



A COMPARISON BETWEEN AL HAYER, UAE COMMUNITY AND LEMARS (IOWA), USA COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this research is to investigate the similarities and differences between two small communities that are different in location and culture; namely Al Hayer in the United Arab Emirates, and LeMars, Iowa in the United States of America.

Design/methodology/approach: The study collected its data from both communities using the same questionnaire, which was designed by a team from the Department of Sociology at Iowa State Universities (ISU) when its members studied LeMars, Iowa. The questionnaire was then modified and translated to fit with the Al Hayer community in the UAE.

Findings: Despite the fundamental differences between the two communities, the findings have also shown a number of similarities between them.

Research limitations/implications: More, similar, comparative research is to be encouraged worldwide in the future, to enable a better understanding of the different cultures around the globe.

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INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven Emirates, formerly known as the Trucial States, which came together after British withdrawal from the region in 1971. Currently, it is the youngest country on the Arabian Peninsula. Geographically the largest and most populous of the seven is the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, which provides the federal capital. The other members, in order of size, are Dubai, Sharja, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quaiwain, and Ajman.

The UAE is one of the world's major oil producers with an installed sustainable production capacity of nearly three million barrels per day for January 2016, as the National Newspaper quoted the UAE Minister of Energy (<http://www.thenational.ae/business/industry-insights/energy/abu-dhabis-oil-output-at-2-8m-barrels-per-day>). These substantial oil revenues have enabled the country to create a solid infrastructure for development in different aspects of life, such as health services, education, transportation, communication and other social services. To sum up, the whole country went through enormous social and economic changes in a relatively short period of time - less than three decades.

One of the two communities under study (Al Hayer) is just one example of the changes that affected the rural communities of the UAE. It is located in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, between the city of Al-Ain (about 40 kilometres to the south) and the city of Dubai (about 120 kilometres to the north). It is about 160 kilometres east of the capital Abu Dhabi. The area is situated in a valley and surrounded by beautiful orange sand dunes. The target population consists of the entire community, which is about 300 families.

The second community is LeMars of Plymouth County, Iowa, United States. Situated in the northwest corner of Iowa, LeMars is about 252 kilometres (flight distance) west of Des Moines (<http://disween.com/le-mars-ia-us/DSM>). It is the home of Wells Dairy, the world's largest producer of ice cream novelties in one location, and is the self-proclaimed Ice Cream Capital of the World. According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 23.23 square kilometres of which, 23.21 is land and 0.03 is water (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Mars,_Iowa). The population was 9,826 at the 2010 census.

The study adopted a questionnaire from a version used by Iowa State University in a similar study in the rural area (LeMars) in the State of Iowa, USA, in 1994. The adopted questionnaire was translated, pre-tested and re-validated to suit the nature of the local population in Al Hayer, UAE. Among other things, the study was looking for comparisons on how the population of the two communities are attached to their homeland, what are the major reasons for living in the community, people's evaluation of the social services provided by the communities, attitudes about the community, and what are the major community threats? Highlights of the results are given below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current literature shows the importance of community comparative studies. The following pages document some of these studies that may resemble the study under focus.

Obst et al. (2002) investigated the psychological sense of community (PSOC) in science fiction fandom, a community of interest with membership from all over the world.

Another study by Shulman and Adams (2002) made a comparison of Russian and British attitudes towards mental health problems in the community to examine the differences in attitudes towards mental health problems of Russian and British communities.

Others such as Levine et al. (2001) conducted independent field experiments in 23 large cities around the world measuring three types of spontaneous, non-emergency assistance: alerting a pedestrian who dropped a pen, offering help to strangers, and assisting a blind person cross the street. Schackman et al. (2002) undertook a comparison study to compare risk factor outcomes in Swedish and US intervention programmes for the prevention of cardiovascular disease (CVD). The aim was to explore how different intervention programme profiles affect outcome.

Son et al. (2008) undertook a study that compared the effects of structural bases and functional elements of social support on mental health in Taiwan and the United States.

Family Size and Community Organization is another issue under cross cultural comparative studies undertaken by Bondarenko and Korotayev

(2000). Tuscisny's (2007) study compared four major regions of security communities in Europe, North America, South America, and South-East Asia. The focus of the study was to analyse the political and social values by the people of these regions.

In 2005, Leon et al. compared approaches to community structure identification in terms of sensitivity and computational cost. The research was trying to propose and introduce a standard yardstick test of community detection methods.

A cross-cultural study between 17 nations was undertaken by Straus (2004) to provide some psychometric information. The study measured the validity of evidence for physical assault, physical injury, psychological aggression, sexual coercion, and negotiation of the dating relationships of 7,179 students at 33 universities in 17 countries.

