

Contradicting parochial realms in neighborhood parks: How the park attributes shape women's park use

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Abstract

Neighborhood parks are significant green public spaces located in close social and geographical proximity to homes to maintain individual and public health. However, some people do not use the nearest parks, but those with other socio-spatial attributes that make them feel more “familiar”. This study argues that with their facilities, amenities and design, and the surrounding land uses, neighborhood parks do not only accommodate, but also define, regulate, and originate social relations among users. Thus, the design and planning of urban public spaces play a role in the emergence and maintenance of supportive and conflictual relations that lead to familiarity. The study answers two research questions: How do the park attributes shape and mediate the interpersonal relations among the park users? How do gender differences influence the parochial realms in parks? Data was collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with 33 female users of two neighborhood parks in a populous district of Izmir (Turkey). Results state that women's park visits were related to their gendered roles and responsibilities. Yet their responses point to challenges emerging from physical and social attributes of parks and park surroundings which lead to negotiations to protect their individual or group's privacy (parochial realm) in neighborhood parks. Mainly, perceived threats to women's parochial realm are men unaccompanied by child(ren), and exposure to the male gaze. The study highlights the importance of investigating these attributes of neighborhood parks for developing research and public policies to improve women's presence and perceived safety in public settings.

Keywords

Gender, Land-use design, Neighborhood park, Park design, Parochial realm.

1. Introduction

"This is a 'family' park. Not too many men come here. That is why there is nothing that women get uncomfortable. It is a comfortable family place, a place for husband and wife, a place for mother and child. This is not like Duru Park (where) the teahouses and the elderly have invaded everywhere. My house is closer to Duru Park, but I don't go there" (Woman, 50, married with three children, elementary school graduate).

Ideally, in close social and geographical proximity to homes, neighborhood parks are significant open and green public places to maintain individual and public health (Şenol & Atay Kaya, 2021). Like the case of this female respondent, however, not everybody uses the closest parks to their home. They visit parks with other socio-spatial attributes that make them feel more comfortable there. An investigation of such park attributes is essential for urban planning and design research and policies aiming to improve women's presence and perceived comfort and safety in public settings.

Designed and legally designated as urban public spaces, parks provide settings for social relations among people with varied socio-economic and demographic characteristics. They are part of the public realm, or "the world where one meets strangers" (Lofland, 1989, cited by Wessendorf, 2013; 393). This "world of strangers" contrasts the private realm with intimate relationships. Also, public spaces can be settings of multiple parochial realms that develop by a feeling of commonality among the acquaintances, or "familiar" people, in these settings (see Hunter, 1985; Lofland, 1998; Kusenbach, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2006). Thus, the parochial realms evolve through the interpersonal relations around shared interests among the strangers who become acquaintances through their "regular" presence in those settings.

Parochial realms may be by, for instance, neighbors, colleagues (Hunter, 1985), members of civil associations, and users of cafes, stores (Oldenburg, 1989), and parks (Krenichyn, 2004). Concerning the shared benefits, the literature points to people's status within the socio-economic and spatialized web of power relations. For instance,

the research about women's experiences in parks (Krenichyn, 2004), neighborhood streets (Cantek & Funda, 2003), library halls (McKenzie et al., 2006), and other public places (Day, 2000; Şenol, 2022) show that women in public settings tend to build connections with each other and exchange assistance around their gendered care responsibilities in public and private realms.

A legally "public" place can be a sociologically "parochial" space (McKenzie et al., 2006). In this study, a reconsideration of public spaces in terms of parochial realms suggests an inquiry into how the socio-spatial features of urban space affect the development of interpersonal relations in public settings. About this inquiry, more research focuses on the supportive characteristics of social relations in urban spaces. At the urban scale (e.g., Loukaitou-Sideris, 2005) and public open spaces (e.g., Whyte, 1980; Carr, et al., 1992; Giles-Corti et al., 2005), they emphasize the significance of the socio-spatial features (such as diversity of land-uses or natural and physical amenities, respectively) for creating population density or attracting more people to provide urban environments with a sense of community, comfort, and safety.

Different from the literature, this study considers both supportive and conflictual characteristics of people's daily contacts in public spaces. It explores everyday relations with a focus on gender differences in spatialized behaviors and relationships (see Şenol, 2022; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). It states that given the variety of their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, people have different expectations from public spaces, which appears with distinct spatialized behaviors and relations in these settings. Public spaces become part of claimed spaces or spaces that various social groups want to change according to their expectations and needs (Nemeth, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; Low & Smith, 2006). This paper argues that the daily relations in public spaces form multiple parochial realms with contrasting socio-cultural values and perceptions about gender identities in public space-

es. Also, recent re-urbanization processes have increased significance of public spaces as negotiated by groups with different gender, racial/ethnic, class-based, age-based, and other socio-economic characteristics. The research for park planning and design should evaluate the kind and spatial organization of park characteristics to provide public settings with less conflict among various users.

This study investigates two related research questions: How do the park attributes shape and mediate the interpersonal relations among the park users? The study examines the park attributes concerning the park amenities (for walking, resting, sitting, playing, and exercising), the kind of land uses, and the density of vehicular traffic next to the park areas. It investigates how the diversity and design of park characteristics influence the number of park users. Also, the analysis takes various users concerning their socio-economic characteristics and ways (purpose, frequency, and duration) of using parks, and thus, the variety of parochial realms in parks.

