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AUTHORS: Nisa ERDEM

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## A Research on City-to-City Pairing Trends of International Sister Cities in Turkey

### Uluslararası Düzeyde Kardeş Kentlerin Eşleşme Eğilimleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Nisa ERDEM<sup>\*</sup> 

#### Abstract

Sister cities were initially intended to create post-war friendships and cultural linkages. During this period, sister city relationships were mostly formed based on similarities such as names, cultural or historical links. In the 1970s, there was an increase in mutual understanding aimed at sister city relations, as well as a shift in the pattern of friendly relations. Relations are based on the availability of mutually beneficial advantages for a wide range of goals, including trade, investment, economy, tourism, health, and the environment. Issues of trade, economy, and development, which have recently become increasingly essential for cities, have begun to be debated in the context of sister city connections. As a result, municipal cooperation decisions in sister city connections have become increasingly crucial. Especially in the choice of partnership, political or emotional decisions prevent effective cooperation. The purpose of the study is to determine the pattern of municipal sister city relationships in Turkey. This study examined 2051 sister city relationships between 486 municipalities in Turkey at the international level, as well as the effects of population size and geographical distance on the selection of a sister city. According to the study's findings, geographic proximity and situations requiring the exchange of information and experience appear to be determining factors in city pairings with different population sizes. Cross-border cooperation, which refers to cities that are geographically close to one another by land or sea, is uncommon in Turkey; however, sister city relations are generally strengthened with cities in geographically close countries, especially due to historical and cultural factors. This study's findings could apply to future research examining the mutual benefits of sister city relationships between cities.

**Keywords:** City diplomacy, Sister city, City-to-city pairings, Population size, Geographical distance.

#### Öz

Kardeş kentler, başlangıçta savaş sonrası dostlukları ve kültürel bağları geliştirmenin bir yolu olarak düşünülmüştür. Bu dönemde kardeş şehir ilişkilerinin kurulması büyük ölçüde isim, kültürel veya tarihi bağlar gibi benzerliklere dayanmaktaydı. 1970'li yıllarda kardeş kent ilişkilerinde amaçlanan karşılıklı anlayışın gelişimi ve dostane ilişkilerin seyrinde bir değişim gözlemlenmiştir. İlişkiler, ticaret, yatırım, ekonomi, turizm, sağlık, çevre, gibi oldukça çeşitlenen amaçları kapsayan karşılıklı faydaların elde edilebilirliği üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Son zamanlarda kentler açısından giderek önemi artan ticaret, ekonomi ve kalkınma konuları, kardeş kent ilişkileri bağlamında ele alınmaya başlanmıştır. Böylece

\* Karadeniz Technical University, Turkey, Trabzon, E-mail: nisaerdem@ktu.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0001-8258-9338

kentlerin kardeş kent ilişkilerindeki ortaklık seçimleri de giderek önemli bir hale gelmiştir. Özellikle ortaklık seçiminde siyasi ya da duygusal yönde alınan kararlar etkili işbirliği kurmayı engellemektedir.

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de belediyelerin kardeş kent seçimini değerlendirmektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye’de belediyelerin kardeş kent eşleşmelerindeki eğilimi ortaya koymaktır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada, Türkiye’deki 486 belediyenin uluslararası düzeydeki 2051 adet kardeş kent ilişkisi incelenmiş ve kardeş kent seçimi üzerinde nüfus büyüklüğü ve coğrafi mesafe faktörlerinin etkisi araştırılmıştır. Çalışma, kardeş kentlerin eşleşme yöntemleri bağlamında önemli bulgular ortaya koymaktadır. İlk olarak, Türkiye’de kardeş kent eşleşmelerinde nüfus büyüklükleri yönünden genel olarak bir denklik arayışı bulunmaktadır. Farklı nüfus büyüklüklerindeki kent eşleşmeleri için ise coğrafi yakınlık ve bilgi-deneyim paylaşımı durumları belirleyici etkenler olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. İkinci olarak, coğrafi mesafe yakınlığı yönünden karasal ya da deniz üzerinden birbirine komşu olan kentleri ifade eden sınır ötesi işbirliği Türkiye’de yaygın olmamakla birlikte, kardeş kent ilişkileri genellikle coğrafi olarak yakın ülke kentleri ile yoğunlaşmaktadır. Çalışma bulguları, kardeş kent ilişkilerinin kentler üzerindeki karşılıklı faydalarını sorgulamak üzere en uygun kardeş kent seçimini tasarlayacak çalışmalar için yardımcı olabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yerel diplomasi, Kardeş kent, Kent eşleşmesi, Nüfus büyüklüğü, Coğrafi mesafe.

## 1. Introduction

Sister city relations are a type of city diplomacy formed by pairing at least two cities in different countries. The emergence of the Cold War after World War II led to the internationalization of the security phenomenon. These years are crucial for the development of partnerships in which cities play a role in peace and reconciliation efforts between states. In this context, the sister city relationship originated in Western Europe and was used to end intergroup hostility (Aktulun, 2018, p. 68-69). The purpose of the first German-French sister city relationship following World War II was to conduct diplomatic activities for peace. Today, sister city relationships have expanded to include cooperation in many fields, including culture, art, education, and sports, in addition to peace and conflict resolution. Since the mid-1900s, the number of sister city agreements has increased, and cities are acquiring new international partners. Only at the end of 1988, it was reported that 190 countries had sister city relationships (Zelinsky, 1991, p. 11-13). Clarke (2011, p. 115) also reported that over 11,000 sister city relationships have been established between cities in at least 159 countries over the past four decades. There is currently no definitive data on the global number of sister cities. However, according to Sister Cities International, which was created in 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States of America, Europe has the most sister city relationships. Most sister city partnerships by country are Mexico and Most sister city partnerships by U.S. State is California (Sister City International, 2014-2015, p. 1). Sister cities provide municipalities with numerous benefits, including policy transfer, cultural exchange, practice sharing, and information exchange. Relationships between sister cities are significant in terms of cities cooperating on a common topic or producing outputs in similar service areas. Sister city relationships can provide beneficial results to the municipalities if certain conditions are met. The selection of suitable partners in city pairings is one of them. In the context of sister city relationships, a city will be favored based on a variety of characteristics. Population, history, cultural values, being the capital city or being close to the capital in terms of location, and

being a trade, tourism, or financial center can be prominent characteristics of sister cities. Which features will be taken into account in city pairings may change in parallel with the purpose of cooperation between cities. In studies on sister cities, while evaluating the areas of cooperation emphasized by sister city relations, their density, and geographical distribution, the previous step, the matching trends or whether there is a general trend, is overlooked. In studies on sister cities, it is overlooked whether there is a matching tendency of cities or whether there is a general trend in this regard. This trend can be uncovered by analyzing the factors that influence sister city pairings. The purpose of this study is to determine whether Turkish municipalities exhibit a pattern of sister city pairings based on population size and geographical distance. The study is divided into three sections to shed light on various aspects of sister city relations. The literature on sister city relationships and city pairings was examined initially. The article then provides an overview of sister city relationships in Turkey. The study concludes with research findings that reveal the city pairing trends in the sister city relationships between Turkish municipalities and cities in other countries.

