

Why Use and Not Use Neighborhood Parks: Cases in Three Park-Rich Districts of Izmir

Fatma ŞENOL^{1*}, Hasan Engin DURAN² and Burcu ŞENTÜRK³

^{1,2} Department of City and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Izmir Institute of Technology,
Izmir, Turkey

³ Department of Business Administration, Ege University, Izmir, Turkey

*Corresponding author: fatmasenol@iyte.edu.tr

ⁱ This paper was presented at ICLAR 2019 Congress, İstanbul, Turkey, 23-24 August 2019.

ABSTRACT

For their well-being, all age groups are encouraged to use public green spaces (or parks). However, parks' presence in neighborhoods is not enough for dwellers' high level of uses of these public greens. Whereas most people have various conditions and reasons for using neighborhoods parks, some residents do not use these parks even in close range to their dwelling. This study aims at identifying kinds of reasons and conditions for people's use and non-use of neighborhood parks. The results can guide park design alternatives in respect to socio-demographic characteristics of neighborhoods. Based on our survey with 2127 park users and 339 non-users in three park-rich urban districts (Karşıyaka, Bornova, and Güzelbahçe) of Izmir in 2018, we investigate the reasons and conditions for park uses in relation to the respondents' age, gender and other individual characteristics and to these parks' and neighborhoods' physical and social characteristics. Study findings underline that people's park use patterns differ especially along with their age characteristics related to their gender and paid-job responsibilities and income level. While such demographic characteristics and also certain park amenities vary among three urban districts of Izmir, adolescent and senior users have contrasting park use patterns especially in the parks of residential versus commercial areas. Non-uses of parks relate to the presence of alternate open spaces (e.g., seashore and own gardens) and the concerns about parks' conditions without climate sensitive design, with stray dogs or "too much children" and also about parks without "crowd and brightness" especially for women alone there.

Keywords: Neighborhood parks, use and non-use, physical characteristics, age-gender

INTRODUCTION

It is a common sense and also based on various researches that the parks as publicly accessible green spaces with various facilities provide many benefits both to their users and also the surrounding environments especially in densely built environments. These benefits of using parks include those for mental and physical health, socialization and also related to improvement of microclimate and biodiversity in urban areas and so on [1, 2, 3]. Relatively smaller ones, neighborhood parks are located in neighborhoods or the areas mostly with dwellings. Thus, these parks are expected to be accessible to neighborhood dwellers within walking distance [4, 5]. Getting benefits from neighborhood parks is important for all, but especially for children, elderly, women with children, low income groups and those who need green spaces in close distance to home [1, 3].

Recently also related to research and policies about healthy cities, quality of life and well-being of all age groups, policy makers and disciplines in design of built and natural environment expect and encourage people to use parks [6]. Meanwhile, some residents use parks either for health related purposes or for other reasons including for getting the benefits described earlier. Also, their park uses vary along with frequency and duration of their park visits. And not every dwellers of neighbourhoods use often or at all their neighbourhood parks. In other words, they do not want to or cannot use these areas, even if they want to [7, 8].

For both use and non-use of parks, there can be various reasons and conditions. In general, a group of reasons and conditions relates to parks' physical and social characteristics either at park area or park

surroundings including the larger neighbourhood area. In other words, parks' presence in neighbourhoods is not enough for dwellers' use and high level of uses of these public greens. Other group of reasons and conditions relates to (potential) users' characteristics based on their gendered roles and responsibilities shaped by their income level, age, work status and so on (7).

Overall, this paper investigate why people use and do not use neighborhood parks. In detail, it asks (i) what kind of spatial and individual factors shape people's uses of parks and (ii) how people perceive these factors and act upon these perceptions as their use or not-use of parks. We identify the spatial factors shaping park use as the characteristics of population and built environment of the neighborhood, land use characteristics at park surrounding, and characteristics of facilities and physical design of park area. The individual factors include the users' socio-economic and demographic characteristics (age, gender, income level, marital-, parental- and job status) and also their sense of safety.

This study aims at identifying the kind of reasons and conditions for people's use and non-use of neighbourhood parks, based on our research project developed in highly used nine parks in six neighbourhoods with high number of parks in Izmir's central city. Based on our survey with 2127 park users and 339 non-users in three park-rich urban districts (Karşıyaka, Bornova, and Güzelbahçe) of Izmir in 2018, we investigate the reasons and conditions for park uses in relation to the respondents' age, gender and other individual characteristics and to these parks' and neighborhoods' physical and social characteristics.

