

*Beach Clubs and Tourist Gaze: A Critical Inquiry into the Construction of Social Distinction**

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Abstract

This study explores the growing concerns about socioeconomic accessibility, inclusivity, and exclusionary practices of beach clubs as ostensibly public spaces in the tourism destination of Çeşme. The thematic analysis of Google Maps online reviews has provided critical insights into beach clubs' selective admission practices and has elucidated the factors influencing customer perspectives and driving high demand for these clubs. Also, the findings revealed a relationship between customer expenditure and favorable entrance experiences; guests with lesser spending reported dissatisfaction and reluctance to revisit. Eight beach clubs with ratings deviating from the weighted average were examined to ensure diverse representation. The findings strongly encourage us to take urgent policy action to address the call for the need to create more inclusive beaches that should not be solely open to certain people with privileges. In the case of beach clubs, the adherence to specific dress codes and the emphasis on Instagram followers as a measure of social status reflect the doxa of conspicuous consumption and social hierarchies. This perpetuates a system where the privileged and affluent are more likely to gain access, while others may feel excluded or marginalized. Drawing on the solid theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu's social theory and John Urry's "tourist gaze," this paper outlines the socio-economic barriers that distort ideals of public space and leisure and invites a reassessment of inclusivity in tourist destinations and luxury tourism.

Keywords: Bourdieu, social and cultural capital, class, inclusion, beach club, critical tourism research, leisure

* This study is part of the first author's Ph.D. thesis conducted under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emir Ozeren in the Department of Tourism Management at Graduate School of Social Sciences, Dokuz Eylül University.

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Plaj Kulüpleri ve Turist Bakışı: Sosyal Ayrımların İnşası Üzerine Eleştirel Bir İnceleme

Öz

Bu çalışma, Çeşme turizm destinasyonunda görünürde kamusal alanlar olan plaj kulüplerinin sosyoekonomik erişilebilirliği, kapsayıcılığı ve dışlayıcı pratiklerine ilişkin artan endişeleri incelemektedir. Google haritalar çevrimiçi incelemelerinin tematik analizi, plaj kulüplerinin seçici kabul uygulamalarına ilişkin eleştirel içgörü sağlarken müşteri bakış açılarını etkileyen ve bu kulüplere yönelik yüksek talebi artıran faktörleri ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ayrıca, bulgular müşteri harcamaları ile olumlu giriş deneyimleri arasında bir ilişki olduğuna işaret etmiş; daha az harcama yapan misafirler memnuniyetsizlik ve tekrar ziyaret etme konusunda isteksizlik bildirmiştir. Temsiliyette çeşitlilik sağlamak için ağırlıklı ortalamadan uzaklıklarına dayanarak sekiz plaj kulübü incelenmiştir. Bulgular, yalnızca ayrıcalıklara sahip belirli kişilere açık olmaması gereken, daha kapsayıcı plajlar yaratma ihtiyacına yönelik çağırışı ele almak üzere acil politik eylemde bulunmamız konusunda bizi kuvvetle teşvik etmektedir. Plaj kulüpleri örneğinde, belirli kıyafet kurallarına bağlılık ve sosyal statü ölçüsü olarak instagram takipçi sayısına yapılan vurgu, gösterişçi tüketimin ve sosyal hiyerarşilerin doxasını belirlemektedir. Söz konusu durum, ayrıcalıklı ve varlıklı kişilerin erişim olasılığının daha yüksek olduğu, diğerlerinin ise kendilerini dışlanmış veya marjinalleştirilmiş hissedebildiği bir sistemi meşrulaştırmakta ve yeniden üretmektedir. Kuramsal çerçeve olarak Pierre Bourdieu'nun sosyal teorisi ve John Urry'nin "turist bakışı" ile şekillenen bu makale, kamusal alan ve boş zaman ideallerini bozan sosyo-ekonomik engelleri ana hatlarıyla ortaya koymakta ve turistik destinasyonlarda ve lüks turizmde kapsayıcılığın yeniden değerlendirilmesine davet etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bourdieu, sosyal ve kültürel sermaye, sınıf, kapsayıcılık, plaj kulübü, eleştirel turizm araştırmaları, boş zaman



1. INTRODUCTION

Beach clubs originated from the general club movement that started in England and spread worldwide, adapting to local cultures and leisure trends (Barrows and Robinson, 2018). Their development was influenced by changing societal attitudes towards leisure and recreation, initially serving elite social circles, and gradually becoming more inclusive and oriented towards entertainment and enjoyment. The concept of beach clubs has evolved significantly over time, drawing from broader historical developments in social clubs and recreational activities. The idea of exclusive social clubs dates back to ancient times, possibly even predating Roman baths, which were early centers of social activity. The modern concept of clubs for socializing and leisure originated in England and spread globally with British expatriates. These clubs were initially exclusive to gentlemen and catered to social, political, and recreational needs (Barrows and Robinson, 2018). In the early 20th century, France saw the development of beach clubs as an extension of the sea-bathing tradition. These clubs provided structured physical activities under the sun and games on the beach, fostering a culture of leisure and physical fitness among holidaymakers. The first beach club was founded in La Baule, France, just before World War I, becoming a model for similar establishments in Europe (Rainis, 2000).