## 2. Sister City Relationships and City-to-City Pairings

Cooperation agreements between two cities in different countries are the most prevalent form of bilateral relationship between local units at the international level. These agreements often appear as sister cities or cross-border collaborations that reveal different types of sister cities. At the international level, a sister city is a movement that establishes economic, political, social, and cultural ties between cities (Jayne et al. 2011, p. 25). Municipalities are crucial participants in the sister city relationship, which is defined as a long-term strategic alliance (De Villers, 2009, p. 150). On the other hand, the existence of cross-border cooperation stems from the fact that neighboring communities on both sides of the international border work together to solve common issues, such as water pollution or infrastructure (Maathuis, 2007, p. 8). Cross-border cooperation is a type of cooperation that is intended to be developed in a variety of fields, including environment, agriculture, spatial planning, tourism, culture, education and research, transportation, security and communication, economy and employment, border population, health and social services, and transportation (Yener, 1998, p. 20-21). The economic, political, and social relations between neighboring cities of different states help to establish close ties between local governments on both sides of the border (Campbell, 1987, p. 87). Cooperation cross-borders also apply to regions separated by water (Tschudi, 2002). The sister city relationship between the Black Sea-bordering Turkish city of Istanbul and the Ukrainian city of Odesa is an example of this.

In the process of getting to know each other in sister city relationships, introduction letters are exchanged and several visits are made. Cities determine the agreement text's reasons for coming together. The text of the agreement includes the cities' shared objectives. After the Second World War, city-to-city cooperation played a crucial role in fostering mutual understanding and peace. Relationships between French, German, and English cities in Europe were maintained

to promote peace in war-ravaged regions and avert another conflict in Europe (Berse, 2019, p. 2). The sister city relationship between Ludwigsburg, Germany, and Montbéliard, France, began in 1950 with informal relations between the mayors of both cities and thus became an integral part of the reconciliation efforts (Ramasamy and Cremer, 1998, p. 449; Campbell, 1987, p. 79). After the War, numerous organizations began to develop different sister city models. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and United Town Organizations (UTO) are two important organizations that were both founded in 1951. CEMR's goal in establishing sister city relationships is to promote the unity of Europe and to defend Christian thought against communism. UTO, on the other hand, examines the sister city's implementation in terms of post-World War II geopolitical and geoeconomic relations. In other words, the term *sister city* refers to a mechanism of bonding between people who share certain characteristics for CEMR and a mechanism for bridging that is anticipated to be established between different groups for UTO (Clarke, 2011, p. 118). After a relatively sluggish start in the 1950s, the sister city movement in Western Europe spread successfully to the rest of Western Europe and the rest of the world. Since the 1950s, the overall development of the sister cities has been upward. It may not be possible to analyze the time expansion of this expansion in full and accurate detail, but it is a fact that the overall trajectory has been upward (Zelinsky, 1991, p. 7).

In the 1970s, a change was observed in the aims of sister city relations. Relations are focused on tangible purposes such as trade, investment, culture, and tourism activities, for which mutual benefits can be obtained (Sillalahi, 1998, p. 30). Sister City International proves that the value of strong sister city programs extends beyond diplomacy and peace-building to economic development and investment. It is realistic to believe that trade and business take place not only in New York City or Los Angeles but also in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and Sausalito, California, as a result of the strong and long links formed through sister city agreements (Sister City International, 2014-2015, p. 6). In a study conducted by Baycan Levent, Akgün, and Kundak (2008, p. 1187), it was discovered that the contributions provided by the sister city relationship, economic benefits, and new business and investment opportunities are the most important elements in the sister city relationship. One reason for this is that, while municipalities are the primary actors in sister cities, actors from a variety of sectors participate in this process. The economic sector is one of them. For example, the sister city process between Istanbul and Odessa included the Vice President of Istanbul Governorship, Istanbul Executive Council members, two district municipalities of Istanbul, Istanbul Chamber of Shipping, Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, Turkey Exporters Assembly, Turkish Commercial Cooperation Foundation, Turkish Airlines, Foreign Economic Relations Commission Turkish-Ukrainian Business Council, and some businessmen. The sister city protocol was signed as a result of the performers' visits. In the post-1990 period, there was a substantial labor migration to Turkey, specifically to Istanbul, from Ukraine and other Black Sea countries. These immigrants worked in fields such as informal manufacturing production, construction, retail, household services, and illicit activities. Informal manufacturing and retail activities coexisted on the European side of the Istanbul Metropolitan Area, where the majority of these businesses were concentrated in a few sites such as Laleli and Aksaray on the historical

peninsula, and Karaköy adjacent to the historical peninsula. The accommodation was made possible by a large illegal dwelling stock and slum regions. In addition to immigration, numerous people from the Balkans and the Black Sea Region came to Istanbul to trade luggage (Erkut and Baypınar, 2006, p. 16-17). Furthermore, according to Ramasamy and Cremer (1998, p. 456), the experience of New Zealand-Asian sister city connections demonstrates that well-managed sister city relationships at both the national and municipal levels may play an essential role in international trade and investment. Initially, sister cities were characterized as *twinning* due to city names, economic functions, export structures, similarities in terms of geographical location, or simply the familiarity of mutual political leaders, and sister cities were dominated by the concept of international friendship (Ramasamy and Cremer, 1998, p. 449). Instead of basing sister city relations on a symbolic emphasis, the objective is shifting toward more functional cooperation (Joenniemi and Janczak, 2017, p. 424). The economic objectives of sister city relationships demonstrate that local governments have increased their efforts to act as catalysts for exploiting the innovation and business opportunities offered by globalization and localization processes (Cremer et al. 2001, p. 384-387). Local governments choose to structure their pre-existing social and cultural relationships following their economic ties, revealing sister city relations as evidence of a successful municipal initiative. For this reason, many local governments are reestablishing sister city relationships as a tool for economic development. In addition, sister city relationships contribute to the growth and development of agglomeration economies by fostering economic and social dynamism (O'Toole, 2001, p. 54; Cremer et al., 2001, p. 388; Shaw and Karlis, 2002, p. 46-47; Ramasamy and Cremer, 1998, p. 446-447, 449).

