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Urban Culture and Traditional Knowledge in the Anthropocene: Rethinking Sustainability in Türkiye

Ezgi Karmaz[1], Günce Demir[2, 3]

ABSTRACT

This study examines the concepts of the Anthropocene and sustainability from a sociological perspective. The Anthropocene era, shaped by modernization, industrialization, and urbanization, has weakened traditional knowledge systems and redefined human-nature relationships. By exacerbating ecological crises, it has also made sustainability an increasingly debated issue. The study examines data collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants aged 65 and above from seven regions of Türkiye.The findings reveal that traditional knowledge-based living practices largely align with sustainability principles and that modernization has led to the erosion of this knowledge. The study highlights that as nature-friendly ways of living are forgotten, environmental crises escalate, while individualization and consumer-oriented systems weaken social solidarity.

Keywords: *Anthropocene, Sustainability, Traditional knowledge, Sociology, Türkiye.*

Antroposen'de Kent Kültürü ve Geleneksel Bilgi: Türkiye'de Sürdürülebilirliği Yeniden Düşünmek

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Antroposen ve sürdürülebilirlik kavramlarını sosyolojik bir perspektiften ele almaktadır. Antroposen çağı, modernleşme, sanayileşme ve kentleşme süreçlerini, geleneksel bilgi sistemlerini zayıflatmış ve doğa ile kurulan ilişkileri yeniden şekillendirmiştir. Bu, modern kriz söyleminin ortaya çıkmasına sebep olmuştur. Bu dönüşüm, ekolojik krizleri derinleştirerek sürdürülebilirliğin giderek daha fazla tartışılan bir konu haline gelmesine zemin hazırlamıştır. Araştırmada, Türkiye'nin yedi farklı bölgesinden 65 yaş ve üzeri katılımcılarla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler yorumlanmıştır. Bulgular, geleneksel bilgiye dayalı yaşam pratiklerinin sürdürülebilirlik ilkeleriyle büyük ölçüde örtüştüğünü ve modernleşme süreciyle bu bilgilerin kaybolmaya başladığını göstermektedir. Doğayla uyumlu yaşam biçimlerinin unutulmasıyla birlikte çevresel krizlerin arttığını, bireyselleşme ve tüketim odaklı sistemin toplumsal dayanışmayı azalttığını vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Antroposen, Sürdürülebilirlik, Geleneksel bilgi, Sosyoloji, Türkiye*

[1] Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Kırıkkale Üniversitesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü, Kırıkkale, 0000-0002-6925-483X
[2] Doç. Dr., Kırıkkale Üniversitesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü, Kırıkkale, 0000-0001-7747-6769
[3] Contact: gunceyilmaz@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

Industrialization, urbanization, population growth, and technological advancements have caused irreversible changes in nature, laying the groundwork for social, environmental, and economic crises. Climate change, depletion of water resources, and environmental problems are among the primary indicators of the Anthropocene epoch. These changes have brought into question the sustainability of the human-nature relationship. In this context, the concept of sustainability has emerged as a discourse promising a balance between humans and nature. However, it has increasingly become a tool that serves market systems within production and consumption discourses, rather than a system integrated with environmental, cultural, and social sensitivities.

A sociological approach becomes essential for understanding the layered nature of the Anthropocene epoch and the concept of sustainability. Such an approach enables the examination of individuals' relationships with nature within a social context, the decoding of cultural codes, and the association of traditional knowledge with the concepts of the Anthropocene and sustainability. Therefore, understanding how nature-compatible living practices in traditional societies have transformed in modern contexts—or the reasons behind the lack of such transformation—is of great importance for sociological research.

The central question of this study is how the concepts of the Anthropocene and sustainability are reflected in past and present social life, and how traditional knowledge relates to modern sustainability practices. It aims to explore these concepts through the everyday life practices of individuals living in different regions of Türkiye. Within the scope of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 participants aged 65 and above from seven different regions of Türkiye. Participants' perceptions of sustainability and the Anthropocene, differences between rural and urban lifestyles and the trajectory of traditional knowledge were evaluated within a sociological framework. In doing so, the study reopens the discussion on the social context of sustainability in the Anthropocene epoch and investigates the potential role of traditional knowledge in building a sustainable future.

2. THE ANTHROPOCENE AND SUSTAINABILITY FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Anthropocene, as an epoch in which the effects of human activities are felt on a geological scale, challenges the traditional dichotomy between humans and nature (Saito, 2024, p.16). Human-induced issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution highlight the extent and responsibility of our impact on nature.Sustainability seeks to redefine this relationship and ensure that humanity can live in harmony with nature (Portney, 2020, p.12). The efficient use of natural resources, environmental protection, and the sustainability of ecosystems are of critical importance for the long-term well-being of humanity (Yılmaz, 2024, p.22). Sociology examines the social, cultural, and political dimensions of this relationship.