To explore the development of social relations in the parks, this paper takes “gender” as a characteristic of individuals and power relations. It asks: How do gender differences influence the parochial realms in parks? Based on biologically determined sex differences, “gender” refers to socio-culturally and politically constructed meanings of sexual identities and value systems that shape the daily experiences. One’s gender identity emerges as a part of interweaving power relations shaped by various cultural and socio-demographic characteristics (Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020; Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022). Influenced by their gender roles and responsibilities, women and men have distinct daily urban experiences with variations across cultural contexts (Day, 2000; Greed, 2007). Socio-cultural perceptions about women “outside” home and the physical design of public spaces can discourage women’s presence in urban public spaces (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022; Day, 2001). To visit and enjoy public spaces, more women deploy behavioral and spatial strategies shaped by

their gender responsibilities and public settings’ features, including the crowd, commercial activities, and bright areas with escape points (Şenol, 2022; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020).

For the study data, we had field observations of park attributes and user characteristics in 32 neighborhood parks, a user survey in four parks, and in-depth interviews with 33 women in two parks in Balçova, a populous district of Izmir (Turkey). The results show that the playgrounds, elementary schools, and daily shopping areas ease women’s regular park visits to fulfill their child and family care but also their own care responsibilities. However, teahouses with male patrons and lack of seats concerning the playground threaten the parochial realms among women most of whom have concerns about the male gaze in public spaces.

The next part gives a literature review on the factors shaping parks with multiple parochial realms and women’s presence in public spaces. After describing the study site and methodology, the study details its findings. The Discussion and the Conclusion points to policy implications for neighborhood park design and further research.

2. Neighborhood parks as designed public settings with multiple parochial realms

Close to home, neighborhood parks’ natural and physical elements provide opportunities for recreation, socialization, and relaxation, and thus, the improvement of individual and communal well-being (Ozguner, 2011; Şenol & Atay Kaya, 2021). Shaped by the physical design, amenities, and locations of parks, and the characteristics of park surroundings, parks’ socio-spatial characteristics affect the conditions for people’s getting benefits from parks (for a review see, Şenol, 2022; Parra et al., 2010). Moreover, people’s age, gender, income level, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and other characteristics shape differently their activity routines (i.e., purposes, frequency, and duration of park visits) and expectations of parks. For women with children and stay-at-home spouses, parks close to

shopping areas and schools (Greed, 2007) and with playgrounds, cafes, seating opportunities, and toilets become important settings to fulfill their care responsibilities for family, child, house, or elderly and socialize with each other (Krenichy, 2003; Şenol, 2022). For children's mental, cognitive and behavioral development, parks with playgrounds, large and open fields, and seating arrangements can provide opportunities for playing and socializing with other children and animals (Giles-Corti et al., 2005). The provision of parks nearby homes and schools can ease park access for children at young ages, encouraging children's park use and physical activity (Floyd et al., 2008). Similarly, parks in neighborhoods with shopping facilities and healthcare facilities (Parra et al., 2010) and parks with walkways, seating areas, public toilets, and eateries attract the elderly (Tinsley et al., 2002).

The legal terms and urban design and planning practices consider parks as shared spaces or public spaces in Turkey. With their location, spatial design, and management, public spaces should be accessible to (or used without any hindrances by) all of any socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Any space that welcomes the presence of certain groups while denying access to others cannot be a public space (Carr et al., 1992). The research in urban studies defines public spaces as shared settings for various encounters among "strangers," that is, individuals outside intimate (i.e., family, blood, or emotional) ties (Lofland, 1989; Carr et al., 1992; Mitchell, 2003). Lofland (1989) defines the public space as a "world of strangers" due to the diversity of city inhabitants. On the other hand, the possibility of random meetings with those strangers in public spaces can lead to positive feelings towards each other (with social support, a sense of safety, personal and communal identity) and future intentions to keep using these spaces (Carr et al., 1992; Krenichyn, 2004; Kusenbach, 2006).

In the development of public spaces as social settings, the notion of familiarity has a key role. Regular visits in the same space lead to a sense of to-

getherness and familiarity among the users (Lofland, 1998; McKenzie et al., 2006). In neighborhoods, parks, streets (Hunter, 1985; Lofland, 1998), local stores, cafes (Oldenburg, 1989), and public libraries (McKenzie et al., 2006), familiarity among regular users can encourage supportive relations around their shared benefits during their stay. Ultimately, it can form the "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989) or the "parochial realm" in these shared spaces (Hunter, 1985; Kusenbach, 2006; Lofland, 1998; McKenzie et al., 2006).

This study considers that physical and social aspects of public spaces interrelate and form public spaces as "parochial" spaces (McKenzie et al., 2006). It uses "the parochial realm" to refer to the interpersonal relations around particular common interests by public space users or those strangers who regularly visit these public places. Being in a familiar public place can encourage particularly women's sense of comfort and safety (Kusenbach, 2006; Vishwanath & Mehrotra, 2007) and development of behavioral-spatial strategies for visiting public spaces (Şenol, 2022). On the other hand, when multiple interpersonal connections develop in the same public spaces, spatial conflicts and negotiations among user groups of that space are unavoidable (Nemeth, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; Low & Smith, 2006). Next section discusses such socio-spatial conflicts that emerge regarding gender relations and women's presence in public spaces.

