Redefining Spaces for Youth: Libraries as the New Social Hubs

Gençler İçin Alanların Yeniden Tanımlanması: Yeni Sosyal Merkezler Olarak Kütüphaneler

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Abstract

Libraries are increasingly being recognized not only as academic spaces but also as "third places" that support socialization, personal development, and well-being—particularly for young people. This study examines the multifaceted role of libraries in the lives of young people, emphasizing their function beyond education to include spaces for relaxation, cultural participation, and interpersonal interaction. The research specifically focuses on how libraries are experienced and perceived by young individuals aged 18 to 30 who are active library users in Istanbul. Designed as a qualitative study, data were collected through in-depth interviews with participants, whose narratives were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed using MAXQDA (2024 version). The findings highlight the crucial role of libraries in supporting both educational achievement and social connectivity among youth. Based on these insights, the study argues for the redesign of library spaces to better meet the evolving needs of young people—particularly in terms of digital infrastructure, social interaction areas, and cultural programming. The study underscores the importance of public policies that promote the transformation of libraries into multifunctional, inclusive environments that contribute to youth development. In doing so, libraries can enhance social cohesion, support personal growth, and improve quality of life within communities.

Keywords: Youth Studies, Libraries, Third Spaces, Qualitative Research.

Öz

Kütüphaneler, günümüzde yalnızca akademik mekânlar olarak değil, aynı zamanda gençlerin sosyalleşme, kişisel gelişim ve iyi oluş süreçlerini destekleyen "üçüncü mekânlar" olarak da giderek daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, kütüphanelerin gençler için çok yönlü işlevini incelemekte; eğitimin ötesinde, dinlenme, kültürel katılım ve kişilerarası etkileşim alanları olarak üstlendikleri rollere odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, İstanbul'da aktif olarak kütüphane kullanan 18-30 yaş arası genç bireylerin kütüphane deneyimlerini ve bu mekânlara yönelik algılarını merkezine almaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma olarak tasarlanan çalışmada, veriler derinlemesine görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış; görüşmeler ses kaydıyla belgelenmiş ve deşifre edilen veriler MAXQDA (2024 sürümü) programı kullanılarak tematik analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, kütüphanelerin gençlerin hem akademik başarılarını hem de sosyal bağlarını desteklemede önemli bir rol oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, kütüphanelerin dijital altyapı, sosyal etkileşim alanları ve kültürel programlar gibi çeşitli ihtiyaçlara cevap verebilecek şekilde yeniden tasarlanması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Araştırma, kütüphanelerin gençlerin gelişimine katkı sağlayan çok işlevli ve kapsayıcı mekânlara dönüştürülmesini destekleyen kamu politikalarının önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Bu dönüşüm sayesinde kütüphaneler, topluluklar içinde sosyal bağları güçlendiren, bireysel gelişimi destekleyen ve yaşam kalitesini artıran önemli aktörler haline gelebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gençlik Çalışmaları, Kütüphaneler, Üçüncü Mekan, Niteliksel Araştırma.

Redefining Spaces for Youth:
Libraries as the New Social Hubs

Spaces carry different meanings for individuals, groups, and communities. This study examines libraries as spaces for social interaction, cultural capital, and civic engagement, extending beyond their traditional functions of knowledge acquisition, reading, and research. Libraries are defined as "third places"—spaces where individuals spend time outside of home and work, forming social connections and expressing themselves. In this context, libraries have evolved into important venues where young people not only access academic information but also engage socially, interact, and strengthen community bonds.

The aim of this research is to investigate the factors influencing the transformation of libraries into third places through young people's library usage. When assessed in terms of social practices and the meanings attributed to spaces, libraries emerge as crucial environments for supporting youth civic participation and personal development. The study focuses on understanding how young people perceive and use libraries not just as educational tools, but as third places that provide opportunities for social and cultural interaction. In other words, the central focus of the research is on how young people use libraries and the social, cultural, and educational impacts libraries have on them. Additionally, the study explores how libraries support youth participation and personal growth, how current policies shape this process, and the expectations young people have regarding libraries. A key question of the study is whether libraries can serve as an intermediary space to foster young people's social engagement.

Historically, libraries have held significant value for societies. This study argues that, in the context of the digitalization of access to information and integration with artificial intelligence, libraries should become spaces that offer not only educational resources but also social interaction and personal development for young people. Libraries are increasingly recognized not only as academic tools but as social spaces where young people can strengthen social ties, express themselves, and contribute to their personal growth. Therefore, public policies aimed at youth well-being should approach library design with this perspective, as it could positively influence the social cohesion of young people. The study aims to contribute to the literature and provide insights for policymakers by examining youth policies, library usage, and the concept of third places together.

As of 2023, according to statistics released by the Presidential National Library, there are a total of 627 university libraries in Turkey, including 477 state and 150 foundation university libraries. The number of registered members in university libraries has increased by 5.3%, reaching 4,199,285, while the number of people benefiting from public libraries has increased by 25.3%, reaching 33,561,919, compared to the previous year (https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Kutuphane- Istatistikleri-2023-53655, Update Date: 10.12.2024). These data indicate that libraries are not only spaces for acquiring knowledge but also important public spaces for civic engagement. As libraries continue to shape social life in urban areas and serve people of various age groups, they provide more spaces for social activities and interactions, especially as young people increasingly utilize libraries.

In this context, the research questions are as follows:

- How do young people use libraries as third places, and how do they evaluate the social, cultural, and educational opportunities these spaces offer?

- How do libraries support youth civic participation, personal development, and social interaction, and how do current youth policies interact with these processes?

Libraries as Third Places: A Social and Cultural Perspective

The concept of "third places," as introduced by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1989, has been widely discussed in sociological and cultural studies. Oldenburg defines third places as public spaces that exist outside the home (the "first place") and the workplace or school (the "second place"), where individuals voluntarily engage in social interactions, strengthen community ties, and spend leisure time. These spaces are critical for fostering social connections and supporting a vibrant public life, offering a place for individuals to meet, converse, and interact beyond the confines of their private and professional lives.

According to Oldenburg (1989), third places play a crucial role in maintaining healthy social structures. These environments offer opportunities for people to establish relationships, create shared meanings, and engage in cultural and social activities. The most typical examples of third places include cafés, parks, public libraries, and other public gathering spaces. These spaces transcend social boundaries, uniting individuals from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and professional backgrounds, and often providing a sense of belonging and community (Purnell, 2015). As comfortable and inviting spaces, third places are essential for both individual well-being and societal cohesion, as they help improve mental health, promote safety, and foster a sense of community (Mehta & Bosson, 2010; Kuno, 2011).

