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SEATING AREA PREFERENCES: A CASE OF KASTAMONU CITY PARK IN KASTAMONU

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Abstract

The seating areas in urban open green areas and the activities performed in these areas are very important for the quality of life of the citizen. It is a known fact that these areas provide many benefits such as improving the sense of belonging, encouraging them to socialize, contributing to the development of urban identity, relieving the users and removing them from their stresses. Researches emphasize that the existence of static and passive activities such as waiting, sitting, reclining, resting has prepared the ground for socializing activities and that the existence of these activities increases the use and vitality of an area. The areas where there are opportunities for comfort and spatial quality with suitable access and connection to the user, providing socialization and providing opportunities for socialization, help urban people to establish relations with each other and with the city. The design of the seating areas, which are so important in the formation of social life, should be considered. With the help of this study, the use of seating areas in urban open green spaces in Kastamonu, the reasons why people prefer to use and which seating areas preferred were investigated. The study was carried out in Kastamonu Turhan Topçuođlu City Park and a survey was conducted with 100 randomly selected area users to get their opinions. 8 different activity areas and spatial elements and components that could be used for sitting purposes were determined in City Park. In order to remind the users of all seating areas and equipment in the area during the survey, the map of the different seating areas and the photographs of these seating areas were used. The results show that a number of factors are effective in realizing a quality and comfortable seating area design that will encourage socialization and require these factors to be considered in the design of these areas.

Keywords: Seating Areas, Landscape Preference, Behavioral Psychology, User Preference.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban open green areas provide a wide range of functions and tangible benefits that meet with human needs. When open urban green areas allow for social interaction, different recreational activities for individuals or groups, attracting users with spatial diversity and used by people with different age and status, these areas are known as successful and quality places (Whyte, 1980; Rivlin, 1994; Nasution and Zahrah, 2012; Düzenli and Özkan, 2016). In open urban spaces, stationary activities or the relationship

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between passive participation and socialization, the presence of spatial characteristics supporting the formation of individual and collective activities in the seating areas is important. In particular, activities such as standing, sitting, reclining, chatting, watching the passers-by, form a basis for social activities such as spending time by himself/herself (Mumcu et al., 2017). Therefore, spatial features that provide opportunities for behavior such as sitting and reclining are frequently mentioned in studies related to public life (Marcus and Francis, 1997; Francis, 2003; Gehl, 2010, 2011). Because the seating spaces in open urban green areas are presented as a successful area, there should be accessible, perceptible, socializing and functional diversity areas (Sakıcı et al., 2013). Otherwise they may lose all the benefits and values they provide.

Social activities often include static activities such as sitting, standing, waiting and watching people. (Aelbrecht, 2016; Mumcu et al., 2017; Düzenli et al., 2018). It is known that the seating spaces within the urban areas and the individual or collective activities carried out in these areas, within the difficulties of the daily life of the society, satisfy themselves the need for physical and mental resting. Being comfortable gives important effects on behavioral psychology and feeling sociable.

Space organization is important for seating areas. Organization of space, the purpose of meeting human needs and motives in order to perform activities and activities of the elements and components of the system as a system to be defined. (Gür, 1996). Briefly, it can be defined as hosting suitable situations for socializing.

In this study, what kinds of spaces the community wants to perform activities, places they prefer for this activity and the reasons to choose it, the appropriateness of the spatial elements and their components, and the appropriate areas in line with their needs has been investigated.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in the Turhan Topçuoğlu City Park located in the city center of Kastamonu in 2017 (Figure 1). This City Park consists of a total area of 24,000 square meters and the soft ground area of the area is 5,000 square meters.

Figure 1: Location of Turhan Topçuoğlu City Park in Kastamonu.



All the different spaces within the parking area were examined and 8 different activity areas and spatial elements and components that could be used for sitting purposes were determined (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Turhan Topçuoğlu City Park and spatial elements and components used for seating.



