

Full Length Research Paper

Changes in leisure and recreational preferences: A case study of Ankara

Dicle Oğuz^{1*} and Işıl Çakci²

¹Department of Landscape Architecture, Ankara University, Dişkapi 06110, Ankara, Turkey.

²Centre for Environmental Studies, Ankara University, Dişkapi 06110, Ankara, Turkey.

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Our physical environment is changing continuously under the effect of natural, cultural and economic systems which influence people's lifestyles. As lifestyles change, people's way of spending their leisure time and leisure activity preferences also change. Urban open public spaces such as parks seem to lose their popularity as shopping malls have become the new leisure centers due to the increasing need "to consume" of today's societies. Changing leisure and recreational preferences of middleclass citizens of Ankara are the focus of this study. Leisure and recreational preferences, and the factors affecting these preferences, are investigated and analyzed through questionnaires. The findings suggest that people tend to spend their leisure time indoors as their first choice, and if they prefer going out, shopping malls are the favorite places to spend their leisure time rather than open and green spaces. Multifacility, climate control and security are the most important factors that affect the preference for shopping malls. However, the increasing popularity of shopping malls may cause a decrease in the use of and importance assigned to open and green spaces, resulting in poor urban life quality. Authorities and related disciplines should define the leisure behavior patterns of the public to develop appropriate policies and strategies that would promote the quality of urban life.

Key words: Leisure, changing preferences, shopping malls, parks, Ankara.

INTRODUCTION

Change and transformation are inevitable phenomenons of life. Landscapes are formed and changed by natural and cultural dynamic forces. Changing societal values, global dependency, and decrease of local autonomy, which the European countries experienced after World War II, brought up new landscapes and life-styles (Antrop, 2005). The leisure behaviour patterns of individuals and communities depend on many factors. Although, leisure behaviour develops throughout life while adapting and renewing itself continuously (Mobily, 1987), it definitely has a strong relationship with both the lifestyles and the physical environment it occurs within. Cybriswsky (1999) summarizes common trends of contemporary life as increasing privatization of spaces that were in the public domain; surveillance of public

spaces and control of access to improve security; and the use of design themes and break connections with local history and geography.

It can be seen that, each of these issues is also experienced in the Turkish case. Transformations in life-styles and urban spaces were practiced in the republican period after 1923. The first urban public spaces of the young Turkish Republic were "public gardens" and "urban parks", in the 1930 - 1940s. These spaces have an extra importance since they exhibited the new forms of urban life and life-styles in Ankara. In the early days of the republic traditional forms of recreation were transformed through these spaces. While, people used to go to picnicking to the natural areas called "mesire" on the environs of the city, they started to use newly planned parks like Gençlik Park and Atatürk Forest Farm in the center and Çubuk Dam in the northern part of the city. Swimming and rowing in Gençlik Park, concerts in Kızılay square and cafes along the Atatürk Boulevard were all part of a conscious modernization policy. Use of the

*Corresponding author. E-mail: oguz@agri.ankara.edu.tr. Tel: +90 312 5961730. Fax: +90 312 3176467.

outdoor space by both sexes and all age groups for recreation was a big step in the use of public spaces (Uludağ, 1998; Oguz and Çulcuoğlu, 1999; Bozdoğan, 2002).

In the 1940s, radio became the new entertainment tool. The State Theater was first established in 1947 in Ankara with daytime schedules (Gültekin and Onsekiz, 2005). In the 1960s, television entered daily life as the main entertainment agent, which resulted in spending longer hours at home and a withdrawal in going movies, theaters and even visits to friends. By the 1980s, the effect of the capitalist system on daily urban life became more visible. Tea gardens were turned into taverns and restaurants were replaced by fast-food places (Gültekin and Onsekiz, 2005).

In general privatization, globalization and the communications revolution are the main issues that cause the decrease of urban public space (Tridip, 2001). Shopping malls, corporate plazas, arcades and gallerias have emerged as new leisure and recreation grounds in most parts of the world, over the last 50 years have become the new downtown (Rybczynski, 1993) and replaced the main street culture (Kowinski, 1985; Tridip, 2001). In the last two decades, the mall has become not only a centre for shopping but also, a community centre for social and recreational activities (Edmonton Journal, 2001; Ng, 2003).