In Çeşme and other popular tourism destinations in Türkiye, it is common practice for beaches to be leased to various businesses. Article 43 of the Constitution of Türkiye states that the public interest shall be the primary consideration in the utilization of coastlines. As explicitly stipulated in law no. 3621, which regulates the use of beaches and coasts, "*The coasts and the lands acquired through filling and drying are under the dominion and supervision of the state. The coasts are open to equal and free use by all citizens. In utilizing the coasts and coastlines, public interest shall be considered first. The coast is open to equal and free use of all citizens and no structures may be built on them.*" While this law espouses the principle of equality, the leasing of coastal areas to private enterprises is a common occurrence. It can be observed that the businesses that obtain the right to lease attempt to exclude citizens from benefiting from these areas by enclosing the coasts for non-customers.

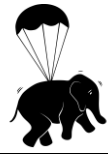
Çeşme is a geographical region in the form of a peninsula within the boundaries of İzmir. Due to its peninsular geography, there are many beaches in the region. Tourism activities began in the 1950s, and an important development that made the region a popular tourist destination was the 1997 construction of the highway. Thanks to this road, transport has become easier and mass tourism has attracted to the region. With 697 facilities and 30,640 beds, Çeşme has the highest number of accommodation facilities of any district in İzmir (Kultur ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2024). During high season and national holidays, the number of tourists hosted by Çeşme exceeds the bed amount with daily visitors and those staying in campsites. This situation can cause the carrying capacity to be exceeded during the high season (IHA, 2024; IHA News, 2023).



Although there are many swimmable areas in Çeşme, the number of places with sandy coasts that can be characterized as beaches is about twenty. Most of these beaches lack public facilities, such as sunbeds, umbrellas, showers, toilets, etc. A limited number of beaches (5) with such facilities are run by the district council and in most of these areas showers, lifeguards, and toilets are provided free of charge, but umbrellas and sunbeds are not provided. The remaining beaches are partly or wholly leased to private companies, which serve only their own customers. It is well known that the prices in these establishments are above average and only a certain group of people can benefit from these places. Current tourist demand causes an excessive density of beaches, especially during the summer season and national holidays. In addition to that overtourism is a growing concern in Çeşme, as highlighted by recent findings on its perception (Nisari and Türksoy, 2023). During the research, it was observed that many tourists prefer beach clubs with cleaner beaches and a safe environment. These beach clubs are less crowded, and tourists can meet their other needs such as food and drink, sunbeds, toilets, showers, music, etc. However, in recent years, the selective admission practices of some beach facilities, based on criteria such as dress code, the brand of the car, applying additional fees or expenditure limits, and number of followers on social media, etc. indicate socio-economic limitations in access to these areas. These selective admission practices have sparked debates about the accessibility and inclusivity of these public spaces. By focusing on specific criteria, these beach clubs may exclude people who do not fit into these narrowly and arbitrarily defined categories. This raises concerns about the socioeconomic limits to entry and the potential exclusion of certain social groups.

The impact of these selective admission policies on different social groups is a key area of concern. Analyzing online reviews can provide valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of individuals who have visited these beach clubs in Çeşme. Due to this purpose, we decided to conduct a thematic analysis of GoogleMaps reviews. By focusing on eight low-rated (due to their actual ratings' distances to the weighted average) beach clubs and examining a total of 9,343 online reviews, the study aims to understand the underlying factors that contribute to the implementation of these admission policies and their impacts on the groups with low social capital to enter the field.

Drawing on theoretical frameworks by Pierre Bourdieu's "social theory" and John Urry's "tourist gaze" we aim to understand the socio-economic limits of entry to beach clubs. Although using a comprehensive and strong methodological framework is crucial in tourism research, studies in this field have mostly overlooked the contributions of Bourdieu (Ahmad, 2013). Bourdieu's ideas have proven to be useful in examining how tourists behave and adapt in unfamiliar social settings (Lee et al., 2014; Garner, 2016) and can be applied to investigate the power dynamics and inequalities that may exist within the tourism industry. Kendall (2008) states that in a class-based society, inequality is perpetuated in numerous ways. One such way is through the social organizations of the upper classes and social inequality is rooted in people's networks, levels of prestige, and the presence or absence of social and cultural capital.



Tourism can be viewed as a complex social field where different stakeholders such as tourists, hosts, and industry workers interact within specific rules and power dynamics that are influenced by their capital and habitus. This perspective aligns with the idea that tourism is not just a discipline but a field with its own unique characteristics and dynamics (Tribe, 2010). Interactions within the tourism field involve various forms of capital, including economic, social, and cultural capital, which play a crucial role in shaping power relations and social practices (McGehee et al., 2009; Çakmak et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the concept of social capital within the tourism field has gained attention, highlighting the importance of relationships and networks among stakeholders (Xu et al., 2020). These relationships are essential for understanding the social impact of tourism and the dynamics of power and influence within the field (Viana-Lora and Nel-lo-Andreu, 2023).