2.1. Women's parochial realms and conflicts in public spaces

The research about women in urban public spaces talks more about how women develop supportive relations in public spaces around their gender roles and responsibilities. Overall, traditional gendered responsibilities expect women's presence in public spaces only to fulfill their goal-oriented purposes, that is, care responsibilities for their children, family, home, or old relatives and to go to workplaces or schools (Paul, 2011; Tuncer, 2018). Additionally, women's leisure-related purposes, or "non-instrumental" activities (McKenzie, 2006), drive women to public spaces (Krenichyn,

2004; Şenol, 2022). When fulfilling their gendered responsibilities in public spaces, women also enjoy conversations with other women and deploy casual behaviors in streets, parks, public libraries, or shopping malls (Day, 1999, McKenzie et al., 2006; Cantek & Funda, 2003); Wessendorf, 2013).

However, regarding their presence in public or “outside,” women face socio-cultural restrictions that dictate certain norms about women’s appropriate public and collective behaviors, acts, outfits, places to visit, and so on. Reflecting an ideal female identity based on a womanhood as good housewives and mothers (Cantek & Funda, 2003; Day, 2001), gendered norms tell women to avoid public spaces unless they have goal-oriented purposes. In public spaces, they need some behavioral-spatial strategies to manage their presence (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022; Paul, 2011; Şenol, 2022), for instance, by downgrading femininity with their outfits and acts and emphasizing their familial roles (Tuncer, 2014). Similarly, research in Turkey shows that female neighbors use local streets, parks, and door-fronts for their gendered multi-tasking activities, such as cleaning, cooking, child care, and organizing get-togethers with neighbors (Cantek & Funda, 2003). As another strategy, women tend to visit public spaces accompanied (by their spouse, female friends, and children) (Şenol, 2022) and identify personal spaces

around some socio-cultural factors (Paul, 2011; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020; Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022).

In public spaces, both physical factors (design) and social factors (use and users) affect the fulfillment of women’s need for privacy (Al-Bishawi, 2017) and strategies for maintaining their sense of safety (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022; Şenol, 2022). At the urban scale, for instance, women use urban public spaces nearby the mixed land-use for shopping, childcare, and others to fulfill their multi-tasking gendered responsibilities. Similarly, a variety of land-use nearby urban public spaces increases the chances for women, children, and the elderly to use these spaces (Passon et al., 2008). This variety allows women to legitimize their presence in public besides those goal-oriented purposes, such as going to their workplace or school, dropping off or picking up children, or shopping (Paul, 2011; Vishwanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Also, the crowd created by the mixed land-use can act as a guardian to maintain women’s sense of safety (Vishwanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Moreover, while public spaces with multiple sites provide women more opportunities to seek for privacy with companionship, women prefer more those locations with visible and escape points (Şenol, 2022).

3. Data and methods

As the study site, Balçova (Figure 1) is a coastal district at Izmir Bay in a Mediterranean climate. It has a densely populated urban area separated from seafront by a highway to the north and surrounded by a forestry area on the hill to its south. It has 32 neighborhood parks (Figure 2).

The study has three phases each of which evolved with a decreasing number of parks. The first phase included all 32 neighborhood parks. We had field observations about park attributes and counted visitors for 30 minutes four times a week in September. We identified four parks with the highest average number of users. In the second phase, we deployed a user survey (total of 159) with an equal number of female and male adults at these four parks. Survey questions are about the

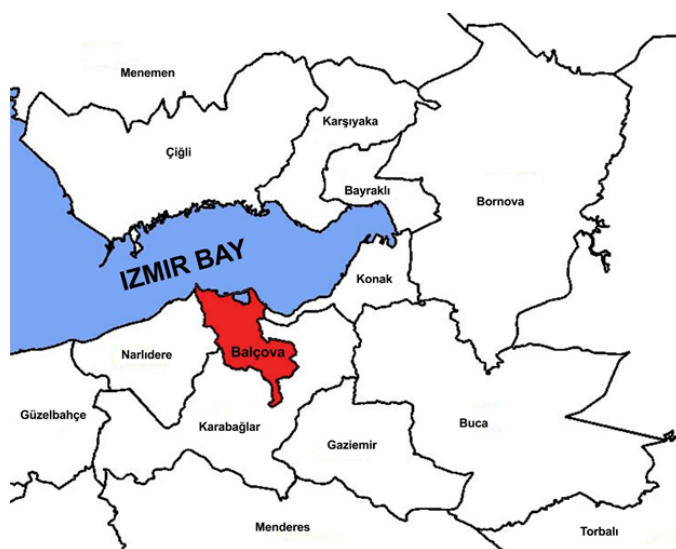


Figure 1. Location of Balçova in İzmir.