STUDY METHOD AND SITE

This study is developed between 2016-2019 in the city of Izmir. Majority of data comes from our user surveys in nine parks and also interviews with non-users living nearby these parks in 3 neighborhood districts (in Bornova, Karşıyaka and Güzelbahçe) (Figure 1).

We chose these districts because of their relatively higher number of park areas per capita, higher percentages of children or elderly and different degrees of education level among women. Two neighborhoods in Karşıyaka and Güzelbahçe extend along the seashore, whereas the former is with relatively higher and the latter is with lower income level, population size and number of building storeys. Bornova has a major commercial area, a hospital and university area next to residential areas.

According to our field observations at all parks of these three districts, these nine parks (3 in each district) have relatively highest number of users and different kind and densities of land uses (residential, commercial, school, mosque etc.) at their nearby surrounding. Also at the park area, these parks have different kind and level of facilities and services. Güzelbahçe neighborhoods do not have any park with sport field or training areas. Moreover, two of its parks lack shade and enough number of seats. One park in each district has no playground. Moreover, Bornova's parks are bigger, Karşıyaka's one park is the biggest one, whereas Güzelbahçe's parks are relatively smaller.

In nine parks, we have surveys with 2127 users in those parks and also interviews with 339 non-park-users we met in park area or nearby public spaces and at home visits. These face-to-face studies are completed in September-October and February-June, the months with better (cooler) weather conditions for park use in Izmir. The survey questions are about the respondents' (i) use characteristics of that park (frequency, duration, with whom, activities), (ii) use habits of open public spaces in Izmir, (iii) experiences and perception about public spaces in Izmir and own neighborhood (duration, quantity, quality, safety), (iv) own household characteristics (dwelling type and location, size of household, number of workers, income level), and (v) individual characteristics (gender, age, work status, gendered care responsibilities).

FINDINGS

Characteristics of Respondents as Park Users and Non-Users

The survey respondents as park users are mostly in the age group of 30-54 and then above, whereas the non-users are majorly at the age of 35 and above. In Güzelbahçe, the percentage of old respondents are more than that in other districts (Figures 1, 2).

