

A Study of Public Life in Two Housing Areas in Bursa

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Abstract: In this study, two different housing areas in the urban fabric of Bursa have been analyzed for distinguishing the characteristics of public life. One of the two housing areas covered in the study is populated by lower-income groups, while higher-income groups generally live in the other; thus the chosen areas are completely different in socio-economic terms. Located in the eastern part of the city and known as Yıldırım, the first area started to develop gradually with the construction of a complex (külliye) by Sultan Yıldırım Beyazıt during the Ottoman era in late 14th century, which was surrounded with residential areas in time. With the migration Bursa attracted as an industrial city after 1950s, the population of lower-income households grew significantly in the area. The second area, Bademli, is Bursa's first suburban neighborhood populated by the houses of Bursa's upper-income population. An evaluation of the two settlement areas shows us that although better physical conditions are prevalent in Bademli, social relations are more intense in Yıldırım. In fact, research made in Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square situated in Yıldırım has shown that there are close social relations among the residents of the area, while Bademli lags behind in terms of public life.

Key words: Urban open space • Public life • Social integration • Residential area • Bursa

INTRODUCTION

In history, urban open spaces used commonly by people in cities have been centers for socialization. These spaces have provided affordances for a number of activities, which include celebrations, religious ceremonies as well as commercial and democratic events. While it is noted that public life nowadays largely takes place in a number of specific places such as shopping malls, sport halls and gyms, a number of studies claim that urban open spaces still preserve their importance in cities for ensuring human relations such as socialization, social justice, democracy and healthy life conditions and bear a significant value for public life [1-6]. The most basic examples of urban open spaces are squares, which create focal points by providing the means for a large number of people to gather. Krier, defines a square as the first urban open space that people have used. He also notes that these urban spaces, defined by groups of houses constructed around them, have provided significant control for indoor spaces and bearing a symbolic value,

they have served as a model for the construction of a number of holy places in history (monasteries, mosque yards, etc.) [7]. Another reason for houses to have historically been constructed around urban open spaces in settlements is claimed to be people's natural inclination to gather [8]. Agoras in Greek cities, the first orderly city squares, have been used for a number of cultural, commercial, legal and religious events [9]. Having served a number of different purposes throughout history, squares have preserved their existence in the urban fabric until the present by means of changes in their identity [10].

Given the demand for urban open spaces, the lack of such spaces in many cities in the world is apparent in terms of both quantity and quality. Research shows that establishing social relations is one of the basic needs of people; however, in present day cities, outdoor spaces do not always succeed in satisfying this demand. In order to understand the reasons behind this problem, one has to go back to the second half of the 20th century, when cities grew rapidly owing to the significant increase in

industrialization and the subsequent development of transportation based on automobiles [11]. With the increase in the use of automobiles, new zones consisting of low-storey houses with gardens started to develop in a number of countries. Gardens in these areas provided opportunities for private outdoor life and shared outdoor activities decreased as a result of new street design, increase in automobile traffic and the sprawl of settlements [2]. After, economic, politic, social and spatial transformation processes, which are experienced with 1980s, affects relations between urban space and urban life. New private-public spaces that appear as an alternative to open-air public spaces as well designed urban environments [12-14]. Despite of this new public space development in cities, urban open spaces still attractive places for urban life. People prefer spend of time in open spaces for too many activities such as sitting, eating, meeting, etc. In this manner, the area called Bademli covered in this study can be cited as an example for the aforementioned development as experienced in Bursa. In contrast, the district of Yıldırım has largely developed as a result of unplanned construction processes carried out by low-income migrant groups who have settled in the area in various periods. The purpose of this study is to examine the availability and quality of urban open spaces in two separate areas of Bursa with different physical, socio-cultural and economic characteristics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Urban open spaces contribute to the physical, social and economical structure of cities. Physically, allocation of outdoor spaces for pedestrian use is important in terms of environmental protection [8]. In fact, pollution created in cities by motor vehicles has become a matter of concern in recent years, given its environmentally hazardous effects and allocation of urban space for pedestrian use is viewed as an important tool for decreasing the level of pollution [15]. With the facilities they possess, urban open spaces offer an opportunity for relaxation and escape from the stress of everyday life, positively affecting people's physical and mental health. In fact, spending time outdoors is a requirement for good health [16].

