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## **Urban Streets from the Perspective of the Youth**

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**Abstract:** The success of urban open spaces is relative to their ability to address the needs of different user groups. Thus, open urban spaces should be designed in consideration of different needs of different user groups. Young individuals are among important users whose needs need to be identified, and their spatial use is different from the rest of the society. In everyday life, streets are significant spaces for young individuals and are effective on their development. Young individuals consider streets are spaces where they contact others. Thus, the present study aimed to scrutinize the streets in urban area based on their use by young individuals. The 4 most intensely occupied streets in Trabzon, Maraş Street, Kunduraçılar Street, Uzunsokak and Tanjant Street were examined in the present study. Behavioral observations were conducted on these streets in the study and which spatial elements were used by young individuals and intended use of these elements were determined. In other words, the facilities that these streets offer to young individuals were identified. In the study 246 young individuals were observed and the findings demonstrated that these individuals utilized the street pavement, walls, curbs, benches and shop fronts to conduct activities such as chatting, sitting, leisure, hanging out and spending time with friends.

**Keywords:** Urban streets, Youth, Spatial elements

### **Introduction**

Urban user groups can be classified in different ways. For example, children, youth, and adults are user groups whose needs need to be identified (Düzenli et al., 2016a). Research on the spaces that young individuals utilize are limited. Thus, the personal experiences of youth (emotional, social and physical) are neglected. Today's young individuals are future managers and decision makers, thus their preferences, interests and information about their environmental attitudes should be recognized. Knowledge on the youth's ideas, perceptions and emotions is important. Generally, social spaces are designed based on the demands of other age groups such as children and adults. However, neglecting young individuals is a significant problem in environmental planning (Owens, 1994; Bredow, 2006). Young individuals are considered invisible in urban areas, "symbolic spaces" are built around their homes and schools, and their desires and needs are ignored (Utne, 1994). However, social spaces are important for young individuals. Street is among the most important spaces in the lives of young individuals. In daily urban life, the street is very important for young individuals and it is effective on their development (Düzenli et al., 2012; Düzenli et al., 2016b). The streets are considered as spaces that allows individuals to contact others. What types of flexible environments can be designed to improve the sense of security, decision making and executive strategies among young individuals? In order to start to design such spaces, it is necessary to understand the perceptual and physical development process. It is important to determine the methods that would allow the development of spaces for young individuals.

Previous studies demonstrated that young individuals use the space around them differently when compared to the general public. This is due to the differences in environmental preferences of young individuals. These

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preferences and differences should be reflected in designs (Düzenli et al., 2017a; Düzenli et al., 2017b). In urban open space design, the benefits of these spaces for young individuals should be considered. For young individuals, increase in their involvement with the environment, socialization opportunities with their peers and other social groups, developing skills, participating in activities to solve problems are important (Düzenli et al., 2010; Versteeg, 2003).

Adequate urban open spaces and activities that take the psychological and social needs of young individuals into account can ease their difficult living conditions and assist them to adapt to the environment, rendering the city more habitable for young individuals. Psychosocially comfortable and happy young individuals could have a more positive approach and be motivated towards their environment, lives and classes. Thus, the psychosocial needs of young individuals and the outdoor activities that could meet these needs and how these activities could be reflected in the environment should be determined.

In recent years, the use of urban spaces by young individuals in urban centers and neighborhood units has become increasingly unfavorable and disturbing. The use of public space by young individuals is considered as a threat to the personal safety of others and the public order on the streets. Furthermore, young people are increasingly considered "out of design/planning" in public spaces. Owens (1994) argues that young people should be included in these designs to transform these spaces into an "in-design" environment.

The present study aimed to determine the issues that should be considered when planning beneficial urban open spaces for young individuals. An attempt was made to determine the needs of young individuals, their demands and the relationship between these demands and urban open spaces. Such studies are very important since young individuals are generally excluded from the process of urban design and planning in history and young individuals were usually not included in the definition of "people". However, the quality of the urban and social structure affects the lives of young individuals. The features of the physical environment indirectly affect the personal development of young individuals due to the activities that these features facilitate. Because, young individuals could express themselves or could not express themselves due to the availability/unavailability of certain activities in that particular space. Thus, opportunities that a particular space would provide for young individuals should be considered when designing spaces for youth.