After the 1980s the global market economy exerted a major impact on the urban form. Turkey has gone through a dramatic change in many aspects since the beginning of the 1980s. Following the military coup in the first half of that decade, Turkey adopted economic liberalism, which led to a sudden rise of foreign capital in the country (Erkip, 2005).

Trade centers and shopping malls rapidly became the most distinctive features of the metropolitan landscape of Turkey as well. The first malls were built in 1987 in Istanbul and in 1989 in Ankara (Erkip, 2003). Shopping malls with their own entertainment facilities have become popular leisure places of the citizens since then (Gültekin and Onsekiz, 2005). Erkip (2003) claims that "the mall as an emerging public space is turning out to be one of the most important sites for the transformation of Turkish urban life".

The question of why this new form of leisure place became so popular has been studied extensively. Besides shopping activity, the shopping mall is a meeting place attracting a wide user group (Michon and Chebat, 2002). Similar to the role of parks in history, managers think that the mall can be a melting pot for some ethnic or immigrant groups in the society or an avenue where people affirm themselves (Halter, 2000) and express their personal values by their shopping behaviour. Shoppers use the mall both for utilitarian and hedonic activities. Therefore, satisfaction from shopping is not gained just from shopping itself but also acquired through the engagement of various activities provided in the malls,

such as exercising, attending shows, having lunch, socializing with friends or even strangers, or attending a movie (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Bloch et al., 1994).

This type of shopping activity is dubbed "recreational shopping". Recreational shoppers pursue shopping as a leisure-time activity (Guiry et al., 2006; Bove et al., 2009). The recreational shopper is profiled as one who spends more time shopping even after making the intended purchase and is more likely to shop with friends (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980). Shopping for recreation for many is not driven by needs alone but also by the pleasure of discovering needs (Nash, 2007; Bove et al., 2009). A number of personal and social motives for shopping are identified: diversion from routine daily life, self-gratification, learning about new trends and ideas, physical activity, sensory stimulation, social experiences with friends, enjoying status and authority, and the pleasure of haggling (Tauber, 1972; Ng, 2002). Previous research shows, based especially on the inequalities of income distribution, the emergence of a "new rich" in the Turkish society who adopted new consumer habits and life style under the effects of global consumption patterns (Erkip, 2005). In addition, people spend longer hours in a mall for socializing, family gathering and recreation and are willing to commute to the mall from distant districts (Erkip, 2003).

Even though the new lifestyle has begun to be experienced by only a small part of the society, it is becoming more common. People are becoming more focused on "consumption". There is no doubt that changing life styles influenced by the global market economy have an important impact on leisure behaviour patterns in Turkey, as in all other parts of the world. While shopping malls are becoming the most popular leisure places, open and green spaces seem to be losing their popularity and priority.

Through the last two decades, "consumption" has become a kind of lifestyle in Turkey, especially for the middle and the upper income groups. Thus, people's leisure preferences have also come to be based on consumption. Leisure and recreational activities are becoming commodities, which can be bought or sold or consumed. According to Erkip (2003) "demand to consume more, and more distinctively, has created a new consumption style that required new consumption and leisure spaces".

A study on Ankara's green space system shows that parks covered an area of 13,627,941 m² in Ankara's eight metropolitan districts, which is 41% of the total open and green spaces (Yeşil, 2006). Yeşil's study also shows the distribution of open and green spaces of central Ankara (Figure 1). According to the data obtained from the Greater Municipality of Ankara, new parks, which cover an area of 729,912 m², were constructed in central Ankara between 2006 - 2008. Furthermore, Yeşil also compared the green space areas of central Ankara