Partner selection is crucial to the sustainability of sister city relationships and the achievement of expected benefits. However, choosing a suitable partner is not easy, and strengthening relationships takes a long time. One of the important factors affecting sister city pairings is the population size of the cities. The population size of the cities is a significant factor in determining sister city relationships. Matching occurs on population sizes in four different ways (Gil, 2021, p. 342): matches in which both foreign and local cities have a large population (large-large), matches in which the foreign city has a large population and the local city has a small population (large-small), matches in which the foreign city has a small population and the local city has a large (small-large), matches in which both foreign and local cities have a small population (small-small). Concerning population size, the most suitable sister city pairings can be determined by the cities' shared objectives and expectations. The unwritten rule is that two cities (or municipalities and locations) must be comparable and possess the requisite characteristics to be compatible partners (Zelinsky, 1991, p. 4). In this framework, cities are expected to have comparable population characteristics (Gezici and Kocaolu, 2018, p. 128; Oktem et al. 2016, p. 82). Gil (2021, p. 342, 344) stated that the similar population sizes of sister cities will benefit both of them. Because large cities typically attempt to attract the attention of cities of similar size. In this case, a small city can also attract the interest of a city of its size and thus have the opportunity to provide the required resources. Small cities may not be attractive to large cities if they seek similar experiences through sister city relationships. According to Zelinsky (1991, p. 4), similar experiences indicate

a degree of shared economic, cultural, ideological, historical, recreational, or other concerns. In contrast, the scope of sister city relationships has broadened to include developed and developing countries, and approaches to development assistance have evolved (Haftack, 2003, p. 333, 336). In this sense, the applicable aspect of sister city relationships has emerged to build local capacity, strengthen urban governance, and ultimately facilitate the transfer of urban policies from one region to another (Berse, 2019, p. 3). Sister city relations are directed by local governments in developed nations and emphasize the effective roles that local governments in developing nations will play in their development (Buis, 2009, p. 190; Tjandradewia and Marcotullio, 2006, p. 358). In this context, city-to-city cooperation is a common term for the relationship between sister cities (Bontenbal and Van Lindert, 2011; Van Ewijk et al. 2015; Hewitt, 1998; Smutek, 2016; Hewitt, 1999; Buis, 2009; Tjandradewia and Marcotullio, 2006). This situation supports the tendency for cities with different population sizes (large-small or small-large) to become sister cities.

Sister city selection is not a random process; historical ties, common economic, cultural, entertainment, and ideological concerns, similar or identical place names, and geographical distance must be taken into account (Zelinsky, 1991, p. 1). Cities are rebuilding their cultures and structures in response to the consequences of global capitalism. As a result, city governments attempt to exist within the existing system while also being accepted by global components (Robertson, 1999, p. 277-278). Cultural activities, expression, attention of city residents and visitors, and the state of the city's cultural heritage assets are all ways that creative cities utilize their creative potential (Ersavaş Kavanoz and Erdem, 2019, p. 192). Also emphasized is the significance of geographical distance in the relations between sister cities (Gil, 2020, p. 184; Han et al. 2022). Kaltenbrunner et al. (2013, p. 5-6), analyzed the distribution of geographic distances between all pairs of sister cities to determine the degree to which geographic proximity is an important factor for collaboration. Geographic proximity is most influential in sister city relationships within Europe, followed by North and South America, and partially by Far East Asia. In Europe, a cross-border sister city is particularly encouraged. In addition, sister city projects between border cities of Northern European countries, and sister city relations between Australia and China-Japan are examples of geographical motivation (Ekşi, 2018, p. 63). Distance is significant in terms of several factors, including mutual problems and cost (O'toole, 2001, p. 416). Consequently, geographical distance can be viewed as one of the success factors in sister city relationships (Baycan Levent et al. 2008, p. 101). According to Sergeant (27 as cited in Zelinsky, 1991, p. 23), the distance between sister cities should be neither too large nor too small. The vastness of the distance incurs high financial costs and makes it difficult to maintain an adequate number of exchanges. Due to the short distance, the sister cities are unable to learn about other cultures and ways of life. According to Akman and Akman (2017, p. 239), the geographical distance between sister cities can delay the signing of the sister city protocol. Demirtaş (2016, p. 155) reveals the geographical distance and cost of direct cooperation in the sister city relationship between the Bursa Nilüfer Municipality and the Cuban El Cerro Municipality. Additionally, Demirtaş (2016) stated that the proximity of the Balkans and the convenience of transportation contributed to the intensified cooperation with nearby Balkan cities. However, geographical distance is not the only determining factor. If



other factors such as tourism, history, and culture are effective, the effect level of geographical distance may decrease. For instance, the Iranian city of Urmiye and the Turkish city of Erzurum are geographically close and have a long history. However, Urmiye's proximity to Turkey can also be explained by racial and cultural factors (Ergün et al., 2020, p. 39). Furthermore, as technology advances, it may become easier to build sister city relationships with communities that are geographically distant from one another. Technology has made it considerably easier and less expensive to use communication instruments that connect the city to the outside world. For example, during the pandemic period caused by the Covid-19 virus, which was detected in Turkey in March 2020, the role of digital technology in events and activities that will maintain communication, such as meetings, conferences, fairs, and congresses, in connecting the city with the world, should not be underestimated. In terms of sister cities, technology can help make these relationships more sustainable. Technology is a factor that can eliminate geographical constraints in sister city relations in a system where time and space restrictions are largely eliminated and interdependence increases rapidly through invisible networks.

### 3. Sister City Relationships in Turkey

In the context of the development of urban relations in Turkey during the 1990s, the ratification and implementation of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid Convention) drafted by the Council of Europe is an important development. Cross-border cooperation is defined in the Convention as *any concerted action aimed at strengthening and promoting neighborly relations between local communities or governments within the jurisdiction of two or more contracting parties, and the conclusion of agreements or arrangements necessary to this end*. Furthermore, it has been stated that cross-border cooperation will be *executed within the scope of the authorities of local communities or governments as defined by domestic law*. During the reform of local governments in Turkey at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the domestic law governing the city diplomacy field underwent significant changes. In 2005, the 18th and 74th articles of Municipal Law No. 5393 governed the municipalities' international relations. Regarding the sister city, establishing a relationship between the municipalities is one of the municipal council's responsibilities under Law No. 5393. According to the law, the above-mentioned relations must be conducted following foreign policy and international agreements, and prior approval from the Ministry of Environment Urbanization and Climate Change is required. Local regulations in Turkey indicate that the central government has the authority to supervise activities in the field of city diplomacy (Erdem, 2021, p. 109).