### **Affordance Theory and the Youth**

Gibson's (1979) concept of affordance and behavior-milieu synomorphy are two closely related concepts that supplement each other. In the case of outdoor spaces, it is more difficult to encounter a program that is always repetitive or with very specific limits like in indoor spaces. However, the facilities that are called the inviting qualities of the space are important in outdoor spaces.

Spaces should provide certain facilities for young individuals to develop strong psychosocial structures, to establish positive social relations, to adapt to the environment, to achieve freedom and to become healthy individuals who have completed their social and personal development in the future. Literature review would demonstrate that socialization, chatting, spending time with peers and availability of diverse activities are important for these achievements based on the psychosocial structure of young individuals (Bredow, 2006; Büküşoğlu and Bayturan, 2005; Driskell, 2002; Hartup, 1992; Kaplan, 1995; Owens, 1994). In brief, spaces create an environment for the activities that the facilities provided by spaces, and young individuals participate in these activities and improve their psychosocial structure.

Thus, the baseline of the present study included the question "How can a more beneficial and habitable urban environment be created for development of young individuals?" The study attempted to determine the significance of open urban spaces for young individuals.

### **Material and Method**

The study areas included the four busiest streets in the city center, namely Uzun street, Maras street, Kunduracılar street, and Tanjant street (Figure 1, Table 1).

Uzun street is the area where the urban bookstores, movie theaters, cafeterias, shops, used by the students extensively. Maraş street is a commercial center with high traffic and includes branches of all banks and business offices, and its connections with other streets are suitable for pedestrian focus. Kunduracılar street is a

pedestrian commercial area where clothing, jewelry and handicraft stores are dominant. It is mostly used for shopping and sightseeing. It has connections with artistic streets. Despite heavy traffic, Tanjant street has large, spacious pedestrian walkways and cafes and restaurants that are used extensively by young individuals



Figure 1. Study Area

### **Behavioral Observations**

The present study aimed to examine the urban streets that differ in terms of available opportunities, based on the activities conducted by young individuals. The study aimed to compare the street components and elements based on the use of young individuals. Several researchers (Lang, 1987; Studer, 1969; Craik, 1970; Michelson, 1975; Barker, 1968; Hart and Fagley, 1995) indicated that observation is an effective technique in understanding human needs, preferences and investigating human behavior. This technique is quite powerful since it records the behavior in its actual state and at the time of its occurrence. In behavioral observation, recording the time, observer and observation are important. Video recordings can be slowed down to count large number of people, and the actions they performed can be distinguished. Observation categories can be defined and observed with certainty, which is not possible in live observation. Time-lapse video recordings are therefore quite successful. Thus, this technique was preferred in order to determine the opportunities that the streets offer to young individuals.

The four streets located in Trabzon urban center were recorded for a total of 3 days during weekdays and weekends without precipitation. May was preferred due to weather conditions and availability of open space facilities. Observations were conducted between 12: 00-13: 25 and 18: 00-19: 25, thus, the recordings were made twice daily. This was due to the fact that young individuals are on lunch break and out of school at these time periods. At these times, the streets reach the highest usage levels. The busiest hours were selected to detect maximum behavior volume. Recordings were made for 10 minutes at 15 minute intervals at the observation locations (Table 2).

