




# Covid-19 Pandemic and Changes in the Social Life of Children: Children's Use Of Space at Home

## Covid-19 Pandemisi ve Çocukların Değişen Sosyal Yaşamı: Çocukların Evi Kullanım Biçimleri

Elvan Elif Özdemir<sup>1</sup> 

### Öz

*Pandemi, günümüz sosyal yaşamına, konutlar ve çocuklar ile ilgili teori, politika ve uygulama alanında yeni sorunları da beraberinde gündeme getirdi. Bu çalışmanın amacı, COVID-19 pandemisinin, çocukların evlerindeki sosyal yaşamlarını nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktır. Evlerindeki mekanlarla ilgili algılarını anlamak için, çocukların karantina sırasında yeni yaşamlarıyla ilgili duygularını ifade etmeleri için çizim araç kullanılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, çalışmanın amacı, çocukların karantina sırasında evlerinde kullandıkları mekanlara ilişkin algı, duygu ve hislerine ilişkin çizimleri incelemektir. Araştırmanın örneklemini 6-10 yaş arası 60 çocuk oluşturmaktadır. Daha sonra çocukların çizimleri değerlendirilmiş, kodlanmış, sınıflandırılmış ve analiz edilmiştir. Çocukların çizimlerinden yapılan analizlere göre evlerinde en çok zaman geçirdikleri mekan olarak balkonlar olmuştur. Kentsel balkon, karantina sırasında çocuklar için hem sosyal hemde fiziksel olarak daha sağlıklı yeni kamusal alan haline gelmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kent Balkonu, Çocukların Mekanı, Çocukların Çizimleri, Covid-19 Kapanma, Konut.

### ABSTRACT

*The pandemic has highlighted new questions for theory, policy and practice regarding children and dwellings. The aim of this research was to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the children's social life in their homes. To understand their perceptions about their spaces in their homes, the method of drawing is used as a tool for the children to make out their feelings, emotions and perceptions about their new life during lockdown. In line with this, the study involves, analyzing children's drawings about perception, emotions and feelings about the spaces they used in their homes during lockdown. Sample of the study is 60 children aged between 6-10. Afterwards, the children's drawings were classified, coded, analyzed, evaluated and the findings were discussed. According to analyzes of the children's drawings, the most mentioned spaces in their dwellings were balcony of their houses. The balcony which is the essential part of flats in Mediterranean cities become the new social healthier public space for children during lockdown.*

**Keywords:** Urban Balcony, Children's Space, Children's Drawings, Covid-19 Lockdown, Home Environment

<sup>1</sup> **Corresponded Author:** Mersin University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, [ozdemirelif@gmail.com](mailto:ozdemirelif@gmail.com), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0456-7226>



## INTRODUCTION:

Covid-19 pandemic made the governments to restrict their own communities' social life. All population groups especially adolescents, children and aged whose current phase of social life mostly spent in public space affected from these contact restrictions too much. The restrictions of children's social life such as the closure of schools, children facilities, playgrounds and parks changed their living conditions to the home environment.

Housing is one of the important issue which reflects the children's development and healthy growth. Some researchers such as Coley, et. al., (2013) highlighted the factors which affect the children's development. They classified these factors such as affordability, physical features and stability of housing. They indicate the physical features of housing and affordability (like poor quality housing) create physiological stress and pressure on children, hindering their emotional state (stability) and learning abilities. And also according to their research residential instability negatively affects their relationships with their peers and their academic and behavioral success is prevented. Coley, et. al., (2013)

In literature to understand the reflection of observations, experiences, problems or ideas of children, some researchers used children's own drawings and claimed that the drawings of children are effective means. (Chang, 2005). Tansuğ (1998) states that children's drawings are a direct product of their pure feelings and sensitivity towards the environment. They express the importance of children's drawings as a device to understand their emotions, observations, perceptions, problems and ideas. However Samurçay (2006), finds the drawings of children as the opportunity to express themselves. Sali et.al., (2014), emphasize the importance of drawings not only the visual perception of their outer world from their own point of view but also they assert the drawings as clues of the children's emotional and spiritual situation. Some of the researchers, (Schirmacher, 2002; Yurtal & Artut, 2008), assert the children's painting as an ordinary part of their own life and they describe it as an a tool used to understand the social, cognitive, mental and emotional development level of children. (Schirmacher, 2002; Yurtal & Artut, 2008).