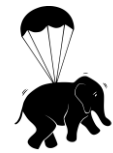
The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on equal access to public spaces and the role of businesses in promoting inclusivity. By highlighting the limitations and challenges faced by some social groups in accessing these beach clubs, the study provides recommendations for fostering a more equitable, inclusive, and welcoming environment in beach clubs not only in Çeşme but also in similar tourist destinations. This research offers valuable insights into potential access barriers and challenges informed by Bourdieu's theory of capitals and calls for the need to create more inclusive beaches that should not be solely open to a few people with certain privileges.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Bourdieu's Social Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's framework of social theory allows for understanding the dynamics of power, taste, and exclusion taking place in the tourism landscape. A focus on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, doxa and field could help in understanding the reproduction of social inequalities through various practices and structures within the educational field (Agbenyega and Klibthong, 2015). By applying these concepts to tourism, similar insights can be gained about how social practices in tourism can reinforce existing inequalities. Bourdieu avoids using the term "society" in his works instead to address the complexity of modern societies he uses the term "field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). With the concept of field that Bourdieu developed, he defined social spaces as fields in which individuals and groups compete for power and resources. These fields have their own specific rules, norms, and boundaries which determine who can access and control resources (Dorschel, 2020).

Bourdieu's ideas of field and space are important for understanding the social dynamics that constitute tourism. He defined a field as a social space that encapsulates relationships reaching over sets of positions between actors (Bathmaker, 2015). This field is defined as a structured set of social agents and their interactions, marked by struggles to change or maintain existing power dynamics (Collyer et al., 2015). In the tourism context, this concept of field can be



applied to power relation analysis and struggles for domination between several actors such as the state, regional governments, private enterprises, and local service providers (Ahmad, 2021). Bourdieu defines a field as a network of relations among positions in each domain of social activity, such as the tourism field. Each field operates according to its own logic and norms, and actors within a field compete for resources and status (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Inequalities arise from the different volumes and types of capital that individuals possess, which determine their positions and power within the field (Bourdieu, 1990). In the context of beach clubs, the field can be seen as a structured social space where actors compete for positions of dominance. The entrance requirements implemented by beach clubs can be seen as strategies employed by beach clubs to maintain and reinforce their position within this field.

On the other hand, Bourdieu's concept of space, especially social space, refers to a structured system of locations that exist objectively but are not necessarily dependent on physical interactions between individuals (Šebek, 2021). This is the social space that is marked by stratified differences which depends on the economic, cultural, and social distribution of capital (Schmitz et al., 2016). Bourdieu's field theory is linked to the concepts of habitus and capital, demonstrating that these concepts are related and require separate analysis (Bathmaker, 2015). In this view, tourism is one of the examples of a social space as a symbolic arena in which actors are in a constant struggle for legitimacy and distinction through the accumulation and display of different types of capital (Murti and Susanti, 2021).

Entrance requirements such as dress code, number of followers, or brand of car can serve as markers of social status and exclusivity within beach clubs. These requirements create a sense of elitism and exclusivity, potentially excluding individuals who do not meet the desired criteria. Bourdieu argues that social inequality is perpetuated through the accumulation and reproduction of different forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1983). Bourdieu's concept of capital, particularly cultural capital, has been instrumental in shedding light on the social dynamics, power structures, and behaviors within the tourism industry. The study focused on cultural capital, which as defined by Bourdieu, refers to the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are transmitted across generations (Macbeth et al., 2004). This form of capital plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' behaviors and practices within the tourism industry. Bourdieu's theory of capital extends beyond economic aspects, highlighting how power dynamics associated with capital operate in various social spheres (Desan, 2013). In this study concept of capital also helps to delve into issues such as how social inclusion and exclusion occur and what impact this process has on larger sociological issues of growing economic and social inequality (Kendall, 2008).

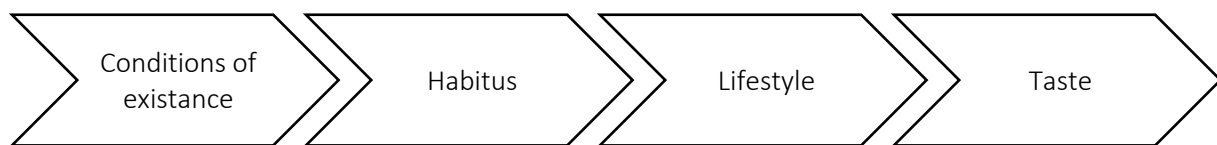
Scholars by far have also attempted to apply Bourdieu's concept of capital to understand the dynamics of the field. For example, Çakmak et al. (2018) conducted a study in Chiang Mai, Thailand, using Bourdieu's theory of fields and capitals to assess the role of different actors in the informal tourism economy. This has been further adopted in Bourdieu's interpretation of cultural capital in the field of tourism, linked to sustainable consumption, in explaining how the



cultural habitus of an individual influences choices and practices in tourism actions (Negacz, 2021). In addition, Bourdieu's concept of capital has been modified and developed so that it can be applied to conditions in tourism. As in the case of the research with tour guides, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital was reformulated to apply it to the competencies and qualities needed in the tourism field (Garner, 2016). This type of theoretical development demonstrates the adaptability of Bourdieu's perspective to gain insight into the complex nature of cultural practices in tourism. Besides, Karatas-Ozkan et al. (2024) use a Bourdieu perspective to show how women entrepreneurs in sustainable tourism use different forms of capital to develop sustainability practices through a gender lens.