Table 1. Street plans of the observed spaces

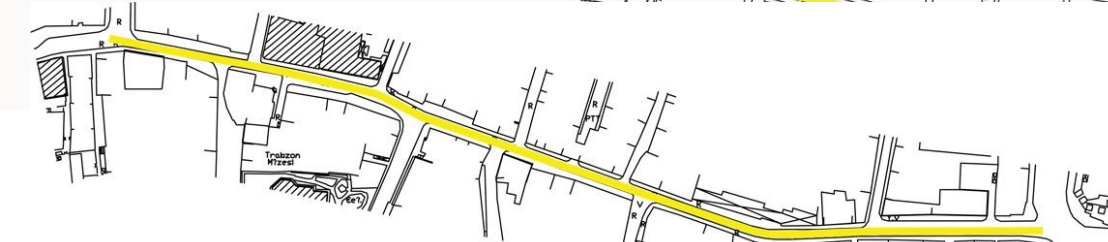
TRABZON KUNDURACILAR STREET



TRABZON MARAŞ STREET



TRABZON UZUN STREET



TRABZON TANJANT STREET

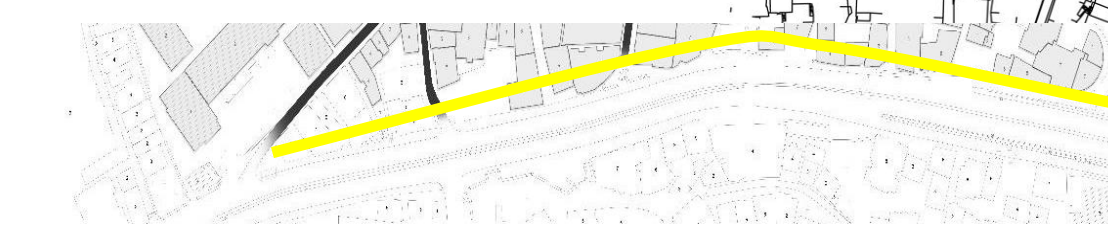


Table 2. Observation record samples





## Findings

After the observations were recorded, the records were viewed, divided into separate records, and the young individuals and the spatial elements they utilized were counted and the percentage of use was determined. Observations demonstrated that out of 246 young individuals (136 male and 110 female individuals) observed on campus open spaces,

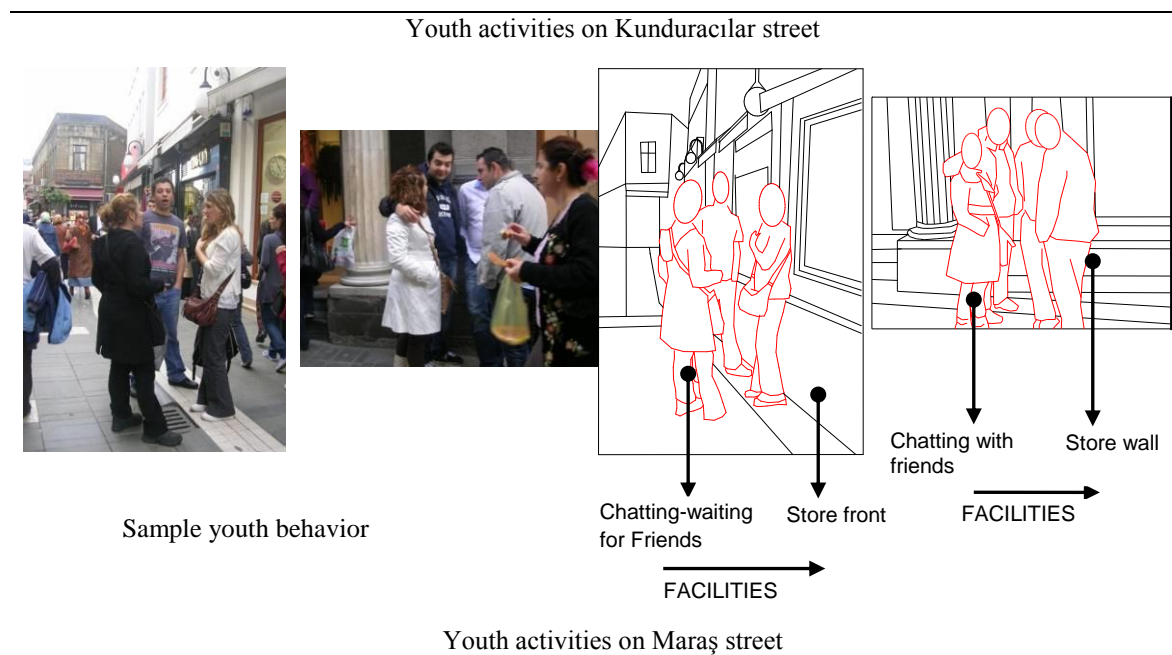
- 36.3% conducted activities using the walls,
- 21.1% i conducted activities using the furniture,
- 21% conducted activities using the pavement,
- 11.2% conducted activities using the curbs,
- 10.4% conducted activities standing, especially at store fronts. The  $\chi^2$  test conducted on the above-mentioned distribution demonstrated statistical significance. ( $\chi^2 = 1320.357$ ; 2 df,  $p < 0,01$ ).