In his book, Campfens (1997), aimed to give knowledge of the current situation of community development. He made a comparison between Canada, the Netherlands, and Israel from the North and Bangladesh, Ghana, and Chile from the South. His intention was to inform policy makers and others about the present state of the communities and community development.

A comparative approach was undertaken by Benewick et al. (2004) to measure how democracy was being implemented in different and varying circumstances of the urban experiments and environments of China.

Another cross country study by Weinehall et al. (2001) compared risk factor outcomes in Swedish and US intervention programmes for the prevention of cardiovascular disease (CVD), to explore how different intervention programme profiles affect outcome.

Hautekeur (2005) who calls for the revival of communities and community development, compared communities and community development in Northern and Southern Europe and the challenges these communities face. He called for the need for cross-border cooperation between these European countries on community matters.

There is a revolutionary book based on vast data (about 500,000 interviews) written by Putnam (2000), which deals with the contemporary American Community. He draws evidence about how individuals in American

communities have become increasingly disconnected from families and neighbours. Moreover he points out that involvement in clubs and voluntary association activities has collapsed in an enormous way. Putnam argues that television may be held responsible for this detachment. As a revival move, Putnam calls on local communities, neighbourhood associations, religious communities and other unions to work together to bring back America's virtue.

The famous Arabian Sociologist, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), in his famous publication *Al "Mugaddimah"* (in Arabic), introduces the concept of community and used the term "asabiyah" to described the strong relationships between the human groups making up these communities, and that this "asabiyah" exists at all levels of human civilization.

He further explained that the concept of "asabiyyah" unites at all cultural levels, but it is stronger in Bedouin communities than in city communities. Ibn Khaldun described the Bedouin communities as too small to provide employment opportunities for all its residents; because of this they have low incomes. Most of them are unable to move and live in nearby cities because they lack the required skills and resources that enable them to survive in the city. The Tunisian Community Center quotes Ibn Khaldun (1377): "What is obtained through the cooperation of a group of human beings (communities) satisfies the need of a number many times greater than themselves".

To sum up, the current community comparative studies literature dealt with varieties of topics in the medical field (Levine et al., 2001; Shulman and Adams, 2002), community development (Campfens, 1997), sense of community (Obst et al., 2002), and democracy (Benewick et al., 2004), to name a few. Some of these studies are at the cross-national level making comparisons between more than one country (Straus, 2004; Tuscisny, 2007; Son et al., 2008; Bondarenko and Korotayev, 2000). Community solidarity is dealt by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), and Putnam (2000).

Although all these cited are comparative studies, this study is different because it adds a new focus to the current literature. This study is also different because it compares two different communities in two different countries of different cultural backgrounds. This comparative

study explores a combination of things, such as how people view and feel about their local community, what socio-economic services are provided, what are the factors threatening the communities, and what are the urgent needs of the communities. In addition, by providing detailed information of these two communities, this comparative study aims to bridge the gap between communities in the North with those in the South; and between Muslim and Christian communities. In short, this community comparative study is more comprehensive than related cross-national studies.

This study aims to investigate the similarities and the differences between two small communities different in location and culture; namely Al Hayer in the United Arab Emirates, and LeMars, Iowa in the United States of America.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Residential Longevity and employment status

The results indicated that the residents of Al Hayer live longer periods of time in their community than LeMars residents. This may be due to the fact that the history of Al Hayer shows that its location is a setting for a local tribe that lived there for long periods of time. However, when it comes to employment, it was found (Figures 1a and 1b) that 45% of Al Hayer residents were employed full-time and only 0.4% were employed part-time. A similar difference between full-time and part-time employment was also seen for the LeMars residents, where 76% were full-time and only 2% are part-time. In Al Hayer, 35% of residents were retired, 18% were homemakers, 1% were students, and only 0.4% were unemployed. In LeMars, it was found that no LeMars residents were homemakers, indicating that all the women of the community were employed, unlike those of Al Hayer. The negligible proportion of students in each community might be expected since neither community includes a university or college.

When it comes to the work place, it was found that there were huge differences between Al Hayer and LeMars in places of employment; they were almost opposite to each other. It was found that only 23% of Al Hayer residents were employed in the community, but 78% of LeMars residents worked in the community. Thus 77%

of Al Hayer residents and just 22% of LeMars residents worked outside the community.