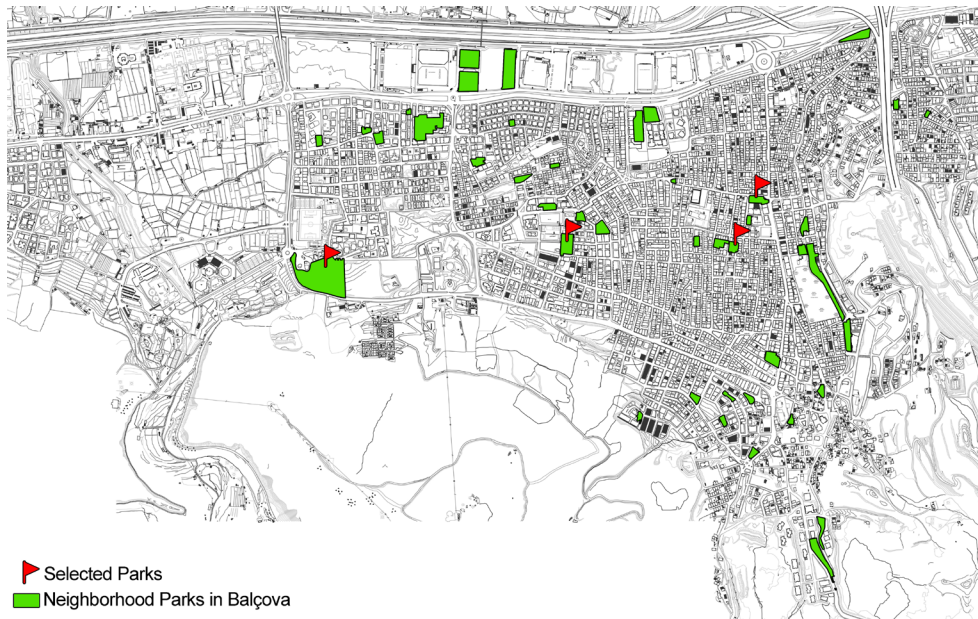


Figure 2. Neighborhood parks in Balçova (Study sites with red flag).

respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics and park usage (frequency, duration, time, and purpose of park visits). According to the survey results, we identified “regular” park users (108 of 159 respondents), or those visiting that park at least once a week and for at least 30 minutes, and the rest as “non-regulars”. Then we selected two parks with the highest and the lowest number of regular users, and a wide variety of park facilities and amenities and adjacent land-use. In the third phase, we held face-to-face interviews with 33 female users in these two parks. Interview questions focused on the respondents’ experiences with and perceptions about available park attributes and other park users.

4. Findings

4.1. Four parks and their users

With the “highest” average number of users among 32 parks, three parks are in residential areas and one is in a commercial area. All four have playgrounds and sitting areas. Ercüment Özgür Park also has sports equipment, attracting more young (15-25 age) men and middle-aged women. Muhtarlık Park has the neighborhood representative’s office building and young female and male respondents. Located next to an elementary school and a parking lot, S.Ersever Park has a playground and a café. It has a high number of female respondents above 56 years old and male and employed respondents between 26-55 ages.

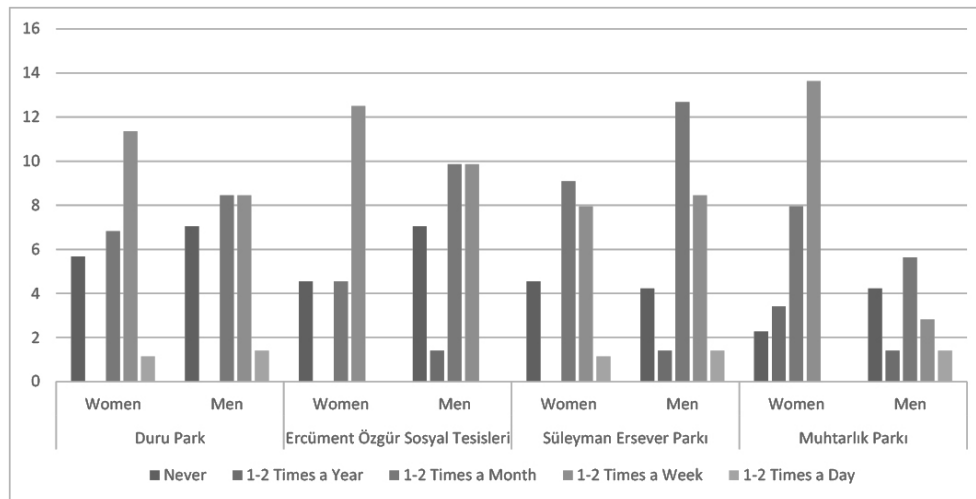


Figure 3. Number of survey respondents across four parks according to their age and gender.

Duru Park is in the commercial area of Balçova. It is next to an internet café, cafes, traditional teahouses (for men), grocery stores, a taxi rank, and a busy road. With a WC, it has the highest number of non-working male respondents over 56 and young women (15-25 years old).

According to the user survey, women between 26-55 years old and without paid jobs are everyday users (Figure 3). While women use parks between early morning and noon, male respondents prefer late afternoon and evening. The primary purposes for park visits are

childcare (44%), leisure (25%), and socialization (19%). Female respondents come to these parks with their children or female friends, whereas a quarter of male respondents visit alone.

More female respondents (43%) encounter negative experiences in parks than men (23%). As the reason for not using parks, men report the factors concerning park design and their lack of time. Women show their family responsibilities, their “social pressure,” and their sense of discomfort due to other users.

4.2. Two parks with regular users, park amenities, and surrounding land uses

Of the four parks, S.Ersever Park and Duru Park have the highest and the lowest number of regular users (21 and 9, respectively). Both parks have a high variety of park facilities and amenities (Figure 4 and Table 1), although Duru Park is smaller (1103 m²) than S.Ersever (2271 m²).