Within the context of libraries, the notion of third places is particularly relevant. Recent trends show that libraries are transforming from places primarily focused on the pursuit of knowledge into venues for social engagement, identity formation, and the strengthening of social connections, especially among youth. Libraries provide a unique environment where both academic and social lives converge, offering opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful social interactions, develop their sense of self, and establish ties with others (Golten, 2019).

Libraries serve not only as knowledge hubs but also as vital social spaces where individuals can build relationships, engage in cultural activities, and develop a sense of community. Especially in urban settings, they offer safe and accessible environments that support young people's social development and participation (Hernon & Matthews, 2011).

Libraries are especially important as third places for university students. Waxman et al. (2007) describe libraries as third places that enable students to socialize, relax, and experience social diversity. These spaces support more than just academic development; they also provide opportunities for students to engage in social interactions, participate in cultural activities, and foster a sense of community (Bosman & Dolley, 2019). In this way, libraries contribute to the creation of a safe, comfortable environment where social bonds are strengthened and community ties are reinforced. Libraries today are valued not only as academic resource centers but also as spaces that foster personal development, cultural engagement, and social interaction. Especially for young people, they offer a balanced environment that supports both focused study and meaningful social experiences (Lippincott, 2007; Oldenburg, 1989). Thus, libraries act as dynamic third places that strengthen social ties while supporting academic achievements. However, the role of social interaction in library settings can sometimes have mixed effects on productivity. Some studies have found that socializing in libraries can reduce focus and efficiency, especially when students are distracted by others (Cohen, 2010). On the other hand, many individuals report that studying alone in libraries is more productive, suggesting that personal study environments often foster greater concentration (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Nevertheless, solitary study can lead to feelings of loneliness, which may reduce engagement with the library (Buldaç & Kalay, 2023; Vårheim, 2012).

In addition to providing quiet study environments, libraries also offer spaces that encourage collaboration and interaction. The design of libraries plays a crucial role in promoting these interactions. As noted by Kneebone (2017) the quiet zones in libraries have a positive impact on academic performance by minimizing distractions. The integration of digital infrastructure in libraries, such as providing access to fast internet and digital resources, is increasingly important for meeting the diverse needs of users. The physical environment of libraries is another critical factor that impacts user satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, accessibility is a key consideration for libraries, particularly in large cities where space limitations can impact the user experience. Studies suggest that 24-hour access to libraries is crucial for students and academics, who often require flexible access to library resources (Yılmaz, 2003). In addition, the safety of the library's surrounding environment can influence users' engagement with the library, and libraries that are integrated with natural surroundings tend to have positive effects on both physical and psychological well-being (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

As public spaces, libraries serve as meeting points where people learn about others who may be different from themselves. Aabø et al. (2010) suggest that libraries function as safe, neutral spaces where people are exposed to the complexities of multicultural society and have opportunities to learn about cultural diversity. In the digital age, libraries have expanded their role as third places by offering online platforms for social interaction. Digital media and internet access allow libraries to extend their reach beyond physical spaces, providing users with virtual spaces for engagement, interaction, and learning (Vårheim, 2012). This shift has further enhanced libraries' role as third places, particularly for young people who are increasingly integrated into the digital world. Libraries not only support the acquisition of knowledge but also facilitate social ties, cultural participation, and personal development. The digital transformation of libraries has become especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when libraries shifted to online platforms to continue supporting education and research while physical spaces were closed. This digital shift has reinforced libraries' role as centers for learning and social interaction, demonstrating their adaptability in a rapidly changing world (Özgüven & Beygirci, 2022). Moreover, the integration of cyber-physical systems in libraries has made information access faster and more efficient, contributing to the growing importance of digital spaces for knowledge exchange (Kavak, 2023). Designing library spaces that encourage social interaction is essential for promoting community engagement. Eyüboğlu and Zorlu (2021) examine the balance between personal space and territoriality in libraries, arguing that designs that facilitate more relaxed and open social interaction are critical. Furthermore, an ergonomic and accessible library design can make it easier for users to engage socially, strengthening the library's role as a third place (Gedikçi Öndoğan, 2018; Yıldız, 2019). Libraries are multifaceted spaces that contribute to the social fabric of society by encouraging interaction, fostering cultural ties, and supporting community development. They are not merely repositories of information but serve as essential places where individuals strengthen their sense of belonging, build social capital, and contribute to the community's cultural and social growth (Kurlgan & Meriç, 2019; Acartürk & Akkaya, 2022; Wojciechowska, 2021). Libraries support both the academic and social needs of young people, helping them balance their intellectual pursuits with their need for social engagement and relaxation (Bayter, 2018; Baker, 2019).

To provide a clearer understanding of the diverse roles that libraries play, the wide range of functions attributed to them in the literature can be grouped under a few overarching categories. These include academic support, such as access to resources and quiet study environments; social interaction, encompassing opportunities for collaboration, communication, and community-building; cultural engagement, through programs, events, and inclusive spaces; and technological adaptation, including digital infrastructure and hybrid spaces. Organizing the literature along these themes helps to reduce repetition, clarify the multifaceted nature of libraries as third places, and highlight the evolving

expectations of young users. This structured approach also aligns more clearly with the study's aim of examining how libraries can meet both the academic and social needs of youth in contemporary contexts.

Method

This study is qualitative research conducted with young individuals aged 18-30 living in Istanbul who are active library users. The aim of the research is to understand how young people use libraries as "third places" and how these spaces contribute to their social, cultural, and personal development. The participants' experiences, their views on library use, and their social interactions were explored in depth.

The age group of 18-30 represents a period in young people's lives characterized by both intense academic activity and social development, making it an ideal cohort to explore the social and cultural impacts of libraries. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method, a qualitative sampling strategy that ensures the selection of individuals who meet specific criteria aligned with the research purpose. Accordingly, young individuals who actively use libraries and engage in social interactions within these spaces were chosen. Although the participants' demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and socio-economic status, varied, no significant differences in the use of libraries were observed based on these factors. Therefore, demographic details regarding age or gender differences were not specifically highlighted in the analysis, as they did not emerge as relevant variables for the study's objectives. All participants were individuals who regularly used the library and participated in social interactions there.

