



Examining the Relationship Between the Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Park Visitors and Park Use by Nonlinear Canonical Correlation Analysis: The Case Study of Konya [*]

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Geliş/Received: 29.08.2023

Kabul/Accepted: 13.09.2023

Yayın/Published: 30.09.2023

How to cite: Arsoy, N. (2023). Examining the Relationship Between the Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Park Visitors and Park Use by Nonlinear Canonical Correlation Analysis: The Case Study of Konya. *J. Anatolian Env. and Anim. Sciences*, 8(3), 500-506. <https://doi.org/10.35229/jaes.1351718>

Atf yapmak için: Arsoy, N. (2023). Park Ziyaretçilerinin Sosyo-Demografik Özellikleri ile Park Kullanımı Arasındaki İlişkinin Doğrusal Olmayan Kanonik Korelasyon Analizi ile İncelenmesi: Konya Örneği. *Anadolu Çev. ve Hay. Dergisi*, 8(3), 500-506. <https://doi.org/10.35229/jaes.1351718>

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Abstract: Modern cities have seen urban parks evolve from mere green spaces into integral components supporting human well-being and environmental sustainability. These parks offer individuals serene settings to unwind and reconnect with nature, promoting mental health by alleviating stress. However, as urbanization increases and public park demand surges, designing and planning these spaces becomes more challenging. To optimize park design, understanding user profiles and utilization patterns is crucial. By examining how visitor demographics intertwine with park usage, policymakers and planners can make informed decisions for future development.

This study employs Nonlinear Canonical Correlation Analysis (NLCC), a robust statistical tool, to explore the intricate connections between socio-demographic attributes of urban park visitors and their usage patterns. Focused on Konya, Turkey, the research delves into the non-linear relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and park usage. Survey data from 444 participants forms the basis of the analysis, unveiling inherent dataset structures and assessing correlations between attributes and usage patterns.

Results highlight the substantial impact of occupation, income, and age as determinants of socio-demographic characteristics affecting park use at an individual level. These findings hold significant implications for urban park planning and management. The research underscores the nuanced interplay between socio-demographic factors and usage patterns, offering targeted strategies for diverse visitor needs. As urban landscapes evolve, this study contributes to refining policies and practices that cultivate sustainable, equitable, and enjoyable park experiences for urban communities.

Keywords: Konya, Nonlinear Canonical Analysis (NLCC), socio-demographic characteristics, urban parks, urban park usage.

Park Ziyaretçilerinin Sosyo-Demografik Özellikleri ile Park Kullanımı Arasındaki İlişkinin Doğrusal Olmayan Kanonik Korelasyon Analizi ile İncelenmesi: Konya Örneği

Öz: Modern şehirlerde kent parkları, sadece yeşil alanlardan daha fazlasını temsil ederek hem insan refahını hem de çevresel sürdürülebilirliği destekleyen hayati bir rol üstlenmiştir. Bu parklar, bireylere dingin ortamlar sunarak doğayla tekrar bağlantı kurmalarına ve böylece stresi azaltarak zihinsel sağlığı desteklemelerine olanak tanır. Ancak artan kentselleşme eğilimi ve halkın kamu parklarına olan talebi, bu alanların tasarım ve planlamasını daha zorlu hale getirir. Park tasarımını optimize etmek için kullanıcı profillerini ve kullanım desenlerini anlamak esastır. Ziyaretçi demografileri ile park kullanımı eğilimleri arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyerek, politika yapımcılar ve planlamacılar gelecekteki geliştirme kararlarını bilinçli bir şekilde alabilmektedirler. Bu çalışma, farklı sosyo-demografik özelliklere sahip kent parkı ziyaretçilerinin ve kullanım desenlerinin karmaşık dinamiklerine ışık tutan, Konya, Türkiye'deki kentsel park ziyaretçilerinin sosyo-demografik özellikleri ile park kullanımı arasındaki karmaşık ilişkileri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Doğrusal Olmayan Kanonik Korelasyon Analizi (DOKKA) adlı güçlü bir istatistiksel aracı kullanarak, bu araştırma sosyo-demografik özellikler ile park kullanımı

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arasındaki doğrusal olmayan ilişkileri irdelemektedir. 444 katılımcıdan elde edilen anket verileri üzerinden yürütülen derinlemesine analiz, veri setinin içsel yapılarını ortaya çıkarmakta ve özellikler ile kullanım desenleri arasındaki ilişkilerin istatistiksel anlamlılığını titizlikle değerlendirmektedir.