Humanity has established near-total dominance over food production. In its quest to manage resources according to its own decisions, humankind has developed a sense of sovereignty over nature (Morgan, 1994, p.78). How societies perceive nature, how they utilize natural resources, and how they respond to environmental problems have increasingly become central themes in sociological research in recent years.

Sustainability promotes the development of environmentally conscious identities and forms of belonging. People are reevaluating their connections to their surroundings and attempting to construct more sustainable and eco-friendly identities. Environmental movements, local communities, and sustainable lifestyles all contribute to the emergence of new identities and forms of belonging. Achieving the social commitment required for a sustainable future is a key objective of sociology. Furthermore, sustainability requires global cooperation and coordination. International agreements, sustainable development goals, and environmental policies are crucial instruments of global governance. Sociology explores the environmental dimensions of policy and governance—how environmental policies are formed, implemented, and assessed are central concerns in sociological inquiry. Developing global governance models necessary for a sustainable future is a significant contribution of sociology.

The sociological intersection of sustainability and the Anthropocene provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the environmental and social challenges facing humanity. This intersection necessitates the redefinition of the human-nature relationship, the elimination of social inequalities, the management of risks and uncertainties, the reconstruction of identity and belonging, and the transformation of policy and governance. Sociology plays a crucial role in this process by interpreting the social dimensions of environmental problems, proposing solutions, and contributing to the construction of a more just and sustainable future.

3. WHAT IS THE ANTHROPOCENE?

The Anthropocene represents a significant turning point for humanity. In this era, recognizing the effects of human activity on the planet, addressing these impacts, and shaping a sustainable future are vital for humanity. Whether the Anthropocene should be defined as a distinct epoch remains a topic of debate in the scientific community. At the core of this debate lies the question of whether the Anthropocene meets the necessary criteria to be officially recognized as a geological epoch (Angus, 2021, pp. 63–64). Issues such as biodiversity loss, climate change, soil erosion, deforestation, and pollution have deeply affected the planet's natural systems. Humanity is leaving permanent marks in geological records—for instance, radioactive isotopes from nuclear tests, plastic pollution, and widespread urban concretization form easily detectable layers for future geologists. The speed and scale of human impact far exceed those of previous geological periods, distinguishing the Anthropocene from earlier epochs. Nevertheless, despite all these transformative changes, the Anthropocene has not yet been officially designated as a geological epoch by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS). Furthermore,

there is no consensus on when the Anthropocene began. While some scholars identify the beginning with the advent of agriculture, others point to the Industrial Revolution, mid-20th-century nuclear testing, or the "Great Acceleration" as the starting point (Steffen et al., 2007). This ambiguity contributes to the lack of formal recognition of the Anthropocene.

In this study, the Anthropocene is approached as the "Age of Humans"—a concept that emphasizes the geological-scale impact of human activities on the planet. It is a multidimensional concept involving disciplines such as geology, sociology, anthropology, ecology, history, and philosophy. Although there is debate surrounding the precise start of the Anthropocene, all perspectives converge on the influence of human intervention in nature. The notion that the Industrial Revolution or the Great Acceleration marks its beginning reflects a phase in which human actions, such as intensified migration, urban restructuring, the expansion of farmlands, and the rise of industrial agriculture, began to systematically reshape nature (Steffen and McNeill, 2007). As humans attempt to shape nature according to their desires and expectations, the relationship between nature and society deteriorates, often with disastrous consequences. In truth, the Anthropocene has been gradually woven into the human-nature dynamic over time. While defining it solely through the Industrial Revolution is reductive, industrialization nonetheless stands as a critical milestone for delimiting its historical emergence.

Key drivers of the Anthropocene include population growth, consumption habits, technological development, economic systems, and political decisions. Their planetary effects manifest through rising greenhouse gas concentrations, accelerated biodiversity loss, increasing rates of deforestation, water scarcity, declining soil fertility, more frequent natural disasters, and the spread of pandemics (Rockström, Steffen, Noone et al. 2009). The consequences of the Anthropocene are not only global but also regionally and locally differentiated. Challenges such as climate change, water shortages, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, natural disasters, and the spread of diseases affect different communities in varying ways (IPCC, 2021).