The data collection process was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews. This method allows participants the flexibility to freely express their thoughts while also providing a structured framework for gathering information related to specific themes pertinent to the research. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes each. During the interviews, participants were asked about their library usage habits, reasons for visiting the library, experiences of social interactions within the library, the role of libraries as "third places," and how these spaces contribute to their social and cultural development. Additionally, the participants were questioned about how the time spent in the library contributed to their social relationships, personal development, or participation in cultural activities.

After the data collected through audio recordings were transcribed, the analysis was conducted using the MaxQda Analysis Program. The analysis focused on how participants used libraries as social spaces, the forms of social interactions that took place, and the impact of libraries on personal development. These themes were examined considering the research questions, with the goal of richly reflecting the participants' experiences related to their use of libraries.

Before conducting the interviews, ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. The study was then carried out using qualitative methods. The primary aim of the research is to explore the relationship between young people's non-academic motivations for visiting libraries and their social participation. Through this examination, the contribution of libraries to young people's social engagement will be discussed. Ethical principles were followed throughout the research process: participants' identities were kept confidential, and written consent was obtained for all interviews. Participation was voluntary, and measures were taken to ensure that participants did not experience any harm during the research process.

The Findings section includes both visual representations and graphs derived from the analysis of the collected data, as well as tables containing participant quotations. These elements collectively present the key results of the study, highlighting the various themes and patterns that emerged regarding how young people use libraries as "third places" and how these spaces contribute to their social, cultural, and personal development. The data analysis reveals the ways in which libraries serve as social hubs for interaction, learning, and growth, offering insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives.

The thematic analysis of the interviews conducted as part of the study revealed four main themes. These themes were developed by focusing on participants' discussions regarding their motivations for visiting libraries, their activities within library spaces, their suggestions for improving libraries, and the alternative spaces that might fulfill similar functions.

Graphic 1 presents the narrative intensity of each participant within the main themes, highlighting the extent to which individual participants engaged with each thematic area.

Graphic 1

*The Distribution of Four Main Themes According to Participant Profiles*
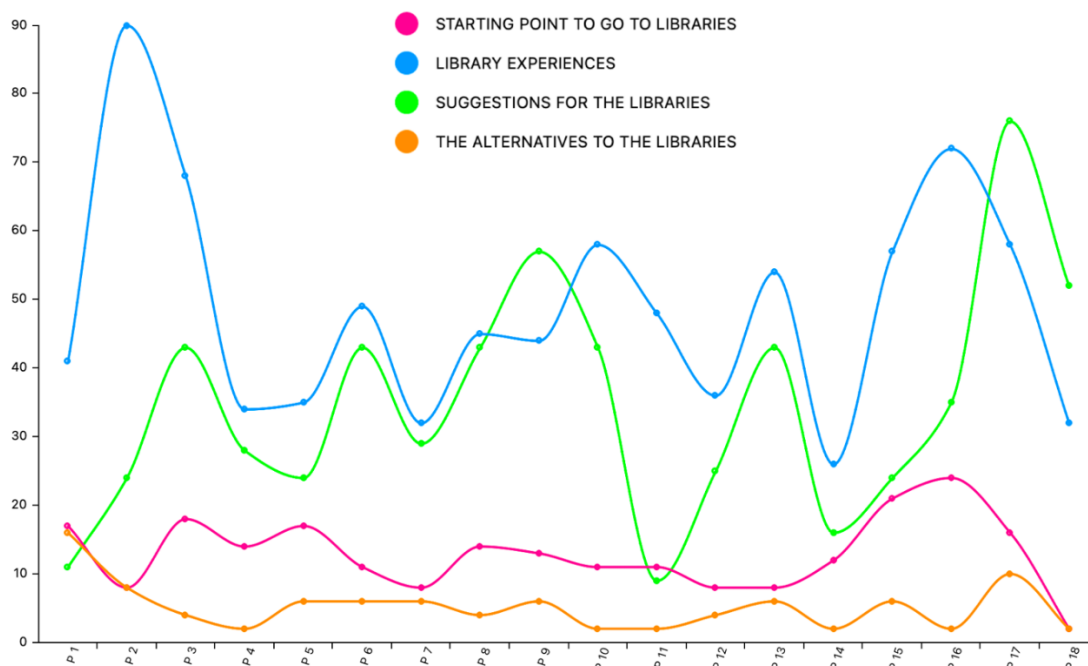
The progression of the four main themes across the 18 interviews conducted in the study is illustrated in Graphic 1. The theme *the alternative to the libraries* is characterized by a similar density of responses across participants, but it is less frequently discussed compared to the other themes. A similar trend is observed in the *starting point to go to libraries* theme, where participants P15 and P16 provide more detailed narratives compared to the others. On the other hand, the themes *Suggestions for the libraries* and *Library experiences* show the highest narrative density, with notable variations in the intensity of responses across participants. While the themes *the alternatives to the libraries* and *starting point to go to libraries* exhibit similar levels of narrative intensity among participants, the themes *Suggestions for the libraries* and *Library experiences* contain narratives where participants express differing opinions and are not in agreement with each other.

The four main themes, along with their associated sub-themes (except alternatives to libraries), are illustrated in Figure 1. Subthemes related to *Alternatives to libraries* are also included and visualized separately (Figure 2).

Figure 1

Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model
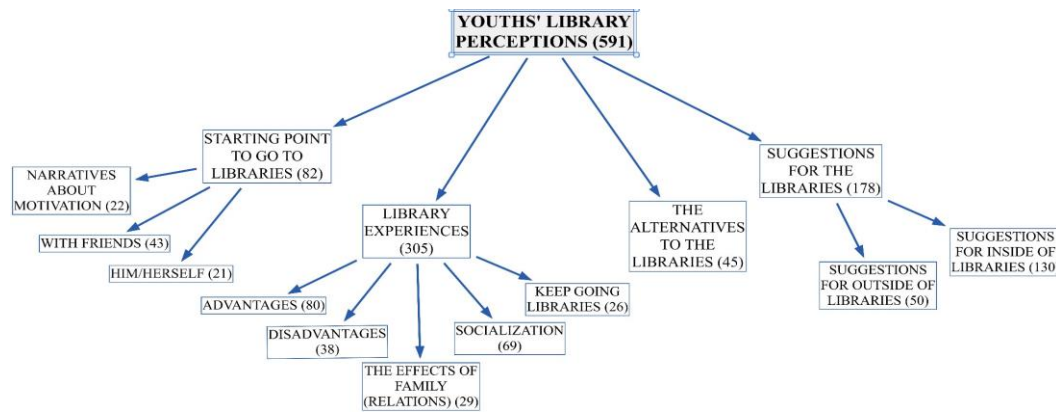
As seen in Figure 1, the study is organized around four main themes. The *Starting point to go to libraries* theme includes narratives regarding the motivations for going to the library, specifically the reasons participants go alone or with friends. The distinction between going alone and going with friends can be explored in the context of socialization processes related to library use. The second main theme is *Library experiences*. This theme encompasses subthemes such as the advantages and disadvantages of libraries, their relation to socialization processes, the influence of family, and the perception of continuing or discontinuing library visits. The *Suggestions for the libraries* theme focus on the interior design of libraries and outdoor planning. Subthemes related to *Alternatives to libraries* are also included and visualized separately (Figure 2)

Graphic 2 illustrates the intensity of sub-themes that emerged during the coding of the interviews conducted in the study.