Sonuçlar, meslek, gelir ve yaşın, bireysel düzeyde park kullanımını etkileyen sosyo-demografik özelliklerin belirleyici faktörleri olarak önemli bir etkisinin olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bulgular, kent parkı planlaması ve yönetimi alanlarında önemli sonuçlar taşımaktadır. Araştırma, sosyo-demografik faktörler ile kullanım desenleri arasındaki nüanslı etkileşimi vurgulayarak, park ziyaretçilerinin çeşitli ihtiyaçlarına daha hedefli stratejiler sunmaktadır. Kent manzaraları evrildikçe, bu çalışma kentsel topluluklar için sürdürülebilir, adil ve keyifli park deneyimlerini destekleyen politika ve uygulamaların geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Doğrusal olmayan kanonik korelasyon analizi (DOKKA), kent parkları, kent parkı kullanımı, Konya, sosyo-demografik özellikler.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is a powerful global force that has significant implications for human health. Urban parks play an important role in urbanization by providing green spaces for people to enjoy and by helping to mitigate some of the negative effects of urbanization such as air pollution and the urban heat island effect.

In modern cities, urban parks are much more than just green spaces. They perform a crucial role in promoting the well-being of both people and the environment. One of the main benefits of urban parks is that they offer a serene space for people to unwind and connect with nature, thereby aiding in reducing stress and promoting mental health. Numerous studies have shown that exposure to natural environments can enhance mood, attention, memory and creativity, as well as lower blood pressure, heart rate and cortisol levels (Kaplan, 2001; Sullivan et al., 2004; Bowler et al., 2010; Bratman et al., 2012; Çorbacı, 2020; Shuda et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022). These effects are especially important in urban settings where people face high levels of noise, traffic and crowding. By providing a refuge from city's fast-paced lifestyle, urban parks can help people cope with the challenges and demands of modern living. Urban parks offer a serene space for people to unwind and connect with nature, thereby aiding in reducing stress and promoting mental health. Physical activity is vital for maintaining a healthy weight, preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers, and improving quality of life and longevity (Giles-Corti et al., 2005; Hunter et al., 2015; Masterton et al., 2020). Urban parks can facilitate physical activity by offering amenities such as trails, playgrounds, sports fields and exercise equipment. They can also motivate people to be more active by providing attractive and accessible environments that encourage walking, cycling and other forms of active transportation. Furthermore, urbanization often leads to the loss of natural habitats, fragmentation of ecosystems and degradation of environmental quality. Urban parks can counteract these negative impacts by preserving green

spaces that support a variety of flora and fauna (Sandifer et al., 2015). These green spaces can also improve air quality by filtering pollutants, sequestering carbon and producing oxygen. Moreover, they can regulate temperature and humidity by providing shade and evapotranspiration. These functions can help mitigate the effects of climate change and enhance the resilience of urban systems. In addition, these parks have a crucial social function, acting as communal spaces where community members can interact and bond, fostering social cohesion and civic engagement (Church, 2018). Urban parks is that they have a crucial social function, acting as communal spaces where community members can interact and bond, fostering social cohesion and civic engagement. Urban parks can serve as venues for social gatherings, cultural events, recreational activities and volunteer work. They can also facilitate social inclusion by providing opportunities for people from different backgrounds, ages and abilities to meet and mingle (Church, 2018). By strengthening social ties and networks, urban parks can enhance social capital and trust among residents. These factors can in turn promote collective action, civic participation and community empowerment. Policymakers and planners must recognize and appreciate the numerous benefits that urban parks offer.