The Anthropocene has led to profound transformations in human-nature relations. Dominance over nature, the commodification of the natural world, overexploitation of resources, and environmental injustice are among its key dimensions (Moore, 2017, p. 59). As an epoch or ongoing process, the Anthropocene necessitates the examination of how modern societies' interactions with nature have led to today's consequences. It represents a metabolic rift, wherein humans extract molecules from nature to produce commodities using labor and technology, but cannot reintegrate waste back into natural cycles. Agriculture depletes soils, glaciers melt, and irreversible changes unfold on Earth (McKenzie, 2020, p. 16). While classical sociology considered society as separate from nature, the Anthropocene reveals the blurred and interdependent boundaries between society and the environment.

4. SUSTAINABILITY

In recent years, sustainability has become a frequently discussed concept in both academic circles and everyday life. Environmental crises, climate change, and ecological degradation have made sustainability not a choice but a necessity. However, what is understood by sustainability, how it is interpreted, and how it is practiced varies. Sustainability emerges as an environmental policy, a corporate strategy, and a personal lifestyle. In this context, it would not be wrong to assert that sustainability permeates all areas of social life. It is often used interchangeably with the concept of sustainable development.

Modern nation-states, shaped by modern society, along with the rise of national and international corporations, are key factors underlying environmental and social issues (Hassan, 2007). The global capitalism facilitated by this process and its unjust distribution have shaped societies and modernity itself, giving rise to the notion of sustainable development. According to Escobar (1995), Western-centered development models and the knowledge produced in line with them were imposed on Third World countries. Development conceived through Western thought thus became a root cause of these countries' underdevelopment and marginalization. In the second half of the 20th century, sustainable development began to emerge with environmentalist discourse. Increasing population density, urbanization, and growth raised concerns that environmental problems could hinder economic development (Şahin, 2004). In other words, the intention was to prevent potential ruptures within the capitalist system caused by environmental degradation. The main criticism directed at sustainable development is that it largely serves to preserve the capitalist economic system and implements practices in its favor.

The concept of sustainability focuses on how societies can coexist harmoniously with the natural environment while maintaining modern life through the use of natural resources (Boschele, 2020, p.12). Yet, these approaches and definitions are deeply intertwined with how the capitalist system perceives sustainability and are directly connected to the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene, shaped by the planetary impact of human activity, forms the basis of the ecological crises that have rendered sustainability imperative. The solutions offered under the name of sustainability today are, in fact, tools to manage the environmental destruction caused by the Anthropocene. In this sense, sustainability is often understood not as a radical transformation aimed at resolving the ecological crisis, but as an effort to make existing production and consumption systems slightly more "green." "Sustainable" products marketed by major corporations using eco-friendly labels, recycling initiatives, carbon footprint reduction goals, and eco-certifications frequently do not challenge consumer culture, but rather reconfigure it in new forms.

Viewing sustainability solely as an environmental issue is insufficient. Social and economic sustainability are as vital as ecological balance. In a world where social inequalities are deepening, the fact that only certain segments of society can access sustainable products and services raises questions about the effectiveness of sustainability itself. For instance, one of the key causes of hunger is the unequal access to and distribution

of food. This inequality, reflecting broader disparities in resource access, results in a paradox where food waste and diseases stemming from undernutrition occur simultaneously (Doğan, 2021). In this regard, while organic food consumption is promoted as a sustainability practice, the high cost of such products makes them inaccessible to large segments of society, prompting inquiries into whom sustainability truly serves. Many solutions produced to ease tensions within the capitalist system tend to reproduce social inequalities. Moreover, even when not explicitly anti-systemic, growth-oriented economic models turn knowledge and cultural elements into commodities, making sustainability discourse a focal point of critique (Hoşgör, 2020, pp.17–18).

As sustainability has become more popular as a remedy to emerging problems, its practices have also evolved (Bhandari, 2019, p.100). Today, sustainability often manifests as a marketing strategy. Eco-friendly packaging, organic farming certifications, renewable energy projects, and carbon-neutral policies allow the system to reproduce itself under the guise of sustainability. Yet the core issue lies in whether nature is approached from a consumption-oriented perspective. What must not be overlooked is that, in the natural world, every form of waste functions as nourishment. Thus, waste management becomes critically important. For example, replacing plastic bags with cloth totes or banning plastic straws may serve more as symbolic tools to market the discourse of sustainability rather than fostering a truly sustainable world.

How we approach sustainability reveals the meaning we attribute to it. If we limit it merely to changes in individual consumption habits, we can be seen as accepting the alternatives offered by the current system. Sustainability is not only about protecting nature, but also about redefining humanity's relationship with nature. In a consumption-driven world, any discussion of sustainability must begin with a critical examination of consumption itself.

5. TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

When we speak of sustainability, it is often modern solutions developed in response to environmental crises that come to mind. However, harmonious living with nature was an inherent understanding embedded in pre-industrial societies. Many of the methods now being "rediscovered" under the name of sustainability were once integral parts of daily life. Yet with the processes of modernization, many of these knowledge systems were forgotten and replaced by lifestyles disconnected from nature and based on rapid consumption.

In traditional societies, sustainability was not a conscious choice aimed at environmental protection but rather a set of ordinary practices embedded in everyday life. In this sense, traditional knowledge appears as an essential component of cultural structure and an extension of harmonious coexistence with nature. Traditional ecological knowledge, as a result of this relationship, refers to the systems of understanding that local communities have developed through their interactions with their natural environments. Berkes (1993) describes traditional ecological knowledge as culturally transmitted knowledge and beliefs about the relationships among living beings and their environments. Houde (2007) expands this to encompass all traditions and knowledge held by a specific group regarding their

environment, warning that the loss of such knowledge could lead to the disappearance of rural life practices. It is fair to argue that awareness of the finite nature of natural resources influenced people to structure their production and consumption habits accordingly. For instance, agricultural techniques, the durability of household goods, dietary habits, and collective work practices all reflect concepts now central to contemporary sustainability debates.

Traditional ecological knowledge encompasses not only information about the environment but also knowledge concerning resource use, social relations, and the broader human-nature connection. Crucially, this knowledge is produced by and for those living within specific geographies and evolves through new observations and experiences (Tang, 2012). Thus, different geographic regions may exhibit distinct traditional knowledge systems and applications for similar challenges. These context-bound insights, born of lived experience with the land, have become core elements of cultural knowledge and reflect the traditional understanding of human-nature interdependence. In this way, many sustainability goals can be seen as having been practiced traditionally. Communities in rural areas possess deep experiential knowledge of how to use natural resources most efficiently. Seeing nature as an inseparable part of their daily lives, and with their livelihoods dependent on it, they may be more effective in conserving ecological balance than those who rely solely on scientific methods (Büyükşahin and Güneş, 2016, p. 4). Accordingly, many contemporary sustainability practices have clear analogs or precedents in traditional knowledge and the social memory built around it.

Today's so-called circular production models, now promoted under the name of sustainable agriculture, were common in traditional societies. Instead of monocultural, large-scale production, systems involving the cultivation of multiple plants together and preserving soil fertility through natural means are now being rebranded as polyculture agriculture. These systems not only prevent environmental damage but also position humans as an integral part of nature. It is difficult to consider practices now categorized under agroecology as separate from traditional ecological knowledge. Region-specific agroecosystems, shaped throughout human biological, social, and cultural evolution, were developed by farmers without capital, scientific knowledge, or modern technologies, relying solely on interactions with their environments (Wilson, 1999). The fact that agroecological frameworks incorporate elements of traditional knowledge supports the argument that many "sustainable" practices proposed today are in fact long-standing, recontextualized traditions.

In today's discussions on effective strategies for preserving traditional knowledge and adapting it to modern social life, there is growing consensus that nature should be considered a subject rather than an object and that traditional knowledge should be treated as a valuable knowledge source. The stories, rituals, habits, and environmental understandings that shape traditional knowledge have long contributed to maintaining human-nature harmony and ensuring the efficient use of resources. Contemporary projects such as "recycling" and "zero waste" can be seen as modern iterations of long-standing,

instinctive sustainability principles. In a study by Akgül (2022), it is emphasized that traditional production systems were based on circular and zero-waste principles, and that many modern initiatives merely aim to reactivate these traditional methods. Similarly, objects were repaired rather than discarded, clothing was reused across generations, and food waste was either fed to animals or composted. Whereas agriculture and animal husbandry once formed parts of everyday rural life, urban life—an extension of modern living—has transformed these into industrial sectors within capitalist economies. Hence, many systems used in contemporary sustainability discourse mirror traditional practices, prompting renewed discussions on how resources can again be used more effectively, as they were in the past (Okumuş, 2024; Özkan, Gültekin Subaşı, Kamiloğlu et al., 2022; Türkoğlu, 2020). Many current sustainability proposals are essentially rebranded versions of practices that existed in the past.

Traditional knowledge and cultural practices encompass not only environmental sustainability but also social sustainability. Social sustainability involves not only conserving natural resources but also maintaining collective ways of life. In traditional societies, production and consumption were shaped by collective norms rather than individual interests. In traditional civilizations, knowledge is never viewed as the property of an individual but as a reflection of metaphysical truths conveyed through symbolic and collective means (Guénon, 2004). Networks of solidarity, communal production mechanisms, and intra-community cooperation contributed to both economic sustainability and the continuity of social relations. For example, the "imece" system in agricultural production allowed individuals to pool their labor for collective welfare. Such practices reinforced trust among individuals and strengthened social bonds. However, in modern societies, where economic systems promote individualism, these mechanisms of solidarity have weakened and been replaced by market-based relations. Although today's sustainability discourse often focuses on environmental dimensions, social sustainability is largely overlooked. In Anthropocene debates, the focus is often on the relationship between ecosystems and humans; however, as Yılmaz (2023) suggests, the Anthropocene must also be approached from a cultural perspective. Humans intervene in the planet not only through physical actions but also via the cultural frameworks they produce, shaping everything from social organization to environmental perception (p. 35).