In order to evaluate the quality of the seating activity performed in the area by the user groups, a survey study was conducted with 100 field users. Survey consist of 4 parts. In the first part, it is aimed to determine demographic characteristics of the users such as gender, age and education level, and in the second part, it is aimed to reveal the order of importance of the internal and external factors affecting the users when they want to perform the sitting action. In the third part, it is determined the characteristics of the space and spatial elements and the components they perform in the existing space and whether there are suitable seating areas in the area or not, which areas they prefer and reason to choose the seating are, what kind of features they want to perform seating activity where they sit, what is spatial the items and components they use for this purpose and what they want to have a seating units are questioned. In the fourth part, how often and with whom they come to this area and how they feel after spending time in this area are examined. In order to remind the users of all seating areas and equipment in the area during the survey, the map of the different seating areas and the photographs of these seating areas were used. The results were analyzed and evaluations were made considering all these parameters.

3. RESULTS

According to the results of the survey, 57% of the respondents were women. Almost half of the participants are young people between the ages of 18-30, 33% are children and 13% are middle-aged. When it was examined in terms of education levels, it was found that almost half of them were university graduates and 39% of them were high school graduates. All demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.



Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic characteristics		%
Sex	Male	43
	Female	57
Age	< 18 (child)	33
	18-30 (teen)	48
	30-50(middleage)	13
	50 + (elderly)	6
Education Level	Middleschool	6
	Highschool	39
	University	51
	Postgraduate	4

In order to reveal the order of importance of the internal and external factors that affect them when user want to realize the sitting action, 12 different space features were determined and they were asked to give a score from 1 to 12 in order of importance (these features were ordered with the help of scoring between 1 and 12). How the users prefer to sit in a space and the total points they give to the properties of this place can be seen in Table 2. In the first five rows of the space features are examined with 896 points in the first feature in the green area under the tree sitting, with 856 points in the second feature natural fragrances (flowers, grass, soil) sitting in areas where the perception, 804 points in third place water formations (pool, pond, sea) near sitting in the areas, sitting in the fourth place with a score of 799 water, birds, leaves can hear natural sounds such as sitting and sitting in a quiet and calm area with a score of 780 emerged as a quiet area. The first five criteria that are considered in the seating equipment are comfort (80%), well-maintained (78%), comfort (71%), having a backrest (63%) and having a table (62%). Table 2 shows the space characteristics of all the preferred seating areas, and the criterias they consider important in the seating equipment.

Table 2: Preferred areas to sit in a space

Preferred Space Properties for Seating Activity	Σ point
Areas under the tree in green area	896
In areas where it can detect natural fragrances(flowers, leaf, grass, soil)	856
Areas near water (pool, pond, sea)	804
In areas where you can hear natural sounds such as water, bird, leaf sound	799
In areas that provide a quiet and calming environment	780
Refuge, high-visual areas that allow prospect	763
In areas where it is possible to see invisible	641
In areas where people can see their activities	586
In areas where natural elements dominate instead of artificial elements	545
Areas with wildlife (such as cats, dogs)	456
Mysterious, non-ordinary spaces	408
Special attractive elements, art works in areas close to	266
Criteria for sitting equipments	%
To be comfy	80
To be well-kept	78
To be comfortable	71
To have backrest	63
To have table	62
Seated surface width	16
Material type	15
To have armrest	13

In order to determine the characteristics of the space and spatial elements and components users are asked the most preferred seating areas, 45% of the users who are asked the most preferred seating areas are in the areas under the grass and trees, 22% in the special attractive areas, and 16% in the amphitheater



shaped seating steps were preferred (Table 3). When the reasons for choosing these areas were questioned, 63% of the participants were answered due to comfortable, attractive, inviting and socializing because 40% of them had the opportunity to sunbath, 39% of them had visual dominance and 38% of them had the chance to observe people. and 33% of them stated that they prefer these areas due to the beauty of the landscape. Other reasons are shown in Table 4. When asked about the spatial elements and components they would prefer to use for the purpose of seating outside the bank, 99% of the participants reported that they could prefer to sit in grass areas, 50% in steps, 15% in pots and 14% in sculpture bases.