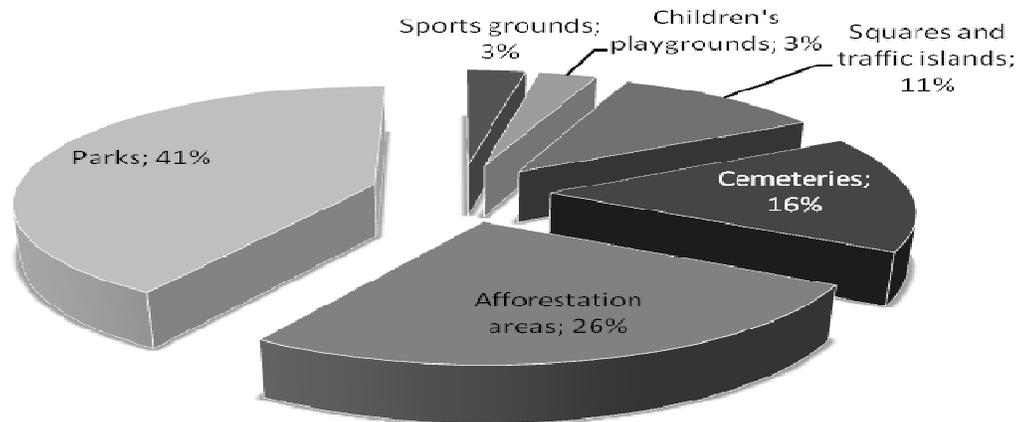


Figure 1. Distribution of open and green spaces (Yeşil, 2006).

between the years 1990 and 2000 using GIS. He concluded that, while settlement areas increased by 11%, the total green space area stayed nearly the same.

There are 22 major shopping malls in central Ankara. Half of these shopping malls have opened in the last five years. While the number of shopping malls in Ankara has increased sharply in the last few years, the Greater Municipality of Ankara has also constructed a few large-scaled parks with many facilities (e.g. sports, entertainment, and catering services) in suburban areas of Ankara. These parks seem to be attractive leisure places for local visitors. However, spending leisure time outdoors is much more difficult for citizens who reside in the city center. Besides, traffic jams and crowding, lack of public spaces for leisure activities make shopping malls a better alternative for spending their leisure time.

We examined the leisure and recreational preferences of Ankara's middleclass citizens in this paper. We focused on why the preferences have changed and the factors affecting the choice. We hypothesize that people prefer going to a shopping mall instead of to a park in their leisure time. We tried to find out which of these spaces is more widely used and the common causes behind these choices. Leisure and recreational place preferences and the factors affecting these preferences, are investigated and analyzed through questionnaires.

RESEARCH METHODS

A questionnaire survey was applied to middle class households in Ankara in order to identify the leisure and recreational preferences of participants by random sampling. The addresses of the households were provided by Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK). A total of 831 questionnaires were completed by the participants in 2007. The questionnaire consisted of 34 questions. Some questions were in multiple choice format and some were open ended. The first section of the questionnaire encompassed questions related to the information on profiles of the participants such as age, educational background and monthly income. The second section of the questionnaire were prepared to determine the leisure and recreational tendencies and preferences of the

participants, including the motivational reasons and drawbacks that influence leisure patterns.

The profile of the respondents

The survey included a total of 831 respondents who live in Ankara. 55% of the respondents were female and 45% were male. The majority of the respondents (59%) were married and 56% of the respondents had children. The demographic profile characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, findings of the questionnaire survey were presented in terms of percentages.

Leisure and recreational pattern of the participants

When participants are asked to define their leisure time, most (29%) respond that only weekends are their spare time. 24% of the participants state they only have spare time during lunch breaks and in the evenings and 19% state they only have one spare day during the week. 15% denote they have spare time all day and the rest (13%) say they are free for half of the day.

A majority of the participants (62,5%) spend their leisure time at home as their first choice. While only 3% spend their leisure time outdoors, for example going to parks, 10.9% prefer going to a shopping mall (Table 2). Data shows that 74.1% of the participants, of which 44% are women, like going to shopping malls in their leisure time (Figure 2).

When people are questioned about what they do in their leisure time, 56.7% of the participants prefer watching TV as their favorite activity in their leisure time. Other popular activities are reading (13.6%) and listening to music (8.5%). Only 5.2% of the participants prefer engaging in a sports activity and 1.8 % prefer going out for a walk (Figure 3).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants.