Sister city relations are the most emphasized subject in studies conducted in the field of local diplomacy in Turkey. Almost half of all academic research focuses on sister city relationships. Sister city relations in Turkey, which date back to the 1960s, began to gain popularity in the 1990s as a means of fostering greater inter-community interaction and intensified in the 2000s (Oktay, 2014, p. 17; Akman and Akman, 2017, p. 232). In fact, according to Bay and Çalışkan (n.d., p. 75),



the guiding influence of the Second World War established Turkey's first sister city agreements. In reality, Torrence Municipality in the United States and Konya Municipality in Turkey made the first attempt at a sister city arrangement in 1958 as part of the Marshall Plan and entrance to NATO. Parallel to the rise of sister city practices in Turkey, it is possible to say that academic research in this area has gained relative importance. In this context, sister city relationships are viewed as an instrument of cultural diplomacy (Usta et al. 2018) and a model of partnership and cooperation between cities (Oktem et al. 2016; Ozcan, 2006; Zeren and Aktulun, 2018). Cultural dynamics is one of the most influential aspects of sister city relationships (Demirtaş, 2016, p. 151). Other factors that affect sister city relations include historical origin, geographical proximity, population, technology, knowledge and experience sharing, policy transfer, cooperation, and providing resources (Toprak, 2003, p. 172; Ersavaş Kavanoz and Erdem, 2019, p. 209).

On the official website of the Ministry of Environment Urbanization and Climate Change, the first agreement regarding sister city relations was signed in 1992. However, sister city relations have been observed in Turkey since the 1960s (Ergün et al. 2020, p. 37). In this context, the 1964 agreement between Bergama (Izmir) and Boblingen (Germany) is the first sister city relationship in Turkey. Until 1984, the development of sister city relationships was a relatively slow process. After the enactment of the Metropolitan Law in Turkey in 1984 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations between sister cities began to accelerate. Cities in Turkey have established numerous sister city relationships with cities in former Soviet republics and Balkan nations (Çalışkan and Bay, n.d. p. 69). After the turn of the 21st century, sister city relations have grown gradually. As of 2022, more than 90 percent of the known sister city relations in Turkey have been established after the 2000s.

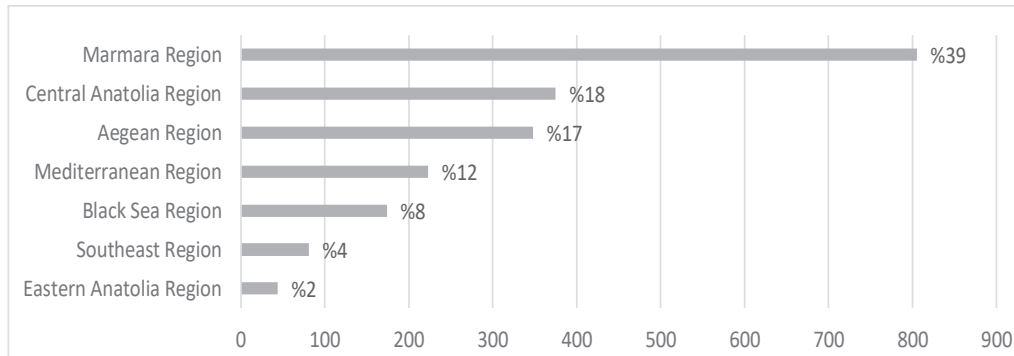
Municipal administrations at the provincial level of the Turkish administrative structure have a dual structure. In 30 provinces, the administrative structure is divided into metropolitan municipalities and metropolitan district municipalities; in 51 provinces, it is divided into provincial municipalities, district municipalities, and town municipalities. Turkey has a total of 1391 municipalities, including 30 metropolitan municipalities, 519 metropolitan district municipalities, 51 provincial municipalities, 403 district municipalities, and 388 town municipalities. 486 of Turkey's 1391 municipalities have signed at least one international sister city agreement.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Sister-City Counts by Municipality Type (2022)

Municipality Type	Sister-City Counts	Percent (%)
Metropolitan Municipalities	490	%24
Metropolitan District Municipalities	1127	%55
Provincial Municipalities	200	%10
District Municipalities	182	%9
Town Municipalities	52	%2
Total	2051	%100

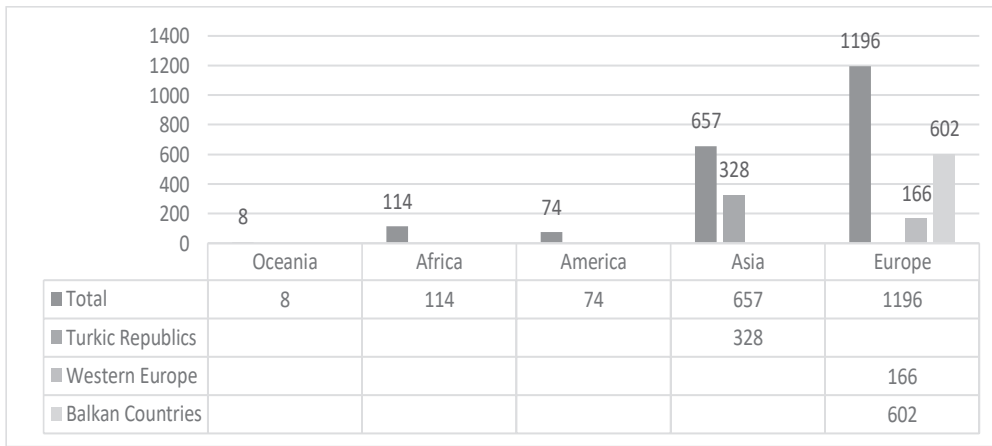
Source: (Ministry of Environment Urbanization and Climate Change, 2022).

Table 1 depicts the distribution of sister city relationships according to the administrative scales of the municipalities. In Turkey, municipalities with metropolitan status (metropolitan and metropolitan district municipalities, 79 percent) dominate the sister city relationship. Town municipalities are the administrative scale with the fewest sister city relationships. Considering the parallel relationship between the administrative scales of municipalities in Turkey and the population, it can be seen that larger settlements in terms of population tend to establish more sister cities.