Graphic 2

Youths' Library Perceptions
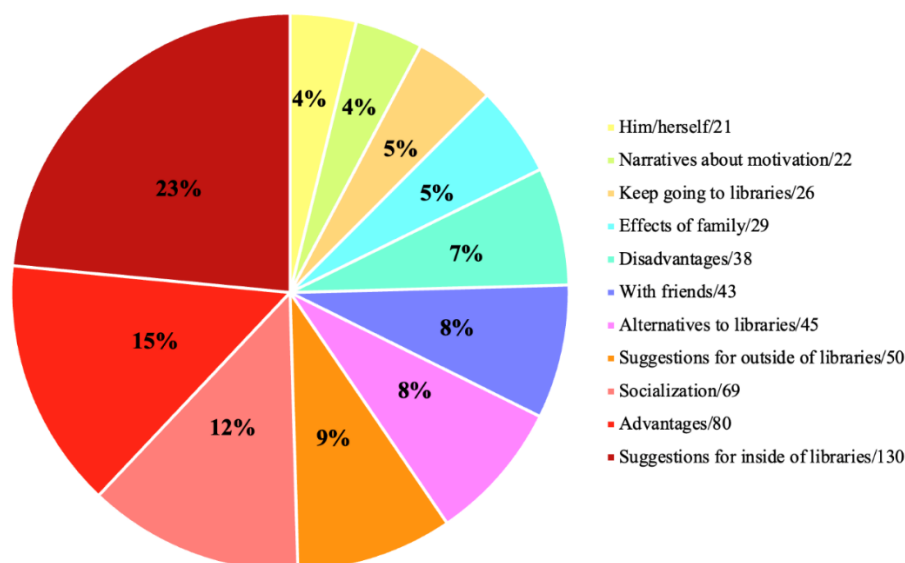
As seen in Graph 2, the most frequent responses concern the interior design of libraries, with 23% of participants offering suggestions for improvements. These suggestions include ideas on layout, facilities, ambiance, and resources, indicating that young people are particularly invested in enhancing the library environment. The second most common response (14%) focuses on the advantages of libraries, such as access to knowledge, quiet study areas, and free resources, although this is less emphasized compared to suggestions for improvement. Socialization emerged as another key theme, with 12% of respondents highlighting the role of libraries as spaces for social interaction. A smaller portion (9%) suggested changes to outdoor library spaces or surrounding areas, pointing to the need for greater community engagement. Similarly, 8% of responses mentioned alternative study or social spaces outside libraries, like cafes or parks, indicating a shift toward informal environments. Another 8% noted the importance of being at the library with friends, reinforcing the social nature of library use. On the other hand, 7% of participants pointed out library disadvantages, such as outdated facilities or lack of resources for social activities. Family influence (5%) and personal motivations (4%) were also noted, suggesting that family attitudes and individual goals shape library use. Finally, 1% of respondents discussed the influence of social relationships on library attendance.

Overall, the findings suggest that young people perceive libraries not only as academic spaces but also as venues for social engagement. The desire for improved interior spaces (23%) and the importance of social interactions (20%) highlights a demand for more modern, flexible environments. As libraries face competition from alternative spaces like cafes and parks, they may need to adapt by integrating more collaborative and informal spaces. Family influence and personal motivations also play a role in library use, pointing to opportunities for libraries to engage both young people and their families in shaping library services.

Figure 2 is a code matrix that illustrates how young people's perceptions of libraries are shaped across different categories and how libraries compare to alternative social spaces.

Figure 2

Code Matrix of The Alternatives to the Libraries
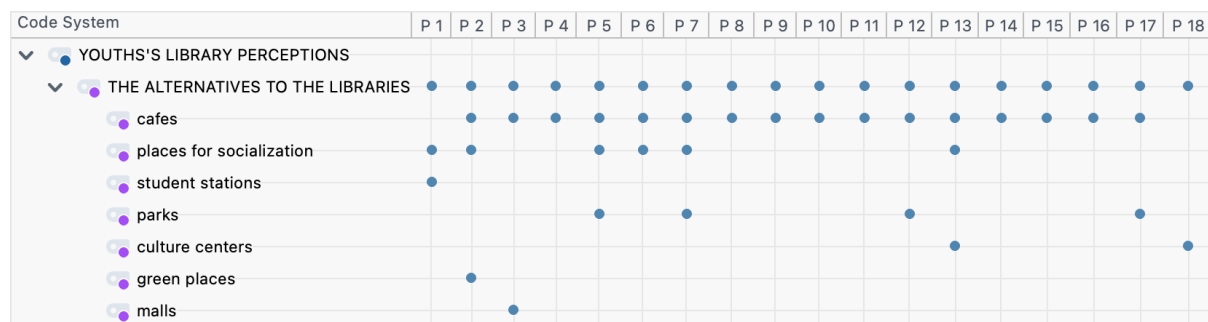
In terms of alternative spaces and the preferences of young people, most participants indicated a preference for socializing spaces (e.g., places where young people gather) as alternatives to libraries (P1-P8, P13, P15, P16, P17). However, some participants (P3, P4, P10, etc.) did not prefer these alternatives. Cafés were observed to be the most chosen alternative spaces. From P1 to P17, the majority of participants mentioned that cafés function as social spaces. Only participant P18 stated that they preferred not to use cafés as an alternative to libraries.