Studies on children's drawings are called children's art and attract the attention of researchers in many different disciplines. Ricci (1887), who was one of the pioneers of this field, began his studies in the late 19th Century. According to his research, when the graphical structure of these drawings is examined, it is possible to obtain information about the mental and cognitive states of children.

All of these researches about children's drawings assert that these paintings has full of meaning signs and indirect statements. With this method to provide insights in to children's thoughts increasingly being used in researches (Horstman et.al., 2008). In their study using this method, Sali et al., (2014) tried to reveal the differences and similarities between the schoolyards in the dreams of preschool children and the schoolyards they use in reality. Findings of the study showed those actual pre-school children's schoolyards are different form their dreams. These results find out the thoughts of children and educators (as users and observers) on the design of playgrounds and schoolyards, giving designers, architects and experts ideas to make better and more useful designs

This article focuses on children's perception of space at home during lockdown. To understand children's thoughts about their use of space at home during lockdown, we expected to draw their house. The findings from children's drawings were discussed to figure out how children experienced and perceived their home environment and also to find out their emotions and observations during lockdown. Eventually, the findings are evaluated and discussed with starting points for further research.

## 1. Children's Use of Space at Home

With the lockdown of all public spaces for children such as parks, nursery, schools etc, contact with peers were largely forbidden and this made the home environment the most important place in all the children's social lives. The fact of being 'moved to indoors' brings children with variety of situations, such as more time was spent in the home environment than before. However the changes caused by pandemic were transformed children's home environment and social lives. Home environment gives new meaning to children. Function of home environment transformed to home schooling or home studying.

Most of the studies in the literature which mentioned about the importance of housing and child development are context dependent (Rollings, et.al., 2017; O'Donnell, & Kingsley, 2020;). Here, housing characteristics such as physical quality of housing is one of the most important contexts with cleanliness, hygiene and clutter, indoor climate, hazards and privacy/crowding.

Some researchers (Villanueva et al., 2019; Dunn, 2019), underline the importance of home environment in child development as a social determinant of child health and state that it directly and indirectly affects child development (Villanueva et al., 2019; Dunn, 2019). For example, according to O'Donnell, & Kingsley, (2020), one of these social determinants is overcrowding which may directly affect children's health. Beside this, this social determinant may also affect parents' parenting styles and their mental health, reflecting their behaviors that affect the child. But in this research, we examine only the use of architectural spaces in home environment which affects children's perceptions, emotions and social life during COVID-19 lockdown.

Apartment buildings are the most preferred type of accommodation in all cities of Turkey, because of urban, economic, political and sociological factors. This study was conducted in the South part of Turkey which has a Mediterranean climate. And according to the Mediterranean lifestyle, Mediterranean people tend to spend their daily lives most of the year outside the home, on the street or in public spaces. This extroverted culture also distinguishes the use of space from other cultures. Plenty of sunlight and mild temperatures in winter cause individuals living in this culture to spend more time outside the home. Balcony is an important place in the Mediterranean climate in terms of space usage in residences. (Picture 1)



Picture 1. Usage of Balcony ([https://ytong.com.tr/dosyalar/user/ytong\\_aktuel-53.pdf](https://ytong.com.tr/dosyalar/user/ytong_aktuel-53.pdf))

Balconies, which are used easily and frequently for eight months of the year, have become new public spaces for the people who live in Mediterranean climate during the lockdown of the pandemic. (Picture 2.)



Picture 2. Usage of Balcony during lockdown (<https://www.egetelgraf.com/izmirde-cati-ve-balkonda-zeybek-oyunayarak-23-nisani-kutladilar/>)

Towers (2005) stated the importance of garden, terrace or balcony at the flats in the apartments which is located in-between private and public and belong to both spaces (Aronis, 2009). Cowan (2011) defined this permeable relationship between private and public, or outside and inside, as neither entirely part of the street nor completely part of the house. She focused on this permeable nature of the relationship rather than the rigid boundaries between the interior of the building and the street. (Cowan, 2011). She described Balconies as spaces where physical actions can be sustained, both by emphasizing their social function and by observing. It talks about the importance of perceiving what is done or said on a balcony by someone nearby. (Cowan, 2011).