Demographics	Distribution (%)
Age group	
12 - 18	22
19- 30	28
31- 65	48
66 and above	2
Education level	
Literate without a diploma	2
Primary school graduate	8
Secondary school graduate	5
High school graduate	35
College/university graduate	50

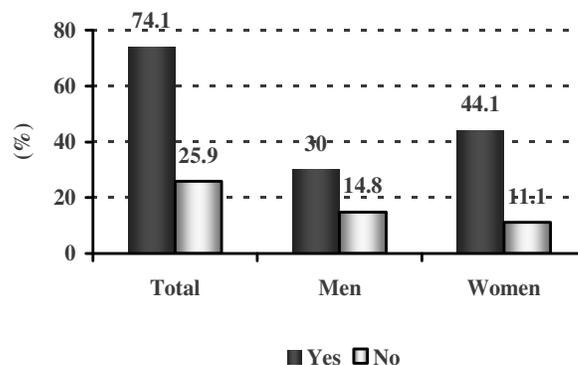
Table 2. Where participants spend their leisure time as their first choice.

Activity	Percentage (%)
Stay at home	62.5
Visiting friends	11
Going to shopping malls	10.9
Eating out	3.7
Movies	3.1
Going outdoors (parks and other public spaces)	3
Other	2.4
Engaging in a sports activity	2.2
Watching sports games	1.2
Total	100

Changes in leisure and recreational preferences of the participants

When participants are asked how their leisure behaviours changed in the last decade, 25% say they tend to go to shopping malls more in their leisure time. However, the same percentage of the participants now prefer going to parks in the suburban areas of Ankara in their leisure time. A major part of the participants (52%) stated that their leisure behaviours changed in parallel to the changes of their personal life and living environment. Figure 4 shows how the participants' leisure behaviours have changed in the last decade.

Participants were asked to identify three reasons for preference of shopping malls in the order of importance. Table 3 shows the major reasons why participants prefer going to shopping malls rather than outdoors. 68.9% of the participants responded yes to the question of whether they prefer open spaces to spend their leisure time. Women tend to prefer open spaces more than men (Figure 5). When the participants are asked to identify

**Figure 2.** Use of shopping malls in leisure time.

the type of the open space they would like to go, 27.4% of them say they prefer the closest park to home (Figure 6). Another majority (23.8%) respond that they prefer going to urban parks throughout the city. Table 4 shows the participants' opinions on what they expect from a park.

Most of the users (72.1%) stated that their living environment within the city was changing in a negative way day by day. Only 14.1% of the users were satisfied with the Municipality of Ankara's policies and work on open spaces (Figure 7).

Participants are also asked about their life styles and its effects on their use of open spaces. Only 5.7% of them, mostly women, state that they have difficulty going out because of the conservative family structure. However, 70.6% of the participants state that, they are free to use open spaces without any restrictions. Most of the participants (85.04%) like to spend their leisure time with friends and only 7% of them want to spend their leisure time on their own.

DISCUSSION

According to the results, people tend to spend their leisure time mostly indoors. Staying at home in their leisure time is their first choice rather than going out, and watching TV is stated as their favorite indoor activity. People like to rest at home, which is very common for middle class people and does not bring any extra spending. If they prefer to go out in their leisure time, shopping malls are their first choice. Here, an interesting point is that going to a shopping mall is almost the same ratio with visiting friends, which is a traditional leisure time activity with a long cultural history. This shows that going to a mall is getting to be a very common activity in Turkish society, as in all other parts of the world.