Cultural capital in the context of beach clubs would consist not only of material possessions, but also of knowledge, tastes, and credentials that mark social distinctions. Indeed, the emphasis on entry requirements corresponds to the accumulation and display of cultural capital, which further reifies social stratification within these spaces. Individuals are products of social conditions (habitus) and struggle for power and capital in social spaces (Bourdieu, 1990). In addition, individuals move through and internalize social structures, developing their own lifestyles and tastes (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Process of habitus



Source: Lee et al. (2014)

Doxa encompasses the taken-for-granted beliefs and values that are accepted as natural within a particular field. It legitimizes the existing social order and power relations, making it difficult to question or change the status quo (Dorschel, 2020; Power, 1999). Doxa shapes the habitus, which is the system of dispositions and practices that individuals acquire through their life experiences. The habitus, in turn, perpetuates the doxic beliefs and values by guiding behavior in ways that align with the accepted norms. Because doxa is deeply embedded and taken for granted, it is resistant to change (Calhoun, 2003). Challenging doxa requires questioning the fundamental assumptions of a field, which can be difficult and disruptive. In their study, Stringfellow et al. (2013) state culinary field's doxa can manifest in the unquestioned valuation of certain cuisines or culinary techniques as more prestigious or authentic than others. This can influence what is considered haute cuisine versus everyday food. In tourism, doxa might include the belief that certain destinations are more worthy of travel and exploration than others, shaping travel patterns and marketing strategies (Ahmad, 2021). In the case of beach clubs, the adherence to specific dress codes and the emphasis on digital followers as a measure of social status reflect the doxa of conspicuous consumption and social hierarchies. This perpetuates a system where the privileged and affluent are more likely to gain access, while others may feel excluded or marginalized.



Habitus, a central concept in Bourdieu's theory, pertains to the ingrained dispositions, tastes, and behaviors that individuals acquire through their socialization and experiences. Habitus refers to the ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through socialization and that influence their perceptions and actions (Ahmad, 2013). Habitus is both structured by past conditions and the structuring of present practices (Bourdieu, 1984). It reflects the internalization of external social structures, allowing individuals to act in ways that perpetuate the social order (Bourdieu, 1990). In the context of tourism, habitus plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' preferences, choices, and interactions with different destinations and activities. Previous studies utilizing the concept of habitus in tourism primarily focus on the role of habitus that influences locals' responses to overtourism (Purwandani and Pakan, 2022), the application of habitus to understand the role of taste, lifestyle, and cultural capital in tourism consumption (Stringfellow et al., 2013).

By examining the habitus of individuals, shaped by their social and economic background, we can gain insight into the underlying mechanisms that drive tourist decision-making and experiences within beach clubs. Those accustomed to privileged lifestyles may find it easier to conform to established norms, while others may feel out of place or unwelcome. By applying Bourdieu's theoretical framework to the analysis of online reviews, we illuminate how these concepts manifest in the experiences and perceptions of visitors to beach clubs in Çeşme. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-economic limits of entry to these spaces and provide insights for promoting greater inclusivity and equity in beach club environments. This application of Bourdieu's theory to the tourism landscape allows for a deeper understanding of how tourism is not just an economic activity but also a cultural and social phenomenon that reflects broader societal values and power structures.

2.2. Applying John Urry's Tourist Gaze

Understanding the impact of the tourist gaze is essential for comprehending how invisible discrimination and negative experiences can occur in beach clubs in a luxury tourism destination such as Çeşme (Pirnar et al., 2011). The gaze influences not only how tourists perceive the world around them, but also how they interact with the local community and the individuals who work in the tourism industry. Urry and Larsen (2011, p.102-107) have applied a Bourdieusian perspective to explain the growing appeal of the mediatic gaze. They connect this trend to the development of consumer society and the rise of new lifestyle groups aiming to differentiate themselves from their predecessors and peers through their preferences. These new lifestyle groups are often attracted to unique and authentic experiences that they seek during their travels (Dorschel, 2020).

The concept of the "tourist gaze" as introduced by John Urry is rooted in the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his concept of the medical gaze. Urry's development of the tourist gaze notion draws on Foucault's work on the medical gaze to conceptualize tourists' experiences and relationships with the people and places they encounter (Samarathunga and Cheng, 2021).



Foucault's gaze is an important conceptual tool for understanding how the act of looking is connected to structures of power. It is not just about literal vision; it is about how certain institutions and their practices shape the way we see, understand, and interact with the world (Urry and Larsen, 2011; Hollinshead, 1999). The tourist gaze, then, can be understood as a socially constructed way of seeing and experiencing the world (MacCannell, 2001). The tourist gaze is not simply about observing and appreciating the sights and attractions of a destination (Urry and Larsen, 2011). It also encompasses the social interactions, power dynamics, and hierarchies that are at play within the tourist experience (MacCannell, 2001). Moreover, the tourist gaze highlights that looking is not a neutral act, but rather a learned ability that is influenced by social factors such as class, gender, and race.

The "tourist gaze" is a concept that refers to the set of expectations and assumptions tourists bring with them when viewing different places, objects, and cultures while traveling. It encompasses the way tourists see and interpret their experiences, often through preconceived notions and cultural stereotypes that have been influenced by various factors such as the media, guidebooks, and societal expectations. Tourist gaze is not simply a passive act of looking; it involves cognitive work of interpreting, evaluating, making comparisons, and capturing experiences, often through photography. It is a socially constructed way of seeing that shapes and is shaped by the tourism industry and cultural discourses (Robinson, 2014).