The "student stations" category received very few responses. Most participants (P2-P18) did not consider or use student stations as alternative spaces. Parks, on the other hand, emerged as an alternative space for some young people (P5, P7, P12, P15), although they were generally less

preferred (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, etc.). Responses regarding cultural centers were also quite low (P13, P18), suggesting that cultural centers are not particularly appealing as alternatives to libraries for young people. Shopping malls were identified as an alternative to libraries by some participants (P3, P6), but this option was also generally less favored. Green spaces were chosen as an alternative by a few participants (P2, P5), but the overall trend remained low.

Social spaces outside of libraries, especially cafés, emerged as the primary alternatives preferred by young people. This indicates that young people do not view libraries solely as places for obtaining information or studying; rather, they also seek spaces for social interaction. Cafés, in particular, are seen as a crucial alternative for socializing. The reason young people may prefer cafés could be their ability to create social environments, relax, and spend time with friends. Spaces like parks and cultural centers, which can offer more opportunities for social interaction and cultural activities, were less preferred. This suggests that young people's interest in such spaces is not yet strong enough to compete with alternatives like cafés.

Understanding why young people prefer social spaces outside of libraries is crucial for developing spaces and public policies that meet their expectations. Transforming libraries into more social and dynamic environments could better address young people's needs. The perceptions young people have regarding alternative social spaces outside of libraries provide valuable insights for the development of libraries and youth policies. Libraries can be reimagined not only as places for information gathering but also as dynamic spaces where young people can engage in social interaction.

The data derived from the word cloud (Figure 1) highlight young people's perceptions and priorities regarding libraries and social interaction. This cloud can help us understand which themes are more prominent and how the social, cultural, and practical aspects of library experiences are shaped.

Figure 3

Word Cloud of Most Repeated 40 Words

Words (can be seen in Figure 1) such as socialization and friend suggest that young people view libraries as spaces for social interaction and that spending time with friends is a priority for them. Terms like group and interaction further reinforce the desire for social gatherings and engagement. Words such as student, university, and youth indicate that libraries are primarily important as social and academic spaces for students. Meanwhile, terms like education and seminar emphasize the educational role of libraries, though these are less frequent compared to the social aspects.

Regarding alternative spaces and locations, words like café, mall, and green reveal that young people consider these places as alternatives to libraries for socializing, indicating that there are other spaces they prefer for social interactions outside of libraries. Libraries are not just viewed as spaces for academic purposes but also as social meeting points. Expressions such as option and place reflect the desire for libraries to offer various choices and spaces. Words like comfortable, silent, and clean emphasize the importance of physical comfort in libraries, showing that a quiet and clean environment is valued by students. The word safe also highlights the significance of safety as a key theme.

In terms of advantages and disadvantages, the words advantage and disadvantage suggest that participants reflected on both the positive and negative aspects of libraries. Words like annoyed and crowded imply that libraries can sometimes be perceived as crowded and potentially uncomfortable spaces. Regarding family influence and social dynamics, terms such as family and culture provide clues about how family and cultural values shape young people's library use. In the area of access and transportation, the word transportation reveals challenges young people face in terms of reaching libraries, which could signal a need for libraries to be made more accessible. On the other hand, words like tea, coffee, and soup indicate that young people associate time spent in libraries with social, relaxing activities such as drinking tea or coffee.

The data from the word cloud illustrate that libraries are not only spaces for academic use but also crucial environments for social interaction, meeting friends, and relaxation. Young people tend to view libraries as comfortable and safe spaces, but they can also perceive them as crowded and occasionally uncomfortable. Alternative spaces outside libraries, such as cafés or parks, are also popular, suggesting that libraries need to diversify their role as social spaces. Practical and cultural factors, such as transportation and family influence, are significant elements affecting library usage. This implies that libraries should evolve to meet the broader social needs of young people, ensuring both accessibility and a more dynamic, welcoming environment.

Table 1 presents participants' reflections on the perceived advantages of going to the library alone or with friends, highlighting the differing impacts on social interaction, motivation, and study efficiency.

In Table 1, participants discuss various advantages of going to the library with friends. The most notable benefits include social support, motivation, and information sharing. Going to the library with friends can sometimes serve as an opportunity for socializing or relaxing, rather than focusing on studying. Specifically, working in groups provides opportunities for mutual assistance and sharing. On the other hand, many participants believe that going alone is more beneficial in terms of productivity. Going solo, particularly, enhances focus and minimizes distractions. This helps participants work more efficiently. Additional advantages of going alone include the ability to set one's own study schedule and work at one's own pace. These factors are seen as positive aspects of studying alone in the library.

Table 2 illustrates participants' diverse perceptions regarding the continued use of libraries, their advantages and disadvantages, family influences, and the role of libraries as spaces for both academic work and social interaction.

Table 1

Going to Libraries

With Friends	By him/herself
"One advantage is being with friends I enjoy, sharing memories with them in a space. It's comforting to be with someone familiar in the library's crowd. We are social beings, and it's reassuring to be constantly in communication with others" (P1).	"I went alone because I needed to focus. The library was the place where I could ensure a quiet environment, and going alone made my work more productive" (P2).
"An advantage is that working in a group ensures discipline. When I'm alone, I often lack motivation and tend to quit easily" (P4).	"The library is, in my opinion, an environment where one can go alone. It's a quiet place, and we should study individually in our own space" (P3).
"When I went with my friends, we could easily exchange information and share notes" (P5).	"When you're with friends, they might call you for a break or distract you. Maybe they've finished their work, but you might not be done yet. Going alone allows you to stay focused" (P8).
"I wasn't really a frequent library user on my own. Usually, my friends wanted to go, and I accompanied them. They encouraged me, and I realized it was beneficial for me too" (P14).	"Going alone is more efficient and consistent in terms of studying" (P12).
"The advantage of going with others is having someone to consult when I face difficulties, which makes me feel more at ease" (P15).	"When I went alone, I set a time limit for myself, and my break times were fixed. But when I went with friends, they'd get bored, want to leave, or suggest taking a break. The break never ended. That's why I preferred going alone" (P13).
"Being with friends makes it easier to relax, although it can be distracting. It's challenging but also fun—it motivates you" (P16).	"When I go alone, I don't take many breaks and can work continuously" (P16).
	"I preferred going alone because it helped me stay focused on my studies. That's why I chose to go alone" (P17).