Results show that, shopping malls are preferred due to their multi-facility characteristics. Climate control is also another factor that affects leisure place preferences. This result is also supported by Lin's (2009) study, which states that the thermal environment in outdoor public

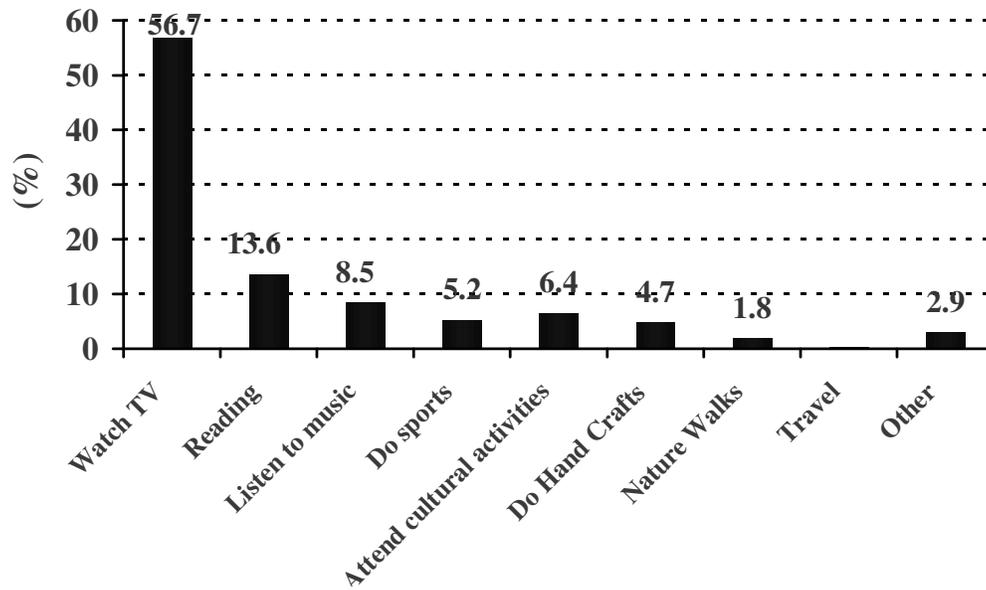


Figure 3. What people do in their leisure time.

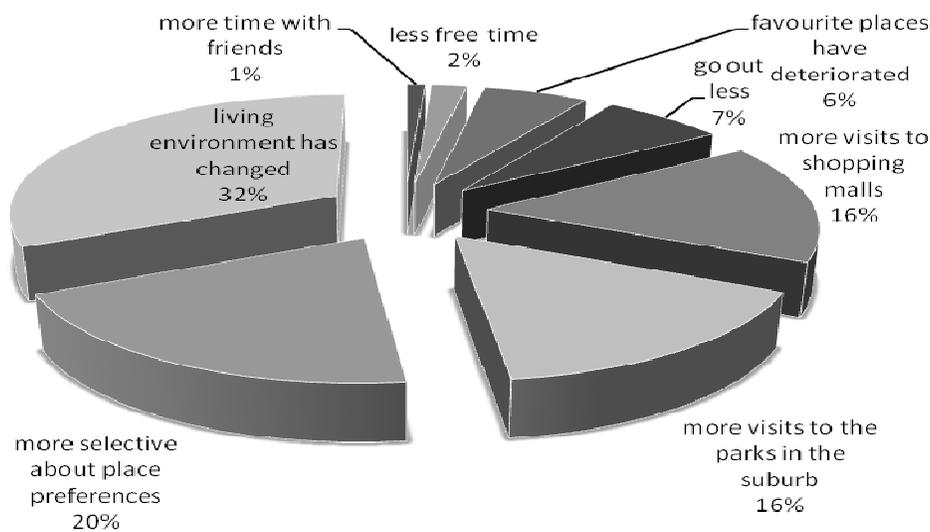


Figure 4. Changes in leisure behaviour.

Table 3. Main factors affecting the preference for shopping malls.