Urban parks, as vital constituents of public spaces, confer a myriad of benefits to both residents and visitors within a city's confines. These multifaceted amenities necessitate a comprehensive comprehension of their usage patterns to ensure a more equitable dispensation and appreciation across diverse population cohorts. A critical part of this understanding involves scrutinizing the nexus between socio-demographic characteristics of park visitors and park visitation patterns.

From a planning and design perspective, this relationship is paramount, contributing significantly to the formulation of responsive and inclusive urban park strategies. By delineating the specific needs and predilections of various population segments, policymakers and planners can make more informed

decisions about resource allocation within these spaces. Moreover, it facilitates the enhancement of park amenities, improving their appeal and usefulness to a wider demographic.

Furthermore, a profound understanding of socio-demographic dynamics in relation to park usage can bolster efforts towards promoting social inclusion within urban parks. This is particularly pertinent in urban environments where the confluence of diverse cultures, income levels, and age groups necessitates the provision of spaces that cater to a broad spectrum of needs and preferences.

By ensuring that urban parks reflect the demographic tapestry of their respective cities, we can create truly inclusive and representative public spaces. These spaces can function as microcosms of the cities themselves, exhibiting the unique socio-demographic dynamics at play, and responding to these dynamics through considered and inclusive design and planning approaches. Therefore, studying and understanding these relationships is an essential step towards the creation of more equitable, accessible, and beneficial urban parks. Public parks and recreational areas are essential for balancing the needs and wants of the people, surveying public opinions, designing according to social and cultural factors, and promoting usage that matches user preferences. Therefore, the socio-demographic profile of the area where these public spaces will be located is very important (Kaya 2008).

Konya is the sixth largest city in the center of Türkiye, has demonstrated a strong commitment to the establishment of new parks in the city in recent years. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of the residents' visitation patterns to parks is crucial for designers, planners, and local authorities in determining guiding criteria for the planning of new parks and ensuring their effective utilization.

In this study, it is aimed to investigate and understand how different socio-demographic characteristics of park visitors are related to their usage of the park. This research investigated the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on park use across diverse groups within the urban context. The research questions could be formulated as follows: Are there variations in park visitation preferences across different socio-demographic cohorts? In what ways do these preferences shape the utilization of parks?

This could involve factors such as the amount of time spent in the park, the frequency of visits, the activities engaged in while at the park.

The study uses Nonlinear Canonical Correlation Analysis (NLCC), a statistical method that allows for the examination of relationships between two sets of variables

(demographic characteristics and park use patterns), are often impractical to apply to large data sets.

The goal might be to generate insights that could guide park management and planning decisions to better cater to the needs and preferences of diverse visitor groups. The research is grounded in the specific context of Konya, suggesting a focus on local dynamics and conditions.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The universe of the research consists of 6 urban parks located in the central districts (Selçuklu, Meram, Karatay) of Konya, which is the 6th largest city in Türkiye in terms of population. The stratified sampling method was used based on the 2021 Konya census data. They have 29.4%, 15.6% and 15.3% of the city's population respectively (TÜİK). The selection of these parks has been based on their size, functional use, and distribution within the city. The predefined sample size (500) was allotted to the three central districts in Konya in accordance with their respective population size. The full survey was accomplished in July 2022 through in situ face-to-face interviews. On-site visitors were randomly selected as respondents.