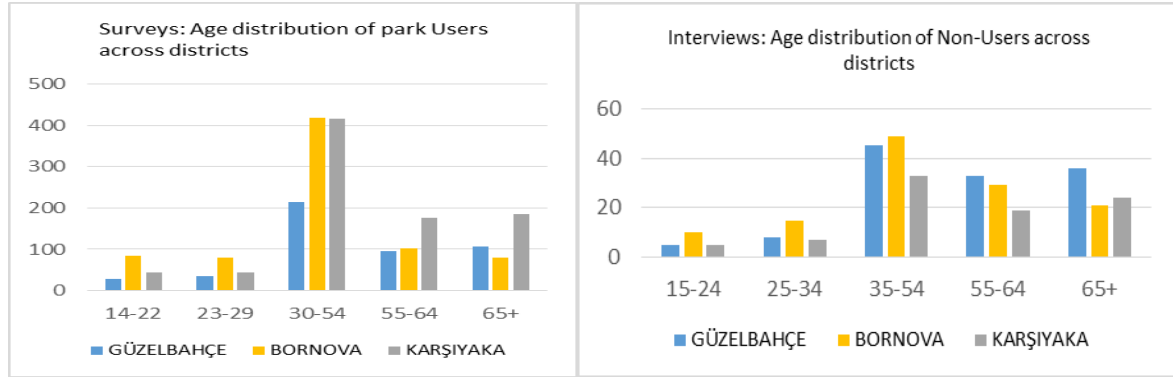


Fig. 1 & 2: Age distribution of study respondents

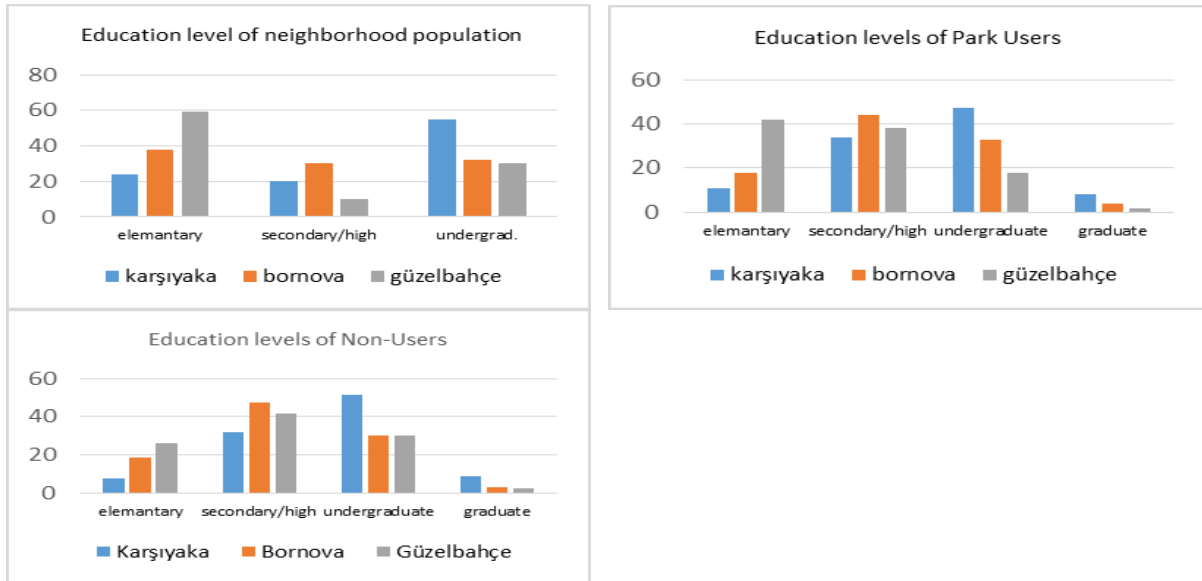


Fig. 3, 4 & 5: Education level of neighborhood population and study respondents

When we compare education level of respondents to those of neighborhood population, we see that the respondents with secondary and high school education have higher percentage and thus, more represented (Fig. 3, 4, 5).

More than a half of female respondents (especially in Güzelbahçe) are not working in a paid-job, whereas a half of men (mostly in Bornova) hold a paid-job. Nearly all among the age groups of 14-22 and 55 and above and nearly a half of the age group of 23-54 do not have a job. Among non-user respondents too, majority (124 out of 214) (esp. in Güzelbahçe) is not working (Fig. 6, 7).

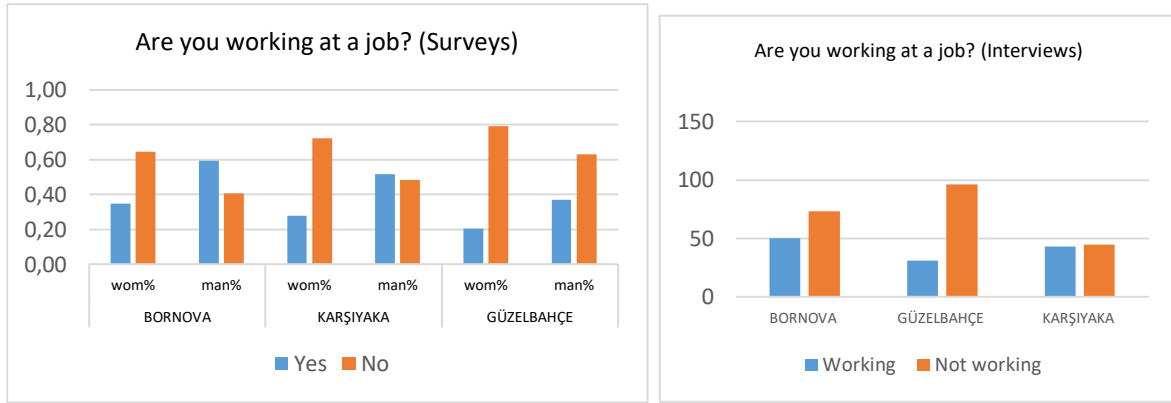


Fig. 6 & 7: Work status of study respondents

Majority of respondents live in their neighborhood for more than 10 years and in Izmir, for longer time than 20 years. Again the majority (89%) perceive Izmir as a safe city and (72%) the quality of its open spaces as “good” and above. And with more than these percentages, the majority (86%) consider their neighborhood life quality “good” and above.

Park Use Characteristics

Nearly all survey respondents use that park very often (1-3 times weekly, 56% and daily, 37%). They usually spend time in that park for 15-60 minutes every time (42% for 15-30 minutes, 31% for 31-60 minutes). Also, the majority live in 10 or less minute walking distance to the park Çoğunluk parklara azami 10 dakika yürüme mesafesinde yaşamaktadır (3-5 minute %58; 10 minute, %25).

Due to hot climate conditions and also family care responsibilities, the major time preferred by majority of respondents for park use is the afternoon and early evening hours. Most users in Güzelbahçe do not prefer the time period at noon because of hot climate conditions, whereas most users in Bornova do not prefer noon because of child users in parks and night time because of stray dogs in parks.