Reason	Percentage (%)
Various activity options in one place	43.58
Climate control	16.94
Food court facilities	17.33

spaces impacts the use. Ankara's continental climate with cold winters and dry, hot summers sometimes makes it uncomfortable for people to spend time outdoors. Shopping malls provide optimal heat conditions

which attract people throughout the year. Gender seems to be strongly related to the preference of going to shopping malls in leisure time, since most of the participants who like to spend their leisure time in shopping

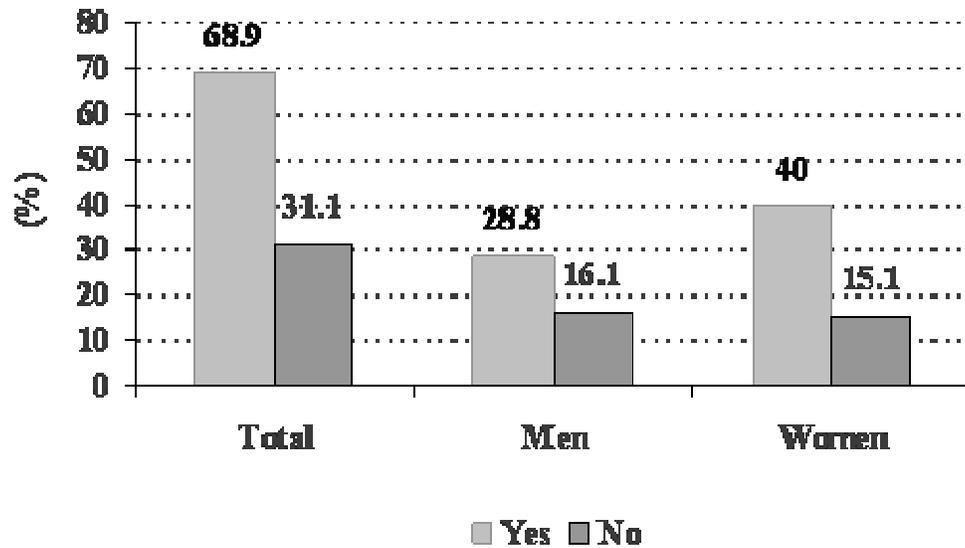


Figure 5. Use of open space in leisure time.

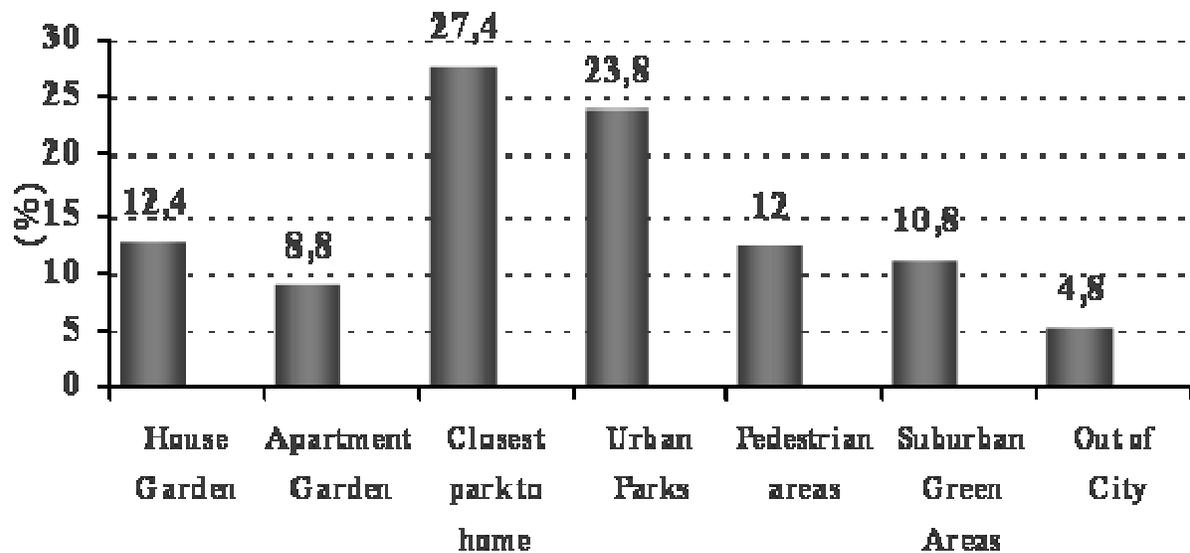


Figure 6. Use of different types of open space.

Table 4. Participants' expectations from a park.