Users reported that they opted for single row seating fittings (86%) when they came to the site alone, and two (76%) seating units when they came two people, and circular (57%) and mutual (40%) seating units when they came with a group. Other answers and percentage values are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The properties of the space and spatial elements and components they perform in the space.

Most preferred seating area	%	Seating equipment preference when they came alone	%
Sculpture base pedestals	1	Single row	86
Benches under pergolas	9	Facing each other	9
Amphitheater seating	16	Circular	2
Special attractive spaces	22	Concave	2
Circular seating units	7	Convex	1
Grass and under tree areas	45	Seating unit preferences when two people came	%
Spatial elements and components they prefer to use for seating other than bank	%	Single row	19
		Facing each other	76
Sculpture base pedestals	14	Circular	3
Stair steps	50	Concave	2
Grass areas	99	Seating unit preference when they came with group	%
Handrail edges	1	Facing each other	40
Walls	1	Circular	57
Flower pot edges	15	Concave	3

Table 4: Reasons why users prefer seating areas

Reasons to prefer seating areas	%
Comfortable, attractive, inviting and socializing.	63
Possibility of sunbathing	40
Prospect	39
Giving people a chance to observe	38
Landscape beauty	33
Feeling safe and be psychologically safe	28
To being comfortable	25
Fulfill the desire to be alone	25
To be close to road	21
High quality	9
Provides visual protection so provides refuge	8
Suitable for anthropometric measurements	6

According to the evaluation of the questions asked for the evaluation of the seating areas within the study area, 67% of the users stated that there is suitable and adequate seating area and 77% of the users preferred to do the seating activity in the green area of the park. 63% of the participants stated that the seating spaces in the area were adequate in terms of aesthetic, functional, perceptible and accessibility.

When the questions asked to evaluate the use of seating areas within the study area were evaluated, nearly half of the users came to the area several times a week, 36% of users came to the area several times a month and 46% of the participants came to the area as a group and 35% of them came as two people. The question was asked about whether they prefer the same places when they want to perform the seating activity. 45% of participants said that the choice of place changed according to the mood, and 43% of user prefer to sit in the same places. When asked whether there is a change in their mood after using the green



area, 71% of the users felt physically and psychologically comfortable and peaceful. Table 5 shows the responses of the users to the questions asked about the use of the seating areas in the park and the evaluation of the areas.

Table 5: Use of Seats in the Study Area and Evaluation of Areas

Evaluation of Use of Seats in the Study Area		%
With whom or how did you come to theseating area?	Single	19
	Two people	35
	As a group	46
Do you prefer the places you go before in the seating areas or the different places in each way?	Same places	43
	Different places	12
	Depends on my mood	45
After spending time in the seating areas, do you feel relaxed and peaceful in psychological psychological terms?	Yes	71
	No	6
	No change	23
How often do you go to seating areas in urban open green areas?	Everyday	10
	Several times a week	49
	Several times a month	36
	Several times a year	5
Evaluation of Seating Areas		%
Is there enough seating area in this city park area that suits your request?	Yes it has	67
	No it has not	33
Do you find the seating spaces adequate for aesthetic, functional, perceptible and accessibility?	Yes	63
	No	37
Which areas do you want to have seating spaces in the area?	Close to the road	9
	Close to the center	14
	In the green area	77

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In recent years, a wide range of studies have been carried out on the design criteria or spatial characteristics of urban open spaces, user and usage types; spatial characteristics of successful and unsuccessful urban areas and their relations with their environment were determined. Being part of social life meets a variety of human needs and provides various benefits to urban people. Developed social links provide psychological support to the user; it develops a sense of respect, belonging and identity and helps social integration. (Cattell et al., 2008; Düzenli et al., 2010). With the help of this study, expectations of Kastamonu citizen from the seating areas, whether they found these areas sufficient, seating area preferences, factors affecting their preferences, reasons for preference, positive effects on moods after using these areas were revealed through the case study of the Kastamonu City Park.

