

Changes in Spatial Practices Following a Shopping and Life Center: The Case of İsfanbul

Büşra Turan Tüylüoęlu¹
Kırklareli University

Abstract: Shopping centers, which are one of the locales occupying the greatest areas in cities in recent years, have been quite impactful on the spatial practices of city residents. This situation has also brought together discussions on shopping centers from many perspectives. This study aims at understanding the changes in the daily urban spatial-usage practices of the city residents living in the region following the opening of İsfanbul, which has the quality of being a shopping center distinct from many others through its entertainment and living-complex characteristics, aside from being an open-street concept. The study, which uses qualitative research techniques, also benefits from visual techniques. As a result, İsfanbul is understood to have made significant changes in the urban practices of these city residents. The main topics of discussion in this study are how the locale's decisiveness in urban life is understood and how the social meaning of shopping centers, which are one of today's important topics of debate, is questioned.

Keywords: İsfanbul • spatial practices • urban practices • shopping centers • life centers • theme parks

1 **Correspondence:** Büşra Turan Tüylüoęlu, Department of Sociology, Kırklareli University, Kırklareli Turkey. Email: bsrturan91@gmail.com

To cite this article: Turan Tüylüoęlu, B. (2020). Changes in spatial practices following a shopping and life center: The case of İsfanbul. *Toplumsal Deęişim*, 2, 97–117.

A critical approach has largely prevailed in the literature on shopping centers. According to this approach, all shopping center designs are constructed with the purposes of creating the illusion of perception in the masses, being able to hold masses inside longer, and encouraging continuous consumption (Şan et al., 2017). While open spaces are usually evaluated as traditional retail spaces (Özcan, 2007), most shopping centers are designed and constructed as indoor spaces. In the critical approach related to shopping centers, having these locales be indoor spaces has a special meaning. This is because shopping centers refuse to relate with the outside and have become a covered space that function with their own rules inside. In this covered space, no sign of the passing of time exists and the amount of light is always constant. In addition, no indication is found in terms of season; the inside experiences an endless spring and an eternal day with a constant temperature (Şan et al., 2017). When looked at this way, shopping centers are defined as the utopia of consumer societies (Yırtıcı, 2009). When shopping centers are left to an open architecture instead of this closed structure that has been identified with the consumption craze, this definition of utopia can be said to bear need for re-discussion. A shopping center with an open-street concept, although containing a confined boundary, has an appearance apart from classic *indoor* and *air-conditioned* spaces. In fact, this alternative appearance makes discussing anew the public realm where such a locale is built meaningful.

This study aims to understand the changes in daily urban spatial-usage practices of regional residents in Istanbul's Eyüp district in 2013 when İsfanbul, which is defined as "the first shopping, entertainment, and living complex in Turkey and the world to combine a theme park, shopping mall, and show center," (İsfanbul, n.d.) started offering services. İsfanbul has made significant changes in the urban practices of the residents of the region where it is located. Understanding these changes is important in terms of understanding the role space has in shaping the subjects' practices and in questioning new public realms. In other words, the place a space has in the daily life of the regional residents of a consumption center that has been built in a remote residential relative to the city center will be able to produce meaningful results about the determinants of locales in urban life.

Method

The research has been conducted using a qualitative method with the phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews have been performed with the purpose of discovering how the subjects have experienced the related changes and how they perceived these experiences; in addition, the researcher took photos while making observations on how space is experienced by frequently spending time in İsfanbul during the research process. The universe of the research is comprised of the residents of the region where İsfanbul is located.

Study Group

The study group is formed of 12 people, five males and seven females. While determining the participants, two basic criteria were taken into consideration: participants are to have lived in this region for at least 10 years and are to have frequently spent time at İsfanbul.