Table 2

Library Experiences

Code	Narrative
	"I can't really define this in terms of age or a specific time frame" (P1).
	"I think I will definitely use it throughout my academic life. In the future, if I have a task that requires working on a desktop or if I need a book later on…" (P3).
Continuing to Use the Library	"I don't plan on using the library once I start my career, after I finish the exam period" (P4).
	"I can't set a limit for this; I plan to go as much as I can. There probably won't be a boundary for me" (P11).
	"You don't need to limit yourself; you can go whenever. I don't think there will ever be a time when I feel like I *must* go to the library. You can go for simple things or even just to relax" (P16).

Table 2 *(continue)*

Library Experiences

Code	Narrative
Disadvantages	"Some libraries close at 5:30 PM. For example, the library in the district where I live closes at 5:30 PM and is also closed on weekends. I believe the lack of the concept of a 24/7 library, as opposed to traditional library hours, is a disadvantage." (P2)
	"Of course, since I plan to go to the library in advance, I wake up early and need to go early because it tends to get crowded." (P8)
	"I had to wait in line. I wouldn't want that to happen again, so I think a larger library with more capacity and well-organized rest periods would be better." (P9)
	"If I were to criticize, I would prefer it if the library were quieter and more peaceful, with fewer people. Larger libraries are nicer in that sense, but when there are too many people, my concentration tends to get distracted. Someone moves, someone speaks, or a phone rings..." (P11)
	"The fact that libraries are often crowded, with poor ventilation and an imbalance in temperature, makes staying at home seem like a more logical choice." (P12)
Advantages	"I used to look for a library with a large number of books, but now, since I have a phone and a computer at hand, I see the library more as a calm environment and a place to study." (P2)
	"In a home environment, you're alone, and sometimes, the motivation to study just disappears. External noises, being near the TV, or other devices can cause you to lose focus. For example, while studying at a desk at home, the door might suddenly be knocked, or you might go to the bathroom and end up watching TV for five minutes, or people passing by create noise..." (P3)
	"A nice thing about the library is that there are constant refreshments; water is free, and the toilets are very accessible on every floor, so we can get what we need without losing focus on our studies." (P5)
	"The library is better because there are other people working there, which motivates you to work more efficiently and stay focused. Your attention is rarely distracted. Even when it is, you look at the desk next to you, and you see someone else working just as focused, which encourages you." (P8)
	"We wanted to study in fresh air. Sometimes, we even studied in the library garden. "Honestly, we enjoyed going to the library." (P16)
	"Absolutely, all your needs should be met in one place. It's not just about studying, but the library should also provide a social space." (P17)
	"For example, if I want to meet my friends but also need to study, you become more productive there because you've gone for a purpose, and your mind is set on that." (P18)

Table 2 *(continue)*

Library Experiences

Code	Narrative
Effect of family	"When I say I'm preparing or going to the library, the technical details such as 'What time will you be back?' or 'Which library are you going to?' are usually enough. These are the kinds of practical details that my family finds sufficient." (P2)
	"It would seem like I was going to socialize or for some other purpose, not to study. My family would react that way." (P8)
	"I used to say I was constantly going to the library, but my family didn't find it convincing. They would ask, 'You're going to the library? Or are you actually going out?' It didn't seem believable to them, but I really was going to the library." (P13)
	"My family wanted me to stay at home. Since I stayed out until late hours, they preferred that, but they also supported me. They didn't say anything because I had become accustomed to going to the library, and this process continued." (P16)
	"From my father's perspective, it's a negative thing. He prefers me to study at home. He doesn't want me to go out too much." (P17)
Socialization	"Especially, as I mentioned, when I go to the library alone and my friends are not there, there are times when, inevitably, I end up greeting the people sitting around me at the table. Later, when we go outside to relax, we can also establish a social atmosphere. Since many people around us share this view, I can say that libraries are an important space for socialization, especially for those who are also looking to interact." (P1)
	"Yes, it provides that. When people see others studying in the same way, it increases their internal motivation. As for socializing, for example, during a meal break, they might eat with someone else who is also studying, or they might start a conversation. Perhaps, they will see the same book being read by someone else... The library offers such opportunities. It creates a space where people can meet others with similar goals." (P2)
	"Libraries do provide spaces where people can socialize. Since the age groups of the people who go to the library are often very close to each other, and most of them have similar purposes for going there, it becomes easier for people to socialize and talk to each other." (P3)
	"I think it does provide that. When I go, I don't smoke, but I see smokers exchanging cigarettes and lighters, and conversations often arise from that. People ask about each other's studies, and you might ask 'Which school are you at?' or 'What's your department?' This creates opportunities for social interaction because we share common topics." (P4)
	"In big cities, having such libraries in central locations and offering libraries with different concepts motivates us more. For smaller cities, of course, it's an important detail, and libraries are always crucial, but in big cities, it's not just a desire—it's an actual need." (P5)
	"As they say, getting to know one person can lead to meeting many others. The concept of networking works exactly like this." (P12)

As seen in Table 2, some participants indicated that they may not continue using libraries in the future as they associate them with educational processes, while others stated that there are no limits to library use due to the comfort they provide. The themes related to the disadvantages of libraries focus on unconscious users, inadequate capacity, overcrowding, library hours, and interior design. In contrast, the advantages highlight themes such as comfort, focus, productivity, socialization, access to resources, and social interaction. Family perspectives include both positive and negative reactions. Families may respond positively by providing support and mindful supervision, but they may also express concerns about security, discomfort with time spent outside, or inhibiting socialization.

Many participants noted that libraries offer opportunities for socialization, in addition to being places for studying. Socialization occurs in various forms, such as meeting new people while studying or conversing with others during breaks. For instance, some participants mentioned that greetings, opportunities for making friends, and even group work are possible in the library. In these environments, the presence of people with similar goals can lead to collaboration or even friendships. Moreover, some libraries offer social moments, such as lunch breaks or opportunities for tea or coffee, which further enhance socialization. These interactions often take the form of brief conversations with people sitting nearby or studying together. Such interactions typically develop through repeated encounters with familiar faces. Particularly in university libraries, social bonds among students often form through shared courses or exams. Furthermore, individuals who regularly visit the library may develop closer relationships by helping each other or discussing questions.

Table 3 presents participants' suggestions regarding both the interior and exterior design of libraries, reflecting their expectations for more functional, comfortable, and technologically equipped spaces.

As seen in Table 3, participants' suggestions for both the interior and exterior of libraries emphasize technological advancements and digitalization, card-based access systems and secure areas, functional and comfortable spaces, the need to simultaneously provide personal and public areas, reliable infrastructure services such as lighting, soundproofing, and electrical systems, 24/7 availability, designated break areas, services like photocopying, hygiene standards, workspaces catering to diverse needs, accessibility, and the inclusion of food and beverage facilities.