John Urry's work on the 'tourist gaze' is informed by Bourdieu's theory. Urry suggests that tourism consumption is not just about the act of traveling but also the way tourists perceive and engage with different places through a socially constructed lens. This lens is shaped by a person's habitus and cultural capital. Tourists from different social backgrounds will have different expectations and practices when traveling. For example, the "romantic gaze" is associated with seeking authenticity and individualized experiences, often linked to higher cultural capital, while the "collective gaze" might be satisfied with shared, standardized experiences of tourism. Urry's analysis reflects the way individuals' tastes in tourism are shaped by their position within the social field and their accumulated forms of capital (Urry, 1990).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

To investigate the socio-economic barriers to accessing beach clubs in Çeşme, a thematic analysis of online reviews sourced from the Google Maps platform was conducted using a data scraper browser extension. The Google Maps platform was chosen for this analysis due to the higher volume of reviews it garners compared to other platforms like TripAdvisor, Foursquare, Instagram, and Facebook. Moreover, there is a negative review deletion risk by beach club owners on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok, which could skew the data; this risk is less prevalent on Google Maps.

Thematic analysis is a method commonly used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data (Mishra and Dey, 2022). It involves examining data such as interview transcripts, observations, and other textual materials to capture the essential themes



and meanings that emerge from the data set. This approach allows researchers to organize and describe their data set in detail and is widely used because of its flexibility (Mishra and Dey, 2022). The thematic analysis technique was chosen for this study due to its flexibility and suitability for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This approach allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of customer experiences and perceptions, which is essential for exploring the socioeconomic barriers to beach club accessibility. Themes are generally abstract notions that capture an aspect of the data that appears to be important concerning the research question and are often associated with a particular level of patterned response or meaning within the dataset. Through this analysis, we gained insight into the experiences and perceptions of tourists who have visited beach clubs in Çeşme, with a particular focus on the distinctions that occur during their beach club experience.

The study focuses on beach club customers in Çeşme, a luxury tourism destination. The target population includes all individuals who have visited and reviewed the beach clubs on Google Maps. The sample consists of reviews from eight selected beach clubs in Çeşme, chosen based on their rating variance from the weighted average rating. This selection ensures a diverse representation of customer experiences, especially highlighting those with lower ratings often associated with exclusionary practices. Purposive sampling was used to select the beach clubs for analysis. This technique was chosen to focus on clubs that exhibit selective admission practices and have a significant number of reviews, providing a robust data set for thematic analysis. The rationale for this choice is to capture a wide range of customer experiences, particularly those who might have faced barriers to entry due to socioeconomic factors. By focusing on clubs with varied ratings, we aim to understand the underlying factors contributing to these ratings and the socio-economic dynamics at play. The comments were retrieved from the system in April 2024. This time frame was selected to ensure the data reflects recent customer experiences and perceptions, considering the evolving nature of tourism and beach club policies.

The data collection and selection process involved searching for public and private beaches in Çeşme. As a first step, we conducted a Google Maps search using the keyword "beaches" to identify potential locations in Çeşme. The researcher's familiarity with Çeşme, its amenities, and common beach-related issues (due to living and working there) aided in identifying operational beaches and beach clubs. A total of 50 private beaches and 13 public beaches were found, with 26,719 reviews. In line with the research design, the focus was narrowed down to private beaches with a selective admission process. To select the most relevant beach clubs in Çeşme, the number of online reviews and their average star rating were prioritized. Based on these criteria (popularity and average rating), the top 8 beach clubs were chosen for further analysis using thematic analysis (Table 1).

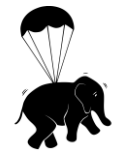


Table 1. Beach selection

Name of Beach Club	Place	Reviews	Rating	Weighted Points	Rating Variance
Imi Beach Club	Aya Yorgi	641	2,3	1474,3	1,286877287
Sommer Klein	Alaçatı	778	2,5	1945	1,086877287
Before Sunset Beach	Ovacık	1602	2,7	4325,4	0,886877287
Beach of Momo	Dalyan	807	2,9	2340,3	0,686877287
Boheme Beach	Ovacık	1053	3,0	3159	0,586877287
OmPaparazzi	Aya Yorgi	1219	3,4	4144,6	0,186877287
SoleMare	Aya Yorgi	1345	3,5	4707,5	0,086877287
Fun Beach	Altinkum	1898	3,5	6643	0,086877287
Total (all beaches in Cesme)		26778		96049,4	
Weighted Average		3,58687			
Average Review		535,56			

We narrowed the data due to the inequality of review numbers and relative ratings. To equalize the number of reviews and ratings for each beach club, the distances between each club's rating and the weighted mean were calculated. Clubs with ratings significantly lower than the average were prioritized for further analysis, as these lower ratings are often associated with barriers to entry and exclusion practices. Additionally, beaches with fewer reviews than the average (total reviews divided by the number of beaches) were excluded to prevent them from skewing the analysis in favor of beaches with more reviews.

3.1. Research Purpose

The primary purpose of this research is to critically examine the socio-economic barriers that influence accessibility to beach clubs in Çeşme, with a specific focus on selective admission policies that may promote social exclusivity. By employing Pierre Bourdieu's social theory and John Urry's concept of the "tourist gaze," this study seeks to understand how economic, cultural, and social capitals interact within the context of beach club accessibility. Furthermore, it aims to explore the implications of these interactions for social inclusivity in tourist spaces. Through the analysis of customer experiences and perceptions derived from online reviews, this research offers insights that could inform policy and operational adjustments aimed at fostering inclusivity and equality in beach club access. This study not only contributes to academic discourse but also aims to provide practical recommendations for making beach clubs more accessible and welcoming, thereby promoting a more inclusive form of tourism.