The traditional practice of *imece*, as described by participants, illustrates a form of collective labor grounded in solidarity and mutual support. Beyond its material function, it played a significant role in maintaining social cohesion and fostering long-term trust among community members. These characteristics align closely with the principles of social sustainability, particularly in relation to interdependence, shared responsibility, and the continuity of collective life. The weakening of such mechanisms in modern contexts points not only to ecological disruption but also to a broader erosion of communal ties.

In today's context, sustainability has shifted from being an ethical concern shaped by environmental anxiety to a strategy for reproducing the economic system. Within capitalist production relations, sustainability is no longer about living in harmony with nature but

about restructuring market mechanisms using ecological discourse. Rather than reducing consumption, proposed solutions to ecological crises often transform consumption into new forms, ensuring the continuity of the system. Reusable products, organic certifications, and biodegradable packaging are presented as eco-friendly choices, but these practices can be seen as further commodification of the human-nature relationship.

From a social perspective, sustainability is not only about addressing ecological issues, but also about understanding transformations in social structures. While production and consumption in traditional societies were grounded in collective norms, modernization has altered how people relate to both nature and each other. The Anthropocene, understood as the era in which human impact on the Earth has become a defining force, reveals that sustainability is not only an environmental issue but also a complex social problem involving systemic transformation.

6. METHOD

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, and semi-structured in-depth interview techniques were employed. This approach allowed the researcher to maintain flexibility while also enabling participants to express their opinions freely (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

The sample consists of 22 participants aged 65 and above from seven different regions of Türkiye. Four participants were selected from the Central Anatolia Region, and three participants from each of the other regions. The key consideration in sample selection was how traditional knowledge production in various regions of the country might be associated with the concepts of the Anthropocene and sustainability. To ensure access to traditional knowledge and its practitioners, the age criterion was set at 65 and above. Thus, the study aimed to explore how the concepts of sustainability and the Anthropocene, which gained prominence in the last quarter of the 20th century, were perceived and interpreted by the participants.

Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method, and telephone interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. This method enabled the study to encompass a broad perspective that included cultural, economic, and ecological variations across different regions. Participants were selected from individuals with firsthand experience of traditional sustainability practices, considering both rural and urban contexts.

Telephone interviews were transcribed in written form. All data were categorized and further divided into subgroups for content analysis, and sociological interpretations were made accordingly. Since qualitative research does not aim to generalize or present a universal representation (Patton, 1988; Holliday, 2007), this study also does not seek generalization. Instead, it aims to provide a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the group under investigation. The intention was to represent how the 22 participants engaged with the study's themes.

Each participant was assigned a number. When referring to them in the text, a coding system such as Px (Region, Gender, Age) was used. Participant information is summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Education Level	Rural/Urban	Region
1	75	Male	Middle school	Urban	Mediterranean
2	75	Female	University	Urban	Mediterranean
3	75	Female	High school	Urban	Mediterranean
4	78	Female	Primary school	Rural	Aegean
5	70	Female	Primary school	Rural	Aegean
6	72	Female	Vocational School	Urban	Aegean
7	68	Male	University	Urban	Black Sea
8	67	Male	High school	Urban	Black Sea
9	70	Female	Primary school	Urban	Black Sea
10	78	Female	University	Urban	Eastern Anatolia
11	66	Female	University	Urban	Eastern Anatolia
12	73	Female	High school	Rural	Eastern Anatolia
13	73	Female	Primary school	Urban	Marmara
14	66	Male	University	Urban	Marmara
15	69	Female	Primary school	Rural	Marmara
16	65	Female	High school	Urban	Central Anatolia
17	81	Female	Primary school	Semi-urban	Central Anatolia
18	86	Male	Middle school	Semi-urban	Central Anatolia
19	65	Female	Primary school	Rural	Central Anatolia
20	74	Male	High school	Urban	Southeastern Anatolia
21	80	Female	Primary school	Rural	Southeastern Anatolia
22	84	Female	?	Rural	Southeastern Anatolia

7.FINDINGS

The interviews revealed that participants from different regions of Türkiye experience the concepts of the Anthropocene and sustainability in diverse ways in their daily lives. Whether individuals lived in rural or urban settings significantly shaped these experiences. It was observed that the concepts of sustainability and the Anthropocene were either not clearly understood or remained vague for the participants. However, their everyday practices and narratives directly reflected the contemporary discourses on sustainability and the societal and environmental impacts of the Anthropocene.