In this study, two data sets were used. The first data set, referred to as set-1, consists of six variables: gender, age, marital status, employment status, income, and level of education. The other data set, referred to as set-2, consists of five variables: frequency of visitation, mode of transportation, time spent in the park, reason for visitation, and the time of park visitation.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents: More than half of the respondents were females (54.1%). The percentage of people who are married and single is 51.8% and 48.2%, respectively. Most of the respondents (46.4%) were 25-44 years old followed by the 24 and below (35.1%), the respondents aged ≥ 65 comprised the age group with the least number of respondents (6.3 %). Meanwhile, 62.8% of the respondents had a university or higher degree, whereas only 27.5% obtained high school education, which suggested relatively high education level in the sample. The respondents' income levels were mostly in the middle range, with 36.5% in the upper-middle income group and 33.6% in the lower-middle income group. The high-income group accounted for 19.6% of the respondents, while the low-income group was the smallest with 10.4%. (Table 1)

NLCC for Socio-demographic Characteristics and Park Use Variables: The determination of object scores is carried out to minimize the loss function of a data

set consisting of two sets and to achieve stationarity. Convergence was achieved with 53 iterations, object scores were determined, and the loss function was minimized to reach the most optimal solution (Table 2).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	All (n = 444)	
	N	%
Gender		
Men	240	54.1
Women	204	45.9
Age		
<24	156	35.1
25-44	206	46.4
45-64	54	12.2
65>	28	6.3
Marital Status		
Married	230	51.8
Single	214	48.2
Educational Status		
Primary school	43	9.7
High school	122	27.5
University	279	62.8
Occupation		
Unemployed	196	44.1
Housewife	18	4.1
Employed	172	38.7
Self-employed	40	9
Retired	18	4.1
Income		
High	87	19.6
Upper-middle	162	36.5
Lower-middle	149	33.6
Low	46	10.4

Table 2. Iteration history.

	Loss	Fit	Difference from the Previous Iteration
0	1.845697	.154303	
53	.487287	1.512713	.000000

The analysis was conducted on a two-dimensional basis, and the total sum of mean square residuals is 0.487. The total fit is 1.513, indicating that the model's fit (explained total variance) is 76%. This level of fit indicates a high level of canonical correlation between variable sets. (Table 3).

Table 3. A summary of the two dimensional analysis.

		Dimension		Sum
		1	2	
Loss	Set 1	.213	.274	.487
	Set 2	.213	.274	.486
	Mean	.213	.274	.487
Eigenvalue		.787	.726	
Fit				1.513

The degree of the relationship between the dimensions as a result of the analysis is interpreted with the canonical correlation coefficient. This value is between 0 and 1 and is expressed as a percentage. The canonical correlation coefficient cannot be seen after the analysis but can be obtained with the following formula (Meulman and Heiser, 2005):

$$\text{Canonical Correlation} = [(\text{Number of Sets} * \text{Eigenvalue}) - 1] / (\text{Number of Sets} - 1)]$$

Canonical correlation coefficients were calculated as 0.574 in the first dimension and 0.452 in the second dimension. Therefore, according to the first dimension, there is a 57.4% positive relationship between socio-demographic variables and park use variables; in the second dimension, this relationship is at a positive level of 45.2%.

The weights, which are the coefficients used to derive the canonical variables, also indicate the contributions of the variables to the fit in the dimensions. Table 4 shows the weight values and component loads indicating the contributions of the variables to the fit in each dimension in deriving canonical variables. These values provide information about which variables have a higher impact (or contribution) for the data sets. If the coefficient in front of a variable is positive, there is a correlation in the same direction between the relevant variable and other variables; if it is negative, there is a correlation in the opposite direction. Examining Table 4, for the fit value of the first dimension, the highest contribution is provided by the "occupation" (0.687) variable found in Set-1, followed by "marital status" (-0.659) and "income" (-0.595) variables respectively; these are followed by the "frequency of coming" (-0.826) and "reason for coming" (0.474) variables in Set-2. The highest contribution to the fit value for the second dimension was provided by the "marital status" (-0.472) variable in Set-1 and the "coming park" (-0.822) variable in Set-2. However, when looking at the weights of the variables, that is, the effect of the variables in the formation of the dimensions, it is observed that the variables of age, marital status, income, occupation, frequency of coming, spending time in a park, reason for coming, and visit time make a stronger distinction for the first dimension, while the variables of gender, educational status, mode of transportation make a stronger distinction for the second dimension.