In the mean time Gehl (2007), pointed out the functions of balconies from the social point of view. While defining balconies, Aronis (2009), emphasizes their functions. He states that balconies are a communication spaces, especially between the house and the street, and serve as a place for activities such as observing neighbors, resting, playing card games with people in the house, as well as a place to dry laundry, simply store unnecessary items or shake rugs.(Aronis, 2009).

With these type of usages balcony is an important space for both family and community for social welfare. From an architectural point of view, it is seen that the balcony spaces are like a prosthesis that completes the building. Beside improving the indoor comfort conditions such as ventilation it creates an additional living space. It is also a unit of a building part which affects the image of whole building. Throughout the history, it has been called as an environmental 'buffer space' which provides the outdoor conditions in dwellings (Chun, et. al., 2004; Kim & Kim, 2007; Kim. et. al., 2011; Requena, 2012; Raji, et. al., 2017). On the other hand, Hirt and Zahm (2012), defines the balcony as an adequate and safe watchtower in the urban space, which also creates an informal area of social control for its user. They also defined the function of balconies as creating a neighborhood community, thus contributing to the principles of designing a healthier city that Jane Jacobs had previously expressed. (Zahm and Hirt, 2012).

This research is conducted to children who lives in apartment buildings during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in a Mediterranean city. (Mersin)

## 2. METHOD

King (1995) argues that one of the easiest and healthiest ways to collect social information from and about children is the drawing technique. (King, 1995). He states that in this technique, most of the children like to draw without being under pressure and without stress, most of the children tend to enjoy drawings especially using colored pencils. Thus, it is a powerful tool for evaluation in research with children. Since many children do not like to be asked questions, this method consists of completely enjoyable, fun, easy and fast drawing tests for children. (Greene & Lewis, 1983). According to Chambers, the drawing method technique prevent the barriers to linguistic expression and also allows researchers to compare different abilities and language groups. Crook (1985) acknowledges that the content of children's drawings is a widely used tool that provides insight into their worlds of thought and emotion about their physical environment.

Like Crook (1985), Thomas and Silk (1990) drew attention to the importance of children's drawings in opening a 'window' into their feelings and thoughts. Because the drawings are the reflection of the image in the minds of individuals. (Thomas & Silk, 1990).

The objective of this research is to clarify the children spend their times in which space mostly in the home during COVID-19 lockdown. With the interviews of the children and in line with their drawings, we try to understand and evaluate children's social, physical and emotional behaviours due to space use in home environment and their perceptions about their home during lockdown. The participants were chosen from a Mediterranean city; Mersin, Turkey. Mersin is in the South Coast of Turkey and the weather condition of Mersin is in summer, it is humid and hot and in the winter, it is rainy and warm. The characteristics of the houses were mostly chosen from the high storey apartment flats. All 60 children between the ages of 6-10 who participated in the study live in a same gated community in Mersin, which consists of houses with the same physical characteristics. All of the houses have a good cooling and heating system that ensures comfortable living in Mersin conditions. The data was gathered over a period of 15 days. The children (aged 6-10 years old) were allowed to draw only one drawing. And then they were asked to explain their drawings individually. These discussions were recorded individually.

## 3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The method to analyze the findings in this research were 'the content analysis technique'. 60 children aged 6-10 years, from one gated community ( 4- high storey apartment flats) in Mersin were asked to draw pictures about the space use of home environment and their perceptions about their home during lockdown. Drawings about use of space at home environment during COVID-19 lockdown and verbal descriptions were collected from 60 children (22 boys and 38 girls) from Mersin. When the drawings were finished by the each child, they were asked to explain their drawings individually. The drawings were analyzed with its verbal descriptions made by each child. Specifications that were taken from the children's drawings included: the use of space at home during lockdown mostly at balcony seen in their drawings. 37 child draw balcony, 12 child draw living room, 8 child draw his/her own room and 3 child draw hall and corridor of their house.

Table 1. Number of children's use of space at home during COVID-19 lockdown.

Balcony	37
Living Room	12
Own Room	8
Hall, Corridor	3
Total	60

22 girl draw balcony and 15 boy draw balcony. 8 of girls draw her paintings from interior space of balcony. And 14 girls draw balcony from exterior point of view. 15 boys draw balcony and 3 child draw from interior view and 12 child draw from the exterior view of the balcony.