Figure 1a, Length of residence

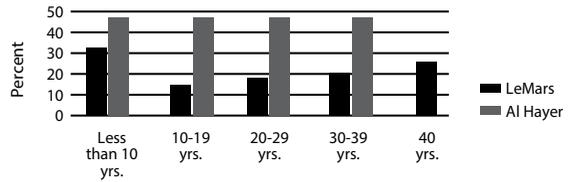
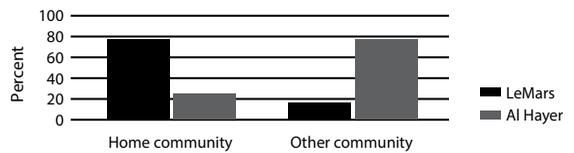


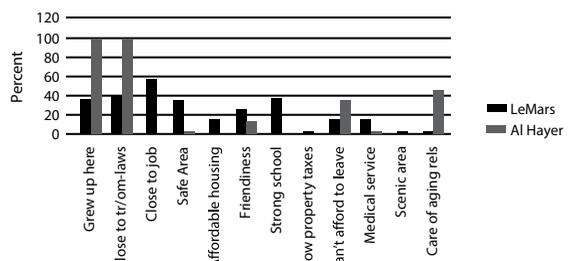
Figure 1b, Place of employment



Reasons for Living in the community

Residents were asked to select up to three major reasons - from a list of 12 - for living in their community (Figure 2). Among other reasons the list included being raised in the community, proximity to relatives, distance to job, area safety, and medical services available. For the Al Hayer residents, the most popular responses were that they grew up in the community and that they were close to relatives/in-laws, where both received a 99% response rate. Other reasons cited were care of aging relatives, not being able to afford to leave, and the presence of friends, cited in 45%, 35%, 14.3% of responses, respectively. Other reasons had very low response rates. For the LeMars residents' the biggest reasons were job proximity (59%), closeness to relatives (39%), and growing up in the area (37%).

Figure 2 Major reasons for living here

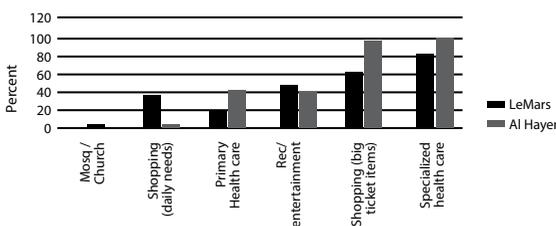


Rating selected services and facilities available in community

Six local services and facilities were listed on the questionnaire to rate each as “very good”, “good”, “fair”, “poor”, or “not available”, and residents were asked to rate selected services and facilities. Both communities gave public schools a high rating: 92% for Al Hayer and 97% for LeMars, rating them as good or very good. The same was true of medical services where Al Hayer residents rated them as 79% good or very good, and LeMars with 75% in the same class. Of Al Hayer residents, 83% rated “jobs” as good or very good; the corresponding figure was 63% for LeMars. As for the differences between the two communities, Al Hayer reported 95% good or very good ratings for housing, but only 39% of LeMars rated it as good or very good. It should be mentioned here that almost all residents in Al Hayer were given either free or financially supported housing.

As for selected services obtained primarily locally for community residents, it was found that almost all of the residents of both communities acquired their primary health care locally, but specialized health care was received locally by only a very small percentage. About 40-50% of both communities satisfied their daily shopping needs within the community; thus around half of each community got its daily shopping needs from outside the community. Nearly 100% of LeMars residents fulfilled their recreational needs locally, while in Al Hayer only about 60% acquired their entertainment locally (Figure 3).

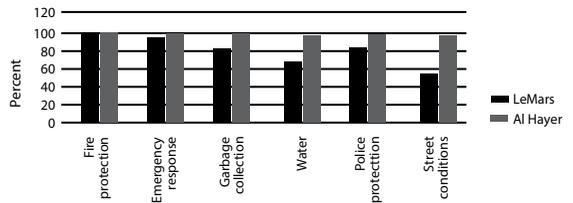
Figure 3 Mostly outside acquired selected services



Respondents were asked to rate the government services in their communities. Overall, all the government services were given a very high “good or very good” rating by all residents of both communities, showing overall satisfaction with the services. The major difference was that, while 55% of LeMars residents rated the street

conditions as good or very good, 97% of Al Hayer residents rated them good or very good.