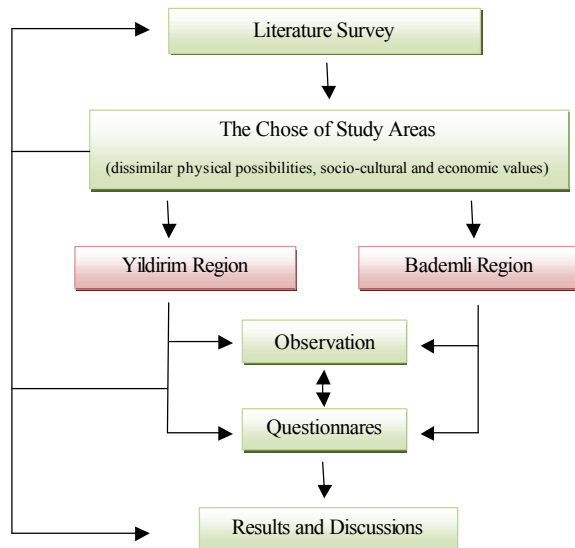
Urban open spaces also have a positive effect on the economic development of a city. Generally integrated with shopping areas, the creation of such spaces leads to new investments and a variety of business opportunities. In fact, high-quality open spaces attract the attention of

tourists and visitors, contributing to the development of tourism. With the development of pedestrian zones, many destinations can be reached without vehicles and public transportation gains more importance in this respect, ensuring economy on transportation costs. In addition, land values and property taxes rise on pedestrian spaces, increasing income within the city [8, 15].

The social importance of urban open spaces arises from the opportunity they create for different people in the community to come together and communicate regardless of their class, ethnic origins, age and gender. In fact, interaction between different groups in a city is required for the establishment of social life. In urban open spaces, people get an opportunity to explore themselves, their values and their surroundings. Serving as a platform for the discussion of different ideas, these spaces also play a political role in urban life (2). Kuntay, describes the contribution of such areas in providing opportunities for social development, regeneration and social integration [8]. In a city where open spaces are only viewed as transition spaces dominated by vehicles, the environment is usually not suitable for the development of social activities. On the other hand, cities which contain open spaces that are used by residents for a variety of purposes are described as lively.

Despite the great importance of open spaces in viability of urban life, the reduction of them in many cities is criticised. With the transition of fordist to postfordist production in the second half of the 20th century economic, social and cultural changes are experienced in urban life and the spaces of public life have begun to indicate varieties [14]. Jayne (2007) defines this transformation as a configuration of new social order based on consumption. Shopping malls, sports centers, beauty centers which are offering new usage possibilities, have become an important part of public life. At the same time, these places provide the socialization of citizens although they are not public in the base, but have become as the new mediums where public life continue its existence. For example it is stated that, in United States shopping malls have been used in public life developing with different functions for more than 50 years. Banerjee [1] defines these shopping malls as new city centers and take main street's place. Similar transformations were experienced in Turkey in 1980s. Against negative conditions owned by Turkish cities as traffic congestion, lack of pedestrian safety and lack of public parks shopping malls are begun to be preferred as a well-designed urban environments to public places [12]. In terms of public life, urban open

Table 1: The method of the study



spaces are still maintaining the attractiveness in cities. Nevertheless nowadays, the design of the outer space should be given more importance to ensure the vitality of urban life.

In this context, the aim of the study is to search the role of urban spaces in terms of social life quality in Bursa, where is the fourth largest city in Turkey and greatly affected by changes in the public life after the 1980s. In the scope of the study literature survey, observation and questionnaire methods were used. After examining literature, for acquiring findings about the research, two different districts are handled (Yıldırım and Bademli region) in Bursa that have dissimilar physical possibilities, socio-cultural and economic values. Observations and analysis have been made in study areas and some data from previously conducted survey has been used¹ (Table 1).