7.1. Traces of Sustainability and the Anthropocene from Village to City

Although participants were unfamiliar with the term *Anthropocene*, they unanimously expressed the view that modern life is unsustainable. They were aware of climate change, declining water resources, and drought—clear indicators of the Anthropocene era.

"It used to be green, and it rained a lot. We had four seasons; now it's just two. Nature was beautiful. Herbs can't grow now because they wait for rain. Trees get cold, so we don't get fruit." — P16 (Central Anatolia, Female, 65)

Most urban participants had previously lived in rural areas and thus compared the two lifestyles. A shared perception was that sustainability practices were once common in villages but have largely been forgotten in urban life. Similarly, rural areas are now being influenced by urban lifestyles, and relationships with nature are increasingly replaced by consumption-oriented practices. Participants living in villages and cities expressed the following:

"We buy things from the market, or sometimes a minibus comes and sells everything. Think of it like a small mobile supermarket. We get whatever we need from there. I don't care about brands. I just get what suits me. We used to make yogurt at home from milk, but not anymore. I buy cheese too." — P12 (Eastern Anatolia, Female, 73)

"I've always lived in Istanbul, though I go to the village sometimes. I know village life. What's changed? In the village, we wore shalwar, now skirts. We used to have manure, but now it's all chemicals. Everything's sprayed. The taste is gone. We used to shop at the bazaar; now it's the supermarket—no big difference for us." — P13 (Marmara, Female, 73)

Participants living in villages said that their direct connection with nature allowed them to observe environmental changes closely and detect the effects of the Anthropocene. However, traditional knowledge is increasingly weakened by the influence of modern life.

"For example, there used to be lots of mushrooms. I'd gather and cook them right away. Not anymore. There were oyster mushrooms, shaggy ink caps, and parasol mushrooms. Nature has changed." — P19 (Central Anatolia, Female, 65)

This statement illustrates how individuals possessing traditional ecological knowledge are losing access to the natural environments where that knowledge was once applied. Rural participants seemed to perceive environmental changes more concretely, as expressed in remarks such as "Olives decrease every year," "There are no longer walnuts like before," and "We can't garden anymore due to water scarcity." These illustrate how being immersed in nature makes environmental change more visible and immediate.

Rural participants demonstrated a more tangible and practical understanding of sustainability. Their traditional ways of living inherently aligned with sustainability through practices like reusing food waste, repairing objects, and using resources efficiently:

"We didn't know about expiration dates. Why would we? Our mothers and grandmothers kept track. Newer food was put at the back; we'd eat the older ones first. Even with bread, we finished the stale one first. I didn't understand why we didn't eat the fresh fruit first. My mom would say that's not how it works. We repaired everything. Nothing was thrown away. Everything had a place. Old newspapers were saved. No one buys newspapers now. We had to reuse things." — P20 (Southeastern Anatolia, Male, 74)

Urban participants, though aware of sustainability in principle, struggled to incorporate it into daily life. Traditional knowledge and practices were seen as relics of the past, while sustainability measures such as zero waste and recycling were viewed as modern and innovative, yet not fully integrated into everyday routines:

"They do recycling here, but we don't separate our trash at home." — P17 (Central Anatolia, Female, 81)

Village participants highlighted that sustainability is not only about ecological practices but also linked to social relations, solidarity, and a sense of responsibility. In contrast, urban participants emphasized the individualistic and disconnected nature of city life, which hampers sustainable practices. Notable differences emerged between the views of rural and urban residents within the same regions:

"I live in a village. Most of my life has been spent here… My neighbor grows crops and gives us some. I give her oil and olives in return. We've done that for years." — P (Aegean, Female, 78)

"We throw away bags of stuff every day. But back then, people shared everything. There was a sense of community. We didn't waste." — P6 (Aegean, Female, 72)

"I shop at the market or the greengrocer and try to buy fresh. But everyone's just focused on themselves. The spirit of helping each other is gone." — P3 (Mediterranean, Female, 75)

This comparison of rural and urban life reveals how approaches to environmental problems differ in the Anthropocene era. Traditional practices in rural settings foster the more immediate perception of environmental changes and resilience, while urban awareness tends to remain theoretical. Therefore, sustainability must be understood not only as a

technical or economic issue but also as a process shaped by social relationships and traditional knowledge.

