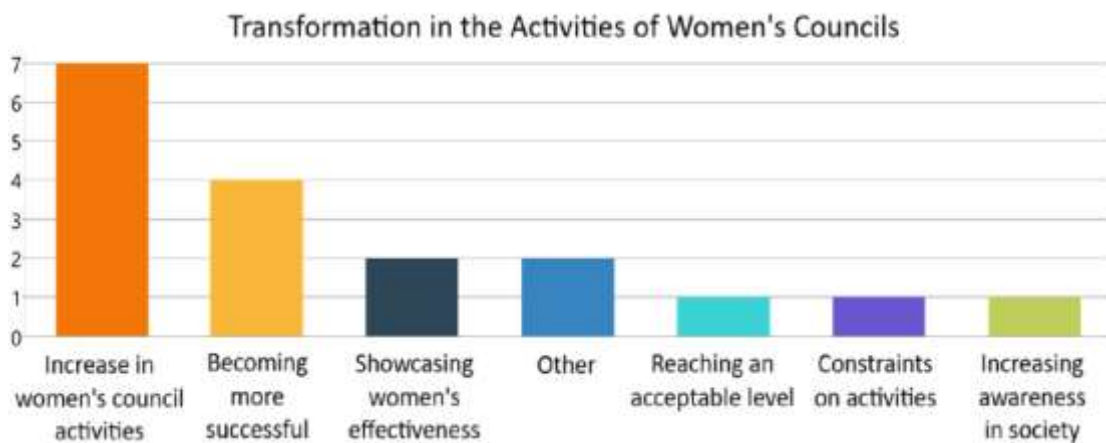


Figure 13: The statistics of sub-codes regarding the transformation in the activities of women's councils

In the findings of the research, considering the opinions of the participants, it has emerged that many changes have occurred. Findings include the women's councils becoming more successful (K1, K11, K13), reaching an acceptable level (K5), showcasing women's effectiveness (K5, K10), increasing awareness in society (K5), experiencing an increase in women's council activities (K1, K4, K5, K7, K11, K13, K14), and finally, findings also indicate constraints on activities (K6). The frequency distribution of participants' opinions

regarding the transformation in the activities of women's councils is visualized in the frequency distribution table in Figure 14.

Coding system	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14	TOTAL
Activities and transformation of women's councils															66
Transformation in the activities of women's councils															17
Becoming more successful															5
Reaching an acceptable level															1
Showcasing women's effectiveness															2
Increasing awareness in society															2
Increase in women's council activities															7
Constraints on activities															2
Others															2
Σ TOTAL	8	4	0	7	17	14	6	3	7	6	6	3	6	8	104

Figure 14: The frequency distribution among participants regarding the transformation in the activities of women's councils

In the evaluation of women's assemblies' activities, it has been found that participants numbered 5 and 6 provided more opinions compared to other participants. Participants numbered 5 and 6 have found more changes up to this period by evaluating past period women's council activities.

Participant K5 expressed the transformation in women's activities as follows:

".... Women's studies have become much more effective in today's context. Awareness has significantly increased in this regard. We have actually encountered more efforts lately to strengthen not only women's employment and rights in the workplace but also their positions within family life, and our awareness has risen. In this sense, women have increased their efforts in the council to fulfill their responsibilities. When I look at this way, while we are evaluating, it is necessary to analyze the current period very well. Nowadays, conducting such studies has become more acceptable and adopted in society. With its influence, these efforts are continuing well ..."

The word frequency analysis conducted with the data from interviews with 14 participants identified the most commonly used words by the participants in this research. According to this statement, the word cloud model showing the first 20 words with high frequency obtained through frequency analysis is presented in Figure 15.



Figure 15: The word cloud model depicting the most frequently used words by the participants

According to the results of the word frequency analysis, the top 3 words used most frequently by the participants, in order of frequency, are "woman," "assembly," and "city."

5. Conclusion

Approaches towards gender equality are increasingly important in ensuring political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental security. Empowering women, expanding their areas of activity, and ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources in education, employment, health, politics, law, and other fields are crucial for a democratic, progressive society. While the empowerment of women is a precondition for social justice, it is not solely a women's issue. This matter is a significant component in constructing a sustainable, fair, and developed society. NGOs serve as a social unit where individuals come together to form a collective force, accomplishing many things that individuals alone cannot achieve.

When evaluating the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study, it was found that the majority of participants are married, and the vast majority are high school graduates, with only two participants holding doctoral degrees. Another result revealed that almost all participants are working women, with only two not being employed, and all participants are members of an NGO.