In Yıldırım, one of the study areas, Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square, which is used by residents as a socialization area, was chosen as a case study and questionnaires were made with the users of the square. The number of people using Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square was determined by means of observation (the number of users was identified in the morning, noon, evening and night, weekdays and weekends), the sample was chosen from the number of users and surveys were carried out with 50 people. On the other hand, because of the lack of public open spaces in Bademli, residents were interviewed in chosen housing areas to gain data. In Bademli, based on the population of the study area, the sample size was calculated as a total of 147 people². In the scope of this study, survey findings were evaluated based on the frequency distribution method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Historically, Bursa is a city that has been a home to different civilizations. Excavations in the region have revealed that the first settlements in Bursa date back to 6000 BC. Firstly named as Prusa, the city was established in 185 BC as a military base and a center for habitation and storage. After 74 BC, the city was annexed by the Roman Empire and got under the Byzantine rule starting from 395. In 1326, Bursa was conquered by the Ottomans (1). In 1339, Sultan Orhan oversaw the construction of his complex outside the city walls, which was the starting point of Bursa's development as an Ottoman city. In subsequent periods, other sultans ruling the empire had their social complexes constructed in different parts of the city and housing areas came to surround those complexes. With the construction of the Yıldırım complex 2.5 km to the east of the city by Yıldırım Beyazıt in



Fig. 1: Housing blocks to the south of the square [5]

¹ Data from the questionnaire survey conducted as a part of a postgraduate thesis has been used and are pointed as 15 and 17 in the references.

² In the chosen housing areas, for calculating the sample size over the universe, the table of Krejcie and Morgan [7] was used.



Fig. 2: A view of housing blocks to the north of the square [5]



Fig. 3: Ceremonial space and amphitheater: World Environment Day celebrations [18]



Fig. 4: General outdoor seating area [19]

the 1390s, another zone for development was added to the city [17]. Today, Yıldırım is one of the three largest central districts of Bursa. The area under study is the zone encompassing the Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square in Yıldırım.

An analysis of Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square and its surroundings, shows that the residences surrounding the area are in the form of 4-5 storey blocks of flats with commercial activities occupying the ground floors (Figures 1 and 2). In addition to houses, which can generally be characterized as architecturally unqualified, there are public buildings in the region, such as an elementary school.

The square was constructed in the reorganization process of the area, previously occupied by an industrial market which was active from 1950 to 1960, after the establishment of the Yıldırım Municipality in 1987, due to the demand for more space and urban expansion, causing the industrial area to be encompassed by the city. With a total outdoor space of approximately 21,000 m², the area consists of two zones: ceremonial space and municipal surroundings, which are connected by a pedestrian route. The part allocated for ceremonial purposes has an amphitheater, an outdoor seating area, a pool and a

playground for children (Figure 3). The other part has a general outdoor seating area with trees, a pool in front of the municipality building and a cafeteria (Figure 4).

It has been observed that Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square is used almost equally by men and women (40% of the users are men and 60% are women) and by different age groups (46% are 35 to 54 years old, 36% are 18 to 34 years old and 18% are over 55 years) (Table 2, 3). The square is located within the residential area and is generally used by people who live in the surrounding apartment blocks. It has been observed that 92% of the users live in the vicinity, whereas 8% of the users have been found to reside in other localities of Bursa.

When the residents were asked to evaluate the square, only 13% of the users indicated that they find the square sufficient in terms of climatic comfort (Table 4). It was pointed out that the pool lacks the size necessary to provide coolness and that shaded areas are insufficient. The times of the day that the square is used are as follows: evening (61%), night (22%) and afternoon (17%) (Table 5). Given the insufficient climatic comfort, the use of the square decreases at noon and afternoon during summer months. Another reason for the denser