4. FINDINGS

During the thematic analysis of the online reviews, we found several important themes related to the experiences and perceptions of tourists at beach clubs in Çeşme (Table 2). The empirical findings from the thematic analysis of customer reviews reveal a vivid representation of social stratification, capital accumulation, and power dynamics within the context of Çeşme's beach clubs, resonating with Bourdieu's social theory. Additionally, Urry's "tourist gaze" provides a



lens through which the consumerist culture and the construction of a touristic space can be understood.

Table 2. Themes and codes

Aggregate Themes	Second Order Themes	First Order Concepts	Frequency
Economic and cultural capital			
		Atmosphere	243
		Events and performances	105
		Acceptance and consent	211
		Overpriced	488
		Money orientation	294
		Value for money/perceived value	112
Entrance Practices and Distinction			
	Distinction in the field	Class Distinction	22
		Unequal Treatment	74
		Rude-Bad Behavior	57
		Favouritism-based pricing	344
		Staff ignorance	25
		Expenditure limit or extra charge	222
	Selective Accessibility	Poor or slow service	466
		Problem-free service at the reception desk	21
		Security check at the entrance (no allowance for some belongings)	83
		Courteous reception desk staff	27
		Access without a reservation	18
		Admission practices at the reception desk	34
	Performative Gatekeeping	Reservation requirement	48
		No child allowance	33
		Inappropriate outfit	63
		Arbitrariness in customer selection	118
		Rejected due to car brand	23
		Rejected for not having a reservation	86
		Rejected at the entrance despite a reservation	600
		Rejected at the front desk without a reason	79
		Rude behavior of front desk staff	790
		Not allowed without a female companion	47
	Physical abuse	8	
	Favoring other customers	309	
	Rejection due to the number of Instagram followers	15	
	Unable to make a reservation	80	



Social Interaction and Gaze	Pitoresque Gaze	22
	Comfortable with other customers	127
	Overcrowded	89
	Entertainment without disturbance	22
	Feel uncomfortable with other customers	97
	Courteous, positive, and friendly staff	161
	Staff extra-role behavior	10
Total		9175

The analysis of reviews relating to beach clubs in Çeşme reveals that economic and cultural capital serve not only as access mechanisms but also as significant barriers, stratifying visitors based on their ability to engage economically and culturally within these spaces. The economic and cultural capital indicators theme captures a dual aspect of the beach club experience, where high prices and exclusive atmospheres create a demarcation line between different social groups.

High prices at beach clubs act as a deliberate barrier to entry, effectively segregating the consumer base from those who can afford such exclusivity. This practice resonates deeply with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of economic capital, where financial capability directly influences one's social mobility and access to leisure spaces (Swartz, 2012, p.213). One reviewer's comment, *"It is a very nice beach with a nice atmosphere...for foreigners, they are quite affordable,"* illustrates this division, emphasizing how economic capital varies significantly between locals and international visitors, impacting their access and perceived value. Additionally, comments like *"It's a perfect hidden paradise...It is a place where ultra-rich people go"* highlight the role of these spaces in reinforcing social distinctions. This observation aligns with Bourdieu's idea that social spaces are regulated by economic power (Bourdieu, 1989), which not only defines but also reinforces social stratification.

The mention of the atmosphere and the quality of interactions within the beach club setting underscores the role of cultural capital. As Bourdieu suggests, cultural capital involves an acquired set of cultural credentials, tastes, and preferences that elevate one's social standing (Robbins, 2005). The review stating, *"The ambience, as always, is associated with the class. You felt very comfortable...able to dance and party..."* reflects how cultural capital manifests through leisure activities, where class-based comfort and exclusivity are celebrated and perceived as the norm.

John Urry's concept of the "tourist gaze" offers a valuable lens to understand how these economic and cultural distinctions are not only observed but also consumed and perpetuated through tourism practices (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The gaze here dictates not only what is desirable but also who is desirable within these spaces, reinforcing a cycle of exclusivity. This gaze influences and is influenced by Bourdieu's distinctions, as the act of consuming luxury and exclusivity at beach clubs becomes a marker of one's social position and taste.



The analysis of entrance policies at Çeşme beach clubs reveals a complex interplay of symbolic violence and selective accessibility, which resonates strongly with Pierre Bourdieu's notions of distinction and symbolic power. The entrance practices and distinction theme showcase how social distinctions are enforced and maintained through rigorous selection processes at the entrance, impacting both the experiences and perceptions of potential customers.

The practices observed at the beach club entrances, such as favoritism-based pricing, staff stonewalling, and the imposition of arbitrary entrance fees, exemplify Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (Wacquant, 1987). These practices naturalize social hierarchies by embedding them within the everyday operations of beach clubs, making exclusion seem both inevitable and justified. For instance, one reviewer's experience of differential pricing based on ethnicity and language underlines how economic and cultural markers are used to enforce social stratification: "*Prices may vary depending on your ethnicity, color, and language spoken... The second visit has an entrance fee of 300 plus a minimum spending limit of 500 per person for entry.*"

Additionally, reviews highlighting rude behavior and unfair treatment by staff reflect the arbitrary nature of symbolic violence where those not fitting the club's ideal customer profile experience direct marginalization: "*The staff is extremely unfriendly and condescending... you will only be treated well if you pay too much.*"; "...they only allow access if you have a reservation and to make a reservation you need to be an Instagrammer with many followers. Or you come with beautiful women, then you might have a chance. The staff at the entrance is very arrogant... but I mean... that's part of their job." This aligns with Bourdieu's view that social fields, like beach clubs, use symbolic violence to reinforce the visibility of social differences, essentially giving access to those deemed suitable (Wacquant, 1987).