The most used areas in parks (Figure 8) vary according to kind of facilities and districts, rather than major gender differences. Overall, the most used areas are those for sitting (benches) and strolling (walkways) (44% & 13%) and then playgrounds (19%) and finally sport areas (8%). In three districts, the ratio of men using sitting areas is slightly higher than that of women, whereas these ratios are lower in Karşıyaka. The use of playground is higher among women in Güzelbahçe and use of sport areas is higher both among women and men in Karşıyaka. A reason for such difference is that Güzelbahçe parks do not have any sport areas and facilities and the ratio of child population is higher than other districts. In contrast, Karşıyaka with a bigger park and another one with sport field and also elderly population keen on jogging.

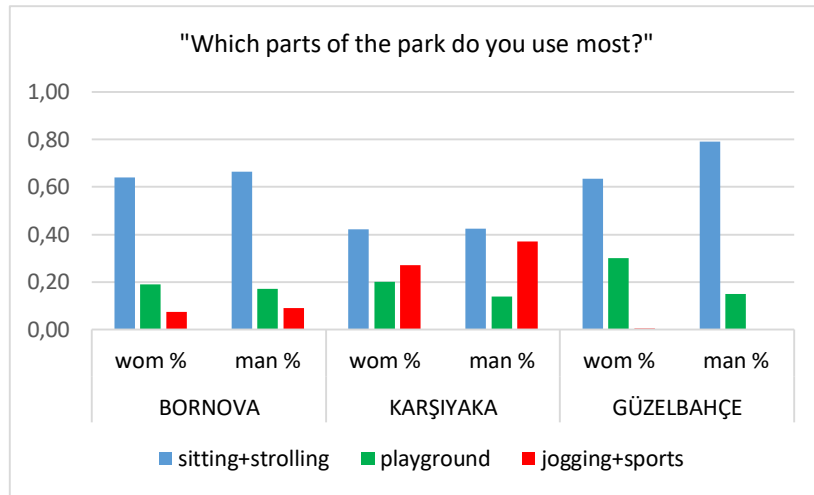


Fig. 8: The most used areas of parks according to user surveys

When evaluating the age of users and their park use, parks according to their location make more sense (Figure 9). Thus, we first compare parks in two groups according to diversity of land use at their nearby surrounding. There appear a group (3 parks in Güzelbahçe; one park in Karşıyaka and BornoVA) in residential areas and another one (Two parks from Karşıyaka and BornoVA) in commercial areas.

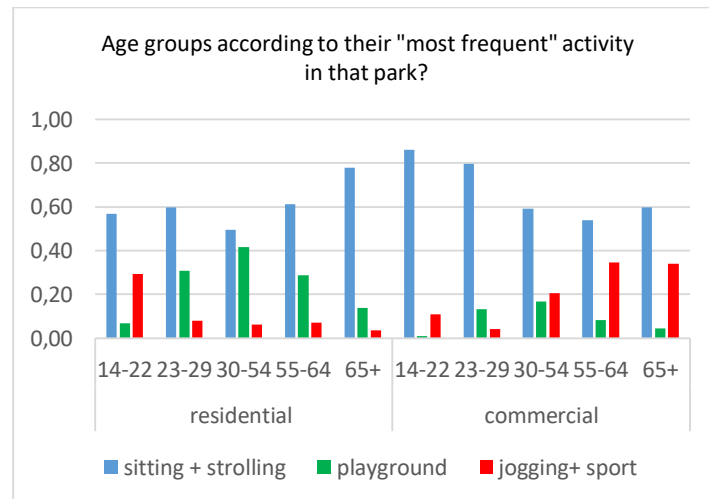


Fig.9: Parks in two groups and distribution of age groups.

There appear user profiles with different uses and activities in the parks in residential and commercial areas.

Profile 1: Majorly the age group of 14-22 use parks in residential areas for sport activities more than other users. In contrast, they (especially female users) use parks in commercial areas with their female friends majorly for sitting, whereas a third of this young grup come from outside the neighborhood. This young users and also the age group of 23-29 have the habit of visiting other open spaces in the city often (1-3 times weekly), more than other users (%65 vs. 42%).

Profile 2: A small group among those with 55 years old and above visits other open spaces in the city (%28). The age group 65 + use parks in residential areas for sitting-resting, whereas more than a half of them have tendency to visit parks in commercial areas alone and use these parks for sport activities. (Yet it does not mean they come to these parks from outside their neighborhood. Güzelbahçe does not have sport areas, whereas in Karşıyaka).