Duru Park provides two main groups of seating opportunities. Next to a pool at the center area and shading elements, it has benches occupied more by the elderly and teahouses’ male patrons. The shading element over the seats protects from the sun but not rain. The playground has two benches (Figure 5). The trees around the playground fail to create any shade for these benches.

Adjacent to Duru Park, the variety of land uses shape park user profile. More park users are older men spending time in the teahouses, young boys using internet café, or local shoppers resting for short durations. During



Figure 4. Duru Park on a spring day & Suleyman Ersever Park when the school is open.

Table 1. Characteristics of selected parks for interviews.

	Duru Park	Suleyman Ersever Park
Number of Regular Park Users:	Lowest Number of Regular Users (12 users)	Highest Number of Regular Users (28 users)
Satisfaction Level of Regular Park Users:	Lowest Level of Satisfaction among Regular Users	Highest Level of Satisfaction among Regular Users
Surrounding Environment:	Commercial activities & dense traffic	Residential & education buildings & low traffic
Park Area	1103 m ²	2271 m ²
Provided Park Amenities:	* Playground, * Café (Food Kiosks) * Toilets * Seating units * Water elements	* Playground, * Café (Tea, coffee etc.) * Toilets * Seating units & tables * Water elements

warm days, teahouses' patrons shift these stores' tables and chairs to the park area. With its playground and toilet facilities, Duru Park attracts women with children too.

The surrounding of S.Ersever Park has an elementary school and more houses. Parents of young students are regular users of this park that has a café run by a private enterprise. Although this park has big trees with large shadows, the seating areas have no shade (Figure 6). It has an ornamental pool

with sections. During our field observations, the pool was empty and public toilets were locked or out of service.

With similar characteristics in their equipment, floor materials, and sizes (Figure 7), the playgrounds in the two parks lack shading and instruments for climate protection. Interestingly, S.Ersever Park has walls separating the playground from the street without a significant vehicular traffic, whereas Duru Park has no physical separation from the surrounding busy roads.



Figure 5. Duru Park seating areas.



Figure 6. Suleyman Ersever Park seating area.



Figure 7. Duru Park playground & Suleyman Ersever Park playground.

4.3. Women's parochial realms in parks around their gendered care responsibilities

Of 33 women interviewed, those in S.Ersever Park have a higher education level than those in Duru Park (Table 2). Most respondents in S.Ersever Park are housewives. In Duru Park, more than half of those (9 out of 15) have paid jobs. All respondents are married with children, except three at Duru and one at S.Ersever Park. The average age of respondents at Duru and S.Ersever Park is 36 and 41.

For all mothers in both parks, their childcare responsibilities initially drove them to parks. They feel an obligation to visit parks as part of their motherhood responsibilities. A middle-aged woman expressed this sense of duty:

"As our lives are based on the needs of our children, there is not much that we can do for ourselves." (38 years old, married with two children)

Table 2. Survey participants' profile.

DURU PARK				
Age	Education	Work Status	Child	Marital Status
28	High School	Housewife	1	Married
43	High School	Housewife	3	Married
50	No answer given	Housewife	3	Married
27	University	Housewife	1	Married
34	High School	Housewife	2	Married
37	No answer given	Housewife	1	Married
42	High School	Accountant	2	Married
51	University	Accountant	0	Widow
29	PhD	Landscape Arch.	0	Single
26	PhD	Research Assist.	0	Single
26	No answer given	Sales Clerk	1	Married
50	Elementary School	Shop Keeper	4	Married
30	Graduate Degree	Teacher	1	Married
35	No answer given	Working	1	Married
30	No answer given	Working	1	Married
SULEYMAN ERSEVER PARK				
Age	Education	Work	Child	Marital Status
28	High School	Housewife	1	Married
38	High School	Housewife	2	Married
42	High School	Housewife	2	Married
38	High School	Housewife	1	Married
55	Elementary School	Housewife	3	Married
53	Elementary School	Housewife	1	Married
42	High School	Housewife	1	Married
40	High School	Housewife	2	Married
45	Middle School	Housewife	2	Married
32	No answer given	Housewife	1	Married
46	University	Retired	3	Married
26	University	Teacher	0	Single
35	High School	Operator	1	Married
40	Middle School	Working	1	Married
55	University	Working	1	Married

These parks have become playgrounds within walking distance of these mothers' homes or workplaces. However, they are not necessarily the nearest locations to be a playground. Some respondents did not choose their house yard as the playground. They explain their choice of parks concerning their perception of parks as a socialization setting for their children but also themselves. Two middle-aged mothers in S.Ersever Park expressed this reasoning:

"House yard is different from a park. I take my children to parks so that they can socialize and have friends. Since there are no neighbor relations these days, it is also easier for me to meet with new people in parks." (38 years old, married with two children)

"Both children and I enjoy more freedom in the park. I don't have to justify my presence to anyone there." (40, married with one child)

As another reason, these talks express these non-working mothers' discomfort with the gaze at their homeplace concerned about women "going outside." When they show their childcare responsibility as a reason for their park visit, they use this also a strategy to escape from this patriarchal gaze and to socialize in parks. Women's shopping activity is another tool to justify women's park visits. In Duru Park, a young mother talks about her and other working mothers' gender responsibilities as a continuous work shifting across public and private settings. Thus, she explains her park visit with her goal-oriented, rather than recreational, purposes:

"Usually, women work (at their job), then go home and continue working there. I should be at the workplace at this time of the day, but today I got out early. I should have stayed home and prepared dinner, but I needed to do some shopping. When we got outside, my daughter started crying to go to the park. That is why we are here now." (26, married with one child)

Shopping areas or an elementary school next to these two parks facilitate women's goal-oriented purposes and, thus, the social acceptance of their park visits. After accompanying children to the school next to S.Ersever Park, non-working mothers sometimes spend time here until school recess.