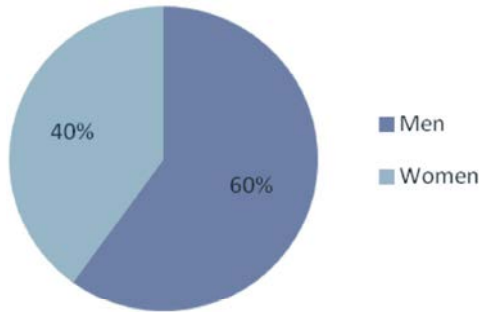


Table 2: Users of the square

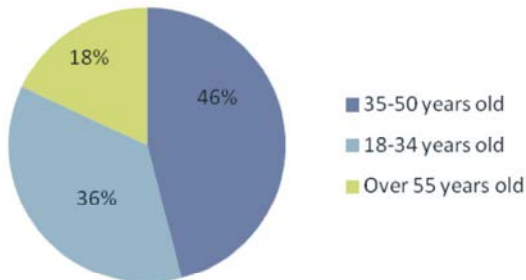


Table 3: Age groups of the users

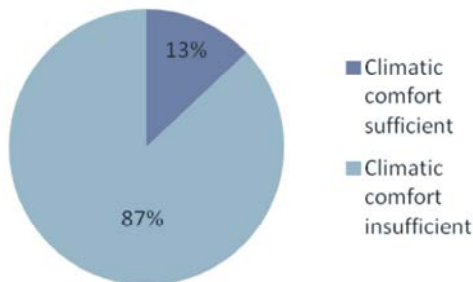


Table 4: Evaluate of climatic comfort

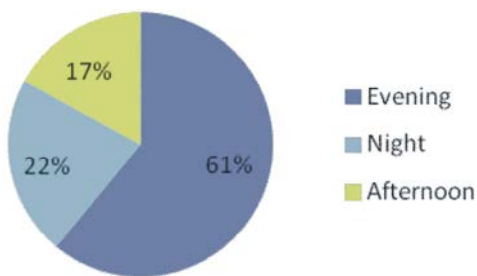


Table 5: Using times

use of the square in the evening and at night is the fact that residents of the area regularly go to work and start using the area after they return home. Due to the scarcity of shaded areas, retired people and housewives also use the square in the evening when the intensity of sunlight decreases. It has been observed that the square not only has problems during the day, but also during the night.

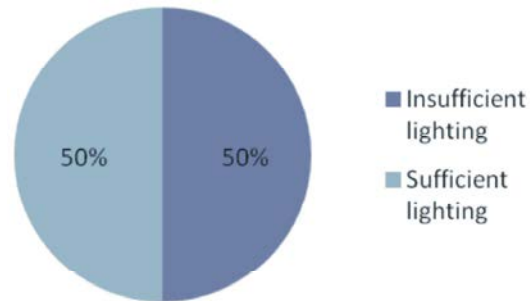


Table 6: Evaluate of lighting

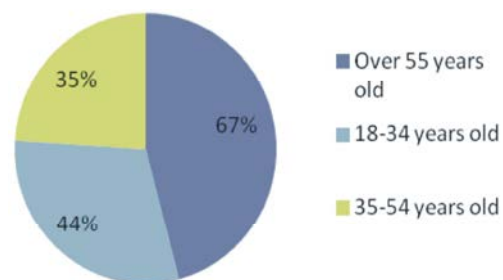


Table 7: Supplying user expectation

For example, the areas outside the main pedestrian route and the vicinity of the municipality building are poorly illuminated. In fact, 50% of the users have reported that they find the lighting insufficient (Table 6).

Although the square succeeds in fulfilling the expectations of the group over 55 years, providing opportunity for relaxation and conversation, users who are 18 to 34 years old and 35 to 54 years old expect a wider range of activities and utilization opportunities to be offered. In short, the square has been found to best match the expectations of the group aged over 55 (67%), with the groups aged from 18 to 34 (44%) and from 35 to 54 (35%) lagging behind, which means that the area fails to sufficiently satisfy the needs of all age groups (Table 7).