**Figure 1:** Geographical distribution of provinces with sister city relations of municipalities in Turkey.

The provinces with the most intense sister city relationships in Turkey are located in the Marmara region, where the human-development index is extremely high and where Istanbul, Bursa, and Kocaeli are among the top 15 provinces in the ranking. Istanbul, the most populous city in Turkey, and its surrounding districts account for nearly half of the sister city relationships. Within the borders of the provinces in the Eastern Anatolia region, the fewest sister city relationships were established. Within the borders of Muş, Bingöl, Tunceli, and Hakkari in the Eastern Anatolian region, no sister city relationships have been established. In addition, Siirt and Batman in the Southeast region, which is one of the other regions with a low number of sister cities; Artvin and Bayburt in the Black Sea region have no sister city relationships. According to Ekşi (2018, p. 80-81), in the Aegean and Mediterranean Regions, where tourist cities are located, the density of sister city relationships is low despite the high international recognition of the cities. On the other hand, the regional distribution of sister city relationships shows a higher concentration in certain cities. Istanbul and Bursa in the Marmara Region, Ankara in the Central Anatolia Region, İzmir in the Aegean Region, Trabzon and Samsun in the Black Sea Region, Antalya in the Mediterranean Region, and Gaziantep in the Southeastern Anatolia Region are prominent examples. In this context, population, economics, commerce, tourism, industry, culture, and the arts, etc., are relevant. Cities that rise to prominence in Turkey naturally attract attention with their sister city activities (Ekşi, 2018, p. 143).



**Figure 2:** Geographical distribution of sister cities of municipalities in Turkey.

In Figure 2, the geographical distribution of the sister cities of the municipalities in Turkey according to the countries they are located in is given. According to this, the majority of sister city relationships in Turkey have been established with European countries. There are extensive sister city relationships in Europe, particularly with the Balkan nations. Asia is the second continent with the most sister-city relationships. There are extensive sister city relationships on the Asian continent, particularly with the Turkic Republics. Significant determinants of the intensity of sister city relations between Turkey and Balkan countries are their historical ties and cultural ties (Bay and Caliskan 933; Bay and Caliskan, 2022, p. 25). Ozyurt (2384) refers to sister city partnerships with Central Asian and Balkan nations based on shared history, culture, and heritage as *past-based* collaborations. In this context, the Union of Turkish World Municipalities (UTWM) provides an important coordination task in the establishment of sister city relations between Turkey and other Turkic Republics and Balkan countries (Kocaalan, 2017, p. 302-303). According to Ekşi (2018), the phrase *an approach of brotherhood, solidarity, and cooperation, taking into account the common cultural and civilizational heritage of the Turkish World* in the third article of the UTWM statute reflects historical and cultural motivation. In addition, Bulgaria (155), Bosnia-Herzegovina (129), Germany (110), TRNC. (130), Macedonia (92), Azerbaijan (91), and Greece (84) are the countries with which Turkish municipalities have the most sister city relationships. Geography, ethnic proximity, shared beliefs, and the intensity of mutual interaction determine the sister city relationships of Turkish municipalities (Pelit et al. 2017, p. 179). In each period, municipalities in Turkey have the most sister city agreements with Germany, in particular. Germany has the highest rate of emigration from Turkey to other countries, and the effect of sister city relationships based on labor migration is evident. According to Bay and Çalışkan (2022, p. 24), the regional distribution of sister cities in Germany within the country is most prominent in industrial regions where Turkish citizens are concentrated.

## 4. Research

### 4.1. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence the pairing of cities in international sister city relationships and to assess the general trends in this area. This study examines the 2051 sister city agreements signed by Turkish municipalities between 1992 and 2022. While municipalities with international sister cities in Turkey are considered *local cities*, other international cities with which these municipalities have sister city agreements are considered *foreign cities* (Gil, 2021).

In the research, the municipalities with sister cities in Turkey were determined using the list of sister cities published on the Ministry of Environment Urbanization and Climate Change's documents page. Following the research, internet searches were conducted on the populations of local and foreign cities with sister city relationships. Population data for 316 cities out of a total of 486 local cities and 939 cities out of a total of 1433 foreign cities were gathered, and the population sizes of 1556 sister city agreements were analyzed. Using the following criteria, the population sizes of sister cities were compared:

- capital city
- being a metropolitan or provincial municipality,
- the difference in population between the two cities,
- city dimensions found in the General Communiqué of the Municipal Revenues Law (2022).

Cities vary in population size from country to country. As a result, demographic equivalences between cities were determined using more than one criterion when comparing cities in Turkey and cities in other countries. Some of the above criteria were employed as definitive determinants and others as supplemental determinants in this direction. The sister city relationship between the countries' capitals is a large-large match. The sister city relationship between the countries' metropolitan centers is a large-large match. The size of the city is also determined by the status of the cities in the country. According to municipality status, for example, it has been paid attention to whether both cities have provincial status or whether both cities have district status. This, however, is not a stand-alone criterion. The population differential and population of that city in comparison to other cities within the country's cities are considered. Again, in this situation, the demographic inequality between a Turkish city and a city in another nation has been considered. Lastly, the Municipal Revenues Law was used to calculate city sizes in Turkey, but the order here was not used exactly. The Municipal Revenues Law was utilized as a supplement in estimating population numbers.

Secondly, the geographical distance was calculated for each country that has a sister city relationship with Turkey. Geographical distance information between countries was obtained for

a total of 2017 sister city relations. While examining the geographical distance between Turkey and the countries with sister cities, the following sources were used:

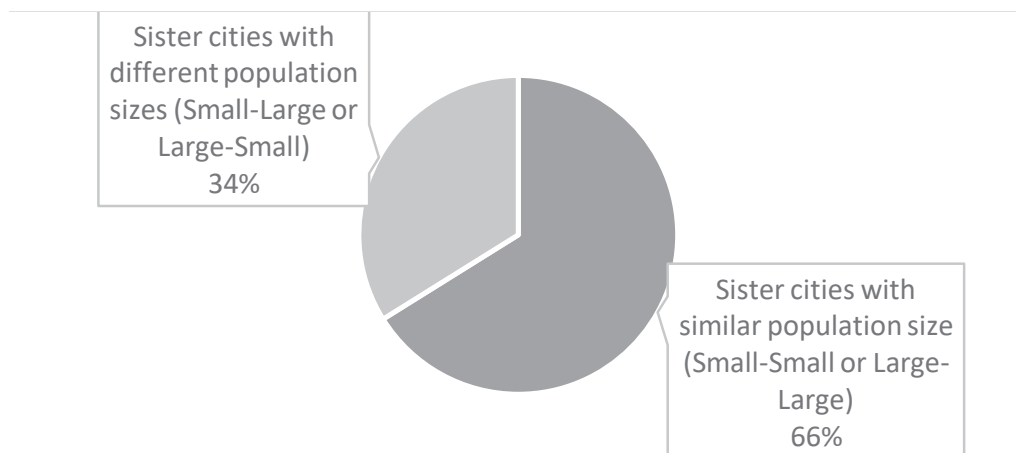
- <https://tr.distance.to/>
- <http://tr.mesafe-hesaplama.himmera.com/dunya>

The study employed the quantitative data analysis method. The study's approach consists of three parts. 1. Data collection: At this step, the population and geographical distances of the cities were acquired from the sources mentioned above. The "data field" is formed by a column assigned to each data (Neuman, 2010, p. 496). 2. Data cleaning: If the data for both cities or any city could not be reached for two cities (one in Turkey and one in another country), the relevant data field was recognized as "inaccessible data." 3. Data coding: The numerically collected data were coded into four groups as population sizes.