The narratives of urban participants reveal that while sustainability is conceptually recognized, it is rarely embodied in consistent everyday behaviors. Practices such as recycling or waste separation are known but not systematically applied, often remaining as abstract ideals rather than lived routines. In contrast to the embedded sustainability of rural life, urban sustainability tends to be practiced at a more symbolic level, reflecting general awareness rather than collective responsibility. This distinction underlines the fact that sustainability in urban settings may be shaped more by discourse than by direct, practical engagement with ecological concerns.

7.2. The Trajectory of Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge functions as a reference framework that governs society's interaction with natural resources, supporting long-term use and a lifestyle in harmony with natural cycles. However, processes of modernization, urbanization, and social transformation have significantly influenced the trajectory of traditional knowledge. Current discussions around the Anthropocene and sustainability have reintroduced the role of traditional knowledge into scholarly and policy debates. Participants' accounts reveal that in village life, traditional knowledge continues to exist through sustainable, efficient, and nature-compatible practices. The examples they provide reflect a lifestyle that once embodied the very principles now promoted in sustainability discourse:

"We used animal manure—we'd bring it to the garden and fields to grow better crops. Back then, we had no electricity or natural gas. We used dried dung—we call it *tezek*—for heating in stoves and tandırs. We'd also gather stiff wheat stalks—*kesik*—and bake our bread with those." — P17 (Central Anatolia, Female, 81)

"Garbage? That's new. Where would trash come from? If there was something burnable, you threw it in the stove. Kitchen waste, like peels, went to the animals. We did our own recycling. Nothing was thrown away." — P20 (Southeastern Anatolia, Male, 74)

These examples of traditional ecological knowledge show that participants not only contributed to natural cycles but also practiced a way of living that aligned with what sustainability advocates now call for. Their lifestyle, particularly in rural areas, was inherently sustainable:

"We used to make use of everything. Leftover food was turned into something else. Buttons and lace from old skirts were saved and reused for other things." — P11 (Eastern Anatolia, Female, 66)

Traditional knowledge and its associated practices have changed with modernization and urbanization. As traditional knowledge is increasingly forgotten, it has been replaced by modern habits, transforming once-functional systems into extensions of urban life. This process, which parallels the environmental degradation of the Anthropocene, has

contributed to the weakening of sustainability practices. The disappearance of traditional knowledge represents not only a cultural loss but also a barrier to achieving sustainability goals. Participants consistently reflected on this shift by comparing past and present experiences, often emphasizing the decline of solidarity and cooperation, key elements of socially embedded sustainability:

"We used to make everything at home—preserved meats, pickles, tomato paste. It was something special, doing it all together as a family. Now you go to the market and just buy it. We used to hang melons to store them. We made our own cheese. We had milk, so we made yogurt, butter… we did a lot. Now no one does anything; everyone's too busy, too tired." — P14 (Marmara, Male, 66)

As traditional knowledge has evolved alongside urbanization and modern living conditions, it has also become a lens through which the impacts of the Anthropocene are assessed:

"Back then, fruits lasted for weeks. Now, they rot before you get home." — P9 (Black Sea, Female, 70)

"We used to consume less, but it was quality. Now, everyone buys too much and wastes it. That's what pollutes the environment—products that spoil quickly and end up in the trash." — P1 (Mediterranean, Male, 75)

One commonly repeated theme among participants was that the durability of goods in the past was significantly greater. Modern consumption habits, a result of the Anthropocene, have altered not only the longevity but also the meaning attached to material goods:

"Things used to last longer. We used everything for years. Even our fridge—when we first bought one, it lasted 30 years. Eventually, it got old, and we replaced it. But it hadn't even broken. I remember—I was in my 40s then. Since then, we've gone through four, maybe five fridges. Thirty years vs. replacing it every 3 or 4 years—big difference." — P10 (Eastern Anatolia, Female, 78)

The contribution of traditional knowledge to sustainable practices is once again gaining importance in efforts to mitigate the effects of the Anthropocene. Though contemporary sustainability is often tied to development policies, technologies, and economic models, traditional knowledge offers relevant, proven alternatives. While participants are generally familiar with modern concepts like recycling and zero waste, they often fail to recognize their connections to traditional practices. Urban consumption culture necessitates a rediscovery of traditional knowledge, and many participants continue to apply it in their daily lives, indicating that it is not yet entirely lost:

"It's just a habit from the past—we make use of everything. If something's left, we either dry it or turn it into pickles." — P17 (Central Anatolia, Female, 81)

"I still can't bring myself to throw things away. I save yogurt containers, cheese tubs, plastic bags—just in case I might need them later." — P10 (Eastern Anatolia, Female, 78)