In spite of the deficiencies affecting daytime and nighttime use and failure to fully match the expectations of all users, the square, described as calm (80%) and beautiful (90%) is used intensively, satisfying the need for gathering and spending time outdoors in the residential area. The site has been found to be used every day at the rate of 40% and a few times in a week at the rate of 54%. The residents of the neighborhood use the square during evening and night hours for resting (37%), conversation (32%), meeting (17%), entertainment (8%), watching the surroundings and people (5%) and eating (1%) (Table 8).

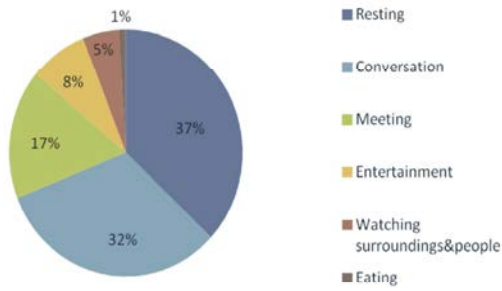


Table 8: Purpose of the square usage

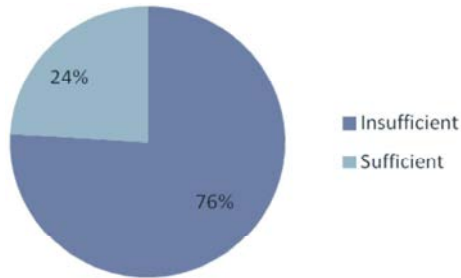


Table 9: Quantitative evaluation of urban open spaces in Bursa

The frequent use of this square in the housing area can be interpreted as an indication of the public interest and need for the use of urban open space. In fact, 76% of respondents in the survey have pointed out that such areas are insufficient in Bursa (Table 9). The indication of the insufficiencies and sources of discomfort in the square by respondents has been interpreted as familiarity of the users with the square to the extent that allows them to define its shortcomings and their sense of belonging to the place.

With economic transformations experienced since the 1980s and the effects of globalization, a new organization model has become prevalent in housing areas in Turkey, particularly in the urban residential areas populated by upper and upper middle income groups. The process experienced in Bursa was the increasing appeal of vacant homes previously occupied by upper income groups to upper middle income groups. The increase in automobile ownership brought about by developments in the automotive industry and the dense traffic, crowded streets etc. caused by the rapidly growing population, triggering the desire to move away from the city, have led upper income groups living in planned neighborhoods situated close to the city center, such as Altıparmak and Çekirge, to settle in residential areas consisting of detached houses along the Mudanya highway.



Fig. 5: A general view of Bademli [20]

The first settlement of this kind is the Bademli region located on the former Mudanya highway. Based on his belief that detached houses with gardens are necessary in Bursa, a private entrepreneur offered attractive payment conditions facilitating home acquisition in Bademli by particularly respected and influential people in Bursa, ensuring that the region would become a popular residential area. Following these developments, a number of private entrepreneurs started to construct houses on their own land, a process which increasingly gained speed in the 1990s. After 1995, construction companies started building houses in the area in addition to private entrepreneurs. At present, the development of housing areas consisting of single family detached houses continues.

Bademli has emerged as a residential area developing in a process of parcel-scale applications. Partial urban development plans were prepared for the region according to the decisions of the entrepreneurs. Lacking an integrated approach, such plans have failed to allocate public spaces such as parks and social centers, leading to the approval of the regulatory development plans which were generated in 2001 and 2006.

80% of Bademli region has been made available for construction (Figure 5). Despite the existence of services such as restaurants, hairdressers, kindergartens and groceries in the region, residents usually use the shopping units and malls located in nearby areas to meet their needs. Evaluated in terms of the quality of the urban environment, Bademli can be described as insufficient in terms of technical and social facilities. The absence of urban open spaces designed to bring together the residents of the area is an important indicator of this. Especially, the piecemeal development of the area in line with individual needs before the approval of the regulatory development plan in 2001 has caused a lot of setbacks preventing the creation of urban open spaces.