Table 4. Weight values for each dimension of variables.

		1	2
1	Gender	-.224	-.310
	Age	-.216	-.015
	Marital Status	-.659	-.472
	Income	-.595	-.285
	Occupation	.687	-.362
	Educational Status	-.034	.349
2	Frequency of Coming	-.826	-.149
	Mode of Transportation	.376	-.822
	Spending time in a park	.299	-.012
	Reason for coming	.474	.041
	Park usage time	.202	.094

When examining the component loads, which are the Pearson correlation coefficients between the object scores and the scaled values, it is observed that the variables of frequency of visitation, occupation, and

income are primarily loaded in the first dimension and largely define this dimension. Similarly, variables of coming to the park, occupation, marital status, and educational status are primarily loaded in the second dimension and largely explain this dimension (Table 5).

Table 5. Component loading for two sets.

Set		Dimension	
		1	2
1	Gender	-.484	-.276
	Age	-.311	.062
	Marital Status	.253	-.643
	Income	-.641	.129
	Occupation	.576	-.548
	Educational Status	-.028	.505
2	Frequency of Coming	-.690	-.085
	Coming Park	.124	-.839
	Spending time in a park	.313	.220
	Reason for coming	.184	.314
	Park usage time	-.053	.147

In the component loads graph (Figure 1), the variables under consideration are expected to be as far from the origin as possible. The degree of distance increases the importance of these variables accordingly. Coming to the park, educational status, occupation, frequency of coming, and income are the most significant variables. Moreover, an inverse relationship is observed between educational status, income, age, and park usage time with occupation, marital status, and coming to the park. Similarly, a strong inverse relationship is seen between the frequency of coming, gender, reason for coming, and spending time in a park. A strong relationship is also observed between the reason for coming and spending time in a park.

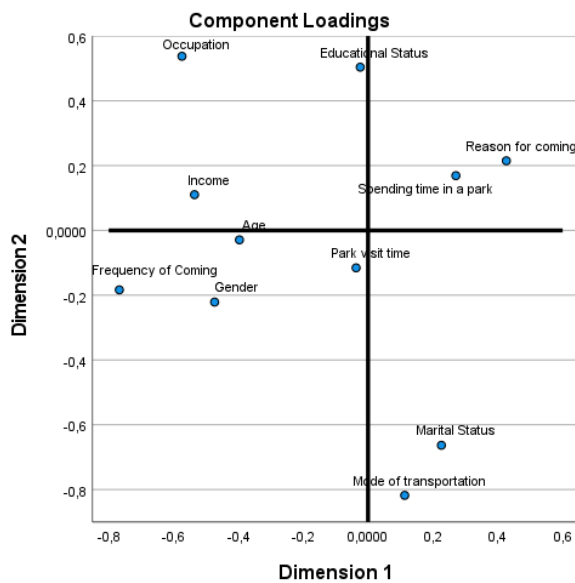


Figure 1. Component loading for two sets.

Upon examination of the centroids graph (Figure 2), four homogenous groups have been identified. In the first group, individuals with their own businesses and high income are represented. This group generally visits the

park for exercise or walking pets, typically arriving once or twice a week. This suggests that high-income individuals typically have more time for leisure activities and may prefer to exercise and spend time with their pets. The second group comprises housewives from lower-middle-income families. This group typically comes to the park for picnics or cycling, often staying for 3-5 hours or more in the evenings. This may indicate that individuals in this group view the park as a venue for social and recreational activities and possibly as a relaxation time after household chores. The third group includes individuals with upper-middle income and elementary school education. This group typically comes to the park to relax, usually arriving on foot and staying for 1-3 hours. This may suggest that individuals in this group generally perceive the park as a place for rest and relaxation. The fourth group comprises single high school graduates under the age of 24, from lower-income brackets. This group usually comes to the park for socializing and enjoying the view, typically staying for less than an hour. This may indicate that young, single individuals perceive the park as a venue for social activities and short-term relaxation. Men aged 65 and older prefer to visit the park in the morning, while women aged 45-64 prefer to come in the evening. Married individuals with jobs prefer to visit the park more often, whereas single, unemployed individuals prefer fewer visits. As the income group increases, the frequency of visits to the park also increases.