## 4.2. Findings of the research

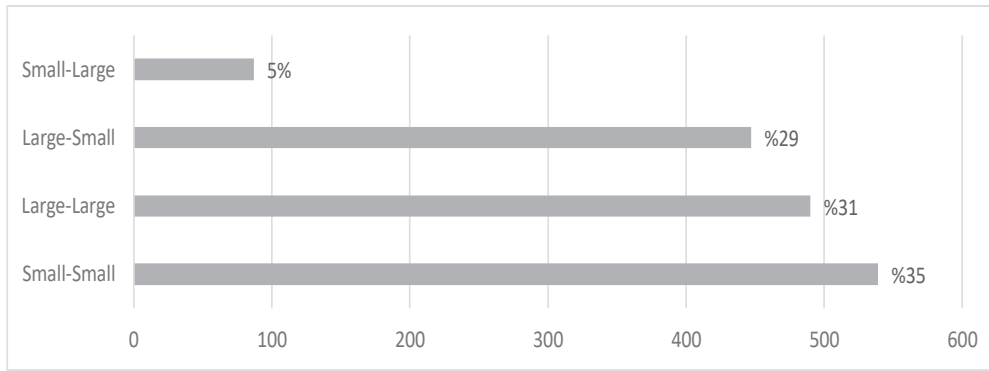
### 4.2.1. City-to-City Pairing by Population Size

According to the four matching methods determined by Gil (2021, p. 342) based on the population sizes of the cities, the sister city agreements between Turkish municipalities and foreign cities are classified. The matching patterns of city populations in regard to largeness and smallness are analyzed first.



**Figure 3:** Population equivalence ratios of sister city relationships in Turkish municipalities.

Figure 3 depicts the similarity and difference rates of population equivalences in sister city relationships of Turkish municipalities. There are a total of 1556 sister cities, of which 66 percent (1029) have comparable population sizes and 34 percent (527) have different population sizes.



**Figure 4:** Pairings patterns of sister city relations of municipalities in Turkey in terms of population.

Figure 4 depicts the reciprocal situation of population sizes between sister cities and the matching methods in terms of largeness and smallness. According to this, as the population in a total of 1556 sister cities; 539 (35 percent) where the local city is small and the foreign city is small; There are 490 (31 percent) sister city relationships where the local city is large and the foreign city is large, 447 (29 percent) where the local city is large and the foreign city is small, 80 (5 percent) where the local city is small and the foreign city is large.

**Table 2:** Geographical Distribution of Sister City Pairings of Municipalities in Turkey in Terms of Population

	Small-Small	Large-Large	Large-Small	Small-Large	Total
Africa	%6	%62	%26	%6	%100
America	%26	%56	%10	%8	%100
Asia	%24	%42	%28	%6	%100
Europe	%45	%20	%31	%4	%100
Oceania	%29	%43	%14	%14	%100

In Table 2, the regional distributions of Turkish municipalities and foreign cities are added to the classification of sister city relationships based on population. Even though many factors such as culture, history, economy, and art play a role in sister city relations, Table 2 allows for a variety of evaluations.

Small municipalities in terms of population in Turkey have generally established sister city relations with municipalities with small populations like themselves in Europe. There are attempts by municipalities in Turkey to establish sister city relations with cities in Western Europe and municipalities in Eastern Europe with cities in Turkey, but these attempts are mutually ineffective. This situation stems from the objectives of the cities to establish sister city relations with the cities of developed countries (Bay, 2020, p. 182). Consequently, these initiatives cannot be implemented

simultaneously, resulting in the tendency for cities of comparable size to become sister cities. On the other hand, Germany (56), Bulgaria (48), Bosnia and Herzegovina (47), Macedonia (36), Italy (28), and Azerbaijan (30) are the countries with which Turkey has the most sister city relationships among global cities. These nations are also among those located geographically close to Turkey. In Turkey, small municipalities (especially town municipalities) lack adequate personnel and resources. In sister city relationships, reciprocal visits of city and country representatives affect the longevity of ties, and when physical meeting conditions cannot be met, the advantages of cities in digitalization and communication technologies are crucial. In establishing relations between small cities and neighboring cities, the fact that small municipalities in Turkey lack adequate facilities in this regard may prove to be a significant factor. Aside from this, as stated previously, China (9) is among the countries that are prominent in a limited number (5 percent) of sister city relationships between small local cities and large foreign cities. The request was made by Sinop in the context of its sister city's relationship with Chenghu in China (Council Decision No. 107, dated 5.6.2012). According to Avşar, the sister city relationship between Marmaris and Jinan focuses on tourism and contributes significantly to the development of tourism in Turkey. In the sister city agreement between Karşıyaka and Wuxi, the tourism city vision of Karşıyaka was also emphasized ([www.yeniasir.com.tr](http://www.yeniasir.com.tr)). According to Turkey, the sister city agreement between Karadeniz Ereğli and Jinhua is significant for the region and the nation ([www.haberturk.com](http://www.haberturk.com)). Small Turkish municipalities seek economic benefits from Chinese cities, as evidenced by the exemplary sister city relationships.

According to Table 2, the majority of Turkey's populous cities have established sister city relationships with cities in countries other than Europe. Large cities in Turkey typically choose sister cities that are comparable to themselves. In the 52 sister city relationships signed by Ankara, the capital of Turkey, foreign country cities are both populous and the capitals of the countries in which they are located, just like Ankara, except for Dilkapraz, the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In addition, 325 of 490 large-large sister city pairings (Figure 4) were established by metropolitan areas in Turkey. The existence of sister city agreements with geographically distant cities from Turkey, such as the United States of America, South Korea, and China, stands out among the large-scale partnerships.