Table 4 summarizes participants' preferences for alternative spaces that integrate both study and socialization, highlighting their desire for more flexible, interactive, and nature-integrated environments beyond traditional library settings.

As seen in Table 4, participants indicated that they preferred spaces where they could combine both their study and socialization needs. While they acknowledged that libraries traditionally provide study areas, alternative spaces can also meet these needs. Generally, although libraries offer conventional educational and work environments, alternative spaces play an important role in addressing the needs of young people. Areas such as book cafés, student stations, and cultural centers offer more flexible, social, and productive work environments. Additionally, nature- integrated spaces, such as libraries located by the sea or surrounded by trees, are highly desired by young people. These environments allow students to engage in social interactions while studying and provide opportunities for relaxation. When describing alternatives, participants emphasized the fusion of physical and digital spaces, open areas, the integration of cultural activities with libraries, the balance between socialization and tranquility, and the improvement of study spaces.

Table 3

Suggestions for the Libraries

Code	Narrative
Inside	"Some libraries have good photocopiers, while others lack them entirely. It's frustrating when you have to go from one used bookstore to another or wander around a library looking for a photocopy service. These technical aspects should be properly addressed." (P2) "What bothers me most in a library is its lack of technology. Being disconnected from technology is a major issue for me. Additionally, overcrowding and the lack of space between tables make me uncomfortable. A nice view from the library is also essential." (P3) "I would prefer a library with more comfortable chairs and desks. The current furniture is often too hard, and long hours of study can cause discomfort or pain. Libraries should offer a softer, more comfortable environment." (P6) "I would prefer a bit more personal space, a distance that respects people's privacy. When studying with others, I would appreciate a layout that provides a comfortable social space without intruding on personal boundaries." (P7) "During breaks, I would like to have areas where I can relax or engage in activities. For example, a nice lounge area or even an outdoor park would make the library more inviting." (P9) "While the idea of unlimited tea is nice, many libraries lack designated spaces for drinking it. You're given tea, but you end up having to drink it at your table, which can be annoying." (P10) "Libraries could organize events to encourage socializing, such as weekly draws or trivia contests. These activities would motivate people and provide opportunities for social interaction." (P10) "Libraries should be open 24/7." (P13) "Not everyone goes to libraries just to study. Separate, isolated areas could be created for those studying, where distractions are minimized." (P13) "I would design a library not just for studying, but as a social space for young people to relax, engage, and enjoy themselves. It should be a place where even children would feel drawn to spend time." (P15)
Outside	"Instead of granting café licenses to coastal areas, library permits could be considered." (P2) "The places we frequently visit are those that are easily accessible." (K 3) "Sometimes, libraries can feel too confining, with the silence and stillness being overwhelming. The rapid breathing of people can make the environment suffocating. Therefore, open spaces are more enjoyable, especially when the weather is warm." (P4) "I imagine a library not as a concrete building but one set amidst greenery, offering a more comfortable environment for both studying and socializing. My ideal library would be away from crowds, in a peaceful area. Additionally, since my neighborhood is not very safe, my family is often concerned when I go out." (P6) "The proximity to public transport is key. A location near a coastal area, where one can walk and sit under a tree to read, or visit a nearby restaurant or café, would make the library more accessible. Such areas encourage people to engage in various activities together." (P13) "I imagine such spaces as being somewhat distant from the hustle and bustle of life, a more secluded area. Psychologically, I prefer these kinds of settings, which is why I would want it to be located there." (P14)

Table 4

Alternatives to Libraries

Narratives
"I mentioned student stations. Although these are not officially classified as libraries, they do contain certain corners designated as book collections. However, as I said, they are not recognized as libraries. Nevertheless, they are important spaces for students, offering opportunities for both studying and socializing. Quiet areas for studying are particularly crucial." (P1)
"I believe there should be a library that overlooks the sky, set amidst greenery. It could be located by the seaside, easily accessible at least. A beautiful, spacious, clean, hygienic library with trees, a view of the sky, and situated by the beach." (P2)
"I believe that studying could be done in the food courts of shopping malls. In fact, if study areas were incorporated into shopping malls, with libraries included, it would be a great addition." (P3)
"A place referred to as a 'book café' allows for a more comfortable environment where you can either study or engage in conversations, as well as attend to other tasks. Even if I can't go to libraries, I plan to use these book café-style spaces." (P6)
"Meeting, for example, on the beach or in parks could be an option." (P7)
"Book cafés, for me, are places where I feel more at ease, with soft music playing and a more pleasant atmosphere being created." (P9)
"Other municipalities' cultural centers could also be an option, where lessons are offered. After the lesson, you can stay there and continue studying. They may also allow you to use a classroom for studying during your break." P 13)
"There could also be places that offer a study environment while allowing for activities like picnics." (P17)

Discussion

The experience of beginning to visit the library often dates to the early years of schooling, particularly middle and high school, for many participants. It has been observed that most participants' stories of starting to use the library stemmed from academic needs such as studying and exam preparation. This aligns with literature that considers libraries as important learning environments and tools that contribute to academic success for young people (Lippincott, 2007; Hernon & Matthews, 2011). Over time, however, the use of libraries has expanded beyond purely academic purposes to include social and personal development, emphasizing the multifaceted role of libraries. The habits of young people in using libraries as a space outside of academic study provide opportunities for social interaction and cultural participation.

Friends were found to play a significant role in the decision to visit the library, both positively and negatively. Positive influences include social support, motivation, and information sharing, highlighting the library's role as a "third place" where young people find opportunities for social interaction and collaboration (Oldenburg, 1989). Group study can strengthen social bonds among peers while also supporting academic success. The coming together of a group facilitates mutual help and the sharing of knowledge. However, there are also negative effects associated with visiting the library with friends. Socializing can sometimes lead to a loss of focus and reduced productivity, disrupting the quiet, concentration-friendly environment that libraries provide. It is emphasized that while libraries offer social interaction, they must also provide suitable spaces for individual study (Cohen,

2010). Balancing these elements can enhance the effectiveness of library use. Many participants reported that visiting the library alone was more productive, as it increased focus and prevented distractions. This finding supports the idea that individual study environments may be more effective, especially for young people (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Working alone provides individuals the opportunity to study at their own pace and promotes a more independent learning process. This can have a positive impact on individuals who prefer solitude in a liberated social space (Hernon & Matthews, 2011). However, there are some drawbacks to visiting the library alone. Feelings of loneliness and a lack of social interaction can decrease participants' desire to visit the library. Social interaction and time spent with friends can make libraries more appealing to young people, supporting the view that libraries serve not only as academic spaces but also as social meeting points (Vårheim, 2012).