Features and facilities	Percentage (%)
Natural areas, peace and tranquility	65.5
Sports facilities	11.4
Different activity options	5.8
Educational facilities	4.5
Cultural activities	4.3
Entertainment	3
Closeness to a shopping mall	1.2
Other	4.3

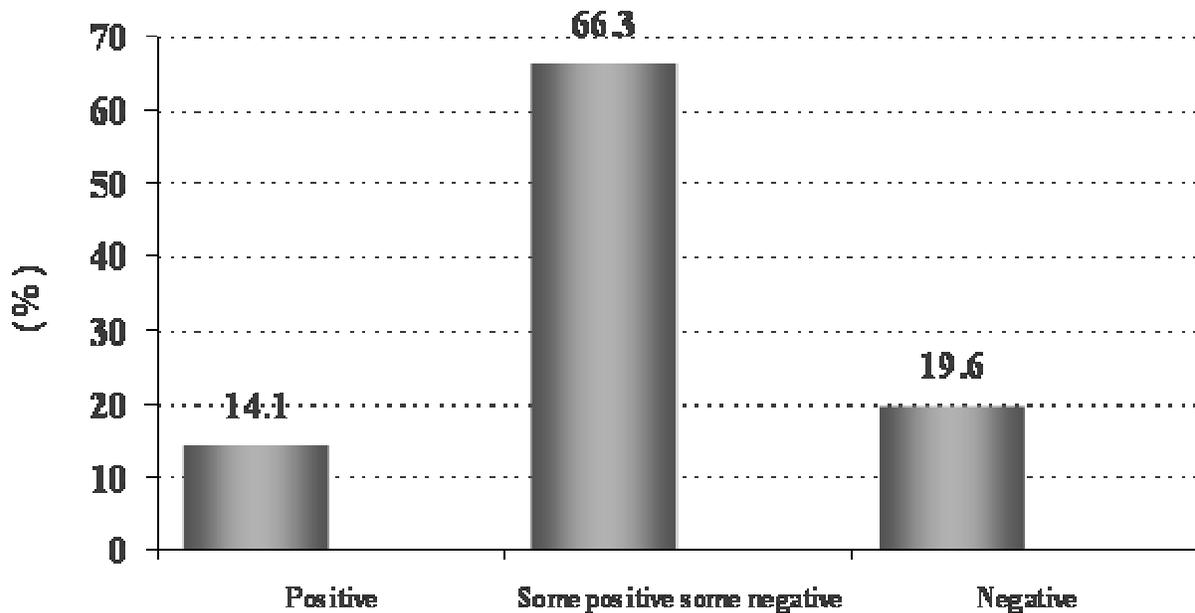


Figure 7. User satisfaction with municipality of Ankara's work.

malls are women. It may have to do with the controlled and secure atmosphere of malls compared to the outdoors, and with women's leading role of consumption in modern society (Erkip, 2003).

It is obvious that open spaces have lost some of their previous users due to the new recreational opportunities offered in shopping malls. However, there might be further possible reasons that attract people to the shopping malls other than the recreational opportunities. Crowded vehicle traffic is becoming a bigger problem day by day in Ankara. It is very difficult to find parking lots, especially, within the city centre. In contrast, shopping malls have lots of parking spaces, although, even these can sometimes fail to meet the demand, especially, at weekends. Although, participants did not mention the fact of personal security, we believe that, it is another issue that needs to be addressed. Feeling secure definitely plays an important role in place preferences. Shopping malls with their own security staff and closed-circuit TV camera systems make people feel safer.

The results show that more than the half of the participants who'd like to go to open and green spaces in their leisure time are women. That could be due to the fact that, the number of working women is lower than that of working men and women have more leisure time to spend outdoors. Also, open and green spaces welcome women with children during the day time by offering children playground opportunities.

The closest park to one's home is mostly preferred. Urban parks within the periphery of the city also attract visitors as a result of increasing mobility opportunities. Still, people from middle and lower income groups tend to

visit the closest options. The preferences for parks and other green spaces are strongly related to the fact that people need contact with natural areas. Most of the people expect tranquility and peace from parks. A discussion would be fruitful as to what extent the existing parks of Ankara provide these qualities. According to the results people have an average satisfaction with the greater municipality of Ankara's work on green spaces.