Their daily park visits help them to have collaborative relations with each other around childcare responsibilities:

“The most important thing is the comfort of children. That’s why we are (in this park). We stay here during recess times to see if they have eaten well. It would have been harder to go home and come back every day. (...) If I can’t come to the park, I call a friend (in the park) and ask her to take care of my child. While she brings my child to the park, I finish my daily errands.” (40, married with one child)

After school time, mothers and children stay in this park for a while. Before and after school, the “park time with other mothers” has become an event organizing non-working mothers’ daily tasks:

“We stay in the park for at least an hour or two. We arrange our daily errands accordingly. We wake up early, and until school time, we finish most of our house chores. Coming here is also an opportunity for us to breathe.” (42, married with two children)

As children grow up, women seeking a parochial realm in parks have multiple paths. Some mothers of adolescents continue visiting their parks and meeting friends who are mothers with younger children. Or when the playgrounds lose appeal as children grow, mothers put effort into entertaining their children in that park or seek other parks with amenities suited more to their children’s needs.

4.4. Park attributes shaping the threats and conflicts around women’s parochial realms in parks

Located next to an elementary school in a residential area, S.Ersever Park has a large surface with tables and benches. Mothers come here in groups of 6 to 7 people, bring food and spend hours here. Duru Park, with a smaller coverage and in a commercial area, has more working women who visit here for the playground and shops nearby, and more men usually patrons of teahouses and an internet café. Both parks have problems with safety and hygiene conditions, limited seats, small playground areas, and a lack of climate-sensitive park design. According to female respondents, while some of these park attributes trigger spatialized social conflicts in two parks, such

conflicts threaten women’s supportive parochial realms, especially in Duru Park, detailed in this section.

4.4.1. How certain stores affect women’s seeking for privacy in parks

More in Duru Park, women express their discomfort in the parks due to “too many men” around. They describe the neighborhood park as a “family territory” designed for the needs of women and children and welcome the presence of men in parks only under certain conditions. In the case of S.Ersever Park, they welcome only male visitors who are fathers accompanying their children and do not deploy acts of “gazing” in the park. Still, these women seem to act as a “park watch” group over the “outsiders” or the male threat and keep this park as their “family” territory:

“(In the park) We have male parents (...) and male teachers. There is a family environment in this park. Everyone knows each other. We know who comes here for what purpose. We can recognize an outsider immediately.” (40, married with one child)

“As long as men bring their children to the park, it is fine with us. However, when they come here to spend alone time in the park, it may unavoidably cause a problem. (...) There is a look, and there is a look (by men). If they annoy us with their gaze, it may create a problem.” (42, married with two children)

The quotation “there is a look, there is a look” indicates these women’s perception of the male gaze (over women) as a threat in public spaces. The male gaze as the threat to women’s comfort in public settings appears to be more immediate for some women in Duru Park particularly due to the surrounding land uses. When maintaining their sense of safety, a few women show the high levels of pedestrian activity around Duru Park as a good sign. However, the presence of particularly teahouses and internet cafes only with male patrons seems to discourage more women’s sense of safety and comfort here, as expressed in the interviewees:

“Duru Park is more like the courtyard of the tea houses, food kiosks, and internet cafes.” (29, single, landscape architect)

“Existence of too many men in Duru Park is the only thing that worries me. I

can't spend time there comfortably. The park and teahouses are too involved with each other." (40, married with two children)

More male users in Duru Park are the elderly who use the park daily from early morning to evening hours. A young mother describes these men as retirees "without any place to go" but the park:

"(Of these retired men,) wives kick their husbands out of the house so that they can run their house chores comfortably. So these men come to park." (34, married with two children)

Due to these older men's long stay in Duru Park, some rumors appear unavoidably about how these men gaze at women sitting at park benches:

"(Men in the park) gaze a lot, especially the older men. I heard that a woman was sitting, and an older man came and asked her if she was a widow or not, and then (he) proposed (to her). These men should go and sit in teahouses. Why do they sit in the park and occupy our space?" (53, married with one child)

None of the women experienced any threatening incident involving men in Duru Park. Still, this and similar hearsays support women's sense of discomfort about being outnumbered by men "all over the park." Some women relate their privacy concerns in Duru Park to parks characteristics with small coverage and limited seats.

"I haven't witnessed any incident. However, the male gaze is disturbing. There is not enough seating. I can't spend as long time as I want in Duru Park as in S.Ersever Park." (53, married with one child)

"No, there is no one disturbing us. However, (men) are everywhere. They use the park more than we do. I was going to sit there (the seat next to the playground), but I couldn't. A man was sitting there." (34, married with two children)

Only a few old women perceive the teahouses around Duru Park and the café in S.Ersever Park as an informal guard keeping female park users safe from threats by "strangers."