Figure 4 Rating of government services



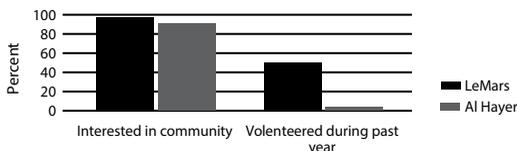
To measure relationships between the members of the communities, residents were asked about the proportion of the adults living in the community they would say they knew by name. It may be seen that a very high proportion of Al Hayer residents knew most of the adults of the community by name, had a high proportion of friends in the community, and a similarly high proportion of relatives in the community, getting 89%, 98%, 99% respectively. However, it was a very different story for the LeMars residents, showing only 21%, 64%, and 34% respectively. It would seem safe to conclude that Al Hayer residents have very strong ties with more than half the adults in the community, but for LeMars residents only the proportion of friends in the community was important.

Residents were also asked to show their concerns about the proportion of the residents of the communities who have ties with less than half of the adults in the community. Many differences were found between the two communities: in general, each community is the converse of the other. It would seem safe to conclude that residents of Al Hayer know, or are much more open, than the residents of LeMars, especially on the subject of relatives, where all of the Al Hayer residents know more than half of their relatives in the community.

Figure 5 summarizes the interests of the residents towards participation in the community. An overwhelming number of responses indicating interest in the community was found in both communities (LeMars, 95%; Al-Hayer, 92%). In sharp contrast, only 2% of the Al Hayer respondents volunteered in the community during the past year; however, the corresponding figure in LeMars was 50%. It was also found that

almost all the residents of both communities usually found someone to talk to. The same was true of the opinion that living in the community was like living with friends. Around 80% of both communities accepted racial/ethnic diversity, showing that both communities were very open and cared about each other.

Figure 5 Interest and participation in community



Community Attachment

Residents were asked to agree or disagree to a list of statements measuring their attachment to their communities. Among other things the statements included, ‘I can always count on my neighbours when I need help’, ‘every one contributes to governmental affairs’, and, ‘I can usually find some to talk to’. Figure 6a shows the distribution of residents that agreed with each of the responses about how the community responds to situations. All of those who agreed to rate community responses show a very high rating (almost 100%) of responses to the different situations stated. This would seem to indicate that the communities try to help each other and work together as a team. The presence of love and care between the residents of both communities would seem to follow.

Contrary to Figure 6a, Figure 6b reflects the distribution of those who disagreed that the community responds in different situations. For Al Hayer residents who disagreed, it was found that 18% responded that not everyone can contribute to governmental affairs; this was the most popular reason. For the LeMars residents, responses were more dispersed. Their main problem was not getting a quick response at the city office.

When it comes to community attachment, residents of the two communities were fairly similar to each other. In both communities members felt extremely attached to their communities, felt at home there, and would be sorry if they had to move out.

Figure 6a, Residents rate social features of community. Agreed respondents

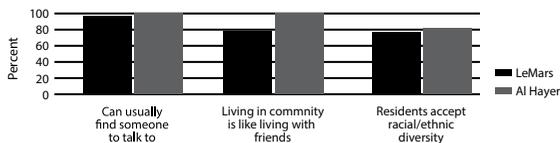
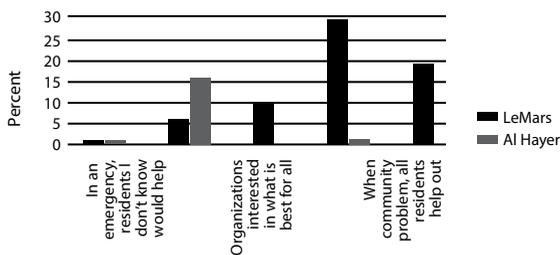


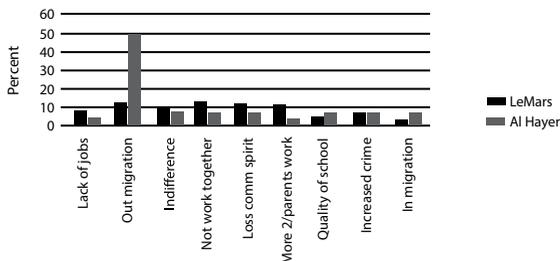
Figure 6b, Disagree residents rate to how community responds



Perceived Community Threats

Nine statements that may pose threats to the communities were listed on the questionnaire, such as lack of jobs, quality of schools, closing of small businesses, lack of leadership, people moving out of the community, and people moving into the community. Respondents from both communities were asked to indicate whether it did not threaten, somewhat threatened or severely threatened the future of their communities. It was found that the biggest threat seen by Al Hayer residents was out-migration (50%): other factors received small response rates. LeMars residents considered the severest threat to be the loss of small businesses (40%). This response did not apply to the Al Hayer residents.