Table 1

Participants' Pseudonyms, Ages, and Residential Neighborhoods

Participants ²	Age	Neighborhood
Arif	46	Kaęıthane
Berrak	24	Alibeyky
Burak	18	Yeşilpınar
Dilan	53	Yeşilpınar
Feride	57	Yeşilpınar
Mustafa	60	Yeşilpınar
Nergis	47	Yeşilpınar
Necdet	44	Kukky
Ozan	40	Yeşilpınar
Sevim	30	Kukky
Şermin	54	Gazi Mahallesi
Yeliz	37	Yeşilpınar

2 Pseudonyms have been used for the participants.

Data Collection Tool

Two types of data have been collected in the research. While one of these is interviews performed with the semi-structure interview technique, the other is the observations made in İsfanbul and the photographs taken at that time. The interview form used in the semi-structured interviews was prepared in the scope of the research. A total of 16 questions have been included on the form, which was developed by benefiting from the views of experts. In addition, a total of 225 photographs were taken during the observations.

Data Collection Process

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the spring of 2018. While the first four interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, the remaining interviews occurred in İsfanbul.

Data Analysis

The interview records, analyzed texts, observation notes, and photographs have been analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

Findings

The İstanbul Experience

The first thing the participants were asked regarding their İstanbul experiences was when they started to spend time there. Remarkably, almost all the participants stated without thinking that they had been going to İstanbul “since it opened.”

Aside from Mustafa, who lives outside of the city itself and stated coming there 3-4 times a year while visiting his son in Yeşilpınar, participants are seen to respond infrequently [Arif, Sermin] with “sometimes once a month, sometimes once every two months,” even though the participants had not much in common between the frequency with which they come to İstanbul. Responses among the participants corresponding to frequencies of *every ten days*, *once a week*, and *once every two or three days* come to the forefront. On this point, the statements used by a significant number of participants also draw attention: “when we get bored,” whenever we have work,” and “when we find the opportunity.” The participants mainly come to İstanbul with family, spouses, children, and friends.

When looking at the participants’ practices in İstanbul, the thing that draws attention first is that they prefer spending time there rather than shopping. The most important places occurring among the purposes for using İstanbul are for eating, drinking coffee, meeting friends, going to the cinema, sitting at the café, and having fun at the playgrounds. On a sunny Sunday, İstanbul shows the nature of a *meeting* place and gives the appearance of a vivid “city” where people walk in the streets instead of a shopping center, riding bicycles or *scooters*, going skating, or watching the city view.

Among the reasons for participants choosing İstanbul are its low architecture, its construction on a wide and breezy area, and its good sunshine. The participants emphasized that İstanbul’s characteristics makes them feel close to nature and stated that this feeling affects their coming there.

Changes Following İstanbul

The participants were asked about the places they had spent time before İstanbul and whether or not they had gone to those places after İstanbul first opened. The participants said that at best these trips had decreased a lot, or they said that anymore they had completely stopped going to those places. This pronounced change that had occurred in the participants’ spatial practices can be said to primarily be related to distance. The presence of a living area close to their areas of residence had taken them away from their previous practices.

The Significance of İsfanbul

The participants stated the thing that most basically distinguishes İsfanbul from other shopping centers to be its open space. This openness together with its width and low architecture are the most distinguishing features of İsfanbul from the participants' perspectives. The participants' responses expressed İsfanbul's characteristics as being "spacious", "comfortable", and "airy"; making one feel "free"; and providing "tranquility". The participants stated that the spatial qualities there offered them the opportunity "to breathe", "to get away from the stress of the city", and to experience the feeling of being "close to nature".

The significance of İsfanbul for the participants became further evident with a provocative question asked at the end of the interview. Accordingly, the participants were asked what they would think if they heard that İsfanbul was going to be closed. Almost all participants expressed sadness with an anxious manner.

Discussion

İsfanbul appears to function as a living space rather than a shopping center for the residents of the region where it is located. The opportunities İsfanbul offers as a venue are quite positively welcomed by the participants through the impact of the lack of alternative public living spaces in the area.