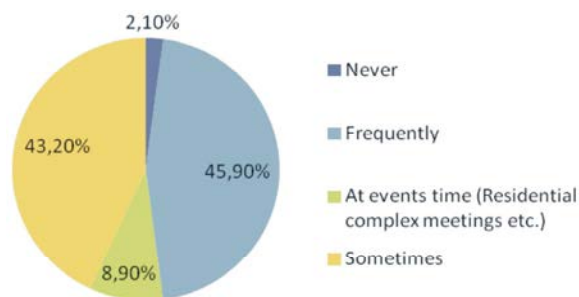


Table 10: The ratio of meeting with neighbours

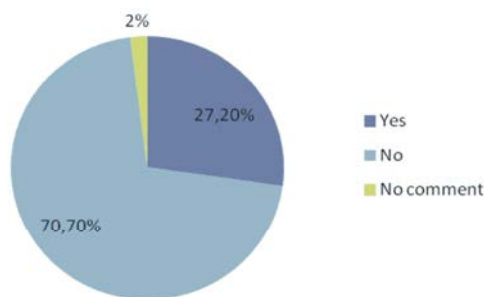


Table 11: The inconvenience of public park

The majority of the houses constructed in Bademli are located in residential complexes, an increasing number of which are defined as gated communities, surrounded by walls, with special security services controlling entrances. The inclusion of green zones into the internal spaces of gated communities prevents the creation of urban open spaces and disrupts their continuity.

Most of the homes in the area are observed to be detached or semidetached houses with gardens. When asked about the frequency of seeing their neighbors, 45.9% indicated that they see the neighbors frequently, 43.2% sometimes and 8.9% responded as seeing their neighbors only when they have to, at events such as residential complex meetings, etc (Table 10). While some of the residential complexes enjoy social facilities, families can only gather in their houses and private gardens in many other complexes due to the lack of such areas or the abolishment of previously existing ones because of redundancy. When asked about the frequency of meeting with neighbors, 100% of the residents of the housing development that has public facilities as a swimming pool, tennis courts, basketball pitches, children's playgrounds, restaurants and hairdressers responded "yes", while 82.4% of the residents of the housing development with basketball pitches, children's playgrounds and a grocery indicated that they meet with each other frequently. In another housing development, 94.1% of the residents pointed out

that they do not see their neighbors frequently because of lack of public facilities and 5.9% of them mentioned that they use their private gardens to be able to hold meetings with their neighbors. In short, evaluation of the surveys shows that urban open spaces are intensively used by residents in residential complexes where such areas are developed. Generally, the positive approach adopted by 70.7% of the residents to the idea of constructing public parks in proximity to their residential complexes and intensive use of urban open spaces inside their complexes, shows that if constructed, urban open spaces will be used to meet the need for establishing social relationships (Table 11).

CONCLUSION

In this study, the use of urban outdoor spaces and need for public life were evaluated in two different housing areas of Bursa. In Yıldırım, it was found out that Ahmet Taner Kışlalı Square which is integrated into the residential area, is intensively used by residents of surrounding houses at different times of the day, even though it is insufficient in a number of aspects in satisfying the needs of the users. Owing to this space, residents have the opportunity to establish social relations and spend time outdoors. Interviews held with the users and detailed comments obtained on the area have been interpreted to show that the square is viewed by the residents of the surrounding houses as a large shared garden, which they welcome and embrace.

The second case study, Bademli suburb, which emerged in a process lacking an integral planning approach, has seen the negligence of urban open space creation. In fact, until the completion of the regulatory development plan, the place was developed partially along zone development plans and individual requirements. In spite of these, interviews conducted with the residents have yielded positive comments on the establishment of urban open spaces. The intensive utilization of common spaces available in some of the residential complexes in Bademli can be viewed as an indicator of the tendency of the residents to use urban open spaces if created.

Referring to the opinions of users on the utilization of urban open spaces should be viewed as an important tool for increasing the quality of these spaces and preserving the vividness of public life. In order for urban spaces to contribute to public life physically, economically and socially, such spaces should not only be sufficient

quantitatively, but they should also be attractive and offer their users high quality living space. To be able to contribute to the enrichment of public life by means of urban open spaces in the future, the design of newly developed residential areas should meet the needs of urban dwellers by affording an abundant supply of activities and social relations.

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