Frugality, as shaped by economic and consumption patterns, continues to be informed by participants' past experiences and serves as a benchmark for assessing contemporary behavior:

"We were much more frugal in the past. Now people consume and throw things away. Back then, throwing something away didn't even cross our minds. Now they say it's not worth repairing—just buy a new one. We wore clothes for years, and when they got old, we turned them into cleaning cloths. We were careful with water, too—now everyone leaves the tap running. We didn't know what food waste was. We'd even use stale bread." — P1 (Mediterranean, Male, 75)

"We were careful with spending. My generation knows this, but the younger ones—no, they run from frugality. And okay, maybe they're right, who knows? But they also spend carelessly. No one wants to drink their coffee at home or bring food from home anymore." — P11 (Eastern Anatolia, Female, 66)

The trajectory of traditional knowledge is deeply connected to rural and urban life, as well as broader social and cultural transformations. While village life, based on harmony with nature and mutual support, served as a carrier of this knowledge, urbanization, modernization, and individualism have weakened traditional knowledge-based sustainability, leading to both cultural and ecological loss.

8. CONCLUSION

Sustainability has become a highly popular concept in recent years. In today's world, where sustainability is a goal across all sectors, many actions are being restructured around this idea. Traditional Turkish culture naturally supports the idea of fulfilling present needs while preserving the ability of future generations to meet theirs—a foundational principle of sustainability.

Interviews conducted across seven regions of Türkiye reveal that traditional knowledge, although increasingly forgotten in the Anthropocene era, forms the basis of sustainable living practices. This aligns with Escobar's (1995) critique that dominant development paradigms often render local knowledge systems. Despite their long-standing capacity to sustain ecological and social balance, such systems are increasingly rendered invisible. The findings demonstrate that environmental and social practices rooted in traditional knowledge can offer viable solutions to the ecological crises faced by modern societies. However, the ongoing loss of traditional knowledge due to modernization and urbanization poses a significant threat to both social solidarity and ecological awareness. The study emphasizes the differences between rural and urban lifestyles, showing how sustainability practices grounded in traditional knowledge are being eroded through urbanization. The erosion of *imece* and similar communal structures corresponds to what Yılmaz (2024) identifies as a weakening of social sustainability, where individualism and market rationality displace mutual responsibility and collective well-being.

The research results indicate that despite the popularity of the concepts of the Anthropocene and sustainability, participants generally had limited or vague understanding of these terms, regardless of the region in which they lived. Nevertheless, the meanings embedded in these concepts were reflected in the participants' daily lives. Even without explicitly referencing the term "sustainability," participants demonstrated adherence to its core values, such as waste reduction and anti-consumerism. Furthermore, interviews revealed a clear distinction between rural and urban practices in relation to sustainability and the Anthropocene. Participants living in rural areas, due to their direct relationship with nature, were found to implement sustainable practices more effectively and tangibly. These narratives illustrate what McKenzie (2020) describes as the fragmentation of ecological rhythms and temporal continuity under the Anthropocene, where fast-paced consumption replaces long-standing cycles of subsistence and renewal. Urban participants, on the other hand, tended to approach these behaviors theoretically but struggled to integrate them into daily routines.

Traditional knowledge, although weakened by modernization and urbanization, still underpins many practices that are now being reintroduced under the banner of sustainability. The findings of this study indicate that building a sustainable future, traditional knowledge and practices must be reassessed and reintegrated. Sustainability should be viewed not only as a technical endeavor but also as a broader process of social and cultural transformation.

The cultural practices of the past demonstrate that sustainability is closely tied not only to technical solutions but also to social relationships and lifestyles. In traditional societies, production based on solidarity and shared resource use made sustainability an organic part of everyday life. In contrast, modern individualism and consumer culture have undermined these systems. As Moore (2017) argues, the Anthropocene can be seen as a metabolic rift in which capitalist systems sever the regenerative relationship between society and nature—a rupture that is reflected in participants' concerns over environmental degradation, waste, and the loss of interdependence. Many of today's sustainability initiatives are, in fact, rediscoveries of practices that have long existed. Thus, the critical question is not simply how to develop new strategies, but how to recover and reintegrate this knowledge into contemporary society. The ecological imperatives of the Anthropocene clearly show that sustainability should be treated not as a purely technical matter but as a process of profound social and cultural transformation.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

In all processes of the article, the principles of research and publication ethics of Manisa Celal Bayar University Journal of Social Sciences Institute were followed.

The ethics committee approval was received from Kırıkkale University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee as Document Date and Number: 20.03.2025 - 325030

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The authors contributed equally to the work.

Declaration of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest with any person or organization.

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