4.4.2. Social conflicts around the seating areas in parks

When expressing their discomfort in parks, women complain more about the seats' characteristics: Seats are

few in number, used by "others," and have no shade and climate-sensitive materials. Women detail this complaint with references to where they sit, talk, and chat, particularly when their children are in the playground. For instance, especially in Duru Park, the limited number of seats has created a quiet battle between mothers and older women claiming the playground area:

"In Duru Park, there is no space left for children. Sometimes it isn't easy to monitor our children in this crowd. Sometimes old ladies put a table right in the playground to sit and chat. (Playground) is not a place for them to chat." (34, married with two children)

The spatial layout of benches in Duru Park is another matter of this complaint. Women ask for alternative designs that could allow women in groups to chat, study, do handcrafts, and have picnics or birthday events there:

"They put the benches in military order. The benches are too close to each other and fixed. Two rows of benches are looking face to face. Every time I walk between these rows, this layout gives me the feeling that all eyes are on me. It does not allow me to move according to what I like. So if I come here in a group of 3 or 4 people, we cannot chat properly." (26, single)

Similarly, S.Ersever Park has limited seats. Areas next to the playground, and the café in the park offers chairs and tables but only for customers. Also, some respondents criticize the café's putting furniture outside the café as an act of turning the park into a customer-oriented space and, thus, invading this public space and their fulfillment of childcare responsibilities there:

"All the tables next to the playground belong to the café. When you sit here, they make you buy something and spend money. But I have to sit there for watching my child in the playground. Otherwise, I have to sit on a (public) bench away from the playground." (42, married with two children)

Respondents in Duru Park have similar concerns about the "invasion" of this public setting by the teahouses. A woman identifies how this spatial invasion caused multiple threats to her sense of comfort and opportunities to build ties with other women in this park:

“Municipality designed a lawn as part of this park. But we can’t use it because the teahouses invaded that part (by putting) tables and chairs. Also, with tables, they block the park entrance. To pass by, I must walk through all those (men). If this is a park, I should be able to benefit from the green and walk comfortably. I don’t want to spend money on teahouses. Even if I can afford it, my friend cannot! Then I lose my friend.” (50, married with three children)

5. Discussion

This study investigates how the park attributes shape multiple parochial realms in parks. Its consideration of simultaneous park characteristics at the urban and park scales (respectively, parks’ amenities, facilities, and design and the surrounding land use) contributes to the growing park research. Based on the perspectives of female users, it highlights those park attributes that influence supportive and conflicting relations in parks concerning gendered identities. Thus, the study contributes also to urban and gender studies.

Study results overall confirm that specific park attributes attract different groups and shape how female users develop daily relations that continuously negotiate women’s presence in public spaces. Accordingly, our survey results with female and male respondents show that the primary purposes for park visits are childcare, leisure, and socialization. However, various park characteristics attract different age groups of women and men (Parra et al., 2010). Mothers between 26-55 years old, housewives, and working women are typical users of the parks with playgrounds nearby schools or stores, thus, with the characteristics assisting with women’s traditional gender roles (Parra et al., 2010; Min and Lee, 2006). While a quarter of men visit these parks alone, most women visit accompanied by their children or female friend, a precautionary strategy by women for maintaining their sense of safety in public spaces (Şenol, 2022; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020).

As a contribution to the literature, the interviews with women in two selected parks detail how the gendered and park-related conditions inter-

weave with each other and shape women’s ways of building parochial realms in parks. Accordingly, married with children, most respondents in Duru Park are working women and, in S.Ersever Park, housewives. Despite this difference determining their available daytime, most women come to parks to fulfill their child, home, and family care responsibilities with the help of a playground at both parks, the school next to S.Ersever Park, and shops nearby Duru Park. Thus, like going to the workplace or school, women’s park visits have (gendered) goal-oriented purposes that socially legitimize women’s presence in public (Paul, 2011; Tuncer, 2014). Women’s performance of their care responsibilities in both parks show the permeability between public and private spaces, as illustrated by feminist research (e.g., McKenzie, 2006; Cantek & Funda, 2003).

All female interviewees show their care responsibilities as an excuse for their “enjoyment” of parks. However, whereas more women over their 50s openly express their leisure purposes for park visits, young mothers are more reluctant to do so. Thus, rather than coming to parks for their recreational needs (Krenichyn, 2004), these young mothers state their leisure activities (such as sitting, chatting, watching, and eating-drinking together) in parks as the by-product of the fulfillment of their gendered care responsibilities there. A reason for not openly stating their leisure purposes in parks may relate to these young women’s preconceived concerns about the patriarchal control over women in public spaces. Such socially learned preconceptions about female identity expect women in public only for fulfilling women’s gendered goal-oriented purposes and by diminishing their femininity by acting with the roles of good housewives or mothers (Day, 2001; Paul 2011; Tuncer, 2014).

Concerning the patriarchal control over women “outside,” all women at any age talk about their discomfort with the male gaze in both parks. On the one hand, triggered by the male gaze and concern about male strangers (Valentine, 1992), socially constructed fear mechanisms about public spaces make

women avoid going to public spaces or feel uncomfortable there. Similarly, in the user survey, more women express their negative encounters in parks and discomfort with other users as a reason for not using parks often. On the other hand, interviews detail that women act upon and develop specific social mechanisms to deal with the male gaze. For instance, some young mothers prefer parks (rather than house yards) as playgrounds. Although parks, too, are under the male gaze, women's regular togetherness there provides a supportive and protective setting for each woman to "escape" from the patriarchal gaze at their home place and "breath". Due to the playground and probably this defensive nature of their parochial realm in parks, all interviewees declare their neighborhood parks as a "family space," or for all women and men fulfilling their traditional responsibilities as mothers, fathers, wives, and husbands. This declaration is not necessarily to claim neighborhood parks as "women-only spaces." It also reflects women's discomfort about the continuous reminder of patriarchal threats to women, although women follow the patriarchal rules and visit parks for their gender responsibilities and act, talk, and wear as mothers and wives.