Figure 7 Severe threats to community



Respondents were asked to consider their total involvement with local or outside organizations. Only 1% of Al Hayer responded ‘two’. However, it was a different story for the LeMars residents,

where the responses were distributed through all possibilities, with none and four or more being the most popular (24% for each). As for involvement with outside organizations, again only 1% of Al Hayer responded to membership in two organizations; for the LeMars residents, we can conclude that only a very small number of residents are members of any or more than one organization outside the community. When it comes to the location of the greatest amount of organizational involvement, it is clear that Al Hayer residents had very low organizational involvement where 98% responded no involvement. For the majority of the LeMars residents (52%), organizational involvement was mostly local.

CONCLUSIONS

Al Hayer and LeMars are two rural communities thousands of kilometres apart. They are located in two different continents, Al Hayer in Asia and LeMars in North America. The dominant culture in each community is different. The people of Al Hayer are from Arabian origins and speak Arabic, while LeMars people are mixed from different origins (Asia, Africa, South America), but mainly from European origins; they all speak English. The dominant religion in Al Hayer is Islam, while Christianity is the dominant religion in LeMars. In short, the two communities are geographically, environmentally, and culturally very different.

Despite these fundamental differences between the two communities, the findings have also shown a number of similarities. People in both communities have highly sentimental feelings towards their communities. Both communities appreciate the importance of having primary health care within their communities and specialized care outside. Both communities are generally satisfied with the services provided by their government. People in both communities feel that they are living in friendly, helping and caring communities, confirming the theory of "asabiyah" of Ibn Khaldun and disagreeing with Putnam (2000). Both groups showed a high degree of attachment to their communities and concern in the communities' affairs.

The findings have also shown some differences between the two communities. In the case of Al Hayer, people have lived there twice as long as

in LeMars. The people of Al Hayer believe that the major reason for living in their community is because they have grown up there (99%), while only (37%) of LeMars have grown up in the area. The people of Al Hayer have more relatives (99%); while in LeMars the figure is (34%). Another big difference is the availability of job opportunities in the community. While the LeMars community offers about 78% of job opportunities to its residents, Al Hayer offers only 23%. More working people in Al Hayer go outside their community for employment (77%) than in LeMars. Also, there was a very low percentage of employed women in Al Hayer compared to the number of women employed in LeMars. In addition, membership and voluntary organizational involvement among the people of Al Hayer is much lower than in LeMars. Finally, the major threat to the people of Al Hayer is the out-migration, while it is the loss of small business in LeMars.

The findings of this study have shown that Al Hayer is a typical rural community in the UAE. The extended family still exists; the majority of people are continuing to live in the community mainly because they grew up there; the divorce rate is low; and many other traditional values are found, reflecting the old tribal system of the people of the UAE.

At the same time the wind of change is blowing hard on the community. Lack of employment in Al Hayer is a major factor threatening its survival. Al Hayer citizens are abandoning the traditional professions that have existed in the area for generations, and are migrating outside of the community looking for new economic opportunities.

Comparing Al Hayer with LeMars, one can conclude that, despite the similarities between the two communities, there is still a big gap between them in terms of values and family construction. Additionally, all the social services in Al Hayer are provided free of charge by the government. Al Hayer is a small community in a developing nation. There have been many modern changes in the community; changes such as types of housing, new economic establishments, the kinds of social services provided. It still seems that this community needs additional work to promote its population to the standard of people in LeMars. This is due to the fact the Al Hayer community is hindered by a low level of education, a low

rate of participation in voluntary organizations, low employment opportunities, and low female participation in public life, to name a few areas. More similar comparative research is to be encouraged worldwide to enable a better understanding of the different cultures around the globe.

Apart from all these similarities and differences, the two communities are just two human settlements sharing innumerable traits and characteristics that are found in all human societies around the globe. From author observations and interviews with some community leaders, both communities reflect the fact that they want to live in peace with themselves and with others, and to live in harmony with the physical environment upon which they depend totally for their survival. If these local communities were given their choice, they would want to see no conflicts, no war, and no hatred of each other. They believe that somewhere out there is enough of everything for everybody. All they need is to stretch hands to each other, understand each other, and to find how to share what is given to them by that greatest of powers that almost all of them acknowledge.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Dr Musa Shallal is currently an associate professor in the United Arab Emirates University, Department of Sociology, where he has been affiliated since 1998. He holds a PhD in Sociology from Iowa State University and has worked with the Sudanese Government and the UNHCR, where he was awarded a copy of the Nobel Peace Prize. He is a founder of the University of Almughtaribeen in Sudan (2010), and a founder of its library (2013). He is heavily involved in Sudanese Community activities in the UAE.

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