It was concluded that the data consists of 2 themes, seven codes, and 49 sub-codes. These themes were determined as "an overview of city councils and women's councils" and "activities and development of women's councils." The codes emerging from the research are "structure of city councils," "access to city council and women's assembly activities," "communication of city councils with NGOs," "support received from local governments," "opinions on city council women's assembly activities," "opinions on the development of city council women's assembly," and finally, "transformation in the activities of women's assemblies."

The initial focus was on the participant's level of knowledge about the city council women's assemblies and their activities. According to the results, the participants have sufficient knowledge about the city council women's assemblies and the commissions within them. This result supports the findings of Biricikoğlu and Akçayır (2021), indicating that knowledge about the commissions increases women's utilization of the city council. Regarding the findings on whether the City Council has a legal personality, it was found that almost an equal number of participants stated that the women's assembly does not have a legal personality, while the other half had no opinion on this matter.

When evaluating the findings regarding support for city councils, it was found that support is being received for women's assemblies from local authorities such as universities, ministries, municipalities, and governorates, with the majority of this support coming from municipalities. Regarding the city council's communication with NGOs, it was concluded that positive communication exists between the women's assemblies and NGOs. This finding supports the conclusion of Kara and Şimşek (2016) that NGOs support the formation of city councils. It was found that this communication, perceived positively, mostly focuses on collaboration and solidarity, while to a lesser extent, it addresses tackling common problems. When evaluating the negative aspects of communication, it was determined that there is a predominant opinion that there is no integration between the women's assemblies and NGOs. Another result obtained in the scope of the research is that access to women's assembly activities can be achieved through various communication tools such as telecommunications, individual communication, and social media.

It has been concluded that city council women's assemblies increase the impact and power of women in politics and the workforce. This conclusion differs from the finding of Ağır et al. (2017), which suggests that women's city assemblies should be independent of politics. The participation of women in political decision-making processes and their rise to leadership positions in the workforce contribute to reducing gender inequalities in society and empowering women. This situation contributes to the development of women's councils and has positive effects on social development.

Participants expressed that the most prevalent opinion regarding the identification of important factors related to the development of city council women's assemblies is the need for budgetary planning. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Kara and Şimşek (2016), emphasizing the importance of financial support for councils. Additionally, factors such as the openness of women's councils to the public, their representation of the community, and the presence of educated members in the council were identified as supportive factors for the development of women's assemblies. This result contributes to the establishment of a structure where women's councils can function more effectively and powerfully, taking into account the relevant issues and organizations.

According to the findings of the research it is concluded that women's councils are more successful in their activities compared to previous council activities, and women are more prominent. The increased participation

of women in council activities and assuming more active roles are considered positive developments in terms of gender equality. Upon detailed examination of participants' views on success, it is evident that women's council activities are of utmost importance in enabling women's effectiveness in politics and the workforce. Similarly, the women's council contributes to the overall empowerment of women in the city. This situation contributes to creating a stronger voice for women in societal life and advocating for women's rights.

In the study conducted by Kaypak (2012), it was stated that women's assemblies within city councils are practical but still not sufficient. When comparing the activities of women's assemblies in the past with the current ones, one of the most important results obtained is that there has been a significant transformation in these activities, leading to more successful activities and enabling women to play more active roles in all areas.

The research has concluded that city council women's assemblies increase the influence and power of women in politics and the workforce. This result aligns with Akman's (2018) study, which supports the conclusion that the women's council activities in Söke City Council increase women's empowerment. The participation of women in political decision-making processes and their rise to leadership positions in the workforce contribute to reducing gender inequalities in society and empowering women. Similarly, the study conducted by Sumbas and Ömürgönülşen (2018) supports this conclusion by indicating its contribution to changing the perception of gender inequality in society. This situation positively affects the increase in women's assembly activities and the social development of women in all areas. However, Küçük and Akpınar (2018) found a different result in their study, suggesting that due to Turkey's patriarchal societal structure, it negatively affects women's individual participation in society and prevents them from fully utilizing their potentials.

6. Recommendations Based on Research Findings

City councils and women's assemblies are among the significant structures established at the local level to promote women's participation and ensure their more influential role in local governance. These two groups aim to raise awareness about gender equality and women's rights, develop policy recommendations, and represent the needs and expectations of women at the local level.