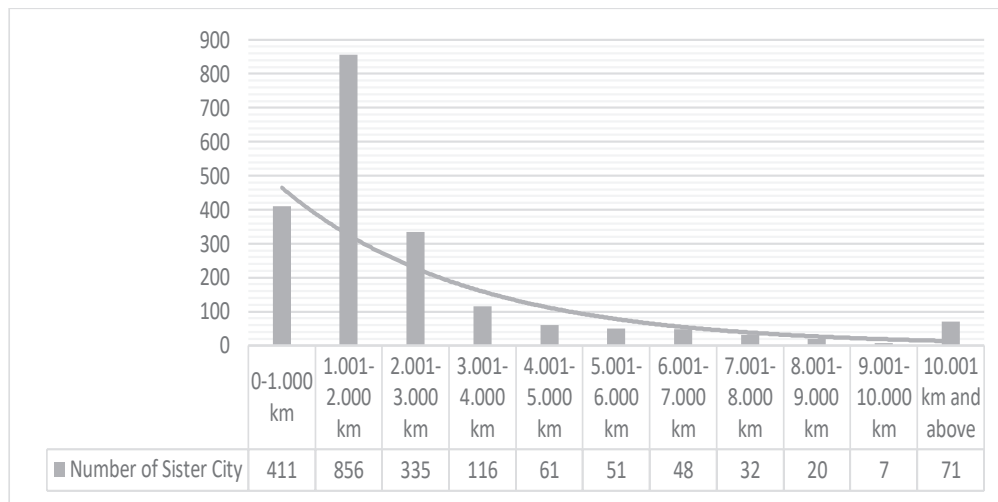
More than half of the Turkish cities have sister city relationships with cities in the Turkic Republics and Balkan countries, as revealed by an examination of large-small sister city relationships. The countries with the highest number of sister city relationships are the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (63) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (47). According to Bay and Çalışkan (2020, p. 20), there is a relationship between the municipalities of Turkey and those of the Balkan countries, with Turkey at the center and the Balkan countries on the periphery. Through sister city relationships, Turkish municipalities are countries that share technology, knowledge, and experience with Balkan municipalities. In this context, municipalities in the Balkan countries seek a variety of benefits from their Turkish counterparts. Similarly, the sister city agreements signed with Balkan nations and Central Asian Turkic republics during the pandemic are at a significant level. An important aspect of these agreements was the assistance provided to these nations (Bay and Çalışkan, 2020,



p. 25-26). During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was observed that Ankara Metropolitan Municipality provided masks and disinfectants to municipalities in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, with whom it has sister city relationships. However, when compared to other countries from which Turkey received aid during the same period, Ireland has provided food aid to the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (Ersavaş Kavanoz and Erdem, 2022, p. 250). During this period, ties between Izmir and China strengthened, and China provided financial assistance to the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality during the pandemic (Erdem, 2021, p. 167). As *source cities*, certain cities participate in international cooperation as givers; as *beneficiary cities*, others serve as recipients (Buis, 2009, p. 192). While sister city relationships with cities in developed nations are *source cities* for Turkey in terms of policy transfer and assistance, cities of nearby nations with strong historical and cultural ties are *beneficiary cities*.

#### 4.2.2. City-to-City Pairing by Geographical Distance

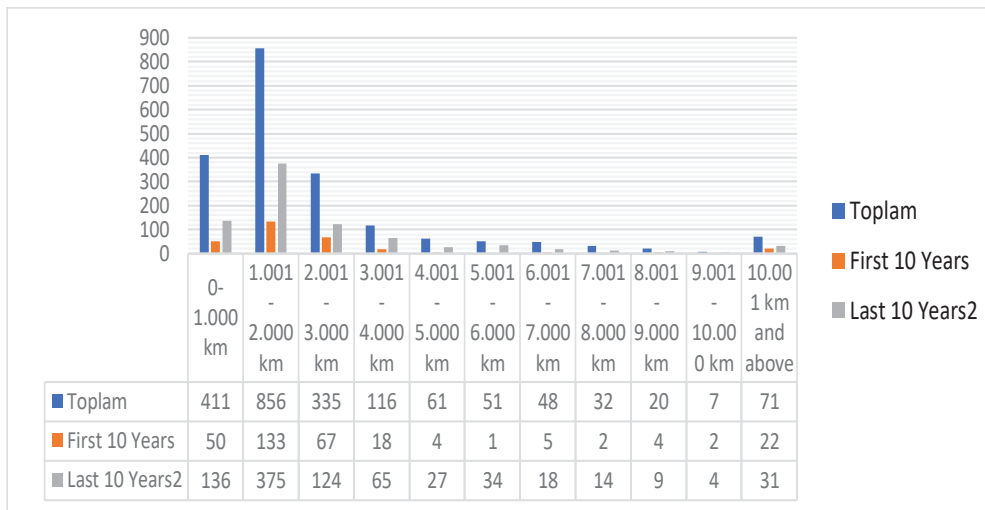
Geographic distance is one factor that influences sister city relationships. Geographic distance is a significant factor in sister city relationships in Turkey.



**Figure 5:** Distribution of sister city relations of municipalities in Turkey based on geographical distance.

Observing Figure 5, the general trend in sister city relations in Turkey in terms of geographical distance is that the number of sister cities decreases as geographical distance increases. Specifically, more than half of the sister cities are established with cities that are approximately 2,000 kilometers away from Turkey. These nations are predominantly comprised of Turkic Republics and Balkan nations. The central foreign policy of Turkey influences the relationships between local and foreign local governments. At the local level, the central discourse is observed to be produced in various ways. Political leaders at the local

level are observed to emphasize the unity of destiny between Turkey and various geographical regions. One of the primary countries in which this emphasis is placed is the Balkans, where relations between sister cities are robust (Demirtaş, 2016, p. 165-166). Among the sister city agreements with European cities, the first was signed with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus city of Dıkkarpaz in 1986, and the second was signed with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus city of Lefkoşe in 1989. During this time, Ankara's sister city agreements with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and its stance on the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus's declaration of independence are apparent (Ersavaş Kavanoz and Erdem, 2022, p. 239). Although not at an institutional level, it can be argued that public diplomacy activities through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TCCA), which was founded in 1992 for the Caucasus and Central Asian Turkic Republics, are fundamentally based on reviving the social, cultural, and historical unity in the Turkish World (Ekşi, 2017, p. 10-11). Consequently, geographical proximity reveals the influence of historical and cultural similarities.



**Figure 6:** Distribution of sister city relations of municipalities in Turkey by years

To understand whether the geographical distance situation in sister city agreements changes periodically, the geographical distances of sister cities formed in the first ten years and sister cities formed in the last ten years are compared. Today, the existence of rapidly developing communication and transportation opportunities is a fact. However, it is difficult to say that this has a significant effect on sister city relations in terms of distance.