Participants' preferences for libraries as study environments are often driven by their search for quiet, distraction-free spaces. The observation that libraries are viewed as more effective study spaces due to the avoidance of distractions at home aligns with the findings of Şeşen (2019), who found that the quiet environments in libraries have a positive impact on students' academic success. Furthermore, participants use the library not only for educational purposes but also for personal development and hobbies. Some participants indicated that their need for the library would decrease once they transition to their professional lives. Kutluca and Yalman (2016) observed that, in professional life, individuals tend to prefer digital resources, which may lead to a decline in the use of physical libraries. This finding reflects how technology has changed individuals' methods of accessing information. The majority of participants, however, emphasized that libraries contribute to learning at all stages of life, not just during education. A similar perspective is supported by Vadeboncoeur & Padilla Petry (2017), who found that libraries provide valuable spaces not only for education but also for lifelong learning and community development.

Participants also noted that space constraints in libraries, especially in large cities, can pose significant problems. Baker (2019) suggested that increasing library capacity could improve the user experience. Some participants pointed out that the accessibility of libraries and their limited opening hours were concerns. A proposal for 24-hour libraries aligns with Yılmaz (2003), who examined how library access and continuity impact user satisfaction. He emphasized that constant access to libraries is particularly crucial for university students and academics. Participants also reported that the physical conditions of libraries were generally inadequate, with specific complaints about ventilation and temperature inconsistencies. The digital infrastructure of libraries also needs to be strengthened. Fast internet connections and access to computers are especially crucial for online education and research. According to Kutluca and Yalman (2016), enhancing digital resources provides students and researchers with more effective opportunities for work.

In terms of safety, it is suggested that card-based entry systems be implemented to enhance security. The ergonomic design of workspaces can enhance productivity during prolonged use. Baker (2019) noted that ergonomic furniture prevents physical discomfort during long study sessions. Providing personal spaces also helps protect privacy, which aligns with the idea of offering distinct areas for individual study and group work. Proper lighting and the availability of electrical outlets on desks are also essential. Şeşen (2019) suggested that lowering noise levels in libraries can increase students' concentration and allow them to work more productively. Providing free photocopying services is also important, as it enables users to continue their research without additional costs. Chiu and Lee (2019) argued that libraries' refusal to charge extra fees for basic services increases user satisfaction. A spacious, hygienic, and comfortable physical environment is also crucial for long study sessions.

Having quiet, nature-integrated areas around libraries provides users with a peaceful environment in which they can both rest and study. Easy access to libraries via public transportation can also increase the number of users. Security concerns can influence the frequency of library visits. Altunbay & Uslu Üstten (2020) found that the safety of the surrounding area affects people's interest in libraries. Some participants suggested that libraries should be in peaceful, less crowded neighborhoods. Avaner (2018) highlighted that noise and crowds in large cities can negatively affect the library experience, while tranquil and natural areas offer more productive environments. Soylu and Medeni (2021) also noted that locating libraries in less dense areas can reduce social isolation and make them more accessible to local communities.

Libraries should not only serve as spaces for obtaining information but also as environments where social interaction increases. Libraries offering social spaces help communities build stronger connections. Common areas, cafeterias, and social lounges enable individuals to work in groups or participate in volunteer activities. Özden (2017) emphasized that social interactions, especially among students, encourage information sharing and collaboration. Libraries that offer spaces for cultural events not only support information acquisition but also foster cultural and artistic development. Yurtseven (2018) suggested that creating event spaces in libraries can increase community engagement and contribute to the revitalization of local culture. Additionally, libraries that provide relaxation areas help promote both physical and mental relaxation (Arıcı & Arısal, 2021). Social areas in libraries should include spaces for eating and resting, as these can help users spend longer periods in the library and improve their productivity. Yılmaz (2003) emphasized the importance of providing social spaces for users who engage in extended study sessions, as these spaces allow for both relaxation and social interaction.

Libraries must offer peaceful and quiet environments, particularly for those who prefer silent study. Abulude et al. (2024) found that libraries providing calm environments increase users' concentration. Some participants expressed a desire for spaces where they can study alone, highlighting the importance of privacy and a deeper study experience. Libraries should be places not only for information gathering but also for psychological relaxation and stress reduction (Kneebone, 2017). Such environments can help individuals feel more comfortable, especially during intense study periods. Motivation-boosting activities (such as free soup distribution) may also encourage library use. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) argued that moral support boosts motivation during the educational process, making students more productive. Moving beyond traditional library concepts, it is recommended that libraries offer interactive and cultural activities. Kutluca and Yalman (2016) stated that libraries are not just places for storing information but also key centers for learning, interaction, and community development. Interactive spaces allow users to not only acquire knowledge but also engage in various social and cultural activities.

Modern libraries must evolve both physically and socially. Libraries are not just places for knowledge but also spaces where social interactions, psychological relaxation, and community bonding are strengthened. Designing libraries with these features, particularly with an understanding of the needs of young people, will encourage future generations to benefit from these environments and make them more integral parts of communities.

Conclusion

This study highlights that libraries serve not only as spaces for academic work but also as important "third places" where young people can socialize, relax, have fun, and engage in personal development. The multifunctional role of libraries is crucial in supporting both the educational success and the social connections of young people. Young individuals use libraries not only as places for information and

study, but also as opportunities for socialization, leisure, and participation in cultural activities. This shows that libraries play a unique and important role, different from schools or homes, in the social lives of young people.

To further strengthen the functions of libraries, physical spaces need to be more user- friendly, ergonomic, and accessible. A good library should not only offer quiet study areas but also provide spaces for social interaction, cultural events, and relaxation. Additionally, improving digital infrastructure, increasing internet access, and providing technological tools will particularly facilitate young people's access to information.

As a public policy, it is essential to recognize the multifunctional roles of libraries and reshape these spaces to better support both the academic and social development of young people. In this context, libraries should evolve from being places that simply provide information resources to becoming "open spaces" where young people can freely spend time, socialize, engage in personal development, and strengthen social bonds. Diversifying library services and equipping these spaces with more youth-centered activities will not only contribute to the cultural and social fabric of society but also enhance the quality of life for individuals.

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