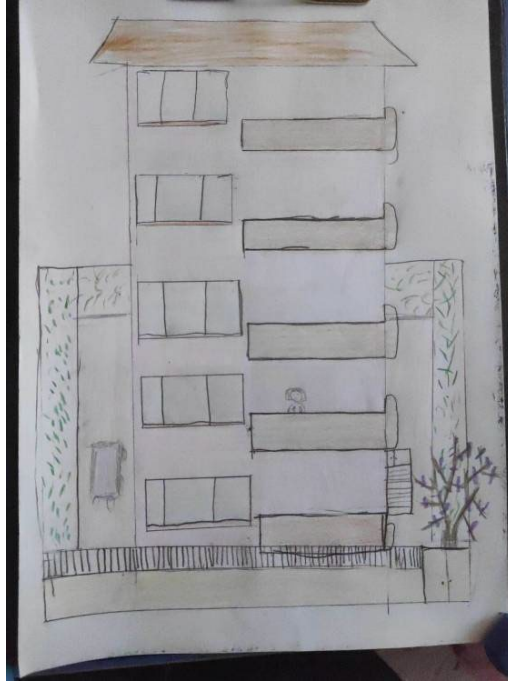
Picture3. 8 years old boy painting.

Important factors draw attention in this painting made by 8 years old boy. (Picture 3.) It is remarkable that the balconies in the apartment are portrayed as safe and closed playgrounds, and the satellite connection (internet connection) on the apartment is emphasized. Although they are asked to draw the space which they frequently used in home during COVID-19 lockdown, he draws the outside of the house with playgrounds and basketball hoop. This gives us the psychological situation of the boy. We can interpret this situation as missing the outside world.



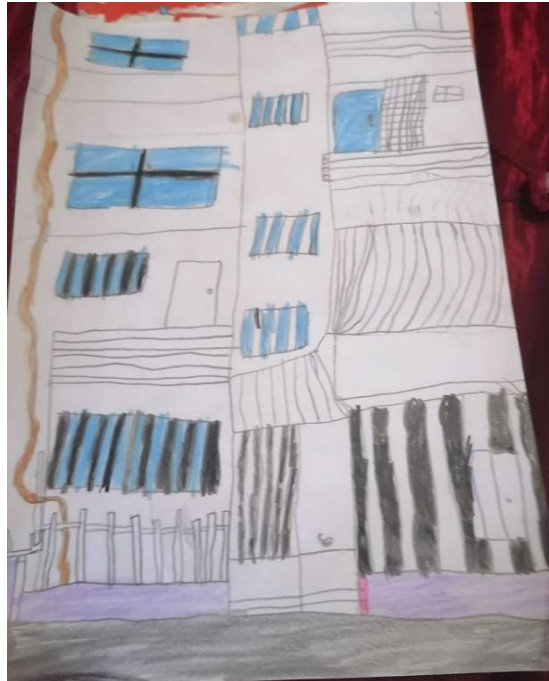
Picture 4. 10 years old boy painting

In the 10 years old boy painting (Picture 4.), he drew his own room from a interior space. Left side of the painting there is a TV. Unite. And at the right side there is a study station which he used as a online school. And its interesting that there is a balcony at the middle of the room. In this balcony, there is a carpet and a huge view with water, trees and fresh air.



Picture 5. 9 Years old boy painting

In 9 years old boy painting, he drew himself at the balcony. Exterior spaces of the apartment were drawn and he emphasized the huge balconies and big garden surrounding the apartment. And the apartment is described as a fenced secure area.(Picture 5.)



Picture 6. 8 Years old girl painting.

With this research we have information about the emotional, psychological situation of children. In Picture 6, 8 years old girl draws pessimistic and gloomy painting balconies with scarecrows like a prison. She mentions her situation during lockdown as: 'We watch TV all the time, study and never go out. Because there is a virus everywhere'. She compares her life before the COVID-19 lockdown. She said that before the virus, she and her friends and mothers went to each other's houses and played games

in the garden of their school. And now she is always in the house and play her games in the living room individually.