The implementation of selective accessibility measures such as dress codes, car brands, and social media follower requirements acts as physical and symbolic barriers that define who gets to enjoy the leisure space. Reviews describe strict security checks and selective admissions, "*We were greeted at the door with a very rude style... Our bags were checked at the entrance,*" showcasing how these practices contribute to an environment of exclusivity. This not only reflects Bourdieu's notion of social fields as battlegrounds for power and distinction but also illustrates how cultural capital - in the form of accepted outfits or social status markers such as car brands - determines access.

John Urry's "tourist gaze" further elucidates this phenomenon, suggesting that such selective practices shape how spaces are perceived and experienced by visitors (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The beach clubs, by curating who is visible within these spaces, also shape the expectations and perceptions of other potential visitors, thereby maintaining an image of exclusivity and desirability: "*You make a reservation in advance... and they turn you away at the door with my baby in my arms without any reason.*" "*At the entrance, they wouldn't let us in... We were looking good; in case anyone thinks we're not.*" The arbitrary nature of these rejections not only



impacts individual experiences but also reinforces the exclusivity of the space, perpetuating a cycle where only certain 'types' of visitors are seen as suitable.

The customers who can be visible in front of others' gaze within these spaces state that they had no issues at the entrance and the staff is courteous and nice: *"The welcome at the entrance was very nice... the atmosphere and people were very elite."* Also, they approve the selection process and advise other customers to make reservations before coming. *"... elite places are definitely pricy, people should come according to their budget, most of the bad comments are about rejection at the door, the beach club can decide whom to accept or not."*

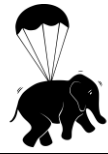
The distinction enforced through entrance policies creates a space where the economic and cultural capitals are continuously at play, influencing who gets to participate in the leisure activities of the beach clubs. The acceptance or rejection at the entrance, often based on superficial or undisclosed criteria, impacts how individuals perceive their social standing relative to the constructed ideals of these leisure spaces.

The dynamics of social interaction within Çeşme beach clubs underscore the intricate play of social capital and the embodiment of the 'tourist gaze'. Social interaction and gaze theme highlights how personal interactions, both between customers and between staff and customers, can significantly influence the overall experience within these exclusive social spaces.

In Bourdieu's terms, social capital is crucial for navigating and gaining acceptance within social fields (Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.128), such as beach clubs, which are arenas of both leisure and social positioning. Positive interactions, such as experiences with courteous, positive, and friendly staff, and the presence of a socially appealing crowd, enhance one's social standing within the club. For instance, a visitor describes, *"Super Beach Club. It's very clean and you have your own space without being close to people, clear sea, very kind and hospitable staff..."*, reflecting how social capital is accrued through pleasant social interactions which also enhance the perceived quality of the space.

Conversely, negative social interactions or the perception of exclusivity can diminish one's social capital, as evidenced by the reaction to perceived snobbery: *"The gate staff acted a bit snobbish...Strange behavior, but still worth going and experiencing the ambiance."* This experience reflects Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, where social exclusion is masked as natural differentiation based on seemingly innocuous criteria like appearance or behavior.

John Urry's 'tourist gaze' is instrumental in understanding how these social interactions are not only personal experiences but also elements that contribute to the social construction of the space (Bourdieu, 1984, p.112; Urry and Larsen, 2011). The 'gaze' shapes and is shaped by these interactions, influencing how individuals perceive and engage with the space. For example, the emphasis on visual aesthetics for social media, *"It's a very beautiful place. Everything is designed for Instagram users to take great photos,"* underscores how the tourist gaze can be



directed towards creating a particular image of the space that emphasizes visual and social appeal.

Moreover, the experience of exclusivity and social segregation, such as feeling comfortable away from "yokels" or enjoying "*quality fun without any annoying stares*," reflects how the tourist gaze can foster a sense of social distinction. These narratives align with Urry's observation that the tourist gaze can create and reinforce social boundaries, often based on class, aesthetics, and social behavior, thus influencing not just individual experiences but the collective perception of the beach club as an exclusive locale.

5. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

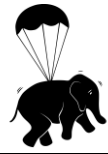
This study reveals the economic, cultural, and social capitals and their roles in defining the leisure spaces by examining the socio-economic barriers to accessing the beach clubs in Çeşme. The paper highlights, in a precise way, the mechanisms of exclusion and distinction structuring the social dynamics within the beach clubs of Çeşme, theoretically grounded on Bourdieu's social theory and Urry's tourist gaze.

Our findings in this regard demonstrate that the exclusionary practices being followed at Çeşme beach clubs were not merely operational strategies; rather, they are clear reflections of the structures of social power and status. High prices and most importantly, the exclusiveness of the atmospheres thus act as gatekeepers, marking the spaces of different social groups and hence making the social stratification that Bourdieu articulates with his concepts of capital and habitus, permanent. The economic and cultural capital provides access to some, while it clearly denies some people the ability to access these places, so challenging ideals of inclusivity and accessibility.