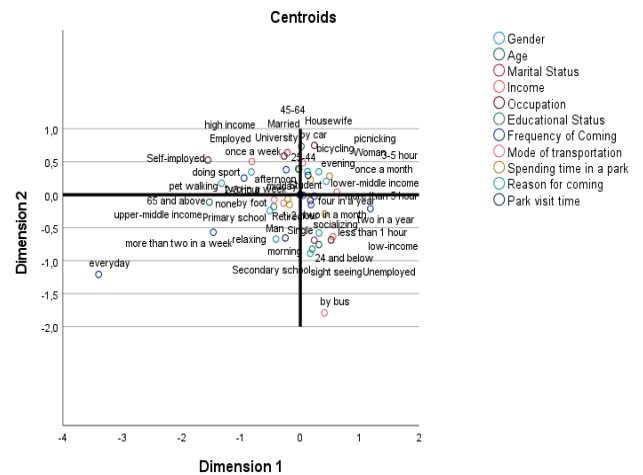


Figure 2. Centroids of all categories of variables for two sets.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the park usage habits and preferences of individuals with different socio-demographic characteristics. The analysis revealed that individuals with higher incomes tend to engage in sports and visit parks with their pets, while middle-income women prefer activities such as picnicking and cycling. On the other hand, individuals with upper-middle income and

primary school education often use parks for relaxation, while young and unmarried individuals tend to use parks for social activities and enjoying the scenery.

Based on the information provided, it's evident that socio-demographic factors play a significant role in shaping park visitation patterns and preferences. The frequency of visits, types of activities, preferred visit times, and duration of stay seem to be influenced by factors such as income level, employment status, age, gender, and marital status.

Comparing these findings with existing research, they resonate with studies conducted in urban settings. For instance, in their study, (Kim & Peterson, 2021) established a strong link between socio-economic status and park usage, noting that higher-income groups tend to visit parks more frequently and spend more time during each visit. This observation aligns with Sessoms (1993)'s finding that individuals with lower income levels lean towards activities requiring less recreational participation. The outcomes of the study also align with (Karaşah, 2017) in which it was suggested that park use levels do not significantly vary based on income. This might be due to the participants being from different cities.

Likewise, age and gender disparities in park visitation patterns have been documented in other research. For instance, younger individuals commonly visit parks for physical activities and social interactions, whereas older individuals prefer more passive pursuits, like bird-watching or simply enjoying the surroundings (Williams, 2021). This finding is in line with Polat and Güngör's (2013) results, where they found that elderly park-goers gravitated towards parks with scenic spots and mature trees, while younger participants based their preferences on prior experiences and the presence of natural features. Although not directly overlapping with this study's results, these observations correspond to the general notion that recreational involvement tends to decrease with age and correlates with park usage satisfaction.

Moreover, the outcomes suggest a potential link between employment status and park utilization; employed individuals seem to visit parks more frequently compared to those without jobs, a result also indicated in the (Fontán-Vela et al., 2021) study. This discovery is particularly intriguing, potentially reflecting the impact of work-related stress and the desire for leisure time in natural settings, a theme explored in the realm of environmental psychology (Brown & Green, 2022).

To conclude, this study underscores the significance of considering the needs and preferences of diverse demographic groups in the design and management of urban parks. This approach can lead to more inclusive and accessible parks, enriching the park experiences of various user groups. Furthermore, incorporating local

context and community feedback into park design and management decisions can enhance the capacity of each park to address its unique requirements and challenges.

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