In this study, 8 different activity areas and seating areas which can be used for seating in the park were determined. Within 8 different areas, users preferred the under trees and grass areas and special attractive areas because of comfortable, attractive, inviting, socializing and providing prospect. With the help of this study, it was revealed that the presence of different seating areas in the park has increased the use of space and increased satisfaction. Gehl (2010; 2011) also shows that the use of seating areas in urban open green areas increases the use. Again, Burns (1997) showed that areas with different properties in a park are preferred according to different needs. Jafarifiroozabadi et al. (2020) revealed that seating area preferences in interior have changed depending on the activity.

Whyte (1980), who considers that the level of socialization is as an indicator of the success of urban open spaces, found that people tend to use the place where they have the most seating places. In the choice of seating, Lyle (1970) found that it is important to direct the seating areas towards the landscape, where there is a crowd of people, Loukaitou-Sideris (2020) revealed that facilitates social interaction and allows people to watch human activity, Mumcu et al. (2010) are presented that the seating equipment having a wide perspective (prospect) and facing people on the street is more preferred. These criteria also were at the forefront in the reasons why seating areas were preferred in our study.



When the participants perform the seating activity, perceiving the natural fragrance, having a water, hearing the natural sounds (such as water, birds, leaves) and silence-calmness are the characteristics they prefer to be in the space features, being within the green area. At the same time, users stated that they prefer grass areas, steps, pot borders and walls within the spatial elements and components that they can use other than the bench for sitting.

Spooner (2014) reveals that the problems of the seating equipment have a deterrent and restrictive effect on the seating activity in the area. Again Hadavi et al. (2015) carried out a study on the choice of space and found that the areas having seating equipments are more preferred and Chen et al. (2016) found that the space having appropriate equipment encourage to do activity in the space. As a result, the seating equipments is extremely essential. In our study, it was revealed that being comfortable, well-maintained, backed, with armrests and with table of seating equipments was important in terms of usage and also Gehl (2010) and Swart et al. (2009) also found that the seating equipments with backrest and armchair were important in realizing comfortable seating activity.

Different people want to sit in different forms, and if there will be a given enough options, each user can have a chance to choose according to his or her purpose. Thus, in order to be able to serve a variety of users, it must provide various seating areas in each location and position (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020). Seating equipments should have this diversity and avoid monotype seating. Marcus and Francis (1997) have shown that the single users of the area want to perform the seating activity in flat seats that allow natural gaps between people and do not force eye contact. In our study, the single users stated that they wanted to perform single row flat bench for seating activity. It is easy for two people to turn their heads and continue the conversation, but for the group of people, the rows of seats are not very inviting (Gehl, 2010). In this respect, also in our study, when two people arrived in the area, they preferred single row and reciprocal seating equipment, when they came together or group, more circular and reciprocal settlements were preferred. Crankshaw (2012) and Hadavi et al. (2015) suggested that clustering should be done for seating equipments to encourage chatting, while Marcus and Francis (1997) suggested that right-angled and inward-facing seating should be preferred. Jafarifiroozabadi et al. (2020) revealed that seating area preferences in interior have changed depending on the activity.

In the study, when choosing among the seating areas in the park, the participants stated that they usually chose the places they previously visited and knew or their mood and preferences are effective in seating place selection. The users stated that there are enough seating areas and units in the park, they were satisfied with these seating areas and felt good in their psychological and physical aspects after spending time in this areas. Sakici (2014) and Woolley (2003) also found that passive activities performed in the urban area were effective reaching mental health and healing. Results of these studies are similar to our study results.

Urban open spaces, park areas and seating areas are important factors in socialization and social environments, psychological and physical relaxation. In this study, even if the seating areas in the study area are seen sufficient by participants, considering the user preferences, the low amount of vegetation is considered to be an important problem in terms of planting desing.

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