The selective access, which further was based on limiting the accessibility criteria, that is, dress codes, norms of social media influence, and arbitrary money charges, are indications of symbolic violence, something that Bourdieu postulated as a subtle and often overlooked force, maintaining social inequality. These policies also solidify the social distinctions and enhance the tourist gaze, as conceptualized by Urry, where the gaze itself becomes a marker of exclusion or acceptance within these leisure spaces.

In Çeşme, the gaze of a tourist is not a passive exercise but a rather dynamic interaction. It has been under the influence of the place, constructed at the beach clubs both physically and socially. This gaze shapes and is being shaped by the visible markers of social distinction, forming in that process the loop where social norms and exclusivities are being produced and consumed. This is not a neutral gaze; it's charged with all the prejudices and preferences the visitors bring, added to those shaped by broader social narratives and policies of the clubs.

Against this background, it will be inevitable that more authorities, interest parties, and societal figures were brought on board while discussing the making of more inclusive spaces bearing the actual public character of the beach. This would include a relook at leasing practices and



the regulatory framework that allows for such exclusivities, to ensure that beach clubs serve all societal groups, rather than being the playground of the elite.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on social inequalities in tourism and leisure spaces. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field are particularly relevant in understanding how socio-economic barriers are reproduced in the context of luxury beach clubs. This study contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence on the specific mechanisms through which exclusion is maintained in Çeşme's beach clubs, reinforcing the theoretical insights of Bourdieu and Urry.

This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on tourism, leisure, and social exclusion but also offers practical recommendations for reducing the socio-economic disparities observed. By advocating for a more equitable approach to tourism development, we call for a broader reflection on how tourist destinations similar to Çeşme can be made more accessible and welcoming, thus promoting a more inclusive form of tourism that respects and enriches all visitors, regardless of their social status.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several implications for tourism industry and academia. Beach clubs and similar leisure establishments should consider revising their admission policies to promote inclusivity. This could involve eliminating or modifying criteria such as dress codes, car brands, and social media followings that currently serve as barriers to entry. Furthermore, establishing clear and transparent pricing structures can help reduce perceptions of favouritism and inequality. This could involve setting standard entry fees and ensuring that all customers are informed of these fees upfront. Also, investing in staff training to ensure courteous and unbiased customer service can enhance the overall customer experience. Employee training programs should emphasize the importance of treating all customers with respect, regardless of their socio-economic background, as well as cultural sensitivity to better deal with the diverse backgrounds of customers and to prevent any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, language, or appearance.

Marketing campaigns should highlight the inclusivity of the beach clubs, showcasing their commitment to welcoming all visitors. This can help to attract a broader customer base and improve the public image of the establishments. Likewise, engaging with local communities and promoting inclusive events can help bridge the gap between beach clubs and the local population, fostering a sense of community and shared enjoyment of leisure spaces.

Physical and operational adjustments, such as providing affordable or free access to essential beach amenities (e.g., sunbeds, umbrellas, showers), can make beach clubs more accessible to a wider range of visitors. Also, establishing robust feedback mechanisms to continuously monitor and address customer concerns regarding inclusivity and access can help beach clubs adapt and improve their practices over time.



This study provides empirical evidence on socio-economic barriers in luxury tourism destinations, contributing to the broader field of tourism studies. It demonstrates how Bourdieu's theoretical concepts can be applied to understand the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in tourism settings. By integrating Bourdieu's concepts with Urry's tourist gaze, the study provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing power dynamics and social stratification in leisure spaces. This theoretical integration can be used as a basis for further research in similar contexts. In addition, the findings of this study can inform policymakers about socio-economic barriers in the tourism and leisure sectors. Recommendations derived from the research can help shape policies aimed at ensuring equal access to public leisure spaces and promoting social equity.

7. LIMITATIONS and SUGGESTIONS for FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited by its focus on online reviews, which may not capture the full range of customer experiences. Additionally, the reliance on Google Maps reviews might introduce a selection bias, as not all visitors may leave reviews on this platform.

Future research could include comparative studies of different geographical locations and types of leisure facilities to explore whether similar socio-economic barriers exist in other locations. Such studies could identify patterns and variations in exclusionary practices across different cultural and economic contexts. Longitudinal research could examine how socio-economic barriers and inclusion practices evolve over time, particularly in response to changing social norms and regulatory interventions. This could provide insights into the long-term effectiveness of policy changes aimed at promoting inclusion.

Furthermore, promoting interdisciplinary research that combines insights from sociology, tourism studies, and cultural studies can deepen the understanding of how socio-economic inequalities manifest themselves in different leisure contexts. This interdisciplinary approach can lead to more holistic solutions to the challenges of inclusivity in tourism. In addition, the development and application of innovative research methodologies, such as mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative data, can enhance the robustness and comprehensiveness of future studies on this topic. Academics can use the findings of this study to advocate for greater inclusivity and social justice in tourism, working with industry stakeholders and community organizations to promote positive change. Future studies can use primary sources such as interviews with customers who faced exclusion, employees or business owners of beach clubs, observation or participant observation at the entrance of beach clubs for analysis to strengthen the findings of this study.



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