Profile 3) Middle age group (30-54) use parks in residential areas majorly for playground. A half of this age group visit these parks alone, whereas nearly all women in Güzelbahçe come to the parks with somebody.

Why not use parks

The interview results suggest that there are multiple reasons for not using the parks (Figure 10). Next to those reasons related to work and family responsibilities and using alternative open spaces, a major group of reasons is about parks' physical characteristics (either its location or lack of or quality of park facilities) or some park users.

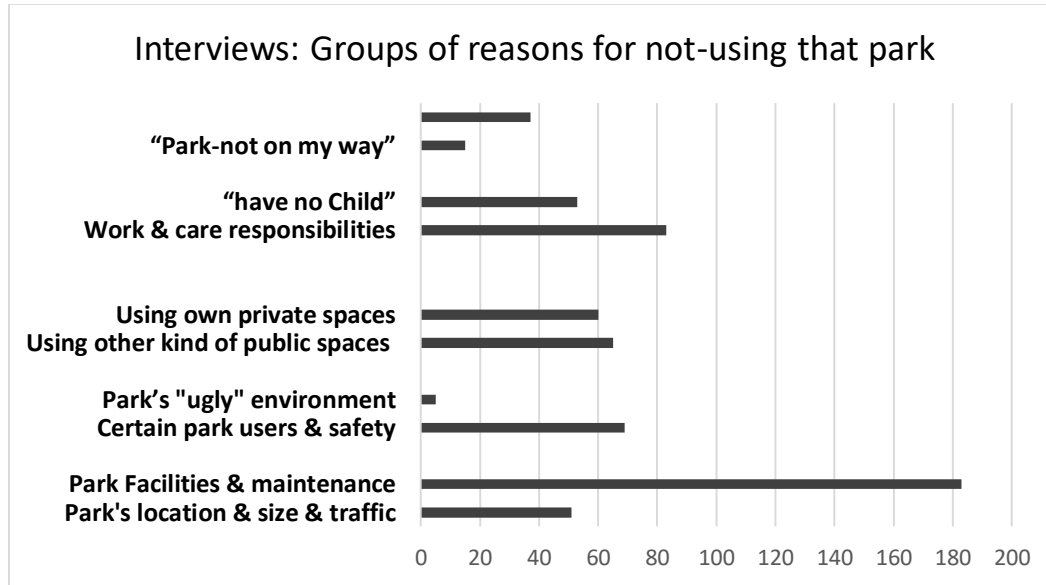


Fig.10. Interview respondents' reasons for not-using their park

CONCLUSION

Among park users in this study, there are major groups (Profiles in this study) identified usually by age. Next to middle age groups with children, elderly above 55 years old and also the age group of 14-22 are frequent park users. This case study detailed the reasons for using and not using neighborhood parks along with the study respondents' age, gender and other socio-economic characteristics. Especially for the professions dealing with planning and designing physical environment and park areas, a significant group of these reasons is important. It points out the importance of parks' location in walking distance and with 'attractive' surrounding land uses and also especially of the park facilities and maintenance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on our research project supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK (project no. 215K239)).

REFERENCES

- [1] D.A. Cohen, T.L. McKenzie, A. Sehgal, S. Williamson, D. Golinelli, & N. Lurie, "Contribution of public parks to physical activity", *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(3), (509–514), 2007
- [2] R. Kaplan, M.E. Austin & S. Kaplan, "Open space communities: resident perceptions, nature benefits and problems with terminology", *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 70, (300–12), 2004.
- [3] C. Maller, M. Townsend, A. Pryor, P. Brown & L. St. Leger, "Healthy nature healthy people, 'contact with nature' as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations", *Health Promotion International*, 21, (45–54), 2005.
- [4] B. Golcink & C.W. Thompson, "Emerging relationships between design and use of urban park

spaces”, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 94, (38–53), 2010.

[5] R. Manning & T. More, “Recreational values of public parks”, *The George Wright Forum*, 19(2), (21–29), 2002.

[6] J.L. Kent. & S. Thompson, “The three domains of urban planning for health and well-being,” *Journal of Planning Literature*, (1-18), 2014.

[7] J. Byrne & J. Wolch, “Nature race and parks: Past research future directions for Geographic Research”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 33(6), (743–765), 2009.

[8] E. Talen.& L. Anselin, "Assessing spatial equity: An evaluation of measures of accessibility to public playgrounds”, *Environment and Planning*, 30, (595 – 613), 1998.