**Table 3:** Cross-Border Cooperations of Municipalities in Turkey

Sister Cities in Turkey	Sister Cities in Foreign Countries	Cross-Border Neighborhood
Gerze	Yalta	Black Sea Border
Rize	Poti	Black Sea Border
Sinop	Batumi	Black Sea Border
Akcakoca	Batumi	Black Sea Border
İstanbul	Odessa	Black Sea Border
Constanta	Odessa	Black Sea Border
Cesme	Chios	Aegean Border
Kas	Meis	Mediterranean Border

Cross-border cooperation is one of the situations encountered in sister city relationships established with geographically close countries. It has been observed that cross-border collaborations, which are particularly encouraged in Europe (Ekşi, 2018, p. 63), are uncommon in Turkey. There are no sister city agreements with foreign cities that share land borders with Turkish cities. As a maritime border neighbor, sister city relationships exist with the cities that border the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Aegean Sea. In the study conducted by Erkut and Baypınar (2006, p. 15), for instance, the articles of the cross-border cooperation agreement between Istanbul and Odesa were included, and environmental issues, which have become one of the most significant issues in the Black Sea in recent years, were highlighted.

Political relations can be determinant in sister cities at a distant geography (Bay and Caliskan, 2020, p. 89). On the other hand, almost half of the sister city relations established with the cities of countries that are geographically distant from Turkey, such as the United States of America, the People's Republic of China, South Korea, Japan, and Mongolia, have been carried out with cities with metropolitan status (metropolitan municipalities) in Turkey. Ankara (30) and Istanbul (42) are the provinces with the highest number of sister cities among the metropolitan municipalities that have sister city relationships with cities in geographically distant countries. This circumstance facilitates the establishment of cooperative political relations with cities in distant countries. This rate is approximately 15 percent in the cities of the countries that are geographically close to Turkey. The number of surrounding municipalities (municipalities affiliated with the center) increases as the geographical distance decreases.

One of the striking aspects of the sister city relations that the municipalities in Turkey have made with the cities of Turkic Republics and the Balkan countries is that Turkey has many sister city agreements with the city of the same foreign country. It is observed that the same city as certain foreign cities has sister city relationships with numerous Turkish municipalities. For example, municipalities in Turkey have sister city agreements with the city of Girne (18), with the city of Gazimağusa (11), with the city of Güzelyurt (9) in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, with the Bulgarian city (9) in Kırcaali; with Prizren city (9) in Kosovo; with Bayan-Olgii city (8) in Mongolia. In terms of geographical proximity, these nations are also among the closest to Turkey. As previously stated, this situation may be the result of historical and cultural ties as well

as the financial advantages offered by geographical distance. In Africa, Western Europe, and the Americas, where sister cities have been established, this number is significantly lower. In reality, Turkey has only one sister city agreement with the majority of these nations. That is to say, the number of *sister city agreements* signed by Turkey with the cities in the Turkish Republics of Northern Cyprus is 130 and the *number of cities* signed agreements is 30. The number of *sister city agreements* Turkey has signed with cities in the United States is 36 and the *number of cities* with which agreements are signed is 32. This means that only one city in Turkey is matched with almost every city in the United States.

## Conclusion

Sister city relations are an important and most common type of local diplomatic activity. In the years after the Second World War, relations based on cooperation based on peace and security turned into a model of cooperation in which more concrete gains were aimed, especially in the 1970s. The appropriate selection of the cities' reciprocal partners is a determining factor in achieving these gains. Depending on the objective of city-to-city collaboration, the preferred partners for sister city pairings may change. In 2022, there are a total of 2051 sister city relationships at the municipal level in Turkey, and it can be observed that population size and geographical distance are the predominant factors in the selection of sister cities, alongside historical and cultural relations<sup>1</sup>.

According to the population size, one of the general tendencies of the municipalities in Turkey is that there is a search for equality in the selection of sister cities. According to this, big cities in Turkey are compared to big cities in other countries, whereas small cities attempt to match up with small cities in other nations. Small cities in foreign countries that correspond to small cities in Turkey are typically located in regions that are geographically close to Turkey, allowing them to take advantage of the financial benefits of proximity. When comparing small cities in Turkey to large cities in foreign countries, it is evident that foreign cities are significant for Turkey in terms of policy transfer, as they are typically located within the cities of developed nations. Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, is paired with foreign capitals and seeks equivalence in this context, which is one of the most notable aspects of big-big city mappings. On the other hand, when we examine the sister city relationships between large cities in Turkey and small cities in foreign countries, the majority of the foreign cities are located in the Turkic Republics and the Balkans. In contrast to the small-large sister city pairings, it is evident that the municipalities in Turkey provide a variety of aids and support to the cities in question. Cities of nearby countries with strong historical and cultural relations can be *beneficiary cities* for Turkey in terms of policy transfer and assistance.

1 For this study, the factors of population and geographic distance are significant. However, factors including the historical context, foreign policy, cultural, and ethnic makeup of that city influence a country's sister city networks (Şahin and Söylemez (n.d. p. 21). According to the study by Şahin and Söylemez (n.d. p. 25), who used geocoding, Turkey's sister city network geographically represents the Ottoman Empire's largest borders, the Middle East, with which Turkey has geopolitical ties, the Turkish Republics, and Germany in Europe, where Turkey is heavily emigrating.

The two countries' shared cultural and historical heritage may increase the desire for policy exchange and mutual assistance.

According to geographical distances, the prevalent trend in Turkey is for cities in neighboring countries to become sister cities. There is a general decrease in the number of sister cities as the geographical distance between them increases. In addition, it has been observed that multiple sister city relationships are established with the same city, particularly in the Turkic Republics and Balkan countries with nearby geographies, whereas with the cities of geographically distant countries, the same city is favored only once. Again, in the sister city relationships that Turkey has established with the cities of neighboring countries, while the agreements made by the surrounding municipalities affiliated with the center come to the fore, it has been observed that the metropolitan cities in Turkey prefer to become sister cities with cities in distant countries. In sister city relationships, the historical and cultural ties that exist in nearby regions become more prominent. In addition, it is among the findings of the study that sister city relations, as a type of cross-border cooperation, are not very common in Turkey, where cooperation agreements made by cities neighboring each other via land or sea are not very common.

Sister city relationships are a form of collaboration that allows cities to conserve their resources, strategically assess their strengths and weaknesses, and achieve information sharing and policy transfer. Despite this, one of the primary issues with sister city relationships is that it is impossible to guarantee the sustainability of this connection model or that the relationships frequently continue on the protocol. The congruence of specific elements between the two cities is crucial if sister city relationships are to remain functioning and sustainable. Therefore, the relationships between sister cities will change to cooperation, enabling them to address their problems more effectively. These elements include things like the population size of the two cities and their distance from one another. Through these various elements, a city should make its expectations of and contributions to the municipality with whom it will be a sister city predictable. Again, it is important to analyze both the positive and negative effects of these elements on the sister city relationships.

#### **Declaration of Interest statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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