The participants' spatial practices prior to İsfanbul have largely replaced with their experiences at İsfanbul. The participants had gotten used to spending time in İsfanbul while leaving aside their practices of spending time in different parts of the city. Other reasons apart from İsfanbul being located near them had also been impactful. The most basic heading that stands out in this sense is that İsfanbul is a large and "spacious" venue possessing an open-street concept. This quality of İsfanbul gives participants a sense of naturalness apart from the city. When considering Istanbul's problems of traffic and dense housing in particular, İsfanbul can be said to serve the functions of covering a deficiency and filling a gap for the participants. In this sense, evaluating İsfanbul just as a shopping center in the form of a part of consumption culture would result in a false reading in the sense of ignoring the place this locale has in human life. İsfanbul has a number of spatial uses able to suggest that shopping and consumption prevail there. In this sense, İsfanbul can also be said to produce its own spatial practices. Therefore, if a cultural critique were to be made, having this critique be developed over urban peoples' compulsion for places of consumption would be more appropriate. This is because, if defining İsfanbul as a place of consumption is necessary, expanding this characteristic as a place of consumption that meets urban needs very well would also be necessary. In this sense, İsfanbul can be accepted not by how much consumer culture has grown but as an indicator of how much the city's construction has become distant from the consideration

of human needs. So much so that regional residents feel the need to get away from stress and choose a shopping center for “breathing”, finding “peace”, and “chilling out”.

The variety of alternatives İstanbul offers and the spatial qualities that make experiencing “city” life possible have allowed the regional residents to be able to reach opportunities they didn’t have before. For example, fathers can skate with their daughters, grandfathers can ride bikes with their grandchildren, spouses can walk in the evening accompanied by live music, and those escaping the noise of the city can feel the wind and the sun. For a city like İstanbul that possesses a high population density and insufficient land facilities, losing all of these are qualities that would be considered a great loss beyond romanticism. On this point, that is a reality the topography upon which İstanbul is located has provided a number of advantages to its construction. In this sense, saying that all these new public spaces being built in the city will be able to meet the socio-psychological needs that İstanbul meets and that as a result the new zoning plans will be able to exemplify the pattern there is difficult. However, the spatial qualities that İstanbul possesses aside from its advantageous position, such as its openness, width, and low architecture, provide important points about the qualities that an urban living area needs to possess.

Acknowledgements: This is an extended abstract of the article entitled “Bir alışveriş ve yaşam merkezi sonrasında mekânsal pratiklerde değişim: İstanbul örneği” published in *Toplumsal Değişim*.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Grand support: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Kaynakça/References

- Gottdiener, M. (2005). *Postmodern göstergeler: Maddi kültür ve postmodern yaşam biçimleri*. İmge Kitabevi.
- İstanbul. (t.y.). *Hakkımızda*. <https://www.isfanbul.com/hakkimizda-2-a> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Özcan, B. (2007). «Rasyonel satın alma» ve «boş zaman sürecine ait alışveriş» eylemlerinin birlikte sergilendikleri mekânlar: Alışveriş merkezleri. *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 9(2), 39–68.
- Şan, M. K., Hira, İ. ve Saraçoğlu, A. D. (2017). Kentlerin yeni tüketim mabetleri: alışveriş merkezleri. *Sosyal ve Kültürel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 3(5), 149–169.
- Thorns, D. C. (2010). *Kentlerin dönüşümü: kent teorisi ve kentsel yaşam*. Soyak Yayınları.
- Vural Arslan, T. (2009). Türkiye’deki alışveriş merkezleri incelemelerine eleştirel bir bakış: Yorumlar, eleştiriler, tartışmalar. *Uludağ Üniversitesi Mühendislik-Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi*, 14(1), 147–159.
- Yırtıcı, H. (2009). *Çağdaş kapitalizmin mekânsal örgütlenmesi*. İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.