Being on guard against the male gaze, women in both parks have different ways of dealing with this concern. As a contribution to the literature, this study details how these ways differ concerning women's parochial realms developed with the help of the park attributes. Firstly, both parks within mixed-use environments (including shops and a school) and with a variety of amenities (benches, playground, WC, water features, walking paths, and shade) attract a high number of users as expected (Carr, 2003; Giles-Corti et al., 2005; Min and Lee, 2006), but not necessarily of "regular" users, or those visiting that park at least once a week and for 30 minutes or more. S.Ersever Park and Duru Park have the highest and the lowest number of "regular" male and female users. Also, female respondents stay in Duru Park for much shorter than in S.Ersever Park.

A reason for the difference between women's regularity in the two parks may relate to these women's work status. Mostly housewives, women in S.Ersever Park arrange their daily schedule to stay in this park for long hours. While the availability of seats and tables assist their coming together in groups, their regular park visits allow them a parochial realm as a safe social environment for children and their gender identity formation in public (McKenzie, 2006). Duru Park has more working women who fulfill and use their child care and shopping responsibilities in and around the park as an escape from their double shifts as working mothers. Sometimes calling a female friend with children to the park after work hours; these women cannot develop a robust parochial realm in Duru Park. Also, for working mothers, Duru Park is the nearest park and thus, the only choice with nearby shopping opportunities. In contrast, some housewives prefer walking to distant parks rather than Duru Park.

Secondly, a reason for women's discomfort in Duru Park seems to relate to the fact that women are outnumbered by (more elderly) men who sit long hours at the park seats limited in number. While more women's regular togetherness in S.Ersever Park makes them collaborate to watch over the male gaze, young women in Duru Park feel to be exposed to the male gaze. Significant for the literature, specific ways of designing park attributes perpetuate this exposure and women's incapacity to create a parochial realm there. These park attributes include certain nearby land uses and the park seats, detailed as followed.

Accordingly, women's concerns about teahouses detail how these stores interact spatially with (or "invade") the park, especially by locating their tables and chairs in the park. A similar concern about such park invasion appears with the café in S.Ersever Park. Overall, the café and teahouses too host multiple parochial realms, or third places (Oldenberg, 1989), by their customers. Also, both private enterprises compensate the problem of limited seats in these parks. Yet these stores create

a customer- (and male-oriented) space in both parks, which threatens the characteristics of parks as public spaces and with women's parochial realms.

Similarly, in two parks, certain park characteristics shape significantly women's ways for seeking privacy and comfort (with their children, friends, or just by themselves) in public. Rather than just the seats' limited number and material sensitivity to climate conditions, the layout and location of seats concerning the playground and the shade are the design features affecting women's parochial realm in parks. Alternatively, interviews suggest designing the seats and tables for women coming together while performing their multi-tasking gendered responsibilities. Also, these seats should be invisible from (the male gaze in) nearby shops but still with a view to the playground.

6. Conclusion

About the relationships between park attributes and women's parochial realms in parks, this case emphasizes the need to investigate the park attributes simultaneously at the urban and park scales. Also, based on the perspectives of female park users, this study shows how the park attributes mediate multiple parochial realms and spatial conflicts in parks. The results reaffirm that park planning and design and land use planning should be part of the research to improve women's sense of safety and presence in urban public spaces.

The results have policy implications about certain land uses nearby neighbourhood parks and the allocation of seating areas concerning the playgrounds. Accordingly, the literature discusses how parks in mixed-use areas attract more users, and these mixed-land uses are helpful to women's daily multi-tasking care responsibilities. However, it does not explore these parks' regular users. In this study, although the two parks have similar park facilities and amenities, the regularity of park visits by women in these parks differs concerning different land uses nearby. Those stores, mostly with the male patrons (e.g., teahouses and internet cafes) and their spatial con-

figuration with the park (including entrances and windows with clear views of the playground) perpetuate women's sense of discomfort with the male gaze in parks.

Park planning and design should consider the surrounding land uses as the attraction points for certain groups whose presence may discourage park visits by others, particularly women, children, and the elderly. Park design should provide multiple recreation areas with different user profiles located according to these attraction points. Like each recreation area, the playground should have seating opportunities to enable caretakers to watch over children while enjoying their interrelations with other users. It should also be kept from surrounding stores to maintain the privacy of parents, caretakers, and children.

As study limitations, this paper considers only neighborhood parks as public spaces when investigating the kind of parochiality in public places. Future research should increase the number of parks to have more opportunities for comparing the variety of park attributes. Meanwhile, the interviews in selected parks do not include men. How male users with different characteristics (particularly the elderly who are complained about) use parks to develop their parochial realm needs to be investigated. Moreover, limited in number, the interviews are analyzed for working, non-working, old, and young women. Further research needs to discuss the park experiences of women and men in different age groups, marital and work status, income level, care responsibilities, and other socio-economic characteristics.

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