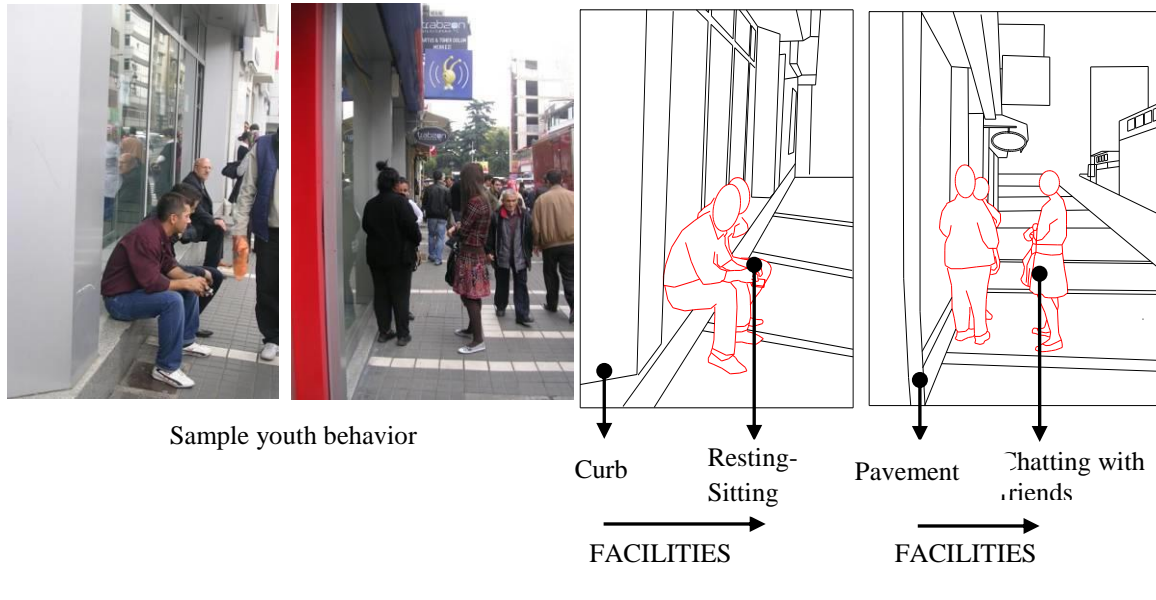
Then the video images were screened to determine which spatial elements were used by young individuals to conduct which activities, and which element afforded which activity (Table 3 and 4).

When the observations were analyzed, it was found that the young individuals utilized

- THE WALLS for activities such as sitting, reposing, chatting with friends, socialization, waiting, and talking on the phone; in other words, the walls provided opportunities for the above-mentioned activities;
- THE FURNITURE for activities such as jumping, laying down, reading books, sitting, chatting with friends, listening to music, playing guitar and lyre, talking on the phone and eating and drinking; in other words, the furniture provided opportunities for the above-mentioned activities;
- THE PAVEMENT for activities such as waiting, chatting with friends and socialization; in other words, the pavement provided opportunities for the above-mentioned activities;
- THE CURBS for activities such as sitting, resting, convesation, watching, and talking on the phone; in other words, the curbs provided opportunities for the above-mentioned activities;
- THE STORE FRONTS for activities such as chatting friends while standing, hanging out, and waiting; in other words, the store fronts provided opportunities for the above-mentioned activities.

Table 3. Analysis of the facilities available on Kunderacılar and Maraş streets





## Discussion and Conclusion

This study was initiated with questions about the features that should be considered in planning useful urban open spaces, especially streets for young individuals, and was conducted to determine how young individuals utilize the streets, and which elements they utilize for various needs. In the study, how young individuals utilize the streets was investigated. According to Piko and Vazsony (2004), spaces adequately designed for young individuals help them to socialize and share information, build relationships, develop their in-group personality and belongingness (Iso-Ahola and Crowley, 1991; Hultsman and Harper, 1992). Flitzgerald (1995) demonstrated that young individuals are most interested in passive but socializing activities. In that study conducted with 15-16 year old teenagers, it was determined that hanging out with friends was the most preferred activity. Culp (1998) also found that friendships relations were a strong determinant in a study conducted with 12-17 years old female students.

Findings of the present study was consistent with above-mentioned studies. It was observed that young individuals spent most of their time with friends on the streets. It was determined that young individuals utilized mostly the walls on the streets, and furniture, curbs and pavements provide facilities for several activities conducted by young individuals. Furthermore, young individuals also conducted several activities when standing at store fronts.



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