The fact that people mostly spend their leisure time with their friends may be the result of the need for social interaction. This result points to the fact that public spaces, as places for social engagement, should gain more importance in urban design and planning. Conservative lifestyles only affect very few women, with those so affected being unable to spend their leisure time outdoors alone. The families of these women are mostly immigrants from smaller towns or villages. However, the low rates of lifestyle-based restrictions on use of outdoor public spaces show that people can adapt to metropolitan lifestyles and actually alter their own.

The number of people who are engaged in physical activities such as sports in their leisure time is very low. This leads us to the conclusion that, the lifestyles of urban citizens are becoming extremely passive. Although, media, NGOs and the Ministry of Health have been emphasizing the importance of physical activity for physical and mental health in recent years, people have not yet recognized the fact. Ankara is a cosmopolitan city which has attracted lots of immigrants since the beginning of the republic. The income levels of inhabitants could vary very distinctively among the different districts of the city. This also affects leisure activity

preferences of the citizens. Unequal provision of parks and green spaces in the districts of Ankara also makes it harder to find a place for walking and exercising. There are many sports centers in Ankara which offer high quality services to their users. However, they attract mostly people from the upper-middle and upper income classes because of their expensive fees.

Conclusion

Public spaces are a very important part of the leisure experience of an individual. The opportunities offered in these places have an effect on leisure preferences. It is obvious that people have been adapting lifestyles based on more consumption, and as a result leisure and recreational activities have become commodities which can be bought, sold or consumed as mentioned above. Therefore, spending time in shopping malls has become an important aspect of leisure behaviour. But are shopping malls really public spaces? This is a controversial issue for many. Although, they are used by the public, they are privately owned and managed. Moreover, every move of the visitors is monitored and recorded by the cameras almost everywhere even though people are not aware of it. The fact that shopping malls influence people to consume more also needs to be questioned, especially, when recent the economic crisis that shook the whole world is considered.

Shopping behaviour in contemporary societies is losing its rational roots based on needs and instead becoming an indicator of social status and tool of psychological satisfaction (Birol, 2005; Baudrillard, 1997). The reflection of change in life-styles in the physical environment may result the development of many architecturally similar modern malls which result in lost landscape identities in metropolises. This is the case in many metropolises in the world as well as in Ankara. In this context, the identity of Ankara as a modern capital should also be questioned. The transformation of the cityscape from “educational and cultural capital” to “one of the biggest shopping cities” should be monitored carefully. It should be noted that there is a saturation point for the development of new shopping malls. In Ankara, while new malls are still under construction some of the previous examples have started to lose their popularity and are run down.

The emergence of shopping malls has another negative effect on people’s lifestyles. The use of shopping malls rather than the outdoors in leisure time has led to more passive lifestyles. People neglect the fact that physically active lifestyles are very important in terms of physical and mental health. Obesity, especially among children, is increasing every day in many countries in the world. People should be motivated to spend more time exercising. In this context, open and green spaces have lots to offer. They are equally accessible to everyone in a society. They do not cost anything compared to the high membership fees of sports centers. Here, another

question arises; are open and green spaces satisfactory for their users? Most people expect tranquility and peace, but they also require various activity options within a park. Security as well is an important issue. Malls in Ankara are searching for better recreation facilities and expanding their provision of activities, especially for young people and children, outdoors as well as indoors. So, the greater municipality of Ankara may adopt a similar management perspective in search of unsatisfactory points for parks and open spaces.

Finally, it is clear that leisure behaviours of the society should be well-defined and analyzed by planning and management authorities. With many advantages to urban life quality and public life, the use of open and green spaces should be promoted by developing new policies and strategies. The aim should be to regenerate the open and green space system of Ankara. The concepts of leisure and recreation should be discussed among the authorities and academic researchers, as they have not yet received the attention they need. Although, the number of leisure based research studies has increased significantly in recent years, in Turkey there are still no legal authorities and departments working on these subjects. It is time that both authorities and the public should think about the future of the open and green public spaces.

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