These findings indicate the need for greater efforts between women's assemblies and NGOs to facilitate more effective collaboration and solidarity. Additionally, it is important to support measures aimed at enhancing the integration of activities such as city councils. This would enable the establishment of more sustainable and effective collaborations:

- While city meetings are perceived positively as collaboration and solidarity between women's assemblies and civil societies, adverse developments have emerged as a lack of integration.
- It emerged that participants desire the relevant budgets of the city council's women's assembly to be publicly accessible and representative of the people, as well as the increase of gains similar to those among educated members of parliament.
- Due to the absence of legal personality, City Council Women's Assemblies are primarily connected to politics and local governments.
- It should be brought to the agenda to grant legal personality status to women's assemblies. This would enable women's assemblies to operate more effectively and independently.
- There should be increased integration between local governments and NGOs. Collaboration should strengthen the culture of solidarity, and efforts should be made to address the issues of women's assemblies more effectively. By establishing communication with relevant NGOs, joint projects can be initiated, and collaborative efforts can be undertaken to raise awareness and enhance the impact of the women's assembly.
- To ensure women's more active participation in politics, education, mentorship programs, and support projects should be provided. Additionally, quota systems or positive discrimination practices should be considered to increase women's involvement in decision-making processes.
- It is important to utilize different communication channels to increase access to women's assemblies. While modern communication tools have their place, encouraging face-to-face interactions and diversifying access opportunities is essential. The effective use of various communication channels is crucial for publicizing the activities of women's assemblies. Activities of women's assemblies should be promoted through channels

such as city councils, social media platforms, local newspapers, websites, and community gatherings, and public events should be organized.

These research findings have provided general information about city council women's assemblies and notably revealed significant findings regarding the empowerment and effectiveness of women. However, further research is needed, and steps must be taken for women's assemblies to gain legal personality status. Based on the research results, it is important for relevant stakeholders to work on these issues.

Based on the results obtained from this research, recommendations regarding the perception of women in Gaziantep City towards the role of women's assemblies can be addressed in three aspects: recommendations for municipalities, city councils, and academics:

6.1. Recommendations for Municipalities:

- Sustainable funding sources can be provided to grant official status to women's assemblies and to ensure their incorporation within municipal structures.
- Training and consultancy programs can be organized to develop the skills of women's assembly members.
- Active participation in the decision-making processes of the assembly can be facilitated, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating decisions can be established.
- Efforts can be made to increase the visibility and recognition of women's assembly activities.
- Initiatives can be undertaken to encourage the participation of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, and disabilities in the assembly.
- The opinions of women's assemblies can be solicited in the preparation and implementation of local development plans and budgets.

6.2. Recommendations for City Councils:

- Measures can be taken to ensure the active participation of assembly members in the working groups and committees of the City Council.
- Priority should be given to incorporating a gender equality perspective into the decision-making processes of the City Council.
- Surveys and workshops can be organized to develop projects jointly conducted by the City Council and Women's Assemblies.
- Initiatives can be undertaken to enable women to contribute to urban issues and participate in decision-making processes.

6.3. Recommendations for Academics:

- Research projects can be conducted on the functioning, impacts, and success stories of Women's Assemblies.
- Training and consultancy programs can be developed for members of Women's Assemblies and relevant public personnel.
- Academic studies on women's representation and participation in local governments can be encouraged.
- Advocacy efforts can be undertaken to strengthen and sustain Women's Assemblies.

The implementation of these recommendations will play an important role in increasing women's influence and power in politics and the workplace, reducing gender inequalities, and contributing to the empowerment of women.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the President of the Gaziantep City Council Women's Council and other women's NGO presidents, and all the women within the network, who supported and contributed to the journalism studies summarized as examples in this study. Their time and valuable ideas helped us move forward.

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Etik, Beyan ve Açıklamalar

1. Etik Kurul izni ile ilgili;

- ☒ Bu çalışmanın yazar/yazarları, Etik Kurul İznine gerek olmadığını beyan etmektedir.
☐ Bu çalışmanın yazar/yazarları, Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu'nun tarih sayı ve karar..... ile etik kurul izin belgesi almış olduklarını beyan etmektedir.

2. Bu çalışmanın yazar/yazarları, araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine uyduklarını kabul etmektedir.**3. Bu çalışmanın yazar/yazarları kullanmış oldukları resim, şekil, fotoğraf ve benzeri belgelerin kullanımında tüm sorumlulukları kabul etmektedir.****4. Bu çalışmanın benzerlik raporu bulunmaktadır.**