Picture 7. 9 Years old girl painting

The fact that a 9 years old girl (Picture 7) drew a large balcony from her house and uses trees in her drawings. She expresses her feelings to missing things like trees and sitting with her family in the balcony.



Picture 8. 8 years old boy painting

8 years old boy drawing shows us huge balconies with surrounding the apartment. And he mentions the fenced secure spaces.

We can understand from their drawings; children's perceptions are negatively about the COVID-19 lockdown. They feel being stuck during lockdown. They need fresh air and play with peers for their health and development. The emphasis on balconies in children's drawings is an indication of their need for fresh air and public space. This study especially conducted with children living in the Mediterranean Climate, is proof of how much children missed for the outdoors.



The government's curfew decision was the same for everyone, but it would be misleading to think that this decision affects everyone equally. All of the children in our study live in flats with similar physical characteristics on the same gated community. This study shows us that having an outdoor space has a positive effect on children's perception of space.

On the other hand, the required quietness as all adults work from home probably also affects the use of space in the home environment by children living at home. These results are of outmost importance for architects and designers.

Nowadays we are faced with the extraordinary situations and our flats were become in the core of our lives. Balconies which could be described as the 'new public spaces' brings new meanings and functions such as restoring our physical and social health. Beside the function of fresh air, natural light and being gate to community interaction, balconies importance as a place has not been highlighted before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. We evacuated from all public social spaces which have reflection on our real existence: action and human presence, such as urban sidewalks, parks, squares, etc.....COVID-19 lockdown affected our social-public lives deeply. It was upended our ideas about public space and also social lives. This situation is unprecedented in modern times. Conditions were altered our social life perceptions into different situations. Suddenly, we spent our lives mostly in our homes. Home environments were become a heartening living, studying and resting space. So, balconies in the flats transformed the unoccupied street like raised pavement space to communicate, play and listen. In addition to this, balcony is not only a space to raise our sociality, but also it is a hygienically safer place to protect us from the virus. It enables family members to get open and fresh air and also reflects their emotional and social situation such as worrying less about the contemination of the virus. During lockdown, the balcony becomes a healthier and safer new public space in the home environment, especially for children, both physically and socially.

## CONCLUSION:

Balconies are described as a mediated space dividing private and public, indoor and outdoor or open and closed space. In line with this description, we can make the following contribution to the definition of balconies; It has an important place in our social and public life, as it is an interface between two separate areas and acts as a transitional connection between them. Especially in residential buildings functions of balconies are based on human need and this requirement can be expressed as a instinctive and fundamental for community. Being between public and private realms, or between the individual and the collective, entails being in contact with the outer environment. And this is a fundamental and essential psychological and physiological need for human life.

The focus of this study was to understand the emotional, social and perception alteration of children's use of space in home during Covid -19 lockdown. Especially, the existing social, physical and emotional nature of the home environment has a significant impact on how children perceive it during quarantine. Covid-19 lockdown was deeply affected the mostly disadvantaged groups in the society. One of them were children. This group is named as Covid generation. This generation are affected a large part of their lives such as their education, their physical and mental health. As seen in the research some of them demonstrate pessimistic behaviour about their home during lockdown.

This research shows the importance of balconies as an architectural space. Most of the researches highlighted the importance of idea to access to balconies can create the users satisfaction and also emphasized the contribution of perception to urban aesthetics. ( Omrani et. al., 2017; Kennedy, et.al., 2020; Chau, et. al., 2004; Dahlan, et. al., 2009; Wago, et.al., 2016). Nevertheless, the current COVID-19 crisis finds out having a social space in dwellings. Balconies were seen as a private outdoor space for all family members especially children to socialize during lockdown. With the COVID-19 lockdown,

our perception of sociality and life style were mostly changed and transformed. Architects, designers, planners, etc... should pay attention to quality of built environments and spaces according to alteration of habitation of people especially after the Covid-19 lockdown. It can be noted that discussing the findings of this current study in residential space, designing spaces which provide games and more physical activities to children when they are at home, will reflect their mental and physical health. And considering the results with its dimensional framework these kind of spaces affects the child development, too. This kind of approaches to designing home environment enable to children to promote physical activity of them for playing by motivating the feelings that occur in the natural environment.

### Compliance with Ethical Standard

**Conflict of Interests:** There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

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